**DITA Listening Session – Denver, CO**

**October 2, 2016**

Attendees

Attendees (DITA Users):

* + - Jeppesen: Scott Hudson (Mgr/Content Strategist), Darrel Schultz (Writer), Whit Broach (Editor)
    - Landmark/Halliburton: Hal Hammond, eLearning Manager
    - Micro Motion: Diane Thomas, Technical Writer
    - Oracle – iCloud: Joel Meier, Sr. Manager Technical Communications
    - Oracle – Flash Storage: Julie Bettis, Sr. Technical Writer
    - Rocket Software: Ann Waite, Department Manager
    - Terumo BCT: Martin Pipho (DITA Lead), Emily Pancake (Manager), Amy Starks (Copy Editor)
    - Xilinx: Don Lammers, Publication Support Engineer

Attendees (OASIS)

* + - JoAnn Hackos (Comtech)
    - Kathy Madison (Comtech)
    - Scott Hudson (Jeppesen)
    - Bob Thomas (TagSmiths)

Attendees (Observers)

* + - Brianna Stevens (Comtech)
    - David Kerfoot (IXIASOFT)
    - Quark: Jason Aiken (Quark)
    - Jason Owens (Ryffine)

Attending remotely:

* + - Keith Schengili-Roberts (IXIASOFT)
    - Joe Storbeck (JANA)
    - Stan Doherty (SimpliVity)
    - Bill Burns (Vasont)

**Summary**

Initial introduction to the Denver Listening Session by JoAnn Hackos. Everyone attending was very glad to have the opportunity to share their DITA experiences. The group represented users from DITA 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3. Most of the group was experienced DITA users. All were happy DITA users, though everyone was frustrated with the error messages for the OT. Most were frustrated with the lack of accessible documentation and examples.

**Company Reports**

**Jeppesen: Scott Hudson**

Overview

* + - Scott is is their Content Strategist for Jeppeson Aviation's Learning and Development organization & also a member of the DITA Adoption committee
    - made the decision last year to adopt DITA at Jeppeson, decided back in December of last year to adopt DITA 1.3; are using some constraints to remove aspects that they do not intend to use, Use Concepts, Tasks, Reference & Troubleshooting.
    - spent much of the year training the writing staff and setting up the infrastructure to support their move to DITA-OT
    - using oXygen (feels it’s the best-in-class); have not done full requirements analysis to choose a CCMS; - - pilot project is currently using Subversion to store content and Jira to track activites/time
    - have implemented ~200 Schematron rules to provide feedback to the writers

Difficult

* + - plugin customization is the most challenging aspects of working with DITA
    - constraints are not an easy thing to work with either
    - change management is also a challenge, especially with people used to working with unstructured FrameMaker

Stupid

* + - PDFs are still an expectation from customers; but working with them is a pain. WebHelp looks good, but PDF is a pain

Challenges

* + - lack of robustness around DITA elements relating to software is an issue; DocBook is better in this regard. For example, there is a lot of overloading of the apiname element. He plans to propose changes/additions relating to this aspect of things for DITA 2.0.

Connecting

* + - Scott also remarked that "it was good to see a bunch of DITA users together in one room". He would like to see more of these types of meetings.

**Jeppesen: Darrel Schultz**

Overview

* + - works as an editor at Jeppeson and works alongside Scott on the information model; this has been a rewarding process as he has had to do a deep dive into DITA as a result
    - he is far from being an expert in DITA, but has worked in structured authoring similar to DocBook at JD Edwards years ago

Challenges

* + - some of the documentation for the specification for the various elements; was hoping for some top-notch tech writing in the spec., but has not found that. Felt the content is sometime abiguous. their own internal documentation on how to use DITA have had to come up with some more examples of usage in the future version of spec.

Worked Well

* + - has been happy with implementation of Schematron working with DITA. "It is truly real-time." Have developed a second version that works just for the editor, handling things like rules for prepositions. This is useful to the editor

Connectiong

* + - Would like to have a local grou to ping ideas

**Landmark / Halliburton: Hal Hamond**

Overview

* + - Manages a Tech Docs and eLearning group for Landmark which is the commercial software development portion of Haliburton
    - have been working with DITA for about 5 years
    - has been a slow process of adoption
    - using oXygen and Subversion
    - have been moving towards a CCMS for past 3 years
    - recent downturn in the Oil Industry has impacted them as well
    - work with remote office in India; "don't share a single minute in common with them"
    - - within North America tech writers turnover tends to be low, typically 10-15 years; for those in India turnaround time tends to be 1-2 years

Challenges

* + - Change Management with all the turnover, makes and remote locations, makes it difficult to train people.
    - DITA is not easy to adopt when people aren’t in the same time zone

OASIS Requests

* + - Anything OASIS can do to have more content to help get people to get up to speed faster, especially remotely. He has made many videos, internal training and many early hours to deal with the people in India up to speed with DITA – wished OASIS would do more of this
    - Scott mentioned using the online training available from [www.learningdita.com](http://www.learningdita.com) - it’s free and sponsored by IXIASOFT
    - Could use more support for workflows with decision trees (multiple paths)

Connecting

* + - because his team is so geographically spread would also like to see virtual meetings (i.e. screen shareing) to share problems.

**Micro Motion: Diane Thomas**

Overview

* + - works with Micro Motion which is a company under the umbrella of Emerson
    - 3 writers in Boulder, 2 writers Austin with whom they share a stylesheet with, plus other writers in Costa Rica, UK and India
    - they make flow meters for various types of liquids; focus is on hardware
    - Products share 80%, so DITA works well
    - it’s hardware-intensive docs, mostly in PDF. "we are one of those companies that can't get off of producing PDFs" – No online or Web content
    - originally were using a CCMS under SharePoint; this worked fine until they went to translation… fixing links became a big issue for localization under this circumstance
    - was forced to move to a cCMS… went with XDocs; needed a hosted server (apologies to IXIASOFT, which did not have a hosted solution at the time)
    - have an IT department that barely knew they existed, so hosted solution was a must for them
    - moved from XMetaL to oXygen
    - currently at DITA 1.2 but using an old version of DITA-OT (1.5.3) that can't handle things like keys
    - now that we have the right tools localization works much better

Worked Well

* + - Saving lots of money on translation

Expensive

* + - beware over-engineering your information architecture; mentioned conrefs that were doubled that previous IA had established, and is something that she has fixed
    - because they share a style sheet with other divisions, they have meetings to make even minor changes

OASIS Requests

* + - would like to see more Best Practice-style documents from the community – especially around constraints (JoAnn responded by mentioning that the DITA Adoption group has some)

Connecting

* + - would like to see more local meet-ups

**Oracle (iCloud): Joe Meyer**

Overview

* + - Writer in the Publications group & president of Boulder Writers Alliance; also active with the local STC
    - writes for the Cloud Identity Management division
    - DITA 1.2, uses Arbortext as the editor, SDL for their CCMS
    - got into DITA two years ago; still considers himself a newbie

Worked Well

* + - have excellent internal training resources available – did lots of reading an watching videos. Their DITA support team. has “office hours” and they have a wiki and internal tech support w/ ticketing systems.

Challenges

* + - everyobe on the team is at a different level

Expensive

* + - internal teams for support

Difficult & Stupid

* + - he finds the open toolkit error messages hard to parse ("But I am able to recognize some of them now.")

Connecting

* + - definitely seeing DITA being used more and more – would like to see a local DITA user group

**Oracle (Storage): Julie Bettis**

Overview

* + - works for Oracle Cloud Storage (originally Axiom/Pillar)
    - believe her group went to DITA some time ago, well before the original firm was bought by Oracle
    - DITA is very much intertwined with the other tools they are using
    - have about 8 writers in her group
    - just converted from using Astoria as their CCMS to using SDL instead (already used elsewhere within Oracle)
    - also using Acrolinx as well as Schematron; not yet working seamlessly but are getting there

Expensive

* + - The conversion fro Astoria to SDL

Challenges

* + - change management has been significant: people have to learn the standard, the tools
    - getting the right tools, getting training and gettng to a level that you can actually write

Working Well

* + - - “we really put DITA through the wringer”; they produce a wide range of hardware and software docs, online help, command-line help (similar to manpages), and find that the ability to reuse content across these types of docs to be great
    - using DITA pieces to describe error messages and for system events in the software
    - are looking forward to using DITA 1.3 troubleshooting (still currently on DITA 1.2)
    - we're there in the trenches really using it [DITA] – nothing they need in DITA that isn’t already there

Connecting

* + - Would like to see more sessions like this

**Rocket Software: Anne Waite**

Overview

* + - Manager of Information Development at Rocket Software
    - Rocket Software is a company that has grown primarily through acquisition, there are maybe 150 or so products; half of these are specifically for IBM, so there are writers dedicated to producing content specifically for IBM, and other writers focusing on non-IBM applications of the products
    - now using oXygen (had been using Arbortext)
    - nobody was using the same authoring tools from all of the various companies that have been acquired; major challenge has been getting everyone working with same tools
    - 90% of company is now using DITA; about a year-and-a-half ago it was only a third of the company, so have made considerable progress
    - produce PDFs primarily; everyone hates it but it is what the customers want
    - using DITA 1.2, would like to move to DITA 1.3
    - use SVN for storing content

Challenges

* + - migrating content from disparate tools to DITA (Frame, bookmaster, word, etc.); people aren’t using the same templates
    - have creating in-house output tools and it’s been a struggle to keep it up

Worked Well

* + - content conversion/migration was done primarily by summer interns; were asked to convert content and sold this to them as you will be the best way to learn DITA!

Connecting

* + - A local group would be VERY Helpful – from this listening session alone, she’s going to explore Schematrons

**Turumo BCT: Martin Pipho**

* + - medical device manufacturer, owned by a Japanese company, sell blood plasmapheresis and blood lab technologies, everything is heavily regulated, not just locally in States with FDA but with international equivalents
    - been doing DITA for 8 years, are on DITA 1.1; would like to move to DITA 1.2 (and 1.3)
    - Astoria is their CCMS – publish to PDF and some WebHelp
    - 8-10 writers
    - translate to 33 languages, so they do a lot of translations; recently added Hebrew to the mix

Worked Well

* + - translation has really worked well: mentioned an IFU document containing 20 languages; talked about an example that was done in under a month; not possible under old toolchain
    - reuse has been great, but there has been some gotchas; sometimes forget that more than one document will change something that affects the output in another document

Challenges

* + - change management is difficult, moved to DITA just as company was beginning a tough transition; would like to go back to original information model "which is kind of informal"
    - getting the PDF transform working
    - always updating stylesheets

Stupid

* + - hard-coding your company name into all of the documents and then having to change it... ;)

Connecting

* + - Wants more of these types of events

**Xilinx: Don Lammers**

Overview

* + - firm makes programmable chips - he works on the docs for the software programming of the chips. with software division
    - 30 writers total; combined software, hardware and IT writers group
    - translate mainly to Japanese, plus some docs in Simplified and Traditional Chinese
    - publish mainly to PDF “which we would be happy to get rid of”, but regulators insist upon the format
    - now working on "Gen 2" of their DITA implementation
    - currently looking at getting a CCMS
    - currently using oXygen and are using Perforce for a repository
    - SMEs contribute in DITA

Worked Well

* + - original impetus for moving to DITA was translation, but in the end the real money savings was in significant content reuse
    - just about to distribute a Schematron with about 80 rules in it; FrameMaker 12 drop author support [name?]; picked up Schematron very quickly (learned it only 3 weeks ago); would like to use Acrolinx but that is too expensive for the first phase

Challenges

* + - that had a setback because of a corporate transition, and many groups went back to FrameMaker
    - moving to topic bases authoring
    - is using Arbortext and DITA 1.1 for the old stuff, and oXygen and DITA 1.3 for the new stuff, but are only using DITA 1.2 features as yet

Difficult

* + - specializations are difficult; "there's got to be an easier way to do this"

Stupid

* + - OT messages “than god for schematron”

Connecting

* + - Wants more opportunities to meet people with the same problems.

**Bob Thomas’ survey of audience**

DITA Features

* + - DITA 1.1 = 3
    - DITA 1.2 = 6
    - DITA 1.3 = 1
    - Specializations = 1 o
    - Constraints = 4 (2 more would like to us them)
    - Filtering = 6 (1 more thinking about it)
    - Branch Filtering = 0
    - Content libraries = All but one
    - Keys = 3 (all were aware of them) (Why not? = wrong OT)
    - Troubleshooting = 1 (5+ were interested)
    - Release managemetng from 1.3 = 1
    - MathML =3
    - Translations = 8
    - Linking videos using the object = 1 (another is just starting to)
    - Learning and Training elements = 0 (4 interesteded)
    - Machinery task = 0 (2 knew it existied)
    - Hazard Statement = 2
    - Configuration of your DTS to name

Reserouces

* + - Knew about white papers on that and put it on OASIS = 2 (Bob and his wife)
    - Knew there was are whitepapers on translation = 0
    - Use dita.xml.org = 2
    - Where do you go for information = internal resource & books

**General Round-table Discussion**

Questions from the users:

* + - Are there robust examples – Yes, Thunderbird, and Eliot’s DITA 4 Publishers
    - Easy authoring tools – JoAnn mentioned her year-old article & Lightweight DITA
    - Are there any standard RFP for DITA tools so IT organizations can be more educated when they go to vendors – JoAnn mentioned the ISO standard for content mgmt (2015) – ISO 26531

Comments:

* + - Write the Docs has meetings in Denver and Boulder
    - Would like to see standard RFP for DITA tools so IT organizations can be more educated when they go to vendors
    - JoAnn emphasized that the listening committees are where we hope to get ideas for DITA 2.0
    - Jason: took a hiatus from DITA, and would like to see more real-world examples. Bob mentioned that Joe Golner/Eliot Kimber’s Thunderbird example is worth a look at.
    - JoAnn mentioned that there has been a recent explosion of some easy authoring tools (aimed at SMEs and others who do not want to learn DITA)
    - JoAnn also mentioned the dynamic publication engines that have sprung on the scene recently, and all of the features that they have to offer (faceted search, automated PDF generation, etc.). Increasingly there are ways to publish that satisfy the urge to have PDFs and topics. Only one person was interested in dynamic publishing.