1. START WITH TRAINING BEFORE SELECTION A PRODUCT CONTENT SYSTEM

Moving to a structured content strategy for documentation and/or product information can be a confusing process given the number of software options, the learning curve, and making the transition from your legacy processes for creating, managing, and publishing content. Fortunately there is a logical first step, one that may seem a little counter-intuitive: start with a basic training course designed for your situation, *before* you choose an architecture or system. In this brief article we're going to look at the logic behind this option.

For the sake of this article, I am going to use [DITA](#) as an example. DITA is an open source database architecture designed to support the creation, organization, management, and publishing of large structured content sets. There are other systems that may be used in your industry, some by default, and this article's recommendations also apply to their use.

Can You Train Without a Strategy in Place?

Is this putting the wagon before the horse? You haven't chosen a specific system, so why begin with training? Structured content creation and management is an entirely new model for those used to tools like Word, Framemaker, or even InDesign, for content. Much of the early training is designed to help understand the conceptual logic that underlies this powerful paradigm shift. It also delves into the way things like DITA make possible much more granular management of content.

You Need To Develop Internal Expertise

If no one on your team has experience with DITA, you are going to run into resistance initially from some who feel out of their comfort zone when adopting new methodologies and tools. This is normal, but it can result in much costly effort going down an adoption path that may not be right for you. The solution to this is to develop internal expertise on the subject and a training program early in the process, brings this directly to your people. This, in turn, builds confidence and support among the eventual users of the system.

One way to 'sell' this process is to make clear that this represents an opportunity to learn valuable career skills that may lead to advancement.

Your People Will Understand Why This Move Makes Sense

When people understand the why and how of a process they are much more likely to engage with it. Having a core team go through a training creates internal champions who can help others get on board. In addition, early training in something like DITA, can greatly demystify its underlying logic and the extensive benefits of the system. Those who are trained can take that training and make a case across disciplines and departments. DITA materially affects content development, content reuse, multichannel publishing, translation and localization, marketing, and other business activities that are likely performed by teams that rarely interact. A trained core of users give you the means to get the word out across your organization.

Internal Champions Make Adoption and Implementation a Much Smoother Process

When your company first looks at moving to more advanced content process, the amount of work that must be done can be daunting. A lot of the expertise at Dakota can help but we know from experience that having an educated internal team makes the entire process go faster and with less headaches or dead-ends. Initially, you'll likely need outside resources for help with implementation, content migration, and training. However, an introductory training program, early in the decision-making process will help you use outside help much more cost effectively.

Ideally an internal champion or champions will emerge who can manage the process and make the case to the management of the various departments that will be (or should be) impacted. Ultimately, these changes will deliver ROI in many areas and an internal champion can help make the case with both decision-makers and users.

Define Your Desired Results

Finally, a brief training gives you a framework for setting goals, a timeline, and a further internal training process. You'll start to identify places where it will make a positive material impact, including determining cost, and the ROI associated with that cost. Having these desired results in place will make the process much less mystifying and the end result much more impactful.

Practical Aspects

How do you go about putting a training in place? Here at Dakota systems we offer a variety of training programs suitable for those early in the learning stages of modern content management. We also offer system-specific training in an array of tools for those who are past the initial planning aspect. This fits in with the systems selection and integration, implementation design, content migration, and other services we provide and manage.

To get started:

- Visit www.ditatraining.com for an example of our training

- Visit our Training Page to see system-specific training

- Contact us to discuss your needs so we point you to your best options or design a training system for you. We are systems-agnostic and our approach is to help you find the best model for your specific requirements.