Daily *hot* sheet

Openers

Good morning and welcome!

We hope you have a great time at this year's conference. As your body absorbs your morning wake-up call, we hope you'll remember a few things during the next three days.

First, please, please mute your cell phones (or at least put them on vibrate) during conference sessions. Maybe even do it now and leave it that way until the conference ends.

Your badge is your ticket to all sessions. Make sure you wear it.

Your conference bag contains all session notes as well as other information. You may want to drop a business card inside in case you leave it somewhere.

Use the last page of the notebook in your conference bag to jot down contact information about the people you meet here.

And finally, have fun!

Today's Forecast

Partly cloudy
74 degrees

Attendees checking in before Sunday's half-day sessions.

14th Annual WritersUA Conference Opens Amid Desert Sunshine

by Chuck Martin

Within view of snow-splashed peaks, nestled in the unusually verdant valley of Palm Springs, the WritersUA Conference for Software User Assistance today opened its 14th annual incarnation.

Dozens of experts are here to share their knowledge with the hundreds of user assistance development attendees from across the country and around the world.

(For those coming from most anywhere else in California, that bright, hot yellow thing in the sky during the day is known as the sun.)

The next three days will be filled with information and networking. For some, it will be their first time, for others, well, they are veterans. But no matter how many times you've attended, because the world of user assistance is always evolving, you will find something new and interesting here.

A year ago, the conference was the center of a little storm in the user assistance world. Macromedia, which had recently purchased eHelp, didn't attend the vendor exhibit to support and talk about its RoboHelp product, sparking rumors and suppositions about the product's impending demise.

Meanwhile, former members of the RoboHelp development team had coalesced to form a new company, which came together to announce a new impending product for help development: MadCap Flare.

Since then, Adobe bought Macromedia, and is not only present at this year's conference, they are sponsoring a networking mixer by the pool this afternoon beginning at 4:45pm.

Meanwhile, Palm Springs offers plenty of diversions if you need a break from the conference intensity. So enjoy the conference and enjoy Palm Springs.

Session Summaries

Taxonomies and Content Tagging
Seth Earley

Taxonomies are foundations for classifying information, organizing documents, and fine tuning search, according to Earley. But, he stressed, it's not navigation. Using a good taxonomy can improve efficiencies to reuse information.

The Help Make Over Workshop
Saul Carliner

Saul talked about strategies for user assistance, including layering information, in part to design for different types of users. For example, tell beginners the basic ways to do things so they can be successful quickly, and then let them learn and discover different ways to do tasks. He showed lots of examples using the Pod home page.

Getting the Very Best from Macromedia Captivate 1.0
Matthew Ellison

Matthew's session was very much a show-and-tell, detailing not only how to do useful things in Captivate, but why they are useful. He went into best practices for using Captivate-style user assistance, then delved into the details of developing Captivate slides.

Seth Earley speaks at Sunday's seminar.

Writing, Photography, Production, Layout:
   Chuck Martin
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Attendees enjoying a sunny outdoor break.

Bits & Pieces

Session Evaluations

One of the most important and useful things you can do to make this and future conferences even better is to fill out the session evaluations, which are on a small pad in your conference bag. The WritersUA staff reads every one and takes all comments, good and bad, to heart.

Each speaker also sees the evaluations for their sessions.

Every night of the conference, a few evaluations are drawn at random and the writers of those evaluations win prizes, which can include vendor products, conference swag, and more.

So be sure to fill out the session evaluations and drop them in the boxes at the back of each session meeting room.

AnswerWorks and WritersUA.com, Together

If you want to see AnswerWorks, by Vantage Software Technologies, at work, check out the WritersUA web site (www.writersua.com), which uses and integrates the AnswerWorks technology.

How Lunch Works

This year, WritersUA is offering lunch for all attendees on Monday and Tuesday. And it is structured so that people with similar interests will get to meet.

Pick up lunch tickets either on the way into the lunch rooms or at the conference registration table during the break between morning sessions.

ProBooster Certificates

You can choose to specialize in one of several topic areas over the three-day conference. Attendees who attend at least four sessions in one Interest Area and fill out a ProBooster Record Sheet will be mailed a certificate after the conference ends.

The record sheets for last year's conference were inadvertently put in this year's bag. Pick up this year's record sheet at this morning's opening session.

Will there be standards for user assistance?

A select group of user assistance professionals met late Sunday night to discuss the feasibility of working to create a standard for user assistance, whether it be APIs, descriptive languages, or something else.

The meeting, moderated by Matthew Ellison, raised more questions than provided answers, questions about tools and technologies, best practices, and more. About two-thirds of the group thought at the end that moving forward to develop such a standard is a good idea, and more than a dozen offered to commit time to the effort.