Plant engineering: Optimizing technical documentation with docuglobe

VWS Deutschland GmbH profits from time and cost efficiency in technical documentation thanks to the gds content management system.

Technical documentation is often particularly complex for plant engineering. Unlike for single unit production, it has to be compiled from the documentation for self-made and supplied components. Operating and maintenance manual, composition description, or user manual, multi-language processing, content management and publishing is time-consuming and cost-intensive without a tool for higher-level, modular content management.

VWS Deutschland GmbH, part of Veolia Water Solutions & Technology, relies on the docuglobe content management system from gds for this reason.

Technical documentation should enable the user to handle a plant, machine, or product safely and efficiently. The EU Machinery Directive makes documentation mandatory. The manufacturer can be faced with significant product liability issues if its manual is flawed. Installations as they relate to mechanical engineering and construction often comprise numerous components, some of which are procured from external suppliers. Often, when a plant is delivered, not only do internal and foreign data have to be turned over in the form of an aggregated document consisting of operating and maintenance instructions, drawings, plans, and logs, but the technical documentation usually has to be created in a number of languages, too. Without software support, even minor changes to a system can not only cause major editing and translation costs, but compliance must also be ensured with ISO 9001 requirements for full traceability of changes made.

Sub-optimal data consistency with loose collections of individual texts

Operating internationally, VWS Deutschland GmbH has relied on the content management system docuglobe since 2010. The company, founded in 1892, is a leading provider of water purification and employs about 350 employees at its locations in Celle, Zwenkau, and Bayreuth.

As part of the Veolia Water Solutions & Technology corporate group, VWS Deutschland supplies plants and solutions for treating drinking, process, and waste water. Other active areas include water recycling and creating and implementing “total water management concepts.” The company’s major target industries are the food and beverage industry, energy generation, chemical and pharmaceutical companies, the metal-processing industry, international aid organizations, hospitals, and laboratories.

VWS Deutschland GmbH’s plants comprise many purchased parts in addition to its self-made components. A given product is therefore accompanied by an extensive volume of documentation. The main components of technical documentation at VWS are operating and maintenance manuals. These are between 70 and 150 pages long. Depending on the order, the purchased parts used will add up to 80 pieces of supplier documentation to that. Documentation for power plants can even reach into the thousand-page range.

The technical writers worked with many individual texts before implementing the content management system docuglobe. If documentation was needed for a new project, a similar project from the past would be used as a template. “We didn’t have superordinate content management,” says Alexander Fenske, who is responsible for technical writing at VWS Deutschland GmbH. “This led to sub-optimal data consistency in creating the document as a whole.” Although content for different projects generally overlaps by about 70 percent, the entire document always had to be reviewed for accuracy. The versions of documentation in other languages also had to be fully translated for most new projects, because there was no modular way to manage content. VWS Deutschland GmbH looks for a content management system to minimize time, labor, and costs here. The company ultimately decided on docuglobe.

Fast training in a familiar software environment

The software’s intuitive interface and the use of Microsoft Word as the editor was another key argument to VWS in favor of docuglobe. When creating a module, a document template automatically opens in Word, providing specific formats and auto texts. The writers quickly found their way around the familiar environment. Today, four employees work with the software in the plant manufacturer’s technical documentation department. Recording the contents of documents with docuglobe provides a crucial advantage over manual and inconsistent methods, as gds sales manager Henning Mallok explains. “For different products, machines, or plants that share some of the same content, whenever the technology or law changes in a way that affects all of the products, for example, we no longer have to make corrections to all of the files.” docuglobe users only have to edit the module in question, which is integrated into a fixed spot in all documentation created.

Alexander Fenkse estimated that creating technical documentation takes only about half the time it used to thanks to using the software, because the writers don't have to spend time creating recurring content, but can focus mainly on the project-specific descriptions and instructions. If, for example, a softening plant is produced in different forms, but the control elements are the same, there are large overlaps and only minor differences in the documentation.

The relevant modules are easily combined with docuglobe by using drag ‘n’ drop. Operating and maintenance manuals can be modified directly for different target groups such as installers or service technicians using a variant feature of the software.

With docuglobe’s language management, the user can then forward content to agencies for translation. This means that only individual modules, not the entire document, have to be translated for international adaptation.

After all information modules have been compiled into a document, docuglobe provides the structure, creates the layout and adds graphics and attachments. In this way a uniform corporate design is guaranteed. The technical writers at VWS Deutschland GmbH are overall impressed today: “Thanks to the user-friendly software, we now have access to a growing pool of finalized contents. This increases the consistency of data in our technical documentation. Recurring contents can be easily managed and added to new documentation with a click of the mouse. That lets us concentrate fully on project-specific instructions and descriptions,” says Fenkse.