

# Inside the Content Marketing Continuum™

What do successful content marketers do differently?

We surveyed nearly one thousand marketers at all levels of the Content Marketing Continuum™ and crystallized the essential ingredients of masterful content marketing.

skyword®  
Moving stories. Forward.™

# Introduction

## Content marketers face an impasse.

No longer is it enough to simply publish content. Nor is it enough to publish more frequently or widely than your competitors.

Becoming a masterful content marketer now requires a complex balance of strategic thinking, creative storytelling, effective use of technology, and an expert command of marketing science.

With such a wide swath of skills required to do it well, where should marketing executives focus their efforts? What activities will pay bigger dividends?

And even more, what does evolving from competent to masterful entail on a practical level—especially considering many marketers already feel overworked and overwhelmed? How can marketers translate ideas into behavior?

## In this report we present two stories:



First, a **snapshot of content marketing** as it is practiced today, according to our survey of 976 content marketers. These are critical benchmarks against which marketers can measure their own work and an excellent way to show your company's leaders where your organization stands relative to all others.



Then, **we zero in on those we call content marketing leaders and visionaries—the most advanced marketers on the Content Marketing Continuum**. These are the marketers who view content not just as a different form of promotion but as a valuable asset to build an audience, engage with customers, and transform the culture of their organization. What do these individuals do differently than their peers? How do they sustain their high level of execution? We'll examine this group in detail to pull out what marketers can learn from them and how to emulate them.

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On behalf of Skyword, Harvey Research analyzed the results of 976 marketers. The online survey was fielded throughout 2017.

# What is the Content Marketing Continuum?

To understand the challenges marketers face as they mature as content creators, we stratify them by maturity level on the **Content Marketing Continuum**.



# The Content Marketing Continuum

## BYSTANDER

Bystanders are still focused primarily on company content, or content that speaks specifically to the company's product line. They rarely consider the customer's perspective or needs.

## NOVICE

Novices are starting to publish content customers want and need early in their buying journey. Yet because novices are more accustomed to advertising, they often take a campaign-driven approach to content marketing.

## EXPERT

Experts think more like editors and less like marketers. They take a longer view, publishing on an ongoing basis and thinking closely about the customer's journey. Experts are also investing in infrastructure to support content marketing: a team that has more in common with a publisher than traditional marketing, a tech stack that automates and scales content marketing efforts, and a defined strategy to ensure content investments are achieving goals.



## LEADER

Leaders are not only publishing on an ongoing basis, they're adopting key storytelling techniques. They have mastered the art and science of helping customers at each stage of their journey. Now they are graduating to think about content as something even greater: an asset that can pay dividends long after they hit publish. Leaders have clearly defined organizational values and are thinking about how to integrate those values into story arcs.



## VISIONARY

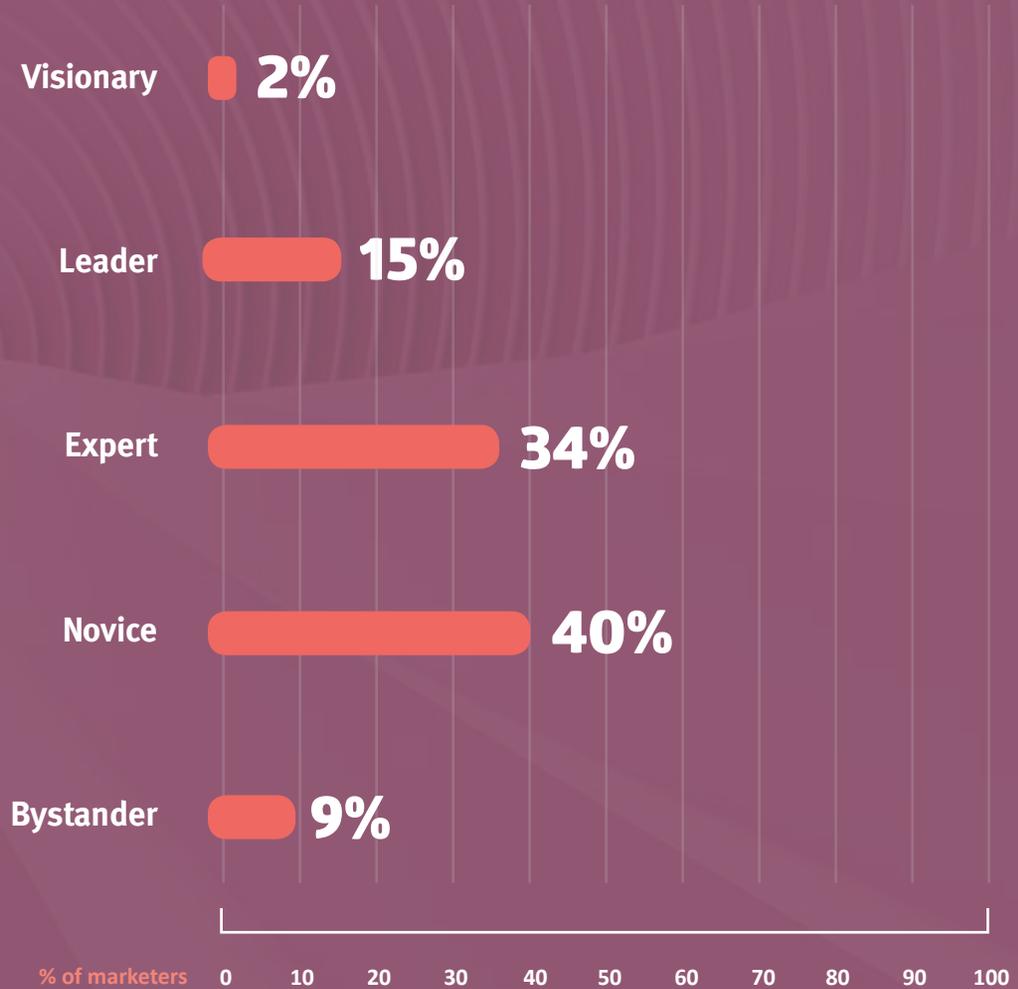
Visionaries understand that content marketing is not just a tool for marketing but a key strategic asset for the organization. It's a way of sharing culture, transferring knowledge, and building awareness of their organization's values and purpose. Visionary companies disrupt markets, recruit and retain the best of the best employees, design leading products and services, and create lasting emotional connections with a loyal following.

# Marketer Levels

Where does your organization fit into the Content Marketing Continuum?



Take the assessment!



# Establishing a Baseline

How does your content marketing stack up?

**Compare your experience** with marketers at large.

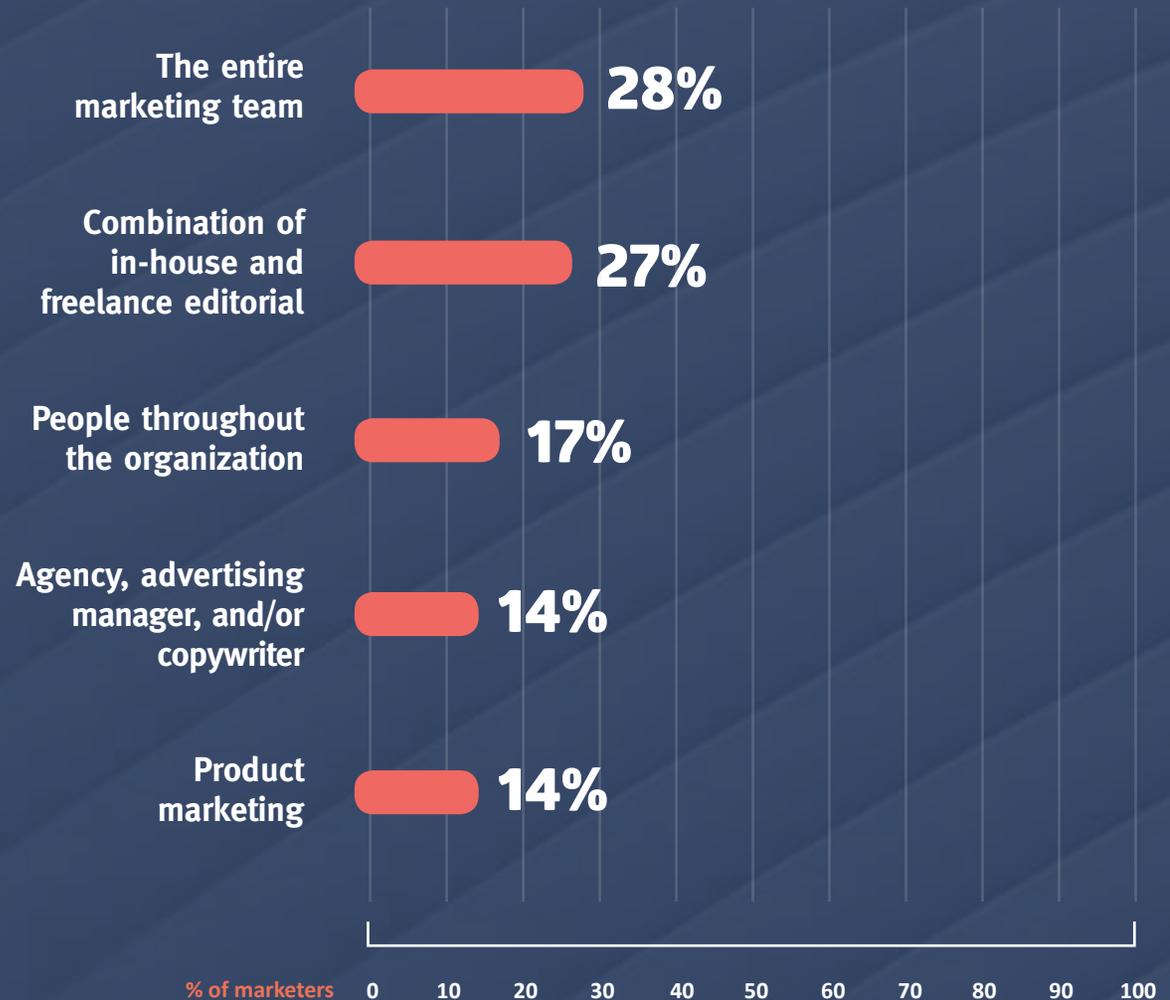
No one model rules when it comes to setting up your content team.

Some organizations use a centralized content creation team, while others use a more dispersed model.

Just 1 in 4 use freelancers to produce their content.

# The Content Creation Team

Who is responsible for producing (or managing the production of) the majority of the content?

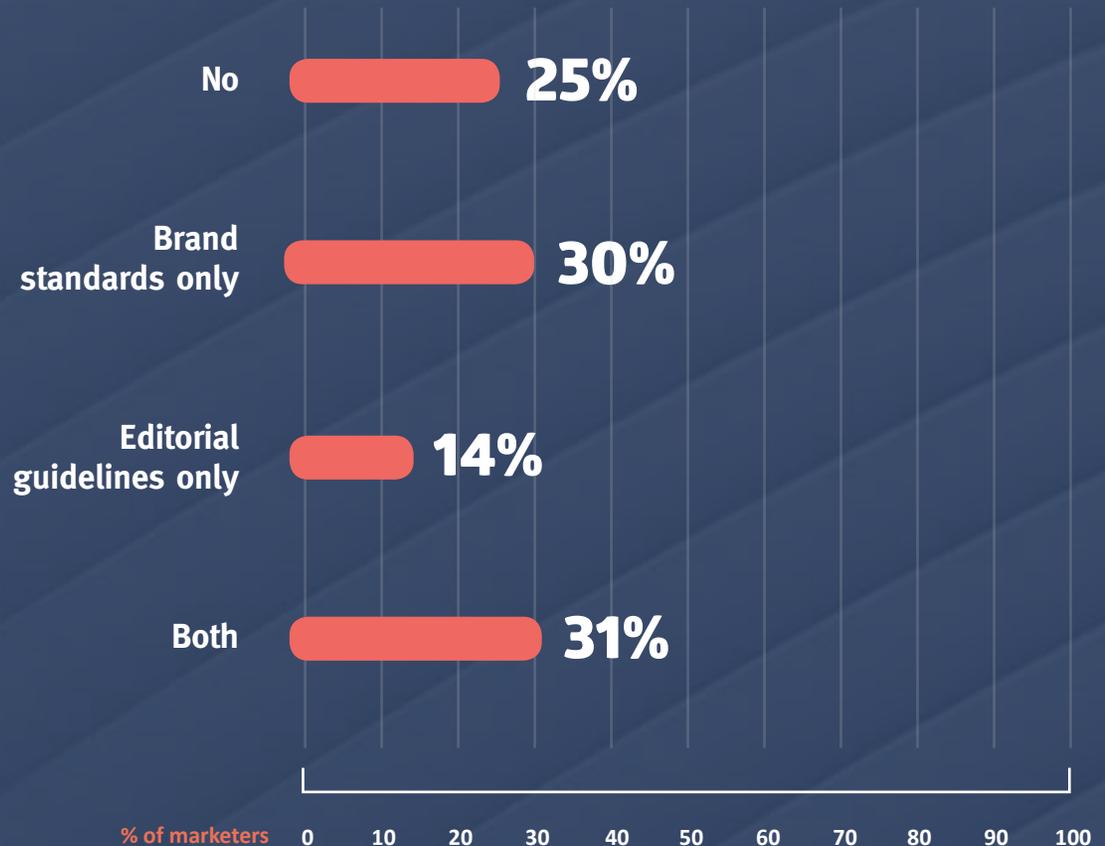


Less than a third of marketers use both brand standards and editorial guidelines—guidance documents that are critical to the transition from traditional marketing to storytelling.

Perhaps of greatest concern, one-quarter of marketers surveyed use neither brand standards nor editorial guidelines.

# Brand and Editorial Standards

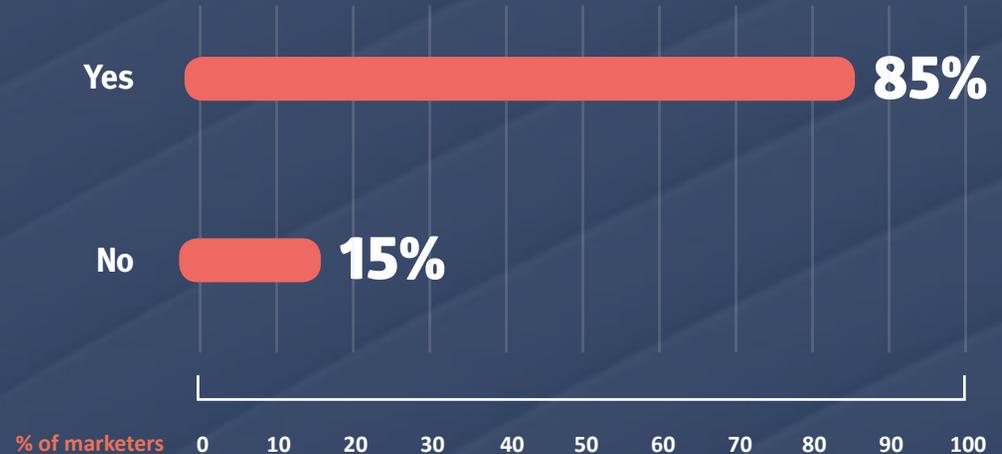
**Do you have brand standards or editorial guidelines that have been adapted for your content marketing program?**



Of the subset of respondents with the most advanced editorial guidelines, most (85%) say they consistently use storytelling techniques, a sign that foundational brand and editorial assets help companies make the transition to “storified” organizations.

# Brand and Editorial Standards

**Do you consistently use storytelling techniques or story form in your content creation?\***



\* Respondents with advanced content guidelines only

## What is a “Storified Organization”?

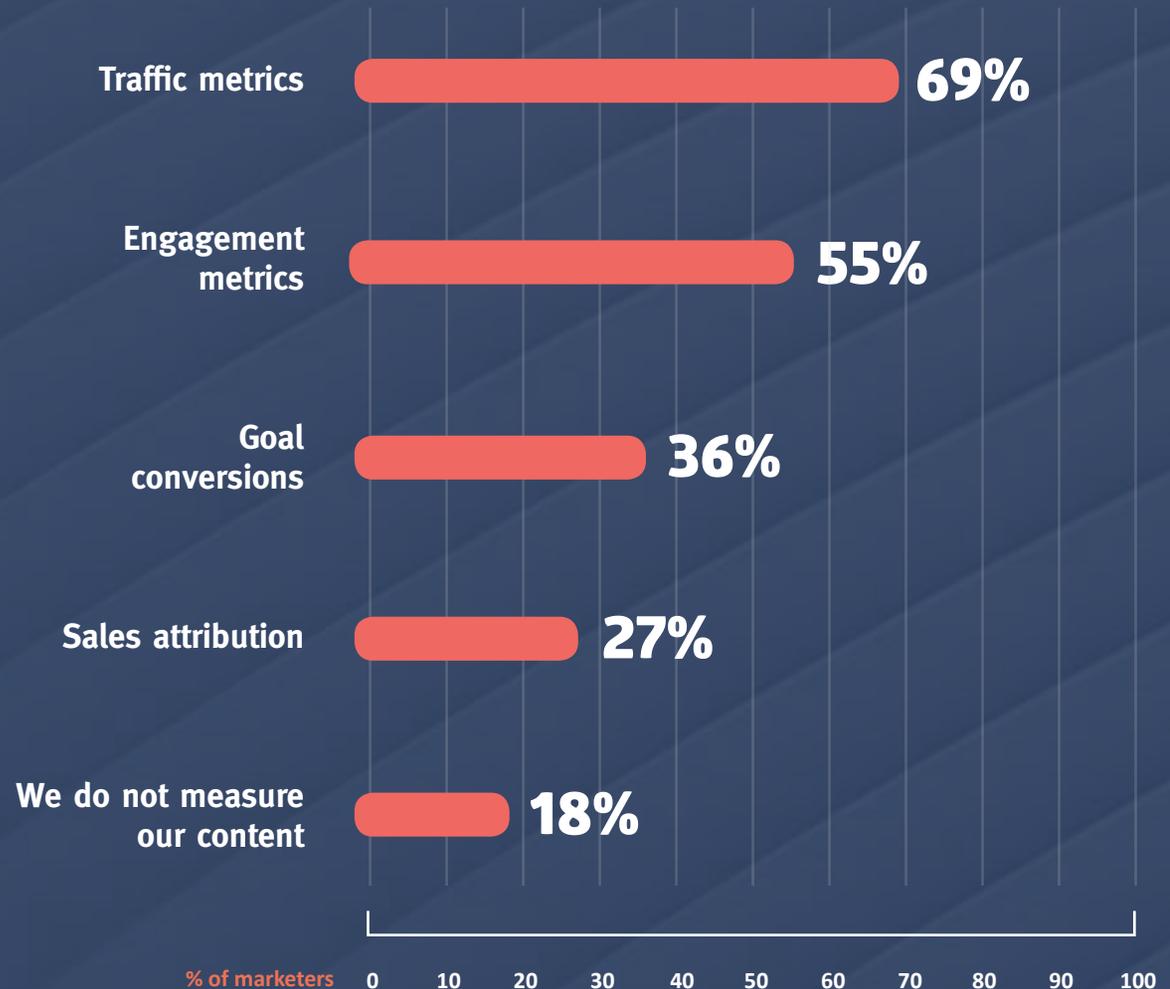
Many companies aim to tell stories, but few understand story as a strategic asset. Storified organizations have clear values and a well-defined purpose—ideas that infiltrate the company’s culture and way of working. They tell stories to share those values with others, be they customers, employees, investors, or community members. When they create content, they are not only answering questions and providing some type of utility, they are also sharing their deeply held values.

Measuring traffic remains the most important KPI for content marketers, though measures of engagement are also popular.

Sales attribution measurement is still difficult for most marketers to achieve: Just 1 in 4 use it.

# Metrics and KPIs

**What metrics and KPIs are you currently using to measure the effectiveness of your content?**

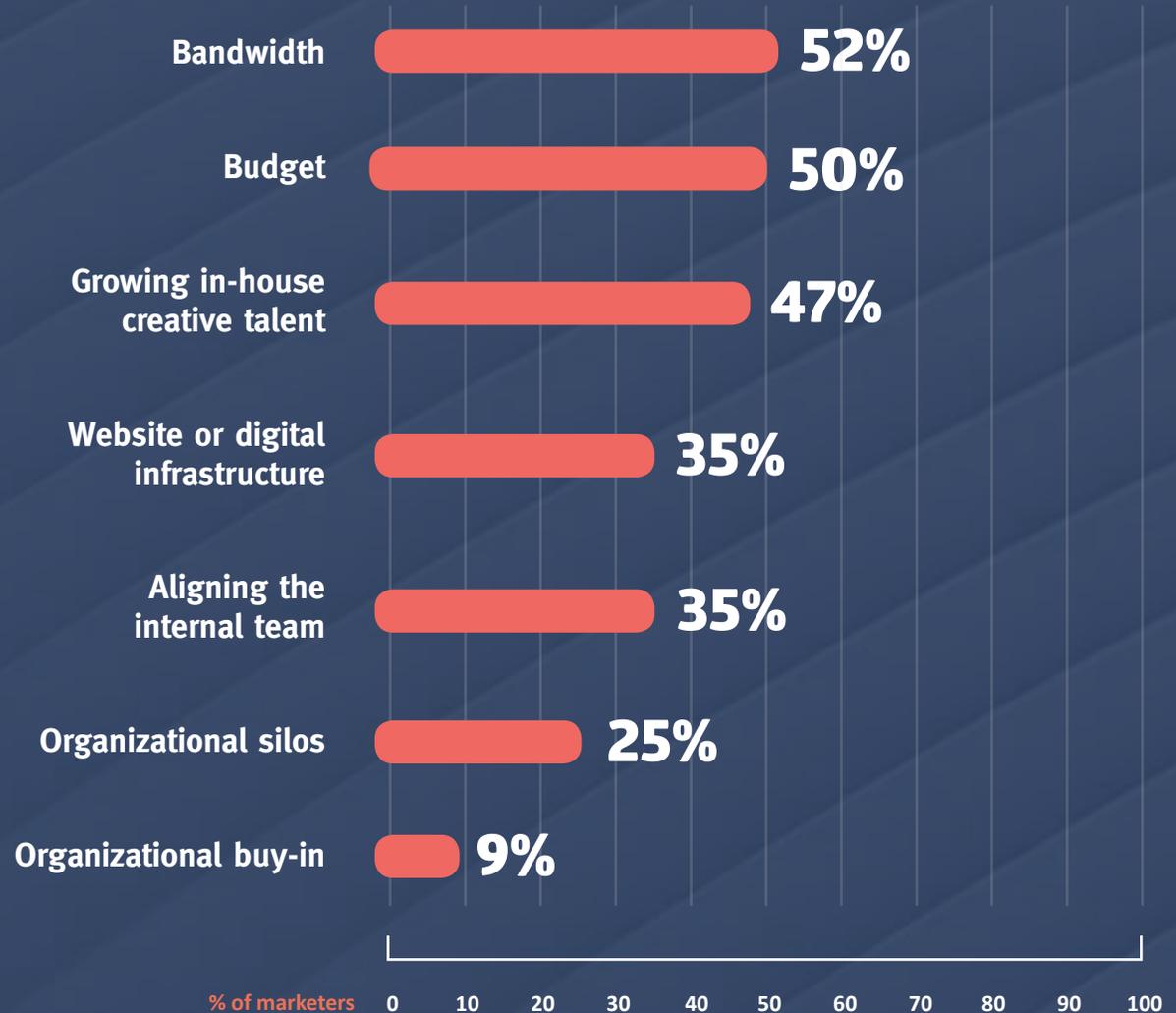


Resource constraints mean marketers must do more with less.

Talent and team-related issues are also high on marketers' list of challenges.

# Biggest Obstacles or Pain Points

What are the biggest obstacles or pain points in reaching your vision for your content marketing program?



# The Content Mindset

Our research shows the most successful content marketers behave differently than their peers. They are not simply doing more: They are doing differently. They are more apt to value content as a transformative force. They are steeped in the science of content marketing. And they have an iterative, experimental, risk-taking state of mind.

## What can we learn from them?



From here on we'll examine the attitudes and habits of the most advanced marketers so we can learn from them.

# A Storytelling State of Mind

In our research, the difference between competent content marketing and masterful content marketing is a storytelling mindset.

Using the term “storytelling” is a bit of a minefield. To begin, it’s an overused word. But even more, it’s an optimistic assessment of what most content marketers do.

Even with all that baggage, storytelling is a critical concept to test whether a company is using content to its fullest potential.

Just a fraction of organizations are true storytellers—companies that use content not only to educate and inspire but to share the organization’s values and culture.



Robert McKee | @mckeestory

Award-winning screenwriter and co-author of *Storynomics*

What marketers have discovered is that the mind is a story-making and taking-in machine. The natural way in which people think is to storify their experiences. This is how you remember, this is how you try to anticipate the future. You put the past or future into story form in order to make sense out of life and try to understand what your life has been like, to try to prepare for the future. The mind is constantly storifying its experience. That’s the way it works. Consequently, by telling stories as a marketer, you’re inserting, like a Trojan horse, a story into a mind that loves stories. And now you’ve got a chance to get your audience to do what you need them to do.



Tom Gerace | @tomgerace

Founder & CEO, Skyword and co-author of *Storynomics*

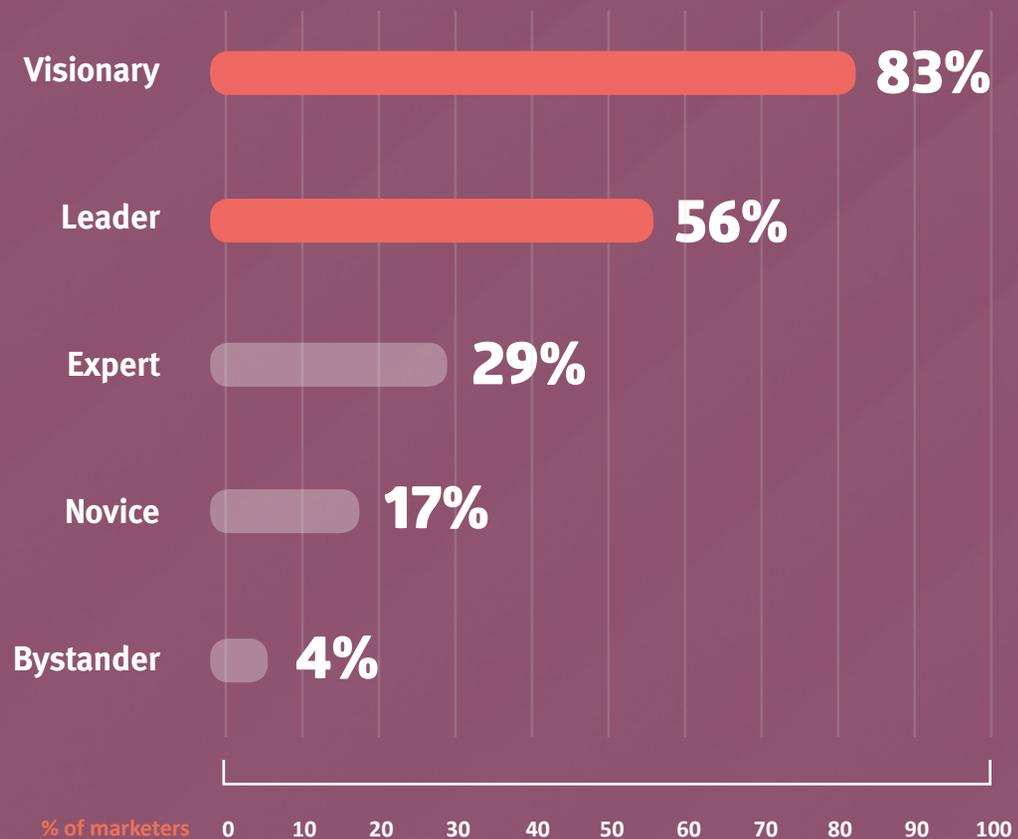
Over the next ten years, we will see the word content fall away from content marketing. When people talk about marketing, they will mean a content-centric approach. As that’s happening, the stories a brand tells will become far more important to their success than they ever have been before. In this new paradigm, putting together the storytelling strategy will not be the job of the director of content marketing or even the VP of digital marketing; it will become the job of the CMO. Choosing what stories to tell, how to tell them, and how to share them with the world will be the CMO’s biggest and most important decisions.

Instead of storytelling, most brands are publishing content. And to be clear, of those publishing content, many are doing it competently. They are answering their customers' questions and providing valuable education or insights.

They lack, however, a clear storyline and defined set of values that can help forge longer-term relationships and grow a sustained audience.

We know most brands aren't using storytelling because in our research, the difference between competent content marketing and masterful content marketing is a storytelling mindset.

## To what extent have individuals and teams across your organization adopted the craft of storytelling?



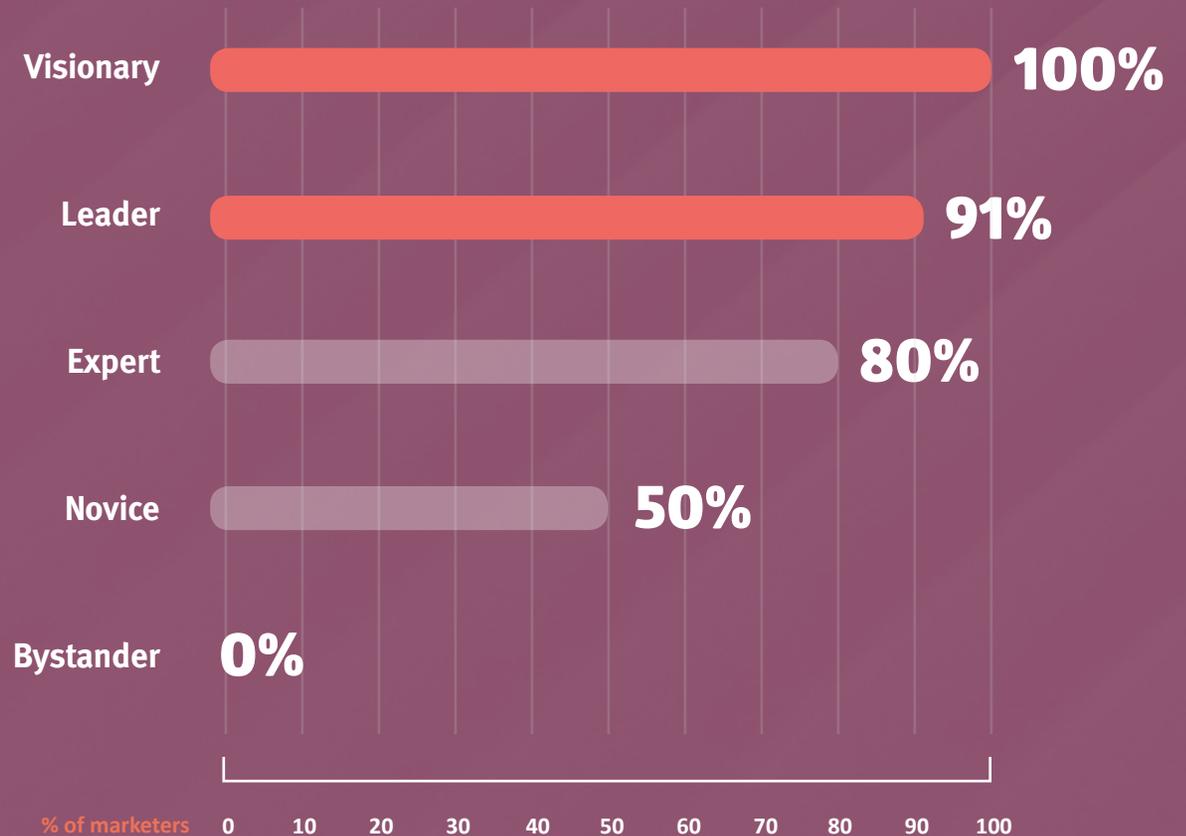
**Visionaries** are very likely to say a storytelling ethos permeates their organizations. Far fewer **Leaders** report the same.

Why Brand Storytelling Is the New Marketing: An Interview with Robert McKee



Read now!

## If you use editorial guidelines, do you consistently use storytelling techniques or story form in your content creation?

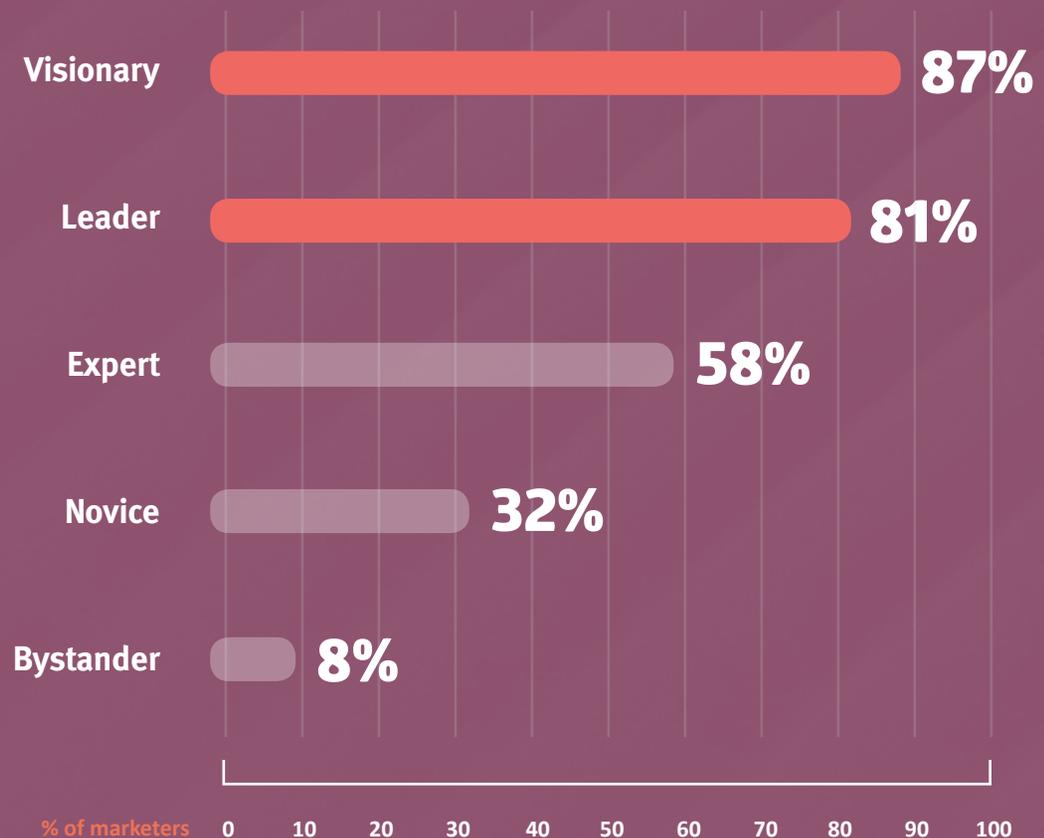


**Leaders** and **Visionaries** who use editorial guidelines are much more likely to use storytelling techniques in content creation.

Leader and Visionary organizations are not simply publishing more in order to advertise their presence and competence. They are behaving as a media company, focused on delivering quality editorial content rather than prioritizing a company message or action.

And Visionaries in particular work inside companies where storytelling is not a tool but a defining ethos for the organization as a whole. It's not "what we do," it's "who we are."

## "Content marketing is at the core of our marketing team."



Organizations getting started with content marketing are more likely to tack it on to what they already do. **Leaders** and **Visionaries** know it's a central, mission-critical activity.



## A Storytelling State of Mind

Chris Mumford, PR Content Manager, Western Governors University

# Marketing Profile

### **Q: How did you champion the value of storytelling internally?**

I champion the value of storytelling by constantly advocating for my audience. I try to push everyone in our organization to concentrate on creating stories that will actually be meaningful to the people who read them, rather than simply finding new ways to talk about ourselves. We want to treat our audience as actual human beings, rather than collections of data points.

### **Q: Can you summarize the essential story your organization is trying to tell? What's the thread that runs through all you do?**

With respect to the Hey Teach project, we want to show that the teaching profession is as vibrant, exciting, and rewarding as ever. We want to provide the tools teachers need to navigate the major challenges they face and empower them to feel like they can achieve the goals they've set out for both themselves and their students. We also want to provide a counterweight to all of

the negativity being spread about the teaching profession by the mass media by reminding readers about the unique joys it has to offer.

### **Q: What effect does this vision of marketing as storytelling have on the team?**

This vision enables us to create real, emotional connections with our audience. It gives us an opportunity to transform the traditional role of marketing into something approaching an act of service: we want to convey value to everyone who reads our content, not just those who will go on to earn a degree from us. Team members are thus motivated by a cause as opposed to just the bottom line, and I think the difference comes through in our content.



## A Storytelling State of Mind

Chris Mumford, PR Content Manager, Western Governors University

### Q: What routine habits or rituals does your team engage in that are critical to the success of the effort?

We watch our analytics very carefully every day and are always making small tweaks and adjustments to performance. We hold weekly and monthly editorial, ideation, and technical meetings to ensure that we keep a pulse on what's connecting with our audience while providing us with the operational flexibility we need to make adjustments when tastes and interests change (and they do, often).

### Q: What quality do you think makes the biggest difference to your success leading this effort?

I think we've been able to be successful to this point in part because we trust our process. We spent the time necessary to craft a clear and compelling vision for our publication, which is the nucleus of everything we do. By staying true to that vision, it has been relatively easy to create operations and processes that ensure we're always progressing toward our goals.

# Disciplined Creativity

Storytelling may appear to be a creative effort, but successful storytelling requires a high degree of discipline.

Among the exercises we view as most critical: documenting brand standards and editorial guidelines.

Brand standards are more common as they've been an accepted requirement for decades; editorial guidelines are less often used but equally important.

Editorial guidelines spell out everything from the types of content your readers prefer to the topics and themes they are most interested in.

The guidelines must also address journalistic issues such as tone of voice, using research and sources, editorial oversight, and transparency.



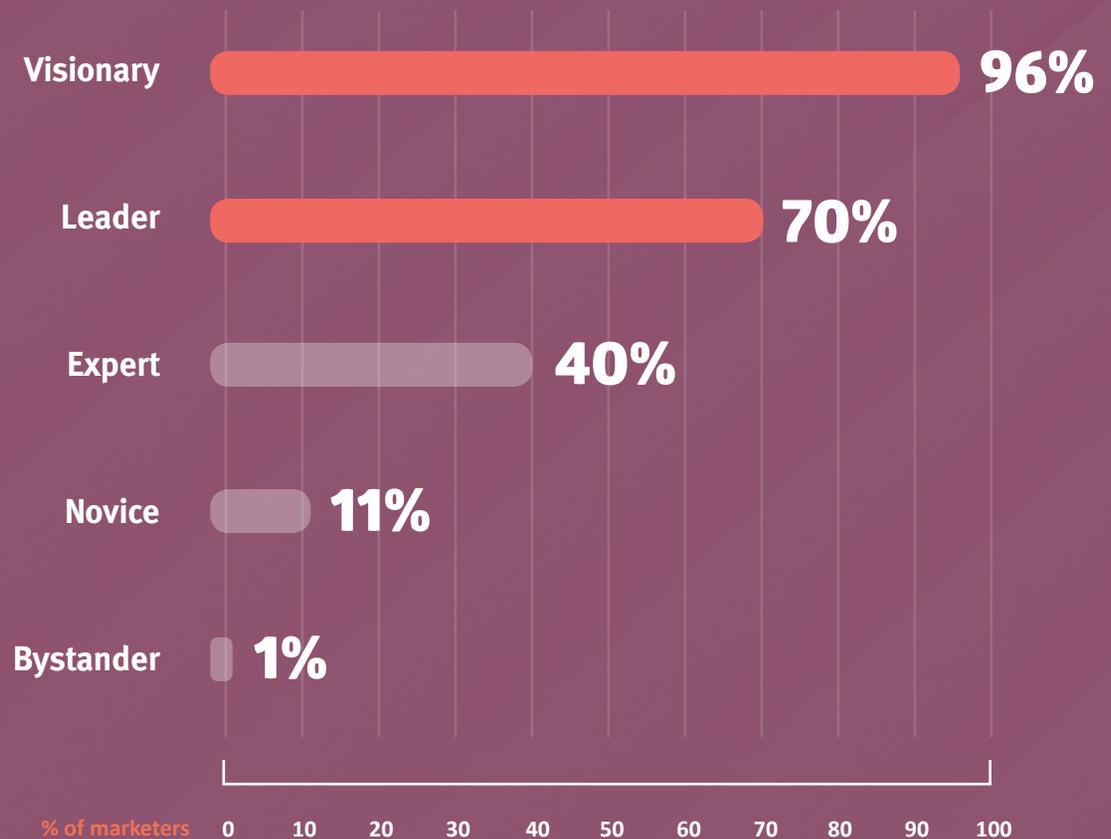
Amanda Todorovich | @amandatodo

**Content Marketing Director  
at Cleveland Clinic**

It boils down to culture. Our entire team (25+ people) is completely dedicated to delivering quality content, but they all also understand content performance data and how to incorporate data into their individual parts of the process. Creating content at scale isn't hard when you have an efficient team committed to the same goals. It's never about more content for the sake of more. Our goal is always around creating the optimal amount of content to generate the greatest return on the platforms we publish. A culture of clearly established goals, commitment to quality, and data-driven decision making is really the secret sauce.

Our research shows Leaders and Visionaries—those who are most advanced in their content marketing practice and effectiveness—are leaders in using these standards. Nearly all Visionaries (96%) use brand standards and editorial guidelines, compared to less than half of Experts.

“We use both brand standards and editorial guidelines for our content marketing program.”



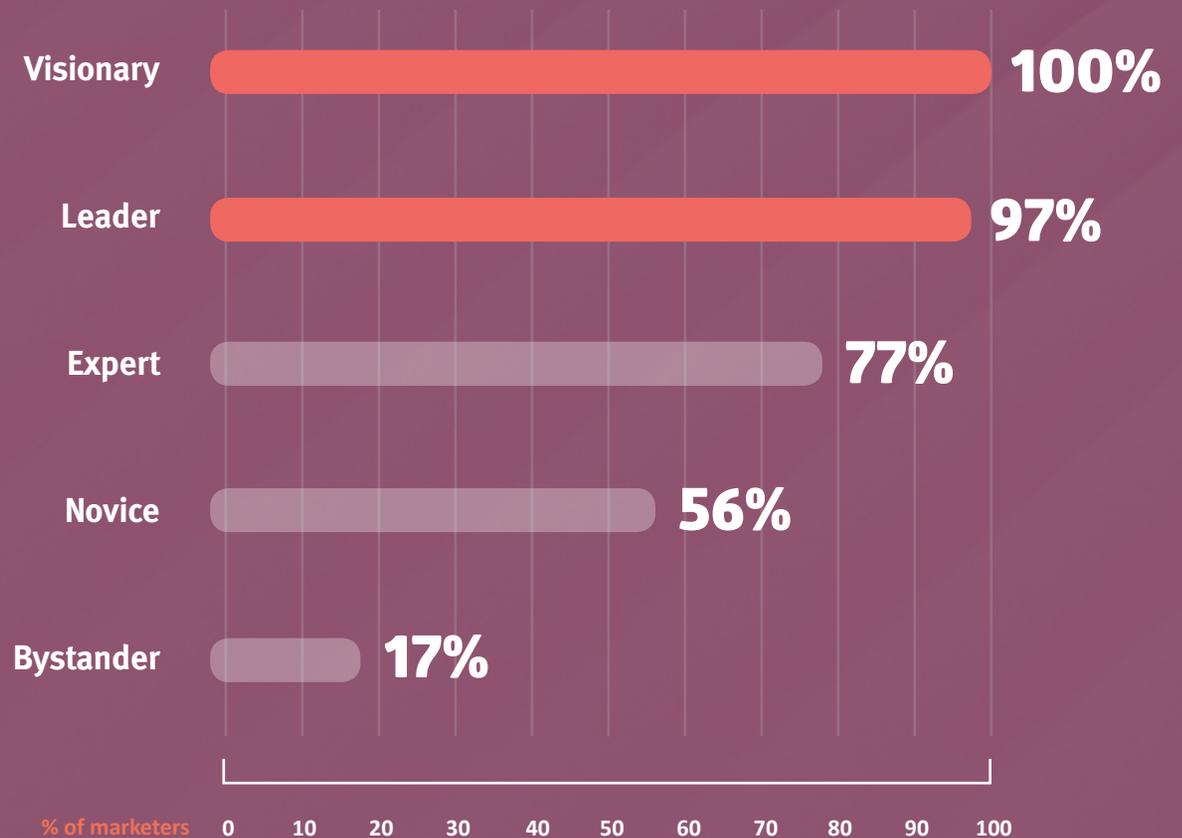
Very few **Novices** use both brand standards and editorial guidelines, while nearly all **Visionaries** use them.

**Checklist:** What to Include in Your Editorial Guidelines



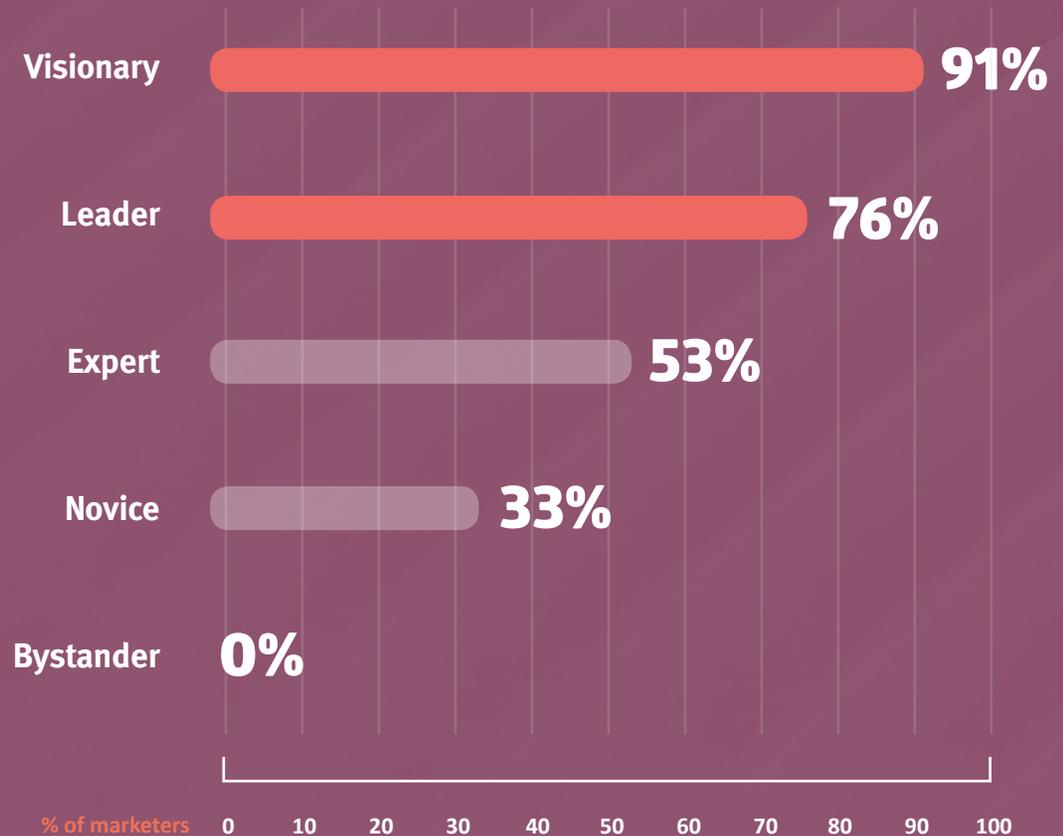
See the checklist!

“Our editorial guidelines cover multiple content/media types.”



Nearly all **Leaders** and **Visionaries** say their editorial guide includes guidance on multiple content types—a sign they use a greater variety of content formats to publish their stories.

“Our editorial guidelines address effective storytelling.”

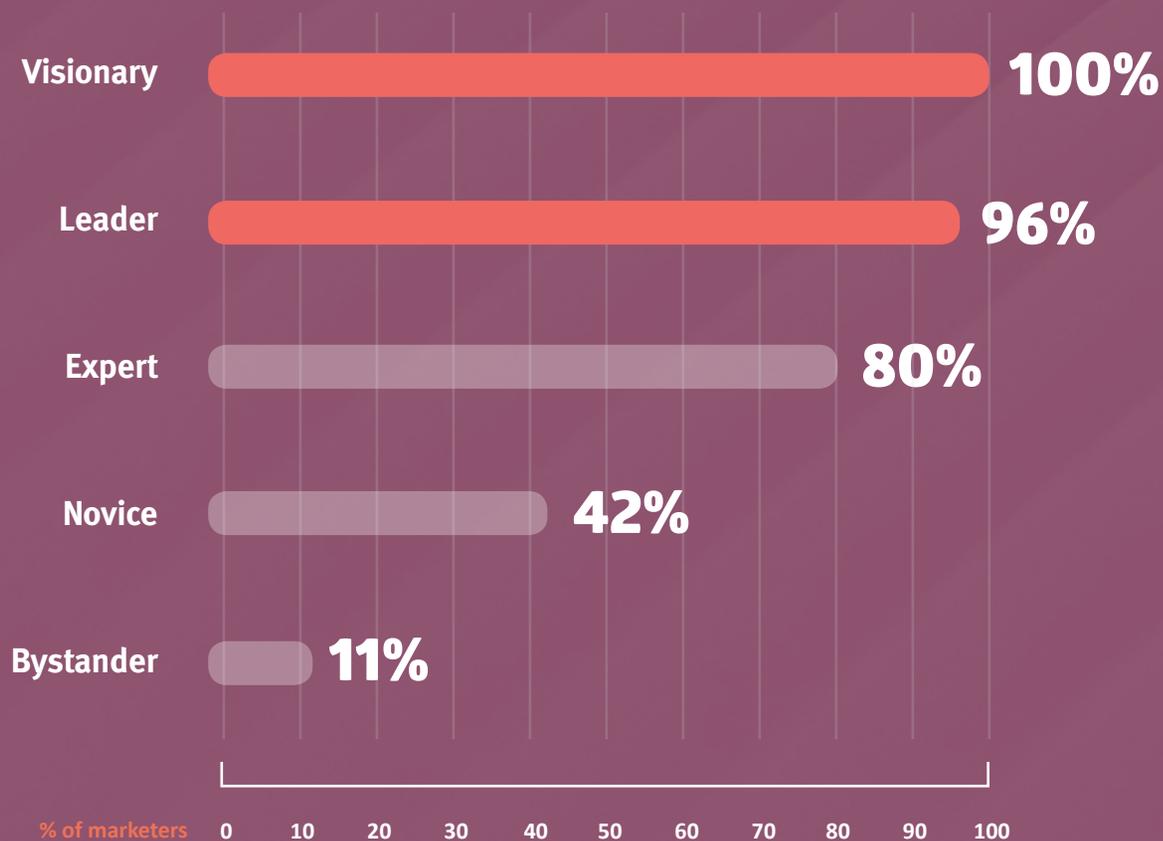


**Visionaries** stand out in their desire to define storytelling and treat it as a craft.

Visionaries also pay close attention to structure, scale, and consistency. Effective storytelling is a creative effort, but it's underpinned by exacting standards, workflow, and procedures. Editorial calendars, for example, are nearly universal among top storytellers.

Marketing technology platforms aid content marketers to set up these critical assets. Once an organization transforms to storytelling, they also outgrow the use of spreadsheets for tracking publishing schedules, deadlines, and workflow. Adept storytellers leverage technology to organize and streamline their efforts as well as maintain editorial integrity and quality.

## “Our organization uses a content or editorial calendar.”



**Leaders** and **Visionaries** require the discipline of an editorial calendar to support their storytelling efforts.



## Disciplined Creativity

Joshua Colburn & Keith Lehman, Hill's Science Diet

# Marketing Profile

**Q: Can you describe the different types of documentation you have internally that help you ensure the team has a common vision and goals?**

Plain and simple, if we do it, it's documented. We operate in over 50 countries, and to be able to get everyone on the same page is like herding cats, so it's essential to document everything we do.

It all starts with an annual marketing grid. Knowing what we're trying to accomplish as a business in the upcoming year helps us dig into our current content efforts to determine what is working, what is not, and where our opportunity areas are.

From there we align our annual content strategy. We create strategic documentation that talks about how content will holistically support the initiatives in the annual marketing grid to make sure all parties are aligned. This document talks about our overall tone of voice that we're trying to convey

and the opportunities we will be going after. Each channel also has its own annual content strategy that aligns to the overall content strategy. Separate from annual strategies, we also have guidelines set up by channel. These documents dictate our tone of voice, look and feel, and how to create content.

Then, mirroring the annual marketing grid, we create an annual content calendar that shows where each channel will help support the overall marketing initiatives. This document consolidates what campaigns are running and what each channel's role is in helping to activate it. Our annual editorial calendar is a little more tactical and speaks to the topics that each channel will create content around to support our business goals. It is a living, breathing document to allow for adaptation and changes within our industry. We also do frequent reporting with all of our work to ensure we understand what is and what isn't working so that we can be prepared to pivot when necessary.



## Disciplined Creativity

Joshua Colburn & Keith Lehman, Hill's Science Diet

### Q: What routine habits or rituals does your team engage in that are critical to the success of the effort?

First of all, your team is the most important component to great content. If your team doesn't collaborate well, your content will suffer. Make sure everyone involved in the content process has comfort in contributing to the team's efforts. The next thing that is vital is brainstorming and ideation. We get everyone in a room and agree what the goal of the meeting is. If the goal of the campaign is X, make sure they understand their contributions to help achieve X. We do quarterly brainstorming sessions to plan ahead for the next quarter with all channels, then micro-brainstorms as necessary for each of the specific campaigns. These are super helpful because they allow people to build on each other's ideas to truly come up with the best way to execute. Also, we make sure to bring snacks!

### Q: What quality do you think makes the biggest difference to your success leading this effort?

I think the best quality you can have is a never-satisfied thirst for improving. We spend hours every week just reading about the latest trends in our industry that will help give us an edge. Your education is never done, and a continual thirst for knowledge is what it takes to truly set yourself apart from your competitors.

## Excellence in Execution

Lately we hear pundits saying marketers shouldn't focus so much on publishing more and more; instead they should be much more mindful about quality.

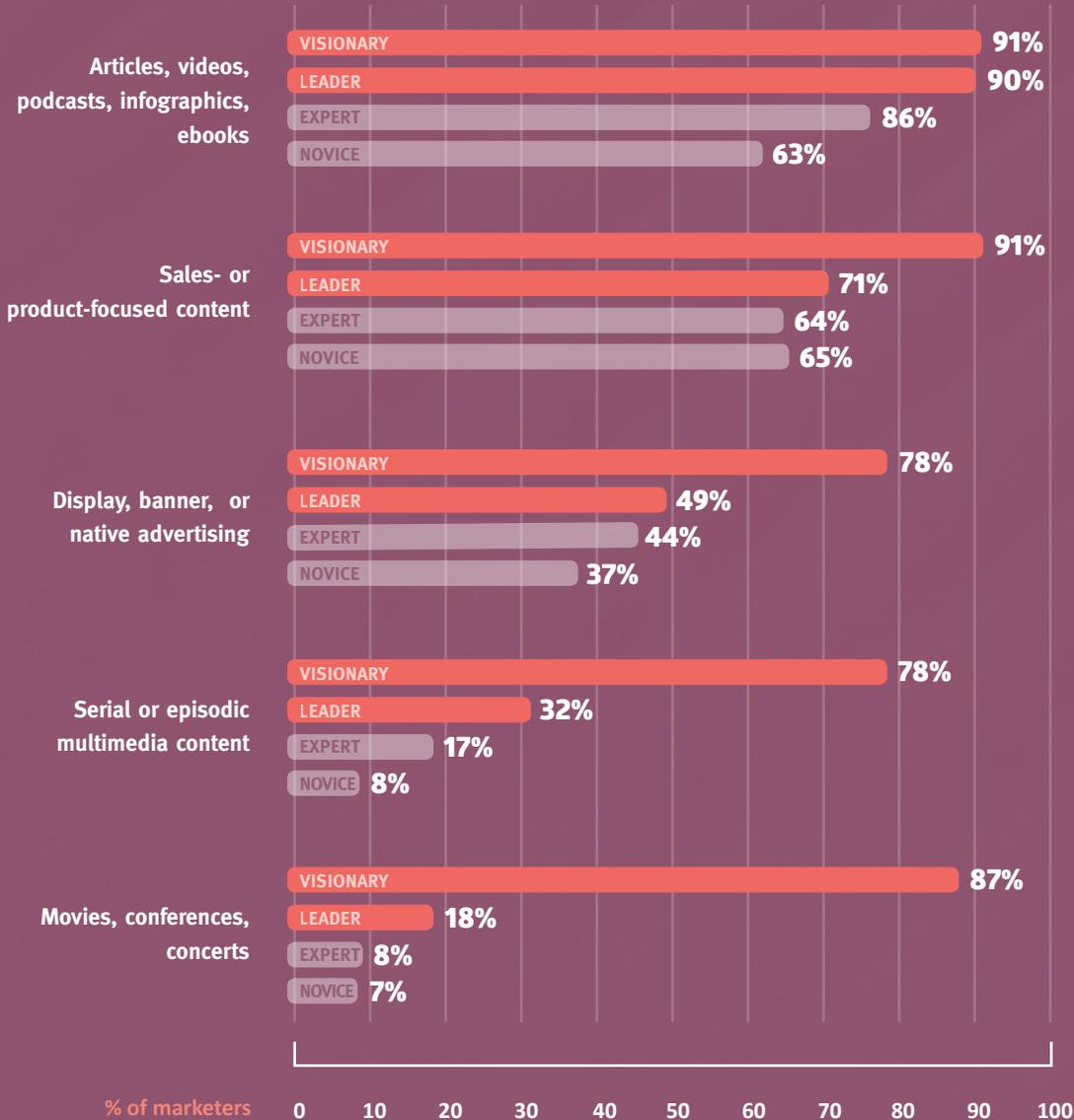
That may be true, but our research points to something that gets lost in the mix. Visionaries are doing more. That doesn't mean they are publishing more content, but they are highly productive—from storytelling efforts to product-driven marketing and native advertising.



**Luke Kintigh** | @lukekintigh  
**Head of Publishing, Intel iQ**

You would think innovation just happens if you really want it to occur, but risk-averse corporate environments typically don't incentivize trying out unproven tactics and unconventional strategies. In order to be more deliberate, the iQ team intentionally devotes 25% of our budget to testing new ideas—these are innovative projects where there's typically not a benchmark or precedent for success. Sure, many of these projects fail, but the process is immensely valuable because it opens our eyes to new approaches and ways to create and distribute our content. By not defaulting to known successes, we've expanded our understanding of how fast audience behaviors move and adapt today.

## Which of the following content types are you creating/publishing at least once per month?



Visionaries do more of everything.

Notice that Visionaries do it all—from publishing various media types, to sales content, digital and native advertising, as well as events.

Again, they aren't necessarily publishing more content, but they are adept at deploying all the tools and tactics in the marketing arsenal. And we find that Visionaries not only do more, they are also adept at telling a cohesive story across channels and marketing tactics.

Many years ago, content marketers believed great content would simply be found online. If it's good enough, they will come. That simply isn't true anymore. Excellent content requires fuel to ensure it reaches its intended audience. That fuel can come in the form of advertising, social media promotion, influencer marketing, SEO, or simply the art of publishing ideas and stories across many formats and channels.

And for a modern marketer, technology is absolutely key to ensure that content is targeted, personalized, automated, and optimized. For Leaders and Visionaries, the technology stack will include a content marketing platform, personalization, marketing automation, CRM, social media management, SEO, and analytics, to name just a portion of the whole.

Excellence in storytelling must be coupled with excellence in story-spreading.

### Checklist: What to Consider to Get Real Value from Your Editorial Calendar



See the checklist!



Robert Rose | @robert\_rose

### Chief Content Adviser for the Content Marketing Institute

As we've said for years, content marketing isn't a replacement for other forms of marketing—it just makes those forms work better.



Andy Crestodina | @crestodina

### Strategic Director of Orbit Media

Quality is a deal breaker. Low-quality content can't be helped by any effort. No amount of promotion will help a bad piece of content get more traffic, engage more visitors, or attain higher ROI. That said, high-quality content and traffic don't always correlate. An OK piece of content that is promoted brilliantly will outperform brilliant content with just OK promotion. The winners are those who are great promoters. Great creators are not necessarily going to come out on top.



# Marketing Profile

## **Q: Can you help us understand the variety of content you publish?**

We have a blog (UPMC HealthBeat) and several websites (UPMC.com, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC, and UPMC Hillman Cancer Center) where we publish content.

The main types of content we publish include:

- Standard blog articles
- Recipes
- Infographics
- Videos
- Clinical content about health conditions and treatments
- Social posts and photos (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram)

## **Q: How do you promote that content? How do you ensure it's found?**

We have an in-house SEO team and work with an SEO vendor. We conduct keyword research and optimize our content to help with findability. We share content via our social channels, and we also run PPC campaigns and promoted Facebook posts.



## Excellence in Execution

Stephanie Vukmanic, Digital Content Specialist, UPMC

### Q: What ratio of time do you believe you spend on creating content vs. distributing and optimizing it?

Personally, my main role is editing our clinical content for readability, usability, and findability, so I'd say I spend 95% of my time on optimizing.

We rely heavily on Skyword contributors to create most of our content and work with other vendors on creating videos and infographics.

### Q: What routine habits or rituals does your team engage in that are critical to the success of the effort?

Drinking heavily. Just kidding.

We're actually a newer, evolving team. We do biweekly meetings where we bring in industry experts to speak for the first half hour. I've heard from multiple people that Tom Gerace was their favorite guest speaker in 2017.

### Q: What quality in you, as an individual marketer, do you think makes the biggest difference to your success leading this effort?

Passion. I strive to make every piece of content I touch be understandable, useful, and compassionate.

# Don't Search for an Organizational Template

Not sure how to organize your team? Or where to locate your content engine? Don't look outside for a clear answer.

Our research shows Leaders and Visionaries take diverse approaches to building their content organizations.

And this makes sense. When marketers pivot from traditional marketing to publishing, and then again to storytelling, they do so with an inherited structure and team. Many organizations don't have the appetite or resources to build content creation teams from scratch. That means organizations have different models for content creation teams and organizations—and it's clear no single

model works best. (While there is no organizational template all marketers must adopt, there are key skills teams need to excel; see our checklist below for ideas.)

**Mini-Guide: The Key Skills and Responsibilities You Need on Your Content Marketing**



**Read now!**



**Michele Linn** | @michelelinn

**Editorial Strategy Advisor, CMI**

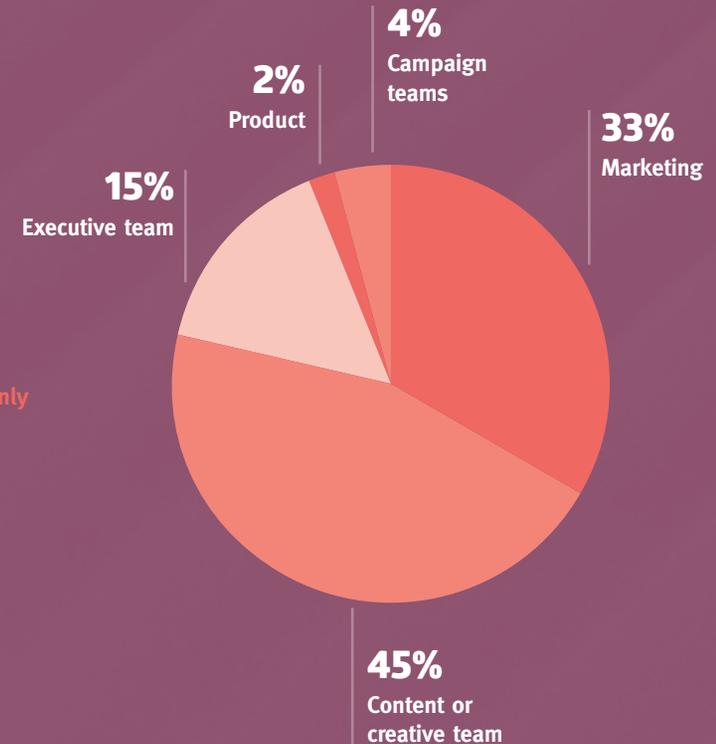
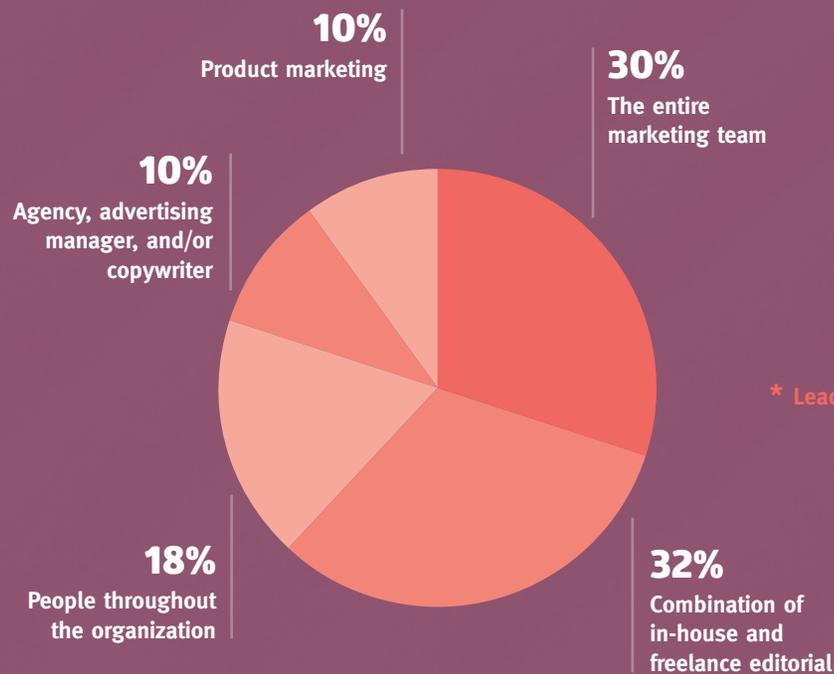
It's no surprise content marketers are feeling a bit confounded about who they need on their teams and how to structure them. 70% of content marketing teams have been around four years or fewer (source: [Conductor](#)), and there is no right path to follow.

Instead, as you put your team together, I encourage you to hire on three degrees of fit: do their skills fill one or more gaps in your process; would they fit within your existing (and aspirational) culture; and do they have a content marketing mindset? Even if you find someone who has two out of these three things, chances are, things won't click into place.

The key to organizing your team is tailoring your approach to your internal reality and needs.

Who is responsible for producing the majority of your content?\*

Which group within your organization is primarily responsible for content strategy?\*



\* Leaders and Visionaries only

**i** No one model works for all. **Leaders** and **Visionaries** organize their content efforts to suit their unique requirements.



## Don't Search for an Organizational Template

Shivaun Korfanta, Manager, Content Marketing, HP Print

# Marketing Profile

### Q: Is your content team centralized or dispersed?

#### Can you describe your model?

Company-wide, it's dispersed. We have people creating content in all types of organizations at HP (Print, Personal Systems, and Graphics, consumer and B2B), but generally speaking, content is developed at a worldwide level and then the regions/countries take that content and "activate" it through media, webinars, direct mail, etc. If WW doesn't give the regions/countries the content they need for their plans, then the countries can also create content.

For Tektonika specifically, it's a combination of centralized and dispersed. EMEA leverages the US content and translates/transcreates, while APJ and Canada do a combination of translation/transcreation of US stories, along with their own original content.

### Q: Is that model intentional?

#### Or did you inherit a team that you optimized?

The structure for WW content is intentional. HP wants consistency, as much as possible, with all of our messaging. That isn't always possible given the nuances in certain markets, of course—and more and more, Corporate/WW are giving the regions/countries flexibility to edit and create their own content, but the original intent was to drive consistency WW.

For Tektonika specifically, it was not intentional. We simply did what we needed to do in the US first and foremost, and then the other regions came on board. In an ideal world, we might have wanted to start out with a WW plan, but then again, it is usually a good idea to test things out first, with one country, before trying to roll something out on a grand scale.



## Don't Search for an Organizational Template

Shivaun Korfanta, Manager, Content Marketing, HP Print

### Q: What routine habits or rituals does your team engage in that are critical to the success of the effort?

Yearly planning is critical for all of our content development, enabling us to allocate our budgets for each quarter. Sometimes the budget changes, but usually not that drastically. And then we have regular team meetings, by initiative, to share best practices, to investigate where there are opportunities for leverage, to make sure everyone understands the latest and greatest assets that are available, etc.

### Q: What quality do you think makes the biggest difference to your success leading this effort?

My experience as a journalist is probably the biggest contributing factor in our content program's success. I understand what makes a story a good story (I think realizing that I'm not the target customer) and how to write. And working with a great group of reporters, of course!

# Iterative, Agile Measurement

Traffic remains the most-used metric content marketers track, but drill down to what Visionaries pay attention to, and the picture changes considerably.

When given a list of metrics and KPIs, Visionaries say they pay the least attention to traffic. Instead, they're focused on indicators of audience growth and content value. They want to know if the audience is engaging with their content, not just finding it online. And they track issues like subscription rates and download forms—all signs that someone is interested enough in your content to seek it out again in the future.

**Also key for Visionaries:** a thorough understanding of how their KPIs impact sales, one of the toughest relationships to capture accurately.

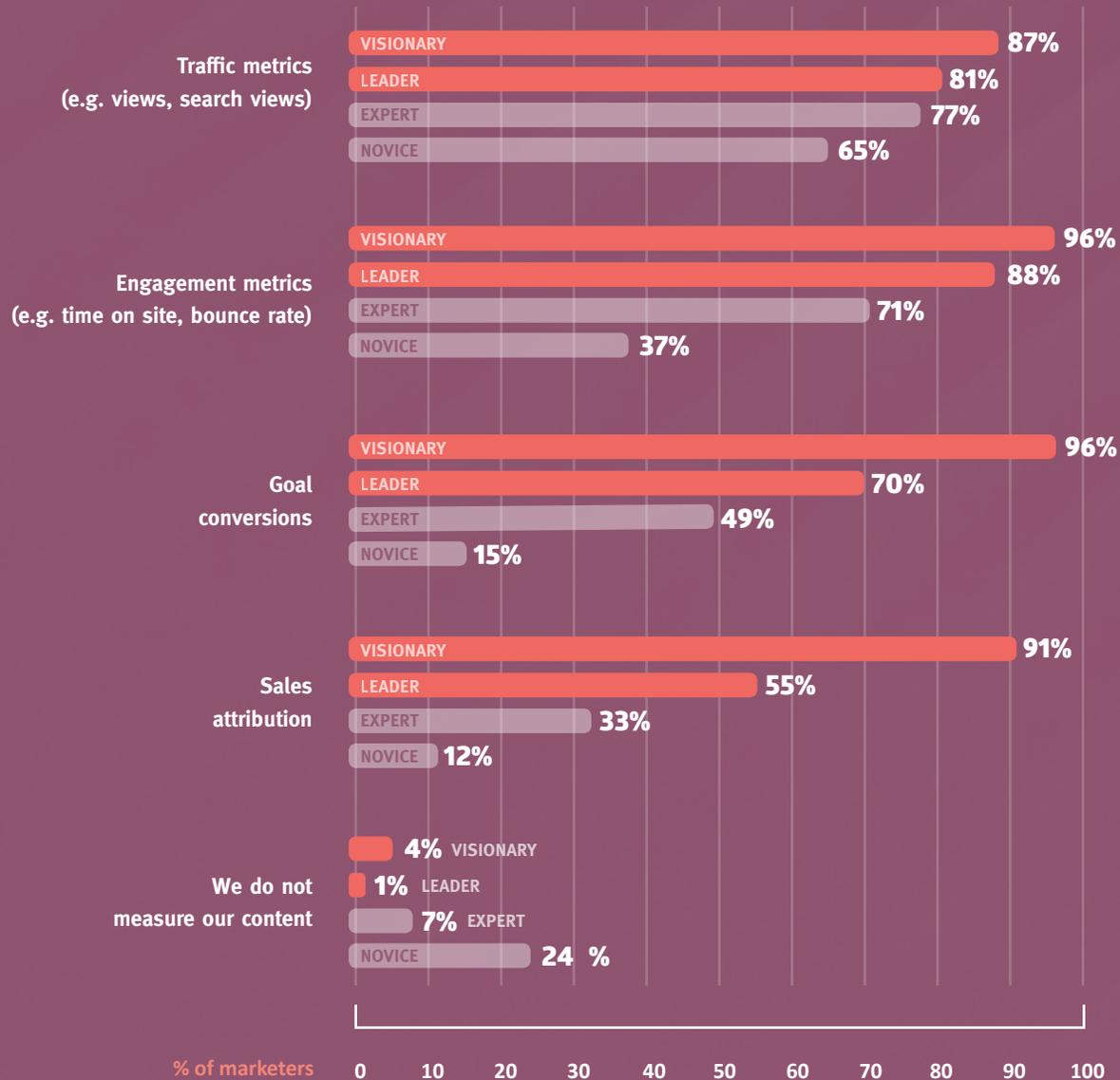


Rebecca Lieb | @liebink

Analyst and Co-Founder,  
Kaleido Insights

To become fluid, companies must be able to see coming technologies, experiment fast, and implement nearly at the speed of a startup. The reason they can do this is because they're data savvy and can connect disparate data sources to visualize a single view, a shared reality of all operations. Fluid organizations are equipped to quickly deliver core teams the information they need to act quickly. (*Kaleido Insights: Three Macrotrends Impacting the Journey to 2030*)

## What metrics or KPIs are you currently using to measure the effectiveness of your content?



**Visionaries** are much more likely to focus on strategic measurements, such as whether content is driving sales or whether it's converting.



18% of total respondents do not measure their content at all.

While some metrics are better indicators of success than others, don't get bogged down finding the one perfect dashboard.

Leaders and Visionaries simply measure more of everything compared to average marketers. The key is to experiment and adapt. Leaders and Visionaries constantly test what types of content gain traction and how to exploit marketing science to gain an edge. Similarly, they experiment with metrics to understand which are the best measures of audience satisfaction, growth, and revenue. They appreciate that KPIs evolve and change.

Marketing technology platforms help content marketers identify the specific metrics and KPIs that matter most—from “vanity metrics” to more meaningful metrics, such as conversions and sales. Advances in artificial intelligence will up-end the way marketers measure and optimize their content creation efforts in the coming years. AI-powered platforms will deliver the right content to the right person at the right time—supplementing human analysis with machine learning.

**Mini-Guide:**  
**Content Marketing  
KPIs and Reporting**



**Read now!**



# Marketing Profile

## **Q: What metrics do you pay closest attention to, and how has that evolved over time?**

As our blog programs have moved from the build phase to steady state, we've identified KPIs for continued growth across audience acquisition, engagement, and conversion. We have real-time visibility to these metrics through dashboards, and we measure and report on our performance and progress on a monthly, quarterly, and annual basis.

Organic search and social views are an important measure of how effectively we're connecting with our target audience's needs and interests. As a highly standardized metric, search views also provide a useful way to benchmark our performance against other B2B content marketing programs.

Average session duration, pages per session, scroll depth, and bounce rate help measure audience engagement. Once our readers come into our site(s), we aim to keep them engaged by offering up additional audience-relevant content that can create a Netflix-like binge reading experience and earn their preference as a trusted source of insights.

As our audience has grown, we've set our sights on conversion. Are we persuading our readers to take action? Opt-in subscriptions to our digests are an important opportunity to nurture our readers and drive return visits. We also measure how effectively our blogs create what we call "pathways to conversion," helping our readers discover related content and click through to other ADP properties and assets, such as webinars, solution pages, and gated assets that generate leads and support campaigns, nurture tracks, and sales conversations.



## Iterative, Agile Measurement

Stacy Landis, VP, Content Marketing, ADP

### Q: What routine habits or rituals does your team engage in that are critical to the success of the effort?

Our editorial strategy is focused on meeting our readers at the intersection of the topics they want to explore and the areas where ADP has the authority to offer valuable thought leadership. We achieve this by identifying and addressing the issues that our audiences care about in a systematic, data-driven way—through keyword research, social listening, and continuous optimization. We also employ living editorial calendars that focus on key milestones and trends that are relevant to each audience throughout the calendar year. Bringing all of this together allows us to plan timely, relevant, and actionable content in advance and publish new insights across each of our audience-centric blogs on a daily basis.

### Q: What quality do you think makes the biggest difference to your success leading this effort?

Communication and collaboration are the keys to success. Our content team partners with colleagues across digital, social, enablement, product, and business unit marketing to ensure that the insights we deliver to our audiences reflect ADP's worldview and expertise. Our blogs provide trusted, authoritative destinations on workforce matters that attract new contacts, bring them closer to our brand, and build relevance for ADP. Achieving this mission requires a collaborative, cross-functional approach to ensure content is aligned with our marketing and sales efforts and ultimately contributes to the business.

# Pain Is Universal

While those getting started with content marketing may think their pain is greater than their more experienced peers, in truth all marketers suffer in myriad ways.

Our research shows Visionaries struggle in certain categories to roughly the same degree that Novice content marketers do. Where are the biggest differences? Visionaries tend to struggle less often (though modestly so) with having sufficient bandwidth or resources; they also struggle less often with aligning the team properly.

It's an important reminder to rise above the belly-aching and make peace with discomfort. All marketers—even Leaders and Visionaries—face serious challenges and self-doubt.



Ann Handley | @AnnHandley

**Best-selling author  
and CCO of MarketingProfs**

Calling yourself a “masterful content marketer” is like calling yourself a good parent or a great friend or an excellent writer: It means more when it comes from another.

That’s especially true of content creators, because inherent to the craft is the need to take risks, to push yourself forward, and to step out of your cozy content comfort zone.

And risk, by definition, means you aren’t entirely ever sure you’re on the right path. You can use customer data and insight to inform your content program, to increase the odds that your customers and prospects will value it.

But you can’t even be 100% sure, can you?

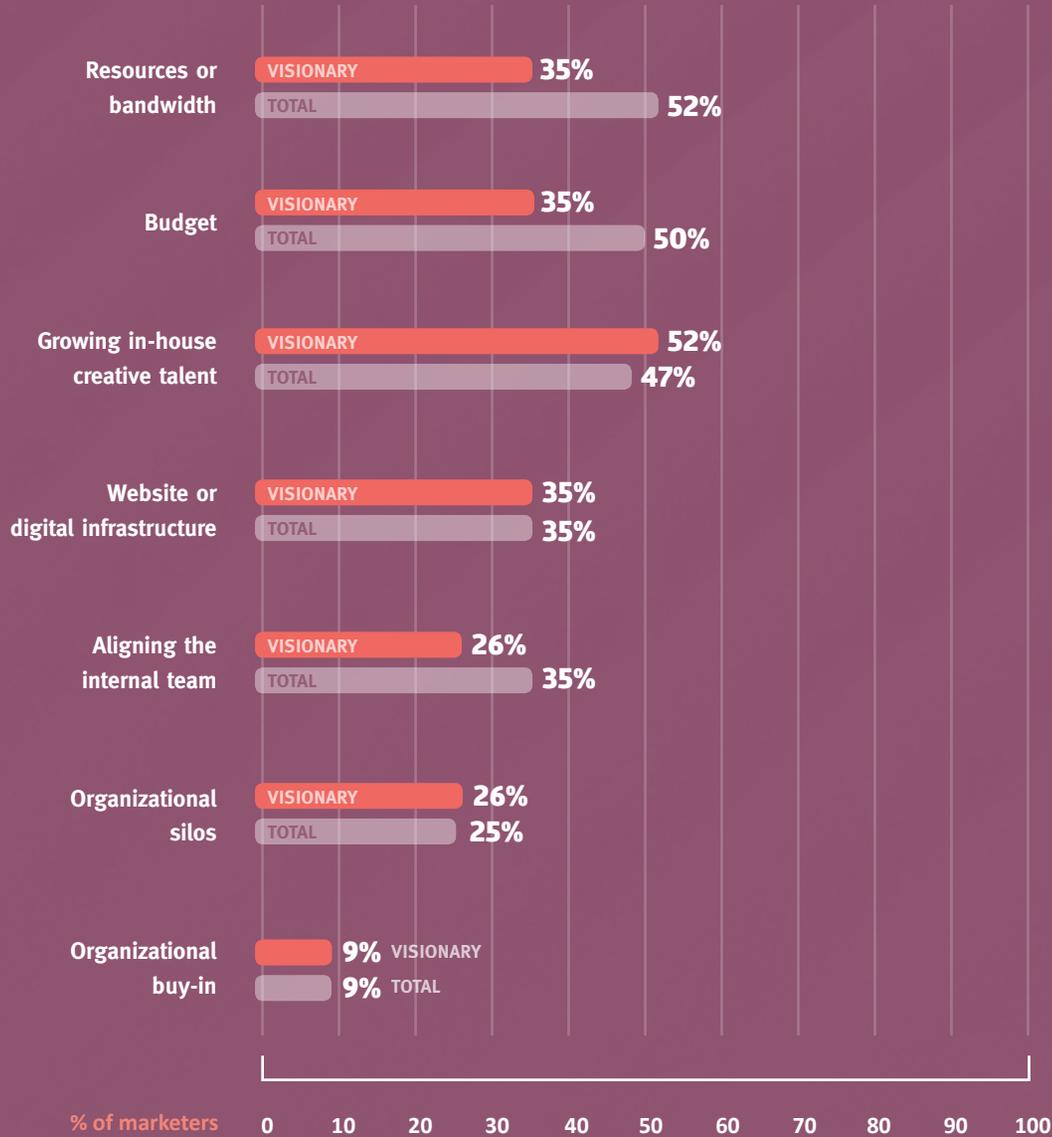
And anyway— what would be the fun in that? You didn’t go into marketing because you wanted a somber, staid, predictable life, did you? (If you wanted that, maybe you should have been an actuary.)\*

Most of us are marketers today because we crave the constant challenge, the change, the creativity, the out-of-the-box thinking that modern marketing demands.

That’s exhilarating. And scary. Or maybe both at once. Which is kind of awesome, when you think about it.

\* **Dear actuaries:** You know I’m just playing with you to make a point, right? I know you’re not actually boring. (Mostly.) I know the world needs you. Although anyway what are you doing reading a marketing publication...?

## What are your biggest obstacles or pain points?



## The question is: How do we as marketers cope with all the unknowns?

Which channels will become important and which will die off?  
How will tech innovation change the nature of our work (and which should we focus on)? What will audiences expect from us in one year? Five years? How will our company stories evolve to embrace it all?

The key is in finding fellow marketers who are excited and emboldened by all this change. Whether they are inside your company, or peers in the industry, it's critical to find a community of would-be Visionaries who are on the same journey you are on.



## Pain is Universal

Christa McHale, Content Marketing Manager, Consumer, Western & Southern Financial Group

# Marketing Profile

### Q: What are your biggest, most overwhelming challenges?

Buy-in, buy-in, buy-in! I spend more time defending why we need content marketing than I do on strategizing how to make it better. Imagine how many more leads I could generate if I didn't have to write my own story on why we need to keep telling stories.

### Q: Do you feel alone in these challenges, or do you feel others share some of the same barriers?

I am not alone. In fact, I have seen so many marketers who have struggled with this and don't have the passion or perseverance to keep climbing up the mountain. They settle, and for a good reason! It's exhausting. I try to remember a quote from Tracy McMillan, "Everything works out in the end. If it hasn't worked out yet, then it's not the end."

### Q: One thing we've heard from other marketers is that they feel pressure to try out new technologies, new tactics, and new channels. Can you explain how you ensure your team is experimenting and growing on an ongoing basis?

You aren't kidding! I barely get one thing rolled out before someone is asking, "What's next?" I understand why! We have to innovate and differentiate, but how do you do that in a flooded marketplace? One thing that our team is implementing this year is an innovation pillar to help the digital team with new technology, tactics, and channels. This will allow us marketers to focus on strategy and work with the innovation team to incorporate their findings into our current mix. Greatly looking forward to this!



## Pain is Universal

Christa McHale, Content Marketing Manager, Consumer, Western & Southern Financial Group

### Q: What routine habits or rituals does your team engage in that are critical to the success of the effort?

We work with our internal customers as if we were an agency. We consistently hold steering committee meetings with important stakeholders and try to over-communicate. As individual teams, we put out reports or status updates to help ensure consistency across the enterprise. As always, we could do more, but this helps our teams stay aligned.

### Q: What quality do you think makes the biggest difference to your success leading this effort?

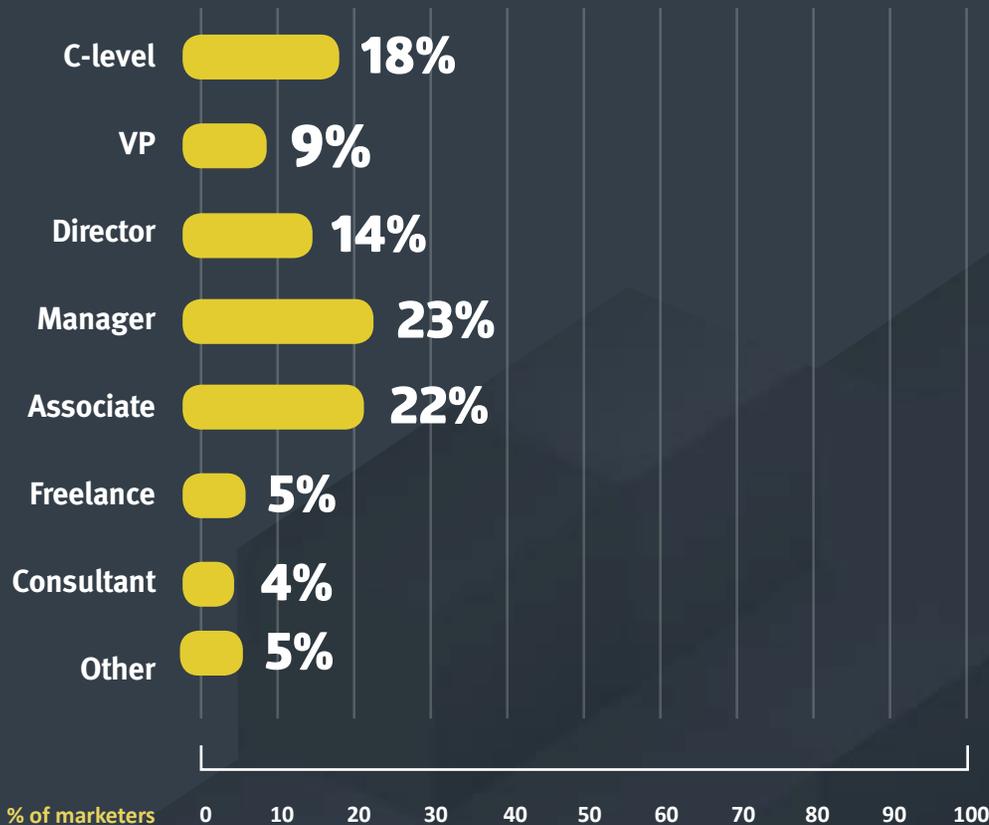
In my opinion, it's my drive and memory. I can't give up! I won't give up! I could probably just sit back in my chair with my hands behind my head and be content with where we are, but I can't do that. It's not in my blood. I won't stop until it's done and done right! You would not believe how many things I manage, from image sizes to content guidelines and SEO requirements to personas. It's not easy to remember it all, and you can only take so many notes and save so many emails. Somehow or another, I seem to remember the little details and keep things organized. I've been called TK or "Trapper Keeper" before. I guess that's pretty true!

# Survey Demographics

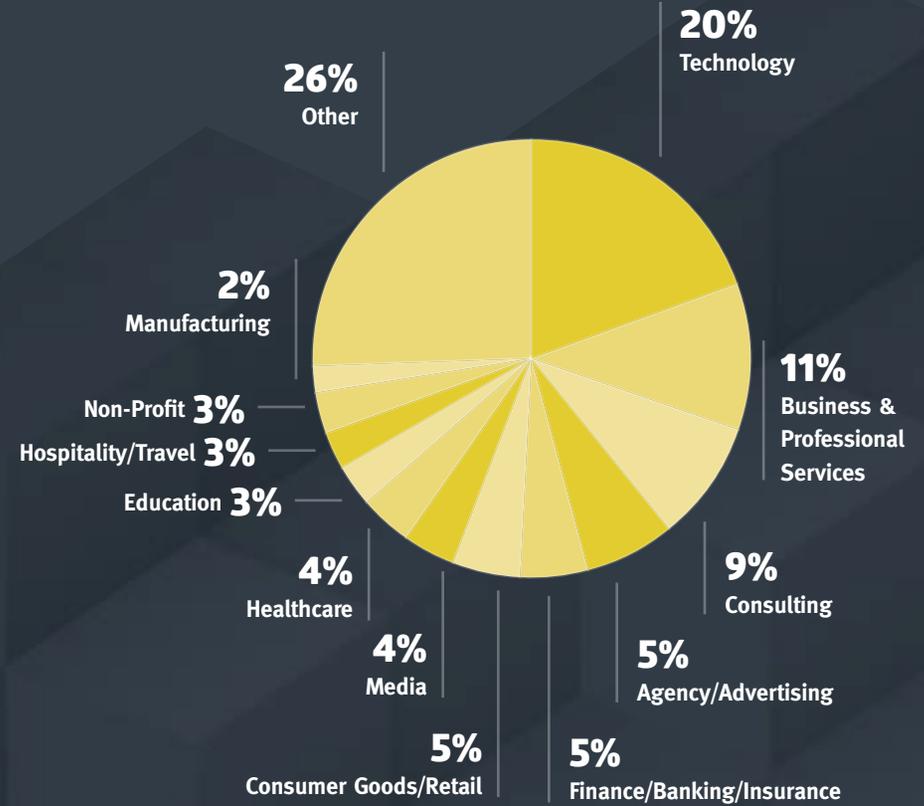
Skyword conducted a quantitative survey of **976 content marketers** during the first six months of 2017. Below find the breakdown of respondents by key demographic areas.

# Survey Demographics

## What is your level?

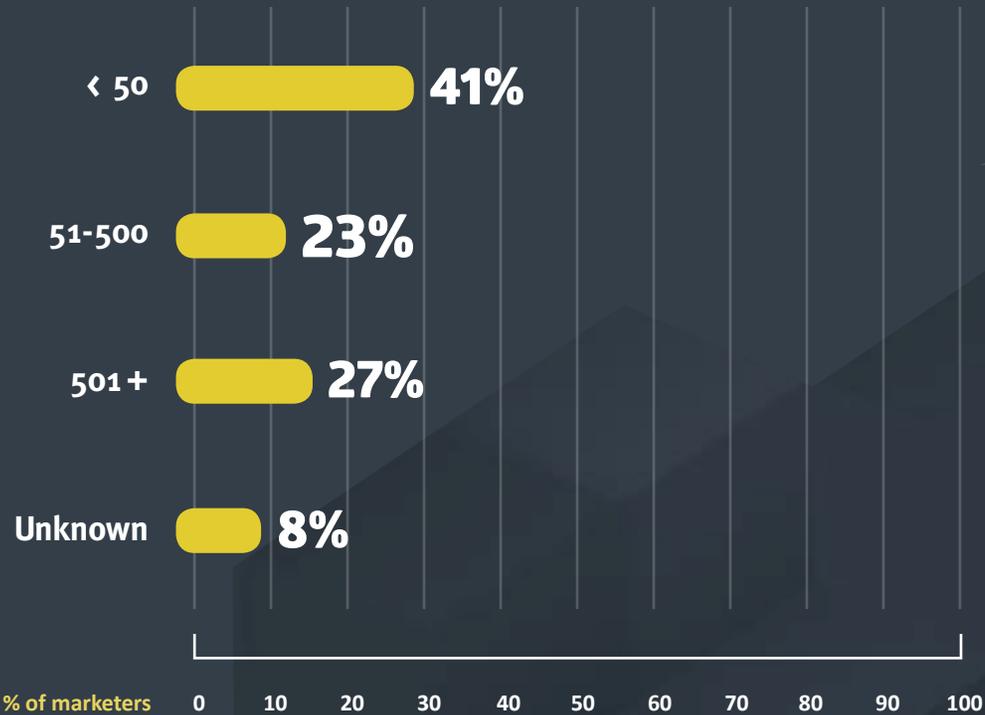


## What is your industry?



# Survey Demographics

## Number of employees



## Countries



Where does your organization  
fit into the Content Marketing  
Continuum?



**Take the  
assessment!**

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