



# How structured content is disrupting the 'Future of Documents' in a born-digital world



Q&A with **Cheryl McKinnon**,  
Principal Analyst at **FORRESTER**

We recently hosted a webinar with guest speaker Cheryl McKinnon, Principal Analyst at Forrester, to speak on an independent [Forrester research report](#) around the 'Future of Documents'. The on-demand webinar *How structured, content is disrupting the 'Future of Documents' in a born-digital world* saw an overwhelming response. There were a lot of questions about structured content management and its impact on the future of documents. We are excited to share Cheryl's insights on some of those questions below.

## **Q: Why do you feel that a structured, componentized content management approach is so critical for the 'Future of Documents'?**

**A:** The way we create documents hasn't changed much in more than 30 years that workplaces have adopted personal computing. Word-processing, presentation, and spreadsheet tools still largely follow the same authoring paradigm. While we've adapted to today's networked, always online, mobile authoring tools, we are still often creating documents that are standalone files sitting in some kind of storage location. Traditional document authoring approaches are ready for their own moment of disruption. The rise of cloud computing, SaaS productivity and collaboration tools, and the need to be nimble and deliver content to a broad range of internal and external consumers means many organizations are looking for better approaches to document authoring. Organizations want to get better at creating documents to meet the needs of the readers - not the writers.

In client conversations, we frequently hear them wanting to find ways of working with more modular chunks of content whether text, images, tables, figures, etc. The ability to manage these smaller components and then reassemble them for specific audiences internal or external is desirable. Similarly, clients report the need to create content once, but publish to multiple channels, such as mobile apps, email, collaboration workspaces, or as a traditional document format.

The benefits to this new approach can include reduced effort to recreate content, more trust that content is vetted and correct, and a better match between the form of the document and the needs of its intended reader.

## **Q: What role do you see robots, AI and ML playing in content authoring and content management in the near future?**

**A:** These are early days but an area of some interesting early innovation. Information workers have become accustomed to their productivity tools providing hints and help starting with spelling and grammar checkers, and now extending to type-ahead suggestions that get longer and more accurate. Ad hoc language translations via cloud AI services are now commonplace. AI authorship, however, is an emerging area that will impact document authoring in the near future. We see examples of this in online journalism, with AI writing sports or weather articles from structured data sources. We are now seeing experimental deep learning algorithms being trained on massive sources of text and they are showing some success producing useful output in some text generation applications, such as creating FAQs.

## **Q: Do you think specialized technical authoring tools using standards such as DITA can serve broader use cases beyond technical content? If yes, what are some of the additional use cases such tools can power?**

**A:** Technical standards bring the promise of consistency, opportunities for automation, and laying common ground among platforms and vendors. But using standards may feel intimidating to non-technical users. DITA is a great example of this. DITA is not a document type but a framework that helps establish a common structure in which to author various components of a document, using XML to define its various elements. It makes it easier to exchange content across applications. While it has found a solid foothold in technical document management, it has potential to help in any area where content reuse is a goal. Use cases such as internal communications, policies, educational materials, research, product information are all examples. The challenge is finding the right authoring experience that is as easy to use as mainstream productivity tools. Forrester's data shows that information workers are highly satisfied with the word-processing and presentation tools they use, so there is some inertia to overcome. The market is ready for authoring tools that can embed standards such as DITA, yet hide the complexity from content authors and eliminate any usability or change management barriers to adoption.

**Q: Considering some of the trends showcased in the webinar, do you see a CCMS (component content management system) as an important solution for powering content creation and management?**

**A:** A CCMS is certainly one of the paths to shaping the future of documents. We see demand for managing content as smaller, granular chunks in many areas. For example, in legal markets there is demand to manage content at the terms and conditions or clause level, especially for contracts lifecycle management. In manufacturing there is interest in compiling manuals/guides for buyers in different jurisdictions, or using variations of a specific product. Deconstructing content to meet the needs of its intended readers, but also for a range of delivery channels, is key. For example, showing just a figure that helps a car owner resolve a warning light by pulling it up on a mobile app, rather than having to download a 100-page static format. CCMS can also help to resolve today's mismatch between what authors create and what their audiences need - the ability to include more structure and data in a document is essential when the end consumer is not a human but an API, a downstream application, or even to serve an IOT use case.

**Q: What other innovations are you seeing in the content authoring market?**

**A:** In Forrester's [report](#) on the 'Future of Documents', we also noted that innovation will come from some of the major productivity suite providers. While in early adoption stages today, we expect that mainstream office suites will allow the creation and distribution of components of content. For example, information workers could create a table of data in a spreadsheet, and insert that table into a presentation deck. Updates to the background data could then automatically update in the presentation, ensuring accuracy and reducing time spent editing documents. More fluid, real-time updates

across various content delivery channels will become more common over the next couple of years. For example, delivering an update to essential content not as a new version of a file, but as refreshed information in a team collaboration channel, or digital workplace news feed. However, innovation can come with growing pains. Organizations in regulated industries or those that have mature information governance requirements may find this transition to future documents messy. Finding the right balance between using new capabilities to improve employee productivity with traditional information management approaches will take negotiation, evaluation, and a continuous improvement mindset. Security, privacy, retention, and disposal policies will need to be extended to these new componentized chunks of content. Governance technologies will need to evolve to keep pace, and ensure sensitive data can be controlled, or to validate that content that needs to be preserved for legal, regulatory, or corporate memory purposes can be made unalterable.

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