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Leading Provider of Customized Software Solutions Uses MadCap Flare to Create Three Permission-based Web Help Versions and a Print Manual—All Integrated with Microsoft Team Foundation Server for Complete Synchronization

INDUSTRY

- High Tech
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Julie Ohri | SEP

Goals:

- Create content-specific Web Help pages for different groups of users
- Enable easier, more intuitive access to Web Help
- Offer users the option to print a complete manual
- Streamline the process of publishing Help content to multiple channels
- Tightly synchronize Web Help updates with new software releases

Solutions:

- MadCap Flare native XML multi-channel content authoring software

Benefits:

- Single-sourcing enables three Web Help versions and a PDF of the manual to be published from the same Flare project
- Context-sensitive, searchable content created in Flare makes it easy for users to find the information they need
- Templates and separation of content from style facilitate the delivery of Web Help customized for three websites, complete with different logos and color schemes
- Microsoft Word integration allows engineers to contribute Help content using software they know
- Version control through integration with Microsoft TFS allows on the fly Web Help updates that are synchronized with new software releases



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Software Engineering Professionals (SEP) has more than two decades of success in developing custom software solutions to address the business and technology challenges of its clients. For one client, a large aerospace company, the solution includes a website that supports users with different levels of site access. Today, SEP relies on MadCap Flare to create and publish easy-to-navigate, context-sensitive Web Help and print manuals for these users—all from the same Flare project.

Migrating from a Complex Proprietary Approach

For many years, SEP relied on its own homegrown software to produce the aerospace company's online Help. However, the development model for the permission-based website was complicated. Moreover, it did not offer authors a what-you-see-is-what-you-get (WYSIWYG) view and could not publish print documentation. So when SEP was redesigning the website, the company decided it was the right time to look at authoring software alternatives on the market.

"What drew me to Flare is you could create Help content very much in a WYSIWYG style on the screen," recalled Julie Ohri, SEP software engineer. "However, the real draw was Flare's single-sourcing, which would let us create a PDF manual and versions of Web Help for different levels of users."

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Streamlining the Publishing Process

For nearly three years, SEP has used MadCap Flare to deliver versions of Web Help for three levels of users: basic, intermediate, and high level, along with PDF version of the Help manual.

"With the single-sourcing in Flare, it just takes a click of the button to select the different targets where we want to publish our content, whether it's to a Web Help page or a PDF," Ms. Ohri observed.

Two other factors that help to streamline the process are the ability of Flare to import content from Microsoft Word, and the separation of content from style in Flare.

"A lot of times, I want the engineers to write their own Help," Ms. Ohri explains. "Flare gives me the ability to import their content from Word. Then I just have to edit the content for look and feel."

SEP also has taken advantage of Flare's integration with the Microsoft Team Foundation Server (TFS) to implement version control.

"We keep all Help content source controlled," Ms. Ohri notes. "Flare lets me check things in and out from the tool itself, and we use the command line for Flare to generate Help on the fly every time we release a new version of the software."

Ms. Ohri added, "Having our Flare content in source control with the software is very convenient, and if I'm out of the office, anyone can access it."

Tailoring the User Experience

The website for the aerospace client is actually a suite of websites for the three different levels of users. Flare enables the Web Help on each of these sites to have its own look-and-feel as well as content that is geared toward the users' varying needs.

“Flare lets us use conditional tags at the target level and page level to make sure that only relevant content is published for each group of users,” Ms. Ohri says.

At the same time, Ms. Ohri notes, “The templating in Flare lets us give the Help a different look, including different logos, depending on which website the user pulls the information from. Help will change based on where users pull that information from. It makes good use of single- source.”

The search functionality in Flare and ability to generate context-sensitive Help also have helped to enrich the users’ Web Help experiences.

“Now through our Flare-based Help, users can search for features on the website, and Flare will get them to the Web page they need by clicking on the Help button,” Ms. Ohri explains. “The users really appreciate the improvements we’ve made; they like the ease-of-use and professional look our Help.”

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The print manual also has been a popular option with users, Ms. Ohri says. “We make the full manual available from our website with the click of a button for those users who want to download all the information. Many of them like to use the printed copies for training.”

Looking back, Ms. Ohri observes, “It basically has been a night and day experience since we moved to Flare for our Web Help and print manual—both internally and for our client’s many different users.”