

Help Authoring Tool Primer Choosing the Right HAT in 2007

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Introduction

- In this session, we will discuss:
 - What's going on with HATs?
 - What do we need HATs to do?
 - How do you choose a HAT?



What's Going On?

- The uncertainty around RoboHelp has created confusion and opportunity
- Macromedia bought eHelp
 - They released the last development efforts of eHelp as RoboHelp X5 in 2004
 - By 2005, the development team was gone as was the product manager
 - Joe Welinske of WritersUA unofficially pronounced RoboHelp had been sunset



What's Going On?

- At WritersUA in 2005, Madcap Software announced that they would create Flare
 - Madcap included the senior developers and product manager for RoboHelp
 - 11 months later they released Flare 1.0
- In 2006, Adobe bought Macromedia
 - At WritersUA, they introduced the new development team (from India)
 - Nine months later they released RoboHelp 6



What's Going On?

- So RoboHelp seems to be back
 - Adobe created a new technical communication suite
 - There is a lot of opportunity for synergy between other Adobe products
 - Framemaker, Acrobat, Captivate, Contribute, Flash, and more
 - However, Adobe does not comment on future development efforts



What's Going On?

- Flare is now up to version 2.5
- Several other HATs are still around and going strong, including:
 - AuthorIT
 - Doc-to-Help
 - Webworks Publisher
- RoboHelp still owns the majority of the HAT market, but the competition is reviving the HAT industry



What's Going On?

- You have choices
- But that means you have to evaluate tools and think strategically about where you want to go with your user assistance

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What Should HATs Do?

- Import and create content
- Link and layer content
- Control the look-and-feel of help
- Reuse and manage content
- Single-source output
 - Generate online help
 - Generate printed documentation
- Deliver content in different languages
- Create context-sensitive help

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How Do You Choose a HAT?

- Consider your HAT options
- Review the deciding factors

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What Are Your Options?

- The main tools to consider are:
 - RoboHelp 6
 - AuthorIT Enterprise
 - Flare 2.5
 - Doc-To-Help Enterprise 2006 v3.1
 - Webworks ePublisher Pro v9.2.2
- There are additional tools but they are not currently key players

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RoboHelp 6

- **Pros**
 - Easy for non-technical users to learn and use
 - Large experienced user base
 - Can convert WinHelp to HTML-based help format
- **Cons**
 - HTML based
 - Doesn't enable reuse of information
 - Printed documentation support is weak
- **Special Features**
 - RoboHelp Server
 - RoboSourceControl
 - FlashHelp

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AuthorIT Enterprise

- **Pros**
 - Object-oriented approach to data
 - XML-based data
 - Inexpensive content management system
- **Cons**
 - Complicated to learn/set up
- **Special Features**
 - Translation management software
 - DITA support

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Flare 2.5

- **Pros**
 - Fairly easy to learn and use
 - XML based
 - Single-sourcing features
 - Strong printed output (Word and Framemaker)
 - Extensive control over look-and-feel
- **Cons**
 - No source control integration
 - No server-based user tracking
- **Special Features**
 - Blaze is on the way (as a Framemaker replacement)
 - Currently has a \$400 trade in for RoboHelp or other HATS
 - Vista and Word 2007 support

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Doc-To-Help 2006 v3.1

- **Pros**
 - Can do pretty much the same thing as RoboHelp, including source control support
 - Supports Help 2.0 format
 - Can automatically generate .net application info
- **Cons**
 - Based on Word documents or FrontPage or Dreamweaver; no built in HTML editor
 - No Framemaker support
 - No RoboServer equivalent
- **Special Features**
 - Supports Vista and Word 2007

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Webworks ePublisher Pro v9.2.2

- **Pros**
 - Strongest support for Framemaker (& Word)
 - XHTML 1.0 help format
- **Cons**
 - More complicated to setup
 - Based on document-model
- **Special Features**
 - DITA support

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Cost

- RoboHelp - \$999 (server cost extra)
- AuthorIT - \$899 + other modules
- Flare - \$899 (\$400 competitive upgrade)
- Doc-To-Help \$999
- WebWorks Publisher \$995

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Deciding Factors

- What tools do you use today?
- What tools do you already know?
- How large is your team?
- Which outputs do you need?
- Do you use Framemaker?
- Do you need any special features?
- How much influence do you want over your HAT vendor?

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Doing Your Research

- Each product has a free trial that you can install and try
- Check out www.hat-matrix.com for a comparison of specific tool features

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Conclusion

- Don't feel pressured to change HATs because of uncertainty
- Do take the opportunity to assess where you are today and where you want to go
- Do evaluate other tools that could improve the way you develop user assistance
- Do run a pilot project before jumping in all the way with a new HAT

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