

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

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The IT World

Applications will be paid for through monthly subscriptions and delivered on-demand through broadband Internet service.

- Ubiquitous, affordable broadband connectivity and non-proprietary standards have made it possible.
- Vendors want to smooth out the revenue cycle.
- SAP, Microsoft, Sun, AutoDesk, IBM, have already pioneered this with some success.
- The development cycle will become a continuous stream of improvements and patches.
- User assistance can explore new opportunities:
 - a "connection" to individual users and user types.
 - dynamic updating of UA content

Two-way interactions with customer service reps are replacing Help for web-based applications.

- Help is melding with customer support to become a two-way interaction
- Customer service reps (CSRs) can be live or set up as automated IM responses
- Live responses mean that the primary audience for help is the CSR
- "Virtual CSRs" use natural language searches to try to answer questions by recognizing keywords
- Content must be findable by search agents and usable by humans, requiring tightly controlled use of language

Applications are becoming easier to use, and users more competent, to the point where they don't need User Assistance.

- Web applications incorporate better field labelling
- Continually improving user competence as computers are more ubiquitous
- Workforce becoming younger, and lower expectations of UA are being met

In five years, English will no longer be the lingua franca of the Web.

- Sites written or translated to other languages (primarily Asian) will overtake the number of sites written in English.
- Double-byte and RTL languages will be used more and more in online deliverables.
- Help authors will use tools that easily incorporate multiple languages, and tools will make it easier to add/create multiple language versions.
- Web sites and documentation will include multiple language options.

New and emerging eLearning and User Assistance will make classroom training a thing of the past.

- Tools such as Captivate for rapid, cost-effective eLearning developing
- Integration of User Assistance and eLearning
- eClassroom technologies such as Breeze, WebEx, Microsoft Office Live Meeting
- Web-based support and user forums

User Assistance

User Assistance will be stored in databases to be retrieved and displayed just like account details or shopping carts.

- Most "Web applications" are front-ends to a database
- Business rules embedded in database or in application programming code
- User Assistance stored in the database, for retrieval and display in UI when required
- Data may be stored as text, HTML or XML
- XML is preferred – but which XML?

Soon, nobody will need to write an index for online user assistance.

- Metadata
- Natural language search
- Search refined and improved through user feedback
- An economic equilibrium will staunch the effects of documentation outsourcing within three years.

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- A rapidly rising wage structure for documentation specialists in India is reducing the cost savings.
- Significant, "hidden," upfront costs are only now being exposed and understood.
 - Building relationships
 - Knowledge and business cultural transfer
 - Networking and communications infrastructure
- In an energized marketplace,
 - geographic proximity of the development team becomes more important.
 - high quality and cutting-edge techniques are needed to differentiate product.

Separating content from presentation will become the norm, letting authors write and designers create layouts.

- Multiple deliverables require more management capabilities.
- Help authors want to be able to analyze their content and use it effectively.
- Management wants better ROI.

The trend toward planning an overall “User Experience” means user assistance will be designed at the same time as the logo and icons.

- “User experience” is the hot term for the entire user involvement with the product
- Encompasses all design, from the brand to the look-and-feel to screen design to the style of user interaction to the information products
- User support is becoming embedded into the entire design and use of the product (finally)
- Better user experience should mean less need for help and support materials

Help Authoring Tools will disappear as a separate software category, and will be replaced by add-ons to mainstream XML editing tools.

- Existing HATs are not XML-compatible
- Separation of content from presentation removes raison d'être of separate tool
- Lack of Help for the Web standards is part of the problem

Two years from now, RoboHelp will no longer be in common use.

- The product has been "sunset" by Macromedia.
- The development staff is gone.
- It is highly likely that no further development will take place - no new versions.
- RoboHelp will remain the product that it is and people can continue to use it as is.
- XML, "Longhorn Help", other developments will eventually make the tool obsolete.
- Other user assistance tools may adjust to import RoboHelp native files.

Tools and Technologies

Writers and Help authors who know structured writing will increase their marketability, making it easier to weather the next job slump.

- Structured Frame, DITA, DocBook, Windows "Longhorn" Help...all use structured writing.
- Conferences will add more sessions on structured content.
- Those who know how to write structured content will be ahead of the curve.

Java-based Help has finally come of age.

- Cross-platform
- Self-contained
- Fully supports dynamic project merging
- Can be embedded within applications
- Can reside on either the client side or server
- Supports CSS

Content Management and globalization are forcing us to develop and enforce rigorous industry-wide standards.

- Content no longer “belongs” just to technical communication
- The workplace is demanding that we move from one-up processes to efficient, consistent, reusable processes and workflows
- Implementing and enforcing widely-used standards is becoming a requirement
- We must adapt to industry group standards
- We must develop and follow centralized writing standards, especially as content is increasingly authored by untrained writers and non-native English speakers