20 Years of Technical Writing

ISDOC’14
Lisboa
Portugal
17-May-2014
Why Start a Technical Writing Department?

English translation of developer Portuguese?

Expensive, outdated, outsourced documentation?
Learn before writing. “Clear thoughts in clear words.”
Then, learn better, write better.

No formal training on technical writing.
1. Hire English, wits.
2. Train on product.
3. Train on writing.
4. Innovate.
(Learning) Operations

Unique concepts.
Business variation.
Operational implications of technical decisions.
(Learning) Systems

21 services.
26 applications.
6 telephony gateways.
..... 1000 small parameters.

Also, third-party systems.
(Learning) Telephony Gateways

Unified telephony model, but...

... varies with switch.
... varies with switch configuration.
(Learning) Scripting

Proprietary language with unique concepts.
(or your choice of language)

Several worlds to coordinate.
Specific roles to fulfill.
Chunking.

Hands-on exercises.
Learning to Illustrate

Patrícia Magrinho
Effective Tools

Operations

- Books in HTML
- Books in CHM
- Contact Center Operations
- Indicators and Reports
- uAgent Windows
- uAgent Windows Layout Editor
- Quick Script Editor
- uSupervisor

- DITA Open Toolkit.
- Serna XML Editor.
- Subversion, Unix tools.
- Scripts to generate topics.

1360k words.
6800 topics.
1075 slides.
3800 images.
170 maps.
Hiring Technical Writers


English. Technically minded. Phone call?

Write procedure. Rewrite confusion. Change program?

Whole team. Writing samples? Additional test?
Training Technical Writers

101 book, product training

1 Year 25%

Coaching

2 Years 25%

Expert books?

3 Years 17%

33%
Professional learners (not just writers).

- Technical writing (for lack of formal training).
- Product (unique, vast).
- Audience background (several of them).

What has helped?

- Audience profiles.
- Improved training.
- Writing patterns.

“Everything is hard until someone makes it easy.” – xkcd.com/1349