



Content marketing report 2014

Digital marketing



In association with



Introduction

There is a lot of confusion about what content marketing is and isn't, but it's generally agreed that at the heart of it is the creation and distribution of valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action.

But what does that mean in reality? Should marketers be doing something differently? Or do most good marketers find they're doing it already?

Advocates will tell you that content marketing requires a profoundly different approach to brand voice and personality. They will advise you that the likes of P&G, Microsoft and John Deere have already caught onto this new and exciting phase of marketing, and are busy reaping the rewards of delivering information that is ultimately making their buyers more knowledgeable about their brand.

Consumers have shut off the traditional world of marketing, explain promoters of content marketing. They skip TV advertising, often ignore press advertising and don't even notice banners online. Savvy marketers have concluded that content marketing isn't just the future, it's the present. The argument goes that unless you are becoming content centric, you're just broadcasting. And without a focus on content you aren't driving value, you're simply creating noise.

Cynics, however, will tell you that there's nothing new about the art of communicating with your current and prospective customers without actually selling. They will tell you that going beyond shouting "Look at us, we are great!" and producing useful content for free with the aim of engaging people has always been important, and that we don't need a new buzzword to describe it. If marketers aren't doing this already, they certainly should have been.

In addition, sceptics argue that marketers understand content marketing in so many different ways that, as a result, it has become meaningless jargon. While for one marketer content marketing is blogging, for another it is an understanding of the whole user journey. And while some marketers say it's putting the right content in at the right time, others insist it's a principal approach to digital.

There's an added argument in the sceptics' ammunition: they claim that the current pressure on marketers to utilise content marketing is causing them to add things like blogging or webinars on their task list, without necessarily producing anything unique or exceptional, just so they can tick that box.

It is this strong divergence of opinion in the marketing world that led us to commission this study. It poses questions such as: **what exactly is content marketing?** Does it really exist? If so, is it a value creating role? If not, why has this buzzword taken off at all?

We hope that the stand-out answers from this research will provide the foundations for a more sophisticated debate around whether you should be doing anything differently as a result of content marketing, or whether, on the contrary, content marketing simply describes marketers going back to basics.

“The argument goes that unless you are becoming content centric, you're just broadcasting.”

Methodology

We wanted to gain insightful perspectives around the topic of content marketing from marketers themselves, with a view to providing a clearer picture of the place for content marketing both today and tomorrow as well as how marketers should be responding to it. Our goal, in other words, was to provide a window into the daily lives of marketers and where they perceive content marketing fitting in, if at all.

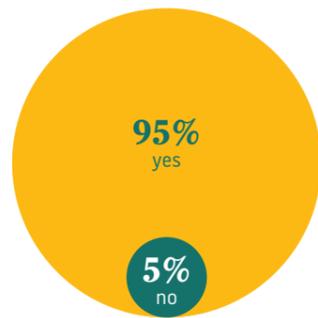
To that end, we commissioned leading independent market research firm YouGov to conduct an online survey in May 2014 of over 650 UK marketers who worked across a mixture of small, medium and large companies, and who were evenly distributed across junior and senior positions in a diverse range of industries.

Early on in this research, it became clear that less than 6% of marketers hadn't heard of content marketing (5.6%) before, and so we felt it made sense to screen these people out from the bulk of the study. We also screened out independent consultants and marketers who were not currently in employment for the more in-depth questions on its usage. And finally, we screened out those whose organisation wasn't investing in content marketing in 2014, or who were unaware of what their organisation's content marketing activities might involve.

Findings

Awareness and clarity

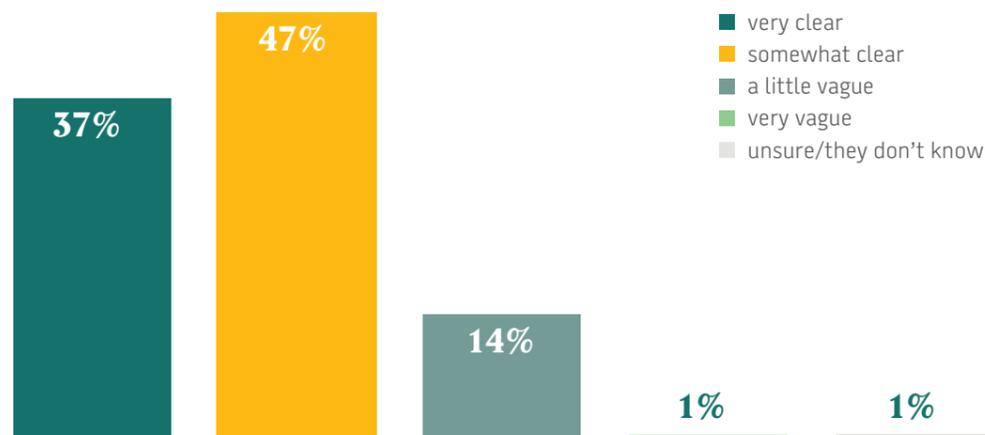
Q Before taking part in this survey, were you aware of the term “content marketing”?



At first glance marketers appear to have been in very little doubt as to what content marketing is, with almost 95% saying they had heard of the term, while over four out of five marketers (84%) claimed they were either very clear or somewhat clear about what it stands for.

“It would be easy to glean from this that marketers are, in the main, all on the same page. But, just because these marketers feel clear about what content marketing means, it doesn’t follow that their view would be the same as someone else’s” – points out Daniel Rowles, expert in digital media and CIM course director.

Q How clear would you say you are on what “content marketing” means, and its role in a marketer’s toolkit?



Indeed, when we asked the question “If you had to explain content marketing to a colleague who had never heard of it before, how would you define it?” we had a wide range of answers, many of which were at odds with each other. While one marketer simply answered “Online PR”, another said “Activity both on and offline created with the purpose of helping deliver a company’s marketing communication objectives”.

In addition, we found discrepancies over whether marketers believe content marketing should focus on promotional tools only. For instance, one marketer offered this definition: “Content written for any promotional tools, such as advertisements and the website, which is able to positively engage consumers with the brand”. Whereas another described content marketing as “the sum of all things published across all channels”.

Marketers were also undecided as a group as to what format content marketing can take. While one offered the definition “An article that promotes a product or business”, another said “Content marketing is copy, images and video used to engage individuals through social media channels”.

There was even disagreement about who should supply the ‘content’. While many marketers took sole responsibility, others answered more along these lines: “Content is useful data/information that can be supplied from many different departments and people within an organisation to marketing. It can then be used in many different media (online, printed, social media, mobile etc.) to best promote to the target market and audience”.

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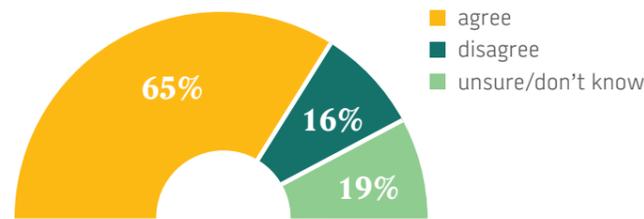
Daniel Rowles
Expert in digital media
CIM Course Director

Findings

Is it new?

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

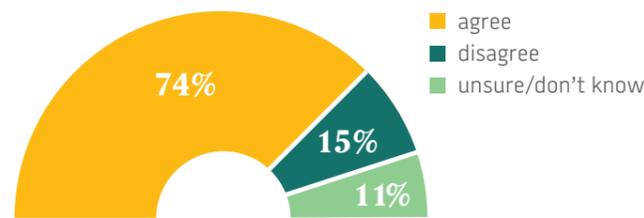
– Content marketing requires a major shift in how business and brands plan and execute campaigns, to which most marketers haven't adapted yet.



Three-quarters of marketers said content marketing implies that businesses and brands need to radically rethink how they engage with their audience. Two-thirds of marketers asserted that content marketing requires a whole new approach to marketing campaigns which they hadn't yet fully grasped. Despite all this, well over a third said that content marketing wasn't really new at all.

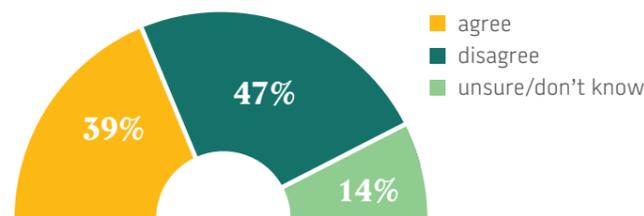
"This confirms that the concept remains ill-defined and that whilst marketers seem to think they know what content marketing is, in reality it means different things to different people" – says Thomas Brown, director of strategy and insights at CIM.

– Content marketing represents a fundamental shift in how business and brands engage in dialogue with customers and consumers.



However, the answers may not be as inconsistent as they appear. He adds: *"If the 39% of marketers are right in thinking content marketing is simply a case of getting back to what we should already have been doing, that might explain why they think there is a need for the shift in thinking around campaigns and dialogue with audiences – that is, the shift is required because we've been doing things wrong for so long. In other words, could it be that content marketing isn't new, but is instead providing a new or at least sharper lens on traditional marketing?"*.

– Content marketing isn't anything new or different – it's just 'marketing' with a new label.



Rowles agrees, although he believes it's not a reason for stopping the conversation around content marketing. *"If the current focus on content marketing is making people think more about providing value, engaging rather than broadcasting and enhancing the user value – in other words, things that have been lacking in marketing for a while – then that could be seen as a positive thing and explain why marketers are jumping on the concept, even if it's not new"*.

After all, continues Rowles, the initial marketing approach to digital was undeniably substandard. *"For example, websites told people what your business does in the hope that people would find your website via Google, but that assumed people are at the point of purchase. The focus on content marketing is forcing us to engage with people who aren't quite at that point yet"*.

Objectives for content marketing

When asked what they felt were the primary objectives for their organisation's investment in content marketing, most marketers said it was to (as one put it) *"grow awareness and improve consideration of our brand by establishing us as thought leaders"*.

Other marketers had different objectives, though. These included more traditional priorities, such as *"generating awareness of the services/support we can offer"* and *"increasing visitor figures to our website"*. Others said their goal was to *"gain valuable behavioural and demographic information from our target audience"*.

Marketers also used this opportunity to reveal some challenges around content marketing. *"Our primary focus is around providing the market with beneficial insights and ensuring we are seen to be clear thought leaders and innovators. We endeavour to place clear calls to action within certain components. However, it is very difficult to turn content marketing activities into sales in the B2B environment unless you're selling learning"* identified one respondent.

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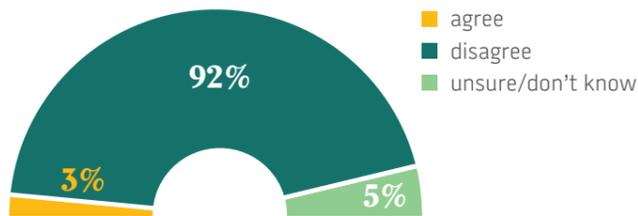
Thomas Brown
Director of Strategy and Insights
CIM

Findings

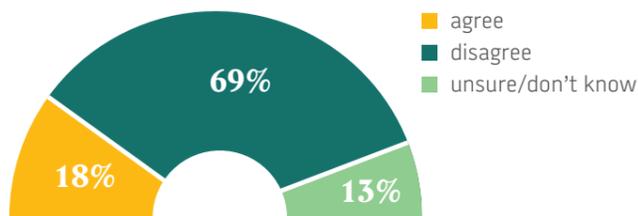
Role and reality

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

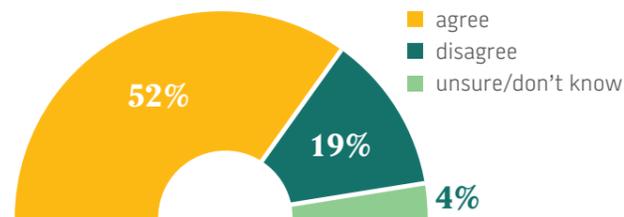
– Content marketing doesn't have a role in business-to-business (B2B) markets – it's only relevant for consumer brands.



– I believe in the potential for content marketing to drive engagement with my consumer/customers, but I don't believe it will deliver a meaningful commercial return.



– Most people who claim to do 'content marketing' aren't – they're just using old broadcast thinking in a new digital world, with a new buzzword.



"It is reassuring that just 3% of marketers believe content marketing has no role in business-to-business (B2B) markets and that it's only relevant for consumer brands" says Rowles. "Arguably, a focus on content has the biggest role of all in B2B due to the longer buying cycles" he explains. "If it's taking a customer, say three years, to decide to buy your product, you need to keep them engaged throughout that process – and if they're not sure if they want your product at any given moment, an emphasis on content gives you more opportunity to persuade them".

Also encouraging is the fact that two-thirds of marketers (69%) agreed with the commercial benefits of content marketing. *"A focus on content should be part of the sales cycle and a demonstrable part of it, at that" Rowles says.*

But once again, marketers revealed an underlying uncertainty around the whole concept with over half of marketers saying that content marketing is rarely being taken up in reality. *"There's this feeling of marketers talking about it, but not doing it" – says Brown. "There is this notion that content marketing can have potential, especially in B2B and in terms of commercial benefits, and that it's not just spin. However, there's also a feeling that in order for it to have maximum impact, it requires changes to the current toolkit that many marketers aren't quite sure how to address".*

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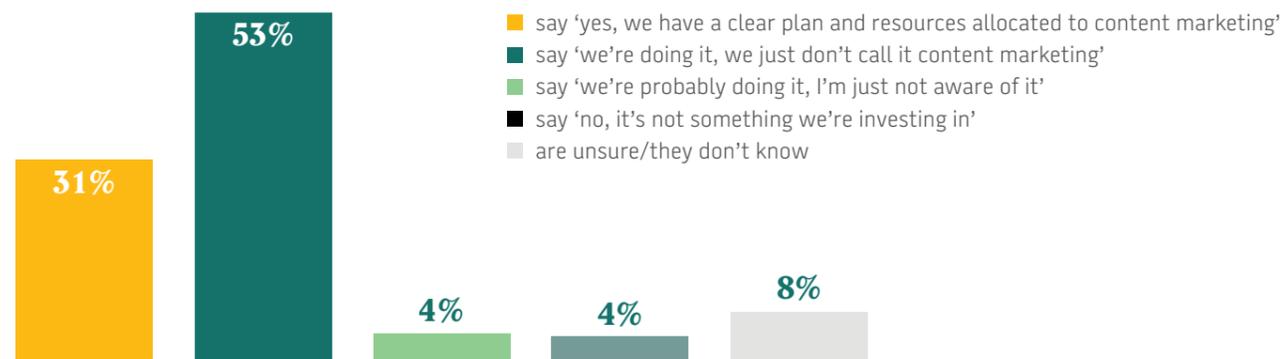
Findings

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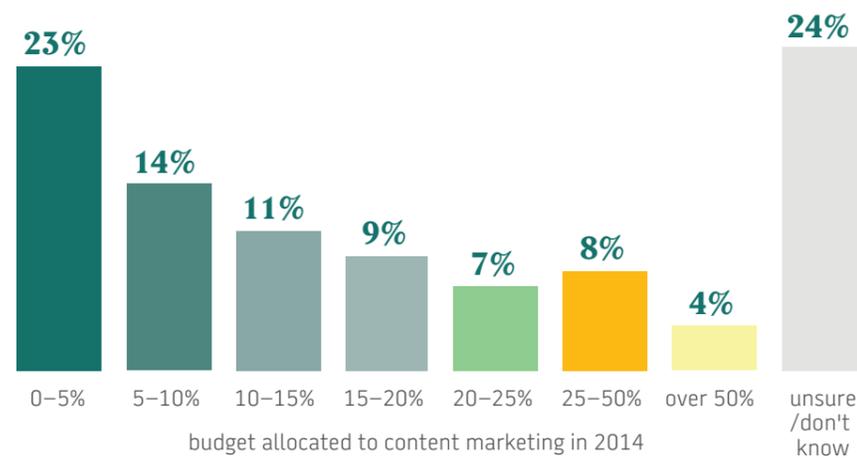
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Investment and integration

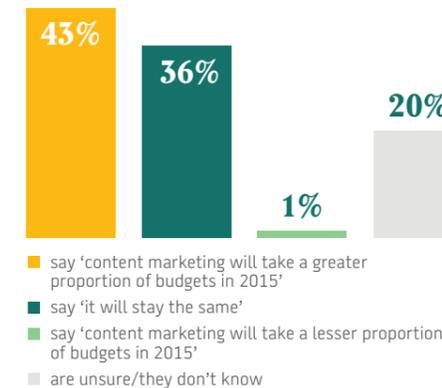
Q Is your organisation investing in content marketing in 2014?



Q Approximately what proportion of your marketing communications/campaign budgets would you say is allocated to content marketing in 2014?



Q How do you see your investment in content marketing, as a proportion of your total communications/campaign budgets, changing in 2015?



It could also be considered as cause for concern that just 5% or less of the 2014 marketing budget is being dedicated to content marketing in almost a quarter of cases – with just 4% of businesses investing over 50% of the marketing budget on this area.

“It would certainly be good to see greater allocation of budgets, but in reality we should have always been doing this - it's just more apparent now because of the increased awareness of the kinds of things we do now under the banner of content marketing” says Rowles, who adds that the research does at least point towards growing investment in the future.

Certainly, nearly half of marketers expected to see an increase in investment in content marketing next year. “Content production and distribution are a real struggle for most organisations from a resourcing point of view currently, so this is reassuring” – he says.

Mind you, says Rowles, planning and investment into content marketing should come with a health warning or risk being siloed. “It's not that having a clear plan or assigning budget to content marketing is a bad thing, but it shouldn't be seen as separate from the rest of your marketing strategy” he explains. “The reality is that content marketing overlaps massively with things like understanding the user journey and search optimisation. Content marketing should be seen as a part of a holistic approach that focuses on business objectives and enhancing the user experience”.

As such, any content marketing goals should be worked into an integrated plan and the value communicated throughout the organisation.

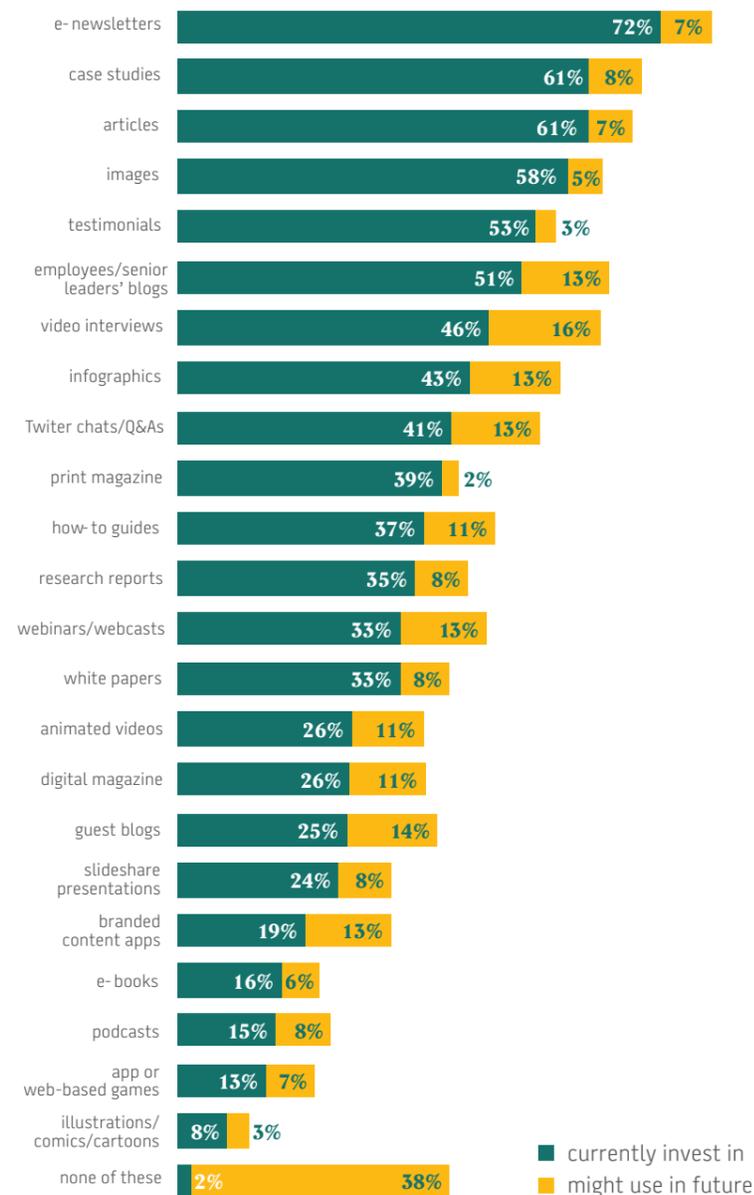
Having a clear plan and resources to invest in content marketing sounds undeniably positive, therefore you could conclude that it's disappointing that less than a third of marketers are doing this. But in fact, over half of marketers said they're doing it, they just don't call it content marketing.

“Once again, this echoes our earlier finding that many marketers are already doing content marketing, just not using the label” says Brown.

Findings

Which elements matter?

Q From the following options, could you please tell us which, if any, your organisation invest in today, or has plans to use in the future?



Despite all the talk about content marketing being new, it is still largely traditional marketing activities – articles, e-newsletters and case studies – that organisations are most likely to be investing in, both now and in the future. Meanwhile, the likes of podcasts, app or web-based games, digital magazines, branded content apps, guest blogs and e-books all come low in the list of priorities for marketing investment.

“We are still banging out e-mails and case studies when there is real potential for these richer ways of engagement through content” says Brown.

‘How-to’ guides and ebooks have particularly significant potential, says Rowles. *“We know that people are looking for answers to certain questions online and this is a real opportunity to capture this audience, to enlighten them and ultimately make them more loyal towards your brand. If nothing else, this chart reveals some huge clues for untapped marketing opportunities whereby marketers could make huge gains from being more original in the way they present their content”.*

It’s interesting that podcasts are supposed to have died a death when it comes to public interest, he adds. *“But I see from the survey that there is growth in this area – an area that I personally think is a particularly underutilised channel”.*

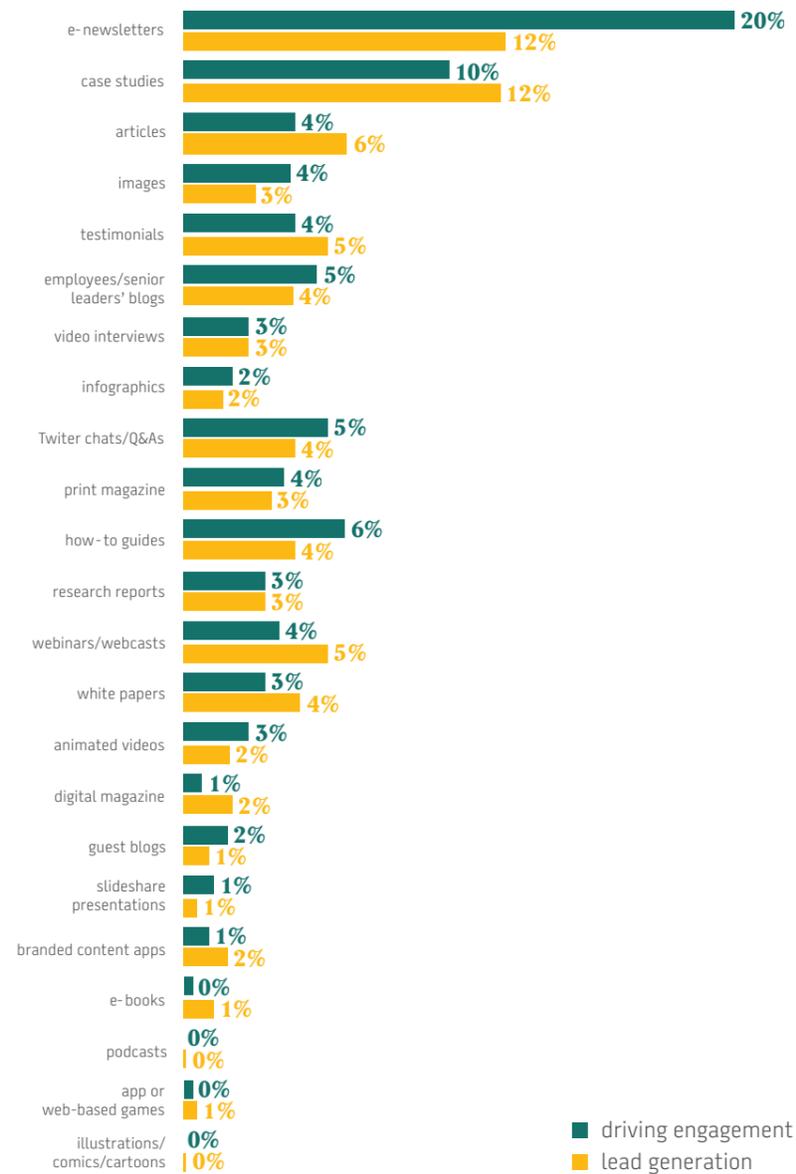
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Findings

Driving engagement and lead generation

Q Which of those which you currently invest in would you say has the most positive impact on driving engagement with existing customers/consumers, or has the most positive impact for lead generation with prospective customers/consumers?



E-newsletters are revealed as the one area of content marketing which marketers felt was really working. *“When e-marketing is done well, it’s really effective and this confirms that”* says Rowles.

“Nevertheless, it’s important to be mindful that e-marketing is done badly by many businesses, something that other studies testify. In fact, it’s harder than ever to do e-marketing well, since it’s easier than ever to unsubscribe and Gmail is filtering out via tab browsing – content that it thinks is content marketing. So the message to marketers is don’t rest on your laurels when it comes to e-marketing as there’s already way too much noise in this space, which is reflected in the volume of emails we all get”.

Case studies came in second place as being the most effective. *“But again, it’s the depth of those case studies that matters, not the sheer volume of them”* says Rowles.

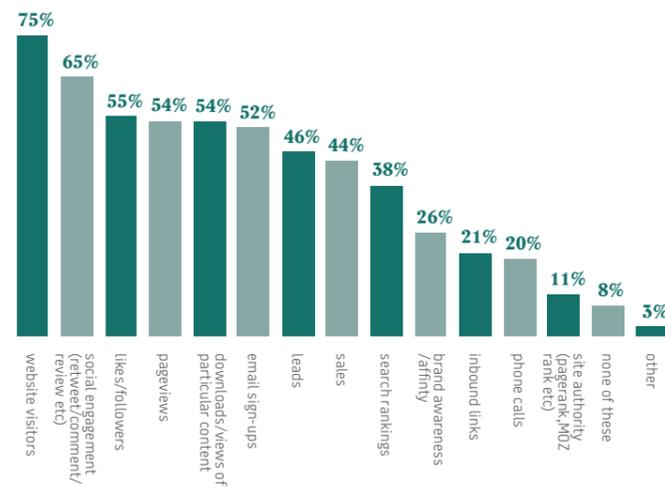
But are these areas actually being measured? Or are marketers going on gut instinct? *“Other research shows marketers are not measuring enough and that they are rarely going into these kinds of activities with a measurement hat on”* – explains Brown. *“This matters because unless marketers plan their campaigns from the outset with measurement in mind, there’s no way to work out which elements achieved what outcomes”.*

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Findings

Metrics and KPIs

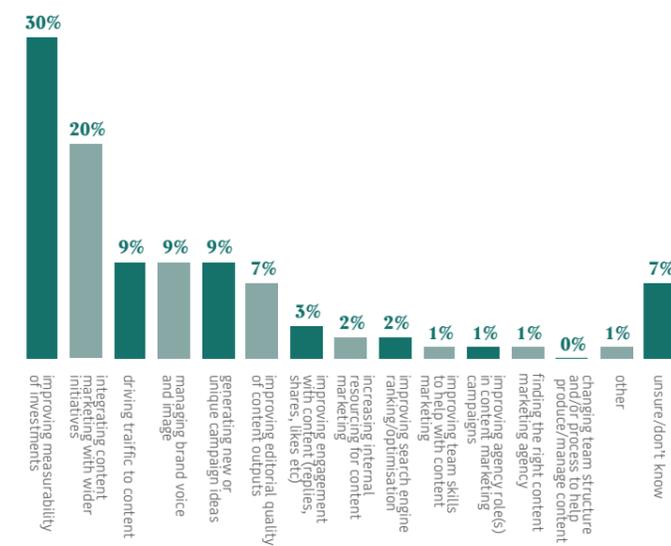


If your glass was half full, you would conclude that three-quarters of marketers saying they measure the number of website visitors is positive. *“But a glass half empty attitude would be to ask why the other quarter – which is still a substantial proportion – aren’t doing it”* says Brown.

He adds that it’s only half way down the list of metrics or KPIs used to measure the effectiveness of content marketing investments that you get to leads and sales, which under half of marketers are using. *“Of course, measuring website visitors and social engagement is important when it comes to metrics and KPIs, as we’ve just established. But actually, you don’t necessarily get any business from these things, so it’s concerning to see sales and leads come so low down the list. For example, you could have plenty of social engagement, likes and followers, page views and downloads but still no actual leads or sales”* says Brown.

This is an area that requires huge change, believes Brown. *“Digital enthusiasts will say SEO is everything, therefore things such as likes, followers and page views are crucial, and it’s true that if you have more meaningful content online then more people will find you as a result of SEO. However, marketers need to be tracking the whole user journey and ensuring that what they are doing is actually leading to more business”*.

Areas for improvement (first choice)



Improving measurability of content marketing investments is cited as the area in most need of improvement over the next year, with almost a third of marketers (30%) making this claim. This confirms our earlier finding that this is an area that’s sorely lacking.

“It is clearly an issue, which is a bad thing. But, marketers are aware of this which is a good thing” says Brown. From social tracking to link sharing, metrics and tools such as Google Analytics should be used to measure everything, he advises.

Integrating content marketing with wider initiatives came in second, with one in five (20%) of marketers stating that it needs attention in the year ahead; again confirming our earlier point that content marketing should be a multiple touch point, not a single one.

Among the areas where the least number of marketers believed attention was required is changing team structure and/or process to help produce/manage content. Although managing brand voice and image came higher up the list, it still shows that only 9% of marketers felt it needed improvement, while improving agency roles in content marketing campaigns was an area worth refining for just 1% of marketers. *“But if we are going to take content seriously and make it more integrated, then surely these areas should matter more to marketers”* says Brown.

Conclusion

The beginning of our study revealed that content marketing was generally seen by marketers as something different and new. But once we dug deeper into the nuances, it was revealed as something many marketers were already doing or at least acknowledged they should be.

Our research also revealed that this was an area of huge and often misplaced potential, and unless marketers started to measure it in a more efficient way, opportunities will be missed.

So is it time to get over the buzz word and look more generally at creating value in a digital world? Or is the phrase 'content marketing' still helpful in encouraging marketers to focus on what really matters – getting smarter at driving engagement with consumers and customers?

Top tips

1.

Start with definitions

Our research shows that both content marketing and its objectives are perceived very differently in the world of marketing. Make sure that everyone involved in your content marketing strategy is singing from the same hymn sheet.

2.

Plan and integrate

Define any content marketing goals around your wider business aims rather than treating it as a distinct piece of marketing activity. Then build an integrated plan to deliver the content, and be clear on which channels and platforms you will use.

3.

Build a business case

You'll need stakeholders' buy-in to support any content creation, so it's vital that you sell the concept internally. Therefore, you need to ensure that you communicate how you see content marketing adding value to your organisation.

4.

Know your audience

You won't wind up with valuable content if you don't know your audience. Engage with customer services and sales teams who meet more real customers than anyone else, and talk to your customers so as to find out what their purchasing needs and priorities are.

5.

Stay focused

Research which areas of content marketing are likely to work best for you from the myriad of options available.

6.

Define your content narrative

Don't launch a strategy until you are committed to defining your content narrative, and you've found your voice and influence.

7.

See it as ongoing

Content marketing shouldn't be seen as a one off exercise. You'll need to publish regular, high-quality content that responds to your audience needs and delivers value to them.

8.

Be proactive

Don't wait for your audience to find your content. Find out where they spend time on and offline, and place relevant and compelling content in those locations.

9.

Partner with other publishers

Broaden your reach by getting your content published on other people's platforms. Ways to help you achieve this include developing a content marketing calendar, and delivering regular, unique and valuable content.

10.

Optimise for search

Ensure that all content is optimised for search by doing your keyword investigation to increase your natural search traffic, as well as being creative with your linking campaigns. Search engines reward businesses that publish high quality and consistent content.

11.

Be accountable

As you embark upon the content marketing journey, be prepared to be accountable to the needs of your audience and take responsibility to maintain the relationship you plan to build with them.

12.

Measure and evaluate

This is an area that our research found was particularly lacking. From social tracking to link sharing, use all available metrics and tools, such as Google Analytics, and measure everything you do.

About companies behind this initiative



CIM (The Chartered Institute of Marketing)

CIM is the leading international professional marketing body. First established in 1911 it has defined the marketing standards that operate in the UK for over a century and is the global champion of best marketing practice. CIM exists to develop the marketing profession, maintain professional standards and improve the skills of marketing practitioners, enabling them to deliver exceptional results for their organisations. It does this by providing membership, qualifications and training to marketing professionals and businesses around the world. For more information visit cim.co.uk



YouGov

YouGov is an international, full-service market research agency which is considered the pioneer of market research through online methods. Their suite of syndicated, proprietary data products includes: BrandIndex, the daily brand perception tracker; SoMA, the social media audience analysis tool; Profiles, their new tool for media planning, market segmentation and forecasting and Reports which provide comprehensive market intelligence on a range of sectors. The market-leading YouGov Omnibus provides a fast and cost-effective service for obtaining answers to research questions from both national and selected samples. Their custom research business conducts a wide range of quantitative and qualitative research, tailored to their specialist teams to meet clients' specific requirements. For further information visit yougov.co.uk

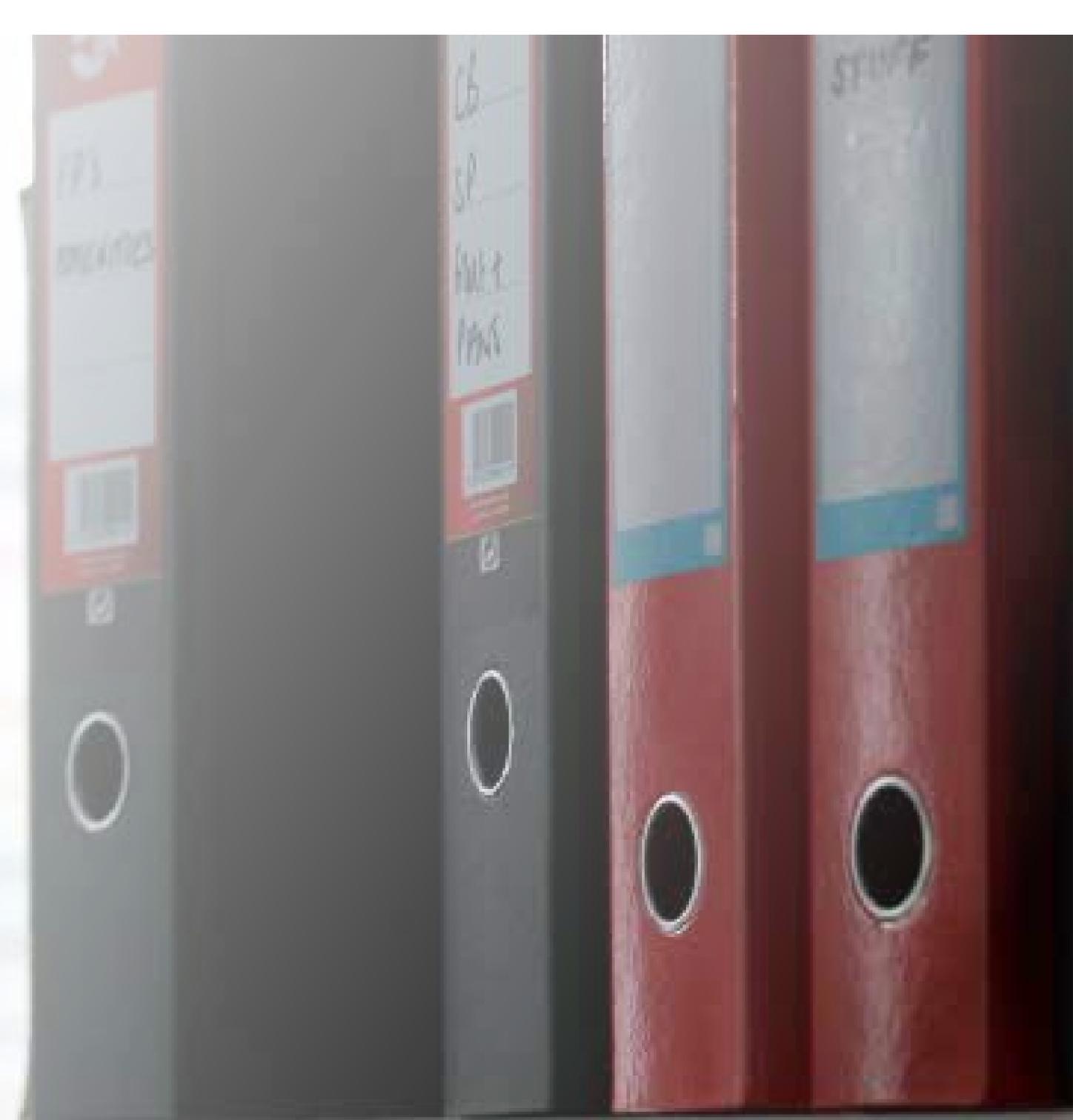


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All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. The total sample size were as follows: consumers study: 2012 respondents; marketers study : 83 respondents. Fieldwork was undertaken between 27 Jan – 6 Feb (consumers) / 10 Feb – 4 Mar (marketers). The surveys were carried out online. The consumer study data have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (18+).

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