1. RIP TRADITIONAL CONTENT STRATEGIES AND METHODOLOGIES

"Life begins at the end of your comfort zone." This tagline from Pam Noreault, presenter at the STC Chicago October chapter meeting, nicely sums up the journey that many technical communicators are embarking on as they move from traditional content strategies to strategies focused on customer-driven deliverables.

Traditional content development has focused on release-cycle content. Driven by sales and marketing, new product features and fixes equal new content to be published to PDF and maybe HTML; start all over again, and then hope that you are meeting your user's needs.

The reality is, while technical communicators agree that knowing their audience is paramount, very few of us spend time with customers. FACT: You can't know anybody without spending time with them.

Fortunately, technical communicators are getting out of their comfort zone and are jumping the gap from release-cycle driven content by talking to their users and delivering what users want, when they need it. Both traditional and newer tools and methodologies are at our disposal, and you can get creative as well:

- UX strategies
- Marketing strategies (SUS, NPS scores)
- Calls, site visits, shadowing customers
- Twitter following, LinkedIn groups
- YouTube videos, JIT content, gamification , crowdsourcing

Engaging regularly with your audience and using this feedback, you can develop your content strategy around a customer-engagement cycle: determine deliverables based on need, create a deliverable schedule and knock it out, report the results to management, rinse, and repeat.

Pam, who is a Principal Consultant and manager at Dakota System's partner SDL, noted that while SDL does have customers whose sole focus is customer-centric deliverables, they also still have customers who deliver just PDFs.

Come join the cutting edge. You can see Pam's slides **here** . She's got a lot of good extra stuff in those slides. What's missing from those slides (and referenced in the presentation) is the excellent US government usability website, www.usability.gov.