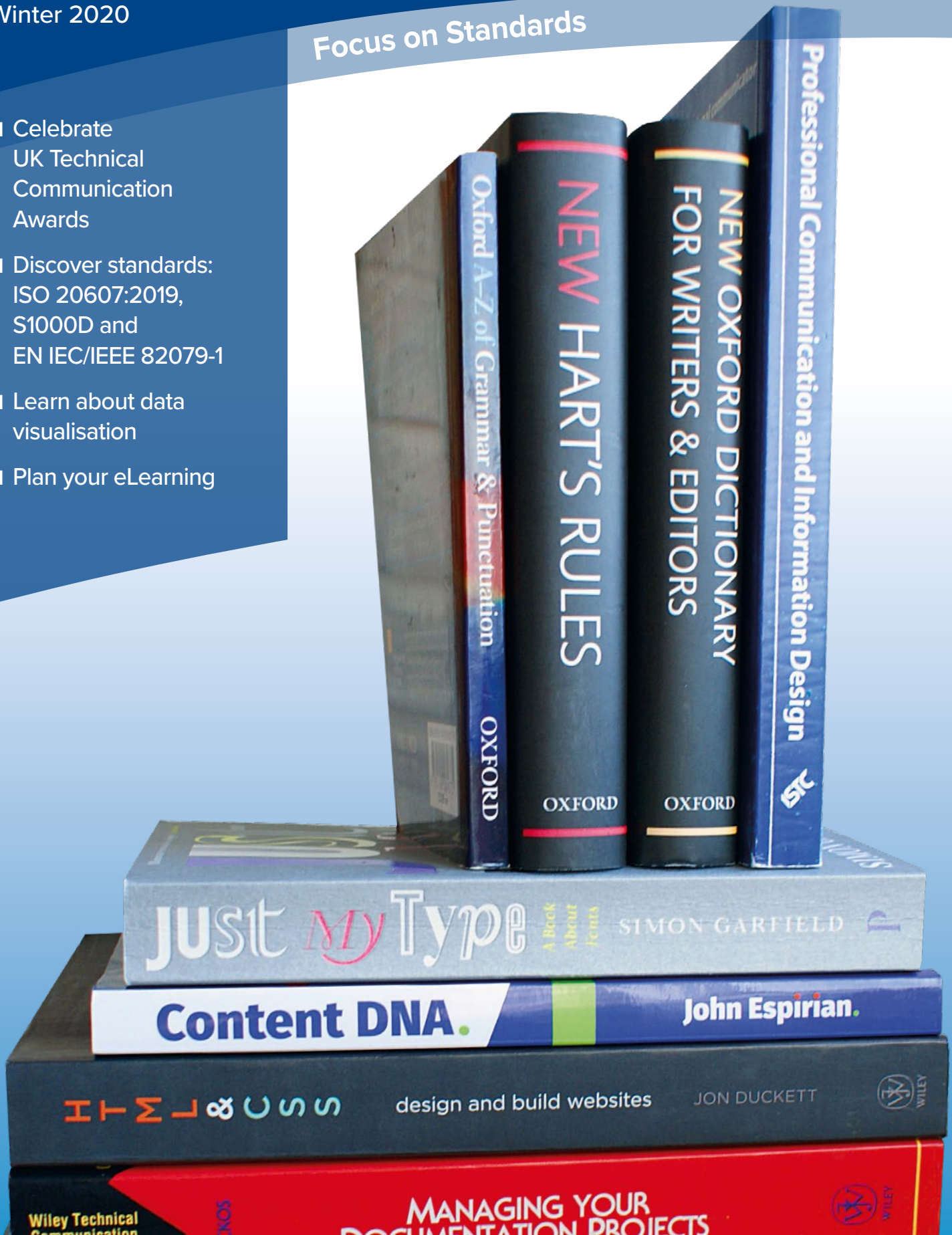# Communicator

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Spirit Software wins an award

Amanda Maher explains how the two companies collaborated to produce a successful project for the iHASCO knowledge base.

iHASCO are an eLearning provider specialising in Health and Safety and HR compliance. Their Learning Management System (LMS) has delivered over 5 million training sessions to businesses across the UK and Europe.

The knowledge base for their LMS had evolved over time with many different contributors and had lost the confidence of both customers and support staff. So iHASCO connected with Spirit Software for technical authoring expertise, to help them create an accurate and professional knowledge base that would provide their customers with the information they needed, and reduce unnecessary calls to the customer support team.

Spirit Software specialises in providing technical authoring and solutions architecture services in diverse industries from automotive to education.

My first meeting was with Nathan Pitman, Managing Director, and Amanda Lowndes, Customer Support Manager, at iHASCO's offices in Bracknell where we discussed the issue in more depth. I suggested putting forward a proposal for the project after more investigation. iHASCO gave me access to a test account in the LMS and subject matter experts (SMEs) in the sales and support departments to get answers to any questions.

The project

With most software, there are many routes a user can take to do a task, as I learned about the LMS, I mapped out all the possible routes to tasks using Visio. This map was compared to the current knowledge base and helped to identify any gaps. I also ran user scenarios under the test account and compared results with current help articles.

The investigation showed that the current knowledge base content could not be recycled, and new help content was needed. The existing knowledge base was managed using Help Scout; a helpdesk software product which includes a knowledge base content management system (CMS) called Help Scout Docs.

Time constraints meant that there was no opportunity to contact end

Figure 1.
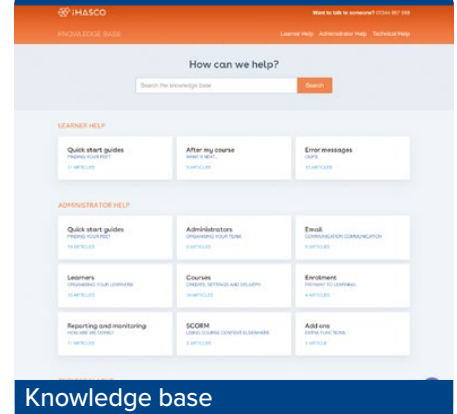
Knowledge base

users, however, Amanda Lowndes was incredibly knowledgeable in helping to identify the three different audience types:
1. LMS learners
2. LMS administrators
3. Technical staff.
Her input helped me to create user stories, user journeys and specific user goals that were kept at the forefront of the design process.

The entire project was completed online and we agreed to use Google Docs to manage the three draft

Amanda Maher with her award

> *iHASCO Knowledge Base is an accomplished entry providing information for three user types: learner, administrator and technical support staff. The entry is organised in such that it is always obvious who the text is intended for. There is a good 'look and feel' and the navigation is clear and consistent. Extensive and effective background work really shows through in the end product.*

stages. Communication between the team was via email, phone, Google Docs and Zoom. The project was planned and managed using Excel. To get a clear understanding of some processes I created flowcharts using Visio. For example, the authentication process had some legacy options and flowcharts mapped accurately what each type of user would experience.

To make effective use of time and resources, the project was split into two streams:

1. Create the new knowledge base structure within Help Scout Docs to hold the new content. Convert the signed off content into HTML to populate the knowledge base.
2. Write the new topics, present to SMEs for three stages of review and sign off.

The design used topic-based content, this meant limiting the content to tasks and concepts. We also identified a need for Quick Start guides for new users. The benefits of this approach include potential content reuse.

The main scheduling constraint was the LMS development cycle. The next update was due to be released at the end of March 2020 and iHASCO wanted to launch the new knowledge base at the same time. Understandably, the COVID-19 restrictions delayed those plans.

Figure 2.

Knowledge base conceptual help
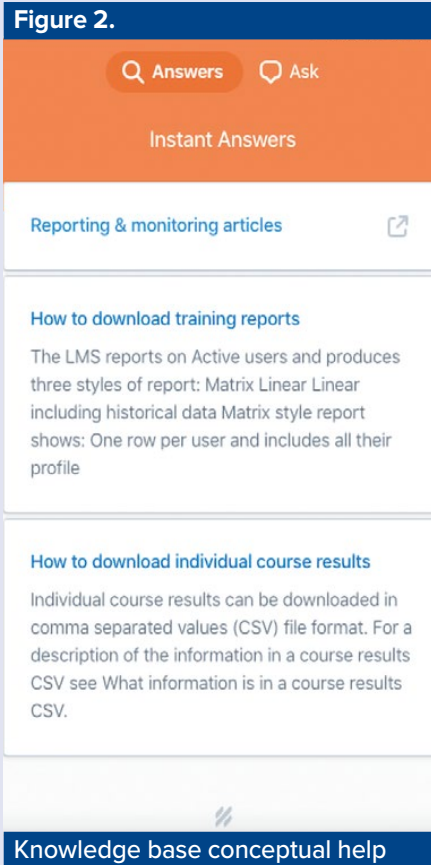
When all the content was completed, the final task was to apply the application branding to the knowledge base to create a seamless link to the LMS, before launching successfully in early April 2020.

The result

Nathan Pitman, Managing Director of iHASCO said "The impact of having accurate and up to date help content has been huge." The knowledge base (Figure 1) has become a single point of reference on the LMS, and resulted in

- Clients solving more issues themselves
- A confident customer support team
- A reference point for the Sales teams.

An unexpected benefit has been the ability to deliver instant answers (Figure 2) to users before they start a live chat. We can write rules that promote location-specific help topics that users can see without leaving the application.

As we reached completion it became evident that it would be an ideal project to put forward for the TCUK 2020 awards. Although putting my work forward for scrutiny was a daunting prospect, the feedback from the judges and the whole experience has been invaluable. In fact, the iHASCO team and I are already planning improvements to the knowledge base and hope to be back in 2021. ∎

Amanda Maher MISTC

www.spiritsoftware.co.uk