

# 2018

# CONTENT FITNESS REPORT



# INTRODUCTION

**H**ow does your content marketing strategy shape up against the competition?

In 2017, marketers set their sights on building out content programs to accommodate new trends centered around customer trust and brand awareness.

At the start of 2018, we found that while marketers were making progress, many still struggled with alignment, positioning, and measuring the customer journey to determine ROI – especially when building influencer and mobile marketing strategies.

Customers are demanding personalized experiences across multiple channels, challenging marketers to create dynamic strategies that connect online engagement with real-world interactions. Emerging trends like video, influencer marketing, and mobile give marketers more opportunities to expand their reach and diversify their content in ways they haven't been able to before. More sophisticated marketing technology opens new doors for precise data analysis and insights, allowing teams to better understand and target the right audiences with laser-focus insight and emotional connections.

We're focused on helping marketers understand and fill gaps in their content marketing by using data-driven insights to align teams and power compelling content across every stage of the funnel. But as the customer journey becomes more complex, marketers need to figure out how to create cohesive stories that translate across all mediums and forge the right influencer partnerships for authentic brand engagement and promotion.

In early 2018, PAN Communications surveyed 200+ marketing leaders as part of its fifth annual Content Fitness Test. The questions focused on measuring the "health" of their content marketing programs within their organizations, with an emphasis on strategy development, technology and data.

All participants in the survey were identified as having "responsibility for their company's content marketing strategy." Our goal is to better understand how marketers today view the strengths and weaknesses of their content marketing, content creation, and content execution strategies, and how content plays a role in the overall brand marketing mission.

The following insights will help marketers better understand how to approach innovation for their own content strategies, and how to focus their efforts to conquer challenges for more successful marketing campaigns as their audience become inundated with all forms of content.



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Marketers are taking more time in assessment and reassessment of buyer personas and overall brand positioning, as content marketing becomes a more integrated aspect of their organizations.

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Content initiatives are growing, with social media, influencer marketing and demand generation as top priorities.

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Marketers are beginning to feel more confident with influencer marketing, but are challenged by identifying the right opportunities.

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# CONTENT STRATEGY AND INNOVATION

## CONCLUSION 1

**Marketers are taking more time in assessment and reassessment of buyer personas and overall brand positioning, as content marketing becomes a more integrated aspect of their organizations.**

## BY THE NUMBERS

# 46.5%

OF MARKETERS SAY THEY FREQUENTLY UPDATE THEIR BUYER PERSONAS AND HAVE TAILORED CONTENT STRATEGIES MAPPED TO EACH PROFILE.

# 54%

OF MARKETERS SAY THEY ARE CONSTANTLY REASSESSING THEIR BRAND MESSAGING AND POSITIONING.

# 46.5%

OF MARKETERS SAY THEIR CONTENT MARKETING PROGRAM IS FULLY INTEGRATED WITH THEIR OVERALL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY.

## A CLOSER LOOK

Buyer personas are a core element for framing content and identifying the right channels for delivery. But creating a full customer profile is becoming increasingly complex in the face of evolving demands, and more complicated cross-channel journeys.

A data-driven strategy is needed to help provide a 360 view of the customer and set the wheels in motion for more personalized experiences.

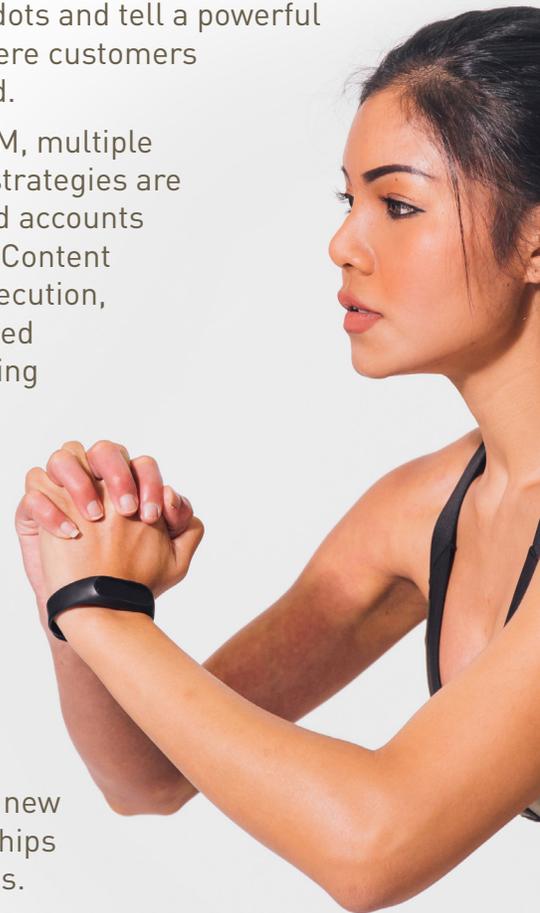
Having one or two buyer personas may no longer be enough to fully encompass the scope of your customer base, especially when there are more touchpoints, mediums, and channels to account for. Content strategies must be closely aligned with the customer journey to connect the dots and tell a powerful brand story, no matter how or where customers choose to interact with your brand.

For B2B marketers practicing ABM, multiple personas are a must, as content strategies are developed specifically for qualified accounts with unique needs or pain points. Content development is centric to ABM execution, and must be successfully integrated across both the sales and marketing teams for seamless alignment at every stage of the customer journey.

Identifying buyer personas (let alone multiple buyer personas) can be a challenging and time-consuming process. Data-driven insights can help your team discover all the players who may be involved in purchasing decisions and identify new opportunities to nurture relationships with potential customers or clients.

*“Inside a complex B2B company, CEB now says there’s 6.8 people on average involved in the internal buying committee to make a decision. How well do you understand who those 6.8 people are? What roles do they play, what approaches do they bring to the table that are different from each other?”*

- Matt Heinz, President, CEO, Heinz Marketing



# CONTENT STRATEGY AND INNOVATION

## WHEN EVALUATING BUYER PERSONAS, ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

- How does our ideal customer typically interact with our brand?
- How does our ideal customer expect to engage with our brand? On social media? On our website? Via email?
- What devices do our customers use to engage with our brand?
- How can we provide unique value points at every stage of the buyer journey to create a seamless cross-channel experience for our ideal customer?

### STARTING OUT SMALL:

**13.6%**  
*of marketers say they rely on free tools and social media to get their content marketing efforts started.*

In some cases, marketing teams may not have the time, or the manpower, to do the extensive research for robust persona development. More than half of marketers we surveyed said they are either in the beginning or intermediate stages of buyer persona development, or only had one complete persona currently mapped to their target audience.

Around 46 percent said they are taking a multi-persona approach and have detailed content strategies mapped to each profile.

Customer experience can also be completely different depending on how a user chooses to engage with your brand. For example, content strategies that work well on desktop may not translate strongly on mobile. Or, messaging that shines on social media may fall flat when presented in an email, or on your website.

It's a balancing act. On one hand, you need to create a variety of unique content experiences tailored to specific channels. But at the same time, all those experiences need cohesion that's authentic and consistent with your overall brand voice.

Luckily, sophisticated marketing technology has given organizations more data visibility. Fifty-six percent of marketers we surveyed say they already have a handful of tools integrated to help measure content marketing efforts, or feel confident with their suite. Nearly 30 percent of marketers that don't have the tools they need are currently exploring and evaluating options to help fill the gap.

**LEARN MORE WITH OUR EBOOK:**  
**[HOW TO MASTER BUYER PERSONAS FOR BUSINESS](#)** 📖

# BUDGETING AND PRIORITY

## CONCLUSION 2

**Content initiatives are growing, with social media, influencer marketing and demand generation as top priorities.**

Budget constraints continue to be a problem for marketing organizations looking to expand content initiatives. While content marketing budgets have grown overall, more than half of marketers we surveyed said their content marketing budgets grew by 5-10 percent (28.74 percent) or have remained stagnant or decreased since 2017 (26.44 percent). Only 16.09 percent of marketers surveyed said their budgets grew by 25 percent or more.

Content marketing and thought leadership were some of the biggest priorities for 2018, coming out ahead of other, more traditional mediums, like digital advertising.

This shift in budget allocations reflects directly on some of the biggest challenges marketers said they faced with digital and content marketing in 2017. Marketers surveyed last year said creating a variety of media (paid, owned, and earned) and setting up a good pace of content were their top priorities (30 percent each, respectively), followed by increased focus on influencer and ABM strategies.

It's interesting to note that less than 20 percent of marketers we surveyed plan to invest in growing their martech stack. Last year, Gartner predicted that 50 to 65 percent of marketing executives anticipated spending more on marketing tech in 2017. This shift could indicate that marketers are starting to have more confidence in the tools they are currently using and are closer to having the complete suite of tools they need to effectively execute their content marketing strategies.

Changes in priority also corresponds to a growing need for more content-based initiatives across the entire marketing organization. This could be due to the necessity of personalization across all marketing verticals, which requires more care for content diversification and more integrated PR, marketing and sales teams.

## WHAT ARE YOUR BUDGET PRIORITIES THIS YEAR?

Content + Social Media Marketing	60.23%
Thought Leadership	50%
Demand Gen (webinars, events, gated content)	45.45%
Digital Advertising	45.45%
Overall Department Growth	37.5%
Influencer Marketing	31.82%
Employee and Customer Advocacy	21.59%
Martech Investment	19.32%

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**"WHY PR IS A CRITICAL PIECE OF YOUR INBOUND MARKETING STRATEGY"** ✨

# INFLUENCER MARKETING

## CONCLUSION **3**

**Marketers are beginning to feel more confident in their influencer marketing strategies, but are challenged by identifying the right opportunities.**

## BY THE NUMBERS

# 58%

OF MARKETERS SURVEYED ARE IN THE **BEGINNER STAGES** OF THEIR INFLUENCER MARKETING PROGRAMS.

# 76%

OF MARKETERS ARE CURRENTLY **NOT USING EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY** AS PART OF THEIR INFLUENCER STRATEGY.

# BIG obstacles

**BUDGETING AND STRATEGY ARE THE BIGGEST OBSTACLES** MARKETERS SAY THEY FACE WHEN BUILDING INFLUENCER PROGRAMS.

## A CLOSER LOOK

When it comes to influencer strategy, marketers struggle with issues of alignment, and impactful spending for ROI. There's also a large gap in maturity models between organizations. Only six percent of marketers said they had an "advanced" influencer program, with the majority identifying as having "beginner" or "intermediate" strategies in place.

According to a [2017 Lingia study](#), 78 percent of marketers said that tying ROI to influencer efforts was a major challenge. When determining how your influencer marketing efforts should be attributed, turn to your data to help map out the entire journey, and see where influencers play (or should play) a bigger role.

## SOME METRICS TO CONSIDER:

- **How much traffic influencer posts drive to your website**
- **How much revenue is generated from individual influencer posts?**
- **What parts of the customer journey are impacted most (initial interest, comparing products, final purchase, etc.)?**
- **New customer vs. returning customer ratios**
- **Average order values**

Having a clear, data-driven understanding of the role influencers play in your overall marketing mission will allow your team to make more knowledgeable decisions on budgeting and delivery. Nearly 57 percent of marketers we surveyed said their biggest brand advocacy issue was lack of industry influencers. The key is making sure you're investing in the right influencers, who will work to extend your message to the audiences that matter most.



# INFLUENCER MARKETING

## QUICK TIPS:

- **Choosing influencers:** Consider the type of engagement you want that aligns with your budget and goals. A larger influencer may give you reach for brand awareness, but is typically more expensive. Niche influencers, or “micro-influencers” are generally less expensive, and are good partners for reaching more targeted audiences.
- **Payment options:** Instead of paying upfront “one and done” costs, consider options like revenue share, where influencers are paid a percentage of every conversion directly tied to their efforts. This will help incentivize influencers to promote your content.
- **Earned media:** Look at organic ways to integrate with influencers to begin and move to a paid model over time.

## PRO TIP: ENGAGE YOUR EMPLOYEES

Aside from lack of industry influencers, one of the biggest disconnects we found in our survey was the lack of organizations tapping into their C-suite and internal workforce to drive earned media opportunities. Seventy-five percent of marketers surveyed said they didn't have a content marketing strategy in place to foster employee advocacy.

According to a [Hinge Research Institute](#) study, 96 percent of respondents said they benefited from employee engagement on social media, and 45 percent attributed new revenue streams to employee advocacy.

[Nielsen data](#) shows customers are more likely to trust recommendations from people they know over traditional brand messaging. Incentivizing employees to showcase company culture and events can help create more authentic stories about your brand, told by people who work at your organization every day. Engaging employees can also help promote overall work morale, recruiting, and retention rates among your workforce.

## LEARN MORE WITH OUR EBOOK:

**[“THE POWER OF VOICE: THE ART + SCIENCE OF INFLUENCER MARKETING”](#)** ✨



# EMERGING TRENDS

## CONCLUSION 4

Companies are seeing success with video marketing, but still struggle on mobile.

### BY THE NUMBERS

# 64%

OF MARKETERS WHO USE VIDEO AS PART OF THEIR CONTENT STRATEGY SAY THEY'VE SEEN SUCCESS WITH THEIR PROGRAM.

# MORE THAN 33%

OF MARKETERS SAY THEY LACK A MOBILE-FIRST STRATEGY, AND STRUGGLE WITH DELIVERING THE RIGHT CONTENT TO SATISFY THE MOBILE USER JOURNEY.

### A CLOSER LOOK

As we mentioned before, the customer journey is no longer linear — it spans multiple channels, with a growing number of complex touchpoints. Video and mobile (and subsequently, mobile video) are becoming important elements for the customer experience.

Cisco projects video will make up around 82 percent of all global internet traffic by 2021. Most marketers we surveyed (80 percent) said they were already using video for internal, external, and social media marketing strategies, with 64 percent saying they've already seen an increase in engagement rates.

Where marketers struggle with customer experience, however, is on mobile. More than one-third of marketers we surveyed said they lacked a mobile-first strategy, while others cited issues

*Customers are 62% less likely to purchase from a brand in the future if they've had a negative experience on mobile.*

- Google

with mobile-friendly content creation, and lack of understanding of the customer journey.

Mobile experiences are different from other online and offline interactions. According to Forrester's 2017 Mobile Engagement Automation Report, there are 30 billion "moments" that

## WHAT'S THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE YOU FACE WITH MOBILE MARKETING?

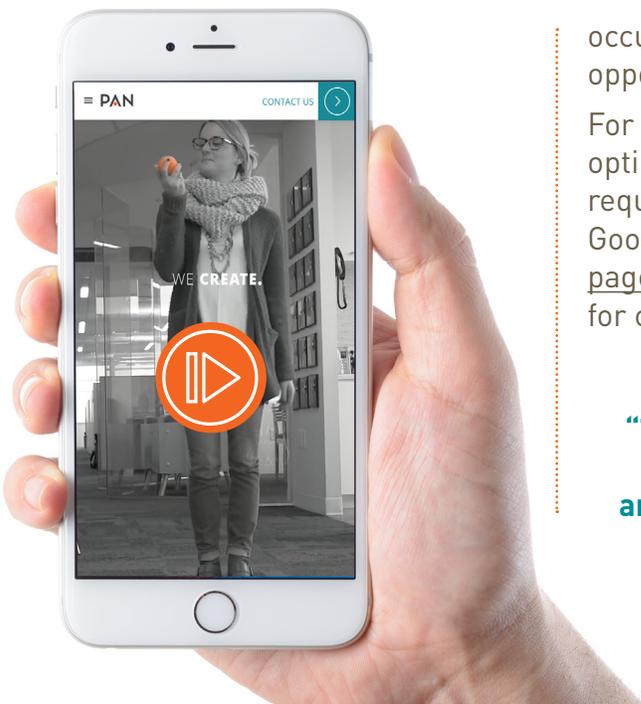
Lack of a mobile-first strategy	34.15%
Budget for mobile-friendly content	23.17%
Inadequate understanding of the user journey	23.17%
Lack of compelling content on mobile	19.51%

occur on mobile across the U.S. every day. Each moment is a new opportunity for marketers to connect with customers.

For mobile marketing success, content and digital ads must be optimized for mobile page size and speed, which have different requirements than their desktop counterparts. Earlier this year, Google announced they would be placing more emphasis on mobile page speed when indexing for SEO, making it even more important for content marketing initiatives.

**"Today, there is this convergence of this digital and physical world, and there's this network of devices that co-exist around individuals, and mobile is in the forefront of that...All experiences are mobile experiences."**

- Marissa Aydtlett, SVP, Marketing, Braze (formerly Appboy)



# OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

## CONCLUSION 5

Measuring ROI and keeping up with competition are two of the biggest challenges marketers face when defining the success of their overall content strategy.

### BY THE NUMBERS

**62%**

OF MARKETERS STILL STRUGGLE WITH DETERMINING ROI TIED TO THEIR CONTENT MARKETING EFFORTS

**ONLY 21%**

OF MARKETERS SAY THEY'RE "AHEAD OF THEIR COMPETITORS" WHEN IT COMES TO THE STRENGTH OF THEIR CONTENT MARKETING PROGRAM

### A CLOSER LOOK

The ability to measure ROI has been a consistent challenge for marketers, as proven by past Content Fitness reports. In 2017, a whopping 76 percent of marketers we surveyed said they didn't feel confident in their ability to properly attribute ROI to their content marketing programs. There's been a slight increase in confidence this year (down to 62 percent) but it's still considerably higher than the 51 percent we saw back in 2016.

In 2017, we found that 24 percent of marketers couldn't prove their marketing efforts resulted in sales and/or revenue.

Marketers we surveyed also expressed a lack of confidence about their ability to keep up against their competitors. It's important to remember that creating a strong, well-managed content strategy isn't a race — it's a marathon. Implementing a full-scale ABM program, for example, can take as long as two years.

Nurture campaigns for demand generation can take equally as long, depending on the size and scale of your content delivery campaigns.

When creating your content strategy, it's important to remember that more content doesn't always mean better results. Focus on creating valuable, high-quality assets that solve real problems or answer real questions your potential customers may have. If customers value your resources, your brand becomes more trusted as an industry leader, propelling your company ahead of the pack.

*In 2017, we found that 24% of marketers couldn't prove their marketing efforts resulted in sales and/or revenue.*

**21%**  
SAID THEY FELT THEY WERE "AT THE TOP OF THEIR GAME."

**64%**  
SAID THEY WERE "GETTING THERE" BUT STILL LOSING SALES/MQLS TO COMPETITORS.

**15%**  
SAID THEY WERE BEHIND BECAUSE THEIR MODEL ISN'T MATURE ENOUGH.



# OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

First, you need to ensure all members of your organization — sales, PR, marketing, and the C-suite — are on board and understand the long-term, big-picture goals (often easier said than done). However, a data-driven strategy can help provide the numbers you need to accurately forecast benchmarks and help score executive buy-in.

Once you've set your benchmarks, leverage your customer data to identify personas and determine your plan of action. Strong content marketing is about creating a suite of assets that provide real value to your customers. Your work should be thoughtful, authentic, educational, and heavily evergreen. A comprehensive guide that educates your audience about their pain points, for example, can provide more value to your customers over extended periods of time.

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STRATEGY FROM THE GROUND UP"** 







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