Dare I "Do DITA" without a CMS?

You could, but...

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You could, but… surely there is a better way? Many organizations have discovered that a CMS smooths the path to realizing the many business benefits of Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA) authoring.

Traditionally, organizations adopted this new structured way of writing with just authoring tools, publishing tools and perhaps a directory system.

The decision about content management was often delayed, and late in the process. But the thinking about methodology and best practices has changed. Organizations increasingly deploy a DITA-enabled content management system (CMS) early in the process to reduce the time to DITA adoption and time to ROI.
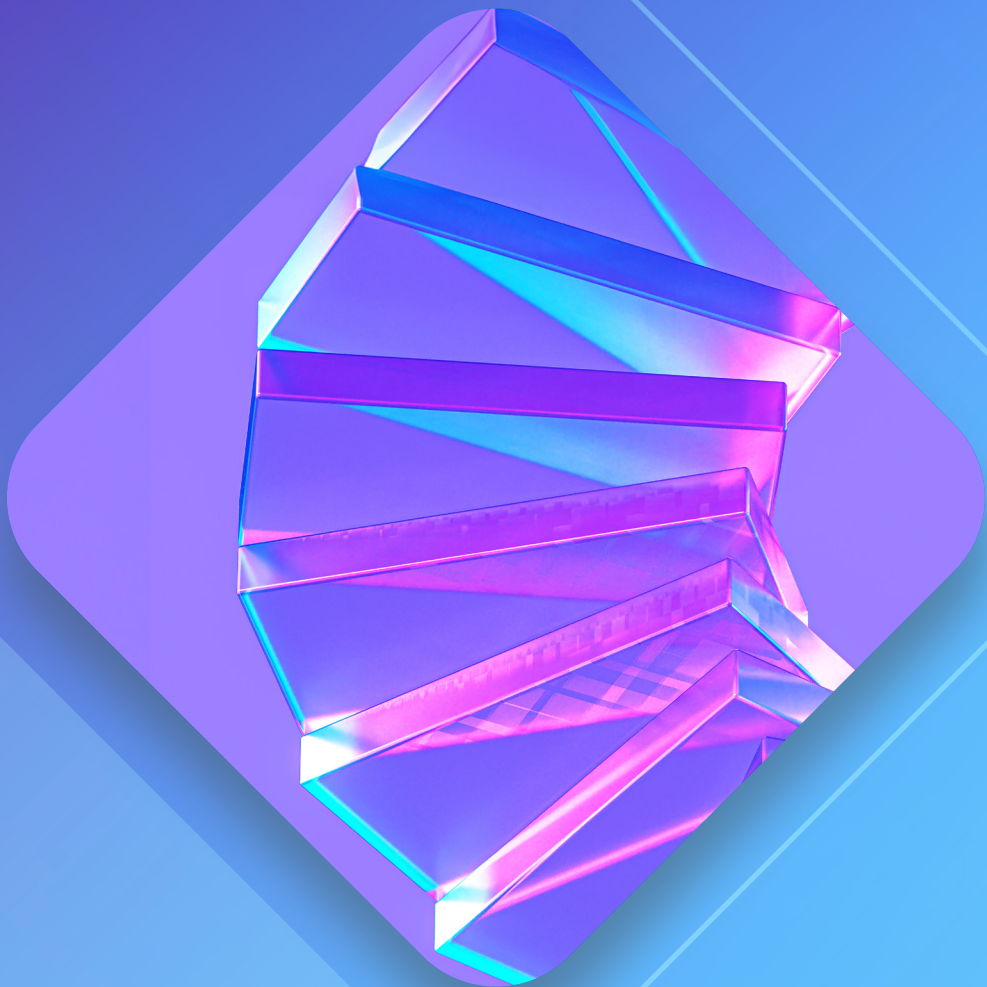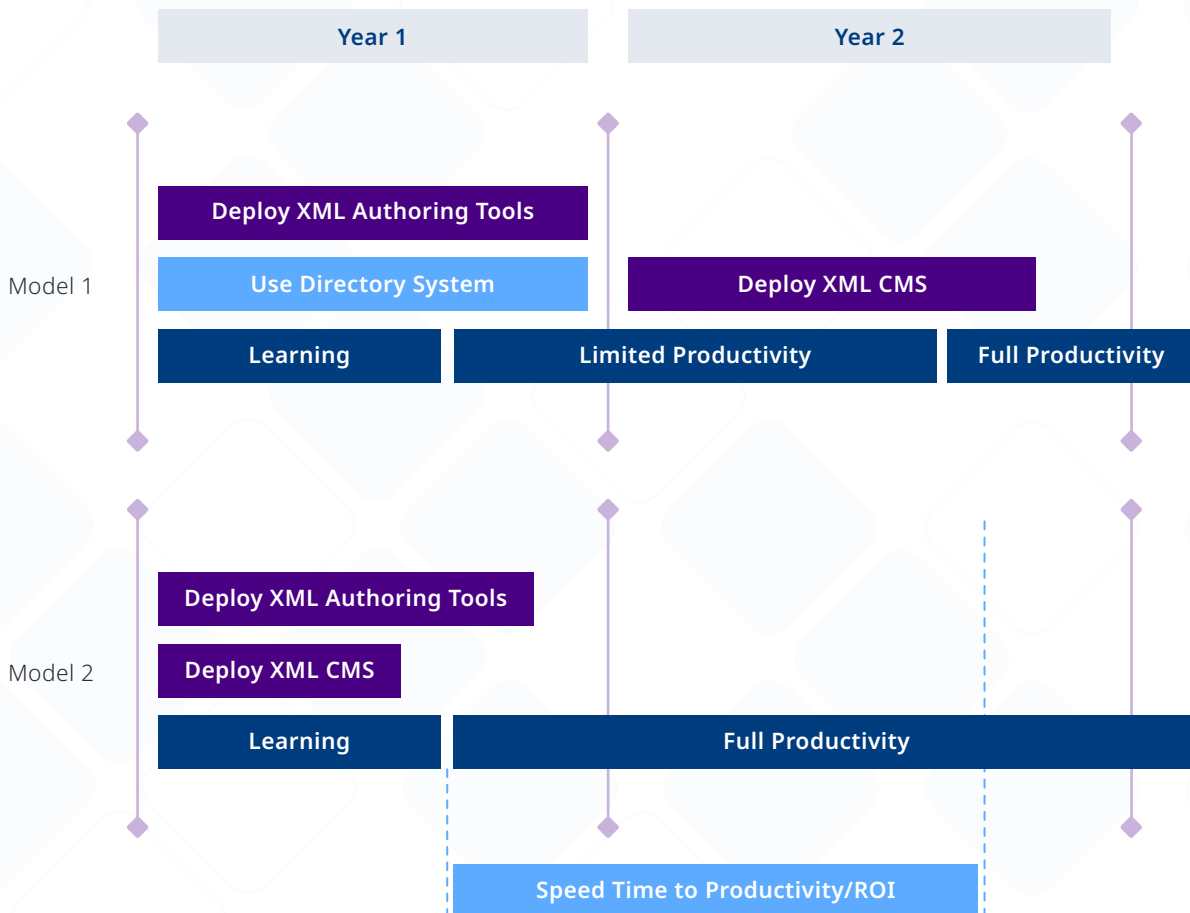
Business benefits

Corporations move to DITA because they see its significant business benefits.

In addition to proven efficiency gains of 30-50%, a significant reduction in Desktop Publishing (DTP) costs and reduced translation costs through translation reuse, DITA provides business agility.

Organizations report the following business paybacks:

- **Competitive sales advantage** – Documentation agility that matches agile product development for the addition of new product features and functionality.

- **Customer support** – Fewer product returns through always up-to-date content and product support.

- **Information exchange** – Easier content and information exchange with resellers and OEM partners for higher channel sales.

- **Personalization** – Product content tailored to customer profile to increase satisfaction and reduce call center costs.

- **Time-to-market** – Reduced time of delivery to global markets.

Year 1	Year 2

Model 1

Deploy XML Authoring Tools

Use Directory System

Deploy XML CMS

Learning	Limited Productivity	Full Productivity

Model 2

Deploy XML Authoring Tools

Deploy XML CMS

Learning	Full Productivity

Speed Time to Productivity/ROI

Corporate websites require a CMS, and DITA does too

To understand this trend, let's look at the now familiar and well-established domain of website management. Today, companies that are serious about their web presence don't think twice about the need for a content management system. It is simply regarded as a standard requirement for website management.

But it wasn't always that way.

At the beginning of the Internet, company webmasters used Notepad and simple HTML editors to create web pages and directory systems to store content. While this worked for first-generation websites, it wasn't long before webmasters and marketing organizations discovered:

- Sites were not manageable without a content management system.

- Websites are a means of customer interaction and a platform for establishing a brand and selling products.

These factors drove the adoption of new web-focused content management systems.

Corporations quickly realized that websites were robust tools for interacting with customers, articulating corporate brand and driving product sales. Dynamic and ever-evolving, websites required serious management by a collaborative team using a unifying platform, not simply a coding in the background.

These drivers led to the specialization of and wide adoption of the now ubiquitous web content management systems (WCMS). In the early days, many asked the same question that adopters of DITA are asking now. "Do I really need a specialized CMS?" The case of the web suggests an unequivocal, "Yes."

Similar factors now drive businesses to adopt specialized content management systems for DITA. Some call these "DITA-enabled" or "component content management systems" (CCMS) – specialized platforms designed to manage DITA-based content.

The DITA content challenge

Like corporate websites, DITA comes with some specific content management challenges. These can be addressed by adopting component content management systems designed for DITA.

DITA content requirement	Description	You need a CCMS that will…
Topic-based content	Content is authored in components. These small pieces of information are assembled to form the eventual deliverable.	Assemble content based on content maps to deliver this content to a wide variety of delivery channels including help files, mobile apps, web content, support content or manuals.
Iterative content development	Content is often updated to keep pace with frequent releases and agile development practices.	Rapidly isolate the impact of a release and quickly identify where updates are required, including the impact on translation.
Constantly revised content maps and topic relationships	The integrity of references between links is critical to accurately assemble content and delivery time.	Use topic and link management for an automated audit trail of information over time and maintain links using internal database capabilities.
Version management	Users need to be able to compare any previous versions to quickly identify differences rather than the typical track-changes feature that only accumulate changes.	Maintain all versions of topics in a database and provide capabilities for approval, rollback and audit trail. Tracks the relationships between the versions of different topics.
Content modeling	A planner or information architect needs to have a view of the whole to envision the context of the final deliverable.	Model how the topics fit together into a variety of final deliverables.
Content review	Ensuring the quality and accuracy of product content which involves reviews from product developers and development team members.	Built-in collaborative review using source content to provide feedback, commenting and updates.
Topic reuse	DITA adoption increases topic reuse. But this means it needs to be easy to find existing content to prevent content duplication and consistency errors.	Use topic and content metadata in combination with advanced search capabilities, so writers can easily find and reuse topics and translations that are already written.

DITA content requirement	Description	You need a CCMS that will...
Digital publishing	Today's consumer expects content on their most used digital channels. In addition to traditional PDF and printed manuals, content expectations cover websites, support channels and mobile apps. This includes integrating product content into marketing channels.	Publish single-sourced content across channels and touchpoints while facilitating channel-specific rendering for the best possible customer experience. This includes merging marketing and product content. Eliminate copy-paste actions.
Permissions	Not everyone should touch everything. Managing rights to topics and content is critical to ensure only the right content gets updated by the right person.	Define users, groups and roles, with clear access controls and workflows for collaboration.
Workflow automation	Distributed work groups collaborating across regions and time zones require coordinated workflow processes.	Automate workflow processes ensuring the status, assignment and progress on any topic with minimal administrative overhead.
Content approval	Topics/components move through workflow approval processes towards the market	Readily identify work-in-progress and content approved for external publication.
Translation	With source content in components, tracking which topics should be translated into which languages becomes complex.	Use a target-language aware CMS to track the flow of topics out to multiple translation vendors and reviewers, tying processes into translation memory to reduce costs.
Personalization and conditional content	The same content must be shared across multiple products, potentially for different types of customer profiles and specific product configurations.	Track publishing conditions (filtering) so multiple users can manage profiles to automate publishing of unique and targeted product and customer deliverables.
Reporting	Evaluate progress and demonstrate success to management.	Use reporting tools to quickly identify benefits as well as areas that need improvement.

Speeding up your time to DITA

Just a few years ago, companies moved into DITA gradually, in small steps, only adopting a content management system late in the game. Using an ad hoc and non-centralized approach resulted in lower time to full productivity, with less than optimal methodology.

DITA has come of age. It is now a critical business capability. As a result, we see more and more organizations adopt DITA-enabled content management early in the process of DITA adoption.

To achieve the business benefits of DITA, it makes sense to "do DITA right." With a smart information architecture and change management procedures, CMS deployment can simplify learning DITA and significantly reduce associated content management challenges.

How do you get there?

To adopt this new methodology requires management support and buy-in. The proven successes of DITA makes it easier for organizations to prove the substantial business benefits to management.

Most deployments pay for themselves in efficiency gains, agility improvements or translation savings in a year. Management is coming to understand that topic-based writing is a must have, the same way it did with corporate websites only a decade ago.

As DITA continues to become a critical business platform for communicating with global customers, so too the need for a specialized DITA-enabled content management system is better understood. Organizations that adopt this methodology accelerate their time to DITA.

Tridion Docs is a structured content management solution that manages DITA content for the creation, review, translation and delivery of global product information.

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Find out more about RWS's component content management system by visiting our website:

rws.com/tridion-docs