In engineering, technical documentation refers to any type of documentation that describes the handling, functionality and architecture of a technical product or a product under development or use. In this article, I am going to mention how technical documentation produced in a dynamic and reactive organization will lead to increased sales and reduced marketing costs while greatly improving customer relations, satisfaction and retention. This might be a bold statement, but with the right processes, workflow management, team skills and tools to help you, this is a very real and achievable goal.

1. Why we define data sheets as technical documents

Technical documentation comes in many different formats and is usually intended for a diverse range of recipients. The common thread between all of these is that the documentation should convey in an efficient and appealing way the key information about the product or process they are promoting. Some examples of these are data sheets, product sheets, user manuals, product specification sheets, etc.As an example, data sheets give an overview as well as a detailed specification table for a featured product. This provides information that will be used by suppliers as well as by the end customer. So, we can see that data sheets can communicate with many different audiences whether it be the marketing department, fellow engineers or the customer.

The common properties of a data sheet are that it defines what the product will do, how it will function, how and where it should be applied or used as well as other product specific information. Often you will find that the product documentation is drawn up directly by the manufacturer and should always accompany the product itself.Technical documents are written chiefly with the contribution of technical departments or technical writers. But non-technical documents are centered upon design issues and generating leads.

Technical writing takes much time and coffee!

“Brochures, leaflets or white papers are not classified as technical documents due to their marketing statements. “

As we have already mentioned, data sheets can address many different types of audiences such as suppliers, manufacturers and customers. According to research done by IBM, 88% of customers make use of technical product information to make their purchasing decisions. The fact that these data sheets are seen as factual and scientific will often create a sense of trust in the contents by the consumer.

At the simplest level, documentation is a form of communication. Effective technical communication conveys complex information to specific audiences clearly and accurately. It will allow your customers to use your products and services more effectively, as well as increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty.The writing style and delivery method should be based on the audience and it is a key component in a complete product package. Increasingly, this is becoming a more and more important part of the sales presentation in today’s competitive markets. Well written documentation will play an important part in increasing your reputation with the documents intended audiences.Product documentation can be a great marketing asset for promoting both your product and your company.

2. What are the benefits of data sheets?

When we look at how marketing and technical documentation come together we can see that the content creators for both types of documentation are creating content for the same target audience, the customer. As a result of this, we can see how important those content creators and the content they create is to the success of the company and the products that they are documenting or marketing. It is clear to see that the better different departments are able to communicate, share and work together, the better the final product, documentation and sales will be.

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It is through the integrated use of easy to define and manage workflows and processes that technical documents can be created. Ensuring that your engineers and marketers can collaborate through sharing templates, design systems and effective checks and balances will mean your company can be trusted for consistent, accurate and relevant product information customers can rely on and use.

3. Why Technical Content and Marketing Belong Together

There is also a key area of documentation that is often overlooked or ignored completely by companies: post sales documentation. This follow-up documentation will often help a customer to understand and better use your products after the point of sale. Rather than abandoning your customer once the purchase has been made, by providing these additional services or documents you will have created an additional opportunity to market and sell additional products to an already converted (hopefully loyal) customer. A fantastic example of this are websites and online resources which customers can go to and through which you can target and advertise new or associated products to the customer directly. It is essential that this service is provided in a clear and precise manner that brings benefits to the customer so that you will, in turn, benefit from the increased brand loyalty that will be engendered in your customer.

It’s apparent that the marketing and engineering professionals in charge of creating these technical documents about complex processes need to be able to communicate the information in a manner that is both appealing and easy to understand from a customer’s point of view. This means that they must take on the additional roles of user advocates, researchers, testers and publishers.

4. Why Technical Content and Marketing Belong Together

Emotions are natural human drives that dictate how we behave and what we do. They are the main influencers in our decision-making processes. They can create and maintain strong emotional ties with certain brands, and when brands evoke emotions in their consumers, those emotions then influence further brand related decision-making such as buying additional products from the same brand over a market competitor.They influence how we shop and what we buy and they are more effective than logic in advertising. Emotion plays a surprisingly large role in B2B market, Black Friday is a perfect example of this dynamic in play and as a result, the best marketing campaigns connect a truly awesome product with a creative, emotional advertisement to create a sense of connection with the customer.

One of the largest (and most profitable) examples of this currently is the annual ‘Singles Day’ sales in China which leads to around 700 million transactions and product purchases in a day, which is many billions of dollars of revenue and sales.

5. How Engineers and marketing can come together and bring more success to your business

Engineers have their own visual language which they use to communicate information about their products. Visual aids such as charts, graphs, tables, diagrams, mathematical symbols, detailed product blueprints and engineering drawings are all used to describe the product or application on offer. It may seem like a cliché, but in many companies around the world, Marketing and Engineering departments often don’t come into contact with each other and when they do they don’t always see eye to eye.

It is important for companies to come up with a system and workflow processes that allow for efficient communication and information sharing between these two departments so that products can be properly described and marketed. Effective use of technical documentation can lead to greater customer engagement and, therefore, more successful product sales and customer experiences.

6. Must-Have Skills for Engineers to have success ın technical documentation and product marketing

Clear Communication SkillsIt is vital to be able to communicate in a clear manner so that you can effectively explain instructions and processes as well as present problems and solutions to both clients and the team members. Without clear communication, the possibility of a project failure is very high and within the engineering fields, it is crucial to success.CollaborationWhether you call it cooperation, collaboration, or teamwork, an engineer’s ability to work with other people from different backgrounds is essential.Dealing with pressureManagers should be able to lead a team in a way that fosters cohesion, communication and collaboration so that if and when a problem arises, everybody is on hand to tackle it. If issues aren’t resolved in a short space of time, they could potentially prove costly for the organization and reflect badly on the team.

Problem-solving skillsEngineers are often called upon to address problems on their own and must be able to figure out where the problems come from and provide solutions. Team playersBecoming the head of a project, one must be able to encourage, empower, and help to improve team members. We must be able to work with others to in order to achieve our goals.Thinking Ahead It is important for engineers to be able to anticipate problems in the product’s development process. The ability to foresee issues in the project and identify possible sticking points means they can be addressed and resolved before causing any real delays or increased costs within the project.

7. What strategies can you use to improve your technic documents and marketing approach?

It can often be a challenge to keep your documentation up-to-date, accessible, and looking professional. There are many different people involved in creating and maintaining the data sheets often with complex and distributed workflow structures.

This means there can be a large overhead in managing these different teams and communicating changes and product updates in an effective and timely manner.More and more companies are choosing to host their technical documentation on their corporate website so that these can be easily kept up to date as well as being a dedicated resource from which suppliers, manufacturers, regulators and customers can come back to again and again.It is worth investing the time and effort into creating great documentation as this is an investment into the product and into the future of the company.

Your brand and your products need to be consistent in message, form and presentation — having effective documentation will reiterate your message and ensure consistency.Your documentation should be written from the perspective of the users and take into consideration what they already know as well as what they are trying to do and how they are trying to do it. You should consider how they will access the product, the documentation, how they’ll communicate to friends and family or co-workers, and about a hundred other important aspects.

This means that having well-defined, collaborative workflows and processes will ensure that none of these are missed, but also that the relevant people are not being flooded with irrelevant information or requests.

If all that data sheets bother you, then it’s time to try TDSmaker

Each time users find the answers to their queries in the documentation, the company saves time and money. So, taking time to provide answers to the most common questions within your technical data sheets is a worthwhile investment.Documents should be designed, prepared, reviewed, and distributed within the boundaries of properly managed workflows and by the appropriately trained and authorized team members. Therefore having a system that allows for dynamic and easy to structure team permissions within workflows will lead to more efficient creation of and maintenance of the technical data sheets.

8. What are some of the common pitfalls in technical writing and product marketing?

When creating and maintaining technical documents, there are a number of issues and problems that can arise from producing a low standard of documentation such as:

Re-work

Re-design

Troubleshooting

Re-testing

Re-inspection

Delays

Equipment Downtime

Product recalls

When it comes to poor management and workflow processes then issues such as these can occur:

Unexpected Overtime

Customer Complaints

Damaged Reputation

Loss of customer goodwill

Extra Setups and Disrupted Production Schedules

CLOSING

With all that being said, are there any products that will allow you to achieve a level of technical documentation for your products? Something that will lead to the types of benefits we have described? A product that provides:

Increased product sales

Increased customer satisfaction

Streamlined, dynamic and efficient workflow management

Integrated and easy to manage deployment channels for your technical data sheets such as HTML and PDF to suppliers, customers and your corporate websites

Integrated workflow user management tools to create dedicated and trackable processes for creating and updating your technical documentation

Real-time monitoring of customer interactions with your technical documentation such as download counts, etc.

New audiences to share and promote your technical data sheets via a web-based store.