Enabling Feedback and Collaboration in Software Help

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What we'll cover in this session

- Why users like to collaborate
- Why should we enable feedback and collaboration in Help?
- Examples of feedback mechanisms in Help
- Examples of collaboration within Help
- How you can implement feedback and collaboration in your own Help

What do software users do when they have a problem?

- Ask colleagues
- Search on Internet
- Search user-to-user support forums
- Search wiki
- Call technical support
- Call a friend
- Search knowledge base and FAQs
- Access Help

Collaborative user-to-user forums

How Do I Turn of The "All Sizes" Option

Tom O'Connor. says:

Hi,

Just wondering how i turn of the All Sizes option on each and everyone of my photos in my photostream?

Cheers.

Posted at 11:01AM, 13 March 2009 GMT (permalink)

Flickr user forum

Dr. Keats pro **says:**

Just go here: www.flickr.com/account/prefs/downloads/?from=privacy

Select "Only You".

Posted 7 hours ago. (permalink)

Interaction is key

Tom O'Connor. says:

Thankyou very much Dr.Keats.

Posted 7 hours ago. (permalink)

Dr. Keats pro **says:**

That's OK!

Posted 7 hours ago. (permalink)

Reply to this topic?

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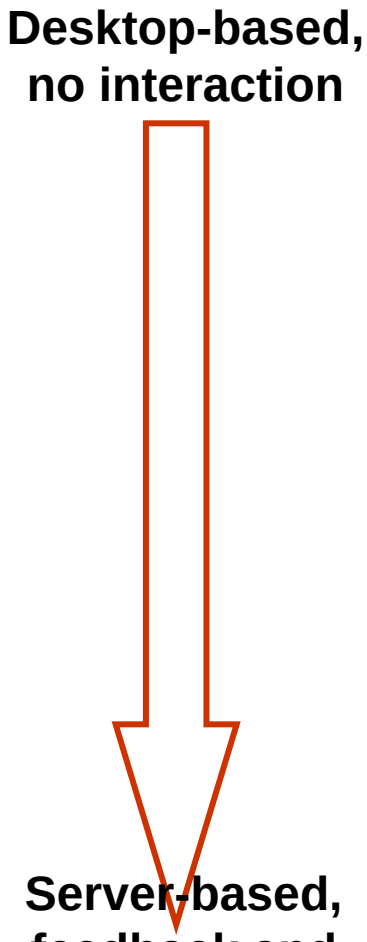
What is “Help”?

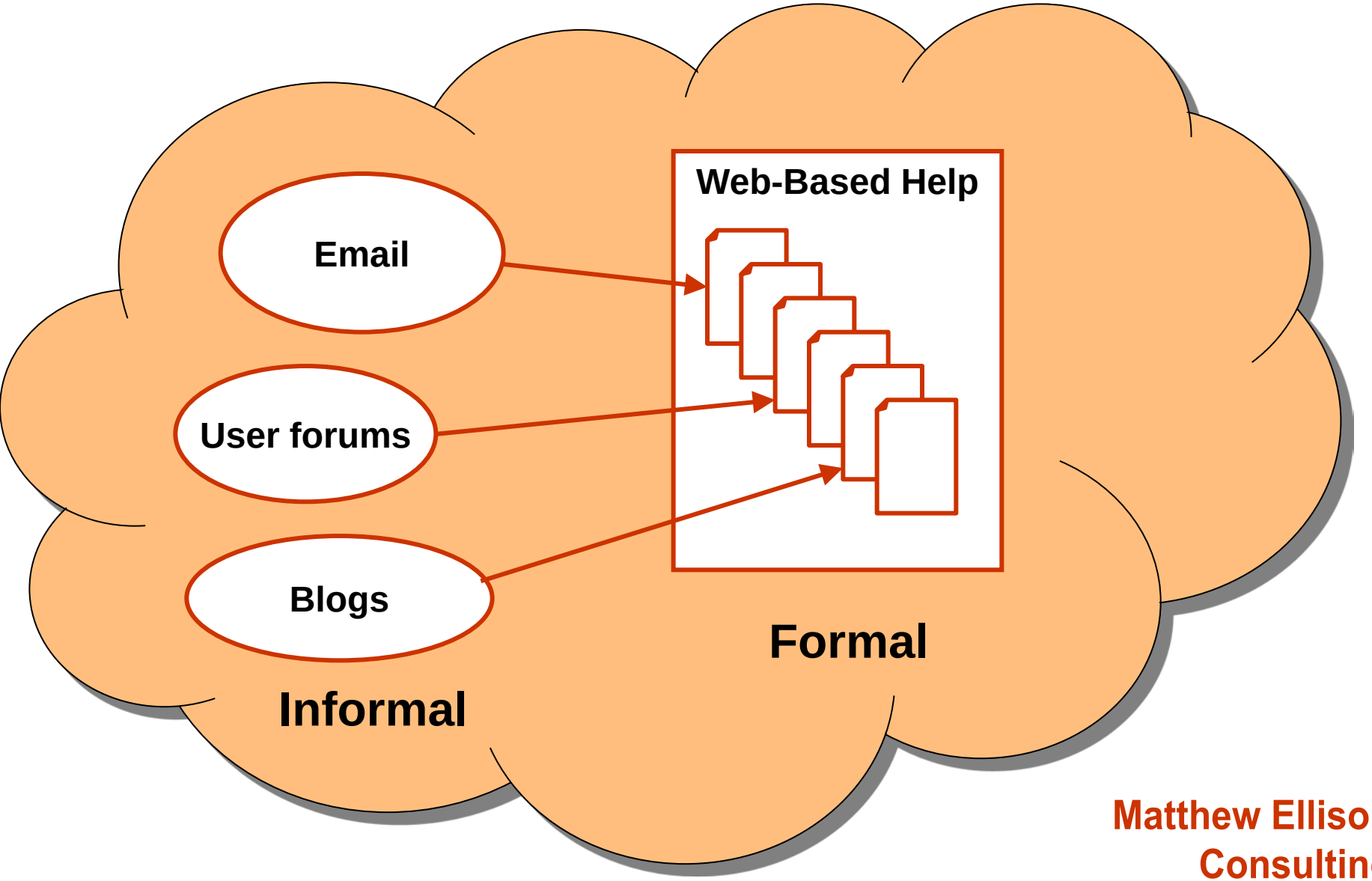
- Answers to questions
- Solutions to problems
- Written by a professional technical communicator
- Used during a real task
- May include tips for getting more from the software
- May be web-based

Help trend

- Windows Help (.hlp)
- HTML Help (.chm)
- JavaHelp
- Oracle Help
- Browser-based Help
- Oracle Help for the Web
- Server-based Help
- Eclipse Help
- Adobe AIR Help
- MS Help Viewer



Connecting the information



Why should we care about Help?

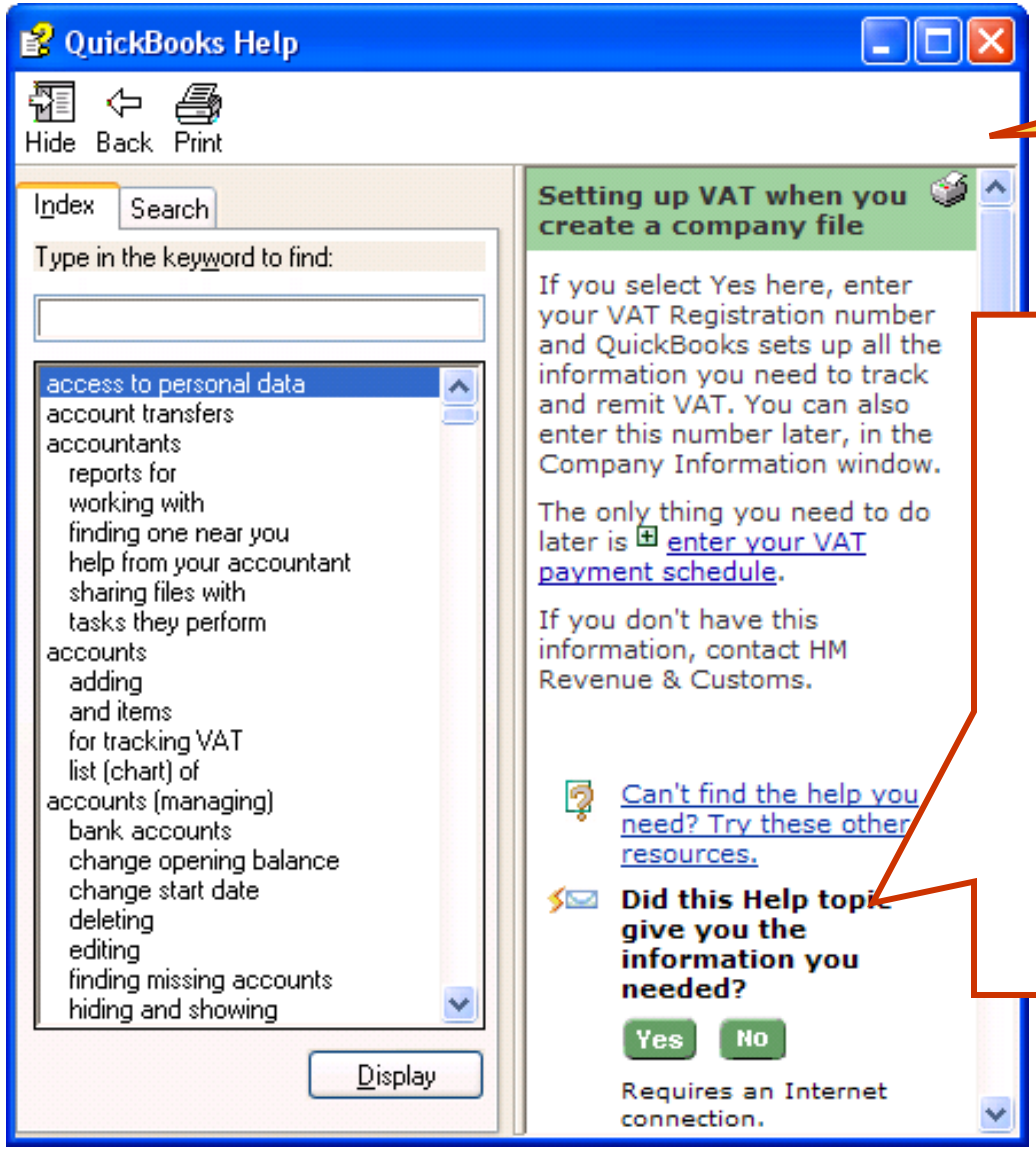
- Provides “official” guidance and instructions

- Killer feature: context-sensitivity
  - No Search/navigation required
  - Direct access to information that addresses the user’s specific situation and needs

Why should we enable feedback and collaboration in Help?

- Users like to contribute and share information
- Feedback enables us to refine and improve the Help
- Shared comments improve the experience of Help

Feedback mechanisms from Help



QuickBooks Help (.chm)

How can we make this information more helpful?

Submit

Requires an Internet connection.

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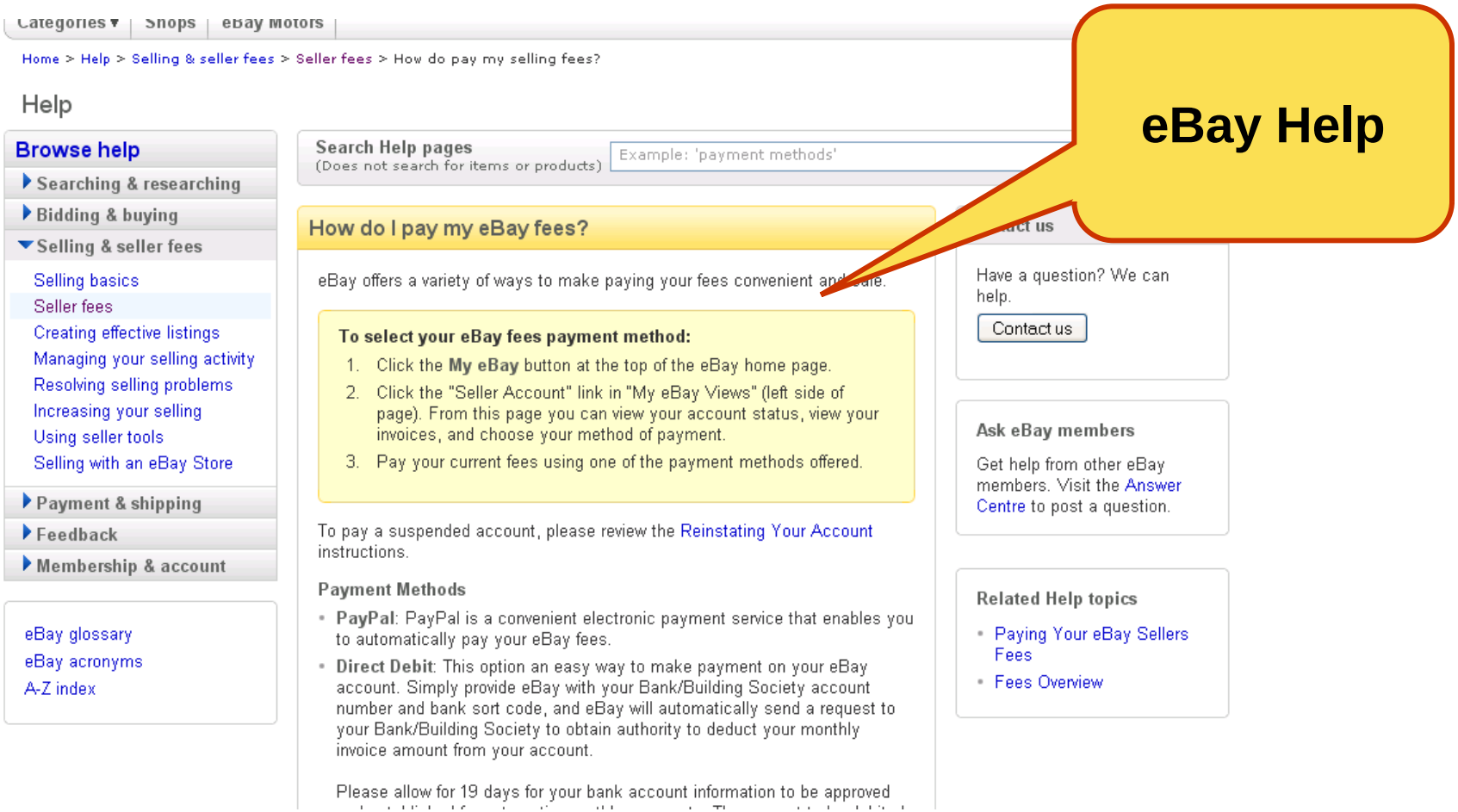
Feedback mechanisms from Help



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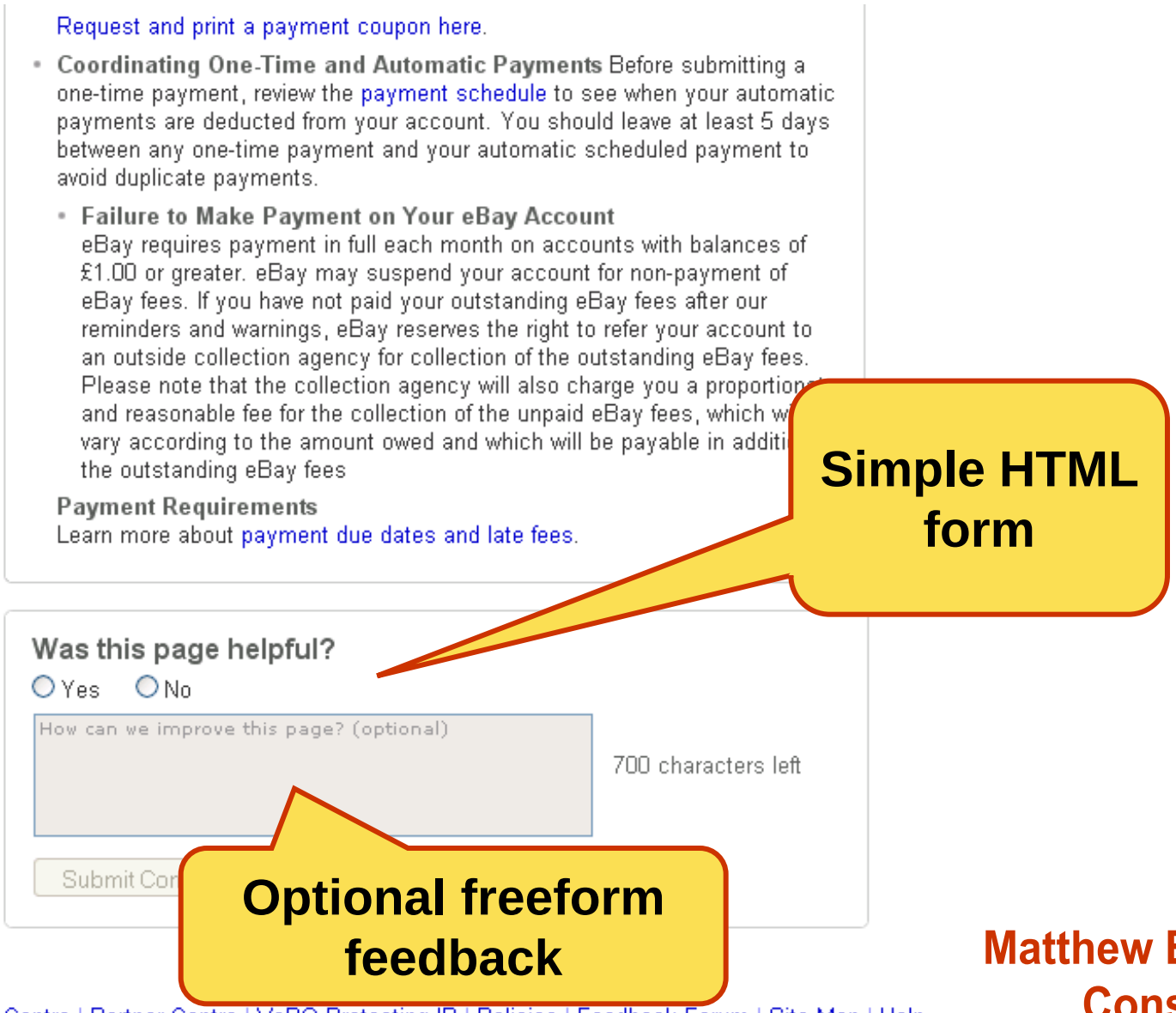
Feedback mechanisms from Help



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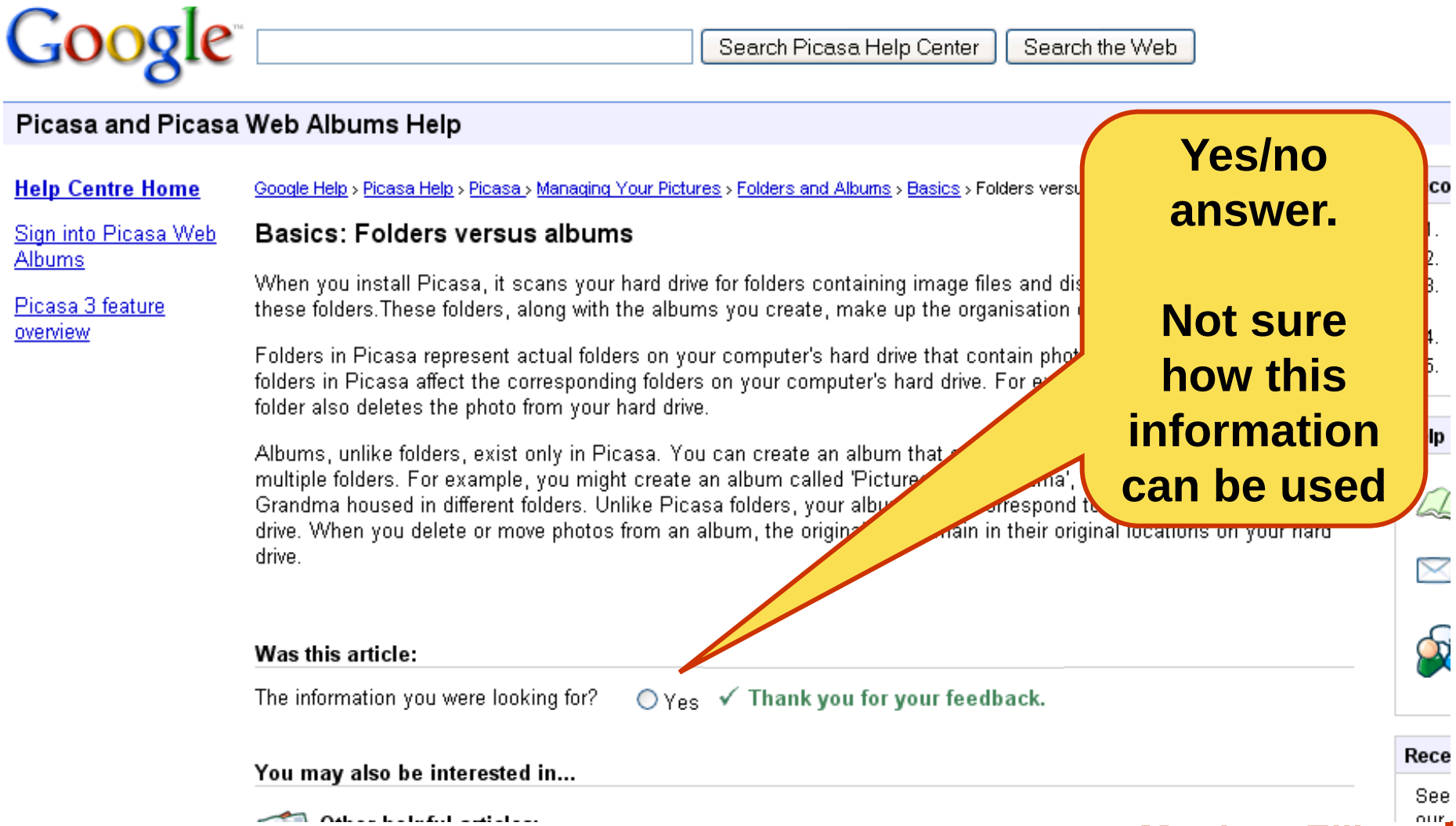
Feedback mechanisms from Help



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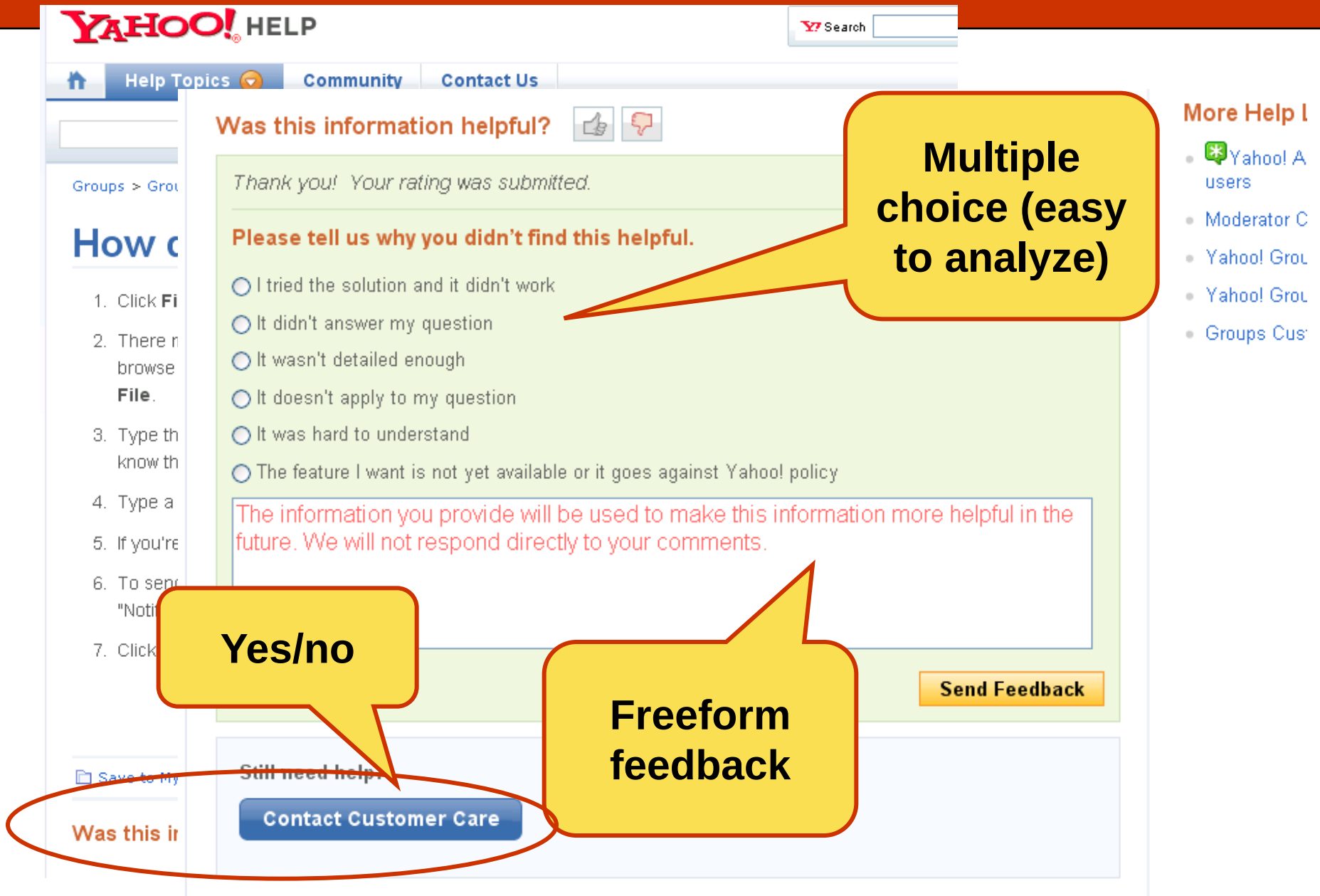
Feedback mechanisms from Help



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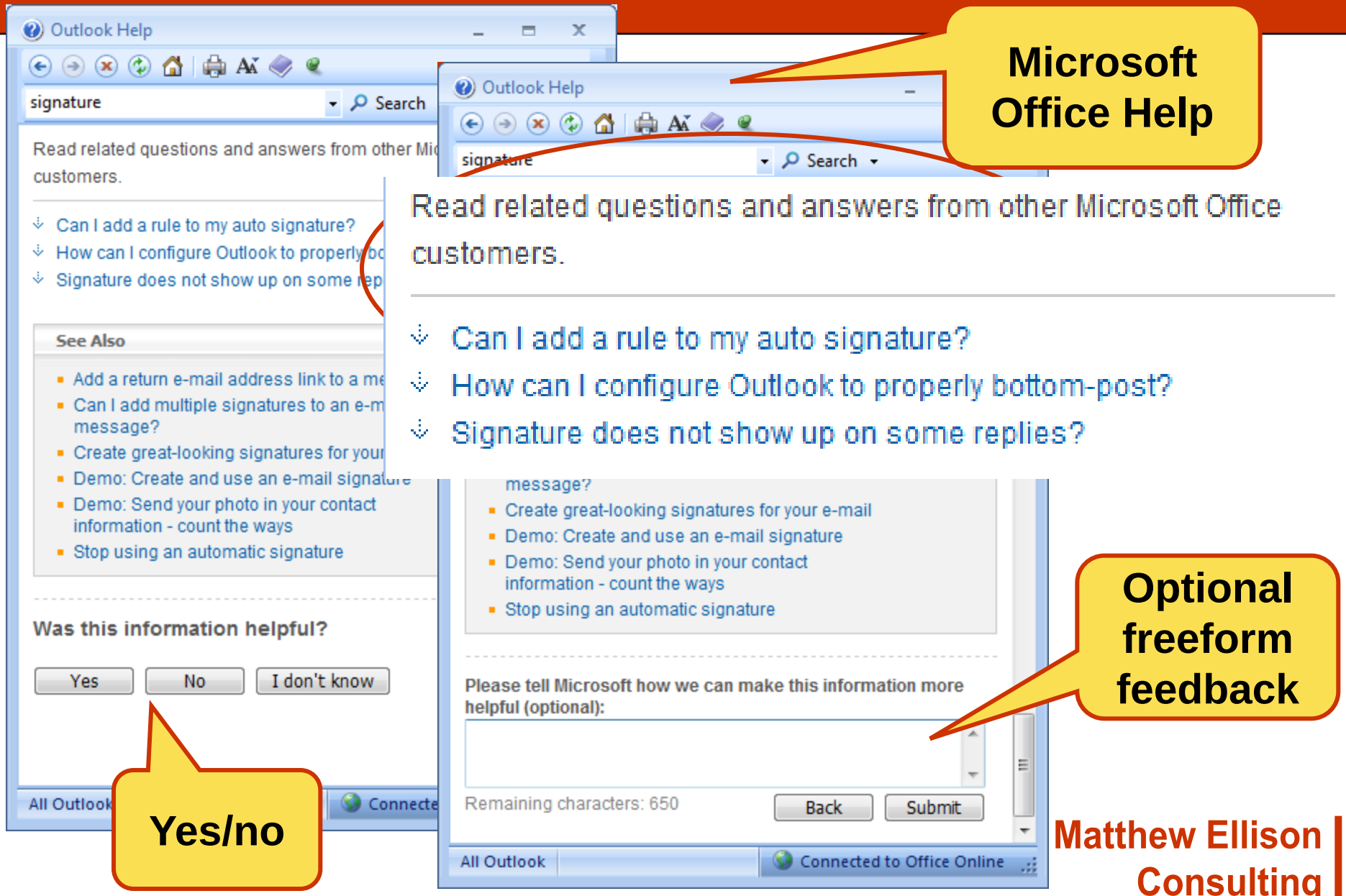

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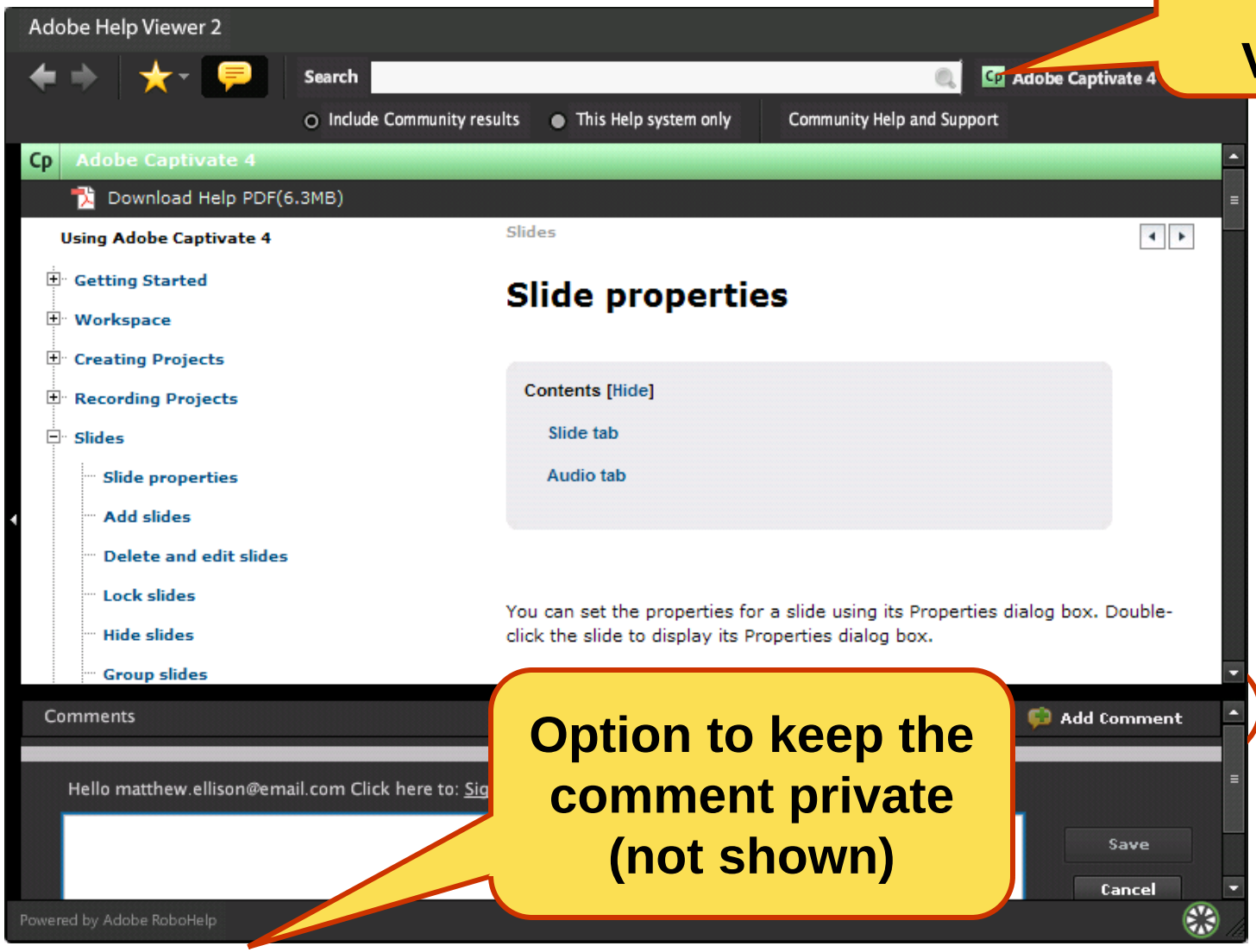
Feedback mechanisms from Help



Adobe Help Viewer

Option to keep the comment private (not shown)

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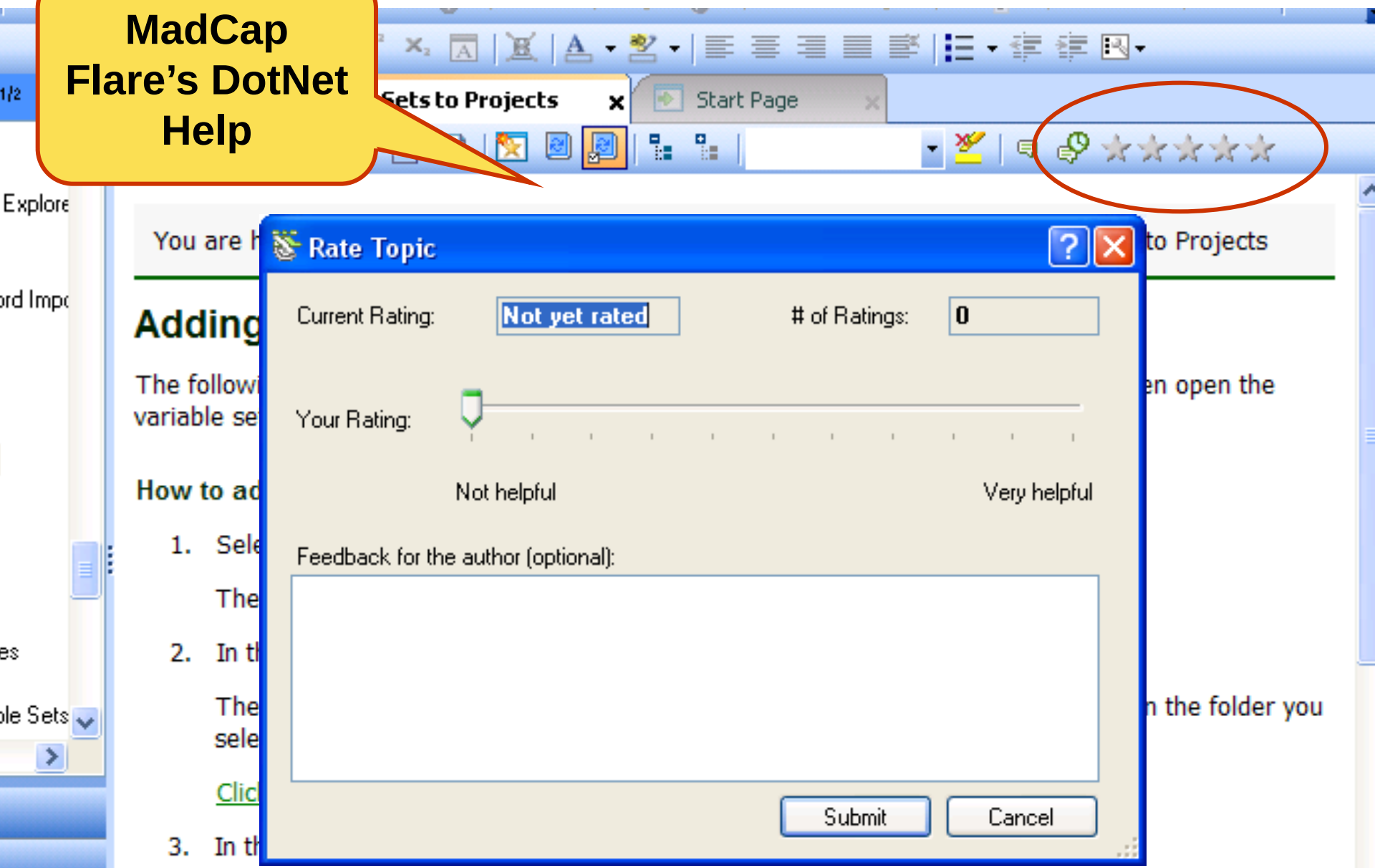
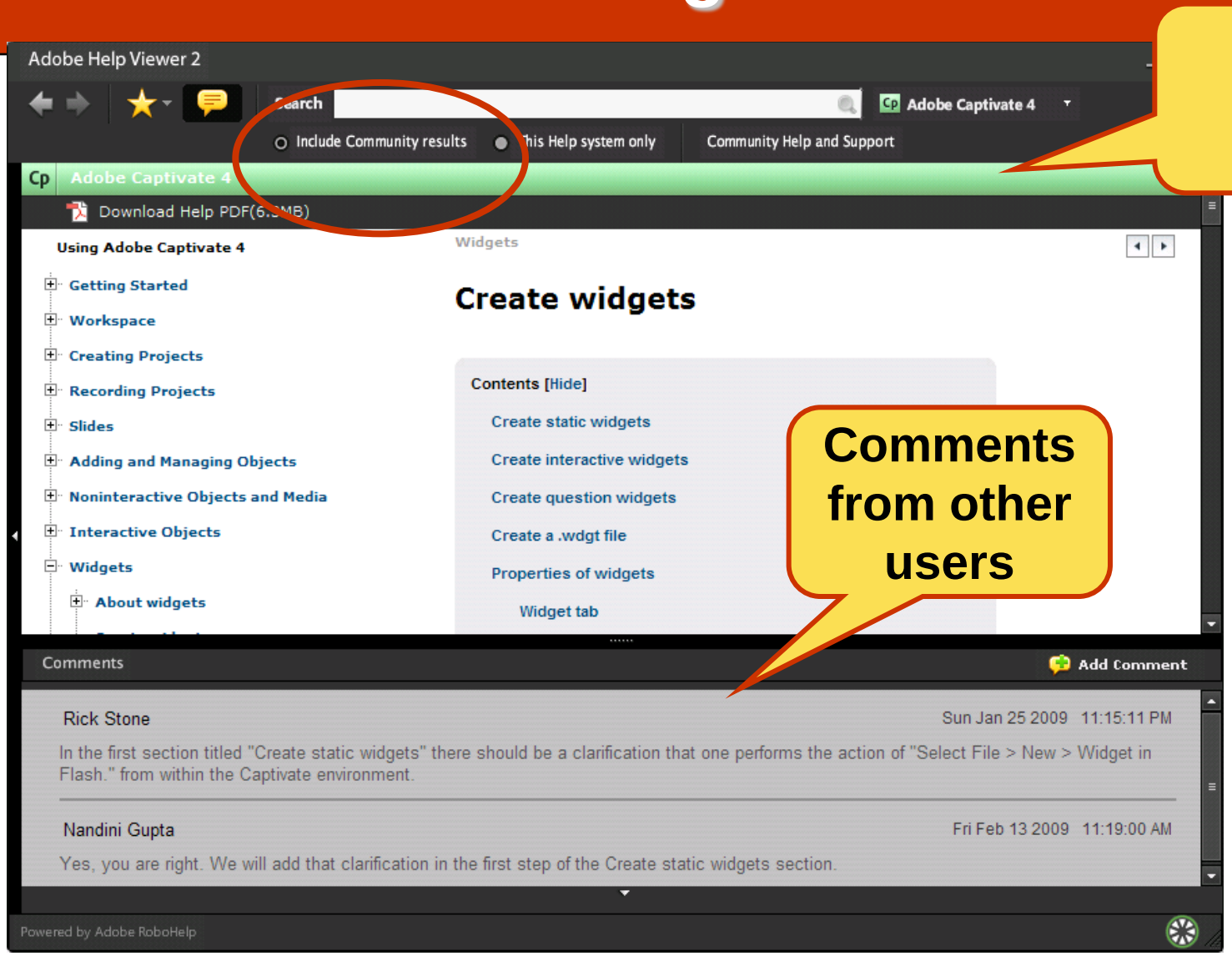
Feedback mechanisms from Help

Feedback mechanisms from Help

MadCap Flare's DotNet Help



Collaboration/sharing



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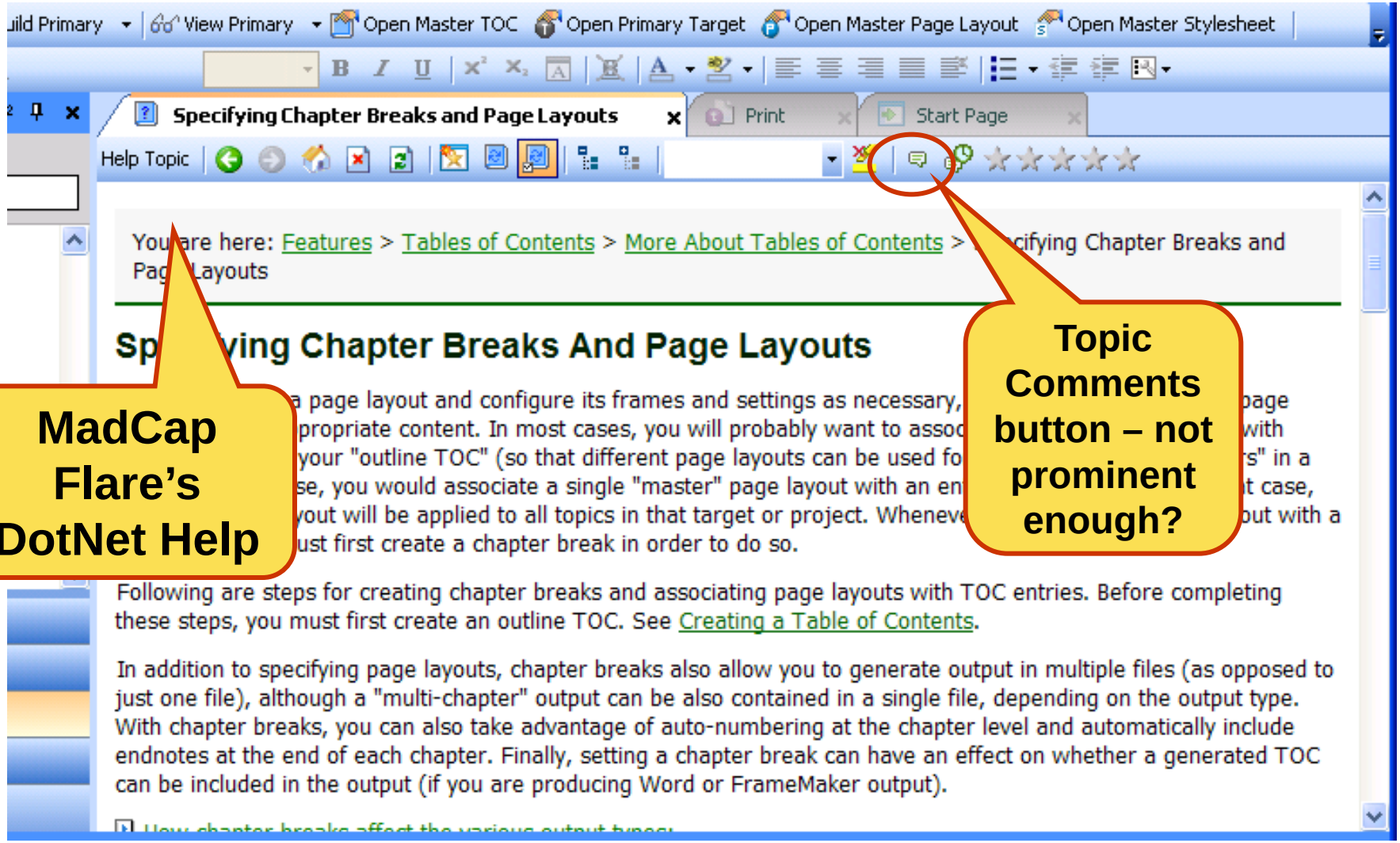

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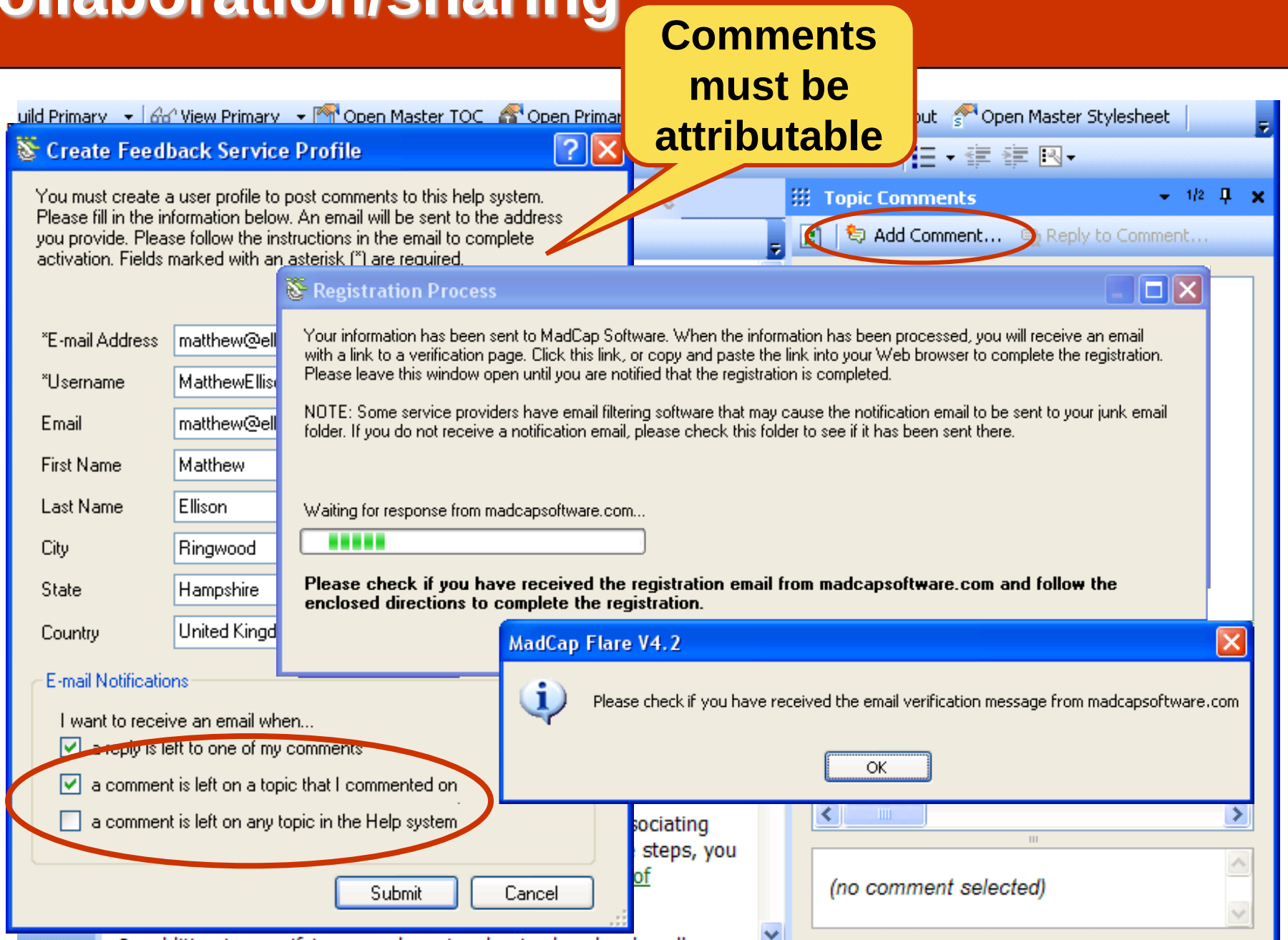

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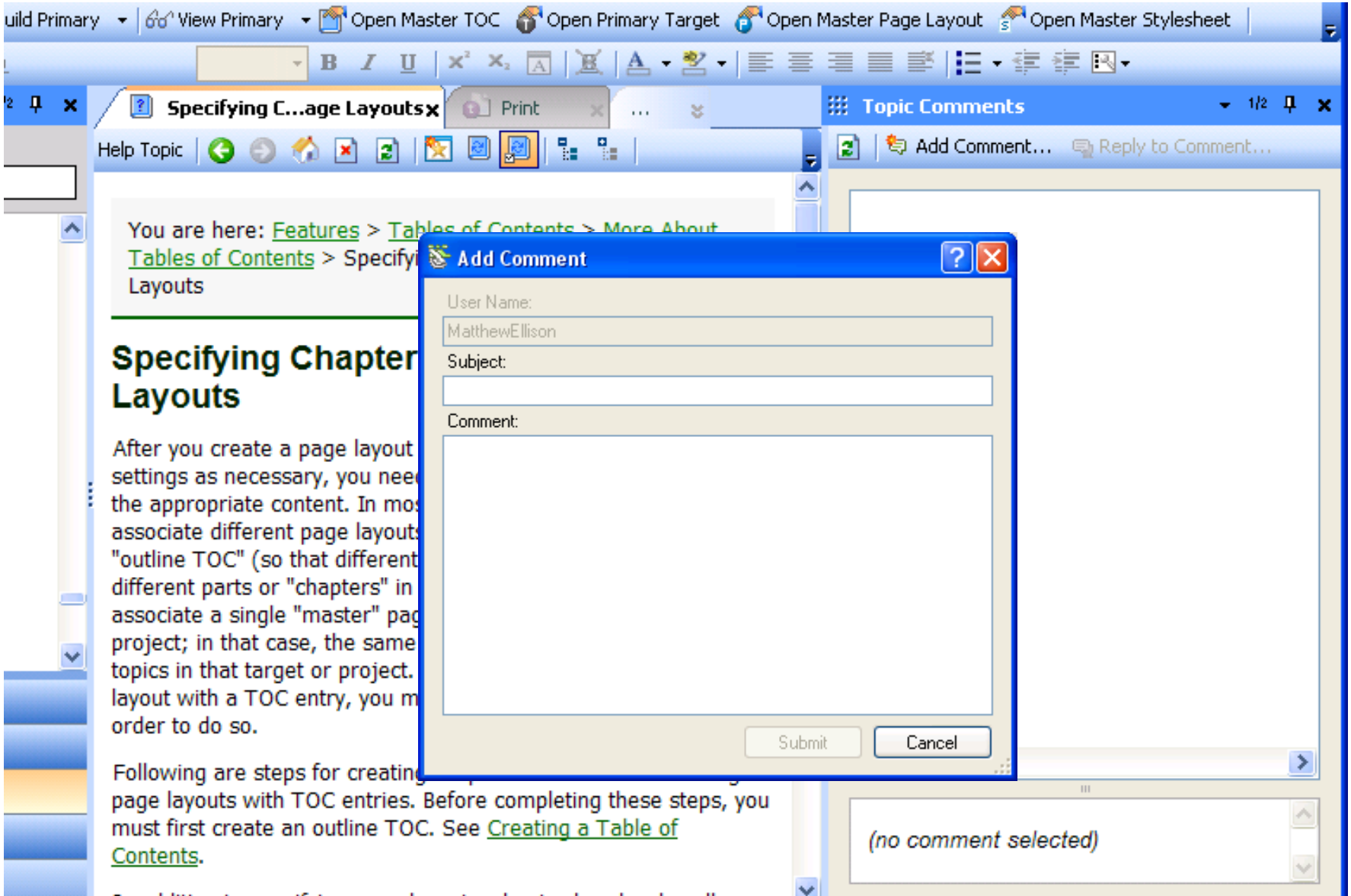

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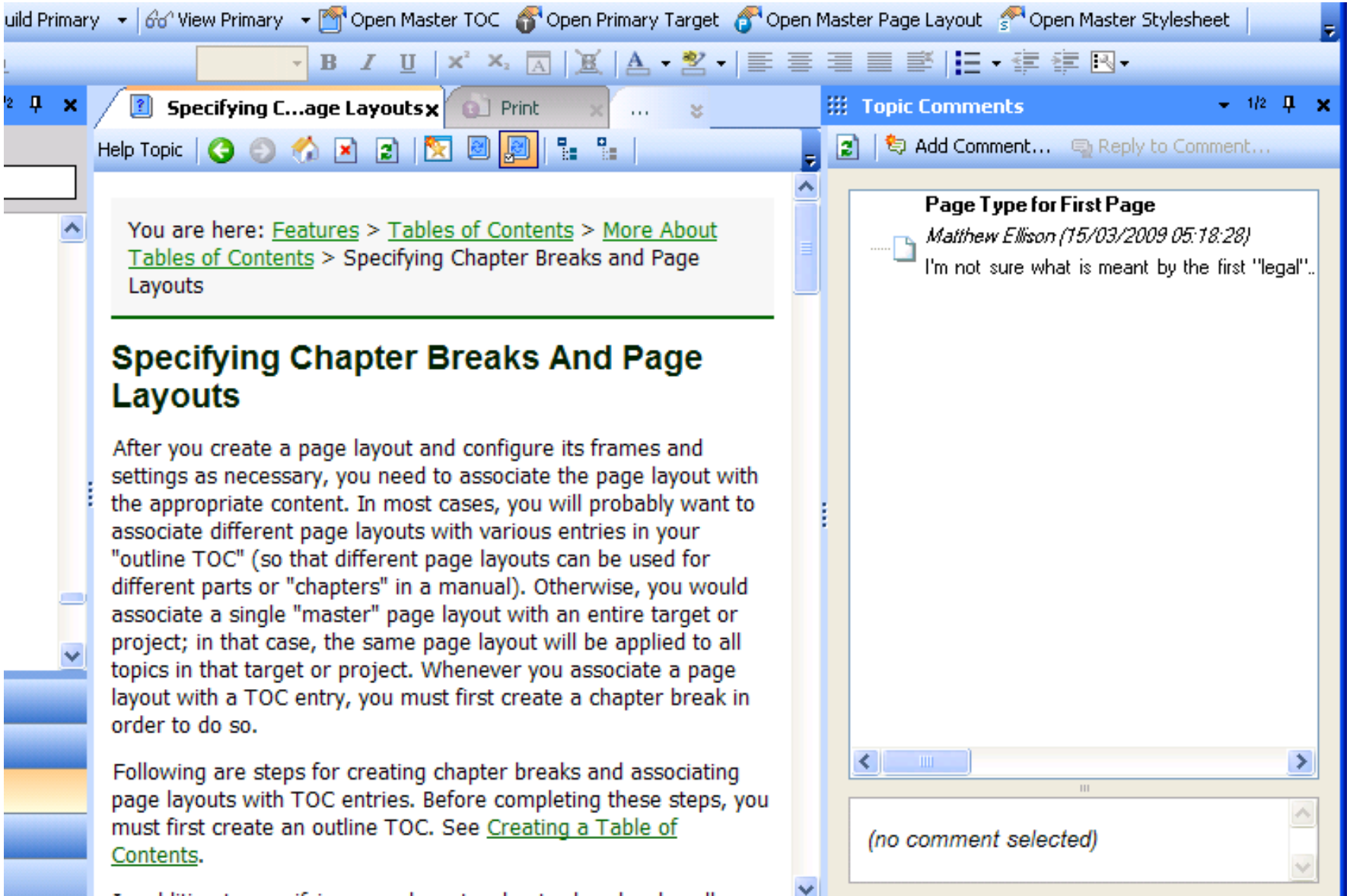

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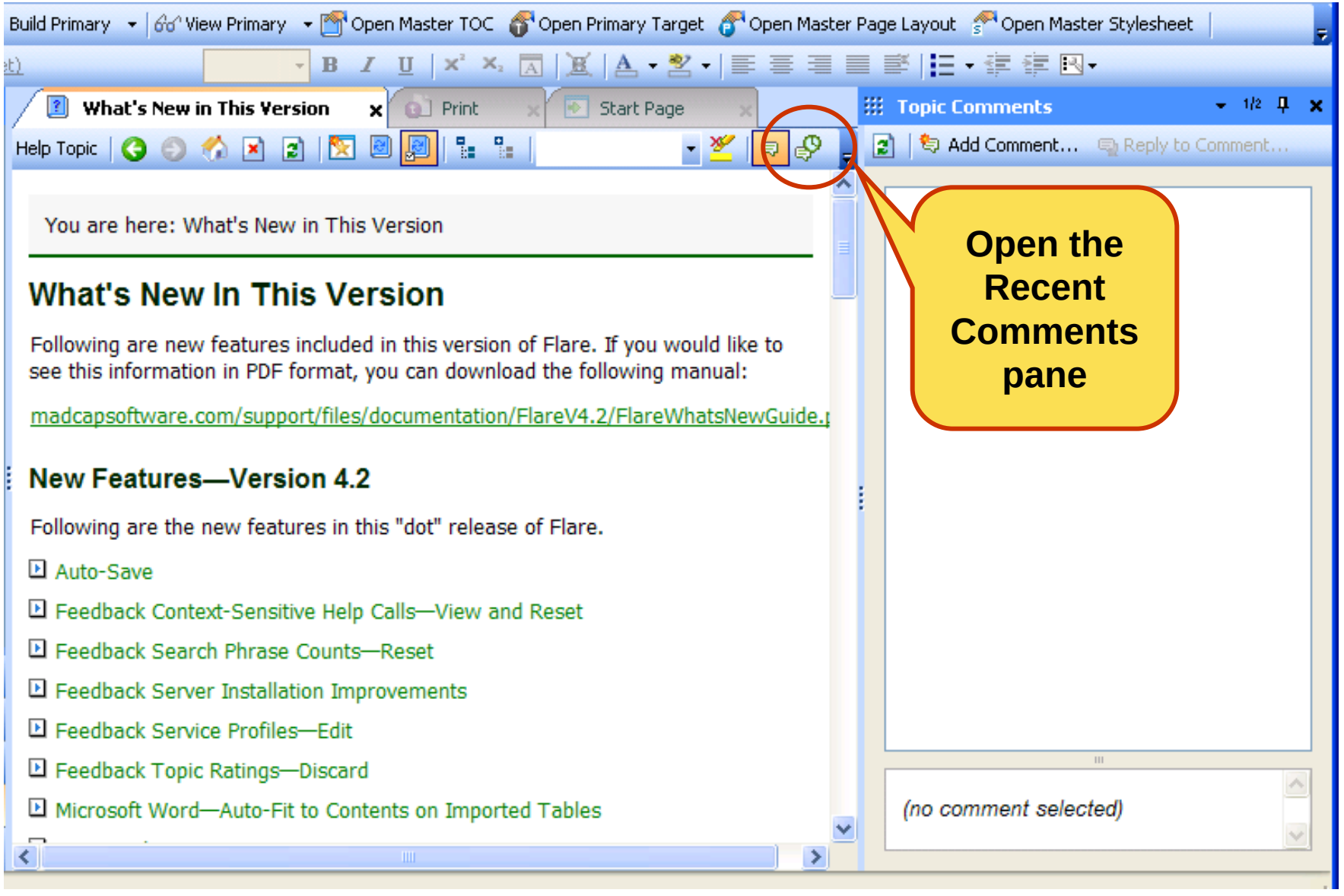

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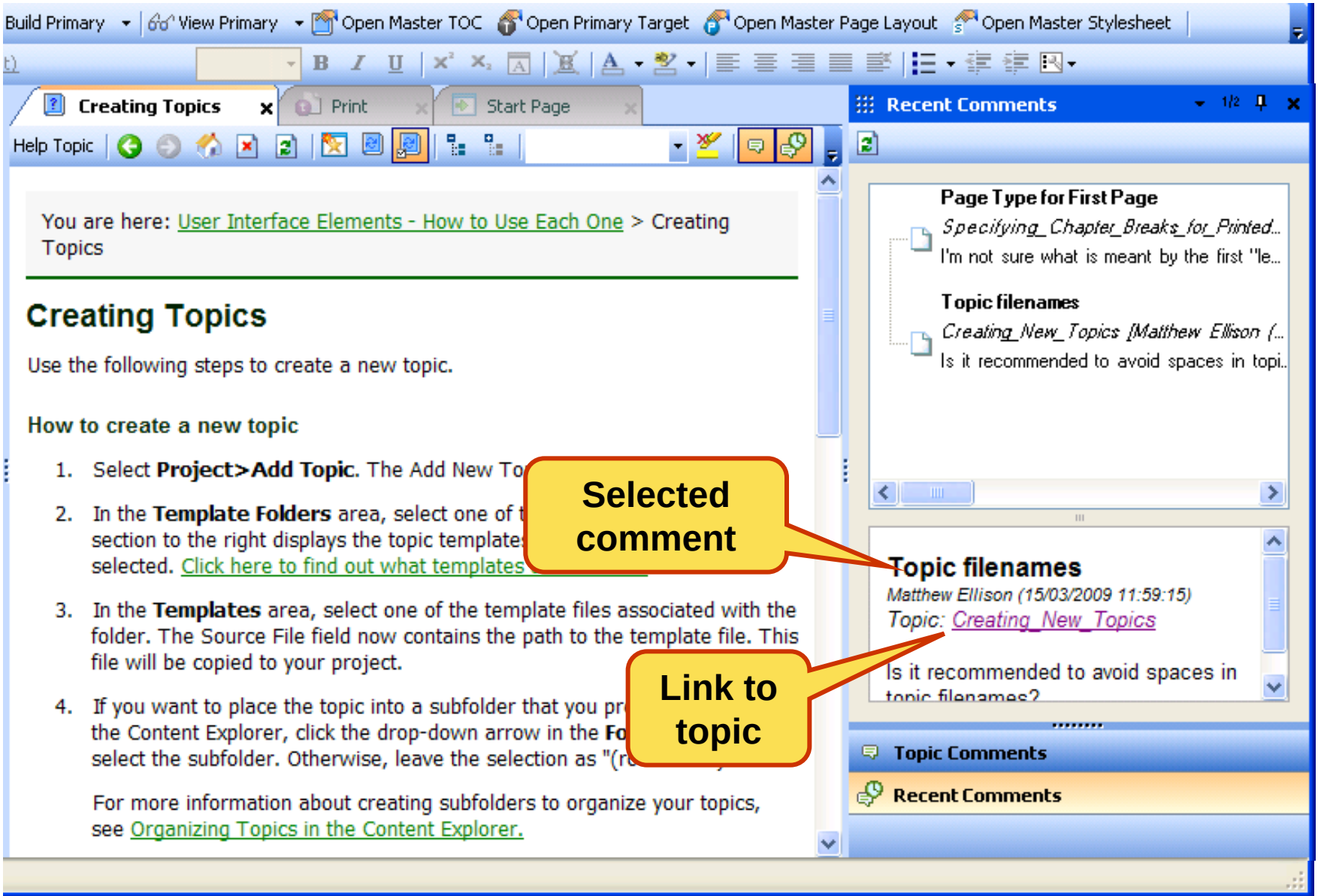
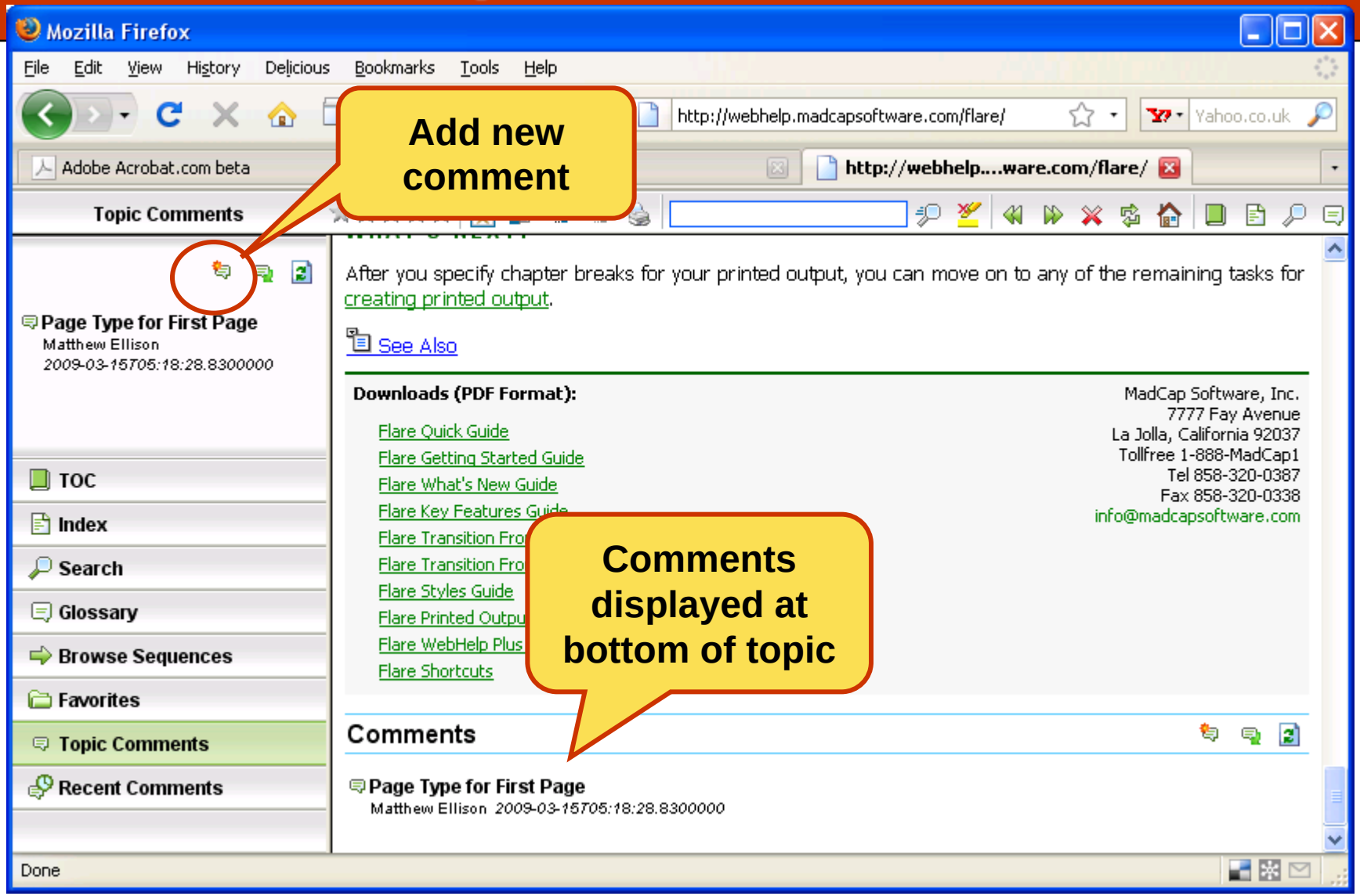


Flare's WebHelp



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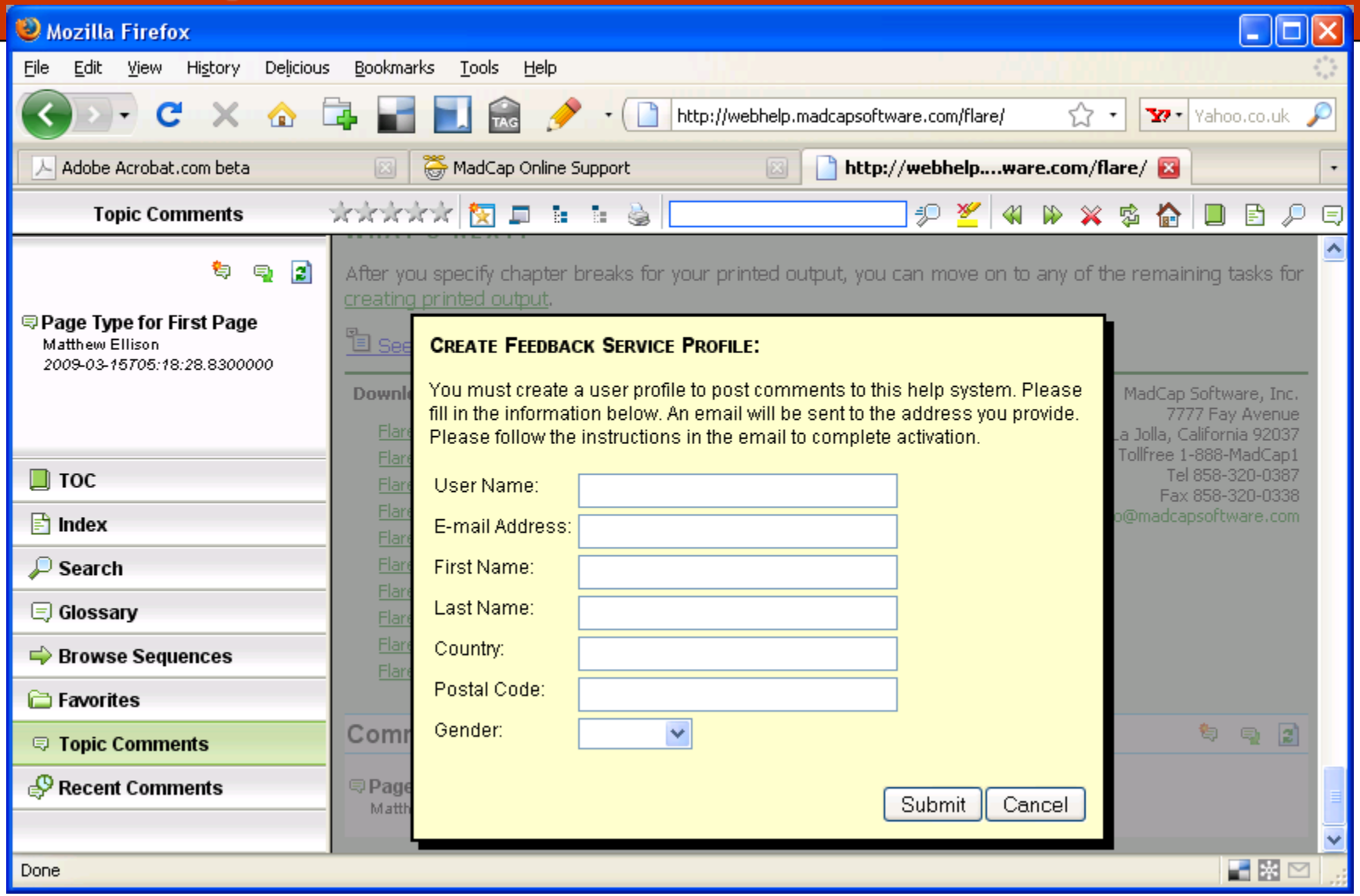
WebHelp



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Technologies for enabling feedback and collaboration

- Mailto link
- HTML Form
  - Server-side scripting
  - Database connection
- Custom web services / database server solution
- Adobe RoboHelp: Adobe AIR Help
- MadCap Flare: Feedback Server/Service

Example of a custom solution: DocCommentXchange (DCX) from Sybase

- Comment-enabled web-based documentation
- Presented as case study at 2009 WritersUA Conference in Seattle
- Allows users to:
  - Write comments about specific help topics
  - Read the comments written by other users
  - Develop comment threads
- When a user submits a comment:
  - It is immediately posted on DCX
  - A notification email is sent to the appropriate doc team members

Technologies used by DCX

- Google Web Toolkit (GWT)
- Database server based on SQL Anywhere

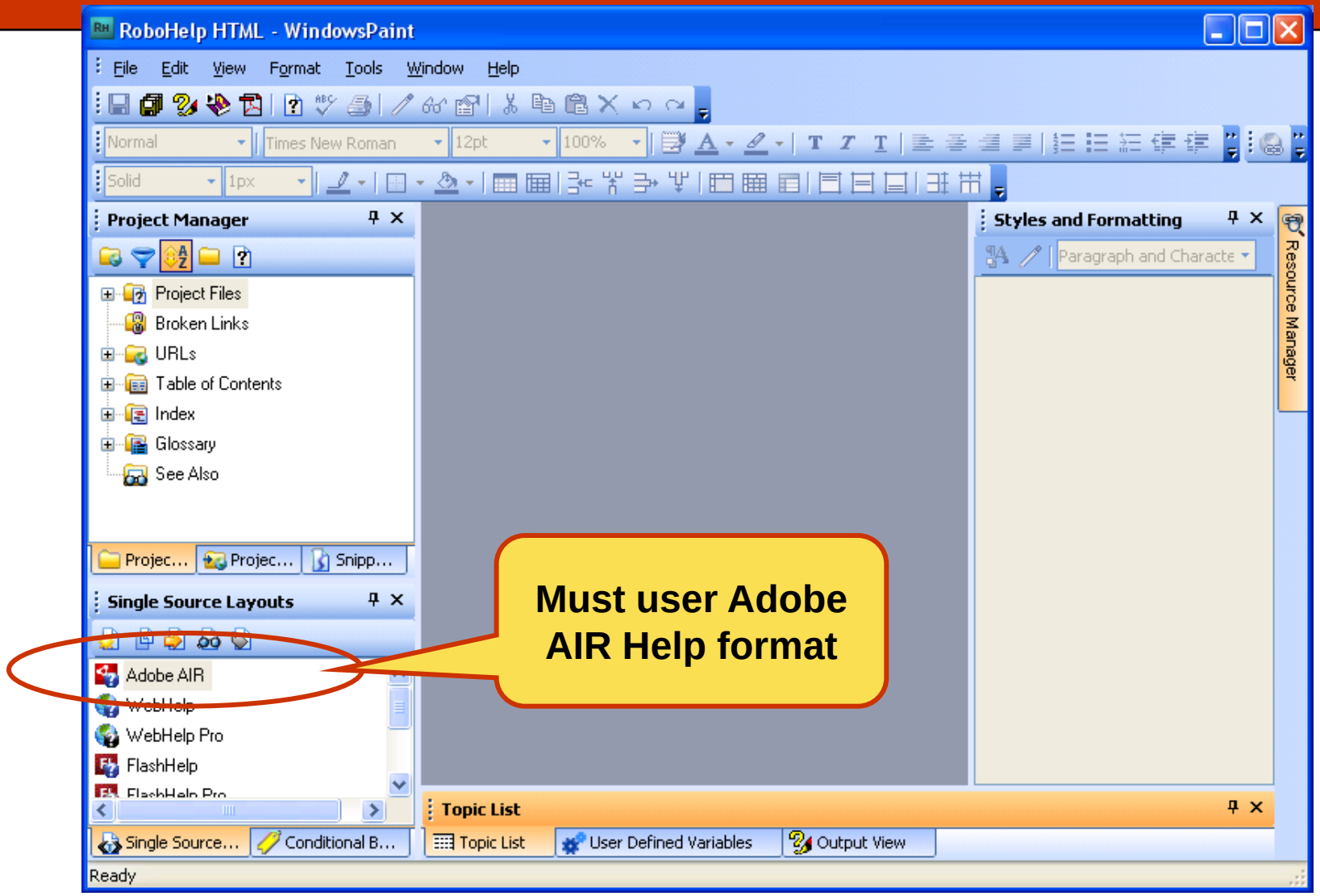
Adobe RoboHelp: Adobe AIR Help

- Comment on topics
- View previous comments
- Share comments with other users on same Local Area Network
- Targeted at reviewers

Adobe RoboHelp: Adobe AIR Help

- Which Help formats are supported?
  - Adobe AIR application only
- What do you (the Help author) need?
  - Adobe RoboHelp 8
  - Or Adobe RoboHelp 7 +
    RoboHelp Packager for Adobe AIR
- What do your users need?
  - Adobe AIR runtime
- Cost?
  No additional cost

Adobe RoboHelp: Adobe AIR Help



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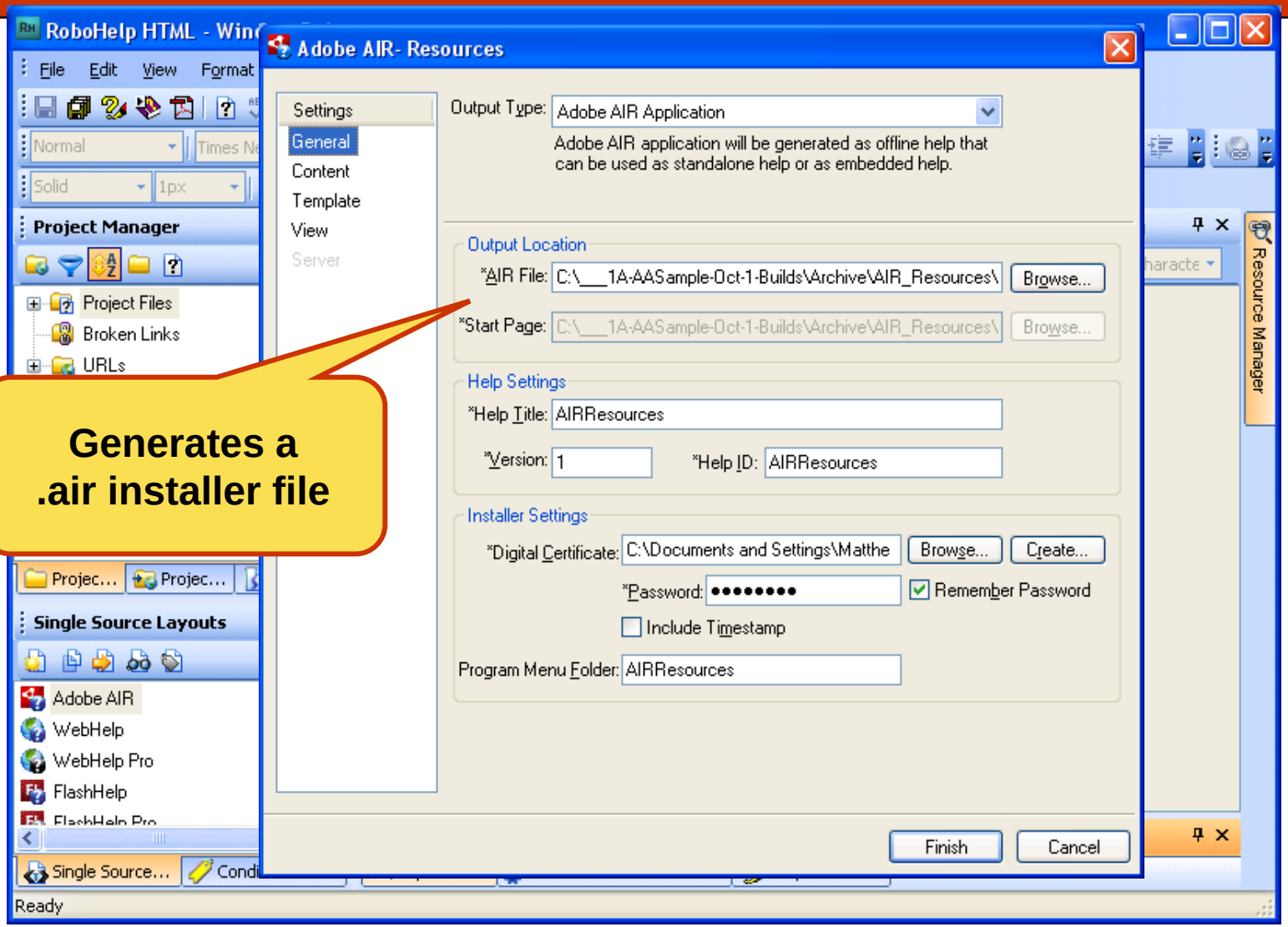
Adobe RoboHelp: Adobe AIR Help



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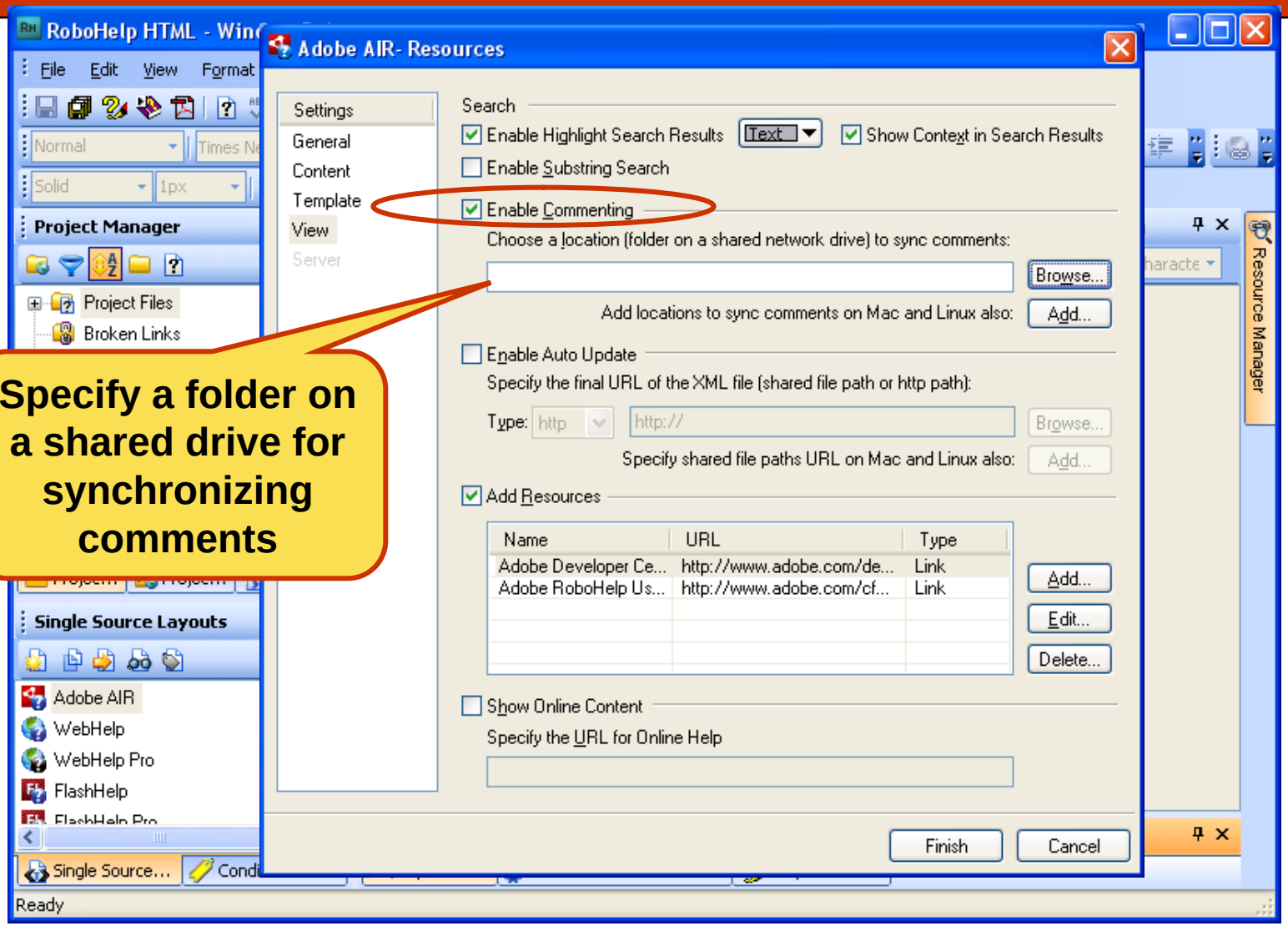

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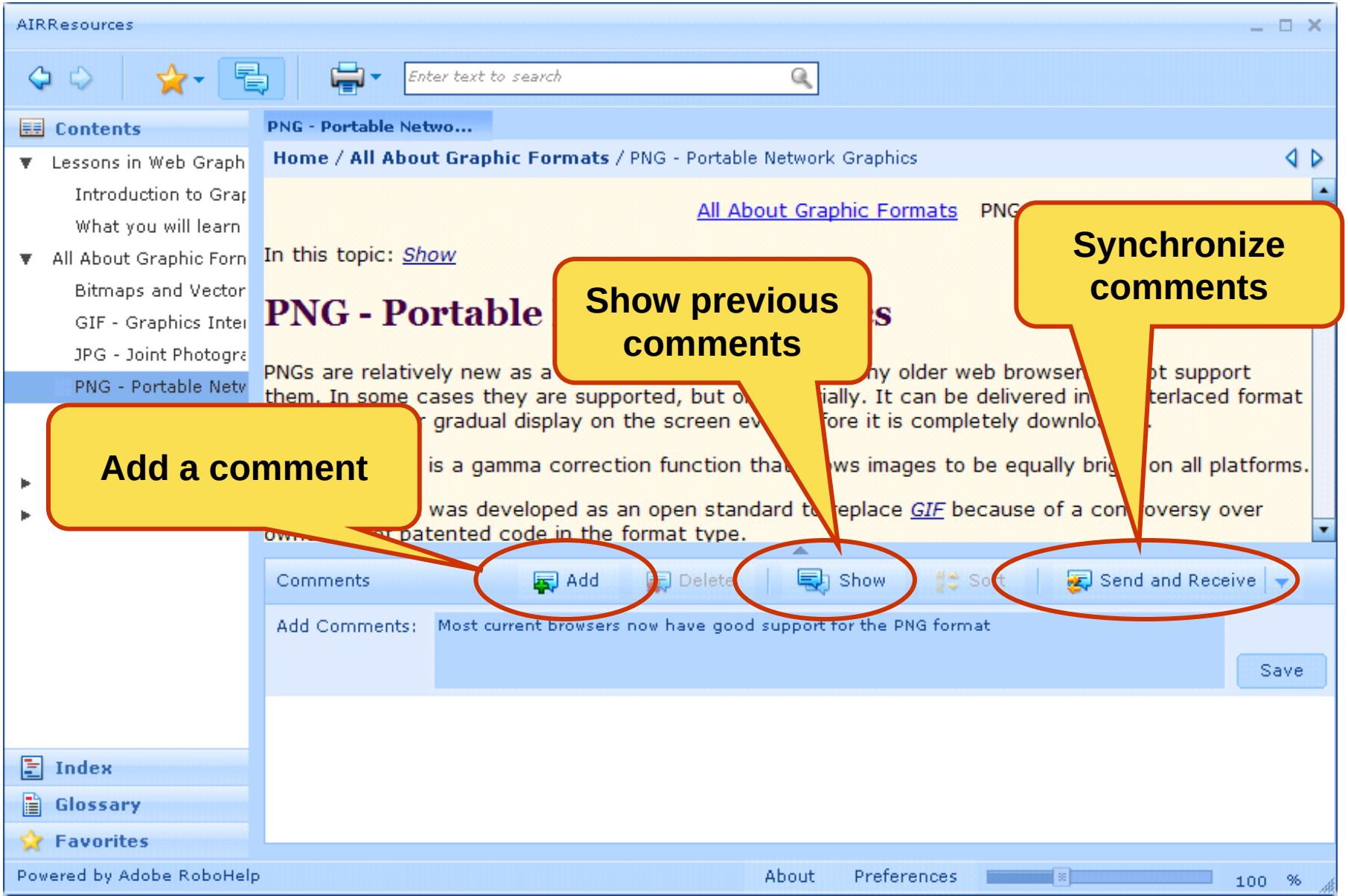


MadCap Flare: Feedback Server/Service

- Provide topic rating and feedback to author
- Share feedback via the Web with all other users of the application

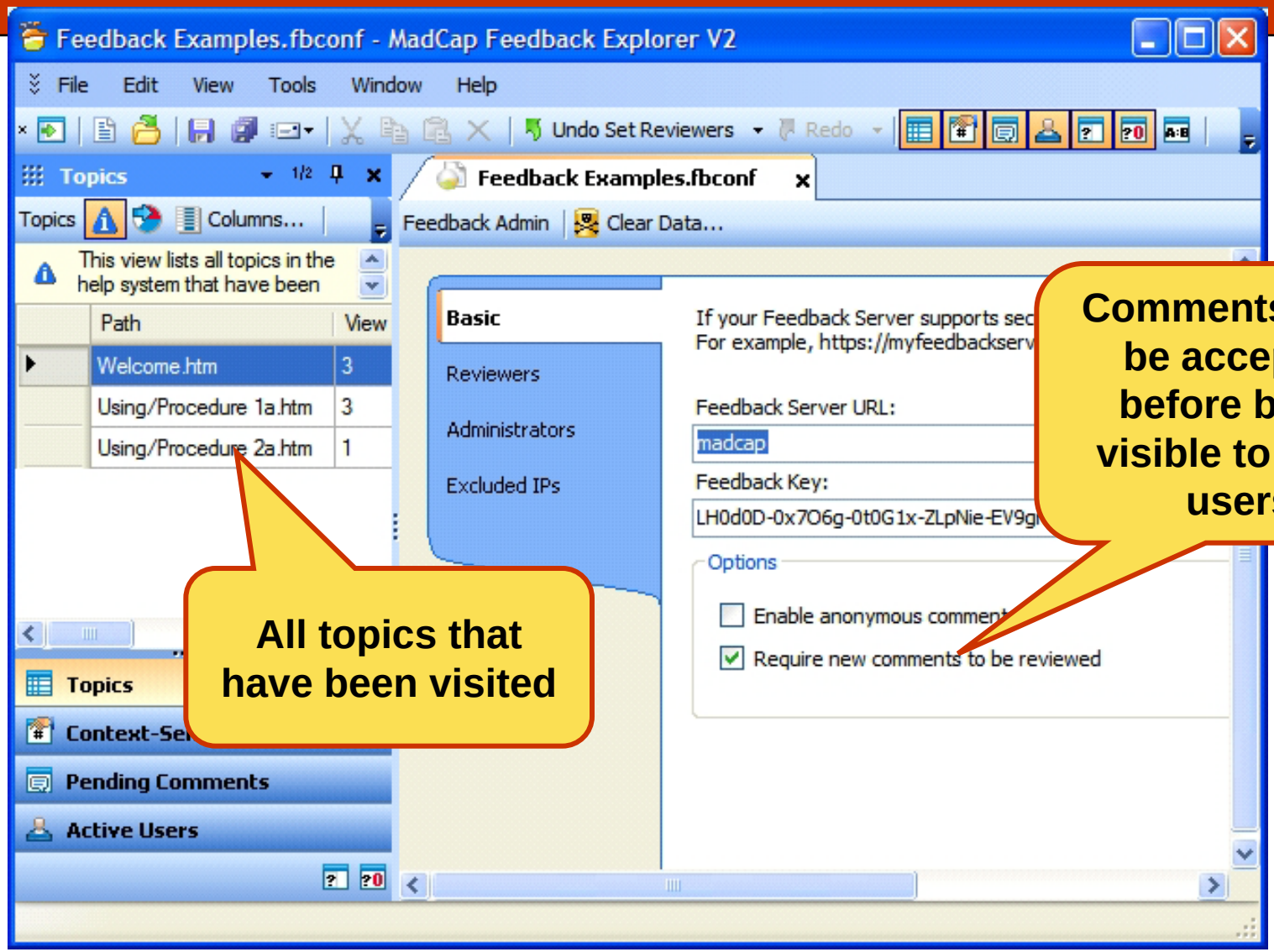
MadCap Flare: Feedback Server/Service

- Which Help formats are supported?
  - DotNet Help, HTML Help, WebHelp, WebHelp Plus, WebHelp AIR
- What do you (the Help author) need?
  - Either MadCap Feedback Server + Microsoft SQL Server Standard or Express
  - Or hosted MadCap Feedback Service
- What do your users need?
  - No additional requirements
- Cost?
  License fee for each Help system

Receiving feedback

- Feedback is automatically stored in an SQL database
- Email notifications can be sent out automatically to specific individuals:
  - Reviewers
  - Administrators
- Comments may be:
  - Accepted
  - Hidden
  - Discarded

Feedback Explorer



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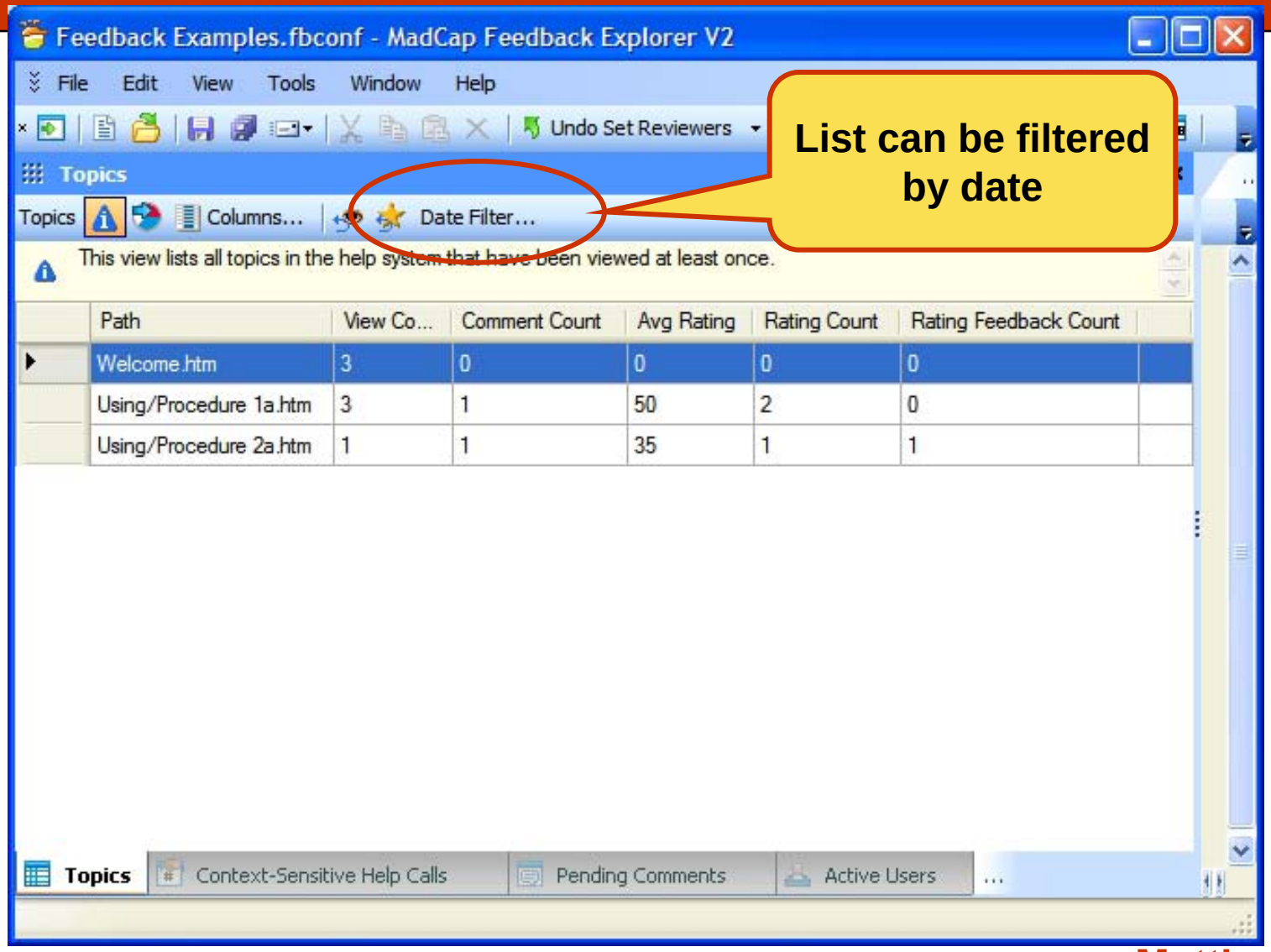
Feedback Explorer



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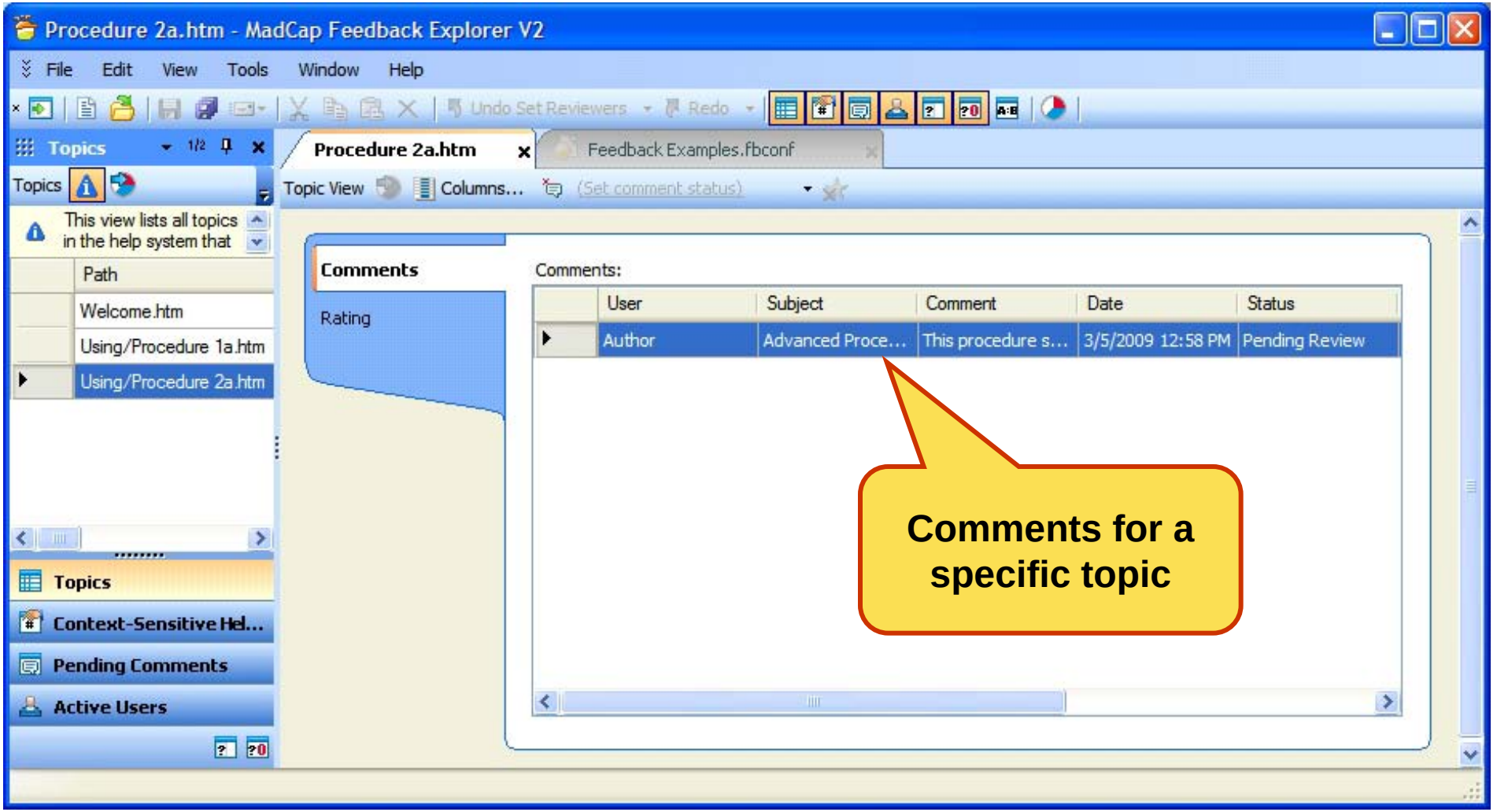
Feedback Explorer



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Feedback Explorer

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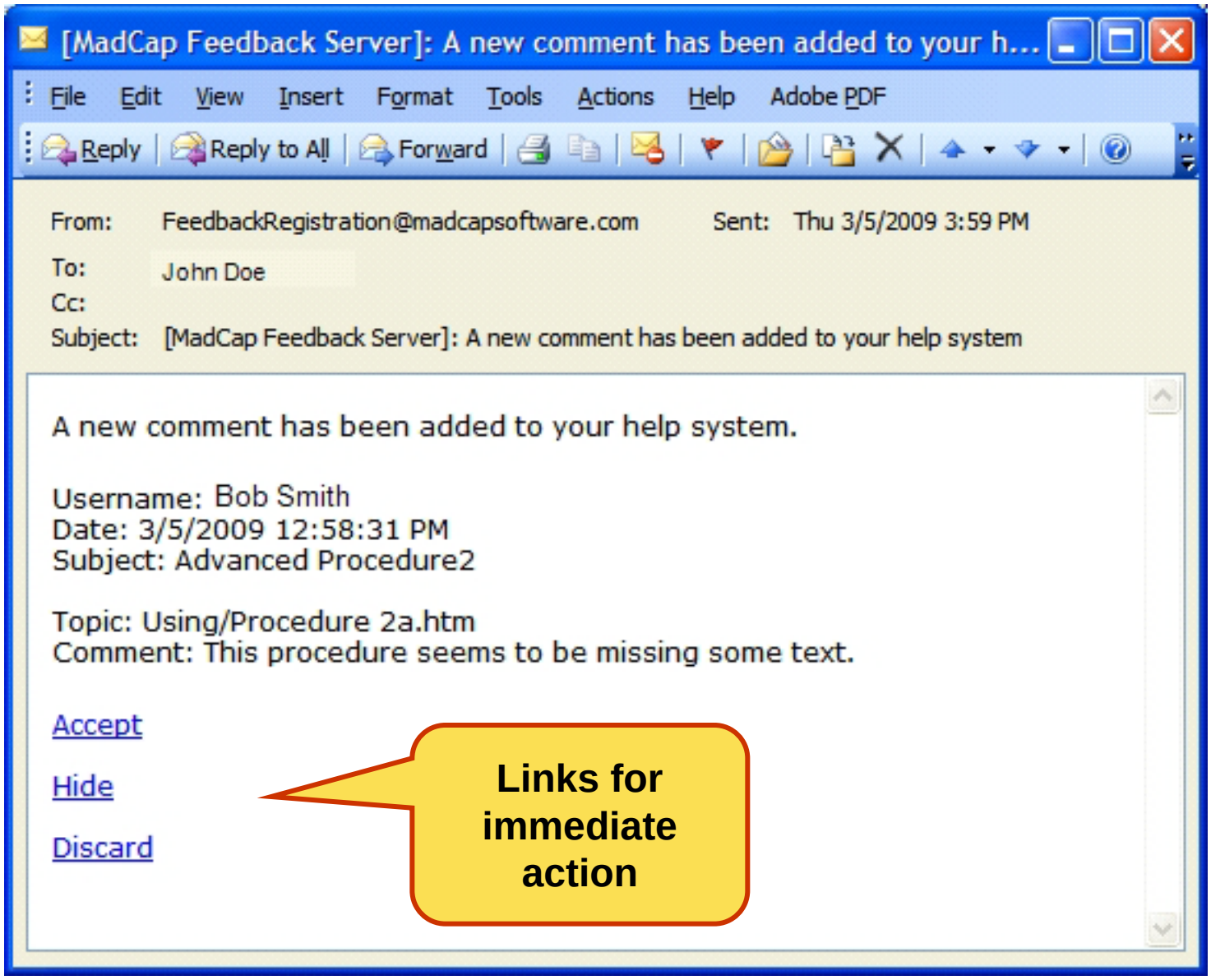
Email notification



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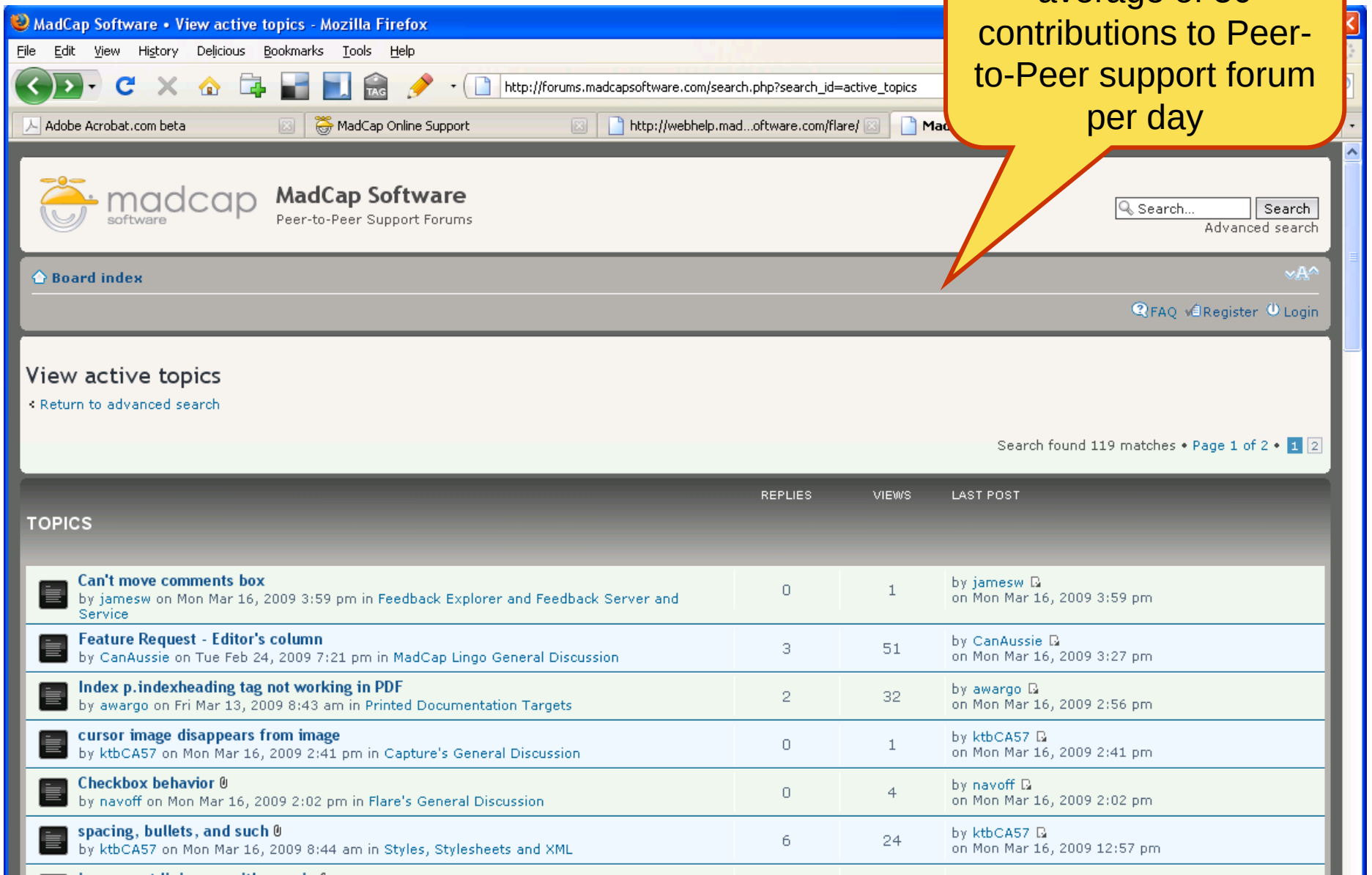
Flare Case Study

- Total number of users in thousands
- Users are Help authors!
- Only about 50 registered to provide feedback/comments
- Most topics have no comments
- Overall:
  average of less than one comment per day
- Comments are invariably constructive and positive
- Response to feedback generates goodwill and increased customer satisfaction

Flare Case Study

Compare with average of 50 contributions to Peer-to-Peer support forum per day



Conclusion from Flare case study

- Users prefer to raise questions/issues in forum rather than Help
- Feedback option in Help needs to be more prominent and compelling

Potential issues with feedback & collaboration in Help

- Connectivity
- Collecting and analyzing the data
- Acting on the data
- Responding to contributors

Questions?

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