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Every Page Is Page One: Topic-Based Writing For Technical Communication And The Web



Synopsis

The Web changes how people use content; not just content on the Web, but all content. If your content is not easy to find and immediately helpful, readers will move on almost at once. We are all children of the Web, and we come to any information system, including product documentation, looking for the search box and expecting every search to work like Google. There is no first, last, previous, next, up, or back anymore. Every Page is Page One. For technical communicators, this Every Page is Page One environment presents a unique challenge: How do you cover a large and complex product using only topics, and how do you enable your readers to find and navigate topic-based content effectively? In this ground-breaking book, Mark Baker looks beyond the usual advice on writing for the Web, and beyond the idea of topic-based writing merely as an aid to efficiency and reuse, to explore how readers really use information in the age of the Web and to lay out an approach to planning, creating, managing, and organizing topic-based documentation that really works for the reader.

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Customer Reviews

For someone like me, who is just breaking ground into this beautiful profession, reading "Every Page is Page One" book has been an extraordinarily rich and revealing experience. The fact that my copy is full of annotations and more than 30 pages of notes is a confirmation of this. Because of my dual role as a database specialist and technical writer, I know Microsoft SQL Server documentation very well, but it was not after reading this book that I realized why this

documentation is so well structured and comprehensive, and why this type of writing is a pattern to follow. The same can be said about Wikipedia, which is an example used in several chapters. This book provides a compelling argument against traditional books or book-style user guides and manuals, and explains the fundamentals to write documentation your users and customers will find -finally- useful. Isn't this exciting enough? The only thing I missed was more examples. If you open the book this may seem contradictory, because it has plenty of examples and metaphors that makes the explanation easy to follow (I particularly liked the "recipe" example), but I am referring here to examples using "real" technical documents. In this way, I think it would be great to have some examples about how a chapter from one "traditional" manual can be rewritten in an "EPPO way", or how DITA and EPPO can both work together in a topic. Yes, I know after reading the book this is not as simple as it sounds! :) Overall, this is an excellent book, well thought and well researched, and plenty of fresh ideas in a field that is particularly stagnant and, in most of the cases, lacks innovation.

"This foraging behavior is not exclusive to the Web, of course. John Carroll saw the same behavior in his research subjects using paper manuals. Learners also often skip over crucial material if it does not address their current task-oriented concerns or skip around among several manuals, composing their own ersatz instructional procedures on the fly. "The Nurnberg Funnel"[8, p. 8]"

This quote is taken from the introduction to Chapter 1 in the book, "Every Page is Page One". How apt it is! I do this very thing and skim through a manual trying to find how to do a particular task, and get frustrated when it isn't there. Then I have to go back and read it again to find what I missed. Of course, many times what I'm looking for isn't there anyway, but until I do read it I don't know that. Either scenario is frustrating. Even on the web, sometimes I find it incredibly hard to find something on the website that I'm looking for. I have learned from this book, and one of the most important thing is to make sure people can find the information I'm writing about by treating each page as if it is page one. I suppose I never stopped to think that deeply about it. But then it's rather hard to have each important point to be the first sentence. However, I can make use of white space and create snippets to the side of the documents which will tend to highlight information, similar to how the book is written. If you write technical manuals, either hard copy or web copy, this book can really help you. It helps by giving you a "window" into how your readers use the material. I skim, even when I search for something, but then I click on a link and I skim again, when not finding it, I will slow down and actually search for the word on the page.

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