

THE HOLY TRINITY OF TECHNOLOGY MARKETING

Answering the three
questions that will earn
you the right to sell

A Velocity Guide for marketers



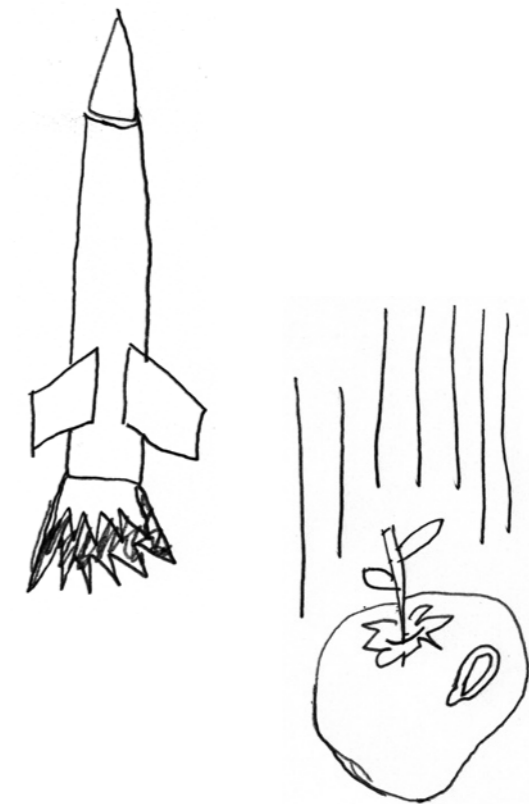
velocity

The holy trinity of technology marketing.

Three questions you'd better be able to answer quickly.

Technology marketers (especially the ones who live in agencies) love to make marketing more complex than it really is.

While there's a lot of craft in the practice of technology marketing – and some of it does start to resemble rocket science – the core of the discipline is very, very simple: you have to be able to answer three questions quickly, clearly and compellingly...



The three questions

Again, nothing that would trouble Einstein:

- 1 Who the hell are you?**
- 2 Why should I care?**
- 3 Why should I believe you?**

That's it. The whole enchilada of technology marketing (some say all marketing, but I actually believe the soap, cigarette and beer peddlers are doing something very different).

If you can answer these three questions well, you'll have done the hardest and most important part of your job. You will also have made the other parts of your job a lot easier.

The questions are sequential. You can't answer them out of order. In fact, answering the first question well earns you the right to ask the second and answering the second well earns you the right to ask the third. Answering all three earn you the right to sell something. There is no other way through this obstacle course.

Fail along the way and you haven't just lost the battle, you've lost the war.

Let's take a look at them.



1 Who the hell are you?

This question tests your ability to break out from an unspeakably noisy world, stand out from a very specific kind of competition and win passage to the second question.

The question is phrased in colloquial Yank-speak for a reason. 'Who are you?' presumes the questioner wants to know the answer. 'Who the hell are you?' assumes the opposite: that the questioner not only doesn't want to know, but is openly hostile – annoyed that you've interrupted their train of thought and tried to impose your agenda on to theirs.

This reflects the real world of the marketer/prospect relationship. Most technology marketing commits the fatal error of assuming the audience welcomes the communication and is highly motivated to sift it for its meaning.

In the real world, the opposite is true. Your prospects don't give a damn about you. They want you out of their face. They hope that you fail so that they don't have to give you any more of their precious time and attention.

'Who the hell are you?' more accurately reflects the psychological context of your attempted communication. It also raises the bar. A lot of marketing can pass the easier test of intriguing an interested, motivated audience. But you're not marketing to your mother. You're marketing to someone who considers you the enemy.

To make the challenge even more accurate (and raise the bar still further) you have to consider your Question 1 competition: the other people and things who are also trying to get the same person's attention at the same time.

Your direct commercial competitors are only one cluster of competitors for the attention of your prospect. Some of these may be formidable competition in their own right. Some may outspend you. Others may execute better. But they're still not your main competition for Question 1.

Your Question 1 competitors are legion and they include such formidable foes as:

- Manchester United
- Global Warming
- Scarlet Johanssen
- A leaking toilet
- A highly-strung boss
- Your prospect's wayward teenage daughter who didn't get home until 3am and refuses to talk about it.

You get the idea.



1 continued. hell are you?

In the no-man's land before the Question 1 hurdle, that pesky company who makes better widgets than you is not the problem. Scarlet Johanssen is the problem.

Here's an exercise: go and get the last ad, brochure, mailing or web page you approved. Now go to your browser and type in this URL:
<http://www.velocitypartners.co.uk/2009/05/29/584/>

Hold your work up next to the browser. Look at one, then the other. Repeat.

The bar is not just higher than you thought, the bar is out of sight.

Your challenge is to use words and pictures to stop your target audience for a millisecond, then plant a tiny suspicion that the thing in front of them just might be worth another five seconds of their time. This is the art of the headline.

Some headlines tell the prospect who you are in a direct, literal way ("Learn Italian in three weeks or your money back."). Others tell people who you are in a more oblique way. They may communicate what kind of company you are, your attitude to your work or the general world you operate in.

The art of the headline is the subject of another article. For now, it's enough to say that a good headline stops the prospect in their tracks and moves them closer to your answer to Question 1.

Who the hell did you say you were?



2 Why should I care?

You've elbowed Scarlet aside for a few seconds. You've emerged from the Question 1 scrum with a small scrap of your prospect's attention.

Now you have a tiny, fleeting opportunity to answer Question 2, 'Why should I care?'.

The key here is speed. Successfully negotiating Question 1 does not mean the prospect's door swings open; that you're ushered into the office, given a cappuccino, and begged to tell your tale.

Despite the effort you put in to getting this far, you have less than a minute to clear the next hurdle. And it's harder than the first. Maybe exponentially so.

'Why should I care?' can only be answered with statements that establish direct, personal relevance for the prospect.

You've woken her up. This had better be good. Maybe something like:

- 'There is a train coming and you're on the tracks and we know how to untie you.'
- 'There is a pot of gold hidden underneath a bush and we have a map.'
- 'We will keep you out of jail.'
- 'We will make you rich and famous.'
- 'We will save you so much money you can do that thing your boss keeps striking out of the budget.'
- 'We will get you out of your crap company and into a great company that appreciates and rewards your talents.'

If it weren't for one thing, answering this question effectively wouldn't be so hard. That one thing is the next Question.



2 continued. Why should I care?

If it weren't for the next question, you could simply lie. You could make any of the statements listed above, sit back and wait for the web hits to come pouring in.

But Question 3 awaits. And it's no good blagging your way through this one if you have zero chance of clearing that one.

Your answer to Question 2 has to be:

Relevant – something the prospect actively thinks about, cares about, worries about.

Available – something that isn't being said by everyone else.

Attainable – something you can deliver on; something you can prove you can deliver on. Something true.

Now you can see the challenge.

Most technology marketers try to clear Question 2 by making the grandest claim they can make. They think about the benefits their solution confers, then think about why this benefit is good, and why this good thing is important and why this important thing is essential.

Then they say the 'essential' thing. And it comes out like this:

- 'Increase your profitability with our spell-checker.'
- 'Boost your share price with our middleware.'
- 'Double your revenue with our test software.'

White noise. Static.

Answering Question 2 is about finding some clear space in the market, then balancing relevance and credibility into something intriguing. Not something that closes the deal right here and now; something that moves the prospect to the next question.

Your job here is to raise an eyebrow. To earn a few more minutes to give you a fighting chance to answer Question 3.



3 Why should I believe you?

You've passed two very tough tests. Your prospect knows who you are and why you think they should care. Now you've got a chance to make them do something about it.

But first, you need to make them believe that what you said in Question 2 just might be half true.

This is the struggle for credibility. No single fact can win it for you. You need to amass enough evidence to tip things in your favour.

There are many ways to bolster credibility:

- Statistics – ideally independently generated
- Awards
- Accreditations
- Analyst attention and endorsement
- Media attention and endorsement
- Lists of customers
- Testimonials
- Case studies
- Your reputation
- The way you speak
- The way you look
- The way you behave
- Your resources and assets
- The credentials of your team
- Other successful products
- Your company's commercial success

You don't just need one or two of these if you want to clear Question 3. You need as many of them as you can get.

Notice that 'simply making a claim' is not on the list of credibility builders. A claim is an empty thing. Prove it. Demonstrate why it's true. Show how you deliver on it. Make me see the light.

Credibility is never granted; it is always hard-won. This is true because all IT buyers have been badly burned. Most have been badly burned repeatedly over the most sensitive parts of the body. They've heard a lot of claims and they aren't in the mood to take yours at face value.



3 **continued.** **Id** **I believe you?**

But because it's so hard, tech marketers often forget the most powerful credibility-builder of them all: a good story that makes sense.

A good, strong, logical story, well told, can earn as much credibility as three or four of the credibility-builders listed above.

This is especially true for 'early adopters' or 'champions' who rely less on what others do and more on their own judgement.

You may not have all the proof you need. You may not have all the endorsements you'd like. You may not have any customers at all. But if your stuff works, there's a reason. And if you can explain why it works while other solutions fall short – and do it in a distinctive, compelling way – you can pass the test established by Question 3.

This doesn't mean you don't need any of the credibility-builders. The more the merrier. But if you've got a great story to tell, invest in telling it well.

In short: get the best copywriter you can find and shower him in riches (shameless plug: see [About Velocity](#)).



Using the three questions.

Answering the Three Questions is the hardest part of technology marketing. It's also the most important part.

You can spend a fortune on advertising; have the best search engine optimisation in the market; generate a library of killer white papers -- none of it will work if you can't nail the Big Three first.

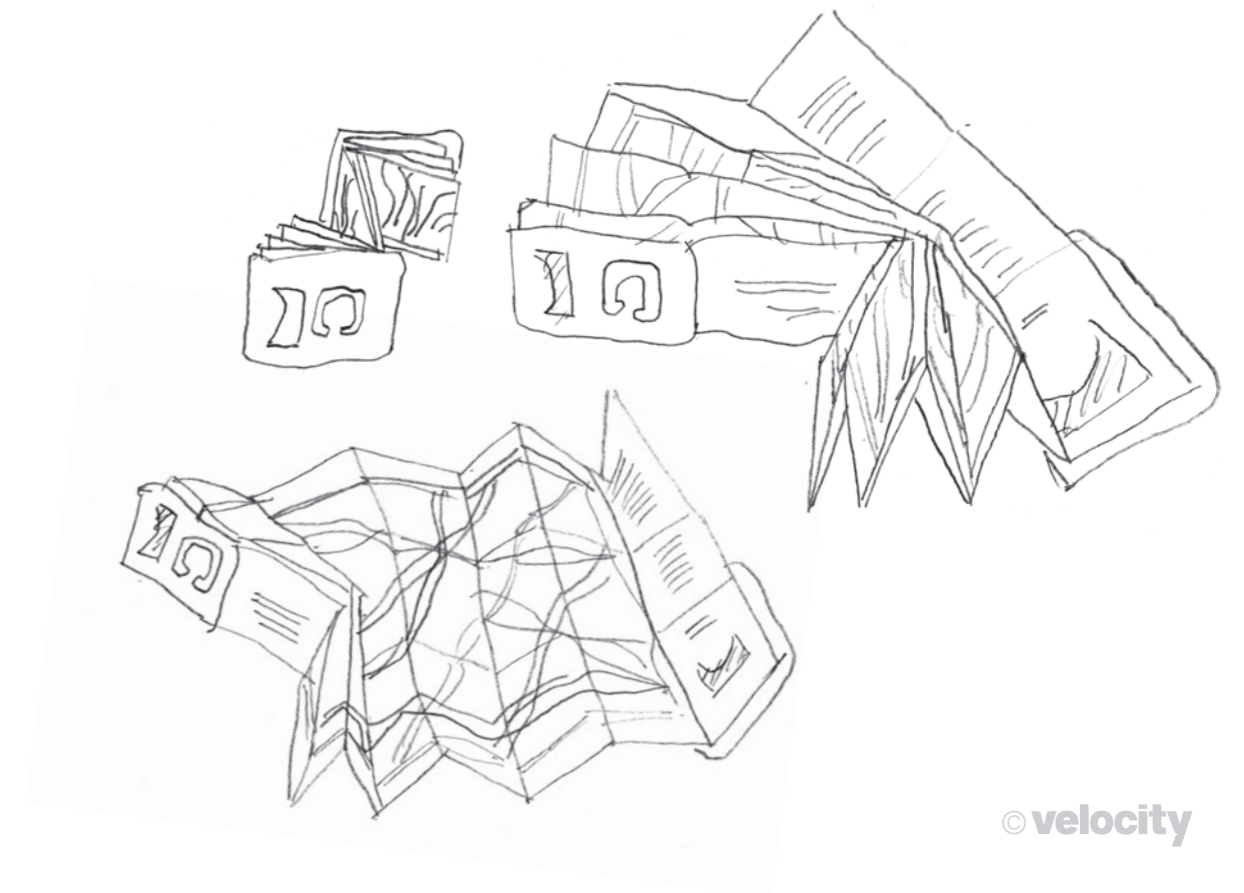
As obvious as they sound, the vast majority of technology marketing fails miserably at answering the three questions quickly, credibly and compellingly.

At Velocity, we make the Three Questions the starting point of every engagement. We don't get stuck into campaigns, websites or brochures until we (and the client) feel we've cracked them.

You can map your entire marketing plan to the Three Questions or use them to guide and evaluate any single piece of communication.

In a good piece of marketing, you can see the Questions get answered, in order. In a bad one, you have to hunt for the answers and you're not satisfied when you find them.

Tech marketing isn't really much more complex than that.



About Velocity.

Velocity is a consulting-led B2B marketing agency specialising in technology markets.

We help B2B companies create compelling stories, turn these into great content and use the content to generate sales leads.

Visit us at www.velocitypartners.co.uk
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