



Case study: good documentation reduces costs and increases sales

[SDL International](http://www.sdl.com) (www.sdl.com) is a medium-sized software house. One of its products is the SDLX translation memory system. (This is a tool for aiding human translators. Words and phrases are translated and saved in a database. When those words and phrases re-appear the previous translation is automatically offered to the translator.) SDLX has been on the market for many years, and is a tried and tested product.

Background

Much documentation was available for SDLX. There were user guides (one for each software module), frequently asked question (FAQ) sheets, online help, self-paced training guides, "how to" guides, and various other items of help. SDL realised, however, that the documentation was not presenting the right image. Although much of the needed information was available, users couldn't find it easily. It was fragmented, it made the product look difficult to use, and it did not really help new users of the software.

TechScribe won the contract to re-design the documentation. This new documentation has [cut support costs](#) and directly lead to [new sales](#).

What we did

First there was an initial briefing session in which SDL personnel explained the purpose and functions of the SDLX software. Then TechScribe investigated user requirements. Who were the typical users? What were the most common tasks that they performed and with which software modules? What were the most common problems? In which order were tasks performed?

On the basis of this, we designed a single 'Getting Started' guide which explained the essential tasks that users performed. An introductory chapter explained typical scenarios in which users might work, and the software modules were related to these working patterns. Diagrams and real, but simple, examples helped users to see the overall picture.

This 'Getting Started' guide was just under half the size of the original manuals (35 sides compared to approximately 80 sides).

We also produced online help (WinHelp). This contained a mix of task-based material and reference material. Information that was available in the 'Getting Started' guide was generally not repeated in the online help, but users were told exactly where in

the 'Getting Started' guide they could find any information that they needed (the guide was also available in electronic format, so users were guaranteed to have a copy).

The online help included the separate items of help that had been previously available, so that now it contained FAQs, trouble-shooting information and so on. Instead of many documents to search, users now only had to look in two places ('Getting Started' or online help) to find answers to their questions.

Would you like to see what TechScribe did? Then [download the user guide and online help](#) that we created.

Results

Reduce support costs

The new documentation was shipped with a new release of the software. An immediate effect was to reduce the number of support calls to the help desk, particularly from new users.

"One noticeable affect of the new documentation from TechScribe was to significantly reduce the number of telephone calls and email requests to our support desk."

Denise Baldwin, SDLX Software Support Manager.

Generate new sales

The new documentation was instrumental in generating new sales.

"This customer says his decision to buy is not just because of the great product but also because of the clear and concise instructions in the 'Getting Started' manual making it easy to get to grips with SDLX.

I would like to convey my thanks to all the team for their efforts in improving the manuals to such an extent that they become instrumental in procuring orders.

This initial order has been made for a specific project and there will be more orders to follow."

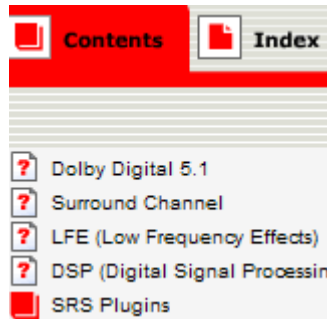
Steve Westover, Product Technology Program Manager.



Macromedia Case Study

(http://www.macromedia.com/cfusion/showcase/index.cfm?event=casestudyprint&casestudyid=31359&loc=en_us)

Orion Studios (<http://www.orionstudios.com/D5/DirectDVD.htm>)



Products used

[Captivate](#), [RoboHelp](#)

Founded in 1999, [Orion Studios](#) is a developer of multimedia software products for the PC with four software titles released to date. Orion Studios develops software in the MP3 DVD genres and has established a reputation of innovating and setting new standards for the market.

Challenge

Orion Studios wanted to impress customers and partners with an improved online Help system to accompany the release of a new version of its popular software DVD Player, DirectDVD 5—without spending a lot of time and money on development and updates

Solution

RoboHelp
RoboDemo

Benefits

- Before using RoboHelp, previous Help systems developed by Orion Studios often took two months to create - now it only takes seven or eight days, and the customer experience is significantly improved
- Typical Help system output is costly to update and requires a new CD for distribution to customers. Using [FlashHelp](#), Orion Studios now just updates a web page and all customers get the information instantly. This has helped cut administrative costs by over 75%.

Project Details

Orion Studios' release of DirectDVD Version 5 heralded a significant development over its predecessor in the company's popular DVD Software Player product line. "DirectDVD brings the latest in video and audio to a greater range of DVD consumers

that want to enjoy multichannel sound from their PC," says Mark Bevins, Lead Developer for Orion Studios. "Providing a complete media package solution so our customers can choose the best audio or video PC experience is what drives sales for DirectDVD. Online Help is an integral part of the package, and we wanted to mark this release with a new Help system that would underscore our philosophy of providing a total, interactive customer experience."

Orion Studios began looking for the right kind of Help authoring software to support its goals for DirectDVD 5's online Help system. Orion Studios wanted a browser-based solution that would simplify the creation and maintenance of its new Help system but most importantly, it wanted impressive results. "We were looking for software to provide us with instant production and glamour; something the customer would fall in love with, navigate easily, and learn the most from," says Bevins. "We found all that with Macromedia RoboHelp and the new FlashHelp output."

"RoboHelp is unbeatable. Macromedia has taken Help authoring software to a whole new level and we are thrilled to be one of the first using FlashHelp to create an interactive experience for our customers with technology that's sure to become the industry standard."

-Mark Bevins, Lead Developer, Orion Studios

Solution

RoboHelp is the fastest, easiest way to create professional Help systems and documentation for desktop and web-based applications. RoboHelp allows users to import existing documentation in a variety of formats, create additional content in a choice of editors including Dreamweaver, and generate Help output in a variety of formats, including browser-based formats. Orion Studios chose the most powerful browser-based Help format that RoboHelp creates, FlashHelp. [FlashHelp](#) is an innovative Flash-based Help format that allowed Bevins to easily include animation and audio without requiring any Flash programming skills.

Benefits

RoboHelp reduced development and maintenance costs for Orion's new online Help system, improved customer experience, increased sales, improved partner relations, and provided the company with the cachet of an interactive Help system unlike any other on the market. "RoboHelp is unbeatable," says Bevins. "Macromedia has taken Help authoring software to a whole new level and we are thrilled to be one of the first using FlashHelp to create an interactive experience for our customers with technology that's sure to become the industry standard."

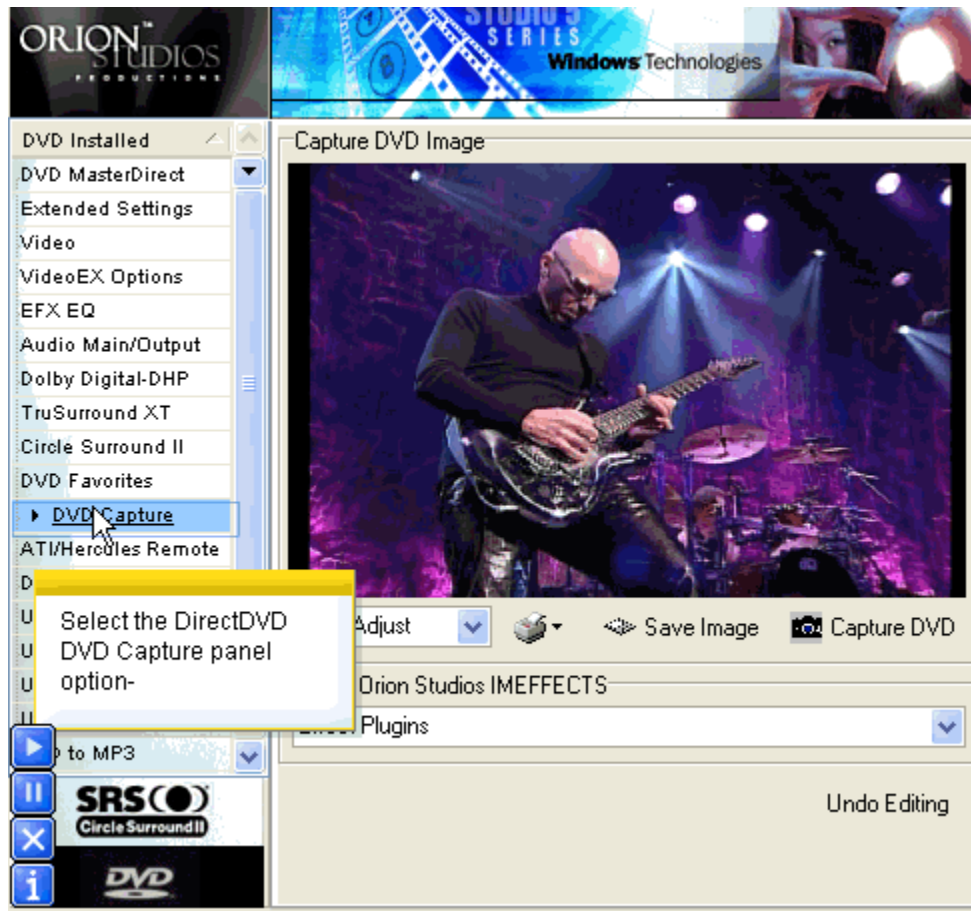
RoboHelp saved Orion time and money while building the DirectDVD 5 Help system by allowing its developers to:

- ← Use existing content
- ← Reduce the learning curve by choosing a familiar authoring environment

- ← Easily add multi-media
- ← Use automated wizards
- ← Employ drag and drop editing
- ← Easily customize look and feel

“RoboHelp automates manual tasks like creating Table of Contents so we could create an impressive online Help system in a short amount of time,” says Bevins. “RoboHelp instantly converted existing HTML files into FlashHelp output. Before we used RoboHelp, previous Help systems we developed often took two months to create whereas this time around it only took seven or eight days to add all the interactivity and new content for the DirectDVD 5 online Help system.

Looking ahead, Orion Studios will use RoboHelp to take care of the many new features planned for DirectDVD version 6 online Help system. Bevins expects to update the Help system’s front page with managed movies, add 25 more main topic pages, 50 more sub-topic pages, and to seamlessly import several new Flash animated elements (Flash-based simulation movies built using RoboDemo) in just one week. “RoboHelp gives our developers the freedom to drag and drop items like a high end web design tool. No other software I’ve seen allows you to do that without being a web developer.”



[RoboDemo Example of DVD Image Capture \(no audio\)](#)

Choosing the browser-based FlashHelp online Help format means Orion also benefited from output that:

- ← delivers a consistent appearance across a wide variety of browsers
- ← loads quickly, even over low bandwidth
- ← eliminates firewall issues sometimes caused by Java applets
- ← reduces maintenance costs

Help system output like Microsoft HTML is costly to update and requires a new CD for distribution to customers. Using FlashHelp, Orion Studios now just has to update a web page and all customers get the information instantly. This has helped cut administrative costs by over 75%. "We achieve instant updates by publishing the online Help to our web servers, thereby allowing our customers to get the most up-

to-date online Help system available thereby improving the customer experience, instead of waiting for the next CD to be manufactured and distributed," says Bevins.

Impressive User Experience

Finding a powerful, flexible and cost effective Help authoring solution only pays for itself if users like the end result. "We knew we found a winner as soon as we submitted the DirectDVD 5 online Help system to our partners," says Bevins. "The folks at SRS Labs were stunned. They watched the movies that we integrated to the online Help and were impressed that we had taken the time to educate our customers about their technology."

FlashHelp provides rich interactivity and multi-media elements without requiring any Flash programming knowledge. Orion created an interactive learning environment that improves customer experience, delivers value-added up-to-the minute information about the company and industry news, and provides an impressive statement about its commitment to customer satisfaction and product quality.

"It all adds up to more than a typical Help system, which drives customer satisfaction and sales," says Bevin. "We can maintain the look and feel of the Orion web site, easily porting interactive elements like RoboDemo movies from one environment to another to keep our customers interactive through the whole experience. Contextual navigation and hyperlinks help us direct customers to where they need to go, providing new opportunities to sell product online. We are sold on RoboHelp and I congratulate Macromedia for doing an awesome job!"

Benefits for Developers

- ← Flexible work environment
- ← Easy to use tool
- ← Drag and drop editing capabilities
- ← Easily import existing content
- ← Easily add RoboDemo simulations and add multi-media content
- ← No Flash programming skills required
- ← Creates browser-based output

Benefits for Customers

- ← Improved interactivity and multi-media experience increases online Help efficacy
- ← Instant updates keep customers well-informed
- ← Added value news and company content provides a well-rounded experience



Case Study: AnswerWorks and the AutoCAD 2000 Help System

[By Jeffrey Allen](#)

The AutoCAD Technical Publications department at Autodesk evaluated the customer experience of using AnswerWorks with the AutoCAD online documentation and found it to be emphatically positive.

AnswerWorks was added to the current AutoCAD Help system (no content changes were involved) and the AnswerWorks-enhanced Help was distributed to a group of customer volunteers via the AutoCAD Beta Program. An email survey was conducted to measure their reaction and collect their comments, as well as to collect data to guide certain design decisions. This case study describes the test and reports on the results of the survey.

How the AutoCAD Help System Was Modified

The Help system that ships with AutoCAD 2000 consists of 36 WinHelp files. From the user's perspective these files form two Help systems: User Help, comprising five of these files; and Developer Help, consisting of six files. The remaining files are supplemental driver and support files. To get some quick feedback on the effectiveness and usability of an "AnswerWorked" Help system, we decided to provide this functionality for the User Help only.

We used the AnswerWorks Wizard to add AnswerWorks to the five User Help files. No other modifications were made to the existing source files for those Help projects, and no synonym file was used. The AnswerWorks Wizard creates a LIM (index) file for each HLP file, and took about an hour to create the LIM files for all five HLP files, which total about 8 MB. We had to recompile the main HLP file so it included references to the AnswerWorks DLL, and also updated the CNT file so the AnswerWorks tab (we called it "Query") would display in the Help Topics dialog.

We provided a bare-bones interface in the Query tab for this test: a simple text entry control plus a panel to display a list of topics with relevance ratings. We arbitrarily limited the list to the top 15 topics.

Distribution and Installation

The updated Help system files were bundled into a self-extracting EXE and posted to a secure location on the AutoCAD Beta Programs web site. Visitors to the site who were current users of the English language

version of AutoCAD 2000 were invited to download the files once they had completed a brief enrollment process.

Although the package was very simple, sometimes the environments it entered were not. Some customers had difficulty getting the new Help system installed and working properly, usually due to the existence of multiple versions of AutoCAD, or multiple AutoCAD-based products. Although there were no cases in which the problems were related to AnswerWorks, some of the negative survey responses are attributable to installation problems rather than the performance of the Help system.

It should be noted that we were trying to get a quick assessment of customer response to the basic functionality offered by AnswerWorks. Our customer sampling technique (self selection) and the design of the survey questions were not rigorous, but we have had great success using this methodology on features in development to perform a "reality check" on our expectations. In addition to feedback on the basic capabilities of the system, the survey allowed us to collect input on specific implementation details, including the beginnings of a synonym list for our domain content.

Summary of Results

In a nutshell, the customer response to AnswerWorks in the AutoCAD Help system was emphatically positive. Overall, 78% of survey respondents said that the enhanced Query was a useful addition to online Help, and 51% indicated that it would become their primary search method as opposed to the Table of Contents, Index, or Find (full-text search). In our experience with similar tests on software features these figures are unusually high, especially considering the "out-of-the-box" implementation and the fact that they are probably conservative (some users were unable to complete the installation, but still responded to the survey and were not filtered out).

Future Directions

In addition to strong validation of customer enthusiasm for AnswerWorks provided by the test, feedback in the survey is also helping us refine our ideas for a more robust AnswerWorks implementation—although we are impressed by how much success we achieved with so little effort.

We are converting the AutoCAD Help system from WinHelp to HTML Help. Our experience with HTML Help on AutoCAD LT has given us some specific notions about what can be effective for content organization and presentation in HTML Help, and we're confident that AnswerWorks will fit in extremely well.

Because our documentation set is relatively large and falls naturally into discrete volumes with distinct audiences, we intend to provide a method for users to constrain their searches to specific collections if they wish. AnswerWorks easily supports this capability.

Customer expectations around the number of topic hits to display are undergoing rapid modification via increased interaction with web searching, but we're finding that customers welcome shorter lists when the accuracy is high. We expect to reduce the default from the value we used in the test, but to provide a one-click method for expanding the list to display all hits.

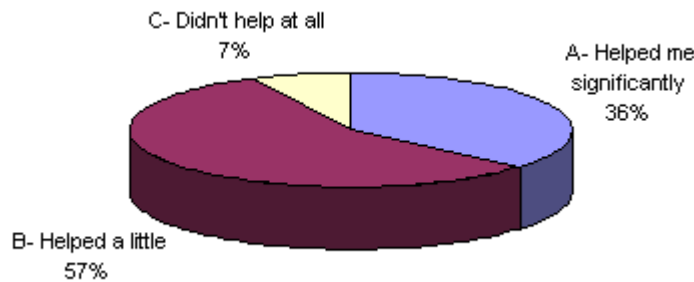
For some time now we have supported the ability of users to update their Help content via web download. We can continue to refine and improve the AnswerWorks search results by incorporating a feedback mechanism directly into the interface that collects and transmits query strings back to us along with optional comments for those occasions when results are unexpected.

Survey Data

- ≡ In total, 246 customers enrolled for the test and downloaded the files.
- ≡ The survey was delivered to these 246 customers via email on March 2, 2000.
- ≡ These results reflect 103 responses (42%) as of March 6, 2000.

1. How would you rate the Query's ability to help you find answers in AutoCAD's online Help?

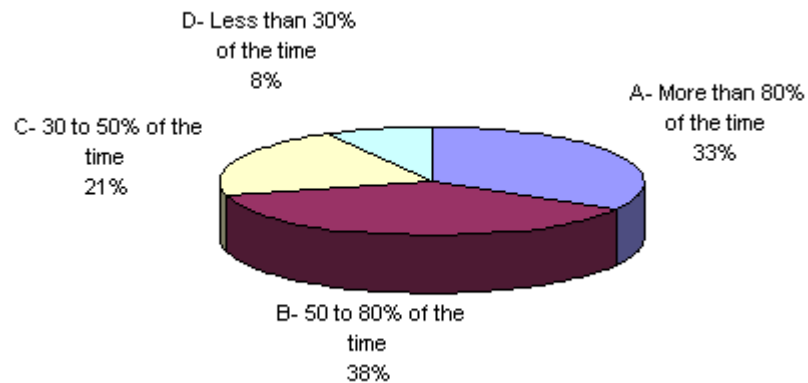
Choices	Count	Percent
A- Helped significantly	35	36
B- Helped a little	55	57
C- Didn't help at all	7	7
Total	97	100



2. For what percentage of your questions did the Query return an acceptable solution?

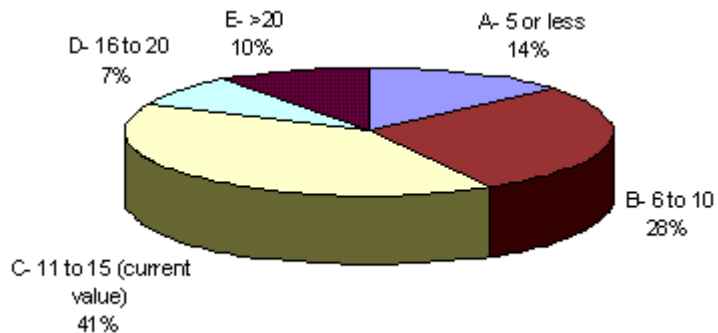
Choices	Count	Percent
A- More than 80% of the time	32	33
B- 50 to 80% of the time	37	38
C- 30 to 50% of the time	20	21

D- Less than 30% of the time	8	8
Total	97	100



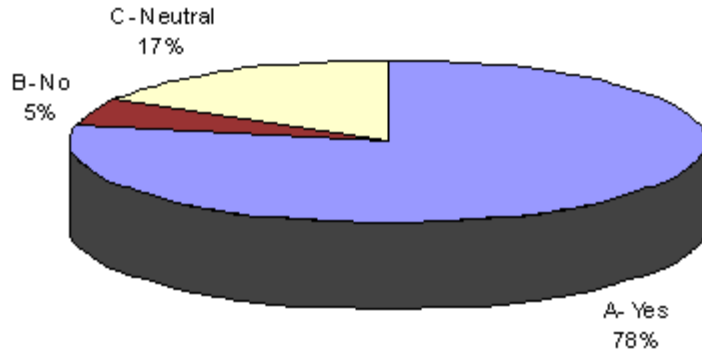
3. If you could control the number of topics that a query displays, what would be a good number?

Choices	Count	Percent
A- 5 or less	13	14
B- 6 - 10	27	28
C- 11 - 15 (current number)	39	41
D- 16 - 20	7	7
E- Greater than 20	10	10
Total	96	100



4. Overall, did you find Query a useful addition to online Help?

Choices	Count	Percent
A- Yes	75	78
B- No	5	5
C- Neutral	16	17
Total	96	100



5. Now that you've used the Query tab, rank the FIRST search method you feel you would use most often to find information in AutoCAD's online Help. (Questions 6 and 7 asked customers to rank SECOND and THIRD choices. The results of these three questions are compiled below for clarity).

Choices	First	Second	Third
Query tab	49	25	12
Index tab	22	35	25
Find tab	15	18	27
Press F1 in command/dialog box	7	6	10
Contents tab	3	13	22