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Consistent Image Uses MadCap Flare to Deliver Interactive HTML and HTML5-based Product Guides for Customers of Sprint, One of the World's Largest Mobile Telecom Providers

INDUSTRY

- Services



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Jim Hodson | **Director of Marketing and Communications Strategy,**
Consistent Image

Goals:

- Create Sprint online guides with a more interactive online experience
- Enable Sprint customers to easily search for the content they need
- Keep pace with multiple product launches and upgrades
- Ensure brand and accessibility consistency while working with different manufacturers

Solutions:

- MadCap Flare native XML tool for topic-based authoring and single-source publishing

Benefits:

- Interactive Web guides published in Flare let users jump to the topics they need
- Flare's HTML5 output enables a Google-like search experience
- Flare's topic-based authoring supports the delivery of some 10,000 to 15,000 topics each year, and makes it possible to support minor product upgrades with only a few topic updates
- Easy import of Word™ content allows manufacturers to create product guides using a Word™ template that maintains continuity for Sprint's customers
- Single-source publishing with Flare allows Consistent Image to make a change once and publish it across all affected guides, including PDFs and mobile Help
- Support for accessibility standards in Flare makes it easier to support Sprint's visually impaired customers

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Consistent Image is dedicated to providing comprehensive technical writing, copy writing, and creative services for organizations seeking to enhance their documentation, marketing, and design projects. For more than a decade, one of those clients has been Sprint.

Working with Sprint, Consistent Image delivers documentation for the broad range of mobile devices that the company sells along with its various mobile telecom and data plans. These include user guides, getting started guides, and printed inbox materials. Today, Consistent Image also publishes user guide content as HTML-based product Help for Sprint's customers using MadCap Flare.

An Authoring Tool for Evolving Standards

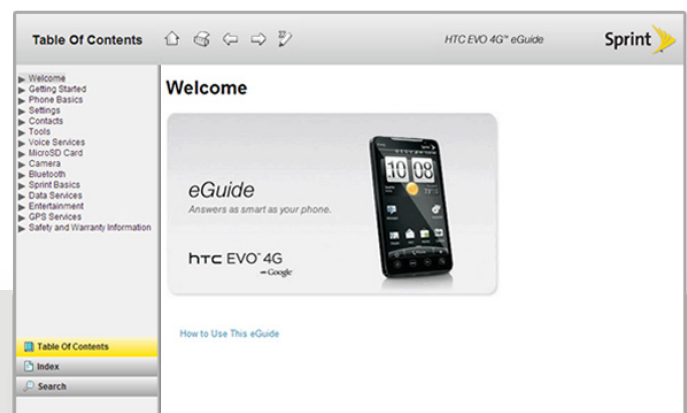
For years, the online documentation was a set of PDF files published on Sprint's website. These were created using a traditional authoring tool first developed in the 1990s. However, as part of a broader education strategy, Consistent Image sought to create a more interactive experience for Sprint's customers.

"We were looking for a way to develop this content, so that Sprint customers could search easily and access direct links—and not just links to the guide's first page, but to specific places within the guide," recalls Jim Hodson, director of marketing and communications strategy at Consistent Image.

Because PDF files didn't provide the flexibility that Sprint was seeking, the team at Consistent Image began to evaluate two other formats: Flash-based e-books and HTML-based Help. The Flash-based approach, while attractive, faced similar search limitations to those of PDFs, leading the company to focus on authoring tools for publishing HTML-based Help. That research led the team to MadCap Flare.

"When we did our prototypes with Flare, the content conversion process worked better than any of the other tools we were looking at," Jim explains. "We liked that it pulled over our source

file content and didn't bring a lot of junk code with it. Sprint was happy with what was happening on the pages and behind the scenes, so we decided to run with Flare."



Screenshot of the HTC Evo 4G eGuide Welcome Screen

Maintaining the Brand Experience for Sprint's Customers Across Multiple Products

Sprint partners with numerous different product manufacturers to produce dozens of mobile devices each year. That means a lot of different technical writers are generating the content. To maintain consistency around Sprint's brand and customer experience, Consistent Image provides these manufacturers with a template in Microsoft® Word™ for drafting the online Help guides. The company then uses Flare to import the Word™ documents and complete editing and production.

"Flare's ability to import Word™ has eased the transition to HTML-based Help," Jim observes. "Manufacturers can work within a familiar application to customize and add their product-specific content to the user guide. Then once we get the content into Flare, we make a few tweaks to create the right look

and feel before publishing it.” Jim adds, “We’re trying to do something very specific with very particular circumstances, and Flare does a better job than anything I’m aware of.” customers could search easily and access direct links—and not just links to the guide’s first page, but to specific places within the guide,” recalls Jim Hodson, director of marketing and communications strategy at Consistent Image.

Delivering Updates for Every Device

The topic-based authoring and single-source publishing capabilities in Flare play important roles in enabling Consistent Image to keep up with the vast amounts of product information that must be published each year for Sprint.

“We develop anywhere from ten to fifteen thousand topics a year. That’s a lot of content.” Jim says. “If there is a major new product release, it can impact hundreds of topics. However, when there’s a simple product update, we might need to update only a few topics in Flare, and that represents a big time savings.”

Flare’s single-source capabilities also allow the company to easily make changes to guides that already have been published.

“With Flare’s single sourcing, we only need to change the content once and then output it to our different targets,” Jim explains. “Because the process is so straight-forward with Flare, it improves our ability to support more frequent software updates in Sprint’s online user guides.”

While Consistent Image originally bought Flare to produce user guides in HTML-based Help format, the company is producing PDFs with Flare as well.

Jim explains, “We’re able to update content in Flare, and then relay that information back out in PDF format.”

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Jim Hodson | **Director of Marketing and Communications Strategy, Consistent Image**

Improving Access to Information

Consistent Image continually looks for opportunities to help Sprint’s customers more easily search and access information in the online user guides. For example, the company has taken advantage of Flare’s recently introduced support for HTML5 output.

“HTML5 support in Flare has been huge in enabling us to move away from frame-based Web pages,” Jim notes. “The frameless approach makes it possible to offer Google-like searches within the Help topics, and that’s really great for Sprint’s customers.”

Jim adds, “We’ve gotten to point that we can output Sprint user guides in HTML5, mobile HTML, and accessible PDF formats fairly quickly.”

Consistent Image has further enhanced the customer experience in the online Help by customizing some of the Flare functionality.

“The built-in flexibility in Flare has enabled us to provide a more customized experience for the needs of Sprint’s customers,” Jim explains.

Flare accessibility features also play an important role in supporting Sprint’s customers.

“There are emerging regulations about how communications, including user guides, need to be accessible to visually impaired customers,” Jim explains. “We’re pleased that MadCap is working to keep up with accessibility requirements. It is very important to Sprint to support its customers.” keep up with the vast amounts of product information that must be published each year for Sprint.

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