

Tinker Tailor Soldier Sailor

What you can do as a
technical communicator

A presentation for STC Toronto Career Day

Beth Agnew Sep 25 2010

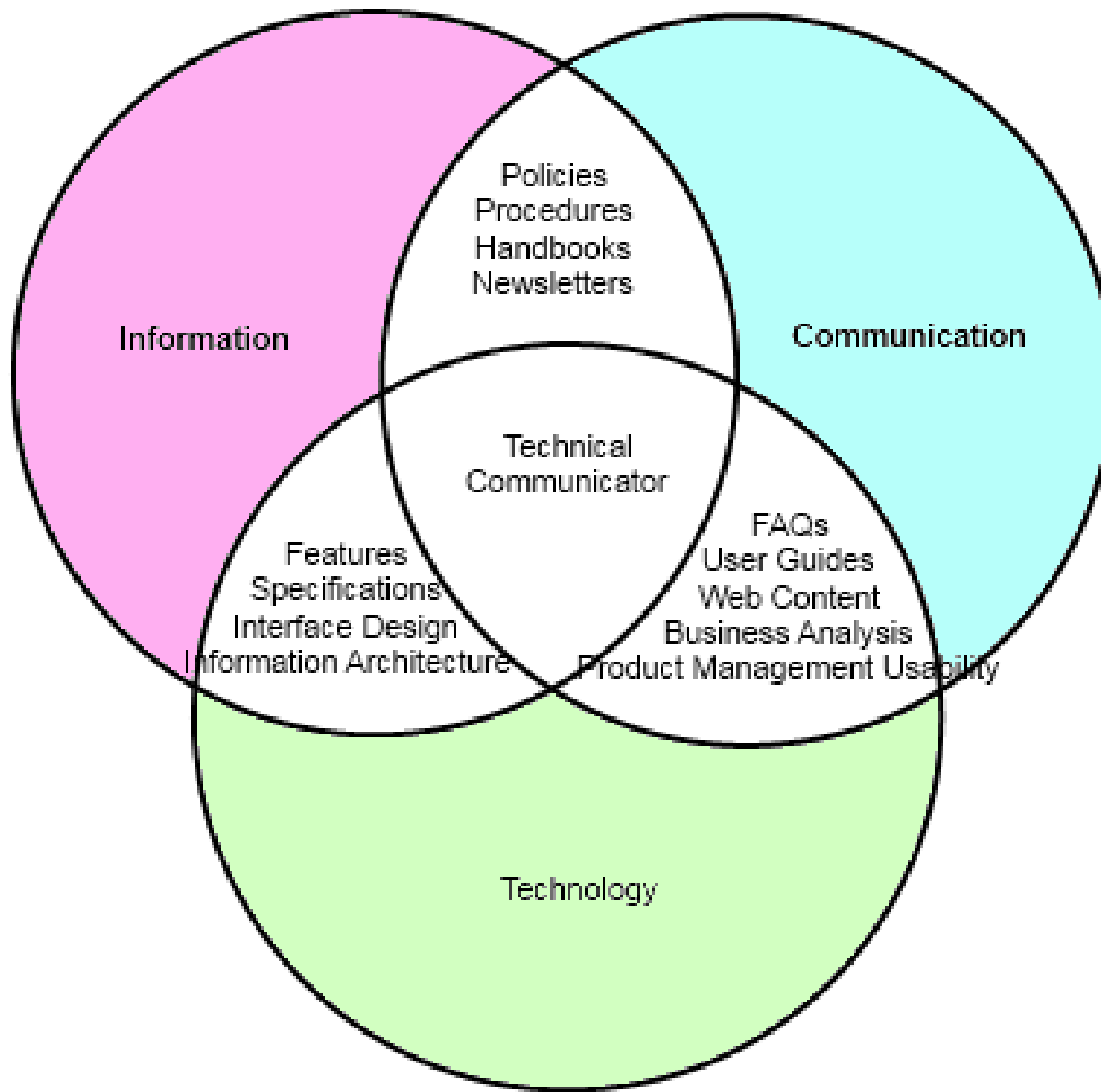
Technical Communication

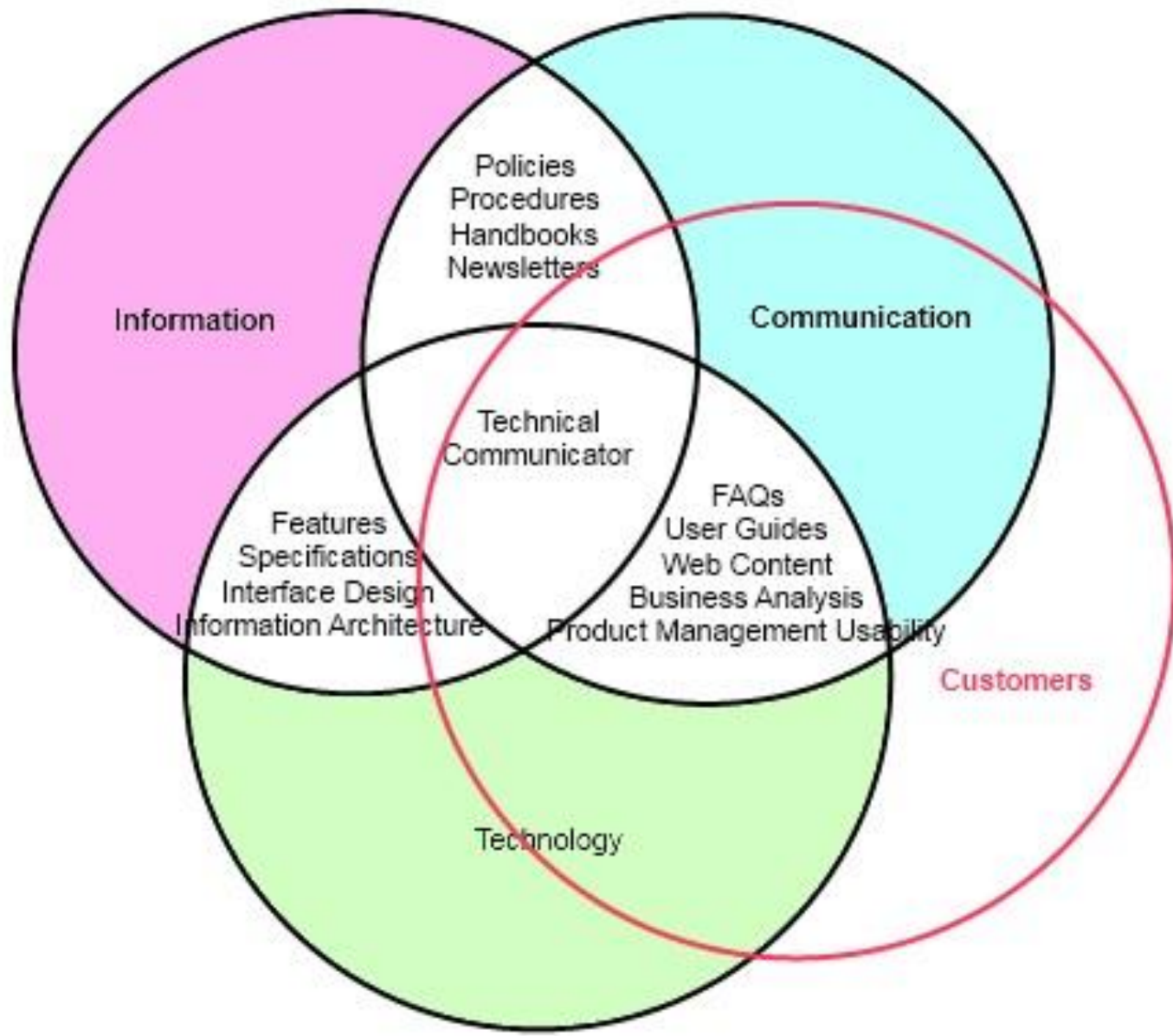
“Practical Communication”

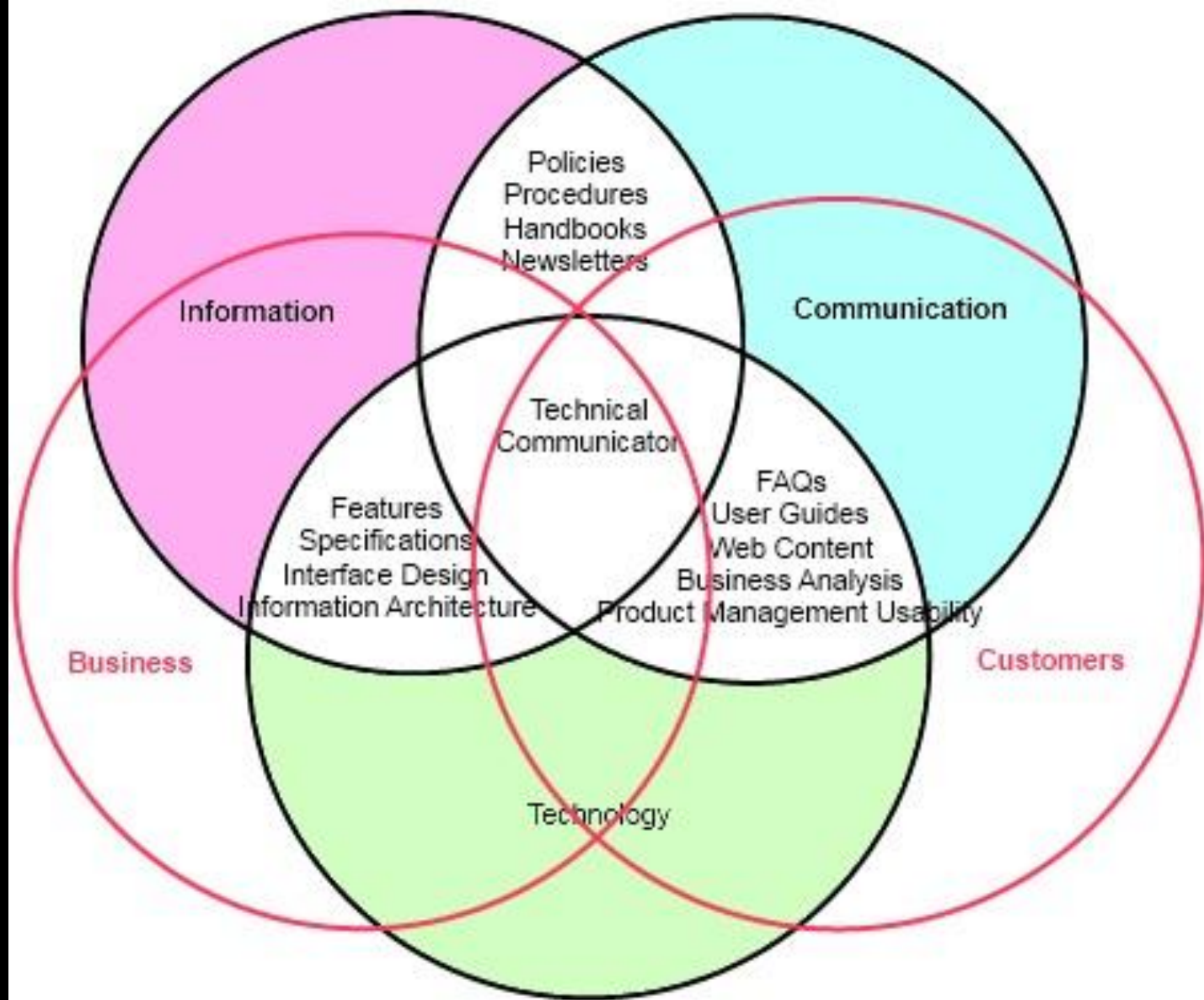
- Communication that helps someone carry out a task, solve a problem, or to answer a question.
- Specialized communication for a non-specialized audience
- Shaping information in such a way that it communicates effectively, quickly and accurately.
- Using technology to communicate information to a user so that a goal can be achieved.

Role of the Technical Communicator

- Facilitate Communication
- Translate technical language into plain language
- Document processes and procedures
- Communicate technical & scientific developments to a lay audience
- Help turn information into knowledge







“Technical Communication”

– a Broad Category

- Including, but not limited to:
 - Technical writers
 - Information developers
 - Web content developers
 - Documentation specialists
 - Technical editors
 - Technical illustrators
 - Technical trainers
- We take complex and technical information and make it understandable to those who need it.

Where we work

- Computer Industry
- Aerospace, Automotive (NASA, GM)
- Manufacturing, Engineering firms (General Mills, AECOM)
- Sciences (Pharma, Biotech, Environment)
- Government, Institutions (Hospitals, Military, Research Facilities, Large corporations)
- Anything “high tech” and many more!

VITAL

Technology determines the nature and supply of a society's physical resources.¹

Technology is knowledge.

Knowledge which is not communicated is lost.

¹ Paul Zane Pilzer

Types of Assignments - 1

- User guides
- White papers
- Marketing brochures, spec sheets, labels, signs, packaging, press releases
- Help files
- Error messages, interface tooltips and labels
- Installation instructions
- Usability testing
- Project documentation
- Technical reports

Types of Assignments - 2

- Web sites
- E-Learning
- Corporate videos/documentaries
- Product Demonstrations & Trade Shows
- Focus Groups & Customer Advisory Boards
- Single-Sourcing
- Knowledge Management
- Content Management

Types of Assignments - 3

- Science Writing
- Customer Newsletters
- Beta Testing Programs
- Voice mail script writing
- E-mail response writing
- E-book publishing
- Mass personalization
- Meeting Facilitation

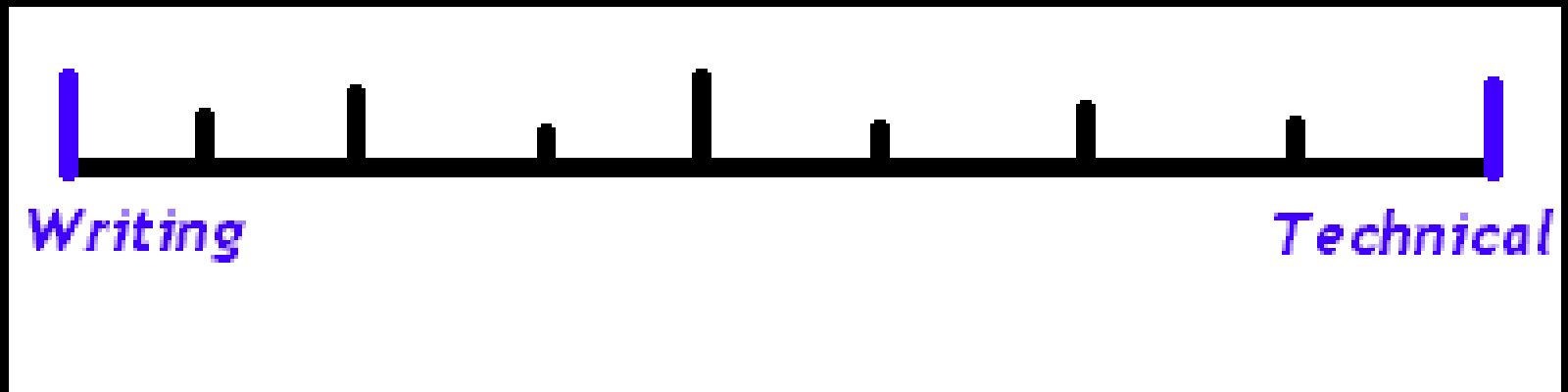
We always do more...

- We might be asked to edit a scientific paper for spelling and grammar
- ... but also discover lapses in logic, in content and in scientific methodology



Photo courtesy of Wenger Inc.

Where do you want to be?



No matter where you see yourself on the above continuum, there is a place for you in the technical communication profession.

Skills

- Project Management
- Leadership
- Interviewing
- Publishing
- Human Resources
- Management & Budgeting
- General Business Skills
- Negotiation, Risk Management, etc.



*Add Accounting
and you have an
MBA!*

Core Competencies

- Action oriented
- Deal with ambiguity and uncertainty
- Communicate needs and requirements
- Interpret information on behalf of the user.
- Figure things out
- Take initiative
- Team Player
- Learn quickly

Core Competencies - 2

- Research thoroughly
- Anticipate problems
- Identify risks
- Develop estimates, plans, and schedules
- Meet deadlines
- Communicate well
- Skilled writer

Core Competencies - 3

Specific Tasks

- Proficient with MS Word
- Proficient with FrameMaker (InDesign)
- Proficient with HTML Help, RoboHelp
- Install/Uninstall Software
- Trouble-shooting
- Proficient with general computer tasks
- Proficient with graphics programs

Tools We Use

- FrameMaker, Quark Xpress, InDesign
- RoboHelp / Doc to Help / Madcap Flare
- Captivate, SnagIt!, Camtasia Studio
- MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint
- Visio, Paint Shop Pro, PhotoShop, etc.
- Web applications, Java, Perl etc.
- Enterprise applications (Lotus Notes, etc.)
- C++, UML, HTML, XML
- Proprietary software / hardware

Drawback or Feature?

Problem:

A company manufactures sea salt as a healthier substitute to regular table salt. Customer feedback on the product indicates that purchasers do not like the way the salt clumps together. This does not happen with competitors' table salt (Sifto, Morton: "When it rains, it pours").

Drawback or Feature?

Solution – Note on the package of **Mediterranean Sea Salts**:

“This ancient natural food enhancer has been collected from the waters of the Mediterranean shores of Sicily. Sun and wind evaporate sea water reservoirs to white crystalline salt masses, harvested and cleared of impurities. This true product of nature, gourmet preferred, contains absolutely no additives and may cake together after long periods of time. In our opinion, a firm tap on the bottom of the box is a small price to pay for the great taste of nature.”

Contact Beth Agnew:

- Beth.agnew@senecac.on.ca
- Twitter: Professorsan, Writingwiz
- SenecaTechComm.com
- 416-491-5050 x 3133 @ Seneca College