No Frills Frame

A Student's Guide to FrameMaker 8

Project Documentation Plan

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Introduction

Adobe FrameMaker is a widely used desktop publishing tool and word processor used in creating longer documents with master and body pages. The latest version is FrameMaker 8. Our user group is college students with proficient general computer skills and working knowledge of word processing programs. The purpose of our manual is to instruct our user group in the use of FrameMaker for their own documentation. Though we do not intend to instruct for professional purposes, the manual will provide a strong basis for use of FrameMaker. We will provide effective task oriented, minimalist documentation by considering the user's tacit knowledge and pragmatic working needs. Our content will be completed on April 30th and the final project will be bound and submitted to Janine Solberg on or before May 15, 2009.

A full documentation of FrameMaker would not fit into our time constraints and would not be necessary for our user group's needs. Instead, we will focus on helping our users understand ways in which they can use FrameMaker effectively. We pulled in as much content as possible, focusing on task oriented user activities that students will actually use. For content, our documentation will cover what it might be like for our user group to design, manage and produce their documentation including use of master and body pages, paragraph tags, character tags, graphics, text frames, etc.

Design Plan

The aim of the design plan is to produce a FrameMaker user guide for technical writing students that serves three critical functions: introduce the software, explain important concepts relevant to FrameMaker, and teach the most common tasks students will need to do in FrameMaker.

Technical writing students such as new students in the PWTC program (or other entry-level technical writers) will be the main user group for this documentation. As these students learn about and begin producing their own software documentation, they will require knowledge of software in which to author this documentation. Most are already familiar with word processing programs like Microsoft Word and have a good grasp of basic computing skills, but require working knowledge of a desktop publishing application, such as FrameMaker, in order to author more complex and longer documentation. An added benefit in learning FrameMaker for these students is that it is commonly cited as a desired skill by employers, and can thus be helpful on a resume.

In order to produce documentation using FrameMaker, students will not only need to learn the steps associated with necessary tasks (adding, laying out, exporting content etc.) that they have already done in a word processing software, but also concepts particular to the way FrameMaker operates. For instance, while students may already have experience formatting text in Microsoft Word, they will need to understand the concepts of paragraph and character tags before attempting to do so in FrameMaker. Also, some concepts--such as master and boy pages--are completely unique to FrameMaker (as opposed to a word processor, not other desktop publishing applications), so it's important that students are made aware of these early on. Because these students need to learn and start using FrameMaker quickly, and because it is a difficult program to gain unlimited access to, the user guide needs to present just the necessary information clearly and concisely, with balance between individual task steps and explication of important concepts.

The document to be produced is "No-Frills Frame," a roughly 40-page tutorial manual. The information presented will be task-oriented, written modularly and in a minimalist style. The tasks will progress from simple to more advanced, in the order students would most likely follow while producing documentation themselves. A detailed table of contents follows. The tasks are organized by the main phases of document production in FrameMaker: in the first chapter, users learn the interface and how to create and save documents; in the second, they begin to add text and format it using tags, third they learn to layout their page design, using text frames, master pages and graphics; the fourth chapter covers the process of creating book files out of individual documents; the final chapter covers output of documents, whether in print or PDF.

The more conceptual information about FrameMaker (topics like master pages and tagging) will be presented in a three-fold manner. First, the introduction will explain what type of software FrameMaker is and what tasks students can do with it, and then it will briefly present these concepts, although not in depth. The introduction will also be divided into 'chunks' of information that fall under question headings such as 'What is FrameMaker?' and 'What else do I need to know before getting started?' The intent is that a student who is merely scanning the introduction will become aware that there are concepts they need to understand before starting to use the program. These concepts will be explained in more detail in the chapter cover pages and once more in the introductory blurbs of each individual module. The chapter cover pages will list the modules covered within and reintroduce/

explain further the applicable concepts. The focus here will be less on *what* these concepts are (that's covered in the introduction), more on *why* the student needs to understand them and *how* they can be used. The individual module blurbs will contain further relevant details, especially those particular to the task at hand.

The specific layout of the manual may differ among the four individual versions that will be produced, but all will be 8.5"x11" in size and contain minimal text accompanied by screen captures.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER THREE: Building Layouts

CHAPTER FOUR: Using Graphics

CHAPTER FIVE: Creating Books

CHAPTER SIX: Output

APPENDIX

Project Schedule

Tues. April 9th: draft of doc. plan due
Thurs. April 12th: doc. plan due
Thurs. April 23: group progress report and page design draft
Thurs. April 30th: user guide content due
Friday. May 15th: final project due

Production of content will be roughly divided as follows:
Chapter 1: Joanne
Chapter 2: Meg
Chapter 3: Liz
Chapter 4,5,6: Ryan

These assignments may shift slightly as we continue drafting. We will be doing all of our drafting in GoogleDocs so that each group member can see and keep track of what everyone else is working on. This, along with our individual chapter assignments, will reduce any possible overlap in our modules. We have set up individual GoogleDocs for each chapter to keep the content organized and manageable. Additionally, we have set up an in-person meeting every Wednesday afternoon, so we can discuss collectively any problems/changes/issues we are having as we draft.

Resources

The project will be completed by Joanne Isabelle, Ryan Smith, Megan Strathearn and Elizabeth Brainerd. We will collectively generate content and then format it individually to produce 4 separate manuals. It will initially require access to FrameMaker 8 on the computers in the PWTC lab and, later on, computers with free-trial versions of FrameMaker 8. It also requires access to GoogleDocs for all four team members in order to work collaboratively. Finally, we will most likely need flash drives so that we can transfer work done in the PWTC lab to our home computers and back.

Additional resources: *Unstructured FrameMaker 8*, a collection of screen captures, our group members, Professor Janine Solberg, and Gwen (TA)

The document will contain approximately 40 pages which, at an estimated average of 2.9 hours per page, will put the total hours for the project at roughly 116.