

THE STATE OF  
DIGITAL MEDIA  
2 0 1 8

presented by [Influence&CO.](#)

# Table of Contents

## **05 Part One: Editor Survey**

- 06 Guest Posting Opportunity in 2018
- 07 The Biggest Reasons Editors Publish Guest Posts
- 08 Content Types Editors Plan to Publish This Year
- 09 The Times of Year When Guest Content Is in High Demand
- 10 From Pitch to Publication: Factors That Determine When Guest Content Goes Live
- 11 The Biggest Reasons Editors Reject Guest Content
- 12 What Great Guest Content Looks Like, According to Editors

## **13 Part Two: Published Content Analysis**

- 14 Headline and Article Word Count Trends
- 15 Comparing Content Publication and Engagement
- 17 Social Platform Popularity
- 18 Methodology

# Each of us benefits from a world of better content.

When content is more thoughtfully created, more professionally edited, and more specifically targeted to a unique audience, everyone wins — readers, content marketers, thought leaders, and publication editors alike.

But none of that is possible without data and insight into what's working now and what needs our attention in the future. That's why the Influence & Co. team has produced its second annual **"State of Digital Media" report.**

Driven by survey responses from 84 online publication editors across industries and an analysis of more than 3.5 million pieces of digital content published in 2017, this report provides both a snapshot of the current state of content and insights for content creators, marketers, and publishers so they can better serve the audiences they share.

**Read on for the full findings from our annual research.**

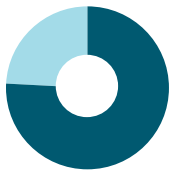
## About Influence & Co.

**Influence & Co. is a content marketing agency that combines a team of content marketing experts with custom technology and relationships with top online publications to provide our clients a turnkey solution to content marketing.**

# Key Findings



**94 percent** of editors plan to publish the same amount of or more guest content in 2018.



**76 percent** of editors publish **1-10 guest posts** per week.



**79 percent** of editors say the biggest problem with guest content is that it's too promotional — an **increase of 8 percentage points** from 2017.



**67 percent** of editors plan to publish video content in 2018 — an **increase of 12 percentage points** from 2017.



The **average word count** of content with more than 1,000 shares is **722**.

# Part One: Editor Survey

If you're looking to get your brand and your content in front of a targeted audience of engaged readers, you've probably considered adding guest-contributed content to your strategy.

Guest-contributed content is pretty self-explanatory: It's content that you contribute. This content positions you, the thought leader, as an expert by placing your original ideas in publications that validate your work and help you reach your audience.

Also known as “guest posting,” this practice involves creating a unique piece of content specifically for a targeted publication and pitching it to that publication editor. It's an effective, mutually beneficial exchange that gives editors new content to share with readers and contributors the chance to reach new audiences.

Online publications are a natural place to reach your audience members and engage them with

content — and when it's properly integrated into your content marketing strategy, guest posting can help you build industry leadership, drive qualified traffic to your site, and contribute to a funnel of opportunity.

Still, earning a byline in the right publication takes more than writing 700 words on your favorite topic and shopping it around to whoever will accept it. Successful guest contribution requires an understanding of which publications your audience reads, what kind of content editors crave, and how to craft content that engages your audience as well as it meets those editors' guidelines.

To help, we surveyed publication editors from a variety of industries. Read on to learn more about what they said.

# Guest Posting Opportunity in 2018

The success of your guest posting strategy relies on two critical factors: your ability to produce amazing content and editors' willingness to accept content from guest authors like you. Thankfully, editors report that they plan to accept and publish a good amount of guest content in 2018.

In fact, **76 percent of editors** publish 1-10 guest articles each week.

Broken down further, that looks like this:

- 57 percent say they publish 1-5 posts.
- 19 percent say they publish 5-10 posts.

While 6 percent of editors don't publish any guest content:

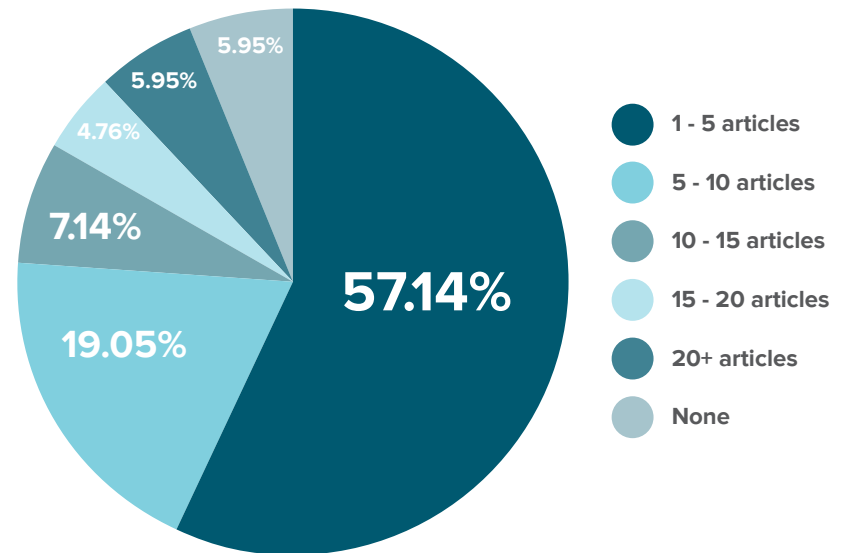
- 18 percent say they would publish more than 10 posts.

This indicates a lot of opportunity for thought leaders and industry experts to contribute content to online publications. Done correctly, your content can position you and your company as industry experts and leaders in front of your target audience.

Publication editors are looking for articles written by experts. To contribute successfully, it's important to understand why they accept and publish guest content in the first place.

On top of that, **94 percent of editors** say they plan to increase or maintain the current amount of guest content they publish in 2018.

Publications' Avg. Contributed Articles Published per Week



# The Biggest Reasons Editors Publish Guest Posts

Every editor is different. Each has his or her own unique needs and goals, and each serves a specific audience. Still, there are some benefits to publishing guest content that editors across outlets and industries agree on.

The biggest reason publication editors accept and publish guest content is to share fresh perspectives, expert opinions, and variety in the content they provide their audiences.

Editors have also noticed that guest posts garner more page views, boost traffic, and help grow their audience, and that makes them more eager to accept content from outside experts.

Finally, editors plan to launch new content offerings, like podcasts and newsletters, and need more content to support these new content efforts.



**Harvard  
Business  
Review**

“Harvard Business Review has always been written by experts. ... **Whenever I edit something, I ask myself, ‘How does this author know what she knows? Why should the CEO of a major corporation listen to her?’ Real experts have that kind of authority and rigor.**”

— Sarah Green Carmichael, Executive Editor, Harvard Business Review



 **CONVINCE&CONVERT**  
WITH JAY BAER

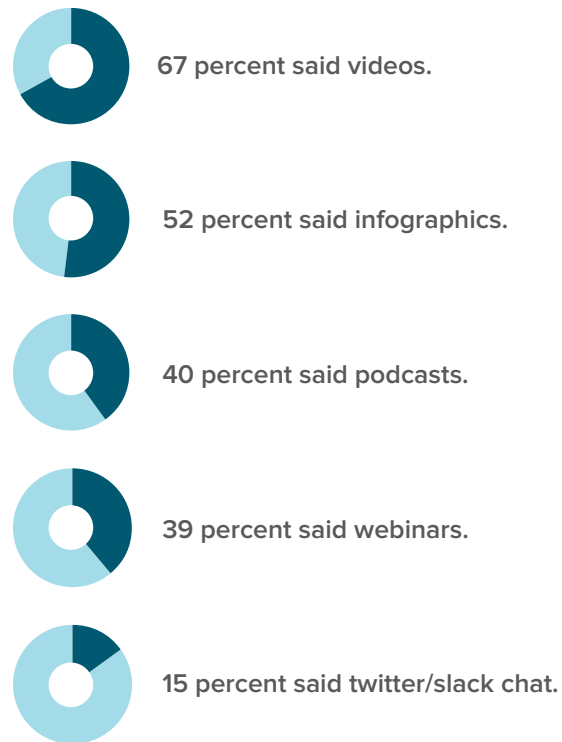
“I would love to see more original research and original takes on topics. ... No one needs another how-to post or list about something that any skilled copywriter could research and write. **We need more original ideas, new takeaways, and deeper analysis on the amazing research and resources that are out there.** Bonus points for original, fun, and engaging graphics that aren’t just pulled from another stock photo site.”

— Jess Ostroff, Managing Editor, Convince & Convert

# Content Types Editors Plan to Publish This Year

Written content is incredibly effective and easily scalable — but it's not the only way audiences enjoy consuming content. And because audiences consume various content types, editors are looking to meet those needs by accepting a variety of content.

## When we asked what other forms of media editors plan to publish in 2018:

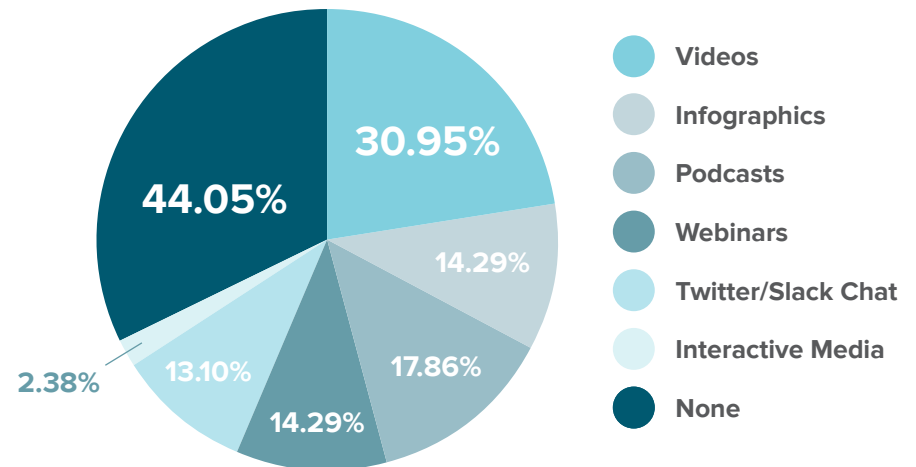


Video content is the most popular form of new media that editors plan to publish — or are already publishing — this year. However, it's worth noting that it's also the one type of media editors need the most help producing.

In fact, **31 percent of editors** report not having the capacity or means to publish video.

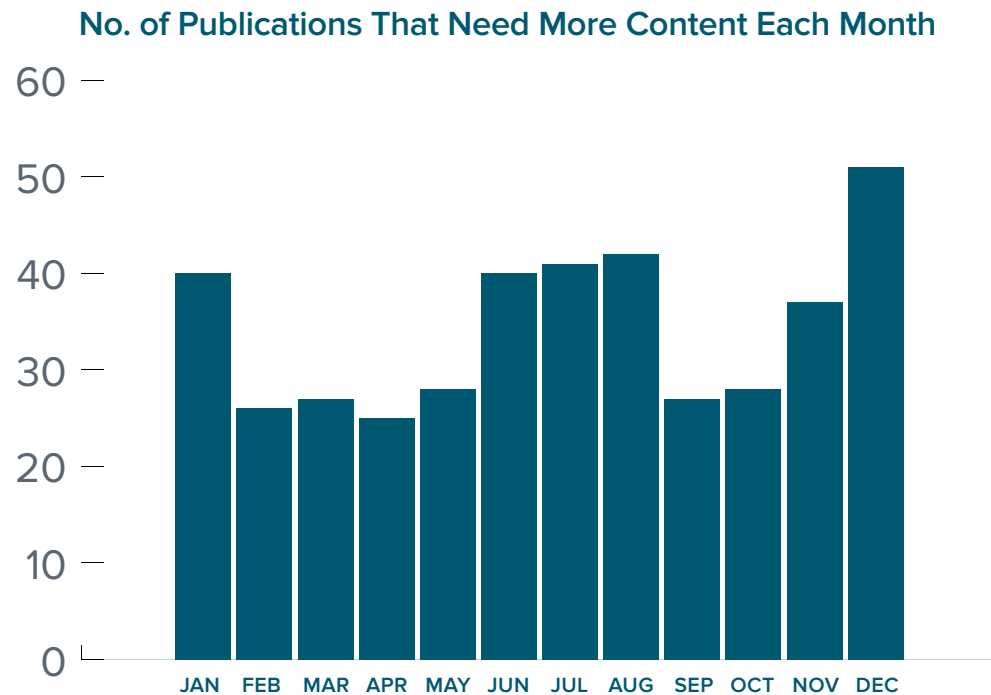
Publication editors are looking to meet their audiences' needs. If you can help them do so by contributing original, relevant ideas in a variety of ways, you'll have a better chance of earning acceptance.

## Editors who don't have the capacity/means to publish the following:





# The Times of Year When Guest Content Is in High Demand



Based on survey responses, editors seem to experience slumps in the summer and winter months.

Editors report needing more content in December than in any other month. That need continues into January, after which point editors seem to be in better shape until June, July, and August, when they can use more contributed content again.

Guest posting can absolutely be a year-round strategy for thought leaders and their marketing teams — but it's worth noting that some seasons might be better than others to increase your chances of acceptance.

# From Pitch to Publication: Factors That Determine When Guest Content Goes Live

As great as the guest content you're contributing might be, it will rarely be the only thing an editor has lined up to review at any given time. Between overseeing internal staff writers, coordinating with multiple guest contributors, publishing content, and plenty of other responsibilities, editors are busy, and your content might not publish right away.

Editors say the following factors contribute to the time it takes to publish the guest content they accept:



**71 percent** of editors said editing content contributes to the time it takes to publish.



**56 percent** of editors said a full editorial calendar/long editing queue is the biggest reason it takes time to publish guest content.

Let's look at the editorial calendar first. With 76 percent of editors publishing 1-10 guest pieces per week — and 94 percent planning to increase or maintain their current amount of guest content in 2018 — it should come as no surprise that editors' calendars might be full.

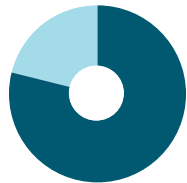
As for the biggest contributor to the time it takes to publish content: The editing of content is time-consuming, especially when an editor is working with an outside contributor. Professionally edited content can't clear an editorial calendar, but it can make an editor's job much easier.

The better shape your content is in when you submit it, the faster and easier it will be for an editor to review the content and move it forward. **Having a content marketing team and a well-designed process for producing and editing content that meets specific publication guidelines can help here.**

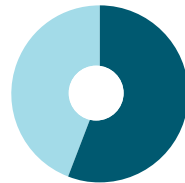
# The Biggest Reasons Editors Reject Guest Content

Just because guest content can benefit audiences, editors, and experts alike does not mean that all guest posts are guaranteed to go live. Editors are the gatekeepers, and they'll reject content that doesn't meet their guidelines.

When asked about the most common problems editors experience with guest-contributed content:



**79 percent** said content is too promotional.



**56 percent** said content isn't a fit for their readership.

Not surprisingly, editors who plan to decrease the amount of guest content they publish this year cited these same problems. When asked why they're decreasing guest content, the most consistent feedback was that they wanted to focus on diverse, high-quality expert content — content that they just weren't receiving from contributors.

Year after year, editors identify excessive promotion and poor fit as the biggest problems they have with guest content. Unfortunately, this trend hasn't changed — yet.

## What does it mean to be “too promotional”?

Promotion is hard to clearly define across the board. It's usually something that you know as soon as you see it, but there's not one universally recognized definition. We asked editors last year to weigh in, and here are three things they say make your content too promotional:

1. Forcing mentions of your company, products, or clients into an article
2. Including a link to your company's homepage in the body of an article
3. Writing about your industry as a vendor



**Harvard  
Business  
Review**

**“There are authors who will try to use their article to promote their consulting business, their software product, or their book, and that's such a turn-off — not only to me, but to potential readers.”**

— Sarah Green Carmichael, Executive Editor, Harvard Business Review

# What Great Guest Content Looks Like, According to Editors

The guest-contributed content that editors love to publish shares three critical qualities:

## 1. It's non-promotional.

Successful guest posts share new ideas and fresh perspectives with audiences — not self-serving advertisements and promotions.

## 2. The topic is a fit for the publication's readership.

Every publication and media outlet is unique, and editors expect guest-contributed content to speak to their specific audiences and meet those audiences' particular needs.

## 3. It shares original, expert-level insights.

Editors are looking for guest content that's full of relevant stories, examples, and original insights that come directly from you, the expert, as well as research to back up your claims.

### How Publication Editors Determine Success

While thought leaders and editors both seek to meet audiences' needs, they often look at different metrics to gauge their success. To determine the success of contributed content, editors report using metrics like:



Social shares:  
69 percent



Page views:  
93 percent



Time on site:  
75 percent

These metrics also reflect the top content goals editors said they're working toward in 2018, which include increasing readership and providing readers with more interesting, high-quality content.

Each of these metrics underscores the value of a loyal audience and a network of brand advocates who trust you. When you put the work into building an audience — something that Content Marketing Institute reports 80 percent of B2B marketers are focused on doing this year — you can expand the reach of your content and make your guest posts more successful.

Another effective way to expand your reach is to actively share and pay to promote your published content. Use your content to fuel your social media marketing, newsletters, and email campaigns and to enable your sales team in outreach and lead nurture.

Put spend behind your high-performing pieces of content and any article you want to make sure your audience notices. Not only does this help you and your company engage the right people, but it also drives traffic to your guest content, which editors say is a metric they use to determine success.

# Part Two: Published Content Analysis

Regardless of how groundbreaking your content is or how many editors accept and publish your guest posts, contributed content alone usually isn't enough to accomplish a full range of business goals. A robust content strategy that drives results includes a variety of earned and owned content that's amplified in numerous ways.

This section includes an analysis of more than 3.5 million pieces of content published last year and uncovers some of the best practices you can use to maximize the effectiveness of your content strategy.

# Headline and Article Word Count Trends

Every content creator knows how important headlines are. Not only is the headline the first thing a reader sees, but it's also what determines whether a reader will consume your content or scroll past it.

That's a lot of pressure, but it's not impossible to craft a headline worth reading. We reviewed millions of pieces of content, collected headline data from the most widely shared articles, and analyzed those trends to see what they had in common.

Among the 100 most-shared pieces of content on social media:

**68 percent** had a headline word count of 8-14 words.

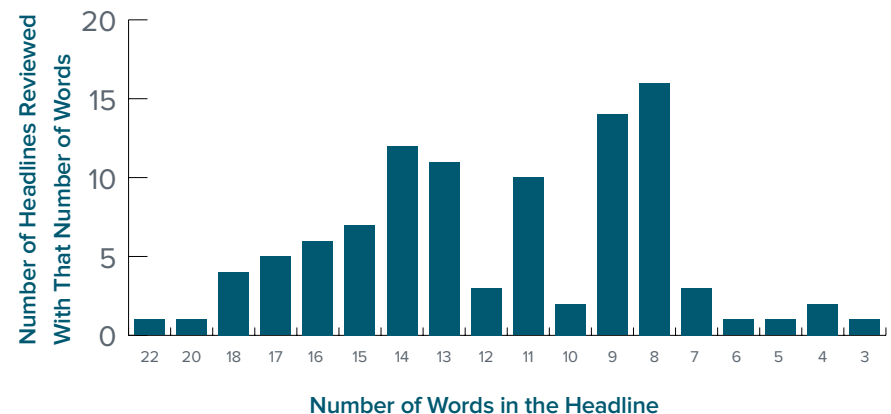
That said, **8 seems to be the magic number**; that's the number of words that appeared most frequently in the headlines of the most-shared content last year.

This is slightly different from our 2017 report's findings, which noted that the average headline was between 8 and 11 words. This year's findings indicate we might be seeing some growth in the word count among the most popular headlines.

And headlines aren't the only element of an article that has increased in word count since last year: **The average word count of content with 1,000 social shares or more is 722 words.** This is on the higher end of last year's findings, which saw an average word count of 590 to 790 words.

Readers appear to be more engaged with content that doesn't take them too long to consume but still explains fully how or why to do something. These headline and word count average trends speak to the value audiences place on their time and on the ability of brands to be concise yet compelling.

### Average Number of Words in a Headline

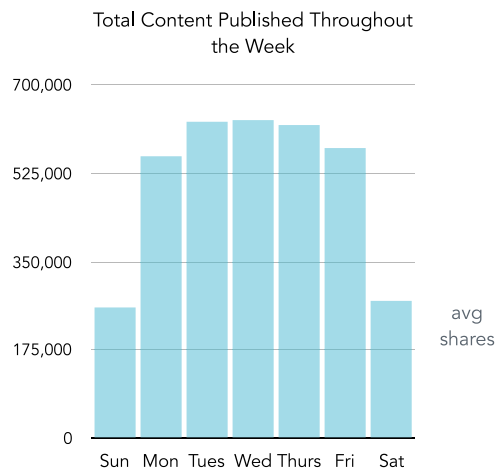


# Comparing Content Publication and Engagement

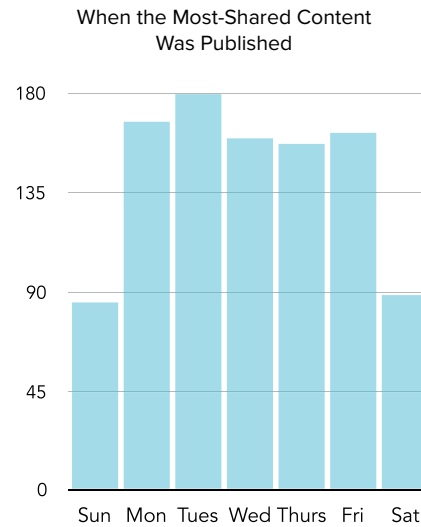
Countless factors affect when content is published, and just as many factors (if not more) affect when, why, and how consumers engage with it. You might not be able to control exactly when each piece of content in your strategy is published, but being aware of when most content is published and when audiences engage with it can help you optimize the efforts you control.

Let's start with a weekly view.

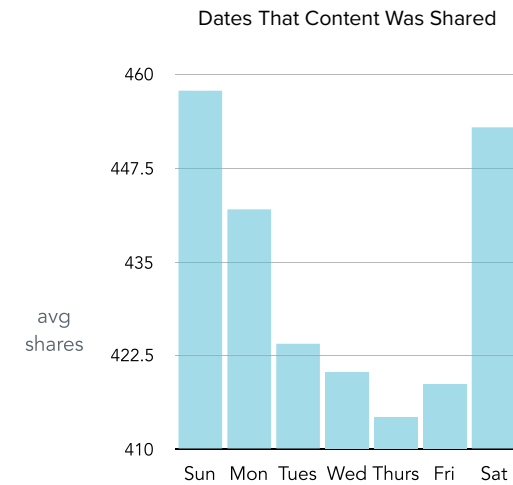
Content was most often published midweek on Wednesdays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. **Publication drops off on the weekends, with the lowest rate on Sundays.**



Content that received the most engagement was published on Tuesdays.



People are most engaged with content on the weekends, liking, sharing, commenting on, and reacting to content on social media more often on Sundays than any other day.



If this looks familiar, that's because data from our 2017 report showed similar trends: Content is typically published midweek, yet audiences are more engaged with content on the weekends. If you control your publishing schedule, weekend publication dates might offer lower competition and higher chances for engagement.

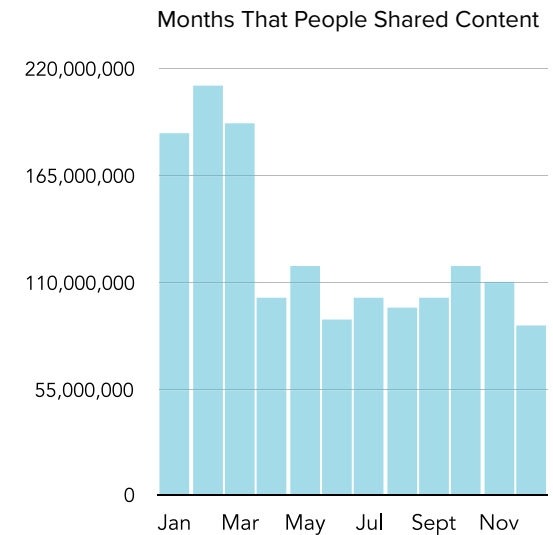
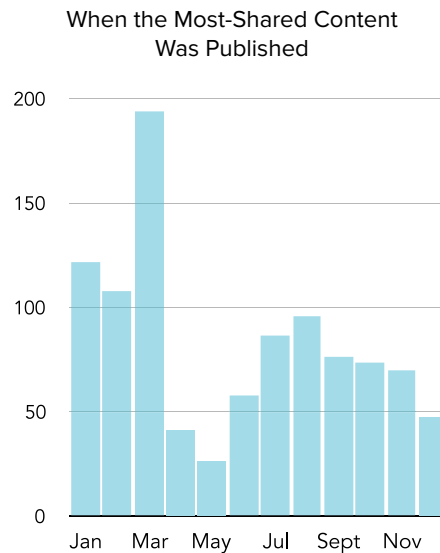
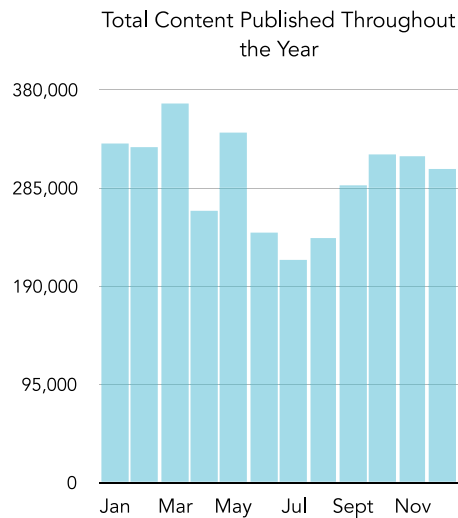
# Comparing Content Publication and Engagement

Now, let's zoom out to a monthly view.

Our analysis found that most content was published at the beginning or end of the year — with the exception of a spike in May.

Content that received the most engagement was published in the first quarter, specifically in March.

Audiences were more much more engaged with content at the beginning of the year than toward the middle or end. In fact, December was the lowest month for content engagement.



These findings might reinforce the value of starting the year strong. On average, audiences engage with more content in the beginning of the year, and content publication nosedives in the summer. Publishing and promoting high-quality, engaging content early in the year could lay a strong foundation for the months to come.

(It's important to note that any number of factors can have an effect on this data. Keyword analysis of the most-shared headlines indicates that the election and inauguration of a new president might have played a role in the engagement rates of published content early in 2017.)



# Social Platform Popularity

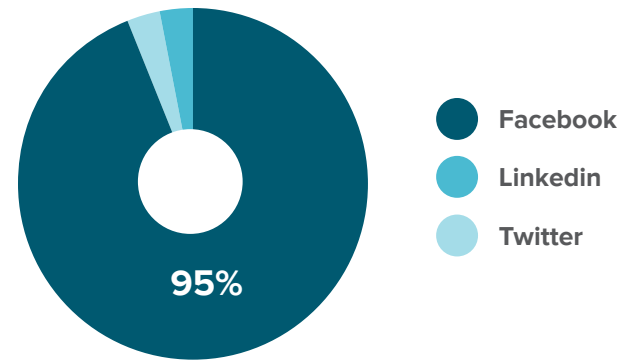
The days of mindlessly sharing your content with the same update across all your channels and calling it “distribution” are over. Today, effective marketers know that every platform is different, and content on each one must be tailored to that channel and the audience that makes it unique.

We analyzed more than 3.5 million pieces of content and drilled down into the top 1,000 to understand where the highest-performing content is engaged with most. Among those top 1,000 pieces of content, we found the following platforms to be the most popular:

1. Facebook
2. Twitter
3. LinkedIn

Facebook remains a powerful social network for sharing and engaging with content. This could be because it offers users several ways to engage by liking, reacting, sharing, and commenting. Worth noting, however, is Twitter’s rise over LinkedIn since last year’s report, which found Twitter to be losing ground.

**We analyzed more than 3.5 million pieces of content and drilled down into the top 1,000 to understand where the highest-performing content is engaged with most.**



## Methodology

This report was compiled based on survey results from 84 online publication editors at the standard **95 percent confidence level with a 10.3 percent margin of error, along with proprietary data** from Influence & Co.'s content marketing software, ICo Core, and an analysis of more than 3.5 million pieces of published content.

As with any survey, this data is not absolute. Please remember that these insights are based on self-reported responses from publication editors, including some with whom Influence & Co. works and others with whom we do not currently have relationships. These results do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the publishing industry as a whole.

## About Influence & Co.

Influence & Co. is a content marketing agency that combines a team of content marketing experts with custom technology and relationships with top online publications to provide our clients a turnkey solution to content marketing.

With our custom content marketing software and more than 1,500 editor relationships at online publications across more than 20 industry verticals, we focus on creating and distributing engaging content, coming from our clients, that reaches their target audiences online and accomplishes their business goals.

If you'd like to learn more about our custom content marketing software or our relationships with more than 1,500 publication editors in industries ranging from technology and finance to marketing, entrepreneurship, and general business, [\*\*contact us\*\*](#).