

Alternatives to RoboHelp for JavaHelp Authors

Knopf Online Tips & Tricks Series

RoboHelp is one of several Help authoring tools that do a very good job for Help authors producing Microsoft WinHelp and Microsoft HTML Help. In addition, if your users access Web-based Help over broadband connections, RoboHelp's WebHelp format can also be a viable alternative.

However, in our experience, when it comes to JavaHelp, RoboHelp has always had numerous limitations. The code produced by RoboHelp is not really what the JavaHelp software is expecting, and this often leads to problems in the visual appearance of JavaHelp systems produced with RoboHelp. For example, numbered and bulleted lists often do not display as authors expect; it is difficult to insert un-numbered paragraphs within a numbered list; and table formatting often does not meet the Help author's expectations.

In addition, many authors wonder how interested eHelp is in providing good support for JavaHelp. For example, Sun released JavaHelp 1.1.3 in June 2002. RoboHelp 2002 (the current release) has compatibility problems with JavaHelp 1.1.3 that can prevent RoboHelp from generating the necessary full text search files for JavaHelp and prevent RoboHelp users from viewing JavaHelp output from within the RoboHelp user interface. Yet, as of the date of this article, eHelp has still not released a patch to correct these incompatibilities. (We worked directly with Sun to make a patch available on our Web site, however, for those who must produce JavaHelp 1.1.3 using RoboHelp.)

Because of these and other limitations in RoboHelp, Knopf Online no longer uses RoboHelp to produce output in JavaHelp format except, of course, for testing purposes.

This tip provides a short list of alternative authoring tools that, in our experience, produce excellent JavaHelp output and in many cases will be better suited to the needs of the typical JavaHelp author.

WordHelp: Author in Word, produce optimized JavaHelp output

WordHelp is a true single sourcing application from Quadralay Corporation, the industry leader in true single source software solutions. Using WordHelp, you author your Help content in Microsoft Word and then generate online Help in four popular online Help formats: JavaHelp, WinHelp, HTML Help, and WebWorks Help. WordHelp provides full support for JavaHelp 1.1.3 and produces compact code that works well with the JavaHelp software. If you are a FrameMaker user, you can use Quadralay's WebWorks Publisher product to generate online Help directly from your FrameMaker files. The software costs less than \$500.

[Visit our WordHelp page](http://www.knopf.com/consulting/tools/wordhelp.html) at
<http://www.knopf.com/consulting/tools/wordhelp.html>

[Visit Quadralay's WordHelp page](http://www.webworks.com/products/wwp_wh/default.asp) at
http://www.webworks.com/products/wwp_wh/default.asp

Notes

Helen: A low-cost alternative designed exclusively for JavaHelp

Helen is an authoring tool designed specifically and exclusively for authors producing online Help in JavaHelp format. With Helen, you can author Help topics using the editor of your choice, and use Helen to bring all the topics together, build the TOC and index, and produce the final output in JavaHelp format. The software costs less than \$200.

Visit Software7's Helen page at <http://www.software7.biz/>

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