Early start today

Today's first session begins early, at 8:30am.

Short breaks

Note that breaks today are short, just 20 minutes.

Hour-long sessions

Unlike previous years, when sessions varied in length, all of this year's sessions are one-hour long.

However, note that start times are not always on the hour, half hour, or quarter hour. Keep your Conference at a Glance card handy to make sure you're on time to the sessions you want to attend.

Peer Showcase

The Peer Showcase, where 23 of your peers show off their work, is in the Grand Foyer from 10:50am to 1:05pm.

Lunch on your own

Lunch is on your own today during the same time as the Peer Showcase. The break for both is 2 hours and 15 minutes, so be sure to spend time looking at your peers' work.

Today's Forecast

68 degrees, partly to mostly cloudy, light variable breezes

Wednesday Hot Sheet

New help and new tools highlight busy Tuesday WritersUA

by Chuck Martin

Microsoft detailed its new Help system and Adobe announced Creative Suite CS5 in a busy middle day of the 2010 WritersUA conference.

The session title—"Microsoft Help Preview"—seemed innocuous enough. But the content inside revealed a shift that may rock the user assistance world.

Some people might just roll their eyes at the revealing of yet another Microsoft help format, reasoning that we've been down this path before. But the stirring this time suggests that this might not be just for developers.

Microsoft's latest incarnation is called Help Viewer. For now, it's being shipped with Visual Studio 2010 and, like Help 2.x before it, is currently slated to be available for developers who create Visual Studio extensions.

But while Microsoft's Paul O'Rear couldn't commit to more, it's clear that the internal tide is to flesh out the new platform and make it a consumer product.

Interestingly, one feature that could make it very appealing to user assistance developers is that it is designed to work with any browser. That's right, it's browser agnostic, not tied to Internet Explorer. In fact, it uses the user's chosen default browser.

The eventual goals are to make help quick and easy, to view both offline and online content in a familiar, browser-based experience, to ensure offline content is relevant and up-to-date, to get fast, relevant search results with both F1 and full text searches, and to have a simple, standards-based architecture.

Later in the day, at the Adobe demonstration, R.J. Jacquez, Product Evangelist for the Adobe Technical Communication Suite, looked at his watch, noticed that it was past 5:00, and announced that while the news had been embargoed up to that time, he could now tell everyone that Adobe was announcing Creative Suite CS5.

The day ended with the rousing Geek Trivia Quiz Show, hosted by the ever effervescent Dave Gash, where the winners and losers walked away with valuable prizes such as Silly Putty, Pez dispensers, and Seattle snowglobes.

The vendor exhibition is gone, but in its place is the Peer Showcase, which spans more than two hours in the Grand Foyer over lunchtime.

Today ends one last busy day with the User Assistance Trends panel, where five intrepid user assistance professionals will look into their collective crystal balls and predict our future.

And the future of the conference? Well, of course it'll be back next year. We just don't yet know where.

Stay tuned to the WritersUA website, writersua.com, for announcements regarding dates and location.

Thanks for coming, and see you next year.

Checking out the conference Twitter feed.

Conference supplemental materials

Additional material provided by speakers will be available on the conference Community site on Monday, March 28. The supplemental materials that speakers provide will be posted to the page containing details for their session.

Peer Showcase today

Twenty-three user assistance professionals are showing their work today at the Peer Showcase in the Grand Foyer from 10:50am to 1:05pm. Feel free to visit the project stations at your own pace and ask lots of questions.

Most Innovative Project Award

Let us know what projects give you the most valuable insights, the most interesting techniques, or new design ideas. Fill out one of the yellow ballots with your choices for the three most innovative projects. The top vote-getter will receive a special award during the conference closing session this afternoon.

Conference evaluations

Please remember to fill out the overall conference evaluations (as well as individual session evaluations) and drop them in the Evaluation Forms boxes at the room exits and in other places around the Grand Foyer.

Not only do your evaluations earn chances to win valuable prizes, the feedback you give is very helpful to all the conference speakers and organizers.

Brief notes from some of yesterday's sessions, compiled by Chuck Martin.

Introduction to eBook Devices and Formats

Joshua Tallent, eBook Architects

There are several eBook formats: Kindle (Mobipocket) ePUB (industry standard), PDF, LIT (Microsoft), eReader, and others. Mobipocket is based on HTML 3 with little CSS. ePUB is an open standard, based on XHTML 1.1 with CSS 2.

Amazon is selling 70-90% of eBooks.

DRM is the bane of the eBooks world. Two DRM standards: Fairplay (Apple) and Adobe Digital Editions Protection Technology (Sony, nook, etc.). DRM makes purchasing and use more difficult, effectiveness against piracy unproven..

eBook market growing at 200% per year, but still too fragmented to know where it will be in just 3-4 years.

UA Design and Implementation for iPhone Apps

Joe Welinske, WritersUA

Mobile devices are likely to be the primary interface for most people. Many organizations are looking to scale off parts of their enterprise applications for employees on the go.

Complexity and minimal screen real estate don't mix. Multi-touch and multi-key controls are not easily discoverable.

Enormous opportunities for wordsmiths to get involved in UI text, which often is the first word or phrase the developer thinks of.

Server-based help doesn't have to go through Apple approval process. It can offer dynamic and easily updated information.

The Apple Human Interface Guidelines are great for everything to do with the iPhone UI—except user assistance.

Microsoft Help Preview

Paul O'Rear, Microsoft

History of Help: 1990, WinHelp, RTf source, .HLP files; 1997, HTML Help, HTML-based, .CHM files; 2002, Help 2.x, HTML-based, .HXS files; 2006, AP (Assistance Platform) Help, XML-based, .H1S files; 2010, Help Viewer, XHTML-based, .MSHC files.

Released with Visual Studio 2010. No timetable for general availability, although many are asking. Only a few tools can output, so far.

Content requires XHTML. Attributes enable TOC, multiple language support, F1 (context-sensitive) support, etc. Title, ID, branding support attributes are optional, but TOC, F1, keywords, category attributes optional.

No separate TOC, index files because all that information in embedded in the topic files.

Where User Experience and Software Engineering Meet

Andrew Ko, University of Washington

From a study at Microsoft of programmers, 25 hours logged, 357 pages of notes, 4231 events. Found work is fragmented, people are interrupted on average every 5-10 minutes. Also, people are blocked—they need information to proceed that they don't have—on average every 10 minutes.

Software development is tacit. Plans and specifications are unwritten, so programmers have to communicate (a lot) to make progress. It takes time to coordinate communication, and it can't be done with just tools.

Software quality depends a lot on the quality of communication. But human communication and cognition are inherently faulty and unreliable.

Enjoying the Geek Trivia Quiz Show.

Conference Notes

LaunchPad, Pro Booster certificates

If you've turning in your LaunchPad or Pro Booster record sheets, your certificates will be available at the conference information desk.

Upcoming conferences

The UA Conference Europe, produced by Matthew Ellison Consulting in association with WritersUA, takes place 16-17 September in Stockholm, Sweden.

The 13th Annual Australasian Online Documentation and Content Conference, AODC 2010, will be held in Darwin, Australia, 12-14 May.

Closing session slides

The slides for the closing panel session will be passed out to you as you enter the session.

HTML 5 slides

Char James-Tanny has uploaded her slide deck for her HTML5 session "Structures, Semantics, Controls, and More: HTML 5 is Here!", complete with links to various resources, to her website at http://jtfassociates.com/wua2010/.

Evaluation prizewinners—come get your prizes!

Each day, we draw several session evaluations at random, and those attendees win prizes. The following winners were selected from yesterday's submitted session evaluations:

- **Shelly Dillon**, Quardev: Book, *Technical Writing 101* (Scriptorium)
- **Susan Lunn**, NCCPA: Book, *Conversation and Community: The Social Web for Documentation* (XML Press)
- **Robert Reynolds**, Edifecs: HelpServer License (HelpServer)
- **Susan Elrod**, Attachmate: Starbucks gift card, (WritersUA)
- **Amy Constant**, Crossroads: 12 mos. access to Irrevo Content Quality System and $50 Amazon gift card
- **Jennifer Rodgers**, Websense: Component One Doc-to-Help License
- **Jamie Young,** Cirris Systems: Book, *The New Language in International Business* (Tedopres Int'l)
- **Patrick Calnan**, N-able Technology: Book: *Technical Illustrations: New Efficient Ways to Visualize Your Product* (Tedopres Int'l)
- **Angel Desjarlais**, Central 1 Credit: Help+Manual (EC Software)
- **Anita Legsdin**, CyberSource: Help+Manual (EC Software)
- **Rose Coblentz**, Optical Research: Book: *Kindle Formatting*
- **Ken Billing**, Blue Cielo: Book: *Kindle Formatting*
- **Sue Heim**, PGP Corp.: Book: Kindle Formatting

Prize winners can pick up their prizes at the conference registration desk in the Grand Foyer.

Don't forget to fill out your session evaluation forms for every session to attend and drop them in the white boxes marked "Evaluation Forms" to have your chance at more prizes.

Vendor prizes

Vendors gave away prizes to folks who visited their booths during the two-day Vendor Exhibition. The following folks won vendor prizes:

- **Leo Paoletti**, Kinaxis: Amazon Kindle (ComponentOne)
- **Kathy Jo Gemmill**, Identicard Systems: t-shirt (XML Press)

Final conference prizes

The last giveaways of the conference will be at the start of this afternoon's closing session. For the two largest prizes, a free admission to next year's conference, and a digital camera, you must be present to win.