Best Tools For Technical Writing and Software Documentation
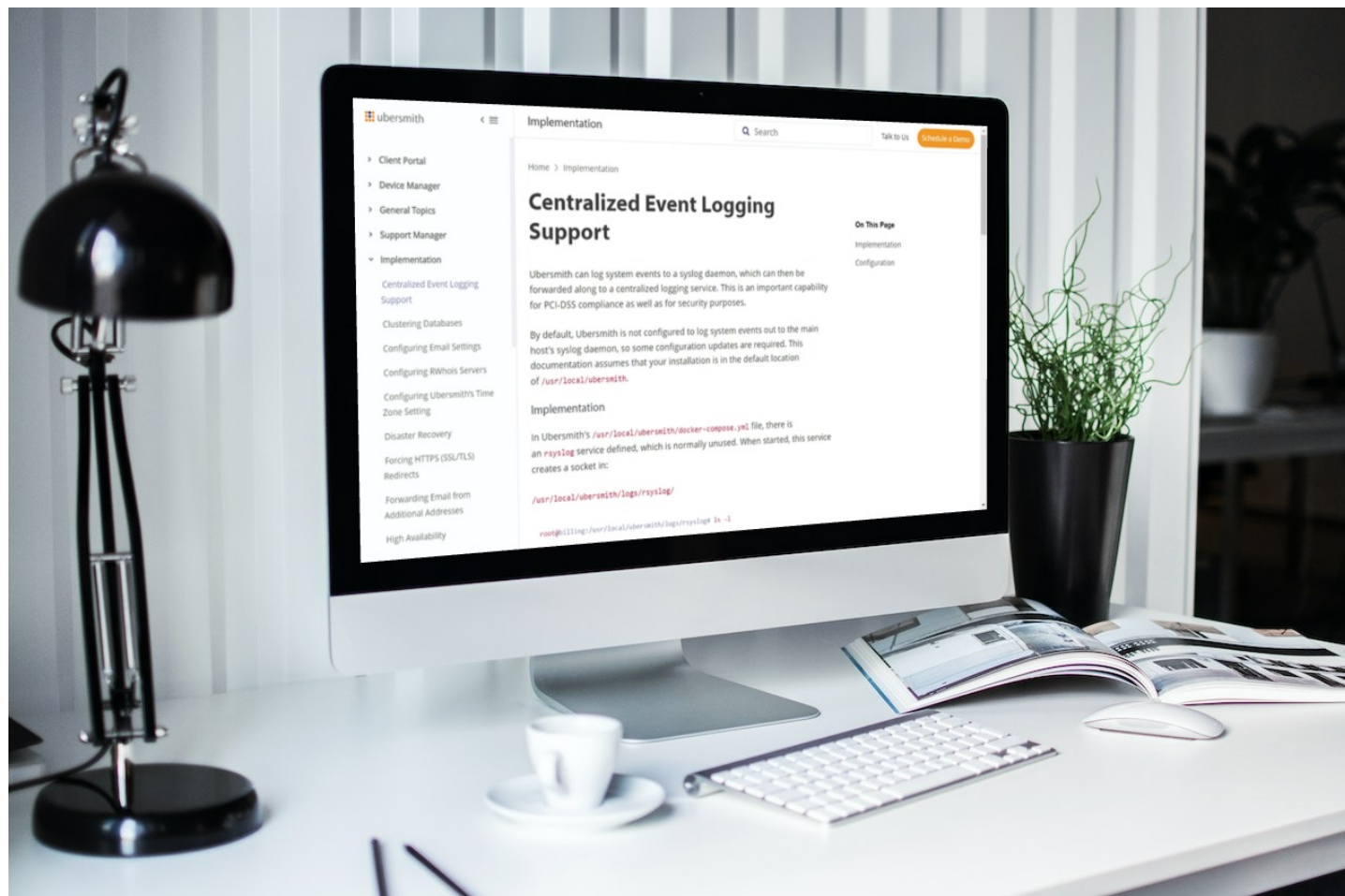
👤 Ajay Chadha

Writing software documentation plays an integral role in the work of a software developer. As they say, if it isn't documented, then it doesn't exist, and in most cases, documenting your software in a proper manner is as important as actually building it.

No matter how wonderful your software is and how intelligent its design is, if you're the only one who understands it, it doesn't do any good. Software Documentation does not mean just autogenerated API references but also annotated examples and in-depth tutorials. You need all three to make sure your software can be easily adopted.

What are Help Authoring Tools?

Help Authoring Tools are software programs designed to assist technical writers in designing, publishing, and maintaining software help documentation. The resulting text is used in explanation guides, manuals, and help files. They are aimed at reducing the time and effort needed when creating assistance materials for employees and end users. Technical writers will use help authoring tools to create documents from start to finish. They are able to write, edit, and export the documents to then be shared with editors, administrators, and other co-workers. Eventually, the **help authoring tool** will allow writers to publish the documentation digitally. Many of these products will import text in different file formats or document creation software.

The screenshot shown in the example above uses PHPKB knowledge base software as Help Authoring Tool.

Let us take a look at some of the best and most commonly used tools for software documentation and technical writing.

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Best Help Authoring Tools (HAT)

Help authoring tools play a major role in software documentation and technical writing, as they make it much easier to design, write, publish, and maintain software documentation. They allow you to reduce the time and effort needed when creating all kinds of help materials both for end-users and other programmers/employees.

MadCap Flare

MadCap Flare is one of the most popular help authoring tools thanks to its rich selection of features that allow you to do much more than just writing help documentation. MadCap Flare was designed for advanced topic-based authoring, single-source publishing, and content management. It allows you to create Help and customer support websites, FAQs, knowledge bases, online learning centers, guides, policy and procedure manuals, and more. MadCap Flare's features make it easier to reuse the same content in multiple channels and publish it quickly over a range of platforms.

PHPKB

PHPKB is another widely used web platform that allows you to build, publish and update all kinds of knowledge bases and help materials. It also has a fully responsive design, including a powerful WYSIWYG content editor, Category Manager to build the knowledge base structure, content publishing, and approval workflow, design customization features, versioning rollback, backup, analytics, an event log, flexible settings, and so on. PHPKB comes in both SaaS (subscription) as well as Self-Hosted (on-premise) licenses.

Adobe RoboHelp

Adobe RoboHelp is another powerful alternative help authoring tool, which offers a slightly different selection of features compared to MadCap Flare and PHPKB. In particular, Adobe RoboHelp offers easy multiformat publishing, allowing you to publish content to a wide range of popular output formats, including Frameless Responsive HTML5, PDF, Microsoft Help (CHM), and even less common formats such as EPUB 3, KF8, and MOBI.

Help & Manual

Help+Manual's major advantage is its simple interface which makes it very accessible and easy to use, along with full functionality of a WYSIWYG XML editor, multi-channel publishing, full support for multimedia and complex modular projects, and Webhelp tool for seamless integration of the documentation into active websites, and so on.

ClickHelp

ClickHelp also provides quite a powerful web platform for software documentation in the form of knowledge bases, FAQs, tutorials, and other Help formats. Supports multiple formats such as Word, HTML, RTF, CHM, ODT, CHM, HTML5 Web Help, PDF, DOCX, etc. Some of ClickHelp's signature features are patented full-text search that makes it easier to find specific topics or articles both for authors and users, as well as a choice of several pre-built templates for the documentation design.

Online URL: https://www.phpkb.com/kb/article/best-tools-for-technical-writing-and-software-documentation-308.html

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