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Fiona Heathcote describes her day...

Before I describe my day, let me introduce myself. I work as a technical author for a part of Alcatel-Lucent called Velocix. We design and build Content Delivery Networks (CDNs) for content providers around the world. I'm guessing that many of you will not have heard anything about CDNs before but, if you've ever watched a film online or devoured the latest box set "on-demand", the chances are that you used a CDN without even knowing it! The availability of TV programmes is changing with new services, like catch-up TV, which rely on technologies such as CDNs. It's an exciting industry to be involved in at the moment.

The technical documentation for a CDN is very broad; the audience spans content providers to systems administrators and integration engineers, and covers a wide range of technical areas including Internet Protocols (IP) and networking, media formats and content encryption. I think I learn something new most days.

I'm incredibly lucky in that I wear many different hats in this job; in some ways, the title 'technical author' doesn't really convey the variety of activities that I do on a day-to-day basis. Here is a 'typical' day for me...

I usually get into work before 8 am as the office is quiet and this gives me the opportunity to catch up on my emails. I scan what's new but also check those emails I've sent which, as yet, haven't been answered and require a gentle reminder. Then I check my calendar to prioritise what I need to do for the rest of the day.

Like the software development teams

here, we have adopted an Agile approach, breaking down our work into user stories and working on these in two week sprints. So my final early morning check is to see how our sprint is progressing. If it's near the end, I check what is planned for our next sprint to make sure there are no surprises.

By 9 am the open plan office is buzzing with activity and this is when my day gets interesting.

The first meeting of the day is a Sprint Review with one of teams in Chennai, India. While it is still early in the morning for us, it is late in the afternoon for them. This conference call provides the opportunity to find out how the new functionality works, and what it looks like. This brings the feature to life, providing a richness that a set of acceptance criteria just cannot convey. Once the demonstration has finished, there's the opportunity to ask questions about those details that make all the difference to the documentation: field names, log files and the all-important configuration settings. For me, these review meetings are as much about reminding the engineering teams there



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is an end user, who may not have as comprehensive an understanding of how our CDN works, as they are about seeing the software in action.

Then I'm off to a meeting with the Product team to discuss how we are going to integrate our documentation into the redesigned product dashboard. Much of the discussion is about how we, the documentation team, can be involved earlier in the process so that we can work with the engineering teams as the user interface evolves. The tight coupling of the technical documentation to the user interface is changing the way we work and creating dependencies that were never there before.

This work is really exciting: not only is it changing the way we work with the engineering teams but it is also providing us with the opportunity to update and improve the structure of the existing

documentation set. The information that currently resides in a set of PDF manuals can blossom into a fully featured online format. This challenge makes a change from just adding to and embellishing the documentation that already exists.

However, as this is only a small part of the documentation we have to produce for the next release, we get together to discuss how to break this task up to into smaller tasks, focusing on those that must be done rather than trying to complete everything.

After a quick bite to eat and a bit of fresh air, I put on my Scrum Master hat and take the tasks we defined in our meeting before lunch and add those to our backlog so that we can estimate their size. This helps us to understand how long the work is going to take us and to communicate our documentation goals to the product owners and the Programme Manager.

Now my focus shifts again and I can finally put on my technical author's hat. I review the feature I'm writing up, deciding which target audience I'm writing for and deciding which of the notes made by the developer are important. I also consider the existing documentation to see if this new functionality changes any of the guidance that we have provided already. So often a minor engineering change leads to a significant change to the documentation. One new field in the user interface, if configured incorrectly, may disrupt a customer's service to their consumers. If I have done my job correctly, they should have all the information at their fingertips and the next episode of that new box set will play perfectly.

After a quick proof read, I package up the new and updated topics for review by the other technical authors and the subject matter experts. While I'm waiting for feedback, I take the opportunity to go through the review comments from a previous piece of work.

Then it's time to go to home and recharge my batteries for tomorrow. **C**

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