Help Authoring Tool Comparison

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UA Europe?

Why use a HAT at all?

- Automates generation/compilation
- Browser-based output (WebHelp)
- Single-sourcing
- Tri-pane paradigm
- Context-sensitivity
- Indexing
- Other Help-specific features

Other possibilities

- Generic HTML-based authoring tool
- Generic XML-based authoring tool
- Wiki
- Blogging tool
- Notepad

For a HAT

- Targeted towards user assistance
- "Off the shelf" solution
- Integrated one-stop solution for multiple outputs
- Usually requires little or no knowledge of underlying technology
- Some tools offer controls for Dynamic/Embedded Help

Against a HAT

- Non-standard
- May lock you in to proprietary technology
- Potentially less flexible
- Limited capability for content management and re-use

The HAT candidates

- Adobe **RoboHelp** (also **TCS3**)
- **Author-it**
- ComponentOne **Doc-To-Help**
- EC Software **Help & Manual**
- MadCap **Flare**
- WebWorks **ePublisher**

Features most of the HATs have in common

- TOC / Index / FTS
- MS Help output
- Browser-based Help output (WebHelp)
- Map IDs for context-sensitive Help
- Conditional content
- Variables
- Snippets / embedded topics
- Resource sharing between projects
- DHTML drop-downs

Selection Criteria

- "In a nutshell" description
- Workflow
- UI and usability
- Key strengths
- Key weaknesses
- Own Help

ADOBE ROBOHELP

RoboHelp in a nutshell

- Edit in XHTML using RoboHelp WYSIWYG Editor

- Project settings stored in variety of text files

- For single-sourcing print and Help:

  - Create print document in Word

  - Link Word doc to RoboHelp project

  - Publish through RoboHelp to Help

RoboHelp workflow

Word

FM

DITA

HTML

HH

PDF

XHTML

HH

WH

AIR

ePub

Word /PDF

Also:
- DITA
- FlashHelp
- JavaHelp
- Eclipse Help
- XML
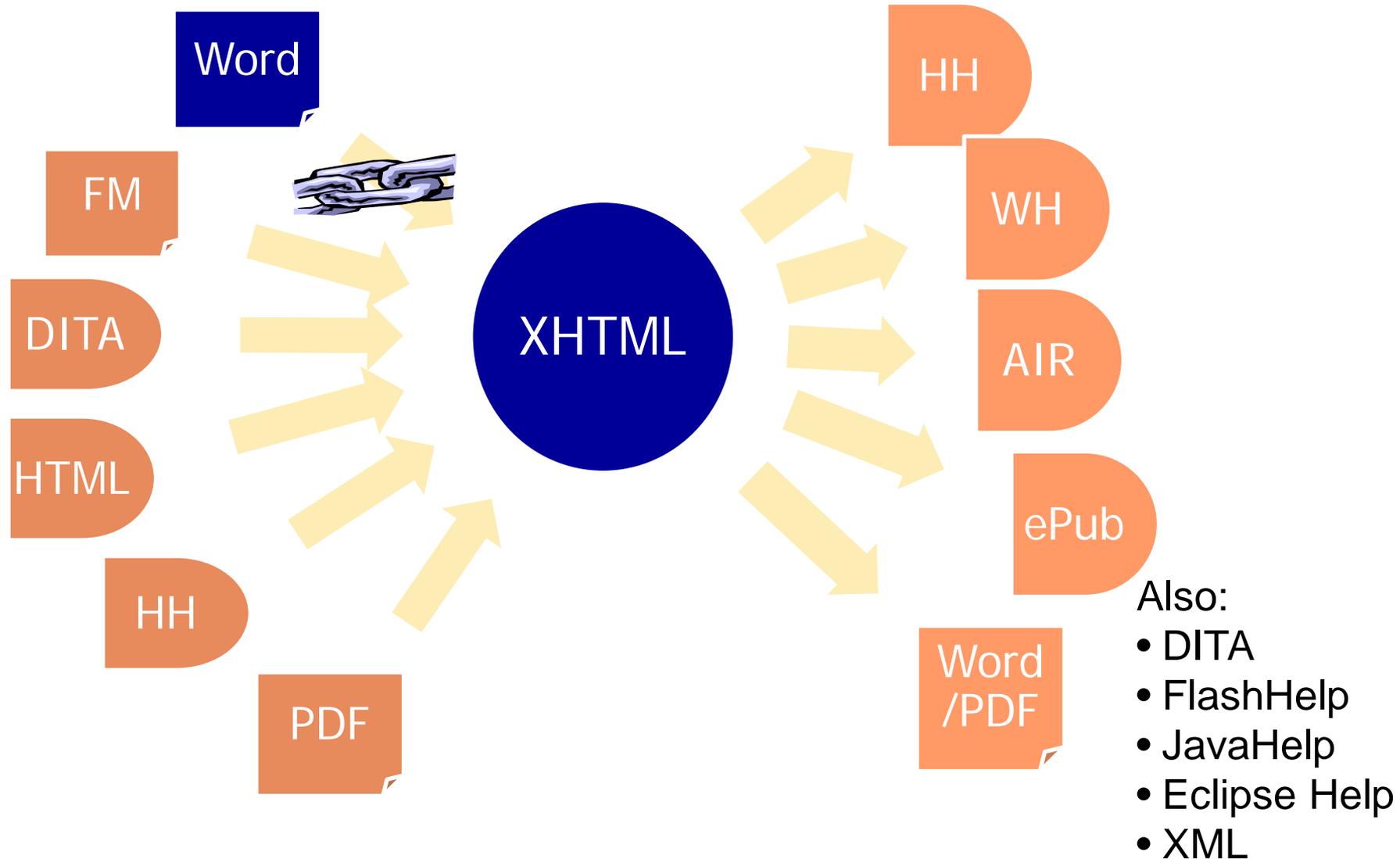
TCS3

- Same as RoboHelp, except:
  - Can link FrameMaker documents
  - Therefore richer print capability for single-sourcing

TCS3 workflow

Word

FM

DITA

HTML

HH

PDF

XHTML

HH

WH

AIR

ePub

Word /PDF
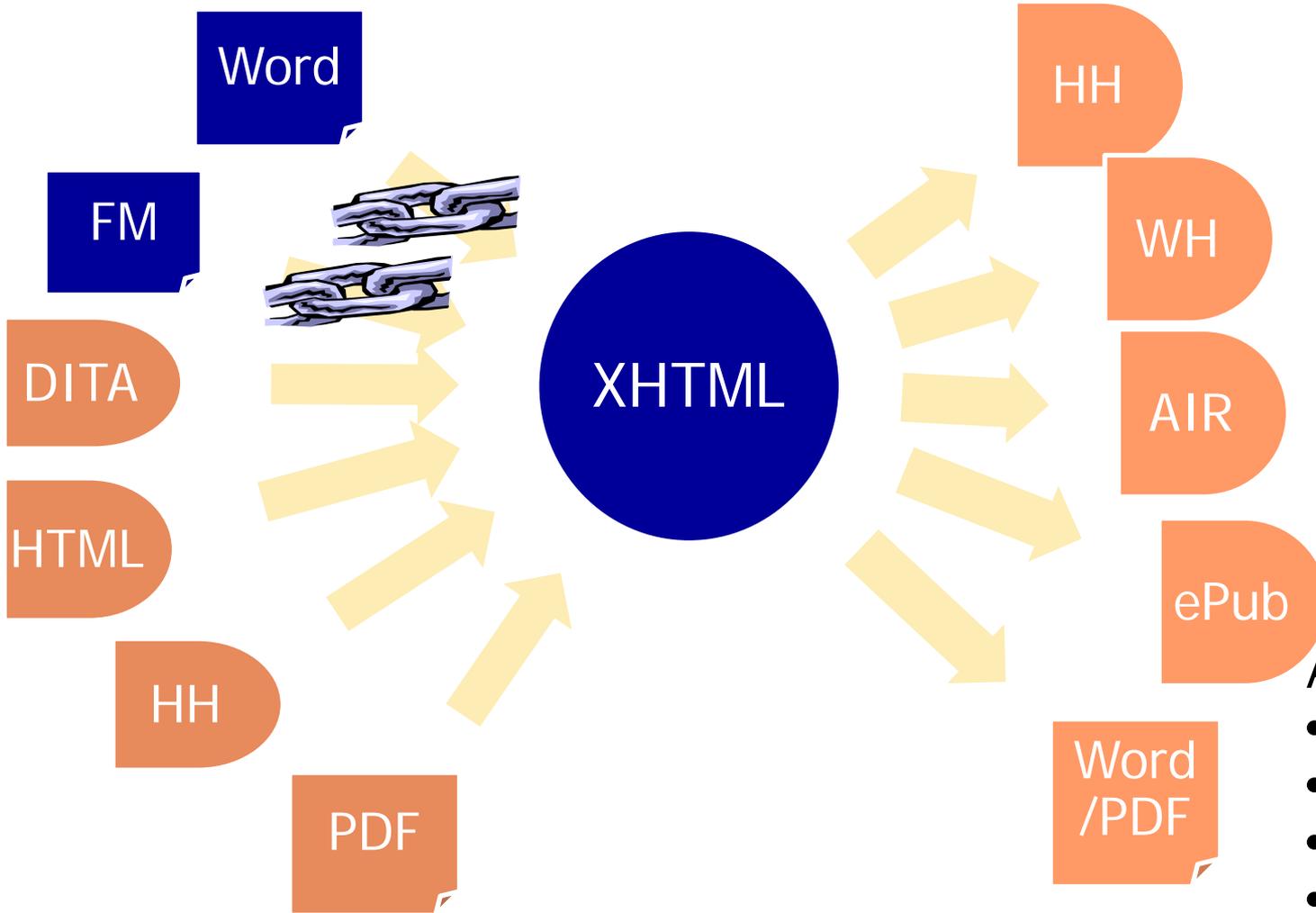
Also:
• DITA
• FlashHelp
• JavaHelp
• Eclipse Help
• XML

RoboHelp UI and usability

RoboHelp UI and usability

- Retains look-and-feel and key principles from earlier versions
- Many Pods – customizable layout
- Editor formatting UI looks like Word (pre 2007)
- In my opinion: some problems with UI for importing/linking

RoboHelp key strengths

- Indexing and search

- WebHelp output

- AIR Help output

- New Resource Manager

- Integration with Captivate

- Single-sourcing from Word
  (and from FrameMaker in TCS3)

RoboHelp key weaknesses

- Print documentation output
- Lack of support for importing/linking FrameMaker documents (except within TCS3)
- UI for importing/linking Word and FrameMaker documents
- Very large footprint

RoboHelp's own Help

AUTHOR-IT

Author-it in a nutshell

- All content (for multiple projects) stored in a single Library (database)

- Object-oriented

- Very powerful and flexible re-use across multiple projects

- Permissions based on logon

- Can use SQL Server or free JET / SQL Server Express database

Author-it workflow

Word

FM (MIF)

RH

HH

HTML

Database

HH

WH

DITA

XML

Word /PDF
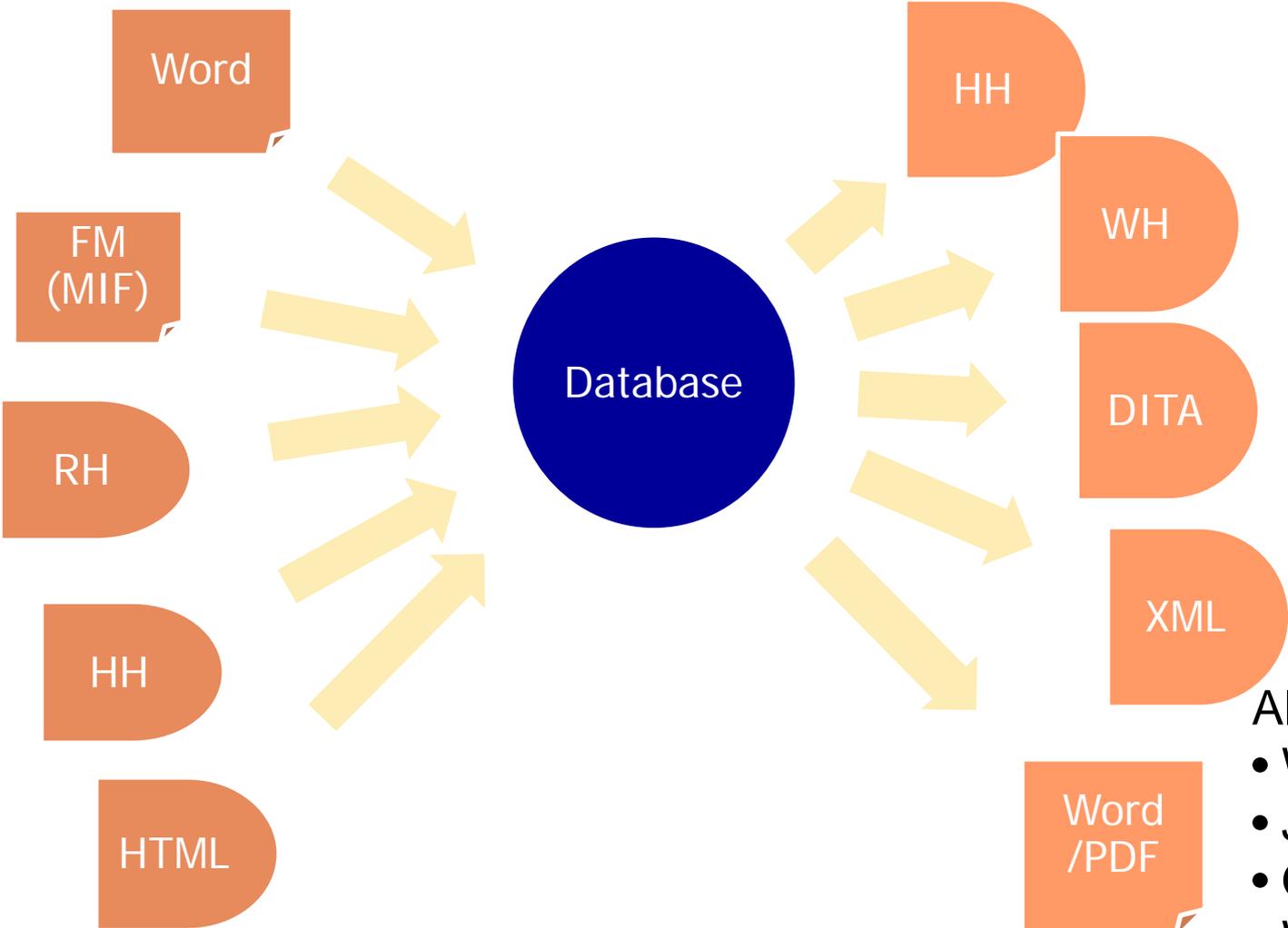
Also:
- Website
- JavaHelp
- Oracle Help
- WinHelp

Author-it UI and usability

Author-it UI and usability

- Ribbon-based

- Multiple windows and components

- Granularity gives flexibility and power, but increased complexity

Author-it key strengths

- Content management
- Structured authoring (without requiring knowledge of XML)
- Role-based permissions
- Object Variants
- Authoring memory (requires Xtend)
- Localization support (requires Localization Manager)
- Project management (requires Project Manager)
- Web-based authoring (requires Author-it Live)

Author-it key weaknesses

- Proprietary storage format
- Uses Word for all print publishing
- No longer aimed specifically at Help authoring
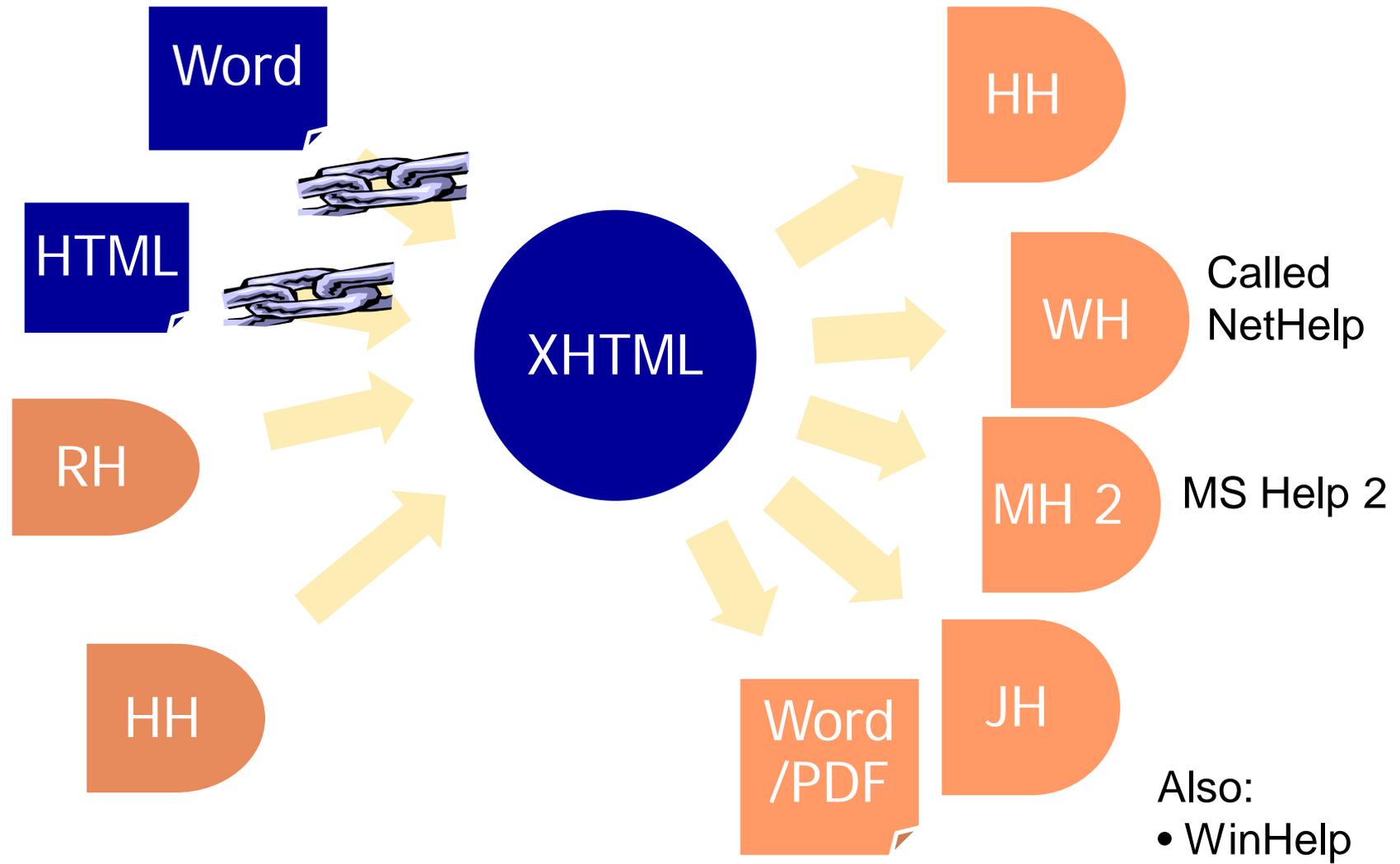- Potentially over-complex for some needs

Author-it's own Help

COMPONENTONE DOC-TO-HELP

Doc-To-Help in a nutshell

- Edit in XHTML using Doc-To-Help WYSIWYG Editor

- Alternatively, edit in Word or HTML (using FrontPage or Dreamweaver)

- Add metadata and other special features using D2HML

- Metadata also stored in an Access database

Doc-To-Help workflow

Word

HTML

RH

HH

XHTML

HH

WH — Called NetHelp

MH 2 — MS Help 2

JH

Word /PDF

Also:
• WinHelp

Doc-To-Help UI and usability

Doc-To-Help UI and usability

- Improvements in UI from 2007 onwards
- Ribbon-based
- Powerful and flexible Topics tab
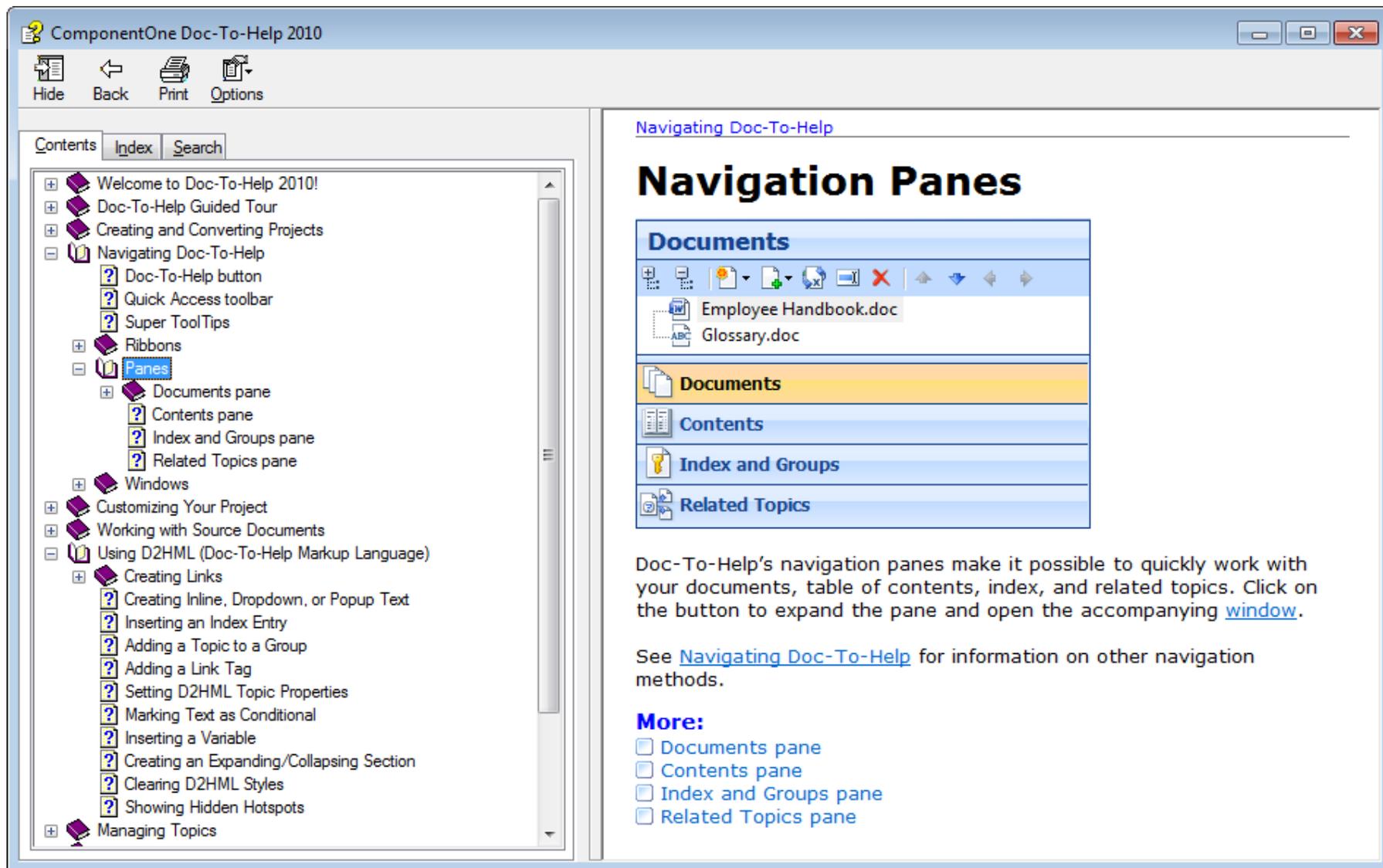- Style sheet concepts can be confusing
- Error messages rather opaque

Doc-To-Help key strengths

- Authoring support for Word, FrontPage and Dreamweaver
- Automatic and customizable "topic relationships"
- New NetHelp search engine
- Support for team authoring without need for source control software
- SharePoint integration
- Support for documenting Class Libraries with Microsoft Sandcastle

Doc-To-Help key weaknesses

- Relatively slow build process
- History of dependence on Word has shaped the product
- Potential synchronization problems between source docs and DTH database

Doc-To-Help's own Help

EC SOFTWARE HELP & MANUAL

Help & Manual in a nutshell

- Edit in XML using Help & Manual WYSIWYG Editor

- Project settings, styles, and templates all stored in a single project file in XML format

- For single-sourcing print and Help:

  - Generate PDF and Help targets from Help & Manual

Help & Manual workflow

Help & Manual UI and usability

Help & Manual UI and usability

- Ribbon-based
- Simple well-organized UI
- Authoring process driven by TOC structure
- Styles and formatting heavily based on Word paradigm
- Advanced features less exposed

Help & Manual key strengths

- Powerful "skins" for adding advanced features and achieving consistency across projects
- Support for modular Help
- Support for team authoring without need for source control software
- Ability to share resources across projects
- Built-in non-scrolling region support
- Support for documenting Class Libraries with Microsoft Sandcastle

Help & Manual key weaknesses

- List formatting
- No FrameMaker import
- No DITA support

Help & Manual's own Help
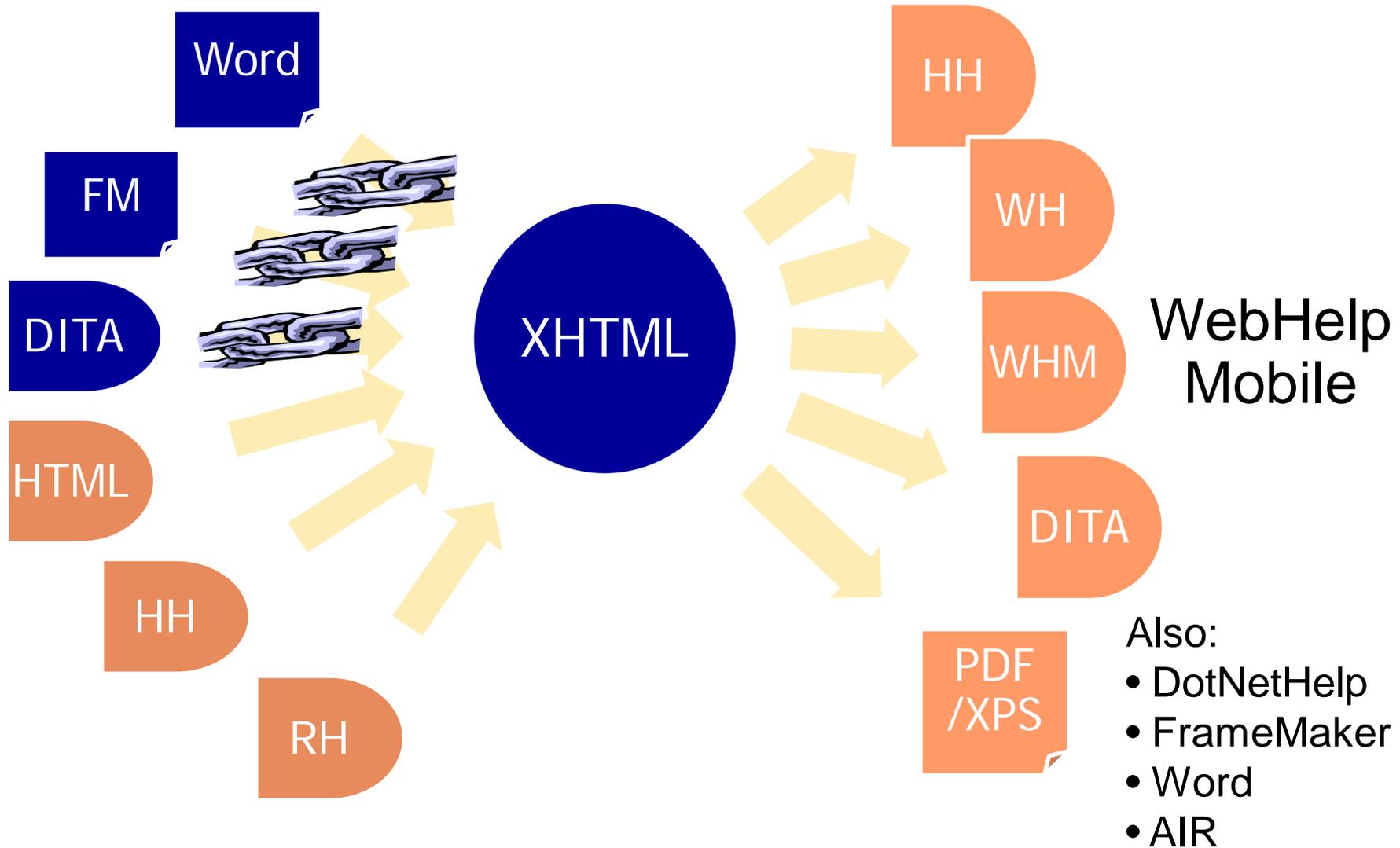
MADCAP FLARE

Flare in a nutshell

- Edit in XHTML using Flare WYSIWYG Editor

- Project settings all stored in XML files

- For single-sourcing print and Help:
  - Generate PDF and Help targets from Flare

Flare workflow

Flare UI and usability

Flare UI and usability

- Powerful, fairly complex and slightly quirky workspace

- Many different editors for different file types

- Users benefit from understanding of CSS

- Unusually comprehensive and excellent Help system

Flare key strengths

- WebHelp Mobile output
- Authoring memory (Intellisense)
- Automatic conversion of text to variables (requires MadCap Analyzer)
- Feedback and collaboration (requires Feedback Server or Feedback Service)
- Search filtering
- DotNetHelp format

Flare key weaknesses

- Limited keyboard shortcuts
- Some quirks in PDF output
- Not a true content management system

Flare's own Help

Deleting Projects

To delete a project completely, you must use Windows Explorer. This operation cannot be done from Flare.

You can also remove projects from displaying in the File>Recent Projects menu and the Start Page in Flare. This does not delete the project, but simply removes it from those shortcut locations.

How to delete a project through Windows

1. In Windows Explorer, browse to the location where you have stored the project (e.g., C:\Documents and settings\Projects\My Project).

2. Delete the folder holding the project files.

How to remove a project from the File>Recent Projects menu and the Start Page in Flare

1. In the Flare project, select **File>Recent Projects>Manage Recent Projects**. The Recent Projects dialog opens.

2. Highlight the project and click **Remove**.

3. Click **OK**.

See Also

Downloads (PDF Format):

Flare Quick Guide

Flare Getting Started Guide

MadCap Software, Inc.
7777 Fay Avenue
La Jolla, California 92037
Tollfree 1-888-MadCap1
Tel 858-32?-0387
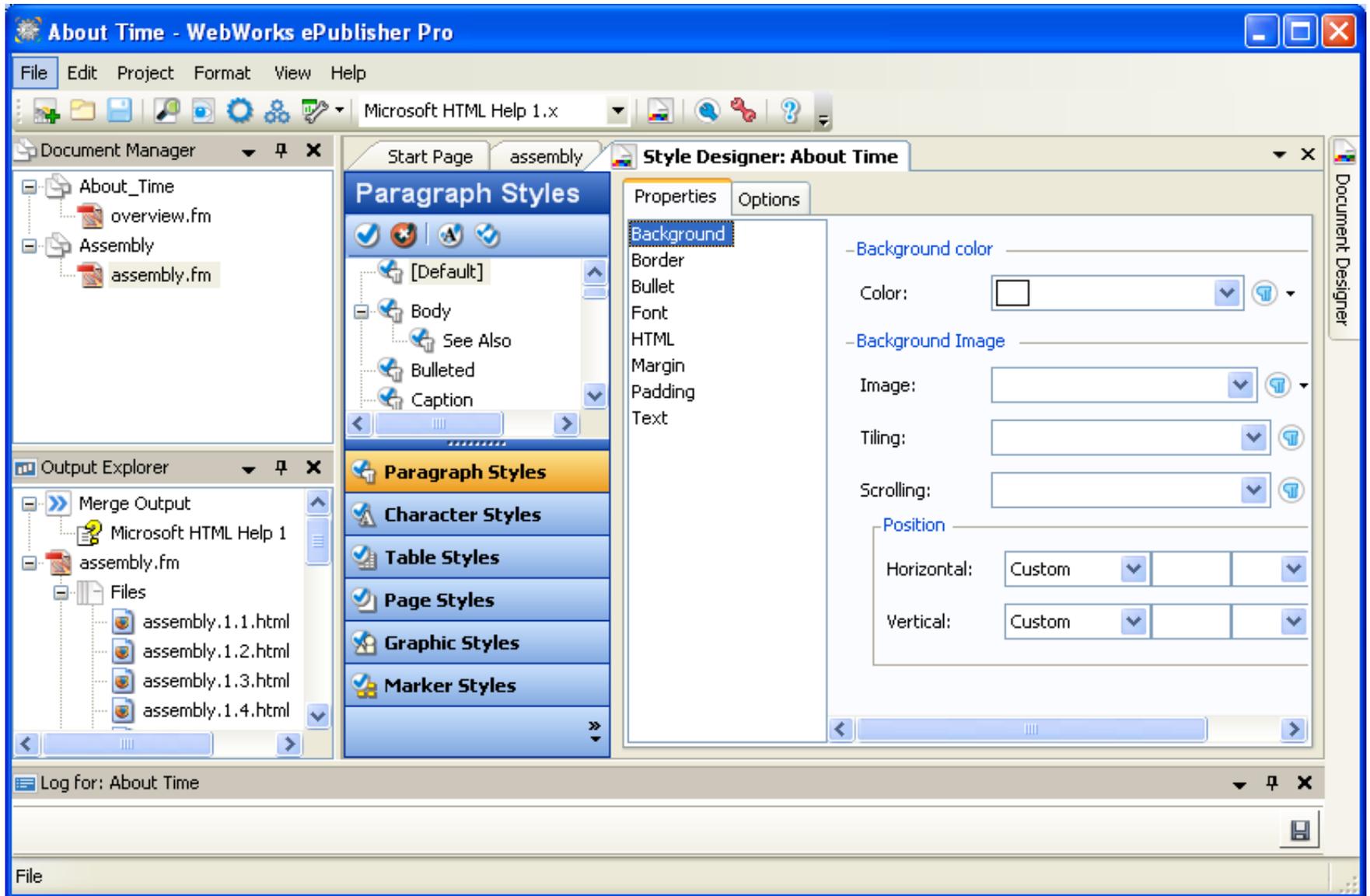
WEBWORKS EPUBLISHER

WebWorks ePublisher in a nutshell

- Converts content from three possible source formats:
  - FrameMaker
  - Word
  - DITA
- No editor of its own
- Separate products for design, production, and power production
- Large range of output types

WebWorks ePublisher workflow
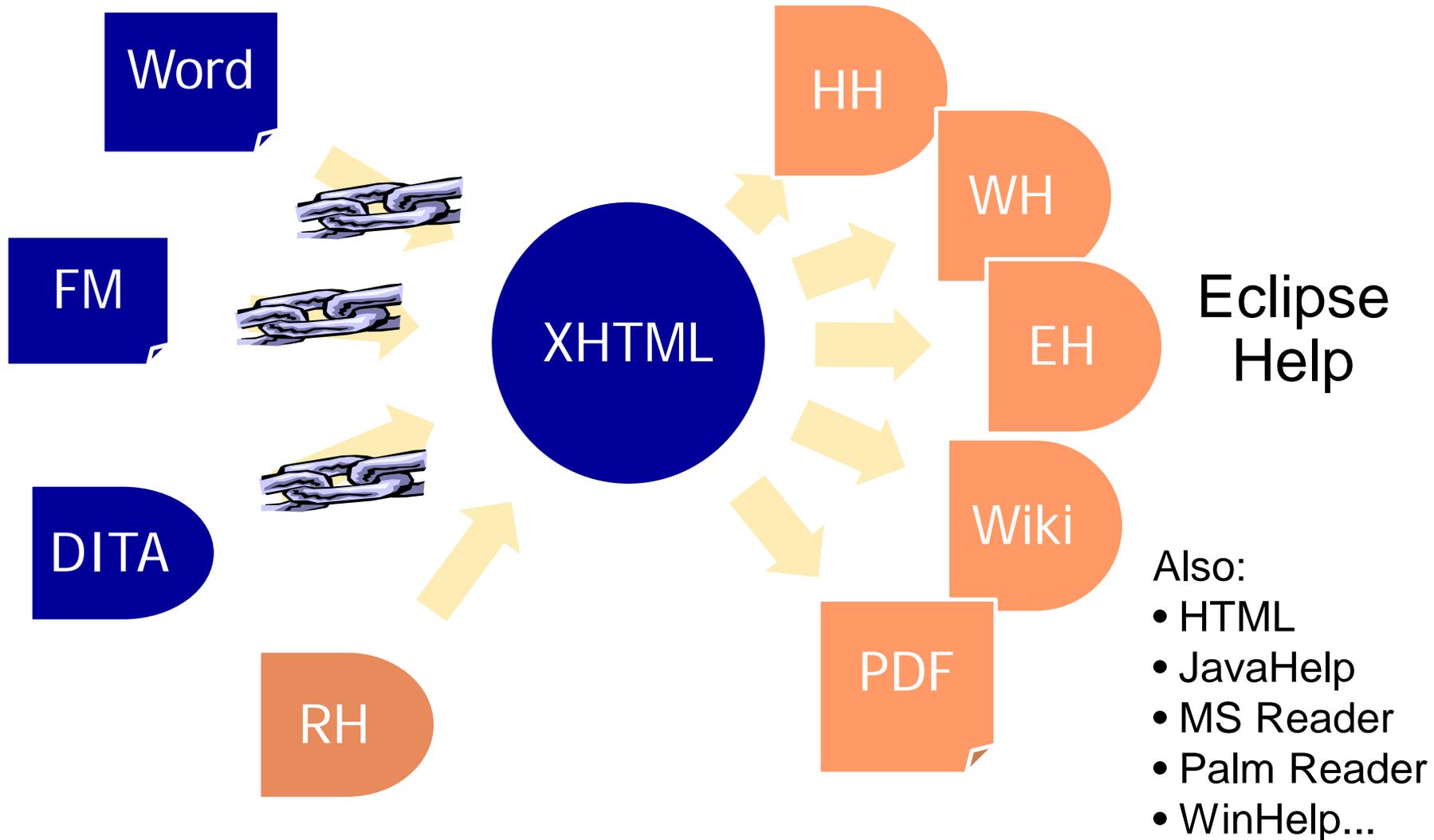
WebWorks ePublisher UI and usability

WebWorks ePublisher UI and usability

- Designer product (ePublisher Pro) is complex and requires some technical expertise

- Production product (ePublisher Express) very simple to use

WebWorks ePublisher key strengths

- User-generated content (wiki and Reverb outputs)

- Simple HTML output

- Stationery makes for very straight-forward production

WebWorks ePublisher key weaknesses

- WebHelp output
- No TOC editor
- Documentation / user assistance

WebWorks ePublisher's own Help

Server-based Help

- HelpServer by 4.ST

- RoboHelp Server

- MadCap Feedback Server

Final comments

- All of the HATs described in this presentation are great tools
- Other HATs are available
- Your best choice depends on your preferred workflow
- Always test drive with real data before purchasing