



# Developing an effective B2B content marketing strategy

Developing an effective B2B content marketing strategy requires an informed and coordinated approach. B2B companies should recognize how they differ from their B2C counterparts, align content investments with objectives at each point in the sales cycle, and invest in the capabilities to execute campaigns effectively.

# Making content marketing work for B2B companies

Every week, the business media highlights another innovative company that has harnessed these digital channels to energize their customer base, take their message viral, or ring up a windfall of new sales. In most cases, this dialogue focuses on B2C companies: many of the latest online tools are tailor-made to encourage impulse buys and support consumer attraction and retention. (Who hasn't clicked on a Facebook or Instagram ad?)

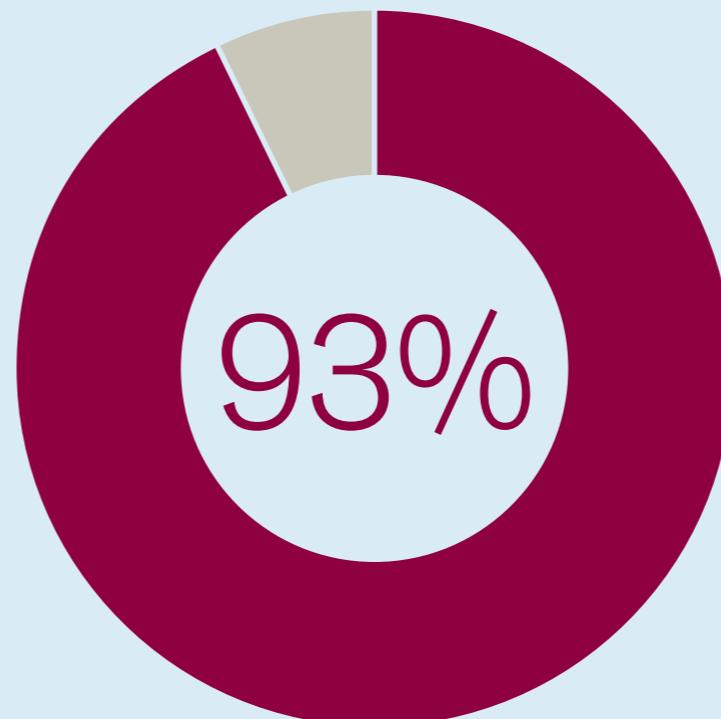


**B2B companies feel a sense of urgency to incorporate these new tools and tactics into their content marketing, but the results often fall well short of expectations and squander resources.**

# What the numbers tell us

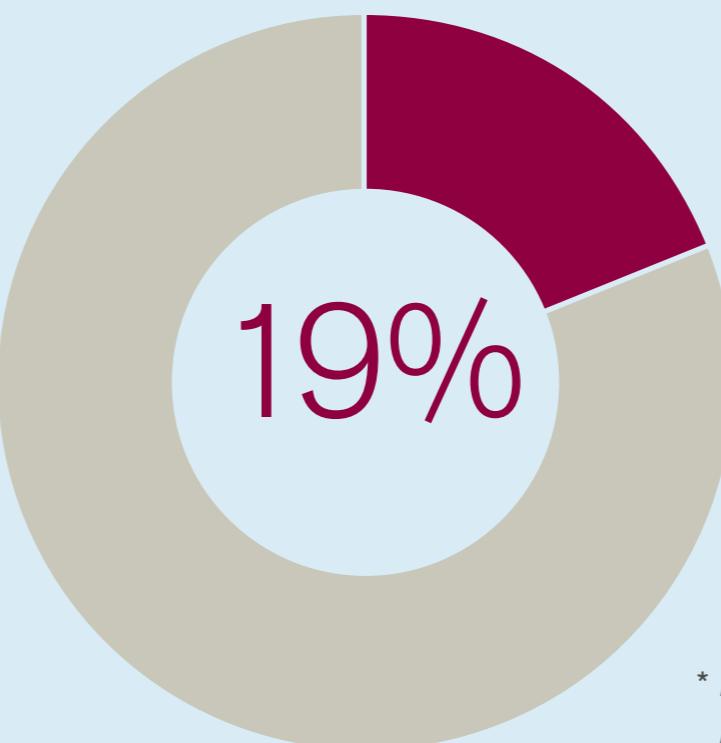
According to recent research, the average B2B company is active in six social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest. Each of these channels requires regularly updated, thoughtful content to maintain connections with prospective customers. But how do these tools generate return for B2B companies? Which channels are most effective? What level of spending is needed to support business goals? And how do you truly measure impact given the long sales cycle and undefined attribution?

**By producing and distributing high-quality content—on the appropriate platforms—companies can distinguish themselves in a crowded marketplace and create valuable dialogues with prospective clients.**



of B2B companies use social media content other than blogs to reach customers

**BUT JUST**



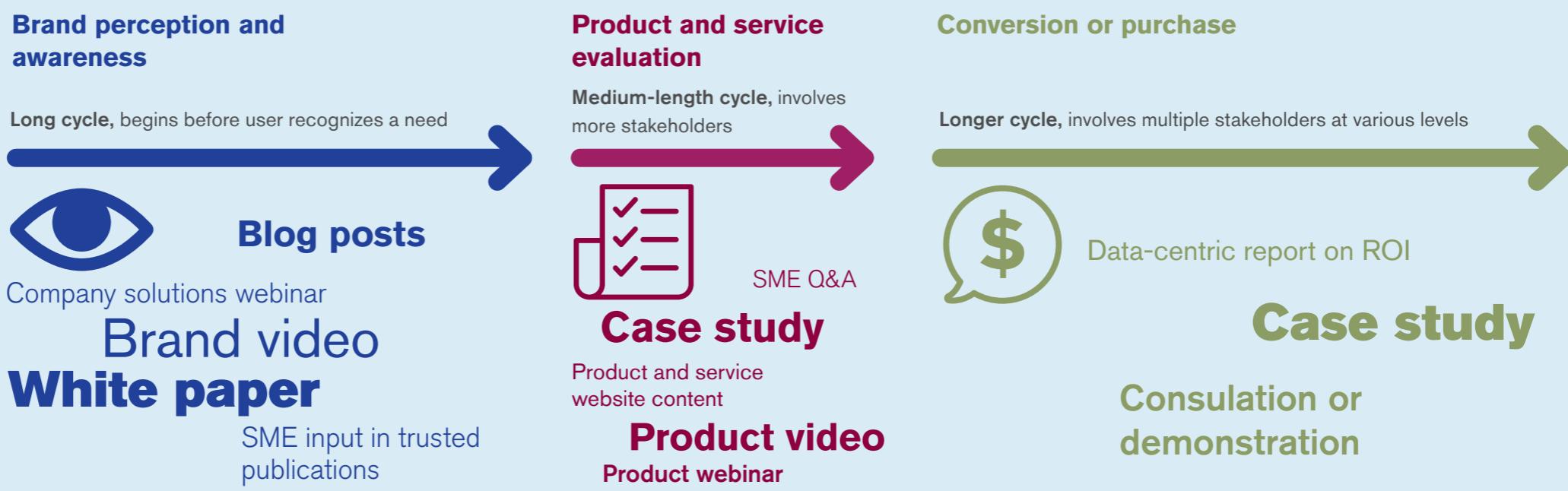
of prospective customers indicated they were likely to engage with social or community-contributed content\*

\* *B2B content marketing: 2016 benchmarks, budgets, and trends—North America, Content Marketing Institute.*

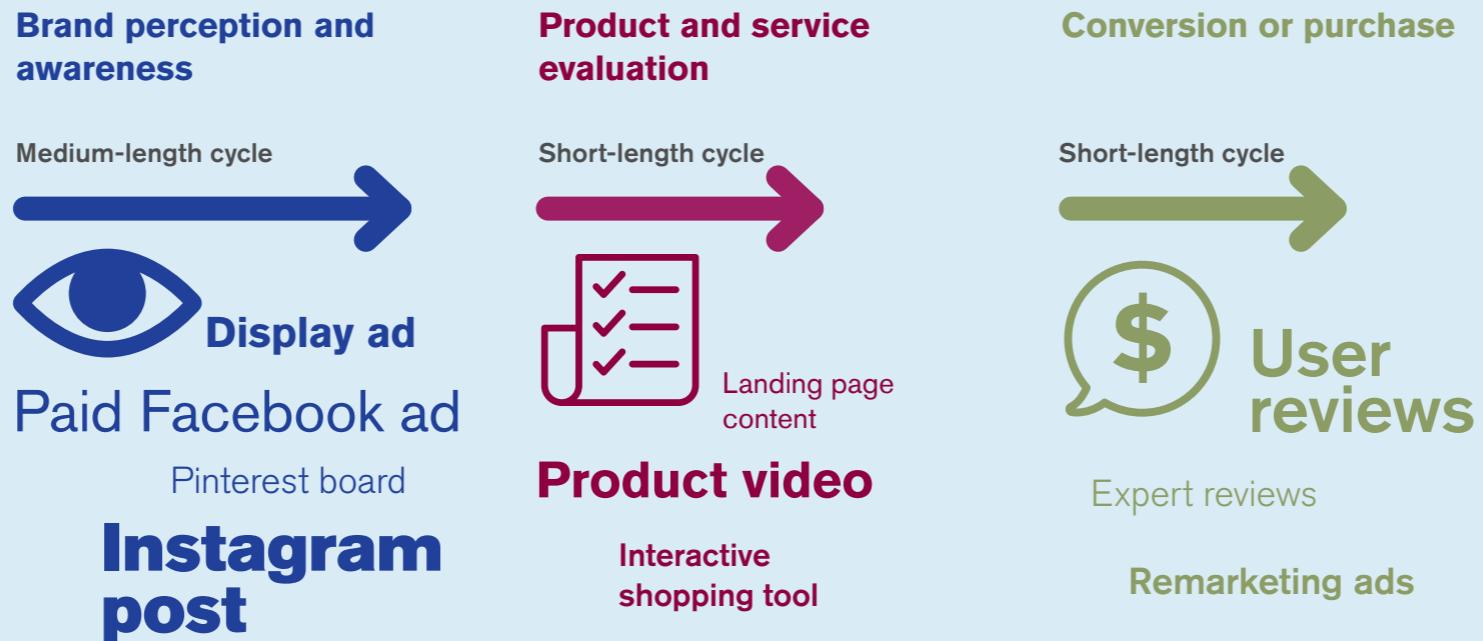
# How content marketing differs between B2B and B2C

B2C content marketing seeks to cast the widest possible net and influence every step of a compressed consumer-buying cycle. In contrast, B2B companies are typically looking to connect with a targeted audience, and the sales cycle is far longer, so creating and sustaining a dialogue over time requires more nuanced understanding of where prospects get their information.

## B2B



## B2C



# Why content marketing is essential to B2B companies

B2B content marketing must demonstrate how these products and solutions, as well as the companies providing them, can deliver tangible value. In the B2B sales cycle, evidence, analysis, and trusted relationships take priority over pithy catchphrases or cute commercials.

Content marketing enables companies to showcase their industry knowledge and insight on the common issues that their customers face. The best content provides new perspectives and analyses, sometimes based on proprietary research and surveys. And it also offers recommendations on how best to manage these issues.

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**When done well, content marketing can accomplish several objectives simultaneously**

▶ **build**

a company's brand

▶ **elevate**

the profile of its experts

▶ **codify**

intellectual property

▶ **support**

sales efforts and business development

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**And insights from subject matter experts (SMEs) can be a differentiator—particularly as B2B companies try to move from providing discrete services to being seen as a strategic partner.**

Before we go on, there's an important distinction to make between *content marketing* and *thought leadership*—and how the two are related.

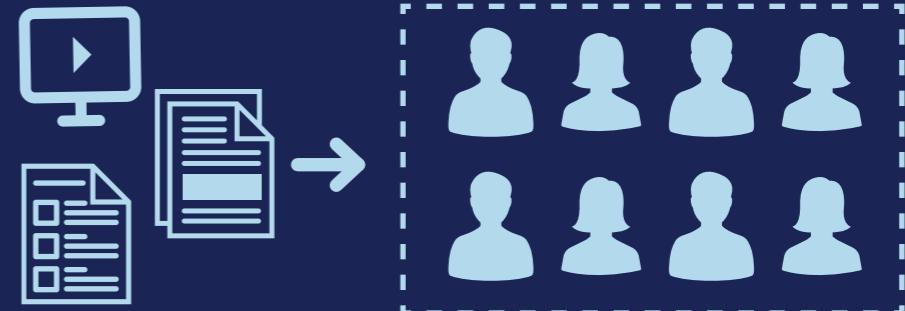
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## Content marketing

The creation and distribution of content to current and prospective customers with the goals of business development, customer retention, and reputation building.

Content marketing comprises various strategies and tactics, from thought leadership to paid brand content.



## Thought leadership

Unique insights, proprietary research, and material from client engagements that are distributed to a defined audience through content marketing.

The tone is objective rather than overtly promotional.

# Choosing the right content formats

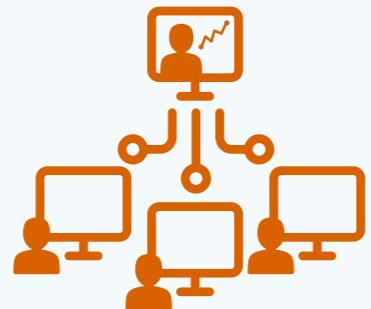
A B2B company's prospective customers are typically seeking answers and information to specific questions. These issues—and their solutions—are often complex and differ by industry. It's little wonder, then, that the top B2B marketing tactics all offer the opportunity to go into some detail.

## Top five most effective content marketing tactics\*

### In-person events



### Webinars/webcasts



### Case studies



### White papers



### Videos



Each of these content types has different attributes:

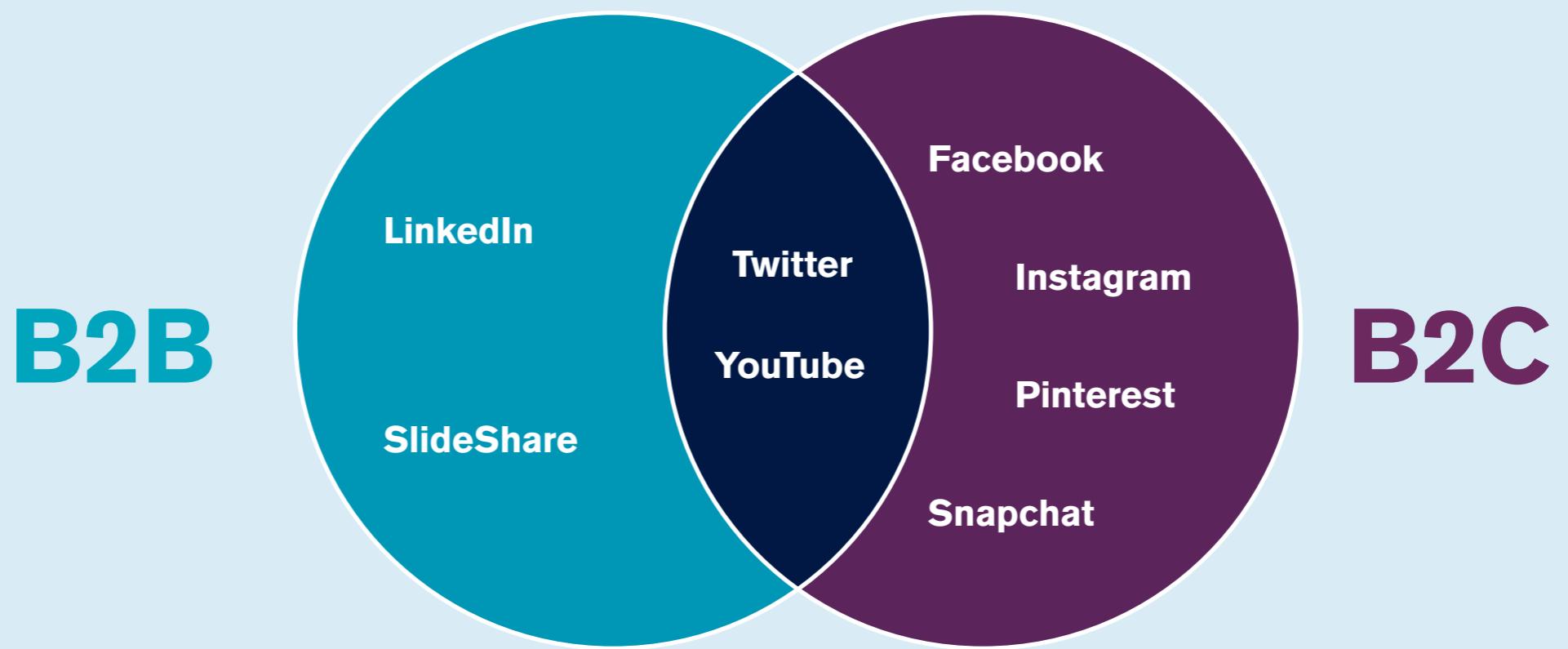
**In-person events are high touch but also labor intensive.**  
**Webinars, case studies, and white papers can have a long shelf life but often require considerable time and effort to produce.**  
**Videos are easily consumed and shared but typically require external vendors to handle production.**

Since longer content pieces ask prospective customers to commit a significant amount of time, B2B companies should consider repurposing material into shorter, bite-size content (one-pagers, infographics, and chart-based articles) that provide multiple paths to the lengthier text.

\*B2B content marketing: 2016 benchmarks, budgets, and trends—North America, Content Marketing Institute.

# Know your distribution channels

Businesspeople are deluged with information at every turn, so knowing where they consume content, then, is critical when determining how best to distribute and promote your insights. Instead of lumping all social media channels together, companies must consider the audience and intentions of each to determine which ones would be an effective platform.



LinkedIn, for example, may have been created as a networking tool for professionals, but it has become an effective channel for sharing content with like-minded audiences. By contrast, B2B companies that direct a lot of resources to Facebook or Instagram, for example, will typically find that these efforts miss the mark. The reason: people, executives included, go to these channels for social purposes, rather than to conduct business. Their massive numbers of registered users may tempt marketers to rationalize activities as playing the percentages, but B2B content marketing is better suited to other channels.

# Getting started

The growing demand for content puts pressure on B2B companies to publish regularly. But without strategic planning and development, the flurry of activity can amount to wasted effort. Effective content marketing for B2B companies is not solely about regular distribution; it's about quality content that demonstrates deep knowledge, fresh ideas, and valuable insights.

**The following four steps are foundational elements to build an effective B2B content marketing campaign**

**1 → 2 → 3 → 4**

Develop  
the content  
platform

Create a  
production  
framework

Manage  
teams and  
contributors

Determine  
the mix of  
formats and  
distribution  
channels

# 1. Develop the content platform



## Establish the key ideas, opinions, and expertise that are worth sharing

What distinguishes your B2B brand in the marketplace? If it's your subject matter experts, tap them for their insights and opinions. If it's proprietary research, translate the research into actionable insights to create a dialogue unique to your company.



## Identify the target audience

Establishing your audience and understanding their needs and interests will help ensure your ideas resonate with them. Articulate the issues they face and share the ways you approach those challenges. Knowing your audience also informs your format and distribution strategy—consider how they take in thought leadership and where they expect to find it.



## Create goals

Measuring the effectiveness of content marketing can be challenging; many B2B companies struggle to connect content with business value. The best way to understand whether content is effective, however, is to establish goals and performance indicators at the outset. Whether it's generating incremental website traffic or arming sales and marketing teams with pieces that showcase innovative thinking, understanding the goal of thought leadership, and how to measure it, leads to results.

## 2. Create a production framework

Creating and publishing effective content requires a committed approach across your organization. A production framework with a clearly defined editorial mission and content objectives is key to mobilizing your SMEs, writers and editors, designers, and marketing teams.

**In the strategy and planning phase, creating an editorial calendar builds a foundation for your efforts. It helps to organize and prioritize content opportunities and aids in aligning content with business strategy and goals.**

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Using the calendar as a tool allows you to



Manage the process from production to distribution and provide consistent direction for all



Quickly evaluate available resources and align writers and subject matter experts on the most relevant pieces



Prioritize topics and trends, with flexibility to respond to shifts in the marketplace, new research and findings, and news events



Identify and fill gaps in the content strategy and process

### 3. Manage teams and contributors

Creating a process to work with subject matter experts or interviewees is important. These professionals are extremely busy, so a thoughtful approach is key to maximizing time and resources. A statement of purpose in the editorial calendar will guide the conversation and identify the questions each piece should answer.

**The editorial calendar is also useful in managing the final stage of content development—revision. Producing high-quality content is an iterative process. Effective content marketing relies on pieces that have gone through rounds of revision to identify gaps, sharpen ideas, and draw out key insights.**

#### Example calendar

Dates	Topic focus	Subject matter experts	Main format	Approvals needed	Supporting formats for additional promotion	Design needs	Related to (previously published)	Response
<b>Publish date</b> <b>3/1/2017</b>	Dispelling myths about the digital revolution in retail	Jeff— scheduled	Article hosted on website under “insights”	Jeff	Shorter LinkedIn piece	Four charts	The digital experiences that bring customers to the store	
Outline date <b>1/2/2017</b>		Martha— scheduled		Martha	E-blast link and need icon from design			
Feedback received <b>1/13/2017</b>		William— to be scheduled		William	Editorial		Retail and the global digital economy	
First draft due <b>1/19/2017</b>				Editorial				
Feedback received				Marketing	Teaser in 3/9 post			
Second draft due				Design				
Feedback received								
Final draft due								

## 4. Determine the mix of formats and distribution channels

Guided by your content strategy, create a mix of formats to distribute your ideas across different channels. We explore this topic in more depth on our website [here](#).

### Channels

Website  
E-newsletters

Social media

PPC  
Remarketing

Native advertising

Video

### Content types

Infographics

White papers

Blog posts

Case studies  
Videos

Webinars

Sell sheets

Promotional pieces

# Assessing and refining content strategy

After B2B companies create and distribute content, there are two questions that often arise:

- 1. How do we know if this content was successful?**
- 2. What impact did the content have?**

## Traffic sources



## Time on site



Understanding how your audience found your content helps ensure placement of content in effective channels and better budget allocation for paid media.

## Shares



Since the audience is narrowcast, visits or impressions are less valuable than engagement metrics. Monitoring time on site and following a visitor's path will yield valuable audience data.

Shares, whether via social channels or email, demonstrate that your content is adding value to a conversation.

## Comments



As with other engagement metrics, comments are an area where the focus should be on quality over quantity. Quality comments start a virtual dialogue and alert you to challenges in the marketplace.

## Subscribers



Subscriptions indicate brand affinity and form a foundation for regular interaction between B2B companies and current and potential clients.

**As stakeholders across the organization use thought leadership content as sales and marketing material, gathering the reactions and conversations can build a store of first-party data that helps refine content strategy.**

# From strategy to action

B2B content marketing requires a different approach—one closely aligned with the longer cycle of relationship-based sales. In addition, a company's unique insights and expertise are the fuel for successful campaigns. By developing a comprehensive content development strategy, understanding how to harness the digital ecosystem, and diligently tracking results, B2B companies can ensure that content marketing investments directly support their business goals.

## Related reading

[\*\*The best content marketing strategy for your company:  
A B2B and B2C comparison\*\*](#)

[\*\*Do the fundamentals of B2C communication translate to  
a modern B2B world?\*\*](#)

[\*\*Does clickbait work in the B2B world?\*\*](#)

[\*\*Storytelling is always evolving, and that's a good thing\*\*](#)