

What Makes Great Product Documentation?

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What Makes Great Product Documentation?

Your customers don't really want to read your documentation, but, unless you offer an extremely simple product, sooner or later, your customers are going to seek out your documentation. When they do, you'll want them to have the best experience possible. That's why your product documentation matters.

Based on our experience developing all types of product documentation for all types of products, InfoPros offers the following guidelines and advice. "Great" product documentation is:

Part of the product, part of the brand

Your customers will not want to search for your documentation. Make it easy for them. Software needs integrated Online Help. Hardware and manufactured products need printed documentation suitable to the environment in which the product is used. Great documentation assures your customers that you're thinking about them beyond the point of purchase.

Useful to its specific audience

Technicians need one kind of documentation, casual users another. Some customers need more training and step-by-step instructions, while others need comprehensive and detailed reference information. Great documentation delivers just what each type of audience needs – no more.

Easy to navigate

Help your customers find what they need, quickly. Different navigational principles apply to print versus online documentation. Does the print copy include a table of contents, an index, and reference pointers? Does the online copy include effective links, search mechanisms and related topic entries? Do both versions feature consistent layout, logical headings, "skimmable" content, and effective illustrations?

Complete and accurate

Reading documentation that has information on everything except what you're looking for can be quite frustrating. Great documentation is tested and validated along with the product, and customer questions are anticipated and answered proactively.

Concise

More words do not necessarily bring better comprehension and more sections do not mean better documentation. Does every feature really require description? Great technical writers can help you trim the fat from your content.

Easy to update and republish

If you've made the investment in great documentation, you need to keep it current. The best documentation is part of a product deployment plan. Great documentation is

designed for regular maintenance. It supports quick product release cycles, marketing and sales needs, customer service and internal training needs.

Easy to translate and reuse

Many products are sold globally. Writing for global audiences requires specific techniques for reducing word count, eliminating jargon and modularizing documentation for downstream automation and management. Documentation content can be reused across a spectrum of venues such as product support literature, user manuals, marketing presentations, web-casting, and more.

Appealing to the eye

You may have great content, but if it's poorly designed, difficult to read, or disorganized, the documentation will not meet its goals. Effective layout and presentation support great content.

About InfoPros

Since 1994 InfoPros has proven its documentation and training expertise with a commitment to best-in-class services and client-centered solutions. Experienced in DITA/XML, we specialize in delivering a blend of services for documenting products and processes, training development and translation and localization.

Whether you need a complete training program to augment a new product or service, or you require job aids for internal learning, InfoPros has the experience and skills to deliver the results you are looking for. By combining a client-centric focus with our structured three-step approach, we are able to design a customized solution that will fit your business.

To learn more about how InfoPros can customize a solution for you, contact us at:

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