

Portraying your passions

Job satisfaction needn't end with your retirement



Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators
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**Facing ethical dilemmas:
tell us what you think**

**Hearing from users about
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**Reviewing SmartDocs from
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**Designing and illustrating
content for localisation**



Colum McAndrew describes a typical working day in the period after finishing one major project and before starting the next.

'My name is Colum and I'm a newsaholic!' My working day starts with the radio alarm and the reassuring sound of James Naughtie, John Humphries or Euan Davis on the *Today* programme. It gives me just the right mix of news, politics, sport and current affairs (in that order of importance) to start the day. Down to the kitchen for a glass of fresh orange juice, a habit I picked up while living in Florida for a month, and then back up to the bathroom.

During a breakfast of Branflakes, banana and a cup of Assam tea (made with real tea—no tea bags allowed in the McAndrew household), I read *Private Eye* while keeping an ear out for anything interesting on the radio. Breakfast over, I drop my wife off at the station before heading to Guildford with the aforementioned radio presenters for company. If the traffic behaves itself, the journey takes 45 minutes; when the school's are out, it's more like 30.

Once at my desk, I start with a pint-glass of water. After a few gulps, it is time for e-mails. This means adding items to my 'to-do' list and hopefully delegating some to others in the team. As a long-time user of Adobe RoboHelp, my day also starts with

monitoring the forums' RSS feeds and scanning Twitter for interesting tweets. I am fortunate to have an employer that recognises the need for personal and professional development, so spending 15–30 minutes a day answering queries is time well spent and immensely satisfying.

Among today's actions is one to complete a Q&A session for the blog of Adobe's Senior Product Evangelist, RJ Jacquez. Apparently, a recent blog post of mine on how our use of RoboHelp Server helped improve our documentation interested him. This is the latest in a list of collaborative efforts we have had with Adobe, the most recent being a Use Case Study on our use of the Technical Communication Suite.

Mid-morning, a member of our Help Desk contacts me with a product-related query. Our teams work closely together as they review our work. The Help Desk gets direct customer feedback so that team's review comments help us to ensure our documentation includes the required detail. The problem comes when they expect me to remember what I wrote over 18 months ago! We end up opening the help file and looking together. He could have done that but at least it proved the help worked and hopefully he'll try that first next time.

Having recently completed a major rewrite, a lot of my time is currently spent on smaller projects, while looking strategically ahead. Our team meets bi-weekly and it is normally down to me to find items we need to discuss and agree a way forward. It is also a useful opportunity to provide training to other team members.

I normally manage to escape for lunch. Working in a remote location means there isn't a lot to do nearby but it does make for good running routes. If my ageing knees allow it, a 40-minute run around the fields and parks nearby, rather perversely, never fails to relax me. After showering, I return to my desk for a sandwich, fruit, yet more water and whatever the afternoon throws at me.

Thankfully, my days are not too full of meetings. Today I have just one, a Release Board, which lasts only ten minutes. We agree to release. Hurrah! In the afternoon, an impromptu meeting with my boss brings her up to speed with the goalposts that have moved during her absence from the office.

As the working day nears conclusion, inane topics of conversation abound around the office. The pros and cons of a new religious model, heated settees, a taxi service for both you *and* your car, and how my colleague is going to prevent his 11- and 9-year-old daughters from having any boyfriends until they're 30!

In the car going home it is more Radio 4 news and, depending on the time, the comedy half-hour. Once home I can relax, unless my in-laws have other ideas. The film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* has to be one of the most astute, accurate and witty portrayals of marrying into a Mediterranean family and should be compulsive viewing for anyone thinking of taking the plunge. As in the film, my in-laws have very healthy appetites and are lively, fun and loud. Oh, and quite a few of them live nearby!

At some point in the evening, normally after ringing my mother to make sure she's OK, I retire to my oasis of calm, my study, complete with another Assam tea. I do voluntary work for Amnesty International so there are inevitably e-mails to send, phone calls to make and, if it is close to a Board or Sub-Committee meeting, a hefty pile of documents to read. If I have the inclination, I'll write a post for my RoboColum(n) blog and check the RoboHelp product forums one last time. The aim is to complete these by 10pm so that I can end the day where I started, catching the BBC news and weather.

Fully conversant with world events, I'm off to bed where I fall asleep instantly, much to my wife's annoyance. As someone who has difficulty getting to sleep, she often wants to talk instead. Strangely, for a professional communicator, 11:30pm after a busy day is not my most productive time! **C**