

Season of Docs 2022: Internet Archive Case Study

Create a Developer Portal

Organization: [Internet Archive](#) ([accepted proposal](#))

Organization Description: At the Internet Archive, we believe that access to knowledge is a fundamental human right. We are building a digital library of everything, which anyone can use and upload to for free. We provide free access to researchers, historians, scholars, and the general public.

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Problem Statement

- Current documentation on the various Internet Archive API's is scattered across multiple, hard-to-find URLs and is inconsistently presented.
- The public is not aware of the full power and breadth of the API's nor of the richness of the content that the API's allow one to access.
- For a developer unfamiliar with Internet Archive's tools, there is no one-stop onboarding experience available. The existing documentation serves as a reference but not a "getting started" guide nor a tutorial for using the services.

Proposal Abstract

- We would like to create a welcome page (probably at [archive.org/developers](#)) that can serve as a jumping off point for new developers to the Internet Archive.
- We would like to make the existing API documentation more consistent, perhaps by migrating the individual sets of documentation to a single, common home.

Project Description

Creating the proposal

For us, corraling our developer documentation was an obvious project choice. We already have a fairly extensive knowledge basis around website usage of our vast treasure trove of materials. However, researchers and others looking to programmatically access them often don't know where to look for information about our API's. Until now, it has been scattered across multiple websites. This project was a chance to bring all the information into one "home", at a URL that made sense, with a welcoming landing page that would help developers new to our content get oriented.

Budget

We based our budget on a duration of 5 months, assuming that the writer would be working 10 hours per week at market rates. This felt reasonable, based on past experience working with technical writers. Plus, there was a certain flexibility of scope, since once the minimum requirement of a developer landing page was achieved, the writer could continue corralling and editing additional documentation for as long as they had time for.

As it turned out, our technical writer, who herself has some programming skills and was already familiar with our API's, worked much more quickly than anticipated in consolidating all of the necessary documentation, and even with the discovery near the end of a dozen extra pages of documentation that needed to be migrated over to the new site, she was able to complete all of the work in half the budgeted hours, resulting in us spending less than the grant award. At the same time, as there were vacation weeks, time off, and weeks where she did not work 10 hours per week, we did end up using the full 5 months to accomplish the project.

Participants

The project personnel consisted of:

- Brenton Cheng (UX Team lead)
- Anindita Basu (technical writer)
- Jake Johnson (documentation platform maintainer)

We had a handful of applicants for Season of Docs 2022. Anindita Basu stood out because of her experience as a technical writer, mission alignment, programming experience, and linguistically flawless application letter. She is also a very friendly and communicative person. After interviewing her, we decided to hire her.

From then on, we met weekly by video or else checked in asynchronously using Slack. After we had a beta version of the developer portal, we solicited feedback from other Internet Archive staff, and then worked with Jake Johnson to integrate the new set of documentation into our existing documentation platform.

Timeline

The project timeline unfolded as follows:

Hired technical writer Anindita Basu	May 16
Kick-off meeting: scoping project, detailing tasks	May 26
New tutorial content written, initial template styling in place	July 7
Design review	July 14
Implemented API playground	Aug. 26

Staging deploy of new site	Oct. 6
Production deploy of new site	Oct. 13
Additional documentation pages ported	Nov. 16
Final code changes submitted	Nov. 30

Results

The new consolidated, organized developer portal launched on October 13, just in time for the Internet Archive anniversary event, where it was showcased to all internal staff. It lives at <https://archive.org/developers/>

Subsequently, one final source of documentation was discovered, and the migration of these final pages is being submitted as a change request. Once the request is reviewed and approved, it will be merged into the new developer site. At that point, all anticipated deliverables will have been fulfilled.

One auxiliary outcome of the project is that there is now more visibility into the documentation platform and its maintenance. There is now more than one person who knows how to caretake and deploy the documentation.

Metrics

Unfortunately, we had no metrics in place for the previous, scattered sources of documentation. Qualitatively, we'd heard numerous complaints from developers who simply had no idea where to go to find information on our API's.

We are now in the process of adding instrumentation to track user engagement (visitors, page views, etc.) with the new developer portal. Meanwhile, we have already heard appreciation from developers, both internally and externally, about the new developer portal.

Analysis

The project accomplished its goal and was well under budget. In this sense, it was a resounding success. It was also a great pleasure to work with our technical writer, with whom I would happily work again in the future.

While I wouldn't say we suffered any major hurdles, it was sometimes challenging to hunt down detailed specifications for the API's we were documenting, so that we could construct manifest files and create live API playground pages for them.

Summary

Our project experience was extremely positive. The project scope was realistic. The timeline was unstressful. And by the end, we successfully launched a brand new developer portal, fulfilling our project goal. Here are a few words of advice, emerging from what we learned during this process:

- Hire an organized, responsible, communicative, experienced technical writer. This is probably the most important point. Having a good collaborator will make the whole project go smoothly and enjoyably.
- Keep an on-going meeting log containing status updates, decisions, and current to-do's. This will help preserve focus from week to week, reminding you of where you've been, as well as what the current priorities and tasks are. It will also help when creating the final Season of Docs case study.
- Select a feasible project scope with a clear final deliverable. Most projects take more time or effort than anticipated, so make sure you can arrive at a satisfying conclusion even when such surprises arise.