Techwriter Wannabe Reads Documentation : Jira and Confluence and MadFlare Cap Overview

What keeps an aspiring technical writer awake at night? For me, it is definitely the overwhelming amount of new tools to learn. After years of simply typing into a text editor, I woke up in the world filled with terms such as: authoring solutions, single-sourcing and content reuse. In times like this, reading technical documentation can be a life saver: not only does it help to grasp the concept of these tools, but it also allows to compare the pros and cons of given products. So, let’s take a closer look at the documentation of three popular solutions: Jira, Confluence and Madflare Cap.

Jira &Confluence

As both of these tools come from the Atlassian family and the organization of their documentation is very similar, I decided to analyze them together in order highlight their similarities and differences.

1. First glance

Immediately after logging in Confluence (<https://techcommvistula.atlassian.net/wiki/spaces/TECHCOMMVI/overview> ), we see a Quickstart menu on the right: photo

It does not give much information, but it is useful as an introduction. Jira does not have this feature: instead, it suggests you a few articles that you can read directly in the Help panel and then evaluate their usefulness Jira2 photo

I think a more detailed Quickstart menu would be a good idea in both cases, just to give us a general overview of the most important functions.

1. Articles, community and courses

In order to find detailed documentation for both tools, we need to click on the question mark button at the top right-hand corner: its visibility and accessibility is a big plus. Then, we can choose: Read help articles (link). This section is divided into a series of articles with mini-presentations embedded in the text. What I liked about them is that they are written in a simple, fun language and provide step-by-step instructions. Another help feature in both tools is the Ask the Community button, providing answers to specific questions asked by users.

But what I found the most interesting in this documentation is somewhat hidden: the Atlassian Uiversity courses (link: <https://university.atlassian.com/student/catalog> ). I could not find this button anywhere in Confluence. In Jira, it is available under Learn Jira: photo Jira3

This feature gives you access to both free and paid courses. They are self-paced and they look a little bit like a game: you can earn badges and complete levels. I found the “Fundamentals” free course particularly useful, as it explains the very basics of both tools:

Another great thing about these courses is their interactivity: you can practice in the tool itself while you’re learning:

Confluence 3

and then take an assessment test to evaluate yourself.

1. Other languages

Jira and Confluence also have some of their documentation translated into other languages, although, again, it is not the easiest to find (I accessed the website – link through Google). Another problem is the translation, which is not always complete in Polish. Below are examples of the same content in Polish and French (Confluence):

and in Polish and Spanish (Jira):

Additionally, the introductory videos are not translated into any language (other than English), which is not coherent with written materials.

1. Overall impressions

The technical documentation of Jira and Confluence is unified, diverse, interactive and detailed, although it would help to work a bit more on the translated content. Also, because it is so vast, the documentation is scattered around the Atlassian website and it takes some time to track the interesting content down. I think it would help to centralize it further, for example by adding an “Atlassian University” button in the Help centre menu.

MadCap Flare

1. First glance

Compared with Jira and Confluence, MadCap Flare makes it more difficult to access documentation. Instead of a visible little question mark, there is a ribbon with many options to choose from:

photo

The specific documentation for this particular software can be found in the “Support/Online Help & Documentation/MadCap Flare” booklet (link).

Additionally, we are greeted by a chatbot Simon, who we can’t actually chat with, but who gives us a few options to orient us in the right direction.

1. Online Help

The good news is, once we find the button that we are looking for, we enter a comprehensive, clearly organized guide with everything that we might possibly need. Step-by-step tutorials are very intuitive and contain relevant screenshots that can be enlarged. Videos are narrated by humans (unlike in the previously analyzed tools), which makes them easier to follow. It might have been a good idea to add subtitles to them ( only the automated ones are available).

As it can be seen in the Product Demo video (<https://www.madcapsoftware.com/videos/flare/product-demo-an-overview-of-madcap-flare/#content> ), the program itself contains a new project wizard, perfect for inexperienced users. Another useful feature, missing from Jira and Confluence, is the Troubleshooting booklet (<https://help.madcapsoftware.com/flare2021r2/Content/Flare/Troubleshooting/Troubleshooting.htm> ), where it is possible to find solutions on our own. There is also the Customer Showcase

1. Other languages

Unfortunately, I could not find any online help resources for MadCap Flare in languages other than English.

1. Overall impressions

Compared to Jira and Confluence, MadCap Flare’s technical documentation seems more advanced and better organized. It might be due to the fact that, from what I learned so far, MadCap Flare is a tool developed specifically for technical writers ☺ The main change I would consider would be to add resources in other languages, as it would certainly help techwriters who don’t work with English.

CONS:

- a little chaotic at the first glance

- too much of everything at first

Jira

PROS:

* Easily accessible help button
* Self-paced courses and badges (like a game; interactivity, flip cards): <https://university.atlassian.com/student/collection/850385/path/1083901>

Same thing for Confluence (in both the voice in video is automated)

* The articles appear on the right and you can rate them (although it’s not very detailed)

CONS:

* Similar outline as in Confluence
* Less intuitive

<https://confluence.atlassian.com/alldoc/>

MadCap Flare

<https://www.madcapsoftware.com>

many ways of accessing the documentation (products/services/resources) – a con - best way is to enter support -> online help & documentation -> MadCap flare

<https://help.madcapsoftware.com/flare2021r2/Content/Flare/Introduction/Home.htm>

PROS:

* Product demo overview video

<https://www.madcapsoftware.com/videos/flare/product-demo-an-overview-of-madcap-flare/#content>

* Intuitive menu
* Written in a simple language
* Presence of tutorials: step-by-step, with screenshots that you can enlarge
* Human voice in videos, likeable and easy to follow
* In the program itself: new project wizard
* Customer showcase

CONS:

* Chatbot (not a fan, but there’s a phone number)
* Hard to find on the main page
* Videos are advertising, no subtitles (only automatic)