1. PRODUCT INFORMATION BORING BUT NECESSARY OR AN UNDERUTILIZED ASSET

Moving from cost center thinking to leveraging product information as a marketing tool

As digital content system developers and integrators, we tend to be immersed in complexity. Developing content transition strategies, recommending and implementing systems, and training our clients' content teams in new ways of thinking, require a deep dive into complexity. But sometimes when you're in the weeds, working out ways to move a company into a digital transformation, you can lose track of the big picture. Creating and managing product information, from documentation to marketing collateral, is costly but necessary. But seldom are these assets viewed as valuable to the bottom line.

The B2B buying process has changed

To truly realize the hidden value of the mountains of content created by your product teams, tech writers, marketers, and strategists, there needs to be a perspective shift and it needs to be pervasive and supported by management. That shift is driven by your customers' changing buying processes. They are hungry for actionable information and they want it long before they interact with your sales and customer success team. This is a sea change in buying habits.

Amazon has raised the bar

Perhaps the best example comes from the largest B2C retailer on the planet, Amazon. Over the years they have gradually increased the amount of product information available on everything from socks to printers. Reviews with star ratings by Verified Buyers. Faceted search so buyers can zero in on every aspect of a product from price to reputation to specifications and brands. Comparison shopping served up without requiring clicks by the visitor. Specs, FAQs, Concept explanations, photos…customers who bought this bought these other things. Everything, *and* the kitchen sink (if it is relevant).

B2B Marketing and eCommerce Has To Step Up

This deluge of product information is not only successful, it is now expected. Yet businesses selling to other businesses (B2B) are only just beginning to offer a similar level of content to their customers, prior to the sale. If I can see deep into a book on Amazon, why can't I see an installation or operation manual on a complex product I'm researching for my business? Yes, I could call a sales person. But I don't want to do that. It's unfortunate, but the old way of selling has actually inhibited buyers from reaching out to a human information source because that human all too often was primarily focused on the sell.

Wrap Your Offerings in Product Information

Enlightened companies, selling complex products like genome samples, into regulated markets, have realized that relying on a sales team to offer up needed product information, when the product mix may number in the thousands or millions of SKUs, can't work. Yet the answer is already there. It is all that content they create to support those products. If you take Amazon's lead, you can leverage these existing assets and give prospective buyers the information they need, long before they contact you. And that content does the selling.

Understand Reputation Management as a Marketing Tool

Let's get specific here, since reputation management is often thought of as a social media function. Reputation that is associated with individual products and buying experiences is powerful information when added to a product information mix. Reviews, good and bad (more below on this), Testimonials, Case Studies, and White Papers are all reputation touchpoints. They offer a buyer a window into what their experience with your products and company will be like:

- How hard was the install?
- Is it too much or too little for my needs?
- Who else is doing business with them and why?
- Are they providing me with enough information to make a buying decision?

And on and on. Questions like these are why including negative reviews, though a hard decision, can be critical. They often reveal misconceptions about a product, unforeseen quality issues, or a need to reevaluate the way the product is positioned. People read and write reviews! Look at a mundane product on Amazon like athletic socks- there are dozens, if not hundreds of reviews.

Your product information mix, for even a simple product or part, can become extensive. And it can be daunting to manage, especially with legacy tools and workflows.

There is a path to leveraging your existing content assets

Existing content development and management systems are either too siloed (desktop apps like Word), too complex (we love DITA, but try and explain it to a newbie), or impossible to manage the way we manage data, because the content is not structured. And to truly populate a Product Management System (PIM) with this wealth of content data, the content process must be transformed. This, at its core, is what we help you do. Take your content, change the way it is created and delivered, train internal teams to leverage it, and put rigorous systems in place to manage it. This transformation is complex but the payoff is measurable and the resulting access to information is not only appreciated but expected by your B2B buyers.