COST-EFFECTIVE CONTENT CREATION

As technology evolves, one thing remains constant: no one wants to RTFM.

More than ever before, users expect product features to be intuitive. If they're not, product designers are to blame. Reading the friggin' manual is a last resort.

This means that information traditionally found in manuals must be designed in, so that pop-up displays can provide relevant content when and where it's needed.

It also means that, more than ever, users expect content to be clear, concise, correct, and consistent. Cost-effective tech writers understand how to generate high quality content *and* get control over each of the following, while balancing the company's need for Tech Pubs to have a small bureaucratic footprint:

- ✓ **Doc Creation Process**
  Define how the org will create, organize, review, gain formal approval of, release, and distribute content, as well as how it will capture and address feedback.
- ✓ **Desktop Publishing Tools**
  Synchronize on which version to use and what options to set in each tool. Quality of output can vary greatly, depending on how options are set in MS Office, Visio, or Adobe CS tools (for example, turning off image compression).
- ✓ **Document Type Definitions**
  Differentiate approved docs from "rogue" content (for example, sales presentations that contain cut & pasted items) by defining standard doc types = content vehicles.
- ✓ **Style Standards for Docs**
  Define typographic conventions, paragraph and character styles, page layouts, margins, logo sizes & placement, colors, preferred grammar usage, punctuation rules, revision history elements, indexing conventions, and other look and feel issues.
- ✓ **Style Standards for Website Content and Context-Sensitive Help**
  Web content overlaps with doc standards, but also includes filenaming conventions, metadata standards, preferred file formats, content structure, etc.
- ✓ **Templates with Boilerplate Front Matter**
  Work with Legal to create standard copyright and trademark blurbs.
- ✓ **Doc Revision Criteria and Archive Procedure**
  Define what constitutes a major vs. minor doc release. To be ISO compliant, establish a corporate-wide (single-source) database for released docs.
- ✓ **Content Distribution Channels**
  Define the process for hardcopies, internal & external web, CDROM, FTP, email, etc.
- ✓ **Master Glossary**
  Capture terminology, tribal slang, acronyms, trademarks, & branding, with examples. Ideally implement this as a web-based wiki-type dealio on the org's intranet, with monitoring by a Marketing-appointed gatekeeper, who approves team member inputs.

While a lack of bureaucracy has advantages, ad hoc cooperation often leads to a waste of precious resources. ***Games with clear rules enable players to have fun***.

Defining processes and standards contributes greatly to productivity and higher job satisfaction across an org, which translates ultimately into increased profitability.

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