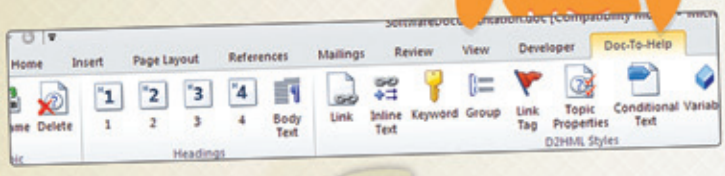
Why People are Choosing Doc-To-Help

Write content once and publish where it is needed. Avoid learning new systems and duplicating work. Doc-To-Help gives you all you need to create and manage content, collaborate, and publish to formats your readers need.

Best support for Microsoft Word

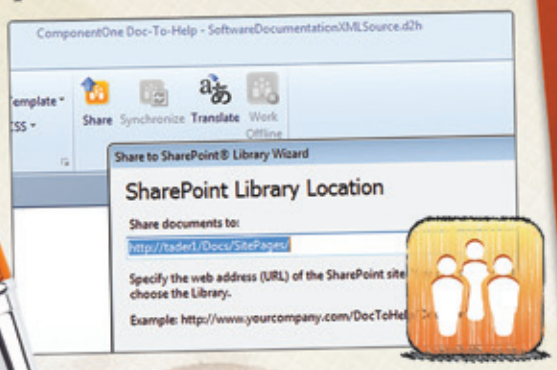
- Write or import Word
- Use the Doc-To-Help toolbar
- Keep everything in Word

(Note that you can choose to use the built-in editor instead)



SharePoint Integration

Manage content, collaborate with teams, track translation, and publish to wikis and libraries.

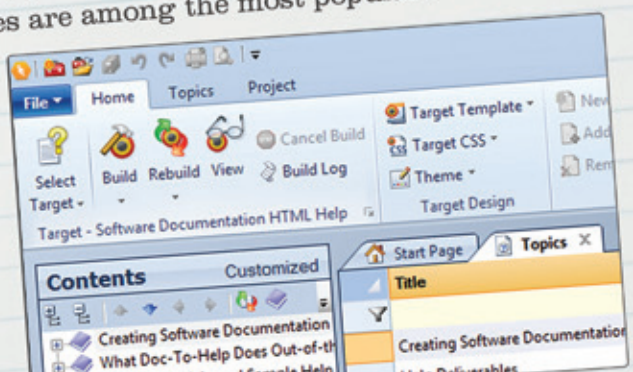


Impressive Desktop, Web, and Print Outputs

Create one project and get professional quality outputs. No need for reformatting; Doc-To-Help does that for you.

Easy and Automatic from Start to Finish

Doc-To-Help is designed to be as automatic, efficient, and visual as possible. Style galleries, automatic TOC, topics organizer, theme designer, and reusable content features are among the most popular.



Download your FREE Trial @:

www.doctohelp.com

The TC/VG Claiming Land in the Country of Gaming

By CRAIG McKENNEY

It is our job to position ourselves as experts in the technical communication of gaming.

Manifesto: Discovered

Jeremy Reddington / Shutterstock.com

AT A RECENT MEETING to introduce new faculty members, my esteemed colleagues and I were asked to mention our teaching and research interests. As I began talking about game narrative and simulations as workplace technical documents, I felt eyes glaze, roll, and turn to the clock. This does not bother me as much as it once did. As technical communication becomes more interdisciplinary, we must become experts at many different things, games included. With journals like *Game Studies* and *Simulation & Gaming* leading the discussion, there is not as much being done in the area of technical communication and gaming. It is our job to position ourselves as experts in the technical communication of gaming. What this issue of *Intercom* represents is awareness that there is merit in the discussion of gaming as it relates to technical communication. And that makes the eye rolls easier to take.

This article will cover how technical communicators—as innovators, communicators, and visionaries—can move the video game conversation forward within the discipline. No longer can the field be locked into conversations of novelty or outrage, dismissive ghettoization, or "pitchfork and torch" parades. Books and articles in technical communication repeatedly address the same issues, trying to determine where the field is and where it is going. By doing this, technical communicators can get down to the business of the what/how/why of the field's role as an untapped resource in the world of gaming. This article hopes to challenge and provoke discussion of that concept.

If you are excited about this issue of the magazine, then I already have your attention. This article will hopefully speak to those of you who, like my esteemed colleagues, feel games are a triviality, a pop-culture fluke whose time will pass. But of note: according to the Entertainment Software Association, the video game industry generated over $25 billion dollars in annual revenue, attributable to the 72% of American households playing computer or video games as of 2011. Employing over 120,000 people, the video game industry develops innovative technologies and applies them to external purposes: entertainment, education, edutainment, simulation, and more. Those numbers are startling for many reasons, but primarily because they have only gone up during this economic recession. The industry is strong, and from an employment perspective, that is useful information for technical communicators.

Definition(s) of Games

At this point, some defining of terms is appropriate. Thinking of games as a general term inclusive of type (video, computer, casual, simulation, and other badge/incentivizing games like the Foursquare mobile application) and genre (puzzle, trivia, card, multiplayer, action, etc.) will provide technical communicators with the richest possible exploration of how to best situate themselves: within the diversity of the discipline and within the diversity of the gaming world. For the purposes of this article, games can be defined as a self-directed activity with a specific beginning and end that is governed by rules, whether they be internal (meaning governed by construction of the game), or external (meaning governed by the agency exhibited in using the game). Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2003) add that a game has an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome. Such definitions will allow for an exploration of the multifaceted games currently in use in the workplace.

Truisms this article won't cover because, problematically, the conversation about video games has stalled at them: such games are variable in purpose but culturally ubiquitous. Games are a "new" form of communication, taking many forms beyond video and computer games. They have multiple applications, rhetorical function, and structure. They are symbols of culture. They do/do not cause violent behaviors.

Games: Embedded in Work

Beyond serving as a tool for entertainment, games are already in place and in use, such as in workplaces. Workplaces from the U.S. Army to local police departments, from Subway to Cold Stone Creamery, have now incorporated games in many forms: from a sophisticated, dramatized, live-action Iraqi village simulation in the middle of the Mojave Desert to teach cultural awareness and flexible thinking in situ, to a video game testing one's ability and speed at making and mixing ice cream for a corporate entity. These are very specific instances, but the point is that many corporations, public and private, have embraced gaming as a legitimate training mechanism for employees. This is where technical communicators come into play, literally and figuratively.

Technical Communicators as Gaming Specialists

Technical communicators can play an increasingly important role in the development, implementation, and assessment of such training games. Knowing that games are currently in use across workplace settings should encourage technical communicators to begin situating themselves as part of this document construction. Gaming structures can serve as useful tools for modifying workplace training. Technical communicators should be involved in the development and design of such scenarios, given their awareness of instructional design, usability studies, and new media, but also given their understanding of structuring information in a variety of document forms. Such projects are more often than not outsourced to other gaming companies, but could easily be kept in-house if a staff member—a technical communicator—had the expertise to produce such documents. The discipline has direct applications to gaming and we, as employees, bosses, and teachers, should be making that connection.

Implications for Writing: Production and Construction

Johndan Johnson-Eilola encouraged that the field of technical communication should be rethought as a "post-industrial discipline." Such an approach allows a vision of what technical communication should be: a key player in the design of information, knowledge, and recursive communication about that information and knowledge. In this case, the opportunity to rethink our field presents itself in the form of games. Michael Albers also recognized that "the focus of technical communicators has been on writing documents. However, in recent years, technical communicators have been widening their scope and expanding into areas such as interface and interaction design, information architecture, information design, and usability. In tandem with this expansion, the fundamental methods of delivering information have changed, primarily through use of single-sourcing, XML, and multiple methods of delivery, all of which have increased the need for both collaboration and project management." With this in mind, the gaming industry's influence and intersection with what technical communication as a field is and could be becomes clearer.

Michael Hughes extends this line of thinking by focusing on the value a technical communicator brings to an organization by "creating organization (internal) knowledge," and he argues that technical communicators need to re-envision themselves as "creators of knowledge" instead of "information packagers." Technical communication has many avenues where this is currently happening: we produce knowledge through research (usability testing, ethnography) and could transition those skills to meet the needs of corporations implementing games, but in addition, those skills could be offered to corporations testing/researching games. Nintendo and Microsoft (to name but two game companies) have game usability labs, where the expertise of a technical communicator could aid the production of scholarship on game testing, further developing the discipline's body of knowledge.

Implications for Research: Assessment and Analysis

As research practitioners, technical communicators have a lot to offer in the field of game and simulation studies. Such research does exist, but it is often an exercise in shambolic research practices. Part of the problem is definitional: analysts speak about games or simulations without a common lexicon, and so there is no consistency of concept from article to article. Another problem is that the research itself is simply ill-conceived or lacks rigor. In one specific case, a research study by Julie Dugdale et al. in 2006, the authors began observing firefighters' use of a virtual reality system in training. However, when the researchers did not have enough firefighters to test the system, they simply went with non-firefighters to test one phase of the study. With technical communicators leading the research in gaming, the opportunity arises for developing a rigorous, fair research methodology that is consistent with its concept, making the technical communicator an essential team member.

Albers suggests that technical communication, "from the practitioner's view[,] has a heavy focus on the technology side, while often ignoring the softer social side. The academic view, on the other hand, often seems too focused on rhetorical or discourse analysis of texts, while ignoring both the technical and social side. We need to move both sides closer to a middle ground." With the pervasiveness of technology in the field, and a shift in effective learning methodologies not recognized in TC literature beyond a handful of articles, professional technical communicators and students of the discipline must understand a broader flexibility in providing information in a variety of formats (like reality-based simulations, for they best reflect the kind of learning needed by the users) specific to the needs of the given audience. These user-driven needs will ultimately shape the development of the discipline, and the discipline should be open to those changes.

Implications for Design: Documentation

These disciplinary growing pains are challenging, because the topic of simulation is something not considered under the limited purview of technical communication. Barbara Giammona (*Intercom*, August 2004 and May 2009) explored the doom-and-gloom of the early 2000s and how technical communication was seen as a dying field by many practitioners. Suggesting ways for the discipline to reinvent itself, she revisited her 2004 article five years later, only to conclude that the same problems still exist, with a few exceptions: 1) technical communicators have become more a part of the development and innovation process (as Johnson-Eilola suggested needed to happen in 1995), and 2) technical communicators have responded to needs in their cultures, such as becoming solution providers (e.g., the symbolic-analyst Johnson-Eilola suggested in 1996). This indicates the persistence of the conversation since 1995 with little to no practical change as a result. One thing of interest here is that in 2004 Giammona also noted that gaming technologies were a rising trend (and still are), and yet that is still something underserved by TC research and emphasis.

George Hayhoe (2005) provides an interesting anecdote to this idea, tracing technical communication's relation as an offshoot of a high-risk industry: "technical communication got its start as a profession in the years after World War II when defense and aerospace contractors in the U.S. and U.K. were required to produce large numbers of proposals, reports, and procedures in response to government requirements." As the role of national defense has changed culturally and rhetorically, and as knowledge has become less reliant on text, there is a consequential change to the way TC functions in this regard. Hayhoe states, "we

must also face the fact that technical communicators in the future will work in different subject domains than computer hardware and software," and identification of such domains (such as simulation design and assessment) is an essential task of the industry. In particular, given the discipline's high-risk industry roots, it would make sense to further develop those connections to organizations like fire and police departments.

Technical communicators are the bridge between information and the user, often tasked with simplifying complex information for specific workplace audiences. Games and game studies (disciplines often not associated with technical communication) present models that reflect this kind of knowledge construction. Increased knowledge of games and their import to education provide a likely connection to the field of technical communication. With growing examinations of the use of games at work—such as training—technical communication becomes a viable field through which to explore this recent trend. Given games and their use in training, and the attention paid to their importance to learning, technical communication can—and should—support the development, implementation, and assessment of workplace games and the user's experience, especially as employers shift to alternative models of documentation, teaching, and knowledge management, such as simulations.

Conclusion(s)

To summarize: the gap for TC practitioners is that the field has not decided what it is and what it covers in the area of gaming. This identity crisis is, unfortunately, transferred to the workplace. Technological changes that affect the amount of information and how it is represented within the workplace for the user and the way the user learns presents a rich opportunity to expand the boundaries of technical communication. This article is one such effort to expand those boundaries given the game-like changes in the workplace. There is great opportunity for technical communicators to aid the state of research in game and simulation studies. Likewise, the structure and dissemination of knowledge in new formats is an important role of a technical communicator. As a practical workplace concern, Susi et al. (2007) recognize that "serious games are also becoming ever more important in the global education and training market, which in 2003 was estimated at $2 trillion. It is also predicted that 'by 2008, 40 percent of U.S. companies will adopt serious games in their training efforts.'" Rather than outsourcing these tasks, technical communicators are ideally suited to complete this work, because it is in the forefront of user support as opposed to being added as an afterthought (where the TC professional supports instead of participates) in the design process (Johnson-Eilola 1996). This backward process is problematic in that such disciplinary limitations—whether self, academically, or workplace-imposed—negatively impact the user because they then miss out on the expertise of technical communicators. At the same time, technical communicators do not get to address the needs or concerns of the user prior to implementation and use of a product.

Much like learning and training is changing, so too must the field of technical communication. The TC practitioner must become a symbolic-analytic worker, for "symbolic-analytic workers possess the abilities to identify, rearrange, circulate, abstract and broker information" (Johnson-Eilola 1996). Technical communication can (and should) incorporate a symbolic-analytic process to better promote the idea that it is a constructive discipline and not just a supportive one. Ultimately, will you be left rolling your eyes or will you find a place to position yourself for developing the discipline and expanding your employment possibilities? i

CRAIG McKENNEY *(*cmckenney@highline.edu*) is a child of the 1980s and has played games since he could walk. He has lived through more gaming platforms than he cares to recount. Currently, he teaches technical communication in Washington state, where he continues to research simulations used in corporate settings as a technical document and the rhetoric of game narratives.*

REFERENCES

Albers, Michael. "The future of technical communication: Introduction to this special issue." *Technical Communication* 52.3 (2006): 267–272.

Dugdale, Julie, et al. "An assessment of a mixed reality environment: Towards an ethnomethodological approach." *Simulation and Gaming* 37.2 (2006): 1–19.

Entertainment Software Association, "2011 Sales, Demographic and Usage Information." Accessed 10 October 2011, *www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA_EF_2011.pdf.*

Giammona, Barbara. "The future of technical communication: How innovation, technology, information management, and other forces are shaping the future of the profession. *Technical Communication* 51 (2004): 349–366.

Giammona, Barbara. " The Future of Technical Communication: Remix." *Intercom* (May 2009): 6–11.

Hayhoe, George. "The Future of Technical Communication." *Technical Communication* 523 (2005): 265–266.

Hughes, Michael. "Moving from Information Transfer to Knowledge Creation: A New Value Proposition for Technical Communicators." *Technical Communication* 493 (2002): 275–285.

Johnson-Eilola, Johndan. "Relocating the value of work: Technical communication in a post-industrial age." *Technical Communication Quarterly* 5.3 (1996): 245–270.

Salen, Katie, and Eric Zimmerman. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003.

Susi, Tarja, Mikael Johannesson, and Per Backland. *Serious Games—An Overview.* Technical Report HS-IKI-TR-07-001. School of Humanities and Informatics, University of Skövde, Sweden.