

DITA Maturity – How To Use DITA To Support Critical Business Needs

At the DITA Europe 2011 conference, as well as the Best Practices 2011, we have observed considerable progress in the way organizations are developing, managing, and delivering content. Much like the CIDM Information Process Maturity Model (IPMM), engagement with content management has moved from a preponderance of immature organizations exploring the possibilities to mature organizations finding new ways to capitalize on their earlier investments.

In his influential text, *Crossing the Chasm* (2000), Geoffrey Moore identified the processes organizations move through when their products begin to be more widely adopted and successful. The Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA) standard appears to be following the same path and, at this point, has moved across the chasm from adoption by Innovators and Early Adopters to acceptance by the Early Majority.

The first organizations to adopt DITA were clearly **Innovators**. A few, like our organization at Comtech, were part of the founders technical committee in OASIS, where we worked for nearly two years to ready the standard for public adoption. Like most Innovators, we were anxious to try a new technology because it promised to foster our interests in making information development more efficient and more effective in meeting the emerging needs of the user communities. Innovators clearly look for technology that provides new opportunities. They are willing to accept the usual deficiencies of new technology, including usability. Although we generally found the DITA XML architecture supportive of topic-oriented authoring and information typing, adoption required dedication in interpreting the emerging specification and experimenting with the open source DITA Open Toolkit.

When we introduced DITA at the first DITA North America conference in 2005, most of the speakers came either from IBM, the organization that had originally developed the DITA architecture, or from members of the OASIS DITA Technical Committee. Most of us used this opportunity to explain what DITA was all about.

Over the next two years, from 2005 to 2007, the Innovators helped move DITA into the **Early Adopter** stage. At Comtech, we began introducing it to our more adventurous customers, those ready to take advantage of the promise of increased productivity and reduced costs. ITT Fluid Technology, now Xylem, was for us one of the successful Early Adopters.

But for DITA to move into the mainstream, it had to Cross the Chasm, metaphorically speaking. That means that we had to witness the emergence of more conservative organizations becoming interested. The **Early Majority**, as defined by Moore, waits until everything appears safe. They are much more likely to look for well-developed, usable tools to support new technology. They want processes that

are organized and easier to learn, and they frequently complain that DITA is “too complicated.”

The process we outline in the first five phases discussed in the Comtech/DCL Webinar series is designed specifically to encourage the Early Majority of potential DITA users to proceed carefully and garner the successes in increasing productivity that we have proven through the work of the Early Adopters. With the help of its supporting technology and experienced consulting teams, the Early Majority adopters have become engaged. Early Majority adopters still require careful planning and a sound roadmap, but their numbers are rapidly increasing, especially among organizations that have sufficient needs in reducing workload and decreasing translation costs.

Although not every Early Majority adopter requires a Component Content Management System (CCMS), clearly a CCMS makes full adoption much easier. Consequently, we have seen an increased understanding of the benefits of effective content management, aided by purpose-built technology that is clearly DITA-aware.

The Phases of DITA Adoption

We explore each of the Phases of DITA adoption in the Comtech/DCL three-part webinar series, beginning with the initial learning steps in the January webinar.

First session

The initial learning steps, outlined in the first three maturity phases, are designed to inform and educate Early Majority adopters so that they can better understand the benefits and challenges of a DITA implementation.

One--Exploration Phase

When we first held DITA North America and DITA Europe in 2005, those giving presentations were clearly in the Exploration Phase. The OASIS DITA standard was officially released in 2004 and implemented by a few innovators and early adopters, but most organizations were just beginning to put DITA on their radar.

Organizations in the Exploration Phase have heard of single sourcing and topic-based authoring and want to learn more. They believe that the DITA standard might be appropriate for their content, but they are not certain. They definitely come prepared to explore.

Two--Preparation phase

In phase two, organizations begin to prepare for a move to the DITA standard. They have a lot to learn, but now their investigation is focused. They may be working on a business case and a presentation to management to win approval for a significant change.

Preparation includes a review of the opportunities to improve how content is managed. Perhaps content management means avoiding duplication by adopting reuse strategies. It likely includes moving to XML-based authoring to avoid time spent formatting output in source and translated content. It should mean reviewing legacy content and making decisions on what to move forward and what to leave behind.

IBM was clearly prepared for their move to DITA, but most other managers wanted to know how to prepare.

Learning more about your customer and their information needs so that you learn if you need to transform your content.

Harmonizer provides a technology to support your investigation of your content. Should not be a manual process; cannot be a manual process.

Three—Education phase

Nothing improves an organization's ability to handle change more effectively than intensive education in the new norms. In phase three, organizations begin an educational program, often starting with minimalism and task analysis to identify areas in which content must be materially improved. They move into training on structured authoring, the DITA standard itself, and information modeling. Some training involves the entire authoring community; other training involves building specialized skills like information architecture and stylesheet development.

At each conference, speakers have emphasized the importance of approaching DITA as a new way of managing content rather than simply purchasing tools. Conference attendees have especially been interesting in training on minimalism, structured authoring, and information modeling.

Second Session

The second webinar outlines the next three phases, which take an Early Majority organization through a successful DITA implementation, including a carefully planned pilot project, tools acquisition, and content conversion.

Four—Pilot phase

At the first single-sourcing conference in 1999, the speakers invited to describe their pilot projects all reported failures. Clearly, they did not know enough about the challenges of piloting a new way of developing content. Many thought they were simply implementing new XML-based tools. They didn't prepare sufficiently to succeed.

By 2011, successes in piloting a DITA project are much more evident. Many speakers outline the requirements of the pilot phase and describe their own pilot projects in detail, providing a recipe for success.

Five—CMS phase

Although Component Content Management System vendors often prefer that organizations begin with a system implementation, many DITA speakers caution that it is too easy to buy something that doesn't meet requirements. A careful analysis of requirements is best conducted in conjunction with a pilot project.

Perhaps the most important issue in phase 5 is to avoid selecting a CMS that does not support the DITA standard. Too often, organizations are coerced into using homegrown systems or those developed for document or project management. The best CCMSs for DITA are those that understand XML-based content and linking at the component level. Those requiring intense management of translations must be especially well educated in component management concepts.

Six—Conversion phase

Although many organizations will find that legacy content requires restructuring to optimize consistency and opportunities for reuse, much legacy content can profit from intelligent automated conversion schemes.

Some information architects tell us that they first restructure content using traditional publishing tools before converting. Others find it easiest to convert first and do minimal restructuring afterwards. It all depends on a careful analysis, something DITA speakers continue to emphasize.

Third session

Phases seven and eight, covered in the final installment of the upcoming three-part webinar, focus once again on the Innovators and Early Adopters. Organizations that have an established DITA implementation are now reaching out in two new directions.

Seven—Optimization phase

Presenters at the 2011 conferences have moved visibly into optimization. They report on their progress in optimizing for translation by using consistent, simplified, and structured language in source content and implementing XML to XLIFF (another XML standard) processes to control costs.

We find organizations that have successfully increased productivity and reduced costs moving into methods to optimize content for customers. They are finding new ways to deliver content, including social media and output to mobile devices. They are using Search Engine Optimization to ensure that information consumers find what they need quickly and easily. They are tracking topic use to ensure that the content created is what consumers really want.

The **Optimization** phase means turning from a concentration on productivity gains and cost reductions to improved support for the consumer of information. In this phase, organizations look at their methods of delivery and at the content they are delivering, finding ways to respond to a changing customer demographics.

Optimization also includes measurements. Speakers like Keith Schengili-Roberts demonstrate how understanding the components of content costs enables managers to make significant productivity improvements at the same time that they improve content and its delivery to customers.

2011 saw stunning presentations from Symantec and Altera that demonstrate the growing importance of measuring the use of social media and content designed specifically for quick access through website search.

Eight—Enterprise phase

After their own successful implementation of DITA for technical content, we find increasing interest in helping other content-intensive parts of the organization join. Speakers report on budding projects with training, support, marketing, regulatory, and other groups that need to manage and reuse content more effectively.

We also see DITA moving into use in more types of organizations, including book publishing, insurance, medical devices, government, non-profits, and others that are anxious to get content under control.

The **Enterprise** Phase focuses on encouraging many parts of the organization to consider automated, XML-based publishing to reduce the time drain and costs required by desktop publishing. It also means inviting groups to develop single-sourced content that can be shared through each group's various publications and website content as well as single-sourced content that can be shared with other groups that develop information.

In the Enterprise Phase, a technical communication department may introduce the DITA standard to the training organization to enable developing shared content. A DITA Innovator might focus on sharing content with marketing communications, using a simplified editing tool that hides the XML underlying structure. A DITA Early Adopter might make a business case for adding catalog content and brochure to its portfolio or introducing topic-based authoring to its service and support group.

The extension of the DITA standard to a host of different content types promises productivity gains to the enterprise and to global organizations.

In Summary

Over the years, the DITA/CMS presentations have mirrored the progress of the most progressive publications organizations of major corporations in North America, Europe, Australia, and Asia. Likewise, other progressive organizations have been able to use the DITA/CMS presentations to model their own implementations. Join us for the webinar series and add your perspective during the Q&A session.