

Conference for Software User Assistance Tuesday Daily Hot Sheet

User Assistance Community Looks Inward to Open 2011 Conference

by Chuck Martin

Instead of just sitting and listening to a speaker opening the 2011 WritersUA Conference for Software User Assistance, conference organizer Joe Welinske again got everyone involved. The opening session polled the audience on a number of user assistance topics. The results were interesting, enlightening, and sometimes funny.

One of the most interesting polls asked how many people have smartphones. A full 40% of

attendees don't. The iPhone was next, with 23% of attendees, followed by Android with 16%.

Another question wanted to know what we said we do when asked at a party. 42% said just plain "writer," with Technical Communicator in second at 33%, but "I work with computers" hit 14%, or about 1 out of 7.

On a more serious note, a question asking what skills are important for the future, delivering information via handheld devices topped the list

with 35%, and eLearning had 25%. Of skills most important in a career, the ability to learn quickly was the overwhelming top choice, with 45%. Writing and interpersonal skills each got 21%, a far-distant second.

A question about the ancient history of online help got perhaps the biggest laugh. When asked what kind of help controls people used, the overwhelming answer, at 66%, was "What the hell are A and K links?" The next answer, A links, got 15%.

The interactive opening session generated an energy that lasted throughout the day, keeping a buzz through lunch, through the doldrums of a three-session afternoon, and into the evening mixer hosted by Adobe. The day was glitch-free, with the notable exception of a radio frequency glitch that briefly stalled the opening session midway through.

Topics covered Monday included user assistance pattern libraries, designing content for mobile devices, leveraging user-generated content, reusing content between training and user assistance, and labs with Adobe and MadCap.

In a new offering, a computer lab allowed attendees to try out dozens of software packages, get hands-on experience, and have questions answered by experts.

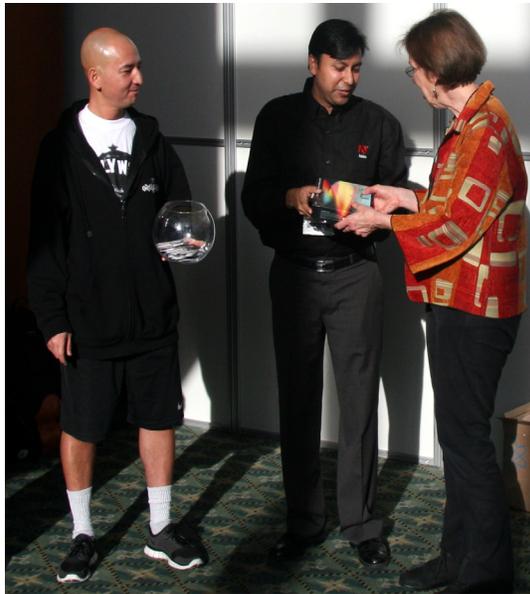
Lunch, provided by WritersUA, offered roundtable discussions on dozens of user assistance-related topics.

The day ended with a social mixer, hosted by Adobe, that found many lounging around the pool in the balmy Long Beach evening.

Updated Product Demonstration Schedule

There were some errors in the Product Demonstration room handout in your bag. We have nine vendors giving demos from 4:05-5:05pm:

- 4.ST / HelpServer – Harbor B
- Adobe – Regency B
- Author-it – Seaview B
- ComponentOne – Seaview A
- Congree – Beacon Ballroom
- JustSystems – Beacon Ballroom
- MadCap Software – Regency A
- Quadralay – Shoreline B
- Tedopres – Shoreline A
- ThirtySix Software – Harbor A



Adobe's Ankur Jain (c) gives away a copy of Technical Communication Suite 3 to Linda Urban (r) as RoboHelp creator Gen Kiyooka (l) looks on.

Session Evaluation Prizes

Each day, conference organizers randomly select names from those 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 Monday's sessions:

- Katherine Nolan, license for Congree Personal Edition, from Congree
- Mike Calvert, license for SmartDocs, from ThirtySix Software
- Niki McDaniels, license for MadCap Flare, from MadCap
- David McVey, license for Video Studio Pro X4, from Corel
- Michelle Sander, license for SnagIt, from TechSmith
- Susan Westmoreland, Microsoft Wireless Mouse & Bluetooth Number Pad, from Catharine Maya of Microsoft
- Mirana Ticea, license for Doc-To-Help, from ComponentOne
- Paultette Tiggs, book "Maximizing LinkedIn," from LavaCon

Winners can pick up prizes at the conference registration desk.

TODAY'S WEATHER



Sunshine w/ cloudy intervals. Winds SSW, 5-10 mph.

CREDITS

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Session Summaries

Following are notes from selected Monday sessions.

A Pattern Library for User Assistance

Rob Houser

UI libraries define common controls or interactions. For UA, look at trends, use what you observe to find common themes. Core UA patterns include getting started, making decisions, and solving problems.

Why UA libraries? Less getting published about UA. Few outlets to transfer knowledge. Use pattern libraries to speed adoption of best practices. It helps to get interaction designers to think about user assistance as part of the design process.

Adobe RoboHelp 9: A Fresh Look

Kevin Siegel

RoboHelp 9 now outputs eBook files in the EPUB format. Dynamic effects don't work in eBooks, so comment out any such content in your source code.

You can create user-centered content with conditionalized content and then let users select the subset of information they want to see.

Using Personas to Improve the Customer Experience

Joan Lasselle

Personas is a technique to help you make tactical decisions about what's next with your content. Metrics can be helpful, but they are abstract. And often, technical writers don't know customers as well as they think.

You measure success with customer satisfaction. Satisfied customers will spend time with you, giving you data to make better decisions.

Personas are created from ethnographic and qualitative (NOT quantitative) research. Personas contain a behavioral model. What motivates people, to get up, to get their job done, to solve problems?

If you're building information that people can't get to, are you really providing a service? That's why you need to know how people work, how they do what they do, what limitations they have.

Techniques for Embedded User Assistance

Tony Self

UA in a UI is the first assistance a user sees. So understanding the many ways you embed assistance in an application is useful.

Why do users like embedded UA? It minimizes interruptions. It makes information more accessible. It reinforces help as being part of the application.

You can create embedded content in an XML file that's not compiled into an application. Then, you can change the content, and it updates within the application without needing to be recompiled. The secret to great embedded UA includes keeping content independent of the product, simplifying integration, and using mapping files and techniques.



Attendees prepare for the Monday morning opening session.

Notes, Events, Reminders

Vendor Exhibition

The Vendor Exhibition, located in the Regency Foyer and Regency F, ends today. Make sure you leave enough time to visit them all.

Vendor Prizes

Several prizes were given away yesterday.

MadCap Software gave away a copy of MadCap to Miruna Ticrea, a Starbucks card to Emily Riclatts, and an iPod Shuffle to Sherrie Friend.

Vendor raffles today include:

- Madcap: MadPakML
- HelpServer: license for HelpServer
- ComponentOne: license for Doc-To-Help (they are also giving away t-shirts for a limited time, while they last)
- ITC: iPad 2
- Congree: license for Congree Personal Edition
- Adobe: license for Technical Communication Suite 3
- ThirtySix Software: license for SmartDocs
- Jack Molisani: book "Windmill Networking" and free entrance to LavaCon 2011 in Austin, TX

LavaCon Discount

Special for WritersUA attendees, register for LavaCon 2011 by March 25 and pay only \$500, a \$450 discount off the normal \$950 rate.

Geek Trivia Tonight

The Geek Trivia Quiz Show, hosted by our very own Dave Gash, is tonight from 6:00pm to

7:30pm in the lobby bar. We'll gather into teams for fun and prizes. No host food & drink.

Lunch Table Topics

The table topics not covered on Monday will be available during Tuesday Lunch in addition to the Tuesday topics. We apologize for the missing tables.

Conference Bookstore

Our conference bookstore will be open in Regency F on Tuesday from 10:50am-1:25pm. Check out the assortment of user assistance-related titles.

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. If you are planning to attend one of the computer Labs, feel free to bring your own project files. The lab experts will be happy to help you with your individual questions. You can also get hands-on help from the experts in the themed lab sessions throughout the conference. Check your schedule for details.

Twitter!

The hashtag for tweets is #writersua. Feel free to add to the conference stream. A large monitor is streaming tweets in the Regency Foyer.

Early Start Tomorrow

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

