



Society for
Technical
Communication

Society for Technical Communication
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Are you looking to learn more about technical communication?

Technical writers can not only be an important part of your team in adding value to your products and services, they can develop into valuable subject matter experts for your organization.

Many firms who seek outsourced technical writing help to complete their projects only have the expectation that the technical writer they bring on board will become knowledgeable enough to be able to communicate to the firms' customers and do an adequate job to get the material out the door. Instead, firms would benefit from viewing technical writers they hire as potential subject matter experts that they'll use on a regular basis so that the technical writers working for them will become increasingly knowledgeable about the company, its customers, its products and the audience for what's being documented.

Contract vs. Permanent Technical Writers

Of course, technical writers who are permanent employees for any length of time can clearly develop into subject matter experts. As iterations of the product or service are developed, the technical writer's knowledge of the inner workings of things is bound to grow stronger. Additionally, as a permanent technical writer increases his or her understanding of the company's market and the audience for the technical writer's deliverables, quality, usability and suitability of the technical writer's output is also likely to improve.

A problem can arise when a hiring firm with a need for quality technical communications goes out in the open market and tries to fill a temporary need. Doing so can be especially problematic for hiring firms who look for technical writers on their own - without the help of a placement firm specializing in technical writers, like Writing Assistance, Inc.

How Technical Writers Can Become Subject Matter Experts

If the hiring firm plans to continue outsourcing its technical writing needs, it would be well advised to consider re-hiring the same professional technical writer for successive releases or iterations of the product or service. Why? Because the technical writer who worked for you previously will already know something about how your company works, who its customers are and, as a result, will have a better understanding of the audience for the deliverables that the technical writer will need to prepare. Training time - and subsequently labor costs - can be reduced substantially since it's not necessary to

completely ramp up the technical writer every time a new project begins. After all, the primary objective of technical writers is to understand what's being documented and then find the best way to communicate information to the target audience. The longer the relationship between the technical writer and the hiring company, the easier it is for technical writer to accomplish that objective.

Technical Writers Can Develop a Broad Level of Expertise

During the course of your technical writing project, it will be necessary for your technical writers to confer with engineers, developers and other subject matter experts within your organization. All of these individuals have extensive knowledge that may be limited to only a few aspects of your product offerings. In time, the technical writer who returns to the same client can increase understanding to the point where the technical writers may become subject matter experts themselves with a well-rounded knowledge of many of the aspects of the overall product. The benefits of such a depth and breadth of knowledge are many, including the technical writer's ability to lead and mentor other technical writers in future projects that require the services of more than one technical writer at a time, and the ability to put his or her knowledge and understanding to use in other areas of the hiring firm, including marketing and in developing both technical and non-technical website content that can be invaluable to the hiring firm's customers and clients.

Technical writers are not just writers. They are communications professionals accustomed to working with highly technical information and complex subjects. As such they may become user advocates, researchers, testers, and publishers. With repeated exposure and experience with the same hiring company and material, they can also be valuable subject matter experts. Perhaps to the extent that the hiring company will find the perfect technical writer who is so invaluable he or she is offered permanent employment.