Measuring the ROI of API Documentation

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Introduction

While most companies with API offerings spend (varying amounts) in developing technical documentation, they tend to view this as an expense, rather than an investment. While the obligation to make documentation available to prospective API consumers is understood, they struggle to attribute the value delivered to this necessary expenditure.

And yet, technical and API documentation yields a significant positive impact on several business, operational and tech metrics. In this whitepaper, we detail the benefits of good documentation, specifically for financial institutions that have API-led offerings ecosystem partners for indirect sales partnerships. We will provide you with the key metrics that will help you track the value delivered by your documentation.

Key hurdles to realizing the value of API documentation

To unlock value from documentation, companies should be aware of typical hurdles that result in sub-par value realization

Information source fragmentation > Oftentimes, the mistake made by companies is not investing in a content platform but sharing a large amount of information spread across various documents and formats, and using different channels (email / websites / file sharing portals, etc.). This creates a poor experience for the doc users, and retracts from the overall value of API documentation

One-size-fits-all solutions > Specific topics within the API documentation should come up for specific types of users, contextualized for their use cases and depending on where they are, in their integration journeys. Developing good documentation is necessary, but not sufficient – it is important to deliver targeted, contextualized content for each type of content audience

Docs out-of-sync with tech > If technical documentation is not maintained in sync with the technology, it causes friction at the point of delivery – either there is a scramble to inefficiently update it, or worse, users receive partial or incorrect details, which results in a cycle of clarifications, escalations and delays

Customer Service Productivity

Good documentation aids both, partner developers, as well as customer service agents, by providing relevant information at the right time.

This inculcates self-service, reducing the need for interaction, which directly translates into a reduction in service requests.

Access to relevant information also lowers the support time, increasing customer service productivity.

Customer Satisfaction

An overall superior integration experience – clear information, lower need to raise issues / service requests, faster issue resolution – results in stronger CSAT scores.

Metrics to monitor

Customer service productivity	Reduction in number of escalations / issues (weekly / monthly trend)
	Increase in issues handled or customers handled per agent
	Increase in first-time resolutions
	Reduction in issue resolution time
Customer satisfaction	Customer NPS / Integration experience CSAT

Potential to reduce number of support tickets by 30-40% via the Documentation Portal

Developer / Integration Productivity

Integration Productivity

Providing the right informational assistance to the integrating partners makes their development process more efficient, reducing their time to go-live, and hence their integration costs.

Post-integration productivity

Good documentation ensures that any updates, changes, migration requirements are reflected and shared with the partners in a timely manner – this further reduces friction in maintenance of the integration

Metrics to monitor

Integration productivity (partner)	Reduction in time to go-live
	Reduction in integration costs
	Reduction in number of issues / queries / support requests
Post-integration productivity	Reduction in number of post-integration issues / queries / service requests

Potential to cut down integration timelines by 50+% on average, across integrating partners

Marketing efficiency

A good docs portal can serve as an extremely effective tool for both, marketing as well as selling. The portal landing page can serve well for content marketing, branding and drawing users' attention to specific areas.

While the portal itself can be instrumental in driving organic traffic, well-written documentation can signal to your audience of the quality of your offerings and the fact that you care about them and value their time. This also helps build your happy customer base, and hence with word-of-mouth recommendations - which tend to have higher conversion rates.

Metrics to monitor

Marketing efficiency

Increase in number of visitors, and time spent per visit
Improved SEO performance and web referencing
Increase in organic visits / leads

Ability to drive xx improvement in SEO ranks within 1 year of the Documentation Portal launch

Growth in in-bound partnerships

Good documentation signals product quality and draws more in-bound partnership prospects. The promise of low integration timelines, clear information and integration assistance results in a stronger conversion funnel, from prospect to partner.

Lower customer churn

An overall superior integration experience has a measurable impact on CSAT, and improves customer stickiness, and lowers customer churn.

Metrics to monitor

Growth in in-bound partnerships	Increase in new in-bound partnerships (weekly / monthly trend)
	Increase in revenue from new partnerships
	Increase in partnership conversions
Lower customer churn	Reduction in customer churn

Potential to boost in-bound prospects by ~20% via the Documentation Portal

Documentation, if written effectively, structured well and maintained regularly, can serve a wider set of use cases in addition to being a resource for API developers.

When each team understands how documentation is relevant and useful to them, for internal or external purposes, this not only unlocks the true ROI and potential of the documentation, but also brings about significant business and operational impact to each of the involved teams.

Documentation as an internal knowledge base

Documentation should be leveraged as a store of information and a knowledge base, to be referred to, when there are questions or discussions about specific areas related to the product. Documentation can drive internal efficiencies - instead of meetings to explain how something works, a redirect to the relevant part of the documentation can save a lot of time!

Documentation for training new recruits

On the same lines, documentation can serve as a great starting point for new recruits who will be working on the same offerings - it can serve as a compendium for pre-reading, helping bring new teammates up to speed much faster and saving much hand-over time.

Documentation to reduce other overheads

Well-maintained documentation helps reduce future maintenance costs - if sections of information are laid out well, and ownership / authorship is maintained clearly, future updates are more efficient, timely, and hence less costly.

Conclusion

API documentation can be a significant opportunity for companies, for both, realizing business upsides as well as maintaining costs.

This opportunity is best unlocked if – a) companies are aware of the advantages of leveraging docs effectively, and b) they adequately invest in not only developing documents, but also in ensuring that the common mistakes and obstacles are avoided.

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