

The Future of Technical Communication Conference

Best Western Chelmsford
Chelmsford, MA
Saturday, September 25, 2010
8 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

Agenda

8-8:30 a.m. Check-in and breakfast

8:30-8:45 a.m. Welcome

8:45-10:15 a.m. Structured and Topic-Based Authoring...Now What?!

Neil Perlin, STC Fellow and Owner of HyperWord Services, Boston

Structured and topic-based authoring have become hot topics in recent years because of single sourcing and the on-again/off-again DITA. But there's still confusion over what the two methodologies are, whether you need them, how to implement them, and whether you **need** structured FrameMaker or DITA. This session addresses those questions.

By way of background...

Topic-based authoring involves creating content in small, **largely** standalone units rather than large, book-style units. Structured authoring involves creating content that follows a structural standard of some sort. They're different methodologies but most effective when used together, especially in single sourcing. Topic-based authoring's chunking of content provide the flexibility to create different outputs from one content source; structured authoring adds consistency to those outputs. The combination can support a company's strategic content direction, which makes the authors more valuable to the company.

As good as this sounds, implementation of topic-based and structured authoring can lead to major operational disruption and expense. This presentation looks at topic-based and structured authoring in ways that use existing tools when possible to simplify the process, focus on strategic fit, and generally try to minimize the pain. We'll first look at large-scale environmental issues like strategic direction and cost-justification. We'll then turn to specific implementation issues such as information typing, template design, style control, writing, and tool selection.



Neil Perlin has 31 years' experience in technical communication, with 25 in training, consulting, and development for online formats and tools, such as WinHelp, HTML Help, JavaHelp, WebHelp, CE Help, RoboHelp, and Flare.

He is a columnist for *Intercom* and the Professional Communication Society of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers' (IEEE PCS) journal, and a frequent speaker at STC chapters and conferences, IEEE PCS, and other groups. He is a member of the STC-Boston chapter, started and ran the EDoc SIG from 1993 to 1996, created and manages the "Beyond the Bleeding Edge" stem at STC's annual conference, represented STC for the W3C (WorldWide Web Consortium) for three years in the early 2000s, and is a 2010 STC Fellow.

Neil is Madcap-certified for Flare and Mimic and Adobe-certified for RoboHelp and Captivate. He provides training, consulting, and development for online documentation and help, Flare, RoboHelp, Captivate, Mimic, XML, single-sourcing, and structured authoring through Hyper/Word Services of Tewksbury, MA, <http://www.hyperword.com>. He can be reached at nperlin@nperlin.cnc.net, and blogs and tweets periodically about technical communication, amateur astronomy, and barbecue at NeilEric.

10:15-10:30 a.m. Break

10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Writing for the Unknown Output
Neil Perlin

Today, we create content that might go out as online help and PDF, period. Tomorrow, who knows? Perhaps mobile, but what kinds? Dynamically configurable online help? Voice? Perhaps some output that's on the drawing board now? It's hard to predict. Who in 1992 would have predicted the spectacular growth of the web?

In the past, we used control files incorrectly, set up projects inefficiently, ignored (or did not follow) standards, and did other bad things. But we got away with it because there wasn't the time-to-market and cost pressure of today; we had time to make mistakes and fix them. But today, those pressures make us create content that's as automatable and flexible as possible – the subject of this presentation. What features and standards do we need to follow or be aware of to make sure that our content is consistent, efficient, and automatable so that one set of content can be single sourced to anything from a desktop PC to an iPhone?

Many of the features and technologies needed to do this have been built into our tools for years, but they're often little known because there wasn't much need for them. Others are just emerging in specific tools or from standards bodies like OASIS and W3C. So in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, this presentation looks at what control features and standards we need to use to future-proof as much as possible.

12:30-1 p.m. Lunch (catered in)

1-3 p.m.

Best Practices for Converting from FrameMaker to Flare

Ed Marshall, Principal, Marshall Documentation Consulting, Boston

If you are considering migrating from FrameMaker to the new help authoring tool, Flare from MadCap Software, this talk covers the strategic decisions you need to consider before migrating from FrameMaker to Flare and best practices for successfully implementing the migration.

In this presentation, Ed Marshall will explain and demonstrate:

- Deciding whether to use Flare for both authoring and publishing or as an output channel for your FrameMaker source files.
- Best practices for selecting test documents for trial conversions.
- Preparing your source files for efficient conversions.
- Recommended conversion settings.
- Running sample conversions and evaluating the output.
- Documenting the steps and settings that work for your documentation set.



Ed Marshall is an independent technical writing consultant and sole proprietor of Marshall Documentation Consulting, with more than 22 years of experience. He specializes in APIs/SDKs (application programming interfaces/software development kits), Web services products, and other types of documentation aimed at developers. Throughout his career, Ed has developed expertise in using tools to "let the computer do the work," such as advanced tools for editing files, comparing files, and searching and replacing text in files.

Ed is a popular speaker at a variety of professional development conferences, locally and nationwide. His previous appearances include events sponsored by the Society for Technical Communication (STC), WritersUA, and DocTrain. For more information about Ed's experience and services, see <http://www.marshalldocumentationservices.com>. He can be reached at ed.marshall@verizon.net.

3-3:15 p.m.

Break

3:15-5:15 p.m.

Thinking Outside the Tech Comm Box

Ed Marshall and Neil Perlin

Whether we're working as a regular full-time employee or a contractor, there are many ways we can use our skills to become more valuable to employers or clients. We can also broaden our skills into new markets and to increase our employability.

How can we do this? Ed Marshall and Neil Perlin will answer that question by exploring several possibilities, based on their experiences as technical communicators and from keeping abreast of trends in communication. Come prepared to share your own ideas, too.

5:15-5:30 p.m.

Wrap-up