



2015

Driving Content Marketing Success

IN EUROPE



HubSpot





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Executive Summary

Are you competing with content marketing?

To succeed in inbound marketing today, Content marketing should be at the heart of your communications strategy. Content marketing should be the fuel that drives all the key inbound marketing techniques across web, search, social and email marketing. But this isn't a secret, content marketing is now a well-established technique and has become hyper-competitive. So, the question is, how do you invest wisely in content marketing to improve your capabilities so that you can compete and stand out from the noise?

In this new research from [HubSpot](#) and [Smart Insights](#), we summarise the experiences of over 700 marketers across Europe to set a benchmark for how competitive content marketing has become. We suggest where you need to focus your activities if you are to compete, and include key insights from the leading industry experts. The main findings and recommendations are:

1. Content marketing is hyper-competitive.

Businesses are increasing investment in content marketing.

- Nearly three quarters (71%) of businesses are creating more content in 2015 compared to 2014
- Marketers believe in the power of Content Marketing – just 3% of survey respondents don't see the opportunity from content marketing
- Over a quarter of companies are increasing internal headcount for content marketing and 28% are increasing investment in agency resources this year

2. Managing content marketing remains challenging

The key issues in managing content marketing are the creation of quality content and measuring ROI:

- When rating their content marketing capabilities, the majority of businesses see significant room for improvement with over two-thirds (68%) rating their content marketing as basic or inconsistent
- Managing content creation is a headache for many, with 55% citing content quality and 58% citing content frequency as specific concerns
- Measurement of ROI and content effectiveness is a challenge for over half (51%) of businesses

3. Strategy and Planning are most effective for content marketing success

The following content marketing tactics were the highest rated by marketers for effectiveness:

- Creating a content marketing strategy or plan (79%)
- Customer content / content maps (63%)
- Creating content calendars (62%)
- Customer persona creation (57%)

4. SEO is the most popular technique for organic content distribution

Marketers rate SEO tactics more highly than social media for organic content distribution.

- Google organic traffic (62%)
- Facebook (46%)
- LinkedIn (43%)
- Twitter (47%)
- Google+ (15%)

5. Paid distribution on social is being grossly underutilised

Despite the competition within organic content distribution, many marketers are not taking advantage of the targeting techniques of paid media ads.

- 50% are not using using Twitter ads
- 48% are not using LinkedIn ads
- 38% are not using Facebook
- 49% are not using Google Remarketing

Out of the people who are using paid content distribution, Google AdWords is used the most, with 53% having paid for their ads to show up in search results.

6. ROI remains difficult to prove

Marketers are still struggling to measure ROI from content marketing

Only 39% claimed they were able to measure return on investment from their content marketing.

About HubSpot

HubSpot is the world's leading inbound marketing and sales platform. Since 2006, HubSpot has been on a mission to make the world more inbound. Today, over 15,000 customers in more than 90 countries use HubSpot's software, services, and support to transform the way they attract, engage, and delight customers.

HubSpot's inbound marketing software, ranked #1 in customer satisfaction by VentureBeat and G2Crowd, includes social media publishing and monitoring, blogging, SEO, website content management, email marketing, marketing automation, and reporting and analytics, all in one integrated platform.

Learn more at www.hubspot.com

About Smart Insights

Smart Insights provides actionable marketing learning resources to help businesses succeed online. More than 100,000 Basic members use our blog, sample marketing templates and weekly Digital Marketing Essentials newsletter to follow best practices and keep up-to-date with the developments that matter in digital marketing.

Expert members in 80 countries use our planning and management templates, guides and video courses to map, plan and manage their marketing using the Smart Insights RACE Planning framework.

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- RACE Digital marketing plan template
- Online Marketing Budget spreadsheet

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CHAPTER ONE

Content Marketing in 2015

Content Marketing Buy-in and Adoption

Content marketing is now well established as a core marketing technique. Seth Godin, stated back in 2008 that ‘Content marketing was the only marketing left’ and in 2009, Joe Pulizzi of the Content Marketing Institute published his ‘call-to-arms’ **Get Content Get Customers: Turn Prospects into Buyers with Content Marketing**. Most B2B marketers will tell you that they have always practiced content marketing, and rightly so.

But how has content marketing evolved since then? With the evolution of digital, it’s now easier for marketers to create more content, faster; and with that came its own issues.



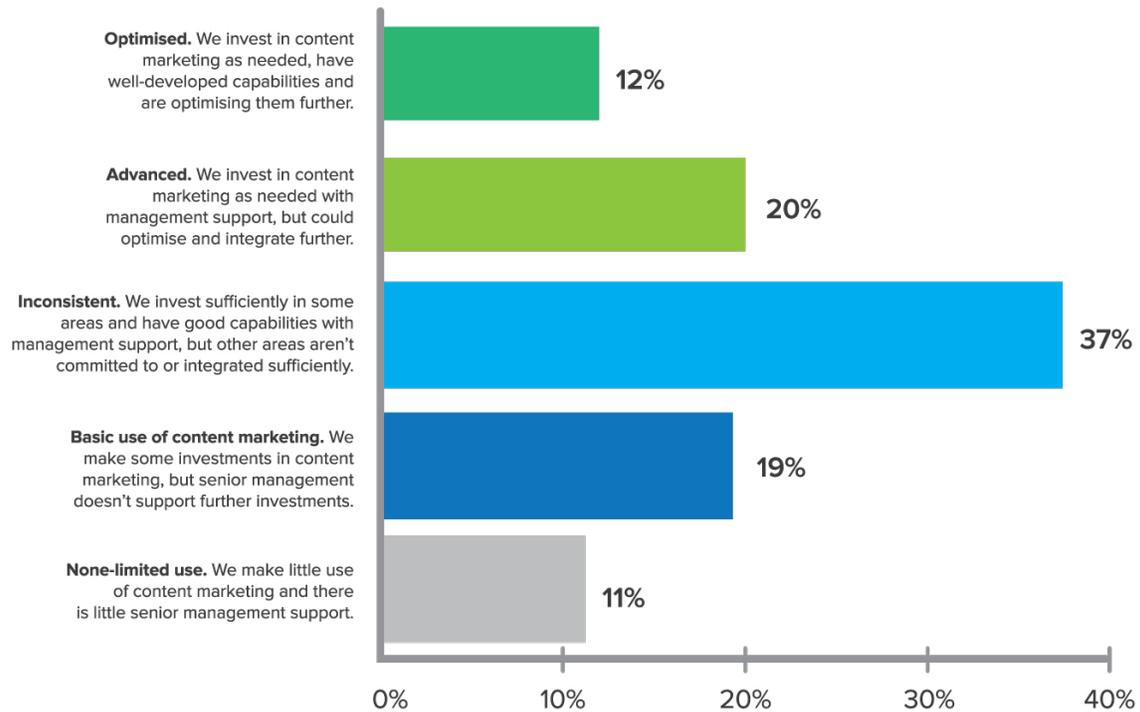
Dan Sharp, [Screaming Frog](#), [@ScreamingFrog](#)

“We have seen continued growth in the adoption of content marketing, not just from larger brands, but also small and medium-sized businesses who are understanding the importance of content. This has been influenced by Google and their various algorithms; Penguin, Panda and Hummingbird to an extent, as well as SEO agencies themselves adapting. As content marketing has matured, it has become easier to get buy-in and budgets have grown, too.

The hype and success stories have caused more organisations to buy into content marketing, so it’s no surprise that it’s becoming more competitive. When asked to what extent content marketing had been embraced in their organisation, **only 11% of our survey respondents said they make little use of content marketing** and didn’t have buy-in from senior management.

Over one third (37%) of respondents felt that they had good capabilities with support from management, 20% said they have advanced content marketing adoption, and 12% said they had an optimised content strategy.

TO WHAT EXTENT HAS YOUR ORGANISATION EMBRACED CONTENT MARKETING?



What is the Perceived Value of Content Marketing?

Companies are not just adopting content marketing into their strategy for the sake of it, either; the majority of marketers can see the huge opportunity it presents.

In the next chart, we can see that just 3% are sceptics, and not convinced of the value of content marketing. 55% are convinced of its value and are happy with their ability to measure ROI, but a large proportion (42%) of 'believers' see opportunities, but are still not able to adequately measure ROI.



Amy Nicholson, [Sticky Content](#), [@StickyAmy](#)

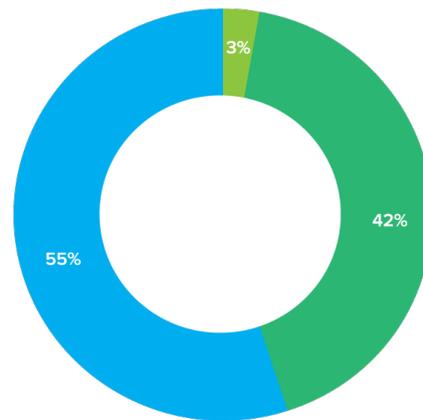
We're now in a position where pretty much everyone – not just big brands, but tiny charities and academic publishers, too – have cottoned on to the value content could be playing, but we've still got a way to go until the strategy side of things straightens out. I really believe that careful and clever use of content can give a better experience for customers as well as spectacular ROI for brands, so it really is a win-win... if you get the strategy right.

I'm hoping that we'll stop hearing about content marketing channels in isolation, or 'content' as a term that applies to just blog posts, emails or video. If you really want to take content seriously, you can't pick favourites – your content is everything from your 404 messages and subject lines to your product pages, ebooks and white papers.

The brands that do well are the ones that have a consistent, joined up approach – even when that means working across teams in different offices or time zones. **Because your customer doesn't care about internal politics – they just need a smooth, consistent journey from content to conversion.**

Don't underestimate the time and energy involved (tip: the actual creation of the content is only a fraction of the job if you're doing it right). Equally, I'd advise against any non-strategic channel, subject or format choices – don't feel you have to publish just because everyone else is. Never be afraid to ask the question: 'What are we actually doing this for?'

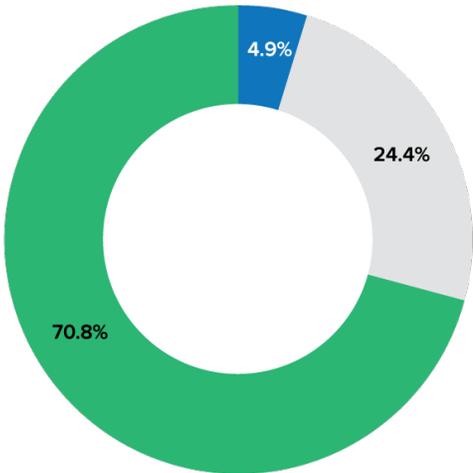
RATINGS OF THE VALUE OF CONTENT MARKETING



- I'm not convinced of the potential of content marketing to deliver value and see it as difficult to measure ROI
- I see opportunities from some content marketing channels but measurement of ROI is limited
- I'm convinced of the value that investment in content marketing can deliver and can measure ROI

As you would expect, with the higher rate of content marketing adoption across Europe, content production has also increased. In the chart below, we can see that nearly three quarters (70.8%) of businesses are creating more content in 2015 than they did last year.

HOW MUCH CONTENT IS YOUR COMPANY PRODUCING IN 2014 IN COMPARISON TO 2015?



● Less ● The Same ● More



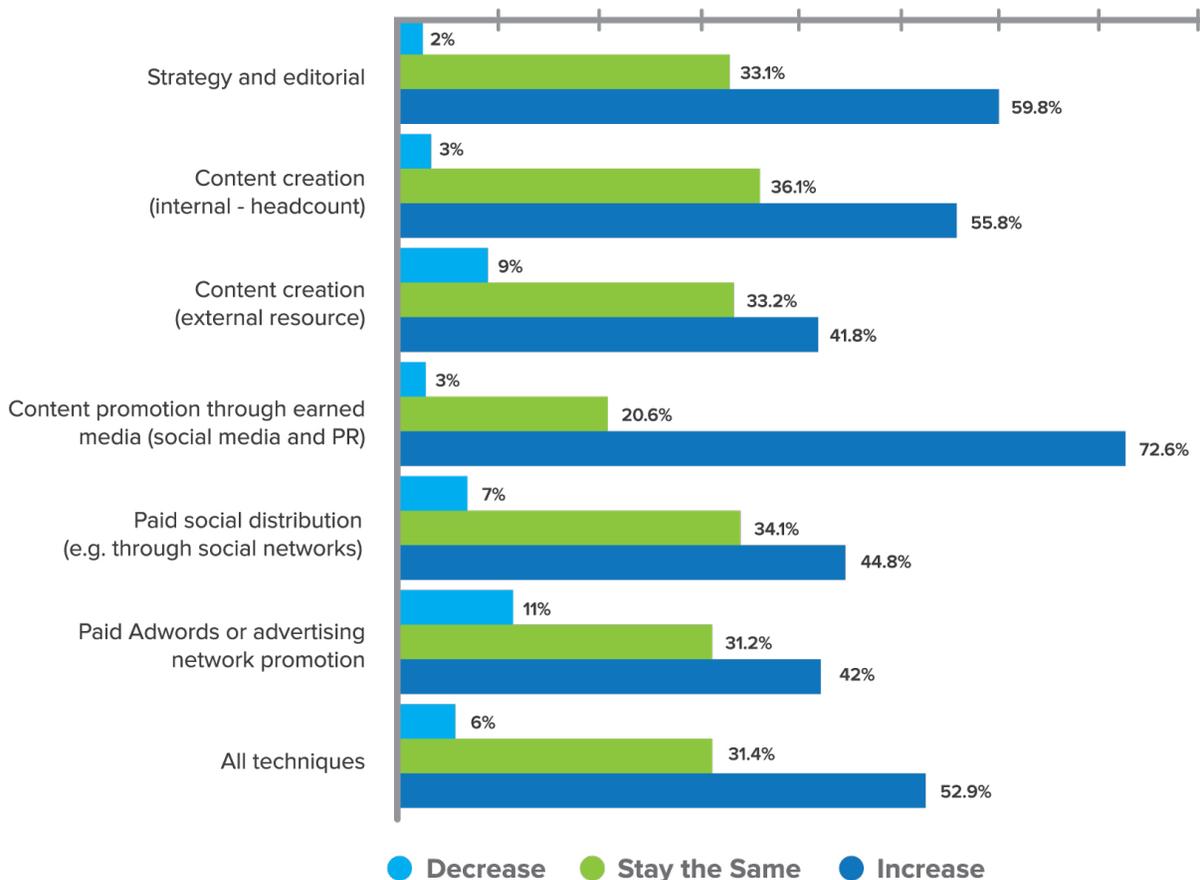
Dan Sharp, [Screaming Frog](#), [@ScreamingFrog](#)

The evolution of content marketing has led to a huge increase in marketers and brands trying to scale content over the last year, which was inevitable. This has led to a lot more noise and content being created for the sake of it. Content quality shouldn't reduce when you scale with the right resources and quality standards, but in reality it often does as businesses push their boundaries.

How are businesses resourcing content marketing?

Looking at where businesses are investing in content marketing this year compared to 2014, we can see an increase in spend for every category of content marketing activity. That said, around one third are maintaining their current budget for content marketing, and a small proportion are decreasing spend, particularly on paid social distribution.

IN COMPARISON TO 2014, HOW HAS/HOW WILL YOUR INVESTMENT IN THESE CONTENT MARKETING ACTIVITIES CHANGE IN 2015?



Stephen Walsh, [Anders Pink](#), [@StephentWalsh](#)

The best resources for content marketing are right in front of your nose. Your own team. They have the intimate knowledge of your customers, products and services. And of course, they're authentic, expert and

passionate.

Tools and templates: In-house resources are more likely to help if marketers make it easy for them. Expect to see more toolkits and templates for content creation. There's a gap in the market for these to help gather and format content.

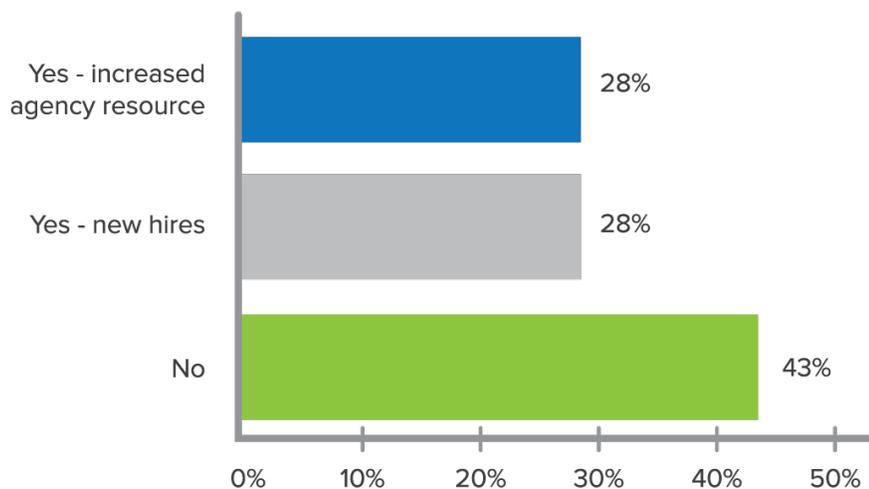
Podcasts aplenty: one form that's clearly on the rise again is podcasts. These are a great way of 'buying' 15 minutes of time from experts who'd rather not write a blog post, but have plenty to say. Expect to see a lot more company podcasts in the next 12 months.

HubSpot recently started a podcast called The Growth Show which surpassed 100,000 downloads in its first few months. [Have a listen here](#)

Where is Content Being Sourced?

The majority of companies we surveyed (56%) indicated that they are increasing their resources to assist with content marketing this year. There was an equal split between companies who are outsourcing those resources to agencies and those who are hiring internally.

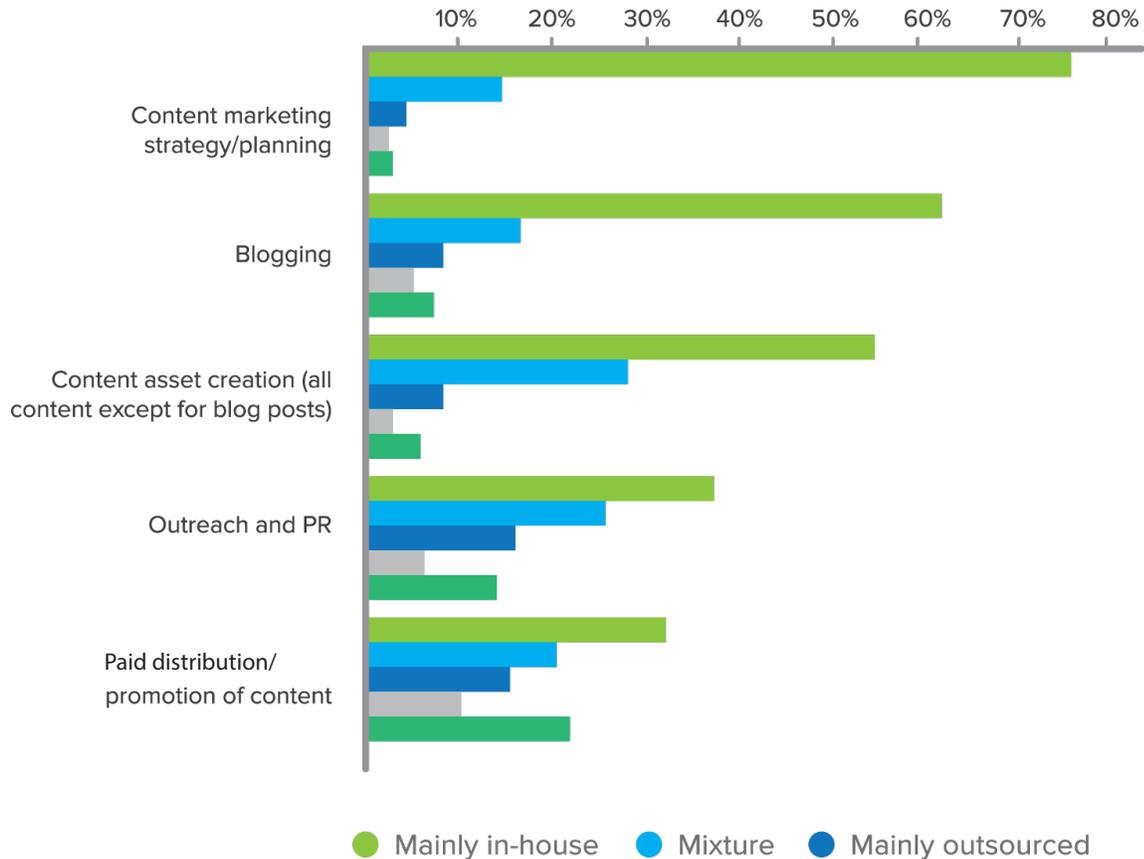
ARE YOU PLANNING TO INCREASE RESOURCES TO ASSIST WITH CONTENT MARKETING IN 2015?



We dug into this further to find out which activities are being outsourced and which remain in-house. From the chart below we can see that content strategy/ planning (75.5%), blogging (61.7%) and other content creation (54.6%), for the most part, remain in-house activities.

There is a good proportion of companies blending a mixture of in-house and outsourced activities, particularly for creating content assets outside of blog posts, for outreach and PR as well as paid content distribution.

HOW DO YOU RESOURCE THESE CONTENT MARKETING ACTIVITIES?



Simon Penson, [Zazzle Media](#), [@SimonPenson](#)

The ability to get to the bottom of a story, present it in an engaging way and also come up, consistently, with brilliant and audience-focused ideas have always been the number one requirement for great content. The difference now is that the ‘idea’ can manifest itself as anything from a simple article to a short form video, podcast, Instagram image or interactive piece and beyond.

That diversity requires greater resource, a wider range of skills and, critically, a better understanding of how to piece it together. This would explain the need for many organisations to outsource some of their content creation activities to agencies that have dedicated staff with the necessary skillsets.



CHAPTER TWO

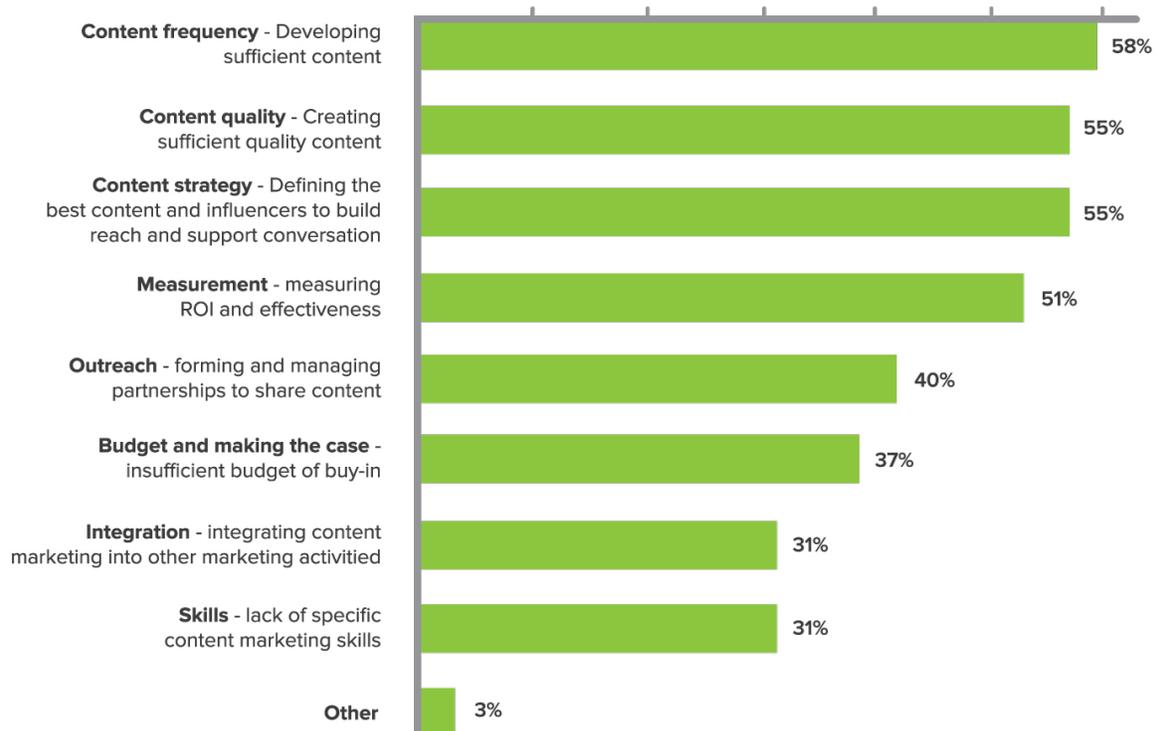
Managing Content Marketing

The Challenges of Content Marketing

The top challenges that marketers face include:

1. Producing enough content (58%)
2. Producing great content (55%)
3. Developing an integrated content strategy (55%)

WHICH CHALLENGES OF MANAGING CONTENT MARKETING DO YOU FACE?



Jorgen Sundberg, [Link Humans](#), [@JorgenSundberg](#)

In order to get more quality content out faster you should re-cycle, or even up-cycle, written content into infographics, slide decks, podcasts, short videos, etc. Create one big piece of content which you can then trim down into bite-sized pieces suitable for different channels online.

Marketers need to be more creative to cut through the noise. They need to ask themselves “why would anyone want to read/watch/listen to my piece of content” - if you don’t have the answer to that, bin it and start again.

Budget and resourcing is less of a challenge than the creation of the content, according to 37% of the marketers we surveyed, which correlates to our earlier data suggesting that many senior managers have now bought into content marketing.



Danny Lynch, [Builtvisible](#), [@DannyLynch747](#)

In many respects, the bar has been raised. What we might have determined 'great content' a year ago, may now be relegated to simply 'good' today.

Creating genuinely thought provoking content is not easy. It's difficult to make and takes more time from concept to completion than many can permit - reducing the competition. Those that put in the extra time and resources will reap the rewards, e.g. coverage on the biggest sites of the highest authority.

In 2015, we expect to see more companies invest in creating content that's beautifully designed, targeted to the user, and stands the test of time.

Which techniques for managing content marketing work best?

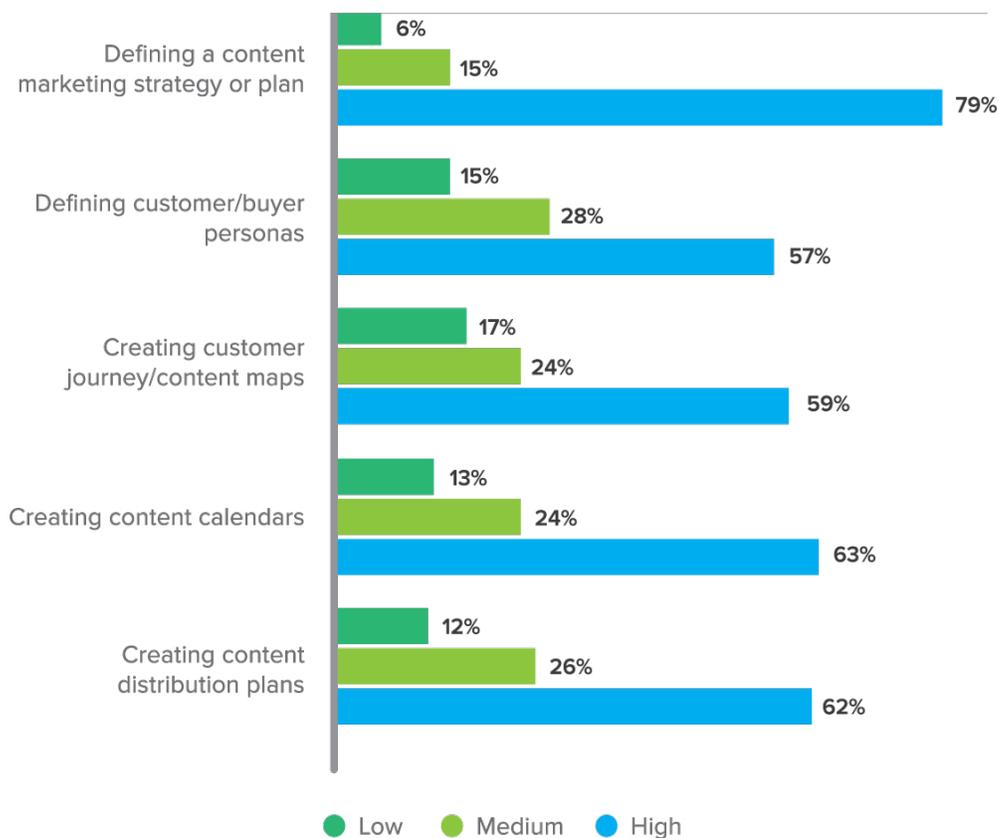
To help share the methods of content marketing that work best, we asked our marketers to rate how effective they found these five core techniques:

1. Defining a content marketing strategy or plan
2. Creating customer/buyer personas
3. Creating customer journey/content maps
4. Creating content calendars
5. Creating content distribution plans

Developing a content marketing strategy or plan came out on top with 49% rating it high for effectiveness.

This is interesting as we saw earlier that 55% of the marketers surveyed indicated that developing an integrated content marketing strategy was a challenge for them. This suggests that although marketers find creating a content strategy a challenge, those who have created one find it the most effective part of making content work for their business.

WHICH TECHNIQUES ARE MOST EFFECTIVE FOR MANAGING CONTENT MARKETING?



Dan Sharp, [Screaming Frog](#), [@ScreamingFrog](#)

A cohesive strategy is required. Marketers need to know exactly why they are producing content, who their audience is and how they can reach them, its value and which areas in their customers' journeys they should be prioritising.

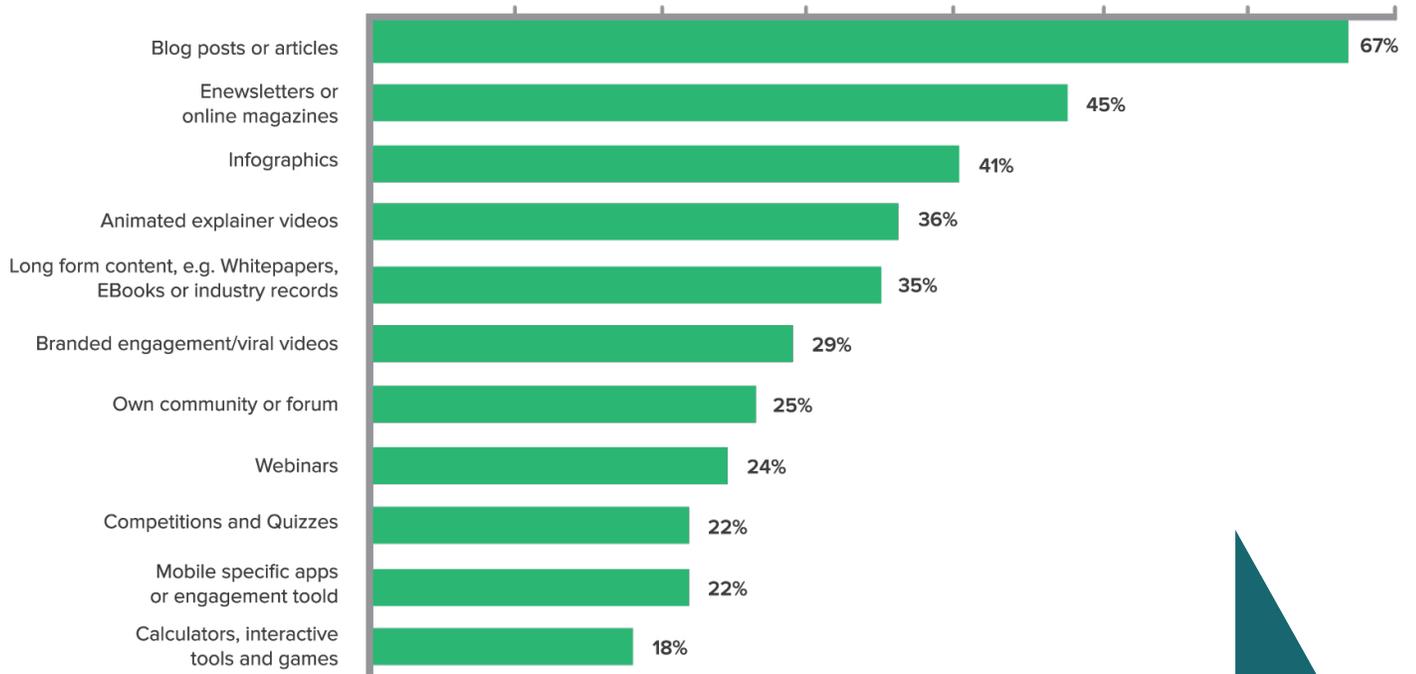
Which Content Formats work best?

With so many different formats available to marketers now, we asked our survey respondents which formats they found most effective in their content marketing.

Blog posts and articles were the clear winner, with 67% of marketers having success with them. E-newsletters or online magazines (45%) came in second, followed by infographics (41%).

Interactive tools were rated the least effective content format (18%) which could be related to the advanced skills necessary to develop them, and thus deterring marketers from experimenting with them.

MOST EFFECTIVE CONTENT FORMATS?



Phil Nottingham, [Distilled](#), [@PhilNottingham](#)

Historically, many businesses adopted something akin to a format-based content strategy, where they'd define their inbound marketing in terms of the types of content they were creating, e.g. blogs, videos, interactive media, social etc..

With technology now allowing the convergence of creative forms, and lines increasingly being blurred regarding what constitutes video vs text vs image etc.. savvy businesses are recognising that format, in and of itself, is not valuable.

Just having a blog, or a YouTube channel, or a Pinterest account is not inherently valuable, what matters is having an idea and a purpose that drives the use of that format or channel.



CHAPTER THREE

Content Distribution & Promotion

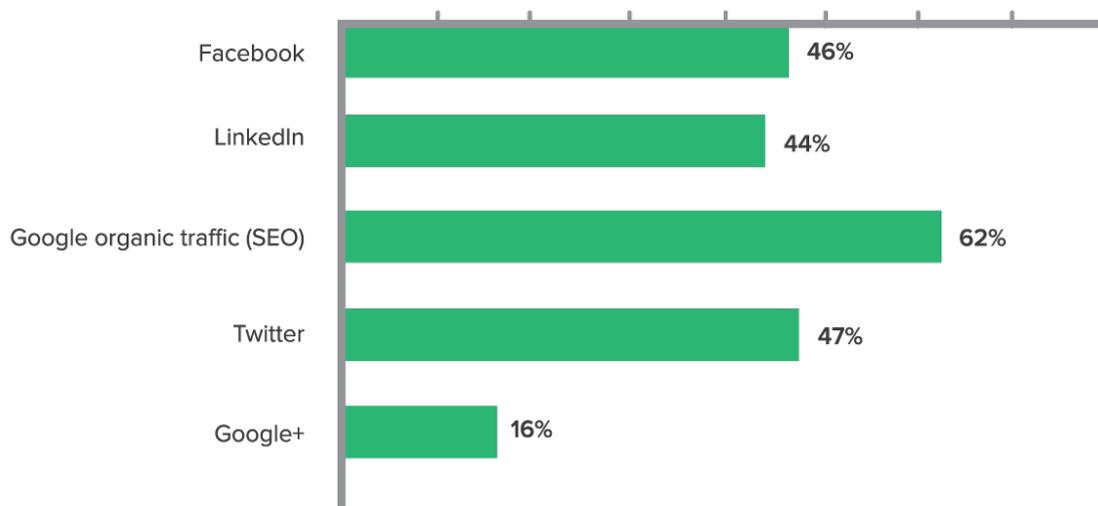
Content Distribution and Promotion

In our experience, content distribution and promotion don't get the attention they need for content marketing success. We asked respondents separately about their experience with organic versus paid content distribution methods to benchmark the 'norm' and uncover areas that can be improved upon. As we might expect, free, organic techniques are rated the highest since there are no associated costs.

Within these, organic traffic (SEO) is top-rated (62%) which suggests that focusing on SEO is still as important as ever to marketers, despite the ongoing debate that it's not as effective as it once was.

Each of the core social networks, (Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter) were rated at a similar level (46%, 44%, 47% respectively), but Google+ was rated very low in comparison, with only 15% of marketers having a good experience with the platform. This suggests marketers have made up their minds that Google + is not worth their time or resources as a distribution platform.

POSITIVE RATINGS OF ORGANIC CONTENT DISTRIBUTION OPTIONS



Evan James, [Socialbakers](#), [@evanjames11](#)

The key is to understand what content works on which platform - how it works - and to build your strategy around using each network to its fullest potential.

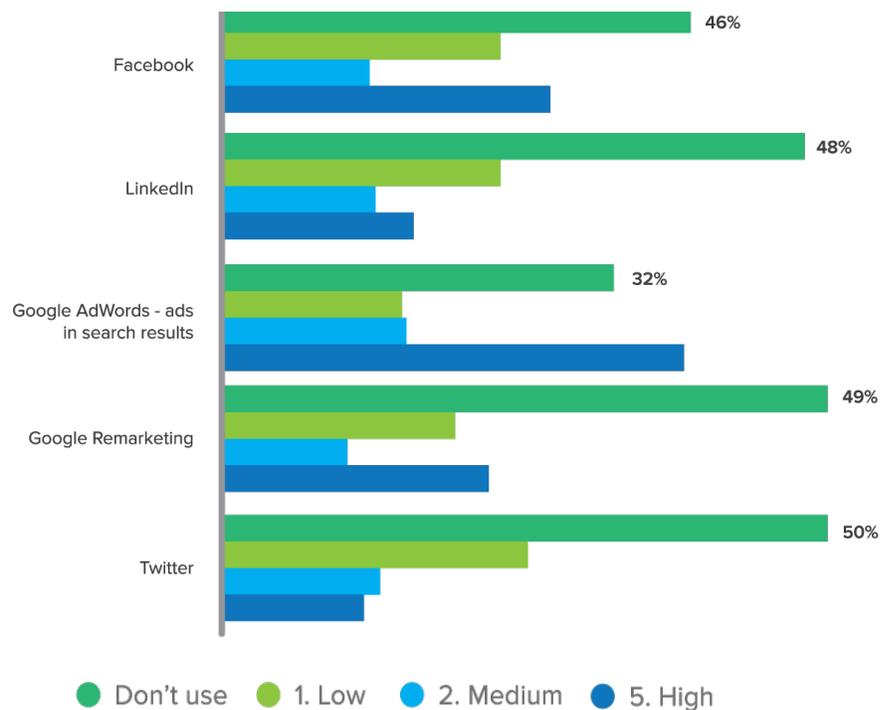
As you might expect, a lot of marketers aren't investing in paid content distribution. However, we feel that they could be missing out on a great opportunity. In the chart below, we can see that the majority of respondents aren't using paid on the platforms listed.



Brian Lavery, [Twitter](#), @Lav

With no clear distribution strategy the content, no matter how fantastic, will be redundant. I think the coming year will require marketers to take an ever more innovative approach to ensuring their content and business really stand out to their desired audience. Social media will continue to play a huge part in content distribution. Businesses will need to invest more time into developing their networks online to build relationships with industry influencers and ensure their messages spread further, faster, and with more impact.

POSITIVE RATINGS OF PAID CONTENT DISTRIBUTION OPTIONS



Half of respondents are not using Twitter ads which we feel is a huge opportunity missed, given the hyper-targeted audience it offers marketers.

Of the people who are using the various paid distribution options mentioned, very few rated them highly, which suggests more education is needed around how to take advantage of, and optimise these marketing techniques.

What we found most surprising was the high rating (38%) that Google AdWords received, as we don't see it as a valuable distribution platform for content.



Linda Bolg, [SocialBro](#), [@LindaBolg](#)

Over the next 12 months, I anticipate marketers will shift the allocation of their content marketing budget so it's evenly split between content production and promotion. There will be greater variety of Earned, Owned and Paid media options used.

I particularly think we will see more brands identifying and leveraging potential influencers for content endorsements or joint content marketing projects. We're also likely to see a big increase in content promotion via social media ads because of greater targeting and segmentation options.



CHAPTER FOUR

Evaluating Content Marketing

Evaluating Content Marketing



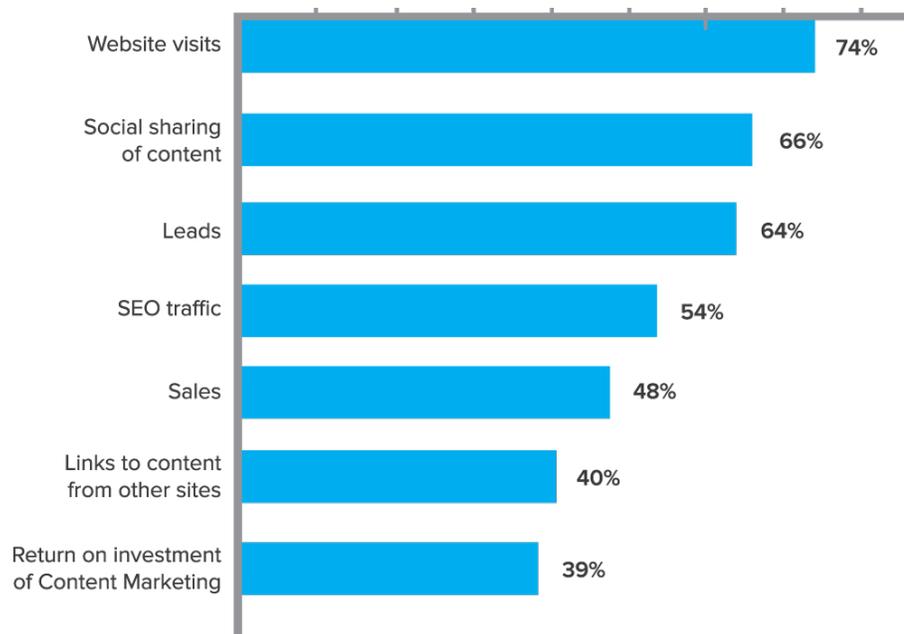
Catherine Toole, [Sticky Content](#), [@catherinetoole](#)

Lots of people have woken up to the fact that they've been measuring the wrong things as far as content is concerned. It's been measurement to cover your back with the budget holders, rather than metrics to inform and improve content strategy. The search for more sophisticated engagement metrics is the hottest measurement activity.

Attempt to define what set of behaviours and levels of content consumption result in increased value from a customer over time. It's a long game now: mapping the value of relationships to content touch points over time, rather than chasing likes or shares.

We saw earlier in the report that many marketers struggled to calculate the return on investment from their content marketing. When we asked our marketers which metrics they use to assess their content marketing effectiveness, the results may suggest why this is so.

METRICS USED TO MEASURE CONTENT MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS



The most commonly used metric to measure content marketing effectiveness was website visits (74%), followed by social sharing of content (66%) and leads (64%). Return on investment was the least popular metric with only 39% of marketers tracking ROI from their content marketing. This could be a result of the difficulties marketers have with tying their content back to revenue. [The right infrastructure](#) needs to be in place in order to close the loop from content to customer.



Kieran Flanagan, HubSpot, @Searchbrat

Trying to measure content in the same way as PPC, SEO, display or any other marketing tactic is wrong. Creating content is not, on its own, a marketing tactic and so marketers should not be trying to place a single monetary value on it.

There is no single metric you can show your boss that will categorically give the ROI of the content you produce. There are, instead, a multitude of goals and metrics associated with content, which vary dependent on what marketing channels are distributing the content, and where that content is being used in your marketing funnel.

Trying to figure out the ROI of time invested in content is the right thing to do, but you need to clearly define the goals of your content, align these across your funnel, and choose the metrics that are going to serve as indicators of your success. Doing this will give you a better picture of how content is performing across your funnel and what areas may need to be improved upon. In [this article](#) I list the metrics you should be measuring if you'd like to read about content ROI in more detail.

Conclusion

In summary, we learned that content marketing is growing in popularity and competitiveness in Europe. Senior management believe in its value so buy-in is no longer a challenge for marketers.

There is still a lot of room for improvement, however, with measurement still a huge obstacle. This comes into play as more and more free tools become available and marketers are faced with what we call 'channel mess'. A lack of integration between tools results in marketers having to spend far too long in excel trying to prove the ROI of their efforts. This can be resolved with an all-in-one marketing platform like HubSpot where you have clear visibility on traffic, leads and customers generated from your campaigns in one place.

Another key takeaway that we identified from the report was that marketers need to realise the opportunity that paid advertising presents. Social retargeting can be highly effective and marketers should experiment with this option for content distribution, even if budget is low. Marketers should try Twitter Cards and Facebook Dark Posts to start.

The promotion and distribution of content should take as much time and attention as the creation of the content and marketers should be investing in this phase of their campaigns with budget and resources.

As content marketing has become more widely adopted, quantity and quality remain top of mind, but forward-thinking marketers will now be more concerned with how to make their content stand out from the noise. They are increasing budget and resources (internal and external) to achieve this.

If you would like to talk to one of HubSpot's inbound marketing specialists about how to do this for your company, [click here](#) to request an inbound marketing assessment.

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