Getting Started with MadCap Flare
Part 1: Basic Concepts
Who Am I?

  • Internationally recognized content creation and delivery consultant.
  • Helps create efficient, flexible content.
  • Certified – Flare, Mimic, ViziApps.
  • Works to make the complex understandable.
Welcome to...

» The first of four webinars for new Flare users.
» We’ll examine basic concepts and terms underlying Flare.
» The result – you’ll be able to make better use of Flare’s features...
» ...possibly even learn about features that you didn’t know existed.
Today’s Agenda

» Analogizing Flare to Word

» Defining:
  • Project and topic
  • Topic-based vs. document-based authoring
  • Structured authoring
  • Single sourcing and multi-channel publishing
  • Version control
Analogizing Flare to Word

» Let’s compare authoring in Flare to Word.
  • You create content in both tools.
  • You format content in both tools.
  • You insert graphics in both tools.
  • You add navigation via a TofC, index (maybe), and cross-references in both tools.

» So you already have the basic concepts for working with Flare.
Analogizing Flare to Word

» So what’s different in Flare?

• Content is in short chunks – “topics” – in Flare.
• You format content using a “CSS”.
• You can insert movies as well as graphics.
• Navigation can include search.
• Output is typically online rather than print.
  – Can use Flare as your primary authoring platform?
• Online output can adapt to mobile.
What’s a Project

» Common definition – a container for all the files used to generate your outputs.

» The primary files are:
  • Content files – in the Content folder.
  • Control files – in the Content and Project folders.
  • Output files – in the Output folder (usually).
  • Flprj – main project control file.
What’s a Project

- What you’ll see in Windows Explorer...

- Plus, project info used by the Analysis feature, in the Analyzer folder.
  - The actual Analyzer is a separate product.
What’s a Topic?

As short, focused and self-contained as possible a discussion about one subject.

- Focused – Answers one question – “How do I...?”, “What is...?”, etc.
- Self-contained – Contains all the info needed to answer the question.
  - Related info is in separate topics.
  - Topics link to related topics.
Topics vs. Documents

» A document is one big chunk of content.
  • Difficult or impossible to subdivide and re-assemble in different forms.

» A topic is one little chunk of content.
  • Many topics can be threaded together to create the document and other outputs.
  • Like the necklace you made in summer camp...
What Is Structured Authoring?

» Authoring with structure.
  • Just means content has structure – no preconceptions about what that is or how it’s applied.

» So what is “structure”?
  • Standard and consistent sectional, syntactical, and stylistic rules.
  • Controlled using Flare features like stylesheets and templates.
  • What technical communicators have always created, albeit usually manually...
Why Work This Way?

» Multi-author capable.

» Writing a chunk once by one author equals consistency, accuracy, accountability.

» Re-usable across multiple projects.

» Automated custom output affordably.
But...

» It’s a new way of writing.
  • Lack of flow between topics makes it easy for authors to lose continuity, focus.
  • Hard to re-use content for stylistically different outputs, like tech support and marketing.
But...

» It can be hard to manage.

• A topic should be the smallest unit of content that answers a question.
• But over-granularity can equal a huge number of topics and files.
• May be hard to communicate project detail to the next generation of developers.

» KISS!
What Is Single Sourcing?

» Something new, exotic, and complex?
  • Exotic? No. Just means using content for different outputs.
  • Complex? Could be…

» The term has two accepted definitions.
Definition 1

» Write content once in one place and extract selective subsets for use:
  • In different formats...
  • On different devices...
  • In different markets...
  • For different audiences...
  • And so on...
Definition 2

» Create chunks of content to be re-used in a project or in different projects.
  • Like a Note or a dialog box description to be used in multiple topics.
Benefits of Single Sourcing

» Content only maintained in one place.
  • One owner writing a chunk once = consistency, accuracy, accountability.

» Re-usability – Across multiple projects.
  – Careful design can allow support for outputs that didn’t exist when the project began.

» Automated custom output affordably.
Also Known As...

» “Multi-channel publishing”

» Essentially means the same thing as single sourcing but:
  • Focuses more on the output side.
  • Sounds cooler than “single sourcing.”
Version Control

» Like a lockable file cabinet for a project.

» Projects are stored in a central repository, usually on a server, with local copies on authors’ PCs.

» Can only let one author at a time edit, or let multiple authors edit simultaneously and then resolve conflicts.

» Also allows “diffing”, history, “rollbacks”.
Version Control

» Flare 11 supports these version control tools natively.
Version Control

» Once the project is in version control, you get the Flare Source Control ribbon.

• Different version control tools have different ribbons but the concept is the same.
Version Control Pros and Cons

» Pros

• Protects the projects by taking them off your C drive.
• Limits edit access to one author at a time, or resolves conflicts between multiple authors.

» Cons

• Setup requires IT involvement, if only briefly.
• Check-in/check-out adds an operational layer – “Gotta go. My ride is waiting”.
Summary

» The next two webinars will introduce specific Flare features, including styles, skins, proxies, and more.

» And one more that looks at different ways to structure a Flare project.

» These webinars may be repeated, so let us know if there’s a topic you think should be added for next time.
Hyper/Word Services Offers...

Training // Consulting // Development

Flare // Advanced Flare (thru MadCap Software)
ViziApps Mobile Apps // Single Sourcing
Structured Authoring
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MadCap Flare Single Sourcing Training
August 25-26, 2015 (web-based)

MadCap Flare CSS Training
September 15-16, 2015 (web-based)

*Offer valid through Friday, August 15, 2015.

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