HOW **QRA CORP** GAINED MORE THAN
3,000 Subscribers in One Year
FROM A SINGLE CONTENT PROJECT

Customer

› **QRA Corp**
› Headquartered in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
› Developers of sophisticated software for engineering development
› Customers primarily in high-tech sectors

Challenges

› Marketing niche-market products to a technical audience
› Needed a copywriter who…
  › Could understand their products
  › Could communicate convincingly with their target audience
  › Would be willing to tackle unusual content projects

Solution

› **Copy**Engineer
› Freelance B2B copywriter
› Former systems engineer with 20 years' industry experience
› Specializes in helping tech companies reach technical audiences

Results and Benefits

› Guide for writing better requirements documents
› In one year, with no paid promotion
 › Garnered over 54,000 pageviews
  › Generated over 3,000 leads

When you're selling highly technical products to engineers, you're facing a tough, skeptical audience.

They demand communications that are honest, intelligent and valuable. They want to be spoken to in a peer-to-peer, engineer-to-engineer manner.

So, where do you turn for copywriting help?

That's the question QRA Corp needed to answer. They needed a writer who could understand their technologies, who could speak their customers' language convincingly, and who'd be willing to tackle some unusual projects.

As it turned out, finding the writer who was right for them helped QRA make a huge splash in their target market.
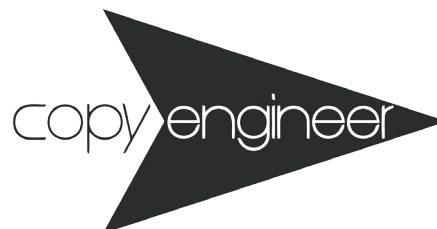
copy>engineer

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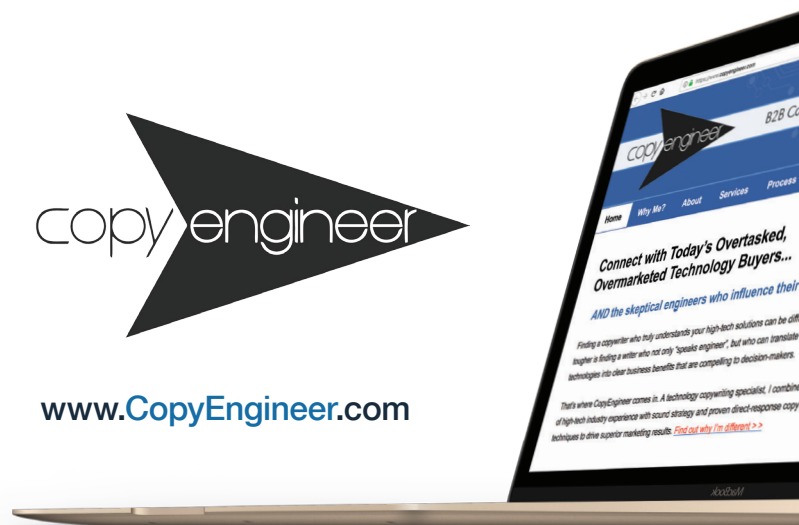
Creators of cutting-edge engineering software

QRA Corp, headquartered in Halifax, Nova Scotia, provides innovative software products that help customers develop better cyber-physical systems and improve their asset procurement processes. QRA's clients include leaders in the aerospace, defense and automotive industries, and government defense departments as well.

QRA currently offers two highly sophisticated tools for engineering development.

Their flagship product, QVtrace, is a tool for verification of model-based system design (MBSE). The result of a collaboration with Lockheed Martin Skunkworks, QVtrace imports the user's design model – typically a Simulink model – and constrains it to its functional requirements using mathematical formal methods. QVtrace then tells the user whether the model satisfies its requirements and where any violations of those requirements can be found.

For QVtrace to tell if a model satisfies its requirements, however, it needs those requirements to be clear and unequivocal. In developing QVtrace, **QRA** quickly learned that good requirements are much rarer than they should be, and that ill-defined requirements are a huge problem for industry. They also found a scarcity of tools addressing the problem. **QRA** decided to help fill this gap with QVscribe, a tool for analyzing requirements written in natural (spoken) language.

Niche-market products, skeptical audience, hectic environment

The nature of QRA's business and offerings presents some formidable marketing challenges.

First, QRA's products appeal to a highly specialized niche market. "It's tough for most writers to get their heads around our tools," says Trevor Bradley, Director of Marketing at QRA. "They're not easy to talk about without a good technical background and a firm understanding of the problems they solve."

Second, **QRA**'s target prospects – mostly engineers – tend to be very skeptical of marketing claims. "To convince them, you need to be familiar with their world, speak their language, and show you understand their problems," says Bradley. Because of this, **QRA** has adopted a marketing strategy of creating resources that are truly useful to their audience. As a result, many of **QRA**'s content projects don't fit conventional molds; they don't conform to the traditional formats typically found on corporate resource pages or in most copywriters' portfolios.

Finally, **QRA** is still a rapidly-growing company. Its hectic work environment is typical of high-tech startups. "Our internal team is crazy busy," says Bradley. "There are frequent last-minute changes, sudden shifts of priority… It's hard for our SMEs [subject matter experts] to find time to contribute to resource-building projects."

> It's rare that an outside writer can also help with subject matter expertise. John contributed not just great writing but valuable insight, as well."

Trevor Bradley, Marketing Director, QRA Corp

Finding a writer who speaks engineer

Applying their strategy of creating genuinely helpful resources, **QRA** had begun putting together a guide to writing better requirements, drawing on a variety of sources. Progress on the project had slowed, however. **QRA** needed someone who could understand the material, expand it, and edit it into a more cohesive, readable format. Trevor Bradley went looking for that someone.

"Working with highly technical customers, and with our company leadership coming from technical backgrounds themselves, we wanted someone who could speak the lingo," said Bradley. "We were working with large defense contractors, like Lockheed Martin. So, we wanted someone who really understood the pains of that audience – someone who could understand the benefits of **QRA**'s offerings and present them in a convincing, peer-to-peer manner. It's a niche area that's hard to understand and write about if you haven't been a part of it. So, we wanted a writer who'd actually lived in that world."

Bradley searched the internet for marketing writers with engineering backgrounds. That search turned up John Cole, a freelance B2B copywriter who trades under the name CopyEngineer.

Not only did Cole have over 10 years of experience producing a full range of B2B content projects for tech companies and technical audiences. He's also a former avionic systems engineer with 20 years' prior experience in system design, system test and qualification, and – most importantly for QRA – requirements engineering.

Bradley and Cole quickly agreed to terms on the project, and CopyEngineer got started.

Not your everyday content project

Cole evaluated **QRA**'s preliminary draft – a solid start overall. Nonetheless, there was a lot of work still to be done. Many of the outlined tips needed further explanation and clear examples.

There was some redundancy among similar tips from different sources. Drawing on his RE experience, Cole made appropriate expansions and changes. He even added a few tips of his own. He then put the tips in a logical order and polished the wording for readability, comprehension and appeal to the target audience.

The result was 21 Top Engineering Tips for Writing an Exceptionally Clear Requirements Document.

Finally, Cole proposed a bit of added value for prospects who download the guide. He created a checklist for real-time authoring and review of requirements – a one-page summary of the twenty-one tips in the same order as they appear in the guide.

QRA was very pleased with the final product. "It's rare that an outside writer can also help with subject matter expertise," said Trevor Bradley. "John contributed not just great writing but valuable insight, as well. Plus, this was not the type of project most copywriters normally handle or would even want to take on. I know a few who would just say, 'Oh, I don't do that.' It doesn't fit in their box. But John was happy to tackle it. Both **Copy**Engineer and the guide exceeded our expectations."
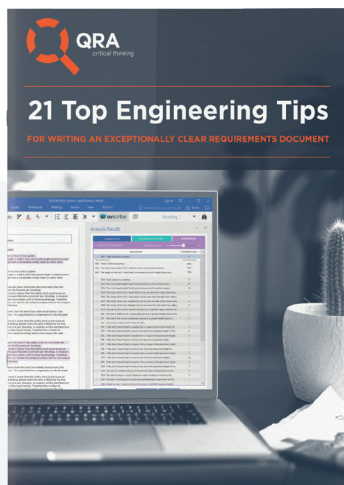
A promotion that needed no promotion

Format was not the only unusual aspect of the project.

QRA used no paid campaigns to publicize the guide. They simply talked to people – natural contacts in a few key channels, like the Project Management Institute (PMI), the International Institute of Business Analysts (IIBA) and IEEE. And when they talked, they didn't ask for distribution. They merely mentioned what the guide was about and how others were finding it useful.

"Because of that, word of mouth just started spreading," said Bradley. "Soon, people were linking to it, and now it does very well in Google searches."

Three thousand leads in one year

In just one year, QRA's 21 Top Engineering Tips for Writing an Exceptionally Clear Requirements Document has garnered some 54,779 unique page views. Of these, 49,678 came through organic search.

"21 Top Engineering Tips has made a massive impact in the RE space," says Bradley. "In most countries of the world, if you type into Google 'how to write a good requirements document', it comes up at the top of the results list. Google has declared it the best source on that topic, which is ideal for us."

Bradley says he usually gets at least one email every week from people telling him how much the guide has helped them or their organization. Most are from folks who are new to requirements writing. This was just what QRA wanted. "The real objective of the piece was to provide something really useful, because we feel writing clear requirements is a critical and highly underrated issue in engineering," Bradley says. "In meeting this objective, the guide has truly exceeded expectations."

"Most who download it are actively trying to improve either their own requirements writing or the RE practices within their organization," says Bradley. "These folks are natural prospects for us, since QVscribe automates so many of the requirements authoring and review tasks that are presented in the guide and checklist."
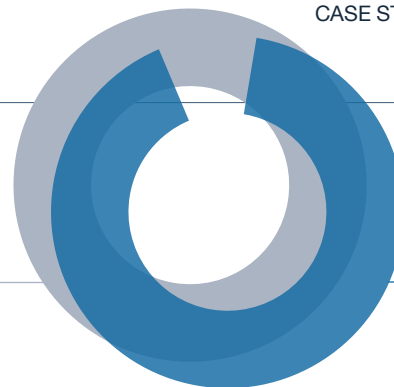
54,779
Unique page views

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Through **organic** search

It has also been extremely effective in generating leads. In just the past year, over 3,000 people have downloaded the guide.

QRA doesn't take the success of their 21 Tips project lightly. "The success of the guide validated our hypothesis that there is an epidemic of poor requirements writing in the engineering world. It's a big problem for many companies," Bradley says. "It has pushed us to create even more resources and tooling solutions for people looking for help in writing good requirements. We want our prospects to know they can find plenty of helpful resources on our website."

QRA also doesn't take its relationship with **CopyEngineer** for granted. "We've worked with other writers, many of them very good, but it's always a tricky proposition," says Bradley. "If you've never been in the [engineering] space, it's almost impossible to write convincingly about the problems and pains in that sector. It's really refreshing to work with a writer who has first-hand experience in the engineering field."

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Trevor Bradley, Marketing Director, QRA Corp

A continuing partnership

Since rolling out 21 Top Engineering Tips for Writing an Exceptionally Clear Requirements Document, **QRA** has commissioned Cole to create several white papers, case studies and technical articles. They've also collaborated on another "outside the box" project: a requirements document template based on MIL-STD-961E.

That specification template has already generated more than one hundred leads for QRA.

"One of the great things about working with John is how he handles all the curveballs we throw at him," Bradley says. "We're constantly upgrading our products. We do a lot of customization for clients and integration of third-party tools. There are always changes, delays and sudden additional needs. We really appreciate **CopyEngineer**'s hardiness, nimbleness and patience in handling those curveballs, as well as his willingness to tackle unusual projects."

About CopyEngineer

John Cole is a freelance B2B copywriter who crafts lead-generation and demand-generation content for the technology, software and aerospace industries. His specialties include case studies, white papers and trade journal articles.

Before shifting his career focus to marketing, John worked for 20 years in the aerospace industry as an avionic systems engineer and project manager. He now combines his extensive hands-on technical experience with skills in direct response and B2B copywriting to help high-tech companies generate more quality leads, and move those leads down the sales funnel.

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B2B copywriter specializing in technology and software

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