

Compliments of Your Technical Communication Experts at Freund Associates

In preparing this issue of our newsletter, we noticed a common thread in the questions people have been asking us lately: their “writing chores” always seem to get pushed to the bottom of the priority list. We’d like to show you how easy and cost-effective it can be to leave this work to the technical writing experts at Freund Associates. Call or e-mail us anytime. There’s never a charge for an initial consultation. We’ll handle all your writing chores, and we’ll put them at the top of our priority list!

Question 1:

We’ve got a ton of information about our company, its products, and our services that we want our customers to know about. How do we present it in a way that is “user-friendly” and will not overwhelm them?

... a one-sided, one-page info sheet or a brochure designed to “get the call” may solve your problem.

A: First, you need to determine what kind of information you want to present. Is it marketing information to stimulate sales? If so, then less information is better. A one-sided, one-page info sheet or a brochure designed to “get the call” may solve your problem. If you want to present more technical or background information, then perhaps a white paper may be more appropriate. You will have more space to demonstrate your expertise, and your customers will come to view you as the resource you want to be. We all have an innate desire to share all the great things we know about our products and services, but sometimes too much information can be a bad thing. If your information is presented in the correct format and written clearly and appropriately for the audience you wish to target, then overwhelming them won’t be a problem.

Question 2:

My customers have been asking me if my documents meet ISO 9000 standards. How can I explain my answer in a way that they can both understand and appreciate?

...the fact that your customers have asked if your documents meet ISO 9000 standards tells me that they don’t really understand the subject.

A: ISO 9000 standards and certification often create confusion and miscommunication, even among those who already understand them. The fact that your customers have asked if your documents meet ISO 9000 standards tells me that they don’t really understand the subject. Quite simply, ISO 9000 (more specifically ISO 9001) is a generic model that outlines the requirements for a customer-oriented Quality Management System. It defines *what* tasks should be performed, but it does not specify *how* those tasks should be performed. That’s up to company management.

If your company follows the ISO 9001 standard, then your management team has already worked together to develop and write down specific procedures. This can bring benefits at two levels. First, your company has thought about how it conducts its business and has established standards. In doing that, your company has also considered how to identify problems and how to resolve them. Second, your company can be certified as having a Quality Management System that meets ISO 9001 requirements. This may be attractive to your clients since they can be assured that your company adheres to a well-known system for quality management. And this can prove to be a great selling point for the customer who wants or needs to feel more confident about working with you.

Question 3:

I manage several consultants at a software company. They are excellent when it comes to installations and troubleshooting, but they seem to fall short when it comes to training our new customers on how to use and get the most from our products. What can I do to ensure that my consultants are proficient enough so our customers can get the most and best value for their dollar?

...your consultants need to understand that the customers they are training all learn in different ways, so what works for one may not work for another.

A: Your problem may be in having your consultants conduct the training in the first place. Just because they are experts on your software doesn't necessarily mean that they know the fine art of teaching technical material to your customers. They need to understand that the customers they are training all learn in different ways, so what works for one may not work for another. If the material is not presented in a way that is both interesting and appropriate for various learning styles, then your customers may shut down, making the entire training experience uncomfortable and unproductive. One suggestion is to "train your trainers" with the proper materials, guides, and notes to make the training sessions as effective as possible. If you'd rather have your consultants do what they do best, then maybe it's time to consider retaining the services of a company that specializes in training trainers.

Question 4:

The cost of updating, printing, and binding my training manual is getting out of hand. Are there more cost-effective ways of keeping my material current without breaking my budget?

...you can put your manuals, catalogs, and procedures on a CD-ROM and print these documents or parts of them as needed.

A: There are a variety of delivery methods that may suit your needs. For example, you can put your manuals, catalogs, and procedures on a CD-ROM and print these documents or parts of them as needed. You can also create web-based documents and link them directly to your site, making your materials more searchable and accessible to employees and customers. Alternatively, you can use an Interactive Electronic Technical Manual (IETM) to link several existing manuals together for instant access to all documents at once. With an IETM, you will also be able to index and cross reference topics. And, if the IETM is created in Adobe® Acrobat®, it is not only affordable but also efficient.

Question 5:

We've just experienced a minor fire at our office and realized that we would be totally unprepared if it turned into a blaze that destroyed the entire building. What can we do to help ensure that we recover from a major disaster, if it ever happens?

... at the very least, you should have an "Emergency Redbook" that contains telephone guidelines, a personnel handbook, security policies, and FAQs

A: While there are no guarantees that you will recover from a major fire, explosion, terrorist attack or natural disaster, you can significantly improve your chances of bouncing back with a Disaster Recovery Plan. At the very least, you should have an "Emergency Redbook" that contains telephone guidelines, a personnel handbook, security policies, and FAQs, as well as the names and contact information of key personnel. It is also important that you establish a temporary crisis management center in the event your office is inaccessible or, at worst, destroyed. Unfortunately, too many people don't begin writing their Disaster Recovery Plan until it's too late. For more information, see the reprint of an article that accompanies this newsletter.