Business Impact of Technical Content — The ROI Paradox

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Executive Summary

In an increasingly digital age, technical content has become pivotal in the entire customer lifecycle. Yet, the traditional mindset often relegates technical content to the post-sale support phase of the customer journey, thereby identifying it as merely a "cost center."

This whitepaper delves into the multi-faceted impact of technical content, shedding light on the challenges organizations face in quantifying its ROI while presenting a compelling case for its importance across all phases of the customer journey. We will examine the metrics that underscore the value of technical content and introduce the innovative concept of composite metrics, paving the way for a more holistic understanding of the business impact of technical content.

Introduction

In the complicated mosaic of the corporate landscape, certain tiles shine with a subtle luminescence — impressive but often overshadowed by their directly quantifiable counterparts. One such important tile in the mosaic is technical content. Historically a functional necessity, the value of technical content goes beyond simply conveying information.

We aim to highlight the multi-faceted value of technical content, explaining its tangible and ethereal benefits. At the end of this exploration, we would like to redefine perspectives and challenge readers to consider technical content not just as a by-product — but as a critical business tool deeply embedded in the entire customer journey.

In numerous conversations with customers and partners, the authors of this white paper, Stefan Gentz and Saibal Bhattacharjee, have repeatedly noted an undercurrent — the knowledge of the latent importance of technical content but the difficulty of positioning it in the best possible way. For many companies the challenge is less about recognizing the importance of technical content and more about accurately naming and quantifying its return on investment (ROI) and broader business impact.

Drawing on their collective insights and Adobe's wealth of experience in the technical communication domain, this white paper aims to shed light on this key area. We aim to highlight the multi-faceted value of technical content, explaining its tangible and ethereal benefits. At the end of this exploration, we would like to redefine perspectives and challenge readers to consider technical content not just as a by-product — but as a critical business tool deeply embedded in the entire customer journey.

The authors of this whitepaper have been working hard to address these challenges. In countless conversations with customers, partners, and industry stakeholders, they have identified a consistent pattern — the desire for a tangible, metrics-based understanding of the value of technical content. This white paper, based on the insights of the experts and Adobe's years of experience, is a response to that demand.

They aim to show the intricate connections between technical content and its impact on the business, exploring tangible and intangible benefits. We see technical content as a source of information and a strategic business catalyst — a tool that can impact the entire customer journey and significantly increase ROI.

Gentz and Bhattacharjee are united in their belief that technical content has the potential to evolve from a mere information medium to an influential cornerstone of the business if used with foresight and expertise. This whitepaper intends to be a compass that guides readers along the path to this transformative understanding and provides a roadmap for leveraging the immense but often hidden value of technical content in today's data-driven business world.

Defining the Scope of Technical Content

Technical content describes a product or service's application, purpose, creation, architecture, or operation. Its goal is to explain something a company offers and guide the user best to achieve the goals of the product or service. An example of this is classic technical documentation, but we define technical content more broadly here and include many other use cases, some of which are listed in the table below.

Every industry creates technical content. It provides important information to internal audiences (e.g., product managers, subject matter experts, technical sales, customer service, field engineers) and external audiences (customers, dealers, distributors, end-users) or even as Content as a Service.

Industry	Type of Technical Content
Software, Hardware, Hi-Tech (like Semiconductors, Robotics)	Getting Started Guide User Guide Administrator Guide Simulation Video Online Tutorial 'Show Me' Walkthrough Online Help FAQs Knowledge Base Support Portal API Documentation
Automobile, Industrial/Heavy Machinery	User Manuals Maintenance Guides Standard Operating Procedures Assembly Guides Troubleshooting Guides Safety Instructions Parts Catalogs/Parts Replacement Guides Warranties

Industry	Type of Technical Content
Banking, Financial Services, Insurance	Regulatory Compliance Guidelines Policies & Procedures Accounting Standards Terms & Conditions Online Help FAQs Knowledge Bases Support Portals Training Portals
Healthcare, Medical, Pharma	Citation Clinical Guidelines Core Data Sheets (CDS) Dosage Information Product Brochures Regulatory Compliance Guidelines Standard Operating Procedures Maintenance Guides
Consumer Products (Electronics, Electrical)	Installation Guides User Guides
Aerospace & Defense	Flight Safety Manuals Technical Specifications Standard Operating Procedures Maintenance Guides

Technical Content Perception and ROI

For an extended period, technical content has predominantly been viewed as an operational expenditure, overshadowing its role as a strategic asset. This perspective often marks departments crafting such content as cost burdens rather than value generators.

The ability to quantify direct costs linked to creating, managing, and disseminating technical content is undeniably refined within organizations. Such costs, being concrete, translate effortlessly into discernible metrics:

People Costs:
Quantifying personnel involved—from content creators to subject matter experts refining the content.

Process Costs:
From content review cycles to translation expenses.

Technology Costs:
Annual outlays for essential content creation and management technologies.

Yet, the quandary lies in measuring the ROI of technical content. Despite growing acknowledgment, its value still needs to be revisited. An insightful Adobe study spanning 40 organizations across North America and Europe revealed that a vast majority — 95 % — struggle with demystifying the ROI of their technical content, primarily due to the absence of precise valuation metrics.

Challenges in Measuring the ROI of Technical Content

In the kaleidoscope of business operations, assessing the tangible impact of specific initiatives often becomes an intricate dance. When it comes to technical content — a blend of art and science, precision, and abstraction — this complexity is further amplified. While the imperative nature of technical content remains undisputed, elucidating its direct financial implications and discerning its true return on investment (ROI) is not without its set of hurdles. These challenges arise from myriad factors, spanning from the inherent intangibility of its benefits to the fluidity of the digital realm in which it exists. Here, we unravel some of the predominant challenges encountered in this pursuit:

- **Intangible Benefits:**
  The benefits of technical content, such as enhanced user experience or training time reductions, remain ethereal and resist exact quantification.

- **Absence of Industry Standard Metrics:**
  Technical content needs a universally endorsed metric set, hampering comparative analyses.

- **Overemphasis on Cost Over Value:**
  Historical emphasis on expenditure rather than value derivation camouflages the strategic advantages technical content can offer.

- **Fragmented Documentation Efforts:**
  In expansive enterprises, decentralized technical content creation often hampers a cohesive ROI calculation.

- **Evolving Digital Landscape:**
  Rapid technological shifts mean yesterday's metrics might be today's relics, adding layers to ROI complexities.

- **Customer Behavior Complexity:**
  Determining the exact role of technical content in influencing customer actions is a complex maze.

- **Lack of Tools and Technologies:**
  The dearth of advanced analytical tools in some organizations restricts nuanced content engagement tracking.

- **Short-term vs. Long-term ROI:**
  While technical content often yields long-term dividends like loyalty, the focus commonly remains on immediate returns.

Future-Proofing Through Technical Content

Adobe foresees a transformative role for technical content in the upcoming years.

Rather than being merely an information vault, it will emerge as an interactive facilitator, enhancing product immersion, solidifying user engagement, and cultivating enduring brand allegiance. The dawn of augmented reality, AI-infused content analytics, and hyper-personalized content delivery underscores an optimistic trajectory. The future is particularly bright for enterprises that judiciously channel their resources into the continuous advancement of technical content.

Evaluating Technical Content Through the Customer Journey

The customer journey, often visualized as a winding path with its unique ebbs and flows, represents the sequential phases a user traverses, from initial awareness of a brand, product, or service to becoming its advocate. Technical content is a steadfast guide throughout this journey, seamlessly bridging the user's needs with the product's capabilities. To truly comprehend its influential capacity, it's vital to dissect each stage, understanding how documentation elevates the user's experience and drives tangible outcomes.

Awareness Phase

Consideration Phase

Implementation Phase

Usage Phase 1

Usage Phase 2
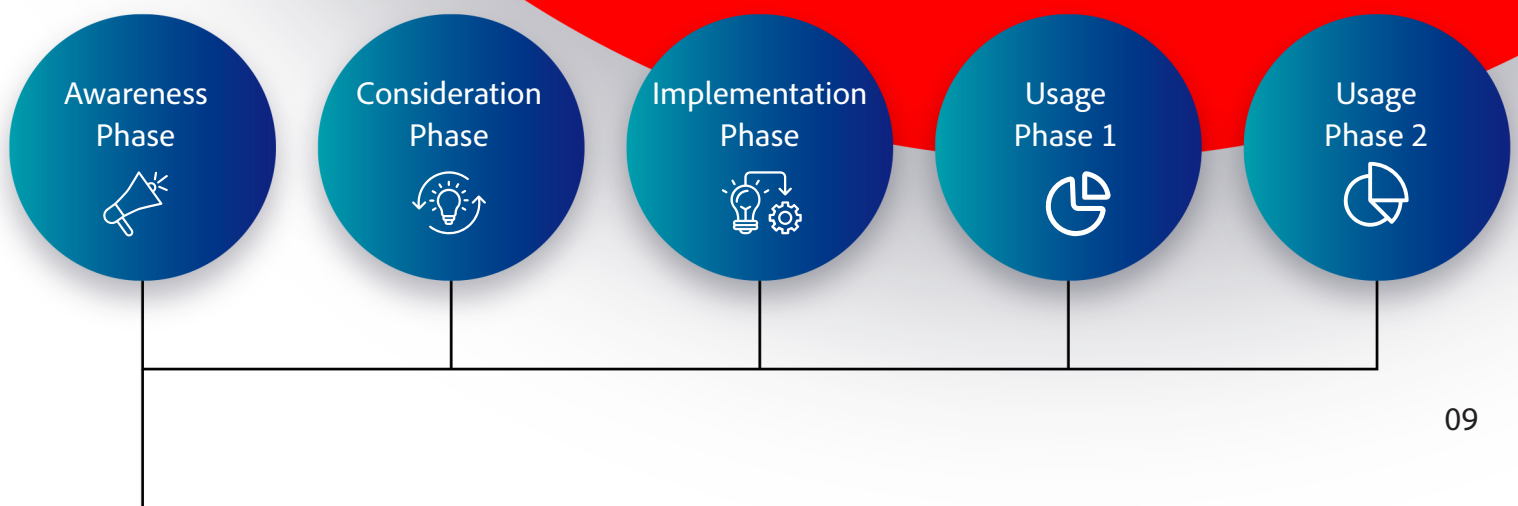
Awareness Phase:
Attracting the Right Audience

In the nascent stages of the customer journey, enterprises need to recognize the role of technical content. Whether nestled within marketing collateral, presented as an independent documentation center, housed in a knowledge base, or featured in a learning portal — it's pivotal.

This content molds the first impression, thereby influencing brand perception. Coupled with sophisticated web analytics built into content delivery platforms, it unveils actionable insights:

Hard Metrics

Distinct separation between traffic originating from existing patrons and potential clientele.

Comprehensive analytics highlighting page views, session lengths, and bounce metrics for these distinct segments.

Soft Metrics

SEO Visibility: Assess the SEO prowess, particularly the organic standings, of your documentation or knowledge base amidst search engine outcomes.

Organic Traction: Scrutinize growth patterns in organic visits, particularly from potential clientele.

User Immersion: Monitor metrics such as mean session lengths or pages per session, implying profound content engagement.

Sentiment Dissection: Extract sentiments from user comments, critiques, or feedback forms to gauge content reception.

Consideration Phase: Navigating Interests to Commitments

When potential clientele progress to the consideration phase, your technical content, knowledge reservoir, or training hub metamorphoses into a robust conduit for lead origination and transmutation.

Hard Metrics

Monitor the surge in inbound sales prospects, trial activations, or enrollments directly associated with traffic from these portals.

Measure the transmutation ratio from leads to viable opportunities originating from this avenue.

Soft Metrics

Depth of Engagement: Observe users' average duration on documentation pages, suggesting intensified interest or engagement.

Feedback and Interactions: Quantify direct inquiries or feedback emanations from the documentation hub, implying an elevated product intrigue.

Content Dissemination: Track instances when prospects disseminate specific documentation links, on digital platforms or within their institutional frameworks, signaling content appreciation.

Post-Purchase Implementation Phase: Enhancing Onboarding Efficiency

Upon finalizing a purchase, the efficacy of technical content comes to the fore, influencing variables like:

Hard Metrics

Abbreviated project launch times, hinting at expedited integrations.

Mitigated implementation expenditures.

Diminishing issues during installation or configuration stages.

Reduced user indoctrination time and expenditures, underscoring the potency of the materials on offer.

Soft Metrics

User Assurance: Interpret the user sentiment post-implementation via feedback channels. A heightened sense of confidence after referring to the documentation suggests success.

Peer Recommendations: Register instances when fresh adopters vouch for specific documentation tools to their network or on digital forums.

Content Discovery Feedback: Collate opinions on the ease of content discovery during the onboarding phase.

Dynamic Content Interaction: If dynamic guides or visual modules are present, analyze their access frequency vis-a-vis conventional text-based content.

Usage Phase 1: Amplifying Value Through Regular Interaction

During the inaugural usage period, the prime directive is to ensure that the clientele derive consistent value from their acquisitions. Technical content emerges as both a preventive measure and an efficient troubleshooting guide.

Hard Metrics

Marked decline in the influx of support queries.

Accelerated resolution timelines for support teams addressing concerns.

Augmented first-time problem rectification rates.

Noteworthy downturn in customer support issue escalations.

Soft Metrics

Time Prudence: Gauge the reduced duration stakeholders spend in pinpointing relevant solutions within the content.

Feedback Caliber: Scrutinize feedback sentiment, emphasizing signals that signify documentation's role in preempting or swiftly addressing complications.

Content Engagement Dynamics: Ascertain the frequently accessed content segments, using this intel to refine content delivery further.

Usage Phase 2: Cultivating Loyalty & Championing Advocacy

As users become more entrenched with the product or service, the focus pivots towards prolonged loyalty and evangelism. Here, the caliber and reachability of technical content and instructional content play a cardinal role in nurturing customer allegiance.

Hard Metrics

Observable uptick in system operational periods.

Diminished durations for effective and prompt execution of scheduled upkeep tasks.

Contracted intervals between system upgrades or feature deployments, attributed to enhanced user comprehension.

Soft Metrics

Product Commitment: Analyze elevated adoption metrics for specific product functionalities, attributing success to lucid documentation and training modules.

Fidelity Indicators: Chronicle advancements in customer contentment indices, evaluating the influence of technical content on these metrics.

Advocacy Markers: Examine reduced attrition rates, amplified customer renewal frequencies, and abbreviated renewal cycles.

Referral Insights: Recognize growth in clientele through referrals, hinting at the documentation's prowess in fortifying user trust and advocacy.

As we trace the entire span of the customer journey, it becomes increasingly evident that technical content isn't a peripheral asset — it's deeply woven into every interaction, decision, and milestone the user achieves. Its value proposition showcases its dynamic nature, from sparking interest to fostering loyalty.

Organizations that adeptly calibrate their technical content to resonate with each phase stand to reap monumental benefits, ensuring that every step the customer takes is informed, enriched, and empowered by precise, accessible, and impactful content.

Technical Content Delivers Measurable Business Value at Every Stage of the Customer Journey

Hard Metrics	Soft Metrics

Awareness

- Improved SEO performance
- Increase in organic traffic
- Reduction in bounce rate Improvement in end-user ratings on topics/FAQs
- Improvement in 'positive sentiment score' of end-user comments

Consideration

- Increase in inbound leads
- Increase in 'lead-to-oportunity' conversion rate
- Documentation PDF downloads during TRIAL period

Hard Metrics	**Soft Metrics**

Purchase

- Reduction in time to GO LIVE
- Reduction in implementation costs
- Reduction in volume of installation/configuration issues faced during GO LIVE
- Reduction in end-user training time and cost

Retention

- Reduction in inbound support calls/cases
- Reduction in TAT for support agents to resolve issues
- Increase in support agents productivity
- Increase in first-time resolution
- Reduction in escalation of support tickets

- Reduction in SEARCH time for internal employees/external customers

Advocacy

- Increase in system uptime Faster completion of schedule maintenance
- Increase in product feature adoption

- Increase in traffic to documentation webpages for new release notes, product updates
- Improved CSAT score
- Reduction in churn rate/Increase in renewal rate
- Faster renewal cycles
- Increase in cross sell/upsell rate
- Increase in avarage order value

Composite Metrics: Advancing the Frontiers of Content Analytics

In our progressive transition into the digital epoch, the convergence of web analytics, content discernment, and customer journey insights afford us unparalleled vistas of comprehension. These technological leaps herald the emergence of sophisticated data surveillance techniques and nuanced data source models. A manifestation of this progression is the inception of composite metrics — intricate indicators offering a more incisive and pertinent delineation of the profound business ramifications of technical content.

Before plunging into the depths, let's crystallize our understanding of composite metrics. In essence, these metrics amalgamate various singular indicators, imputing them with gradations commensurate with their business relevance. Such an integrated metric furnishes a comprehensive insight, transcending the depth afforded by scrutinizing each metric singularly.

Merits and Limitations of Composite Metrics

Merits:

Composite metrics proffer a panoramic perspective, weaving myriad data strands into an intelligible, singular datum. This assimilation often filters out extraneous data fluctuations, facilitating lucid realizations and judicious resolutions. By customizing gradations aligned with business imperatives, entities can fine-tune their metrics to resonate with strategic trajectories, rendering the insights more pragmatic. Furthermore, composite metrics can unveil subtle data interplays and correspondences that might remain camouflaged when metrics are evaluated in silos.

Limitations:

Conversely, formulating composite metrics can inject intricacies. Ascertaining apt gradations for individual metrics demands discernment of both the commercial terrain and the available data. There's an inherent risk of misconstruing the data, particularly if stakeholders remain nebulous about the constituent elements of the composite metric. An excessive lean on a lone composite metric might inadvertently eclipse salient nuances inherent in the singular metrics. Wielding these metrics judiciously, perennially affirming their pertinence and veracity amidst evolving business currents is imperative.

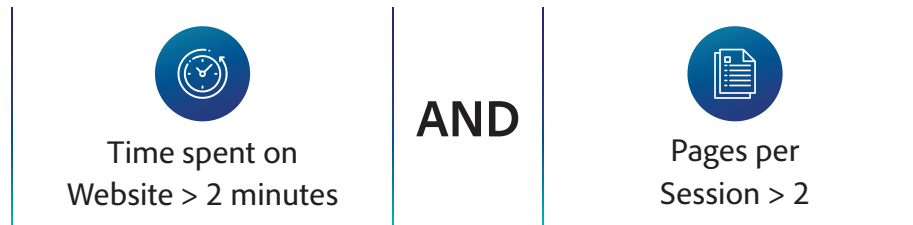# Composite Metrics—
Illustrative Snapshots

Visualize a situation where Metric A catalogs user immersion on a technical content interface, Metric B quantifies the leads birthed from that interface, and Metric C registers post-acquisition affirmative feedback attributed to content lucidity.

A composite metric could apportion weight to these independent metrics based on strategic gravitas, coalescing them to proffer a unified glimpse of content potency.

Such refined metrics chart an exhilarating course in content analytics, and we are merely at the cusp of discerning their expansive applications. As you internalize this paradigm, contemplate its alignment with your organizational milieu. Discern metrics within your orbit ripe for fusion, sculpting composite barometers that enrich your grasp on your content's commercial sway.
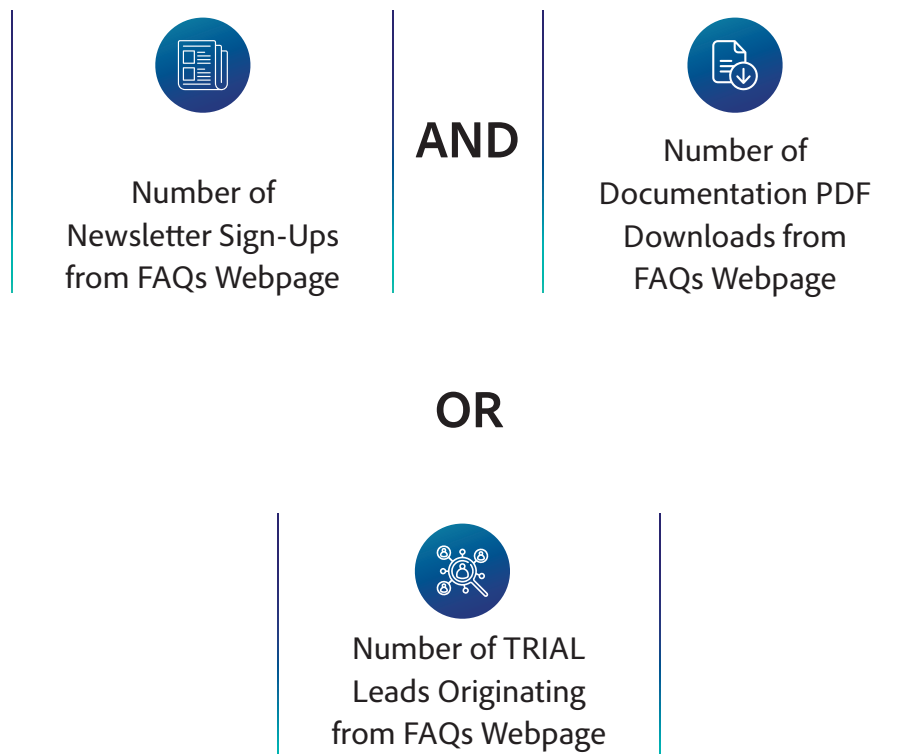
Example 1: Web Engagement Composite Metric

A value synthesized from criteria like:

Time spent on
Website > 2 minutes

AND

Pages per
Session > 2

Example 2: FAQs Engagement Composite Metric

Employing graded criteria such as:

Number of
Newsletter Sign-Ups
from FAQs Webpage

AND

Number of
Documentation PDF
Downloads from
FAQs Webpage

OR

Number of TRIAL
Leads Originating
from FAQs Webpage

Crafting Composite Metrics:
A Stepwise Paradigm

① **Metric Selection:** Cherry-pick data anchors pertinent to the underlying business query.

② **Weightage Allocation:** Calibrate metrics according to business primacies.

③ **Data Standardization:** Harmonize metrics to a unified scale, ideally spanning 0 to 1.

④ **Metric Synthesis:** Employ a formulaic approach to merge metrics by their calibrated weightage.

⑤ **Insight Extraction & Decoding:** Leverage the composite metric to unearth and decode insights.

Integrating these components enriches reader comprehension, seamlessly bridging theoretical constructs with tangible implementation.
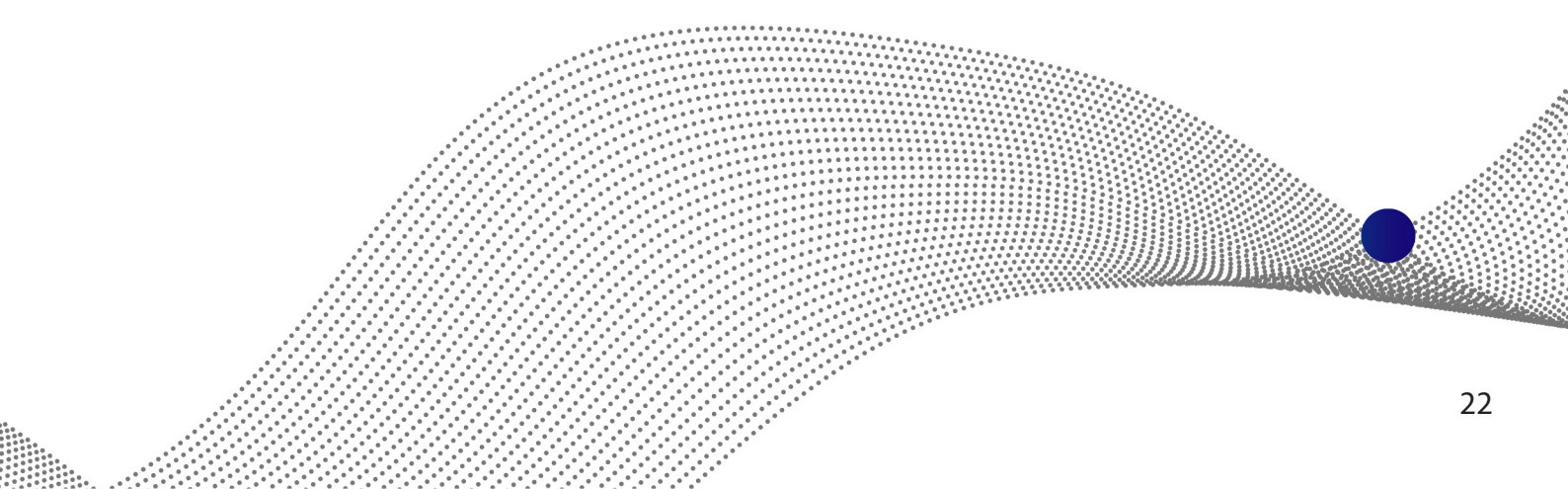
Conclusion

Our odyssey through the intricacies of technical content has underscored a foundational insight: Technical content is not merely a static vault of data. Instead, it emerges as a dynamic linchpin, orchestrating pivotal interactions throughout the entire customer continuum, from the nascent flickers of awareness to the cultivation of unwavering advocacy.

Amidst this digital renaissance, punctuated by ceaseless innovations and a mutable technological tableau, the gravitas of metrics is irrefutable. As corporate entities grapple to maintain their bearings in this data-centric milieu, we must perpetually hone our analytical prisms to ensure a lucid appreciation of the expansive resonance of technical content, capturing its multifarious subtleties.

The ascendance of sophisticated analytics and the avant-garde notion of composite metrics bestows organizations with amplified prowess. Such progressive tools not only elucidate the manifold ramifications of technical content but also furnish instruments to delineate its value proposition vividly. When juxtaposed with the qualitative augmentation proffered by robust technical content, this tangible affirmation solidifies its invaluable stature.

As we charter a trajectory into a future imbued with amplified synergy and a magnified focus on user-centric paradigms, the quintessence of technical content gains even sharper focus. Businesses with a vision of not merely retaining but truly captivating their patrons must internalize this. It beckons a directed endeavor towards curating premier technical content, unraveling its latent potential, and consequently, weaving resilient, value-imbued affiliations with its consumer base.

About the Authors

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Saibal Bhattacharjee has been with Adobe for more than 13 years now and is currently the Director of Marketing in the Digital Advertising, Learning & Publishing Business Unit.

In his current role, Saibal is in charge of GTM and business strategy for a diverse product portfolio in Adobe—ranging from market-leading cloud-native component content management system (Adobe Experience Manager Guides), advertising & subscription monetization products for connected multi-screen TV platforms, content authoring and publishing desktop apps (Adobe FrameMaker, Adobe RoboHelp), to print & scan solutions that power Office and Commercial printers, etc.

Saibal holds a B.E. degree from Jadavpur University, Kolkata, and an M.B.A. degree from the Faculty of Management Studies, University of Delhi.
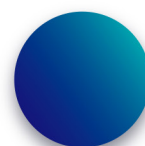
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Stefan's mission is to inspire enterprises and technical communication professionals worldwide.

As a sought-after keynote speaker and moderator at conferences worldwide, he travels around the globe, showing how to create compelling technical communication experiences with Adobe solutions like RoboHelp, FrameMaker, and Adobe Experience Manager Guides.

He is also a certified Quality Management Professional (TÜV), ISO 9001 / EN 15038 auditor, ISO 31000 Risk Management expert, and Six Sigma Champion. Besides that, he has been a member of the tekom Conference Advisory Board, the tekom iiRDS working group for Intelligent Information, and the OASIS DITA Adoption Committee.

In 2016, MindTouch awarded Stefan Gentz as one of the Top 25 Leading Content Strategist Influencers in the world and one of the Top 25 Content Experience Influencers in the world in 2017.

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