

WebWorks Publisher Professional Edition 6.0 Review

Quadralay Corporation's WebWorks Publisher converts FrameMaker documents to online formats, including HTML, Dynamic HTML, WinHelp, HTML Help, XML, and WebWorks Help. This capability has become essential for technical documentation departments that deliver multiple formats of the same book. WebWorks Publisher provides technical writers with a way to deliver multiple formats without maintaining separate FrameMaker books and help files.

Scriptorium Publishing Services has used WebWorks Publisher to convert documentation to online formats for years. We are certified WebWorks Publisher trainers and had early access to the new release, so we've used it extensively. This review summarizes our assessment of WebWorks Publisher Professional Edition 6.0.



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Version control

Currently, there are a number of different “WebWorks Publisher” products, and quite a bit of confusion about their capabilities. The following are available:

- WebWorks Publisher 2000 (also known as version 5). This is the fully featured predecessor to WebWorks Publisher Professional Edition (also known as version 6). WebWorks Publisher 2000 was released in 1998.
- WebWorks Publisher Professional Edition (also known as version 6). WebWorks Publisher Professional Edition is an upgrade of WebWorks Publisher 2000.
- WebWorks Publisher Standard Edition. This light version is bundled with FrameMaker 6. The Standard Edition lets you create HTML and XML output, and make some basic customizations. You can also develop complex HTML or XML templates in the Professional Edition and then use them in the Standard Edition. The Standard Edition does not have a Style Designer, so the template cannot be modified. It doesn't include traditional online help templates, such as WinHelp and HTML Help, but you can buy them from Quadralay.

This review focuses on WebWorks Publisher Professional Edition.

New Feature Overview

WebWorks Publisher Professional Edition includes several new features and templates to make the conversion process run more smoothly. The new features are listed below and are fully described in the following pages.

- XML templates
The XML + CSS template converts documents to XML and formats them with a cascading style sheet (CSS) for multibrowser compatibility. The XML + XSL template lets you include formatting instructions in the extensible style sheet language (XSL), along with rules that extract and format specific data from the FrameMaker file.
- Updated WebWorks Help template
WebWorks Help 2.0 has a new design and also includes two implementations—JavaScript and Java. Your helpset detects which platform and browser is in use and displays either the JavaScript or Java version of the helpset, depending on which implementation is compatible.

- Global script feature

In the project window's Script tab, you can include scripts to run on a single file or an entire project either before or after project generation.

- Conditional new page generation

In paragraph tags, you can specify that a new page be generated only if the previous paragraph didn't generate a new page. This prevents pages from generating that include only a heading and no body text. You can also specify that a new page be generated unconditionally.

- File naming customizing

A new marker, Filename, makes it easier to customize the output names for individual files.

- Font and character set updates

Six character sets are included with this version—Latin1, Unicode, Japanese, Korean, Simplified Chinese, and Traditional Chinese. If you select Latin1, all fonts are automapped to Latin1. The BBFontFamilyOverride building block checks for Symbol, Wingdings, or ZapfDingbats fonts, so the Symbol character set is unnecessary in the Professional Edition.

- New macros

New macros help control output file names, link projects, convert character sets correctly, work with FrameMaker + SGML documents, and write more readable code.

- Project linking

Links resolve correctly among linked projects that aren't in the same Output directory.

- Updated, printed documentation

For the first time, Quadralay has shipped printed documentation to every user as part of the product.

XML templates

Quadralay has jumped on the XML bandwagon with two new XML templates. XML, or Extensible Markup Language, is a simplified form of Standard Generalized Markup Language, or SGML. XML lets you create your own tags, but the structure is in the document instead of in a separate Document Type Definition (DTD). The XML + CSS template creates XML output (Figure 1) formatted by a CSS file.

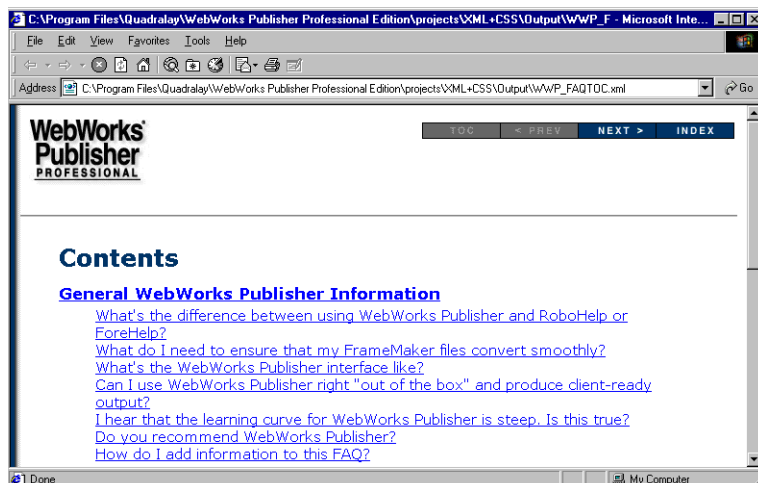


Figure 1: XML + CSS template output

The XML + CSS template produces XML pages with navigation bars and headers and footers that are similar to HTML output. At this time, XML + CSS output is supported only by Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.0 or Netscape 6.0.

If you plan to display information on a wireless phone or compile it into a Java application, you can use the new XML + XSL template to create data that can be parsed. The output looks similar to the XML + CSS output—the navigation, footers, fonts, colors, and other design elements are identical. The main difference is XSL, a powerful pattern-matching language. In the XSL file, you can define rules that produce data only if specific conditions exist in the XML file. For example, a rule might check for a Logo element immediately followed by a Footer element and then output the elements in a table. The default XSL file includes rules that format logos, navigation bars, contact information, image maps, tables, and other elements. Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.0 is the only browser that currently supports XSL.

Updated WebWorks Help template

WebWorks Help 2.0 displays content in two panes—a navigation pane on the left and a main pane on the right. The navigation pane includes four tabs—Contents, Index, Search, and Favorites (or bookmarks) (Figure 2).

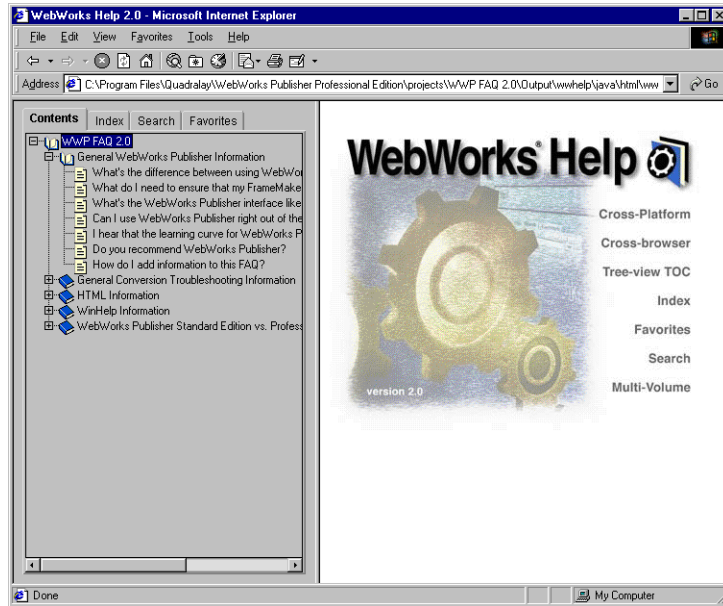


Figure 2: WebWorks Help 2.0 Java implementation

Although the new version looks similar to the version of WebWorks Help 1.0, the code underneath has been completely rewritten.

This version strives to produce multiplatform, cross-browser output by including both JavaScript and Java implementations in projects. By default, WebWorks Help 2.0 produces XML files for content, a Java applet to create the navigation pane, and JavaScript to detect the reader's browser and platform. The Java implementation ranks search results, displaying files that contain the most search terms at the top of the list. You can also save favorite pages as bookmarks (Figure 3).

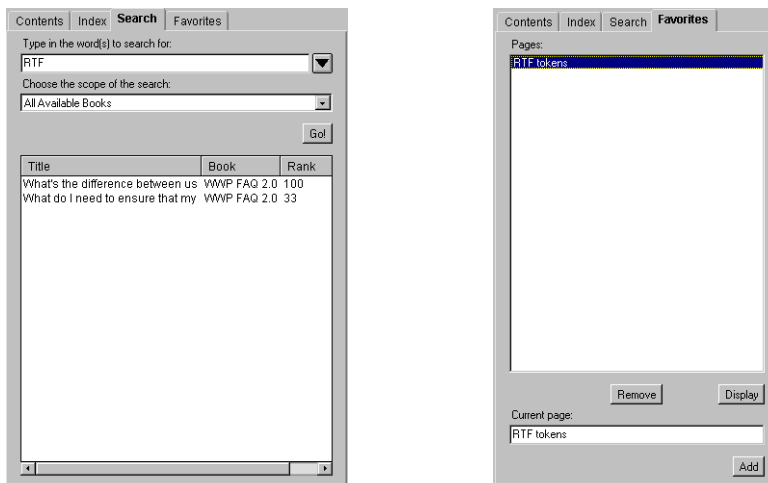


Figure 3: Search and Favorites tabs

Another handy feature in WebWorks Help 2.0 is the KeyWords marker. You can automatically generate meta data, or the key-words in source code that search engines index, by mapping the KeyWords marker to the Index marker. If you want to separate index terms from meta data, create a custom meta data marker in FrameMaker and then map that marker to the KeyWords marker.

WebWorks Help 2.0 detects the reader's browser and platform, and if they don't support Java, the JavaScript implementation is displayed (Figure 4). The JavaScript implementation looks like the Java version but lacks two features—a Favorites tab and search result ranking. Both of these features require Java.

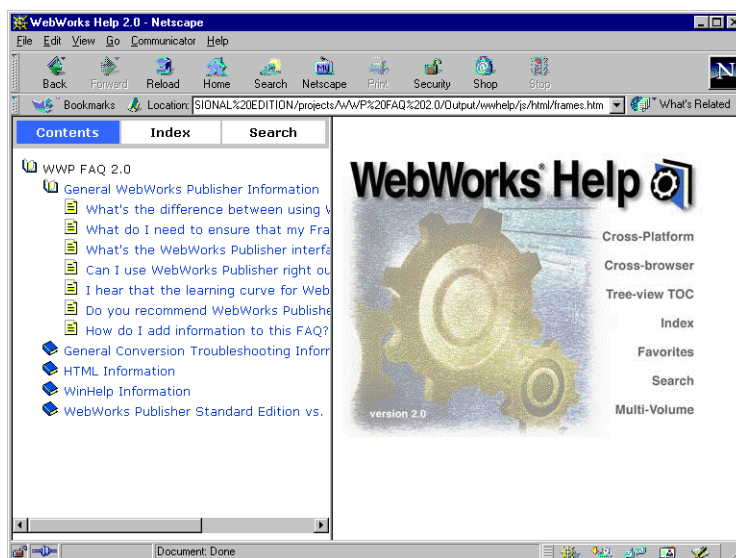


Figure 4: WebWorks Help 2.0 JavaScript implementation

Though WebWorks Help 2.0 tries to create multiplatform output, the Mac implementation, backed by JavaScript, loads slowly at times. The Java implementation works fine for readers with version 4.0 and higher browsers.

WebWorks Help 2.0 provides support for context-sensitive help. There is, however, a nasty bug associated with shipping context-sensitive WebWorks Help files that are viewed locally (that is, not from a web server). Quadralay has promised a fix in the near future and has provided a work-around.

Global script feature

In WebWorks Publisher Professional Edition, a new Scripts tab lets you keep track of the scripts you want to run before and after generating files and projects (Figure 5).

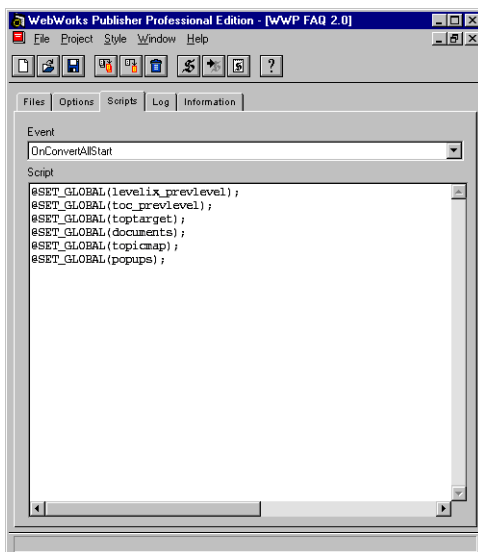


Figure 5: Scripts tab

This tab makes it much easier to implement scripts. In previous versions, you embedded in the Page definitions, under the Options tab. There, you include scripts to run before or after the selected page is written to disk. The Pages Options subtab is limited to a specific page style—Normal, TOC, Index, and so on, but on the Script tab, you can apply scripts globally or to specific files.

The drop-down list selections are OnConvertAllStart (run script before converting the project), OnConvertAllEnd (run script after converting the project), OnConvertFileStart (run script before converting a specific file), and OnConvertFileEnd (run script after converting a specific file).

The Scripts tab doesn't add any new features, but it is much more convenient. Instead of putting all the start-up housekeeping scripts in the TOC's Scripts to Run Before field and all the closing scripts in the Index's Scripts to Run After field, you have a single location where you can put the scripts, which is much cleaner.

Conditional new page generation

In WebWorks Publisher Professional Edition, you can now modify paragraph styles to generate a new page only if the previous paragraph style did *not* generate a new page (Figure 6). This feature lets you prevent the generation of empty pages when a heading is immediately followed by another heading.

In version 2000, you had to go into the FrameMaker files and modify them to prevent this problem; for example, by creating a Heading2 and Heading2NoNewPage tag and applying the latter when you did not want to generate a new page. The new check box eliminates this step.

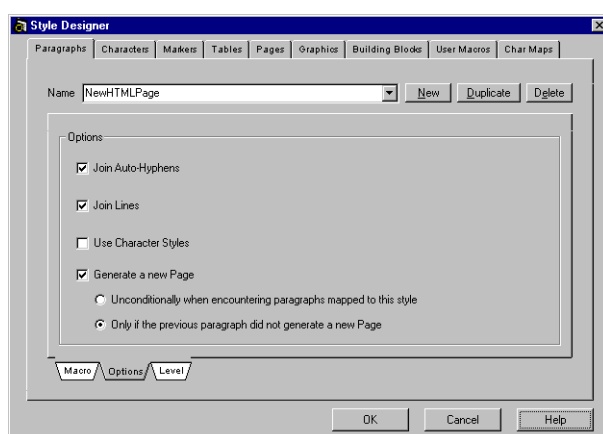


Figure 6: Conditional page generation setting

File naming customizing

In version 2000, the only way to rename files was through the File Properties dialog box. This presented some major problems because the file names were saved based on the position of the output file and not based on the content of the FrameMaker files. For example, a chapter split into several pages would generate consecutive pages named fooa.html, foob.html, fooc.html, and so on.

In version 6, WebWorks Publisher provides an easy to way to rename your output files. You create a custom Filename marker in FrameMaker and insert this marker into the heading whose output file you want to rename. Type the output file name into the marker. When you generate the project, the marker automaps

to the new WebWorks Publisher Filename marker. In the project window, the new file name is displayed (Figure 7).

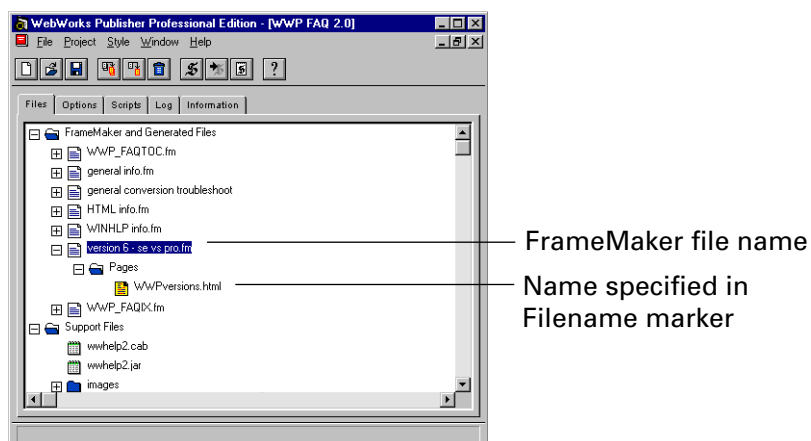


Figure 7: Customized file name

The short file name in Figure 7 was created by including a File-name marker in the FrameMaker file with the marker text WWPversions. If you have to specify page names for your output, this new feature can save you a lot of time.

Font and character set updates

Six character sets are included with the Professional Edition—Latin1, Unicode, Japanese, Korean, Simplified Chinese, and Standard Chinese. If you select Latin1 as the default character set when you create a project, Publisher automaps all fonts to Latin1. Instead of requiring you to map the Symbol font to a Symbol character set, a new building block, \$BBFontFamilyOverride, detects Symbol, Wingding, and Zapf Dingbats. The result is that the output contains a font specification, such as:

```
<FONT FACE="Symbol" >
```

This simplifies the Char Maps mappings by consolidating regular characters and symbols into one character set. However, this implementation assumes that the end users will have the same “special” fonts as the developer. This is probably not a good idea. Although the version 2000 approach of using a special character set and embedding small graphics for various special characters is a bit clumsy, it is a much better solution from the point of view of the end user because it does not make assumptions about what fonts are available on their machines.

The new Unicode character set appears to be incomplete and is the source of much confusion among users who work in languages that need it, such as Russian, Polish, and the like.

New macros

The Professional Edition provides new macros, described in Quadralay's *Macro Reference*. The `@SET_FILENAME` macro is used in the new Filename marker. However, you can use `@SET_FILENAME` in other ways to customize the generated file names.

The new `$CONTEXT` macro returns the context ID of the current project, and the `$LINKCONTEXT` macro returns the context ID of the target of the link. These are compared to identify cross-project links in the `GotoLinkOpen` marker style definition.

The `$CONV` macro translates text to the correct encoding (ISO-8859-1 for Latin1 character sets, UTF-8 for Unicode, and so on). It's a necessity if your project name includes non-Latin1 characters.

WebWorks Publisher Professional Edition also includes new macros to work with SGML attributes (from FrameMaker + SGML files), such as `$SGML_ATTR`, which outputs a specific attribute from a FrameMaker + SGML document. Another macro, `$IF_SGML_ATTR_EXISTS`, tests to see if a certain SGML attribute exists in the document.

Finally, the new version includes several "negated" macros. For example, the `$IF_EQUAL` macro now has an `$IF_NOTEQUAL` counterpart. These macros do not provide new functionality (because you can use the `$IF_EQUAL` macro to accomplish the same thing), but they are convenient for making your code more readable.

For example, consider this macro:

```
$IF_EQUAL(a,b,<HTML><HEAD><TITLE>blah blah blah</TITLE>,d);
```

The equivalent statement using `$IF_NOTEQUAL` is:

```
$IF_NOTEQUAL(a,b,d,<HTML><HEAD><TITLE>blah blah blah</TITLE>);
```

The `$IF_NOTEQUAL` makes your code easier to read.

Project linking

In previous versions of WebWorks Publisher, documents that cross-referenced each other had to share the same Output directory, or the cross-references wouldn't resolve correctly. Now, they can be in separate Output directories (each of which has a unique name; they

can't all be named Output). You make the Output directories relative to each other, open the projects, specify a unique linking context for each project (in the Options tab), and then generate each project.

Updated, printed documentation

When you buy WebWorks Publisher Professional Edition, you now receive printed documentation. *Getting Started* helps beginning users create their first project. The *User's Guide* describes features common to all templates and helps users customize projects. The *Macro Reference* lists all macros in alphabetical order and describes their functions. It also explains how regular expressions work. The *Template Reference* describes the templates and how you can customize them. Quadralay converted the documentation to WebWorks Help and included the output with the installation. Select the Help menu in WebWorks Publisher Professional Edition and then select Contents. You can search the entire documentation set, save bookmarks of favorite pages, and browse the index.

Bug fixes

Version 6 includes a few important bug fixes:

- The WebWorks Rasterizer no longer must be the default printer. You install the Rasterizer, but version 6 will work correctly without resetting your default printer.
- The streaking or banding problem seen on some graphics has been corrected.

Summary

The top user complaints for WebWorks Publisher 2000 were as follows:

- Inability to tie file names to content of FrameMaker files
- Cross-project linking problems
- Slow performance of WebWorks Help
- Bad documentation

With this new release, Quadralay has addressed all of these issues to some degree. If you are one of the people who needs the ability to name files or cross-project linking, this is a compelling reason to upgrade. The new attribute macros will be very useful to developers working with FrameMaker + SGML.

But for those people who depend on WebWorks Publisher's batch processing feature, version 6 presents a nasty surprise. The batch feature is now gone, and Quadralay plans to provide a new solution, which will be available through their consulting division for a fee. If your workflow depends on the batch facility, our advice is to wait to find out what this new solution will be and how much it will cost. In the meantime, unless you need the updates that address the preceding four items, there's not much reason to upgrade.

The WebWorks Publisher interface is still difficult and cumbersome. In our last review, we complained about difficulties with the interface and offered some specific examples and suggestions. Quadralay has added a few new elements, such as the five tabs now available on the project window (before, there were only two) and adding the conditional page generation check box on the Paragraph style definition's Options subtab. But we still have to right-click to get to the style mappings, and the overall experience for new users remains intimidating.

Contacting us

Scriptorium Publishing Services, Inc. excels at transforming complex technical ideas into clear, concise documents. Our clients, who range from start-ups to Fortune 500 companies, rely on us for the full spectrum of technical publishing services—everything from turnkey documentation to specialized technical editing and consulting. Our expert, talented staff thrives on working with challenging new technology in a deadline-driven environment.

We are certified WebWorks Publisher trainers and offer training and consulting services for FrameMaker and WebWorks Publisher.

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