

AGENDA

9:00 – 10:00:

An Overview of Trends, Tools and Technologies in Software User Assistance

The application of technical communication skills to the development of software user assistance has grown immensely in the past twenty years. This specialization is very fulfilling and challenging and technical communicators are finding their role in the software development process to be increasingly valued. User assistance is much more than "Help." It encompasses a wide range of skills and technologies that are combined to improve the software user's experience. We contribute through wizards, tutorials, and web-based training. We develop and populate knowledge bases and content management systems. Printed manuals and their PDF equivalents are still an important element of our documentation sets.

Many of us are now embedding helpful content directly into the user interface. We are involved with usability testing, localization, testing, quality assurance, and branding. This presentation provides a cutting-edge overview of the latest trends in software user assistance, defines the key terminology, highlights the most important technologies, and offers predictions on future directions of our field.

10:00 – 11:00:

Write More, Write Less: Embracing the Value of Crafted Words and Images

While the word "content" is a good shorthand for words, audio, and images, it unfortunately can move us farther away from the core competency of developing good information. The theme of this presentation is that documentation teams are often spending too little time writing well; and at the same time spending too much time writing little-used information. Research and professional observation suggest that not enough time is being put into crafting text to be exactly the right text for a particular context. And writing resources for doing "agile" user assistance would be more readily available if writers would prioritize topic writing based on user need. "Writing More" while "Writing Less" can result in better usability for users and can reduce the need and load on the overall documentation development process and content management.

11:00 – 12:00:

Optimizing the Googleability of Your Content

Despite our best efforts at developing user assistance, it is increasingly likely that your users will turn to Google for answers to question about your software. The success Google has in providing quick answers to difficult questions has made it a natural resource for help with software - even if the software provides tutorials, online help, FAQs, forums, and e-mail support. Since this trend will probably continue, we need to learn how to "embrace the beast".

There are a number of things you can do to improve your Googleability without too much time and money. This session describes how Google indexes information and what you need to do to be visible, how to use search engine optimization techniques (including the use of sitemaps and metadata), how writing styles affect indexing, and what other search engines you may want to support.