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DITA PUBLISHING

The true costs of taking your DITA content online.

A WebWorks.com White Paper.

<u>Author:</u>
Alan J. Porter
VP-Operations
WebWorks.com
a brand of Quadralay Corporation
aporter@webworks.com

Overview

The aim of this paper is to compare the true cost of ownership associated with publishing DITA-XML content using the DITA Open Tool Kit and the WebWorks ePublisher Platform.

Introduction

The Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA) has become one of the fastest-growing and most widely adopted standards in the technical publishing industry. While its adoption means a paradigm shift in authoring, from a continuous narrative style to a structured topic-based approach, the business benefits are well-proven in terms of content reuse, reduced translation costs, and the ability to single-source content for multiple deliverables.

One impact of DITA adoption that has been widely accepted and implemented is the need for a content management system (CMS) to manage the multiple tasks and their relationships. This need has been filled by multiple vendors offering highly developed, well-supported commercial products.

But until recently, perhaps one of the most vital areas of DITA adoption has been overlooked: the actual publishing of the content. The team behind the development of the DITA standard addressed this issue with the DITA Open Tool Kit (OTK), designed to provide basic functionality and offered to the DITA community for free.

The DITA OTK was adopted by many companies leading the adoption of DITA and was included in several commercial CMS and authoring solutions, but it was never designed to be a fully scalable, commercially developed and supported solution. While the initial cost of using the OTK may be zero, the true cost of installation, deployment, and maintenance can quickly add up to a total cost of ownership in excess of that of a commercial publishing tool.

Using the DITA Open Tool Kit

The DITA OTK was designed as an initial reference implementation by the developers of the DITA standard and was offered, along with the standard itself, to the technical publishing community through the OASIS group. Since then it has largely been maintained and developed on a volunteer basis by the DITA user group community, which has added additional functionality on an ad hoc basis. Given this background, the OTK is an excellent example of community cooperation, initiative, and technical excellence.

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However, this approach can also cause issues when implementing the OTK in a corporate production environment.

➢ Downloading and installing the OTK can take upward of 30 to 40 minutes, even for a technically competent user. If multiple authors are required to use the OTK, the process needs to be repeated on each desktop. It can be days before it is correctly configured and ready for use.

➢ The individually repeated installation process is required for any additional plugins that may be necessary.

➢ Projects become linked to specific versions of the OTK and upgrading to a newer version may mean a complete reinstallation and configuration exercise.

➢ Configuration of business logic and project files requires expertise in editing Ant files. Once set up this file would then need to be replicated on all individual desktop machines using the OTK.

➢ The DITA OTK provides the same functionality and capability to everyone irrespective of their roles or where the tool kit is used in the production process. It is a one-size-fits-all solution.

➢ Only incremental changes will be implemented from now on.

➢ Fixes are developed as and when volunteers can get time and support.

➢ The user community is strong, but is focused on the technical details rather than addressing business needs.

WebWorks ePublisher and the DITA OTK

In September 2007, WebWorks.com, a brand of Quadralay Corporation, released version 9.3 of its award-winning ePublisher Platform. Described by company founder and CEO Tony McDow as the most important release in company history, it bought Quadralay's 15 years of publishing experience to the DITA marketplace.

By embedding the DITA OTK into the existing ePublisher Platform, WebWorks now offers DITA users the same ease of use, scalability, and support for true single-source publishing previously available to companies authoring content in Adobe FrameMaker and Microsoft Word. By building on the OTK, ePublisher makes it even more powerful and gives it the ability to output in over a dozen different formats.

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By building on the work done by the DITA OTK user community and enhancing it, ePublisher provides unparalleled ease of use and management for DITA publishing.

The ePublisher Platform is designed to streamline the publication workflow. An information architect uses the comprehensive user interface of the ePublisher Pro component to design the look and behavior of the deliverables based on styles and tags. There is no need to learn the complexities of the DITA OTK and Ant files. It's all point and click.

Once the design is complete the architect creates the ePublisher Stationery, which can then be saved out on the company network or stored in a CMS for all the authors to access.

Using the ePublisher Express component, the author simply links the DITA-authored content he or she wants to publish with the redefined Stationery. There's no need to install the OTK on every desktop and train each author how to use it. Publishing becomes a ten-second, three-click operation.

Embedding the OTK in ePublisher also eases the adoption of DITA for companies migrating to the standard. Using ePublisher it is possible to merge DITA content and legacy data into a single deliverable. Instead of making the jump all in one go it is possible to choose a single project, or even a single document, and merge it with existing content from Adobe FrameMaker or Microsoft Word into one seamless deliverable, such as a single PDF file.

Implementing a commercial product brings many advantages:

➢ Downloading and installing the ePublisher Platform components takes just a few minutes. The included default Stationery and sample files can be used to produce deliverable results within minutes.

➢ Any changes made in configurations or design are done by information architects and saved as updated Stationery. Each time ePublisher Express is launched it will check for updates to the Stationery and apply them, ensuring that at publication time each instance is using the latest version. There's no need to reinstall or update every machine.

➢ While ePublisher uses the DITA OTK, it is not reliant on it. In fact, ePublisher supports multiple versions, so different projects can be linked to different versions of the OTK as needed. Updates made to the design project are then propagated out using the Stationery.

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➢ Configuration of business logic and project files is done using the comprehensive ePublisher Pro user interface. There is no need for additional training in DITA OTK-specific files.

➢ The role-based components of the ePublisher Platform -- Pro for information architects, Express for authors and the optional AutoMap component for automation -- provide the right tools for the right job at the right time.

➢ As a commercial product the ePublisher Platform has a full-time team dedicated to its development.

➢ As well as adding value to the OTK, ePublisher ensures that the embedded OTK will also benefit from additional functionality and features developed for other content formats, such as Adobe FrameMaker and Microsoft Word.

➢ The embedded OTK is considered part of the ePublisher product and as such any bugs found in the base DITA OTK are treated and fixed as part of the commercially supported product.

➢ As a commercial product, ePublisher Platform development is driven by customer and market needs. It is designed to be a robust, scalable publishing solution for complex publishing needs and delivery of multiple outputs such as websites, mobile devices, online help, and electronic publication formats.

Conclusions

Using the WebWorks ePublisher Platform for publishing DITA content leverages the best features of the industry-standard DITA OTK while adding value and greatly decreasing installation, deployment, and maintenance costs.

While the DITA OTK may be "free" its true cost of ownership is considerable. Purchasing the WebWorks ePublisher Platform provides equivalent capability to the OTK but with the benefit of additional features and functions, as well as a lower total cost of ownership.

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About ePublisher

ePublisher is a multiple component product that enables cost-effective processes for efficiently writing, presenting, and deploying online and print publications. Through the use of its three components, organizations can leverage existing authoring tools and content management systems and meet organization-wide publishing needs without incurring expensive training or software deployment initiatives. Its open system architecture, based on industry-standard XSL, enables a large degree of flexibility, customizability, and migration investment protection.

ePublisher is available in two packages: ePublisher Standard Version and Enterprise.

ePublisher Standard Version is for writing groups that manually convert and deliver their online content. The Standard Version includes ePublisher Pro and ePublisher Express. Pro will be used to create, maintain, and deploy your ePublisher Stationery; Express will be used by your writers to run reports, proof online output and deliver final online content.

ePublisher Enterprise Version is for writing groups that have frequent updates of their online content, would like to integrate online help deliverables into a software build, or want to utilize the power of a content management system. The Enterprise Version has the same components as the Standard Version, plus the powerful and flexible ePublisher AutoMap.

Each version of ePublisher will save your group time and seamlessly fit into your writing workflow, giving your writers more time to do what they do best - write.

About WebWorks.com

WebWorks.com, a brand of Quadralay Corporation, is the leading provider of comprehensive online publishing and Help system delivery solutions. Its products and services constitute the definitive single source for all your ePublishing needs. We specialize in content conversion software that outputs Web, online help, and electronic publication formats. Our e Publisher Platform can automate the conversion of source documents in popular authoring formats such as DITA-XML, FrameMaker or Word and convert them to multiple end-user formats such as WebWorks Help, HTML, CHM, and PDF. Our conversion system is based on XSL so that output formats can be customized or even developed from scratch if needed.

Contact

Phone: 1-877-6_WEBWORKS
Email: info@webworks.com
Web: http://www.webworks.com