

Best Practices to Create User Manual

User documentation (also called end-user manuals, end-user guides, instruction manuals, etc.) is the content you provide end-users with to help them be more successful with your product or service. An online manual allows the user to familiarize themselves with the program, on their own time, at their own pace, without having to hassle tech support.



Why create an online help manual?

Online help usually comprises many web pages with a common table of contents, navigation menus, keyword index, and search functions. Building online help is strongly recommended for cross-platform projects, web systems, and software that are frequently updated.

Reduce Support Cost

An online manual is about offering as many resources to customers as possible so they can access the information they need at any time, thus enabling self-service. With an online manual, you will be able to direct your customers with queries to links/relevant portions of your manual, where they can find the answers to their queries, thereby removing the need for you to spend time/money in resolving their queries manually. This is possible because the individual pages of the online user manual are given their own addresses (URLs), as opposed to one complete file with only one address (URL). PHPKB knowledge base software allows you to create SEO friendly online user manual for being found in Google when users are searching for its content; your customers are more likely to find the solutions on their own, saving you both time and money.

Strengthen Online Presence

The online user manual will form new valuable content that can be added to a range of online platforms. Your online user manual will constantly be accessible when your customers need it. Online help makes your website attractive for search engine crawlers and brings you targeted traffic from Google, Bing, and other search engines. A good online manual presents your product as serious and credible. You may easily resolve users' issues by referring that user to a certain page of your online help. Make your help system a part of your websites and attract more prospects and generate more sales of your software.

Easy to Update

Having an online user manual means that your customers will always have access to the most **"up to date"** information available. This is because the online user manual can easily be overwritten/updated with no loss of its existing features and settings. It will no longer be necessary to go through the troublesome and cost-intensive steps that are involved in changing a physical user manual, and your printing and distribution costs could be vastly reduced. If a mistake is noticed in the online user manual, it is unnecessary to re-print and re-distribute new material; the changes can be made online.

Platform Independent

Knowledge base users should be able to access the information from any media device they use (desktop or mobile). You don't have to create help files in different formats for various operating systems and platforms. Your online help should be accessible in any web browser on any operating system.

With PHPKB knowledge base software, you can create effective online user manuals that reduce the cost of physical manuals and also aid in customer support by providing a self-serving manual. You can view the live example of the [PHPKB user manual](#). PHPKB knowledge base software can not only be used as a product manual but can also be used by different teams to create training or user manuals.

IT Operations Team

Automatically document any process. Create user guides, knowledge base articles, and SOPs in just minutes.

Enterprise Consultants

Successfully onboard your clients and make them highly rate your work with the help of quick step-by-step guides

CEOs and Founders

Automate the way you delegate tasks and organize employee training, saving time for the decision-making process.

HR and Trainers

Create simple step-by-step guides and training videos to ensure an outstanding employee training process

Best Practices For Writing Online User Manuals

For writing help documentation a content writer needs to learn to think like a product user, not a developer. A content writer should involve with the product and should be very familiar with how it works. However, the language and presentation style should be according to the layman as may be obvious to the writer may be a complete mystery to someone without prior experience of the product, or knowledge of the design process.

Most people use help documentation when they want to know one particular thing. Often there is a function or a tool that they want to use, and they can't understand it without one specific piece of information. They navigate to the help manual to quickly locate the information they need and so they can get back to work as soon as possible. Below are a few best practices to arrange your documentation:

Plain language

Use simple, plain language whenever possible to help your customers understand even the most complex concepts. A difficult reading will frustrate the user. The writing should be for the user and not for the developer. Customers don't know anything about your product and wouldn't be able to understand the technical and/or industry buzzwords that are used in a company daily. Therefore, write documentation in an easy-to-read way.

Simplicity

Keep it as simple as possible to achieve its goal. This applies both to the document's content as well as its design. Long blocks of text and pages tightly packed with written and graphic content can make user guides or manuals feel intimidating and unfriendly. The poorly framed documentation would lead to a bad customer experience and more support calls.

Visuals

The best user documentation perfectly illustrates the adage, "**show, don't tell.**" They don't have to read about it, they can see it! People actually absorb visual information faster and perform tasks better when instructions are provided with visual or video content. The infographics are far easier to understand than the lengthy texts. Therefore, add more visual content, including images, annotated screenshots, graphics, and video to show someone how your product works. PHPKB knowledge base software has a powerful [WYSIWYG editor](#) through which you can embed any visual within seconds.

Logical Hierarchy

Online documentation is a collection of articles/pages organized into categories. The hierarchical structure of your categories should follow a logical flow that helps the user learn to use your product in the most helpful way. For instance, the organization of articles/pages in your documentation should move from easy to advance. Write the easiest stuff first as the users build their knowledge, write about the advanced features.

Table of contents

Good documentation needs a hierarchy of headings and subheadings that lets a user understand what each section will

contain. A table of contents is placed at the top of the document so that users can navigate to the section easily. PHPKB knowledge base software comes with a Table of Contents (TOC) feature that auto-generates a table of contents or navigation table on any article on your knowledge base. It can automatically scan the headings through your article content and create a table of contents. You also get various options to configure your TOC and control how it is going to appear. The best thing about this feature is that it allows you to generate fully customizable and multi-level TOC. It also supports smooth scrolling.

Searchable

The users spend most of their time on mobile phones so develop an online manual that not only meets the requirements of desktop users but is also mobile-friendly. Deploy a powerful & accurate search engine that can search thousands of articles in few seconds so that mobile users get the desired results on time. **PHPKB knowledge base** search among categories, articles, news, attachment files, and custom fields. Even if you have created an internal knowledge base for your customer service representatives to assist customers quickly or you want your customers to self-service themselves, PHPKB knowledge base software is perfectly suitable and provides the results swiftly with its fast search engine.

Accessibility

This means ensuring that electronic documentation adheres to standards of accessibility for people who may be blind or visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, or may have cognitive disabilities. Remember, many of your customers need this to understand and fully access your user documentation. PHPKB knowledge base software conforms with WCAG 2.0 success criteria and is already accessibility-ready.


Find out a lot more about web accessibility and [WCAG 2.0 compliance in knowledge base software](#).

Good Design

A design should be user-friendly; a user will find a poor design hard to perceive, navigate, and follow. You should use consistent fonts and complementary colors across multiple documents. Large blocks of unbroken text can be frustrating to a user, particularly when reading on a screen. Consider highlighting important text using **bold colored font** to help important information stand out. This helps to create a hierarchy of information, focus, and flow. If you're working in PHPKB knowledge base software, the procedure is much simpler as you are provided with powerful WYSIWYG editor to create beautifully designed documentation.

Color Harmony

The word "harmony" usually associates with something orderly and pleasing. The color harmony is about the arrangement of the colors in a manual in the most attractive and effective way for users' perception. When colors are organized, viewers feel pleased and calm, while disharmony in design gives the feeling of chaos and disgust. Ensure the contrast between the background color and the text is high enough for the text to be legible if you're thinking of having a colored background. Remember that the deliberate and consistent use of color creates an immersive user experience.

[The research provided by Colorcom showed that it takes only 90 seconds for people to make a subconscious judgment about a product and between 62% and 90% of that assessment is based on color alone.](#) 

Negative Space

Make sure to leave plenty of space around the text. Use margins and white spaces to structure your online manual. Leave space at the margins for users to add their notes, as some may want to print out the pages and insert notes. White spaces guide the reader's eyes to the important information. Make use of bullets and numbered lists to highlight important information and make the text scannable.

Typography

Typography plays a critical role in strengthening your brand, creating interest in your product, and highlighting your central message. Typography is the art and technique of arranging type, type meaning letters and characters. It's about more than just the design of letters and characters; the arrangement of those letters and characters is just as big a part of it all. That refers to the **selection of point size, line length, and spacing**, both on a single line and throughout an entire page or piece of work. The typography helps in generating a hierarchical flow of contents i.e. certain words stand out more than others. You can use different weights (bold, regular, light), styles (italic), and sizes to create a sense of order within your text. Not only does this help create a legible flow, but it helps the reader see what the most important points are.

Feedback

A great user documentation can only be maintained when you have listened to the people outside your organization who actually are going to use the product. Learn their pain points and try to address them as best you can. Find out what they tell you they need to know to best use your products. While some of it might be obvious, I guarantee you'll learn things you never even considered.

Online URL: <https://www.phpkb.com/kb/article/best-practices-to-create-user-manual-224.html>