Adobe FrameMaker and Microsoft Word

A brief feature comparison between Adobe FrameMaker and Microsoft Word.

Course: Tools and Technologies for Technical Writing (CAR-790-75)Student Name: Madhumita SenDate Submitted: 3/24/2024

Table of Contents

A brief history of Microsoft Word and Adobe FrameMaker

FrameMaker and Word are not competitors. It is a common misconception that FrameMaker competes with Microsoft Word. At first glance, this is how they appear.

Both products offer similar authoring solutions and perform word processing and multi-column page layout.

Both Microsoft Word and Adobe FrameMaker can work with multiple files and generate Tables of Content and Indices.

It's when it comes down to comparing tables, numbering, and options for positioning graphics that the contrast between FrameMaker and Word becomes especially evident.

Microsoft Word was initially developed as a personal productivity tool. A word processor for a personal computer. For years, Microsoft's main focus for Word was the single-author creation of letters, memos, and typical short office documents. Anything longer than 10 pages was considered a long document.

FrameMaker was introduced in 1986 and Microsoft Word in 1983. For the first decade and a half of its history, very few Word users used the software to create complex, technical documentation comprising elements like multiple tables and graphics with varied page placements. Using Word to create complex documentation gradually became more and more difficult.

FrameMaker had a distinctly different beginning and customer base from Word. The earliest computers that ran FrameMaker were powerful UNIX workstations which possessed memory and disc capacity that would not be available on a PC or MAC for nearly 10 more years. As a result, the earliest users of FrameMaker created long complex documents that involved collaboration amongst many authors and content reuse.

Feature Strengths of Adobe FrameMaker

Single-source publishing: FrameMaker had early support for conditional text, which could show and hide selected parts of content, creating different versions of a document or manual from one set of source files. For instance, early versions of FrameMaker used conditional text control to create a UNIX and Windows version of FrameMaker documentation. Early versions of FrameMaker supported "save as HTML" as well as "save as hyperlinked PDF".

Automatic hyperlinks: Very early versions of FrameMaker placed a hyperlink in generated Tables of Contents, List of Figures, List of Tables, Indices, and between cross-references (xrefs) and target text. These hyperlinks could be used for cross-document navigation during authoring and were automatically placed within generated HTML files.

XML and Structure: About 25 years ago, a version of FrameMaker was developed to handle SGML. This evolved into the current product, which has an intuitive approach to handling DITA, XML, and other structured applications.

Word has some of the capabilities described in this section, but to a lesser degree. This is primarily because the original publishing model was designed for single users aiming for an increase in personal, not enterprise, productivity.

Business Benefits of Adobe FrameMaker

- Faster time to market.
- Content Reuse.
- Reduced localization costs.
- Lower total cost of ownership.
- Reliable and Robust solution.

Strengths of Adobe FrameMaker

- Individual files can be combined, linked and reused.
- Highly stable product.
- Enables content to be unique and reusable.
- Template standards are enforceable.
- Allows for multichannel publishing.
- Complex content can be authored with dependable results.

Limitations of Microsoft Word

- Most documents are unique and short or a single massive file.
- Stability concerns.
- Docs with embedded content (img/TOC/etc).
- Template Inconsistency.
- Reusing and repurposing is difficult and risky.
- Multichannel publishing has issues.
- Creating and managing complex content is challenging.
- Review cycles can get interesting.

References:

- Video Watched: Advantages of Adobe FrameMaker
- Adobe FrameMaker versus Microsoft Word White Paper
- Getting started with Adobe FrameMaker

END