



Content Marketing Report



HubSpot



Smart Insights

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Welcome to the the European Content Marketing Report - 2016 Edition. Every year, HubSpot and Smart Insights work together with European businesses to establish the current state of content marketing in Europe to help marketers benchmark their efforts and identify areas for improvement.

As marketers, we're very much aware of the essential role that content plays in our marketing strategy. Yet with the soaring popularity of content marketing, as seen in our 2015 report (71% of marketers were creating more content than in 2014), it's getting more difficult to stand out from the noise. 'Content Shock' will be a theme throughout the report as marketers try to increase the volume of their content output without decreasing its perceived value to their target audience.

In order to compete with content marketing it is becoming ever more important to question your approach, tweak and optimise your strategy, and grab the attention of your potential customers.

In our latest report, we summarise the experiences of over 700 marketers across Europe that you can benchmark your own efforts against. The main findings and recommendations from the report are:

Content marketing is still widely used and effective for businesses.

- Content marketing was rated the top digital marketing technique based on biggest commercial impact on incremental leads and sales by 21% of marketers.
- Over two-thirds of businesses (67%) are planning to create more content in 2016 than they did in the previous year.
- In our 2015 report, 71% were planning on creating more content than 2014 -- does this mean marketers are already adapting, aware of the potential for 'Content Shock'?

Marketers are 'resourcing up' to improve their content production.

- Although it's the top rated technique, many businesses have not yet cracked content marketing: Around three quarters of businesses (72%) rated their content marketing as limited, basic or inconsistent.
- In an effort to upskill, more is being invested to create and distribute content, both via new hires (33%) and increased agency resource (29%).

A strategic approach to content marketing is often lacking.

- 60% rated content strategy as their biggest content marketing challenge. This was the top challenge across all marketers.
- Almost half (46%) of marketers don't have a defined strategy or plan.
- Although many are using core planning techniques such as buyer personas, journey mapping, and editorial calendars, over three quarters (76%) rate their capabilities for these techniques as basic or medium.

As with last year, blogging remains the most effective content marketing technique (75%).

- Followed by e-newsletters (66%), infographics (60%) and long-form content (50%)

Google Organic SEO is still the most popular organic content distribution option (51%).

- Followed by Facebook (48%), Twitter (39%), and LinkedIn (34%).
- Google + was the least popular (10%)

More than half of businesses are now using paid content distribution channels.

- This year we have a new winner with Facebook (35%) beating Google Remarketing (32%) as the most popular choice by European marketers for content distribution.

INTRODUCTION

Are You Preparing for Content Shock?

Our 2016 survey results show that marketers are continuing to believe in the power of content marketing to generate ROI. You will see in the report that many of our respondents see it as the single best way to improve their marketing to generate more leads and sales in 2016.

Yet, the 'elephant in the room' that was surfaced in our findings from our 2015 report is even clearer in 2016.

That elephant goes by the name of 'Content Shock', and refers to when more content is being produced by businesses than there is demand to consume it. This means that as you produce more content, so too does your competition and as a result, the perceived value of that content by your target audience is reduced.

Mark Schaefer explains it this way:

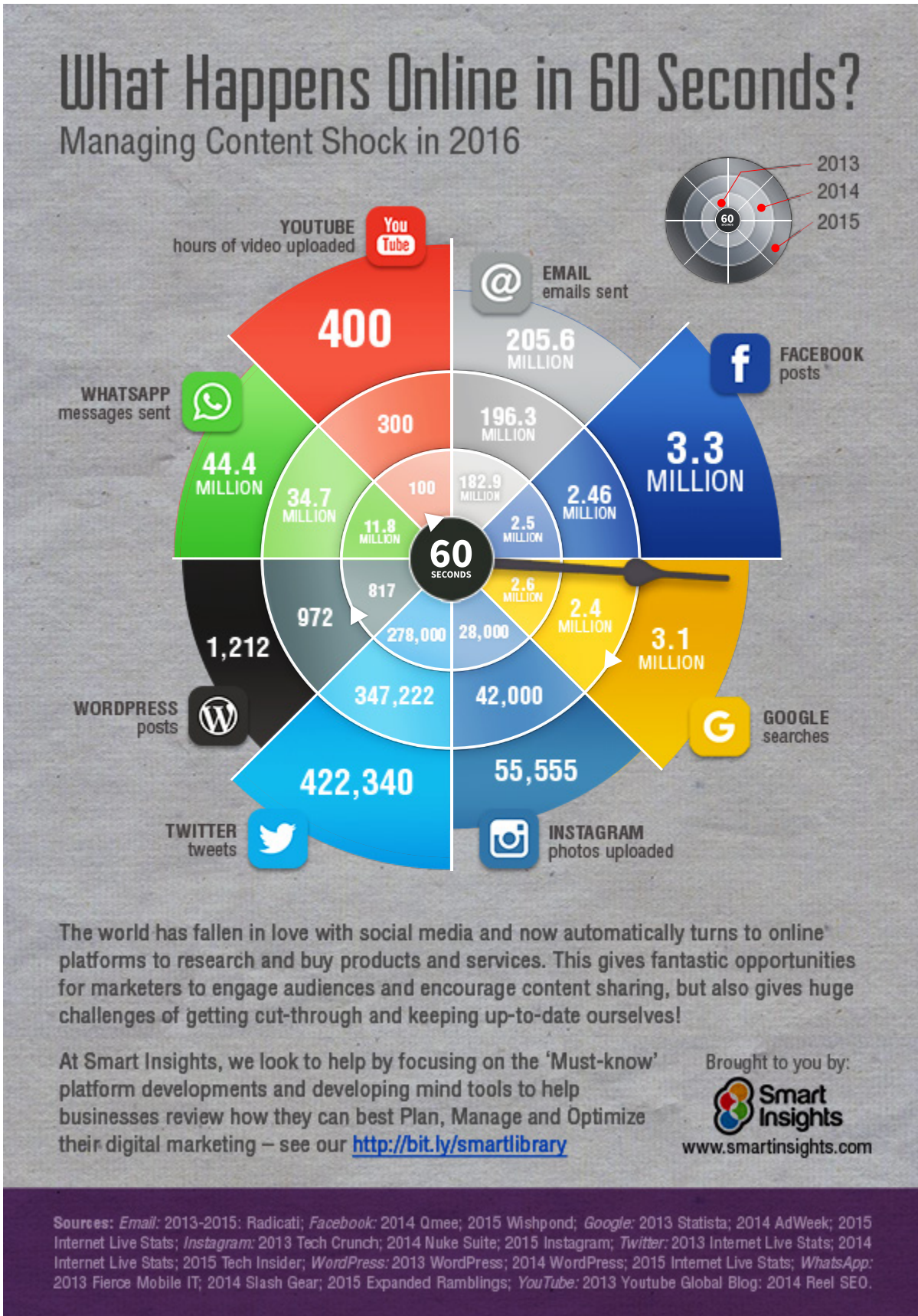
"This upward trend of content consumption is not sustainable because every human has a physiological, inviolable limit to the amount of content they can consume. I believe as marketers, we have been lulled into a false sense of security thinking that this consumption trend will continue to rise without end. That is simply not possible."



Mark Schaefer
Keynote speaker, marketing consultant and social media coach



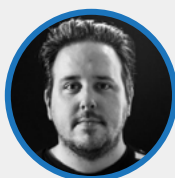
This infographic from Smart Insights paints the picture well:



So what does this mean for marketers? Is 'Content Shock' going to spell the end of content marketing as an effective strategy for generating traffic, leads, and sales? Rest assured, the answer is no.

However, 'me too' and 'on-the-cheap' content marketing may no longer be effective, if it ever was. As you read on you'll see that there are many advocates of content marketing and we'll share their approaches with you in this report.

"We don't need more content — we need more relevant content"



Jason Miller, Sr. Manager Content & Social
LinkedIn

How is the report structured?

To enable you to review and improve your own approach to content marketing, we have structured this report around a series of core questions you should reflect on.

We've then answered those questions using the related survey data so that you can easily identify any opportunities that exist to improve your current content marketing strategy and techniques.

Q1. Which online marketing technique will give me the most ‘bang’ for my ‘buck’ in 2016?

Since digital marketing changes so fast, it’s important to review your approach and deploy the techniques that have the biggest impact on your bottom line. We asked marketers which single online marketing technique would make the largest commercial impact or uplift in leads and sales in 2016.

The chart shows that Content Marketing was a clear winner with 21% of votes.

The Marketing Activity to Have the Biggest Commercial Impact in 2016 on Business



Other popular techniques closely related to effective content marketing included marketing automation (15%), conversion rate optimisation (11%), Big Data (10%) and Social media marketing (9%).

Naturally, priorities depend on the sector and digital maturity of an organisation.

Q2. How do my content marketing capabilities compare?

We believe benchmarking your digital marketing capabilities against others is useful to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement. For content marketing, we asked respondents to rate their capabilities on a simple five-point scale.

Rankings of Content Marketing Capabilities



28% of marketers rated themselves as 'Optimised' or 'Advanced' with almost three quarters (72%) rating themselves as inconsistent, basic, or limited in their use of content marketing.

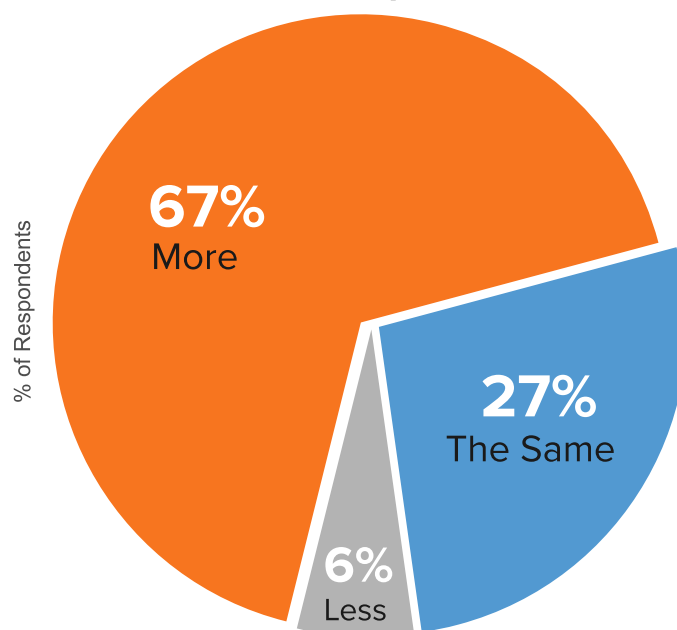
This is a huge opportunity to get ahead. If you can become advanced or optimised in your own approach to content marketing you'll be ahead of 72% of marketers in Europe. Where would you rate your own capabilities on this scale?

Q3. Should I be producing more content?

In the introduction we explained the idea of ‘Content Shock’ which means that as more content is produced there is limit to how much it will be consumed and shared by our target audience.

Yet the survey results show that marketers are actively continuing to increase the volume of their content creation. Over two-thirds are creating more content in 2016 than last year, around one quarter (27%) are creating the same amount and just 6% are producing less. We saw a similar pattern in our 2015 report.

How Much Content is Your Company Producing in 2016 in Comparison to 2015?



To counter ‘Content Shock’, marketers can invest more on creating higher quality content and on extending their promotion plan rather than increasing volume and frequency of content production.



"With content marketing reaching near-ubiquity, the success pendulum will swing toward boosting consumption of content. That will put a new focus on math, testing and optimization as content production and content distribution become equally important."

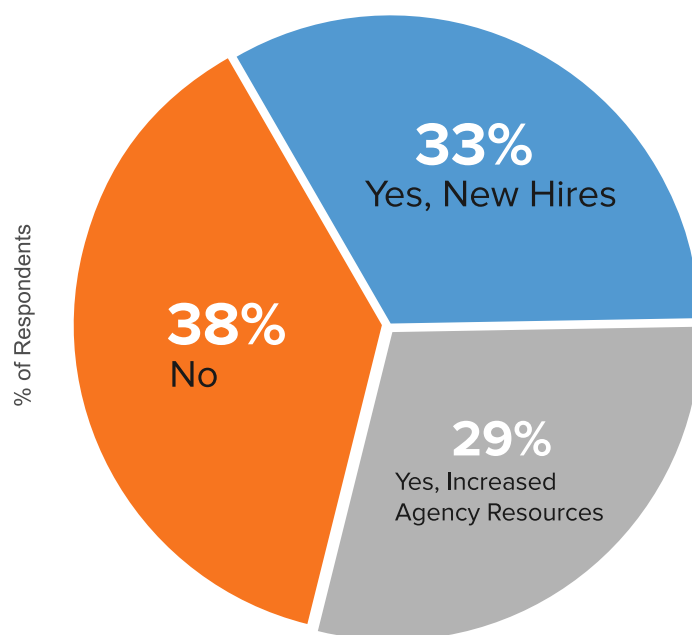


Jay Baer, President
Convince & Convert Media

Q4. How should I be resourcing my content marketing?

In line with the growth of popularity in content marketing, we're seeing more resources being invested in it, both via new hires (33%) and increased agency resource (29%).

Will Organizations Be Increasing Resources Allocated to Content Marketing in 2016

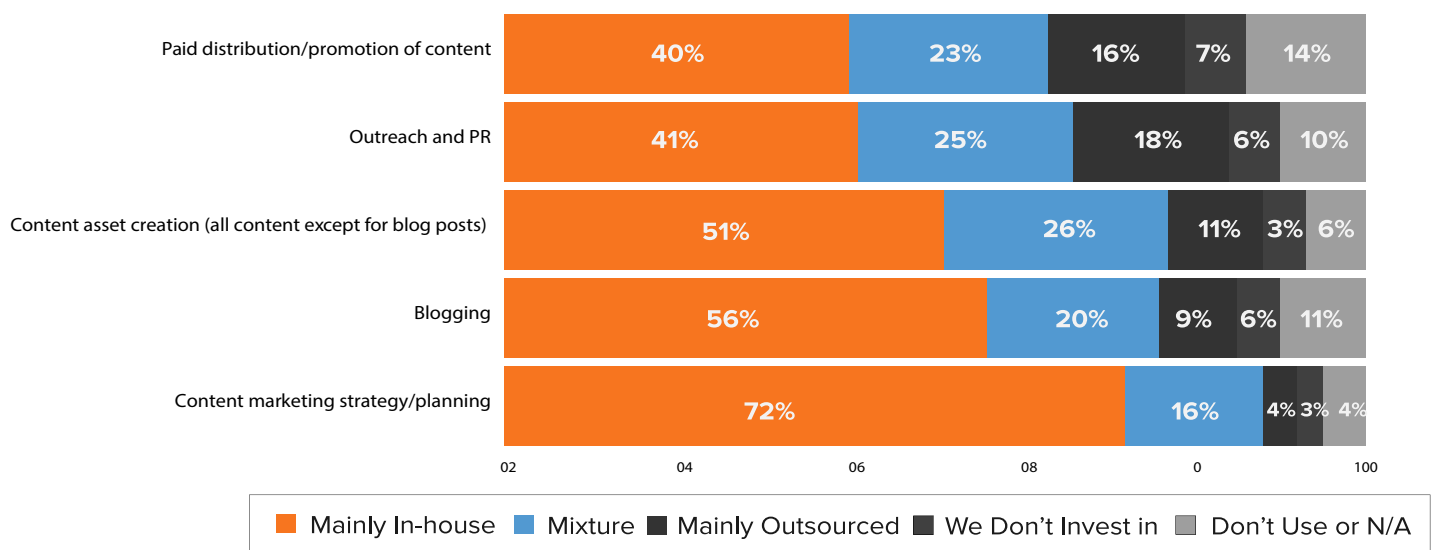


To find out more about how key content marketing activities are managed among marketers in Europe, we asked if they are mostly resourced in-house or outsourced.

The chart below shows that it's most common to manage content marketing strategy/planning (72%) and content creation (51%) in-house. It's more common for outreach (18%) and paid distribution activities (16%) to be outsourced to agencies.

There are also a lot of companies who have a mixture of the two across all activities.

Resourcing Used for Content Marketing Activities



Q5. Do I need a content marketing strategy?

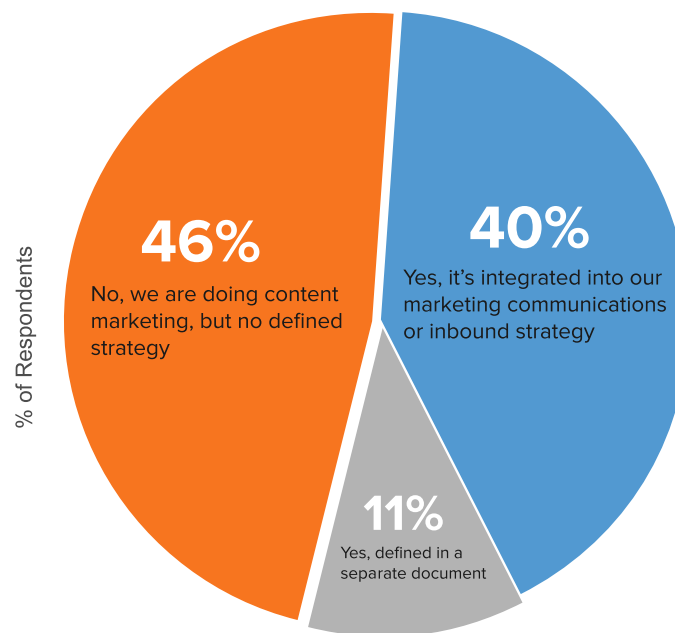
A planned, strategic approach to content marketing will help you focus resources in a repeatable, scalable way and allocate your budget where it will get the best results for your business' growth.

It was good to see from the survey that over half of marketers (51%) now have a planned

approach, with the majority of these (40%) integrating content marketing planning into a broader marketing communications or inbound marketing strategy.

Around 11% define content marketing into a separate document which can be useful when you're setting up your programme or making the case for investment.

Does Your Organisation have a Clearly Defined Content Marketing Strategy or Plan



On the other hand, 46% of businesses are using content marketing but don't have a defined strategy.

Having a strategy correlates closely with capability – 80% of leading companies that rated themselves as 'Advanced' or 'Optimized' in content marketing had a strategy compared to 27% of companies who rated themselves as 'Basic' or 'Limited'.



"Content strategy is the infrastructure of content marketing. Without answers to 'why' & 'how' the result is chaos."



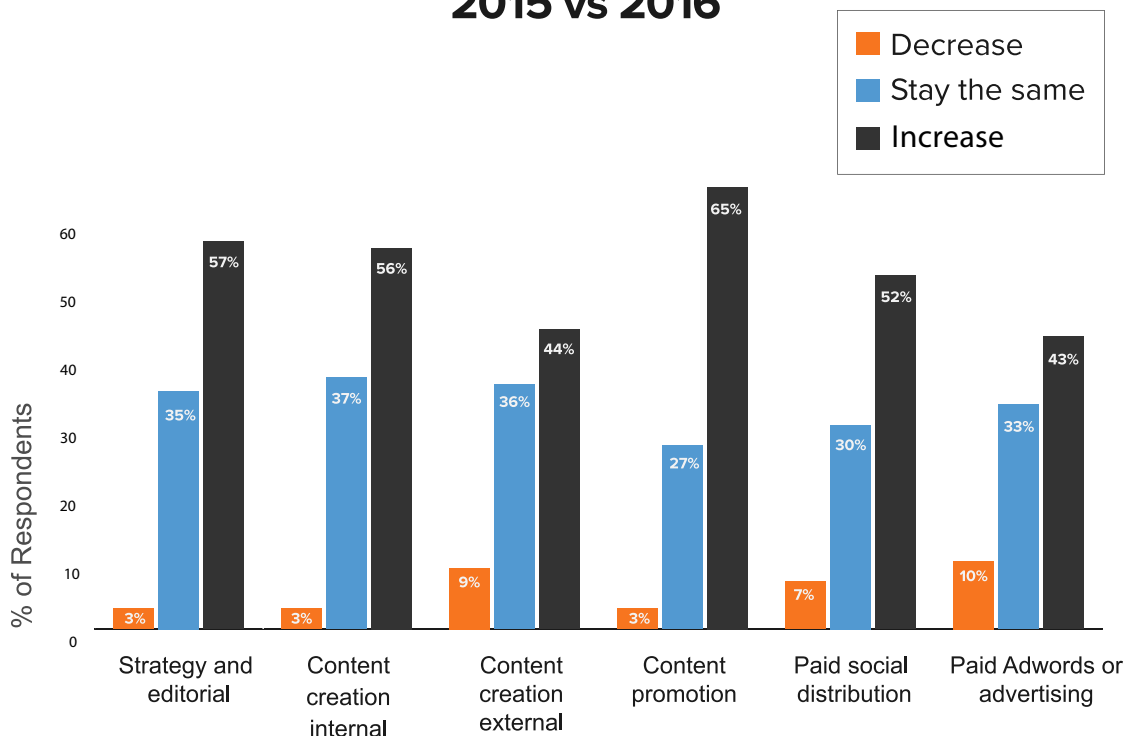
Rebecca Lieb, Analyst, Advisor, Author
Altimeter Group

Q6. Where should I invest my budget?

With so many new techniques and tools emerging almost daily, it's a challenge for marketers to know where their resources are best spent. We asked the marketers in our survey where they were planning on focusing their marketing budget in 2016.

From the chart below we can see that 57% are increasing their spend on getting their strategy and editorial right.

Content Marketing Spend per Channel: 2015 vs 2016



There is also a significant uplift in expenditure on content promotion (65%) which is in line with our recommendation to create less content at a higher quality and invest more in its promotion in order to avoid Content Shock.

Q7. What planning techniques should I use?

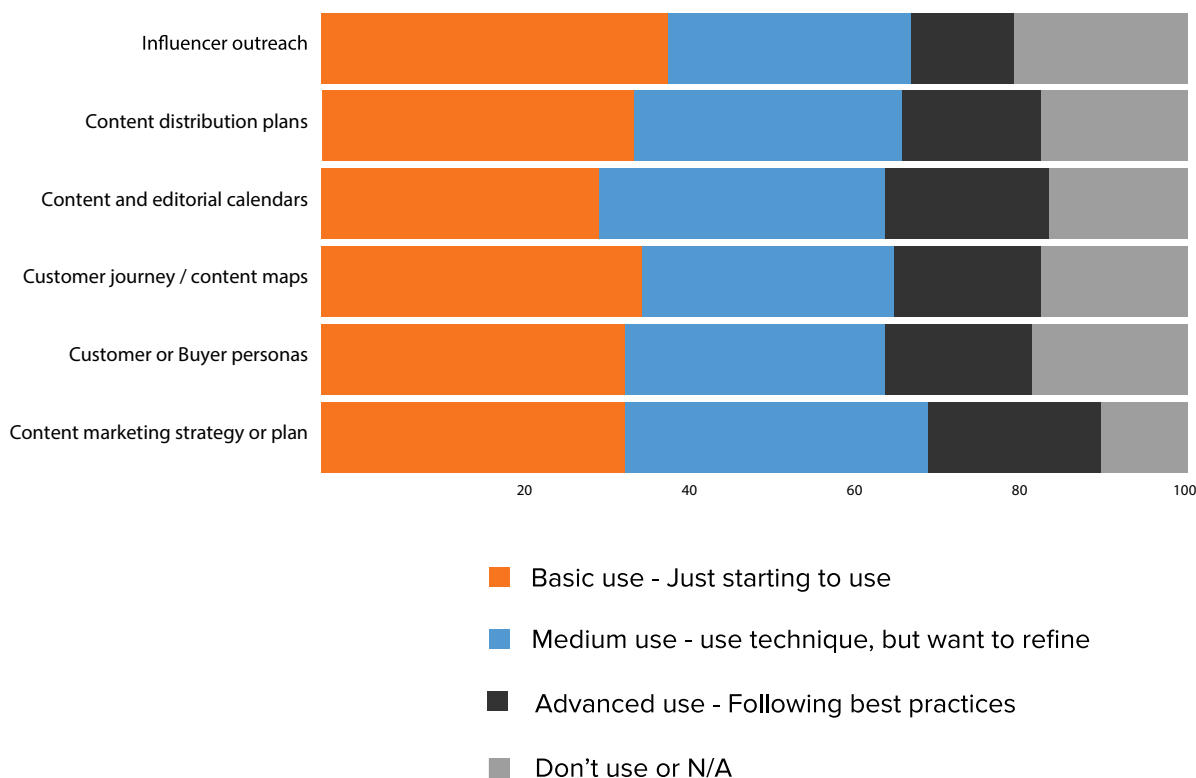
With strategy and planning so important to the success of content marketing, we wanted to know how sophisticated businesses felt they were at different planning techniques.

"If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail"

Benjamin Franklin



Use of Content Marketing Techniques



While it's great to see that the majority are now deploying these core content marketing techniques, many are at a basic or medium level. Only 18% say they are advanced and following best practices when it comes to a content marketing strategy or plan.

16% said they are not using buyer personas at all and only 13% said they were advanced in this technique. When we know that [targeted content results in a 19% uplift in sales](#), it seems like there's a huge opportunity here to get ahead of the competition by building out your buyer personas and tailoring your content for their specific needs.



"Effective messaging emerges at the intersection of what your buyers want to hear and what you want to say."

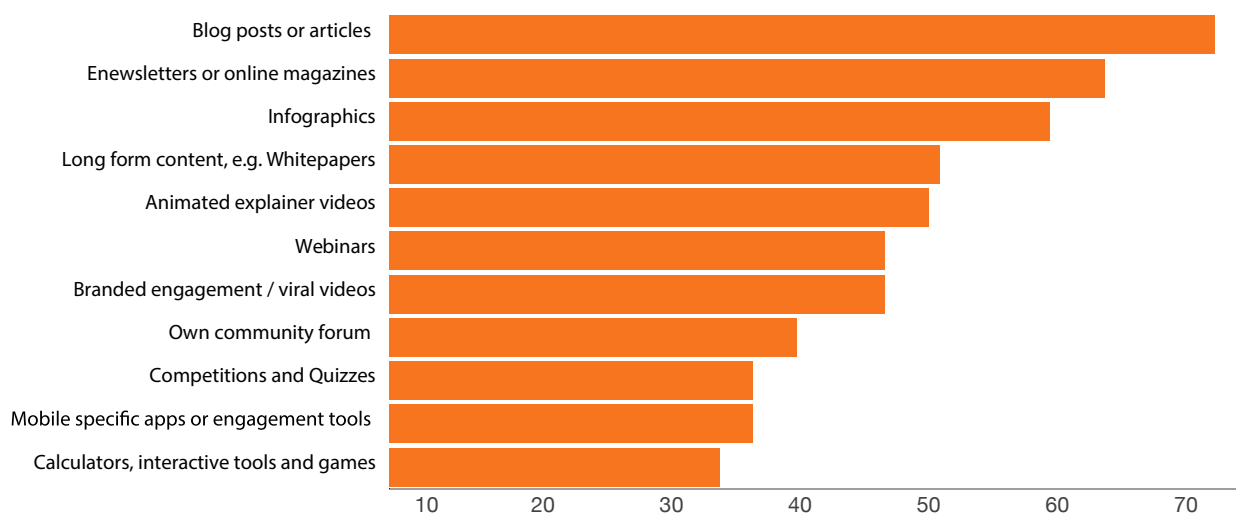


[Adele Revella](#), CEO
Buyer Persona Institute

Q8. Which content marketing formats are most effective?

It's vital that marketers experiment and test different content formats to see what resonates best with their audience. However, from the chart below we can see that blog posts (75%), e-newsletters (66%), infographics (60%), and long-form content (50%) are the most popular among those we surveyed.

Which Content Marketing Formats are Most Effective



Other techniques such as video, webinars, interactive tools, quizzes and mobile engagement tools are less widely used but could be effective in more niche business segments.

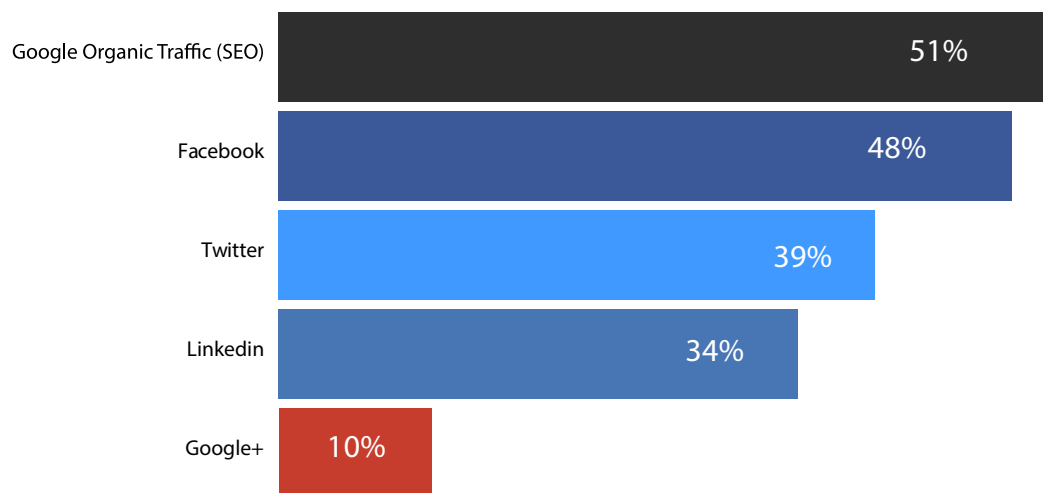
Marketers should also be testing different content format effectiveness for the various stages in the funnel. For example, blog posts may be most effective for generating website traffic but long-form content will likely provide better results for converting leads.

Q9. How Should I Promote My Content?

In our experience, content distribution and promotion often doesn't get sufficient attention, however, marketers are going to need to pay more attention to this side of their marketing if they are to avoid content shock.

To get a better idea of where marketers are currently investing their time and budget, we asked them separately about organic versus paid methods.

Organic Distribution Activities Rated Highly



On the organic side of things, generating organic (free) traffic from Google was rated highest (51%). This was followed by Facebook (48%), Twitter (39%), and LinkedIn (34%).

Google + has come in last place for two years running with only 10% of marketers rating it as effective this year.

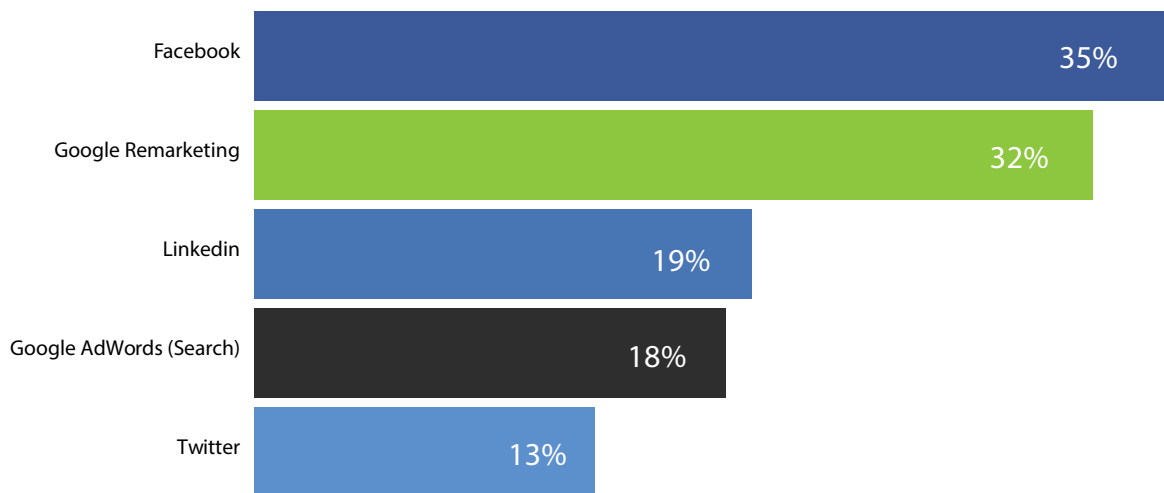
"The minimum bar today for modern SEO is a step higher than good, unique content, and that is as good as the best on the search results page. If you can't consistently say, "We're the best result that a searcher could find in the search results," well then, guess what? You're not going to have an opportunity to rank."



Rand Fishkin, Moz
Founder, Author, Blogger

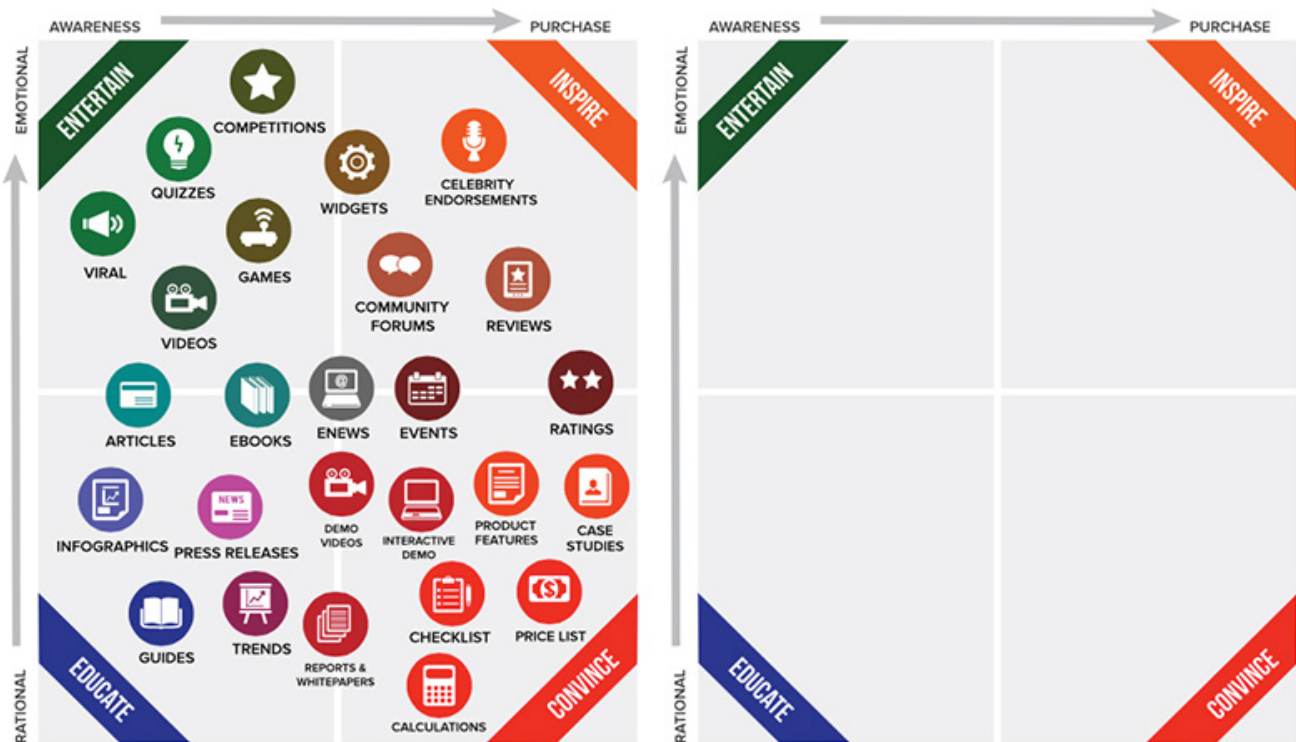
On the paid distribution channels, Facebook was rated the highest at 35%, followed by Google Remarketing (32%), LinkedIn (19%), and Google Adwords (18%). First place is a change from last year when Google Remarketing was rated the most effective paid channel.

Paid Distribution Activities Rated Highly



It's a little surprising that Twitter came trailing in in last place. In our experience, it can be a very effective distribution channel with good targeting capabilities and a lower CPC than LinkedIn.

If you'd like help planning out your content across the funnel, check out this [content planning template](#).

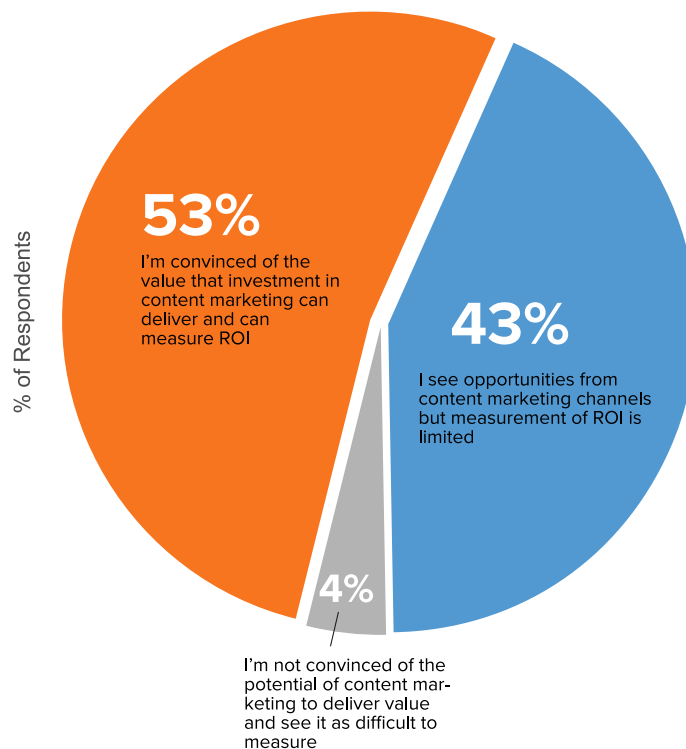


Q10. What is the value of my content marketing?

Many marketers are now in good shape for understanding the value of their content marketing. Just 4% are sceptics and not convinced of the value of content marketing.

However, a large proportion (43%) of 'believers', though they see opportunities, are still not able to adequately measure ROI from their content marketing.

Ratings of the Value of Content Marketing



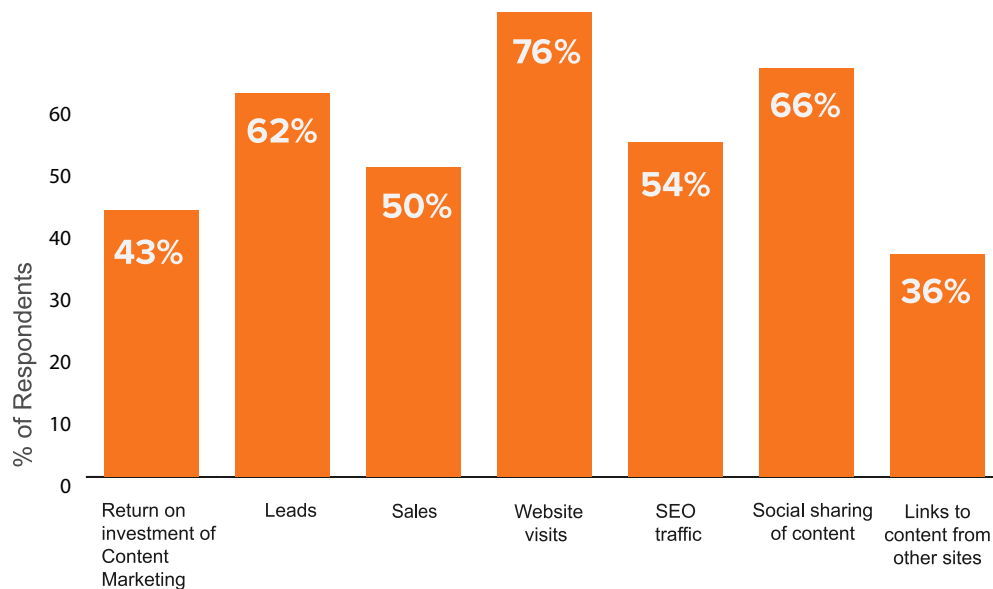
Being able to measure ROI correlates closely with capability – 75% of leading companies that rated themselves as 'Advanced' or 'Optimized' in content marketing had a content marketing strategy compared to 39% of companies who rated themselves as 'Basic' or 'Limited'.

Q11. What Metrics Should I Measure?

In order to know if you're being successful with content marketing, it's important that you're measuring the right things. We asked our European marketers what metrics they are currently using to measure their content marketing effectiveness.

- 76% measure website traffic
- 66% measure social sharing of content
- 62% measure leads
- 54% measure SEO traffic
- 50% measure sales
- 43% measure return on investment
- 36% measure links from other sites

Metrics Used to Assess Content Marketing Effectiveness in 2016



Marketers seem to be focusing on top of the funnel metrics with only half (50%) of marketers actually measuring bottom of the funnel metrics like sales to measure the effectiveness of their content marketing.

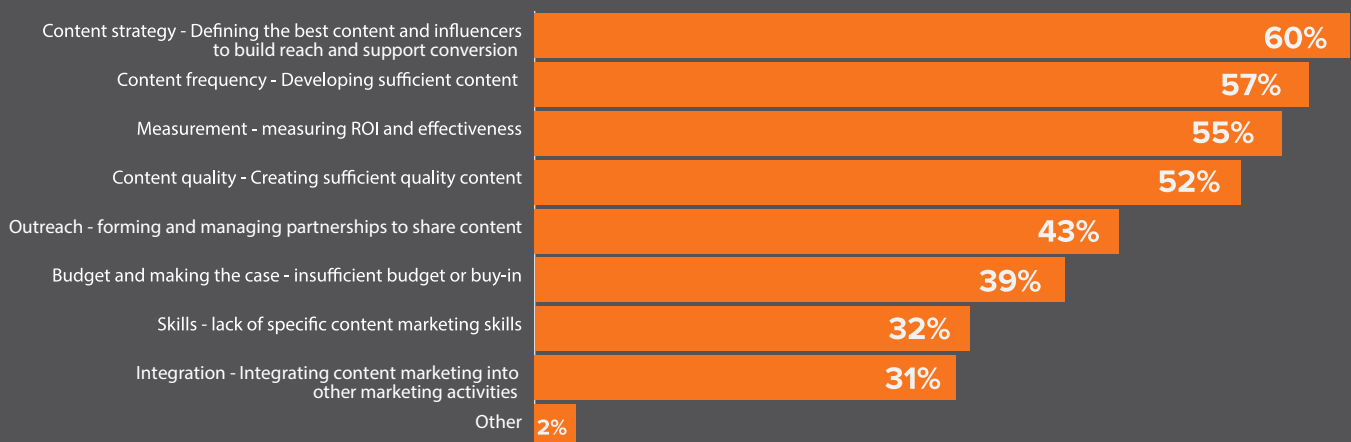
By measuring what's working for your bottom line, you can increase the effectiveness of your entire funnel and ensure your marketing resources are invested in the right places for growing the business.

SUMMARY

What are obstacles I need to overcome to be successful at content marketing?

We've covered a lot of what's working and not working for marketers across Europe. To conclude the report here is a final benchmark for you to review and compare your own experiences against.

The Challenges of Managing Content Marketing in 2016



- Content strategy is definitely the biggest challenge for marketers (60%) but its trickle effect is clear across every other marketing activity. Without a strategy, every part of your marketing suffers.
- Content frequency (57%) is also a major challenge but as marketers learn more about, and adapt to content shock this trend may change in 2017 as they spend more time on less content, increasing quality and promotion power.
- Measurement is also a key challenge for marketers (55%). This could be a knock on effect from a lack of strategy or it could be a situation of using too many tools to perform marketing activities that don't talk to each other, making reporting difficult and time consuming. Check out [HubSpot's all-in-one platform](#) if this sounds familiar.

About Smart Insights

Smart Insights provides actionable marketing learning resources to help businesses succeed online. More than 130,000 members globally use our blog, marketing planning templates and weekly Digital Marketing Essentials newsletter to follow best practices and keep up-to-date with the developments that matter in digital marketing.

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