



How to recharge your content marketing engine during uncertain times

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Meet the experts

Keeping your content marketing engine running smoothly

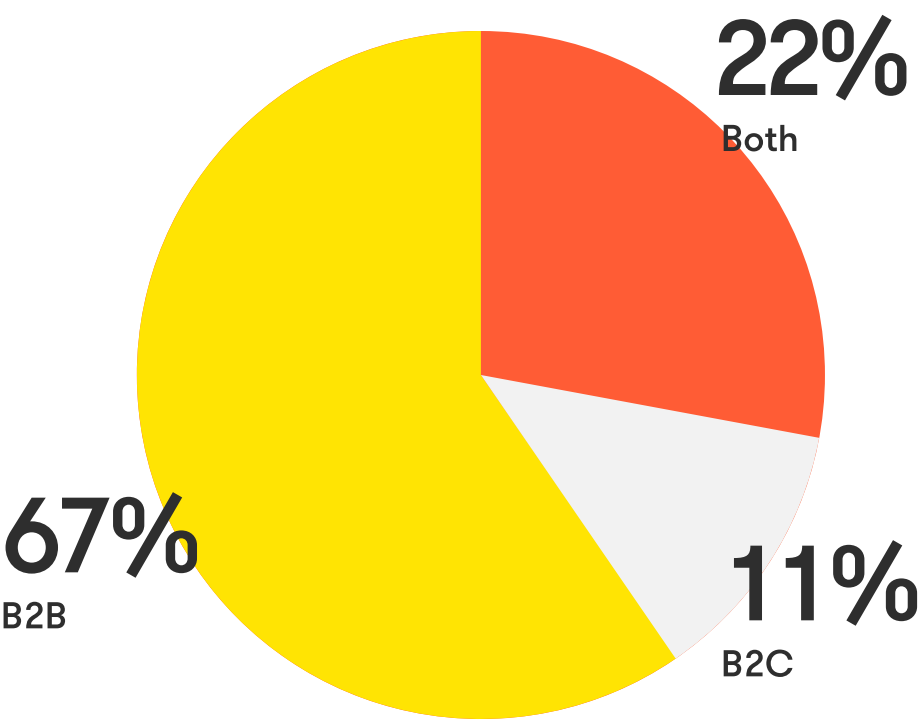
As a veteran marketer, you’ve probably seen it all before: reduced budgets, limited headcount, struggles with aligning sales and marketing. Expanding your audience is tough enough as it is. And when economic forecasts grow dim, you need to harness all your creativity to keep your content marketing engine running at full speed.

To keep on top, you need an agile content marketing strategy—one that keeps your content performing on the same level, no matter what challenges come your way.

Which activities and channels should you prioritise? Which metrics should you track? And which tools help you maximise your ROI?

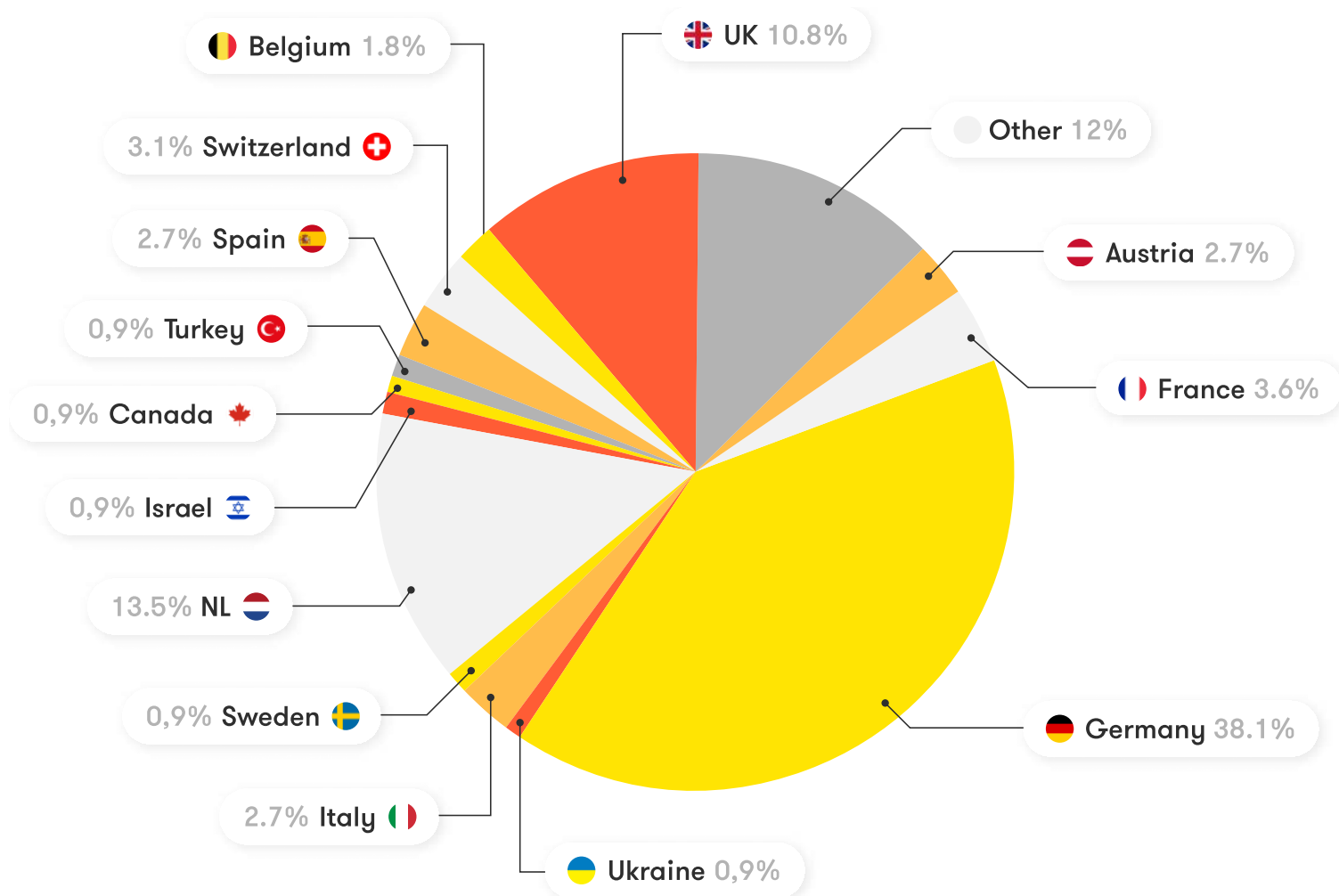
These are just a few of the topics covered in our study of experienced marketing decision-makers, representing fast-growing brands from around the world.

Which markets are they targeting?



In this report, we share their best practices to help you keep growing your business through effective content marketing—even during uncertain economic times.

To get a look behind the scenes at some of the world’s fastest growing brands, we surveyed over 200 CMOs, marketing managers and other marketing leaders. They shared their experiences, insights and best practices that can help you create a winning content marketing strategy in today’s fast-changing economic climate.





**Why content is your
most powerful tool in
a difficult market**

Why content is your most powerful tool in a difficult market

Content marketing is a proven tactic for building a strong brand and generating high-quality leads. In a normal year, the average marketing team spends 25% of its budget on content marketing. And during tough economic times, the marketing leaders we spoke to say content is even more of a priority for them:

- 51% say content marketing is “very important” to them during tough economic times, compared to 46% who say it is very important all the time.
- Despite concerns about how the economy might impact their budget, nearly **9 out of 10** say they plan to maintain the same level or increase their spend on content marketing production in 2023.

9/10 say they plan to maintain the same level or increase their spend on content marketing production in 2023

As the numbers show, marketing leaders are focusing even more than usual on content marketing right now. Here are 4 of the main reasons why:

1 Content is the cost-effective solution.

Content marketing costs 62% less than traditional marketing (such as ad buy and paid search), but generates around 3 times as many leads per euro spent. And when spending decreases due to poor economic conditions, it's more important than ever for companies to generate high-quality leads.

2 Content is more engaging than advertising.

People are faced with an ever-increasing number of ads each day. Around three quarters of B2B and B2C customers say they'd rather ignore ads and learn about companies through informative content instead. As a result, online display ads now have an average click-through rate (CTR) of less than 0.1%.

3 Content keeps customers coming back for more.

Helpful content is far more likely than advertising to add value to your customers' lives. When customers feel supported, informed or entertained, they're likely to follow your brand and become repeat customers. During a tough economy, retention is even more valuable, since acquiring a new customer can cost 5 times more than retaining an existing customer. Plus, your chances of selling to an existing customer are up to 14 times higher than selling to a new one.

4 Content generates actionable first-party data insights.

As marketing strategies become increasingly automated, data is your most precious resource as a marketer. Yet third-party data (generated, for example, by search engine ads) is increasingly unreliable, as more customers block data collection. With high-quality content, you distribute directly to your customers through your owned channels. This enables you to collect more relevant data, so you can improve your strategy and target your activities more effectively.

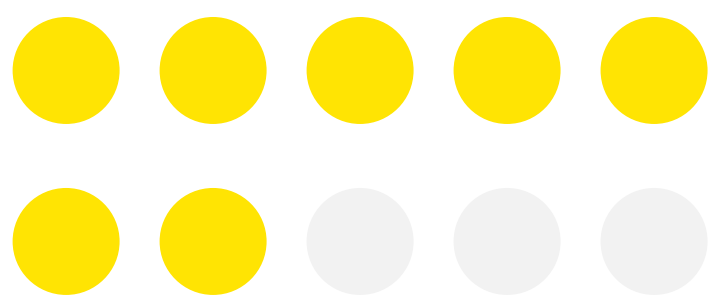


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Which goals does content help you achieve?

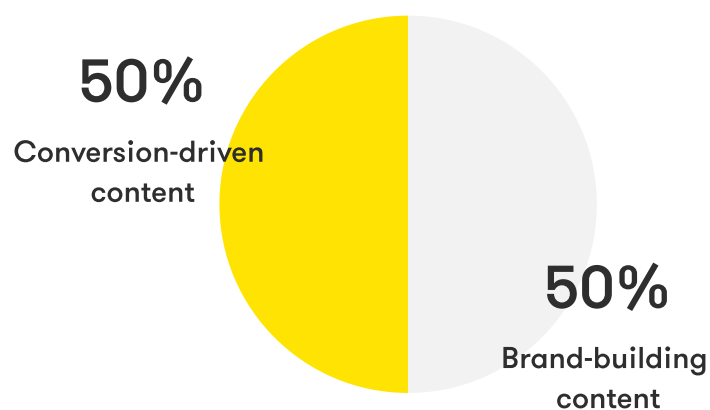
Marketers rely on content to achieve many different goals. Our study found a slight shift in priorities during tough economic times:



7 out of 10 respondents say showing consistency and building trust among potential customers is their main content-marketing focus when the economy slows down.



Retaining customers was the most important goal to just over one quarter of the respondents, as was maintaining market - and mindshare.



The experts were divided almost evenly into two camps when it came to choosing which type of content to focus on: half of them say conversion-driven content is their main focus during tough times, while the other half say they focus on brand-building content.

So, how are marketing leaders putting effective content strategies into place? In the next chapter, you'll learn 7 proven best practices revealed in our global content marketing study.



The 7 best practices to recharge your content marketing engine



**Best practice #1:
Focus on building your blog**

Best practice #1:

Focus on building your blog

9 out of 10 organisations rely on organic search as their most effective distribution channel. Nearly two-thirds (**59%**) say that their **blog is the most valuable channel**. After all, in terms of search engine visibility: blog posts are over 5 times likelier than other web pages to be indexed pages and around twice as likely to be indexed links. And as a result, companies with blogs attract over two-thirds more links each month as those without.

What the experts say

Among the experts we surveyed, **77% say short-form content is important or very important to them**. This includes blogging, along with short news articles and social media posts.

“As content marketers, we always dream of that one magical piece of content that achieves all three things at once: content that attracts traffic, is super deep and generates a lot of leads in the process. But at HubSpot, we had to break away from this idea, because there is not one perfect content piece that can achieve all of these goals. We now focus on giving each content piece a task and finding a balance between traffic attainment, depth and lead generation”, says Jennifer Lapp, SEO Team Lead for the DACH market at HubSpot.

Some of the main reasons they gave for focusing on short-form content were:

- Direct ownership of your message
- Showcasing your thought leadership and expertise
- Full control of your brand image
- The ability to compete for keyword rankings

“We keep content creation close to home, in order to make sure that our identity is spread in a way we find fitting. As perception is everything, we like to stay in the lead on that part when times are uncertain”, says Jelte van der Meulen, Team Lead Content at online marketing bureau Brandmerck.

Especially among the experts who are currently representing young brands, building a strong library of owned short-form content is seen as the best way to achieve these goals:

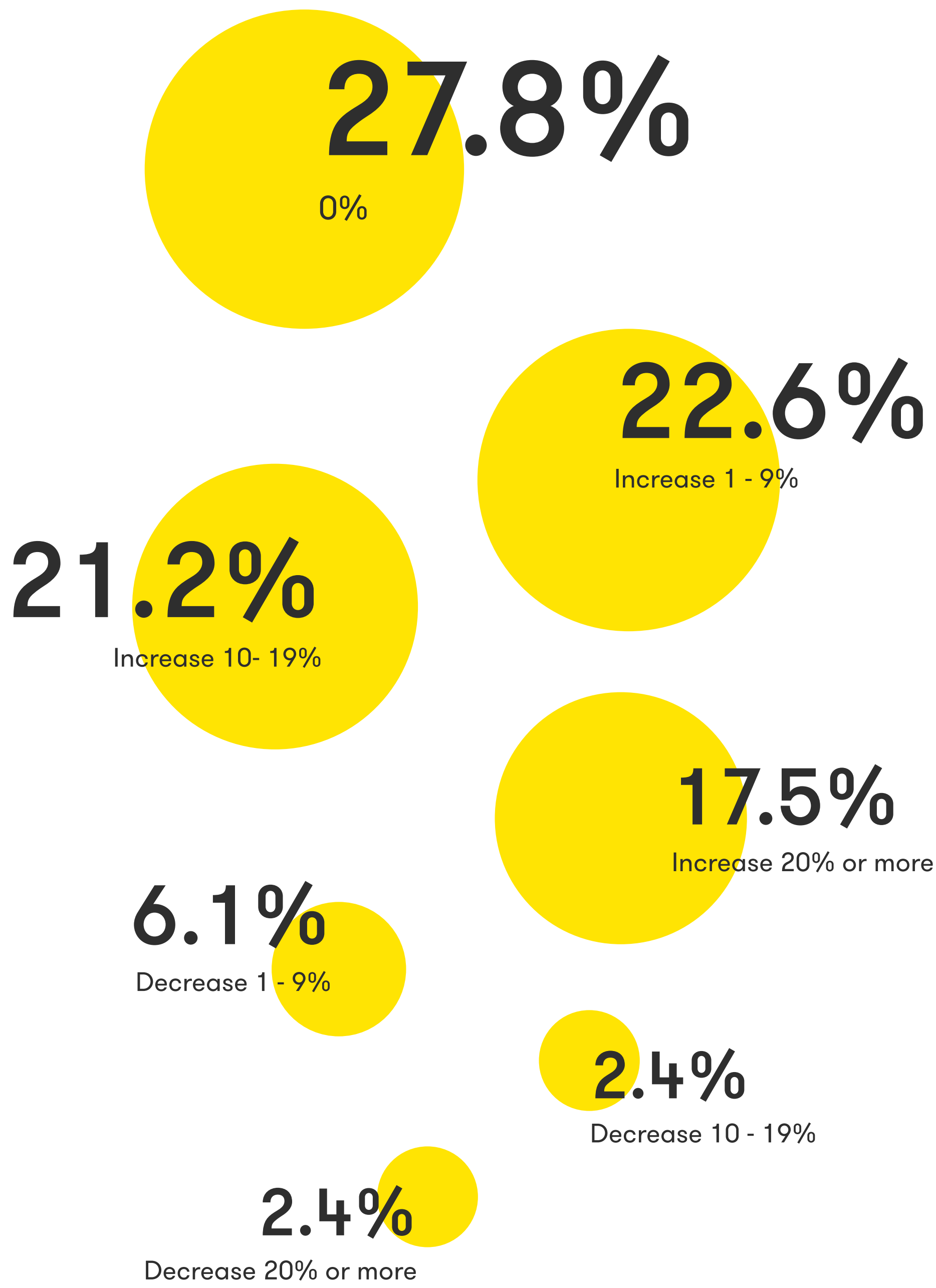
“In an early stage of a product, the best way to go is to build your own content instead of relying on user-generated or influencer content”, says Munda Kamlesh, Marketing Manager at CloudFiles.

While only **6%** of the experts say they plan on working with **influencers** in the near future, **45%** say they will work with more **external content creators** (freelance talent) to produce the original branded content they need.

Key takeaways and tips

- Short-form content is an essential format for most of the brands we surveyed.
- Your blog is a powerful asset for attracting organic search.
- Update your blog frequently with original, insightful content that your audience won't find anywhere else.
- Align with your sales team and subject-matter experts within your organisation to ensure your blog is delivering useful, accurate information.
- Align with your brand team to ensure that blog content is consistent with your brand image.

How much will you increase or decrease your production budget for content marketing 2023?



#2

Best practice #2:
Building your brand is just
as important as conversion

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Building your brand is just as important as conversion

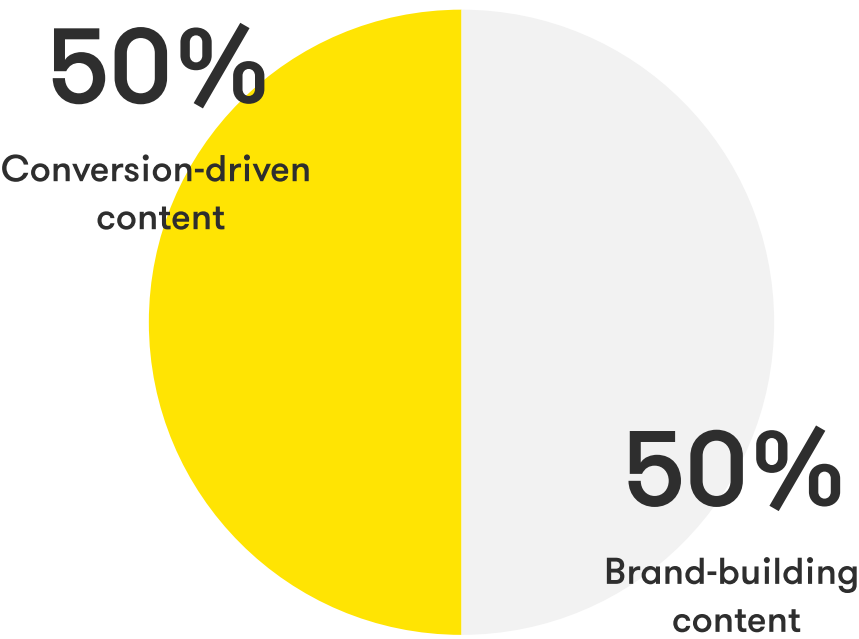
Content marketing is an effective tool for reaching many different goals, including raising brand awareness and driving conversion and sales. While you might expect for brands to be doubling down on conversion- and sales-driving content during tough economic times, many experienced marketers are taking a more balanced approach.

What the experts say

The experts were split evenly when choosing which type of content to focus on: **around 50%** say conversion-driven content is their main focus during tough times, while the other half say they focus on **brand-building content**.

This split can also be seen in the metrics that the experts say they're watching most closely now:

- 61% say conversion metrics (CTR, CPA, ROAS, CPC, etc.) are important or very important to track at the moment.
- 61% say branding metrics (SOV, reach, engagement, etc.) are important or very important to track at the moment.



Clearly the experts find it important to divide their focus equally during an uncertain economy. That’s because potential customers are likely to be more price-sensitive. They want to be fully convinced before deciding to convert. As a result, brands need to work harder to put potential customers’ minds at ease. This is where building a strong, recognizable brand makes a powerful difference.

It takes flexibility and a close knowledge of your customers’ pain points to offer content that resonates with them.

According to Tom Hitch, Head of Content at Oktra: “A tough economy changes how we speak to prospective customers and our work pivots to match buying trends. Therefore, the content we produce becomes more sensitive and relevant to the scenarios people find themselves in.”

Munda Kamlesh says it is important to target the potential customer’s pain points while also assuring them of the solution: “The pain points that firms face during bear and bull runs change. During bear runs, firms focus on ensuring only essential resources are being used, and any resource they purchase should provide them leverage on either revenue or cost. The product does not change, nor the core messages; however, showcasing the relevant benefits ensures proper transmission of the message.”

“

Employee advocacy amplifies our reach and engagement and creates micro brand influencers.

Anne Smink
Head of Brand & Content, Recrutee

That same expert went on to say: “Building trust is an important aspect of our growth journey. We try to build this through customer education and showcasing our capabilities in various content forms.”

Matthias Weber, Business Development Manager at DIE DIGITAL-WEBER, emphasised the importance of targeting potential customers with the right content at the right moment of the buyer journey: “A tough economy makes people more cautious about purchasing decisions. This makes it all the more important to provide the right information at the right time.”

Key takeaways and tips

- Understand your customers’ pain points so you can determine which messaging and format adds the most value.
- Focus on valuable, educational content that targets customers in the consideration stage. This type of content strengthens your brand while also helping to drive conversion.
- Showcase customer success stories that emphasise the power of partnership, trust and shared responsibility. This shows how much your brand cares about its customers, while also proving how useful your company’s products are.



#3

Best practice #3:
Power up your inbound
marketing activities

Best practice #3:

Power up your inbound marketing activities

For years marketers relied heavily on outbound marketing activities like trade shows and cold calling to fill the top of their sales funnel. Yet the high cost of outbound activities results in a low ROI. These activities are also increasingly seen as out of touch with modern consumer preferences.

Today, nearly all customer journeys, including for B2B customers, start online. Your chances of reaching an interested potential customer on the internet are much higher than being at the right trade fair at the right time. That's why brands increasingly rely on an inbound marketing strategy: you provide the information in a way that's easy for your potential customers to find, and when they're interested, they'll come to you.

It sounds too good to be true, but inbound is definitely a winning strategy. In fact, research by Gartner finds that inbound is 10 times more effective for lead conversion than outbound marketing.

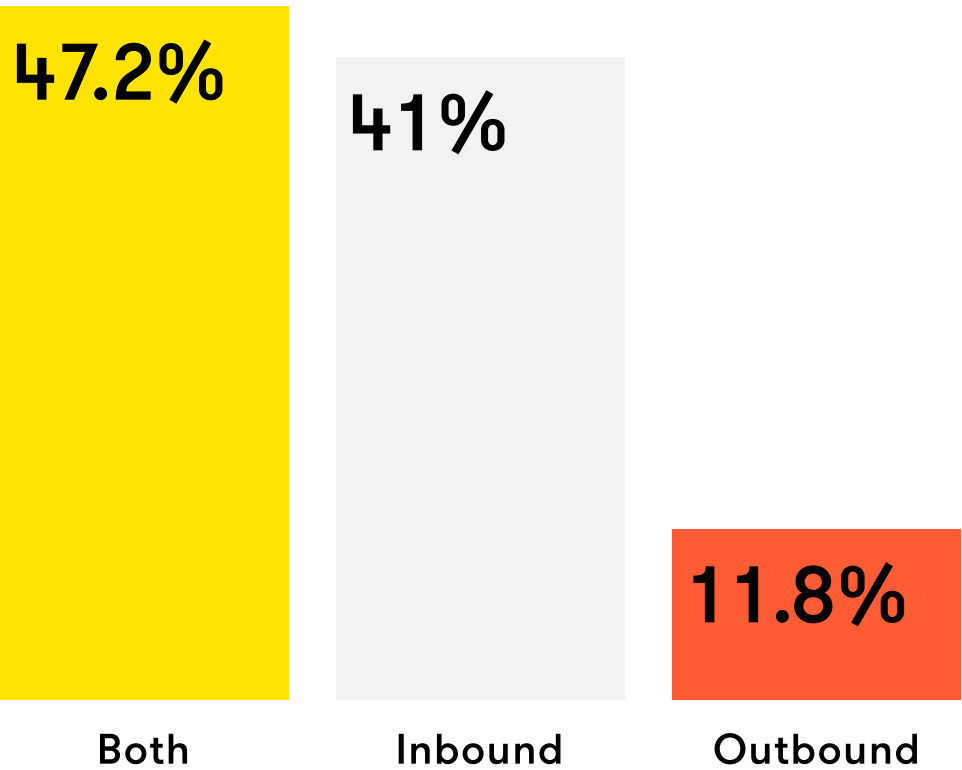
What the experts say

Nearly **90% of the experts** we spoke to say that they use inbound marketing, including **41% who say their strategy is inbound-only**. These numbers show the clear trend away from outbound-only strategies.

Outbound-only

Of the experts who pursue an outbound strategy, most say this is due to their company's long-standing practices and existing relationships with their customer base.

Is your company's marketing strategy inbound or outbound focused?



Inbound-only

Those who pursue an inbound-only strategy cite a number of advantages for doing so, including:

- Better ROI compared to outbound marketing
- Higher lead quality
- More organic traffic

Niklas Dorn, CEO at Filestage, summarises his organisation's inbound-only strategy, saying: "We believe in helping our preferred customers when they have chosen to be helped and inspired. In contrast, outbound feels like an interruption."

Andrei Klubnikin, Content Manager at ITRex Group, says, "We set up our content marketing department and started creating content regularly roughly two years ago. Our key objective was to grow the website's domain rating, rank for a pull of relevant commercial and informational keywords, and attract quality traffic. So inbound marketing was an obvious choice for us." Michael Brenner, CEO at Marketing Insider Group, agrees by stating that inbound leads convert 10X more than outbound leads.

According to Jocelyn Chan, Global Marketing Communications Manager at TrusTrace, who’s also pursuing an inbound-only approach, “We have started to see leads come to us through word of mouth and from people who have downloaded our gated content. This gives us confidence that we are adding value through the quality of content and product experience we produce.”

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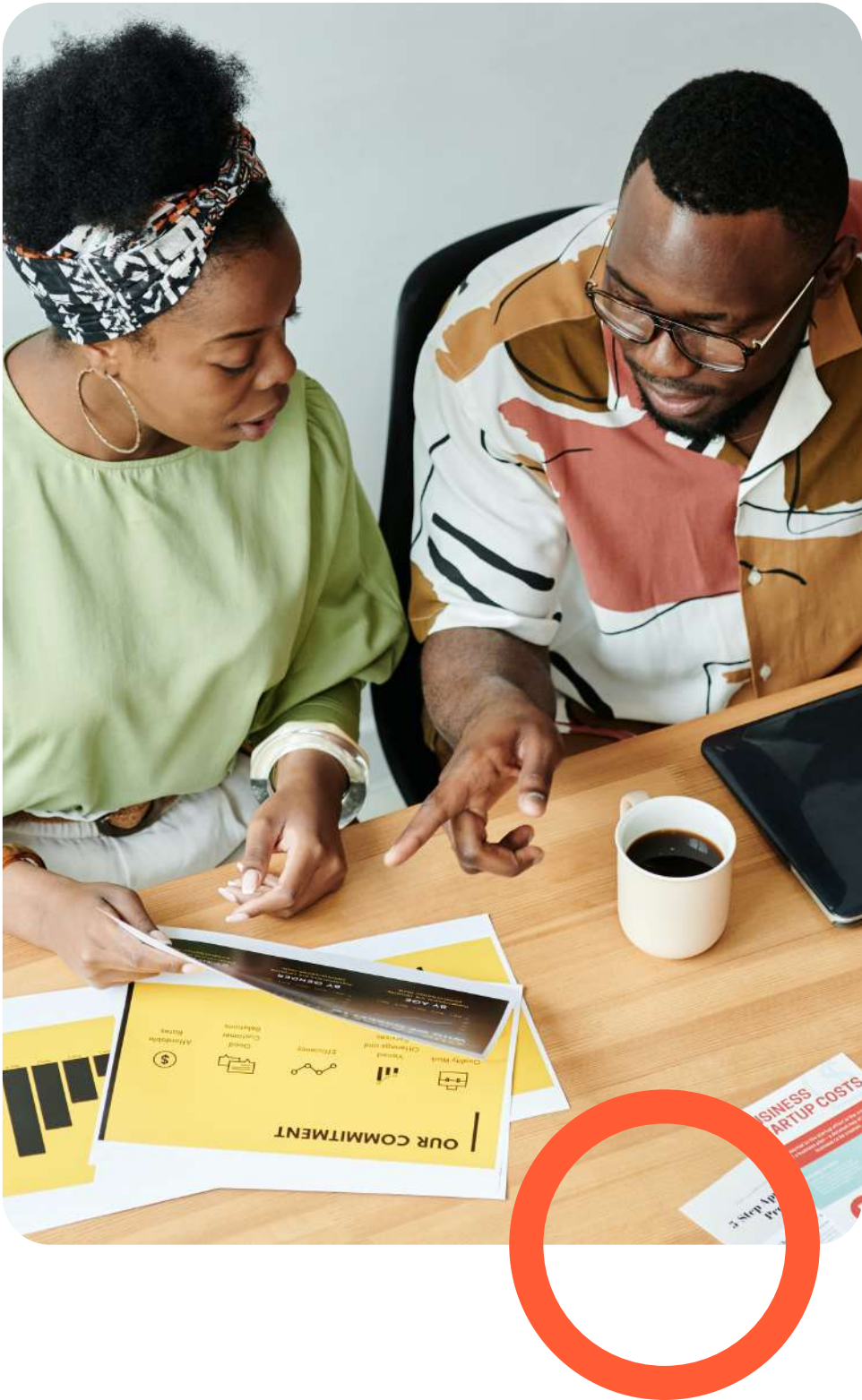
Leads are way more likely to convert into real, paying customers when coming from inbound activities.

Patrick Hollenbeck
Head of Marketing DACH, PlayPlay

Both inbound and outbound
Others say that there’s room in their strategy for both inbound and outbound activities.

“We have an inbound marketing team who produce content and manage organic and paid searches. However, we also concentrate on existing relationships with existing clients via the Sales team. They own these relationships, so they’re well placed to share relevant content and drive action at the right time”, says Kevin Tierney, Commercial Operations Director at CommunicorpUK.

“I like to combine both inbound and outbound, so the users may be attracted by the inbound content, but they also can find commercial information about our products easily”, Andrea Bleyer, E-commerce & Marketing Manager at Papeles Salvi S.A., says.



Key takeaways and tips

- Inbound marketing is more cost-effective and yields more high-quality leads and a higher ROI than traditional outbound activities.
- Successful inbound marketing relies on having high-quality SEO content.
- Outbound strategies are still preferred by some marketers, especially those with a well-established brand and customer base.
- Combining inbound and outbound can open you up to the benefits of both approaches, but most experts recommend focusing primarily on inbound, especially in a tough market.



Best practice #4:
Extend your content's life cycle with
a content refresh

Best practice #4: Extend your content's life cycle with a content refresh

Even if your brand’s message remains the same, keyword focus and customers’ interests change—especially during uncertain economic times. By periodically revamping and realigning your existing content, you can dramatically increase its search performance and get new life out of your old material.

Refreshing your content has been found to help improve:

- Organic traffic
- Search engine ranking page (SERP) performance
- Click-through rates
- Lead generation and conversion

Best of all, it’s a cost-effective solution compared to creating all-new content from scratch.



There are also some risks that you'll want to avoid when refreshing your content:

- Make sure the **main intent** of the content remains the same, even after a refresh. Otherwise, it may confuse search engines and result in a drop in SERP. Focus on fine-tuning instead of completely overhauling the content.
- **Changes in URLs** may result in redirects, slow page loading speeds and broken links. Only change URLs when strictly necessary and perform an interlinking and backlinking analysis to make sure URL changes don't have unintended consequences.

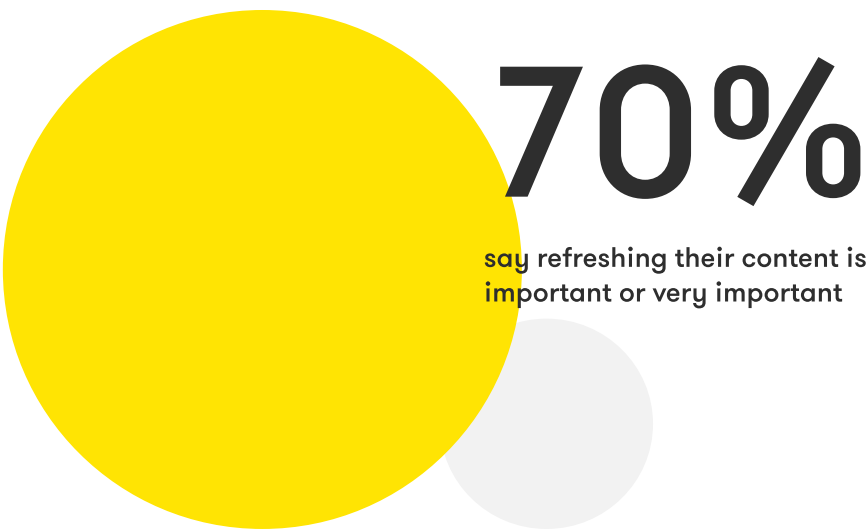
What the experts say

Most of the experts we spoke to say repurposing and refreshing content is always a priority for them: **70%** say **refreshing their content is important or very important** under normal economic conditions. In a volatile economy, that number rises slightly to **71%**.

The main reasons for refreshing content varied, but here are the most common:

- Saving time and budget
- Addressing changing customer concerns
- The ability to provide the same content in multiple formats

Some emphasised the importance of getting more value out of your investment in creating original content:



“Quite simply, refreshing and repurposing content is an essential part of a content strategy in any market condition if content teams are to execute efficiently and effectively. Content production, distribution and measurement are resource-intensive and expensive, so who wouldn’t want to get more value out of every bit of content if it can continue to be optimised or be evergreen? A tough economy puts extra strain on resources such as having reduced headcount and budget, so it’s a smart move to double-down on refreshing and repurposing existing content as it’s less time and cost than creating all-new content”, Meredith Odgers, Founder at BambooWorx, explained.

Jocelyn Chan even recommended devoting 80% of time to repurposing existing content: “Whether you are at risk of being impacted by a recession or not, I think repurposing and repackaging content is the best way to scale out your efforts. You put a lot of time and energy into creating it, and it’s equally as important to put energy into distributing it by packaging the information in different formats. Also, not everyone likes to read, or listen to a really hyper podcast host, so repetition of your message in a diversity of formats can go a long way. Always apply Pareto’s rule: spend 20% on creating something new and 80% in repackaging and distributing”.

Others pointed to efficiency and saving money, especially in an unpredictable market:

“As a medium sized company, creating new content non-stop is not very efficient”, says Svenja Böhme, Senior Project Manager at WPWA Team.

“In good times, repurposing the content helps put the message across better. During a recession, it reduces the crunch on resources”, says Munda Kamlesh.

“

Being impacted by a recession or not, I think repurposing and repackaging content is the best way to scale out your efforts.

Jocelyn Chan

Global Marketing Communications Manager,
TrusTrace

Key takeaways and tips

- If you’re not already refreshing and repurposing your content, now is a great time to start.
- Devote a larger proportion of your time (one expert recommends up to 80%) to repurposing content instead of creating new.
- Focus on repurposing your best-performing content to expand its audience.
- If a piece of content failed to perform well in the past, there’s a good chance that the keyword focus was wrong. Research keywords and realign the piece with your customers’ interests.

**Spend 20% on creating
something new and
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and distributing.**

#5

Best practice #5:
Sharpen your channel focus

Best practice #5:

Sharpen your channel focus

As marketers continue to shift towards inbound strategies, owned media is becoming increasingly important compared to paid. Choosing the right channels becomes even more of a priority during an unpredictable economy, when marketers need to work even hard to maximise their ROI.

What the experts say

93% of the experts say that **owned media channels**, such as their company website and social media channels, are important or very important to their content marketing strategy.

Compare that to 63% who say **earned media channels**, such as PR and reviews, are important or very important, and 52% who say **paid channels**, such as search ads, are important or very important.

84% of the experts say they stick with **proven channels** when faced with a difficult economy. In other words: “If it’s not broken, don’t fix it”—especially when every cent counts.

Closely related to their channel preferences is also the type of content marketing the experts are focusing on. 76% say their main focus is “**traditional**” content marketing created by their own brand,

compared to user-generated content (13%) and influencer-generated content (6%).

The experts cite different reasons for choosing which type of content to focus on, including:

- The right match for their audience or industry
- Budget
- Size of their team or organisation

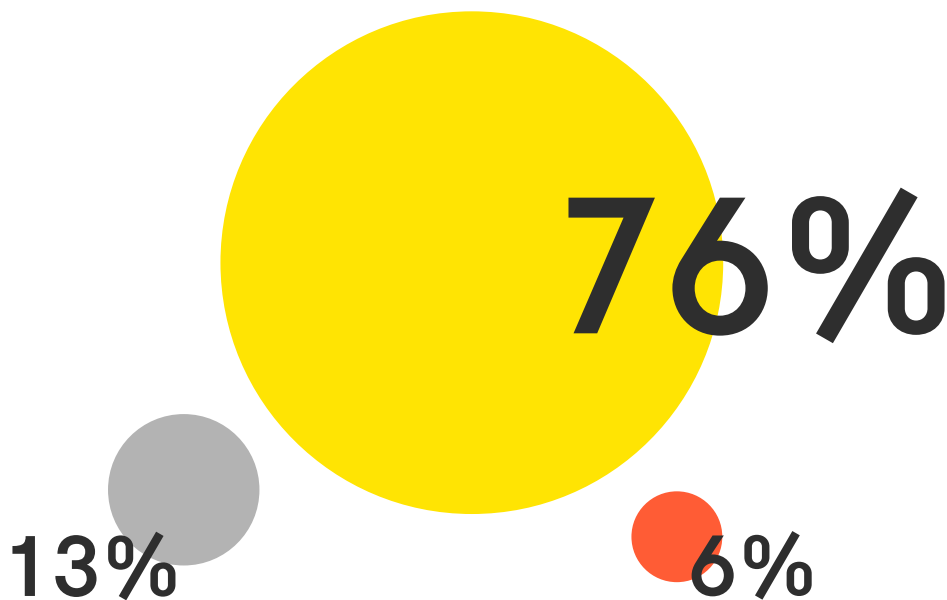
In general, smaller companies operating in niche markets say influencer marketing is not a viable choice for them.

“The recession environment means more inward facing tactics and less resources and budget to involve external parties, like influencers”, explains Lauren Percy, Marketing Acquisition Manager at Quadmark.

Others, like Ljubica Jovanovasay, Director of Creative and Content Marketing at Bynder, say that experimenting with channels and content types is a way to showcase a brand’s innovativeness: “We are always trying to create more value for our buyers and customers, so innovating and experimenting with our content is always something we strive to do.”

Key takeaways and tips

- Owned media channels are now seen as the driving force behind any content marketing strategy.
- Once you’ve found which channels reach your audience, focus your efforts there rather than experimenting with new channels.
- Owned media gives you full control over your message and brand safety.





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with proven channels when faced
with a difficult economy.



Best practice #6:
Outsource your content creation

Best practice #6:

Outsource your content creation

While the vast majority of companies now rely on content marketing to grow their business, most marketing departments experience chronic overwork and understaffing. This has a negative impact on the health of marketers themselves, as well on the quality and quantity of content they are able to produce.

To achieve scalability and keep up with their demanding content production schedules, marketers are increasingly outsourcing to external suppliers. While the outsourcing trend has been growing for years, it is expected to become even more important during a tougher economy, when marketing teams will need more help, but have less budget to hire full-time employees.

What the experts say

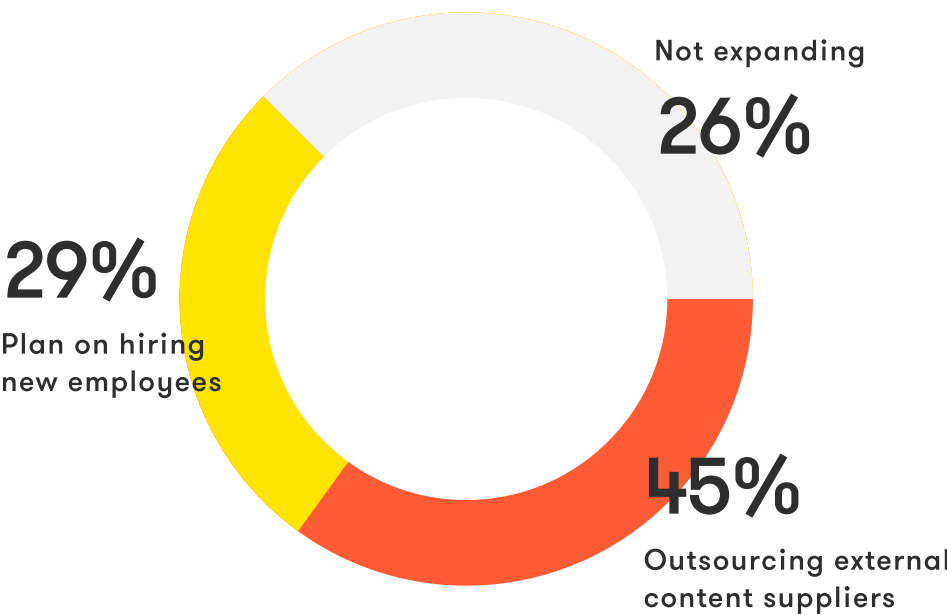
In line with the current trend towards outsourcing, more of the experts (45%) said they'll be relying more heavily on external content suppliers (freelance talent), compared with only 29% who said they plan on hiring new employees.

The main reasons the experts gave for choosing to work with freelance talent were:

- Less overhead compared to hiring new staff
- Access to a bigger pool of subject matter expertise
- Access to more specialised skills
- Saving time, speeding up content production and improving efficiency
- More flexibility and better scalability

“We need the flexibility to scale up or down content to manage costs at all times, but this is especially true during a recession when winning new business is more challenging than usual. Plus, there are so many good freelance content creators out there right now who may have lost their jobs during a recession and are looking for opportunities to keep in the game through freelancing while they secure their next role”, explains Meredith Odgers.

Others emphasised the creative input that freelance talent brings to their content. “The more diverse minds in our team, the better”, says Motshabi Hoaeane, MD & Chief Digital Strategist at Akira Vault Consulting.



Key takeaways and tips

- Outsourcing helps you keep on schedule with your content production while also keeping overhead to a minimum.
- The advantages of outsourcing to freelance talent become even stronger during an uncertain economy.
- The freelance talent market is thriving at the moment, as many in-house marketing teams have downsized, leading lots of experienced content creators to go into business for themselves.

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**Meredith Odgers,
Founder, BambooWorx**

#7

**Best practice #7:
Leverage new technologies**

Best practice #7:

Leverage new technologies

Digital marketers have always been eager to embrace new technologies that help boost productivity and quality. AI-driven technologies are attracting a lot of attention now. If applied correctly, they promise to speed up and streamline content production. Could AI be the key to maintaining a thriving content marketing strategy during a tighter economy?

What the experts say

Most of the experts have already started using AI in their content production: **36%** say they are now using it for the first time, while **17%** say they are already expanding their use. Meanwhile, **28%** say they are sceptical about the quality that AI is capable of producing.

These results show that we are still in the early stages of the AI-driven content revolution. While experienced AI users still make up the smallest group, the largest group are those who are currently testing this new technology.

Some of experts were curious, but expressed concerns about how AI-generated content could meet their needs, especially with regard to:

- Content quality
- Brand safety
- Tone of voice
- Search ranking

“I see the opportunities, but it is yet to be seen how it can support our niche—especially using the right tone-of-voice. It will also be interesting to see how search engines will handle AI-generated content”, says Antonie Bartels, Marketing Manager at Hodl.

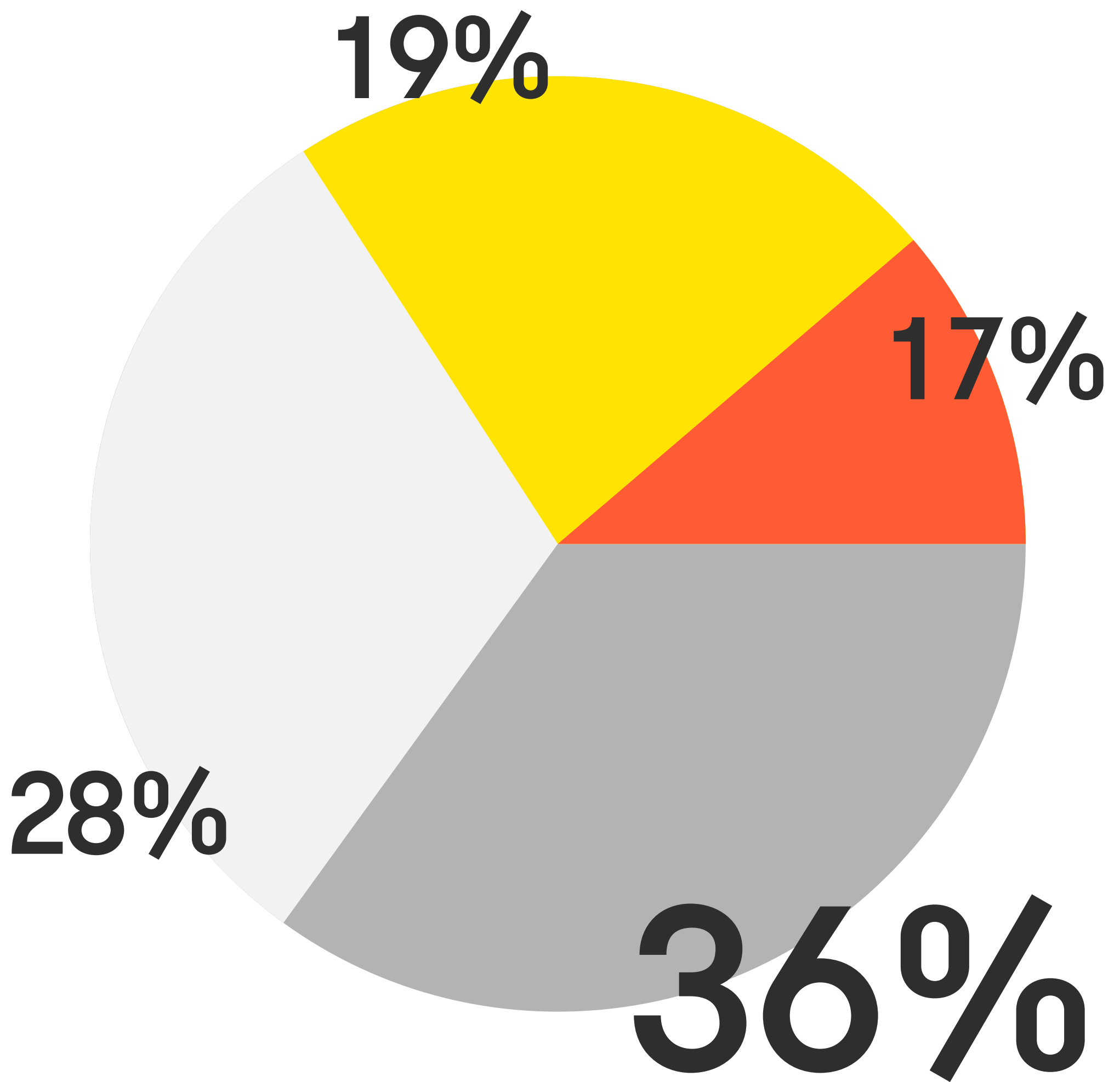
Joévin Canet, a freelance content director, emphasises that AI alone is not enough: “It will be important in the future to develop an editorial mix between AI and human talent focused on content quality.”

Nergis Sungur, Marketing VP at VSight, predicts that AI will allow marketers to shift their focus: “AI will facilitate the process, inspire, maybe help to create a framework and do the low-quality work. This will free up time for content marketers to spend on more value-added efforts.”

Key takeaways and tips

- A fast-growing number of marketers are already gaining experience using new AI technologies for content marketing. Now is a great time to get out ahead of the crowd and start exploring the possibilities.
- AI saves time and allows marketers to focus their efforts on adding quality and value.
- The ideal solution is to use AI for time-consuming, repetitive tasks and apply human talent to ensure the right level of quality, brand safety and tone of voice.





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Recharging your content engine in 5 steps

Our research gave us useful insights into how leading marketers are preparing for the future. The best practices they shared can help marketing teams of all shapes and sizes to improve their performance and maximise their ROI.

Here's are 5 steps you can take right now to recharge you content engine:

1

Set up a game plan on what type of **short-form content** fits your channels and builds engagement amongst your audience.

2

Focus equally on creating **educational content** that **builds your brand** while also driving **conversion**.

3

Increase your focus on **inbound marketing** through your **owned channels** as these generate more high-quality leads at a lower cost.

4

Lower your overhead and scale up your content production by working with trusted **freelance content creators** who know your brand and tone of voice.

5

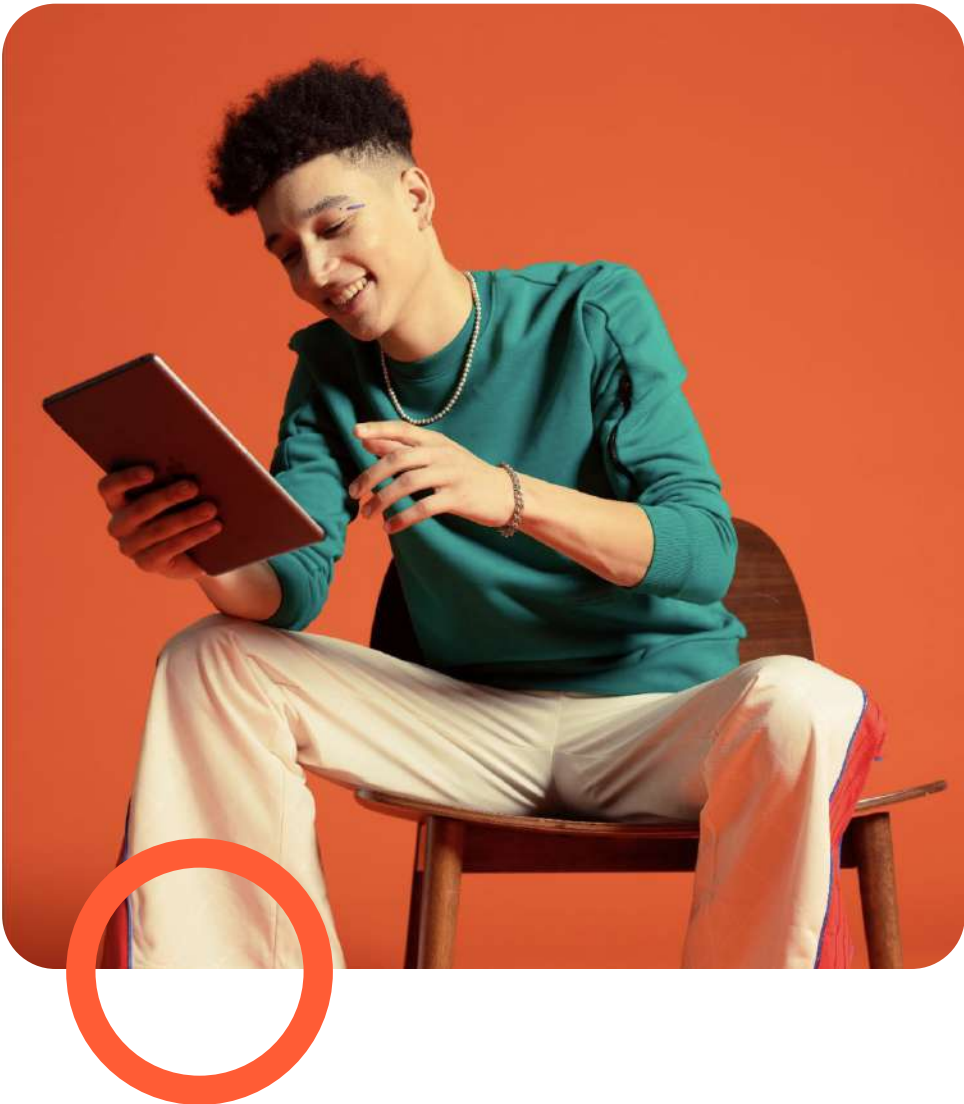
Explore how the combination of **AI** and **human talent** can fit into your content marketing strategy.

These actions provide a solid framework to help keep your brand thriving, no matter what challenges you face. Just remember that the power of any strong brand is its own unique voice. That's why your most powerful tool as a marketer will always be your own creativity.



About HubSpot

HubSpot is a marketing, sales, and customer service platform that helps companies grow better. Our solutions make it easy for your entire company to work together, from marketing, to sales, to customer service. We revolutionised the world of marketing when we launched in 2005 as the first company to advocate the inbound marketing philosophy, the notion that people do not want to be interrupted and harassed by salespeople and marketers. Since then, we have grown to serve over 158,000 customers in over 120 countries, helping them to stop interrupting, start helping, and return their focus to the customer.



About Contentoo

Contentoo is a full-service content creation platform, combining the best of AI and human creativity. We help fast-growing brands scale their content production and improve performance by connecting them with the tools and skills they need. We believe that the future of content marketing lies in effectively leveraging technology and talent. That's why we offer AI-driven content creation and localisation services backed by our global network of experienced freelance professionals, spanning every industry.

