

Comparing Standards DITA or S1000D

Which is Best for Your Technical Publishing Project?

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Introduction

Publishing is one of the most important aspects of any business and yet it is often the most overlooked. In reality all companies are publishers. Once you create information and send it on to another person for them to consume, and possibly act upon, that information, then you are publishing. For companies this means all communications between departments or between the company and its partners, customers and prospects should be considered publishing. From simple broadcast e-mails, to marketing, training and sales messages. Among these many publishing activities the production and publication of technical information, either in the form of support documentation or as revenue-oriented publications (e.g. marketing materials or training materials), is key to the management and leverage of a companies intellectual property assets.

Any product or service where information is required to develop, sell, install, operate, maintain, repair or support a high-value product, should be underpinned by correctly structured quality publications. From simple one-sheet assembly instructions for a bookcase or a quick-start installation guide for a piece of software, to multi-volume maintenance manuals for a jumbo jet or an enterprise suite of technology. By taking the lessons learnt and the approaches developed on the large complex projects and applying them to ALL styles of Technical Content it is possible to increase quality and revenue, speed development, and decrease production costs. This white paper endeavours to contrast two industry standard applications of such knowledge: S1000D, and the Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA).

TECHNICAL PUBLISHING involves disseminating information required to design, develop, evaluate, sell, install, operate, maintain, repair and support a product throughout its operational life.

Once you start to merge information from a variety of sources the task of managing the use and updating of that information becomes more complicated. As the complexity of the piece of equipment being supported increases the complexity of managing the information grows at an almost exponential rate. This is due to the fact that high tech “products”, from digital cameras to software, are in fact assemblies and configurations of other high tech subcomponents, each of which may have multiple content consumers with varying requirements on the overall content set.

Technical Documentation is not just a one-off expense, a good Technical Content policy will mean that information will need to be continually, reviewed, revised, updated and republished throughout the initial development and operational lifetime of a product. For products like microchips or software, or today’s multitude of high tech products that combine both hardware and software, emphasis is on quality and speed of innovation, regular replacement with upgrades, and time to market. Smooth transition of technical information from software or hardware design specifications to production engineers through to external documentation and marketing is vital to corporate success.

For products like large engineering undertakings like, aircraft and naval vessels, it is important to remember that the integrity of the documentation lasts for the considerable period of time; the equipment is in service often in excess of 25 years.

Complexity and increased variation means ever increasing volumes: