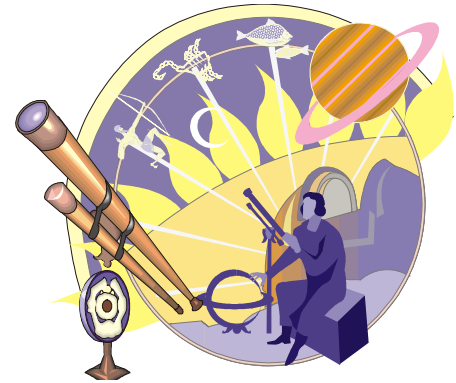


Marcom for the Technical Communicator

Marketing Communications (Marcom) is a branch of marketing that concerns itself with communicating the marketing message to the customer, through product branding, advertising and connections with the press and public. It manages everything to do with the image that a company plans to present to the outside world.

As technical communicators, you may be directly or indirectly involved in Marcom activities. You may be required to coordinate your activities with the Marcom department or report directly to a Marcom manager.



Many technical communicator play a key role in presenting a company's information to the public. This article describes ways in which technical communicators can contribute to Marcom activities in a company.

The Key Contribution of the Technical Communicator

Marcom managers, copywriters, marketing writers, graphic artists, tradeshow managers, Web masters and public relations personnel are part of a dynamic team, working together with the marketing department to convey the company's messages to a wider public.

As a technical communicator, familiar with the company's products and able to communicate in a clear and concise manner, you play an important role in this process. You can act not only as the user advocate, but be an important bridge between the technical departments in your company and the marketing focused departments. Your communication, writing and layout skills, together with your knowledge of audience and subject matter can play a central role in presenting corporate messages to a wider audience.

The tools of marketing communications include:

- Marketing collateral: brochures, white papers
- Multimedia demos
- Presentations
- Press releases and public relations
- Trade shows
- Web site
- Product branding
- Advertising

You may be able to lend your expertise to many of these areas.

Marketing collateral: brochures, case studies, white papers

This is an area in which technical writing skills are highly relevant. Your writing and layout skills, knowledge of technology, product and audience put you in a unique

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position to create product and service brochures, case studies and white papers. When times are good, companies will usually hire a separate marketing writer to take care of this type of writing; however, in smaller companies or companies that are outsourcing many of their Marcom requirements, you may have an ideal opportunity to take over responsibility for this area.

Multimedia demos

When your company develops a multi-media demo, describing the company and its products and services, you are in a unique position to write the text or the narration script for the demo. Since the design of the graphics and the layout is largely dependent on the text and narration you provide, your contribution to the demo is central. Working together with an internal or external graphic artist, you can help define the content and structure of the demo. Try learning the tools used to create interactive demos, such as Macromedia Flash and DemoShield Designer.

Presentations

Your communication, writing, usability and layout skills, knowledge of technology, product and audience put you in an ideal position for writing corporate sales and training presentations. Having some personal experience as a presenter would be beneficial, although this is not essential. More important are your skills in presenting information in a clear, concise and consistent manner. The most common tool used for presentation is Microsoft PowerPoint, installed with Microsoft Office.

Web site design

Managing content and providing it to users in various formats is what technical communicators do. You already have most of the skills for providing content, format and layout for web site design. Investing in a course in HTML and Web design, and designing your own web site is one way in which you can gain the skills necessary to design a Web site. The STC Intercom magazine often contains useful articles on web site design. Web page design tools include Microsoft FrontPage and Macromedia Dreamweaver. A fully functional trial version of Dreamweaver can be downloaded from the Macromedia Web site (www.macromedia.com).

Press releases

Writing press releases is a specific genre that needs to be learned. However, you already have the content knowledge and writing skills necessary to contribute to this area. Writing a press release requires that you liaison closely with the major decision-makers in the company and present their message to a professional audience of investors and industry analysts. If you have been at your company for some time, you may have built up good working relationships with many of the decision-makers, making it easier for you to communicate, and gain their trust and support. It also requires coordinating with various media and advertising companies. You can start out by taking a look at your company's press releases and attempting to write one or two of your own.

Trade shows and public relations

Knowing content and being able to communicate this content in a clear manner puts you in a position to assist at trade shows and events. This does require, however, having

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good oral communication skills, a pleasant manner and neat appearance, and being comfortable working directly with the public.

Product branding

Product branding has to do with what you call your products, in order to position them in the market. Since ultimately you will be the one who will be using the branded names in the documentation, you have an important role to play in providing your suggestions as to the suitability of a product name. Ask to be involved in committees decided product naming. Name branding requires brainstorming names, based on functionality or purpose, or relationship to other products and architectures. Once a short-list of names has been drawn up, these need to be checked on the Internet (e.g. using Google.com), to make sure that no other company in your field uses the same name. Your legal attorney should then advice you on whether the name can be trademarked.

Advertising

Although this is an area in which technical communicators are rarely involved, your communication, audience and layout skills can help you to contribute. While almost all technical and marketing writing involves factual or literal descriptions, advertising messages are conveyed in more figurative and indirect language. This involves putting on a different thinking cap and treating the communication of information, not so much as telling the “facts”, but rather indicating intent, mood, focus or vision. Areas such as slogans, tag lines and images involve distilling information about the core reasons for a company’s existence and understanding how the company perceives itself. The activity of contributing to advertising efforts gives you a broader insight into the functioning of the company and its products.

Benefits of Being Involved in Marcom

If you are currently doing technical or proposal writing, why should you consider becoming involved in Marcom activities? There are numerous benefits to being more involved in Marcom projects. These include:

- Greater opportunity for creative expression
- A chance to influence the company’s image
- Producing material that is “lighter” and may be more interesting than heavy technical stuff
- Your involvement in different Marcom tasks helps diversify your skills set
- Provides you with a broader perspective of the life cycle of a product within a company (i.e., not only what it does, but what its value is to the customer)