



# Marketing Your Tech Talent

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# “Am I in the right room?”

Which tech talent are we talking about?

Who’s doing the marketing?



## Do you do any of the following in the tech industry?

- code
- ops / devops
- sysadmin
- support
- training
- evangelism
- documentation
- community management
- technical marketing
- product management
- project management
- leadership

Then you have technical talent, and I'm talking to you.



In case you need reassurance: if you do any of these things, and probably more I've forgotten to list, then you have technical talent and I'm talking to you.

I assume that you already know what your own technical talents are.

This talk is about why and how you should market your talents and yourself.

# A Brief History of Technology Marketing



We need to start with some historical context.

# So Powerful It Can't Be A PC.

**Transform Your PC With The INTERACTIVE UNIX System.**  
Upgrade the 32 bit power in your PC with the INTERACTIVE UNIX System from SunSoft. Change through applications at record speeds. Use real world multitasking and networking. Get on the path to a distributed computing future.

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What? The INTERACTIVE UNIX System is easy to use, simple to administer, all at a great price.  
Open Systems Users "rate the INTERACTIVE UNIX System management... as easy to use and more comprehensive" than SCO's and "as simple a combination of good design".  
Looking Glass Professionals' desktop manager makes the INTERACTIVE UNIX System easy enough for novices, yet powerful enough for experienced UNIX users, and the award-winning Easy Windows makes setting up graphic environments infinitely simpler. You can't afford not to take advantage of the already low cost of the INTERACTIVE UNIX System.

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INTERACTIVE UNIX System/386 Release 3.2 supports hundreds of the most popular local-based platforms and peripherals. So getting started is fast, easy, and cost-effective. Thousands of UNIX and OS/2 applications are at your command. And our OS/2 package runs virtually all OS/2 software. You get Lotus®, WordPerfect®, and Oracle! You get SCO applications. You get it all.

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The INTERACTIVE UNIX System is the environment of choice for 80386 application development. You get access to a full range of development tools including compilers, debuggers and libraries. And for graphical applications, the GUI INTERACTIVE environment is a revelation.

**Partner With Power.**  
The INTERACTIVE UNIX System is a powerful business partner for companies who know something about power. Companies like BBN, Gordan's Labs, and Datalog to name a few. They power your business, too. All have trusted, the leading supplier of 32-bit UNIX system software.  
Call today and see OS/2 on UNIX power that's cost-effective. Forget the anything but a PC. 1-800-227-0227.

**SunSoft**  
A Sun Microsystems, Inc. Company

Byte magazine 1993

Technology marketing, as practiced by marketing professionals, looked pretty much like any other marketing of that time: it was all glossy brochures, magazine ads, and product datasheets.

All written by professional marketers in that neutral, professional marketing voice.

Tech marketing was aimed at corporate decision makers or home consumers. Neither category was expected to be very savvy about technology.

## All marketing was a one-way street

Companies had the power to communicate out to customers, because they could afford to pay for mass media: print, TV, radio.

Customers could not communicate back, except by making a phone call or writing a letter.



In 1993, all marketing, not just tech, was a one-way street.

Companies could communicate out because they could afford mass media.  
Customers could not communicate back in any impactful way

The Internet was about to change this equation. But companies were slow to understand this. Marketing was still all one-to-many.

Early websites were referred to as brochure-ware, because companies essentially took their glossy corporate print brochures and reproduced those on the web. The tone and style of their communications did not (immediately) change.

# Technology was produced by companies

The developers who actually made software and hardware were anonymous drones working behind the scenes.



Except for a few famous company heads such as Jobs, Wozniak, and Gates, technology companies were mostly faceless, and they wanted to stay that way.

Why? Let me tell you a story.

In the early 90s I worked for an Italian startup that made a consumer CD recording software called Easy CD. In 1995 we were acquired by an American hardware company called Adaptec.

As part of my job, I worked closely with the engineers on UI and wrote all the documentation, but I also interacted with customers and others online, via CompuServe, the Usenet, and later a mailing list.

Because of that interaction, my name was well known in the world of CD-R. In a small way, I was famous.

I always felt that was unfair to the engineers, because I had not written a line of the code that made it possible for our customers to record CDs.

By 1996 I was writing a lot of Adaptec's web content – everything related to CD-R, and I was always looking for new things to write about.

I had the idea to do bios of our engineers, so that customers could get to know the great people who made the software they loved. 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 away by another company.

This was typical company behavior at the time, and had been for years. Developers were a critical asset, and companies thought that the way to protect that asset was to lock it up where no one could find it.



Developers quietly rebelled against this. One way they did so was to put easter eggs in their software.

This was the first known software easter egg, placed in the Atari Adventure game back in 1979 by game designer Warren Robinett.





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

*The Cluetrain Manifesto, 1999*



By 1999, some people began to realize that the world was changing.

The Internet was very different from other forms of communication: it offered equal access and immediate response. While companies were still treating the Internet like a digital version of print media, individuals began finding new ways to use it – to create conversations.

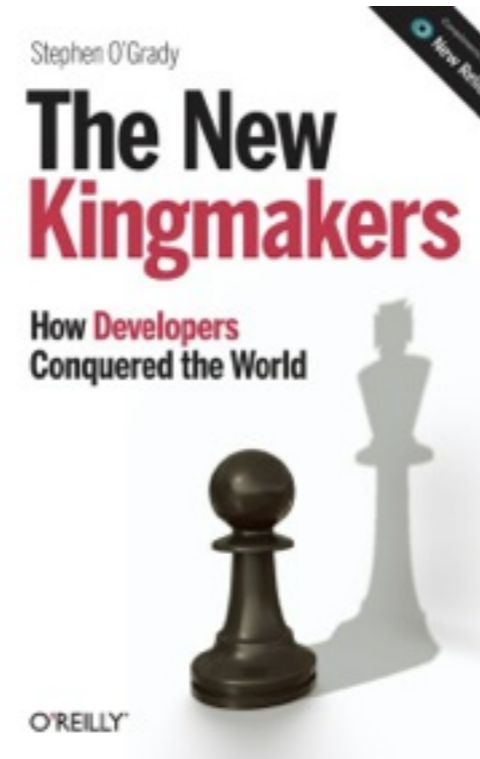
Customers were becoming less and less interested in corporate weasel words and happy talk. They were looking for open and honest conversation.

## 15 years on...

“The new century... has ushered in profound and permanent shifts in the relationship between developer and employer. ... With the cost of development down by an order of magnitude or more, the throttle on developer creativity has been removed, setting the stage for a Cambrian explosion of projects.

**Four major disruptions drove this shift: open source, the cloud, the Internet, and seed-stage financing.”**

Stephen O’Grady *The New Kingmakers*  
O’Reilly, 2013



15 years later, 3 more critical elements have come into play.

The Internet had first made it possible for customers to talk back to companies, and the smarter companies – the ones who jumped on the Cluetrain – were learning how to listen.

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

Then along came the cloud, which meant that you could run an online business without having to buy your own servers.

These three factors made starting your own tech company a hell of a lot cheaper than it had been. Seed stage financing is now available to cover what costs are left.

## Companies now must talk *with* techies, not at them

Better yet, let techies talk directly with techies, and get out of the way.



When he says “developers are the new kingmakers”, O’Grady means that tech companies now have to sell directly to technical staff, who are the ones making the decisions about what technology to use.

He advises that marketers must “talk with developers, not at them.”

This is obvious to us:

We’re techies. We know that we don’t like the traditional ways that marketing is done to us.

We know that the best people to talk with techies are... other techies.

## Back to Marketing

Through all these changes, we techies have tended to leave marketing up to the marketing department (sometimes because we're told that marketing has to "control the message").

In many tech companies, geeks and marketers neither understand nor appreciate each others' work.



In many companies, this can be hard to do.

Through all these huge changes in how companies are created and built, we haven't changed much about how marketing departments work. Devs tend to leave marketing up to the marketers, and the marketing staff try to keep devs from peeing in their pool.

In many companies, geeks and marketers do not understand or appreciate each others' work.

Sometimes they don't even like each other much as people.

This rift can cause problems. I'm sure all of you can think of examples. I strongly believe that one of the reasons Sun Microsystems failed was the lack of communication between engineering and marketing.

# Meanwhile, in Hollywood



Now let's take another detour to look 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" mostly refers 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.

# The Hollywood Model for Tech



In the last 15 years in tech, I believe we've been moving towards a Hollywood model of employment.

You can think of a startup as analogous to a film production. Instead of releasing a finished film, the final goal may be to sell the company and its technology, leaving the people free to move on to new projects. Even in an acqui-hire scenario, the target talents often move on despite any and all incentives to stay at the acquiring company.

# But...

**There's no IMDB or talent agents for geeks**



We're missing a critical part of the Hollywood model:  
the film industry has well-established methods for identifying, categorizing, and promoting talent.

There's no IMDB or talent agents for geeks.

# You are responsible for your career



This means that you are responsible for your career.

Part of that responsibility is that you have to market yourself.

I know: marketing is not a skill that comes naturally to many of us. But, in the end, no one else can market you as well as you can.

The most important message I can give you today is: You need to do this. I am talking especially here to anyone who feels uncomfortable talking about their own accomplishments. Women in particular have reasons to be wary about how we promote ourselves; experience and research tell us that “bragging” can backfire on us.

Another aspect of this is that technical people – men or women – don’t really want to think about anything besides technology. Technology is what we love and what we do, and all this marketing stuff is an unwelcome distraction. We want to believe that: “If we build it, and it’s good, they will come.” Or “If we are good at what we do, that will be recognized, and we’ll automatically get to do more of it.”

Unfortunately, none of that is true.

If you want your technology and your career to thrive in the real world, you need to learn how to market yourself and your accomplishments.

Then, as you move from project to project, or company to company, you will bring your own fame with you, which will contribute to the success of whatever larger thing you do.



# How to Market Your Tech Talent



So we've talked about why, now let's get to how.

## What exactly are you trying to do?

- Establish a reputation for yourself, independent of your employer, for the great work you're already doing
- Motivate yourself to be still more awesome
- Help your company:
  - by providing specific information about your product/project
  - by showing that awesomeness thrives at your company



Before you start any project, it's helpful to think about exactly what you're trying to do.

In this case, you're trying to...

- establish a reputation for yourself
- get even better at what you love to do – talking about your achievements in public can be remarkably inspiring. You get feedback, people tell you that work is useful, and you want to do more.
- help your company

## Platforms / Media

- Blogs
  - Video
  - Screencasts / webinars
  - Conferences
  - Meetups
  - Open source
  - Communities
- Publications:
    - Tech media
    - Scientific journals
    - Books
  - Twitter
  - White papers



Nowadays, we all have the power of the printing press - and the camera, too. Each of these tools is good for different uses, and this is not a complete list.

You should probably be using more than one of these. Probably you already are.

Let's go into a bit of detail about each

## Blogs

- Blogging is ideal for talking about technology: text is still the best format for sharing code and screen output
- Text is highly searchable and keyword-rich
- It's easy to manage your own blog – you should have your own, as well as contributing to any blogs that your current employer offers



I could do a full-day workshop about blogging but here are some basic points.

## Video

- A great way to deliver a lot of information quickly
- Easier than you think:  
[beginningwithi.com/2010/03/09/the-videoblogging-manual/](http://beginningwithi.com/2010/03/09/the-videoblogging-manual/)
- Does not have to be studio quality



I have done hundreds of videos, many of them simply capturing talks at conferences and events, or informal chats among techies like the one shown here. Getting yourself onto video is an important part of your portfolio these days: it's almost required as part of the proposal process for the larger conferences, and it can also be useful for potential employers and colleagues to see your communication style. The quality doesn't have to be professional. If, for example, you're just getting started and have the opportunity to speak at a local meet up, have a friend film you on a smartphone.

## Webinars

PLEASE do video instead, if at all possible.



The term webinar is usually used to mean a remote presentation of slides and/or some sort of onscreen demo, done live so that you can hear the presenter's voice and see what they're doing in real time, but there's no camera – you cannot see the person talking.

Marketing departments are fond of this format, possibly because it's relatively easy to set up and run, even when the speaker is not at the same location as the A/V team.

But it's BORING for the audience. You lose a lot of information when you cannot see the speaker's expression or gestures.

## Public Speaking

- Internal: team meetings, company brown bags
- Local meet ups
- Regional conferences (some of which, e.g. SCaLE, are as big as many national ones)
- National and international conferences



Yes, you should get onto the speaker circuit as soon as you can. Some of you may have spoken right here at OSCON and therefore don't need this advice. If you haven't done much public speaking yet, you can ease into it with internal talks to colleagues, company brown bags, local and regional meetups. These all give you opportunities to hone your speaking skills, while building up a portfolio of talks what will help you win speaker slots at more and bigger events.

The boost to your career should be obvious, but it's also good for your company.

I don't mean that you should deliver a sales pitch – we all know how much we hate those – but you can use a talk to help establish thought leadership and demonstrate your and your company's technical competence.

## Open Source

Your repo is (part of) your resumé



Since we're all here at OSCON, we'll take this one as read.

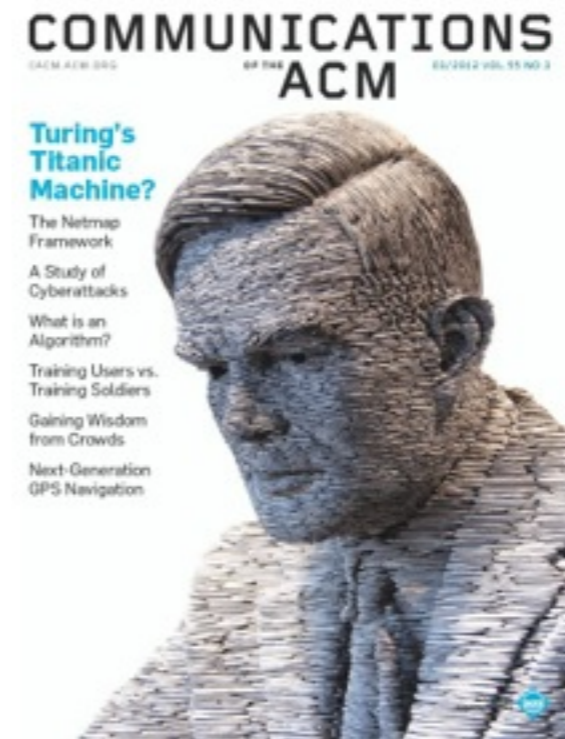
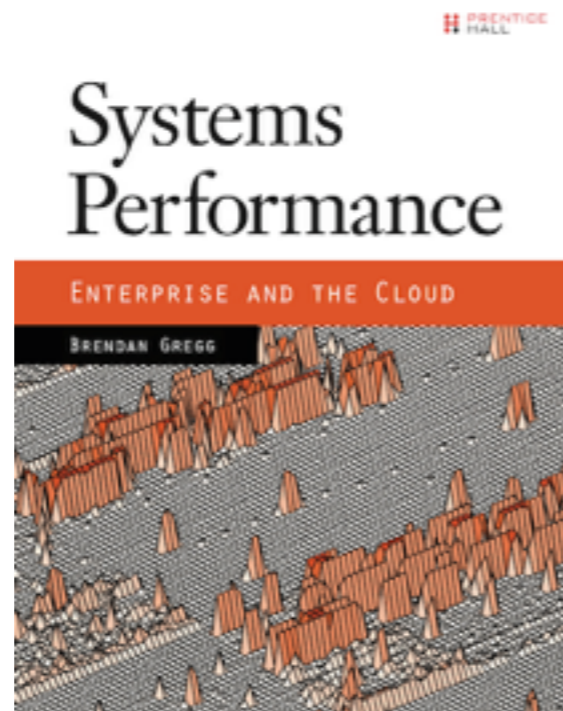


## Communities

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



Again, we're all here at OSCON, I probably don't need to say much about this to this audience.



Do you have enough material to make a journal article or book out of it? Getting published may be easier than you think –publishers are always hungry for material, and your company will probably love the idea of having a published author on staff, even if they’re not crazy about how much time it takes you to do it.

It is a LOT of work.

Do not do it for the money.

## Twitter

- Not good for complex conversations
- Great for:
  - Building and maintaining relationships
  - Steering people to content (yours or others'): content curation is a valuable service



At the opposite end of the word count spectrum is Twitter.

It's not good for dense topics or complex conversations, but it is great for...

## White Papers

Meh



Marketers and execs are still fond of these, partly because “we’ve always done white papers” and “white papers establish expertise and authority”. If you go and ask actual techies, many no longer bother to read white papers because they have become sinkholes of marketing fluff and impenetrable jargon. We especially don’t like it when marketers use their favorite trick of making you surrender your email address to be able to download a paper. If you have technical content, put it on an openly-accessible blog – it will get read there, not as a white paper.

## Some general guidelines for creating great content



These apply to any medium you're using.

## Tone

- be honest
- be open
- be precise
- be authentic

In other words: be yourself



Don't try to have that neutral corporate voice. You wouldn't talk to your friends that way.

So don't talk to your peers that way.

## Do at least the basics to be respectful to your audience

- Spell check
- Good grammar



Get copy-editing help if you need it. Basic mistakes are distracting and look sloppy, and make the reader wonder whether your thinking is also sloppy.

## **“But I don’t have any ideas!”**

You may already have created great content that you can adapt and repurpose. Look in:

- bug databases
- mail threads
- source code comments
- any question you’ve had to answer three times



Getting started may seem intimidating. You see all these people writing and tweeting up a storm, and you don’t see what you could possibly contribute.

But there’s a good chance you have already written material that will be useful and interesting to someone.



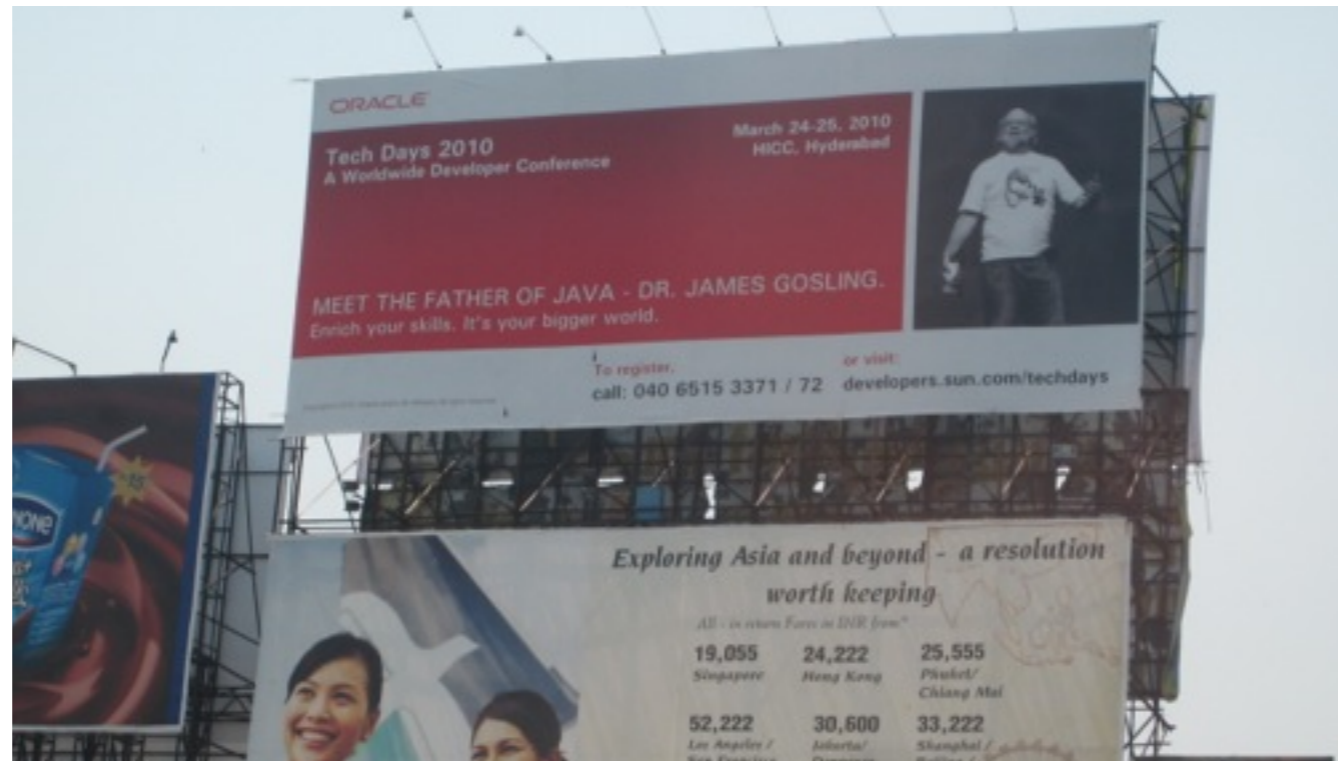
## Why is this good for your company?

- Technology needs marketing, and good technical content is the best form of technology marketing
- You will likely produce better tech content than the marketing department
- You can help attract other great people to work with you



As you get into a rhythm of writing, speaking, and self-promotion, you or your colleagues may wonder if all this focusing on yourself is good for your company.

It is, for these reasons...



Superstars attract attention.

If we go back to the Hollywood metaphor, someone like James Gosling is the Brad Pitt of tech: When he finishes a project or leaves a company, the public and the media wonder “What’s he going to do next?” Because they know he’s a superstar, and whatever he gets up to is bound to be interesting.

## Content Questions & Caveats

- What should you NOT say in public? The old Sun Blogging Guidelines are good common sense:
  - <https://web.archive.org/web/20080512010308/http://www.sun.com/aboutsun/media/blogs/BloggingGuidelines.pdf>
- What belongs to you, what to your employer?
  - Your content is valuable intellectual property – make sure you protect your rights in it with exclusions in your employment contracts.



## Things You Can Do Right Now

- If you don't already have a public presence of your own (Twitter, blog, etc.) – create it now.
- Look at any technical content you may have already created, eg bug reports and emails – can it be made public?
- Does your company have a blog (or multiple blogs)? Find out how to contribute. Or help get one started.
- If your company has strict controls over who gets to talk to the public and how, start trying to change that.
- Get started on your public speaking career.



Thank You

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beginningwithi.com



The marketing version of this talk (as delivered at  
Monktoberfest 2013):

[http://www.beginningwithi.com/2013/10/19/video-marketing-  
your-tech-talent/](http://www.beginningwithi.com/2013/10/19/video-marketing-your-tech-talent/)



## Media Efficiency

How long it takes to create:

- Informal talk (on video): 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

