

# 10 ways DITA can help drive a unified strategy



## Table of Contents

---

Overview	3
Content reuse	4
Translation (localization)	5
Vendor interchange and tool neutrality	6
Integrated work sharing	7
Content as a business asset	8
Templates for authoring	9
Managed content release	9
Multi-channel publishing	10
Conditional publishing	11
User experience of content	12
Conclusion	13
Next steps	13

## Overview

A Unified Content Strategy is the methodical and purposeful management of your information assets across all divisions of your enterprise, in a way that breaks down silos and makes information easy to find and use.



If there's one thing technical communicators know inside out, it's content. From planning and creation to reviews and delivery, we're definitely the experts in the room. Actually, it is safe to say that we're the experts in the enterprise.

Structured content is the best way to strategically optimize your content. Firstly, structured content separates content from format. This frees your content from its format, and from tools like Microsoft Word or other proprietary formats. That frees it up for intelligent reuse, multi-channel publishing, efficiencies in translation, and all sorts of enhancements while delivering it to end users. Secondly, structure allows you to mark up content with semantic elements and metadata, both of which can lead to high levels of consistency and lower maintenance efforts. Structured content is ready for XML. As a matter of fact, it's the 'behind-the-scenes' XML that gives structured content all of its superpowers. One XML standard that has taken off in the technical communication space is DITA.

DITA is the accepted industry standard for creating structured content. It provides an intuitive and friendly approach to guided authoring. DITA also breaks content down into manageable, reusable, information blocks. Its authoring and reuse benefits far outweigh the initial investment and effort of transitioning. On top of that, it separates content from format, which enables efficiencies in translation, publishing, and enhancements in many other facets of content.

Prior to DITA, there wasn't much we could do when it came to strategizing with the rest of the enterprise and pooling our tools, processes, and content. That's no longer the case; we're starting to see DITA adoption from many expected and unexpected divisions, from Training and Support to Academic Publishers, Operations and Insurance.

DITA is perfectly poised to bring a much-needed evolution to enterprise content, making it easier to deliver the right information to the right people at the right time and in the right format.

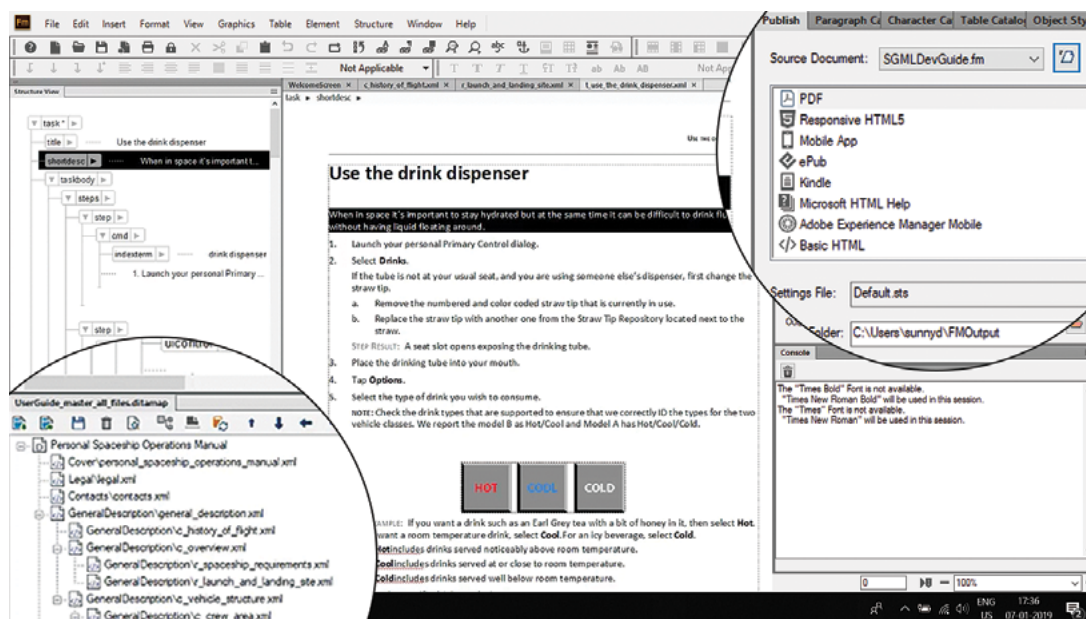
A unified, DITA-driven, enterprise-wide approach to content can have a profound impact on the enterprise. When content created by the enterprise is treated as a valued and valuable corporate asset, it's a win-win-win situation. It's more efficient for the enterprise and easier for content creators. But end users reap the real benefit by getting the content they need when they need it.

## Content reuse

Content reuse is the most obvious benefit of an XML-based approach to documentation, but experience shows that not everyone has an easy time wrapping their heads around it.

The reuse mechanisms inherent in DITA let you reuse a small (or large) chunk of content or image wherever you need it without having to copy/paste. The shift that DITA introduces over the old copy/paste method is equivalent to the difference between attaching a document in an email and storing your documents in Google Drive. Think about updating and maintaining those documents over time. There are distinct advantages to storing a document in a shared repository and having everyone access it in a collaborative manner.

DITA takes this idea one step further by storing the content outside of the Word file and in small bits, called topics. Anyone can then assemble these topics in any order and combination, and then publish that content into any format. When you update a topic, it gets updated everywhere it is used.



A good unified content strategy considers all the assets and all the possible ways they can be reused across the enterprise. Marketing, training, support and technical documentation are all likely to have significant overlap in the subjects they create content for, although the level of detail and end users can differ. DITA's flexibility can handle both the similarities and the changes.

## Translation (localization)

A large part of what DITA does is, separate the content from the format. This means that an author or translator doesn't have to format text manually—they use semantic tagging and let the publishing engine automatically format the text. This introduces immediate and substantial savings when it comes to localization; the translators don't have to worry about the look and feel of the content, they just translate the words.

When combined with DITA's reuse, where now the translators only translate content once, no matter how many places you use it, the cost and management of translation can be vastly reduced. The savings in this area can be phenomenal, with careful planning and implementation.



You can also introduce more sophisticated translation mechanisms, like sending only the content that has changed since the last translation. By using SVG (Scalable Vector Graphic) images, you can also ensure translating graphics is easy by providing a text layer distinct from the image layer in the graphic. This saves translators a lot of time because they don't have to recreate the entire graphic with translated content. These smarter, more efficient ways of dealing with content that needs translation, introduce profound savings, multiplied by the number of languages you translate into.<sup>1</sup>

DITA-optimized tools like a CCMS can also partially automate the management of translated content, alerting you when the source language has been updated and translation is required, and providing an integrated delivery mechanism with the translation vendor.

You can take your translation efficiency to the next level by using a standard like XLIFF, which works in conjunction with DITA to simplify the package to the translation vendor even more.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Adobe Case Study

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oasis-open.org/committees/download.php/48340/DITA12XLIFFArticle.pdf>

## Vendor interchange and tool neutrality

DITA is an open standard, managed and maintained by OASIS committees made up of industry experts working as volunteers. DITA is not a tool—it's a framework that can be used by anyone and any tool.

DITA's position as a vendor-neutral standard means that you can use whichever tools you need without risking vendor lock-in. There's an array of DITA tools for various parts of the content lifecycle, but in general, quality DITA tools help you author, manage, review, and publish content without ever adding any proprietary code. This means you can switch tools easily or push content through one tool and into the next, whenever needed.

It also means that you can link tools together—you can use a suite of tools, passing the DITA XML from one to the other, to achieve the result that works best for your enterprise.



## Integrated work sharing

DITA breaks up content from long documents into small, modular pieces to be assembled into documents at publish time. The idea of content ownership is based on the book paradigm, where one person is generally in charge of the content throughout its lifecycle.

A massive shift occurs when you introduce the modular writing of DITA. It lets you really dive into collaborative, workflow-controlled content creation and reviews. DITA allows many individuals to contribute to a single "document" while maintaining consistency. A DITA-optimized tool like a CCMS lets all authors have access to the shared content, even allowing subject matter experts to contribute by creating content or providing reviews.



Reviews on DITA content, enabled by a DITA CCMS, are real-time and collaborative, where comments and suggested changes occur on a centralized, shared view of the content by one or more serial or concurrent reviewers. Reviewers can see each other's comments in real time. You can also have discussions, track items accepted or rejected, and keep an audit history of the comments made and resolved on the content. CCMSs also let you connect content to workflow, so everything flows as per your desired processes, and nothing falls through the cracks. Combining collaborative workflows solves quite a few business problems. By attaching deadlines and due dates, the entire review process is easily managed and seamlessly becomes a part of the project workflow.

Having centralized control of the content lifecycle as a project lets you have visibility into the metrics around each step in that lifecycle, giving you a deeper understanding of the cost and effort the enterprise puts into creating and approving content.

## Content as a business asset

For decades, product documentation has been treated as an after-thought, something that adds no revenue to the enterprise and is required only because end users may ask for it. However, we've lately seen a shift in this thinking at the highest levels. After all, this is the information age.<sup>4</sup>

There's now a growing enterprise-level awareness of the importance of documentation as part of the product and part of the customer journey. This extends to all content created by the enterprise.

This change treats all content as an output of enterprise, as much as any product, which means content has inherent value. Once this idea of content as an asset permeates into senior management, there's support for managing any content generated by the enterprise efficiently and consistently, whether it's intended for internal or external end users.

Templates, consistency, tools, storage, retrieval, and quality become the driving force behind creating a high standard for the right content at the right time with the right tools. Infrastructure and tool enhancements are introduced enterprise-wide so that content can be created, maintained, and delivered efficiently and effectively.



As a by-product of this enterprise-wide change to treat content as an asset, the idea of sharing content across departments and breaking down silos becomes an obvious step.

Thanks to shared infrastructure, tools, and management buy-in, departments that create similar types of content can start leveraging each other's work. Common cross-overs include Marketing, Training, Support, and Technical Documentation. However, there is a growing trend for other departments to adopt more sophisticated content management as well. Often, people in Operations, Legal, Business Processes, Finance, and Education don't even know they're writing in DITA—they just know that it's suddenly easier to create, share, find, review, and publish content.

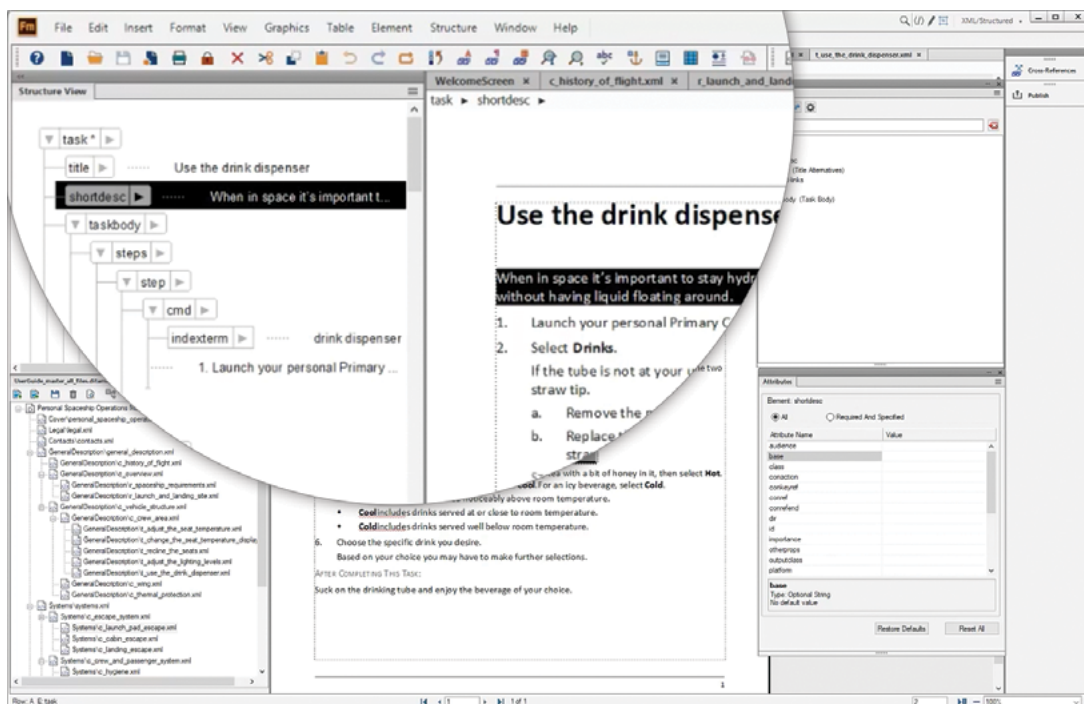
<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information\\_Age](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_Age)



## Templates for authoring

As the tools that allow you to create DITA content improve, the idea of providing an assisted authoring environment for authors has become possible. Although DITA provides an infrastructure for creating content in topics, there's little guidance about how to write in those topics and how to consistently apply elements across many writers.

Adobe FrameMaker as a DITA authoring tool, or the web-based editor of Adobe Experience Manager Guides, allows you to create easy-to-use templates and provide them to content contributors and authors.

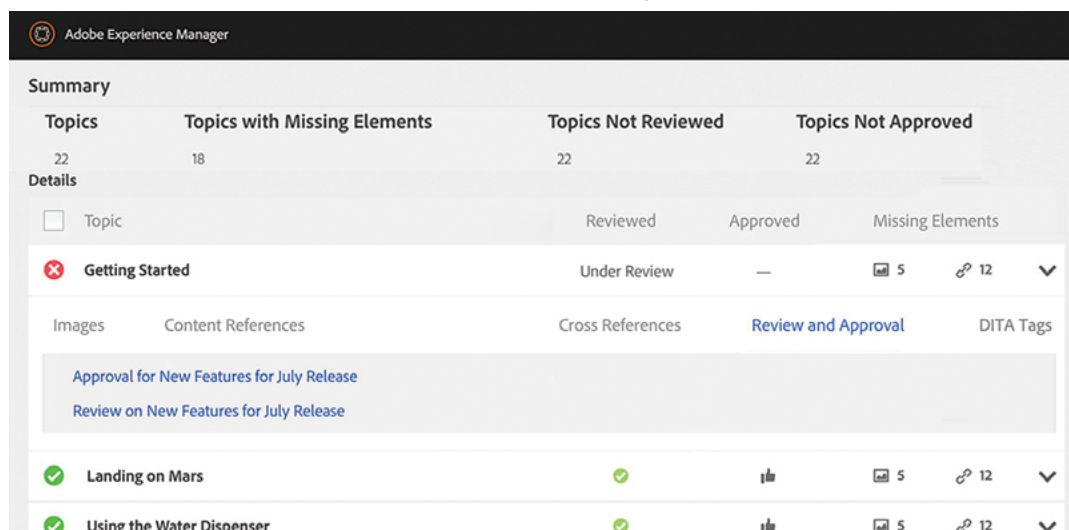


DITA authoring tools allow you to create a managed shell to guide authors for writing clearly and consistently based on the particular type of content and audience they are writing for.

## Managed content release

DITA-optimized CCMSs allow you to introduce managed content releases into your content lifecycle. You can automate and control the release of your content to end users so that publishing occurs only after content is approved by the right people.

The audit trail of all changes to content is also automated and available, which satisfies governance requirements for more controlled industries, like semiconductors, medical devices, and manufacturing.



DITA managed with a CCMS allows enterprises to track and be able to recreate any publication, complete with who made changes and when and why each change was made, down to the sentence level. This level of control is not always required. However, when it is, automation with a DITA CCMS is the only reasonable solution.

## Multi-channel publishing

End users need your content in a variety of formats, so that they can access it from the device of their choice. The more accessible your content is, on whichever device they use, the better their experience is with your products and your company.

A huge benefit of DITA is that you can output content to many formats from one source. Instead of using many tools, use one to create all the formats end users need without duplicating content creation and management efforts.

A side benefit to multi-channel publishing is that no author is formatting their own content. The layout and design of each published deliverable are automatic, enforcing consistency and branding.



## Conditional publishing

For many enterprises, including software and aviation, a key piece of DITA functionality is the ability to customize information automatically. If you have a client, model, or a product combination that needs tailored content, you don't need to create and customize a duplicate set of content. You can deliver content tailored for specific uses with little extra effort over creating it for just one using DITA attributes. These tiny little values let authors write a complete set of content just once (and maintain it all in just one place) but create deliverables that are tailored to a specific need on-the-fly.

This dynamic, customized content publishing cuts down on authoring time, review time, and overall ongoing maintenance of content.

This idea is very foreign to content creators who are not technical communicators, but the need is still there. It's very much like Excel's filter capability, where you can automatically see just the content you want and filter out the rest.

For example, when writing policies and procedures for Oil & Gas or Insurance, there are often details that only apply to some roles or divisions. Instead of creating separate, mostly duplicated content for each type of role, DITA lets you create all the content, just once, and then filter out what you don't need, delivering just the right details to the right people.



## User experience of content

This growing area of interest is all about understanding the end user and designing their content consumption experience. Your end users progress through an entire journey when it comes to your content. Even if creating the content spans many different departments in your enterprise, for the end users, it is all just your content.



The consistency of the customer journey is the driving force here:

- **Messaging:** No matter which department creates the content, information shouldn't have discrepancies, describing products and features similarly, just with varying levels of detail. It should be one voice across the enterprise.
- **Voice:** Everyone should hear the same message, from the same source, no matter where they are listening to your message. Everything your company creates and delivers should focus on the client and do so in a consistent and brand-focused tone.
- **Branding:** Your branding, from logos to font choice, should be automatically applied throughout, ensuring consistent brand experience no matter what part of the customer journey they have reached.

Another facet of the user experience of content is progressive disclosure. The idea of progressive disclosure<sup>5</sup> is to provide a teaser or advanced notice of more content. As the end user travels through the customer journey, you provide more and more information the deeper they dive. Using DITA, the progressive disclosure of documentation can be automatically rendered in HTML5 and apps.

A final consideration for the user experience of content is to allow them a fully functional HTML experience when the content goes from micro to macro. There comes the point at which there is so much content available that you need to provide multiple entry points to enable easy findability of a specific piece of information that they may need.

Consider the analogy of a big box home improvement website. They have search functionality, but that often results in too many search results to be useful for finding a particular item. Users want to filter down those results and find just the piece of hardware they're looking for, with the features they need, and a price they're willing to pay.

Petroleum Industry

Structure

Upstream

Midstream

Country

US

Canada

India

The petroleum industry

The petroleum industry, also known as the oil industry or the oil patch, includes the global processes of exploration, extraction, refining, transporting (often by oil tankers and pipelines), and marketing of petroleum products. The largest volume products of the industry are fuel oil and gasoline (petrol). Petroleum (oil) is also the raw material for many chemical products, including pharmaceuticals, solvents, fertilizers, pesticides, synthetic fragrances, and plastics. The industry is usually divided into three major components: upstream, midstream, and downstream.

Petroleum is vital to many industries, and is necessary for the maintenance of industrial civilization in its current configuration, making it a critical concern for many nations.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/book/the-glossary-of-human-computer-interaction/progressive-disclosure>

12

An end user has just as much trouble finding the piece of information they need in your library of content. DITA enables tagging and categorizing so that an HTML rendering of that content allows end users to find the categories of content that apply to them at that moment. This is called faceted search and can be an invaluable tool that is enabled by a strong infrastructure such as DITA.

DITA content allows a great deal of metadata to be associated with it, both for findability in faceted search and for enhanced overall search engine optimization (SEO) value. By associating a carefully planned set of metadata values to discrete pieces of content, you can increase the reach of your website and drive successful findability for every piece of content for your visitors.

For internal content, you could deliver pre-approved, high-quality content that is findable rather than a mess of pages, libraries, and sites. For external-facing content, you can let end users pick and choose product versions, product combinations, and operating systems so they can see just the content that applies to them.

## Conclusion

DITA's strengths are very much focused on flexibility and extensibility so that it can be used to create the content you need regardless of the type of content or who your end users are. Better, faster, more effective content management, backed by a well-planned unified content strategy, can save enterprises millions of dollars. It also frees up resources that should be developing, building, planning, and innovating by making the content lifecycle as automated and transparent, yet managed, as possible.

Although DITA's adoption began with technical communicators, it's now primed and ready for wider adoption across all content creators in an enterprise. There are interesting times ahead.

## Next steps

If this all sounds good to you, maybe it's time to consider exploring how Adobe and DITA are a great match. Tools like Adobe Experience Manager and Adobe FrameMaker are made for DITA, working in harmony to create a complete technical communications solution. You can create, edit, manage, and publish all your content, driving a unified content strategy using tools in a unified communication suite.

Visit [the website](#) to get started.

## Get in touch



[techcomm@adobe.com](mailto:techcomm@adobe.com)



+1-408-536-1144



**Adobe**

Adobe Systems Incorporated  
345 Park Avenue  
San Jose, CA 95110-2704  
USA  
[www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)

Adobe, the Adobe logo, and FrameMaker are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Adobe Systems Incorporated in the United States and/or other countries. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

© 2022 Adobe Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in the USA.

1/19