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SCALING AND MEASURING CONTENT MARKETING TO GENERATE DEMAND, MEASURE AUDIENCES

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Added pressure to improve short-term performance is taking away from marketers' ability to invest in long-term strategy.

BY ROBERT ROSE

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A message from our sponsor, ScribbleLive

IT'S TIME TO HOLD ATTENTION, NOT JUST SEEK IT

Creating high-performing content for demand generation is complicated for any organization. Time and resources are at a premium—and communication on large projects can tend to go off the rails. As marketers, how can we solve this problem and launch content pieces that will truly be effective for our campaigns?

After sponsoring last year's Content Marketing for Demand Generation survey, we were anxious to discover new trends that emerged—and recognize patterns that stayed the same. For years, our focus has remained on creating premium content at scale; a crucial part of that is understanding the pain points and successes of our peers and the changes that affect us all.

As noted in this report, marketers continue to face significant challenges when it comes to scaling and measuring content. The mounting pressure to consistently create high-performing content has strained marketing teams across the board—regardless of budget or size.

With these challenges in mind, how can we drive strategy forward? How can we avoid sacrificing long-term investments to meet short-term demands?

Another point expressed in the brief focuses on the need for audience engagement. The survey found that marketers are increasingly focused on *holding* audiences' attention rather than just *grabbing* it, a fact that plays a significant role in how audiences are nurtured throughout their journey.

However, fewer than half of survey respondents rated the quality of their content as “excellent” or “very good.” Though in the content world, it's safe to say that the “excellent” experience has become the marker of success.

So, what if we expanded our ideas to ensure they will strategically feed our future content needs? What if we placed emphasis on the quality of our content, rather than the volume? What if we could repurpose existing content to achieve better results and alleviate the burden on our teams?

The time to make the shift is now. By creating richer, full-circle content experiences, we can move from simply *grabbing* our audiences' attention to *holding* it—breathing new life into our campaigns and allowing our demand generation efforts to thrive.



INTRODUCTION

“Don’t ship the org chart.”

Steven Sinofsky, a former president of the Windows Division at Microsoft, famously said this more than 10 years ago. The quote is a clever rephrasing of another business truth put forward by computer programmer Melvin Conway, who in 1967 introduced what would become known as Conway’s Law. It says:

“... organizations which design systems ... are constrained to produce designs which are copies of the communication structures of these organizations.”¹

In other words, and in both cases, we speak in the same manner as we are organized.

These ideas are often interpreted to serve as a warning that businesses should communicate in a way that reflects their customer’s needs, not their organization’s internal structure.

The problem is that neither statement is a warning. They are simply statements of fact. What we must realize is that we will ship the org chart. It is inevitable. Therefore, we will not change the customer’s experience by being conscious of not communicating in the way we are organized. No. The only way to change the customer’s experience is to reorganize ourselves to be inherently more customer-centric.

Nowhere is this more pronounced than it is for the function of content marketing, and the way we use it to achieve our demand generation goals. Businesses have been tackling the idea of modern content marketing for almost a decade now, and for many it is still a struggle.

In 2010, when Content Marketing Institute (CMI) conducted our first annual content marketing survey, 9 out of 10 marketers reported their organizations were marketing with content—regardless of company size or industry. Two of the primary goals marketers were trying to achieve with content marketing were “brand awareness” and “lead generation.” Among their biggest challenges were how to produce enough content (i.e., how to scale) and how to measure their efforts.²

Today, it’s almost the same story. The two biggest challenges we see with content marketing and demand generation are how to scale content production at the top of the buyer’s journey and how to measure our efforts.

A LONG WAY TO GO—AND A SHORT TIME TO GET THERE

The digital landscape has become increasingly complex over the last decade. This complexity has put more pressure on the demand generation marketer to continually improve results in the short term. According to the 2019 Lead Nurturing & Acceleration Survey Report, 41% of companies are delivering “weekly campaigns.” And, in the visible “shift to dial up the frequency of nurture campaigns, only 6% of respondents said their typical cadence is monthly, compared to 17% in the previous year who indicated monthly was their normal cadence.”³

Unfortunately, this short-term pressure to iterate has led many businesses to delay longer-term investments such as developing the infrastructure and processes to scale and measure their overall content marketing efforts.

Last year, when we reported the results of our first Content Marketing for Demand Generation Survey, we discussed the pressures of short-termism:

“Most demand generation strategies are simply demand identification programs. Marketing teams exert tremendous effort to optimize content experiences for search terms and questions, and to be ever more different, persuasive, and faster for anyone who has raised their hand to say, ‘I’m interested.’”⁴

In that report, we concluded that many businesses had “moved to good, but not great.” The results showed that while “demand gen marketers are seeing some success, many lack an aligned strategy, measurement plan, and technology that could help them achieve more expansive goals.”

Put more simply: While they were achieving some short-term success, last year’s survey respondents were struggling with scale and measurability—both of which require a long-term approach to strategy, planning, infrastructure, and investment.

In this year’s research, we sought not only to capture the changes in the landscape over the last 12 months, but also to learn about the current attitudes regarding the quality of the content that businesses create. We hypothesized that there is at least some desire to move from “good” to “great,” and that we can, indeed, overcome the hurdles of short-termism to at least partially invest in the longer-term strategy, infrastructure, and skills we need to evolve.

The questions for marketers then become: Where are the gaps in our approach? What changes are occurring with how content marketing is being used across demand generation? How do our efforts compare with those changes?

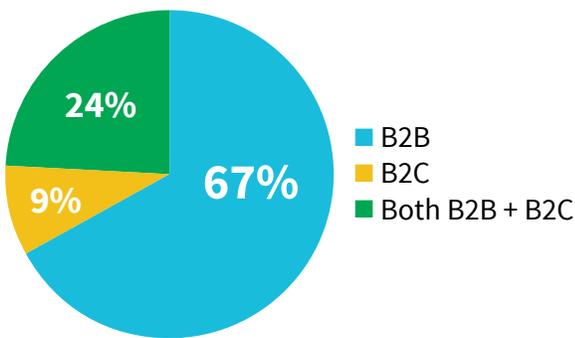
METHODOLOGY

In August 2019, the CMI research team conducted a survey to learn how marketers are using content marketing for demand generation purposes.

CMI sent email invitations to a random slice of its total opt-in subscriber list. A total of 238 global responses (representing 32 countries) were qualified for analysis. Qualified respondents were those who indicated their company uses content marketing to generate demand from buyers (create and/or nurture leads or potential customers) at the top, middle, and/or bottom of the buying funnel.

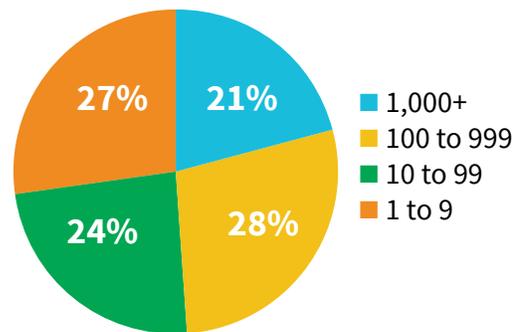
Qualified respondents represented a full range of industries, functional areas, and company sizes. Most were B2B marketers in the U.S.

Nature of Organization

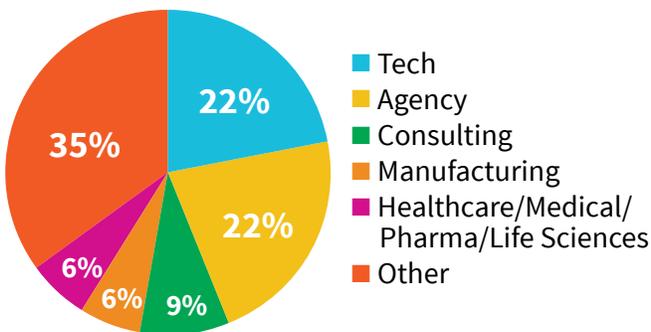


Company Size

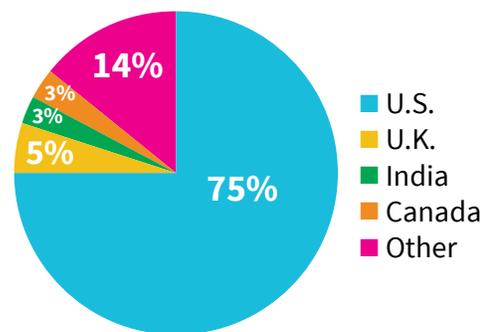
(By Employees)



Industry



Locations



FINDINGS

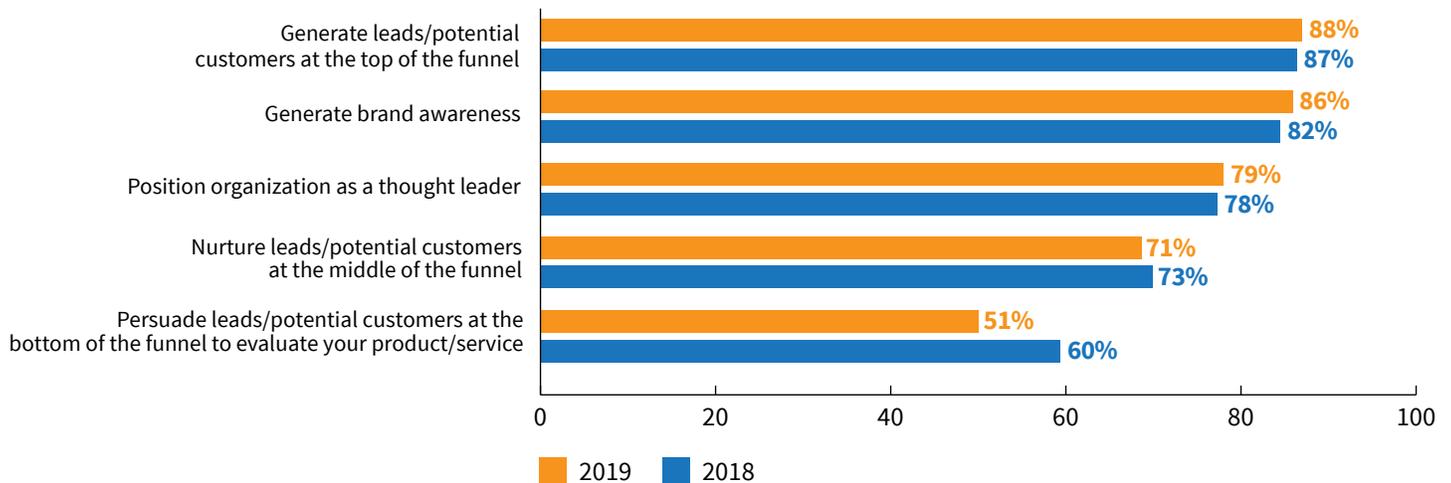
MIRROR, MIRROR IN OUR CONTENT

Overall, the findings from this year's demand generation survey mirror much of what we saw last year. However, the underlying observation this year is that marketers are more pressured, and thus becoming less patient and less focused on longer-term investment in favor of more content and more optimized display of it in the moment.

Nearly all (91%) of the marketers we surveyed said they use content marketing to generate demand from buyers (create and/or nurture leads or potential customers) at the top, middle, and/or bottom of the buying funnel.

Their top reasons for using content marketing for demand generation purposes are to generate leads at the top of the funnel (88%) and create brand awareness (86%). As was the case last year, the numbers get lower as the funnel deepens.

Reasons Organizations Use Content Marketing for Demand Generation

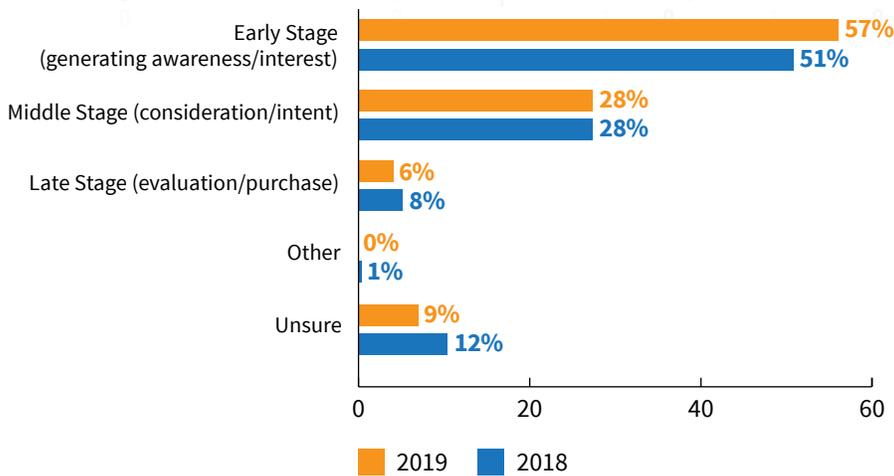


Base: All for-profit respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.

But, interestingly, these numbers were starker this year than last year. While the focus at the top of the funnel was almost identical to last year (88% vs. 87%), when we looked at the bottom of the funnel and the “persuade leads/potential customers to evaluate your product/service” stage, just over half (51%) reported using content marketing for that purpose vs. 60% last year.

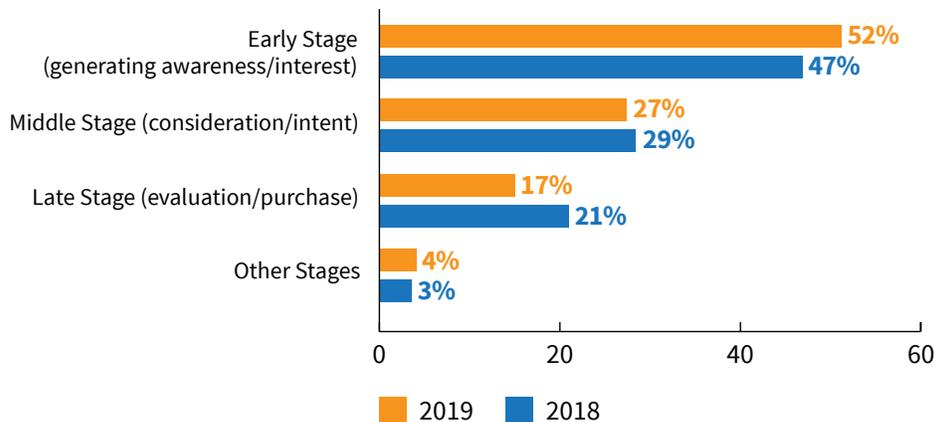
This usage result was mirrored in the question asking marketers where they see the most value in their efforts. Again, like last year, respondents reported they get the most value from their demand generation-focused content marketing at the uppermost parts of the funnel (57% said they see the most value in the early stage).

Stage in Buyer’s Journey Where Organization Receives Most Value from Content Marketing Used for Demand Generation



Base: All for-profit respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers; aided list.

Estimated Percentage of Total 2019 Content that Organization Will Create for Each Stage of Buyer’s Journey

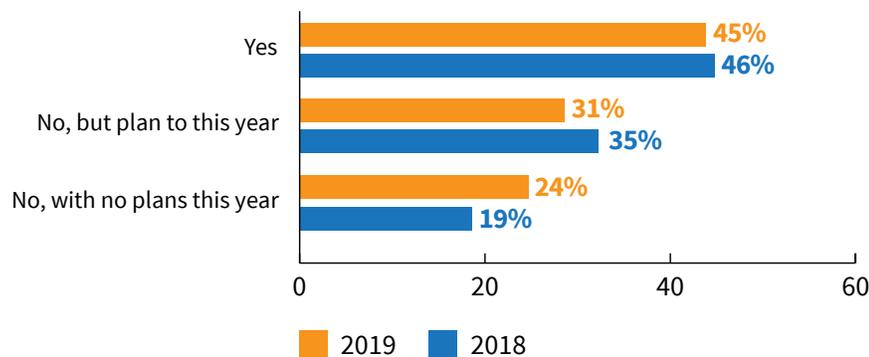


Base: All for-profit respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers; aided list. Responses were required to equal 100%.

But, also similar to last year, while the amount of content created matched well with the value received at the top of the funnel, there were some contrasting differences at the bottom of the funnel. This year, while only 6% of respondents said late-stage content provided the most value from content marketing, they also said late-stage content would be 17% of all the content they created. This suggests that marketers are attempting to create scale for their efforts at this stage of the buying journey, but are having more difficulty creating results there.

Next, we asked marketers if they segment their demand generation activities by personas. Only 45% said they do. Interestingly, and mirroring our conclusion of a decreased investment in long-term strategy, the percentage of respondents that said “no, with no plans,” increased by five points from 19% last year to 24% this year.

Do You Segment Demand Generation Activities by Personas?



Base: All for-profit respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers.

When we then asked marketers which content type was most effective at various stages of the buying journey, we found their answers to be similar to last year's. The only notable difference was for videos, whose effectiveness rating shifted more toward the early stage. This year, 66% of marketers found video to be most effective in the early stage (vs. 54% last year) and 29% found them to be most effective in the middle stage (vs. 40% last year).

The data suggest marketers are attempting to create scale at the late-stage of the buying journey, but are having more difficulty creating results there.

In Which Stage of the Buyer’s Journey Is Each Content Type Most Effective* When Used for Demand Generation Purposes?

	Early Stage (Awareness/Interest)	Middle Stage (Consideration/Intent)	Late Stage (Evaluation/Purchase)
Blog posts/articles	73%	23%	4%
Case studies	21%	46%	33%
Ebooks	56%	35%	9%
In-person events	40%	38%	22%
Interactive content	48%	39%	13%
Podcasts	59%	36%	5%
Videos	66%	29%	5%
Webinars	36%	50%	14%
White papers	31%	51%	18%
Other types of content	40%	25%	35%

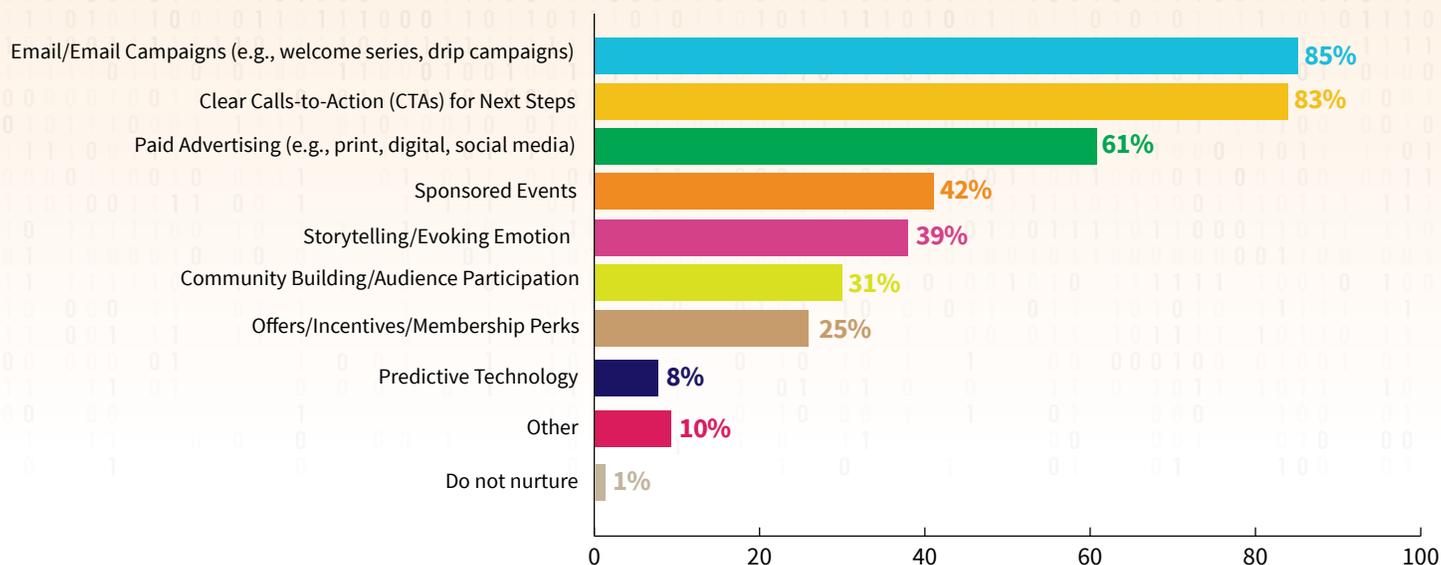
Base: All for-profit respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers; aided list. Percentages based on respondent users for each content type.

*Effective was defined as succeeding at moving leads/potential customers to the next stage (e.g., generating an initial inquiry, nurturing a lead through the buying process, or convincing/persuading someone to make a purchase) based on your organization’s specific objectives.

A new question asked respondents which content marketing-related methods their organizations use specifically to nurture audiences through the customer journey. Email campaigns were the top method (85%), followed by clear calls-to-action (83%), paid advertising (61%), and sponsored events (42%). These results indicate there is at least some increased investment in *holding* attention—rather than just *grabbing* it.

The findings on nurturing methods indicate there is at least some increased investment in *holding* attention—rather than just *grabbing* it.

Which Content Marketing-Related Method(s) Does Your Organization Use Specifically to Nurture Audience(s)?



Base: All for-profit respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers.

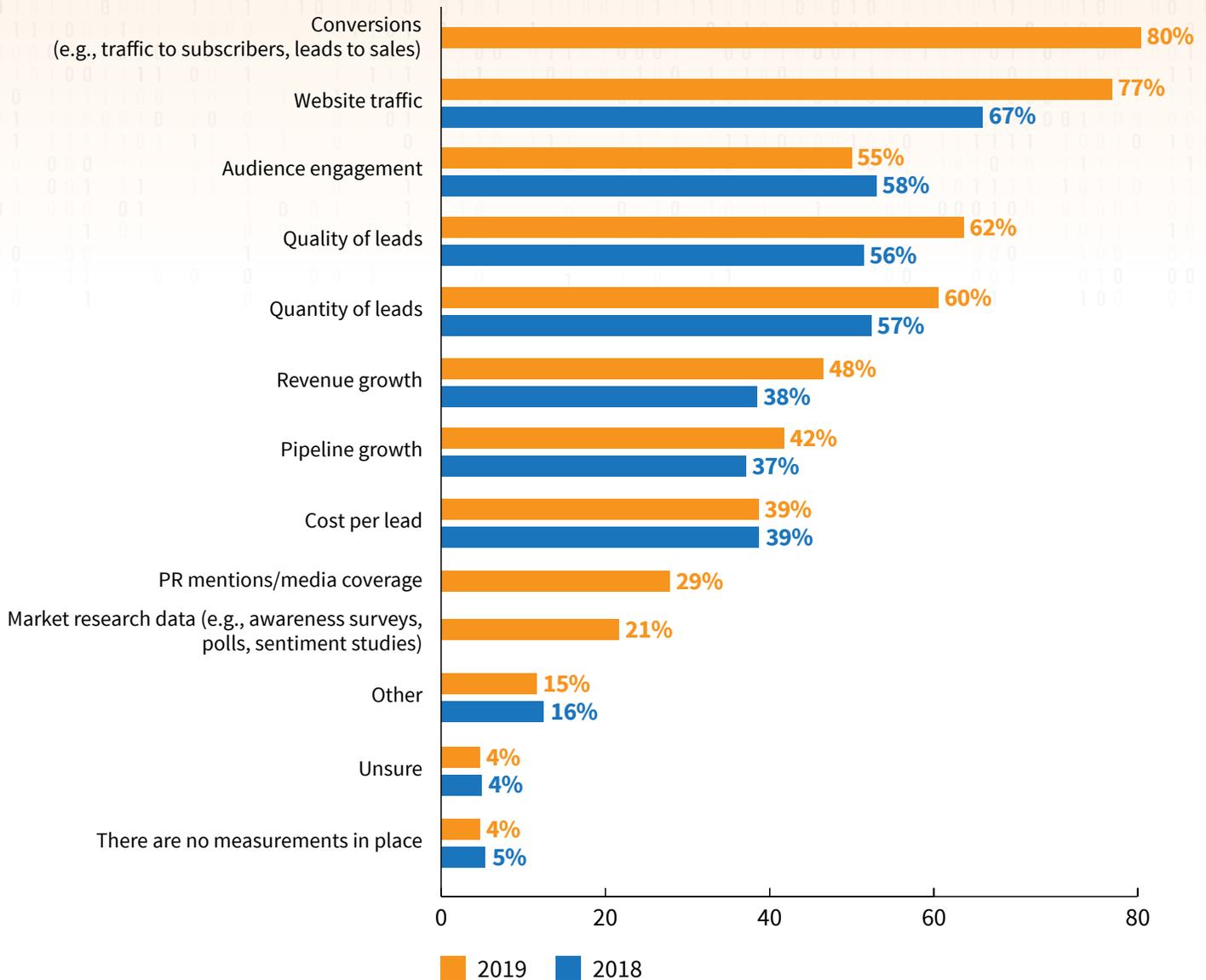
LOOKING FOR THE GLENGARRY LEADS

In further alignment with the above, is the use of conversion-focused metrics to measure demand generation success.

This year, the addition of the metric “conversions” (e.g., traffic to subscribers, leads to sales) took the number one spot—with 80% of marketers indicating they use it to measure the impact of content marketing on demand generation. Further, quality of leads (62%) topped quantity of leads (60%), indicating a slight reversal from last year, when quantity topped quality by one percentage point. Also noteworthy is the increased use of revenue growth (48% vs. 38%), a conversion-focused metric.

“Conversions” was rated the top metric for measuring the impact of content marketing on demand generation.

Metrics Organizations Use to Measure the Impact of Content Marketing on Demand Generation

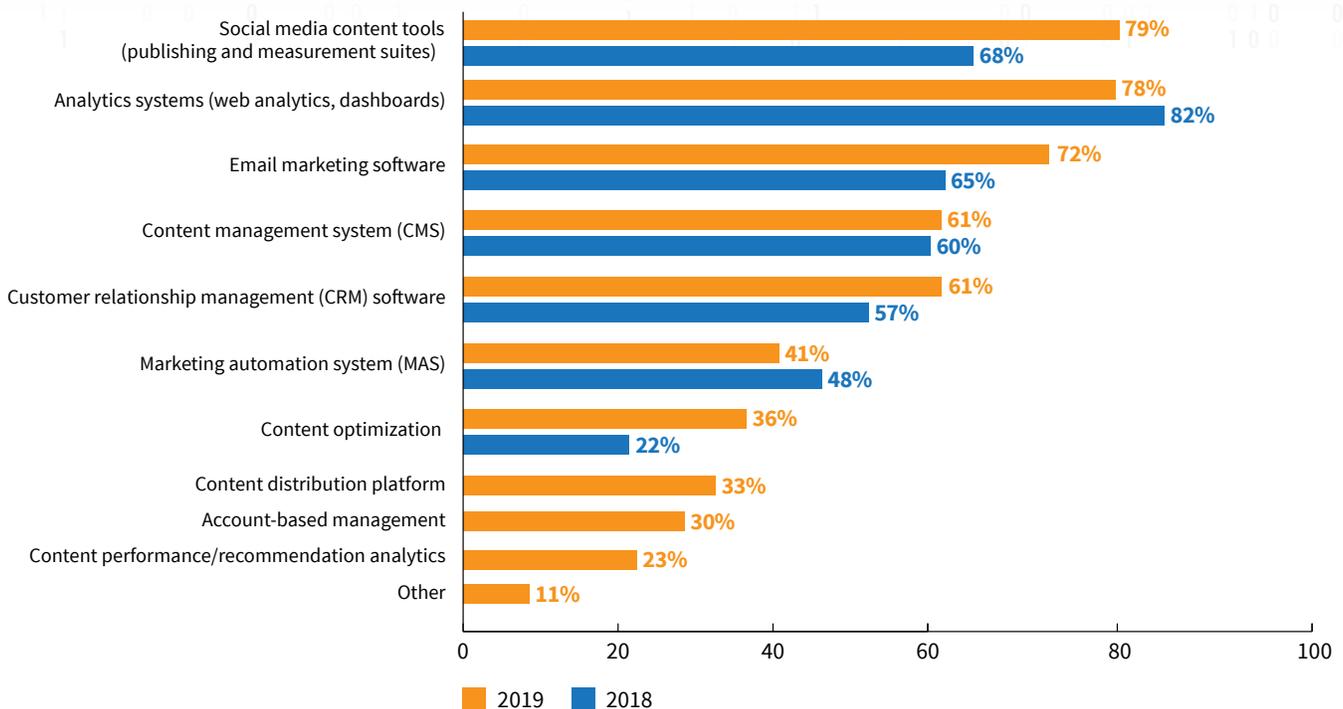


Base: All for-profit respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.

CONTENT OPTIMIZATION SHOWS GROWTH

In terms of technology that demand generation marketers use for content marketing, the results, again, largely mirrored last year. Social media content tools, analytics systems, email marketing software, content management systems, and CRM software are the most common technologies cited as part of the content stack. Of the top five, social media content tools is the only one that had a significant increase over last year (from 68% to 79%). Another notable observation is the increased use of content optimization, from 22% to 36%.

Technologies Organizations Use to Aid Content Marketing Efforts to Create Leads and Nurture Potential Customers



Base: All for-profit respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.

WHEN IS ENOUGH, ENOUGH?

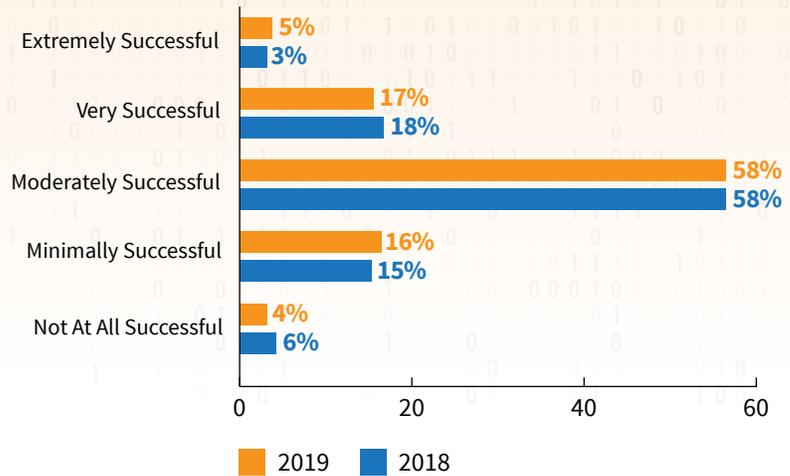
This year, we also wanted to know what marketers think about the quality and quantity of the content they have available to meet their demand generation goals.

As we did last year, we began by asking respondents how they view their organization's success with using content marketing for demand generation. Like last year, 58% said their organization is moderately successful (only 5% of marketers said it is extremely successful).

In terms of importance, 77% said their organization views content as extremely or very important to their demand generation efforts. Only 8% said it was minimally or not at all important.

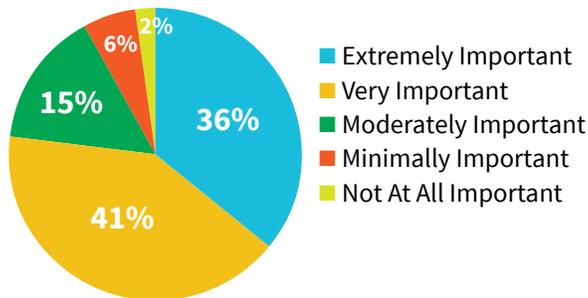
Interestingly, though, when we asked if they have enough content to fulfill their organization's current demand generation goals, most said no (63%). Furthermore, fewer than half (45%) rated their content as excellent or very good.

Success of Organization's Current Overall Content Marketing Approach for Demand Generation

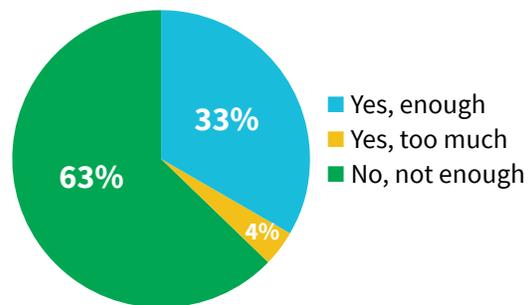


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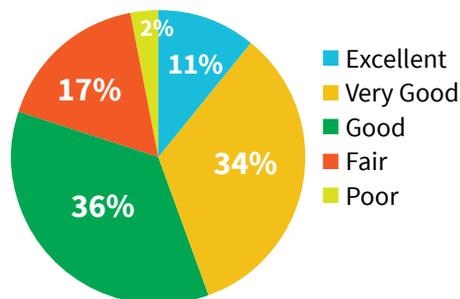
How Does Your Organization View the Importance of Content as Part of Its Demand Generation Efforts?



Do You Feel Your Organization Has Enough Content To Meet Its Current Demand Generation Goals?



How Would You Rate the Overall Quality of the Content Your Organization Has Available to Meet Its Current Demand Generation Goals?



Finally, to drill deeper into this question, we asked marketers what their biggest challenge is when using content marketing for demand generation purposes. This was a fill-in question, so we could capture more of the raw sentiment that marketers are feeling.

Among the 150 or so responses, more than 30% had to do with having the time, resources, budget, or team to create more, high-quality content.

The verbatim answers included:

- “Being able to generate large quantities of content, given our small team and budget”
- “Creating a large amount of content catering to our audience”
- “Not enough time to create the content we need”
- “Frequency of content creation and distribution”
- “Having the time to create high-quality content”

The resulting question, then, is “how much is enough?” Will businesses always be chasing more content, no matter how much is produced?

The second top answer had to do with using content strategically. More than 25% of the answers addressed a lack of strategy and measurement.

The verbatim answers included:

- “Measuring and tracking leads”
- “No clear plan/strategy”
- “ROI”
- “Alignment with our business units for measurable goals”
- “Determining what success looks like”
- “Unsophisticated internal systems and tracking”
- “Understanding tracking, who is using it, and how much of an impact it has”

CONCLUSION

REORGANIZING AROUND THE BUYER

When it comes to scaling and measuring a content marketing approach for demand generation, it's clear from the last two years of research that there is both progress being made and much left to do.

One of the clearest paths to success will require investing in the creation of new governance processes, technologies, and skills to ensure we can scale and measure our efforts.

The creation of high-quality content is inherently more expensive, takes longer, and requires a different skill set than traditional advertising or direct marketing. If content marketing is to be a meaningful—and growing—part of any company's demand generation operation, the company must invest in it the same as they would any other vital business strategy.

For example, Red Hat Software, a leading force in the world of open source software, was recently acquired by IBM for \$34 billion. Red Hat is a strong proponent of using content marketing across every part of the buyer's journey—including demand generation. At the source of their ability to scale and measure their efforts is a concerted effort toward the long-term investment of a documented strategy, a dedicated team, and focused, aligned goals for everything they do from a content marketing perspective. Over the last four years, the company's content team has grown to 45. They are scaling well. As Laura Hamlyn, global content director for Red Hat, told us when we interviewed her recently, the creation of an applied strategy with a dedicated team has been the source of this success. Laura said, "We've been given a lot of responsibility at Red Hat. Brands have to deliver consistent value in a consistent voice. The way we do that is with a consistent team and strategy."

The key to Laura's success was that she didn't try to change existing processes, teams, and measurement programs related to how Red Hat scaled and measured their existing sales and marketing. Rather, she reoriented and created a NEW "org chart" (her team) in order to create new processes and measurement programs to add to the existing sales and marketing programs.

This same approach can help demand generation marketers move beyond simply identifying existing demand with the content they already have, to creating new types of content that will generate new demand.

END NOTES

- 1) [Conway's Law](#).
- 2) [B2B Content Marketing 2010: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America](#)
- 3) [2019 Lead Nurturing & Acceleration Survey Report](#). Demand Gen Report.
- 4) [2018 Content Marketing for Demand Generation Survey Report](#). Using Content Marketing to Generate Demand, Create New Audiences.

ABOUT CONTENT MARKETING INSTITUTE

Content Marketing Institute (CMI) is the leading global content marketing education and training organization, teaching enterprise brands how to attract and retain customers through compelling, multichannel storytelling. CMI's [Content Marketing World](#) event, the largest content marketing-focused event, is held every fall in Cleveland, Ohio, and [ContentTECH Summit](#) event is held every spring in San Diego, California. CMI publishes [Chief Content Officer](#) for executives and provides strategic consulting and content marketing research for some of the best-known brands in the world. Content Marketing Institute is organized by Informa Tech. To learn more: ContentMarketingInstitute.com.

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