

# Daily Hot Sheet 2007

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## 15th Annual WritersUA Conference Trundles Down To Long Beach

BY CHUCK MARTIN

From the beginnings of Win-Help as a viable software development subculture, through the heyday of the Dot-Com era, enduring the Dot-Bomb, and now with the dawning of Web 2.0, the WritersUA Conference for Software User Assistance has been there. This year, the conference's 15th, "there" is here in Long Beach, CA.

That's right, 15th.

More than 400 user assistance professionals from across the country and around the world are here at the Hyatt these three days. People have come here from as far away as Great Britain, Australia, India, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Germany, Korea, Austria, and South Africa.

As usual, the conference has plenty of sessions with information about cutting-edge technologies, information that you can use to build the current and next generation of user assistance systems. But the conference also of-

fers sessions for those new to the user assistance world, an opportunity for those folks to build their knowledge foundation and enjoy success at their work.

A number of speakers are also LaunchPad mentors. LaunchPad is the program aimed at newer folks, but the mentors are around to help anyone. Look for them at breakfast each morning near the WritersUA information table.

This year's conference offers 60 sessions by 45 speakers, including favorites such as Dave Gash, Jared Spool, and Char James-Tanny, and ends Wednesday afternoon with a keynote by Geoffrey K. Pullum of the University of California, Santa Cruz, on the intriguing topic of "Far from the Maddening Gerund: Observations About Language."

*See Conference on next page*



CHECKING IN SUNDAY AFTERNOON.

## Reminders...

### Cell phones

Turn them off. Or put them on vibrate. Please.

### Session evaluations

In each conference bag is a pad with evaluation forms. Please take a few moments at the end of each session you attend, fill out a form for that session,

and drop it in the yellow box by the door.

Speakers get cumulative feedback from these evaluations, and WritersUA uses the information to improve the conference.

Plus, you can win valuable prizes. Several evaluations are drawn each day and the winners receive anything from cool swag to valuable software.

### Badges required

You will need your badge, which you received upon registration, to get into conference sessions.

### Need a job? Offering one?

Check out the message/job board nearby the registration desk in the Regency foyer. This board can be used for other messages as well.

### Got Internet?

Free Internet stations are in the Beacon Ballroom. Please limit your time when others are waiting.



JOE WELINSKE WELCOMES ATTENDEES AT SUNDAY NIGHT'S LAUNCHPAD INTRODUCTION.

## Today's Events

**Networking lunch** compliments of WritersUA in the Beacon Room on the Regency level from noon to 1:15pm. Today's topic tables will include authoring tool selection, indexing, and usability.

**Networking reception** in the evening, sponsored by Adobe, out by the hotel pool from 4:45 to 6:00pm. Nosh on appetizers served under the Seaview Rotunda, exchange business cards, and enjoy the balmy weather by the pool.

**Conference exhibition** runs all day in the Regency foyer. An even dozen vendors will be happy to tell you about their latest products and innovations.

## Session Summaries

A brief review from some of yesterday's sessions.

### Introduction to Structured Authoring

TONY SELF

When companies are looking to adopt new methodologies for creating user assistance, they need also to understand why they need it. Tony began his afternoon session by reviewing the whys, the benefits of structured authoring, benefits that included consistency of content and benefits to the business. He defined structured authoring as a publishing workflow that enforces consistent organization of information.

### Developing a Working XML Application with Frame-Maker

BERNARD ASCHWANDEN

This session was very technical, with Bernard throwing around acronyms such as XML, XSL, XSLT, and EDD like politicians throw candy at a parade. But these are what's

needed to move content in and out of a (structured) Frame-Maker application. Markers identify elements in such an application.

### Writing for Small Spaces

ROB HOUSER

This session focused a lot on just-in-time (JIT) user assistance, such as field-level pop-ups. Rob also took some time to talk about error messages, suggesting that useful error messages first describe the problem in the language of the user, are not accusatory, offer possible causes, and then provide solutions.

Rob also talked about the importance of conceptual information, and how it helps users understand how something works so that they aren't so much using step-by-step procedures to get through a task, but rather using that understanding to figure out how the system works to get the task done.



SUE HEIM AND TONY SELF EXCHANGING "BUSINESS CARDS" THE 21ST CENTURY WAY.

## Vendor Exhibition Begins Today

The conference vendor exhibition begins today and runs all day today and tomorrow. A dozen vendors of user assistance tools and services have booths set up and will be staffed to answer all your questions.

Vendors this year: 4.st, Adobe, AuthorIT Software Corp., ComponentOne, Innovasys, ITR, LavaCon, MadCap Software and MadSkills, PubNow, Quadralay Corp., Scriptorium Publishing, and Vasont Systems.

A number of vendors are giving away prizes via raffle, including a \$250 Hyatt gift voucher from ITR, a set of Bose noise-canceling headphones from AuthorIT, and a free registration to LavaCon from LavaCon. Check out all the vendors for more information.

## Prizes

Each day, several session evaluations are drawn at random from those dropped in the yellow Evaluation boxes the day before. Attendees who submit evaluations can win prizes, which can be picked up at the conference registration desk.

Today's winners are:  
Timothy Saludo  
Kathleen LaFlamme  
Brian Wilkins

Each winner receives a beach towel from Adobe.

### Today's Forecast



Mostly sunny

65



### DAILY HOT SHEET

Writer, photographer, publisher: Chuck Martin  
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ENJOYING THE SUNDAY MEET-UP.

### Conference, from previous page

While the conference offers so much in every hour of every day, if you want to take a break, this area of Long Beach offers plenty, from restaurants to attractions, many listed on an insert in your bag. It's easy to get overwhelmed with so many

session choices each day. It's no sin to take a timeout and catch your breath.

So whether it's immersing yourself in conference sessions all day, every day or cherry-picking sessions that are right for you, enjoy your time here.

