**The Future of Content: This is Our Time**

**by Noz Urbina**

Rob Markey, Daniel McCarthy, and Peter Fader have just posted an article called “[The Loyalty Economy](https://hbr.org/2020/01/the-loyalty-economy#are-you-undervaluing-your-customers)” to the Harvard Business Review website. I choose to highlight this for the Future of Content because it speaks to the central issues of how the enterprise relates to its customers in the past vs the future.

It’s this change in perspective that re-contextualizes content and provides a new platform for having interdepartmental, omnichannel conversations about how content plays a role in customer experience.

Historically, content generally, and techcomm in specific, has been seen as a cost-center that was working best when its financial burden was minimized, rather than a contributor to customer experience or top-line revenues. Sadly, in the last 20+ years, not many organizations have shifted off this mentality.

However, globalization and omnichannel – challenging as they are to the enterprise – have put a spotlight on content and customer experience. Rather than focusing on only increasing the customer base, the emphasis has shifted to improving relationships with the customer base over the long term. Repeat business, upsells, cross-sales, referrals, testimonials, and case studies have risen to the top of the priority list. The market environment of frequent mergers, acquisitions, and consolidation has increased the need to consider the “footprint” within a customer organization, rather than only the number of customers.

Finally, Agile design methods and Service Design – both incredibly popular methodologies for improving the entire product lifecycle and production process, have emphasized the eroding of high silo walls in favor of cross-functional collaboration and processes.

Due to all these many factors, technical communication has increasingly been given a seat at the table as part of the post-sales experience and due diligence research in presales phase. But now that we’ve been invited to the conversation, what do we say?

The answer is that we, content professionals, can help the brand with these four high-priority goals.

**Bringing better products to market, faster.** If you can’t clearly describe a process in words, there’s often something wrong with it. Most of us have had the experience of having an idea that seemed to make sense in our heads, until it came time to express it out loud or in writing to someone else. The process of translating to language often serves a natural de-bugging process for cloudy, convoluted thinking or faulty logic. Product development teams, working in their sub-teams and workstreams, can often act as a collective unconscious. The content professional can see flaws in design when we try to express simply and clearly how a process works or what a user is supposed to do. Many teams benefit from this effect by avoiding spending unnecessary time taking a poor idea too far into the development lifecycle. Just having a content person in the room to say, “Explain this simply” and find it can’t be done, helps the design process move faster, with less waste, to a better end result. In one organization, who I can’t name (for reasons that will be obvious at the end of this sentence), hundreds of thousands of dollars in development hours were wasted because of a simple language misunderstanding when capturing requirements.

**Increasing loyalty by improving the post-sales experience and helping customers get the most out of their investments.** Enterprise content is decision-makings support. In technical communications it’s often a task- or action-based decision like “What do I do next?”, but for techcomm or marketing, its often a commercial decision like, “Is this the product I want?” or “Does this feature do what I need?” In all these cases, by helping prospects and customers find their way and make decisions, we are helping them along their journey and towards their goals. The ability to consistently and efficiently package and deliver this value-add differentiates the good brands from the rest. The ability to do this at all stages of the customer lifecycle and across all channels differentiates great brands from good ones. This is the core drive towards [omnichannel strategies](http://www.omnichannelx.digital/what-is-omnichannel) all over the world.

**Increasing revenues by improving loyalty.** Effective customer centric omnichannel strategies deliver more revenue. Awareness of this is growing fast. As Markey, McCarthy, and Fader say, “customers are the ultimate source of corporate value. CEOs themselves are beginning to acknowledge this idea… the Business Roundtable, representing many of the largest U.S. firms, issued a statement on the purpose of the corporation in which members put delivering value to customers, among other goals, on equal ground with creating shareholder value.”

**Innovating on content and metadata management strategies.** By being asked to do magic with little resource for decades – personalized, multi-format, contextual, real-time, embedded, translation-friendly, cost-efficient, highly accurate, accessible – technical communicators have had no choice but to become lean, mean, content machines. As brands want to get on the semantic web, reuse across channels, micro-target [adaptive,](http://urbinaconsulting.com/category/adaptive-content/)value-added content, bring in place enterprise ontologies and taxonomies and more, it’s often the humble technical communications department who is actually the furthest ahead with these methods and technologies.

Technical communicators, even though often denied direct access to customer conversations, have always been trying to put the customer first. Finally, after decades of feeling left behind, the entire market is catching up to us. As we start a new decade, this is our time.

*Noz Urbina is a globally recognised leader in the field of content strategy and customer experience consultancy. He’s well known as a pioneer in customer journey mapping and adaptive content modelling for delivering personalised, contextually relevant content experiences in an omnichannel environment. He is alsoc co-author of the book “Content Strategy: Connecting the dots between business, brand, and benefits” and lecturer in the Masters Programme in content strategy at the University of Applied Sciences, Graz. In 2013 he founded his own consultancy*[*Urbina Consulting*](http://www.urbinaconsulting.com/)*and in 2018, co-founded the omnichannel events organisation*[*OmnichannelX*](https://www.omnichannelx.digital/)*.*