

Boosting Value in a Technical Manual

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I can't say I know anyone who would call an operations manual "riveting" or a "real page turner"—but here at Corporate Project Services we treat these resources as an opportunity to add value for our clients.

Though technical in nature, we look at them as a communication tool that we use to help our clients bridge the gap between ideas and execution. All of us at CPS, and Wenger Manufacturing as a whole, strive to create this kind of value each and every day—and that covers everything from equipment to processes to our consulting services...and even our operations manuals.

I lead the Technical Publications Group for CPS, and our objective is to create instructional resources that empower clients to get the most productivity possible from their Wenger equipment. What we create includes installation, how to run it and adjust settings, cleaning and sanitation, how to tie it to other pieces of equipment, and more, depending on the clients' needs.

We don't look at each project as just another technical manual; we see it as an opportunity to offer something useful and beneficial to clients. That requires thinking beyond our technical expertise to capture what's relevant and meaningful—the "how" and the "why" of all the

processes and operations associated with factory equipment.

Why? Because even though it's a technical document, it's also a communication vehicle. And for that to be effective, we have to think about it in a way that's different than expected.

Yet, simplifying complex information can be a stretch for our technical brains. Our world is filled with engineers and process technology experts, so we naturally default to technical jargon...because that's just the way we think. So the key is to go straight to the source to pick out what's meaningful so you really can bridge that gap rather than just creating a how-to document.



Beyond Nuts and Bolts

When I took this role with CPS a few years ago, my manager told me right out of the gate to become knowledgeable about everything—that meant engineering, extrusion, safety, drying and every other component our business offers. There's genius thinking in that because documenting the steps in setting up a twin-screw extruder is far different than understanding WHY those steps are important, and how they fit into the overall process.

That's where on-the-ground experience really makes a difference, and how we really get to

the heart of it—the “how” and the “why,” if you will.

Nothing beats hands-on experience when it comes to learning. You can spend hours at your desk reading about how a machine works, and that will give you information and ideas. But there’s no substitute for what you gain from observing the equipment and all the related processes in action with your own eyes. It’s how you discover the issues operators may run into with installations and how they need to work with the settings on the machine to address them. This experience tells you which steps require less explanation, and which are the most relevant and useful to the client and therefore deserve more attention.

Immersing myself with the equipment is how I’m able to craft the most beneficial, all-encompassing resource possible. Only through this submersion into the environment and the processes is how I can pick out what’s relevant and assess which parts necessitate more explanation and in what form. I learn what’s important, what questions to ask, and it prepares me to field questions from clients (or know who to turn to for the answer). While I may not ever be a master of these disciplines, having a solid understanding about them is how I bring value to the end product.

Picking Out What Matters Most

Our manuals are not one size fits all, and we tailor them for each client by first understanding how this equipment fits into their goals.

To determine the right approach, you have to start at the end—what does the complete manual need to look like? What do we need it to accomplish? What problems do we need it to solve? What are the interlocking pieces? Knowing these factors helps us—once again—get to the “why” and the “how” for each client. Then we make the road map.

Looking at it from every angle is the key. You’ve got to be up close and personal with the equipment, but you’ve also got to take a step back to see it from a broader point of view. Sometimes an outside source comes up with the best questions—so my advice always is to find a neutral party to test what you’ve written. He or she can flag steps that are confusing that we may not notice because we see it every day.

We also have to take into consideration the various audiences and their information needs. It must be user-centric and effective for the factory floor, because a poorly crafted resource can lead to errors and downtime. Putting yourself in their shoes helps guide selection of relevant information to include.

Customers don’t necessarily ask for this—most may assume what we create is just a technical document to keep on the shelf and reference when needed. But once they have it, they see the value. They didn’t know they needed it until they have it—and then we’ve exceeded their expectations.

Our intent with these technical manuals is to provide the link between the customer and getting the most from their extrusion equipment and processes—it’s just one of many ways CPS bridges the gap, and we work hard to fulfill that goal every day.

If you have questions for CPS or want to learn more about how our consulting services and resources can help you reach your goals, please [reach out to our team](#).

Corporate Project Services, a division of Wenger Manufacturing, is a dynamic group of planning specialists backed by Wenger’s more than 80 years of process system supply to the industry. Our knowledge base and breadth of experience in extrusion processing and facilities construction is unsurpassed – and our commitment to excellence is recognized around the world.