

# Marketing Your Tech Talent

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# Which tech talent? And who's doing the marketing?

## ...to whom is this talk addressed?

This is addressed to both individual technologists - how to market your own tech talents - and to the companies who would like to “leverage” those talents in marketing their technologies and themselves.

Mostly, it's addressed to marketers who are trying to market technology. I'm suggesting that you market technologists instead.

By technologists I mean software engineers, sysadmins, devops, support teams - all the people who are actually creating, using and running technology, and know how it works.

I'm assuming that the audience we're talking about marketing to are also technologists.

I hope by the end of this talk you'll see why we need to market tech talent, have some new ideas on how to do it, and understand how it's to the mutual advantage of buyer and seller to do it well.

Caveat: I'm not talking about trying to spin straw into gold, ie making fake “tech rockstars” out of mediocre or completely non-technical talent.

# Agenda

- **History** (brief) of technology marketing
- **Why** market technologists
- **How** I do it

# History



# Once upon a time...



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Byte magazine, 1993

Technology marketing, as practiced by marketing professionals, looked pretty much like any other marketing

glossy brochures, magazine ads, and product datasheets written in that “professional” voice, aimed at corporate decision makers or home consumers, who were mostly not expected to be technologically savvy.

With the advent of the world wide web, the tone and style did not (immediately) change.





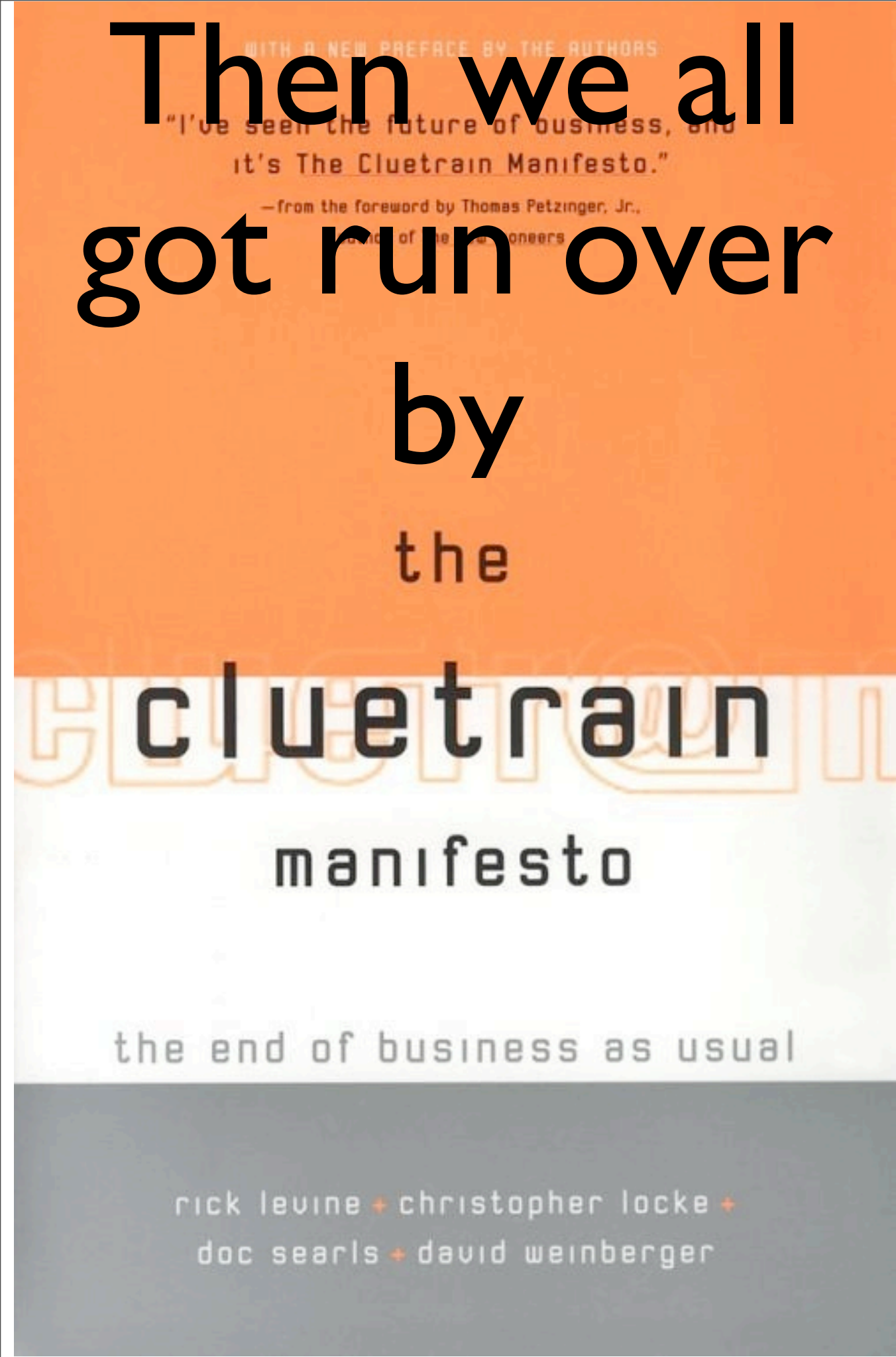
In the early 90s I worked for Incat Systems, an Italian company that made CD recording software, and in 1995 was acquired by Adaptec.

I worked closely with the engineers on UI and wrote all the documentation, but I had also for some time been interacting with customers online. Mostly because of that, my name was well known to the public who cared about CD-R. I always felt that was unfair to the engineers - I had not written a line of the code that made home CD recording possible.

By 1996 I was writing a lot of Adaptec's web content - everything related to CD-R. I had the idea to do bios of our engineers, so that our customers could get to know them. But, before I even got started, some exec heard about this idea and shut it down hard. I was ordered never to name engineers in any public forum, for fear that they would be recruited.

And this was typical of the time: engineers were a hot commodity, but were expected to be faceless, nameless software drudges.

...and that was why they used to put easter eggs in software.



“A powerful global conversation has begun... markets are getting smarter—and getting smarter faster than most companies...”

1999

Customers across the spectrum were becoming less and less interested in corporate weasel words and happy talk.

# Markets were getting smarter

## ...and so were employees

Talented techies began to realize that their employers were rarely loyal to them, and there was no reason for them to be loyal to their employers.

(Sun Microsystems may have been the last tech company which commanded or deserved much employee loyalty.)

The dot com crash of 2001 made this painfully clear.

Meanwhile, the open source movement began to show us entirely new ways of doing the software business.



# Meanwhile, in Hollywood

Let's look aside for a moment at a different industry.

For decades now, the model for physical production and post production of films is that most of the people involved are freelancers, brought together for the duration of a project.

In film, the term "talent" is used mostly to refer to actors and directors, who are selected for box office appeal - that is, their ability to get people to buy tickets.

Production teams are hired for skills such as knowing how to use a particular effects editing suite.

A team comes together, works on a project for up to several years, then they all disperse to other projects.

in the last 15 years in software we've been seeing a move towards a similar model of employment.

you can think of a startup as analogous to a single film production. Instead of finally releasing a film as the product, the goal is most often to sell the company and its technology as the product.

This obviously has implications for employers and employees alike.

# Why

which brings us to why market your tech talent

One of the implications of the Hollywood model is that, for the company, the top talents don't need you as much as you need them.

And, while it may seem counter-intuitive, this is precisely why companies need to market the tech talents who work for them.

# Why market tech talent?

- For their “box office” appeal
- To get quality tech content
- To attract, develop, and retain talent
- Luster, leads, and SEO



How's this for box office appeal?

Hyderabad - Sun Tech Days - March 2010

James Gosling was an early example of how Sun Microsystems actively marketed its technologists, creating tech “rockstars” who were recognized and admired by customers and others in the industry.

They had box office appeal - literally in Gosling’s case: his JavaOne toy show would pack the main conference hall at Moscone Center.

- Box office appeal also means that customers will be aware of your project because some of their favorite technologists are working on it. How many times have you read a nostalgic farewell article about a big name departing a company with words like: “We look forward to seeing what this person will do next!” And, whatever that person goes on to do, the industry pays attention.

In some cases, customers expect to benefit directly from the involvement of a particular person in a company. As you can imagine, Joyent’s customers are very happy to have Brendan Gregg available to work on their performance problems.



# Quality Content

- Let the technologists create your technical content - they will do it best
- Good technical content is the best form of technology marketing
- Your most effective content may also be the cheapest to generate

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- Quality of content. I could rant about this for hours, but it's really very simple: leave the creation of technical content to the actual technologists.  
Do NOT have it done by marketing people or hired writers.

Among other reasons, because it stretches your marketing dollar: your most effective content may also be the cheapest to generate

Your techies may have already created great content, but perhaps it's hidden in a bug database, mail thread, or source code comments.

Ask what's stopping them getting this content out to a wider audience, and how you can help.

# Tech Traffic:

## [dtrace.org/blogs/brendan](http://dtrace.org/blogs/brendan)



When you have a technologist who blogs well, be very very nice to him or her.

Your tech talent can attract serious traffic, at no cost to you: simply allow them to blog.

As I learned in a little survey I ran for this talk, some companies even in this day and age forbid their talent from communicating about the work they do. This would be like a producer banning actors from doing interviews about a film they star in. Massive lost opportunity.





# Attract, Develop and Retain Great Talent

## Attract

Having well-known techies on your team helps you attract more of the same, and keep them. “A” players like working with “A” players. People want to work with top names that they can learn from.

## Develop

The kinds of marketing I’ll be describing in a bit all have the intended effect of helping to develop your tech talent, in skill areas outside of strict coding. For them, that’s career development, and most of them are happy to have the help.

## Retain

Talented people who know they’re working with other talented people and developing further in their own careers - that’s a recipe for retention



# Luster, Leads & SEO

[Linux Performance Analysis and Tools: Brendan Gregg's Talk at ...](#)

[www.joyent.com/.../linux-performance-analysis-and-tools-brendan-greg...](http://www.joyent.com/.../linux-performance-analysis-and-tools-brendan-greg...) ▼

Mar 1, 2013 - The talk is about **Linux Performance Analysis and Tools**: specifically, observability tools and the methodologies to use them.

- This blog post has been in the top 5 to 10 Google results for “Linux Performance” since the day it was published.
- It has been the 12th most popular page on Joyent so far this year.

This is where marketing your tech talent helps with the classic problem of widening the funnel.

The background for this one:

We sent speakers to SCaLE in 2012 because they asked me.

Brendan spoke there again this year - packed the largest room at the conference with his talk on “Linux Performance Analysis and Tools”.

I filmed that talk, had the video online within the week, and together, that weekend, we ran a twitter campaign which helped to get it and keep it on the front page of Hacker News for about a day.

This is all pretty ironic for a cloud company whose competitive differentiator is a Solaris-derived operating system!

<http://www.beginningwithi.com/2013/05/19/a-twitter-campaign/>



# How

So how, specifically, do you market your tech talent - or get them to do your company's technology marketing?

# Media

- Blogs
- Video
- Events
- Conferences
- Open source
- Communities
- Publications:
  - Placed articles
  - Scientific articles
  - Books
- Twitter
- White papers

# Sun Blogs

## Overview

- 4,268 Bloggers (16% of all employees)
- 5,224 Blogs
- 128k Posts
- 140k Comments
- 22M Page Views 2008
- Jonathan Schwartz's (Sun CEO) blog: <http://blogs.sun.com/jonathan>



The screenshot shows the Sun Blogs website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the Sun Microsystems logo, the URL "blogs.sun.com", and a "participate" button. Below this, a welcome message states: "Welcome to Blogs.sun.com! This space is accessible to any Sun employee to write about anything." A search bar is present with the text "Search Blogs" and a dropdown menu set to "Full Text". A "Most Popular Tags" section lists various technology-related tags such as "adoption", "ajax", "bigdata", "blog", "china", "cluster", "community", "drac", "frontpage", "glassfish", "hpc", "identity", "identitymanagement", "japan", "java", "javafx", "javaone", "jruby", "linux", "management", "netbeans", "mysql", "netbeans", "open", "open-source", "opensolaris", "opensource", "opensso", "performance", "portal", "project", "ruby", "security", "server", "solaris", "software", "source", "storage", "sun", "sunray", "sysadmin", "technology", "vdi", "virtualbox", "virtualization", "web", "web2.0", "webservices", "work", "xvm", "zfs", and "ネット". Below the tags, there are three main sections: "Recent Posts", "Popular Blogs", and "New Sun Bloggers". The "Recent Posts" section lists three posts: "Everything Old is New Again" by Joseph D. Darcy, "Hibernate in GlassFish - Reloaded" by Bistrol, and "Change Y (Our) World with OSUM" by Gary Sarda. The "Popular Blogs" section lists five blogs with their hit counts: "Jim Grisardio" (9816 hits), "The Aquarium" (6660 hits), "Miles to go ..." (4900 hits), "Geertjan's Blog" (4268 hits), and "Rich Bumidge's Blog" (4208 hits). The "New Sun Bloggers" section lists three new bloggers: "Ryan Kopf - University of ...", "Sampat Patnaik CA, Sampat Patnaik", and "Marcelo Arbore, Marcelo Vitor Moretti Arbore".

stats from early 2009, supplied by Linda Skrocki

blogging is an ideal format for technologists - text still the best format for sharing code and screen output

highly searchable





how to promote blogging among techies

encouragement - if they haven't blogged before, encourage them to do so. Remind them that lots of valuable information is in their heads, and there is an audience out there who would love to be able to read it.

offer to help with editing, review and promotion

help with stats such as Google Analytics

in a large company, it may make sense to run contests - this shows a t-shirt that I gave out to a number of people at Sun for particular blogging successes. Yes, it's cheesy. But it works.



# Video



[youtube.com/  
user/deirdres](https://youtube.com/user/deirdres)

video is a great way for techies to deliver information

I have done hundreds of videos, many of them simply capturing talks at conferences and events

even informal chats among technologists like the one shown here can be useful and interesting to your tech audience

my YouTube channel contains over 500 technical videos, view counts ranging from handfuls to 13,000 - which is not bad considering their extremely technical and somewhat narrow focus

rough quality is fine, as long as audio quality is decent

video is NOT always the favorite way to receive information. Some learning styles prefer text

you can consider transcribing video and using it to develop text

transcribing and translating subtitles also good, funds permitting

<http://www.beginningwithi.com/2010/08/07/why-film-engineers/>

# Media Efficiency

time to generate different formats of content:

- Informal talk (video'd): 0.5 – 1 hour
- Blog post: 1 – 10 hours
- Formal presentation: 3 – 10 hours
- Published article: 3 – 30+ hours
- Whitepaper: 5 – 50+ hours
- Book: 2000 hours

Brendan Gregg wrote this list

# Conferences

- know what's a good fit for the technologies and the people
- track deadlines
- encourage and help with submissions, titles and abstracts
- help overcome impostor syndrome
- practice at smaller meetups

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Sponsoring a talk at a big conference costs big bucks. And we all know how we feel about sponsored talks at conferences we've paid to attend.

So how much is it worth to have an employee invited or accepted to speak at a conference you don't sponsor?

Those non-sponsored talks tend to be the best-attended and the most inspiring to those who attend them

having your company's name associated with a well-received talk at a big name conference is an obvious Good Thing

You can help that happen



# Own-Label Events



You can also run your own events, or, better yet, facilitate the techies' running their own.

I was part of a small OpenSolaris community team within Solaris engineering. We ran some small independent events such as the Open Storage Summit, and helped with special day-long sessions on things like Solaris Security, alongside USENIX LISA, a model which Oracle carried on for a couple of years.

At Joyent, I have run many meetups, and larger events such as last year's dtrace.conf, illumos Day, and the first ZFS Day. ZFS Day was so popular that others have now taken up that mantle.

Tips here are:

keep the events cheap, friendly, and technology-centric

with emphasis on knowledge sharing, evangelism, and relationship-building - NOT lead-gen

Events are also a very good way to generate lots of good video content in a hurry.

film and live stream EVERYTHING. Many people who would like to participate in an event cannot travel to it, but are surprisingly willing to be on a live stream at all hours, even when they know they'll be able to see the video afterwards. People like to feel like they're part of the event.



# Open Source Software

A lot has been said about this by people who know far more than I do, but for completeness' sake I will say:

open source is obviously a very important way for technologists to market themselves.

they can share what they do - not just the binaries, but the lines of code

the repository becomes the resumé

And they can take their products with them when they move on.

# Communities

- Being an active member of a relevant community should be part of everyone's job

Again, this is an area where lots has been said and I think we all understand the value.

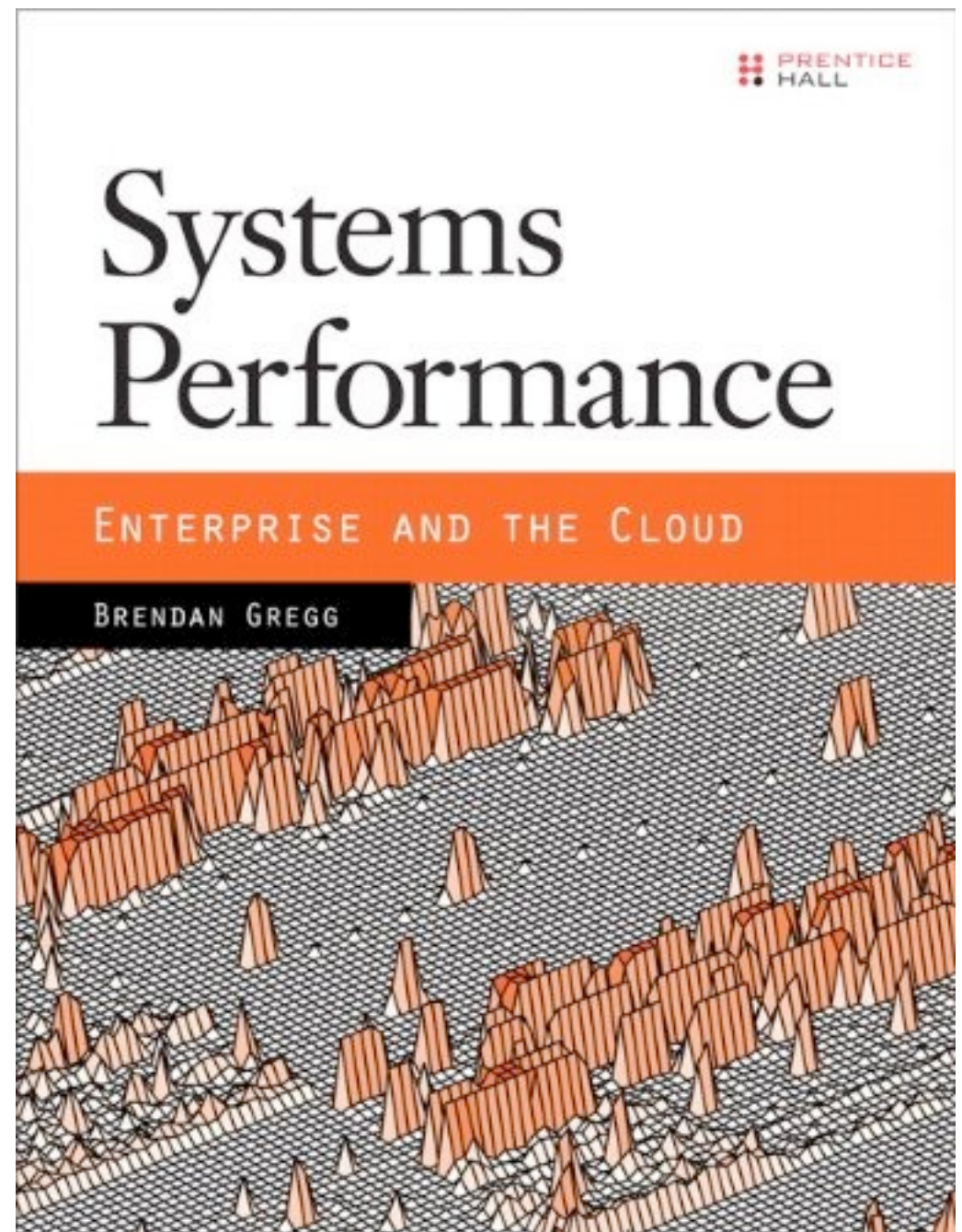
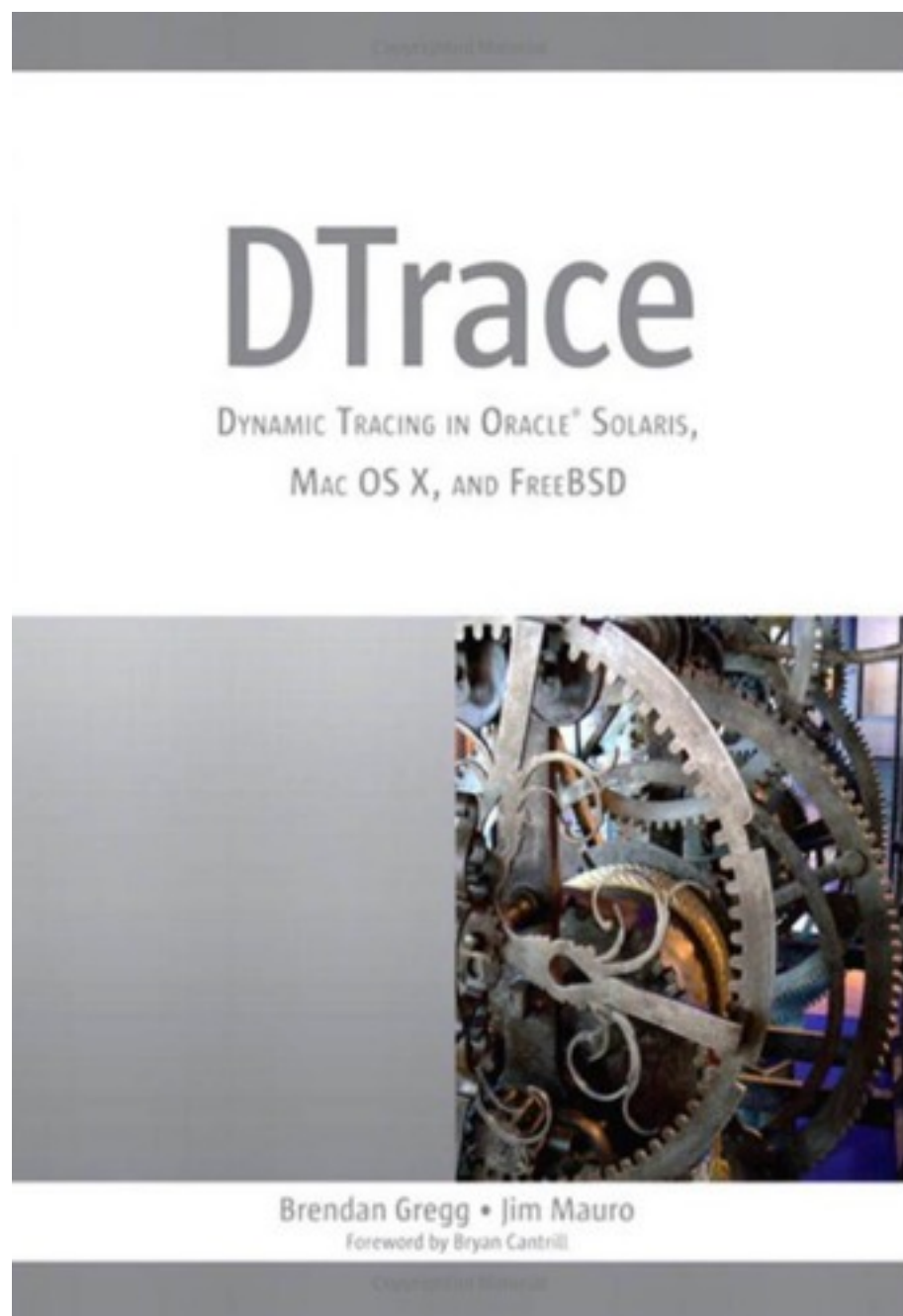
My specific tactical advice to marketers is:

do whatever you can to help community happen and get people talking to each other

then stay out of the way, except as needed to keep infrastructure running

be very, very careful about how you try to use the community for direct marketing

# Publications



- if your tech talent has invented/developed something worth writing a book about, you may want encourage that, as books are a great marketing tool. But be aware that it's an insane amount of work.

- learn what journals/publications exist in your space, and encourage your talent to submit articles where appropriate. Be aware that even an article, for example in ACM, can be a lot of work.



# Twitter

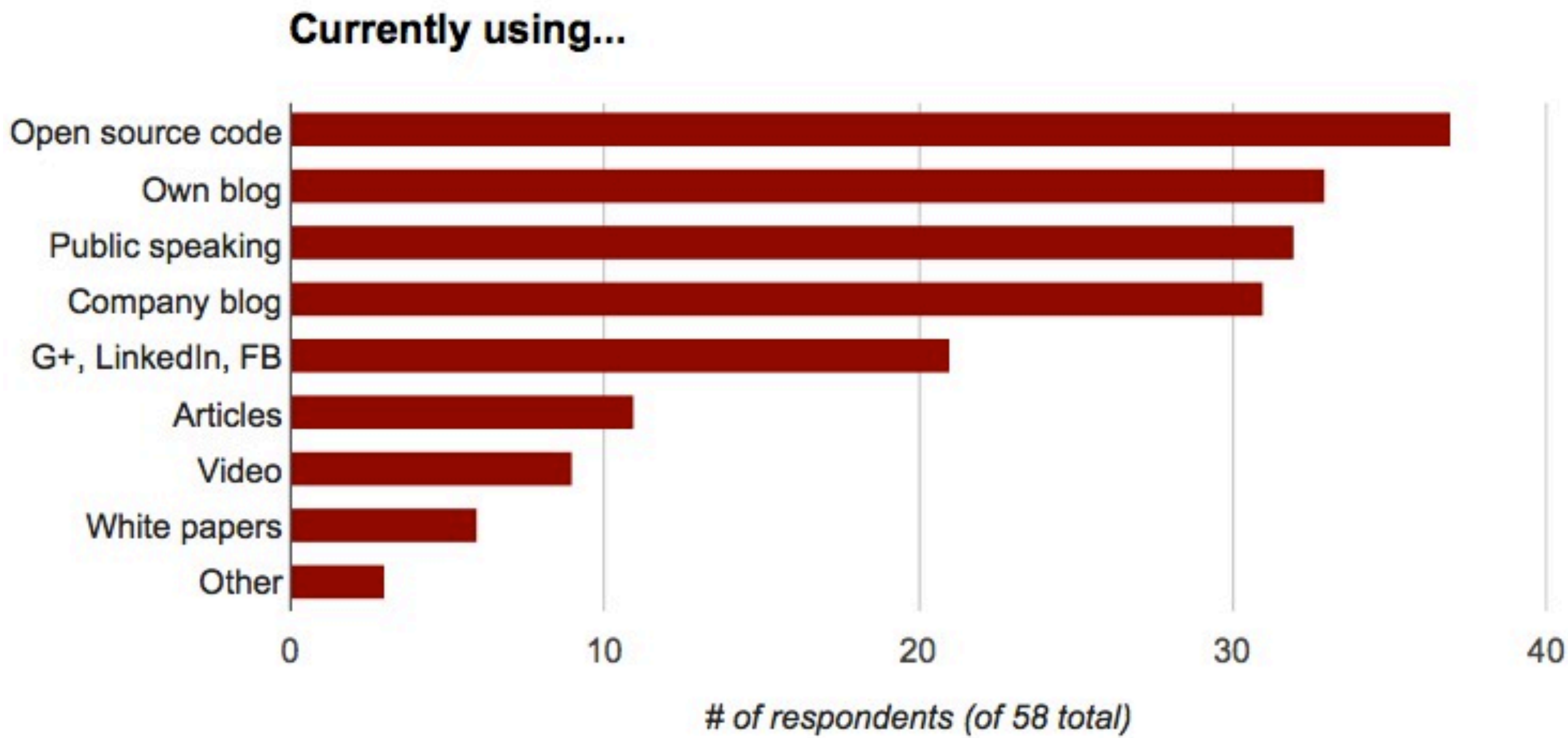
in itself not a useful medium for technical content - too small

but it's a good way for technologists to steer their audience to their content, and have conversations about it

# White Papers

Meh

White Papers

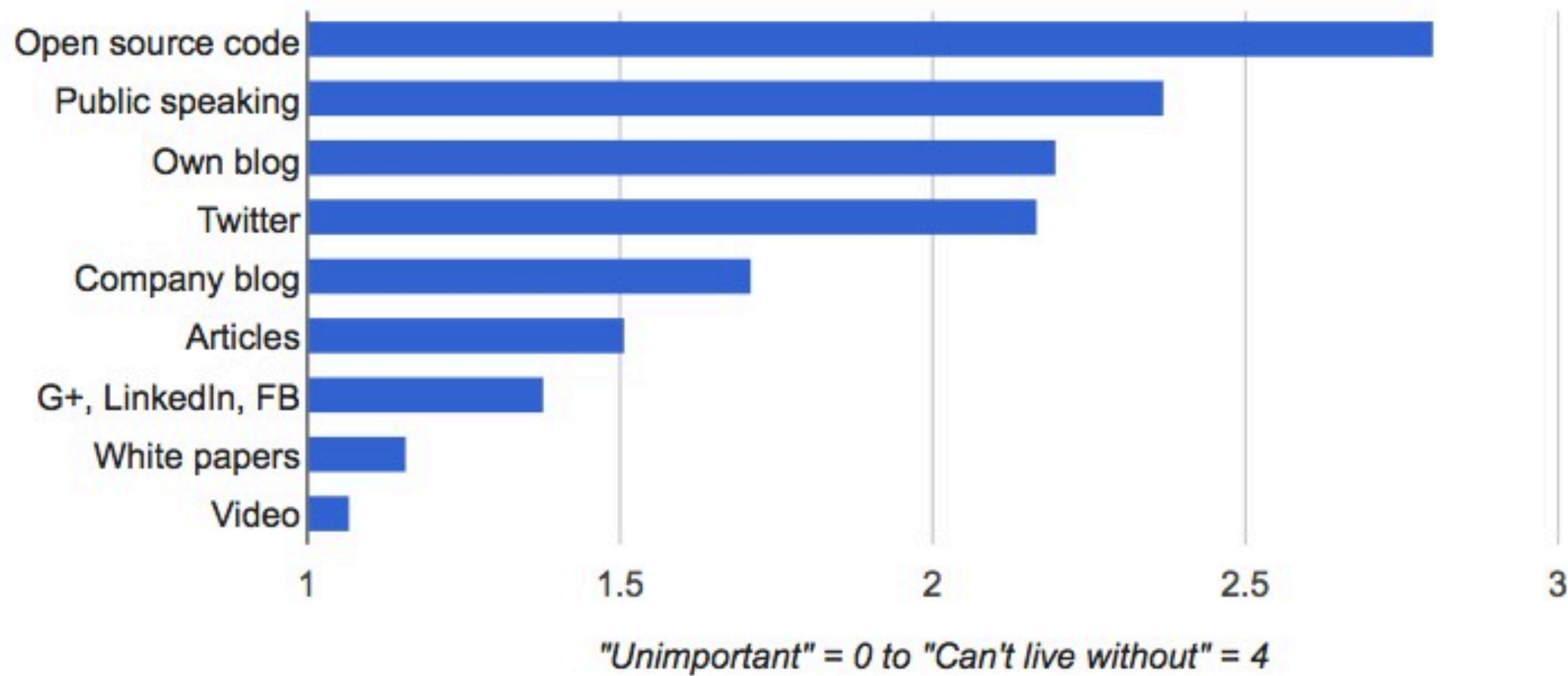


I ran a little survey on what forms of content techies are currently using to communicate about their work

Note that twitter is left off here because I publicized the survey via twitter, so of course every respondent is using twitter.



How important is it to communicate via...



...and which ones they think are important.

- Your tech talent probably already considers public speaking and blogging very important, after open source, so that should be the easiest path to marketing.
- Convincing them to do white papers or video may be the hardest, although for video you can explain how amazingly efficient it is.

# A few do's & don'ts

Going back to the Cluetrain Manifesto: markets are conversations

In this case, it's a conversation among technologists, not between marketing and customers.

You can use all of the media I've mentioned to facilitate the conversation

with a few caveats

# What NOT to Do

- editorial calendars
- “dev blogs” that look just like the marketing pages
- attempt to control the message or the tone

A few final points about how not to get techies to cooperate with marketing



# Tone

- be honest
  - be open
  - be precise
  - be authentic
- In other words, techies: be yourselves.  
(Execs: Yes, that often includes a beer in hand and liberal use of the word “fuck”. Get used to it.)
  - if you’re a marketer: facilitate conversations between techies - then get out of the way



# Unanswered Questions

- What exactly is this job?
- Who should do it?
- Whose budget and whose KPIs?
- How do you measure results?

all the activities I've been describing seem to add up to a sort of job, which has been an ongoing part of my work for the last 7 years, even as my employer and job title have changed several times

there's vague general agreement that doing this stuff is useful, but there are questions -

Different organizations have different answers to these questions

Other people I know who do this work have also found themselves bounced around different parts of a company - support, engineering, corporate marketing

We don't know what to call it, but we recognize the importance of the work, and we keep on doing it, even though we get tired of explaining to new management why it matters.

perhaps someday we'll consolidate this into a recognized title, something like "Technology Talent Manager"

# Thank you!

- Brendan Gregg, as ever
- Jonas Thaler for film industry consulting



# Resources

- @deirdres
- [beginningwithi.com/tag/what-i-do](http://beginningwithi.com/tag/what-i-do)