An Oracle White Paper
September 2011

Putting the User into Oracle Fusion Applications
User Assistance
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Executive Overview

Bringing a superb user experience to life where it matters—in the workplace—requires equally great user assistance.

User assistance is defined in broad terms as anything that helps users complete their tasks. In Oracle Fusion Applications, user assistance takes the form of help embedded in application pages, searchable help on a dedicated site, and messages that appear to users to help them solve their problems.

User assistance impacts user acceptance and adoption rates of new releases, can reduce internal support costs, and can improve the overall user experience. User assistance is an integral part of how applications users complete tasks productively and easily. Understanding users is where the Oracle Fusion Applications user assistance design begins.

Introduction

Great user assistance means understanding users. The Oracle Applications User Experience (Applications UX) team's user-centered research and design process for Oracle Fusion Applications delivers a completely integrated user assistance solution that accurately reflects how applications users work. These users—not technical writers or software developers—have set the direction for the user assistance.
A Shift in the User Assistance Paradigm

Traditional design of enterprise applications user assistance often leaves users with siloed information that is incomplete, inconsistent, and difficult to access when it’s needed. Images of large printed manuals gathering dust on shelves, hostile error messages, and illusive answers in a cumbersome help system come to mind. One of the problems with this type of user assistance is that it is external to the overall user experience. In this model, users must disrupt their tasks to access user assistance, taking their energies and focus away from the tasks at hand and reducing productivity. And all too often, they cannot find the information that they seek.

Oracle Fusion Applications user assistance is a paradigm shift in enterprise applications user assistance. Oracle Fusion Applications user assistance is concise, contextual, and offers a complete solution within the user experience. Rather than reams of documentation or difficult-to-navigate pages of text, Oracle Fusion Applications embeds user assistance within its applications to provide users with highly contextual, focused information that’s relevant to the tasks at hand.

Applying Science to User Assistance

When creating Oracle Fusion Applications user assistance, the Applications UX team used a state-of-the-art, scientific research process. The team talked with and observed thousands of users worldwide to find out when, how, and why they seek help from their applications—or from each other—to complete their work.

Seeking answers and insight, the Applications UX team employed the full range of modern usability techniques both remotely and in usability laboratories: surveys, observation, productivity analysis of task completion efforts, and eye-tracking technology. The team researched onsite customer activities, analyzed user profiles and business processes, conducted in-depth usability studies, and tested prototypes and live applications with real tasks. This iterative user-centered design process was refined in usability engagements with customers at conferences worldwide and validated with global pre-general availability (GA) sessions for customers and partners. At Collaborate 2011, users said their teams would really love the new user assistance embedded right in the application, no longer having to look through 90 page documents to find what they are looking for.

The result: a new standard of enterprise applications user assistance. The reaction from users: an authentic anticipatory excitement atypical of user assistance in the enterprise applications space.
User Assistance Design Patterns

Reflecting a new standard in design for Oracle Fusion Applications user experience, design patterns were also used in user assistance to bring the requirements artfully to life in the enterprise applications space like never before. User experience professionals, information developers, and support teams carefully designed and validated these patterns. And feedback from user testing refined the patterns before finalization, right down to the size and shape of icons used for the user assistance.

All Oracle Fusion Applications user assistance patterns integrate with each other to form an encompassing, layered pattern library of solutions for user information requirements. Applied during the application life cycle design phase, the library approach means there are no overlaps or gaps between embedded help, messages, or online help, thus enhancing the just-in-time, right-when-you-need-it, only-when-you-need-it approach to user assistance.

Oracle Fusion Applications User Assistance: A Complete Solution

Oracle Fusion Applications comes with the following user assistance:

- Embedded help
- Messages
- Oracle Fusion Applications Help

Embedded Help

Embedded help is contextual, concise, user interface-based assistance (Fig.1). Help is right on the screen, assisting users to complete their tasks without ever having to leave the page, resulting in a more productive and satisfactory experience.

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Five different types of embedded help are provided.

**TABLE 1. EMBEDDED HELP TYPES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>USAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Static Instruction Text</td>
<td>Text that explains to users the primary way to use a page, section, or subsection of a page. Used only on pages where typical users may fail to perform a task unassisted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Field Help Note</td>
<td>Note window text that tells users what data to enter in a field and how that data is used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminology Definition</td>
<td>Hover text that defines the meaning of user interface component labels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bubble Help</td>
<td>Hover text that tells what actions users can take on links or buttons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Assistance Popup</td>
<td>Brief dialog-based text that explains context, tasks, tools, or tips on pages or regions. The user assistance popup also enables users to access links to contextual help topics in Oracle Fusion Applications Help.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Messages**

Messages smooth the flow of work for users by displaying well-timed information in the user interface, communicating in plain language with users as they work. Messages are about more than errors. Here are the five different types of provided messages.
TABLE 1. MESSAGE TYPES AND USAGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>USAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>Tells users about any data or action performed that violates a business, user interface, or formatting rule. Explains how to correct the error. Tells users about application performance issues and creates incidents for the help desk automatically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning</td>
<td>Alerts users about the important consequences of the data that they enter or impending actions that may have serious consequences before they proceed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Informs users about changes in the application, page status, or business objects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing</td>
<td>Tells users that the requested action or process is in progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmation</td>
<td>Lets users know when an action or process that they or the application requested has completed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Oracle Fusion Applications error messages are a form of customer support. Users are no longer instructed to “contact their system administrator” when something goes wrong. Instead, the messaging solution integrates with an incident creation framework that automatically informs help desks about any issues that users cannot resolve themselves, while capturing all the application and diagnostic information in the background.

**Oracle Fusion Applications Help**

Nonembedded help is delivered to customers using Oracle Fusion Applications Help (Fig.2), which is a context-sensitive, fully searchable portal available in either hosted or on-premises installation options. Oracle Fusion Applications Help is accessed from within the application using a user assistance popup, help menu, or Search field. Oracle Fusion Applications Help can also be opened directly in its own browser window.
Putting the User into Oracle Fusion Applications User Assistance

Here are the provided nonembedded help types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>USAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)</td>
<td>FAQ help expedites task completion. FAQs provide specific question and answer-style information about task completion activities, explanations of application functionality, and performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>Conceptual help explains business or application contextual information for actions performed by users so that they quickly make the best decisions, work more productively, and get the best from the application for their roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Reference help provides structured administrative, technical, or functional information used in the application implementation, configuration, and maintenance stages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Example help brings to life information about how users can obtain desired task or business results. Real-world examples or possible scenarios tell users how to get the most from their application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations</td>
<td>Recorded User Productivity Kit (UPK) demonstrations show and tell users about key features and explain tasks or procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process Flows</td>
<td>Flow charts and descriptions explain the roles of participants and the steps involved in enterprise business processes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
User Assistance That Works the Way Users Do

Oracle Fusion Applications user assistance integrates with the user interface to provide a seamless user experience of contextual, relevant, and concise task completion information exactly when and where users need that information.

User Assistance That Is Contextual

To be productive, applications users no longer need distract themselves from real work by flicking through unwieldy printed manuals on their desks to try and find answers to their questions.

Oracle Fusion Applications provides a range of user assistance in context, enabling users to stay focused on the tasks at hand. When users need assistance, they can call on popup dialog boxes that provide information without the users ever having to leave the pages on which they are working. They can use internet searches and read the results online. They can use collaborative social media and increasingly rich sources of multimedia know-how (such as online demonstrations and video) and real examples to work as a community with peers and managers who are willing to create and share their knowledge and experiences—avoiding the need to leave the application to use their phones or email systems to obtain information.

User Assistance That Helps Users Complete Their Tasks

Oracle Fusion Applications user assistance is not designed as an afterthought, but as part of the overall task solution provided by the user interface itself. Information development professionals design Oracle Fusion Applications embedded help as part of the overall user interface. This help is carefully integrated with the page design, subtly assisting users to complete tasks only if and when the assistance is necessary.

User Assistance That Increases Productivity

Oracle Fusion Applications user assistance anticipates the need for assistance and when needed tells users how to complete tasks. The help leverages what is obvious from the intuitive, user-friendly interface. The help does not describe what users see on their screens.

The user assistance provides the right “how-to” productivity information when needed. Oracle Fusion Applications Help, for example, contains recorded Oracle User Productivity Kit (UPK) demonstrations of tasks (Fig 3); worked, real-world example topics; and frequently asked questions
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(FAQs) — all as part of a design focus that is expected to deliver an average increase of 60 percent in user productivity over existing applications.

![Oracle Fusion Applications interface](image)

**Figure 3.** UPK demonstrations enables users to learn by seeing and hearing step-by-step instructions.

User Assistance That Is Readily Available

The Oracle Fusion Applications user assistance design process is based on real-world, Oracle-validated business process and task analysis. The user assistance provides the right amount of information at the right level. Concisely written, task-based information is organized into business activities and processes

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so that users have context for the assistance that’s vital to their understanding in the enterprise environment.

For example, users can access relevant FAQ help topics from a user assistance popup (Fig. 4). The popup provides not only an FAQ about the queried object but also Oracle Fusion Applications Help FAQs relevant to the business process.

![User Assistance Popup](image)

Figure 4. Individual FAQ help topics and links to related task-based topics in Oracle Fusion Applications Help are available from popups.

User Assistance That Is Consistent Across Types

Oracle Fusion Applications user assistance has the same look and feel as the application itself. Consistent placement, presentation, and behavior of common help types result in a cohesive experience and shorten the time that it takes users to become familiar with the application.

Oracle has made a strategic investment in the quality of the textual information in Oracle Fusion Applications. A comprehensive terminology management and grammar and style quality-assurance
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The combination of user assistance types in Oracle Fusion Applications means that users are able to more quickly adopt our applications and that they require little if any additional on-the-job training. For example, the results-driven audio-visual UPK recordings within the context of tasks mean that users can get up and running quickly, delivering immediate productivity gains.

For telling insight into the overall quality of Oracle Fusion Applications, users need look no further than the error messages⁴ (Fig. 5). Gone are the days of enterprise applications messages being written by developers in convoluted, intimidating technical language.

In Oracle Fusion Applications, information development professionals apply information quality guidelines consistently across applications and review all message text. All messages have a consistent look and feel according to each message type, and each message is written in plain language, communicating application responses accurately so that users can immediately resolve any issues themselves.

Figure 5. Oracle Fusion Applications error messages tell users the causes of issues and what actions they must take so that they can proceed quickly.

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User Assistance That Is Tailored to Your Enterprise

Research shows that enterprise applications are widely customized\(^5\) and that Oracle Fusion Applications users will also tailor user assistance to their needs if the tools provided make it easy.

In Oracle Fusion Applications, users can easily add their own user assistance content, such as workplace examples, corporate policies, or corporate procedures—again within the context of the tasks at hand. For example, Oracle Fusion Applications Help enables users with the right security privileges to add user-generated content of all media types or to edit the Oracle-provided help topics from a page-based user assistance popup, without leaving the task flow.

![Manage Custom Help](image)

Figure 6. Users can quickly add their own user assistance content, in context, using the manage custom help capability.

Embedded help can also be easily customized and extended using Oracle JDeveloper tools, while error messages can be customized and extended using JDeveloper and application administrator tools available as part of the functional setup.

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User Assistance That Encourages Collaboration

Research shows that enterprise applications users like to help each other, often turning to coworker expertise as the first line of user assistance.

Oracle Fusion Applications' use of Oracle WebCenter middleware technology enables users to embrace the task completion collaboration opportunities around them. Users cooperate using user assistance components like email, moderated online forums, tagging, and ratings to leverage their own knowledge, sharing productivity tips, insights, and experiences. For example, users rate content in the Oracle Fusion Applications Help or discuss a topic, adding additional value.

![Image of User Assistance Features](image_url)

**Figure 7.** Users can rate help topics and also contribute to moderated discussions around topics.

User Assistance That Is Easily Searched and Read Online

Oracle Fusion Applications Help caters to today’s technically savvy users who are familiar with searching for solutions online and provides them with multiple ways to search for help information. For example, users can search by keyword (entered directly or by autosuggest), by product, or by functional setup hierarchy from the global search region of the user interface or directly in Oracle Fusion Applications Help.

Weighted search results return relevant titles with concisely written summaries that are easily consumed online and provide information for users about the business context. Topic titles for each help type are written using consistent formatting and structure.
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Figure 8. Search results are relevant and easy to scan online, meaning users can easily explore topics of interest in more detail.

For those functional or technical users who want to refer to complete manuals, the same help content is available in both HTML and PDF versions.

Conclusion

Enterprises state that the biggest barrier to receiving the expected benefits of new software is user acceptance and adoption⁶, ranking much higher than change management or even software functionality itself. Oracle Fusion Applications user assistance gives users the help that is relevant to what they are doing and that they need to complete their tasks in context, thus increasing application adoption speed and getting users up and running on applications more quickly.

Your users will appreciate the ability to help themselves and each other using well-accepted collaboration tools, and your enterprise will benefit by putting the maintenance of help where it belongs—in the hands of privileged business users and internal support personnel and not with a

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costly IT customization project. Oracle Fusion Applications user assistance gives users what they want: the ability to quickly and efficiently solve their problems and proceed with their work.