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SCTE ACTIVE STATUS

By RON HRANAC

It's been quite awhile since I used this forum to get on my SCTE soapbox. Regular readers know that I've long been a supporter of SCTE and its programs and have even served on the Society's national board and various committees and subcommittees.

I sometimes hear questions along the lines of "What's in it for me?" or "Why should I be involved in SCTE?" The simple answer is that the more you give - in terms of being an active member - the more you receive. The key phrase here is active member. Let's take a look at a few ways that one can be active in the Society.

Recognizing our technical workforce

A little over a year ago, SCTE declared the month of March "Broadband Engineering & Technology Awareness Month." Last year's inaugural campaign of BETA Month was to highlight the engineering and technology profession across our industry - basically a formal tip of the hat to all of our technical workforce for a job well done.

The 2006 Broadband Engineering & Technology Awareness Month initiative included a national ad campaign, articles, pre-written press releases, and public relations kits that could be used by cable operators, SCTE chapters, and just about anyone else wishing to promote BETA Month and salute the folks who are on the technical side of our industry. The timing of 2006's campaign coincided nicely with the National Cable and Telecommunications Association's "Cable: A Great American Success Story." NCTA made available a DVD copy of a short film of the same title, which highlighted "… the achievements and enterprising spirits of cable's engineers and technicians."

Here it is a year later, and the second annual Broadband Engineering & Technology Awareness Month is upon us. If you're an SCTE Chapter officer or board member, a system-level supervisor, manager or director of some sort, perhaps even a regional or corporate honcho, why not take advantage of BETA Month to recognize your fellow SCTE chapter members or those with whom you work?

How? Sponsor an ice cream social, a luncheon, pizza after work, a buffet breakfast or lunch, or maybe something as elaborate as a dinner or evening event. Be creative!

The May 2006 issue of SCTE's Interval highlighted a cooperative effort on the part of the Society's Lighthouse Chapter and Time Warner's New England Division employees based in Portland, ME. Vendor-sponsored box lunches for all of the system's technical staff, hourly drawings for Wal-Mart gift cards, and a showing of the NCTA video were part of what was a two-day celebration.

By the way, if you're involved with a chapter, conducting a BETA event and submitting a report about it to SCTE headquarters is good for points in the 2007 compliance and awards matrix.

Elections

TECHNICAL COLUMNS

SCTE

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SCTE mailed ballots for this year's national board of directors election back in January. If you haven't voted yet, dig down through your in-basket and open that big envelope. Read the candidate biographies, and either mail your paper ballot in or vote on-line. The voting deadline is March 30, and results will be announced no later than April 15. This year's ballot once again features a strong slate of candidates, thanks to the hard work of the Nominations Subcommittee. Remember, the Society's board members are your voice in the goings-on at SCTE, and your vote really does count. There have been several instances over the years where a given candidate won by just one or a handful of votes. I recall one director position that had to be decided by a coin toss, because of a tie vote. Had just one more person in that region voted ….

Staying in touch

Speaking of SCTE's directors, when was the last time you spoke or corresponded with a regional or at-large director? I phoned my regional director the morning I started writing this month's column (he's running for reelection) and chatted about issues that are important to me. I asked my director's thoughts on various topics and shared some of my opinions.

Maintaining a dialogue with our elected directors - or candidates running for a position - is not a whole lot different than letting our elected government officials know what we think about new, pending or existing legislation. Those we elect to represent us in a government role or an SCTE director role really do listen to constituents. While they may not always agree with us, or us with them, staying in touch is important.

Chapter meetings

The reality is that Cable-Tec Expo - SCTE's flagship annual confab - is simply out of reach of a lot of folks, especially at the system level. The good news is that most of the Society's roughly 70 chapters conduct local or regional technical seminars on a regular basis, often every other month. These seminars provide excellent low-cost or free training to attendees. While one can certainly learn a lot by attending a chapter seminar, one can learn even more by volunteering to be a speaker! Pick a favorite topic - it doesn't have to be a theoretical deep-dive on electromagnetic wave propagation. Are you handy with a quadrature amplitude modulation (QAM) analyzer? Consider conducting a hands-on session in which you demonstrate how you use a QAM analyzer to troubleshoot digitally modulated signals.

Bring a live drop into the meeting room, and hook it up to a half-dozen or so instruments. (Maybe you can convince a favorite vendor to lend you the analyzers for the meeting.) Come up with ways to create some simple impairments and show seminar attendees what a good digitally modulated signal looks like and what a not-so-good one looks like.

If you have time - yes, I know time is a valuable commodity these days - consider getting involved with your local chapter as a friend of the board or maybe even running for a board position. And don't be bashful about sharing new ideas, even if you're not part of the local board. That's what keeps any organization on its toes.

Certification

SCTE has had a variety of technical certification programs available since the 1980s. Many cable operators have their own internal training and certification programs in place, but why not pursue getting certified above and beyond what your company may offer? Studying for and successfully passing a certification exam is a great way to demonstrate to yourself and your peers your competency in one or more subjects. That certificate says you know your stuff. It gets you a little peer recognition. And it just plain feels good when you find out you passed the test.

This month's column touched on just a few ways you can be active in SCTE. For more information about Society programs, visit www.scte.org.
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