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Mastering Metadata in Technical Documentation

Make your content easy to find and save valuable time in everyday authoring work!

Content

Introduction	3
What is metadata?	4
From a complete document to a small unit of information	5
Advantages of metadata	7
Who needs metadata?	10
Three myths about metadata	11
Reap the benefits of metadata	13
Three steps for introducing metadata and working with it in the long term	16

Use Case: How BWT AQUA AG uses automated metadata assignment	22
Conclusion	25
Kontakt	26



Introduction

Metadata in Technical Documentation

Graphics, text modules, photos, and even entire operating manuals: technical writing involves juggling huge amounts of information and countless documents every day. It's hard to keep track of it all. If you then want to edit one of thousands of elements, the big search begins. Where was that item filed again?

Metadata is the hidden helper in the background that takes you straight to the information you need. It brings order to the vast jungle of data and saves you a great deal of time..

In this white paper, you will learn why metadata is useful in technical writing and read about those situations where you actually cannot do without it. We also dispel some myths and show you how to introduce metadata step by step.



Eva-Maria Wolf, a professional technical writer, was on hand to provide us with expert advice for this white paper. She is a consultant and project manager at the Quanos subsidiary plusmeta, which specializes in the use of AI-based processes in technical documentation. One example of plusmeta's work is a solution that allows users of the SCHEMA ST4 content management system to assign metadata automatically.

What is metadata?

We come into contact with metadata in many areas of our daily lives: in digital library catalogs when we search for new reading material by title, author or keyword, on our smartphones when we come across an image from years gone by and look to see exactly when we took it, or when we check how many megabytes a file occupies in the file folder.

Metadata describes data. It provides a wide range of information about the content and properties of the data.

In technical writing, metadata is essential for classifying and retrieving data and documents, especially considering the vast amounts of material involved. Whether you're using a component content management system or store Word documents conventionally in a file, **you are using metadata – whether you're aware of it or not.**



From a complete document to a small unit of information

If your company only manufactures a few products and does not sell them abroad – so you don't need translations – up to now your technical writing department may have been able to get by with a word processing system and a graphics program. Typically, you work within a complete document that includes the operating instructions or the maintenance plan for a product, for example.

However, the more variants there are in a product range and the more languages the technical documentation is produced in, the more cumbersome it becomes to work on a complete document. You have to start again from scratch for every new product, variant, and language version. Updates are also very awkward.

Component content management systems offer an intelligent solution. You can use this software to create modular information units (individual texts, graphics, safety instructions, etc.), which are then combined to form one complete document or several different ones.

Using a content management system saves a great deal of time because you can reuse these modules in different places and they can also be easily updated. Metadata comes into play when these small units of information are being organized.

