Cherryleaf

10 Tips on implementing a single sourcing solution

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10 tips on single sourcing

We asked the consultants at Cherryleaf for tips on implementing a single sourcing solution. These are their top 10 tips:

1. Define your reasons for reusing information

Configuring information for single sourcing can be time-consuming. You need to know what you stand to gain by putting in the effort.

2. Define your level of granularity

Granularity of information is key to reuse. To customise content to be used in varied publications you need to:

- Represent information differently
- Exclude content
- Alter the purpose of information.
- Be consistent in the way documents are broken down into granular chunks

To maximise flexibility for these changes you sometimes need to identify quite small units of information. The smaller these units, the more granular your information is. But if they're too small they become hard to manage.

3. Separate format from content

If you're not doing it already, start separating format from content. Use Word styles, FrameMaker paragraph formats or cascading stylesheets. It will then be much easier to format content appropriately for each publication.

4. Name your styles (or paragraph formats) semantically

It will be more useful to your single sourcing process to know that a word or phrase is, for example, a User Interface control than to know that it is big, blue and bold.

5. Try to implement top-down writing when describing concepts

Top-down writing is similar to journalistic writing. Try to encapsulate the whole topic in the first paragraph then progressively increase the detail as you move down the page. This makes it easier to produce a shorter version if certain publications need it.

6. Learn about XML

Not all single sourcing approaches are XML-based, but it is the single most important technology in the field

7. Learn about DITA

In particular learn about the DITA XML schema- reuse is at the heart of DITA.

8. Think about which media output is most important to you

Although single sourcing is all about producing more than one output from one set of information, solutions often favour either online or printed outputs. Think about which type of output is most important to you, and choose a solution that favours it.

9. Carry out an information audit

Carry out an information audit (as defined by Ann Rockley). This will show you what information you have, how many people are writing content, how much content is common to the documents you produce, and how it might be reused. It will help you assess your return on investment. Cherryleaf can help with this.

10. Talk to other departments in your organisation

It may be easier to build a case for single sourcing if information produced by other departments is included

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.