

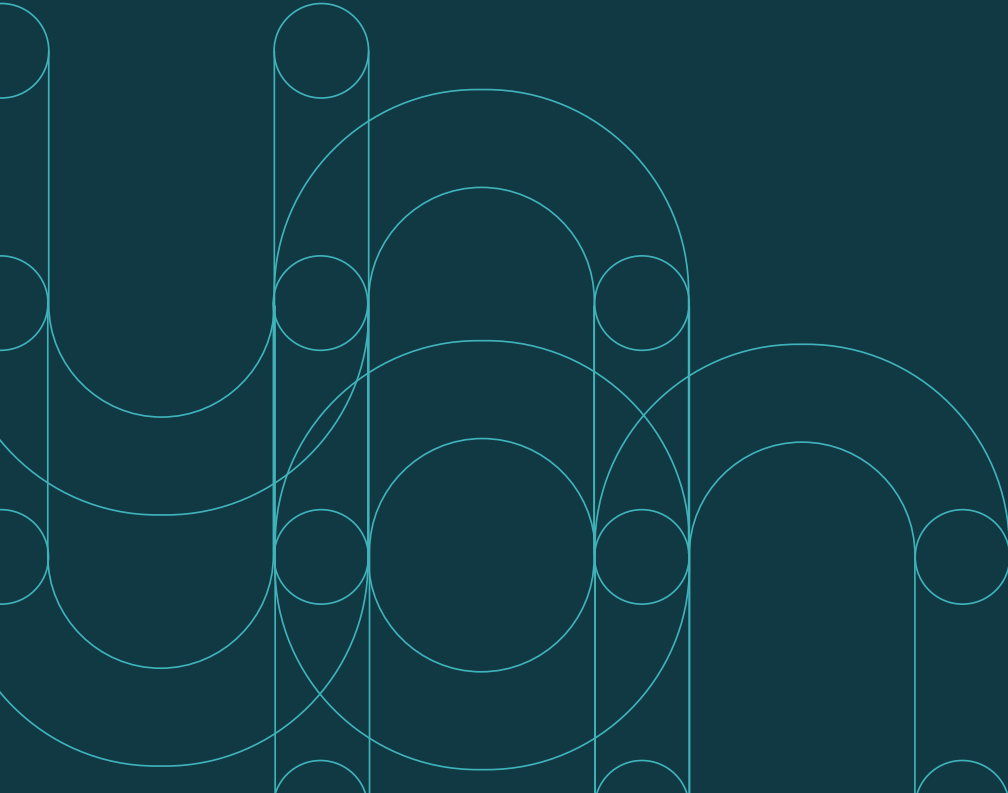
(Un)told



How Innovative Companies Nail Message-Market Fit

Untold crafts compelling messaging
that ***aligns our clients' product
capabilities with the market***
to accelerate demand and adoption
of their innovations.

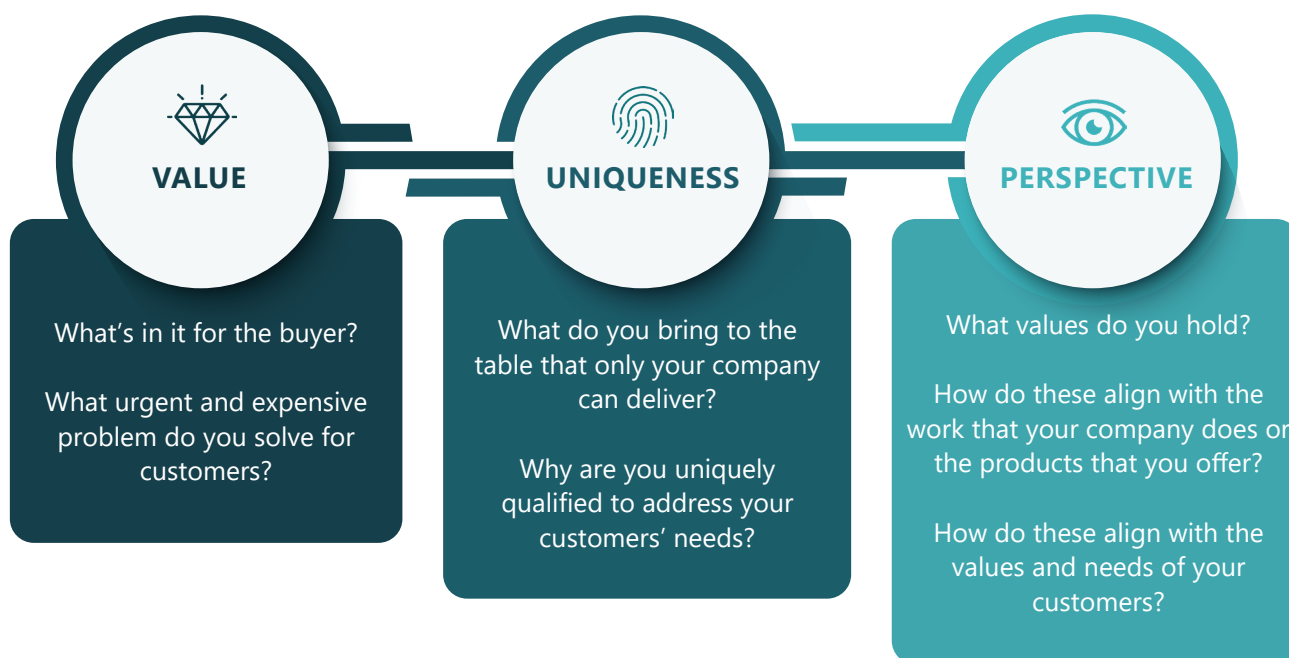
This is what we call ***message-market fit.***



Successful product innovation requires clear, compelling storytelling at all stages of the innovation lifecycle—including discovery, launch, and improvement.

Product teams must strive to articulate the value of new products and initiatives to both internal and external stakeholders to generate organizational buy-in and secure funding—and they need to bring great products to market at a fast pace. Sales and marketing teams need to align on a product's key value proposition and be able to articulate it consistently in customer engagements. And content needs to prompt conversion by clearly communicating technical ideas in ways that resonate with customers and differentiate innovations from competitors.

Message-market fit expresses the uniqueness of your product and company in a way that resonates with your customer's goals and values. It incorporates three key insights:








In our work offering content and technical writing services to some of the world's most innovative brands, we have seen time and again how considering these questions throughout the innovation lifecycle drives market momentum for disruptive products and initiatives. Ultimately, achieving message-market fit ensures a better product-market fit.

A case in point: when Proctor and Gamble tasked [Eric Cohen, the award-winning inventor, entrepreneur, and CEO](#), behind the revolutionary product, Swiffer, with “reinventing the floor cleaning business,” he sought to understand the work of mopping from his customers’ point of view, including both “functional and emotional levels.” His team learned that floor cleaning needed to be quick and easy, especially for those times when you had unexpected household visits. While the initial (and seemingly unremarkable) prototype design for the Swiffer (a stick with a wipe attached) was at risk of being shelved, Cohen’s persistence that it resonated with customers’ needs brought the product to market. As we now know, the Swiffer “was the biggest consumer products launch in P&G history” and revolutionized the home cleaning product industry.

Swiffer found success because Cohen believed that innovation is about human connection: “When technologists are trying to sell their ideas, you have to remember that who you’re telling about your idea is another human being... If we didn’t [have] stories and deep understanding of what’s important to consumers, Swiffer never would have seen the light of day.”

When innovators nail message-market fit, they see:

-  Valuable insights that inform products that customers care about.
-  Strong internal buy-in for new product innovations.
-  Alignment among sales and marketing teams: everyone connects to customers with consistently impactful messaging.
-  High-performing content that inspires customers to act (i.e. higher click rates, more lead conversions).
-  Faster time from ideation through product development.

Pursue Message-Market Fit Across the Innovation Life Cycle

Message-market fit matters at every pivotal moment of the innovation life cycle.

At the **discovery** stage, innovators collaborate around message-market fit as a tool to ideate a new product or service idea. As you prepare to **launch**, message-market fit connects you to (and keeps you connected to) the people who matter most, ensuring internal buy-in and external uptake of your product or service. After launch, refining your messaging can be used to **improve** content writing and drive new product ideas.



Discovery: How Message-Market Fit Drives Product Ideation

It's common for product teams to work out messaging for new products just prior to launch, but seeking message-market fit at the outset of the innovation cycle yields a host of benefits, including stronger product ideas, a better understanding of customers' problems and experiences, awareness of competitors and market niche, and potential roadblocks to market uptake.

This is one reason why Amazon, for example, asks its teams to respond to a simple prompt at the vetting stage of new product development. “The Amazon Method ” asks innovators to begin with a story: Imagine that the product is ready to ship to customers—and that it is a success. The product team then drafts a press release to the target customer announcing the product launch.

While the purpose for writing this piece is to empower, inspire, and align internal teams around getting the initiative to market, it also helps teams identify key aspects of the innovation process in advance. To write the press release, teams must answer:

- What does success look like? What goals do we have for this product or initiative?
- What hurdles do we need to overcome to achieve our goals?
- How does what we are making improve the customer experience?

Amazon Marketplace—a business ecosystem that has transformed the consumer experience—was ideated through this story-centric approach. John Rossman, author of *Think Like Amazon: 50 and ½ Ideas to Become a Digital Leader*, envisioned the press release for Amazon Marketplace with this story: “A seller, in the middle of the night, can register, list an item, receive an order, and delight a customer as though Amazon the retailer had done it.” Marketplace found success in large part because the customer story was top of mind from the start.



Pro-tip: Empathize with your target customers

Dwelling on the needs and pain points of your target customers—that is, practicing empathy—is critical for achieving message-market fit. Most companies have multiple audiences to inform, convince, and convert as part of their business models. We tend to categorize these audiences as **users**, **buyers**, and **champions**. Users are the people who will use your product in their day-to-day work: their problems are those that cost the organization money and time. **Buyers** are the ultimate decision-makers on whether or not to purchase your solution. And champions are those advocates for your product who communicate the value of your solution to buyers, and evangelize its adoption among

users. Achieving message-market fit requires considering the values, pain points, and needs of all of these customers, and developing a cohesive content strategy that speaks meaningfully to each.

Directions:

1. Choose one persona: user, buyer, or champion. Then ask a cross-functional team to create a persona for this customer: they should imagine everything from day-to-day work, frustrations, and successes, to stage in life, hobbies, and demographics. Teammates should reflect on this persona's ways of thinking, their concerns, and their sense of value. It helps to give their persona a real name!
2. Next, teammates identify the transformation they want to take place when this customer engages with their product or service.
3. What's their current state? Why are they burdened? Frustrated? What's their urgent, expensive problem? Where are they when they feel that problem the most? What triggers the pain? Paint a picture of your customer at that moment.
4. How does this innovation transform them? What does success look like for that person? What emotional transformation occurs? What ease do they feel? What's the ah-ha moment?
5. Then, write the story of this persona's transformation. Think through the specifics: envision exactly how your product interacts with users, buyers, and champions to resolve their frustrations.

Framing your story in this way asks you to move from thinking about your product as specs and features into one that solves a customer problem. Then use this story to communicate the power of your innovation with empathy to target customers and internal stakeholders alike.



Pro-tip: No good idea should be left untold. Make space for everyone at the innovation table.

In **Silos, Politics, and Turf Wars**, author, business consultant, and innovation leader Patrick Lencioni explains that nothing devastates a company faster than working in silos. Not

asking your talent to collaborate wastes resources, squelches innovation, and puts the company's success at risk. According to Lencioni, healthy organizations are ones that are able to tap into all of their intellectual capital through effective collaboration. Working together to achieve message-market fit is one way to break down barriers between teams in a way that helps everyone—and the company—to its goals.



Marketing and R&D Can and Should Collaborate Often

Marketing and content teams should be pulled into new product development sessions—even if briefly—to bring their superpowers in communications, writing, and marketing to bear on product concepts when ideating. The added critical bonus is that because marketing teams are on the front lines listening for how best to communicate products to customers, they are constantly hearing new product ideas and enhancements. Having their voice in the room during product ideation is essential to the R&D discovery process.

At Untold, we've experienced firsthand the magic that happens when everyone's voices are at the table to ideate your message-market fit. When we facilitate content strategy sessions for innovative companies, for example, we incorporate prompts and exercises that help guide cross-functional teams on a path toward message-market fit. In these company-wide sessions, we listen to teams articulate the product vision to identify disconnects and overlaps that we can map onto the target customer personas to craft a shared innovation vision. Our MA and PhD-level content strategists and writers help to identify gaps in messaging around meeting customer needs, or in product understanding. Each of your teams brings a piece of the message-market puzzle to the table: when the story of what you are making and why becomes clearer to everyone involved, you are better equipped to explain it in a way that resonates with all stakeholders.

Take for example how this works at a company well known for leading the way in innovative customer-centric product design: The Honest Company. In our interview with **Don Frey, Chief Innovation Officer at The Honest Company**, he shared compelling insight

into the role of message-market fit in product development:

“[O]ne of the things I tell my people is that R&D needs to be the first salesperson in the process. And so as they’re developing products, you know, that’s something I keep trying to make them think about—is like, how are you going to tell this story? Because we have to sell this product to the marketing people. We have to sell to the salespeople. And the more that we can get in front of that, as we’re formulating or as we’re developing a package, then the better off you are. Start to think about that as you’re doing the technical work of putting things together.”

At Honest, Marketing sits alongside R & D as they work together at the project outset to drive product ideation. This allows R & D to gain valuable insight into what the customer needs which in turn, can shape the product design and prevent it from being shelved due to poor product-market fit.

Expert-led content strategy sessions are a way for your company to rapidly align all teams on the story of your brand to speed up innovation.



Good Ideas Can Come From Any Employee

In our interview with Kate Maxwell, former Technical Director & Innovation Leader at Raytheon Technologies, she shared that to foster an innovation culture, you have to create an environment to make innovation accessible to everyone in your organization. Maxwell noticed that while the company had thousands of employees, it was “only the same handful of folks that brought forward ideas for new R&D projects every year.” Maxwell thought: “Surely in a business of this size, with this many brilliant people — across all functions, not just engineering — there must be other ideas out there. How do we capture those and help people advance them and accelerate them inside of the corporate environment?” Instead of relying solely on R & D or technologists to come up with the next big idea, Maxwell had an idea: remove the barriers for folks from other teams to work together to contribute to innovations.

To do this, pitch challenges for innovative ideas were open to all employees. Rather than start with the technical specs of a product, employees were tasked with connecting their idea with customer pain points to address in their pitch. Product-oriented teams were also developed that were integrated across multiple functions to increase the diversity of thought and to make sure that ideas had “business value that could make a difference for our customers.”

Not only did these integrated product teams generate more ideas, they also provided a way to learn how to improve product design. According to Maxwell, breaking down organizational silos provided useful feedback to everyone involved in product development and communications. Teams were able to learn from each other, and to take that learning to refine their product, or in some cases, “take that exit ramp because something didn’t quite work out.” Maxwell made sure that marketing and communications were involved throughout the innovation lifecycle as “they really hold the keys and own all of the magic to getting things sold.”

Focusing on messaging alongside the technical specs at the start of product ideation has been essential to Raytheon becoming an innovation powerhouse. As Maxwell explained, her role in essence was to “inspire and empower people to innovate no matter where they were in the business. And I think that’s ultimately what made us successful.”



Launch: How to Use Message-Market Fit to Generate Demand

At launch, marketing and content teams inside innovative brands set to work translating the complex scientific, technical, or medical insights shared by the product, tech, and R & D teams into high-impactful content that boost customer uptake. This is a critical time for testing message-market fit: achieving it at this stage is critical to customer conversion. The content you distribute is often the first point of contact between your customer and your company—in a content preference survey, **41 % of customers report reading three to five pieces of content before connecting with a sales rep**. A robust content strategy designed for your launch activates what you have learned about message-market fit during discovery.

Content production is also an opportunity to identify any gaps that may need to be addressed in your messaging—or your product. There is a great (or maybe not so great) story about the Michelin PAX Tire System that Rita McGrath talks about in her article [**Anatomy of a Failed Launch**](#). The original run-flat was developed by Michelin and brought to market back in 2005. The technology was sound, the customer need was understood, they were the first to market, and they had a clear intellectual property moat around this development.

Their technology was so good that Honda decided to redesign the body of their 2005 Honda Odyssey to remove the spare tire and have the van come standard with the Michelin PAX Tire System. Technology ✓, Partner ✓, Customer base ✓.

But...in April of 2008, Michelin discontinued production of the PAX Tire system. What happened to the technology that seemed fail-proof?

For all of the technological advancements and first-to-market advantages that Michelin had, they didn't take into account that you couldn't change PAX system tires without specialized equipment—equipment most mechanics didn't have and weren't going to purchase. Because most shops didn't have the equipment to service the tires, the associated tire distributors wouldn't carry them for sale.

Had the company realigned around message-market fit, gaps between the technology and the customer could have been strategically addressed.



Pro-tip: Prepare for launch with data-driven insights

Message-market fit—and the content that activates it—should be high-quality, evocative, and data-driven. Launch is an ideal time to make sure that you have identified the evidence that your customer personas need in order to make a decision to buy. Does your product offer a remarkable return on investment? Increase efficiency or safety? Demonstrably support sustainability initiatives? B2B buyers in particular overwhelmingly [**prefer to read content that is trustworthy**](#) and evidence-driven.



“The overall story starts with... the data. And having done the homework to show that we believe this is something that’s going to add value. This is not a made-up problem. It’s a significant problem. **We have the data and an understanding of the problem behind it. That can be a story in itself.**”

Lou Gritzo, VP of Research at FM Global

Lou Gritzo, VP of Research at FM Global, which focuses on commercial property insurance, explains that sharing the right data helps to establish credibility with your audience and your stakeholders. “The overall story, though, really starts with, I think, having—and this is fairly dry—having the data. And having done the homework to show that we believe this is something that’s going to add value. This is not a made-up problem. It’s a significant problem. We have the data and an understanding of the problem behind it. That can be a story in itself.”

To craft the right data-driven insights to share, select 1-3 data points that crisply communicate value. Map each value proposition to the customer persona with whom it most resonates. And make sure that those claims are true.

One approach we take in delivering content writing services at Untold is to understand a story’s [impact-evidence quotient](#), which is a conceptual term we coined that describes the amount of information or data needed to create the desired impact. Too little or too much data can result in a loss of credibility or disengagement with you, your problem, and your solution.

Get back into the mind of your user, then ask yourself: Are my data stories clear? Do they contain the right data to establish credibility and impact? Do they create a clear picture of the future?

If you don’t yet have the data to validate your value claims, ask your innovation teams these

questions: What results or claims do we wish we could make? What data can we track now to get to that claim?

Keep in mind that these data points should resonate with what your target audiences' value as evidence. Depending on the target audience at the product launch, the kind of data and which content to prioritize will differ if your campaign is primarily B2C, B2B, or a combination of both. Whenever possible, we suggest collaborating across your innovation teams to identify key data points to be leveraged in your messaging across content types.

"Data is all good, but it's just numbers on a page. For anyone to buy into what your message is, you have to have a story. Really putting your stake in the ground on some of the innovative processes you're building and the results you're getting is humanized when you tell a story about it. People can relate to it. That's how teams can go from this isolated thing that they're working on, to creating more of a movement."



Pro-tip: Test your messaging legs

Not all messaging will work for every market segment. Content is king when you've figured out how to storytell your claims in multiple ways or a variety of content types. It may take some trial and error to figure out which messaging connects with your target customers, and in which formats.

Our suggestion at Untold is to build 3-4 messaging pillars that align with your market segments or audiences to test before the product launch.

- If you're doing B2B or enterprise sales, you can hold message-market feedback sessions designed as focus groups. For instance, 3-4 focus groups with 6-8 people are a great place to start so that you're gathering feedback and validation for your messaging before scaling it up.
- If you're doing product-led growth, direct-to-consumer, or generally B2C, there are great automation tools inside tools like MailChimp or Hubspot, where you can A/B test messaging and track analytics to find out what's working best.

Developing your messaging pillars, honing in on your core value props, and identifying data points can help you write better go-to-market content while also continuing to provide insights for R&D so they can make products and features that will ultimately drive demand.



Improvement: Revisit Your Message-Market Fit to Improve Traction After Launch

Your company has great products. They're thoroughly researched, designed, and tested. You've come up with a catchy pitch and your sales are good, but you are not getting the right kind of traction you need. You find yourself looking for new and innovative ways to get your message in front of your customers, boost your reach, and convert leads.

Alicia Smith, Director of Innovation Services at Centrifuse, knows that achieving message-market fit through the power of story is invaluable for connecting to the people who “don’t necessarily understand the technology or the innovation [to] help them really see how an innovation can come to life and how it can solve problems.” Smith also knows that it is just not the story itself but also how you convey the message that shapes its impact. Smith explains her a-ha moment as recognizing a “pattern that whenever I laid out my arguments in a certain way, I was more likely to get buy-in. And also noticed that if I told my colleagues or counterparts, ‘hey, lay out your story this way, to get buy-in,’ noticing the difference in their success if they did that versus if they didn’t do that, that really helped me with solidifying that, okay, there’s something about storytelling that will help me to get this influence that I need.”

If traction and conversion are slower than expected after a product launch, and you suspect it may be a problem of message-market fit, it may be time to gut-check your messaging and your story approach.



Pro-tip: Learn more about your customers and audiences

At Untold, we ardently preach the power of audience-driven stories. When content doesn't gain traction with customers, good ideas risk being shelved. For this reason, we encourage clients to reevaluate message-market fit while testing and iterating the product itself. Because customers' and audiences' values and needs often emerge more clearly through their engagement with your products and services, content strategies should evolve in response.

Tisha Livingston, CEO of Infinite Acres and president at 80 Acres Farms, explained to us how sharing messaging with your audience in a way that makes sense to them provides an opportunity for feedback on the messaging strategy to improve buy-in:

"Some of my best consumer insights are from my mom. And, you know, when I'm talking about, you know what is impactful to a consumer? So if I start talking to her about photosynthesis and how we can grow faster and, you know, cheaper, blah, blah, blah, it's not going to matter to her. But the fact that it's pesticide free and that we picked it, you know, hours, not days or weeks before she gets it. Those are things that are important to her. So being able to share your story at the right level is really important." This kind of feedback helps you to hone in on the product features that resonate the most with your audience, which can then be leveraged throughout your content.

Keep in mind too that when any of the variables change that impact message-market fit—your audience, the market, or the social context—is an opportunity to reevaluate your messaging.

Nothing in our shared history demonstrates the need to continually revisit messaging due to changes in social context even more than the COVID-19 pandemic. For many of our clients, communication channels had to be updated to reflect a lack of in-person opportunities to connect with potential buyers. Our clients in the digital health sector recognized the important gap that their innovation filled for consumers and reframed messaging in their pitches and one-pagers to speak to telehealth as an opportunity to maintain wellness at a time when consumer concerns for health and safety were at an all-time high.

Changes in the innovation lifecycle also prompt shifts in messaging and content strategy.

For example, in medical innovation, there is a time after product launch when your target audience will want to see validation for your product—consumer demand data will not be convincing enough to use in your B2B marketing. This is why (and when) many of our clients choose to bring in subject matter experts who can help craft the kind of research-driven thought leadership publications that validate your products and services for buyers.

It's worth investing in realigning your messaging with your target audience on a consistent basis to produce content that customers will want to read and convert on.



Pro-tip: Pay attention to language

Strong message-market fit requires articulating the right content in the right style. If your messaging isn't getting through to customers, you may have a case of style mismatch. Style mismatch occurs when how you talk about what you do does not fit within your audience's social context—which includes choices about language and tone. Ultimately, you have been able to explain your innovations in a way that doesn't confuse your target audiences, but instead empowers them and gives them the opportunity to really understand it and to act.

Are you articulating your value props using words that make sense to your target customers? Does your word choice, style, and syntax both reflect your brand and evoke the kind of emotions that you hope will inspire your customers to act? Do you draw on a shared vocabulary among your customers to help connect your products and ideas to the social context of customers' lives? Does your language set you apart from competitors?

There are times when intentionally changing word choices used to describe innovation can be used to help reframe an industry for your audience. For example, some of our clients in digital health prefer to use the term “wellness” or “well-being” rather than illness or disease. If you want to use language to reframe an industry, you need to make sure that the rest of the message conveys the intent to the audience so that it sticks.

We highly recommend documenting and updating a style guide that aligns with your content strategy and can be used to keep messaging consistent.

To begin a style guide, consider the following:

- What makes your company and its products stand out?
- What is the style/tone of your current content?
- What is your IDEAL style/tone?
- What terminology and naming conventions should be used to connect with my ideal customers? And what should be avoided?

Once you create your style guide, make sure it is consistently used across the organization and throughout all your content writing for external and internal audiences.

At [Untold Content](#), we support product development and marketing teams in crafting strong message-market fit through every stage of the innovation cycle. We use evidenced-based strategies to deeply understand your product and market and to craft impactful content that creates market momentum.

Join 100+ innovative organizations like NASA, Boeing, Hershey's, and Edgewell who have experienced outstanding results.

Schedule a call today.

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