



copy engineer

WHITE PAPER

9 Essential Truths You Must Keep In Mind When Marketing to Engineers

Introduction

Marketing to engineers is different. If you market B2B technology, you probably don't need to be told that. But coming up with effective strategies for reaching these technical influencers can be a challenge. To help you with that, CopyEngineer has drawn on recent industry studies, personal experience as both engineer and marketer, and the opinions of our fellow tech marketers to identify nine "essential truths" that reflect how most engineers react to technology marketing.

Some of these truths you've probably already discovered. Others may surprise you. In any case, savvy technology marketers will want to keep all of them in mind while developing content and campaigns aimed at this highly technical audience. This white paper outlines strategies for addressing each of these essential truths.

About CopyEngineer

John Cole is a freelance B2B copywriter and content marketing strategist who crafts engaging lead-generation and demand-generation content for the technology, software and aerospace industries. His specialties include white papers, case studies and trade journal articles.



Before shifting his career focus to marketing, John worked for 20 years in the aerospace industry as an avionic systems engineer and project manager. He now combines his extensive hands-on technical experience with skills in direct response and B2B copywriting to help high-tech companies build greater trust with their target audience, generate more quality leads, and move those leads down the sales funnel.

ESSENTIAL TRUTH #1

Engineers Have a Huge Appetite for Content

It's a widely held belief that engineers hate marketing. Holders of that belief may be surprised by some recent study findings.

A poll taken by engineering.com at the end of 2018 found engineers spend an average of 10.3 hours per week consuming engineering content.ⁱ That was up 24% from the 8.3 hours reported the previous year.ⁱⁱ

"Twenty-five percent of a traditional 40-hour work week is a lot of time," said Dmitry Shamis, Sr. Director of Creative at HubSpot, who helped analyze the data. "It makes me think engineers in 2019 are looking for resources to solve exciting new problems within emerging technology."ⁱ

The 1,540 engineering professionals surveyed also said 8.6 of those hours (84%) were spent accessing content online.ⁱ In other words, you can't rely solely on printed sales collateral and trade magazines anymore. Today, you must reach your engineering audience online.

Fortunately, most technology companies have caught on. In another engineering.com poll, 87% of the technology marketers surveyed are practicing content marketing. Of those, **78% said content marketing helps them deliver qualified leads.**

Of the rest, 95% said they planned to spend as much or more on content marketing in the coming year.ⁱⁱⁱ

Still, some companies are getting better results than others. Success in content marketing depends on getting your content seen by your target audience, which correlates heavily to marketing spend.

Engineers spend an average of **10.3 hours** per week consuming engineering content.

Top-performing tech marketers—those whose companies outpace the growth of their industry—spend more on creating and distributing content than their counterparts who lag the industry. They also spend more on search and on email (We'll see why in Essential Truth #7). Laggards outspend top performers primarily on print and other offline activities (Figure 1).ⁱⁱⁱ

Q: What percentage of your external marketing budget will go to the following activities?

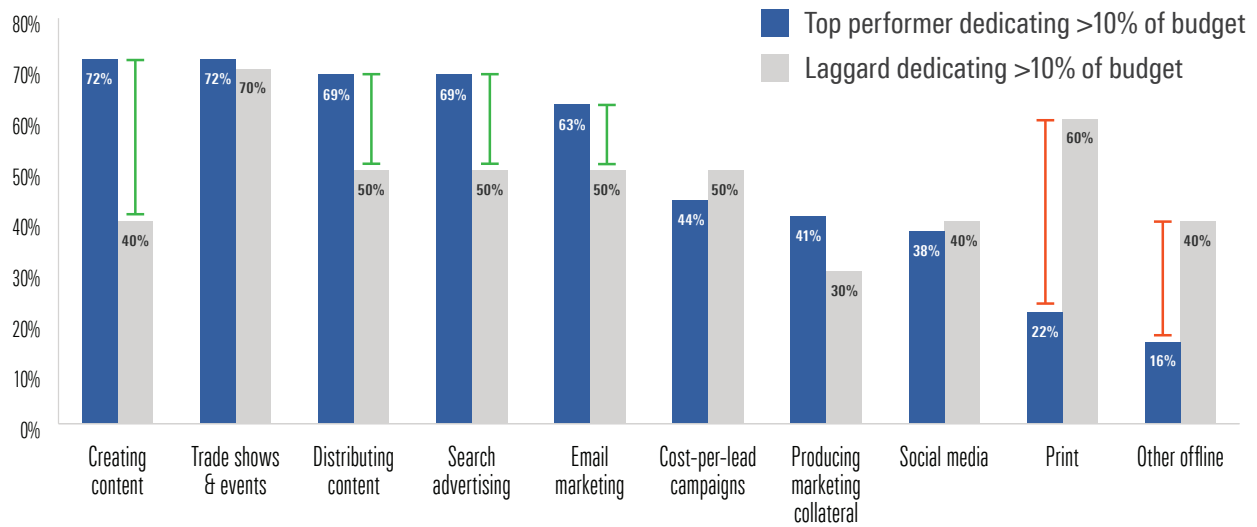


Figure 1: Comparison of marketing budget allocation between industry growth leaders and laggards

Source: Engineering.com, Engineering Marketers' 2017 Spending Plans ⁱⁱⁱ

When engineering.com asked engineering marketers to list the biggest challenges they face in executing their content marketing strategy (Figure 2), the top three were:

1. Creating engaging content
2. Finding resources for content creation
3. Amplifying and distributing content*

* Content distribution encompasses paid search, email, social media, placement in print publications, advertisement in online publications, and other tactics.

Clearly, online content marketing is a must for reaching engineers. But it's not an easy task.

Q: What are your biggest challenges around content marketing?

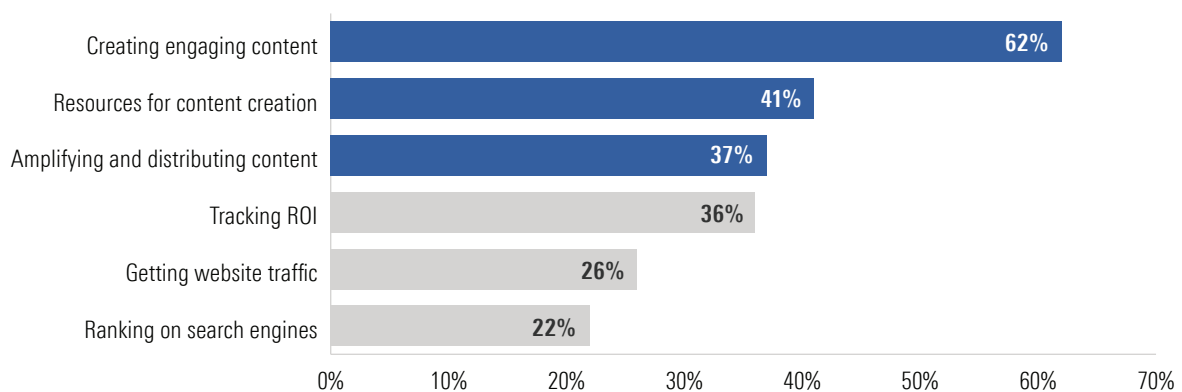


Figure 2: Technology marketers' biggest content marketing challenges

Source: Engineering.com, Engineering Marketers' 2017 Spending Plans ⁱⁱⁱ

To overcome these challenges, top-performing marketers often outsource content creation to agencies or freelancers. Plus, they spend nearly five times as much of their budget on content distribution, compared to the worst performers (Figure 3).^{iv}

Continuous development of fresh content and effective distribution are essential to effective content marketing. It pays to get expert help with content creation if your in-house resources are limited, and then to be relentless in publicizing your content.

Q: What percent of your budget will go to distributing content?

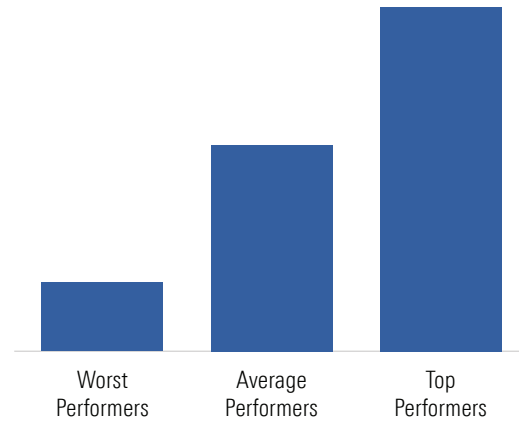


Figure 3: Percentage of budget allocated to content distribution by technology marketers

Source: Engineering.com, Engineering Marketers 2015 Campaign Plans ^{iv}

ESSENTIAL TRUTH #2

Engineers Hate “Fluff”

As the preceding statistics have shown, engineers don’t really hate marketing. What they hate is marketing “fluff.”

“The commonly held belief that engineers hate marketing is only partly true,” says Achinta Mitra, Founder of [Tiecas, Inc.](#), an industrial marketing consultancy in Houston, Texas. “Engineers don’t necessarily hate marketing; they recognize marketing fluff easily and question the marketer’s credibility when they see it. That doesn’t mean your content needs to be dull and boring.”^v

What it means is your content shouldn’t look or sound like “traditional marketing.” Technology and industrial marketers told [engineering.com](#)^{iv} that marketing to engineers:

- “Requires a no BS approach”
- Must focus on “just the facts with no sales hype”
- Should contain “validated data from reputable sources”

Engineering.com chose one quote to sum up the comments of their survey respondents:^{iv}



Engineers resist marketing messages. They inherently distrust the message and the messenger.

Many engineers like to think they’re immune to marketing influence. They believe they make their purchasing decisions based solely on logic—that emotion never enters the equation. As we’ll see in a moment, that is not entirely true. It does mean, however, that we must take a fact-based approach and provide solid, useful information when marketing to this audience.

ESSENTIAL TRUTH #3

Engineers Are Highly Risk Averse

Engineers want and need everything they work on—and work with—to operate correctly. Their careers and reputations depend on it. And while engineers are rarely the final decision makers in major technology purchases, they are often responsible for the technical evaluations of those purchases. Their management depends on them to provide sound recommendations. **These factors make engineers highly risk averse.**

“Even though the line between our personal and professional lives has blurred, engineers make work related decisions very differently from their personal lives,” says Mitra. “Risk aversion is the primary emotion that drives engineers to make a buying decision which is then justified with logic.”^v

Percent of Marketing Budget Allocated to Display Ads

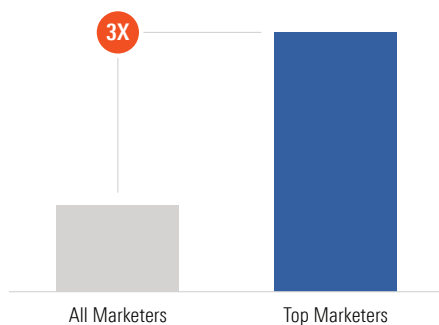


Figure 4: Budget for display ads – top-performing marketers vs. industry average

Source: Engineering.com, Engineering Marketers 2015 Campaign Plans^{iv}

For just this reason, top marketers spend differently. Engineering.com found top-performing tech marketers spend three times the industry average on display ads (Figure 4).^{iv}



Risk aversion is the primary emotion that drives engineers to make a buying decision.

– ACHINTA MITRA

“Engineers live in fear of buying the wrong product,” says John Hayes, former President of engineering.com. “Whatever they’re building could fail if they specify the wrong thing. To relieve engineers’ fear of making mistakes, top marketers spend on awareness (display ads).”^{iv}

It’s important your engineering prospects not only get to know you, but to trust you, as well—not an easy thing with people who “inherently distrust the message and the messenger.” The best way to do this is by satisfying their information appetite with content that is truly useful to them. We’ll look at ways to accomplish that goal throughout the remainder of this white paper.

ESSENTIAL TRUTH #4

Engineers Want Technical Detail

How is marketing to engineers different from marketing to other business buyers?

In a survey of engineering marketers by engineering.com, the most frequent response to that question by far was: **engineers want technical content.**^{iv}

Marketers also said engineers want:

- Precise details
- In-depth specifications
- Validated, error-free data^{iv}

Recent findings on engineers' content preferences validate those impressions. According to a 2019 study by Trew Marketing and IEEE GlobalSpec, the most influential type of marketing content among engineers is still the old, reliable datasheet.^{vi}

Bear in mind that, in most cases, engineers are seeking information that will help them develop their own technical solutions. They want to be assured that your solution is compatible with theirs. Clearly, all content aimed at engineers, not just your datasheets, must provide solid technical information.



The most influential type of marketing content among engineers is still the old, reliable datasheet.

ESSENTIAL TRUTH #5

Engineers Want Problem-Solving Content

Another frequent response among engineering marketers surveyed is that engineers want “content that solves problems.”^{iv} This is related to risk aversion; engineers want proven know-how. And once again, engineers themselves confirm marketers’ perceptions. Consider the chart below (Figure 5) from a study of engineers’ content preferences.

Note that after datasheets, which typically provide the greatest technical detail, the next seven content types engineers find most valuable (case studies, product demos/how-to videos, online courses, webcasts/webinars, eBooks, white papers and

application notes) are all geared toward addressing how to solve problems or how problems were solved. In contrast, the four formats at the bottom of the chart (interactive content, trade publication articles, infographics and podcasts) are all less likely to provide problem-solving information than those above.

Engineers are problem solvers. That’s their job. When solving complex problems, it’s only natural they look to credible sources for help. Marketers can gain the trust of engineers by providing them with reliable problem-solving information.

Q: How valuable are the following types of content when researching the latest engineering technologies, industry trends and products or services?

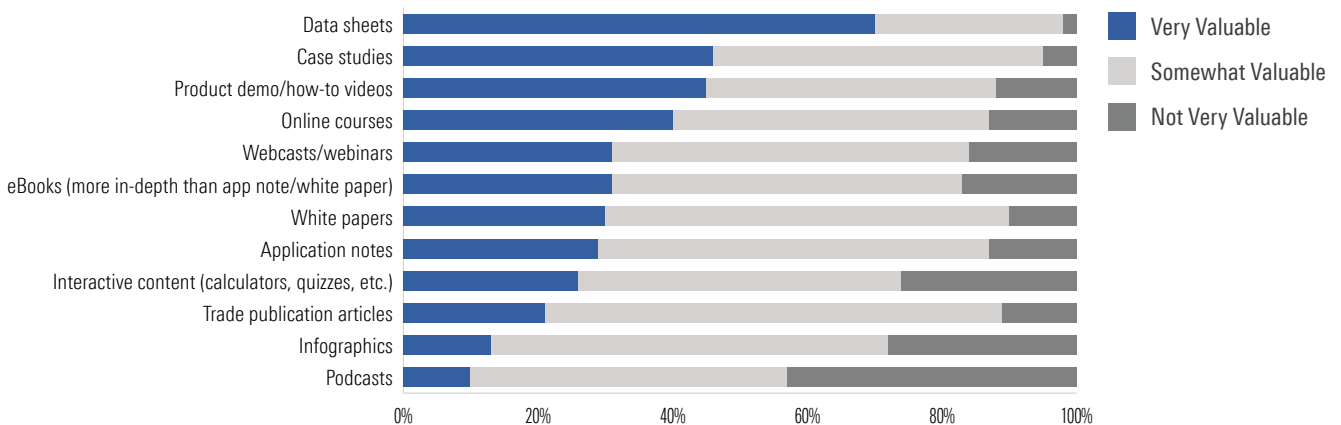


Figure 5: Engineers’ value rankings of marketing content formats

Source: Trew Marketing and IEEE GlobalSpec, 2019 Smart Marketing for Engineers^{vi}

ESSENTIAL TRUTH #6

Engineers Are Highly Skeptical... But They Trust Their Peers

Engineers are technology experts. If they need technical advice, the first person they'll want to ask is another engineer. So, it's no surprise engineers prefer informational content that's written by their peers.

When engineers were asked to rank their level of trust in content by source, they said an "engineering expert at a vendor company" was the source they trusted most—even above a neutral industry analyst—while

"an anonymous source at a vendor company" was the one they trusted least (Figure 6).^{vi}

Figure 6 is further evidence that engineers "inherently distrust" marketing messages; they tend to prefer neutral third-party content over vendor content. But it also demonstrates that engineers truly trust their peers; replacing an "anonymous source" with an "engineering expert" elevates vendor content from "least-trusted" to "most-trusted" status.

Rank your level of trust in content that is written or published by the following, where a rank of 6 is your highest level of trust, and a rank of 1 is your lowest.

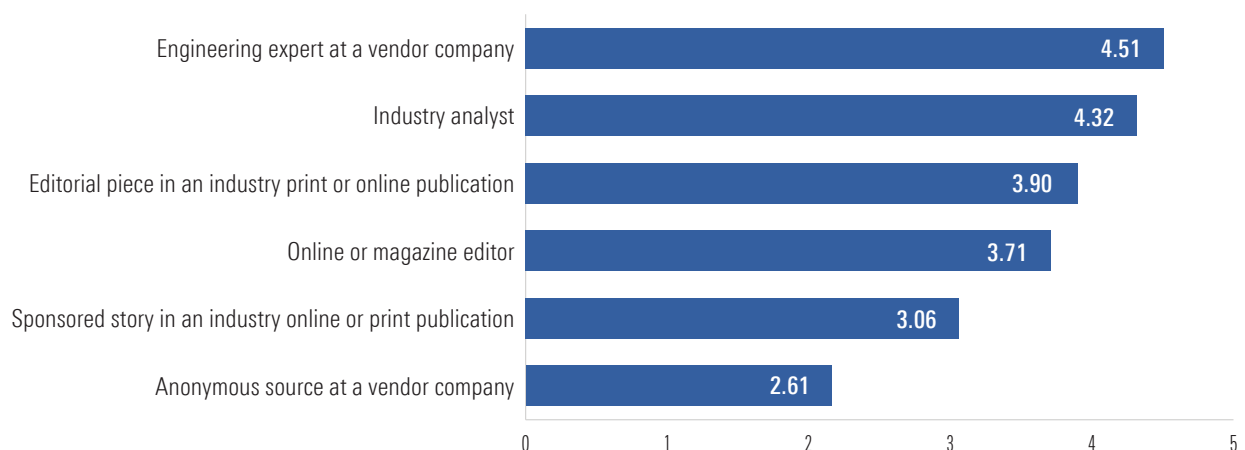


Figure 6: Engineers' level of trust in content by author/source

Source: Trew Marketing and IEEE GlobalSpec, 2019 Smart Marketing for Engineers^{vi}

Interestingly, engineers generally trust sponsored content, especially if it comes from an expert source. Some 54% trust sponsored content as editorial. Another 37% will still read, though with added skepticism, and only 9% will reject sponsored content outright (Figure 7).ⁱ

“Clearly labeled sponsored content from a trusted resource should feel seamless next to the ‘regular’ content,” says Shawn Fitzgerald, Vice President of Marketing at Thomas. “When done right, it is just an extension of a good story that focuses more deeply on a certain product or service. This can be a very impactful campaign for product launches or new use cases for an existing product.”ⁱ

There are two important takeaways from all this.

First, it pays to byline your engineering subject matter experts. Be sure to highlight their background in an “about the author” box, even if they don’t write the content themselves.

Second, engineers expect your content to speak their language. Ghostwritten content must sound authoritative, use correct domain terminology and be factually sound. To assure this, it should be written from interviews with your engineering subject matter experts. Your ghostwriter should be someone capable of communicating with your SMEs and understanding your solution’s technical domain.

Finally, ghostwritten content must be reviewed by your relevant SMEs to make sure all the technical details are correct, and the language rings true for them.

Q: How do you treat engineering stories that are sponsored by vendors?

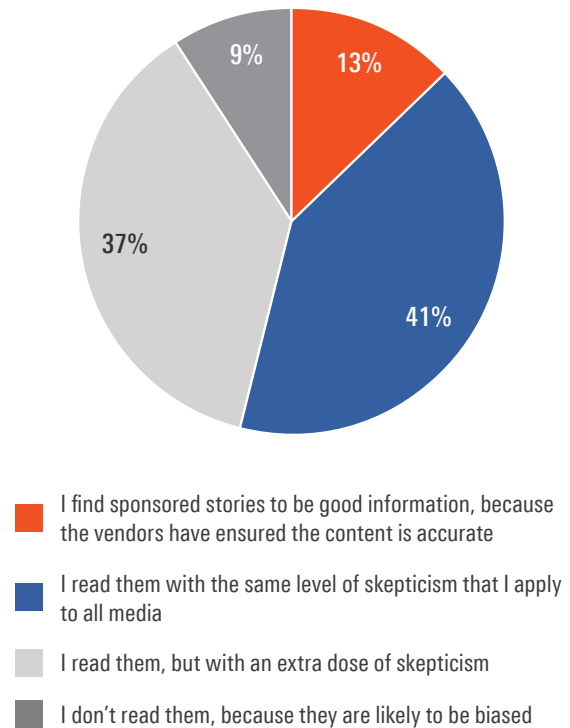


Figure 7: Engineers' level of trust in sponsored content

Source: Engineering.com, How Engineers Find Information 2019ⁱ

Ghostwritten content must sound authoritative, use correct domain terminology and be factually sound.

ESSENTIAL TRUTH #7

Engineers Like to Do Their Own Research

Engineers like to formulate their own opinions and make decisions based on their own research. When engineering.com asked engineers, “What is your preferred way to acquire engineering information?” their top three responses were Google search, trusted trade publications, and email (Figure 8).ⁱⁱ

For technology marketers, these findings translate into three must-dos.

First, optimize your problem-solving content for search, so engineers can find it easily with Google.

Q: What is your preferred way to acquire engineering information?

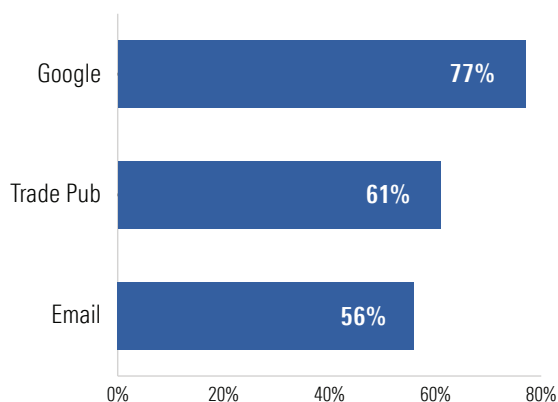


Figure 8: Engineers' top 3 means of finding information

Source: Engineering.com, How Engineers Find Information 2018ⁱⁱ

Second, place content in relevant trade publications and industry web portals. Feature articles and case studies are great for gaining exposure, but also consider press releases that describe and provide links to other content, like white papers and eBooks.

Finally, provide an opt-in newsletter that delivers your content directly to your prospect's inbox. Some 95% of engineers say they will read your subject line to consider your email's relevance to them, and 47% say they open and either read or scan most of the emails they receive (Figure 9).ⁱ

Q: How do you process emails that land in your inbox?

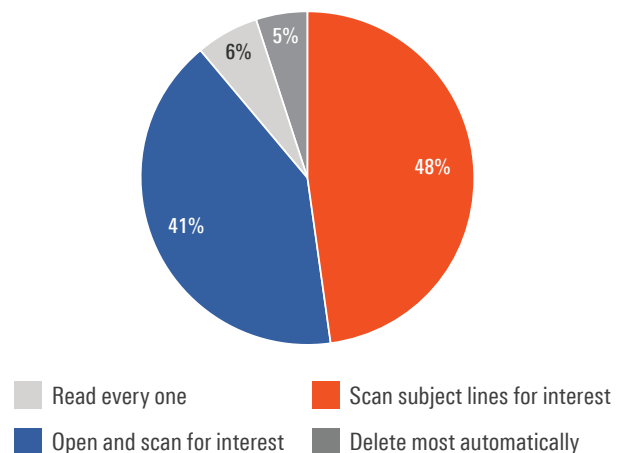


Figure 9: How engineers treat work-related email

Source: Engineering.com, How Engineers Find Information 2019ⁱ

“Trade publications and platforms will always provide the most relevant data in the shortest time frame. Their market focus allows for more accurate data and faster consumption,” says Shawn Fitzgerald. “The best way to be ‘filter resistant’ is to have an opt-in newsletter that delivers high quality data to engineers every day. When your target audience is asking you to deliver data and expecting it, you become an even more valuable and trusted resource.” ⁱⁱ

Engineers are deliberate and thorough in their work, and that includes their consideration of technology purchases. Overwhelmingly, they want to delay speaking with sales reps until at least the midpoint of their buying journey—after they have eliminated options that don’t fit their needs. Only then do they seek conversations to confirm suitability for a specific application (Figure 10). ⁱⁱ

“Engineers and industrial buyers are in self-serve and self-select mode. Your marketing strategy must align with their preferences,” says Achinta Mitra. “Going against this trend by bombarding them with cold calls and unsolicited emails is a waste of time and money.” ⁱⁱ



The best way to be ‘filter resistant’ is to have an opt-in newsletter that delivers high quality data.

– SHAWN FITZGERALD

Q: At what stage of your investigations into a new product or service do you prefer to engage with a vendor representative as opposed to conducting independent research?

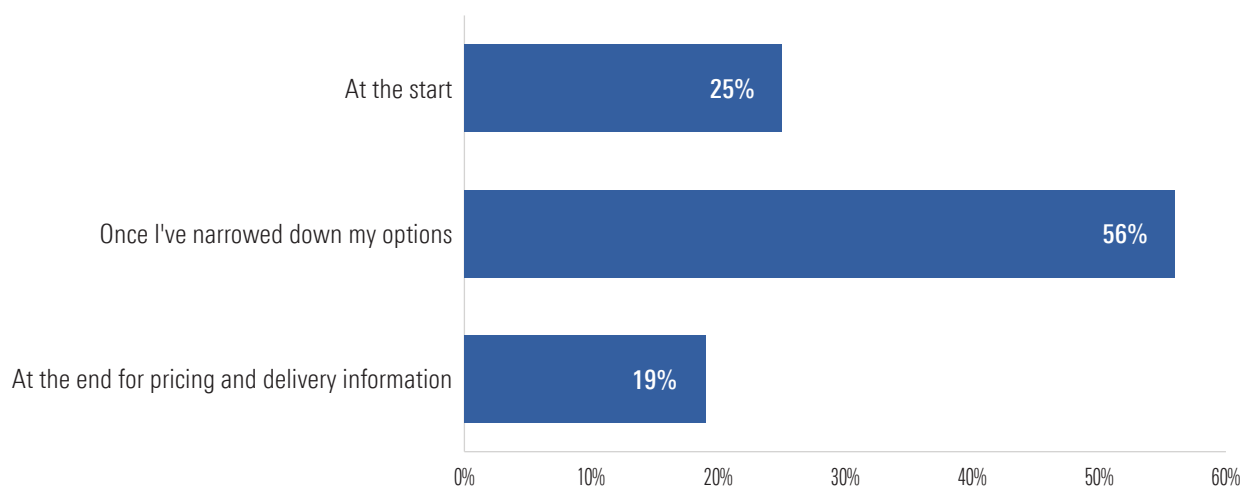


Figure 10: Point in the buying journey where engineers want sales contact

Source: Engineering.com, How Engineers Find Information 2018 ⁱ

ESSENTIAL TRUTH #8

Engineers Value Brevity, but Will Read as Much as They Need

In their surveys of engineering professionals, ^{i, ii} engineering.com found engineers access short-form content (short articles, social media and videos) most frequently, but they also consume long-form content (long-form articles, white papers and eBooks) on a regular basis (Figure 11). ⁱ Patterns for engineers who make purchasing decisions were roughly the same, but show somewhat higher consumption overall and a slightly greater preference for long-form content (Figure 12). ⁱ

In other words, engineers will read as much as necessary to get the information they need.

Q: Approximately how often have you accessed engineering content of the following types over the last twelve months?

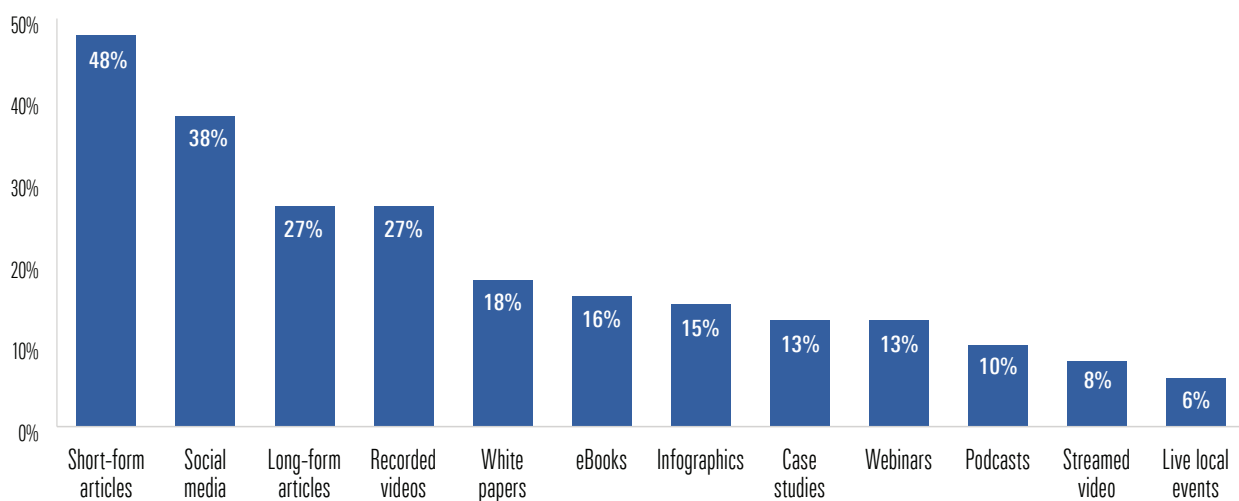


Figure 11: Engineers' weekly consumption of content by format

Source: Engineering.com, How Engineers Find Information 2019 ⁱ

Q: Approximately how often have you accessed engineering content of the following types over the last twelve months?

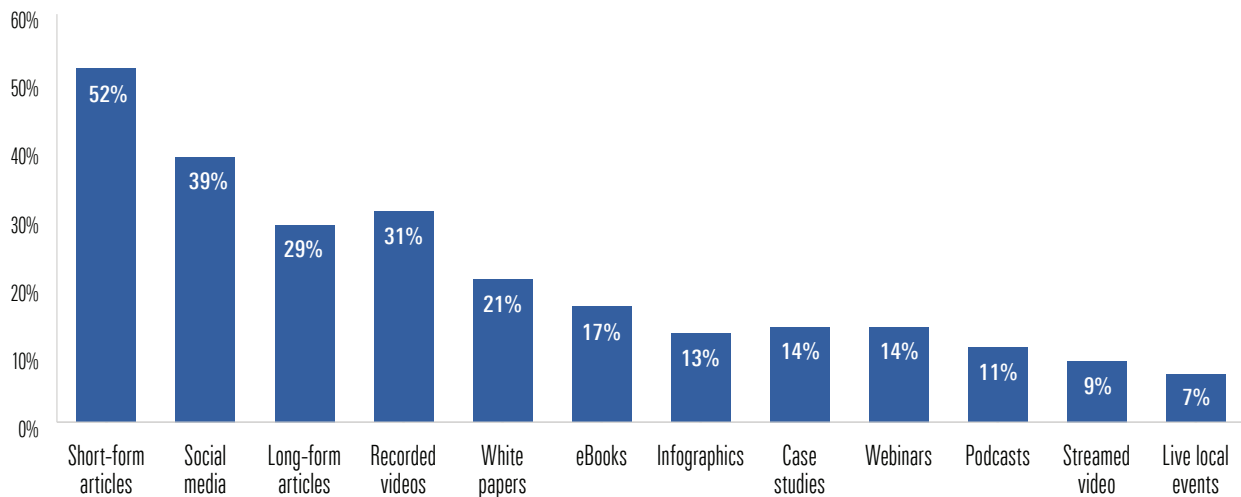


Figure 12: Engineering decision makers' weekly consumption of content by format

Source: Engineering.com, How Engineers Find Information 2019 ⁱ

"The results for short-written and video don't mean the other formats are less valuable, but rather that they would be consumed less frequently," says John Hayes. "You can leverage the best of both by pairing your gated content with a short article or a video. Once a reader has taken the time to consume the easy-to-access content, it's a small investment for them to then download a related eBook or white paper." ⁱⁱ

"Long-form content does very well in the evaluation and decision-making part of the buying process, says Fitzgerald. "This is the portion where engineers want to get deep

into the capabilities and possibilities of a product or service they are investigating. After they select a path forward, they still like to be reassured that they've made the right decision." ⁱⁱ

Regardless of length, engineers need solid information to determine if your product meets their needs. Just don't waste their time. Engineers quickly grow impatient when forced to wade through a lot of verbiage to find the data they need. Don't use any more words than necessary, and deliver content that's clear, informative and engaging.

ESSENTIAL TRUTH #9

Engineers Like Images That Convey Information

Engineers solve complex problems using complex technologies. Neither are easy to describe using words alone. Moreover, many engineers are far more at ease with schematics, charts, and equations than they are with written communication.

For those reasons, it's generally a good idea to include clear, informative images in your content.

"Pictures can help illustrate concepts and improve readability of written content," says Marina Malenic, formerly a Content Editor at Kuno Creative, "Engineers and scientists value images, because pictures are one of the best ways to communicate and assist in solving problems at a glance. Images also greatly improve the readability and comprehension of your engineering resources by breaking up large chunks of text." ^{vii}

Be careful with stock photos, however. They can make your content look like fluff and sabotage your efforts to earn the trust of this audience. Use stock images sparingly, preferably to illustrate a point.

Good illustrations for engineering content include:

- Product photos (close-ups)
- Embedded product demonstration video clips
- 3D models
- Cross-section and blow-out illustrations
- Technical schematics
- Flow charts
- Use case diagrams and other modelling language (for some audiences)
- Graphs or charts of performance data
- Product comparison tables

Conclusions

Marketing to engineers is different from marketing to other business buyers and influencers. Engineers make purchasing decisions at work much differently than they do in their personal lives. They're highly averse to risk, and they tend to distrust marketers and marketing. Still, there are ways to gain an engineer's trust, especially through good content marketing.

Start by keeping these nine essential truths in mind when marketing to engineers:

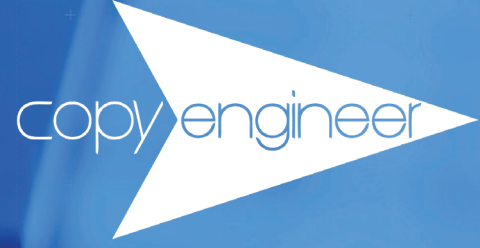
1. Engineers have a huge appetite for marketing content
2. Engineers hate marketing "fluff"
3. Engineers are highly risk averse in making business purchasing decisions
4. Engineers want technical detail in the content they consume
5. Engineers want problem-solving content
6. Engineers are highly skeptical of marketing, but they trust their peers
7. Engineers like to do their own research before they talk to sales
8. Engineers value brevity, but will read as much as they need
9. Engineers like images that convey information

On a more practical level, these nine essential truths translate into the following action items:

1. Spend on content creation and distribution
2. Take a fact-based, logic-driven approach to content development; avoid sales hype
3. Spend on display ads to increase awareness of your offering and your content
4. Provide solid technical information engineers can use to solve their problems
5. Byline your engineering experts in your content, even if it's ghostwritten
6. Make sure your content sounds authoritative, uses correct domain terminology and is factually sound
7. Optimize your content for search
8. Place content in relevant trade publications and industry web portals
9. Provide an opt-in newsletter aimed at your engineering audience
10. Don't bombard engineers with cold calls and unsolicited emails
11. Provide both short-form and long-form content, but keep it all concise and fact-based
12. Include clear, informative images in your content
13. Be very careful with stock photos; use them sparingly

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