

After Economic Adjustments: What's a Technical Communicator to Think?

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I believe any of us who have been in the technical communications business for a dozen years or more have seen a lot of changes and economic adjustments in corporate America. In some way, all of have felt it's affects on our profession. Such terms as "global economy", "outsourcing", "recessions", "conservative spending", "mergers", and "acquisitions", have all become part of our professional landscape.

So what is a technical communicator to think? My recent observations about the market during the past twelve months may offer some answers:

- Following the "end" of our recession, the market for technical communicators has rebounded, especially during the past two years; it remains strong overall.
- We have seen an increase in fulltime direct openings.
- Contractor opportunities remains strong (especially in the medical device industry); however, not quite as strong in the manufacturing sector as pre-2000.
- Contractor rates have rebounded in certain industries since the end of 2000 recession (with pervasive conservative spending attitudes overall that persist).
- Mergers and acquisitions continue, and they continue to affect communicators (usually in a negative way in either moving jobs out of state, or eliminating some positions due to duplication).
- Globalization appears to have had minimal affects locally on job count (except in the areas of IT where outsourced IT departments mean "outsourced writing" goes with it).
- Overall, all companies are maintaining conservative spending attitudes. Example: Instead of asking requesting two writers, a client may request one; instead of requesting a contractor for 6 months, the client may pose the question: "what can we get done in 3 months?"
- Opportunities for communicators in other areas have increased since 2000, including: compliance documentation of all types, especially medical device and associated FDA regulatory, knowledge management and knowledge transfer, engineering development and design specifications, web content for user documentation and training. Sarbanes Oxley and ISO are still out there.
- Shortages are felt in areas of medical device technical writers, and a shortage of such professionals as experienced Framemaker desktop publishers.
- Technical writers are being asked more and more to be project managers, and to work more with not only SMEs, but with other stakeholders as well (ie., marketing, QA).