

# User-centered Design of Context-sensitive Help.

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# What is context-sensitive help?

- In theory : Users should be able to access help directly, that focuses on their current needs.
- Should be up to the point, pertaining to user's current task.
- In practice : Helps is based on user's current state, action or focus within the software system.
- Enable user to get help when required.

# Agenda

- CSH is a shortened form of Context-Sensitive help.
- CSH forms provided in Windows systems.
- User centered help design goals.
- What information goes into effective CSH.
- Look at a few CSH architectures.
- Finally, point some guidelines on CSH.

# What to include in a CSH topic?

- What is this screen for?
- What do I need to enter in this field?
- Why do I need to provide this information?
- What does xxx mean?
- Dedicated CSH topics are more effective. Help means Answers to questions. We need to know what the questions will be to design better help.



# User-centered design

- Users need help while they are engaged in a task.
- They do not need/consult help ahead of time.
- Users require a “Scent of information” that guides them to help.
- Help should always help the user accomplish the task with minimum to no interruption.
- Finally the Goal : Keep the users engaged in task flow.



# Comparison of CSH Topics.

- Reference topic based
  - Explain detailed information of subject.
  - Requires search in the entire topic to find answers to questions.
  - Handy at times.
- Procedural topic based
  - Step-by-step instructions of performing a task.
  - Good for users to quickly learn a procedure
- Compare the CSH built in MadCap Flare versions 3 and 4.
- CSH topics type was changed from reference to procedural, apparently in response to requests from customers

# Contextual help

- Additional information on the UI that supplements the UI and provides brief , up to the point support.
- Usually displayed in a pop-up window or beside some important fields.
- Contextual help embedded in the application interface, makes sure user doesn't't leave the interface.
- Complements web based applications.



# Providing deeper contextual help.

- Contextual Help may not answer users' specific questions
- Users may require:
  - More detailed information
  - Key concepts
  - Step-by-step instructions
- Optional links within contextual Help provide a solution





# Future possibilities: Procedural contextual Help

- In addition to procedure and direction , also provide sequence of actions to perform a task.
- Two possible implementations
  - Balloon help
  - Guided help

# Summary

- CSH may be the most frequent way that users access Help.
- You should plan your CSH strategy and write dedicated CSH topics.
- More and more systems are employing procedural help. Procedural help is becoming more popular than reference based help.
- Documenting the application and using the same for CSH may not be a good strategy.
- Identifying and answering likely questions might be a good strategy.
- Layered help to provide deep help may be an effective strategy.
- Guided Help may be an effective way of providing procedural assistance in context.

