To: Jessica Smith; Computer Engineering Project Manager
From: Autumn Hood; Junior writer, Technical Communication Department
Date: 24 November 2014
Subject: Proposal to adopt MadCap Flare to switch to single sourced documentation

Hello, Ms. Smith. This proposal describes the benefits for the computer engineering department of the technical communication department adopting single-sourcing as our method of documentation and why we would use MadCap Flare to do it.

Why do we need single sourcing?

The technical communication department is still rooted in the "craftsman model" of documentation, composing entire documents one at a time [1]. However, this model is inefficient and does not allow for a timely or resourceful method of creating, updating, and managing content. Although this responsibility lies within the technical communication department, the documentation methods we use have implications on external departments, including computer engineering.

The main problem for the computer engineers is that because multiple technical communicators have to manually update separate documents for different branches, products, audiences, outputs, and more, technical communicators will have to more frequently refer to the computer engineers for reference or help. However, with single sourcing, if a technical communicator has a question about a new product version, for instance, a computer engineer will only need to be asked once, and when the technical communicator updates the content in the single source, that content will automatically update everywhere it is output.

Why MadCap Flare?

Flare has several features that make it ideal for topic-based authoring and single sourcing. Instead of being created out of necessity to meet trends, Flare was built to support reusable content. Flare's structure relies on CSS and XML, standardized by the W3C, making it easier to create content that is accurate and consistent.

What are the challenges, and how do we avoid them?

The upfront costs are admittedly daunting, and some people may at first think that the whole process is more trouble than its worth. There are also potential issues of frustration among departments if team members do not feel like they are being supported or that everyone is working toward the same goal. Finally, some computer engineers might understandably feel like their being asked to take on additional work that is not their responsibility. However, we can take certain actions that are likely to prevent or decrease any of these issues, especially
- Applying transition best practices [2]
- Creating explicit protocols for communication and cooperation between departments [3]
- Presenting the switch as mutually-beneficial, which will make it "well received" and "exciting" [3]
- Creating "early successes" that all the teams can take credit for [4]

What are the benefits to the computer engineering department?
There are three main advantages for the computer engineering department.

1. **Technical communicators will not have to refer to computer engineers for answers as often**. As mentioned earlier, the greatest benefit to computer engineers will be the decreased frequency with which technical communicators must defer to them for answers. Because single sourcing updates all instances of a specific kind of information, technical communicators will need to refer to engineers less to confirm that content is correct and up-to-date.

2. **Increased digital literacy among the technical communicators will make them better prepared to interact with the computer engineers**. As technical communicators grow more comfortable and confident with technology, they will be better able to relate to and understand the lingo, processes, and methodologies of the computer engineers. In no way will the technical communicators become subject matter experts themselves; however, especially with using MadCap Flare (which runs on CSS and XML—markup languages), technical communicators will be at least more familiar with the work that the computer engineers do. Ideally, they would be more aware with the theories that drive their work so they can ask better phrased, more intelligent questions.

3. **Technical communicators will not have to ask computer engineers for certain specifications**. Using MadCap Flare for modular authoring removes the design and formatting aspects of documentation. Thus, technical communicators will no longer have to ask engineers for certain information, such as specifically sized screen shots or single-spaced writing.

Thank you for reading my proposal. If you have questions on the information I've presented here or would like to further discuss how we can successfully transition to single-sourcing with MadCap Flare, please contact me at autumnhood@techcorp.com at your convenience.

Appendix A: References

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions about my resources.

[1]. Albers, M. (2003). Single Sourcing and the Technical Communication Career Path. *Technical Communication 50* (3). 335-343.

[2]. Clark, D. and Rebekka Anderson. (2005). Renegotiating with Technology: Training Towards More Sustainable Technical Communication. *Technical Communication 52* (2). 289-301.

[3]. Technical Communication Manager. Personal Communication. November 13, 2014.

[4]. N. Cobb. Personal Communication. November 6, 2014.