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consulting

Case study No. 2
Single source publishing
with a content management system
(2/2000 – 7/2000)

Customer

Software producer of the content management system (CMS)

How it began

The CMS was originally optimized to produce web sites, i.e., to generate HTML content. To enter new markets, the usage of the CMS for producing online help as well as printed documentation should be proved by developing the CMS's documentation in the system itself.

At the same time, the technical writing department should test the new software feature for editing web texts online via the browser interface.

There were several open questions:

- How to subdivide the content for single source publishing?
- How to design templates for online and print output?
- Which markup language to export to, HTML or SGML?
- Which DTP program for final output of the print manual?
- How to export index, table of contents and cross-references?

Solution

At the beginning, two kinds of templates were used, one for HTML (online) and one for SGML (print) export.

- The HTML output was a "traditional" website. Index and table of contents were done via Javascript.
- For the SGML output, the content pieces were generated into a SGML wrapper and imported into Framemaker+SGML 5.5. There, a previously prepared EDD and template were used to finish the document. Finally, the document was distributed as PDF.

Obstacles

- Although there were two kinds of templates, the content of the placeholders was automatically partly formatted as HTML. This led to problems with not-closed tags, e.g. und <p>, because the SGML parser of Framemaker reacted with format loss. Special AWK scripts were programmed to solve this problem, but the SGML result was still faulty.
- To change from HTML to SGML output, a file in an operating system folder had to be changed manually instead of simply triggering it in the CMS software front-end.
- The index of the online version could not be exported. Because of this, the index entries for the online and the print version had to be done separately, i.e., twice.
- In HTML, cross-references are jumps to HTML sides, in the print versions they are jumps to other sections of the document. This problem could also be solved with an AWK script.
- Highly specialized knowledge is needed to make changes in the EDD and template of Framemaker+SGML.

New Approach

- Instead of SGML, the export was down into a WORD2000 wrapper. To prepare this, a WORD2000 document was created, exported as website and integrated into the project in the CMS. Advantages are the HTML import and the easy editing of the WORD document.
- A new version of the CMS software allowed to trigger the toggling between the templates via the front-end.

Latest information (7/2002)

The single source publishing is still done by the technical writing department of the CMS producer. The volume in total is more than 800 print pages.

Due to some problems with WORD2000, the documentation team considered going back to Framemaker+ SGML, but the plan was dropped for various reasons.