



At a glance

Channels shift and budgets follow

Content marketing amid COVID-19

Vying for audience attention

Developing quality content

Delivering outcomes

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Final observations

# Creating Connections

How to stand out from the content marketing crowd

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## At a glance

Well before COVID-19 took hold, businesses and their marketing teams were busy finding the best way to leverage digital channels and leave a lasting impression on their audience. As COVID-19 restricted the avenues to reach customers, the focus on digital communications went into overdrive.

Marketers across the country have adapted rapidly with many mobilising digital programs. Despite falling revenues for most businesses, priorities shifted, and budgets followed, with many mobilising programs to drive credibility, awareness, and sales.

With social media feeds and inboxes overflowing, competition for people's limited attention has increased. This has forced many marketers to consider how to engage an audience whose needs have never evolved so quickly.

In this report, we take a look at what highly effective content marketers are doing, their strategies and approach to content development. In an uncertain environment where attracting and retaining customers is more important than ever, we hope these insights help as a guide.

This report contains only some of the insights unearthed by our research and we encourage you to contact us to learn more.

James Organ  
Managing Director  
Fifth Quadrant and ACA Research  
jorgan@acaresearch.com.au

Alexandra Coroneo  
Director  
The First Principle  
alexandra.coroneo@thefirstprinciple.com.au

Marketing is taking on a new importance amid COVID-19, to support sales and develop credibility and trust



Revenue has fallen for

**67%**

of Australian businesses due to COVID-19



meanwhile,

**82%**

are increasing or maintaining marketing budgets in at least one area

An elevated focus on digital channels is set to be a lasting trend



As businesses rebound from COVID-19

**79%**

are prioritising content marketing budgets



and even more among those with a decline in revenue

**84%**

Businesses recognised the importance of content marketing but very few considered their efforts highly effective



Before COVID-19

**91%**

of Australian businesses thought content marketing was important



but only,

**10%**

believed their content marketing is highly effective

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# Channels shift and budgets follow

## Restoring revenue growth comes into focus

As marketing teams reset their strategies and budgets for the FY21 financial year, COVID-19 played a defining role. Despite revenue falling for two in three businesses, most recognised the role marketing could play in keeping customers engaged. But marketers had access to fewer, more saturated channels and each dollar spent needed to generate a return.



## Reshaping budgets

Many businesses adapted quickly to COVID-19, redirecting marketing budgets to where they would have the greatest impact. Despite falling revenues, 82% of businesses maintained or increased budgets in at least one area of the marketing and communications mix.

As a direct result of COVID-19, businesses increased public relations, communications and content marketing spend and will prioritise these activities over the next 12 months. This reflects the need to stay close to customers during the pandemic. Conversely, almost seven in 10 have reduced spending on events amid ongoing social restrictions.

### Post-COVID-19 budget priorities



Public relations and communications

81%



Content marketing

79%



Advertising

73%



Market research

59%



Events

49%

Rate as a priority

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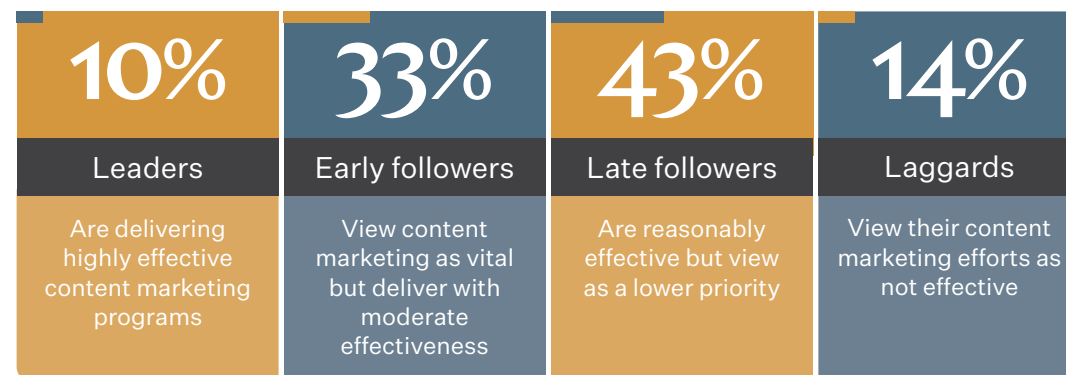
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# Content marketing amid COVID-19

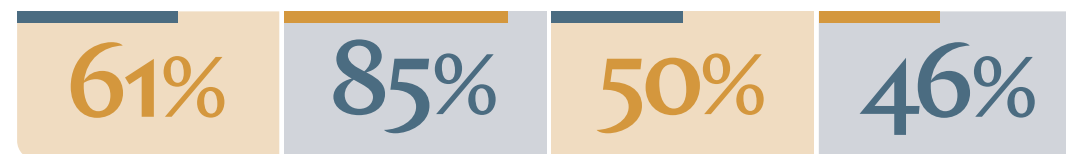
Many businesses rank content marketing as a high priority – more than any other marketing activity – and most say it's become more important to their commercial strategy since COVID-19. Even among businesses with falling revenue, 58% still intend to increase their content marketing budget over the next 12 months.

Businesses are most likely to use content marketing to build credibility and trust in the organisation (58%) and raise brand awareness (52%). They are also seeking to support customers through uncertain times, drive sales and reinforce a continued market presence (all 44%).

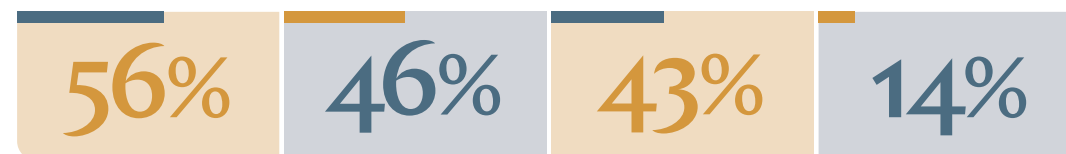
While many businesses agree on the importance of content marketing, only a fraction rate their efforts as highly effective. Evaluating an organisation's emphasis on content marketing and how effectively they deliver shows that some businesses are more advanced than others. Looking at the traits of market leaders is instructive.



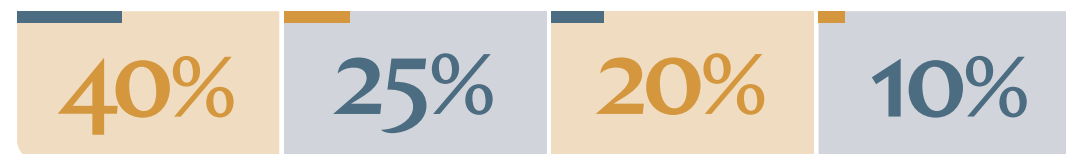
## View content marketing as more important post-COVID-19



## View content marketing as more effective than other marketing



## Median percentage of annual marketing budget allocated for content marketing







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# Vying for audience attention

## Activity is concentrated

Businesses have more recently ramped up their digital communications activity to build credibility and remain relevant to their audience. The research shows that businesses are active in an average of just over four channels.

Businesses continue to favour more conventional channels and content formats, engaging audiences through social media posts, newsletters, events and press releases. The leaders are active across a higher number of channels (average of 5.3), and are more likely than their peers to be leveraging white papers, interactive graphics and podcasts.

Some areas where leaders are more active



32%

interactive graphics



26%

podcasts



26%

whitepapers

## Audience satisfaction drivers

With most businesses concentrating their efforts on similar formats and channels, marketers need to work harder to create engaging and differentiated content. Looking at perceptions of audience satisfaction reveals that leaders believe the content they are sharing is more unique, relevant and is easily accessed across channels.

Where leaders are driving higher audience satisfaction



90%

information that is relevant and valuable



87%

easy to access



84%

new and unique insights

## More channels mean more metrics

As businesses engage customers through more channels, evaluating performance becomes multi-faceted. Marketers are combining hard and soft evaluation criteria, with website traffic, customer experience measures and revenue the most popular. Leaders are using more metrics reflective of their wider use of channels. Most notably, tracking social media activity, combining cross-sell with a greater focus on revenue, and monitoring leads and feedback from sales teams.

Top metrics (all businesses)



45%

website traffic



42%

customer experience metrics



40%

revenue



Did you know?

B2B marketers are more focussed on feedback from the sales team, revenue and leads as a performance indicator, while B2C marketers are far more likely to use consumer perception metrics including awareness, consideration and trust.

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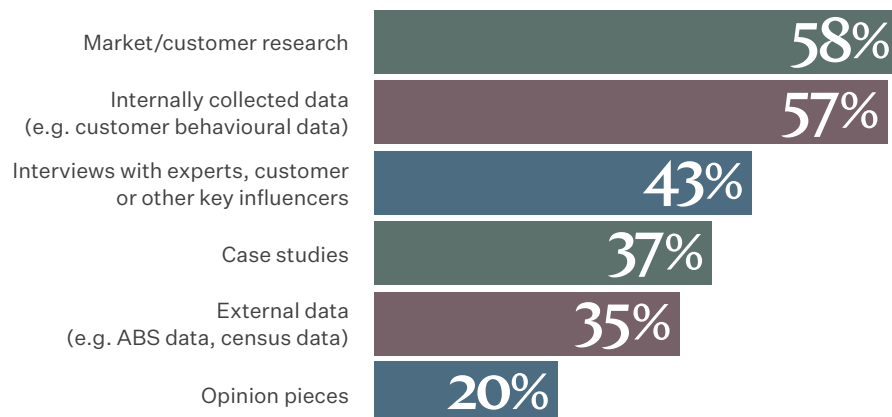
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# Developing quality content

## Leveraging data and customer insights

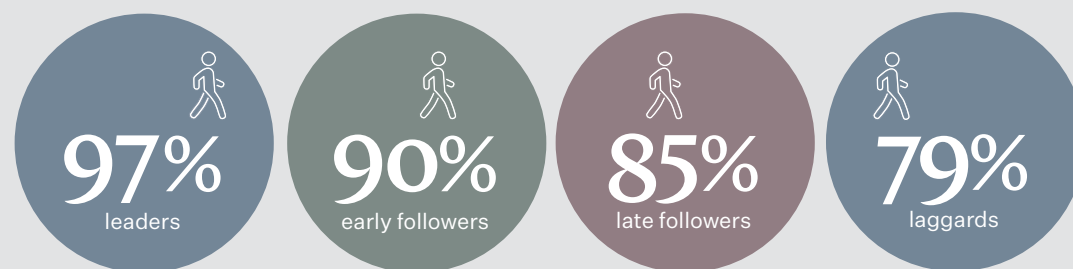
Given businesses are using similar tactics to reach their audiences, improving the quality of the content becomes even more important to get cut-through. Most businesses are using data and other quantitative sources to inform their content, with market/customer research and internally collected data the most preferred. This is even more prominent among leaders and early followers.



## Building relevance through market research

While budgets for market research can create a hurdle, almost nine in ten businesses agree it drives the success of their content marketing programs. Given that leaders focus on creating unique and relevant content to drive audience satisfaction, it is intuitive that they place more importance on market and customer research.

### Importance of market research to content marketing success



Did you know?

B2C marketers are moderately more focused on market and customer research to inform their communications while more B2B marketers turn to case studies within their content marketing programs.

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# Delivering outcomes

## Influencing action

Given businesses that have experienced a decline in revenue due to COVID-19 are placing greater emphasis on content marketing, driving outcomes comes into sharper focus. When asked about the actions people take after engaging with thought leadership content, the benefits are evident.


### Actions among content consumers



## Turning inward

Beyond engaging with external audiences, 72% of organisations are leveraging thought leadership content for internal learning and development purposes. The leaders are the most likely to be regularly doing so.

**30%**   
of all businesses regularly use thought leadership to upskill staff

**42%**   
of leaders regularly use thought leadership to upskill staff

### Top areas for improvement



### Refining the content approach

Many marketers agree their content marketing can be improved, specifically by making it more visually appealing, better aligning it to the target market and learning from performance data. Most consumers said content could be enhanced by making it more relevant to them as individuals.





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# Making a case for content



## Director of Content, Digital Healthcare

The pandemic certainly changed the way we approached users. The healthcare space has probably accelerated by five years, and that means moving quickly and suddenly speaking to millions of people who want to know about digital health. While that's really exciting, the challenges of building trust, educating, and innovating products, remain the same.

As a result, I'm interested in how content will play a role in ensuring people are comfortable with approaching digital healthcare, as health specialists don't always have adequate tools to deliver meaningful information to people online.

I believe that content products are the present and the future, but there hasn't been much innovation in that space for a long time and the next stages are on the horizon. Everyone is used to streaming services like Netflix, and they're also familiar with platforms that direct funding on an individual level like Patreon and Kickstarter. I think there's a logical meeting point between those two services that we're set to take on.



## Marketing Manager, B2B Technology

As an emerging SaaS platform, increasing awareness of brand, product, and features are among our main priorities, and that involves connecting with new audiences globally. Sponsoring events was one channel to introduce our brand, but amid the pandemic we were unsure of the impact we could achieve in a virtual event setting.

Instead, we doubled down on a longer-term initiative to build a community for our audience, and created a blog and attracted high quality contributors on the 'craft' of our audience. We wanted to add real value to people in our community, position ourselves as a trusted partner, and surface engaging content.

We also sponsored an industry influencer's YouTube channel and she did a walk-through of our product with the offer of an extended trial. We benefited from her reach in the B2B space, and the trust the audience placed in her perspectives.

These initiatives helped raise brand awareness and brand is one of the most defensible assets a business can have. Building a strong brand (and the community around it) is hard for competitors to copy.



## Head of Partnerships, Financial Services

We reimaged our marketing strategy due to COVID-19 to accelerate our digital-led approach and re-align our thinking and budgets to reduce our reliance on physical events. We ensured our front line sales teams were also focused on digital channels, and built deeper relationships with third-party partners to collaborate.

We had to move quickly to remain relevant and upskill as the market changed. That meant producing content for digital channels faster than ever and moving to new, virtual ways to deliver our creative process as a team.

The result was a successful webinar series and we expanded into on-demand video and content for the first time. We also conducted market research to help our clients manage the impact of COVID-19, which became a powerful engagement tool as our audience sought helpful, value-add information.

We also invested in a new marketing cloud platform to create more meaningful customer journeys using digital delivery tools and data-led insights. We will continue to focus on using this to its maximum potential given the likely lasting shift to digital channels.





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# Emerging methods and technologies: spotlight on Martech

## Technology adoption set to rise

While many marketers will be familiar with emerging digital content channels and formats, the usage of many emerging tactics and technology-assisted tools remains low.

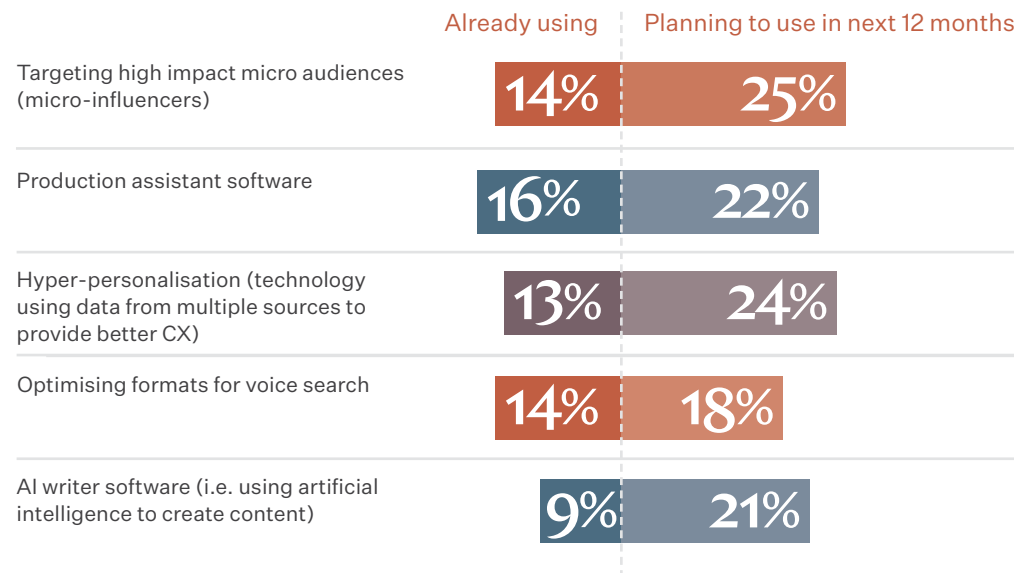
Only 16% of businesses are using production assistant software, 14% are optimising formats for voice search and targeting niche audiences through micro influencers.

Further, just 13% are using technology to enable hyper personalisation and only 9% are using AI assisted writing tools.

Usage of these technologies is far more prominent among leaders who are setting the pace and investing early.

However, adoption is set to significantly pick up pace in the next 12 months with one in four businesses expecting to target micro-influencers, and a similar number seeking to use technology combining data sources to improve the customer experience.

## Usage of emerging content marketing methods and technologies



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## Reshaping budgets

COVID-19 has forced decision-makers to think differently about how to engage their customers. They are now more focused on digital and content marketing and that's directing their spend.

How does your budget stack up?



## Leading strategies

Highly effective content marketers are active in more channels. They are using data to deliver valuable content and combine hard and soft methods to evaluate performance.

How does your strategy compare?



## Building influence

Consumers of content say that it influences their purchasing decisions and perceptions of price. But there is room for improvement in the eyes of consumers and businesses alike.

How does your content perform?

James Organ  
Managing Director  
Fifth Quadrant and ACA Research  
[jorgan@acaresearch.com.au](mailto:jorgan@acaresearch.com.au)

Alexandra Coroneo  
Director  
The First Principle  
[alexandra.coroneo@thefirstprinciple.com.au](mailto:alexandra.coroneo@thefirstprinciple.com.au)



## About the research

The research was undertaken by ACA Research and Fifth Quadrant between 18 and 30 June 2020, with the survey completed by 309 decision makers and influencers in businesses that are responsible for planning, executing, and/or supporting content marketing programs in their organisations across all industry sectors operating throughout Australia. The sample included representatives from businesses in both B2C and B2B sectors.