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Help Authoring: RoboHelp 2017 Is Easier, Faster and More Accessible

By [Willam van Weelden](#) on 25th March 2017

Adobe released RoboHelp 2017, the latest and greatest version of the popular help authoring tool. When you open RoboHelp 2017 for the first time, you may get the impression that this release is only minor. (The ribbon and pods from RoboHelp 2015 have been unchanged.) But don't let appearances fool you!

HTML508

The problem with Responsive HTML5 was that it lacked Section 508 compliancy. That means that an estimated 7.35 milion US citizens couldn't efficiently use Responsive HTML5 output. If you were supplying content to public institutions, you would have to deliver 508 compliant WebHelp (an old output that has several usability problems for non-impaired readers).

With RoboHelp 2017, Responsive HTML5 output is now WAI-ARIA and Section 508 compliant. (WAI-ARIA is the web accesibility initiative for web applications, the

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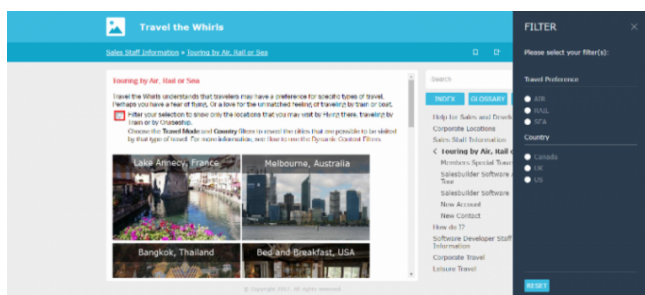
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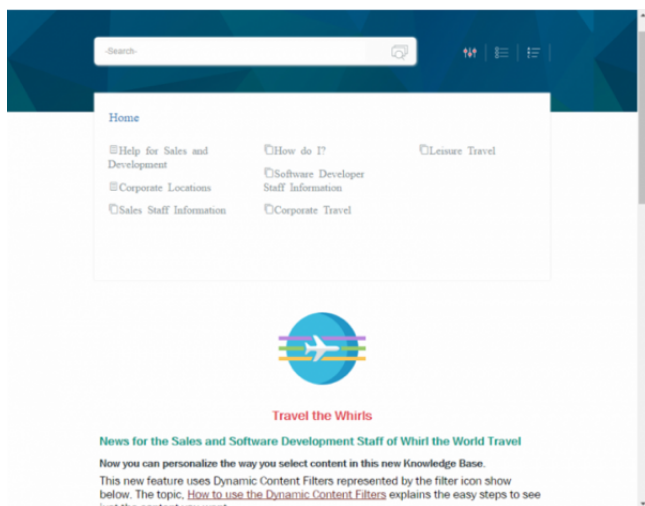
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global accessibility guideline for the web.) You can now provide an HTML5 layout that works for everyone! And because keyboard support has been greatly improved as well, it's now easier than ever for users to navigate your help system.

At the time of writing, only the new Indigo layout is fully compliant. But I have heard that Adobe will be updating the existing Azure Blue and Charcoal Gray layouts as well.



RoboHelp 2017 introduces two new layouts: the Indigo layout as shown above and a new Ocean Layout. Both layouts move away from the more traditional help systems and have an FAQ or search center style. (A perfect match for the non-traditional help guides!)



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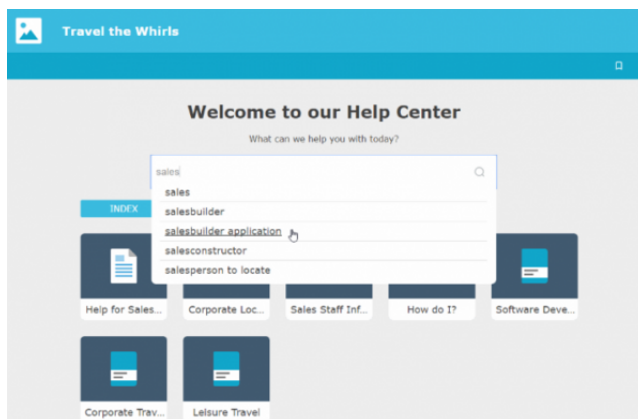
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Search is the primary way people move around the internet. Having a search feature is vital to allow people to find the content they need. And the search in Responsive HTML5 has just become a whole lot better!

Responsive HTML5 now contains search suggestions. A reader simply starts typing and the suggestions show up, just like you're used to with Google. No need to spell it all out for RoboHelp; just select what you are looking for.

The new search is available for all layouts. Though if you're upgrading a project, you'll have to add the skin again to get the suggestions to work. Any modifications to your layout will be lost. But if you ask me, that's a small price to pay for this feature.



Everyone's Favorite!

Another great addition is the option for readers to save topics as a favorite. Saving a page as a favorite saves the pages in the browsers' cache. And the help system has a list of all favorites within the current project. No more searching for that one topic: a single click adds the list to the favorites. Favorites survive a reboot and are only removed when a user clears all browser history and cache.

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November 2014

September 2014

August 2014

July 2014

March 2014

February 2014

January 2014

October 2013

September 2013

January 2013

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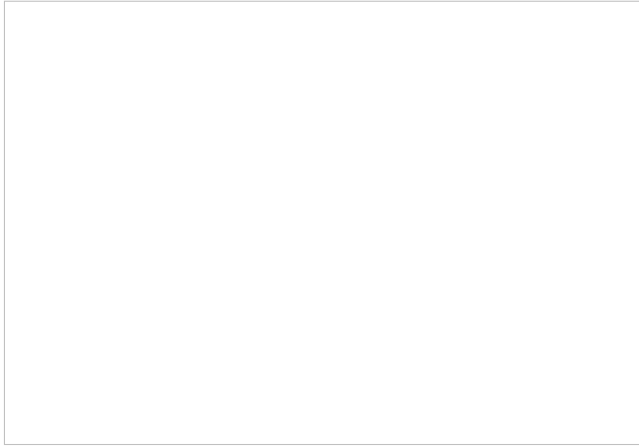
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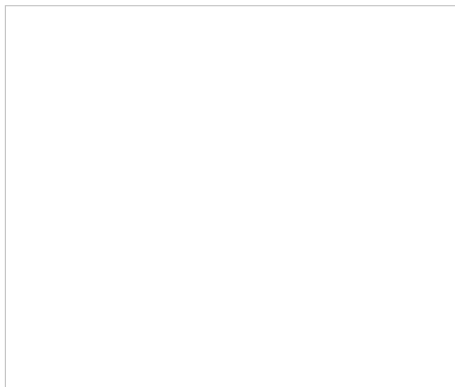
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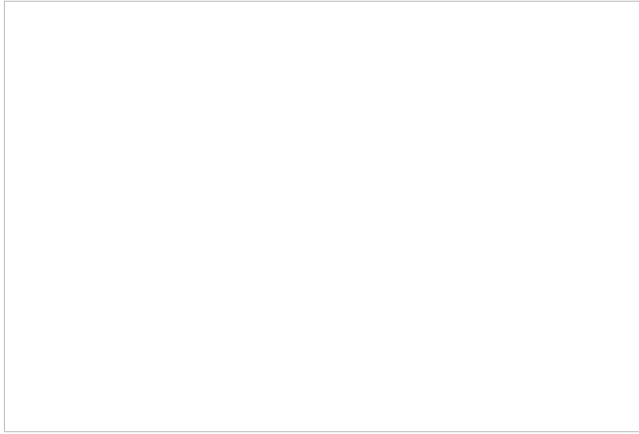


While the favorites are only available in the new Indigo layout, I'm crossing my fingers in the hope that Adobe will add this favorites feature to the other layouts as well.

Image thumbnails

On the RoboHelp forums, people ask questions on how to use RoboHelp. A regular question is how to create image thumbnails: adding small images on a page that expand when clicked. With RoboHelp 2017, you can define specific images as thumbnails. When your reader clicks or tabs the image, the full sized image is shown:





This feature is still a little rough around the edges as the box containing the image doesn't scale very well. I'm hoping that this will be fixed in one of the patches that are sure to follow this release.

And Some Other Things

All the major features in this release are for Responsive HTML5: 508 compliance and search suggestions. In my opinion, these two features alone warrant an upgrade for everyone looking to support mobile devices. (And who isn't?)

Adobe has also made two small but useful enhancements in RoboHelp itself:

You can now import an entire folder with baggage files. You no longer need to select files one at a time, but can store a whole directory of Word, Excel, or other files in your project.

You can now toggle User Defined Variables to show the name of the field instead of the value, similar to fields in Microsoft Word. Authors wanting to see which variables are used can toggle them all. But I still prefer to just show variables in bright green to identify them.



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