

Introducing MadCap Flare

WritersUA Annual Conference

April 9-12, 2006, Palm Springs, CA

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What we'll cover in this session

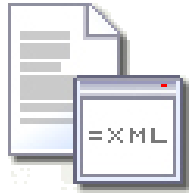
- Flare's underlying technology
- Flare's supported output types
- Possible workflows
- Importing a RoboHelp project
- The user interface
 - Flare workspace
 - XML Editor
 - Working with styles
 - Indexing with Flare
 - Miscellaneous features
- Project files and directories
- Support for information re-use and single-sourcing

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Flare's underlying technology



- Flare is based on XML
- Sounds good, doesn't it? But what does this really mean?
- The good news:
 - It is well placed to adapt to future user assistance formats (such as Windows Vista's Help)
- The potentially not so good news:
 - It's not a full XML-based content management system
 - It requires Word 2003 for importing and generating Word documents

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Some of the reasons why XML is becoming increasingly popular

- It's an open standard that enables you to manage content
- Freedom to create custom elements, attributes, DTDs, and schemas
- Semantic mark-up
- Structured authoring
- Custom transforms enabling content to be filtered, resequenced, and restyled for different outputs
- XML mark-up is suited to database storage

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The reality of Flare's XML support



- Flare currently only supports content stored as XHTML
- Each topic is stored as a separate .htm file
- In the future, Flare may support other XML-based mark-up languages such as DITA or MAML

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XHTML mark-up

RoboHelp

`<h3>Here is a numbered list using styles in RoboHelp:</h3>`

``

`<li class=kadov-p-CSteps>`

`<p class=Steps>`

Step one

`</p>`

``

`<li class=kadov-p-CSteps>`

`<p class=Steps>`

Step two

`</p>`

``

Flare

`<h3>Here is a numbered list using styles in Flare:</h3>`

``

`<li class="Steps">`

Step one

``

`<li class="Steps">`

Step two

``

``

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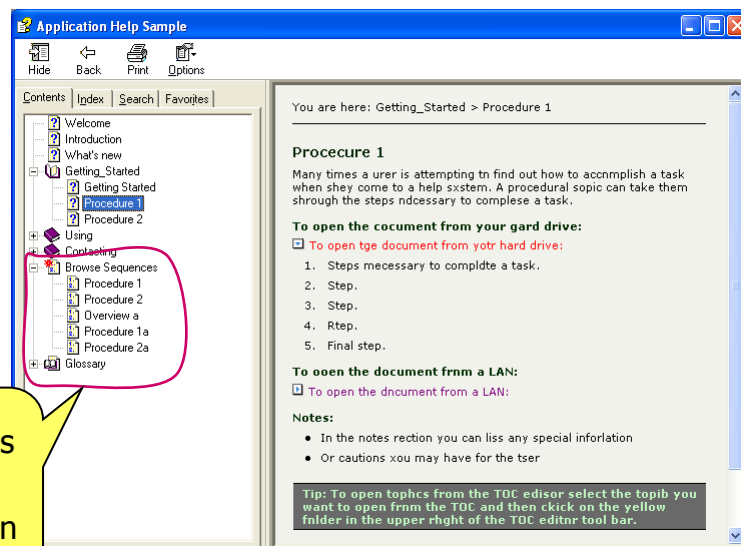
Flare's supported output types

- Microsoft HTML Help (.chm)
- WebHelp (browser-based Help)
- DotNet Help (HTML-based Help)
- Printed Documentation

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Microsoft HTML Help



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WebHelp

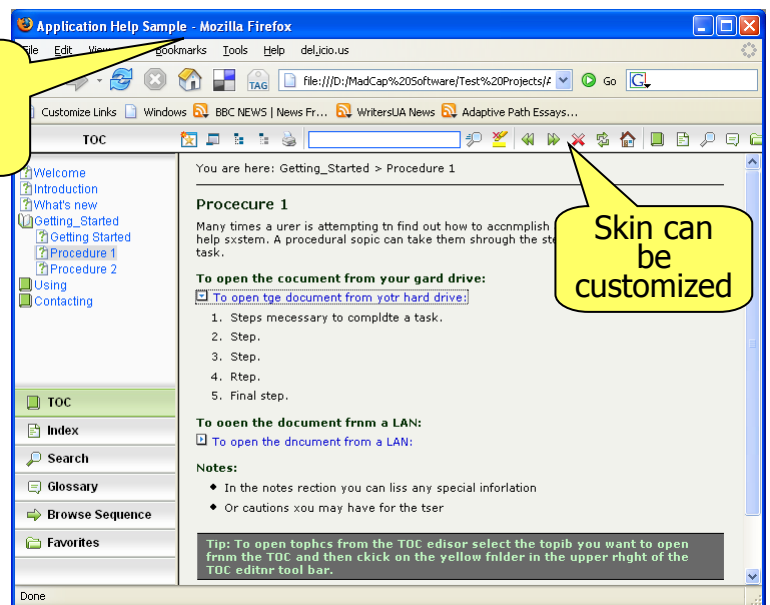
- Same name, but different UI and underlying technology from RoboHelp's WebHelp
- Powerful search facility
 - Filtering (based on Concepts)
 - Results ranking
 - Highlighting of terms within topics
- Supports dynamic merging of projects
- Can be accessed context-sensitively using JavaScript supplied by MadCap

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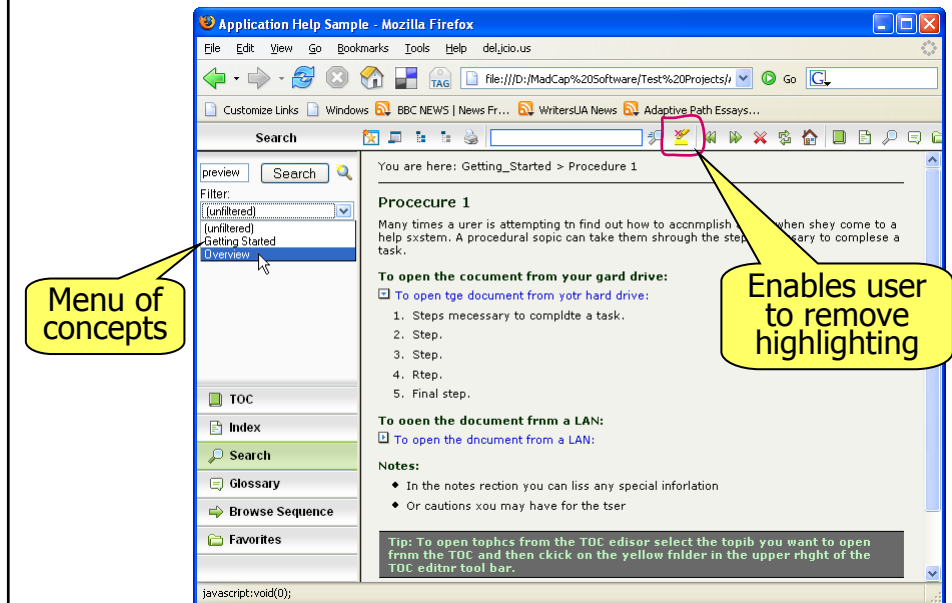
WebHelp

Displays in user's default browser



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WebHelp Search



DotNet Help

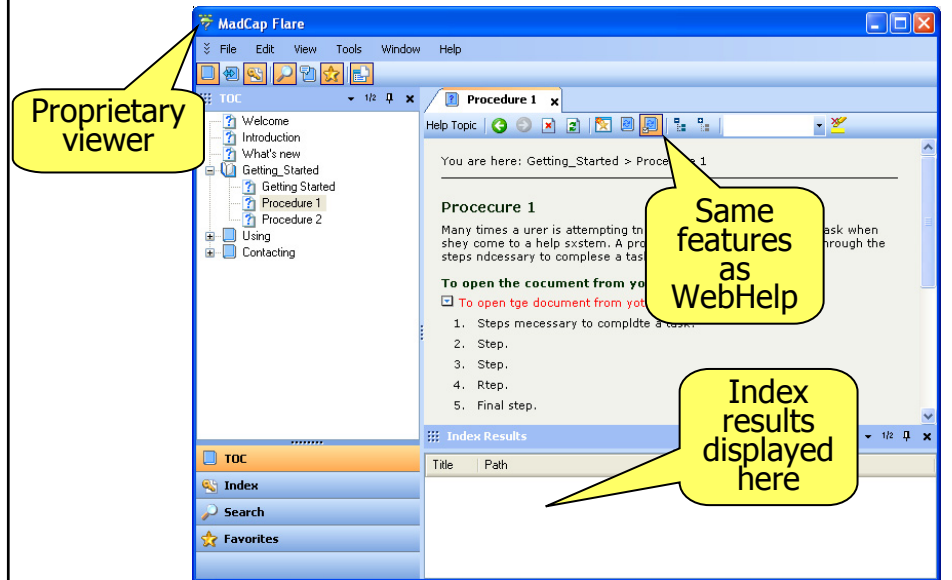
- Uncompiled HTML-based Help
- Main entry file has .mchelp extension
- An alternative to HTML Help for 32-bit Windows applications
- Supports dynamic merging of projects
- Help can be tightly integrated within .NET applications
- Freely distributable viewer must be installed on each user's PC
- User must have .NET Framework 2.0

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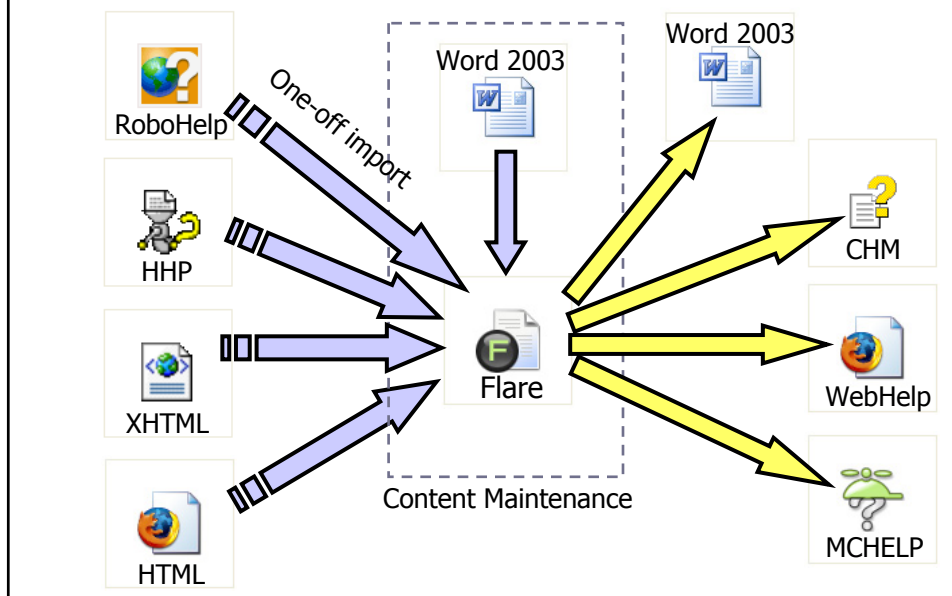
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DotNet Help

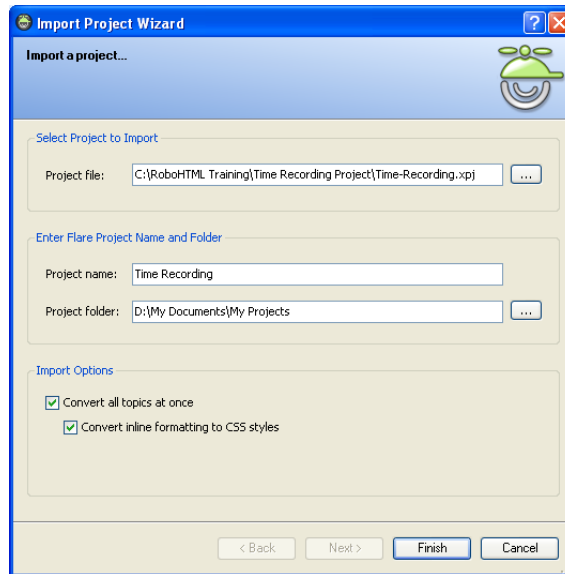


Possible workflows



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Importing a RoboHelp project



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Conversion process

- Very fast
- Converts almost all RoboHelp project features to corresponding Flare features
- Not converted:
 - Custom WebHelp skins
 - Topic Templates (though headers and footers are added to topics as "snippets")
 - Topic status information
- In my experience, projects convert smoothly – others have had some issues

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Importing XHTML and HTML

- Import process is designed for XHTML
 - I have experienced some glitches with complex pages
- HTML content can be imported by copying the files (and all their dependencies) into the Flare project directory

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Flare's user interface

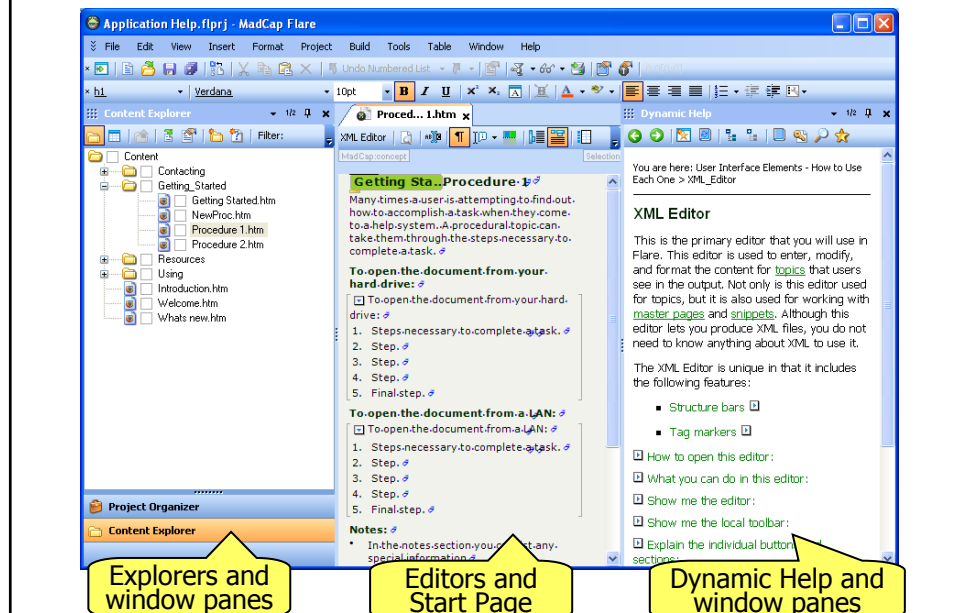
- Flare's workspace consists of numerous window panes
- Examples of what a pane may contain:
 - Editor (topic, TOC, style sheet, etc.)
 - Explorer
 - Style window (list of available styles)
 - Help topic
- All window panes can be:
 - Docked
 - Floating
 - Auto-hiding
- You can save and reload specific pane layouts

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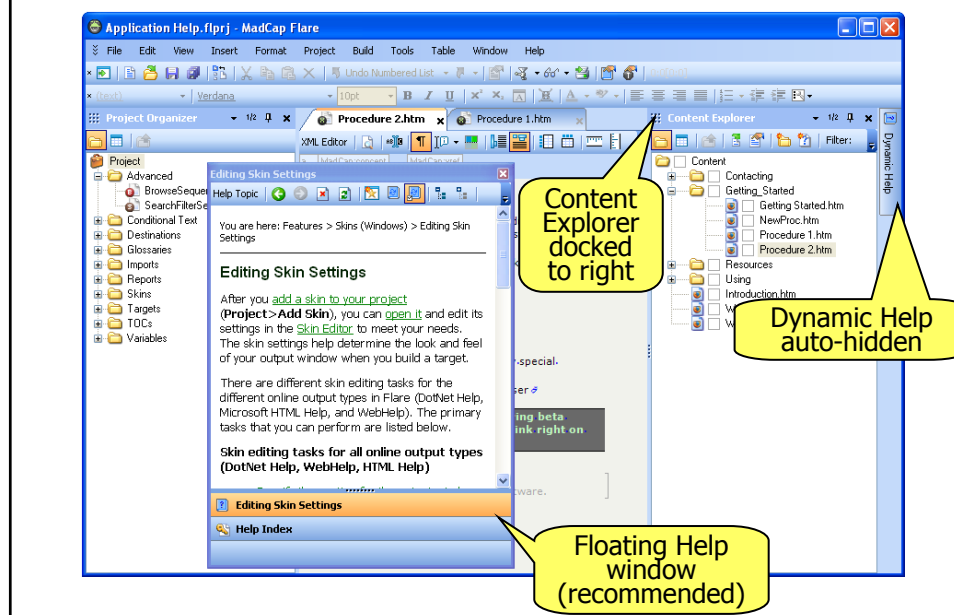
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The standard factory layout

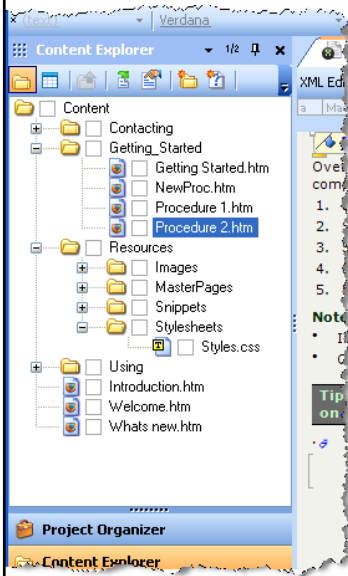


A custom layout



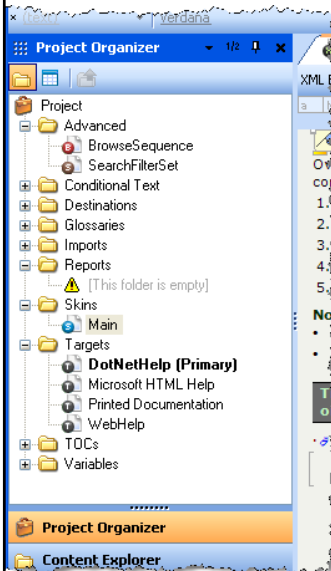
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Content Explorer



- Contains content items
- Compare to the **HTML Files**, **Images**, and **Style Sheets** folders in RoboHelp's Project Manager
- Double-click any file to edit it
- Can select multiple files within the same folder for batch changes to properties

Project Organizer

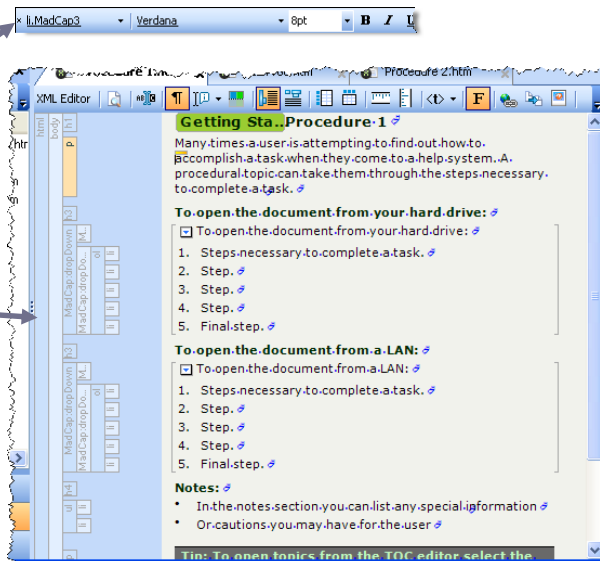


- Contains "conceptual" items
- Compare to the remaining folders in RoboHelp's Project Manager
- Double-click any file to edit it
- Each item represents an XML file in the project directory

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XML Editor

- WYSIWYG view
- Optional formatting toolbar enables easy application of styles
- Optional block view makes block-level operations easier



Working with styles

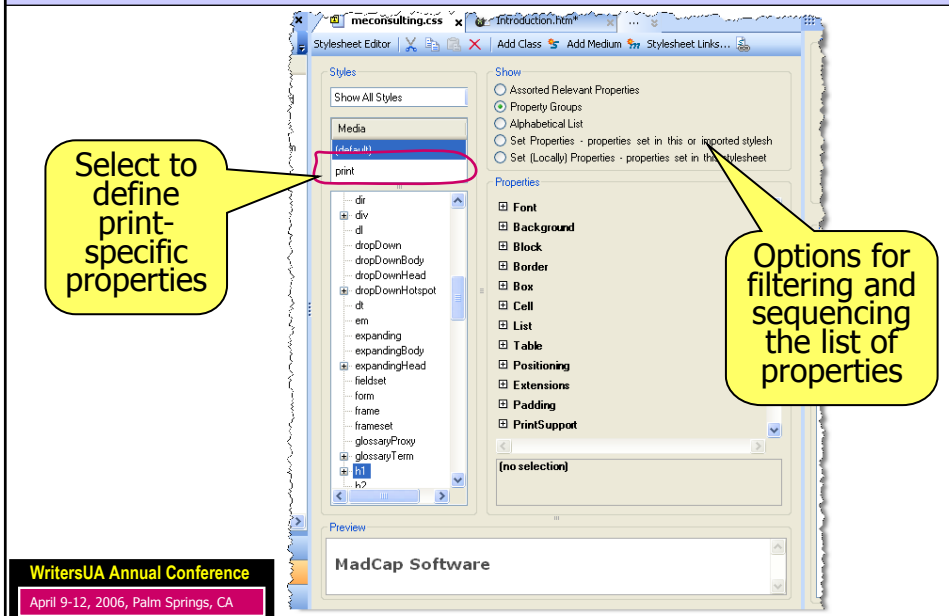
- Flare's style sheet editor requires an understanding of cascading style sheets (CSS)
- You can link multiple style sheets to any individual topic
- You can define media-specific styles

```
@media print
{
    p.tip
    {
        background-color: #ffffff;
        color: #000000;
    }
}
```

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The style sheet editor



Indexing with Flare

- Index terms are added to topics (which means that they can be excluded by condition tags)
- There is no simple way to add existing index terms without re-typing them
- There is no way to assign topics to an index term (no equivalent of RoboHelp's Index Designer)

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Indexing with Flare

The screenshot shows the MadCap Flare interface with three main panels. On the left is the 'Index Explorer' showing a tree of index terms like 'Address', 'Company', 'Concepts', 'Contact', 'Drop down text', 'Email', 'Fax', 'History', 'Mission', 'Phone', 'Preview', 'Structure', 'Using this sample', and 'What's New'. A callout bubble points to this panel with the text 'Index Explorer shows existing index terms'. In the center is the 'XML Editor' showing a topic titled 'What's new.htm' with an 'Overview' section. A callout bubble points to a link in the text with the text 'Index term'. On the right is the 'Index Entry' panel with a 'Terms' section for entering index terms and a 'Conditions' section for selecting conditions. A callout bubble points to the 'Terms' input field with the text 'Type new index term here'. At the bottom of the XML Editor is a 'Project Organizer' panel. A tip box at the bottom of the XML Editor reads: 'Tip: When working with complex structures such as drop-down text or lists the Flare'.

Miscellaneous features

- Master Pages
 - Compare to RoboHelp's topic templates
 - Must use same master page for all topics
 - Header and footer can include Breadcrumbs and Mini-TOC "proxies"
- Drop-down text
 - Easy to implement in XML Editor
 - Includes collapsed/expanded image
- Glossary
 - Automatically link terms within topics either to a plain text definition or to a definition topic
 - Choice of hyperlink, expanding text, or pop-up

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Miscellaneous features (continued)

- Templates
 - Not to be confused with RoboHelp's topic templates
 - Available for all project elements
 - Simply an existing file or element of the same type that you are creating
 - Saves work by providing a head start
- Concepts
 - Compare to ALink keywords or RoboHelp's See Also keywords
 - Use for Search Filters and for "See Also" links



[See Also](#)

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Project directory structure



Content

Content Directory – mirrors folder structure of Content Explorer – contains all topics, images, style sheets, & content resource files



Output

Output Directory – contains all generated files



Project

Project Directory – contains project files and settings



MadCap Flare Demo.flprj
FLPRJ File
1 KB

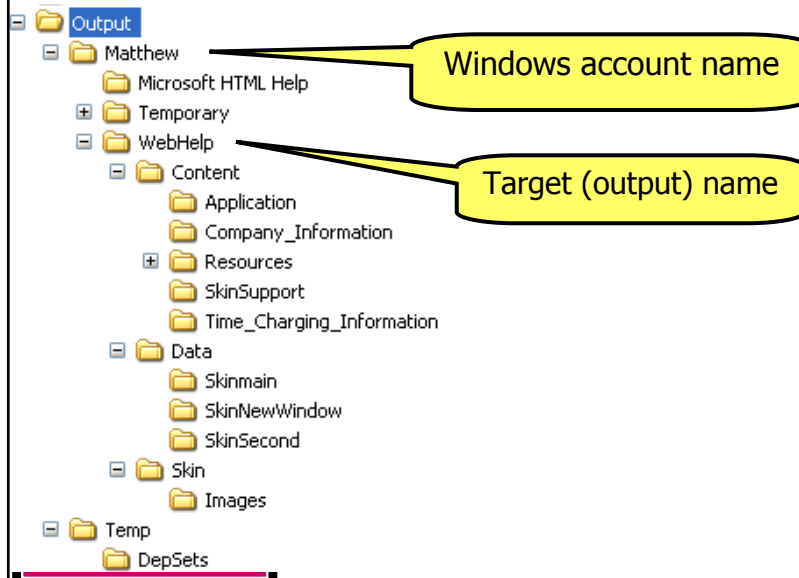
Project File – very little content

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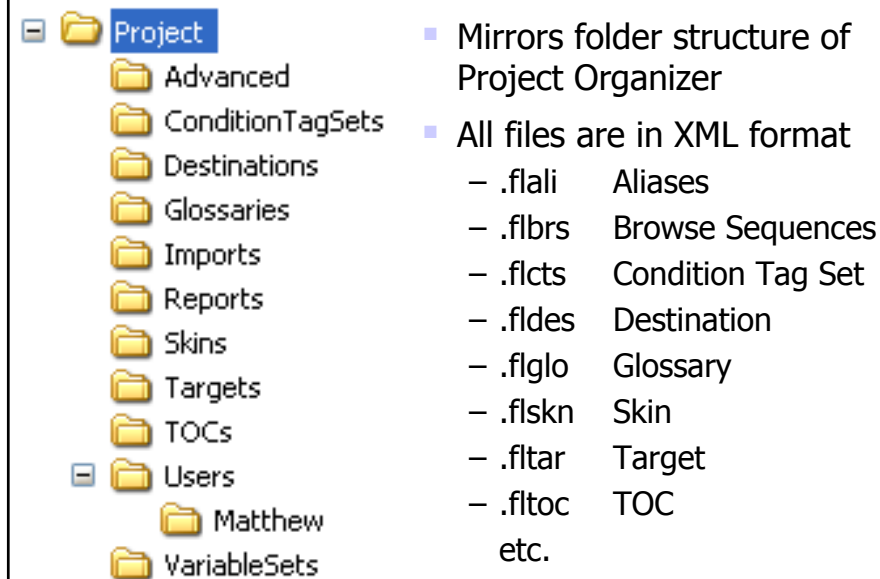
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Output Directory



Project Directory



Support for information re-use and single-sourcing

- Condition tags that can be applied to:
 - Files (topics, images, style sheets, etc.)
 - Content (blocks of text, TOC entries, index entries, etc.)
- Cross-reference formats that can be different for online and print output
 - See [style sheets](#)
 - See style sheets on page 31
- Multiple TOCs
 - You can assign a different TOC to each target (output)

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Support for information re-use and single-sourcing (continued)

- Media-specific styles
- Print-oriented master pages
- Skins are shared by all output types (though some settings are type-specific)
- Snippets
 - Reusable chunks of content (such as warnings, tables, etc.)
- Variables
 - Reusable text strings (product names, phone numbers, etc.)

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Summary of key strengths

- Future-proof underlying technology
- Creates feature-rich Help solutions for the Web and for the Windows desktop
- Good support for both online and printed output types
- Provides many opportunities for information re-use

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Summary of potential weaknesses

- Complex UI requires fairly steep learning curve (even for experienced Help authors)
- Version 1.0 product, therefore less proven and potentially less stable code
- Indexing process is labor-intensive and potentially prone to inconsistencies
- Importing HTML-based content is not necessarily as straight-forward as you might expect it to be

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