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PowerXEditor Eases Online Collaborative Authoring and Workflow

By [Rahel Bailie](#), special to The Content Wrangler



As the market develops for XML tools that work for a growing number of user types in a variety of industries, we are starting to see creative products come on the market. One need that is becoming more common is for the average business author – that is, someone who is not a technical writer and hasn't studied the craft of writing – to create documents that validate to an [XML DTD](#).

The difference between the needs of the typical business user differs vastly from those in the technical production environment. Technical writers and developers want to be exposed to the XML. The ability to see what's happening behind the curtain, so to speak, allows authors to control the tagging and ensure that whatever they create works for their readers as well as creates [valid XML](#). The complexity of the content, when taking into account things like [conditional text](#), [variables](#), and [multi-channel publishing](#) outputs, makes the exposure to the [XML tags](#) and elements critical.

In the business world, exposure to the XML is not necessarily a welcome strategy. Authors who may be subject matters experts in law, medicine, science, or business may not even know what XML stands, let alone want to learn how to use it. Their needs are to create content that conforms to a documentation standard, such as the [APA guidelines](#). They want to concentrate on the content, not on the form. Yet, the organization needs valid XML documentation in order to publish, whether that means submitting the content to academic journals, or stream the content into their own publication software.

[Aptara Inc.](#) has developed [PowerXEditor](#), a full XML editor complete with [workflow](#), to address exactly this conundrum. The company, based in Falls Church, Virginia, created an XML editor that has balanced the needs of the non-technical author with the need to have valid XML output for the publishing needs of their organization. Their editor protects the users from the complicated side of XML, thus preventing distractions from the authoring process, while ensuring that the content they create can be validated against the organization's DTD.

PowerXEditor is part of the [PowerSuite](#) of tools, which provides an online authoring environment that allows non-technical authors to create their material online and submit it directly into the publishing process. The built-in workflow sends completed work to an editor for review and comment, and lets the editor either return an article to the author for further polishing, or to approve it and automatically add the article to a bank of approved content.

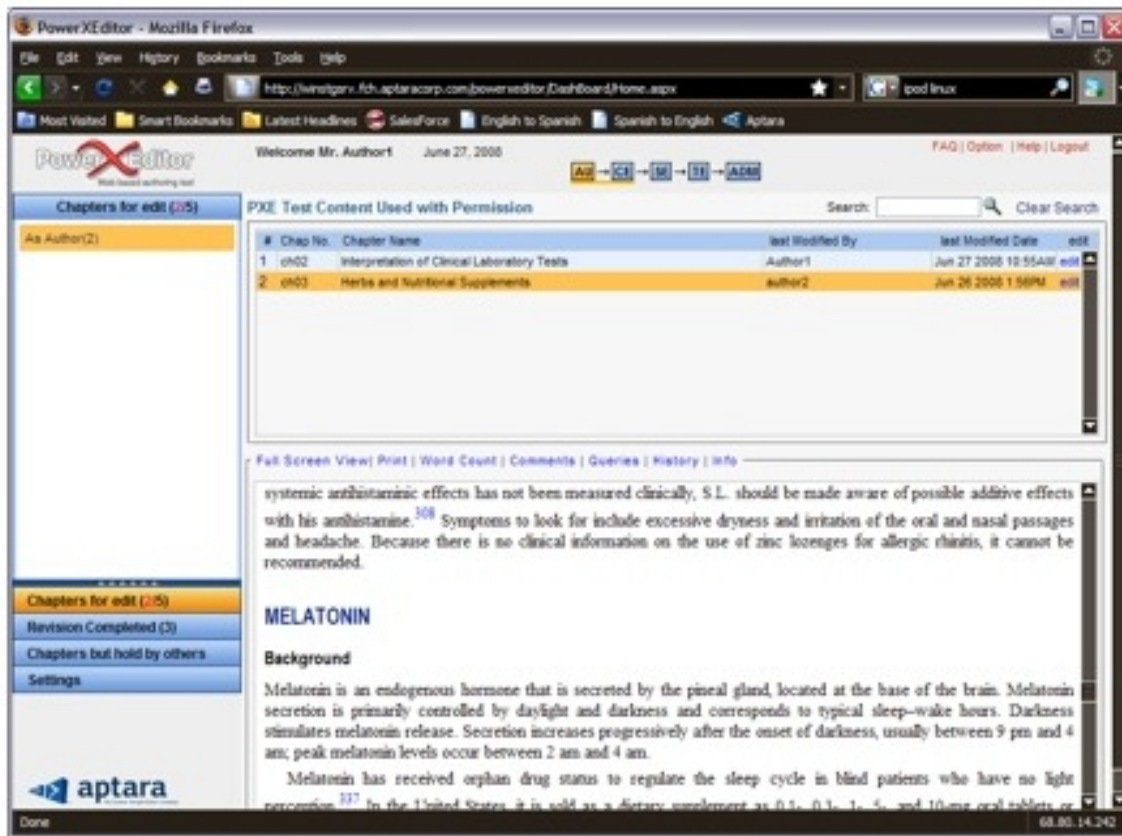
XML advocates will undoubtedly ask how valid XML can be created, when the author isn't exposed to the underlying rules of the DTD. This is handled in PowerXEditor by relaxing the rules for the writers. During the writing process, authors can work much like they do in a word processor. The key differences involve protecting the XML structure by disallowing functions such as adding a text box, or by limiting the copy-and-paste function to plain text. However, most of the menu bar items function much the same as an online text editor.

For example, during the creative process, a writer might create a list with only one bullet item, then return to the article later to add more bullet points. Or perhaps the writer adds a citation that doesn't conform to the APA standard notation. The editing tool allows the writer to work, uninterrupted by error messages, until the writer decides the article is complete. For authors, completion is when they send their content in to the editors who will review and approve their work, or re-route the work back to the writers for further polishing.

After the content has been approved, and as the content is published, the XML is then validated. Any references are resolved, citations made to conform to the publication standard, figures properly labeled, and other anomalies fixed, in an automated process, by the software. The automated validation process ensures that the content conforms to the organization's DTD.

According to Aptara, about 95% or more of the validation decisions involved with relaxing the XML for authors are discovered and repaired by the parser and heuristics within the application. Aptara technicians intervene in the remaining cases where a rule cannot be resolved by the application, as part of the customer support services offered as part of the standard support package.

Using role-based permissions, PowerXEditor controls the writing environment, from the login and dashboard, right through the process. The dashboards differ by role, giving writers, reviewers, and administrators separate sets of controls designed for them.



The PowerXEditor authoring tool is meant for use in publishing environments where writing is more than an occasional activity. For an organization to invest in software that unifies the tasks of authoring with workflow that takes that content through its review/revision and approval stages, the writing is likely high-value content that is published to strict standards, and involves authors who are subject matter experts (SME), and a publishing process that includes roles such as editors, art directors, and so on.

The product contains the type of workflow capabilities that one would expect in a product with this robustness. The workflow is configured by Aptara, with certain functions remaining configurable by the administrator. This builds in certain workflow flexibility, such as skipping a step or re-routing an article to someone not usually in the sign-off loop. The Administrator has access to a number of options usually associated with a content management system (CMS); when integrated with a CMS, these settings are controlled directly by the CMS.

Workflow

Role:

Auto signoff Yes No

Allow signoff Yes

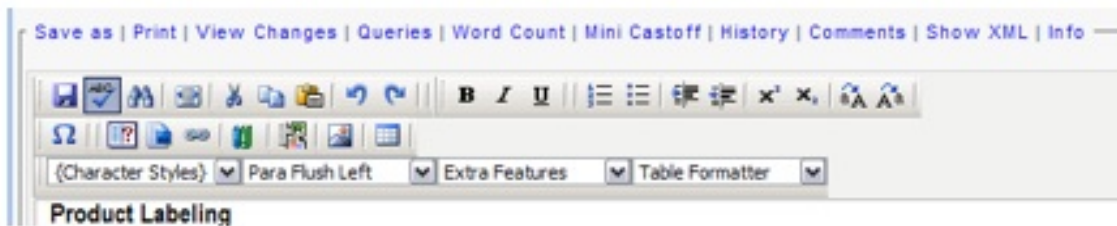
Allow signover Yes

Allow remand Yes No

Gets Signoff notification Yes No

#	Role	Auto Sign-off	Sign-off	Remand	Sign over	Sign-off Notification
1	Author	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
2	Copy Editor	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
3	Senior Editor	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Technical Editor	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
5	Administrator	No	No	Yes	Yes	No

The [.NET framework](#), combined with the power of [AJAX](#) and [Java](#), means that the browser-based application is cross-platform and cross-browser compatible. There is no software to download or install, and the controls are simple enough for any author to quickly learn. The content remains format-neutral – in other words, in XML – so there are none of the barriers posed by proprietary systems. PowerXEditor can integrate with a content management system or other workflow system through its [application programming interface](#). Though a Microsoft SQL database controls content and workflow, the XML editor can be integrated with other systems.



The product is meant for multiple publishing channels, with a strong supports built in for publishers of print. In addition to standard features such as word count, PowerXEditor feeds high-end composition from [InDesign](#) and [Quark](#) to [LaTeX](#). Its mini-castoff calculator provides a much more accurate idea of page layout restrictions early on, supporting editorial staff in their decisions about how to judge the amount of content in relation to the available number of pages.

Mini CastOff

Specs

Text Area: Text Size: Text Leading:

Text Line per Page: No. of Character per lines in the typeset page:

Leading of Text: Table Leading: Table Size:

Expected typeset pages

No. of Pages for Character : 23.3
 No. of Pages for Heading : 1.8
 No. of Pages for Table : 6.5
 No. of Pages for Figure : 4
 Total No. of Page : 34.6

For more information about PowerXEditor or the entire Aptara PowerSuite, contact one of the Aptara offices, at <http://www.aptaracorp.com>, or contact them at info@aptaracorp.com.

About Rahel Bailie

[Rahel Bailie](#) helps content-driven companies create and better manage their communication strategies. Her firm, [Intentional Design](#), serves clients in and around North America and Europe. Rahel is a popular presenter at content industry conferences, is a frequent contributor to trade and industry publications, and leads several online discussion groups, including [Content Convergence](#). Contact Rahel [via email](#) or via telephone at +1 604-837-0034.