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# When Customers Hate Help – And What We Do About It

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# When Help Wasn't Help

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- With the best intentions, we made the wrong choice
- We didn't check with the users first
  - What's their work environment?
  - How do they use software?
  - How do they use documentation?

# The saga begins

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- Cadence Design Systems, Electronic Design Automation software supplier
  - Decided to port PCB tools to NT
  - Decided that users expected WinHelp (HyperHelp for UNIX users)

PCB = Printed Circuit Board

# Who were the users?

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- PCB design software users
  - Small consultants and large design houses
  - Work in teams of ~2 - 10 per design
- Environment
  - Large users on UNIX; small users on PC
  - Use other Cadence tools with PCB tools
  - Each user must use a license to run the software

# The old versus the new

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- Previous software documentation
  - An online library of books
  - Search available for entire library
  - Ran standalone or called from software

# The old versus the new

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- New WinHelp/HyperHelp documentation
  - Several compiled Help systems
  - Search available per individual Help system
  - Built into the software

# What they said

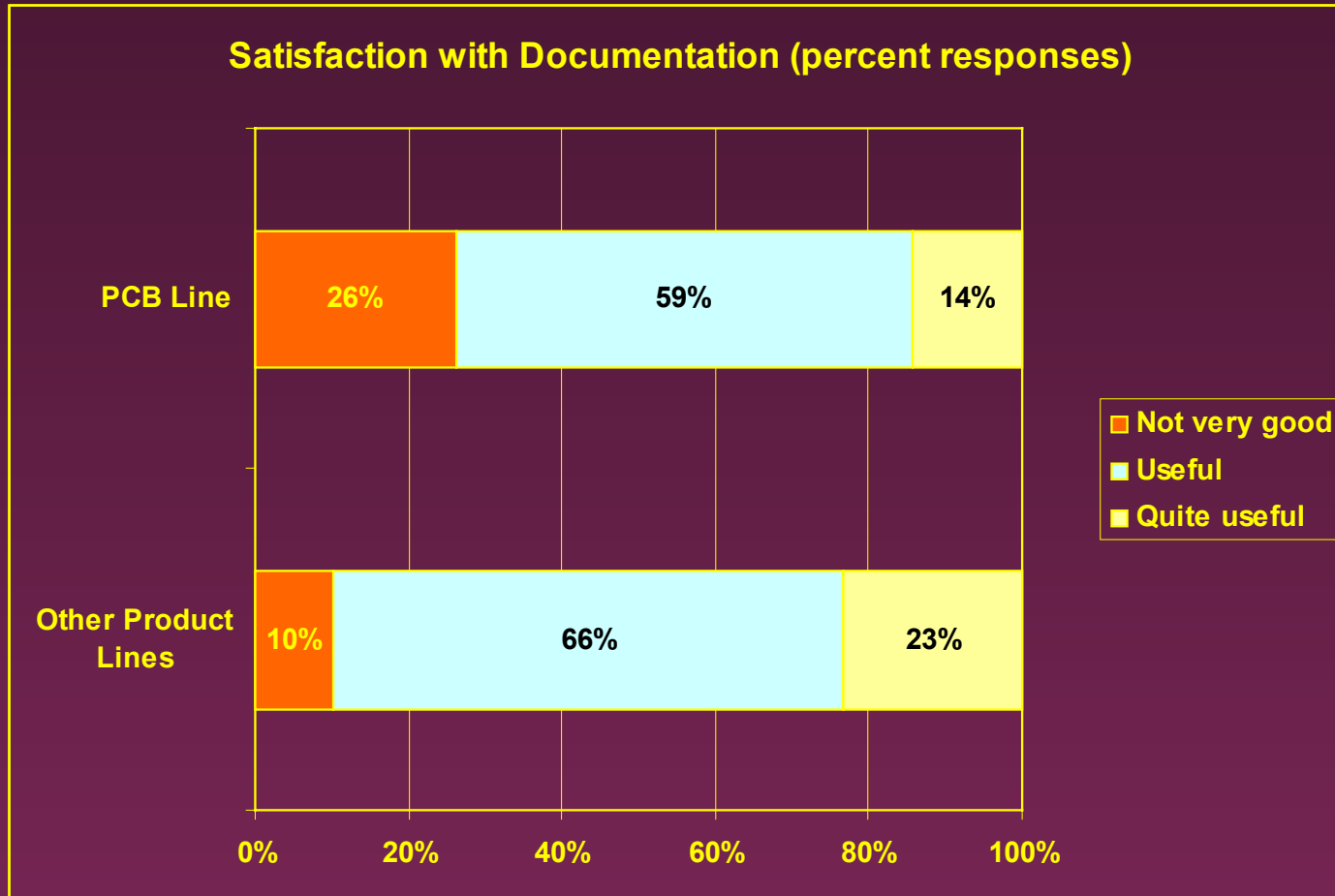
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*Quality of information in WinHelp is not  
up to the [previous] standard*

*WinHelp is too shallow, clumsy ...  
slow and difficult navigation*

*Just because that's the way it works in  
PowerPoint doesn't mean that's  
the way it should work.*

# The numbers



# Why didn't WinHelp work?

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## Environment

- Support persons didn't want to “waste” a product license just to read Help
- Used multiple PCB tools, expected all info at the same time
- Used non-PCB tools as well, docs not available in WinHelp/HyperHelp

# Why didn't WinHelp work?

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## User's preference

- Used to comparing info between books
- Wanted to search all documents at once
- Couldn't find conceptual info when separated from procedures
- Chunked presentation frustrated them

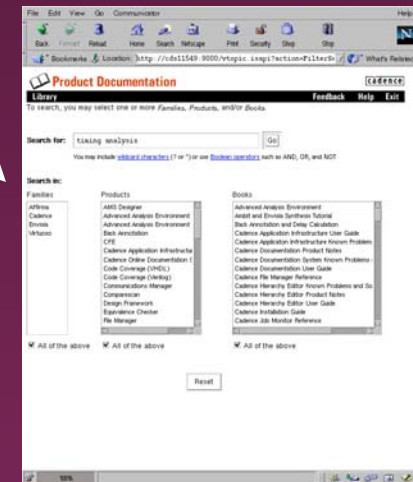
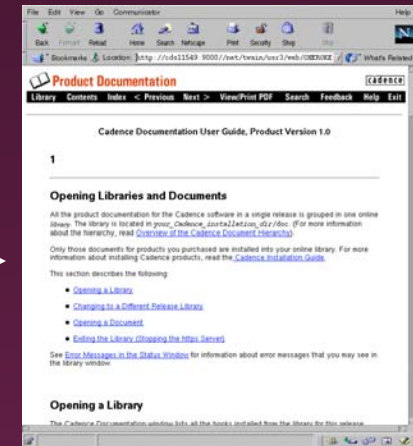
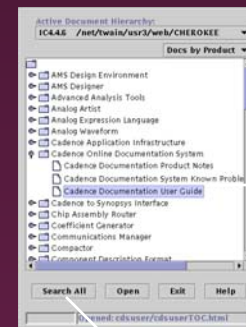
# What did we do?

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- Listened!
  - PCB users wanted their library back
  - Other users also preferred a library
  - Users preferred web browsers
- Prototyped
  - Usability tested a web-based system
  - Developed the THIRD prototype

# Web-based library

- Provide local library of HTML
- Java application for additional navigation
- Full-text Search
- API for opening docs from applications
- PDF for printing



# Did it work?

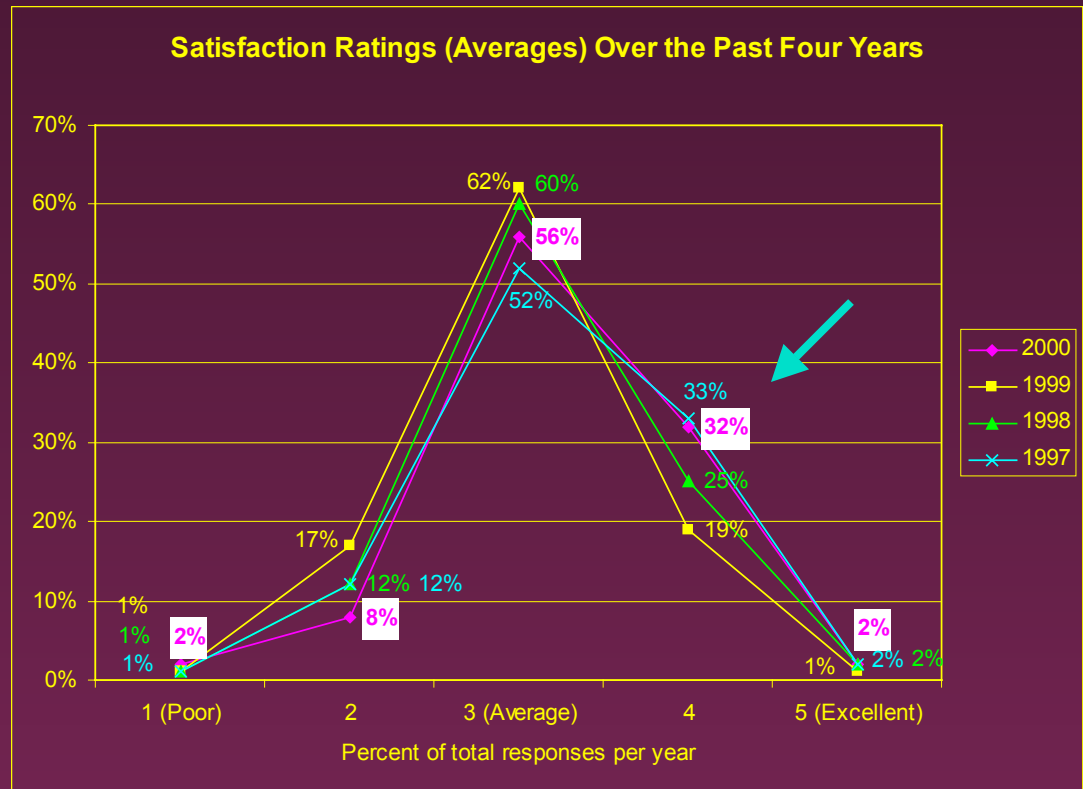
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*Thank you for listening!*

*Thank God you're going to HTML!*

# Did it work?

- Percentage of users who gave us a better-than-average rating went up for the first time in 3 years



# What else?

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- “Mine” customer support info
  - Get examples from support solutions
  - Create “frequently asked questions” docs
- Publish product docs on the web
  - Add product docs to support website
  - UI similar to what’s shipped to users
- Help to improve error messages
- Keep listening

# What's coming?

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- One-stop shopping: knowledge bases
  - Source material from support, training
  - Writers become editors
- Don't define your doc by its container
  - Help  $\neq$  WinHelp (HyperHelp, HTMLHelp ...)

*If it helps your user - it's Help!*