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magazine for international information management

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New wine, old wineskins, and content management

Does your content management strategy need a revamp?

What's your content really worth?

Insights from the Technical Content Benchmark Report

Personal branding for technical communicators

Take charge of how you are perceived as a professional tech writer


The New
Machinery Regulation:
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From the editor

The ability to communicate complex issues is what has set humankind apart for tens of thousands of years. It is what has enabled our race to coordinate our strategy for survival, organize societies, climb to the top of the food chain, conquer continents, found religions, invent engines, conduct symphony orchestras, develop microchips, and spin the World Wide Web. As the environment we had created became more and more intricate, communication had to follow suit. In order to operate the sophisticated devices and machinery that assist us in our everyday lives today, we strongly rely on professionals with highly advanced communication skills.

Technical communication is the backbone of this latest step of evolution. Technical communicators transform data and content into valuable product information, without which companies could not ensure the appropriate and safe use of products. Technical content plays a pivotal role in the success of companies today. Yet, the people behind this are often the unsung heroes on the back bench of profitable businesses. So, how can we change the image of technical communication?

"As adoption of GenAI is increasingly thrusting our content into the spotlight, we need to seize this moment and connect our work to some of the most fundamental overarching goals in our companies," write Joe Gelb and Rita Khait. In their article (from page 22) they outline their "2024 Technical Content Benchmark Report", a valuable reference for demonstrating the impact of technical content.

But what about our personal value as a professional individual and member of a team? How can we show our worth and make sure we are perceived as the experts we are? Kees van Mansom introduces the building blocks of your personal brand (from page 38).

Many of our authors at *tcworld magazine* are taking to the stage at the tcworld conference, taking place in Stuttgart, Germany, from November 5-7. You will find a reference to their presentation and information on where and when you can meet them in this issue's articles.

This year's conference will take a deep dive into how Artificial Intelligence will continue to shape technical communication and how we can actively help to shape the future.

Wishing you an enriching and inspiring time in Stuttgart.

C. Melville

Corinna Melville
Editor, *tcworld magazine*

New wine, old wineskins, and content management

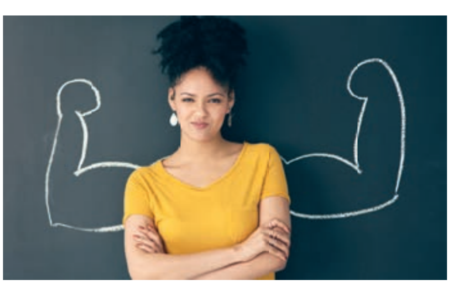
Content automation is key in this fast-paced industry, where new technologies can change content requirements over night. So, does your content management strategy need a revamp?

page 12

What's your content really worth?

As a technical writer, you know the crucial role you play in producing content which allows customers to safely use your products. But does your boss know too? The "Technical Content Benchmark Report" makes a case for the value of tech writers.

page 22



Personal branding for technical communicators

How do you want to be perceived? What motivates you to do your job and what skills do you bring to the table? Here are the building blocks that will help you develop your own personal brand.

page 38

Language services industry faces revenue decline

The language services and technology industry, a sector long-driven by traditional human-powered translation and interpreting services, experienced a significant revenue decline in 2023. According to CSA Research's latest market sizing update, the industry generated US$49.68 billion in 2023, a notable decrease from US$52.01 billion in 2022. [1] This 4.5% drop reflects the effects of inflation, economic instability, and the rise of generative AI, which continues to disrupt the industry.

However, despite this contraction, CSA Research maintains that the market holds substantial opportunities for those prepared to innovate and expand beyond traditional services. Language Service Providers (LSPs) are now being urged to pivot toward becoming Global Content Service Providers (GCSPs), offering enhanced value-added services that capitalize on the ever-growing volume of content generated globally in the post-localization era. [2]

Inflation erodes revenue

Since 2021, inflation has had a pervasive effect on many industries, and the language services market is no exception. While businesses across sectors delayed spending, waiting for economic conditions to stabilize, the language services sector bore the brunt of these delays. Combined with high interest rates, enterprises have cut back on traditional services and postponed investment in localization technologies. As a result, the inflation-adjusted industry size for 2023 represents a 16.3% decline from its 2019 peak.

Generative AI disrupts the market

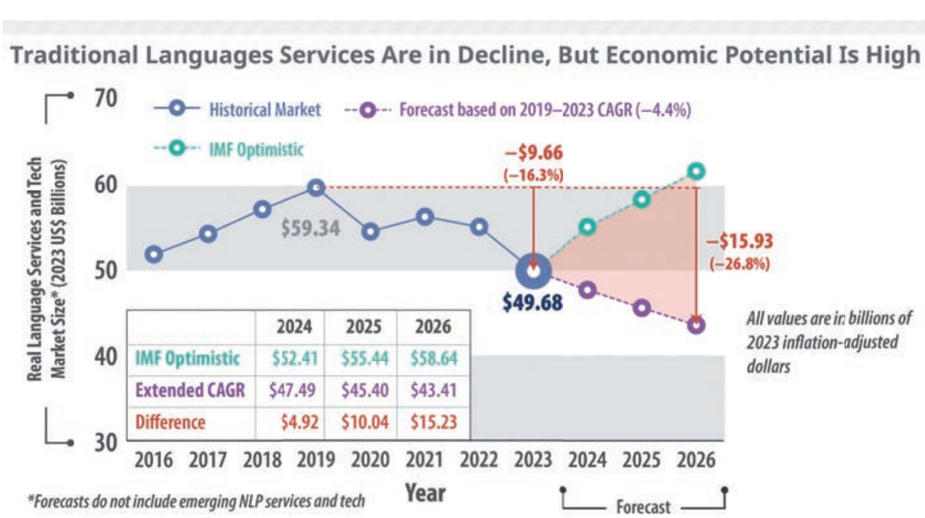
Generative AI has further compounded this economic uncertainty. The rise of AI-first strategies at major enterprises, which include shifting language needs from human services to Neural Machine Translation (NMT) and Large Language Models (LLMs), has been a key driver in declining revenues from traditional services. While translation volumes have remained steady, prices per word have dropped, and demand for lower-cost services is rising. This trend has caused additional revenue loss as organizations reallocate their budgets toward AI-driven solutions that sit outside the traditional language service ecosystem.

Despite these pressures, generative AI also represents a significant growth opportunity for LSPs, provided they adapt quickly. Adds CSA Research analyst Dr. Arle Lommel, "Machine translation alone will not be enough to sustain the industry in the long run. Many LSPs that pivot solely toward MT may find themselves with stagnant or decreasing revenues unless they can offer services that incorporate both AI and human expertise, unlocking new value for their clients."

A shift to value-added services

The ongoing downward spiral in traditional services has underscored the need for LSPs to redefine their value propositions. According to CSA Research, simply providing "high-quality translation and interpreting" is no longer a sustainable business model. Instead, companies need to focus on offering services that help enterprises achieve their broader international goals, whether that be through more sophisticated localization strategies, content management solutions, or global content service provision.

There remains a massive opportunity for LSPs to capture more of the global content market. Today, only a small fraction of the content produced daily is translated. Even if just 0.1% of all global content were deemed worth translating, this would represent an enormous potential revenue source. Meeting this demand will require innovation in



© CSA Research

how services are delivered, with LSPs integrating more deeply into content generation systems and using AI tools that augment, rather than replace, human linguists, an approach CSA Research calls "human at the core."

Recommendations for LSPs and buyers

The report concludes with recommendations to guide LSPs and enterprise buyers as they navigate the changing landscape:

- For LSPs: The most pressing need for LSPs is to innovate by offering value-added services that go beyond traditional translation. As generative AI drives down the cost of basic translation, LSPs must redefine their value, focusing on what they enable for their clients rather than simply the quality of their translation services. Developing solutions that combine technology with human expertise will be essential to long-term success.
- For buyers of language services: Buyers of language services must recognize the pressures facing their LSPs and work closely with them to define the next generation of services. Technology alone will not solve the challenges of multilingual content delivery. Therefore, it is critical that enterprises collaborate with their providers to develop strategies that meet their needs in cost-effective, innovative ways.

Looking ahead

While the near-term outlook for the language services industry remains uncertain, CSA Research is optimistic about the potential for growth. The demand for multilingual content will only increase as global enterprises expand, and LSPs that can pivot to meet these needs with new offerings will be well-positioned to thrive.

Adds Lommel: "As the report highlights, the opportunity is huge. The future of the language services industry will depend on the ability of LSPs to innovate, collaborate with clients, and embrace technology while maintaining the human touch that adds crucial value to content creation and global communication."

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csa-research.com

Argos releases its 2024 Global Ambitions publication

Argos Multilingual has published its yearly edition of the Global Ambitions publication. The 64-page issue examines present-day language industry challenges and sketches the big topics of tomorrow. Titled "Windows Into the Future", the publication outlines challenges that are defining the present and will continue to shape the rest of the decade:

- As the GenAI hype is fading away, the report recaps the lessons learned and early returns on experiments and implementations for the modern company creating and transforming content for global audiences.
- It unveils the results from Argos' latest end-user research on sentiment and perceptions of GenAI and offers food for thought for those designing AI-augmented products.
- Localization is closely intertwined with other industries. The report examines challenges across the spectrum of industries to see where localization can draw inspiration from.
- It explores evergreen challenges – and how to overcome them – still present despite AI hogging the limelight: the necessity for localization teams to seek alignment and adapt to continuous business transformation.
- It examines humans' place in the AI-driven workflow of the future and offers suggestions on how humans can stay relevant and continue to thrive.
- It shows examples of how the language industry can break through the glass ceiling of being perceived as a transactional, end-of-chain process.
- The report examines what AI developments mean for the traditional TMS-centric ecosystem.

The "Global Ambitions: Windows Into the Future" publication addresses questions beyond what is happening today and where we are headed. It prompts readers to think about how to build a more equitable, inclusive future where humans can coexist with machines.

The digital version of the publication is available for free at:
https://info.argosmultilingual.com/2024-global-ambitions-windows-into-the-future-pdf

Image: © ConceptCafe/istockphoto.com

RWS LAUNCHES CONTENTA CLOUD S1000D

RWS, provider of technology-enabled language, content and intellectual property solutions, has launched Contenta Cloud S1000D, tailored for large-scale deployments in the aerospace and defense industry. The cloud-based solution simplifies the creation, management, and publication of technical documents, enabling aerospace and defense organizations to deliver critical information to engineers and technicians, reduce mean time to repair, and keep assets up to date and deployed.

www.rws.com

XTM CLOUD 13.8

Translation technology provider XTM International has released XTM Cloud 13.8, which includes several AI features. XTM AI SmartContext harnesses the power of OpenAI to automatically generate high-quality translations based on fuzzy matches. Other enhancements include an improved workflow editor, REST API enhancements for continuous localization, and a new REST API to help assess the quality of MT or GPT translations.

https://xtm.cloud

VSI ADOPTS OOONA INTEGRATED

OOONA, provider of management and production tools for the media localization industry, has announced that its flagship platform, OOONA Integrated, is set to power the future global operations of The VSI Group, a global localization provider. The tool has been further developed to meet their specific operational needs and is currently in the early deployment phase.

https://ooona.net

Emerging technologies: Hype or here to stay?

Research firm Gartner has published its "Hype Cycle for Emerging Technologies, 2024" outlining 25 disruptive technologies to watch in 2024/25. These fall into four key areas: autonomous AI, developer productivity, total experience, and human-centric security and privacy programs.

"Generative AI (GenAI) is over the peak of inflated expectations as business focus continues to shift from excitement around foundation models to use cases that drive ROI," said Arun Chandrasekaran, Distinguished VP Analyst at Gartner. "Even as AI continues to grab the attention, CIOs and IT executives must also examine other emerging technologies with transformational potential", said Chandrasekaran.

The report distills key insights from more than 2,000 technologies and applied frameworks that Gartner profiles each year into a succinct set of "must-know" emerging technologies. These technologies have the potential to deliver transformational benefits over the next two to ten years (see Figure 1).

Autonomous AI

AI's fast evolution is producing autonomous AI systems that can operate with minimal human oversight, improve themselves, and become effective at decision-making in complex environments. These advanced AI systems that can perform any task a human can perform are beginning to move slowly from science fiction to reality. Technologies include multiagent systems, large action models, machine customers, humanoid working robots, autonomous agents, and reinforcement learning.

Boost developer productivity

Developer productivity is about more than writing code quickly. It's influenced by developers' effective communication and collaboration, and their feeling of energized focus, full involvement and enjoyment (being in the "flow state").

"Technology is revolutionizing the way developers design and deliver software, making them more productive than ever," said Chandrasekaran. "It's ensuring they deliver higher-quality products quickly while maximizing gains by improving developer satisfaction, collaboration, and flow." Emerging technologies enabling developer productivity include AI-augmented software engineering, cloud-native, GitOps, internal developer portals, prompt engineering and WebAssembly.

Empower with total experience

Total experience is a strategy that creates superior shared experiences by intertwining customer experience, employee experience, multiexperience, and user experience practices. It uses technology to address critical interactions, empowering both customers and employees, with the goal of driving greater confidence, satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy. Technologies to assess include digital twin of a customer, spatial computing, superapps and 6G.

Human-centric security

Organizations will become more resilient by using security and privacy techniques that create a culture of mutual trust and awareness of shared risks between teams.

Emerging technologies supporting human-centric security and privacy include AI TRiSM, cybersecurity mesh architecture, digital immune system, disinformation security, federated machine learning, and homomorphic encryption.

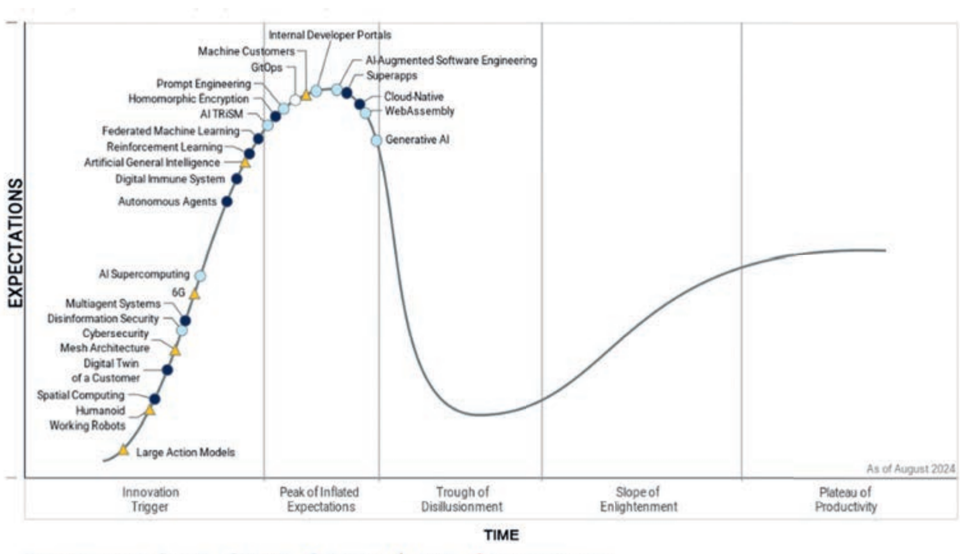

Figure 1: Hype Cycle for Emerging Technologies, 2024 *Source: Gartner (August 2024)*

www.gartner.com

Ciao, Auf Wiedersehen, Goodbye

Wrapping up my time as your tc unplugged columnist

Text by Leah Guren

I began writing the tc unplugged column in 2014. Over one decade (and almost 40 columns), I've shared my thoughts, insights, and experiences – as well as some random rants – with my tekom colleagues. Now it is time for me to step aside and let someone with new ideas and a different perspective take up the baton.

Before I go, allow me to share a few last tips for your TechComm career.

Turmoil is here to stay

The past four years have been filled with unprecedented upheaval in our industry. We've seen the COVID-induced lockdowns, corporate changes in attitude towards work-from-home flexibility, massive cultural shifts triggered by emerging Gen Z/Gen Alpha users (with their strange linguistic patterns and different UI expectations), and finally, the disruptive technology of AI.

Sadly, turmoil is here to stay. [1] We aren't likely to go back to long development schedules, large document projects, careful review cycles, and what we used to consider "normal".

What can you do? Stay flexible and keep learning. [2] It may be more pragmatic to know a little bit about a lot of things rather than know everything about one narrow specialty. Those who are experts in one niche may find it difficult to land another job or adjust to changing business models. Just as financial advisers warn you not to put all your money into one type of investment (the proverbial "putting all your eggs in one basket"), futurists are urging us not to narrow our options. Attend conferences and webinars, take courses, and make time in your weekly schedule to read industry publications.

Develop coping skills

Because of this constant turmoil, we can expect more stress in our jobs. Companies are attempting to downsize, consolidate jobs, and replace people with automation. Add rapid release schedules, limited resources for review and feedback, and more types of deliverables, and you have a recipe for increased stress in the work environment.

What can you do? Most people can deal with short bursts of stress. Our body pumps out adrenaline and cortisol to help us survive. But extended exposure to stress is exhausting and unhealthy. Everyone needs to learn techniques for managing stress in healthy ways, as opposed to the negative coping mechanisms that we often use automatically. First, learn to identify those things that you should never tolerate (bullying, sexual harassment, etc.). While the latter is still a serious problem, European numbers are lower than those in the U.S. [3] Your company almost certainly has a policy in place, and the problem can often be dealt with swiftly and effectively, especially as most companies fear the cost and bad press of litigation.

But what about stress that isn't actionable? There are a range of things you can do to lower cortisol levels and support your body's resilience, including exercise, a healthy diet, and sufficient sleep. There are also some techniques you can apply on the job, including listening to music, doing breathing exercises, getting away from your desk, and venting safely. (For these and other techniques, join me at the tcworld conference in Stuttgart for my session, "Coping in Chaos and Crisis.")

Your job is not your calling

There is a trend I see in the United States where career influencers tell people to "find your joy". The underlying myth is that you can find the perfect job that aligns with your passion if you create a vision board and think good thoughts. Founded by the infamous Louise Fletcher, this movement has done as much to create misery in the workforce as unbridled capitalism.

I consider this to be an utterly ridiculous mindset, and I am happy to say that I do not see it as rampant among my European and local clients. Your career should, ideally, be something that you are good at and do not find distasteful. It does *not*, however, have to be the thing that gives you purpose and meaning in life. In societies with a healthy work-life balance, people usually look outside of their job for fulfillment.

Don't expect your job to replace friends, family, community, hobbies, fun, or volunteering. [4] People who place their entire identity into their careers, especially those who are chronic workaholics, have double the risk of heart attacks and a one-third higher risk of stroke than their more balanced coworkers. [5] The Japanese even have a term for work-induced early death – especially an in-office heart attack – caused by this imbalance: *karoshi*.

What can you do? Develop a life outside of your career. Find hobbies that are vastly different from what you do on the job. For example, if you spend all day sitting in front of a computer, don't select other activities that are also solitary pursuits in front of a computer! And don't rely on the workplace to furnish you with friends. When your project is terminated or your department decimated in layoffs, you risk becoming socially isolated. In any case, our lives are richer when we maintain friendships with people of different backgrounds and jobs.

Learn to write

This may seem obvious, but I am often dismayed by the poor writing skills of many so-called practitioners in our field. I once was the guest editor of a journal in the U.S., and was shocked when I received sloppy, unstructured, rambling, incoherent, and typo-riddled submissions from senior writers in the industry.

No tool can take the place of some solid writing and editing skills! This is one of the core foundational skills in our profession, so shouldn't we proudly earn this ability? Also, we've all seen some of the more egregious errors that AI content authoring can produce; no one can safely rely on tools to do all of the work.

But it goes beyond that; you need to *think*! A good TechComm professional should be curious, logical, and sometimes appropriately suspicious. You need to be able to know when to ask the client or SMEs and when to do external research for yourself. And you need to proactively write the best possible content to address your client's pain points while serving the needs of the users, rather than blandly pandering to the client's most illogical requests. Sadly, many practitioners in our field think that their domain and product knowledge is sufficient, and they never take the time to research other information, perform audience analysis, or even learn to write.

What can you do? If you never learned how to logically structure information, write a good context paragraph, create lists that have correct agreement, or simply write clear, useful content, then get started! There are plenty of courses, workshops, and even private coaching options. You'll feel more confident and more connected to the profession.

I also encourage everyone to study logic. A logical mind will help you recognize problematic source content. Once you can spot the problems, you can ask the right questions and thus get the information you need to create useful content. Initially, you may need a checklist of things to look for or ask. Eventually, you'll get better at spotting problems, which is essential if you want to grow in this field.

No one gets out alive!

We have a finite time on this earth. Very few of us will lead a life that has a historic impact. Realistically, we leave a very small mark, only affecting family, friends, and occasionally on those we teach or mentor. It may seem harsh, but at times it is important to remember that today's disaster in the office probably won't matter in a month – and certainly not in ten years!

What can you do? Don't become so cynical that you don't take anything seriously. After all, we all need to take pride in our work and do the best we can for our clients and their users. Despite your best intentions and efforts, documentation mistakes occur. This is when you need to step back and adjust your view. Take responsibility for your role in the problem, figure out how to fix it, and move on. Remember that in the scheme of things, it is just a tiny blip in the universe. I remember one of my early bosses who used to say, "It's not cancer!" when things went wrong. That was her way of putting problems in perspective for us.

Conclusion

I've enjoyed these past ten years as your columnist, and it has been a privilege to work with *tcworld magazine*'s outstanding editor, Corinna Melville. And remember, I'm still here, leading workshops, teaching courses, and presenting at TechComm conferences. So come say hi and let's talk about your vision for our profession.

All of Leah's columns can be found at tcworld.info/e-magazine/column

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leah Guren is the owner/operator of Cow TC. She has been active in the field of technical communication since 1980 as a writer, manager, Help author, and usability consultant. She now devotes her time to consulting and teaching courses and seminars in technical communication, primarily in Israel and Europe.

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New wine, old wineskins, and content management

Where old content meets new technology, things are bound to get messy.
But you don't have to start from scratch.
Here is a deep dive into content goals and the efforts required to reach them.

Text by Alex Masycheff

Image: © FreezeFrameStudio/istockphoto.com

"And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved."
Luke 5:37-39

A quote from the New Testament might be the last thing that you expect to see in a magazine on information management, but – apart from grabbing your attention – this quote is here for a reason.
I have been in the content industry for almost 30 years and have seen a lot of successes and failures in implementing content management and content automation solutions. A common failure story can be told about companies that tried to reach new goals by deploying new technology and applying the old content and content processes they have had for years.
What happened then? You guessed it: The new wine burst the wineskins and spilled while the old wineskins were ruined. Or, to put it in TechComm language: Wrapping old content and old processes into a new technology delivered a subpar experience to both content authors and customers.

How new goals dictate new requirements

Why do new goals require the transformation of old habits? To answer this, let's take a look at the goals that companies may want to pursue. From my time as a documentation manager, consultant, and a founding CEO of two companies in the industry, I can say that companies implement content management solutions because they want to

- make their content reusable (preferably on different levels)
- enforce structure and consistency
- reduce translation costs
- personalize content by tailoring it to the customer's context and specific product configurations
- reduce customer service costs through self-service solutions
- speed up content time-to-market and increase content quality by assembling product content automatically based on the product configuration

The company does not have to want to achieve all of them. They may want to start with something modest and simple, like making content reusable. However, all of these goals have one thing in common: They all imply that the content meets certain requirements. Table 1 summarizes these.
As you can see, reaching the new goals requires your content to be transformed. This transformation requires certain efforts, which are listed in Table 2.

Is an all-out implementation required?

Looking at the list of possible efforts might feel scary and overwhelming. But the good

Goal	What it implies
Make content reusable	Content is granular
Enforce structure and consistency	Content is structured and semantically rich
Reduce translation costs	Content is format-independent
Personalize content and make it customer- or product configuration-dependent	Content is enriched with metadata
Introduce a customer self-service solution	Content is precise, easily discoverable, and context-sensitive
Assemble content automatically based on the product configuration	Content can be manipulated by machines

Table 1: Goals and requirements

Effort	What needs to be defined
Content restructuring	• How should content be split into components for better reuse and search? • How should content be rewritten as a result of restructuring?
Metadata modeling	• For which purposes will the metadata be used (for example, search and navigation, content filtering, dynamic publishing)? • What metadata is required? • On which level should metadata be assigned?
Information typing	• What types of information exist? • What is the internal structure of each information type?
Content profiling	• What profiling domains are required? • How should the content structure support these domains? • What metadata should be used for profiling?
Structures for dynamic content assembly	• What types of output documents exist? • What is the structure of each type? • What content patterns exist? • How are output documents automatically assembled?
Content delivery model	• How do customers access the content? • What customer contexts exist? • What parameters define each context, and how are these parameters reflected in the content?
Training the team	• How should the authors' mindsets be shifted to the new way of working? • What habits and processes need to change?

Table 2: How does the content need to be transformed?

news is that not all efforts have to be made from day one.

To help you assess the efforts required to achieve a certain goal and understand what efforts should be increased and when, take a look at Figure 1, which visually demonstrates the share of different efforts required for achieving different goals.

For example, if your goal is to make your content reusable at least on the topic level, the content will likely need some basic restructuring to make it more granular. Additionally, to let content authors find the content that they can reuse, the content should be labeled with searchable metadata. However, extensive information typing is not necessarily required at this point.

Content personalization, however, will require stepping up the efforts for introducing information typing and building a solid metadata model. Perhaps some additional content restructuring will be needed too.

We will now review several real-life projects that I have managed in different roles. These will show you what needs to be considered and how efforts should be tailored towards the goals.

Case Study #1:
Propagating the value of structured content from the documentation team to end customers

Our first story is about a company that makes industrial printers. Although they had several product lines and highly configurable products, all customers received only generic documentation. But even that documentation was poorly written (in an unstructured format) and lacking standards. This resulted in both high content production costs and high service costs because customers could not find the information they needed and had to call customer service.

The ultimate goal was to reduce the costs of both content production and customer service. This was done in two stages:

Stage 1

The goal of Stage 1 was to reduce the costs of content production, translation, and maintenance. The main beneficiaries at this point were the content authors.

With a considerable amount of potentially reusable content, the documentation team had to find a way to update content quickly. Therefore, making content reusable and format-independent was a top priority, dictating the nature and scope of the efforts shown in Figure 2.

Therefore, the return on investment was an increase in the efficiency of content production and maintenance (see Figure 3).

Stage 2

By the end of Stage 1, the main beneficiary of the improved process was still the documen-

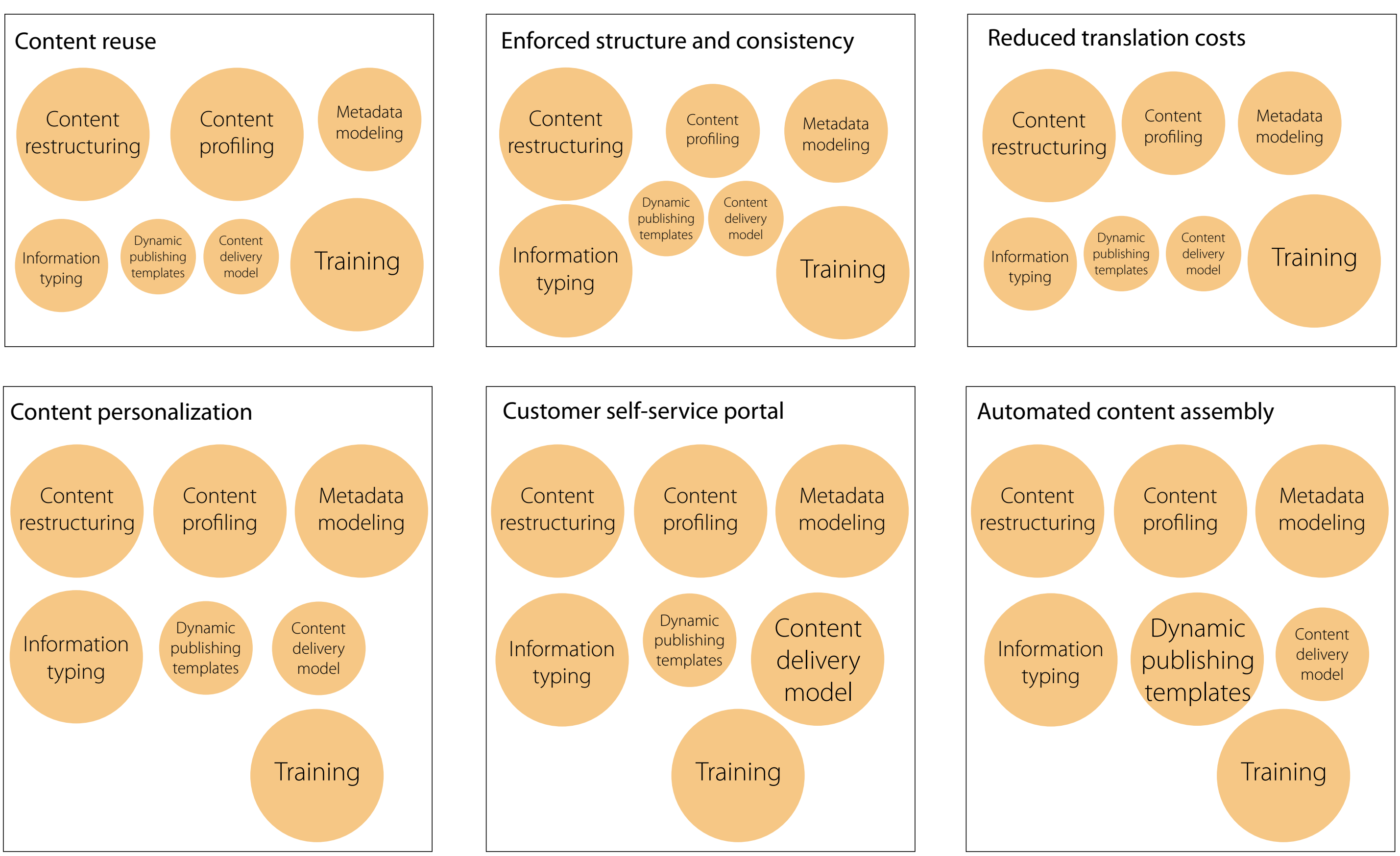

Figure 1: Different goals require different efforts

Efforts

Basic content strategy	Criteria for splitting the monolithic documents into reusable profiled topics
Basic metadata model	Criteria for labeling content by products and product lines
Basic content organization	Approach to organizing and structuring the content repository
Legacy content conversion	Reusable DITA topics with content profiled for different product variants
Component Content Management System	Central repository, easy reuse, versioning, automated publishing and workflows, translation management
Publishing stylesheets	Consistent look-and-feel of the user manuals
Training	Shift in the authors' mindset from document-oriented to topic-oriented writing

Figure 2: Efforts to reduce the costs of content production, translation, and maintenance

Return on Investment

- Faster content creation
- Faster content updates
- Lower translation costs
- Streamlined content process
- Higher quality of content for end customers

Figure 3: Benefits of optimized content processes

tation team. There is nothing wrong with keeping the documentation team happy and efficient, but what about end customers?

Stage 2 was about increasing customer satisfaction. The metric used to measure this was the case deflection rate. In other words, customers should be able to find all the required information by themselves without having to call the service center.

At this stage, a content delivery platform was introduced to provide customers with access to granular, precise, and easy-to-find product information. However, as we already know, new wineskins are required for new wine. This was the time to step up the efforts to achieve the new goals shown in Figure 4.

This time, the return on investment focused on propagating the value of the structured content to the end customers (Figure 5).

Case Study #2:
Automatically assembling product documentation based on product configuration

The second case study is of a European manufacturer of passenger airplanes. Aircraft are highly configurable products. When an aircraft manufacturer sells aircraft to airlines, each airline receives its own configuration of the aircraft. For example, an Airbus 320 sold to Lufthansa and KLM would have two very different configurations. Even within a fleet owned by the same airline, it is unlikely that there will be two airplanes with an identical configuration.

Since the configuration directly affects the way the aircraft is operated, the entire flight documentation had to be assembled dynamically for each airplane.

Thus, the goal was to ensure that the pilots had interactive access to the correctly assembled flight documentation of the specific aircraft they were flying.

The efforts were focused on redesigning content in a way that makes it machine-readable and ready for automated assembly and automating all processes related to content creation, reviewing, management, and release (see Figure 6).

However, automated content assembly also means that you have to think about potential issues not considered earlier. One of them is how you handle cross-references between different parts of your documentation. When you write a monolithic book, you always know which pieces of content go together. You can safely add cross-references from one topic to another.

But when content is assembled automatically, there is no guarantee that the target topic is

Efforts

Proper information typing	More consistent content, more ways to access content in the content delivery portal
Product taxonomy	Faceted content search and filtering in the content delivery portal
Content restructuring	More granular, more precise, and more comprehensive product content
Content delivery portal	Easily accessible, searchable content with content analytics capabilities
Training	Properly designed, maintained, and used product taxonomy

Figure 4: Efforts to increase customer satisfaction and improve deflection rate

Return on Investment

- Customer service costs reduced by 34%
- Maintenance time shortened
- Service engineers gained more autonomy

Figure 5: Benefits of a content delivery portal

Efforts

Information typing	Flight operations are correctly displayed on the flight computer, interactivity is enabled based on the type of the currently displayed information
Content restructuring	Content is compliant with ATA2300, industry standard accepted in the aviation industry for flight operations, and available via the flight computer
Content reuse strategy	Criteria for reusing and profiling the same content for different aircraft configurations
Legacy content conversion	Reusable content modules with content profiled for different product variants, compliant with ATA2300
Metadata model	Enabler for automated content assembly based on the aircraft
Dynamic publishing	No need to manually assemble content modules into highly variative publications
Component Content Management System	Central repository, workflows compliant with the industry regulations, integration with the configuration database, automated publishing
Training	Documentation team follows regulation-compliant processes to create, review, approve, and release flight operations

Figure 6: Efforts to assemble documentation automatically

Return on Investment

- ✔ Completely automated process of the flight operations creation, reviewing, management, and release
- ✔ Pilots access the flight operations tailored to the specific aircraft configuration
- ✔ Information is complete, no broken links
- ✔ Compliance with the regulation

Figure 7: Benefits of automated documentation assembly

valid for a specific configuration. This means it may not become part of the operating manual of a specific aircraft and could potentially result in broken links.

In the aviation industry, cross-references are handled using the concept of containers. Imagine a topic providing a general description of an aircraft door. This description refers to another topic that describes the door's locking mechanism. However, the door-locking mechanism is different for various configurations of the aircraft, so there are different topics explaining that mechanism. To which of these topics should the source refer?

The solution is to put all variants of the topic describing the locking mechanism into a container. The reference in the source topic points to the container rather than to a specific topic. When a publication is generated based on the aircraft's configuration, filtering is applied to exclude the topics that are not applicable to this configuration. This way, the cross-reference is always resolved correctly.

The return on investment was to ensure that the mission-critical information was correct, complete, and available to the pilots (see Figure 7).

Case Study #3:
Ensuring automatically assembled content is correct

Another example of product documentation that needs to be tailored to a specific configuration is from the car industry. Getting a generic user manual that describes all the features and then states that this feature is unavailable in your market or for your configuration can be a frustrating and disappointing experience for customers.

Making content configuration-specific requires labeling portions of content in a way that indicates the validity of features for a certain variant or configuration and then applying a filtering mechanism that excludes all irrelevant content.

If variant content is labeled correctly, customers only get the information relevant to their particular car. However, there are a few ways things can go wrong:

- The variant content is mistakenly not labeled at all and thus appears along with generic content.
- The wrong label is assigned to the variant content, so the content does not appear where it should but instead appears in a configuration where it shouldn't.

Efforts

Identifying critical content	Content whose correct appearance plays a critical role is labeled
Rules for checking the presence of critical content	Content authors are aware if the wrong content appears in the output or the required content is not published
Editing the generic language	Users do not become frustrated whether or not they have a certain feature
Training	Ensuring that the correct content is included in the output is part of the authoring and reviewing process

Figure 8: Efforts to ensure only relevant content is delivered

Return on Investment

- ✔ All required information is included, irrelevant information is excluded
- ✔ Users receive all necessary safety information
- ✔ Compliance with the industry regulation

Figure 9: Benefits of a content validation solution

- A label is assigned at the wrong level of granularity, causing empty or even invalid content elements.

While the latter case might be relatively easy to identify (provided that the filtering mechanism notifies authors about invalid content), the first two cases may only be discovered when it is too late. For example, a critical safety warning might be accidentally excluded from the output, leading to disastrous legal consequences, or worse, endangering user safety.
Another source of customer frustration might be language. If you previously had generic documentation, some of the language probably needs to be adjusted. For example, it is common to see phrases such as “Depending on your configuration…”, “this function is not available in all countries”, or “if this function is available in your car…” in generic documentation.
Therefore, the efforts were focused on building the mechanisms that ensure only relevant content is delivered to users (see Figure 8).

Conclusion

You cannot put new wine into old wineskins – but that does not mean that you have to start from scratch. Your goals dictate the nature and scope of your efforts. Some goals require rethinking your content strategy. Understanding how the goals are mapped to the efforts, which efforts are relevant in each case, and how the efforts can be managed is key to a successful implementation of your content management and content automation initiatives.

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I will be diving deeper into this topic at the tcworld conference:
Come and see me there:

NOV 7

November 7 at 10:00 AM
“Best Practices for Implementing Your Content Management and Content Automation Initiatives”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alex Masycheff has been in the content industry for 30 years. He has led the implementation of content management and content automation solutions in many companies, including Kodak, Siemens, Toyota, and Netgear. Today, Alex is a Senior Consultant at conceito GmbH.

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Turning pain points into opportunities

Has your company faced unhappy users?
Seize the moment and turn the customer escalation into a winning documentation strategy.

Text by Caley Burton

Product documentation is a key driver for customer loyalty. It can make the difference between a customer ditching a brand or upgrading to the latest version, expanding their licensing agreement from 50 seats to 5000 seats, you name it.
However, technical documentation teams are often left out of customer interviews, engagements, or support calls. Thus, technical writers and content strategists learn about customer roles, goals, and workflows through other people – colleagues whose expertise is not in product documentation and whose focus is on different parts of the product or customer experience. This leaves technical writers interpreting generic feedback ("they don't like the docs") or receiving no feedback at all, leading to the same result: Nothing really changes with the documentation, save for a handful of new topics or bug fixes each release.
When an escalation inevitably happens due to this abstraction, it's important for the technical documentation team to use this

Image: © rawintanpin/istockphoto.com

as an opportunity to get closer to the customers. Not only will this help you write better product documentation, it will help you improve your documentation strategy and strengthen your documentation portfolio in the long run.
If you are in the middle of a customer escalation, this article is for you. Many technical communicators have been in your place, survived, and delivered a better documentation experience as a result. Here are some pro tips my brilliant content team and I have picked up over the years.

Customer experience and content debt

Regardless of your documentation portfolio's size, changing a single content standard can lead to a major maintenance initiative, where every publication needs an update. This means that at any given time, a large swath of your portfolio becomes out of date or noncompliant with your own strategy. Sometimes, this isn't a big deal. But it can quickly become one if you deprioritize content maintenance.
It is important to fathom the scope of this: Anything that makes the documentation experience inconsistent or different from product to product or publication to publication impacts the customer experience. Any time the documentation experience makes a customer jump through hoops to find what they need – because it can be found in one product's documentation *this way* and in another product's documentation *that way* – the customer's confidence and trust are broken. This incentivizes them to

- call support, which costs your company money.
- rely on an external forum, which can pull customers away from your website.
- look at a competitor's website, which can mean losing a customer.

So, it's important to understand the risks associated with providing an inconsistent documentation experience to your customers, and why you should avoid it when you can.
Remember these risks when your content team works on solving a customer escalation. It will help you develop a solution that works not only for that particular customer but for your entire customer base.

Assemble a cross-functional content team

A big, hairy problem cannot be solved by one person. It requires a content team composed of stakeholders from across your company, such as a technical writer, a content strategist, an account manager, a product owner, and others. If you only invite technical communicators to the table, you will miss an opportunity to lean on other roles and expertise to help you solve the problem. For example, while an account manager will not help with a content model design, they do have access to customers and can set up customer calls.
Each person will come with their unique skills and expertise. It is important everyone understands the following things:

- Why they are involved
- What the problem is
- What the project requirements are
- What their role is in solving the problem
- What decision rights they have
- What the desired outcome is
- What the KPIs are
- What the next steps are
- When the solution is due

If you are the only technical writer in your company and feel like it would be impossible to build a cross-functional content team like this, don't worry – there is a way to do this on a smaller scale. In her book *Continuous Discovery Habits: Discover Products that Create Customer Value and Business Value,* author Teresa Torres shows how anyone can build a cross-functional team to design and deliver better products. All it takes are three product people (e.g., a product owner, a designer, and a developer) regularly meeting up with customers, capturing their learning, and collaborating to build small improvements. You can apply this powerful concept to a content team.
Take, for example, a content team composed of a product owner, a content strategist, and a technical writer. The product owner can prioritize what gets updated (product-wise, documentation-wise, etc.), share product and customer knowledge, and define acceptance criteria. The content strategist can design content models and standards based on customer feedback, usability tests, and data analytics. Then, the technical writer can draft content based on those standards for the customer to test. Each person brings their unique skills to the table, enabling the team to quickly design and test proofs of concept until they solve the customer's problem.

Create a game plan

With your content team in place, schedule meetings with the customers. Prepare for the meetings as a group. Determine what you want to learn about the customers and come up with questions that will help you extract that information. And while listening is great, observing a customer using the product and the documentation is even better. Set up a test environment so the customer can show you how they access the help and navigate through it.
Make it an expectation that everyone takes notes during the meeting and then shares them back. This will enable your content team to compare differences and similarities between the content team's observations, but also between all the customer interviews you conduct.

Talk to and observe customers

When you meet with a customer, your goal is to get the customer talking and keep them talking. Capture as much information as you can. Ask them about their job, what they do, and what they use to accomplish their work each day. When and why do they use the documentation? How are they accessing the help? Are they successful in finding answers? How many publications do they open before they find it? What happens when they can't find what they're looking for? Do they go to Google or do they contact support? How many clicks does it take for them to find what they're looking for? You get the idea.
If you have a test environment set up, ask them to show you how they use the docu-

mentation, employing the think-aloud protocol. So, not only do you see what they do, but you can hear their thoughts on why they do what they do.

By the end of the meeting, you will have a clear picture of what leads your customer to open the documentation, what they do to find information in the documentation and why, and what makes them close it (for better or worse).

Interview as many customers as you can during this step.

Identify areas for improvement

After each customer meeting, map out what the customer's workflow looked like. Did you notice that the customer had to jump between three publications to find their answer? If so, add your observation to your map. Repeat for each customer interviewed. Soon, you will be able to compare each map and find similar pain points and themes. Use these emerging trends to help you determine what is worth tackling first. For example, did every customer get tripped up trying to find the pinouts or was it only one customer's issue? If everyone had a hard time finding them, but only one customer had a hard time finding the release notes, prioritize the finding of the pinouts.

When you have your user stories prioritized, assign the work, agree on due dates, and set up weekly check-ins. You can move as fast as your team needs to, but do not skip testing your work with the customers or proxy customers. Proxy customers are internal partners who use the documentation on a daily basis. They are likely to have similar issues with the documentation as real customers, and can therefore fill in for your content team's testing needs. During this time, your team will conduct card sorts, meet with internal subject-matter experts on content gaps, and vet your customer maps. Soon, you will have a proof of concept ready for feedback.

Check for bias and scalability

It can be easy to focus on designing a fix unique to a specific customer's needs. However, you must remember that every publication exists in the context of your documentation portfolio. As a result, your solution – be it a new content model, content type, content structure, or other – must work within the context of your portfolio. Does your solution scale across products? Is it sustainable? Will it introduce yet another inconsistency into your portfolio? Or is it a strategy worth applying to your entire documentation portfolio because it will improve customer confidence and success?

Ensure the project requirements account for this. If they don't, advocate adding one that does. You want a solution that can work for any product and any customer – not just one – because an inconsistent documentation experience is a risky one.

Track and measure your KPIs

Compare the feedback and sentiment on the proof of concept to your current product documentation experience. If the proof of concept works better, what exactly is working better? How quickly are customers finding the information? How many testers are successful with the new model compared to the old one?

Use these data points to check against the KPIs your content team defined. For example, if one of your KPIs is that customers can find pinout topics 3 times faster with your new content model, get a baseline of the average time it takes to find pinouts in your current model and then compare them to your new model. Are they finding them at 3 times the speed? If so, your team is onto something!

Repeat until all your KPIs are met. Once they are, you have a working solution and a new standard or group of standards. Congratulations!

Capitalize on your data story

One of the benefits of testing a solution with customers is that you can easily make a business case to apply these changes to the rest of your documentation portfolio. It is not hard to convince business stakeholders when customers share that they are more likely to buy a product because they learned more about its functionality since the update. This means the customer found more value in the product, and this increases their odds of buying a similar product from your company in the future. Or perhaps the customer will no longer need to call support after the update, which would save the company money in call deflection value. But the opportunities will only be realized if all the documentation has these new standards and updates applied consistently.

Stay close to your customers

Once you have developed strong customer relationships – don't lose them. Because your content team showed customers they can turn a pain point into a winning solution, the customers will see your team as a good investment of their time. As a result, they are more likely to volunteer as testers, provide feedback on new strategies, and more – because it will mean a better documentation experience for them and other customers.

Conclusion

Capitalize on documentation escalations by gaining access to your customers. While some stakeholders may question if that's necessary, remind them that a better documentation experience is a better product experience.

When you get the green light to proceed, complete the following steps.

- Pull together a cross-functional content team to learn about and eliminate documentation pain points.
- Set up customer interviews and map out what your customers do and why.
- Compare your customer maps and data and identify improvement ideas.
- Prioritize improvement ideas based on impact, pain, and KPI alignment.
- Test and measure each improvement against the current experience.
- Build a compelling data story based on your team's work to receive more support and funding.

- Stay close to your customers, because they are invested in the success of your documentation experience now.

And that is how you can turn a bad customer experience into a positive one. It takes time, energy, planning, and hard work, but it will help your customers and your documentation portfolio succeed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Caley Burton is a content operations leader in Emerson's T&M Group and a community organizer for Write the Docs ATX. When not talking about docs, Caley is likely reading a sci-fi book, watching women's sports or playing a TTRPG with friends.

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November 5, 9:00 AM (CET)
"Fix Your Docs or Else: How Our Biggest Customer Helped Us Improve Our Content Strategy"

What's your content really worth?

The 2024 Technical Content Benchmark Report:
Measuring and demonstrating the impact and performance of your technical content

Text by Joe Gelb and Rita Khait

Image: © bombermoon/istockphoto.com

Our industry has long struggled to demonstrate the impact of technical documentation and our critical role as producers, curators, and distributors of that content. Many of us identify with the struggle to get a seat at the decision-making table with other leaders in our company. Too often, documentation is seen as a compliance requirement as opposed to the powerful business driver that it really is.

This all changed with the advent of generative AI, increasing the importance of enterprise content and knowledge as a precondition and fuel for GenAI applications. As most companies investing in AI are focusing primarily on customer self-service use cases, this puts our content and domain in the spotlight.

Still, the basic rules of business have not changed. If our TechComm teams are unable to empirically tie their work product back to cost-saving or revenue-driving Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and demonstrate clear business value, they will struggle to get the acknowledgment, support, and budget they need and deserve. We must therefore improve our performance over time by measuring against our team's historical performance as well as by comparing against industry norms. This requires a good understanding of what "good" looks like using a robust benchmarking process, which we will present in this article: The Technical Content Benchmark Report is an important tool for articulating measurable value to our leadership.

In order to equip your team with data-driven knowledge, you need to evaluate how your content performance stands up to industry averages. We pored over data from over 97.6 million documentation portal sessions across 136 countries to comprehensively analyze critical KPI benchmarks. Figure 1 shows the KPIs you should keep an eye on. We will take a look at what the data tells us about industry norms. A link to the full report can be found at the end of this article.

Focusing on the right KPIs

There are many KPIs that can be considered for measurement and attention. The impact of technical content is directly tied to the ability to effectively deliver that content to your readers, typically including customers, prospects, and partners as well as internal support, enablement, and engineers. Therefore, the KPIs we've chosen for the benchmark are primarily related to the content delivery platform experience and the ability to collect data through that platform. This is regardless of whether your content delivery platform is essentially a standalone documentation site, integrated into your support portal, or integrated directly into your application as in-product assistance. We've categorized KPIs into five major categories:

- Traffic – relating to the volume of users and sessions accessing your content
- Search – relating to the effectiveness of findability of your content
- Content – relating to the utilization of content and user satisfaction
- Self-service – relating to the ability of your content to reduce support costs
- GPT and AI – relating to the effectiveness of GenAI functionality based on your content

It is important to understand that each KPI directly impacts the performance of one or more parts of your business, such as support, enablement, product development, sales, and marketing. Through this linkage, each KPI translates your content performance directly to the business.

It is impossible to focus on everything, so when choosing the KPIs you will measure and track, it is important to consider which part of the business your organization reports to, where your funding comes from, and where leadership attention is largely focused. For example, if your company's senior leadership is focusing on your Net Promoter Score (NPS), then you may choose to focus on measuring and tracking the content satisfaction score and self-service rate. If your organization reports into the same organizational structure as service and support, you may want to focus on KPIs that directly affect support metrics such as case deflection, self-service, and search effectiveness for agents.

Let's take a closer look at each of these KPIs.

Traffic KPIs

Traffic KPIs give you a better understanding of the size of your audience and the frequency with which they are engaging with your content. In addition to the volume of page views and the geographical and language distribution of those views, traffic KPIs can include average pages per session, bounce rate, average session duration, and returning users.

Across all the sessions we analyzed for this benchmark report, we found that users viewed an average of 5.2 pages per session, spending a total of 4.8 minutes engaging

Figure 1: KPIs chosen for the 2024 Benchmark Report

with content. A low average time per page coupled with a large average of pages per session means content may be too fragmented or people are skimming the pages but not spending enough time on a single page to answer their questions. In other words, they are hunting for their answer and not finding it right away. This also relates to possible issues with findability.

The average bounce rate (i.e., the percentage of visitors who left after viewing just one page) stands at 38% for the benchmark, suggesting a trend of users leaving documentation without exploring the site further. Traditionally, for marketing websites, a high bounce rate is considered negative. However, for a documentation site, a high bounce rate on an ungated site coupled with excellent SEO can point to a highly effective self-service experience.

When analyzing your own content delivery analytics, it is important to look at these KPIs holistically. For example, a high average number of pages per session may be a result of navigational challenges or an ineffective search. On the other hand, it may be due to a high level of engagement with your content, leading to better enablement and product adoption.

Measuring your own behaviors and comparing them to the benchmarks gives you actionable insights for improving your content experience. For example, to increase the average time spent on a page (indicating the usefulness of the content being viewed), you may need to improve findability by making the search results more usable. This can often be done by refining topic titles to reflect common customer tasks and ensuring that all content is found within that topic.

To raise the number of pages per session, increase session duration, and decrease the bounce rate, you could consider the following:

- Using embedded links to support nonlinear navigation
- Integrating related links and mini tables of contents in the sidebar
- Presenting content in smaller, more manageable segments (if your help pages are very long) and ensuring each segment is understandable on its own
- Aggregating documentation topics into "workflows" that lead the user step by step through a learning path as opposed to relying only on the traditional hierarchies of the manuals

Search KPIs

Tracking search KPIs helps you understand the level of effort required to find relevant content and improve content discovery. You can look at KPIs such as the number of sessions with search, click-through rate (CTR) from the search results page, searches with no results, and searches with results but no clicks.

Our research found that, on average, users utilize the search function 30% of the time as opposed to site navigation tiles, third-party search engines, and context-sensitive help links. For ungated sites accessible to Google indexing, a low level of search usage can indicate strong SEO. Understanding the proclivity of your users to utilize search can sharpen your site navigation strategy to be more in line with your typical user journeys.

Our research found an average of 55% CTR. Click-through rate indicates the usefulness of your search, the level of coverage your content has to common questions, and the ability of your users to connect a topic title with the subject matter of the topic. You can optimize this KPI by:

- Reviewing the top queries without clicks to identify gaps in your content or opportunities to improve results by adding metadata and synonyms
- Reviewing the top queries without results to identify ineffective search titles
- Implementing semantic and GPT search capabilities to further improve search efficiency and relevance

Content KPIs

Content KPIs give you insight into the level of utilization, engagement, and satisfaction. Proper analysis of these metrics can help you determine where to focus your limited resources on creating and updating content that will have the greatest impact on customer satisfaction, product adoption and, ultimately, retention.

Examples of Content KPIs that measure the success of your content strategy include page views and pages with engagement per session. The page view metric provides insight into the overall utilization of your content and should be further broken down into what specific content is used (and with what frequency) and what content is seldom used (and should be deprioritized or archived). A high page view rate across your corpus of content indicates broad interest and relevance as well as the efficiency of your team to create and distribute useful content (as opposed to squandering resources on content that is not useful).

Our research found that the average content view rate is 50%. This metric can be optimized by:

- Actively steering users toward more valuable content by improving site navigation, adding related links and recommended content
- Collaborating with support and product teams to identify and bridge gaps in the content
- Regularly archiving content that users are not viewing

Similarly, we found that the number of pages with engagements per session – such as likes, feedback, shares, "watched" content, and downloads – stands at about 19%. This KPI can be improved by actively seeking user feedback and promoting site functionality through walk-throughs, pop-up reminders, etc.

Self-service and case-deflection KPIs

One of the most compelling ways to demonstrate a measurable return on investment of TechComm as a cost saver is by tying our work to successful self-service and deflected support cases. Besides the clear reduction of support costs, improving these metrics also leads to higher customer satisfaction scores.

Indeed, documentation is one of the most powerful tools organizations have at their disposal to improve their self-service experience and reduce the need for support agents. This also allows your company to scale efficiently by reducing the costs needed to support increased sales of existing or new products or the expansion into new markets.

The self-service rate quantifies the proportion of doc portal or support community sessions where users successfully resolve their issues using existing technical content without contacting support and creating new tickets. We found that the self-service rate can reach 89%.
Some tactics for optimizing self-service include:

- Integrating your content delivery platform into your customer support experience, so your users gain easy access to your documentation content and knowledge articles when needed
- Regularly analyzing search analytics to identify gaps in your content, and either creating new content or making existing content more findable and useful
- Creating guided troubleshooting pathways for common issues
- Conducting regular internal knowledge sessions to gain insights from customer-facing team members to better understand common challenges and incorporate them into your content strategy
- Personalizing the content experience based on your understanding of your users' profiles

Case deflection measures the rate at which customers who have opened a form to submit a case are provided with relevant recommended content, and by accessing that content the case is ultimately not submitted. Our research found that the case deflection rate stands at 58% for customers implementing an effective content delivery platform. Your teams can improve this metric through:

- Integrating your content delivery into the forms used for creating support tickets to proactively recommend documentation content that can resolve their problem
- Making consolidated and easily accessible content available for your customers in your web application, community and support site, and docs portal
- Regularly analyzing support tickets to identify gaps in your content and create a continuous feedback cycle

By embedding these content delivery strategies into your overall content strategy, you can streamline operations while enriching the end-user experience around your product. The aim should be to cultivate an environment where users feel supported yet autonomous – a balance that, when achieved, signifies a mature, user-centric approach to documentation and customer support.

GPT and AI KPIs

In recent years, generative AI has disrupted our industry. As we integrate AI technologies into our content creation and delivery, it is critical to regularly monitor the related metrics to ensure that AI is actually improving the self-service experience without sacrificing accuracy and degrading trust in our content.
Our research found that the average utilization of GPT search was around 5%. While this is a low figure, it is not surprising as these technologies are slow to take off. However, usage is indeed growing exponentially month over month. Interestingly, a sample of almost 10,000 GPT queries in the research found an average accuracy rate of 85% – an impressive achievement for such early adoption and application. We find that users typically do click on the links to the original content, indicating that GPT is providing useful answers but is not replacing the need for the full fidelity of content.

Final thoughts

As the adoption of GenAI is increasingly thrusting our content into the spotlight, we need to seize this moment and connect our work to some of the most fundamental overarching goals in our companies. The data outlined in the 2024 Technical Content Benchmark Report will help you not only evaluate your content against industry norms but also provide you with guidance towards benchmarking your teams' progress month over month and year over year. And remember: The metrics and insights themselves are only as impactful as your ability to effectively articulate your successes internally to your team and externally to your leadership.

You can download the full report here: www.zoominsoftware.com/zoomin-benchmark-report-2024

Meet me @ tcworld conference 2024

I will be heading to the tcworld conference in Stuttgart, where I will expand on this data and methodology. I would love to see you there and hear your feedback and experiences. Meanwhile, if you're interested in discussing benchmarking or using AI for TechComm, reach out to me.

NOV 5

November 5 at 3:00 PM
"Get AI-ready: Practical tips for consolidating knowledge for your AI applications"

NOV 7

November 7 at 9:00 AM
"2024 Technical Content Benchmark Report: What the data tells us about content performance"

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From novice to master

We all strive to become better – or perhaps, *the* best – in our field, ideally without too much effort. Here is a guide to stimulating our brains, or those of our users, to reach higher levels.

Text by Dimiter Simov

Image: © wildpixel/istockphoto.com

We've all seen a master at their craft: Think of a chef chopping onions at a speed that blurs the movements of his knife. Or a street artist drawing the face of a tourist with just a few strokes of her charcoal pencil. Or maybe you have a colleague who can capture a complex topic in documentation in no time and without missing a thing.

These people are all masters of their craft. What connects them is the apparent effortless grace and fluidity with which they perform their activity. Masters accomplish their tasks with a natural ease that belies the complexity of what they are doing. It's as if they are in perfect harmony with their craft, making it appear effortless. Moreover, they are very fast and extremely accurate.

So, what lies behind such effortless grace? Is it talent, years of practice, a deep understanding of the subject matter, a love for their craft, strong motivation, or all of the above? Can everyone achieve mastery and perform without effort?

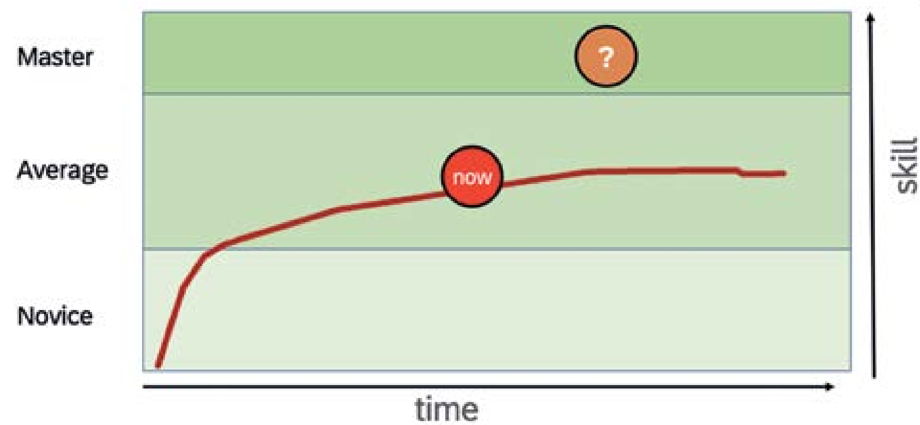


Figure 1: We move from novice to average quickly, but we might never get to the level of mastery.

From novice to master

We all endeavor to perform our activities with minimum effort. The first time we do something, it is difficult. We think about the various moves we need to make. We run every detail through our minds. We are conscious of the activity throughout its entire duration. We get tired quickly.

The next time we do the same activity, it might be a bit easier. Why? Because our brain already recognizes some of the details. We remember how we did this task in the past, so we just repeat it. When we start doing the activity regularly, it becomes much easier. Within a few days or weeks, we automate many of the actions, so we no longer have to think about how to perform them. Progress comes fast. The speed would vary with complexity of the activity but, in general, we begin to feel confident about it after several performances. It still requires effort and thinking, yet we have become much faster and it feels much easier.

Once we have gained some skill and confidence, we delegate the performance to our subconscious. This is when we stop advancing at a fast rate. Most of us will plateau and, for some, their performance might even degrade. Automation is killing our progress, and we might never become masters of the activity.

There might be better, faster, smarter, easier ways to do it. "But no, sir, we already know how to do it." After all, we've been doing it like this for five weeks (or fifty years) and it feels good and comfortable enough. Changing the way that we perform the activity feels hard, so why change it? We might even consciously refuse to learn new ways, fearing change that might challenge our old ways. We are in our comfort zone and do not want to leave it.

Figure 1 shows a very simplified graph of how we progress from novice to master.

Mastery requires effort

They say it takes 10,000 hours of practice to become an expert. If only it were that simple. Not all practice is the same. For practice to be effective, it needs to deliberately take us out of our comfort zone, change the way we are used to doing an activity, focus on specific parts of it, and challenge us to achieve a certain level of accuracy. However, deliberate practice alone is not enough.

Age, genetics, motivation, emotional involvement, and other factors play a role too. These are "internal" factors. We cannot influence our age and genetic predisposition or those of our students and users. Emotions are critical. If you do not like an activity, you won't enjoy practicing, and you will struggle to improve. But it is up to us to choose the skills we want to develop. Without motivation, practice loses focus, and we might abandon it. We need to find meaning and relevance in the activity by connecting it to a goal, a purpose, and our long-term values. While we can work on our emotions and motivations, we cannot control those of students and users.

The pillars of mastery

We can support learning through deliberate practice, exposure to good examples, and feedback. We will look into these three as controllable factors to improve skills in ourselves and in users to achieve mastery.

- Deliberate practice – the most efficient way to consciously accrue skills and knowledge. It involves multiple sessions in which one exercises a specific activity to achieve high reliability in execution.
- Perceptual exposure – a subconscious way in which we stimulate the brain to discover patterns and automate good practices. It involves exposure to many high-quality examples.
- Immediate feedback – interactive help about our performance from peers or the environment. Feedback allows us to take corrective actions and creates additional motivation to move in the desired direction.

Let us look at these principles in more detail.

Deliberate practice

Deliberate practice is a type of training where each session has a specific goal, addresses a specific subtask, and is targeted at achieving high reliability in execution.

Let's look at Jackie Chan's character Chan Foh To from the movie *Thunderbolt* as an example. Chan is a race car driver who needs to be as fast as possible on the race track. Switching gears is important in racing, and thus gear shifting is one of the many subtasks that a car racer needs to master. So, in the garage Chan installs a gearbox with a gear lever, a seat and pedals, and practices his ability to shift gears until he achieves a certain goal. He repeats the exercise multiple times, internalizing the movements, experimenting, and adjusting.

Some tips to assist deliberate practice:

- Deconstruct the skill into tasks. These can also be subskills or movements.
- Identify the tasks that need improvement and practice them.
- Seek the help of an expert for the deconstruction of the skill and identification of the areas that need improvement.
- Work towards achieving high reliability in executing the task: 90+%.
- Re-practice and experiment.
- Aim to fully understand the task and its execution. This rationalization helps to internalize and hone the skill.

In documentation

Here are some tips to help you incorporate deliberate practice in your documentation:

- Perform a task analysis of the product domain to identify the tasks that users perform. Be careful to capture their tasks, not the tasks of the product.
- Create topics and tutorials for these tasks. Keep each task in a separate topic.
- Make clear to users the objectives and expected outcomes of each topic.

Figure 2 shows an example that illustrates the principle of deliberate practice in documentation. The screenshot shows a group of SAP Business Technology Platform (SAP BTP) tutorials that teach users to create applications on SAP BTP. Each of the three tutorials is a small learning chunk within the overall activity. The tutorials are broken down into steps for readers to follow and practice.

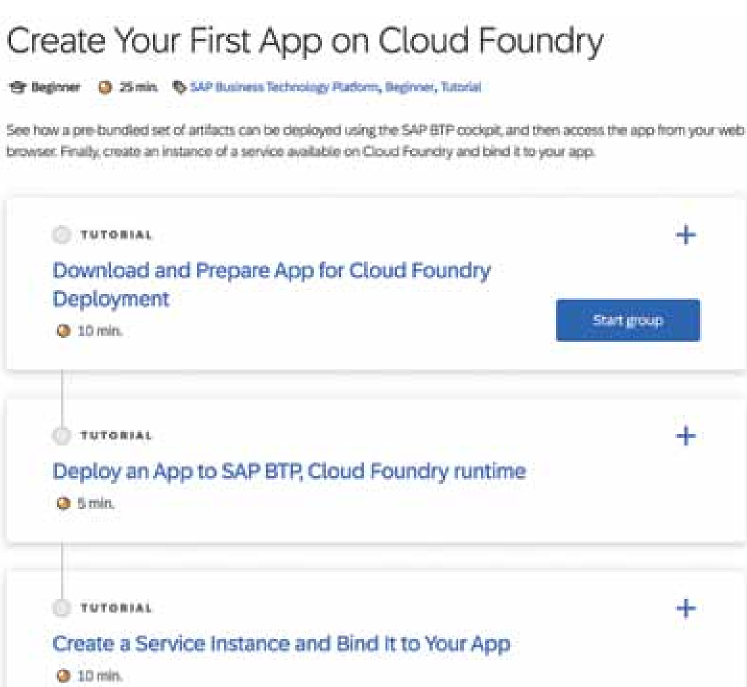


Figure 2: Deliberate practice – The big task of creating an application is broken down into subtasks that are presented as mini tutorials. Each tutorial has a specific objective and clear success criteria.

Perceptual exposure

Perceptual exposure involves presenting high-quality examples to the learner. This stimulates the brain to discover patterns and automate desired practices.

Positive examples are key here. Let's look at link anchors, for instance. A link anchor must be informative (clearly show where it leads), noticeable (the readers can see it easily), and clickable (readers can click or tap it easily).

A good example of a link inviting visitors to join tekom could be:

"Not a tekom Europe member yet?
We offer
different types of memberships."

as opposed to

"Not a tekom Europe member yet?
More information on the different types of memberships can be found here."

Think about all those links and buttons that we see on the web anchored on void words such as "here", "click", "more info", and the like. Such links are a poor design decision. They are uninformative – they do not convey what is behind this link; users need to read the surrounding text for this. Because of their small size, they are less noticeable and harder to click. They also bloat the text with parasitical words. In the case of "here", it is arguable whether the target is here or there. And, last but not least, they create a false positive example – if the web is loaded with such links, then it must be okay to anchor links this way.

Some tips for perceptual exposure:

- Find and look at many good examples.
- Observe what the best in the field are doing (always with a grain of salt and keeping in mind your own context and level).
- Recognize bad examples and analyze why they are bad.

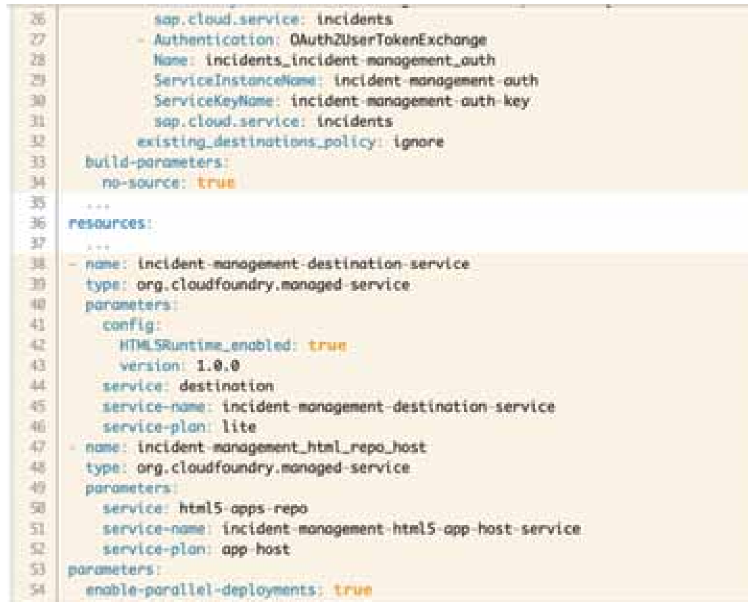
In documentation

Here is how you can incorporate perceptual exposure in your documentation:

- Provide good positive examples that illustrate the outcome or the steps of the activity, for example, templates, code samples, or videos showing experts performing the activity.

- Use screenshots to help users visualize the task at hand and the area they operate in. But don't overdo screenshots either – you do not need one for every step in a flow.

The screenshot in Figure 3 shows a piece of sample code, included in an SAP BTP tutorial. Users can study the code and copy it for use directly in their applications. By showing good examples, the tutorials speed up the users' learning process.



```
          sap.cloud.service: incidents
        - Authentication: OAuth2UserTokenExchange
          Name: incidents_incident-management_auth
          ServiceInstanceName: incident-management-auth
          ServiceKeyName: incident-management-auth-key
          sap.cloud.service: incidents
        existing_destinations_policy: ignore
  build-parameters:
    no-source: true
  ...
resources:
  ...
- name: incident-management-destination-service
  type: org.cloudfoundry.managed-service
  parameters:
    config:
      HTML5Runtime_enabled: true
      version: 1.0.0
    service: destination
    service-name: incident-management-destination-service
    service-plan: lite
- name: incident-management_html_repo_host
  type: org.cloudfoundry.managed-service
  parameters:
    service: html5-apps-repo
    service-name: incident-management-html5-app-host-service
    service-plan: app-host
parameters:
  enable-parallel-deployments: true
```

Figure 3: Perceptual exposure – The tutorials provide good code examples that users can study and use directly as they work through tutorials.

Immediate feedback

Immediate feedback is the concept of reviewing and commenting on the performance of the learner by a trainer, peers, or the environment, thus allowing the learner to adjust. The best feedback is that which comes on time and is offered in a constructive way.

I once read a story about the founder of Hallmark Cards – J. C. Hall. He would stand in the shop and talk to the customers who bought postcards, asking them about how they use the postcards, what occasions they are sending them for, and so on. That is, he was actively collecting feedback about his products.

Some tips for immediate feedback:

- Ask for feedback and provide feedback when asked.
- Test your skill or product, measure the result, and track progress.
- Accept that failures are useful too; you learn something from them.

In documentation

To incorporate immediate feedback in documentation, consider this:

- State the expected outcome of a tutorial or topic, so users can compare their own achievement to it.
- In certain steps where the result of the step is not obvious, state what will happen after the user performs the action.
- Offer small self-evaluation quizzes.

To gather feedback for your documentation, consider this:

- Allow users to provide contextual feedback.
- Observe people using your documentation. Often.
- Act on feedback quickly. Don't wait for a "write-up sprint".

Figure 4 shows a short quiz from an SAP BTP tutorial. It allows readers to check their understanding at a certain point in their learning. These questions appear at various points in the tutorials and ensure that the users will learn and understand the most important concepts. The questions provide feedback to users, but they also provide feedback to the authors of the documentation on how well their content is helping readers to learn.

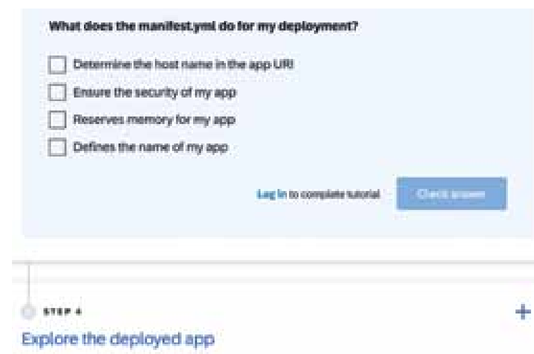


Figure 4: Immediate feedback – At the end of some tutorial steps, there are questions that allow users to test their understanding of the material.

In conclusion

By using the principles of deliberate practice, perceptual exposure to good examples, and immediate feedback, we can stimulate our brains, or those of our users, to do their miracle job and take us to new heights. Who knows, we might even achieve the speed of a master chef, the grace of a street artist, or the ease of your master colleague.

My last tip: Attend workshops! Workshops at conferences and other practical training programs are ideal for practicing and improving your skills. A good workshop has a specific focus, comes with many examples, allows you to exercise specific skills, and offers feedback from the trainer and other attendees.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dimiter Simov (Jimmy) helps businesses and people make their software products understandable and easy to use. He spends most of his time as a UX consultant focusing primarily on usability, user research, and interaction design. His career started in technical communication and to this day revolves around how people are expected to use software and devices.

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Building in localization from the start

If left until the end of the content creation process, localization faces issues that can compromise translation quality. A shift to the left provides a solution.

Text by Ramona Wühle

Image: © Photo_Concepts/istockphoto.com

In today's global marketplace, the demand for software transcends geographical borders. Whether it involves mobile apps or enterprise solutions, products and services must cater to an international audience to be successful. However, going global and meeting customer expectations requires a well-thought-out strategy. Localization should not be an afterthought, but a crucial component.

Many companies localize (or rather, translate) their software and documentation. But despite advancements in tools and technology, translation quality often remains a sore point. Quality is typically evaluated based on the final output alone, without factoring in all circumstances. And this is a classical fallacy in any quality discussion. A paradigm shift is needed – a shift to the left.

The concept of "shifting left" is not new. It has its roots in software development and testing and is surprisingly simple: Tasks that were traditionally performed at later stages in a project, such as testing or debugging, are moved to earlier phases. This way, issues can be detected and resolved earlier, reducing costs and improving outcomes. So why not apply this proven approach to localization? By integrating localization processes and considerations early in the content creation and development cycle – from design all the way through implementation – we can enhance the translation quality and thus the user experience.

Context is king, but…

In the localization industry, context is often considered the "holy grail". The more context, the better the translation. But context is just one ingredient for good quality. Another, even bigger one is a shift left, incorporating three "magic" ingredients to spice up the quality of your localization output: design-stage localization, internationalization, and good UX writing. Combining these ingredients will significantly boost localization quality.

The current state of translation quality

Despite best efforts, localization quality is quite inconsistent. Often, these inconsistencies are brushed off as mere linguistic glitches. But these "glitches" can considerably affect customer satisfaction and product usability. They can diminish the reputation of a brand and can even cause financial losses, all because localization tends to be the last step in the content creation process.

Typically, the process looks like this:

The product design is created based on the requirements of the source language (often English). Then, technical writers, engineers, or UX writers create the source content. Once finalized, it is handed off to the localization team. This linear approach creates a significant disconnect between content creation and localization. Often, there is no collaboration between the different teams. They all operate in silos, and content is created without considering the needs of other languages or the technical constraints of localization. So, it's no surprise that text or design choices that work well in the source language often fall flat in some or even all target languages. Without early collaboration, these issues only become apparent later, requiring costly rework.

This is a prime example of reactive problem-solving. Instead of getting the content right from the start, it will only be patched up when translation issues arise. These temporary fixes work as a short-term solution but do little to address the underlying issues. Over time, unresolved problems will pile up, degrading localization quality further.

Making the shift

A successful shift-left approach in localization should focus on three key principles: design-stage localization, internationalization, and UX writing. When applied strategically, they can help ensure that content resonates with global audiences and enhance translation quality for a better user experience.

Let's look at these three ingredients in more detail.

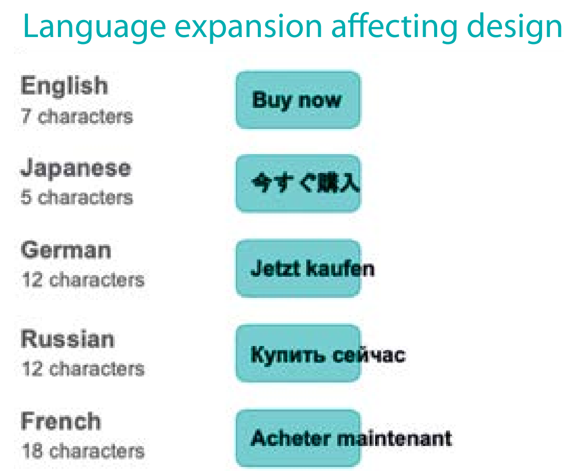

Figure 1: When translated text takes up more space than the source, copy can make the buttons overflow.

1. Design-stage localization:

Laying the foundation early

Localization is often overlooked when it comes to design considerations, and localization teams only come in at the tail end of the process. By then, the product has been fully laid out and designed – from early mockups to UI considerations and final coding. But this is risky: To give you an example, just think of copy running over buttons or being truncated because they have been designed without taking text expansion into account (Figures 1 and 2).

Design-stage localization factors in translation at a point when important design

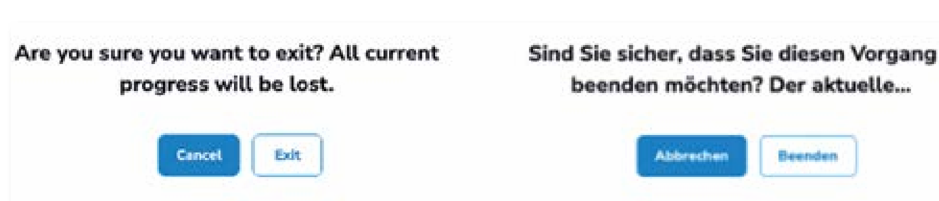

Figure 2: Language expansion can cause copy to be truncated.

decisions are made. This approach has clear benefits: By working together early, writers, designers, developers, and localization specialists can align requirements for a smooth translation process and make informed decisions regarding content, layout, and functionality. With their shared knowledge, designers can create layouts that accommodate text expansion, while developers can ensure that the code supports different character sets and formats as well as right-to-left languages such as Arabic and Hebrew. Ideally, these will then be tested in prototypes in selected languages to help identify potential issues early on. When localization is considered at this initial stage, the product will be designed for an international release from the start.

2. Internationalization:

Building a global-ready framework

Internationalization (i18n) is the process of designing and developing software for easy adaptation to different languages, regions, and cultures. It's the groundwork that needs to happen before localization comes in, yet it is frequently neglected. Often, companies apply just a few random i18n principles before expanding to two or three new languages and markets. But when it comes to extending the product offering to additional regions and languages, this approach reaches its limits.

A few basic rules lay the foundation for global readiness: [1]

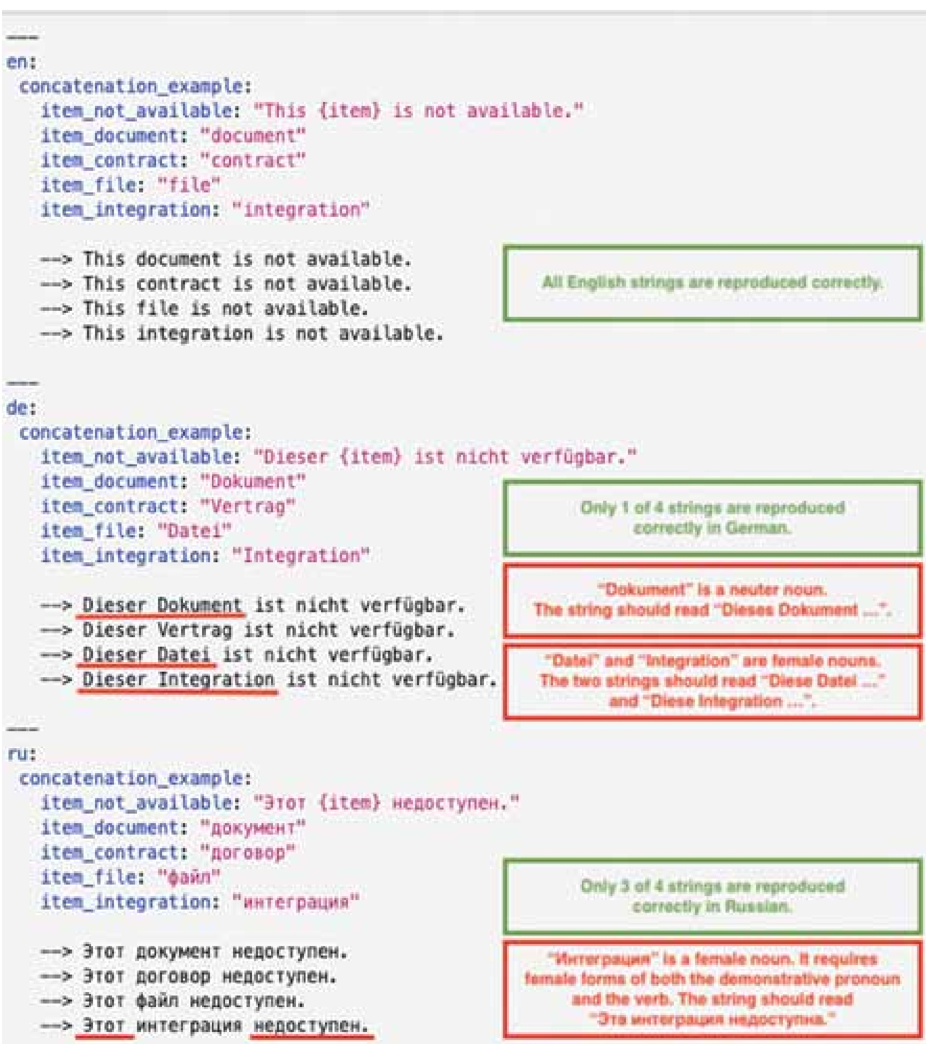

Figure 3: String concatenation causes issues in languages with multiple genders of nouns.

Separate content and code

Thinking about hard-coding text into a user interface? Better think again!

Separating all text strings, labels, interface elements, and other content from the codebase is one of the core principles of internationalization.

Embedding strings directly into the code involves a lot of copying and pasting. This is extremely time-consuming and risky, as one mistake can break the underlying functionality. Externalizing the text in the resource file avoids such issues, making the content more adaptable, scalable, and easier to localize – all without developers having to touch the code to access and modify content elements.

Unicode support

Using Unicode encoding is essential to support multilingual content. Unicode provides a standard to represent characters in all the writing systems of the world. Whether you are dealing with an "Umlaut" (mutated vowel), Cyrillic script, or Kanji characters – you can be sure that they will be displayed correctly.

Formatting counts

The right format is key. Make sure your code supports different date and time formats aligned with regional preferences. To do so, use locale-specific formatting functions and libraries such as the ICU (International Components for Unicode). [2] ICU offers components for locale-based content elements such as dates and times, numbers, currencies, and more in accordance with legal and cultural expectations.

Keep it together

In other words: Don't concatenate strings!

String concatenation is a very common coding practice – and one of the most frequent issues in software localization. Developers often use it to form one sentence with the same format out of multiple strings. This practice is problematic because other languages have different rules regarding word order and/or gender markers that often can't be applied correctly in concatenated strings. Figure 3 shows an example to illustrate the issue.

In English, the string works well for all four op-

tions inserted into the `{item}` placeholder. In all cases, the output is grammatically correct. This is, however, not the case in German and Russian. They are gendered languages and/or use inflection. Depending on the translated word, these languages need different demonstrative pronouns and/or verb forms to render the string correctly. But the source string doesn't support multiple options for the pronoun *this* or the verb and expects one translation to work for every use case. Thus, the translation will either be wrong (like the examples in Figure 3) or sound awkward when translators try to work around that grammar conundrum. Either way, the result can lead to a broken user experience.
To avoid this, replace concatenated strings with versions that make the complete sentence visible to the translators.

Do not split sentences

Sentence splitting is another typical issue in software localization. To save time and effort, developers often split sentences in order to reuse parts of them in a different context (Figure 4).
While this makes sense for engineers and developers, it becomes an issue in other languages, where word order or grammatical structure differs from the source.

Use placeholders with care

Placeholders are handy but should be used correctly and consistently. They usually refer to variable elements in the text (for example, a product name, a username, or a number).
Set in curly brackets, placeholders in strings might look like this:

```
%{count} articles available
%{username} has been made an
admin of this instance.
A yearly subscription of
%{productname} costs %{price}.
```

Placeholders can be moved in the translation in accordance with the target language. Be consistent and don't split them into separate strings.
To account for singular and plural versions of a placeholder variable, one solution is to use separate strings as shown below:

```
Your subscription expires in
%{days} days.
Your subscription expires in
%{days} day.
```

This allows for correct localization into several languages but is still problematic for languages that use more than one plural form. These languages need more separate strings to account for different forms.
Another option is to use the ChoiceFormat. [3] A string with choice tags could look like this:

```
Your subscription expires in
{0, number, integer} {0,choice,
0#days|1#day|1<days}.
```

This method comes with a caveat, though: Developers would need to be trained in all the syntactical options that are possible in the target languages to set up the code correctly – not an easy feat as they are not professional linguists – while translators often lack the technical background to understand the construction and handle strings using this format correctly.

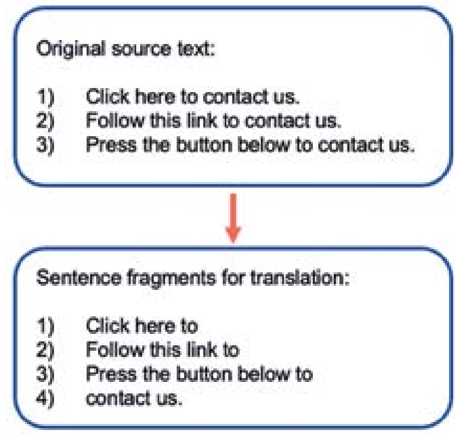

Figure 4: Example of sentence splitting

Test the code

Test your code for localization issues by using pseudo-localization. Pseudo-localization modes simulate translation, helping to find potential internationalization glitches when writing the code. That way, developers can confirm whether their software code is ready for localization.

3. UX writing:

Crafting user-centric content

Have you ever clicked on a link expecting a specific action, but it triggered an action you did not expect, or worse, you did not want? Have you ever struggled to decipher an error message full of technical terms? We have

all been in situations like these. And that means we have all been exposed to bad UX writing. Just like the technical aspects above, the user experience (UX) plays a key role in the international success of software or applications. That's where UX writing comes in.
UX writing is the practice of creating content for user interfaces such as buttons, tooltips, pop-ups, info screens, error messages, and feature explanations. [4] This content guides users through a product or service in a clear, concise, and engaging manner. Applying UX writing best practices is essential for creating content that provides a good user experience. This content is also easier to localize.
However, many companies don't put much thought into their UX copy. Just like localization, UX writing is often neglected. The results are texts in an app or software that a developer wrote as a rough explanation for a particular string or button: too technical for comfort and far from user-friendly.
Even if you are not a UX writer, following these simple rules is half the battle:

Be clear

Clear and simple language is easier for users to understand and easier to translate. Always remember that just because the internal developer team understands something, this doesn't mean the users do! Therefore, avoid jargon, ambiguity, and unnecessary complexity.

Be consistent

Inconsistency creates confusion. Consistent terminology, tone, and style allow for a cohesive user experience and clear content. For localization, consistency is vital to ensure that translations are accurate and aligned with the source content. When designing user interface copy, create and follow style guides, glossaries, lists with preferred terms, capitalization and punctuation rules, and other guidelines.

Be brief

Consider the space available and the user's attention span. In software or apps, both are limited. Keep it short and concise. Remove unnecessary words and organize sentences in a way to make texts easy to read. Get the message across with as few words as possible.

Following these three principles is a huge step on the path towards a better user experience in the source content of your app or software and enables improved quality in the localized versions. [5]

Shift left!

In today's globalized market, high-quality localization is no longer optional; it is a necessity. However, the traditional reactive model, where localization is an afterthought, is loaded with challenges that compromise translation quality and undermine the user experience.
Adopting the shift-left strategy addresses common localization issues early and fosters collaboration across teams for more efficient workflows and higher-quality outcomes. The three "magic" ingredients – design-stage localization, internationalization, and UX writing – are the pillars of this strategy. When integrated effectively, they create a robust framework that supports seamless localization, ensuring quality content that is accessible, culturally relevant, and user-friendly across diverse markets.

Meet me @ tcworld conference 2024

Interested in hearing more? I will delve deeper into this topic at the tcworld conference, looking at the benefits of shifting left in localization and sharing useful dos and don'ts. Join me on

NOV 6

November 6 at 2:00 PM (CET)

References

[1] For a more comprehensive overview of i18n best practices, see https://w3c.github.io/bp-i18n-specdev. The Unicode CLDR project (Common Language Data Repository) at https://cldr.unicode.org/index provides useful information and key building blocks to create software that supports the languages of the world.
[2] https://icu.unicode.org
[3] A detailed overview of how the choice format works can be found at https://unicode-org.github.io/icu-docs/apidoc/released/icu4c/classChoiceFormat.html
[4] UX copy is sometimes referred to as "microcopy", although these terms are not fully interchangeable. Microcopy can be considered a part of UX writing but the latter is the broader, more comprehensive term.
[5] For a deeper dive into the world of microcopy and UX writing, take a closer look at Kinneret Yifrah's standard reference *Microcopy: The Complete Guide* and her contributions on Medium at https://medium.com/@Kinneret

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ramona Wühle studied translation at the University of Heidelberg and works as the Language Manager for the German-speaking markets at Coupa Software, a leading provider of cloud-based spend management solutions. She has 20+ years of experience in the localization industry, working on marketing content as well as software and technical documentation for Fortune 500 companies and start-ups alike, both on the LSP and client side.

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Mitigating the planning fallacy

Big projects – in technical documentation as in any other field – rarely go to plan. But don't let the unforeseeable spoil your work.

Text by Nithya Krishnan


Image: © DNY59/istockphoto.com

Have you ever found yourself overly optimistic about how long a project will take, only to be surprised by delays and unexpected hurdles? This is a common experience, known as the "planning fallacy", where we tend to underestimate the time and effort needed, even when past projects have taken longer. Technical writing projects, with their unique complexities and unforeseen challenges, are prone to this pitfall.

We often fall into this trap due to a mix of natural optimism and a tendency to overlook potential roadblocks. As technical writers, we're skilled and confident in our abilities, which can lead us to underestimate the time a task requires. Additionally, it's easy to forget that projects rarely go exactly as planned; unexpected issues can always crop up, adding extra time and effort to our workload.

The planning fallacy isn't just a minor inconvenience – it can have serious repercussions for documentation projects. Missed deadlines, compromised quality, and increased stress levels are all-too-common consequences.

Let's look at how planning fallacy affects documentation projects and what steps you can take to mitigate these issues and risks.

How the planning fallacy affects projects

The challenges technical writers face when estimating task complexity and setting deadlines can have far-reaching consequences. Table 1 explores these consequences in detail, highlighting the domino effect that can occur when deadlines are missed due to unrealistic planning.

Strategies for mitigating the planning fallacy

The planning fallacy is not just about misjudging timelines; it's a catalyst for a chain reaction that can compromise the quality of your docs, create stress and burnout, and damage professional relationships. Recognizing and proactively addressing the planning fallacy is essential for ensuring project success and fostering the sustained professional growth of technical writers. By implementing strategies to mitigate effects, technical writers can improve their project planning, deliver high-quality documentation on time and within budget, and build stronger relationships with stakeholders. Let's look at some of these strategies.

Leverage historical data

Utilize data from past projects to work on your current project planning:

- Analyze timelines and resource allocation from similar projects in the past.
- Identify patterns in task durations, bottlenecks, and unexpected challenges.
- Incorporate historical insights into your current estimates.

Create detailed work breakdown structures

Break down the project into the smallest possible tasks:

- Divide and conquer – create granular tasks.
- This aids in accurate task estimation and reveals dependencies.

Build in buffer time

Include extra time in your schedule to account for unexpected events:

- Add some buffer time to your initial estimate.
- Adjust based on historical data and project complexity.

Conduct regular reviews

Schedule periodic check-ins with stakeholders:

- Discuss progress, address concerns, and identify potential roadblocks.
- Act as an early warning system to allow for proactive adjustments.

Develop contingency plans

Plan for potential project risks:

- Identify risks like resource issues, technical problems, or scope changes.
- Create a plan for each risk, outlining the response if it occurs.

Set realistic expectations

Be upfront with stakeholders about potential challenges and uncertainties:

- Avoid overpromising to gain approval.
- Provide regular updates and communicate any changes proactively.

Problem	Consequence	Impact
Technical writers underestimate task complexity, leading to overly optimistic timelines.	Missed deadlines	Delayed product launches, missed market opportunities, unprepared users, and strained support teams.
Missed deadlines force technical writers to rush the authoring process, leading to long hours and a loss of personal time.	Increased stress	Burnout, decreased morale, health issues, and stress for both the writer and project stakeholders.
The pressure to meet deadlines can compromise the quality of work, as essential steps like thorough research and peer reviews are overlooked.	Reduced quality	Documentation contains errors, inconsistencies, or outdated information, hindering user experience and reflecting poorly on the writer.
Missed deadlines and subpar work erode trust between the writer and stakeholders.	Strained relationships	Tense communication, micromanagement, lack of confidence in the writer, and difficulty with future collaborations. This can damage the writer's reputation within the organization.

Table 1: The domino effect of strained timelines

Foster open communication

Encourage feedback and collaboration:

- Establish two-way communication with stakeholders and team members.
- Listen to concerns and suggestions to find mutually beneficial solutions.

Embrace flexibility

Be ready to adapt your plan as needed:

- Anticipate changes in technology and requirements.
- Consider agile project management for iterative development and flexibility.

By taking these steps, you can increase your chances of completing your project on time and within budget, while minimizing the stress associated with the planning fallacy.

An example

Imagine the scenario of a new mobile banking app. The app has advanced features like budgeting tools, investment options, and personalized financial insights. Here is the set of deliverables required within a period of three months:

- **Quick start guide:** A concise document to get users up and running with essential functions (login, account overview, basic transactions).
- **Comprehensive user manual:** Detailed instructions for all app features, including advanced functionalities, organized logically with screenshots and step-by-step guides.
- **Troubleshooting guide:** A resource for common issues (password reset, connectivity problems, transaction errors) with solutions and contact information for support.
- **Video tutorials (optional):** Short, engaging videos demonstrating key features and user flows.

Planning fallacy impact

- **Underestimating task complexity:** The technical writer might overlook the intricacies of the new mobile banking app, its advanced features, and the level of detail needed to explain them clearly. For instance, the "personalized financial insights" feature might involve complex algorithms and data analysis, requiring in-depth research and understanding to document accurately.

- **Ignoring unforeseen delays:** The project plan might not account for unexpected issues like delays in app development, changes in features, or difficulty obtaining necessary information from developers or subject-matter experts.
- **Overlooking review and revision time:** The plan might not allocate enough time for thorough reviews and revisions of the documentation, which are essential for ensuring accuracy, clarity, and consistency.

Mitigating the planning fallacy

Use the following strategies to mitigate the planning fallacy.

Prioritize & phase

Focus on essential deliverables first, such as the quick start guide and key sections of the user manual. Document advanced features later.

- This ensures core documentation is available at launch, enabling users to start using the app immediately.

Divide and conquer

Break down each deliverable into very specific tasks. Create a Work Breakdown Structure to organize the tasks.

- This improves task assignment, progress tracking, and identification of bottlenecks. It also enables easier plan adjustments.

Leverage existing resources

Utilize existing documentation or design assets to speed up the creation of screenshots and user flows.

- This saves time and ensures consistency between the app's interface and the documentation.

Parallel workflows

Have multiple writers work on different sections simultaneously. A dedicated resource could also start working on the troubleshooting guide.

- This accelerates the documentation process, especially where large amounts of content are involved.

Continuous feedback loop

Involve product managers, designers, and developers in reviewing drafts early and often.

- This ensures the documentation is accurate, user-friendly, and aligned with the app's functionality.

Adapt & adjust

Be prepared to adjust the plan as the project progresses. Reallocate resources or prioritize if needed.

- This ensures essential documentation is completed on time, even if the full scope cannot be achieved within the timeframe.

Additional tips

Here are some additional tips that can further empower technical writers to combat the planning fallacy:

Utilize project management tools

Employ specialized software for enhanced project planning and tracking.

- Features to look for: Gantt charts, task dependencies, resource allocation, progress tracking.
- Examples: Asana, Trello, Monday.com, Jira

Use templates

Utilize standardized content templates to build content artifacts.

- Work with templates to keep a consistent structure to your docs.
- Use templates for quick start guides, troubleshooting guides, and user manuals.

Seek mentorship and feedback

Tap into the experience of seasoned technical writers and peers.

- Seek guidance from experienced colleagues for insights and lessons learned.
- Conduct peer reviews of your project plan for valuable feedback and risk identification.

Cultivate a learning mindset

Continuously improve your project planning skills through reflection and analysis.

- Reflect on the project's successes and challenges.
- Document lessons learned and apply them to future projects.

Takeaways

Overcoming the planning fallacy is an ongoing process. By actively using project management tools, seeking feedback from experienced peers, and reflecting on past experiences, technical writers can continuously improve their project planning skills.

Remember, the goal is not to eliminate all uncertainty but to approach projects with a realistic mindset, a well-structured plan, and the flexibility to adapt as needed. By doing so, you can deliver high-quality documentation on time and within budget, while also building a reputation of reliability and excellence.

Embrace the reality of uncertainty, but equip yourself with a pragmatic approach, a meticulously crafted plan, and the agility to adjust along the way. This empowers you to consistently deliver exceptional documentation, meeting deadlines and budget constraints, all the while establishing yourself as a trusted and accomplished professional.

By adopting these strategies, technical writers can circumvent the common trap of overoptimism and the pitfalls of the planning fallacy, ensuring they produce top-tier documentation that truly serves their audience.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In her many years working as a technical communicator, **Nithya Krishnan** has authored end-user documentation artifacts across domains such as healthcare, mobility, database modeling, enterprise on-premise and cloud-based solutions. With an academic background in information technology, her interest lies in creating a cohesive learning environment for all roles involved in a software development process.

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Personal branding for technical communicators

Creating and maintaining a strong brand helps you to take control over how you are perceived as a professional tech writer and expand your network.

Text by Kees van Mansom

Image: © PeopleImages/istockphoto.com

I have been a technical communicator all my professional life, but I have not always been called one. As a real job hopper, I moved from one position to another, from technical author to documentation specialist, documentation manager, implementation manager, business consultant, information advisor, and even product marketer. Every two to three years I switched roles while, in essence, I used the same skill set.

About ten years ago, something happened that drastically changed my perspective and compelled me to act. After being a happy job hopper for almost 20 years, I lost my job due to the bankruptcy of my employer. And it was then that I found out that having a diverse professional background can be both a blessing and a curse. To some people, a long list with a variety of roles looks impressive, but others perceive this as a failure to persist in any of the listed roles. One of the interviewers at that time summarized it in one simple question: Who is the person behind this long list of work experiences? That was when I realized that I needed to make the pattern in my work explicit and that I needed to specify the distinct driver for all my actions, building a storyline that explains who I am, what I stand for, and what I bring to the table. In this article, I will share my recipe for successful personal branding.

The importance of personal branding

Why would we, as technical communicators, spend time on our personal branding when we are not looking for another role or assignment? The answer is that personal branding is not something we can switch on or off. We do it every day and with everyone we encounter. It happens at the coffee corner while speaking with colleagues, or in a workshop with a client. It is important to be aware of this and stay in control. From the moment I started working more consciously on my personal branding, I have seen many positive effects in my relationships with leadership, colleagues, and clients. My branding helped me to quickly build an internal and external network and have meaningful conversations with the people in that network.

In fact, I credit my current role, my network, and my assignments to a large extent to my personal branding. I work for a global organization with over 700,000 people. In such an organization, it can be easy to be overlooked. My branding has given me the right visibility to the right people and ensured that people know how to find me whenever there is a question or opportunity related to technical documentation. Personal branding is important and will influence your career, your network, and your daily work. And most importantly: You are in control.

The building blocks of your brand

As in every good recipe, I will start with the ingredients. These will be the building blocks of your brand. To successfully build your personal brand, I found that it is important to answer the following questions:

1. How do you want to be perceived?
2. What is it that drives and motivates you?
3. What are your strengths, unique skills, and experiences?
4. What is it that you do?

Unlike food recipes, the idea is not to mix these four ingredients but to use them in a structured way, starting with the goal.

A goal-driven approach

Your personal branding – how people perceive you – is not a stamp that you get just based on your actions but something that you carefully build and maintain. In the early years of my career, referring to my master's degree in Linguistic Competence and the work I have been doing in technical documentation were enough for people to form an opinion. Over time it became more complex, and I lost control over how people viewed me. So how can we take control over our brand again?

It all starts with setting a goal for how we want people to perceive us. Here are a few examples of goals technical communicators have given me:

"I want to be seen as the advisor in technical communications in my company."
"I want to be seen as the ultimate expert in product communication."
"I want to be seen as the UX writing specialist."

Consider this goal an ever-evolving parameter that you write down for yourself. You can compare it to driving a car or riding a bike: You aim for a certain place on the horizon, steer towards it, and then select a new destination when you reach it. This is exactly what branding is. At the beginning of 2023, I set my goal of being recognized as the inspiring leader for technical communication within the company Accenture. Now, as of June 1, 2024, I was formally appointed as the Technical Publication Services Lead for Europe and have placed a new dot on my horizon again.

Over the past ten years, I recognized a pattern, a clear relation between the goals I set for myself and the professional development I achieved. But it is not just me: I have been teaching my findings and approach to Accenture Leadership and consultants since 2015, and I have noticed a similar pattern with those who actively pursue their goals.

My personal goal is now to gain global recognition for my thought leadership as an innovator of technical publication services. It is this dot on the horizon that keeps me on my toes and helps me assess where to focus my efforts.

Your purpose and beliefs

I can advise and guide organizations to improve their authoring and publication processes. I can also develop new documentation models for my clients or design innovations to improve the way they work. This is what I do every day. But what does this say about me? How does it help people to distinguish me from everyone else?

About ten years ago, I was introduced to a marketing concept called "The Golden Circle", in a TED talk by author and motivational speaker Simon Sinek. In his TED talk and his book *Start with Why* (Penguin UK, 2011), Sinek describes what he calls a naturally occurring pattern, "a way of thinking, acting and communicating that give some leaders the ability to inspire those around them". In essence, what Sinek says is that most companies and most people can explain what they do, but very few companies and people can explain why they do it. While explaining what you do is not inspiring, explaining why you do what you're doing makes all the difference in the world.

If you think about it, it makes sense. Most of us are perfectly capable of describing what we do and, by now, I can fill at least twelve pages with it in my resume. But it is uninspiring and doesn't say a thing about me. What is inspiring is what drives us: the things that we love and cherish, the things that engage us and give us the energy to do our work every day using everything we have.

Answering the question of what drives you is not easy, and it took me quite some time to answer it for myself. In my workshops, I often see participants writing long introductions about the importance of a certain change, approach, or technology – and though this might drive the changes in a sector or industry, it doesn't have much to do with you unless you put yourself at the heart of this change and explain what drives you to commit to it.

For example, as a technical communicator, you could start your WHY by explaining the importance of technical documentation:

"Everything I do comes from the belief that technical documentation is key for product usage, maintenance, troubleshooting, and repair. Technical information should be understandable, accurate, and easy to find."

This seems to be a fair statement and shows commitment to our profession, but what does it say about the person who wrote it? During my personal branding workshop at tcworld conference 2023, one participant came up with this beautiful statement that seems to come straight from the heart:

"Everything I do comes from my passion for sharing my knowledge with other people and creating trust by transparency and honesty."

In this second example, the WHY statement is no longer directly related to the work this participant is doing as a technical communicator but really describes what drives the person behind the technical communicator. It is a perfect example of how setting your purpose and beliefs at the heart of your branding enables people to see the core of who you are and what you stand for. This goes beyond the role that you play in an organization. Being clear about your objectives can also help to avoid conflicts at work and open new career paths for positions that you have not been considered for before.

Your unique selling point

While your purpose and beliefs will describe WHY you do the things you do, your strengths and experiences are your unique selling points. They define HOW you do things.

There are various tools and methods to help you identify your strengths. I have used a strength finder tool, which gave me a good overview of my strengths and their impact on my daily work. Another approach is to ask your supervisors, colleagues, or clients for input. A typical strength I would expect in many technical communicators is communication: the ability to describe and explain in writing and speaking. If you have this strength, you can make people read your content and listen to you. Some of us might also be drivers, eager to start an action. Others might be more analytical, looking for proof before they start a certain action. Just like with our DNA, our combination of strengths defines who we are.

Your profession

Most people find it difficult to describe what motivates and drives them, or WHY they do the things they do. I see a few people in my workshops struggle with HOW they utilize their strengths and experiences to explain how they do what they do. Only a small group of people finds it hard to explain WHAT they do.

There is a logical explanation for this. Imagine your job is to write service instructions for technical products. This is an activity visible to your co-workers, management, and clients. And if someone were to ask you: "What is it that you do?" you would have no problem answering that you are writing service instructions for technical products. For people in an advisory role, it gets a bit more complex. When, for instance, people ask me what I do, I need to explain a little bit about the technical publication domain and how I shape services and solutions for it. My recommendation here is to always have an example ready, a small story to illustrate what you have recently achieved.

Your professional profile text

Now that we have looked at the building blocks, it is time to start writing our new profile. Fortunately, there is a recipe for improving your personal branding that is so easy that everyone can do it. The recipe contains only three ingredients: WHY – HOW – WHAT. And while we start filling in these three ingredients, we keep an eye on our goal to make sure we position ourselves in such a way that it contributes to how we want to be seen.

Let's use my profile as an example. In a traditional format, my profile would look like this:

"Kees van Mansom is the Accenture lead for Technical Publication Services in Europe, working on reshaping technical publication processes for clients in Automotive, Aerospace & Defense, and Manufacturing."

Though this explains in one sentence what I do, it is uninspiring and doesn't create the right image of me. Now, let's look at my actual profile, starting with the WHY section:

"I must have been born as a (technical) writer and storyteller, since I have been telling stories and writing technical content as long as I can remember. My main motivation – you could call it my purpose – has always been helping people. I feel at my best when working on transformations and innovations that have a positive impact on people, and I thoroughly enjoy presenting, writing, and leading design thinking sessions about my ideas.

I have a passion for Technical Communication, leveraging my vast experience in this field by designing services and solutions that profoundly change the way people create, publish, and use technical publications."

The next step is to describe HOW you use your strengths in your work, again, aligned with your goal. I chose to focus only on my key strengths, which are communication and activation, and not emphasize other strengths like learning, building relationships, and being productive. This led to the following section in my profile:

"By utilizing my storytelling, ideation, and (technical) writing skills, I make sure there is the com-

mitment from all key players in the organization to grow these transformation and innovation ideas into solutions that bring real value to my clients, their customers, and their people."

And then, finally, we get to our conclusion by describing WHAT we do. I added the following paragraph to finalize my profile:

"As the European lead for Technical Publication Services at Accenture, I help my clients in transforming their technical publication-related processes. A good example of my work is the Author Assist application, which utilizes a combination of Generative AI and Semantic AI to support technical authors during the impact analysis and early stages of the authoring process."

In my workshops, I deliberately teach people to write down their profile, instead of practicing short 1- or 2-minute pitches. Having a standard pitch ready for whenever a decision-maker is standing next to you in an elevator might seem handy, but how often does it happen? In my experience, it is better to first build your storyline in a structured manner. The writing process will help you memorize your main points, allowing you to build customized pitches based on the context that you're in.

Join my workshop

Ready to start working on your personal branding? There will be a 105-minute workshop on personal branding for technical communicators at tcworld conference 2024, allowing a (small) group of technical communicators to kickstart their personal branding journey. The workshop is scheduled on Wednesday, November 6, 2024, from 2:00 to 3:45 PM CET.
During the workshop, we will be using Mentimeter (or a similar tool) to anonymously gather input from participants. This will give us a great insight into how the technical communicators who participated in the workshop want to be seen, what their core drivers are, and what they consider to be their strengths. The results of this workshop will be published in the January 2025 edition of *tcworld magazine*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The main motivation of storyteller and technical communicator **Kees van Mansom** is to have a positive impact on people. He has a passion for technical documentation and uses his vast experience in this field by designing services and solutions that profoundly change the way people create, publish, and use technical publications. At Accenture, Kees combines his work as Technical Publication Services Lead for Europe with giving training in leadership skills and coaching and mentoring people.

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Ten questions about iiRDS

Two founding members of the iiRDS Consortium explain the importance and potential of iiRDS and its integration at Endress+Hauser. An interview with Thomas Ziesing from Endress+Hauser and iiRDS consultant Ulrike Parson from parson.

Interview: Susanne Lohmüller

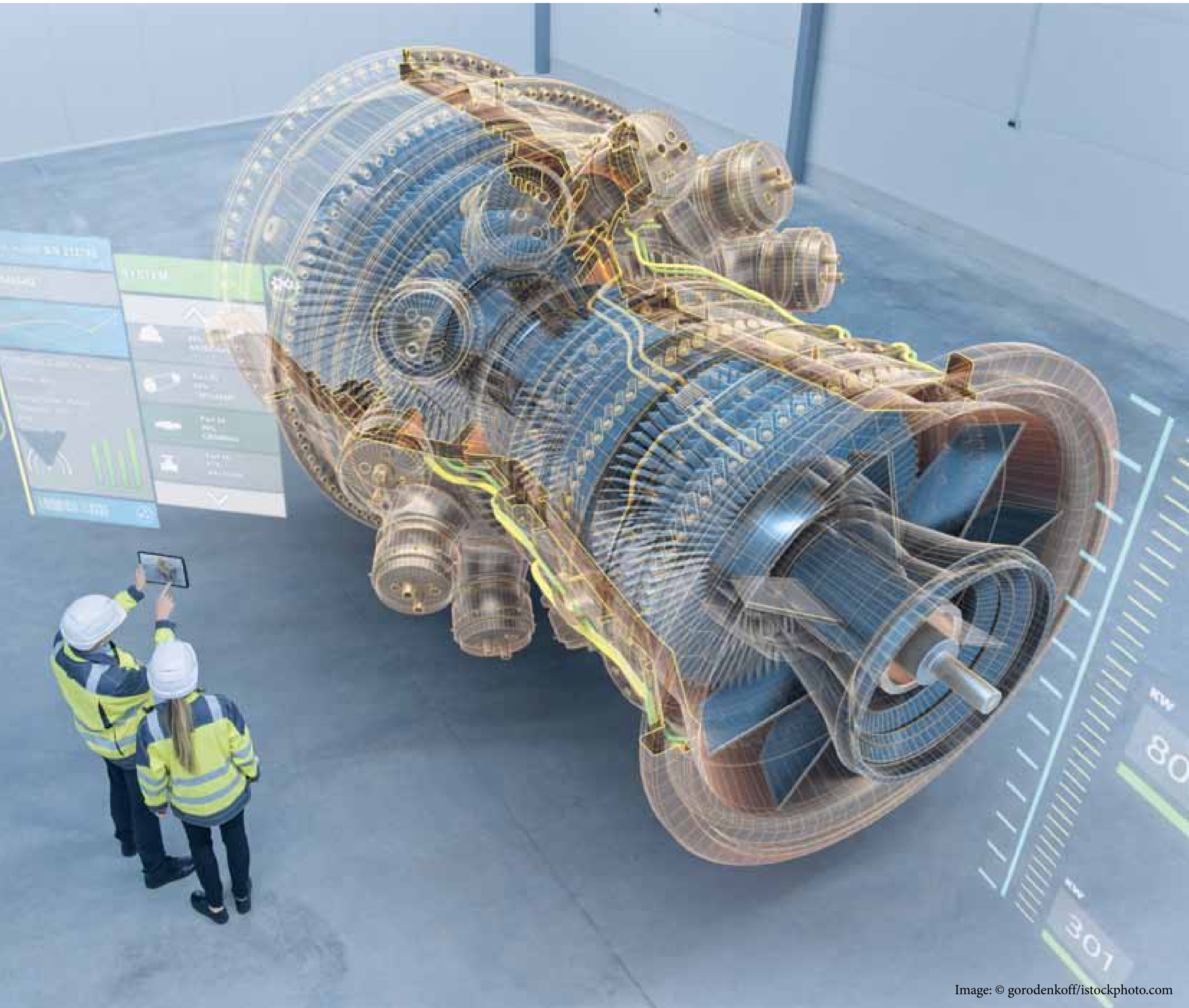

Image: © gorodenkoff/istockphoto.com

How did you come across iiRDS?

Thomas Ziesing: tekom brought the topic to our attention. We found the approach and possibilities of iiRDS so interesting , we joined the Consortium as a founding member in 2018.

Since then, we have been working in the Consortium on the further development of iiRDS.

Why did you choose iiRDS?

Thomas Ziesing: We see the greatest potential in the openness and expandability of iiRDS.

As one of the leading providers of measurement instrumentation, services, and solutions for industrial process engineering, Endress+Hauser has gained sufficient experience in the past with standards for describing and classifying our products, e.g. NE100, ECLASS. In doing so, we have often encountered the problem that certain aspects and features and, in some cases, entire device types cannot be mapped or cannot be mapped completely.

In addition, many of these standards are tailored to the requirements or needs of a specific industry. However, as Endress+Hauser is active in a wide range of industries, this often presents us with problems and generates increased effort.

We see iiRDS as an opportunity to map our information comprehensively and holistically. In addition, iiRDS is combinable with other industry standards such as ECLASS, and the consortium actively cooperates with such industry standards. This makes it possible to map all our metadata in a single model and thus optimize our processes. Efforts towards international standardization as a process model for the exchange of information also benefit our activities regarding digitalization and Industry 4.0.

Ulrike Parson: iiRDS offers a standardized information model for technical documentation that is ideally suited as a blueprint for company-specific metadata models, regardless of the technical implementation. And this knowledge can be used by any company free of charge, as iiRDS is an open-source standard.

For which products do you use iiRDS?

Thomas Ziesing: We are currently working on a project in which we are completely redesigning the authoring, management, and delivery of technical communication information. This information is authored as topic-oriented information units and stored in a comprehensive information model. These information units are then linked to the contexts for which they are valid via a graph-based product model. The aim is to be able to generate order code-specific documentation in the future and to make these information units available to other applications in a context-oriented manner.

iiRDS serves both, as an ontology for structuring and classifying the content and as the delivery format for making the content available.

How do you use iiRDS in technical writing?

Thomas Ziesing: As part of the project mentioned earlier, the content of the technical documentation is created in information units based on topics. These information units are DITA-based and are automatically enriched with the metadata that they receive through their mapping to the information model and product model. As iiRDS is the underlying ontology, the metadata is based on it.

In the future, the information units will not only be made available in information products such as operating instructions but will also be addressed and delivered individually

ABOUT THE INTERVIEW PARTNERS

Thomas Ziesing worked as a media documentalist in the chemical-pharmaceutical industry until joining Endress+Hauser more than 25 years ago. He was involved in several projects in the online sector before taking over responsibility for the translation management process and the coordination of the technical editing departments of the Product Centers at Endress+Hauser Consult AG.

Ulrike Parson is the founder and CEO of parson AG, a service provider for technical communication. Her areas of expertise are consulting for content strategy, digitalization, and intelligent information. She is a member of the iiRDS Steering Committee.

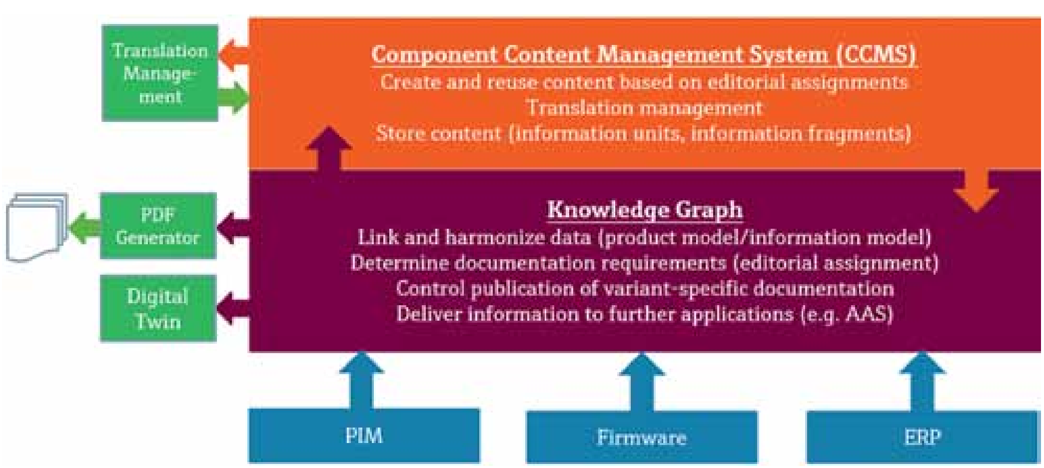

Figure 1: Technical writers work with various sources of product information.

and specifically via the metadata in order to be used, for example, in an app or website. iiRDS will serve as the transfer format: The information units are transferred to a content delivery portal in the form of iiRDS packages. End users and apps can find the information from the portal via metadata and retrieve it for further use.

Have you brought in external support?

Thomas Ziesing: We called in parson AG for technical and information architecture consulting in this project. Like Endress+Hauser, parson is a member of the iiRDS Consortium and brings a great deal of expertise to this area as well as to DITA, which helps us a lot.
We are also working together with Empolis, another iiRDS Consortium member, as a technical partner. Here, we use their Knowledge Graph component for modeling product information and documentation metadata as well as linking CCMS content with product data.

Which other departments are involved in the implementation of iiRDS?

Thomas Ziesing: The project in technical communication is a pilot with which we want to test and demonstrate the possibilities of iiRDS. In principle, it is feasible to extend this concept to other types of information, and we are planning to do so.

Ulrike Parson: In our iiRDS project, information from different groups and sources is already merged: The product data comes from different systems such as a PIM and a software configuration system, the information model is maintained by the technical writing groups, and product management is responsible for ordering options for the products. Thus, the project also has the major task of harmonizing data from different sources.

Thomas Ziesing: There is great interest in this harmonized product data and documentation content, which can be compiled to match the order code, especially in the area of digitalization activities. On the one hand, we are planning to integrate this content into our own applications and, on the other, to deliver the technical documentation in an administration shell for the digital twin. The corresponding submodel "Intelligent Information for Use" is also based on the iiRDS concept. [1]

Do you involve your suppliers?

Thomas Ziesing: We are already talking to one of our customers, a plant manufacturer, who is very interested in our concept and would like to integrate iiRDS packages into its engineering processes. They see considerable potential for simplifying and optimizing their processes.
I expect that such collaborations will increase as soon as the project is completed and we can make the content of the technical documentation available in the form of topic-oriented information units.

How have processes in technical writing changed with the introduction of iiRDS?

Thomas Ziesing: The implementation of the project will fundamentally change the processes in technical writing. The document-oriented authoring and management of content will be replaced by topic-oriented authoring and management based on an information model and product models.
Technical writers will no longer have to work in the context of documents but based on editorial assignments. In an editorial assignment, the content for a specific subject area is compiled according to the product

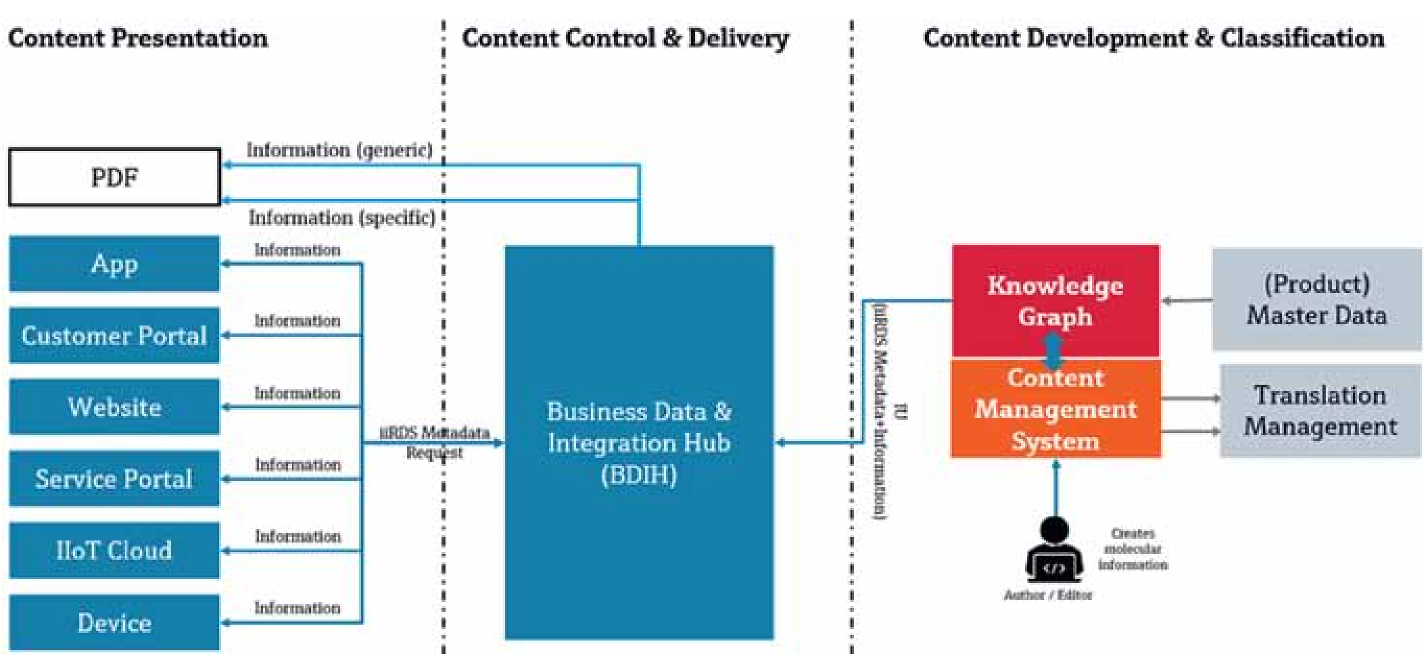

Figure 2: Overview of the targeted information process at Endress+Hauser from content development to presentation

variant, e.g., for the commissioning of the product. The content is compiled based on the data and relations in the Knowledge Graph, which manages the product and information models. Existing information units are automatically determined based on the assigned metadata, and missing information units are created. The structures of these information units are DITA-based.
Once the technical writer completes the editorial assignment and the content is approved, the information units are translated and published. As a result, they are available in all necessary languages for use in a content delivery portal.
Compiling and publishing information products, such as operating instructions or data sheets, are independent of the authoring processes. Information products are generated on demand. Mechanisms such as an automatic completeness check ensure that all the necessary information for an information product is available. The information products are equipped with all the required metadata and can be published in various output formats. We hope that this will significantly speed up the authoring process, as editorial assigments can be started earlier and in a more focused manner. The higher granularity of the information units will give us greater flexibility in terms of use, allowing us to use content in different information products and contexts. This has taken us to the point where we will be able to deliver order code-specific documentation and information in this way. It also prepares the technical writing team for the growing requirements associated with digitalization and enables them to contribute to formats such as the administration shell or the digital twin.

What future benefits do you expect from iiRDS?

Thomas Ziesing: As already mentioned, iiRDS serves as an ontology for structuring and classifying content and will be the delivery format for making it available. The openness and individual expandability allow us to classify the information on our devices and products without major restrictions.
The search and delivery options also meet our requirements. This makes it easier for us to provide technical documentation information for different applications.
We also see the cooperation and coordination with other committees such as ECLASS or VDI 2770 as an advantage, as this will considerably simplify the exchange between different systems.

Ulrike Parson: Using standards such as iiRDS and DITA makes the new documentation concept less dependent on the technical implementation in a specific content management system. At the same time, we are using the knowledge contained in these standards and do not have to develop all concepts from scratch. We can use future additions to the standards for our project.

Where do you see potential for improvement in iiRDS?

Ulrike Parson: For a long time, one area for improvement was the lack of a request interface for iiRDS content. However, the Consortium is currently working on this, and we are hoping to be able to use this API for future delivery of Endress+Hauser content[2].
Also, iiRDS deliberately does not map the product dimension, e.g., product functions, product features, and product variants. iiRDS is an information model, not a product data standard. However, this must be taken into account in a project such as Endress+Hauser's – the product model must be developed specifically for the company and linked to iiRDS.

References:

[1] https://landkarte.interopera.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Submodel-Specification-Document_Intelligent-Information-for-Use.pdf
[2] The API for querying and retrieving iiRDS RDF resources is now available at iirds.org/tools/request-api.

iiRDS Request API

The specification for the request interface has now been published by the iiRDS Consortium on their website (iirds.org). At the tcworld conference from November 5 to 7 in Stuttgart, this year's iiRDS developments will be presented, such as the plugin for DITA-OT, the request API and the associated mock API to be developed in the fall. There will also be presentations on the iiRDS pilot projects.

iirds.org
tcworldconference.tekom.de

ABOUT ENDRESS+HAUSER

Endress+Hauser is a global provider of measuring instruments, services, and solutions for industrial process engineering. The company offers process solutions for flow, level, pressure and temperature measurement, analytical measurement, data logging and digital communication, and optimizing processes in terms of economic efficiency, safety, and environmental impact. Customers operate in a wide range of industries, such as chemicals, energy and power plants, basic materials, metals & mining, food, life sciences, oil and gas, and water/wastewater.

ABOUT THE TECHNICAL WRITING TEAM

More than 40 technical writers work across technical editorial offices in five Product Centers. They currently use COSIMA Enterprise to create operating instructions, short instructions, safety instructions, installation instructions, and other documents, primarily in the form of print documents, which are made available in up to 30 languages.

events

tcworld 2024/2025

OCT '24

Lava Con
- October 27-30, 2024
- Portland, OR, USA
- https://lavacon.org

ATA Annual Conference
- October 30-November 2, 2024
- Portland, OR, USA
- www.atanet.org

NOV '24

tcworld conference 2024
- November 5-7, 2024
- Stuttgart, Germany
- tcworldconference.tekom.de

Languages & The Media
- November 13-15, 2024
- Budapest, Hungary
- www.languages-media.com

IUNTC Meeting

Topic: AI-based iiRDS tagging of technical documents as an example of applied and collaborative research

- November 14, 2024, 4 PM (CET)
- Online
- www.technical-communication.org

Nordic Translation and Interpreting Forum
- November 18-20, 2024
- Malmö, Sweden
- https://ntif.se

DEC '24

IUNTC Meeting

Topic: AIWorkbench

- December 5, 2024, 5 PM (CET)
- Online
- www.technical-communication.org

MARCH '25

NORDIC TechKomm Stockholm
- March 12-13, 2025
- Stockholm, Sweden
- se.nordic-techkomm.com

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APRIL '25

GALA 2025
- April 13-15, 2025
- Montreal, Canada
- www.gala-global.org

MAY '25

tcworld China
- May 2025
- Shanghai, China
- www.tcworld-china.cn

SEP '25

NORDIC TechKomm Copenhagen
- September 18-19, 2025
- Copenhagen, Denmark
- dk.nordic-techkomm.com

NOV '25

tcworld conference 2025
- November 11-13, 2025
- Stuttgart, Germany
- tcworldconference.tekom.de