



CIDM Survey

Technical communicators hold own during economic turmoil: survey

Gordon Brown

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A survey of the effect of the economic downturn on Canadian technical communicators indicates that our profession in many ways held its own amidst the turmoil in the high-tech industry over the past year. While some respondents reported deep job cuts, hiring freezes, and declines in salary or benefits in 2001, others reported no layoffs or salary cuts.

A surprisingly high number of respondents — 60% overall — reported no layoffs in their departments last year. Of the 40% who reported layoffs on the 28-question survey, the cuts ranged in size from 75% down to 10%.

Of those who lost their own jobs, three of seven had already found new jobs in the field by the time they filled out the survey. For one respondent, finding a job took only six weeks, while another reported little success after seven months.

In another surprising result, only 50% of the respondents reported terminations of contractors or temporary employees within their companies.

The Society for Technical Communication Eastern Ontario chapter (STCEO) collaborated to survey the economic downturn with Dr. JoAnn Hackos of the Center for Information Development Management (CIDM). The Canadian subset of an American-based CIDM survey was open from October 12 to 29.

STCEO invited the presidents of all eight Canadian STC chapters to encourage member and non-member technical communication managers to participate in the confidential survey.

But while we received 40 replies, at

least 50% were from the Alberta chapter of the STC, based in Calgary, and 27.5% came from this region. Other members logged on from the Canada West Coast chapter, which had five participants.

Of the 11 non-STC members who participated, at least 7 were from Ottawa, due to a broader mailing to non-member technical communicators here. The total number of participants from this region was 11. The overall proportion of members to non-member respondents was 73% to 27%, or about 3 to 1. Two respondents did not indicate where they live in Canada.

While the number of survey responses from Alberta and Ontario may make the survey statistically relevant for our regions, the low or non-participation of other regions likely renders the survey statistically irrelevant for them.

68% experienced no salary cuts

And while 32% had experienced salary cuts, or changed roles, 68% of respondents (25 people) experienced neither. More pervasive were budget cuts for software purchases, with 68%

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Stimulus Issues Extra Edition

This Extra edition of *Stimulus* is special in two different ways. First, it is issued as a supplement to the regular February printed edition, to provide you with more detailed information about the study the Eastern Ontario chapter carried out in cooperation with the Center for Information Development Management. Second, it is special because it is not printed, only available online at www.stceo.org 📄

Technical communicators hold own

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of managers reporting cutbacks there, and hardware purchases, with 51% of managers reporting cuts there. The silver lining in that story is that those expecting to purchase software or hardware in the new year (answering either "yes, definitely" or "yes, perhaps") added to a healthy 72% of respondents.

In terms of benefits, the overwhelming majority reported the economic slowdown had no effect last year: 72% to 28% (28 respondents to 11).

Travel and training budgets also remained unchanged for more participants than for those who reported significant decreases. But for both travel and training the combined responses for "Decreased Significantly" and "Decreased Somewhat" outnumbered those who reported "Remains the Same".

In the area of telecommuting, 85%

reported that policies had not changed in 2001, but several commented that telecommuting never was encouraged.

"Reorganizations were not uncommon..."

Reorganizations were not uncommon, but just over half of managers reported the status quo unchanged and outsourcing was also uncommon, with 85% stating that there had been no increase in outsourced work.

And while there was a split between the negatives and the positives, only 17% of all managers reported project cancellations as a result of the slowdown.

In terms of stock options, 27 of 40 respondents' companies offer them. Of those, 74% continued to offer options while 26% did not.

Zoomerang.com provided the web questionnaire software and secure hosting site.

For details of the survey, see the article **Canada coping with the slowdown** on page 6. You can also find more information at www.infomanagementcenter.com and www.zoomerang.com 🐞

Stimulus

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Submissions

Stimulus welcomes submissions on topics relevant to technical communicators in the Eastern Ontario area. We reserve the right to edit articles for length, clarity, and suitability.

Please e-mail articles and advertising copy to stimulus@stceo.org or mail to the address below. Articles and media will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. Most major electronic formats are supported for both Mac and PC.

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Benefits unaffected in economic slowdown: follow-up survey

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The STCEO Eastern Ontario Chapter (STCEO) worked with The Center for Information-Development Management (CIDM) to survey managers in technical communications. The initial survey is described in the article on page 4.

On November 19th, follow-up survey questions were sent to the 37 participants of the first survey. In one week, we received results from 12 respondents, which we forwarded to CIDM for review and possible use.

12 responses are not enough to characterize the state of technical communications in Canada. However, they are interesting and may strike a chord. Comparing the results to the other survey suggests these respondents were harder hit by the economic slowdown than those who didn't participate.

Note that the identity of the respondents to the second survey was not retained, in order to preserve anonymity given the sensitive questions.

Below are the questions and a summary of the responses. There were only 11 responses to each question. The twelfth person wrote: "All questions not applicable: no layoffs, no

terminations, no reductions in budget; we are busier than ever - I can't keep up." Timewarp!

Layoffs

If you have experienced lay-offs in your department, how does the percentage compare to company-wide lay-offs?

Summary: Their departments had similar or slightly higher lay-off percentages, compared to the rest of their companies surveyed.

1. 50%
2. N/A
3. Higher
4. Similar
5. Equally
6. Same
7. Employer carried out a 20% staff reduction across the board, TechPubs reduced by 30%.
8. We haven't had lay-offs, per se, but have not replace people who have left the department.
9. Dept lay-off was 25% and company-wide was about 30%
10. No layoffs
11. Company lay-offs: 20 percent. Department lay-offs: 25 percent

*see **Benefits unaffected in economic slowdown: follow-up survey** on page 4...*

Ottawa companies didn't lean on contractors

The most striking fact of the Ottawa response to this survey was evidence that many companies did not appear to turn to contractors for help through the downturn.

Fully 73% of respondents reported that contractors were in fact cut due to the slowdown. And at four of the companies all contractors were let go. Another reported that 60% of contract staff were terminated. Further, all 11 respondents said outsourcing was not being considered for the future.

On a more encouraging note, only 1 in 11 respondents reported slowdowns or reductions in total projects as a result of the downturn.

Eleven technical communication managers from Ottawa responded to the online survey Canada: Coping With the Slowdown conducted October 12-29, 2001. That figure represents at least 2.2 per cent of all Ottawa high tech businesses.

Survey participants who filled out the online poll hosted by Zoomerang.com answered questions prepared by the CIDM in collaboration with STCEO. Respondents represented 5 companies in Kanata, 5 in Ottawa, and 1 in Nepean, all former municipalities of the newly amalgamated City of Ottawa.

As of last July the Ottawa Business Journal listed 503 high tech companies in the Ottawa region and outlying areas on its mailing list. ☺

Benefits unaffected in economic slowdown: follow-up survey

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Layoffs by industry

If you have experienced lay-offs in your department, to what industry does your company belong (hardware, software, telecommunications, etc.)?

Summary: Most of their companies belong to the software industry. Smaller percentages belong to the hardware or telecommunications industries.

1. Hardware
2. N/A
3. Software
4. Software
5. Hardware and Software Engineering, Survey
6. Military communications (includes hardware, software, telecommunications)
7. Sector is broadband wireless telecommunications.
8. Telecommunications software.
9. Software for telecommunications
10. N/A
11. Software

Contract employees

If you have terminated contract employees, how is your department handling the same amount of work with less help? Are you limiting deliverable formats? Are you reducing the number of deliverables? Are you single sourcing?

Summary: All are working harder, and most have reduced deliverables.

1. Yes
2. N/A
3. Redistributing work among offices in different cities

4. Cutting corners on the same number of deliverables

5. Long hours, less produced, projects on hold, heavy prioritizing

6. We have reduced services to internal customers (it's more self-serve), we do more work with less people (more cross-function working).

7. TechPubs used only one contract writer. Her project was moved back one year, so reassigned workload had minimal impact to dept.

8. Unfortunately, our manager isn't inspired enough to have found ways to "work smarter" ... people are just working harder, and panicking more.

9. No contract employees terminated

10. N/A

11. Temporarily (hopefully) limiting deliverable formats. Moving deadlines. Putting projects on hold. Planning to single source.

Benefits

If the slowdown has affected employee benefits, what benefits have been affected?

Summary: In most cases, benefits haven't been affected. Pay was frozen in some cases. However the question didn't explicitly ask about pay, so perhaps pay was frozen more widely than the responses indicate.

1. Yes
2. N/A
3. No impact
4. None
5. Overtime pay eliminated
6. No change
7. Annual salary adjustments were to take place at date of layoffs, all salaries frozen at FY01 levels. No other changes.
8. Company perks have not been delivered, and annual raises have not come through.
9. No benefits affected
10. N/A
11. N/A

Travel

If your travel budget has been

restricted, is it due to fears of terrorist attacks or reduced budgets?

Summary: All travel restrictions are due to reduced budgets, not fears of terrorism.

1. Yes
2. Reduced budgets is the driving problem.
3. No
4. Reduced budgets
5. Reduced budgets
6. Apart from the temporary suspension of all business travel, I think all travel restrictions are due to budget.
7. Travel restricted due to budget cutbacks. Due to nature of corp. business, standard precautions considered adequate. Personal concerns over air travel were allowed to influence whether to travel or not. Charter flights increased.
8. Reduced budgets.
9. Reduced budgets
10. Reduced budgets
11. Reduced budgets

Training

Is there any difference between training held locally and training that requires travel? Are employees more likely to attend training held locally?

Summary: In almost all cases, employees are more likely to attend local training.

1. Yes
2. Local or via distance ed.
3. Yes
4. No
5. More likely locally. Distance training still possible, but very hard to get approved.
6. Yes, employees are more likely to attend local training.
7. Where possible, all training to be done locally due to budgets (i.e. cheaper to fly instructor in.) Same reasons as 5.
8. We've been told not to take "formal training" (i.e. where we have to pay) if there is a less formal alternative. Travel for training is frozen at the moment.

9. We usually have training for staff done on our premises

10. Local

11. More likely to attend locally because employer is more likely to send us to local training. Travel budget is almost non-existent.

Telecommuting

Did your department have a telecommuting program before the slowdown?

Summary: Three-quarters did not have a telecommuting program before the slowdown. This question follows #16 from the other survey, which showed that 85% of companies did not change their telecommuting program due to the economic slowdown.

1. Yes
2. No
3. No
4. No
5. No
6. Yes
7. Yes
8. No
9. None in our department
10. No
11. No

Telecommuting facilities

Does your company provide hardware and software for telecommuters?

Summary: Two-thirds of companies provide hardware and/or software for telecommuters. Apparently not to the technical communications departments (see #7).

1. Yes
2. No
3. Yes
4. No
5. Software but not hardware
6. Yes
7. Yes
8. N/A
9. Yes
10. N/A
11. N/A 🐱

Canada coping with the slowdown

Following are most of the questions asked and a summary of the responses received in the survey of the effect of the economic downturn on Canadian technical communicators conducted by STCEO in conjunction with the Center for Information Development Management.

1. Are you a member of the Society for Technical Communication?

Yes: 29 (73%)

No: 11 (28%)

Total: 40

2. If so, which Chapter?

Alberta: 20 (69%)

Canada West Coast: 5 (17%)

Eastern Ontario: 4 (14%)

Manitoba: 0 (0%)

Montreal: 0 (0%)

Southwestern Ontario: 0 (0%)

Toronto: 0 (0%)

Vancouver Island: 0 (0%)

Total: 29

3. Have there been any layoffs in your department in the last year?

No: 24 (60%)

Yes: 16 (40%)

Total: 40

4. Have you lost your job during this downturn?

Yes: 5 (13%)

No: 34 (87%)

Total: 39

5. If so, have you found a new job in technical communications?

Yes: 3 (43%)

No: 4 (57%)

Total: 7

6. Have you taken a salary cut or changed roles?

No: 25 (68%)

Yes: 12 (32%)

Total: 37

7. Have contract and/or temporary employees been terminated in the last year?

No: 20 (50%)

Yes: 20 (50%)

Total: 40

8. Have you had to postpone or cancel software purchases?

Yes: 27 (68%)

No: 13 (33%)

Total: 40

9. Have you had to postpone or cancel hardware purchases?

Yes: 20 (51%)

No: 19 (49%)

Total: 39

10. Do you expect to have the funding to purchase any of these after the beginning of your new fiscal year?

Yes, definitely: 9 (23%)

Yes, perhaps: 23 (59%)

No, but perhaps: 6 (15%)

No, definitely: 2 (5%)



11. Have any staff benefits in your department been affected by the slowdown in spending?

Yes: 11 (28%)

No: 28 (72%)

Total: 39

12. Has your department's travel budget been cut?

Decreased significantly: 13 (33%)

Decreased somewhat: 8 (21%)

Remains the same: 16 (41%)

Increased: 1 (3%)

13. Has your department's training budget been cut?

Decreased significantly: 12 (30%)

Decreased somewhat: 10 (25%)

Remains the same: 16 (40%)

Increased: 1 (3%)

14. Has your department's telecommuting policy changed?

Yes, ended: 0 (0%)

Unchanged: 34 (85%)

Not allowed in the future (never again): 1 (3%)

Increased (more people telecommuting): 1 (3%)

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executive

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15. Have any other perks been eliminated?

No: 26 (65%)
Yes: 14 (35%)
Total: 40

16. Has your department been reorganized since last year?

No: 22 (55%)
Yes: 18 (45%)
Total: 40

17. Is reorganization being discussed?

No: 24 (65%)
Yes: 13 (35%)
Total: 37

18. Since last year, have you outsourced any work that would typically have been handled in-house?

No: 34 (85%)
Yes: 6 (15%)
Total: 40

19: Is outsourcing being considered?

No: 33 (83%)
Yes: 7 (18%)
Total: 40

20. What other cost savings have you been asked to pursue or have you decided to pursue in your department?

21 responses received.

21. If you have experienced any layoffs, have your total project responsibilities been changed?

Fewer projects: 4 (19%)
More projects: 7 (33%)
About the same: 9 (43%)

22. If your staff has remained the

same, have your total project responsibilities been changed?

Fewer projects: 3 (10%)
More projects: 12 (40%)
About the same: 11 (37%)

25. If your staff has increased, have your total project responsibilities been changed?

Fewer projects: 3 (21%)
More projects: 3 (21%)
About the same: 5 (36%)



26. Have any documentation projects in your department been cancelled as a result of an economic slowdown?

No: 34 (83%)
Yes: 7 (17%)
Total: 41

27. Have any documentation projects in your department been slowed as a result of an economic slowdown (delayed releases)?

No: 29 (71%)
Yes: 12 (29%)
Total: 41

28. If stock options were offered to staff before the layoff, are they still being offered?

Yes: 20 (74%)
No: 7 (26%)
Total: 27



STC Eastern Ontario Chapter

Mission Statement (2001/2002)

Our chapter's mission is to work together in a spirit of community to promote and develop professional technical communication.

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Do you have a passion for history? Are you a collector? If so, then you're just the sort of person the chapter is looking for.

We need an archivist to care for our historical documents as STC approaches its fiftieth anniversary.

If you are interested, please contact Gordon Brown, the chapter's Vice-President, at gordon.brown@nortelnetworks.com



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