

## CONTENT MARKETING

# The 7 Rules of Writing Persuasive Technical Content

*Helping people understand what your technical products do will be easier if you follow these seven guidelines for writing B2B technical content.*



Image credit: 10'000 Hours | Getty Images



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*The following excerpt is from Robert W. Bly's [The Content Marketing Handbook](#). Buy it now from [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)*

A lot of B2B marketing either promotes technical products, sells to a technical audience, or both. The nature of these marketing campaigns poses a challenge to those who must create them because the marketers tasked with executing these campaigns often lack a technical background. Therefore, they may have a steep learning curve and difficulty understanding what they're selling and to whom they're selling it.

I've been writing copy to sell technical products to engineers, scientists, programmers and other techies for more than four decades. Here are seven tricks of the trade that give me an edge in creating copy that pleases the client and persuades the prospect:

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**1. Build an accurate "fact bank."** A fact bank is a series of statements describing the product and its features that have been vetted by a technical expert. Before I start writing my copy, I go through the source material for the project and write down five to 10 sentences that precisely describe the product, how it works, its major features and how those features translate into important benefits. I email these sentences to my clients with the request that they review them and make any necessary corrections, additions, or deletions. After they do that, I incorporate their edits. Now I have a set of preapproved sentences I can use to construct my copy, and I know what I'm writing is technically accurate. The clients then get a first draft of copy on a highly technical subject that's correct and on the mark.

**2. Buy a children's book on the topic.** If you have to write copy about a technical subject, buy either a children's book on the subject or an adult nonfiction book aimed at a lay audience. For example, when I had to write copy for an aerospace contractor, I was aided by an Isaac Asimov book for young readers about satellites. The children's books especially will provide clear, easy-to-understand explanations of key terms and concepts. The adult books will likely have descriptions of features and functionality you can paraphrase in your own copy. (If I "borrow" from books, I alert the client by adding a footnote and make sure I'm not plagiarizing by rephrasing in my own words.) Another good purchase for the high-tech copywriter is a dictionary of industry terms. At various times, I've owned dictionaries for computers, telecom, banking, finance and aerospace.

**3. Ask the client for copies of PowerPoints.** Engineers in particular tend to be visually oriented, so you should have visuals to accompany your text. Rather than draw a lot of charts and graphs, I ask the client for copies of PowerPoints used in presentations by their technical and sales staff. I then paste into my copy whatever visuals I think will work best, carefully noting the name of the PowerPoint and the page number from the source. Sometimes I find an ideal diagram for illustrating my point on a website that's not the client's. If I use it, I add a note explaining that it's for reference only and must be redrawn to avoid copyright infringement.

**4. Understand that graphics have meaning.** Unless you understand what a chart or graph means, don't use it. It's extremely embarrassing to cut and paste a diagram from a client's PowerPoint into your copy, only to be unable to explain to the client why you used it. You should understand each visual so well that you can write a clear, descriptive caption for it — and then do so.

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**5. Use email for interviews.** I often interview subject matter experts (SMEs) over the phone when writing copy. But occasionally I get SMEs who can't express themselves well verbally. In those cases, I offer to email them questions so they can email me their replies. Often technical people who can't speak English well can write well — perhaps a result of the rise of email, which forces people to write often. At times, the email replies are so clear I can almost paste them right into my copy. If the answers are still unclear, I rewrite them in plain English and then email my rewrite back to the SME for review. Usually the SME makes a few minor edits, and after that, it's ready to use.

**6. Use Wikipedia — with caution.** You can't wholly rely on information in Wikipedia to be accurate because it's compiled by volunteers. However, I've found that entries on technical terms usually start off with a plain English definition of the term, which can be invaluable. But when you're researching statistics to augment your copy — for example, the date the laser was invented or the speed of sound in a vacuum — most clients want a better source than Wikipedia. Websites are also iffy when you don't know who's running them, as are blogs. I prefer to cite an article from a respected industry or scientific journal.

**7. *Get smart.*** If you're going to be regularly writing about a product or technology, it makes sense to get some additional education on the topic. One ad agency president told me he assigned an account executive to handle an industrial welding account. On his own, the account executive took night school courses in welding, eventually becoming a certified welder. Smart move!