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www.sybase.com



Sybase: Where information management and mobility come together

With a loyal, global customer base (80 of the Fortune 100 use Sybase technology), Sybase enables companies of all sizes to realize the “Unwired Enterprise” – where information flows freely and securely within an organization, either in the office or on the road.

With Sybase software solutions, customers can enhance the IT investments they already own, link together the valuable data resources already in place, and extend the reach of business-critical information to users on the front lines.

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Maria Brownstein, Senior Engineering Manager, Sybase

Lessons learned from Sybase’s content lifecycle transformation

Five key best practices helped the software giant speed product releases and increase efficiencies with reusable, dynamic content

If money was the primary fuel of business in the last generation, Sybase’s explosive growth is proof positive that it’s data that drives growth in today’s connected world.

The company’s database technology makes it easier for enterprises to pull, push, and leverage vast amounts of complex information from where it’s stored to where it is cleanly presented and accessed by customers, employees and partners. Today, twenty years after its humble beginnings in a Berkeley, California garage, Sybase is the largest global enterprise software company exclusively focused on managing and mobilizing information.

Catalysts that Pointed Sybase to XML-Based Content

When Sybase – data innovator in its own right – needed to get better at leveraging the informational content in its own enterprise, it turned to XML-based authoring and publishing. Maria Brownstein, Senior Engineering Manager with the company, reflects on what finally drove the long-awaited push to content efficiency.

“As the company grew – adding new products, versions and regional markets – we saw the volume of our customer-facing content explode,” she says. “Information had to be brought together from a very complex network of disconnected IT environments. It slowed our ability to get products to market quickly, and as the company grew more ambitious, our documentation was destined to fall further behind.”

Exponentially Increasing Volume of Information Tapped Fixed Resources

Sybase’s product documentation mandate is vast in every possible way. More than 40 products each generate multiple versions every year – and each requires a full set of documentation to be released on product media and helpsystems, websites, PDFs and in print.

The company is a virtual publishing house as well, coaching customers on the latest innovations of database management. This generates more than 700 books with over 94,000 pages of content – all told, a virtual rabbit’s warren of interconnected, ever-changing information.

“With such a complicated content mandate, we’d been anticipating a major change for a long time,” says Brownstein. “We knew that demand was only destined to increase as the company expanded – and we were already working at capacity. Something had to change.”

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Sybase's Volume-intensive Content Mandate

- 40+ products x multiple version releases per year
- 4 languages per product
- 700+ published books
- 94,000+ pages of content
- Multiple channels, formats: media, helpsystems, websites, PDF, print

Five Key Principles to XML Content Success

Once the company set its sights on XML and DITA as the modes of content delivery for the future – and chose JustSystems' XMetaL solution as its enabling technology – they took an all-bases-covered approach to the transition, as Brownstein explains.

“If we were going to make a real difference in the way we worked with our content, we knew we'd have to go beyond simply purchasing technology,” she says. “We had to consider our people, our processes – examine our natural strengths, our operational blind spots, and our needs with as much clarity as possible. This is how we made sure to get the exact capabilities we needed.”

Step One: Understand Your Business Drivers

As simple as it may seem, organizations that want to move towards XML-based content lifecycle should be decisively clear on what business issues they expect XML to address.

“XML-driven content is something of a no-brainer these days, for content-rich companies,” says Brownstein. “But in order to make it an obvious and worthwhile path that executives will universally support, you need to prioritize and then communicate how improved content will generate results that matter to them.”

For the Sybase team, this meant exploring business drivers with a wide range of leaders across engineering, marketing, product and program management and technical publications.

“The content creation and release process touches so many unique groups,” she explains. “Everyone with either responsibilities or deliverables around content had to understand what we were doing, why we were doing it, how it affected the product and release cycle – and most important, how it affected customers.”

Following are some of the most common business drivers – as Brownstein notes, all relevant for Sybase – that serve as catalysts for the shift to a more efficient content lifecycle:

- Fundamental changes in the business model that affect content, such as moving from marketing individual products to integrated solutions
- A delivery mandate that includes multiple output channels (online help, PDF, print) that make it difficult to make necessary updates efficiently
- A desire to present a more consistent user experience and branding across products
- Pressure to increase techpubs efficiency – to use fewer writers per project, and to share a pool of writers with other departments despite having to produce a growing volume of content
- Rapid expansion of the content mandate combined with a desire to focus on quality rather than being distracted with repetitive, low-value tasks

A clear understanding of business drivers like these makes for an easier 'sell' of the project's value down the line. Says Brownstein: “When it came time for implementation, everyone was not only supportive, but deeply invested in making it work.”

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“...Beyond skillsets, one of the most important qualities of our writer-advocates was that they all had a genuine enthusiasm for figuring out smarter ways of working.

They were all excited to be taking part in something that would have such a huge impact on the whole team – and this genuine interest rubbed off on everyone.”

Maria Brownstein, Senior Engineering Manager, Sybase

Step Two: Enlist Internal Champions to Facilitate Funding and Resources

A holistic approach to successful implementation goes beyond technology to include change management and internal buy-in, as Brownstein notes.

“JustSystems’ XMetaL team helped us to make the case for XML content internally,” she explains. “We collaborated to understand what our results could be, and then quantifiably communicated that potential as an enabling platform that would speed time-to-market.”

In addition to earning champions within the executive team, nurture an inner circle of experts within techpubs who will help guide the project for those it will affect most – the writers.

From the beginning, Sybase identified key people within techpubs to lead the effort, and gave them a period of full-time dedication to the project. Most were technically proficient to start, but also had strong project management skills and a big-picture outlook that would translate well to writers of all backgrounds.

“Beyond skillsets, one of the most important qualities of these advocates was that they all had a genuine enthusiasm for figuring out smarter ways of working,” Brownstein recalls. “They were all excited to be taking part in something that would have such a huge impact on the whole team – and this genuine interest rubbed off on everyone.”

Step Three: Establish The Implementation Team & Define Roles

An implementation team helps shepherd an XML rollout from end-to-end – from choosing a solutions provider to managing grassroots adoption of the finished system.

In the case of Sybase, the team’s charter was to define, build, and maintain a DITA-based authoring system and output mechanism that met the requirements of a variety of content-producing teams. The group defined the migration plan, established best practices and created and delivered training. It included key players such as a team lead (to coordinate the effort), an architect (a non-writer whose role is to define the overall solution for how information is delivered, based on user goals), a transition lead (to manage the migration of content, processes, people and technology), solution engineers (technology-savvy writers to help design and configure the system and process) and transition team members (part-time content contributors).

“Once we had all the right people on board, we set to gathering requirements from each of the content-publishing teams that would be using the system,” Brownstein says. “Since we chose to undergo a phased implementation, we were able to continually update all our stakeholders as to how things were going elsewhere. This meant that the rollout promoted itself at every step of the way. By the time a new group was slated for the transition, they were prepared and keen for it – which made our job so much easier.”

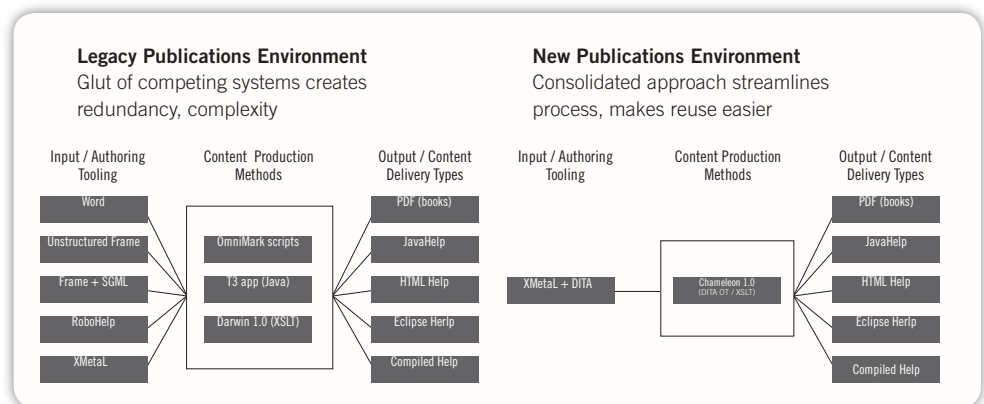
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Step Four: Search for The Right System and Provider

As the team at Sybase discovered, consolidation should be an all-encompassing priority in transitioning to XML-driven content – consolidation of redundant content, resources, effort and systems. Even the first step – eliminating multiple systems to centralize under a unified XML-based content system – brings an organization much of the way towards reducing content and effort redundancy.

“What’s so impactful about a new authoring platform is that it represents a fresh start for content efficiency in an organization,” she says. “A big part of that is the effort of focusing on one authoring application and one transformation process, and doing away with the rest. It’s very liberating for the whole team.”



Before choosing solution providers, identify all the systems and processes in place that currently impact content production. Using business drivers and content delivery priorities as a foundation, test and evaluate several applications ensuring that the finished system will:

- Provide features that support the functional requirements of the team
- Support single-source publishing to multiple formats
- Integrate to other systems throughout the content lifecycle
- Support open standards such as XML and DITA
- Meet the organizations’ needs now and in the future
- Assist the converting of legacy content to XML formats
- Provide services to help with information architecture, software configuration, and business process consultation
- Provide administrator and end-user training to ensure continued success

Finally, solicit input from other companies using the applications – non-competing enterprises will most often be happy to share trials, errors and lessons learned.

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JUSTSYSTEMS.
<http://www.justsystems.com>

North America:
 +1.866.793.1542
contactsales-na@justsystems.com

Europe:
 +44.0.1462.889.082
contactsales-emea@justsystems.com

International: +1.604.697.8705

About JustSystems

JustSystems is a leading global software provider with three decades of successful innovation in office productivity, information management, and consumer and enterprise software. With over 2,500 customers worldwide, the company is continuing a global expansion strategy based on its xfy enterprise software, XMetaL content lifecycle solutions, and its pioneering work in enabling XBRL financial reporting technologies. JustSystems is one of the 2008 KMWorld 100 Companies that Matter in Knowledge Management, a 2008 EContent 100 member, and was recognized on the 2008 KMWorld Trend-Setting Product list for XMetaL. Major strategic partnerships include IBM, Oracle and EMC.

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Step Five: Establish Guidelines and Collaboration Channels

First, start small. Begin with a small team, minimal features and a manageable schedule. Identify a reuse strategy outlining content crossover and – referring again to business drivers – determine the most appropriate strategy for reuse, including models, templates and the degree to which you want to specialize your solution.

A reuse strategy will determine how structured a writing environment will be, and which day-to-day workflow patterns will be employed for common procedures, troubleshooting or reference topics. Models and templates can be developed to help writers learn the new paradigm and remain consistent across information products, and new information types and supporting tools can be tailored to suit specific industries. Clearly defined corporate authoring guidelines should be made accessible to everyone who participates in content creation, making it easy for both full-time writers and occasional contributors or reviewers to understand (and buy into) how the process works.

“To move to an XML-based content process is to eliminate redundancy of effort, and break down resource silos,” says Brownstein. “Writers no longer need to worry about covering the same ground twice – or more – but instead, they can pull from the work that others have already completed. Just be sure to communicate the new approach thoroughly, and help writers to understand the shift from whole-document thinking to topic-based thinking.”

To support the rollout, Sybase’s team launched an internal website with links to external resources, training information, document builds, guidelines, schedules, contacts and a Wiki – lending deeper credibility and openness to the endeavor.

A New Era For Sybase: Living Its Brand Values Across the Entire Content Lifecycle

Before their shift to an XML-driven content lifecycle, Brownstein recalls, Sybase’s image as a powerhouse of data seamlessness made its own content issues that much harder to take.

“It was ironic – here we were, leaders in the business of data efficiency – and we had our own barriers to break down within our own organization,” she says. “We were thrilled to get the green light for XML-based content, because we knew it would finally give us that ‘right person, right time’ flow of information that we needed to work smarter, to start re-using our content.”

At this stage for Sybase, Brownstein’s team has achieved success: a more consistent experience for customers, improved efficiency of the writing team, lending more time to provide value-add, quality content for customers. These accomplishments came thanks to a balance of big-picture thinking, grassroots champions, thoughtful business analysis, solution fit and a mix of in-house and outsourced expertise. Their inclusive, people-driven and holistic approach adds up to a set of best practices, all of which are relevant for any organization exploring the transformative potential of an XML-based content lifecycle.