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Welcome to MadCap Central

Neil Perlin introduces you to the new software from MadCap which will help you with project management and source control.

If you're a MadCap Flare user, you're likely to have run across two issues with your projects.

Issue one has to do with safeguarding your projects, getting them off your local PC and onto a server to avoid losing the project files if your PC is damaged, and making them available to additional authors. The traditional answer is to get a version control system like Subversion or Git, but what if you don't have the budget or IT support? From my training and consulting experience, many MadCap Flare shops are in this position.

Issue two is project management - how to keep track of the projects, tasks, and staff needed to create your projects. Many authors keep project to-do lists but they're hard to manage and easy to lose, even for a single project with one author. It becomes still more difficult if you have one project with multiple authors, or multiple projects. How to keep track of everything?

MadCap Central is MadCap Software's answer to both issues. MadCap Central combines project management and version control in one surprisingly easy-to-use package that integrates with the latest version of Flare, version 2016 r2. (If that number seems odd after years of integer versions like 10 and 12, it's because MadCap has adopted an Agile release policy that promises incremental releases with new features and bug fixes several times a year.)

Let's take a look at how MadCap Central offers version control and project management.

Version Control Features

Look at Flare 2016 r2's View ribbon and you'll see the new MadCap Central icon. Clicking it opens the MadCap Central pane where you can log in to MadCap Central. (You can also click an icon on that pane to quickly open the MadCap Central portal page in a browser and log in there.) Once you're logged in, you've got several options from the MadCap Central pane's local toolbar.

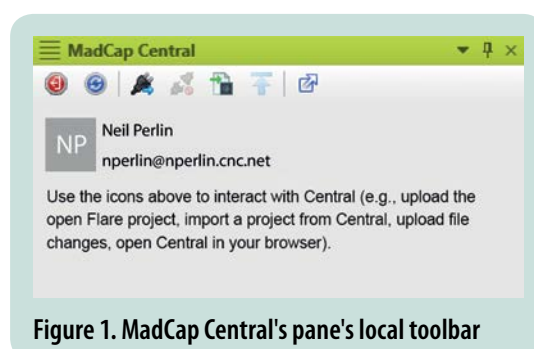


Figure 1. MadCap Central's pane's local toolbar

Principal options





-  **Upload this project to MadCap Central.** Click to move the project into (bind it to) MadCap Central. Once you do this, you'll see a Source Control item on Flare's menu. Clicking that item opens the Source Control ribbon, shown below, which lets you control the project's interaction with MadCap Central. At this point, you're using MadCap Central like any version control system.



Figure 2. Source Control ribbon

-  **Remove MadCap Central Bindings from Project.** Click to remove the link from Flare to the project in MadCap Central. You'd do this if you want to take the project back to local status for some reason. Removing the binding from a project does not remove it from MadCap Central; instead, it simply removes the link between MadCap Central and the project.
-  **Import a project from MadCap Central.** Click to download a copy of a previously uploaded project. You'd do this if you hired new authors and need to give them access to the project, or if an author's PC crashed and the project has to be re-downloaded onto the new PC.
-  **Upload latest local files to MadCap Central.** Click to move any changes made on the author's local PC to the version of the project in MadCap Central. You'd do this to update the version in MadCap Central with the latest local changes.
-  **Open the MadCap Central portal.** Click to open MadCap Central in your browser. You'd do this to quickly access MadCap Central's project management features.

So MadCap Central is actually replacing a traditional version control system. And you can use it to actually host your output. So binding a project to MadCap Central and managing the version control aspect really does seem to be this simple.

Three points to bear in mind

- MadCap Central is in public beta as of the date of writing this article - mid-December 2016. My experience is that everything is working smoothly but, as in any beta, some oddities may emerge.

Safeguard your projects, getting them off your local PC and on a server to avoid losing the project files.

Project manage your projects, keeping track of the projects, tasks, and staff needed.

- MadCap Software plans to provide a gigabyte of storage for each MadCap Central subscription, shared among the users associated with a subscription. That figure may change depending on the result of the beta trial.
- MadCap Software hosts MadCap Central, handling all server administration for you and effectively acting like a shadow IT department. This saves you the cost and effort of hosting a version control system yourself. Note that if you have a mandate to use a version control system that's already in place, you can use MadCap Central in conjunction with other tools like Subversion or Git.

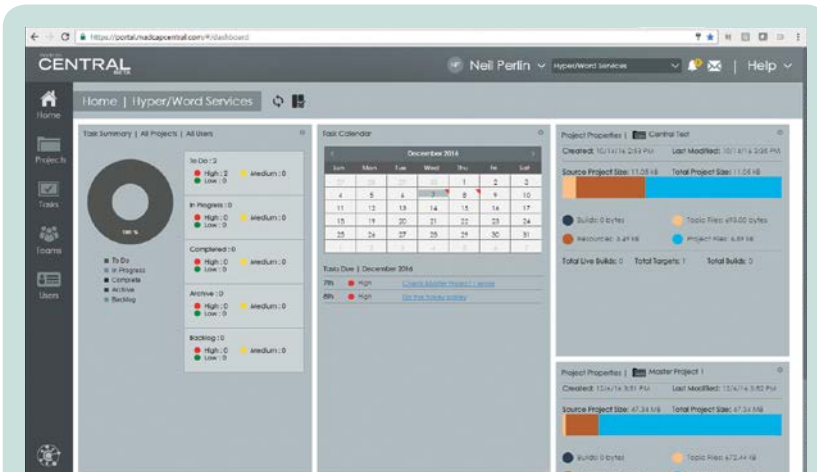


Figure 3. Home page

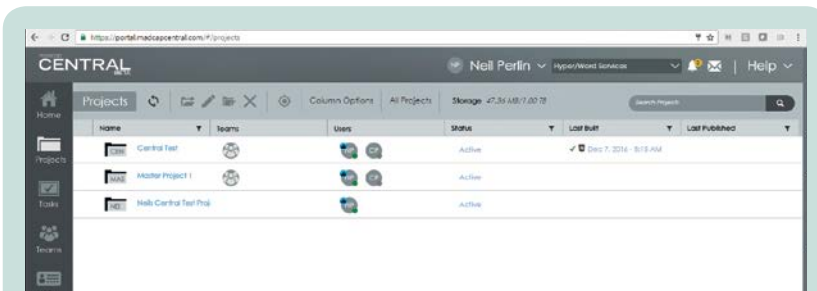


Figure 4. Project page

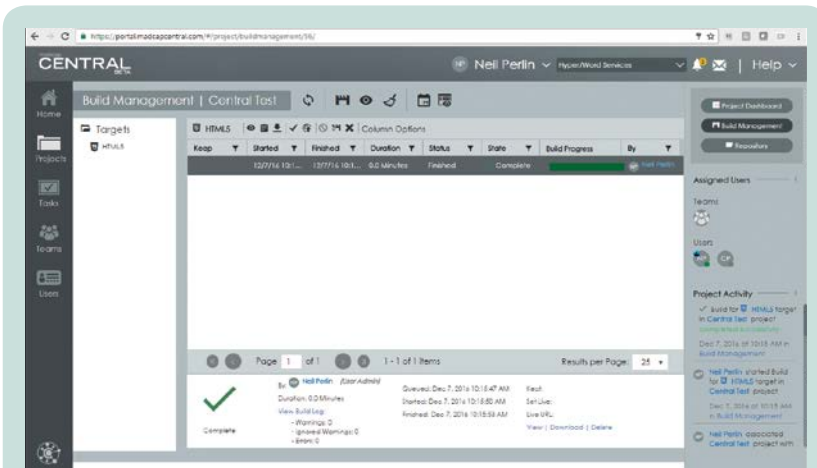


Figure 5. Build Management page

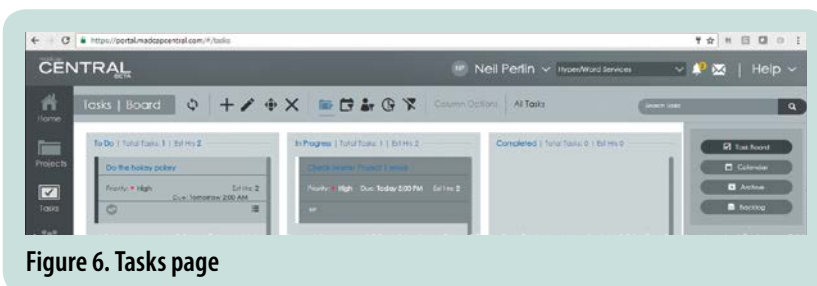


Figure 6. Tasks page

Project management features

Once you bind a project to MadCap Central, you can access a wide range of project management features.

Home page

The Home page features that let you display a dashboard, shown below, containing various widgets with information about aspects of all or selected projects or users.

The first release lets you select from eight pre-defined widgets. (Future releases may let authors create their own custom widgets.)

You can manage the widgets and filter the information they show.

Project page

The Project page has features that let you get a high-level view of all projects stored in MadCap Central, showing the team members and individual users assigned to projects, project status, build and publishing history, and more.

Build Management page

A Build Management page lets you see the targets for a project, and allows you to build one from Central.

Tasks page

The Tasks page has features that let you define tasks with priority levels, the person responsible for the task, start and end dates, and more. You can see these tasks in a task board, shown below.

You can also see the tasks in a calendar view to help you plan your schedule. You can also filter and archive tasks in various ways to focus on what's important at a particular time, and be able to go back and review what you did for a project post-mortem.

The Users page lets you invite authors into MadCap Central, set their permissions, specify projects and teams in which they can participate, and more.

The Teams page lets you specify what users belong to what teams, send messages to team members, keep tabs on the activities performed by members of a team, and more.

Basically, there's no one specific way in which to use MadCap Central as a project management tool. Its features let you view projects in many different ways depending on what information

you're looking for. (This is similar to MadCap's Analyzer add-on tool. Analyzer is analytic and reporting tool; the ones you use are entirely up to you.)

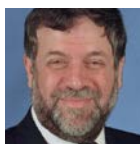
Summary

MadCap Central is a well-thought out product that offers easy-to-use project management for Flare projects and an equally easy-to-use alternative to traditional version control systems. It will also serve as a platform for future enhancements to the project management and version control features. In summary, MadCap Central will add control and safety to your Flare projects and is definitely worth a look.

One obvious question – is MadCap Central worth it if you're a sole author working on one project? In my opinion, yes, *if only* for the version control system aspect. In fact, that may be the strongest selling point if you're a sole author because you probably lack the time to deal with the complexity of installing and managing a traditional version control system. The fact that MadCap Central does that installation and management for you is a huge time saving.

MadCap Central webinars

For a more detailed look at MadCap Central, watch the introductory webinar. Download it from the list of recorded webinars. Go to www.madcapsoftware.com/resources/recorded-webinars.aspx#central and look for "Introducing MadCap Central: An Overview + MadCap Flare 2016 r2" dated 17 November 2016. There's a second one as well, dated 15 December 2016. **C**



Neil Perlin is president of Hyper/Word Services of Tewksbury, MA. He has many years of experience in technical writing, with 32 in training, consulting, and developing for *online* formats and

outputs ranging from WinHelp to mobile apps and a broad range of tools.

Neil has been using, training on, and consulting on MadCap Flare since 2004 and is MadCap-certified in Flare and Mimic. He is an STC Fellow, he founded and managed the Bleeding Edge stem at the STC summit, and was a long-time columnist and contributor to STC Intercom, IEEE, *ISTC Communicator*, and other publications.

E: nperlin@nperlin.cnc.net

W: www.hyperword.com

MadCap Central is a well-thought out product that offers easy-to-use project management for Flare projects. It will add control and safety to your Flare projects and is definitely worth a look.

Note:

MadCap has released Flare 2017, which supports Central, and released Central itself.

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