

# Getting Started with MadCap Flare

## Part 1: Basic Concepts



# Who Am I?

» Neil Perlin – Hyper/Word Services.

- Internationally recognized content creation and delivery consultant.
- Helps create efficient, flexible content.
- Certified – Flare, Mimic, ViziApps.
- Works to make the complex understandable.



# Welcome to...

- » The first of four webinars for new Flare users.
- » We'll examine basic concepts and terms underlying Flare.
- » The result – you'll be able to make better use of Flare's features...
- » ...possibly even learn about features that you didn't know existed.

# Today's Agenda

» Analogizing Flare to Word

» Defining:

- Project and topic
- Topic-based vs. document-based authoring
- Structured authoring
- Single sourcing and multi-channel publishing
- Version control

# Analogizing Flare to Word

- » Let's compare authoring in Flare to Word.
  - You create content in both tools.
  - You format content in both tools.
  - You insert graphics in both tools.
  - You add navigation via a ToFC, index (maybe), and cross-references in both tools.
- » So you already have the basic concepts for working with Flare.

# Analogizing Flare to Word

## » So what's different in Flare?

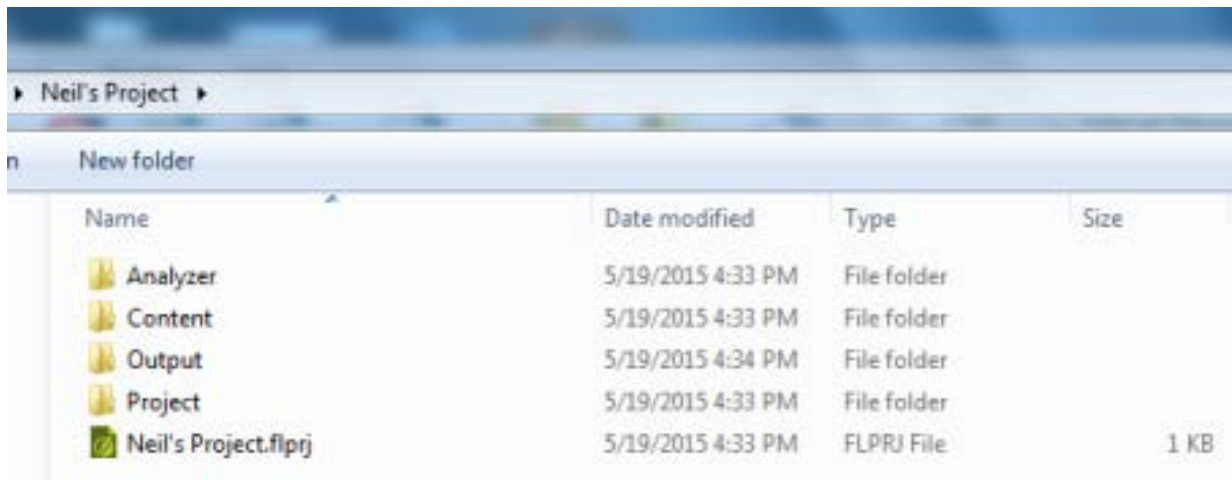
- Content is in short chunks – “topics” – in Flare.
- You format content using a “CSS”.
- You can insert movies as well as graphics.
- Navigation can include search.
- Output is typically online rather than print.
  - Can use Flare as your primary authoring platform?
- Online output can adapt to mobile.

# What's a Project

- » Common definition – a container for all the files used to generate your outputs.
- » The primary files are:
  - Content files – in the Content folder.
  - Control files – in the Content and Project folders.
  - Output files – in the Output folder (usually).
  - Flprj – main project control file.

# What's a Project

- What you'll see in Windows Explorer...



- Plus, project info used by the Analysis feature, in the Analyzer folder.
  - The actual Analyzer is a separate product.



# What's a Topic?

- » As short, focused and self-contained as possible a discussion about one subject.
  - Focused – Answers one question – “How do I...?”, “What is...?”, etc.
  - Self-contained – Contains all the info needed to answer the question.
    - Related info is in separate topics.
    - Topics link to related topics.

# Topics vs. Documents

- » A document is one big chunk of content.
  - Difficult or impossible to subdivide and re-assemble in different forms.
- » A topic is one little chunk of content.
  - Many topics can be threaded together to create the document and other outputs.
  - Like the necklace you made in summer camp...

# What Is Structured Authoring?

- » Authoring with structure.
  - Just means content has structure – no preconceptions about what that is or how it's applied.
- » So what is “structure”?
  - Standard and consistent sectional, syntactical, and stylistic rules.
  - Controlled using Flare features like stylesheets and templates.
  - What technical communicators have always created, albeit usually manually...

# Why Work This Way?

- » Multi-author capable.
- » Writing a chunk once by one author equals consistency, accuracy, accountability.
- » Re-usable across multiple projects.
- » Automated custom output affordably.

# But...

- » It's a new way of writing.
  - Lack of flow between topics makes it easy for authors to lose continuity, focus.
  - Hard to re-use content for stylistically different outputs, like tech support and marketing.

# But...

» It can be hard to manage.

- A topic should be the smallest unit of content that answers a question.
- But over-granularity can equal a huge number of topics and files.
- May be hard to communicate project detail to the next generation of developers.

» KISS!

# What Is Single Sourcing?

- » Something new, exotic, and complex?
  - New? No. Appeared in '91 with Doc-To-Help.
  - Exotic? No. Just means using content for different outputs.
  - Complex? Could be...
- » The term has two accepted definitions.

# Definition 1

- » Write content once in one place and extract selective subsets for use:
  - In different formats...
  - On different devices...
  - In different markets...
  - For different audiences...
  - And so on...



# Definition 2

- » Create chunks of content to be re-used in a project or in different projects.
  - Like a Note or a dialog box description to be used in multiple topics.

# Benefits of Single Sourcing

- » Content only maintained in one place.
  - One owner writing a chunk once = consistency, accuracy, accountability.
- » Re-usability – Across multiple projects.
  - Careful design can allow support for outputs that didn't exist when the project began.
- » Automated custom output affordably.

# Also Known As...

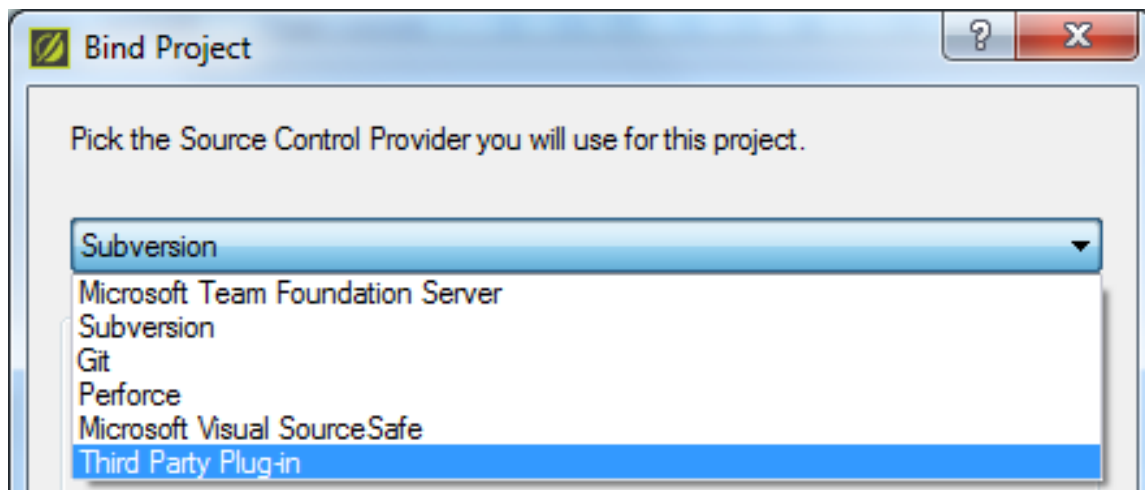
- » “Multi-channel publishing”
- » Essentially means the same thing as single sourcing but:
  - Focuses more on the output side.
  - Sounds cooler than “single sourcing.”

# Version Control

- » Like a lockable file cabinet for a project.
- » Projects are stored in a central repository, usually on a server, with local copies on authors' PCs.
- » Can only let one author at a time edit, or let multiple authors edit simultaneously and then resolve conflicts.
- » Also allows “diffing”, history, “rollbacks”.

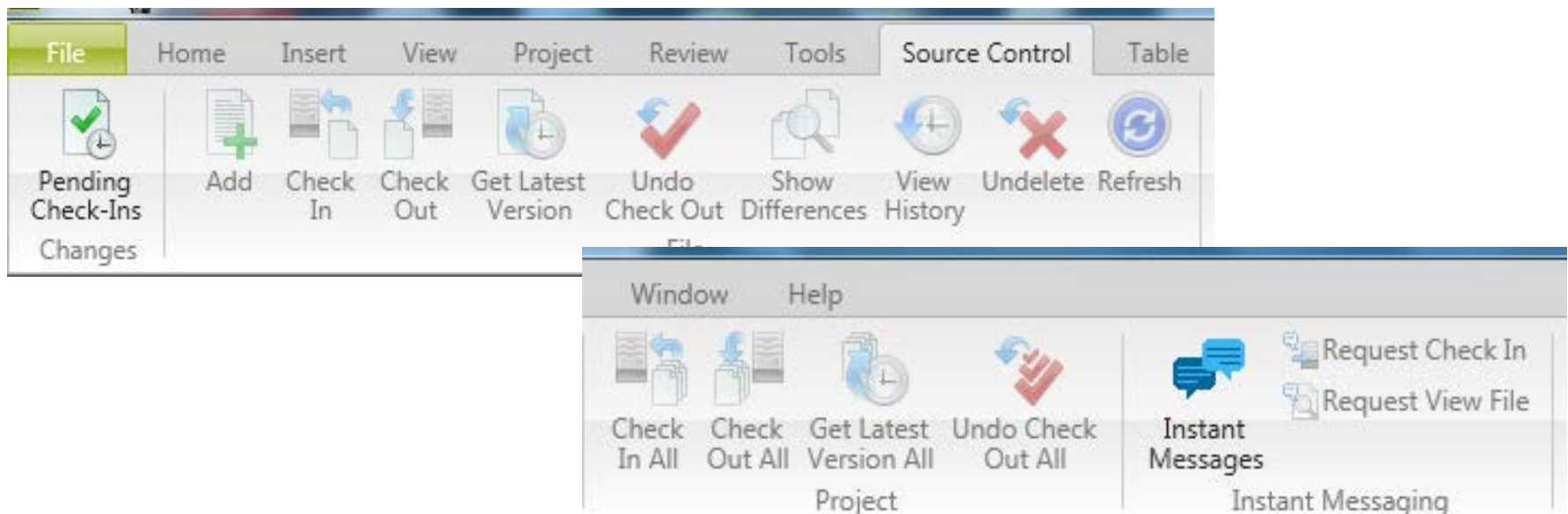
# Version Control

» Flare 11 supports these version control tools natively.



# Version Control

- » Once the project is in version control, you get the Flare Source Control ribbon.
- Different version control tools have different ribbons but the concept is the same.



# Version Control Pros and Cons

## » Pros

- Protects the projects by taking them off your C drive.
- Limits edit access to one author at a time, or resolves conflicts between multiple authors.

## » Cons

- Setup requires IT involvement, if only briefly.
- Check-in/check-out adds an operational layer – “Gotta go. My ride is waiting”.

# Summary

- » The next two webinars will introduce specific Flare features, including styles, skins, proxies, and more.
- » And one more that looks at different ways to structure a Flare project.
- » These webinars may be repeated, so let us know if there's a topic you think should be added for next time.



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Structured Authoring



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# Thank you... Questions?



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