

# Streamline your online help

Global SaaS marketplace platform company Mirakl brings added value to its online documentation with MadCap Software as Sabine Berland explains.

Having user documentation is great, but when you can also help your company internally with this asset, it is a great way to prove the value of a professional documentation team.

This was the challenge I faced at Mirakl, the leading SaaS marketplace platform, when joining the adventure some years ago. Thankfully, Mirakl had already recognised the necessity of providing technical documentation with its application.

During its early stages as a start-up company, every employee contributed to content and collaborated on using Confluence wiki, which was used both internally as a knowledge base and externally by customers. Being a wiki, maintaining consistent terminology and writing styles was therefore a challenge, and it was difficult for users to quickly identify if the page they opened contained a procedure or a concept explanation.

As a result, the majority of the support team's activities were centred around answering customer questions by providing links to the documentation set that users couldn't find themselves. This significantly impacted the productivity of the team as they had to both maintain and update the documentation as well as investigate issues reported by customers.

Ultimately, to improve our teams' efficiency, reduce the burden of maintenance, and shorten the 'learning curve' for our end users, we convinced the management team to allow us to find another solution that better suited our technical communication needs.

## Choosing flexibility with MadCap Flare

During the investigation phase for a new solution, we benchmarked almost 25 tools, then selected a short list of 5, which closely matched our requirements. Throughout this rigorous selection process, MadCap Flare<sup>2</sup> continuously rose to the top as the best solution for Mirakl.

MadCap Flare stood out for its easy-to-use link management features, advanced single-sourcing, text conditioning, and customisable outputs for online help, among others.

With Flare, we could also create relevant, customised documentation for all of Mirakl's user profiles, which was one of the additional pain points we needed to solve.

## Fostering Agile collaborations

Flare stood out for its ability to integrate with and be extended by the tools that our teams rely on. Flare offers native integration with GitHub, which Mirakl's R&D team uses to store the source code of our application. Consequently, we also selected GitHub as the content management system for our documentation.

This allowed the documentation team to use the same methodology and tools as the development teams which brings several advantages: now, each of our R&D teams can collaborate together, and the documentation team is fully integrated in the creation process. Additionally, Mirakl employees who are comfortable with GitHub can also contribute to the documentation.

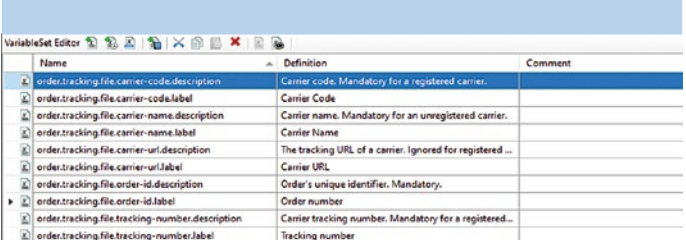
Technical writing is a continuous learning path in all domains, including software solutions and project methodology, and the entire team was rapidly onboarded to get familiar with the Agile concepts and the main Git commands. The entire team is now able to develop content in parallel on a same source repository, meeting the goals of each sprint, and pairing with developers to gain autonomy. Fortunately, for those who are not so familiar with lines of codes, GitHub also has a graphical user interface that turned this new experience into an even more user-friendly one. Additionally, Flare allows us to manage 'branches' of documentation and 'pull requests' directly from its interface.

## Achieving efficiency with MadCap Flare

To effortlessly manage the change with our internal and external users, we decided to keep the initial documentation structure in place and focus first on the layout. A CSS style change and a new destination URL were minor changes compared to modifying the entire content structure – however such changes can still be a confusing experience for an end-user.

With that said, the first introduction phase involved tracking KPIs (key performance indicators) and gathering user feedback about our visuals, various logo interpretations, and page structure. Thanks to the ease of use of Flare, we rapidly integrated the feedback from both our internal and external users, and started the next phase of the new documentation roll-out: enriching the content and easing maintenance.

In this next phase we started by explaining the structure of the variables file in Flare to our developers and requested that they transform the UI labels files from the code into **.flvar** ones, which they did! Now, our procedures are always up-to-date with the latest UI changes, and thanks to the Analysis tool embedded in Flare, it is also very easy to check if variables are broken or not.



Name	Definition	Comment
order.tracking.file.carrier-code.description	Carrier code. Mandatory for a registered carrier.	
order.tracking.file.carrier-code.label	Carrier Code	
order.tracking.file.carrier-name.description	Carrier name. Mandatory for an unregistered carrier.	
order.tracking.file.carrier-name.label	Carrier Name	
order.tracking.file.carrier-url.description	The tracking URL of a carrier. Ignored for registered ...	
order.tracking.file.carrier-url.label	Carrier URL	
order.tracking.file.order-id.description	Order's unique identifier. Mandatory.	
order.tracking.file.order-id.label	Order number	
order.tracking.file.tracking-number.description	Carrier tracking number. Mandatory for a registered...	
order.tracking.file.tracking-number.label	Tracking number	

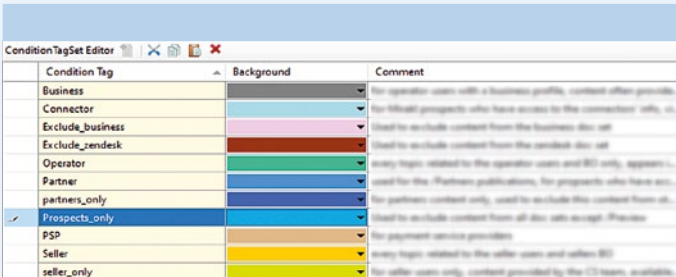
Figure 1. Samples of variables in the Flare project

As a result, the documentation is now more accurate, preventing user frustration, and the team can more efficiently maintain software documentation and keep up with the pace of continuous delivery.

## Enhancing the customer experience

Next, we started the enriching phase. For Mirakl, enriching the content goes through correctly addressing our several user profiles. Text conditioning helped us ensure accuracy and relevance for our users by tagging pieces of text or topics based on user profiles. We also use snippet conditions to

strengthen text reuse within our single-source strategy. Mirakl has three main types of users and several modules that are not all relevant for all our end-users. A condition exists for each of these variations. Our custom condition definitions, associated with the MadCap Software conditions hierarchy system, produces documentation that targets and informs each specific end-user profile.



Condition Tag	Background	Comment
Business		Only for users with a business profile, content often provided by Mirakl prospects who have access to the connectors, will not be available content from the business also will
Connector		Only for users with a business profile, content often provided by Mirakl prospects who have access to the connectors, will not be available content from the business also will
Exclude_business		Only for users with a business profile, content often provided by Mirakl prospects who have access to the connectors, will not be available content from the business also will
ExcludeZendesk		Only for users with a business profile, content often provided by Mirakl prospects who have access to the connectors, will not be available content from the business also will
Operator		Only for users with a business profile, content often provided by Mirakl prospects who have access to the connectors, will not be available content from the business also will
Partner		Only for users with a business profile, content often provided by Mirakl prospects who have access to the connectors, will not be available content from the business also will
partners_only		Only for users with a business profile, content often provided by Mirakl prospects who have access to the connectors, will not be available content from the business also will
Prospects_only		Only for users with a business profile, content often provided by Mirakl prospects who have access to the connectors, will not be available content from the business also will
PSP		Only for users with a business profile, content often provided by Mirakl prospects who have access to the connectors, will not be available content from the business also will
Seller		Only for users with a business profile, content often provided by Mirakl prospects who have access to the connectors, will not be available content from the business also will
seller_only		Only for users with a business profile, content often provided by Mirakl prospects who have access to the connectors, will not be available content from the business also will

Figure 2. Conditions on user profiles

To further enhance the user experience with the documentation of each module, we integrated a script that allows end-users to select their condition from a drop-down list located at the top of the page content. We're thankful for Eloise Lewis, senior technical author at JHC Systems, who first introduced this topic to us at MadWorld Europe<sup>3</sup> back in 2018 when she presented her session, 'Using MadCap Flare to Write for One Product with Different User Experiences'<sup>4</sup>.

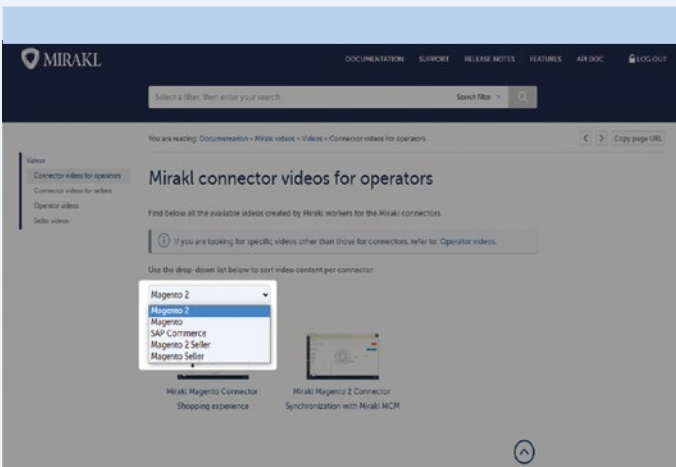


Figure 3. Sample of a drop-down list

To render and enable this functionality to our users, a dedicated condition set and TOC were associated with a target and a destination, which are then published whenever there are updates to the documentation.

An additional system that was developed in-house and based on our GitHub repository, interacts with the Mirakl application and triggers a visual notification to Mirakl users, in relation to the modules they have. This allows our users to always be aware of key features and updates in their daily tasks.

### Empowering users and meeting their needs

Our third roll-out phase of the new documentation began with user sessions. On specific days during the year each department and each function meets with our users. We listen to feedback, analyse it, and define a consecutive action plan. During these sessions, we use the NPS (Net Promoter Score)

to follow up on customer satisfaction. When it came to the support they received, customers evaluated Mirakl as the best in class. We're proud of this, especially when you know that the support team is our number one reader and knows the documentation sets almost by heart.

We were blessed enough that several times, consultants shared customer testimonies and even video recordings with us to emphasise how the documentation helped them get onboarded quickly, and how much of a pleasure (yes, you read it correctly!) it was to find every bit of information they needed about Mirakl.

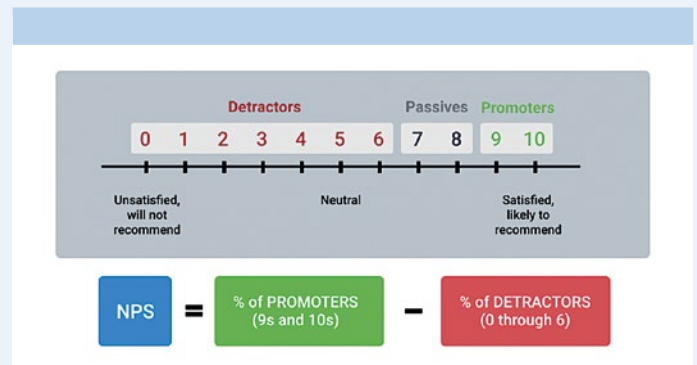


Figure 4. Overview of NPS calculation

Finding information is another aspect of Flare that we focused on.

When we converted our wiki documentation into Flare HTML files, it was imported without any metadata or keywords. Because our content is very sensitive and cannot be indexed or referenced by Google, we used the embedded mechanisms in Flare to improve our search results. Flare allows you to define index words (also known as keywords) and concepts per file. That's what we did.

In addition to the basic heading levels, with Flare, you can give more relevance to a topic by adding a list of index keywords and synonyms. In doing so, there are more chances that a user search will return relevant results. Furthermore, Flare can further suggest a list of index words if you want. You can also integrate a Google Analytics script to your master pages and look for 'Search terms'. This information helps you ensure that index words are meaningful for your users and complement your topics.

The search bar is often the entry point to your documentation or Help Centre, and you can also create filters from the search bar, helping end users further tailor their searches based on their profile and needs.

In addition to Flare search functionality, we're planning an integration with Algolia APIs. We'll leverage the tags from Flare (headings, concepts, master pages and so on) that are present in the rendered HTML files, and will use them to index and weight content in Algolia. The goal is to provide even more context so that end-users can find their way around Mirakl's growing documentation sets and modules.

### Providing micro content with MadCap Flare

To enhance our search capabilities, we're also using Flare's micro content feature.

Micro content can be text, images, and videos that can be consumed by a reader in about 10-20 seconds. We see micro content often when we use Google. When you search

in Google, you may see a featured result at the very top of the search results. Sometimes it's text, but it can also include procedures, images or video links. Have a question? Here's a quick answer. That's micro content.

We adapted and took advantage of Flare's micro content feature to document Mirakl APIs. Our users' behaviours showed that 'integration' and 'API documentation' were the most commonly searched terms, so we created a template of micro content for searches around the term 'API', providing several details about the use of the API along with illustrated use cases. We also include links to our dedicated API documentation portal, which is custom-developed by our developers using the doc-as-code method to ensure that API information is always up-to-date.

Micro content is now loved and cherished by Mirakl's client success consultants and solution engineers. Whenever there are no search results for a topic or an API is not yet documented, we are notified within a few hours that something is missing.

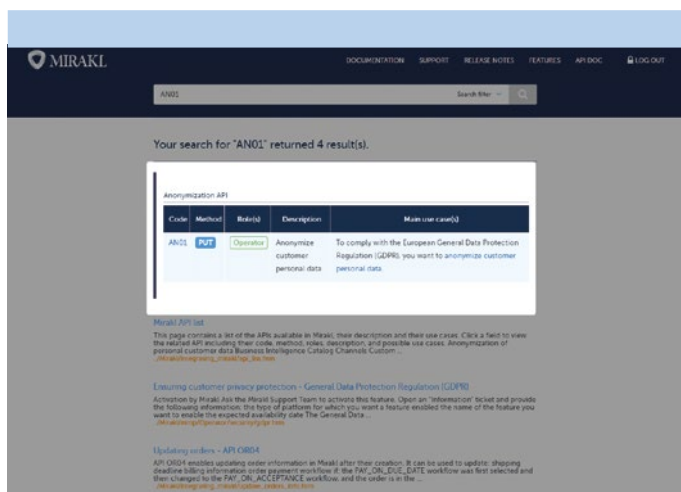


Figure 5. Example of a micro-content result

## Standardising while diversifying content

As Mirakl grows, it is critical that we are able to quickly onboard new members in the documentation team while ensuring that content is consistent. Master page and template management in Flare guarantees that every enhancement is propagated to all the files and is available by default for every user. The same goes with our title snippets and step snippets. We all use the same elements, preserving both documentation consistency and the end-user experience.

To support Mirakl users in learning how to use the application, and as per end-user request, we also use Flare's embedded features to include videos from Vimeo in the documentation. They complement the written documentation and make the documentation pages more dynamic. This also ensures that users have all the information they need.

We've also taken advantage of how extensible and customisable Flare can be. Most recently, we worked with Mirakl developers to add share buttons to the documentation pages. They allow our customers to share documentation pages within their team and the company, as well as with customers and partners. As a result, Flare has not only had a positive impact on our internal and support teams, but also on the support teams of our customers.

## Measuring the added value

Our journey with Flare is a true testament that strong technical communication can bring added value at every stage of a company:

- Flare allows us to keep customers informed of our latest developments thanks to the 'one-button-publication' and the fast rendering in HTML5 (we update the documentation several times a week).
- With multichannel publishing capabilities, we can produce PDF outputs from the same content, and therefore satisfy and empower the Sales and Legal teams with on-demand delivery of contractual content.
- We have seen the increased use of the documentation in general as an argument to convince and reassure prospects.
- The recent code snippets feature helps us assist consultants during their integration workshops with customers.

The support team and customers benefit from always up-to-date documentation. We could further develop more micro content usage to increase self-help and reduce tickets of the support team. However, we are currently focusing on further integration with Zendesk and Algolia at this time.

Today, our ambition is to grow the documentation and support resources into a complete Help Centre that fits all user profiles. To achieve this goal, we work closely with the UX/ Design team to validate each scenario to find the best solution for end-users.

Since the introduction of the Flare-based HTML5 help, Mirakl's customer base has grown significantly, and as we scale, the views for our documentation pages are rising even faster. This has also been offset with a reduction in the demands on our support team. Since introducing Flare, we've had a 10% year-over-year decrease in the number of questions that our support team receives from end-customers.

I'm now eager to capture new KPIs and further measure the added value of the documentation once our latest objectives go live. I also look forward to sharing these successes with others, such as the students in the technical communication course of Université de Paris with whom MadCap Flare started a scholarship program this year. ■

## References

All references accessed 17 May 2021.

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## Sabine Berland



**Sabine** is in charge of the Documentation and Translations team at Mirakl. She also teaches about software documentation at the Université de Paris where she uses MadCap Flare to illustrate best-practices and produce documentation outputs.