

Microsoft Press

Publisher speeds creation of books and interactive training aids with FrameMaker+SGML 6.0 and XML

PROFILE

- Publisher of retail books supporting Microsoft products
- Revenue for fiscal year 2001: \$25 billion
- Headquarters: Redmond, Washington
- www.mspress.microsoft.com

BENEFITS SUMMARY

- On-the-fly content validation in FrameMaker+SGML instantly informs desktop publishers if content elements are out of place and suggests allowed elements.
- XML support in FrameMaker+SGML enables Microsoft Press to reuse content authored for one project in other projects, such as interactive training aids and eBooks.
- By importing Word documents into FrameMaker+SGML, Microsoft Press gains a structured document view while leveraging the tool with which writers are comfortable authoring.
- Automated formatting in FrameMaker+SGML reduces errors and helps ensure consistency across Microsoft Press publications.
- FrameMaker+SGML supports the long documents that Microsoft Press creates.
- FrameMaker+SGML supports the full range of design elements, such as bleeds and full color, that Microsoft Press customers expect from retail books.
- Adobe PDF files distributed for review print exactly as intended, even if the reviewers don't have copies of FrameMaker+SGML.

Reusing content is the name of the game in publishing. The faster and more accurately a publisher can generate new titles, the lower the costs and the higher the quality. Consider Microsoft Press, the publisher of retail books such as *Word: Step by Step*, *PowerPoint: Step by Step*, and Readiness Review books for people preparing for Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE) exams. To speed publishing and produce the highest quality books and interactive training aids possible, Microsoft Press uses Adobe FrameMaker+SGML 6.0 software and the eXtensible Markup Language (XML) format. The publisher then reuses the XML data to create self-tests and eBooks, and provides the data to other publishers.

Microsoft Press writers author titles in Microsoft Word, and then desktop publishers import the files into Adobe FrameMaker+SGML to gain the benefits of a structured environment. “FrameMaker+SGML offers important extras such as structured document views, on-the-fly validation, and the ability to publish easily to XML or Adobe PDF,” says Patty Gardner, program manager for Microsoft Press Editorial.

Many uses of XML

Microsoft Press began using FrameMaker+SGML in early 2000, when it adopted XML. When FrameMaker+SGML documents are saved in XML, each element—such as a heading, paragraph, or graphic—receives a tag that describes it, resulting in a repository of reusable, tagged document elements.

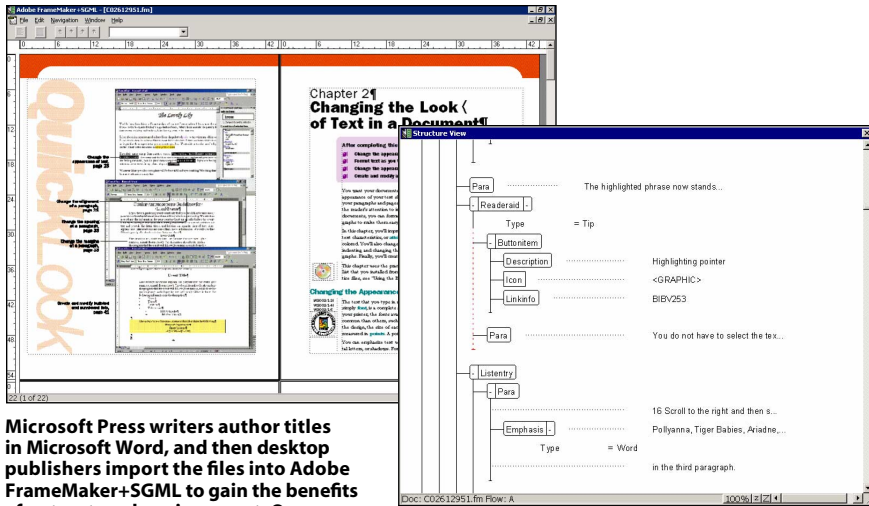
For example, to create interactive practice tests for MCSE certification, which are included on

the Readiness Review CD, Microsoft Press imports book elements, identified by XML tags, into a proprietary assessment engine that mimics the actual MCSE test. “This is much faster than re-entering book information or having to painstakingly cut and paste,” Gardner says. “Because the process is so fast, we can also wait until the book content is finalized before we create the assessment engine.”

Microsoft Press also uses the XML-tagged content to speed the creation of eBooks in the Microsoft Reader and .CHM (Compiled HTML Help) formats. Included on companion CDs that ship with certain printed titles, the eBooks are formatted somewhat differently from the printed books. After the publisher creates an XML file from the FrameMaker+SGML file, the eBook team runs a series of transformations on the XML so that each element falls into place automatically. The eBooks are interactive; for example, the *Encyclopedia of Networks* includes a customizable index that reflects the reader's profile and areas of interest.

Synergy between FrameMaker and Word

A key advantage of FrameMaker+SGML for Microsoft Press is that it supports the existing workflow. “One of our criteria for a structured content solution was to preserve as much of our process as possible,” Gardner says, “and that includes authoring with Word.” The company publishes about a third of its books in-house and works with outside vendors for the rest.



Microsoft Press writers author titles in Microsoft Word, and then desktop publishers import the files into Adobe FrameMaker+SGML to gain the benefits of a structured environment. Once imported into FrameMaker+SGML, any content that violates the structural rules is highlighted. With FrameMaker+SGML, Microsoft Press can output to XML, Adobe PostScript, and Adobe PDF from a single source file. XML support in FrameMaker+SGML enables Microsoft Press to reuse content authored for one project in other projects, such as interactive training aids and eBooks.

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*Patty Gardner
Program manager
Microsoft Press Editorial*

Vendors receive Microsoft Word templates, instructions about the content model, and a conversion table that maps Microsoft Word styles to FrameMaker+SGML elements within the element definition documents (EDDs). When authors import Word documents and apply the conversion table and the EDD, FrameMaker+SGML automatically applies the appropriate formatting. “Automated formatting reduces errors and helps ensure consistency across publications,” Gardner says. “And FrameMaker+SGML is easy to pick up for skilled publishers.”

On-the-fly validation

On-the-fly validation of document structure is a major benefit of Adobe FrameMaker+SGML for Microsoft Press. When desktop publishers import their Word files into FrameMaker+SGML, any content that violates the structural rules is highlighted. For example, suppose the FrameMaker+SGML EDD specifies that a chapter heading must be followed by a paragraph. If a bulleted list or graphic appears instead, the structure line changes from a solid black line to a dashed red line that informs the desktop publisher a fix is needed. The desktop publisher can view a catalog of valid elements for that location by clicking where the dashed red line begins. “The feature of highlighting invalid elements is very helpful,” Gardner says, “saving time and ensuring we maintain excellent document quality.”

Full-color support

Microsoft Press publications must be formatted attractively, often with bleeds and full color. “These are retail books, and readers have high expectations for the look and feel,” Gardner says. “FrameMaker+SGML not only provides the design elements we need, it supports very long documents—up to 1,500 pages. That’s a rare combination.”

More accurate printing

With FrameMaker+SGML, Microsoft Press can output not only to XML, but also to Adobe PostScript® and Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF). Authors typically use Adobe Acrobat software to convert FrameMaker+SGML documents to Adobe PDF for review, ensuring that the documents print out exactly as intended, regardless of the reviewers’ hardware and software. Microsoft Press also uses preprepared Adobe PDF files to streamline the print workflow.

Toward database publishing

The next step for Microsoft Press will be to integrate FrameMaker+SGML with a content management system, creating a central repository of content elements. Gardner notes that FrameMaker+SGML works with a variety of content management systems, giving the publisher a choice of platforms.

The cost for all this flexibility? Impressively nominal. “We looked at proprietary publishing software, but the costs of bringing them in were too high,” Gardner says. “FrameMaker+SGML gives us structure, XML support, and the ability to handle long documents—all at an excellent price.”

TOOLBOX

Adobe Acrobat
Adobe FrameMaker+SGML
Microsoft Word

PCs running Windows® 2000 or Windows XP

