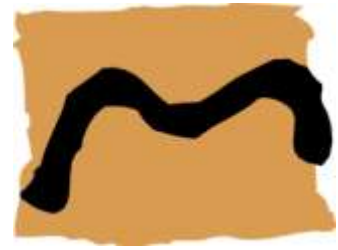


A **Method M** White Paper



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DITA: THE DOCUMENTATION STANDARD

Why It Matters, What's In It for You, Getting Started

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DITA is about moving to architecture that makes sense for contemporary technology companies.

INTRODUCTION

Standards for technical documents enable quality, usability, maintenance, and scalability. Standards enable you to achieve improved productivity, more customer satisfaction and reduced support costs.

DITA is the most important standard today for technical documents. DITAs ultimate goals are enabling the highest quality customer education, tailored to individual needs, and delivered cost-effectively.

THE PROBLEM

Companies spend generously for product documentation, but too often get documentation that is difficult to use, not focused on the core implementation or other tasks that need to be performed, costly to maintain and expensive to translate.

Documentation often does not support your key business needs: getting customers up and running as fast as possible, with the best customer experience and minimum support costs.

TRADITIONAL AUTHORING

With companies focusing on shortening implementation cycles, increasing customer satisfaction, reducing support costs and reusing components in multiple products, book-based paradigms for technical documentation just make no sense. Traditional authoring is just not good enough anymore.

WHAT IS DITA?

DITA is an acronym for Darwin Information Typing Architecture. DITA has been adopted by IBM, Adobe, Nokia, Autodesk and other companies to enable faster production of more effective documents at lower cost.

BUSINESS BENEFITS OF DITA

Standards are essential to any technology-based industry. Whether it's 802.11 for wireless networking or standardized track gauges for railroads, standards foster efficiencies and synergies.

These benefits certainly apply to documentation standards, allowing organizations that adopt DITA to improve productivity, reduce risk, improve documentation effectiveness, and increase return on investment (ROI).

IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY

REUSE CONTENT

Reuse enables faster content development, greater consistency for users, faster maintenance and much lower total cost of ownership.

SHARE CONTENT BETWEEN PRODUCTS

DITA makes integration easier between existing and future systems, protecting your investment in people and tools.

REDUCE COST OF MAINTENANCE

Edit once, update everywhere lowers your overall cost of content maintenance.

AVOID PROPRIETARY AUTHORING TOOLS

DITA content can be edited using any XML editor. DITA content can be manipulated, published and tracked by any DITA-aware editor or system.

TRAIN WRITERS FASTER

As DITA adoption spreads, the talent pool of writers experienced in DITA grows too. A wide selection of DITA tools, training, editors and consultants are available to get your team up-to-speed fast.

LEVERAGE BEST PRACTICES

Take advantage of the collective knowledge and expertise of the very best technical writers and managers who contribute to the growing and evolving DITA community.

Documentation teams have typically devised their own rules and best practices. DITA distills the experience and guidelines of the most effective teams and brings them to your group.

REDUCE RISK

DITA reduces risk because it enables content portability, durability, and interoperability.

COMPENSATE FOR "BOUNCY" PRODUCT DESIGN

A key advantage of DITA is that the modular architecture enables rapid adaptation to the changes that inevitably occur in product design over the development cycle.

FUTURE-PROOF PUBLISHING

No matter who developed DITA content, or what tools or editors they used, the content can be published seamlessly to any of the deliverables that you need. DITA content

STANDARDS, STANDARDS, STANDARDS

The more that your documentation conforms to standards, the more easily your content will fit into tomorrow's authoring and publishing environments.

Embracing standards reduces the risk that the tools you use, the content you create, and the skills your staff acquire, will become obsolete.

MORE EFFECTIVE CONTENT

DITA enables you to create more compelling learning experiences by focusing the content that users need to know, focusing on tasks and task sequences, empowering users to personalize content, and more.

FOCUS CONTENT (NEED-TO-KNOW)

DITA enables easy construction of customized content for special needs – new user orientation, implementation for experienced technicians, troubleshooting, FAQ, configuration, and much more.

TASK-ORIENTED SEQUENCES

Many of the tasks that you describe need to be performed before or after other tasks, and may have related tasks. DITA supports easy description of parent/child topics, sequential topics, and related topics.

EMPOWER USERS – PERSONALIZE CONTENT

Continuing on the spectrum from old-fashioned dump everything that we know into a reference or user manual, to DITA-enabled focused content (customization), DITA can also enable personalization: users choose their own content, based on the tasks that they need, and their particular implementation.

DITA enables more targeted and personalized learning, empowering users to make the most of your products while requiring minimum support.

INCREASE TECH DOC ROI

Modular, reusable content. Targeted at specific user needs. Automatically published to the deliverables that you need. With lower cost to create, maintain and translate. It's a no-brainer. DITA will substantially increase the return on every documentation dollar.

EMPOWERING TECH WRITERS

Some writers are concerned that authoring to a standard may restrict design flexibility. While this concern is understandable, DITGA ultimately yields more flexibility.

DITA's discrete content building blocks, separation of content from presentation and structure, dynamic sequencing, automated publishing, and other features, enable a much wider range of content deliverables than is feasible using book-oriented paradigms.

DITA: LAUNCH TO IMPLEMENTATION

Method M offers a range of services and tools to help you get started with DITA. Whitepapers and articles are freely available on the download section of our web site. The Method M DITA Immersion Workshop is a popular way to get started in DITA. And, of course, Method M is available to accompany your entire shift to DITA, ensuring your success.

Our own experience has been that after start-up costs, DITA content is less expensive to develop and maintain, but provides much more flexibility in creating and delivering effective content aligned with customer needs.

DITA AND METHOD M

Because Method M supports many DITA projects and many writers using DITA, we have extensive practical experience developing, delivering, and supporting DITA solutions.

We leverage that experience to provide our customers with products and services that take full advantage of the benefits of DITA:

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