Transcript for Unlock the Potential of Markdown: Instantly turn Markdown files into shareable web pages with Docsify-This
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Unlock the Potential of Markdown: Instantly turn Markdown files into shareable web pages with Docsify-This. This session is with Paul Hibbits. Paul is an instructor at Simon Fraser University. Over to you Paul.

PAUL HIBBITS:
Thank you so much. Jamie. Can you just give me a quick thumbs up if everything's okay with my audio and if you can see my slides. Thank you. Perfect. Thank you so much. Welcome, everybody. Thanks for joining me today. We've got a quick session for you. I should say that I'm speaking to you this afternoon from the traditional ancestral unceded territory of the Musqueam First Nation. For today's session, I've got basically a collection of 12 URLs. I'll be sharing out a link at the end of this session with everything that you are about to see. Today will be like a demo. I'm also going to give you a brief introduction to Markdown for anybody who's not familiar with it. Why don't we jump right in.

First thing I'd like to do is give you a little overview of Markdown and then how my new open source tool, Docsify-This might be able to help you publish Markdown content faster than probably you've ever seen before. Let's take a little review for a moment about what Markdown is. Markdown is basically a markup language used to format content stored as plain text. It's similar to HTML but more simple I would say. Some reasons why you might want to use Markdown. It's system independent. It's text only, which is perfect for version control. It separates content and presentation. It's more human readable than HTML anyway. It can also contain HTML snippets. There's a very large and growing number of editor and publishing applications. You're not locked in at all into any one platform or way of doing things.

Here you can see a few examples of Markdown. For instance, if you want to use a header one element, you would just use one single number sign space and then your text. Yes, you guessed it. For a header two, you would just use two number signs. If you want to do italicized text, you would just do underline your text and then underline to mark the end of that. You can see here on this screen just a few little examples of what Markdown would look like. Publishing with Markdown. There's Markdown converters that will translate Markdown into HTML and other things like PDFs and all kinds of good stuff such as Pandoc that's quite popular in the open education and publishing area. There's static site builders like Jekyll, where you can generate an HTML website from a collection of Markdown files. But today I'm going to focus on using a tool called Docsify. I've spoken about Docsify before here with ETUG folks. Docsify is quite unique. It's a dynamic renderer. It will go directly from Markdown to web pages. You don't have to do a build process, you don't have to do really anything. It will just dynamically translate on the fly in

your browser Markdown to web pages. Docsify-This is my newest open source project and the goal of the project is to lower the barrier to the entry of Markdown publishing. It's built obviously by the name, with Docsify in the back end. It's also open source. There are many ways that you can use Docsify-This. In just a moment, I'm going to show you some demos and also of course for you to try. You can publish any Markdown page that you have as a stand-alone web page. You can visually style these pages. You can share GitHub-hosted or Codeberg-hosted or web server-hosted Markdown pages with even an optional like edit this page link. You can use the system, as I do quite a lot, to seamlessly embed constraint-free Markdown into other platforms like LMSs like Canvas or even CMS's like WordPress. You can use some URL parameters where you can match the visual style of the destination platform even better, so viewers don't really realize that they're looking at some content from another system or storage area. One key thing, we're just about to hop over to Docsify-This. One key thing about Docsify-This is the web page builder, and this gives you a fairly easy point- and-click interface to create and present web pages. By the way, what you're looking at here is a Docsify-This document. Yes, it was a great acid test to use Docsify-This in order to create the publishing guide for Docsify-This. Let's take a look.

Here is Docsify-This. Basically it will instantly turn Markdown files into web pages. That's what we're going to do right away. Here you can see in this area, your web page builder. Basically you enter in a URL or a Markdown file and instantaneously it will create a web page for you. Let's try this out. Let's take a look at this Markdown file.

Now this Markdown file happens to be hosted on GitHub. It can be hosted on different platforms like Codeberg or a web server. But in this case I'm just going to use GitHub. What I'm going to do is I'm just going to copy the URL to this Markdown file. And by the way, I should move. You can see the Markdown of this file. I'm just going to tap the Raw button, and then you can see that, yes, indeed, this is a Markdown file. I'm going to take that URL, I'm going to paste it, and tap this one button. And I've got my web page, No website to create, no server to set up. This is a responsive, mobile-friendly web page. Now that I have that web page, I can then style it with the web page builder. Perhaps I'd like for my readers to have a table of contents on the left-hand side so they can jump around to the main areas of the content. Actually, there's a great sidebar that Docsify provides, so maybe I'd like to use that instead. Maybe what I'd like to do is add some more levels of hierarchy or indexes to that sidebar to allow readers to even have more control. You'll see here that there's a few basic options, but there's a way to click Show More page appearance options. Here, for instance, I can choose to increase the level of headers in my sidebar. Now you'll see that change right away with the page. There's a lot more I could explore. You could change your font, your link colour. Basically parameters that will help you match your destination platform if you want to reuse content and other platforms. That's an example of using a GitHub Markdown file.

I could use a Codeberg Markdown file. Here it is. I'm just going to copy that URL. I'm going to go over to Docsify-This, and I'm going to paste it. And voila if all goes well.

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Yeah, we've got a Markdown file now presented as a stand-alone web page with a sidebar because it remembered all my settings from before. We've got a few more items to show you here before we wrap up. This is an example of an entire site. This is using Docsify-This. This is using a collection of Markdown files for a course.

This is my previous 363 course at SFU. You can see there's a course welcome. You can see there's a weekly materials page. You can see the sidebar breaks up the content in chunks like this. Up along the top you can see that there's a topics page.

All of this is simply a collection of Markdown files and presented by Docsify-This. Because Docsify-This, as I mentioned, can style web pages.

This is Canvas using no Canvas web pages for content, but using Docsify-This. You'll notice that now the links are blue. The font is matching the default SFU style of the Canvas content. This is actually Docsify-This content within Canvas. I can go to a modules page. Once the modules page loads up, sorry that it's a little bit slow here on the server.

There we go, I can tap on a module. And you can see here that this is content again from Docsify-This. In fact, we can give our students a little right side a table of content so they can jump to different chunks of material.

We can also look at all our readings for the course. Again, all of this content is Docsify-This. Students don't need to know that. It's just magically going to be there. One or two more quick things to show you and then we're going to maybe have a moment or two questions.

This, by the way, is a fantastic open source collaborative environment that I've recently discovered called HedgeDoc. It's like Google Docs, except it's open source that you can host on your own server and it uses Markdown. Here on the left you can see my Markdown content and on the right you can see it being previewed. Well, with Docsify-This, even if you have your own custom Instancer install of Docsify-This and change a few settings, you can have Docsify-This present HedgeDoc-based content. I'll show you how fast this is, how easy it is. Here I'm, you can see Create, Share, and Collaborate. I'm going to put three exclamation marks. Then I'm going to go over to my preview tab of my HedgeDoc site and I'm going to reload that page. There they are, the three updated exclamation marks, there's no built process, there's no delay. You edit your page collaboratively. It's version controlled and boom, it's something that you can present as a stand-alone page site or embed into other platforms. I can't believe it. Our 10 minutes is almost up.

If you're interested in Markdown, the number one place I suggest you go to is Markdownguide.org. It has some really great beginner- friendly materials on Markdown with an overview of all the syntax and lots of great examples and things like that.

Finally, here is a little collection of all the URLs that I presented today. So I'm just going to copy that. I'm going to go over to the chat, and I'm going to paste that in. That'll be a URL that you can go to whenever you want to view all the materials I just shared with you today. Probably we'll get that posted as well on the ETUG web page with the presentation of the session today. Jamie, I think I'm at 10 minutes but we've got a few minutes for questions, if there are any, that would be great. Thank you so much.

JAMIE:
Yeah, that was wonderful. I'm sure there's going to be questions because I know I have a lot of questions. That was a whirlwind. Yeah. It does leave it open for quite a few questions. Like Laura said, "There goes my whole weekend. This is so great."

PAUL:
Have fun, hope you enjoy that. Yeah. Feel free. Whatever questions you've got, I'll try to do my best.

JAMIE:
Jillian's asking, "For someone starting from scratch, how long do you think it takes to learn Markdown?"

PAUL:
The nice thing about Markdown is if you just open a text editor and you start writing some content, that's Markdown, right? So that's just going to be plain text rendered as it is. And then you might go, well maybe I'd like to put a header to title that content and that would be a number sign for a header level one, a space, and then your title. That's a Markdown content example too. That's what I like about Markdown. It's something that you can build on over time. And to be honest, I find it a lot easier to remember things rather than HTML. Like I still swear I can't recall how to create proper lists in HTML. With Markdown, it's just a dash, space, and your item. And then Markdown, dash, space, and item. Yeah, you could take your time with it and learn more as you need to. And then when you need it, you can embed HTML so you could use an I-frame. Perfect. You can even add CSS classes if you want to get really advanced. Yeah, I hope I answered that question.

JAMIE:
Yeah, I think so. Keith is asking, "What are the embedding methods?" And that's also one of my questions.

PAUL: Oh, sure. With Docsify-This, everything is at the URL level. What's really going on if you want to be a detective is whenever you style your page like with a sidebar, or you change your font family, or you change your link colour and you click Publish As a Stand-alone Web Page, you actually generate a URL with parameters. That means that is totally ready to be embedded

with an I-frame or an external URL tool. It's not requiring any kind of configure on a server or anything like that. It's designed through a URL. And because it's a URL, anything that you can put a URL into, you can display it. You could display it as a stand-alone web page. You could display it as an embedded I-frame. You could use an external URL tool with like Canvas, Moodle, I think Desire2Learn has something like that. Anywhere that you can feed a URL into, you could then present content from Docsify-This.

JAMIE:
Andrew is asking, "What are the advantages of using this over say, the WYSIWYG editor in the LMS?"

PAUL:
It really depends on your needs. For me, I find that a lot of the editors and LMSs are very labour intensive. It takes me a long time to just even get to the page in the LMS. Then the formatting and content editing is sometimes, to be honest, laborious. With Docsify-This, I choose my editor. I choose where I want to store my content, and then I simply point the LMS content container to that. You can be as advanced or basic as you want to be. Just having a file on a web server. Perfect, you can do that. But you can also host it on GitHub or Codeberg, and that gives you version control. And you can even mirror and clone content to your desktop. For my 363 course, actually on my course content is, I know this is going to sound crazy, authored on my desktop, automatically synced up to my GitHub repo and then my Canvas site reads it from that point. It doesn't need to be complex. It goes with you. If you want to keep it basic, simple, just a file on the web, perfect, you can do it. But it has a lot of flexibility because it's only text and it's very...

JAMIE:
We're at 2:30, but there's one last question. "Can you recommend any apps that support authoring and Markdown?"

PAUL:
Oh, sure thing. There's so many out there for both Mac and Windows. If you're a little bit more on the techy side, VS Code (Visual Studio Code) by Microsoft as cross platform. That's a great tool. If you're a little bit more on the word processor side of things, there's an app called Typora, and that's on Mac and Windows. Those would be my two favorites. Adam was a great editor for a long time, but then it's been discontinued. Now I think it's called Pulsar. That might be something as well, and that's open source. Literally, if you do a Google search on Markdown editors, there's going to be so many for you to take a look at and see. And again, that's one of the nice things about Markdown. You can really choose your own tool set and work with it that way.

JAMIE: Perfect, excellent. Well, thank you so much. It's very informative.

PAUL: Great, thank you so much, everybody. Take care. Thank you. Bye bye.