A Book Proposal for

Building Help Systems That Work

SAMPLE

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About This Proposal

The purpose of this proposal is to present the background and concepts *Building Help Systems That Work*. It establishes the author's credentials for writing this book, and provides an outline of the book itself. The proposal contains the following sections:

About This Book

This section presents a brief overview of the book and the reasons for writing it. It describes the need in the marketplace for a book like *Building Help Systems That Work* and how this book fulfills those needs.

About the Author

This section gives a brief biography of the author. It describes his professional experience in the field of technical communication and online documentation, especially where related to online help systems.

Chapter Outline

This section provides a brief synopsis of each of the chapters that comprise *Building Help Systems That Work*. It presents the main ideas for each chapter and section.

About This Book

This section of the proposal provides a brief summary of the book, describes the need for this book, tells why *Building Online Help Systems That Work* is different from other books on the same subject that are currently on the market, and presents some of the publishing details for this book.

Summary

Building Online Help Systems That Work primarily deals with online help systems created for the Microsoft *Windows* platform. The principles and guidelines presented in the book, however, are applicable to any online delivery platform. It covers the basics needed for creating *Windows*-based help systems, then presents guidelines and procedures for enhancing the functionality and usability of these help systems.

Why This Book is Needed

The Microsoft *Windows* environment has become the most widely used graphical user interface for IBM-compatible personal computers. As the complexity of applications written for *Windows* increases, and more people purchase personal computers, the need for good, well-designed online documentation increases as well. *Building Online Help Systems That Work* is meant to serve as a guide for designing online help systems that do more than merely display information on the computer screen, which has been often been the trend for delivering information online.

What Makes This Book Different

As of the date of this proposal, there is only one mass-market book available on the subject of developing *Windows* help systems: *Building Online Help for Windows* (SAMS Publishing). This book covers all of the basics for creating *Windows*-based online help systems, then falls short. It offers very little on how to combine the advanced features of *Windows* Help to make help systems easier to use. The Index is poorly constructed and inadequate for the amount of information in the book.

Building Online Help Systems That Work covers the same basics for creating online help systems for *Windows*, but then takes readers several steps further by demonstrating how to use some of the features of *Windows* Help (such as macros and bookmarks) to produce better help systems. This is a book designed for online help developers who want to push the envelope of what they can accomplish with *Windows* Help.

Publishing Details

Building Online Help Systems That Work can be completed in approximately three to four months. It will contain between 200 and 250 pages. Black-and-white diagrams, charts, and screen shots comprise the artwork in this book. There are currently no plans to include photographs. All of the example code provided with the book will be originally produced for this book and will not have to be licensed from another source. A diskette that contains these examples could be packaged with the book.

About the Author

The author of this book possesses a varied scope of experience in technical communications in general, and developing online documentation systems, specifically.

Steven Radecki

Building Help Systems That Work is Steven's second book. His first book, *Multimedia with QuickTime*, was published in October 1993 by Academic Press Professional (a division of Harcourt Brace & Co.).

Steven Radecki currently works as a Senior Technical Writer developing online help for Borland International in Scotts Valley, California. He developed two of the online help systems that shipped with *Borland C++ for OS/2* and served as the Online Help Project Lead for *Borland C++ 4.0.* He has been in the technical communications field for more than six years. During that time he has also worked for PDR Information Services in Santa Clara, California, and for Kirk Paper Corporation in Los Angeles, California.

Steven, along with colleagues, has presented several talks on hypertext and hypermedia at colleges, universities, corporations, user groups, and professional associations. His most recent publications include:

- "A Recipe for Creating 'Best of Breed' Online Help Systems" (*Proceedings*, Society for Technical Communication Region 8 Conference, November 1993)

- "Practical Hypermedia: Using Hypertext and Multimedia in the Real World" (*Proceedings*, 40th Society for Technical Communication Conference, 1993)

- "Developing Hypertext Documentation: One Writer's Experience" (*Proceedings*, 38th International Technical Communication Conference, 1991)

While at PDR Information Services, Steven contributed to their report, *No Hype, Just Media: An Independent Evaluation of PC Hypermedia Software*. He also served as an assistant instructor at the 1990 International Technical Communications Conference post-conference session, "Making the Hypertext Decision." At the 1991 International Technical Communications Conference, he served on the panel, "The Twists and Turns of the Hypertext Learning Curve."

Steven has a Bachelor of Science in Information and Computer Science from the University of California at Irvine, and an Associate in Science degree in Data Processing from Mount San Antonio College. His

background also includes film, creative writing, and speech communications.

Chapter Outline

Developing Online Help Systems That Work contains the following chapters:

Designing Usable Help Systems

Regardless of the platform for which you are developing for, there are general principles behind good online design. This chapter provides guidelines for the visual layout of individual topics and the general design of entire Help systems.

Navigating Users Through Seas of Information

One of the advantages of Help systems is that users can access information in a variety of ways from them. This chapter discusses the various methods by which users might access the information stored in a Help system. It provides guidelines for making this access clear and obvious to most users, while also providing shortcuts for sophisticated users.

Indexing the Help System

As with printed documentation, a good index is vital to the usability of a Help system. This chapter discusses the importance of good keywords and indexing of a Help systems. It presents some strategies for providing the best indexes that serves the most variety of users.

Making Your Help Systems Smarter

Many Help systems rely on the default behavior of the delivery platform to deliver information to users. This chapter presents some of things a Help system developer can do to make a Help system even easier to use. It demonstrates some methods by which Help systems can "remember" how a user has accessed information in the Help system and give the user a head start the next time they access related information.

Using Secondary Windows for Maximum Impact

Secondary windows are perhaps one of the most misused and under-used features of Windows Help. This chapter demonstrates how to use secondary windows to dramatically increase the usability of a Help system.

Preparing for *Windows 4.0*

The next release of the *Windows* contains several major changes to the user interface. Online help is one of the areas most affected. This chapter deals with issues unique to creating Help systems for *Windows 4.0*, such as creating Contents files and producing an Index.

Building Help Systems From Print Documents

One of the biggest issues facing Help developers is how to share information that also appears in the printed documentation that accompanies a product. This chapter presents some methods for managing this effort, with some tips for making it as painless as possible.

Managing and Scheduling Online Help Projects

In most software development efforts, online help falls into a gray area between software and documentation. This chapter discusses some the ways to manage that fuzzy distinction and offers some guidelines for managing online help development so that fills the requirements of both the software and documentation teams.

Glossary

Developing Online Help Systems That Work will include a glossary of terms used throughout the book.

Index

Developing Online Help Systems That Work will include a comprehensive index.