

Simply XML August 2019 Newsletter

This is the Simply XML Newsletter written by Doug Gorman, Founder and CEO of Simply XML, often under the counsel of his canine colleague/muse, Frank.

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Moving DITA to the Rest of the Organization? Proceed with Caution!

Simply XML enables enterprise success with DITA. Along the way, we have seen departments and organizations determine that DITA is just too complicated and probably not cost-effective. Sometimes, they run. As a result, the enterprise loses a great opportunity. This article is based primarily on the “running” that we have seen. Imagine the following:

Typical Situation:

- You hired smart and capable consultants who helped specify your DITA content architecture for Tech Pubs.
- You have implemented a very granular DITA architecture for Technical Publications.
- You transformed your legacy docx, HTML, or XML content to DITA.
- You licensed a CMS and developed appropriate work flows.
- You trained your technically enthusiastic and capable staff in DITA, traditional XML authoring tools, and your CMS.
- You may have even developed DITA specializations to meet your audience-specific needs for your complex solutions or products.
- You recognized the segmented needs of your audience and the advantage of conditional publishing.

Result:

- You can reuse content.
- You can publish content from a single source to PDF, HTML, Mobile, HTML Help, and more.
- You can use attributes and DITA Val files to publish exactly what subsets of readers need.
- It is easy and efficient to localize content for your global audience.

Congratulations:

- You spent a lot of money, but you saved even more through reuse and efficient localization.

- You improved your brand with discipline and consistency.
- Your information consumers now get just enough, just in time information, localized if required, on their device/media of choice. They love it!
- Your technical staff feels good with experience in a new cutting-edge implementation.

And now you want to convince your C-level executives across the enterprise that there is a great opportunity to implement a DITA architecture more broadly. By assuming that your work in Tech Pubs is directly and efficiently transferable to the Rest Of The Organization (ROTO) you may be putting “the cart before the horse!” We have seen this issue over and over and it is the main reason that, to date, DITA is often stuck in Techland.



Here is how to put the organizational results (the cart) behind the DITA adoption process (the horse):

- When describing the new architecture, use familiar terms like headings, paragraphs, sections, tables, lists, and images. Classify content as procedures, processes, principles, concepts, and images. Avoid references to more than a few DITA terms.
- Let ROTO use an MS Word-based XML editor like Content Mapper.
- Tell ROTO about the process stages(author, edit, review, approve) that documents need to pass through and that such process will be seamlessly managed by the new CMS.
- Position the CMS as a place to store “stuff” that lots of people can get to.
- Reinforce that the functions of marketing, training, operations, compliance, finance, and more will continue in the usual, efficient, and high-quality way during the implementation effort.
- Tell ROTO that any directives and changes will be practical and cost-effective.
- The effort will be driven by a commitment from and efforts of both technical and operational (line) management.

Your organization may be more like a tree than a cart:

- Think of your DITA architecture as a tree with a strong trunk and branches that meet the needs of each audience. Each branch must meet the needs of its department and its audience. Extraneous requirements on your branch and any other branch adds weight, and cost, and may cause the branch to break and the tree to become “unhealthy.”
- The roots of the tree represent the foundation of your organization. The health of the roots is dependent on people, processes, and other responsibilities that support the organization in good weather and bad. The roots must remain alive and healthy.
- The Tech Pubs branch of the tree might be hugely weighty and successful, but such weight need not be also borne by other branches.

Conclusions and Suggestions:

1. Ideally, in the beginning of your DITA effort, but absolutely before any plan to adopt DITA beyond your Tech Pubs organization you need to understand the operation, responsibilities, and minimalist architecture requirements of ROTO.
2. There will be change, but make it “least change” on many levels including tools, training, and management.
3. Keep It Simple Smart-person (KISS).
4. Remember that your information consumer, the person who reads your content, is the ultimate audience for your work.

The Sub-Optimal Alternative:

Your alternative may be to confine the wonders of DITA to a small, technical group in your organization.

Back Pedaling Caveat:

I hope this article has provided perspective and perhaps some food for thought. Our world is complex and no one, including Simply XML knows all the answers or has a monopoly on ideas or actions. If you agree, disagree, or have comments regarding our newsletter or approach, I hope you will send an email to me or to our general mailbox hello@simplyxml.com. We may publish some of these comments in a future issue. Thanks for reading, listening and helping us move this great opportunity forward.

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Hidden in Plain Sight

Offline Editing Facilities and DITA Map Starter Templates



Frank: Hey Doug. Do you see them?

Doug: See what, Frank?

Frank: Two amazing “new” facilities of Content Mapper that have been there all along. I know you and James have been spinning your wheels trying to satisfy the vision and needs of that big tech company on the West Coast. They have at least 4 DITA CMS’s being used by their technical staff. Now they want to bring their SME’s and a much broader group of authors into the DITA World.

Doug: Yes, Frank. As a condition for sale, they wanted two “new” features that James and I have been trying to figure out. The first was a facility to allow their authors and reviewers to work offline with the many facilities of Content Mapper and their CMS’s still in play. The second was a facility for DITA Map Starter Templates.

Frank: Well you and James developed these features, but let’s just say it was “not recent!”

Doug: I see the first one now, Frank, hidden in plain sight.

CM Doc Files for Offline Editing and Review

While travelling, working out of the office, and travelling internationally Content Mapper users often know they may lack, or have weak or insecure internet connections. However, they still need do their jobs and develop, review, and/or edit content.

Content Mapper has a simple to use facility that lets you:

1. Open and Check out a Topic(s) from the CMS
2. Save the Topic as an offline document
3. Edit, Review, and save the Topic offline
4. Reconnect to the CMS and Open the offline document.
5. Save the document to the repository and check the content in.

Frank: Voila!

Doug: That was great, Frank, how about the other feature?

Frank: I know you and James have been trying to figure an easy way to create reusable DITA Map and DITA Bookmap starter templates.

Doug: That is a complex implementation issue, Frank. A DITA Map is really just a collection of links to various DITA Topics. Topics need to be created and enabled to be able to use the great facilities of our DITA Map Editor. We have been suggesting that customers should pre-form the Topics in a DITAMap with no content and then save that Map to a new place in the repository. But that doesn’t really support

our “Keep It Simple Smart-person” approach.

Frank: Again, Doug, the easy to use feature is hidden in plain sight. Do you see it?

DITA Map or DITA Bookmap Starter Templates

Organizations can use MS Word and Content Mapper’s import and transform function to create templates for larger and more complex documents. To create a large document template for a DITA Map you need to

1. Create the template as a MS Word Document with hierarchical headings to create Topics, Sections, Paragraph Headings, Tables, and Lists.
2. Import that docx template to DITA. Content Mapper will automatically create the DITA Topics/Concepts and place the larger set of content into Content Mapper’s DITA Map Editor
3. Content can now be edited, reviewed, and published from Content Mapper’s easy to use DITA Map Editor.

Frank: Voila!

Doug: That is really cool, Frank. Have a cookie! Most of our customers have seen the Pampered Pets import demo and we can send any Content Mapper user the business plan template that will speed the development of similar business plans.

Simply Tips and Tricks

All of our newsletters provide quick tips and tricks to help you simplify the XML world and beyond. Our tip for August is that reading our Simply XML Newsletter and attending Lavacon or DITA Europe has its own rewards!

In Life:

There is no such thing as a free lunch (or a free Simply XML polo shirt)!



IN XML:

Read our Newsletter. Bring a copy of this Newsletter to our booth at Lavacon in Portland Oregon <https://lavacon.org/2019/> or DITA Europe in Brussels, Belgium <https://dita-europe.infomanagementcenter.com/>. We'll give the first to come to our booth at each conference a coveted Simply XML Polo. Send us an email (hello@simplyxml.com) and we may also be able to get you a discounted pass to either conference.



There's a reason we call it Simply XML.

Simply XML provides simple, easy to use solutions for creating and publishing great content. Creating, managing, and publishing content with our XML editor, Content Mapper, minimizes costs and ensures efficiency across your organization. Learn more at www.simplyxml.com.

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