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DITA

Process Documentation

Before this assignment, I had absolutely zero experience with DITA; I had heard it mentioned in passing and seen it listed in preferred-experience lists in job postings—but nothing more. It just so happens that DITA appears to be a perfect tool for what I would like to do after I finish my time in university: play a role in creating documentation for tools in the pro-audio industry.

I had noticed that my client has almost no user manuals available for their products, and the information that is available is very limited; granted, it can be reasonably assumed that a significant portion of the audience for the client's equipment possesses a degree of knowledge that makes the expense of creating user manuals largely unnecessary; especially since my client is a very small company. I approached this assignment with the mindset that user manuals do more than inform users; they also play a role in marketing to potential customers and they help create or reinforce the perception of reliability. For the sake of brevity, I won't expand on why I believe that to be the case.

Before I began to work on the DITA document in Oxygen, I selected pieces of client-gear to document that are not so complicated that I would be distracted by the complexity of documenting the piece itself, while also not being so simple that I would have very little to document; that is, I wanted to balance my opportunity to learn how to use a new tool (DITA) with the opportunity to create documentation where users may have significant questions that may not be addressed or expressed clearly by pre-existing documentation provided by the client.

On of the issues I encountered while creating my document in Oxygen was how to include an image on the cover page. It seems that it can be done, but Oxygen flags errors when XML is used to force DITA to do what it seems it doesn't want to do. I'm a bit confused on why DITA would make the insertion of images on the cover page such a problem—ditto the use of . I imagine CSS styling of a DITA document may hold the key doing just about everything I envision (e.g. page color, logo insertion, font changes, table styling, etc.), but time constraints have made it necessary for me to save that next-level of learning for a later time. Oxygen made DITA file creation super

simple, but, for the sake of better understanding the how it works, I found myself composing in the XML-editor view most of time.

I first tried to create the manual without first creating a task analysis, mostly because playing in Oxygen was more enticing but also to see how much help the analysis would be. I did an ok job, but it didn't take me long to realize that I had to stop and complete the analysis first. The task analysis really helped with minimizing the time and mental effort that I had to put into structuring the manual; it also helped with keeping the writing minimal.