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Innovating Content Creation and Reuse

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As the non-profit association dedicated to nurturing, growing and supporting the user and supplier communities of ECM (Enterprise Content Management) and Social Business Systems, AIIM is proud to provide this research at no charge. In this way the entire community can take full advantage of the education, thought-leadership and direction provided by our work. Our objective is to present the “wisdom of the crowds” based on our 80,000-strong community.

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Process used and survey demographics

The survey results quoted in this report are taken from a survey carried out in October of 2015, with 307 responses from individual members of the AIIM community surveyed using a web-based tool. Invitations to take the survey were sent via email to a selection of AIIM's 80,000+ registered individuals. 75% of the respondents are from North America and 16% from Western Europe, covering a representative spread of various industry sectors.

About AIIM

AIIM has been an advocate and supporter of information professionals for nearly 70 years. The association mission is to ensure that information professionals understand the current and future challenges of managing information assets in an era of social, mobile, cloud and big data. AIIM builds on a strong heritage of research and member service. Today, AIIM is a global, non-profit organization that provides independent research, education and certification programs to information professionals. AIIM represents the entire information management community: practitioners, technology suppliers, integrators and consultants. AIIM runs a series of training programs, which can be found at <http://www.aiim.org/Training>.

About the author

Bob Larrivee is Vice President of Market Intelligence at AIIM, and an internationally recognized subject matter expert and thought leader with over thirty years of experience in the fields of information and process management. Bob is an avid techie with a focus on process improvement, and the application of advanced technologies to enhance and automate business operations.

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Introduction

Organizations typically focus on the management of content, and not the content itself. Struggling with the exponential growth of content that is expanding across the enterprise, businesses are creating and filling corporate digital landfills, clogging operational processes without knowing their complete content holdings or the value contained within.

When looking at the content in its entirety, there is value to be found, with opportunity for that usable, useful content to be transformed and reused for multichannel publishing. It is time business organizations identify their content, allocate value to that content, eliminate the ROT (Redundant, Outdated, Trivial) content, and take the next steps toward creating intelligent content.

Intelligent content can be defined as rich content that is findable, reusable, re-configurable, and available to be re-purposed by authors and business systems beyond its original single use purpose. In many cases, intelligent content environments are designed in such a way as to immediately identify and make the content available at the moment it enters the information ecosystem, thereby notifying those who may have a specific need or benefit resulting from the entering content.

In this report, we look at the pain points and approaches organizations are taking to create, use, and publish their content assets. The paper presents the findings of the survey along with the analyst's commentary and recommendations.

Key Findings

Creation and Reuse

- **Duplicative content efforts (87%) and extensive time searching for content (85%), are the top issues related to poor content practices.** 79% say there is too much single use content within their organizations.
- **While office productivity tools dominate content creation in business, 48% of respondents cite they use web content tools to create business content.** 46% are using desktop publishing tools.
- **65% report that their organizations leverage a team writing approach for some content, using shared documents.** Subsequently there is still a large amount of independent writing activity using email as the review and approval tool (65%), or share central locations (59%).
- **The greatest focus for team writing is in marketing (74%), and HR Policies and Procedures (60%).** 56% indicate writing teams in use for learning and development materials.

Operational/Organizational

- **Challenges are seen in collaboration and review of content creation by 51% of respondents while 45% cite content reuse and a common vocabulary as the main challenges. (45% equally).** 40% feel there is a lack of standard tools and content sharing within their organizations.
- **For many (66%), training and competency development for content authors is the focus as a result of their audits.** 45% have turned their attention to the content itself with 42% taking a technology approach.
- **While a web interface is commonly used for content distribution (66%), print is a dominant means of distribution with 64% citing this as a primary method.** Additionally, 60% indicate use of office applications as the means of distribution, pointing supporting the stated use of email for review and approval cycles.

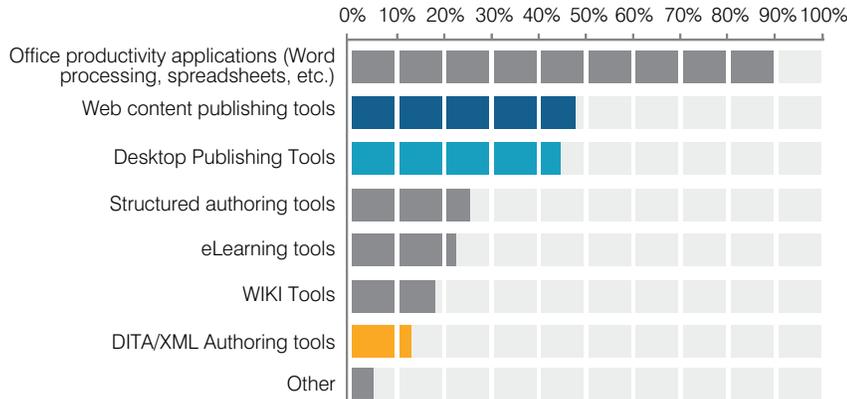
Governance

- **While information governance is gaining attention in many organizations, when it comes to content creation, 16% indicate there are strict standards in place, while 47% acknowledge there is something there, but not strictly followed.** For 37% the indication is that there is little to no use of standards in any form.
- **Authoring education is cited as a key way for organizations to support the user community (65%), with 54% saying the identification and implementation of standards should be a focus.** For 53% organizational support would come in the form of a standardized tools set, providing greater levels of governance over content creation and standardization.

Creation and Capture

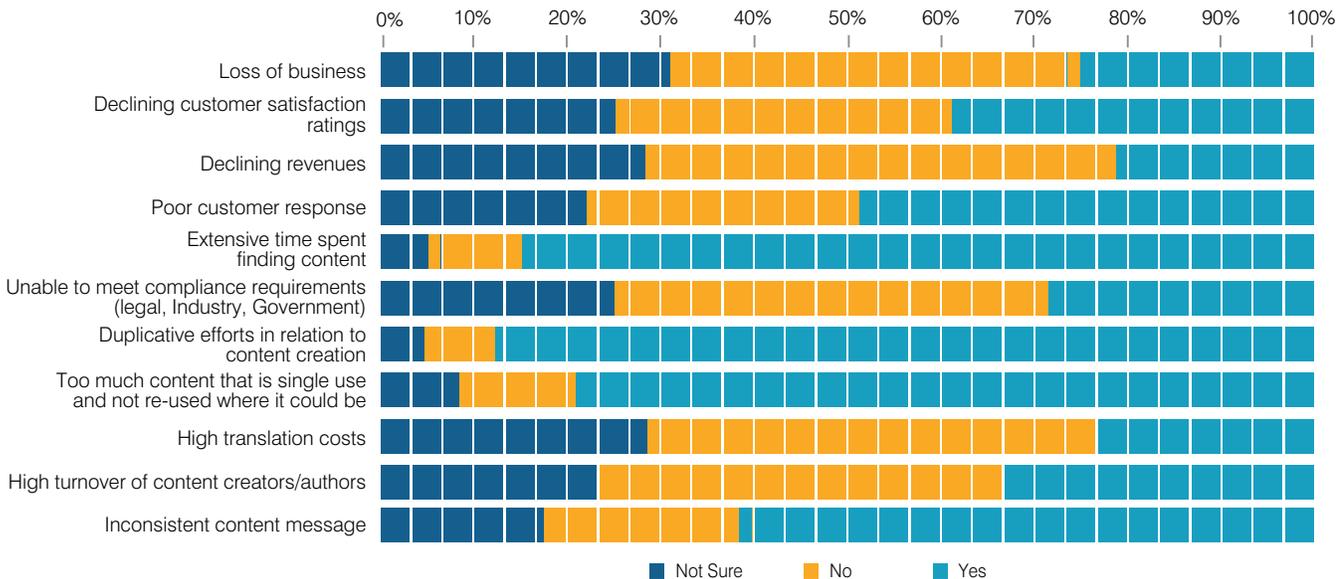
The beginning of the content lifecycle – creation – requires some sort of tool, whether it is an office productivity tool, authoring tool, or other means of creating the desired content. When we asked about the use of various tools used for authoring, it is of little surprise that 95% of our respondents chose office productivity tools as one of their tools of choice. Web authoring tools followed this with 48% while desktop publishing tools fell into 3rd place at 46%. Nearly one quarter of all respondents indicated that they are already working with structured authoring tools, half of which would include DITA/XML authoring tools. (Figure 1)

Figure 1. What tools do you currently use to create business content? (Pick all that apply)



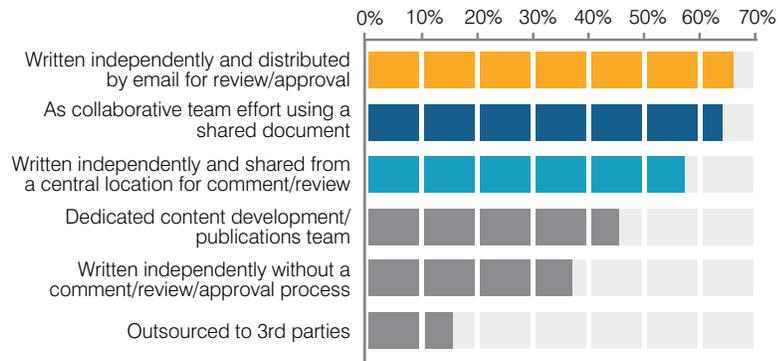
While it is easy to create massive amounts of content, the true test lies in the value associated with that content. Value in the sense of business value but also the overall value gained through findability, search ability, relevance, and reusability. Strong content creation practices bring about that high value characteristic and benefit while conversely, poor content and content practices can result in business related issues. When asked about the issues related to poor content, 87% of our respondents cite duplicative efforts as their main issues, with 85% saying they spend extensive amounts of time trying to find their content. Single use content is an issue for 79% of respondents in that it is not reused beyond its original intent. (Figure 2)

Figure 2. In your opinion, do you feel that your organization has experienced the following issues related to poor content?



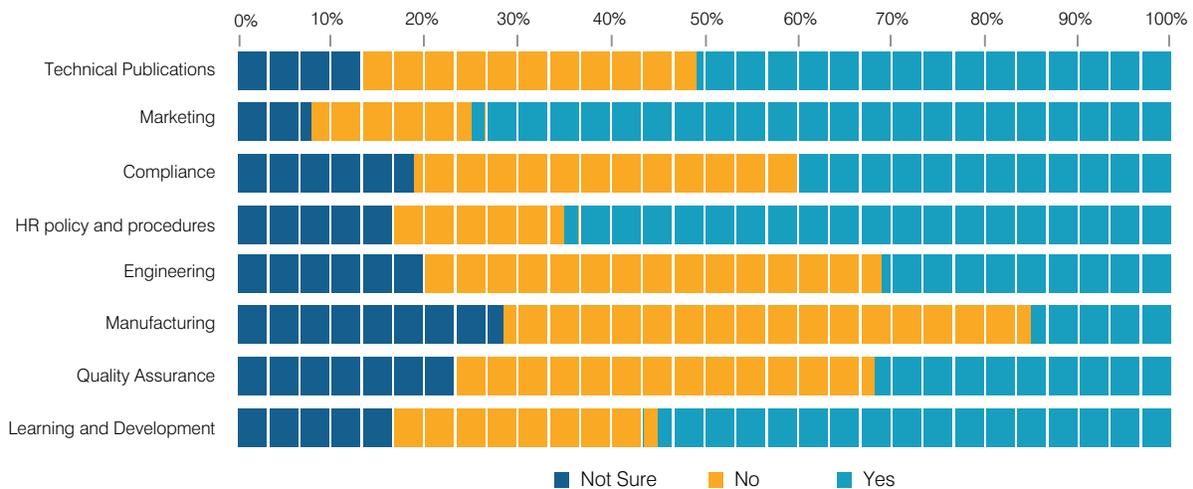
Content and process are tightly related and intertwined within business processes from a transactional perspective. This should also be a consideration in the creation process. What content is being created, by whom, and in what way? Are there specific tools and workflows in place or is the process serendipitous in nature? When we asked about the creation process, 66% of respondents say their content is written independently with email used for review and approval purposes. For 65%, the use of a shared document as part of a collaborative team effort is the method of choice with 59% citing their content is written independently and shared from a central location for comment/review/approval. (Figure 3)

Figure 3. Which of the following processes does your organization use for content creation?



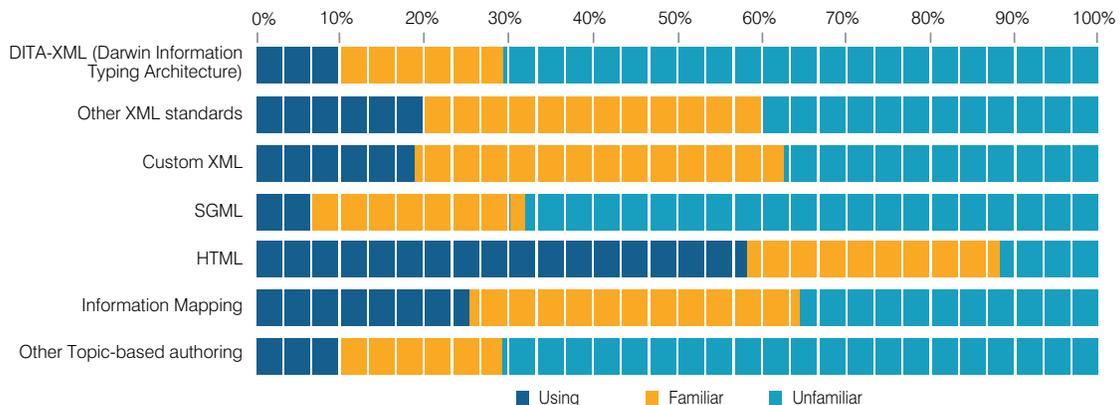
Indications here are that for the most part, content is created by most organizations in an independent manner rather than as a collaborative team effort. The reality is that a team approach is used, at least from a role or topical sense. When we asked for more specifics related to having dedicated teams responsible for authoring, we find that marketing (74%), HR (66% for policy and procedures), and learning and development (54%) top the list. (Figure 4)

Figure 4. Do you have dedicated content creation teams/writers for any of the following?



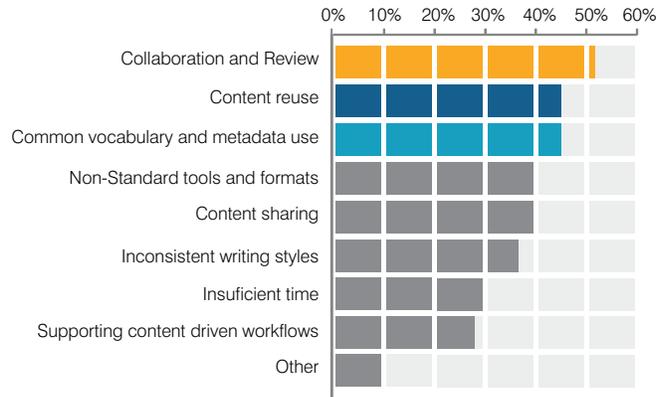
While the use of collaborative authoring teams is becoming a best practice for some organizations, there are still other methods and tools that can be incorporated to establish standardized content creation. Turning our attention toward the use of authoring standards, we asked about the familiarity and use of various content standards and authoring approaches. Our research shows that most commonly used standards and approaches are HTML (56%) and information mapping (24%). This demonstrates the fact that unless you are heavily involved in formalized content authoring, standards like DITA (Darwin Information Typing Architecture) and approaches like topic-based authoring, are largely unknown (71%) or while beneficial, are considered non-essential to most of those creating content. (Figure 5)

Figure 5. Are you familiar with or are you now using any of the following content standards or authoring approaches?



This brings us to identifying and understanding the areas of difficulty for organizations in relation to content creation. When asked, respondents indicated that the most difficult aspects of content creation for their organizations are collaboration and review (51%), with content reuse and a common vocabulary/metadata use equally recognized at 45% each. This indicates a combination of challenges with technology, culture, and standards. (Figure 6)

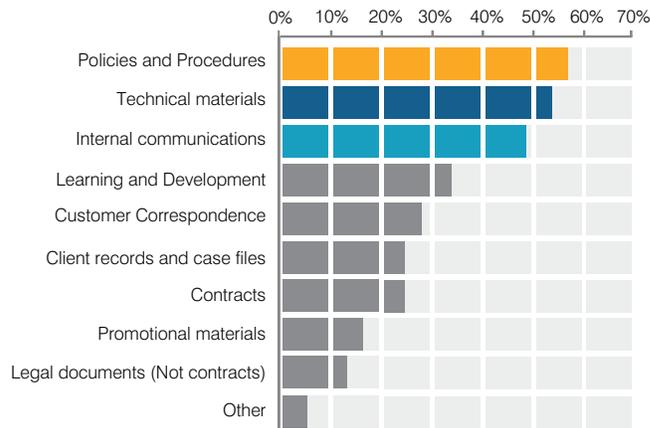
Figure 6. What are the three most difficult aspects of content creation for your organization?



Operational/Organizational

With organizational perceptions of what constitutes content and content creation varying throughout an organization, it is essential to identify and understand the types of content being created. When we asked about their involvement with various types of content creation, 57% of the respondents cite they are involved with the creation of policies and procedures. Beyond this we see technical materials (54%), and internal communications (50%) as the next areas of focus. (Figure 7)

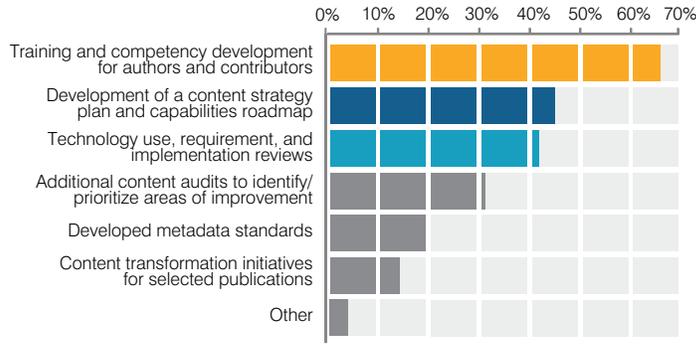
Figure 7. What types of content creation are you involved with?



A key element of establishing and maintaining a sound content creation environment is not only to understand the types of content being created, but also what content is being maintained. As a result, it is a best practice to conduct periodic content audits, identifying what content exists, where it resides, who is responsible for it, and how it is being used. When asked if content audits are conducted in their organizations, only 29% responded they in fact do conduct these audits with 44% indicating it occurred within the past 6 months and 74% indicating they took action as a result of the audits. Of course this begs the question that if an audit is conducted, why not take action to improve?

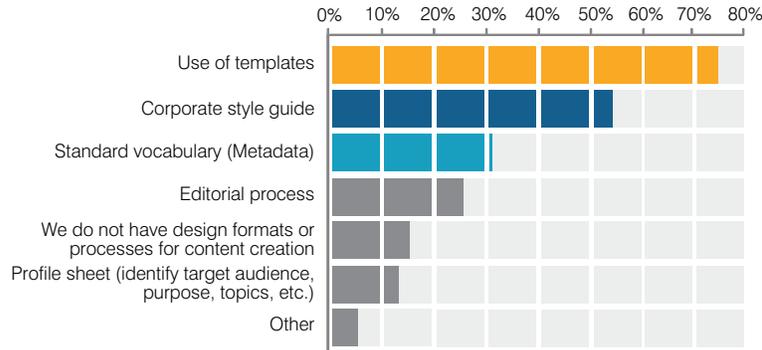
When action is taken, we find that training and competency development for authors and contributors is the top priority for 66% of respondents. 45% turn their attention to the development of a content strategy plan and capabilities roadmap, with 42% focused on technology use, requirements, and implementation reviews. (Figure 8)

Figure 8. What actions did you take as a result of our content audit?



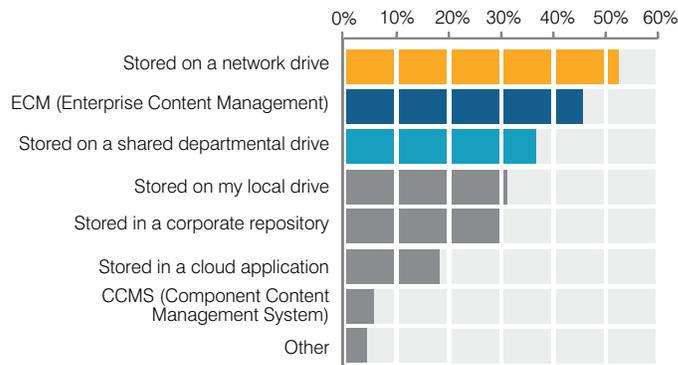
Procedurally, there are many options available to an organization related to content creation including the use of standardized templates, style guides, and even common metadata. When we asked about the use of design formats or processes to follow when creating content, 75% of respondents say they use templates, with 54% citing they do have corporate style guides. Looking at common vocabulary or metadata within an organization, only 31% indicate this to be in place. Where things really begin to fall short is the lack of any editorial processes to ensure consistency and accuracy. (Figure 9)

Figure 9: Do you have a design format or process to follow when creating content?



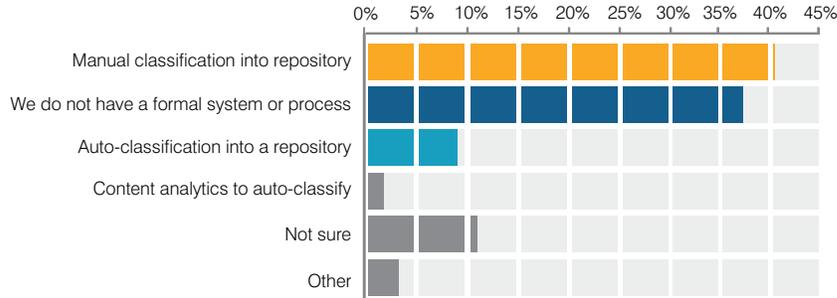
The management of created content is also of concern in that if it is maintained in a siloed environment, it is unavailable for multipurpose use. Additionally, given these content assets are corporate assets, they must be maintained in a secure manner. While there are some restrictions placed on information of a sensitive nature, information that is not considered sensitive should be reused to maximize its value. When asked about content management practices, 53% of respondents indicate their content is stored on a network drive, while 46% say they use an ECM (Enterprise Content Management) system. For 38%, created content is stored on a shared departmental drive. (Figure 10)

Figure 10: How do you manage/store this content once created?



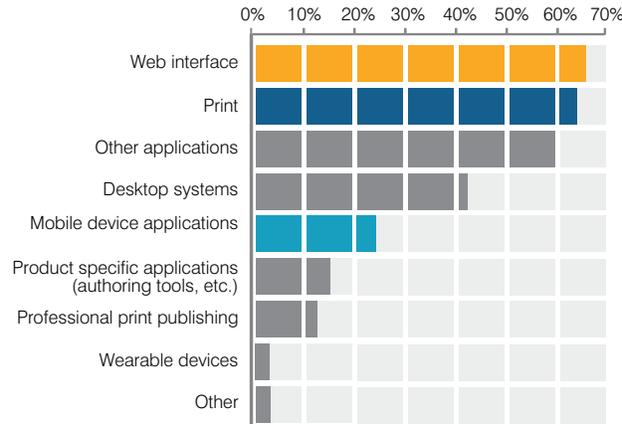
Metadata serves multiple roles in relation to content. Used for content management practices that include findability, security, and workflow, it is essential that metadata be properly addressed and applied. This means that the capture of metadata should be seen as a critical part of the overall content strategy. When asked about the capture of metadata, 40% of respondents cite that they use manual classification into a repository, and 38% have no formal system or process in place. (Figure 11)

Figure 11: How do you capture metadata?



Content is created with a purpose; the end result being it is shared or distributed in some way to an intended audience. In days when paper was the only means of distribution, it was a simple answer to the question of distribution channel. Today, content can be distributed using the web, mobile devices, and yes, even paper. Respondents to the question of distribution methods cited web interfaces as the top method of content distribution for their organizations. This was followed by paper at 64%, which given the human element of feeling comfortable with paper, is of no surprise. While mobile device use is gaining rapidly in popularity, only 23% indicate they support mobile device use as a means of distribution. (Figure 12)

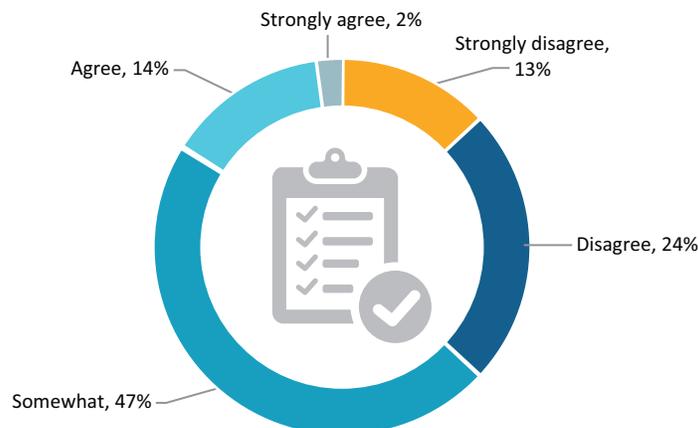
Figure 12: What are the methods of distribution supported?



Governance

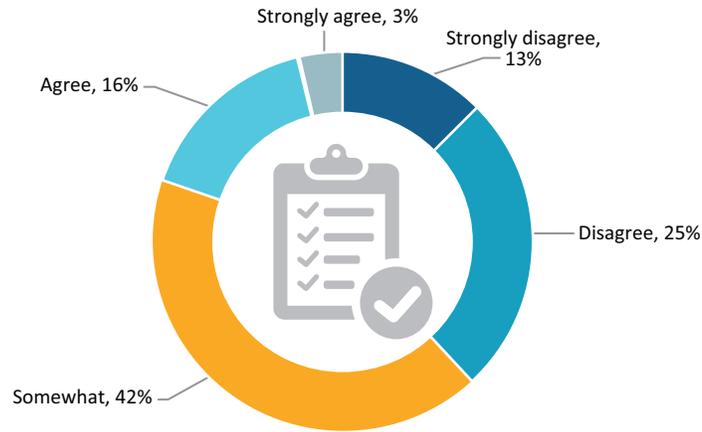
Strong content environments begin with a solid foundation built on well-defined governance policies and procedures. These may range from an overarching set of general guidelines to more specific elements like the use of standard file formats, templates, and appropriate use of mobile devices. When asked about following content creation standards, only 16% of respondents say they agree that standards are being followed. For those who either disagreed (24%) or strongly disagreed (13%) that standards are being followed, there is opportunity to begin moving the organization forward through the development and education on the importance and benefits of standards. (Figure 13)

Figure 13: We follow a strict set of standards in relation to content creation.



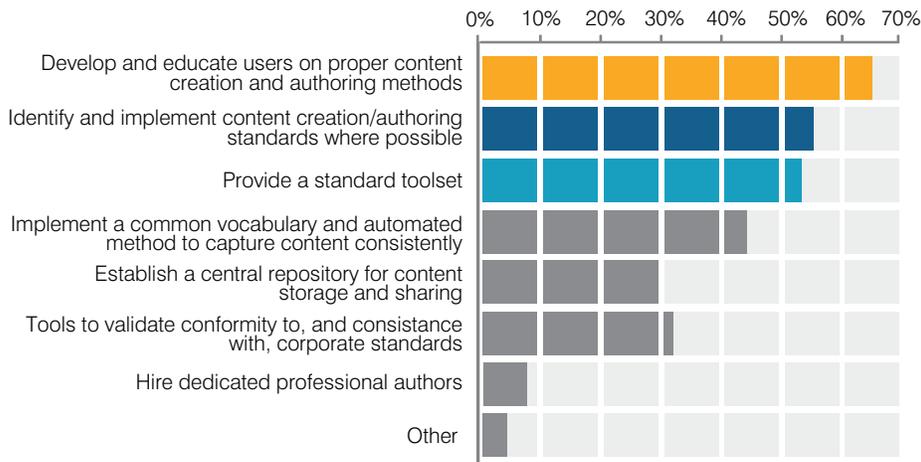
Governance alone is insufficient to ensure good content creation and management practices. While it is a best practice to establish policies and procedures, organizations must support this with the development of skills and provision of tools enabling the workforce to adhere to the governance policies. When asked if they provide a focused set of tools, guidelines, and training for content creators and authors, 42% say they do to a certain degree while 19% indicate they do provide such support. (Figure 14)

Figure 14. We provide a focused set of tools, guidelines, and training for our content creators and authors.



This brings us to a discussion on organizational support. For many involved with content creation, there is a willingness to work in a more standardized fashion and their organizations realize there is benefit from doing so. The issue is typically one of where to begin. We found that when asked about organizational support 65% of respondents feel there is a need to develop and educate users on proper content creation and authoring methods. 54% feel there is need for organizations to identify and implement content creation/authoring standards where possible, and 53% looking for standardized toolsets. (Figure 15)

Figure 15. Which of the following do you feel your organization could do to support a more consistent and standardized way of creating content?



Conclusion and Recommendations

Content is a valuable corporate asset, driven by value, created by many authors, and generated from many sources. Yet content creation is often taken for granted by business organizations as something that just happens as part of the daily business routine.

While our community has long focused on processes and technology required to manage content once it enters the information ecosystem, there has been little forethought given to the most effective and efficient means of creating content or how this may impact our ability to manage it. Best practice in operations dictates a standardized approach to maximize efficiency and benefit, yet when it comes to content, this is overlooked. Standardized content creation and management practices bring about consistency, reuse, and an opportunity to substantially streamline content creation and publishing processes.

Imagine a world where you assemble a document rather than write it out word for word each time. Imagine that content relevant to what you are creating has already been created and is now made available for you to reuse. It is possible and plausible to think that content creators can and will in the future, be able to select standard content sets, and assemble them into the form they require. It is also possible and plausible that this same content can be transformed into several delivery formats supporting multi-channel distribution. The key is to develop, implement, and refine a content creation and management strategy that maximizes content use, eliminates duplicative efforts, and provides a consistent method of authoring for all.

Your greatest advancements in information management still to be achieved may not lie in the technology you use to manage content but in the content itself. Other similar organizations or perhaps even parts of your own organization have realized success with introducing intelligent content for their high-value information assets. Many technical publication groups have been working with structured authoring practices for producing intelligent content for more than a decade and found ways to reduce many of barriers to adoption including cost and complexity. You need not look too far to find practical advice and leverage lessons learned to extend that success beyond those centers of excellence.

While this journey may seem daunting, it is one that should be taken seriously with a focus to begin with one element, and grow it out from there. Perhaps you choose contract creation, or technical documentation as the first step. Whatever it is, take it, learn from it, and move your organization forward.

Recommendations

Start from your business goals to begin planning a content strategy that addresses an overarching vision related to content creation, management, and use. Identify a set of goals in relation to content creation and an approach to identify and dispose of content considered to be ROT (redundant, outdated, or trivial). Find ways to automate as many content related tasks as possible leveraging standards and available technologies.

Consider taking the following steps:

- Investigate existing best practices and technology in place within your organization and industry.
- Identify challenges your organization is facing with content development and deployment.
- Conduct content audits to identify what is being created and how it is being managed.
- Identify content creators and assess their current knowledge and skill levels.
- Establish governance policies related to content creation and the use of standards.
- Assess the needs and requirements of content creators as they relate to education and tools.
- And lastly, position yourself to take a primary role in forming your organization's content creation and management strategy.

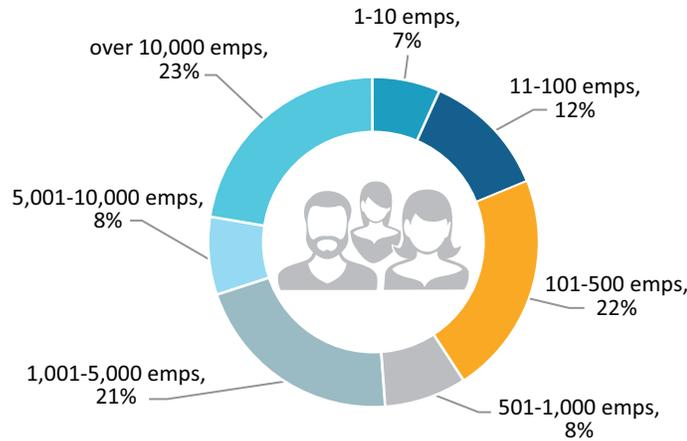
Appendix 1: Survey Demographics

Survey Background

The survey results quoted in this report are taken from a survey carried out in October of 2015 with 307 total responses from individual members of the AIIM community surveyed using a web-based tool. Invitations to take the survey were sent via email to a selection of AIIM's 80,000+ registered individuals.

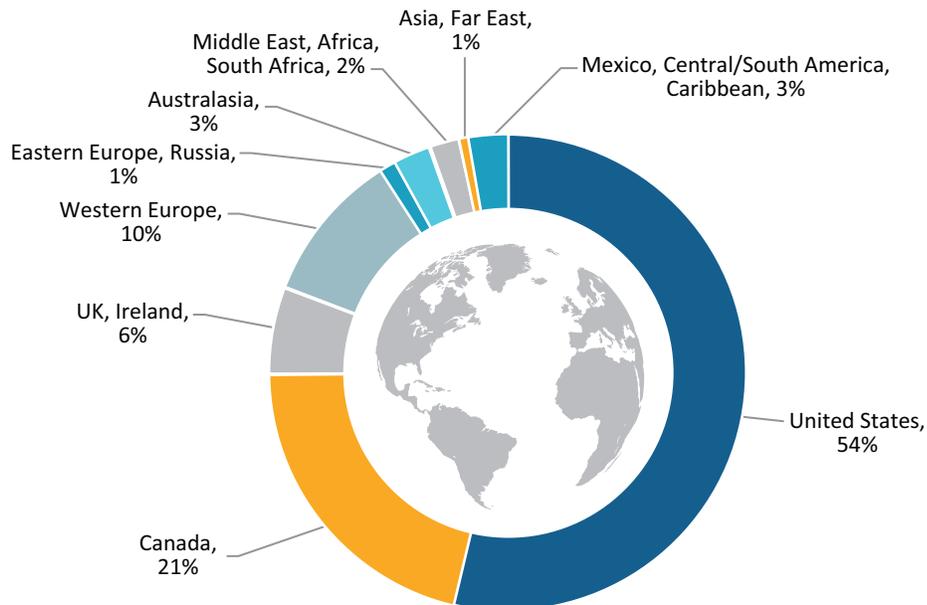
Organizational Size

Larger organizations (over 5,000 employees) represent 31%, with mid-sized organizations (501 to 5,000 employees) at 29%. Small-to-mid sized organizations (1 to 500 employees) are 41%.



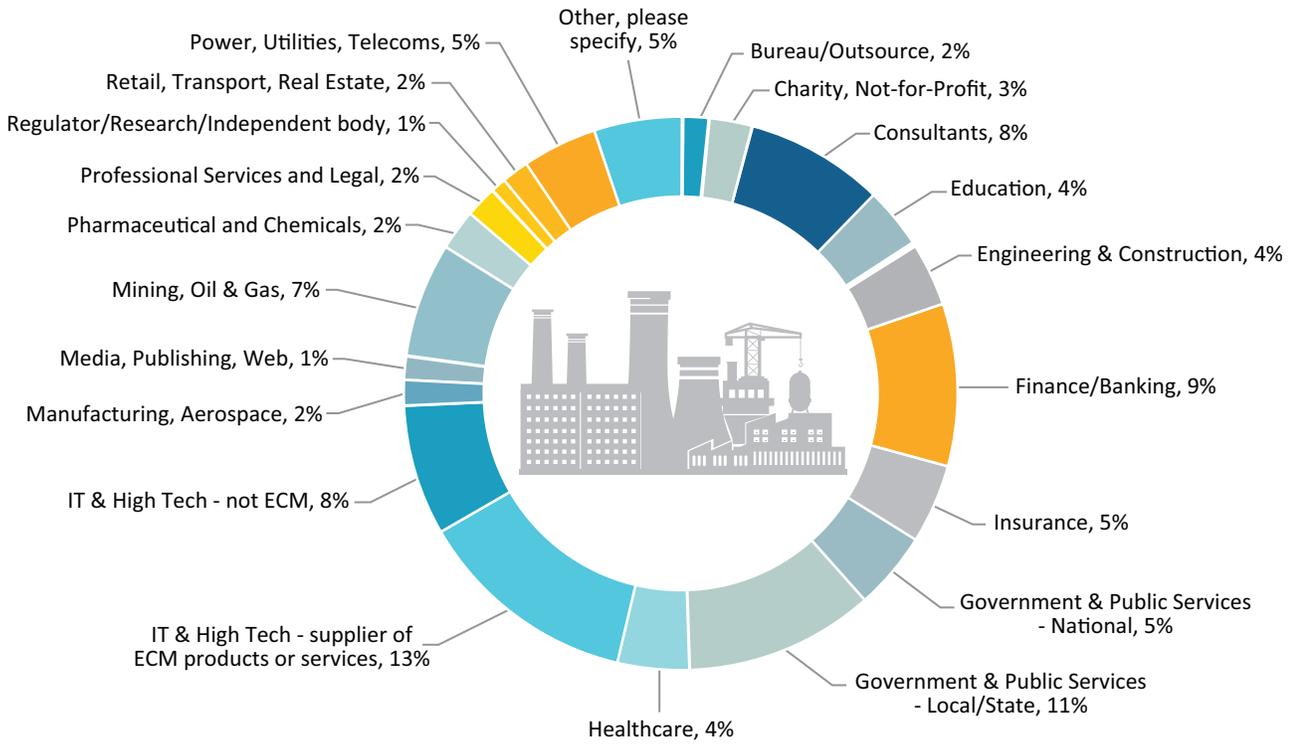
Geography

The survey was international, with US and Canada making up 75% of respondents, and 16% from the UK and Western Europe.



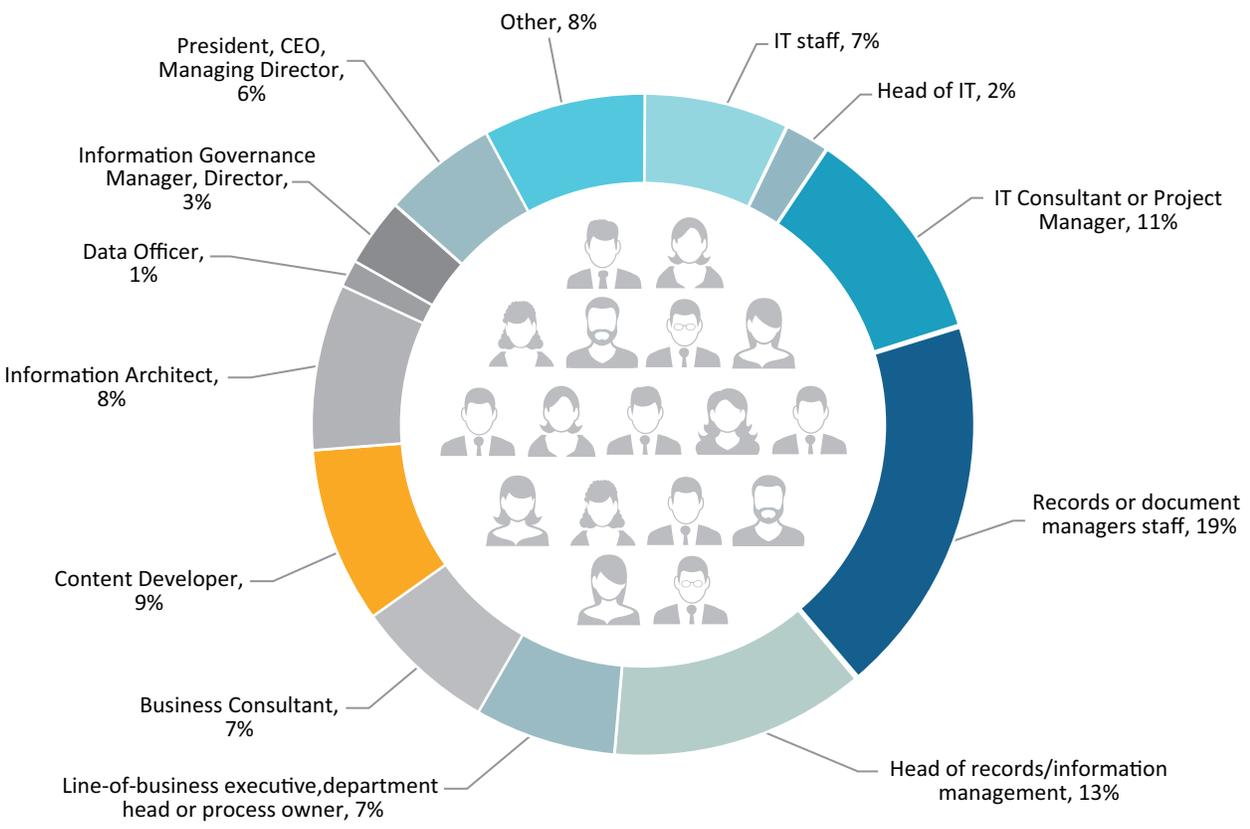
Industry Sector

Government represents 16%, Finance and Insurance 13%



Job Roles

32% of respondents say their role is focused on records and compliance, while 13% are Executives and Line of Business Management, and 21% from IT services.



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Precision Content Authoring Solutions Inc. is a full-service solution provider to medium- and large-scale organizations around the globe seeking help to better understand and solve their content challenges. Our core services involve designing and implementing innovative, scalable, and sustainable solutions for authoring, managing, and publishing high-value content.

Our approach involves examining the utility, usability, and maintainability of your content with a view to developing a comprehensive content strategy for your business. Our highly-respected technical team of developers, information architects, and technology partners, such as **easyDITA**, work to construct scalable, standards-based tool solutions. Our experienced team of technical communicators work closely with you to transform your unstructured content into highly-usable intelligent content for substantially improved future-proofing, accessibility, and multi-channel publishing capabilities. Once we are done, our trainers teach you everything you need to know to ensure a successful and sustainable hand-off.

We are a proud and committed member of the world-wide AIIM community and look forward to continuing the conversation around the importance of content creation practices as they pertain to improving the manageability and effectiveness of content. Do not hesitate to contact us with your comments and questions. Learn more about how we can help you at www.precisioncontent.com.

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easyDITA

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We pride ourselves on delivering a complete approach to content development. From authoring to publishing, we're there every step of the way. Visit us at www.easydita.com.

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