Revealing

Your Hidden Value

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"Are technical communicators getting the respect and credit they deserve?"

STC

Our Discussion Today

How do we add value?

How can we measure that value?

How can we add more value?

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Do technical communicators get the proper respect and credit **for their work?**

STC Funded Research Study

"Adding Value as a Professional Technical Communicator"

Technical Communication
February 1995
by Dr. Janice (Ginny) Redish

What is added value?

"Value added means generating greater return on investment than the cost of the initial investment…" (Redish 1995)

How do technical communicators

add value?

How do we add value?

- ♦ **Serving as an integral part of the team**
- ♦ **Developing answers**
- ♦ **Designing better interfaces**
- ♦ **Correcting the error messages, etc.**
- ♦ **Writing clear, concise specifications**
- ♦ **Documenting the cost we save**
- ♦ **User advocate and perspective**
- ♦ **Improving Return on Investment (ROI)**

How do we add value?

- ♦ **Reducing support costs**
- ♦ **Portraying a consistent image**
- ♦ **Streamlining development process**
- ♦ **Selling more product**
- ♦ **Reducing printing costs**
- ♦ **Reducing legal liability**
- ♦ **Increasing customer satisfaction**
- ♦ **Providing greater user satisfaction**

Measuring the Value

We Add

Do Your Own Case Studies

- ♦ **Managers want to know what is going on in their organizations**
- ♦ **How it affects the bottom line**
- ♦ **Your first case may not be perfect**

Breaking the Barriers

- ◆ **Getting the resources approved**
  - ▸ **Catch 22 situation for us**
  - ▸ **One way out is to analyze information already being collected**
    - • **Data on support calls**
    - • **Customer response cards**

Potential Problems with Data

- **Data may be uneven for these reasons:**
    - Some may classify problems using different guidelines
    - Some support personnel document calls more extensively than others
    - Questions on customer response cards may not generate data that focuses on issues
- **We can still get valuable information!**

Reporting is Critical

♦ **STC insisted on reports before funding**

♦ **The numbers never tell the whole story!**

- ▸ **Describe context of the project**
- ▸ **Describe role of technical communicators**
- ▸ **What process was used**
- ▸ **How the process helped or hindered**
- ▸ **Tell them how we got the numbers**
- ▸ **Suggest changes to get better results**

Use other efforts

- **Work with product support**

- **Add questions to the customer response card**

- **Work with Customer Training**

- **Usability Test Data**

  - **Improve products**

  - **Predict savings from value of changes we make based on testing**

Learn Managers' Language

♦ **Most managers are interested in the bottom line, their Return on Investment (ROI)**

   ▸ **Investments should always show higher return**

      • **Resources for QUALITY work**

      • **Studies about how to improve productivity also reduce investment to show a higher ROI**

Measuring ROI

- Saving money through increased productivity or costs

- Saving by improving the preparation and production costs (design and development)

- Saving money after product goes to users

- Increased revenue or productivity
  - Fewer support calls
  - Fewer revisions
  - Less rework

- Tangible benefits, like customer satisfaction

Outcome Measures Showing Increased Benefits

- More sales

- Increased productivity

- More proposals won

- More awards won

- More completed forms returned

- Forms returned quicker

- More people who are entitled to a benefit complete the process

- More users' problems identified earlier in the process

Measures Reducing Costs

- ◆ **Fewer support calls; lower support costs**

- ◆ **Less need for training; lower training costs**

- ◆ **Fewer maintenance requests; lower repair costs**

- ◆ **Less translation time; lower translation costs**

- ◆ **Less downtime for workers**

- ◆ **Less effort (time, lines of code, rework) needed when TC are involved early**

- ◆ **Lower costs for writing, paper, printing, etc., because TC convinced developers they did not need all the planned documentation**

- ◆ **Fewer errors by users**

Measures Reducing Costs

- ♦ **Fewer errors in specs written by TC than those written by engineers**

- ♦ **Fewer errors by clerks, technicians, or subject-matter experts who work on the documents (forms)**

- ♦ **Fewer forms returned to respondents because of incorrect or missing answers**

- ♦ **Fewer grievances**

- ♦ **Fewer accidents**

- ♦ **Less waste of materials (Carnevale & Schulz 1990)**

- ♦ **Less litigation; lower litigation costs (Mauro 1994, Tchobanoff 1987)**

Measures Reducing Costs

- **In counting costs and benefits, we must include not only preparation and production, but also**
  - ‣ **Support**
  - ‣ **Maintenance**
  - ‣ **Revision**

Ratings of Customer Satisfaction

▸ **Ratings of just one document or process**

▸ **Ratings of specific aspects, such as layout or organization**

▸ **Comparative ratings across documents**

▸ **Preferences across documents or processes**

▸ **Ratings by users and reviewers**

Estimates or Projections of Value Added

"The problem in most businesses and bureaucracies is that the two sets of costs (test it now or fix it later) do not come from the same budget. The manager who must get the manual to the printer on a certain schedule and within a certain cost is not responsible for whatever havoc the manual might cause later on."
(Redish and Selzer 1985)

Estimates or Projections of Value Added

- ◆ **Estimating avoidable costs from historical data**
  - ▸ **Refer to Cover, Cooke, and Hunt February 1995 *Technical Communication***
    - • **Cost of developing a typical manual**
    - • **Avoidable costs incurred in fixing problems**

Estimates or Projections of Value Added

- ◆ **Estimating savings through usability tests**
  - ▶ **Increasing users' productivity**
  - ▶ **Usability specialists and forms designers use comparative usability testing to show how their work reduces**
    - • **User errors**
    - • **Time it takes a user to perform a task**

General Perceptions of the Value of TC Work

To discover perceptions, ask these questions:

- ◆ How much does documentation count in decisions to buy a product?

- ◆ How much more would we pay for a useful document?

- ◆ How much money and time saved by having TC write, edit or review?

- ◆ How much time saved if TC in at beginning?

Adding More Value

- ◆ **A by-product is working with other groups**
  - ‣ **Leads to better appreciation of what we do**
  - ‣ **Everyone learns more about customers**
  - ‣ **May have to convince management that the best way to measure the value is looking at what happens in another department**

Adding More Value

◆ **When planning new projects, think about showing value added**

▶ **Collect data now**

▶ **Plan new data collection efforts,**

data in real time

Adding More Value

◆ **Once we have a system, we can use it for continuous improvement**

▸ **Monitor success of information products**

▸ **When new trends emerge, arrange for more resources to improve information**

Adding More Value

- ◆ **Make sure you get credit when you add value**
  - ‣ **Tell managers and executives**
  - ‣ **Traditional accounting practices make it difficult because some things hide or show up as negative value on accounting reports (Kaplan 1990)**

Adding More Value

♦ **Problems with traditional accounting practices:**

  ‣ **Track costs by department, not project**

  ‣ **Once set up, they are slow to change**

  ‣ **Based on manufacturing model, not a labor-intensive service model**

Adding More Value

- ◆ **To see the implications for TC, ask yourself:**

  - ▸ **Do you know what upper management sees about the costs and benefits of your work?**

  - ▸ **Do you know what measures are used by accounting to track costs for TC?**

Adding More Value

- ▸ **Do these measures match the way your group now works and the diversity of your work?**

- ▸ **Do these measures give TC credit for contributions to other groups?**

Adding More Value

- ◆ **Toot your own horn:**
  - ▶ **Make sure your contributions get touted in company newsletters and at meetings**
  - ▶ **See about getting accounting reports and accounting practices changed**
  - ▶ **Make sure your manager has the information needed to make judgments about value**

Summary

▸ **You bring value in many different ways**

▸ **You may be able to show**

- **Savings of various kinds**
- **Increased user satisfaction**
- **Reductions of various kinds**
- **Increases in sales or use**

Summary

◆ **Make sure you get credit**

◆ **Be proactive in showing your value**

  ▸ **Start with Saul Carliner's business objectives**

  ▸ **Work with other departments to get data**

  ▸ **Make sure management knows what you do**

  ▸ **Share your case study with others**

◆ **We bring value to more than documents**

Summary

- **Process is as important as the product**
  - Context in which project was completed
  - Role technical communicators played
  - What process was used
  - How the process helped or hindered
  - Explain how we got the numbers
  - Suggest changes to process to get better results

Other Value Added References

Technical Communication:

♦ Redish, Janice C. (Ginny) 1995. "Adding Value as a Technical Communicator*"*

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- Henry, Jim. May 1998. "Documenting Contributory Expertise: The Value Added by Technical Communicators in Collaborative Writing Situations"
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♦ **Carliner, Saul. Sept./Oct. 2000. "Intellectual Capital: Placing a Value on Technical Communication"**

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Questions?