

Don't Think You're Spending Much on Documentation? Think Again!

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INFORMATION MAPPING

Documentation as a Necessary Evil

It's Important, But ...

If you're like most managers, you probably think of documentation as a necessary evil. You know you need it to

- meet compliance requirements
- ramp up new hires
- establish basic policies and procedures
- help people learn new systems.

But, is it really worth the time and effort it takes to develop and maintain that documentation?

It's Good Enough for Now

Maybe your people have complained that the existing documentation (if any) is inaccurate, incomplete, or difficult to use, but you don't have the budget to deal with it. You've got bigger, more important issues to worry about – like poor sales performance, low customer satisfaction ratings, skyrocketing operating costs, failed audits, high turnover, costly compliance or manufacturing errors, or (add your own issues).

Besides, when there's been a real crunch to get new documentation done, there's always been somebody on staff you can get to write something up and put it through the approval process. Or you've just stayed late and done it yourself. Not the most ideal approach, but it's cheap and easy. And it's good enough for now.

In This White Paper

This white paper looks at the real costs of documentation, both in terms of

- how much time and money are actually spent in developing, managing, and using your documentation, and
- how much time and money are lost in inefficiencies, lower productivity, poor performance because of poor documentation.

This white paper includes these topics.

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The Truth About Your Documentation Costs

The truth is, the haphazard approach to documentation may be easy, but it is definitely not cheap and it may not really be good enough. To discover why, let's look at these costs:

- the soft costs of documentation
- costly reviews and updates
- unproductive workarounds.

The Soft Costs of Documentation

Questions To Ask

First, consider the “soft” costs associated with your documentation development and maintenance:

- How many people in your organization spend time writing, editing, and reviewing policies, processes, procedures, training, or other documentation?
- How much time does each person spend on this process?
- Do the people who write documentation have the skills to work efficiently, or do they waste time struggling to get their knowledge and meaning on paper in a way that will be useful for different audiences with different needs and backgrounds?

Typical Answers to the Questions

Many managers who take the time to look seriously into these questions find that they really have one, or sometimes many, full time equivalent employees doing documentation development. If these are highly paid experts and managers doing the writing,

- the payroll costs can be much higher than you think, and
- the time these employees spend on this task cannot be used for the other value-added activities you hired them for in the first place.

IDC Study Results

An International Data Corporation study (The High Cost of Not Finding Information, IDC, 2001) suggests that knowledge workers spend an average of

- 13.3 hours per week creating documents, and
- 8.8 hours per week editing and reviewing documents.

This represents a potential cost of over \$30,000 per year, per worker at an average employee cost of \$65,000 per year including benefits.

This does not count the time workers spend analyzing and searching for information, which averages another 19.1 hours per week, combined.

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The Truth About Your Documentation Costs, Continued

Costly Reviews and Updates

Documentation development costs can pale in comparison to the cost of

- putting essentially the same content through legal reviews and approvals over and over again, or
- finding and updating a single process change in tens or hundreds of related documents written by different people at different times for different purposes and in different formats, or
- doing all this in more than one language?

Unproductive Workarounds

Once you've looked at the cost of developing, reviewing, and maintaining your documentation, then take a look at the time your organization spends trying to work around its inadequacies:

- How much time do you and your employees spend searching for the information you need each day?
- How often do workers get up from their workstations to ask a coworker to show them something that was supposedly covered in the documentation?
- How much time do your senior staff members, supervisors, and managers spend answering questions from your employees?

Conclusion

The actual costs of documentation are usually much higher than most of us imagine.

But far more significant are the hidden costs – how does all this poor documentation affect organizational performance?

Root Cause of Bigger Problems

Still not convinced that your documentation is costing you money?

Well, remember those really important business issues you're trying to deal with? Each of these issues – like poor sales performance, low customer satisfaction ratings, skyrocketing operating costs, failed audits, high turnover, costly compliance or manufacturing errors, and others – has often been linked directly to documentation failure.

By following your most pressing business issues down to their root causes, you might be surprised to find that your cheap and easy documentation solution is costing you even more money than you thought.

Here are some sample scenarios to illustrate these costs.

Major Credit Card Company

Issue: Reduce call center costs and improve customer satisfaction.

Root cause: Representatives could not find the answers to customer questions in the documentation, significantly prolonging the average length of calls.

Resolution: Reorganized and improved the call center documentation, which reduced call times by 20% and improved the overall quality of responses to customers.

Environmental Company

Issue: Problems with compliance.

Root cause: Inconsistent, inaccurate, incomplete, outdated, and unclear documentation.

Resolution: Restructured and redesigned their online compliance documentation which improved compliance rates by 25%.

Audits for Compliance

Issue: Fines, shutdowns, and legal liabilities that result from failed audits.

Root cause: Auditors rely on documentation to verify you are “documenting what you do and doing what you document.”

Resolution: Developed and maintained consistent, accurate, complete, updated, and clear documentation.

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Root Cause of Bigger Problems, Continued

Insurance Company

Issue: Improve employee morale and performance and reduce high turnover.

Root cause: The quality of the information employees had to answer customer questions and do their jobs.

Resolution: Redesigned the documentation used by their employees every day, thereby boosting morale and reducing turnover.

Other Scenarios

And there are many more similar scenarios:

Providing this group ...	With ...	Helps them ...
sales and service people	clearer, more accessible product documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feel more comfortable with new product offerings, and • expand sales to new areas.
operations staff	clear process and procedure documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand the big picture, and • make better decisions about how they do their work
personnel	clear, understandable benefits information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce calls to the human resources department, and • eliminate processing errors.
workers	clear security and safety procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce risk, and • better prepare for unexpected situations and emergencies.

Rethinking Priorities

So, once you've looked at the *real* costs of your documentation, you may want to rethink your priorities:

- Is the cost of your current documentation development practices actually a little too high?
- Will investing a little time and money in your documentation now help solve some of those big problems you are struggling to overcome?

How Information Mapping® Can Help

Information Mapping

- is a documentation methodology that has helped leading organizations around the world for over 40 years
- addresses the root causes of the documentation and communications failures, and thereby
- helps overcome individual and organizational performance problems.

About IMC

Information Mapping Canada is a professional services firm helping organizations improve performance by focusing on the critical area of written communications. By helping our clients manage their knowledge, we help their people work smarter, manage information overload better, and become more productive.

For over 40 years, the Information Mapping® method has been helping public and private organizations around the world manage their information better. When organizations manage their information well, then they

- improve performance
- resolve information-intensive business challenges, and
- achieve long-term, measurable results.

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