

A Proposal for Redesigning the STC Houston Chapter Web Site

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for
The STC Houston Administrative Council
March 29, 2000

This proposal offers a strategic vision for redesigning the web site of the Houston Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), along with an implementation plan to bring the web site into alignment with that vision.

Executive Summary

About this section

This section discusses the current situation, target, and proposal for the STC Houston web site in general terms.

Situation

Members of the STC Houston Administrative Council, among other STC Houston officials, have expressed interest in redesigning the chapter's web site. This interest has increased in recent months, as STC Houston will be hosting the Region 5 Conference in October 2001, and will use the web site as a primary communication tool.

The site was launched in 1996 and has remained essentially the same since then. During this time, the Internet has grown in size and scope, and web site owners have found that their audience expects more functionality from this technology. As Internet technology has evolved, this medium has become integral to the communication strategy of many organizations.

STC is no exception, and has established its web site as the organization's primary communication tool. Given this strategy, STC makes it easy for its member chapters to link from the society's main page. The STC Houston web site address is <http://www.stc.org/region5/hou>.

Target

A successful web site redesign begins with a strategic vision. We conducted research on Internet technology and comparable web sites to have a basis for that strategic vision.

We envision the STC Houston web site as being *the definitive chapter resource*.

In recent years, only the web site content has been maintained. The framework has remained the same. We agree with the consensus of the Administrative Council that a redesign is advisable, not only because of the growing demands for more information on the web site, but also because the site, as currently organized, falls short of our vision.

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Executive Summary, Continued

Proposal

We propose to translate our vision into a detailed plan and then implement this plan in a five-phase process. This site will include new content, improved navigation, and a fresh, new, graphical appearance and design.

We expect the redesigned STC Houston web site to be officially launched at the September, 2000, program kickoff meeting. As this proposal explains, we believe we can do this with staff and technical resources in place, and at minimal cost.

To successfully execute this plan, we request Administrative Council approval for this proposal.

In this proposal This proposal includes the following sections:

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Introduction

About this section

This section discusses the research and development efforts made in developing the strategic vision for the STC Houston web site.

This information is crucial not only for creating a strategic vision, but also for identifying a strategy for a web site redesign.

Surveying the STC Houston Administrative Council

In February, we submitted a survey to the STC Houston Administrative Council members. The purpose of this survey was to solicit opinions on the current STC Houston web site and to measure the Internet usage of Administrative Council members.

The response, though limited, helped us formulate our strategic vision by identifying elements to be included in a redesigned web site.

In addition, the response provided useful feedback in identifying web sites to review for ideas on design and content.

Benchmarking competitors and alliance partners

In addition to reviewing web sites identified in the survey responses, we reviewed related STC web sites for benchmarking purposes. These sites fell into two categories.

Item	Category
1.	Regional sites – Houston is in Region 5, and comparable sites reviewed included those of the Lone Star (Dallas-Fort Worth), Alamo (San Antonio), and Austin chapters.
2.	Comparably size chapters – Houston is the fourth-largest city in the United States, and comparable sites reviewed included those of the New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago chapters.

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Introduction, Continued

**The web site
redesign
feasibility study**

Upon the conclusion of this research, we prepared a web site redesign feasibility study for the Administrative Council in March. Here, again, are the conclusions of that study:

Item	Conclusion
1.	STC Houston has an interest in a web site redesign, based on concerns about content design and the need to actively promote upcoming events, such as the STC Region 5 Conference.
2.	STC Houston has the staff expertise to perform a web site redesign.
3.	STC Houston has the staff availability, or volunteer interest, to perform a web site redesign.
4.	Technical considerations, in terms of ISP, are not an issue, and should not be a problem if those redesigning the site have web site design and experience.
5.	The financial cost involved in a web site redesign is negligible.

Objectives of our Web Site Redesign

About this section

This section discusses the strategic objectives we expect to meet in redesigning the STC Houston web site.

Target audiences

STC Houston serves a number of audiences. It stands to reason that we must identify them before embarking on a web site redesign. The basic audiences would include the following:

- STC members, regardless of chapter affiliation
 - Potential STC members
 - Potential attendees of the Region 5 Conference
 - Potential corporate sponsors of STC Houston
 - Employers & potential employers of technical communicators
 - Technical communication professionals
 - Professional writers, regardless of whether they write technical information
 - Graphic designers/artists
 - Web designers/artists
 - Students of technical communication
 - Faculty teaching and/or researching technical communication
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Expected outcomes

We know that effectively and efficiently redesigning a web site is not easy.

We need to ensure that the site includes information that is necessary and useful to our target audiences. We also need to ensure that this information is easy to find and remains current. Finally, we need to proceed in a methodical manner to keep this a manageable process.

That is why we expect this project to yield two outcomes.

Item	Outcome
1.	A plan that will establish a clear direction and vision for our web site. This plan will specifically outline the proposed changes to the web site.
2.	An implementation plan that will specifically show both how we will redesign the web site, and how we will maintain it on an ongoing basis.

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Objectives of our Web Site Redesign, Continued

Measurable Results

Upon the successful implementation of this proposal, STC Houston will see measurable results in several areas:

- More information on the web site
- Easier navigation to find that information on the web site
- An enhanced image of STC Houston as evidenced by a fresh new look for its web site

Key questions

Our plan will answer the following key questions.

Item	Question
1.	What are the information design criteria for the web site?
2.	What are the graphic design criteria for the web site?
3.	What are the navigational design criteria for the web site?
4.	How, in terms of time and cost, will the proposed changes be implemented?
5.	How will the redesigned web site be announced to the STC Houston membership and other interested parties?
6.	How will the redesigned web site be maintained, and by whom?

The Strategic Vision for our Web Site

About this section

This section discusses our strategic vision for the STC Houston web site.

Our strategic vision for the web site

When we reviewed the surveys, several people responded that the web site should be a resource for everyone – though they didn't necessarily put it in those terms.

Our vision for the web site can be stated this way: *The STC Houston web site will be the definitive chapter resource.*

Vision to Reality

Our vision will become a reality by the conclusion of this project.

We have translated our vision into a detailed plan by identifying what this vision means for the different aspects of the web site, including:

- The structure
 - The content
 - The navigation
 - The graphics
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The Strategic Vision for our Web Site, Continued

Changing the structure

Currently, the STC Houston web site has five main links from the home page: calendar, employment, announcements, membership, and links.

We propose to increase the number of links from the home page to 12. Here are the categories we envision linking, along with a brief description of what the link would lead to:

Link	Content
About STC Houston	Information on STC and STC Houston, including chapter leadership directory and information.
Competitions & Awards	Information on competitions and award winners.
Calendar	Calendar of STC Houston events.
Employment	Information on Houston employment opportunities in technical communication.
Volunteers	Information on volunteering and its benefits.
Region 5 Conference	Information on the upcoming Region 5 Conference.
Corporate Sponsors	Information on becoming an STC Houston corporate sponsor.
Publications	Archived Dateline Houston newsletters and other STC publications of interest.
Other Resources	Links to related sites of interest.
Listserv	Information on how to add your name, remove your name, or post information to the STC Houston listserv.
FAQ	Frequently asked questions about STC and STC Houston.
Site Map	Site Map for an overview of how the site is organized.

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The Strategic Vision for our Web Site, Continued

Changing the content

In performing an “information inventory,” we learned that much of the information we would like to put on a redesigned web site exists. The problem, however, is that much of it resides with individual content owners and is not on the web site already.

Examples of information that we have, but do not have posted to the web site, include awards, corporate sponsorship, and Region 5 Conference news.

We propose to work with the content owners to get their information posted to the redesigned web site.

Changing the navigation

Easy navigation encourages web site visitors to explore, and of course, makes it easier for the visitor to find the information he or she is seeking.

We believe that our plan to increase the number of main links from the home page, along with the site map, will make it easier for visitors to find what they are looking for on our web site.

Changing the graphics

In our study of comparable sites, we noticed that other chapters often have graphics that not only add color to their site, but add a unique touch because that graphic reflects that town. An example of this is the Alamo Chapter web site, which has an icon of the Alamo.

We do not have specific graphics to propose at this time. However, we expect the person we recruit to do the graphic design will have some ideas for the Administrative Council to consider.

The Web Site Implementation Plan

About this section

This section discusses how we propose to implement the redesign changes and make the STC Houston web site fulfill our strategic vision as *the definitive chapter resource*.

How we propose to redesign the web site

We propose to redesign the web site in a five-phase project, with the final rollout of the redesigned site at the September, 2000, program kickoff meeting.

We believe that organizing the implementation of the redesigned web site into five phases will greatly facilitate this project. Each phase has a specific objective along with specific action items and due dates that coincide with the monthly meeting of the Administrative Council.

This approach breaks down the overall project into manageable tasks. This approach also allows the team to easily present the Administrative Council with a status at the monthly meeting.

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The Web Site Implementation Plan, Continued

Phase 1

Objective: To create a mock home page with graphics for Administrative Council review and approval. This phase also includes the establishment of a new domain name.

Due Date: May 11

Details: It is important to the success of the project that agreement on the overall look of the redesigned web site is reached at the beginning. The graphical expertise and immediate availability of students at the Art Institute will allow us to develop sample home pages for Administrative Council review and approval. The proposed design will be replicated on each page of the redesigned web site, which will be hosted on the STC server. This phase includes the following:

Step	Action
1.	Register http://www.stchouston.org as our domain name. Cost: \$119 for a two-year period. Rationale: In an effort to better market our URL, we need a name that is easily remembered. This URL would link to the actual site, but is much easier to remember than the current URL.
2.	Recruit an Art Institute of Houston student/member to prepare graphics for mock home pages for Administrative Council review and approval. Rationale: Gerri Huck, the STC Houston web diva, has friends with the Art Institute who know web graphic design and who would be interested in this type of project.
3.	Create mock home pages for Administrative Council review and approval. Rationale: In order to give the Administrative Council the opportunity to select the design it likes best, and to get a better feel for what we can do, graphically speaking.

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The Web Site Implementation Plan, Continued

Phase 2

Objective: To move forward with content development within the approved web site design.

Due Date: June 13

Details: As soon as the design is approval, the team can proceed with populating the new site with existing and new content. The agreed-to framework will also allow the project leaders to determine more specifically how many additional volunteers will be needed and what specific knowledge is required. This phase involves the following:

Step	Action
1.	Administrative Council approval of mockup design at the May meeting. Rationale: The Administrative Council has executive authority for the web site, and should have the opportunity to review the graphic design options.
2.	Determine need for volunteers and recruit accordingly by phone calls, listserv announcements, and newsletter announcements. Rationale: When the Administrative Council approves the mockup design, the information itself should be fairly easy to gather and post. We think it's better to recruit volunteers once the design is in place and we need only "fill in the blanks."
3.	Coordinate gathering of content from content owners. Rationale: Again, here is where we "fill in the blanks" for the information we are missing.

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The Web Site Implementation Plan, Continued

Phase 3

Objective: To ensure that the redesigned web sites meets design criteria.

Due Date: July 11

Details: To be effective, the redesigned web site must be usable by everyone in its target audience. This phase puts into place processes that will ensure content and navigation integrity by applying quality assurance and usability testing concepts. Steps 2 and 3 of this phase call for the hands-on participation of the Administrative Council. This phase involves the following:

Step	Action
1.	<p>Gerri, our web diva, will design a front-end quality assurance program to ensure that all content is consistent in terms of organization and coding.</p> <p>Rationale: We want to make sure that the content is consistent in terms of organization and coding.</p>
2.	<p>Check the site, in which everyone involved will make sure the content is accurate and timely.</p> <p>Rationale: We want to ensure that the content is accurate and timely.</p>
3.	<p>Usability testing, in which everyone involved experiments with navigating the site, which will be posted on the current site but not advertised in the interest of discretion.</p> <p>Rationale: We want to ensure that the site is easily navigable.</p>

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The Web Site Implementation Plan, Continued

Phase 4

Objective: To promote the web site to our target audiences.

Due Date: August 8

Details: The web site is now complete enough to introduce to our target audience. This phase involves the following:

Step	Action
1.	Launch the redesigned STC Houston web site. Rationale: To promote a web site, we must first launch it.
2.	Announce the web site launching through Project Open Mouth. Rationale: This is our in-place program to announce chapter news to our membership.
3.	Announce the web site launching to our targeted media list of like-minded organizations and other Region 5 STC chapters. Rationale: Chapters in our region will want to visit the redesigned site, as well as those with an interest in the Region 5 Conference.

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The Web Site Implementation Plan, Continued

Phase 5

Objective: To implement an approach that ensures ongoing web site maintenance.

Due Date: September 12

Details: September 12 marks the date the new web site will be launched. This date will also mark the implementation of the process that assures the ongoing maintenance of the web site as follows:

Step	Action
1.	The volunteers will be asked to take ownership of the information they have gathered and work with the content owner to update/revise as needed. Rationale: Taking ownership in this fashion increases participation in STC Houston.
2.	The web diva will lead a web site inventory every six months. Content owners will be asked to validate the information they've posted, or see it removed from the site. Rationale: Removing outdated information is just as important as posting new and current information. Furthermore, conducting a semi-annual inventory ensures that nothing falls through the cracks.

To Recap

We believe that our phased approach will allow us to implement a redesigned web site in a timely manner, and make most efficient use of resources. The preliminary analysis completed during our feasibility study has already helped us formulate our vision and translate it into a plan for implementation.

The phased approach for implementation will give the implementing team manageable chunks to work with and give the Administrative Council the opportunity to keep close track of the project.

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The Web Site Implementation Plan, Continued

Role of the Administrative Council

The Administrative Council will play a critical, hands-on role in the web site redesign in the following ways:

- It will give final authorization to this proposal
- It will select the design at the May meeting
- It will see the site taking shape by looking at the mockup version during the summer
- It will, by exploring the mockup site during the summer, participate in quality assurance

Finally, Administrative Council members are always welcome to share their views with George, Gerri, and Joelle.

Qualifications of the Web Site Redesign Team

About this section

This section discusses the qualifications of the team who will implement the STC Houston web site redesign.

Who's in charge of the project

George Slaughter, Gerri Huck, and Joelle Hollowell will lead the web site redesign project. Here is a breakdown of their responsibilities for this project:

Leader	Role in the Redesign
George Slaughter	As director of communications, George is the liaison with the Administrative Council. Also, George will help recruit and supervise the volunteers helping with this project.
Gerri Huck	As web diva, Gerri will take the lead in ensuring the information is posted to the web site and making sure things go on schedule. Gerri and George will recruit and supervise the volunteers helping with this project.
Joelle Hollowell	As web site scholarly advisor, Joelle will help George and Gerri keep things on track. She will also help gather and prepare information that needs to be posted to the web site.

Volunteers

Volunteers will be recruited based on the expertise required.

Students at the Art Institute will contribute their graphic design expertise in the design, development, and implementation of graphics for the new web site.

The need for other volunteers will be determined by the design criteria approved on May 11. Based on the required end result, volunteers will be recruited within the STC membership according to their web expertise. The selected team of volunteers will work within the established implementation framework under the guidance of the web redesign leaders.

Benefits

About this section

This section discusses the benefits of accepting this proposal.

Benefits of this redesign plan

An effective web site that serves as the definitive chapter resource cannot be created without first creating a detailed plan. We believe this redesign plan helps STC Houston in the following ways:

- The web site redesign project will proceed with a definite sense of goals
 - The web site redesigners will know what is expected, and when
 - The web site will be redesigned in a timely manner
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Benefits of the redesigned web site

Our detailed implementation plan will move STC Houston towards its goal of having a definitive chapter resource. The benefits of this redesigned web site include the following:

- Users will find more information on the redesigned web site
 - Users will find the redesigned web site easier to navigate
 - The reputation of STC Houston will be enhanced as evidenced by a redesigned web site that serves as *the definitive chapter resource*
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Conclusions & Recommendations

About this section

This section discusses our conclusions and recommendations based upon our research and planning for this proposal.

Conclusions

We know that STC Houston wants to redesign its web site. In order to do so effectively and efficiently, it needs a written game plan with which it can meet this goal in a timely manner.

The only cost associated with this project is \$119 to register a new, easy-to-remember domain name for two years.

We believe this plan is a reasonable, measurable, and attainable method of achieving our common goal of redesigning the STC Houston web site.

Recommendations

We ask the STC Houston Administrative Council to approve this proposal so that we may proceed with Phase 1 of the web site redesign project.