



Managing information By Alan Loveard CEO of ASPAC Consulting Group

Not to trivialise the excellent articles on SitePro News that deal with the use of graphics, design and with the various aspects of SEO to make our website work better, we also need to look seriously at the underlying importance of the information we are attempting to communicate and how best to manage it.

One of the most important tasks is to identify and define the characteristics and information-needs of those with whom we will communicate. This is because different users will each have their own specific requirements in how they access and in what form that information takes.

Say you market a new “widget” to make some aspect of house building faster and easier. Who needs to know about this? Is it the distributor who displays and sells this item to builders? The architect? The specifier? Or does the homeowners need to know how to insist on its incorporation in the design? How about the building authority that must approve its use and the maintenance contractor who may need to fix it later? The answer is of course that ALL these “stakeholders” need information, but NOT always in the same format, or accessed in the same way. While the primary information might be fairly broad, users should be able to “drill down” to different levels of detail according to their needs and authorisation clearance level.

Next, what considerations apply to the features and benefits of our product or service? Do we want to let individuals anywhere in the communication chain create versions of this information for themselves? Don't laugh –the lack of a formal information structure allows this to occur, time and time again, even in the largest corporations. EVERY product and service has definable *properties*. So it makes sense to have these consolidated where they can be developed, updated and managed in a controlled manner. This is where the “Object library” becomes so fundamental. Let's look at an example:

Our “widget” has a particular shape, dimension, load-capacity, fixing method, colour-option and so on. Each of these characteristics may be defined in text, illustrations, charts and tables and *each of these is an “object.”* A set of these objects may be created for *every* element of a business – not just for products, but also for services, sales-materials, POSM, company-procedures, terms and whatever. By creating and maintaining these in a central, common object library, *only* the *approved* versions are available. (There are archiving issues too, of course)

Yes, it is a lot of work to achieve this consistently across a complete business, but the benefits far outweigh the costs by preventing the use of obsolete or “home-grown” versions, as well as reducing keying errors and work-repetition. In practice, a formal approach to information management delivers significant benefits:

- Within the confines of authority-control, structured information becomes universally available to those who need it.
- Web, printed and other material attains a consistent look and feel.
- Pre-defined templates allow custom versions of documents to be created quickly in formats where they conform to the business standards and use the latest approved text, images, specifications etc.
- Print-ready versions allow site users to print their own documents direct from the web, eliminating wastage, cost and inefficiency

In conclusion, lets use some science and structure for our information to complement the other essential communication elements.

About the Author: Alan Loveard is the founder and CEO of a marketing consultancy specialising in Information management, He has broad corporate and SME experience across numerous consumer, industrial, rural and marine sectors