



B2B MARKETING SERIES

# A 7-STEP APPROACH FOR COMPELLING CONTENT MARKETING

A Red House SmartGuide



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# AN INTRODUCTION TO CONTENT MARKETING

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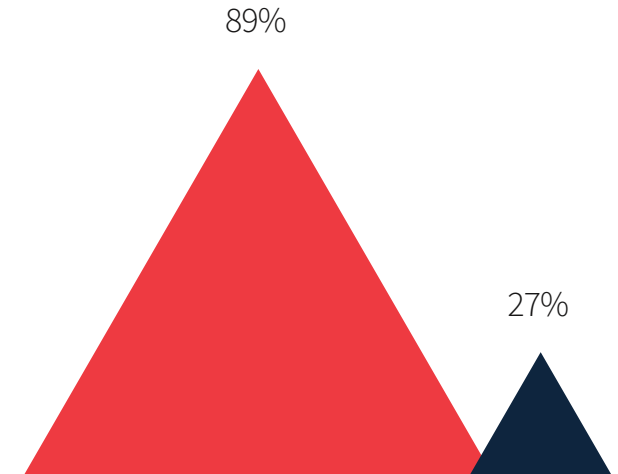
## Getting Down to Business with Content Marketing

The line between marketing and content marketing has blurred over the past few years, as content marketing has become more and more pervasive. Marketers now realize that having an effective content strategy is the cornerstone of a results-driven marketing program.

Compelling content helps attract, educate, and make the case for products and services. It also provides a better way to build awareness and trust – and directly impact sales.

But putting together an effective content strategy and reaping the rewards requires a well-thought-out plan and a dynamic set of capabilities to execute it.

Marketers now realize that having an effective content strategy is the cornerstone of a results-driven marketing program.



### Commitment to Success

Nearly 90% of successful content marketers identify as being very committed to content marketing, compared to only 27% of their less-successful peers.<sup>1</sup>





## Documented Strategies Improve Success

According to the *2019 B2B Content Marketing Report* by the Content Marketing Institute, whether an organization has a documented content marketing strategy often indicates the level of success they are able to achieve. The research points out that 65% of successful marketers have a documented strategy, compared to only 14% for those who don't consider themselves to be successful.<sup>2</sup> What's more is that three-quarters of organizations with high sales and content marketing alignment have a documented content marketing strategy, whereas only 41% of those with low alignment have a documented strategy.<sup>3</sup>

## Turn Your Content Into a Workhorse

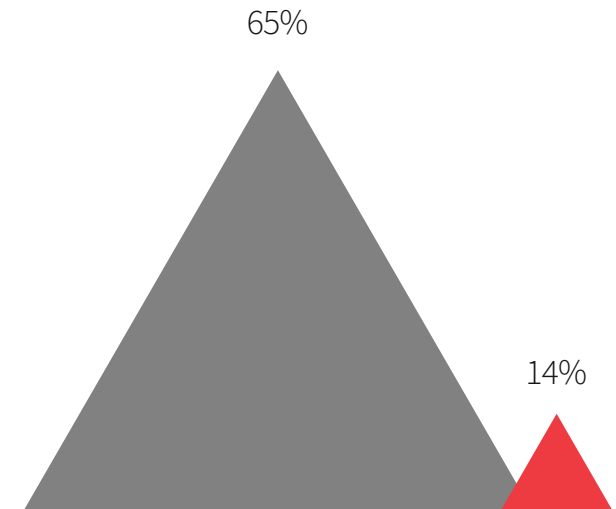
In this eBook, we'll reveal our proven seven-step methodology for creating an effective results-driven strategy that takes you through every major point of consideration. From uncovering consumption habits and buying-stage alignment to distribution and program measurement, we'll get down to business and guide you through the most important steps of your content marketing journey.

# CONTENT MARKETING

Thought leadership adapted for strategic campaigns that persuade customers and prospects to buy.

# THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Your unique perspective that provides insights your prospects and customers care about most.



### Success + Strategy

Successful content marketers are more likely to have a documented content marketing strategy than their less-successful peers.<sup>4</sup>

# MAPPING YOUR CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY

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A close-up photograph of a red pushpin with a silver metal stem, pinned to a colorful map. The map shows various geographical features and text, though it is out of focus. The pushpin is the central focus, with its sharp point resting on the map's surface.

## To Build a Content Marketing Machine, You Need a Plan

Highly effective content marketing begins with your business goals and involves a number of steps to achieve them.

The following pages contain the most important considerations for making sure you're developing the right content, and getting it delivered to the right audiences at the right time.

B2B marketers with a documented strategy  
are more effective in their use of tactics and  
distribution channels.<sup>5</sup>

## Create Confidence in Your Approach

Taking the time to answer these questions is essential to building a strong foundation for your program. There is simply not enough time or money to go about winging it every time you want to create a new tactic or launch a new campaign.

Mapping your strategy will give you the confidence and guidance to ensure that regardless of any individual tactic, everything is executed with the overall strategy – and end goal – in mind.

## 7 Steps to Content Marketing Success

- 1** ▶ **Align to business goals.**  
What are your long- and short-term business goals, and how will content drive response, conversion and revenue?
- 2** ▶ **Zero in on targets.**  
Who is your ideal customer, how do they consume content and what information do they need to make buying decisions?
- 3** ▶ **Identify themes, topics and formats.**  
Are corporate guidelines holding you back from communicating the “wow!” in your offering?  
How can you use content to demonstrate the unique value of your solution?
- 4** ▶ **Create your calendar.**  
What will you write about and when? How does it lead the buyers’ journey?
- 5** ▶ **Determine your distribution strategy.**  
Where and how does your audience consume content, and what is the most effective way – both in terms of reach and efficiency – to engage with them?
- 6** ▶ **Create your content.**  
How can you create content that is compelling, builds trust and sparks engagement?
- 7** ▶ **Measure, learn and succeed.**  
How will you measure and track engagement, what are your KPIs and how will you implement ongoing learnings?



**STEP 1:**  
ALIGN TO BUSINESS GOALS

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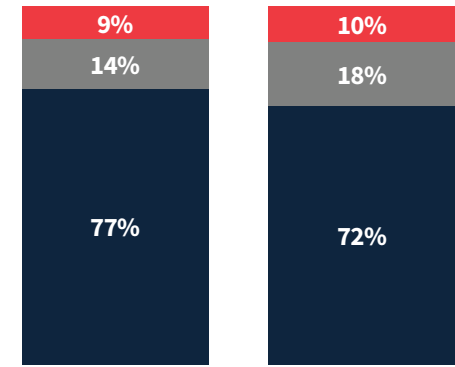
## Use Content to Drive Business Value

As the customer buying cycle continues to transition from sales-led to marketing-led, content marketing plays a more critical role in advancing prospects through the journey.

While marketing was once limited to front-end activity, such as building awareness and interest, quality content now drives quantifiable interest at every stage for both prospects and current customers.

Determine how content will impact your response and conversion rates, and what KPIs you'll track to gauge impact on revenue.

### B2B Marketers Can Demonstrate How Content Marketing Has Increased Engagement and Number of Leads



Increased audience engagement

Increased our number of leads

■ Agree ■ Neither Agree Nor Disagree ■ Disagree

Source: 2018 B2B Content Marketing Trends—North America: Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs





## The Three Keys to B2B

Catering to the B2B market can be challenging, so whether it's differences in the sales cycle, the increasing amount of decision-makers or keeping the "human" in mind, there are key elements to a B2B approach that should be taken into consideration when developing your plan.

# 1

### ▶ Longer sales cycle.

By nature of the business, B2B sales cycles are extending – they're twice as long as they were five years ago.<sup>6</sup> Knowing your customer and how your product or service helps solve their pain points – better than anyone else – is a great way to cut down on the time it takes to close a sale.

# 2

### ▶ More decision-makers.

There are a lot of cooks in the kitchen when it comes to making a big investment. The average size of buying groups is now 6.8 individuals, on average.<sup>6</sup> Knowing your decision-maker, who influences them and who makes recommendations is key to getting the right message in front of the right people.

# 3

### ▶ Human to human vs. business to business.

While it's called business-to-business, we're all humans trying to reach and connect with other humans. Inside and outside of work, we all have our own goals and interests that drive our purchasing decisions. Talk to prospects like they're emotional beings, and frame what you're selling around how it will ultimately help them in their role and make them better at what they do.

STEP 2:  
ZERO IN ON TARGETS

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## Increase Audience Engagement with Understanding

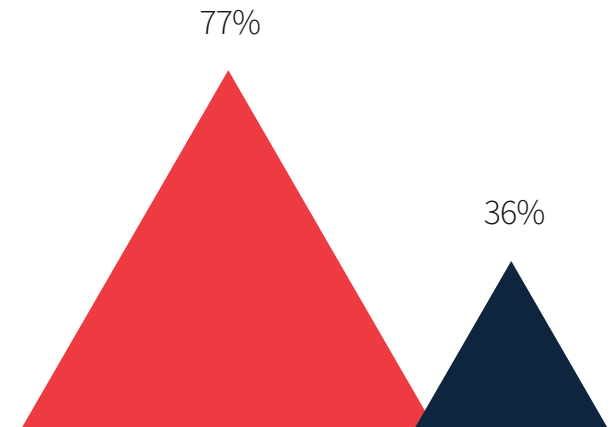
To reach your desired audience, you have to know who they are, what types of content they're interested in, and how and where they consume content. Once you have determined these answers, you'll need to create a plan that allows them to engage with your content whenever, and however, they choose.

Utilizing a data-driven approach to understand your audience can also help you predict their behaviors and reactions. Knowing key factors about your audience provides the foundation for customizing your program in a manner that speaks directly to them, and reduces the length of the sales cycle.

### Make it Personal with Personas and Messaging

While it's not feasible to customize every message for each contact, creating personas for your key audiences brings your prospects and customers to life by summarizing who they are, including their demographics, motivations, values, frustrations and perceptions. Identifying your key personas, and how to best communicate with them, will drive both efficiency and effectiveness for each piece of content created.

And because no two personas are exactly alike, applying personalization – particularly in B2B content – is a great way to make your audience feel that you're addressing their specific needs.



### Success + Personas

More than three-quarters of successful content marketers use personas, compared to 36% of the least successful.<sup>7</sup>

## Streamlining Product and Service Messaging

The way you speak about products and services must be consistent across the organization. Internally, if you're not able to consistently decipher what the most important benefit of your product is and why, then how will your customers?



## STEP 3: IDENTIFY YOUR THEMES AND FORMATS

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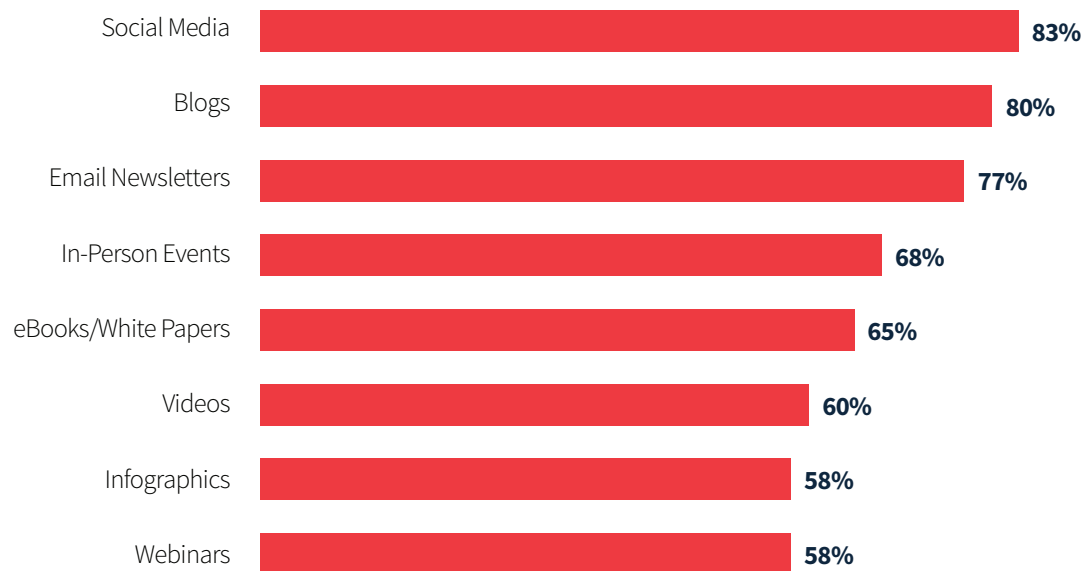
## Breathe New Life into Messaging

Most companies have brand standards and approved messaging in place that marketers may find limiting when considering a new approach. On the contrary, there's plenty of opportunity to ideate around fresh themes that will breathe new life into corporate stories that may have become stale.

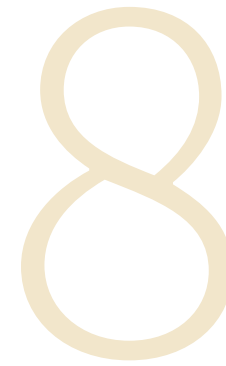
The great thing about content marketing is the ability to test ideas and repurpose them into many different topics and formats across a wide range of tactics.

When something takes off and gets your prospects and sales team excited – and it will – do more of it!

B2B Marketers' Content Marketing Tactic Usage



Source: B2B Content Marketing: 2017 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America



The average number of tactics used by B2B marketers is eight.<sup>8</sup>

## Don't be a Dime a Dozen

To create true fans and build brand trust, you have to create content that is differentiated and unique. Finding and filling the “content gaps” in your market is a strategic way to go about creating compelling content for both your brand and your industry.

One of the most overlooked ways to establish differentiation is through voice and tone. Consistency in style sets the stage for your brand's trustworthiness, personality, attitude and the types of customers it hopes to attract.

## Teach, Don't Sell

To be the thought leader in your space and build trust, you have to put your audience first. Tell them something they don't know.

As the adage goes, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” The same is true in content marketing. Don't just give your audience information about what you're selling, educate and motivate them. When they're ready to buy, they're likely to consider you first since you're a trusted resource.

## Storytelling in B2B

Every B2B brand has a story, a larger purpose and a compelling reason they got into business, and there is a tremendous opportunity to share that story with your audience.

As you're developing your message, content themes and topics, think about how you can infuse storytelling in a way that will make your content memorable and shareable. The more you can help your buyers emotionally connect to your brand, the more likely they are to trust and buy from you.

### How Often B2B Marketers Consider Various Concepts While Creating Content

■ Always/Frequently   ■ Sometimes   ■ Rarely/Never



Focus on creating content for our audience versus our brand



Differentiate our content from our competition's content

Source: 2018 B2B Content Marketing Trends—North America: Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs

STEP 4:  
CREATE YOUR CALENDAR

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## Map a Strategic (but Nimble) Plan

A solid editorial calendar should provide structure to effectively and consistently carry out your program. It should include all tactical elements and details, such as what, when and where. Your calendar and schedule should be strategically sound, but remain flexible enough to pivot based on opportunities or changes in the market.

When strategizing your content calendar, let the buyers' journey help guide your decision-making. According to a Content Marketing Institute study, B2B marketers identified blog posts/articles, white papers and case studies to be the most effective for moving prospects through the stages the buyers' journey.

### 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%	21%	6%
Case Studies	18%	42%	40%
eBooks	56%	39%	6%
Videos	54%	40%	6%
Webinars	36%	47%	17%
White Papers	34%	53%	14%

Source: Using Content Marketing to Generate Demand, Create New Audiences. Content Marketing Institute.



## Let the Journey Guide Your Calendar

Mapping against the journey – and creating a strategic balance of content types that serve the following stages – allows content to effectively lead your prospects down a path, confidently guiding them to the point of decision-making.

### Awareness →

Content in this stage of the buyers' journey is more focused on education and thought leadership – increasing overall awareness and trustworthiness. Content in this stage should be disruptive, easy to consume and attract people to your brand.

- Infographics
- Articles and blog posts
- Videos
- eBooks and eGuides

### Consideration →

Content at this stage is a bit more in-depth. It can involve product-specific mentions, demonstrate how your product or service solves problems, and help customers when they're assessing what's currently available in the market. This stage targets prospects who are actively "shopping around."

- Case studies
- Data sheets
- Thought leadership white papers
- Webinars

### Evaluation

Content at this stage helps buyers make their final buying decisions. It answers specific questions, creates buy-in and belief, and really helps your audience envision what it would be like to work with you or use your product.

- Product-focused white papers
- Testimonials and product reviews
- Implementation guides
- Product literature and FAQs

# STEP 5: DETERMINE YOUR DISTRIBUTION STRATEGY

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## Getting Content to Those Who Count

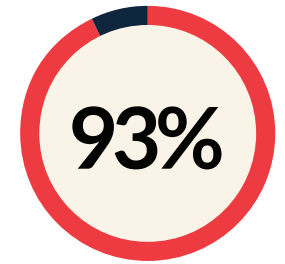
Just as important as the content itself is how you'll get it in front of your key audiences. A lot of time and money is spent on creating content, but without a strategic way to distribute it, all that effort won't be optimized.

### Inbound vs. Outbound

Although the lines between inbound and outbound strategies are blurred, especially as it relates to content marketing, both provide unique benefits and effective ways for getting your content and message in front of your target audience.

Inbound tactics are more closely aligned with the very nature of content marketing – creating compelling content that attracts readers (and improves SEO) and later influences buying decisions thanks to positive interactions with your brand. But outbound tactics should also have a place in your strategy, whether through email campaigns, paid social posts, direct mail, sponsorships or advertisements.

Despite its maturity, email is still one of the most effective – and most popular – channels for distribution, with 93% of B2B marketers using it to distribute content.<sup>8</sup> When it comes to social media, LinkedIn comes out on top as the most effective channel for delivering content and securing audience engagement<sup>9</sup>, with 71% of B2B marketers citing its contribution to their overall content marketing success.<sup>10</sup> Combining the two is certain to maximize reach and results.



### OF B2B MARKETERS

use email to distribute content, making it the most popular outbound tactic.<sup>10</sup>

### Create Seamless Consistency Across Channels

When determining your distribution strategy, consider the user experience within each channel. What experience do you want your audience to have, and how does this translate to different devices and ways of consuming and interacting with content?

Making a seamless transition from one channel to the next is key to an omnichannel approach. So whether it's through your website, speaking to someone on the phone, email campaigns, social media or trade shows – ensuring consistency and a seamless approach across all channels builds efficiency and makes it easier for your prospects to engage with your brand.

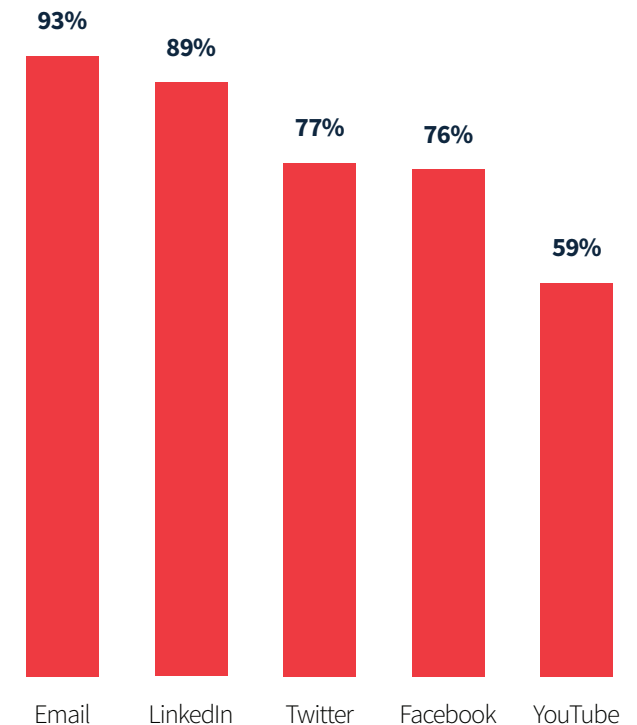
### Make it Automatic

Automation is a powerful tool that guides your prospects down a clear path, all while providing data that can provide sound reasoning for next steps. So whether it's through sequencing and delivering messages in a controlled way, or segmentation and further personalizing content delivery, automation platforms should be used by both small and large brands alike.

## Control the Uncontrollable

As marketers, we'd like to feel that we're in complete control of the way our content is delivered, but this is not always the case. Your sales team and partners are key distribution channels that must be considered as a part of any campaign. Ensure both are prepared to deliver the message and understand the strategy behind the content.

### Channels B2B Marketers Use to Distribute Content



Source: B2B Content Marketing: 2017 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America.

**STEP 6:**  
CREATE YOUR CONTENT

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## Compelling Content Always Comes Out Ahead

Your audience is being exposed to more marketing messages than ever before, so it's critical that the content you create is not only compelling, but high-quality and high-value.

While having a lot of content is great, having fewer pieces of compelling content is even better. Measured by a lot more than word choice, great content is based not only on your overall strategy and the purpose it serves, but also on your audience and how they're engaging with it.

### Drive Engagement with Visuals

Good design and careful consideration to visuals amplifies great content and plays an instrumental role in its success. When it comes to blog posts, those that include images have 650% higher engagement than those without.<sup>11</sup> This, in addition to the substantial rise in video consumption, is a serious indicator of how engagement is impacted by visuals. Don't underestimate the power of captivating visuals, compelling photography and how innovative design can bring your content to life.

## Get the Most Mileage Out of Content

Marketers are naturally resourceful people, and applying this resourcefulness to your content strategy can help you get the most mileage out of what you're creating. Incorporate a repurposing strategy into your content marketing roadmap. This will extend the life of content, better serve your audience and diversify your content offerings.

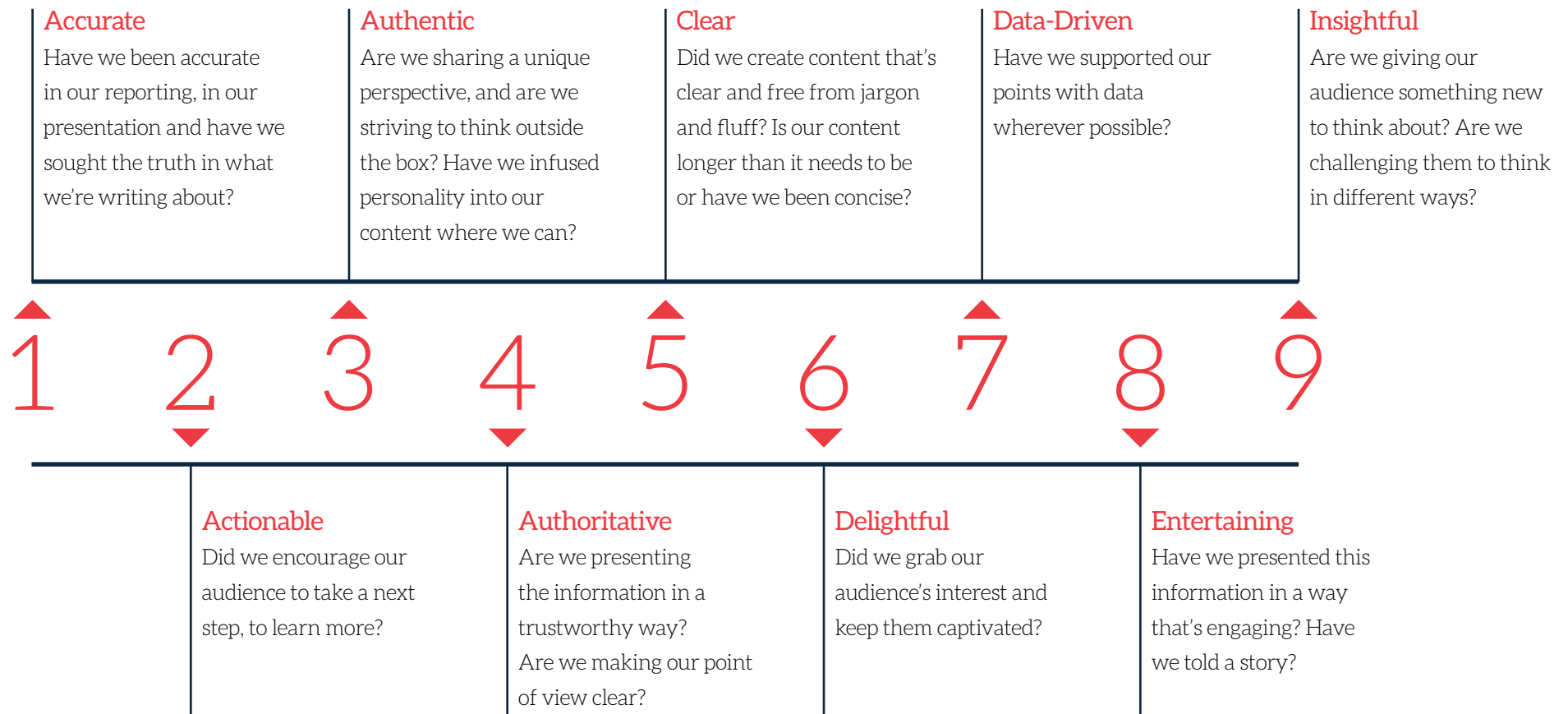
For example, a data-heavy blog post could make a great infographic, and a demo video could make an informative data sheet. Webinars and podcasts are also goldmines when it comes to content repurposing. Strive to create multiple pieces out of the original piece, as someone who may not be ready to watch a three-minute video could be in a great position to consume a brief data sheet.



## 9 Characteristics of Compelling Content

Beyond helpfulness, there are a number of other content qualities that should be taken into consideration.

In the pursuit of creating the best content, ask yourself the following questions:



**STEP 7:**  
**MEASURE, LEARN AND SUCCEED**

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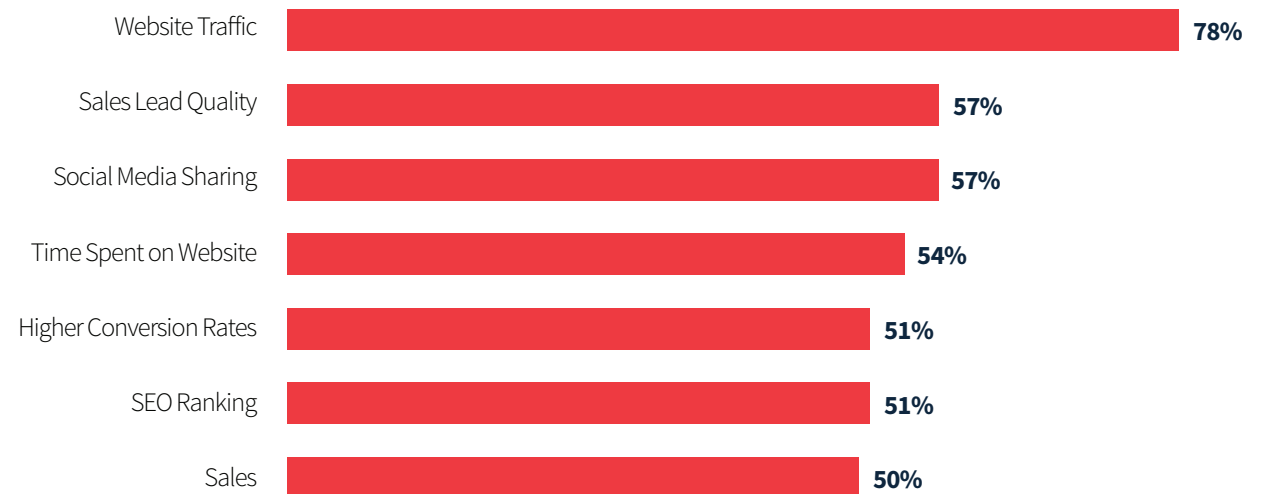
## If You Can't Measure it, You Can't Manage it

Historically, marketers have had a difficult time measuring content marketing effectiveness. Even though it has reached a level of maturity, many are still trying to figure it out – nearly 40% of B2B marketers are still not measuring content marketing ROI.<sup>12</sup>

Part of the issue is that the tactics used to measure more traditional marketing efforts have not always translated to meaningful measurement of content marketing programs. Looking beyond downloads and opens, marketers have to dig deeper – and get strategic – to gauge effectiveness.

Setting KPIs and identifying what it is you'll measure is a necessary step to know how content is impacting business goals. Understanding metrics and knowing what to look for will determine what steps should be taken next, how to apply what you're learning and how to get the most out of your content marketing program.

### B2B Marketers' Content Marketing Metrics Usage



Source: B2B Content Marketing: 2017 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America



### Measurement for Driving Innovation and New Thinking

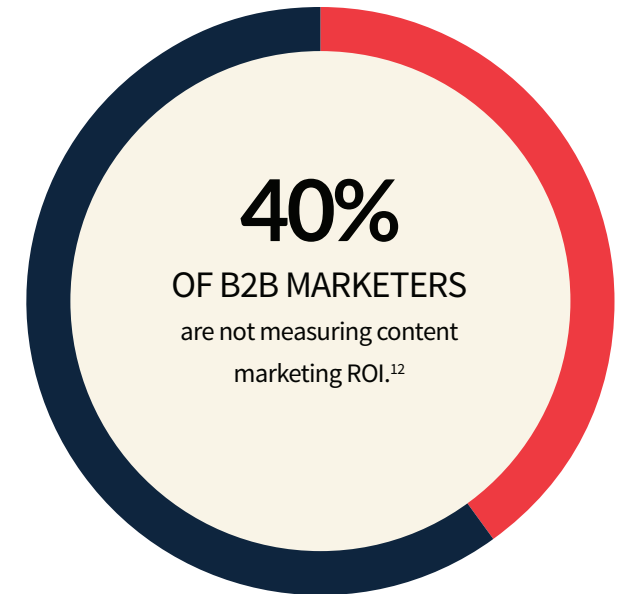
Analytics aren't just measurement. They're powerful bits of information that can help you better understand your audience and inspire new ideas. With the right analytics tools and data sets, you can predict audience behavior and projected performance of any particular tactic or campaign.

Testing is an effective way to experiment and learn more about how your audience reacts. Whether you're comparing messaging, creative or timing/delivery, split testing can give you insights that will extend far beyond the tactic being tested.

### Creating a Learning Culture

Ongoing measurement and refinement to your program is crucial to ensuring efficiency and effectiveness. With the tools available today, you don't have to wait until a campaign ends to know how it performed. You're now able to course-correct along the way, getting to where you want to go while learning throughout the process.

Whether you're comparing against industry benchmarks or past campaigns, knowing where you've been is an important factor in understanding where you're headed. Every tactic created and every campaign launched will contribute to how you'll learn, grow and create more effective programs.



BRINGING IT  
ALL TOGETHER

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## Strategize with the Experts

While each content marketing strategy is unique – just as each business and its objectives – having one in place can be the difference between success and failure. With the financial impact that a well-executed program can have on your bottom line, and the complexities involved in launching and measuring successful programs, there's a lot to manage, but there's even more to be gained.

With experience in working with brands of all sizes across numerous verticals, the content experts at Red House B2B Marketing are well-poised to consult with you to prioritize your business needs, create a compelling content marketing strategy and help you create a plan to grow your content marketing results.

To learn more about how we can help you craft a measurable and results-driven content marketing strategy, contact [consulting@redhouseb2b.com](mailto:consulting@redhouseb2b.com) or visit <http://redhouseb2b.com>.

### Sources

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## RED HOUSE B2B MARKETING

An award-winning B2B agency with a proven track record of engaging decision makers, generating and nurturing leads, and creating demand.

We offer a wide range of services to support our clients' content marketing initiatives. We'll help you identify and develop the most compelling content to connect with your audience along every step of the way.

**Learn more at [redhouseb2b.com](http://redhouseb2b.com) >>**



Top Agency Multiple Years



Top US Agencies



Past Winner  
Best of Division,  
Lead Generation



Multiple Years