

## **Content Is Key**

The Internet has grown from a physicist's research project to a gargantuan marketplace, contributing billions of dollars and millions of jobs to the global economy. In the beginning, the web was filled with plain hypertext pages and brochureware—simply replicating a company's corporate or product literature online. Eventually, users were allowed to interact with the content by leaving comments and messages.

Today, we've applied a social mechanism to the web, reorienting content around people. The information is personal in nature, reworked for each individual's preferences and offered on a platform for sharing with others. Typically referred to as web content marketing, it is the art of communicating with customers and prospects without overt selling.

Web content marketing supercharges human conversations. The social media structure that monetizes these conversations is becoming a core marketing strategy for many companies. As social beings, we turn to other people for guidance about what matters and what deserves our attention. From social ad networks to blogging to social commerce platforms, the online landscape is transitioning to enhanced consumer engagement. Web content marketing is redefining the way people interact and do business.

## **Don't Interrupt Me**

For decades, traditional "interruption" marketing has been the backbone of customer contact, wherein a company promotes a product through continued advertising, promotions, public relations and sales. Often seen as an annoying user experience, interruption marketing is declining and businesses are dramatically shifting to web content marketing—specifically geared toward the continually connected world in which we live. Here's why: people have a limited amount of time and attention, so as they experience more interruptions within their chosen media platform, the less they listen and the more they ignore all messages, eventually losing trust in the companies and brands doing the interrupting.

According to the Content Marketing Institute, web content marketing is "non-interruption" marketing. Instead of pitching products or services, companies are delivering information that makes their customers more intelligent. As CMI explains, "the essence of this content strategy is the belief that if we, as businesses, deliver consistent, ongoing valuable information to buyers, they ultimately reward us with their business and loyalty."

Whether it's writing user-friendly tips in blog posts, publishing infographics rich with industry insights, or producing online videos to answer customers' questions, web content marketing is about creating avenues to consumers by addressing their needs.

Recently the Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs.com published a study, [B2C Content Marketing: 2013 Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends-North America](http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2012/11/2013-b2c-consumer-content-marketing/), to see how web content marketing is advancing. Here is what they found:

**More than three in four B2C marketers are using Content Marketing.** 86% of B2C respondents are investing in content marketing and, on average, B2C marketers use 12 content marketing tactics in their content marketing plans.

**Content marketing budgets.** Nearly a third, or 28%, of B2C marketing budgets are allocated to content marketing.

**Most popular tactics.** Social media (84%), Articles on website (84%) and eNewsletters (78%) are the most frequently used content marketing tactics.

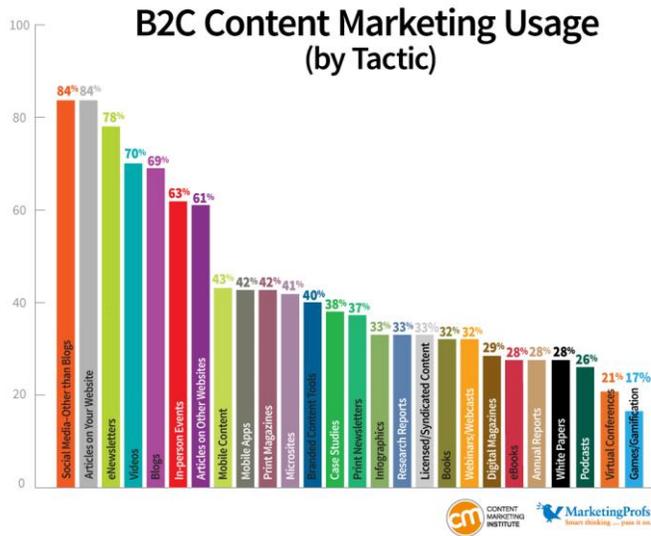
**Social channel usage.** Among B2C marketers employing social media, Facebook is the most commonly used platform (90%), followed by Twitter (69%) and YouTube (65%).

**Organizational goals:** Customer Retention/Loyalty (77%), Customer Acquisition (75%) and Brand Awareness (74%) are the most commonly identified goals.

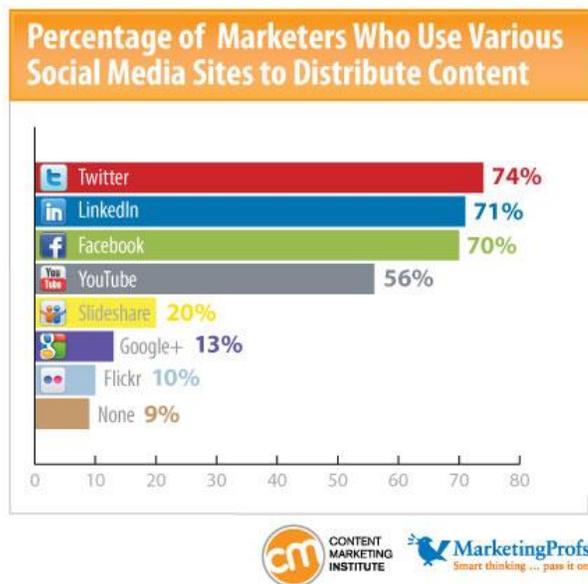
**Measurement criteria.** Web traffic was identified as the number one measurement of content marketing success (62%), followed by direct sales (55%) and social media sharing (52%).

**Increases over the next 12 months.** 55% of marketers plan to increase their content marketing spending over the next year, with 10% stating they would significantly increase their budgets in these areas.

**Challenges.** The most commonly cited challenges that B2C marketers face are: lack of budgets (52%), producing enough content (51%) and producing content that engages (49%).



The rise of social media has rapidly altered how people interact. The web is being rebuilt around groups of people with collaborative ties, similar interests and tangible trust. And marketers are paying attention because, for the first time, we can accurately map and measure this human-to-human interaction. We can determine who is connected to whom, who shares ideas with whom and how messages spread.



**No Lack of Challenges**

In the online marketing arena, the endgame is the same as ever: it's all about getting people to remember your company, your products and your brand. Creating rapport with current and prospective customers, through strong web content marketing, puts the "big picture" into focus and determines where a company takes and makes its future. And for many companies yearning to enhance loyalty to their brand, the future lies in B2C and B2B web content marketing.

The social connectivity and personal loyalty that stem from web content marketing can result in a much deeper emotional investment in a product or corporate brand, but also one that is harder for companies to control. What's more, because social media platforms allow messaging about a brand to change and spread in real-time, a brand's image can soar or crash very quickly and very publicly.

Other challenges are delineated in the Content Marketing Institute's recent study:

### Challenges that B2B Content Marketers Face

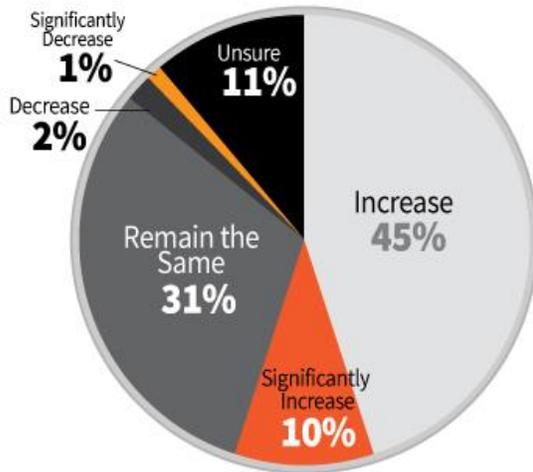


Marshall McLuhan has long been known as having coined the phrase, "the medium is the message." In his book, *Understanding Media*, McLuhan asserts that, "the form of a medium embeds itself in the message, creating a symbiotic relationship by which the medium influences how the message is perceived."

In declaring "the medium is the message," McLuhan goes one step further to propose that the media itself, not the content it carries, should receive the most attention. For marketing purposes, content and messaging are vital to showcasing a brand and the selected medium, in this case social media, must grab the audience and usher them inside—eager to find out more.

Recent surveys indicate that the future of web content marketing is bright, as companies invest more money in content management experts and initiatives. During the next year, the Content Marketing Institute is expecting a 45% increase in content marketing spending.

### B2C Content Marketing Spending (Over Next 12 Months)



As the social media ecosystem continuously evolves to mimic real-world personal interaction, it provides an opportunity for businesses to mix online and offline content marketing in unique ways. Companies that grasp this opportunity and take effective action can look forward to expanding brand awareness and marketing success.

Sources:

<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2012/11/2013-b2c-consumer-content-marketing/>

<http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/8-content-marketing-trends-for-b2b/>

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/capitalonespark/2013/01/23/tell-dont-sell-use-content-marketing-to-boost-your-business/>