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Communicator

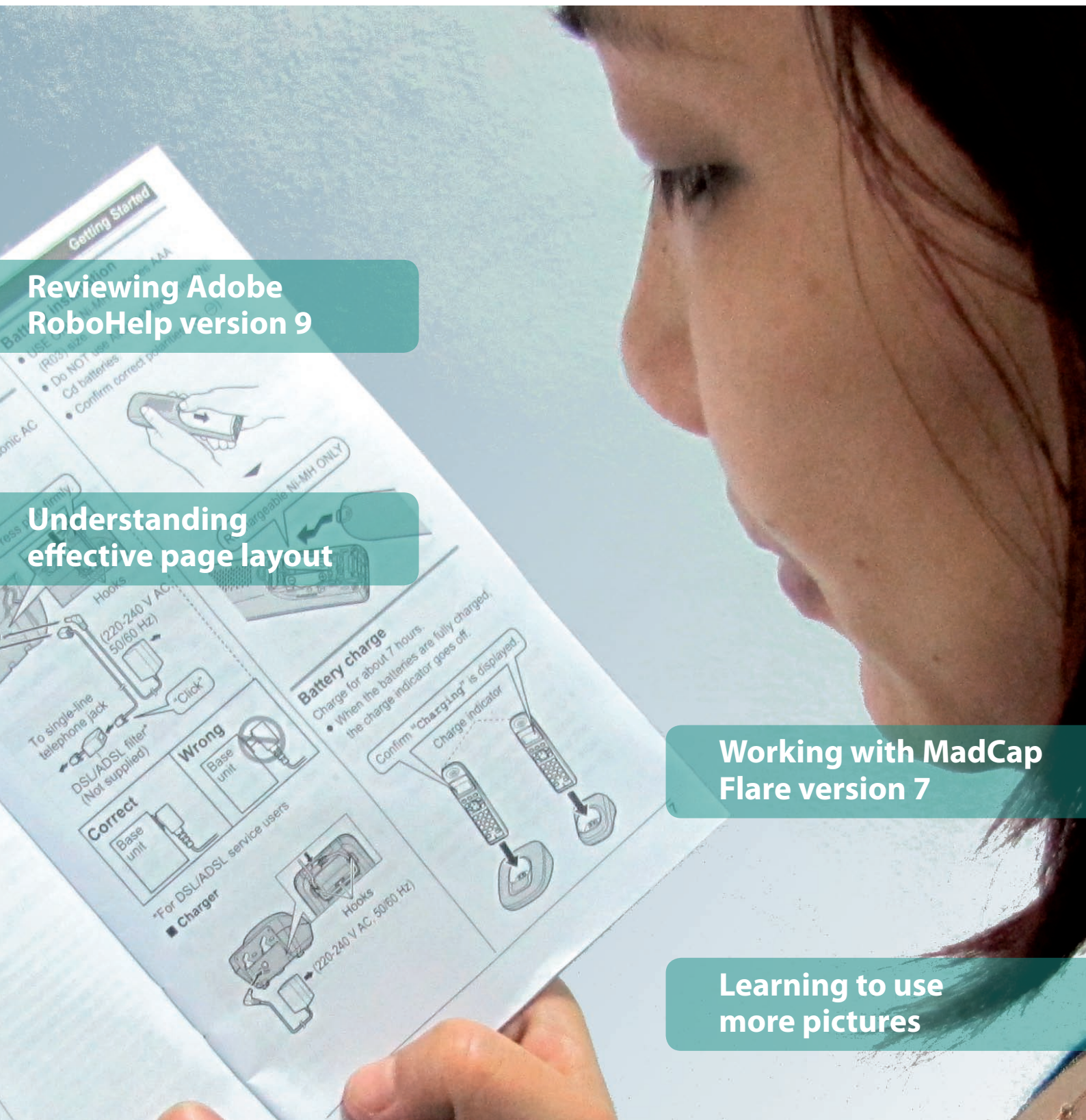
The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators
Spring 2011

Reviewing Adobe
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Understanding
effective page layout

Working with MadCap
Flare version 7

Learning to use
more pictures



A 'Flare' for translation

Scott Bass explains how technical communicators can best exert their power over the challenging task of translation using MadCap's Flare and Lingo.

Technical communicators wield real power. (I forgive you for reading that twice.) Yes, you wield real power. This may contradict your perception of your position in the corporate food chain. However, as the provider of translation services, from where I sit, you are truly powerful and can make the lives of numerous translators, project managers and desktop publishing (DTP) specialists blissful or hellish.

Your ability to not merely influence translation service providers but to truly shape our professional well-being is multifaceted. First there is the content that you write. When it is well written, a calm descends across all involved in translation; clarity is achieved, and from the perspective of individual translators, all is right with the world. The number of questions that translators must ask is greatly diminished when the answers spring forth from the text. Devoid of ambiguities, translators can move unencumbered through the text and efficiently go about their task.

Content is of course the primary concern; it is why we are all here: technical communicators creating it and language service providers translating it. However, the electronic format within which the content is disseminated increasingly continues to be a factor that can make or break a successful translation project. Therefore, as the veritable masters of the translators' universe, you must give equal care to both the content and format of what you write.

Choosing the right authoring tools not only makes you more efficient, but it should also make the translation process faster and cheaper. Even if at this moment none of the content you or your organisation is creating is being translated, you should always assume that someday it will be, and choose tools that will support efficient publishing in a wide variety of languages and publishing formats.

Criteria for the right tool

The factors that go into selecting the best authoring tool for you and your organisation are complex and well beyond the scope of this article. However, in choosing the right software that will meet the needs of most technical communication departments and easily support the translation process, consider applications that:

- Use standards-based technology for storing and formatting content.
- Allow for the easy transport of content

into and out of commonly used translation memory (TM) environments.

- Support all the languages you require.
- Have the ability to create documents for print, the Web, desktop and mobile environments.
- Do not require direct programming knowledge of CSS, XML, XSLT, and so on. in order to publish.
- Integrate with image editing and capturing software.
- Make the update and republishing tasks as efficient as possible.
- Work 'out of the box' without requiring development of workarounds or middleware to accomplish the publishing task.

Conventional applications such as FrameMaker, RoboHelp, Microsoft Word, InDesign, and Quark Xpress each meet some of these criteria, but not all. FrameMaker, while it has improved its multilingual support, still uses proprietary technology to create and format content. It can work with topic-based authoring such as DITA, but requires special support. Microsoft Word has been multilingual for a long time, but it is not very flexible when it comes to publishable output formats other than .doc, .docx or .pdf. InDesign is being pushed to support XML-based formats, but it still requires extensive work to make content flow between the .indd format and more open technologies, such as DITA and other types of XML.

Choosing the right toolset

Based on 17 years of empirical evidence accrued through hundreds of translation projects in myriad file formats (for example, Quark Xpress, PageMaker, FrameMaker, InDesign, Microsoft Word, as well as .CHM, .HLP), we have concluded that MadCap Flare is, objectively, the best choice for authoring, translating and publishing technical documents across a wide variety of output types and languages.

It meets or exceeds expectations for each of the criteria listed above.

Flare stores content in XHTML format along with ancillary files in XML format (although Flare does use proprietary file name extensions for XML files, for example, *.flglo for glossary data). CSS technology is used extensively to manage formatting at a high level in a Flare project.

Content can be easily transported in and out of the Flare environment and into translation either with or without the MadCap Lingo TM tool, which integrates with Flare. Most translation providers can set up filters for

Flare's XHTML files and ancillary files for table of contents and indexes.

Flare currently supports over 39 languages. All of these languages are standard for international business. Support for right-to-left reading languages such as Arabic and Hebrew is still pending. However, none of the other mainstream DTP packages support them well either, at least not without special support or specialised versions of the application.

With the ability to define specific target output types in Flare that include print, Web, desktop and mobile formats—again, out of the box—Flare offers the best flexibility with the least amount of specialised technical knowledge.

Flare's companion applications, Capture and Mimic, work in synergy with Flare and allow for easy access to translatable text via external XML files. This is far more efficient than having to translate text embedded in a Photoshop file or to have to manually extract text from third-party screen capturing tools.

MadCap Lingo allows for efficient 'diffing' of files in order to see what has been modified or added in a Flare project, thus making updates and revisions across multiple languages easier. Lingo enables you to compare a newer version of a Flare project to an older version and it will report changes to all topics and images, so that you and your translation provider can easily identify where changes have been made. Plus you have the option of highlighting content in Flare in order to identify spot updates to be inserted into translated versions.

You can start working with Flare and publishing useful content with minimal training. Basic knowledge of CSS and XML technologies is, of course, very helpful, but the lack thereof is not an impediment to using the tool. Knowledge of the underlying technologies that Flare uses will just enable you to do more sooner with the software.

Flare projects for translation

Choosing to work with Flare can yield excellent results for authoring and downstream processes such as translation. The key to success is how you use the tools that Flare makes available to you. Snippets, variables and targets are three innovations that make Flare a powerful tool.

Snippets enable you to cleverly reuse text that may repeat throughout your documents.

Variables let you dynamically substitute text such as model, brand or feature labels, depending on context and target type.

Targets enable you to create different versions of your content according to user requirements—for print, PDF, desktop, the Web and mobile.

How you setup your original Flare project (for example, in English) must be done carefully and with translation in mind, otherwise you may end up creating work for your translation provider instead of minimizing it.

Softver prikazuje poruku kada unesete već upotrijebljeni ID pacijenta. Ako se

1. Provjerite da mogućnost [Pokazi samo pacijente koji su na današnjem rasporedu] [AdminApp: aplikacija Admin] Prikazat će se svi zapisi o pacijentima. U okviru [Odabir pacijenta] da biste očistili sve filtre.
2. Kliknite [naslov stupca ID-a] da biste zapise o pacijentu sortirali prema ID

Figure 1. Snippet (highlighted) is placed using the nominative case, which is incorrect for this context.

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2. Kliknite [naslov stupca ID-a] da biste zapise o pacijentu sortirali prema ID
3. Utipkajte ID pacijenta u polje [Pacijent] da biste mogli odabrati pacijenta koji želite prikazati.
4. Kliknite [Pojedini] da biste mogli odabrati pacijenta koji želite prikazati.
5. Provjerite je li se radi o zapisi [Pacijent] pacijenta.

Figure 2. The snippet needs to be converted to text so that the correct grammatical form can be inserted.

Softver prikazuje poruku kada unesete već upotrijebljeni ID pacijenta. Ako se

1. Provjerite da mogućnost [Pokazi samo pacijente koji su na današnjem rasporedu] aplikacije [Admin] Prikazat će se svi zapisi o pacijentima. U okviru [Odabir pacijenta] da biste očistili sve filtre.
2. Kliknite [naslov stupca ID-a] da biste zapise o pacijentu sortirali prema ID

Figure 3. The manually corrected form 'aplikacije' now appears as normal text and is no longer part of the snippet.

For example, snippets have become one of Flare's most popular features. Writers just love not having to repeat themselves, so many have taken to heavily 'snippetising' (yes, I have actually heard this word used by technical communicators!) their Flare projects. Overuse of snippets, however, can have a detrimental effect on translation.

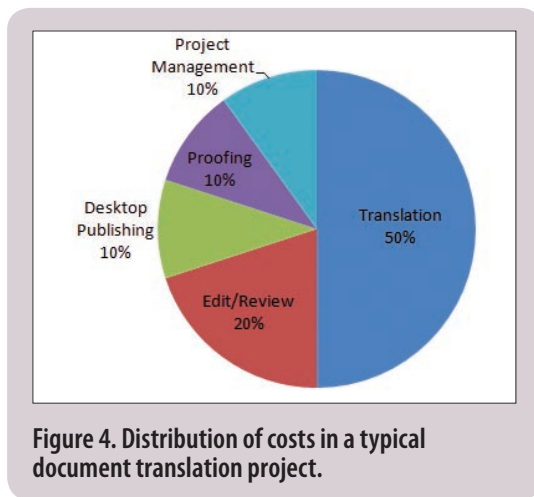
Here is an example for what can go wrong with snippets in other languages:

English: Check that the **Show Only Today's Scheduled Patients** option is not selected in the **Admin application Select Event** dialog box.

Croatian: Provjerite da mogućnost **Pokaži samo pacijente koji su na današnjem rasporedu** nije odabrana u dijaloškom okviru **Odabir pacijenta** aplikacije Admin.

Note that in this context, the Croatian word for 'application' is 'aplikacije', which ends in 'e' and not 'a' (see Figure 1).

The snippet is the underlined text 'Admin application,' and in Croatian the nominative



form is aplikacija Admin, which is highlighted in red in Figure 1. In isolation, the phrase would by default be translated into the nominative case, which is what virtually every translator regardless of language would do.

To correct this issue, you need to manually convert the snippet to text and change the ending. See Figure 2.

The final, correct version appears in Figure 3.

Snippets cannot dynamically account for such grammatical variations, so in the translation the snippet had to be removed and reverted to normal text. Translators who know Flare well will look for such potential problems prior to starting translation. Doing this kind of internationalisation is critical, especially for projects involving multiple languages. It makes more sense to address problems once in English than to fix the same problem repeatedly in five, eight or ten translated versions.

Lingo: a bridge to translation

One of Flare's greatest benefits is its companion tool Lingo. Lingo is a TM application that can be used by translators to translate content created in Flare, Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, DITA, simple text files and .Net resource files. For technical communicators Lingo is an excellent addition to your toolset:

- It gives you the ability to manage your TM databases as well as terminology databases—both important assets that should be created and maintained for every translation project.
- Lingo gives you the ability to easily prepare Flare content for translation, using the Translation Project Packager function.
- Thanks to Lingo's common interface design with Flare it is easy to learn and works seamlessly with Flare.
- You can easily manage revisions and updates using Lingo's Update Project feature.
- Lingo is one of the most affordable TM tools on the market.

Lingo may not have all the features found in competitors' TM products, but it does do the most important thing—capturing content

for later reuse—easily and reliably. Also, its integration with Flare makes a cumbersome process—the movement of content to and from translation—much more efficient.

Where the costs hide

Anyone who has dealt with translation projects before knows that considerable time, care and, therefore, cost is required to produce high-quality translations. In addition to translation, there are also costs related to publishing—as there are in English. The goal is to minimize publishing costs and work to ensure that the process used to output all languages is efficient and consistent.

On average, the distribution of costs for a typical document translation project are as shown in Figure 4 and has been derived from real projects carried out by our organisation:

From a process perspective, desktop publishing (DTP) typically offers the best possibilities to reduce and control costs. Also DTP is the one area in which cost has the highest rate of re-incurrence when documents are revised or updated. This is because recycling text using translation memory technology has become highly efficient, while desktop publishing must often be reworked from scratch after a large volume of text has been reused.

When working with Flare, DTP costs can be less than 10%. This is due to the high level of control Flare offers when designing your documents and by using style sheets for as much of the content as possible. Occasionally, styles may need to be tweaked to enable them to work optimally in the translation, but this is far cheaper than having to apply formatting manually to each translated version of your documents.

Production costs related to DTP in Flare stem from:

- Setup and preparation of the Flare projects prior to translation
- Tidy-up of content post-translation
- Remediation of textual issues that may arise due to idiosyncrasies of a particular language
- General Flare operation.

As with any tool, what can be produced is only as good as the skills of the tool user. In our experience, a well-planned and executed Flare project that takes translation into account can drastically reduce the costs and time of translation, when compared to traditional layout tools. Frankly, even those Flare projects that are not well created are still easier to work with and can yield better results compared to using a toolset that has changed little since 1997 (sorry, FrameMaker and Microsoft Word!). In the end, it is the management of both content and form that makes Flare and its companion tools so effective for authoring and translation. **C**

Scott Bass is president of Advanced Language Translation Inc., a provider of technical translation services for corporate clients. He has over 20 years of experience in the translation and communications fields.
E: sbass@advancedlanguage.com
W: www.advancedlanguage.com
Blog: www.translationwire.com