


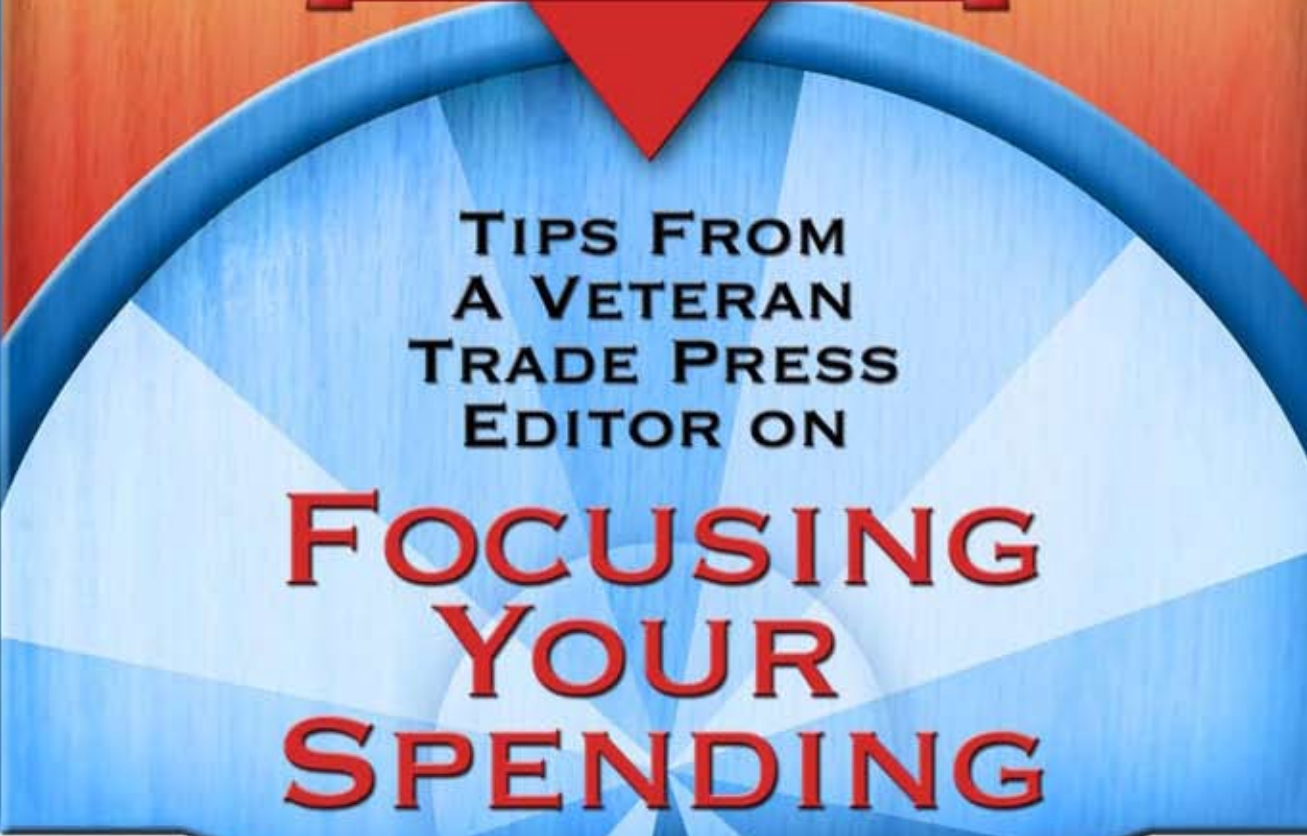


**CONTENT
MARKETING:**



**Where to
Place Your
Quality Bets**

By BOB SCHEIER



TIPS FROM
A VETERAN
TRADE PRESS
EDITOR ON

**FOCUSING
YOUR
SPENDING**



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By Robert L. Scheier, Copyright 2010.



Between texting, Tweeting, blogging, Facebooking, podcasting and Webcasting, every B2B marketer is also expected to be a reporter and an editor these days. It's called "content marketing" and done right it helps attract prospects and drive them towards purchases.

But you don't have unlimited time or budget to do all this content creation. In fact, you probably have *little or no time or budget* for it, but are expected to somehow fit this in with your regular marketing or sales duties. Which means, to succeed in your job, you must prioritize your time and effort on only those content creation tasks where the prospect will reward you for higher quality.

This book briefly explains 1) why you as a B2B vendor need to be in the content creation business, 2) the steps in the "value chain" required to create quality content, based on my 20+ years as an IT writer and editor, and 3) how to choose which steps you should spend most heavily on based on the needs of your specific prospects.



KNOWING WHEN TO INVEST IN QUALITY CONTENT IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE B2B MARKETERS CAN'T AFFORD TO WASTE MONEY ON QUALITY THAT PROSPECTS DON'T VALUE.

First, a brief review of how we got here.

Once Upon a Time...

...all notebook computers were heavy, you needed a phone line and modem to get your email, "car phones" were only for the rich and the only way to learn about new IT products was from a print publication that landed on your desk every week.

Readers liked these trade pubs because they provided a reality check to vendors' product claims. Vendors liked them because the IT pubs "qualified" their readers, offering a free subscription only to those who had a certain level of purchasing authority. The publishers got rich selling ads or the subscription lists to vendors.

The old trade press tradeoff:

**READERS
GAVE UP...**

Information about their purchasing authority, products in use, company size, etc.



READER GOT...

Earliest access to exclusive information that helps them do their jobs

**VENDORS
GAVE UP...**

Advertising bucks.



**VENDORS
GOT...**

Exclusive access to pre-qualified prospects.

Everyone was happy. Except the cool technology the trade pubs were paid so well to write about wound up killing them. Between portable devices like notebooks, netbooks and smartphones, and ever-faster wireless connections to the Internet, nobody wanted to, or had to, wait for that physical print pub to hit their desk every week.



Trade press story planning session, circa 1993. Author is on left.

B2B customers liked getting IT news quickly and easily over the Internet and began ignoring the print trade pubs. Facing competition from “free” producers such as bloggers and vendors, the trade pubs also had to give away their content on line. But since on the Web it’s much harder to “qualify” your audience, the trade pubs couldn’t charge the same premiums for on-line ads as they had for print. The vendors realized traditional trade pubs were becoming less useful and began to produce much more of their own content such as white papers, Webinars, and podcasts.

**I can hear the complaints now that many trade pubs “just reprinted press releases” and otherwise served as mouthpieces for vendors. Sometimes, yes, but readers could choose among known “brands” that faced financial consequences if they lost reader confidence. When vendors, or random users, control the “printing presses” it’s harder to pin down the motivations, or even the identities, of the content creator.*

EVERY COMPANY IS A MEDIA COMPANY BECAUSE EVERY COMPANY PUBLISHES TO ITS CUSTOMERS, ITS STAFF, ITS NEIGHBORS, ITS COMMUNITIES. IT DOESN'T MATTER IF A COMPANY MAKES DIAPERS OR STEEL GIRDERS, IT MUST ALSO BE A MEDIA COMPANY AND KNOW HOW TO USE ALL THE MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES AT ITS DISPOSAL. WHILE THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN TRUE TO SOME EXTENT, IT IS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT TODAY, BECAUSE OUR MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES HAVE BECOME SO MUCH MORE POWERFUL. IT IS NO LONGER A ONE-WAY BROADCAST MEDIUM; EVERYONE NOW HAS ACCESS TO AN ONLINE PRINTING PRESS THAT CAN POTENTIALLY REACH TENS OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE. – FORMER IT JOURNALIST AND NOW FULL-TIME BLOGGER TOM FOREMSKI.



The New Trade Press

The decline of the traditional IT trade press has created a new relationship between vendors and customers. Readers still want quality information and vendors still want to get their messages in front of them. But the trade press intermediary is out of the picture, and the communication happens more often directly between the vendor and the customer.

Except when forced to register to get something they want (like access to a Webinar or a white paper) readers don't have to give up personal information in return for content. But they do have to give up something which is almost more precious: Their time and attention. The vendors still have to give up dollars, but they give them to their own marketing departments (or outside vendors like myself) rather than to a trade publication.

The new Web 2.0 tradeoff:

READERS GAVE UP...

Their time and attention, personal contact info about their purchasing authority.



READER GOT...

Access to information, from peers or others, that helps them do their jobs.

VENDORS GAVE UP...

Marketing bucks to build Websites, create content.



VENDORS GOT...

To tell their stories and/or information directly to prospects

And not all of the content needs to be created by vendors. A recent MarketingProfs article, citing statistics from Forrester Research, shows nearly half (46%) of tech decision-makers say they maintain a profile on a social-

networking site and visit the site at least once a month for business purposes. A third of them create content, 51% are motivated by the ability to get answers to problems, 36% are looking for a broader range of answers and opinions. Even the customer, then, is a reporter.

When anyone can be their own writer, reporter, commentator or videographer, you get what “anyone” turns out. Some of it is great, from skilled, knowledgeable, articulate and fair IT professionals who otherwise might have been locked out of the conversation. But some of it is pure vendor propaganda, rantings from cranks or poorly disguised attempts to sell rather than to educate the reader.

As a B2B marketer, your logo and company name are your “brand” online, and the quality of your content says everything about your brand. And most B2B marketers don’t have anywhere near the content they need, nor a good idea about how to feed the content monster without going broke.

Yesterday’s IT News Brands



Today’s IT News Brands

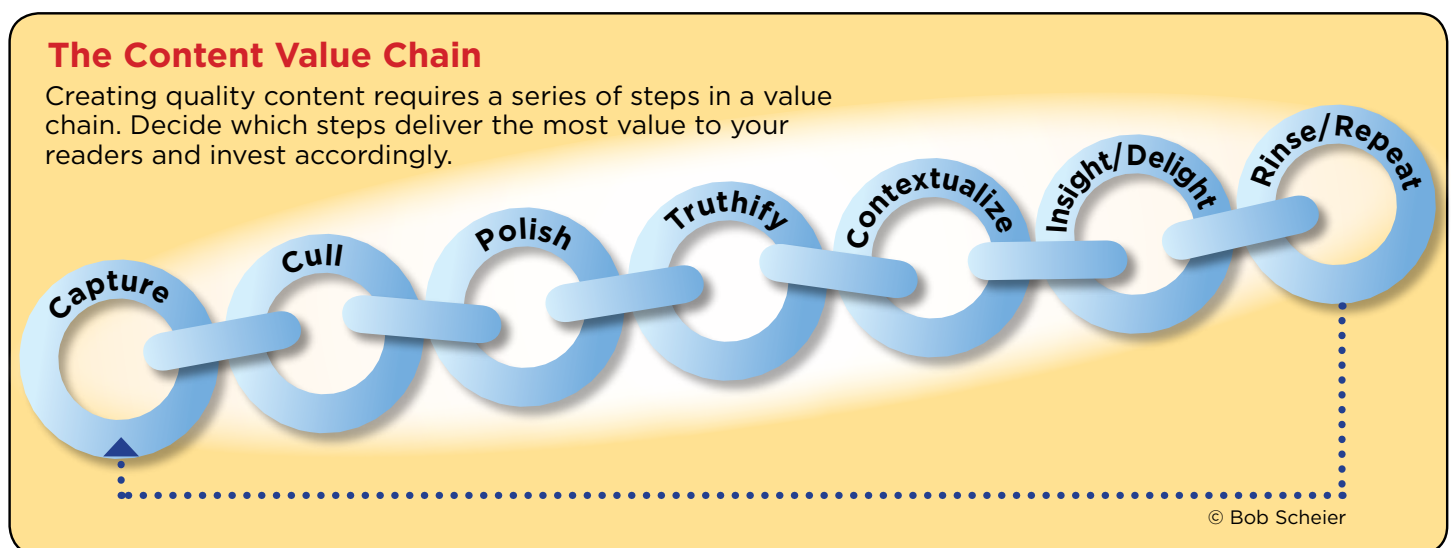


To create and sustain your “brand” without going broke or crazy from overwork, you need to pick your content creation fights, deciding where it’s worth it to invest your money and effort. From the outside “creating content” looks like a writer tapping the keyboard or a Webcaster speaking in front of the camera. There is actually an entire “value chain” required to create quality content, and you need to understand which links are most important to your prospects to focus your efforts properly.

The Value Chain of Content

Companies have long used the concept of a “value chain” to analyze and fine-tune operations. For an auto maker, design might be a high value-added step they want to keep in house, while stitching seat covers is low value-add and can be outsourced. In handling an insurance claim, talking to the customer is high value-add so you want a person doing it, but moving their file from Point A to Point B is low value-add so you do it electronically. The aim: Eliminate or reduce cost in the steps that add the least value (perhaps accepting somewhat lower quality) and invest more in the steps that provide the most value in return.

There’s a similar value chain in content creation. In this age of Web 2.0 and social media mania, we tend to either throw out the whole value chain (let anyone write or say anything) or waste money trying to do every part of it right. But after 20-plus years of IT reporting and editing, including marketing writing for the last ten years, I’ve learned there are some parts you can leave to amateurs and some you want done by professionals.



The first link in the value chain is:

1. Capture

This is the act of capturing the “raw material” in digital form (text, photo, audio and/or video) shareable over the Web. This could be:

An event: You release the new version of your virtualization software, a customer gets frustrated with poor service from a vendor, a new regulation sparks demand for tape-based archiving.

A problem: A customer runs out of space on their storage array, electricity price hikes force customer to seek more efficient servers, new regulations force customers to undergo new data protection audits.

A trend: iPad apps get unexpected interest from vertical markets like health care, server virtualization creates demand for network virtualization, mobile apps create new requirements for software testing.

The event might happen outside the person to whom it happens (a keynote at a trade show or a lousy experience with a product) or internally (their reaction to a new product or service.) The “capture” might be done manually (a system administrator posting an answer on a Web support forum) or automatically (a Web analytics program records a large number of hits on a specific product page.) The value added is that someone or something was at the right place and time to record it so it can move further along the chain.

IF YOU’RE PLANNING TO HAVE AN OUTSIDE EXPERT “POLISH” YOUR CONTENT, MAKE SURE THEY’RE INVOLVED IN THE “CAPTURE” AND “CULLING” STAGES. AN EXPERIENCED WRITER CAN ASK 90% OF THE QUESTIONS THEY NEED IN THE FIRST INTERVIEW, REDUCING THE NEED FOR FOLLOW-UPS AND SPEEDING WRITING TIME.

EVEN BETTER, IT REDUCES “REWORK” LIKE THE TYPE I EXPERIENCED IN A RECENT PRESS RELEASE ASSIGNMENT. THE VENDOR SENT OVER THEIR STANDARD “BACKGROUND” SHEET WHICH INCLUDED INFORMATION I COULDN’T USE (THE CUSTOMER’S FUTURE PLANS FOR THE PRODUCT) AND DIDN’T INCLUDE SOME INFORMATION I NEEDED (SPECIFICS ON HOW THE PRODUCT ACHIEVES ITS COST SAVINGS.) THAT MEANT WASTED TIME IN THE WRITING, EDIT AND REVIEW CYCLES AS WE CHASED THE MISSING INFO.

IF YOU’RE HIRING AN EXPERIENCED REPORTER OR EDITOR TO PRODUCE YOUR CONTENT, BE VERY EXPLICIT IN WHAT YOU WANT AND THEN LET THEM DO AS MUCH OF THE JOB AS POSSIBLE. IT WILL MEAN LESS WORK FOR YOU, A BETTER PRODUCT AND FASTER TURNAROUND.



In B2B marketing capture is a job you must share with your customers and prospects, because they (not you) are often in the right place at the right time to know what's newsworthy. After all, they work with your stuff, or with your competitor's. But customers and prospects are overworked and sometimes suspicious of sharing their thoughts. Luckily, you have your own "reporters" in the form of product managers, technical leads and salespeople who can harvest raw material for you.

For example:

At a trade show a marketing manager sees (and notes the deficiencies in) a competitive product.

In customer calls, your salespeople notice prospects are talking not only about cutting costs, but about growing their businesses.

While debugging a storage array for a customer, one of your tech reps overhears an admin describe a great new freeware management utility they're using.

In each case, you now have in your sweaty palms what we used to call "news" – something new and interesting that can help someone. Knowing the weaknesses of a competitor's product prepares you to sell against it. Knowing customers are moving beyond cost-cutting mode helps you tailor your marketing pitches. Sharing the link to that management utility can build good will with your customers and make them turn to you when they have money to spend.

How much does such "capture" cost? When it is done automatically (say, a new comment in a discussion on your blog) the tab is just about zero – just the disk space, memory and power needed to record the event, store it and forward it if necessary. When a busy human being has to stop and write something down, or record an event, the costs can rapidly rise based on what else the human could be doing.

OK. We now have our metaphorical raw material (events) in the door of the metaphorical factory and ready to start processing it. The first step is figuring out what to use and what to toss, which means to...

2. Cull

What stuff is most important and deserves the most or least exposure is one of the most critical functions any editor plays. What you choose to present in your marketing content, its length and tone, and what you choose NOT to publish speaks volumes about how well you know your market and your customers.

How To Think Like a Real Editor in Five Seconds

If you can't answer "yes" to both questions, ditch the content.

Is this information new?

New means "new" to the reader, not new to you. You may have just caught up with an industry trend, technology buzzword, or sales model, but if your prospects already know about it, don't waste your breath.

Will the reader care?

You care about your new VP of sales, reseller agreement or release 7.0, but does the prospect? And why? It's not newsworthy if it doesn't help them cut costs, increase sales, improve their love life or make their children smarter. In journalism, editors insist on a "nut graf," early in the story, that explains why the reader should care. If you can't create such a "nut graf" for your news, it ain't news.



You're lucky if you have someone in your organization who can take the coldly realistic few of what is and isn't news. If you don't, don't feel bad: It's so hard to create a great new product or service that you have to live and breath it, thereby losing the objectivity to describe it quickly and clearly to others. This is why the journalism industry invented editors (to remind reporters to explain why readers should care about the stuff they cover every day.)

THE TYPICAL PRESS RELEASE IS, UNFORTUNATELY, A PRIME EXAMPLE OF CONTENT THAT HAS BEEN BADLY CULLED AND CONTEXTUALIZED – ALMOST INTENTIONALLY SO. IT HARKS BACK TO A TIME WHEN COMPANIES “RELEASED” NEWS ON THEIR OWN SCHEDULE TO A “PRESS” CORPUS WHICH CONTROLLED ITS DISTRIBUTION TO A WAITING WORLD. TODAY’S THERE’S FAR LESS “PRESS” OUT THERE, AND “NEWS” (GOOD OR BAD) ABOUT A COMPANY FREQUENTLY HITS THE DIGITAL STREETS LONG BEFORE THE COMPANY CATCHES UP WITH A PRESS RELEASE.

PRESS RELEASES USUALLY SAY ONLY WHAT THE VENDOR WANTS TO SAY ABOUT ITSELF (WE HAD A GREAT QUARTER, WE SIGNED A NEW DISTRIBUTION AGREEMENT, WE HIRED A NEW CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER.) THERE IS LITTLE OR NO CONTEXT TO TELL THE READER WHY THEY SHOULD CARE. THIS IS BECAUSE A PRESS RELEASE MUST BE APPROVED BY THE LEGAL, MARKETING AND PR GROUPS, WHOSE JOBS DEPEND ON MINIMIZING RISK. RATHER THAN INCLUDE INTERESTING CONTEXT (WHAT PAINFUL PROBLEMS WAS THE CUSTOMER HAVING, WHAT INTERNAL WEAKNESS ARE WE SOLVING BY HIRED THE NEW CTO) THESE GROUPS INSERT ONLY APPROVED, BLAND, JARGON THAT OFFENDS NOBODY, BUT SAYS NOTHING.

MAYBE, AS PR PRO DON JENNINGS SUGGESTS, COMPANIES NEED TO ISSUE PRESS RELEASES FOR REGULATORY OR DISCLOSURE PURPOSES. IF SO, PERHAPS THEY SHOULD DO JUST ENOUGH POLISHING SO THEY’RE CLEAR AND ACCURATE, AND SAVE THE REAL CULLING, CONTEXTUALIZING AND OTHER STEPS FOR WHEN THEY CAN CREATE SOMETHING MORE USEFUL, IN-DEPTH AND RELEVANT TO THE READER.



If they’re good, your sales and marketing departments should be able to help you assess what information is most valuable to your prospects. But since their job is to tell your story (rather than focus on what customers need to know) this is an area where outside help can be valuable simply because it comes from outside your organization.

**TIP: 15 Second Test:
Do You Need an Outside Eye on Your Content?**

Ask the proposed author to explain, in 15 seconds, why the reader should care about what he will write. If the author can’t do it in 15 seconds, get someone else (from inside or outside your organization) to help hone the messaging.

If you aren’t sure the message is clear enough, have the proposed author explain it to your spouse, significant other or the barista at your local coffee shop. If they get it, good. If not, you need outside help.

In the B2B marketing world, some of this outside “ranking” can be done by your customers when their opinions genuinely add value. One example is the Dell IdeaStorm site, that lets readers vote by “promoting” or “demoting” product suggestions.

370 **Give us the option to upgrade / replace the videocard in all laptops**
By Rebel333, Apr 24, 2010

Promote ↑
Demote ↓

Do not integrate the videocards to your motherboards, but use a proprietary module! This case we do not have to change the whole motherboard if the videocard going to dead. We also could replace your junky Nvidias to better watt/performance videocards like to Ati Mobility HD5830 and later to more modern. Thanks!

f
Comments: 8
Categories: [Laptops](#)

Status: **Acknowledged**

105830 **No Extra Software Option**
By ootleman, Feb 16, 2007

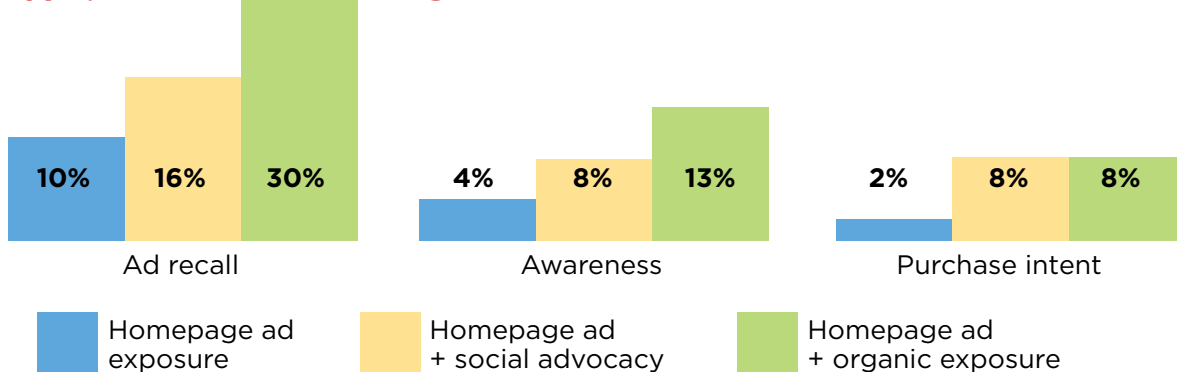
Promote ↑
Demote ↓

Would love the ability to have a clean Vista install. No AOL software, no earthlink software, no google software - just a clean, original OS.

DELL Status Update
Per jeremy_f

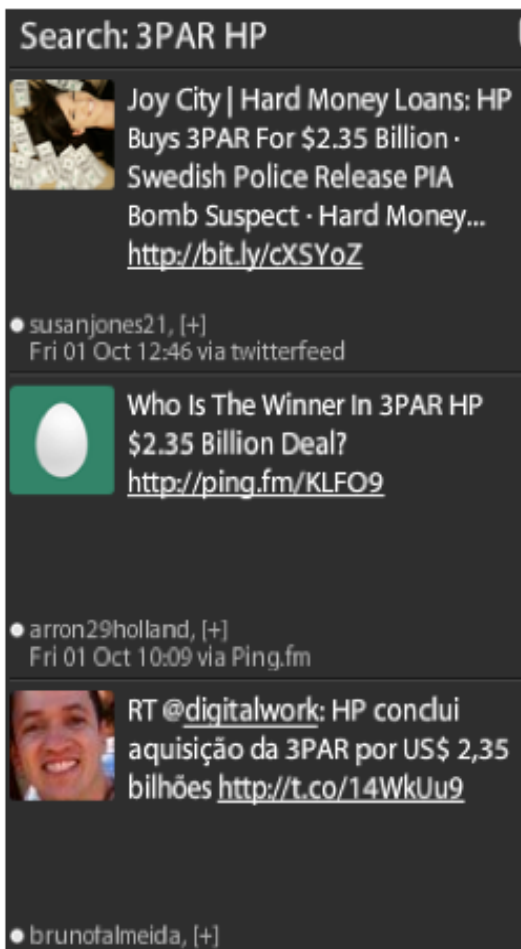
Not only is this content inexpensive to produce, but it's real (it comes right from customers). Every time a customer or prospect "promotes," reTweets or forwards such content, or simply clicks on a "Like This" icon, it instantly amplifies the impact on other prospects. Such "organic exposure" means the mention of the product or brand occurred naturally during the prospect's social media activities, and is generally considered to be very powerful (see graph.)

Facebook ad effects on brand metrics in the US, by as exposure type, 2009-2010 (average delta* above control)

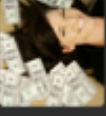


But there are limits to this “voting” model. First, it takes big numbers to get a statistically valid sample, and if you don’t have a Dell-size customer base that could be a problem. Second, it is only a “snapshot” of what people think at that moment. Third, if you rely on merely measuring page views, what you see first or most prominently reflects only that point-in-time “vote” of the sub-set of the entire market that is using that site. Finally, outsiders can “game” the ratings system to tout a company’s product or services.


Culling is more than selection. It also means eliminating redundant information, such as when multiple people re-Tweet the same link or a search engine throws up responses in no particular order or priority. How about, for example, if you were about to commit to buying 3PAR storage and needed to know the effects of its upcoming acquisition by HP. Here’s a sample of what a search for “3PAR” and “HP” turns up:




Search: 3PAR HP

 Joy City | Hard Money Loans: HP Buys 3PAR For \$2.35 Billion · Swedish Police Release PIA Bomb Suspect · Hard Money... <http://bit.ly/cXSYoZ>

• susanjones21, [+]
Fri 01 Oct 12:46 via twitterfeed

 Who Is The Winner In 3PAR HP \$2.35 Billion Deal? <http://ping.fm/KLFO9>

• arron29holland, [+]
Fri 01 Oct 10:09 via Ping.fm

 RT @digitalwork: HP conclui aquisição da 3PAR por US\$ 2,35 bilhões <http://t.co/14WkUu9>

• brunofalmeida, [+]

That’s quite a jumble of perspectives and even languages, which doesn’t lend itself easily to answering questions from a jumpy prospect on the verge of signing a deal.

The chaos is even worse in blogs and networking sites, where every poster starts and stops the conversation at a different point, assumes the reader has a different level of background and approaches the event from a different perspective. Consider these replies to a technical discussion on LinkedIn, just the sort of place a B2B prospect for a high-end product (storage) might be found lurking. The topic is how to configure the RAID storage on an EMC CX4 storage area network to run Microsoft’s Exchange 2008 email and messaging server. (I told you it was geeky.) Among the 39 answers the lucky questioner got:



Andrej Gursky
Storage Solutions Specialist
at PosAm
[See all Andrej's activity »](#)
[Follow Andrej](#)

It depends on many factors - how many exchange users? amount of IOPS expected? expected IOPS per user (average could be 0,5IOPS/user) ? User profile? Required response time? Amount of storage cache available (use as much cache as possible for MS exchange) ? ... etc. Normally RAID10 (strongly recommended to separate Logs and DB) is recommended as Anand says but in some cases RAID5 could be also good performer (I have experience). Anyway read MS and EMC best practises guides :)

Posted 19 days ago | [Reply Privately](#)



Ismail Ali
system engineer
[See all Ismail's activity »](#)
[Follow Ismail](#)

Thanks Archie , Aran and Anand

I've got the answer

To decide when to use a RAID 6 group or thin pool, RAID 5 group or thin pool, RAID 3 group, mirror (that is, a RAID 1 mirrored pair or RAID 1/0 group), a RAID 0 group, individual disk unit, or hot spare, you need to weigh these factors:

- Importance of data availability
- Importance of performance
- Amount of data stored
- Cost of disk space

Use the following guidelines to decide on RAID types.

Use a RAID 6 (double distributed parity) or RAID 5 group or thin pool (distributed parity) for applications where:

- Data availability is very important. A RAID 6 group or thin pool provides higher availability than a RAID 5 group or thin pool, but uses more overhead than a RAID 5 group or thin pool.

Posted 19 days ago | [Reply Privately](#)



Erich van Alphen
Vendor independant Storage
Consultant
[See all Erich's activity »](#)
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In my opinion the best raid config for Exchange 2007 is:
Transaction logs on Raid 1/0, Database on Raid 5.

Number of drives: depends in the number of users and the expected load (iops). Just remember that the write penalty of Raid 5 is 4 and on Raid 1/0 it is 2. If I am not mistaken the write penalty on Raid 6 equals 5. Info on writ epenalty see google or other search engine.

Posted 19 days ago | [Reply Privately](#)



Andrej Gursky
Storage Solutions Specialist
at PosAm
[See all Andrej's activity »](#)
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...and one recommendation - use JetStress to proof your configuration if possible (download form MS web)

Posted 19 days ago | [Reply Privately](#)



Aran Hoffmann
Sr. Systems Administor -
Storage Area Networks
[See all Aran's activity »](#)
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I would add also to look at the Exchange storage calculator. This will help determine the spindle requirements for the iops that your environment will generate.

Take a look at this post from the Microsoft Exchange Team blog:
<http://msexchange.com/archive/2007/01/15/432207.aspx>

Posted 19 days ago | [Reply Privately](#)



Jeremy Barth
Enterprise IT Consultant
[See all Jeremy's activity »](#)
[Follow Jeremy](#)

RAID 10 is pretty standard for transaction logs (for any database server, not just Exchange).

For the databases themselves, I wouldn't touch RAID 5 or RAID 10 for any volume of data greater than a couple of TB in size -- the risks of array failure during reconstruction due to latent errors is simply too great. Double-parity schemes (whether standard RAID 6 or 60, or proprietary solutions such as Netapp's RAID-DP) were invented precisely to deal with these kinds of risks. Double-parity also enables modern arrays to better perform routine data integrity scrubs.

There's lots of useful information here, but NOT in easily digestible form. Various respondents gave totally different recommendations, and even different lists of factors to consider. And multiple responders gave the same answers, again forcing the reader to sort through the same information time after time to get to the new stuff.

The technical reader who asked the question may be OK sifting through the multiple viewpoints and might enjoy the different insights, or the serendipity of finding new approaches to the problem. But his boss, who is struggling to get by with a reduced IT management budget and staff, wants him to find the answer quickly and move on to the other 1,400 jobs on his plate that day. He may thus value, and pay for (in the form of a premium support contract with EMC) fast access to short, concise technical information.

Speaking of EMC, they should worry if a "check signer" like a CFO sees this thread and says "Whoa! This CX4 thingy looks waaaaay too complicated and expensive for us to manage. Buy something else!" Paying someone to cull, condense and summarize those 39 answers into easily usable form could be the difference between making and losing a multi tens of thousands of dollars sale.

You can, then, consider spending less on the culling process to the extent:

- The content is perceived as relatively unimportant.
- The reader has time to digest and compare multiple sources, and/or
- The reader values spontaneity and entertainment more than complete and instant accuracy.

But consider spending more on culling to the extent:

- The reader or prospect places value on the information;
- The reader or prospect values their time and needs the information quickly, and/or
- When assured accuracy is more important than the entertainment or educational value of browsing different viewpoints.



DONE RIGHT CULLING ALONE CAN SOMETIMES BE ENOUGH TO DELIVER SOLID VALUE TO A PROSPECT. WHILE RESEARCHING A BLOG FOR A CLIENT, I CAME ACROSS AN EMAIL FROM **SAP INSIDER**, A TRADE PUB DEVOTED TO HELPING USERS GET THE MOST OUT OF THE GIANT SOFTWARE SUITE, PROMOTING THEIR **ADMINISTRATOR AND INFRASTRUCTURE CONFERENCE**. AFTER A BRIEF INTRODUCTION, IT LISTED SIX TIPS (“BEST PRACTICES”) FROM EARLIER CONFERENCES:

- Tip 1** 10-STEP GUIDE TO INTEGRATE **SAP NETWEAVER BW** AND **SAP BUSINESSOBJECTS SECURITY**
- Tip 2** TECHNICAL PREREQUISITES FOR YOUR **SAP** ENHANCEMENT PACKAGE IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT
- Tip 3** TIPS FOR WORKING WITH **SAP NETWEAVER** VARIABLES IN **CRYSTAL REPORTS**
- Tip 4** 19 GUIDELINES FOR AVOIDING COMMON PITFALLS DURING YOUR NEXT **SAP NETWEAVER BUSINESS WAREHOUSE UPGRADE PROJECT**
- Tip 5** HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CENTRALIZED, DISTRIBUTED, AND AUTONOMOUS DATA GOVERNANCE MODELS, AND
- Tip 6** 10 BEST PRACTICES FOR BUILDING **XCELSIUS DASHBOARDS**

EACH TIP IS SPECIFIC AND TECHNICAL ENOUGH TO SHOW THE PROSPECT THE TYPE OF NITTY-GRITTY VALUE THEY’D GET FROM THE CONFERENCE. AND BY TRACKING WHICH NEWSLETTER RECIPIENTS CLICK THROUGH TO WHICH TIP (THE PROSPECT GAVE UP THEIR CONTACT INFO TO GET THE TIP) A VENDOR CAN INFER WHAT PRODUCTS EACH PROSPECT IS USING, WHAT CHALLENGES THEY’RE FACING AND THUS WHICH OTHER PRODUCTS OR SERVICES TO PITCH TO THEM.

How much does all this cost? Eliminating multiple references to the same link could be done by a low-paid intern or even automatically, but prioritizing multiple, conflicting viewpoints (such as in the SAN configuration thread) requires more technical expertise, context (see link 5 on the value chain, below) and human judgment.

You can’t properly cull and prioritize until you know what the reader wants, and this, too, takes time and money. Responding to preferences readers express (either as individuals through registration forms or in aggregate through Web analytics) may seem easy, but editors go nuts trying to deliver “follow on” stories that keep readers on their sites. Knowing what readers want but haven’t asked for takes years of experience, really good analytics, and a touch of genius. Done reasonably well (as in Amazon recommending books and music for you) it works quite well. Done superbly – as with Steve Jobs’ anticipating market needs in everything from the iPod to the iPad – it blows the competition away. Same is true for content

3. Polish

OK, “polish” might be an overstatement. All I really mean is making the content look like it was written, narrated, or taped by someone with their head on straight.

I’m talking checking spelling and grammar, spelling out and explaining acronyms and using full names and titles. If the “event” is a price change or a product going on sale, clearly explain the pricing and terms and conditions. Make sure the product information is searchable. For written material, make sure the type is readable. For podcasts or Webinars check the sound quality and watch the “ums” and “ahs.” We’re not talking Academy Awards here, just enough so you’re not too embarrassed.

The costs for such polishing vary from zero (running a spell check) to moderate for chasing down proper names and titles to high if the original content is in really tough shape, or if you have to learn how to port media to various platforms. If you don’t think you can afford quality, consider this story touting, among other things, “The benefits of Employing an Rewrite Content Tool.”*

key phrase from being spam

The benefits of Employing an Rewrite Content Tool

The bonus utilizing these kinds of rewrite content tool [applications](#) is that an author could quickly as well as affordably create hundreds of well written keyword and key phrase rich articles and reviews. All these articles developed by using a rewrite content tool perform perfectly pertaining to backlinks in your primary websites. When employed with the suitable computer [software](#) and back linking solutions, can mean the distinction between no targeted visitors to your [internet site](#) and numerous unique guests everyday.

Would this bring sophisticated B2B customers to your Web site? If so, I have an Rewrite Content Tool to sell you. This actually seems to be the SEO (search engine optimization) component of an online marketing platform sold (clumsily) as a standalone feature, substituting words search engines have identified as popular for the words you would use yourself. Kissing up to search engines may draw readers to your content, but can’t make them read.

*Being cool, you of course noted that should have been “a” Rewrite Content Tool.

You can spend less on polishing to the extent:

- Readers or prospects understand they are reading “raw” commentary from others and are content to do so;
- They see misspellings, incomplete references and other imperfections as signs of authenticity.
- The reader or prospect can understand the concepts or information “well enough” without it being corrected or improved.

But consider spending more on polishing to the extent:

- You are selling a high-priced product or service and need to show you are competent;
- You are trying to establish thought leadership;
- You are trying to brand yourself as a source for professional, unbiased information.

BOB SCHEIER’S NINE MARKETING WRITING COMMANDMENTS

THOU SHALT:

EXPLAIN ALL TERMS

SUMMARIZE AT THE BEGINNING

LEAD WITH MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION

UNDERSTAND AND TAILOR THE **CONTENT** TO NEEDS OF THE TARGET AUDIENCE

UNDERSTAND AND TAILOR THE **VOICE** TO NEEDS OF THE TARGET AUDIENCE.

WRITE CLEARLY SO GRAMMAR DOES NOT CONFUSE.

AVOID/EXPLAIN JARGON AND CUT THROUGH VERBAL CLUTTER.

KEEP SENTENCES SHORT AND UNDERSTANDABLE, AND

STRIVE TO BE HONEST AND CREDIBLE. (HONEST, PEOPLE DO NOTICE.)

One technical consideration here is cross-platform compatibility – whether your content will display correctly on all Web browsers, for those with slow Internet connections, and on platforms with unusual requirements (such as smartphones with their small screens and various operating systems, and on the iPad with its refusal to play Flash.)

4. Truthify*

Unless your content is sheer entertainment, the reader wants to know the source of the information and whether (or to what extent) it is true. If you're trying to provide “journalistic quality” micro-sites, e-books, newsletters, Webinars and podcasts, you can't outright lie and you can't just talk up your own product. You can overplay your strengths, underplay your weaknesses and subtly position the argument to make you look good. But you also need to

Take reasonable steps to authenticate the sources of information you cite;

Identify and disclose known conflict of interests;

Check at least basic or easily verifiable facts;

Clearly label which content is news and which is opinion, and

Give both sides of the story.

Most of these steps are easier than they might seem. Disclosing conflicts of interest is as easy as the traditional “About the vendor” paragraph at the end of most white papers. Fact-checking is something most of my clients do as a matter of course. Giving “both sides of the story” is a bit trickier when the whole idea is to tell your side of the story. But you can gain needed credibility AND give prospects valuable information by admitting what your product is not ideal for, or some of the common implementation challenges customers face. After all, no product is good for every problem or for every customer, and admitting it up front shows you're somewhat smart and honest.

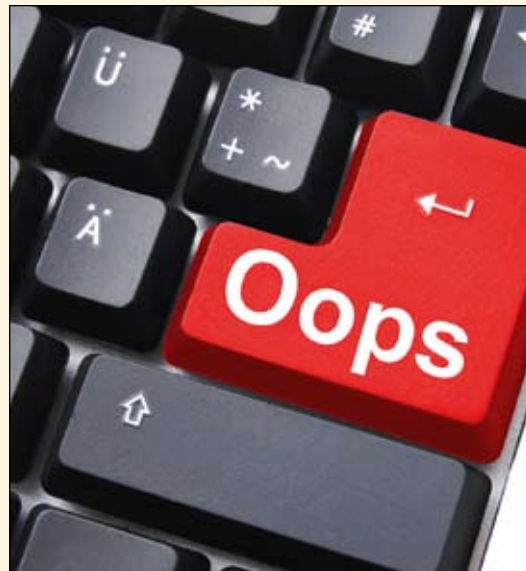
** Hey, if Stephen Colbert can make up words, so can I.*

Finally, with all the lousy, biased, or just plain inaccurate information flooding us all in the Web 2.0 world, being even reasonably honest and upfront is a competitive differentiator in and of itself. Especially when you're selling products that cost tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not millions, and whose performance could determine whether the customer keeps their job.

Three Ways to Be Open and Honest Without Being Stupid About It.

1) Write about the problem, not the solution. Tap your in-house expertise to give anecdotes from the field or to highlight "common mistakes" customers make but might not realize. (Watch out for dropped files from NAS devices on a Fibre Channel network; be sure to include end users early on when doing software testing.) If there is a new, unique way to solve the problem – and that's the foundation of your next product release – this is a good place to tease it.

2) Explain some of the common purchase mistakes or implementation problems customers face in your product category. (Be sure to ask about volume pricing for enclosures and not just disk arrays when buying storage; check with your software licensing experts to make sure extra software costs won't eat up your virtualization savings.) These are, again, tips your sales or support people should already know from their everyday work. Even if you're not talking about yourself by describing them, you're establishing yourself as a trusted expert in the field.



3) Come right about and describe what your product does and DOESN'T do. You're probably not targeting a regional retailer and Wal-Mart with the same product set, are you? You're probably not equally skilled at, say, call center management as at supply chain optimization. Explain what each of your products or services does well, of course, but also explain what they DON'T do. Your customers will find out soon enough, and being up-front will build trust and help the right customers steer themselves to you.

It pays to spend more on “truthifying” when customers/prospects:

- Are new to the subject area and need/appreciate basic information;
- Do not trust their ability to judge the accuracy/authenticity of the content for themselves, and/or...
- Will base high-value personal or professional decisions on the content.

Consider spending less on truthifying to the extent customers/prospects:

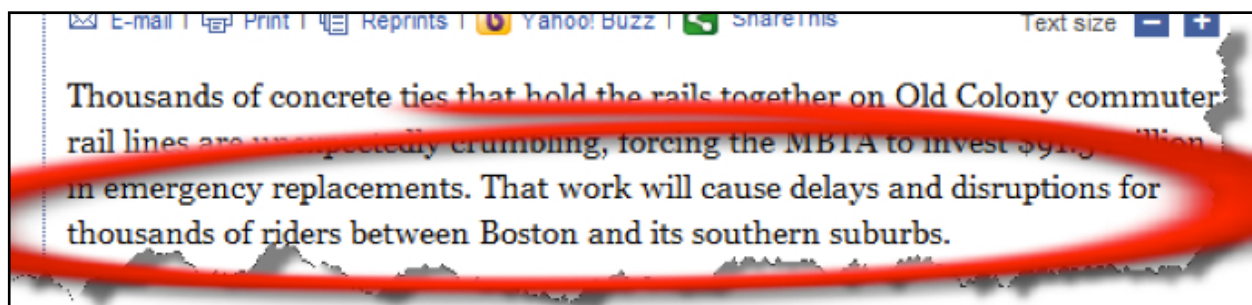
- Value the right to judge the accuracy/authenticity of content themselves.
- View the content specifically for the unfiltered ideas/feedback of their peers, not a “trusted source.”
- Do not value the content highly enough to want or need clarity or accuracy, and/or
- Enjoy or are entertained by speculation.

“Truthifying” is another area where, the more important accuracy is and the more consistently you need to vet information, the more you’ll have to pay.

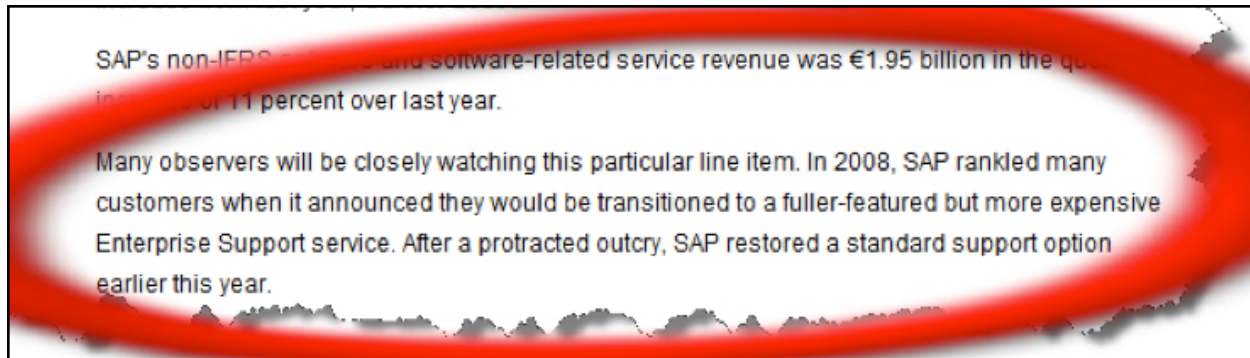
5. Contextualize

Another ugly word I think I just made up. Context means describing why the reader should care about the content and what it means to them. It is often included in the “nut graph” a good reporter includes no further down than the second or third paragraph of every story.

Sometimes, coming up with this “so what” angle is easy:



Other times, it's more difficult or even inferred, as in this story about quarterly earnings from software giant SAP:



Adding context often requires explaining events that happened before, and understanding which event – in this case, a change to SAP's support policies – angered customers and why. Often, providing context requires contacting outside sources such as customers or industry analysts.

Instant Context: Heat This Side Down

Remember that “context” is just a fancy way of saying “Why should I care?” To find the context, go back to the “culling” process where you asked yourself why a reader would care about what you have to say. Add that explainer early in your content, and repeat at the end.



Context gets costly because it requires background information and knowledge of what's important to the reader. One of the highest “costs” is the effort required to pull back far enough from the subject to think like an outsider and remind the reader why they should care. Of course, if you find it too hard to explain why the reader should care, maybe you have no story.

The Power of Questions

By asking questions, instead of making statements, you can get your customers or prospects to produce quality content for you and furnish context to the “news.” By asking the right question or elaborating on a previous question, you’re helping people by spurring them to think more deeply about their concerns, and to offer help to others.

I recently used this technique to spur networking among attendees before a user conference for a global professional services company. I began by simply asking “What are you hoping to learn at the conference?” One person – one – replied they were curious about how much their peers were spending on a certain support function. Rather than let the question hang, I repeated it and observed that the answer probably depends on a number of factors (such as the type and criticality of the application in question.) That spurred a second conference attendee to agree, and to say he had established specific criteria for determining how much to spend on support. Hmmm, very interesting, I replied – can you share any of the specific criteria? Which, it turned out, he was happy to do, and we were off and running.

Some tips for using questions to spur and extend customer feedback:

- Feel free to start open-ended, with “What problems are you facing with XYZ” or, even, “What questions would you like to see answered in our blog?”
- If a reader’s question needs more information to answer intelligently, ask someone to supply that information. (See my “It depends” example above.)
- If someone says they have done something, but doesn’t explain how (such as with the metrics for support spending) ask for specifics.
- In fact, if every post doesn’t answer the “Who” “What” “When” “Where” and “Why” questions, ask them.
- Ask again if a respondent isn’t clear enough in their first post.
- And, if all else fails, the all-time reporter’s favorite: “Tell me more.” People usually will.

You should consider spending more time and effort on contextualizing when:

- You're trying to establish thought leadership or to set new terms for the conversation (which of course helps you stack the deck in your favor. For example: "Most customers think only about cost savings when they virtualize their servers. But most of those savings have already been realized. The real benefit of virtualization is business agility...")
- The customer/prospect is unfamiliar with your product or service, or has only recently seen the need. "You've been tracking your IT infrastructure with spreadsheets and flow charts for years. But now that you have thousands of servers and arrays, you need an enterprise architecture..."
- You are solving a problem the prospect never thought about solving or thought was unsolvable. "You probably didn't even know that your Microsoft Office files were full of unnecessary information that's taking up disk space. Our software removes that unneeded information without affecting image quality..."

Consider spending less time and effort contextualizing when:

- The threat, or opportunity, is so self-evident it needs no explaining. "A giant meteor is heading towards earth and will wipe out all life tomorrow..."⁵ "How you can slash the time and effort required to provision new storage volumes."
- The event or content has already been contextualized for you, such as an ongoing chat about a product or technical issue.
- You would look amateurish or insult your readers if you explained too much context for them.⁶

Sometimes your customers/prospects will add the context for you, but usually they won't be able to because they're too close to the subject. The more you need context, and the more consistently you need it, the more you'll have to pay. The good news is that the more important an issue is to a prospect, and the less time they already know about it, the more value they will place on the context you provide.

⁵ A good indicator you can safely cut your marketing budget.

⁶ In my opinion, vendors worry about this more than they should. Except for extremely specialized areas, you lose more prospects by under-explaining than by over-explaining.

Real Men Don't Just Retweet

Don't be fooled into thinking that just redistributing and commenting on other's work is enough to move customers towards a purchase. In a recent interview, CEO Brian Halligan of marketing software vendor HubSpot was quoted as saying:

"So what a newspaper editor would do is he is reading blogs and newspapers all day looking for ideas...so I would spend a reasonable amount of my day looking at my RSS reader looking at different blogs, looking at different articles and when I find something interesting I would promote it by Twitter or Facebook or a LinkedIn group so other people can collaborate around it."

No real editor would last a week if all he or she did was troll the competition for stories and throw them on the Web for other people to (hopefully) add value. Sure, as an editor I read "the other paper," but mostly to harass my own reporters about scoops they missed. I spent much more time talking to those reporters about what's going on in their beats, looking for the next great story the competition hasn't found yet.

As a marketer, your "reporters" are your developers, your salespeople and your product managers. Their "beats" are the technology they work with and the customers they talk to. As an "editor" you need to find what they think is new and interesting, and help them turn those ideas and observations into content customers care about - before your competitors do.

6. Deliver Insight/Delight

This is the step where we swing for the fence, creating content that either changes how readers think about an important topic or their purchase decisions.

One B2B example is an InfoWorld article explaining cloud computing, when readers might use it and the various forms it takes. Long after it was first posted, it's still one of the higher-drawing articles on the InfoWorld site. One reason is its delivery of insight, in the form of a clear way of thinking about a confusing topic:

Test Center's comparison.

Cloud computing comes into focus only when you think about what IT always needs: a way to increase capacity or add capabilities on the fly without investing in new infrastructure, training new personnel, or licensing new software. Cloud computing encompasses any subscription-based or pay-per-use service that, in real time over the Internet, extends IT's existing capabilities.

If adding context requires you to step back and think like an outsider, adding insight requires you to step way, way back and think about familiar things in an entirely new way. Adding delight requires sweating the details, going over each word and tweaking until it's just right. The result is nice, but it takes a lot of grunt work in addition to skill and insight.

It Doesn't Take a Genius...

...to produce compelling content. True, there are times when you'll want an expert videographer, for example, to capture a great customer presentation, a designer to spruce up that ebook or a writer to polish the prose on that white paper. But for the content itself, look to your internal subject matter experts - the salesman who gives great presentations, your chief technology officer who is passionate and insightful about the market, the customer who is really thrilled with what you did for them. It's all, again, part of thinking through the value chain of content and investing more only where you need to.



Customers/prospects can sometimes achieve this level of insight and delight, as in the case of open-source developers who love crafting great code, or great bloggers who write for love of the craft or for a cause. But the more specialized the industry you're in, the less likely it is you'll find the right person (or people) who will agree to consistently work for free.

Consider spending more to deliver insight and delight to the extent...

- You need to create a unique value proposition or brand experience;
- You need customers/prospects to think of you as a leader, or to quickly establish you can meet an important need;
- You *genuinely*⁷ have something unique or delightful to say.

Consider spending less time and effort to the extent customers/prospects...

- Are filling time with “good enough” content and don’t want or need insight or delight.
- Are not convinced, and cannot cost-effectively be convinced, you can provide either insight or delight, and/or
- Have numerous other sources for such insight and delight.

7. Rinse and Repeat

If you want to make a splash, especially in the B2B world, you must create and distribute content repeatedly. The very act of repetition provides value, enhancing your reputation and brand over time. But it also carries high costs in effort, time and talent. The higher a level of repeatability, consistency and quality you need, the less you can rely on prospects and customers to do it for you.



⁷Be painfully honest with yourself here. If you’re not as smart as you think, you could wind up wasting a lot of time and money.

This is one of the areas where a trained journalist can use their experience covering a beat to come up with follow-up stories, such as:

- *How different size customers tackle* the issues/opportunities in Implementing your product. Hit the SMB market one time, the enterprise market the next.
- *How various vertical markets* tackle the unique issues/opportunities in Implementing your product. Most companies target 3-5 key verticals, which gives you material for 3-5 good-sized blog posts (or series of blog posts) right there.
- *“Whatever happened to...”* Think of all the channel deals, support for new standards or new capabilities you’ve announced. Report on how those deals, standards support or new capabilities have panned out in benefits for customers. If you’ve quietly pulled back on any past announcements, explain why before competitors or dissatisfied customers do.
- *Customer Win, Chapter 2.* You announced that contract from Mega Customer with great fanfare, even though it only involved their East Peoria plant. How did the implementation go, and are any others within the company adopting your product?

Consider spending more on repeatability and consistency to the extent that...

- Readers/prospects value alerts to time-sensitive events, whether that be product availability, price changes or breaking news.
- Readers/prospects make purchase decisions over a long and complex evaluation cycle, requiring gradual education in the benefits of your offer over time, and/or
- You are using the content to evaluate the interest of readers or prospects in different offerings, or to gauge where they are in the purchase cycle.

Consider spending less on repeatability and consistency to the extent that...

- Readers/prospects value the quality/insight of your content more than its timeliness;
- Readers/prospects are sensitive to even small changes in the quality of your content, and/or...
- The difference between so-so and great content could have a material effect on how well the prospect is educated, and the likelihood they will move further down the purchase path.

Where's the Payback?

How are you making money from all this? The reader or prospect may pay in:

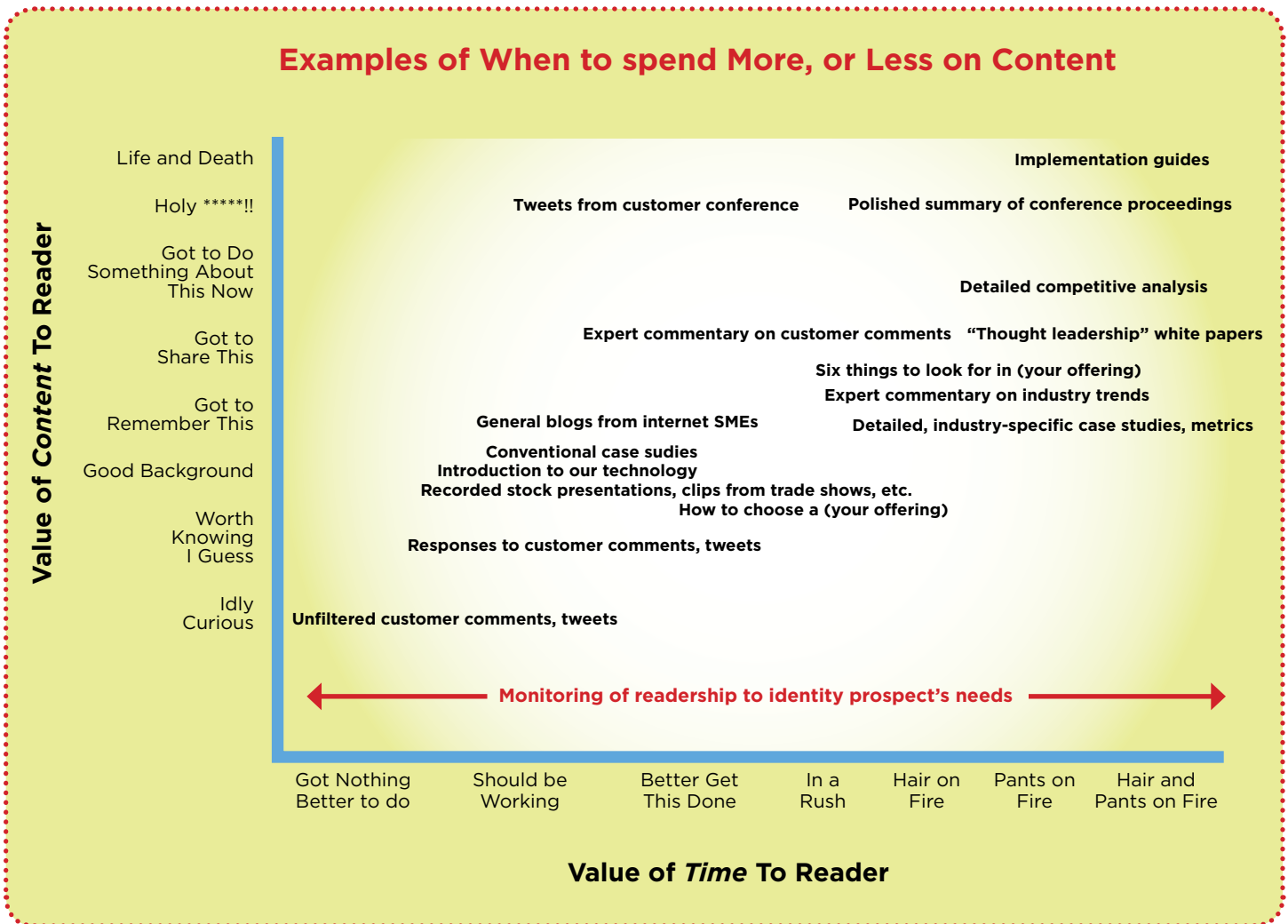
Time spent reading about your offerings and the smart folks in your organization who produce them. The more time they spend with your content, the more you can learn about them by tracking and analyzing their reading/viewing habits. Modern marketing automation tools let you track their behavior, nurturing them with customized content and following up with an expensive sales call only when they're ready for it.

Endorsement of your content by recommending it to others through social networks such as LinkedIn and Facebook, links to your blogs or by a "ReTweet" on Twitter.

Information such as their name, email address, phone number, organization, purchase authority, buying timetable, etc. This is even more valuable than their time, as you've generated an identifiable "someone" who might be interested in buying from you.

A **request** to learn more, or even to meet with you. This is perhaps the ultimate compliment to your content because the reader is not only willing, but eager to get more of it, with the express understanding you might try to sell them something.

My point here is that *some consumers will always pay some premium for some forms of editing. Deciding when to spend more, or less, on each step of the content value chain is critical to getting the most for your money.* For all you visual thinkers out there.



Now, Get Started

Now you now why, as a B2B vendor, you need to produce your own content. You understand the steps an event, idea or insight must go through to become outstanding content. And you understand when it pays to spend more, or less, on each of those steps.

I envy you the next step because it is the most exciting one. You will get to experience what editors and reporters have always known: The excitement of knowing, or understanding, things a few minutes or hours or days or weeks before everyone else. You will get the satisfaction that comes with having strangers read (or hear or watch) something you've created and learn something from it. You'll get to advance the state of knowledge in your industry. And you'll do something fewer "editors" do these days: Make a bunch of money if you get your content strategy right.

Enjoy the ride, and don't forget that spellchecker thing.



About Us



At Bob Scheier Associates, we're ready to fill whatever parts of the content value chain that are a) important to your customers and prospects, and b) you don't have the time or expertise to do yourself. We can help you:

Focus your content marketing spending where it will do the most good;

Create stories, Webinars and other content to reach IT buyers;

Repurpose your existing content to cost-effectively reach new prospects;

Design a content marketing plan that automatically scores prospects based on their reading habits, without losing them to long registration forms;

Help you choose the right content marketing/marketing automation platform, and

Analyze readership results to understand your prospects' needs and tailor custom offers for them.

We have more than 25 years experience writing about virtually every form of information technology and have interviewed hundreds of IT purchasers and CIOs about their needs. For more background visit our Web site, (**www.scheierassociates.com**) email us (**bob@scheierassociates.com**) or call at **781-599-3262**.

Appendix A: When to spend more, or less, on content.

	Increase Spending To the Extent...	Reduce Spending To the Extent...
Capture	<p>You are in a position the reader can't be to recognize and record events/trends.</p> <p>No other content creator will do as good a job as you as recognizing and recording the event or trend.</p>	<p>Readers are willing/able/best positioned to capture information themselves.</p> <p>Other content creators (bloggers, trade press, etc.) can do as good a job as you at capturing information.</p>
Cull	<p>Readers will value "hidden gems" of info they don't have time to find themselves.</p> <p>Readers place value on finding information quickly without excessive scanning.</p>	<p>Readers are willing and able to eliminate redundant material themselves.</p> <p>Sifting through unedited content in search of gems is part of the pleasurable user experience.</p>
Polish	<p>You need to precisely explain concept(s) that are key to your positioning or value proposition.</p> <p>Readers need and value clarity (are pressed for time and/or make high stakes choices based on content.)</p> <p>Professional presentation is important to building your image.</p>	<p>Readers value misspellings, poor grammar, etc. as signs of "authenticity."</p> <p>Immediacy of content is more important than wording or presentation.</p> <p>The format (i.e., Twitter, Facebook updates) does not provide space to display polished content.</p>
Truthify	<p>Stakes (money, job or status) are high.</p> <p>Prospects are faced with uncertainty or cannot easily determine truth themselves.</p>	<p>Author's bias is evident and accepted.</p> <p>Prospect is in early "sniff" portion of product evaluation and absolute truth not as vital.</p>
Contextualize	<p>The "so what" or "what's new" angle is critical to your "thought leadership" or positioning.</p> <p>This is a response to content from another source, such as a competitor.</p> <p>You are adding your own spin to "conventional wisdom."</p> <p>You are trying to establish a new product or service in the market, or to convince customers to pay a premium price.</p> <p>You are trying to establish industry leadership or buzz; prospects wants/expects very high levels of value for their time.</p>	<p>Info is easily understood.</p> <p>Scope of content is well-defined or limited; speed of delivery, ease of comprehension are more important than context.</p>
Insight/Delight	<p>Delight: Prospects value the "sizzle" of entertainment as much as the "steak" of content.</p>	<p>Insight: Significance of event is instantly clear.</p> <p>Delight: Reader value the message, or content, more than the medium or how the content is conveyed.</p>
Rinse/Repeat	<p>You represent yourself as the "publication of record" for an industry or technical field.</p> <p>You want/need to establish credibility over time.</p> <p>Prospects get genuine value by your timely review of an issue.</p>	<p>Absolute top quality is more important than predictability.</p> <p>You are in an industry where products or underlying technology change very slowly.</p>