Developing and Delivering Sample Projects as User Assistance

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• Written and designed documentation for software products in the documentation, media, industrial automation, simulation, and pharmaceutical industries.
• Speaker at STC, WritersUA, tcworld, LavaCon, and CIDM on a variety of topics.
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What We Will Cover

• The many uses of sample projects
• How sample projects help users
• Developing sample projects
• Publicizing sample projects

We’ll look at real samples throughout ...
User Assistance Can Be Many Things

- Help
- Manuals
- Quick Start Guides
- White papers
- Tutorials
- Videos
- Code snippets
- Sample Projects
Sample Projects Can Be ...

- Sales tools
- Educational
- Proofs-of-concept
Why Sample Projects are UA

Because Customers Can:

• Become comfortable in the user interface quickly
• Work in a real project with no harm
• Add their own data/content
Why Sample Projects are UA

Because Customers Can:

• Learn concepts more quickly
• Use the sample as a starting point
• Learn what the product is capable of doing
• Learn informally
There are many approaches

You can combine approaches:

• Include samples with product.
• Post interactive samples on the web.
• Post downloadable samples on the web.
• Include product with sample download.
There are many approaches

• Post examples of end results ("Gallery")
• Provide examples that users can build on.
• "Crowdsource" – ask customers to share projects.
Examples

Unity: http://unity3d.com/support/resources/example-projects/
FTDI: http://www.ftdichip.com/Support/FTSwExamples.htm
CeledyDraw: http://www.celedy.com/samples.html#row3
A4 Desk Pro: http://www.a4deskpro.com/sample.php
DemoBuilder: http://www.demo-builder.com/samples.html
Mathematicata: http://demonstrations.wolfram.com/
The Sample Project Team

Will work on different phases ...

• Product Management
• Marketing
• Software Development
• Web Development
• Technical Communication
• Quality Assurance
• Technical Support
Everyone on the team should agree on ...

• Goals
• Responsibilities
Determining Objectives

What do you want to illustrate? You can illustrate several concepts with good planning.

• Features
• Best Practices
• Scenarios
• Product Capabilities (power)
• Ease-of-Use

• Completed Projects
• End User interaction
• Outputs
• Development Environments
• Industry uses
Examples:
Doc-To-Help

• Samples can be opened from a Wizard.
• Backups are stored in the Program Files folder so they can be restored.
• They are real-world examples users can build on, they show features, they contain educational content, they use different editors, there is one in German.
Project Planning

- The content or data included in sample projects must yield meaningful results.
- The more features you want to demonstrate, the more content or data you will need.
- Avoid proprietary content and graphics.
- If you need a database, use a public one, or create one.
  - Consider a web-based sample if setup will be too complex for users.
Project Planning

• Establish themes that you can use for tutorials and training.
  – Consistent experience for users.
  – Saves development time.
• Download of software and sample projects should be as easy as possible.
• If code snippets will be needed, allow extra time to develop them.
• Decide if you need samples in several languages.
Project Planning

- Provide descriptions of the samples, as well as instructions for using them.
- Give samples meaningful names.
- For desktop products, make sure there is a way to restore samples.
- If developing a web based sample, determine if a login will be needed.
- Web based samples must be tested on different browsers.
If you decide to collect samples from users...

• Develop technology and guidelines
• Create plan to encourage and reward contributions.
• Acknowledge it will be an ongoing effort.
List all learning objectives
Use realistic scenarios
Scenarios should be familiar
Verify content/data will work in scenarios
Highlight best practices
Plan to add video, audio, etc. as appropriate
Example: Studio for SharePoint

- This product allows you to build interactive data displays for SharePoint Sites

- Live Demo site: http://webparts.componentone.com/SitePages/Home.aspx (The site contains more than just the samples.)

- Since it was possible to use SharePoint as a platform for the samples, why make the customer do the configuration?

- Customers can make changes (but not save them) so it is training and proof-of-concept.

- The home page of the Help links to this site. The site links to the Help: http://helpcentral.componentone.com/nethelp/c1webparts/
Distributing Samples

- Wizards
- Website
- Product interface
- Online Help/Documentation
Publicizing Samples

- Webcasts
- Email Newsletters
- Blog Posts
- Twitter
Example: Studio for LightSwitch

- This product allows you to add data displays to your website with little coding. (LightSwitch is a development environment built on Microsoft SilverLight.)

- This sample project shows what you can build and how users can interact with it. [http://demo.componentone.com/LightSwitch/Studio/](http://demo.componentone.com/LightSwitch/Studio/)

- The documentation has quick starts that take you through the steps.

- There are also downloadable samples, the version depends upon your installation of Visual Studio -- one for VS 2010 and one for 2012. [http://www.componentone.com/SuperProducts/StudioLightSwitch/](http://www.componentone.com/SuperProducts/StudioLightSwitch/)
Sample Projects on the Web

ComponentOne Studio for SharePoint:  
http://webparts.componentone.com/SitePages/Home.aspx

ComponentOne Studio for LightSwitch:  
http://demo.componentone.com/LightSwitch/Studio/

Mathematica:  http://demonstrations.wolfram.com/  
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfram_Demonstrations_Project)

Unity:  http://unity3d.com/support/resources/example-projects/

Graphisoft:  

FTDI:  http://www.ftdichip.com/Support/FTSwExamples.htm

Chief Architect:  
http://www.chiefarchitect.com/products/samples.html
Sample Projects on the Web

CeledyDraw: http://www.celedy.com/samples.html#row3
A4 Desk Pro: http://www.a4deskpro.com/sample.php
DemoBuilder: http://www.demo-builder.com/samples.html
Recommended Reading


Questions?

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