

Single-Source Publishing

Nowadays there are many different kinds of media formats such as a PDF file for reading on a computer, an HTML searchable file for reading online, and an InDesign file for paper printout publishing.

In a traditional document management system, source files are typically authored in different formats for different publishing media. When a product is updated, the documentation that describes the product must be modified or even rewritten. A content-maintenance team needs to apply the changes to various versions of source files.

Obviously, work is repeated many times for the same content, because multiple source files for the same content exist based on each output media format. The main reason for this situation is that the content and presentation are together. So in a traditional content-management system, the process of updating documents requires more human power and longer production time, and poses a greater risk of errors due to human-involved formatting. If localization is required to meet the demands of the global marketplace, translation cost can soar to have multiple-versions of source files for the same content.

While technology is developing rapidly, products are upgraded more and more frequently; therefore, the updating period of product documentation is getting shorter and shorter. That necessitates a faster, more accurate, and more cost-effective solution for content-managing and publishing process.

A single-source publishing system is the solution for the problems existing in a traditional content-management system. A single-source publishing system mainly does two things: firstly, it separates the content from the presentation and keeps all content only in one source file. Secondly, it stores the source file in a structured way; that is, it separates content into small units called topics. And for each topic, a set of metadata is designed to describe it.

A single-source publishing software application is required for switching to single-source publishing. The application mainly consists of two parts: content authoring and content publishing.

The content-authoring part is used for authoring and editing content that will be saved in an XML file in most single-source publishing applications. XML format is a very popular and convenient format in which to store and transfer information, and XML makes it possible to separate the content from its presentation.

The publishing part mainly consists of more than one converting or transformation module that can read the content from the XML file and convert the content into different kinds of output formats according to the publishing media.

The benefits of using a single-source publishing system are as follows:

1. Keep only one source file for same content, so only one version needs to be updated whenever update is required. This will save lots of human power and time because no duplicate work needs to be done.
2. When localization is required, only one source file of the same content needs to be translated. Thus the translation cost will be reduced.
3. Computer software is used to convert content to required formats. That means no human interference is involved in the formatting process, so errors caused by human formatting are eliminated.
4. The logical workflow, reasonable way to organize content, and auto-formatting greatly shorten the production cycle.

To conclude, the single-source publishing solution can deliver technical content in a much better quality, at a fast speed, and at a much lower cost. This will increase customers' satisfaction and enhance the competitiveness of an organization.

If your organization is struggling with delivering quality content at a reasonable cost and in a timely manner, you might need to consider switching to single-source publishing.