Comparison of Help Authoring Tool Workflows & Paradigms

What we’ll cover in this breakout

- Which tools are available today?
- What should your selection criteria be?
- What are the various development paradigms?
- How should you make your tool selection?
Comparison of
Help Authoring Tool Workflows & Paradigms

The tools on today’s market

- ActiveHelp Web
- AuthorIT
- doc-o-matic
- Doc-To-Help for Word
- Doc-To-Help Enterprise
- EasyHelp/Web
- FAR HTML
- Flare
- HDK
- Help & Manual
- HelpBreeze
- Help Development Studio
- Help Magician
- Help Publisher
- HelpStudio
- Hypertext Studio
- Mif2Go
- OfficeHelp
- ReWorX
- RoboHelp Office
- Sevensteps
- WebWorks ePublisher Pro
- XDK

Selection criteria

- Don’t be preoccupied with feature charts

- What really differentiates the tools is their underlying work flows and development paradigms
Questions for discussion

- What are your top three criteria for choosing a Help authoring tool?
  “It must be able to…”

- What do you like most about your current Help authoring tool?
  “It’s very good at…”

Critical factors: Current authoring environment & workflow

- What format is your existing information in?
- Are you producing paper documentation? If so, what tool are you using?
- Who will have responsibility for creating and updating information?
- Which word-processing environment do you want your content editors to use?
- To what extent do you need to:
  – reuse your source content for different media and purposes?
  – restructure the information for each purpose?
- Which is your primary output format, paper or online Help?
Comparison of Help Authoring Tool Workflows & Paradigms

Other critical factors:

- What type of application are you developing Help for (Web-based, C++, Java, etc.)?
- Which online formats do you need to produce?
- What HTML-specific technologies and techniques do you want to exploit?
- What platforms will you be supporting?
- What are your localisation needs?

Development paradigm 1

- Author content within a print-based publishing tool
- Convert the print document to the required online Help format(s)
Comparison of Help Authoring Tool Workflows & Paradigms

Development paradigm 1

Print document source

Conversion rules and mappings

HTML Help

Browser-based Help

Java-based Help

Single-sourcing from print document to multiple online formats

Examples of mappings

Paragraph style: Heading 1 → HTML tag: H1

Paragraph style: Note → CSS Class: P.Note

Screenshot image → Thumbnail hyperlink

© 2006, Matthew Ellison Consulting Ltd

Presented at the TICAD Conference, 22nd Nov 2006

5
### Potential advantages of paradigm 1

- A single source for all outputs
- Printed manual is created using tool designed for that purpose
- Content is created and edited outside of a specialist Help tool environment
- Can continue to use in-house word-processing/DTP skills

### Potential disadvantages of paradigm 1

- You have to create a print manual even if you don’t need one
- Help features are generated from document counterparts
- May be more difficult to create custom HTML or scripts within Help topics
Tools that use paradigm 1

- WebWorks ePublisher Pro (Quadralay)
  - Source documents: Word or FrameMaker

- Mif2Go (Omni Systems)
  - Source documents: FrameMaker

- Doc-To-Help for Word (ComponentOne)
  - Source documents: Word

- ReWorX 2004 Professional (Virtual Media Technology)
  - Source documents: Word

Development paradigm 2

- Work directly with the source HTML required by the Help compiler
- Convert the source files for any other required outputs
Comparison of Help Authoring Tool Workflows & Paradigms

Development paradigm 2

Potential advantages of paradigm 2

- Tool is based on the Microsoft HTML Help paradigm
- You are working directly with the underlying HTML
- Single source for all outputs
Potential disadvantages of paradigm 2

- Tied to a specific Help technology
- HTML Help paradigm is not suited to print output
- HTML files are not well suited to managing and re-purposing content

RoboHelp Office

- Very similar to MS Word
- Includes style mappings for Word output

- HTML files
- .HHC
- .HHK

- Word Processor
- Output-specific settings

- HTML Help
- Browser-based Help
- Java-based Help
- Word document

PDF
Comparison of Help Authoring Tool Workflows & Paradigms

Other tools that use paradigm 2

- HelpStudio (Innovasys)
  - Stores HTML topic markup in single XML database

- Doc-To-Help Enterprise (ComponentOne)
  - Can be used with any HTML editor

- FAR HTML (The Helpware Group)
  - Not really a tool for authoring content

- Help Publisher for Dreamweaver (Indigoware)

Development paradigm 3

- Create and manage content in a database
- Output to all required outputs from the database
Development paradigm 3

Potential advantages of paradigm 3

- Single source for all outputs
- Content may be stored in an “output-neutral” format
- Topic-centred architecture
- Object-oriented database provides very rich opportunities for information re-use
### Potential disadvantages of paradigm 3

- Content authors have to learn a new text editor
- You’re not creating any specific output format directly
- May be more difficult to create custom HTML or scripts within Help topics
- May have less control over presentation of printed output

### Tools that use paradigm 3:

- AuthorIT (only!)
Development paradigm 4

- Work in a proprietary Help Authoring Tool that stores content at XML “under the hood”
- Output to all required outputs from the XML source

A note about XML

- It’s been the “in” buzzword for about six years or so

- If a tool uses/supports XML, find out why and how
  - Is it simply for the convenience of the tool developers?
  - What benefits does it offer you?
  - Ask not what XML can do for the authoring tool – ask what it can do for you!
Comparison of Help Authoring Tool Workflows & Paradigms

Development paradigm 4

![Diagram showing single-sourcing from XML to multiple online formats]

Potential advantages of paradigm 4

- Single source for all outputs
- Content is stored in an “output-neutral” format
- XSLT provides very rich opportunities for information re-use
- Future-proof standards-based technology

© 2006, Matthew Ellison Consulting Ltd

Presented at the TICAD Conference, 22nd Nov 2006
Potential disadvantages of paradigm 4

- Content authors have to learn a new text editor
- You’re not creating any specific output format directly

Tools that use paradigm 4:

- MadCap Flare (MadCap Software)
  - May also support paradigm 1 in the future
- Help & Manual 4 (EC Software)
  - An easy-to-use XML-based authoring tool
**Development paradigm 5**

Non-proprietary XML-based content management: Create source content as XML and then transform to required formats

**Pros:**
- Non-proprietary format
- Enables structured authoring
- Enables flexible re-purposing of content
- Many transformation engines available

**Cons:**
- New and more complex authoring environment
- Technology requires steep learning curve

---

**XML Transformation process**

```
XML Document

XSLT Processor

XSL-FO doc

XSL-FO Formatter

PDF Doc

HTML Pages

CSS

Style sheet for printed output

Style sheet for online output
```

© 2006, Matthew Ellison Consulting Ltd

Presented at the TICAD Conference, 22nd Nov 2006
### Tools

**XML editors:**
- Arbortext Editor (PTC)
- XMetaL (Justsystems)
- Structured FrameMaker (Adobe)

**XML-based content management systems:**
- Documentum (EMC Software)
- RedDot (RedDot Solutions)
- SiberSafe (SiberLogic)
- Vasont (Vasont Systems)

### Summary 1

**Develop online Help only:**
- RoboHelp Office
- Help Publisher for Dreamweaver

**Single-source from:**
- **MS Word:**
  - Doc-To-Help for Word
  - WebWorks ePublisher Pro
  - ReWorX
- **FrameMaker:**
  - WebWorks ePublisher Pro
  - Mif2Go
Summary 2

**Single-source from:**

- **HTML:**
  - RoboHelp Office
  - HelpStudio
  - Doc-To-Help Enterprise

- **XML**
  - Help & Manual
  - Flare

- **Object Oriented Database:**
  - AuthorIT

Summary 3

- Base your choice on your required development paradigm and processes
- Also take into account your primary output format
- Consider whether you require the flexibility of topic-centred re-use
- Test-drive a shortlist of tools to find which you are most comfortable with
- All the tools we’ve seen today have outstanding qualities
Further reading

- www.HAT-matrix.com
- Review of MadCap Flare: http://www.cherryleaf.com/flarearticle-1.htm

Further reading (continued)

- Comparison of HTML Produced by HATs (David Knopf, Char James-Tanny, Paul Neshamkin, MJ Plaster, Dana Cline): http://www.knopf.com/resources/hatcomp/index.html
- Review of AuthorIT 4.0 http://www.winwriters.com/aitv4review.htm