

CHALLENGING THE MYTH OF THE EMPOWERED BUYER: GENERATING DEMAND FOR HOW TO CHANGE INSTEAD OF WHY TO CHANGE

Successful marketers in 2022 will stop pouring more information on people to convince them to change — and start making it easier to purchase across all stages of the buyer’s journey.

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EMPOWER BUYERS THROUGH CONNECTION

There's one question on every marketer's mind: "How do I connect?"

We've all been seeking connection since the pandemic struck. Stuck at home, working from kitchen tables and converted closets, marketers have been fighting to create and maintain connections with their audiences.

Despite all the upheaval, content remains a tried-and-true way to generate demand. After all, it's content-driven experiences that build those precious connections, no matter what's going on in the world outside.

Connection is more important than ever. And as you'll find out in this report, successful marketers are beginning to make it easier for prospects to purchase at any stage of the buyer's journey — messages are shifting from *why* to buy to *how* to buy.

This has been another tough year. One negative headline after another has drained audiences' emotional reserves. They need an escape. Marketing content can offer that empathetic, emotionally stirring olive branch they're searching for.

As you read on, you'll discover that blogs, podcasts, and videos are the content types that are most effective at the early stages of the buyer's journey, where brands are fighting to establish customer awareness and audience interest.

The reason is simple: These content types foster connection. They tell a story, they evoke emotion, and they present a face that the audience can relate to. And the strength of the connections that these content types create helps carry buyers through the rest of their journey on a wave of engagement and investment.

In conclusion: Connection lies in content. The last Content Marketing for Demand Generation survey report (2020) talked about creating desire and holding attention. This year, we talk about making it easier for customers to purchase across all stages of the buyer's journey.

By providing audiences with earnest and engaging content, you can build lasting connections in 2022 and beyond that drive demand to new heights.

INTRODUCTION

Today, many businesses believe there is an asymmetric relationship between their companies and potential customers. The perception is that buyers are “in control” and armed with more and higher-quality information than ever before. Businesses see the prevalent research that says:

- 71% of commercial buyers begin their research with generic Google searchesⁱ
- 68% of B2B customers prefer to research independently onlineⁱⁱ
- 47% of B2B buyers consume three to five pieces of content before engaging with a salespersonⁱⁱⁱ
- 90% of buyers won't take a cold call^{iv}

Businesses conclude that the modern “empowered buyer” and their preference for self-service knowledge should be the center of the conversation. Demand generation teams create content to ensure that every buyer's experience caters to every question or objection that could exist about why customers should change to a solution like theirs. Sales teams provide the differentiating product features and ensure that the company is positioned as the “best supplier.”

Demand generation teams pour thought leadership and product/service information out to websites and resource centers. These teams vow to become “buyer-journey-focused.” They use all their energy to dump mountains of research, data, and information and become the first available answer to “why should we change?” They seek to meet their mission: to generate demand.

There's only one problem: Many of today's buyers are not empowered and, what's more, they have little interest in being so.

MEETING WHAT'S IN DEMAND

Research from CEB (now Gartner) shows that buyers are “deeply uncertain and stressed.”^v Yes, modern research concludes that most buyers are self-directed. But the question we're not asking is *why* are they self-directed?

Increasingly, it's because their organizational leadership assumes that all the information they need is readily available. Thus, these managers are under increasing pressure to self-educate and become subject matter experts.

Yes, almost two-thirds of buyers are now likely to be part of a buying committee of four or more people. But as marketers, we again must ask why. It may be because they are trying to speed up the long, complex acquisition

process and split up the tasks of combing through the mountains of available online research. As Brent Adamson, principal executive adviser at Gartner, says, *“In many ways, the single biggest obstacle to purchasing today is a buying problem that has nothing to do with the supplier at all.”*^{vii}

Put simply, there are reasons why today’s buyers perform so much online research before talking with a salesperson. They usually don’t know what they’re looking for, where to get it, or whom to trust when they do find it. Is it any wonder that so few buyers want to talk with a sales rep first? They’re already worried that they haven’t gathered enough information and education they can trust. They have no time for someone who will distract them from that task.

Further, many demand generation marketers have become wrapped up in providing more and more content focused on why a prospect should change, that it creates an unintended result: Buyers see the same point of view repeatedly but presented from different angles. They are trying to learn how to play chess and are bombarded with stacks of research teaching them why chess is important. They’re sure there’s better research out there — but when can they stop digging for it?

This leads, as the CEB research found, to “unproductive, open-ended learning loops by the deluge of information.”^{viii} While providing more educational and product content feels more customer-centric, buyers say it drives an 18% decrease in purchasing ease.^{ix}

Because buyers don’t know how much they need or what information they can trust, they must consume exponentially more to learn enough to feel comfortable talking with a supplier. This process almost certainly doesn’t leave the buyer empowered or better enabled to make the best purchase.

So, what’s the answer? What kind of content should demand generation marketers produce if more thought leadership, research, or product information isn’t helping?

We’ll get to that in a moment.

DEMAND GENERATION IS CHANGING

Things are different in 2022. As we finally emerge from the pandemic-related disruptions, marketers are moving back into familiar habits.

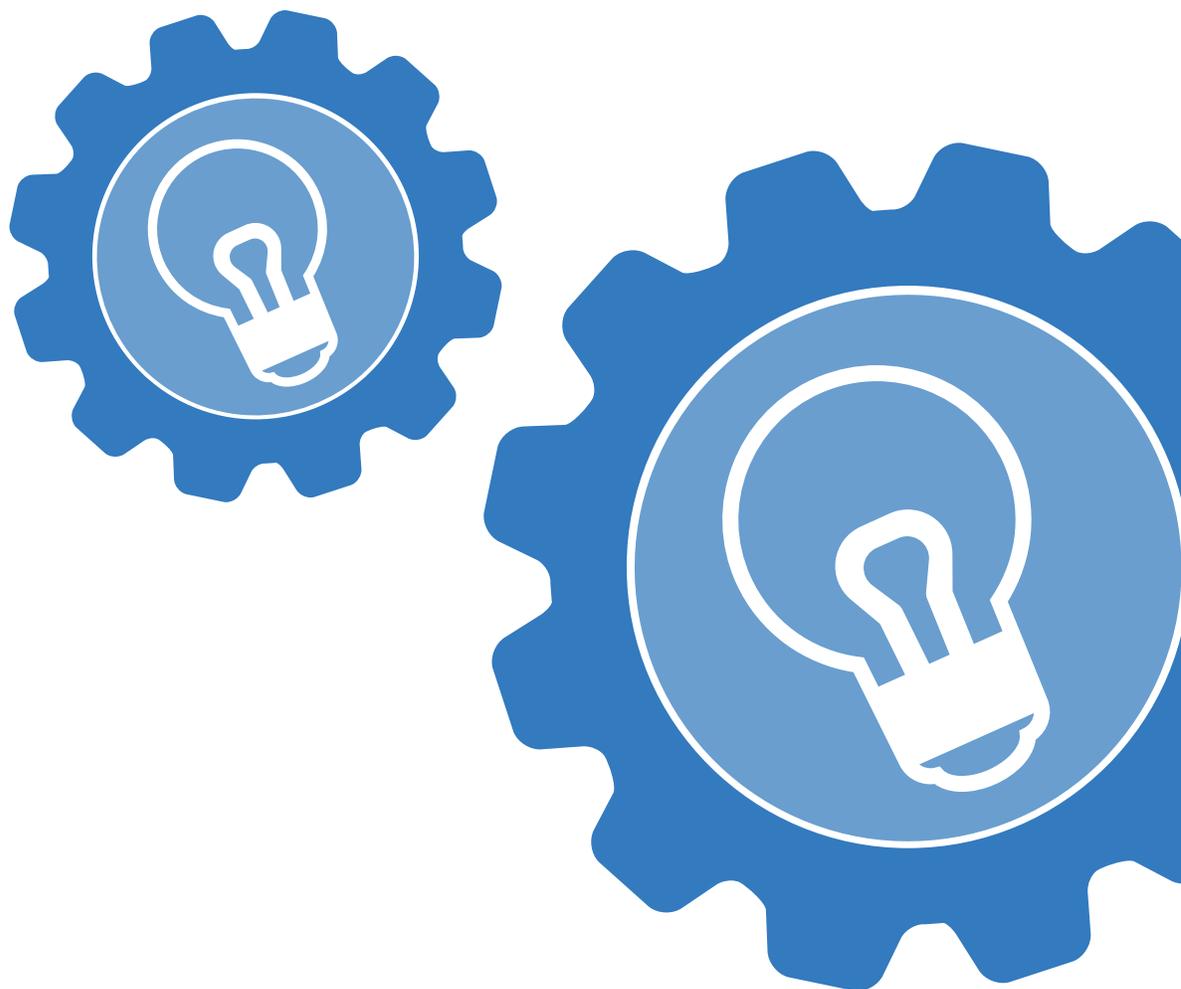
In our last version of this study (2020), we recognized the difficulties of remote work, challenging economic conditions, and the waterfall of negative headlines.

This year's research illustrates a return to some of the demand generation priorities we've seen in the past and recognizes (and challenges) the myth of the empowered buyer.

As you'll see, demand generation marketers still focus on top-of-the-funnel brand awareness but are also starting to recognize that content should focus on making it easier to buy.

You'll see the growth of account-based marketing in demand generation efforts, as marketers simultaneously realize that their companies are probably producing way too much content.

The one thing we can all agree on is that we have a lot of work to do.



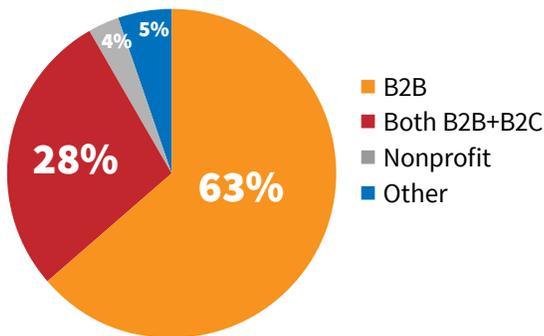
METHODOLOGY

In February and March 2022, the CMI research team conducted its fourth Content Marketing for Demand Generation survey to learn how marketers use content marketing for demand generation purposes.

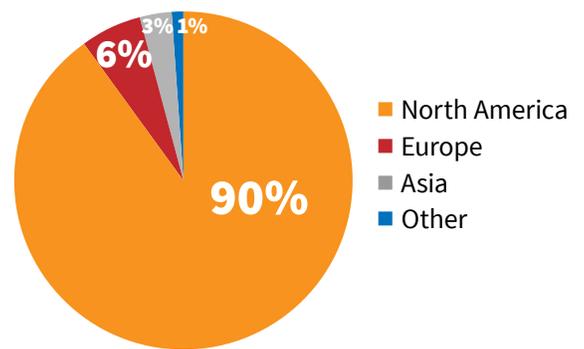
CMI sent email invitations to a slice of its opt-in subscriber list. A total of 219 global responses (representing 19 countries) were qualified for analysis. Qualified respondents were those who indicated their company uses content marketing to generate demand from buyers (create and/or nurture leads or potential customers) at the top, middle, and/or bottom of the buying funnel.

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

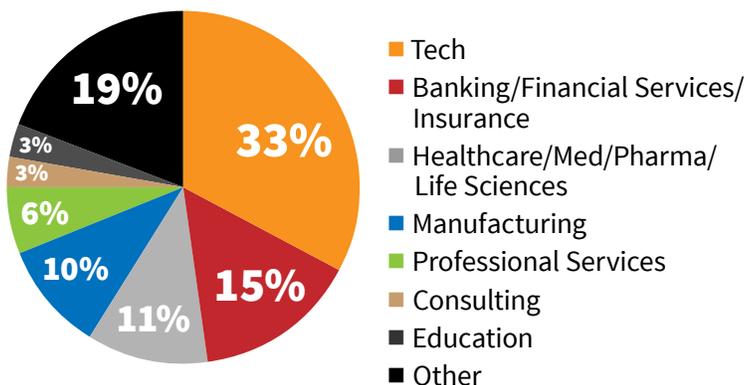
Nature of Organization



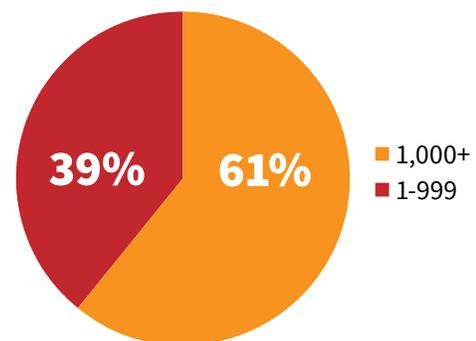
Locations



Industry



Company Size (By Employees)



FINDINGS

Ninety-three percent of marketers we surveyed said their top reason for using content marketing for demand generation is to create brand awareness.

We no longer see a decreased focus on the nurturing of leads in the middle of the funnel, as we did in 2020 compared with 2019. In 2022, those using content marketing to nurture leads increased to 78% from 69% in 2020.

The 2022 data illustrates that demand generation is more spread out against the entirety of the buyer's journey (every category of reasons for using content marketing increased). The implication is that marketers must add value with content at every step — because who knows where the buyer has been educated and where they will enter our content experiences.

Reasons Organizations Use Content Marketing for Demand Generation

	2022	2020	2019	2018
Generate brand awareness	93%	88%	86%	82%
Generate leads/potential customers at the top of the funnel	89%	86%	88%	87%
Position organization as a thought leader	84%	80%	79%	78%
Nurture leads/potential customers at the middle of the funnel	78%	69%	71%	73%
Convince/persuade leads to evaluate/purchase in the late stage of the customer journey	60%	55%	51%	60%

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

When we asked about the stage in the buyer’s journey where organizations receive the most value from content marketing for demand generation, here again, as in 2020, respondents indicated that the early stage (generating awareness/interest) drives the highest value (56%).

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

	2022	2020	2019	2018
Early stage (generating awareness/interest)	56%	54%	57%	51%
Middle stage (consideration/intent)	24%	30%	28%	28%
Late stage (evaluation/purchase)	8%	4%	6%	8%
Unsure	12%	12%	9%	12%

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

These findings support our anecdotal experiences that indicate demand generation teams are beginning to find better results from focusing earlier AND later in the process and making it easier to purchase, rather than pouring more information into convincing people to change. While generating awareness increased slightly (56% from 54%), consideration/intent dropped to 24% from 30%. Most interestingly, the late stage doubled from 4% to 8%.

Put simply: It’s becoming more productive to create content marketing to make it easier for customers to purchase. (Note below how the late stage is the only area where respondents foresee a year-over-year increase in content to be created.)

Estimated Percentage of Content That Organization Will Create for Each Stage of Buyer’s Journey

	2022	2020	2019	2018
Early stage (generating awareness/interest)	46%	49%	52%	47%
Middle stage (consideration/ intent)	29%	29%	27%	29%
Late stage (evaluation/ purchase)	20%	17%	17%	21%
Other stages	6%	5%	4%	3%

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

When we asked marketers which content types were most effective at various stages of the buying journey, their answers were similar to 2020. The only notable differences were for:

- Podcasts — Effectiveness was much higher in the early stage (77%) when compared with 2020 (60%).
- Videos — While videos were still most effective in the early stages (59%), effectiveness in the middle stage increased to 34% compared with 26% in 2020.

These findings suggest that demand generation marketers are experimenting (and succeeding) with new, richer media formats at both earlier and later stages.

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)	Number of Users
Blog posts/articles	76%	23%	1%	214
Case studies	8%	54%	39%	217
E-books	41%	49%	9%	217
Events (e.g., virtual, in-person)	30%	41%	28%	198
Interactive content	47%	44%	10%	161
Podcasts	77%	23%	0%	112
Videos	59%	34%	7%	212
Webinars	34%	49%	17%	187
White papers	27%	42%	31%	168
Other types of content	37%	33%	30%	115

Base: Respondents who use each type of content listed. Nonusers of each type were removed from counts.

*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 process, or convincing/persuading someone to make a purchase) based on your organization’s specific objectives.

Next, we asked respondents if their organization had sponsored any virtual events (for demand generation purposes) in the last 12 months:

- 68% said yes, up from 56% in 2020
- 25% said no, compared with 41% in 2020

We then asked those who had sponsored virtual events how they would rate the importance of those events compared with that of in-person events held pre-pandemic:

- 26% said they were much more important, compared with 53% in 2020
- 11% said they were much less important, compared with 4% in 2020

These findings suggest that we are moving back into a world where in-person events will play an important role in content marketing. We can see a great leveling of the importance of virtual events vs. in-person events. It is, however, interesting to note that virtual events still play an important role — and this is likely to continue.

Has your organization sponsored any virtual events (for demand generation purposes) in the last 12 months?

	2022	2020
Yes	68%	56%
No	25%	41%
Unsure	7%	3%

Of those who said yes...

How would you rate the importance of virtual events compared with the importance of in-person events held pre-pandemic?

	2022	2020
Much more important	26%	53%
Slightly more important	27%	18%
About the same	22%	19%
Slightly less important	14%	6%
Much less important	11%	4%

Base: Respondents whose organizations sponsored any virtual events (for demand generation purposes) in the last 12 months.

Later in the survey, we asked respondents which content marketing-related methods their organizations use to nurture audiences through the buyer’s journey.

As they were in 2020, email/email campaigns was the top response (92%). Interestingly:

- Paid advertising increased to 80% from 54% in 2020
- Sponsored events increased to 63% from 45% in 2020

After a 10-point increase in 2020 from 2019 in the percentage using storytelling/evoking emotion, that percentage leveled out at 49% in 2022.

The percentage of demand gen content marketers who use paid advertising to nurture audiences increased to 80% in 2022 versus 54% in 2020.

Which content marketing-related method(s) does your organization use specifically to nurture audiences?

	2022	2020	2019
Email/email campaigns (e.g., welcome series, drip campaigns)	92%	85%	85%
Paid advertising (e.g., print, digital, social media)	80%	54%	61%
Sponsored events (virtual, in-person)	63%	45%	42%
Storytelling/evoking emotion	49%	49%	39%
Community building/audience participation	36%	31%	31%
Offers/incentives/membership perks	25%	19%	25%

Note: This question was new on the 2019 survey.

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

Regarding the metrics they use, 84% of respondents said they look at conversions, making it the top metric in 2019, 2020, and 2022.

It’s interesting to note the steady growth of conversions as a solid metric that demand generation teams use. This reflects the previous finding that demand generation teams are beginning to spread out over the entirety of the journey from awareness through to late-stage persuasion — and they’re using conversions to measure the results.



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

	2020	2019	2019	2018
Conversions (e.g., traffic to subscribers, leads to sales)	84%	75%	80%	N/A
Website traffic	69%	74%	77%	67%
Quality of leads	62%	56%	62%	56%
Audience engagement	55%	64%	55%	58%
Revenue growth	46%	47%	48%	38%
Quantity of leads	45%	53%	60%	57%
Pipeline growth	40%	44%	42%	37%
Cost per lead	31%	39%	39%	39%
PR mentions/media coverage	27%	29%	29%	N/A
Market research data (e.g., awareness surveys, polls)	27%	19%	21%	N/A
Other	4%	4%	15%	16%

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

BIG JUMP IN THOSE USING ACCOUNT-BASED MANAGEMENT

Regarding the technologies that demand generation marketers use for content marketing, 2022 has been a year of recognizing the account buying team — and creating demand cohesively.

We continue to see increases in those using content management systems (+6), marketing automation systems (+8), content optimization (+8), and content performance/recommendation analytics (+11). However, the biggest jump this year was in account-based management (+13). While this increase was markedly more among enterprise companies (1,000+ employees), it was also meaningful among smaller companies.

The implications are that demand generation teams are focused on creating valuable content for “buying committees” or “teams” that make decisions about solutions.

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

	2022	2020	2019	2018
Social media publishing/analytics	89%	87%	79%	68%
Analytics (e.g., web analytics, dashboards)	89%	86%	78%	82%
Email marketing software	84%	83%	72%	65%
Content management system (CMS)	63%	57%	61%	60%
Customer relationship management (CRM) software	62%	63%	61%	57%
Marketing automation system (MAS)	46%	38%	41%	48%
Content optimization	43%	35%	36%	22%
Account-based management	41%	28%	30%	N/A
Content performance/recommendation analytics	38%	27%	23%	N/A
Content distribution platform	34%	23%	33%	N/A
Other	3%	5%	11%	N/A

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



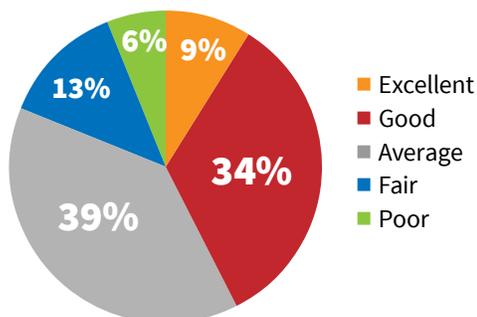
Technologies Organizations Use to Aid Content Marketing Efforts to Create Leads and Nurture Potential Customers (By Company Size)

	All Respondents	Large Companies (1,000+ employees)	Small-to-Medium Companies (1-999 employees)
Social media publishing/analytics	89%	89%	88%
Analytics (e.g., web analytics, dashboards)	89%	90%	88%
Email marketing software	84%	87%	79%
Content management system (CMS)	63%	67%	58%
Customer relationship management (CRM) software	62%	58%	67%
Marketing automation system (MAS)	46%	44%	49%
Content optimization	43%	43%	44%
Account-based management	41%	48%	31%
Content performance/recommendation analytics	38%	41%	34%
Content distribution platform	34%	37%	28%
Other	3%	4%	1%

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

In a new follow-up question, we asked respondents to rate their organizations' use of technology to get meaningful insights into the buyer's journey. Forty-three percent said excellent or good, suggesting that most businesses are still struggling to derive valuable insight from the multitude of technologies they have acquired.

How would you rate your organization's use of technology to get meaningful insights into the customer journey?



SUCCESS INCREASES

As in previous surveys, we asked respondents about their organizations' overall success with using content marketing for demand generation.

Thirty percent rated their organization as extremely or very successful, compared with 26% in 2020, 22% in 2019, and 21% in 2018.

This slow and steady increase over the years suggests that despite the struggles with metrics and measurement, companies are learning how content marketing can make a difference across multiple areas of the journey.

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

	2022	2020	2019	2018
Extremely successful	4%	2%	5%	3%
Very successful	26%	24%	17%	18%
Moderately successful	57%	55%	58%	58%
Minimally successful	13%	18%	16%	15%
Not at all successful	1%	1%	4%	6%

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

The same holds for how organizations view the importance of content as part of a demand generation program. Those who said their organization views content as extremely or very important increased to 80% from 76% in 2020.

80% said their organization views content marketing as extremely or very important to their demand generation efforts.

How does your organization view the importance of content as part of its demand generation efforts?

	2022	2020	2019
Extremely important	35%	33%	36%
Very important	45%	43%	41%
Moderately important	17%	21%	15%
Minimally important	2%	4%	6%
Not at all important	1%	0%	2%

Note: This question was new on the 2019 survey.

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

It was unsurprising that only 35% felt their organization had enough content to meet its current demand generation goals — down from 41% in 2020. But where the dissatisfaction came from was the real surprise.

Feeding our theme for this year, we see that the percentage of marketers who feel the organization is generating too much content doubled from 5% to 11%. This was among the most validating results from this year's study and is something we see in almost every client engagement we have: There is simply too much content being generated, and not enough focus on quality.

65% said the overall quality of the content their organization has available to meet its demand generation goals is excellent or very good — up from 42% in 2020.

Do you feel your organization has enough content to meet its current demand generation goals?

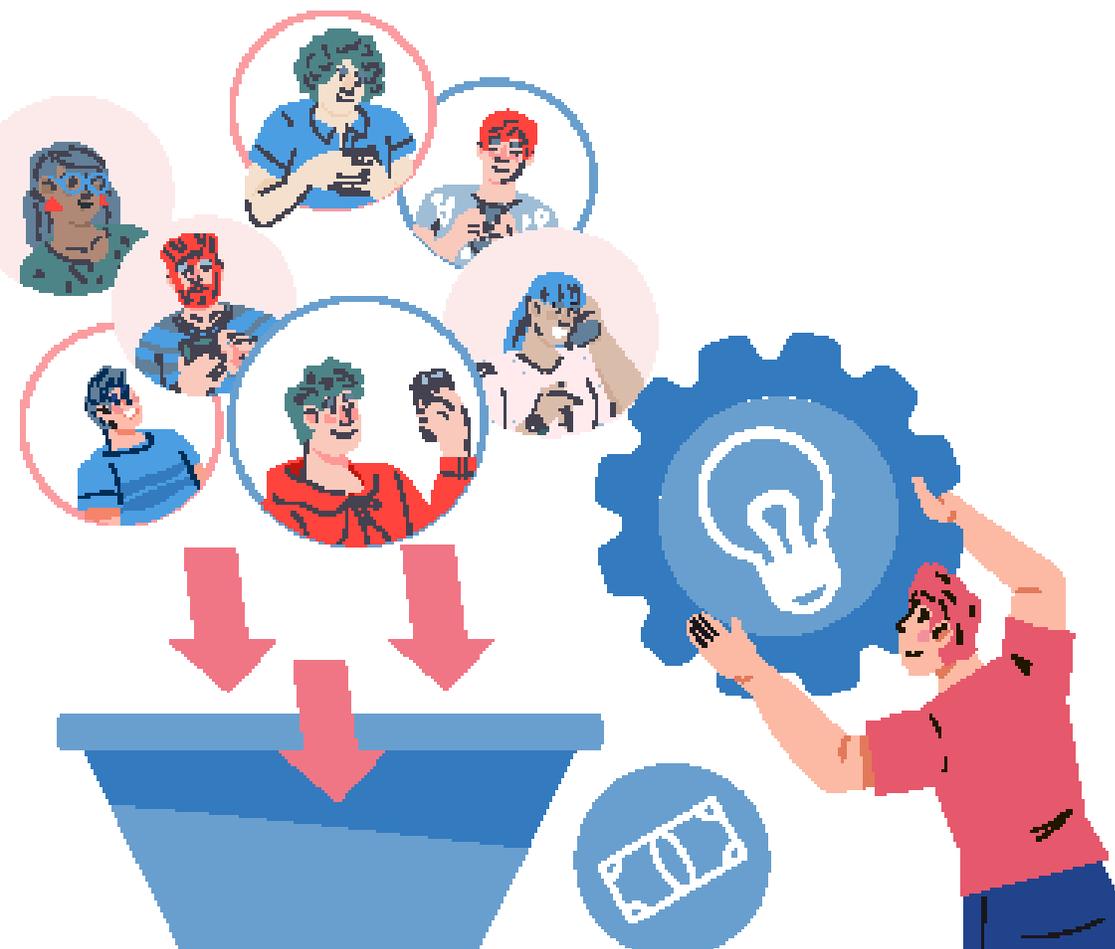
	2022	2020	2019
Yes, enough	35%	41%	33%
Yes, too much	11%	5%	4%
No, not enough	54%	54%	62%

Note: This question was new on the 2019 survey.

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

However, our survey results show the perceived quality of the content being produced is higher: When we asked these marketers how they would rate the overall quality of the content their organization has to meet its demand generation goals, 65% said it was excellent or very good, compared with only 42% last year.

This suggests that while most businesses are producing more content than they need, the content teams are still maintaining or increasing the quality.



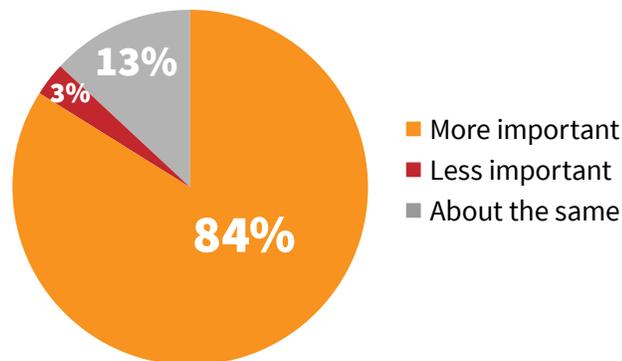
How would you rate the overall quality of the content your organization has available to meet its current demand generation goals?

	2022	2020	2019
Excellent	14%	10%	11%
Very good	51%	32%	34%
Good	24%	42%	36%
Fair	8%	14%	17%
Poor	2%	2%	3%

Note: This question was new on the 2019 survey.

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

Over the last year, has content marketing become more or less important to your organization's demand generation efforts?

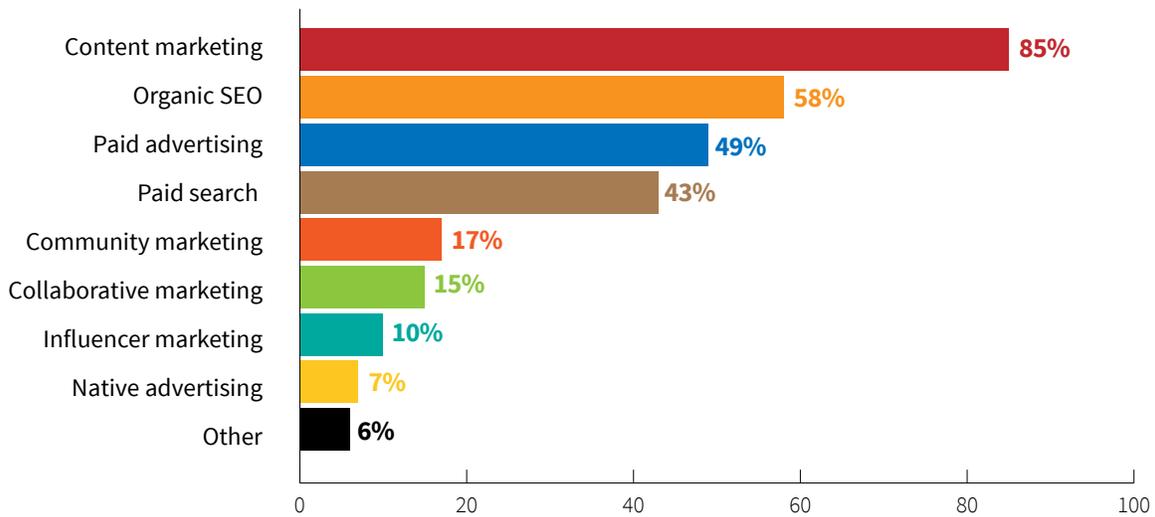


Note: This question was new on the 2022 survey.

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

Finally, content marketing seems to be an increasingly important piece of the demand generation marketer's priorities: 84% of respondents said that content marketing has become more important to their organizations' demand generation efforts, and 85% said it is the most effective marketing strategy for their demand generation efforts.

Most Effective Marketing Strategies for Demand Generation Efforts (Top Three)



*Note: This question was new on the 2022 survey.
Base: All respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers.
Aided list; maximum of three responses permitted.*

Almost nine out of 10 marketers said content marketing was the most effective marketing strategy for their demand generation efforts.

CONCLUSION

In 2022, organizing our demand generation efforts around the customer's perceived thought leadership needs is a mistake. Content marketing is vitally important, and if not thought leadership, research, or product information, then what?

In other words, what content should we focus on as demand generation teams continue to become more involved in the entirety of the buyer's journey?

Today, when we ask, “*what business is the demand generation team really in?*” we might note the myth of the empowered buyer. We might ask ourselves four clarifying questions:

1. What if instead of seeing every prospective buyer as a highly informed expert looking for yet more requirements, alternatives, and other education, the business acts from the perspective of the job that’s not getting done? In this case, the business might need to empower experts to create prescriptive, easy, successful buying experiences. Instead of creating more compelling reasons to change, what if we created easier and more valuable methods of buying?
2. What if the demand generation team was more prescriptive and consultative about the entire buying process? What if the business enabled all kinds of front-line workers to help distribute education while also exuding confidence, delivering value, and anticipating the needs of a buying group?
3. What if we could link improved demand generation success to an improved process of a coordinated content strategy? What if we could understand which content resonates with buyers and sellers so that demand generation teams become more efficient and gain the insights to deliver the “best next” experiences to customers?
4. Can our companies evolve from a reactive “buyer experience myopia” to connected consultative experiences that make for new kinds of customer experiences?

The answer to these questions is not simply better content that demonstrates thought leadership — nor is it case studies or the best features-and-benefits brochures.

The solution is taking a holistic approach to demand generation to understand how to make the entire process of purchasing easier and better — and not just more “educational.”

Demand generation teams should focus on what the customer wants to purchase but, more importantly, how they want to purchase it.

Customers don’t buy products, they buy results. Professor Theodore Levitt taught us this.

But the question is, what results?

Building a strategic content operation that can better help our teams answer that question is the first step in evolving from the myopia of the “empowered buyer” into a more expansive and differentiated consultative experience.

About Content Marketing Institute

Content Marketing Institute (CMI) exists to do one thing: advance the practice of content marketing through online education and in-person and digital events. We create and curate content experiences that teach marketers and creators from enterprise brands, small businesses, and agencies how to attract and retain customers through compelling, multichannel storytelling. Global brands turn to CMI for strategic consultation, training, and research. Organizations from around the world send teams to Content Marketing World, the largest content marketing-focused event, ContentTECH Summit, and CMI virtual events. Our community of 215,000+ content marketers shares camaraderie and conversation. CMI is organized by Informa Connect. To learn more, visit www.contentmarketinginstitute.com.

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- i. Think With Google Research*
- ii. Forrester Research: The Ways and Means of B2B Buyer Journey Maps*
- iii. Siteimprove: What Does a Cookieless World Mean for Digital Marketers*
- iv. Zipwhip: Why Your Customers Don't Answer the Phone Anymore*
- v. Harvard Business Review: The New Sales Imperative*
- vi. Forrester: Three Seismic Shifts in Buying Behavior*
- vii. Gartner: New B2B Buying Journey & Its Implication for Sales*
- viii. Harvard Business Review: The New Sales Imperative*
- ix. Ibid*

