Alstom Transport

Multinational high-speed rail and power company puts the brakes on costs with Adobe® FrameMaker®, yielding a smoother end-to-end technical publishing system

Alstom Transport
www.transport.alstom.com/home

In partnership with
Antéa
http://antea.fr/

Industry
Transportation

Challenges
• Improve post-sales documentation quality
• Reduce production costs
• Standardize publishing process
• Foster interoffice collaboration

Solution
• Integrated technical document publishing system

Alstom Transport uses Adobe FrameMaker technology to provide customers with improved post-sales documentation, reduce publishing costs, and standardize its high-volume publishing across the multinational enterprise.

Results
• Reduced publishing costs
• Improved documentation quality
• Increased client satisfaction
• Enabled easy collaboration across enterprise
• Centralized and standardized high-volume publishing
• Integrated documentation process with engineering process

Systems at a glance
• Adobe FrameMaker 9
• Adobe FrameMaker Server 9
• Adobe Acrobat® 9 Pro Extended
• Adobe Flash® Professional

Establishing document control and distribution

Alstom Transport, a major player in the energy and transport sectors, has a reputation for being at the forefront of environmentally conscious and innovative technologies. Its customers expect to receive high-level, professionally written materials throughout the sales cycle, and long after, that keep them up to date on the latest advances in Alstom Transport's products and services.

The company has six research offices throughout France, Germany, and Italy, which are responsible for determining maintenance strategies and producing documentation for the firm's clients. The offices are organized by product line. Each group is responsible for overseeing service guidelines for trams and subway cars, very high-speed trains, high-speed trains, locomotives, intercity trains, and regional trains.

The company needed to revamp the way their post-sales documentation was edited, produced, and distributed and found that both sales and service materials lacked a unified, corporate voice. There was no template in place and no style or text standards with which authors had to conform. In addition, it was noted that in many cases, the post-sales and maintenance literature was prepared by outsourced writers using a variety of in-house and third-party applications—a process that was becoming overly expensive.

Alstom Transport's corporate team could not easily edit or oversee the quality of the content before it reached the recipients. Ultimately, customers would receive a 5,000 to 8,000-page, graphics-heavy maintenance guide created with a word processing program. "We had multiple challenges," says Eric Ribeyre, director of integrated logistical support at Alstom Transport. "We needed a content-management technology that would help us unify the documentation-delivery process, reduce production costs, and gain tighter control over the content itself."

"Our customers expect relevant, readable materials," continues Ribeyre. "It was imperative that we bring consistency to our documentation so that our literature reflected a high standard of quality, and Adobe FrameMaker enabled us to do exactly that."

Ribeyre and his colleagues set out to find a robust, economical publishing solution that supported lengthy, technical, and graphics-heavy components. For years, the group had been using an in-house hybrid application that relied on open-source Java™, Tomcat, and FOP technologies. However, the team recognized that their open-source content-production tool came with a number of limitations.

For starters, Ribeyre notes, the company's existing, home-grown technology was ill-suited to handle large documents. It did not support CGM or 3D vector illustrations. Materials that were published were often unstable and of poor quality. Trying to harness multiple formats created in competing applications came with a significant price tag. Furthermore, files created in open-source technology did not lend themselves to secure collaboration.

An ideal end-to-end solution

Alstom Transport contacted the French consulting firm and Adobe partner, Antéa, to help ascertain Alstom's publishing specifications. Quality and stability were of paramount importance, so the prospective software had to deftly handle large, graphics-heavy files. The company's writers wanted to be able to manage and edit their output before it reached the intended audience and the design team wanted more control over the content's illustrations and layout. Above all, the ideal technology would be cost-effective when it came to implementation, licensing, updates, maintenance, and customization.

The decision to implement Adobe FrameMaker 9 and Adobe FrameMaker 9 Server was made swiftly, says Ribeyre. "We evaluated a number of offerings, and only Adobe FrameMaker gave us complete support for automating and delivering large-scale documents, quickly and efficiently. We are confident that Adobe FrameMaker is the most powerful technical documentation tool on the market."

Alstom Transport was most impressed by the seamless integration of Adobe software into the organization's existing IT infrastructure. The firm's users were already actively engaged in using Adobe Acrobat 9 Pro Extended and Adobe Flash Professional to create and share interactive 3D content in Adobe PDF. By adopting another Adobe technology, the company was helping to ensure the stability of its content-production system. Additionally, by harnessing the power of Adobe FrameMaker Server 9, Alstom's high-volume materials would be output in a secure, feature-rich publishing environment.

Collaboration across the enterprise

Deploying the Adobe FrameMaker solution occurred in two stages. In phase one, Alstom's consulting partner, Antéa, assigned a documentation job to a research office. Each collaborator contributed content in XML format, which was then automatically published as a PDF document. In the second phase, Antéa used Adobe FrameMaker to comb the output for common blocks of information, or modules. These standard chunks of text and graphics can be reused and assembled for future documents. "We have developed command lines in Adobe FrameMaker which let us define publication orders," says Ribeyre. "FrameMaker will automatically gather the XML information, assemble it according to the style rules we have predefined, and output it in PDF."

The organization is simultaneously using two tools which complement its Adobe FrameMaker authoring solution: Arbortext Editor for editing XML data in the research offices, and Arbortext IsoDraw for editing illustrations in isometric view, which will be used for the documents. "We do not yet integrate 3D models in PDF documents," explains Eric Ribeyre. The PDF document must therefore remain printable by the clients. "We publish in parallel an electronic document that can be viewed with an Internet browser, in which we can link digital models to the traditional diagrams. But it is not a file that is assembled like a PDF document," he explains.

To fully meet his customers' expectations and offer the printing function while also preserving the browsing and reading ease of the PDF piece, the Alstom team uses embedded URLs. "We're supplying very complex publications with diagrams and illustrations. When clients want to print a file, we replace the hot links with the page number and the procedure reference," says Ribeyre.

Unprecedented ROI

For Alstom Transport, choosing Adobe FrameMaker as the core of its automated publishing solution for post-sales literature is a direct source of profit in a number of ways. First, by breaking the documentation into blocks, one module can be reused on a number of projects. "Reuse is significant, allowing us to greatly reduce production costs," notes Ribeyre.

Second, by empowering its staff with skills to control the publishing process, Alstom Transport is enjoying a new level of responsiveness and negotiation with its vendors. "The easy learning curve and intuitive interface of Adobe FrameMaker 9 have led to more productive budgetary discussions with our suppliers," said Ribeyre. "Our users have learned the craft and can speak from experience. In the past, we were working with providers on a project-to-project basis. Today, we use a global approach rather than by the project."

A third source of ROI has been in pure customer satisfaction. "Our clients have congratulated us on the quality of our publications. We have made real progress and have control over our documentation, in both content and style," says Ribeyre, who also commends his company's close work with Antéa. "Antéa has a very in-depth understanding of the document-creation process, and a great ability to translate our operational needs for Adobe FrameMaker."

Looking ahead, Alstom Transport is seeking to refine its publishing processes by integrating new features. "There is little need for training on Adobe FrameMaker," Ribeyre states, noting that he plans to allow each of the six research offices to tailor documents based on client requests. "We'll integrate the solution at the PLM Teamcenter and undoubtedly link 3D digital models to the PDF document." Also on the horizon will be the use of Adobe LiveCycle® Digital Signatures ES2 for maximum security.

"We're very confident that adopting new and complementary Adobe technologies is key to our positive bottom line," says Ribeyre. "Thanks to Adobe FrameMaker, we greatly enhanced our document-publishing skills—which in turn makes it possible for us to considerably improve quality, better satisfy our customers, and significantly reduce our production costs."

For more information
http://www.adobe.com/ products/framemaker/