

STC TC Communicator

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Tech Corner: Five XML Editors

by Lily Keire

We name electronic storage units folders and files, right? And Microsoft Word continues the tradition of pages; we write on electronic paper. However, machines don't necessarily organize this way. The fact is that Word is actually written in XML.

It has come time for us to take the leap, and that leap is to XML structured authoring. It's coming. It's something that you, as a technical communicator, do now or will do in the future.

Extensible Markup Language (XML) defines a set of rules for encoding documents in a format that is both human- and machine-readable.

XML is related to Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA), but it is not DITA, which is XML based but is a standard rather than a language.

DITA is to XML as a tree's branches are to its leaves. The tree is the archetype and the leaves are the means to an end—the place where sunshine is converted to energy. DITA provides topic trees (concept, reference, task) while XML is used to populate the topics.

Machines read the resultant texts and output to a variety of channels. Because the content is set up in XML, it can be manipulated for display on the Web or output to such electronic forms as SharePoint in the Cloud; it can output for hardcopy print or prepare content for a myriad of user devices.

This is great! Machines can do our bidding, releasing us to do the heavy thinking instead of the heavy lifting. All that time spent formatting—gone! All that time spent in output silos reinventing the wheel—gone! Here come the glory days of writing, writing, writing!

Whoa, whoa, whoa, I say!

In this transition period, a certain amount of customization and command must be performed for structured authoring to work.

Enter XML editing and XML editor software. And this is where the agile technical communicator comes in. We get the process going; we complete the task; we make it work. Yes, we write, but we also edit for machine readability.

Here are the most popular XML editors on the market, according to the Writer's UA Tools Survey Of 2014:

Name	Manufacturer	Rank	Survey Tally
FrameMaker	Adobe	1	199
Flare	MadCap	2	148
AuthorIT	Author-it Software	3	73
oXygen	Syncro Soft	4	66
XMetal	JustSystems	5	50

Source: www.welinski.com

FrameMaker

Adobe FrameMaker has been around forever, making its debut in 1986. While dipping in popularity with versions 5.0 through 7.0 due to the fact that no upgrades were made and no support for Apple existed during that time, FrameMaker continues to satisfy the needs of companies who must produce large documents during the course of their work.

In 2007, version 8.0 added DITA support and introducing Flash, Unicode, and 3D. User interface (UI) changes in version 9.0 in 2009 improved the UI look and feel while providing full support for DITA and introducing support for Content Management Systems.

Lately released on a yearly basis, the 2015 version of FrameMaker fine tunes its output with multichannel, multi-device publishing and mobile app productivity.

FrameMaker is recognized for contributing to XML adoption throughout the industry.



February's STC TC Meeting

Tuesday, February 9, 2016
Meal and networking 5:30 - 6:30 PM
Speaker's Presentation 6:30 - 7:30 PM

Metropolitan State University
700 7th Street East
St. Paul, MN 55106

Room 115, new Science Education Center located on the corner of 6th and Mounds. Park on Maria.

[St. Paul Campus via Google Maps](#)

[Register Here](#)

Working as a Technical Communicator: Panel Discussion

Come to the Society for Technical Communication (STC) Twin Cities (TC) meeting at Metro State for a panel discussion on what it's like working as a technical communicator. A range of writing topics will be covered: networking, skills needed to succeed, writing specializations (medical, proposal, web, and more), and changing careers to the wide ranging and interesting field of technical writing. Bring your questions and learn from working professionals, including Metro State graduates.

Panel members include:

Lily Keire (Metro State alumna)
Transitioning to writing from a different career, and being an older worker

Gayle Werner (Metro State alumna) and **Carolyn Witthuhn**
Networking from the introvert and extrovert perspectives

Dr. Alex Layne
Grant writing, and starting a writing consultation business

Lisa DeLuney (Metro State alumna)
Translation and localization

[STC TC Website](#)

January's Meeting Recap

Informal Learning Basics

Saul Carliner's stimulating presentation on informal learning was well hailed by fellow technical communicators at last month's STC TC meeting!

Despite technical difficulties, Carliner managed to get his message across: over 70% of learning takes place outside the classroom.

It's to your advantage to keep this in mind when creating user documentation, Carliner said. The user is going to come to your guide or manual or website when they are learning on their own; they are going to be looking for:

- The answer to a question
 - Use Flowcharts
- Your expertise
 - Be accurate
 - Be timely
- Memorable takeaway tips
 - Keep it simple

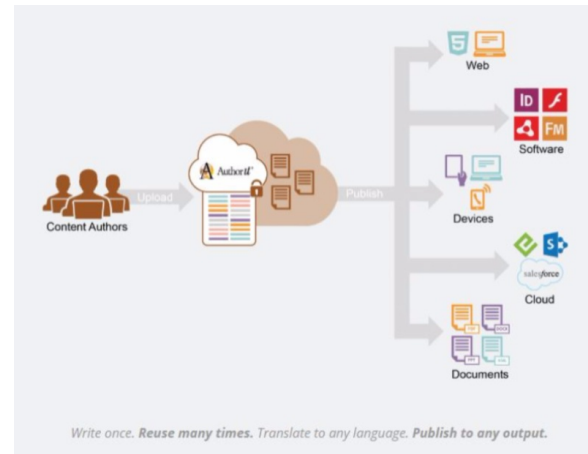
Informal learning is learning through participation so the user experience needs to be as interactive as possible, much like Carliner's presentation. Good job!

MadCap Flare

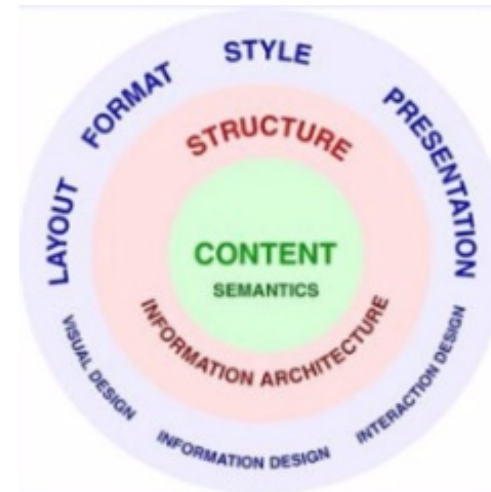
Ranked second in the annual Writer's UA Tools Survey of 2014, Madcap Software has also been around the block once or twice. Having gone through several critical gyrations since its founding in 2005, MadCap Software has come out with an end-to-end product line which meets both technical authoring and publishing needs. It not only provides its signature online help system, Madcap Flare, but a variety of technical communication tools used to create knowledge bases, policy and procedure manuals, and software documentation output in various formats, all from single-source native content. Interestingly, the Madcap series of software is entirely written in XHTML.

AuthorIT

AuthorIT Software Corporation delivers a complete Content Management System. Its market share is smaller than FrameMaker or Madcap Software, but its potential is great. AuthorIT has five modules: AuthorIT, Administrator, Project Manager, Localization Manager, and Publisher. The AuthorIT system allows precision output of pure content, illustrated below:



Source: <http://www.author-it.com/software/>



Source: <http://www.cmsreview.com/XML/Editors/>

Oxygen

Synchro Soft's oXygen, a "what you see is what you get" (WYSIWYG) XML editor that includes an IDE, in company with other XML editor packages; though, interestingly, no others that include an IDE were in the top 5 ranked XML editors in the UA Writer's Tool Survey.

An IDE is an XML Developer Editor that is the central part of an Integrated Development Environment. It is a must-have tool for any organization moving its content to XML.

This software is for organizations that need to manage large projects with multiple authors and editors who need to manipulate content that is to be used on multiple platforms.

Project content is broken down into tasks, concepts, or references. Does that sound familiar? These project pieces are structured using DITA, and more specifically, a DITA map editor.

A DITA map is a container for topics; it is used to transform content created and edited by many into one output. The DITA map sequences the topics and provides the structure necessary to allow more than one author to work with the project files. Topics associated with the DITA map can then be reused and published into different outputs. For example, the same manuscript can be published to the web, mobile, print, and PDF by manipulating the DITA map.

JustSystem's XMetal

What is XMetal used for in the technical writing business? Integrated with Microsoft, this ActiveX embedded, browser-based XML editor helps developers customize publishing environments through its thin client XMetal components. That is, XMetal quickly integrates with web publishing systems, CMS, CRMS, and other business applications by being the pass through desktop virtualization resource in addition to providing WYSIWYG views.

That concludes this brief rundown on XML editors. Learn about them; understand their function; prepare for working with content in a way that is not based on books, but on topics rich in markup.



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