

Agentic AI for Technical Documentation

A real-world, experience-based review

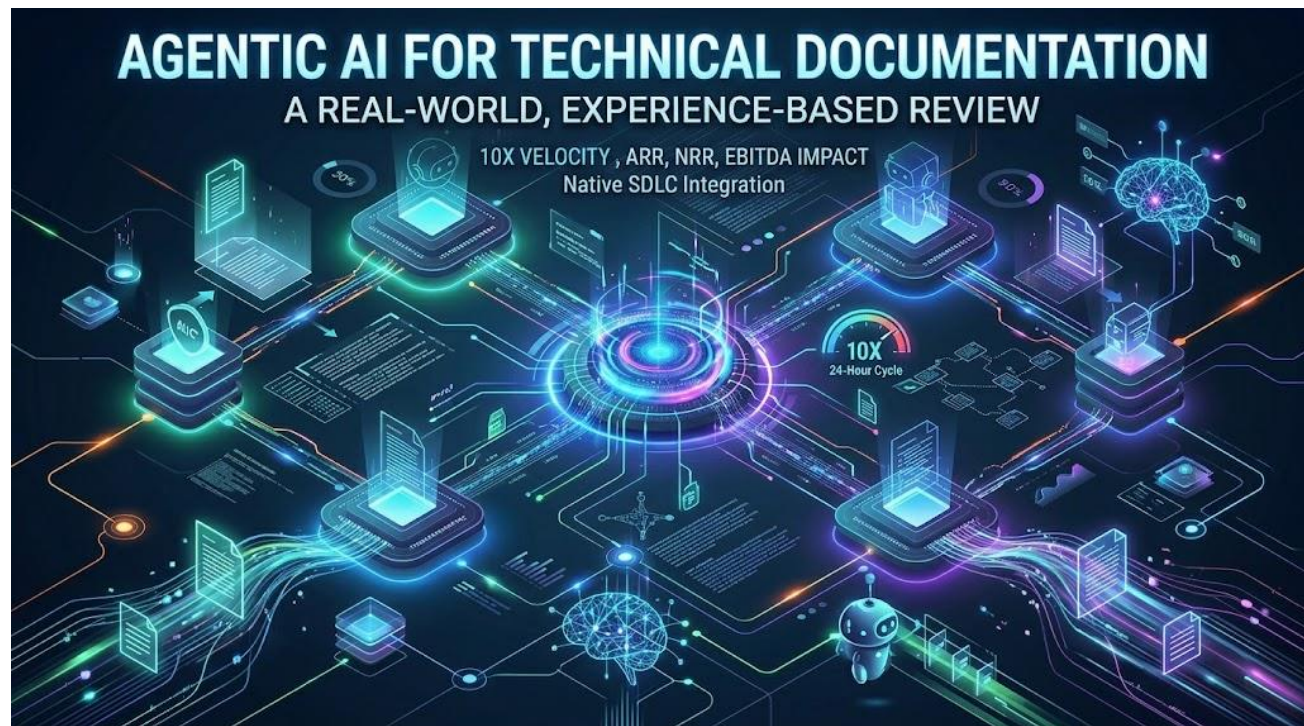
PART ONE:

Business Drivers, Productivity, Velocity, and Impact

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We're now squarely in the age of agentic AI for technical documentation. But the landscape is uneven. Some organizations are racing ahead with mature, end-to-end agentic systems – stateful and stateless workflows supported by full infrastructure. Others are experimenting with lightweight productivity agents, while many still limit their use of AI to direct prompting of frontier models.

One thing is certain: the pace is extraordinary and breathtaking, and it's accelerating.

It would be fair to say that what is changing fastest is not merely the technology – it is the rate at which the rate of change itself - is changing.

Before we delve into the real-world challenges we've encountered while building and deploying some of the most advanced agentic solutions for technical documentation in the industry, it's worth examining the business drivers behind these initiatives.

Make no mistake: there is a widespread – and often misguided – perception among business leaders that AI can replace technical writers. There's little value in pretending otherwise. The AI hype machine has been extraordinarily effective, appealing directly to one of the most powerful incentives in business: reduce costs, increase margins, and do so as quickly as possible. Writing, in particular, can appear to be low-hanging fruit – an obvious target for automation.

In my own role as a Senior Director of Knowledge Platforms and Engineering, I'm close enough to that leadership environment to understand the mindset. My conjecture is that it's reinforced by a skewed system of incentives and rewards: reduce headcount, claim the savings, and demonstrate immediate efficiency gains. If the organization overshoots, people can always be rehired later.

At least, that's the core of the "break-fix" management theory.

But what happens in the meantime? What accumulates when expertise walks out the door, content quality deteriorates, and the systems needed to maintain accurate documentation are neglected?

Documentation debt?

What's that?

This business of technical documentation

One of the first mistakes we make as career documentation professionals is failing to focus enough on the **business of what we do**.

I'm not talking about "business" in the way documentation teams often think about it – budgets, staffing, project plans, traditional documentation metrics, and delivery schedules. I mean business as leadership sees it: a world of ARR, NRR, EBITDA, CPOs, margins, retention, growth, and an alphabet soup of metrics that can feel almost foreign to documentation professionals.

But that is precisely where we need to start, because ultimately, everything we do maps back to the measures executive business leaders care about.

Make no mistake: **technical documentation is a business function with measurable business impact.** It influences adoption, retention, support costs, time to value, customer satisfaction, and the ability of a company to scale.

If we want documentation to be treated as strategically important, we have to start treating it that way ourselves. That means understanding the language of business leaders, connecting our work to the outcomes and measures they care about, and learning to articulate our value in those terms. After all, we're supposed to be the expert communicators – the people who know how to adapt the message to the audience, right?

Otherwise, we shouldn't be surprised when we're dismissed as *"just those annoying doc people again."*

Productivity, speed, velocity, and impact

In the age of agentic AI, it is worth grounding the conversation in the core business drivers that ultimately map back to those top-line executive metrics.

Productivity, speed, velocity, and impact are not the same thing.

Productivity is about how much useful output we can produce with the resources available. Speed is about how quickly an individual task can be completed. Velocity is broader. It is the sustained *rate* at which valuable work moves through the entire system, from idea to production to customer impact. A team can produce a first draft very quickly and still have terrible velocity if that draft then sits in review for three weeks.

And **impact is what ultimately matters**. Faster production means little if it does not improve the customer experience, reduce costs, accelerate adoption, increase retention, or contribute to growth.

This distinction becomes especially important with agentic AI technical documentation.

Productivity at lower cost is a powerful business driver. If an organization can develop an agentic system that allows work previously requiring ten dedicated technical writers to be performed effectively with one, business leaders are going to pursue it. That reality will not change because rank-and-file writers complain, construct counterarguments, or simply resist.

Trust me, we will get to the quality argument shortly. Quality matters enormously. But arguments framed primarily around fear of displacement are rarely persuasive in executive circles. Business leaders hear resistance to change constantly. If we want to influence the outcome, we need to understand that reality, digest it, and adjust both our approach and our attitude.

The goal should not be to preserve a dying status quo. The goal should be to reshape and recast our profession and become catalysts for the transformation ourselves.

The **business challenge** given to my team was remarkably simple to state, even if accomplishing it was anything but simple:

- 1. Dramatically reduce first-draft production time.** Reduce the time required to produce a good-quality first draft of new technical content from two weeks to 20 minutes or less on average, while requiring fewer dedicated technical writers through the use of agentic AI.
- 2. Improve customer self-service.** Create documentation experiences that enable more customers to solve problems and manage change independently, reducing the cost and demand placed on technical support.
- 3. Accelerate customer onboarding and retention.** Help customers adopt, configure, and become productive with products faster and more easily – and thus become more satisfied, or at least less dissatisfied. I sometimes joke that the latter is the CPO: the “customer pissed-off” measure – which is a real measure some businesses actually use.
- 4. Achieve a 24-hour draft-to-publish cycle.** Move technical content from initial creation to publication in 24 hours or less, end to end.
- 5. Increase documentation velocity by 10X.** Match the accelerating velocity of the 10X agentic software development lifecycle (SDLC) by increasing the sustained throughput of technical documentation by an order of magnitude. This is not simply about writing ten times faster. It means removing bottlenecks across research, drafting, review, validation, approval, publishing, maintenance, and measurement.
- 6. Integrate documentation directly into the agentic SDLC.** Documentation can no longer operate as a downstream activity attached to software development. Even docs-as-code, as we know it today, is insufficient and has become obsolete in an agentic SDLC. Documentation must become a native participant in the same automated and agent-driven workflows used to design, build, test, release, and maintain software.
- 7. Maintain and improve technical and editorial quality.** Increased productivity and velocity cannot come at the expense of accuracy, clarity, usability, technical correctness, or effectiveness. Agent-assisted content production must meet or exceed existing quality standards.

- 8. Transform documentation maintenance.** Apply the same agentic capabilities to existing content, reducing accumulated documentation debt while continuously detecting and preventing new debt from forming.
- 9. Expand the audience beyond humans.** Technical documentation must increasingly serve machine consumers as well as human ones, including automation systems, AI agents, retrieval systems, and emerging agentic user interfaces.
- 10. Automate documentation operations.** Apply agentic technology not only to content production, but also to the planning, design, orchestration, governance, and management of documentation operations. The objective is greater capability and efficiency with fewer resources devoted to administrative overhead.
- 11. Automate accountability and measurement.** Continuously track what is being produced, who is responsible, how effectively the system is performing, where bottlenecks exist, and whether the intended business and customer outcomes are actually being achieved.
- 12. Build the guardrails required for success.** Design and implement the technical, editorial, operational, and governance controls necessary to ensure quality, safety, accuracy, traceability, and effectiveness at scale.

Every one of these objectives ultimately maps back to ARR, NRR, margins, retention, customer acquisition and support costs, time to value, and the rest of the gobbledygook spoken in executive conference rooms.

I'll leave it to y'all to ask your favorite frontier model what all those acronyms mean and how documentation maps back to them. It's at your AI fingertips now.

Continue to Part Two

Part Two – Challenges, Approaches, and Solutions for Designing and Implementing Agentic Documentation – moves from the business case to the implementation itself, examining the design principles, production workflows, architecture, failures, lessons learned, and real-world solutions behind an industrial-strength agentic documentation supply chain.