

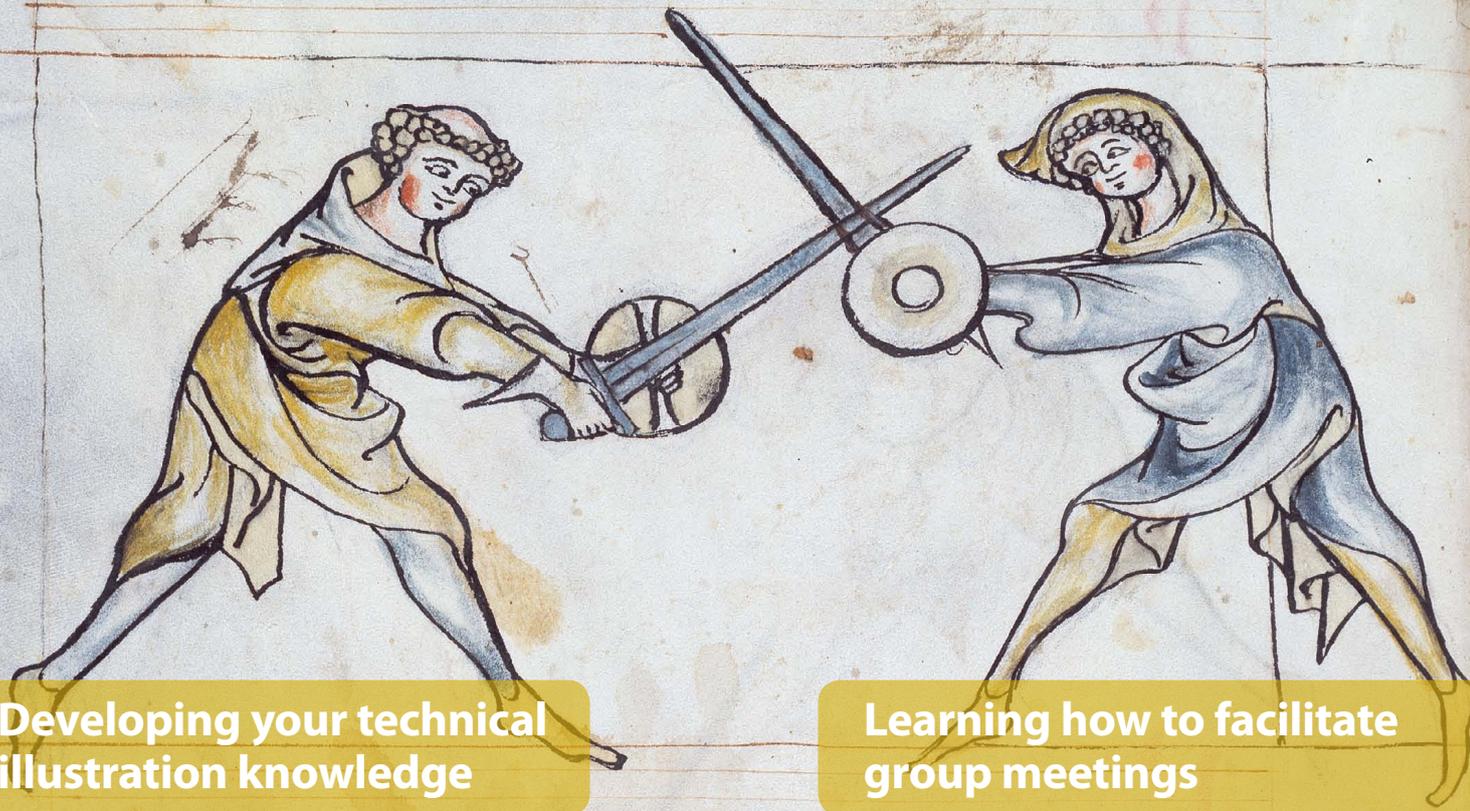
# Early technical illustration skills

Learning about historical fighting manuals



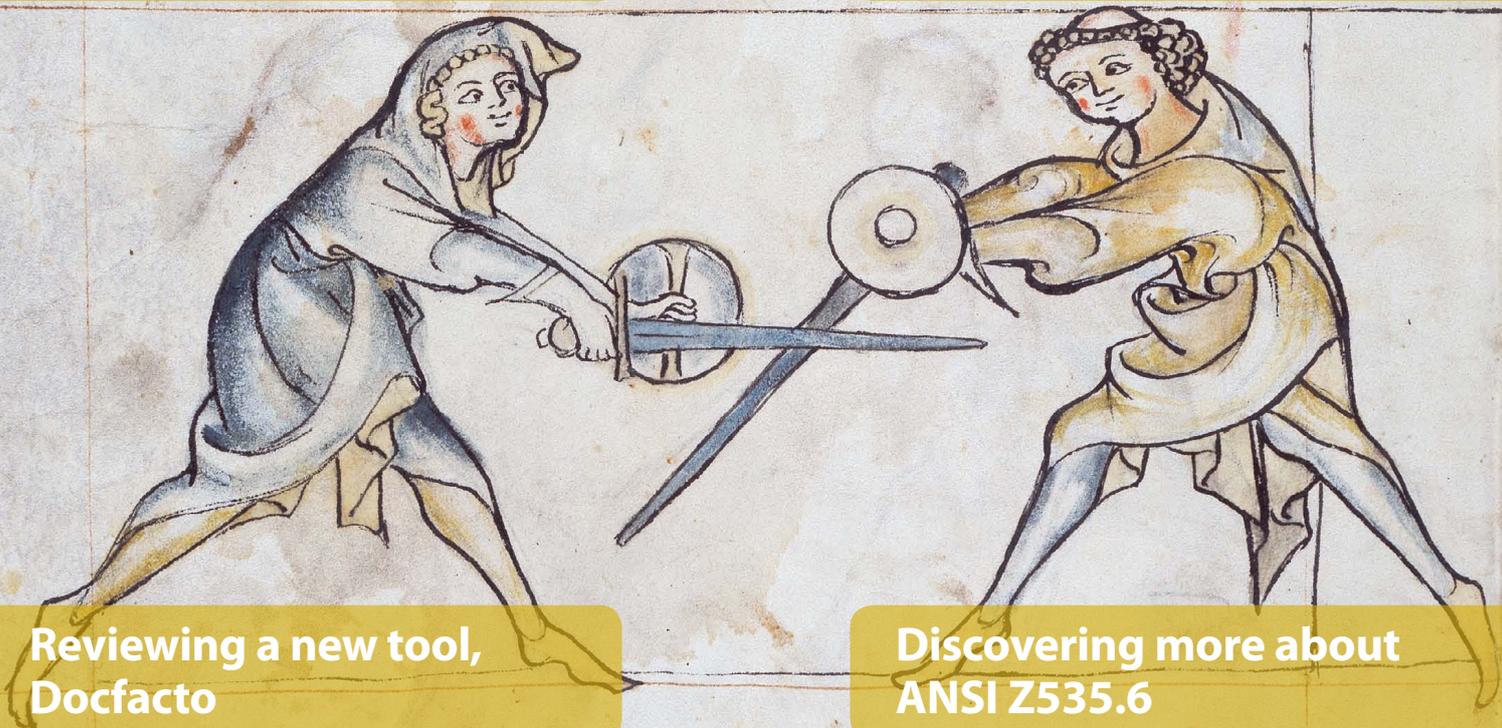
# Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators  
Summer 2013



Developing your technical illustration knowledge

Learning how to facilitate group meetings



Reviewing a new tool, Docfacto

Discovering more about ANSI Z535.6

# MadWorld 2013—an event to remember

**Pam Coca describes the MadWorld Conference held 7-9 April in San Diego, USA.**

From the moment I entered San Diego's Hard Rock Hotel, it was obvious that MadWorld was going to be a truly unique event. Hosted by American computer software firm, MadCap Software, Inc., that creates XML-based technical communication tools, this remarkable two-day learning conference for technical communicators had a lot to offer.

Everywhere you looked MadCap's propeller-cap logo graced your presence and their prolific staff extended graciousness. Registration packets included a t-shirt, a notebook, a thumb drive populated with upcoming sessions and a lanyard ID with your drink tickets printed on the back. Such ultra-organisation inspired me to ask David Ferriot, MadCap Marketing Manager, about the work that went into planning such a colossal event. 'From the start, our team understood the level of detail that would be required to put on a great conference. Everything—from the gift bags in the hotel rooms, to the mix of speakers, to the specialty cocktails at networking events, to the unique music-themed venue—was thought out and planned for with the goal to provide a distinct experience that embodied the company culture and personality, and would provide our users with a completely new experience.'

## Constantly evolving sea of people

MadCap Software derives a lot of its product enhancements from its users. The company listens, it acts, and its

staff network. So of course, MadWorld was structured around some serious networking. Two-hundred attendees and dozens of MadCap personnel circulated throughout the hotel enjoying food, drink and shared knowledge.

Technical writer and fiction author, Lori Berhon, commented, 'I was excited to meet such a variety of people. We had representatives of every generation, and people who'd flown halfway across the world to be there.'

The guest rooms were large and comfortable with great views. The baths had double-head rain showers and a sign by the lavatory that read, 'The water you save could go in your Scotch.' Big screen televisions with built-in amplifiers were there to fulfil your musical needs. Like all good public establishments, the Hard Rock has a few secret weapons: one is an electric guitar delivered to your room at no charge so you can jam all night.

## Wined, dined and wowed

At registration, attendees received lovely wax-sealed invites to a cocktail party at *Float*, the Hard Rock's rooftop nightclub. In this Hollywood/Rockstar setting, networkers joined together for appetizers, an open bar, and numerous chances to win their own propeller beanie.

Monday morning: as a great start to a busy day, comedian Wayne Cotter had us rolling in the aisles. The fast turn-around times (50 minutes each) of the subsequent sessions provided

information without any chance of boredom. From a proper English breakfast in the morning to coffee, tea and treats on networking breaks, to cocktail parties every evening...a new surprise was around every corner.

## A flare for education

Defined by knowledge level, the four classroom session tracks (basic, intermediate, advanced and tools agnostic) gave everyone a chance to easily select classes suitable to their needs. Presenters came from all over the world. *Communicator* readers are already familiar with some of them.

Neil Perlin, a well-respected authority on mobile apps and mobile help enlightened the rest of us on the topic. He also gave a fun talk called *What the Heck Does THIS Do?* that encompassed variables, togglers, Mark of the Web and other obscure Flare features. Matthew Ellison wowed everyone with presentations on hyperlinks, global project linking, and *Techniques for High-Powered Single-sourcing with Flare*.

Nita Beck walked attendees step-by-step through a pilot project she did for a research library, demonstrating not just how to organise a massive project, but the importance of having a really good plan before you start. She also joined forces with Neil Perlin for an exciting presentation for technical communicators who might want to leave office politics behind and venture out on their own.

Ellis Pratt pointed out that tablets have entered our world of technical



**Figure 1. Technical Communications Strategist, Nita Beck leading one of her sessions**



**Figure 2. Sunshine, free drinks and terrific door prizes provide a happy ending to a fabulous event**



**Figure 3. Most coveted MadWorld door prizes included two one-of-a-kind guitars**

communication and showed us the importance of using flow-based user assistance (UA) to keep users in the zone. Defining embedded user assistance as ‘the UA that resides within the application interface’, Tony Self displayed a wealth of knowledge on how it improves usability. His presentation, *Any Colour...As long as it's black* compared our profession to the automobile industry in that we need to work at keeping technical communication from becoming as obsolete as the Model T; re-use, repurpose and automate.

Knowing that translation and localisation are in the forefront of technical communication today, Scott Bass showed the audience a complete translation process using Flare and Lingo, and Thomas Bro-Rasmussen walked an audience through *Automating and managing multiple projects in a multilingual environment*.

There were sessions on DITA, APIs, SDKs, indexing, team authoring, and much more than can possibly be mentioned here. Visitors saw demos of Flare’s new social media community, *MadCap Pulse*. They were introduced, in one way or another, to all the products in the MadCap suite and in some cases received in-depth training on the secrets within. All-in-all, it was a chance for technical communicators to improve their skills and become more in tune with their users.

### Hospitality personified

One particularly popular spot for learning and networking was the hospitality suite—a very large lounge with modular seating, computer podiums and a never-ending supply of ever-helpful support personnel. I asked Jay Wulkowicz, Senior Quality Assurance Lead, for his insight into the visitors drawn into the suite. ‘Nearly everyone who came in had a specific question on an issue or a workflow

problem with their project. Some people brought their project with them. Some just wanted a demonstration of a feature that would solve their problem or to see *MadCap Pulse* or *MadCap Lingo* in action. Longest visit was probably a guest who said to Lori (one of our QA employees) ‘I am going to take up all your time!’ She made herself comfortable, pulled out her laptop and went question after question to Lori, who was more than happy to help out. She was a solo technical writer who didn’t have many resources to get help with *Flare*, so she took full advantage of having an expert at her fingertips.’

### In a nutshell

This four star event comprised 40 training sessions, 24 professional speakers and two-plus days of networking all housed in a classy, constantly rockin’ hotel in sunny San Diego.

MadCap CEO, Anthony Olivier told me, ‘Our goal for MadWorld was to hold more than just another technical writing conference and to create a unique experience for technical communicators worldwide. We wanted this experience to extend to learning, team building and networking. We had attendees and customers from as far away as Africa, Europe, Australia, all across the United States and Canada and we appreciated everybody who attended. More importantly, our main goal for this event was to truly make everybody feel like a part of the MadCap family.’

Suffice to say, MadCap met its goal.

### Rock your world in 2014

Whether it is responding to an email, answering a phone call, or talking to you at an event, MadCap staff has a talent for making you feel like you are the only person that matters. If you aren’t already hooked on *Flare*, a few



Figure 5. Madworld logo in hotel lobby

minutes with their amazing support staff will change that. After all, the easier and faster you work, the more you accomplish. **C**



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*Pam Coca is hosting a free MadCap webinar, 27 June 2013, Code-o-phobic? Time to Get Over It! [www.madcapsoftware.com/resources/livewebinars.aspx](http://www.madcapsoftware.com/resources/livewebinars.aspx)*

MadWorld 2014 will again be held at the Hard Rock Hotel in San Diego, CA and until July 15, readers of *Communicator* can contact [sales@madcapsoftware.com](mailto:sales@madcapsoftware.com) and use promo code MW2014CMR to save \$150 on early registration.

### Further reading

Self, T (2012) ‘You can have any colour’ *Communicator*, Spring 2012: 36-39

### All things Mad...

- MadWorld 2013 Recap [www.madcapsoftware.com/events/madworld](http://www.madcapsoftware.com/events/madworld)
- LinkedIn group = *Users of MadCap Flare*
- Blog [www.madcapsoftware.com/blog](http://www.madcapsoftware.com/blog)
- Forum <http://forums.madcapsoftware.com>
- Knowledgebase <http://kb.madcapsoftware.com>



Figure 4. Comedian Wayne Cotter captivated a full-house