



ASTC Conference Review

By George Chapman

The topics presented during the two day conference can be broadly grouped into three categories:

- **Profession**
 - **Skills**
 - **New fields**
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The annual ASTC NSW conference held on Friday and Saturday, 31 October and 1 November, was a huge success.

Fourteen presentations were made during the two day event and valuable “networking time” was afforded by two excellent lunches, morning and afternoon tea-breaks and the optional dinner on Friday night. This article will provide a mini-review of the presentations, and then a closer look at one of the more unusual.

The topics presented during the two day conference can be broadly grouped into three categories:

Career/Profession

These topics concerned “bread and butter” issues.

“Articulating the value of technical communication services” directly considered workplace strategies to make sure technical writing is not underrated, taken for granted or saddled with an undefined objective. Always first determine what defines success before engaging in a project.

The other two topics explained the experience of other professional associations in Australia that have begun to implement certifications/accreditation programs, specifically the mechanics of setting their programs up and the value it is expected to impart. The amount of work involved was sobering, but the successes achieved provide inspiration.

Tasks/Skills

Presentations relating to the everyday work of technical writing formed the largest group.

Topics included effective planning and design of forms, structure mapping for large documents, identification and elimination of “weasel words”, mixed and dying metaphors, plain old waffle, meaningless expressions, etc., techniques for reviewing user interface, essential considerations for grabbing reader’s

attention, and finally a demonstration of an new, extremely interesting, Australian-designed technology called eComPress that ought to replace .pdf’s and .mdi’s (alas, but for market position, power, etc.).

New Fields for Technical Writing

While the Task/Skill group referred to techniques and competencies that most Technical writers deal with on a daily or routine basis, the third group explored areas of the technical communication realm where many of us have yet to venture or perhaps have not yet considered.

This group of topics included the specialised requirements of writing annual reports (in particular for government departments), the wonderful world of mining processes, software and attendant technical writing opportunities, the special considerations of help desk support design and documentation, and finally a lively and fascinating look at advanced animation techniques. This included a demonstration of the remarkable power of Flash MX as well as the enthusiastic teaching style of the presenter.

But what’s this?

Immediately after Friday morning’s tea break there appeared to be an interloper at the conference.

The topic title was “Technical Writing from a personality-type perspective”.

Perhaps there had been a mistake, could a presenter for the Australian Psychological Society (APS) conference had inadvertently been included in the ASTC conference?

Tech Writers meet MBTI™

Any sceptics were quickly disarmed and transformed into true believers by the lively and eloquent explanation of this invaluable technique.

Brian O’Donnell (the presenter) is an advocate, accredited practitioner, and, in

my opinion, apostle of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). He regularly works with individuals and groups applying the Psychological Type analysis methodology in their workplaces and everyday lives.

Carl Jung (1875-1961) first proposed the theory in his book *Psychological Types* (1921) in which he posited three psychological functions, each composed of two contrasting types:

Perception having the contrasting functions of **Sensing** as opposed to **Intuition**;

Judgment having two contrasting functions of **Thinking** as opposed to **Feeling**;

and an overall general **Attitude**, in which people focus their overall psychic energy:

Extroversion or **Introversion**.

The important thing to remember is that while everyone has some degree of all these personality components, Jung believed that most people by their individual nature prefer one contrasting function to the other and, providing they are not forced, coerced, etc., the behaviours and abilities related to these natural preferences will more readily develop and manifest themselves in each individual's developing personality

These theories were comprehensively consumed by the American Katharine Cook Briggs (1875-1968). In two articles in the progressive magazine *New Republic*, Briggs introduced her fellow countrymen to Jung's theory: *Meet Yourself Using the Personality Paint Box* (1926) and *Up From Barbarism* (1928). Together with her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers (1897-1980), she embarked on a project to create a 'personality inventory'. During this process they developed a fourth pair of contrasting processes concerning how individuals relate to their outer world:

Judging and **Perceiving**.

The result is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) psychometric assessment technique.

The four pairs (referred to as dichotomies in MBTI speak) form the basis for the personality type matrix:

Extroversion	Introversion
Sensing	iNtuition
Thinking	Feeling
Judging	Perceiving

From these four groups of contrasting preferences, sixteen different personality types can be derived: INTP, INTJ, INFJ, INFP, ISTP, ISTJ, ISFJ, ISFP, ESTP, ESTJ, ESFJ, ESFP, ENTP, ENTJ, ENFJ and ENFP. Each type has its particular attributes and tendencies, which have been extensively evaluated, analysed and documented.

After quickly and effectively explaining this framework, Brian proceeded to recommend ways in which this knowledge can be practically employed on a day-to-day basis by technical writers, specifically:

Attitudes to Change

How often has instituting change been a problem for technical writers?

Whether it is changing the wording of something that has been put down on paper (especially if it has been written by an "expert" or "manager"), or something more comprehensive and complex, like implementing a SOX project.

Different types have vastly different attitudes toward change.

Teams

The ability to analyse the constituent members of a team can avoid conflict and increase productivity.

It can also allow the strengths of each team-member to be identified and utilised. This may otherwise be over-looked on account of an unrecognised type-based conflict.

Customer/Audience

Assessing the personality type of a 'target' can greatly enhance the prospects of a proposal or product. For example, Brian explained how certain occupations tend to be dominated by particular personality types, hence we should accommodate these natural preferences if they are our audience.

Self Awareness

Finally, undoubtedly the most important benefit is a heightened awareness of our own biases generated solely on account of our individual personality type. Perhaps we can be overbearing, have good ideas to put forward but do not, are unconsciously ignoring deadlines, and so on.

For myself, the most attractive notion of the technique is that you can take as much as you want from this obviously very complex

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methodology. As Brian explained, the simple determination of the extrovert or introvert personality type will provide an advantage in dealing with an individual.

Likewise if you can begin to understand your own personality type you may have greater insight into how you relate and interact with others.

Obviously having this technique in our toolbox will have enormous ramifications in an industry where we have to interact, listen, communicate and ultimately make a living.

More Information

Brian's presentation provided a thorough introduction to this complex subject. At the conference the copies of the following introductory text were available for purchase:

You've Got Personality, An Introduction to Personality Types describe by Carl Jung and Isabel Myers, Mary McGuinness, MaryMac Books, Sydney 2004, \$12.95

For those interested in furthering their knowledge of MBTI, Brian provided an ample bibliography and list of websites.

Brian O'Donnell is a technical writer based in Canberra ACT, a director of First Rate Solutions Pty Ltd, and is an accredited practitioner of MBTI.

For more information on MBTI, contact Brian at: odonnell1@netspace.net.au
