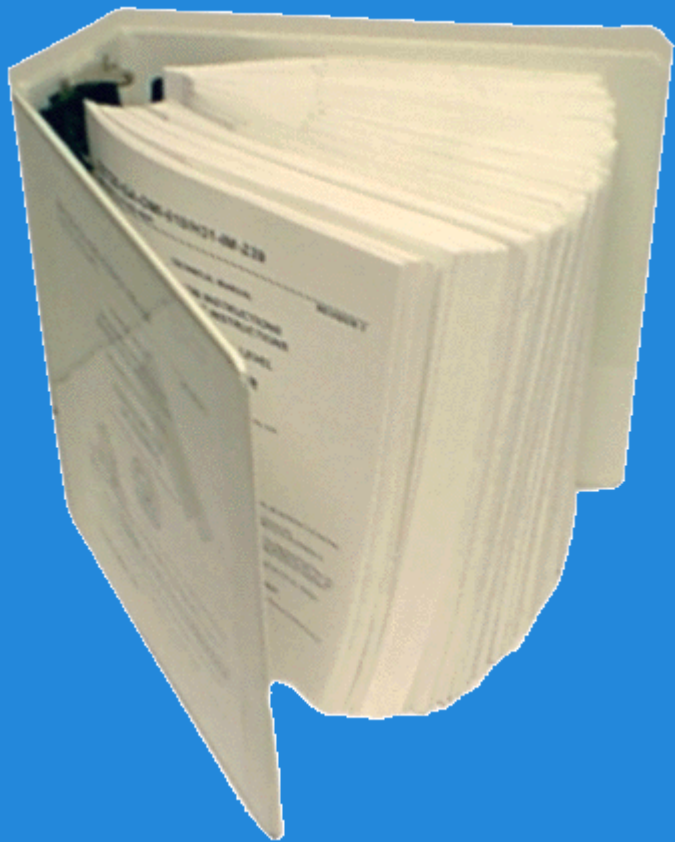# Creating Technical Documentation for Digital Natives

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Changing Needs for Technical Documentation

- Ease of use and scan-ability

- New expectations of design

  - Redish, *Letting Go of the Words*

- Technology provides new affordances

  - Video, audio, social interaction

Technical Communication: Beginnings

- Technical communication seen as a "tool"
- Conversation (Redish)
- Mainly text / image based
  - Technologies
  - Cost of production

How Technology Changed

- Many more methods of production
- More flexibility
- Greater reach
- Ability to interact socially

New Types of Technical Communication

- Instructional videos

- Forums

Welcome
Find and share solutions with Apple users around the world

Search or ask a question

New to the community? Start here.

You Tube

How *We've* Changed

"Thanks to the ubiquity of text on the Internet, not to mention the popularity of text-messaging on cell phones, we may well be reading more today than we did in the 1970's or 1980's, when television was our medium of choice. But it's a different kind of reading, and behind it lies a different kind of thinking – perhaps even a new sense of self" (Carr, 2008, p.1).

Turning Points: Scrolls to Books

- Historical Precedent
  - Scrolls → Books
- "The development of knowledge became an increasingly private act, with each reader creating, in his own mind, a personal synthesis of ideas and information passed down through the writings of other thinkers. The sense of individualism strengthened" (Carr, 2010, p. 67).

Turning Points: Books to Screens

- Major shift from books to screens within last 10 years

- "The ability to skim text is every bit as important as the ability to read deeply. What is different, and troubling, is that skimming is becoming our dominant mode of reading. Once a means to an end, a way to identify information for deeper study, scanning is becoming an end in itself- our preferred way of gathering and making sense of information of all sorts" (Carr, 2010, p. 138).

Digital Natives vs Digital Immigrants

Digital Natives: "Native Speakers" of the digital language of computers, video games and the internet; grew up immersed in technology

Digital Immigrants: Began to use technology at some point later in life; learned how to use it

Characteristics

Digital Natives Prefer:

- Receiving info quickly from multiple sources
- Multitasking and parallel processing
- Pictures, sounds and video before text
- Hyperlinked sources
- Interacting in "real-time"
- User generated content
- Learning that is instant, relevant and fun

Digital Immigrants Prefer:

- Controlled release of info from limited sources
- Single or "focused" tasks
- Often prefer to get information from text
- Greater need for private and personal space for introspection
- Like info presented linearly, logically and sequentially

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Defining Characteristics

- Parallel, not sequential thought

- Visual-spatial skills

- Multi-tasking skills

- Response times

- Mental mapping

Digital Natives: Gathering Information

1. Graze all available information

2. Deep dive

3. Feedback loop

Future of Technical Documentation

- New needs for a complete technical documentation solution

  - Company sponsored forums

  - YouTube or other instructional videos

  - Manual in print and hosted online

How Technical Writers can Facilitate This

- Greater flexibility working with digital technologies
- Be able to produce videos/audio
- Customer support
- Ability to keep up with changing technologies

Reading Recommendations

- Bettles, C. C. (2008). Capturing the imagination of the digital native. *The Massachusetts Cultural Coast Forum,* Boston, MA.
- Carr, N. (2010). *The shallows: What the internet is doing to our brains* (1st ed.). New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Palfrey, J., & Gasser, U. (2008). *Born digital: Understanding the first generation of digital natives* (1st ed.). New York: Basic Books.
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon, 9*(5), 1.