

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATORS IN MARKETING:
SWITCHING ROLES AND CHANGING ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES
WHEN WORKING WITH CONTENT MARKETING

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents an alternate career path for technical communicators in the area of content marketing and expands on the ethical and goal-related issues associated with a career change to a marketing-focused role. Many of the skills necessary for technical communication are transferable to marketing communication roles; however, a successful career change requires that technical communicators understand how the ethical values and goals of marketing professionals can differ from those of technical communicators.

Through a detailed literature review and autoethnographic study, this thesis discusses the performance goals of marketing professionals to determine how these clash with those of technical communicators. This study also discusses the ethical values of technical communicators and marketing professionals, and how these values are shaped by their unique job functions. The overall goal is to determine how this affects the technical communicator working with content marketing.

After combining the data available in the literature and the data gathered from the autoethnographic study, this study suggests that due to the differing job functions and training received by technical communicators and marketing professionals, ethically charged situations and ethically questionable practices are likely to be viewed under different perspectives by each professional. This can lead to vastly different perspectives on a particular situation and result in the two groups having vastly different ideas in regard to how ethical-decision making should proceed.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Preface

This thesis is about new developments in the field of technical communication. In some industries, the role of the technical communicators melds with or even takes the place of the marketing communicator. This complicates the ethical issues faced by many technical communicators, including myself.

My first experience as a technical marketing communicator took place in early 2013, just weeks after being hired as the sole technical writer for an agricultural equipment manufacturing company. Though I am officially a technical writer, my position is housed in the company's marketing department, so I was informed from the start that I would be responsible for drafting a wide range of texts ranging from technical brochures and proposals, to magazine articles, e-learning courses, social media marketing messages and campaigns, ads and advertorials. Since the products and services the company provides are fairly technical, they chose to hire a technical writer rather than a marketing communications specialist due to a technical writer's ability to grasp technical content more easily and communicate to clients on a more direct and technical level.

During my second week at the job, I was tasked with writing a technical brochure to help the sales team promote a new irrigation product in California. Several pages with notes and data were placed on my desk and I was asked to highlight the key features and benefits of the product in a four-page brochure. As I looked over the new data and began drafting a brochure that would appeal to the owner of a large-scale farm, I noticed that the data pertaining to the sprinkler did not match previous company documents I had looked over. The flow rates, pressure range and throw distance for the product had a much wider range than previously stated.

I contacted my manager and asked if the data given to me was for another product or if the testing department's original data was incorrect. What I learned was that the data given to me combined the data (flow, pressure and distance throw) of two sprinklers, both of which would be promoted to the client, but only one of which would appear in the brochure. In short, though the brochure focused and displayed only one product, the data I was asked to use combined two products because it made the sprinkler appear more powerful. The sales manager would clarify that this data was the result of using two products together in a complete installation, but the document would not.

An ethical red flag instantly rose in my mind and though I was new to the company and the industry, I felt the need to protest this decision. I argued that the information in the document was confusing and potentially misleading, but was rebutted with the fact that the sales manager would clarify the data when talking to the potential client, so there was no need to worry. The sales manager would attend a meeting with 10 to 20 large-scale farmers and pass along the brochure to all of them, but there was no certainty that he would talk to each of them and clarify that the data was for two products. Our competitors could eventually acquire this brochure if they were also attending. Worse, if anyone bought that product based on the data provided and found that the product's performance did not match the claimed performance, there was a possibility of not only gaining an unsatisfied customer, but also encountering a potential legal and fiscal issues.

After discussing the points above with my manager, it was determined that I should add a small disclaimer under the data stating: "The following flow ranges, pressure ranges and diameters were obtained by combining the standard arm impact sprinkler with the flexible arm sprinkler in a solid set installation." The notification would appear on the document two point sizes smaller than the rest of the text.

At the time, I was disappointed in how the issue was ultimately handled; however, it prompted me to think about the roles, goals and values of technical communicators and how the ideals taught in academia may continually struggle against the expectations and goals of company decision makers. Scholarly works frequently emphasize that the technical writer is commonly relegated to a supporting role in a company, and is thus obligated to follow managerial decisions without being provided the opportunity to voice concerns or opinions or make decisions. For this reason, I was thankful for the opportunity to voice my concerns and see them considered despite a less-than-ideal result. Given that I was now working for the marketing team however, I began to wonder how my values, work and concerns would be regarded now that I had entered a department with goals and values that could differ greatly from those of technical communicators.

Background

Technical communicators are not new to marketing. When companies are involved in the sale of technical products, such as robotics, plastics, or machinery, it may be beneficial to include technical writers in the marketing team due to their ability to perceive the impact and significance of a technology while not losing sight of the market the technology is intended for (Harner et al. 3). According to Harner et al. technical marketing communicators focus on creating and coordinating technology-oriented communication in a strategic fashion to accomplish marketing goals. It is not a discipline focused on how to create technical documentation, press releases and usability studies, but on how to coordinate the use of these tools to achieve marketing goals (14 – 15).

However, recent trends in marketing have opened the door for technical communicators and other communication professionals to join marketing teams in different ways than as

described by Harner et al. Both technical and marketing communications require a similar, transferable skill set that includes the ability to conduct an audience analysis, a needs analysis, the ability to research subjects, and the ability to write clearly and concisely to deliver a key message. This opens the door for technical writers to join marketing teams in technical industries as content writers or as marketing content developers.

Partially because of the increased use of web search and the ability to filter content, consumers are growing resistant to traditional unsolicited or outbound means of contact, such as direct advertisements (Schultz et al. 4). Many consumers mentally and instinctively block out this sort of media or find ways to avoid these tactics. Most consumers are exposed to nearly two-thousand online ads alone in just one month for example, and have become increasingly blind to ads. Thus, click rates have declined to a near 0.1% in select cases (Martin 70).

Consumers are open to marketing communication and marketing messages however, if they have control over when it is delivered. Schultz et al. explain that this new inbound form of marketing gives the consumer increased power in defining the marketplace and directly collides with commonly taught outbound forms. Consumers now have access to massive amounts of information about industries as a whole, brands, and product, and commonly base any purchasing decisions based on electronic word-of-mouth (Shultz et al. 4-7).

Since consumers are frequently searching for information, marketers have responded by providing ways to be core sources of information for consumers – an initiative commonly referred to as content marketing. According to Joe Pulizzi, author of “Managing Content Marketing,” this marketing technique focuses on the constant creation and distribution of relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire and engage a defined target audience. Nothing is overtly sold to the audience; rather, the audience subscribes to the content source and is given the

information and content they value with the hope that they will respond by awarding a company or brand their business.¹ While there is some room for self-advertisement, the goal of the publishing efforts should be to inform and aid consumers. Marketing teams target consumers and communicators attract them by delivering content that answers common questions and appeals to their needs. As needs and questions change, so does the content and the mediums used to deliver it. It is a strategy based on the idea that if consumers are given truly valuable content and information, they will learn to trust the source and develop loyalty to the source.

Marketing professionals are now concentrating their efforts on projects such as updating blogs where general information is shared and discussion is encouraged, publishing articles with tips and recommendations on subjects appealing to the target audience, developing web spaces for education and information sharing, and creating multimedia that not only entertains but also informs. To achieve these goals, marketing departments must have someone capable of researching, drafting and publishing information that fills consumer's needs through mediums they trust or frequent. In technical industries where products are directly marketed to end-users, technical communicators experienced in understanding and advocating for consumer needs may be the most apt at performing these tasks.

The tactics chosen by the marketing team or technical communicator may vary depending on the target audience for the message (general consumers or businesses), but the strategy remains the same.

¹ Joe Pulizzi's blog, Content Marketing Institute, expands on this: <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/what-is-content-marketing/>

Scope and Rationale

Whether in a support position or as a strategist and decision maker, technical communicators frequently find themselves as information gateways for users. At times, the technical communicator works as an accommodator, extracting information quickly and easily by accommodating technology to the user so they may complete their “main goal” (McBride 7-8). At other times, technical communicators may find themselves as guides not just to technology, but to broader issues that can be resolved with the help of technology (Johnson-Eiola 245 – 258). Either way, the technical communicator has a role in educating consumers on the basic functions of technologies or on ideal ways to achieve broader goals using technological tools.

As a gateway of information, the communicator has control over the information available and may also have control over the way the information is disseminated, when it is disseminated and even to whom – putting the technical communicator in a position of power over the reader. Though this practice is common and entirely legitimate, when the technical communicator is engaged in marketing communications, ethical problems may arise.

In relocating the value of work, Johnson-Eiola refers to “reviewers who misunderstand their responsibilities or work” and commonly force writers to include (or remove) content whether or not it is beneficial to the audience (247). Similar issues may surface when the technical communicator is part of a marketing team. The purpose of marketing is to ensure profitability by matching a company’s products or services to consumers. Consumers are persuaded into believing they need a product or service. Because of this, there is an immense pressure to present information exclusively in a positive way and focus communication efforts on the most likely potential customers. This can lead to situations in which writers may feel

pressured to hide information from readers in an attempt to downplay the flaws of a product or service, produce content that disregards views and options that do not fit with the company, even favor certain audiences and their needs when writing and designing documents. On top of this, audiences are frequently generalized or segmented in ways technical communicators are unaccustomed to. For the technical communicators who are focused on helping their audience better understand a product or service or better understand their ultimate goals and how technology fits in with these, this change in work expectations may seem strange and perhaps unethical at times.

Though technical and marketing communication require similar skills, and writing marketing content for technical products may seem very similar to technical writing, marketing and technical communication are two different fields with differing performance goals. The goal of the marketer is to attract customers and increase sales, while the goal of technical communication is to help users understand technical information and how their main goals can be achieved with the help of technology. This means that though a technical communicator will be producing technical documents and other deliverables associated with their field, they will be doing so while adhering to the goals and ethical norms of marketing.

In this thesis, I will discuss the unique ethical principles in marketing versus those of technical communication to see how the ethical dilemmas technical communicators may face are framed in the mind of a technical communicator and in the mind of marketing managers who hire them for content marketing initiatives. I intend to answer three questions:

1. Do the performance goals of marketing collide with those of technical communication?
2. Do these overall goals have any impact on the ethical principles of each field?
3. How does this affect the technical communicator working with content marketing?

Organization of Chapters

The remainder of this thesis will be divided into four chapters: Chapter Two reviews literature to date relating to both marketing and technical communication and will focus on comparing and contrasting these fields. First, I review the role of technical communicators in industries and the goals of technical communication overall. I reference how the work of technical communicators is frequently viewed as a support role and how communicators have the potential to be viewed as “symbolic analytic workers” when we reframe their work as a rhetorical and persuasive endeavor. Next, I go over ethical theories commonly discussed in technical communication and research on ethical decision-making pertaining to the field. I then discuss the role of marketing in a company and the goals of marketing professionals. This will be accompanied by an overview of content marketing and inbound marketing goals along with examples to help clarify what this emerging trend looks like in practice. I then end the literature review with an overview of ethical concerns discussed in marketing and technical communication and move on to discuss the institutional pressures professionals in each field face when taking decisions.

In comparing, contrasting and providing definitions for each field, it will be easier to comprehend why certain situations may seem ethically questionable to the technical communicator creating content marketing materials. It will also reveal the reason the marketing profession may or may not be accepting of situations and actions that may seem unethical or immoral to the technical communicator.

Chapter Three is presented as an autoethnography. I begin by presenting a brief overview of content marketing in the agriculture industry in which I am employed along with an overview of the agriculture industry’s target audience to define the target of content marketing efforts. I

then briefly describe my role as a technical communicator and content developer, and provide a variety of examples to highlight ethical issues I have personally seen or personally experienced. These focus on issues I have encountered as a content developer, ranging from the omission of information, the reluctance to admit alternate options and product deficiencies, data misrepresentation, misleading designs, and unequal treatment for international customers. While these are issues common to technical communicators in other fields, the difference in this case is that these are present in content marketing documentation that can be easily confused with technical documentation or in materials that many times mimic the design and tone of journalist articles and editorials, content that many readers take as fact. Ethical dilemmas in content marketing will be defined and explained from the perspective of marketing professionals and then from my perspective as a technical communicator taught to consider the ethical implications of my work according to the ideologies described in the literature review.

Chapter Four recaps the similarities and differences in ethical ideals and behaviors and goes over why technical communicators should assert their ethical ideals as symbolic analytic workers. I go over how the perspective of the technical communicator could shed light on different ways of handling these situations for both the benefit of the business and customers. I then discuss the challenges to asserting ethical values and go over possibilities to do so and how this may be accomplished.

Finally, I conclude this thesis by summarizing the issues discussed, explaining this study's limitations and providing suggestions and recommendations for further research and study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

When looking over the core competencies of marketing and technical communication, I recognize that these two fields share similar theories to a certain extent. Technical communication and marketing professionals (particularly those in marketing communications) both understand theories of audience and needs analysis, project management and publication processes; study concepts relating to the communication process; and frequently find themselves in contact with or studying their target audience. This may be one of the reasons technical communicators may feel comfortable migrating to marketing communications or working in a hybrid of the two fields.

Despite some similarities in work tasks and a number of transferable communication skills, however, it is important to highlight the differences between each field, particularly the key differences between each profession's role and function within a business. Though it could be argued that the overall goal of both technical communication and marketing communication is to inform and persuade an audience using rhetorical means, I argue that the differences in roles and goals for each field affect the way each professional views the ethics of communication, interprets ethical theories, and makes ethical decisions.

The Role of Technical Communicators and Marketers

Technical communicators sometimes have difficulty describing their role, function and goals in a business environment. For years, technical writers resisted the perception that their work involves merely a transfer of self-evident facts to a clear, organized structure and have sought to promote the idea that their work is in fact, rhetorical and analytical; “a persuasive version of experience” (Miller 49-52). Unlike marketing communicators, who are clearly known

to use rhetoric and persuasion to communicate, technical communicators perhaps struggle due to their connection to science and due to the nature of the documents they produce. It is easy to believe that a document or product made for the sake of informing and educating audiences about technology merely re-writes or re-phrases that which scientists and engineers take as facts. However, this does not take into consideration the idea that “science is through and through, a rhetorical endeavor” (Miller 52) and it reinforces the incorrect notion that communicators are nothing more than workers with knowledge of mechanical writing skills (Dombrowski “Post Modernism” 174). Informing and educating readers about technology is no less rhetorical and persuasive than the promotion of a brand, product or service.

In “Relocating the Value of Work,” Johnson-Eilola further highlights the rhetorical nature of technical communication by reframing the role of professionals as symbolic-analytic workers. This reframes the value of technical communicators by defining their core skills in abstract thinking, identification, experimentation, collaboration and system thinking. These skills are then used to mediate between the audience’s needs for usability and efficiency and their need to better understand their larger goals and the social context of those goals (Johnson-Eilola 245). This changes the role and function of the technical communicator from a technology accommodator to a communicator that can empower an audience by disseminating information and educating audiences not on what technology can do, but what technology can do for them. The technical communicator is then a source of audience or user empowerment and an information broker with the overall goal of providing audiences with the guidance and information to accommodate technology to their unique needs.

Interestingly, marketing professionals also function as information brokers at times, and provide audiences with information and guidance on technology and products; however, this is

not the end goal for marketers. According to Philip Kotler, marketers work to create and deliver customer value and satisfaction at a profit (7). The field's core goal is to increase profits, but the function and role of marketers is not to sell – it is to communicate to audiences a product or technology's superior value and deliver satisfaction in a form that matches audiences with products and services that fit their needs or wants (8-10). Much like technical communicators who identify audience needs and goals and then accommodate technology to these, marketers identify audience needs and goals and communicate how a technology or product offers a solution to these needs by communicating the value of a technology or service.

In some industries, it is not the marketers themselves who drafts and develops the message that reaches audiences; however, those who do craft and publish their own messages will often complete some tasks common to technical communicators. This includes identifying needs and audiences, developing communicative strategies based on the needs identified and company objectives, and identifying the appropriate communication channels or media (Harner et al. 51). Traditionally, marketing communicators have reached audiences through direct marketing tactics such as unsolicited advertising and news releases, but these outbound methods are now being replaced by inbound, customer-controlled systems (Schultz et al. 4).

Audiences have developed methods of blocking unsolicited marketing communication, whether through the ability to intuitively block content based on its appearance and location or through actual technology to help them achieve this. Partially because of modern technology, they have ways to access massive amounts of information and seek out solutions to their needs or wants. For the technical communicator, this represents a grand opportunity to make information dissemination easier as audiences now have greater access to information and have the opportunity to consume it in different mediums such as text, audio, video or a combination of

these. As audiences gain more control over their communication channels, technical communicators can more effectively reach their goals of matching needs with solutions. In contrast, this represents a challenge for marketing communicators.

While both marketing and technical communicators match solutions to needs, the technical communicator does not promote these solutions to audiences that have not solicited the information. Marketing communicators have the added challenge of promoting solutions (in the form of products and services) to audiences that may not be aware of them. Due to this new control and power audiences have, marketing communicators have had to shift tactics and find ways to get their message through the filters that audiences have created. For many, this solution comes in the form of content marketing.

As previously stated, content marketing is a tactic that focuses on attracting and engaging audiences by providing them with relevant and valuable content in the hope that audiences will develop loyalty toward the content creator or simply gain awareness of the source (usually a company or brand) that provided the content. While the overall goal is still to increase profits, the role of content marketers is similar to that of the technical communicator: accommodate technology or products to the needs and goals of audiences and provide guidance on how to achieve these overall goals.

This strategy first emerged in 1895, when the John Deere Company began publishing a magazine for farmers titled *The Furrow*. Originally, the company hoped to promote their products by using the magazine as a sort of buyer's guide. This approach was unsuccessful as farmers refused to buy a publication that only attempted to sell them more products. Editors realized that their target audience would be more interested in purchasing the magazine and reading John Deere messages if they instead communicated about topics farmers cared about,

such as how to manage common pests and the benefits of certain farming practices. John Deere then recruited journalists, storytellers and designers to provide them with articles focused on these topics. The new approach was successful and became instrumental in making John Deere one of the most trusted companies in agriculture to date. Their magazine is still in publication and is considered one of the most trusted sources of general agricultural information.

A more current example of content marketing would be Articulate e-learning Heroes. Articulate is a company that provides e-learning authoring software and has managed to develop a loyal customer base and a large volume of inbound leads through content marketing. The company has created a forum community, E-learning Heroes, where staff and users can share content about designing and developing e-learning courses. The content in the community includes ‘how to’ text and video tutorials for the software, downloads to help their target audiences achieve their e-learning goals, as well as a larger body of tutorials on developing e-learning courses in general. These resources can be used by those who do not own their software. They also provide actual users with guidance on how to achieve their broader overall goals by providing context to solutions and explaining how their software can help them achieve these goals in various ways.²

In “Relocating the Value of Work”, Johnson-Eilola provides an example of a company that has developed a word-processing program and explains how communicators should not aim simply to produce a manual that covers local program functions. Instead, they should work to create a document that not only supports the use of the tool, but educates users on the contexts in which the software can be used. Perhaps unknowingly, Johnson-Eilola is advocating for a document that modern marketing departments may describe as a product of content marketing. If

² See <http://www.articulate.com/rapid-elearning/> and <http://community.articulate.com/> to view some of the resources provided.

this were an online guide for example, audiences would encounter this webpage while looking for information on the context in which the software would be used, such as to write a proposal. They would willingly absorb the company's message while looking for products or services that help them resolve a need and may be inclined to subscribe to this source of information. They may even purchase products from this source at some point in the future because the company not only sells a product as a solution, but also provides invaluable information.

Looking at the end-products produced by content marketing efforts, it is apparent that many of these resemble documents produced by technical communicators: guides, tutorials, articles explaining conceptual information or educating on larger user goals, informational websites, among others. Developing these requires a thorough understanding of how users think (usability) as well as an understanding of the technology or products audiences will use. Because of this, it is not surprising to see technical communicators taking up jobs as content marketing writers or content developers in technology-based companies.

As stated earlier, technical communicators working in marketing is not an entirely new phenomenon; however, becoming involved in marketing activities by producing quality, informational content similar to content already developed in technical communication departments is a new and intriguing opportunity. Due to the marketing's new focus on informational content, this would provide communicators with the chance to work as symbolic analytic workers, reaching out to audiences by aiding them with larger rhetorical and social contexts (what Johson-Eilola describes as their real work) and allowing them to become empowered by subordinating technology, not the user.

Despite these opportunities, it is important to remember that content marketing is still a marketing tactic and the overall goal of this tactic is the build brand awareness, increase leads

and generate sales. If a technical communicator enters a marketing department as a content developer, it should be no surprise that taking this job requires a change in mindset when it comes to understanding one's role, function and goal in a business. This change in mindset may in turn affect the way the technical communicator writes, and cause points of contention over the manner audiences are treated and with the manner in which decisions are made.

In short, because marketing communication's goals differ from technical communicator's, and because marketing is taking up the challenge of attracting and persuading audiences primarily for the sake of profit, technical communicators working in marketing could potentially face ethical dilemmas on the job when presented with values and ideals foreign to them.

Ethics in Technical Communication

Before discussing any examples or events that may cause contention, it is important to discuss what technical communicators as a field define as ethical. The discussion of ethical behavior and workplace incidents involving ethical decision-making are common in academia, but it is important to understand why technical communicators carry ethical responsibility, as well as the common theories and ideals communicators share, before considering how our role in the workplace affects our ethical decision-making. Though a variety of factors – such as workplace culture – ultimately affect the decision-making process, understanding the ethical theories shared by academics and espoused in technical communication education helps communicators “articulate what makes a particular ethical judgment right [for us], that is, the ground for [our] ethical judgment” (Dombrowski “Ethics” 3).

Technical communicators have the responsibility of understanding how technology and science influence society in order to communicate about them effectively. As symbolic analytic

workers, they also have the added responsibility of understanding how science and technology are socially constructed, how individual cultures use science and technology to create facts out of assumptions, how messages will be interpreted in different cultures and contexts, and how outside pressures and expectations influence the way they communicate about these subjects. The work of technical communicators is complex, creative and rhetorical. Though many would like to think that technical communication is simply the dissemination of universally agreed upon facts, all communication is crafted according to the values of the communicator and will likely be urging of a point of view a particular culture defines as fact. This opens technical communicator's work to ethical scrutiny because it places communicators in a position of power over audiences.

Dombrowski explains the ethical responsibility of technical communicators in more detail in "Post Modernism as the Resurgence of Humanism in Technical Communication Studies." In explaining the rhetoric of science, he highlights that science is in fact subjective and filled with socially constructed truths. Communication about science is produced and reproduced in a particular culture – a culture that is known to "disprivilege" other sorts of knowledge and expects communication to accommodate audiences to science and technology (170-172).

Technical communicators can chose to view their work in a supporting role and can chose to grant technology "autocratic authority" by subscribing to the positivistic view of science. However, this is an ethically irresponsible decision because it rejects the notion that technical communicators are humanistic and rhetorical workers who have a responsibility to act as a sort of liaison between a culture that grants authority to opinions under the guise of objectivity, and the audience that expects to learn about science and technical subjects without

being restricted (174-178). Technical communicators have a responsibility to interpret “facts” without being clouded by the values and assumptions of their corporate culture.

Though it is clear that technical communicators carry plenty of ethical responsibility, defining the ethical values of technical communicators is a more daunting task. Groups such as the Society of Technical Communicators (STC), the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) and the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW) have tried to define their values by drafting guidelines for communicators and professionals that vaguely define the values of those who work with and communicate about technology. The STC for example, defines its ethical principles as legality, honesty, confidentiality, honesty, quality, fairness and professionalism.

Many scholars have stated that technical communication as a profession requires a set code of ethic for moral guidance and to help define the field’s values; however Dragga states that “a code of conduct that tries only to detail ethical and unethical behavior has to achieve a virtually impossible level of specificity to be genuinely instructive” (174). For this reason, the STC’s ethical principles read as legal requirements and simply reiterate the basic principles of the profession: that the technical communicator will communicate with “conciseness, clarity, coherence, and creativity, striving to meet the needs of those who use our products and services” (STC.org).

Ethical decision-making is steeped in context and influenced by a variety of ideological principles. This explains in part why most professional technical communicators simply adhere to their own set of personal ethics and the ethics of the environment they are in to make any sort of judgment call. In determining what is ethical and what moves ethical decision-makers, we might do well in looking past these codes and guidelines and instead focus on analyzing the

ethical theories and ideologies commonly used by technical communicators when debating the ethicality of a decision.

Most ethical decision makers will probably agree with Aristotle in that ethics is a subject without clear-cut answers. It is impossible to develop an algorithm for ethics or an instruction booklet because each particular ethical dilemma can only be resolved and analyzed by looking at the context of the situation. These decision-makers might also agree with the notion that ethics is associated with the character and behavior of the individual, on developing good character traits and being able to determine what constitutes ideal behavior, as well as developing a sense of morality according to Aristotelian virtues (Dragga "A Question of Ethics" 162). However, not all ethical decision-makers will agree with Aristotle's view of virtue-based judgment.

Many technical communication scholars describe ethical-decision making in technical communication as being influenced most by three principle theories: the utilitarian (goal-based) theory, the deontological (duty-based) theory, and the virtuous (rights based) theory commonly associated with Aristotle and modern ethical theories of care. This essentially gives technical communicators three ways to look at a situation. A question of ethics can be analyzed by weighing the consequences of an action rather than the action itself, the motive driving the decision-making rather than the consequence, or by determining what action would result in preserving the rights of others (Sims 284-286).

In *Ethics in Technical Communication*, Dombrowski remarks that technical communication is a field that emphasizes usefulness as a core goal. Therefore it seems only natural to look at utilitarianism as one of the ethical ideologies technical communicators could adhere to, given that it emphasizes just that. Utilitarianism is an ideology concerned with actions and results. Perhaps most striking about utilitarianism is how well it fits with science and

technology. The theory espouses a sort of algorithm or calculation for ethical decision-making, focused on comparing the benefits and costs of a situation and selecting the outcome that produces the largest intrinsic good or where happiness is maximized (54).

Unlike ideologies of virtue or care that focus on moral character, utilitarianism is an ideology focused on behavior and how to negotiate between “the moral perils of rival obligations and ambiguous consequences” (Dragga “A Question of Ethics” 163). It can be described as the way to achieve a common good or as a way to make the largest amount of people happy, but it can also be described as a dangerous ideology that can be twisted to ethical egoism.

Dombrowski explains some of the dangers with this ideology by pointing out that utilitarianism can lend itself to a devaluing of human life and difficult questions of who is actually being considered when determining the greater good. A company, for example, can define human life in dollars and cents when conducting a cost-benefit analysis and limit results and consequences to those that provide the greatest good to company stakeholders (*Ethics in Technical Communication* 55). A company could determine that protecting its own assets and employees brings a greater good than taking precautions to ensure the lives of a few.

Technical communicators may chose to move away from ethical decision-making focused on consequence however and instead focus on ethical obligations or moral duty. Deontological ideologies take away the sentimental aspect from morality and focus on abstract reasoning. The ideology emphasizes social obligations and states that ethical decisions should be made taking our duties and obligations into consideration as well as motives behind any action, regardless of competing interests and consequences (Dombrowski “Ethics in Technical Communication” 51-53). A technical communicator thinking deontologically though, may come

to question the moral virtue of an action given that moral duty may be defined differently in various cultures.

Finally, technical communicators may also subscribe to an ethics of care. This ideology borrows from the Aristotelian ideology of ethics of virtue and emphasizes “concern for the good of the others in the light of the particular demands of a situation and of the individual” (Thomas 134). Essentially, it rejects the inflexible application of ethics and emphasizes taking context and circumstances into consideration for more flexible ethical decision making focused on preserving the rights of others and other egalitarian principles.

With these three ethical ideologies in mind, we can then look at technical communicators in a professional environment and analyze how the influence of cultural expectations, performance goals, supervisors and co-workers, and the communicator’s role affects their ethical ideology and decision-making process.

In “A Question of Ethics,” Dragga remarks that most technical communicators make moral choices in the workplace based on feelings, intuition, conscience and the moral guidance of colleagues and supervisors (167). According to his findings, there is no single or consistent process of making an ethical decision; rather, issues are discussed with various people in the same culture and ideals are reinforced or challenged by others in this culture (168). This implies that the technical communicator will commonly allow his ethical values to be dictated by whatever ideology the company culture chooses, be it an ethical culture based on care and virtue, or one based on utilitarianism or deontology. Sadly, practicing technical communicators do not often look to their discipline for ethical guidance and technical communication as a field has still been unable to clearly define ethics (178).

The issue of ethics is further complicated by the communicator's relationship with his or her audience and the debate of where the technical communicator's loyalties should lie.

Technical communicators must meet the needs of diverse audiences while juggling the need to represent corporate interests as well as their own personal investment. According to some authors, the communicator's audience is the judge of what is ethical, implying that the technical communicator is meant to retain his or her loyalty to end-users and the company's target audience; however, this point of view disregards the technical communicator's role and duty to represent his employer and protect the employer's interests as well (McBride 3).

In "Owning Corporate Texts," Dorothy Winsor comments on the ethical dilemmas of technical communicators by discussing the unfortunate fact that though technical communicators are rhetorical, symbolic analytic workers, they do not fully own the texts they draft. Technical communicators are responsible for representing an audience's best interests, but they are also expressing words and ideas that represent their employer and a corporation as a whole, thus borrowing the authority of their employer (180). The communicators must negotiate the meaning of technology by taking into consideration the opinions of employers and the needs of audiences, as well as their own personal judgment as professionals.

Because of these at times conflicting interests and the fact that communicators may not fully own the texts they produce, a variety of ethical dilemmas may present themselves in the workplace, including: the push to include false impressions, imprecise language such as abstractions and euphemisms, omitting information, providing misleading information, deemphasizing information and conducting "no fault writing" (Sims 288-289). These issues all disrupt the technical communicator's duty to act as a sender of information, as an encoder, as an accommodator of technology, a knowledgeable professional and as an interpreter (McBride 5).

While these are all ethical issues and points of concern for all communicators (including marketing communicators), we cannot assume that these issues will be handled the same or considered equally problematic under the perception of marketing ethics. After all, “we cannot assume that one group’s judgment represents a universally agreed-upon ethical perspective” (McBride 3).

Ethics in Marketing

Ethics in marketing may seem like a contradiction or an impossible feat to individuals unfamiliar with business ethics and the role of marketing professionals in general. This belief is reinforced when even marketing scholars admit that marketing practices have resulted in various negative social consequences, including increased materialism, social competitiveness, envy, and cultural imperialism. The field has also been plagued by issues such as the creation of artificial needs, the promotion of dangerous products to vulnerable groups and intrusive and deceptive advertising. However, some scholars believe that as marketing shifts toward building and maintaining relationships, ethically honest and socially responsive marketing will be attainable (Kliatchko 84 - 85).

When we look at content marketing, it is possible to see a new form of marketing that is indeed honest and socially responsive. It seems to borrow from a service-dominant logic of marketing and marketing ethics, one that is founded on the premise that a customer focused, service centered view, in-tune with consumer values, will lead to economic success (Williams et al. 452). Consumers have access to the truth through the Internet and are becoming increasingly vigilant of corporate activity and values, so a shift toward more honest and ethical marketing is only natural, says William et al.

Many scholars also believe that viewing marketing practices as just another tool for profit gains is strictly unethical and amoral. In *Ethics in Marketing*, Smith and Quelsh state that some marketers believe ethical principles conflict with the function of companies in a capitalist economy; however, “unethical marketing contradicts the social role of a firm” (5). According to the authors, business is integral to society, its activities and values, which means that trust, fairness, honesty and respect should be key values in any business. Though some marketers may argue that the purpose of any business is to increase profits, that any dubious marketing practices can be justified and rationalized by proclaiming consumers should be more responsible, or that negative consequences were avoided, the authors also state that “if not greater purpose can be discerned or justified, business cannot morally justify its existence” (6). Their core argument for ethical behavior and rejecting ideals of value-neutral business is that in the long term, these ideals will cause consumers to go elsewhere, may cause the company to encounter legal opposition, and will change the overall culture of the organization to one of competition, responsibility deflection, and a “dog-eat-dog mentality” (8).

While this shift toward more ethical practices is commendable, it appears to highlight a strong component of what guides ethical decision-making in this field: *consequences*. Unlike technical communication scholars who emphasize utilitarianism, deontology and theories of care and virtue, marketing and business ethics rarely discuss ethics of virtue (Williams et al. 19). Marketing professionals, like technical communicators, generally adhere to corporate policies and business ethics when making decisions. However, decisions are largely chosen based on two principles: deontological principles and utilitarian principles. Marketing activities are judged by their foreseeable and potentially serious effect on individuals and/or their foreseeable and potentially serious consequences for individuals (Williams et al. 20).

On the other hand, scholars such as Martin et al. argue that ethical decision-making in marketing is largely guided by social norms and institutional expectations on behalf of consumers. Marketing professionals are driven to conform to the norms of the organizational identify they work for, and ethical marketing can stem from marketers and companies that truly wish to put people first and serve consumers. For many others though, ethical behavior is an “attractive source of differentiation that garners a powerful and positive market response” (575). Businesses are noticing that their potential clients increasingly care about the company’s behavior and ethics, which has made some groups publically advocate ethical causes or change their operational practices to increase their standing with the public; however, many business only make weak gestures toward meeting the basic standards for acceptable behavior (576 - 577).

To understand how ethics is regarded and discussed among marketing scholars and professionals, we should then look at the various ethical models generated and shared in the field. According to Dinah Payne and Milton Pressley, marketing professionals would benefit from a single code of ethics to follow, but they remark that this is a difficult task given the various models developed. One of the more popular ethical models in marketing is the Hunt-Vitell model, which presents four different factors affecting decision-making: cultural environment, industry environment, organizational environment and personal experience. The model presents the influences behind any ethical decision-making and divide outcomes into three possible options: punitive action, non-punitive action and no action (Vitell et al. 4-5). The model unites deontological norms and analysis with utilitarian analysis to explain how ethical judgments are made (Payne et al. 57).

Other ethical models discussed by scholars include the golden rule, ethical models based on what the public views as ethical, deontology and utilitarianism, and models based on inter-organizational factors. In general, the models all include similar basic ideals such as deontological values of duty, recognition of duties owed to stakeholders, adherence to efficiency, legal and moral accountability, honesty, adherence to one's own norms and professional conduct and a desire to avoid harm (Payne 57 - 59). The majority of the ethical models created center on making judgments based on the moral or ethical sensitivity of the individual or business, and on the consideration of various solutions and the associated consequences of these solutions. For many people outside of marketing, however, ethics should be defined according to the perceptions and beliefs of the public and according to the consequences of a decision, namely, if the decision will benefit the common good (Payne et al 57 - 58). Payne et al. also found that despite the abundance of theories, marketing professionals adhere to a judgment and evaluation process focused on the rightness or wrongness of the consequences of a choice rather than one focused on the rightness or wrongness of the choice itself (60). Due to this focus on consequence, it is not uncommon to see ethically dubious behavior in marketing.

Ethical behavior and profits go hand in hand for some marketing professionals, but for others there is always a tradeoff between ethics and profits, which leads to permissive unethical behavior under the guise of serving corporate interests. Smith and Quelch present a graphic found in many marketing ethics articles and books, which they refer to as the "Ethics-Profits Trade-off Matrix" (8).

Ethics	<i>High</i>	Tough choice?	You have your cake and eat it
	<i>Low</i>	Foolish	Risky and Wrong
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
		Profits	

Figure 1. Ethics – Profits Trade-off Matrix

This graphic implies that while ethical behavior generally results in good business, there are situations where ethical decisions would be foolish or detrimental to corporate interests and profits, and situations where unethical behavior presents no negative consequences or a low possibility for negative consequence. Though the pursuit of ethical and profitable decision-making is regarded as ideal, realistically, this is not always the choice marketing professionals choose.

In *Moral Dimensions of Marketing*, Kirk Davidson remarks that though there are marketers that put people first, marketers are “naturally competitive and aggressive” so unethical behaviors will always be an issue in the field (4). He goes over many of the issues common in marketing ethics, including puffery, consumer and corporate responsibility and deceptive ads, and explains not just why these are unethical behaviors, and alternative solutions, but also the consequences of going too far with these behaviors, again, highlighting the effects of ethical and unethical decision making rather than the ethicality of the choice itself.

This literature review cannot possibly cover 40 years of ethical marketing research and go over all the ethical models espoused, but it has demonstrated that there is a trend toward making ethical judgments on the basis of consequences for either the public and consumers, stakeholders or the company itself. It should also be noted that though content marketing does differ from traditional marketing practices, particularly in how product or brand promotion is

done, basic marketing principles are always at play so it is important to understand the core values and goals of marketing in general.

More detailed descriptions of ethical issues in marketing and the perspective of marketing professionals will be provided and discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 as I present issues relating to external marketing communications.

Comparing the Ethical and Decision-Making Environments

For technical communicators and marketers alike, there are no clear ethical principles to follow nor a clear understanding of what failure to follow these principles means as a professional. This leaves both types of professionals susceptible to organizational pressures and left to make ethical judgment calls based personal beliefs or the company culture.

Like technical communication, marketing has also attempted to define its ethical principles and determine a set of guidelines for practitioners to follow. This desire for a single code of ethics stems from the vague principles set in place by marketing groups such as the American Marketing Association (AMA). The AMA, much like the STC, has a list of principles or guidelines for professionals to follow, which include: honesty, responsibility, fairness, respect, transparency and citizenship. The AMA states that it expects members to “be courageous and proactive in leading and/or aiding their organizations in the fulfillment of the explicit and implicit promises made to those stakeholders”; however, there are no penalties for professionals who do not adhere to these guidelines and no clear indication of just who the stakeholders for marketers are.

As previously stated, most professional technical communicators simply adhere to their own set of personal ethics and the ethics of the environment they are in, which is generally the ethical environment of their workplace. This holds true for marketing professionals as well, and

places both types of professionals in a position to be influenced by either an ethically bound environment or a culture that prioritizes profit and business interests over customer interests.

Both technical and marketing communications “is produced by and reproduces the culture in which it is embedded” (Dombrowski “Post Modernism” 170). The choices and judgment of these professionals engaged with customers are not only important to the well being of the company, but the well being of society as a whole. Despite both types of professionals being in similar situations where interaction with customers and the general public is expected and normal, the choice to reproduce cultural values or push for more ethical values depends on what each field views as permissible and ethical; and as described in the previous sections, ethical behavior takes on different shapes according to each field.

For the technical communicator working with marketing professionals in content marketing, this naturally presents a great challenge since “often, individuals in cross-functional teams misrecognize the presence of other fields of knowledge” (Norton 78). Thus, the ethical values of the technical communicator may be ignored or left unconsidered due to a potential marketing environment that is more permissible of ethically dubious behavior.

The following chapter will include examples of these types of behaviors and present anecdotal information on the marketing perspective to these situations and behaviors and the technical communication’s based perspective. This auto-ethnographic chapter will recount the experience of a technical communicator sharing an environment with marketing professionals and analyzing the corporate culture that defines marketing attitudes.

CHAPTER THREE: GOALS AND ETHICAL VALUES IN MARKETING AND TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION - AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

Technical communicators are increasingly called upon to play marketing roles. In technology-based industries, the boundary between marketing and technical communication may even be blurred as technical details become marketing points and documents like brochures and white sheets double as both technical documents and marketing literature (McBride 7).

My personal experience as a technical communicator working with content marketing is not meant to be representative of all the challenges and experiences other professionals may encounter in similar job roles. However, I believe my experiences can be viewed as a Case Study or as an example of what technical communicators can expect when working alongside marketing professionals and what sorts of roles and ethical challenges they may take on if they chose to work as content marketers or developers of technical information.

Currently, I am employed as a technical writer and content marketing developer for an international company in the agriculture industry. My employer (whose name shall be omitted), mainly develops irrigation products for use in agriculture and select alternate industries that may require precise water application, such as mining. The company sells its products to distributors worldwide and to a select number of large clients who are permitted to purchase products directly from the factory.

From a marketing standpoint, the company's greatest challenges are finding ways to promote its products to both distributors and end users, and properly educating consumers on correct use and installation of products. At first glance, these products do not appear to be overly complex and technical given the few number of parts they contain. However, users generally require professional guidance when selecting product specifications, installing products and

conducting maintenance. For users to successfully install and use these irrigation products, they need to know how to set up a system that takes environmental factors such as general climate conditions and topography into consideration. This system will also need to take user's unique restrictions into consideration, such as maximum pressure and flow rate available and the type of crops the user is looking to irrigate. Users also need to understand how to properly install and maintain products, which includes knowledge of factors such as proper spacing between products and knowing which products can be combined and how, among other factors.

Marketing has determined that though many users are educated consumers, a majority of them do not fully understand the complexity behind using these products to obtain maximum results. Marketing has also determined that distributors may not be knowledgeable of the products either. Thus, end users may obtain faulty information from sellers.

As a solution to these educational deficiencies, marketing is attempting to reach out to users, distributors and any potential customer and educate all these groups on proper product selection, usage and maintenance. This approach is similar to the service-dominant logic of marketing mentioned by Williams et al., which describes a customer-focused, service oriented approach to marketing. As a result, the company's marketing manager chose to hire me, a technical writer, to develop technical content to be used in marketing materials, and develop electronic and/or online sources of information to educate users on how to use products and reveal how products can be adapted to their unique needs.

A Brief Overview of Content Marketing in Agriculture

According to the Business-to-Business Content Marketing "Agriculture Industry Report" by the Content Marketing Institute, the agriculture industry has the lowest levels of content marketing adoption compared to alternate industries, but they report the highest levels of

effectiveness using this marketing strategy (2). The agriculture industry also reported that the majority of sales revenue comes from existing customers, which results in marketing efforts equally focused on brand awareness as well as customer retention and loyalty (7).

For marketers and content marketers alike, the greatest challenges are reaching out to consumers in these industries, producing engaging content and obtaining a large enough budget to produce content (10). These challenges surfaced partially because of agriculture's preference for non-digital channels of communication. Agriculture marketers have determined that their content marketing efforts are best spent producing print articles, print magazines and newsletters, and conducting in-person events, all of which are more costly than the more commonly seen content marketing tactics, such as social media outreach, webinars, and educational websites and e-newsletters (3). These tactics are more expensive as well as limited in reach, and less timely due to their geographic restrictions.

In a conference offered by Purdue University on November 4 to 5 2013, by the Center for Food and Agriculture Business, agriculture marketing professionals found that the data identified by the content marketing institute in 2010 is still applicable. However, agricultural consumers are adopting online and electronic forms of communication more rapidly. They determined that though there is still a preference for print mediums of communication, manufacturer websites, industry websites, and e-newsletters are becoming more prominent sources of information for consumers of agricultural products, with manufacturer websites and industry websites becoming a prime source of information for new product updates and general product information.

The most recent findings determined that consumers are most open to company marketing messages when the sales and marketing team takes time to understand customer's values, needs and goals, and when they can communicate about their products with expertise.

These findings also showed that consumers have become less tolerant to disruptive marketing and sales tactics and would prefer if corporate sales and marketing communication was accessible to them at the time of their choice and tailored specifically to their unique needs. Consumers expressed that they “did not have time” for general marketing messages and would rather receive information tailored to their needs, questions and concerns. They requested sales and marketing communication that does not persuade them to buy, but helps them make informed decisions.

In conclusion, though consumers of agricultural products may differ from the “traditional” targets of content marketing efforts, this is a group that has expressed an interest in company communications as long as these demonstrate an awareness and understanding of their concerns and interests and explicitly describe solutions for their needs. Content marketing efforts that can educate consumers about their needs and possible solutions by focusing on general information rather than direct selling appear to be a welcome change in the industry on the part of consumers. In addition, this strategy’s ability to retain customer loyalty, promote brand awareness and educate consumers has made it equally popular with corporate marketers in the irrigation sector I personally work in, as identified by increasing content marketing output among our competitors worldwide.

Ethnographic Study: Introduction

Both technical communication students and professionals are aware that writers and communicators manipulate language when presenting information. Language, layout and visuals are powerful tools technical communicators can use to control the way readers perceive information, and distort the message they are sending (Sims 287). Understanding that all communication is affected by the author’s point of view, priorities and beliefs, makes technical

communication a rhetorical endeavor similar to marketing communication; however, technical communicators are educated to view language manipulation under a cautionary perspective rather than an opportunistic.

In “Linking Ethics and Language in the Technical Communication Classroom,” Brenda R. Sims highlights various ways communicators may negatively manipulate information and the ethical conundrums associated with these manipulations. She defines the following tactics as ethically dubious and manipulative: creating false impressions that make readers think conditions exists when they do not; using imprecise language; omitting information; presenting inaccurate information; suppressing facts; emphasizing misleading information; and engaging in no-fault writing (288 – 289). These tactics are then defined as lacking in honesty and truthfulness, and as potentially causing damage to end-users by technical communicators; however, many of these tactics are permissible and even normal or expected in marketing communications.

According to Philip Kotler, marketers face difficult decisions when choosing to serve customers profitably while ensuring the well-being of customers (43). This pressure to increase profits many times leads marketing professionals to create messages that, though legal, mislead consumers. We can see these types of messages in literature that uses small print to suppress information, ads with images of products that include special features consumers would need to pay extra for, and vaguely worded product benefits or features. These are all legal and expected communication tactics in marketing, but they are also prime examples of ethically dubious communication to technical communicators who have a goal of educating and aiding product users.

In my current position, I have frequently been asked to deemphasize and suppress information, emphasize misleading information and engage in no-fault writing, all while working

at the same time to educate consumers and help them make informed decisions. In the following sections, I will provide some examples of these situations and describe the issues from my perspective as a technical communicator, and from the perspective of my marketing coworkers as marketing professionals. These scenarios will be the foundation for the discussion on ethical beliefs and practices found in Chapter Four.

Data and Information Misrepresentations

Books and articles covering ethical writing to any degree will generally include various rules for ethical communication, such as not to lie, mislead or omit the truth, and will then provide examples of bad practices and suggested solutions. Though some of these principles seem near-universally accepted – such as not to lie or mislead – marketing writing takes these unethical actions and places them in a gray area they can be perfectly ethical and even desirable.

Marketing writing must be persuasive. To persuade effectively (at least in the United States) marketing messages generally includes puffery, omit negative information while highlighting positive features, present ideal or non-standard versions of a product, and may even provide less data and technical information to instead highlight non-concrete ideas such as style or vague benefits. This happens because marketing has a dual purpose to inform and generate interest. D. Kirk Davidson states that marketing in general presents a tension between economic goals and ethical goals (8) or a tension between the company's best interest, end user's best interests, and the employee's own best interest. Thus, behavior that scholars like Sims find ethically dubious, such as the emphasis of misleading information combined with imprecise language, the de-emphasis and suppression of important information, and the omission of information mixed with no-fault writing, can be considered acceptable among marketing professionals.

In my experience with marketing, I have witnessed various ways marketing professionals use text to make misleading suggestions, hide facts and re-define concepts. Next, I will provide three examples that show ethically questionable behavior through textual usage and I will provide my perspective as a technical writer and the perspective of my marketing peers.

In mid-2013, our marketing team was developing a promotional campaign for a new product release. This new product was described as a micro-sprinkler and it would be promoted to nursery and greenhouse owners. My manager determined that our promotional campaign would need to highlight this product's water and energy saving benefits, as well as its ability to spread water with "exceptional" uniformity, which our company defines as a coefficient of uniformity of 90% or more. As the team's technical writer and content developer, I was tasked with researching competitor products, learning how the product works, and researching issues of importance to this industry. This knowledge would be used to draft a technical sales brochure, to create e-learning courses and website content, and to draft educational articles for our online and offline content marketing efforts, which would cover irrigation issues common to nursery and greenhouse operations and demonstrate ways our product could help growers.

During my research, I came across various definitions of micro sprinklers, all of which explained that these products must operate at low flow rates and low pressures. Upon comparing our product to these definitions, as well as competitor products, it became clear that our product did not fit the definition due to its high flow rates. It also became apparent that the product data I was provided would mislead buyers because it was given in uncommon measurement units. For example, flow rates are always provided in gallons per hour for the nursery and greenhouse market; however, the data I was given was in gallons per minute, which gave the impression the product used less water than it actually did. Later on, I also realized that though this product

could provide “exceptional uniformity,” this was only possible when operating with higher flows and pressure rates and when installed with specific spacing between heads. If a user already had an irrigation system set up with different spacing between heads, they would not obtain the promised “exceptional uniformity.”

I recall going through this experience and questioning the ethicality of deliberately mislabeling a product and its data. In switching the unit measurements of the micro-sprinkler from gallons per hour to gallons per minute, the information would still be truthful and honest in conveying accurate flow rates; however, it could mislead readers who do not expect to see a change in unit conversion given that all products in the industry feature the same units of measurement. To my marketing co-workers, because the rates were still a factual statement there was no issue to discuss. In fact, many marketers in general feel that consumers should be responsible for studying advertising and marketing claims, and that any confusion is the fault of the buyer who did not analyze the message clearly. Associations like the Federal Trade Commission, which state that consumers are responsible for shopping around and gathering as much information possible before making a purchase, reinforce this idea.³ As a technical communicator, I feel this situation contradicts some of our profession’s goals, which includes providing users with clear and accurate information that will allow them to reach their goals.

There was also the issue of imprecise language or vague statements. Marketing claimed that the product operated with exceptional uniformity; however, this statement fails to inform readers that exceptional uniformity can only be achieved if the product is operated under very specific parameters. Statements such as “exceptional uniformity” fall under what marketing describes a puffery – statements that are obviously subjective or exaggerated (Quelch 547).

³ What are my responsibilities as a consumer? : http://www.ftc.gov.bb/index.php?Itemid=76&id=46&option=com_content&task=view

Some marketing professionals, such as Theodore Levitt, state that puffery is necessary in marketing because consumers will not buy pure functionality (Kotler 48). According to my direct co-workers, a statement such as “exceptional uniformity” is general enough to let end users know the product will perform, but not specific enough to limit the product’s performance in the eyes of consumers. In this environment, a statement such as this was described as acceptable because it communicated product benefits without revealing weaknesses that could cause consumers to lose interest. As a technical communicator focused on aiding customers, my concern was that buyers would not have sufficient knowledge to judge these claims and might determine that the product is not suitable for their needs once they have already made a purchasing decision.

A similar event happened later in the year when I was asked to develop an e-learning course for a large international client. I was asked to develop a course that would help this client’s sales team understand the technology behind our top selling product: how it works, how it is installed, the reasons why end users would benefit from this technology, and how the product resolves larger problems. After researching the product and developing a course, I presented my work to my manager for content approval. During a discussion over the content, I was told that certain information would need to be omitted from the course (or made less specific) because it would show some of the characteristics of our product could not compete against our competitor’s best selling product. A clear example was how our product is always advertised as capable of applying water in 60 foot diameters; however, this is only possible on the first two spans of a center pivot- the machine on which they are installed. On a quarter mile machine with seven spans, these diameters can only be obtained on the first two spans. This information would contradict marketing efforts to promote the product as capable of wetting

more with less sprinklers, thus, I was asked to omit this fact in the installation section of the course despite understanding that the information was necessary for designing a complete irrigation system. The course was changed to promise 60 feet of coverage without letting the learners know that this number is only achievable with higher end pressures and flow rates, and when the sprinkler is installed with larger nozzles – none of which are representative of average installations.

The ethical dilemma presented here seems easier to comprehend at first glance. In this situation, crucial information about a product's use and installation is being omitted out of a desire to present the product in a better light, thus, the decision to suppress information is based on a desire for economical gains. For my perspective as a technical communicator, this omission does not give the learners taking the e-course enough information to correctly understand other pieces of information, such as the product's true capabilities under normal or ideal (rather than inefficient) conditions. Omitting information about the product's limitations can prevent learners from arriving at correct conclusions and can create false expectations.

This perception is not mine alone. Marketing scholar Kirk Davidson also remarks in *Moral Dimensions of Marketing* that marketers may believe they are telling consumers everything they need to know about their products, and that by using inexact terms such as “up to” and “a maximum of” delivery promises are kept; however, these assumptions eventually lead to a lack of consumer trust (87 – 88).

In this particular scenario, my marketing co-workers believe that because end-users usually obtain professionally created installation guides before making any large purchasing decision, this information could easily be omitted from official documents such as the company literature or the e-learning course. The shared perception was that if the information was

available in more technical documentation, there was no need to present any flaws or potentially discouraging information in documents created by the marketing department since our goal is to generate interest and promote the benefits of our products.

To end with these examples of ethical issues with data misrepresentation, I would also like to highlight another event that took place near the end of 2013. As the writer and technical content developer for the marketing department, I must frequently write articles and help guides available online. This includes articles meant to help users troubleshoot issues with our products. We recently learned that one of our newer products was not operating reliably after three to five years of use and I was asked to draft articles for our website, newsletter and social media accounts to let user know how to expand their product's life. After drafting these articles, I was asked to make a number of changes before publishing them, including removing the admission of fault on our end. I was asked to avoid mentioning issues with our product's quality and durability and told to focus solely on problems the end user may be responsible for, such as poor maintenance. The company was not ready to admit responsibility for faulty products and hoped that with these articles, many end users would realize fault might lie on their end.

The final situation presented admittedly seems discouraging and even unethical, but situations such as these are charged with a number of variables that make the ethical decision making process complicated. In deciding to deny responsibility for the time being and omit information that could help end users expand the product life of faulty products, one may be quick to label this situation as unethical since the company appears to be dishonest and appears to be clearly lying to consumers about product quality. This communication is not honest, the decision to omit information is clearly taken to benefit the company's best interest rather than the consumers, and the decision may actually violate the rights of buyers.

What makes this situation difficult though, are the variety of factor surrounding the decision: quality control has determined that many faulty products were also heavily damaged by improper use, admission of these products fault would drastically reduce sales and potentially result in layoffs, and not all users were reporting issues with the product.

The issue then becomes a question of: Is it ethically right to admit these faults for the benefit of consumers and risk the well-being of the company and its employees, or is it ethically right to not make a public announcement and accept fault to preserve the well being of employees? In this case, the marketing team was concerned about the announcement resulting in product returns and replacements and giving negative press to the company's top-selling product, which could drastically reduce sales. However, there was also concern about what denial meant from a public relations stand-point. In admitting there is an issue, the company could be perceived as responsible and customer-focused, but this could also result in the company's products getting a negative reputation for poor quality.

As a technical communicator in-tune with the needs and issues of our target audience, I understand that faulty agricultural equipment could potentially impact farmer's profits. For example, malfunctioning irrigation equipment could result in overwatering or under watering, which diminishes farmer's yields and causes them to make poor use of the water they pay to pump, which is also heavily restricted in many states. I also understand that a mass recall could drastically affect our profits and result in lay-offs or other internal issues.

The decision to deny fault for the time being was a result of analyzing the consequences of each decision and determining which resulted in a lower economic impact for the company, once again showing that in marketing (and business) ethics, decisions are largely made by taking consequence into consideration.

Questionable Visual Designs

Ethically questionable decisions in marketing extend beyond simple textual messages and data presentations. Writers such as Alicia McBride recognize that though companies might relent and include information they wish to hide, they have found ways to alter visual displays and deemphasize information by including it as small print, by using complex phrasing or other means (7).

In my experience with marketing, I have witnessed various ways marketing professionals use visuals to promote a false idea, de-emphasize information and even deny certain bits of information. Continuing, I will provide three examples that show ethically questionable behavior by altering visual displays and as in the previous section, I will provide my perspective as a technical writer and the perspective of my marketing peers.

One of the most common ways marketers deemphasize and hide information while still legally providing it is by placing potentially unflattering information as small print. Brenda Sims remarks that writers may deemphasize information using print size, color or placement by placing more prominent text and visuals of larger print size in clearly visible areas and in attention-calling colors (289). As the writer for my employer's marketing department, I find that information I include in regular print size and in clearly visible areas in a document is moved and altered by graphic designers working on product literature and ads.

For example, information about a product only being able to work at full capacity on only a section of a full installation is commonly placed as small print at the end of our technical brochures. The same is done with information that clarifies vague statements such as the previously mentioned "exceptional uniformity" and with statements that explain other product limitations, such as the dependency on another product. This information is always moved under

tables and to the bottom right of a page in a print size two sizes smaller than the rest of the document. The inclusion of the text ensures we are being truthful to readers, but it places a burden on them. Readers must now actively search for this information or else they may miss it entirely.

As a technical communicator, it is apparent to me that hiding information necessary to the reader affects their ability to make informed decisions; however, it is also apparent that certain information may make users less likely to buy a product. Situations like these result in ethical dilemmas related to assumptions of what users need to know and how much information we are ethically obligated to provide.

My marketing co-workers are not concerned about the implications behind de-emphasizing information because the fact that the information is included at all means the communication is “honest.” They also state that making this information more prominent could potentially lower sales due to revealing product weaknesses. However, this may actually be an outdated view of marketing if we were to look at the comments made by scholars such as Williams et al. The idea that information can be hidden from consumers in an increasingly connected environment and among increasingly vigilant consumers is simply false in an era where internet reviews, forum recommendations and comments, and transparency has drastically increased (452). Technical communicators have discussed the issue of small print as well. Though there appears to be a larger resistance to this practice, there is still acceptance among fairly a larger percentage of technical communicators.⁴

Another common tactic used in marketing communications and described as ethically questionable by Brenda Sims is the creation of false impressions through the inclusion of

⁴ In “Is This Ethical”, Sam Dragga found that 35% of technical communicators view the use of small print as a completely or mostly ethical practice (260).

misleading information (be it visual or textual). A questionable situation relating to this tactic arose in my office in relation to product images including a variety of components not included with the actual purchase of the product. Nearly all photographs of our irrigation equipment include non-standard additions such as weights, pressure regulators and other components. In particular, there is one product that requires the use of a weight and pressure regulator to operate correctly, thus, brochures, ads, articles and other content always features this product with the inclusion of this components. These components must be purchased separately, but they are included in installation sheets and other more technical documents that highlight all the part numbers relating to the product.

Much like with small print, my co-workers believe that showing the product with these components is not an issue since the product needs these to work. However, they are reluctant to highlight the necessity behind these components due to the belief that this could make consumers view the product as if featured a faulty design.

Visuals, or a lack of visuals, have also been used to deny or deemphasize certain truths or possibilities marketing would not like to highlight, but ultimately must admit. I discovered this while attempting to draft various articles for our international customers on how to install our products on older center pivots and while working on technical brochures for our Russian customers, many of which still retro-fit their existing systems due to their inability to afford newer pivots. I chose to include various images of older pivots with our products not only to provide a visual supplement to the process I described, but to also provide visuals relevant to that particular audience. My efforts were quickly halted when it was revealed that one of our largest customers, a manufacturer of center pivots, would be displeased if we promote in any way the use of older models. Though this client understands that we must provide some support to

customers using these older pivots, any visual demonstrating these older models could still function well would could affect their sales efforts in Russia.

In this situation, the ethically charged question is: Is it right to desist in order to support an existing customer and their operations at the expense of downplaying the ability to retro-fit older systems (which would save end-users money), or is it right to continue and confirm with end-users in Russia that it is possible to keep their existing equipment?

My marketing co-workers chose to desist because favorable relations with this large customer were perceived as more important than showing a small group of poorer end-users that they do not need to upgrade their equipment in order to use ours. In weighing the consequences of this decision my co-workers saw that, our company would profit, our customer would profit, and though this small pool of end-users may not receive any supporting documentation, they are free to experiment and attempt to retro-fit their systems.

Though the examples provided above are all linked in that they demonstrate how visuals can be ethically charged, more importantly, it should be noted that these examples all demonstrate instances where marketing professionals analyze ethically questionable situations (or fully accept these situations) by only considering consequences as related to the company and not about the ethicality of the situation itself. In each situation, the consequence of obtaining a few unhappy customers and potentially negatively affecting some of these, is less impacting than what could potentially occur if we catered to the needs of these groups. The marketing professionals around me feel that they did their job in being ethical and honest by including information (though in small print), by protecting the interests of our employer, and by making decisions that will impact the least amount of people.

Issues with International Audiences

Dan Voss and Madelyn Flammia present an excellent overview of the ethical problems that arise in intercultural communication in “Ethical and Intercultural Challenges for Technical Communicators and Managers in a Shrinking Global Marketplace.” Among the many concerns they raise, there is a great concern over engaging in stereotyping and tokenism while attempting to learn about other culture’s values, beliefs and traditions (72). Their paper focuses on the ethical issues that technical communicators face when attempting respectfully communicate with international audiences – but in my personal experience, there are also a fair number of ethical issues that can arise when communicators make no attempt to understand other cultures or fully meet their needs.

Voss and Flammia remark that technical communicators now require intercultural sensitivity and a rhetorical awareness of verbal and non-verbal communication to draft effective technical and technical marketing materials for a broad international audience (77). When drafting marketing materials, they state that different cultures have different textual and visual expectations of what documents should look like and different belief systems and value systems that affect their design and substance choices (77 – 78). They also remark that technical communicators have a social responsibility to ensure international audiences are receiving the same information national users receive and that all information products are fully accessible to all users, even if this requires re-designing documentation to fit cultural expectations (79).

These are issues I have brought up in my office as we are an international company that markets and sells products to 49 countries. Ethical issues relating to intercultural / international audiences first arose when I learned that installation sheets, assembly sheets, and customer notifications were only available in English. Our company recently opened a manufacturing

plant in Brazil and only sent English language assembly sheets to the factory along with English-only documentation for customers that may or may not speak English. These documents were created by the marketing department and were not sent for translation due to the high cost of translating these when compared to the economical gains stemming from Brazil.

I also learned shortly after that these types of documents in general were never translated to any language. Despite selling to 49 countries, including South America, the Middle East and Europe and Eastern Europe, my coworkers did not believe they needed to translate these documents. There was a belief that if the products were being sold in these countries, then the distributors and users must understand English to some extent and are capable of reading these documents.

After some research, I learned that our distributors worldwide spoke English to some extent, thus they could purchase products, but end users usually did not speak English. Following the Kantian universal law that states information accessibility should be a universal right (Voss et al. 79), I argued for document translation and succeeded in getting approval for translation into four languages my team believed would cover a large number of users internationally: Spanish, Portuguese, Russian and French. This also resulted in a decision to translate more technical marketing documents to these languages.

Unfortunately, these translations did not take into consideration Voss and Flammia's guidelines for intercultural communication, which include: taking cultural differences into consideration such as issues of privacy or differences in design, avoiding the use of jargon, slang and humor, and revising the documents for visuals such as icons and graphics that may be unclear or even politically charged (85). As the team's technical writer, I was able to modify text to omit jargon, humor and other difficult to translate text, but I was unable to argue for document

redesigns and for altering the content of each document to fit cultural expectations; this included removing comparisons to our competitors, removing testimonials, and making certain statements more literal and direct.

After creating direct translations of these documents, we received concerns from our international sales team due to the inclusion of images only pertinent to American end-users, vague language that did not provide specific benefits, and American only testimonials that made international readers wonder why their concerns were not being addressed.

What is interesting about this scenario is not just how my marketing co-workers questioned the validity or reason for necessitating translated documents, but their desire to cut costs with these because the international market is simply not as strong as the domestic market. Voss and Flammia do mention that costs are an important consideration to take when trying to accommodate many different groups, but they do not touch on the ethical dilemma present when international audiences and their needs, value systems and ways of comprehending communication are regarded as less important.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

According to David Glen Mick, all decisions and behaviors are value guided and socially embedded, and most decisions and behaviors affect other beings in some form or another (292). This is why ethics continues to be a subject of contention among researchers and why academic inquiry into the goals and purpose of various professions fosters debate on ethical duties, social responsibilities, and common practices among professionals.

As mentioned in the literature review section of this paper, ethics and ethical decision-making can be largely influenced by job roles, goals and responsibilities. Ethics is determined by the context of a situation, the ideological principles of a group and the individual's perspective on priorities and responsibilities. This means that though technical communicators and marketing professionals may disagree on ethical judgment calls and workplace decisions, each group cannot assume their beliefs represent a universally agreed-upon ethical perspective (McBride 3).

For some technical communicators, myself included, the goal of their professional endeavors is to inform and educate users of technology. It is a technical communicator's duty to understand how individuals use and perceive science and technology, and to educate users on how they can manipulate technology to meet their overarching goals. For this reason, a significant portion of ethical debate has centered on the technical writer's responsibility for reader comprehension of specialized knowledge (Porter 182) as well as issues relating to information accessibility, responsible use of technology, and the effects of social values and assumptions on communication about technology.

These ethical concerns in conjunction with the profession's audience-centric goals can cause technical communicators to subscribe to ethical ideologies that place society's well-being above other concerns. Researches such as Sims and Porter exemplify this ideology (though they

may not subscribe to it) by presenting technical communication as a field ethically responsible for not only ensuring audiences are entitled to information, but that they are also given information that leads to safe and efficient use of technology (Markel 5). They also present technical communicators as responsible for ensuring the information users receive is devoid of any vagueness or misleading content (Porter 185), and ensuring that users are fully informed about technology's benefits as well as weaknesses and limitations (Sims 297). These ideologies or greater ethical concerns also place the focus of consequences on the audience / customer and advocate for ethical decision making that reduces the possibility of negative consequences for users.

James E. Porter highlights these concerns in "Truth in Technical Advertising" by stating that "technical writers have an ethical obligation to tell the truth" (182) and focusing his discussion on the ethical responsibilities of the technical communicator creating advertisement and sales materials— specifically on the effects these documents have on readers. In "Linking Ethics and Language in the Technical Communication Classroom," Brenda Sims also highlights concerns with users by focusing on the technical writer's potential to manipulate understanding of information and the importance of language choice from an ethical perspective. This is not to say that technical communicators are only concerned with ethics in regards to how decisions affect end users, but that it is a relatively common concern. A large number of technical communication articles touching on the subject of ethics and ethical behavior recognize that writers have an obligation to their employer, the public and themselves. However, various articles also show that technical communicators working in the field conceptualize ethics as actions and decisions that "don't hurt others" (Dragga "A Question of Ethics" 168). Of course,

this is not surprising given that it has been established that the core goals and responsibilities of our profession lie in informing and educating users of technology.

In contrast, marketing has never explicitly stated its loyalties to the public or society are of prime importance. The current definition of marketing, according to the AMA, is “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large;” however, marketing researchers have long questioned the ethical responsibilities and loyalties of marketing professionals. In 2007, the AMA’s definition of marketing defined the goals of marketing professionals are those that “benefit the organization and its stakeholders,” which made scholars such as David Glen Mick argue that marketing professionals place commitments to society and customers last when compared to corporate interests and stakeholders. He stated that the lack of clear prominence of ‘society at large’ indicates “the opposite of their importance, despite the association’s statement of ethical commitment to the contrary” (290).

Kelly D. Martin et al. also state that marketing ethics and responsibilities are difficult to pinpoint because “social norms and institutional expectations create pressures for organizations to conform or to respond in a manner acceptable to important societal constituents” (574). In other words, pressures generated by the institutional environment – these being pressures to increase sales for the benefit of the employer and pressure to adhere to corporate social responsibility among others – influence the role and function of marketing professionals. It is true that marketing decisions are made by looking at the foreseeable and potentially serious effect on individuals and/or their foreseeable and potentially serious consequences for individuals (Williams et al. 20), but it important to also ask for *what* individuals.

While the goals of technical communication lie in aiding users and consumers, marketing focuses on acquiring customers by matching a company's products and services to the people who need and want them, and maintaining a relationship with these customers to ensure profitability.⁵ These goals indicate that though many marketing professionals adhere to consumer-focused ideologies, marketing is mainly responsible for increasing an employer's profits, thus, these professionals have an ethical responsibility to aid their employers and help them achieve their goals.

Technical communicators also have an ethical responsibility to aid their employer and make decisions with their best interest in mind. They write and produce the documents that establish their companies' relationships with other businesses, clients and consumers and render the company (employer) legally liable (Porter 182). However, Mike Markel states that "the writer's obligations to the employer, the public and even the environment often conflict and give rise to ethical dilemmas (335). The technical writer is commonly viewed as an intermediary between employers, the public, customers or a prospect, and their work must meet a multitude of requirements including fulfilling an employer's goals and providing readers with important technical information that at times may place an employer or a product in a negative light. Interestingly, marketing professionals can also be described as intermediaries between these competing interests, but ethical discussions of this nature tend to center on taking the focus away from the employer or company interests and giving more importance to public and customer interests or concerns.

To understand how technical communication and marketing values and ethics contrast, we can look toward definitions and descriptions of common terms and practices, such as the definition of lying and explanations of what constitutes acceptable behavior in the field. Leigh

⁵ Investopedia: <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/marketing.asp>

Henson brings up this crucial point in her discussion of how to avoid ethical issues as a copywriter. In referencing James Porter, she highlights that technical writers must look critically at the conventional ethics of copywriting – a subfield of the sales/marketing communication – according to Porter, certain deceptions are permissible and convention within the sales advocacy situation, and these generally include puffery, vagueness and withholding negative information (449). Henson also references marketing / sales professional Frederick Van Veen, who states that marketing communication is biased; however, since the public “knows” it is biased, it is permissible to exaggerate the significance of product features and make the “not-very-exciting” exciting or at least interesting (450). As a technical communication, Henson insists on avoiding these actions as she finds them ethically questionable.

Understanding these differing values, opinions and job responsibilities puts the situations described in Chapter 3 into perspective. My employer and my coworkers are not amoral or unethical in their behavior, nor are they simply meeting the minimum requirements for ethical and legal behavior. Their perspective and the factors they take into deliberation when making decisions are entirely based on a system that considers both their responsibility to increase sales and the need to ensure customer safety and satisfaction. Looking back at one of the previous examples mentioned in Chapter 3 for example, in labeling a product “Micro Sprinkler” despite the product not fully meeting the definition of a traditional micro sprinkler, my coworkers were concerned over the effects a change of label would have on company sales. In changing its name, consumers might want to buy this product to use in locations it is unsuited for. There was also some concern over the product potentially taking away another product’s market share. In keeping the name “Micro Sprinkler,” sales would not be affected and users would begin to use the product in nurseries and greenhouses where the product was meant to be used. Similar

explanations can be made for decisions like omitting and downplaying crucial but negative information. For my employer, admitting to any negative fault would provide our direct competitor clear talking points and marketing points to show how our products cannot compare to their own. Our direct competitor is known to use many of the ethically questionable tactics described by Brenda Sims and my marketing coworkers have determined that they cannot fight against these tactics without also resorting to some of these as well. For this reason, decisions to place information in small print or only provide data in ranges are perfectly acceptable. Not doing so would affect economic gains and result in their inability to meet their job roles.

In situations like the two described above, the decisions made seem reasonable and perfectly ethical. Marketing professionals may have different criteria to evaluate the ethicality of a decision or outcome. Their decisions may not always seem ideal to a technical communicator, but at times they must be made. However, there are moments where technical communicators should assert their point of view and argue for decision making more in-line with technical communication's standards. This is especially important for marketing created document such as technical brochures, online information banks and even a company website. Users of technology need clear and precise information to make the most of their technology and fully understand the capabilities and restrictions associated with it. Sales and marketing brochures that double as technical documents are likely to present information vaguely and downplay any concerns or issues, thus, technical communicators working with documentation like this should argue for better clarification or for the creation of an entirely new technical document.

Arguing for a different perspective can be difficult in these situations as a technical communicator may be part of a cross-functional team or part of an all-marketing team. In "Technical Communication as a Business Strategy," David W. Norton remarks that not only do

cross-functional teams occasionally misrecognize the impact other fields of knowledge and limit the impact of other members to their job description, but other fields tend to view technical communication as a “production” field, the lowest form of cultural capital (88). To counter this, technical communicators must prove that their opinions and perspectives can add strategic value to department projects and demonstrate that their knowledge can translate to knowledge useful to business strategies.

Norton states that technical communicators must identify and learn how their co-workers communicate in order to present their ideas and concerns as valuable opinions (83). He states that if the knowledge provided by a technical communicator “can be leverage strategically rather than just tactically, then a company has one more highly effective body of knowledge to draw from” (89). However, this requires that technical communicators change how they communication about the technical aspects of their field and even change how they accomplish their goals.

For example, when arguing for the translation of technical documents and brochures for my company’s international audiences, an argument over the ethicality of making essential information easily accessible and available would not have persuaded my manager in considering the proposal to translate our documents. A more effective approach was to argue that translated documents would increase our brands’ appeal as an international corporation that services farmers across the globe. It would give our international sales team materials that would help them increase their sales, and it could potentially lower the number of complaints coming through customer service due to document mistranslation resulting in misuse of products. Communicating about the issue by highlighting marketing and branding concerns was essential to giving value to these. The ethical issues I had with this situation – if described as such – would

not have persuaded my manager or my co-workers but in framing these concerns in a way that appeals to their concerns as marketing professionals my concerns were given value.

Re-framing a situation may not always result in ethical concerns being recognized or that a technical communicator's opinions are followed, but this is an effective way to assert one's opinions and attempt to resolve ethical concerns.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The combination of marketing and technical communication is academically recognized and discussed in textbooks like Harner and Zimmerman's *Technical Marketing Communication*, but the workplace practices and expectations of technical writers taking up marketing roles is little discussed beyond this textbook. A quick online search for technical marketing communications on any online search engine will provide a few results with advice on how to switch from technical communication to marketing communication. These search results generally include information on common writing tasks and explanations on how technical writing skills are easily transferable to marketing writing skills. However, there is little discussion on this role shift beyond the obvious statement that writing styles must change. As I have discussed in this paper, moving from technical communication to marketing communications, specifically content marketing communication, necessitates an understanding of marketing professionals goals and roles, as well as ethical values. While the skills necessary to write technical and marketing documents are easily transferrable, a successful transition to marketing may require technical writers to let go of certain value systems and beliefs or accommodate these to an environment with different priorities, responsibilities and value systems.

The goal of this paper was to research and discuss whether the performance goals of marketing collide with those of technical communication, whether these overall goals have any impact on the ethical principles of each field, and then determine how this affects the technical communicator working as a content marketer. Through the literature review chapter of this paper, it was shown that technical communication and marketing communication has identifiably different performance goals and professional responsibilities despite similar methods of

operation. As discussed, the performance goals of the technical communicator are to help an audience better understand a product or service or better understand their ultimate goal and how technology fits in with these, while marketing professionals work to ensure profitability and increase sales by matching products and services to the people who need them. These goals can result in technical communicators subscribing to more expansive ethical value systems that focus on Aristotelian value and well as consequences. In contrast, marketing ethics seems to solely focus on consequences, and ethical decisions are made by taking into account how to reduce damage to the smallest number of individuals while ensuring corporate success.

These value systems and thought process was exemplified in the auto ethnographic chapter, where I described a few simple ethically charged situations that demonstrate how my thought process and ethical values as a technical communicator do not always fall in line with the ethical values and thoughts of my marketing co-workers. I hope these situations also show some of the higher concerns of marketing professionals and how problematic situations need to be reframed by technical communicators in order to actually seem problematic to marketing professionals. In my personal experience, I discovered that the ethical values I learned as a technical communications student, and the problematic situations described in my academic studies, either do not match with marketing's ethical concerns or the problematic issues discussed are simply seen as non-problematic, normal and expected as in the case of using small text and altering visual displays. Through these same experiences, and through a review of literature on the subject, I also discovered that for a technical communicator such as myself to make certain scenarios or situations relevant to marketing professionals, they must be reframed and described as having potential negative consequences that could directly affect marketing's core goals.

I believe this study shows that the switch from technical communication to marketing communication, which is commonly referred to as “Marcom,” is not as simple as previously described. Even with a focus on content marketing communication, which includes projects and goals far more similar to technical communication, this study has shown that a successful switch to marketing communications requires that technical communicators do more than simply change their writing styles to a more promotional or persuasive text. It requires that they thoroughly understand the role, goals and responsibilities of their marketing coworkers in order to produce documents that meet marketing expectations and in order to understand and grow accustomed to habits or tactics that may have been considered wrong or questionable as a technical communicator. Technical communicators may need to adopt a new view of what their responsibilities are or find ways to reconcile these views and make them appear more in line with marketing views.

It is important to note that this study was never meant to fully define marketing ethics and values. This study mainly works as a case study describing a potential new job area for technical communicators– that being content marketing. Though previous literature was consulted, no other working technical communicators other than myself were asked to describe their experiences working alongside marketing professionals or describe their perceptions of the role and goal of technical communication, as well as their ethical values. For this reason, I suggest that any future study into the subject of marketing ethics or content marketing and how this relates to technical communicators include the participation of various working professionals. A survey of many working professionals would allow for more detailed data and could disprove or prove many of the comments included in this paper. It may also be beneficial to study the growing trend of content marketing and identify further similarities between this type of

marketing writing and the work completed by technical communicators. Perhaps this can shed light into new similarities between marketing communication in general and technical communication, as well as identify new opportunities for working professionals.

To conclude this study, I would like to reiterate the importance of thoroughly analyzing marketing as a profession before suggesting technical communicators can easily transfer their skills to this profession. Marketing professionals, even those who work mainly with content marketing, have clearly distinct goals, values and responsibilities when compared to technical communicators and understanding these better is as important to as understanding which skills are transferable among both fields. I hope that this study brings to light some of the little discussed difficulties associated with changing job roles and helps bring forward discussions on marketing communication, content marketing, and how technical communicators have the opportunity to expand their professional reach.

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