![Ascend2]

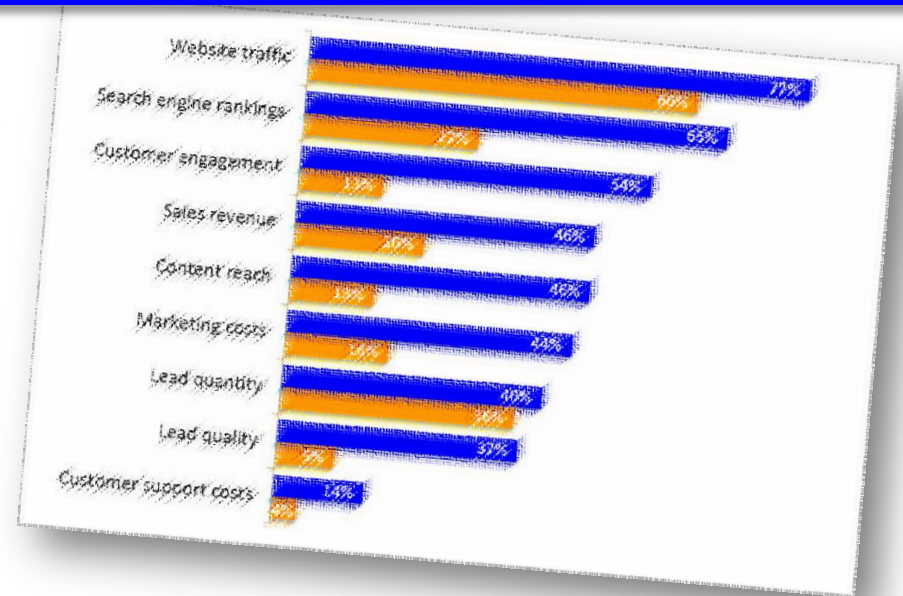# Inbound Marketing
Strategy Outlook Report

What inbound marketing success will look like in the year ahead and how marketers plan to achieve it.

Inbound Marketing Strategy Outlook Report

Client Connection Research™ conducted by Ascend2 and Research Partners.

Inbound Marketing Strategy Outlook Report

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Inbound Marketing Strategy Outlook Report

What is driving the success of inbound marketing?

There has been a seismic shift changing the marketing landscape from traditional, interruptive methods for pushing your message out, to inbound marketing strategies for pulling your prospects and customers in.

What will inbound marketing success look like in the year ahead, and how do marketers plan to achieve it? To find out, Ascend2 and its Research Partners fielded the Inbound Marketing Survey and completed interviews with 519 business leaders, marketing executives and marketing practitioners from around the world. We thank these busy professionals for sharing their valuable insights with you.

This report features a methodology that distinguishes companies with a superior strategy for accomplishing inbound marketing objectives from those having an inferior strategy. It includes actionable advice on using this research to develop a superior strategy beginning with a SWOT analysis of your inbound marketing program.

This Client Connection Research™ has been produced by Ascend2 and its Research Partners for your use. Put it to work in your own marketing strategy planning and presentation materials. Clip the charts and write about them in your blog or post them on social media. Use this research however you like, credited as published.

Sergio Balegno
Chief Strategy Officer

![Ascend2]

PS: If you develop business for a marketing agency or marketing SaaS firm, a white label edition of this report is available with corresponding leads and new business opportunities for growing your firm at Ascend2.com.

Inbound marketing strategy outlook summary

The charts in this section average the sum of all responses. The data has not been segmented, as it has in other sections of this report, so results represent a high level view of the inbound marketing landscape you can use to examine how your strategy compares with marketing industry averages for practices and performance.

Lead generation is the top objective of the average inbound marketing strategy. Improving the quality of leads and their rate of conversion also important goals.

What are the MOST IMPORTANT OBJECTIVES for your inbound marketing strategy in the year ahead?

Objective	Percent
Increase the number of leads generated	56%
Increase lead conversion rate	46%
Improve the quality of leads generated	44%
Increase brand or product awareness	38%
Increase website/landing page visits	34%
Improve organic search rankings	22%
Increase customer retention rate	17%
Improve analytics and reporting	14%
Reduce marketing costs	6%

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Achieving important inbound marketing objectives without the budget or headcount required to do the job is the most challenging obstacle to success.

What are the MOST CHALLENGING OBSTACLES to achieving your inbound marketing objectives?

Obstacle	Percentage
Inadequate budget or headcount	43%
Lack of an effective inbound strategy	34%
Lack of conversion worthy content	33%
Inability to measure or attribute ROI	24%
Lack of tactical knowledge or abilities	22%
Complexity of marketing automation	20%
Lack of social network followers	20%
Inadequate organic search rankings	18%
Lack of executive level commitment	18%

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While 83% of companies integrate tactics used for inbound marketing purposes to some extent, only 27% of marketers integrate these tactics extensively.

To what extent does your company INTEGRATE SEO, SOCIAL MEDIA, PR AND CONTENT for inbound marketing purposes?

We don't integrate inbound tactics 17%

Extensive integration of inbound tactics 27%

Limited integration of inbound tactics 56%

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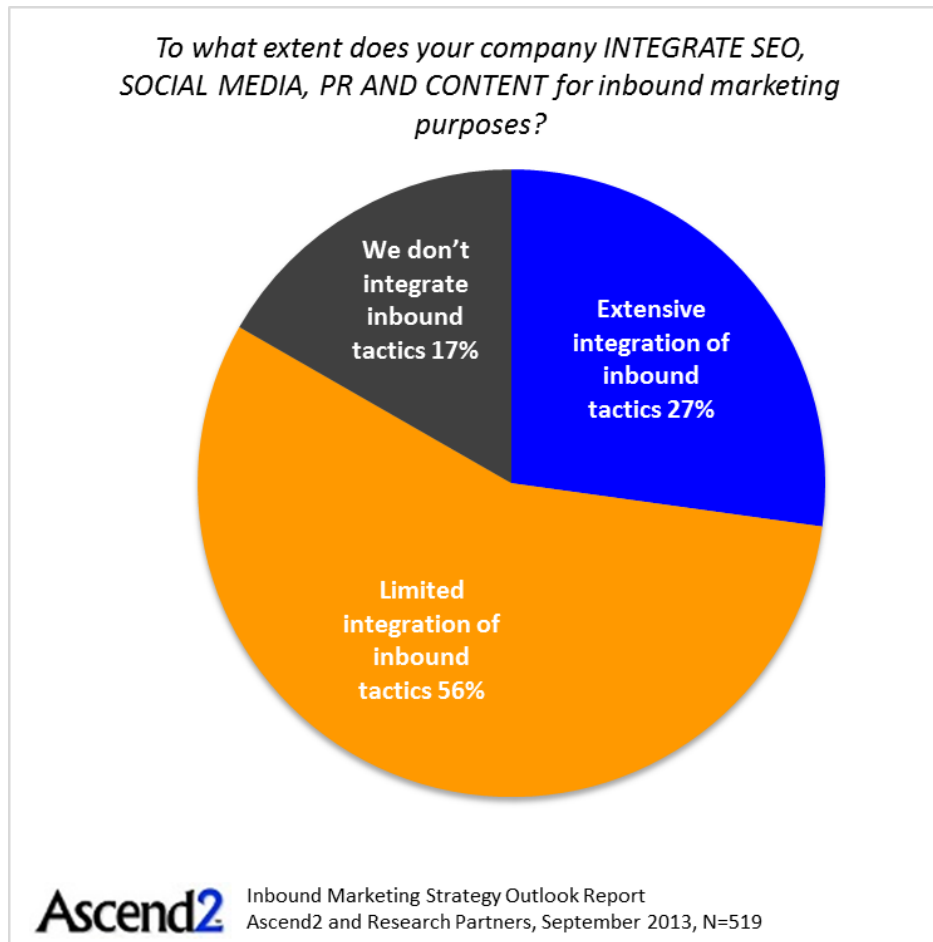
Inbound marketing success relies on attracting leads with compelling content. SEO enables prospects to find the content most relevant to their needs.

What are the MOST EFFECTIVE TACTICS used to achieve inbound marketing objectives?

Tactic	Percentage
Content creation and marketing	66%
Search engine optimization	41%
Social media/social networking	32%
Blogging or guest blogging	26%
Lead nurturing and scoring	25%
Press and public relations	25%
Use of marketing automation	21%
Outbound marketing integration	20%
Social sharing buttons	9%

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Creating content is a time consuming tactic. Marketers challenged by a lack of headcount find content creation the most difficult inbound marketing tactic to execute.

What are the MOST DIFFICULT TACTICS to execute for inbound marketing purposes?

Tactic	Percentage
Content creation and marketing	51%
Lead nurturing and scoring	39%
Use of marketing automation	32%
Search engine optimization	29%
Social media/social networking	29%
Blogging or guest blogging	23%
Outbound marketing integration	22%
Press and public relations	17%
Social sharing buttons	5%

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Not only is content creation the most effective tactic, it is also the most difficult to execute. Lead nurturing and scoring is significantly more difficult than effective.

Comparing the MOST EFFECTIVE TACTICS used with the MOST DIFFICULT TACTICS to excute.

Tactic	Most Effective Tactics	Most Difficult Tactics
Content creation and marketing	66%	51%
Search engine optimization	41%	29%
Social media/social networking	32%	29%
Blogging or guest blogging	26%	23%
Lead nurturing and scoring	25%	39%
Press and public relations	25%	17%
Use of marketing automation	21%	32%
Outbound marketing integration	20%	22%
Social sharing buttons	9%	5%

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Surprisingly, nearly one-in-three companies do not measure the performance of inbound marketing. Only 13% measure inbound performance very effectively.

How effectively does your company MEASURE THE PERFORMANCE of inbound marketing campaigns?

Very effectively measure performance 13%

We don't measure performance 28%

Somewhat effectively measure performance 59%

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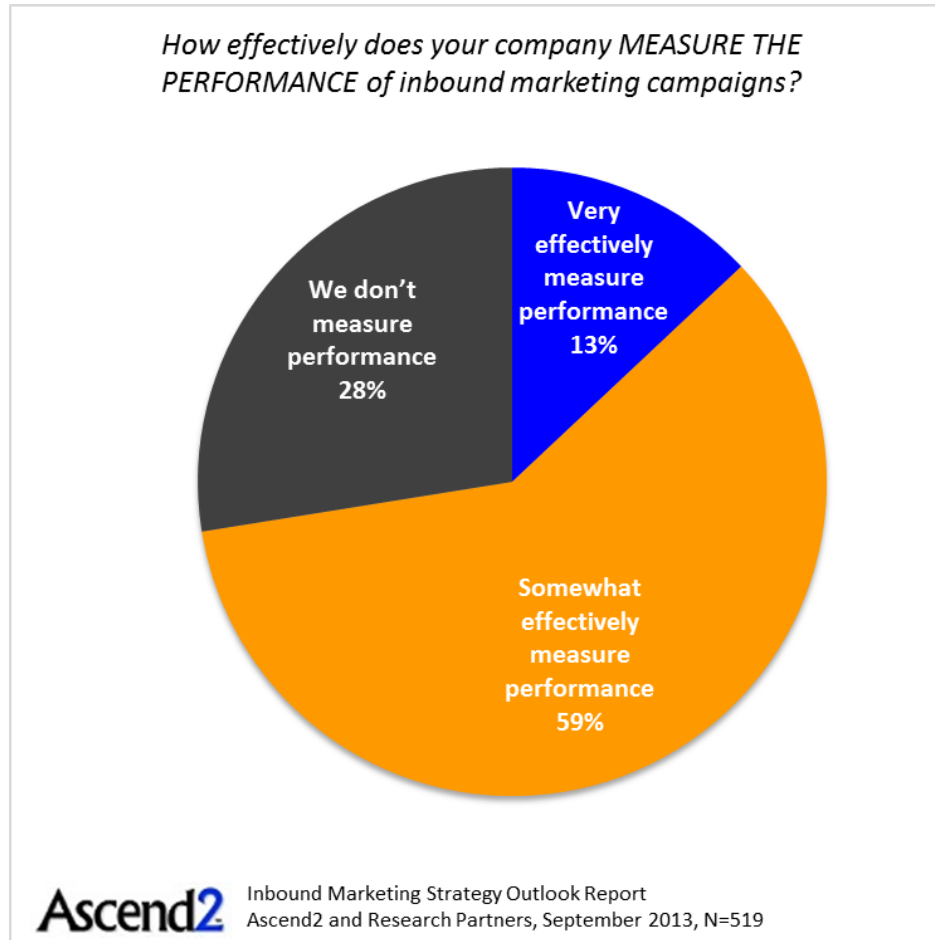
Inbound tactics are inherently digital so the automation of these marketing processes is a practical choice. Yet 39% of companies do not use marketing automation.

To what extent does your company USE MARKETING AUTOMATION to manage inbound marketing?

Extensive use of marketing automation 18%

We don't use marketing automation 39%

Limited use of marketing automation 43%

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Ascend2 and Research Partners, September 2013, N=519
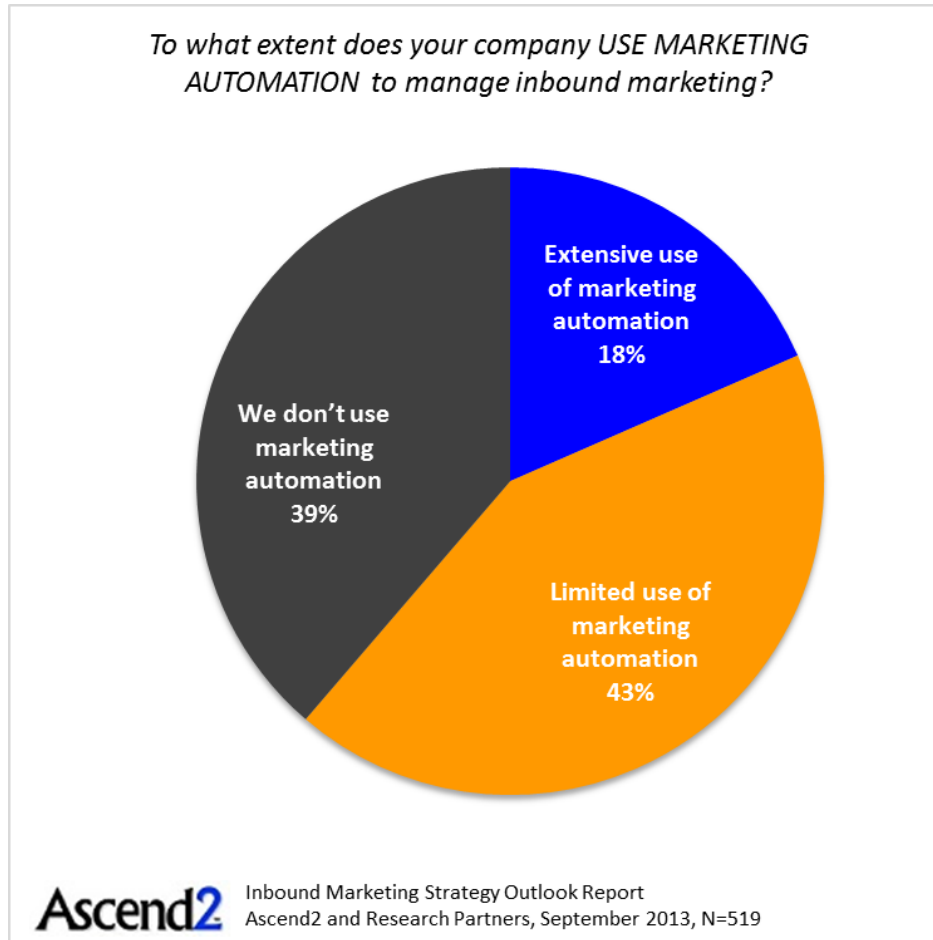
The difference between *Superior* and *Inferior* strategies

In this section, the disparity between companies with a Superior Strategy for inbound marketing and their Inferior Strategy counterparts is clear. These benchmarks are provided to show you what inbound marketing success will look like in the year ahead and how marketers plan to achieve it.
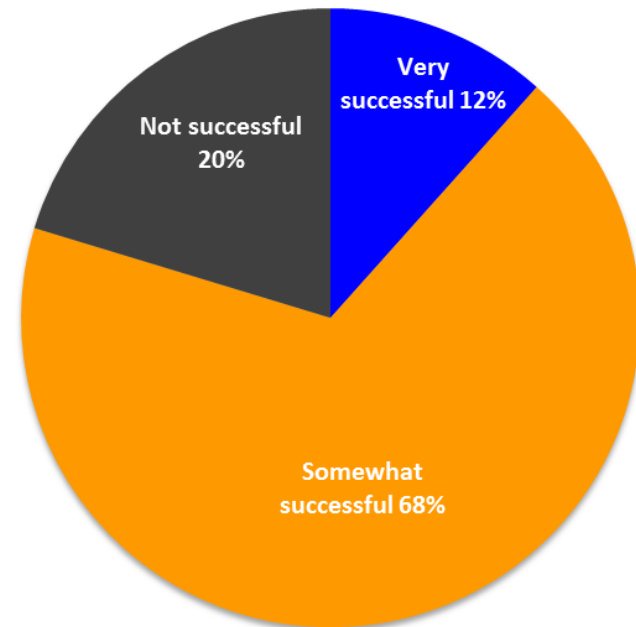
The successful achievement of objectives distinguishes a *Superior Strategy* from an *Inferior Strategy*.

Determining which inbound marketing strategies are worth emulating requires identifying characteristics of the most successful marketing organizations. Performance criteria, based on the success of an inbound marketing strategy to achieve important objectives, is used to differentiate between companies with a Superior Strategy from those with an Inferior Strategy for the purpose of this report.

The highest performers (12% of respondents rated Very Successful) are identified in this section as having a Superior Strategy. The lowest performers (20% of respondents rated Not Successful) are identified as having an Inferior Strategy.

Marketers rating their inbound strategy as Somewhat Successful (68%) are not represented in the charts in this section.

How do you RATE THE SUCCESS of your inbound marketing strategy to achieve important objectives?

Very successful 12%

Not successful 20%

Somewhat successful 68%

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Successful marketers do not live by lead generation alone. Increasing the rate of lead conversion is equally important to the very successful inbound marketer.

What are the MOST IMPORTANT OBJECTIVES for your inbound marketing strategy in the year ahead?

Objective	Very successful	Not successful
Increase the number of leads generated	46%	66%
Increase lead conversion rate	46%	43%
Increase brand or product awareness	40%	41%
Improve the quality of leads generated	38%	46%
Increase website/landing page visits	27%	34%
Increase customer retention rate	21%	12%
Improve organic search rankings	19%	18%
Improve analytics and reporting	15%	9%
Reduce marketing costs	10%	3%

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A clear majority of inbound marketers who are not successful suffer from the lack of an effective strategy to achieve inbound marketing objectives.

What are the MOST CHALLENGING OBSTACLES to achieving your inbound marketing objectives?

Obstacle	Very successful	Not successful
Lack of conversion worthy content	41%	34%
Inadequate budget or headcount	35%	40%
Complexity of marketing automation	28%	16%
Inability to measure or attribute ROI	26%	8%
Lack of executive level commitment	26%	16%
Lack of tactical knowledge or abilities	20%	28%
Inadequate organic search rankings	20%	14%
Lack of social network followers	17%	26%
Lack of an effective inbound strategy	9%	59%

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The message here is clear; the extensive integration of inbound tactics can mean the difference between success and failure of your inbound marketing program.

To what extent does your company INTEGRATE SEO, SOCIAL MEDIA, PR AND CONTENT for inbound marketing purposes?

- Very successful
- Not successful

Extensive integration of tactics: 67% (Very successful), 9% (Not successful)
Limited integration of tactics: 24% (Very successful), 52% (Not successful)
We don't integrate tactics: 9% (Very successful), 39% (Not successful)

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Content creation is the most effective tactic used. SEO is much more likely to be effective for very successful inbound marketers as are social sharing buttons.

What are the MOST EFFECTIVE TACTICS used to achieve inbound marketing objectives?

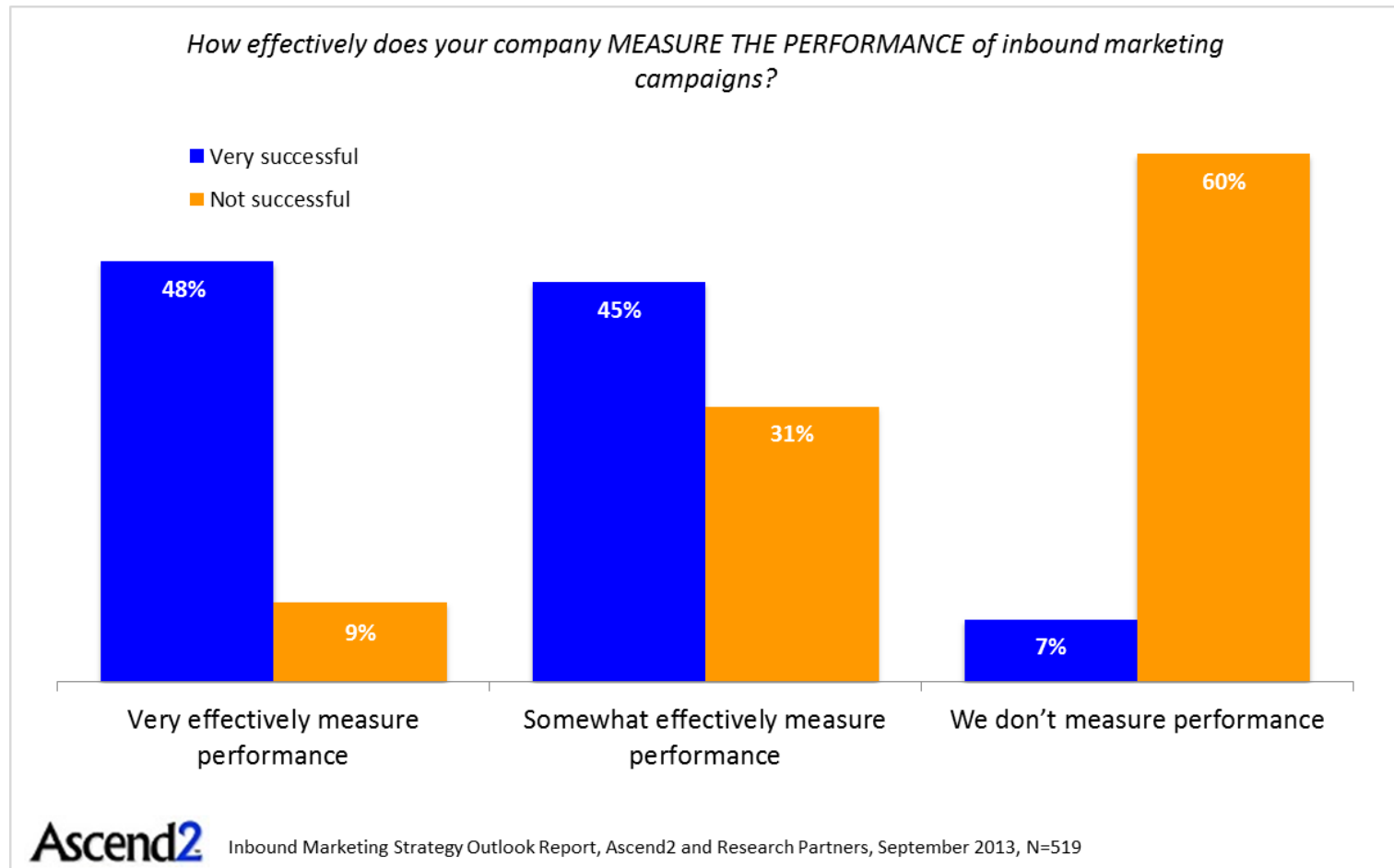| Tactic	Very successful	Not successful
Content creation and marketing	70%	61%
Search engine optimization	52%	36%
Blogging or guest blogging	30%	26%
Social media/social networking	30%	25%
Use of marketing automation	25%	22%
Lead nurturing and scoring	25%	21%
Outbound marketing integration	14%	21%
Press and public relations	14%	30%
Social sharing buttons	14%	1%

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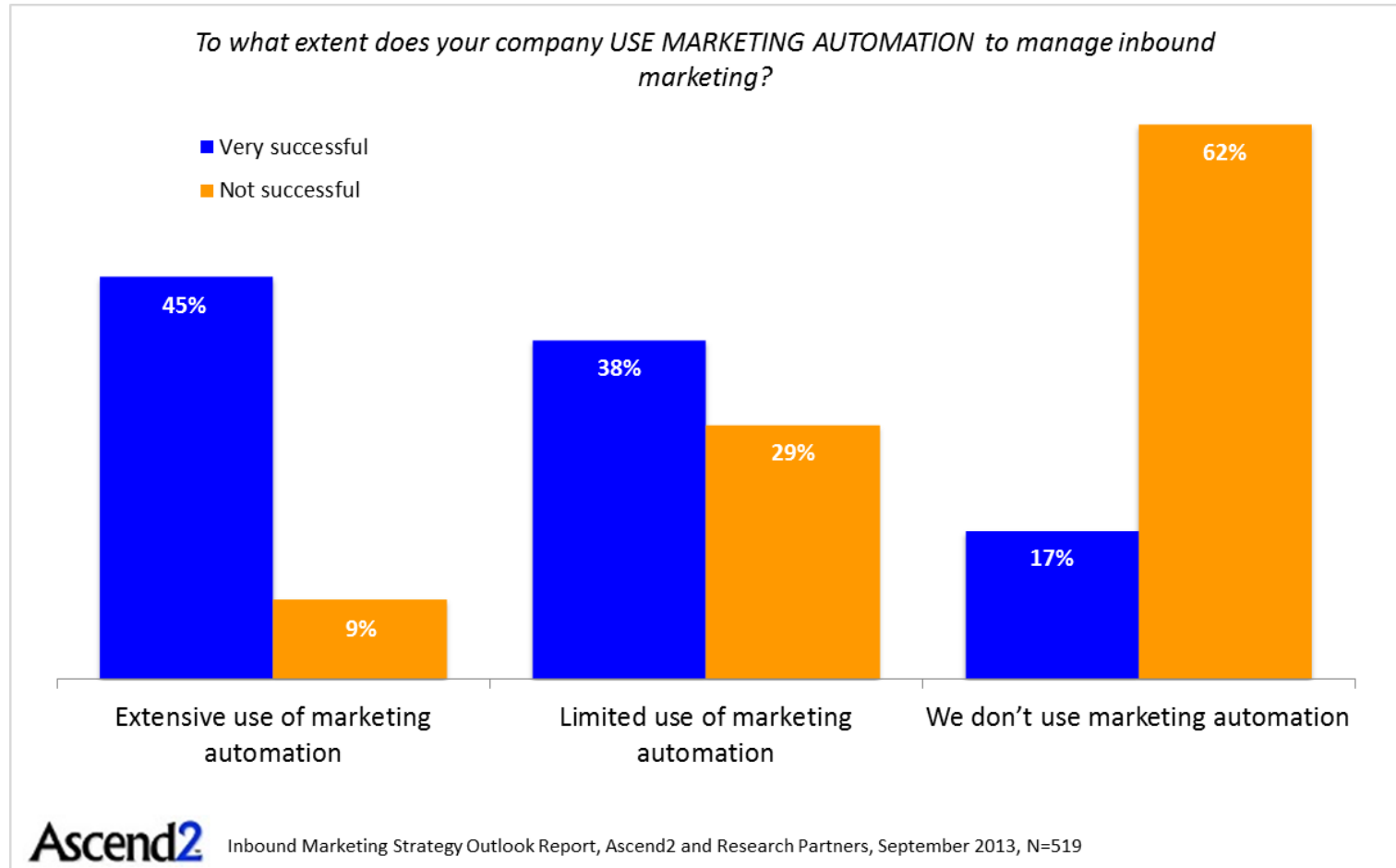
Creating content is difficult for everyone. However it is much more likely to be difficult for those not successful using inbound marketing to achieve their objectives.

What are the MOST DIFFICULT TACTICS to execute for inbound marketing purposes?

Tactic	Very successful	Not successful
Content creation and marketing	43%	57%
Social media/social networking	34%	35%
Lead nurturing and scoring	27%	36%
Search engine optimization	27%	30%
Outbound marketing integration	25%	19%
Use of marketing automation	25%	31%
Blogging or guest blogging	23%	22%
Press and public relations	14%	14%
Social sharing buttons	5%	6%

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Companies that don't measure the performance of their inbound marketing campaigns, are not likely to succeed at this effective marketing strategy.

How effectively does your company MEASURE THE PERFORMANCE of inbound marketing campaigns?

- Very successful
- Not successful

	Very effectively measure performance	Somewhat effectively measure performance	We don't measure performance
Very successful	48%	45%	7%
Not successful	9%	31%	60%

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There is a clear correlation between those who use marketing automation and those who have very successful inbound marketing programs.

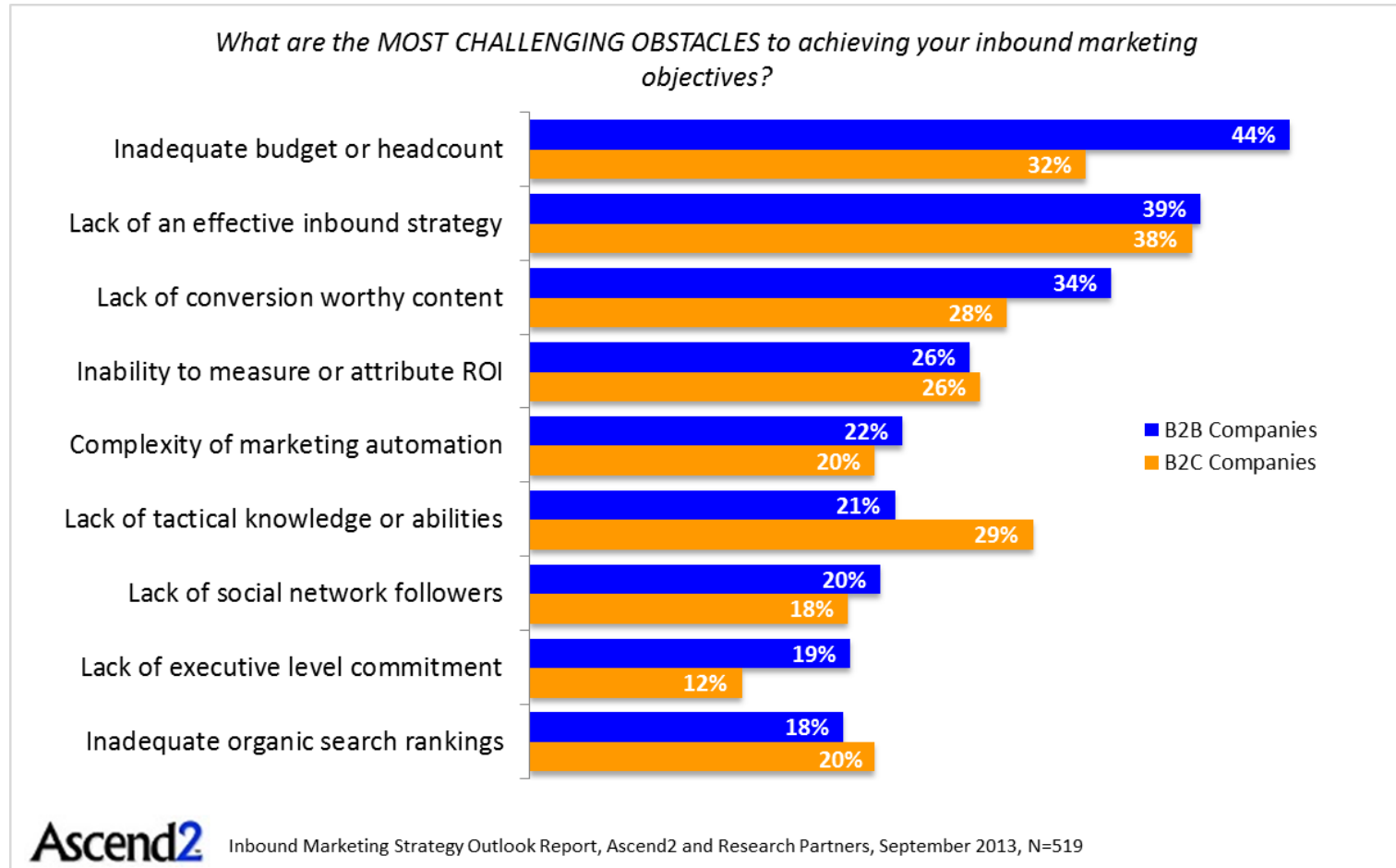To what extent does your company USE MARKETING AUTOMATION to manage inbound marketing?

■ Very successful
■ Not successful

- Extensive use of marketing automation: 45% / 9%
- Limited use of marketing automation: 38% / 29%
- We don't use marketing automation: 17% / 62%

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How strategies and tactics differ by business type

The chart breakouts in this section are by type of business. The survey questionnaire was segmented by three types: Business-to-Business, Business-to-Consumer and Marketing Services. The following charts represent responses from B2B and B2C marketers only, and do not include responses by the providers of marketing services (29% of respondents).
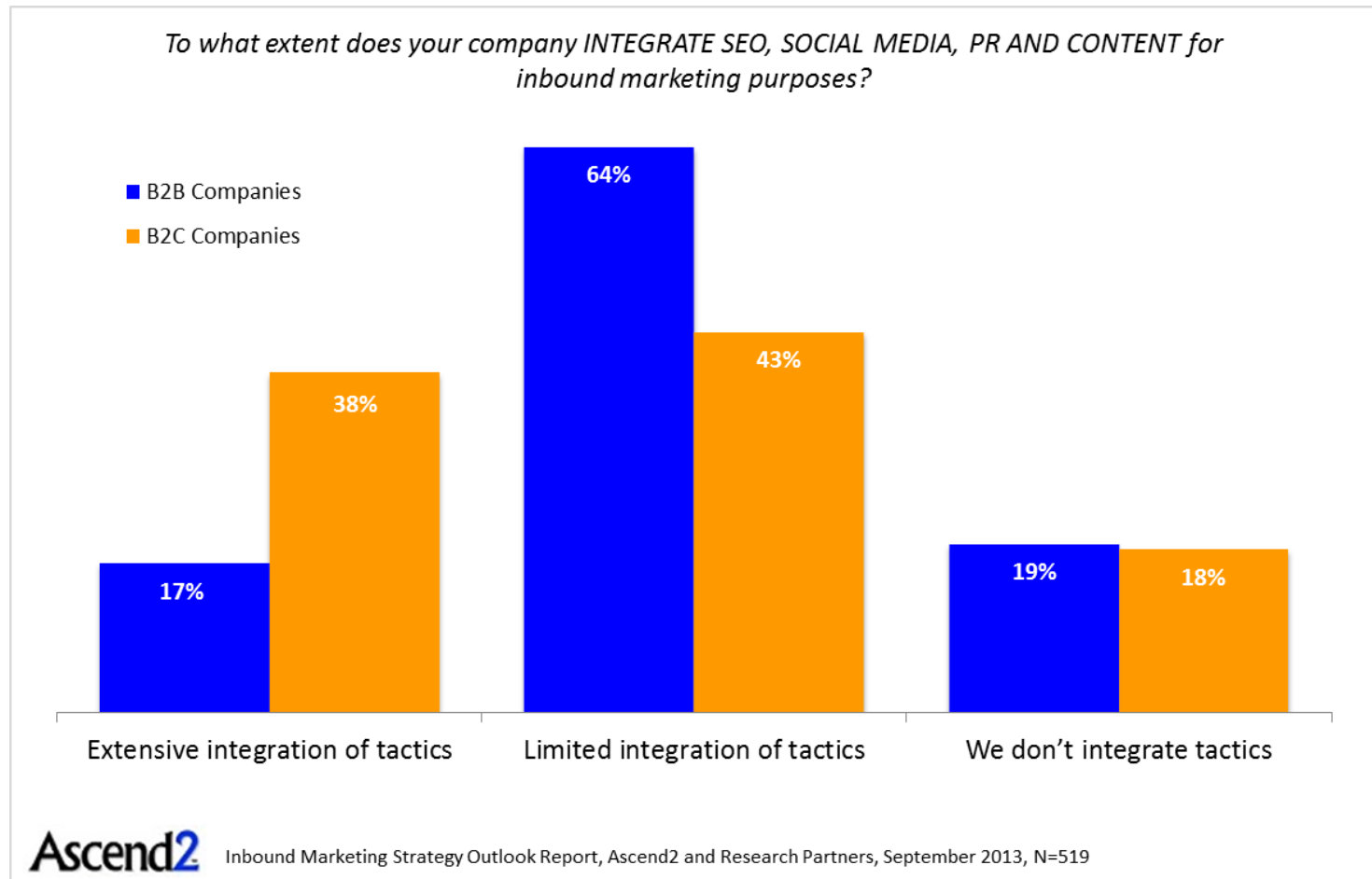
Generating, improving quality and converting more leads are the top objectives for B2B marketers. B2C marketers are more concerned with brand awareness.
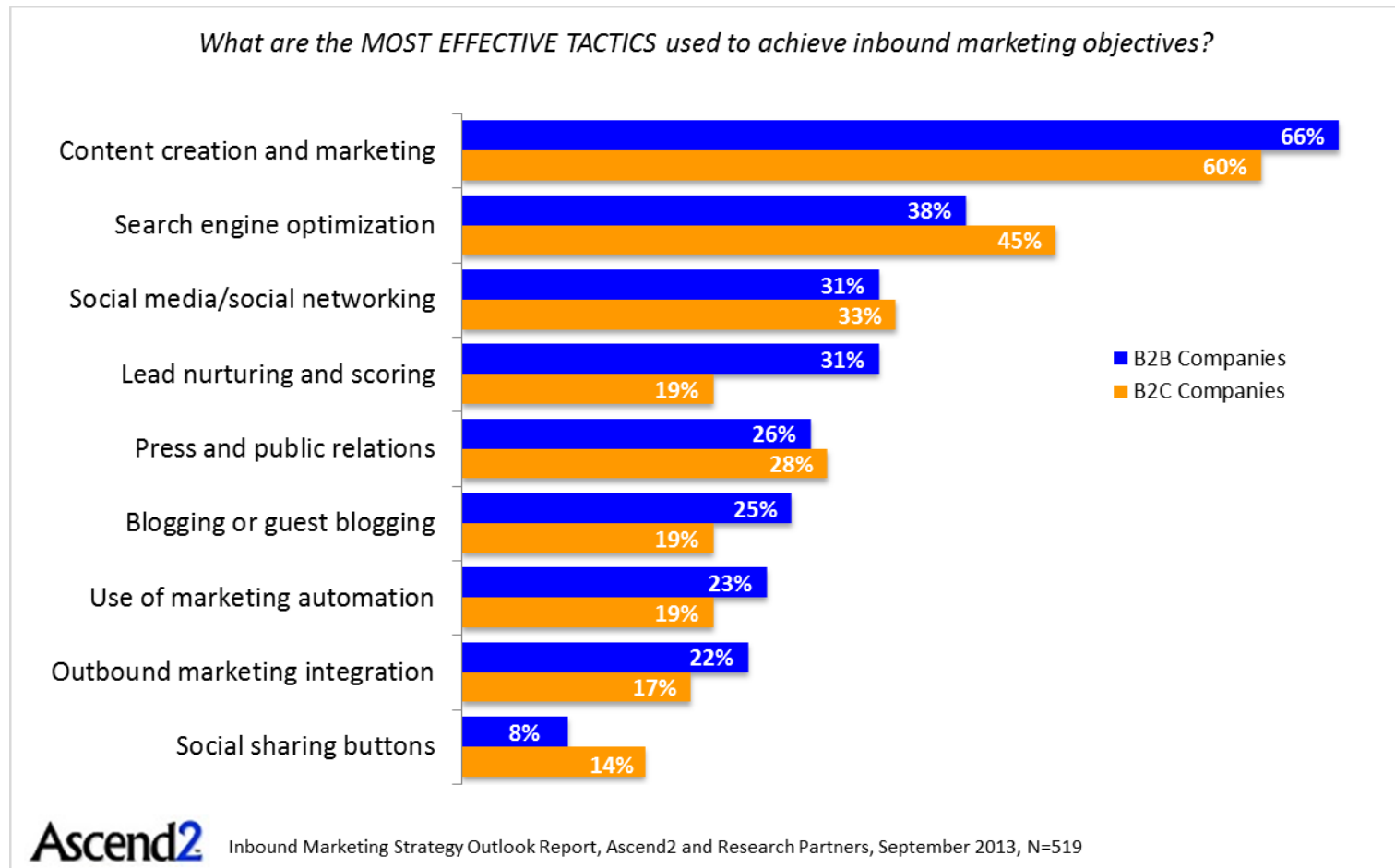

What are the MOST IMPORTANT OBJECTIVES for your inbound marketing strategy in the year ahead?

Objective	B2B Companies	B2C Companies
Increase the number of leads generated	58%	40%
Improve the quality of leads generated	49%	30%
Increase lead conversion rate	48%	36%
Increase brand or product awareness	40%	43%
Increase website/landing page visits	33%	39%
Improve organic search rankings	21%	27%
Increase customer retention rate	15%	27%
Improve analytics and reporting	13%	21%
Reduce marketing costs	6%	10%

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The lack of an effective inbound strategy is an equally challenging obstacle for companies targeting both businesses and consumers.

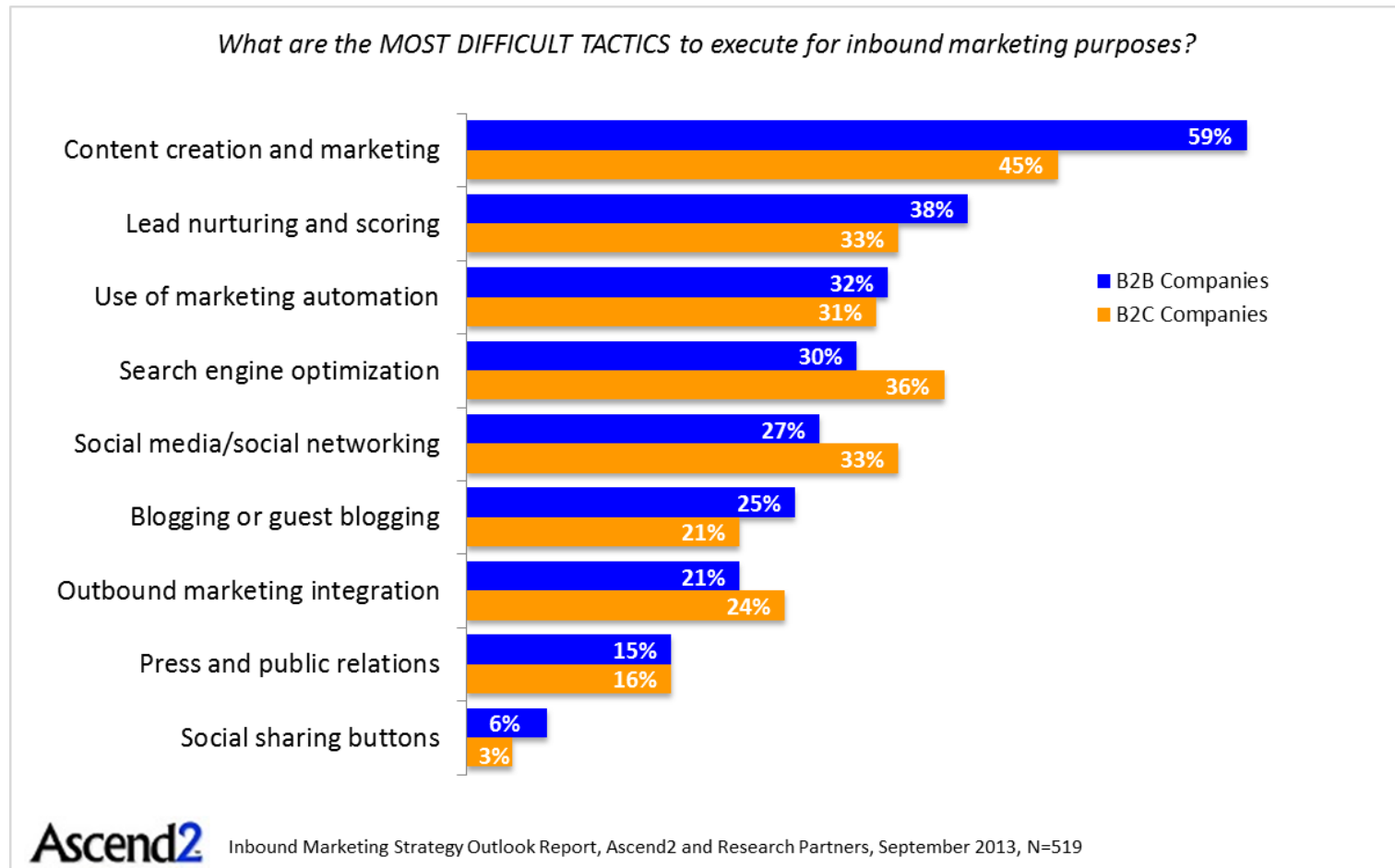What are the MOST CHALLENGING OBSTACLES to achieving your inbound marketing objectives?

Obstacle	B2B Companies	B2C Companies
Inadequate budget or headcount	44%	32%
Lack of an effective inbound strategy	39%	38%
Lack of conversion worthy content	34%	28%
Inability to measure or attribute ROI	26%	26%
Complexity of marketing automation	22%	20%
Lack of tactical knowledge or abilities	21%	29%
Lack of social network followers	20%	18%
Lack of executive level commitment	19%	12%
Inadequate organic search rankings	18%	20%

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Companies that target consumers are more likely to integrate inbound marketing tactics extensively.

To what extent does your company INTEGRATE SEO, SOCIAL MEDIA, PR AND CONTENT for inbound marketing purposes?

- B2B Companies
- B2C Companies

	Extensive integration of tactics	Limited integration of tactics	We don't integrate tactics
B2B	17%	64%	19%
B2C	38%	43%	18%

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Blogging, one of the first and foremost inbound tactics, is not ranked very high by either type of company on the list most effective tactics. Surprising?

What are the MOST EFFECTIVE TACTICS used to achieve inbound marketing objectives?

Tactic	B2B Companies	B2C Companies
Content creation and marketing	66%	60%
Search engine optimization	38%	45%
Social media/social networking	31%	33%
Lead nurturing and scoring	31%	19%
Press and public relations	26%	28%
Blogging or guest blogging	25%	19%
Use of marketing automation	23%	19%
Outbound marketing integration	22%	17%
Social sharing buttons	8%	14%

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Creating content is more difficult for B2B companies which are often technically oriented, while SEO and social are more difficult for B2C than B2B marketers.

What are the MOST DIFFICULT TACTICS to execute for inbound marketing purposes?

Tactic	B2B Companies	B2C Companies
Content creation and marketing	59%	45%
Lead nurturing and scoring	38%	33%
Use of marketing automation	32%	31%
Search engine optimization	30%	36%
Social media/social networking	27%	33%
Blogging or guest blogging	25%	21%
Outbound marketing integration	21%	24%
Press and public relations	15%	16%
Social sharing buttons	6%	3%

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When it comes to measuring the performance of inbound marketing campaigns, there is no notable difference between B2B and B2C companies.

How effectively does your company MEASURE THE PERFORMANCE of inbound marketing campaigns?

- B2B Companies
- B2C Companies

	Very effectively measure inbound marketing performance	Somewhat effectively measure inbound marketing performance	We don't measure inbound marketing performance
B2B Companies	7%	61%	33%
B2C Companies	10%	60%	29%

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While B2B companies are more likely to use marketing automation to manage inbound, it is by a small margin.

To what extent does your company USE MARKETING AUTOMATION to manage inbound marketing?

- B2B Companies
- B2C Companies

	B2B	B2C
Extensive use of marketing automation	16%	14%
Limited use of marketing automation	45%	43%
We don't use marketing automation	39%	43%

Ascend2 — Inbound Marketing Strategy Outlook Report, Ascend2 and Research Partners, September 2013, N=519
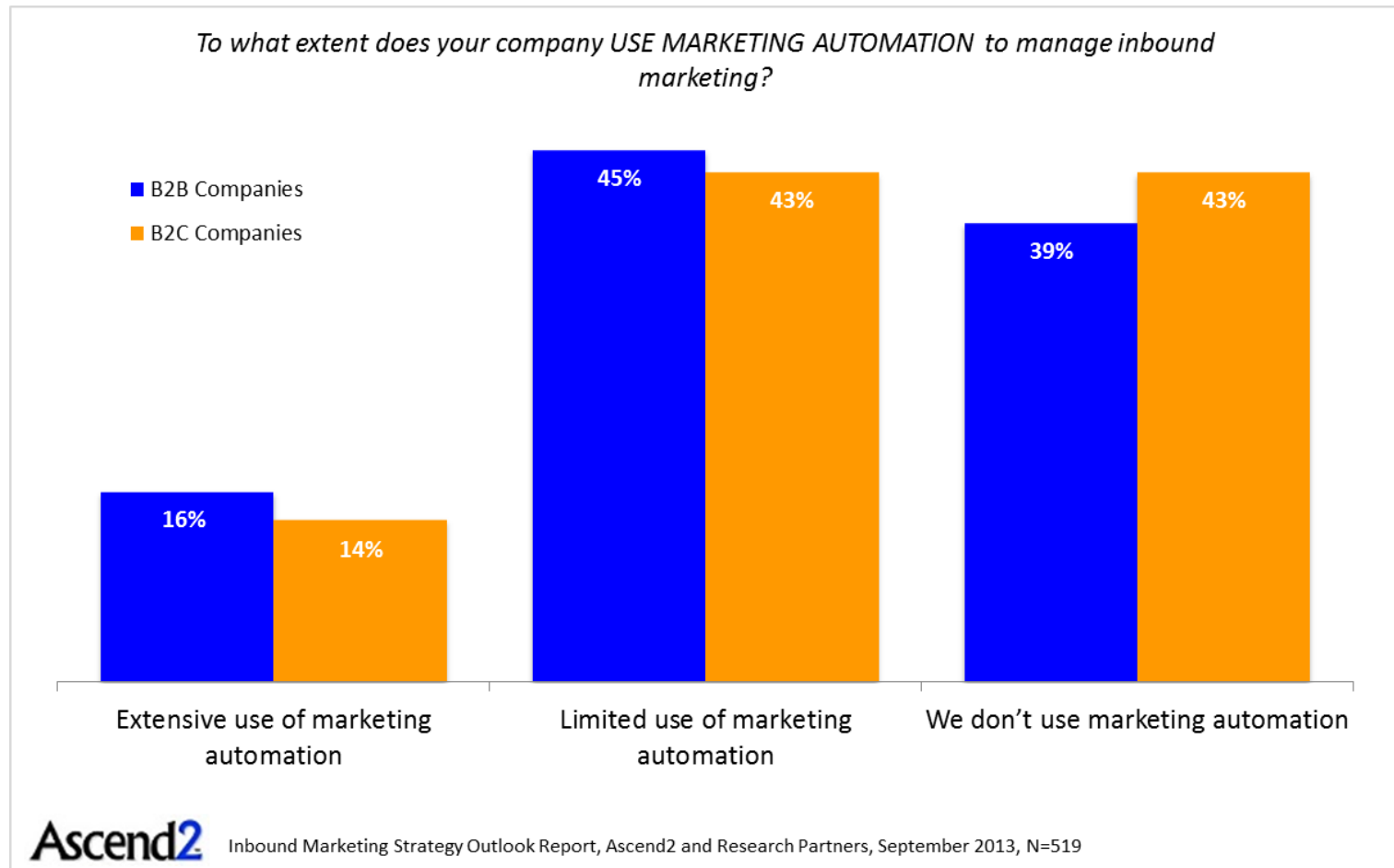
Actionable advice for developing a *Superior Strategy*

This research was conducted to help marketers develop a Superior Strategy for effectively achieving their inbound marketing objectives. This report features a methodology that distinguishes companies with a superior strategy for accomplishing objectives from those having an inferior strategy. This methodology enables the analysis and comparison of your inbound marketing strategy with those companies having a Superior Strategy.

A *Superior Strategy* is the goal. Developing one begins with an inbound marketing SWOT analysis.

The process of developing a Superior Strategy begins with a SWOT analysis of your inbound marketing program. This is accomplished by applying the questions asked in this survey to your company, then comparing your responses to the top strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of companies with a Superior Strategy (ranked here in order of priority).

	Strengths	**W**eaknesses
Tactical	Most Effective Tactics Used 1. Content creation and marketing 2. Search engine optimization 3. Blogging or guest blogging 4. Social media/social networking 5. Use of marketing automation	Most Difficult Tactics to Execute 1. Content creation and marketing 2. Social media/social networking 3. Lead nurturing and scoring 4. Search engine optimization 5. Outbound marketing integration
Strategic	**O**pportunities Most Important Objectives to Achieve 1. Increase the number of leads generated 2. Increase lead conversion rate 3. Increase brand or product awareness 4. Improve the quality of leads generated 5. Increase website/landing page visits	**T**hreats Most Challenging Obstacles to Overcome 1. Lack of conversion worthy content 2. Inadequate budget or headcount 3. Complexity of marketing automation 4. Inability to measure or attribute ROI 5. Lack of executive level commitment

Survey methodologies and demographics

Ascend2's Client Connection Research™ surveys are conducted online from a panel of 70,000 US and international marketing decision-makers and practitioners representing a range of contact roles, company types, sizes and geographic regions. Survey findings are examined in a quantitative context by experienced analysts and reported objectively.

An important goal of Client Connection Research™ is differentiating the performance of companies with a Superior Strategy from those with an Inferior Strategy. To identify these groups, performance criteria is used based on the success of a company's marketing program to accomplish its objectives. This model for segmenting Superior Strategy is then used to analyze and present for comparison marketing performance in the form of charts and a Marketing Program SWOT Analysis by topic. The questionnaire used is standardized to incorporate these methodologies across all studies while maintaining our proven 3-Minute Survey format.

# Survey respondent and company demographics

Business Type
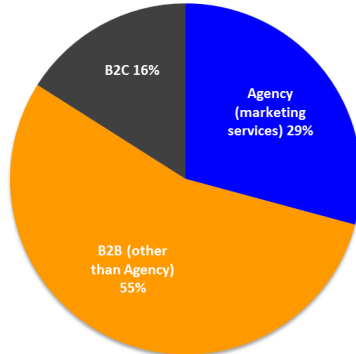
B2C 16%
Agency (marketing services) 29%
B2B (other than Agency) 55%

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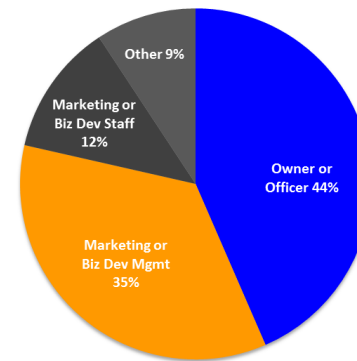

Company Location
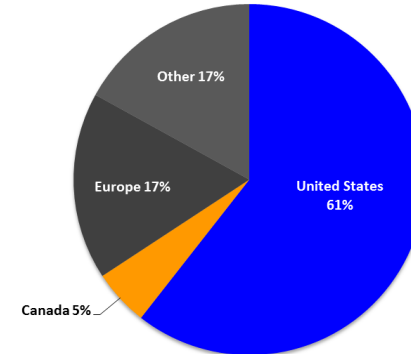
Other 17%
Europe 17%
Canada 5%
United States 61%

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Number of Employees
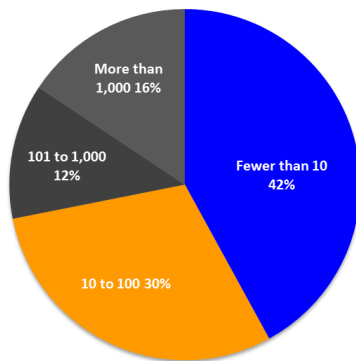
More than 1,000 16%
101 to 1,000 12%
Fewer than 10 42%
10 to 100 30%

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Role in the Company

Other 9%
Marketing or Biz Dev Staff 12%
Owner or Officer 44%
Marketing or Biz Dev Mgmt 35%

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About Ascend2

Connecting Agencies to Prospective Clients with the Power of Research

Marketing agencies and marketing automation firms partner with Ascend2 to generate new business opportunities. An integrated research, content creation and lead generation process delivers richly qualified leads while positioning your marketing firm as a thought-leader for solving a client's specific challenges.

Learn more at www.Ascend2.com

Ascend2 Client Connection Research^(tm) Process.
Connecting agencies to clients with the power of research.

The goal is to make new business development more effective for marketing agencies and marketing SaaS firms by integrating research, content creation and demand generation. This proprietary process generates richly qualified and profiled leads at both the research survey and content marketing stages.

White label strategy outlook reports and the leads generated during this process are available to marketing services firms on a pay-for-performance basis segmented by contact role, company type, size and geographic region on the following topics:

- Social Media Marketing
- Lead Generation
- Content Marketing
- Email Marketing
- Organic Search (SEO)
- Landing Page Optimization
- Inbound Marketing
- Paid Search (PPC)
- Web Analytics
- Digital Marketing