

## Optimistic 19th WritersUA Conference Returns to Long Beach

by Chuck Martin

The software industry, as with the country and the world, has not seen the recovery it had been hoping for. Neither has the user assistance development community. But that did not stop Joe Welinske, organizer of the annual WritersUA Conference for Software User Assistance.

When last year's conference wrapped up in Seattle, he plunged into planning for 2011, convinced of the importance of quality user assistance and the tools, techniques, and concepts that make it happen.

So here we are, back in Long Beach, where we were in 2007, right down to the same hotel.

Back then, the conference opened with a trends panel making predictions about the future of technology and user assistance. An interesting prediction, from Welinske, was that Windows Help would never evolve from HTML Help. Other predictions included the death of desktop computers, the long future of PDAs and Internet appliances, and wireless and RFID everywhere.



Adobe folks prepare for their Sunday morning training session.

Guess no one saw the iPad coming. Nor the proliferation of eBooks.

But that just shows how fast this industry evolves, and the importance of a conference such as this one. If you don't keep up, you'll definitely fall behind. And the 360 folks who come here from far flung places recognize the need to keep up, even get ahead.

The future focus is where we begin this morning, in an interactive session hosted by Welinske, Tony Self, and Matthew Ellison, that you will not want to miss. Later in the day, session topics include topics

on personas, user-generated content, eLearning, and mobile content. The day wraps up with a focus on the past, with Adobe celebrating 20 years of RoboHelp by hosting an evening mixer, by bringing back RoboHelp creator Gen Kiyooka, and by giving away a copy of the latest edition of Adobe Technical Communication Suite, which includes RoboHelp.

This year's conference features two keynote speakers, finishing the final two days. Tuesday you'll see Shawn Henry explaining how to make your user assistance accessible. Wednesday, Adam Rubin talks

about sharing ideas memorably.

Immediately following Tuesday's keynote, vendors will demonstrate their products. Your conference materials include a list of where each vendor will be. The Geek Trivia Quiz Show rounds out the Tuesday schedule, an always-fun event that gives you a chance to meet your fellow conference goers in a fun and challenging atmosphere. And there's prizes. Or at least, a prize for the winning team.

Speaking of prizes, the conference itself gives away prizes for filling out session evaluations. Check here each day to see winners listed.

Wednesday is the only day that you're on your own for lunch, but don't forget about the Peer Showcase from 10:50am to 1:05pm. More than a dozen of your user assistance development peers will show off their great approaches and techniques. You can also vote for the most innovative project; the winner receives a distinctive award.

**TODAY'S WEATHER**

75

Intervals of clouds & sunshine. Winds W, 10-15 mph.

**CREDITS**  
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Speaker Linda Urban makes a point in her Sunday supplemental full-afternoon session "Topic-Based Authoring: Getting a Handle on Topic Types."

**Updated Session Schedule**

Some minor changes have occurred in the conference session schedule. Not all the changes have been reflected in the conference materials (which are printed in advance), specifically the at-a-glance card. Please note these changes:

- "Leveraging Social: User-Generated Support," by Doug Bolin:
  - Originally scheduled for today (Monday) at 12:45pm in Regency B
  - Moved to Wednesday at 8:30am in Regency A.
- "A Style Guide for DITA Authoring," by Tony Self
  - Originally scheduled for Wednesday at 8:30am in Regency A
  - Moved to today (Monday) at 12:45pm in Regency B.

## Session Summaries

Notes from the Sunday supplemental sessions.

### A Writing-Intensive Workshop for Embedded User Assistance

**Rob Houser**

The main goal for embedded user assistance—content within a user interface—is to motivate users to explore, to get them started on their tasks. What questions do users ask when they are getting started? Answer them!

You don't need sentences. Phrases can be effective user assistance. How can you say it in half the words? (It's easier to do with someone else's words; find someone else to help with yours.)

### Writing Engaging eLearning Exercises and Test Questions

**Saul Carliner**

One of the notions that Saul touched on is the idea of acceptable completion for tasks. There is a big difference if you're unable to complete the task of installing a pacemaker vs. installing software.

Saul also discussed the idea of accurate objectives. Accurate objectives need to be observable or measurable. That makes verbs such as "know" or "understand" unacceptable in objectives. How do you measure if someone "knows" a procedure?

### Topic-Based Authoring: Getting a Handle on Topic Types

**Linda Urban**

This hands-on session detailed the different types of topics, including task and concept, and gave extensive practice in understanding the differences. Patterns were also introduced for the different topic types. Linda explained that different elements make up particular types of topics.

Development of patterns is iterative. But pattern usefulness can't be ascertained without adding content.



Speaker Rob Houser helps an attendee after his Sunday Supplemental session.

### Notes, Events, Reminders

#### Networking Mixer

Adobe Systems Inc., sponsors a networking mixer this evening from 4:30-6:00pm in the Hyatt lobby bar. Not only can you nosh on appetizers, meet and mingle with fellow user assistance professionals, and win a bunch of prizes, including software, but...

Adobe is proud to announce the return of Gen Kiyooka, creator of RoboHelp, who will appear at the mixer. And to celebrate the 20th anniversary of RoboHelp, Adobe will also be giving away a full copy of their brand new Technical Communication Suite 3.

#### Vendor Exhibition

More than a dozen vendors are here at the conference to demonstrate their products and services. Several are also raffling off products or other prizes.

They are here only today and tomorrow. So be sure to stop by the vendor booths, located in

the Regency Foyer.

#### Book Giveaway

Tony Self, a long-time WritersUA speaker, has a new book, "The DITA Style Guide." Tony will be at the Scriptorium booth from 2-3pm today and will be raffling copies of his book.

#### Computer Labs

The computer lab in Shoreline has 24 laptops filled with software tools. Feel free to drop into the lab in the morning, on breaks, and at lunch to experiment.

You can also get hands-on help from the experts in the themed lab sessions throughout the conference. Check your schedule for details.

#### Early Start Tomorrow

Remember that sessions start on Tuesday at 8:30am. Breakfast on the Regency level begins at 8:00am and runs just 30 minutes.



Concentrating at the LaunchPad session.

## Session Evaluation Prizes

One of the most important ways this conference remains at such a high quality level is the feedback from you, the people who attend and learn from all the speakers. The feedback you provide in evaluations helps the speakers themselves improve and helps the conference organizers make sure the highest quality speakers return.

Each day, conference organizers pick names at random from attendees who filled out session evaluations and dropped them in the white boxes in the session rooms or at the registration desk. Today's winners, from yesterday's Sunday supplemental sessions:

- Chris Thiessen, of Emerson Process Management, wins an Arc Mouse, from Catherine Moya of Microsoft
- Carolyn Stratton, of LexisNexis, wins Corel Draw Graphics Suite X5, from Corel

Winners can pick up prizes at the conference registration desk.