Managing DITA projects in the real world
Alan Pringle

- Chief operating officer, Scriptorium Publishing
- Coauthor, *Content Strategy 101*
- Bachelor of Arts in English, Wake Forest University
- In tech comm since 1990 and with Scriptorium since 1997
Alan Pringle
A quick poll

- Considering a DITA implementation
- In the midst of a DITA implementation
- Completed a DITA implementation
- Here to make Alan’s life difficult
- None of the above
Before you go to the DITA circus
Before you go to the DITA circus

• Content strategy
  • Analyze business goals
  • Implement when DITA is a good match

• Change management
  • Good communication is key during all project phases
  • Targeted training is essential
Aspects of a DITA project

- Managing people
- Content modeling
- Evaluating tools and vendors
- Understanding outputs
- Considering conversion
Managing people

Web team

IT

Content creators

Executives

Flickr: National Media Museum
Managing people

- Content consumers
- Product development
- Localization team
Content modeling
Content modeling

- Map current content types to DITA elements
  
  ...but be careful

- Metadata: crucial for managing content
Attributes for filtering

<p audience="beginner" ...></p>

<task product="product1" ...></task>

Elements that are metadata (bookmap)

<bookid>
<edition>First edition</edition>
<isbn audience="pdf">9780982811849</isbn>
</bookid>
Content modeling

- Map current content types to DITA elements
  
  …but be careful

- Metadata: crucial for managing content

- Specialize?

- Constrain?

- DITA constructs: conref, keyref, and so on
Evaluating tools

- Choosing DITA tools ≠ DITA strategy
- Current tools should not be your main comparison point
- Compile requirements for vendors
  - Ask vendors specific questions
  - Discomfort now means discomfort later
- Get help with evaluations (particularly with CCMS)
Understanding outputs
Chapter 7

Managing risk

Topics:
- Corporate risk
- Technology risk
- Storage risk

Risks that are common in technical content include the following:
- Inaccurate information
- Incomplete information
- Information that is ignored
- Poorly written information
- Unclear information
- Information that is inappropriate for the target audience
- Legal liability due to documentation problems

Is there risk in having a really good content strategy? Consider the following factors:
- If information is easy to find and analyze, people may be able to more easily identify deficiencies in the product.
- Some companies like to practice security through obscurity. If the information is sufficiently difficult to locate, they reason that nobody will find it, and therefore the information is safe.
- Implementing a system that tracks and manages content changes may be seen as a litigation risk, because the record of changes might become discoverable.

Risks associated with the development of technical content include:
- **Release schedules.** Pay attention to product release schedules. Avoid scheduling launch of a new content development environment inside the chaos that is a release deadline.
- **Communication.** Good communication about the project alleviates fear, uncertainty, and doubt. Lack of communication does the opposite. The staff needs to understand the reasons for changing the approach to content and the benefits it provides. People do not like change. A careful change management process based upon a great deal of communication should address this challenge. When in doubt, overcommunicate—undercommunicating can kill your project.
- **Training.** Writers need training to understand the new workflow. Without training, they will take longer to learn the new process and may resent the steep learning curve.
- **Productivity.** Productivity will be initially low in the new system as people learn how to use it.
- **Quality of implementation.** The new workflow should closely match the requirements of the content that’s being developed. Improving processes that do not accommodate writers’ legitimate requirements will lead to disgruntled writers.
- **Leadership.** Within the workgroup, the attitudes of leaders—whether positive or negative—will influence reactions of the entire staff. Without
Fledging Research does, however, invest a significant amount of time and energy into building stylesheets that output the information in an attractive, professional format. The company then contributes these stylesheets back to the open source community so that others can benefit from them.

![Diagram]

**Figure 21: Open-source content strategy**

**The business case**

Fledging Research has very few costs, and all work is done with in-house resources.

**Table 9: Estimated costs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Implementation cost (one-time)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design attractive output</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement design</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$20,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cost savings and revenue sides of the business case are also sparse. One option is to assume that the increased customer satisfaction from better content will lead to at least one additional customer per year and that, likewise, the open-source contribution will yield one additional customer per year. Another way to look at the business case is to assume that better technical content will open up projects with larger customers, which would increase the average value of a customer.
Chapter 7: Managing risk

Risks that are common in technical content include the following:

- Inaccurate information
- Incomplete information
- Information that is ignored
- Poorly written information
- Unclear information
- Information that is inappropriate for the target audience
- Legal liability due to documentation problems

Is there risk in having a really good content strategy? Consider the following factors:

- If information is easy to find and analyze, people may be able to more easily identify deficiencies in the products.
- Some companies like to practice security through obscurity. If the information is sufficiently difficult to locate, they reason that nobody will find it, and therefore the information is safe.
- Implementing a system that tracks and manages content changes may be seen as a litigation risk, because the record of changes might become discoverable.

Risks associated with the development of technical content include:
stylesheets back to the open source community so that others can benefit from them.

*Figure 21: Open-source content strategy*

**The business case**

Fledgling Research has very few costs, and all work is done with in-house resources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Implementation cost (one-time)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design attractive output</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement design</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$20,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cost savings and revenue sides of the business case are also sparse. One option is to assume that the increased customer satisfaction from better content will lead to at least one additional customer per year and that, likewise, the open source contribution will yield one additional
Managing risk

Risks that are common in technical content include the following:

- Inaccurate information
- Incomplete information
- Information that is ignored
- Poorly written information
- Unclear information
- Information that is inappropriate for the target audience
- Legal liability due to documentation problems

Is there risk in having a really good content strategy? Consider the following factors:

- If information is easy to find and analyze, people may be able to more easily identify deficiencies in the products.
- Some companies like to practice security through obscurity. If the information is sufficiently difficult to locate, they reason that nobody will find it, and therefore the information is safe.
- Implementing a system that tracks and manages content changes may be seen as a litigation risk, because the record of changes might become discoverable.

Risks associated with the development of technical content include:

- **Release schedules.** Pay attention to product release schedules. Avoid scheduling launch of a new content development environment inside the chaos that is a release deadline.

- **Communication.** Good communication about the project alleviates fear, uncertainty, and doubt. Lack of communication does the opposite. The staff needs to understand the reasons for changing the approach to content and the benefits it provides. People do not like change. A careful change management process based upon a great deal of communication should address this challenge. When in doubt, overcommunicate—undercommunicating can kill your project.

- **Training.** Writers need training to understand the new workflow. Without training, they will take longer to learn the new process and may resent the steep learning curve.

- **Productivity.** Productivity will be initially low in the new system as people learn how to use it.

- **Quality of implementation.** The new workflow should closely match the requirements of the content that’s being developed. Imposing processes that do not accommodate writers’ legitimate requirements will lead to disgruntled writers.

- **Leadership.** Within the workgroup, the attitudes of leaders—whether positive or negative—will influence reactions of the entire staff. Without support from leaders, you will encounter heightened aversion to change and perhaps even outright hostility. Leaders may or may not be managers; look for the employees to
Content Strategy 101
Transform Technical Content into a Business Asset

Managing risk

Risks that are common in technical content include the following:

- Inaccurate information
- Incomplete information
- Information that is ignored
- Poorly written information
- Unclear information
- Information that is inappropriate for the target audience
Chapter 7: Managing risk

Risks that are common in technical content include the following:

- Inaccurate information
- Incomplete information
- Information that is ignored
- Poorly written information
- Unclear information
- Information that is inappropriate for the target audience
- Legal liability due to documentation problems

Is there risk in having a really good content strategy? Consider the following factors:

- If information is easy to find and analyze, people may be able to more easily identify deficiencies in the products.
- Some companies like to practice security through obscurity. If the information is sufficiently difficult to locate, they reason that nobody will find it, and therefore the information is safe.
- Implementing a system that tracks and manages content changes may be seen as a litigation risk, because the record of changes might become discoverable.

Risks associated with the development of technical content include:

- *Release schedules.* Pay attention to product release schedules. Avoid scheduling launch of a new content development environment inside the chaos that is a release deadline.

- *Communication.* Good communication about the project alleviates fear, uncertainty, and doubt. Lack of communication does the opposite. The staff needs to understand the reasons for changing the approach to content and the benefits it provides. People do not like change. A careful change management process based upon a great deal of communication should address this challenge. When
• Default output is ugly—but fixable and extensible

• Take software development approach: requirements, and so on

• PDF processing
  • Apache FOP is limiting
  • License professional tool?

• Get significant budget for modifying default transforms
Considering conversion
Considering conversion

- Research DITA best practices.
- Evaluate existing content. Better to start over?
- No conversion? Still need content to test content model and outputs.
- Allow enough time for conversion.
- Valid DITA ≠ good DITA.
In conclusion…
The important stuff!

- No DITA without a content strategy analysis
- Change management is as important as the technology
- Choosing DITA tools is not a DITA strategy
- Valid DITA ≠ good DITA
Resources

- XML calculator
  scriptorium.com/xml-calculator/

- Change management
  scriptorium.com/change

- Output specifications
  scriptorium.com/specifications

- Best practices
  tiny.cc/ditastyle

- Conversion tips
  scriptorium.com/convert

- FOP deficiencies
  tiny.cc/fopflop

- DITA skills
  scriptorium.com/skills

- Free DITA training
  - English: learningdita.com
  - German: learningdita.de
  - Chinese: learningdita.cn

- Podcast on DITA projects
  scriptorium.com/dita-project
Questions?
Contact me

- asp@scriptorium.com
- Twitter: @alanpringle
- scriptorium.com/blog
Your opinion is important to us! Please tell us what you thought of the lecture. We look forward to your feedback via smartphone or tablet under http://ta25.honestly.de or scan the QR code.

The feedback tool will be available even after the conference!