

# Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators

Winter 2022

- Did you make your vote count?
- Full coverage of UKTC Awards 2022
- Gamification



# President's View

Linda Robins shares the latest ISTC news.



## New roles

Developments in scientific and technical communication have brought with them roles not previously considered part of the technical communicator's brief. In fact, many of these roles did not previously exist.

With increased automation and different methods of delivery, the changes to means of communication have extended the scope of the communicator's brief. New roles have appeared, such as:

- API Documentation Writer
- Content Designer, Content Developer, Content Engineer, Content Officer, Content Strategist, Digital Content Designer, Digital Content Manager
- Information Architect, Information Designer, Information Developer
- Knowledge Base Writer, Knowledge Manager
- UI Text Writer
- User Assistance Designer
- UX Copywriter, UX Writer.

Even the scope of roles under 'traditional' titles has expanded with the developments in technology and publication methods. The technical author, scientific writer or technical translator today will have additional skills, necessary to take changes in working methods into account.

This brings opportunities for our Institute to spread the net more widely in attracting more members. But because the roles are different (in name though not in fundamentals) the ISTC may not appear to all newcomers as being relevant, even if our Institute is known to the practitioners.

So this presents a challenge and an opportunity for us to reach out to the newer community. The ISTC Council is on the case!

To remind ourselves of the prospective reach of the ISTC as described on the ISTC website:



*ISTC members come from virtually every industry and area of society within the UK, as well as internationally, who all need to communicate complex or important information effectively.*

*It's what you do that matters, rather than your job title. If you're communicating technical information to explain and instruct, there's a good chance you're a technical communicator. And if you are a technical communicator, we'd love you to be part of the ISTC.*



## Telling others what you do

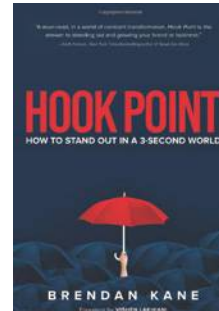
When discussing the professional development needs of our members with other ISTC members recently, another point struck me. I wondered if we make enough of this diversity of experience within the ISTC. It is easy to make assumptions about the work ISTC members do and the issues they face, as we decide which resources to provide to improve our members' working lives. It would be very useful to have more details from the practitioners directly.

With more knowledge of members' backgrounds and needs, we can boost the relevance of our offering. We welcome any information, and, insights you as members and *Communicator* readers can supply will be gratefully received.

## Improving ways of working

### Attracting attention

In the continuing quest to work more efficiently and effectively, I have added the 'three-second rule' to my stock of options. Moving on from the three-minute rule (President's View:



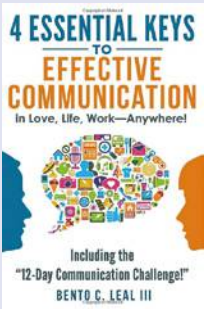
*Communicator* Summer 2020) to the three-second rule. The name comes from a rule of thumb for a Facebook video. If you stay on for three seconds and you are not

scrolling through, your attention has been caught and you will engage with the subject. Brendan Kane introduces this rule in his book, 'Hook Point'<sup>1</sup>. He describes the book as a 'must read' for anyone posting anything on social media today. The book's strap line is 'How to stand out in a 3-second world'. The examples are related strongly to marketing and the concept of 'hooks' as used in copywriting. However, the writer suggests the three-second rule can be used to convey any insight, concept, idea, format, product or service. This is a powerful message. Stop people in their tracks.

So, the idea can be used in the workplace to ensure focus and relevance. It is easy (or lazy) to make assumptions when describing a development or initiative. I find this can also be true when presenting (speaking or writing) without considering whether my listener or reader is in sync with the topic and my thoughts. That is, will I even grab attention long enough to have the chance to expand and expound? From my investigation of the message and the examples given, I can see the value of adopting the three-second approach. And I don't think it need involve oversimplification of the subject. It is a way of 'hooking' the audience. Having achieved this, you can elaborate.

## Improving Communication

And having 'hooked' my audience I am working through a book which promotes effective communication. This is '4 Essential Keys to Effective Communication' by Bento C Leal III<sup>2</sup>. And as you will realise by now, I cannot resist numbers or a challenge. This book includes the 12-Day Communication Challenge. The book



covers Empathetic Skills relating to Awareness, Listening, Speaking and Dialogue. Each day of the 12-day challenge the reader is tasked with practising one or more of these

skills and recording outcomes. It is early days yet; I shall endeavour to complete the challenge and report the success or otherwise and the value of the experience.

### Improved Communication in Practice

I wrote about the TED Radio Hour in the August issue of InfoPlus. The programme is broadcast on Radio 4Extra and available as a podcast weekly on BBC Sounds: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/brand/b065ynsn>

TED is a non-profit organisation devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or fewer). TED began in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment and Design converged, and today covers almost all topics — from science to business to global issues — in more than 100 languages.

The TED Radio Hour is carried on more than 600 public radio stations and is one of the top podcasts in the world.

There is a TED presence on LinkedIn:

[https://www.](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ted-conferences)

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I have since started reading 'the official TED guide to public speaking'. This is 'TED Talks' by Chris Anderson, Head of TED<sup>3</sup>. I am not often swayed by commendations on the cover of a book, but in this instance I was greatly encouraged by a quote from Tim Harford of the Financial Times: "The single best book on public speaking I've ever read." I am a follower of Tim Harford's writing and broadcasting and valued this endorsement. Again, this is early days for evidence of results in my work. The book is very practical with

sound guidance on preparation, form and delivery. There are excellent examples of successful speakers from many walks of life. I am hopeful of improvements on my part!

### Horace Hockley Award

This prize is presented to a person or organisation that in the opinion of the ISTC Council has made a considerable contribution to the technical communications industry over a sustained period. This year the recipient is **Sarah Winters**, Founder of Content Design London.

In the early 2010s, Sarah headed the team at the Government Digital Service that looked to user-centred design techniques to transform their content. The team used this new approach to set out a system of content design in the UK Government's content. The outcome was a tremendous success, winning awards and acknowledged by users on every visit to the GOV.uk site.

Sarah's book, 'Content Design' is a fine introduction to the concept, a practical guidance on how to use it for your own projects and in your own organisation.

### ISTC news round-up

#### Advertising Agent

After more than 15 years as ISTC's Advertising Agent, Felicity Davie has now stepped down from the role. We value Felicity's long association with the ISTC and the way she has worked with our advertisers through the years. We wish Felicity well for the future. Our Advertising is now dealt with in-house by the ISTC's Administrator; please use the ISTC office email address: [istc@istc.org.uk](mailto:istc@istc.org.uk).

#### TCUK 2023

For next year's Conference, the ISTC Council is planning a return to an



The last TCUK in-person event we hosted in 2019

in-person conference. Planning is underway for an exciting new event; we will build on past experience and make improvements to reflect changes to conference formats since our last face-to-face event.

#### Priorities for 2023

The ISTC Council is working on the following while managing regular activities as usual:



Source: 2HMedia at unsplash.com

- Boost membership: focusing on age profile, benefits and reach
- Review and update communication policy and implement improvements
- Explore affiliations with other organisations
- Expand our Community – including discussion forums and special interest groups
- Enhance the digital version of *Communicator*
- Hold an in-person TCUK event.

We always welcome suggestions from ISTC members and all readers of *Communicator*. Please contact me ([president@istc.org.uk](mailto:president@istc.org.uk)) or the ISTC office ([istc@istc.org.uk](mailto:istc@istc.org.uk)). ■

### Reference

- 1: 'Hook Point: How to stand out in a 3-second world'; Brendan Kane: ISBN 9798425205179 (Amazon 2020)
- 2: '4 Essential Keys to Effective Communication': Bento C Leal III; ISBN 9781546581734 (Amazon 2017)
- 3: 'TED Talks: The Official TED Guide to Public Speaking': Chris Anderson: ISBN 9781472228062 (Nicholas Brealey Publishing 2016).

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