

# 10 WAYS TO DRIVE KILLER ROI WITH YOUR SPONSORED CONTENT

*Practical Examples from Top-Performing Brands on LinkedIn*

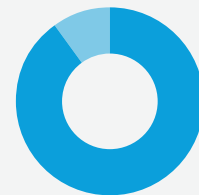
# 10 Ways to Drive Killer ROI with your Sponsored Content.

You know the story. The B2B buyer's journey is 90 percent complete by the time he or she engages with sales,<sup>1</sup> and on average, buyers will consume 10.4 pieces of content on their way to a purchase decision.<sup>2</sup> That's why savvy content marketers use Sponsored Content to keep their brand in front of prospects at every stage of the buyer's journey.

As a regular Sponsored Content user, you already know the value of distributing your content on the world's only professional feed. Now it's time to kick your publishing prowess up a notch. In this short guide, we'll reveal the ten most effective Sponsored Content tactics to help boost your return on investment (ROI). Let's get to it.

<sup>1</sup> Forrester, "Buyer Behavior Helps B2B Marketers Guide the Buyer's Journey," October 2012

<sup>2</sup> Zero Moment of Truth Study, Google



**90%**

of the buyer's journey is complete by the time they engage with sales.



**10.4**

pieces of content are consumed by buyers on their way to a purchase decision.

# 1. Followers and paid targets want different things: Tailor your content accordingly.

*A follower is a member who opted in to receive updates from your Company Page or your Showcase Page. You can see the size and composition of your followers on your Company Page's Analytics dashboard.*

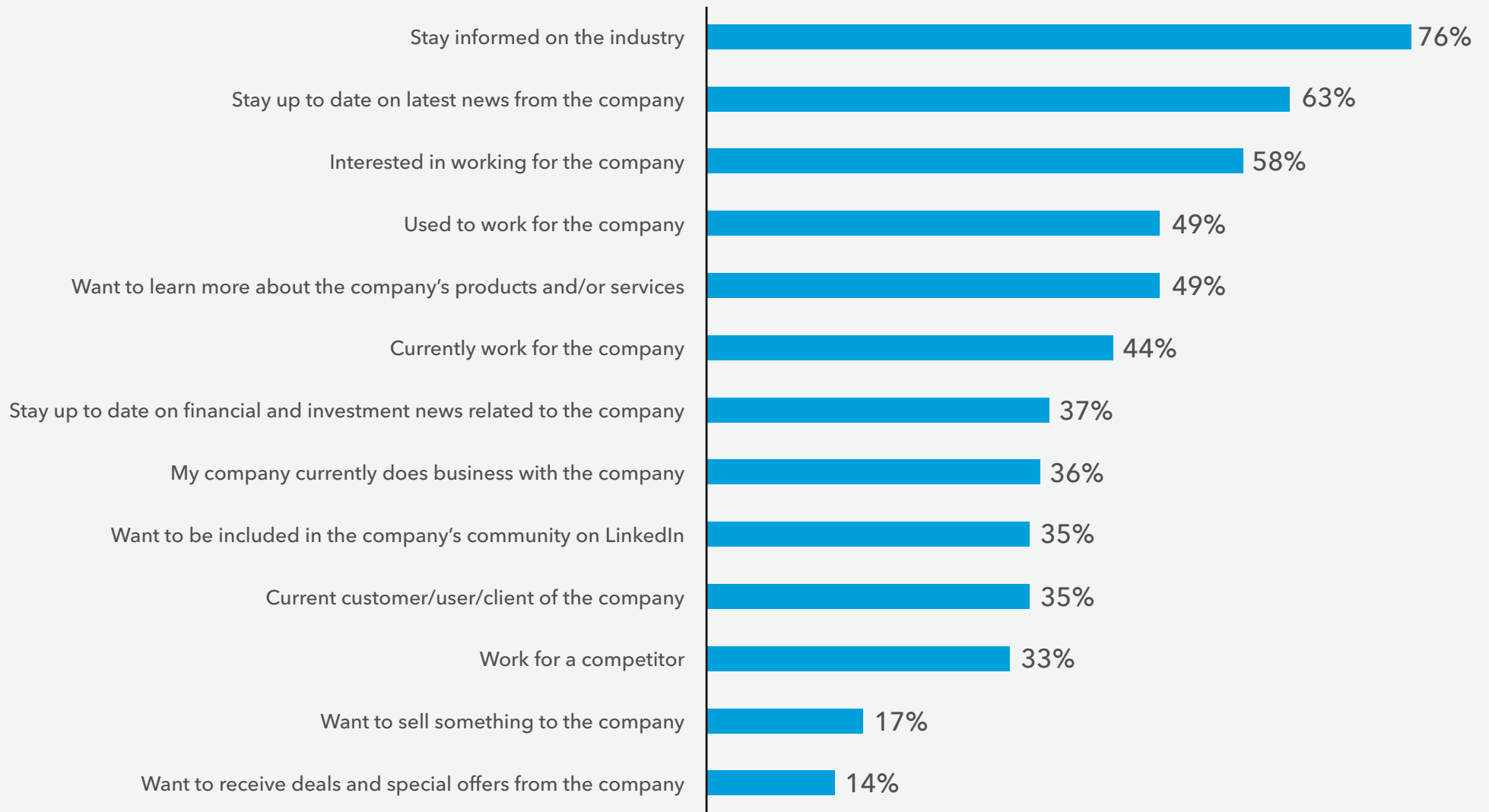
Your Company Page followers have opted in to receive regular updates from your company. It's likely that they are interested in different content than your target audience. For example, a large portion of your followers may include past, current, or prospective employees or people who are already doing business with your company. They may be interested in updates regarding the latest company news and whether or not you're hiring. Your target audiences on the other hand **may not yet be familiar with your brand or your service offerings. Your goal should be to educate them through content.** Here's how to manage your Organic Updates (on your Company or Showcase Page) to your followers vs Sponsored Content to your target audience:

# What your Company Page Followers want to hear:

In a recent survey, LinkedIn asked members to cite the primary reasons they follow companies on LinkedIn. Here's what they said:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>LinkedIn Internal Study, May 2015

% Among US Followers



# What your Target Audience wants to hear:

One surefire way to get high engagement in your Sponsored Content is to write about things that interest LinkedIn members. Here are trending topics in some popular sectors on LinkedIn for inspiration:

High Tech Industry Engagement  
(Clicks + Likes + Comments + Shares)



Financial Advisors Engagement  
(Clicks + Likes + Comments + Shares)



Manufacturing Industry Engagement  
(Clicks + Likes + Comments + Shares)



## Pro Tip:

Do you know how frequently you should post to engage your Company Page Followers and your target audience?

**Company Page Updates:** Provide a steady stream of content for your followers to consistently engage them. Best-in-class content marketers post one to three updates per day on their Company or Showcase Pages.

**Sponsored Content:** Sponsor two to four updates at any time to maximize your reach to your target audience. Pro actively optimize or cycle out the updates that aren't achieving your key performance indicators (KPIs).



## 2. Build trust first, then ask for contact information.

*LinkedIn data reveals that infographics, blog posts, and industry trends work best to drive engagement in the upper funnel. To generate leads and drive bottom-funnel conversions, go with gated content such as white papers, product demos and trials, and product reviews.*

Your sales rep wouldn't just walk up to a prospect at an industry event and ask him or her for their phone number. If he did, his chances of getting a valid contact would be slim to none. That's because there's no relationship yet—he's done nothing to engender trust.

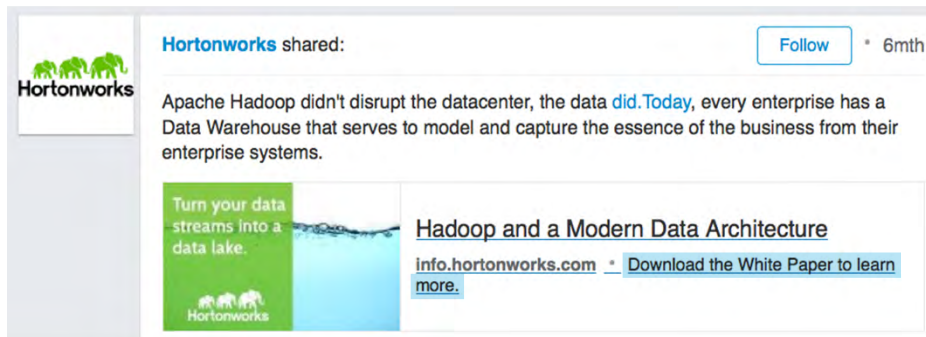
The same rule applies to content marketing. Serving up Sponsored Content to a prospect at the bottom of the funnel is like asking for their phone number without introducing yourself. You need to deliver relevant content at *every step* of the buyer's journey.

We've already established that people on average consume 10+ pieces of content before making a purchase decision. That means *you have 10+ opportunities to publish Sponsored Content that effectively introduce your brand, build trust, provide helpful information, and ultimately inform a purchase decision.*

Start by creating a content calendar that includes everything from top-funnel infographics and SlideShare presentations to bottom-funnel eBooks and whitepapers. *Serve up the lighter materials first to build awareness, educate, and entertain, then offer gated materials to capture the lead.*

# Pro Tip:

Clear calls to action (CTAs) will maximize your clicks and conversions to gated content. How do you write a clear CTA? Tell people exactly what they'll get when they click and how they'll be able to use it. **This CTA from Hortonworks for a whitepaper download couldn't be more direct:**



The screenshot shows a LinkedIn sponsored content post. On the left is the Hortonworks logo, which consists of three green elephants of varying heights above the word "Hortonworks". To the right of the logo, it says "Hortonworks shared:" followed by a "Follow" button and "6mth". The main text of the post reads: "Apache Hadoop didn't disrupt the datacenter, the data [did](#). Today, every enterprise has a Data Warehouse that serves to model and capture the essence of the business from their enterprise systems." Below this text is a promotional graphic for a whitepaper. The graphic is split into two parts: a green left side with the text "Turn your data streams into a data lake." and a blue right side with the text "Hadoop and a Modern Data Architecture". Below the graphic, there is a link: "info.hortonworks.com - Download the White Paper to learn more."





### 3. Boost your content ROI through repurposing.

It takes a lot of time, energy, and resources to produce long-form content with real value. So, you want to be sure you get as much out of your gated eBooks and guides as you can. LinkedIn's own content guru Jason Miller refers to such tomes as "Big Rock" content. And his popular "Sophisticated Marketer's Guide to LinkedIn" provides a textbook example of how to repurpose content for every stage of the buyer's journey.

From one comprehensive bottom-funnel guide, Jason was able to carve out a variety of full-funnel pieces—including blogs, infographics, webinars, videos, SlideShare presentations, and more—achieving a phenomenal ROI.





## Pro Tip:

Leverage your employee network to scale up your reach:

One of the most cost-effective and efficient ways to spread the word is through your own employees. Take advantage of earned media opportunities by encouraging your employees to mention, share, post, or link back to the content you create. There's no easier way to get exponential exposure for your brand. By leveraging your employees' own professional networks, you can expand the reach of your Sponsored Content campaigns.

In a recent Sponsored Content [case study](#), Dutch Bank ABN AMRO revealed that their “secret weapon” for scaling always-on content is their people. The bank's social media team distributes a content calendar to all employees every week, explaining what they'll be posting to their Company Page and when. Now they have 600 people who can share ABN AMRO's content with their connections.

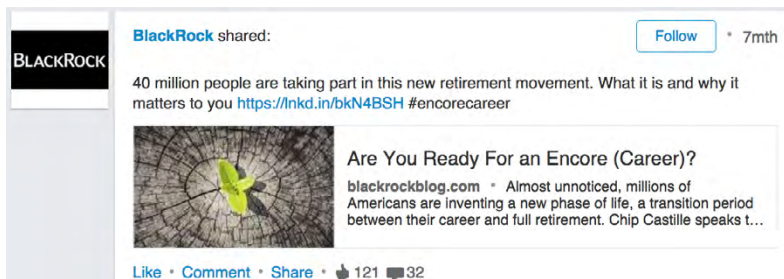
## 4. Create content that is helpful, informative, and/or entertaining.

People come to LinkedIn to better themselves, build their professional brands, and keep up with industry news. And they're increasingly consuming more content to make some of their most important career and purchase decisions. The best way to engage these professionals is to provide them with useful professional content. As you create your Sponsored Content, ask yourself why your target audience should read it and how it will help them. If you can answer these questions with confidence you should be able to craft a compelling headline and concise introduction text that drives engagement.

# To get your audiences hooked on your content, try writing from one of these perspectives:

## The Helpful Advisor

Start by explaining how your piece of content will help your target audience achieve professional success, like this popular BlackRock update.



**BlackRock** shared: Follow • 7mth

40 million people are taking part in this new retirement movement. What it is and why it matters to you <https://lnkd.in/g/bkN4BSH> #encorecareer

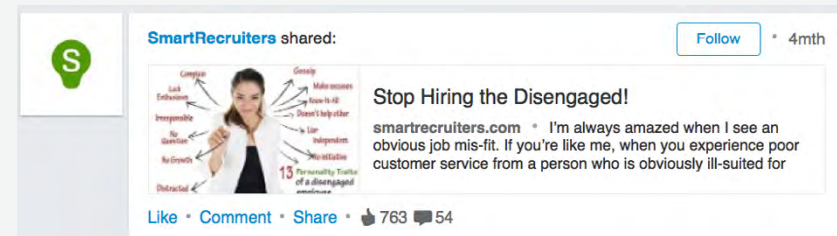
**Are You Ready For an Encore (Career)?**  
blackrockblog.com • Almost unnoticed, millions of Americans are inventing a new phase of life, a transition period between their career and full retirement. Chip Castille speaks t...

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## The Conversationalist

Make a bold statement or ask a question to spark a conversation and get your audience to react.

Look how this headline from SmartRecruiters stops you in your tracks.



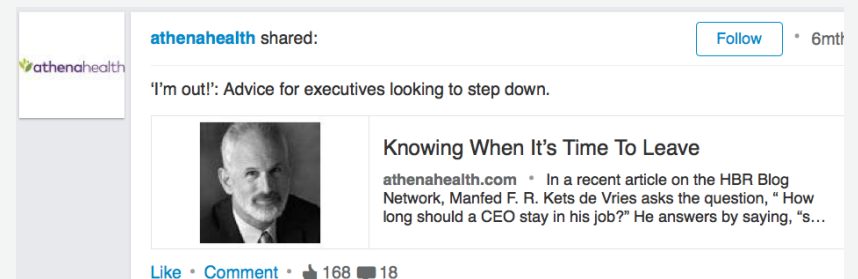
**SmartRecruiters** shared: Follow • 4mth

**Stop Hiring the Disengaged!**  
smartrecruiters.com • I'm always amazed when I see an obvious job mis-fit. If you're like me, when you experience poor customer service from a person who is obviously ill-suited for

Like • Comment • Share • 763 54

## The Cliffhanger

Tell your audience just enough to pique their interest but not so much that they aren't compelled to learn more. This intriguing intro from athenahealth begins with the exclamation "I'm out!" and promises to deliver advice for executives considering a career move.



**athenahealth** shared: Follow • 6mth

**"I'm out!": Advice for executives looking to step down.**

**Knowing When It's Time To Leave**  
athenahealth.com • In a recent article on the HBR Blog Network, Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries asks the question, "How long should a CEO stay in his job?" He answers by saying, "s...

Like • Comment • 168 18

## 5. Optimize your content for mobile.

A recent Acquity Group study found that 44 percent of B2B buyers researched company products on a smartphone or tablet in 2014.<sup>4</sup> When you combine that number with the fact that more than 75 percent of Sponsored Content engagement happens on mobile, optimization is no longer an option—it's an imperative. So, to ensure the best click and conversion rates, make sure your copy is concise, your CTAs are clear, and your landing pages are optimized for the small screen.

For example, if your goal is to capture leads, then you might want to shorten your form. In a recent Marketo A/B test of short forms versus long forms, those with as few as five fields performed best.<sup>5</sup> And, you can still capture enough data in five fields to conduct a respectable follow-up with a prospect.

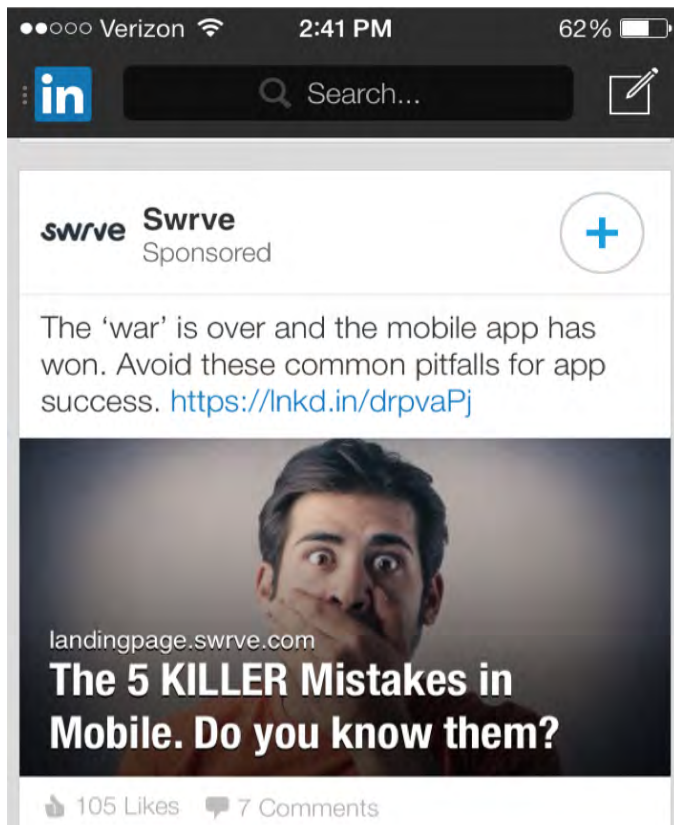
<sup>4</sup>2014 State of B2B Procurement Study: Uncovering the Shifting Landscape in B2B Commerce, Acquity Group, part of Accenture Interactive

<sup>5</sup>The Definitive Guide to Lead Generation, Marketo 2014

# Pro Tip:

With mobile, less is more. Either keep your intro copy to fewer than 150 characters, or eliminate it all together.

Check out this mobile friendly content from Swrve with concise and compelling copy.



The screenshot shows a mobile view of a LinkedIn sponsored post. At the top, the status bar displays 'Verizon', '2:41 PM', and '62%' battery. The LinkedIn logo and a search bar are visible. The post is from 'swrve Swrve' and is marked as 'Sponsored'. The text of the post reads: 'The 'war' is over and the mobile app has won. Avoid these common pitfalls for app success. <https://lnkd.in/drpvaPj>'. Below the text is a video thumbnail featuring a man with a surprised expression. The video title is 'The 5 KILLER Mistakes in Mobile. Do you know them?'. At the bottom, it shows '105 Likes' and '7 Comments'.



## 6. Use images to drive engagement.

On average, large images (using the image upload function) see higher engagement rates than thumbnail images. That's because larger images stand out in the feed and command attention. However, regardless of your image size, make sure to put your best foot forward with a quality image that's both relevant and compelling:

- Adhere to [published specifications](#) to ensure your image is the proper resolution.
- Use the image to expand on the content or emphasize the CTA.
- Make sure you choose an image that accurately reflects your content. Consistency between image and story conveys the topic before the member even reads a word. *The following AIG post combines a compelling visual with text to deliver a one-two punch.*

AIG shared: Follow • 1mth

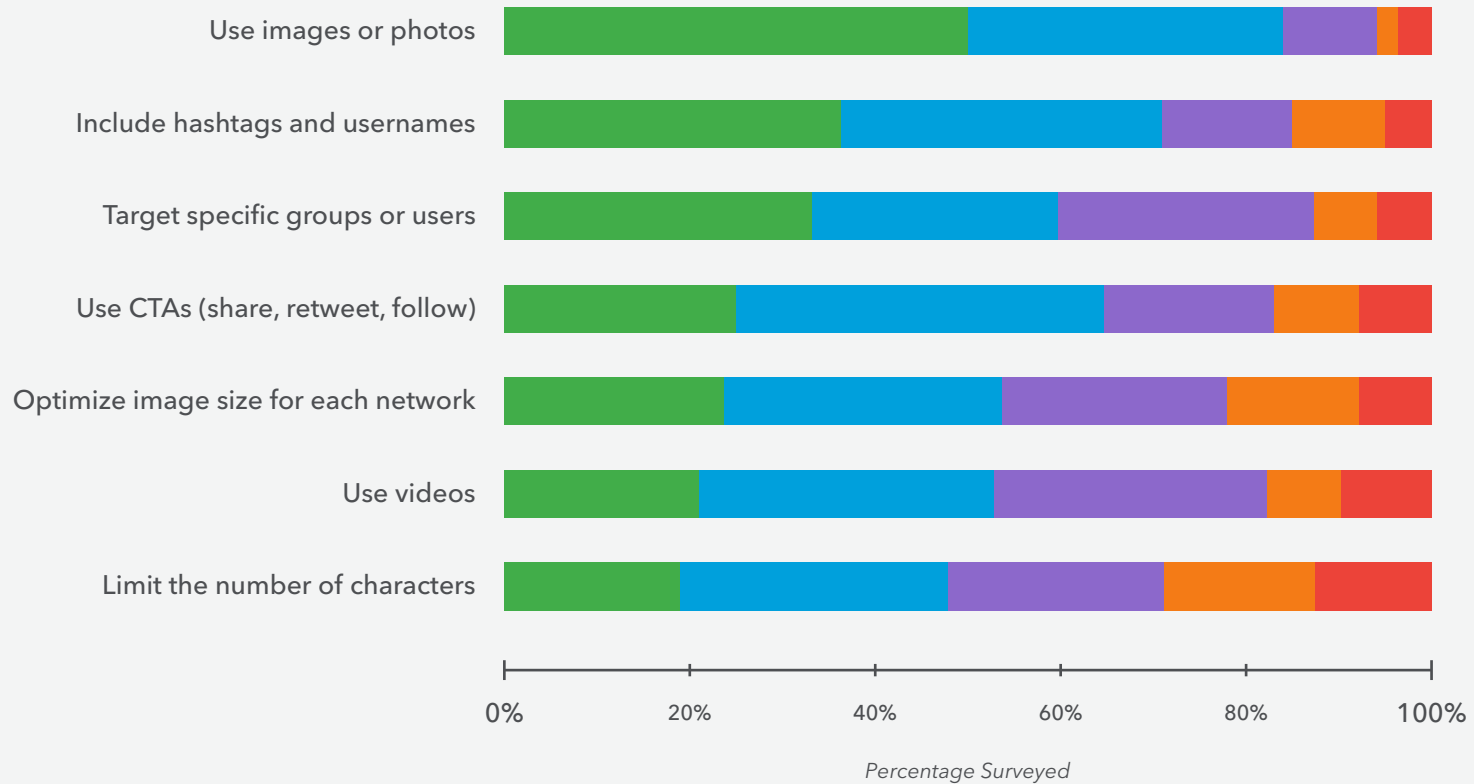
Examine these 7 retirement facts and more in our final #RetireStronger series post: <http://spr.ly/6008BBcaA>

**41% retired earlier than planned due to a personal health problem**

Like • Comment • Share • 95 likes • 17 comments

According to Hubspot, images and photos are the most important tactic in optimizing social media posts.<sup>6</sup>

## Most Important Tactics for Optimizing Content on Social Media



Very Important    Important    Moderately important    Minimally important    Not important at all

<sup>6</sup><http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/visual-content-marketing-strategy>

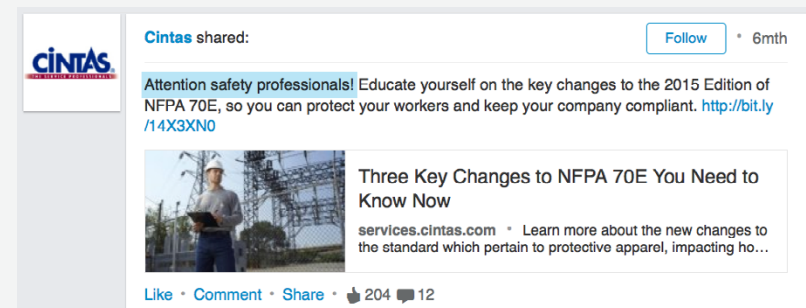


## 7. Test and re-test. And then test again.

*How do you know what content works? In 1,000 impressions/variation (or 50 clicks) you can easily determine what's working and what's not and then double down on the high performing content.*

Direct Sponsored Content gives you a way to publish content directly in the feed, allowing you to test and re-test until you get the best possible results. Ideally, you should have at least two to three variations of each piece of content you want to publish. Think simple. For example, calling out the audience by their title may be the difference between just-average and outstanding performance.

Consider testing things like personalizing your greeting to your target audience or your call to action verb. **In the following example, Cintas personalizes their content to a key audience segment by title:**



**Cintas** shared: Follow • 6mth

Attention safety professionals! Educate yourself on the key changes to the 2015 Edition of NFPA 70E, so you can protect your workers and keep your company compliant. <http://bit.ly/14X3XN0>

**Three Key Changes to NFPA 70E You Need to Know Now**

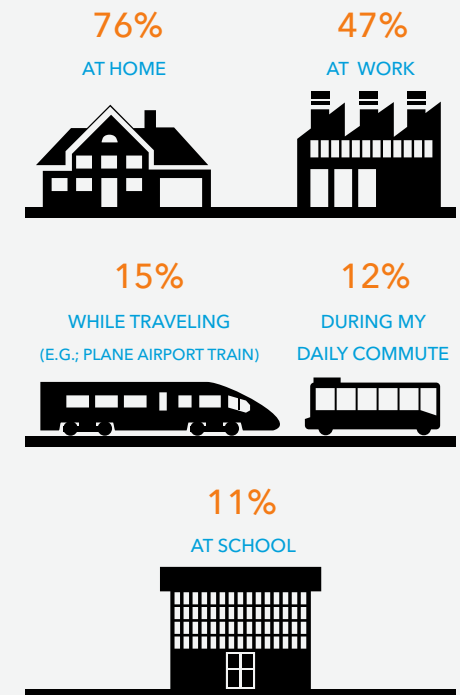
[services.cintas.com](http://services.cintas.com) • Learn more about the new changes to the standard which pertain to protective apparel, impacting ho...

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## 8. Adopt an "always-on" mindset.

You may think that your professional content will get the most engagement during work hours, but research indicates that many professionals catch up on content at home. In fact, according to the *Mindset Divide Study* commissioned by LinkedIn, professionals are 62 percent more likely to access content at home than they are in the office.<sup>7</sup> If you take an always-on approach, you'll never miss an opportunity to reach your target audience —no matter where they are or how and when they choose to consume content.

<sup>7</sup> *The Mindset Divide: Spotlight On Content*™ a study conducted by Millward Brown Digital and LinkedIn, March 2014





## Pro Tip:

Think beyond the limits of traditional campaigns and embrace an always-on content strategy. According to a recent Demand Gen Report, **B2B buyers increasingly rely on social media for their purchase decisions:**

- 72% of decision makers use social media to research the solution purchase.
- 64% of B2B purchase decision makers said that winning content had a significant impact on their decision.<sup>8</sup>

Make sure your solutions are always in the consideration set of your target audience by adopting an always-on Sponsored Content strategy.

<sup>8</sup> The 2014 B2B Buyer Behavior Survey, Demand Gen, January 29, 2014

## 9. Expand your reach to similar audiences.

Sponsored Content reporting tools allow you to see which audience segments engage most with your content. You can use this information to create campaigns to target only your most attractive audiences. Thanks to the Audience Expansion function, a simple click of a button reveals users similar to your initial target audience, enabling you to easily reach more of the right prospects with your content.

Let's say you're targeting high-level executives at an industry-leading healthcare enterprise. By enabling Audience Expansion, you can serve Sponsored Content from your campaign not only to the executives at the target company, but also to executives at other large healthcare firms. [Here's how you can enable Audience Expansion with the click of a button in your campaigns.](#)

The screenshot displays the LinkedIn targeting configuration page. At the top, a header reads "OK, now let's target your audience" with a sub-header "Reach the right people by selecting specific targeting criteria like job title, location and more..". Below this, a section titled "What location do you want to target? (required)" features a search bar with "United States" selected. To the right, a summary box shows "Your estimated target audience" as "100,000,000+ LinkedIn members" for the "United States", with a status indicator for "Audience expansion: Enabled". The main area lists various targeting criteria such as Company name, Company industry, Company size, Job title, Job function, Job seniority, Member schools, Fields of study, Degrees, Member skills, Member groups, Member gender, Member age, and Custom segments. At the bottom, a checkbox is checked for "Help my campaign reach new audiences similar to my targeting criteria with Audience Expansion.", accompanied by a "Learn more" link. A "How do I target the right audience?" link is also present in the bottom right corner.

## Pro Tip:

Make your content last longer. Before you retire a campaign that's showing fatigue, consider enabling the Audience Expansion function. It's a great way to reach new audiences similar to your target audience and expose them to your brand message. Remember, these audiences haven't seen your campaign, so it's new to them.



# 10. Incorporate Sponsored Content into your lead nurturing strategy.

*To strengthen your nurture strategy, consider adding LinkedIn Lead Accelerator to your marketing mix. Lead Accelerator uses display and social advertising to nurture both anonymous and known prospects—anywhere they travel online—and across multiple devices. It's the new way to connect companies to the right professionals with the right content as they make their way through the purchase decision process.*

According to a recent Demand Gen Report, B2B marketers who have successfully deployed lead nurturing programs average a 20% increase in sales opportunities from nurtured leads versus non-nurtured leads.<sup>9</sup> While capturing leads is a big piece of the demand gen puzzle, you can't complete the picture without a robust nurture program.

Remember how we said that prospects consume more than ten pieces of content on their journey to purchase? It's important to keep feeding those prospects (both known and unknown) the relevant content they crave until they become sales-ready leads. Creating Sponsored Content campaigns that keep your brand top of mind can help you build followers and create advocates who can boost your viral impressions.

<sup>9</sup>Calculating the Real ROI from Lead Nurturing, Demand Gen, Aug 2013

## Conclusion:

LinkedIn is the social media platform most closely associated with professional content, and most trusted to deliver it. For 77% of professionals, it's the "Platform where I expect to find professional content" and for 74% it's "the place where I can get content that's relevant to my career and professional interests."<sup>10</sup> Significantly, it's also the environment in which professionals feel most comfortable sharing professional content. When asked which social media platforms were a suitable environment for exchanging such content, 74% named LinkedIn compared to 54% for Facebook and 39% for Twitter.

Sponsored Content is an effective way to educate and guide your prospects at every stage of the buyer's journey. We hope the tips compiled here will enable you to reach and engage more of your prospects, and ultimately convert them to loyal customers.

<sup>10</sup> *The Mindset Divide: Spotlight On Content*, a study conducted by Millward Brown Digital and LinkedIn, March 2014



Today, LinkedIn has more than 433 million professionals in its network. That's more than two-thirds of the 600 million professionals on the planet, representing the largest group anywhere of influential, affluent, and educated people.

For more information, visit [marketing.linkedin.com](https://marketing.linkedin.com).