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Documentation as Code: Making Writing “Technical” Again

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IN THIS PRESENTATION

1. **What does ‘Docs as Code’ mean?**
    a. What is it?
    b. What’s involved?

2. **Benefits**
    a. For writers and developers
    b. For organizations or projects

3. **Challenges**
    a. For writers and developers
    b. Technical

WHAT DOES ‘DOCS AS CODE’ MEAN?

Writing, testing, publishing, and maintaining documentation using the same tools developers use for software code.

Goals

- ❑ Content authoring
- ❑ Formatting, styling
- ❑ Version control
- ❑ Issue tracking
- ❑ Testing, validation
- ❑ Publishing

Tools

- ➔ Text editors
- ➔ Markup languages
- ➔ Git, SVN, Mercurial, ...
- ➔ JIRA, BugZilla, Mantis, ...
- ➔ Scripts, linters, spell-checks
- ➔ Site builders, CMS, ...

CONTENT AUTHORING

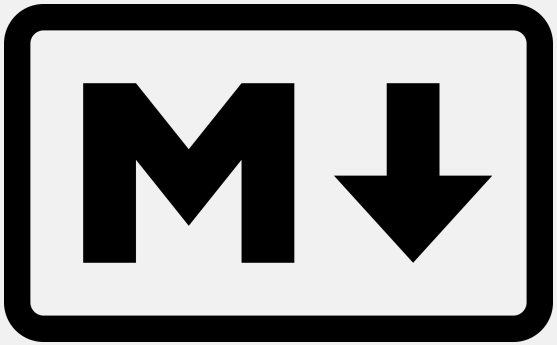
→ TEXT EDITORS

- Writers have freedom of choice
- Advanced batch operations
- Using external tools to process text

FORMATTING, STYLING

→ MARKUP LANGUAGES

- Universal readability (plain text)
- Syntax validation
- (More or less) semantic, i.e. parseable



VERSION CONTROL

→ GIT AND CO.

- Distributed, decentralized (Git)
- Integral peer-review workflows
- Docs can share space with code
- Public hosting & on-premise deployment

git

mercurial

ISSUE TRACKING

→ BUGZILLA, JIRA, ...

- Integration with version control
- API hooks (e.g. generating ‘release notes’)
- Agile facilitation

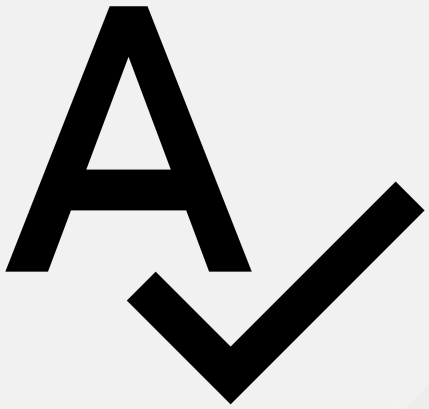
TESTING, VALIDATION

→ SCRIPTS, LINTERS

- Continuous integration
- Customizable, extendable
- Link validity, component checking
- Semantic syntax parsing

BASH

THE BOURNE-AGAIN SHELL



PUBLISHING

→ SITE GENERATORS, CMS, ...

- Continuous deployment
- Local and on-production building
- Containerized toolchains (multi-platform)

GitBook

Drupal™

BENEFITS

FOR WRITERS & DEVELOPERS

- **Developers** familiar with toolchain
  - Contributions from developers
  - Fly-by contributions
  - Community contributions (if open source)

- **Writers** integrated with developer teams
  - Involved with product planning
  - Included in the **definition of done**
  - Easier collaboration with QA
  - Sense of common responsibility

BENEFITS

FOR ORGANIZATION, PROJECT

- **No vendor lock-in**
  - Future-proof format & tools
  - Easy switching to different formats & tools

- **Tighter collaboration** between teams, depts.
  - Unified, streamlined workflows
  - Efficiency (automation)
  - Aligning releases with publishing

CHALLENGES FOR WRITERS & DEVELOPERS

- Resistance from **writers**
  - Training for writers may be needed
  - Steep learning curve
  - Many tools with single-purpose function (vs monolithic docs system) - tools may seem too difficult, yet simple

- Resistance from **developers**
  - Documentation slows down ‘done’
  - Corrections more visible; hurt pride

CHALLENGES

TECHNICAL

- Content preparation
  - (Potentially) non-trivial conversion
  - Release disruption

- Technical support & administration (depending on scope)
  - IT resources
  - IT staff

DISCUSSION

- Your experience?
- Tools of choice?
- Development models?
- When adopting a new system
  - Convert existing?
  - Start from scratch?
- Metadata?
- Peer-review approaches?

THANK YOU

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