



# FrameMaker 2017 and InDesign CC comparison for technical documentation

Different tools meet different needs. Select the right one based on your specific requirements.



## Adobe FrameMaker (2017 release)

For a 30-day free trial, visit [www.adobe.com/go/tryframemaker](http://www.adobe.com/go/tryframemaker)

To schedule a private demo, visit [www.adobetechcommdemo.com](http://www.adobetechcommdemo.com)

## The challenges

Technical documentation faces two primary challenges: Products get more and more sophisticated and increasingly complex—and users need more access to information through different channels. The change towards technical systems and products interacting with each other has a direct impact on the way of our understanding of the information flows. More and more, information needs to be broken into coherent “chunks” that are adapted and recombined with other bits of information.

Technical documentation no longer is a set of instructions set in stone or defined in a fixed process of gathering, bundling, and publishing. As products change, so do the requirements for technical documentation.

Hence, technical documentation is driven by two main aspects: producing technical information within tight schedules efficiently in an ever-increasing variety of languages on the one hand, and the need of its users to access that information any time on any device — instantaneously. Adding to this sense of urgency is the ever increasing speed of updates of the products themselves. To keep up with product updates, the requirements for publishing speed and reliability put an enormous pressure on the technical documentation. Making it all the more important to have the right tools to accomplish these tasks.

Deciding about the right tool is not a decision easily made, since the consequences can be far reaching for years ahead. To help you cope with the decision we need to have a closer look at the tools as well as what their specific features and abilities may mean for the technical publishing process.

## The champions

After looking at the needs of technical documentation, there is little doubt that two applications will almost always come out going head-to-head for taking the publishing crown: both applications have their audience and followers who rightly claim the superiority of their respective tools.

### Adobe FrameMaker

Adobe FrameMaker easily takes the crown when it comes to longevity and reliability in publishing long and complex documents of sometimes more than 1000 pages. But reducing FrameMaker to printed documents would not be fair, as the application can publish HTML5, ePub and apps—all from one single source.

The documents themselves may consist of reusable sections and fragments that are formatted consistently throughout the documents.

To help the author stay in control of this vast amount of information, FrameMaker offers sophisticated features such as variables, running headers and footers as well conditional formats.

Since FrameMaker is built for manipulating large amounts of information, it also offers an unparalleled support for working on structured content, helping the author to create well-formed XML content.

### Adobe InDesign

InDesign from Adobe is a different beast: made to produce high-quality layout for all sorts of marketing communication, the application shines when it comes to beautiful print and refined typography. Originally made for printed output, the application offers unparalleled support for color management, flexible page layouts and arranging content.

As marketing communication faces the same challenges with respect to multi-channel output, the application can publish content to ePub, retaining a nearly identical layout. The hallmark of InDesign, is its integration into the Adobe Creative Cloud, sharing almost the same interface and user experience with Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator.

## The comparison

The following comparison is by no means exhaustive and will cover only the highlights of each application. Its aim is to facilitate the decision making process, thereby helping to quickly compare features for your specific documentation situation.

## Tables of contents

- [Book Building Features and Long Document Support](#)
- [Document Editing](#)
- [XML and Structured Authoring](#)
- [Automated Authoring, Input and Output](#)
- [Publishing to Tablets and Mobile](#)
- [Role-Based Publishing](#)

## Book Building Features and Long Document Support

[Back to TOC](#)

Feature	FrameMaker	InDesign
<b>Book management</b>	Books control the consistency of all lists, TOCs and documents. Documents in books can be grouped and excluded from output.	Books are containers with limited functionality. Documents in books can be reordered but not grouped or excluded from output.
<b>Text styles / formats</b>	Decent set of text styles with basic typographic controls. Text formats cannot be inherited. Margin header and run-in styles available.	Elaborate typographic controls such as "single-line composer" and "GREP styles" (automatic formatting of elements within a paragraph). Text styles can be set to cascading, inheriting features from a "parent" style. Run-in styles are available.
<b>Paragraph numbering</b>	Extensive numbering options for chapters, sections, lists and headers. Numbering sets can be defined.	Basic numbering styles for chapters, headers and lists. Numbering sets can be defined.
<b>Master pages for page layout</b>	Page layout is defined on master pages.	Page layout is defined on master pages. Master pages can "inherit" layout elements.
<b>Reference pages for building blocks</b>	Objects such as footer lines or TOC formats are configured on reference pages. Reference pages can be updated and distributed across all documents within a book.	N/A
<b>Table of Contents (TOC)</b>	Automatically generated from any paragraph or XML element text. Can include entire or partial numbered paragraph prefix. Order of text, leader dots and page numbers can be easily defined. Multiple TOCs are possible. TOCs are placed in specific documents within a book and generated when the book is updated.	Decent set of tools for generating TOC from specific paragraph elements. Limited control over inclusion of numbered paragraph prefixes, etc. Strong control over styles and display of TOC elements. Multiple TOCs are possible. TOCs are placed in documents and not managed by the book document.
<b>List of Tables or Figures</b>	As TOCs, lists of tables or figures are part of a book and are updated as the book is updated.	Lists of tables and figures can be placed within documents, but must be updated separately.
<b>Index</b>	Index entries may be sorted and displayed in virtually unlimited nested indents. Workspace pod displays all index markers sorted in a variety of ways. Character tags may be used to make portions of index entry be bold, italic, etc.	Decent set of tools for creating a simple index without too many levels. Granular control over display of individual words (common to tech doc) not available.
<b>Cross-references</b>	Any paragraph or XML element may be a target of a cross-reference. Special pods display all cross-references in all open documents. Unresolved cross-references are highlighted. Cross-reference formats can be defined as standardized building blocks.	Any paragraph may be a target of a cross-reference. Special panes display all cross-references in current document. Unresolved cross-references are highlighted. Cross-reference formats can be defined as standardized building blocks.
<b>Fixing unresolved cross-references</b>	Cross-reference pod displays unresolved cross-references and provide hints to missing target text. When a document is opened, FrameMaker warns about unresolved cross-references.	Cross-reference pane displays unresolved cross-references. When output is generated, InDesign warns about unresolved cross-references.

## Document Editing

[Back to TOC](#)

Feature	FrameMaker	InDesign
<b>Variables</b>	Variables are controlled from a pod. Often used terms or expressions can be defined as variables and placed within any text.	Often used terms or expressions can be defined as variables and placed within any text.
<b>Running headers and footers</b>	"Running headers/footers" are placed on master pages to display the actual header on the page. Running headers/footers can be combined. Running headers/footers can be longer than one line of text.	"Running headers/footers" are placed on master pages to display the actual header on the page. A running header/footer has a maximum length of one line of text.
<b>Output to PDF or other formats</b>	FrameMaker output is performed via Acrobat plugin. HTML5 output is native with extensive styling options. All bookmarks and cross-references as well as interactive elements remain "live" in PDF and HTML5 as well other output formats.	Due to the integrated PDF engine, PDF output is reliable and fast. All bookmarks and cross-references as well as interactive elements remain "live" in PDF and ePub.
<b>Footnotes</b>	Complex footnote notation and styles are available in both paragraphs and tables.	Normal footnotes are possible. Table footnotes are not available.
<b>Conditional expressions</b>	Show hide sections of text with conditional tags. Creating complex combinations of conditions to create custom versions of a document with single-source publishing are possible.	Show hide sections of text with conditional tags. Conditions are controlled per document with a conditional styles pane.
<b>Modularization</b>	Text modules such as sections or safety warnings can be managed separately as "text insets". Text insets live outside of documents and can be placed within any text flow.	Modularization is possible, but inconvenient, as text modules are placed as separate objects, not within a text flow.
<b>Regular expression support in search</b>	Use PERL, eGrep and other regular expression search protocols.	Search with GREP is possible.
<b>Single-click session restore for quick start</b>	Ability to restore the last location when starting next session.	Ability to restore the last location when starting next session.
<b>Auto-save</b>	FrameMaker auto-saves documents within a configurable interval to prevent data loss after a crash.	InDesign auto-saves a configurable number of documents to prevent data loss after a crash.
<b>Review PDF</b>	Save files for PDF review with Acrobat Reader. Import comments, deletions and annotations "in place" back into FrameMakersource files.	Comments cannot be re-imported into InDesign.
<b>Layers and spreads</b>	N/A	Text layers contain objects and can be set to hide (e.g. watermarks). Text spreads (pages) can be reordered to reflect printed output.
<b>Color management</b>	N/A	Uses color management for consistency across the Adobe Creative Cloud applications.

## XML and Structured Authoring

[Back to TOC](#)

Feature	FrameMaker	InDesign
<b>Role-based XML authoring</b>	FrameMaker a full-featured XML and DITA editor. Authors have three views: XML View, Authoring View, and WYSIWYG View. Full XML editing is possible in all three views. It is also easier now to hide menus and customize workspaces. The structure tree to navigate long documents is configurable, showing only parts of the text or the longer form.	A simple structured tree view is available, as well as a view of XML code. Style mapping formats pre-defined (and well-formed) XML on import: elements are mapped to formats.
<b>Ability to edit DITA or XML files directly</b>	Can use structured applications that will support native *.xml files, not just *.fm binary files with embedded structure.	N/A
<b>Full DITA 1.2 and XSLT 2.0 support</b>	Virtually all DITA constructs are supported. EDD (FrameMaker-specific element definition documents) allows complex nesting of elements and automatic insertion of sibling elements.	N/A
<b>Configure DITA editing for beginners</b>	Possible elements according to rules are suggested.	N/A
<b>XML view: code completing and error tracking</b>	When authoring in XML view, author is prompted for legal elements. When element is entered, the "closing" value of element is dropped in automatically. Misplaced elements (not rule-conform) are marked in the structure tree.	N/A
<b>Expandable DITA map topics for quick viewing of content</b>	Switch from traditional "tree" view of structure tree can be expanded or collapsed.	N/A
<b>Quick Element toolbar for easy, visual insertion of common structure elements</b>	Click on icon to create new topics, tables, figures, unordered or numbered lists.	N/A
<b>Smart paste of unstructured content into DITA</b>	Convert unstructured portions of Word docs, HTML, etc. into valid DITA by "smart pasting" into a structured document.	N/A
<b>XSLT support for transforms</b>	XML can be transformed through custom use of XSLT.	N/A
<b>"Intelliprompt" for elements and attributes</b>	Authoring in XML mode will prompt user to choose correct element or attribute.	N/A
<b>Expert mode for XML and DITA</b>	Technical users who prefer to directly manipulate and author XML markup can work in XML view, with no preview of page output.	N/A

## Automated Authoring, Input and Output

[Back to TOC](#)

Feature	FrameMaker	InDesign
<b>Scripting</b>	Supports ExtendScript and custom plug-ins via FDK to automate tasks associated with high-volume production. Third-party plugins and scripts help to generate complex output like packaging for printers (collecting all files and fonts for output).	ExtendScript and various third-party tools to automate tasks is available. Packaging for printers (collecting all files and fonts for output) is available without plugins.
<b>Libraries</b>	N/A	Recurring contents (images, text styles, colors etc.) can be placed and managed in Creative Cloud libraries. CC libraries can be shared with other authors.
<b>Import from other editors</b>	Imports existing Microsoft Word files (RTF, DOC and DOCX) with style mapping (paragraph formats from Word are imported as FrameMaker formats).	Imports Existing Microsoft Word files (RTF, DOC) with style mapping (paragraph formats from Word are imported as InDesign formats).
<b>Export to other editors</b>	Exports FrameMaker files as Word files.	N/A

## Publishing to Tablets and Mobile

[Back to TOC](#)

Feature	FrameMaker	InDesign
<b>Multiple print formats in one document</b>	N/A	Use the Liquid Layout of InDesign to automatically adapt content when you create an alternate layout with different size or orientation in InDesign. Works for PDF.
<b>Responsive HTML5 output</b>	Publish to HTML5 ("responsive") without additional software.	N/A
<b>Native mobile app output</b>	With Adobe PhoneGap license, you may instantly generate standalone phone or tablet mobile apps.	Can be accomplished via Adobe Digital Publishing Suite.
<b>EPUB 3 output</b>	Available	Available
<b>WebHelp output</b>	Available	Requires additional software or services.
<b>CHM output</b>	Available	Requires additional software or services.
<b>MOBI output</b>	Available	Requires additional software or services.
<b>KF8 support</b>	Available	Requires additional software or services.

## Role-Based Publishing

[Back to TOC](#)

Feature	FrameMaker	InDesign
Custom workspaces	Workspaces can be customized and "named" to match tasks for specific users and specific tasks.	Workspaces can be customized and "named" to match tasks for specific users and specific tasks. Workspaces can be saved on Creative Cloud to be available on multiple devices with one CC account.
Hide all or part of pull-down menus	Setting to make unwanted formatting or other pull-down menus unavailable.	N/A

### The decision

Both applications are very capable tools to produce world-class documents in a wide variety of different languages and flavors with each having its own strength in their respective category. The main difference between both applications has been for years that InDesign allows for more flexibility at the cost of consistency, whereas FrameMaker honors the structured and consistent approach to meet the tight deadlines and requirements of technical communication.

The decision between both powerhouses of the publishing world should be based upon the requirements within the technical documentation. There are more factors coming into play when pitting one tool against the other.

### People

An important factor to be considered are the skills of the people working with the tools: How fast will they be proficient enough to master the publishing process reliably? Do they use the tools correctly to meet stringent deadlines? How well does the tool help them to stay focused on their goals?

### Process

In a more abstract sense: How fast can the process be adapted to changing product requirements? Does multi-channel publishing provide enough "wiggle-room" for new languages, for new devices, or new product variants? Can the process be scaled up to incorporate more departments and more products without having to start all over again?

## Tools

Technical publication needs a range of software tools to accomplish its task of delivering the right information at the right time to the user. Besides using a tool for editing the text based information and putting it all together for publishing in a consistent manner, additional tools for editing the images, graphics and managing the information are necessary. Starting with the needs of the editing process itself for drafts, corrections, storing information and staying in control of the publishing process itself, the need for the tools to interact with each other within the publishing process is of utmost importance to efficiency.

How well does the “tool zoo” interact with each other? Is there a need for a conversion process to “translate” between the tools? Should the publications be exported and imported just for exchange between departments? Constant migration can be a show-stopper, so how well can the tools interact with each other?

## Conclusion

We hope this document helps you make a well-informed decision when it comes to the future of your publishing process.

We encourage you to test drive both applications and then decide on which one best fulfills your needs.

For any queries, please write to us at [techcomm@adobe.com](mailto:techcomm@adobe.com)

