

Choosing a Help Authoring Tool

Char James-Tanny
JTF Associates, Inc.
www.helpstuff.com

This presentation is provided as a supplement to the Tools Matrix,
Available from JTF Associates at

<http://www.helpstuff.com/downloads/tools.pdf>.

Send any comments or questions to Char James-Tanny
(CharJT@helpstuff.com)



About the Speaker

- President, JTF Associates
- Based in Lynn, Massachusetts (north of Boston), USA
- Author of two books and several tutorials
 - HHW Tutorial downloaded over 12,000 times since 2000
 - Other tool-based tutorials include AuthorIT and The HyperText Studio
- Microsoft Help MVP
- HAT expert
- Knowledgeable in HTML, XHTML, CSS



The Deciding Factors

- Your users' environment
- Your development environment
- Output
- Other considerations
- Output features
- Other features
- Cost
- Support
- Learning curve
- Training



The Tools

- AuthorIT (www.author-it.com)
- Deva Tools for Dreamweaver and Deva Search (www.devahelp.com)
- Doc-To-Help
(www.componentone.com)
- FAR (www.helpware.net)
- Microsoft HCW
(support.microsoft.com/support/kb/articles/Q164/0/12.asp)



The Tools (cont'd)

- Help & Manual
(www.ec-software.com)
- Microsoft HHW
(msdn.microsoft.com/library/default.asp?url=/library/en-us/htmlhelp/html/vsconHH1Start.asp)
- Mif2Go (www.omsys.com)
- RoboHelp Products (www.ehelp.com)
- The HyperText Studio
(www.olsonsoft.com)



The Tools (cont'd)

- WebWorks Publisher Professional for FrameMaker (www.webworks.com/products)
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for Word (www.webworks.com/products)
- Veredus (www.rascalsoftware.com)
- XDK (www.vmtech.com)
- plus more...



Your Users' Environment

- Determines which output you should produce
 - Windows
 - Macintosh
 - UNIX
 - Mixed or unknown
- Windows-based applications can use any Help output. Web-based applications require a Web-based solution.



Your Users' Environment (cont'd)

- If your users need browser-based output and do not want to download anything extra (such as Java applets or ActiveX controls), look for a pure HTML solution.



Your Development Environment

- With a HAT, you typically use Microsoft Word, FrameMaker, or a proprietary editor to enter content.
- You will probably select a tool based on your current proficiency.
 - For example, if you are an expert Frame user, you probably won't select a Word-based tool.
- The editors in both AuthorIT and RoboHelp HTML use Word-like features.
- If you select a tool with a proprietary editor, you may be able to leverage your existing proficiency.



Microsoft Word

- These tools are used to develop content in Word.
 - Doc-To-Help
 - Microsoft HCW
 - RoboHelp for Word
 - WebWorks Publisher Professional for Word
 - XDK



Microsoft Word (cont'd)

- Some tools also produce print output in Word.
 - AuthorIT
 - Doc-To-Help
 - Help & Manual
 - Mif2Go
 - RoboHelp for HTML Help
 - RoboHelp for Word
 - WebWorks Publisher Professional for Word
 - XDK



Adobe FrameMaker

- These tools are used to develop content in Frame, which is also used to produce printed output.
 - Mif2Go
 - RoboHelp for FrameMaker
 - WebWorks Publisher Professional for FrameMaker



Adobe FrameMaker (cont'd)

- Some tools let you import .mif files. You can produce printed output by either using the original Frame files or using the Print option from the new tool after importing.
 - AuthorIT
 - RoboHelp for HTML Help
 - Veredus



HTML

- These tools are used to develop content in HTML.
 - Dreamweaver + Deva Tools
 - FAR
 - Microsoft HHW
 - The HyperText Studio
 - RoboHelp for HTML Help



XML

- These tools are used to develop content in XML.
 - Veredus
 - XDK
- RoboHelp Office lets you import from well-formed XML.
- AuthorIT allows you to provide output in XML.
 - Enterprise Edition
 - Uses the AuthorIT Schema



Word Processor/Database

- These tools are used to develop content in a proprietary editor or database.
 - AuthorIT
 - Help & Manual
 - The HyperText Studio



Production

- Some tools are technically production tools, because you don't use them to modify content.
 - Mif2Go
 - WebWorks Publisher Professional for FrameMaker
 - WebWorks Publisher Professional for Word



Considering the Output Choices

- The output you select will depend on your users' environment:
 - WinHelp 4
 - HTML Help 1.x
 - Windows “Longhorn” Help
 - HTML/XHTML/XML
 - HTML-based Help
 - JavaHelp and Oracle Help
 - Flash
 - Print



WinHelp Tools

- AuthorIT
- Doc-To-Help
- Help & Manual
- Microsoft HCW
- Mif2Go
- RoboHelp for Word
- The HyperText Studio



WinHelp Tools (cont'd)

- WebWorks Publisher Professional for FrameMaker
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for Word



HTML Help Tools

- All tools included in the Tools list (except HCW)



"Longhorn" Help Tools

- AuthorIT
- Doc-To-Help
- FAR
- RoboHelp Products
- Veredus
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for FrameMaker
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for Word
- Others...



HTML/XHTML/XML Tools

- AuthorIT
- Doc-To-Help
- FAR
- Help & Manual
- Mif2Go
- The HyperText Studio



HTML/XHTML/XML Tools (cont'd)

- WebWorks Publisher Professional for FrameMaker
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for Word
- XDK



HTML-based Help Tools

- AuthorIT
- Dreamweaver + Deva Tools
- FAR
- Help & Manual
- RoboHelp Products
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for FrameMaker
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for Word



JavaHelp and Oracle Help for Java Tools

- AuthorIT
- Doc-To-Help
 - JavaHelp only
- Mif2Go
- RoboHelp for Word
 - JavaHelp only
- RoboHelp for HTML Help



JavaHelp and Oracle Help for Java Tools

- WebWorks Publisher Professional for FrameMaker
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for Word



Flash

- Combines Flash, XML, and HTML
- Cross-browser and cross-platform
- Small file size
- Firewall-friendly
- Requires Flash player
- Can add animation and audio
 - (You decide if that's a benefit or a limitation)
- Only available with RoboHelp products



Print

- Produced by almost all tools
- Possible output formats include Word, Frame, and PDF.
- Check list of tool features to see if it can be produced
- Tools with conditional content let you produce print output that differs from any online Help output



Other Considerations

- Development and output features that may be important to you
- Different tools offer different combinations



Output features

- Full-text Search for HTML Outputs
- Valid HTML (W3C)
- Valid CSS (W3C)
- Natural Language Query



Full-text Search for HTML Outputs

- Most tools provide full-text search
 - Usually JavaScript or Dynamic HTML
- AuthorIT lets you choose:
 - CGI
 - Must have access to the server to set it up
 - Must modify HTML file templates
 - Dynamic HTML
 - Included with DHTML User Guide (book) Template



Valid HTML (W3C)

- AuthorIT
- Dreamweaver
- Mif2Go



Valid CSS (W3C)

- AuthorIT
- Dreamweaver
- Mif2Go
- RoboHelp Office (as long as IE-only selectors aren't used)
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for FrameMaker
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for Word



Natural Language Query

- RoboHelp Office Pro (server-based)
- Also available from third-party vendor
 - Most tools let you implement it



Other Features

- Context-sensitive Help
- Dynamic HTML (built-in)
- Cross-references in Print
- Single sourcing/repurposing
- Content Reuse
- Conditional Content
- Variables
- Content Management
- Project Management
- Multi-authoring Support
- Team Support
- Translation Support



Context-sensitive Help

- All tools include some form of context-sensitive Help.
- Some tools include an API for connecting HTML-based Help to an application.



Dynamic HTML (built-in)

- AuthorIT (version 4.52)
- RoboHelp for HTML Help
- XDK



Cross-references in Print

- AuthorIT
- Doc-To-Help
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for FrameMaker
 - through FrameMaker
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for Word
 - through Microsoft Word



Single Sourcing and/or Repurposing

- Single-sourcing tools let you create outputs that are different from each other (content and format)
- Repurposing lets you create outputs that are identical
- Single-sourcing tools can be used to repurpose documentation
- Repurposing tools cannot be used to single source
- All non-Microsoft tools include some form of single sourcing or repurposing



Content Reuse

- AuthorIT
- Veredus
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for FrameMaker
- RoboHelp includes external document reuse



Conditional Content

- AuthorIT
- Doc-To-Help
- RoboHelp Products
- Veredus
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for FrameMaker
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for Word



Variables

- AuthorIT
- Help & Manual
- RoboHelp for FrameMaker
- WebWorks Publisher Products



Content Management

- Only one tool qualifies:
 - AuthorIT



Project Management

- AuthorIT
- Doc-To-Help
- Help & Manual
- RoboHelp Products
 - Greatly enhanced in X5, but called "content management"
- The HyperText Studio
- XDK



Multi-authoring Support

- AuthorIT
 - Dynamic check-in/check-out
 - (Workgroup and Enterprise Editions)
- FrameMaker
- RoboHelp Office
 - File check-in/check-out (manual)
- The HyperText Studio
 - Enterprise Edition



Team Support

- Includes modular Help or multiple documents
- Typically, tools that don't have multi-authoring support allow for some kind of team support



Translation Support

- "Translation" can include more than just translation.
 - Can also include different fonts, paper size, and more
- All tools allow for some kind of translation support.



Translation Support (cont'd)

- AuthorIT includes built-in support (multiple language files stored in the same library).
 - Optional Localization Manager lets you create translated sub-libraries.
- Other tools require separate projects.
 - RoboHelp products require separate version for Asian languages.



Translation Support (cont'd)

- AuthorIT (unlimited single- or double-byte, but no right-to-left languages)
- Doc-To-Help (more than 11 languages)
- RoboHelp Office (11 languages)
- WebWorks Publisher Products (more than 20 languages)



Reports

- Doc-To-Help
- Help & Manual
- RoboHelp Products
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for FrameMaker
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for Word



Command-line and Batch Processing

- AuthorIT
- Help & Manual
- Mif2Go
- RoboHelp Office (batch processing only)
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for FrameMaker
- WebWorks Publisher Professional for Word



Output File Size

- File sizes vary by tools
- See the HAT Output Comparison
 - Compares .chm information for several tools on this list
 - Hosted at <http://www.knopf.com/resources/hatcomp/index.html>



Cost

- Spend as much or as little as you like
- Tools cover all price ranges
- Price doesn't necessarily indicate power or functionality
- Some tools that are less expensive have more features or functionality than more expensive ones
- Check features before worrying about price
- And remember that prices change!



Support

- Typically, the more expensive the tool, the more expensive the support costs.
- Be aware that tool vendors change their support policies!



Possible Support Methods

- None
- Free (e-mail only or e-mail and phone)
- Pay per call
- Annual
- Subscription plans that include upgrades



Forums

- Dreamweaver
- RoboHelp's Help Community



User Groups

- Yahoo! Groups
 - AuthorIT
 - Deva Tools
 - FAR
 - The HyperText Studio
 - WebWorks Publisher Products



User Groups

- Other Groups
 - Doc-To-Help
 - HATT (Yahoo! Group, covers all tools)
 - Techwr-l (e-mail, Web access, covers all tools)
 - XDK



Editable Knowledge Base

- MSHelpWiki (www.mshelpwiki.com)



Workforce Proficiency and Experience

- Adobe FrameMaker
- Microsoft Word
- RoboHelp for HTML Help
- RoboHelp for Word
- Coming up fast...AuthorIT



Learning Curve

- Depends on the tool
- Relative term
- User groups are very helpful



Training

- Tools that are easy to learn typically require very little training.
- Once you learn one tool, you can usually use your skills and knowledge to easily learn another tool.
- If you switch from a Word-based tool to a non-Word tool, be sure to focus!
 - Otherwise, you'll try to use Word functionality where it doesn't exist.



HAT Matrix

- Download the HAT Comparison Matrix from:

<http://www.helpstuff.com/downloads/tools.pdf>



Thank you!

Char James-Tanny
CharJT@helpstuff.com



Please fill out your evaluations!