Adobe

Technical Content — Assessing Business Value and Impact

Citations

FAQs

User guides

Customer journey

Awareness

Purchase

Advocacy

Consideration

Retention

Composite metrics = IQ score

Table of Contents

Executive summary

In our digital age, technical content serves as an essential and foundational resource across the entire business customer journey. Yet, primitive perception often relegates technical content to the post-sale, support phase of the customer lifecycle, and as an obligatory cost center.

In this whitepaper, we'll delve into the multi-faceted impact of technical content on business. We'll shed light on the challenges organizations face quantifying their return on investment (ROI). And we'll make a compelling case for its prioritization and methods of impact evaluation across all phases of the customer journey.

But most importantly, we will introduce you to a more accurate, holistic understanding of the business value of your technical content — today and in the future.

Introduction

We believe that technical content is evolving from an information medium into a business cornerstone.

Historically considered a functional necessity, the value of technical content goes well beyond simply conveying information.

In countless conversations with our customers, partners, and industry stakeholders, we've repeatedly noted common experiences. Whether it's the knowledge of its latent potential paired with a simultaneous difficulty positioning it, or the challenge of accurately measuring, naming, and quantifying its ROI, our customers reflect a consistent desire for a tangible, metrics-based method of evaluating, proving, and communicating the value of technical content.

Drawing from Adobe's wealth of experience in the technical communication domain, this paper highlights and explains the tangible, and sometimes, ethereal benefits of technical content as not just a by-product — but as a key business tool deeply embedded across the entire customer journey. At the end of this exploration, we hope our insights and recommendations can serve as a compass and guide to reveal and enhance the hidden value of your technical content in today's data-driven business world.

What is technical content?

Every industry creates technical content. It typically describes a combination of applications, purpose, creation, architecture, and/or operation of a product or a service. Its goal is to explain a company's offer with technical depth and guide the customer on how best to achieve the optimal benefits of the product or service. It can also provide important contextual or supplemental information to internal audiences (e.g., product managers, subject matter experts, technical sales, customer support agents, service technicians) and external audiences (e.g., customers, dealers, distributors, resellers, end-users.)

The most common example is technical documentation, but here are other examples in the table below.

Software, hardware, technology
(e.g., semiconductors, robotics)

- Getting started guide
- User guide
- Administrator guide
- Simulation video
- Online tutorial
- Show me walkthrough
- Online help
- FAQs
- Knowledge bases
- Support portal
- API documentation

Automobile, industrial/heavy machinery

- User manuals
- Maintenance guides
- Standard operating procedures
- Assembly guides
- Troubleshooting guides
- Safety instructions
- Parts catalogs
- Replacement guides
- Warranties and service schedules

Banking, financial services, insurance

- Regulatory compliance guidelines
- Policies and procedures
- Accounting standards
- Terms and conditions
- Online help
- FAOs
- 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 and defense

- Flight safety manuals
- Technical specifications
- Standard operating procedures
- Maintenance guides

Technical content — Perception and costs

Traditionally, technical content has been predominantly viewed as an operational expenditure, overshadowing its role as a strategic asset. This perspective often drives departments to craft their content with the approach and prioritization of their work as a cost burden, rather than business value generator.

In this context, the process to quantify the direct costs of creating, managing, and disseminating technical content is well understood and actively measured by organizations today, and provides a foundation of discernible, usable data points for building metrics.

People costs
The personnel involved — from content creators to subject matter experts refining the content.

Process costs
Workflows from content review cycles to translation expenses.

Technology costs
Tools needed for content creation, publishing and management.

While costs are understood, the quandary lies in measuring the resulting ROI of technical content.

An Adobe study in 2023 spanning 40 enterprises 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.

Technical content — Challenges measuring ROI

While the importance of creating technical content remains undisputed, challenges assessing its value arise from a myriad of factors. Some of them are outlined below:

Intangible benefits

Technical content often leads to enhanced user experience and reduction in training or on-boarding time. But it can be difficult to capture and quantify these perceived benefits in monetary terms.

Absence of industry-standard metrics

Technical content lacks a universally endorsed metric set, and thus it is difficult to set benchmarks for comparative analysis and derive meaning from collected data.
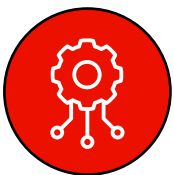
Overemphasis on cost over value

We tend to focus on the data we have and understand — in this case, costs. As a result, we miss the strategic advantages technical content can offer.

Fragmented documentation efforts

In larger enterprises, decentralized technical content creation often hampers cohesive ROI calculation.

Evolving digital landscape

Rapid technological shifts can mean yesterday's metrics might be today's obsolete relics, and at best, compare relative value of an, for example, upgrade.

Complexity of customer purchasing behavior

Technical content often leads to enhanced user experience and reduction in training or on-boarding time. But it can be difficult to capture and quantify these perceived benefits in monetary terms.

Lack of tools and technologies

Few organizations possess the mandate, advanced analytical tools, budget, and skills needed for nuanced, insightful content engagement tracking.
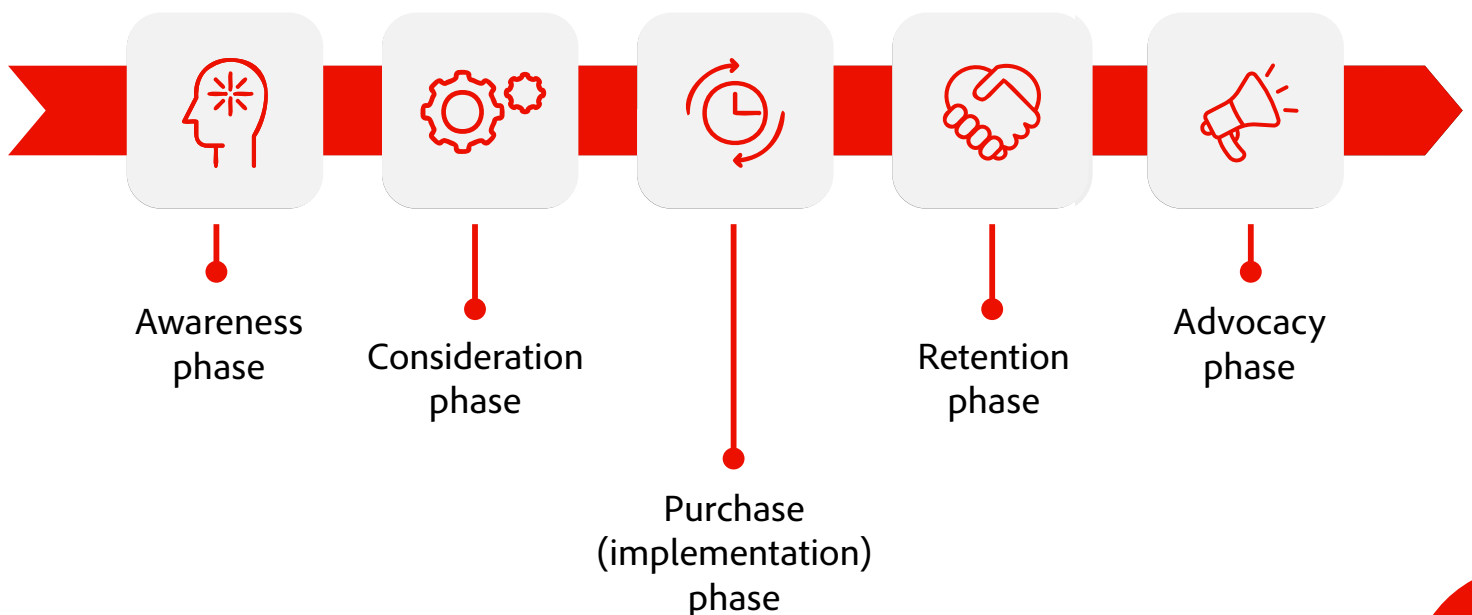
Short-term versus long-term ROI

While technical content often yields long-term dividends like brand loyalty and customer advocacy, the value focus commonly remains on immediate returns.

Technical content — Evaluate across 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 loyal advocate. Technical content is a steadfast guide throughout this journey, organically bridging user needs with product capabilities. To truly comprehend the influence capacity of technical content, it's vital to dissect each stage of the customer journey, understanding how documentation elevates the user experience and drives tangible favorable outcomes at every stage.

Awareness
phase

Consideration
phase

Purchase
(implementation)
phase

Retention
phase

Advocacy
phase

Awareness phase: Influence your audience

Whether nestled within marketing collateral, presented as an independent documentation center, housed in a self-service knowledge base, served up in tutorial video, or featured in a learning portal — technical content is pivotal.

This content can mold early impressions, influencing brand perception. Using sophisticated web analytics built into content delivery platforms, tracking technical content can unveil actionable insights.

Hard metrics

- Distinct separation between traffic originating from existing customers and prospects.
- Comprehensive analytics highlighting page views, session lengths, and bounce metrics for these distinct segments.

Soft metrics

- SEO visibility: Assess the SEO performance, particularly the organic results, of your documentation or knowledge base in search engine outcomes.
- Organic traction: Review growth patterns of organic visits, particularly from prospects.
- User immersion: Monitor metrics such as mean session lengths or pages per session, which may suggest positive content engagement.
- Sentiment dissection: Capture user sentiment via user comments, critiques, or feedback forms to gauge content reception and performance.

Consideration phase: Convert interest into commitment

When prospects progress to the consideration phase, your technical content, knowledge reservoir, or training hub can turn your contact into a lead in nurture. The quality, efficacy and findability of your technical content can also become the differentiating factors against your competition.

Hard metrics

- Monitor inbound sales prospects, trial activations, or webinar/whitepaper enrollments directly associated with traffic from your technical content.
- Measure the conversion rate of leads (to sales opportunities) that engaged your technical content or experiences like self-driven demonstrations.

Soft metrics

- Depth of engagement: Observe user dwell time on documentation pages, which may suggest intensified interest or engagement.
- Feedback and interactions: Quantify direct inquiries or feedback originating from the documentation hub to ascertain engagement or interest.
- Content dissemination: Track shares/reshares of links to your technical content by prospects to signify user interest.

Purchase (implementation) phase: Enhance onboarding experiences

Upon finalizing a purchase, the importance of technical content becomes most apparent when your new customer depends on the quality and availability of your support and guidance that can determine the success — or failure — of their project.

Hard metrics

- Shortened project launch timelines, hinting at expedited integrations.
- Reduced implementation costs.
- Fewer support issues reported during installation or configuration stages.
- Reduced user training time and costs, which may suggest positive content or product design.

Soft metrics

- User assurance: Collect user sentiment post-implementation via feedback channels, with questions about use and utility of supporting materials.
- Peer recommendations: Look for positive reviews on your specific tools posted by users on their professional network or digital forums.
- Content discovery feedback: Gather 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 versus conventional text-based content.

Retention phase: Value through content engagement

During the initial usage period, the main goal is to ensure that the customer perceives and derives consistent value, and ideally a short time-to-value from their investment.

Technical content emerges as both a preventive measure and an efficient troubleshooting guide.

Hard metrics

- Significant decline in the influx of support requests.
- Faster resolution times for support teams addressing inbound customer queries.
- Improved first-time problem resolution rates.
- Measurable downturn in customer support issue escalations.

Soft metrics

- Time efficiency: Evaluate the time stakeholders spend in pinpointing relevant solutions within the content.
- Review feedback: Scrutinize feedback sentiment, focusing on signals that signify documentation's role in preempting or swiftly addressing complications.
- Content engagement dynamics: Identify the frequently accessed content segments, and use this intel to refine content delivery further.

Advocacy phase: Build allegiance

People naturally promote and support what they know, and what they have had a positive experience with. As users become more entrenched with your product or service, the focus pivots towards prolonged loyalty and evangelism. Here, the quality and accessibility of technical and instructional content play a cardinal role in nurturing customer allegiance.

Hard metrics

- Monitor for longer system uptime.
- Monitor for shorter maintenance task durations.
- Monitor for shorter response times to system upgrades or feature deployments. This may be attributed to better user comprehension due to quality advisory content.

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 of the customer experience. Its value proposition showcases its dynamic nature, from sparking interest to fostering loyalty.

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

Sample key performance indicators

Awareness

- Improvement in SEO performance
- Increase in organic traffic
- Reduction in bounce rate
- Increase in return visits and dwell times

Consideration

- Increase in contact to lead conversion
- Increase in lead-to-opportunity conversion rates
- Documentation PDF downloads during trial period

Purchase (implementation)

- 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 turnaround time (TAT) for support agents to resolve issues
- Increase in support agent productivity
- Improvement in first-time resolution
- Reduction in support ticket escalation
- Reduction in search time for employees/customers

Advocacy

- Increase in system uptime and faster completion of scheduled maintenance
- Increase in product feature adoption
- Increase in traffic to documentation webpages for new release notes, and product updates
- Improved CSAT score
- Reduction in churn rate/increase in renewal rate
- Faster renewal cycles
- Increase in cross-sell/upsell rate
- Increase in average order value

What are composite metrics?

So far, we've covered:

- Data and metrics (for technical content) commonly tracked today — primarily on costs.
- Challenges on evaluating technical content performance and resulting ROI.
- Potential data points and indicators to measure the impact of technical content across the customer journey.

It is now time to introduce composite metrics. Let's start by defining them.

In essence, composite metrics combine various, singular indicators into a single, higher-level metric — similar to the way an IQ score is determined. When assessing the performance and value of technical content, a single data point may not be a clear enough indicator. But a collection of data points may highlight an insight with higher confidence levels on accuracy.

Merits and limitations of composite metrics

Merits

- Composite metrics offer a higher-level perspective, bringing together data strands into an intelligible, singular insight.
- They filter out extraneous data fluctuations.
- By customizing gradations aligned with business imperatives, organizations can fine-tune their metrics to connect to strategic initiatives.
- By evaluating multiple data points together, unique correlations can be observed that might otherwise be missed if all singular points are analyzed in siloes.

Limitations

- Ascertaining gradations for individual metrics requires understanding of both the commercial terrain and its available data.
- There's an inherent risk of misconstruing the data, particularly if stakeholders remain uncertain about the constituent elements of the composite metric.
- Bias on one composite metric might inadvertently eclipse important insights to be gained from singular metrics.
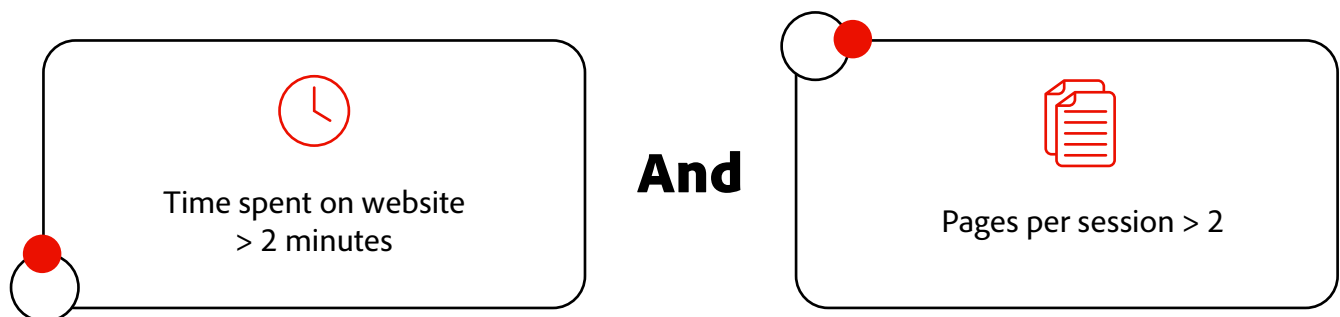
Composite metrics — Examples

Imagine a situation where Metric A catalogs user engagement on a technical content interface, Metric B quantifies the leads captured from that interface, and Metric C registers positive feedback attributed to content quality.

A composite metric could apportion weight to these independent metrics based on strategic importance, coalescing them to suggest an overall score on the customer's perceived quality and value of the content.
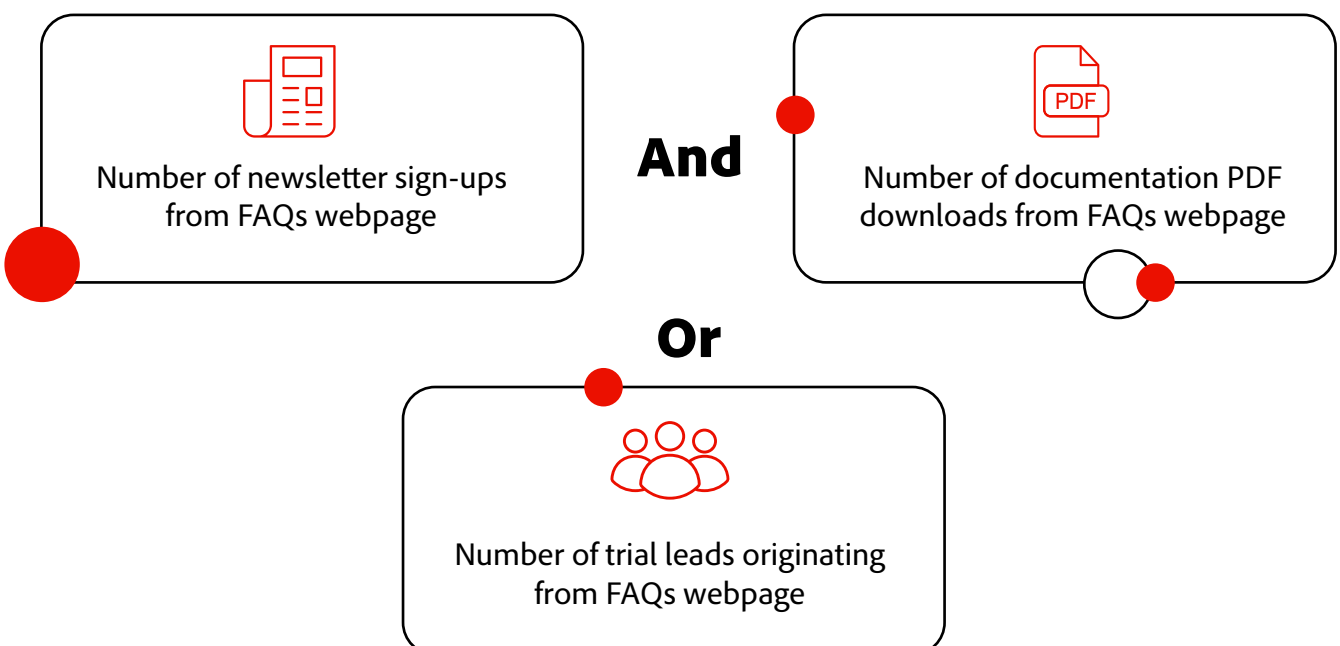
This approach to metrics opens the door to new possibilities in content analytics. In this model, it is possible to customize and construct your own composite metrics to ask the most important questions in your content strategy and in support of your customer journey.

Example 1: Positive web engagement composite metric

A value synthesized from criteria like:

Time spent on website > 2 minutes

And

Pages per session > 2

Example 2: FAQs performance composite metric

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

Steps

Metric selection: Pick a question you want to answer. Select the collectible data anchors most pertinent to the underlying business query.

Weightage allocation: Calibrate metrics according to business priorities.

Data standardization: Harmonize metric measurement to a unified scale, ideally spanning 0 to 1.

Metric synthesis: Employ a formulaic approach to merge metrics by their calibrated weightage.

Insight extract, decode, test: Start collecting data to develop insights and test the new metric for accuracy.

Futureproofing through technical content

Our odyssey into the world of technical content has underscored a foundational insight: Technical content is not merely a static vault of data. Instead, it drives interactions throughout the customer journey — from early-stage brand awareness impressions to the cultivation of unwavering advocacy and loyalty.

Amidst this digital renaissance, the gravitas of metrics is irrefutable. With the ascendance of composite metrics and more sophisticated analytics, both qualitative and quantitative cases may be made to demonstrate not just ROI, but a more holistic understanding of the business impact and value of technical content.

However, more broadly, Adobe also foresees a transformative role for technical content in the upcoming years.

Moving beyond its place as an information vault, technical content will emerge as an interactive facilitator, enhancing product immersion, solidifying user engagement, and cultivating enduring brand allegiance. As we increase investments in augmented reality, Al-infused analytics, and hyper-personalized content delivery, we can project that technical content has an optimistic trajectory. And the future is particularly bright for enterprises that strategically channel their resources into the continuous advancement of technical content designed to serve the interests of their customers.

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