DITA in the cloud: dream or reality?

Learn why a cloud-based DITA CMS is being used by a mobile app start-up company and how they built their cross-company content strategy based on DITA.

Last month our communications team conducted a series of interviews with customers using DITA-based Cloud CCMS. The interviewed customers come from different industries, geographies and sizes. The objective of the interview was twofold: to learn about the factors the customers consider in deciding for a DITA-based Cloud CCMS, and to determine the advantages a DITA CCMS as a cloud service is bringing to them.

The first candidate to be interviewed was Darwinapps LLC, a US-based software engineering company engaged in creating premium mobile apps.

Sergey Kisly is the Product Manager at Darwinapps LLC. One of his missions is to deliver documentation for their apps in the form of manuals and help for print and a variety of mobile devices. Darwinapps decided for DITAworks Cloud, because it supported their targets in terms of faster time-to-market, fitting tight budgets, fast access and cross company content reuse strategy.
The following is an excerpt of our interview with Sergey Kisly.

Q: Sergey, there are many documentation tools out on the market - why did you decide for DITAworks Cloud?
A: As a premium developer of custom mobile apps, we usually deal with relatively small projects that have to be delivered in a short timeframe. For our technical writers, it is a challenge to keep pace with the software development speed. The single-source approach of DITA helps us to meet the time-to-market targets of our customers, because we write content once and publish it into different media formats and for different target groups like end-user and technical support. We also identified a potential of reusing description of typical standard functions in the mobile apps.
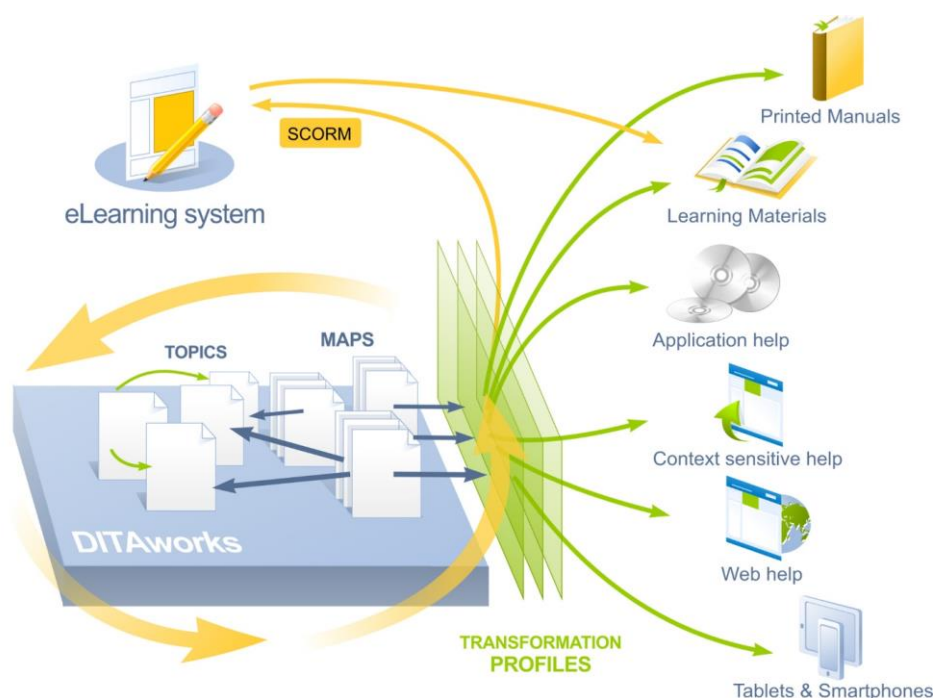

Figure 1: Cloud-based publishing from one source to mobile devices and other formats

Q: Some people have concerns about using cloud offering for their business. Didn't you see any risks?
A: Yes, we know these discussions about potential downtimes and safety leaks of cloud offering. However, DITAworks is hosted by a large cloud computing company, offering levels of security which we could not afford to implement on our own servers. On the other hand, we saw a big advantage in getting started very quickly without large investments and implementation time – we ordered our service subscription and started writing professional documentation the next day.

Q: But professional documentation needs comprehensive functionality – how can a cloud tool satisfy these needs?

A: Cloud version of DITAworks offers full functionality of an enterprise-grade DITA CMS. Authoring as well as processes for review, publishing and localization are available out-of-the-box. For our specific publishing needs, especially in the area of mobile layouts, instinctools implemented some custom plugins.
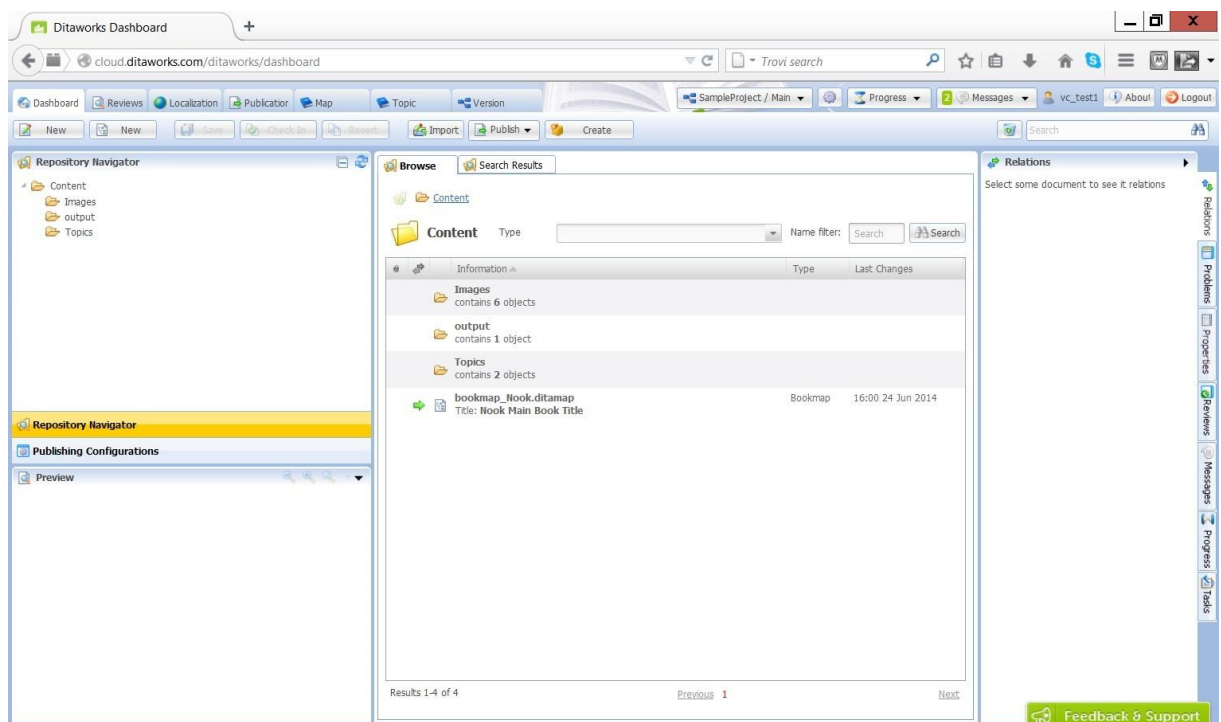

Figure 2: Full DITA CCMS functionality organized in perspectives and views

Q: Do you plan to extend usage of this cloud offering for your company?
A: As we are a growing business, our onboarding process appears to be an ongoing challenge. Therefore we decided to develop learning and training content for our employees and provide them with mobile self-regulated education apps.
Q: Would you need a special plugin or custom functionality for developing learning content?
A: No, we can use the same tools as for technical documentation, just the underlying DITA model is different. But as the DITA Learning & Training model will be integrated into the cloud system by end of next month, we can select it with a few clicks as a base for our learning content.
Q: Is Darwinapps following a strategy of DITA adoption for different departments?
A: Yes, sure, our vision is to implement a cross company content strategy. We see big advantages in sharing and reusing content for technical documentation, learning & training and even marketing. We believe in being able to increase our customers' experience by reusing content, because of higher quality, fast and easy accessibility. And this strategy will help us to maintain brand recognition. We expect to stay in the cloud for the future.