madcap software

PLEXSYS

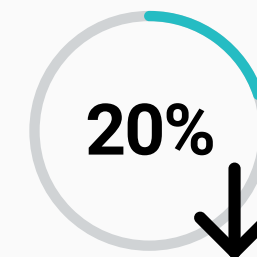Aerospace and Defense Training Solution Company PLEXSYS Moves to MadCap Flare to Modernize its Documentation and Cut Production Time by 20%

20% Cut Production Time by 20%

www.plexsys.com

Camas, Washington

INDUSTRY Aerospace and Defense

Since moving to MadCap Flare, PLEXSYS has cut the time to produce documentation by 20% while adding new product lines and providing more comprehensive online Help and print documentation for the many customized versions of its solutions.

For more than three decades, PLEXSYS has been delivering innovative solutions for the aerospace and defense industry, which merge simulation and reality for realistic and accurate training. Its tailored solutions include air, land, and maritime training environments; scenario generation; Live, Virtual, and Constructive (LVC) datalinks; model behaviors; and radar and weapons. Today, PLEXSYS customers represent a who's who of government and commercial air force, defense, aerospace and aeronautics organizations around the world.

PLEXSYS is driven to enable customers' best readiness and success throughout every aspect of its 100% employee-owned business—from state-of-the-art immersive simulations and software to its training and support teams to the documentation for using these solutions. To enable the single-source publishing of its online and print documentation, the company adopted MadCap Flare.

GOALS

- Replace previously used software with modern HTML5-based Help and print documentation.

- Facilitate content reuse for the many customized versions of its solutions that PLEXSYS produces for its different aerospace and defense customers.

- Reduce demands on the support team by providing intuitive, easy-to-use documentation for customers.

- Maintain documentation for multiple release versions of products, since not all customers migrate to newer versions at different times.

SOLUTIONS

- MadCap Flare native XML single-source, multi-channel content authoring software.

- MadCap Capture for screen capture and image editing.

BENEFITS

- **Efficiency**: MadCap Flare's single-source publishing, conditional text, snippets, variables, and Analyzer functionality enable PLEXSYS to deliver high-quality content for more products while cutting overall project time by 20%.

- **Intuitive Experience**: Top Navigation, modern search capabilities, and embedded screenshots in the HTML5-based Help make it easier for customers to find the information they need.

- **Reduced Support Demands**: Detailed, customized content based on MadCap Flare has resulted in fewer customer questions for the product support team.

- **Version Control**: MadCap Flare's integration with GitHub enables PLEXSYS to manage documentation for the different release versions of products being used by customers.

The Demand to Modernize Documentation

For years, PLEXSYS created all its documentation in popular word processing tools and then converted it into PDF files. However, it was difficult to maintain different versions of the same document for various customers. Additionally, as the company began developing a new product line, the team wanted to support it with HTML, context-sensitive Help.

Initially, PLEXSYS decided to migrate to different software solution for its print documentation and online Help. The team also became trained in using the Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA). But, after several months, it became clear that the current solution would not support everything that PLEXSYS wanted it to do.

"I realized that other products couldn't do what we needed them to do without a lot of other third-party plugins, and one day when I was frustrated, I decided to look at MadCap Flare," explained Jenni Christensen, training and technical documentation manager at PLEXSYS.

Over the years, many companies have turned to MadCap Flare because it allows them to apply DITA concepts in an elegant and easy-to-use way. For the PLEXSYS team, which had become well-versed on DITA best practices, MadCap Flare provided a natural fit.

> I downloaded the 30-day trial of Flare, and I very strategically tested the exact features that we needed. Not only did Flare do what I wanted, but it also did it effectively.
>
> **JENNI CHRISTENSEN**
> Training and Technical Documentation Manager, PLEXSYS

After several members of the management team compared the results of the MadCap Flare test project against content being developed with other software solutions, PLEXSYS decided to migrate to Flare.

Maximizing Content Reuse

Today, the product line that served as the catalyst for modernizing PLEXSYS' content delivery

features eight applications, which are all supported by both HTML5 Help and PDF documentation produced using MadCap Flare. To ensure confidentiality and security, the HTML5 output is provided along with the software on a web server that PLEXSYS provides each customer so that it can only be accessed via a server or intranet behind the customer's firewall.

PLEXSYS also uses MadCap Flare to provide PDF documentation for its other five product lines, including 29 applications. While customers are the primary audience for the documentation, the product support team uses it as well. Plus, PLEXSYS uses MadCap Flare to produce two internal documents to support the bids and proposals team, which provide guidelines on how to do pricing and provide the verification document required when bidding on some government contracts.

Beyond single-source publishing, conditional text and variables in MadCap Flare also play an essential role in streamlining the delivery of documentation by enabling content reuse.

> With conditional text in Flare, we can provide more comprehensive documentation than was ever possible before and manage all of those variations. It is one of the biggest advantages we have seen from Flare.
>
> **JENNI CHRISTENSEN**
> Training and Technical Documentation Manager, PLEXSYS

"For example, we have 24 versions of one application because we do a lot of work for specific companies or entities that can't be shared with other people," Jenni explains. "With conditional text in Flare, we can provide more comprehensive documentation than was ever possible before and manage all of those variations. It is one of the biggest advantages we have seen from Flare."

Additionally, Jenni notes, "We use variables extensively along with snippets in MadCap Flare for different target versions, in some cases rebranding the product where the code base underlying is similar, but the output that the customer is buying is different or has different subsets."

Technical writers are not the only ones who have benefitted. Because customers get more specific information upfront, the PLEXSYS product support team no longer must spend as much time providing particular set-up and configuration guidance.

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Ensuring Consistency, Version Control, and Quality

To ensure consistency across all its solutions, PLEXSYS maintains a global project that has all its branding assets and licensing information, which is the same across all products. Using the import feature in MadCap Flare, the team then imports this global or "parent" project into multiple "child" projects.

"We've set it up with Flare such that our child projects are linked to the parent project," Jenni notes. "Now, if we update something in the global project, when we go to publish a target in the child project, it automatically pulls those updates and publishes the new information."

Beyond multiple product versions, PLEXSYS also manages different releases of those products. To maintain documentation for these various releases, the company relies on GitHub for version control integrated with MadCap Flare.

"Sometimes the way our contracts are set up, we might have moved on to a newer software version, but a customer is still on an older version, and we have to provide documentation for that version," Jenni explains. "GitHub combined with Flare is beneficial for this kind of timeline because we can create a branch stub in GitHub for that older version and publish it from there if needed. It has been a very fluid, effective, and smooth process."

Before publishing any documentation or HTML5 Help, PLEXSYS runs the Analyzer functionality within MadCap Flare to ensure that there are not any broken links.

> ❝
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>
> **JENNI CHRISTENSEN**
> Training and Technical Documentation Manager, PLEXSYS

"I love the Analyzer functionality in Flare," Jenni says. "We've iterated on our processes for implementing our Flare projects, and the Analyzer tool in Flare helps us identify what we want to change and make those changes quickly. It has really been integral to our ability to iterate and improve our internal processes faster."

Enhancing the User Experience

For its online Help, PLEXSYS has aimed to create a modern web experience even though the Help runs on a local server or intranet. To do so, the team has used the HTML5 output, top navigation, and search functionality provided by MadCap Flare.

Beyond single-source publishing, conditional text and variables play an essential role in streamlining the delivery of documentation for PLEXSYS.

> " One of our products might have five applications supporting it, and the HTML5 output and search with Flare allow us to more easily put all that information in one place and help customers find it.

JENNI CHRISTENSEN
Training and Technical Documentation Manager, PLEXSYS

"One of our products might have five applications supporting it, and the HTML5 output and search with Flare allow us to easily put all that information in one place and help customers find it," Jenni observes. "Internally, our product support team, project managers, and employees learning the software have all found the Flare search functionality helpful as well."

To help illustrate key concepts for users, the HTML5 Help and PDF documentation all incorporate screenshots created using MadCap Capture, which is tightly integrated with MadCap Flare.

"We use MadCap Capture for all of our screenshots along with the conditional tags in Flare. This enables us to provide far more images for our customers since we can control who gets which image," Jenni explains. "We've gotten a lot of feedback both internally and externally that customers have appreciated how many more images we're able to provide them."

> " A project manager told me that he used to get a lot more questions. Now, when he hands the Flare-based manuals out to customers, he hears almost nothing from them because they are getting the information that they need.

JENNI CHRISTENSEN
Training and Technical Documentation Manager, PLEXSYS

Optimizing Team Performance

Since implementing MadCap Flare, PLEXSYS has reduced the time to develop and publish all its content by 20% even as the company has added two new product lines and eight new applications.

> " We've effectively halved our work time using Flare. It has enabled us to do a whole lot more without scaling our team as much as we would've needed to if we had remained using other products.

JENNI CHRISTENSEN
Training and Technical Documentation Manager, PLEXSYS

"We've effectively halved our work time using Flare. It has enabled us to do a whole lot more without scaling our team as much as we would've needed to if we had remained using other products." Jenni notes. "I definitely haven't looked back."

Beyond efficiencies, the results of using MadCap Flare are leading PLEXSYS product managers to think more strategically about how they approach documentation.

> " Everybody has been excited to see what we're already doing with Flare and what we can do in the future.

JENNI CHRISTENSEN
Training and Technical Documentation Manager, PLEXSYS

"Using Flare has made us a lot more modern and proactive, and that really benefits the way that we're able to support customers using our products," Jenni observes. "I'm excited to see the subtle cultural shifts in our company that have taken place over the last couple of years; everybody has been excited to see what we're already doing with Flare and what we can do in the future."

For more success stories on ways smart companies are increasing productivity, reducing costs, and streamlining content delivery, visit:

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