

Daily Hot Shee

Volume XII, No 2

Tuesday, March 31, 2009

Today's Forecast



48/36

Cloudy, rain early, winds W, 10-15 MPH, chance of rain: 70%

Today's Highlights

- Breakfast buffet, 7:30-8:30am, Grand Three
- Morning break, 9:45-10:15am, sponsored by Volt Technical & Creative Communication
- Lunch break, 11:30am-1:00pm
- Vendor Exhibition, 17 tool, technology, and service vendors, 7:30am-4:00pm, Grand Foyer
- Afternoon break, 2:15-2:45pm, sponsored by ComponentOne Doc-To-Help
- Exhibitor demonstrations, 4:15-5:15pm, all rooms
- Conference session time slots:
 - 8:30-9:45am
 - 10:15am-11:30am
 - 1:00-2:15pm
 - 2:45-4:00pm

Comics As User Assistance? Yes!

by Chuck Martin

For years, the notion of user assistance was words, often accompanied by graphics, typically screen shots. Scott McCloud, who created a comic book to explain the workings of the Google Chrome browser, obliterated that notion at Monday's conference opening session.

McCloud was greeted by more than 300 attendees as he showed off many of the ideas behind the creation of his comic. The session happened in the form of an interview by conference organizer Joe Welinske, and incorporated questions asked not only by the live audience, but via Twitter, making it a very Web 2.0 event.

"Get excited about what you have to say," McCloud exhorted late in the session, "and then realize you have a set of vis-

ual tools to get the idea in readers' heads and nail it there."

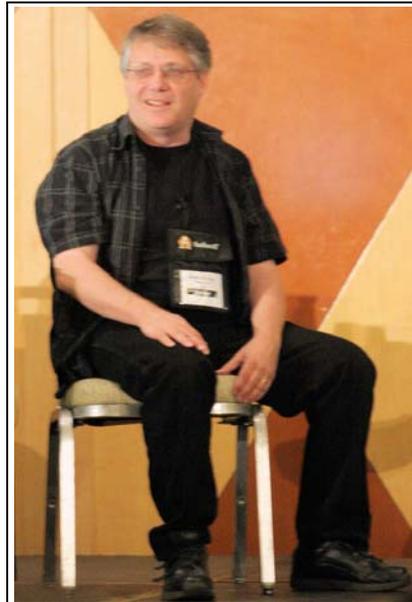
And with that, the conference got into full swing, with a slate of sessions all day long.

The vendor exhibition got underway as well, with conference vendors filling the Grand Foyer and the Grand Crescent, 17 in total, a nice turnout and show of support in tough economic times.

The conference's two main social events oc-

curred on Monday as well. The networking lunch brought folks together around a variety of

topics, from DITA to UI design. And the evening mixer allowed everyone to relax and mingle, with good food and good drink interwoven into the fabric of the event. Today is not only the longest day, it is the last day of the vendor exhibition, and it ends with several vendors giving product demonstrations in the conference session rooms.



Scott McCloud speaks on comics as user assistance at Monday's opening session.

**"Static images can act as a natural mnemonic device."
Scott McCloud**

Speaker/Session Change

Speaker Doug Bolin experienced a family emergency and can't be with us. His Tuesday session will be replaced with another topic.

XML and Structured Authoring: Is it right for your organization?

1:00-2:15, Fifth Avenue Room
Bernard Aschwanden

XML and structured authoring have soared in popularity in the technical communications field in the past few years. However, what people don't

always know is that structured authoring has costs associated with it. Not just the cash outlay, but many other costs. People, processes, documents, style guides, policies, and more may have to change. Before any of that can be done, it's also pretty crucial to decide if it's even the right fit at all. If so, then maybe, just maybe, the current economic down time is the right time to go to structure. Want to know why? Attend this session.

Credits

Writing, photography, layout, production: Chuck Martin
Editing: Sue Heim

Session Summaries

Google Chrome Comic & Visual Communication

Scott McCloud

Scott was interviewed by Joe, talked first about the germination of the comic, the early process of letting engineers sketching out the engineering details of Google Chrome. "The first goal was to get Scott to understand."

When you try to visualize complex systems, you realize that there is a visual metaphor. You can reduce what you have to say to a few simple parameters. An interesting idea expressed was that training videos don't always work. Static images become "anchors" in memory.

Get excited about what you have to say, and then realize you have a set of visual tools to get the idea in readers' heads and nail it there.

A Painless Introduction to Structured Authoring

Dave Gash

Root of issue is too much repetition, local formatting, and rewriting; not enough sharing and reuse; and writers spend too much time not writing. Structured authoring provides efficiency. Overall user assistance systems aren't narrative, but content blocks are.

From WYSIWYG authoring to WYSIOO: What You see Is One Option. Write to standards, don't care about end result. Content and format are separate. Use cross references to get

multiple instances of content chunks in different places.

Structured authoring is the methodology, XML is the technology.

Writing Within An Agile Development Environment

Gavin Austin

Agile is a "flexible framework of common values," which include teamwork, no hierarchies within the team, and open communications within the team. Salesforce.com created Adaptive Development Methodology from Agile methods.

Writers should take class to understand Agile. Agile is more self-determining, and everyone on the team has a sense of responsibility for it.

Managing Agile Documentation

John Barrow

We use 6-8 week iterations, and development goes through a "stabilization" period at the end of the iteration, which is when documentation really gets their final work done for the iteration.

Techniques for Reviewing a User Interface

Rhonda Bracey

The earlier a UI gets reviewed, the lower the cost.

Review of design elements: look good (aesthetics), does it work (function), and is there "anything that makes you hesitate." Rhonda showed several examples of poor error messages and explained what was wrong with them.

Vendor events

A number of vendors at the exhibition feature events and giveaways. They include:

- ProSpring is raffling off a free entrance to the 2009 LavaCon Conference on Professional Development.
- JustSystems (XMetaL) is raffling off a Garmin Nuvi GPS at their afternoon product demonstration session.
- MadCap Software is raffling off one of their products at the end of each lunchtime presentation, and a MadPak at the end of their product demonstrations session.
- ComponentOne (Doc-To-Help) is raffling off an iPod Touch at their product demonstration session.
- Author-it is raffling off a set of noise-canceling headphones at their product demonstration session.
- Flypaper is raffling 1 copy of their software at their booth in the Grand Crescent.
- eLearningZoon.com is offering a free 2-month basic membership to the first 50 people who sign up at their booth in the Grand Crescent.

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- ITR is raffling off a huggably plush teddy bear at their booth in the Grand Foyer.
- Adobe is raffling off a copy of Captivate 4 at their booth, as well as 2 iPod Touches at their product demonstration.
- HelpServer is raffling off one license, to be given away after the conference.



Don Lammers

Session Evaluation Prizes

Session evaluations were drawn at random and the following attendees have won prizes. More will be awarded tomorrow, so please keep filling them out after every session. Pick up prizes at the registration desk.

- (1) Author-it Base User License and Logo'd Cap: Alexis Hacker-Scholz
- Pdfscripting.com 3 month free basic membership: Susan Jaeger
- eLearningZoom Stimulus Packages: Scot Marvin, Ted Seastrom, Andrea Frazier, Shirley D'Souza
- \$10 Starbucks Cards (WritersUA): Berry Braster, Sylvia Dodd, Cyril Dickson, Patricia Heuser, Lisa Smith
- License for Doc-to-Help 2009 from ComponentOne: Tom Risse
- Bernard Aschwanden's new book: *A Hands on Guide to Creating DITA Compliant Docs*: Roslyn Bryan

Notes

Vendor Exhibition

Today is the last day for the vendor exhibition in the Grand Foyer and Grand Crescent

Product Demos

Vendors will be demonstrating their products from 4:15-5:15pm.

No Lunch

The conference is not providing lunch today.

But the vendor exhibition will be open during the extended lunchtime.

Silence Cell Phones

Please, turn your cell phones off or set them to vibrate during sessions.

Thank you.

Early Wednesday

Wednesday's sessions again begin at 8:30am, so set your alarm early.

Breakfast is in Grand Three from 7:30-8:30am.