

Maximizing Your Prime Asset

OR...

The Secret to Content Management

Those Magical Three Clicks...

"Three clicks, that's what they say it should take. Three clicks, and no more, to get what you need," the speaker from Public Works and Government Services Canada explained to a room full of colleagues. "And it worked. I found what I needed in three clicks! So the system works. Trouble is, what I found was 29 pages of dense text."

This last comment got a huge laugh from the 50 people in the room, a laugh of recognition. They'd all been there, all clicked thrice only to be drowned in a sea of impenetrable text or swamped by apparently disconnected data and figures. Just because all this information

now resides in a Content Management System (CMS) and can be accessed in three clicks or less doesn't mean anything has really changed. A Content Management System cannot turn "Garbage in" to "Gold out".

"Knowledge is displacing capital, natural resources, and labor as the prime economic resource."

*Hansen and Norhia,
"What's Your Strategy for Managing Knowledge?" Harvard Business Review,
March-April 1999*

Yet gold is what content management promises and gold is what all organizations need. There is no area, department, or division in any enterprise, public or private, that does not live or die on accurate, up-to-the-minute content that answers questions, provides guidelines, facilitates clear decision-making, and explains how to perform

"Isolated IT investments made in the absence of a lifecycle-based, global content strategy, are inadequate bandages on a gaping wound."

*Robin Athey,
"Enterprise Content Management:
Taming Content Chaos"
Deloitte Research*

crucial tasks – that doesn't directly connect to the day-to-day operations of every facet of the entire organization.

Indeed, clear communications can be linked to financial performance. Ultimately, content management is all about improving the bottom line and researchers have made a direct link between financial performance and clear communication. Deloitte research reports the findings of Malcolm Smith of the University of South Australia and Richard Taffler of England's Cranfield University that "clarity of communications can be a very good indicator of corporate performance." Good financial performance does not necessarily mean you're communicating clearly, though it indicates that you probably are. Conversely, poor financial performance can be traced to poor communications, which can lose organizations money: \$50 billion every year in Canada alone, according to Peter Richardson, professor of strategic management at Queen's University. His study on a cross-section of executives, managers, and senior sales staff shows that they spend 56% of their time dealing with documents and 40% of that time is of little or no value to the organization. That means 22.4% of their time is wasted because of content management issues.

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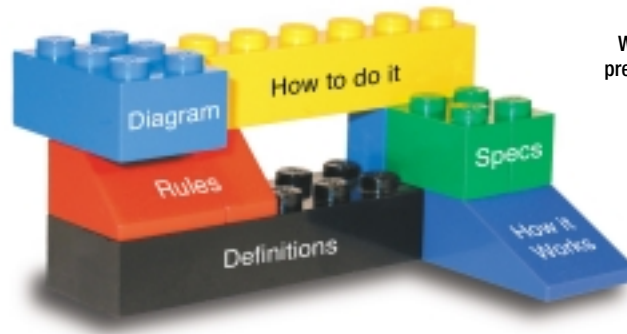


Problems with Content Management

The problem is not the technology or the Content Management Systems. They provide all the capabilities needed, but as the PWGSC speaker pointed out, they aren't helping people find answers to their questions. Jupiter Research found "only 27% of CMS users are satisfied with how they were currently using their system and almost one-third have so many problems they are building another system from scratch." And the Gartner Group, in recent discussions with Doug Gorman, President and CEO of Information Mapping, Inc., claimed that... numerous Gartner clients had not achieved the full benefit or return on investment (ROI) from their investments [in Content Management Systems].

Any Content Management System is only as good as the content it manages. There must be emphasis placed on the content itself. Traditionally, multiple content creators develop information products to answer their own needs: training develops instructional materials, support develops solutions, sales develops marketing, the web team develops web content, all while virtually every employee sends countless emails full of details about the organization and its products. All of this redundancy is very inefficient and costly. It also creates inconsistent versions of the same content within an enterprise, sending a confusing message to customers and employees alike. Problems are compounded by dynamic content – content that is constantly changing and in need of frequent updates. For each update, every single instance of each topic developed by every department must be tracked down and changed every time such updates are needed.

Probably the most alarming outcome of all this, however, is that people stop trusting and using the actual content and instead start phoning whomever they think might have the answer. Now, all the money spent developing the content and placing it in an expensive CMS has been wasted while employees are using up more time and money answering phone messages about the very same content.



Structured Content

When content is broken down into precisely-defined modules, they act like LEGO® blocks. Each can be isolated as an individual content block, can be tagged and searched by any CMS down to a granular level, and can be combined and recombined with other blocks to serve an infinite variety of user needs.

Source of the Problem: Unstructured Content

Traditionally-written content is unstructured. It tends to be narrative prose written in each author's distinctive voice and style, which usually results in vast walls of words and grey boxes of paragraphs with run-on sentences cluttered with complex grammatical structures, multi-syllabic and jargon-filled vocabulary, and convoluted phrases. The average reader finds it difficult to readily understand this content or to isolate within these grey boxes of paragraphs the specific details that answer the specific questions that prompted the reader to consult the document.

Such traditional documents of unstructured content are like plates of spaghetti in which each strand represents a single, self-contained subtopic and all the strands together represent the complete discourse on the subject matter. The trouble is that users tend to need specific details, not the complete discourse, but isolating strands that are interwoven in a collective lump takes enormous effort. And a CMS cannot effectively mine such content for details; technology has no ability to separate each strand when they're simply dumped into the repository as a single document. Word searches tend to be scattershot, pulling out dozens, even hundreds, sometimes thousands of instances of the search criteria, all of which the user must then rummage through in the hope of finding what is needed.

And once they find it, people still need to be able to scan for pertinent details – no one has time to "read" a document; they need to "use" content to find answers

and draw conclusions. At the same time, the content repository of any CMS prefers "information objects" over "documents" where each object is a discrete, self-contained topic unto itself that can be tagged, identified, and isolated by the system for the user. So there's definitely a confluence between what users need and what technology needs in terms of how content should be structured – and it's definitely not plates of spaghetti.

The Solution: Structured Content

If unstructured content serves neither users nor technology, then how do we structure content so that it works for both? It requires a complete rethink in how we approach the development, use, and re-use of content. Structured content must meet two sets of fundamental needs: it must allow people to quickly and efficiently access only the level of detail they need on any topic at any given time; and it must capitalize on the powerful functionalities of Content Management Systems that allow people to develop, store, manage, distribute, use, and re-use content.

Let's shift from the analogy of spaghetti to that of LEGO® building blocks. Everyone, even young children, intuitively understand how LEGO blocks work. Even though blocks come in different shapes, colours, and sizes, they are all designed to snap together to form structures. And they can be unsnapped and resnapped together into an endless variety of structures without any change to each individual block. This serves as a way to think about structured content.

Topics: Safe Deposit Boxes		NO: PPI A6	
3.0.7	Semi-annually. Systems w safe deposit boxes. Branch fees have not been paid by initial the report. If the rent due date field of the "USD" amount paid on Form 4154	2.0.11	To guard against pe compartments for d following:
3.0.8	After the first week of Jan branches that have safe de deposit boxes. Refer to Top (Safe Deposit Access Card computer system and make	(a)	New custom
3.0.9	A notice is to be sent to cu is to advise the customer b of the notice, the box will be charged all relat	(i)	Verify the id
3.0.10	If the safe deposit box has deposit box and record the "Safekeeping" in a sealed e branch is to complete a "S contains the contents of the and a copy must be attache	(ii)	Follow the sa
4.0	GST	(iii)	Individ manage
4.0.1	Branches are require will calculate and remit the GST po credited to GL 61000 whether the fe included in the pricing of all CB saf	(iv)	Individ with C
5.0	LOCKS AND KEYS	(b)	Existing Cus
5.0.1	CB safe deposit boxes have open the box. Branches are (2 copies of the second key under joint custody overnig	(i)	Custom large ar
5.0.2	Branches are to charge cus	3.0	RENT
5.0.3	When a customer loses bot drilled and all related costs	3.0.1	Safe deposit box rent
5.0.4	In order to maintain an inv the box size, number and k	3.0.2	For the first year in follows:
		(a)	Box opened rent or
		(b)	Box opened PLUS,
		(c)	The balance e.g. Mr. Jon 1/2 mo
		3.0.3	Branches are to debt rental fee.
		3.0.4	Branches are to rece Deposit Box Rent bill the customer for
		3.0.5	For safe deposit box computer system a account automatical account and a credit
		3.0.6	For customers that p computer system by receipt using Form
		1.0	OVERVIEW
		1.0.1	Safe deposit boxes are secure storage compartments that may be rented by customers for protecting valuables against fire, theft, or loss. Branches with safe deposit boxes are encouraged to offer them as a preferred alternative to Safekeeping.
		1.0.2	Gold Leaf Plus™ customers are to receive a \$15.00 reduction in the annual rental fee of the safe deposit box.
		2.0	GENERAL
		2.0.1	CB is legally obligated to protect the contents of safe deposit boxes only to the extent of which CB would protect its own assets. That is, contents of a safe deposit box are held at the customers' own risk.
		2.0.2	As added security to protect the contents of safe deposit boxes, branches are to ensure that the safe deposit box number and key number assigned/rented to the customer are not the same number (i.e. Box # 12 and Key # 12).
		2.0.3	CB does not provide insurance for the contents of safe deposit boxes. It is the responsibility of the lessee to obtain insurance for the contents if desired.
		2.0.4	Branches are not to maintain records of the contents of a customer's safe deposit box.
		2.0.5	Safe deposit boxes may not be available in all branches and if available, may not have all the various sizes to suit all customers' needs.
		2.0.6	Branches are to complete Form 4151 (Safe Deposit Box Lease) and Form 4150 (Safe Deposit Box Access Card) for any customer that opens a safe deposit box and have the customer(s) sign the forms.
		2.0.7	Where the Lessee is a Corporation, the right to access and surrender the box will be vested in the person(s) appointed by resolution passed by the Directors of the Corporation. Branches are to request a certified true copy of this resolution when a safe deposit box is opened.
		2.0.8	Where the Lessee is an Association, Society, or other organization, the right to access and surrender the box will be vested in the person(s) appointed by resolution at a constituted meeting of its members or trustees. Branches are to request a duly certified copy of this resolution when a safe deposit box is opened.
		2.0.9	Where the Lessee is other than one person(s), the branch is to ensure all persons who are to have access to the box, sign Form 4150 (Safe Deposit Box Access Card). The branch is to ensure the appropriate box marked "Any one to Sign", "Any Two Sign" or "All to Sign" is checked.
		2.0.10	If an agent is appointed, the "Appointment of Agent" section of Form 4151 is to be completed by the branch and signed by the Agent. The branch is to ensure that the Agent has also signed the top portion of Form 4150 (Safe Deposit Box Access Card). For joint tenants, all Lessees must sign for the "Appointment of Agent".

Details on setting up a box for a customer are buried within numbers 2.0.6 through 2.0.10. How can any user quickly find that information?

Content broken down into little LEGO-like blocks – “content blocks” – meets the needs of both people and technology: Users can scan content blocks and reference only those that are immediately pertinent to their situation and yet access any related details that provide big-picture context; technology can follow search criteria to isolate content down to the very granular level of the blocks, or “information objects.”

To illustrate, let's look at an example of actual content. A bank develops content about safe deposit boxes for its employees to use in providing customers with such a service. In the traditional prose version pictured below, the topic is broken down into several categories or blocks: Overview, General, Rent, GST, and Locks and Keys. A bank employee will be able to scan some of these topics, but what does “General” mean? And where is the information on how to set

up a safe deposit box for the first time? After scanning the headings and not finding it, the user is forced to work their way through all the numbered clauses full of details they don't need until they eventually find what they're looking for buried under the “General” topic, numbers 2.0.6 through 2.0.10. Time-consuming and inefficient.

Taking exactly the same content and breaking it down into precisely-defined content blocks and then displaying each block using an appropriate graphical format, turns the information into a series of labeled modules that can be scanned for the pertinent topic. It's very time and cost-efficient to find how to set up a safe deposit box.

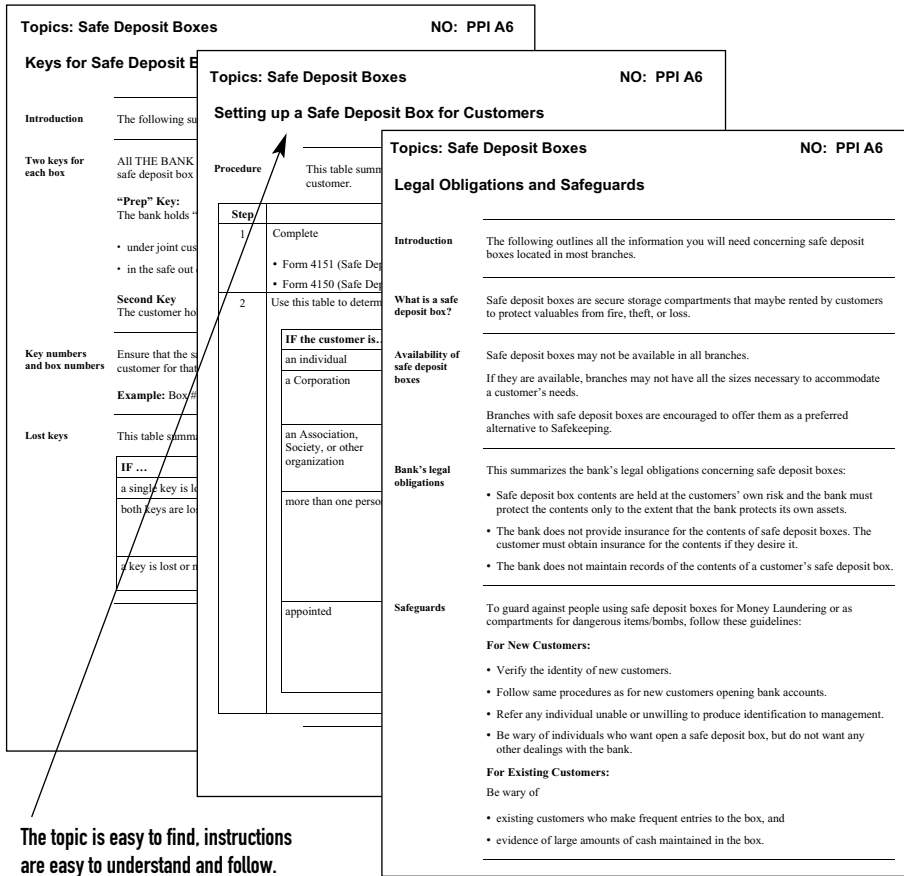
At the same time those same blocks make the information compatible with the needs of any Content Management System. Content blocks become “information objects” that can be tagged and

stored in the content repository and searched by the system very effectively. In the original version, searching on the system for instructions on how to set up a safe deposit box can only result in the entire document appearing; there is nothing in its structure that allows for intelligent tagging, which is the prerequisite for precise searches. But with the content properly structured, it is ready-made for tagging and the search result is very focused and accurate. The user would end up with this content block:

Different search criteria will bring up different content blocks. Just like LEGO blocks, these discrete modules of information can be arranged and re-arranged to create a different pattern of information that is based on each user's search criteria. Such blocks can be added or subtracted, whereas large swaths of information such as that contained in the original bank document under “General” cannot, like our spaghetti, ever be disentangled from itself and sub-topics within it selected with pinpoint precision.

As well with structured content, the blocks can be called forth and changed. The content developers described earlier all working within their own silos – product development, marketing, tech support, training, the web team – now have access to the same, common details on any subject. They can call forth whichever content blocks are appropriate to their needs and, when the blocks have been saved as XML files, republish them in any format or medium – as a marketing brochure, a web page, a job aid, a technical manual; in PDF, Word, HTML; to paper, to a computer screen, to a PDA. The information is consistent across all of these formats and media. And none of the content developers are performing redundant writing tasks.

Further savings occur with dynamic content in need of frequent updating. Only the specific module that needs changing receives the change and the rest remain untouched. Typically, product information such as new features or pricing changes or special, time-sensitive discounts are all dynamic and in need of frequent updates. When the features and pricing information is con-



follow the same set of principles to break down content into similar blocks and the same set of tools to display the content of each block in an easy-to-use format.

The structured writing methodology, to be explored in the next issue of *Executive*, is based on nearly 40 years of research, is being used in nearly 40 countries around the world, crosses all language and cultural barriers, and can be applied to any information presented in any medium, from print on paper or screen to web graphics and slide presentations. It relies on a set of cognitive principles to design content blocks that are based on how people actually read and comprehend information. As well, the methodology uses a range of tools that answer important fundamental issues such as deciding what should go into each module and how to accurately label each module.

For structured writing to work, it must provide precise answers to these questions, and be applied consistently across an enterprise. Only then can any organization hope to reap the benefits not just of its Content Management System but also of its most important asset – its information. ☒

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tained within their own content blocks, it is easy for the content developer to access them, make the change once, and return the block to the repository for everyone to access for their own uses and publication.

If knowledge is power, then organizing systems and content so it can be most efficiently used is key to accessing that power. Structured content leads to faster, more accurate decision-making, increases operational efficiency, and helps organizations gain competitive advantage.

How Structured Writing Works

None of this will work, however, unless all content developers – including those sending out email messages that must also be stored and archived as official corporate information – are all working on the same page. They all must have the ability to break content down into blocks in precisely the same way. Unlike narrative writing where all authors say the same thing in entirely different ways, structured writing requires that everyone essentially say the same thing in exactly the same way, that they all