

# Content is Content

by Jacquie Samuels and Bernard Aschwanden



# Introduction

We've come to think of it like this: content is content. Marketing and technical communications are generated for the same end users at different points in the product adoption lifecycle.

The distinction between marketing communications and technical communications is far less pronounced than it once was. Managers sometimes see little difference in skillsets and often put content creators together in one role or department - and maybe they're right. Our careers as consultants mean that we're often dealing with a lot of technical content but also creating marketing communications; we're in a good position to see how very little difference there is between them. They're both an always-on dialogue with the user, just at different points in the product adoption lifecycle.

# Convergence

Pre-sales content (marketing content) is increasingly focussed on providing enough technical details so potential buyers can make an informed decision. The days of glossy but vacuous marketing content are coming to an end because buyers insist on making a more [informed decision before purchasing](#).<sup>1</sup> Content is usually publicly available, as is the feedback and opinions from existing customers. Which means everyone will know both, what you do well and where you need to improve the experience.

Post-sales content (technical content), while always focused on providing enough technical details to use the product, is [now evolving to provide more useful information](#)<sup>2</sup> based on business goals, is presented in a more usable way, and made available in a helpful format. This technical content is more and more becoming a part of the pre-sales research consumers do. They make purchasing decisions based on research which includes watching videos of your products in action, reading customer reviews, comparing reference information, learning concepts, and getting to know how well you document tasks they may have to perform. What you write matters more than ever. How you manage it becomes mission critical to business success.

	Marketing	Technical
End users	Identify end users early, target content for their needs. Provide an always-on dialogue aligned with end users.	
Multi-channel publishing	Provide content in appropriate formats, including HTML, PDF, and applications.	
Level of technical detail	Always high-level, now increasingly technical.	Always technical, now increasingly focussed on higher level, including users' business goals.
Type of content	Articles, blogs, tweets, case studies, whitepapers, advertising, promotions, etc.  Integrated marketing communications helps customers understand what the product does and decide if the product solves their problem.	Books, guides, and topics, where the aim is to provide a library of content to help users understand and use the product.

Table 1: Where Marketing and Technical Communications converge

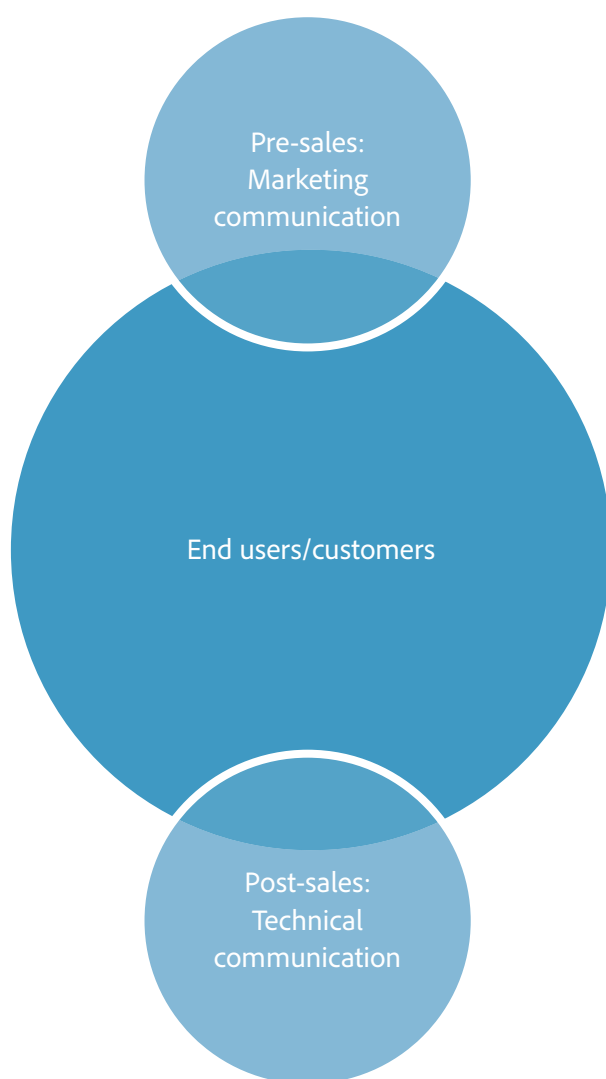
<sup>1</sup> <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2015/02/5-things-b2b-buyers-want-content>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.stilo.com/article-dita-minimalism/>

There are, of course, several important differences between the two. Although they share the same core delivery channels, technical communication often publishes into formats that just don't apply to marketing, including online help, error messages, and code-integrated API documentation.

Conversely, marketing sometimes applies to outputs that are absolutely the wrong place for technical content, including point-of-sale, ads, and brochures.

Despite these differences, the overwhelming and growing similarities make it clear that marketing and technical communications are not as different as we thought.



*Figure 1: Customers stay the same and content changes based on the point in the product lifecycle*

# Seamless, consistent user experience

Your end users don't distinguish between pre- and post-sales content, so why do you? Provide a consistent user experience and branding on all content throughout the product lifecycle, no matter how and when users interact with your content.

A consistent content user experience would include the same content functionality, including location, search and filter widgets, print-to-PDF, bookmarking, sharing, and feedback mechanisms, regardless of whether content is created for the purposes of pre- or post-sales.

Gather metrics on all the content to record at what points and how frequently end users switch between the two types of content. With metrics that cross the content silo boundary, you get a deeper insight into what your customers look for at each step of their product adoption. This is a golden opportunity to keep refining your content to ensure it constantly meets end user needs.

This integrated user experience allows pre-sales customers who need a deeper dive get directly into the technical communication content. On the other side of the coin, new adopters may need simply an overview of your product, which the technical communications content does not cover. An integrated model will allow them to navigate through the two types of content and access that business case or summary view seamlessly.



## Leverage customer research

There is one major boon for technical communicators in this convergence of content: Marketing has already done the work of identifying and researching customers. Technical communicators can and must leverage that information, and use it to align their content with what users need. Most content creators will find that this vital information is often overlooked in the analysis to better shape content. And yet, all the research is only a department away.

Customer research not only helps focus the technical content, but also aligns both types of content to consistently focus on the same user goals.

When both sets of content are focussed on the same assumptions, the same set of underlying business goals, and the same audience, the content is not only better, the experience between pre- and post-sales content is also much better aligned, making the overall customer experience far more seamless.

Your messaging is clear and consistent, which strengthens your brand and enhances the quality of your technical communication. These are all very, very good things.

## Take it further:

### Deliver a consistent user experience for training and support too

Why stop at considering marketing as part of technical communications (or vice versa) only? Content that provides support and content that provides training must be consistent as well. All communications about a product must support and enhance the entire user experience, from pre-sales to learning to long-term use. End users don't distinguish between the source of content they experience - you should be aiming for a seamless, coherent experience for them.



Figure 2: Delivering a consistent communication experience

# Implementation

## Leverage an enterprise tool

Let's talk implementation. Marketing and technical communications rarely use the same tools to author and publish, which is likely to make the effort for a consistent user experience an uphill battle, and a manual one at that. However, there's a new player in the field that promises to make a big splash in integrated content.

[Adobe Experience Manager \(AEM\)](#) is an enterprise marketing tool used to author, store, and publish marketing content. Technical communicators can now purchase the [Adobe Experience Manager Guides](#)<sup>3</sup> that makes AEM DITA-aware. What this means is that technical communicators and marketing communicators can now use the same tool, leverage the same infrastructure, and create that same consistent user experience that is so vital.

If your enterprise is already using AEM, then this is a no-brainer. Leverage what has already been developed. No other tool lets you plug your DITA content and delivery into an enterprise marketing tool—and besides, it's a full DITA CCMS too. Win-win.

If your enterprise is not already using AEM or is in the market for both a DITA CCMS and a marketing CMS, then add AEM with Adobe Experience Manager Guides to your CCMS shortlist. [Adobe Experience Manager Guides](#) is a full DITA CCMS in its own right, with all the bells and whistles for managing DITA components.

The flexibility in content creation (including XML for technical communicators) using an enterprise-ready tool combined with the power of a consistent end user experience makes it a unique and robust offering for both content streams.

## Publishing

One of the biggest pain points in DITA adoption is publishing: determining how to publish, publishing to all channels, and choices on what functionality to build into the user experience of the content delivery. You can leverage and build on AEM's publishing functionality, especially if the marketing team has already put a great deal of effort into setting AEM up with custom branding and experience.

## Sharing or reusing content

As an added but not-to-be-overlooked bonus, Adobe Experience Manager Guides lets marketing communicators and technical communicators create collaborative content quickly and easily. For example, a simple drag-and-drop can pull marketing graphics into a DITA topic.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.adobe.com/products/xml-documentation-add-on-for-experience-manager.html>

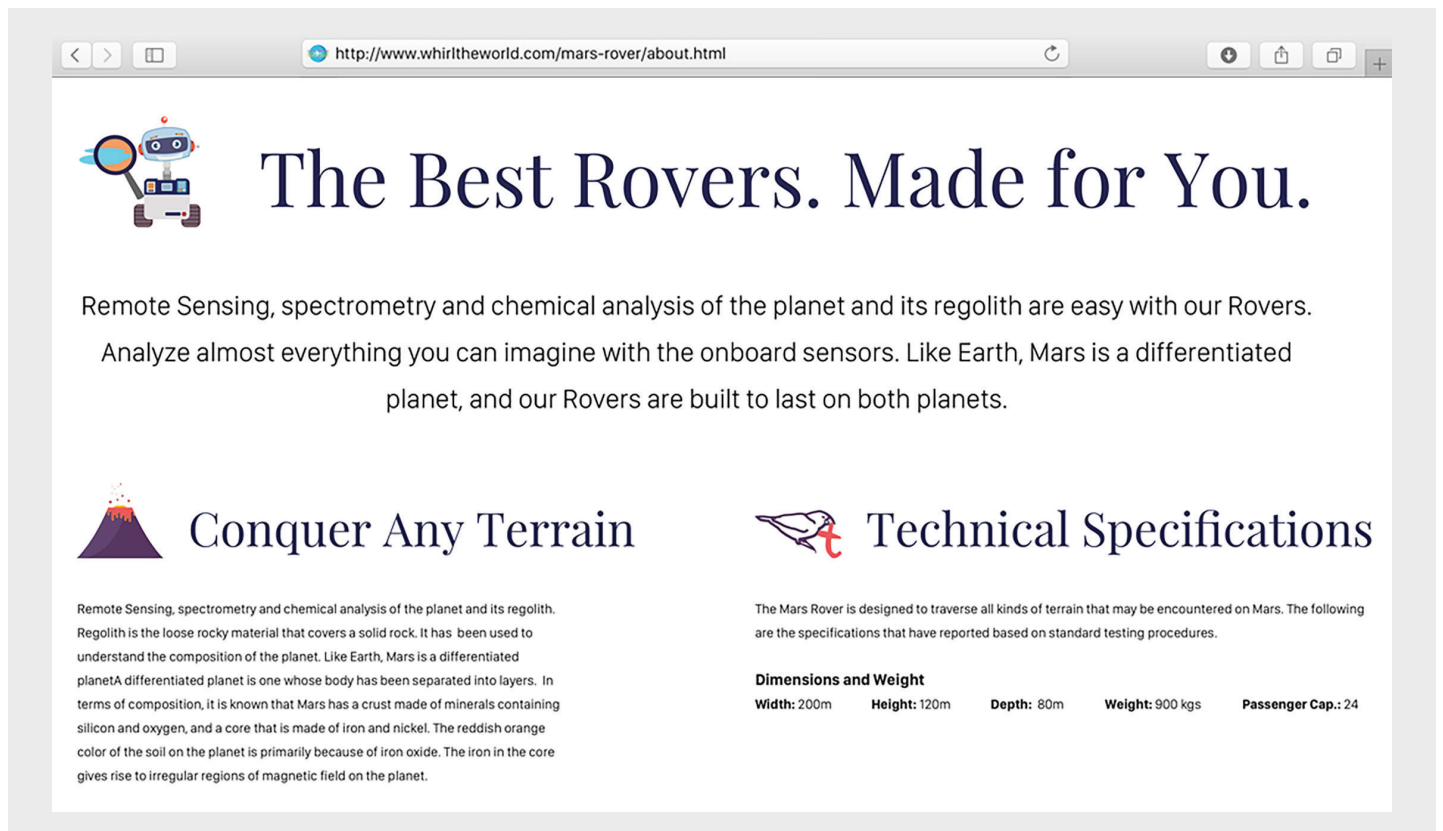


Figure 3: Marketing and Technical content blended on the same website

The value of being able to share content like this is clearly immense. Usually, the two departments may not even be aware of each other's assets until after publishing time, and then too, only when they happen to stumble across the data. To be able to browse for content (yes, graphics, but also text) easily and know that you're looking at approved, ready-to-use assets is without a doubt a great silo-busting advancement.

While reading this, think about whether content in your organization is being intelligently reused. If it gets updated by Marketing, will the DITA topic reflect the latest version? With Adobe's solution, the answer is yes. And if Marketing wants to leverage content created in a DITA topic, they too can drag and drop and always get the most up-to-date content, even when that content changes.

Of course, there's always a requirement for careful asset management and information governance, but a robust content strategy does take that into account and ensures that communicators from any department are able to trust that the assets in AEM correct, complete, and approved.

## Conclusion

A consistent user experience of content, no matter where the end user is in the product adoption lifecycle, just makes sense. Let customers flow seamlessly from one type of content to another, both carefully aligned with the business cases and goals of the consumer.

[Adobe Experience Manager Guides](#) is a great option for aligning tools and breaking down silos between Marketing and Technical Communications.

## More resources

<https://www.forrester.com/report/Your+Customers+Demand+Valuable+Content/-/E-RES113407>

<https://flite.com/blog-post/home/2014/3/6/how-always-on-marketing-reaches-always-connected-consumers>



# Biography



Jacquie Samuels, a consultant with Publishing Smarter, specializes in DITA CCMS selection and content strategy. She helps technical communicators write concise, structured content with the right tools and the right strategy.

She lives in Ottawa, Canada.



Bernard Aschwanden founded Publishing Smarter to focus on communications. He helps clients reduce costs and improve quality by providing insights about communications and related technology (think tools, process, DITA), across Europe and North America. He is an Adobe Certified Expert, a Certified Technical Trainer, and the past President of the Society for Technical Communications. He trains, writes extensively and presents internationally on communications, publishing, and single sourcing content. Everything he does with clients is geared towards publishing better, faster and smarter to provide a maximum return on investment.

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