Special Report

The 5 Most Common Case Study Mistakes in Technical Industries — and How to Fix Them

Turn your customer success stories into persuasive, sales-ready proof that builds trust and shortens the buying cycle.

Dear Sales and Marketing Leaders,

If your company makes complex products, sells to engineers, or competes on technical merit, your content needs to do more than impress prospects with dazzling infographics and technical gobbledegook.

It needs to prove your value and gain their trust that your company can solve their problem.

That's where case studies—or *success stories*—come in.

Essentially, a case study is a detailed story about how your company solved a problem for a customer, and it's champagne content when done right.

In fact, a 2024 Demand Gen survey[1] found that

- **78%** of B2B buyers rank case studies as the **single most important type of content** in the late stage of the buying decision.

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[1] Demand Gen. "Content Preferences Benchmark Survey: Navigating the Attention Economy via Snack-able and Shareable Content," 2024. <https://53a3b3d3789413ab876e-c1e3bb10b0333d7ff7aa972d61f8c669.ssl.cf1.rackcdn.com/DGR_DG283_SURV_ContentPref_April_2024_Final.pdf >

And the Content Marketing Institute's latest B2B research[2] revealed that

- **75%** of B2B marketers used **case studies/customer stories** in the last 12 months, and

- **53%** say they're among the **top formats producing the best results** (second only to video this year at 58%).

Problem is, far too many case studies disappoint. Some are the cave diver in a pocket of bad air, gasping for key details. Others come choked with jargon so thick you need a machete to hack through it. And plenty are drier than a Saharan summer. What's more, there's no shortage of product descriptions—like the villain in a melodrama—deviously masquerading as case studies, with nary a mention of customers at all…

So in this short guide, I'll show you:

- The *5 biggest mistakes* common in industrial case studies

- Why they fail to engage buyers or support your sales team

- And how you can quickly transform them into sparkling proof of value that your sales team will be proud to show their prospects.

If your case studies aren't pulling their weight right now, scroll down to discover how easy it is to whip them into shape and earn their keep.

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[2] Content Marketing Institute. "B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends: Outlook for 2025 [Research]," October 9, 2024. <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/b2b-research/b2b-content-marketing-trends-research >

❌ Mistake #1: No Clear Problem or Stakes

Why it matters:

If your case studies fail to clearly lay out what was at risk or what challenge the customer faced, readers won't be able grasp the problem or the consequences of failing to act. They'll simply end up as forgettable project overviews with no value for your customers or sales team.

How to fix it:

AI image

- Lead with the pain point or mission-critical challenge

- Quantify the impact where possible (e.g., production delays, safety concerns, cost overruns)

- Make the stakes relatable to your buyer's role. For engineers, include relevant technical details; for accountants, emphasize the higher costs or lost revenue the problem is causing.

- Everyone loves a good story, so create a sense of tension with a conflict to resolve. The "hero's journey" literary device is a good tool for this. Deep down, who doesn't want to be a hero?

❌ Mistake #2: No Data or Specific Results

Why it matters:

Buyers want cold, hard proof. Without it, nobody will take your case study seriously. Cuddly general statements like "the project was a resounding success" don't cut it in competitive industries.

How to fix it:

- Include measurable outcomes: time saved, output improved, defect rate reduced

- Use charts, before/after numbers, or even quoted estimates if exact numbers aren't public

- When data can't be shared, use anonymized or indexed metrics. For example, "energy costs decreased 14%, downtime for maintenance fell 21%, and the production rate spiked by 10%"

❌ Mistake #3: Jargon-rich, Meaning-poor

Why it matters:

Jargon can make us sound smart and part of the in-crowd, but it rarely persuades. In fact, it can actually obscure the real value you're offering if it's targeting the wrong people.

That's not to say jargon has no place in a case study, but use it judiciously and only when key decision makers know what it means.

How to fix it:

- Explain what your product or service *means* for the buyer (e.g., faster throughput, finer finishes, easier integration)

- Use plain-language analogies or metaphors when possible for clarity and to paint a mental picture that's easy for readers to relate to. A good resource for this is a book called ***The Tall Lady With The Iceberg***, by Anne Miller.

- Ask yourself: "Would this be clear to a bright but non-technical stakeholder?"

❌ Mistake #4: No Buyer-relevant Framing

Why it matters:

All too often case studies sound like internal recaps, along the lines of "Phyllis from Sales gave a presentation to the head of procurement at Rusty's Sheet Metal on our new quick-drying spray-coater."

They fail to answer the key question of "**What's in it for me?**"

How to fix it:

- Frame your story through the reader's eyes (e.g., the plant manager, design engineer, procurement head)

- Highlight how your solution solved a problem *the readers* are likely to face

- Show strategic impact, not just tactical execution: i.e., the long-term benefits to the customer, not just how you did it

❌ Mistake #5: Weak Structure or Forgettable Flow

Why it matters:

A good case study is a mini sales story, so it needs to seize your reader's attention right from the start and be easy for them to follow to the last word. Nobody's going to trudge through the mud of a case study that's disorganized, peppered with walls of text, or hard to skim.

How to fix it:

- Use a clear structure: Problem → Solution → Outcome → Takeaway. Essentially, the hero's journey

- Add bolded callouts, pull quotes, or charts to break up the text

- Plant a short executive summary at the start for decision-makers to scan, so they can decide whether to delve into the details

Bonus: Case Study Fix Checklist

☐ **Does it lead with a clear, relatable problem?**

☐ **Is there measurable or specific proof of success?**

☐ **Is the language plain, persuasive, and clear?**

☐ **Is it framed for the target buyer's needs?**

☐ **Is the structure easy to follow and skim?**

If you've ticked all five boxes, terrific – you're well on the way to way to producing a magnetic success story that'll measurably help to generate new business.

But if you're stuck like spinach on teeth, reach out for a toothpick.

Need help turning your next case studies into asset your sales team would trade their own mothers to get their hands on?

Simply book a free 15-minute Case Study Consultation today. I'll review one of your case studies and suggest two or three immediate fixes.

Schedule your consultation or visit yeswords.com