

STC Telephone Seminar:

**“Building a Product, Manual and Website Using Customer-Focused Design.”
Presented by Basil White, January 16, 2002**

By Jeff Klein, MTC Member

Thirty people sitting in a room, listening to a disembodied voice. Sounds like a meeting of Al-Qaeda, doesn't it? Actually, this was the first of six STC telephone seminars occurring over the next two months, designed to offer instruction and food for thought.

The presentation was made via telephone, and the audio was top-notch. Everything could be clearly heard, including the phone calls from listeners (despite occasional static). It all rolled along with neither interruption nor technical difficulty.

The speaker, Basil White, was a little dry and would have benefited from using specific, concrete examples. The only visual was a handout consisting of ten pages. More and better visuals would have helped this sort of seminar – and why not video teleconferencing? Isn't this the 21st Century? I should note that, through the entire 90-minute program, I didn't see a single soul walk out.

The workshop was primarily intended for project managers of enterprise technology products, who want to implement low-cost usability assessment and customer-focusing tools to ensure that their product development plans fit with unmet business needs and contribute efficiently to an overall enterprise architecture plan. (I'm quoting from the handout; no Jayson Blair am I.)

The objective for the workshop was “to teach information technology development teams a method for constructing a customer-focused plan for a product consisting of a goal hierarchy, a process flowchart and a product state table.” The demonstration was supposed to show these three models in the context of a sample product. This demonstration did

not occur, possibly due to time constraints.

The Schedule Of Activities began with Product Goals and Their Relationships, including How To Build A Goal Hierarchy. It weaved through User Processes and Their Relationships, Possible States of the Product; and finally, User-Focused, Goal-Directed [Documentation, Training, Customer Support, Online Help, Interface Design]. Unfortunately, there were no actual exercises in which the audience could partake, and I was not the only one disappointed by this.

Mr. White suggested that Goal Hierarchy could help with a customer support system, and this was clear from his flow chart. He explained how it could help improve customer support by identifying problematical issues for users.

I'll admit, the subject matter was over my head, so I wasn't sure I was qualified to write a review. But when I queried folks afterward, three out of four told me they got little out of the conference as well. One person noted that, while it gave her a different perspective, she didn't feel it was any better than her normal way of working. She agreed that Mr. White's approach was sort of like reinventing the wheel.

This contention was further supported during the seminar, when Mr. White was fielding phone calls from listeners. One caller wondered how Mr. White's Goal Hierarchy was different from User Task Analysis. Mr. White allowed that they were similar, but argued that User Task Analysis is more detailed, while Goal Hierarchy is more abstract.

It would have been far more effective—and intriguing—if Mr. White had started with an example of a specific product or

model that failed, and then applied his Goal Hierarchy to show how the failure might have been averted.

Listening alone, I would have had a hard time staying interested. However, attending in a room with some thirty folks upped the dynamics and interest level for me. I clearly see the value in this kind of presentation, and look forward to the next one on February 20. ✍

Telephone Seminar Schedule

By Christina Dunn, Publicity Officer

Our chapter of STC is sponsoring four STC Telephone Seminars at the HCA Corporate Campus this quarter. If you are an STC member or an HCA employee, these seminars are FREE. If not, the cost for each seminar is only \$5. The seminar times are from 12:00–1:30. You can bring your lunch, and HCA is providing drinks and cookies.

Find the registration form, seminar details, and directions to the HCA seminar site at <http://www.stcmid Tenn.org/registration>. The next three seminars are:

Creating Effective Documentation Plans, February 20
http://www.stc.org/seminar_022002.html

Communicating Clarity: Make Your Technical Marketing Matter, March 6
http://www.stc.org/seminar_030602.html

Creating Usability Goals: Understanding What Usability Means to Your Users, March 20
http://www.stc.org/seminar_032002.html