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# POWER OF SINGLE SOURCING

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The need for producing detailed and well-designed documentation. is increasing, and this does not stop at a single document. There is constant pressure to deliver information online, on several different user platforms. We end up duplicating content repeatedly for multiple media, platforms and audiences. This is time-consuming and costly.

Single sourcing is the solution to your problem. This allows you to output documents in different formats, while you work with a single version. This whitepaper describes the power of single sourcing.



WHITEPAPER CATEGORY: BUSINESS

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# Table of Contents

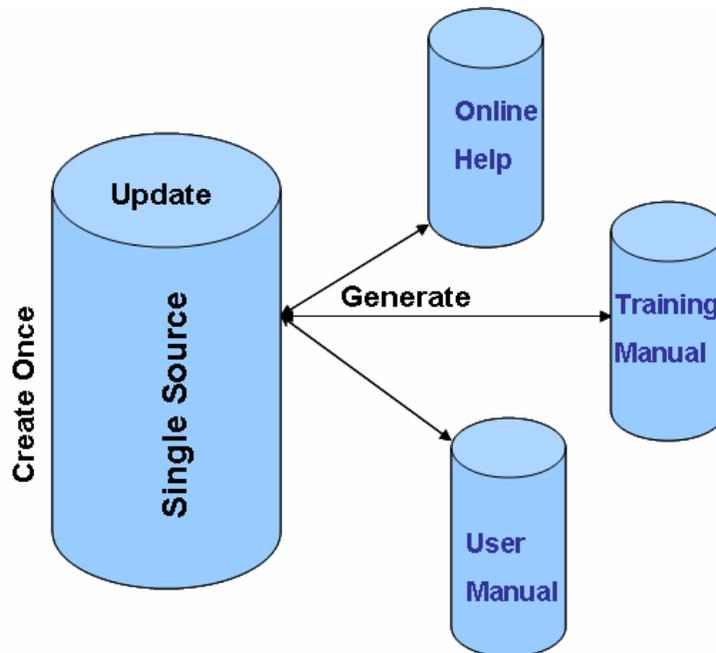
WHY SINGLE SOURCING? .....	3
ADVANTAGES.....	4
ELIMINATE DUPLICATE CONTENT .....	4
MAINTENANCE COSTS REDUCTION .....	4
IMPROVES CONSISTENCY .....	4
WHAT IS SINGLE SOURCING? .....	5
THE BASICS.....	5
PHASES OF SINGLE SOURCING.....	5
ANALYSIS.....	5
AUDIENCE ANALYSIS .....	5
INFORMATION ANALYSIS .....	6
SINGLE SOURCING PLAN.....	6
IDENTIFY TOOLS .....	6
SINGLE SOURCING TOOLS.....	6
CONCLUSION .....	6
REFERENCES.....	7
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	7
ABOUT THE AUTHOR.....	7
ABOUT WIPRO TECHNOLOGIES .....	7
WIPRO IN TECHNICAL PUBLICATIONS PRACTICE.....	8

## WHY SINGLE SOURCING?

In this cyber age, information is in demand. All of us need information now! In addition, the information needs to be consistent, correct and useful. If information cannot be accessed it means that it is not being managed, and cannot be reused, therefore is less valuable. It is this drive towards recovering the value of content that leads organizations to consider single-sourcing strategies.

Single sourcing allows us to use the same content in different documents, and in various formats. (Web, Online Help, Print, CD, etc.) Single sourcing is generally used for projects that include large volume of data.

Single sourcing is more than just re-presenting a document in a different medium. It is complex, but it has its advantages. The advantages are listed in the next section.



## **ADVANTAGES**

Single sourcing has proven to be advantageous for the following reasons:

- Easy Generation
- Eliminate Duplicate Content
- Maintenance Cost Reduction
- Improves Consistency

### **Easy Generation**

Allows you to reassemble documents quickly and easily. You can modify your documents to meet new requirements over time. The idea is to record information only once and then generate various formats as needed from that information.

### **Eliminate Duplicate Content**

To cite an example--in the documentation for related products, which share the same features, instead of updating several separate documents; writers update only the single source file from which the documents are generated.

### **Maintenance Costs Reduction**

Any document goes through the following phases: Write, format, review, publish. When this applies to multiple documents the effort is multiplied. Hence, there is a saving in time and effort.

### **Improves Consistency**

If there is more than one writer involved in a project, single sourcing ensures consistency across a set of documentation.

## WHAT IS SINGLE SOURCING?

In single source documentation, the writers define the elements required for the documents. All the elements of a document are written in one single source file. The elements may include sentences, paragraphs or entire sections. Typical examples of elements are:

Table of Contents	Chart, table	Tip
Introduction	Screen	Warning, Caution
Step	Concept	Field definition
Definition	Title	Example
Note	Explanation	
	Picture	

### The Basics

Write content once and store it as an element. Use the element as a base every time you need to convey the information. Then assemble the elements into information products. Use content management software to track and maintain the database of elements. Use a tagging language (XML is widely used) to identify the elements. These tags are used to control the format and assemble the content for different forms of output.

## PHASES OF SINGLE SOURCING

Single sourcing involves identifying all information requirements up front, and then developing them. This is generally done in phases. Following are some of the phases of single sourcing:

### Analysis

Analysis is the first step towards single-sourcing. Gather clarity on why you want to single-source. Some reasons for analysis could be:

- Do you want to reduce maintenance?
- Is information becoming out of synch in different information products?
- Are you using different tools for developing the same content?
- Are you catering to multiple platforms?

### Audience Analysis

As we cater to a varied audience in different environments, it is important to perform an analysis of the audience. You would need the answers to the following questions:

- Who are the users?
- What do they need to know?
- What platform are the users using?
- What are their limitations of the platform?

## **Information Analysis**

Analyze your existing data and identify the following:

- Structure of information
- Content of information
- Potential areas of single sourcing
- Potentially missing information

## **Single sourcing Plan**

Determine a plan to manage your data and content. Identify grains of data and modify them to make it simple. Spend some considerable time in planning and designing. Your plan could include details about:

- The set of documentation deliverables
- Structure and content of individual information products
- The writing process (the elements and attributes to use, nomenclature etc.)
- The flow of information
- Version control
- Testing and validating information products

## **Identify Tools**

Identify the tools. The aim is to ensure that all outputs are usable and the key is user focus.

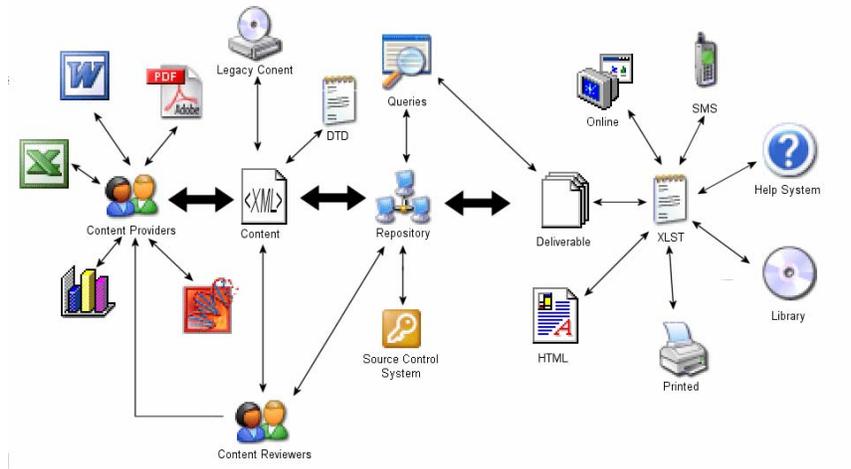
## **SINGLE SOURCING TOOLS**

Following are some of the Single Sourcing tools:

- Author IT
- WebWorks
- RoboHelp
- XML

## **CONCLUSION**

Customization based on the needs of customers has always been one of the main goals of organizations. There is no magic solution. While single sourcing can help organizations reduce costs and improve quality, implementing it requires proper attention, research and planning.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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