

## Quotes from the Team

What we love:

- Reusable content – not just for ever-changing product names, but so easy to re-use words, sentences, paragraphs, topics. Quite challenging to use phrases.
- Working with tags saves time since formatting is predetermined.
- Editing with change tracking is a snap.
- Learning what the tags mean is simple. You can start with a cheat sheet.
- DITA or any XML-based structured authoring makes localization easier, cheaper, and faster. Machines can do a lot of the processing.
- Much easier to write bottom-up. Just put info in discrete chunks in topic files, figure out the order later if needed. For chaotic development environments where features pop in and out (Agile), very helpful.
- Very easy to find all instances of a string (especially if you learn regular expressions), even if it's not a reused string. Oxygen is your friend.

What we hate/what can be hard:

- Tools can be a barrier—if a non-writer on your team wants to update content directly, he can't, even if he's a programmer and not afraid of tags. Most non-writers get lost in the structure and specifics of DITA XML source files.
- Change tracking breaks our HTML builds, so drafts have to be PDF.
- Building a large doc (especially when you reuse a lot of text) can take forever, even with a dedicated documentation server. Can't build two docs at once (though we're working on that).
- Sometimes the information architect is unaware of all the consequences of a formatting choice or tag rule in every deliverable, creating hard-to-read output for “outlying” topics or deliverables. Changes in the build process can expose or create bugs that hit the writer the first time they build a target that wasn't tested.
- Format is predetermined – you lose ALL direct control of output.
- The deliverable type is completely divorced from the content in a particular topic. It is excruciatingly difficult to stop thinking of your content in terms of the finished book. But if you don't you may write topics that can't be re-used.
- Exceptions are expensive because of the nature of XSL. If-then-else formatting seems to be very hard (i.e. if a bullet is in environment X do "A," otherwise, do "B").
- Even the fanciest CSS using the most expensive tool (Epic) fails to create a real WYSIWYG experience. You have to remember to review the output.
- Weakly defined areas (don't get me started on DL) generate lots of argument.

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## Subtle Facts with BIG Consequences

- DITA provides the *tools*, not the *structure*. Your team must create an information model and adhere to it, or suffer the consequences. Content may not be re-usable due to divergent choices among writers, or you may have to create way more build targets than necessary, all kinds of issues can arise if you don't think deeply about the structure as well as learn how to use the tools.
- Information types are not the same as document types. One document may hold many different information types. Defining the information types (topic types) that your team wants to use can make the Linux/Windows wars look like a trip to the zoo.
- A chunk of content in your source files, a topic file, may appear as part of a longer HTML page. That is, you can't associate containers like files with finished deliverables like chapters or web pages.

## Resources for Beginners

- [Fabulous conceptual introduction by Anne Rockley](#)
- [Intro to DITA](#)
- Wikipedia!  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darwin\\_Information\\_Typing\\_Architecture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darwin_Information_Typing_Architecture) and  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DITA\\_Open\\_Toolkit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DITA_Open_Toolkit)

## Resources for the Adventurous

O'Reilly's XSLT and XSLT Cookbook (print books! How 20<sup>th</sup> Century!)

[DITA OpenToolkit Project: http://dita-ot.sourceforge.net/](http://dita-ot.sourceforge.net/)

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This handout reflects my own individual opinions and recommendations, not necessarily those of salesforce.com.