Influencing Change: Negotiating vs. Building a Vision

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Because the development of product documentation is typically categorized as overhead in most companies, technical publications managers often struggle with how to seek support and funding for resources they need. Corporations nowadays respond and operate on data-driven decisions and solutions. But what meaningful data can a technical publications manager use to build a business case? How do you find this data? How can you leverage this data in effective ways to secure the funding you need?

An Approach, A Strategy, And Tactics

In this article I present ideas on how to find data, how to use that data to build both a compelling argument and a vision for your team, and then how to leverage that vision for support and funding. Key to this process is learning how we need to make adjustments to our traditional way of thinking, evolving from “negotiation” to “vision.” This article suggests three basic components of using an approach, a strategy, and specific tactics. As a technical publications manager for many years, I summarize these lessons learned about pain points of discovery and perseverance, and reading the true messages behind rejection. Embedded in that discovery is the realization of the absoluteness of data, of using effective rhetoric, and understanding how funding works in the corporate environment. I present five examples of where technical publications managers can find the data to go after the funding they need.

How Do Technical Publications Managers Successfully Negotiate for Their Needs?

This question has come up several times over the last few years, and it is here where we need to make the first adjustment to our way of thinking. Fundamentally, there’s a problem with this question. We shouldn’t be “negotiating” for anything. We should consider the task as “educating.” OK, so, how do we effectively educate our management who

♦ don’t understand what we do or how we do it
♦ care but believe that there are bigger fires elsewhere
♦ assume we do magic, that we somehow make it all work, and will continue to make it work

This thinking can be a big roadblock for technical publications managers, especially when we realize that educating is a one-way exercise.

Flip the Rhetoric...And Apply a Strategy

Another adjustment to our way of thinking is to consider how to “flip the rhetoric” and re-engineer what we communicate. You can both educate and argue for what you need. The question should be: As a manager, how will you achieve efficiency gains with your organization? But be careful of the trap of the negative response:
♦ Efficiency gains! Are you crazy?
♦ I already have been doing more with less...
♦ I’ve cranked my processes down tight and there’s no margin!

We should think in terms of strategy. Influencers are not successful at being negative. The strategy is to turn that question around and build a compelling argument for what it will take to achieve those efficiency gains for the longer, sustaining haul.

Breaking it Down to Three Common Components

If we can adjust our traditional way of thinking, we can apply some basic directives to influence change:
♦ Approach – an attitude to convey
♦ Strategy – maneuvers and messages
♦ Tactics – the sequence of activities to get there

The Approach: Turn an Argument into a Compelling Proposal

The approach, plain and simple, is to stop negotiating! Ask the right question—one your manager wants to hear. Provide the answer with a compelling argument and turn that argument into a proposal. Communicate that proposal as part of your Vision. With this approach, the heart of your proposal is your Vision. The hammer for your proposal is data. Later, you’ll read several examples of what data to use and where to find it.
The Strategy: Argument → Proposal → Vision

The strategy is how you maneuver your negotiation to education to compelling argument to proposal to finally, your Vision. It is a strategy for building influence. Influence can be more successful if delivered as choices you offer your management, for instance:

- What will the future look like if there’s no change?
- Where should your organization be, what is the ultimate value for your company/customers, and what decisions are required to get there?
- Your management can ignore the data or act on it
- Result is their choice: Reaction or Vision

Your proposal (Vision) should provoke these choices.

Tactics: The Roadmap

The following tactics are the focus of this article. They represent messages learned from dialogues with management over the last several years—the result of which is a roadmap for building influence for change. They’re broken down into three milestones: Prerequisites, Proposal, and The Closer. Examples supporting these themes are interspersed throughout this section. They’re for reference only and intended to stimulate ideas for how you can creatively and succinctly communicate your message.

Prerequisites

- Anticipate. Tighten the ship before you ask
- Think years ahead
- Understand—and accept—the relationship of time and money

Proposal

- Begin at the grassroots level
- Data, data, data: collect it, know it, use it
- Five examples of data

The Closer

- Show what WILL get done IF there’s change
- Tie everything back to the customer
- Primary message: Investment
- Show leadership and vision

Prerequisites

In the Prerequisite phase, you need to anticipate. Tighten the ship before you ask and anticipate the rebuff. What questions will your management ask? Make sure you’ve done what you can with your current processes. Examine your workflows for redundancy and inefficient process loops. Make sure you’ve squeezed the process down to what it will support. Document all of this (you will use this later). Once you’ve exhausted your limited options for what you can do, then it’s time to plan for what you should be doing.

Figure 1 shows an example of the data that we collected. You need to get used to thinking five to eight years ahead. Ask yourself if you are looking ahead or down at your toes? Start now on your vision of where your organization needs to be. Work with your team and build a roadmap. Put it out there—get your team thinking creatively and futuristically. This is the fun part!

- What cool new deliverables will you produce (formats, venues, media)?
- What tools and processes will you need?
- What training is needed?
- Where is our technical communication technology headed?
- What skill sets will you hire/train to?
- What will be the make-up of your functional groups?

Figure 2 (on page 4) shows a picture of our roadmap and our Vision.

Break your roadmap down into Phases/Milestones and build a transitional plan for your team. Focus now on what you need by next year to jump-start this plan. What do you need in subsequent years to achieve your vision?

- Headcount?
- Tools?
- Training?
- Process overhaul?
- Different/new/improved deliverables?

Another critical prerequisite is to understand—and accept—the relationship of time and money. Or, another way to put it, understand the ratio of dollars to time. Don’t nickel and dime your company. You want significant change? You have to ask for significant dollars. Big dollars (headcount, new tools/systems) require 12-15 months of company planning, not just your planning. Your constraints didn’t happen over night, so know that solutions won’t happen over night. Put together a comprehensive, long-term growth plan. Companies need budgetary input months in advance of an annual fiscal plan.

Proposal

When you’re ready to begin work on the proposal phase, begin at the grassroots level to communicate your needs and ideas. Start a dialog with peers and management. Build the context
and communicate the gritty constraints that are killing progress. Don’t whine and complain or wallow in today’s problems. Never be sarcastic. Set expectations of the limitations you have and learn to feel accountable. Turn the dialog to fixing what’s broken, being positive, and being on a mission. Communicate with excitement “how great would it be if our company could do this.”

Data, data, data—you can’t get around it. You need to collect it, know it, use it. When building a proposal, it “must be born of data.” Nothing gets attention if not data-driven. Make sure it’s solid, robust, checked, verified, and rechecked. Know your data upwards, downwards, sideways. Memorize sound bytes of data for side discussions with management. Be able to explain how you derived your data in simple terms to propeller heads and the finance geeks.

You may be asking yourself “but where does the data come from?” The following are five examples of where to find data to build your business case and measure your as-is process against what it could be if given the funding and resources you need. In each example, think about how you can present in graphical format using charts, paretos, tables, timelines, etc. Visually-driven information is easier to communicate and gain attention to a problem. Most importantly, it demonstrates how the data speaks for itself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Comparative – Productivity Metrics for Tech Pubs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1997</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>vs.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Streamlined processes, topic-based, single-sourcing methodology</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Industry Productivity Standard: one technical page of content is averaged to **7 hours per page**. Includes research, development, reviews, edits, graphics, text, new and modified files, and production time.

**Information Products:** Published 6701 pages in 2006, divided by 12 months = 475 pages per month. Applying standardized 160 work hours per month x 5 developers = 800 hours. 475 pages/300 hours = 1.68 hours per page.

Reduced production cycle time from **10 man-days (2005)** to **< 3 man-days (2007)** (the publishing and releasing process of raw files to finished product).

**Strategy Summary**

How we did it . . .

- **Benchmark top tier industries, engage in SEMI forums, adopt industry standards for quality, process, tools, and measuring productivity**
- **Become experts with our limited tools and maximize their capabilities**
- **Streamline processes, wring out all the excess, push hard for efficiencies**
- **Reduce production cycle times**
- **Adopt Single-Source Publishing model: reconfigure 1 set of files per platform for all models within that platform via condition tagging text**
- **Cross-train team for surge cycles and backfill**
- **Move service documentation online to post and download; eliminate CD distribution for FSEs**
- **Hire a dedicated technical writer to assume Tech Support documentation needs**
- **Formalize procedure validation**
- **Develop error correction feedback database and metrics**
- **Implement eLibrary Updater tool and field compliance report**
- **Develop delivery and quality solutions for internal and external customers**

**Figure 1: Historical Productivity Efforts and Achievements**
FIVE EXAMPLES OF DATA

**Data Set #1: Product Forecast**
In this example, use your company products, goods, and/or services as data. Research your company portfolio. Learn what new and upgraded products are planned over the next three to five years. Map out the deliverables that each will require and the resources you need to meet the forecast. Add in the products that are supported now and will need continued maintenance. Factor in the normal fixes, corrections, and the overhead of design change. Show exponential growth of product line vs. the flat resource levels you have work with. Figure 3 on page 5 illustrates the product forecast.

**Data Set #2: The Cost of Manual, Error-Prone Processes**
In this example, you need to identify what chronically breaks down and requires workaround solutions. Think about what home-grown, outdated system/tools you have to use. Show the quality gaps, slow cycle times, rework, hampered development, and manual production processes. Calculate lost time from forced workarounds because of poor tools or error-prone manual processes. Convert this lost time into cost, either of man-hours and/or dollars, and determine how much this is costing you each month. Extrapolate out to a year or more and show it as a graph, as illustrated in Figure 4 on page 6.

**Data Set #3: Retention of Skills**
Does your company talk about employee retention? If so, exploit it. You know the cost of turnover: training, learning curves, morale, and motivation. What gets compromised? Typically, it’s quality, innovation, and creativity. What’s your turnover rate? What has it cost you? Talk to your HR organization—they have statistics. Communicate how

♦ high caliber employees won’t stay if there’s no growth
♦ high caliber employees want innovation, challenges, and to work with new technology
♦ high caliber employees will work incredibly hard if valued

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**Where We’ve Been and Where We’re Going**

Information Products Roadmap 1996 - 2007

![Information Products Roadmap](image)

**Product Documentation Delivery**
- Field Service: Dynamic content delivery, database driven, XML-sourced documentation for menu-driven, task-driven information on Intranet
- External Customers: Cymer.com, Extramet, e-Commerce, Customer Portals

**Knowledge Management System**
- Service Information Repository
- Troubleshooting Database
- Software Diagnostics tools bundled behind one interface
- Linkage to Related ERP Systems and Tools: Siebel, Oracle, Agile, COL
- Multimedia Vehicle for Refresher Training and Procedure Videos
- Interactive Communication between TS and Field for Escalations

**Figure 2: Sample Progression of a Roadmap and Vision**
**Figure 3a: Showing Available Man-Hours vs. Forecast vs. Prioritized Work Demand**

**2007 Output Forecast**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services</th>
<th>RPM</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount of Man-Hours</th>
<th>RPM Price</th>
<th>Revenue Project-Related</th>
<th>RPM Price</th>
<th>Forecast Project-Related</th>
<th>RPM Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Builds</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>New build vs. prior</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>New build vs. prior</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>New build vs. prior</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upgrades</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>New build vs. prior</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>New build vs. prior</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>New build vs. prior</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updates</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>New build vs. prior</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>New build vs. prior</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>New build vs. prior</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gross Hours derived from: 40/52 weeks x 2 weeks = 2000**

**Vacation:**
- 10 days
- 20 days

**Annual Payroll:**
- 52 weeks
- 2040 total hours

**Total Required Man Hours/Available hours per person per year:**
- 2040 / 12 = 170 hours

**Notes:**
- Data only includes 75 hours per page. Includes comments, do not include graphics, text, and production.
- 2006 included over 100 hours per page, increased in page to 200 due to increased demand for print output.

**Figure 3b: Showing Available Man-Hours vs. Forecast vs. Prioritized Work Demand**

- **Backlog**
  - SLR: 50%
  - SLA: 90%
- **Pending**
  - Other: 20%
  - TCZ: 40%
- **CIP**
  - Illustrated Parts Catalog: 15%
  - Cart: 5%
- **Not Started**
  - Baseline Procedures: 40%
  - Preliminary Analysis: 25%
- **Projects Categorized in Decreasing Priority**
  - 100% Revenue
  - 90% Revenue
  - 80% Revenue
  - 70% Revenue
  - 60% Revenue
  - 50% Revenue
  - 40% Revenue
  - 30% Revenue
  - 20% Revenue
  - 10% Revenue

- **Not Additional Resources Required for each Project**

**ARTICLE REPRINT**
Only the tip of the iceberg!

**The Problem: As-Is Process**

- Developed process in 1997 with 11 people in Tech Pubs to support 1 product.
- Now support 20 products with 7 people.
- No longer maintaining T000 or P000 series pubs.
- G000 series is next to drop off, so next platform comes on line.
- Gained efficiencies with streamlining the copier process, but limited tools are not scalable to manage demand.
- Basic desktop tools are not robust. As-is process is failing, causing errors and rework.
- Production cycles now taking >2 days per topic (Should be 2 hours with a CMS tool).
- In 2005, correctly forecasted that the next product line (RLX) would exceed capacity (proved true).
- CapEx for CMS first requested in 2004.
- Need (2) additional headcount now to manage ALX updates, RLX 700, RLX 8000, and XLX 320.
- Roadmap requires (4) additional headcount for future RLX, LXL, Pipeline upgrades, TSG, FSE CERT, and LLP. (Can also be needed with a CMS).

![Graph showing the cost of poor quality](image)

**Figure 4: The Cost of Poor Quality**

**Data Set #4: What Won’t Get Done? Always Give Options**

Show what won’t get done with your as-is condition. Present decisions needed between product priorities vs. the quality of deliverables. What are the company options?

- Do they want it on time?
- With quality?
- Translated?
- Full document set?
- Book-based? Web-based? Online Help?

Explain how they can pick one! (Or, whatever your resources can support.) List what products have to fall off when new ones come on, and what product deliveries are at risk. What dates slip? Use visuals to draw lines between what is needed and what won’t get done, as is shown in Figure 5 on page 6.

**Data Set #5: Add to the Competitive Edge**

Benchmark! And then answer the following questions: What are other companies doing? Where does your company stand with competitors? And with industry peers? Is your company lagging? Does your company want to be at the leading edge? Are you translating for your global customers? What standards should you be adopting but can’t because of poor tools, processes, and skill sets? Identify what it will take to be compliant or ahead of emerging standards. Show where your value is to keep or put your company in a leadership position as illustrated in Figure 6 on page 8.

**The Closer**

Now, give them the good news! Show what WILL get done IF there’s change. Compare your current scenario against the optimum scenario, based on new tools, more people, or what it is you need:
| Options | With These Additional Resource Expenses | Would Achieve the Following Estimated Productivity Gains Through 2008:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CMS Tool – Productivity Gain</td>
<td>2 Permanent Writers 2 Contractors (Full-time)</td>
<td>New Products Building Funding Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMS Tool – Productivity Gain</td>
<td>1 Permanent Writer 2 Contractors (Part-time)</td>
<td>New Products Building Funding Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMS Tool – Productivity Gain</td>
<td>2 Contractors</td>
<td>New Products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMS Tool – Productivity Gain</td>
<td>1 Permanent Writer (Gain 100 hours per month)</td>
<td>New Products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMS Tool – Productivity Gain</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>New Products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Grown System</td>
<td>4 Permanent Writers 2 Contractors (Full-time)</td>
<td>New System Built</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Grown System</td>
<td>2 Permanent Writers 2 Contractors (Part-time)</td>
<td>New System Built</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Grown System</td>
<td>1 Permanent Writer 2 Contractors (Part-time) (Gain 100 hours per month)</td>
<td>New System Built</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Grown System</td>
<td>1 Permanent Writer 1 Contractor (Gain 100 hours per month)</td>
<td>New System built</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Grown System</td>
<td>1 Permanent Writer</td>
<td>New System Built</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Without CMS</th>
<th>With CMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 additional headcount needed in 2007</td>
<td>0 for 2007, 2 for 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New headcount needed as permanent hires</td>
<td>Contractors only needed for surge cycles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 days production cycle per topic</td>
<td>2 hours production cycle per topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLX 9000 doc set delivered late</td>
<td>RLX 9000 doc set completed, released by ship date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LXi 700 doc set delivered late</td>
<td>LXi 700 doc set completed, released by ship date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot commit to LXi development dates</td>
<td>LXi doc set completed, released by ship date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000 Docs Sets not updated</td>
<td>1000 docs updated Q1 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0000 Docs Sets not updated</td>
<td>0000 docs updated Q1 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F000 Doc Sets dropped off of schedule</td>
<td>Continue updates for F000 doc sets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No writing or validation support for Troubleshooting Guides</td>
<td>Assume validation and maintenance of Troubleshooting Guides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% manual rework from broken system</td>
<td>0% rework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No new procedures to support training curriculum</td>
<td>New procedures on time for training FSEs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No procedure validation for new product lines</td>
<td>All new procedures validated prior to publishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing backlog of eLibrary Feedback</td>
<td>eLibrary feedback corrected and posted within 30 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No support for Pipeline Projects (CSS3, L3, LX, L1, RPSI)</td>
<td>Upgrade procedures completed by product release date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lose skilled resources from burn out</td>
<td>Retain team members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5: Providing Choices for Management—With and Without Needed Resources**

- with better quality
- faster development cycle times
- more consistency in quality deliverables
- translated for competitive edge
- book, web, and Help formats
- retention of key skills sets
- adherence to standards
- other? What else can you do if given what you need?

Explain how your info products will improve as a result, as we see in Figure 7 on page 9.

**Tie Everything Back to the Customer—it’s Always About the Customer**

Draw the argument to show how your needs impact the customer:

- Where are the customer pain points?
- What value can you add for your customers?
- What’s in it for them and how would they know?
- What are the benefits for your internal customers?

Couch the argument in terms of what’s in it for the business. How does this affect the success of your company? Remind your management of customer perception: sloppy docs = poor impression on product = second-rate company.
Primary Message: Investment
The message behind the argument is that you get what you pay for. Put Data #3 to work. The company must invest in your organization to be competitive, to produce quality output, and retain essential skills sets. The question to your management is: can you continue to be of value if the company doesn’t invest in your team. Growth requires investment. A modest investment now pays in spades later. Provide a high-level cost breakdown of what you want: new tools, more people, and so on. Compare this cost to the delayed cost of not investing now.

Bring it all together with leadership and vision. Your proposal should be part of the bigger plan. Know where you need to be in the next five to eight years. Communicate where your organization will be and its potential. Show your roadmap: “X marks the spot where we are today, and this is where we will be.” Market your vision and use branding. Have your team come up with a catchy name for your new tool, system, or process. Create a logo and use it in your emails. Make announcements to your internal partners on milestones achieved. Get on the radar!

Benchmarking

Learned how top tier companies manage their technical publications processes
- Documentation development methodologies
- Documentation delivery strategies — reusing information
- eCommerce and Extranet capabilities
- Blended learning models
- eLearning Technologies
- IT requirements
- Content Management Tools
- Source formats (intranet - > FrameMaker - > HTML - > XML)
- Companies include Intel, LAM, NIKON, Varian, IBM, KLA-Tencor, NCR, Stanbord/AMD, IBM, TEL, Motorola, HP
- Organizations include: STC, ASSTD, TPIC, SEMI, CIDM

Adopting Industry Standards

Standards adopted for development, output, and delivery of technical documentation
- Process Maturity Model for Technical Communication (CIDM)
- EPSS - Electronic Performance Support Systems (SEMI)
- SEMI S13, Safety Guidelines for Operation and Maintenance Manuals Used with Semiconductor Manufacturing Equipment
- SEMI S1, Safety Guidelines for Visual Hazard Alerts
- HTML for Structured File Hierarchy (STC)
- Topic-based information and Single sourcing (STC)
- In process of adopting DITA Technical Communications Standard and XML (Oasis)
- Researching emerging standard for Simplified Technical English (STE)
- Member of TPIC Standards Committee for SEMI
- Member of DITA XML Standards for Semiconductor

Figure 6: Showing Value: Benchmarking and Standards
Project Benefits

Reduce Production Cycle Time [cost avoidance]
- Reduce production cycle process from 2 days → 2 hours
- Increase throughput (released documentation) 200%
- Eliminate manual tracking of what information is used where (seconds vs. hours)
- Eliminate rework from incorrectly configured documentation - 40 hrs/month
- Auto reporting of productivity metrics
- Re-use 80% of content via attributes/meta data capabilities

Mitigate Business Risk
- Invoke content accountability with tracked tech reviews and audit trials
- Reduce error rate 60% (and resulting rework)
- Keep up with released products’ updates, fixes, upgrades, CIs
- Ensure compliance with SEMI and TechCom Standards
- Retention of skilled staff, alleviate declining team morale, burn out
- Eliminates alternative of re-building home-grown database

Publication/Technical Authoring System

Quality and Productivity Benefits
- Reduce production time from 5 days to 2 days.
- Reduce error rate by 50% (measured by eLibrary feedback)
- Reduce technical reviews from an average 5 day turn-around to 2 days using live collaboration, integrated feedback tools.
- Increase throughput by 250% (released documents in Agile)
- Meet 100% of field readiness with new product support and upgrade documentation
- Increase efficiencies with:
  - Real-time scheduling status
  - Automated workflow triggers
  - Single sourcing HTML and PDF outputs

Figure 7: ROI on Investment in Needed Resources
Since annual budgets are usually finalized in early Q4, start your campaign in Q1 to gain support and build the vision in Q2. Present a proposal in Q3 for the next year’s budget (typically decided in Q4). In other words, plan time to acquire data, grass roots ideas, build a roadmap, and have the proposal ready for the annual budget planning sessions. Figure 8 on page 10 and 11 shows our timeline and conceptual ideas for a vision.

And finally, don’t give up! It may take several attempts. Don’t be dismayed—learn from each presentation. Note where the resistance comes from; factor those into your solutions. Take advantage of every opportunity to present and show your vision.

Figure 8A: Sample Timeline and Concepts of a Vision
One-Stop Shopping for Every Service Call

1. Diagnostics
2. Problem Isolation
3. Data collection and analysis
4. Procedures
5. Online Refresher Training Module (as needed)
6. Troubleshooting
7. Parts Identification
8. Parts Ordering
9. Service Report
10. RAM Collection
11. Customer Notification

FSE Product Support Console 1-Stop Shopping

Figure 8b: Sample Timeline and Concepts of a Vision