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Document Summary

What Technology Buyers Want You to Know About Online Content
by KnowledgeStorm, Inc

Published on: December 13, 2005

Type of content: Vendor White Paper

Format: Adobe Acrobat (.pdf)

Length: 0 Pages

Price: Free

Overview:

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The findings, however, stretch beyond this basic understanding to craft a guide to what technology buyers fundamentally want from the information they access online -- what knowledge they hope to gain from it, how they use it in their own jobs, how they share it among others involved in the purchasing process and how they factor it into their evaluations and final purchasing decisions.

The study was conducted jointly by the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Council and KnowledgeStorm, the Internet's top-ranked search resource for technology solutions and information. The goal of the study was to provide research-backed observations to help technology marketers understand and improve the quality, availability and accessibility of their online content based on the desires of the technology buyers who use it.

The findings from 1,400 respondents involved in researching, evaluating or selecting IT solutions provide core insights that can help technology marketers do a better job of reaching, influencing and convincing buyers through online content.

What Technology Buyers Want You to Know About Online Content

A KnowledgeStorm White Paper

December 2005



Introduction

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Technology Buyers Need Online Content to Make Informed Decisions

Industry publication *eMarketer* has reported statistics for 2004 that showed 65% of U.S. business-to-business technology buyers turned to the Internet *first* when researching technology solutions – and noted expectations of 70% for 2005. Likewise, 2004 research conducted by custom business researcher FIND/SVP showed that 67% of U.S. executives said it would be “difficult or impossible to do their jobs without Web-based search tools.”

The research in *Define What's Valued Online* underscores those findings with the importance technology buyers place on obtaining information online. Nearly 90% of respondents said that online content had a “moderate or major impact on vendor selection.” More than half (54.5%) spend up to five hours per week researching IT solutions online, while 25% spend 5 to 10 hours per week doing so. Almost 16% spend 10 to 20 hours per week researching IT solutions online.

When asked to rank the benefits of online research on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest benefit), the top three responses were:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|------|
| 1. Ease of access and availability | 4.32 |
| 2. Breadth and depth of information | 4.04 |
| 3. Timeliness and currency of content | 3.93 |

Technology Buyers Leverage a Broad Range of Online Content

Technology buyers access and use a broad range of online content to make buying decisions. Vendor white papers, product reviews, analyst reports and product literature were the most popular content formats.

Varied Types of Content Are Frequently Used



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(Response to the question: "What types of content do you use most frequently?")

Three factors contribute to this finding:

- 1. The Internet serves as "the great equalizer" when it comes to obtaining information on technology products and services.** While business executives used to rely on getting information from their technology experts, now they can use the Internet to begin researching technology solutions from a business perspective on their own.
- 2. Many people researching technology solutions are gathering information for a "pass-along" audience.** This audience may include executives, department leaders, financial evaluators, such as the CFO, and end users who will interact with the solution to get their jobs done. These "customers" for the technology researcher encompass the range of people who are involved in any way in evaluating or in selecting the solution, and can be described as a "decision network." Almost 35% of the respondents noted that

more than 20 people within their organizations relied on them “for content sourcing and advice.” That number rose to 47% for “more than 10 people” and to 66.6% for “five or more people.”

3. Broader, more business-oriented content is used at the beginning of a solution search. More detailed, technical content is sought further along in the process, closer to vendor selection. Because of these varying content needs, technology marketers must provide high-value online content at each stage of the evaluation process.

Technology Buyers Want “The Right Content” to Be Easier to Find

A June 2004 study conducted by custom business researcher FIND/SVP pointed to the conclusion that time spent sifting through irrelevant search results cost businesses \$31 billion annually. The study found that not only are 71% of business executives frustrated with search engine results, 74% are not confident that the results are reliable.

With respect to the relevance of search results, 27.2% of respondents noted that online content often “lacks keywords for easy access via search engines,” and 21.0% noted the “lack of proper categorization of content.” The overwhelming majority of respondents, however – 68.5% – still turn to search engines *first* when they begin their online research. Responses rounding out the top five were: 5.8% noting vendor Websites; 5.3% noting industry-specific Websites; 4.8% noting research analysts such as Gartner Group and Forrester Research; and 4.3% noting online magazine sites.

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The overwhelming majority of respondents, however – 68.5% – still turn to search engines first when they begin their online research.

Technology marketers should take steps to make their online content easier to find. First, they can regularly update search engine keywords and make them as tightly differentiated as possible. For example, if you sell imaging software used solely by radiologists, your keywords should be “radiology imaging software,” not simply “imaging.” The difference? A search on Google for “imaging” returns 200,000,000 responses, compared to 486 for “radiology imaging software.”

Still, 486 responses is a lot to sort through. That is why smart companies also are working with content distribution, or content syndication, networks (KnowledgeStorm operates a premier network, the KnowledgeStorm Network, comprised of over 150 sites that reach both broad and targeted audiences searching on the Internet). These services provide a structured, organized way for technology buyers

to easily find information on technology solutions and topics as they search online – matching their business requirements to a “short list” of technology vendors. Search resource companies, like KnowledgeStorm, aggregate and classify content from thousands of vendors and distribute it through their network of partners, including search engines, industry-specific Websites, online magazine sites and professional and industry organization sites. Additionally, they provide lead generation and performance reporting services that help marketers more tightly target and distribute their content.

The earlier technology marketers take advantage of these services, the more opportunities they will have to deliver content that rises above the noise of the Internet that can be associated with general online search results.

Technology Buyers Want to Know What *Other* People – Especially Experts – Think About Your Solution

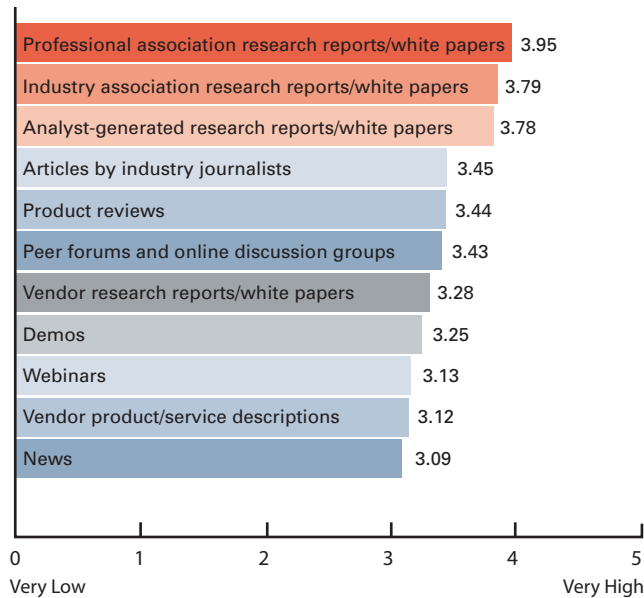
Technology buyers are most confident in content that comes from sources other than technology vendors. Topping the list are research reports and white papers from professional associations, industry associations and industry analysts. These same sources also top the list of responses to the question, “How do you rate the decision support value of the following content types?”

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The *Define What's Valued Online* survey explored these issues. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 indicating “very high” trust), the top trust score was 3.95, which went to “professional association research reports/white papers.” The lowest score (although still above the mean) was 3.09 – and it went to information gathered from news sources.

These “they say” messages – as opposed to the “we say” messages you create – are more credible because they come from independent professionals who understand the industry as a *whole*, not just your company. That is exactly what technology buyers are trying to do as they gather research to determine the optimal solution to their business need. Technology marketers should partner with these types of organizations to ensure their products and services are accurately covered. They also should consider working with these organizations to co-research and co-publish nonbiased reports on topics of interest in their industry.

The Top Six Most Trusted Content Sources Are Outside Your Company



(Response to the question: When researching IT solutions online, what is your level of confidence and trust in the technical accuracy of the following content types?)

“Biased or Slanted Content” Is Viewed Almost As Negatively As Spam

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Asked “What are the most pressing issues or problems associated with researching IT solutions online?” respondents ranked “invasive online advertising and pop-ups” a 3.91 on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being “most pressing”) and “spam or phishing” a 3.79. Technology marketers, however, may be surprised to see “biased or slanted content” a very close third at 3.73.

And, when asked to select their top three “pet peeves about online technical content and information sourced from the Internet,” 53% noted “hype and puffery of offerings.” Each of the top five responses to this question concerned a lack of real, succinct, “hard-evidence” communication regarding solutions and their impact on business – delivered without hype.

Content Short on Realism and Facts Annoys Technology Buyers

Hype and puffery of offerings	53.0%
Poor communication of business-value proposition	46.3%
Too few proof-points that show ROI of the solution	44.8%
Long-winded descriptions	36.0%
Absence of real-world success stories	31.3%
Lack of keywords for easy access via search engines	27.2%
Lack of proper categorization of content	21.0%
Too much focus on technical features and functions	19.6%
Hard to understand and translate to others	16.9%
Others	4.9%

(Response to the question: "What are your pet peeves about online technical content and information sourced from the Internet?" [Select top three])

In fact, less than half (45.5%) of respondents are "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with online content today. This presents a strong opportunity for technology marketers to stand apart from the crowd by developing and distributing content that is fact-based and business-solution oriented.

Additional Insights

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Additional insights that can help technology marketers improve the effectiveness of their online content include:

- **Adhere to the principle "you have to give to get" if you ask for personal information before granting access to your online content.** Deliver something of value – for example, a 10-page white paper on *The First Five Steps to Complying with the Sarbanes-Oxley Act* as opposed to a 2-page product slick. Allow product slicks and like information to be downloaded without requesting personal information. Technology buyers rated "personal information requirements to download content" a 3.66 on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the most significant) regarding the "most pressing issues or problems associated with researching IT solutions online."
- **When you do require registration in exchange for information, make sure you follow up personally, promptly and relevantly to the information shared.** Research conducted by KnowledgeStorm and The Artemis Group revealed the best time to contact a lead is *the same day you receive it*. In that study, 88% of leads were happy to be personally contacted when called the same day as their inquiry, but receptiveness to contact

declined over time. Respondents in the *Define What's Valued Online* research ranked "unwanted follow-up from vendors" a 3.52 on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the most significant) regarding the "most pressing issues or problems associated with researching IT solutions online." A good marketing rule of thumb is to contact every lead within 48 hours of receiving it.

- **Stand out by creating content that can be skimmed.** With the tremendous volume of information competing for attention online, savvy technology marketers can rise above the fray by creating documents that score points with well-chosen subheads, diagrams, pictures, callouts and other devices that add interest and aid skimming. Technology buyers say they are overwhelmed by the amount of information on the Internet, ranking this issue a 3.12 on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the most significant) regarding the "most pressing issues or problems associated with researching IT solutions online."

10 Things You Can Do *Now* to Improve Your Online Content

1. Partner with industry analyst firms to research and publish nonbiased reports on topics of interest in your industry. Pairing your brand with a well-respected industry analyst firm can position your company as a thought leader.
2. Submit your products and services to be reviewed by editors at respected publications in your industry. Purchase the rights to make reprints and PDFs available on your Website and in your sales collateral.
3. Conduct research to answer questions from buyers of your products and services, and publish the results online.
4. Hire an editorial professional to edit all of your online content to eliminate jargon and hype and to ensure consistency between the information and positioning messages on your Website, as well as the promise made in the lead generation material that directs respondents there "for more information."
5. Constantly update and refresh content about your products and services. Out-of-date information damages the credibility of your company and of the other content you make available.
6. Make sure all the links referenced in your online content and on your Website work.

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7. Ask researchers to register only for important content that delivers high value, such as industry research or informative white papers. Provide your product slicks and technical specifications without requiring registration.
8. Publish transcripts or podcasts of speeches your executives make at industry events and make those available online. Also, allow readers to access streaming video of the speech at your Website.
9. Update your list of paid-search keywords to ensure your materials *do* appear for those searching for products and services in your category – and *do not* appear to those who are not.
10. Work with a content distribution, or content syndication, network, like KnowledgeStorm, to ensure that your content can be found on a broad range of industry sites, no matter where technology buyers begin their search. For ideas to improve the availability and effectiveness of your online content, see the white paper *How Savvy Marketers Can Improve Results with an Intelligent Content Strategy*, available at www.knowledgestorm.com.

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About the Study

The CMO Council conceived *Define What's Valued Online* as a thought-leadership initiative to better understand how online technology content influences information technology buying. The study explores how technology buyers access, use and value varying online content elements, and it highlights changes technology marketers can make to improve both the quality and accessibility of their online content.

The CMO Council partnered with KnowledgeStorm to conduct the study in July and August of 2005, and the results were published in September 2005. The program began with a dozen qualitative interviews of IT researchers across a variety of job titles, industries and company sizes. These exploratory conversations regarding the relative value of different online technology content, consumption habits and the likes and dislikes of those accessing and using content formed a baseline for shaping the quantitative survey, which was distributed throughout KnowledgeStorm's user base. Nearly 1,400 technology researchers responded to the survey. Almost half either make the final purchase decision or "significantly influence" the decisions, while 83.2% have at least moderate influence on IT purchasing in their organization. The complete *Define What's Valued Online* report is available at

<http://www.knowledgestorm.com/search/viewabstract/77699>

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About the CMO Council

The CMO Council is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to high-level knowledge exchange, thought leadership and personal relationship building among senior marketing and brand decision makers in the global technology industry. Based in Silicon Valley, the Council works to further the stature, credibility, influence and understanding of the strategic marketing function among business executives, opinion leaders and critical stakeholders in the technology sector. More information is available at www.cmocouncil.org.

About KnowledgeStorm

KnowledgeStorm is the Internet's top-ranked search resource for technology solutions and information. Leveraging the KnowledgeStorm Network of premier partners and its extensive search expertise, KnowledgeStorm is able to reach business and technology buyers and deliver the information they need no matter where their search begins. KnowledgeStorm, with its premier network, search expertise and performance tools and services, is a powerful resource for technology vendors providing them with the most opportunities to reach buyers on the Internet and convert them into Web leads. For more information, call (877) 340-9274 or visit www.knowledgestorm.com.

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