ZOOMIN

4 THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING FOR DYNAMIC CONTENT

Dynamic content provides your customers with easy access to contextually relevant information, enabling them to be more effective. When planning for dynamic content, it is important to stay focused. Here are some key aspects to consider.

1. WHERE IS YOUR CONTENT?

In a perfect world, all your content would be living together in harmony. But most organizations have content — important content — in separate content silos. The key to bringing these **content silos** together is to *think integration*. Silos can exist — in fact, the different content teams in your organization have their own workflows and preferred formats for a reason — but they need to communicate with each other.

The ideal solution needs to draw content, both structured and unstructured, from the different silos into a single accessible repository. That repository should be designed so that the important and relevant content is *easily* accessible by the different users of your content: employees, partners, and customers.

2. WHO ARE YOUR USERS AND WHAT ARE THEY LOOKING FOR?

At the most basic level, your content is designed for two different audiences: an **internal audience** and an **external audience. Your internal content** is meant for your employees and sometimes, your partners. **Your external content** is designed for your prospects and customers. Some of the content your organization develops, such as technical documentation, focuses on both audiences.

Within these two larger groups, there are specific roles or stages that are meaningful to your organization. For example, a new customer needs different information than an experienced customer does, and your engineering staff will need access to different documents than your support team does. It is important to give each group the easiest access **to the information they will actually use**.

You can accomplish this through a classification system that tags each piece of content according to the roles it is important for. This classification allows easy filtering by role. It should preferably be applied to each content component — that is, each piece of information that is independently relevant. A strong taxonomy will allow you not only to classify by role, but also by product and function.

3. HOW DO USERS ACCESS YOUR CONTENT?

It is a given that users today expect mobile access to your content. But do they also need offline access? Do they expect the same functionality on their mobile device as on their PC? And what technologies are coming down the pike?

- Offline access is particularly important to field service employees, who may be sent on calls that are either outside of mobile service areas or suffering from a mobile "black-out". To ensure that offline access is possible, make dynamic documentation accessible in ePub format or use one of the new HTML5-based output formats.

- The more ubiquitous mobile access has become, the more users have become accustomed to the peculiarities of the mobile interface. This is good news for you, because it makes it easier to use standard rules for generating the mobile version of your dynamic content. At the same time, customers are unlikely to easily accept a much more limited mobile interface if it obstructs key functionality. Employee-facing mobile apps can be more focused, including only those functions that are needed when internal users are away from their desks.

- Content accessibility is developing so quickly that we cannot even imagine how we might be using content five years from now. The good news is that dynamic content is usually based on generally accepted standards like DITA XML, so it is relatively future proof. That is, since DITA is not specific to a single vendor or solution, new technologies quickly spawn multiple solutions for extending DITA-based documentation to whatever access technology becomes popular.

4. TO WHAT DEGREE DO YOUR USERS WANT OR EXPECT TO INTERACT WITH YOUR CONTENT?

Increasingly, companies want to allow their customers to comment on their product content. When deciding how interactive you want your content to be, ask the following questions:

- **How likely is it that your users want to or will contribute to your content?**

  If they do, you should think about how your system will interact with your content creation workflow.

- **How will you approve "interactive" content?**

  Customer comments are actually another part of your content workflow: will you need someone to moderate and approve these comments? How will these comments be added to the content workflow so that you can improve your own content based on customer feedback?

- **What do you want to learn from customer interaction?**

  Interactivity gives you the opportunity to learn how effective your content really is. What does your department or organization want to learn from customer comments and ratings? Sample questions include: How often are customers reading the different pieces of your content? Is it clear for them? Does it encourage them to interact more in your customer community?

  Once you allow comments and rating functionality, ask the questions that are most important to you, and put analytics in place to take advantage of the new data your system can collect.

If you keep these key issues in mind, you will have a plan for dynamic content that combines a focus on your customer with a realistic understanding of your company's expectations and needs.