

**A Framework for Leveraging Subject-Matter Expertise in B2B  
Content Marketing**

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## **Abstract**

This research explores how organizations can leverage technical expertise within their content marketing to enhance the customer journey in business-to-business (B2B) markets. The research examines two existing buyer journey frameworks that extend beyond the point of decision and purchase and analyze their potential application in the integration of technical expertise in content marketing. Additionally, there is review of current research on the most effective methods for incorporating technical expertise into marketing content, which is currently siloed and limited.

In response to these findings, the paper proposes a preliminary framework for integrating technical expertise within content marketing across a B2B buyer journey. This framework maps technical expertise across the content creation process. By developing and implementing this framework, organizations can better leverage the value of their subject-matter experts, improve customer engagement and satisfaction, and ultimately drive business growth in the B2B marketplace. The research concludes by addressing the challenges and opportunities associated with adopting the proposed framework, offers recommendations for organizations operating in B2B markets, and suggests future research directions to further refine and enhance the integration of technical expertise in content marketing.

# Introduction

The landscape of business-to-business (B2B) marketing has undergone significant changes in recent years, with an increasing emphasis on content marketing as a crucial element of the overall strategy (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Content marketing involves the creation and sharing of valuable information to engage target audiences and foster long-term relationships (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2016). In B2B markets, technical expertise can often be a key differentiator between competitors, and organizations must find ways to effectively leverage this expertise within their content marketing efforts.

Subject-matter experts possess the knowledge and credibility to address the specific needs of the target audience; however, organizations may often struggle to effectively incorporate technical expertise into their marketing communications, despite its potential to enhance customer trust and loyalty (Berrey, 2021). To address this challenge, it is essential to understand the customer journey in B2B markets and identify opportunities for integrating technical expertise throughout the various stages of the journey (Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

This research seeks to provide answers around the following research question: How can organizations leverage technical expertise within a content marketing strategy as part of the customer journey in B2B markets? After the initial discussion, a novel framework is proposed for B2B organizations centered around the inclusion of technical expertise to help enhance customer engagement, satisfaction, and business growth.

# **The Buyer Journey - Different Markets, Different Journeys**

The buyer journey, also referred to as the customer journey, is a holistic view of the process through which customers become aware of, consider, evaluate, and ultimately decide to purchase a product or service. The journey encompasses all touchpoints and interactions between a customer and a brand, spanning both online and offline channels. The concept of the buyer journey has become increasingly important in the digital age, as customers have access to a wealth of information and can engage with brands through multiple channels at their convenience.

Understanding and mapping the buyer journey is essential for businesses to create targeted marketing strategies, optimize the customer experience, and ultimately, drive sales and customer loyalty (Halligan and & Shah, 2014). A well-defined buyer journey can help marketers identify key moments of interaction, anticipate customer needs, and allocate resources more effectively.

In both business-to-consumer (B2C) and B2B markets, the buyer journey typically consists of several stages that represent the customer's progression through the decision-making process. These stages may include awareness, consideration, evaluation, purchase, and post-purchase. However, it is essential to recognize that each market has its unique characteristics, and the specific stages and dynamics of the buyer journey can vary. In recent years, the nature of the buyer journey has evolved significantly, especially in B2B markets, where the decision-making process is often more complex and nonlinear (Gartner, 2019).

## Existing Buyer Journey Frameworks

Two well-known frameworks that describe the buyer journey are the McKinsey Consumer Decision Journey (CDJ) (Court, Elzinga, Mulder, & Vetvik, 2009) and Gartner's B2B Buying Journey (Gartner, 2019). These frameworks share some similarities in their structure, as they both consist of several stages that customers progress through during the decision-making process. However, they also have notable differences, particularly in their focus on either B2C or B2B markets and the distinct characteristics of each.

The McKinsey CDJ (see Figure 1) is primarily focused on B2C markets and consists of four stages: initial consideration, active evaluation, moment of purchase, and post-purchase experience.

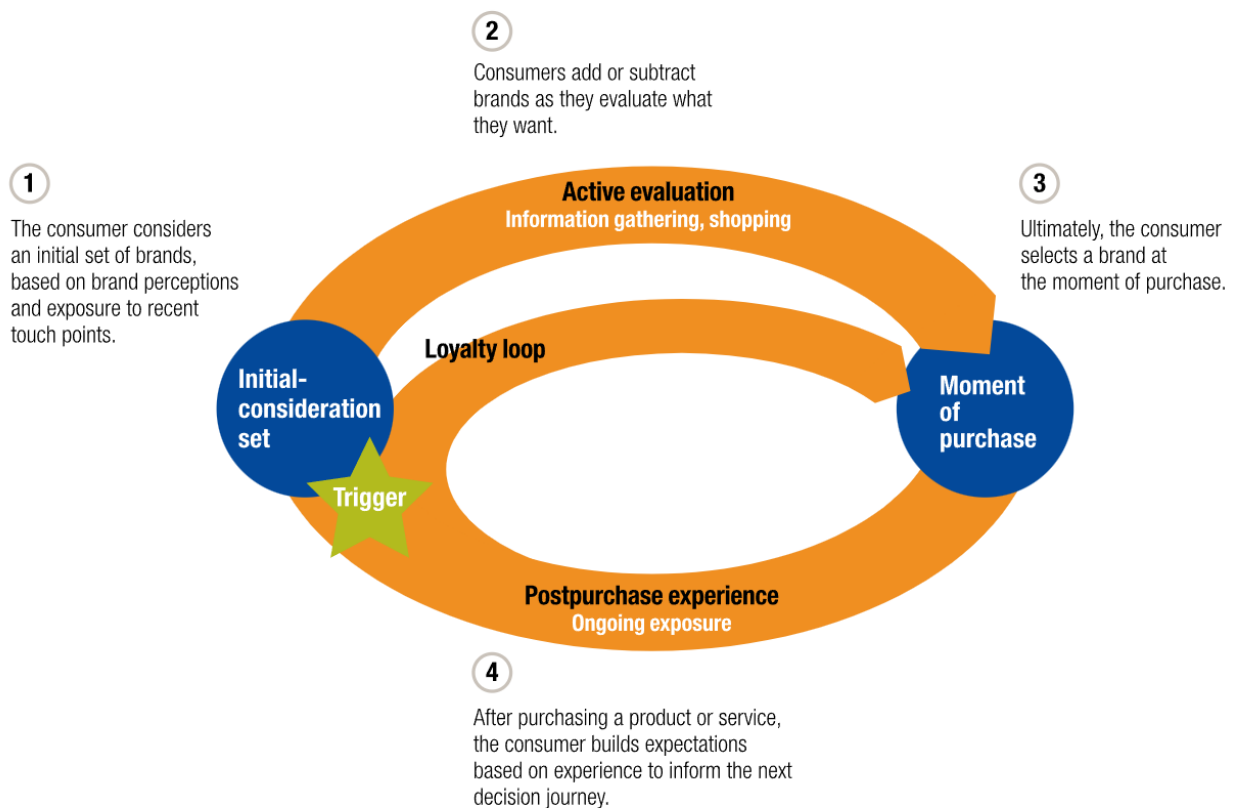


Figure 1 | McKinsey Consumer Decision Journey. Source: [McKinsey.com](https://www.mckinsey.com)

In this model, customers begin by considering a set of brands, products, or services based on their initial preferences and exposure to marketing efforts. As they move into the active evaluation stage, customers gather more information and expand or narrow down their choices. The moment of purchase represents the final decision to buy a specific product or service, while the post-purchase experience encompasses the customer's satisfaction, loyalty, and potential to become an advocate for the brand.

The McKinsey CDJ model emphasizes the importance of managing the entire customer journey to create a seamless experience that encourages brand loyalty and repeat purchases. In B2C markets, customers often make decisions more independently and have access to a wealth of information and resources to help them evaluate their options. This model highlights the role of marketing efforts in influencing customers throughout the journey and the need for brands to be present and provide value at every touchpoint.

In contrast, Gartner's B2B Buying Journey (see Figure 2) is centered around the unique characteristics of B2B markets, which often involve multiple decision-makers, a longer sales cycle, and more complex buying processes. Gartner's model consists of six stages: problem identification, solution exploration, requirements building, supplier selection, validation, and consensus creation (Gartner, 2019). . This framework emphasizes the potential collaborative and nonlinear nature of B2B buying journeys, as customers often revisit previous stages, consult with colleagues, and engage with multiple sources of information before reaching a consensus. Validation and consensus creation often occur as byproducts throughout activities in the problem identification, solution exploration, requirements building, and supplier selection stages.

Gartner’s framework highlights the importance of content throughout the B2B buyer journey, which can be utilized at multiple points leading up to a purchase decision.

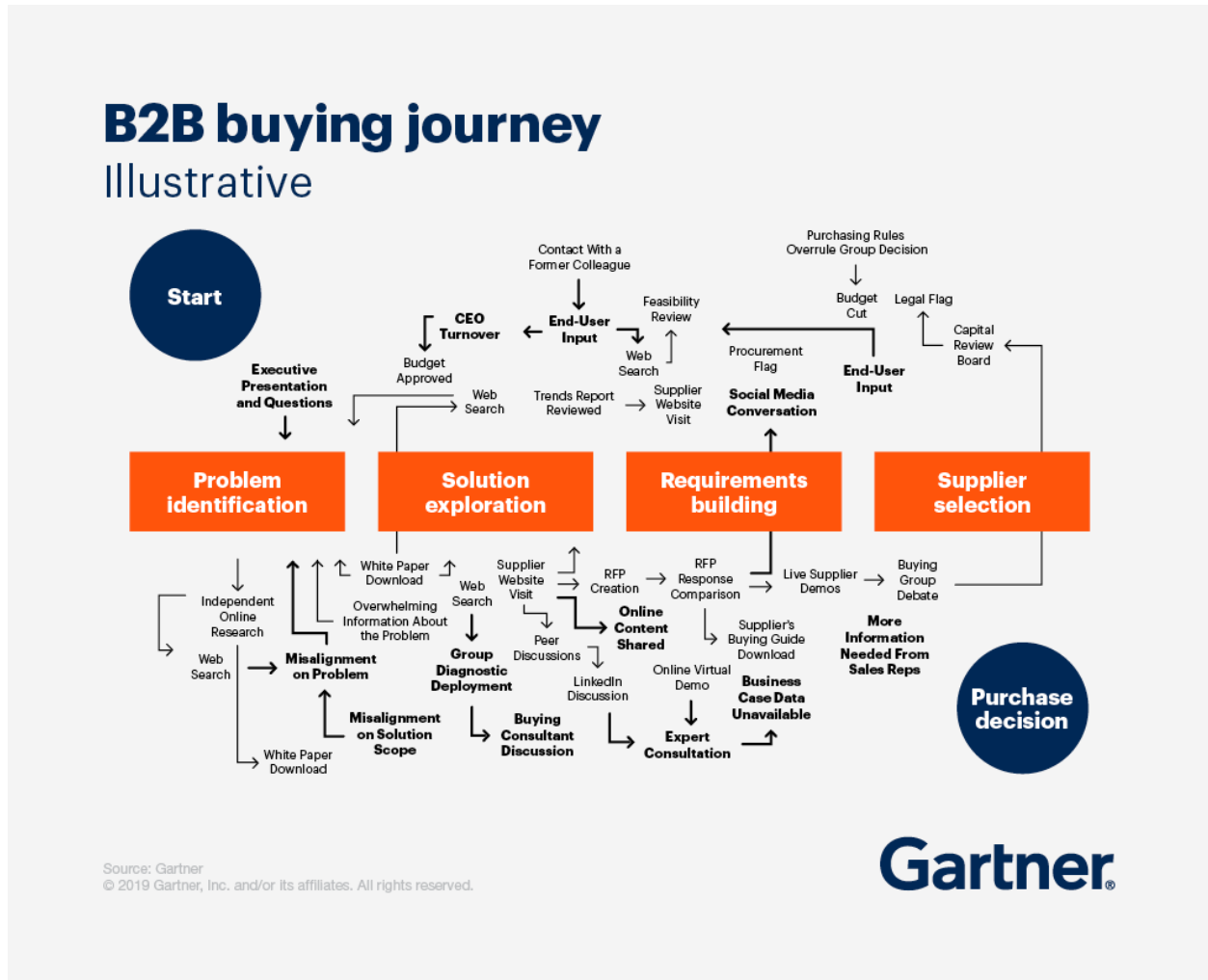


Figure 2 | Gartner’s B2B Buying Journey. Source: [Gartner.com](https://www.gartner.com)

B2B buyers typically have more specialized needs and require customized solutions, making the decision-making process more complex than in B2C markets. The Gartner model acknowledges the importance of understanding the unique dynamics of B2B markets, such as the

role of stakeholders, the need for tailored solutions, and the potential for longer negotiation periods. By addressing these distinct characteristics, the Gartner B2B Buying Journey framework helps organizations develop targeted marketing strategies that cater to the specific needs of B2B customers and foster long-term business relationships.

While both the McKinsey CDJ and Gartner's B2B Buying Journey frameworks aim to describe the buyer journey, they differ in their focus on B2C and B2B markets, respectively. The McKinsey CDJ model emphasizes the role of marketing in influencing customer decisions in B2C markets, while Gartner's framework highlights the complex and collaborative nature of B2B buying journeys, emphasizing the need for tailored strategies that address the unique dynamics of these markets.

## **Integrating Technical Expertise into the B2B Content Creation Process**

Technical expertise, in the context of B2B content marketing, refers to the specialized knowledge and skills possessed by subject-matter experts in a particular field or industry. These experts have a deep understanding of the technical aspects, trends, and challenges within their domain, making them invaluable resources for organizations looking to develop high-quality, relevant content for their target audience.

In the complex landscape of B2B marketing, as noted above through Gartner's B2B Buyer Journey, leveraging the technical expertise of subject-matter experts plays a critical role in building trust and credibility with potential buyers. B2B buyers often face unique challenges, requiring comprehensive and accurate information to make informed decisions. By showcasing

their subject-matter expertise, organizations can address the specific needs and pain points of B2B buyers, providing them with valuable insights and guidance throughout their buyer journey.

Furthermore, integrating expertise in content marketing can help organizations differentiate themselves from competitors (Handley & Chapman, 2012), as it demonstrates a deep understanding of the industry and the ability to provide solutions tailored to the needs of their audience. In a crowded marketplace, showcasing technical expertise can be a powerful way for organizations to stand out and position themselves as thought leaders in their respective fields.

## **Connecting the Content Creation Process to the B2B Buyer Journey**

The content creation process plays a pivotal role in addressing the unique characteristics and needs of the B2B buyer journey, which differs significantly from the B2C buyer journey. Longer sales cycles, complex decision-making processes, and involvement of multiple stakeholders in the B2B buyer journey requires a tailored approach to content marketing. By strategically aligning the content creation process with the various stages of the B2B buyer journey, organizations can develop targeted content that effectively showcases their technical expertise and supports decision-making.

One of the key distinctions between B2B and B2C buyer journeys lies in the level of detail and depth of information required by B2B buyers (Blythe, 2012). B2B buyers often need comprehensive, accurate, and technical information to make informed decisions, whereas B2C buyers typically rely on more general, easily digestible content. This difference highlights the

importance of incorporating technical expertise into the content creation process for B2B marketing.

To address the unique needs of the B2B buyer journey, the content creation process should take into account common stages associated with the B2C buyer journey, such as awareness, consideration, decision, and post-purchase support, as the typical content types associated with each of these stages will still be relevant. However, at each stage, organizations should identify the specific challenges and information needs faced by B2B buyers and create content that caters more specifically to these needs by integrating subject-matter expertise into the content. For example, during the awareness stage, educational content that introduces industry trends and insights incorporating the subject-matter expert's knowledge can help establish a foundation of trust and credibility. In the consideration stage, more in-depth content, such as case studies and whitepapers, can showcase the organization's technical expertise and demonstrate the value of their products or services.

Collaboration with subject-matter experts becomes particularly crucial in the B2B context, as these experts can provide the depth of knowledge and guidance required to support the complex decision-making process of B2B buyers. By involving subject-matter experts in the marketing content creation process, organizations can ensure that their content is both informative and engaging for their target audience.

## **A Proposed Framework for Technical Expertise Integration in B2B Content Marketing**

In order to effectively incorporate technical expertise into B2B content marketing, it is essential to develop a framework that focuses on the content creation process inclusive of the nonlinear

nature of the B2B buyer journey and its various aspects. By doing so, organizations can create valuable, targeted content that addresses the specific needs of their audience and supports decision-making throughout the buyer journey. This approach will enable organizations to leverage their subject-matter expertise in a way that resonates with their target audience and drives desired outcomes.

The proposed framework will consider several critical components in the content marketing process, including content strategy, content types and formats, content creation, content distribution and promotion, and content performance measurement. By systematically addressing these components, the framework aims to provide a comprehensive approach to incorporating technical expertise into content marketing.

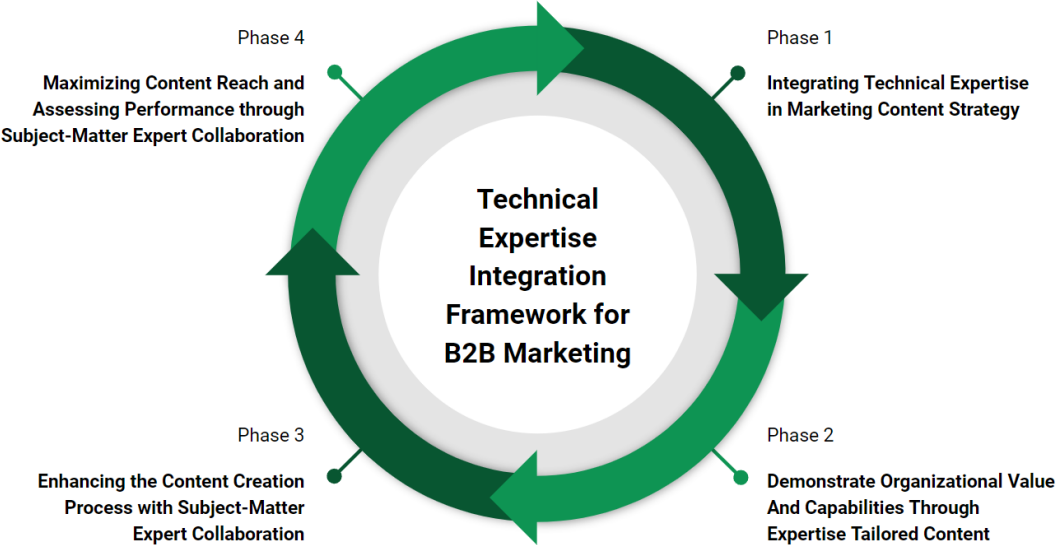


Figure 3 | Technical Expertise Integration Framework for B2B Marketing

First, the content strategy component will involve identifying target audience segments and their specific needs, defining content goals and objectives, and mapping technical expertise to these needs and objectives. This will enable organizations to create a strategic plan for developing content that effectively addresses the challenges faced by their target audience and showcases their technical expertise.

Second, the framework will consider various content types and formats that are relevant to the target audience, such as whitepapers, case studies, webinars, and blog posts. By incorporating technical expertise into these content types, organizations can provide in-depth information and insights that support the decision-making process.

Third, the content creation process will involve collaborating with subject-matter experts to ensure the accuracy and relevance of technical information, while also balancing this expertise with accessible language and presentation. This will help organizations create content that is both informative and engaging for their target audience.

Last, the framework will address content distribution and promotion, as well as content performance measurement. By identifying appropriate channels for content distribution and leveraging subject-matter experts' networks and authority, organizations can effectively reach a broader audience. Additionally, by defining key performance indicators (KPIs) and tracking content performance, organizations can adapt their content strategy and approach based on data and audience feedback.

## **Integrating Technical Expertise in Marketing Content Strategy Development and Execution**

Identifying target audience segments and their specific needs: Begin by conducting comprehensive market research to identify the various audience segments within your target market. Gain an understanding of their pain points, preferences, and the challenges they face related to the technical aspects of your industry. This will allow you to create detailed audience personas that include their specific technical needs and interests, serving as the foundation for your content strategy.

Defining content goals and objectives with technical expertise in mind: Establish clear content goals and objectives that align with your organization's overall marketing and business objectives, while also considering the role of technical expertise in achieving these goals. Examples of goals may include demonstrating thought leadership, providing solutions to technical problems, or helping customers make informed decisions based on your organization's technical knowledge.

With a clear understanding of your target audience's technical needs and objectives, identify the areas of technical expertise within your organization that can address these requirements and where along the buyer journey a B2B customer may encounter marketing materials. Collaborate with subject-matter experts to create a content strategy that addresses the most relevant topics and challenges faced by your target audience, effectively showcasing your organization's technical expertise.

## **Demonstrate Organizational Value And Capabilities Through Expertise**

### **Tailored Content**

Through collaboration with subject-matter experts within your organization—after mapping your organization’s technical expertise to your target customer’s needs—determine the most effective content formats for engaging your target audience and showcasing your organization's technical expertise. These formats may include whitepapers, case studies, webinars, blog posts, infographics, or videos. By selecting the appropriate content formats, you can optimize the delivery of your technical knowledge and better address the needs of your audience.

Ensure that your technical expertise is integrated into each content format in a way that effectively addresses your audience's needs and supports their decision-making process. This may involve:

- Including subject-matter experts' insights and knowledge in the form of interviews, quotes, or data within your content.
- Utilizing technical demonstrations or simulations to provide practical examples of your expertise in action.
- Presenting case studies that highlight your organization's technical capabilities and the solutions you have provided to customers.
- Offering webinars or workshops that allow your audience to interact with your subject-matter experts and gain a deeper understanding of the technical aspects of your industry.

By incorporating technical expertise into various content types, you can provide in-depth information and insights that support the decision-making process of your target audience, demonstrating your organization's value and capabilities.

## **Enhancing the Content Creation Process with Subject-Matter Expert**

### **Collaboration**

Establish a strong working relationship with your organization's subject-matter experts to ensure a seamless content creation process. Encourage open communication and brainstorming sessions to identify key topics and insights that will resonate with your target audience. Involving subject-matter experts early in the content creation process can lead to the development of more accurate, informative, and engaging content that showcases your organization's technical expertise.

Work closely with subject-matter experts to validate the accuracy of the technical information presented in your content. This collaboration will help identify potential inaccuracies or gaps in knowledge, ensuring that your content remains up-to-date and relevant to your target audience's needs. By maintaining the integrity of your technical content, you will build trust with your audience and position your organization as a reliable source of information. While showcasing your organization's technical expertise is essential, it is also crucial to make the content accessible and engaging for your target audience. Collaborate with subject-matter experts to translate complex technical concepts into plain language that can be easily understood by a broader audience. Additionally, consider utilizing visual aids, such as infographics or animations, to help explain intricate ideas in a more digestible manner. This approach will ensure that your

content effectively communicates your technical expertise while remaining engaging and relevant to your audience.

## **Maximizing Content Reach and Assessing Performance through Subject-Matter Expert Collaboration**

Collaborate with subject-matter experts to determine the most effective channels for distributing and promoting your content. By understanding where your target audience engages and consumes content, you can optimize your distribution strategy and increase the visibility of your technical expertise. These channels may include social media platforms, industry forums, email marketing campaigns, webinars, or conference presentations. Subject-matter experts can also leverage their professional networks and industry connections to help promote content, further extending its reach.

Encourage subject-matter experts to share and promote content within their professional networks, using their authority and credibility to enhance the visibility of your organization's technical expertise. By tapping into their connections, you can reach new audiences and increase the chances of your content being shared and discussed within industry circles, ultimately expanding your organization's influence. Pinpoint the most pertinent key-performance indicators (KPIs) for evaluating your content's performance. Ensuring that these KPIs correspond with your content goals and objectives, you may consider metrics such as engagement rates, content downloads, lead generation, or social media shares. By choosing KPIs that truly represent your content's intended results, you can efficiently gauge the influence of your technical expertise on your target audience.

Use the insights gained from content performance measurement and audience feedback to refine your content strategy and approach. This iterative process will enable your organization to continuously improve the way technical expertise is incorporated into content marketing, ensuring that you remain relevant and valuable to your target audience. Involving subject-matter experts in this ongoing process will help maintain the accuracy and relevance of your content, further strengthening your organization's credibility and authority in the industry.

## **Challenges and Opportunities of Adopting Framework**

Implementing the technical expertise integration framework may require a significant investment of time and resources. Subject-matter experts may have limited availability due to their core responsibilities, making it challenging to involve them consistently in the content marketing process. Additionally, organizations may need to invest in training content creators and marketing professionals to work effectively with subject-matter experts.

Striking the right balance between showcasing technical expertise and maintaining content that is accessible and engaging to the target audience can be challenging. Content creators must ensure that the technical information is accurate and relevant while also being presented in a manner that is easy to understand and digest for the intended audience. Assessing the impact of technical expertise on content performance and audience engagement can be complex. Identifying and tracking relevant KPIs, as well as gathering qualitative feedback from the target audience, may require significant effort and expertise in data analysis.

In terms of opportunities, by incorporating technical expertise into content marketing, organizations can establish themselves as credible and authoritative sources of information within their industry. This can help attract and retain customers, as well as increase brand awareness and reputation. Providing targeted, valuable content that addresses the specific needs and challenges of the target audience can lead to increased engagement and stronger customer relationships. By leveraging technical expertise in content marketing, organizations can better support their customers in the decision-making process and foster trust and loyalty.

Integrating subject-matter expertise into content marketing can set organizations apart from their competitors, providing a distinct competitive advantage. By offering in-depth insights and information that are not readily available elsewhere, organizations can position themselves as industry leaders and create a unique value proposition for their customers. Adopting the technical expertise integration framework encourages a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability. By regularly reviewing content performance and gathering feedback from the target audience, organizations can refine their content strategy and approach, ensuring they remain relevant and valuable to their customers. Involving subject-matter experts in this ongoing process helps maintain the accuracy and relevance of the content, further enhancing the organization's credibility and authority in the industry.

## **Recommendations for Organizations in B2B markets**

As B2B organizations consider implementing the technical expertise integration framework, it is crucial to begin with a thorough assessment of the current content marketing strategy and processes. This assessment should involve identifying strengths, weaknesses, and areas for

improvement. By understanding the current state of content marketing, organizations can better identify where to focus their efforts when incorporating subject-matter expertise. One critical step in the implementation process is to establish strong collaboration between content creators, marketing professionals, and subject-matter experts. This collaboration can be facilitated through regular meetings, workshops, or training sessions that foster open communication and understanding between the different parties involved. By creating an environment where subject-matter experts feel comfortable sharing their knowledge and insights, organizations can more effectively incorporate technical expertise into their content marketing efforts.

Another essential aspect of implementing this framework is developing a clear content strategy that outlines the goals and objectives for incorporating technical expertise. This strategy should include identifying target audience segments and their specific needs, as well as defining how subject-matter expertise can address these needs and support decision-making throughout the buyer journey. By developing a comprehensive content strategy, organizations can ensure that their efforts are aligned with their overall business objectives and focused on creating value for their customers.

In addition to developing a content strategy, organizations should also consider the various content types and formats that are most relevant and engaging for their target audience. This may involve exploring new formats, such as webinars, podcasts, or interactive content, as well as reevaluating existing content types to ensure they are effectively addressing the needs of the audience. By incorporating technical expertise into these content types, organizations can provide in-depth information and insights that support the decision-making process and enhance customer engagement. Organizations should also pay close attention to the content creation process, ensuring that subject-matter experts are involved in the development and review of

content. This collaboration is essential for maintaining the accuracy and relevance of technical information while also ensuring that the content remains accessible and engaging for the target audience. By working closely with subject-matter experts, content creators can strike the right balance between technical depth and audience accessibility.

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