



A Case Study in Technical
Communication Best Practices

bre

COMPANY WEBSITE

www.bre.co.uk

LOCATION

Watford, United Kingdom

INDUSTRY

Building and Construction

Leading International Building Research Firm Relies on Single-Source Publishing of MadCap Flare to Cut Production Time of Print and Online Documentation

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GOALS

- » Increase efficiency and content consistency through single-source publishing of documentation for 10 environmental assessment schemes, including printed manuals, downloadable PDFs, and online Help.
- » Strengthen collaboration among BRE writers and subject matters experts.
- » Enhance users experience by making it easier to navigate the documentation to find the information they need.

SOLUTIONS

- » MadCap Flare native XML single-source content authoring software
- » MadCap Analyzer for analyzing Flare content and recommending improvements
- » MadCap Contributor for reviewing and contributing to Flare-based documentation

BENEFITS

» EFFICIENCY

MadCap Flare's topic-based single-source publishing simplifies the delivery of documentation, including online Help, PDF files, and printed manuals. Snippets and conditional tags enable writers to tailor content for manuals serving different audiences.

» QUALITY

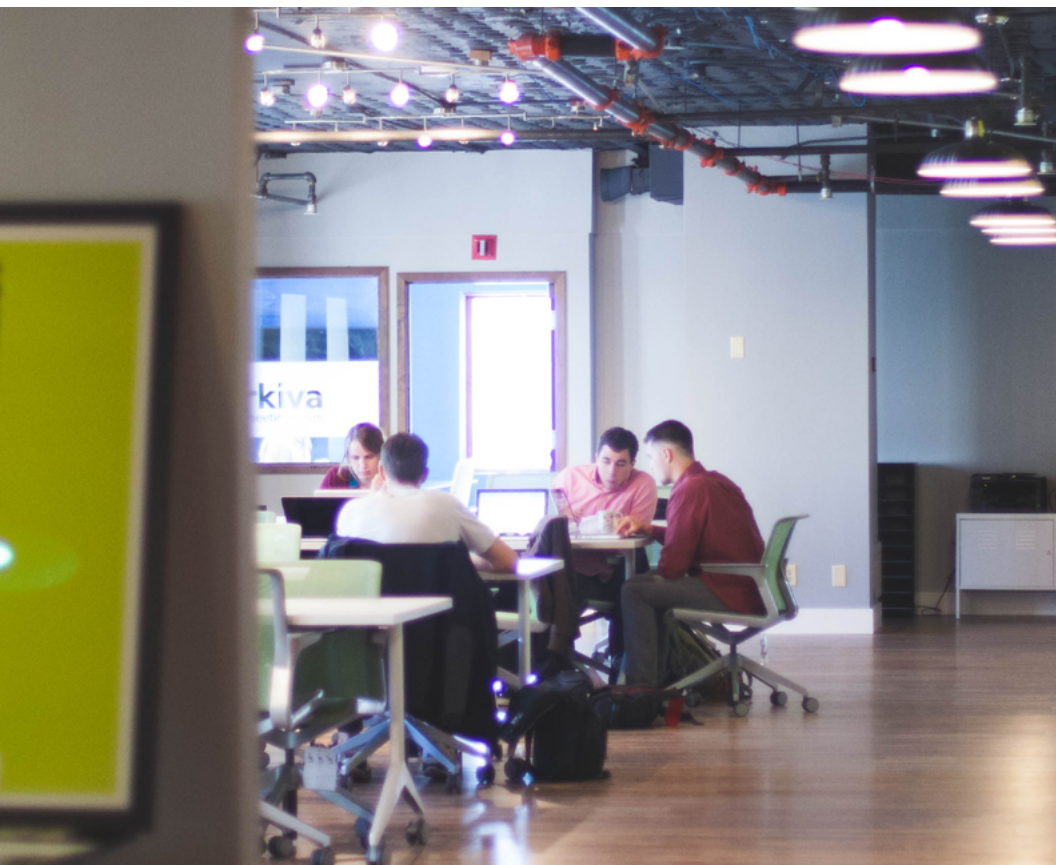
Single-source publishing in MadCap Flare ensures consistency across different manuals. MadCap Analyzer analyzes BRE's Flare-based content to identify issues and recommend improvements.

» COLLABORATION

Integration of MadCap Flare with Subversion provides version control of content created by teams of writers. MadCap Contributor enables other BRE team members to contribute content to Flare without having to worry about the design elements.

» INTUITIVE USER EXPERIENCE

Search functionality and glossaries built using Flare enable users to readily find the information they need whether accessing documentation online or in print.



BRE Group, headquartered in the United Kingdom, is a world-renowned building research, consultancy and testing organization for the construction and build environment sectors. For nearly 100 years, BRE has helped government and private sector clients meet the significant environmental, social and economic challenges that clients face in delivering homes, buildings and communities.

Over time, BRE has created the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology (BREEAM), which is the world's longest established method of assessing, rating and certifying the sustainability of buildings. More than 250,000 buildings have been BREEAM-certified, and more than a million are registered for certification in the UK and worldwide.

To help its independent, licensed assessors and customers understand the BREEAM process, requirements and ratings across different categories of sustainability, BRE delivers online Help, printed manuals, and PDF guides. Today this documentation is delivered using the single-source, multi-channel publishing capabilities of MadCap Flare.

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The Challenges of Managing Multiple Versions

For years, BRE used other software to produce its online Help and print documentation. However, BRE found it increasingly difficult to keep track of multiple versions of the same documentation, each with slightly different variations.

“Keeping all our documentation versions in sync resulted in a lot of multi-source issues, which slowed down the completion time of our manuals,” recalls Peter Giblin, BRE business systems analyst. “We needed new software that could help us maintain consistency in our documents, forms and phraseology, as well as speed up the process of delivering information to our assessors and customers.”

BRE began its software search with three goals in mind. It had to help the company keep track of multiple versions of its manuals; update documentation efficiently; and produce it in a mix of PDF, online Help and print formats. In the process, the company evaluated products from several technical documentation software companies, including MadCap Software.

“We did a lot of research on the various documentation software companies before downloading the trial of MadCap Flare,” Giblin recalled. “Flare ticked off all the boxes that we needed, and we haven’t looked back since.”

Single-Source Publishing With MadCap Flare

Taking advantage of MadCap Flare’s single-source functionality has enabled BRE to organize, customize and reuse content for ten different BREEAM schemes. These include manuals for each of the four countries that comprise the United Kingdom (UK): England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Additionally BRE produces a general UK manual for non-domestic builders plus international manuals for new and refurbished non-domestic buildings.

Because all of the documentation is stored centrally in a MadCap Flare project, BRE is able to reuse the content that is common across its various manuals, as well as prevent duplicate information and inconsistent phraseology.

“The topic-based approach to authoring and content reuse enabled by Flare have allowed us to drastically cut down the time it takes to create manuals and get the information out to our assessors and customers,” Giblin observes.

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Streamlining the Documentation Process

Additional capabilities in MadCap Flare have enabled BRE to streamline the process of creating and publishing documentation, including the Microsoft Word import function, snippets, and conditional tags.

“For our UK non-domestic manual alone, we have seven different versions—all with slightly different information, and trying to keep track of all that without Flare would be impossible.

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“Using Flare, we’ve adapted all of our UK manuals from Word documents into single-source documentation, and it’s been working out great for us,” Giblin says.

Meanwhile, Giblin explains, “We are using snippets and conditional tagging in Flare to help weed through certain content and insert slightly different information where we need to.”

For example, BRE has five different print versions of the UK non-domestic manual plus online Help and a downloadable PDF file.

“For our UK non-domestic manual alone, we have seven different versions—all with slightly different information, and trying to keep track of all that without Flare would be impossible,” Giblin notes.

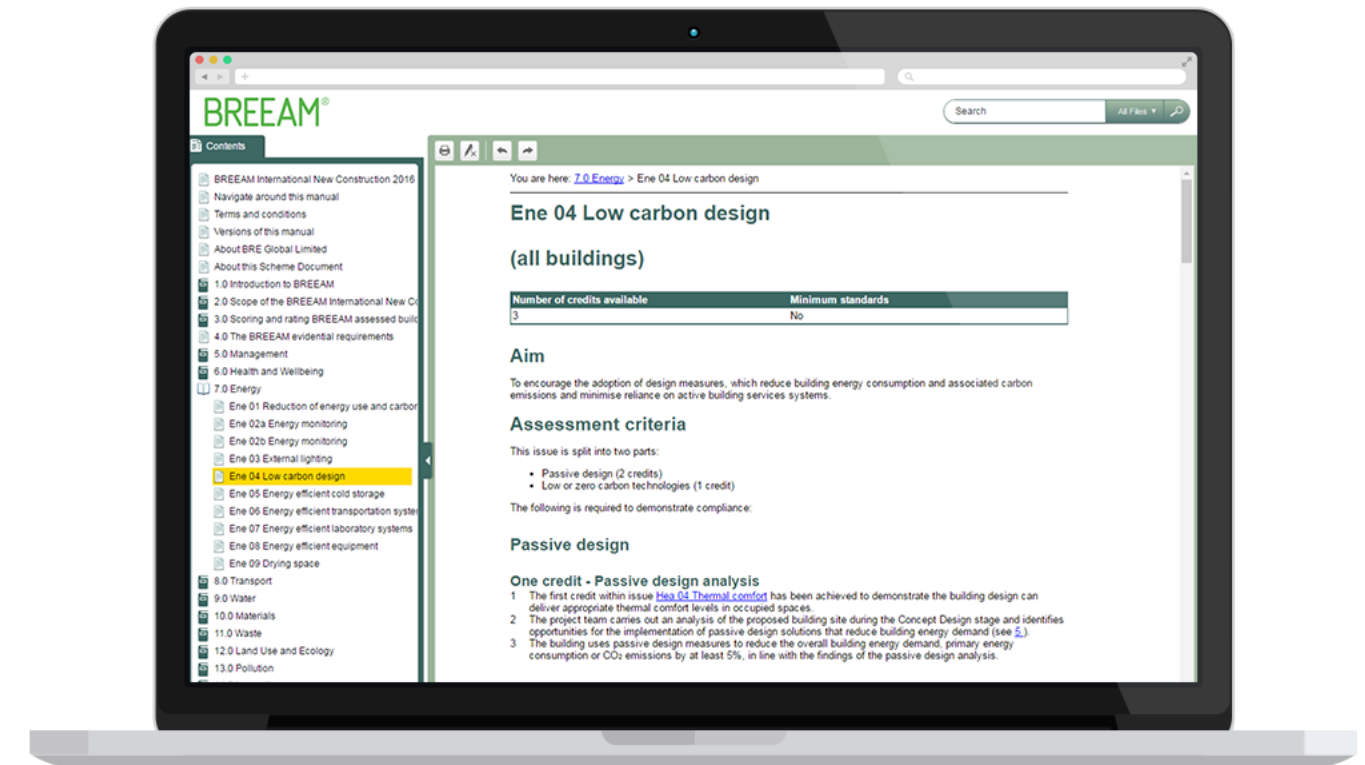
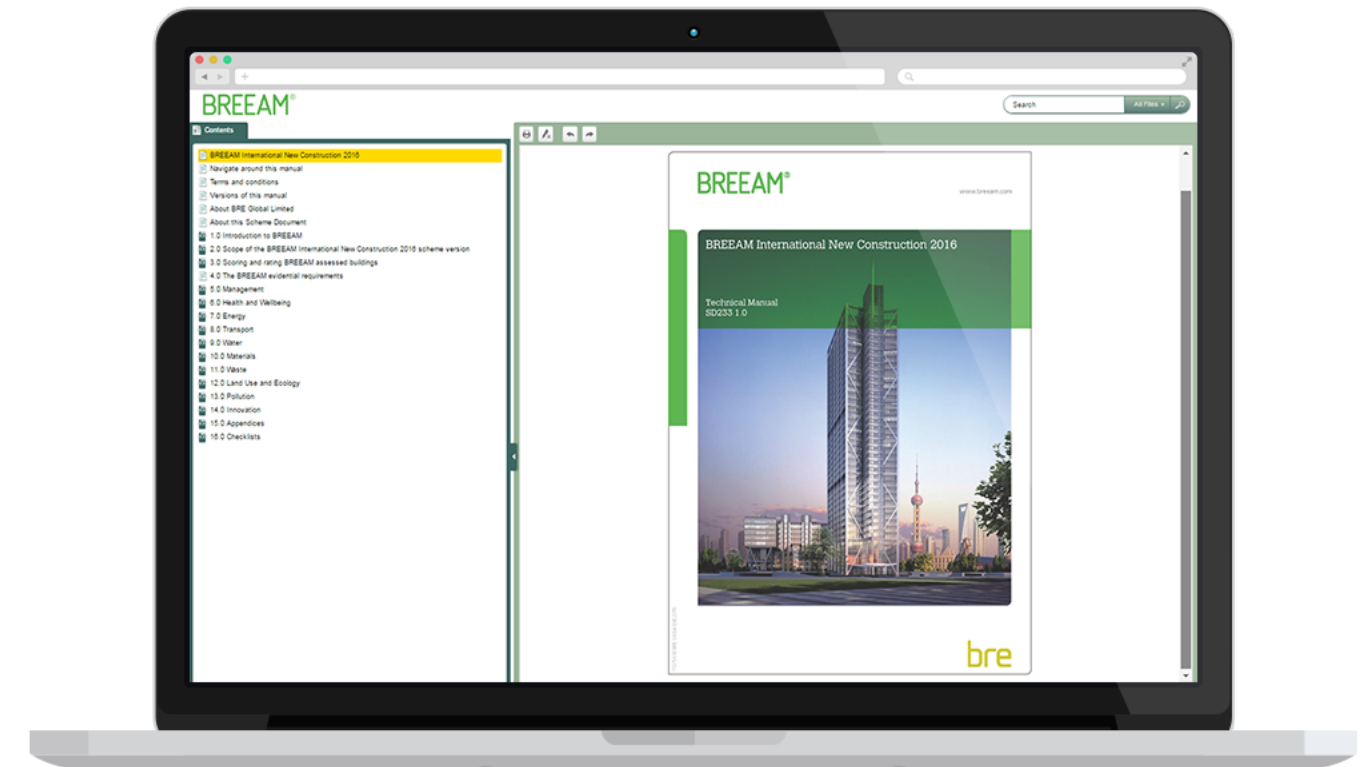
The MadCap support team and community also have contributed to BRE’s efficiency by helping the company to resolve issues quickly.

“MadCap support is really good. If we reach out to the support team at the beginning of the day, we get a response back from them by the end of the day,” Giblin observes. “Additionally, if we need a quick fix, we often use the MadCap forums or MadCap user group on LinkedIn. Both are great and very helpful.”

Improving Content Quality

To enhance the quality of its manuals, BRE also uses MadCap Analyzer, which is fully integrated with MadCap Flare. MadCap Analyzer goes through BRE’s Flare-based documentation to help find issues, such as missing content, broken hyperlinks, and unused style sheets that need to be removed from the project.

Additionally, BRE uses the reporting feature in MadCap Analyzer to share information with its documentation teams about issues and the progress of projects—further helping to ensure the quality of manuals while improving team efficiency.



BREEAM Online Help Created With MadCap Flare

“Before we go live with our Flare-based manuals, Analyzer gives us the chance to verify the status of our links, and it notifies us if we are missing pages in our documentation.”

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“It’s very helpful to have a reference for all our documentation”, explains Giblin. “Before we go live with our Flare-based manuals, Analyzer gives us the chance to verify the status of our links, and it notifies us if we are missing pages in our documentation. This helps us to stay on track as we create and update our manuals.”

Fostering Collaboration

At the same time, BRE fosters team collaboration through the use of Apache Subversion, Microsoft SharePoint and MadCap Contributor.

“We use Subversion integrated with Flare for version control, so that we can keep track and manage changes to our documentation files,” Giblin explains. “We also find using Microsoft SharePoint Explorer for managing review packages to be useful. No one is perfect when it comes to updating and keeping track of documents, so knowing we have a backup to revert back to, is very important.”

Meanwhile, MadCap Contributor enables BRE’s writers and subject matter experts to review and contribute to content in a Flare project.

“We want to make sure our writers can focus solely on the writing aspect of the manuals and not worry about the design and layout,” Giblin notes. “So we’ve created a form in Contributor that our writers use to input information, and then we are able to open that form and integrate it with Flare.”

Enhancing the User Experience

The range of manual output serves to address the diverse needs of assessors and customers going through the BREEAM process.

“Our customers use our print manuals for taking notes, the PDF version for references on terms, and the online Help for quick searches on questions that need fast answers when the customer is

on the go,” Giblin observes. “Also, our assessors are usually out in the field, and they are able to pull up the online Help and PDF versions of our manuals on a phone.”

Across the company’s different print and online versions of documentation, BRE provides a glossary created using MadCap Flare, which breaks down for readers the acronyms associated with the construction industry.

“Our glossary of acronyms helps out people who aren’t experienced in sustainability construction to easily find those acronyms and the meaning behind them on our Help website,” Giblin says.

For online users, BRE also uses the search functionality enabled by MadCap Flare.

“Instead of having to go to Google, customers and assessors on our Help website can go to the search bar and locate information simply by typing in a keyword,” explains Giblin. “It helps cut the time it takes for users to get what they need.”

As BRE moves forward, the company is looking at additional ways to enhance the user experience. The company is revisiting how to make its manuals, which can run 400 to 500 pages long, easier to navigate. It also is examining how to create versions of manuals that are fully optimized for mobile devices, as well as how to modernize the web experience of its online Help.

“We are currently in the process of creating an HTML5-based website with the top navigation that Flare now offers, which will create a more cohesive look for our online Help that is more like our corporate BRE website,” Giblin notes. “We’ve been using Flare for a number of years now with much success, and we are excited to move forward with Flare and see what it has to offer for our future.”

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