



# The Future of B2B Content 2019

How marketers turn content into real  
business impact



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# Welcome to the future of B2B content



# Nearly all B2B brands (98%) finally recognize that content's performance justifies its cost.

But marketers can't afford to rest on their laurels. Increasingly, B2B brands rely on content to generate actual business improvement. And in 2019, B2B marketers intend to squeeze even more value from their content marketing investments.

B2B brands plan to increase investments in social, video, blogs and website content over the next 12 months — to boost topline revenue, channel leads through the funnel and fuel post-purchase/current customer nurture programs.

Yet questions remain about how to maximize the business value of content, including concerns about video and the use of gated content assets.

Across industries, B2B marketers report an urgent need to improve all aspects of their content marketing programs in the next 12 months.

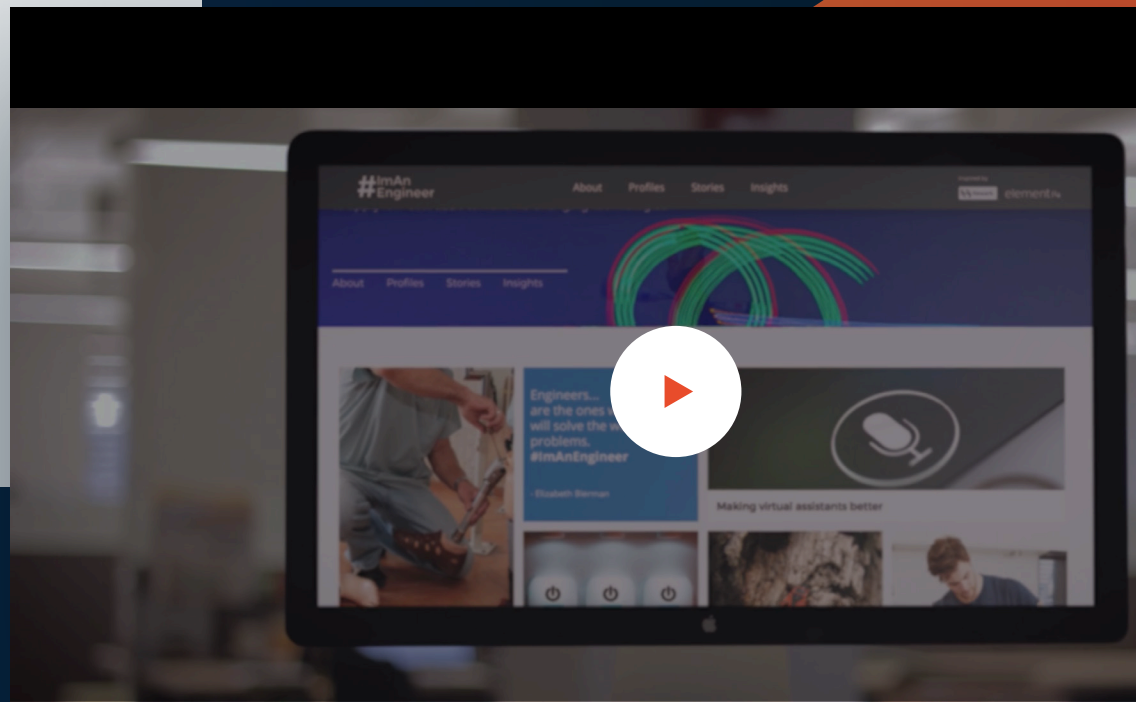


Source: Walker Sands *The Future of B2B Content 2019*



Additionally, a clear majority of B2B organizations now work with external content partners. But while external partnerships solve many concerns, data shows that B2B decision makers may need to re-evaluate existing relationships and pivot to partners with demonstrated subject matter expertise and the ability to differentiate brands in crowded markets. Integrated marketing capabilities are also emerging as a must for external content partners.

Finally, B2B organizations need to address the growing rift between executive decision makers (VPs and above) and content developers (directors and below). Although these two groups of stakeholders have divergent views on their organizations' content priorities and capabilities, collaboration can pave the way for performance improvement, increased ROI and better business outcomes.



# Key findings



## Content has earned a seat at the grown-up table

Virtually all B2B marketers (98%) believe content performs well enough to justify its cost.

## B2B marketers expect content to generate new business

B2B brands' top goals when producing content include boosting sales/converting customers (29%), building relationships with new customers (19%) and increasing brand awareness (18%).

## Short-form content currently rules the roost

The greatest number of B2B organizations plan to produce more social (72%), website content (65%), video (63%) and blog posts (49%) in the next 12 months.

## Buyers want more video/multimedia content

Sixty-nine percent of B2B marketers believe their target audiences will prefer video/multimedia content over written content in the next 12 months.

## External content partnerships are standard

Nearly all B2B marketers (95%) say it's a priority to work with external agencies for content strategy/production in the next 12 months. Forty percent say it's a high priority.

# Content means business

B2B marketers are counting on content to  
generate and accelerate business improvement.



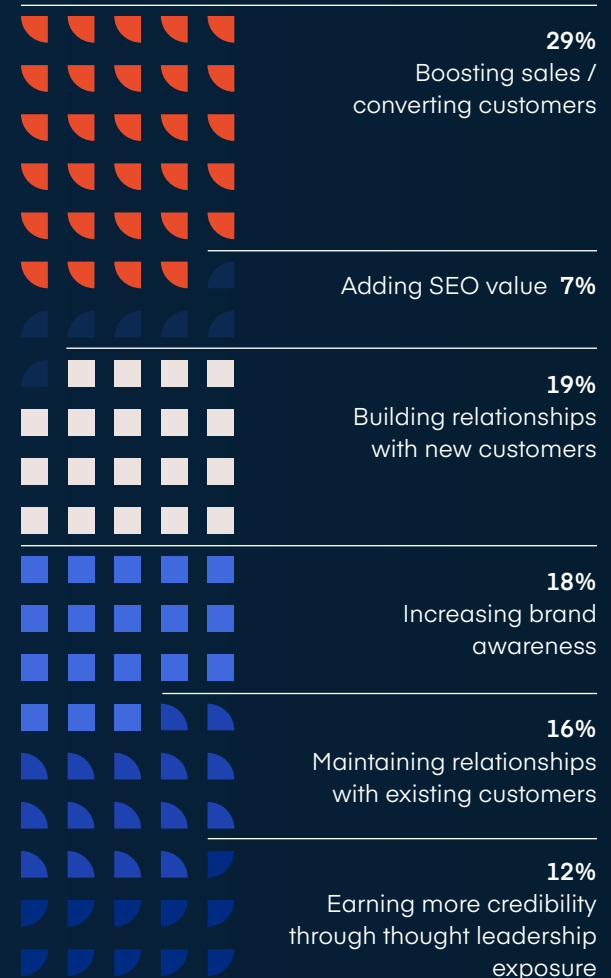
# In the not-so-distant past, B2B brands updated the company blog or developed value-rich content assets **only when time and budget allowed.**

Although brands recognized they should produce content (often because their competitors were doing it), relatively few expected content marketing investments to generate actual business outcomes.

Fast-forward to 2019. In today's B2B sector, marketers rely on content to achieve business improvement and grow their bottom lines. In fact, B2B marketers now rank boosting sales/ converting customers, building relationships with new customers and increasing brand awareness as their top three goals when producing content — in that order.

More than ever before, B2B organizations use content to move prospects and leads through the sales funnel.

## B2B organizations' top goal when producing content



Source: Walker Sands *The Future of B2B Content 2019*





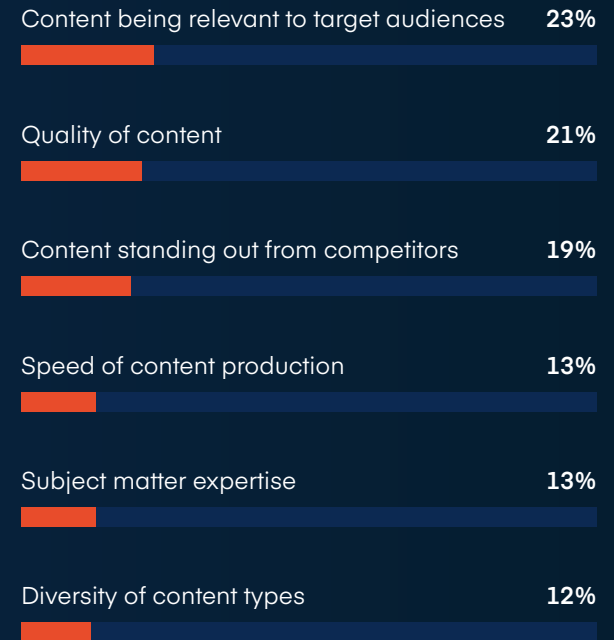
Content also plays an important role in post-purchase/current customer nurturing — a pillar of savvy brands' marketing programs and a catalyst for improving the customer's lifetime value to the business.

Additionally, B2B marketers believe content quality and content relevancy are the characteristics that drive audience engagement and differentiate their brands in crowded marketplaces. As a result, B2B marketers view quality and relevancy as the factors most important to the success of their organizations' content programs in the next 12 months.

While keeping a close eye on content quality and relevance, B2B marketers plan to ramp up investments in video, web and social content. The greatest share of B2B organizations plan to produce more social (72%), website content (65%), video (63%) and blog posts (49%) in the next 12 months than they did during the previous 12-month period.

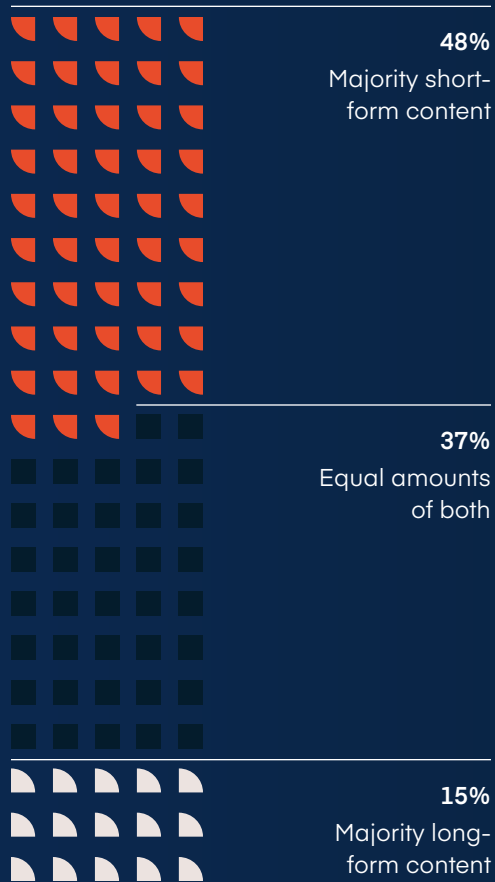
B2B marketers' future plans align closely with their current content production efforts, which demonstrate a clear bias toward short-form categories. Nearly half of B2B marketers (48%) report that short-form content (e.g., blogs, bylines, social media content, etc.) comprises the majority of their content, while just 15% say the same about long-form content (e.g., white papers, case studies, data reports, etc.).

## The factor B2B marketers believe is most important to the success of their organizations' content programs in the next 12 months



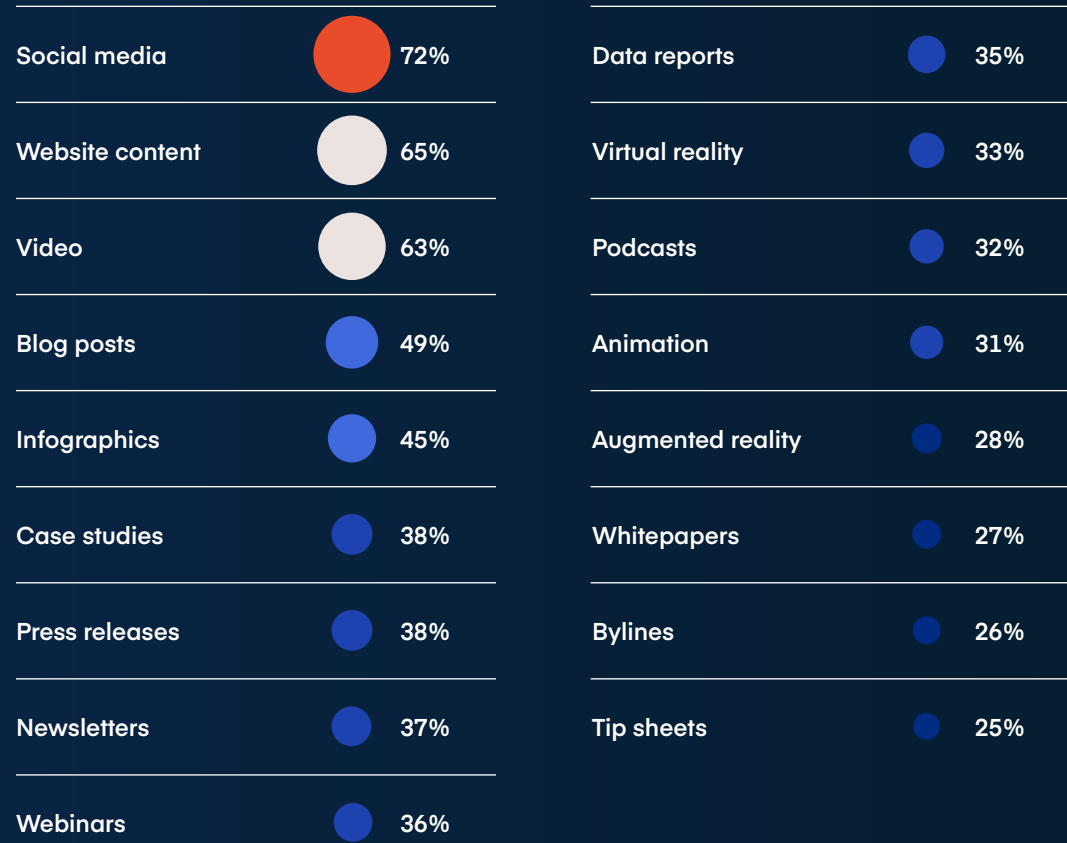
Source: Walker Sands *The Future of B2B Content 2019*

## How much short-form versus long-form written content B2B organizations produce annually



Source: Walker Sands The Future of B2B Content 2019

## Content types B2B marketers believe their organizations plan to produce more of in the next 12 months compared to the past 12 months



Source: Walker Sands The Future of B2B Content 2019






Overall, B2B marketers view short-form content as more valuable than long-form content for achieving business goals. Although marketers have historically relied on the social channel to increase brand awareness, B2B marketers now identify social as the primary content category for attracting new customers (63%). Social is also the second most popular option for engaging existing customers (58%), just behind website content (65%).

These behaviors underscore the value B2B organizations place on social as a foundational channel for driving new business and growing existing business. For some brands, social may offer an avenue for reaching audiences that are inaccessible on other marketing channels.






Website content plays a similarly important role in nurturing customer relationships and maximizing the lifetime value of the customer. B2B marketers ranked website content as the second most popular content type for attracting new customers, and their preferred option for engaging existing customers.

## B2B marketers' top content types for attracting and engaging customers

### Attracting

Social media		63%
Website content		61%
SEO*		43%
Video		43%
Newsletters		40%

### Engaging

Website content		65%
Social media		58%
Video		52%
Newsletters		41%
Blog posts		32%

*\*Content created primarily for search value  
Source: Walker Sands The Future of B2B Content 2019*

# Pro tip

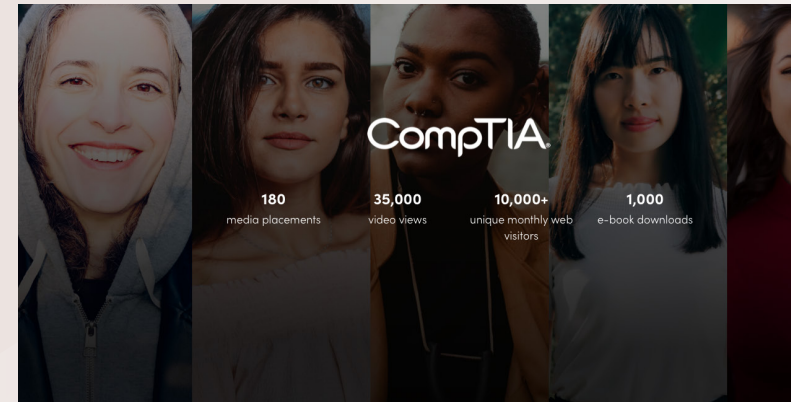
In the B2B universe, we're seeing content evolve from simply another marketing function to a critical driver of business outcomes. Developing a content program that inspires memorable, revenue-building relationships with target audiences requires a more serious commitment to strategic content strategies.

## Content quality matters more than ever

If your B2B organization is still arguing about quantity versus quality, you're wasting your time. Quality wins hands down. In today's marketing environment, content quality and content relevance outpace other factors in B2B marketers' efforts to convert content into revenue improvement, including speed of content production.

## Don't overlook long-form

Organizations prefer short-form content for achieving specific business outcomes. It grabs prospects' attention, and is faster and easier to produce. But don't neglect long-form content. The right data report or white paper can make a big impact and incentivize key segments to provide personal information for lead gen. At the end of the day, content success hinges on B2B marketers' willingness to embrace an integrated approach across a range of owned, earned, paid and shared content categories — long-form content included.



### Walker Sands Calls on Rosie the Riveter to Help CompTIA #MakeTechHerStory

Women currently earn less than 18% of computer science degrees each year and hold less than 22% of core technology occupations in the U.S.

Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA), a nonprofit trade association for the tech industry, has long observed the lack of women in the IT industry, and approached Walker Sands to help champion a movement of change.

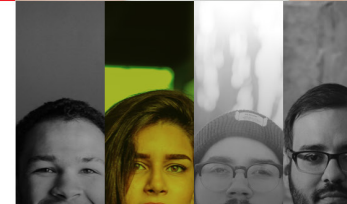
Scroll to see how we did it

## 01 Kickoff



### Why Do So Few Girls Pursue Careers in IT?

Before research and content creation begins, Walker Sands starts by asking one question: "Why do so few girls



# The future is video

Video and multimedia content matter to B2B audiences. But brands need to think even bigger.



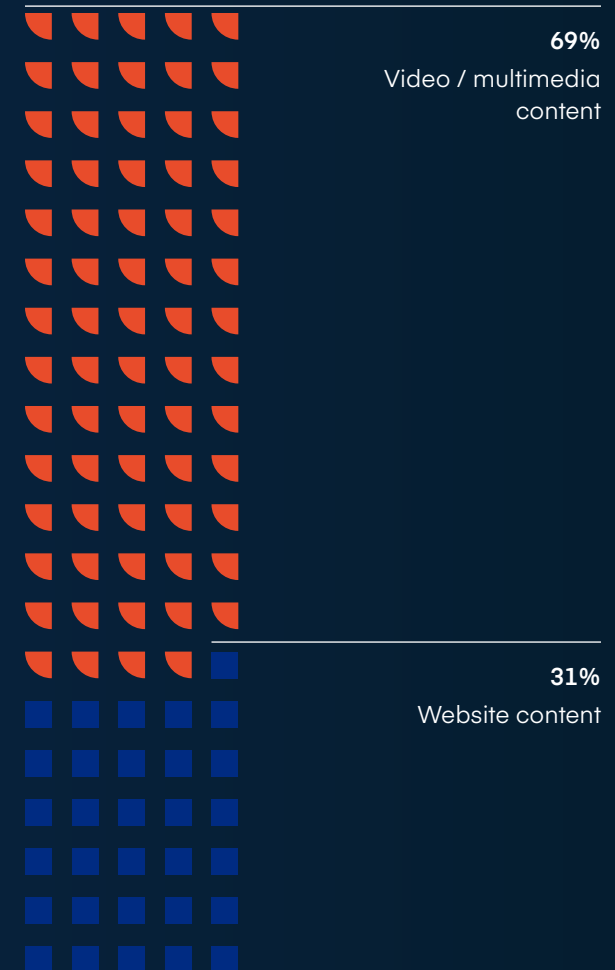
# B2B brands face mounting pressure to embrace mobile-friendly formats, including video.

Experts predict **70%** of B2B search queries will originate on smartphones by 2020, partially due to the growing number of millennials in the workplace. With social video already generating **1,200%** more shares than text and images combined, serious brands can't afford to leave video on the backburner any longer.

B2B marketers' push for short-form content reflects the fact that buyers are more discriminating about the long-form content they consume. They won't commit to lengthy articles or reports unless they perceive value. Since short-form content requires less time to consume, it's not surprising that a majority of B2B marketers believe their audiences will prefer video/multimedia content in the coming year.

But here's the catch: Even though marketers identify video and multimedia as a preferred content format for audiences, B2B organizations currently produce more written content than video (42% majority written content versus 35% majority video/multimedia content).

## Type of content B2B marketers think their organizations' target audiences will prefer in the next 12 months



Source: Walker Sands The Future of B2B Content 2019

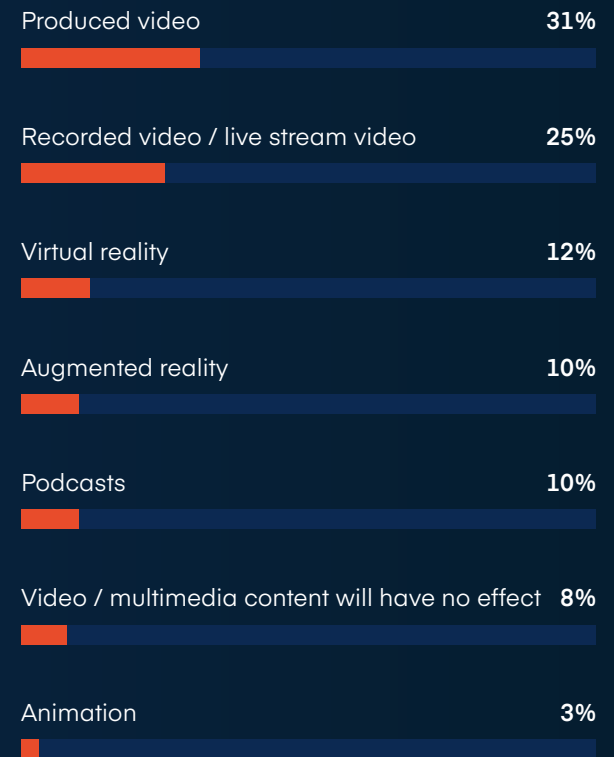


This disconnect raises a red flag about B2B organizations' ability to connect with key audiences. Content strategies must change if marketers have any hope of keeping pace with their customers.

In fairness, many B2B organizations have developed video/multimedia content. But most B2B video/multimedia projects lack sophistication, and next-generation video technologies like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) are still evolving. Despite the hype, two of the top content categories in which B2B organizations plan to reduce investments this year are AR (20% of marketers) and VR (18% of marketers), probably because the technologies haven't matured enough to gain traction with audiences. Instead, B2B brands believe produced video will have the greatest impact on their marketing strategies in the coming year, followed by recorded/live stream video.

But simply rearranging video/multimedia spend won't cut it. To meet the expectations of today's buyers, brands need to improve the quality of produced videos and approach all video/multimedia projects from a more strategic perspective. For most B2B marketers, this means re-evaluating and optimizing the integration of video/multimedia across channels.

## Type of video/multimedia content B2B marketers believe will have the greatest effect on how their companies handle marketing in the next 12 months



Source: Walker Sands The Future of B2B Content 2019

# Pro tip

It's time for B2B marketers to re-examine their content investments and allocate additional resources to video and multimedia (e.g., interactive content, HTML 5 landing pages with video elements, etc.). Buyers' short attention spans work in video's favor — a good piece of content should be bite-sized, relevant and informative.

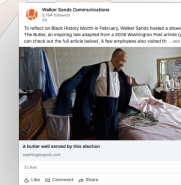
## Boost the value of video with transcripts and captions

Adding captions to your videos increases accessibility and allows B2B buyers to watch regardless of access to sound — an important consideration for users who consume video on public transportation, have a disability, work in a busy office, etc. Although posting a transcript below the video may seem counterintuitive to the concept of non-written content, it allows search engines to index your video, improving its visibility in organic search. Just make sure the transcript is accurate or it could negatively affect both search and credibility.

## Animation isn't just for kids

While conservative B2B organizations may shy away from the word "animation," recent innovations in alternative formats like motion graphics can help B2B videos appear more polished and professional. Animation is also a boon for generating the kind of consumable content that thrives on social media — a channel which should be a priority for B2B marketers due to its ability to attract new customers.

90%



▶ of B2B marketers believe content performs well enough to justify its cost.



B2B content is not one dimensional.



# Gated content

B2B marketers continue to struggle with the idea of trading content for personal information.



## To gate or not gate? It's a question that continues to divide B2B marketers.

Although most brands recognize the value of gated access in lead capture, an overwhelming majority of B2B marketers (80%) say gated access stops them from downloading content at least some of the time.

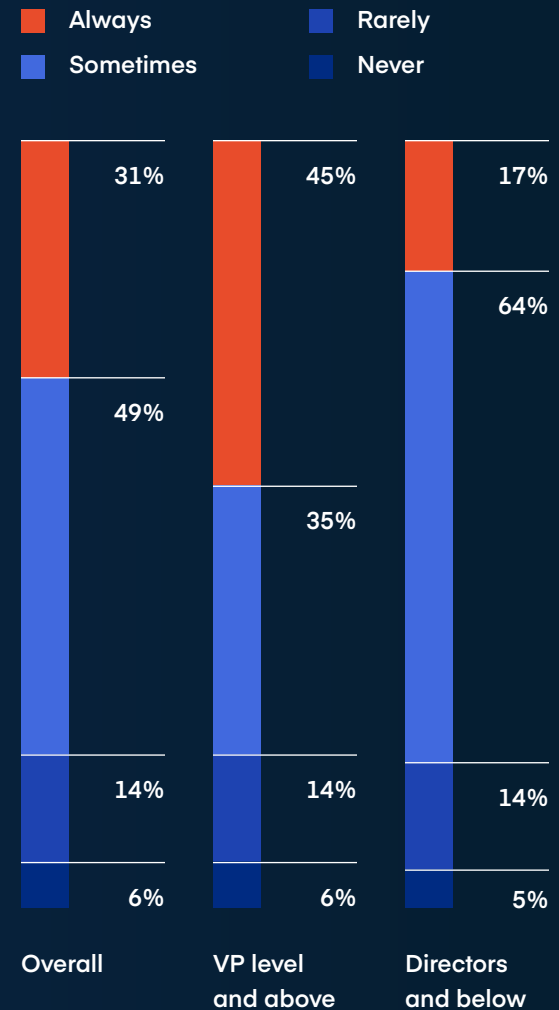
But an alarming 45% of executive B2B decision makers (VP level and above) say gated access always stops them from downloading content. Like it or not, a sizeable share of B2B leaders either don't have time to provide their information or harbor serious concerns about what happens to their information after they trade it for a juicy piece of content.

Many B2B marketers avoid gating content for the obvious reason that it limits the reach of high-value assets. In fact, more than half of B2B marketers don't gate any of their content. For them, the risk of alienating target audiences outweighs the potential benefit.

### Gated content:

Readers have to enter personal information to download content

### How often having to enter personal information stops B2B marketers from downloading content



Source: Walker Sands The Future of B2B Content 2019



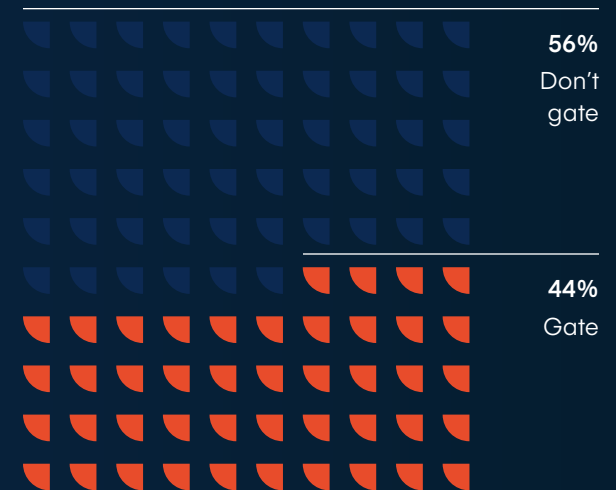
But gated content yields big gains, especially for B2B marketers who expect content to produce business outcomes. In addition to generating qualified leads and funneling prospects into automated marketing programs, gated content reveals insights about the buyer's interests, enabling the brand to tailor future marketing interactions to her unique needs.

There's no denying the fact that even marketers who gate content themselves won't always trade their own data for content. But buyers' resistance to gated content melts away for the right piece of content. Keep in mind that more than half of B2B marketers at the VP level and above (55%), as well as 83% of directors and below, will sometimes surrender personal information, especially if they believe the content provides value.

So what does the right piece of content look like? It must be high quality, relevant to the buyer's actual needs and capable of providing real value. An out-of-the-box, unremarkable piece of content lacks currency — buyers won't provide their information because they don't believe the content is worth the price.



## B2B organizations that gate content



## Why B2B organizations gate content



Source: Walker Sands *The Future of B2B Content 2019*



# Pro tip

Decisions about gated content call for a balancing act between the needs of the sales funnel and the opportunity to maximize brand exposure. Savvy B2B marketers understand that gated access isn't an "all or nothing" proposition. They evaluate the intended purpose of each asset and offer a mix of gated and non-gated content to audiences.

## Determine the desired outcome

Before you gate a piece of content, determine what you hope the asset will achieve. If you need the asset to generate leads, a gated approach is probably the right decision. But if you want to increase brand awareness or maximize exposure with executive decision makers, you may want to leave it ungated.

## Explore progressive profiling

This automated marketing tactic can offer a win-win solution to the gated content dilemma. It solves for the annoyance of providing personal information multiple times by capturing a user's information at first conversion and pre-filling it for subsequent downloads. Progressive profiling saves time and makes the customer feel like he is a known, trusted priority for your organization.

## Get the report

First Name*	Last Name*
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Company*	Email*
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Industry*	Job Level*
<input type="text" value="Select one"/>	<input type="text" value="Select one"/>
Phone*	Capability of Interest*
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text" value="Select one"/>
Questions or Specific Needs	
<input type="text"/>	

Download



# External partners

External partners and agencies play a larger role in B2B content programs.



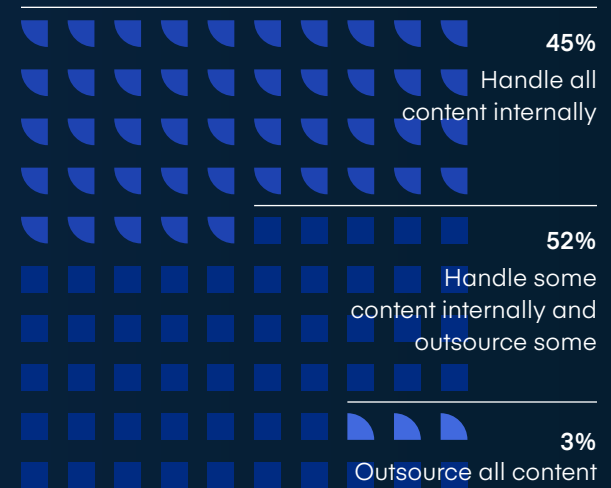
# B2B organizations recognize the necessity of external partnerships for content production /strategy.

However, internal marketers still play a major role in content, and B2B organizations present a mixed bag in terms of the way they outsource content.

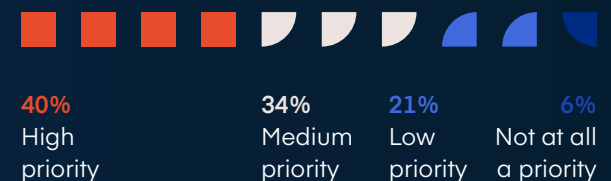
Virtually all B2B marketers (97%) report some involvement in their companies' own content marketing efforts. But nearly as many (95%) say it's a priority to work with agencies for content strategy/production in the next 12 months. For 40% of B2B marketers, working with an external agency represents a top priority.

There's a reason why so many B2B brands want to outsource aspects of their content programs. Marketers who work with external content partners are more satisfied with performance in key areas. More than half of B2B marketers (53%) working with external teams report they are very satisfied with the diversity of content types. Only 41% of B2B marketers whose organizations handle all content production/strategy internally indicate the same.

## How B2B organizations currently handle content strategy and/ or production



## How much of a priority B2B marketers say it is for their organizations to work with external agencies for content strategy and/ or production in the next 12 months



Source: Walker Sands The Future of B2B Content 2019



Additionally, half of B2B marketers who outsource are very satisfied with the speed of content production, compared to 41% reporting the same satisfaction with internal teams.

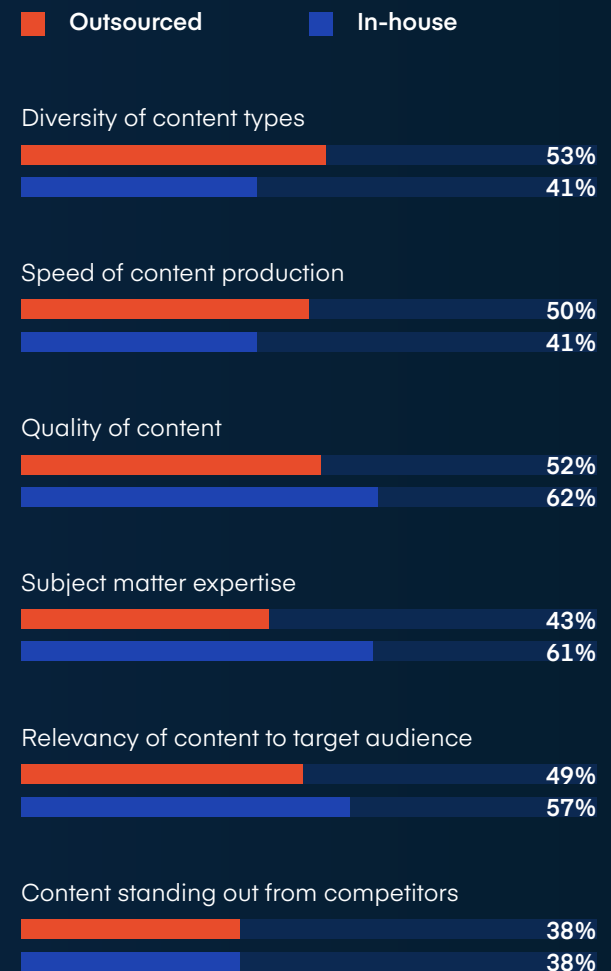
Internal-exclusive teams report greater satisfaction when it comes to subject matter expertise (61%) and the relevance of content to target audiences (57%), compared to 43% and 49% of B2B marketers working with external agencies. Although small, this variation underscores the importance of industry expertise and audience familiarity in the selection of an external content partner.

Interestingly, internal content teams in general struggle to produce the types of content B2B marketers value most. A third of B2B marketers (33%) say they struggle to create website content in-house. Data reports (29%) and blogs (28%) present similar challenges.

These owned content categories demand a combination of strategy, expertise and, most importantly, integration. For example, effective blog programs involve more than just cranking out posts at regular intervals. To drive business outcomes, B2B blogs require editorial strategy and integration with social, paid and earned media channels.

Additionally, while B2B marketers place a high value on tracking the **ROI of content**, many struggle to quantify the impact of content investments using internal resources. Executive decision makers cite ROI as a significant concern, with 31% of B2B marketers at VP level or above identifying ROI tracking as their in-house team's biggest challenge.

## B2B marketers who are very satisfied with various aspects of their organizations' content



External content partners can bring added value to the content initiatives that internal teams struggle to execute. So what prevents brands from using external partners?

For B2B brands that do not currently work with any external partners, the top barriers to outsourcing content include simply not wanting to work with external partners (39%), external partners not understanding niche messaging/industry expertise (36%) and a lack of budget (35%).

B2B marketers' perceived barriers to outsourcing content point to a possible mismatch between brands and content providers. In some cases, decision makers might simply need to do a better job selecting an external content partner with industry expertise and a track record of delivering results-based content to their brands' most important audiences.





## Pro tip

There's a growing consensus that external content partnerships are vital for achieving success across all aspects of the organization's content marketing program. But B2B organizations that hope to benefit from external agency partnerships need to be discerning.

### Hire subject matter experts

Subject matter expertise makes all the difference when choosing an external partner. The more specialized your content, the more pressing the need to find partners with experience in your field. Don't waste time working with partners who don't know your industry or brand. Find an agency that can capture and amplify the insights of your internal thought leaders as well as their own.

### Use partners to diversify your tactics

Beyond subject matter expertise, content relevancy and integration separate the most effective partners from the rest of the pack. The most successful B2B brands work with integrated marketing agencies that offer comprehensive content marketing capabilities (including video/multimedia and social) as well as a full range of PR, demand gen and digital service offerings. In many cases, integration improves your ability to measure content ROI.



# Getting it together

Executive decision makers and content developers need to work more collaboratively to improve the value of content.



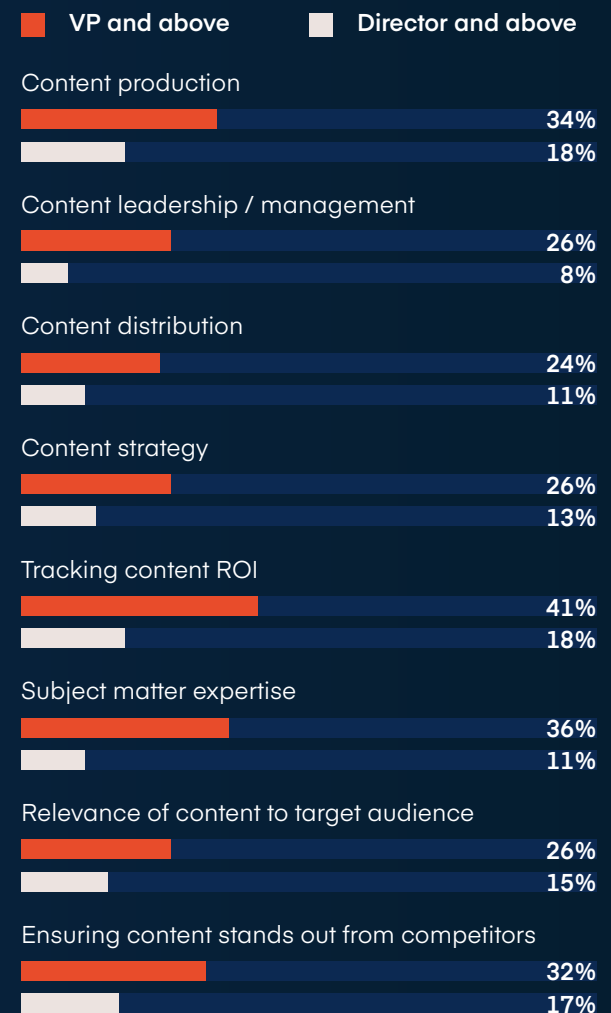
# There's an urgency for executive decision makers and content developers to collaborate more effectively.

Executive decision makers (VPs and above) focus on the organizational impact of content-related issues. Whilesome developers (directors and below) may also participate in content decisions (especially directors), developers offer frontline perspectives and are generally closer to the work itself.

Divisions between executive decision makers and content developers surface around the issue of external partnerships. Executive decision makers are keenly aware of the value external partners bring to content. B2B decision makers are more interested in hiring external partners to improve every area surveyed than directors and below. Further, 54% of B2B executive decision makers rate working with an external agency as a high priority, compared to just 26% of content developers.

Why the variance? It's partially because executive decision makers and content developers cite different barriers for working with external content partners.

## B2B marketers who plan to use external partnerships to improve areas of content in the next 12 months



Source: Walker Sands The Future of B2B Content 2019



# Content types B2B marketers:

VP and above Director and above

Say their organizations use to attract new customers

## VP and above

SEO 54%

## Director and below

Social media 75%

Website content 72%

SEO 32%

Believe their organizations plan to produce more of in the next 12 months compared to the past 12 months

## Video

VP and above: 56%  
Director and below: 69%

## Website content

VP and above: 56%  
Director and below: 73%

## Social media

VP and above: 62%  
Director and below: 81%

Believe their organizations' target audiences find valuable

## VP and above

Data reports 52%

Case studies 48%

## Director and below

Website content 52%

Social media 48%

Video 42%



A perceived lack of resources presents the biggest barrier for B2B directors and below, with 40% reporting budget prohibits them from hiring external partners. However, only 25% of B2B executive decision makers (presumably those holding the purse strings) identify budget as the biggest hurdle to working with an external content partner.

But even though executive decision makers understand the difference external partners can make, they're not as knowledgeable about the elements their organizations' content programs should include. Disagreement with content developers over the types of content that need to be produced stems from a lack of insight into day-to-day operations.

Given their familiarity with program performance, content developers want increased investments in video and social, while executive decision makers assume video and social are already thriving.

As mentioned before, decision makers and content developers aren't on the same page about ROI tracking. So while 41% of B2B VPs and above want to solve for tracking content ROI with external partnerships, only 18% of directors and below say the same.

To improve the value and effectiveness of content, developers must be more open to collaboration with external teams, while those in charge of content decisions must welcome advice on program specifics.





## Pro tip

Executive decision makers and content developers play different, but equally important roles in improving business performance through the use of content. However, these stakeholders are frequently on different pages when it comes to external partnerships and content priorities.

### Get decision makers and developers on the same page

Executive decision makers (VPs and above) and content developers (directors and below) are working from different playbooks. While decision makers are more attuned to the organization's capacity and the need to work with external content partners, developers are more informed about the performance of specific programs and campaigns. By working more collaboratively, decision makers and developers can create an organizational strategy that achieves business goals, while improving ROI on the organization's external and in-house content investments.



# In summary

B2B content has transitioned from a peripheral marketing activity to a core marketing function — a catalyst for acquiring new customers and nurturing relationships with the brand's existing customer base.

In 2019, short-form content should figure prominently in your marketing strategy. Social, video, blogs and website content hold promise for capturing the attention of prospects and growing relationships with customers post-purchase. But long-form and other types of content remain vital for a well-rounded strategy. To maximize value, you'll need to consider an integrated approach that spans a range of owned, earned, paid and shared media channels.

Finally, the presence of a trusted, external content partner is vital.

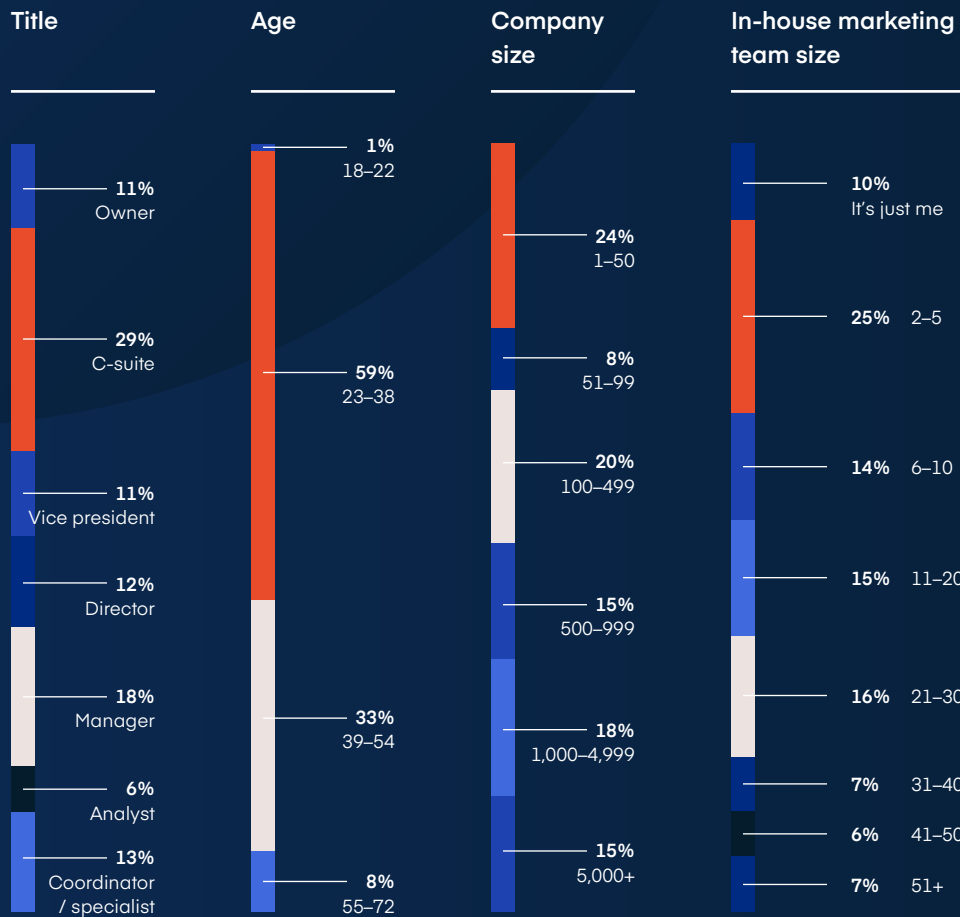
Agency partners bring much-needed resources and perspectives to the table, helping brands diversify their content and align it with the needs of target audiences. In many cases, external partners are also best positioned to bridge the gaps between executive decision makers and content developers. They provide the context and expertise B2B brands need to optimize the impact of content on business performance.

In the past, marketers often struggled to define how content generated value for their organizations. Content was king, but it was hard to say how it benefited the kingdom. Now, B2B brands know what content can do and they expect it to generate business results. In 2019, B2B marketers must decide how they will respond to the opportunity. Choose wisely.

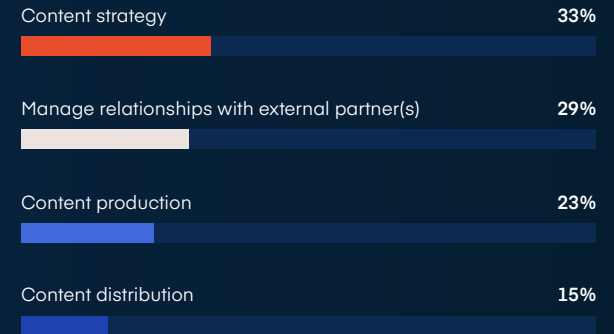


# Methodology

The Future of B2B Content 2019 report explores the needs, interests and future plans of 300 B2B marketers with active roles in their companies' current content programs. The survey was conducted in January of 2019, and respondents are broken down as follows.



## Biggest content responsibility



## Industry





# Authors

Content quality drives business performance. From attention-grabbing creative campaigns to integrated marketing retainers across a range of earned, owned, paid and shared channels, Walker Sands' in-house **Creative Services** team has the skills and industry expertise to help your B2B brand achieve better results from content investments.



Jeffrey Stehlin



Rachel Lira



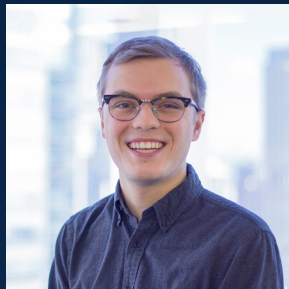
Dana Moran



Tim Morral  
VP of Editorial Content



Matt Latuszek



Tanner Walters



Alexandra Jonker



Traer Schon



## About us

Walker Sands is a B2B marketing agency. With an integrated approach to creative services, Walker Sands helps clients build brand awareness, enhance credibility and drive new business. Walker Sands is a six-time Inc. 5000 honoree and regular recipient of some of the industry's most prestigious awards from organizations including Entrepreneur, Holmes Report and Hermes Creative. Walker Sands was founded in 2001 and has offices in Chicago, San Francisco and Seattle.

To learn more, visit [walkersands.com](https://walkersands.com)