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AVST Uses MadCap Flare to Replace Four Documentation Applications, Eliminate the Need for a CMS, and Cut Project Time in Half

INDUSTRY

- Communications Software Solutions

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Chris Sullivan | AVST, Inc.

Goals:

- Cut time and cost for producing print and online documentation
- Increase documentation accuracy
- Improve writing team’s responsiveness
- Avoid cost and complexity of moving to a CMS

Solutions:

- MadCap Flare native XML content authoring software

Benefits:

- Project time is reduced by 50 percent
- AVST now maintains documentation in one application versus four
- Streamlined review cycle and ability to reuse topics have improved consistency and accuracy
- Translation into 13 languages from a single Flare project simplifies localization process
- Eliminated the need for an enterprise CMS



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As a leading developer of communications solutions, Applied Voice & Speech Technologies, Inc. (AVST) understands the importance of creating a first-class experience to attract and retain customers. At the same time, market pressures demand continual improvements in efficiency to drive competitiveness and profitability.

AVST's training and documentation team has helped the company meet both of its goals with MadCap Flare. Using Flare, has significantly streamlined its delivery of documentation and training materials—cutting training and documentation project time by 50 percent.

Through the comprehensive functionality of MadCap's flagship multi-channel publishing software, AVST no longer needs to use four applications to create the Administrator's Guide, Online Help, and Administrator's Training Guide for each of its products. Instead, Flare generates the content for all three AVST deliverables. The single-source publishing capabilities in Flare also have removed the need for AVST to purchase a content management system (CMS) costing tens of thousands of dollars more.

With MadCap, the output for all three deliverables is virtually flawless. Headings, the table of contents, cover page, and other elements all appear automatically without any manual manipulation after the fact.

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"With MadCap, the output for all three deliverables is virtually flawless. Headings, the table of contents, cover page, and other elements all appear automatically without any manual manipulation after the fact," said Chris Sullivan, AVST director of training and documentation. "Moreover, because our content updates occur in a single project, rather than four separate projects, the resulting output is generated in just a few minutes—saving us hours of updates, edits, revisions, and formatting."

For more than a quarter century, AVST has been producing a range of business communications applications, each of which requires administrator documentation, a training guide, and online Help system.

Prior to implementing Flare, Sullivan recalled, "It was tedious. Every time we had new information, we had to update the content fields in several applications. Compounding matters, some of our documentation was localized in 13 different languages, and those localizations had to be completed using these different applications. It was an extremely complex process."

"Now, by producing all three documentation deliverables in a single Flare project, we're seeing immediate savings," Sullivan says. "We simply have reviewers provide their feedback in a Word document, and we incorporate the changes into Flare. Similarly, translations are now completed using a single Flare project. Not only are these processes faster, they're also more accurate."

AVST recently completed a cost savings analysis for producing single-sourced documentation with Flare. The Online Help, which provided the core content, took 190 hours to develop, review, revise and produce. In the past, completing the Administrator's Guide and Administrator's Training Guide would then require another 99.2 hours each (198.4 hours total). However, because AVST was able to repurpose 50 percent of the topics in Flare, the documents only took 8.3 hours each (16.6 hours total) to produce, resulting in a total savings of 181.8 hours. With project-related labor costs averaging \$50 per hour, AVST was able to save \$9,088 producing one set of documentation.

The AVST analysis does not account for the added benefit of eliminating the need for a CMS, which would have added tens of thousands of dollars in license fees and hundreds of person-hours.

"The cost evaluation showed that our copies of MadCap Flare basically paid for themselves with just one set of single-sourced

documentation,” Sullivan said. “Equally important, our writers are achieving faster delivery to support the many tight turnaround situations we face each year.”

Widely used features in Flare include variables and conditional tables of contents. Variables have significantly cut the time it takes to customize documentation for its OEM partner, changing all of the names in order to re-brand the materials. Meanwhile conditional tables of contents for topics mean AVST simply needs to hide topics that the company is not using for the print version or vice versa. AVST also makes extensive use of pop-ups to give readers the option of expanded in-line text.

Going forward, AVST looks to begin using MadCap XEdit, which is available today, to further streamline the review process

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and keep all edits and comments in a single project. When it becomes available, AVST also plans to implement the MadCap Team Server, which will facilitate collaboration among the company’s distributed team of writers.

“Customer satisfaction is about being responsive and providing accurate information that users can trust,” Sullivan said. “MadCap Flare is playing a central role in helping us to optimize the customer experience on both fronts.”