

## Writing for the Celtic Tiger

The Celtic Tiger brought me to Ireland. Though locals and returning émigrés have come to loathe this term for the last ten years of unprecedented Irish prosperity, it is apt. In the last decade, buoyed by membership in the European Union and a burgeoning high-tech sector, Ireland has vaulted to eleventh place among the world's economies. The combination of a young, skilled labor pool and tax incentives has compelled a who's-who of American corporations--IBM, Gateway, Intel, Compaq, and Hewlett-Packard, to name a few--to open offices and manufacturing plants on the Emerald Isle.

Now the world's second largest exporter of software, Ireland requires professionals to explain how it all works. Enter the technical communicators, who, like other Irish IT professionals, are enjoying a seller's market in Ireland. When I decided to relocate to Dublin from Canada, I contacted Kudos, a recruitment agency that handles technical writers. As a midlevel writer with four years' experience, I had interviews with six Irish companies within a week. That's typical of the employment situation here.

Ireland suffers the same talent gap that North America does. In fact, according to human resources professional Annette Foy, the situation in Ireland is worse: "It is particularly difficult to find senior people locally. Per capita, I get writers with more experience and familiarity with cutting-edge technology from abroad." Foy chalks up this situation to a combination of factors, especially the relative newness of the software industry in Ireland. "Until recently," Foy says, "many multinational corporations only had satellite offices here. Most of the writing was still done in North America."

Limerick University hopes to mitigate this scarcity of senior talent. Since 1995, it has graduated 175 students from its master's of technical communication program. Most of these graduates immediately find work as writers or trainers in local companies (Limerick is host to a sizable technology park). The university also teaches technical communication at the undergraduate level as part of its undergraduate languages with computing degree. This program combines language skills with programming and humanities courses, making the students valuable commodities to software developers in Germany and France.

Once they leave university, many technical writers (and other IT professionals) turn to recruiting agencies for work. Such agencies are far more plentiful in Ireland and the United Kingdom than in North America, and they recruit mostly for permanent positions instead of contracts. Jack Plunkett is managing director at Kudos, an agency popular among technical writers. Regarding a perceived difference between the caliber of local and foreign writers, Plunkett says, "Today's technical writers in Ireland compare well with writers anywhere in the world. In many cases we can find the technical writing personnel we need here in Ireland. The writers we recruit from overseas usually have specific technical skills which are in demand and are in short supply locally."

About three-quarters of Ireland's IT community resides in Dublin, the capital city. However, the Irish government has encouraged regional growth, and technical writers can now expect to find work in other centers such as Donegal, Limerick, Cork, and Galway.

Another difference between Ireland and North America is the low profile of professional associations. There is no STC chapter in Ireland. According to principal technical writer Alan Crilly, my colleague at Cape Clear Software Inc., "STC and ISTC (the Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators) have very little visibility with employers here. So you don't gain a lot of benefit from them. If you went into an interview situation and said you were a member of STC, most employers wouldn't know what you were talking about."

Though little formal salary information exists for Ireland, writers here are paid similarly to what they might expect to receive in Canada, which is somewhat below what they would receive in the United States. Many of the job postings here describe salary parameters, which show that an entry-level writer might expect to earn £18,000-£20,000 IEP (\$20,500-\$23,000 USD), while a senior writer would earn at least £37,500 (\$43,000).

Technical writing in Ireland is clearly a growth industry. My time thus far at Cape Clear in Dublin has reinforced this fact and confirmed that technical writers in Ireland are as skilled and experienced as those in North America.