Daily *Hot* Sheet 10.0

Prediction: Windows Help Will Never Evolve From HTML Help

BY CHUCK MARTIN

While there weren't any real bombshells in this year's conference-opening trends panel, one prediction of non-change stood out. Joe Welinske, after seeing Windows 98, 2000, XP, and Vista all ship with essentially no update in the help "bits," offered that he could take a hint and claimed that Windows Help will never evolve from HTML Help.

Interestingly, in one section of the morning trends panel, all the speakers were essentially in agreement, even though they claim that they made their predictions independently. Many of the IT industry predictions were along the lines of the computer is dead, long live the PDA or Internet appliance, especially if the latter is small. And wireless (and RFID) will permeate all of life as we know it.

And that all was just for openers on a day packed with sessions that leads into two more days even more packed. Yep, you ain't seen nothin' yet.

Tuesday is invariably the busiest, most bustling day of the conference. From its early morning beginnings to the events that pack the day and slide into the evening. it's no wonder that Wednesday dawns on tired faces. Thus the importance of pace.

The good news—well, one nugget of good news among many—is that pacing yourself might be a bit easier if you've chosen to avail yourself of one (or more) of the hands-on double sessions, two occurring today and one tomorrow. The double sessions not only allow the time to really get intimate with the topic at hand, they allow you to settle in for a whole morning or afternoon.

Monday ended with a fun mixer, sponsored by WritersUA and Adobe, with plenty of food and drink, as well as prizes for several lucky attendees.

ATTENDEES LISTEN TO A DEMONSTRATION OF AUTHORIT.

Vendor Exhibition Ends Today

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

A number of vendors are giving away prizes via raffle. Typically, you stop by the vendor booth and drop off a business card or fill out a form to have a chance to win. Prizes include:

A $250 Hyatt gift voucher from ITR.

A set of Bose noise-canceling headphones from AuthorIT.

A free registration to Lava-Con from LavaCon.

A $25 Amazon.com gift certificate from Scriptorium.

A Garmin StreetPilot c330 GPS from ComponentOne.

A copy of MadPak and a specially engraved iPod Nano from MadCap Software.

Three copies of RoboHelp 6, Three copies of FrameMaker 7.2, and Three copies of Captivate, plus one "special prize" from Adobe, where the winners will be announced on their blog (http://blog.adobe.com/techcom) on April 9.

Today's Events

Networking lunch compliments of WritersUA in the Beacon Room on the Regency level from 11:30am to 1:00pm. Today's topic tables will include accessibility, CSS, DITA, Flare, and FrameMaker.

Networking reception in the evening, sponsored by MadCap Software, out by the hotel pool from 5:15 to 6:30pm. 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.

Product demonstrations by 4.st/Help Server, Adobe, AuthorIT, ComponentOne, MadCap Software, Quadralay, and Vasont in the various conference session rooms from 4:15 to 5:15pm.

MADCAP FLARE WINNER.

Session Summaries

A brief review from some of yesterday's sessions.

User Assistance Trends Panel: What's Ripe, Hype, and Out-of-sight

Bernard Aschwanden, Dana Chisnell, Rob Houser, Paul Mueller, Joe Welinske

Tools & Technology

RH: Traditional HATs will cease to be relevant in 3 years if they don't support new UA paradigms because things are changing with Web 2.0, have to allow non-help authors to modify UA content, SMEs and users more than help authors.

DC: RoboHelp will integrate with Acrobat, Vista will change help delivery methods.

PM: New tools with common help components with drag-and-drop implementation.

BA: XML-based files will become interchangeable, current software is overpriced and underfeatured.

User Assistance

JW: Windows Help will never evolve from HTML Help.

BA: Google & Wiki approaches to help will bypass company development and go to real users who have encountered the problems already. Writer's job will be to manage information (information architect) raher than creating content.

RH: Help authors will relinquish control of content to SMEs, who will create and update content themselves.

DC: We will be moderating user-contributed forums, rather than writing help systems.

PM: Information Development and Tech Support will merge.

IT World

DC: Just having a novel product isn't enough to retain customers.

PM: PDAs and Bluetooth/wireless will change everyday tasks.

RH: Virtual classrooms will decrease demand for web-based training.

BA: Computer is dead; long live the letter "i." The iVerything will be replaced with an RFID implant in people within 10 years.

Fab FAQs
Dave Gash

Dave delved deeply into the depths of JavaScripting, particularly arrays and loops, to show an "easy" way to create and maintain user-friendly FAQs. He suggested parallel arrays are easier to maintain than multidimensional arrays.

What Makes A Design Seem Intuitive
Jared Spool

Calling a design "intuitive" is a shortcut; people intuit things. When is design no longer intuitive? When users look at it and don't know what to do. Intuitive is personal. To succeed, design must bridge the gap from current knowledge to target knowledge. Our job is to help users bridge that knowledge gap.

Flare Tips and Tricks
Scott DeLoach

Among the topics Scott covered were how to manage reusable content on Flare. For example, snippets, small chunks of content each of which, in the Flare paradigm, are stored as small .FLSNP files.

Scott also showed how to code variables in places such as TOCs and hypertext links. Variables, he noted, can be overridden in a target.

New software, new versions

The final release of Screen Capture Pro, a new and easy-to-use screen capture program, is now available, according to its developer, Jim Palik. Jim previewed the software at last year's WritersUA conference and took the feedback he received to make improvements.

Palik is giving away free demo versions at his vendor booth, and is also offering a 40% discount to WritersUA attendees.

MadCap Software announced yesterday the pending release of MadCap Flare 3.0, which integrates with MadCap's new Feedback Server, and includes other new features such as automatic integration with source control software, instant messaging and email notification, and more.

Madcap's Feedback Server gives you the ability to see how customers are using your desktop or web-based help.

Reminders...

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

Session evaluations
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.

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.

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:

Jonathan Sherrill, Adobe RoboHelp 6

Emily Shoup, Adobe RoboHelp 6

Tammy Dyk, MadCap t-shirt

Dave Koch, MadCap t-shirt

Seth Seppanen, AirLink 802.1g wireless USB adapter

Michelle Sander, Adobe beach towel

Remember to keep filling out those session evaluations.

Today's Forecast
Sunny late
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