**Writers benefit companies**

(Continued from page 1)

had no idea. When a technical writer did, Verrazani landed the job, and has since held two management-level positions in technical writing.

"Whenever I go as far as I could go, and I couldn’t replace my boss, I left, and somehow I fell into the right company at the right time," he said.

"This kind of book, How To Get There From MIT? Verrazani sold to his audience. "I’ll sell you how I got there from MIT. In each case, I just fell into it."

In defining the evolution of the technical writing, Verrazani identified and described five historical periods:

- **The Mithrilic**: when "no writers were needed because only computer programmers worked with computers and the attitude toward writers was, ‘Anybody can write’, I’ve been doing it since third grade.

- **The Creoleacous**: when "computer-naive people first began getting into software" noting the documentation was a job often given to failed programmers during this time, Verrazani said.

- **The Secretaries**: during the age of manuals, when writers were trained as secretaries.

- **The Emanicipation**: when writers finally achieved equal but separate status. "The approach was to find writers and teach them as secretaries. This was easier than teaching programmers to write — much to the program’s chagrin," said Verrazani. "But still, in those days what you skipped to the customer was code, and everything else was peripheral."

- **We are now in what I hope is the Modern, or Post-Copernican age**, said Verrazani. "The writer is seen as an engineer and given a hand in developing new personal computers, like Apple’s Macintosh. Once upon a time, error messages were codes. Now they are in English and often include the recovery procedure — as innovation due largely to the writers, he noted.

One consequence of the explosion of ‘naive users’ is that the writer of computer documentation must often write two different audiences focused at different audiences. Verrazani noted, "One tells you something you could possibly want to know about a system, and is aimed at programmers," Verrazani said. "The other covers the twenty percent of the system that eighty percent of the people will use. Some people write these by telling themselves they’re going to write for their grandparents."

Verrazani urged his audience not to understand the role of technical writers in product development. "One serious mistake in a system was selling was traced in the field to a single confusing use of the passive voice in the documentation. It took five people six weeks or was it six people five weeks? — to find the problem."

"Companies don’t want to spend money on misunderstanding if they can avoid it," Verrazani noted. "For this reason, I can delay the shipping of a product if the boss to go with it isn’t ready or isn’t good enough."

"In addition to such management decisions, his job includes supervision of a staff of 67 people as well as training and library programs. Small computer companies seek people with deeper-than-superficial backgrounds in both computer science and writing. Verrazani said, but such people are in short supply. "We milk history, with college market students with degrees in both very fast," he commented. Because of this drain, larger companies with more time and money to spend are often willing to take "entry-level" technical writers — people with proficiency and experience in only one or two disciplines, and train them in the remaining field so they can confidently function as intercessors.

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**Tuesday, March 10**

Britain’s War Requiem, 3 pm, Symphony Hall, Benefiel Hall. "If you know something about the war — and you may or may not — you will be well entertained."

The Cambridge Center for Adult Education will celebrate the joy of Mardi Gras with a costume festival on black tap. Price for the best costume and group costume. Proceeds go to the Cambridge Center Scholarship Fund. Will be held at the Blacksmith House, 56 Brattle St., Cambridge. For details, call 347-6769.

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**Saturday, March 14**

A lecture by Allen Temko, Environmental Architectural Design Editor of the San Francisco Chronicle, will be held at Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

Mark O. Harrick, United States Senator from the State of Oregon will deliver the William Bridges Noble Lectures in the Memorial Church, Harvard University on March 14 and 15 at 8:00 pm. The titles of his lectures will be The Recognition of Differences: The Moral Implications of Public Policy. For more information call David Fountain at 495-5088 or 495-5510.

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