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# RoboHelp 11 Review

By Willam van Weelden on 21st January 2014

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Adobe released a new version of their Technical Communication Suite last week. The Techcomm suite includes FrameMaker 12, RoboHelp 11, Captivate 7, Illustrator and Presenter. Since my expertise is RoboHelp, I will focus on RoboHelp 11 only in this



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review. And there is more than enough to tell about that.

Whenever a new release is published, the question is whether this new version warrants the upgrade fee. While having the latest and greatest is nice, it is by no means an end in itself. Therefore, I will ask: is it worth paying now or am I better off with my current version?

## RoboHelp for Word

RoboHelp for Word was one of the more esoteric parts of RoboHelp. We have been wondering how long it would remain, and it seems Adobe has finally buried RoboHelp for Word with this latest release. If you are still using RoboHelp for Word, it is time to upgrade to RoboHTML and take advantage of all the cool features you get there.

If you require RoboHelp for Word to create WinHelp files, don't upgrade unless you still retain your old version for creating WinHelp files. And maybe it's time to check whether you may be able to use one of the new formats for creating help.

## What's improved?

The new version of RoboHelp contains several improvements. Here's the list of improvements I think are worth mentioning.

Improved features in this release:

- Resource Manager supports Topics and Master Pages: You can now share topics between projects.

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- Support for Captivate 7: Captivate support for Android devices.
- Support for Microsoft Office 2013.
- Support for the latest version of Chrome.
- Support for Internet Explorer 11.
- Support for Windows 8.1: Other versions also work on Windows 8.1 but now it is official.

## What's new?

### Responsive HTML5 help

Responsive HTML5 help is the new kid on the block. This is a variant of HTML5 help, only it allows you to support all devices with a single layout: a layout that scales to be usable for the reader.

The best way to understand what Responsive HTML5 help does, is to contrast it with the existing Multiscreen HTML5 output of RoboHelp. The Multiscreen HTML5 output uses screen profiles to detect which device a user is using. And then the help redirects the user to the output optimized for that specific device.

This is very powerful, as it allows you to create different content for different devices. For example, you can have different Captivate movies for different devices depicting the change in user interface.

One downside of this method is that it is complex, because you have to specify which devices you want to support. And you need to set the profiles for these devices correctly. That means that when new devices are introduced, you will need to update existing profiles and add new profiles. This process has proved to be

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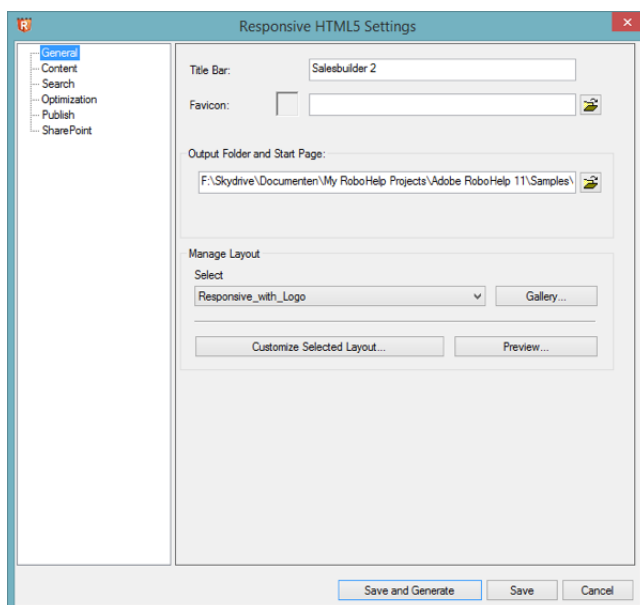
August 2012

July 2012

too cumbersome for most situations, as most people just want to support mobile and desktop. And they do not want to be bothered by the wide range of devices, screen sizes and operating systems.

Responsive solves this: You create a single HTML5 output using a single template. The template then detects the available space on a display and restyles the template accordingly. And the great thing is that this method is completely device agnostic. So any new device will immediately work.

The great advantage of this method is that you have a single skin that is consistent across all devices, whether a user views the help on desktop, iPad, android phone or another device. This also makes mobile support much easier to implement. You create a single output, choose a layout and you're done. No more mucking with device profiles.

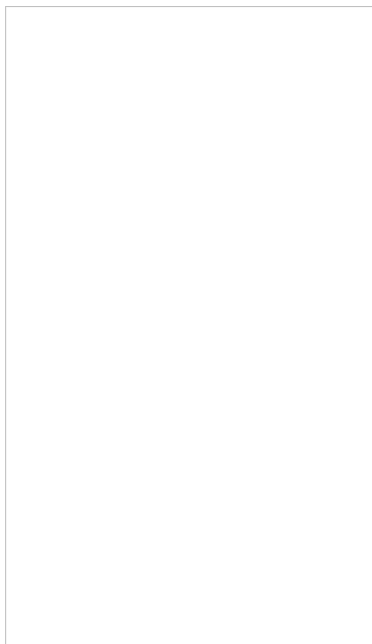


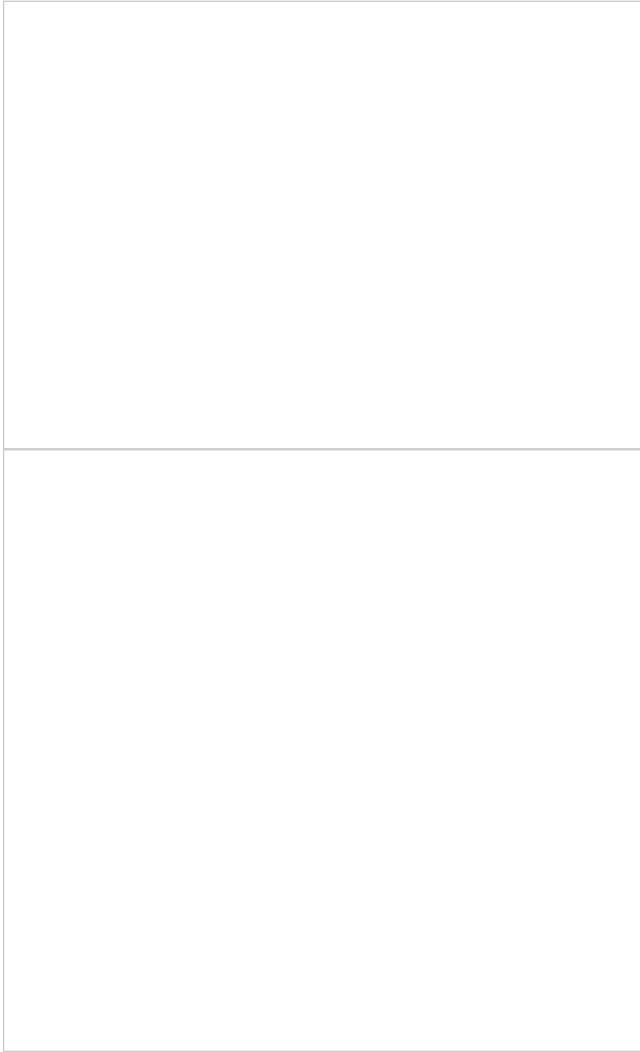
Are there no downsides to Responsive HTML5 help? That depends on your requirements. With Responsive HTML5 help, all devices will get the exact same content. Only the skin adjusts to the device. When you want to

exclude specific information for specific devices, you must use the Multiscreen HTML5 output. But, and this is a touch I really like, you can also use a responsive layout when creating Multiscreen HTML5 output to get the benefits of the Responsive HTML5 help and the benefit of specialised output for specific devices.

At the time of the release, there are only two responsive layouts available out of the box. But I have good hopes that Adobe may release a few more layouts after the release. But given the ease of changing responsive layouts yourself (see next section), two is more than sufficient to get going.

Here are some screenshots from several devices. – I added the device frames to give you an impression of how it looks on actual devices. I made the screenshots with a Samsung Galaxy Nexus and a 2012 Nexus 7.





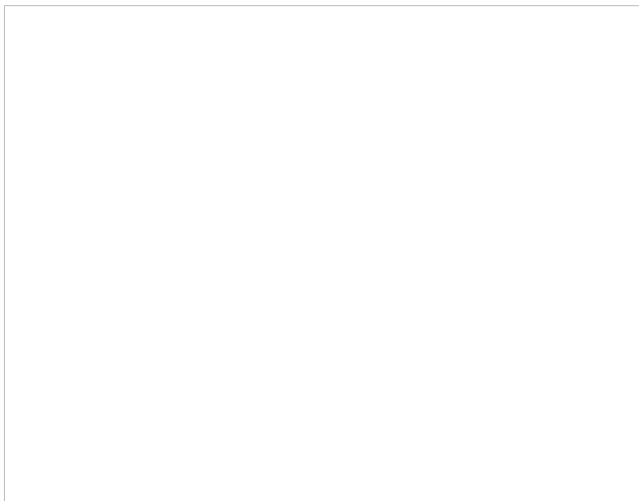
My thoughts: The responsive layouts are a huge improvement as you now have a unified way of supporting desktop and mobile at the same time. This is certainly a huge plus over competitors like Flare where you still have to create two completely separate outputs to support both Desktop and Mobile.

I see a lot of future in this. Web apps are becoming more prevalent. And customers expect apps to work whether they are using their iPad or their desktop. And with Responsive HTML5 help, you can support your application in a single go.

## **HTML5 skin editor**

One of the biggest issues with Multiscreen HTML5 in RoboHelp 10 is that it is so difficult to edit the layouts. The editor was basically a glorified HTML editor. And while that gives you 100% control over what is going on (perfect for tinkerers like me!), it also makes editing very complex.

In RoboHelp 11, Adobe introduces the HTML5 skin editor. This is a skin editor alike to the skin editor in WebHelp, where you can change the look and feel of a skin using a simple interface. But this may give you the wrong idea because the HTML5 skin editor is much more powerful than the WebHelp skin editor.



I think you cannot overstate the importance of this addition. It is now possible for everyone to quickly change a layout to adhere to their style guide. You can quickly change images such as logos, but you can also set colours, backgrounds and change the fonts. This sets RoboHelp's template editing capabilities on par with the editor you may know from Flare. RoboHelp's editor has a visual interface where you can use the image to select the item you want to change. And with the preview, you can immediately view your changes in a browser.

At the time of writing, this editor is only available for the new responsive layouts. So let's hope that Adobe will also make this editor available for the Multiscreen HTML5 templates.

Fortunately, the Screen Layout Editor from RoboHelp 10 is still available. I'm glad Adobe preserved that for people like me, who always shun visual editors and go straight for the code.

My thoughts: This feature is the missing link to make HTML5 available to everyone. The editor is simple and works very well and you don't need to dive into the HTML, CSS and JavaScript to get what you want.

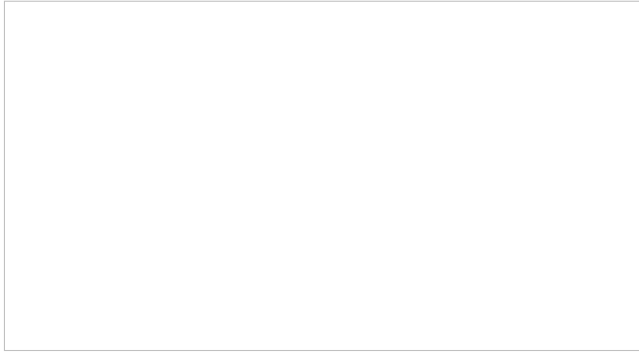
## **Shared Location Updater script**

This new script is a useful addition to RoboHelp. It updates an old path from a shared resource to a new path. That means that you can change the location of your shared files in the resource manager and update all links without losing the synchronisation between shared files in your project and the shared resources.

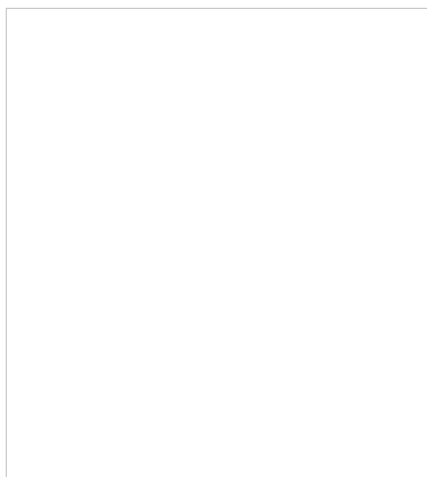
## **Cloud integration for resource manager**

The resource manager can now detect any cloud services available on your pc. And you can use one or more folders in the cloud to host your shared resources. Handy if you want to keep resources synchronised between different users without using source control.





The real advantage of this feature is that cloud drives are indicated by their respective icons so that you know which resources reside in the cloud.



My thoughts: This feature looks nice but you can get the exact same effect in earlier versions by simply pointing the resource manager to your Dropbox/Skydrive/SugarSync/etc. folder. This feature does make the advantages of using cloud providers more visible though.

## Improved Printed Documentation

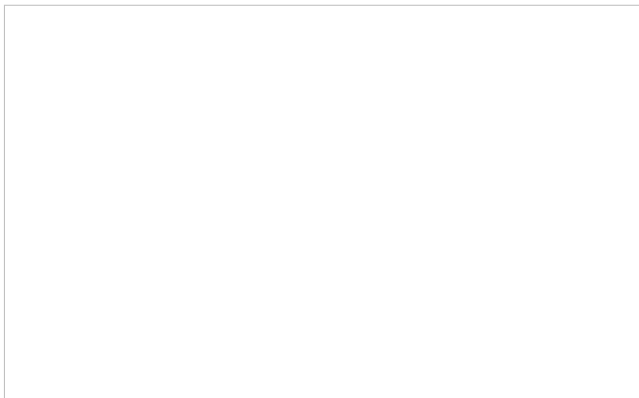
One of the weak points of RoboHelp has long been its printed documentation feature. Read: creating Word files and PDF. With RoboHelp 11, Adobe brings many new features to create traditional manuals right from

RoboHelp. This is a large improvement so I will cut the review in three:

- Assign master pages to different document sections.
- Control headers and footers from master pages.
- Include Captivate content in Printed documentation.

## Assign Master Pages to Different Document Sections

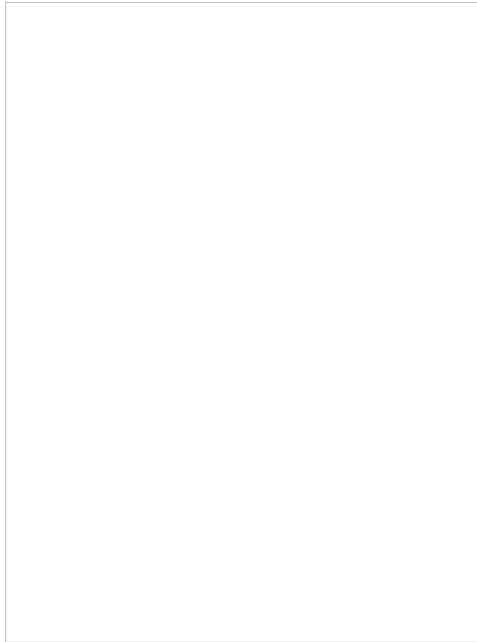
The big improvement is that you can now assign RoboHelp master pages to sections in the generated document. And in the master pages you control the layout of the headers and footers that the Word document will use. So you can apply a master page to the page holding the TOC and a different master page to the regular content.



## Control Headers and Footers from Master Pages

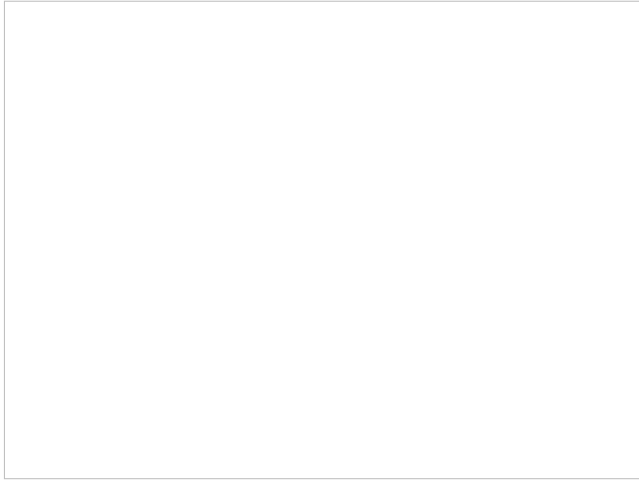
You can now also add printed output specific information into your master pages. This includes adding page numbering and chapter numbering. Combine this with the multiple master pages

capabilities and you have fine grained control over the look and feel of your printed output. This should save you a considerable amount of time because you no longer have to manually modify the layout of the generated Word documents.



## **Include Captivate Output in Printed Documentation**

If you use Acrobat Pro, you may have noticed that it is possible to embed Flash movies in Word documents and PDF documents. Adobe has now added this capability to RoboHelp's Printed documentation output. So if you use Captivate output in your RoboHelp projects, you can now also bring the SWF output over to your Printed documentation. I really like embedding Captivate movies in PDF documents to combine the power of examples with more traditional instructions



My thoughts: Does all this mean that you can say goodbye to FrameMaker? No. This release solves many of the annoyances with RoboHelp's printed documentation output. RoboHelp 11 does a much better job of generating Word and pdf than previous versions and the output is quite acceptable. But RoboHelp is still primarily a help authoring tool. So if pdf or printed output is your default delivery format, I would still advise you to use FrameMaker.

## Annoyances?

Are there no annoyances in the new version of RoboHelp? RoboHelp is a very mature product and I have very few issues in day to day usage. But there are some annoyances that I hope will be fixed in the new version:

- The interface may have been updated, but it's still an Office 2003 interface. It's outdated and I would like it to have a facelift. (Like the new interface of FrameMaker 12: grey with large coloured icons.)
- There is no Pro version of any of the HTML5 layouts. So if you use RoboHelp Server, you'll have to use WebHelp.
- SEO is still a bit difficult with RoboHelp. Sure you

can write for SEO and create a sitemap, but dynamic discovery is could be better. (But the Responsive HTML5 help solves many of the WebHelp and Multiscreen HTML5 problems.)

## Verdict

So would I buy the upgrade? Me? Yes! I really like the Responsive HTML5 help and the HTML5 editor. But should you upgrade too? That depends on your situation. Here's how I see it:

Your situation	My recommendation
You create WinHelp files	You're out of luck. You can go to RoboHelp 10, but no further. If you only have to support WinHelp for a subset of your applications, consider upgrading to RoboHelp 11 based on the other situations. But I would suggest looking into alternatives for WinHelp though.
You want to support mobile	RoboHelp 11 is a great enhancement over RoboHelp 10 and well worth the upgrade. Upgrade if any of the following apply to you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You just want to change the look and file of the mobile</li> </ul>

	<p>output and want to use a simple editor. You want to provide Captivate movies to devices other than Desktop and iPhone/iPad. You want to provide content to all possible devices with a unified interface in a single go. You simply want to support all devices at the same time without hassle. You think responsive design is the way to go for anything you put on the web.</p>
<p>You create WebHelp</p>	<p>RoboHelp 11 supports the latest version of all major browsers. Browsers keep developing at a rapid pace. Unless you create help for an intranet where everyone is stuck on IE8, I would advise upgrading. You can patch some things in earlier versions, but Adobe will not support older versions when new browsers break the WebHelp.</p>

You only create CHM	Not much has changed in this regard. Unless you really need support for Office 2013, you can stay at your current version. (Unless you're on RH9 or earlier, see below.)
You create printed documentation	Unless you're perfectly happy with what you have now, you should at least try the trial version. I think you will find the enhancements will justify the upgrade fee.
You use RoboHelp 9 or earlier	It's time for an upgrade. The enhancements from RoboHelp 10 and 11 combined are more than enough to justify the upgrade fee. Even if you're just creating WebHelp, the latest version of RoboHelp supports all new versions of the major browsers. And features like Mini TOC placeholders and variables in topic titles make your life as a writer much easier.
You use Office 2013	If you need Office 2013 you will have to upgrade. If you are fine on 2010 or earlier, you can stay at

your current version.  
That is, unless you want  
the cool new printed  
documentation features.

## RoboHelp or Technical Communication Suite?

If you want to upgrade, you should ask yourself whether you want only RoboHelp or get the Technical Communication Suite. The question is simple: do you need any more of the applications provided in the suite? Then get the suite. The suite is cheaper than, for example, buying both RoboHelp and FrameMaker separately. And then you get Acrobat XI, Captivate 7 and Presenter.

If you are absolutely sure that you only will use RoboHelp, you can get RoboHelp separately. You can upgrade a RoboHelp license to a TCS license later on.

Both TCS 5 and RoboHelp 11 are available as a subscription model as well.

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