

Choosing FrameMaker for Multilingual Documents

By Maxwell Hoffmann

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"Top 10 Reasons to Choose FrameMaker as your Authoring Tool for English and Multilingual Documentation"

The world of multilingual documentation is full of authoring choices for technical writers and desktop publishers. Choices from industry standard word processors like Microsoft Word, to powerful desktop publishing packages, such as Quark Xpress, certainly offer the user a wide range of options. Why then has the bulk of the industry migrated to FrameMaker as the authoring tool of choice for documentation.

If you are not currently a FrameMaker user, or are contemplating switching to FrameMaker, this article is written for you. We will explore what we believe are the top 10 reasons you will want to consider using FrameMaker as your authoring tool of choice, especially if you intend to produce documents that will eventually be translated into another language. These top 10 reasons, while not an exhaustive list by any means, will hopefully give you some insight into the powerful functions available to you.

10. Integration with TM Tools

Starting off the list of top ten reasons is probably one of the most important for authors of multilingual documents. In order to develop an efficient and cost effective translation process, you will require the use of a Translation Memory (TM) tool. All of the major TM tools, Trados, Transit, SDLx, and Déjà Vu, have filtering that supports the importing and exporting of FrameMaker files.

Most of the TM tools work with the FrameMaker interchange format, similar to Words' RTF format, called the MIF format (Maker Interchange Format). Once translated, the TM tool exports or converts the file back to a FrameMaker MIF file and can be readily opened in FrameMaker. This process can save a significant amount of time in the subsequent DTPclean-up of the files. In most cases, the files are returned to Frame with only minor pagination and formatting issues to be fixed. Again, achieving significant time and cost savings.

For a more complete explanation regarding translation memory tools, see the sidebar article on page 2.



Language Options in FrameMaker

9. Wide language support

A huge problem in the past has been the lack of language support from an authoring tool. Sure you could work with documents in French, German, Spanish, and other Latin alphabet based languages, but try Chinese and you were in trouble. Most programs either did not support other languages, or required you to buy a special localized version of the product.

Right out of the box, Adobe FrameMaker will allow you to author in everything from Italian to Russian, Chinese to Korean and just about any language in between. You do not need to buy a special version to work with other languages. Couple that with the multilingual capabilities of today's operating systems and you'll be able to parlez-vous with the best of them.

If that is not enough, you get a host of other language tools as well. You will get spelling and hyphenation dictionaries in 20 languages, from Brazilian Portuguese to Swedish.

8. Tight integration with Acrobat PDF

Adobe revolutionized the electronic publishing world when it developed Acrobat and its associated free viewer, Acrobat Reader. Now, more documents are distributed on the Internet and CD in Acrobat format, than just about any other available format. The best part is it does

not matter what platform produced the file or which one it is being viewed on, Acrobat PDF works equally well on Mac, PC, Unix, Linux, Palm OS, etc.

Since both Acrobat and FrameMaker come from Adobe, Frame benefits from the collaboration possible between the two programs. Creating an Acrobat PDF from Frame is about as easy as doing a Save As command. Within minutes, a single document or an entire book can be converted to PDF, with bookmarks and hyperlinks and many of the other functions of PDF that are essential to online documents.

What are TM tools?

Translation Memory tools are a database of previous translations you have completed. These translation units are usually stored in pairs, the source language and a target language. Then, when you want to translate another document or update a currently translated document, the TM tool will automatically search the new document and insert the appropriate translation where the text is 100% the same. This ensures you maintain consistency from one translated text to another, and it also affords you savings by not having to pay the entire cost of translating the entire document again.

In addition, TM tools have a function known as "fuzzy matching". When translating and no 100% match is available, the software scans the memory database for translations that may be similar to a sentence currently being translated. The results may be a sentence that is 90% the same which can be reused and updated by the translator to match the new sentence 100%. Reputable localization vendors will only charge you a portion of the normal translation cost for these fuzzy matches because the translator did not have to retranslate the entire sentence, passing the savings on to you. All newly translated sentences become part of the translation memory database for future use.

Additionally, you can import pages in PDF format into a Frame document for use as graphics or other page elements. If that is not enough, a full version of Acrobat comes with every FrameMaker license purchased. You get two great tools for the price of one.

7. Cross platform support

Today, users have multiple choices of computer platforms from which to choose. Sometimes the choice is dictated by the company, or other times it boils down to personal preference. In any case, authors across various environments and locations need the ability to collaborate and exchange files effectively. Frame fits this need.

Whether on Mac, Windows or Unix, Frame has cross platform support for you. You can create a document in Windows and be confident your colleague across the country will be able to open it on his Unix station and edit it flawlessly. Then, you will get the file back and it will open again on your PC for the final check before publishing.

6. Indexing and Table of Contents capabilities

Let's face it, before FrameMaker, creating a table of contents or Index by hand was akin to having your teeth pulled. It was a time consuming, slow process that was prone to mistakes and a source of major frustration, especially when the document pagination changed with the last minute revisions. Now, almost at the touch of a button, you can create fully formatted lists for any document, from 10 pages to 10,000. Frame does all the hard work for you, from alphabetizing the list to putting in the proper page number for each reference. Do you have a last minute update to the manual? Simply regenerate the index or table of contents and in minutes you are ready to hit the ground publishing. Add in the dimensions

of multiple languages and you can readily see the benefits.

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5. Cross-references, Conditional Text & Variables

These three features, while confusing at first, will soon become indispensable tools used in FrameMaker. The power of these 3 features alone make Frame a must have tool for authors.

Cross-references allow you to use any block of text in a document and reference it in other sections of the document, including an automatic reference to the original page in which the item appears. For example, you may have a title of a table you wish to reference on multiple pages in the document. Creating a cross-reference to the table title allows you to easily insert the appropriate title and page number.

Conditional text allows items to be displayed or hidden from view depending upon certain criteria you select. The item can be text, a table, a footnote, cross-reference or even a graphic. One of the best uses for conditional text is when you have different versions of a document you want to write. A single document can be created with elements tagged for different version conditions and then, depending upon the version to be printed, only those elements will be displayed to the user.

Variables are exactly what the name implies, an element that can be defined and updated

based upon information provided by the user or information supplied by FrameMaker and the computer operating system. A user-defined variable has a specific definition that you assign to it and is useful for text that may change frequently or is repeated frequently in your text. System variables can include page numbers, page counts, time and date, running headers and footers, or even the current filename. Some variables, like the date variable, will use the correct text according to the paragraph language option selected. For example, the current date variable may appear as 10 December 1997 in an English paragraph but as 10 Dezember 1997 in a German paragraph.

4. Generate HTML for Help or Web

If you are writing the manual for your software application, you can use the FrameMaker files to create the HELPSystem as well. Previous help systems were based on RTF files. With Frame you can still export your files as RTF, however, newer HELPSystems have turned to HTML as the basis for creating these files and tools like RoboHelp have adapted to the task.

Now, you have the same export capability into HTML that you had with RTF. Simply do the Save As command and select the HTML format and you have files you can use on the web or in your HTMLHelp system.

In addition to the Save As command, Adobe also provides with Frame their software Quadralay WebWorks Publisher, which provides robust features for creating HTML, Dynamic HTML, and XML output. With it, you get increased capabilities to do the following:

- ① Map FrameMaker elements (such as paragraph and character tags, and graphics) to online styles.

- ① Convert text, graphics, and tables to HTML, Dynamic HTML (HTML with cascading style sheets (CSS)) and XML.
- ① Determine how a FrameMaker document is divided into one or more HTML files.
- ① Convert any images into online formats.
- ① Specify how navigation bars appear at the top and bottom of a page.
- ① Create an HTMLFrameSet.

3. Structured Authoring Environment

Many writers never need the added functionality of a structured authoring environment, but when you do, Frame is ready to meet the challenge. In previous versions, if

you wanted a structured environment, you had to pay extra for FrameMaker plus SGML. Starting with Frame 7.0, the two versions are joined in the same program and

you choose at startup whether you want the structured environment.

By authoring in a structured environment, you can create documents in SGML format that can be stored and managed using programs like Documentum or Epic. For some larger industries, such as automotive and aerospace, this type of operability is a necessity.

2. Superior handling of long document

If you ever tried to create a document longer than ten pages in typical word processing programs, you probably cursed at least a dozen times. Yes, many word processors have all the features needed to create long, complex manuals, but these applications crash and resulting file corruption issues will leave the author desperately looking for a solution with less headaches.

Unfortunately, some page layout programs do not fair much better. While both Quark and PageMaker have added some long document features such as indexing and books to their programs, they still lack some of the advanced features most writers can not live without. On top of this, these programs are not for the faint of heart and have a steep learning curve with few benefits to the average writer.

Frame on the other hand, was designed from the beginning as a long document program. Whether a 4 page technical spec or a 2,000 page user guide, the results are the same. You will get a stable application that does not even break a sweat under the load. Of course, factors such as RAM memory and processor speed will impact your performance, but in a head-to-head comparison, Frame wins hands down.

“authors...need the ability to collaborate and exchange files effectively”

1. FrameMaker 7.0 (NEW) and XML support

When FrameMaker 7.0 becomes available (2nd Quarter 2002), it will have a feature that has been long sought after by users: increased operability with XML. Following is a list of some of the enhanced XML features as announced by Adobe. Further information can be obtained about this and other features of FrameMaker 7.0 by visiting the Adobe website at www.adobe.com.

- ① Ability to import, validate, and export XML files and DTDs for “XML roundtripping”
- ① XML namespaces as a prefix to XML element names when combining content from multiple sources

- ◉ Support for importing and exporting XMLfiles containing Unicode (UTF-8/UTF-16) characters, plus automatic character mapping for Asian-language printing
- ◉ Automatic generation of CSS style definitions for XMLfiles
- ◉ DocBook 4.1, xDocBook 4.1.2, and XHTMLsample applications included for structured authoring
- ◉ “XMLCookbook” manual for learning to work in structured authoring environments

Note: The above information is information provided directly from Adobe.

Now, the missing link between XMLand FrameMaker had been completed. The above Top 10 list, while by no means a complete list, should set users on a course to learn more about FrameMaker and its benefits in the multilingual authoring world. Many of the features may not have an apparent connection to multilingual documents, however many of these features streamline the source file creation and have a trickle effect when it comes to subsequent language versions. They reduce time, costs, and effort when it comes to creating your documents, translation, and ultimately publishing them in whatever formats you require.