RoadSoft ®
RoundUp

Do you have a question?
Call Technical Support at 906-487-2102

Software Training Provides Rich Opportunities for Learning

New methods present new sets of challenges and rewards

"What's your number?" one participant asked another during a recent RoadSoft training session, "I'm gonna call when I have questions." We had just begun the session and I was trying to answer a question asked by a new user. Another user interrupted my dissertation with a short explanation that answered the question perfectly. That was when the phone number was exchanged and a relationship between different people seeking the same goal began. I get excited when stuff like that happens.

Users helping users is a very powerful thing. In many cases, it's more effective than the help that trainers can provide because trainers and users relate to the software differently. As trainers we try hard to understand the user's perspective, and judging from user feedback we do a pretty good job. But users talk from the perspective of having been there. They have the advantage of real-life experience and the *common sense* that results from that experience.

Steve Krug, web usability expert and author of *Don't Make Me Think*, says that "Common sense is not necessarily obvious until *after* someone points it out to you." With respect to the usability of RoadSoft, common sense is made obvious most often through contact with our users. We learn more about the usability of RoadSoft while conducting a couple of hours of training than during weeks of internal reviews. Sr. Software Engineer Steve Kangas, one of the RoadSoft Development Team's most experienced trainers, said, "The customer contact I get while training users is crucial for developing software that people can use." Kangas and others have hit the road at least four weeks every year for the past five years to provide face-to-face, hands-on RoadSoft training. The common sense perspective gained through face-to-face contact with real users has been priceless.

At the urging of John Velat, a web-based training expert on staff with the Michigan Tech Transportation Institute, we recently experimented with a few sessions of web-based training. The sessions, usually 60 to 90 minutes long, were well attended and well received. Scott Pollins, a Software Engineer who teamed up with Kangas to provide instruction for one of the sessions, is excited about the potential for developing web-based training capabilities, "It's very convenient for us and for the users," Pollins said, "it could never replace everything that goes on during face-to-face training, but it sure will help for short, specific topics."

Among reasons why the web-based training worked, convenience was cited most often by the participants. The length of the sessions and the fact that participants could attend without leaving their offices both were identified as positives. The most common complaint was that the students with slower internet connections lagged behind the others during procedures that required more than two or three mouse clicks.

In addition to face-to-face training sessions this fall, plans are underway for several web-based sessions this summer. Tim Colling, Assistant Director of LTAP, comments, "This technology will be great for familiarizing users with the software, one topic at a time. The nice thing is they won't have to wait until fall to get going." Sessions will be announced as they become available. See the back panel for information on how you can suggest topics for future sessions, and how you can make sure you're on the list for announcements.

The next time you're in one of our training sessions – face-to-face or online – please don't hesitate to interrupt if you can answer a question more intelligently or more quickly than one of the trainers. The trainer and your fellow users will appreciate your perspective.

RoadSoft® RoundUp

RoadSoft® GIS — Web-Based Training

- Hour-long sessions typically cover three or four short topics.

- You don't need special software to participate.

- Each session requires a web browser, a high-speed (cable or dsl) internet connection for the visuals, and a phone line to get the audio.

- Sessions are announced via email two weeks ahead of time.

- Call 906-487-2102 or email ltap@mtu.edu to make sure you're on the RoadSoft mailing list.

- Email jeryynan@mtu.edu to suggest topics for future sessions.