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Software and system engineering — Guidelines for the design and preparation of user documentation for application software

Ingénierie du logiciel et du système — Lignes directrices pour la conception et la préparation de la documentation de l'utilisateur de logiciels d'application

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Fax + 41 22 749 09 47
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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) and IEC (the International Electrotechnical Commission) form the specialized system for worldwide standardization. National bodies that are members of ISO or IEC participate in the development of International Standards through technical committees established by the respective organization to deal with particular fields of technical activity. ISO and IEC technical committees collaborate in fields of mutual interest. Other international organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO and IEC, also take part in the work. In the field of information technology, ISO and IEC have established a joint technical committee, ISO/IEC JTC 1.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

The main task of the joint technical committee is to prepare International Standards. Draft International Standards adopted by the joint technical committee are circulated to national bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

ISO/IEC 18019 was prepared by Joint Technical Committee ISO/IEC JTC 1, *Information technology*, Subcommittee SC 7, *Software and system engineering*.

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Introduction

Anyone who uses application software needs accurate information about the correct way to use it. If the information is supplied in a convenient form and is easy to find and understand, the users can quickly become proficient at using the product. Consequently their view of the product is positive, with the result that their view of the supplier is positive too. Hence, well-designed documentation not only assists the user and helps to reduce the cost of training and support, but also enhances the reputation of the product, its producer and its suppliers.

Although many software products aim to have user interfaces that behave so intuitively that very little separate documentation is needed, this is rarely possible.

Documentation is an essential component of any product. Documentation design is crucial; the success or failure of an entire product can depend on it. The documentation can be the first tangible item that the user sees, and so influences the user's first impressions of the product.

Users of application software products generally have one important feature in common: they might be experts in the tasks for which they wish to use the software, but they are not, initially, experts in using the application software itself.

Although the guidance given in this International Standard covers all the activities and all the design decisions that need to be made, some of the activities can be extremely simple to carry out in some environments, as demonstrated by the following examples.

- If there are already established typographic and illustration standards and established development and production routes, very little design and planning will be needed in these areas.
- If the product being developed is for a single type of user with well-known user characteristics and well-defined tasks, very little user analysis will be needed.

ISO/IEC 18019 is based upon British Standards BS 7649:1993 and BS 7830:1996.

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Software and system engineering — Guidelines for the design and preparation of user documentation for application software

1 Scope

This International Standard gives guidelines for the design and preparation of user documentation for application software. It describes how to establish what information users need, how to determine the way in which that information should be presented to the users, and how then to prepare the information and make it available.

For the purposes of this International Standard, application software includes the types listed below.

- Consumer software packages, that is, software products designed and sold to carry out identified tasks, where the software and its associated documentation are packaged for acquisition as a unit.
- Software for office applications such as word processors, spreadsheets, databases and electronic mail.
- Business software, for example, software for recording and monitoring business activities, such as stock control and order processing.
- Specialist software for use by professionals, such as accounting systems, graphic design systems and engineering design systems.

These guidelines may also be helpful for developing documentation for the following, although it does not cover all the issues relating to them.

- Software engineering products for use by computer professionals.
- Software for programmable electronic or mechanical systems.

This International Standard is for use by people responsible for specifying, designing and preparing user documentation for application software and people who manage these activities, including.

- Developers of tools for creating hardcopy documentation.
- Product designers.
- Application developers.
- Project managers.
- Authors.
- Programmers.
- Translators.
- Localisation staff.

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It is intended for use in all types of organisations, whether or not a dedicated documentation department is present. In all cases, it can be used as a basis for local standards and procedures. Readers are assumed to have experience or knowledge of software development or documentation development processes.

This International Standard may also be useful to.

- Developers of tools for creating on-screen documentation.
- People who are evaluating existing or proposed application software.

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