



CASE STUDY

Supporting 1,500 global technical authors

Converting more than a billion words a year from DITA and other source formats



IBM is a global business and technology leader with operations in 170 countries and over 399,400 employees.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Converts over a billion words from DITA and other formats in English language every year – plus many more in other languages**
- **Is delivered as part of a high performance, integrated workbench of tools for 1,500 professional technical authors**
- **Forms part of IBM's DITA development environment and is relied upon for complex conversions**
- **Has met the needs of IBM for over 15 years and delivered excellent reliability throughout this time**
- **Contributes to significant cost savings and cost avoidances, by facilitating fast and accurate processes**

As the world's largest IT and consulting services company, IBM sells thousands of technical products and related services all around the globe. For every device, software package and service, it publishes multi-lingual manuals, technical specifications, datasheets, brochures, online tutorials, help pages and more. With such a colossal volume of content to manage, the company uses Stilo's OmniMark technology to convert thousands of documents into multiple formats and support the work of 1,500 professional technical authors who produce IBM product publications.

In the early 1990s, IBM adopted the Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML) and launched a new strategy to 'componentize' the vast information resources it owned. It wanted to make its information more accessible, enhance the online user experience and enrich its technical resources to increase customer satisfaction. In order to achieve this, it needed to find a way to convert large volumes of content into a variety of formats.

At the same time, IBM had the visionary idea to create an integrated workbench of tools to support its team of 1,500 global technical authors. It aimed to develop a single content conversion solution and combine it with all of the other tools and processes routinely used by authors, in one place. "We wanted to deliver a consistent and standardized authoring environment for all our technical writers, that would improve efficiency and reduce costs," says Mike Iantosca, product development team lead for authoring tools at IBM. "We wanted to create a publication lifecycle system that would be world class."

The first prototype system that IBM built to handle its SGML content conversion didn't live up to expectations. "We discovered that the speed and agility of the programming language didn't give us the performance and complex content manipulation capabilities that we needed," explains Iantosca. "Our initial prototype was neither fast nor robust enough for a production environment the size of IBM's."

The IBM team congregated at a conference to discuss the issues and drew up a new approach, based on Stilo's OmniMark content processing platform. "We felt that the performance and flexibility of OmniMark would give us the ability to handle complex processes and convert very large documents quickly," says Iantosca. "OmniMark offered us the kind of performance that we could not achieve with other options."



“OmniMark is fast, stable and reliable.”

Robert Anderson,
advisory software
engineer, IBM

“By making our technical documentation more accessible in more formats, we can provide a better end-user experience and ensure that our customers achieve a faster time to value from the use of our products and services.”

Mike Iantosca,
product development
team lead for authoring
tools, IBM

A high performance environment

IBM first deployed OmniMark in 1994. Later the same year, the company achieved its vision and unveiled an integrated toolset for its global authors. Called the Information Development Workbench (IDWB), this innovative system had OmniMark embedded right at its core.

Still in use today, IDWB brings together tools and processes for planning, writing, converting, designing, checking, translating and distributing content. IDWB therefore gives authors all the tools they need to complete their publishing tasks in one place and helps to ensure that all authors, all around the world, follow the same consistent process.

“IDWB provides IBM with a high performance authoring environment that helps our authors to adhere to standards,” explains Iantosca. “The use of IDWB has enabled us to improve the efficiency of support and benefit from economies of scale. Technical authors can also transfer their skills and work across multiple divisions of IBM more easily.”

Part of IBM’s DITA toolset

Accessed via the IDWB, OmniMark was initially used to perform core transformations from SGML to a range of formats including Adobe PDF, Windows Help and BookMaster. Then, when IBM created the Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA) standard, it used OmniMark as a key part of its DITA development environment. Today, OmniMark is one of the components of IBM’s DITA publishing chain and is used as a pre-processor for DITA content.

Every year, OmniMark converts over a billion words in English language from DITA and SGML into other output formats, as well as countless millions of words in as many as 45 other languages.

Fast, stable and reliable

IBM has found that OmniMark has good memory management, which means that it doesn’t consume large amounts of memory on the system when dealing with large volumes of content. “This contributes to faster performance,” explains Robert Anderson, an advisory software engineer and one of IBM’s lead DITA architects. “OmniMark is fast, stable and reliable.”

Iantosca concurs: “OmniMark offers extremely high performance. I would call it a large industrial-class solution.”

Fifteen years of success

OmniMark remains as vital to IBM today as it was when it was first deployed in 1994. “After over fifteen years, we are still using the initial programmes that were created using OmniMark,” says Anderson. “We have developed the system over the years, used new features as they became available and added new output formats, but the core functionality continues to meet our needs.”

He adds: “We have been able to upgrade to newer versions of OmniMark with minimal trouble. It’s a pretty easy process.”

Value for IBM and its customers

The use of OmniMark allows authors to undertake conversion projects very quickly, and this, in turn, enables IBM to achieve highly efficient business processes. “OmniMark contributes to considerable cost savings and cost avoidances,” says Iantosca.

But OmniMark adds value for IBM in other ways too. Iantosca explains: “Combined with other leading technologies, OmniMark has enabled us to reuse, repurpose and leverage our document assets. However, the main benefit of the solution is the value that it enables us to deliver to our customers. By making our technical documentation more accessible in more formats, we can provide a better end-user experience and ensure that our customers achieve a faster time to value from the use of our products and services.”



About Stilo

Stilo International (LSE:STL) is the leading provider of automated XML content conversion solutions and associated processing technologies to multi-channel publishers. Products include OmniMark, the high-performance content processing platform, and Migrate, the world’s first on-demand, pay-as-you-use, content conversion service. Operating from offices in Europe and North America, we support customers in Aerospace & Defence, Manufacturing, IT, Telco, High Tech, Publishing and Government.

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