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Strengthening the connection

Doc-To-Help 4 comes with a new connection to Word. What does this mean for its authors? Many advantages, says Sabine Kamprowski.

For more than 25 years, Doc-To-Help has assisted authors who edit in Word find solutions to its many limitations. With Doc-To-Help, authors use multiple source documents. Source documents are combined in one Doc-To-Help project. For most types of output, Doc-To-Help can merge documents from many projects into a complete solution.

The Workflow with Doc-To-Help and Word

Workflow with Doc-To-Help and Word consists of four basic steps that may be iterated in a different order.
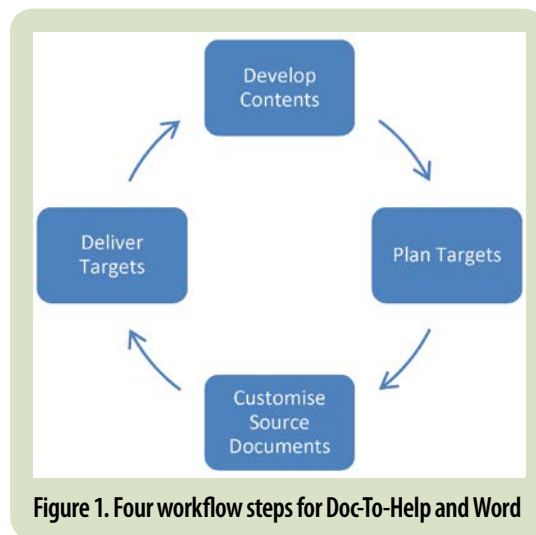

Figure 1. Four workflow steps for Doc-To-Help and Word

In many companies, content often exists as Word documents, graphics, movies, or audio files. It is advisable to collect all existing material before creating anything new. Doc-To-Help supports variants inside documents as well as in projects. Variants in sources are assigned by conditional tags to specific targets. Replicated contents can be avoided by using variables.
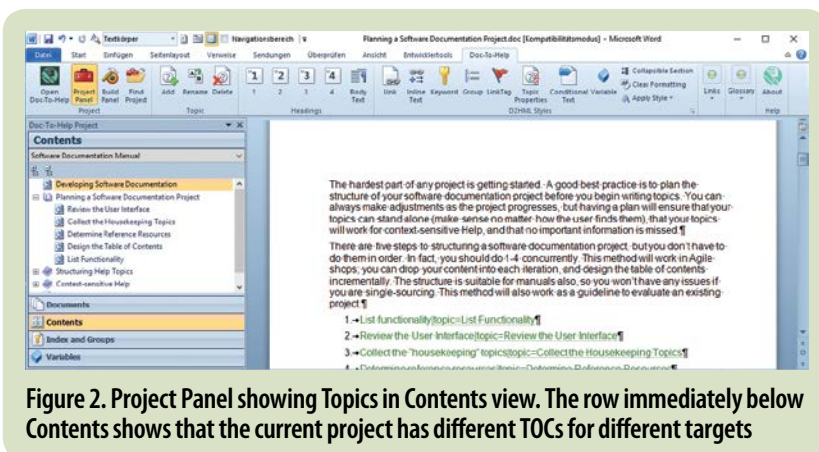

Figure 2. Project Panel showing Topics in Contents view. The row immediately below Contents shows that the current project has different TOCs for different targets

Doc-To-Help Deliverables

Doc-To-Help generates deliverables for different viewing environments. PDF files are just one option. User assistance for local Windows applications may still be delivered as Microsoft Compiled HTML Help (as a .CHIM file). For all results, which are to be viewed platform-independent on a variety of devices, Doc-To-Help has the result type NetHelp.

New panels in source documents

Previously, authors had to switch frequently between Word and Doc-To-Help. But with the new release of Doc-To-Help 4, MadCap has chosen a new form of bond between these two programs, making individual portions of the project database appear in windows within Word. These windows are movable and sizable, allowing authors to arrange to create an optimised and convenient edit environment. The new working facilities are probably welcomed by most Doc-To-Help users.

The Project Panel

When you open a Word document, Doc-To-Help now checks whether it belongs to a Doc-To-Help project. When a document is associated with more than one Doc-To-Help project, the author can select their current project from Word. The Project Panel (Figure 2) offers an overview of all available source documents belonging to the same project. The Contents view displays the TOCs (table of contents) already produced, and it indicates when there are different TOCs. Index and group names are offered as reference targets and variables to be inserted in the Word document. The author can open any other source document of the project in no time. References to documents or topics can be created much faster with drag and drop. References to groups of topics that will be achieved in Doc-To-Help by an index term or group name can be set in the same easy manner. Older versions of Doc-To-Help also possessed the function to set references by drag and drop from Project's Topic Overview into an open Word document, yet it required more arrangement of the various program windows.

The Build Panel

The Build Panel (Figure 3) allows the author to compile any result of the project, to follow the compilation progress and to open the result from Word. Unlike in the project database, the author can view recent build logs for different results. In case of error messages the author

might miss the feature to double click the message in order to find the topic where the error occurred. Producing several results in a batch process also requires a return to the project database.

New document templates

MadCap, which now owns Doc-To-Help has expanded the number of document templates that are provided with Doc-To-Help. The "Fancy" templates add variety and make it clear that Doc-To-Help does not restrict Word in customization of manuals and PDF results. Using the "Procedures" templates, the author may look at to the new features in the project database: the list of paragraph formats, which are interpreted by Doc-To-Help to start a new topic, now includes new styles "Heading 1 Numbered" to "Heading 5 Numbered", in addition to Word's default styles "Heading 1" through "Heading 5". With these styles, Doc-To-Help generates manuals with numbered headings from appropriate source documents. The numbering is performed automatically for the entire contents of a manual, no matter how many source documents they are compiled of and what number level a source document starts with. Another way to produce manuals with numbered headings is the adaptation of the standard styles in a new target template.

Since Doc-To-Help document templates are now free of VBA code, authors won't miss the warning that a digital signature might get broken by modifying the VBA code.

More Themes and Stylesheets for NetHelp

NetHelp has had three differently designed themes: Tabs, Accordion and Responsive. With Doc-To-Help 4, MadCap delivers three additional themes: Tabs Logo, Logo Accordion and Responsive Logo. While these additional themes do not bring anything fundamentally new, they highlight the option to integrate your own logo in a custom theme.

In addition, with two new stylesheets "green" for Responsive and "green sheen" for Tabs and Accordion (Figures 4 and 5), MadCap offers similar colour schemes for all themes.

Conclusions

With Doc-To-Help 4, MadCap has successfully renewed the bond between Doc-To-Help and Word. The sliding windows enhance the author's productivity. The new templates encourage authors to design their own. And MadCap proves that they attach the greatest importance to result types NetHelp and Manual. C
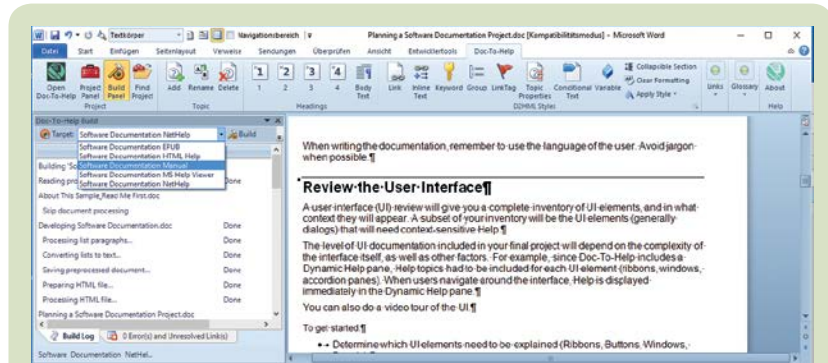

Figure 3. Build Panel shows all existing target of the project. For each target the most recent build log can be displayed
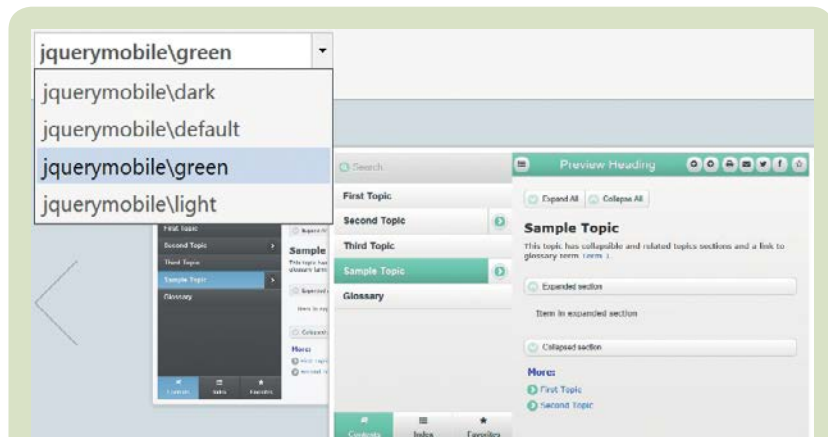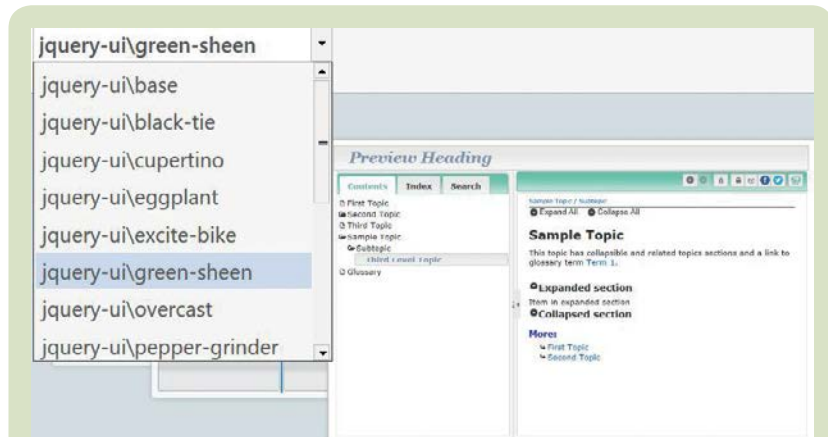

Figure 4. Stylesheet green for Responsive in Theme Wizard

Figure 5. Stylesheet green-sheen for Tabs in Theme Wizard

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