Sylvan Learning

Baltimore, MD

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Sylvan Learning Uses MadCap Flare to Provide Web-based Help for Employees at 900-Plus Tutoring Centers

INDUSTRY

• Education

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Melissa Nelson | **Sylvan Learning**

Goals:

• Deliver online Help for employees at 900 Sylvan Learning Centers

• Provide users an easier and more intuitive way to access information

• Streamline publishing process through a single product for both print and Web content

• Facilitate ability of knowledge experts to contribute content

Solutions:

• MadCap Flare native XML multi-channel content authoring software

Benefits:

• Flare's single-source, multi-channel publishing lets Sylvan publish print and Web documentation from the same Flare project

• Flare's ease of use and intuitive processes for technical writers helped Sylvan get up and running quickly

• Topic-based publishing, and features like single-click access to the glossary help users easily find the information they need

• Flare's ability to import Word lets knowledge experts contribute content using a familiar desktop application

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If any company understands the importance of sharing knowledge in a meaningful and easy-to-use way, it is Sylvan Learning. Sylvan is the premier provider of tutoring services to students of all ages, with instruction levels ranging from grade school to college prep and state exams. With some 30 years of experience, it has helped more than 2 million students to achieve success through Sylvan's proven process and personalized tutoring methods.

Today, Sylvan Learning is taking advantage of MadCap Flare and its single-source, multi-channel publishing to create both print and Web-based training documentation from the same source code, which allows employees at its 900-plus education centers to access the information they need in their preferred format.

Move to Online Training Creates New Documentation Demands

In the past, in-person training for Sylvan's 900-plus centers in North America has served as the primary vehicle for preparing new center staff. Increasingly, Sylvan is using technology-based training to create richer learning experiences. With this move has come the need to deliver the documentation that supports Sylvan's training both in print and on the Web.

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"For years, the documentation to support our training was published in PDF files, but with more tutors taking advantage of technology to enhance their teaching, we wanted to add an online Help system that would be easier for our support staff and educators to use," explains Melissa Nelson, Sylvan technical documentation specialist.

Ms. Nelson adds, "We really liked the efficiency of an authoring tool that would let us publish to both print and the Web. And after getting so many great references for Flare from the tech writer community, we decided it was the right software for our needs."

Ease of Use Streamlines Publishing, and Improves User Experience

Despite the industry endorsements for MadCap Flare, initially there was concern that its next-generation XML architecture would make the authoring tool complex to use. However, working with Flare quickly eliminated those fears.

"Flare has all these wonderful features that sound challenging, but when you use them, they're great," Ms. Nelson notes. "It's clear that the processes in Flare were created by tech writers for tech writers, and the features are very intuitive. For me, that ease of use is one of the most exciting things about Flare."

Ease of use also has come in MadCap Flare's ability to import Microsoft Word documents, allowing the many knowledge experts within Sylvan to contribute content using the familiar desktop application.

"We have five departments that provide content: operations, technology, customer care, education, and marketing," Ms. Nelson explains. "Now we just tell them, "Use this heading and font,' and then when they send us their content, they can see it on our online Help. That has been really valuable."

Another popular feature in Flare has been its glossary function, Ms. Nelson notes. "We have a lot of educational and technical acronyms in our documentation, so I love the glossary tool. I don't have to stop while writing to provide a definition for the

term. Instead, I just use the glossary link tool, which lets users click on the term to see the glossary description."

She adds, "This is also the type of feature that makes it easier for our users, who typically don't like to read documentation, to access the information they need."

Next Step: Integration of Documentation and Training Application

Significantly, the use of Flare for online documentation is part of Sylvan's evolving training strategy at Sylvan Learning, which is moving to include support, and in the future, online content will be linked directly to Sylvan's training application.

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"That's the exciting thing with Flare," Ms. Nelson says. "You don't need two tools, and that means a seamless experience for both our technical communications team and our users."