Increasing Your Corporate Value

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About the Speaker

- President, Prospring Technical Staffing

- Executive Director, The LavaCon Conference on Digital Media and Content Strategies

- STC Fellow

Ground Rules

- Group Participation

- Nothing is true until you try it and see that it is true for *you*.

- Chinese Artists

Overview

- What is corporate value

- How to measure corporate value

- Ways to increase your corporate value

- And if time:

  - Statistics about what company *say* they are looking for (from jobs postings)

  - Examples of what company are *actually* looking for (from hiring managers)

Overview

- Originally this session was to be about assessing your corporate value.

- But many people don't work for corporations, so I considered using, "assessing your personal value."

- But that sounds too much like measuring personal *values*, clearly not where I am going with this session.

Overview

- So I'm sticking to "corporate value" for now as an inclusive word meaning the value you bring to any organization for which you work or volunteer.

- I also changed the title from "assessing" your corporate value to "increasing" your corporate value, since that's why we're at the conference, right?

Defining "Value"

- What, exactly, is "value"?

- Encarta.com has two definitions that apply:

    Monetary worth: an amount expressed in money or another medium of exchange that is thought to be a fair exchange for something

    Worth or importance: the worth, importance, or usefulness of something to somebody

Defining "Value"

- Education.Yahoo.com defines value as:

    Worth in usefulness or importance *to the possessor*

    (emphasis added)

Defining "Value"

- Thus there are two types of value:

    - Actual value: Do you generate revenue and reduce costs for your organization?

    - Perceived value: Are you *perceived* to generate revenue and reduce costs for your organization?

Measuring Value

- You can't manage what you can't measure

- So how do you measure your corporate value?

- Your actual corporate value?

- Your *perceived* corporate value?

Measuring Value

Andrea Ames

- Is an STC Past-President

- The first person from an information development role in the history of IBM to rise to her level in the company

- Delivered the keynote address at LavaCon 2008 in Honolulu, Hawaii

Measuring Value

- When asked what does she do for a living, she replies, "I solve business problems."

- Not "I'm a technical writer."

- Not "I document policies and procedures."

- Not "I coordinate changes to the user experience."

Measuring Value

- While she may actually do those things as part of her job, they're not the way she approaches her job.

- And *certainly* are not how she identifies her corporate mission.

- She finds problems her company is experiencing and then finds solutions.

Measuring Value

- How does she find problems to solve?
  She asks for them!

- About every three months she makes a point
  to ask the executives in her division,
  "What problems are you running into?"

- Then she looks at what her organization can
  do to help solve those problems.

Measuring Value

- Even if the problems are not directly related to her area, there are often actions her group can take as part of a larger solution.

- In short, she strives to be an innovative solution provider and profit center, not a commodity-like tech pubs cost center.

Measuring Value

- What a great way to increase your job security!

- Who in the world would lay off an individual who's continually saving the company money and helping to solve Management's problems?

Measuring Value

- API story

- RoboHelp story

- Boxtop story

- Decision tree story

- Social media story

Measuring Value

- While I found plenty of individual examples of how technical writers have generated revenue or saved their company money, and most people agreed that good technical writing *does* the above, I could not find any industry-wide statistics to quote for this presentation.

- So if there are no industry-wide statistics, what *can* you use to measure your corporate value?

Measuring Value: Actual

- Have you helped generate revenue for your company?
    - Sales proposals
    - Marketing collateral
    - Presales-tutorial, etc.
    - Lead generation (I met someone at a conference...)
    - *Anything* that helped generate revenue

Measuring Value: Actual

- Have you helped generate decrease costs for your company?

    - Decreased time-to-market (which does both)

    - Decreased tech support costs

    - Decreased translation costs

    - *Anything* that saved your company money

Measuring Value: Perceived

- Compensation (salary or hourly bill rate)

- Where you are in the product development cycle?

- Are you considered a critical member of the development team (profit center)…

- …or someone who *has* to be there, a commodity to be acquired for the lowest possible price given an acceptable level of quality (cost center)?

What are Companies Looking For?

- Statistics from job postings

- Feedback from hiring managers

Statistics from Job Postings

- I chose 50 technical writing jobs at random using *Indeed.com* (a job posting aggregator)

- I copied job "Requirements" into a file and then sorted and tabulated the results

- I did not include "pluses" or "nice to haves"

- I'm only reporting on skills or attributes that appeared at least two times in the results

of Years of Experience

1 to 3+ years	28%
4 to 6+ years	30%
7 to 9+ years	10%
10+ years	10%
Didn't specify	28%

Skills and Attributes

Excellent communication skills	58%
Ability to work alone, work in teams	22%
Ability to adjust to changing priorities, deadlines	18%
Ability to multitask/juggle multiple projects	18%
Good organization skills	14%
Attention to detail	12%
Strong interpersonal skills	10%
Self motivated	6%

Tools

Microsoft Office	50%
Online help/documents (in general)	22%
Microsoft Visio	20%
FrameMaker	18%
RoboHelp (in particular)	12%
Adobe Acrobat	10%
Photoshop	6%
HTML	6%

Tools

Microsoft Project	4%
Wikis	4%
Content Management Systems	2%
Blogs	2%
DITA	2%
XML	2%

Degrees

Degree   66%

    Degree engineering or applied science

    Degree in Business Administration

    Degree in Computer Science

    Degree in Computer Science with minor in English

    MS in Chemical, Electrical or Mechanical Engineering

Drug or Background Checks

Clearances/Background Checks	22%
Clearance, able to get	12%
Top Secret	4%
Clearance, active	4%
Able to pass a drug test and background check	2%

Feedback from Hiring Managers

- I posted the following question to the STC Management SIG email list:

  I know what's popular these days with respect to tools and technology, but what "soft skills" do you look for when interviewing candidates?

  Or, which soft skills do you wish technical communicators had more of?

  Please reply to me off-list.

Feedback from Hiring Managers

- I requested "off list" feedback because I wanted to see if multiple managers identified the same qualities

- Unfortunately this was such a hot topic it created quite the online conversation

- At one point a manager had to say, "Enough—get back to work!"

Feedback from Hiring Managers

Ability to analyze

Ability to plan

Ability to work in a virtual environment

Adapt quickly to change

Analytical skills

Assertiveness

Being open

Body language, reading

Business acumen

Business analysis skills

Business of tech comm, u. of

Can-do attitude

Compromise

Conflict resolution

Creativity

Critical thinking skills

Cultural bounds, understanding

Curiosity

Customer service

Demonstration skills

Discretion

Flexibility

Fun to work with

Feedback from Hiring Managers

Honesty

Humility

Independent

Initiative

Integrity

Interest

Interpersonal skills

Juggle workload

Leadership skills

Listening

Multicultural issues, awareness off

Multitasking

Office politics, awareness of

Organized

People skills

Positive attitude/outlook

Presentation skills

Proactive

Problem-solving

Project management

Project scheduling

Punctual

Quality, attention to

Relationship-building

Feedback from Hiring Managers

Responsible

Self-motivated

Self-motivated

Sense of humor

Service-oriented

Social skills

Stakeholder awareness

Strategic thinking

Strength

Strong work ethic

Tact

Task management

Teams, working in

Thick skin

Time management

Upbeat

Verbal communication skill

Voracious learner

Workload balancing

Written communication skill

Feedback from Hiring Managers

"I think the list of required soft-skills depends on the size/type of the company's environment.

Over the last 15 years, I've worked in many types of environments, including in an information services bureau and in more traditional industries such as manufacturing, and discovered along the way that approaches that worked in one environment sometimes backfired in another."

Feedback from Hiring Managers

"Here is a rule of thumb that I swear by: You can tell more about a candidate from the questions they ask than the answers they give.

Do they ask about your business model? Where they fit in? Why the position is open? Are there any "challenging" projects or people they should be aware of?

Do they ask about what problems you are facing that they can solve? What keeps you up at night that they can take off your plate, etc. ...?"

Feedback from Hiring Managers

"Keeping awareness of what our stakeholders value."

Feedback from Hiring Managers

"Business acumen. Understanding the basics of how and why an organization ticks and what motivates managers in general so that when specifics come around no one is surprised. Oh, yeah. Business acumen."

Feedback from Hiring Managers

"I would rate Listening Skills and Research Skills as my two favorites when interviewing for new folks."

Feedback from Hiring Managers

"A technical communicator needs to have some drive and be willing to go get the info they need. Being proactive does not come to all folks naturally so I look for some passion for the job and the ability to use social engineering skills when needed.

Example: A couple of years ago we had two writers—the pushy little flower that is me, and a guy who sat in his cube and waited for people to come to him.

I'm still here and he's not."

Feedback from Hiring Managers

"I like to see passion: does the applicant get excited about something. It doesn't have to be work-related; can be music, travel, food, whatever.

Another skill I value is balance. Can the applicant treat critical tasks as urgent yet remain calm.

Lastly, does the applicant pick up on body language and move on or shut up when I indicate that I've heard enough of an answer…?"

Feedback from Hiring Managers

"1. Assertiveness (the ability to effectively push back on unreasonable demands AND make requirements known).

2. Tact (the ability to accomplish #1 without giving offense, embarrassing or otherwise making enemies).

3. Relationship-building, especially in situations where the other person is remote and there are no opportunities for face-to-face interaction.

4. Ability to plan, keep to plan and keep stakeholders aware of necessary changes to plan.

5. Ability to follow instructions (for example, when someone asks for information to be sent off-list)."

Feedback from Hiring Managers

"In my experience, the essential soft skill are the ability to perceive how others are perceiving *them*, and to adapt as necessary to differing personality types among the subject matter experts with whom they have to deal. It is a surprisingly rare attribute.

Without that ability, the technical writer will have difficulty forming and maintaining the collegial interactions necessary to get the job done."

Feedback from Hiring Managers

"I hired a great writer once because of curiosity. I talked to him on the phone and asked if he knew Frame. He didn't. I called him back about four days later to ask another question and he had downloaded the Frame trial and was working hard to learn it. And had some good questions.

I liked that initiative and curiosity. I liked the 'Go Get It' attitude. I could see that would be priceless in our environment. I could teach him my writing standards and the products. But that attitude I couldn't teach.

I could see moving him to more advanced projects over time and as team lead eventually."

Feedback from Hiring Managers

"Analytical skill, definitely!

Lately, I see people wanting to become content strategists, but the questions they ask aren't in the strategic range. They can't seem to bump up their thinking to the next level, of content analysis.

And that goes for just about any career-track position, whether it's tech comm or consulting."

Feedback from Hiring Managers

"Business acumen has been mentioned—but I'd like to highlight it a bit.

It isn't necessarily a must have for a brand new shiny grad, but, if you wish to fill a slot with a grizzled veteran, knowing how your function might fit into the company's success is very valuable.

Years ago, we got the team together (pushing 40 writers/editors) for a yearly face-to-face. The group was highly distributed (as a result of a merger and acquisition binge), and most hadn't met any of their colleagues from other facilities.

One of our goals was to get folks talking to one another, so the question was asked, 'What makes a good document?'

Feedback from Hiring Managers

The answers were all over the map, as you'd expect, with copies of *Strunk and White* being brandished, *Chicago Manual of Style* used as a weapon, curses in COBOL being lobbed across the room, and the expected pleas for just 'one more round of reviews and editing to get it perfect.'

One of the more senior writers sat quietly with a Mona Lisa smile on her face. When asked her opinion, she said:

- On time
- On budget
- Fulfilling requirements

Feedback from Hiring Managers

This writer demonstrated an understanding that we were there not to create the world's best doc set (though this would certainly be lauded, should it occur), but that our responsibility was to support our products with deliverables that suited the need."

Feedback from Hiring Managers

"Here are the traits I think are vital to being a successful tech com person:

- Curiosity
- Ability to analyze lots of disparate input and distill it into the essential bits
- Thick skin
- Ability to work with a variety of people in a virtual environment
- Sense of humor
- Self-motivated
- Ability to move between the clouds and the weeds without getting stuck in either place
- Interest in science and technology
- High but realistic standards for quality and strong work ethic"

Feedback from Hiring Managers

"I think it's interesting that Kit listed "curiosity" first. At ProSpring, the first attribute I list in the Recruiter job description is, 'Curiosity and the desire to help.'

I think that summarizes what we're all looking for in an employee, eh?"

Recap

- More companies are looking for soft skills than particular tools and technologies

- Managers want to see excellent communication skills combined with curiosity, observation skills and the desire to help

- The upshot: Have those *and* the hottest tools and technology to increase your corporate value.

Reach the Speaker

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