

# InfoWorld

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## Exclusive: Astoria On-Demand tames complex docs

Hosted XML content management system speeds technical publishing with DITA and sophisticated features

MOST ENTERPRISES DRIVE THEIR WEB sites and intranets using a CMS (content management system). That's because CMSes offer consistent branding, easy editing, content reuse, and approval workflows. Unfortunately, publishing systems for producing structured technical manuals came late to the party in delivering these benefits. Sometimes you must learn older SGML (Standard Generalized Markup Language) -- or deal with expensive and cumbersome XML editors. Astoria On-Demand sidesteps these problems with a highly usable and quickly deployed hosted system based on OASIS' DITA (Darwin Information Typing Architecture) standard.

Fundamentally, XML-tagged documents are ideal for, say, manufacturers of complex machinery that must deliver supporting documentation. For instance, details about a commonly used part could be included in various manuals or online help systems. Astoria isn't unique here. But, whereas other systems usually place

a layer between the user interface and a relational database -- creating bottlenecks when the application tries to manage millions of links to the various content pieces -- Astoria On-Demand handles these XML objects directly. This is unusual -- and rarer for a SaaS (software as a service) solution. In my testing, this design enabled On-Demand to provide a response as fast as I've seen with in-house applications (typically a few seconds), even when used across DSL-speed Internet connections.

Moreover, I found using the system straightforward, after I brushed up on some DITA concepts (which should take new users a few days at most). To begin, the visual Web interface is arranged into logical areas. On the left, much like Microsoft Word's Document Map feature, Astoria's Map Editor structures content into standard DITA topics, references, and tasks that appear in a hierarchical tree.

Opening a task folder allowed me to easily tap other Astoria capabilities. The upper ribbon area provides quick access to 18 repository functions, including authoring and reusing objects. Collaboration is just as essential to the documentation cycle, and here Astoria On-Demand is especially strong. For example, I added annotations and attached comments to content at the element level and then triggered a workflow. The system sent an e-mail task notification along with a link to the exact section of the document that required revision or approval.

Modifying content in the XML editor is swift; Astoria bundles Parametric Technology's popular Arbortext Editor. Familiar text and image formatting options appear in a toolbar, and a variety of other options (such as selecting content for re-use or showing revision history) are found within clearly labeled menus.

Astoria On-Demand demystifies other



Astoria's visual Web UI is straight-forward and responsive.

complex tasks, too. For instance, Astoria Document Assembly (a built-in application) creates new documents for you from components and topics stored in the repository. Moreover, these technical bulletins, data sheets, and operator manuals are dynamically updated to reflect changes in the single copy of the underlying content. The Astoria Translation Manager is equally adept, creating versions of documents for each translated language (there's complete UTF-8 and UTF-16 support).

Also on the publishing side, Astoria Filtered Publisher outputs only those pages that are appropriate for certain audiences or products. This finish-quality output is available in PDF, HTML, and other formats that include Windows compiled help files.

For organizations that produce complex products and need an equally sophisticated solution to create associated documentation, Astoria On-Demand has top qualifications.

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www.astoriasoftware.com

### Astoria On-Demand

Astoria Software, [astoriasoftware.com](http://astoriasoftware.com)

VERY GOOD

8.6

Capability (25%) 9

Ease-of-use (20%) 8

Performance (15%) 9

Scalability (15%) 8

Security (15%) 9

Value (10%) 8

**COST:** Custom quoted based on configuration

**PLATFORMS:** Hosted SaaS (software as a service).

**BOTTOM LINE:** Astoria On-Demand quickly moves enterprises, especially manufacturers, to a DITA standard publishing environment. This easy-to-use solution enables remote teams to author, review, and publish XML-based technical documents. On-Demand manages content as elements (which can be reused), provides automated workflow, and publishes to multiple formats -- with the short implementation and predictable cost provided by the SaaS model.