PhoebusGroup Products & Services

About the PhoebusGroup

PhoebusGroup LLP accelerates the development of documents and enriches their quality and effectiveness. We assist corporations, subject-matter experts, and authors in clarifying and expressing ideas. We have broad experience in a number of document types.

Who We Are

PhoebusGroup LLP is a partnership comprising Susan and David King. We have offices near Portland, Oregon and in Astoria, Oregon. Most of our work is done remotely for clients around the world.

Rick Eberly and Margaret Anderson are trusted associates who produce gorgeous and informative technical illustrations, cover art, and animated presentation graphics.

What We Do

There are two ways to look at what we do. One is to look at the results of work—the white papers, case studies, books, and journals that we have helped to create. A second way is to look at the services we supply—writing, copy editing, typesetting, illustrating, indexing, and more.

The remainder of this document first describes the types of documents that we have created, along with specific examples of our work. We then explain our services breakdown. We can function either as the center point for document creation or as team players completing specific aspects of the writing process.

Contacting Us

Send a message to David.King@PhoebusGroup.com to contact PhoebusGroup LLP and we will promptly reply. We eagerly accept work in a variety of domains. Exploring a new domain is especially satisfying to us.

What We Make

Over the twenty-five years that PhoebusGroup has been providing technical writing services, we have created different types of documents to satisfy client objectives. Here is a sampling from our experience.

Case Studies

We consistently encourage authors to include real examples to illustrate key ideas. Case studies are an important part of the design of Intel's IT Best Practices series and IDC white papers. We developed criteria for case studies that consist of three basic principles:

1. **Seek out fresh cases – stories that have not been told.** There is an unfortunate tendency to overwork examples and we avoid doing so if at all possible.

2. **Interview respondents directly and present the case study as a narrative.** When we reported on Delta Technology's IT planning strategy, for example, we spoke to and quoted the key IT leadership who formulated that strategy.

3. **Focus on process in balance with outcomes.** In most of our case studies, the respondents have faced problems, evaluated options, implemented solutions, and measured the results. We believe it is important to communicate the entire process along with challenges encountered along the way. Doing so increases credibility significantly.

Case Studies for Books

- For Intel IT management books, we developed a simplified design that is similar to business school cases. In the first section of the case study, readers learn what the IT challenge is and the alternatives that might address that challenge. The section ends with a question: What should the IT organization do?

- The second section begins with the IT group's decision and follows onward to the consequences of that decision. The business school style facilitates using cases as a part of IT courseware. Intel Press has granted permission to use the Delta Technology case as a part of a university course on IT management.

- For IDC, the challenge was to be concise and benefits oriented. Cases were typically presented as 4 to 6 paragraph sidebars as a part of a white paper. We enticed readers to take the time to read synopses of early adopter activities.

White Papers

When we develop white papers, we work with subject matter experts incrementally through a standard series of checkpoints. We have developed well over 200 white papers for IDC, major IT suppliers, and startup companies. Our workflow for white paper development is as follows:

- **Formulate the document objectives**. While informative, white papers inevitably have an underlying purpose. Identifying that purpose is important. White papers typically have multiple stakeholders. Building a con census about objectives is critical.

- **Develop a skeletal outline**. The skeletal outline focuses on order of attack—the logical sequence that leads to conclusions that are congruent with the objectives. Broad stakeholder review is needed at this level so that issues emerge as early as possible in the writing process.

- **Flesh out a writer's outline**. The writer's outline reaches down to the paragraph level and further reveals how the white paper's argument will be made. At this stage, only the primary stakeholder needs to validate the results.

- **Draft the white paper**. Due to the steps taken along the way, drafting the white paper is not a monumental task. We often talk through the writer's outline with the subject-matter expert one last time before preparing the full draft.

- **Revise to completion**. The final step is iterative to make sure that all stakeholders are satisfied with the results. Due to the intermediate stages, one or two iterations are common. Final art is tidied up and the results are ready to go.

In our experience, this method is efficient because issues arise early when they are more easily addressed. Preparing a writer's outline is the most important step. It allows us to lock onto authors' intentions before drafting the paper.
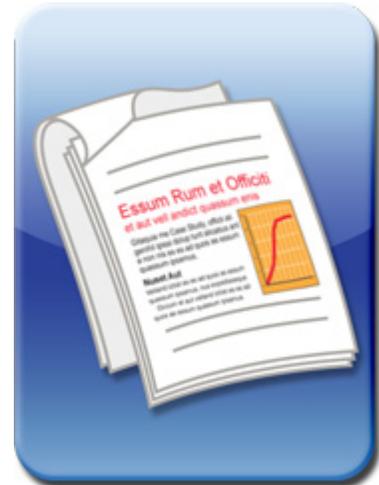
Tek-Tools

With this method we created a white paper for a startup company (Tek-Tools, acquired by SolarWinds) in four weeks. It was the company's first white paper, so we also designed the layout, a color palette, and a style for figures. We studied reference materials and spent two hour-long sessions with their subject-matter expert. The first draft was accepted after a single revision, proving the efficiency of our successive approximation approach in preparing white papers.

We have edited many IDC white papers that were most commonly focused on products for deploying new technologies. These assignments required us to accommodate to IDC's existing writing style, which is to ground analyses with their extensive market research data and to adopt a critical and balanced stance when reviewing new products. We generally interviewed early adopters and presented their viewpoints as narratives.

Books

We have produced four books in the past few years for Intel Press. *Managing IT Innovation for Business Value* by Esther Baldwin and Martin Curley is a good example. Here is how we assisted Esther and Martin:

- PhoebusGroup acted as the series editor for the Intel Press IT Best Practices series. *Managing IT Innovation for Business Value* complements two other books on IT and business value with a consistent design for text, interior art, and cover art unifying the three books.

- We worked with authors to develop an order of attack for presenting key concepts. We researched and drafted topical sidebars and collected case studies. We edited and merged chunks of text that the authors submitted from all over the world as they continued their daily work and global travel.

- We were able to launch the typesetting, technical illustrations, and indexing processes well before the manuscript was complete. Telescoping these stages enabled two advantages: authors were invigorated when they could see the early results in the finished format, and we were able to reduce the life cycle from concepts to printer's PDF from around two years to about 12 months.

- To shelter our authors of this book from their "day jobs," we invited Esther and Martin to our Astoria, Oregon office, which is an historic house at the mouth of the Columbia River. In a bed-and-breakfast type of setting, we worked them in two intense, uninterrupted, 3-hour sessions each day. After each session, the authors broke away for fresh air, meals, and to explore Astoria's many historical sites.
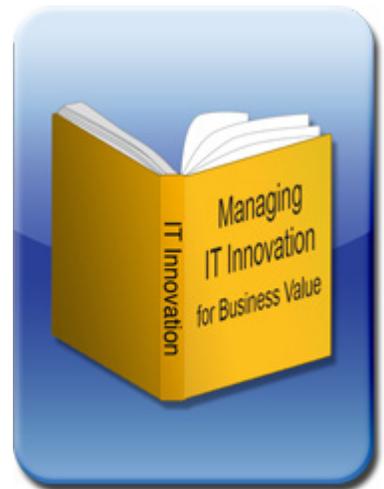
- In the authors' absence, we compiled the results of the session, as either an expanded outline, a initial draft of a topic, or a re-sequencing of topics as a basis for the next session. An astonishing amount of work can be accomplished with uninterrupted time in a relaxed and interesting setting.

Libraries and Journals

Creating and managing a library of books and journals of articles constructed by multiple authors over multiple issues offers a number of challenges. PhoebusGroup has worked with two documents, a standards library for an electrical utility company and a captive technology journal for a major semiconductor company.

PGE Standards Library

Fifteen years ago, Portland General Electric's standards group created books using mechanical cut-and-paste methods. The standards library includes over 20 volumes covering design and construction for overhead and underground transmission and distribution, substation design and construction, technical notes, and catalogs with photos and descriptions of materials and tools.

In 1995, cut-and-paste meant using real scissors and real glue. However, PGE anticipated electronic delivery of their standards documents, and chose FrameMaker as an environment that could deliver both printed and electronic books. An additional goal was to have power transmission engineers create standards on their own and to deliver standards files to a document manager. Moreover, PGE wanted the printed standards to appear consistent with their legacy documents.

PhoebusGroup created a template aimed at minimizing the need for extensive knowledge of FrameMaker. We created initial volumes, trained the engineers who would be making revisions and adding new standards as well as the staff responsible for managing online and print production. In the ensuing years, we have stood by to help with extensions and revisions to the library.

For example, when PGE was acquired by Enron in 1997, all SKU numbers referenced in the Tools and Materials catalogs had to be changed to match Enron's numbering system. PhoebusGroup was able to automate the conversion by developing Unix scripts to be used in conjunction with FrameMaker's underlying markup language to expedite the completion of a potentially time-consuming task. With the scripts prepared in advance, the actual conversion was completed over a single weekend on PGE's server with no disruption to their work.
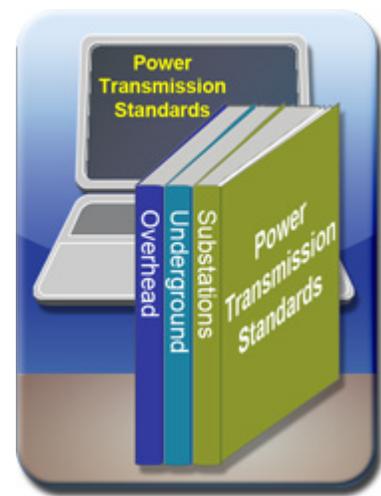
Lessons learned from working with PGE's standards library include the following:

- Reference libraries are living documents that require maintenance over time. Moreover, it is important to revalidate the library's document design on a regular basis. For example, PGE began distributing their standards as printed books in 1995. By 2010, the distribution is 80% electronic and just 20% paper.

- To use Intel terminology, the engineers writing the standards in FrameMaker did not "copy exactly,' but rather went on what Intel calls "excursions." More specifically, engineers tinkered with the templates, which caused significant downstream maintenance efforts.

Intel Technology Journal

PhoebusGroup managed the Intel Technology Journal through a transformation from primarily an internal document to one that could compete with captive journals from other technology companies. We worked with a design firm to meld a creative new design with the document requirements at Intel.

We also managed the selection of authors and coached them at each step along the way. PhoebusGroup artists illustrated the Journal and created its cover art.

Lessons learned working with the Intel Technology Journal (ITJ) include the following:

- A captive journal need not use the traditional 'call for abstracts' process that academic and association journals do. We adopted a top-down approach by soliciting Intel fellows to identify the critical topics in a domain and then identify the best qualified authors for each topic. The content of the ITJ improved dramatically as articles provided perspectives over larger topics.

- A captive journal need not exclude external contributions. The new ITJ included articles by outsiders having deep experience with Intel technologies. Relaxing the constraint that authors be from Intel improved the breadth of coverage. Contributions from academia and the industry added credibility to the ITJ.

- Each team of authors needs attention throughout the development of an article. We paced the authors through four milestones—outline and abstract, rough draft, finish draft, and validated final draft. Validation means that articles were vetted by senior scientists and engineers at Intel.
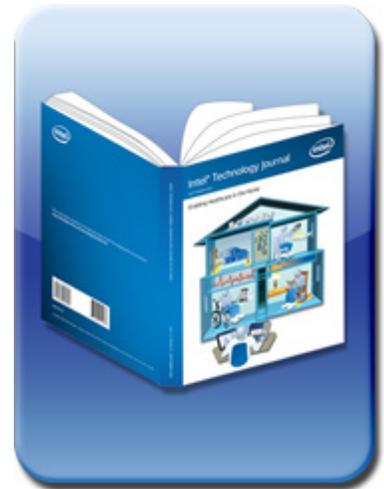
Presentation Graphics

While at PricewaterhouseCoopers, PhoebusGroup members were on the team that created and deployed presentations to communicate the analyses contained in the annual PwC Technology Forecast. These presentations were designed to communicate the essence of cutting-edge technologies to C*x*O audiences. Hundreds of executives, government officials, and industry executives attended this annual review of technology change. Quality was crucial.

Our artist created fresh art to represent concepts and often added animation to display visually how next-generation technologies work. He developed a consistent color palette and graphical style to provide visual integrity for the presentations. Audiences all over the world were informed and impressed by our presentations.

Our PhoebusGroup technical illustrator went on to produce numerous presentations for a major market research firm and for a major network equipment supplier.

How We Organize Our Work

PhoebusGroup provides an integrated set of specific services. We segment document development services as follows:

- **Developmental editing** — working with authors on the organization of ideas, drafting text based on author guidance, managing the incremental development of the text, and integrating figures and tables.

- **Case study development** — collecting real-world examples to enhance the concepts under discussion. Case studies based on actual implementations of ideas provide strong underpinnings for technical documents.

- **Copy editing** — improving the clarity of a document at the word and sentence level, repairing errors in grammar, while leaving the content unchanged.

- **Proofreading** — checking a finished document for word-level problems before delivering a final document that is ready for publication.

- **Indexing** — designing a navigation system for readers, placing markers in the text, generating and tuning the index, and revising the index with feedback from authors and potential readers.

- **Technical illustration** — developing figures that communicate important concepts visually. We provide color palettes and graphical styles to make figures and colors consistent throughout a document.

- **Document presentations** — extracting key figures and topics to be used by authors to talk about their work. Static figures in a document can be animated for presentations to audiences.

- **Typesetting** — transforming manuscripts, mathematical formulae, and finish art into a PDF file ready for printing or posting. We preflight our PDF files to ensure that they are ready for the printer

- **Printing** — creating copies of the document on paper. We have a working relationship with a local printer in Portland, Oregon. Our PDF files have been printed offshore as well.

- **Electronic publishing** — posting a document on a web site or hosting it as an electronic book. We hand off light-weight PDF files for Web posting. We have produced documents that have been both printed to paper and published electronically.

These PhoebusGroup services are available separately, but when assembled together, they will accelerate document development dramatically.

The conventional publishing process follows a single thread and fails to exploit parallelism. When problems occur downstream, the repair process can be quite costly.

PhoebusGroup launches several processes in parallel, thus shortening the development process as well as uncovering problems earlier in the process. For example, we launch finish art with our illustrators as soon as rough art is available. We create index entries and the Table of Contents as we typeset.

This approach enables us to present early results to authors in the document's final look-and-feel and gives us the flexibility to adjust the document's design early on at the authors' request. We avoid the costly extra "laps" that are common when problems show up late in the document workflow.