

Doing More with Less

Meeting content authoring and
publishing challenges today
and in the future

Doing more with less: Why topic-based content development?

Summary:

Historically, organizations created content as silo-ed large books or help systems that were delivered in big pieces to the user. In the new century, content needs to be developed once and delivered in multiple ways, as organizations need it. Additionally, content must be localized for the international market. The entire content development process also needs to be included into the rest of the product planning and management.

Topic-based content development is the solution to these issues. Using topic-based content development methods, organizations can reduce content development time by nearly 50% and increase productivity by up to 200%.

The old way to develop content

Twenty years ago, authoring content and desktop publishing with one product was a revolutionary idea. Products like PageMaker® and FrameMaker® changed how we developed and published technical content.

Desktop publishing tools allowed one person to control the format and the content in one file to get the corporate look for our information when we printed. Occasionally, we put the information online as a book or help system. There was no other way to deliver content.

But the new century brings new challenges and new publishing channels. The old way of developing silo-ed information that's hard to reuse prevents us from leveraging the investment in our intellectual capital. We don't have time to copy and paste, manually tracking where and how the information is used.

We need a better way to develop content to meet the multiple publishing challenges in this century. We need the power of topic-based content authoring.

Topic-based content development

Topic-based content development is a new way to look at content. In the old way, you wrote a book or a chapter for a book. The entire book or chapter was shipped to the user. Updates were slow and information quickly became outdated.

Topic-based content development breaks the information into smaller parts called “topics.” Topics are much smaller than chapters, perhaps no longer than 2 to 4 pages of content. Topics include only enough information to perform one procedure or understand one concept.

Topics can easily be pushed to the user, resulting in faster updates and more accurate information in knowledge bases, user’s guides, online help, and more, all from one set of source files.

Why topic-based authoring is better

The power of topic-based content development comes from (re)combining and reusing topics in new products, different deliverables, or other ways to meet your publishing needs. Additionally, topic-based content development improves the entire product development process and reduces costs in other areas.

Easily updated content

Topics are easier to update than chapter or entire documents because you are changing less content. That makes it easier to get approval for updating topics from management, because the economic investment is smaller. Then, depending on your delivery methods, you can push the changed topics to your users, instead of republishing the entire manual or help system.

Easily reuse content

Content reuse increases in topic-based content development as well. It’s very easy to reuse content in new publishing formats or deliverables because a topic is smaller than a book or chapter. This content reuse can dramatically reduce deadlines because the content already exists and is easily reused in new publishing formats.

Reduces localization costs

Topic-based content development also results in lower localization costs because you can send topics out for localization when the topic is complete, instead of waiting for the entire chapter or book to be complete. After the topic is localized, you can reuse it many times, depending on your publishing requirements.

Increases the quality of information

Organizations often discover they are developing less information overall but the quality of the information improves. Topics are very user-focused because they're developed based on the users' information needs, not the organizations' needs or the whims of a developer. Higher quality information can result in reduced customer support costs, because people find the information they need.

Improves the technical review process

Companies that move to topic-based content development report that technical reviews stop impacting product delivery. Instead of asking reviewers to read a 300 page book, which always impacts the development schedule, topics are placed into the review process as soon as they are complete. Reviewers can usually find time to read 2 to 4 pages and send the comments back without impacting delivery schedules.

Incorporates topic-based content development into project management

In a Use Case- or Scenario-based product development environment, topics map nicely to use Cases and Scenarios, letting organizations plan and manage content just as other parts of the project are planned and managed. Product documentation is no longer a black hole of unknowable processes and uncertain results. Instead, the project team knows what they're getting and when they're getting it. Projects run more smoothly.

Prioritizing topics is easier than prioritizing manuals or chapters, too. A list of topics can be identified and priorities set so if project time or staffing becomes an issue, everyone knows what information must be developed and what can be delayed, as schedules change.

MadCap Software supports topic-based content development

MadCap Software designed our tools to fit the topic-based content development paradigm from the beginning. Our flagship products, MadCap Flare and MadCap Blaze, are primary examples of this new architecture. Using Flare or Blaze to author and publish your content can reduce the time to develop content by nearly 50% and provide up to a 200% increase in productivity.

Flare and Blaze not only work best when used in a topic-based content development environment, these tools take this methodology a step further, with multiple targets, outlines, conditional text, variables, and snippets.

Because a Flare or Blaze project can include 30,000 or more topics, the information reuse possibilities are almost limitless. And Flare and Blaze support multiple publishing channels, giving you the perfect solution to leveraging your content well into the new century.

To learn more about MadCap Software and how topic-based content development will help your organization, go to www.madcapsoftware.com or call 1-888-MadCap1.

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