COSTS ARE DOWN, REVENUE IS UP:

Digital Content Distribution Makes It Possible

Do you work for a certification body or accreditation board that's looking to lower the costs of printing and shipping materials to purchasers? Do you have the unshakable hunch that your association or society should be engaging with its members through digitalized content, but are struggling to make the case for this shift in organizational process?

This white paper will help you determine if digital content distribution is the right next step for you, whether you're an association, accreditation body, certification board, society, or other member-driven organization. This white paper will demonstrate how digital content distribution is vital to:

- long-term, successful organizational growth
- decreasing costs
- positively influencing revenue

VitalSource®

Table of Contents

Introduction

We Live in a Digital World

Twenty-five years ago, few envisioned a realistic future in which bar tabs could be paid by tapping telephones on cash registers, in which lightweight computers could be used on airplanes, and in which thousands of books, images, and high-quality videos could be kept on a small device in a pocket.

A lot has changed since the technology for the World Wide Web was released to the public in 1993. While educational products for consumers have kept up with (and helped to accelerate) advancements in web-based technology, most B2B and B2C professional educational products have been slow to keep pace.

Does This Sound Familiar?

Outside of work, you live digitally. Yet at work, it's as if the digital revolution was never fully realized:

- your organization prints books, assembles binders and provides other printed educational materials to clients
- outdated, stored inventories of printed materials become unsellable and go to waste if made before the most current version was released
- your organization's biggest competition for revenue is the seemingly unstoppable reselling of their own printed materials by former students or unapproved third parties.

Despite the near-universal adoption of technological advancements like e-mail, Wi-Fi, web-based commerce, and video conferencing, many organizations still cling to outdated processes when it comes to creating, updating and distributing their own content. They continue using antiquated methods even as modern professionals increasingly demand digital materials. Eventually, organizations that don't adapt to the digital age will be left behind. They'll lose potential purchasers and market share to digital alternatives that better suit the everyday needs of tech-reliant professional clientele.

Thought leadership shouldn't be trapped between the pages of a printed book. It's time to get with the times and release digitized versions of the industry-leading content your organization already creates and distributes.

Your Bottom Line Demands Digital Solutions

Individual clients aren't the only ones demanding digital solutions. The tech revolution has taken hold of the corporate world for business reasons, too. Consider how many businesses now operate through AWS or other Cloud solutions in order to reduce costs. Or, think about how online conferencing has replaced flying teams halfway around the country to meet each other.

Digital content distribution solutions significantly decrease production, manufacturing and shipping costs while simultaneously addressing fixed costs such as expenditures on production or storage facilities. From a business perspective, making content available digitally is like the switch from in-person meetings to speaking over the phone, 2.0: **a business's bottom line demands the use of this cost-reducing technology.**

Section 1: Which Organizations Benefit Most from Digital Content Distribution?

Determining if Digital Content Distribution is Right for Your Organization

Digitally distributing materials makes it easier to get vital content in front of a wider audience faster, more affordably and more securely. Let's examine which types of organizations benefit most from switching to digitally-distributed content.

Organizations that Create and Sell Specialized Content

Any membership-based organizations that create and sell their own materials uniquely— accreditation boards, societies, certification bodies— benefit from digital content distribution.

That's because these organizations manufacture, maintain and distribute a distinct type, amount and variety of content. Some produce a diversity of professional development content (e.g. thought-leadership books and employee education courses), while others create supplemental materials for in-person courses, or certification exam preparation workbooks. Digital content distribution benefits

these types of organizations because it specifically eliminates the logistical headaches of producing wide varieties of content types.

Organizations that provide diverse offerings but use legacy, paper-based printing processes must tackle the individual constraint of each type of content being created, printed, and bound. Workbooks, textbooks, practice exams and course materials each have a different format need. But with digital content distribution, these hassles fall by the wayside without compromising the purchaser's experience.

In fact, a key benefit of digitally distributing content is that it erases the logistical business problems associated with having a diverse set of offerings while having little-to-no-impact on the member-purchaser's experience. Purchasers can access all content in one convenient online location, whether it be books, supplemental exercises or an instructional course. Digital textbooks and workbooks, just like printed materials, allow for note-taking, highlighting and page-marking.

Organizations with Internal Publishing Arms or On-Demand Printing Arrangements

Many accreditation boards, certification bodies and societies have an internal publishing arm that manufactures their materials (e.g. hard-copy textbooks, workbooks other educational content). If that's the case for your organization, you're likely all too familiar with the expenditure associated with this process – and how these costs limit your organization's ability to grow its library of content offerings quickly.

Digital distribution is still a cost-saving solution for any society or association that creates its own materials, even if your organization doesn't have its own publishing arm. Even organizations printing materials on-demand through a third-party service are having to handle the costs of formatting materials, getting them printed, having them bound, and then shipped!

No matter what your current process is for generating and delivering content to purchasers, digital content distribution eliminates costs.

Organizations that Want to be Industry Leaders

It takes a lot of hard work, time, experience and audience awareness to become a recognized industry leader. You need to get high-quality, specialized content in front of as wide of an audience as possible, as quickly as possible.

The industry leaders of yesteryear are making a mistake that is allowing emerging authorities to get a foothold in their industries: they're still distributing materials in print, as heavy books and binders that must be snail-mailed to purchasers who pay shipping fees.

Whether your organization is already seen as an authority and wants to maintain this position, or if it's an up-and-coming voice looking to solidify influence within its industry, digital content distribution is a key component of making that goal a reality.

Digitally distributed content allows the wide and fast expansion of audience, without increasing production costs or losing time to the printing and shipping materials. Digital content also better serves those who purchase your offerings by providing them with a richer learning experience than can be achieved with printed materials.

Section 2: What Are the Business Benefits of Digital Content Distribution?

If you're a learning professional, or if you work closely with learning professionals at your organization, you may already know that providing interactive, digitally-formatted content would be educationally beneficial to your customers.

But to make a strong case internally for the switch to digital content distribution, it's important to remember the first principle of business: it's all about the bottom line.

The best way to keep and grow your organization's market share is to **lower costs while simultaneously increasing revenue.** A pipe dream, right? But it can be a reality, when content is digitally distributed!

Digital content distribution will significantly decrease costs, increase revenue, and eradicate re-sold content and piracy – all while increasing the value of your offerings to members and purchasers.

How Digital Content Distribution Decreases Costs
It Eliminates Printing and Shipping Costs
Digital distribution of content directly decreases costs in an unparalleled way; **the printing, binding, shipping, and costs of updating materials are all but eliminated** when content is distributed digitally.

The costs of printing materials and then shipping them around the world is nothing to shrug at. These costs are a major factor that any content-creating organization must deal with. For example, before a new project can be approved, each new piece of certification preparatory material must be calculated against the associated costs of creating, printing, and shipping these items to interested professionals (and determining how many interested professionals there are!).

If selling printed materials is the bread-and-butter of one of the organization's revenue streams, then the flip side of the coin will always be the manufacturing costs.

Digital distribution of content is the single most impactful way to reduce the costs of producing materials and increasing their availability to purchasers. Lesser acknowledged costs, such as printing test-runs of textbooks to ensure their quality and paying to store pre-printed copies of materials, are also eliminated when content is digitally distributed.

And, you can say good-bye to shipping costs: digitally-distributed content can be made available immediately after purchase via a portal that is accessible whenever the purchaser is ready to start using the materials – even at a later time, when they're offline or if there's no internet connection available.

The elimination of shipping costs is particularly beneficial to organizations that distribute materials internationally or overseas. Too often, these organizations pass on the increased shipping fees to their purchasers. Other organizations may refuse to ship materials internationally at all as a way to avoid unexpected costs.

When content is distributed digitally, there's no passing the buck to ensure expenditure is within its approved margins. Your international audience will thank you! And, for those that have avoided international distribution due to its associated costs, you can now tap into a new, world-wide revenue stream that previously wasn't accessible.

It Lowers the Cost of Updating Existing Content

In addition to the initial labor, logistics management, and cost of printing and distributing content when it's first released, organizations must tackle these challenges over and over again as they update materials. This is especially tiresome for groups that provide exam preparation or professional certification materials covering regulatory statutes that are subject to change. Or still-evolving industries, such as within the technology, healthcare, and scientific sectors.

Seemingly small changes such as fixing typos, updating statistics or refreshing existing graphics can become massive undertakings with paper-based products. Even worse, if materials are not printed-on-demand, these necessary changes mean previously printed and stored inventory decreases in value and, in some cases, can't be sold any more at all. All of this can result in business spend that simply goes to waste.

In contrast, when materials are distributed digitally, any piece of content can be easily updated and re-exported without the costs and difficulties of re-printing it. This is achieved with minimal disruption to clients' learning or experience; organizations can simply replace the available file of their content with an updated, re-exported version. And, because the materials are distributed digitally, there's no old product or stagnant stock that results in spend-without-sale. The lowered cost of updating content regularly is specifically beneficial for organizations with ongoing contracts whose

clients rely on accessing up-to-date materials. If your organization has ongoing contracts with clientele that require re-delivery or re-distribution of content after its been updated, then this is another way digital distribution can significantly undercut costs.

How Digital Content Distribution Increases Revenue

Perhaps most importantly, **digitally distributing content keeps revenue in your organization's pocket.**

It Stops A Major Revenue Risk: Resold Content

Long story short: don't let your main sales competition be someone with an old textbook, a scanner, or a copier. If your organization finds itself competing for sales against former students and third-party reselling sites like Amazon and eBay, digital content distribution can help by **securing your content in a way that's simply impossible to do with printed materials.**

With print, the only way to stifle the reselling of content is to constantly release updated versions of printed material as a way of decreasing the perceived value of older versions. From a production stand point, this tactic is expensive. Worse, it doesn't solve the problem at large. For every potential purchaser that buys the most recent version of the printed materials from your organization directly, there's another purchaser who's willing to gamble on outdated course material in order to save a few bucks. **Distributing content digitally decreases content re-selling and piracy in a way that can't be achieved with printed**

materials. By securing organization-made content so that it can't be easily shared, pirated, copied or otherwise stolen, it undermines the reselling of your organization's printed materials by previous purchasers and third-parties. While some aspects of digital content security are based on the backend configurations of the distribution platform you ultimately partner with, most piracy can be stopped through admin-controlled Digital Rights Management (DRM) settings within the platform.

DRM is an important component of digitally-distributed content as it allows organizations to control how their content can be interacted with. It can:

- allow customized, limited user functionality over time.
- limit the length of time that content is available to a user (the equivalent of a purchased book that disappears once the course is completed).
- limit purchasers' access to content through their unique login and credentials.

Being the sole source of your organization's content is an important part of capturing audience and keeping revenue squarely in your organization's pocket, where it belongs. Just imagine if resellers were no longer a viable threat. Wouldn't that be nice?

It Grows Audiences and Offerings

Competitively, it's a race to see who can widen their audience, fastest. **Digitally distributing content gives your organization a competitive edge** by making it easier to

expand your offerings at a reduced cost, relative to legacy print processes. Because materials can be developed and released without printing and shipping costs, your organization will be able to release more new content, and at a faster rate, than when using traditional print processes. This makes it exponentially easier to grow your audience and your offerings.

One unique way in which digitally-distributed content can help grow your organization's offerings is by **providing detailed analytics** around purchasers' interests. Metrics from within your digital content distribution platform will allow you to **see which content is the most engaging and in what ways.** By knowing which available content your audience is most interested in, your organization can make better-informed business decisions regarding the creation of new, supplemental or additional materials that target like-purchasers and bring previous purchasers back for related products.

Similarly, experimental topics no longer carry the same financial risks as printing and storing paper-based materials. Digitized content distribution minimizes the financial risks of creating and making available new topics that may or may not ultimately be of interest to your target audience. This makes diversifying your offerings through experimentation and expansion an easier, more cost-effective process that just might yield big results for your bottom line.

Another easy way to grow your audience and expand your available materials? Release versions of existing materials translated into other languages – another process that's

significantly easier when the manufacturing costs are eliminated!

By creating analytics-informed, specialized content, and by being the sole source of this content, you'll be well on your way to growing your audience and establishing your organization's authority within your industry.

It Increases Recurring Revenue Streams

Whenever a client feels like they're getting more out of their purchase, they're more likely to return. When they need new materials, when they want to build their knowledge, or when they are seeking industry-leading content.
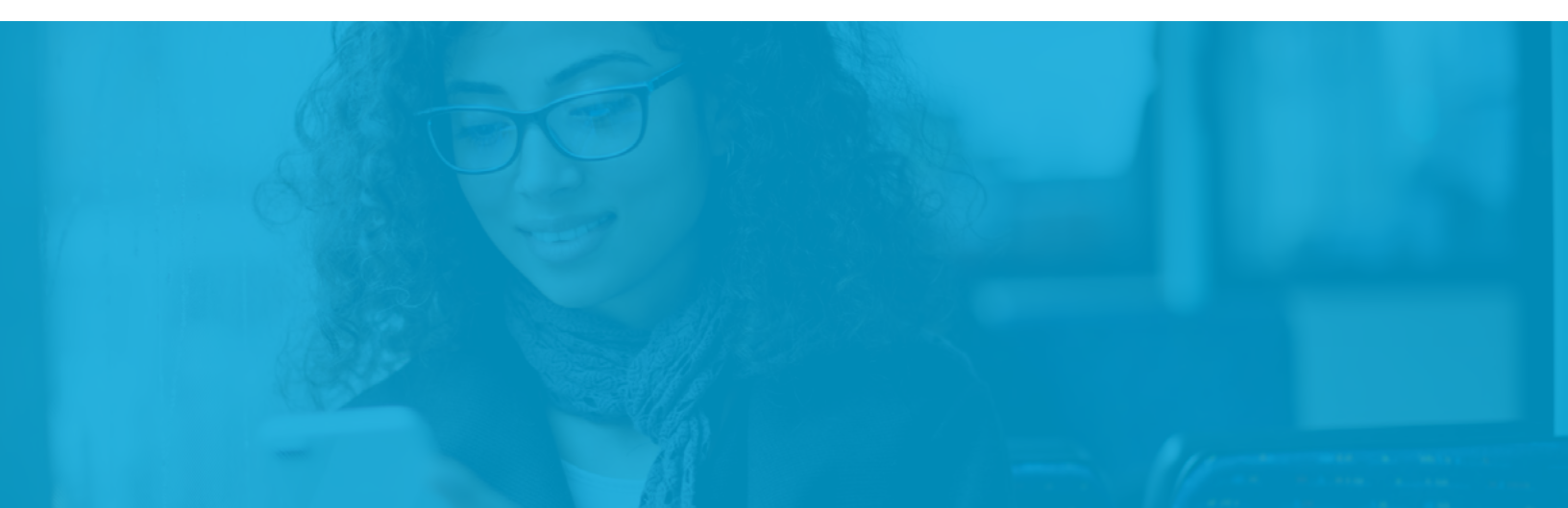
Below are three ways in which clients get more value out of digitally-distributed content than they do from traditional print media formats.

Digital Content Maintains and Enhances "the Book Experience"

Some organizations worry that their clients will have an adverse reaction to the change to digital. Your team might envision releasing boring, plain text content on digital pages that readers scroll through mindlessly, unable to mark important sections they want to re-read and unable to make notes in the margins.

This may have been what digital reading looked like in the early days of the Internet, but it's changed a lot since then!

Modern digital content is a fully interactive experience that can be made available on any device of the learner's

choosing and accessed at any time. Just like with printed materials, learners can:
- complete sections of workbooks
- take notes (often longer and more detailed ones than they could fit in the margins of printed materials)
- highlight and mark sections of text
- share these mark-ups with admin-approved groups within the digital distribution platform.

Also like a printed book, digital content can be taken with you anywhere – but without the extra step of having to remember to pack it. Because digital content is accessible through the electronic devices we already carry with us every day, such as mobile phones, tablets and laptops, learning can happen at any time and in any place with minimal disruption to daily routines, even without Wi-Fi access. (Bonus: tablets weigh a lot less than a large book.)

The Incorporation of Interactive, Digital-Only Elements
Print books are limited to what can be put on the page with ink. Digital content, alternatively, is much less limited in what can be included with the text.

In place of static images, you can embed elements such as interactive graphics and video. Text-heavy content can be enhanced by adding integrated interactive assessment tools, such as multiple-choice questions, short answer questions, or surveys that ensure readers stay engaged.

These digital-only elements enhance purchasers' learning and keep learners more engaged with your content, further solidifying their perceived value of the content and ensuring their return to your organization's offerings when in need of new educational materials.

The Most Up-To-Date Materials Available
When content is digitally distributed rather than printed, clients can have immediate access to the latest versions of the materials they've purchased. Because they're accessing the most up-to-date version of the content, they have confidence that they're keeping on the cutting edge of their industry.

This is especially important for clients with long-term contracts that require the most current materials be provided to them as part of the agreement. They will no longer have to wait for shipments of new material or find ways to get rid of previously purchased hard-copies of now-outdated materials; when they log in, they'll always be accessing the latest update of their purchased material. How's that for customer service?

It Brings Awareness to Your Organization's Subject Matter Authority
Increase membership, member advocacy and bolster your brand by keeping all forms of your content close-to-home. If

your organization offers online courses, posts videos on its blog, releases annual reports or is seeking to ignite an active community within your industry, digital content distribution is a must.

Within a digital content distribution platform, this wide diversity of business strategies for highlighting your organization's subject matter expertise can be featured side-by-side with the specialized materials your purchasers and members have come to rely on from you.

Use your platform as a direct-to-buyer interface through which your members not only receive fresh content from your organization on a regular basis, but also further familiarize themselves with your other offerings, thought leadership and achievements.

Conclusion

Digitally-Distributed Content: It's Not Just A Format. It's a Solution.

Digital content distribution is a necessary next step for any association, accreditation board, society or other organization that creates and distributes its own educational content to today's professionals. It's not a matter of if content should be digitized, so much a matter of when the process can start.

Here's a hint: the sooner you start, the better. Why wait to eliminate costs, increase revenue, and establish yet another way that your organization is leading its industry?

Are You Ready to Go Digital?

Now that you've familiarized yourself with why a content distribution platform is important to the success of your organization, it's time to select a content distribution solution that's right for you.

Ensure the delivery of exceptional digital experiences to your members while reducing your organization's manufacturing, printing and shipping costs by choosing VitalSource as a digital distribution partner. With over twenty years in digital learning, VitalSource has helped organizations of all types; we know digital transformations aren't always a straight line. That's why we've created top-of-the-line solutions like Bookshelf that provide you with the security, analytics and integration with your existing processes needed for your transition to digital content distribution to be a success. And, with content accessible to learners both offline and online, your members will be more successful, too, meaning they'll return to your products again and again.

Bookshelf is the world's most-used platform for distributing, accessing, consuming, and engaging with educational content, just like your organization creates. The world and technology are changing fast and being stuck with outdated solutions and mode of distribution can be frustrating. With Bookshelf, you'll never be left behind.

Would you like to see what Bookshelf can do for you?