Annual Conference Newsletter

STC India Chapter

President's Address
By Mugdha Achalkar

Hello Friends,
What a year it has been! By now all of us are tired of hearing about the "The One Which Has Raised a Havoc and Has No Foreseen Cure" factor in our lives. This year we have experienced unprecedented circumstances and almost everything had come to a stop – as far as our so-called normal lives are concerned.

STC India Chapter is equally impacted by this. But at the core, we @STC India Chapter still believe in building, learning, networking, and more. We are proud to say that even though most of our day to day lives were affected in some way or the other, STC India managed to keep the learnings going. We had an excellent and enthusiastic team of city representatives helping us keep the flame burning. We believe that learning is a continuous process and all that we learn today might not be relevant or implemented today in our professional lives, but it does open our minds and helps us be better prepared.

This year we added Trivandrum to our tribe, and we are very happy to see the enthusiastic response from the city representatives and the participants to imbibe and share knowledge. We also had equally interesting sessions from our usual suspects □ – cities like Pune, Mumbai, and Chennai leading and paving the way.

Even though we missed the direct connect, 1:1 networking session, the silver lining was that all the sessions were turned into webinars, so the boundaries were kind of blurred. Even though we had the city representatives take the initiative and plan the sessions, like every year, these sessions were not "local".

This helped us interact with each other across geographical locations and it meant that a lot of us got to meet a lot of new people. Be it experienced professionals, entrants, aspiring writers, students, and so on.

This year has been a year of challenges and coordinating the sessions and the annual conference was no ordinary feat. The annual conference is going virtual for the very first time in the history of last 22 years of STC India Annual Conferences!! Yeah, definitely a silver lining.

If anything, we as Human Race have hopefully understood that we can only plan so much – finally as the saying goes – "Man Proposes and God Disposes". These times have forced us to reconsider our plans, our options, our outlook towards life – both personal and professional.

Let us open horizons and think different. Only when we put ourselves in the shoes of others is when we will start thinking differently, and ideally think better. Our conference theme this year is what takes this emotion a notch ahead and encourages us to have a **20/20 Vision: Trigger Deep Delight with User Experience! Break silos. Transform. Delight** We are all set to welcome you with a promise that all sessions are going to be very engaging and informative. Get ready to get on a roller coaster ride with tidbits and learnings from professionals which will enrich our lives!

Conference Program Manager Writes…
By Rajib Borkataki

When I took charge as the Program Manager for the 2020 Annual Conference, I was a bit nervous. This would be the first 'virtual' conference in its history of 22nd years, and that was not by choice, but driven by the circumstances. The challenges of hosting the conference started looming large one by one. First thing first – I set out by forming the Conference Core Committee. And after the initial few meetings of answering 'do we still want to do the conference?' to each other in the committee – we all had a resounding yes in response in the next few days!

The opportunities of hosting a virtual conference started dawning on us and they easily outnumbered the challenges we anticipated when we started. We set out to achieve through the conference a 'content-rich' experience by having a great line-up of speakers, and we had the advantage of reaching out to the peers and eminent speakers globally. Time zone was not much of an issue. Logistics could be easily managed. Yes – the misses were the networking, the once-a-year meet up with so many folks in the annual festival of the community, and the sponsorship. At the same time, it enabled us to have a different perspective at hosting the conference.

It's amazing how the different pieces come together to host the conference each year, how the team always makes a difference with their ideas and efforts. The eve of the conference this year is the Thanksgiving Day and it makes such a compelling setting to make us realize that together we make anything and everything possible! The joy of coming together as a family to celebrate knowledge and sharing the same to uplift the community, to be relevant for the future, and to nurture the user advocate in each one of us have set the tone of the conference this year. We are because of our users! We have a big responsibility towards them and we need to keep reinventing ourselves to make the user experience delightful through our every interaction with them and what we produce for them. With so many distractions around us and in our jobs, it's easy to lose sight of this very important essence of our being user assistance professionals, but we believe that such reinforcements from time to time on the topic will help us make the world of our users a much better and efficient place. Let's tune into the conference to learn and get inspired by what some of our fellow community members globally have achieved through their relentless efforts in making a difference to their jobs and to the lives of their users.

Let's have a great conference!

The Lone Lily
By Anagha Walvekar

During my morning walk today, I happened to see a lone lily that had blossomed over a large expanse of green. That is why it caught my attention. The small pink dot stood out in contrast to the fresh green background. It set me thinking whether the Lily felt the same as some who were alone at home during the lockdown period. And I realized how lucky I was to have my family with me.

The lockdown was something none of us had ever imagined. It was a totally new experience. As there were restrictions on venturing outside our home, we had to stock a few groceries and other necessary items such as medicines. We had to set our priorities and divided the household chores between all the family members. We had to prepare a workplace with a proper desk and chair. Later on, we also upgraded our broadband plan.

I logged in as early as I could so that I could take breaks to take care of my household chores during the day (there were no maids! ☹). I took timely breaks and did my share of household chores. This was possible because we are all adults at home, and sometimes I wondered how people with young children were coping with the situation.

I got used to working virtually. Instead of walking up to someone's desk for a query I had, I was using Slack. All our meetings became Zoom meetings. We had our cameras turned on so that we could see each other virtually (which eventually stopped as our appearances became less presentable! :D). There was one bright side to the lockdown – all of us were saving commute time!

As days turned into weeks and weeks into months, all of us got used to working from home. By the fourth month, working from home had lost its luster. I was missing working with my team around me. I missed having coffee with Bhavana and the small talk with Ashwini, turning around and asking Surya a quick question, walking to Amruta's desk to ask her a query regarding the usage of a term, and having lunch and snacks with the team. I missed having people around me. However, there was one thing I did NOT miss. My daily commute!

It has been more than seven months now. Working from home has become a part of our lives. I am now well equipped to work from home – mentally and physically. I have separated my work life from my personal and have set a regime for both. However, with the lockdown lifted and the threat of the pandemic seemingly reduced, I am looking forward to going to work at least once a week or when necessary and otherwise working from my home office. ☺
I remembered the Lily swaying in the wind. Was she used to being alone?

Link up and Not Lose the Loop

By Mrunalini Kelshiker

Year 2020 … the year to embrace the challenges, the year to accept unexpected changes, the year to move ahead with the heads-up moves, the year to endure the hard knocks and the year perhaps we never wished for.

But this odd year has not been successful in impacting our willingness to give our users the more better user experience.

As a technical communicator, it is our aim to assist users in knowing what they need to know. And here, user assistance comes into the picture. User assistance helps users to interact with software through information and describing the user interface. It also assists them to know the product capabilities to apply to their requirements. It plays an important role in the ideal interaction between human and computers. It allows users to focus on more important and higher-level aspects that contribute to their achievement of goals. User assistance is like one of the factors of user experience.

Human Factor at Core
The study of human factors is necessary to simplify and improve the interactive computing systems. The ease of use is a centralized technique to let the human-machine interfaces communicate smoothly. None of us would like to let your users wait to obtain user assistance while using the software. It is when the accessibility of information is measured.

The practice of advocating for the end user fits into the terms of User advocacy. User advocates set aside their personal point of view and try to see the product from end users' perspective through their eyes. This ultimately enables team to come up with observations and better recommendations to improve the overall user experience.

Usability
"Usability is about people and how they understand and use things, not about technology." (Steve Krug)

User-centered designs need to be implemented to cope with the users and their goals. The product and information should undergo usability testing to evaluate the usableness of interfaces. We must design and write for usability.

Online information, document or knowledge base can be prepared with different user approaches to the information to build the artifacts that meet the needs of users. All these basics must be factored into the product design. The combination of designs - visual design, interaction design and information design should be worked out to build usability, which ultimately turn out to as the user experience.

The design of user interaction should be crafted considering user needs. It should be easy to learn and efficient for users. The interface and interaction should promote user engagement.

"Interaction is the essence of all user experiences. It is the conversation between your product and your user, and if the conversation is boring, your user will leave and talk to someone more interesting." (UXPin team)

The rich the product with features, the more difficult to use it. The conceptual gap between the designers of software and its end user reduces the usability of software despite the best intentions of its maker. Hence, end-user analysis makes it must to study the work style that users will bring into the system.

Are we Are we connected enough to make our path towards our vision?
Though the situation of covid-19 pandemic has changed the way the entire world work and strive to survive, it could not touch our holy approach of wellbeing of users.
Even in this virtual world, we technical communicators, continue to embrace the breakthrough, to reveal the true self and challenge our own capabilities.

We have adapted to the virtual world – without compromising on the release deadlines. We never dreamt of - the collaboration, teamwork, management, and spirit that we carried out to keep the show going.
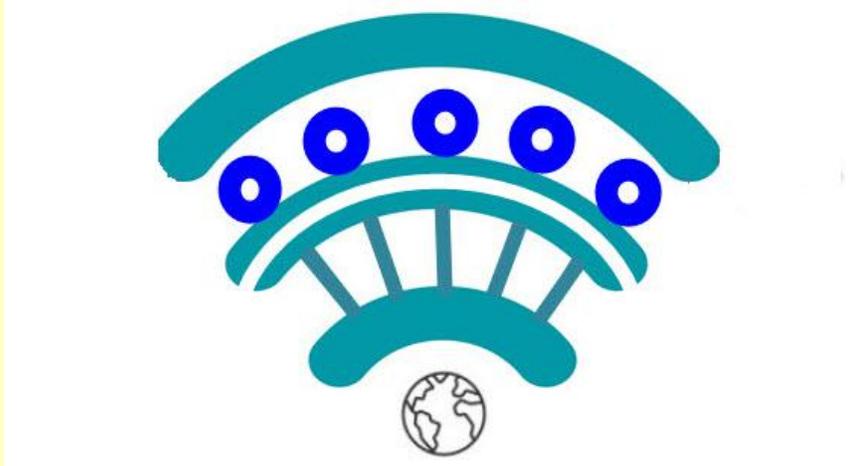
We have learnt to connect more closely with our colleagues virtually and move ahead keeping hand in hand to survive through this storm.

I cannot miss to quote the verse from Shrimad Bhagvad Gita at this point – "vasudhaiva kutumbakam" (The entire world is one family)

When we think about the lives of people we affect (i.e. users) and work with sympathy towards them, it certainly renders a delighted experience for them.

Oh, Sorry!
By Sharada Kotcherlakota

"Sharada, could you please mute yourself. Your pet is not a meeting invite."

"Oh sorry!" I quickly muted my call and gave Casper a dirty look. The fellow, on his part, returned me a smile with fervently wagging tail as if telling it is fun to "Woof from Home".

That's Home Office! A world, literally 'pushed to wall', is confined within a 1500 sft home-bound-ary.

Working from home is like being sandwiched between two relationships; you are trying to prove your loyalty to both.

Can't you attend the doorbell? Can you please quickly get salt from the shop down? Are you that busy? Neighbors are like, you have two mins? The apartment's drain is blocked and we are checking the root cause, can you come over? None is interested in your response. I feel like screaming, "Common, I am working!"

If you oblige and attend to these 'requests', just that time, someone from office pings you; then when there's a delayed response, "…were you away?", more of an accusation than a question. What to fault others; I too, when in office, on not getting a response to a ping, would get up and go to the desk to confront. Now, at home, I am like, "Damn! Where are you?" and then wait for the response like an anxious husband outside the labor room. Times…

…times have forced a new work culture where WiFi has replaced HiFi and home office is no longer an oxymoron. Twin it! Live it!

Competitions: STC India Chapter, Annual Conference, 2020

Competition Managers: Nibu Thomas and Anindita Basu

What's usually missing on most tech writer resumes, is a section called achievements. Well, not for these individuals! Congratulations on teaming up with someone from another organization and winning your tickets to what seems to be shaping up as a great conference!

We ran some games, you played. It's time now for the prizes, so here goes:

Game1: Undetectable typos

Winning Team: Gayathri Jaishankar (Informatica) and Prema Ramakrishnan (HCL Technologies)

Game 2: The Measure

Winning Team: Dishari Chatterjee Dutta (HPE) and Ravi (Rahi Systems Pvt. Ltd.)

Game 3: Lights, Camera, Action

Winning Team: Dishari Chatterjee Dutta (HPE) and Ravi (Rahi Systems Pvt. Ltd.)

To all of you who participated, way to go and keep the faith!

Editors
Annual Conference NewsLetter

GopalKrishna Tharoor
Gayathri Jaishankar
Kiranmayee Pamarthy

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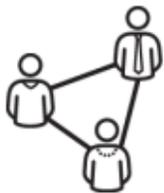
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