

Estimating time budgets for software documentation projects

Overview

- Why estimate?
- Before estimating starts
- Estimating basics
- The complexity matrix
- Estimating matrix
- Factors affecting your estimates

Three estimates for written content

- Number of topics to be written
- Average time to create a topic
- Likelihood of delays

Before writing starts

Structure

Look and feel

Identified common units of work (topic types)

There may be additional requirements

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Glossary

Context-sensitive Help

Factors affecting your estimates

Before estimating starts

Identify any assumptions

Identify any important missing information

Determine if an estimate is possible or how accurate the estimate need be at this stage

Stability of the software

Stability of the software

Significant impact on your time
Rewrites and more reviews Which parts are likely to change?

Information available
prior and post estimation

Information available prior
and post estimation

- How up-to-date?
- Time per topic
- Helps writers as they work
- Reuse/written from scratch

Information available prior
and post estimation

- How complete?
- Number of topics
- Other information available when work starts

Information available prior and post estimation

Examples:

Existing user documentation

Programmers' functional specifications for the software

Training material

FAQs from support calls received for any previous versions of the software

Existing user documentation

Likes and dislikes of existing material:

Structure

Writing style

Overall look and feel

Programmers' functional specifications

Can be useful

Sometimes they:

Don't exist

Are Missing

Are not up-to-date

Programmers' functional specifications

Number of topics

– May help

Time per topic

– Reduce extra time if access to software is limited

Any training material

Number of topics

– Course material may not cover all the procedures

Time per topic

– Complexity of the content and/or the software itself

Any Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

Number of topics

May require more topics to answer these

Availability of Subject Matter Experts

Availability of Subject Matter experts

Communication is vital
May not impinge on number of writing hours
Can affect overall elapsed project time time commitment

Access to the live software/prototype

Complexity of the software

Complexity of the software

Amount of instruction to be written

Time for writers to assimilate the software

Usability of the software interface

Accessing the software before estimating

Walk-through by expert

Number of screens in the application

Average number of fields in a screen

Effectiveness of reviews

Effectiveness of reviews

- Increased risk of missing deadlines
- Ineffective reviews may mean re-writing
- Late return of review points

Effectiveness of reviews

- Reviewers
- One point of contact
- Importance of reviews
- Allocating time for them
- Purpose of each review

Writing and document design experience

Images

Significant effect

How many?

How many exist in electronic format (GIFs, JPGs...)

Screen captures, diagrams, flowcharts

Images

Simple screen captures

Relatively quick

Access to the live software

Images requiring extra manipulation

Particular section of a screen

Adding static "call-out" labels

Image maps/segmented hypergraphics

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- Importance to the user
- Importance to the client
- Dependent on authoring tool
- Automatic creation

Glossary of terms

- Level of jargon/number of abbreviations
- May exist with development team
- May need "client" to compile terms and definitions
- Auto-linking glossary terms (online Help only)

Context-sensitive Help

- Can be very significant
- Two types of context-sensitivity:
 - Screen-level
 - Field-level

Field-level Help

A separate short topic for every field in every screen

A rarer requirement these days

Context-sensitive Help may need a separate estimate

May be very different from "standard" topics

Not procedural

Different layout and length

Hence separate estimate may be needed, particularly if describing

Fields

Number of fields per screen

Complexity

Context-sensitive Help Communicating with developers

Availability of developers

Mechanism for associating screens with Help topics

May be a new concept

Summary

Summary

Factors affecting each estimate

Average time to create a topic

Number of topics to be written

Likelihood of delays

Factors affecting the average time to create a topic

All of the factors!

Factors affecting the number of topics

Information available prior and post estimation

- Existing user documentation
- FAQs

Complexity of the software

Additional requirements: Context-sensitive Help

Factors that can increase the overall elapsed project time

Availability of SME(s)

Effectiveness of reviews

All additional requirements:

- Images
- Index
- Glossary
- Context-sensitive Help

Further reading

JoAnn Hackos . Managing your documentation projects. 1994. Wiley

http://comtech-serv.com/index.php?main_page=index&cPath=26_103

saulcarliner.home.att.net/resources.htm

<http://www.useraid.com/UsingMetricsToEstimate.pdf>

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