Appendix A – Questionnaires

This appendix contains the questionnaires used for the research, for each of the following groups:

- Users of Technical Communication
- Technical Communicators
- Corporate Management

1. Questionnaire for Users of Technical Communication

Introduction

Technical communication is a field involving designing and developing communication products that transfer technical or specialized information from the expert who know it to others who need to know it.

Technical communication can be effectively used as a tool to achieve a number of corporate objectives, especially in the field of Information Technology. The reason for choosing this field is because of the complex technology involved, which at the same time finds widespread use by diverse user groups. It is a field where technology information transfer can be used proactively and positively to add value towards a number of corporate objectives.

To evaluate the value added to the user, we have considered typical formats like popular media articles, marketing / sales Material, and product documents. These formats cover verbal to written communication, and text to multimedia presentation.

As a user of this technical communication formats, please tell us your opinion about how much value they add.

Questionnaire

To begin with, provide us your personal information. This information will be used for respondents profile analysis only, will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with anyone.
1. Your information

° Name

° Age Group
   a. 18-25 Years
   b. 26-35 Years
   c. 36-45 Years
   d. Above 45 Years

° Address

° Telephone

° Email

° Education
   a. Undergraduate
   b. Graduate
   c. Post-graduate / Professional

° Occupation
   a. Not employed
   b. Employed non-professional
   c. Employed professional
   d. Self-employed / business

Often, companies communicate through print media, radio, television, or conferences about various aspects of the company. The information is very general, and not trying to sell a particular product. For each type of these information communications, please mark how it is useful to you?
2. General information about technology, research, and innovations of the company, not focusing on any specific products, and not trying to sell
   a. Extremely useful
   b. Very useful
   c. Somewhat useful
   d. Less useful
   e. Not useful at all
   f. Not come across any such information communication

3. Company products, their technical features, prices, and how they compare with the competition, trying to make a sell
   a. Extremely useful
   b. Very useful
   c. Somewhat useful
   d. Less useful
   e. Not useful at all
   f. Not come across any such information communication

4. Company’s stand on various social and environmental issues, and how it contributes towards helping solve these issues
   a. Extremely useful
   b. Very useful
   c. Somewhat useful
   d. Less useful
   e. Not useful at all
   f. Not come across any such information communication
The next questions focus on the product related information.

5. When you decide on a particular product to buy - for example, a mobile phone - how useful are company brochures, catalogues and listing of technical features provided at the outlets?
   a. Extremely useful
   b. Very useful
   c. Somewhat useful
   d. Less useful
   e. Not useful at all
   f. Not seen any such catalogues / features listing

6. How much would you say such brochures / catalogues are useful to sell a product, in general?
   a. Extremely useful
   b. Very useful
   c. Somewhat useful
   d. Less useful
   e. Not useful at all
   f. Not seen any such brochures / catalogues

7. Once you have bought a product, it comes with a description of technical features, and a user’s manual for basic features. It also sometimes gives you a reference manual for advanced features, set up instructions and help for solving problems. How useful are these manuals?
   a. Extremely useful
   b. Very useful
   c. Somewhat useful
   d. Less useful
   e. Not useful at all
8. How much would you say such product manuals are useful for a product, in general?
   a. Extremely useful
   b. Very useful
   c. Somewhat useful
   d. Less useful
   e. Not useful at all
   f. Not seen any such manuals

The next questions are based on your perception of about the information communications.

9. When purchasing again from the same company, how much would you consider the value of all the information communication from the company that you have already seen / used?
   a. Extremely useful
   b. Very useful
   c. Somewhat useful
   d. Less useful
   e. Not useful at all
   f. Not seen / used any such communication

10. When you see various communications from a company, regarding its technology, its products, product manuals, how much would you say these communications are useful to a company’s overall image?
    a. Extremely useful
    b. Very useful
    c. Somewhat useful
    d. Less useful
2. Questionnaire for Technical Communicators

Introduction

Technical communication is a broader field of business communication, involving designing and developing communication products that transfer technical or specialized information from the expert who know it to others who need to know it.

When expanded, it means creating effective knowledge transfer, in appropriate format, suitable to the profile of the users, to help improve their efficiency.

Technical communication can be effectively used as a tool to achieve a number of corporate objectives, especially in the field of Information Technology. The reason for choosing this field is because of the complex technology involved, which at the same time finds widespread use by diverse user groups. It is a field where technology information transfer can be used proactively and positively to add value towards a number of corporate objectives.

This is a planned study to evaluate how and to what extent does good technical communication contribute towards achieving corporate objectives.

We have broken down the corporate objectives into two main categories – financial objectives, and non-financial objectives. They are further divided into tangible categories so that five financial and five non-financial categories are selected for evaluation.
Financial objectives:

1. Increase revenue
2. Reduce Fixed costs / overheads
3. Reduce Production costs
4. Reduce Sales cost
5. Reduce Maintenance costs

Non-financial Objectives:

1. Promote Innovation and Research
2. Pursue higher quality
3. Ensure Employee satisfaction
4. Establish leadership in the field
5. Demonstrate corporate social responsibility (CSR) – awareness, education, health benefits, environmental protection, active support to a cause

We have also broken down the other variable, value of technical communication, to six typical formats commonly used in corporations, along with their primary usage:

1. Popular Media Material – to create awareness
2. Marketing / Sales Material – to promote sales
3. Product Documents – to guide towards efficient use
4. Support / Services / Maintenance Documents – to assist maintenance
5. Training Material / Knowledge Base – to facilitate training
6. Internal / Quality/ Process Documents – to ensure quality and efficiency

These formats cover verbal to written communication, and text to multimedia presentation.

We now have a matrix for measuring how each of these six formats contributes towards each of the ten corporate objectives. To ensure 360° views, we are collecting data from three sources:
• Corporate groups, who initiate and sponsor the technical communication,
• Technical communicators, who create the communication
• End-users, who receive / use the communication

We would like your personal input, in the role of a technical communicator, towards this study.

**Questionnaire**

To begin with, provide us your personal information. This information will be used for respondents profile analysis only, will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with anyone.

1. Your information

   ° Name

   ° Address

   ° Telephone

   ° Email

   ° Education
      a. Undergraduate
      b. Graduate
      c. Post-graduate / Professional

   ° Which of these activities you are routinely involved in creating? Please tick all that applies.
      a. Popular media material such as light articles, simple technology write-ups, simple demo / presentation
b. Marketing / Sales material such as collaterals, technical concept papers, white papers

c. Product documentation including print / online guides, features listing, reference manuals, troubleshooting information

d. Support / maintenance documentation

e. Training material / self-learning guides / demos / presentations / case studies / knowledge base

f. Internal / process/ quality documentation

g. Other, please specify

For the first part of this survey, respond to the following questions as a technical communicator.

2. In your opinion, how much value the following different forms of technical communication add towards achieving the listed corporate objectives?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Average</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Low</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No value added</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blank</td>
<td>Not used</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the second part of this survey, consider yourself in the role of a user, who is much better informed about the technical communication products and their benefits, and respond to the following questions.

Often, companies communicate through print media, radio, television, or conferences about various aspects of the company. The information is very general, and not trying to sell a particular product. You may have participated in creating such communication. For each type of these information communications, please mark how useful it is to the intended audience?
3. General information about technology, research, and innovations of the company, not focusing on any specific products, and not trying to sell
   a. Extremely useful
   b. Very useful
   c. Somewhat useful
   d. Less useful
   e. Not useful at all
   f. Not come across any such information communication

4. Company products, their technical features, prices, and how they compare with the competition, trying to make a sell
   a. Extremely useful
   b. Very useful
   c. Somewhat useful
   d. Less useful
   e. Not useful at all
   f. Not come across any such information communication

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   a. Extremely useful
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   c. Somewhat useful
   d. Less useful
   e. Not useful at all
   f. Not seen / used any such communication

11. When you see various communications from a company, regarding its technology, its products, product manuals, how much would you say these communications are useful to a company’s overall image?
   a. Extremely useful
   b. Very useful
   c. Somewhat useful
   d. Less useful
e. Not useful at all
f. Not seen / used any such communication

Any additional information / suggestions / references that you would like to provide us to help with the project. You can use the last page to share your ideas, or mail them to meghashri_dalvi@yahoo.com.

Thank you for your participation!

3. Questionnaire for Corporate Management

Introduction

Technical communication is a broader field of business communication, involving designing and developing communication products that transfer technical or specialized information from the expert who know it to others who need to know it.

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1. Promote Innovation and Research
2. Pursue higher quality
3. Ensure Employee satisfaction
4. Establish leadership in the field
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- Corporate groups, who initiate and sponsor the technical communication,
- Technical communicators, who create the communication
- End-users, who receive / use the communication

We would like your company’s input towards this matrix.
**Questionnaire**

To begin with, provide us your company information. This information will be used for respondents profile analysis only, will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with anyone.

1. Company
   - Name
   - Address
   - Telephone
   - Contact Email

2. Size of the company
   - a. < 100 employees
   - b. 100-1,000 employees
   - c. 1,000 - 5,000 employees
   - d. 5,000 - 10,000 employees
   - e. >10,000 employees

2. Which of these technical / information communication forms your company routinely uses? Please tick all that applies.
   - a. Popular media material such as light articles, simple technology write-ups, simple demo / presentation
   - b. Marketing / Sales material such as collaterals, technical concept papers, sales presentation, white papers
   - c. Product documentation including print / online guides, features listing, reference manuals, troubleshooting information
   - d. Support / maintenance documentation
e. Training material / self-learning guides / demos / presentations / case studies / knowledge base

f. Internal / process/ quality documentation

g. Other, please specify -

3. How many technical communicators do you employ?

If not, how do you communicate technical / specialized information to your customers / users? Do you outsource your work, or other groups handle this activity?

4. Have you measured value of the technical communication? If yes, would you like to share your data with us?

5. In your opinion, how much value the following different forms of technical communication add towards achieving the listed corporate objectives?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Increase Revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Reduce Overheads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reduce Production / Development Cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reduce Marketing / Sales Cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Reduce Maintenance Cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Promote Innovation and Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Pursue Higher Quality</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ensure Employee Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Establish Market Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Demonstrate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Any additional information / suggestions / references that you would like to provide us to help with the project. You can use the last page to share your ideas, or mail them to meghashri_dalvi@yahoo.com.

Thank you for your participation!
Appendix B - Published Papers and Articles

Contribution of Technical Communication towards the Growth of the Indian IT Industry.

Presented at the International Conference Indian Social Science Congress XXXII, JMI Delhi, 17-22 December 2008


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Social Science Abstracts

17251 SIRAJ, SADAF AND SHARMA, PRATIMA (Marketing, Asia Pacific Institute of Management, 384, Institutional Area, Jasola, New Delhi). BUILDING BRAND EQUITY IN HINTERLAND.

With about 75% of population living in the villages and generating nearly half of the national income, the rural market is increasingly playing a very important and decisive role in the Indian marketing environment (Bargal, 2004). This market offers a cornucopia of opportunities to companies who venture to brave it. These rural markets exhibit linguistic, regional, cultural and economic disparities, and hence, are considered to be more complex to deal with than the urban markets.

As branding can make or break a product, marketers have to take immense care in positioning a brand for rural market, as, often the traditional route to market entry and brand building employed in the urban markets do not provide the desired outcomes. Thus in order to make its presence felt, corporate need to understand the needs and psyche of the rural consumers and tailor-made their offerings and the brand building initiatives according to the dynamics of the rural markets.

Through this paper an attempt has been made to understand the ever changing dynamics, challenges and bottlenecks faced by the marketers and suggesting a gamut of innovative promotional and marketing activities which would help in creating distinct brand image and evoke positive brand associations. The paper is based on secondary data and the information has been sourced from books, newspapers, rural journals and white papers, industry portals, government agencies, monitoring industry news and developments. Some data are also collected through the prominent players in the rural sector.

17252 SHARMA, GULNAR AND DALVI, MEGHASHRI (Janki Devi Bajaj Institute of Management Studies, SNDT University, Mumbai 400 049). CONTRIBUTION OF TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION TOWARDS THE GROWTH OF THE INDIAN IT INDUSTRY.

Technical communication serves as the primary communication line between technology and its users, to make technology more useful, meaningful and more accessible.

Communication has always been an essential factor for the success and quality of any product, service or business - more so in case of technically complex products, applications and processes, which highlights the need and demand for technical communication.

This paper discusses technical communication and its scope, retraces its recent development, explores current scenario in global and Indian context, studies the extent of its contribution towards the growth of Indian Information Technology, and identifies the potential for improving and highlighting its rightful place.

17253 THAKUR, RICA (International School of Informatics and Management, Jaipur). INDIAN BOURSES: CHAOS TO CLARITY.

Market-oriented economic reforms in India began in 1991. With the removal of administrative controls on bank credit and the primary market for securities, the capital markets came to occupy a larger role in shaping resource allocation in the country. This led to a heightened interest amongst policy makers in the institutional development of securities markets. The efforts towards empowering the securities market regulator (SEBI), and the first efforts towards attracting foreign portfolio investment began early in the reforms process. Almost immediately after the reforms began, there was a prominent scandal on the fixed income and equity markets, which was exposed in April 1992.
Promoting Equitable Global Society through Effective Business Communication

Presented at the International Conference Indian Social Science Congress XXXI, SNDT Mumbai, 28-30 December 2007


As businesses spread globally, they encounter environments differing vastly from their established settings – in terms of geography, economy, culture, and sociopolitical structure. Their success depends largely on how they understand and respond to these different cultures. Going further, they can actually leverage this understanding to enhance their worldwide communication and promote globally equitable society.

This paper focuses on how business communication should be designed for global delivery, and how it can be leveraged to promote equitable global society. The emphasis is on:

- Adopting Business Communication as a strategy
- Designing Business Communication specific to audience profile
- Communicating with appeal across the globe – emotional and rational
- Communicating consistently and sensitively to all-inclusive teams
- Exploiting new technologies and innovative trends
- Promoting equitable global society through effective business communication

This paper analyzes how responses to communication vary across the globe, explores the extent of their influence on business, analyses the most recent available data to evaluate the benefits of strategically designed business communication, and identifies the potential for promoting equitable global society through effective business communication.

In recent years, there has been a considerable experimentation in the institutional arrangements governing natural resource management (NRM), including fishery resources, in different countries. The institutional changes amount to a redefinition of the role of the state and have stimulated further exploration regarding a variety of local government and non-state forms of management and co-management. Several countries have recognized the role and relevance of local communities in the management of natural resources. However, most often the central agencies do not provide enough space for local communities to participate in resource management. At the same time, top down government fails to mobilize cooperation of local communities to deliver sustainable livelihoods that ensure fair and equitable distribution of resources, as well as, effective conservation and management of the resource. Exceptions to this general failure are, however, increasingly being documented and analyzed globally.

It is believed now that new configurations of social and human relationships are prerequisites for long-term sustainable management of natural resources. There is growing recognition of the effectiveness of local groups, associations and people’s movements in bringing about positive natural resource outcomes.

A study has been undertaken on "Studies on fishing cooperative societies with a focus on their potential for conservation of fishery resources" by the National Bureau of Fish Genetic Resources, Lucknow.
Evaluating Information Usability


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<tr>
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<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<td>Break</td>
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<td>4:00-5:00</td>
<td>Wiki/Info</td>
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<td>7:00</td>
<td>Awards Banquet</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
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<td>8:00-9:00</td>
<td>Coffee and Registration</td>
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<td>&quot;Communication Science—The Alternative Paradigm for Technical</td>
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<td>&quot;Charting new Directions: Communication in technology Transfer and</td>
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<td>Diffusion,&quot; Nancy W. Coppola</td>
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Helping the Experts – Communicating to the Expert Users

Published in UXMatters - Insights and Inspiration for the User Experience Community, June 2008

Helping the Expert

Can Also an Expert Users Turn off base Help once they are familiarized themselves with the application.

- The main point is that our implementation has much more to offer than the bundled help and
  troubleshooting help is not more valuable.

If all the features make the end system too bulky and the system is according to skill levels users
are actually less serious from moving up to the next level of expertise.

How Can Expert Users Help You?

Naturally, providing help for expert users takes considerable time and effort. But there is a definitive need to
get using expert users in meaningful dialogue to offer a number of benefits here are some nice things you
can do that:

- One approach would be to encourage user feedback or participation in user forums where
  users can share their ideas and ideas. Your forum will then be filled with valuable problems
  that you can address and their solutions.

- Routinely ask users about their own feelings and necessary parts of procedures.

- Ask users for their ideas on the usability of the application. This can bring in some surprisingly
  practical ideas that can actually improve your application.

- Experts like to understand how the application works, communicate with other
  applications. For example, they might want more comprehensive integration for export or import
  which is then only possible if your application is indeed the end system. This can be introduced into our
  platform as an add-on.

- The next step is to use the contributions and feedback of our expert users in some tangible way:
  having helping them collaborate through a letter or a certificate is a good idea. A token gift an invitation
to participate in beta testing or a new upgrade can also demonstrate your gratitude.

Make helping your expert users a common situation.

Comments

Rahib: weblog-user

This is a very useful start for new users. we have designed user assistance for the most common
features. The expert system can be used to help the experts. John Garrido notes that Instructual System Design
seeks to remove common problem areas, and this article starts to address that issue in the context of new

- posted on June 15 2008 07:27 PM

Rahib: weblog-user

And of course we need to consider how we help people become experts. In the past system The

- posted on June 16 2008 01:52 AM

Rahib: weblog-user

Agree.

Another issue from my own experience is establishing a dialogue between the expert users and

- posted on June 16 2008 02:11 AM

Rahib: weblog-user

This is an excellent article. I would recommend this for all users, and many of the topics discussed are

- posted on July 1 2008 02:35 PM

Join the Discussion


12 12 2008

369
Evaluating Online Help

Published in STC UUX Community Newsletter Usability Interface, May 2008


Usability

The definition of usability in the ISO 9241 standard is:

"The extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction in a specified context of use."

Whitney Quesenbery advocates looking the usability requirements for different aspects of the user experience. For each of the five dimensions of usability (the 5Es), we think about how it is reflected in requirements for each of the user groups. The 5Es are:

- Effective
- Efficient
- Engaging
- Error Tolerant
- Easy to Learn

The evaluation criterion is organized into these five characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>1. The help label / icon is clear and prominent from all screens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Help is available for all screens for which users may need assistance or a more detailed explanation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Help is not provided for screens that are self-explanatory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Clear directions for exiting the help are available (&quot;Close this window&quot; button, or &quot;Close X&quot;).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Both help and the application window can be viewed simultaneously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. The help window can be resized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. The focus is on user tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficient</td>
<td>8. Identification of, and navigation to, the required topic is easy (context-sensitive help / clear TOC / support for keyword search).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Navigation from one topic to other topics is available (mostly through the TOC, breadcrumb trails, and &quot;see also&quot; links).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. The help pages indicate where you are in the help system (through breadcrumb trails or indigo band in the current topic in the TOC).</td>
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</table>

Usability Interface

Evaluating Online Help

By Meghashn Dalvi

With increasing frequency, products are released with online help, but without printed documentation. This places a large burden on online help to deliver high-quality, compact content that is extremely easy to use.

Online help excels in providing quick access to concise information - but only when the users choose to access it. Delivering high-quality online help that satisfies all users is a hard task. Several good help authoring tools make help generation and maintenance easier, but to create good content that is highly effective is still a huge challenge.

Experience shows that even after following quality guidelines or best practices, the final output may still not be good enough to satisfy the needs of your users. Heuristic evaluation of an online help system provides an initial assessment of both quality and usability. This article presents a summary of key points for evaluating online help, though you will likely want to expand the heuristics with company or product-centric metrics suitable to your application.

The evaluation focuses on two main areas:

- Usability
- Content

Each perspective covers several key points serving as guidelines to achieve best results. Each key point contains simple checklist statements that can be answered yes or no.

Usability

The definition of usability in the ISO 9241 standard is:

"The extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction in a specified context of use."

Whitney Quesenbery advocates looking the usability requirements for different aspects of the user experience. For each of the five dimensions of usability (the 5Es), we think about how it is reflected in requirements for each of the user groups. The 5Es are:

- Effective
- Efficient
- Engaging
- Error Tolerant
- Easy to Learn

The evaluation criterion is organized into these five characteristics.
10. The help pages indicate where you are in the help system (through breadcrumb trails or highlighting the current topic in the TOC).
11. The direction of navigation (to the next task / next topic / next level) is clearly indicated.
12. A keyword index is available.

Engaging
13. Layout is clear and aesthetically pleasing.
14. The help system is visually appealing and motivating to use.
15. Intuitive navigation is supported.
16. Graphics and multimedia elements are provided (but only as required).
17. The help system can be somewhat customized.

Error-tolerant
18. The help system displays warnings / errors in usage (for example, possible keyword spelling corrections in keyword search).
19. The user is prompted to go to the next logical step / level.
20. A troubleshooting help system is available.

Easy to learn
18. The help system includes instructions on its use.
19. The help system layout, theme, and icon usage are consistent with the application.
20. Help is divided into levels according to user levels.
21. Additional or background information is provided through links.
22. The user is motivated to learn the help system and use it often.

If you answer "Yes" for more than 20 of these points, the help system usability is high. However, if the score falls below 10, then consider further assessment of the help system.

Content
Good content should always meet the six criteria of communication:

- Complete
- Clear
- Correct
- Concise
- Contextual
- Consistent

The content evaluation criteria are organized divided into these six characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Clear           | 1. The help system covers all functions and features, with illustrations and examples as required.  
2. All routine tasks / procedures are described step-by-step.  
3. Reasons are provided for a particular step, format, or restriction.  
4. The help includes a glossary of terminology.  
5. Background information / domain notes / usage guideline / best practices are provided.  
6. The help provides common workflows.  
7. The help indicates navigation to the next task (through procedure sequence or "see also" links).  
8. Instructions about how to use the help are included.  
9. The help includes basic troubleshooting information for the application.  
10. The help provides contact information for further information (such as help desk number or support site link). |
| Complete        | 11. The help provides unambiguous instructions and descriptions.  
12. Plain language is used.  
13. The help uses short sentences.  
14. The help avoids unnecessary wordiness.  
15. The language used is suitable to the audience. |
16. The information provided is factually correct for the objective and purpose of the application.
17. Platform support, available features, memory usage, and the like are accurate for the referred version / release / module / part number.
18. The help menu structure is logically aligned to the typical workflow / procedure sequence.
19. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are correct.
20. Language and structure are sensitive towards gender and culture.
21. The content complies with required industry standards.
22. Content is short and precise, with each help topic preferably limited to one non-scrolling page.
23. Long procedures are broken down to smaller sub-procedures.
24. Descriptive lead-ins are typically limited to one small paragraph.
25. Where appropriate, bulleted lists, numbered lists, tables and graphics are substituted for lengthy descriptive text.
26. Information is layered - basic information is immediately available with optional links to additional information.
27. Each help topic has an appropriate title describing its content.
28. The context of a particular task / procedure is explained, with a specific reason (if applicable).
29. Examples / cases / demonstrations are included.
30. Help is divided into levels according to user experience levels.
31. The terminology and word usage (including action verbs) is consistent across the entire help system.
32. The terminology, menu options, field labels, and action button labels are consistent with the application.
33. The terminology, word usage (including action verbs), and usage of the help system are consistent with other applications from the same suite / group of applications.
34. The terminology, word usage (including action verbs), and usage of the help system are consistent with internal company guidelines.
35. The terminology, word usage, and usage of the help system are consistent with industry standards.

If you answer "Yes" for more than 30 of these points, your content exceeds expectations. However, if the Yes answers are fewer than 20, then you should perform a thorough assessment of the help and make improvements to it.

Resources
Quesenberry, Whitney. Using the 5Ts to Understand Users. www.nquaability.com/articles/getting-started.html
www.nquaability.com/articles/getting-started.html

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Getting Technical Review Done

Published in MITWA News, Newsletter from the MITWA (Mentors, Indexers, Technical Writers & Associates) Group May 2007


**Getting Technical Review Done**

By Meghashri Daly

Technical review is one of the major phases in the document lifecycle. Typically, the Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) or senior developers review the documents to ensure that the content is technically accurate and consistent. However, most of us find that getting technical reviews done is one of the toughest tasks. Why?

I tried to look at the top two reasons from fellow technical writers:
1. SMEs don’t have time.
2. There is no SME assigned to do the technical review.

If at all the SMEs review the document, their review comments are very general, incomplete, and in bits and pieces.

To get the complete picture, I discussed this matter with some SMEs. Of course they didn’t have time—but I still managed to put together some of their routine reasons.

1. No time.
2. Technical review of documentation is not an assigned task.
3. No details about what is required in the technical review.

If you look carefully, both sides are talking exactly the same things! This is the key to getting technical review done. Let us get down to the specific challenges and how to manage them.

Lack of time

We all are pressed for time towards the release date—so it would be a good idea to start review early. But again, to get the review done early, we need to develop the content early. How can we develop the content early if we get in the team towards the end of the project?

The solution is to make sure that the technical writer is part of the team from an early stage. As the features and functions are developed, start creating the document framework, and get it reviewed. Put placeholders where you don’t have details. Note what is missing and what will be added at a later stage.

In the early phase, documenting helps in clarifying the functional details for the developers. You can convince the project manager about your early involvement in the team and start acting from the beginning of the project.

Since lack of time is a real concern, you can also give smaller chunks for review. Reviewing a 100-page document is a daunting task for the SME. If you can manage to provide ten pages at a time for review, the task seems easier. In fact, not all the content needs a technical review. Make a judgment and send only those sections that require a technical review. You can also mark the sections in a guide that need the SME’s attention.
Acknowledge often that the time is insufficient – for both of you. Suggest that you need the review comments by a particular date so that you deliver the document on time. Specifying these dates helps the SMEs to prioritize and track their tasks.

**Missing ownership**

In some projects, technical review is not recognized as a task, and no time is budgeted for it. Also, no one in particular is identified to do the review and thus, a very genuine task simply remains in limbo. Untangling this issue of missing ownership requires efforts, which begin with overhauling the project plan.

You need to convince the project manager about the requirement of a technical review and value that it adds. You also need to formally include technical review in the list of tasks of SMEs and make them accountable for it. For all practical purposes, make the technical documentation deliverables a joint ownership – one writer and one SME / reviewer.

In your report, mention the technical review as a task and mark its status – highlight if it is due or overdue. In the project meetings, bring up the review activity and get it included in the action items. Track this activity regularly and it will gradually become a part of the system.

As you get more familiar with the team, you can also identify who can do a good review and who cannot. Or, who will do a review and who will not. Start approaching those who understand and appreciate the worth of technical review. Work with them and build a good relationship — soon, you will have a number of enthusiastic SMEs willing doing the technical review.

OK – that was overly optimistic – but you get the point.

**No guidelines**

This is a very valid issue from the SME’s side. Review is a vague term and each individual tries to interpret it in his own way. Some try to look at spelling and grammar, while some focus on the structure. Many SMEs ignore all this and simply check if technical information is included or not.

And let us be honest - quite often, even the technical writers are unsure about what they want in the review!

A systematic approach to this problem is to state clearly what you want from the SMEs.

First make sure you tell them the following details about the content:

- Delivery format of the document – printed guide, online guide, online help, case study, FAQ, PowerPoint presentation
- Intended audience – users, administrators, developers, managers
- Intended use of the document – installation, standard use, advanced use, reporting, training

Then explain what you are looking for. For example:

- If the structure is suitable (this can be done at a very early phase of the project).
• If all the technical details are covered for the defined format, audience, and use.
• If all the steps, screens, and cases are included.
• If the technical details are correct. You can add notes / comments where you have doubts to help them to focus.
• If you have seen any inconsistencies, mention them clearly, and ask for clarification.
• If any point is ambiguous, request for an explanation.

If you can also explain upfront what you are “not” looking for in the review, it helps. Explain that spelling, grammar, and pagination will be taken care in the release checklist. If you do a regular peer review, explain what it covers. That way, SMEs are relieved of some tasks. As the technical review becomes a regular assigned task — you can slowly cut down on these instructions or include them in process documentation.

In addition to the review comments, ask SMEs for general feedback. For example - if more examples should be included, or if a descriptive section should be converted to a diagram, or if the delivery format of a particular guide should be changed. When such suggestions come from SMEs, your case becomes stronger.

Finally, just the way you want to be part of the project team, make SMEs feel that they are a part of the doc team. It works.
Sensitivity in Writing

Published in Indus – Newsletter from the India Chapter of STC, April-May 2007


The biggest impact of globalization is our vast exposure to diversity. Compared to earlier generations, we regularly come across a variety of different people. As professional communicators, it is extremely important for us to recognize this diversity and represent it sensitively in content that we develop.

What is sensitivity?

Sensitivity in approach suggests that we:

- Recognize the diverse groups, their history, culture, beliefs, customs, conventions, and ethics.
- Respect individuals, and their freedom of choice within legal boundaries. Life style choices, such as career, ideological preferences, food habits, hairstyle, clothes, body art, entertainment preference, and sexual orientation, are often knowingly taken up by the individual, with full awareness of their implications.
- Understand circumstances such as social and economic situation, education level, marital status, employment status, available free time, weight, accent, and state of health. Some of these circumstances are quite often beyond the control of the individual.

Best practices

With awareness and empathy, it is not too difficult to ensure sensitivity in writing. The following best practices are based on a simple structured approach and constant alertness:

1. Identify possible traps

Country—or culture-specific references are the usual suspects. Sometimes these references just don’t click. For example, using cricket references (like “gauzy” and “bouncer”) for U.S. audiences will fail to convey the meaning just as using baseball references (like “home run” and “ballpark figure”) will miss the mark in Asia. Sometimes, however, these references can hurt. Phrases like “holy cow,” “instant,” and “devil” have altogether different meanings in many cultures. It is best to avoid such phrases.

Political references are a strict no-no. And so are references to historical, cultural, and sports icons. Our vocabulary already supports politically correct words for disabilities, gender neutrality, and racial references. Use them consciously to avoid problems.

Sometimes, seemingly harmless phrases evoke strong responses. In 2004, Los Angeles actually banned the use of “master-slave,” a common computer networking term. The Global Language Monitor 2006 report cites the bizarre example of using “writing block” in place of “flip chart” so as not to offend Filipinos. These examples may sound over the top at first, but the concern for respecting all cultures and situations is very evident.

Note that when content gets translated or localized, the meaning can get further twisted, inviting more potential problems. The notorious anachronism of christening a car model as Nova and losing market in Spain (“nova” in Spanish means “new”), or naming a curling iron as Mist and losing face in Germany (“mist” means “manure” in German), are no longer mere gaffes but a serious concern for organizations. How text can be misinterpreted by the localizer is one of the vexing traps that you should keep in mind.

A new front is now opening toward sensitivity—how more prosperous cultures behave toward the less prosperous ones. As affluent societies get exposed to underprivileged societies, they learn that not all have access to technology, education, and health. Objects such as cars that
learn that not all have access to technology, education, and health. Objects such as cars that are considered a necessity by some can be considered a luxury by others. These nuances in outlook are getting clearer. Try to incorporate them in your writing.

Recently in a management training conference, one of the attendees had an interesting experience to share. Word problems or quizzes are often used in management training. However, for a global training program, the trainers could not use these traditional methods because some of the attendees did not understand the clues at all and some were offended by the clues. In certain cultures, even the idea of adults trying to solve word problems is ridiculed.

Given sufficient time to get familiarised with global culture, most people can manage. However, the process of globalization has accelerated to such an extent that there is hardly any buffer time to understand each other. Identifying and avoiding possible traps is the best interim solution.

- Develop guidelines

It would be a good idea to start early and make a simple set of guidelines for your own use and for the team. Go on adding to these guidelines as you come across more information or more directions from clients. The Internet offers lots of resources that you can customise according to your content needs.

Keep checking the news and current events—they offer a true reflection of global concerns about sensitivity, and see if any of them can add to your guidelines. A recent incident was about the Chinese stumbling on the word "stakeholder" in U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick's speech. It took quite some time to sort that out. Not understanding a certain, fairly common English buzzword led to the Chinese desperately searching for its full meaning—whether the connotation of the word was positive or negative for them.

Another interesting anecdote refers to how minorities in a country are being referred by several newly coined terms, "asylum seekers," for example. In another report, terrorists are now being labeled "misguided criminals."

On another level, if you know your audience preferences, you can build a vocabulary master with equivalent words for different audiences. British-American word lists, which are now very common, highlight differences like "gas and petrol" and "parking lot and car park." You can make similar lists for your audience.

While you are at it, you can also prepare a list of words that may be misinterpreted in other cultures. In English, the adjective "sweet" typically indicates "good" or "nice." In Japanese, however, "sweet" conveys "bad" or "immature." A "sweet person" in English has all the possibilities of getting interpreted as a "rather pushy, spoiled person" in Japanese. A Bobby (policeman) is immediately recognized by those who have had a brush with British culture, either directly or through literature. But "Bobby" may have an altogether different meaning in other languages and cultures, leading to possible embarrassment from its use.

Titles referring to the marital status of a woman ("Miss" or "Mrs") are considered unprofessional and offending in several western cultures, but omitting such a title is a big offence in the Eastern culture. You can choose a middle ground, like addressing a woman by the title "Ms."

Go on adding such points to your guidelines. Over time, they will serve as pointers that help you design and deliver sensitive writing.

- Pay attention to design elements

Besides the obvious words and phrases, other aspects of content can also lead to possible sensitivity issues especially design elements such as fonts, colors, pictures, and illustrations.
Pay attention to design elements

Besides the obvious words and phrases, other aspects of content can also lead to possible sensitivity issues—especially design elements such as fonts, colors, pictures, and illustrations. Fonts may seem noncontroversial, but recently Kathy Porter, an HR trainer in a multinational company, embarrassed herself when she used a font style that is commonly used for funeral announcements in the Czech Republic. She now advises people to stick to 3 to 4 common fonts for all communication that may or may not be intended for a global audience.

Choosing colors is also a major issue. White color generally indicates purity and peace, but in Japan it is associated with death. Some colors like red, orange, and green are clearly associated with religions or ideologies, and some hues convey masculinity in some cultures. Neutral colors and universal hues may make your work look a little boring, but they are, nonetheless, safer to use.

Pictures, photos, and illustrations need to be examined very carefully. Quite a few cultures have taboos about photos of living people. When using illustrations, keep lifestyles in mind. Showing a plumber arriving at work in a car is acceptable in the United States, but may raise eyebrows in India. Even a logo like using old or controversial maps of countries can make the communication insulting.

Designing graphics that can be later adapted for languages that are not left-to-right reading is also a big step toward sensitivity.

Metaphors in graphics make them appealing, but they can also make them insensitive. Making an OK sign by touching the thumb and forefinger, while the rest of the fingers are held straight, is actually considered an insulting gesture in parts of Australia and Indonesia. Cartoons are considered offensive in the Eastern culture, and using children in illustrations is becoming a sensitive issue. Tread these zones carefully.

Using noncontroversial and universally understood metaphors is a good solution. An envelope always represents letter, mail, or post. A book represents a set of pages or papers that have a common theme. Up/down arrows indicate upward/downward directions. These are simple and clean metaphors that are globally effective.

Keep yourself updated about how the global perspective on sensitivity keeps adjusting—and reflect that in your writing.

About the Author

Meghashr Dahi has combined her love of writing with an engineering and management background to create a successful career in technical communication. She currently works as Consulting Technical Communicator, and is pursuing her doctoral research in management. You can write to Meghashr at megshahr_dahi@macmail.com.

Also in This Issue

- Parenting: The Art of Parenting — Song I. S.
- Should we stick to the shadows, or take on a little more heat? — Gopi Harms
- Social or Philosophical Issues Related to the Design and Delivery of User Assistance — Pradip Das
- Scientists Must Write — Sharada Sharma
- Technical Writers Must Learn to be Technical — Sanath Vavilapalli
- Ten Tips to Grow Your Writing Career: A Manager’s Perspective — Pramod Netzri

Also in This Issue
Effective User Assistance Design: Ten Best Practices

Published in UXMatters - Insights and Inspiration for the User Experience Community, February 2007


Effective User Assistance Design: Ten Best Practices

By Nazgahant Dalvi
Published: February 20, 2007

If a customer finds a product to be so perfect it would not need any user assistance at all, but in reality, products aren't perfect and users need assistance throughout different stages of their use. User assistance (UAs) in the form of manuals or online help guides used by the users suggests better ways of getting their work done, and provides a route for troubleshooting their problems.

Designing effective user assistance is a challenge, especially within the available resources and time constraints. If you make a little extra effort and follow certain best practices, you can make your product user assistance a big success.

Here are ten best practices for creating effective user assistance:

1. **Step into the user's shoes—in mind and in practice.** Gather information as you advocate to know your users. After all, you'll need to model your users by creating a set of distinct personas. These personas might represent roles in a corporate world—such as a type of knowledge worker, supervisor, or manager—or groups of users of advanced, intermediate, or expert. Persons might even represent users' diverse goals in approaching user assistance. For example, users might simply want to learn a procedure. They might need help troubleshooting a problem. Or perhaps their task demands expertise, as the article described in a UX Matters article: "User Assistance in the Field of Ophthalmology.”

2. **User differs from one another in many ways.** They may be old or young, skilled experts or novice users, rural or urban—whatever makes you do any kind of research and testing as possible. When testing is done for people who work close to your user profiles as possible, you can also learn a lot about user assistance requirements by doing some comparative analysis. Use other similar products and find out whether their user assistance works for you, and what is good and bad about it. Use research tasks analysis, and usability testing are two elements of user-centered design that is essential for good product design. Treat the user assistance you are designing as a full-functioned product and go all out to design with your users.

3. **Borrow behaviorally.** This element of best practice is very simple. Dell sold, famous owner of one of the largest car dealerships in the United States, resale his favorite principle for generating customer loyalty (UX, brand, brand, and brand) he borrowed good ideas from many other companies to learn to deal with the best in the country.

You can borrow this simple and effective principle too. Adopt other designers' good ideas that have proved effective and apply them to your user assistance or design process.

4. **Plan, estimate, budget, schedule, and track.** Project management is an essential part of creating great user assistance. If your team budgets sufficient time and money for user assistance, your most creative ideas will fail, and may never make it into your product. To ensure that your best user assistance ideas are not wasted, plan for user assistance from the beginning of a project, align your goals with your team's development schedule, and track your progress.

5. **Create small chunks of information.** When creating content, users do in small portions and need them simple. Cognitive psychology tells us that presenting small chunks of information is a great strategy for organizing and prioritizing information, making it easier for users to comprehend.

6. **Small information chunks help users to focus and ease information recall.** We break phone numbers into small groups of numbers so we can remember. Follow the same principle when organizing descriptions and procedures.

When users need to learn how to complete their tasks, they're short, easy steps to guide them through.

For more information, check out the original article: http://www.uxmatters.com/MT/archives/000170.php

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procedures. When users need some troubleshooting information, they want a helping hand to guide them through detailed step-by-step instructions in plain language, rather than bombarding users with heaps of information all at once. Break information into smaller chunks.

Users don't want to read long pages of descriptive text—especially online. According to one study by Jakob Nielsen,[2] reading from computer screens is about 25% slower. Therefore, they achieve using as little as 50% of the text that would appear in printed content. People don't like having to scroll pages unnecessarily either. For online help topics, try to fit your content on one brief page whenever possible.

Smaller nuggets of information in simple language are easier to understand, too. Keeping a description or instructions brief reduces the use of complex, more concise language, making them easier to read.

- Provide good navigation. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines emphasize the importance of good navigation.[3] User assistance may contain valuable pieces of information, but what the user can't find what they are looking for? Display a Help menu or link prominently in your product's user interface. For help systems, provide lists of contents, indexes, lists of figures and tables, and a search function so users will know what help is available and where to find it.

- Provide context-sensitive help for the pages of web applications and interfaces in the windows of desktop applications. Present lists of links to related information so users can quickly get more information by clicking hyperlinks and cross-references. To sum up, make your content accessible from every possible place. So users can easily get to the information they need, wherever and when they need it.

- Pack user assistance with examples. A great example here, a demo there, a short-napkin link, a guided tour, a detailed case study—all of these give users confidence by letting them know that tasks really get done. Marketing people, domain experts, or business analysts often have such materials ready. Use them. When writing a how-to procedure, provide a realistic example to show users how it is done. For reports, nothing works better than a screen shot of a typical report with standard values. In short, show users rather than just telling them.

- Use graphics wherever you need to illustrate a point, but keep them as small as possible and don't overload. Online readers dislike unnecessary graphics that make pages slow to load and require them to scroll. So, when you use graphics, use discretion. For example, when you need to include larger graphics, use thumbnail links to them. If you want to illustrate a complete procedure visually, create a separate demo. Showing off your multimedia skills is fine, provided you keep the media separate and make viewing or listening optional. In short, do everything in moderation.

- Employees say that users need help. Keep user assistance consistent. After all, you're building a brand. And don't forget the importance of consistency. Lack of consistency in user assistance is the single biggest factor in dissatisfaction.

- Bellevue's principles of HCI—human-computer interaction design[4]—emphasize consistency in all aspects of the user interface. Extend that principle to user assistance. Just as you use the same fonts, colors, and layout in the same across all the user assistance components of a given product. Graphics, grammar, wording, style, and tone should be consistent, too. Use the same terminology everywhere and, if necessary, provide definitions in a glossary. Remember, your goal is to help users, not confuse them. So forgiving inconsistencies before delivering your user assistance.

- Practice Kaizen, let's see if it's a product or user assistance is perfect in the first iteration. You need to keep improving the design and content of your user assistance by coming up with innovative ideas and incorporating customer and team feedback. Once you have launched a service or product, you can delight your existing customers by regularly releasing updates to it—including enhancements to the user assistance. The Japanese call this Kaizen.[5]—continuous incremental improvement.

References


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Solid fromTmnawtaanM' I hd th« opportunitv to s• tii« powr of th« principl* of "PackUaer A»»«t»nc« vrith Examp|«^ ' //vhen usuabilitv testing caatcid-Mncitv* Hdp Kr««nithit vt»% usad to explain dialog boxes in an
mp^icabon. Th« main elements for a Help topic vvere » a «ren capture of a populated diatog ttox—the example)—(b) Help that vipeared
vth^n a user pointed to each of the fields shown in the screen capture, (c) a
conceptual description of the dialog box, and (d) step-by-step instructions. Most of the users just had to see the
example of the dialog box populated with realistic values, and they got it. They closed the Help at that point and
successfully «mpleted their task.

osted on February 21, 2007 12:07 PM

Mia Northrop wrote:

Usabilitv testing is a great source to determine not only which task a user will require assistance with, but what
information will actually help them on their way. If you have a usability problem that cannot be rectified entirely
through design changes or can be solved in a few different ways, notice the words people use to describe what
they were looking for or what they were expecting and use those exact words in the user assistance. For
example, we tested a tool that was labeled in a particular way that no one understood. Three different
suggestions consistently came up in the usability testing sessions. We could pick only one new label, but we
used the other two suggested terms in user assistance to resonate with a wider group of users. Covering all
three interpretations improved users' task performance.

osted on February 28, 2007 9:07 AM

Ragnar wrote:

Very true. Mia.

Usability testing gives very useful insights about "what users really want." Interestingly, often the user
assistant (UA) designer/ writer becomes the first usability tester and comes up with feedback about the
product design.

osted on March 1, 2007 6:13 AM

Robert wrote:

You help file need to be present and they should contain all of these suggestions. Context-sensitive Help is
preferred as well.

However, let's not forget that our user assistance pieces parts should not be used to supplement or replace
solid design. "RTFM" does not work and is not a design philosophy.

osted on May 1, 2007 4:15 PM

Dr. Allison Jackson wrote:

I am writing a user manual for 30,000 small businesses in the US to help us software for writing grants and
contracts. Anyone with expertise out there to help in this discussion?

osted on October 18, 2007 3:35 PM

Join the Discussion

To make comments, you must first sign in. Sign In or Sign Up.
Documenting for Complete User Experience

The Sidebar - Newsletter from the Snake River Chapter (U.S.A.) of STC, December 2006


December, 2006

Happy Holidays!

Review of Molly Harkness’s "Ten Ways to Increase Your Value as a Technical Communicator"

Leading Small Teams Without Losing Your Mind

Documenting for Complete User Experience

Upcoming Events

Sidenotes

Happy Holidays!

It is the product release day. You have managed to squeeze in all your last-minute changes, camouflaged the bugs in the release notes, and put in the latest screenshots. Your job is done.

One of my favorite mind games is to see when the user will use my documentation. Will the user read the documentation only when he needs some quick fixes? Will he open the guide after he is stuck for directions? Or will he open it before attempting a task? Will he read it to understand more about the product?

And that essentially describes the concept of complete user experience. Technically speaking, user experience is a term that encompasses the visual appearance, interactive behavior, and assistive capabilities of software (Apple Computer 2004). Practically speaking, user experience is what we relate to, while using the software. Do we enjoy working on that software? Do we complete our tasks quickly, easily, and efficiently? Do we intuitively understand what to do in a screen? Do we get appropriate help for complex and problematic areas? All these contribute to the complete user experience.
An important point to note is that complete user experience is a sensitive element that can make or break your product, and needs to be handled extremely carefully.

Each field goes through various stages of maturity. I believe that for technical documentation, we are already past the struggling stages where documentation served as an afterthought and later as a support activity. We are at a stage where we can actively get involved in providing the complete user experience—and that is where technical documentation is heading.

Why do I think so?

- More and more people are using computers, especially the web-based applications. They look for an easy-to-use interface, and given the countless options, they stick to sites that offer complete user experience.
- The usability concept is here to stay. It has already moved beyond the basic SEs and is gaining respect in the technical community. Eventually it will be an integrated part of any technical design.
- Organizations are discovering the benefits of well-designed usable systems that need the least support staff.
- Moreover, the general trend is towards the acceptance that technology is for everyone, and it must be accessible to all.

Like all good things, complete user experience doesn’t just happen. It needs to be planned in advance, designed early, and implemented with extreme passion. How can you go about it?

- Start with users. Understand their personas, and their roles. Create a matrix of tasks they will perform. Anticipate their needs and expectations. Use modeling techniques to get under the skin of your users.
- Create user-centric information architecture and work towards meeting user expectations.
- Use the best-suited documentation delivery such as PDF guides, online Help, FAQ, searchable databases, and case studies.
- Devise a set of guidelines and stick to it with discipline.
- Choose appropriate documentation tools.
- Test for usability. Test for overall consistency of the product and documentation. Carry iterations until you get the optimum design.
- Test with real users. Note their preferences and choices.
- Rework to achieve the best design.

Testing is the key activity where you assess the work gone into designing the user experience. It is a tricky, subjective activity driven by three main aspects:

- Is the help available when needed?
- Is the help really useful to solve the problem?
When the documentation passes these simple tests, you are on your way to achieving a great user experience.

Besides the core responsibility of documenting the product, we technical communicators can contribute further for creating that magical user experience. Extend your skills to interface text, screen messages, and training.

- Interface Text: Using your language skills, ensure that the field names are clear and intuitive. Design screen instructions with a direct, positive tone. Use a minimalist approach. Give users flexibility and freedom to explore the interface. You will need to work with the UI designers and developers right from the early stages of the project/product.

- Screen Messages: Provide information about what has happened, why, and what to do next. A positive tone helps to gain confidence of the user. Maintain consistency across all types of messages—informative, warning, and error messages. Help users recognize, analyze, and recover from errors quickly.

- Training: Although training is not considered an integral part of the product, effective training or learning aids boost product performance tremendously. Consider your documentation as a self-learning tool for the user and design it accordingly. Make efforts to get in more examples, and step-by-step tutorials. If there are separate training programs, ensure that the documentation style and theme is extended to these program contents as well.

These contributions go on adding value, and over time, you can establish these practices in your organization, making complete user experience a conscious choice—not an afterthought.

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Writing for Global Market

By Magnuson Davis

In the current market scenario, many of your revenue may come from countries other than your own country. In fact, several of your key customers may speak languages other than English. This makes the old paradigm of write English, publish everywhere a real concern.

In this truly global economy, you may write in English, but you also need to keep an eye on your global non-English speaking audience.

In other words, you need to write translateable and localization-friendly documents for the global market.

Preparing such a document means paying special attention to certain variables. This article discusses these issues briefly.

Write As Source

Consider your English document as a resource for other documents, rather than the "gold" deliverable.

• Write faultless; English: The translator most probably will have mastered English as a foreign language and may be more familiar with Standard English. Poor, colloquial, grammatically wrong English will give you equally bad translation. The translator may not have the time or the capability to understand the context and the implied meaning of your sentences. For the same reason, use standard dictionary words and sayings, and set the expectation for your localization clearly.

• Keep the content simple and concise. Translation costs are based on word count, and cutting out rambling reduces the time and cost.

• Confirm that your document meets the five keys of good writing: clear, concise, correct, complete and consistent.

Understand Preferences

Writing for the global market means that you first establish the audience profile. This profile will be extensive, covering the language, culture, level of exposure to foreign cultures, technical background, subject matter consistency, level of education, socioeconomic status, political beliefs, affiliations, religious preferences, attitudes, audience expectations.

• Avoid attention to graphics. Pictorial icons must be used with caution. Choosing the right colors is of the utmost importance, as some colors have multiple meanings in different cultures. For example, in the U.S., green is a neutral color with no special meaning; in certain Islamic countries, however, green color is associated with prosperity whereas in certain African countries green color is associated with religion. White color in general indicates purity, peace, or authority. However, in Japan, white is associated with death. Choose neutral colors and use with universal association. Limit the text in your graphics. Replacing English text will add to the graphics work.

• Ensure that the writing does not offend or hurt other cultures, or get misunderstood. This includes all cultural and references such as etchings, using colloquial expressions, national figures, events, politics and politicians, national holidays, historical heroes, etc. For example, words like initials are not favored in certain cultures. You need to be very careful with this, too. Similar to Dr. Eckert, some cultures also use English, Arabic, and Arabic. They indicating marks status are always best avoided. If you use initials, a more common and used throughout the document.

• Be conscious about how the target audience understands numbers and counting. For example, in the U.S., people count each finger as a unit, but in some Asian countries, people count each joint of a finger as a separate number. Therefore, five raised fingers may mean fifteen, not five. The larger numbers are especially tricky. Some countries use a separator after each 3 digits starting from the right, as in 20,000,000. But some Asian countries prefer putting a separator after the first 3 digits starting from the right, and subseverely put a separator after every 2 digits, similar to the ancient way of counting. For example, 2,000,000. It is always safe to check your target audience preference for writing large numbers. How the separators are addressed is also important. Majority of us use a comma for separators, but in some parts of Europe, a comma is used as decimal separator and a period looks like for higher number separators. When
means 2-100 in two thousand four hundred to some, and 2 and 100 to some. Express in words when in doubt, or specify clearly in guidelines so that your translators are in tune.

- Be clear of the wording preferences of the audience. Not all languages have the same order of a phrase as in A-B, nor do they always sort according to letters.

- Check how the target audience presents dates and time. Americans prefer to mention months before dates as in 11/28/2002. Europeans, on the other hand, are more comfortable with smaller-enlarger structure, with dates before months. For example, 28/11/2002. Some European countries also prefer a period to a slash, as in 28.11.2002. A number of South American countries also use the same format. Another important issue is how you write the single digit numbers. Some prefer 01.05.2002, while some prefer 1.5.2002. Note the absence of the leading zero; the indication is enough; slip-up. Some countries have simply adopted the 24-hour clock always being 17.30 or 23:15. But some countries are more comfortable with the A.M.-P.M. concept. Check before you internationalize.

Help your Translators

When you write the source document, remember that it will be translated into various languages. The translators may never be able to get in touch with you, and they need to understand your document thoroughly and in great detail entirely on their own.

You must also note that they may use software tools to assist them if your document is simple and can be well understood by the tool as well as the human translators; the result will be fast and of good quality.

- Use words with single meaning. For example, the word right can mean correct, as well as the direction opposite to left. If you want to say "correct," use the word "correct." In short, use the principle of one word for one meaning, one meaning for one word. Certain words are used as nouns as well as verbs. For example, that's a used to indicate a catalog number or to display (verb). If you are using "as a noun and using sentences such as "This page lists the records," instead of, "This page displays the records."

- Ensure that you use the terminology correctly and consistently. Prepare a glossary before you begin writing, stick to it, and give it to your translators. Simultaneously, prepare a list of frequently used words that need to be translated.

- Avoid long, complex sentences. Use the voice as much as possible. It needs the sentences short and clear, a positive tone so that the translators do not struggle to understand you.

- Steer clear of Latin abbreviations, such as etc., or, etc., as they may not be understood properly. Find a way to write them in simple English.

Format carefully

Cleaner and careful formatting goes a long way in ensuring that your translated document bears a very similar to your original document. It also helps in estimating the page count for translators.

- Design your documents with room for text expansion. For example, Japanese fonts are twice as wide or some short English phrases may need longer phrases in other languages to bring out the meaning. Text expanding or almost always needs 20%-40% more space depending on the target audience.

- Provide enough white space in a page so that the pagination is retained. The help in maintaining cross-references. Extra white space also ensures that your readers and focus are protected.

- Format globally with the help of well-defined sections, sub-sections, and paragraph formats.

Planning before you start creating documents will always be the best option. Translation and localization can never be taken up as an afterthought. The should be included in the design phase itself. A well-designed, "translation-friendly" and "localization-friendly" document goes a long way in ensuring you a global market.

Megan Chan works as a Technical Documentation Consultant and is currently pursuing her doctoral research in management. She can contact her at megan@pantheon.com.

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Retronym: Looking Back on Progress

By Meghashri Dalvi

Technology changes the way we live. It also affects the way we do the gadgets we make and use grow more complex, we're breaking down the words we use to define them. Like 'printed book': What was once simply a guitar is now an acoustic guitar, because of the growing popularity of electric guitars.

Frank Marklewitz, an aide to Robert Kennedy, invented a term for these newly complex words.

He called them 'retonyms' (from the roots retro - back, and nym - name or word). A retonym is generated by a change in the meaning of the root, usually because of advances in technology.

In the big days, there was only mail that arrived by post. Today we have faster and more convenient e-mail (electronic mail) and old postal mail is retonymed as snail-mail.

The advent of the electronic penwriter brought in the term 'manual to be writer'. Availability of an electric fireplace introduced the term 'conventional oven'. The list is growing by the day.

Once there were simply movies - moving pictures. Then movies became talk, necessitating the retronym 'silent movies'. Then came color and the oldies were retchrished 'black-and-white movies'.
There was a time when a grim-looking box was called television. A
came color television and with that the retronym 'black-and-white

television'. Then came cable television and so the retronym 'on-air

television'.

The same happened to usher in retronyms like 'pocket watch' to
differentiate from the new 'wrist-watch', or 'analog watch' to make it
the new 'digital watch'.

With the cordless phone the old instrument became 'corded phone,
with the advent of wireless phones, connected sets are now labeled
'cordless phones'.

With the Internet, lots of activities have gone online and we are
struggling to fit the old simple words with a prefix real - like real
reality.

Sooner there will be a low-definition TV as High-definition ones become
more common, a manually driven car as opposed to computer-driven
and 'real reality' as against virtual reality.

(Mughalshir Dalvi [mughalshir_dalvi@hotmail.com] is a Documentation
Executive at Savvyon, India)

http://www.stc-india.org/stc/tds/05/2003/indus_050503.html

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