

Information Architecture ROI



- A white paper by Susan Kraft-Yorke



Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Executive summary	3
The problem: documentation sprawl	4
Strategic solution: Information architecture	4
How IA drives ROI in documentation	5
Quantifying ROI with IA metrics	5
Recommended implementation approach	10
Building the business case with leadership	10
Summary	11
Conclusion	11
Contact us	11
References and some calculation references	12

Introduction

Even experts know that rebuilding a messy content structure isn't trivial. But the real issue is hidden. The hemorrhaging is in the daily hidden costs.

Employees spend up to 1.8 hours per day (~25–30% of their workday) hunting for documents across fragmented drives and outdated versions.

Their energy is shifting to anger. They've lost precious time they will never make up. The solution is to implement a well-designed Information Architecture to restore order. Well-organized content makes it easier to find, eliminates version confusion, and cuts costly mistakes down to trivial levels.

The bottom line is that planned information architecture dramatically reduces search times, produces fewer errors, and shows measurable savings, between a 200 and 300 percent return.

Executive summary

Technical documentation is a high-value corporate asset that is too often unmanaged. Outdated or duplicate files waste employee time, create support backlogs, and complicate audits. Inaccurate information can spread unchecked, resulting in costly errors.

A structured information architecture approach transforms documentation into a measurable business advantage. By archiving obsolete content, reorganizing evergreen material, and implementing a searchable, well-structured repository, organizations can:

- Cut wasted time and support costs.
- Reduce compliance and audit risk.
- Eliminate duplicate effort and error propagation.
- Achieve ROI of 200 to 300 percent, often within one year.

When documentation is integrated with the development lifecycle, it becomes a competitive differentiator. Version-controlled, peer-reviewed, and continuously maintained content stays accurate, discoverable, and aligned with the product. The result is leaner operations, faster onboarding, improved compliance, and greater customer trust.

The problem: documentation sprawl

Legacy documents like fragmented folders, untagged legacy files, and redundant versions. Does this scenario seem familiar? At best, this style of document handling diminishes effectiveness; at worst, it demoralizes team members, who feel their time is wasted. It makes them concerned about anything they did find and read, or passed on to a high-tier customer.

Other team members may waste time by recreating missing content or interrupt other people's day chasing down files, asking the same question they heard from another person yesterday.

These issues mirror those faced by organizations lacking proper asset tracking: duplicated efforts, compliance blind spots and unnecessary costs.

Strategic solution: Information architecture

Adopting a robust IA strategy involves:

- Identifying, classifying and archiving obsolete or redundant documentation.
- Tagging and reorganizing evergreen technical content using metadata, versioning and taxonomy.
- Constructing a unified documentation repository and static site optimized for discoverability and comprehension.

This approach transforms documentation into a high-value asset, akin to systematic fixed asset tracking.

Tailored solutions

Would you like a way to survey internal stakeholders? How about a report calculating baseline search costs, or mapping metadata taxonomies for IA planning? Maybe everyone knows this is a problem and you want to dive into the solution side of the equation. If you answered yes to any of those concepts, Kraft Consulting can help.

How IA drives ROI in documentation

The ROI you receive by making information easier to find directly impacts how quickly a search takes and stops duplicating efforts. More benefits are fewer questions, lower support costs, with fewer interruptions.

Fewer interruptions improve productivity and compliance outcomes.

Improved productivity and labor savings

Workers spend significant time locating correct and current information—studies show up to five hours weekly can be lost, representing ~12–13% of a workweek (A. Covert 2022). That benchmark is low compared to 20% workweek benchmarked by other papers on the hidden costs of information work (*International Data Corporation, McKinsey Global Institute, and Gartner*). A well-structured IA can lower search time by 30-40%, freeing valuable staff hours for more strategic tasks.

Reduction in errors and duplication

Clear structure and metadata reduce the need to recreate content and prevent users from working with outdated or incorrect documents. Improved documentation quality also lowers support tickets and miscommunication.

Audit readiness and compliance efficiency

Organized documentation supports audit readiness. As with enterprise asset systems, structured documentation systems reduce audit ([Ref. 1](#)).

Cost avoidance through better control

Eliminating duplicates, outdated files and ghost documentation reduces operational waste. Proper IA avoids wasted writing effort, mitigates misinformation and supports alignment across teams.

Quantifying ROI with IA metrics

A practical ROI framework includes:

- Baseline metrics: hours lost to document search, support ticket volumes, and time spent onboarding or servicing auditors.

- Improvement metrics: percent reduction in search time, support requests, audit prep time and duplicate document creation.

Estimated annual savings might include:

- One hour per week saved per technical staff member at \$50/hr¹ yields ~\$2,600 per person annually.
Note: If searching for docs is a daily occurrence, one hour per day @ \$50/hr is \$13,000 per person annually.
- Substantial reduction in support tickets with associated labor cost savings.
- Audit preparation reduced from 15 days to 3 days per year, freeing staff capacity
- Eliminated duplicate documentation and rewrite costs.

Based on studies of document management ROI, organizations often realize a **200–400% return over three years**. Conservative internal estimates typically show **200–300% ROI within the first year**, with payback in 4–6 months.

¹ \$50/hr is used in all calculations in this paper

Concrete Example: Mid-sized professional services firm

Consider a professional services firm with 200-500 employees that handles approximately 50,000 documents annually. We'll use costs that are seen as industry standards.²

Pre IA set up (past cost)	Post IA Investment (3-year) \$374,000
Legacy document system annual licensing: \$75,000	Implementation: \$30,000 (one-time)
On-premises infrastructure costs: \$45,000/year (servers, storage, maintenance)	Migration: \$80,000 (one-time)
IT support time for document system: 0.5 Full-Time equiv. (\$60,000/year)	Training: \$12,000 (one-time)
Physical document storage: \$15,000/year	New offsite-document management system licensing: \$35,000/year (\$105,000 for 3 years) <i>[MkDocs option is nearly free]</i>
Employee time spent searching for documents: 30 min/day per knowledge worker (150 workers × 30 min × \$40/hr × 230 work days = \$690,000/year)	Cloud infrastructure: \$25,000/year (\$75,000 for 3 years)
Compliance management: 2 Full-Time equiv. (\$200,000/year)	IT support time: 0.2 Full-Time equiv. (\$24,000/year, \$72,000 for 3 years)

² Exact quotes vary between organizations as the scope and requirements vary for every business case.

Quantifiable Benefits (3-year)

The following table shows the ROI in terms of updated infrastructure tech stack, manual upkeep and support hours. The total benefits over three years is approximately \$1,305,000.

Savings over 3 years \$	Tools	Processes	Specifics
\$180,000	System and infrastructure	-	Lower licensing and Infrastructure cost
\$54,000	-	IT support time	Moved to existing engineering system
\$45,000	Eliminated on prem machines	-	-
\$621,000* ³	-	-	Search time reduction (30%)
\$180,000	-	-	Compliance efficiency improvement (30%)
~ \$225,000	-	Process automation savings	-
Sum total = \$1,305,00			

ROI calculation approach

For document management migrations, organizations typically maintain parallel systems during transition periods of 3-6 months or longer. Given this reality, a full investment approach that accounts for all costs provides the most realistic assessment:

$$ROI = (Total\ Benefits - Total\ Investment) / Total\ Investment \times 100\%$$

Total **Benefits** = **\$1,305,000** (over 3 years)

Total **Investment** = One-time costs + Recurring costs = \$122,000 + \$252,000 = **\$374,000**

ROI = (\$1,305,000 - \$374,000) / \$374,000 × 100% = **249%**

This shows the organization would recoup its investment in approximately 10 months⁴.

³ Current search time cost: \$690,000/year × 3 years = \$2,070,000
30% reduction = \$2,070,000 × 0.3 = \$621,000

⁴ Based on total benefits of \$1,305,000 spread over 36 months, resulting in an average monthly benefit of \$36,250.

During the parallel operations period, organizations will incur costs for both systems while gradually realizing the benefits of the new system. This approach properly accounts for this transition reality and provides a conservative and realistic assessment of the financial returns.

Measurement tools: Using analytic tools to track user behavior

Analytics tools, such as Google Analytics, provide valuable insights into user behavior. By tracking metrics like page views, bounce rates and conversion rates, organizations can understand how users interact with their product or service.

Conducting user research and testing

User research and testing are crucial for understanding user needs and preferences. By conducting usability testing, user interviews and surveys, organizations can gather qualitative and quantitative data to inform UX design decisions.

Leveraging A/B testing to inform design decisions

If you cannot decide without data to back up your choice, use A/B testing to determine the best path. A/B testing is also known as split testing, compares two versions of a product or service to determine which one performs better.

By testing different design variations, organizations can make data-driven decisions and optimize the design.

Recommended implementation approach

To prepare to implement an IA plan, start with a documentation audit. Depending on your authors' relationships with their files, you could walk through the list of files with an accounting sheet, marking which files to keep and which ones to remove or archive. Or you may need usage analytics, edit timestamps and stakeholder input to classify each document as evergreen, redundant, or archival.

Archive deprecated files into long-term storage. For evergreen content, apply rich metadata (topic, version, author, audience) and ensure consistent taxonomy.

Design documentation repository and static site with fast search and intuitive navigation underpinned by IA principles with your IT department. Apply workflows for automating archival triggers, periodic review reminders and usage monitoring.

Track ongoing performance metrics: document access rates, support volume trends, search satisfaction scores and time saved in onboarding and audits.

Building the business case with leadership

You may need to collect data from your company's stakeholders to determine the level of discordance and pain points, such as searching inefficiencies, redundancy, inaccurate results, and audit burdens. Quantify the hidden costs of maintaining the current state and how these costs will escalate without action.

Use benchmarks from document management studies shown here or from other papers to support the case for investment. Link Information Architecture improvements to measurable outcomes, such as:

- engineer hours reclaimed
- support ticket costs reduced
- compliance risks mitigated
- faster onboarding.

Emphasize the intangible benefits as well. Higher-quality documentation improves developer morale, reduces burnout, increases customer satisfaction, and fosters a more professional, knowledge-driven culture.

Summary

Technical documentation is a **high-value corporate asset** that is too often unmanaged. Outdated or duplicate files waste employee time, create support backlogs and complicate audits. Inaccurate information can spread unchecked, resulting in costly errors.

A structured **information architecture** approach transforms documentation into a measurable business advantage, as shown by:

- Cutting wasted time and support costs.
- Reduced compliance and audit risk.
- Eliminating duplicate effort and error propagation.
- Achieving a ROI of 200 to 300 percent, often within one year.

When documentation is integrated with the development lifecycle, it becomes a competitive differentiator. Once your documentation is set up to be evergreen and findable, your users have access to:

- Version-controlled
- Peer-reviewed
- Discoverable
- Continuously maintained accurate content

The result is leaner operations, faster onboarding, improved compliance, and greater customer trust.

Conclusion

The most successful organizations recognize that document management is not merely an IT cost center but a strategic investment that delivers measurable returns through operational efficiency, risk reduction and improved decision-making capabilities.

Contact us

Click [Help! We need to clean up our docs.](#)

References and some calculation references

1. [The ROI of Modern Document Management: Reducing costs and risks, understanding the real value and investment calculation for your document management system](#)
2. [Information Architecture 101 for Technical Writers](#)
3. [Technical Documentation: Cost or Investment?](#)
4. [Best Practices for Technical Architecture Documentation](#)
5. [What is Knowledge Base Architecture?](#)
6. [How to Stop Wasting 20% of Your Day Searching for Information.](#)
7. [Does Your Workforce Spend Too Much Time Searching for Information?](#)
8. [What is Information Architecture and how can we benefit from it?](#)
9. [The importance of information architecture.](#)
10. [What Is Information Architecture & Why Does It Matter?](#)
11. [Here's how you can evaluate information architecture comprehensively](#)
12. [How can you measure the effectiveness of your information architecture?](#)
13. [How can you evaluate and compare different information architecture options?](#)
14. [How can you measure the success of your information architecture?](#)
15. [The Complexities of Measuring AI ROI](#)
16. [How can companies effectively measure the ROI of their business intelligence initiatives?](#)
17. [Top 5 Returns on Investment \(ROI\) from Document Management](#)
18. "The High Cost of Not Finding Information", 2001 IDC Report
19. "The Hidden Costs of Information Work", 2005 IDC Report
20. "Information Is Useless If It Can't Be Found and Retrieved", 2018, Medium
21. "Bridging the Information Worker Productivity Gap", 2012, [warekennis.nl](#)
22. "Neglecting Small Data Risks Big Problems", 2014, Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology News
23. "Loses a document", 2017, LuitBiz DMS

GitHub hosting for 100,000 files is generally free, provided they are in a standard repository under the 1 GB size limit, or use GitHub Pages for public hosting. Costs arise if using Git Large File Storage (LFS) for, e.g., (>1) GB of large files, which costs \(\$0.07\) per GB/month.

Hosting a "docs as code" MkDocs static site for 50,000 files can cost anywhere from \$0 per month to tens of dollars per month, depending on the hosting provider and specific usage (storage/bandwidth). The MkDocs software is free.

Alternate SMART Communications is a top document automation software platform with enterprise-level, compliance-focused pricing listed at \$35,000 per year. Primarily in highly regulated industries such as insurance, financial services, healthcare, and government. The platform is recognized for its focus on compliance, enterprise-level capabilities, and integration with systems like Salesforce, Guidewire, and Duck Creek

