

**Method M**

A **Method M** White Paper

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# WHAT MANAGERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DITA

Quantifying the Cost Savings and Benefits for Your Organization

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## ABSTRACT

Product documentation is expensive – often, much more expensive than it needs to be. With DITA promising savings of 50% in product documentation preparation costs, and 80% in translation costs, managers need to know what DITA is and if it can work for their organization.

This Method M White Paper distills the information that managers need to know about DITA.

## THE PROBLEM

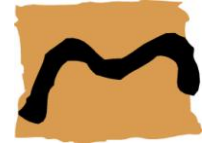
Companies neglected product documentation processes while improving core functions such as development, implementation, production, support and sales. In an increasingly globalized market, with increasing numbers of product variants, managers can no longer afford to ignore documentation costs.

*Enterprise companies spend twice as much on document costs than they think. InfoTrends/CAP Ventures found that companies spend 6% of revenue on document costs, but believed they spend 3% of revenue.<sup>1</sup>*

This White Paper provides managers with the tools needed to understand and act on opportunities to win by changing how their organization builds and maintains documents.

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<sup>1</sup> InfoTrends/Cap Ventures, reported in CRN. October 10, 2005.



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### WHERE WE ARE TODAY

In the last twenty years advances in methodology have driven productivity for most engineering tasks – except for product documentation. Engineers fix a bug or add a feature in one module, enhancing many products and variants. But documentation will need to be updated manually in many locations.

Even within a single product, information is often repeated for pre-sales, requirements, installation and implementation, operation, training, and support materials. Updating is costly and error-prone.

When product documentation needs to be delivered in multiple formats (such as PDF or print, on-line help, and web), the effort – and room for error – multiplies.

If product information is translated, the costs, errors and potential bottlenecks multiply yet again.

It's no wonder that companies worldwide are turning to DITA for solutions.

*DITA<sup>2</sup> was developed by IBM to enable faster production of more effective documents at lower cost. DITA has been adopted as a standard for document processes throughout IBM.*

*IBM has passed the DITA standard to the not-for-profit OASIS<sup>3</sup> and made software tools to publish from DITA available as the open source DITA Toolkit.*

### DITA REPLACES BOOK PARADIGMS

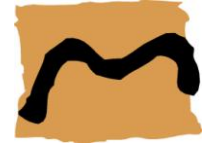
With companies no longer delivering just a user guide, and companies reusing software and hardware components in multiple products, book-based paradigms for the document lifecycle just make no sense.

DITA isn't about a particular tool or even about XML. It's about moving to architecture that makes sense for an object-oriented workplace. Even companies that had migrated to XML authoring using DocBook (the leading DTD for tech docs) have found that implementing DITA provides enormous benefit.

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<sup>2</sup> DITA is an acronym for Darwin Information Typing Architecture.

<sup>3</sup> OASIS is an acronym for the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards.



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### JUST ENOUGH INFORMATION

Effective documents provide just enough information (and no more) for the tasks that each user needs to perform at any moment in time.

DITA enables automatically producing just enough information per product, per audience and per output format.

### REAL WORLD FLEXIBILITY NEEDS

Meeting the demands of different types of information products (for example, implementation manual vs. web self-support) and different departments has resulted in redundant documents where information reuse was difficult.

DITA provides a mechanism for meeting unique needs of different products or departments while maintaining a common base structure that facilitates reuse. In DITA jargon this mechanism is referred to as specialization.

### DEVELOPED FOR CONTENT REUSE

Developed by technical writers for technical content, DITA enables the highest level of reuse and minimum content redundancy.

*DITA stores content as modular chunks called topics.*

*A DITA Map organizes topics for publication in a logical order and hierarchy. (A DITA Map resembles a table of contents.) Different DITA maps are typically defined for outputs such as online help, user guides, system description and FAQ.*

*A single topic can be included multiple times in a single DITA map or in multiple DITA maps, and will appear in as many output products.*

### CONSISTENCY IN DITA

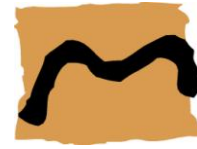
An XML DTD<sup>4</sup> defines the structure of content. By allowing authors to only enter content according to the structure, the DTD ensures that content is consistent and reusable (as well as helping writers create content more rapidly). DITA includes a complete DTD.

#### SEMANTIC TAGS, FORMATTING TAGS

In tools such as Microsoft Word or FrameMaker, authors apply style tags that define *look and feel*. In a DITA environment, authors apply tags that define the *meaning* of content. These semantic tags can be used to filter content (such as, filtering out advanced content for a novice), to support parametric search and to enable other functionality.

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<sup>4</sup> Document Type Definition.



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### GETTING STYLED OUTPUTS FROM DITA

Stylesheets control the look and feel of DITA outputs. Applying different stylesheets enables publishing to the look and feel best suited to different output formats. The DITA toolkit includes a set of stylesheets that you can use out-of-the-box or customize to your needs.

### FILTERING DITA CONTENT BY CONDITIONS

DITA supports marking content (text, tables, and images) with conditions. For example, an image might be appropriate for the user manual but not for the online help. A particular instruction in a procedure might be appropriate for Model 2000 but not Model 1000. When publishing to an output product, conditions can be used to filter content appropriate for each audience.

### IMPLEMENTING DITA

In the past, developing and implementing an XML solution could be very costly. Creating or customizing a DTD takes time and resources. Different departments might require different DTDs. Getting published outputs from content requires developing XSL (XML stylesheets). And different products might require unique XSL development.

Fortunately, the DITA toolkit includes an out-of-the-box DTD that will very

likely meet your needs as well as a set of XSL stylesheets for automatically generating ready-to-distribute outputs from your content.

Over time, as the DITA community adds to the toolkit, your implementation benefits from additional and improved stylesheets.

### BEFORE YOU START – CONTENT MODELING

Your first step should be building a model of your content. Think of this step as taking an audit of what output products you need to provide, what information each product needs to contain, and identifying what content can be reused.

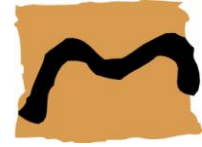
Once you have a content model, you can determine:

- Savings from reuse.
- If customization (specialization) is needed.
- If the standard stylesheets in the DITA toolkit will meet your needs.

*To jump start your DITA implementation, Method M suggests going first with DITA out-of-the-box wherever possible. You can specialize and customize stylesheets later as needed.*

### IS DITA RIGHT FOR EVERY NEED?

Of course not. If your content model indicates that there will be little reuse, and you will have to do extensive specialization of elements and topics, and extensive customization of the



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stylesheets in the DITA toolkit, then DITA may not be the right choice for you.

As a rule-of-thumb, DITA will probably offer great productivity gains if your organization creates online help, web self-help, troubleshooting documents, API documentation, installation manuals, implementation manuals, user manuals, FAQs and similar documents.

For linear, straight narratives (such as, “A History of the Widget from the Early Industrial Era”), DITA will not be the best fit.

### SUMMARY

DITA offers companies opportunities for significant benefits:

- Deliver just-enough information to each user.
- Update content just once; reuse in many products and outputs.
- Enable powerful end-user and author functionality, such as parametric search and content filtering.

DITA is an open standard supported by IBM and implemented in more and more leading companies. The DITA toolkit enables many organizations to start getting benefits from DITA out-of-the-box immediately.

Your first step towards DITA implementation should be modeling your content to anticipate how much benefit DITA provides your organization and how much customization, if any, will be required.

### ABOUT METHOD M

The Method-M team has radically improved the productivity of thousands of information developers and technical writers. Our proven methodology, and experienced staff, will help guarantee the success of your move to DITA or adoption of other productivity solutions.

#### ANALYZE WITH METHOD M:

Where is effort being wasted? Can information be reused? How is information updated? Will content be translated? How does the technical support content affect support incidents?

#### PLAN FOR CHANGE WITH METHOD M:

Start with information and content analysis. Select the tools that meet your requirements. Build the workflows that meet your needs.

#### DELIVER WITH METHOD M:

Method-M accompanies all productivity and process improvement projects through to delivery. From authoring to delivery of outputs, from staff training to any needed tuning of the DTD and final deliverables, Method M guarantees the integrity of your document solution from end-to-end.