

Planning for Publishing Technical Content (Discussion)

**Project Scenario**

This sample scenario calls for planning a 200-page manual for a software product and related services.

**Content:** One-third of the document is a high-level description. The second one-third is a deeper technical specification of the product with step-by-step instructions on use and troubleshooting. The remaining one-third contains supporting source material in several appendices.

**Audience:** The audience is comprised of mid and senior level management, developers and technicians, global offices, and vendors and partners.

**Time:** Four months to plan, research, write, edit, and publish the document.

**Budget:** sufficient budget is provided for development, production, and distribution of version one. The budget for updates is limited.

Based on the above scenario for developing, publishing, and distributing a technical manual for a software product, I would use a single source, XML-based process. This method would allow a single set of source files to be used across a combination of formats including print, web, and electronic.

For small sections of the handbook, I would also repurpose information to include infographics and slide deck versions. These formats add value by potentially increasing sales in the global offices and with vendors and partners.

I would suggest publishing the document in three sections. Each section would have a combination of formats suited to the specific audience as shown in the following chart.

Publication Planning			
	Technical Manual - Volume Division		
Audience	Section One <i>High-level Description</i>	Section Two Technical Specifications	Section Three Appendices/ Source Material
	Published Versions <i>Print Web Electronic Slide Deck Infographic</i>	Published Versions <i>Print Web Electronic Slide Deck</i>	Published Versions <i>Web Electronic</i>
Mid- & Senior-Level Management	Slide Deck	Electronic	Electronic
Developers & Technicians	Electronic, Slide Deck, or Print	Electronic or Print	Electronic, Web
Global Offices	Electronic, Slide Deck, or infographics	Electronic, Web, or Slide Deck	Electronic, Web
Vendors & Partners	Electronic, Slide Deck, or Infographics	Electronic, Web, or Print	Electronic, Web

This combination of formats is appropriate for a product of high importance. Combined use of media can serve a wider audience.

The single sourcing method will work well for this publication as the company has allocated a sufficient budget for production, development, and distribution. Updating the publication in electronic, web, infographics, and slide deck versions would not add significant time or expense. This combination of formats will not over-stretch the limited budget for updating material. I would apply the budget for updates to the print and web formats.

Although users can print an electronic version, I would make sections one and two available in print. The print format will support vendors and partners. A printed version will also benefit global offices creating translations. Additionally, an automated XML-based system significantly reduces cost in creating translations. Updates that would require weeks of formatting are completed instantly using an XML-based method such as DITA.

I would include a slide deck format that summarizes high-level information. This format serves the mid- and senior-level management looking for a high-level overview. Partners and vendors also scan information and would use slide decks.

I would also include Infographics that provide a large amount of data with few words. This format can serve vendors and the global offices. Infographics enable this audience to scan details regarding comparison and relationship between elements. Infographics quickly illustrate how one product fits among other products in that category. Infographics illustrate process, flow, and structure. This format can draw the customer in and help lead to increased sales.