
What's Ripe, Hype, and Out-of-sight

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

Tools & Technology

Rob Houser

Traditional HATs will cease to be relevant in three years if they don't support the new paradigms of user assistance

- UA is created by multiple authors in multiple locations many of whom do not need to understand help authoring (or HATs)
- UA includes more forms than traditional, self-contained, page-based help systems
- UA is built into applications
- UA solicits user feedback (ex. ratings of topics)
- UA must be customized in the runtime environment to reflect the terminology, workflow, and P&Ps of different user communities

Dana Chisnell

90% of tech writers will be using new authoring software in the next two years.

- Adobe will integrate RoboHelp more closely with the Acrobat suite and their other products (ComponentOne has already done something similar by marrying their StudioEnterprise product with Doc-to-Help in one package for .NET)
- Vista will force changes in Help and other delivery methods of user assistance

Paul Mueller

Object-oriented programming meets Help design

- New tools emerge with common Help components
- Standard elements with custom skins
- Drag-and-drop implementation with properties
- Extend information design and delivery methods

Bernard Aschwanden

As XML based files become completely interchangeable (transforms, DITA, etc) no one will use software because of 'legacy' use: Instead all decisions will be based on functionality.

- current software is overpriced and underfeatured as XML allows for data exchange, software will be interchangeable
- people will only use features they want
- software will become modular so you only use what you want from any given tool (for example, you'll use Frame to publish to PDF, XMetaL to build online content and Word to run a full review)

User Assistance

Joe Welinske

Windows Help will never evolve from HTML Help for third-party developers

- The current help was designed in 1996-98.
- Windows 98, 2000, XP, Vista: all shipped without an update in Help bits.
- The MS Help team have not offered any information about the possibility of a new solution for the next version of Windows
- After ten years I can take a hint.

Bernard Aschwanden

Google and Wiki approaches to help will bypass most companies in becoming a destination for help.

- more and more content will be online from 'real' users who explain what they had to do
- tech writers will need to be more competitive and become experts to survive
- the advent of voice activated search is here and when you say "why is my document numbering screwed up" you will get a google based link to four wiki locations immediately

Rob Houser

Help authors will relinquish more control over content to SMEs and users, who will create and update the content themselves

- Help authors interested in writing and editing will assume the role of content editors
- Help authors interested in user-centered design will assume the role of interaction designers
- Help authors interested in training will assume the role of instructional designers
- Help authors interested in the technology will assume the role of programmers/tool specialists

User Assistance (cont.)

Dana Chisnell

Technical Communicators will be moderating user-contributed help forums rather than writing help systems or stand-alone in instructional modules within 3 years.

- There's a trend toward building online * communities * use of blogs and wikis
- Companies want to get on this bandwagon by creating user communities
- Who better to moderate and respond than articulate, responsive, knowledgeable tech writers?

Paul Mueller

Information Development and Tech Support teams merge

- Direct ROI in 1 department to guide efforts
- Develop common solutions with multiple delivery systems
- Less formal Wikis, blogs, & listservs managed by ID team
- Continuous publication through Web technologies An emergence of hundreds of different "smart" devices will fundamentally change applications and how they are supported

IT Industry

Dana Chisnell

Companies will start to realize that just having a novel product isn't enough to retain customers and they won't be able to keep up with the demand for the next big/new thing.

- One question: How long was it between the Mac and the iPod (and was there anything that was truly innovative in between)?

Paul Mueller

PDA's & Bluetooth/Wireless everywhere change everyday tasks

- Will push integrated User Assistance into PDA's
- Network management through PDA's, machines call for help
- Shopping ads on PDA while walking malls and streets
- Take photos with public cameras through PDA
- Auto-action when sense PDA (lights on/off, temperature,...)

Rob Houser

Virtual classrooms will decrease the demand for more formal web-based training

- WBT costs a lot more and takes longer to create than virtual classroom training
- Virtual classrooms allow more impromptu training
- Virtual classrooms allow discussion
- Virtual classrooms can be recorded and viewed by others
- The instructors in most virtual classrooms will be the SMEs, not traditional trainers

Bernard Aschwanden

The computer is dead: Long live the letter "i".

- the computer as you know it is dead
- portable devices, net based applications, remote storage and universal high speed wireless will let you retrieve, edit and store content from anywhere on earth
- one device (the iEverything) will be the size of a business card and act as bank info, phone, ID, medical history, and more. You'll approach a terminal (or project a three-D image of one) and use voice and gestures to do your work and be identified by the wireless features of the iEverything.
- the iEverything will be replaced with an RFID implant in people within 10 years.