PASSPORT TO INNOVATION

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More effective training and product materials

Product Information at Your Fingertips

For over 40 years, Alliance Machine International LLC has designed and manufactured more than 16,000 machines for the corrugated box industry, with installations worldwide. To help our customers maximize their productivity and safety, we deliver training and product manuals as print documents and on our machines' interactive touchscreens. Today, we produce these manuals using the MadCap Central Suite from San Diego-based MadCap Software Inc., including MadCap Flare for single-source authoring, MadCap Central for version control and collaboration, and MadCap Lingo for translation.

Supporting a Broad, Modular Product Portfolio

At Alliance, we continuously strive to provide customers with an ever-broadening line of reliable, cost-effective products, including robotic load formers, stackers, pre-feeders, pallet handlers and specialty folder gluers. Our flagship solutions are two large modular systems—a robotic back-end automation (BEA) system and plastic belt conveyor (PBC) system—that represent the model of Alliance's future. Between them, these systems have 54 modules and over 92 configurations. New pre-feeder systems are being developed on a modular design as well.

We create tailored manuals for customers based on the configurations they use and other customer-specific details. We use "conditions" to automatically manage configuration-specific information about the machines and modules, and indicate whether a manual will appear in print, on a touchscreen or both.

Additionally, we need to deliver updated documentation anytime Alliance introduces a new machine or product enhancements. We maximize content reuse by using "snippets" in MadCap Flare, which allow us to write content once and then use the snippets of content in multiple places within both our training and product manual. All content stays consistent during updates.

Snippets also let us ensure that product descriptions and warning text are consistent across different manuals. For example, we have all of our required warning statements in Flare snippets, so all warning text is fully standardized automatically. If our manual says, "Do not enter the hazard area without lockout," it is the same in all manuals. That's important from a legal standpoint and for protecting customers.

Finally, we use variables extensively to help maintain consistent field definitions across multiple modules. We want to ensure customers can trust that the field, "Entry Photo Eye to Center Conveyor," is the same measurement on all conveyors, regardless of the module used. This helps give our customers confidence that they'll be calibrating the field on different modules consistently.

> **USING MADCAP LINGO, WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO CUT OUR WORKING TIME ON TRANSLATIONS BY 30% TO 75% WHILE REDUCING OUR COSTS BY 20% TO 30%.**

Putting Product Manuals at Workers' Fingertips

For a majority of our Alliance products, we use MadCap Flare to deliver manuals as both print documents and interactive HTML content on the machine's touchscreen, which users can access by hitting the "Help" button. This is important because many print manuals end up in a manager's office where operators can't access them. Now, operators can get to the homepage of our Flare-based machine manual on their touchscreens and use sidebars to navigate to the information they need.

We're also looking at multiple ways to present information, since many of our customers' employees are hands-on people who don't want to look at a wall of text. Presently, our technical writing team relies on still images to illustrate how to use Alliance's machines. Moving forward, we plan to embed video and automation graphics in the machine manuals.
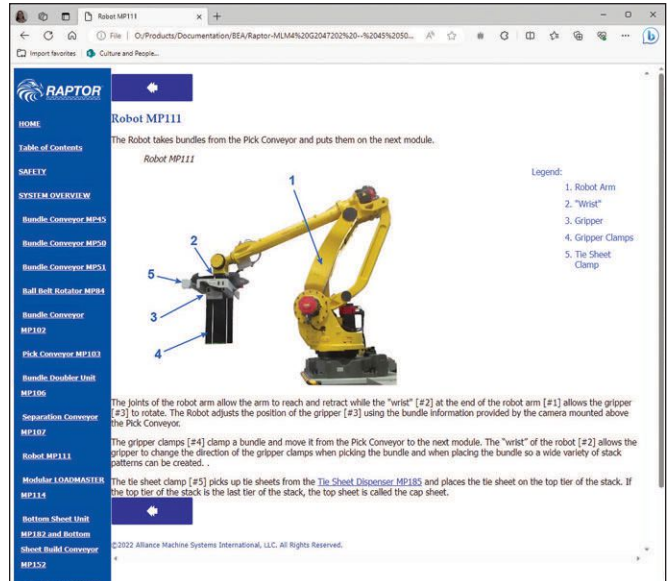
Repurposing Content

We also rely on the content reuse enabled by Mad-Cap Flare to produce training manuals that help users get up and running quickly, complementing the product manuals that provide more detailed information on machinery features and processes.

For example, we have different modules affected by our hazardous energy lockout procedure. In our training manual, we have a slightly abbreviated version of the procedure because operators don't need all the detail included in the product documentation. In this way, we're delivering the right level of information to customers based on their current needs.

Cutting Translation Costs and Time

In addition to producing manuals in English, the Alliance office in Spokane regularly translates content into Latin American Spanish, Canadian French and Brazilian Portuguese. We now use MadCap Lingo, a computer-aided translation (CAT) tool, to support these translations. Its translation memory and out-
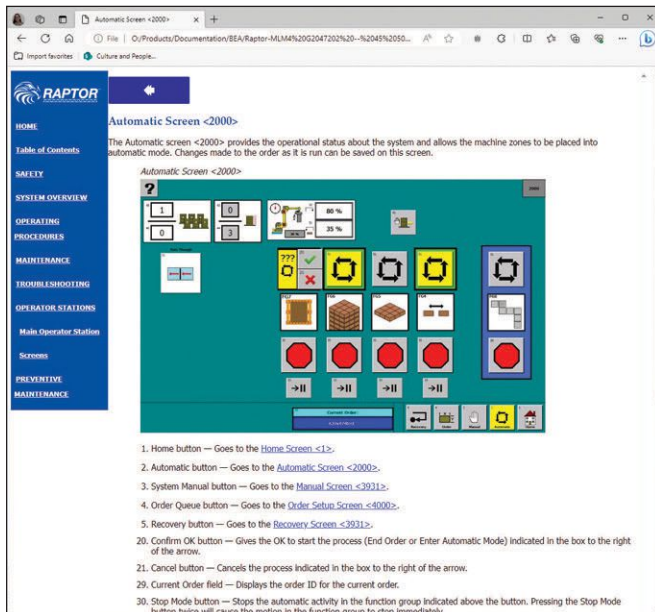

Product manual PDFs for Alliance machines feature drop-down menus on the left side to help customers navigate to the information they need. The PDF manuals and their machine-screen counterparts are based on the same content in the MadCap Flare project, maximizing content reuse. (Photo provided by Alliance Machine Systems International LLC)

Embedded photos in Alliance's product documentation help customers quickly understand how its machines work. (Photo provided by Alliance Machine Systems International LLC)

of-the-box integration with MadCap Flare gives us a seamless process from content creation to localization and promotes the reuse of previously translated content. Using MadCap Lingo, we've been able to cut our working time on translations by 30% to 75%, while reducing our costs by 20% to 30%, depending on the product line.

Simplifying Collaboration

All of our MadCap Flare-based product and training manuals are now uploaded to the cloud-based Mad-Cap Central platform, which serves as our technical writing team's backup repository, version control and central source for project administration documents. This has made it much easier for our team to collaborate and assign work to writers with available capacity.

Since implementing the MadCap Central suite, we've seen tremendous gains in productivity. Before, we were months behind on product manuals for our 92-plus machine configurations. Now, our team is delivering these manuals as soon as new product versions are released, adding training materials and ensuring that all information is consistent. This has made it easier than ever for our service team to support our customers and for our customers to support themselves.⌃