

ARE YOU READY TO BE INTELLIGENT?

Many companies want to improve their information products with intelligence.

Despite your first thoughts, this doesn't always mean the use of big data, or the use of research, but using the newest and coolest tech. Companies want their content to be available in AR, VR, and XR, readable on adaptive and responsive websites, and usable in apps, chatbots, desktop computers, tablets, and TV screens. Many content creation teams get asked to produce all the newest information products in addition to or instead of their regular content. However, they may not have the programs, processes, and people to do anything fancy. How can you prepare for producing more intelligent content?

MEANING + MODULES + MOLECULES + METADATA

1. START WITH THE PURPOSE

After years of working with different companies and their content questions, it's clear that teams are often asked to produce the latest trending information product just because it's trending, not because there's a reason for following that trend.

Instead of tools and tech, you should begin with a purpose. The basic whats and hows get you started. What is it that you want to achieve? Why are you using something or producing something? What is the lifecycle of your content, who owns it, and how is it managed?

Purpose gives meaning for your work, providing a concrete idea of what you want to achieve and why, a basis for making decisions, and a context for your later work.

2. STOP THINKING ABOUT DOCUMENTS

Most of us started in technical communication by writing documents in a linear fashion, from start to finish. Many of us also moved to modular documentation, and instead of writing documents, we have been writing modules that are then combined into different information products and published in different publishing channels.

In a way, the module is the new document. Standalone modules are readable on their own, without the support of other modules. Still, if you think about it, modules are written as something people would read from start to finish – after people have found them through Google, for example.

Moving to modules helps to manage the mental move from delivering a document to delivering a much smaller content object.

3. STOP THINKING ABOUT MODULES (WELL, KIND OF)!

If you have already moved to modules, it's time to go even smaller. A full module can be too long for some of the future publishing channels. Would you have the patience to read a 10-step task complete with context, pre- and postrequisites, and results on your AR headset or in a chatbot?

In Information 4.0, a content molecule is the smallest standalone piece of content with a purpose. A single step shown to a user in an AR headset could be a molecule. The content objects that we create should become even smaller than modules, and offered to the user just when they need it on the user journey they themselves are creating.

However, don't forget that even if your team would want to produce the cool new stuff™, the customers may still want the good old stuff™, namely print and PDF that is printable as A4s.

4. ENRICH YOUR MOLECULES WITH METADATA

Adding metadata which describes the molecules from different user perspectives will really support you in delivering the right information to the user at the right time. The trick is to get the metadata just right. You must have a clear vision about what metadata is required and not add a forest of metadata without a purpose. Clearly, you need a good understanding of your users to decide what is useful and how you want to serve up the molecules to your users.

Getting even more intelligent, you can start to model the relationships between metadata concepts and leverage these in your user experience so that you can for example present related information to users and enrich their understanding and experience. Once you have this taxonomy in place, you can start to really get smart with your molecules, providing targeted information and context.

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