madcap software | A Case Study in Technical Communication Best Practices

Multinational Telecommunications Giant Vodafone Chooses MadCap Flare and the team at 3di Information Solutions to Create Award-Winning Help Website

vodafone + 3di

COMPANY WEBSITE

www.vodafone.com
www.3di-info.com

LOCATION

London, UK: Vodafone
Ripley, UK: 3di

INDUSTRY

Telecommunications

GOALS

- Reinvent product documentation by creating an HTML5-based online Help website to complement Vodafone's One Net Business cloud service.
- Facilitate more efficient development and delivery of Vodafone's documentation through content reuse enabled by topic-based authoring and single-source, multichannel publishing.
- Create an appealing and interactive web experience for users that aligns with the Vodafone corporate brand.

SOLUTIONS

- MadCap Flare native XML single-source, multi-channel content authoring software

BENEFITS

- **Efficiency** — Flare's topic-based single-source publishing speeds the creation and delivery of a comprehensive online Help website while snippets facilitate content reuse.
- **Easy Customization** — Variables and conditional tags in Flare enable 3di to customize the content, look, and feel of different documentation versions. The ability to create custom skins with Flare allows 3di to maintain Vodafone's brand alignment.
- **Enhanced User Experience** — Flare's HTML5 output and multimedia support provide an interactive, modern web experience for users when navigating the Help.
- **Collaboration** — Integration of MadCap Flare with TortoiseSVN provides version control of content created by 3di's content writing team.

Vodafone Group is the seventh-largest telephone operating company by total revenue at $64.5 billion, and for more than 30 years, it has led the way in providing unified communications solutions for small and medium-sized businesses throughout Asia, Africa, Europe and Oceania.

Among Vodafone's offerings is One Net Business, a cloud-based unified communication service for small and medium-sized organizations. Delivering all fixed and mobile communications through a single platform, One Net Business improves employee productivity and ensures that companies' customers are always able to reach them.

To support customers in optimizing their use of One Net Business, Vodafone provides the award-winning One Net Information Site (ONIS). The interactive, HTML5-based ONIS Help website was created by 3di Information Solutions, one of the United Kingdom's leading suppliers of technical authoring, translation, and localization services. The 3di teams in the UK and Poland designed, developed and implemented ONIS using the industry leading topic-based authoring and single-source, multi-channel publishing capabilities of MadCap Flare.

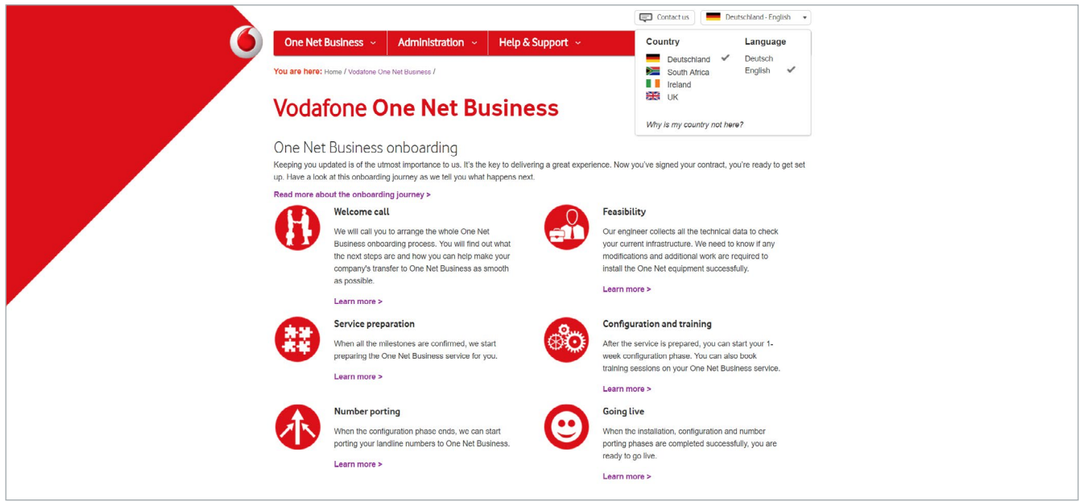
The Challenges of Supporting Different Groups of Users

With the worldwide rollout of One Net Business, the Vodafone product management team saw an opportunity to evolve all of its One Net technical documentation to better support their vision of providing a top-notch customer experience. Although existing One Net product offerings provided rich functionality, the accompanying documentation was neither robust nor effective enough in helping users to optimize their use of the product suite.

Adding to the complexity was that One Net was supported by four different operating companies (OpCos) located in four different countries. Therefore, Vodafone needed to produce One Net Business service versions tailored to each market, each with a slightly different set of features and in different languages.

To address this challenge, the Vodafone product management team brought in 3di, a highly recognized technical communications consultancy in the UK. After reviewing Vodafone's technical and information requirements, 3di developed a design solution to transform the One Net product documentation into a user-friendly online Help website. In looking at software for designing and implementing this site, the content writing team at 3di selected MadCap Flare, which provided the comprehensive functionality the team needed to build an extensive, easy-to-use Help website.

"Having had prior experience using Flare, we knew we'd be able to quickly prototype a website and publishing pipeline with variable content," said Pawel Kowaluk, technical director at 3di Information Solutions. "We loved that MadCap Flare allowed our team of writers to get started on the project right away."



HTML5-based Help Site, with Multiple Language Support

Award-Winning Online Content with Flare

The comprehensive, HTML5-based Help website acts as a self-service portal that enables buyers, users and potential users to find everything they need to know about how to buy, install, set up, use and troubleshoot One Net Business and its components. 3di produces different versions of ONIS for each of the markets OpCos Vodafone supports: Germany, United Kingdom (UK), South Africa, and Ireland.

The ONIS content in each OpCo can be found via search through links supplied in emails, newsletters, and main Vodafone marketing sites, as well as from the "Help" links in some One Net Business components. Furthermore, 3di has been able to create a more interactive, visual learning experience for Vodafone customers by utilizing MadCap Flare's support for multimedia content.

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> **PAWEL KOWALUK**
> Technical Director | 3di Information Solutions

"The ability to embed Vimeo videos in Help topics with Flare gives customers much more flexibility to access content in their format of choice," Kowaluk explains. "Overall, Flare's rich functionality has played an integral part in enhancing Vodafone users' experiences when they are buying, installing and using One Net Business."

Kowaluk adds, "This is significant because we have been able to deliver on Vodafone's vision of having a Help website that goes beyond being just a technical manual to one that plays a key part in how customers understand, implement, and use the vast number of Vodafone's offerings."

The innovation of 3di's work on ONIS recently was recognized by the Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators with two 2017 UK Technical Communication Awards: "Best Business Integration" and "Best use of single sourcing and multi-channel publishing."

Fostering Content Reuse and Customization with Flare

Not only has MadCap Flare enabled 3di to create a superior customer experience; it has also empowered 3di to optimize its efficiency. Notably, by taking advantage of Flare's topic-based, single-source publishing functionality, the 3di content writing team has been able to create 1,500-plus different and re-usable topics, as well as manage what topics are included—and in which languages—for each the different OpCos.

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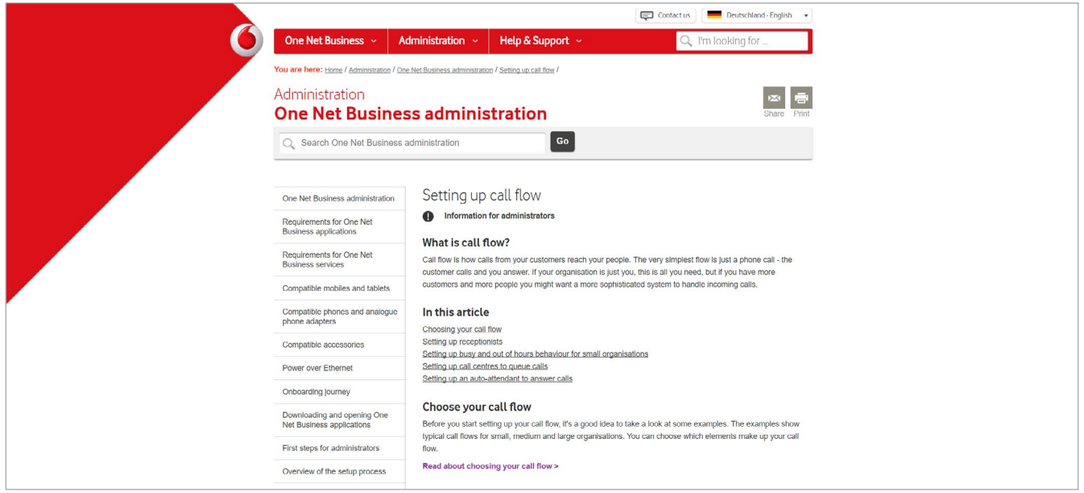
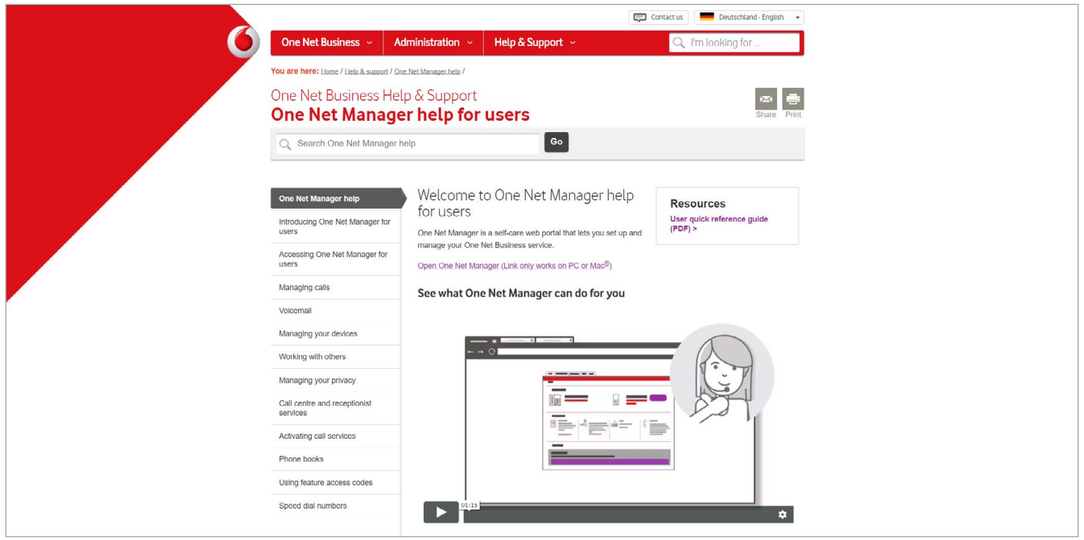


Example of Topic Page Created with MadCap Flare



Embedded Video Functionality on Topic Page

"Since all of our content is stored centrally in a single Flare project, we're able to drastically reduce the time it takes to create documentation and get the information out to Vodafone customers," Kowaluk notes. "It makes our monthly publishing cycle much more efficient."

The 3di content writers also make extensive use of snippets to maximize content reuse and customize content for different versions of ONIS.

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"We use snippets in Flare to automatically insert content that we share across our different outputs, such as product and company names, region-specific terms, and common procedures," observes Kowaluk. "Snippets also remove the need to retype content for all our different Help site versions, helping us to eliminate redundant efforts."

Additionally, the writing team relies on variables to automate translations of different strings of text in each market's applications.

"Text strings are different in each market for multiple reasons such as branding or language, so we have to be able to both translate them in the Help and then synchronize with how the interfaces translate," Kowaluk explains. "Flare variables have been super useful in helping us to automate those changes."

Moreover, conditional tags in MadCap Flare help 3di's writers customize content for different versions and user groups of the Help website.

"Conditional tags in Flare make it so easy to tailor content to different groups of users," Kowaluk says. "We're able to maintain the main procedures or features set in one topic, and then apply conditional tags to tweak certain features or steps for a particular market and user groups. It requires very little effort on our part."

Facilitating Collaboration and Corporate Brand Consistency

Maintaining source control is critical given the multiple Help website versions and number of writers on 3di's team who contribute content. The writing team manages source control by leveraging MadCap Flare's support for integration with TortoiseSVN, a tool that provides a user-friendly interface to the Apache Subversion version control system, which is being hosted in CloudForge. The integration allows Flare to download files from TortoiseSVN and then generate outputs via an automated build process that is set up on Jenkins, an open source automation server.

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"Flare's seamless integration with TortoiseSVN is a huge attraction," says Kowaluk. "When we do our monthly revisions of ONIS, we just update the content in the central location and then feed it into our Jenkins build server, which automatically publishes the documentation to our custom PHP portal engine. This automated process has enabled us to publish much more quickly with fewer errors."

Beyond improving the writers' efficiency, the 3di team has been able to maintain brand consistency with other Vodafone websites, since MadCap Flare provides the option to produce skinless HTML5 output. This allows the team to take skins that have been custom-built for Vodafone, set them up in Flare, and translate them into HTML and republish this through Flare.

"Flare's ability to produce standardized HMTL XML output makes it simple to feed content into another system," Kowaluk observers. "Due to the specific visual design specifications required by Vodafone, the raw HTML output from Flare is published out through a style sheet. This preserves all of the architecture and links but enables the content to look and feel just like any other Vodafone website, giving customers a consistent web experience wherever they navigate."

Kowaluk adds, "All together, we have created a really inviting, easy-to-use online Help portal thanks to Flare. It has allowed us to deliver on Vodafone's vision of providing an optimal customer experience with its powerful One Net suite across all the different OpCos."

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