

Paligo vs Zendesk Knowledge

From Unstructured Content in Zendesk Knowledge to Structured Content in Paligo

Executive Summary

Effective content creation and management are foundational to high-quality technical documentation, scalable operations, and getting AI-ready. Yet, many teams rely on unstructured content tools like Zendesk Knowledge. These tools frequently result in inefficiencies, duplication of content, and high operational costs, especially as businesses scale, introduce product variations, or expand into new markets.

Through workflow visualizations and real-world scenarios, we demonstrate how structured content:

- Reduces duplication
- Reduces errors
- Improves formatting consistency
- Simplifies multilingual documentation management
- Streamlines multichannel publishing
- Optimizes content for AI apps, such as chatbots and knowledge bases

This guide will help you compare and contrast structured and unstructured content creation workflows and, therefore, understand the tangible benefits of adopting structured content.

Structured authoring has changed many technical writers' working day for the better. Single-sourcing their content reduces the stressful "cognitive load" of managing large sets of complex documentation. Knowing that everything is in control, consistent, and high-quality gives those who switch to structured authoring confidence and pride in the work that they're delivering.

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The Modern Challenges of Managing Technical Documentation

The Modern Challenges of Managing Technical Documentation

Customer self-service is growing in demand every day, with the majority of customers preferring to resolve issues independently. A recent [Salesforce study](#) found that 61% of customers prefer to use self-service to resolve simple issues. As self-service becomes the cornerstone of modern support strategies, the demand for consistent, accurate, and high-quality technical and product documentation has never been greater.

However, as much as customers demand access to accurate documentation, most organizations struggle to deliver it; not because they lack the information, but because they don't have the tools and processes to create, manage, and publish it efficiently and effectively. For those organizations that seek to leverage the power of AI in their knowledgebases and help centers, the challenges of unstructured content and content chaos also hold them back.

The challenges of managing technical documentation stem from several areas. For starters, documentation teams often use a mix of tools, each with its own capabilities and issues. Even when a single tool is used, issues can result (as we'll show you).

Documentation is typically in an unstructured format, such as MS Word, Google Docs, Confluence wikis, or PDFs. It's page- or article-based, with style and formatting mixed with the content. Unstructured content does not support content reuse, which means technical authors must frequently copy and paste the same information within and across documentation, and then manually track where this is happening.

In some cases, instead of copy and pasting content, authors are creating it from scratch, leading to inconsistencies in how information is written and shared.

Collaboration among authors, editors, and subject matter experts is also manual, with a lot of emailing of documents back and forth, and trying to resolve multiple edits from multiple reviewers.

For organizations that provide documentation in multiple languages, the translation workflow is often manual, more costly, and takes longer, resulting in inconsistent information across languages.

And organizations that need to deliver technical documentation to more than one channel (and in more than one format), such as an online Help Center, a Knowledge Base, a customer support portal, or via PDF, find they must create and manage separate versions of their documentation, making it difficult to maintain and keep the versions in sync.

One other important challenge is budget. Although organizations understand the need to provide customers with accurate information, technical documentation teams work with limited budgets for resources and technology.

Is there an answer to these challenges? Yes.

Structured Content and Component Content Management Systems (CCMS)

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Technical documentation

Technical documentation teams are smart. They know that unstructured content is the biggest challenge they need to overcome if they want to develop scalable, accurate documentation across customer channels. And they know the answer is switching to a structured content model.

Structured content is content that's separated from its presentation and is written by breaking the content into reusable topics (or components). You can create structured content manually but you'll have more success if you use a component content management system (CCMS).

A CCMS, like Paligo, provides a structured authoring environment that enables you to create all your technical documentation in one place (called single sourcing). With a CCMS, you can create your content, collaborate on it with your team and subject matter experts, track versions, send it for translation (and track translations against the source language), and leverage features like content variants, filters, and profiles. Additionally, a CCMS enables the export of content in multiple formats (e.g., HTML, HTML5, XML, PDF) and across multiple channels (e.g., Knowledge Base, website, customer portal).

It sounds like a CCMS is the best tool for managing technical documentation, right? But not every organization uses a CCMS. Instead, some are using unstructured content tools, such as Microsoft Word, Google Docs, Confluence, Adobe RoboHelp, and Zendesk, among others.

We're not saying these tools are inherently bad. There is a time and place where they might be right for your needs. The key is to understand how they work in comparison to a CCMS, so you can determine the right tool for your documentation team. That's what we're going to do.

Zendesk Knowledge, Support Content Meets Workflow Walls

Zendesk Knowledge: Support Content Meets Workflow Walls

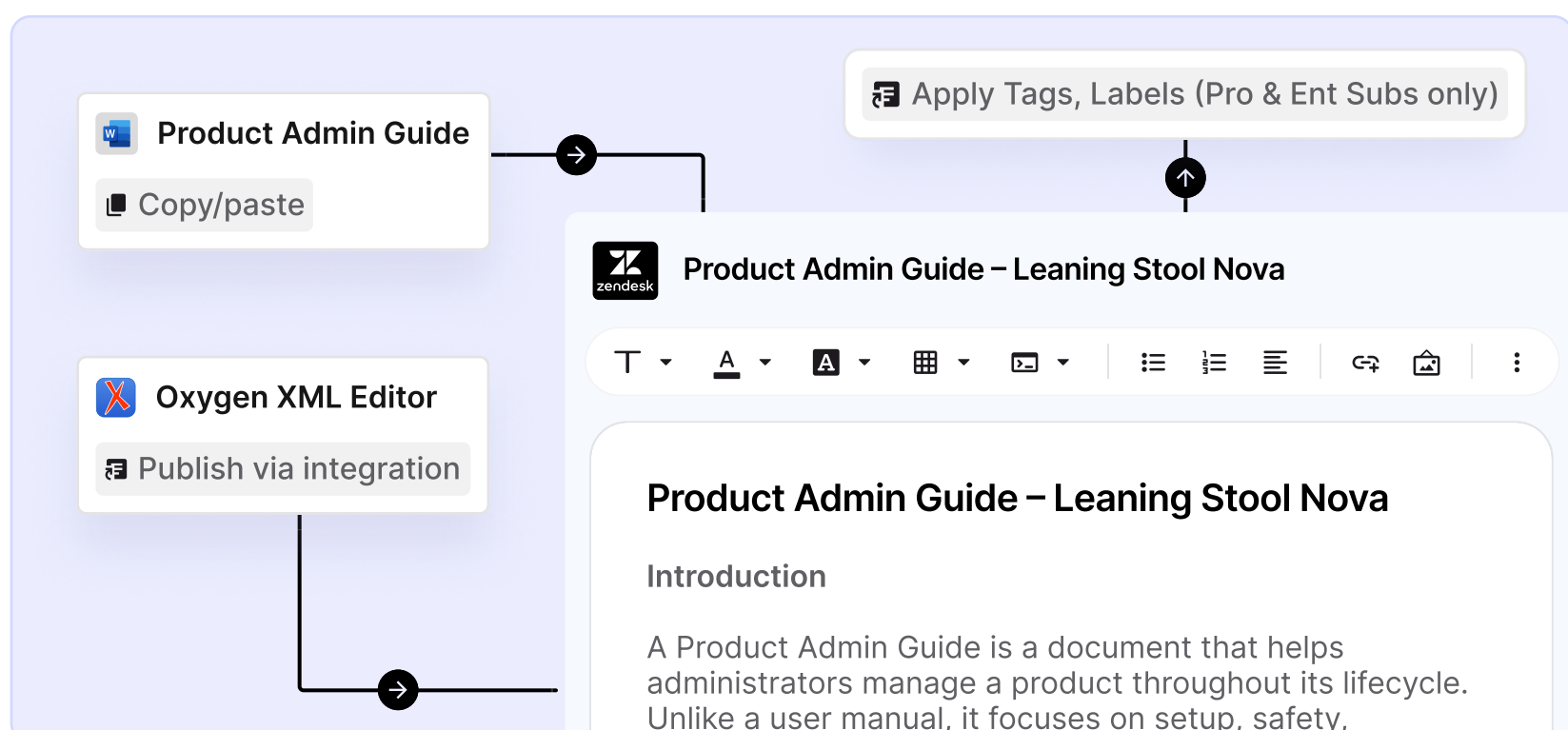
Zendesk is a cloud-based customer support platform that offers messaging and live chat, voice support, ticketing, and a help center. Zendesk is not primarily a technical documentation tool, but the Knowledge Base (formerly called Guide) can be used to create and manage technical documentation such as knowledge base articles, FAQs, and other technical content.

Zendesk has three subscription levels that include the Knowledge base: Suite Team, Suite Professional, and Suite Enterprise. As we review the knowledge base capabilities, it's essential to understand that some features apply only to specific subscriptions.

Creating a Publication

Zendesk Knowledge's content architecture is basic. Content is organized into categories, sections, and then articles. There is no content directly under categories or sections; all content is built at the article level. On Enterprise plans, you can create sub-sections up to six levels deep.

You can create content using external authoring tools (e.g., Oxygen editor) and publish them into Zendesk Knowledge, or you can cut and paste from Google Docs, text, or HTML into the article editor. You can also work directly in the knowledge base using the article editor. All articles start in draft mode.



Articles are page-based, and all styles and formatting are part of the page. Styles are applied through a site-wide theme, using the WYSIWYG editor, or you can edit the HTML source code of an individual article (Zendesk limits the HTML tags you can apply). Any manual HTML changes require you to keep track of where you've made those manual changes.

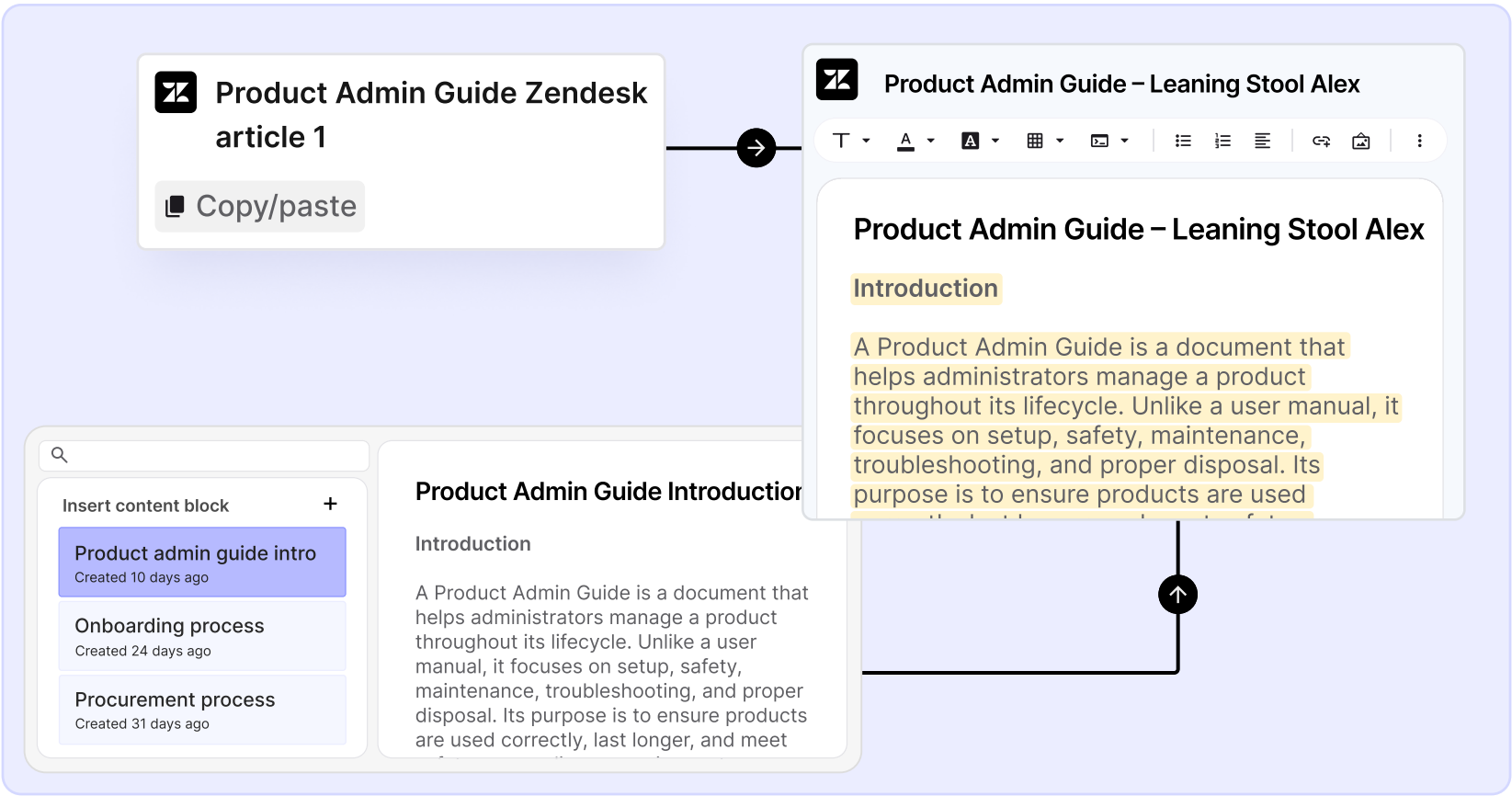
People who create articles directly in Knowledge must be an admin or have an agent role in the Zendesk account, one that has permission to create articles.

Professional and Enterprise accounts have the ability to assign tags and labels to articles. You can apply up to 25 tags to an article. Tags are used in the Related To section of the article template. There is a 200 tag limit per account. Labels are keywords or phrases related to the article. Labels are used to support search, to create lists of articles, or to help chatbots return relevant content.

Managing Reuse and Product Variants

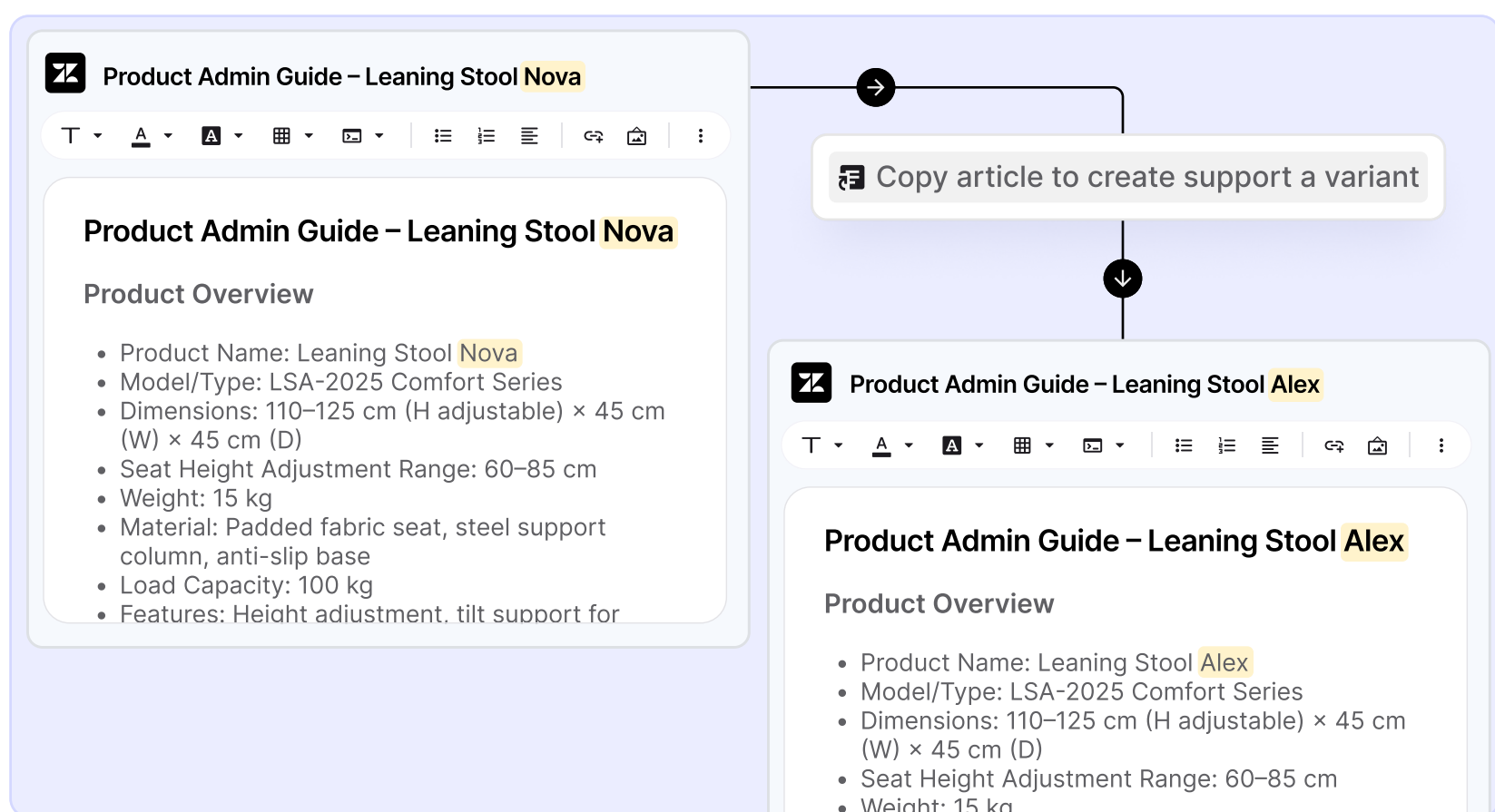
There is limited content reuse in Zendesk Knowledge through the use of “content blocks,” which are available only in the Enterprise Edition. All content blocks are stored in a dedicated section and inserted into articles as needed. You can apply formatting to content blocks.

You can create a content block for a paragraph, section heading, table, bulleted list, code block, or a series of subsections in an article. You can even create a content block from the text in an entire article.



However, they are not very powerful or flexible. There have been complaints that content blocks don't update across all articles where they are used. Additionally, since you can apply formatting to a content block, its design may conflict with the article's design and impact its layout. You can view a list of all articles where a content block is used, as well as the status of those articles.

Zendesk also lacks native variant management. For different product names or market-specific content, users must manually duplicate the content and keep track of it. Zendesk also does not support content filtering or profiling.

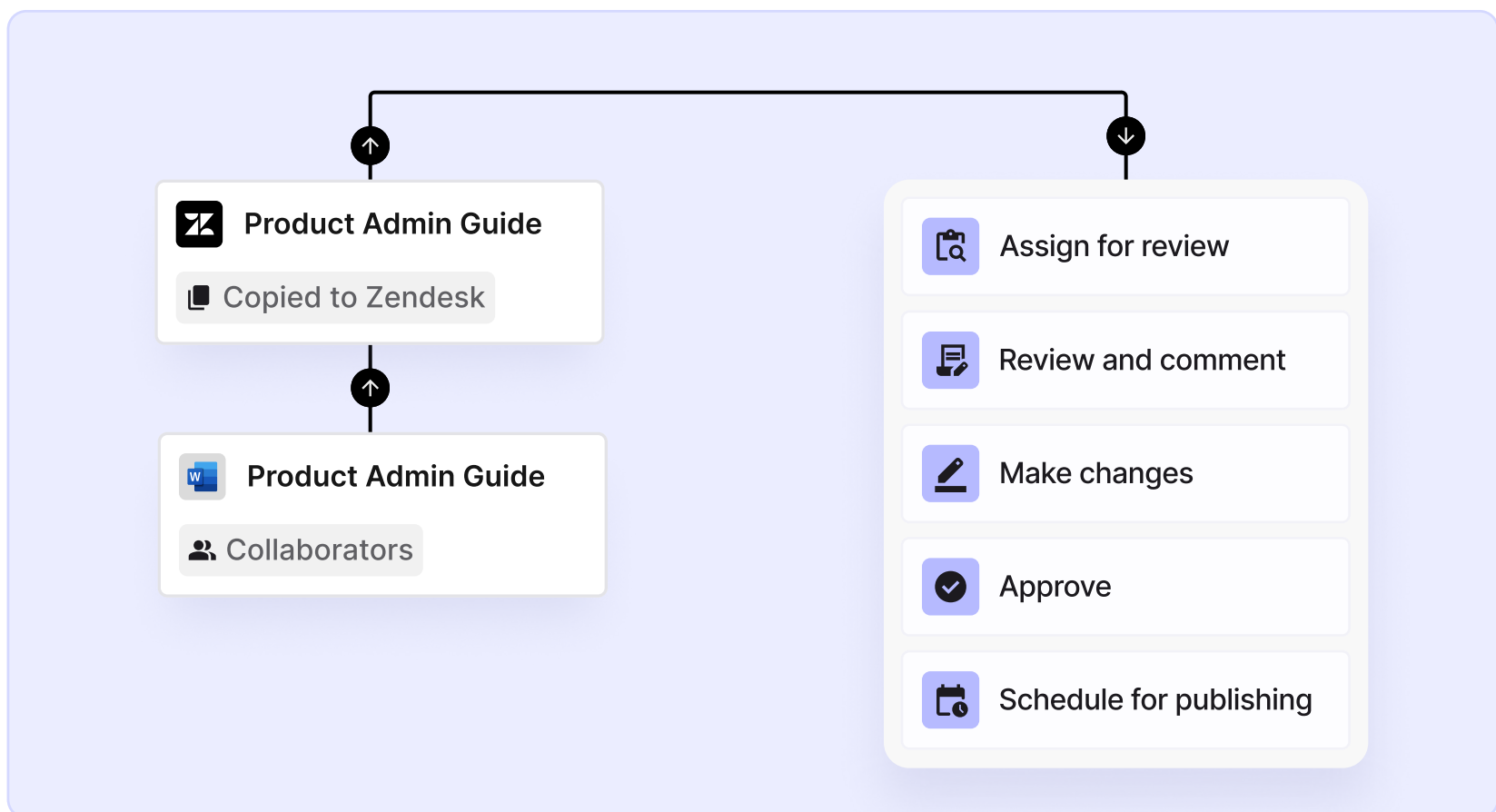


Collaboration

Zendesk tracks revisions for articles, allowing users to revert to previous versions. Each save creates a new revision tied to a specific user. However, versions and version history are only available to Professional and Enterprise subscriptions.

For Enterprise subscriptions, there is also a review and approval workflow, along with the ability to schedule articles for live publication.

For all other subscriptions, if you are using another tool to create content (such as Google Docs), you need to perform all reviews and approvals within that tool. This ensures you have a proper review and a history of all changes. Only copy the final, approved version to Zendesk.



The closest feature to commenting is a "note" left when assigning an article. When you assign an article to somebody, you can leave a note saying what to do with the article, and the person assigned the article can read it.

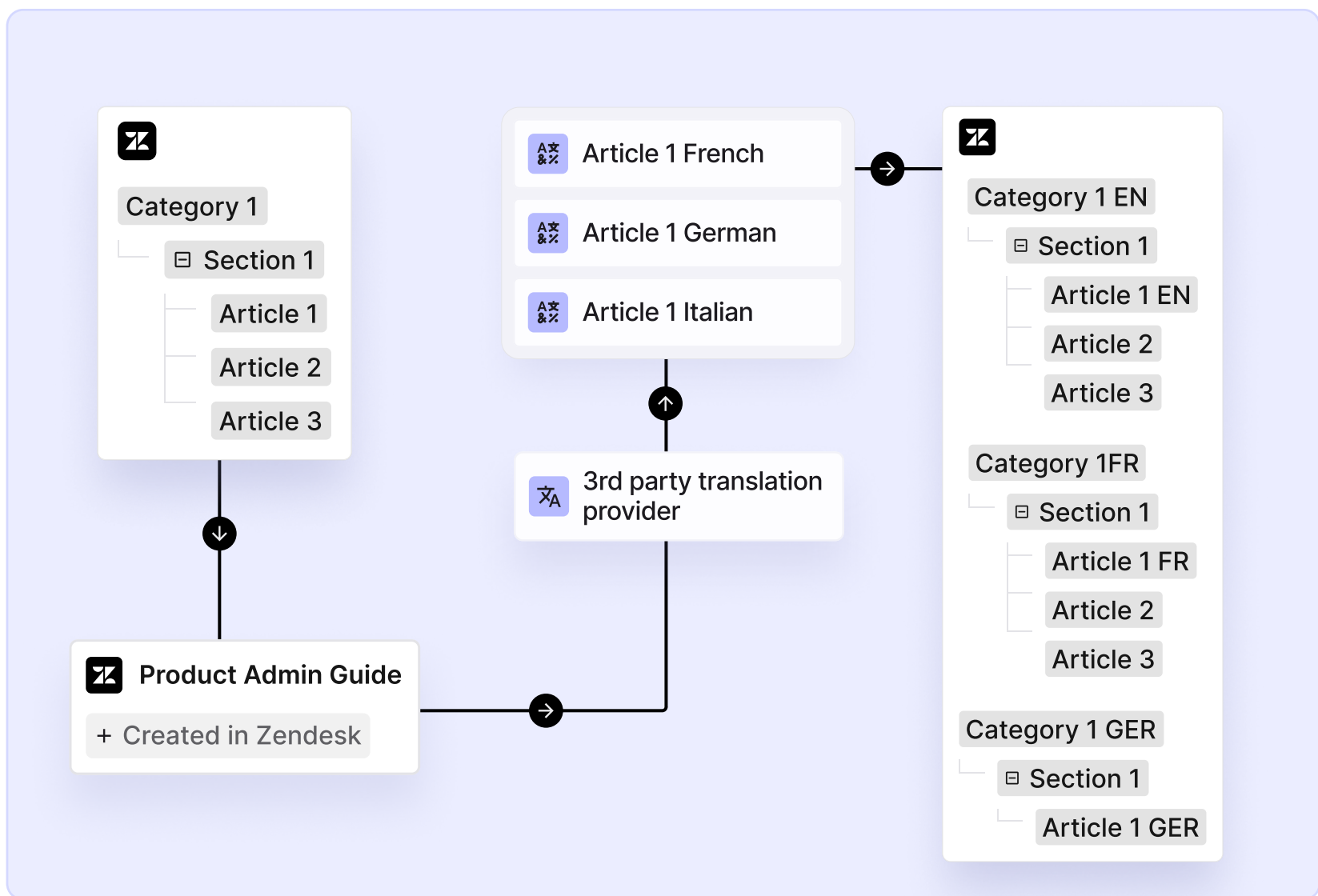
There are commenting capabilities that apply to an entire article. However, these apply to published content, allowing readers to leave a comment on the article.

Translating Documentation

There are several options for translating knowledge base articles, depending on the subscription you have.

- Integrate a third-party Translation Provider
- Build your own integration with the Help Center API
- If you purchase the Copilot, you can use the translation AI to create new versions of an article in each new language you want.

A more manual approach includes adding all source content to a spreadsheet and sending it to a translation provider. The spreadsheet is returned with all languages requested and then copy/pasted into new articles

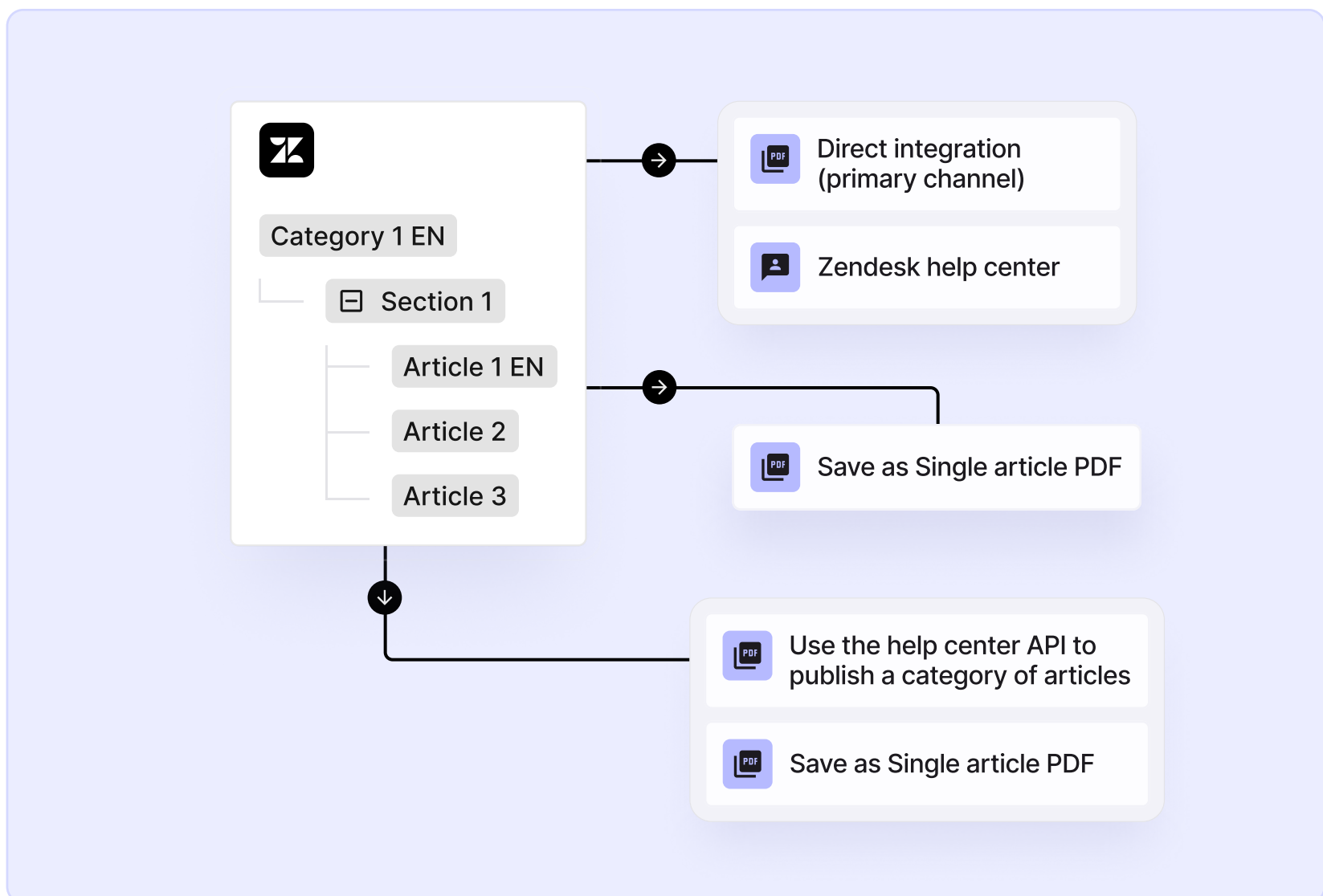


Zendesk allows admins to flag a language as outdated. However, getting the content updated happens through a manual process or by sending to an integrated TMS.

In all cases, translated articles are managed as separate copies. There is no connection between the source language article and the translated copy.

Multi-Channel Publishing

The primary publishing channel in Zendesk is Zendesk itself. Knowledge base content is published to the Zendesk Help Center, a web-based HTML site.



Users can save an article as a PDF, but to export an entire category of articles, you need to use the Help Center API or integrate a third-party add-on.

Why use Zendesk Knowledge

Zendesk is a great solution if you want to publish your technical documentation and knowledge base alongside other support content and other support functionality.

Paligo has a direct integration with Zendesk. Paligo handles all the structured authoring and content management, and Zendesk is a channel to publish content to.

Managing Technical Documentation with Paligo CCMS

Managing Technical Documentation with Paligo CCMS

True Structured Authoring and Management

We've walked through the key capabilities of five unstructured authoring tools. Now, we want to describe how Paligo CCMS differs from these tools to offer true structured authoring and single-sourcing capabilities.

Paligo is a cloud-native component content management system that gives you granular control over your content. Technical documentation teams use Paligo CCMS to create, manage, and reuse content through structured, topic-based authoring. It provides full version control, built-in review workflows, automated translation management, and multi-channel publishing.

Let's examine these capabilities in more detail to understand how a structured authoring solution offers numerous improvements over an unstructured authoring tool.

Creating a Publication

Paligo has a structured authoring environment. Content is organized by publications and topics. Topics can be as small as a tip, note, or warning, or as large as a paragraph or section. The key with a topic is that it can stand alone and be reused across publications.

Each topic follows a structured XML-based layout, which includes at a minimum a title and a paragraph. Authors can add additional elements as needed using the Paligo Editor, which resembles a word processor, hiding XML tags to keep the interface uncluttered. The Editor also provides some basic formatting features.

Paligo tracks all changes to a component, maintaining a complete history. You can roll back to previous revisions, and compare different revisions of a component. Every time you save a component, Paligo stores a record called a revision. You can also create branches of your content at the publication or component level.

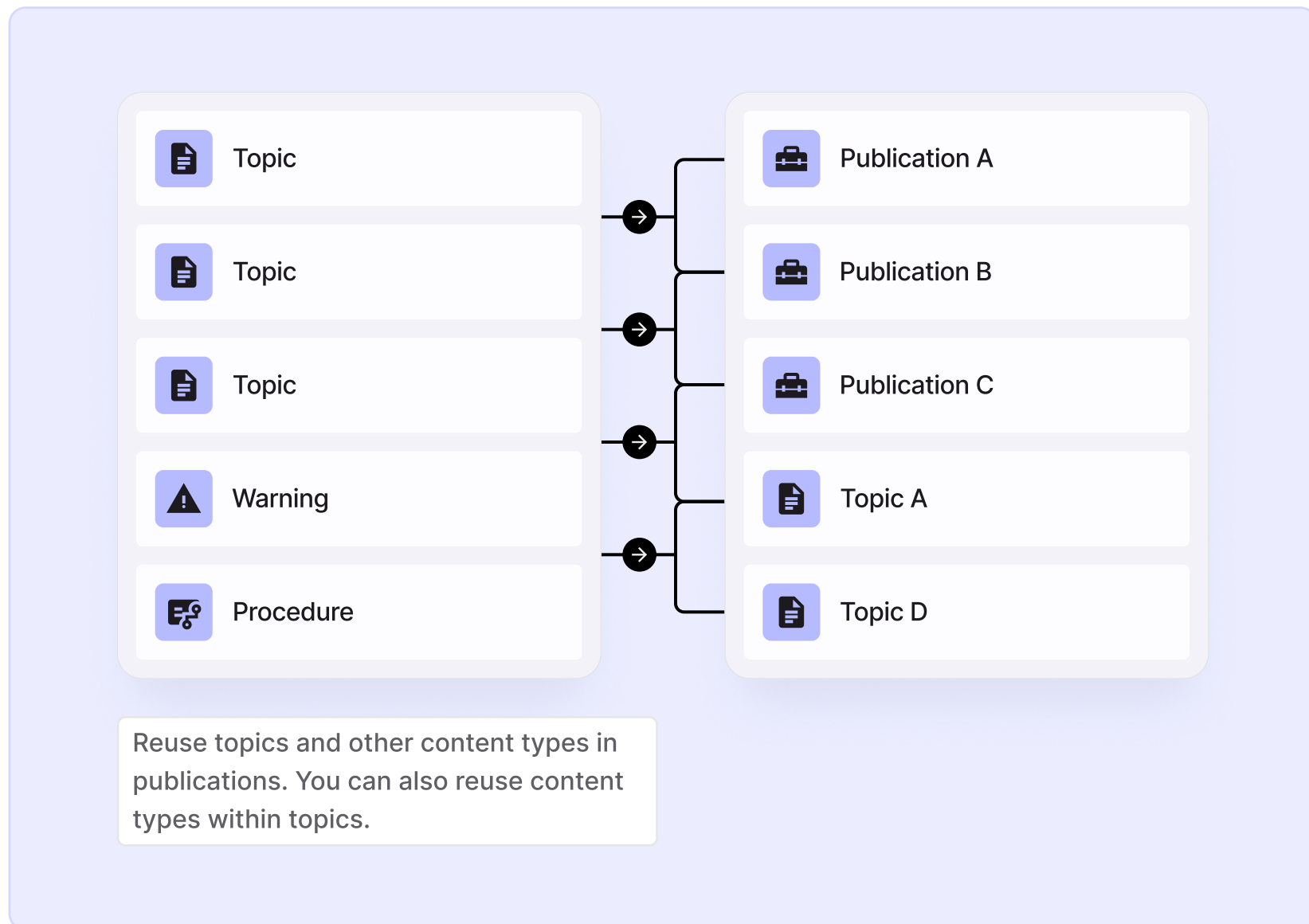
The screenshot displays the Paligo CCMS interface. At the top, there is a rich text editor toolbar with icons for bold, italic, underline, and other formatting options. Below the toolbar, a document titled "Sun roof" is shown with a paragraph of text and an image of a car's sunroof. To the right of the document, a sidebar contains a list of topics, each labeled "Topic A" with a person icon and a superscripted number (1 or 2). A line with an arrow points from the first "Topic A" entry to a callout box containing the instruction: "1. Create a publication and create topics (sections) for that publication". Below the document, a "Create content" dialog box is open, showing a grid of document types: Publication, Topic, Informal Topic, Appendix, Danger, Warning, Caution, Notice, Note, Important, Tip, and Custom element. To the right of the dialog box, another callout box contains the instruction: "2. Create topics and other content types separately in the content manger and then insert them into publications as needed". At the bottom right, there are two buttons: "Paligo editor" and "Oxygen XML Editor", each with a corresponding icon and a sub-button labeled "Create content directly in the Paligo editor" and "Publish via integration" respectively.

Branching allows you to create concurrent or parallel versions of content, often used to work on major updates to documentation that support a new product update before the product is released. Once the product is officially available, you can merge the branches back together and have the new content available.

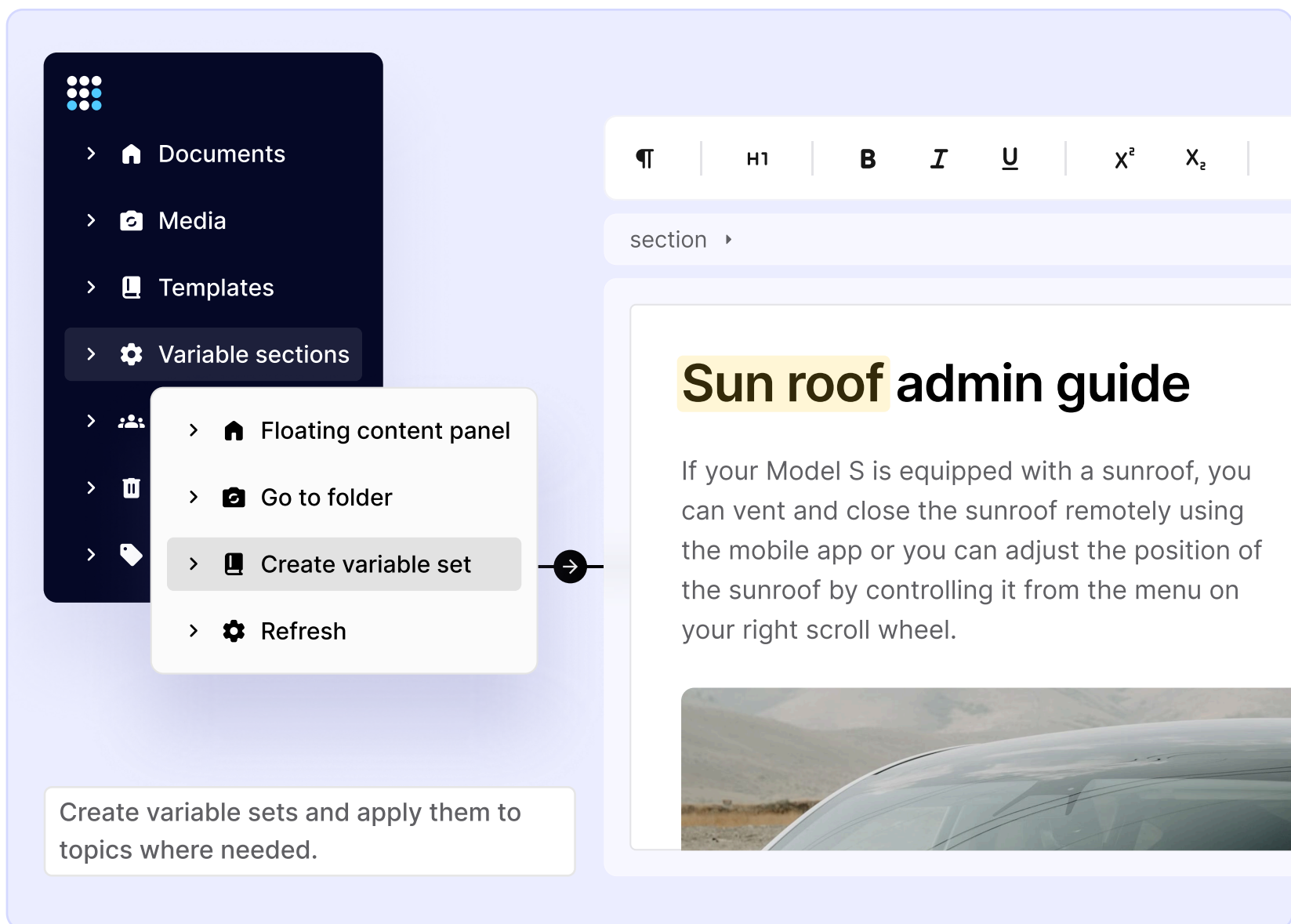
Managing Reuse and Product Variants

Paligo CCMS supports content reuse. Because content is structured, you can include topics inside other topics.

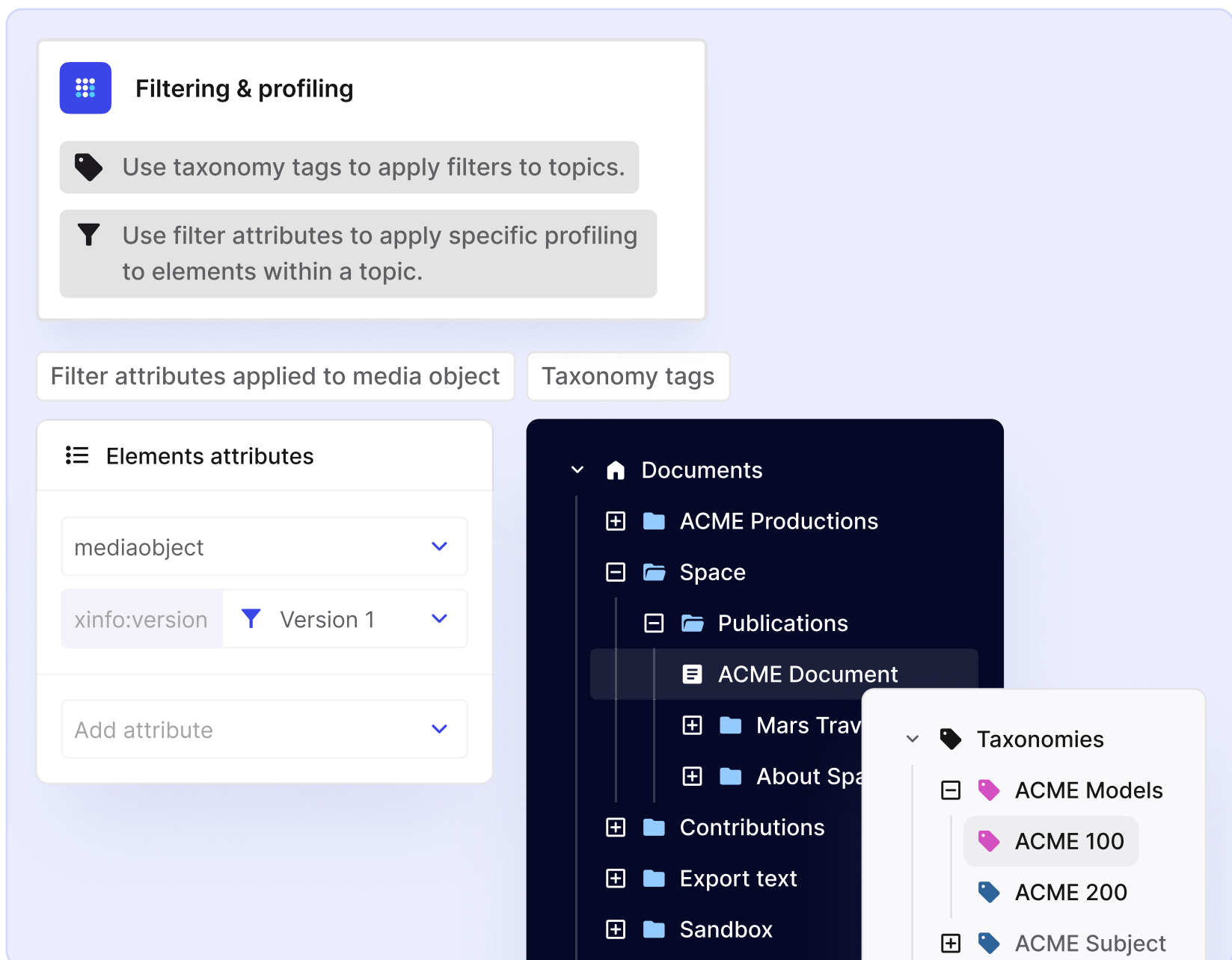
For example, if you have a series of Tips or Procedures created as reusable topics, you can insert one or more inside another topic. When that Tip or Procedure is updated, it's automatically updated everywhere it's reused.



You can also create product variants and conditional content in Paligo. Let's say you have a product that you sell globally, but the product has a different name in several countries. The rest of your documentation remains the same; it's only the name that differs. Instead of creating multiple copies of your documentation for each country that needs a different product name, you can use a variable. You create a variable set in Paligo that contains the product names you need, and you insert the variable everywhere the product name is mentioned. When you export your publication for publishing, you select which variable value to use.



In addition to variables, you can also perform filtering or profiling to enable a topic to be reusable in multiple contexts. For example, you are creating an administration guide that supports multiple subscription levels. However, some of the content is only applicable to a specific subscription. In this example, you apply a filter to the content that you only want to publish with the higher-level subscription documentation. Filtering is also known as conditional text and can be used to change data, images, or hide information for certain products, models, or markets.



Collaboration

Paligo CCMS includes built-in collaboration capabilities to support multiple authors, editors, and reviewers. First, you can create assignments, including Review, Contribution, Translation, and Translation Review. An email notification is sent to the assignee containing a link to the assignment. This link also appears in the Assignments panel of their Dashboard.

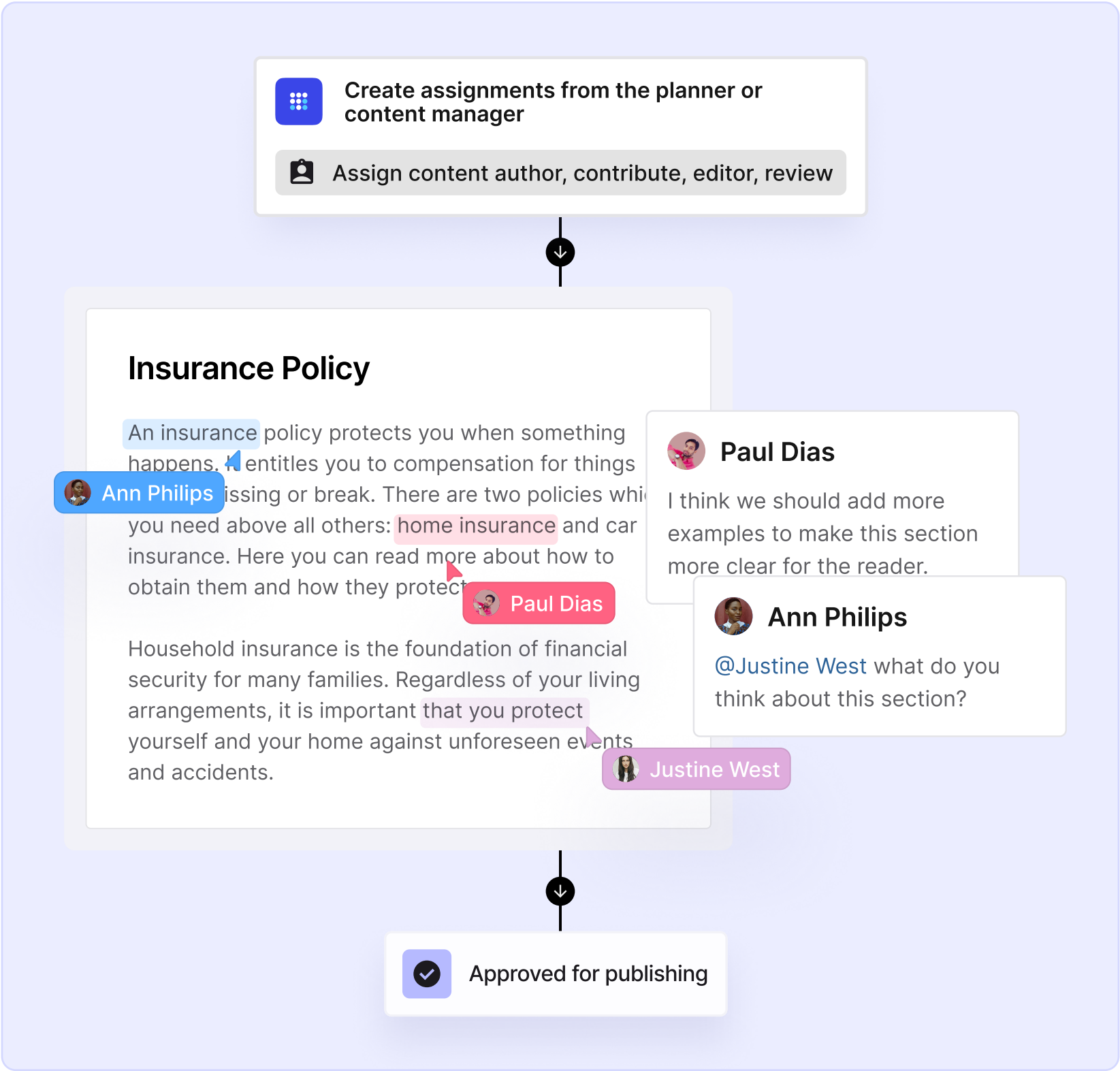
You track the status of the assignments using the Dashboard or the Planner. The Dashboard is the first thing you see when you log into Paligo. It shows the work you are doing, your assignments, and more. The Planner is a built-in project planning tool, similar to a Gantt chart for planning your technical documentation assignments. Use the Planner to create and monitor assignments.

When an administrator or an author assigns content for review, they can select one of two options: Edit and Suggest, or Suggest Only.

The reviewer receives an email notification, clicks the link, and opens the content within Paligo in a Contributor view (a streamlined editor designed for contributors), then performs their review.

When the Reviewer is done, they click the Finish Assignment button, selecting either Needs Work or Approved and ready for publishing. The Author gets a notification the review is complete and moves forward. If the reviewer has the Author user type, they can create a snapshot of the content to create an archived version for comparing changes later on.

There is also the ability to share content without using the Planner or Assignments feature.



The key to collaborating on content with Paligo CCMS is that everything happens within the same environment, on the source topics, enabling multiple contributors to work on the same publication. There is no need to create copies and share them, or try to synchronize edits and comments. All edits and comments are saved and tracked with the content giving you a complete picture of everything that has happened with the content.

Translating Documentation

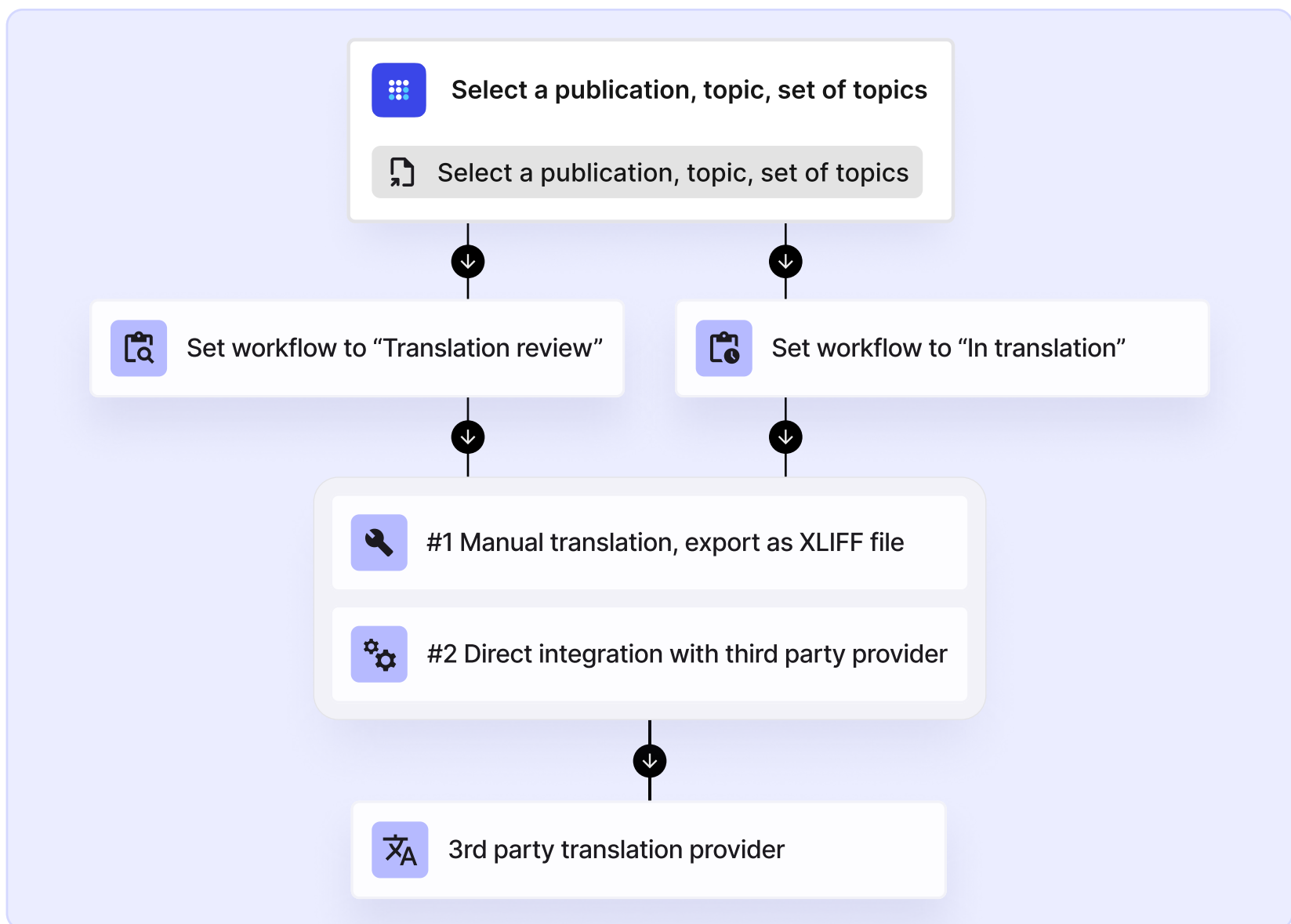
Paligo has built-in features for supporting the translation of your content. These include integrations with translation services, built-in translation workflow statuses, Translation View and assignments.

Managing translations within Paligo CCMS differs significantly from the unstructured tools discussed above. To manage translations, you have to enable translations in your Paligo instance and then add languages to your publications and topics. This means that the translation is connected to the topic, not to the publication as a whole.

To translate content, you select the topics to send for translation. If a topic is reused, you only need to translate it once. When you view a topic, you can select to view the translated versions.

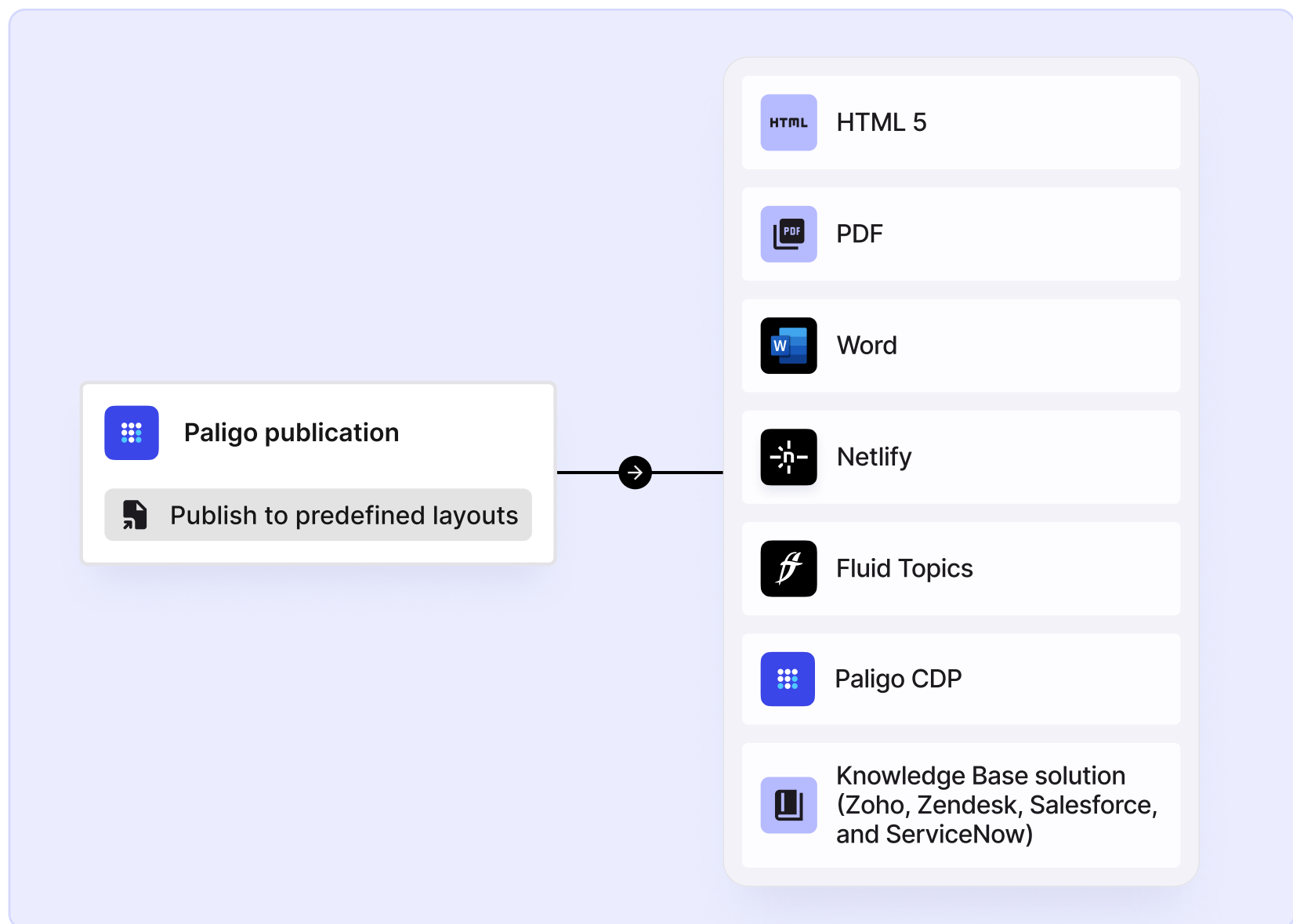
Translation can happen through a third-party integration or using Paligo's built-in translation editor. In addition to translating text-based content, you can also manage translations for images, variables, and filters. You can also exclude content from being translated. Image, variable, and filter translations are not included as part of a translation package for third-party translation, so you will need to export them and send them for translation separately. However, the translations are still connected to the source content the way that translated text is connected to its source text.

Paligo includes built-in integrations with several Translation Management Providers, including Phrase, Crowdin, and LanguageWire. Additionally, you can export XLIFF packages and manually send them for translation, then reimport the translation package when it's complete. There is also a translation workflow that enables authors and reviewers to review the translations before they are accepted and marked for publication.



Multi-Channel Publishing

Paligo does not provide publishing channels by default. Instead, it provides the ability to publish content in multiple formats, including HTML, HTML5, PDF, Word, online help, and SCORM (for Learning Management Solutions). It also integrates with several content delivery solutions, including Fluid Topics, Zendesk, Salesforce Knowledge, ServiceNow, Netlify, GitHub, and others.



You define layouts in Paligo to support each export format you want. When you select to publish a publication, you configure the Layout settings and choose the publishing settings. Paligo takes care of the actual "transformation" into HTML5, PDF, and other formats. When you are publishing via a direct integration, Paligo also takes care of transforming the content for the destination channel based on how the integration is set up.

Zendesk Knowledge vs Paligo CCMS At a Glance

Zendesk Knowledge vs Paligo CCMS At a Glance

Feature	Paligo	Zendesk Knowledge
Creating a Publication	Structured topic-based	Article-level WYSIWYG
Managing Reuse & Product Variants	Topics, variables & filters	Blocks (Ent only), no profiling
Collaboration	Built-in assignments & reviews	Limited workflows, external reviews
Translation Management	Integrated translation workflows + XLIFF export/import	Standalone translations
Multi-Channel Publishing	Multiformat & integrations	Help Center only
Best Use Case	Multiple Product & technical documentation, content reuse, high translation requirements	Managing small product help content and knowledge base articles published to Zendesk only.

Choosing the Right Model for Your Organization

Choosing the Right Model for Your Organization

The goal of this ebook is to help you understand how various unstructured authoring tools help you create and publish technical documentation compared to Paligo CCMS and structured authoring. While there is no one-size-fits-all answer to “Should you use a CCMS?” There are indicators that suggest which approach will work best in certain citations.

When Unstructured Works

If you have very simple, straightforward documentation requirements, using a tool like Microsoft Word or Google Docs, or one of the other tools mentioned here, may be sufficient. For example, if one or more of these is true, then you may not need a structured authoring model or a CCMS:

- Have one or two authors/editors.
- Manage fewer than three documents with little to no reuse across them.
- Support one or two languages.
- Have a small team with few reviewers (or no reviewers)
- Have no requirements for variants, filters, or profiling.
- Don't need to maintain version history.
- You are only publishing to a single channel (like PDF).

However, even if these are true, a CCMS can still provide many benefits, especially around maintaining a single, easy-to-use environment for all your documentation.

When Structured is Essential

There are situations where structured content is critical to ensure your ability to create, manage, and publish technical documentation quickly:

- You have a large documentation set supporting multiple product lines that is regularly updated.
- There is significant reuse across documentation.
- Some products have different names in some countries
- Documentation is published in multiple languages, including a lot of translated images.
- You need to track changes and maintain version history for all content by all authors, editors, and contributors/reviewers.
- You publish content across multiple channels in multiple formats and need to ensure consistency and accuracy across channels.

Checklist: Is Your Organization Ready for Structured Content?

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If you're unsure whether you need to adopt a structured content model, and specifically a CCMS, use this brief checklist as an early indicator.

Analyze Current Content Landscape

- ☐ Conduct a preliminary content audit (content types, channels, formats, versions, languages).
- ☐ Map out your content team, including all authors, editors, reviewers, and collaborators, noting their locations and work schedules.
- ☐ Document any current documentation challenges (inconsistency, slow publishing, high translation costs).
- ☐ Document any bottlenecks or hand-offs that consistently slow delivery.
- ☐ Gather team feedback (including pain points and frustrations) from reviewers on the current content development process.
- ☐ Gather customer feedback on your existing content and delivery channels.

Identify Content Reuse Opportunities

- ☐ What output formats do you require today (PDF, HTML, mobile, embedded help, etc.)?
- ☐ Do you need product- or customer-specific variants (e.g., region, language, customer tier)?
- ☐ Do multiple products, versions, or channels share identical, or near-identical, text, graphics or procedures?

- ☐ Are you manually adjusting layouts or continually saving Word documents as PDFs or HTML and dealing with formatting issues?
- ☐ Could content reuse in structured topics reduce translation volume (and cost)?
- ☐ Do you have any future or near-future content needs (new markets, languages, products, channels) that you need to consider?

CCMS Considerations

- ☐ Identify measurable goals (reduce costs, speed up review, improve scalability).
- ☐ Preliminary evaluation to determine CCMS need.
- ☐ If needed, map requirements and research options (features, integrations, costs, support).

The Path to Smarter, Scalable Content Management

The Path to Smarter, Scalable Content Management

The decision to move away from unstructured authoring tools to structured authoring and component content management makes sense for many companies struggling to manage effective technical and product documentation. The growth of customer self-service, including the demand for clear and accurate documentation, as well as the speed at which it needs to reach customers, employees, and teams, means traditional unstructured authoring approaches to managing it are no longer effective.

Structured authoring introduces a systematic framework emphasizing modularization, consistency, and reusability. It involves using predefined structures and formats to ensure that information is presented in a consistent and standardized manner, making it highly adaptable and scalable to different channels and formats. It also fosters a more agile and collaborative environment for writers, editors, and subject matter experts. The same can't be said for unstructured authoring.

If you are struggling with your current authoring tool, take the time to think through your challenges and consider how a CCMS, such as Paligo CCMS, can help alleviate them. Ask a lot of questions, request demos, and most importantly, make the decision that is right for your team and situation.

Learn more about why leading global companies choose Paligo

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