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Results
- Cut language translation time in half and reduced translation costs by 21%
- Successfully implemented single sourcing of content using Adobe FrameMaker
- Eliminated redundant editing and indexing for large, complex documents with multiple versions in multiple languages

Marcia Riefer Johnston

Saving the day, every day

Technical writer uses Adobe FrameMaker to simplify documentation, saving one client as much as $16,000 on translation costs

More than 15 years ago, Marcia Riefer Johnston switched from Microsoft Word to Adobe FrameMaker for technical writing and editing. Once she discovered the power and reliability of FrameMaker, she was a lifetime convert, and Johnston has now been using Adobe FrameMaker for most of her 25-year writing and editing career.

"I don't recall the first version of Adobe FrameMaker I used, but I remember being thrilled by the features in FrameMaker 7.2," says Johnston. "It could do everything I wanted it to and kept working flawlessly, no matter how big the book I was working on."

Today, as president of her own consulting firm, Johnston uses Adobe FrameMaker 11—as well as previous versions of FrameMaker depending on her clients' needs—whether she's working at home or working at a client site. She specializes in long-form technical content, including white papers and user documentation. Her client list includes small and mid-size companies in the public and private sectors, and large corporations that include major sports retailers and medical-device manufacturers.

Marcia's journey

Johnston notes that Microsoft Word wasn't designed for handling large, complex files or supporting long, structured documents. However, the software was ubiquitous, and she was initially reluctant to switch. But after trying Adobe FrameMaker, she had an epiphany. "Adobe FrameMaker 'thought' differently than other document tools," she says. "Adobe FrameMaker just made sense."

She adds, "Even now, I know I still have a lot to discover about what Adobe FrameMaker can do. Every time I think of something new I'd like it to do, I find that the Adobe software engineers have already developed an advanced feature to support it."

For example, Johnston remembers reading a book, *Single Sourcing: Building Modular Documentation*, by Kurt Ament. Single sourcing is a content-management method in which one source of content is used across document versions and media types. It helps reduce the need for expensive, labor-intensive editing. The book talked about the process but not the technology to support it.

Meanwhile, a colleague showed Johnston how to pull one Adobe FrameMaker file into another by reference (File> Import> File). As soon as she saw that, Johnston realized it was exactly what Ament's book was talking about.

"I had wondered if I could single source the user guides I was writing. And there was the answer right in front of me," says Johnston. "Adobe FrameMaker had been waiting for me to catch up."

Johnston put her discovery to the test. She had already created separate user guides for two models of an electrocardiograph. One had basic features; the other had advanced features. Although much of the content was duplicated, Johnston originally developed separate FrameMaker document sets, which had been standard operating procedure. Her exposure to the single-sourcing concept prompted her to look for tools to support a new workflow. Johnston found what she was looking for in FrameMaker— conditional text for model-specific information and variables for model names.

"After a few days of consolidating and testing, I had a single set of Adobe FrameMaker files that could generate either book," Johnston says. "Single sourcing worked. No more redundant editing or indexing. It was rewarding and exhilarating to make the discovery."

These source files include variables & conditional tags.
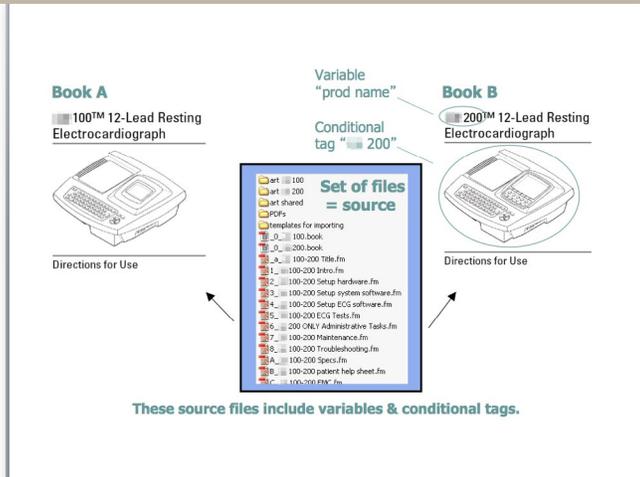
> *"After a few days of consolidating and testing, I had a single set of Adobe FrameMaker files that could generate either book. Single sourcing worked. No more redundant editing or indexing."*
>
> Marcia Riefer Johnston, president of Marcia Riefer Johnston, Inc., and author of *Word Up! How to Write Powerful Sentences and Paragraphs (And Everything You Build from Them)*

Challenge

- Reducing redundancies and inefficiencies related to publishing technical documents that share content
- Simplifying processes and minimizing costs of translating documents into multiple languages

Solution

Use Adobe FrameMaker for effective single sourcing of content, creating templates and modifying source files to include conditional text, variables, and other elements

Systems at a glance

Adobe FrameMaker

For more information

www.adobe.com/products/framemaker.html

Stunning efficiencies realized

The biggest savings generated by single sourcing came when her client needed to translate the documents into multiple languages. Originally, the team planned a two-step translation process: first, translate the full-featured electrocardiograph's manual and then leverage the translation memory to translate the basic manual. By using a master set of source files with variables and conditional tags, the translators could translate the master source for both manuals in a single step.

The original plan—translating two books, serially, into nine languages—would have taken 12 weeks and cost $77,000. Translating single-sourced files (with conditional graphics and text showing) into nine languages took only six weeks and cost $61,000.

"By using the single-sourcing capabilities within Adobe FrameMaker, we created two large manuals from one set of files," Johnston says. "What did this mean to the business? As we created the content, we eliminated redundant editing and indexing processes, saving time and increasing accuracy. Then we cut translation costs by $16,000 and cut translation time in half."

Finding process improvements

Although Johnston relies extensively on Adobe FrameMaker for her everyday work, she also uses other software in Adobe Technical Communication Suite. For example, she has worked with an instructional designer to create training modules in Adobe Captivate. In addition, she has used Adobe RoboHelp to create Help topics. Johnston plans to extend her skills with the suite and encourage clients to use it as well.

Currently, Johnston is investigating new uses for Adobe FrameMaker. For instance, just as it can generate tables of contents and indexes for use in the document itself, Adobe FrameMaker can also generate documents for the author's own use in troubleshooting. For example, Johnston has found it handy to generate a list of markers (LOM file) when she wants to review a document's comment markers, cross-reference markers, or index markers. Johnston is also looking for new ways to improve the translation process, such as creating template files that hold language-specific variables and conditional-text settings.

"Templates offer a powerful way to update translated source files," Johnston says. "To update a book file in a certain language, I just open the template file for that language and import the appropriate settings. Boom. Done."