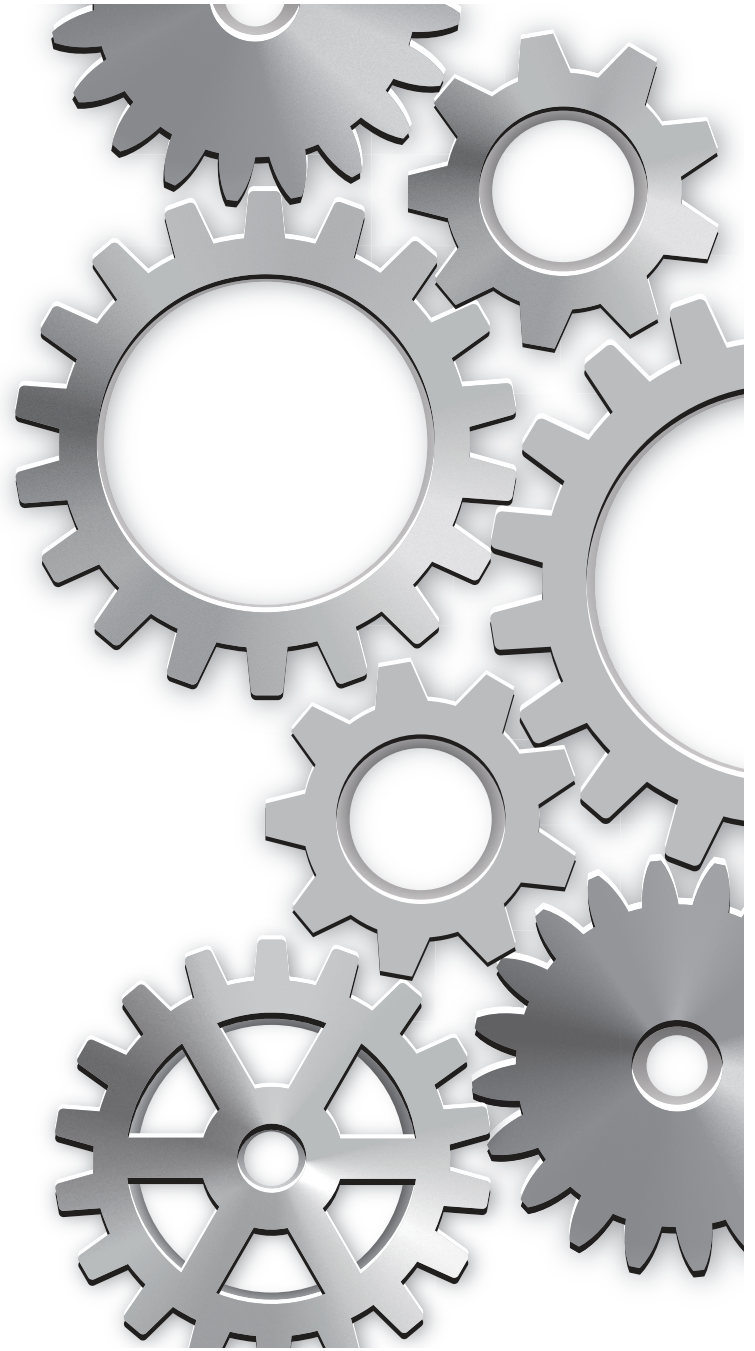


Managing Workflow: Engaging in the Content Development Process



Clients seek vendors who can expertly manage their projects. Beginning a development process sets off a chain of events that builds momentum as the project unfolds. Writers begin researching and developing new material, subject matter experts and content editors revise the first batches of completed work, artists create graphic components to complement content, and copy editors comb through finished work to ensure perfection. With so many parts of project development out of their view, clients benefit from strategies that actively engage them in the process.

Select a vendor that applies extensive knowledge of the development process, uses tools that provide transparency of the project status, and facilitates open communication. A responsive vendor works collaboratively with the client to create a customized project workflow.

While every development process looks a bit different depending on the project, several main components are always in place during well-managed development processes.

Take a Look Inside a Project Development Process

Equip Staff with Resources

Ensure that everyone involved with the project receives adequate training and resources needed to produce excellent work. Focused vendors ask questions such as, “Do the resources available match the intended quality of the project?” Training is the time to:

- establish project specifications
- clarify expectations
- provide resources
- discuss exemplars
- review templates

Information is made accessible to all stakeholders in a secure central location. Pertinent details, such as behind-the-scenes functions in a learning management system, are covered in the training process to prevent delays in the workflow.



Customize the Project Structure

One size does not fit all when it comes to organizing a project structure. Skilled vendors consider the project scope and tailor the development process accordingly. For example, if a project involves creating reading passages with corresponding assessment items, it makes sense to write, revise, and approve the passages before writing the assessment items.



Consider Project Workflow

Within the project development process, many people and teams are working together on a common goal. Proactive vendors consider what order components should be created and revised in and establish the workflow before development begins. Planning the workflow order carefully prevents costly mistakes, such as recording the audio file for a voiceover before the Storyline file is approved in an interactive lesson. Be sure to plan for revisions, including how long it will take each party to review work and provide feedback. Emphasize teamwork and collaboration, and keep lines of communication open to ensure that all parties meet deadlines. A tool that helps team members monitor workflow is a Web-based project tracker that lists each step of the project.





Ready. Set. Go! Execute with Precision.

The development process officially starts when the project tracker goes live and writers begin. Vendor project managers are constantly balancing the need to meet or exceed quality goals and project deadlines. Strategic management of the development process includes tools such as:

A secure file storage system (Web based or FTP)

Establishing a plan for organizing project files saves time and creates an efficient workflow. Managing version control of documents is critical. All team members should follow the same protocol and naming conventions when uploading more recent versions of a document. Ideally, everyone working on the project is able to access all files stored in a secure location.

Project trackers

Using a project tracker offers workflow transparency and unifies all stakeholders by offering a window into the current status of the development process. A project tracker is a live document that promotes collaboration and communication by allowing anyone to get a snapshot of the project at any time. Using project trackers provides several benefits, including:

- organizing and stating workflow
- monitoring progress
- tracking the status of deliverables



Be Vigilant About Quality Assurance

The guiding force in the project development process is quality. Embedding quality assurance features into the workflow timeline keeps all members of the project focused on quality.

Establish quality checks


Reflective vendors examine the quality of deliverables early and often. One way to ensure that all expectations are met is to include a calibration round, when a small sample is submitted for review early on in the project. The client has the opportunity to express any feedback, which then is applied to additional batches of development.

Plan internal status meetings

Depending on the length of a development cycle, internal status meetings are a way to address quality concerns and refine the development process. During a longer project, teams establish check-ins, such as a weekly meeting with lead editors to:

- identify and resolve issues
- observe trends in errors
- provide additional training to troubleshoot problems
- use coaching to team subject-matter experts with writers
- review exemplars and provide revision feedback

For a shorter-length development cycle, it may be more appropriate to send out emails with positive examples and general check-in information in place of an established meeting.

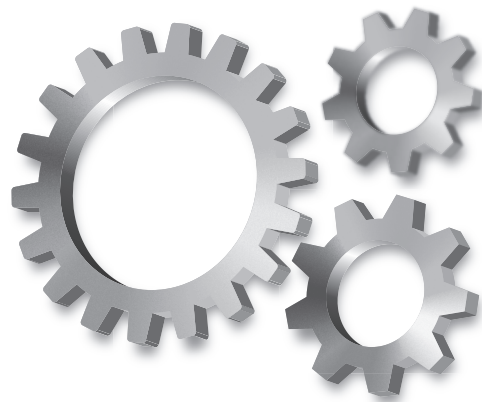




Prepare the Final Product

Consider this final project development step early on. Flexible vendors can submit deliverables in a variety of formats, using a variety of methods. The client indicates how deliverables, or the various components of deliverables, should be delivered.

Managing workflow in the content development process is a dynamic task. Often, there are many project variables and they are frequently changing. Managers must adapt and use proactive tools to look out for potential delays and prevent miscommunication. Intentional practices, such as status meetings and quality checks, guide the development process. Tools such as a project tracker and Web-based file storage system ensure that all stakeholders can access the latest version of documents and up-to-the-minute project status reports. Providing transparency allows the client to take an active role in the development process as well as view behind-the-scenes work as the project is completed.



Vendors with expert knowledge of the development process utilize skills and techniques to structure a project effectively to meet or exceed time, budget, and quality goals.



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