Tuesday
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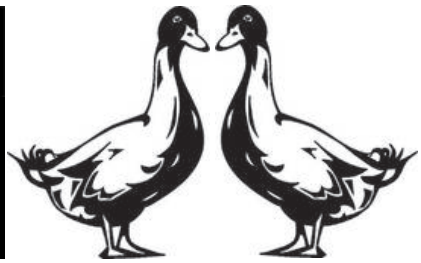
WritersUA
Daily Hot Sheet



20th WritersUA Conference Opens

by Chuck Martin

The 20th annual WritersUA Conference for Software User Assistance officially got underway yesterday here at the Peabody Hotel in Memphis, TN. WritersUA president Joe Welinske welcomed the more than 200 attendees promptly at 9:00am and took the crowd right into a look at itself with a series of audience-participation questions.

Among the most interesting was one about how many people work with an Agile team. The top 3 answers were almost evenly split, with about 28% each for fully participating Agile team member, providing services to an Agile team when needed, and the organization doesn't use Agile.

The audience was asked what area interested them the most. UI design came out on top with 36%, followed by content management with 32%.

Asked what they value most in their work, two answers popped to the top, the environment/culture with 29% and the nature of the work with 27%. Salary and flex time were a distant third and fourth.

In response to what kind of smartphone you have, 36% have iPhones, but Android devices are charging up the charts with 29%. While BlackBerry, Windows Phone, and other devices each scored in low single digits, 27 percent of the people have no smartphone or mobile phone at all.

Attendees enjoying the Adobe mixer on the Rooftop Terrace.

But in one fun question about Memphis sports teams, Joe Welinske couldn't remember which of the Memphis team names was fake because he inadvertently listed all real teams. Here is a full list: Redbirds (baseball), Riverkings (hockey), Grizzlies (NBA), Tigers (U. of Memphis), Showboats (USFL), Pharaohs (arena football), Mad Dogs (CFL).

Bracketing the day of sessions was the Adobe-sponsored mixer in the evening. Held on the Rooftop Terrace, conference attendees enjoyed drinks, conversation, and fresh fried green tomatoes while watching a gorgeous sunset over the Mississippi River.

Joe Welinske makes a point.

Thank you Adobe!

The WritersUA Conference would like to express a big thanks to Adobe for sponsoring the Monday night mixer. The weather was great, the food was excellent and it was a beautiful place to have a drink with friends and colleagues.

Raffles/Giveaways

ITR

ITR will be having a raffle of a Kindle Fire during the 3:05 break. Be sure to make it to their booth and put your card into the drawing.

Adobe

Adobe gave away a copy of Adobe Technical Communication Suite 3.5 (worth $1899) to a lucky winner. The suite includes the latest versions of RoboHelp, FrameMaker, Captivate, Acrobat and Photoshop. The drawing was held at the Adobe booth during the 10:50am break today. Check at the booth or in tomorrow's newsletter to find out who won

At-a-glance Agenda

11:10am-12:10pmm: Conference Sessions, Grand Ballrooms
12:10pm-1:10pm: Networking Lunch, Continental Ballroom
1:10pm-2:10pm: Conference Sessions, Grand Ballrooms
2:10pm-2:20pm: Break
2:20pm-3:05pm: Conference Sessions, Grand Ballrooms
3:05pm-3:15pm: Break
3:15pm-4:00pm: Conference Sessions, Grand Ballrooms
4:00pm-4:15pm: Break
4:15pm-5:15pm: Exhibitor Demonstrations, Grand Ballrooms

Today's Events

Networking Lunch

Enjoy lunch from 12:10pm to 1:10pm in the Continental Ballroom, sponsored by Adobe and WritersUA. Each table will have a topic to start conversation. Note that today's lunch is just one hour.

Vendor Exhibition

Conference vendors demonstrating their products from 7:30am to 4:45pm in the Grand Ballroom.

Product Demonstrations 4:15

Vendors will talk about their products in the Grand Ballroom meeting rooms.

4.ST Help Server, Grand Ballroom A
Author-It, Grand Ballroom B
Vasont, Grand Ballroom C

ComponentOne

ComponentOne's Doc-To-Help crew is giving away two Kindle Fires: one from a raffle from survey cards, and one from a QR code lottery. They have a stack of flyers with a QR code that opens a sample of their Mobile Help output. One of those flyers has a special QR code that opens a web page that says "YOU WIN."

Session Summaries: Monday

Notes from selected Monday sessions.

Embedding User Experience in the Product Development Life Cycle

IBM's Michael Hughes presented this topic, first explaining the challenge to integrate user experience into the development cycle, traditionally mostly in the usability testing stage. At that point it is too late in the process to do more than make the product "suck less."

The best place to get involved is when requirements are being defined. But requirements are a terrible way to communicate about a product, because requirements are words, and everyone thinks they know what the words mean. That's not always the case when the words are "translated" into a product.

Cascading Style Sheets (CSS): Current Techniques and the Promise of CSS3

Madcap's Mike Hamilton presented this session on pure CSS. He spent time explaining some current technologies, especially ones that can cause issues, such as lists and the box model. He explained it well, adding the tip to give each tag a thin border so you can see how adjusting the attributes affect the box model (margin and padding).

Even though CSS3 isn't "official" yet, modern browsers have already adopted many CSS3 elements. One of the biggies: borders can now have curved corners. The font-face attribute allows you to embed fonts, but there's a caveat: you have to own the fonts and have a license to distribute them on the web.

Getting Good PDF Out of DITA

Scriptorium's Sarah O'Keefe stated clearly that getting PDF out of DITA is a"pain in the patootie." Why is PDF publishing hard? Because print has many more layout options than HTML.

But does your audience really care about typographical niceties? Or are you just trying to force a specific look-and-feel on printed output because you've "always done it that way?" Less sophisticated formatting equals lower cost.

There are three V's that drive how simple or complex your output process can be: volume, velocity, and versioning.

User Annotations with HTML5

Dave Gash took a big crowd through more slides full of code, this time HTML5 code to demonstrate how you can annotate not only web-based help systems, but any web page. The solution is called HTML storage, which can store content (up to 5MB) on your local storage medium that is saved across sessions. It is not accessible, however across browsers, to form the same site using different systems.

Annotations should be simple, brainless even. There should be no Save, Close, or Delete buttons, and Dave showed some code that would do just that.

Notes

Early Start Wednesday

Sessions start early on Wednesday, at 8:30am, and breakfast is just 30 minutes, starting at 8:00am.

Short Breaks

Morning breaks between sessions are 20 minutes. Afternoon breaks are just 10 minutes. Be sure to visit the vendors during the breaks if you haven't already.

Matthew Ellison is a dynamic and demonstrative speaker.

Tweet! Tweet!

Feel free to post to Twitter, Facebook and other social sites about your conference experience. The conference hashtag is #writersua.

ProBooster

Turn in your ProBooster sheets by the end of the day today to pick up your certificate tomorrow.

Conference Parking Rate

If you have a car self-parked in the hotel garage, show your conference badge for a special rate of $13/day.

TechWhirl is here.

We are pleased to have TechWhirl at the conference to provide coverage of our event. TechWhirl is one of the best sources for news and information related to the technical communication field.

Busking

Although not an official conference event, speaker Mike Hughes and Chris Thiessen will be busking and playing bluegrass on Beale Street at seven-ish on Tuesday.

Wednesday Lunch

Wednesday's lunch is on your own. The area around the Peabody Hotel has many fine eating establishments, so there's no need to do the familiar.

Many raves have come in for Kooky Canuck across the street. Beale Street two blocks away features southern comfort food. And the Capriccio Grill in the hotel is a star.

Just don't forget to come back in time for the Peer Showcase.

techwhirl.com

Vendor Exhibition Ends Today

The Vendor Exhibition in the Grand Ballroom ends today.

Vasont is demonstrating how technical documentation content can be shared with training (eLearning through an LMS) and marketing (with PowerPoint).

ThirtySix Software and **WebWorks** have teamed together to develop the Smart Content Cycle. How reliable, manageable, reusable, and portable is your content? Process is important, but only if it fits in with your strategy. Stop by their booths and ask for a demo.

Today's Forecast

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Partly cloudy, winds SSW 5-10 MPH

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