

A high-angle, top-down photograph of a group of people in a meeting. They are gathered around a dark wooden table. A silver laptop is open on the table, and a person's hand is visible near the trackpad. A tablet is also visible on the right side of the table. The people are wearing business casual attire. The background shows a patterned rug and a blue chair.

Drop Everything and Do Content Marketing

101 Stats, Facts and Hacks to Help B2B Companies Drive Leads, Brand Awareness and Sales



B2B MARKETING EXPERTS

Introduction

At the dawn of the decade, B2B companies were seeing major changes in the way buyers wanted to approach a purchase. More and more buyers were going online and doing their own research instead of consulting sales reps. Now that we're coming to the end of the decade, B2B buyers are doing 94%¹ of their own research online without sales rep intervention. Forrester predicts that by 2020, one million B2B sales people in the US alone will lose their jobs due to this phenomenon.² What does this mean for your business? Marketing is critical to B2B sales – and content marketing is its voice, so use it well.





What is Content Marketing?

Content marketing is about more than just words. It takes both art and science – creating the right copy, choosing the right medium and distributing it to the right people in the right channel at the right time. Content marketing is made up of marketing tactics, such as blogs, whitepapers, eBooks, infographics, videos, webinars and more. Its primary goal is to educate and inform. Its secondary goal is to establish a relationship between your brand and your audience to ultimately attract new customers and drive revenue.

Content marketing isn't only the act of executing and distributing content; it also needs a strategic plan, management and maintenance. These entail establishing a certain cadence with your marketing, like a weekly or monthly blog and then planning out the year, managing content creation and distribution and maintaining subscriptions and publishing frequency.

The State of Play in Content Marketing

In our 2019 B2B Marketing Benchmark Study, CEOs/senior executives of small to midsize companies cited marketing (76%), not sales, as the function that will have the most impact on their business this year. There was a time when “sales” would have been the automatic response. It's no longer a secret that marketing is the biggest sales influencer and that content marketing has a huge role to play. But the world of content marketing is getting a little more complicated. Today, it's not just a matter of generating quantity and being one of the first in your field to produce blogs, newsletters, webinars and more. With the amount of content available, B2B buyers are now gravitating to the highest quality. They are becoming much more selective about the content they give their time to when educating themselves about a product or service.

Content Marketing Drives Business Results



When asked to select their top 3 marketing goals over the next 12 months, the CEOs/senior executives in our 2019 Marketing Benchmark Study responded with:



87%
Generate leads



47%
Increase brand awareness



44%
Improve conversion of opportunities to deals

Lead generation (#1) and **brand awareness** (#2) go hand-in-hand in B2B marketing. You can spend all the money in the world trying to generate leads, but if you have no credibility (which comes from awareness), very few prospects will do business with you. At the same time, the content marketing that you're using to generate leads is also helping to grow your brand awareness. When it comes to converting opportunities to deals or sales (#3), content marketing informs and nurtures (and tracks) buyers throughout the buying process, bringing them further down the funnel than ever before.

When the Content Marketing Institute asked B2B marketers what goals they are achieving through content marketing, they also cited lead generation, brand awareness and sales/deals³:



81%
Create brand awareness



73%
Educate audience



68%
Build credibility/trust



68%
Generate demand/leads



58%
Nurture subscribers, audience, leads



54%
Build loyalty with existing clients



49%
Drive attendance to in-person events



45%
Generate sales/revenue



43%
Build a subscribed audience



40%
Support a new product launch

It's surprising that educating the audience is number two in this list. Education should always be the number one goal of content marketing. If you get that one right, all of the others, from growing brand awareness to generating leads and revenue will all fall into place. Well researched content that educates buyers, answers their questions and speaks to their pain points is essential.

A woman with short grey hair and glasses, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, is speaking and gesturing with her hands in a meeting. She is seated at a wooden table with a smartphone and a coffee cup. Other people are partially visible in the background.

What Do B2B Buyers Want in the Content They Consume?

B2B buyers are looking for content from trustworthy sources, including industry thought leaders and peer recommendations, to help steer them along the path to purchase. Since 51% of buyers feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of content available,⁴ it's important to make yours stand out visually, in addition to producing quality writing.

Most buyers (88%) say they want content that focuses less on product features and more on the benefits to their business.⁴ Over 75% want content customized for their company's needs,⁵ and 75% strongly agree that there should be more data and research to back up claims.⁴ B2B buyers need to know how their company will benefit, backed by data to support those claims, not only because buying is a great responsibility but also because they need the data to support their own internal sell to other stakeholders in the company.

Buyers' content consumption habits are changing rapidly. When asked in a recent study how their consumption had changed in one year⁴:

- 78% placed a higher emphasis on the trustworthiness of the source
- 65% now prefer to read credible content from industry influencers
- 58% now prefer longer formats and more in-depth reads

And where B2B buyers consume content is also changing: 84% say they frequently or occasionally access business-related content on their smartphones.⁴ Five years ago, only 69% of B2B buyers thought content needed to be mobile-ready.⁶ Millennials, especially, are having a big impact on how content is being consumed. They are now the largest demographic in the workforce. Even if they don't have direct buying power, they are often in the role of researcher/influencer and they expect to be able to consume content on their phones.

Content Is Influential Throughout the Buying Process

When it comes to the buying process overall, buyers prefer different content formats at different buying stages. This will of course vary by industry, but in general B2B buyers are looking for:

| Early Stage of the Buying Process ⁴ | Mid Stage of the Buying Process ⁴ | Late Stage of the Buying Process ⁴ |
|--|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Infographics (76%) 2. B2B media/news sites (65%) 3. Podcasts (64%) 4. eBooks (62%) 5. Industry newsletters/publications (61%) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Third-party/analyst reports (48%) 2. Webinars (48%) 3. Interactive content (43%) 4. Case studies (42%) 5. Blogs by thought leaders/industry analysts (40%) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ROI calculators (48%) 2. Case studies (42%) 3. Assessments (40%) 4. Colleague and peer reviews (35%) 5. Third-party/analyst reports (25%) |

Seeing blogs at the bottom of the mid-stage list is a bit surprising, especially since the same survey found that the popularity of blogs has increased, and 71% of B2B buyers said they consumed blog post content.⁴ Blogs also led the pack in shareability, with 74% sharing blogs with colleagues.⁴

Content Is Not Only Consumed, It's Shared

While it's difficult for buyers to share the details of a demo or the substance of a sales pitch with colleagues, marketing content can be passed along in its entirety. The following is a list of content B2B buyers consider most sharable with colleagues⁴:



Blog posts (74%)



Case studies (64%)



Infographics (62%)



Whitepapers (61%)



Webinars (61%)

In terms of how B2B buyers share their content, email wins at 70%, followed by LinkedIn (52%) and Facebook (38%).⁴

Content Marketing Develops Relationships

When a prospective buyer engages with your content, it establishes and deepens their relationship with your brand. They are actively choosing to spend time with your content over others. However, because there is so much content available, they are also devoting less time to consuming each piece. The majority of B2B buyers spend the following amount of time with⁴:

- Blogs: 5-10 minutes
- eBooks: 5-10 minutes
- Podcasts: < 5 minutes
- Whitepapers: 10-20 minutes
- Case studies: 5-10 minutes
- Infographics: < 5 minutes
- Webinars: 30-60 minutes

It's not surprising that buyers spend the most time engaging with your webinar content, since webinars run 30-60 minutes. What is notable here is that you have the buyer's undivided attention during that time. That is golden. And 61% of buyers then share the recorded webinar.⁴ As a marketing tactic, webinars can hold a lot of sway, so consider adding them to your toolkit. If you don't want to take on the time/expense of doing it alone, a good marketing hack is to partner with another, complementary company, and divide the presentation into two halves that make one fantastic whole. You not only share the burden of creating and presenting the webinar but you also have the advantage of marketing to both company's lists, increasing your reach. It's really a win-win.

Content Marketing Generates and Nurtures Quality Leads

When it comes to building qualified lead lists, webinars share the top spot with whitepapers, as 75% of buyers stated they would share more information about themselves and their company in exchange for this content.⁴

Buyers who are reading your content have an interest in your industry or specialty and a greater chance of conversion. Use your content to both generate and nurture leads throughout the funnel. A good way to generate leads is by sending 3-4 weekly emails in succession with links to high value content, like whitepapers, infographics, webinars or articles. Ensure you send prospects to a landing page with a form fill so you can collect some of their data. But don't make the forms too arduous.

To nurture leads, you need to understand where a buyer is in the funnel, what information they need at that moment and what format they like to consume. Lead nurturing, therefore, requires a high level of personalization. And this is where marketing automation (MA) can really earn its keep. MA platforms track, measure and analyze how people engage with your content, by device and by channel, so you can deliver the right personalized content to prospective buyers throughout the buying cycle, in the format that they prefer to consume. Such data-driven personalization helps marketers better connect with their audiences and establish deeper relationships.



Content Marketing Is Measurable and Actionable

In our 2019 Marketing Benchmark Study, content marketing was listed as the second most effective marketing tactic (58%) after websites (87%) and ahead of email marketing (51%) and trade shows (44%). Yet despite their success with content marketing, B2B companies still struggle with measuring its success. On average only 49% of B2B marketers are measuring the ROI of their content marketing.³ Measurement is important to the success of any business endeavour. Yet 57% of content marketers say measuring ROI is one of their biggest marketing challenges⁷ and 27% say they simply don't know how to do it.⁸

Marketing automation platforms can bridge the gap between empirical evidence that content marketing works and hard numbers proving that it does. In fact, MA could be considered the ultimate marketing hack. MA platforms not only help generate, score and nurture qualified leads, they provide metrics that show return on investment, as well as actionable data to help with the ongoing improvement and optimization of campaigns.

What Should You Budget for Content Marketing?

The average percentage of total marketing budget spent on content marketing is 26%. As content marketing maturity grows and organizations see results, they tend to up their game. Companies in the:

- Young/first steps spend 19% of their budget on content marketing
- Adolescent phase spend 25% of their budget on content marketing
- Mature/sophisticated phase spend 33% of their budget on content marketing⁸

No matter which phase they are in, across the board, 50% of companies said that they planned to increase their content marketing budgets in 2019, 36% said it would remain the same and only 4% expected it to decrease.³

A photograph showing the hands and arms of several people in business attire gathered around a table, looking at documents and a tablet. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a professional meeting or collaborative work environment.

Content Marketing Pitfalls to Avoid

1. Forgetting the needs of your audience

As mentioned above, promoting your company vs giving buyers the information they need is the fastest way to failure. Use your content to educate buyers on the industry, the technology space (if applicable) and anything else they might need to make an informed decision. Recognize that they are buying based on how your product or service can benefit their company, so clearly articulate those benefits.

2. Failing to spend time promoting your content

Plan to spend twice as much time (or more!) promoting your content as you did producing it. If you spent 25 hours to create a whitepaper, spend 50 hours spreading the word about it. Many B2B companies are not properly leveraging their content as a potential opportunity for conversion and lead generation – a missed opportunity. Use a variety of communication channels, such as LinkedIn, your blog or a newsletter to tell buyers about your content. Tweet about it, post it on Facebook, run an email campaign around it. Remind buyers that you're producing this great content for them. Understand that they're busy and might not remember to check in frequently for updates, so remind them.

3. Creating text-only content and ignoring visuals and videos

People are incredible at remembering pictures. Hear a piece of information, and you'll only remember 10% of it after three days; add a picture, and you'll remember 65%.⁹ And never underestimate the power of video in business. Forrester Research reports that over 75% of employees are more likely to watch a video than read text.¹⁰ Overall, 73% of businesses report positive ROI from using video.¹¹ Embed short videos on your home page, in blogs, in social media posts and in emails. Ensure your videos have both a place to live and a method of distribution. Whether it's a company overview video or a product tutorial, videos provide potential and current customers with an easy and engaging way to learn more about what your company has to offer.

4. Neglecting to include user-generated content

B2B buyers trust peers for reviews and recommendations. In fact, nearly all (95%) of B2B buyers say they view user-generated content, such as reviews and testimonials, as trustworthy.¹² Case studies can also be seen as a form of user-generated content, as they are essentially another company's story of how your product helped their business. Use case studies to illustrate challenges customers have faced, how your product or service has addressed those challenges and the measurable results achieved. Such user-generated content especially appeals to millennials, who will make up 75% of the workforce by 2025.¹³ They've grown up with constant opinion sharing on social media, and they expect the companies they do business with to have the same openness and transparency.

5. Failing to reuse content

The B2B buying process generally involves many buyer personas at different levels. The whitepaper that appeals to the CEO may not appeal to the initial product researcher who prefers blogs and tweets. Recycling your content is a great marketing hack that enables you to address the different ways people want to digest information. Once you have a piece of content, it can be massaged and reused in other forms. Don't hesitate to turn a 10-page whitepaper into an article and infographic, or turn an article into two blogs or create ten tweets from a 'Top 10 List'. If you recycle your content, you will get more mileage from it and appeal to more of your buyer personas.

Summary

On the whole, 78% of B2B content marketers said their efforts were successful last year, up from 70% in the previous year, and that number continues to rise as companies become better at producing and distributing content.³ And it's worth the effort. Content marketing has the power to generate and nurture high quality leads, educate and inform prospects, grow brand awareness and help turn opportunities into closed sales.

More than half of B2B companies (56%) outsource at least one content marketing activity, from strategy development to content creation and distribution.⁸ You don't have to go it alone. Accelerate your company's results by tapping into our strategic B2B marketing knowhow. For over 10 years we've helped more than 250 B2B companies like yours design content marketing strategies and execute the tactics to achieve their business goals. Find out what we can do for you.

LET'S TALK!

References:

1. *Accenture, 2014 State of B2B Procurement Study.*
2. *Death Of A (B2B) Salesman, 2015.*
3. *Content Marketing Institute, 2019 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America.*
4. *Demand Gen, 2018 Content Preferences Survey Report.*
5. *Demand Gen, 2018 B2B Buyers Survey Report.*
6. *Demand Gen, 2014 B2B Content Preferences Survey.*
7. *Content Marketing Institute, 2016 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America.*
8. *Content Marketing Institute, 2018 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America.*
9. *John Medina, Brain Rules, Pear Press, 2014.*
10. *B2C, 10 Reasons to Use Video for Employee Training and Development, 2018.*
11. *Invisia, 50 Must Know Stats About Video Marketing, 2016.*
12. *Demand Gen, 2016 Content Preferences Survey Report.*
13. *Bersin by Deloitte, Global Human Capital Trends 2014.*



About Us

The Mezzanine Group accelerates revenue growth for business-to-business companies. We build B2B lead generation machines that combine traditional and digital marketing with marketing technology, systems and processes to deliver powerful and consistent revenues. Over the past decade we've helped over 250 B2B companies across a variety of emerging and mature industries. www.themezzaninegroup.com