Four stories about the future
Exploring possible futures for the technical writer in a collaborative media landscape

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Abstract
As a technical writer I have come to see that the collaborative media landscape has started to change the way many B2C companies work with support information. It is companies producing software based consumer products that has taken the lead in this new way of approaching the customers. More and more companies in other product segments are starting to go in the same direction. But what happens to the technical writer when more and more customers are creating their own support information? The death of the technical writer has been proclaimed for several years. It is no wonder that one asks: What is the future role of the technical writer facing the challenges with collaborative media? That is also the research question for this thesis.

To investigate this I have experimented with a method called scenario planning and scenario writing. In order to get a well-grounded base of trends to create the scenarios from I’ve concluded a rigorous empirical base. The following methods where used:

- In-depth interviews with practitioners in the technical writer field
- Content analysis of a support forum
- Email interviews with frequent forum users.

It was clear that when implementing new media structures it also involves new challenges. These challenges could potentially also lead to new roles for the technical writer. The challenges I consider to be most important were; trust, transparency, motivation and information overload. To facilitate those needs and challenges roles like community manager, content curator and content strategist are needed.

With those roles in mind I created four scenarios. Each with a different take on collaborative media (and one that actually ignored this emerge). The names of the scenarios are:

- The outcasts
- The insider matter
- Sharing is caring
- The third player
Foreword
This report is the result of a ten week project conducted in spring 2013 at the Master’s Program in Interaction Design at Malmö University. During these weeks I’ve had the privilege to learn and write about the future role for technical writers.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank my supervisor Jonas Löwgren. Without your positivism and good advice this project would not been possible. The support from my girlfriend, family, friends and classmates has been fantastic. Thank you! Last but not least I also want to say thank you to all of you that participated in interviews and questioners during the way.

May you all have a bright future!

Björn Lindh

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of the problem domain
What do people do when they need to find information about how a product works? Do they try to find the manual for the product or do they do a quick search on Google? Chances are quite big they do the latter. Most of the information they find are not produced by the company itself. Instead it is blogs, forums, YouTube videos and Twitter. Companies have even started to incorporate forums in to their existing support sites. These are all examples where the support information is produced by the users of the product. The question is how does this impact on the role of the technical writer?

1.2 Research area

For time and the world do not stand still. Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or the present are certain to miss the future.

John F. Kennedy (electronic reference 1)

The quote above makes a good description of why I decided to investigate the future role of the technical writer. We cannot sit down and think what we got is enough. We must look in the future. Even though we cannot know how the future is going to look like we do know that it is going to be different. We should learn from the past and present and from that build up the scenarios what might come. Then we are better prepared when the future actually arrives.

Being a technical writer myself the area concerning the future role of the technical writer is of course something that is of great interest to me. But to be able to understand this role I also think that you need to understand the consumer of the product. In other words a holistic view is needed in order to further down the road pinpoint the future role of a technical writer.

By saying so you unavoidably get into the question of the relationship between the company and the consumer of the product. In terms of the area this thesis is covering the question for that topic would be how support information could be used to build a long lasting relationship with the customer. I believe that one of the most important aspects of this relationship is trust. But how could a customer trust that the user generated information that he or she reads is accurate?

Another side of the current trends that need to be taken into consideration is crowd sourcing. Today more and more people are devoting their time and (sometimes) even money to help a company or cause they believe in. What motivates these people to contribute? Of course the opposite question is equally important to understand what you should avoid.

Last but not least the importance of an infrastructure supporting collaborative design is a crucial point in this investigation. By pinpointing the infrastructure you also pinpoint the tools that are going to be needed for the technical writer.

As can be seen in some of the examples in chapter 2 the change towards user generated content has already begun. But it’s fairly notable that the change mostly involves B2C-companies. In this thesis I have contacted a global consumer product company to perform interviews and other research
investigations. Due to requirements from them they will be called Company x through the whole thesis.

1.3 New knowledge
Within the field of technical writing there is still a sense of the technical writer as the producer writing for a consumer. I believe that in order to grow as a profession the field of technical writing needs to use the power of the consumer in a much greater extent. The general experience I’ve got is that many companies’ support information is produced with little or no investigation of what the user really needs information about. I assume that by letting the user be a part of a collaborative creation between the company and the user of their products could be beneficial both for the quality of the support information as well as for the customer satisfaction.

By introducing such a concept there is one more key point to take in to consideration; the role of the technical writer. Like Löwgren (electronic reference 2) I also believe that the profession of technical writing still will be needed, though the role of the technical writer would most probably change when introducing this type of collaborative production. The interesting part is how and also what skills that are needed for the future technical writer.

By my previous experience and after my investigation to find canonical examples it is clear that the idea of having a producer (technical writer) who creates and consumer who reads is soon going to be outdated. We still don’t know what will take over and how the process of collaboration will work. But that is where I think a thesis like this could help. During the process I have tried out different ways of how this change could be designed. My hope is that the conclusions I’ve made could be beneficial in the evolution of the future role of the technical writer trade.

1.3.1 Research question
With the introduction in mind the following areas are of interest for me in this thesis:

- The future technical writer.
- The user creating content.
- Trust of information.

The main focus in this paper is the future technical writer within a B2C-company. I think that in order to get a good estimate how that future could look like you need to take a holistic approach. For that reason the main research question for this thesis is:

- What is the role for the future technical writer within a B2C-company facing the challenges with collaborative media?
To back up this question the two sub questions are:

- What is the driving force for customers to contribute with support information?
- How do people know if the user created content could be trusted?

### 1.4 Expected knowledge contribution

My knowledge contribution will be a case study of design oriented change process. What I aim for is to get an understanding of how a possible future scenario looks like, where technical writers work in another way than today and the argument to why this scenario would work.
2. Canonical examples
In this section I present examples where user generated content is the main driving force of each concept.

2.1 Get satisfaction

Get Satisfaction was founded in 2007 and is a customer community platform that helps companies create customer experiences by fostering online conversations about their products and services during the lifecycle. Today, Get Satisfaction powers 70,000 active customer communities hosting more than 35 million consumers each month.

The company describes its product as "people-powered customer service". Through the integrated platform, anyone can ask a question, submit an idea or complaint, or give praise. All posts can be read by anyone. Companies can participate directly with their responses marked as official answers, but other users can chime in with answers of their own. A rating system pushes the best answers to the top.

For me Get Satisfaction is a good example of the crowdsourcing movement that has been seen in various occasions during the last 5 years or so. Brabbham (2008) defines crowdsourcing as "Crowdsourcing is an online, distributed problem-solving and production model".
Wikipedia is a collaboratively edited, multilingual, free Internet encyclopedia supported by the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation. Its 26 million articles, over 4.2 million in the English Wikipedia alone, are written collaboratively by volunteers around the world. Almost all of its articles can be edited by anyone with access to the site, and it has about 100,000 active contributors. As of April 2013, there are editions of Wikipedia in 286 languages. It has become the largest and most popular general reference work on the Internet, having an estimated 365 million readers worldwide (electronic reference 3).

Wikipedia is obviously the biggest success story when it comes to collaborative created content on Internet. But it’s interesting to note that in comparison to all of the people using the site only very small group are actually contributing with content.
2.3 DELL – Ideastorm

In 2007, Dell invited end users to share their ideas and collaborate to create or modify new products and services through an online community — Dell IdeaStorm (www.dellideastorm.com). With the launch of this website, Dell created a user innovation community where end users freely reveal innovative ideas with community members and Dell. Through IdeaStorm, end users contribute their business ideas to be reviewed, discussed, and voted upon by the user community. (Di Gangi and Wasko 2009)

I believe that this serves as a good example how companies can take an open innovation approach, combining internal and external components to successfully develop innovations and gain a competitive advantage. In this example it is innovations, but I think that often an innovation process starts with “why doesn’t my product work the way I want?” which is a typical domain for support information. The areas could easily piggy-back on each other.
The web could be overwhelming with information being both bios and outdated. Does the information we come across paints the full picture? The idea with Factlink is that when reading something on the web it should enable us to let us know what other people with expertise think about what we are reading. This platform let you add what you know by creating fact-links. You can annotate any statement on the web and attach review information to strength or weakening facts. The result is a collective perspective that is updated continuously.

It could of course be argued that Wikipedia has built a great collective perspective and that nothing new is needed. But there are some important differences. Wikipedia is built as a single website hence Factlink build a collective perspective as a layer over the web as a whole. Wikipedia focus on the content where Factlink is more leaning to letting people value the content.

Factlink is currently at the stage of being at a beta testing level for invites only. For that reason it’s hard to say whether it’s going to be a success story. But in my view it opens up an interesting path of how you collectively could handle and value vast quantities of information. The question of trust when it comes to support information is a deal breaker, especially if you are looking to get in to the B2B.
3. Method

In this thesis I try to understand what the future role of a technical writer is in a context where a lot of the support information is made in collaborative media platforms. The move towards collaborative media involves a closer interaction between the companies and the customers. For that reason I believe that it is needed to take a holistic approach to achieve a satisfied result. That is why my empiric work has been conducted both on a quantitative and qualitative basis, focusing on both the technical writer and the customer.

Quantitative methods can tell us little about a lot of people, while qualitative methods enable us to say a lot about a few people. A mix of both these methods is referred to as triangulation (Schröder 2003). Triangulation is a method:

“…in which multiple (quantitative and qualitative) methods are used on the same object of study, in order to compensate for each other’s weaknesses and together provide a better insight into the phenomenon we are studying… by adopting a triangulating approach we shall be able to say a lot, or at least more, about a lot of people.” (Schröder 2003:350)

The methods used in my empiric work of the thesis were:

- In-depth interviews with practitioners
- Content analysis of a forum
- Email-interviews with frequent forum participants

The methods used in my design work of the thesis were:

- Scenario planning and scenario writing
- Workshop to validate my scenarios

To write good and well-grounded scenarios extensive data is required. You need to look both at a macro and micro level. The main reason for the empiric work was to get an understanding of the current trends in support information as well as an understanding of the driving forces, both from a technical writer’s perspective as well as a customer’s perspective. The interviews were made with that focus. The content analysis was made to strengthen the information that was given in the interviews. Did the customers actually participate in the way that was described during the interviews and what role did the technical writer have in this dialogue? All of the information gathered from the empiric work was then filtered down to trends, driving forces and possible risks.

I selected a global consumer product company to perform my empiric work at. The two main reasons for selecting this company were that I found it to be on the edge when it comes to communicating with customers through collaborative media as well as the fact that I knew people working there and hence had easy access to interviewees. I do not claim that the specific data gathered from the empiric work could be valid as a generalization of how the role of the technical writer is today. What I do think could be applicable in a more generalized perspective are the trends and driving forces when technical writers and customers together create support information.

From the filtered and thermalized information gathered from the empiric work I could start to write the scenarios. They were made by mixing several well established methods. The work was an iterative process that went on for about a week. The scenarios were later tested during a workshop by using components from Lindgren’s (1996) method.
With this overall description I would like to show that during the process I’ve come to understand that in order to get a satisfactory result you must be able to combine several established methods. Also that methods describe in books are often far too generic to fit the purpose of your specific research. Therefore it is the researcher’s responsibility to tweak those generic methods in order to make them work in a specific context.

This overall presentation of my methods gave me the following process.

### 3.1 Choice of methods

In the chapters below I will describe each method in detail and argue why it was appropriate to use in my project.

#### 3.1.1 In-depth interview

An interview can be described as a situation of interplay between two people with different and not equal roles. One asks and one answers. The interplay is based on voluntariness and it is the communication between the interviewer and the interviewee that is subject to analysis. A well-made interview should give a result with enough liability to be beneficial and useful for others (Lantz 2007). In my research question I aim to get an understanding in how the future role of the technical writer might be, provided that collaborative media platforms is used more both by the technical writer as well by the customers. To be able to make an accurate prediction of how this future could look like I need to understand the environment in which the technical writer works in as well as how these persons view up on the future and what trends they have seen emerged. For that reason it seemed as an appropriate start to interview people working within the field of technical writing. The selection criteria I had for the interview were:

1. The person has or is working on a global consumer product company.
2. The person is working as a technical writer or in a role that involves producing or administrate support information. This means that the interviewee at least has an understanding of the context the technical writer is working in, how the role has evolved and what might lay ahead.

Through a connection at Company x I got three interviews with in total four people working at Company x. These interviews were all made at Company x’s office. Since no technical writers are stationed in Sweden at Company x I needed to go outside Company x, hence two of the interviewees
were made with people not working at Company x. Both had worked in a global consumer product company before. These two interviews were both made in my home. The interviews were between 45 and 75 minutes and were all recorded with my cell phone. Depending on what type of role the person had I used one of the two interview guides (see Appendix 1 and 2). The questions in the guides evolved around the following main areas:

- Opening questions
- Support information today and tomorrow
- Changes in the future
- The future technical writer
- The support zone
- User generated support information

Even though the guides give the impression that the interviews where strict and structured I tried to steer them to be more of the unstructured kind. I viewed the sub questions under each main area as possible directions rather than questions that needed an answer. If the interview took an undesired route I could always go back using these questions. Ruane (2006) concludes that unstructured interviews are useful in exploratory research, when you want to get a detailed and descriptive picture of a phenomenon or process, or when you are trying to get an understanding of a respondent's unique experience.

After the interviews were made I transcribed each and every one. Lantz (2007) explains that the first step is to make a data reduction of the collected material. In my case this meant read the transcriptions several times and filter out quotes where I saw overall similarities in the interviews or quotes that somehow could be used to prove literature from the theory chapter. The next step after this is to code the material (ibid). In my case this meant categories the material and put it in a hierarchy. From the material three main categories emerged and from that several sub categories. Several filtrations of quotes were made until I had what I found to be an overall representation of the interviews. The quotes where then put in a narrative to describe the overall picture.

### 3.1.2 Content analysis

Content analysis or textual analysis is a methodology for studying the content of communication. Babbie (2012) defines it as "the study of recorded human communications, such as books, websites, paintings and laws". Since my research question to a great extent includes not only the technical writer but also the user I wanted to get a better picture of how the user actually took part in the content creation. Since Company x has had their own support forum/support community during a couple of years I figured it made sense to conclude the content analysis here.

The support forum is divided in what type of product you want to post a question about. I decided to focus on one of the product categories during three days. All the threads that where active between the 22nd of April and the 24th of April were analyzed. That meant that even if a thread was active during this period it didn’t necessarily mean that it was created during this period. To get the full context I decided to include all of the posts in the analysis when it came to threads of this type.

When logged in to the support forum there is a functionality that supports saving the thread as a PDF. Between 18.00 and 24.00 on the 24th of April I used this functionality to save all of the threads that had been active during the period. The PDF: s were then printed and an ID-number where assign to each print-out.
According to Lasswell (1951) the key questions of content analysis are: "Who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect?”. With those questions in mind I developed a coding form (see appendix 3). In total 24 different types of data were collected from each thread. The data types that were collected were both quantitative (such as number of participant in a thread) as well as more qualitative (such as the reason for a thread being created).

The data types for each thread were added to a spread sheet in Excel. From here a chart for each one were made. The data types were not analyzed any further in terms of performing correlations. The intention with the content analysis was to get a statistical overview of the forum and an understanding of who did what.

3.1.3 Email interview
To get the holistic approach that my research question needed it was not enough to gather information from practitioners or quantitative data from the forum. I also need qualitative data from the users of the forum to understand their view and reasons to participate in discussions around support information. All of the participants of the forum have a rank (in points). The ranking points are accumulated every time the participant makes a post and also if he answers a question that is marked as “answered”. The forum supports a functionality to list all the members by their rank. By using this functionality I could list the forum participants with the highest rank. I decided to contact top 20 through the internal email system at the forum (see appendix 4).

The reason for selecting the participants with the highest rank was simply due to time constraints. These people were more frequent users and hence logged in to the forum more often. I assumed that the chance to get an answer would be much higher. For the people sending a positive response to participate in the interview I sent a survey-like questionnaire (see appendix 5). The questioner included eleven open ended questions. It was based on four different topics:

- Types of threads they like to posts in
- Their general participation on the forum
- Their motivations
- The future of support information

All the participants got the same questions. The interviews were gathered during a period of two weeks. In some cases extra time was devoted to explain to participants who I was and to gain their trust in order for them to answer the questions. Out of the 20 persons that I contacted I got back seven fully filled out questionnaire. The analysis of the answers was made with the same process as described for the interviews with the practitioners.

3.1.4 Design - Scenarios
Since this is a project in interaction design some sort of design is necessary. But how does one create an artifact that represents the future role of the technical writer? In my mind you can’t. I needed to find another way to represent this. A technique that answers questions like this is scenario planning and scenario writing.

Peter Schwartz (1996) defines scenarios as:

"Scenarios are stories about the way the world might turn out tomorrow, stories that can help us recognize and adapt to changing aspects of our present environment. They form a method for articulating the different pathways that might exist for you tomorrow, and finding your appropriate movements down each of those paths. Scenario planning is about making choices today with an
understanding of how they might turn out. In this context the precise definition of “scenario” is: a tool for ordering one’s perceptions about alternative future environments in which one’s decisions might be played out.” (Peter Schwartz, 1996:4)

In other words, scenario planning is a strategic tool to predict and plan for possible futures. This sounds far from the creativity that is a core part of interaction design. That is far from the truth. Even though the use of scenarios often takes place at a management level the creation of it belongs more to art than science or business (Schwartz 1996).

"Scenario thinking is an art, not a science. But the basic steps are the same – whether for small business, an individual, or a large corporation. Typically, you will find yourself moving through the scenario process several times – defining a decision, performing more research, seeking out more elements, trying on new plots, and rehearsing the implications again.” (Schwartz 1996 p.27-28)

The process to create scenarios is iterative and very much resembles with the standard process of interaction design. That is why I would argue that this is a method and a project that can and should be considered as interaction design.

It is important to understand that the creation of scenarios does not mean to create isolated worlds. Even though there is a pedagogical advantage to diverse possible outcomes to understand the impact if it should take place the reality more often is a mix of all or some of the created scenarios. Schwartz (1996) concludes that:

“Using scenarios is not a matter of memorizing “Plan A” and “Plan B” because in the real world, A and B overlap and recombine in unexpected ways. It is a matter of training yourself to think through how things might happen that you might otherwise dismiss – to get to know the shapes of unfolding reality. To have at hand the answer to the question, “What if …” (Schwartz 1996 p.28)”

3.1.4.1 Creating a scenario

Lindgren (1996) concludes that:

“There are as many methods for scenario planning as there are scenario planners” (Lindgren, 1996 p.100)

With this in mind I’ve come to understand understood that creating scenarios is much about tweaking the process to fit a specific situation. That is also why I used bits and pieces of several methods to create a method that I found appropriate for the time, resources and knowledge that I got.
3.1.4.1.1 The first method
The first method is created by Coate & Jarret Inc (Lindgren1996). It is a pretty straight forward method with clear steps.

a. Determine a year for the scenario.
b. Brainstorm freely about the variables that may affect the future. Thematize what is being said and decide scenario subjects from what is brought up.
c. Identify:
   i. Trends and key factors which are crucial
   ii. Wild cards that could throw the whole thing
   iii. Hopes and fears that are the future
   iv. Discuss the basic assumptions that the group should work beyond
d. Conclude which key development that applies to the scenario.
e. Try to determine the significant events that may occur in the future, which has crucial importance for the development of the scenario.
f. Find a good title for the scenario.
g. Put up guidelines for the development of events in the scenario.

3.1.4.1.2 The second method
The second method is created by Peter Schwartz (Lindgren 1996). This is a method that is more open for interpretation and more artistic. Schwartz view scenarios as stories and they should hence be written as such. For that reason the scenario writing is a very informal process. There are three variables to take in to account:

- What are the driving forces?
- What is unsecure about the future?
- What is inevitable about the future?

When that has been concluded it is time to formulate a plot. An example could be “This scenario is about how X and Y join forces to defeat Z”. The three most common plots are:

- Winners – losers
- Challenge – response
- Evolution (organic development)

3.1.4.1.3 The third method
According to Lindgren (1996) a complete scenario should consist of the following elements:

- The actors (WHO) or WHOM drive the plot
- The events (WHAT events take place)
- The time (WHEN does it take place)
- The scene (WHERE does the plot take place)
- Props (HOW does the plot develop? What props are used)
- Motive (WHY does it happen)

3.1.5 Workshop – “The user test”
How do one judge if a scenario is good? According to Lindgren (1996) there are three main criteria that should be taken in to consideration when judging the quality of a scenario:

- Relevance - are the scenarios about issues that matter to the business?
- Consistency - are the scenarios consistent, coherent and perceived as such?
- Archetypal – Do the scenarios describe different "models" or are they just variations on the same theme?

These criteria were also the starting point when I planned for my workshop (see appendix 6). The aim with the workshop was to validate the scenarios. Another important aspect (that is not discussed in the literature) was what pros and cons that the workshop participants could identify in each scenario.

Two persons took part in the workshop. Both are working as technical writers but none of them at Company x. One of the participants had previously been involved during the interviews. The other one had not been involved in the project before.

I started the workshop by showing a short movie about what scenario planning is to give them a basic understanding. After that they read the scenarios and then we went through the workshop plan for each scenario. The workshop plan consisted of discussion topics that where the same for every scenario. In total the workshop lasted for two hours.
4. Theory

4.1 Collaborative media

The field of technical writing has changed rapidly within the B2C. Much to this is because of the widespread use of collaborative media on a consumer level. Nowadays the traditional producer/consumer perspective is more or less outdated (Löwgren and Reimer 2013). It is my belief that in order to get an understanding of the future role of the technical writer within the B2C-market one must also understand the mechanisms that collaborative media plays.

Collaborative media is mediated communication that participants collaborate around, for example content, meaning and messages. The most prominent feature about collaborative media (at least from a historical perspective) is the grass root cultures that through communicative practice cut across established media structures of society (ibid).

Today people are not only consuming media, they create it themselves. Through collaborative media like Facebook, YouTube and Tumblr they have become the producer. Löwgren and Reimer (ibid) conclude that the practices of collaborative media are consuming, producing and design of infrastructure. It’s important to emphasize the features are not isolated from each other.

To begin the “circuit” of a collaborative media process one first need a platform. But that platform could still be very sketchy. There are also examples of platforms that are built on top of a previous platform. Once the platform is out there the design, production and consumption take place simultaneously.

If you compare collaborative media to a classic mass medium like TV one could see that TV sends out a specific message to a large audience sent in static infrastructure that could not be change by the audience, whereas collaborative media is instead more modular based. The collaborative media offers a framework of different components that could be appointed in different ways to suite the purpose of the people using it. A crucial point in the comparison is also the reuse of already produced text when creating new media text. For example it could be a new version of an old text, or a mash-up of an old or new text or a remake of an old text.

Löwgren and Reimer (ibid) do not define collaborative media as any specific media type. They recognize “collaborative” as relative. Some media have better properties in order to serve as a collaborative media, but it is not until it is used in a collaborative way it becomes a collaborative media. Hence, some media could at a given time be collaborative and in another situation not. Properties and characteristics that collaborative media share are:

- Easy to use
- Can be used creatively in many different ways
- The practice is in large part collaborative. By getting help from others people could create things not possible on their own

4.2 Diffusion of innovation

The concept of diffusion of innovations is about how, why, and when innovations make its way through communication channels in society and become accepted. Diffusion as a social concept was coined and defined by Everett Rogers in 1968. The principles were not new, but it was Rogers who gave the concept some real academic weight in his book Diffusion of innovations (Rogers 2003).
Rogers’s book revolves around four key elements that greatly influence the spread of innovations in society. These elements are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innovation</th>
<th>This could be an idea, practice or object. The important thing is that it is understood as new by an individual.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication channels</td>
<td>The medium where the information (message) is sent from one person to another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>The time it takes for a person to get through the innovation-decision process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social system</td>
<td>A group of people that through problem solving wants to accomplish a common goal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diffusion of an innovation occurs through a five–step process. This process is a type of decision-making. It occurs through a series of communication channels over a period of time among the members of a similar social system. The five stages of the adaptation process are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>In this stage the individual is first exposed to an innovation but lacks information about the innovation. During this stage of the process the individual has not been inspired to find more information about the innovation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>In this stage the individual is interested in the innovation and actively seeks information/detail about the innovation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision</td>
<td>In this stage the individual takes the concept of the change and weighs the advantages/disadvantages of using the innovation and decides whether to adopt or reject the innovation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>In this stage the individual employs the innovation to a varying degree depending on the situation. During this stage the individual determines the usefulness of the innovation and may search for further information about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmation</td>
<td>In this stage the individual finalizes his/her decision to continue using the innovation. This stage is both intrapersonal (may cause cognitive dissonance) and interpersonal, confirmation the group has made the right decision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The adopters of innovations are categorized in five measured units that are based according to the respective time an innovation is adopted. The innovativeness (the degree that an individual or other component of adoption are quicker at assuming new ideas as compared to other members of a social system) of the five-adopter categories are:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innovators</td>
<td>Innovators are the first individuals to adopt an innovation. Innovators are willing to take risks, youngest in age, have the highest social class, have great financial liquidity, are very social and have closest contact to scientific sources and interaction with other innovators. Risk tolerance has them adopting technologies which may ultimately fail. Financial resources help absorb these failures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early adopters</td>
<td>This is the second fastest category of individuals who adopt an innovation. These individuals have the highest degree of opinion leadership among the other adopter categories. Early adopters are typically younger in age, have a higher social status, have more financial liquidity, advanced education, and are more socially forward than late adopters. More discrete in adoption choices than innovators. Realize careful choice of adoption will help them maintain central communication position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Majority</td>
<td>Individuals in this category adopt an innovation after a varying degree of time. This time of adoption is significantly longer than the innovators and early adopters. Early Majority tend to be slower in the adoption process, have above average social status, contact with early adopters, and seldom hold positions of opinion leadership in a system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Majority</td>
<td>Individuals in this category will adopt an innovation after the average member of the society. These individuals approach an innovation with a high degree of skepticism and after the majority of society has adopted the innovation. Late Majority are typically skeptical about an innovation, have below average social status, very little financial liquidity, in contact with others in late majority and early majority, very little opinion leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laggards</td>
<td>Individuals in this category are the last to adopt an innovation. Unlike some of the previous categories, individuals in this category show little to no opinion leadership. These individuals typically have an aversion to change-agents and tend to be advanced in age. Laggards typically tend to be focused on &quot;traditions&quot;, likely to have lowest social status, lowest financial fluidity, be oldest of all other adopters, in contact with only family and close friends.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A bell curve representing the different groups.¹

Most people belong to the majority groups while only a few percent belong to the innovators. The innovator is usually too different to become an opinion leader, but the early adopters are central point in the communication process (Falkheimer 2001).

4.3 The current world of a technical writer

Technical writing is on the brink of a paradigm shift from one-sided, expert driven user documentation to integrating user-generated content, collaborative communication and the power of communities (Lykhinin 2012). Interestingly this grand paradigm shift in technical communication is hard to find in academic literature. To define the current state of the technical writer and the area in which he acts I had to turn to practitioners to obtain my body of knowledge for the field of technical communication. This due to no published research could be found related to my research question. The sources that I use (blogs, trade publications, etc.) haven’t given many clues for academic literature in the subject. This overlaps with Cleary’s’ (2011) observation, based on an analysis of influential blogs by technical writer practitioners.

The lack of conversation between academics and practitioners on the blogs examined is quite striking. Apart from a small number of comments responding to blog posts, there is no academic presence on these blogs. No academic is listed on the MindTouch list of the 25 most influential technical communication bloggers—all are practitioners. In other fields, such as economics and law, many influential bloggers work in academia. Although the bloggers in this study regularly reference blogs, websites, and occasionally white papers, they rarely reference academic journal articles or even academic blogs. (Cleary 2012 p.20)

Also Rauch et al (2010) have a similar observation when they conclude that:

“Because a limited amount of traditional research is targeted to social media’s impact on technical writing, writers must often make due with extrapolating from research carried out in related fields or based on older technologies. Increasingly, writers also turn to blogs, wikis, online forums, and other forms of social media as sources for information. There is a growing need for reputable, high-quality, timely research findings that can be put into practice by communicators immediately.”

4.3.1 The paradigm shifts

Even though the paradigm shift Lykhinin (2012) describes is the most recent it isn’t the only shift in technical writing during the last decade.

¹ Picture taken from http://altastreet.com/blog/diffusion-innovations
**4.3.1.1 The first paradigm shift: single-sourcing**

Single-sourcing or modularization as Haramundanis (2009) refers to it has had a major impact on how technical writers work and how content could be distributed to different type of documents. Haramundanis describes modularization as a fully team-oriented approach where the technical communication department together writes the bits and pieces of the document. It is defined as:

“The process of separating content into discrete topics and storing them for reuse as modules in an appropriately capable content management system or database. Single-sourcing is the activity of using such modules to create multiple documents with relatively little or no change.” (Haramundanis 2009 p.151)

Haramundanis concludes that:

*This is a major shift in the work process of a writer in the content management environment; writers have become versioners rather than authors of original content. From author (original creator) of a document, writers have become changers of text working in a niggling environment of tags and attributes. Granted it makes for more accurate, more consistent, and more predictable documents.* (Haramundanis 2009 p.154)

**4.3.1.2 The second paradigm shift: technical writing in Web 2.0**

Today single-source writing is standard in many technical communication departments. This change accustomed the technical writer to a more team oriented approach and hopefully this could benefit in the next challenge; namely technical writing in Web 2.0.

Scott Abel (2011) refers to this type of support information as “Help 2.0”. Help 2.0 is about going away from only supplying product information (most probably in a static format) and start to create a support experience. He defines it as:

“Help 2.0 is about letting go of old school, preconceived notions about our role as content providers. Help 2.0 forces us to realize that by leveraging the knowledge of the crowd we can help users find the right information quickly and easily, whether we created the content ourselves or not. And, perhaps most importantly, Help 2.0 is about creating support experiences in which users can help us learn what they want and need, while also allowing them to assist one another, in ways that are meaningful to them.” (Abel 2011 p.22)

Abel (2011) argues that when the move started from providing users with paper-based documentation to providing them with electronic access to technical support content, the web was used as just another channel. He calls this Help 1.0. Support sites were populated with digital copies of printed documentation – downloadable, keyword-searchable PDF files. Technical writers often became adept at repurposing content – pushing it to other digital formats. While Abel sees that these were all steps in the right direction, he concludes that repurposing content in this manner is no longer an acceptable support solution. With Help 2.0 we should instead focus on areas such as:

- Online communities
- Hubs for collaboration
- User generated content
- Content personalization
- Content analytics
Larry Kuntz (2010) has a less populist and more historical approach to the future for technical writers in the Web 2.0-era. He describes an evolutionary three stage process/model that the technical writing trade has gone through. The first is what he describes as the “traditional process”. The technical writer got information from a subject matter expert (SME) and wrote a static user manual about the product. This process was often in long cycles. The second stage of the shift was towards multichannel output. This shift could be described as the shift towards content management systems and single-source writing, discussed in previous chapter. The SME was still the primary source of information. In the last phase Kuntz (2010) concludes that the number of output formats has grown in the last years. The line between technical documentation and other kinds of company-produced information, like marketing white papers, has blurred. More significantly, writers are now receiving content from sources outside the enterprise. The content is now coming from a community of contributors instead from a relatively small number of SMEs. The community often includes customers who might not even understand the community to which they belong and who doubtless wouldn't consider themselves to be part of the product documentation team. They simply responded to a feedback link on the company's web site. Or they saw a question in a forum and decided to post an answer. Today, a depiction of the process looks like a double funnel: information flows in from a variety of sources, of which the SME is only one of many. Simultaneously, the information is distributed in a growing number of output formats, also reaching the customers through social media outlets like Twitter feeds and Facebook fan pages.

4.3.1.2.1 A brand new world
Obviously Kuntz paints the picture from a technical writer’s perspective. But from a user’s perspective the way of how he obtain support information has shift drastically the last ten years.

“Search technology, and its application by users, has changed the face and entry point to technical documentation. The “entry point” is the page your user lands on first, also called a “landing page.””

(Gentle 2012 p.6)

This tells a lot about the world in which the technical writer works in. The manual is not the main starting point any more. The search engine is. Google is obviously the main starting point for most users. And it’s crucial to have a good SEO to be the main entry point when users do their search.

But it is not only the information provided by the company that will end up in those search results. As Rauch et al (2010) explains:
“Technical communicators must now compete with information being generated by the users...”

Thanks to Web 2.0, today almost everyone is an author and a publisher. We collectively upload millions of hours of video to YouTube, billions of images on Instagram, and Wikipedia had over 3.5 million articles in English. Altruism and passion for self-expression, combined with web publishing systems that ensure low barriers to entry, lead to a whole new way of working and writing. Regardless of background, education, and training, more and more people become providers of support information on the Web outside of their regular employment. In 2008, Daren Barefoot noted that “people formerly known as audience are already documenting your products in ways and to an extent you could never hope to cover yourself or with a team of technical writers”. To execute a successful social documentation strategy, technical documentation teams need to learn how to architect and foster user communities and then how to incorporate user-generated content into their workflows. (Lykhinin 2012). One of the ways of doing that is to create collaborative media platform like a wiki, a community or a forum.

4.3.1.2.2 Communities
Looking at Kuntz model it is clear that he sees the production of support information as a job made by the technical writer only that today there are much more SMEs to take in to consideration. The collaborative media platforms are used to retrieve information about how the user experienced the product, information that could be used in the support information. What he doesn’t elaborate on is the actual relationship between the user and the technical writer. Anne Gentle (2012) takes a bigger grip on that. She describes this shift to enormous amount of channels. Instead of problematizing it she takes a more solution based approach. She recognizes that a lot of the conversations about products often create communities. She defines community as

“An online community is: Where a group of people with similar goals or interests connect and exchange information using web tools.”

She explains the difference among the so called “owned communities” that are corporately created and the external communities that are driven by enthusiasts. The technical writer could use both of these types of communities to foster good conversations. Gentle argues that documentation as conversation means getting closer to users and helping them perform well. User-centered design has been touted as one of the most important ideas developed in the last twenty years of workplace writing. Web 2.0 gives users a chance to interact with information and other users. Now, writers can take the idea of user-centered design a step further by starting conversations with users and enabling user assistance in interactions.

4.3.1.2.3 Participation
One could question if it is realistic to think that all customers should start to fill collaborative sites with support information. The answer to this somehow rhetorical question is no. Gentle (2012) concludes that like other types of online communities, you will not have hundreds of content contributors. Realistically, you might have a core group of about five contributors for most types of information products.

Jakob Nielsen’s (2006) describes the “90-9-1 rule,” which claims that participation in online communities (forums, email lists, wikis as documentation systems, newsgroups, etc.) breaks down into about 90% lurkers, 9% small contributors, and 1% large contributors.
4.3.1.2.4 Motivation to join
To be able to build and foster a community it requires an understanding of what motivates community members to participate. Andy Oram (2006) reports on a survey gathered 354 responses over three months in 2007. He suggests these reasons why people contribute to community documentation:

- Community building
- Informal technical support
- Mutual aid
- Gratitude
- Personal growth
- Payment
- Enjoyment of writing
- Reputation building, career building

Gentle (2012) gives a few other suggestions on what might motivate people in creating content for free. Her overall summery is that the payment for participants is happiness. She also has some more substantial bullet points:

- Autonomy: People want to personalize their experience, have choices, and have an open and transparent environment
- Competence: People like to feel they’re good at what they do
- Relatedness: People want to connect with others in similar situations
- Self-esteem: People like to feel confident in their knowledge and relationships

4.3.1.2.5 Setting up a strategy
With the explosion of content sources comes the need for a content strategy, which Kristina Halvorson (2010) defines as "recommendations about how to create, deliver, and govern web content" during what she calls the web content lifecycle.

Creating content might mean that content originates in the technical writing team as in the past. But it can also mean assembling and assimilating content from many sources, both inside and outside the organization.

Delivering content means selecting from the wide range of delivery formats that are available. These choices are influenced by the kind of content and the needs of the customer.

Governing content involves several tasks: doing a content inventory to determine what already exists and how much of it is useful; monitoring the community’s contributions to ensure that everything meets the organization’s standards for style and format; and maintaining the content to ensure that it remains current and useful. (Kunz 2010)

4.3.1.2.6 New roles – Kunz, Rauch
Even though “everybody is a writer” these days there are emerging roles within the field of technical writing. Some of the roles that were discussed in the literature were:

Community manager

An emerging role, still being defined, that involves communication with the community, encouraging community members, advocating for the community, and promoting awareness. (Gentle 2012)
**Content curator**

A curator is typically the custodian of a collection of art or historic objects; for content curation the person's role is to manage, administer, and generally take care of content. (Gentle 2012)

**Content strategist**

The content strategist must consider the big picture-handling all of the information that comes from the community and aligning it with the organization's values and strategies in a way that meets the needs and expectations of the customers. (Kunz 2012)

**Content analyst**

As was described in Abels’ (2011) manifesto like text analysis of the content created and the people participate in creating it is of big importance in HELP 2.0. A content analyst could for example analyzing web metrics that included user ratings, polls, socialmeter scores, and the number of downloads and page views per day. It could also be to analyze search engine data to determine what issues most often prompt users to seek help online. (Rauch et al 2010)

**Information intelligence**

Knowing what is said in external communities and forums has become more and more important. One of the reasons might be the risk that wrong solutions are given to problems. Rauch et al (2010) argues that while companies cannot expect to control external communications, they may need to monitor them with the objective of locating and correcting information that is inaccurate or misleading. Such efforts should involve technical writers and editors to ensure that the information is clear and understandable.

4.3.1.2.7 The importance of transparency
The more a company let the customer in the more open they need to be. Gentle (2012) concludes that the social media audience expects open communication and honesty. Much like the general web-reading audience, this audience has little time or patience for messages that are not directly related to their task at hand.

Furthermore Gentle says that transparency is important for building trust with your audience. This trust and belief in the accuracy of your documentation is crucial for creating successful relationships with readers through any social media communication.

**4.3.2 Summarized conclusion of literature investigation**

Even though collaborative authoring, community building and discussion as support information has been wieldy discussed amongst practitioner during the last years it is fair to say that very few of the articles that I’ve read concludes a total vanishing of the official user information. A death of the technical writer is not to be seen anytime soon. But due to the advancement of Web 2.0 technologies it is clear that to technical writers needs to establish a closer relationship with its users and let them in to the arena of creating support information. Maybe the wording support information ought to be change. Janet Swisher (2010) propose the term “user assistance” and writes: “The term ‘user assistance’ encompasses all the ways that users get help in figuring out how to use a product”. For example, it can include video tutorials, demos, mailing lists, blogs, tweets, forum questions and answers, and live chat with experts and other users. Each of these methods has implications for the technical writer.
Now that I've gone through the existing literature (mainly from practitioners’ field but also the limited academic research that is available) it seems to point quite clear on three things. Firstly, the people previously known as the audience help to create support information in the collaborative media landscape and it is not of obviously poorer quality. Secondly, there are reasons to consider alternatives to the traditional producer and consumer structure in support information. Thirdly, if you are considering such options it seems (according to theory) that the professional technical writer has the potential to develop new roles in an alternative media structure.

This is the platform on which my work is based. Through rigorous empirical studies of the ongoing change in the field of technical writing, and the design and validation of a number of future scenarios for professional technical writers I will concretize possible development directions.
5. Empiric work section 1 - Interviews with people working with support information

5.1 The technical writer

5.1.1 The product evolution
The end of an old world and the beginning of a new, that is how most of the people I talked to described the shift of the products in the company during the last years. To be a technical writer in such a transforming area that Company x is in demands much more in terms of being able to follow the constant change. But it’s not only that circumstances change from product to product. A product in itself is most likely to change during its lifetime due to software updates.

To write about a product that "is alive” certainly has its challenges. Within the home electronic industry there are a lot of examples where products have “come life” during the last years. The Internet of things phenomenon and the connected society is soon in most consumer products with intelligence. One of the reasons (not the only though) might be the need for constant upgrade to have the latest functionality.

Setting trends in terms of being the latest and first is crucial in the business of consumer products. This also affects the support information. Today there is a demand on a much faster turnaround. The companies cannot wait until the next update or the next product. If there is a “hot subject” then it needs to be handle directly.

5.1.2 The change in the role of technical writer during recent years
When looking back on how a technical writer works now and ten years back there is one key difference that stands out. Technical writers are not writing ONE single manual at the time. They are writing EVERY support document involved with the feature you are currently covering. This due to the introduction of XML and content management systems and it has made a key difference in how support information is produced and how it could be delivered.

One of the interviewee says that five years ago they used FrameMaker and the mindset was one product and one manual. If there came a new product, even if it was very similar you wrote a new manual. Nowadays most of the technical writer departments have an XML and content management solution. The thought behind it is to reuse as much content as possible. The mindset has changed to functionality and description. When done right it has been a way to streamline the content production. Other benefits are that by using the same source of information in several documents it also provides a possibility to have a more accurate use of specific words or phrases.

Another big difference, in many companies producing consumer products, is the reduction of information products in paper. Reducing the amount of paper doesn’t change the role of the technical writer per se. But it change how users experience and interact with the support information and in that way also how the text should be written.

5.1.3 The future role and skills
When compiling the interviews it was clear that all of the interviewees put great hopes to the users when it comes to the development of future support information. Once a product is out on the market they think that the technical writer will be much more dependent to get information from actual users to be able to revise and maintain the material. Because you never know what the customers want to know until they actually tell you.
It’s not that users are expected to create support content that could be directly implemented is in the companies’ own support structure. Based on the interviews the collaborative media platforms are viewed up on as a thermometers on how the customers are doing. What questions they are asking, what they dislike etc. This information is then used to produce the static support information on the support site.

There are new skills and roles that are needed in order to do that. Companies need to have dedicated people to analyze what customers are writing about and the data that comes out from their interactions. To be able to write suitable support information the technical writer needs to take the user in to consideration in a whole new way. The analytical skills of transforming what is being said about a product in collaborative media to an informative explanation are crucial knowledge in the future role of the technical writer.

But it is not only that the technical writer needs to be analytical and responsive regarding the users complaints and questions in collaborative media. Today, and most probably even more in the future, there are a vast amount of channels to feed the information to. To get the right effect the technical writer needs to find the channel and media that are most suitable for the message of the text. This demands a broad knowledge of how people are behaving in collaborative media, what the strengths and weaknesses are considering different type of infrastructural platforms as well as an understanding in how people experience different types of media.

5.2 Support information

5.2.1 The role of support information

Mentioning the legislation as the reason for having a manual or support information is very common reason that I’ve encountered. According to the EG machinery directive a product needs to have a manual to get the CE marking. The directive states that in order to sell a product within the EU countries the product needs to have a manual. The manual should explain how the product should be used and it should be written in the language of the country the product is being sold in. The main reason for this legislation is to prevent people from hurt themselves during misuse of the product.

Some interviewees had a more interesting argument to have a manual for a product; that people expect that there will be one, because that is the way it has always been. This point in the direction that supports information and manuals are being made because of tradition. It is far from working with user experience of support information that some technical writing departments are striving towards.

There is a risk of producing something in a specific format because “that is the way it has always been” and the risk is that you stagnating in terms of what the user really wants.

It is not only the aspects of legislation and tradition that are being held as an argument for the need of a rich and deep manual. It is also the fact that products are getting more and more advanced. By introducing more and more advanced functionality in products some of the interviewees also saw the importance of support information was increasing. Other interviewees saw that official support information have started to be exposed to competition and the competition is coming from the users themselves.

With Web 2.0 there has also been a change in behavior amongst the customers. Today people know that the company making the product is not the only source of information. By having manuals and support information more easily accessible for people, who even not own the product for the manual, it has also opened up a new possible use for the manual. One of them is that potential customers use them as research material before a purchase. If this is the actual case it somehow also indicates that
condensed hard facts are starting to be viewed as selling arguments. In could in the end mean that marketing departments and the technical writing departments are moving towards each other with a more precise direction of outcome.

We have seen that many products within the consumer electronic industry are getting more and more technically advanced and get more and more functionality. Does that mean that we also get more and more support information? Some of the interviewees think so, because pure product design can’t fully explain all functionalities to the user. There will always be an issue with implementing a product design that is so intuitive that everyone would understand it. On the other hand some interviewees mentioned that more and more products are competing on their UI and if that would work flawlessly there is no real need for a manual. If people have problem to understand there is a problem in the UI, not a need for a manual.

5.2.2 Does official equals trust?
Several of the interviewees pointed out the importance of manuals and support information, provided by company, being official. Since the information is sanctioned by the company it also gives it legitimacy of being the correct way to solve a specific task.

Not only does it give legitimacy of being the correct way of solving a problem. It also calms the user because they know that the way they have solved an issue was the right way. If the product doesn’t work when they have tried it out according to the support information they know that there is something that is wrong with the product.

But all the interviewees weren’t of the same view. When trying to see it with the eyes of a customer some of them pointed out that the producer of a product most certainly wasn’t viewed up on as someone with unbiased information. Some interviewees saw that as a reason for users to go to external forums to get information from other users that they viewed as more credible.

This is most probably because people believe that companies have an interest of profit and will never tell the true story if they got something to lose on it. But it doesn’t necessarily need to be a monetary reason. In some part of the world it could be of cultural ground. One of the interviewees told about a study in China where it was very clear that the general population did not trust corporate information because they already had a hard time to trust the government. In that case you rather trust your friends, family or someone online.

Of course the world isn’t black or white. It’s not a matter of either or. Official support information from a manufacturer is (except the fact that it is the law) in many ways a must. The question is rather if the traditional way that support information has been provided in the past is the most suitable way. Is there another way to do it that would benefit both the manufacturing company as well as the customers?

5.2.3 The future of support information
What is out there in the future of support information? Or is the future already here without us realizing it? During the interviews it was clear that a couple of things stood out when it came to what was viewed up on as the future support information. One of those things was integrated support. One of the interviewees mentioned that in a way it already exists today. Regardless if you install something on your computer or start your new GPS for the first time there is a guide that instructs you how to proceed and that is also support information. The interviewee thought that more of the future support information would be like that.
The conventional manual is slowly dissolving in to digital 1's and 0's. Today more and more products are operated using a screen. To have the support information on that screen while performing tasks could be a way of making more natural use of support information. Another interviewee had similar ideas and hoped that in the future support information would no longer be viewed as a manual and that much more of the support is integrated in the product. The interviewee exemplifies with apps as a current example and think that is good way to go and storage the information centrally on a server. Then it is much easier to update for the company.

Not only have we got start up wizards in our products, we now have applications that for example allow us to monitor our home alarm or our power consumption. With the applications comes a possibility for a more direct interaction with the customer. Not only could the application be used to control a devise or system. It could also be used to give support information.

Does this mean that the conventional manual and support information is obsolete? According to most interviewees there is currently no need to disregard it. Why? Simply because people still demand it and are using it. One of the interviewees mentioned that there most probably is research on an academic level to see if companies could stop producing user guides and leave that to the customers. But the interviewee still sees that there is a need and a demand for support information from Company x’s customers.

So how should future technical documentation departments position themselves regarding the user generated support information? There is obviously no quick fix to provide. But according to one of the interviewees it is important to have a rational approach and understand what makes most sense for the user. There are many sources of information and there is no purpose on its own to have a user guide. It is there to help the customer to accomplish a task. The interviewee still think that it will be there as a complement to other sources like forums. The sender of the information might not be that important for the user as long as he gets the help he is looking for. This would also lead to a change in the view of what is needed to be produced by the company.

Foreseeing a continued democratization of the content on the Internet it may also open up for more direct collaboration between companies that use the same platform or are dependent on each other to make software and hardware to work. From a consumer perspective it then doesn’t really matter who the sender of the support information is. All the consumer wants is to make the product work.

5.3 Collaborative media

5.3.1 Current use

We have previously covered the official support information. A conclusion that can be drawn for that is that a lot of that the support information is developed in regards to what people are saying “out there”. The collaborative media platforms are considered as the most effective channel to really understand the customer. Web 2.0 has made it easy for anyone to raise their voice and say their opinion and without much research you can get a fairly good picture of what the customers need. The knowledge that the company get could then be used in static support information.

What is interesting is that many of the interviewees equalize the user generated information as opinions from the user. It is often not viewed up on as the user has contributed with support information themselves. That is of course a part of what a collaborative media platform generate; a discussion around a specific problem or feature. But it’s not the entire part of spectrum. What is clear is that during the last years collaborative media has affected technical writers in that sense that they are more aware of the consumer of the product. Some of them think that they get more honest feedback
from customers through collaborative media channels than they would compared to phone calls to the support center.

One of the qualities that collaborative media platforms provide is the “stealth feeling”. Consumers could more freely speak their mind about for example experienced problems without any need to have a personal interaction with someone. This also involves risks. People could be more eager to speak their mind and it could easily create a negative snowball effect.

User generated content has a quality that official support information lacks. It is not bound to any loyalty or restricted to work within specific frames. A problem that is experienced could be illustrated in a broader spectrum. Another aspect of the same topic is credibility. If a company in any way invites the user to speak their mind in a public space they also open up for themselves for possible critique. This requires a more transparent communication towards customers.

During this empirical review we have concluded that there has been a change in how users find support information. User generated support information is out there. It needs to be taken in to consideration. But one question remains. Apart from being a great source of information for what the user wants to know, how should user generated content be viewed up on? To view user created support information as a complement to the official support information is an opinion that is shared by most interviewees. Even though many have a positive view up on user created information in general there is still a hint of skepticism around it. And one of the reasons might be that companies feel like they lose control by letting users explaining how to fix a problem.

There are of course many advantages of the user generated information that have been brought up as well. One of them is the very effect of letting go of control. That most of the time there is an active user behind the posted support information and that other users could get in contact with much easier than they could with a subject matter expert on a specific company. By letting people outside the company explain how a product works the company all of a sudden has an ambassador, at least for that specific topic. Other effects are of course that with a vast amount of people helping out there will be a huge collection of information and it is based on customers’ real questions.

This is very much the core of how collaborative media is used and viewed up on today. Everything should be based on the customers’ actual questions about the product. One of the interviewees summed up the use of collaborative media in three bullet points 1. Business intelligence 2. To let people share 3. As a channel for information to customers.

5.3.2 Motivation
Looking back at the canonical examples we could see that only a very small part of the users of Wikipedia actually contributed with content, 1 of 3650 users. It is still people like that are the heart of collaborative media and user generated content. To make an effort and produce this content there must clearly be a motivational factor. Even though it is impossible to generalize everyone there were a couple things that the interviewees looked up on as generic motivational factors for users to create support information. The motivational factor according to the interviewees turned out to be a pretty conventional factor. Just the fact that they actually like to help people and to get a sincere thank you afterwards. But also to spread knowledge and to learn new things. One of the interviewees thought that what it all comes down to is acknowledgement and recognition.

People want to feel that they make a difference. They want to get acknowledged for it. These are all basic needs. The Web 2.0 has provided a platform for it. But this is only one side of the story. The brand in itself could evoke very strong feelings. Those users identify themselves to that specific brand
so much that they would do anything to be a part of it. A brand like that is Apple and there are of course numerous reasons, that do not have to do with user generated content, why Apple has become such a success story when it comes to how people identify themselves with the brand. But being an active contributor of user generated content or being an active ambassador for a brand still evokes the same mechanisms of dedication.

5.3.3 The risk of trust
Just as many interviewees regarded support information from the company of the product as needed because it was official user generated information is disregarded as “real” support information because it is not official.

By not having the quality stamp the user generated information could potentially be harmful for the customer. But in the world of democratized content does that stamp have any real meaning? Some of the interviewees didn’t think it had. They thought that a customer always trust a fellow customer more than the company that produced that product.

The discussion filters down to a similar conclusion that one of the interviewees had in previous chapters. It’s not a purpose of its own to have an officially stamped user guide or support information. It’s rather about finding ways to get the user the best possible support that he could have. If that is with content created by the technical writers at the company or by the users themselves is not that important. What is important is that the users feel that they could trust the information they get. That has to do with how we consume information. In order to trust information we might need to change the way we consume it. One of the interviewees made a parable to how people consume products today. That a lot of the purchases are made because of recommendations, either by friends or sometimes people we don’t even know. Maybe information could be consumed like that as well? That people you know and trust could recommend you information and the trust of information is built on a social layer.

This once again leads us back to the canonical examples in previous chapter. Factlink is a product made on these premises. Somehow it make sense that users help each other out. Not only by providing answers to questions and tricks on how to enhance the user experience but to validate that information is correct.

5.3.4 Quality
Being a technical writer means having certain qualities, such as structure information and produce support information with a professional tone and feel. When discussing a future scenario where content from users and technical writers are mixed some of the interviewees where a bit skeptical regarding whether the user generated support information could keep the same quality as the support information produced by technical writers.

The main reason for not having user generated support information in the same context as support information produced by the company could mostly be viewed as a branding issue. If the product represents a certain quality it is an obvious choice to have support information that reflects this quality. When it comes to support information through videos there might be a risk that user generated videos do look a bit less unpolished compared to professional videos. There is a matter of having the right equipment to make it look good. When it comes to support information in plain text there is less obstacles of that matter. With this type of information another interviewees see a possible integration between user created content and company created support information in a more positive light. In some cases it might even be considered an advantage to have user created content as a complement to the official support information. The user created content is written with a tone that most people feel
familiar with and could relate to. In bigger companies technical writers often need to follow a specific tone of voice. This leads to a more uniform language. The writers shouldn’t distinguish themselves from each other. But as the interviewee revels this might lead to a text that for a person outside the company could be looked up on as formal and stiff.
6. Empiric work section 2 - Text analysis of Company x’s support forum

Collaborative media can take many forms. One of them is forums. Company x has since some years their own support forum. Even though my empirical research has no intention to get a generalizable result of Company x’s work with support information as a whole, I wanted to keep a coherent target of the investigation and it seemed as the obvious choice to perform the text analysis at their forum.

6.1 Threads and posts

In total there were 110 active threads during the selected dates. Of these threads 65 of them were created sometime during these dates. The other was created previously but had been active during the selected dates.

![Bar chart showing total threads and threads created during the period](chart.png)

Table 1: Active threads and created threads during the selected dates.

The threads contained in total 800 posts. About half of them were created during the selected dates and the rest prior these dates.
Out of the analyzed threads it could be seen that the number of posts rarely goes over 10. Most of the time it is the subject of question that is answered and in some cases a follow up question. In the cases where there are 10 posts or more it is usually a question that a lot of users have problems with. In some cases this could lead to long discussions about how to solve the particular problem.

Table 2: Number of post created before selected dates and number of posts created during selected dates. N=800

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Posts created before period</th>
<th>Posts created during period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>48,50%</td>
<td>51,50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Number of posts in the threads. N=110

Most of the time there are a limit number of users participating in a thread. It rarely goes over 4 people. The most common situation would be an answer from a super user and maybe an addition from another experienced user.
Table 4: Number of users involved in each thread. 
N=110

6.2 User groups
In order to analyze the different type of users I designed a category schema based on how many posts that the users had made.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newbie</td>
<td>0-20 posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
<td>21-50 posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>51-150 posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced</td>
<td>150+ posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super user</td>
<td>Awarded by Company x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company x</td>
<td>Company x support agents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the interviews it was said that about 60% of the posts were one time posters. These are users that more or less only visit the forum if they have a problem and when they get the answer they are satisfied and stop to use the forum. But the initiation of threads is a little different. Here it is clear a domination of what I’ve decide to call “Newbie”. Take in to account that the user group “New” also are kind of inexperienced on the forum. Then it adds up to 90% that were created by these categories. It also shows the nature of this forum. Inexperienced one time users go to the support forum to be helped and experienced regular users go there to help out. It is also noticeable that Company x’s support agents didn’t initiate a single thread during the investigated period.
Table 5: Type of user that initiated the thread. 
N=110

Since most threads are initiated by newbies it is logical that a majority of the posts also are made by this category. But it could also be seen that there has been a significant shift in percentage. Many posts come from the “Medium” user group. These users are “up comers” that have started to take an interest in helping out at the forum. Most probably they also want to create a reputation and tend to help out a lot. The group “Experienced” consists of a rather limited amount of people. There seem to be a glitch here up to the super user. Maybe you either get tired of using the forum when you reached this status or you get appointed to Super user, get a real kick out of that and continue to use the forum. Considering that Super users only initiated 2% of the threads it is clear that the number of actual posts comes from helping out. Most of the time they will serve as the guarantee of assurance during a discussion.

Table 6: Number of posts for each type of category. 
N=800
6.3 The reason behind it

During the analysis of the forum it emerged 6 different types of categories for the type of threads that was posted. Of these categories three of them have a sub category called “discussion”. This is when three or more people take off into a deeper discussion about the subject that has been brought up. The most common type of thread is “Question about problem”. This is a thread where someone asks a question about an issue and someone respond direct and more or less no deeper discussion takes part. Together with the discussion sub category this stands for 55% of all threads. Aside from that are “General question” a subject for threads that are about problems and questions not immediately related to the product. Worth to mention is that threads handling the actual usage of the product only stand for 8% of the threads. Does this mean that people visiting the forum in general have a good knowledge about product usage or that people in general get that information from somewhere else?

![Pie chart showing distribution of types of threads]

Table 7: Types of threads.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaint/feedback</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question about usage</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General question</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General question and discussion</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question about problem and discussion</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question about problem</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When it comes down to the actual questions asked or subjects brought up it becomes a lot more diversified. Of the analyzed threads only a few subjects occurs in several threads.

To give an overall understanding of what type of subjects that the threads involved the subjects were also given a high level category. Within these categories “Software” and “Hardware” where the type of questions and subjects that where most brought up. This concerns subjects directly about the product. Also general discussion had a high percentage. This category does not involve a direct problem or question but are more about discussing a specific subject and giving opinions. These types of threads are most often created by high ranked users.
Table 8: Subject in the threads. 
N=110

Of the analyzed threads about half of the questions brought up could be considered to have got helpful answers. In some cases it was hard to know if the replies for a question were helpful since the initiator of the thread did not make any further posts. It should also be taken into consideration that some of the threads did not involve a question per se. These threads have been given the value “No”.

Table 9: If the replies in the thread are helpful. 
N=110

Of the posts that have a helpful answer some categories stand out in terms of providing answers. Even though the Super users and Company x’s support agents have a fewer total number of posts (12% and 6%) they are the ones who give more than half of the helpful answers. As pointed out before Company x’s support agents never initiates any threads on their own, but they are constantly monitoring the activity on the forum and if there are no one giving a reply to a thread or there is something that needs to be cleared out they are there to help. Also the medium users have a considerable large percentage of helpful answers. As pointed out before this may be due to a strive of
getting a higher rank.

Table 10: The ranking of the user with a helpful answer. N=80

Overall the tone at the forum could be considered helpful. Especially the Super users help out to nuance the topic discussed by providing their knowledge. This also helps setting the positive tone. However, every now and then a canon of complaints burst out. This is generally due to a specific problem that a lot of the users have encountered. The frustration in this type of threads could be pretty intense. In other threads a question may lead the participants clueless due to no one knows the answer.

Table 11: General tone of the threads. N=110
7. Empiric work section 3 - Interviews with super users

To get a deeper understanding about the people actually populating collaborative media platforms with support information content I decided to investigate users on such a platform. Since a text analysis already had been made of Company x’s support forum it made sense to also interview the people using it.

7.1 About the super users

7.1.1 Reason to start

Several of the interviewees started to use the forum by chance.

“I came across this support forum and, thinking that they could help me out, I posted my problem. I have quickly received an answer, which was very useful. After looking at other topics in the forum, I realized I knew the answers to some of them and I decided to help, too. Ever since, I have gained more and more experience.” ~ IP1

They do a Google search and ends up there. They are happy to get an answer that helps to fix the problem. In many cases they continue to browse the forum and realize that there are a lot of questions that they know the answer of. So they start to pay it forward and help other people out.

In some cases they do not know that much to begin with but are eager to learn more and then that is the initial motivational factor. When they have come up to a certain level they realize that there are a lot of questions that they can help out with.

“After searching in Google, I was always directed to Company x’s forum where I found useful answers. Soon I became good with these products. Later I decided to share my knowledge with people and help them. Thus joined the forum.” ~ IP2

Some of the users even use words like “hooked”, connotating that for some of the participants of this forum it is a part of their lifestyle.

“I browsed the rest of the forum, in which I think I got hooked up because people are asking basic questions about their product and it so happens that I know the answers.” ~ IP3

7.1.2 Time spent

Being a lifestyle also mean that some of the participants spend a considerable amount of time at this forum. But the range varies from everything between 4 hours a week to 35 hours. Some of the users have a hard time to give an estimate on how much time they spend on the forum.

“It’s hard to give an exact amount of hours as in my personal life I spend quite a bit of time using computers either at work, school or leisure time.” ~ IP4

Almost every one of the participants visits the support forum on a daily basis.

7.1.3 Motivational factors

In previous section we could see that some of the participants spent nearly a normal working week on the forum. But what is it that makes these people so dedicated and willing to spend so much of their time? When this subject was brought up in the interviews with the technical writers it was clear that most of them thought that the basic satisfaction of helping and the gratitude from the helped were the key element to why people dedicated their time to the forum. Most of the forum participants give a similar answer.
“My goal is to help as much people as I can, not just at the forum but in real life as well; I had have few weekends were I don’t have plans and/or extra free time and I try to answer all the threads that are expecting an answer.” ~ IP4

But it is not only that. In many ways the forum participation is a social one.

“Also, I like socializing and helping people out, while making new friends.” ~ IP1

It is a way of finding people all around the world with similar interests. In many ways it could be described as a lifestyle.

“But the main reason is geek’s lifestyle; it’s like a hobby and also makes good feeling about ourselves, to be useful. I like It :D” ~ IP7

It is also about being recognized for what you know. That other people contact you specifically because you have good knowledge in a subject.

“People on the forum contact me a lot regarding rooting, flashing, custom roms.” ~ IP2

It is clear that reputation in this world is a big factor. And that is something you have to earn through dedicated work, by helping others out. These people are creating their reputation because this is what they love to do and it is what makes them happy.

“It’s the satisfaction and respect I get after helping someone. Users become really happy when they get help with their problems which in turn make me happy as well.” ~ IP2

But it is not all of the interviewees that have that specific reason to be involved at the forum. One of the interviewees makes a clear distinction between the users at the forum and the company. For him the forum could be described more of a rebellious act.

“All the People in this forum are like me and I prefer to help them, be friend with them and stay in our side instead of Company’s side! You see, in this kind of Forums, they wanna make you to "Super Users" to defend their Company. It’s just my opinion based on my experience in this Forum.” ~ IP7

Even though several of the interviewees mentioned that companies sometimes withhold information due to the risk of monetary losses the above quote stands out. It is not significant among the interviewees, but it is an interesting comment in terms of what tools that the Web 2.0 are equipped with and how this type of behavior could create a snowball effect for a company. It also shows that transparency has become more important factor within customer relation and support information.

“If someone with-held information from me I'd be disappointed. I believe in sharing my knowledge with others.” ~ IP5

To paraphrase an old expression “sharing is caring”. That is essentially what active forum users do and that is what motivates them.

7.1.4 Credibility

Even though the interviewees find it important to help out as much as possible there are limitations to what they would do. For all of them it is very important that the information they provide is correct.

“I would not answer to questions that are beyond my knowledge [...] The reason I do not answer such questions is that I do not want to give wrong directions or confuse people.” ~ IP1
Another interviewee has similar thoughts.

“I would not like to give someone false information so if I didn’t have a helpful or correct answer, I wouldn’t say anything.” ~ IP5

What it all comes down to is credibility. It is obvious that they feel that they got a responsibility being high ranked forum users. This could also be tied back to the reputation. To build up a reputation you need to provide and what you provide needs to be accurate.

7.2 Helping out at the forum

7.2.1 The people that are helped
Since most of the interviewees are highly experienced users a lot of the questions asked at the forum are considered very basic for them.

“Many questions are very easy to answer, because the users do not know their product very well yet or they do not have the patience to figure it out by themselves. They are “rookies”.” ~ IP1

In above quote the interviewee consider many of the forum participants as “rookies”’. Looking at the statistics of who usually initiate threads it is most probably so, that the participants creating the threads are quite inexperienced when it comes to using their product. But another interviewee points out the importance of having an accepting attitude towards people that might have less knowledge than them.

“Some questions are very obvious and easy to answer but I must take in consideration that the user may be owning this type of product for the first time. I try not to discriminate in that sense.” ~ IP5

This most probably goes back to the sharing is caring − attitude that was discussed previously. To help out everyone and share what you know. But interestingly enough many of the interviewees have discovered that the ranking system makes newbies trust forum participants more if they have higher ranking.

“People asking for help on the forum always want an experienced high ranked member to answer. They trust them more than a noob member.” ~ IP2

“most people asking would be more settled or less to doubt people with the higher ranks than a regular visitor.” ~ IP3

This goes back to the trust issue that has been discussed in previous chapters. It also shows that a quantifiable method is desirable in order to trust. The ranking system at this forum is one of those methods.

7.2.2 Ranking system
The ranking system could as pointed out above be used as assurance for new users that the information that they get could be trusted. Several of the interviewees also point out that they initially felt excited about reaching a high rank.

“In the beginning I worked about 5 hours a day to achieve a good rank. But it’s been more than year now since I joined the forum, and now my only purpose is to help as many users as I can. I don’t care for any rank.” ~ IP2

“Frankly, pretty excited with the ranking system initially, but not anymore after time.” ~ IP6
“The ranking system is I think a big factor for me why I stayed on the forum. ~ IP3

It seems that when they have reached a certain ranking there are other factors that get more important. Maybe it could be view up on as initiation to show the “worthiness” of your place as well as your motivation. Once you have reached that step you are in the circle and then it matters less.

“When I got to the EXPERT rank which is the last rank till SUPERUSER, I Stayed 8 hours on the forum. ~ IP3

It is obvious that people put in a great deal of time and engagement to reach that circle. On the way towards that circle you have also started to get a certain behavior.

“People with higher ranking often seem more helpful and responsive than those who may only have a few gathered points.” ~ IP5

All of the interviewees where not that excited about the ranking system. They had never seen any reason to strive for a high ranking.

“I have never tried to achieve a high ranking, simply because I am not interested in this. I just want to help people and the points are just a bonus.” ~ IP1

For the people that do find the ranking system appealing there are also some down sides that could affect especially new users.

“I think an environment such as this forum, with the points enabled has its good and bad points. It promotes forum users to answer threads quickly but often, they give incorrect information or simply post anything regardless of the topic just to get points.” ~ IP5

7.2.3 Experienced problems
A recurring problem that a lot of the interviewees mentioned is the overload of multiple threads on the same topic.

“We have an issue with new users and sometimes with regulars; instead of using the search box a lot of users prefer to create a new thread, even if the question has been answered before.” ~ IP4

For some of the interviewees this creates strong reactions.

“Many users disregarded that threads were duplicates and posted the same thread over and over, I would not reply in those threads because the Author of that thread doesn’t deserve the effort or time to get the same answer everyone else is getting which he could easily find by himself.” ~ IP5

This shows the importance of structure and common understanding of the structure and rules within the collaborative media platform. But it is also important that the existing infrastructure provides an easy and understandable experience.

“Yes, sometimes new users ask a question before searching! But it's not only their fault, some users didn't choose a right subject for new topics and the Forum's Software hasn't any Smart Topic Suggestion to show users similar Topics and Questions.” ~ IP7

In other words there needs to be a mix of participants following the rules and an infrastructure providing an easy navigation.
7.3 Support information

7.3.1 How to find information
The interviewees are more or less experts in how to use the product and how to solve problems that could come up. Sometime they are of course facing troubles themselves. As they are familiar with giving support information through collaborative media platforms it is not a surprise that it is there where most would go to find information.

“I usually surf the internet in order to find solutions to my problems and I apply them until I find the right one. I think the best way of finding answers is on supporting forums.” ~ IP1

“If it were my own device that was not working, I would ask fellow customers on the forums and or contact Company x’s support for answers.” ~ IP5

Company x’s support forum could be considered as a lightweight forum in terms of how advanced the discussions are. In many cases the interviewees answered that they would go to other forums for information about how to solve a specific problem.

“There are other forum too, example the X forum, which is a very technical one, mostly about hacks and backdoor processes. Company x’s Products page also is a great help.” ~ IP3

This might imply that the interviewees already have a good knowledge about the product and if they encounter a problem they cannot solve it is most likely a very advanced problem. Hence they prefer the X forum².

7.3.2 Official support information
Even though most of the interviewees seem to prefer getting support information through user created content it is interesting to see the diversity on how they view the need for official support information. Some of the interviewees see no need for it at all.

“The conventional manual is outdated and I think that it is not very useful. Firstly, it only offers instructions of using the product but not of solving certain problems. Secondly, many people ignore it because it is not interactive. It is easier to google a problem rather than searching through the manual.” ~ IP1

The quote above points to an interesting feature of user created content. As could be discovered in the text analysis of Company x’s forum it was relatively few threads that handled actual usage of the product. Most of the threads instead were about problems or issues that a conventional manual do not cover. Using the forum the customer could then, with help from others, troubleshot the issue in a much more direct way than could be done with a manual, where there are obviously no possibility to ask follow up questions.

Another interviewee would not go as far as saying that the conventional manual is outdated, but more on the way to be phased out.

“It is already slowly phasing out, mostly can be found online though. But I believe not much people would want to read it until they have a problem. However, lots will take the easiest way - support forum (if there is one).” ~ IP5

² Forum name changed to protect the anonymity of Company x.
According to the interviewee it is easier to use user generated support information. From the answer it is hard to determine in what way it should be easier. A probable guess is it has to do with it being direct and like previous quote stated that it is interactive. Other interviewees have a different view; they see the official support information as a useful tool to find most of the basic questions that often are asked at the forum.

“A well written, information and interesting manual needs to be a staple with any technological product solved. Above 50% of the answers to the questions customers ask, will be found in the manual. Companies just need to make them more engaging to read and straight forward than a sheet of text that is too precise for everyone to follow, especially the older generations who may have no to little experience using advanced technology.” ~ IP5

However it is clear that this specific interviewee in general see that the weakness in the official support information is the way it is written. One could almost say that in order for official support information to be relevant it should be an engaging experience to take in.

The argument for interviewees that prefer to use official support information is more or less the same as the argument the technical writers had. That the information provided by the company could be guaranteed to be correct.

“I prefer getting information from the company itself. I trust them a whole lot more than customers. I am not saying the customers can often be wrong or misleading just that if I were to get an answer on how to fix something on my product by the company that actually produces it, I would have faith that the fix would work without any issues.” ~ IP6

Another way to see it is a compromise.

“I think there should be both standard and user generated support information available. Probably, companies can compile those common user generated questions into FAQ to cater for different consumer groups.” ~ IP6

Because after all it is not a question of either official or user generated support information. It is a question about getting the best possible support to the paying customers. Regardless if it is official support information or user generated.

7.3.3 Support information created through collaborative media platforms

Even though there were a lot of different opinions about official support information the positive view on support information created through collaborative media platforms were more coherent. Not surprisingly, since all of them are frequent users of these types of platforms. Their opinions on why it is a good source for information are more interesting. One of the reasons is similar to what was brought up as a flaw when it came to the official support information, the tone of voice used.

“I prefer user generated support information because the information is more accessible as they explain the solutions in a rather informal style, while companies are more rigid and I have encountered cases in which companies do not even answer your questions. In addition, there are more problems than the company actually finds and the users can figure them out and share the solutions.” ~ IP1

It is also the fact that companies cannot always disclose all information for one or another reason. This is a topic that not only the quote above addresses.
“I think user generated support is much better because the fact the people is allowed to disclose full information about a certain know-how. Company generated information is biased to protecting company interests and will not disclose information that maybe used against its assets.” ~ IP3

“I don’t quite like contacting customer service, most of the time their suggestions are the same suggestions that I’ve posted, and since they work for Company x they can’t quite give any other suggestions and/or alternatives, user generated support in the other hand can suggest to debrand, flash, side load this and that to improve and/or fix or change this and that.” ~ IP4

Other users had a more pragmatic view on official support information versus user generated.

“It depends and varies with topic to topic. Sometimes information provided by users is more informative and deep on one topic.” ~ IP2

The user generated support information is particularly good when it comes to getting deep information about a specific issue. This rich and deep information is something that some interviewees think is important that the companies notice. Just as was brought up during the interviews with the persons working with technical writing it also signals that the more information that is created outside of the company the more important it is to analyze it.

“In my opinion, the companies should make the most out of user generated support information in order to improve their products, both hardware and software. Companies should regularly analyze the support forums for their products so that they can find out what makes the users unhappy and what problems do their products encounter.” ~ IP1

One interviewee didn’t really make a difference of where the information came from. The person meant that all information is out there. You just need to know how to search it.

“However, some if not most answers asked on these forums can be solved by either reading the manual or using Google or any similar search engine. Most of the information (Answers) are already out there, the forums just condense this information into one spot that is easy to access.” ~ IP5

This is maybe also the best way to describe collaborative media platforms used for support information; a condensed spot for exchange and gathering of information.

7.3.4 The future of support information

The interviewees had a hard time to imagine how the future of support information could look like if collaborative media platforms and user generated content were having a bigger part. Many of the ideas were not far from what already exists today. From some of the answers it could be understood that they foresaw more mobile and direct future of support information.

“I think in the future companies, would set up a customer support service that will allow people to ask other people in real time. And also having an integrated information hub in which the company and the users information is readily accessible.” ~ IP3

“It’ll be wise to create an app for the forum and pre-load the app with all their products, as long as they allow the app to be uninstalled if the user does not want to keep it.” ~ IP4

As discussed previously openness and transparency is becoming more and more important. This could also be a way of engaging the most enthusiastic customers.
“It will be interesting if companies are a bit more open, there is only so much they can share with users and future buyers to stay competitive but it’ll be interesting if user’s suggestions were taking into account, after all, we, the users, buy the products. I read some posts on how would you change such and such products, and that’s great, but it’ll be great if Company x had something alike.” ~ IP4

This is quite similar to one of the canonical examples, DELL’s IdeaStorm.
8. Trends towards a possible future

To use collaborative media in order to discuss and get information is nothing new. That more and more companies regard it as an important part of their support information is a new shift that potentially could have major impact on the role for the technical writer (Lykhinin 2012). For the last decade we have seen a shift in user behavior in how support information is obtained. The manual is no longer considered the first choice, most people google their problem and use the search result to guide them to what they view as the most relevant information. In some cases that happens to be company’s official support site, but in many cases it is unofficial forums, blogs or a YouTube clips. Through the interviews with both people working with technical writing and with active forum members it was clear that one of the top criteria of support information today was to get it fast. Some forum members said that using forums or other collaborative media platforms was considered the “easy way” of getting information. You don’t want to sift through a manual to get the information and if you do you want the manual to be interactive and responsive for possible follow up questions.

Applying Roger’s diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers 2003) to the use of collaborative media platforms could be viewed upon from two dimensions. The first dimension is the actual use of collaborative media to obtain support information. In the content analysis of Company x’s forum it was clear that most of the threads were initiated by what was categorized as “Newbies” or “New”. In total 90% of the threads were initiated by these categories. This means that the “innovation” of using collaborative media platforms as a source of information could be viewed up on as fairly wide spread. At least the early majority could be considered of using collaborative media platforms in this way. In some cases perhaps even the late majority. Newbies and New are definitely a part of the collaborative media exchange since their questions leads to information about how to solve experienced problems. The collaborative media circuit would not be closed if the more experienced forum members were there to answer the questions. This is also what I would like to consider as the second dimension on diffusion of innovations; the production of support information through collaborative media platforms. In the eyes of Löwgren and Reimer (2013) the contributors are crucial in order to have a functional collaborative experience. But if you view this from Nielsen’s (2006) perspective and his 90-9-1 rule you would rarely have more than 1% of the total users that could be considered as true contributors. This in turn contradicts with Roger’s (2003) diffusion of innovation theory that concludes that there will always be a steady growing number of people taking on to an innovation. In a pure theoretical point of view one could then ask if support information through collaborative media platforms is a true innovation.

Looking back at canonical examples it is clear that even a massive website like Wikipedia has, viewed up on the total amount of users, relatively few contributes of content. In the eyes of Roger’s diffusion of innovations theory it could be argued that the diffusion of producing content for support information or other fact based collaborative media platforms is in a relatively immature state. The people interviewed in the forum could be categorized as early adopters in terms of producing support information by using collaborative media platforms.

But there are other driving forces in society that most probably will contribute to further of diffuse this innovation. One of the forum members mentioned that a reason he was involved in this forum was that it was a part of the “geek culture”. The geek culture has during the last years gone from being viewed as an underground phenomenon to a well-established mainstream culture much similar to the gentrification of the punk culture. Examples in global mainstream TV is the show “Big bang theory” about a group of physicists and engineers in their twenty-something. In other words it is cool to be geek. But the evolution and gentrification of the term has led to a much broader group than the
original stereotypical picture of a geek. The example of a forum member, that one of the interviewees at Company x provided, also strengthens this assumption. This particular member was a woman in her forties working as medical assistant and when signing up to the forum she had no prior knowledge about how to use the product. But she loved to help and she used Google to find all the answers of the questions that was addressed at the forum. Another trend in society that wasn’t discussed during the interviews, but could most possibly have an impact on user generated support information, is the maker culture. A site like instructables.com is a fine example on how this movement is getting more and more popular. It also has its roots in the geek culture, but has slowly spread into a more mainstream genre. Not only does this culture emphasize the creative side of people. It also wants to help others to recreate the same artifacts. The helping side of this culture has a lot to do with the main driving force of why certain forum members spend so much time in the forum. They want to help other people. They want to spread the knowledge that they got so it can help others. And the main driving force is the feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction they get when their contribution is acknowledge from other forum members. The makers culture could also be connected to another trend in current technique; customization. Some of the technical writers also saw the customization trend as a trend that could have a great impact on the future role of the technical writer.

With the introduction of the Web 2.0 the customers have been “invited” to an arena where they potentially could have a bigger saying and influence companies more directly. This all goes on at an open stage. If the companies displease the customer things could go really bad really fast. An example of that is the “United airlines breaks guitar”-video where David Carroll wrote a song and made a music video that was put on YouTube. The video went completely viral and had 1 million views within 4 days. During that time the United airlines stock went down with 10 percent. Shedding a 180$ million in value. This proves that with the right use of collaborative media no customer is statistically insignificant. It also proves that when the customers is let in to this giant open stage that we call social media or collaborative media the importance of transparency within a company is a key factor. Sure, for competitive reasons it is impossible for companies to share everything. But the trend among customers today is an increase in awareness about the companies they want to buy products from. They want to have the overall picture of a company and they want to feel that they are acknowledged if they decide to invest in a product from that company. An example of this is My Starbucks Idea. It was initiated with the words “Share. Vote. Discuss. See.” and during almost 5 years they have let customers add suggestions on how they should improve. Not only have they acknowledged the customers’ ideas, they have also communicated the progress of the ideas. More than 250 of the ideas that have been posted have also been realized and is now a part of their offer. This discussion could in a direct sense seem far away from the future role of the technical writer. But in reality it is the opposite. With the possibilities of collaborative media people can now express their questions about troubles they experience with a product. Help is given, either by a fellow forum member or by the support agent at the forum. The customer is hopefully satisfied with the help and now has a better understanding for how the product works. That same person may also have got an idea of what the product lacks and how the problem he or she encountered could be avoided. If there is a system to receive that kind of feedback and within that system also a way that this particular customer (as well as other customers) could see how the feedback is taken in to consideration by the company and how it could be implemented there is much better chance to increase customer satisfaction. And increased customer satisfaction is really what support information is about. In that way there is a clear trend within the business towards participatory design between companies and customers. One of the reasons for this is due to the need for transparency.
During the interviews another subject related to transparency was discussed; trust. Both the people working with technical writing and forum members brought up the subject in relation to that the official support information could not always be trusted. The reason for that was that consumers of the product felt that the companies in some cases were hiding information about certain issues that could cause monetary losses for the company if it came out. A technical writer pointed out that the reason for this behavior is in many cases that technical writers are working within certain frames. They cannot talk bad about the product or company they are representing. The same interviewee also mentioned that if they did and if they practiced a more transparent communication it would also strengthen their credibility as providers of support information. The interviews also showed that it is not always the doubt in the companies’ agenda that creates distrust about the support information. In some cases it could also be cultural. An interviewee pointed out an example of a user test made in China. Here a lot of people already had problems to trust authority; hence they did not trust companies either. On the other hand official support information where in many cases viewed as reliable source information because of the simple reason that it came from the actual producer of the product. This was a quality assurance of the support information. The strength of official support information is to describe best practice of features and functions within the product. But as one of the forum interviewees mentioned a manual never or rarely describe what to do when you got a problem and things are not working as the manual explains. This is also the strength of user generated support information in collaborative media. From the content analysis it could be seen that most of the threads created addressed problems with either hardware or software. Only a few of them, around 8%, addressed questions about actual use of a working product or software. Just as in official support information there is a trust issue within user created support information. Logically it is the exact opposite reason as why some people trust official support information more; user generated support information is not official. Looking at the attitude the forum members had about credibility it could be concluded that giving false information or speak about things you are not sure of is an unwritten rule that you simply do not do. Not to say that there will never be inaccurate information in this specific forum. Judging from the forum members a conclusion could be drawn that amongst active support information providers correctness is a highly valued asset. It was also clear that the official ranking was another factor that helped to create a feeling of trust. During the interviews it was also discussed that the way we consume information potentially could change in the future. Just as we share specific information about a variety of subjects we could also share the level of trust that is within this specific piece of information. One of the canonical examples, Factlinks, is built on those premises.

As far as it goes for official support information it is clear that what could be described as the conventional paper manual is long gone. For the last decade that type of product has more or less been phased out. Today only a very small part of the support information is in paper when it comes to advanced home electronic products. More or less everything is digital. The introduction of XML has helped to reuse the information and given the possibility to different output formats (Haramundanis 2009 and Kuntz 2010). Following the same path of evolution several of the interviewees that work with technical writing saw a trend that support information not only had become digital but also have become an integrated part of the product. Current example is a start-up widget that guides the user through the start-up procedures of the GPS. This is a very easy example of integrated support information. In order to draw the full potential of this type support information the product also need to know when to show relevant support information. This type of support would develop more towards context-based support information. The system in the device would constantly know the status and could give guidance and support accordingly.
Quality in user generated support information was one factor that was brought up both by people working with technical writing and by forum members. For some of the people working with technical writing it was hard to see that official support information and user generated support information could coexist within the same context. This particular interviewee thought that if a product reflected a certain quality the support information should reflect that quality too and that was not possible with user generated support information. Other interviewees thought that the tone of voice used in official support information could sometimes be stiff and formal. With user generated support information the explanations could be described with a more natural and personal tone of voice.

So what is the future of support information? One of the interviewees said that since more and more information is generated and similar information is available from different sources it will become less and less important from what source you get the information. An example is cell phone manufacturers that use Android OS. Other sources could for example be Android’s own support site where a lot of the support information that is relevant for customers could be found. This thought opens up for a more collaborative production of support information between companies. It could also mean a clearer collaboration between customers and companies.

Another subject that was brought up and could be placed within the future of support information is how official user guides and support information is used. One of the interviewees had seen a trend that they were used by potential customers to investigate a product before a purchase. A result of this is that support information and marketing material will be more converging in the future.

In many ways there is a clear barrier between user generated support information and official support information today. From people working with technical writing it is regarded as a great asset of knowledge of what customers are wondering about, have issues with or like. But in most cases it is not considered as “real” support information since it has not got the official “stamp”. To be able to know what is going on there will become higher demands of the analytical skills for the future technical writers. They need to be able to map out and make sense of the information and opinions that are posted within collaborative media platforms.

The technical writer also needs to make sure that the infrastructure of the collaborative media platform is understandable for the users. An example of a problems that occurred in Company x’s forum was multiple posting of the same subject. Making systems to avoid this type of behavior and to structure and curate the content that is created could be one of the possible assignments for a future technical writer. Because the problem in the future will not be that there isn’t information. The problem is to fast find the correct information.

Another possible path that the technical writer could take is to be more engaged in the actual R&D process. More and more information will be integrated in the products in a context based approach. Then it will be important to know how the users behave in order to provide the correct information at the correct time. Performing user studies on this type of behavior would be a logic approach towards the future role of the technical writer.

During the interviews it was clear that there were both pros and cons with official support information and user guides. To think that this type of information products will disappear or be totally replaced by user generated information is probably not likely, not only because of legislation but also for the fact that customers (also some of the forum members) use it. Just as the presumed battle between radio and TV the technology won’t be evolutionary extinct it will just take different forms. That is most probably what will happen in the ecosystem of support information as well. Both the official support information and the user generated support information will continue to exist and they will be used to
cover different areas of the field. As a result of this the trend will most probably continue of a decreased official support information.

Today Company x has their technical writers in China. This is a most probably a trend that will increase further within the field of technical writing. To put the day-to-day technical writing in low cost countries and keep the more strategic positions in the west. Within the strategic positions are also the more social parts of technical writing and customer care.

During recent years roles like community manager has started to be used frequently. The importance of creating a community and feeling of “we” will be even more important. In this role it’s important to understand what motivates the users and to help them find their role in the community that the community manager is trying to build up for the company. In the interviews it was clear that motivational factors most of the times were about quite rudimentary needs. Both people working within the area of technical writing as well as the forum members saw the joy of helping as the most motivational factor. To get a “thank you” from someone that really means it is in many cases rewarding enough. This goes well in hand of what both Gentle (2012) and Oram (2006) concludes. The technical writer would be perfect for this type of position where support information, PR and product branding is blended together. A world that is not far from what Abel (2011) describes. The future is collaborative and the technical writer certainly has a part in that collaboration.
9. The design process

With the previous mentioned quote: "There are as many methods for scenario planning as there are scenario planners" (Lindgren 1996) in my mind I decided that a good way to learn more is to actually experiment of how to develop a scenario method of my own. As a beginner I of course need to rely on previous work, which I have described in the methodology section. My strategy was to use the parts of those methods that I thought could be of value. This approach ended up in the following process:

a. Determine a year for the scenario
b. Identify:
   i. Trends and key factors which are crucial
   ii. What are the driving forces
   iii. What are the risks
c. Decide on two main key factors (dichotomies) that would affect the scenarios.
d. Brainstorm freely about the variables that may affect the future. Decide the plot of the scenario from what is brought up
e. Flesh the scenario out. Make sure that all of the following elements are in the scenario:
   i. The actors (WHO) or WHOM drive the plot
   ii. The events (WHAT events take place)
   iii. The time (WHEN does it take place)
   iv. The scene (WHERE does the plot take place)
   v. Props (HOW does the plot develop? What props are used)
   vi. Motive (WHY does it happen)
f. Find a good title and illustration/picture for the scenario

9.1 The overall design process

Lindgren (1996) concludes that a scenario should not be situated to close to the present. He propose somewhere between five and ten years in the future. Since the scenarios I have written take place in a context of fast developing technology I found it appropriate for my scenarios to take place five years from now. If it would be further in to the future I saw a risk that technological advancement could either be over or under estimated.

The empiric work was then filtered down to trends, driving forces and risks (see appendix 7). This was an iterative process where I at first had a much longer list. I also added trends that I spotted myself during previous work as a technical writer as well as from the literature survey. During the process I valued the data on the list from what I saw as the most crucial points and then came up with a final one.

From here I tried to see the overall picture and decide on two main key factors that most probably would have a great impact on the future both if they took place or if they didn’t. In other words, these key factors could be categorized as dichotomies. The two dichotomies that I found important were:

- Trust everyone/trust no one
- Uncollaborative support information/collaborative support information

The choice of these two was not made on theoretical grounds. I simply found them interesting and relevant in the sense that they could be used and provocation and inspiration for myself when I brainstormed around possible scenarios. At the same time I used the list of trends and tried to see were the trends could fit in together with the dichotomies. From this I made short scenarios (one-two
sentences long). This is what Schwartz (1996) calls the plot. The plot should explain the development pattern in the scenario. Lindgren (1996) suggests that between three and four scenarios is a good amount. More than that usually gives too similar plots that are hard to see differences in.

At this stage I got the foundation of the scenarios. Now I used my imagination together with the trends, driving forces and risks to give some flesh to the skeletons I had created. The trends of course had different impact depending on what scenario it took place in. From here on it was an iterative process in order to find the right structure and logic for each scenario.

When the scenarios were done there was one crucial task left: to come up with a title. It might sound as an imbecile duty but the fact is that the title should actually carry the whole scenario. With just a few words it should be possible to describe what this scenario is about (Schwartz 1996). In this context I made an addition from what the books describe. I think that it is important not only to describe the overall plot in words but also to have a correspondent picture or illustration. This gives more direct understanding of what is going to happen.

9.2 The scenarios
This chapter gives a short summery of the thoughts behind each scenario.

9.2.1 The outcast
The development pattern for this scenario is “Winners and losers”. Schwartz (1996 p.141) describes plots like this to be about that:

“…the world is essentially limited, that resources are scarce, and that if one side gets richer, the other side gets much poorer [...] conflict is inevitable.”

With this scenario I wanted to explore what happened if companies attempt to provide social and collaborative support information failed. Who would get the blame? In this scenario companies decide to “play it safe”. To go back to what they knew worked before. The result of this is stagnation, which leads to a slow suffocation of the technical writer trade. Barefoots conclusion that “nowadays everybody is technical writer” is the norm. Why should companies put money on technical writers if the customers create support information themselves on external forums and communities? This is a dystopia of the future for a technical writer if things go really wrong. The technical writers are the losers. The winners are probably not the customers but the management that could release costs.

9.2.2 The inside matters
The development pattern for this scenario is “Evolution”. Schwartz (1996 p.147) describes it as:

“...evolutionary changes are always biological in nature. They always involve slow change in one direction – usually either growth or decline... The most common evolutionary plot in the world today is technology.

This scenario has some similarities with “The outcasts” in terms of that the collaborative support information platforms that are corporately created don’t work that well. But instead on focusing on negative trend I wanted to turn that failure in to something positive. I wanted to explore what the qualities that the technical writer possesses could be used for. One of the trends in the interviews was integrated support information. In this future the technical writer has taken a much bigger part in the actual development of the product. This due to the fact that the support information now is a part of the software in the product. A scenario like this could possibly increase the status of the technical writer. But it also demands new competences.
9.2.3 Sharing is caring
The development pattern for this scenario is “Infinite possibilities”. Schwartz (1996 p.155) describes it as:

“Infinite possibility start with public perception: the world will expand and improve, infinitely. It is a seductive perception; under its influences many things happens that would not otherwise take place.”

In this scenario I wanted to try out what would happen if collaborative media platforms really emerged to be the standard for support information. I had noticed the maker culture has advanced a lot during the last years and I used that as a catalyst for making creation of support information “cool”. In this future more or less anything surrounding collaborative media platforms is possible. Companies are the new media provider and with their branded communities they could continue to build trust and loyalty. This scenario explores the extreme side of what could happen if Anne Gentles (2012) thoughts would be implemented all the way.

9.2.4 The third player
The development pattern for this scenario is “Challenge and response”. Schwartz (1996 p.145) describes plots like as:

“We may see events that bring us to the brink, but the system itself won’t fail. Instead, it will evolve further with each new challenge and response.”

Here I wanted to experiment with two main risks namely trust and transparency. In this scenario customers are tired of the companies’ bland answers to questions or problems. Gentle (2012) explains that transparency is a key factor when a company decides to “go social”. I wanted to reason about what would happen if that transparency was not there and also think of what other business models that could be possible in such a situation. This scenario sketches out such a possible model.
10. The design

10.1 The outcasts

Around 2010 and 2011 technical writing departments rushed to social channels to build platforms for support information and customer service. Experiments with Twitter, Facebook, owned communities, forums were made only to find out the answer was not there (at least not as was expected). The future of support information got stuck somewhere on the road to achieving the customer satisfaction most sought as proof of that model. As a result of this the majority of the companies decided to go back to what they knew had been working before; the good old standard PDF manuals.

More and more people within organizations are now starting to question the role of the technical writer. The criticism share one common idea “everyone can write and create content so why do we need technical writers” and it has been proven in all the blogs, YouTube clips and forums. The customers don’t use official support information. They google their question and help themselves or get helped by other customers to find solutions for their problems. The only thing that is keeping the technical communication departments alive is the fact that the legislation demands a manual. Today the main concern in manuals is to describe every potential hazard or possible risk of danger that could occur while using the product. The technical writer has indeed learnt more about legislation during the last years but the question is if that has helped the customers to get the best possible use out of their products?

Within the companies the technical writers are considered as expendable and a cost center, so when the hard times hit they are the first in line to be let go. This has also been the fact for many technical writers in the western world. Since most of the writing have been outsourced to countries such as China and India there is not much left to do for the technical writers here. The ones that are left have taken more strategic positions. This mostly involves analyzing and making sense of what users are talking about in different type of social media platforms. Big data became a buzz word around five years ago and today it is an everyday occurrence to aggregate all the relevant parameters from relevant sources over the web. With this information the communicational strategies could be drawn. This is the second area where a lot of previous technical writers have moved toward namely; content strategy. But since the content of support information has been reduced the content that the strategies evolve around is mostly of commercial nature. Overall most of the technical writers in the western world have moved towards what previously has been known as business intelligence.

The support information as we knew it five years ago is on its way out. Everybody is a writer and the role of the company is to monitor what everybody writes. The Web 2.0 has created a culture where quality is less important. Where “good enough” support information BUT in time is better than a
flawless text but addressed too late? The DIY culture is the result. With the Web 2.0 the people have been given the tool to express themselves. They are the true experts of the products and for better or good the new technical writers.
10.2 The inside matters

From the first iPhone it was clear that there was two things that were going to be the main competitive focus; user experience (UX) and usability. During the last decade this has been the main driving force together with faster, better and cheaper. In year 2018 more or less all technology is equipped with some sort of screen based interaction where the technology is controlled from. From a support information standpoint this has revolutionized the way technical writers work and provide information. Even ten years back the trend started by transferring paper manuals to online manuals. The paperless society that the futurist talked about in 1980’s has in fact become a total reality, at least when it comes to support information. When you buy an electronic product today there a few short introductionary instructions on the box on how to get your product started. Other than that all the support information is in the product.

The focus nowadays is about embedded user assistance models that allow users to get help without leaving the application interface. By providing the embedded help it is less disruptive to the overall workflow for the user. To be more specific this is a technology that support context based information. The device recognize wherever the user is and what application or program that is used. Based on the awareness of the context the specific support information that is needed is provided in the situation when it is needed. By providing support information in this way it is also possible to customize at what experience level the support information should be given, for example beginner, intermediate or experienced. The support information is cloud based and could be updated seamlessly without the user knowing it. This is a time when products have come to life. Now the Internet of things is here. The Knightrider with the talking car seemed like sciences fiction in the 1980’s and sure we are not there yet. But this type of support information is a way towards that type of envisioning.

To provide this type of information we still going to need skilled technical writers with good writing and editorial skills. The writing of the content is mainly done in low cost countries like China and India. But there will be new arenas for technical writers in the west. These people are more leaning towards a role as technical communicators rather than writers. During the last years a lot of these people have developed usability and user experience skills. Their main role is nowadays to focus on user behavior of the product. In order to do so technical communicators need to have an even closer collaboration with the R&D-department. This work involves a lot of user tests in order to understand the behavior of people and how they use the product. To know where and when they need support information and more specifically what type of information. When this is evaluated the technical
communicators also need to work closely with the technical writers situated in another part of the world. If it wasn’t before the work of a technical writer or technical communicator has become international. By working closely with the R&D-department another skillset also comes in handy; programming. To implement support information and to prototype for user test some program knowledge is almost a must. This type of role could be seen as a form of specialist roles with UX design and support information as the most fundamental blocks. It requires a convergent set of skills from design, application development, and communication. Companies have now recognized that UX requires multiple skill sets in which the previous knowledge of support information is a great asset. But more importantly they see the combination of excellent UX and support information as a critical business objective.

Company owned support forums continue to be a part of the standard support offer. But the previous high expectations, some years ago, have now been considerably lowered. During the first year of the decade much money and effort was put to create company communities. As it turns out most of them were a failure. Even though most people still use Google to search for information and most probably end up in an environment that could be classified as a collaborative media platform the users try to avoid the corporately created ones. As it turns out they feel more monitored in those ones and would not like to be a part of the statistics that they know the companies get from them and are using in order to control and lure the market with. Instead users prefer collaborative media platforms that are driven by non-profit organizations for the fact that they are true enthusiasts. However statistically analyzing the user behavior on the web is still an important part of the job. This information is then shared to the people working on the integrated support information.

Trust between C2C is no longer an issue when it comes to user generated information. During the last five years a technology created by a startup company called Factlink has flourished. With this web browser skin technology people are able to rate the credibility in whatever sort of information they encounter on the Internet. This has now become a standard in every web browser such as Chrome and Mozilla. People are now together building the trust of whatever sort of support information that is out there.
10.3 Sharing is caring

From around 2005 the “maker culture” has grown significantly. This involves everything from hacking your home electronics into new areas of use, sew your own clothes or use a 3D-printer to create a toy for your child. Within the makers culture there has always been a tradition of sharing experiences, knowledge and how to make the actual products. Companies manufacturing customer products had seen this trend coming and during the last five years a significant amount of their work have been spent on building platforms to let their customers share their experiences and knowledge about how to make use of their products from a makers culture perspective.

By combining the now full blown makers culture with support information in the same community people have taken the mindset from the makers culture in to help others to get the most out of the products through collaborative support. The amount of regular content providers of support information within these new corporate communities and support forums has hence increased a lot during the last years.

The technical writers still write support information. But instead of explaining how to use every function in the product they focus on making the very basic instruction that are needed to get things going after the product is purchased. This type of information has since many years been written in low cost countries such as China and India.

The main responsibility for technical writers in the western world is the analytical part. Making sense of what users are talking about in different type of social media platforms. Big data became a buzz word around five years ago and today it is an everyday occurrence to aggregate all the relevant parameters from the internal community as well as other relevant social media platforms over the web. With this information the communicational strategies could be drawn. By having this position the technical writer becomes a valuable asset within the R&D-department since another part of the job is to compile relevant problems that users have addressed through different channels.

With the decision of downsizing what was previously called user guide there came up a need for something else that explained the everyday use of the product. The collaborative manual was introduced. In this ever going manual customers could add their own tips & tricks. This could be in
text, video or picture format. Questions of experienced problems that are answered in the support forum are added here as well by the technical writers. The technical writer has the overall responsibility of this wiki-like web document. The role of the technical writer could be described as a curator. Each product has its own manual. When a new product is released the manual is never empty, new functionalities are always explained as well as some of the most asked questions. The main focus on the collaborative manual is not on how to do things but how to solve issues. Everything that is added to the collaborative manual is ratable. Just as in the support forum users get points when they provide content.

The role for collaborative media platforms or communities has changed since 2013. These sites have now become more of media publishers. They have their own in-house editorial team, like a radio or TV station, a magazine or newspaper all with a light branding in the created content. In the business these sites are called “owned media channels”. It is within this context that companies build their trust. And within this controlled arena they also have the possibility to work in a more transparent way. With the endless amount of applications created people are also more eager to be a part of the creation of the product. In the community the company and the customers together create a dialogue of how to improve the products.

But everyone is not satisfied with the new approach companies have taken. People born in the 40’s or earlier are feeling left out. Their experiences with collaborative media platforms are very limited. Even though their children have tried to learn them over and over again they never seem to quite get the hang of it. As a result the contact centers are experiencing an increased contact with people in this age group. As this is a big group of potential customers companies feel that this is a group that they now should start investigate how to help.
10.4 The third player

Around five years ago more and more companies started to reach out to their customers by creating their own communities. Today most of the corporately created communities don’t have enough contributors. Only the companies with the biggest brands and most devoted customers can make decent support by using crowdsourcing methods and not even those sites are as active as was predicted when they first were introduced. For smaller brands and companies it is mostly empty forums and communities. People go there if they experience problems but not to contribute and help others. Why would they do that? Why would they help a company that they already paid money in order to get a product? On the other hand it is clearly so that customers are still collaboratively creating support information. But they try to avoid the corporately created forums and communities. Instead users prefer collaborative media platforms that are driven by non-profit organizations. Usually when users ask questions in a support forum it is due to some sort of problem that they experienced. If support agents from the company get involved in such a discussion the answers from them are most often very generic because they are bound to not say anything bad about the product and company they are representing. A lot of users have experienced this as companies in general are hiding information from the customers. There is a trust dissonance between users and the companies.

Many actors outside have seen this dissonance and also the fact that customers still collaboratively create support information on other sites. In this a business model was discovered. A new community called My Gadgets was born. Here everyone that has a question about an electronic product could join and if they want also contribute with answers, content or tips or tricks. The people running My Gadgets serve as support agents. If no one else from the community could answer a question they will go in and provide the information. Even though the support agents do not have inside information they are not bound to any loyalty for a specific company. Specific support agents will be appointed for each
product. What is in it for the user? If they didn’t like to provide information to a corporate community why would they do it here? My Gadgets is based on a reward system. Each time you give a correct answer to a question you are rewarded with points. These points could later be exchange for gifts in the gift shop. They are only valid if My Gadget has an established information exchange with the company in question. Because what My Gadget does is curate the information and sell it in a package to the specific company. If a user for instance gives a correct answer for a question about a product produced by Company Y and there isn’t an established information exchange the points that user gets will be available as soon as My Gadgets establish a collaboration with Company Y. Currently a lot of the big companies are collaborating with My Gadgets.

Even though My Gadgets has grown fast there are other similar companies popping up all over. These are companies that a lot of technical writers are heading for. Here they create content “live” and are a part of curating process as well when compiling content. There are also other titles like community manager.

The support information that is produced for the end product has change direction and form in a lot of ways during the last years. Before efforts were made to describe how to use a product, but since most the information that My Gadgets sells is about how to solve issues when a product is not working that is also the form that the support information has taken. Support pages in general have also evolved a lot. Nowadays you rarely see text on the pages. Animations and short movies are more or less standard. Naturally the qualifications for the technical writer also have changed in these companies. Knowledge about either 3D-animations or filming and movie editing is more or less a must.
11. The Workshop
As described in the method chapter the main intention of the workshop was to get an understanding if the scenarios were perceived as realistic. Other angles that where covered where the consequences each scenario would have on the technical writer but also on a more holistic approach, such as for the customers and the company as a whole. If any of the scenarios appeared to be unrealistic for a participant we discussed the logic in the scenarios.

The workshop plan (see appendix 6) served as a guideline for the discussion but the participants were given a lot of freedom to discuss whatever they felt relevant for each topic. This was important to get a full cover of the angels that I might have missed out on. Furthermore I tried to not explain the scenarios for the participants. I wanted their interpretation of them. In some cases this resulted in discussions that where because they had not understood the scenarios the way I had envisioned them to be or they simply forgot about certain facts that was given.

In the beginning of the workshop we discussed their overall impression of the scenarios. Their impression was that none of the scenarios stood out as completely impossible. One of the participants said: ”Each story is a tiny seed to a possible future. I think they are nice”.

We then moved on to discuss each scenario more in detail. Below follows a compilation of the most important parts of the discussion.

11.1 The outcast
One of the main focus points in the discussion of this scenario was economy. The participants assumed that in order to get to this scenario their need to be a very big focus on costs. “Maybe there has been a financial depression” one of the participants suggested. They said that the motive in a situation like this is rarely that things should improve for the user, even though that could be the official message, but rather it is to cut costs. In a case like this there is actually only one winner. The person that is responsible for the budget.

Another suggestion what could happen in order for this scenario to take place was if the creation of the support information got more template oriented and wouldn’t require much thinking. Such work is easy to outsource. A consequence of outsourcing could be deteriorated quality of the support information. Especially if the technical writers wouldn’t get any feedback from the users or the producing company on what is good support information. This in turn could lead to people saying “there are no one that read what we are writing” which in turn could lead to arguments such as “Look! Here is a great blog explaining exactly what the user needs to know. They could use that instead.”

In terms of logic the participants saw that there is a risk that this scenario could turn in to reality but they also concluded that the technical writing industry is slow and things do not change from one day to another. “Something rather extreme must happen in order for this to be the future in five years” said one of the participants.

Another point that was discussed, in terms of logic, was that they didn’t fully saw the need for content strategists in this scenario. One of them said “If you see that the world creates their own questions and answers on the web you might as well disconnect from the web and continue to create you PDF:s”.

But things are not all bad. One of the main benefits to go back to PDF: s is that there is a lot of knowledge and best practice around this way of working. Technical writers do not have to make an effort to be innovative.
As the last discussion exercise a consequence tree was created. In this exercise we took a look how consequences could build on top of each other as a result of this scenario to take place. A picture of the tree for this scenario could be found in appendix 9. The main consequence the participants saw was that the purpose of the support information is now about preventing warranty issues rather than helping the customer. This leads to a changed customer behavior. They no longer assume to be helped by the company. Instead they search towards other channels. It is a world where the one that shouts the loudest is the most visible.

### 11.2 The inside matters

“Personally I would have liked to work in this future” said one of the participants. And it is not that strange since the participants conclude that this is a future where the technical writer has a bigger saying in how the product he is writing about should be developed. They said it is a must that the technical writer gets a higher status otherwise he will not be able to do the work that is described in this scenario. And most important the technical writer must have a mandate in the development team because in this scenario it is necessary for the technical writer to be involved during the product development cycle. Today there is no need for that since the technical writer comes in after the product is more or less finished.

The participants definitely thought it is a possible future but they said it felt as a bigger step than most of the other scenarios. It demands more for this scenario to actually take place. This is not a matter of downsizing. Here you must change processes. You need to build in support information in the development process. On the other hand the role is considered as more multifaceted and there is room for different type of skills, which could mean that more people potentially could be interested in becoming a technical writer.

In order to get here the companies must find a business case for this type of support information. The participants said that in a way it already exists in form of content marketing. There is also the fact that more and more products are actually marketed on their UI.

In terms of logic in the scenario the participants found it hard to understand why the users would feel monitored on the support forum but not from the device. One of the participants meant that in order to provide good context sensitive support information companies continuously need to gather behavioral data from the users in order to know how they use their products. After some reasoning the participants meant that a more realistic reason for the customers to not use the support forums was that the experience was not as good as getting context sensitive support information. Maybe the user feels that he always get blunt answers in the support forum or it might be overcrowded with useless information and it is too hard to find what he is actually looking for.

An interesting thought from one of the participants was how embedded support information might change our relations to our products. He made a parable with a banker. This is someone you trust and probably you get a personal banker that you see every time and you are satisfied with the advice he gives you. During time you build up a personal relationship with this person. The participant meant that the same thing could happen between customers and their products while using embedded support information.

The consequence tree for this scenario was all centered on the technical writer and how this role could add value to the product development (see appendix 8).
11.3 Sharing is caring
This was the scenario that the participants for some reason had least comments about. Most of their comments were about relevance and the realism of the scenario. The risk that the participants saw in this scenario was the involvement factor. They said that you need to have people involved that really love their product. It is those people that got the engagement. If nobody cares about the community or forum there is no reason to have it. There is also the fact that this is a scenario that can’t be realized for all type of consumer products. “You can’t do it for a toilet paper holder” as one of the participants said.

If the company decides to host this type of community they also need to give the customer enough freedom and let go of some of the control. The customers need to set some of the rules themselves. Who says that the customers will continue to visit the site otherwise? The customer needs to feel that he gets something on this site that he can’t get anywhere else. In terms of promoting the customers to share support information and help out both the participants thought it was important with some sort incitement for the user when he had made a contribution. One of these incitements had a connection to participative design. They said that “A connection could be that my answer on a question would result that the company develops a new feature for the next software release”. They both felt that this almost touched customization which they also saw as an important part in a scenario like this.

Interestingly most of the focus was on the customer in the discussion of this scenario. In a way it may have been the nature of this scenario. It focuses a lot on the actual infrastructure, the features of the infrastructure and a little less on how the technical writer fits in here. But it could also be that the participants had a hard time see how the technical writer would fit in here since it is a long way from what standard technical writer does today.

The scenario tree (see appendix 10) also had a strong focus on the customers and how they did or did not participate in the community. If they did participate they saw potential that this could lead to good possibilities for branding value experiences such as participative product development between the customers and the company as well as new type of products.

11.4 The third player
This was the scenario that the participants thought was less likely to happen. The main reason for this was that they did not see any incitement for Company Y to actually use My Gadgets. Another was that they considered as the same as outsourcing and they didn’t see any differences between My Gadgets and an ordinary consult company. A third one was that Company Y would never publish material from My Gadgets that involved any inconvenient answers to a problem. So why would they then put money and buy information from a company that were not loyal to them but to the customers? They also imagined that it would be scary for Company Y to be in the hands of a third part supplier where they couldn’t control the answers.

The participants saw the customers as most benefited from such a scenario. They reasoned that this probably meant that the customers would get honest answers with a high quality. But they also saw that it could be on the company’s expense if the answer to the problem was that the product the customer bought is of bad quality.

However they saw a possible narrative in a scenario like this and that would be if a big player, like Google, would start up such a service. Then it might have worked. The service, in their mind, wouldn’t care about selling the information to the producing company. Instead the main focus would
be on the customers and help them get the best answers. The producing company could then use the information if they wanted by using some integrated API.

The scenario tree (see appendix 11) also visualize the fragile ecosystem that they view this business model as. They viewed the fact that My Gadget gets money from Company Y by selling information as a big risk. This is a relationship that needs to be handled with total transparency. If the customers start to see My Gadgets as an affiliate to Company Y the customers’ trusts to My Gadget is zero and it is a fail. The same goes for if Company Y gets too much influence of My Gadget. As the participants viewed it it’s more a matter of time before failure.
12. Concluding discussion

In this thesis I have researched and elaborated on the future role of the technical writer. I have obtained knowledge through a variety of methods. The methods have partly been pure academic such as quantitative (content analysis) and qualitative (in-depth interviews and email interviews) but also methods that adjacent to a more artistic approach (scenario writing). In fact the academic approach was a must in order to perform a well-grounded scenario writing process. Because what it all comes down to is what trends that could be found, how they relate to each other and how they affect each other. Schwartz (1996) claims that scenario writing is not scientific; on the other hand it does not mean that they are wild guesses. I agree that I can never claim that the scenarios I have created are the roadmap for the future. But since they are made with a scientific grounding they have the chance to be more accurate than a wild guess.

When I started my thesis I had three research questions. The main question was:

- What is the role for the future technical writer within a B2C-company facing the challenges with collaborative media?

During my work I realized a paradox in my research question. In order to give an answer on the future role of the technical writer in a world where more of the support information is created by users in collaborative media platforms I must put a lot of the focus in the investigation on the actual user. They are the actual premises for the technical writers’ work. Just like Lykhinin (2012) says there is a paradigm shift within the business of technical writing and support information and the persons that are standing in the front circle are not the technical writers (at least not only). It is the users of the product. That is why I have put as much energy and focus on the users as on the technical writers. In a way that goes for both the research part and the design part.

In this paradigm shift towards user generated support information on collaborative media platforms there emerge new issues and problems that needs to be sorted out. It is here that I believe that you should look for new roles and opportunities for the technical writer. Through my interviews and observations I found several topics of this kind. The following I think is the most important in order to create long lasting relations with your customers:

- Trust

As the old saying goes; trust is not something you get, it is something you earn. I think that this could be implemented both in terms of users trusting user generated support information and official support information. But the further this type of support is developed I think it is also important for companies to trust user generated support information and regard it as real support information. Going back to Gentle (2012) one could see that her method of support information through discussion between company and user is one way to go. Another is Abels’ (2011) suggestion that all content (no matter who have created it) should be possible to comment. With Web 2.0 we have the possibility to go away from static documents and have a more direct contact with the customers. I also think that is the way to create trust.
- Transparency

In close relation to trust is transparency. This issue was most clear in the interviews with the forum members. Some of them expressed that companies occasionally gave bland answers on issues. This could result in customers feeling that the company would be hiding something. This reasoning gave birth to one of the scenarios (The third player); that the future technical writers are actually not a part of the company that manufactures the product but an outside company providing none biased support information to the customer.

- Motivation

To get people motivated is crucial for companies that decide to go towards a more social support information. But to actually achieve that is not easy. Nielsen (2006) concludes that there are only 1% true enthusiasts and judging from Roger’s diffusion of innovations theory it is more or less early adopters that take an enthusiastic approach to collaborative creation. But maybe that isn’t bad after all. Wikipedia still has a tremendous amount of content even though a very few (in percentage) actually contribute. To motivate people to contribute a new role has started to spread among companies; community manager, a mix of PR and technical writing.

- Information overload

Even though only a few percentages of people actually contribute a large amount of content could be created. Sometimes it could even be hard to find the relevant information. The problem with multiple posting that the forum members mentioned is an example of that. In many ways the community created support information is not any different than the other content on the web, since it most of the time it is rather unstructured. And here is another opening for technical writers; content curating. To help to make sense of user created content and to put it in a context that makes it easier to find. The overload of information has also created another role; content strategist. This role involves several tasks: doing a content inventory to determine what already exists and how much of it is useful, monitoring the community's contributions to ensure that everything meets the organization's standards for style and format and maintaining the content to ensure that it remains current and useful. In short know what information the company has and needs.

What if the future takes another turn and companies and users realize that collaborative support information is not that great? Something that a lot of people mentioned during interview were the emerge of integrated and contextual support information. This is also what the scenario “The inside matters” is about. How technical writers take a role within the R&D that involves more UI and user experience.

Apart from the main questions I had two sub questions to broaden the research area. The first one was:

- **What is the driving force for customers to contribute with support information?**

As it turns out driving forces and motivation usually filters down to rudimentary needs. Both the forum members and the people working within the field of technical writing mentioned things like the joy of helping, a feeling of accomplishment and being a part of a community with people that share the same interest. I also think it is those qualities that the community manager should focus to elicit.
• How do people know if the user created content could be trusted?

The short answer on this question is: they don’t but they keep on using it anyway. During my interviews with forum members it was clear that giving the correct answer were the top priority. They said that they would never give an answer if they did not know it was correct. On the other hand the answer is given in a context where the receiver could ask a counter question to make sure that he understands it correct. That is one of the main advantages compared to static support information.

12.1 Critical reflection on result and method

"Scenario making is intensely participatory, or it fails” (Schwartz 1996 p. 248) is the last sentence in Schwartz book. Looking back at this journey I should definitely have picked up that advice much earlier. In a way you could argue that the interviews are a form a participatory work and the workshop was definitely participatory. But the actual making of the scenarios was something that I did alone. In hindsight I think that I would have benefited from having the workshop before the scenarios were written. On the other hand Lindgren (1996) claims that it is possible to create scenarios on your own. So I wouldn’t say that I had wrong methodology, just not the most effective.

In terms of the empiric work it is unavoidable not to mention the restrictions I got from the informant company about the interview result where I wasn’t allowed to use direct quotes in the thesis. Unfortunately I got this information in a very late stage of the process. This has made the interview section with the practitioners less understandable and the reader needs to have some blind faith in the conclusions I make.

12.2 Further research

In this thesis I have investigated the role of a future technical writer in terms of B2C-products. For that reason I think that a natural way for further research would be to investigate how collaborative media platforms could be used to produce support information for B2B-products and how the role for the technical writer will differ in this context. Especially products with tuff regulatory requirements, like medical equipment, would be interesting to aim for.

Another possible area of investigation (which might actually be more appropriate in terms of interaction design) that has been discussed a lot recently (Schiller 2012) is gamification of support information. In a way it already exists in terms of badges and points in forums and communities. But in my view this is something that could be developed even further and hence and interesting area of research.

12.3 Final words

After you read all this you still might wonder, what the fuss with support information through collaborative media platforms is all about. Isn’t it enough with the good old manual? Maybe there is a similarity here from when the television was introduced. That people started to question what they should do with the radio. But as it turned out the radio found a new place in our lives. Maybe it is so that the use of collaborative media within support information has certain qualities that none of the previous support channels have had. Maybe these qualities can’t be quantified, at least not now. But Web 2.0 and the democratization of content is still just a baby. Within time there will be possibilities to compare if companies that made support information social actually made the right move.
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**Electronic references**

Electronic reference 1: http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9303


14. Appendixes

14.1 Appendix 1: Interview guide 1

**General questions:**

What is your role?

What is your experience of working with technical writing during the past 5 years?

- Is there a different focus now compared to before?
- Is there a difference working with support information in B2C and a B2B company? What is that?

**Support information today and tomorrow**

What role do you see that the manual has today for a product targeting the private consumer?

Do you believe that is going to change?

What role do you see that user generated content have in support information today?

Do you imagine that to change in the future?

Do you see any way that we can reuse user generated content that is out there but provided through different channels?

Do you think that users trust user generated content?

Do you think that the user trusts support information produced by the company of the product more compared to if it was user generated support information?

Why do you think that people add information about products (thinking about support information)

- What is the motivation for the user to do that?
- What are the risks with user generated content? How can the risks be minimized?

**Other changes in the future**

What big changes to you see for the technical writer in the near future and in 10 years’ time?

What skills are needed to cope with these changes?

How do you see up on the use of social media together with support information?

- What possibilities are there for that use
- Do you see any risk with that?
Future technical writer

Now we have spoken a lot about the future. But in order to facilitate these needs that the user potentially would have, how do we do that? What are important considerations?

How would you envision such a design?

What would be important attributes for such a solution?
14.2 Appendix 2: Interview guide 2

**General questions:**

What is your role today?

What is your experience of working with support information during the past 5 years?

- Is there a different focus now compared to before?
- Is there a difference working with support information in B2C and a B2B company? What is that?
- What role do you see that the manual has today for a product targeting the private consumer?
- How does the content production at Company x look today?

**The support zone**

- Tell me about your support site today.
  o How is it structured?
  o Why is it structured in this way?
  o How has it developed during the resent years?
  o Who are the moderators?
  o Are they mainly working with moderating the forum?
- Why did you decide to add a forum to the support site?
  o What was the goal about adding the forum?
  o What is the result of the addition of the forum?
  o Did you discuss any other ways of achieving the same goal?
  o What have you learnt about user generated support information during this time?
- How do you use the content created by the users?

**User generated content**

- What type of users do you consider using the forum?
  o Do you have a specific strategy for how to attract users to the forum?
  o What are the most discussed topics on the forum?
  o Why is it important to promote user generated content?
- What do you think motivates the users to produce information to the forum?
- What role do you see that user generated content have in support information today?
- Do you think that users trust user generated content?
- Do you think that the user trusts support information produced by the company of the product more compared to if it was user generated support information?
- What are you thinking about user generated support information that is produced for other channels, have you discussed any ways to use that kind of information?

- What is the risk with user generated support information?

- How do you consider the quality of the user generated information?

**Other changes in the future**

What big changes to you see for the technical writer in the near future and in 10 years’ time?

What skills are needed to cope with these changes?

How do you see up on the use of social media together with support information?

- What possibilities are there for that use
- Do you see any risk with that?

**Future technical writer**

Now we have spoken a lot about the future. But in order to facilitate these needs that the user potentially would have, how do we do that? What are important considerations?

How would you envision such a design?

What would be important attributes for such a solution?
14.3 Appendix 3: Coding form

1. Number of posts in the thread
2. Thread created during the investigated period (no/yes)
3. Date the thread was created
4. Number of posts in the thread during the investigated period.
5. Number of views of the thread
6. Number of people posting in the thread
7. Post initiated by:
   A= newbie
   B= new
   C= medium
   D= experienced
   E= super user
   F= Company x support agent
8. Number of posts in the thread by "newbie" (newbie=0-20 previous posts)
9. Number of posts in the thread by "new" (new=21-49 previous posts)
10. Number of posts in the thread by "medium" (medium=50-150 previous posts)
11. Number of posts in the thread by "experienced" (experienced=151-X previous posts)
12. Number of posts in the thread by "super user" (super user=badge)
13. Number of posts in the thread by Company x support agent
14. Links in the thread (no/yes)
15. Number of links in the thread
16. What URL is the link to
17. Attached pictures in the thread (no/yes)
18. Number of attached pictures in the thread.
19. Type of thread:
   A: Information
   B: Other
C: Discussion
D: Complaint/feedback
E: Questions about usage of product
F: General question
G: General question and discussion
H: Question about problem
I: Question about problem and discussion

20. Subject:
   A: Other
   B: Accessory
   C: External hardware
   D: External problem
   E: External SW problem
   F: Usage of product
   G: General discussion
   H: Software
   I: Hardware

22. Helping answer (yes/no/not clear)

23. Status of the helper
   A= no helping answer
   B= newbie
   C= new
   D= medium
   E= experienced
   F= super user
   G= Company x support agent
24. General tone in the thread

A = Neutral
B = Complaining
D = Clueless
E = Helping
Hi!

My name is Björn Lindh and I’m currently studying the master's program in interaction design at Malmö University in Sweden. At the moment I’m writing my thesis and this is the reason I’m contacting you. I have decided to write about the hypothesis that user generated support information changes the role for the technical writer. I’ve decided to investigate Company x’s support forum to understand how people using this type of forums view them. I’ve found you to be one of the most active users at this forum and I assume a great source of information. I wonder if it’s possible that I could do an interview with you? Email or Skype, what you feel most comfortable with works for me. If you want you can reply here on the forum or to my email bjorn.lindh@muzic.se.

Many thanks in advance!

Best regards

/Björn
14.5 Appendix 5: Interview guide email

First, some basic questions.

1. Are there any particular types of discussions that you use to take part in on Company x’s forum?
2. Are there any particular questions that you would never answer?
3. Are the questions that are asked on the forum often obvious and/or already have an answer?

Now about your use of this forum.

4. How much time do you estimate that you put on the forum each week?
5. How come that you started to use this forum?

This is about your motivations to use the forum.

6. How does the ranking system at the forum affect your interest to take part and contribute at the forum? Have you tried to be extra active on purpose to achieve a high ranking?
7. What is your driving force to answer questions in the forum?

Finally, thank you to endure this far😊 Let's finish with a couple of questions about your use of support information and the future of support information.

8. How do you find information about a product if there is something you can’t get to work?
9. How do you see the future for the conventional manual?
10. How do you see that future systems and technical infrastructure could be developed to help companies to use user generated support information (information all over the Internet) to be a part of their standard support offer?
11. Is there a difference to use user generated support information compared to use support information produced by the company? What do you prefer? Why?
14.6 Appendix 6: Workshop plan

**Scenariogenomgång**

- **Aktörer**
  - Vilka synliga och dolda aktörer finns i detta scenario?
  - Vilka motiv kan tänkas finnas för att driva mot detta scenario från respektive aktör?
- **Relevans**
  - Handlar scenerna om frågor som betyder något för teknikinformatörsyrket?
  - Vilka? Varför är dessa viktiga?
- **Realism**
  - Känns scenariot som en möjlig verklighet? Varför/Varför inte?
- **Orsak och verkan**
  - Vilken utveckling tog oss hit?
- **Konsekvensträd**
  - Vad blir konsekvensen av denna verklighet?

Exempel på konsekvensträd (konsekvenser förorsakade av TV:s intåg i hemmet):

1. Människor får nya möjligheter till underhållning och upplysning i hemmet.
2. Man stannar hemma mer i stället för att som tidigare gå till jylvbar, föreningar eller ut för att träffa vänner och bekanta.
3. Grannarna i bostadsonrådet träffas inte längre så ofta som förr och lär därför inte jänna varandra så bra.
5. Isolerade från grannarna lir familjemedlemmarna mer utlämnade och beroende av varandra för att kunna tillfredsställa sina behov av umgänge med andra människor.
- Konsistens – finns det en sammanhängande logik i scenariot?
  o Hur ser den ut?/Vad fattas?
- Identifiera kvalitéer
  o Fördelar
  o Nackdelar
### 14.7 Appendix 7: Scenario trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trends</th>
<th>Driving forces</th>
<th>Risks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geek culture</td>
<td>Customer: Feeling of accomplishment</td>
<td>Customer feel that companies are hiding information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makers culture</td>
<td>Customer: Feeling of satisfaction</td>
<td>Customer don’t trust UGC because it is not official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customization</td>
<td>Customer: The joy of helping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased customer awareness of what companies do.</td>
<td>Company: Enabling that the customer get the most out of the product</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Customers should have a say in what the companies should do</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transparency is a key factor</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Participatory design</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrated support information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manuals and support information used in investigation before purchase</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic technical writing made in low cost countries.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Faster iterations in creating support information</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Create support experiences not support information</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
14.8 Appendix 8: Consequence tree - The outcast

The customer gets angry on the product

The user doesn't assume to find help from the company
= change in behavior

Google is a fraud of mine

The company loses the control of the user
= the one that shouts the loudest
= is the most visible

More opinion based not only the solution to the problem but also avoid the problem

He, support is removed leaving the customer unhappy
14.9 Appendix 9: Consequence tree - The inside matters
Appendix 10: Consequence tree - Sharing is caring
Appendix 11: Consequence tree - The third player

The relationship between Company X and MG is very important, how the customers understand the relationship between Company X and MG is crucial. Also that MG need to deserve how they get money from Company X.

People trust key gadgets (MG) and agree with the concept.

FAIL

NO

Company X gets to main influence

FAIL

NO

MG is still floating and work on earning trust from people

Becomes a relationship that needs care