ARCOM

Salt Lake City, Utah

ARCOM Uses MadCap Flare to Streamline Delivery of Print Documentation and Online Help for Construction Specifications Software

INDUSTRY

- Software

- Construction

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Goals:

- Enable easy customization of documents

- Streamline the delivery of online Help and print documentation

- Allow specification writing and software development teams to contribute content in Microsoft® Word™

- Support future developments, such as mobile Help systems

Solutions:

- MadCap Flare native XML tool for topic-based authoring and single-source publishing

Benefits:

- Flare's ability to import Word lets ARCOM specification writing and software development teams contribute content using a familiar application

- Single-sourcing allows various Help versions and product guides to be published from the same Flare project

- Separation of style from content makes it easy to adjust formatting without affecting text

- Native mobile publishing in Flare enabled rapid delivery of a prototype mobile Help system

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ARCOM is dedicated to helping design and building professionals easily produce the most accurate specifications in the construction industry. Since 1995, that has meant wearing two hats.

On the one hand ARCOM publishes MasterSpec®, the industry's preeminent master guide specification system, on behalf of The American Institute of Architects (AIA). On the other, it delivers the SpecWare® family of software tools for taking advantage of MasterSpec by automating construction specification development and editing.
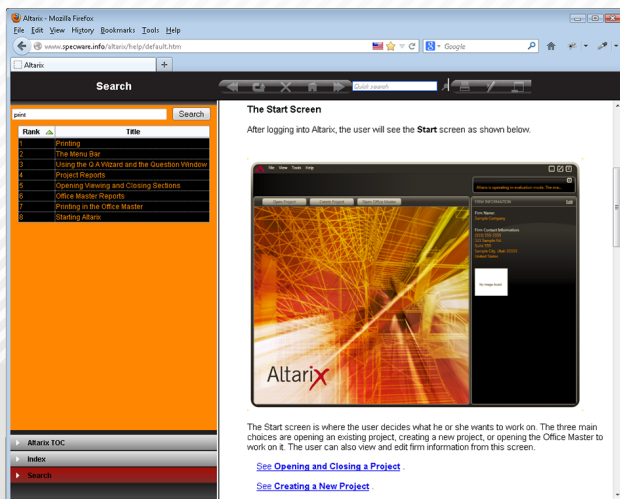
Today, ARCOM relies on the single-source publishing capabilities of MadCap Flare to deliver both print documentation and online Help for its SpecWare software tools from the same source content.

ARCOM's WebHelp Search Screen

Company at a Crossroads

For years, ARCOM used Adobe® RoboHelp® to help develop its print documentation and online Help. However when it was time to upgrade to a newer version of the software, the company decided to explore other solutions in the market.

"We were at a crossroads," recalled Gregory Owens, ARCOM senior quality assurance engineer. "Do we want to continue with what we had or use something new?"

The company's search led to MadCap Flare, which offered the single-sourcing that the technical communications team sought to streamline its efforts. Flare also enabled Microsoft® Word™ documents to be easily imported, allowing ARCOM specification writing and software development teams to contribute content using familiar software.

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Most importantly, Gregory observed, "We tried Flare out for a trial period, and within that trial period we were able to do everything that we wanted to do and then some." He added, "RoboHelp was nice, but using Flare was the difference between riding a skateboard versus driving a Ferrari."

Streamlining Content Creation

One of ARCOM's SpecWare tools builds on Microsoft® Word™ and adds capabilities—think macros on steroids—that enable

ARCOM's customers to manipulate the specifications they need for their construction projects. Using Flare, the company can take input from multiple sources and import it into Flare almost seamlessly and with very little manipulation in order to produce documentation for end users.
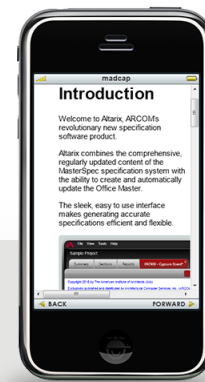
"When it's time for our specification writing and development teams to develop documentation or online Help, I can give them a template for the heading, paragraphs and outline. Then, once they're finished, I use Flare to import the content and review it," Gregory explains. "I also have the option to let them manage the Word™ document. Then, if they add changes, I can re-import them without much involvement."

Looks are important as well for ARCOM management. Reviewers not only look at the content, they also review documentation and online Help to ensure usability and brand consistency.
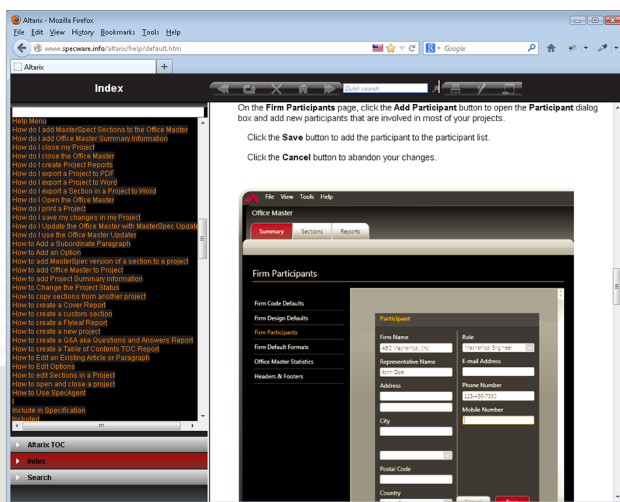
"The way things look is very important to our brand and how we present documentation," notes Gregory. "One of the beautiful things about Flare is how it separates style from content, so it's a snap to fix the formatting without affecting the text."

ARCOM's WebHelp Indexing Screen

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ARCOM currently takes advantage of single-sourcing to publish the content in Flare as print documentation delivered as downloadable PDFs and as Web-based Help. Choosing the different outputs is simply a matter of setting up different targets.

Looking ahead, the company also plans to add mobile versions of its Help systems.

ARCOM's Upcoming Mobile WebHelp

"I was able to quickly create a mobile version of our online Help and show it to our software development director," Gregory recalls. "When he asked how I did it, I replied, 'Flare.' Now it is just a matter of creating mobile skins that match the look of our Web-based Help."

Gregory adds, "At the heart of it, our customers rely on us to provide the tools and accurate information they need for their construction projects to succeed. With Flare, creating the content to help them get the most out of these tools is easier than ever."