
Cherryleaf

12 tips for hiring a technical author



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Cherryleaf Ltd
Cherryleaf House
31 Arlington Road
Ashford
Middlesex
TW15 2LS
United Kingdom
+44 (0) 1784 258672
Internet E-Mail: info@cherryleaf.com
www.cherryleaf.com

12 tips for hiring a technical author

We asked the consultants at Cherryleaf for tips for hiring a technical author. These are their top 12 tips:

1. *Write a clear job description*

Be clear about what qualities you want in a technical author. Write a clear description of the position, the project and what you want to achieve.

2. *Think about the type of personality you're looking for*

Communication and interpersonal skills are an important part of being a writer, as they may need to glean source information from very busy people. If you have a team of writers, then check whether they would work well with the existing team members. Does the candidate understand your goals? You should pick a writer that you feel comfortable to build a working relationship with, someone you like and trust.

3. *Set a realistic budget*

Be realistic about what you pay a technical author. They have highly specialised skills and can command decent salaries, if they have the experience. If you're just starting out in business, costs are big issue, but remember cheaper isn't always better.

4. *Check they have a track record*

Does the person have a good history of solving the issues you have? Technical authors pick up software quickly; it's part of their job. Just because they haven't worked on exactly the same type of environment as yours, doesn't mean they won't become "expert level users" very quickly.

5. *Listen*

Listen to advice from your technical writer. Remember that they are there to help you gain the users' perspective, and they can help you avoid problems in the future.

6. *Think about your opinion towards age and experience*

If you have the resources to train/mentor it can be worth taking on a graduate. If you don't have these resources, there's a lot to be said for experience.

7. *Permanent or contract?*

Do you need a contractor or permanent member of staff? It sounds obvious, but you might not have thought through the benefits of each for your particular situation.

8. *Tools of the trade*

Candidates should have experience of the software commonly used by technical authors, such as FrameMaker, RoboHelp, Word or an XML authoring tool. However, it's easier to teach a good writer how to become an expert in an authoring application than the other way round. Don't rule out a promising candidate applicant just because they've not used your favoured tools.

9. *Look at any samples of work*

Look at the overall structure of the documents. Is there a logical progression of information from the beginning to the end? Structuring a document well is one of the most important skills needed in a writer. You should also look for an awareness of a documentation process and a wish to follow it. Can you spot any typos or inconsistencies within the document? Is the writer aware of these? Is there a reason why they crept through the quality control process (such as having been produced to really tough time constraints)? Was the document written exclusively by the candidate?

10. Technical experience and skills

The writer needs enough knowledge to explain the subject; they don't need to be able to actually do it. Do they have the ability to learn? Could they gain an in-depth understanding of a subject?

11. Ask around

Find out from friends and colleagues who they use and if they would recommend them.

12. Use a specialist agency

When it comes to technical authoring positions, most agencies don't know their AuthorIT from their elbow, so it's best to use a specialist technical authoring recruitment agency (such as Cherryleaf) that can send you candidates who fit the bill.

About Cherryleaf

Cherryleaf Limited has locations in Birmingham, Brighton, Heathrow (London) and Thame, although we carry out work throughout the UK and the rest of Europe.

We explain things. We work with:

- Developers of software who are afraid of losing their customers and frustrated with the cost of supporting them.
- Anyone who needs to create straightforward, easy to use information and get it to the people who need it.
- Developers of software who lack the time and resource to document their systems adequately.
- Companies who need help organising, writing or delivering their policies and procedures.
- Technical communicators who are looking to improve their skills find a new job or need help with their processes.

We are technical writing specialists, also known as technical communicators, documentation specialists, technical authors and technical writers.

Contact us on 01784 258672 or info@cherryleaf.com, if you are looking to recruit a permanent or contract technical author.