LOGICAL DESIGN SOLUTIONS®

Delivering Content that Matters

An LDS white paper
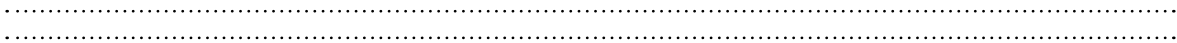
Employees, as business consumers, expect consumer-grade digital experiences

when they are at work. Innovations in content delivery, combined with increasingly sophisticated abilities to harness the power of data, have led them to expect instant access to personalized content when and where they want it. The delivery of relevant, contextualized experiences is now so pervasive most people don't realize how well it works until they don't have it. Compounding these factors is the growing presence of tech-savvy Millennials in the workforce. As a generation born and raised in a digital world, they are shaping how information is created, distributed and managed. A challenge every HR organization now faces is how to deliver the right content, to the right people, at the right time. It's the consumerization of HR.

The consumerization of HR content, the digitization of the enterprise, and an alignment between the external brand and internal culture is imperative. Organizations that don't keep up with these trends when imagining, or re-imagining, their digital employee experience risk alienating a large percentage of their workforce.

A responsive design is a good start, but it isn't enough. The goal of responsive design is to build web pages that detect the visitor's screen size and orientation and change the layout accordingly. It does not affect the actual content being delivered. Every person receives the same information, regardless of their unique needs.

Adaptive content, which uses responsive design, delivers the most personalized, contextual content available, and provides the means for creating essential digital experiences. For truly flexible content that meets the individual needs of a vast group of users, you need a comprehensive content strategy – one that delivers the content that users want, when and how they want it.

Content Strategy Dimensions

A content strategy is the cumulative outputs of iterative phases of analysis that span business goals, user intents, personas, and technology. It informs how an experience will deliver the right content to the right people at the right time.

Understand business goals
The purpose of a content strategy is to support a user experience that advances business goals.

A thorough understanding of business goals is the backbone of our content strategy. We work with business analysts and stakeholders to create a content strategy that helps enable businesses to reach their goals.

Understand users and their needs
In order to deliver contextually relevant content, we seek to understand users and their goals, and determine how to best provide value while advancing business goals.

We rely on personas and journey maps created in conjunction with our UX team to provide deep insight into user needs, behaviors, and motivations. This knowledge guides every aspect of our content strategy.

Structure content to best support users
Well-designed content incorporates features and abilities that are the outcomes of use cases and structural plans.

We don't just write content; we model and design structured content to add real user value. We deliver a content strategy that is an output of research and architectural design, and early design concepts.

Determine when adaptive content is appropriate
The use case for adaptive content needs to be carefully considered. When adaptive content is required, additional, sometimes complex, business rules are required.

Adaptive content needs to know when and how to flex. We work with business partners and architects to define business rules that will dictate the "who, what, and when" of content presentation.

Design for content
Defining the presentation is an iterative process, but the fundamentals need to be considered early in the strategic process.

We bridge the gap between content and UX by specifying clear content designs and functions, based on user analysis. We work closely with architects to ensure our strategies are feasible, and with IT to ensure they are achievable.

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Employees as Consumers: Meeting Emerging Expectations

In just four years it is expected that the most technologically savvy generation of our time -- Millennials -- will make up 50% of the workforce in the U.S.[1] With their unique generational attributes, Millennials are changing how organizations recruit, train, reward, and communicate with employees. They expect workplace technology to align to the seamless, personal and empowering experiences they encounter outside of the workplace. Organizations need to deliver consumer-grade digital experiences. Those that keep up with these trends will have a workforce that is more engaged, collaborative and productive. Organizations that don't keep up risk alienating a large percentage of their workforce.

When an organization's internal culture is not reflective of their external brand, the misalignment can negatively affect everything from recruiting and retention, to internal knowledge sharing, managerial effectiveness, and overall day-to-day efficiencies. Creating a mobile version of a web application that works on a smartphone is a step toward creating a multi-channel experience, where an employee can interact with the same content, using the device of their choosing. The next evolution, an omni-channel experience, leverages corporate assets and data to harmonize the multi-channel experience, blurring the distinction between channels to provide a unified story. When organizations envision and invest in an omni-channel employee experience in the same way they envision the customer experience, issues of employee engagement are addressed holistically. (Learn more about the omni-channel experience by watching A Blurred Line and the Omni-channel Experience.)

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PLAN FOR FUTURE-FRIENDLY CONTENT

One area where organizations should focus their attention is delivering essential digital experiences and capabilities based on user needs, behaviors, and attributes. The experience a new hire requires vastly differs from that of a seasoned manager, which differs from the employee who is approaching retirement. Recognizing this fact is a step towards realizing that not only does the delivery of HR content need to adapt (*the how*), but the actual information provided needs to adapt (*the what*). HR content needs to be freed from the repositories in which it is currently held captive, and adapt to this changing environment.

When we free content from the confines of design and device specifications, we make it future-friendly. Future-friendly content has been structured and stored outside any user interface[2]. It requires a content strategy that places an emphasis on the content itself, not the delivery channel. As the channels and devices on which people rely continue to grow and change — from laptops to tablets to phones to watches (to who knows what's next) — we can no longer be safe in our assumptions regarding how, or when, people will interact with content. We must move away from static, unstructured content, and move towards dynamic, flexible, structured content. Structured content is the first step in creating adaptive content -- a key to providing contextual, personalized employee experiences.
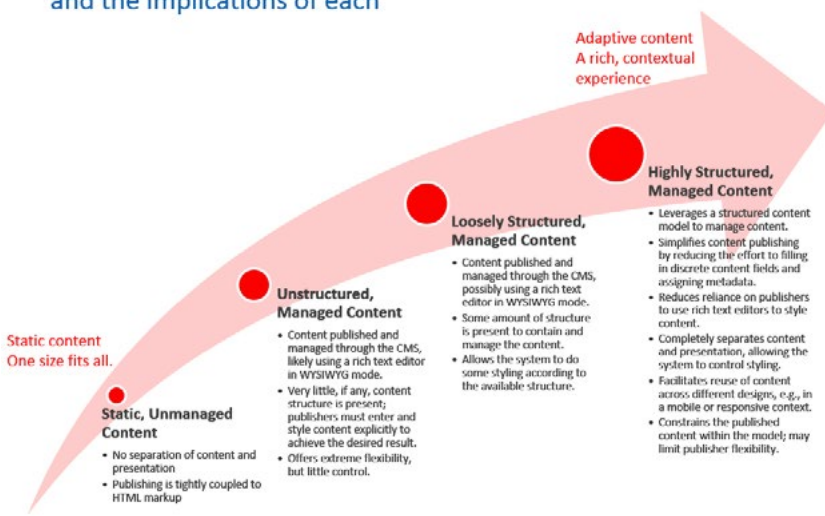
CREATE FLEXIBLE CONTENT

Unstructured content, often in the form of large bodies of text, tends to be a by-product of most content management systems and web production tools that rely on WYSIWYG editors. While useful for content publishers, content created in this way is constrained by the page format, is not device agnostic, and lacks opportunities for content reuse. It is not flexible. It cannot adapt. It may look good on a single web page, but chances are that's the extent of its value. This one-size-fits-one approach to content design no longer works.

Structured content, content that has been broken down into discrete pieces, can be combined in different ways, for different devices, contexts, and audiences. By structuring content, it becomes more flexible and can be used to form unique experiences, without creating new content for every use case. Structured content takes advantage of a method commonly referred to as COPE (create once, publish everywhere.) Because it's easier to create, manage, and deliver, structured content can reduce costs. (Although structured content may require some up-front investment, the payoff comes later when efficiencies in publishing and content reuse are realized.) Structure unifies content, regardless of who is writing it. This is important as most organizations rely on content authors who work individually, across divisions, and are often producing content secondary to their primary jobs.

A structured content approach considers the purpose of each piece of content from various perspectives, including reuse opportunities, scenarios of use, audience variability, and relevancy. Once the strategy is established, content models are created to support a structured content design. This process is iterative and involves a team with cross-functional expertise, including content strategists, UX designers, architects, and engineers.

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Varying degrees of content structure and the implications of each

Adaptive content
A rich, contextual experience

Highly Structured, Managed Content
- Leverages a structured content model to manage content.
- Simplifies content publishing by reducing the effort to filling in discrete content fields and assigning metadata.
- Reduces reliance on publishers to use rich text editors to style content.
- Completely separates content and presentation, allowing the system to control styling.
- Facilitates reuse of content across different designs, e.g., in a mobile or responsive context.
- Constrains the published content within the model; may limit publisher flexibility.

Loosely Structured, Managed Content
- Content published and managed through the CMS, possibly using a rich text editor in WYSIWYG mode.
- Some amount of structure is present to contain and manage the content.
- Allows the system to do some styling according to the available structure.

Unstructured, Managed Content
- Content published and managed through the CMS, likely using a rich text editor in WYSIWYG mode.
- Very little, if any, content structure is present; publishers must enter and style content explicitly to achieve the desired result.
- Offers extreme flexibility, but little control.

Static content
One size fits all.

Static, Unmanaged Content
- No separation of content and presentation
- Publishing is tightly coupled to HTML markup

DELIVER ESSENTIAL DIGITAL EXPERIENCES

An established content strategy, and a defined approach towards structured content, allows an HR organization to consider how they can move beyond useful experiences and start delivering essential experiences. A *useful experience* is one that provides access to important systems and information for all employees. An *essential experience* is one that becomes a personal assistant for employees in managing their day-to-day needs at work, providing targeted information and tools that are timely, helpful, useful, even inspiring — and always "just for me."

When an organization commits to creating essential digital employee experiences, the use of adaptive content is critical. Adaptive content uses responsive design and structured content to deliver flexible, relevant content — through personalization rules, data, and sometimes by taking advantage of device capabilities. In this way, organizations are able to provide relevant, personalized content that meets the unique needs of individual users.

As its name implies, adaptive content is designed to adapt to the needs of the user, *delivering the right content*, to the *right person*, at the *right time.* It delivers content that is:

- device-specific
- user-specific
- context-specific

That means adaptive content can:

- Deploy the best content experience for any channel
- Optimize responsive design by tailoring content volume to its presentation
- Allow user entitlements to determine who can see what content
- Support translated content across multiple languages
- Enable sophisticated content targeting
- Deliver personalized recommendations and attention management
- Support an omni-channel employee experience

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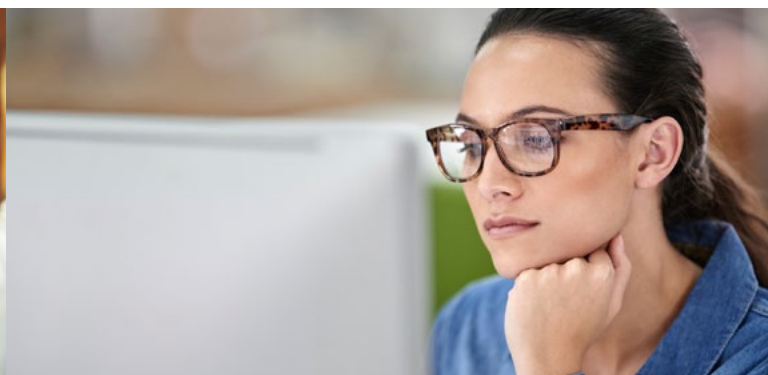
RECOGNIZE THE CHALLENGES

Creating an adaptive content experience inside the enterprise is not without its challenges. Bottom-up content approaches are typically entrenched and can't be abandoned without substantial operational and compliance-related consequences. Often, many content owners are involved, who are dispersed across countries, languages, and areas of the business. Legal regulations make adapting or truncating content for different devices impractical. Transactional systems and third-party sites may be deeply integrated within the portal experience, limiting opportunities to apply adaptive content practices. Additionally, an enterprise portal can comprise tens of thousands of pages and hundreds of thousands of assets, requiring intensive use of resources to implement a brand-new content strategy, let alone one based on complex business rules to support an adaptive experience that delivers personalized, contextualized content.

However, not all content in an employee experience can or should be adaptive. For example, policies and legal caveats might not make good adaptable content, whatever technology might enable – but the summary information, process support, and applicability criteria that make them meaningful often does.
Knowing when content should adapt is influenced by several factors, and varies by organizational needs. Minimally, the following inputs need to be considered:

- Business goals
- User research
- Technical capabilities
- Organization capabilities

Armed with this information, an adaptive approach takes shape that enables a business to reach their goals, by delivering contextually relevant content that can be technically supported.

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The Road Ahead

While most organizations have a long way to go in realizing a structured content environment that can support an adaptive experience, there are often opportunities to move in the right direction. These include opportunities to take static, poorly presented, difficult to use content and make it better.

At LDS, we choose to embrace the content constraints of intranet portals as opportunities for innovation. Our approach is to leverage adaptive content strategies to make it easy for users to find the information they need most, while deploying creative tactics to improve findability for resources that aren't adaptive-ready.

Consider, for instance, life events content – getting married, having or adopting a baby, getting divorced, retiring. Each scenario requires different information, but there are content elements across scenarios that are common, including an introduction, a list of things to do, supporting documents, a related transactional system. This is an opportunity to structure, to see the content in "chunks", define those chunks, and apply this structure across all life events. In doing so, your content is closer to being able to adapt, and more accessible to all users.

Undergoing a content transformation is a lot of work, but given the changing demographics of the workforce, planning today for how your content could be used in the future is liberating – and your users expect it.

1. Maximizing Millennials in the Workplace   2. Designing Future-Friendly Content: Modeling Structure for Every User Interface

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🖋 An LDS white paper

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