



Improving the **Buying** **Experience** With Content

Executive Summary

Content is one of the most-discussed marketing and sales strategies used by enterprises today, and with good reason: survey after survey places content at or near the top of executives' sales and marketing priorities.

With that in mind, it's troubling that four out of five marketing and sales professionals only have access to content they say doesn't help them much, according to a new survey by Showpad. The survey, comprising 504 respondents working for medium-to-large businesses across the United States, United Kingdom, and mainland Europe, found that just 20% of marketers and sales professionals today are able to fully take advantage of content's benefits.

78%

believe content
is sub par

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These high performers – whose content is effective at converting prospects, securing repeat sales, and building brand reputation – represent the ideal for executives today. So what sets them apart? How can companies learn from their example?

Based on the findings of the survey, the key lies in embracing sales enablement. That term, while relatively common – 85% of respondents said it's used to describe strategies at their organization – isn't nearly as well understood in conjunction with content. More than 80% of respondents reported being very familiar with content, while 67% said the same of sales enablement.

The concept itself is simple: empower sales professionals to create enjoyable buying experiences by giving them access to the right content, for the right people, at the right time. This is the differentiator for high performers.

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underperforming content. This represents a huge gap between prioritization and success, making it clear that focusing more on content isn't sufficient to actually drive revenue.

Instead, the highest performing marketers and sales professionals are more likely to share two common characteristics: **they have access to customized, targeted content; and they know how to create great buying experience by sharing the right content with the right audience at the right time.** In other words, marketers and sales professionals who are most effective at using content have most closely adopted the concept of sales enablement.

HIGH PERFORMERS ARE

52%

more likely to strongly agree that different pieces of their company's content are designed for different audiences.

65%

more likely to strongly agree that they **understand the impact** that different pieces of content can have on customers.

70%

more likely to strongly agree that different pieces of their company's content are **designed for different stages** in the sales cycle / funnel.

73%

more likely to strongly agree that they know **which content is most useful at specific points** in the sales cycle.

HIGH PERFORMERS

Are more likely to strongly agree that the people who create content at their company are responsive to feedback from the people who use it (61% vs. 45%) and to report that they've got a formal feedback mechanism in place to facilitate that process (61% vs. 43%).

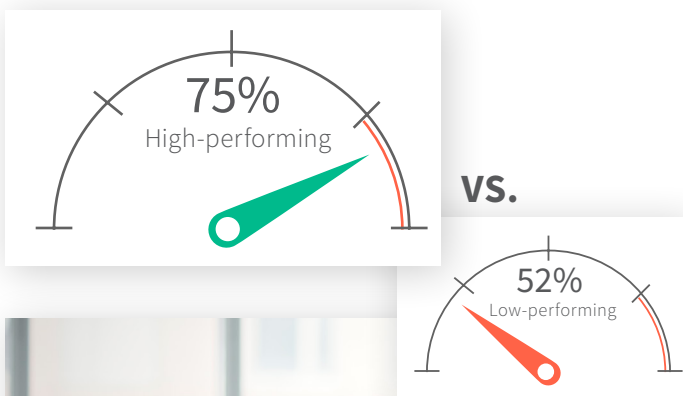
They're also more likely to be able to **learn from their colleagues' experience** with using content (72% high performers vs. 48% low performers).

Sales enablement also hinges on a few additional requirements, chief among them close collaboration between marketing and sales departments. Content is the material that most closely links marketers with their sales counterparts, but it can be difficult to manage complementary but different objectives.

But for companies that can unlock that cooperation, the benefits are clear:

- High performing marketing and sales professionals are significantly more likely to report that their departments **collaborate very closely** (75% high-performing vs. 52% low-performing).
- High performing marketers and salespeople also said they are **very satisfied with the amount of collaboration between their teams** (69% vs. 48%).

Even on a cultural level, high performers rate interactions and quality of collaboration with their counterparts more positively. Through close collaboration between their marketing and sales departments, companies should be striving to meet the ideal of sales enablement. The benefits are unquestionable; all that's needed is adoption.



Understanding What Content Means

“Content” is a hazily-defined term. In a marketing and sales context, it’s generally accepted that content has to be able to stand on its own – i.e. it needs to be self-contained enough to be consumed independent of other marketing or promotional materials. For the purposes of this study, the following definition was used:

Externally facing materials (written, audio, and or visual) created by a company for the purpose of supporting sales, marketing, and/or communications efforts. This includes:

- Website materials / blog posts
- E-books, white papers, brochures
- Videos posted to YouTube, social media, and/or other websites
- Podcasts or vlogs
- Infographics and research reports
- Thought leadership materials
- How-to guides
- Case studies
- Q&A/FAQs
- Webinars and slideshares
- Newsletters

Content and advertising materials are linked; generally, advertising materials can be classified as content as long as they are used outside of a purely paid context.

To explore the connection between sales enablement, content, and success, Showpad commissioned a survey of 504 marketers and sales professionals at medium- to large- enterprises across the United States (n=254), United Kingdom (n=150), and mainland Europe, specifically Germany and France (n=100).



All marketers and sales professionals who were included in this survey, and are referred to in this report, work for – or represent via their main client relationship – a company with at least 200 employees. They also interact with content (i.e. reference, distribute, or create) in some way.

Sales Enablement and Content

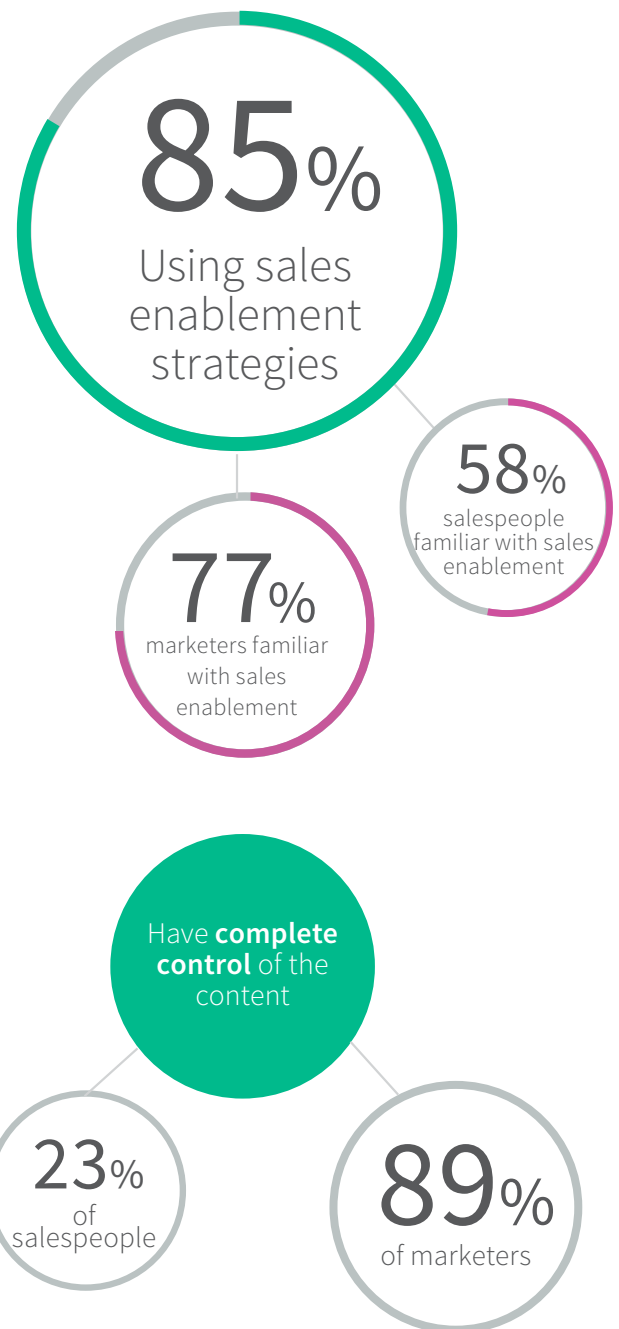
The cutting edge of content strategy today revolves around sales enablement: empowering sales professionals to access and distribute the **right content**, to the **right prospects**, at the **right time**. The phrase is now commonly known, though less so than content, which was a well-known term by 98% of respondents:

- 85% of marketers and salespeople in the US, UK, and Europe report using sales enablement to describe specific sales/marketing strategies.
- It is much more widely used among marketers than their sales counterparts, with 77% of marketers reporting that they are very familiar with the concept, and only 58% of sales professionals reporting the same.
- 42% of marketers think their company puts too much emphasis on content, while 27% of sales professionals believe the same

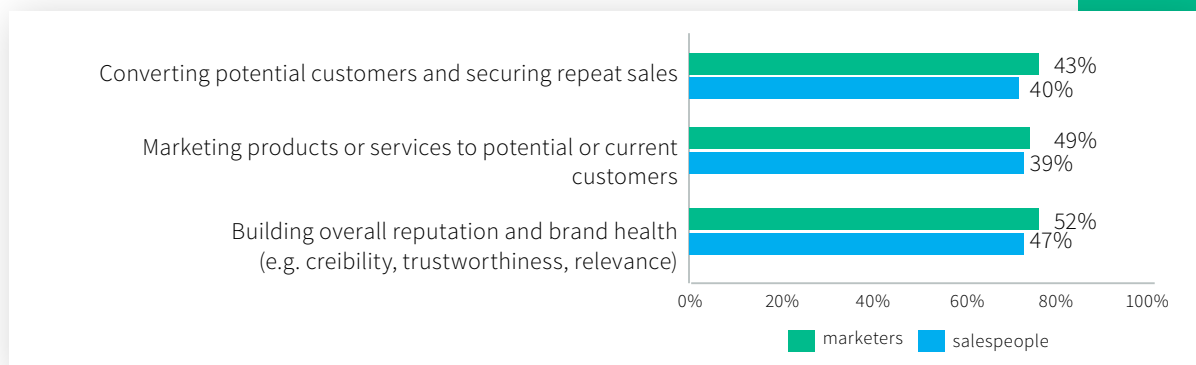
The disparity in understanding between marketers and sales professionals over the concept of sales enablement and content's role in that process underscores one of the biggest problems: tension between the marketers who drive content strategy and the sales professionals who use it.


In general, marketers **tend to have more control over content**:

- 89% of marketers report having complete control over at least some of the content their company creates, while 23% fewer sales professionals report the same amount of control.
- On average, sales believes that content creation is split nearly evenly between marketing (52%) and sales (48%); marketers, on the other hand, believe that it is closer to 60%-40% in their favor.



1.1. Content is very effective at:





80% of marketers and sales professionals believe content is effective at accomplishing at least one of these three overarching objectives:

- To **market specific products and services** (i.e. for marketing)
- To help **convert potential customers** and secure **repeat sales** (i.e. for sales)
- To **build overall reputation and brand health** (i.e. the characteristic that sets content apart from other marketing materials).

Four out of five (80%) marketers and sales professionals think content is effective at accomplishing at least one of the three overarching objectives:

- Converting potential customers and securing repeat sales
- Marketing products or services to potential customers
- Building overall reputation and brand health

That also implies that one in five marketers and sales professionals is a content skeptic who doesn't believe that content is effective at any of them.

Even among content skeptics, there is tacit acknowledgement that some content is effective. Half of marketers and sales professionals who believe content as a concept isn't effective think that their own content is effective at accomplishing at least one task that supports the three overarching objectives.

Diving deeper into the specific aspects that make up the overall three objectives, marketers and sales professionals think content is effective at accomplishing both soft objectives, such as building trust (80%) and raising awareness (79%), and hard objectives – such as demonstrating specific benefits (79%) and converting potential customers (79%).

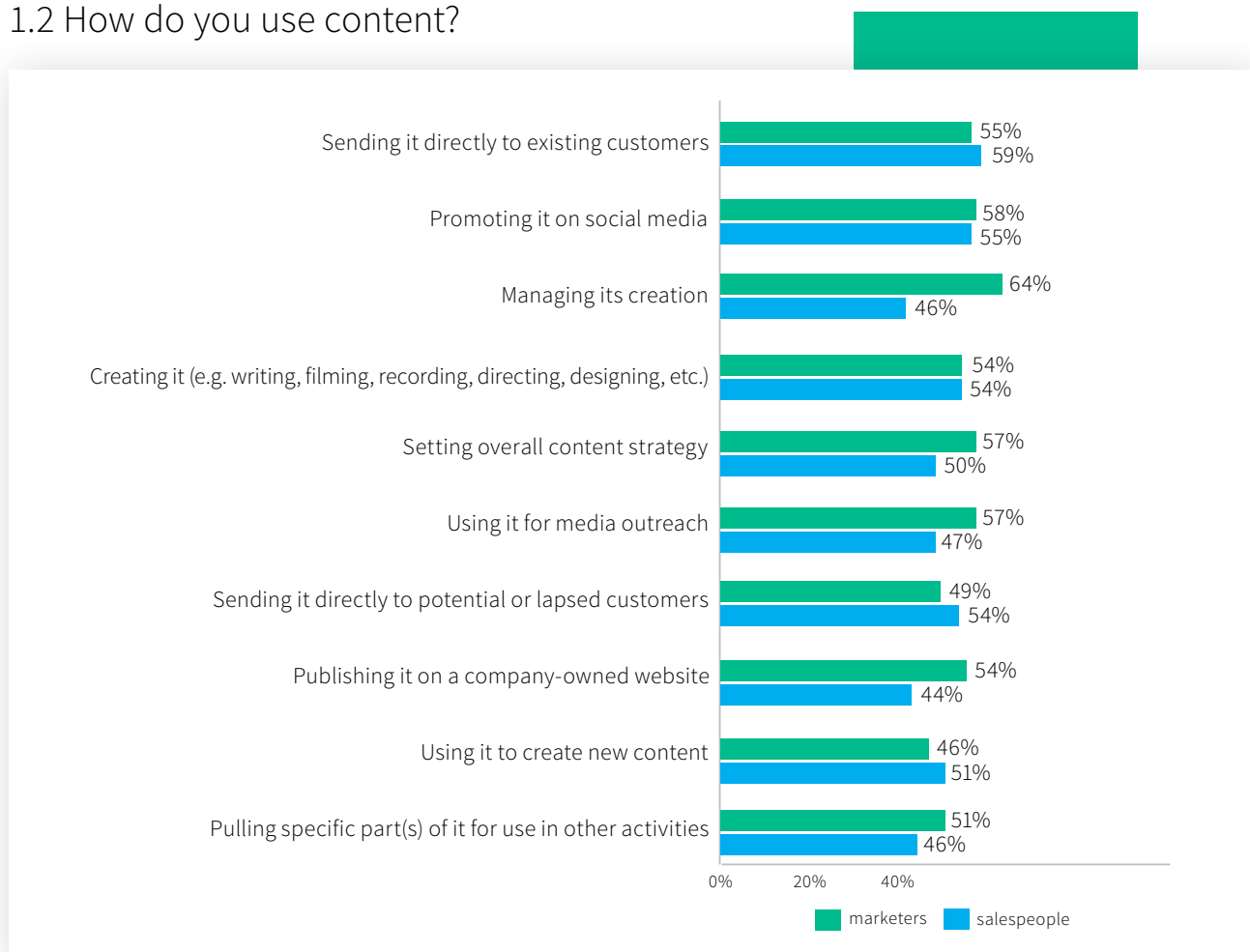
Sales professionals and marketers exhibit no significant difference in their views of content's effectiveness at any one specific task. They are just as likely to view content as effective at the full range of sales, marketing, and brand-building tasks.

Even more surprising than their similar views on content's effectiveness, marketers and sales professionals use content in almost the same ways. Though marketers are more likely to manage content creation, publish content on a company website, or use it for media outreach, the other ways that marketers and sales professionals use content is quite similar (see chart 1.3)

Measuring impact and return on investment (ROI) are key components in any business campaign today, and logically that focus has extended to content. High-performing marketing and sales professionals are twice as likely to strongly agree that the impact of their content can be quantified (70% high performers vs. 34% low performers) and also more likely to strongly agree that their company can measure the ROI of its content (69% vs. 41%).

High performers are also less likely to encounter tension between the sales and marketing departments at their company. They are more likely to report that the two functions collaborate very closely at their company (75% high-performing vs. 52% low-performing), and are more likely to be very satisfied at the overall amount of collaboration (69% vs. 48%). The quality of interactions is also rated more positively; high-performing marketers are more likely to describe interactions with their sales counterparts as very positive (81% vs. 61%); the same is true with high-performing sales professionals (65% vs. 43%).

1.2 How do you use content?



Conclusion

Content today is ubiquitous. But the most advanced iteration of content strategy is sales enablement – ensuring that content is a living, fluid resource that supports sales efforts at any part of the customer journey.

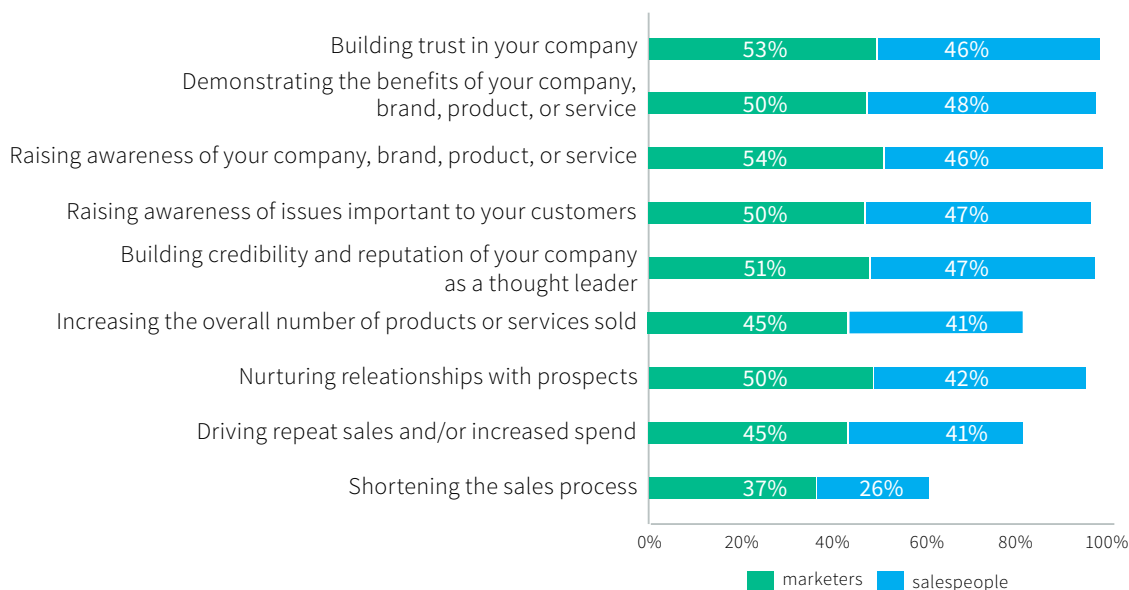
The lag in sales enablement adoption and proliferation represents a major missed opportunity for companies today. The underlying tenet of sales enablement – giving professionals access to the right content, for the right people, at the right time – is the defining characteristic that can separate high-performing content users from the low-performing ones. Sales and marketing professionals who have the most effective content are more likely to report that their content is tailored for specific audiences and for specific

points in the sales cycle / funnel. They are also more likely to report knowing which audience will respond best to which content, and the right time to use content. Placing a priority on content isn't enough; more than three quarters of marketers and sales professionals who work at a company that places a priority on content nonetheless have to make do with materials that fall short in at least one key area.

There are also organizational factors that play a part in determining content effectiveness. Content, more than other marketing materials, blurs the line between marketing and sales; it is (or should be) designed to be equally useful to both functions. Given that dual purpose, it is only logical that close collaboration will produce the best content – a hypothesis that is fully supported by the data. The highest-performing marketers and sales professionals are more likely to have the closest functional alignment, to be very satisfied in the amount of collaboration, and to report the highest positivity in interactions with the other function.

As companies look to constantly refine and improve their content to better reach their buyers and customers, the data indicates a clear roadmap: pursuing the ideal of sales enablement through close collaboration and alignment between revenue-generating functions. The road is clearly marked; it's up to companies today to make sure they take it.

1.3 Content is useful for:



Methodology

The survey reflected in this document was designed by Showpad in conjunction with March Communications; respondent recruitment was handled by Precision Sample, LLC. The survey was fielded online between February 23, 2017 and March 15, 2017.

The overall sample size is n=504, with a margin of error of $\pm 4.4\%$ at a 95% confidence level. Of the total sample, the following categorizations are present:

- Country: n=254 United States; n=150 United Kingdom; n=100 mainland Europe (Germany and France)
- Job role: n=237 Marketing; n=267 Sales
- Job level: n=365 Senior leadership (e.g. C-Suite, Executive Vice President, Senior Vice President, General Manager, etc.); n=139 Non-senior leadership

Respondents spanned all industry verticals. The most common was retail/retail ecommerce (16%), followed by technology (12%), manufacturing & industry (11%), financial services (9%) and consumer goods (7%).

Participants in the survey were divided into two groups based on their responses: 102 are “high performers,” who see their company’s content as highly effective at accomplishing all three of its overarching objectives; and 402 are “low performers,” whose content falls short in at least one area. Consistent with the whole of the survey data, both groups comprise a nearly equal split of marketers and sales professionals (46%-54% high performers, and 47%-53% for low performers). Performance was also consistent across countries; the US, UK, and mainland Europe all had roughly equal proportions of high and low performers. By looking at the differences between high performers and low performers, the data indicates what companies can do to ensure their content is effective.

