

AUGUST 1, 2024

Compass Guide to Component Content Management Systems Q3 2024

Evaluation of RWS Tridion Docs

By: Tony White



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RWS Tridion Docs Product Evaluation

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ARS LOGICA POSITION

Tridion Docs from RWS is the CCMS market's top-performing platform, leading the industry in a majority of the evaluative criteria in our Vendor/Product Scorecards. The cross-industry offering within RWS' five-part Structured Content portfolio, Tridion Docs proves singularly compelling for global enterprises orchestrating people and processes with structured and unstructured content into efficient, controllable, and relevant workplace and customer experiences. Recent productizing of collections of features with a previously "custom-only" complexity level also makes RWS' competitive position relevant to a wider range of customers.

NOTES & RESOURCES

Sources of Information

Some company and product information contained in this report was collected via Ars Logica's vendor questionnaires. Vendor responses were verified through product demos, customer interviews, implementation monitoring, product documentation, Ars Logica's knowledge base, and/or hands-on product testing.

Platforms Included

The Compass Guides include the platforms that Ars Logica considers to be the most significant in the CCMS market. While scores on our business and technology scorecards vary widely, each platform evaluated will be a best-fit given the right use case, and may therefore prove worthy of shortlisting.

Customer Interviews

Ars Logica has interviewed users of every product covered in the Compass Guides, including RWS Tridion Docs.

Implementation Monitoring

Since the 1990s, Ars Logica founder Tony White has kept close tabs on ongoing content management implementations. Some of this knowledge is represented in the Compass Guide reports.

No Vendor Influence

Ars Logica retains complete editorial control over the Compass Guides and receives no funding in their production.

RWS Vendor Overview (specific to RWS Tridion Docs)

RWS secured a leadership position in the component content management market with its 2020 acquisition of longtime frontrunner SDL. Prior to that, SDL had become a key player in this market with its 2007 acquisition of Trisoft – the same year it acquired Tridion – a move that announced the company’s strategic entry into the DITA market. SDL’s further acquisition of XyEnterprise in 2009 netted the vendor moderate expansion of its content delivery capabilities, but more significantly, expanded SDL’s mind- and market-share in the DITA tools market. In 2011, Xopus, producer of a market-leading XML editor, also became part of the SDL family. These three acquisitions collectively signified attainment of the leadership position in the management, delivery, and creation of component-based content, respectively. Most recently, RWS’ acquisition of Fonto and Propylon in 2022 and 2023 has expanded its reach into the pharmaceutical, government, legal, audit, and compliance sectors.

Company Profile

Year Founded: 1958
Headquarters: Chalfont Saint Peter,
Buckinghamshire, UK
Employees (or FTE equivalents): 7,814
Geographies: Global
Revenue (2023): \$931 million (£734 million)
Product Types Offered: Translation management, project management, electronic discovery, digital experience platform, component content management, integration platform
Commercial or Open Source: Commercial
Strategic CCMS Implementation Partners:
Accenture, Deloitte, TCS, Content Rules, ITP Japan, Technically Write it (TWi), Mekon, Precision Content, SWC, Etteplan, Citec, Pantopix
Top Competitors: Adobe, Documentum, MadCap, Quanos
Key Vertical Industries: Aerospace, automotive, high tech, financial services, legal, life sciences, manufacturing, pharmaceutical

Product Profile

Product Name: Tridion Docs
Version: 15.1
Next version release date: Q2 2025
Market segment: Enterprise
Average Sales Price (License Only): \$250,000
Technology Platforms: Java and .NET
Key Strengths: Best available localization and translation management, excellent management of full component lifecycle, robust workflow, market-leading information governance, extreme scalability, strong technical ecosystem
Key Limitations: Complexity of implementation and ongoing administration in on-premise offerings; price justifiable to some customers only with usage of other RWS products; leveraging tight integration with rest of Tridion stack entails vendor lock-in
Highest-Value Use Case: Global deployment of digital experience and workplace initiatives in which a single source of truth and strong information governance figure prominently in the integration of structured and unstructured content

Vendor History & Product Evolution

Understanding Tridion Docs in its current state requires knowledge of the history of four separate companies and product lines originating from different technology spaces: RWS, SDL, Tridion, and Trisoft. Before its acquisition of SDL, RWS offered a range of translation-based technology products and services in the areas of patents, life sciences, and turnkey localization for global companies. From its founding in 1992, SDL had similarly specialized in translation and machine learning, beginning with the localization of software and supporting documentation and applying its expertise over time to an expanding set of use cases. By contrast, Tridion had focused since its founding in 1999 on web content-and-experience management. After several years of developing applications for clients on professional services engagements, Tridion launched its first commercially-available WCM product, R3. The product's success in the Netherlands and surrounding countries was immediate, as it was in North America and Asia following debuts in 2006 and 2009. After acquiring Tridion in 2007, SDL continued the development of Tridion's namesake platform unabated (now Tridion Sites), as RWS does with both Tridion Sites and Tridion Docs.

Starting in 2001 with its flagship product, InfoShare (since rebranded as LiveContent Architect, Knowledge Center Content Manager, and Tridion Docs), Trisoft always focused narrowly on DITA-based XML component content management – not necessarily an intuitive match as a technology space with SDL's translation management until one considers the need among the largest of companies (especially in regulated industries) to deliver product-, process-, policy-, and compliance-related information globally.

The four product lines now fit together as follows: Tridion Docs and Tridion Sites as parts of what became the Tridion platform through the sharing of taxonomies and the full dynamic content delivery architecture; the Tridion platform itself as part of the whole RWS stack through tight connections with the vendor's language and integration offerings (software and services); and the combination of offerings from pre-acquisition SDL and RWS through nascent, but rapidly-evolving and comprehensive integration initiatives.

Key Recent Developments

Tridion Docs 15.1 introduces a level of "trustability" across the platform, from robust AI-assisted authoring, to reliable guided search/navigation, and truly relevant chat. The product's improved headless delivery facilitates the assembly of multichannel user experiences; and Tridion Docs also introduces new project management functionality that improves productivity for technical users, strengthens information governance across the platform, and includes for the first time content-reuse metrics/formulae that can fully justify technology costs and demonstrate content-reuse savings. Other major developments include (1) the availability of Tridion Docs Genius, AI-based technology that powers trustworthy content discovery and underlies a new approach to content-delivery experiences; (2) Web UI-based usability refinements across the platform; and (3) numerous improvements on par with market evolution, such support for OpenID Connect and OpenAPI.

Profiling the Ideal Buyer

The ideal buyer of Tridion Docs is the large organization seeking to reduce the cost and improve the accuracy of delivering localized product-, process-, policy-, and compliance-related information across geographies; strengthen information governance and compliance with regulatory processes; improve collaboration between subject matter experts (SMEs) and documentation teams; and establish links between related but previously unconnected structured and unstructured content. Key differentiators for Tridion Docs is the scale at which these can be accomplished, as well as unmatched experience in the regulated industries and fields relating to intellectual property.

- **Enterprise-Scale Deployment**

Customers extracting the most value from Tridion Docs are large companies with siloed or geographically dispersed SMEs and documentation teams who must increasingly collaborate to make possible the modular, taxonomic, cognitive-services-enabled content creation processes required to dynamically and accurately deliver both structured and unstructured content, regardless of channel.

- **Global Digital Presence**

A particular forte of RWS, global information management is a requirement namely for companies with high volumes of content that span multiple geographies, languages, brands, and online channels. Tridion Docs is the link between structured content and, (1) the rest of the former SDL's global information management stack, and (2) the broader range of RWS's translation-centric products and services targeted at large global enterprises.

- **Requirements beyond Tridion Docs**

While Tridion Docs is the market's most capable CCMS, the ideal customer will leverage much of the rest of RWS's product range – the full Tridion offering, translation software and services, compliance solutions, and integrations with third-party e-commerce, collaboration, DAM, and CRM platforms.

A Word about Deployment Options

The three bullet points require the consideration of a universe of additional requirements: developmental (custom coding, enterprise application integration, governance, security, fit with emerging AI mandates); organizational (distributed team structures, people-process-technology mapping, IT staffing requirements, growth planning); fiscal (technology budgeting, return on technology expenditures); and so on. In-depth consulting initiatives are often the most appropriate means to address these. It must be said, however, that deployment options impact nearly all of these. Though not the only CCMS platform to do so, Tridion Docs offers a cloud version hosted by AWS, private cloud deployment options, and traditional on-premise implementations.

Key Product Strengths

Tridion Docs excels in a number of evaluative categories in our scorecards for business users and technologists, with industry-leading performance in the majority of both. First, the platform boasts superb localization and translation management capabilities. Related taxonomy and semantic functionality also lead the CCMS industry. The Compass Guide on version 14SP4 on Tridion Docs stated, “Benefitting from expertise acquired in the development of the Tridion Sites platform, Tridion Docs also includes workflow and approval features whose maturity and integration with collaboration and information-governance tools are unmatched.” The same remains true currently, but through implementation of a cross-platform Web UI, the 15.x versions extend the usability of workflow, collaboration, and information-governance functionality from primarily SMEs, to highly technical resources as well.

One of the major strategic thrusts for the 15.x versions of this platform is a broadening of RWS’ competitive market position through the continued provision of Tridion Docs’ most sophisticated, large-enterprise feature-functionality – while simplifying the adoption, deployment, and use of these capabilities for mid-market implementation scenarios. In short, viable mid-market solutions reified from the same large-enterprise technical foundation.

FIGURE 1 Tridion Docs, Key Product Strengths and Limitations

Below are several key product strengths and limitations that potential buyers should keep in mind when assembling vendor shortlists.

KEY STRENGTHS

KEY LIMITATIONS

Productizing collections of features with previously “custom-only” complexity level makes competitive position relevant to a wider range of customers.	Expansion of RWS’ technology portfolio has out-paced the vendor’s ability to craft a unified narrative conveying its highest value proposition.
Focus on enhanced, cross-platform, Web UI-based content governance and collaboration, extends practical usability from SMEs to technical users.	Leveraging tight integrations between layers of the RWS’ technology stack comes with a fair amount of vendor lock-in.
Industry-leading management of the complete component lifecycle.	Price justifiable to some customers only with usage of other RWS products.
Localization/translation management that surpass all other offerings in the CCMS market.	
Introduction of AI-based content delivery experiences and meaningful evolution of content-reuse technology/metrics will interest many enterprises.	

Source: Ars Logica, Inc.

Sources of information: product testing, customer interviews, vendor briefings and questionnaires

The following are a few examples that underlie statements in the preceding paragraph:

- Tridion Docs Genius, an AI-based content delivery portal that typically replaces and improves upon customer-built, bespoke content-delivery web applications
- Tridion Docs Draft Companion, an LLM (large language model) tool that facilitates access to and usage of sophisticated machine-learning technology without custom integration work by IT
- Highly-evolved productized metrics and reporting capabilities within the Organize Space module that foster content reuse and quantify associated cost savings, while eliminating the need for significant additional BI tooling and custom-generated reports

Key Product Limitations

The expansion of expansion of RWS' technology portfolio has outpaced the vendor's ability to craft a unified narrative conveying its highest value proposition. While not mandatorily a true platform limitation for all prospective customers, there will be technology-selection projects – especially at the larger of mid-sized companies – at which the actual fit between Tridion Docs and customer requirements will not be accurately understood. Best-of-breed vendors have always faced this difficulty when competing against suite-oriented offerings, whose value propositions are simpler to articulate, and whose correlated shortcomings can seem “worth it,” when they sometimes are not.

For customers who need RWS's uniquely robust translation capabilities integrated with one of the few available top-tier CCMS platforms, some of the thorny historical DITA-compliance issues discussed in the previous version of this report may well be worth embracing – while others may reason that Docs is not DITA-compliant “enough.” Ars Logica's own position is that some DITA-related compromises were justifiable in order to (1) fully leverage synergies between Tridion Docs and the range of RWS's translation offerings; and (2) offer productivity, accuracy, and user-experience enhancements when compared to file-system based authoring. In order to make the full RWS stack available to Tridion Docs and the Tridion Digital Experience Hub, decisions to follow RWS standards rather than DITA standards had to be made in certain cases – a calculation that results in real business value for some customers.

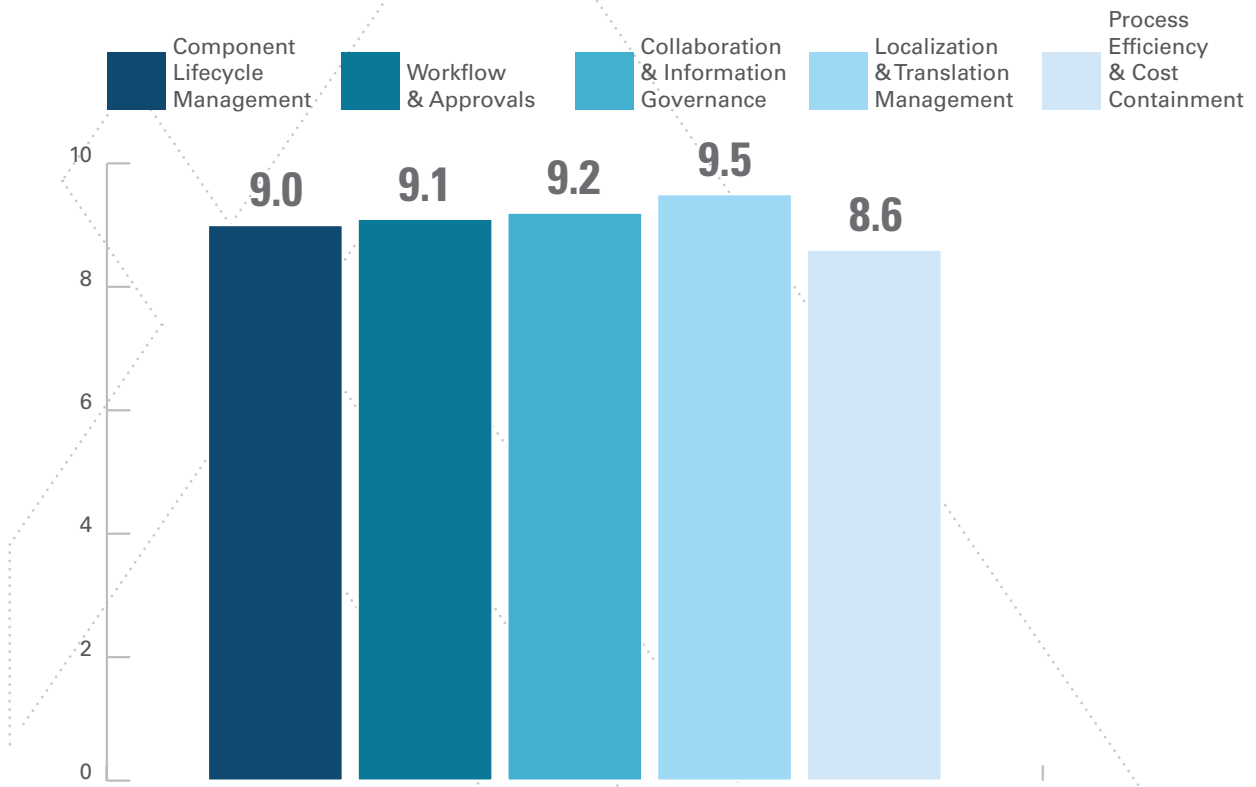
Next, the price of the product – justifiable for organizations with global information management requirements beyond CCMS – will put it out of reach of many technically-focused medium-sized companies who would still benefit from synergies between Tridion Docs, Tridion Sites, and RWS's other offerings. This situation has been improved in the 15.x versions of the product, but some mid-sized organization will find this to be the case.

Vendor/Product Report Cards

The features, functions, and technical underpinnings of CCMS products vary considerably, as do the customer requirements they are intended to satisfy. For this reason, the only reliable way to assure the best product fit for a particular client is to spend anywhere from several weeks to several months assessing the client's specific needs and analyzing product capabilities line by line. Still, Ars Logica is frequently asked to rate products in categories such as those in Figures 2 and 3. While the average scores across these categories might be the same for two products, proper weighting will often cause the overall scores to diverge significantly.

FIGURE 2 Tridion Docs Report Card for the Business User

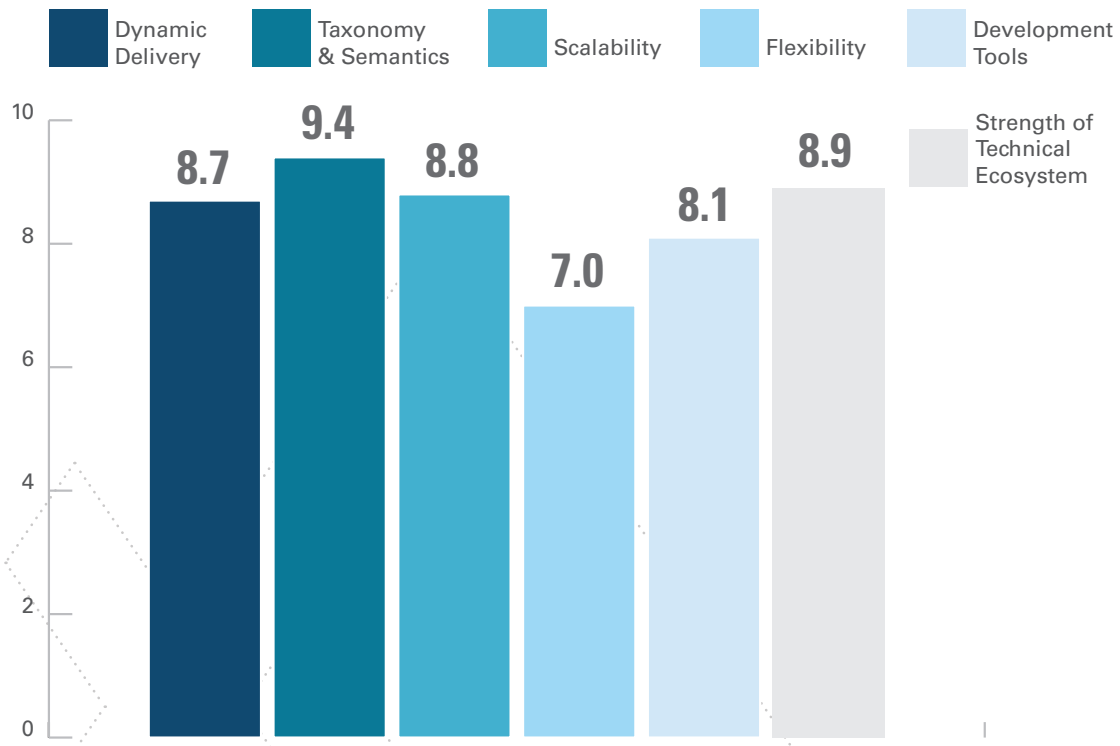
Figure 2 shows Ars Logica's rating of Tridion Docs in five CCMS categories of critical importance to business users. Refer to Page 11 for an explanation of the evaluation criteria.



Sources of information: product testing, customer interviews, vendor briefings and questionnaires

FIGURE 3 Tridion Docs Report Card for Technologists

Figure 3 shows Ars Logica's rating of Tridion Docs in six CCMS categories of critical importance to technologists. Refer to Page 12 for an explanation of the evaluation criteria.



Sources of information: product testing, customer interviews, vendor briefings and questionnaires

Report Card Evaluation Criteria

Criteria for Business Users

- **Component Lifecycle Management**

Managing the full lifecycle of content components harnesses a wide range of tools and feature-functionality (along with entire evaluative subcategories such as DITA compliance), including: content authoring/editing for SMEs; content discovery and reuse; content annotation and collaboration; dynamic content assembly; component versioning; component auditing and reporting; content/component retention and archiving; library services; repository capabilities; and output options.

- **Workflow & Approvals**

Authors need intuitive tools to move and control content through complex production processes – to individuals, groups, and agencies inside and outside the enterprise. Feature-functionality represented here includes linear modeling and approvals; workflow branching and merging; conditional approvals; auto-escalation; graphical workflow builders; and regulatory compliance capabilities.

- **Collaboration & Information Governance**

As the role of SMEs as technical content authors grows, content creation processes are transcending departmental boundaries – spreading out both organizationally and geographically to distributed documentation teams. This category assesses the agility and security of location-independent, structured, collaborative authoring processes.

- **Localization & Translation Management**

For enterprises doing business in multiple languages, delivering consistently compelling user experiences requires a strategic approach to content translation. Not only must translated content remain free of obvious linguistic inaccuracies, it must also be contextually relevant – to businesses, consumers, and machines – based on geography, country, dialect, industry, role, department, application, device, touchpoint, time, and logic. This category assesses a platform’s ability to deliver specific, error-free, contextually correct content in such highly variable situations.

- **Process Efficiency & Cost Containment**

The highly structured nature of component content implies that platforms in this category manage only format-free, purely modular, reusable content. When this is the case, the organic pieces of unified business processes such as “go to market initiatives” can be made to scale very efficiently. When this is not the case, the same processes tend to stall or fail, with costs that spiral out of control. This category assesses a platform’s demonstrated ability to streamline – at scale – the content-and-context aspects of such business processes while simultaneously containing costs.

Criteria for Technologists

- **Dynamic Delivery**

This category refers to a product's ability to deliver content to any information channel, regardless of format or destination point. This includes traditional delivery to PDF, Web, help, and e-learning modules, as well as integration with chatbot software, IoT devices, and AI platforms.

- **Taxonomy & Semantics**

This category refers to the hierarchical structure of content authoring environments, which drives site organization and URL structures, as well as to the metadata functions required for metatagging content, essential for effective content discovery and personalized customer experiences.

- **Scalability**

Scalability refers to the ability of a product to function well as system demands increase. Factors contributing to scalability are database size, query efficiency, bandwidth consumption, ease of system management, caching efficiency, load balancing, and mass content deployment capabilities.

- **Flexibility**

Flexibility denotes the ability to integrate with existing infrastructure, including operating systems, Web servers, databases, directories, development tools, and other enterprise applications. In the component content space, better adherence to DITA standards usually results in higher flexibility scores because of improved interoperability with other DITA-compliant systems.

- **Development Tools**

This category describes the quality of a product's development environment, the technologies it incorporates, and overall ease of customized application development. This category refers primarily to development frameworks, but other supporting applications are also included, such as XML editors, content conversion applications, specialized output engines, content optimization tools, and any other functionality that enables or eases the installation, development, and customization of CCMS implementations.

- **Strength of Technical Ecosystem**

Though component content management products have existed for more than 20 years, users of these applications have worked primarily in technical documentation departments, whose requirements vary greatly from company to company due to size, budget, geography, language, vertical industry, communication channels, and other individual differences. As a result, no two CCMS implementations are the same. With such a divergent implementation landscape, strength of the technical ecosystem – which determines options for outside expertise – becomes hugely important. This category estimates the strength of the third-party technical ecosystem available for customers to leverage.



SERVICES

Advisory Services

Ars Logica is a vendor-neutral analyst firm helping companies evaluate their digital experience requirements and select appropriate software. To address clients' questions and concerns that arise throughout the year, Ars Logica offers unlimited direct analyst access through its Analyst Anytime advisory services. These annual, subscription-based services provide guidance by phone or email within 24 hours on a wide range of issues. The number of inquiries submitted throughout the year is not limited.

Software and Technology Selection

In our technology selection engagements, Ars Logica maps clients' functional, technological, and strategic requirements to potential software platforms and identifies the vendors whose products best satisfy these requirements. We maintain a continuously updated comprehensive matrix of the feature-functionality of most digital experience vendors' products and solutions. We receive frequent briefings from these vendors and have in-depth conversations and consulting engagements with their customers, ensuring that we always understand the actual state of vendors' offerings as well as their forward-looking strategic directions.

Custom Engagements

Ars Logica's expertise in technologies such as web content management, digital experience management, digital asset management, marketing campaign management, enterprise search, and portals, gives us the open-ended ability to help clients on a wide range of projects, including: building internal business cases, assessing technology requirements, analyzing software products and vendors, selecting and assembling software solutions, crafting digital strategies, and running corporate educational seminars. We also assist vendors in developing strategic roadmaps, and we present our view of the digital experience market at industry conferences and end-user events.

Contact

Tel: +1 617.943.5611
867 Boylston Street
Fifth Floor
Boston, MA 02116
consulting@arslogica.com
www.arslogica.com