



Mountain View, CA

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Actel Uses MadCap Flare to Reduce Production Time by 50 Percent and Enhance Customer Experience

INDUSTRY

- Semiconductors

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Case Farley | **Actel**

Goals:

- Improve version control and consistency of documentation published in print and online formats
- Facilitate collaboration with co-workers who contribute content
- Enhance the experience of Actel customerscustomer
- Improve project efficiency

Solutions:

- MadCap Flare™ native XML software for single-source, multi- channel publishing

Benefits:

- Reduced project time by 50 percent
- Eliminated the need to outsource projects to meet tight deadlines
- Created consistent and reliable content in multiple formats
- Facilitated collaboration with co-workers by allowing them to contribute content in Microsoft® Word
- Delivered content that rivaled documentation produced using CMS software costing tens of thousands of dollars more



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With tight competition and slim profit margins, the semiconductor industry puts a priority on maximizing both quality and efficiency. For Actel Corporation, a leader in low-power and mixed signal field-programmable gate arrays (FPGAs), that drive extends to the company's product documentation.

"To be competitive, we are continually evaluating our processes and resources for cost-effectively delivering documentation that provides a superior customer experience," said Case Farley, senior technical writer at Actel. "MadCap Flare has allowed us to provide consistent, high quality print and online documentation while cutting our production time by 50 percent."

Version Control Headaches

For years, Actel had used a legacy Help authoring tool to produce documentation for its semiconductor chips and their software. The tool lacked single-source publishing functionality, so delivering print and online documentation required multiple redundant and time-consuming processes, producing version control headaches along the way.

"Managing our documentation using the previous tool was exhausting," Farley recalled. "We needed to find a better solution."

Cost-Effective Alternative to CMS

In 2006, Actel evaluated traditional Help authoring tools, content management system (CMS) solutions, and the newly launched MadCap Flare native XML multi-channel publishing software.

The traditional Help authoring tools were based on proprietary software and were not designed to support Web content publishing.

"It's not enough to simply post PDF files online," Farley notes.

At the other end of the spectrum, CMS software offered rich functionality, but implementing it would cost tens of thousands of dollars. Moreover, a CMS would require training for anyone planning to contribute content, including Actel's engineers.

The solution was Flare, which at a cost of \$899 per license, provided the functionality Actel required at a fraction of the price.

"With Flare, we're getting the CMS functions we need for a lot less money, Farley says. "There also has been no need to train our engineers. They can continue to contribute content in Word as they always have, and I simply import it into Flare."

Flare Increases Actel Productivity

Actel has been publishing product documentation and online Help using Flare since MadCap launched Version 1.0 in 2006.

"Flare has allowed us to take advantage of the flexibility offered by a single-source XML solution," said Farley. "It also has enabled us to deliver better quality work in less time. In fact, we have been able to cut our production time by 50 percent – a savings of 40 to 60 man-hours with each release of our documentation. That efficiency means we no longer have to outsource documentation projects to meet short deadlines."

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Flare's single-source multi-channel publishing allows Actel to publish content within a single Flare project in a range of formats, such as PDF files, Microsoft Compiled HTML Help

(.CHM) files for the Web, or Word documents, depending on the need. Equally important, since different forms of output are generated from the same Flare project, only one set of content has to be maintained and updated—ensuring consistency.

“With Flare’s single-sourcing, it’s much easier to maintain version control, and I can deliver content that is comprehensive, looks better, and is well organized” Farley noted.

He added, “Robust conditional text in Flare, not only saves time on the publishing side, it also has enabled me to reduce the file size of our hardware Help content by almost 75 percent. This smaller file size provides an immediate customer benefit by reducing the documentation download and opening times.”

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Another benefit is that Flare’s topic-based authoring approach facilitates collaboration within Actel.

“I can create a Flare project and draft placeholder topics,” Farley explains. “Then I can output content to Word and use changetracking to gather information, feedback, and edits from other departments. My co-workers don’t have to learn new software, and it’s easy for me to import their input and then deliver the final version using Flare.”

Most recently, Actel has upgraded to Flare 5.0, which was launched in early 2009. Farley notes that Actel has been taking advantage of the enhanced code line editor, which makes it easier to go down to the code level to tune the documentation, and the updated graphical user interface, which facilitates inline formatting.

“I’ve been working with Flare for three years, and from the first product release to Version 5.0, Flare keeps improving and simplifying the ways I work,” said Farley. “With Flare, I can deliver high quality and easy-to-use documentation that rivals content created using costly CMS software – and that benefits both our company and our customers.”