



Rochester, NY

Website: <http://www.cymphonix.com>

Help: <http://help.cymphonix.com>

Cymphonix Uses Single-Sourcing in MadCap Flare to Publish Intuitive Product Help and Documentation in Print, Online and on Mobile Devices

INDUSTRY

- Network security

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Kathi Hennebry | **Cymphonix**

Goals:

- Create more intuitive online Help and print documentation for customers and employees
- Expand reach through mobile Help
- Enable easy customization of Help for OEMs
- Support new technology releases every four to six weeks

Solutions:

- MadCap Flare native XML multi-channel content authoring software

Benefits:

- Topic-based authoring facilitates the creation of intuitive, easy to navigate Help content
- Native mobile publishing in Flare lets Cymphonix offer mobile Help
- Single-sourcing allows five Help versions and numerous PDFs to be published from the same Flare project
- Variables and snippets automate many updates to support Cymphonix's rapid product release schedule

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A leader in Internet management solutions, Cymphonix is committed to providing organizations with the technology solutions and supporting documentation they need to reduce the time, effort, costs and risks of being connected to the Internet.

The Cymphonix Network Composer line of appliances gives businesses full visibility into and control over their Internet circuits in order to implement policies around usage, security, application control and bandwidth that are based on informed decisions. These industry-leading appliances are backed by equally state-of-the-art documentation, developed with MadCap Flare, which users can access in print, on the Web, and even on their mobile devices.

“With MadCap Flare, we’re able to deliver intuitive documentation and online Help that supports the many ways our customers and sales reps use our information,” says Kathi Hennebry, Cymphonix senior technical writer.

Wanted: Single-Source Authoring Solution

Two years ago, when Kathi joined Cymphonix, she was charged with selecting the technical communications software for producing a new generation of documentation and online Help for the company’s appliances. Although she formerly used a popular print publishing package in combination with another tool for Web authoring, she decided to research other options.

“Using two different tools was a complicated way to publish content, and I began reading about a new generation of single sourcing solutions that could handle both my print and online needs,” Kathi said.

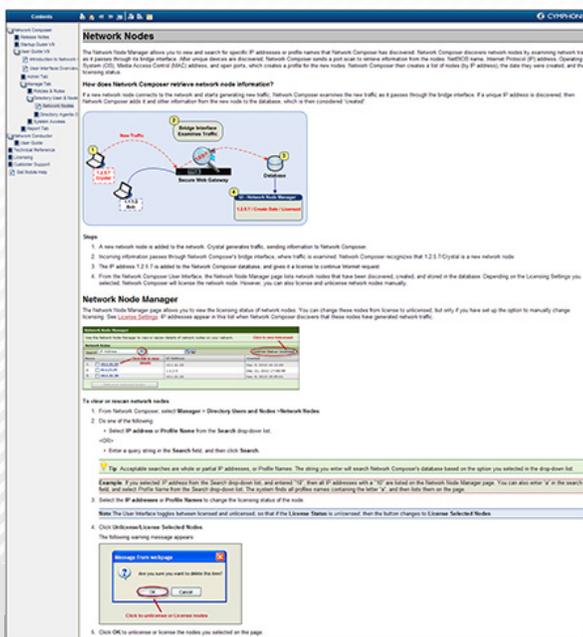
After researching several software options and talking with professional colleagues, she decided to download the trial version of MadCap Flare.

“I quickly realized that Flare would meet my need to make changes online on the fly. And with its cascading style sheets and use of variables, Flare made it very simple to change the formatting and creative skin to look like our home website,” Kathi recalls. “After two days, I was able to show the management team two files I had created with Flare and how easy it was to make changes. We all agreed that Flare was the right tool for us.”

Online Help that Works the Way Users Do

The first priority for Cymphonix was making the documentation available as online Help in addition to the printable PDF files it traditionally offered. Flare’s topic-based approach supported this effort by enabling the writing team to structure the online Help to support the ways that users access information online.

“When information is available on the Web, people click around to different topics,” Kathi explains. “With Flare, I can publish topics-for example, on how to set up the appliance that cross-reference the steps that occur beforehand and afterward.



Then, Flare lets me create links between the topics, so that it's easy to navigate from one topic to the next."

This simplifies the customers' experiences and helps ensure their success, observes Kathi; "Now, users who jump to topic two for the set-up process in the online Help, will be directed to topic one, and they get there with a single click. Similarly, once they've completed topic one, there is a notice at the bottom of the topic directing the user to topic two."

Flare's support for creating reusable snippets helps simplify the authoring of content that is cross-referenced throughout the Cymphonix online Help. This feature makes it possible to write a text snippet once and then use it in two or more places, and any edits to the snippet are automatically reflected wherever it appears.

Finally, the cascading style sheets in Flare have allowed Cymphonix to create an online Help user interface that replicates the look of the product screens. For instance, the admin tab in the online Help looks like the admin tab in the product, and there are different drop-down menus for accessing different network control features. The color schemes are very similar as well, helping customers to identify the Help topics that support different product features.

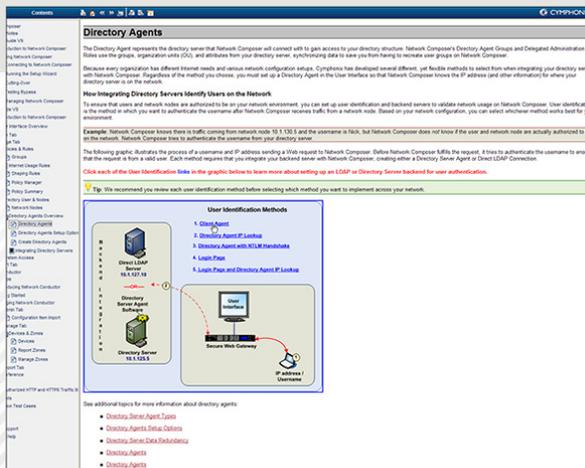
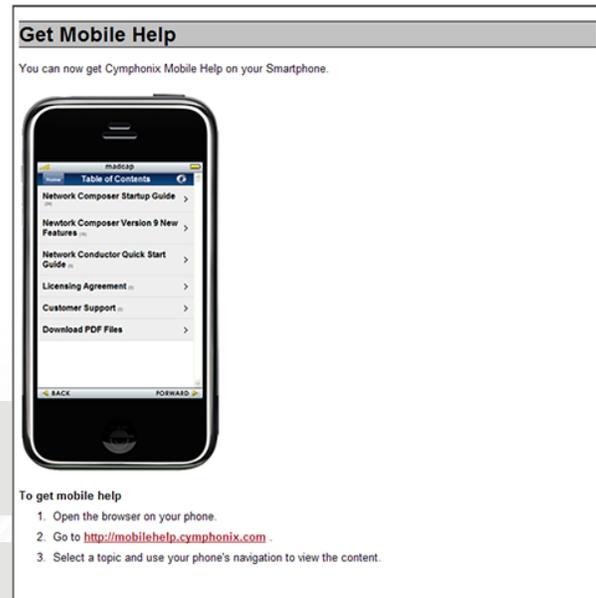
"We've received so many comments from our customers, support team, and sales reps about how simple and easy to use our online Help is," Kathi says.

Mobile Help Provides a New Level of Flexibility

Recently, Cymphonix has taken advantage of the native mobile output functionality in Flare and added a mobile Help option.

"When MadCap came out with mobile output in Flare, I immediately created a mobile version of our Help and showed it to my manager," Kathi recalls. "He was as excited as I was, and at the next management meeting, he rolled it out by having everyone pull out their mobile devices to try it."

The mobile Help has been popular with both Cymphonix customers and sales representatives, particularly when an appliance is being installed. Users like the mobile Help because it's easier to access Help on their smart phones over their wireless phone network than it is to get onto a laptop.



Significantly, Flare's mobile output is platform-independent, so it is available to a range of smart phone users. Kathi notes that, "You can come to our website and access mobile Help from an iPhone, an iPad, Blackberry or Android phone, and it works every time."

Write Once, Publish Many Ways

Cymphonix now publishes three versions of online Help for its customers and employees: the main Help system, mobile Help,

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and beta Help. Additionally, the company produces several PDF documents that are available for download, including a sales guide and various user guides.

“We started the beta Help site, so that it doesn’t disrupt our regular online Help,” Kathi explains. “The beauty of Flare is that once we’re ready to move to general availability, we can simply change the conditional tags to move the beta Help topics into the main Help system.”

Cymphonix also has OEM customers for which it produces versions of its online Help. By using variables to add the OEM-specific content and graphics, the company is able take the Flare-based source file and produce Help projects customized for each OEM, complete with skins that match the OEM’s sites. Cymphonix then sends the Help projects in Zip folders, so the OEMs can host the online Help on their own websites.

“We update our products every four to six weeks, and that means our online Help system, mobile Help, beta Help, PDF files, and Help files for our OEMs have to be updated as well,” Kathi explains. “Flare takes what could be a painful process, and makes it very easy. Variables and snippets help automate many of the changes, and removing a topic is as easy as un-clicking it from the table of contents.”

Moving forward, Cymphonix plans to migrate its knowledge base into Flare to provide employees with easier access to the product information they need. The company also is looking at embedding videos that provide more intuitive set-up instructions for customers.

“We have been using Flare for nearly two years, and our experience is that if there’s a way to do something, Flare can figure it out,” Kathi says. “And this lets us innovate in ways that create richer experiences for our users.”