The Global Content Impact Index
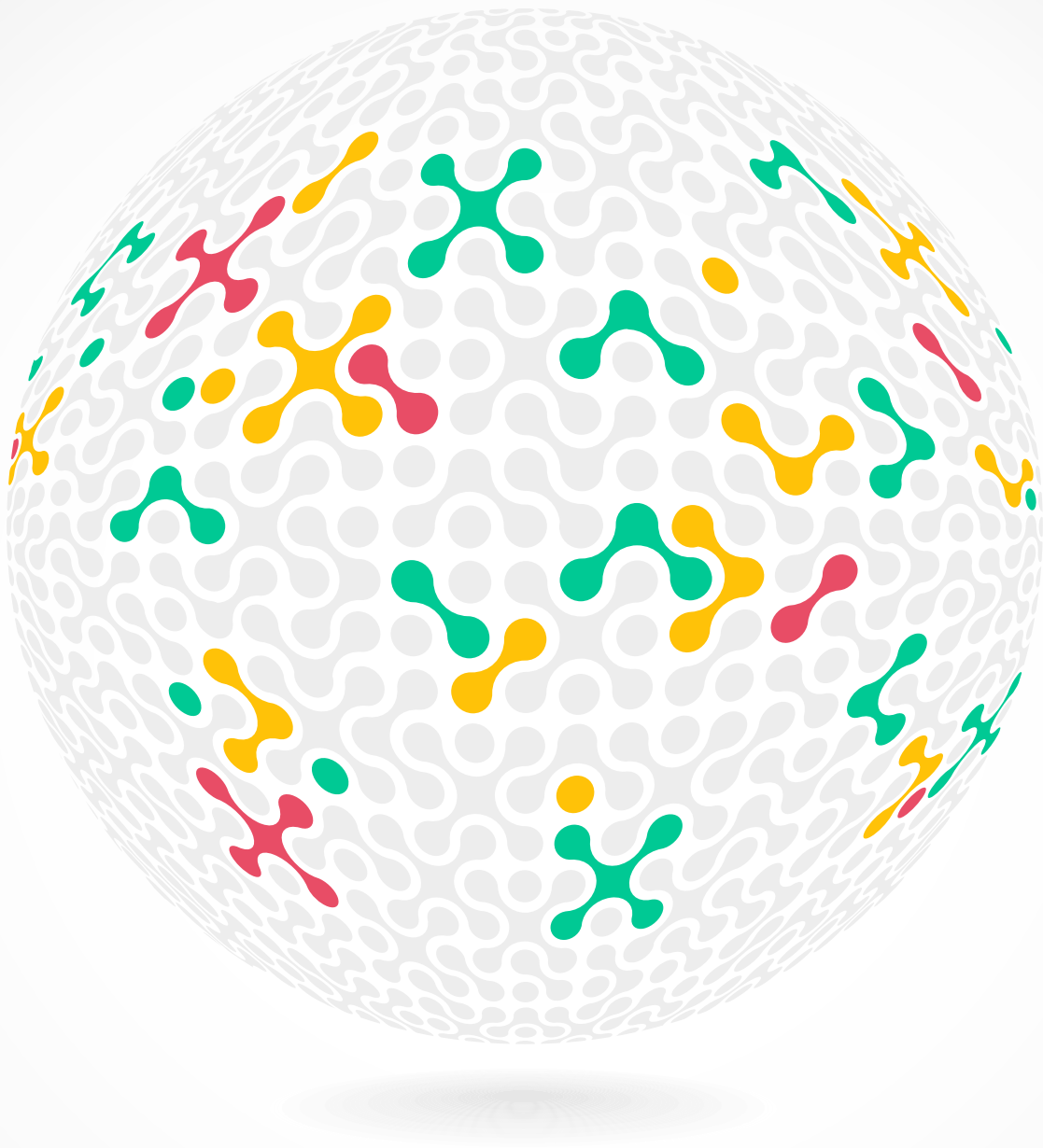
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Despite its tremendous success in recent years, the tech industry faces an array of significant challenges. For example, tech companies have to strike the right balance to be both high performing and trustworthy at a time when concerns around privacy and security are soaring.

Working in an exceptionally competitive market, they must also deal with the realities of turnover, as the global war for tech talent rages on. Further complicating things is a relentless need for speed in everything they do, and the near constant pressure to transform their business models to meet evolving customer demands.

Suffice it to say that while it's a great time to be in tech, it isn't easy. It's an industry full of uncertainties and one where for every breakout company there are many more that fail.

One way that tech marketers are trying to bolster their company's chances of success is with content. In fact, according to recent research from the Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs, 95 percent of technology marketers report using content marketing. Among other reasons, they do so to increase lead generation and sales, as well as enhance their lead nurturing efforts. Interestingly, however, only 30 percent of them think their organizations are effective at it. They note the difficulties that they have creating engaging content and measuring the effectiveness of their content among their top challenges.[1]

We found a disconnect between the pervasiveness of content marketing and the relatively low perception most marketers share of their success. Acrolinx, therefore, decided to study a fundamental component of the industry that we believe has otherwise been overlooked: the actual content it creates.

Using our content optimization platform, we evaluated and scored the quality and consistency of the online content of 22 different tech companies from around the world. We then compared the results against the benchmarks we established in our previous research reports.[2]

What all of the companies whose content we analyzed have in common is that they're large technology businesses from around the world, each generating more than $250 million in annual revenue. Many of them, like Apple and Microsoft in the United States and Siemens AG, are also household names. All told, we analyzed over 1.7 million individual words, more than 246,000 sentences, and 2,033 individual web pages from these companies as part of our research.

In the pages that follow, we'll explain how we analyzed their online content and what we learned in the process about its quality and consistency. The results might surprise you.

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1 "B2B Technology Content Marketing, 2016: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends — North America," Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs, March 2016.

2 See "The Global Content Impact Index — March 2015" and "The Global Content Impact Index — September 2015."

# Quality Matters: An Overview of the Content in the Tech Industry

If you think the key to successful content marketing is simply creating lots of content, or that your customers only care about what you say and not how you say it, think again. Arguably, well written content is one of the most important factors in determining whether it will succeed or fail. And, as we explained in our previous Global Content Impact Index reports, content quality has very real business implications. It can impact everything from brand perceptions and Alexa rankings to overall sales.

Research from Global Lingo provides a prime example. While 74 percent of respondents to a survey noted being conscious of the quality of spelling and grammar on company websites, 59 percent said that spelling and grammar mistakes would prevent them from purchasing from a particular business.[3]

For this report, we evaluated the quality of each tech company's online content by looking at two main factors: style and grammar usage on the one hand and overall clarity on the other. Next, we scored the content against those factors using a 100-point scale. We then applied the results to a proprietary algorithm, from which we derived an overall content impact score for each company. In our experience, a company's content impact score is a very accurate indication of the effectiveness of its writing. To learn more about the methodology we used to evaluate each company's content, see the Appendix of this report.

Based on our more than 10 years of experience working with hundreds of brands, we've determined that companies need an overall content impact score of 72 or higher for their content to be effective. Companies with scores below that threshold tend to publish content that contains issues, suffers stylistically, and generally isn't as appealing. Companies with scores of 72 or higher, by contrast, tend to have well-written content that's effective at engaging their audience type.

Figure 1. Content Impact Score by Company
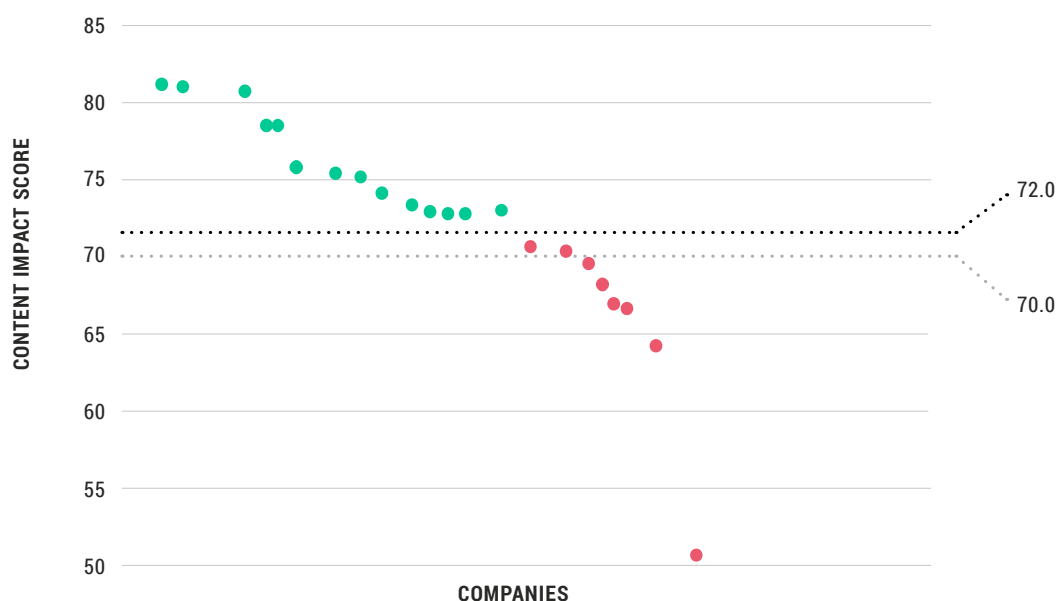
3   "Poor grammar on websites scares 59% away," Realbusiness.co.uk, 2013.
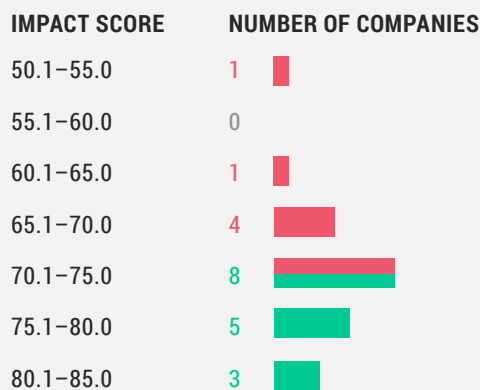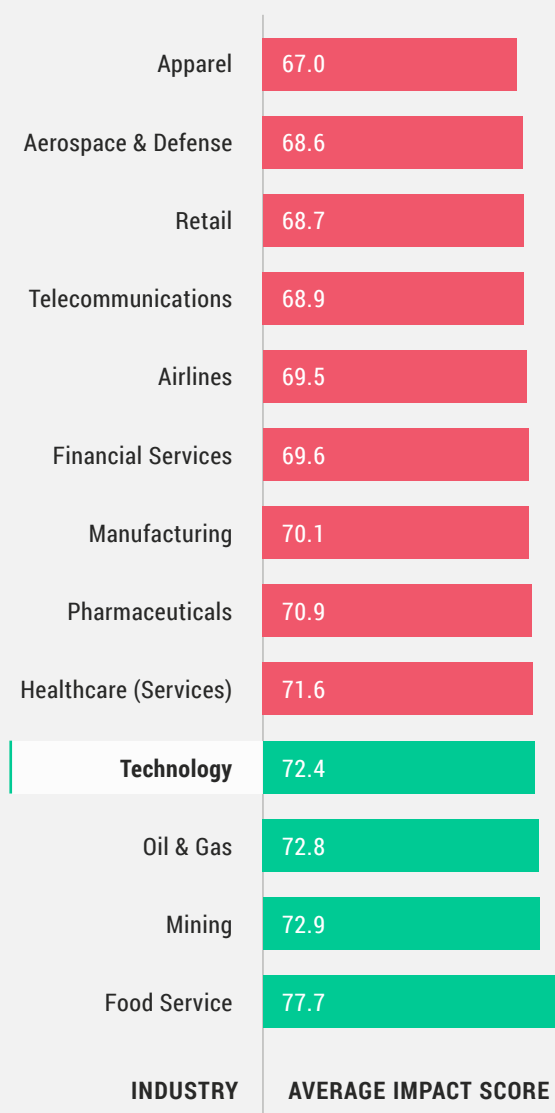
Figure 2. Content Impact Score Distribution

IMPACT SCORE	NUMBER OF COMPANIES	
50.1−55.0	1	
55.1−60.0	0	
60.1−65.0	1	
65.1−70.0	4	
70.1−75.0	8	
75.1−80.0	5	
80.1−85.0	3	

Figure 3. Impact Scores by Industry, How Tech Stacks Up

INDUSTRY	AVERAGE IMPACT SCORE
Apparel	67.0
Aerospace & Defense	68.6
Retail	68.7
Telecommunications	68.9
Airlines	69.5
Financial Services	69.6
Manufacturing	70.1
Pharmaceuticals	70.9
Healthcare (Services)	71.6
Technology	72.4
Oil & Gas	72.8
Mining	72.9
Food Service	77.7

Interestingly, the 22 tech companies whose content we analyzed earned a broad range of content impact scores. The company with the worst content earned a score of just 50.7, while the company with the best score achieved 81.9 points. Figure 1 shows the scores for all of the companies we reviewed as part of our research.

The average content impact score for tech companies whose content we analyzed was 72.4. That's great news because it's just above the 72-point minimum threshold we believe that companies need to achieve for their content to be effective. Only around one third (36 percent) of the companies we analyzed earned scores below that threshold. Figure 2 shows the distribution of scores.

Based on these scores, it appears that the majority of tech companies are creating high-quality content. But bear in mind that this is a relatively small sample size and not necessarily indicative of the broader tech industry.

Next, we wanted to see how the tech industry's average content impact score compared to other industries. This is reflected in Figure 3 and, as you can see, tech is one of the stronger performing industries among those we analyzed.

While the majority of the tech companies we looked at are creating high-quality content, their content also has to be consistent to have a real impact.

Consistency Is Key: Are Tech Companies Paying Attention to All of Their Content?

Content consistency may seem like a nice-to-have, but in reality it's critically important. Inconsistent content can make your company start to feel disjointed to customers. At times, it can also create the impression that your company has several distinct voices or personalities, with no coordination between what's happening at one customer touchpoint versus another.

Plus, as we noted in our previous Global Content Impact Index reports, according to recent McKinsey & Company research, there's a direct correlation between having a consistent customer journey and overall customer satisfaction.[4] Since content plays such an important role in shaping the customer journey, it's not a stretch to conclude that, when it's inconsistent, it can negatively affect customer experience.

With that in mind, we decided to look at the quality of the tech industry's content from a different perspective. Rather than simply compare how scores vary from company to company or industry to industry, we wanted to see how effective individual tech companies are at ensuring that the quality of their content is consistent no matter where in the organization it's coming from.

Specifically, we sought to measure the variance in content quality that can exist within each company's website. While maintaining a consistently high level of content quality (that is, grammatically accurate, unified voice, style, and tone) is difficult to achieve at scale, it's essential for brand.

To do this, we reviewed and scored the individual types of content that tech companies publish by isolating different sections of their websites, including their blog, about us, news, product, and support content. We then calculated the variance between the highest and lowest scoring sections within each company's site, which we used to benchmark their content's consistency.

Based on our research and experience, we know that companies with a variance of 7.0 points or less have content that's sufficiently consistent to help them build their brand. Companies with a variance of greater than 7.0 points start to suffer as a result of that inconsistency.

As it turns out, most technology companies' content is somewhat inconsistent. The industry's average content variance is 9.6 points. In fact, only around one in three of the companies whose content we reviewed is consistent (that is, has a variance of 7.0 points or less) as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Tech Companies With Consistent Content

36.4%
Consistent
Content Scores

63.6%
Inconsistent Content Scores
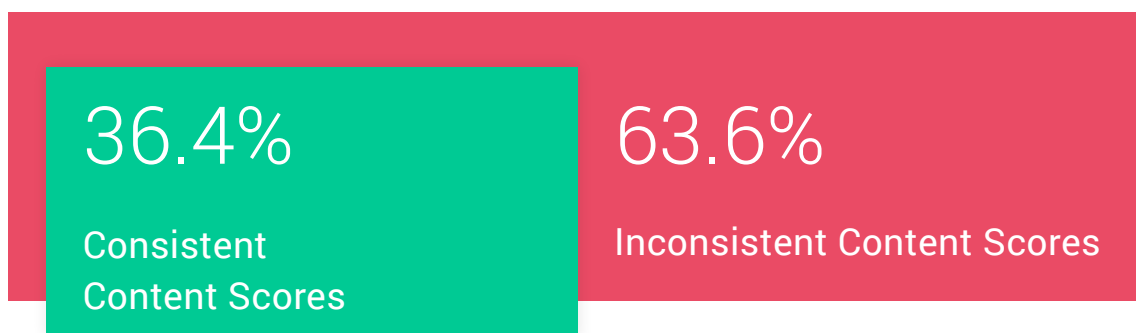
4   Alfonso Pulido, Dorian Stone, and John Strevel, "The three Cs of customer satisfaction: Consistency, consistency, consistency," McKinsey & Company, March 2014.
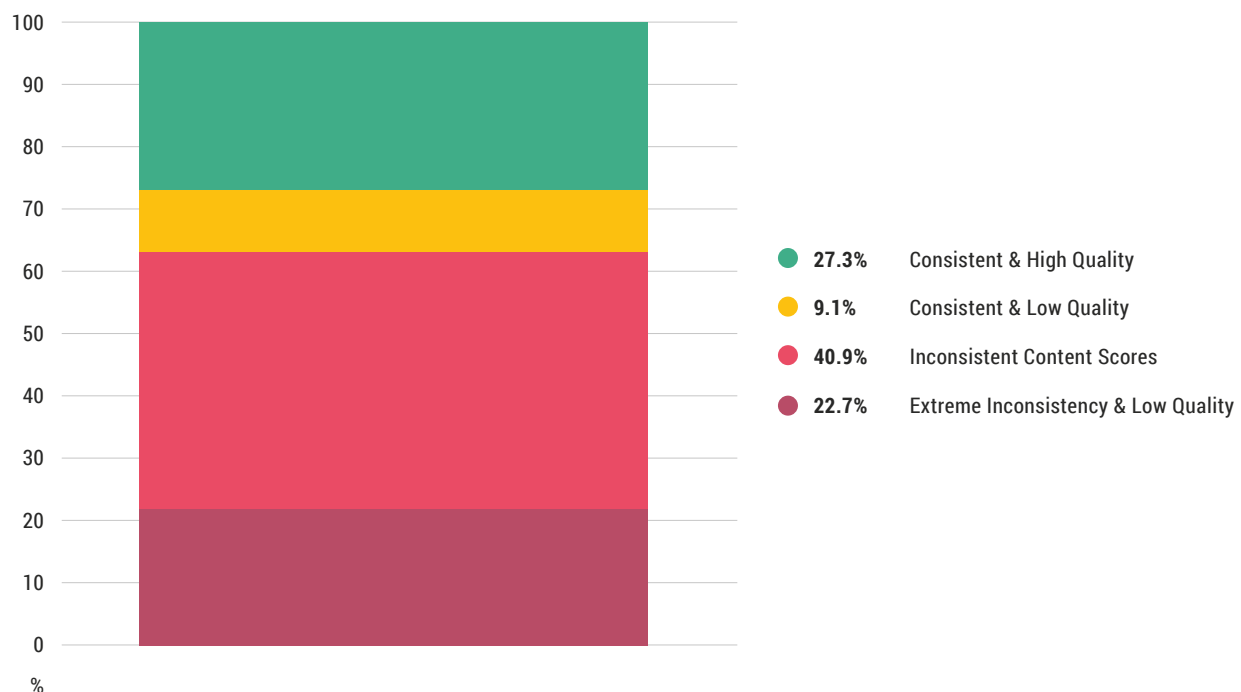
Of course, having consistent content isn't necessarily a good thing if it's all consistently bad. So we decided to isolate those companies whose content is both consistent (has a variance of 7.0 or less) and high quality (has an overall impact score of 72.0 points or more). As Figure 5 illustrates, about one quarter of the 22 companies we analyzed — the equivalent of just six brands — fell into this category.

Figure 5. Tech Companies With Consistent, High-Quality Content

27.3%
Consistent and High Quality

9.1%
Consistent and Low Quality

**63.6%**
Inconsistent Content Scores
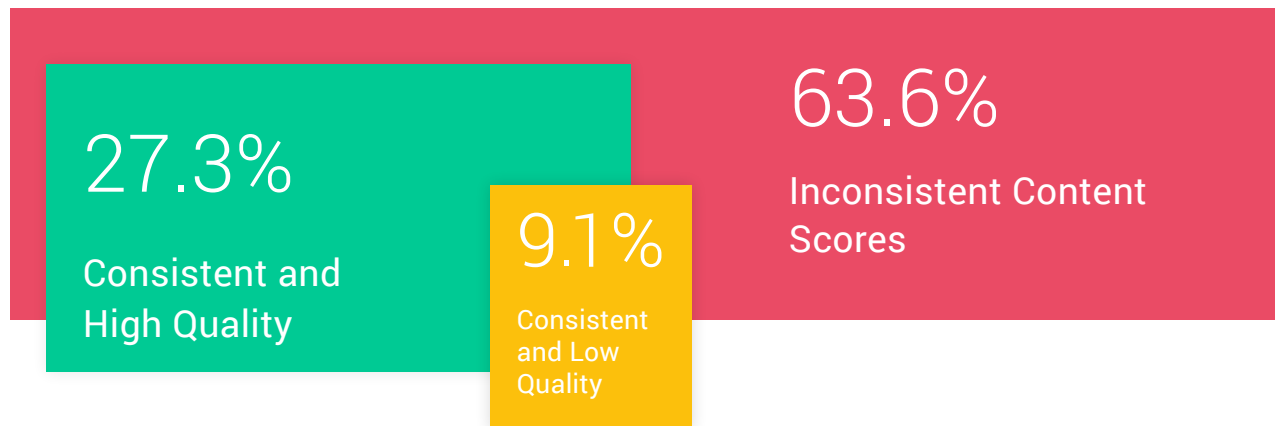
At the other end of the spectrum, 22.7 percent of the companies whose content we analyzed not only had low-quality content, but also extreme levels of inconsistency, with 15.0 point variances or more. While all of these companies had content we considered to be low quality, just how poor the quality was varied considerably from section to section of their websites. Figure 6 shows this.

Figure 6. Tech Companies With Inconsistent, Low-Quality Content

- ● **27.3%** Consistent & High Quality
- ● **9.1%** Consistent & Low Quality
- ● **40.9%** Inconsistent Content Scores
- ● **22.7%** Extreme Inconsistency & Low Quality

Lastly, we wanted to see how the tech industry's average variance compared to other industries. Figure 7 shows that it has one of the highest variances. Interestingly, only five of the industries are below the 7.0 point threshold, and none have both a low average variance and a range of content impact scores that starts above 72.0.

Figure 7. Average Content Variance by Industry
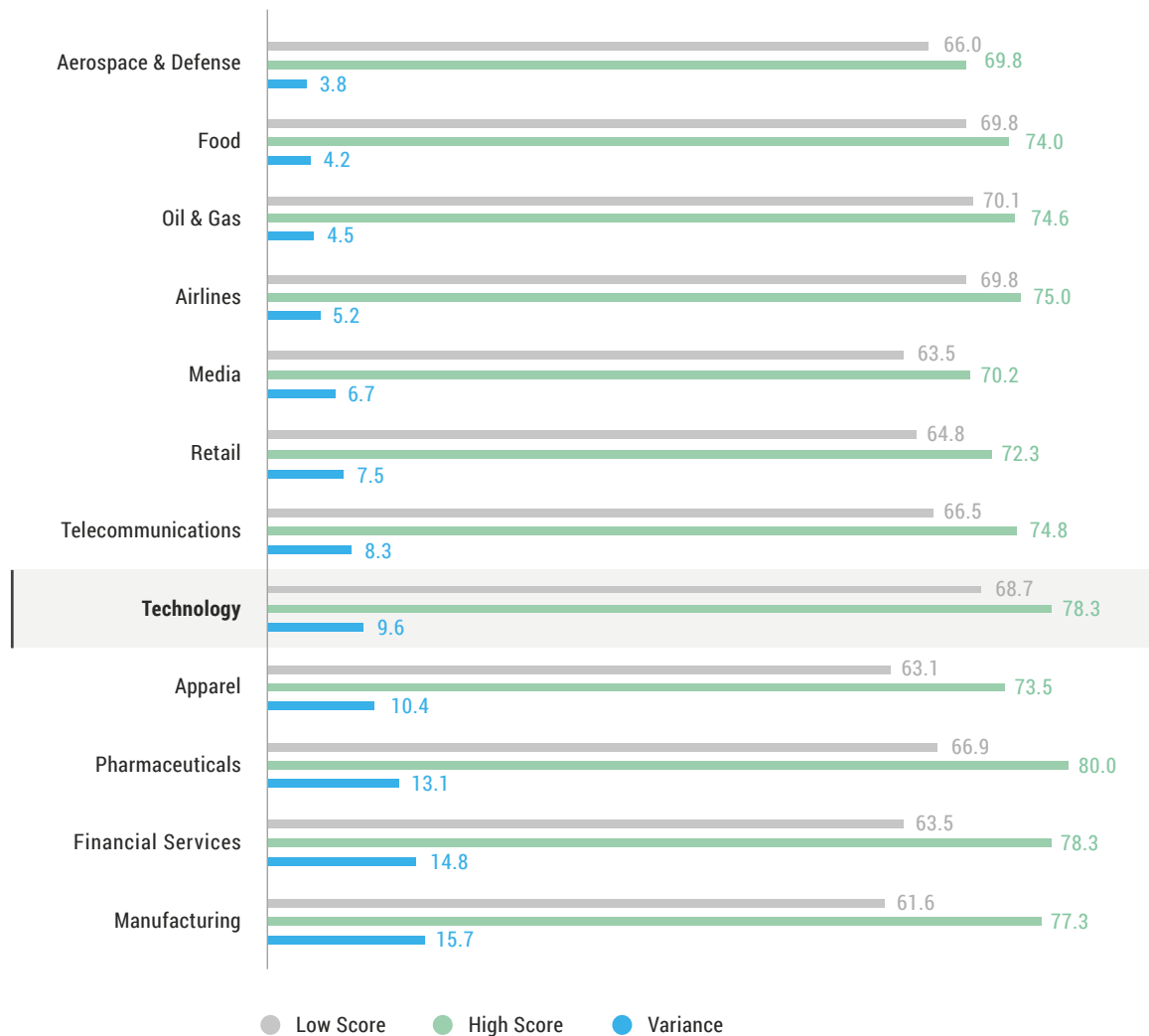
In our opinion, the key takeaway here is that although many of the tech companies we analyzed are creating high-quality content, they're not doing so consistently across the board. This is an issue they need to address or their prospects and customers will continue to have inconsistent experiences and will be less satisfied overall.

Quality and Consistency Matter!

The tech industry has embraced content marketing. Tech companies are using content to showcase their knowledge and expertise, and it has become an important tool for differentiating themselves from their competitors. The challenge the industry faces, however, is making sure that the content it's producing is at a consistently high quality across the board, regardless of who in their organization is creating it. That suggests that content optimization needs to be a priority in the future.

Although content optimization means different things to different people, for us, it's all about creating content that's clear, engaging, and easy to read. Those are pretty easy goals to hit when you're talking about one team creating a finite amount of content. For large organizations that are creating thousands of pieces of content every year, across a variety of teams, and spanning numerous offices and geographies, it's a much greater challenge.

Fortunately, content optimization platforms like Acrolinx can help. To find out how, visit www.acrolinx.com.

Appendix

We evaluated the overall quality of each company's content by analyzing it across two main dimensions: grammar and style.

To assess a company's grammar usage, we examined its content against best practices for standard grammar conventions and then calculated how many issues it contained on average per 1,000 words. Examples of the types of issues we looked for include subject/verb agreement and use of pronouns and double negatives.

Similarly, we evaluated each company's style based on 62 separate guidelines and writing practices (the kind that you find in *The Chicago Manual of Style*) and on our years of linguistic experience. Our platform looked at the various companies' use of language and structure to identify a variety of style issues.

Next, we looked at clarity, which is a measure of how easy a piece of content is to read and understand — something that's particularly important when you're trying to communicate complex ideas. We evaluated the clarity of each company's content by looking at various factors, including sentence length, structural complexity, and word choice.

As part of our analysis, we gave each company a score for quality and clarity using a 100-point scale. Then, using a proprietary algorithm, we used these results to derive an overall content impact score for each company — a measure of their writing's effectiveness. In our more than a decade of experience, we've determined that companies need to achieve an overall content impact score of 72 or higher in order for their content to be effective.

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