



MAKING CONTENT GROW INTO CUSTOMER FLOW

Improving Content Marketing Value from
the Pipeline to the Bottom Line





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INTRODUCTION

Marketing legend John Wanamaker famously said, “Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is, I don’t know which half.” That was more than a hundred years ago. Yet, marketers are still no closer to knowing if their advertising, in the form of content marketing, resonates with the right people and impacts their buying decisions.

“Content is a company’s most important asset.”

—Robert Schefferine, Vice President of Production at ABC Entertainment Marketing

It’s a costly blind spot, given that content marketing represents nearly 40 percent of marketing spend for most companies, according to the Content Marketing Institute. Cision says enterprises invested a \$300 billion on global content marketing last year.

Today, teams of writers, designers, photographers, podcasters and videographers create mountains of content and distribute them over a myriad of digital channels. But until marketers get a firm grasp on content quality, distribution and impact, content marketing budgets will remain on shaky ground.

When the CMO Council gave marketers a wish list to resolve one challenge that would lead to improving content performance and return, the top three answers were:

1. Knowing if the content being created is actually influencing and engaging our audience
2. Budget to develop high-quality content at scale
3. Measuring true content ROI against our business goals of growth

Wanamaker’s words were never more true.

It all seems shockingly haphazard. Marketers heavily invest in churning out content, both externally to potential customers (e.g., demand gen) and internally to sales organizations (e.g., sales enablement). Much of this content is poorly consumed, if at all. It’s akin to firing a thousand arrows hoping one will find its mark.

The problem is made worse in light of content marketing’s critical role in the customer experience.

“Content is a company’s most important asset,” says Robert Schefferine, vice president of production at ABC Entertainment Marketing. “It’s the way you communicate to customers about who you are, what your brand is all about, why people should care, and that you care about your customer.”



Prospects, customers and partners, too, expect contextually relevant content distributed over the right channel at the right time. When content does hit the mark, results can move the sales motion forward. Forrester Research found that 62 percent of B2B buyers can finalize their selection criteria or vendor list solely on digital content.

In the best cases, content marketing can even act as a market research engine that influences the way a product is sold or delivered. For instance, Aaron Wahle, senior vice president of marketing at Fuzzy Door, a film and television production company, creates movie trailers and distributes them on YouTube. He follows up trailers by polling viewers to find out if they plan to see the movie.

Based on these results, he might recommend releasing the movie on Netflix instead of movie theaters. Such is the star power of content marketing.

“You can say, ‘You know what? This is going to a sister network or streamer. We’re not spending \$50 million to push this into the theatre and get \$8 million on opening weekend,’” Wahle says. “This is a business.”

MISSTEPS MAR CONTENT MARKETING

To better understand the challenges of content marketing, distribution and impact, the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Council, in partnership with Rock Content, surveyed 195 marketers and conducted eight in-depth interviews with marketers at IBM, ABC Entertainment Marketing, Autodesk, The Economist, Fast Company, Fuzzy Door, Guinness World Records and Boston Ballet.

Among the insights gleaned from this study is this key finding: When it comes to content strategy, it’s a tale of two cities. Half of marketers said their content strategy tunes into signals that guide content development, while the other half said they’re struggling to apply intelligence to develop content strategies.

With content execution, an even more troubling picture emerges. Three out of five marketers cited serious content challenges in the CMO Council report. There is no question missteps at various stages of the content lifecycle derail otherwise well-intentioned efforts.

The CMO Council found a range of common mistakes. They include:

- Content strategies not based on data and intelligence
- Brands producing too much content
- Shotgun approach to content distribution
- Failure to measure content’s impact

The first half of this report helps marketers understand what makes great content for your target audience and what challenges stand in the way. The second half deals with content distribution, testing and optimization.

KEY FINDINGS

WHAT GREAT CONTENT LOOKS LIKE — AND DOES

“If you haven’t got the content right, the distribution is kind of academic,” says Jamie Credland, senior vice president of client strategy and marketing at The Economist.

Just about everyone agrees great content is the holy grail of marketing. But before marketers can begin their quest for great content, they need to define the content’s role and objectives.

The top five most important roles content plays in a customer engagement strategy are the following:

- Communicating brand promise and value
- Delivering thought leadership
- Communicating with customers, prospects and partners
- Powering demand generation or lead acquisition strategies
- Differentiating products and services

If the content’s aim is lead generation and advancing a prospect along the buyer’s journey, marketers should also be able to define specific objectives or next steps. If marketers don’t know what this looks like, they run the risk that their content will frustrate customers — or worse.

“Good content draws you in and, hopefully, gets you to stick around.”

—Jennifer Weissman, CMO at Boston Ballet

“What’s the next step?” says Michael Therrien, head of content and sales enablement for North America at IBM. “If they get to the content, consume it and want to move to the next level, but we don’t give them that opportunity, then we’re just offering up information and only generating demand for our competitors.”

Depending on the role, content can take all kinds of shapes.

Readers of The Economist, for instance, tend to be high-level executives looking for business strategies and thought leadership. This means The Economist’s marketing content should echo this mission with humanistic elements followed by service-style content, Credland says.



Same rings true for Fast Company. “You’re trying to tell a great story that’s valuable to your audience,” says Ben Baer, executive editor at Fast Company. “The content should make them smarter, more informed, better at their jobs.”

At Boston Ballet, CMO Jennifer Weissman must balance education and entertainment in her marketing content. She’s trying to put “butts in seats,” but newbies to ballet don’t know much about the art. “The idea of educating the audience just feels a little painful to me,” Weissman says. “So, our voice is playful and informative.”

43 percent of marketers said some content hits the mark with customers and drives value, while other content misses and wastes budget.

Profiles of dancers talking about their craft are some of the more popular types of content. If Weissman’s content makes a personal connection with potential ticket buyers while helping them feel closer to the arts, she’s done her job. “Good content draws you in and, hopefully, gets you to stick around,” Weissman says.

But if a brand’s audience wants, say, deep technical information, then great content means something entirely different. It’s not thought leadership, nor does it have human elements.

Case-in-point: Many of Autodesk’s content marketing creators are former engineers who play a pivotal role helping inform technically savvy customers and potential customers. These readers care less about slick PowerPoint presentations and more about the content’s helpfulness.

“Engineers are notoriously horrible writers,” says Brian Sather, senior manager, product marketing and campaign development at Autodesk. “But we have sophisticated products, and the value propositions are sometimes difficult to explain.”

In today’s world of amateur YouTube videos, part-time bloggers and user-generated content, a guiding light for content marketers is that the value of the content far outweighs the look-and-feel. That’s a tough pill to swallow for many marketers.

“Back in the day, we wouldn’t dream of doing a piece of content that wasn’t beautifully edited, but now the world’s changing,” says Samantha Fay, senior vice president, global brand strategy at Guinness World Records. “Something that has been sent to us that we put together in 15 seconds can perform better than a professionally shot piece by a big brand.”

Speed of content delivery also helps make content great. When actress Jennifer Aniston broke the record for the fastest time to reach one million followers on Instagram (which, by the way, took 12 hours and three minutes), Fay’s team had to act fast — verifying, endorsing, creating and posting content about the record across social platforms. That content had awesome engagement.



CHALLENGES TO CONTENT CREATION

The problem is that creating consistently great content remains vexingly elusive.

In the CMO Council report, 43 percent of marketers said some content hits the mark with customers and drives value, while other content misses and wastes budget. Another 14 percent said they struggle to create content that is impactful with customers and prospects. Lastly, two percent create content, which often fails to deliver measurable returns, only because they feel forced to play the content marketing game.

The top five challenges facing marketers in developing impactful and effective content:

- Ensuring there is a budget to develop content at scale
- Determining if the content actually influences and engages the audience
- Taking ideas and translating thoughts and concepts — even ones on napkins — into reality
- Measuring content ROI against business goals of growth
- Sourcing creative talent that can develop the interactive formats that customers desire

Meanwhile, content sprawl continues to plague marketers. According to the CMO Council report, less than one out of three marketers say they can quickly scale content operations up or down. “There’s just too much content out there”, says IBM’s Therrien, who is also trying to reduce the amount of content his team produces.

“We’re not here to build content; we’re here to help our customers.”

—Brian Sather, Senior Manager, Product Marketing, Autodesk

Autodesk’s Sather admits he fell into this trap three years ago. “We created this beautiful resource center and said, ‘We need more content, more content, more content.’ But it’s no longer the goal. We’re not here to build content; we’re here to help our customers.”

Content consumers suffer, too. “People are starting to get wise to the fact that, ‘Oh my God, there’s so much content, and now I’ve got to whittle it down to what’s important to me,’” Schefferine at ABC Entertainment Marketing says. “If you start feeding too much content that’s not necessarily relevant or maybe something they’ve already seen before, you start losing their attention and dedication.”

Many of these problems can be traced back to a poorly thought-out content strategy.

While a majority of marketers said customers, prospects and partners expect relevant, contextual experiences at every touchpoint that is powered by data and intelligence, this isn’t how many content strategies are designed.



Nearly half of marketers said they struggle to apply intelligence about customers or market trends to develop and guide content strategies. The top three factors most impacting, directing and shaping the development of content strategies: budget, time and leadership requests.

Again, not the stuff of data and intelligence.

DISTRIBUTION REALLY MATTERS

“You can have the best piece of content in the world, but if you put it out organically on Instagram, it’s buried in four seconds,” says Wahle at Fuzzy Door. “If there is no media plan to make sure the right people see it at the right time, you just shouldn’t do it.”

Too many marketers make the mistake of scattershot content distribution. Worse, marketers go down the programmatic route to achieve even greater distribution with the added sense that they’re reaching their target audience. But this doesn’t make much sense.

“Agencies were telling clients that as long as it was your target audience, it really didn’t matter where they saw the ad, which in retrospect seems completely crazy,” The Economist’s Credland says. “You can be the CEO during the day, but at home you’re a dad. When you’re with your buddies, you’re a football fan. We’re different people at different times of the day, and so different messages are appropriate.”

“A culture of testing and optimization is critical for us to make sure we’re improving on our work.”

—Michael Therrien, Head of Content and Sales Enablement for North America at IBM

The days of dropping content on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram are long gone as well, Wahle notes. Now it’s about identifying primary, secondary and perhaps tertiary audiences, finding where they like to consume content similar to what you’re creating, and then delivering great content in those channels.

Let’s say Wahle is trying to reach hardcore horror movie fans as his primary audience, and people who like softer-edge horror movies as his secondary audience. He looks for people watching and talking about horror movies across Hulu, Netflix, Amazon, Apple, theatrical, television, etc. Then he connects the dots and builds a psychographic profile of the audiences.

“We don’t define our audiences as males or females above and below 25 years old or movies made for men over 45,” Wahle says. “That is a ridiculous, old-school way of marketing.”

When it comes time to decide on channels for content distribution, it’s best to be super selective, says IBM’s Therrien. In an era of fake news, privacy issues and cluttered feeds, Therrien is thinking about pulling his content from public domains. He doesn’t want his content in places where people won’t take it seriously.



“There’s a little bit of a withdrawal, and people are moving to closed social systems,” Therrien says. “The whole idea of a private group is something that we’re going to start to see. It might be LinkedIn groups or another solution.”

“You’re trying to tell a great story that’s valuable to your audience. The content should make them smarter, more informed, better at their jobs.”

—Ben Baer, Executive Editor at Fast Company

The whole idea is to be careful and make sure you’re testing in the places where you can reach your audience, Fast Company’s Baer says. You don’t want to be everything to all platforms, nor chase the latest cool channel that might not be a fit for your audience.

“It’s about making sure you reach audiences in the places they want to be quickly found but with focus,” Baer says, adding that email is still

one of the most effective content distribution channels. “You also don’t want to have a one-size-fits-all strategy; the story you tell on Twitter might not be the same story you tell on Instagram.”

WHAT COMETH AFTER CONTENT?

Once content is created and distributed, you can ease back in your chair and pat yourself on the back, right? Nope. Now the real work begins. It’s critical to gain an understanding of the content’s impact.

Time and again, marketers in the CMO Council report highlighted that their biggest challenge is knowing if the content actually influences and engages the target audience. “It’s the million-dollar question,” The Economist’s Credland says.

The trick is measuring as much as possible, Credland says, in order to identify the key performance indicators and tweak the content and distribution accordingly. To this end, The Economist tracks all sorts of metrics: PR coverage, overall awareness, content views, cost per leads for paid LinkedIn and social activity, engagement on the site, where people drop off, subsequent sign ups, etc.

“If a lead wants to stay in a conversation with us, that’s obviously prized,” Credland says. “If they start that conversation with us on social and engage in multiple ways, we have a tiering system to measure the social engagement.”

IBM’s Therrien recommends having a testing plan before going to market with content. This plan should include a hypothesis to test against. He codes every content asset in order to track performance and learn what asset has produced engagement or resulted in a lead. Last quarter, his team ran 19 tests and continues to run tests every month.



“We want to give a different amount of time for traffic and response for any one piece of content in the market before we go ahead and make changes to it,” Therrien says. “A culture of testing and optimization is critical for us to make sure we’re improving on our work.”

So, what happens when content doesn’t hit the mark? Discovering the reason feels more like reading tea leaves than making sense of metrics. Maybe the problem lies in a faulty headline. Or poor promotion on a social platform. Or distribution to the wrong people. Or maybe it really was the content’s fault — that is, it just didn’t resonate.

Conversely, what if content appears to hit the mark? Did it really lead to a business outcome? A good practice for marketers is to follow up on the quantitative metrics by gathering qualitative data via polls and surveys to help answer these questions.

“You can be the CEO during the day, but at home you’re a dad. When you’re with your buddies, you’re a football fan. We’re different people at different times of the day, and so different messages are appropriate.”

—Jamie Credland, SVP, Client Strategy and Marketing, The Economist

At Fuzzy Door, Wahle will post a movie trailer on YouTube that gets tons of views and tons of engagement. But this doesn’t mean viewers will dip into their wallets to see the movie. “It correlates but isn’t causation,” he says. So Wahle follows up with a poll asking viewers about their intentions, thus getting a better understanding of the trailer’s impact.

Similarly, Autodesk’s Sather sees how many sales reps downloaded his team’s sales content but doesn’t know if the content was effective in a sales pitch. Did it help in the purchase decision? Like Wahle, Sather follows up with qualitative research, such as asking for feedback from salespeople and a third-party market research firm.



CONCLUSION

There are four main stages in content marketing where mistakes can be made, resulting in content that widely misses the mark or fails to deliver on its objective. In each stage, best practices emerge as big takeaways from the study:



When designing a content strategy...

Make sure data and intelligence about customers and market trends help shape your content strategy. Don't rely merely on budget, time and guesswork. Avoid becoming a mass content producer.



When creating great content...

Define overarching content goals and tactical next steps. Identify tiered audiences and similar content they consume. Understand that great content looks different depending on these audiences.



When choosing distribution channels...

Don't take a shotgun approach to distribution. Be selective in terms of channels where your audience will not only see the content but be open to consuming it. Consider private channels instead of public domains.



When measuring content impact...

Create a testing plan and hypothesis for both content and distribution channels. Measure as much as possible, but don't rely solely on metrics. Follow up with qualitative research to gain insight into content's ability to impact business outcomes.



BEST-PRACTICE LEADERSHIP



ROBERT SCHEFFERINE

ABC Entertainment Marketing

Vice President of Production and Post-Production



BRIAN SATHER

Autodesk

Senior Manager, Product Marketing



JENNIFER WEISSMAN

Boston Ballet

Chief Marketing Officer



JAMIE CREDLAND

The Economist

Senior Vice President, Client Strategy and Marketing



BEN BAER

Fast Company

Executive Editor



AARON WAHLE

Fuzzy Door

Senior Vice President, Marketing



SAMANTHA FAY

Guinness World Records

Senior Vice President of Global Brand Strategy



MICHAEL THERRIEN

IBM

Head of Content and Digital, North America

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVES

Featured Question | What Is Content If Not King?



ROBERT SCHEFFERINE
ABC Entertainment Marketing
Vice President of Production
and Post-Production

“Content is everything.”



BRIAN SATHER
Autodesk
Senior Manager,
Product Marketing

“Content has become kind of a buzzword, and in many ways it's a trap. It's ‘if we just produce a bunch of content then good things will happen.’ And it's not true. Content is about substance. Content with a purpose is king. It's not the king part that's wrong; it's the content part.”



JENNIFER WEISSMAN
Boston Ballet
Chief Marketing Officer

“Content is glue. It's something that draws you in and entices you to want to stick around and engage.”



JAMIE CREDLAND
The Economist
Senior Vice President,
Client Strategy and
Marketing

“Content is fuel, in the sense that it drives the conversation. You can burn it up, engage with people, and make a reaction from your audience.”



BEN BAER
Fast Company
Executive Editor

“Content is connection. It's about maintaining a connection with our audience so that we can continue to tell really creative, cool stories about innovation and design that push things forward.”



EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVES

Featured Question | What Is Content If Not King?



AARON WAHLE

Fuzzy Door

Senior Vice President,
Marketing

“Content is a measuring stick. You can really tell a lot about audiences based on their reaction to your content. It’s the measuring stick by which you’re going to succeed or fail.”



SAMANTHA FAY

Guinness World Records

Senior Vice President of
Global Brand Strategy

“Content is emotional. It’s about people and storytelling. But most importantly, it’s about relevancy. Content may still be king, but the context is the kingdom.”



MICHAEL THERRIEN

IBM

Head of Content and
Digital, North America

“Content is King, and Distribution is Queen, because she wears the pants!”



ROBERT SCHEFFERINE

Company: ABC Entertainment Marketing
 Title: Vice President of Production and Post-Production
 Industry: Entertainment



“Content is the most important asset a company has because it’s the way you communicate to customers, whether you’re making media to help people watch more media or making a product and want them to buy more of your product.”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#COMMUNICATE

Robert Schefferine serves as Vice President of Production and Post-Production at ABC Entertainment Marketing where he has overseen the creation of over 18,000 pieces of media each year for the last twelve years. From shows, to movies, to advertisements, Schefferine has a hand in every jar at ABC. Needless to say, Schefferine is a bona fide expert on how to create and distribute engaging content.

“It’s a big creative factory,” Schefferine says.

With such a large volume of media, all communicating the ABC brand to the many micro-segmented audiences, there’s a lot to coordinate, track and analyze. Schefferine prefers to take a hands-on approach to his work. Prioritization and efficiency are mainstays, but he argues that the smaller details — color correction, graphics and finishing touches — matter just as much.

In an ever-growing organization such as ABC, a holistic strategy for content is not just recommended but imperative. Each platform demands different types of content, which means Schefferine’s team, working alongside with his creative colleagues must work tirelessly to create and distribute relevant content for different audiences on those platforms. Whether that’s resizing an image for Twitter or building a billboard campaign in Times Square, every detail counts, he says.

It’s also important to get feedback to understand how well the content has communicated its message to the audience. Feedback data is central to creating content on a high level, he says. ABC has begun leveraging AI and other analytical tools to gain insight into content’s impact. Did it strike the right chords? Was the audience moved to action?

“There are buckets of data everywhere. You just have to know where to look,” Schefferine says. “We’re looking at AI and metadata and following the chain of content to capture real measurement as far as what the rate of return is on any piece of content that we’re setting out there.”

But it’s not just about working efficiently and delivering a good ROI — content’s role is much larger. Schefferine acknowledges how important it is to ensure that the audience is receiving the content they expect when they see the iconic ABC logo attached to it.

“Content is how you communicate with and retain a customer,” he says. “Not done with care or precision, it could also be how you lose one.”



BRIAN SATHER

Company: Autodesk
Title: Senior Manager,
Product Marketing
Industry: Computer Software



“Content isn't the goal. We're not here to build content. We're here to help our customers. And the way in which we help our customers is by providing them with information around what they can be doing better and how our products can be used to do that. Content is a means to that end.”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#TECHSPEAK

Brian Sather, an engineer by trade, made a move to technical marketing in order to support Autodesk's design and manufacturing portfolio, which spans from 2d and 3d design tools to simulation tools to manufacturing software to data management to automotive styling to visualization.

Marketing a suite of highly sophisticated solutions to a technical customer base comes down to creating content products that speak the language of the engineer. So Brian's team is made up mostly of engineers. “Marketing is hard; engineering is hard. Finding that unicorn that knows both is nearly impossible. But given the highly technical nature of our products, we find it easier to teach an engineer to market than to teach a marketer about engineering.”

It helps that Autodesk's customers are engineers themselves, who are, by nature, practical. They're less enticed by the sexiness of content or the look and feel of how information is delivered. They're more interested in the value proposition.

“Substance trumps style for our audience every single time,” Brian says. “So even though engineers are notoriously horrible writers, we have been successful in our content marketing strategy because we're always focused on how our solutions actually help our customers. We're not trying to trick anybody into buying our products. We're trying to figure out what we can do to make their job easier. If we can figure those things out, we're helping them, and we're helping ourselves.”

Running a lean content team to support such a broad array of products means each piece of content needs to be vetted to determine whether it provides tangible value for the customer. For Brian, it's not just about the benefits, but what customers can actually do with those solutions. Content becomes the spotlight on why Autodesk's solutions are better than the current solutions customers have in place.

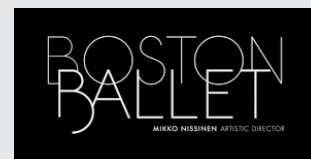
To determine whether a content product is valuable, Brian's team asks the same set of key questions: Who is it for? Does it help the end user understand how the solution will help them? Are we matching the informational needs of the customers with the actual information we're delivering? And lastly, what is the channel and format that will be best for them to receive it?

“If we can't answer those questions, then why are we producing the content?” he muses. “Are we just producing something because we're bored?”



JENNIFER WEISSMAN

Company: Boston Ballet
Title: Chief Marketing Officer
Industry: Entertainment



“ We have this very elegant venue and art form, which some people find super fun and others find intimidating. We want to be playful, accessible, and welcoming. ”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#EXPERIENCE

Non-profits depend on patrons to keep the doors open and lights on — and for Jennifer Weissman, that means getting “butts in seats.” With a full calendar of performances and dance studios in three locations, Boston Ballet remains one of the largest ballet organizations in North America. Jennifer Weissman is in the thick of it all, serving as CMO of the organization since 2013.

For centuries, an air of elitism hovered over ballet, making it appear more inaccessible than other experiential products such as museums, films or amusement parks. Weissman and her team want to make ballet an experience that more people can enjoy, with the ultimate goal of turning audience members into lifelong enthusiasts.

One of Weissman’s most important accoutrements: content that moves people. “We’re using content to power every part of the patron journey and to continually attract, engage, and delight our audience,” she says.

It’s a big production. Her team creates behind-the-scenes articles and videos that deepen patrons’ connection to each production, as well as teaser videos to share on social media and through email. She wants audiences to have an idea of what to expect when they come to see a performance at the spectacular Boston Ballet. She also wants them to see themselves so content increasingly includes patron voices. A recent video of kids’ reactions to *The Nutcracker* was among the top converting for the iconic holiday show. “We want to share the fun, social nature of the experience as well as the artistry.”

Additionally, her team creates dancer profiles to build a stronger connection between the audience and the performers. Dancers are interviewed on Boston Ballet’s YouTube channel and answer questions about their favorite roles, what’s in their dance bag, favorite snacks, and more. This information is available at each performance for patrons to discover more about the people they’re watching on stage.

“We find that once people have come a couple of times, then they start to get very invested in particular dancers,” Weissman says. “It’s all about helping people feel closer to the art and having memorable experiences with their friends and family.”

**JAMIE CREDLAND**

Company: The Economist
Title: Senior Vice President,
Client Strategy and Marketing
Industry: Publishing

**The
Economist**

“ *You can't just make content and walk away from it. You have to keep refreshing, refueling, keeping the fire going in your conversation with the audience.* **”**

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE**#CONVERSATION**

Jamie Credland, who runs the B2B marketing strategy at The Economist, knows we're different people at different times of the day. More often than not, our many little worlds clash. "Different messages are required at different times," he says.

If you're a CEO at work showing your computer screen to a colleague, for example, you don't want pop-up programmatic ads about your upcoming vacation to Las Vegas. If you're watching the World Cup with buddies, you don't want to be bothered with B2B text ads.

Yet many brands still don't get this. "Agencies tell clients that as long as it's your target audience, it doesn't matter where they see the ad," Credland says. "This seems completely crazy."

Credland's mission is to change this conversation by making it more personalized.

He has the challenging task of reaching the right person at the right time and conveying the right information that helps them in some way — that is, he wants to have a real conversation. And he needs to know a lot about the person beforehand, not just their name and title.

"Let's say I know you're a CMO at a midsize IT firm in the U.S. looking at expansion into China, The Economist Group has access to a lot of content that's very interesting to you," Credland says. "If I could get to that point, the phones would be ringing hard."

This calls for connecting dots of data, such as the person's behavior on websites and social media and interactions with previous content. The goal is to learn what challenges stand in the way to their success and craft the appropriate content.

Then the content needs to be served up in places where the person is most open and in the mood to receive it, such as via work email or in reputable business environments — for example, a luxury watch advertisement in a high-end business magazine.

"Making a much richer persona of their buying interests and feeding them content that is relevant and useful and with a human element, I'm very excited about that," Credland says.

**BEN BAER**

Company: Fast Company
Title: Executive Editor
Industry: Publishing

FAST COMPANY

“Tell something of value to your audience in a way that makes them smarter, more informed, and better at their jobs after they read it”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE**#STORYTELLING**

At the heart of Fast Company's culture lies good storytelling. Editorial's best practices in entertaining, educating and engaging readers have made their way into branded content. After all, both speak to the same audience.

“Our audience expects stories to be told,” says Ben Baer, executive editor at Fast Company. “It’s about sharing thought leadership, not just selling something.”

Telling stories isn't as simple as putting pen to paper. Fast Company's content studio leverages data analytics to understand what kinds of stories resonate well. Content marketers work closely with social media and consumer marketing teams to figure out why some stories are more successful than others.

A poorly performing story, for instance, might not have itself to blame. Did the headline miss the mark? Or maybe the story wasn't promoted well. False signals show up, too. A high-performing story might have done well because of a marketing push that isn't repeatable with other stories.

Stories need to match the form and platform they're distributed on as well, which can be challenging with so many channels available today. A story on Twitter, for instance, shouldn't be the same story on Instagram. Podcasts, which appear to be making a comeback, must be distributed on social platforms that make sense for the medium.

“We're seeing a maturity in the audio and podcasting space,” Baer says. “Because technology and platforms are giving rise to more opportunity to tell stories, podcasting is hot again... We're looking at voice platforms and trying to find the sustainable strategy versus the one-off execution.”

Content marketers need to be focused and “not chase the newest, hottest thing,” Baer advises. While it's good to experiment with different content forms and distribution channels, marketers should be careful where they put their dollars. It's important to test regularly in the places where your audience clusters and consumes content.

Amid these challenges, there's a silver lining for storytellers.

“A renaissance is happening because of the number of platforms that you can distribute your content on,” Baer says. “It's a great time to be a content creator.”



AARON WAHLE

Company: Fuzzy Door
Title: Senior Vice President, Marketing
Industry: Entertainment



“ We don’t define our audiences as males or females above and below 25 years of age. That is an old-school way of marketing. ”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#STARPOWER

Imagine being surrounded by amazing content, creative artists and famous people all day long. Aaron Wahle runs marketing at Fuzzy Door, a production company led by creator Seth MacFarlane and President, Erica Huggins. Fuzzy Door is the driving force behind popular film and television projects, such as “Family Guy,” “American Dad!” and “The Orville.” So when Wahle talks marketing content to get people to watch shows, he draws inspiration from some of the best content in the world.

But Wahle’s job is much more than creating content that resonates with audiences. He first needs to find them. Harder said than done. If he’s searching for hardcore fans of adult animation, for instance, he can’t rely on some silly demographic, such as males below 25 years old. Instead, Wahle builds what he calls a “psychographic” of the target audience from data across Netflix, Amazon, Apple, theatrical, television, etc.

Once he knows his audience — both primary and secondary — he creates, say, a movie trailer for a movie in the works and distributes it on Youtube. That’s not the end of his team’s story. Wahle follows up the trailer with polls asking about intent to see the product. (Hint: Tons of YouTube views don’t mean much about buyer intent, he says.)

Here comes the plot twist: Based on Wahle’s findings, he might recommend releasing the movie on a different date, or a streamer instead of the movie theatre. “It’s a really tough call to make for filmmakers,” Wahle says. “But you can say, ‘You know what? This is going to a sister network or streamer. We’re not spending \$50 million to push this into the theatre and get \$8 million on opening weekend.’ This is a business. Fans want the right content on the right platform and when that happens, everyone ends up happy.”

Now that’s content marketing with star power.



SAMANTHA FAY

Company: Guinness World Records
Title: Senior Vice President of Global Brand Strategy
Industry: Entertainment



“ We may not be a big-brand company, but we have the agility to tap into something and hone what customers want from our content. ”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#AGILITY

When Hollywood star Jennifer Aniston broke the record for the fastest time to reach a million followers on Instagram — 12 hours, 3 minutes — the Guinness World Records team leaped into action. It was all hands on deck. The Records Management Team needed to verify the feat in order for the Marketing team to create newsy content and post it across the organization’s social platform in, ahem, *record time*.

“Ten years ago, our content strategy was telling stories when our book came out,” says Fay, senior vice president of global brand strategy at Guinness World Records. “But now, with 24/7 rolling news, records need to be reported on as they’re broken. Honestly, thank goodness for social media.”

There’s a lot of people scrutinizing stories from the company’s content team. Guinness World Records has television shows capturing 750 million views. Its website grabs nearly 20 million eyeballs every year. They have 15.8 million Facebook followers, 5.9 million Youtube followers and 6.8 million TikTok followers, making them the world’s second biggest brand on the platform. Luckily, the team receives content from people all over the world, eager to showcase their record-breaking achievements.

There’s never a dull moment, Fay says. On any given day, she’ll be talking up a record for, say, fastest 50m swim by a robotic fish, which, by the way, is 26.79 seconds. Beyond being able to keep pace with the extraordinary things record holders attempt — and accomplish — Fay also leads the innovation division at Guinness World Records and sits on numerous panels for award shows all around the United Kingdom.

In a brave new digital world, it’s a challenge for a 65-year-old brand to stay relevant. Fay says one of the keys to Guinness World Records’ success is making provocative, diverse and unique content readily available for fans online. It’s important to converse with them all year round, just talk at them when you have something to sell.

“Content has become a form of entertainment for Guinness World Records,” Fay says. “It’s less about one-way communication and more about conversation and a continuous dialogue.”



MICHAEL THERRIEN

Company: IBM
Title: Head of Content and Digital, North America
Industry: Information Technology & Services



“The thing that binds the content creation team with the content distribution team is the audience. Content creators know what will resonate, and content distributors understand the data, the processes and the ROI of a content product.”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#ATTRIBUTION

Have you ever asked your content creators what they expect the reader to do with the content as a next logical step? The marketing team at IBM asked that very question and discovered a hard truth: Most didn't have an answer.

That's where Michael Therrien comes in. IBM developed his role in order to bring together the asset and audience against a specific objective — typically to generate demand.

Being such a mammoth organization, IBM has more content than it can possibly know what to do with, but that's changing. "We're making a massive change in the amount of content that we're putting out there and strictly limiting the number of assets per campaign," Therrien says.

Through a culture of testing and optimization, Therrien's team is working to reduce content flow by streamlining and focusing on what's going to be most effective and efficient. To make those judgement calls, they code all content assets and track the performance by asset.

"We know right down the line if an asset has produced engagement, has resulted in a lead and how it is performing overall," Therrien says. "We now regularly scrub assets on pages that don't perform well after asking why they didn't."

Some of this testing has yielded surprising results. Recently, the team developed two videos covering artificial intelligence: one that was straightforward and seemingly tailored to a B2B professional audience, the other an emotional one featuring a marine traveling home using AI.

When it came time to track performance, it was a landslide. The **emotional video** had a 12 percent higher visit rate, a 22 percent lower cost per view, and double the response rate.

"The thing is, most people view B2B customers as a business, but they're not," Therrien says. "At the end of the day, you're interacting with people who are driven by emotion, just like in a B2C environment."



EXPERT COMMENTARY



DIEGO GOMES

CEO
Rock Content



We know that we need great content to connect with our audiences — but how do we ensure that we're getting the most value from our content marketing efforts? And perhaps more importantly, how can we ensure that our audience is getting the most value from our content?

Rock Content partnered with CMO Council to discover the challenges that marketers are facing today, and to take a closer look at how we can collectively improve on content ROI.

In the report, executive editor at Fast Company Ben Baer comments on quality content, saying in part that, "The content should make them smarter, more informed, better at their jobs."

This comment struck a chord with us, as it's exactly what we try to achieve at Rock. Every piece of content should fulfill a specific purpose, and should add specific value to your customer during a specific stage of his or her journey. It's that simple.

Though it isn't *that* simple, is it? We are presented with hundreds — if not thousands — of content pieces to consume on a daily basis. From the moment we wake up, until the moment we go to sleep, we consume content like coffee. And like coffee — some of it isn't very good.

So how can we make sure that our content stands out? How can we avoid the common mistakes that cause content to fall flat?

Regardless of industry, regardless of product — content marketing begins and ends with research. A research-based strategy is a data-driven strategy, and a data-driven strategy means data-driven results.

When you're strategizing, listen to your audience. Create content that will, as Baer said, make them better at their jobs.

Put your content out in the world, and keep listening. "Set it and forget it" does not apply — the measurement phase of content creation is perhaps the most critical.

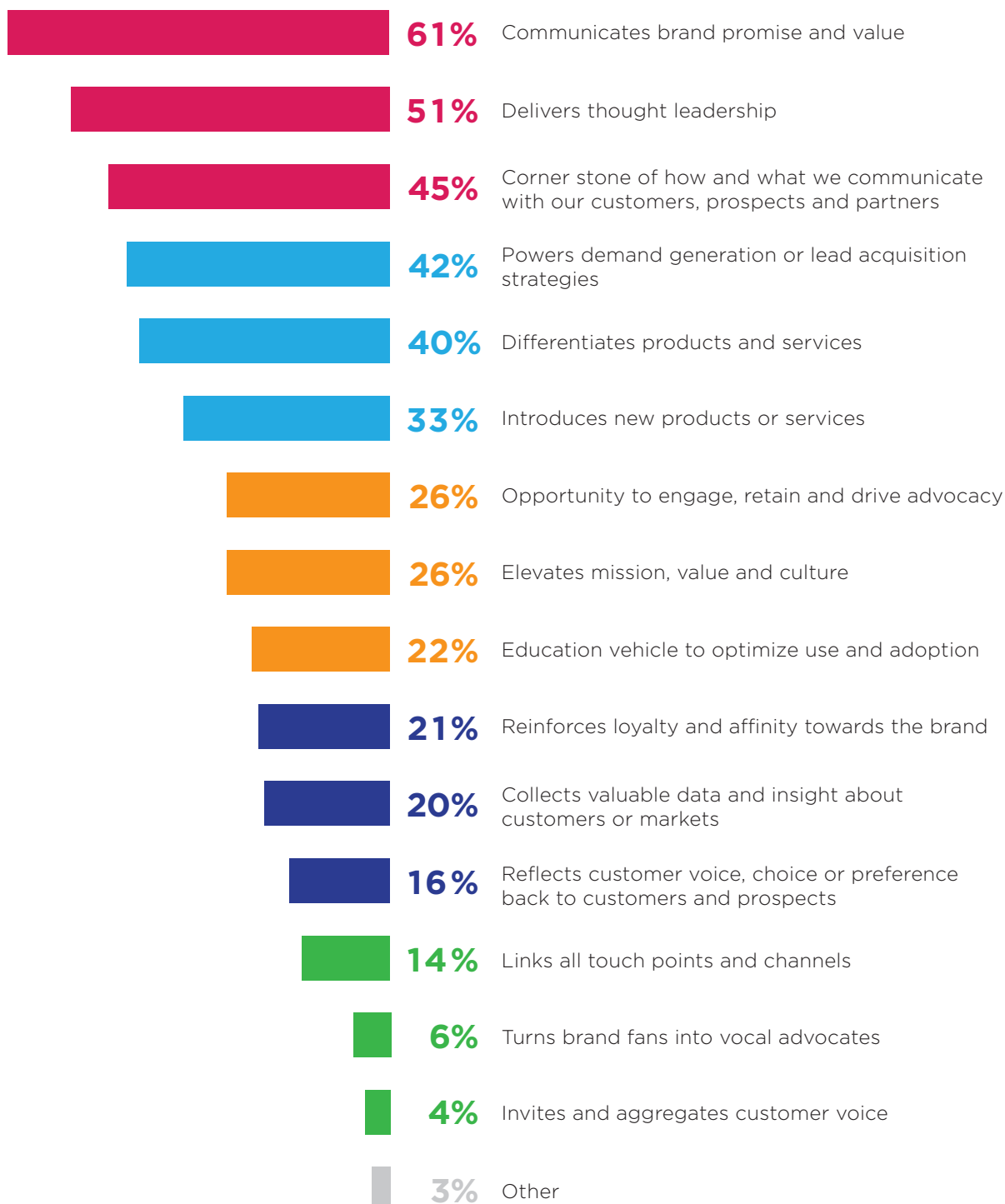
When you have a strategy that's rooted in data, you'll be able to optimize and tailor future content pieces to educate and resonate with your audience, bringing your research full-circle.

Creating content that makes your audience better at their job makes *you* a better marketer — and transforms the challenges you face into opportunities for growth.



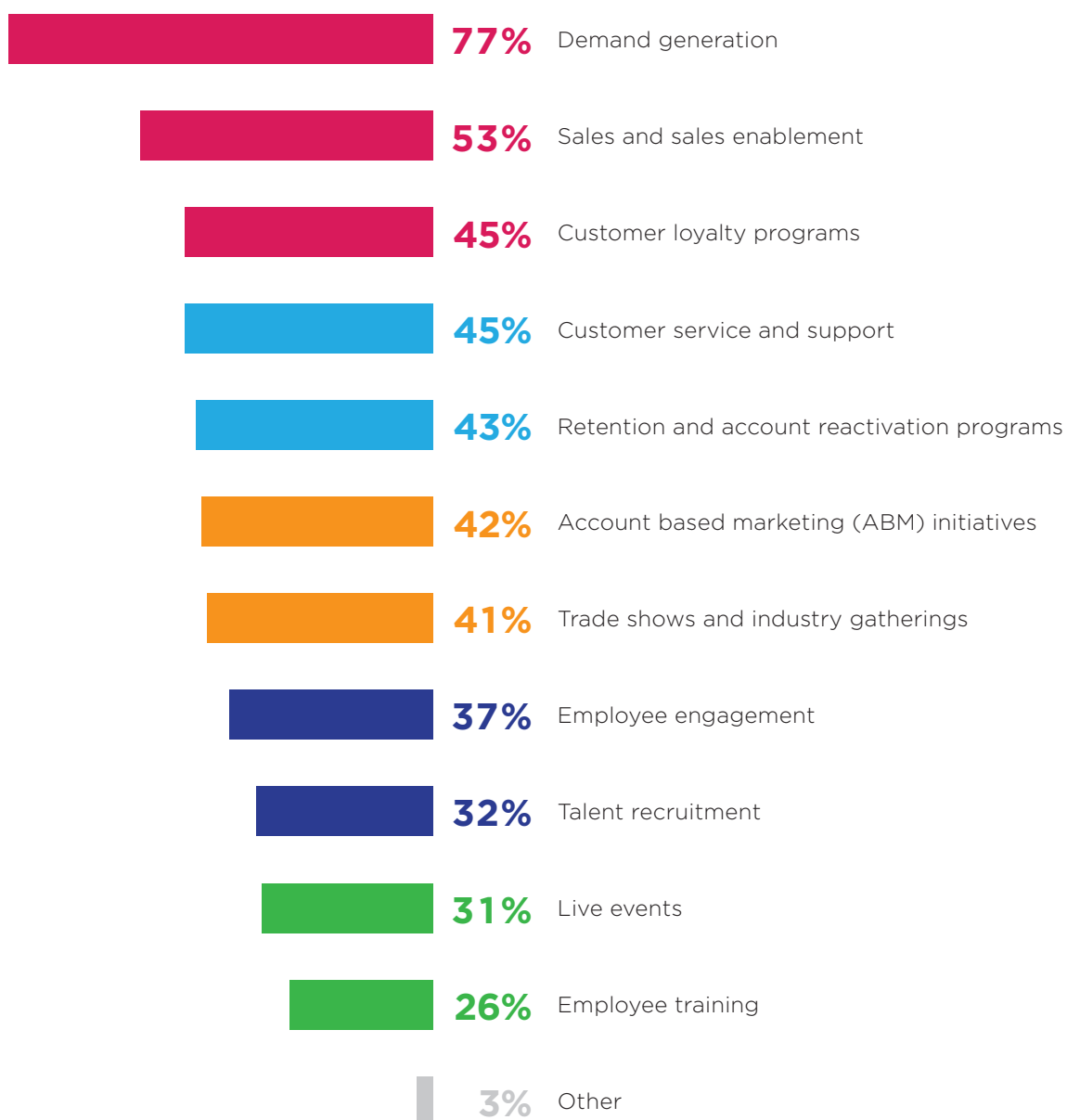
DETAILED FINDINGS

Q1 | What role does content play in your customer engagement strategy? (Select top five)



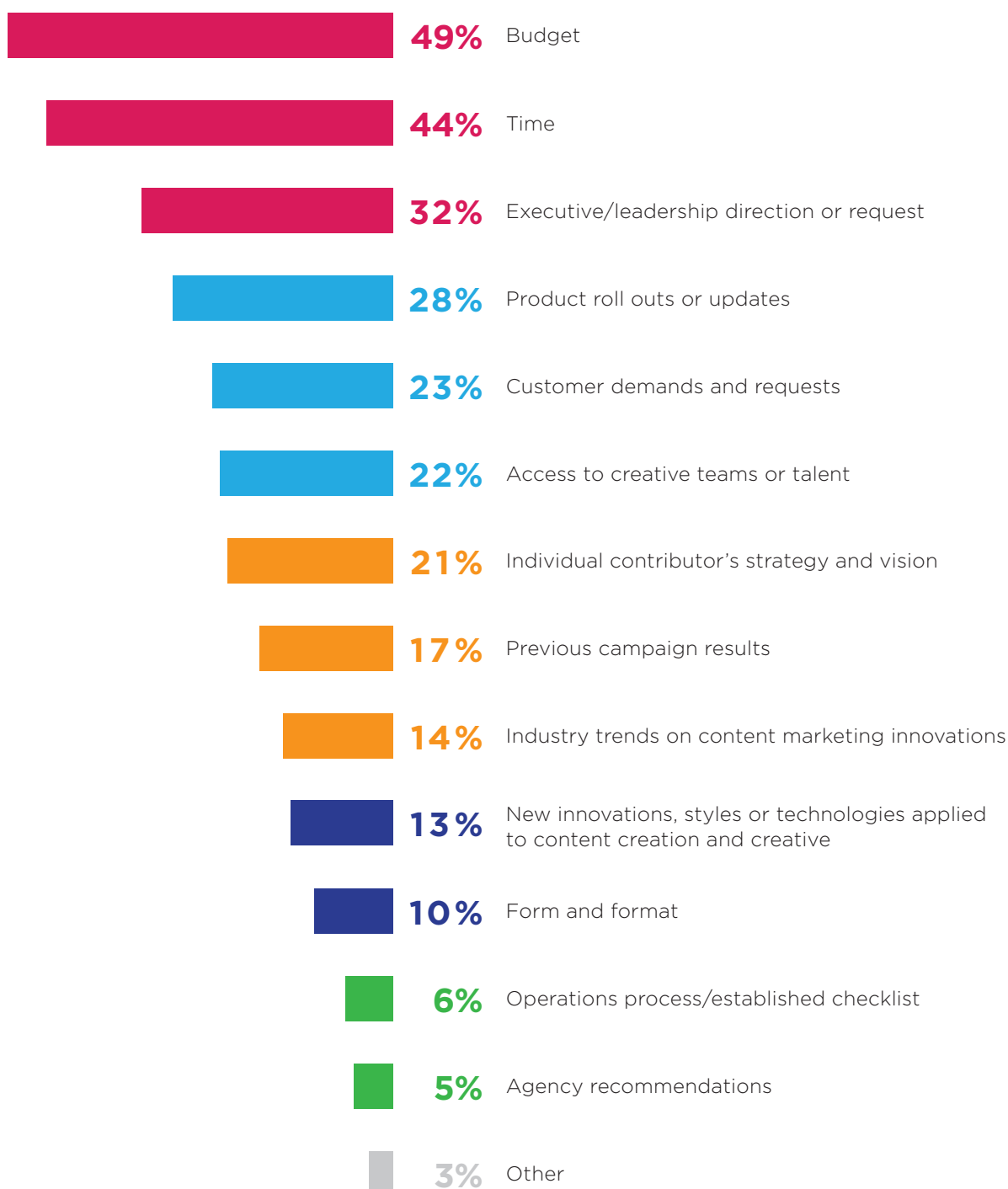


Q2 | What strategies rely on the successful development of robust interactive brand content? (Select all that apply)



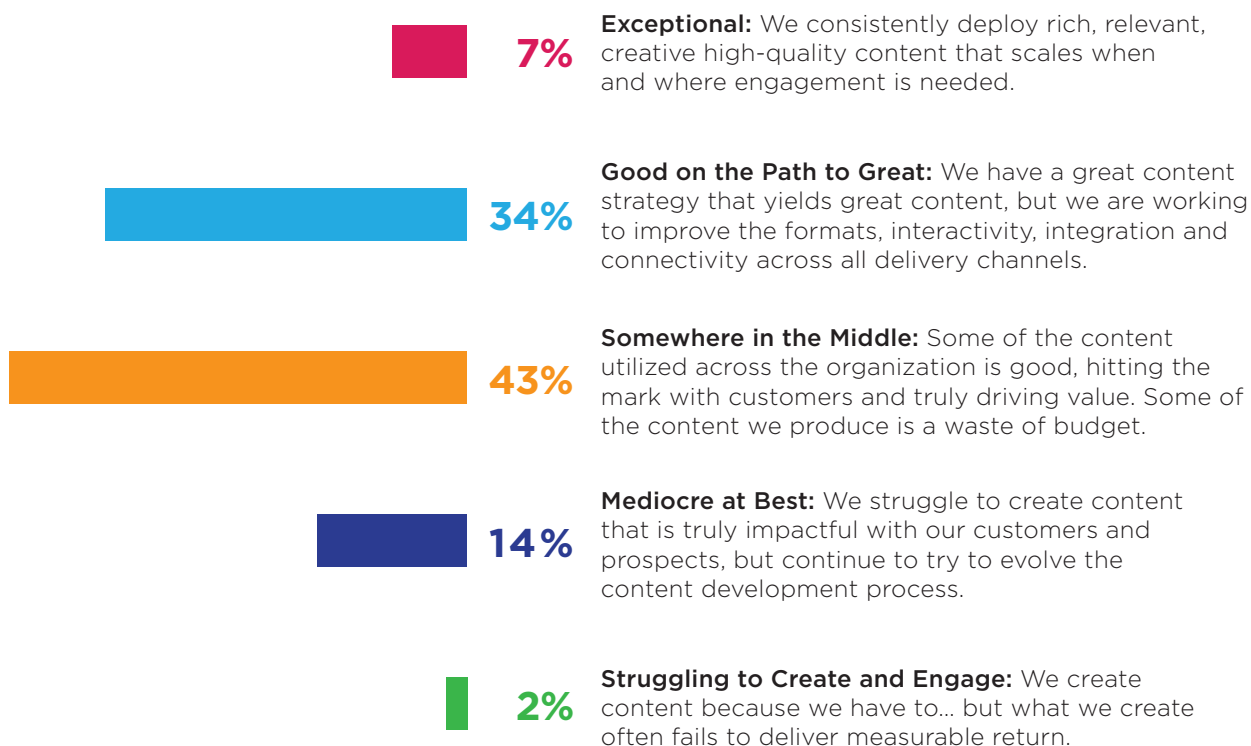


Q3 | When thinking about how content strategies are developed today, what most impacts, directs and shapes what is developed and produced? (Select top three)



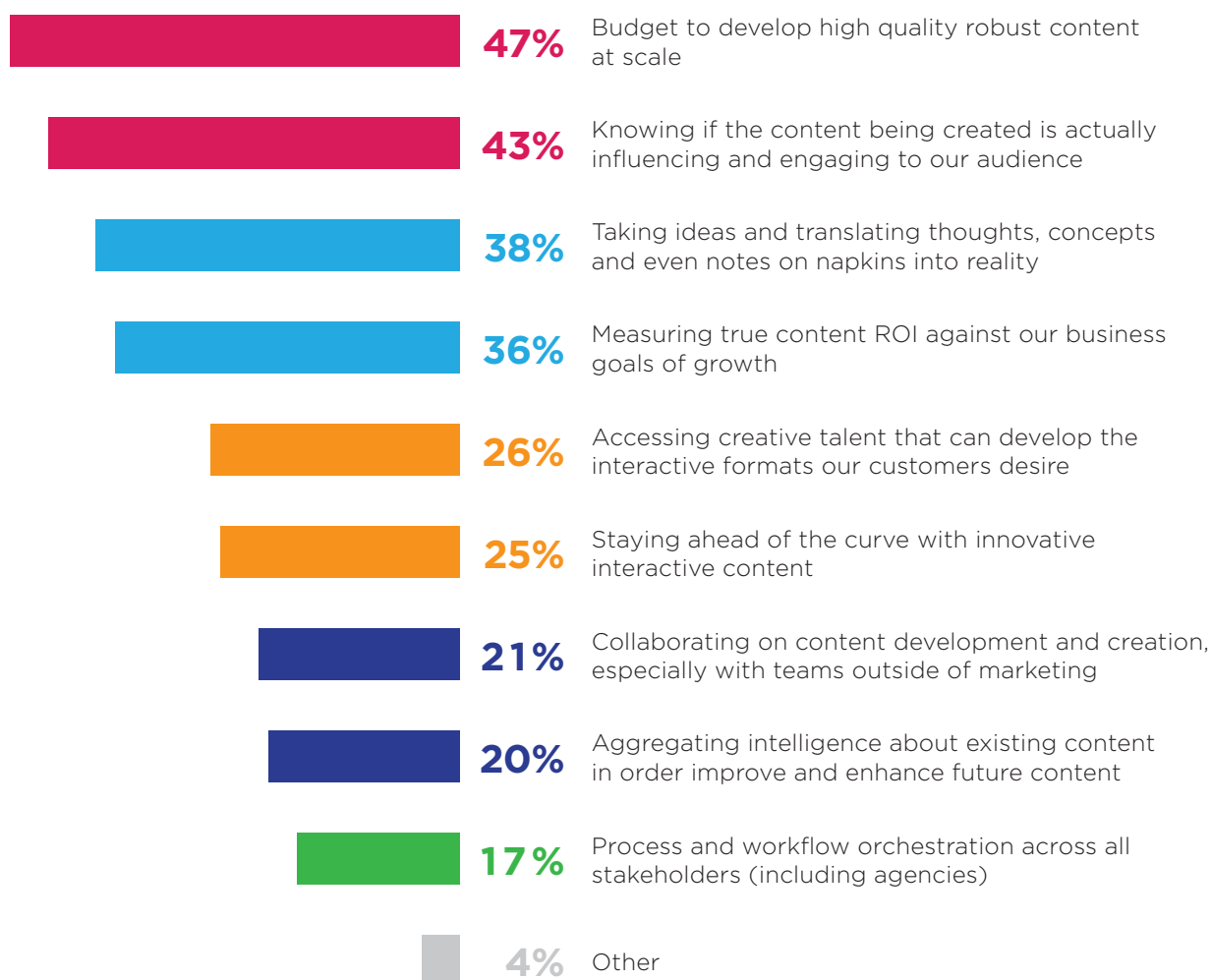


Q4 | Rate your organization's content quality and impact (including content not currently created directly by the marketing organization)



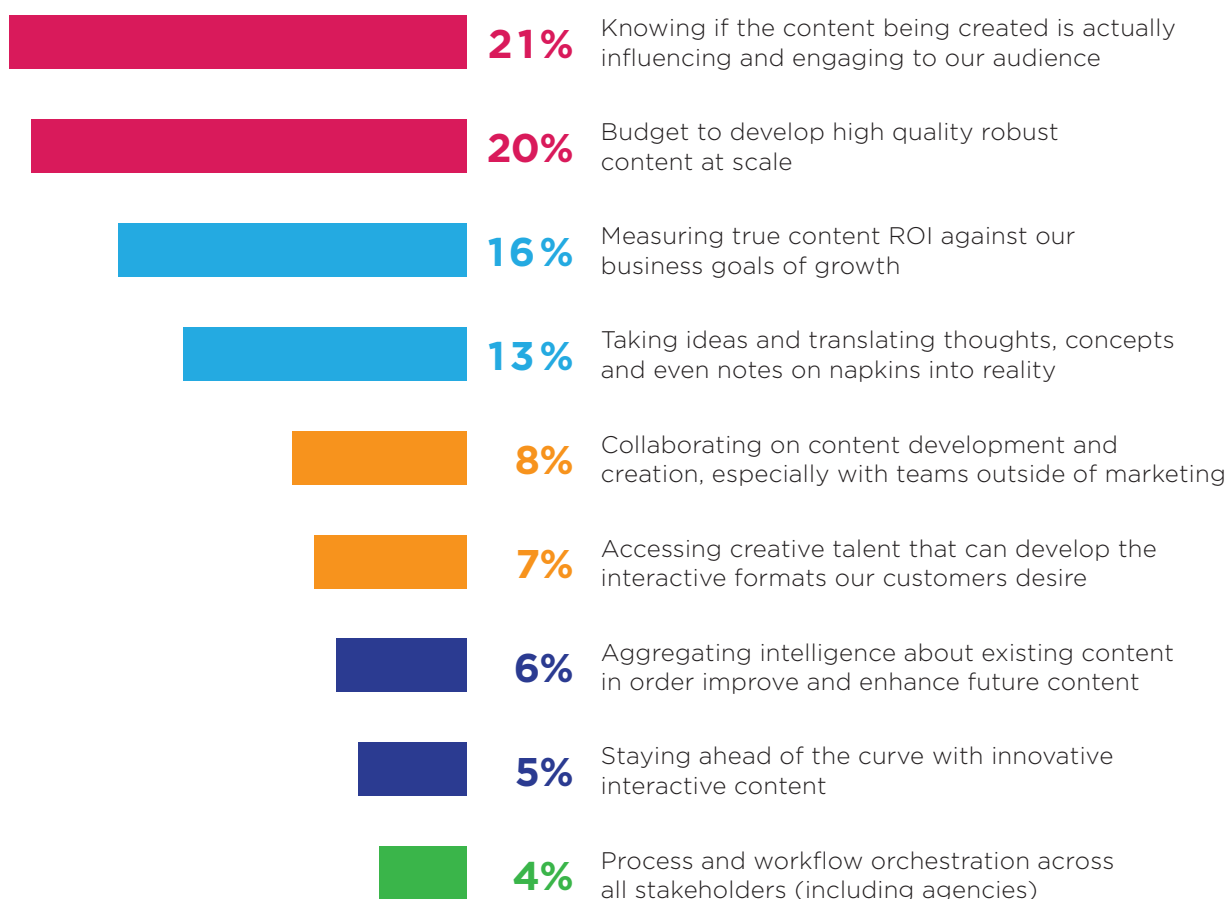


Q5 | What are the top challenges the organization faces specific the development of impactful and effective content? (Select top three)



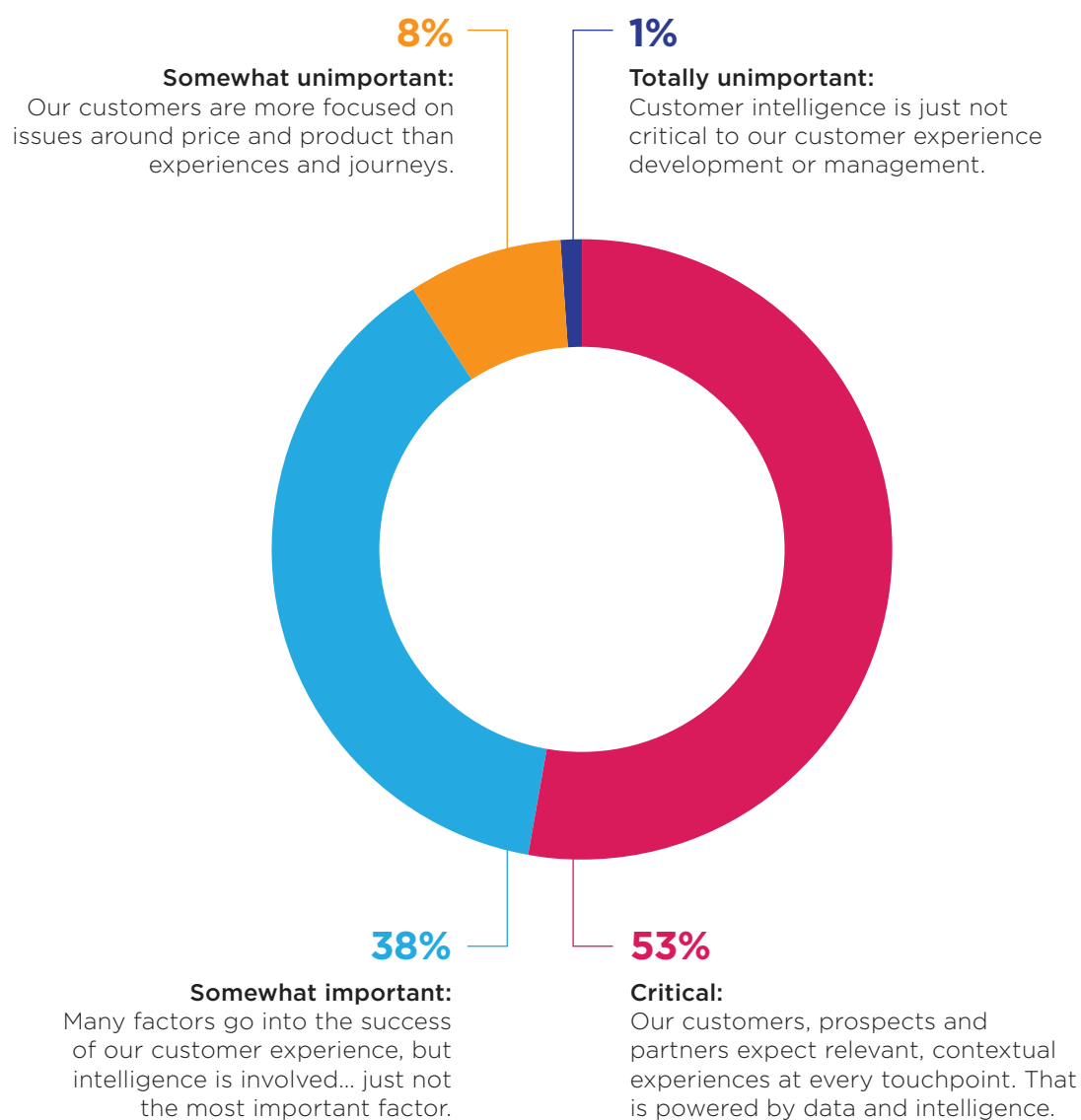


Q6 | Thinking about the question you just answered, of the challenges you identified, if only ONE could be resolved, which would have the greatest impact on evolving and improving content performance and return?



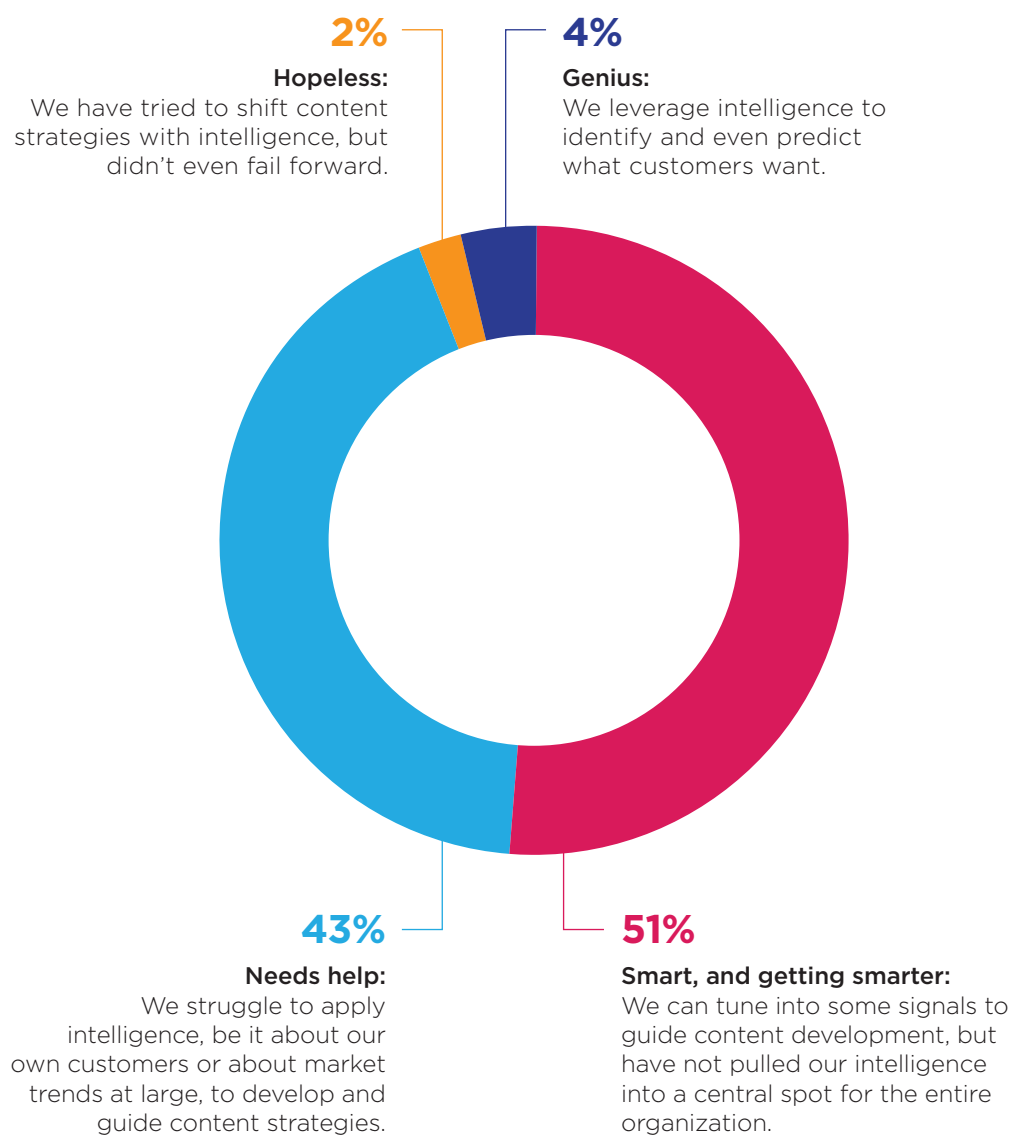


Q7 | How important is the application of customer intelligence to your overarching customer experience?



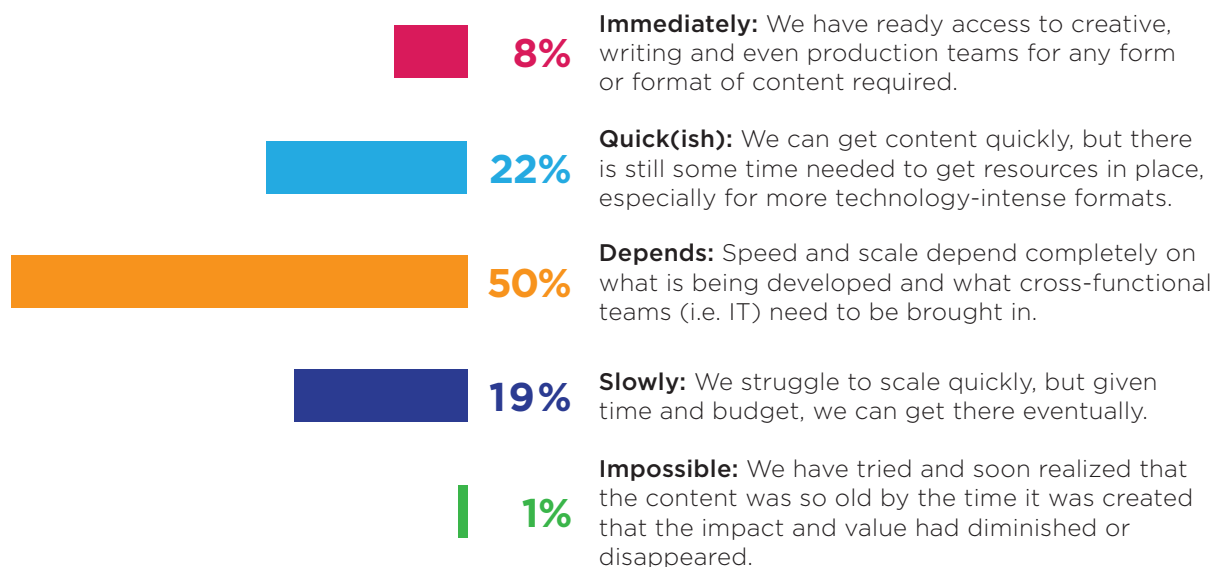


Q8 | How intelligent is your content?



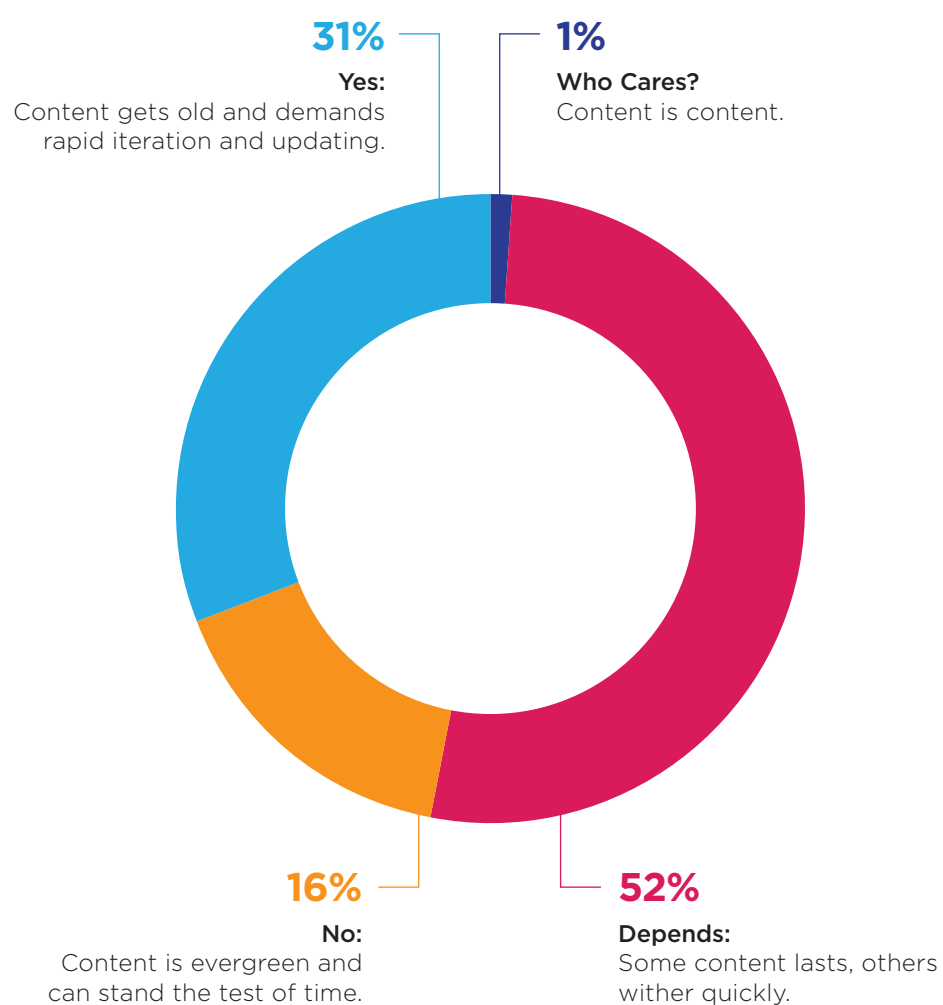


Q9 | How quickly can your organization scale up or down content operations?



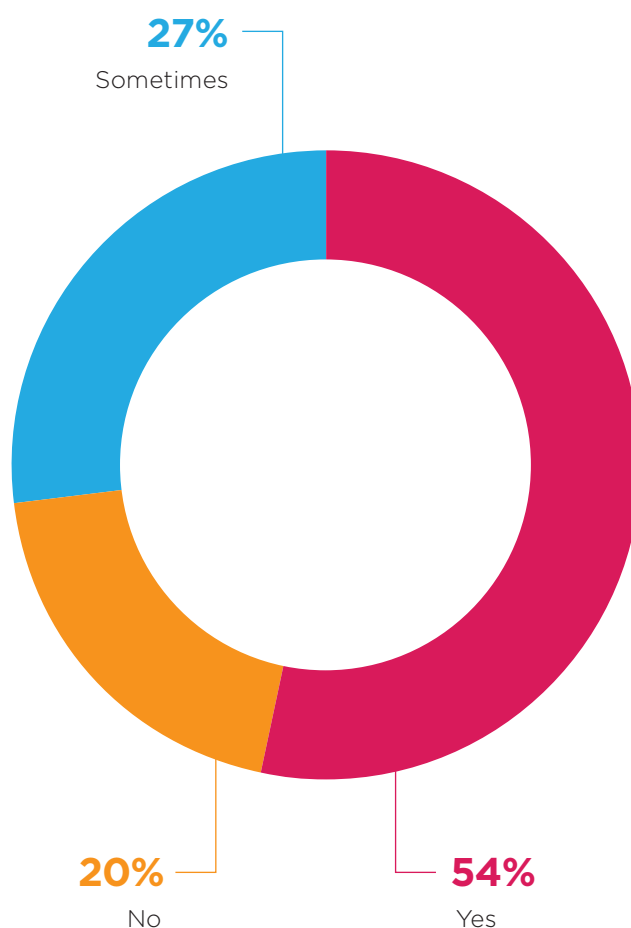


Q10 | Does content have an expiration date?



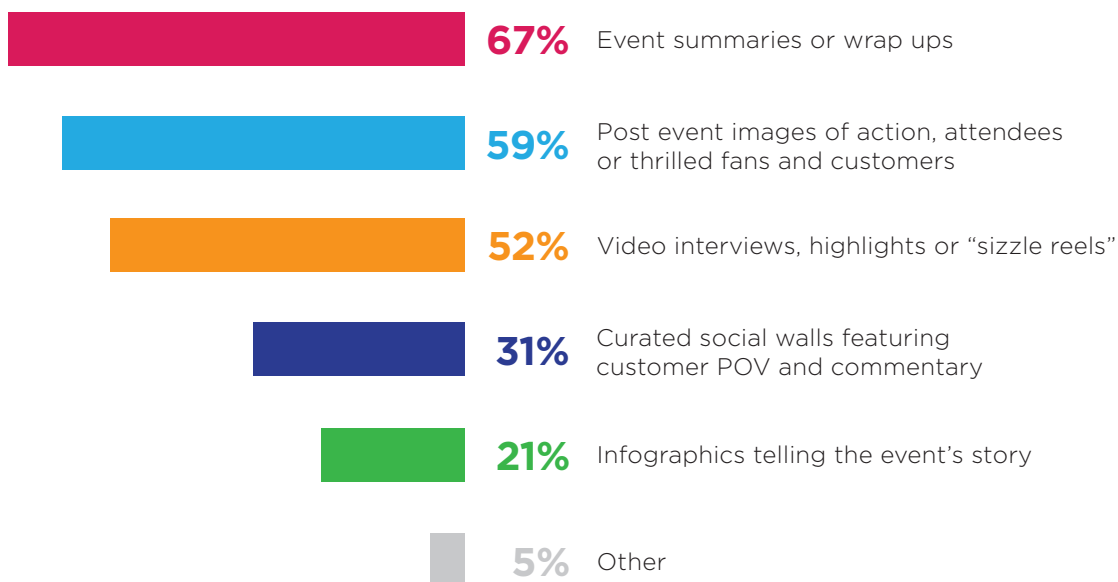


Q11 | Do you currently view live events (including employee all-hands, live training and trade show experiences) as an opportunity to generate content?



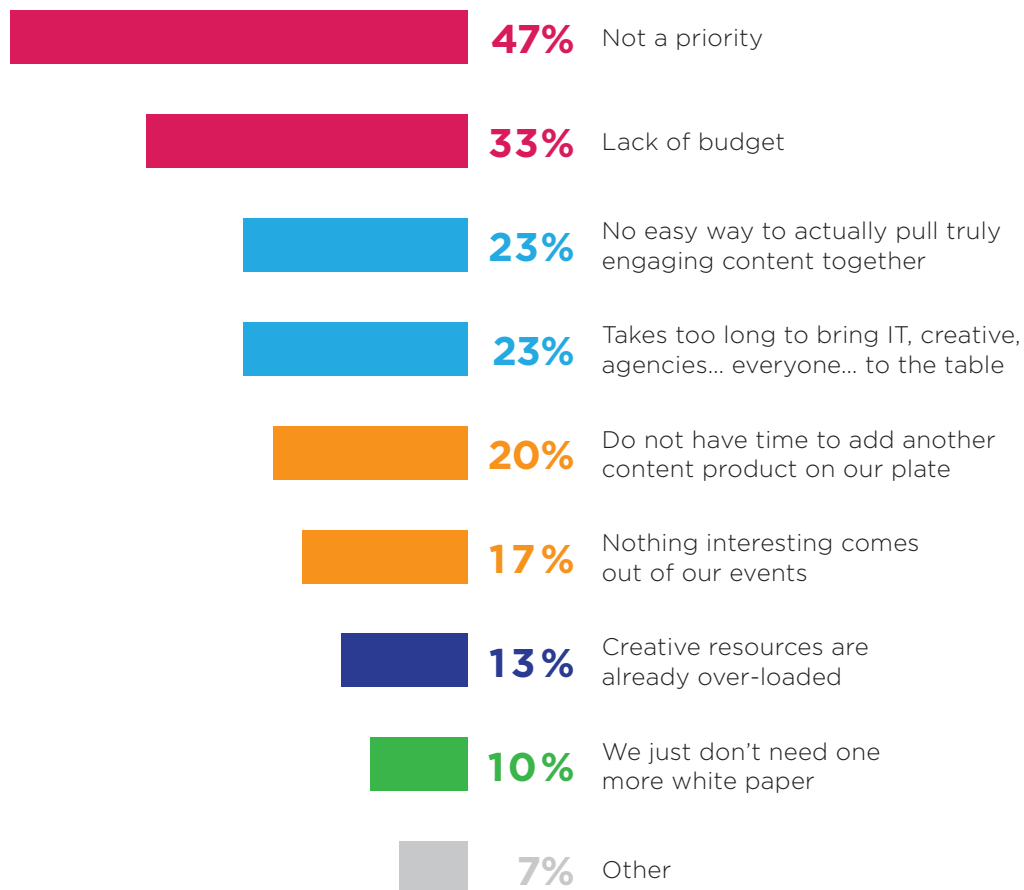


Q12 | What content is traditionally created after an event?
(Select all that apply)





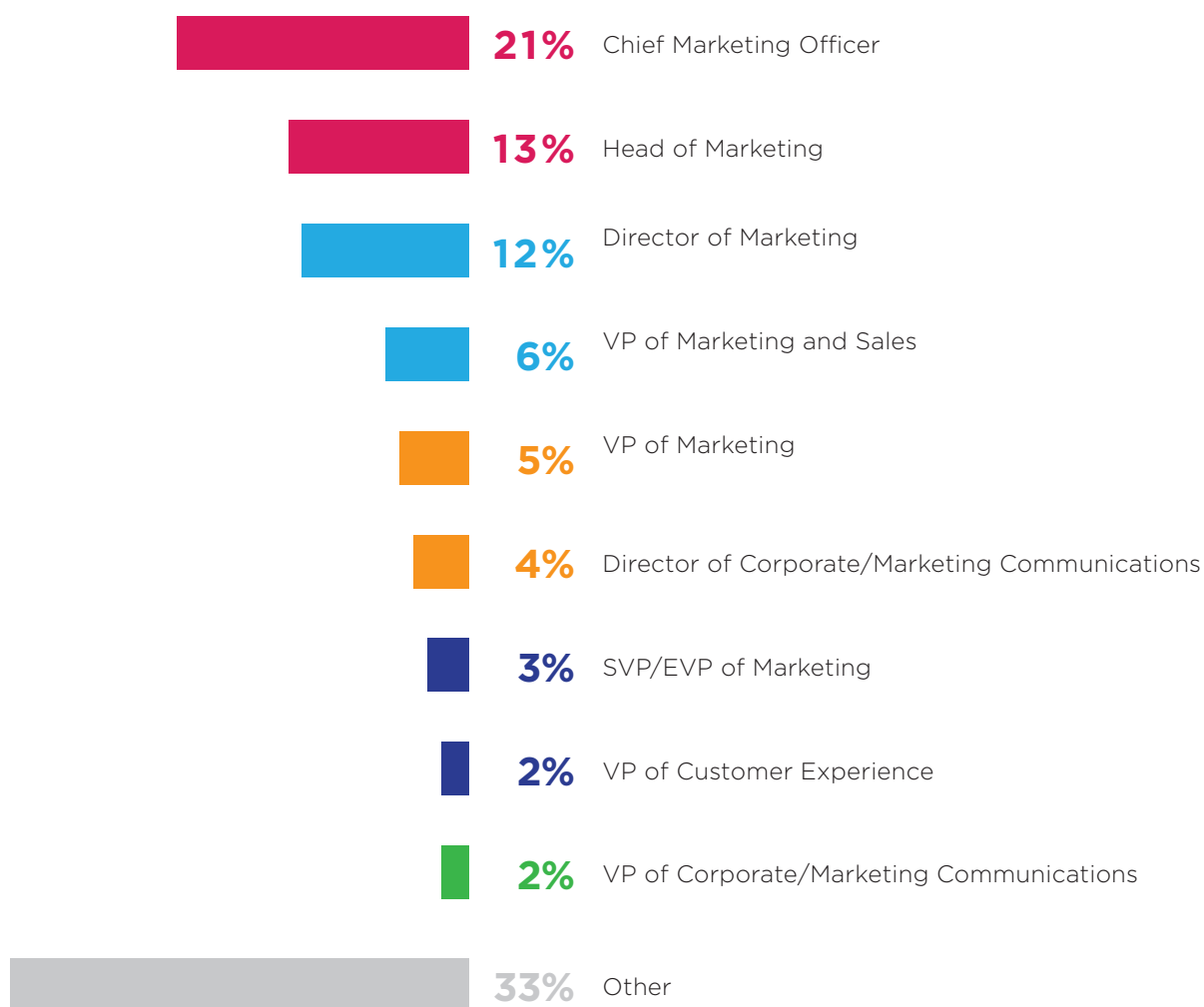
Q13 | Why are events not leveraged as content producing opportunities? (Select top three)





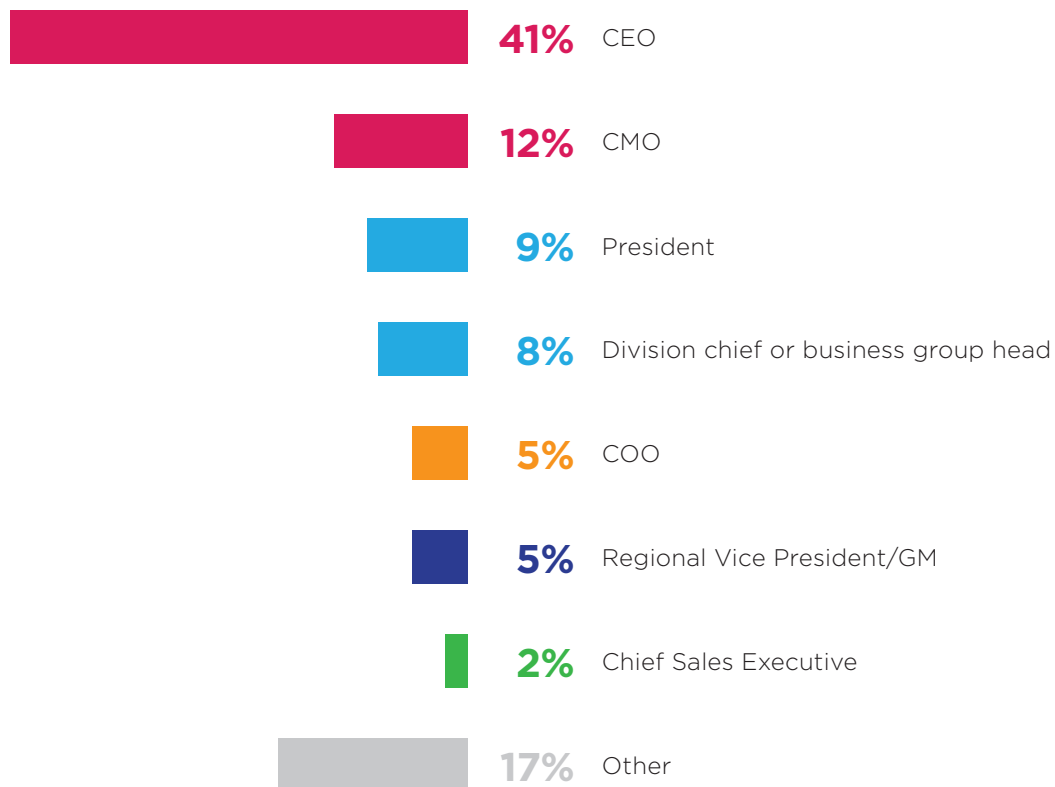
DEMOGRAPHICS

Q1 | What is your title?



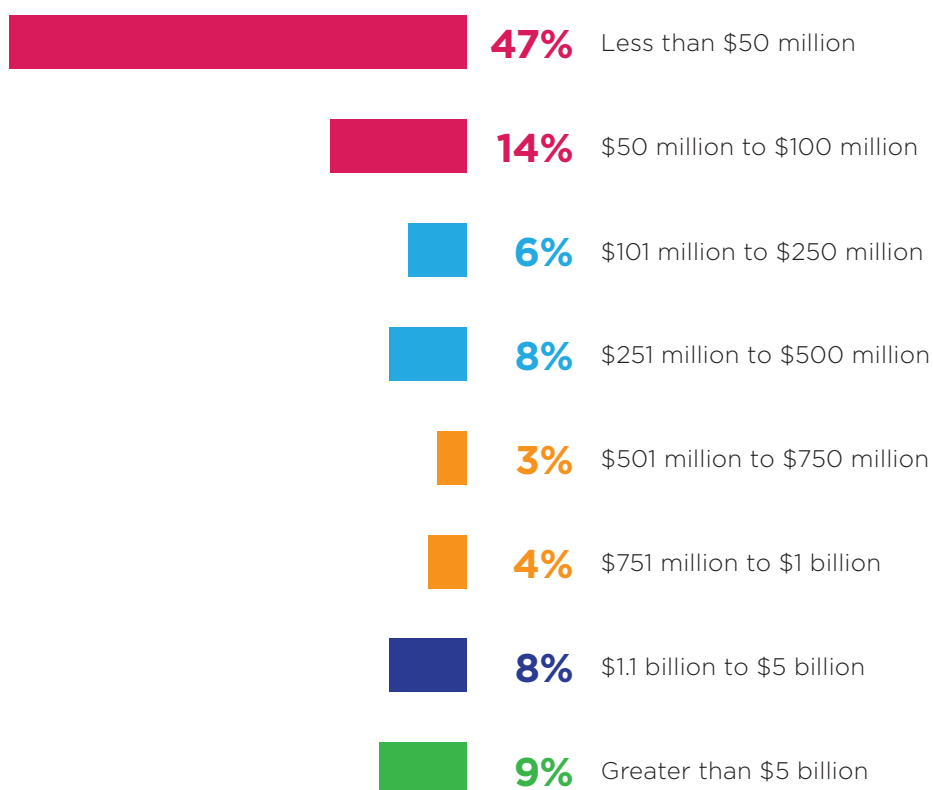


Q2 | To whom do you report?



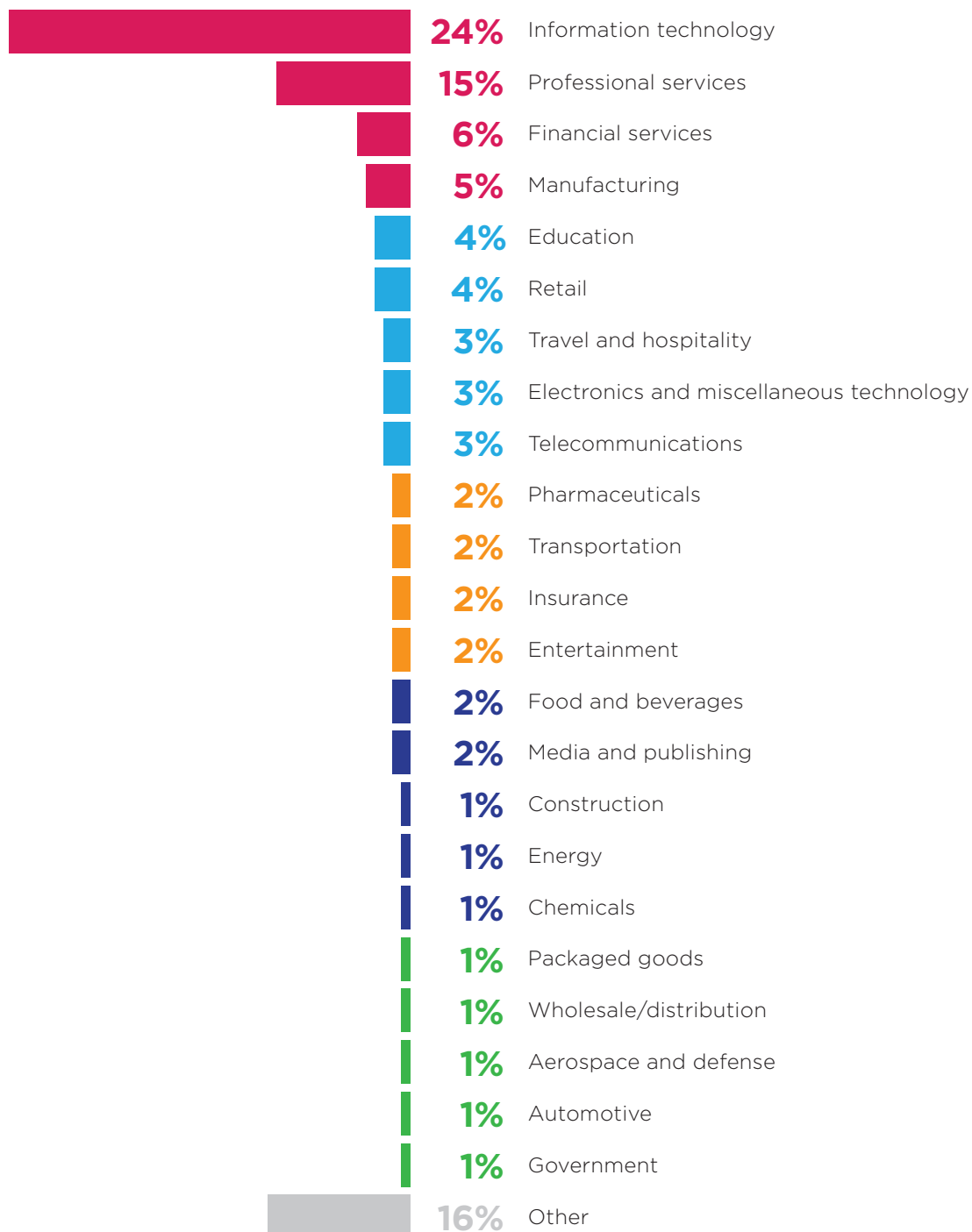


Q3 | How large is your company in USD Revenue?



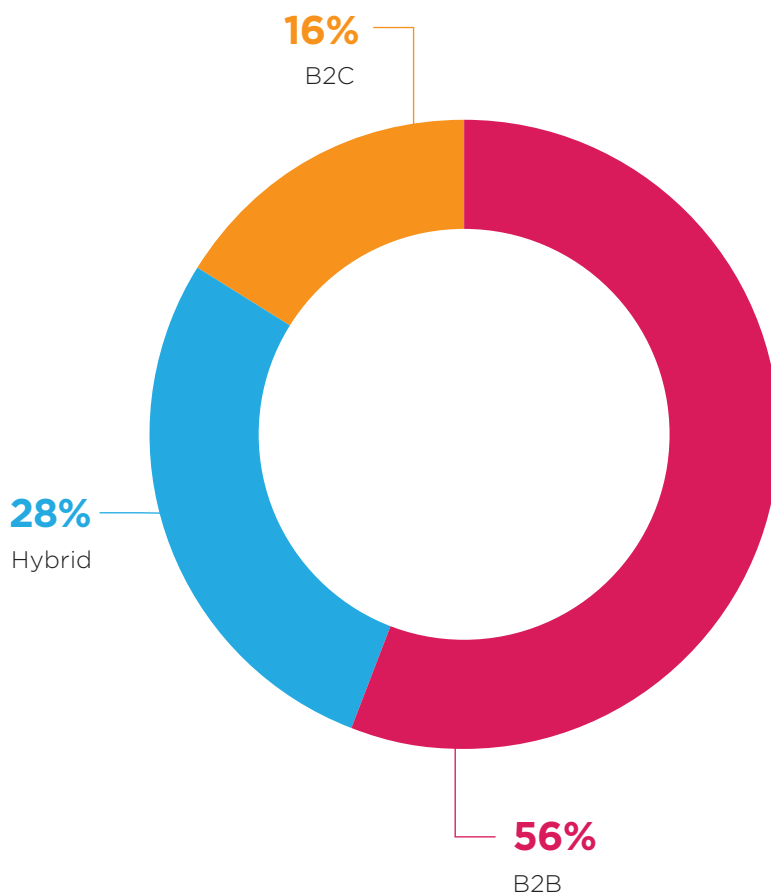


Q4 | What best describes your company's industry sector?



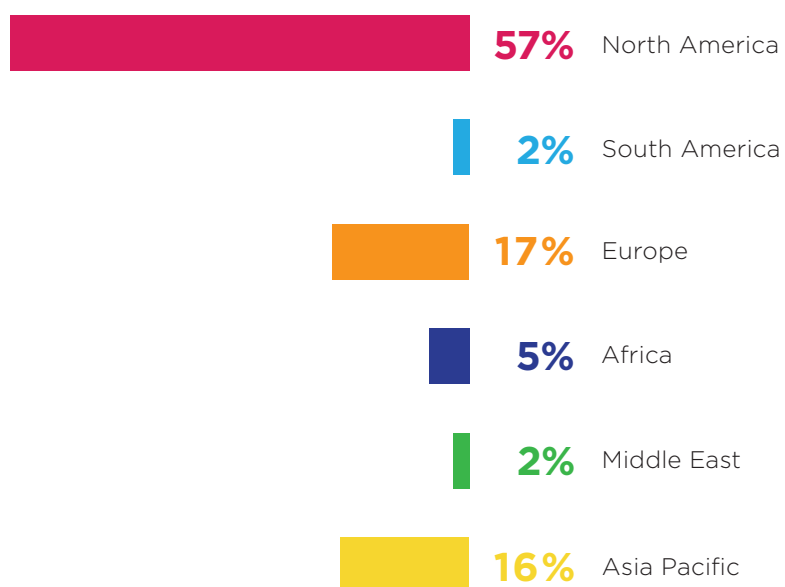


Q5 | How would you describe your company's market focus?



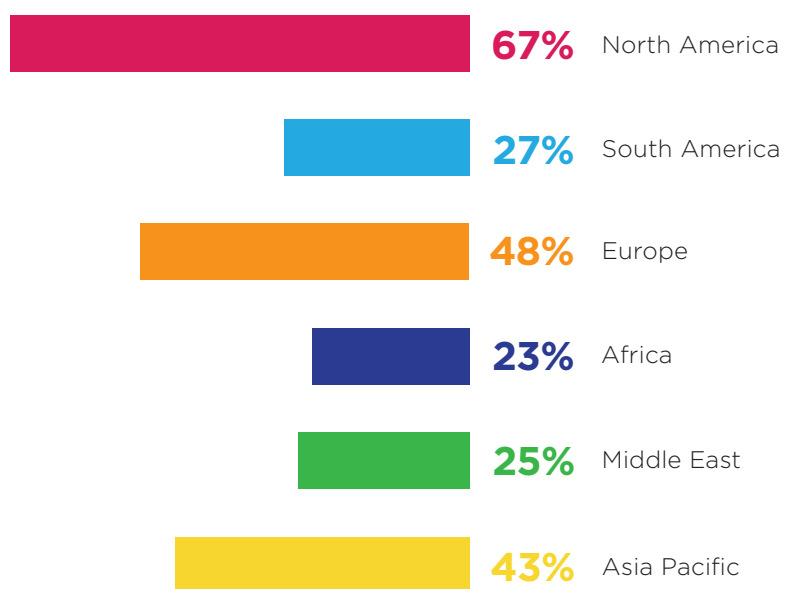


Q6 | In which region is your company headquartered?



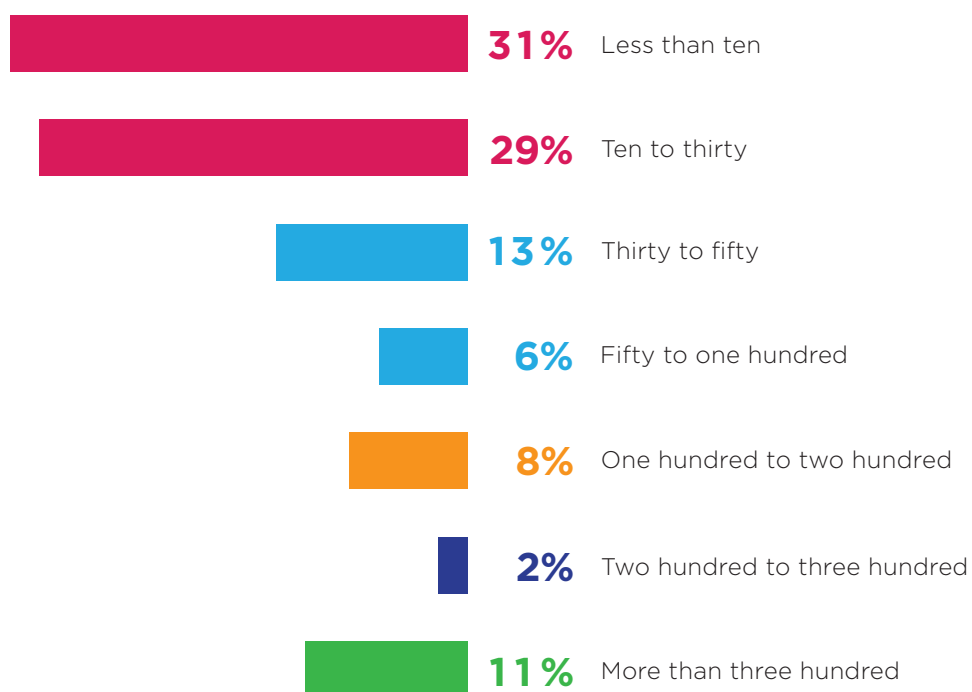


Q7 | In which region(s) does your company operate?





Q8 | How large is your staff/team?





ABOUT THE CMO COUNCIL

The Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Council is dedicated to high-level knowledge exchange, thought leadership and personal relationship building among senior corporate marketing leaders and brand decision-makers across a wide-range of global industries. The CMO Council's 16,000+ members control more than \$1 trillion in aggregated annual marketing expenditures and run complex, distributed marketing and sales operations worldwide. In total, the CMO Council and its strategic interest communities include over 65,000 global marketing and sales executives in over 110 countries covering multiple industries, segments and markets. Regional chapters and advisory boards are active in the Americas, Europe, Asia Pacific, Middle East and Africa. The Council's strategic interest groups include the Customer Experience Board, Digital Marketing Performance Center, Brand Inspiration Center, Marketing Supply Chain Institute, GeoBranding Center, and the Coalition to Leverage and Optimize Sales Effectiveness (CLOSE). To learn more, visit www.cmocouncil.com.



ABOUT ROCK CONTENT

Rock Content is a pioneer in developing the first content marketplace to provide its customers in Latin America, North America and Europe with innovative content marketing solutions, creative services, on-demand talent, and professional training. Founded in 2013, the company has grown rapidly, profitably, and delivers outstanding business results to over 2,000 brands, marketers, and agencies. Rock employs over 500 people globally and maintains a talent network of over 80,000 creative professionals who all share in Rock's mission to create growth opportunities for its customers, talent community, and Rockers worldwide. For more information on how you can create premium content experience faster, and at less cost, visit www.rockcontent.com.



PARTNERS & AFFILIATES



QUALTRICS

Qualtrics is a leading global provider of enterprise data collection and analysis products for market research, voice of customer, employee performance, and academic research. Through an intuitive, easy-to-use interface and award-winning services and support, Qualtrics products enable both professional and DIY researchers to conduct quantitative research at a lower cost and in less time than competing alternatives. Founded in 2002, Qualtrics has more than 5,000 clients worldwide, including half of the Fortune 100, more than 1,300 colleges and universities, and 95 of the top 100 business schools. For more information and a free trial, visit www.qualtrics.com.



NETLINE

NetLine is the world leader in business content syndication aimed at driving buyer engagement, customer lead acquisition and sales pipeline performance. Its Precision Targeting Engine™ and global multi-channel network of more than 15,000 website properties enable BtoB marketers to reach a diverse audience of more than 75 million business professionals across 350-plus industry sectors. NetLine's multi-channel content delivery model allows for brand customization, content adaptation and flexible market access through publisher websites, expert blogs, email, search engines, social media networks, e-newsletters and mobile. Founded in 1994, NetLine Corporation is privately held and headquartered in Los Gatos, California, with operations across the globe. For more information, visit www.netline.com.