

BtoB Research Insights

Content Marketing: Ready for Prime Time



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NOTES & RESOURCES

In 2012 *BtoB* surveyed 440 b-to-b marketing professionals about their views of, and practices in, content marketing, their favorite channels and methods, and what constitutes best practices in this arena. This white paper presents the findings, as well as suggestions for the future. See the Appendix for further details on the methodology.



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CONTENT'S NEW MEANING

Content marketing isn't new. All creative is content. Print ads have always combined the content of text and image to convey company messages. Direct marketing calls to action compel urgency and action through content. Content is what informs prospects and customers about products and services, and leads them toward a conversion decision. In the days before the Internet, the content offered by advertising was the driving force in most marketing departments. It was the hook to get prospects to find out more about a company; content contained in brochures and corporate videos was secondary.

The advent of company websites and the rise of search and social media have enabled marketers to move their content to the forefront of the customer acquisition process. Content *marketing*, per se, has taken on within the past few years this entirely different meaning. The rise of content marketing—which can include custom publications, email newsletters, video, whitepapers, webinars and much more—is changing how marketing departments are constituted and how marketers communicate their messages.

In this white paper we will explore the state of content marketing today, the goals marketers are addressing, the methods of distribution, “best of breed” performing methods, some obstacles to overcome, and recommendations for the future.

THE STATE OF THE ART

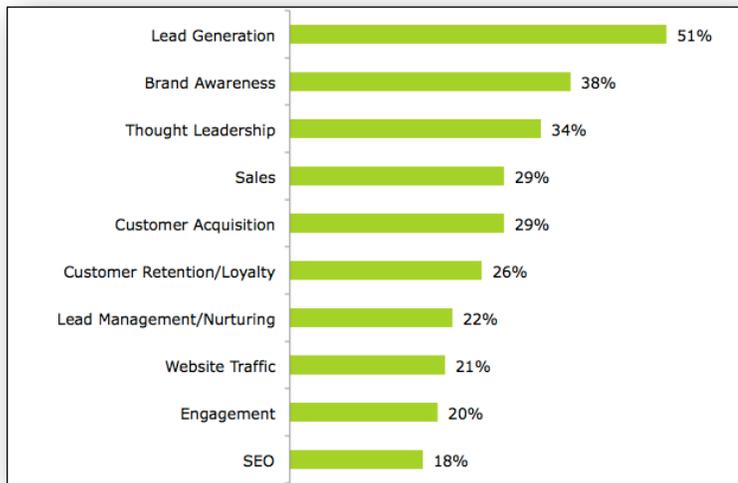
Content marketing is no longer in its early stage of adoption. It is being used in customer relations, prospecting, thought leadership, brand awareness and, of course, to encourage sales. The shift in marketers' attitudes toward, and use of, content marketing is seen dramatically in how fast content marketing has been adopted. Last year, *BtoB* found that 55% of marketers had either no involvement with content marketing or were only somewhat involved. Meanwhile, those who said they were “very” or “fully” involved totaled just 18%. The picture is quite different now; just 29% have no or little involvement with content marketing, while 34% are “very” or “fully” engaged.

For the future, marketers indicate their companies' commitment to content marketing will only increase, and rapidly. Those with no or little involvement with content marketing will total merely 11% of all marketers in 2013, according to *BtoB's* survey. By then, 89% of marketers will have content marketing programs in place to some degree, with 66% “very” or “fully” engaged.

“
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AN ARRAY OF GOALS

Marketers view the value of content marketing overall as having a major impact on lead generation, cited by 51% of respondents, followed by brand awareness (38%), thought leadership (34%) and sales (29%). Many of these content marketing goals are “softer” ones, things that polish a company’s reputation, enhance customer loyalty and improve



Question: What are your company’s objectives in using content marketing?

engagement. A different assessment becomes obvious when marketers were asked to pick *the most important objective* of content marketing. Here, lead generation is the most important goal, but sales jumps dramatically to second place, followed by customer acquisition. It is clear that marketers consider content marketing’s contribution to their *most important* objectives to be intensely revenue oriented.

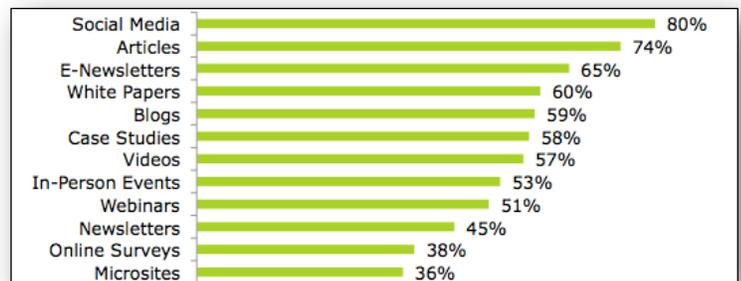
CHIEF CONTENT METHODS

Marketers are exploring the full range of content types to home in on the right combination to achieve their content marketing objectives. Social media is considered the most important method used

to improve sales and marketing effectiveness and initiatives, cited by 80% of respondents.

While generally considered a channel rather than a type of content, social media has captured the devotion of marketers who view it as the prime conduit of marketing content.

Other popular types of content include articles posted on corporate websites, e-newsletters, whitepapers, blogs, case studies and videos.



Question: What content methods are you using the most?

Intriguingly, live events are viewed here, like social media, as a type of “content,” although many forms of content can certainly be distributed at expos and other events.

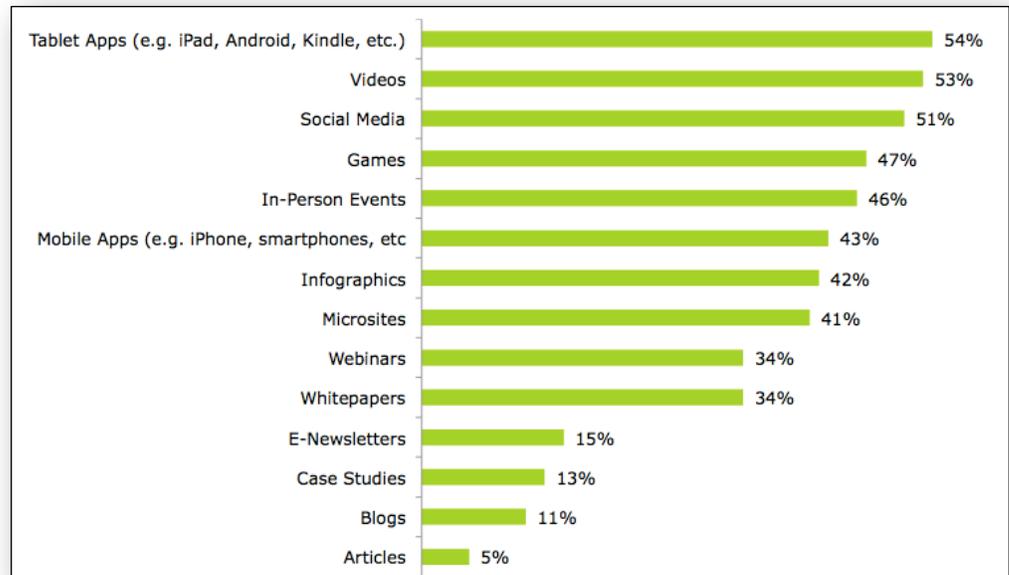


Question: What content methods are you using the least?

Those types of content used the *least* include research reports, byline articles, mobile content, branded content tools, infographics, podcasts, mobile apps, digital magazines, e-books, tablet apps and games. Much of this may be due to the newness of some of these types. In *BtoB's* study, “lack of knowledge about content marketing” was cited by 16% of respondents as a barrier to better content marketing (see below).

HIGH PERFORMING CONTENT METHODS

What are the content marketing methods marketers are *most satisfied with*? Topping the list are tablet apps (54%), followed by videos (53%), social (51%), games (47%) and live events (46%).

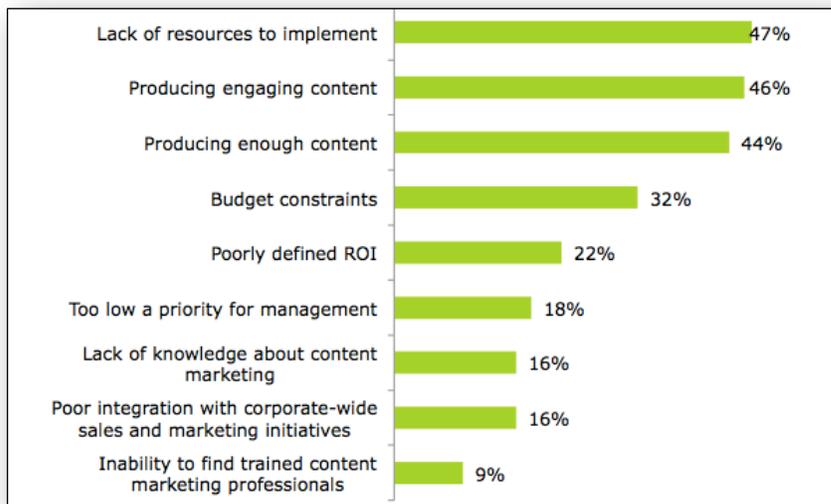


Question: What content methods are you most satisfied with?

By contrast, the “most used” methods cited above—social networking, articles, e-newsletters and whitepapers, etc.—almost disappear in this particular assessment of content methods that provide the greatest marketing satisfaction (read, *performance*). Most obvious is the high satisfaction level with those methods that are used extremely rarely—infographics, etc. It is obvious that *popularity* of method does not equate with *effectiveness* of method.

BARRIERS TO OPTIMUM CONTENT MARKETING

What challenges are marketers facing that prevent them from deploying a more successful content marketing effort? Not surprisingly, lack of resources, cited by 47% of respondents,



Question: What are your biggest challenges to implementing content marketing?

leads the list (with budgetary woes also cited highly), as is common in most marketing challenges. But this is closely followed by challenges that are unique to content marketing itself, including a lack of ability to produce strongly engaging materials, producing enough content to fill various pipelines, and a general lack of metrics to gauge the effort adequately.

Perennial marketing

challenges also creep into the list, including unsympathetic management and poor sales-marketing alignment that sabotages the effort before it can begin.

Clearly marketers must gauge the value of content marketing to their own situations, and reallocate budgets accordingly. When the C-suite is on-board, courtesy of demonstrations of strong ROI, management resistance will recede. With the appropriate support—not only from the C-suite but also between sales and marketing—sourcing appropriate vendors to help with producing abundant, engaging content is a next logical step.

THOUGHTS FOR THE FUTURE

- ✓ While a number of marketers have become fully involved in content marketing, they comprise just 12% of all b-to-b companies surveyed. This represents a competitive advantage for those companies that can quickly deploy strong content marketing initiatives.
- ✓ Content marketing has many strengths, but some are more important than others. Marketers should decide what their key objectives are, and only then determine the methods to be used.
- ✓ Pay attention to those methods with superior marketer performance assessments, not just those that are most used, to gain a competitive advantage.
- ✓ The emphasis placed on thought leadership among socially active content marketers underscores the subtlety of the channel, and the “pull marketing” that is becoming more pervasive.
- ✓ Best-of-breed content marketers are highly focused on content to boost lead generation and drive sales. This underscores the value of greater sales-marketing alignment within high-performing marketing organizations.
- ✓ Content marketing is a legitimate marketing channel. Consider carefully vendor and platform options, features and affordability in making content creation, management, distribution and measurement decisions.

Management Central

The corporate website is the core component to a content marketing strategy. Many companies deploy their tactics in silos, whereby content is pushed through social or other channels completely separate from the companies' dot.coms. Consider utilizing platforms that manage and distribute content through all channels, but with the corporate website as “Management Central,” to unify all possible conversion opportunities.

APPENDIX

Methodology

In 2012, *BtoB* surveyed 440 b-to-b marketing professionals on their use of content marketing. Three-quarters of respondents said their company revenue is less than \$100 million, with companies above that revenue level evenly represented. Technology companies comprised 19% of total respondents, representing such sectors as computer and peripheral hardware manufacturing, and software design and distribution. Also well represented were agencies (advertising, marketing, promotions and public relations) at 15%, and media companies at 14%, with consulting, financial services and non-tech manufacturing companies also surveyed.

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About *BtoB*

BtoB is the only media brand dedicated to integrated business-to-business marketing. The magazine and its website content are read by 100,000 b-to-b marketers, with every issue filled with game-changing strategies and tactics needed for success, including news, analysis, benchmarks and best practices. *BtoB* also publishes a wide variety of e-newsletters addressing specific areas of b-to-b marketing, and hosts webinars, virtual trade shows and live events. In addition, *BtoB* publishes *BtoB's Media Business* for business publishing executives.

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About Percussion Software

Percussion Software has long been known for its web content management expertise, helping companies move their web content from creation through approval to publishing on websites. Today, online strategies starts much earlier, with planning content marketing strategies and continuing on to publishing content to websites and across every available channel, including social, mobile ... and whatever comes next. It also includes creating an unrivaled, engaging customer experience wherever customers are, then measuring success and optimizing the experience further. For more than 10 years Percussion Software has created Web content, experience and engagement software products that enable companies to have more people creating more content, and publishing that content across more channels faster than ever before, all while creating a deeper, more engaging experience online. This functionality is packaged in a highly usable product that is flexible, supportable, upgradeable and—importantly—affordable.

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