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B2B Marketing Trends Report

December 2017



An ever-shifting landscape

In the endless search for a competitive edge, it's easy to get caught up in the hype surrounding new marketing trends and technologies. But the truth is, in B2B marketing there are no silver bullets — no surefire, “works every time” solutions.

B2B marketing is unique, and uniquely challenging. The sales cycles are long, the buyer's journey is complex, the influencers are many, and the data to drive decisions are diverse and voluminous.

As a global leader in information services and events, we at Informa Engage wanted to find out how marketers are dealing with the rapid evolution of their field. Where do their priorities lie? What's their vision for the future? We surveyed a broad spectrum of companies, gathering honest perspectives on marketing trends, challenges and priorities across a range of sectors and industries.

B2B Marketing Trends 2017 is the result of that effort. Providing a practical view of today's B2B marketing landscape, it shows clearly that data has an important impact on business decisions at almost every touchpoint. Yet, companies grapple with how to effectively leverage and elevate the role of data in their marketing measurement, targeting and user experience to drive greater profit.

We hope these findings, which we intend to update every year, will be a valuable indicator of innovation and key levers for B2B marketing strategies, and will provide a sound benchmark for companies' marketing efforts.



Thank you for your interest!

Sincerely,
Kate Spellman
President, Informa Engage, Informa

Trends at a Glance

As B2B marketers strive to boost conversions and sales, three themes stand out from this 2017 survey.



Content marketing & social media are key growth areas.

Social media and content marketing are top strategies for reaching audiences as marketers shift their tactics from interruption to engagement. Content marketing in particular is important as marketers look to reach buyers at different stages of their journeys. This kind of tracking is becoming a growing focus and area of increasing spend.



Data quality topples quantity.

B2B marketers are focused on accurate, high-quality audience data for precision targeting. Most have turned away from blast emails and broad “spray” advertising for good and are instead turning their efforts and budgets towards more finely tuned tactics. Audience data is now key to how businesses practice marketing, purchase advertising and deliver compelling customer experiences. That said, marketers do face challenges: acquiring deep data on niche audiences is expensive; and buyer intent data is still difficult to acquire.



Measurement continues to be a challenge.

More than half of our survey respondents said measuring success and proving return on investment (ROI) were top challenges for content marketing campaigns. Measurement isn't simply improving campaign reporting, it's providing the insight needed to empower more engaging experiences, tracking attribution to maximize investment, and validating marketers' efforts in delivering value to their customers.

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MARKETING TACTICS

With competition for audience attention getting more intense, B2B marketers are choosing to take more focused, targeted approaches instead of trying to “shout louder from the mountaintop.”

B2B marketing continues to rely on traditional tactics, prioritizing in-person events and advertising, but marketers are increasingly taking advantage of a more diverse range of solutions including content marketing and social media to attract and engage their audiences. Those audiences themselves are showing preferences for shorter, often visual, content forms like infographics, videos and articles.

As the lines between content and advertising continue to blur—driven strongly by the growth of native marketing channels for content distribution—it will be important for marketers to view marketing as an experience. Campaigns need to be holistic and adaptable across the full range of channels to optimize audience reach.

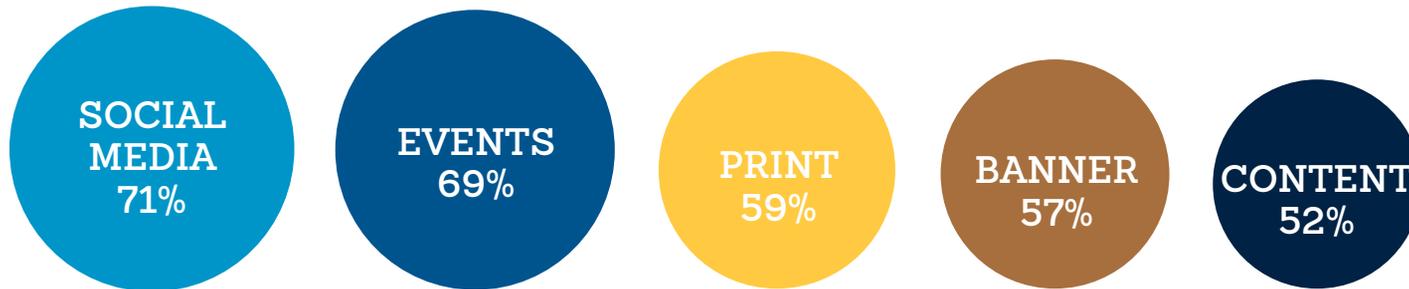


Connection counts: B2B marketing is social.

B2B marketers continued last year to rely on social media and events to engage decision makers and get buyers into the sales funnel. Social media and events were part of an all-around mix that also included print and digital advertising for building brand awareness and driving the customer journey, along with content marketing as a growing tool for guiding prospects through the sales cycle.

Going forward, as data quality improves and targeting becomes more precise, new marketing models are going to emerge that leverage intent-based tactics and personalized experiences.

2017 B2B MARKETING TOP TACTICS: ALL COMPANIES



“ We’re certainly putting money where we know things work—content, data, banners, top of funnel—but we’re also going to try investing in social, for example, which is not an area we have heavily invested in.”

Marketing Director of a Manufacturing Company

The biggest players prioritize events and content.

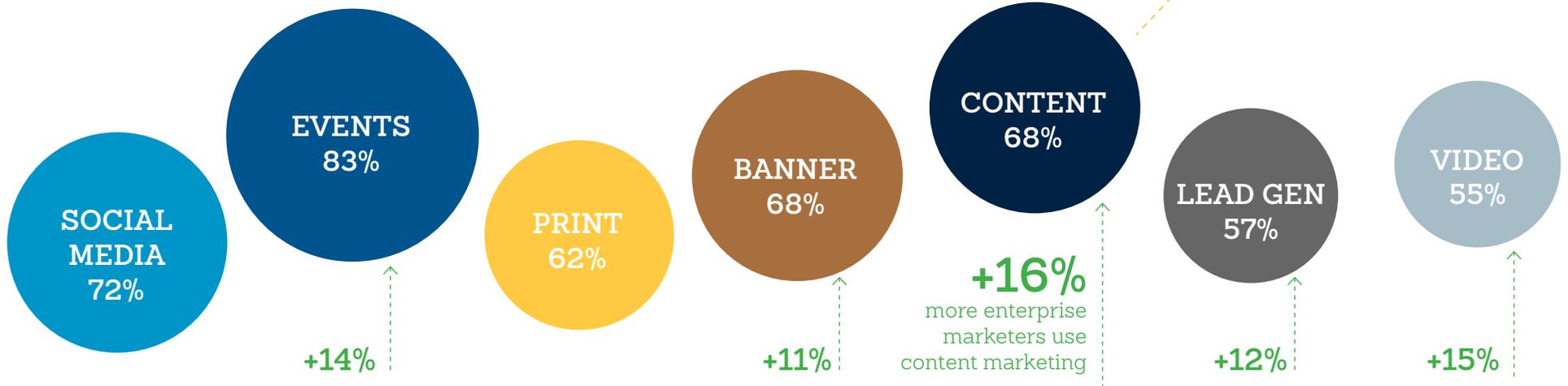
With access to greater resources, the largest companies tend to use more marketing tactics simultaneously. Compared to the overall sample, enterprise respondents put events in the top position (83% vs 69%) and content marketing (68% vs 52%) in the top three. As one may expect with larger enterprise budgets, we see more than half of those enterprise marketers relying on custom video compared to 40% of overall respondents.

» **VERTICAL SLANT**

Content marketing is king in tech—used by 80% of technology marketers.

 **80%** Technology

2017 B2B MARKETING TOP TACTICS: ENTERPRISE COMPANIES



“The cornerstones of our 2017 strategy are inbound marketing and content. We try to avoid producing content for the sake of producing content, but rather try to make sure our content maps to our target audience, through each stage of the buying and ownership cycles. We use our content to help other social and digital opportunities.”

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING FOR A SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS PROVIDER

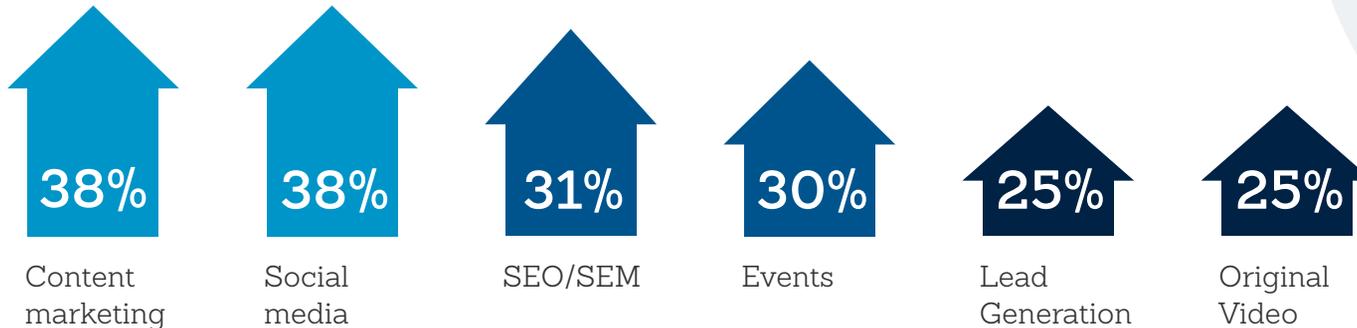
MARKETING TACTICS

Content and social get biggest spend increases.

Content marketing and social media top the list of where marketers will spend the most in the coming year, especially among enterprises and medium-sized companies. Tactics that are easiest to measure and demonstrate ROI are rising as priorities, while traditional tactics will see little increased investment, although events remain important “activators” of the buyer’s journey.

As users consume content in shorter, more visual formats and increasingly on mobile formats, marketers are responding; one in four of those surveyed said they planned to invest more in original-content video in 2018.

WHERE B2B MARKETERS WILL INCREASE INVESTMENT IN 2018



More Enterprise companies will increase their content marketing and social media spend next year.

45% Content marketing

42% Social media

CONTENT MARKETING

More and more B2B marketers are using content to propel conversations with prospects and strengthen existing customer relationships by providing a steady stream of valuable information. Those increasing their spend on content marketing are getting more strategic with the content they are developing – creating content that serves audience needs at each stages of the buyer's journey.

To maximize audience reach, most companies rely on a mix of social, owned and paid platforms for distribution. The increasing mix of distribution channels improves audience reach, but sometimes comes at the cost of reaching the desired audience targets and being able to track success back to the corresponding mix of touchpoints that led to sales.



CONTENT MARKETING USE BY INDUSTRY



80% TECHNOLOGY



65% INDUSTRY & INFRASTRUCTURE



61% FINANCIAL SERVICES



57% MEETINGS



51% AVIATION



39% PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE



34% RESTAURANT & FOOD



30% AGRICULTURE



29% AUTO & TRUCKING



23% WASTE & RECYCLING

All survey respondents.

Social channels are increasingly content channels.

Most marketers said they used social media, owned platforms and paid platforms to distribute marketing content in 2017. Email continues to be the marketer's workhorse, although the majority of respondents said they are increasingly making use of social channels for content distribution.

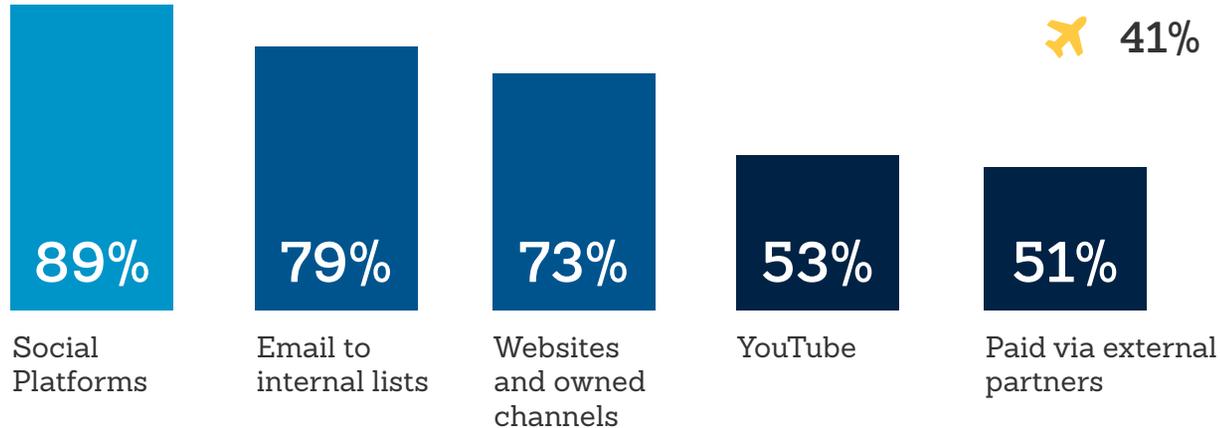
Marketers should beware of the broader audience spectrum and potentially irrelevant environment their marketing content might be aligned with on social media. B2B marketing content side-by-side a sensational fake news story will have an impact on its perceived credibility. Since B2B marketing targets niche decision makers, presenting it to B2B audiences in the context of trusted content on the same subject produces more authentic engagement.

» VERTICAL SLANT

Industries with increased content marketing spend tend to rely more heavily on paid external partners.

-  **66%** Technology
-  **53%** Industry & Infrastructure
-  **53%** Financial Services
-  **41%** Aviation

TOP WAYS CONTENT MARKETING IS DISTRIBUTED



Proving returns is a challenge.

While marketers are convinced that content marketing attracts audiences and is an effective tool for lead conversion, proving its connection to sales returns is difficult. Marketers also struggle with how best to drive traffic to content — recognizing that targeting decision makers with purchasing intent is key, as is reaching them with information they will value. To access audiences, many marketers leverage publishers' trusted connections with audiences to disseminate their content organically.



» VERTICAL SLANT

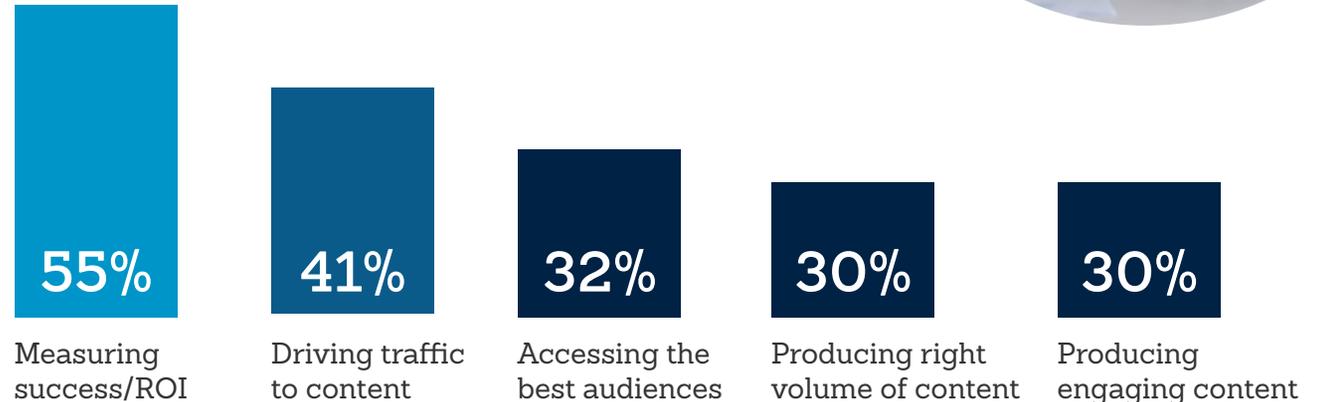
The same industries that are spending more on content marketing are more focused on measuring success.

 **60%** Industry & Infrastructure

 **59%** Financial Services

 **53%** Aviation

TOP CONTENT MARKETING CHALLENGES



“This year we focused on inbound marketing more than ever, with both content and the marketing tools we use. **Numbers don't lie.**”

MARKETING DIRECTOR FOR AN AUTOMOTIVE SOLUTIONS PROVIDER

Conversions and leads are key measures of campaign success.

It is not always easy to trace sales back to content marketing campaigns, especially for complex campaigns with multiple parts, broadly distributed assets and long sales cycles. By measuring and optimizing customer interactions across the buyer's journey, marketers can improve their sales success rates. Attribution is still a fundamental challenge—yet critical—to ensure dollars and efforts are spent on the right tactics.



HOW MARKETERS MEASURE CAMPAIGN SUCCESS

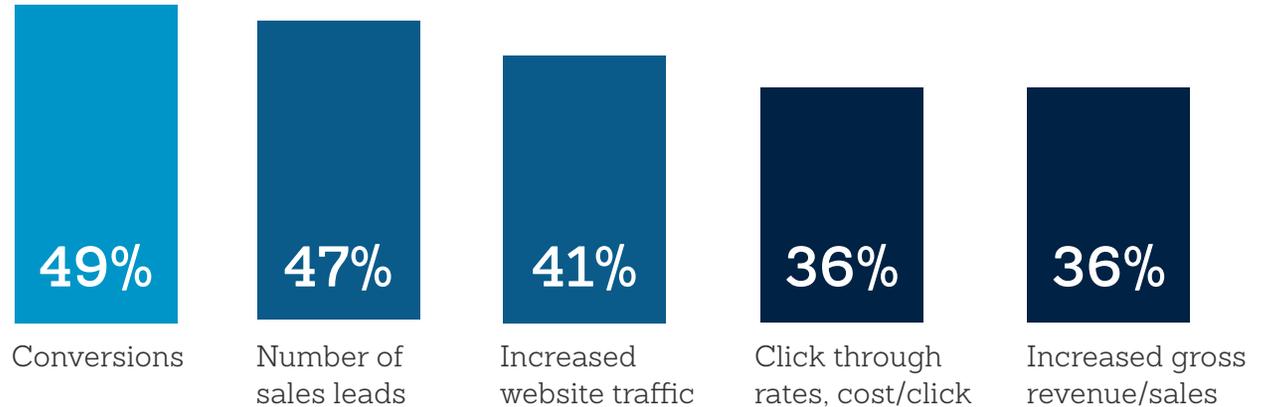
» VERTICAL SLANT

Industries increasing content marketing spend use conversion as a key success metric.

 **76%** Technology

 **62%** Industry & Infrastructure

 **56%** Financial Services



“We are always looking for new venues to make content easier to access. We’re looking for other ways and places to engage with audiences online, and to do a better job of monitoring that.”

MARKETING DIRECTOR AT AN AUTOMOTIVE SOLUTIONS PROVIDER

» VERTICAL SLANT

B2B MARKETERS INCREASING CONTENT MARKETING EFFORTS ACROSS INDUSTRIES

50%



INDUSTRY & INFRASTRUCTURE



TECHNOLOGY



FINANCIAL SERVICES



36% AVIATION



30% AUTO & TRUCKING



29% MEETINGS



29% PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE



29% WASTE & RECYCLING



24% RESTAURANT & FOOD



21% AGRICULTURE

All survey respondents.

DATA, ANALYTICS, & TARGETING

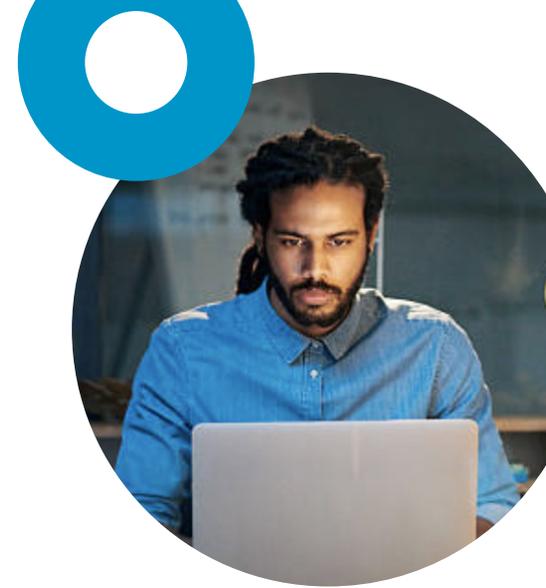
Marketing continues to become increasingly data-driven to reach specific target audiences with greater precision. As it does, marketers are looking to improve the quality of their data sources and identify partners who can help extend their reach.

Marketers tend to prefer working with their own in-house data, though they recognize the advantages that can come from reaching beyond those proprietary data sets. Choosing the right partners, and looking at new ways to use data and algorithms for activities like programmatic media buying, are questions that will continue to occupy B2B marketers in 2018.

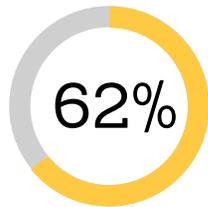


Getting the right data to reach the right audience is a challenge.

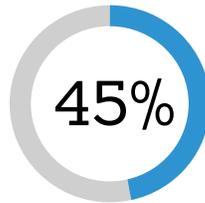
While marketers generally have access to more data these days, what they really need is the right data to refine their targeting. This tends to come at a high cost: the smaller and more focused the data pool, the higher its cost. However, evidence suggests that the increase in conversions and sales is worth the investment — provided those increases can be measured effectively.



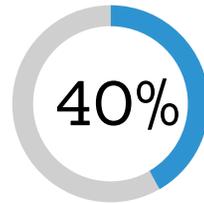
TOP AUDIENCE ACQUISITION CHALLENGES



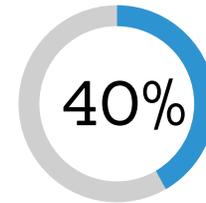
Cost



Quality of data



Finding the right decision makers



Finding people in the right place on the buyer's journey

“It used to be a very broad target. It’s now much leaner, a narrower pipe, so we have to work harder... to keep that filled, but there is more potential there. So the challenge is having fewer names on the list, fewer prospects, but the same conversion expectations. **Targeting is key.**”

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING FOR A MANUFACTURING COMPANY

Not all data are created equal.

B2B marketers rely on a mix of in-house analytics solutions and insights from third-party partners to acquire audiences. Yet, with the proliferation of data providers, not all data sources are of equivalent quality and accuracy. Marketers would benefit from access to a centralized data team capable of evaluating data sources and determining which will yield the best results—and also identifying how to utilize the capabilities of external resources to meet campaign objectives. Getting all the data in one place and using it holistically is critical to campaign success.



TOP SOURCES FOR MEETING AUDIENCE & DATA NEEDS

- 1 AUDIENCE ANALYTICS
- 2 PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS
- 3 SOCIAL MEDIA
- 4 AGENCY PARTNERS
- 5 LIST BROKERS
- 6 MEDIA PUBLISHERS

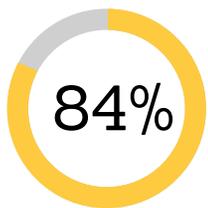
B2B marketers trust their own data first.

The marketers we surveyed consider their in-house data sets to be most valuable, turning to third-party data to fill gaps and access new audiences (by obtaining new and different perspectives on the people they want to reach). It is generally acknowledged that variable quality across data segments and providers can make third-party data challenging to work with.

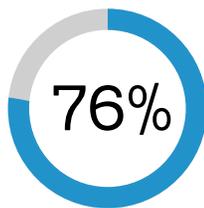
Because audiences view publishers as independent and credible sources of information, B2B marketers value publisher data. Sophisticated publishers are getting smart about how they mine their insights and behavioral data to deliver the most relevant content to audiences based on their behavioral interest.



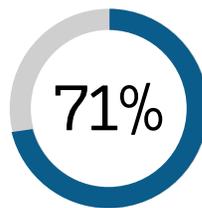
MOST COMMONLY LEVERAGED DATA SOURCES



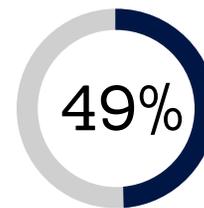
CRM Records



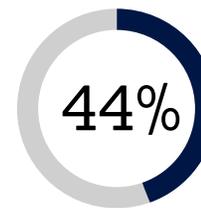
Website registrations and transaction records



Website analytics and traffic



Qualified third-party online leads



Audience rentals

“Wherever we can, we funnel in data to help us make decisions and refine the information we are pushing to our customers. We use both internal data sources and list rental and purchased data.”

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING FOR A MANUFACTURING COMPANY

Marketers look to media partners for audience quality.

The marketers we surveyed clearly believe access to a high-quality (and well qualified) audience is the key value a media partner can provide. Publishers have the opportunity to evolve relationships based on traditional advertising models into strategic relationships built around content marketing and higher levels of engagement. Those publishers able to leverage the rich insights and audience data they hold, will be able to provide a great service connecting marketers with buyers as they reach specific points in their journey. To meet marketers' needs going forward, publishers will need to prove their performance and continually improve their reporting.

WHAT MARKETERS WANT IN A MEDIA PARTNER

 Effective audience reach	63%	 Targeting/audience segment reach	45%
 Competitive pricing	56%	 Audience insights/analytics	44%
 Performance/demonstrated ROI	46%	 Market knowledge/expertise	41%

» *VERTICAL SLANT*

Audience insights and analytics were the top consideration for restaurant and food service companies.



62% Restaurant & Food

“Lack of product and industry knowledge is a challenge, and getting agencies up to speed can be a time suck. So working with a company that already has this industry knowledge is a huge benefit; your efficiencies increase, and you can hit the ground running.”

SENIOR MARKETING DIRECTOR FOR AN IT SOLUTIONS PROVIDER

B2B marketers are starting to explore programmatic buying.

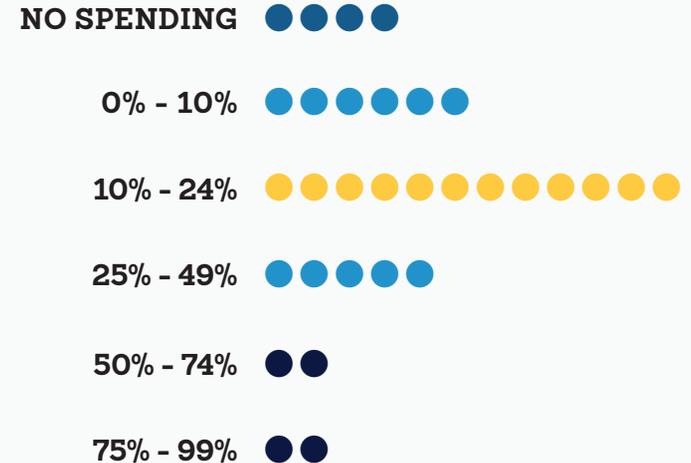
Programmatic media buying — using technology to automate and accelerate the placement of digital ads — is still far from a conventional B2B tactic, but marketers are beginning to test how to leverage it best. Adoption varies by company size and vertical: the technology, automotive, manufacturing, wealth and aviation sectors are farthest ahead, while those in agriculture, public infrastructure and trucking are just beginning to test its power. The complexity of programmatic buying and how to use it effectively for niche B2B verticals remain challenges to solve. Marketers need to figure out how to harness the data available to them, and how to ensure it is served in the most relevant context for the product.

“ We’re going to invest in programmatic buying in 2018. We’re interested in its targeting capabilities, moving beyond known prospects and getting to lookalikes.”

Marketing Manager for a Manufacturing Company

24% Average percent of digital marketing budget spent on programmatic buying.

PROGRAMMATIC BUYING FORECAST AS PERCENTAGE OF DIGITAL MARKETING

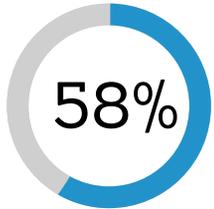


Data segment from those who specified they using programmatic as a tactic in 2017.

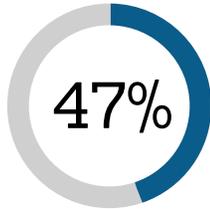
Programmatic buying is an opportunity for cost efficiency.

Programmatic media buying gives marketers new opportunities to gain competitive advantage by using marketing technology and audience data to improve targeting efficiency. Many B2B marketers see it as a way to achieve cost savings by eliminating wasted impressions and non-working media spend.

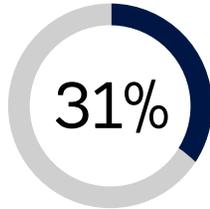
TOP BENEFITS OF PROGRAMMATIC MEDIA BUYING



Pricing, more efficient CPMs (costs/thousands)



Greater access to audience data



More sophisticated reporting analytics



What's ahead in 2018?

B2B marketers continue to refine their understanding of the buyer's journey and adopt strategies focused on moving prospects along the stages of that journey. In the B2B space, that journey is often long and complex. In the following, we'll share key trends we see shaping up for 2018.





WHAT'S AHEAD IN 2018

Content marketing will become more sophisticated.

B2B marketers will put their knowledge of the buyer's journey into action and shift from generalized content creation to developing journey-based strategies in which content is mapped to each stage.

Typically, this will see top-of-funnel content focused on the customer issue, challenge or opportunity, followed by educational content that puts solutions into context and highlights their respective advantages. End-of-journey content will focus on product/service differentiation and benefits. This refined approach to content marketing requires deep understanding of audience needs and industry motivators: working with knowledgeable partners such as publishers to leverage their understanding will be critical.

Topic-focused digital environments will emerge, capitalizing on the “binging” behavior people have already demonstrated with entertainment content. Niche websites will evolve with a range of trusted editorial content: marketers will be smart to jump on the opportunity to align with these “single-source experiences” where there is authentic alignment with the solutions they are selling.



WHAT'S AHEAD IN 2018

Marketing will become more data-driven and personalized.

As marketers continue to try to reach more targeted audiences, research will play a more important role in content creation, providing the evidence base for understanding audience needs and pain points. In more sophisticated markets, this will lead to greater personalization, with messaging tailored not only to decision makers but also to influencers. Better data will help marketers ensure the right content reaches the right people.

Advances will be made in merging first-party data with third-party data — new products will come to market that allow companies to capture third-party data in real-time and add it to their own datasets. This will help companies understand prospect activity outside their owned channels and target their messages to enhance the content prospects engage with on partner sites, like those hosted by publishers.



WHAT'S AHEAD IN 2018

Measurement will continue to evolve.

This year's survey found that easier-to-measure tactics are proving their returns on investment and receiving increased funding. What marketers measure will continue to evolve: increased website traffic — this year's number-three result — will likely be displaced by other, more sophisticated measures of quality versus quantity, i.e., ones that show engagement versus simply visits. Vendors that supply marketing services will need to improve their ability to prove ROI on marketing campaigns to become valued partners.

More technologies will be adopted to provide a single view of a prospect or customer. Siloed data has been a problem for years, and the tolerance for working across those silos has diminished, driving demand for change, especially in larger enterprises.

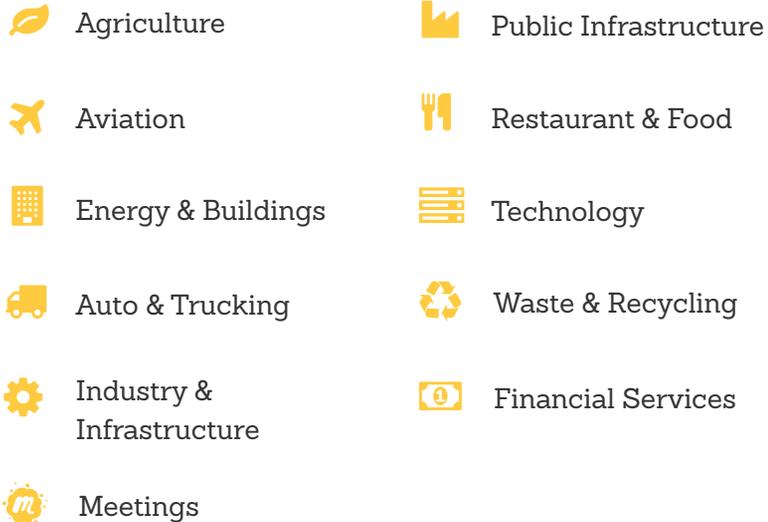
“Our gaps center around big data, online/offline attribution, and especially, understanding the decision paths in the B2B buyer’s journey. The company that can crack the code on that? **They’re sitting on a goldmine.**”

MARKETING PROFESSIONAL FOR A WEALTH MANAGEMENT COMPANY

Methodology

Between August 1 and August 25, 2017, Informa Engage invited contacts within its database of B2B companies to participate in an online survey about marketing challenges and trends. The 475 respondents, 86% of whom are located in the USA, represent a range of industries, company sizes and job responsibilities.

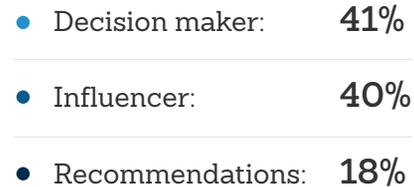
INDUSTRY COMPOSITION OF SAMPLE



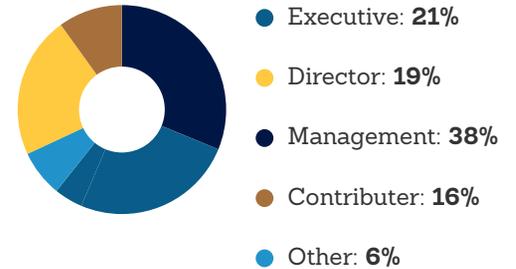
COMPANY SIZE



DECISION INVOLVEMENT



JOB ROLE



2017 ANNUAL MARKETING BUDGETS



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GLOBAL REACH TO 30+ MILLION BUSINESS DECISION MAKERS.

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250+

DATA, INSIGHT &
INTELLIGENCE
PRODUCTS

INTELLIGENCE

110K+

ACADEMIC BOOKS
& JOURNALS

KNOWLEDGE

1,800+

EVENTS &
EXHIBITIONS

EVENTS

180+

COUNTRIES
WORLDWIDE FUELING
A RICH DATABASE

GLOBAL REACH

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