

The Hidden Costs of Product Information Publishing

By Chip Gettinger, Vice President, Customer Service and Support, Astoria Software

Manufacturing enterprises have placed a sustained focus on information management solutions to support and augment the design, development and production process. The associated product and manufacturing information that parallels the production process is closely managed, tracked and reviewed to optimize the overall product lifecycle opportunity.

Increasingly, many organizations are tracking and measuring the product information chain beyond the direct manufacturing process. The findings? This extended chain is much longer, broader and costlier, with a decentralized network of product information creators and consumers. The critical nature of this chain is evident as most content flows directly to the creation of customer-facing product information, from sales and marketing content, to product documentation and operations manuals, and to customer service and support information. Some estimate the current costs of content creation, management and delivery throughout the organization accounts for up to 6% of the costs of goods sold for any one product.

Volume, Velocity and Variability

As companies add to and customize product lines, the associated content costs grow

exponentially. The *volume* of content rises as product lines are extended, the *velocity* of content accelerates as product lifecycles shorten and the *variability* in information grows as products are customized and internationalized. The strain on the organization's product information processes is apparent in squeezed product documentation deadlines and missed launch dates, information inaccuracies that trigger legal liability and increased redundancy costs as content is updated and transformed for multiple languages and delivery formats.

Enterprise customers now identify and measure where value and costs are created or diminished throughout the product information lifecycle. From original content creation, to review and translation cycles, to document assembly and delivery, there are four specific areas identified within organizations where content value and cost is likely to be measured: re-use of content; collaboration and review workflow cycles; language translation processes; and publishing.

What is clear is that the more an organization can eliminate a redundant, standalone approach to product information processes, the better the cost-efficiencies across the entire content lifecycle. For many, the old model of writing and locking valuable

content in static documents stored on file-servers in a business group is crippling in an age when agility to respond is critical to success.

A Standards-based Approach

Astoria Software has helped leading organizations realize efficiency and cost-savings in how they create, manage and deliver their product information. Most start with the adoption of a single-source information model, relying on a centrally managed content repository. This centralization of content in an XML repository delivers flexibility as an organization creates, tracks, updates, translates and publishes content and manages its re-use over time. Besides automation tools, organizations are adopting information standards such as the OASIS Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA). This standard supports a single-source information model with the creation and management of content "topics" that are easily re-used. Content topics, along with metadata and product content attributes are managed independently, but maintain relationships with each other. DITA's granular topic-based approach, in concert with an XML content repository, delivers inherent flexibility in the creation of documents, and supports efficiencies throughout the author-to-publish process.

As demand for new products continues to put pressure on content groups, the need for more cost-effective management of the information lifecycle becomes critical to business efficiency. Solutions such as Astoria's have helped Fortune 500 companies streamline their product information processes and reduce costs, from \$3 million to \$300,000 in documentation translation costs alone for one Fortune 500 manufacturer. It starts with an organization's capability to re-use content, to effectively collaborate, and to automate multi-language, multi-format publishing. Finally, it means adopting a single-source information model and content management solutions that can effectively manage the entire process in a measurable and cost-controlled way. ■

Chip Gettinger is a long-time executive in the information publishing industry and is a regular speaker at content management and publishing industry conferences. As vice president of services and support for Astoria Software, he advises customers on best practices in product information management. Gettinger is also involved with OASIS, the XML standards board, and is leading the first DITA specialization committee for medical manufacturing. Astoria, based in San Mateo, CA, and founded in 1994, is a leading provider of XML content management solutions for the dynamic publishing of product documentation and content.

To learn more about how Astoria has helped leading organizations including Siemens Medical Solutions, Texas Instruments, NCR Teradata and more, visit www.astoriasoftware.com/kmworld, or via email at info@astoriasoftware.com.

Technical Document Publishing On-Demand

A manufacturer's technical publication departments are most affected by the velocity of new product innovation, and the volume of demand for new content delivered in more formats and languages.

To address this need, Astoria Software introduces a new end-to-end XML content management solution now available as an on-demand offering. This best-in-class solution delivers an XML authoring tool, an XML content management repository, workflow, a built-in DITA Workbench for simple transition to the DITA standard and a composition engine to output to any delivery format—print or digital. This entire solution is accessed from the Web via a third-party hosting provider, eliminating the need for any hardware or services investment, and supported and serviced by Astoria. For more information, visit Astoriasoftware.com/OnDemand