

Episode Transcript

Hello, hello. I'm Heather Terry, the Technical Writer here at Hurricane Labs—Welcome to my podcast. Today I'm going to be talking about the Technical Communication Summit of 2020—If you're in a technical writing field and are considering attending next year's Summit, I hope today's episode helps you decide if the event is for you.

If you're new to technical writing or cybersecurity conversations, you are in good company. In a past life, I taught English; I did so for ten years. I'm now approaching my one-year anniversary since shifting from education to technical writing, so I know exactly how daunting learning infosec and technical writing as a whole can be, especially if you feel like you're coming to the conversation late. Transitioning into this field has meant picking up new terminology, concepts, and technical applications on the fly. It also required a perspective shift; I had a very simplistic view of what working in a technical field would be like.

I'm fortunate to work alongside such a knowledgeable—and patient—team like the folks here at Hurricane Labs. Our standing prime directive to support community members learning infosec starts right here, in our home office.

In addition to learning from my coworkers, I've also been provided a membership with the Society for Technical Communicators (or STC)—and the opportunity to attend their Technical Communication Summit.

Before I dive into the content of the summit itself, I want to give a well-deserved congratulations to the STC conference planners, vendors, and speakers. The Summit had initially been planned for a face-to-face event in Seattle, but obviously current events derailed that.

Given the short notice that the speakers and the coordinators had, I'm impressed by how smoothly the virtual summit is going. The video and audio has been good quality, the messaging system they have in place makes interacting easy, and the speakers did a great job making their content visually accessible while also keeping themselves visually accessible, too. The result is a platform that really helps with the personal connection and conversational feeling we look for in these sorts of conferences.

That's not to say there weren't hiccups—But for when they arose, the STC had a help desk chat available for attendees, and they played an active role helping the speakers get set up in each session and troubleshoot issues they encountered.

A cool thing they offered that I really liked, especially given the limitations of virtual events, was AI transcription to improve their accessibility, which provided a real-time transcription of live sessions. It had it's issues—things like the AI hearing DITA and churning out variations like “Delta” or “did a,” so it wasn't not perfect, but I think it's definitely a step in the right direction.

The overall theme for this summit was Career Vision, which was super helpful for me, personally. It's exciting to learn about the potential directions and growth opportunities available

on this new path that I'm on, and I'm glad for the direction the conversations this week has provided.

But the talks weren't limited to just career advancement, or even to general technical writing. I absolutely loved the wide range of topics the Summit offered. I was able to participate in a conversation on just about every aspect of my job; from managing a wiki to supporting user onboarding even to technical communication issues specific to cybersecurity.

I think my favorite parts of the conference includes a discussion about interviewing Subject Matter Experts and Tech Comm Celebrities, which was led by Nicky Bleiel. It was super informative. I also very much enjoyed the folks from Rubric, which was one of the vendors at the conference. Their introductory video included raffling off a bottle of scotch, so that was amazing—and learning about their content strategy services was interesting. When the sessions were all over, a large group of us celebrated in a virtual happy hour—music and games included—and chatting with many of the other attendees—including the team from Rubric...though that bottle of scotch had mysteriously dwindled in volume—was a very good time.

One of the perks of being in STC is it also offers local chapters—and the Northeast Ohio chapter held a virtual happy hour of its own after the Summit ended. It was great getting to connect with technical communicators in my area. If you decide to attend next year's Summit, definitely consider a full membership—I've really enjoyed getting to know the people in my local chapter.

I hope my musings gave you some things to think about for next year's conference! Thanks for listening, and I'll catch you next time.