

Streamlining HTML and PDF production

Our client is the publications department of a federal agency. The department, which publishes hundreds of manuals for both private and public reference, used an outdated publishing process that required hours of manual work to create PDF files and accessible HTML output. We implemented a new workflow that offers push-button production of HTML and PDF output.

Problems

Our client spent years fine-tuning a publishing system based on Broadvision QuickSilver, formerly known as Interleaf. The process began with Microsoft Word files. Authors from around the country submitted materials in Microsoft Word format. The compositors then imported the Word files into QuickSilver. The compositors adhered to the templates overall but often had to create custom styles at the request of authors.

Compositors used several additional components to create hyperlinked and bookmarked PDFs, and they manually added some links to the PDFs. URLs and cross-references were not hyperlinked.

Creating HTML was a time-consuming process. The compositors generated HTML in QuickSilver and used a series of Visual Basic scripts to customize the HTML. These scripts mapped the template formats and any ad hoc styles to HTML components.

The web team then spent hours cleaning up the HTML to ensure compliance with accessibility guidelines (known as Section 508). The conversion process for one document could take up to a week.

Solutions

As the QuickSilver system grew increasingly difficult to maintain, our client began planning for

a new publishing system. They requested a system with the following features:

- ❖ Production environment based on unstructured FrameMaker
- ❖ Comprehensive set of FrameMaker templates for multiple publications and numbered heading schemes
- ❖ Push-button production of HTML and PDF
- ❖ Automated QuickSilver-to-FrameMaker conversion process

FrameMaker implementation

FrameMaker was the perfect solution for many reasons. Our client handles long, complex documents containing many tables, graphics, and cross-references. The templates we developed save time and take advantage of FrameMaker's powerful automation features:

Text insets: A single 1000-page book consists of thousands of rate tables with a large percentage of repeated content. In QuickSilver, the tables were shared components. When rates changed, the compositor modified the shared components and then had to click in every table cell that needed updating. In FrameMaker, storing the tables as text insets eliminates redundancy, and updating text insets is a one-step process.

Cross-references: In QuickSilver, inserting cross-references required several tedious steps. The process is automated in FrameMaker.

Conditional text: We used FrameMaker's conditional text feature to provide variable footers.

Push-button HTML and PDF

Using WebWorks ePublisher Pro and a highly customized template, our client saves hundreds of hours converting documentation to HTML. The



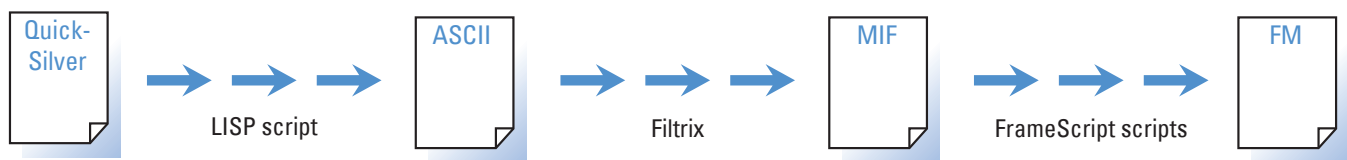
client publishes the HTML in multiple locations requiring different header content. In the template, we included a list of output targets, each with its own header design, JavaScript, and CSS file. To change the look and feel, the client selects a target and regenerates the project, a two-step process.

The template we designed meets stringent accessibility standards. For example, two forms of navigation are displayed—flyout menus and a standard list of links. The template also converts FrameMaker marker text to table and image attributes for Section 508 compliance. The web team no longer spends hours validating the HTML.

The new PDF conversion process reduces production time by hours. Creating hyperlinked, bookmarked PDFs in FrameMaker takes minutes because compositors no longer manually add links to the PDFs or save individual chapters as PDF. These tasks are all automated in FrameMaker.

Conversion process

The conversion process runs a LISP script in QuickSilver to create ASCII and then converts ASCII to MIF with Blueberry Software's Filtrix. Customized FrameScript scripts handle the rest of the conversion process. We designed scripts that map QuickSilver to FrameMaker styles, resolve cross-references, delete typed heading and step numbers, convert URLs to hyperlinks, insert variables, insert PDF navigation buttons, and more. These scripts save our client hundreds of hours of manual conversion and cleanup.



Knowledge transfer

We split training into several classes throughout the project. Introductory FrameMaker training prepared our client to evaluate the templates and understand the new workflow. Mid-project, we delivered FrameMaker template training. Toward the end of the project, we provided custom WebWorks ePublisher Pro and conversion process training. All training was based on the template and conversion process documentation we wrote during the project.

Future plans

By following our detailed conversion process, the client plans to convert more of the QuickSilver-based library to FrameMaker format and then to HTML and PDF. They will create new FrameMaker templates for additional publication sizes. A Word conversion workflow is also in the works.

Tools

- ❖ Adobe FrameMaker (unstructured)
- ❖ Quadralay WebWorks ePublisher Pro
- ❖ Custom FrameScript scripts
- ❖ Custom LISP script
- ❖ Blueberry Software's Filtrix

scriptorium.com

