

SARIE – HTML Tool Evaluation

Situation

Currently, the Documentation team publishes both Word documents and .PDFs to the Stellent InfoBase for version control and display to business users. While the .PDF format does not allow edits and provides security, it also introduces several issues that are detrimental to business users. The first time a user opens a document, the Adobe Acrobat splash screen appears and delays the document by several seconds, a delay that has a large negative impact on call center users. Compatibility issues between differing versions of Acrobat also create difficulties opening and creating .PDFs. Usability studies have also shown that while .PDFs provide general security and portability, these files are not optimized for onscreen viewing and do not take full advantage of web capabilities. Finally, an issue has been identified with Acrobat Reader 7 that makes it very difficult for users to return to the original document after clicking a link to a new document, resulting in complex navigation, workarounds, and frustrated users.

To combat these issues and provide better service to our users, the Documentation team would like to move from .PDF files to .HTML files for web display of documentation. HTML provides a number of advantages:

- Because it is designed for online delivery, HTML takes full advantage of web capabilities and allows greater flexibility in how documentation is structured and delivered.
- HTML is interpreted natively by browsers, eliminating any delay in the display of the requested document. While it is true that complex, graphic-laden HTML files can be slow to load, this is not an issue for our documentation. Our documents are generally short and use few graphics, and our users largely access these documents at work over a fast connection.
- HTML's hyperlinking capabilities preserve a navigation trail, allowing users to easily return back to original documents.
- Because it integrates easily with XML, HTML gives us greater flexibility for future development efforts.

Before the Documentation team can make this switch, however, we need to evaluate the tools to use to generate HTML files. These tools include web development applications, HTML editors, and Word-to-HTML conversion software, and lastly, the Stellent Dynamic Converter. While each category of tools contains any number of suitable applications that could be used, this discussion focuses on the general categories. When mention is made of a specific application, it is because that application is generally viewed as a leader.

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Alternatives for Consideration

	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4
Description	Web Development applications (such as Dreamweaver)	HTML editors (such as CoffeeCup)	Word to HTML conversion tools	Stellent Dynamic Converter
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive web design and development • Robust CSS support • Check in/Check out tools • O'Reilly reference material built in • Comprehensive training and resource materials • XML support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively inexpensive (CoffeeCup runs \$50.00) • Includes many Dreamweaver tools at a lesser price (WYSIWYG editors, HTML strippers, CSS support). These tools may also be less robust. • Simpler to learn • Many come with a good amount of samples and training materials. • Generally good support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows us to author natively in Word; easier revision for business approvers • Batch conversion tools: quick conversion for all existing Word docs • Customizable: we specify the tags to delete or keep. • Some can split large Word documents into several files and auto create a TOC • Automatically create links • CSS support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automatically generates HTML for display from Word files upon document check-in • Integrates completely into Stellent workflow and content management tools • Graphic files managed automatically by Stellent. • Little change from current workflow. • Ease of revision for business authors.
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost: Dreamweaver runs \$399 for the basic application (not taking into account any volume discounts we may have) • More for full on site development than simple HTML authoring • Instructor-led training is available in the Mpls/St. Paul area, but it's expensive (\$1100 for 3 days) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not as robust. These tools are less for site-management and may not include the tools we'd need for upgrades to the InfoBase interface. • May not contain support for XML, giving us less flexibility for future development. • Training resources are not as extensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows us to author natively in Word • These are not HTML editors, so we'll still need an HTML editor/web development application in the future, if we switch to authoring natively in HTML 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive (\$25,000; this may represent a bundled pricing) • May require a good deal of IT support • Extensive set up might be necessary • Requires more time from Documentation team members and IT to learn • Reliant on Stellent technology

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Potential Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If we author natively in HTML (instead of Word), it's more difficult for business editors to edit and revise • Need access to directories on the Stellent server in which to store graphics and .CSS templates. • May need IT resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If we author natively in HTML (instead of Word), it's more difficult for business editors to edit and revise • Need access to directories on the Stellent server in which to store graphics and .CSS templates. • May need IT resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While these may be extremely useful for converting existing documents, their use might be limited to just that time period. May be difficult to get approval to purchase. • These tools don't fully fill our needs, and we'll still need to purchase additional software. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost • IT/Doc team requirements to implement
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Recommendation

Due to future development plans for the DICE project (which include adding a new interface), Dreamweaver best fits the Documentation team's needs. However, because we have a large volume of existing documents that will need conversion, purchasing a Word to HTML conversion tool will make that conversion much faster and help eliminate .PDF files from InfoBase sooner.

Assumptions

- The Documentation team will be given access to the appropriate directories on the Stellent server, or a process will be developed so that graphics and .CSS template files can be easily incorporated into Stellent and used in .HTML files.
- Appropriate training for IT and Documentation team members will be available.
- The Stellent content server will be the repository for all documentation for the foreseeable future.
- The Documentation team will work to make any reviewing process as simple as possible for business users/reviewers.

Evaluation

By moving to HTML, the Documentation team will remove many of the negative conceptions our users have about InfoBase and improve user experience. We cannot eliminate these issues by continuing the same process we use today. HTML also positions us well for future development efforts and continual improvements and enhancements to best serve our customers.