

How Savvy Technology Marketers Can Improve Results with an Intelligent Content Strategy

A KnowledgeStorm White Paper

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Executive Summary: The New Marketing

A classic marketing rule is to “Fish where the fish are.” For marketers of technology products and services, this used to be a relatively easy thing to do. The “fish” were technology professionals who could be easily found on technology-specific mailing lists, at conferences and trade shows, and reading technology journals; the “bait” was marketing content presenting messages of technical superiority and predictable, safe performance. It worked very well, providing control of the process to the marketer, while still capturing the interests of these fish. Today, the game has changed. The fish are in control and they are a lot more sophisticated than they used to be. Here's why:

1. The timing of marketing is now in the hands of prospects and buyers.

The Internet enables prospects to search for you (and your competitors) rather than the other way around. Prospects and buyers are using broad Internet search engines (such as Google and Yahoo!), vertical search engines (such as KnowledgeStorm and GlobalSpec), online media, and industry-specific websites to create short lists of solutions and companies to consider—often before they ever hear from or contact you. This means that you not only need to fish for prospects by launching carefully controlled programs, you also must place expertly crafted content wherever prospects might be fishing—so they will find you.

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2. The audience has changed. Technology has moved into the mainstream, and marketers must reach not only technology professionals, but everyone else in the decision cycle. This includes executives, financial managers, line-of-business managers, consultants and a myriad of others inside and outside the organization. Technology sales teams have long complained about the difficulty of getting a meeting with anyone but a technology professional, even when the team making the decision is much broader. Technology marketers need to uncover who is seeking, sharing, and using your content, so that they can tailor what is said, and can continue to refine messages and content formats through ongoing analysis of who is using what content, and at what points in the buying cycle. Marketers need to increase their access to and control of all decision makers.

3. Marketers and their programs no longer define the competitive playing field – prospects and buyers do.

The competitive playing field—from the buyer's perspective—is no longer limited to companies that attend the same trade shows, advertise in the same magazines and appear on the same competitive analysis matrices marketers invariably produce.

Ubiquitous access to information and rich search technology give buyers the ability to assemble their own lists of possible solutions from a multitude of sources.

Often these lists contain surprises for marketers, who may have outdated or restricted views of the competitive field—particularly in the technology industry, where change is fast and relentless.

Understanding what content—from what companies—buyers find most compelling will reveal how competition is changing.

Savvy marketers are surmounting these challenges by leveraging a new marketing methodology—called **Intelligent Content Strategy**—to attract more prospects that are looking for their solutions. An Intelligent Content Strategy results from following a three-step process pioneered by KnowledgeStorm and outlined in this white paper. It is based on research and insights from years of experience working with technology companies and analyzing the challenges they face when attracting and fulfilling sales leads.

An Intelligent Content Strategy leverages the Internet to gain experiential data—data that provides additional value because it shows what *actually* happened, as opposed to predictive data, which is what you *expect* to happen—revealing how the content of marketing materials is sought, shared and used among people involved in buying technology products and services. It also identifies other sources (such as competitors, partners and analysts) these same people are using as they evaluate solutions.

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An Intelligent Content Strategy also takes advantage of new electronic content tracking and feedback loops to give marketers a powerful window into how they can refine and target their content to deliver optimal results for their marketing programs.

Marketers use an Intelligent Content Strategy to develop more effective content, to make it available more efficiently and to influence the most important decision makers at the right stages of the buying process. The result: streamlined, effective marketing programs that generate leads from people who are actively searching for solutions.

Today's Technology Marketing Requires More Than Process

“The brain is hungry not for method, but for content.”

Frederick Turner

Author and literary critic

Today's technology marketers still need to be smart about defining and refining process, but they also must be more intelligent about *content*.

By *content* we mean both the key **messages** (proof points, descriptions, testimonials, instructions, elaborations, news and other information that we distribute regarding our products and services), and the **method** by which these messages are delivered. For most companies, this content remains fairly consistent – but is often repurposed by deliverable (direct mail, advertising, Web and so on) and by target audience. Marketers must identify and understand all the people involved in making a purchase decision or recommendation and determine the best way to influence each.

Practically speaking, technology marketers need to expand their skills – from fundamentals on out.

Yesterday, Marketing Meant...	Today, Marketing Also Means...
Companies find prospects using highly-targeted marketing programs.	Prospects find companies, which must figure out how to affordably be everywhere prospects might be looking for them.
Companies set the timing for controlled and measured marketing programs.	Companies must make their marketing content available 24x7x365 to meet prospects' timing.
IT marketers target IT professionals with technically oriented messages.	IT marketers must understand the make-up of collaborative buying teams, and must determine how to cost-effectively reach each member with the right content at the right time.
Marketers measure success by lead quantities delivered to sales.	Marketing success is better measured by delivering <i>sales-ready</i> leads—that is, by delivering to sales only the leads most likely to turn into revenue.

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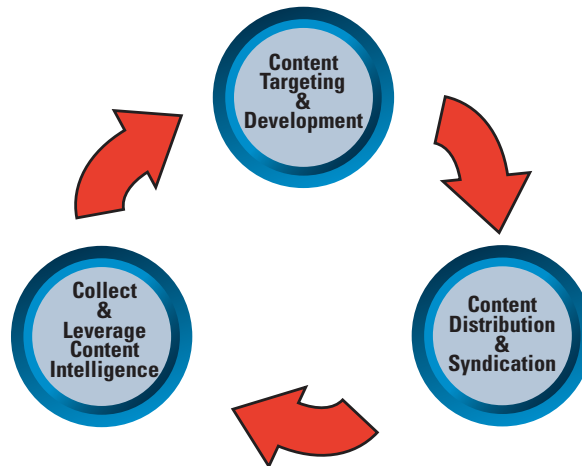
An *Intelligent Content Strategy* is at the heart of how marketers can expand their skills and knowledge to meet today's technology marketing demands.

A Framework for Creating an Intelligent Content Strategy

How do marketers gain the focus that is so clearly needed? Intelligent Content Strategy is a practical framework supporting three steps that—when repeated, analyzed and refined over time—sharpen a marketer's understanding of which targets, messages, content elements and distribution strategies will deliver the most revenue for each dollar spent. Each step is shaped by the one before and is continuously improved as repeated execution drives deeper knowledge around buying patterns, lead generation and lead-to-close ratios.

The process works like this:

An Intelligent Content Strategy is an Iterative Process



Step One: Target and Develop Content

Take the following steps to target and develop the most appropriate content

- **Profile the players involved in the buying decision.** You can start by talking to your sales team and by analyzing win/loss reports. See if there is a difference between the positions and titles that were involved when you won compared to when you lost. If your Website uses a subscription model or has tracking and analysis capabilities, analyze who is visiting your site and what content they are reviewing and/or downloading.
- **Conduct a content inventory.** Catalog everything available, both online and offline. Throw out or delete anything outdated – you’ll be surprised at how much you find that is unnecessary or even incorrect. This can be a laborious task, but will be well worth it when the final result is synthesized content that delivers messages that are consistent, compelling and credible.
- **Map your content inventory to your decision makers and influencers.** Discard content not required to influence people involved in saying “yes” or “no” to your product. Fill in any gaps you might have, such as ROI calculators or total cost of ownership case studies to sway financial buyers, or ease-of-use studies for people who will use your solution to get their jobs done each day. The diagram below shows a basic matrix that can be used to create a content inventory.

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An Intelligent Content Strategy Helps Determine The Best Message, Content Deliverable and Distribution Method For Each Buyer At Various Stages of the Decision-Making Process

	Vision (Biz regs)	Plan (Func Regs)	Evaluate (Short List)	Select
Executive	○	○	○	○
Business	○	○	○	○
Technical	○	○	○	○
Financial	○		○	○

Message: Cost Savings
Content Deliverable: ROI Calculator
Distribution: Corporate Website

Step Two: Distribute Content

With content decided and developed, it is time to distribute it. A thorough approach to distribution includes both online and offline programs.

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Offline content distribution programs include sending direct mail to targeted lists, handing out materials at trade shows and conferences, sending materials in response to inquiries generated by advertisements, sending media kits to reporters and industry analysts and placing materials in information packets handed out by partners, distributors and companies marketing complementary products and services.

In terms of cost effectiveness, online programs provide a tremendous advantage. Making PDFs available on your Website for downloading is virtually free compared with printing a piece and paying to mail it. HTML emails can be distributed to targeted email lists and embedding links back to your Website streamlines the fulfillment of additional information. In addition, affiliate marketing programs enable you to place your content on other sites and pay-for-clicks (how many times your site is accessed) or leads generated. Many industry- and function-specific sites, even ones that focus on editorial content, sponsor these programs.

Maximum efficiency – especially reaching interested buyers where they are researching – or searching – comes from leveraging content distribution or content syndication networks...

Maximum efficiency—especially reaching interested buyers where they are researching—or searching—comes from leveraging content distribution or content syndication networks, such as those operated by KnowledgeStorm and GlobalSpec. Content distribution networks enable marketers to reach out to prospects through a rich and varied distribution network that requires only one “placement” or marketing program, as opposed to the dozens that would be required to get the same exposure without using a distribution network.

Companies can use content distribution networks to make available white papers, solution listings, case studies, research reports, ROI studies—any content likely to gain a prospect’s attention and generate a lead from someone ready to buy.

A useful benefit that some content distribution networks offer is the ability to understand how your content is being viewed (“consumed”) in relationship to content from partners and competitors. While distributing your content on your own Website and through email campaigns is effective, content distribution networks also shed light on what content searchers are looking at in addition to your own.

With multiple content distribution networks to choose from, be careful to align yourself with those networks that offer breadth and depth of distribution through relationships with prominent online properties. A good content distribution network can offer many advantages beyond simple distribution. For example, your content could be automatically republished or redistributed to other applicable outlets, thereby magnifying the buying power and reach of your communications efforts.

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Step Three: Collect and Apply Content Intelligence

During Step 1, you defined your target prospects and determined what message and content to use to reach them. In Step 2 you created a strategy and plan for distributing your content to those prospects. Now you need to collect information about how your content is being shared and used, and then you will need to apply that intelligence to improve how you create and distribute content. You also can use this content intelligence to better educate key groups within your organization, such as sales and product management.

You can gather basic intelligence by (1) analyzing responses to targeted outbound programs (both on—and offline) to determine which target lists generate the most favorable response rates, and by (2) analyzing traffic demographics and behavior on your own Website, using one of the numerous tools available for tracking navigation and search patterns.

This history will tell you what content on your site is being reviewed in what order, which you can use to optimize site space and structure (the “real estate”) by eliminating extraneous material in favor of consistently used information.

While these patterns will help you hone existing content, they don’t shed light on *who* is visiting your site, or highlight needs for additional content. Registered user models, which ask site visitors to provide some brief demographic information to gain full access to the site, fill this gap. Most visitors will comply if you keep required information short or require registration only when users access or download content that provides business value in addition to product information, such as a total cost of ownership study or a case study.

For more sophisticated content intelligence, you can turn to content distribution networks. Look for a content distribution partner that goes beyond providing “click reports” to deliver richer “actionable lead reports” that profile who is using what content, in what patterns, and for what decisions. This data can help you create “maps” of decision makers and influencers, and “content use cases” to assist marketing and sales people in prioritizing lead follow-up.

In addition to these methods for collecting content intelligence, technology marketers can also deploy new ideas that leverage the Internet to deliver deeper understanding not always possible through offline methods. Three examples are described below:

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1. Conduct surveys specific to search interests. Some companies use “pop-up” surveys online to flesh out information on visiting users and their roles in the Decision Network—the team of players who come together to make a buying decision. Because users are not always accurate in answering pop-up or online surveys, many companies also supplement this data with telephone surveys in response to online queries. These are most effective when the questions are specific to the prospect’s search interests. Some content distribution networks, such as KnowledgeStorm, also provide in-depth lead assessment services through telephone assessment and surveys.

2. Leverage technology to monitor content users. Registered user models help you analyze demographics and content usage.

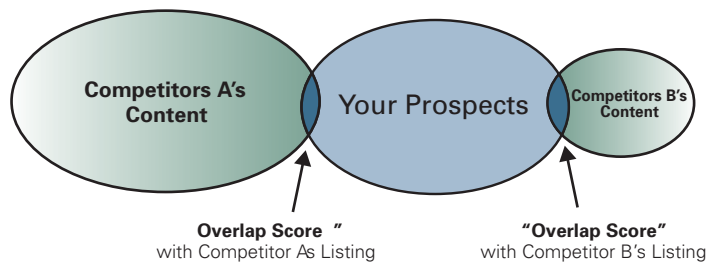
Some content distribution networks provide reports that aggregate data from all visitors using the network. These reports give you a cross-section of the kind of people looking at your content, at competitive content and at content from other vendors such as partners.

Rich competitive data is much easier to collect online than offline.

This analysis helps you prioritize both competitors and partners by showing where prospect interests overlap. For example, KnowledgeStorm provides a Competitive Overlap analysis that can tell technology marketers how many of the prospects who accessed their content also accessed content from Competitor A, Competitor B and other vendors. Offline, such rich data is difficult to capture. Imagine being at a trade show where you

received information not only on everyone who stopped by your booth, but also on what other booths those same people visited and what information they picked up while they were there.

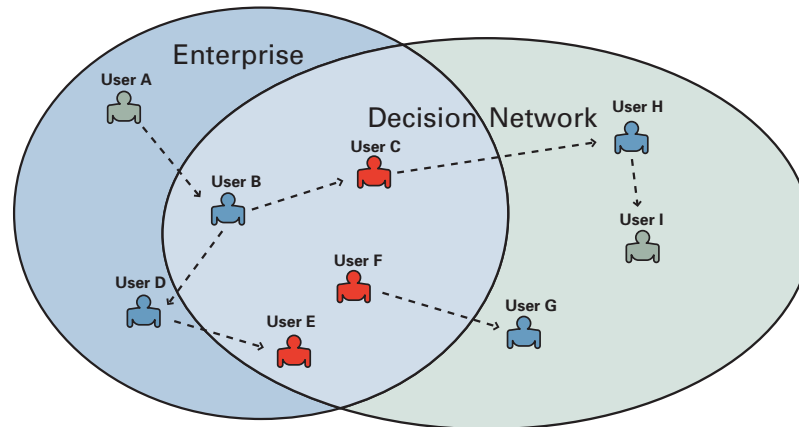
Competitive Overlap Analysis Helps Prioritize Competitors



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3. Deploy dynamic content feedback tools. Your content itself can become a model for how information is shared and used. KnowledgeStorm offers a LeadRelay™ service that places a “wrapper” on PDF documents so that pass-along readers register before opening documents. This service makes it possible for you to understand not only who requests information, but also with whom and when they share it. This will help you to better understand the Decision Networks that are in play during a buying cycle. The individuals may represent that technology organization, be a business or finance person or a consultant from outside the company.

LeadRelay Gives a Voyeuristic View into Who is Involved in the Decision Process Both within and Outside The Enterprise



Using technology to track how content is accessed and used is a powerful advantage when you make content available online. This information is impossible—at least today—for offline marketing programs. Imagine placing an advertisement in a magazine read randomly by a wide and diverse audience—such as *Sky* magazine, which is available each month on thousands of flights operated by Delta and its partner airlines. Wouldn't it be valuable to know not only who saw your advertisement, but also who took it off the plane with them and then to whom it was given?

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Applying Content Intelligence to Improve Predictive Marketing Models and Overall Organizational Performance

Predictive models are a mainstay of solid marketing programs because they set a stake for what we expect to happen (leads generated, meetings set, sales closed) when we invest marketing dollars. An Intelligent Content Strategy makes these models better by providing experiential data on how your prospects are interacting to assess, evaluate and select products and services offered not only by you, but also by your competitors and partners.

An Intelligent Content Strategy can provide fast-turn-around, experiential data on how your prospects interact with your content.

An Intelligent Content Strategy helps you answer crucial questions to make your predictive models more accurate: Who is reading my content? Who participates in the Decision Network for my product? From what other sources are they obtaining content—partners, competitors, companies I didn't realize were competitors?

Benefits of Using an Intelligent Content Strategy

Business Area	Impact
Strategic marketing planning	An Intelligent Content Strategy helps marketers target prospect types and buying stages <i>before</i> they create content, and also helps them pinpoint content creation and distribution to where they will be most effective, so that marketing dollars are allocated to maximize revenue generation.
Marketing programs	Enables marketers to refine content and content strategy based on intelligence gathered. Deliver the knowledge to streamline content distribution and syndication to achieve broadest reach per dollar spent, and to generate leads from people most likely to buy.
Sales tactics	Teams can shorten sales cycles and improve close ratios by understanding who participates in decision making, what their critical purchase decision drivers are and how they use and share content.
Competitive intelligence	Content distribution and feedback reports help rank competitors within market segments and may uncover new competitors.
Partner marketing	Content distribution and feedback reports may indicate potential partners who can help you position and sell your products and/or services.
Customer satisfaction	Customer satisfaction may increase because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prospects find it easy to get the right information at the right time • Marketers are able to target the right people with the right content • Products and/or services become better aligned with the needs and desires of the right prospects through feedback into product planning and development

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The answers to these questions help you refine both your content and your targeting and distribution strategies to attract the right people, at the right buying stage, generating leads that result in the highest possible conversion rate to sales.

The results go beyond stronger returns on marketing dollars invested. You will be armed with information that better satisfies key constituents across the organization: sales, executive management, product planning/development, customers and shareholders.

In Summary: Intelligent Content Strategy Can Mean a Bigger “Seat at the Table” for Marketing

An Intelligent Content Strategy is likely to create a “bigger seat at the table” for the marketing organization.

As buying decisions become more complex and budgets become tighter, a marketing executive who can present thoughtful empirical intelligence on how prospects and customers are using the company’s content, as well as interacting with the competition’s, will gain the attention and respect of his or her peers on the executive team. Having this data without making large investments in market research costs is even more impressive.

Much of this knowledge could not be captured easily in an offline marketing world, where marketers had no idea who in the organization (much less external to it) read or used a brochure mailed to a technology professional. But today, with prospects using the Internet to seek solutions to business needs—and electronic technology to share information with colleagues—marketers can track and understand these collaborative patterns using an Intelligent Content Strategy.

With an Intelligent Content Strategy, marketers can pinpoint what content should be generated for what influencers, and eliminate content and distribution tactics that are not delivering revenue. Marketers also can discover how different players in the buying decision are helping or hindering sales, and then devise strategies appropriately. Being able to back up recommendations with experiential data rather than “company lore” or anecdotal evidence gives marketers ammunition they often have lacked.

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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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