Information Development in a Flat World

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Global collaboration among information developers was the theme of our 8th annual Best Practices conference of The Center for Information- Development Management (CIDM) in September 2006. The senior managers presenting at the conference discussed the increasing global reach of their organizations. They have worldwide customers requiring information in multiple languages. They have global organizations with information developers in many countries and whose first language is often not English. They find themselves collaborating with colleagues in product development, marketing, customer support, and training to produce and disseminate information. They are continually challenged to reduce costs and time to market while increasing the value of their contributions to the corporate bottom line.

In this address, I paint a picture of the pressures under which information-development managers work and how they are transforming their organizations to be better aligned with corporate objectives. The transformations require significant new skills and competencies among staff members. The rather free-wheeling creativity fostered by an over-emphasis on desktop publishing is rapidly being replaced by a manufacturing discipline. New information developers must be versed in topic-based authoring, writing for use in more than one context. They must be familiar with international standards such as DITA, DocBook, XML, XLIFF, and others. They are most valuable if they are knowledgeable about the disciplines of information architecture, information design, content management, translation coordination, and customer and usability studies. They need the discipline required to function well in a structured-authoring, controlled-language environment. They must have the technical education and experience to understand the technologies about which they write without trivializing the content. And, they must recognize that unless they can continually prove their worth to management inside and outside their departments, their positions will be outsourced to lower-cost economies.

Join me in an examination of the latest requirements for successful information-development careers.