# Notes from DITA Listening Session #1

June 1st 2016, Boston, MA

* About 20+ people in attendance from about half as many companies
* Stan Doherty, representing OASIS, organized this; Keith Schengili-Roberts also attending in-person as an OASIS represwentative
* Contributing remotely: JoAnn Hackos, Joe Storbeck, Bob Thomas, Don Day
* Meeting space hosted by Pega Systems

## Company Report-outs

### Sabine Ocker – IA with Akamai Technologies

Originally started with FrameMaker, now with SDL and oXygen

* Have just gone through user acceptance phase, are now two weeks from production
* Main business driver for moving to DITA: translation (have a business need to do more of this)
* Are going to DITA 1.2
* Phased deployment working well, core team of DITA implementers was also a good idea that has worked out well
* Plan to convert content to generic topics and then apply information topic typing afterwards
* Problems: have a lot of silo’d content; breaking silos (and even discovering who owns which silo) is a challenge
* From OASIS would like to see more info on change management; would also like to have more info on the nuts and bolts of the DITA maturation model
* Would like see more on the DITA Maturity Model, especially anything on best practices to build momentum and to push investments
* See the migration as being done in a series of well-defined hops

### Richard Pagano with Fidelity Investments

* Currently moving from DocBook to DITA 1.2
* Are using Kapow software to migrate content
* Their CMS is SharePoint 365
* Process so far is going well except for choosing an authoring tool
* Still authoring using legacy platform (made in-house)
* Investigating Oxygen WebAuthor.
* Seeking buy-in from authors to help gain support for transition internally
* How to sell DITA to management is something he would like to know more about; he finds he is always having to re-sell the idea. Detailed examples form other companies about their reuse successes and overall ROI would be wonderful
* It’s OK to talk money re: ROI and use cases and business models
* Liked the idea of Lightweight DITA from the DC DITA NA conference

### Laura Bannister from NANTHealth, Director of Documentation

* Currently have a mix of FrameMaker and oXygen
* Repository in GIT
* Workgroup environment = Confluence
* “lots of things in lots of places” in terms of tool usage within the company, includes Drupal being used a CMS
* Translation will be a big thing
* She wants to build a foundation, as she realizes that they are a long way from where they will need to be
  + Starting with single sourcing (15-20 separate user guides)
* Wants to know what the rights steps are from a management perspective, how to move things along
* Specifics about moving from MadCap to DITA would be useful.
* Need to know the right questions to ask vendors about migration support.
* Also wants to feel confident when she makes a tool choice; does not want to be in a position where she has to talk to her CTO and ask for more money to buy a different tool a year or so after buying a tool

### Nicholas Villahermosa – Oracle, tools developer

* Finished moving to DITA in 2008, so they have been using it at Oracle for a long time, has lots of stories
* His group is using XMetaL Author 8 along with Subversion; are looking at Git and are not using a CMS per se
* Rest of company is using Arbortext and SDL; his warning to the rest of the group about these two products: “stay away from them at all costs”
* His division and the other groups do share a processing pieline.
* His main complaint about DITA is that customizing PDF via XSL is expensive
* Mentioned a PDF output tool (MyPDF - http://www.mypdf.net/) that comments every line of XSL code at output, so it is easy to know where to change things in the XSL code
* Really hates classic CTR relationship tables; believes source -> target reltables are the only type to use
* Very willing to help other groups get going.

### Jeff Evangelista – AIR Worldwide

* Early in the DITA migration process; still exploring benefits and formulating a business case.
* Identifying and reducing content redundancy would be the biggest immediate benefit. Best practices around redundancy management would be useful.
* Chunking is potentially a big deal as the group plans a conversion. Are there best practices around chunking legacy content into DITA topics?
* Conversion strategies – piecemeal? all at once? – seem very subjective. Are there any best practices around planning the conversion?

### Jennifer Wickman – Pega Systems

* Not in DITA at the moment; currently using Madcap Flare as a stepping stone on the path to DITA
* Works in an Agile environment
* Has previous extensive experience with DITA
* Have many inter-related products with lots of shared content; reuse is a key driver in their move to DITA; benefits of reuse is an easy sell to upper management
* Has been getting her doc team to work on chunking and updating information for the past couple of years; “our content has to be ready before we move to DITA”
* Currently hitting the edge as to what they can do with Madcap Flare
  + Using it with Subversion is problematic
  + Conditions “just don’t work”; apparently works by indicating what not to include, desperately want to have the include/exclude flexibility that a ditaval file would accomplish in DITA
  + Are using Madcap Flare as it is a “close approximation of DITA” for the members of her team; consider it a good tool to teach some of the basics of DITA (i.e. “topic”-based writing that is single-sourced) but they have definitely outgrown it
* Currently doing a DITA pilot project; has hired another writer with previous experience with DITA to help with the project

### Debbie Femia – Simplivity Corp.

* Has a team of 10 tech writers
* Started using Madcap Flare, now using DITA: “we are past the basics” (when it comes to working with DITA)
* Using DITA 1.3 integrated with the standard Engineering infrastructure (GIT, Jenkins, Stash, nightly builds)
* Using Oxygen 18.0 for authoring.
* Produce PDF, WebHelp, and (soon) MindTouch wiki.
* Based the company shells on customizations done by Bob Thomas.
* Moving into a CCMS (easyDITA)
* Would like to see a more in-person community of fellow DITA users to talk to; general comment in the room that many of the online venues are a bit daunting
* Her team is introducing Markdown-based Lightweight DITA with engineering staff

### Lee Anne Kowalski – VMWare

* 100 tech writers
* Output to PDF, translate from 8-10 languages; need for translated content was a key driver in their move to DITA
* Currently using DITA 1.2
* Environment is: SDL LiveContent (“or whatever it is called now”) along with XMetal 9.0 (moving to v.10 shortly); were previously using Perforce as a repository to hold their DITA content
* Has found that having “DITA Captains” (people hired from other firms who have had DITA experience) has been very helpful in their current success
* Would like to know “what the ROI is for moving to DITA 1.3” from DITA 1.2
  + As an example, would like to know more about how keyrefs can be used and what are the benefits of using them; noted that current examples found in articles are too simplistic to be useful
* The DITA spec needs to contain more complex examples. She was reviewing the keydef/keyref examples and realized that the examples seemed to dwell on the easy/obvious stuff. Need to throw in some nasty edge case examples.
* Not quite sure where to go to get detailed information about DITA 1.3.
* Do not know what questions to ask vendors to determine ROI on upgrading to DITA 1.3.
* Noted that marketing and sales “still want their own thing”

## General Themes and Interests

DITA versions:

* Only one company firmly on DITA 1.3.
* Several companies planning (hoping) to move to DITA 1.3, but do not have a detailed picture of what it brings to the party or how to justify moving if there is a cost.

DITA features:

* Reltables were not very popular.
* Universal interest in seeing more information about deploying keys --- how many? to do what?
* Vague-ish awareness of DITA 1.3 features such as scoped keys and branch filtering.
* Interested in Troubleshooting topic type and Release Management domain.

DITA information:

* Attendees seemed largely unaware of the resources developed by OASIS TCs. Perhaps they do not think of OASIS and DITA as being related.
* Several attendees have attended DITA conferences in the past, but none had this past year --- mumblings about budget. Definite interest in attending. Seemed unaware on the live streaming and replay videos CIDM made available.
* No attendees indicated that they were regular members or attendees at STC events.
* Several folks nodded when asked about DITA webinars.
* Oxygen training videos were broadly praised as a great learning resource for both basic skills and tricky DITA features. The videos “helped us get to the next stage of our implementation” because they provided good examples of things like conrefs, keyrefs, and conditions.

Interests (a.k.a. want more info):

* Management assistance in building a DITA migration proposal – all aspects. ROI. Financials. Historical data. Use cases. Best practices.
* Pilot projects – how to get going and measure results.
* Collaborative authoring – Markdown, LW DITA – VERY HOT – workflows, use cases
* MadCap Flare and DITA – how they differ? complement? how to migrate from Flare?

People issues:

* What skills are needed on a staff to do a successful migration?
* Is it easier to hire Information Architects (Content Captains) or to grow them? If growing them is the only way to go, how does a manager approach that?
* How much DITA experience is enough when hiring from the outside?

Listening session:

* Very interested in networking formally or informally.
* Experienced DITA people were open about being willing to help the new folks.
* Liked the face-to-face, team-to-team dialog happening in the session
* Would recommend doing something like this again – “learned a lot”
* Appreciated being asked by us OASIS types how things were going with them.