

Global Growth: **The Small Business Marketing Roundtable**

4 marketers from SMBs around the globe share their growth challenges and how they're overcoming them



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For this Small Business Marketing Roundtable, we went global. We gathered four marketers at small businesses with one each from Brazil, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

These marketers shared their insights into the challenges SMBs faced in generating growth for their companies. Key hurdles included creating engaging content with only a handful of people, prioritizing the right tactics, balancing between demand generation and branding, and working more closely with sales to drive revenue growth.

Despite these challenges, these marketers were not discouraged. They all believed they had found keys—ranging from sitting in the same area of the office to regular meetings to agreeing on metrics—to align more tightly with their sales counterparts. These marketers were, in fact, emboldened by what the digital era offers them in targeting their intended audience and making their voices heard.

Perhaps their optimistic outlook was summed up most succinctly by one of our panelists:

“What I’ve seen is we’ve got some very small teams that are producing amazing content. With paid social media, it’s in an ad format where it doesn’t matter whether you’re IBM or a two-person company that just opened yesterday, you have the same ability to reach people.”

A.J. Wilcox
Founder, B2Linked

Read on to find out more about the hurdles SMB marketers are facing in driving growth and how they’re rising to meet these challenges.



The Marketers



Marina Mendoca Ferreira

Marketing Analyst, Digital House
Sao Paulo, Brazil



Tom Metcalfe

Senior Lead Generation Executive,
In Touch Networks, United Kingdom



Lauren Stephenson

Marketing Director, Nugit
Singapore



A.J. Wilcox

Founder, B2Linked
Lehi, Utah, United States



Q: Thanks for joining this Roundtable, everyone. First, tell us about your company and your role.

Lauren Stephenson: Nugit is a Data Storytelling Platform. The amount of data companies are collecting is enormous; however, we believe that the tools that are currently in place in the market don't actually enable companies, teams and individuals to make sense of their data.

A data storytelling platform combines data, visualization and narrative.

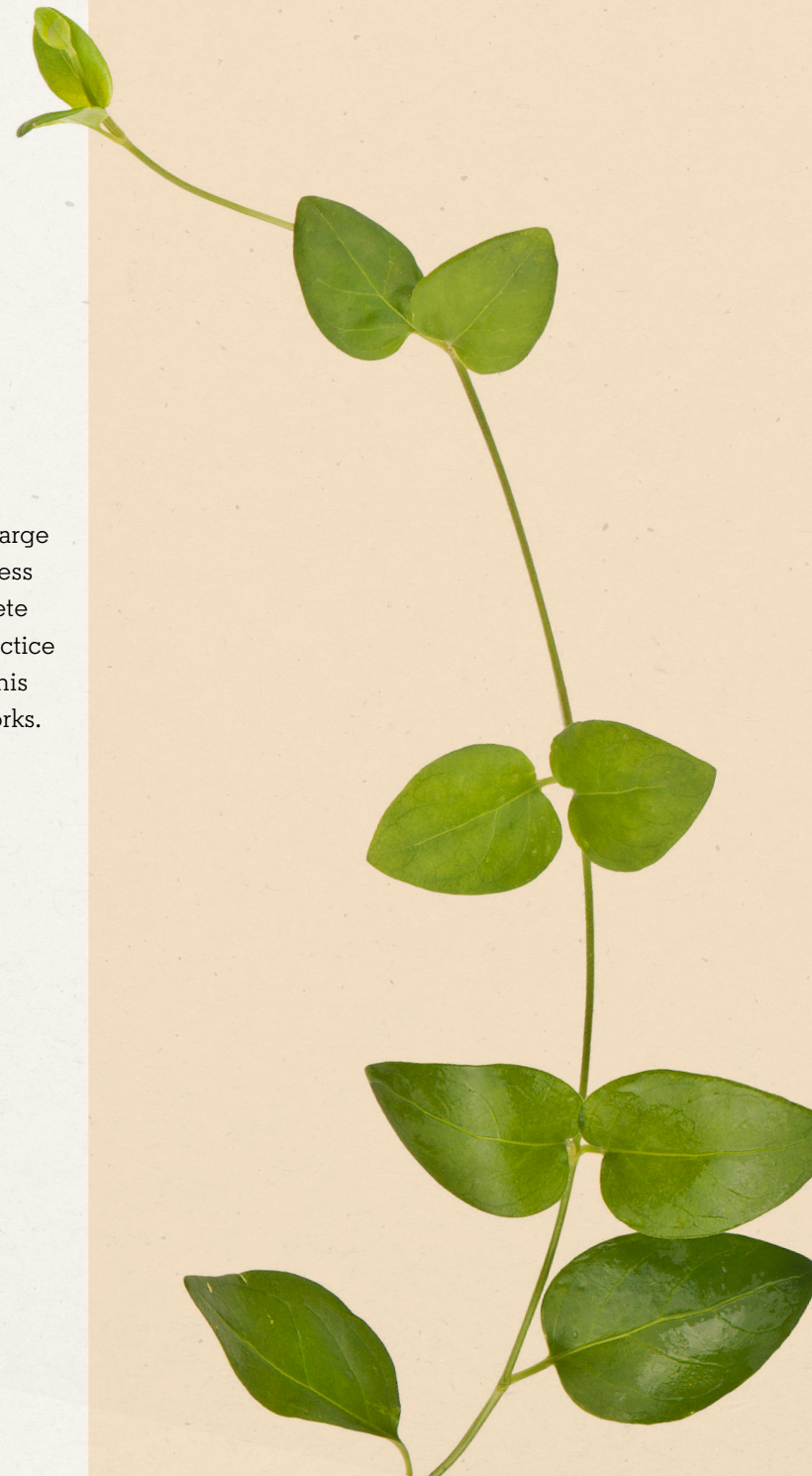
Dashboards were an innovative technology 5-10 years ago but we take companies to the next step, and we believe that you should be communicating your data in easily understandable stories.

Marina Mendoca Ferreira: I'm on the digital marketing team at Digital House. Digital House is a coding school and a bootcamp that was born in Argentina three years ago and arrived here in Brazil March 2018. At Digital House, we teach courses about mobile developing, web developing, digital marketing, user experience, and others.

Tom Metcalfe: I'm the Senior Lead Generation Executive at In Touch Networks—a career development platform designed to help elite business professionals transition to a portfolio or consultancy career.

We have a unique business model: we don't charge recruitment fees and hiring companies get access to our membership base for free. It's a complete spin on the recruitment industries standard practice and we really want to maximize exposure of this through engaging content on LinkedIn's networks.

A.J. Wilcox: I'm the founder of B2Linked.com, and we're an ad agency. LinkedIn Ads is all we do. So, we've got 30ish clients. Our goal is to help anyone whose doing anything significant with LinkedIn Ads to do it better.



Q: What's your biggest marketing challenge?

A.J.: Content is the biggest hurdle for our clients. If you put an ad that just says talk to our sales rep, no one is going to want to click on that. So, it's this conversation where we say what kind of lead magnet do you have, what kind of content do you have that's valuable enough that someone is willing to give their e-mail address in exchange for?

Generally, what we recommend is go put on a webinar using one of your best decks that maybe you already use with prospective clients. A webinar tends to be lowest amount of friction that you can put into developing an asset just to see if it works.

The two guidelines we give are the content has to either solve a major curiosity or a major pain point. The thing is the smaller the team the more agile you can be. **What I've seen is we've got some very small teams that are producing amazing content. With paid social media, it's in an ad format where it doesn't matter whether you're IBM or a two-person company that just opened yesterday, you have the same ability to reach people.**

Lauren: Our target audience is mostly enterprises. In terms of marketing **we are still a very small team, but we have very big goals.** Our biggest challenge was—particularly at the beginning of this year—having a very, very small team of just two people. We've since then grown that to four people. And I think the way that we're trying to overcome the relatively small size of our team is prioritization.

We can't do everything, so we have to become hyper-focused and targeted.

So, we go after specific target markets and audiences. We are moving away from just throwing money at big industry events and we're hosting our own events where we know the quality of engagement is high.



Q: What's your biggest marketing challenge?

Marina: We have two big challenges here. One is to show everybody how important it is to your update your digital skills. And the second is that we have just been in Brazil for a few months. We are a startup, and it's a challenge to show that the school has a lot of quality content.

To overcome these challenges, we are holding a lot of events here on our campus, which is really beautiful. When people come on the campus, they say, "Oh it's so good. I would like to study here." So, the strategy is to make everybody spend time on our campus. We also give away a lot of our content for free.

Tom: Currently, our biggest marketing challenge is the consolidation of our domains, so we're all moving onto one domain: In Touch Networks. Up until now, we've had multiple brands that fit under it. So, moving under one domain requires us to think more strategically about how we position our brand without losing any customers and maintaining that sort of strength and to make sure the revenue stream will persist.

It's hard for small businesses, because of the size of the team.

Obviously, with more resources you can create more engaging content, and you can do some collective research and find out what your member base wants, what your customers want. But in the same breath, I think social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, are making it easier for marketers to produce video content.



Q: Is branding or demand generation more of a challenge for your company?

Tom: For us they sort of go hand in hand—especially when you consider that we’re in the process of consolidating our domains. So far NonExecutiveDirectors.com has been our strongest brand with the largest reach but we’re now shifting under InTouchNetworks.com. So the question is, how do we position our brands and what message do we want to convey?

Lauren: I think brand awareness will always be a challenge for any brand to be honest. For us, though, **our bigger challenge is definitely demand generation.** We have created a new category essentially, so we have to educate the market. For some people it’s quite challenging to get your head around what we offer. Once they get their head around it, they love it and they see the value in it. It’s like when we went from DiscMan to iPod, you didn’t really think you had the problem until you started using the iPod.

Marina: (Our biggest challenge) is branding. We have been in Brazil just a few months, so nobody knows we exist.

A.J.: For B2Linked, definitely **demand generation is what 95% of our clients are after.** We have probably 5% of our clients where it is a pure branding play.

Demand generation is what

95%

of our clients are after.



Q: Are your sales and marketing departments separate, or are they unified under a single sort of leader?

Tom: They are separate, but we've developed a healthy relationship between sales and marketing. We have weekly meetings with the head of sales and ensure frequent feedback on leads generated. When they have their sales call, we listen to their feedback and they'll then provide the team with, "Oh, this person was brilliant for X, Y and Z" or "This person wasn't so great for these reasons." With that feedback in mind, I'll look through the database and look at the lead origin of those leads and how that came from our targeting on LinkedIn or other sources. **To me that's the best thing about sales and marketing being cohesive: It impacts directly on the targeting we do day in day out.**

A.J.: At our clients, sales and marketing are usually separate. I would echo Tom's comments there exactly. I mean the way that he is running his team is exactly how I would recommend all of our clients run their teams as well. **I think they should be separate, because I don't see very many leaders who are actually capable of running both the sales team and a marketing team.** They're very separate disciplines, but inherent in that decision to keep them separate means you're going to have politics, means you're going to have the butting of heads.

So, I think if you do what Tom does, which is really play that sales enablement role where you go in and you talk to the sales reps and you're getting feedback on the leads; you're showing them here are the ads we're running and this is what the content looks like—these are the ads people are seeing, this is what they're reading, this is the frame of mind they are in by the time they cross your desk.

10x-20x

increases on performance

When you put yourself in their shoes and have the conversation the way that the sales team is expecting to have it, **oftentimes we can have 10x to 20x increases on performance—just because they now understand what it is marketing is doing and we understand what they're doing.**



Q: Are your sales and marketing departments separate, or are they unified under a single sort of leader?

Marina: Here, we work in unified model, because we believe both departments exist to achieve the same goal. When the two teams work together, marketing can better understand the needs of sales team. At the same time, sales can understand all the metrics marketing needs to do our jobs better. We work in this unified team, because we understand it's better for all the company.

The leader of the teams is the marketing manager, it's not a sales manager. But he leads both teams. I have worked in some companies where there was bad communication with sales team. But at Digital House, we work together, and it's perfect for us. We both understand our goals, and we both understand each other's team.

Lauren: We're separate teams but working as a unified model too, and we sit together.

I've worked in many organizations where sales and marketing try to be unified and aligned, but I think a big thing is physically sitting in the same area.

In fact, myself as the head of marketing sits right next to the head of sales. We're talking constantly, and I think it's the same as what Marina said, we are aligned to the same goals and that is sales pipeline.

I think both teams realize we can't live without each other. When the sales team uses LinkedIn, for example, they need marketing content, our website, sales assets and messaging to communicate via LinkedIn. Marketing might use a different part of LinkedIn, but it's the same tool.

We need to be working together, so when sales are outreaching, we know that we can target those same people with ads or relevant content. I actually get on very well with the head of sales.

I've worked in organizations before where there has been an unhealthy tension, I think there needs to be a healthy tension between the two teams, because it kind of keeps you both going and it make sure neither of you are complacent.



Q: What are the key marketing metrics for your company?

Lauren: We don't have just one metric. For us, it really depends on the campaign and the current strategy. We have a real marketing mix. Our entire marketing strategy is combined. For events—each event would actually have a different KPI. For example, if it's a roundtable, it would be how many conversations sales could start following that event. At a thought leadership event, it's about how many leads then become a marketing qualified lead.

As a team, we're contributing to one goal, which is the sales pipeline.

Marina: So, our main metric is CPL and CPS, Cost Per Lead and Cost Per Sale. Those are most important for us. I look at them every day, but we have a weekly report and monthly report to show to all the team. Our performance is getting better, because in the first months we didn't have anything. But now we are growing with 700 students. So in seven months, we've added 700 students. That's really good.



Q: What are the key marketing metrics for your company?

A.J.: For us, it depends on the client. For the most part, if you are a marketing team newer to LinkedIn, you don't have enough data yet, so you make your decisions based off of a cost per lead and a percentage—like percentage conversion rate to lead. But as you gather more and more data and spend more and more money, you can start to take a look at it optimizing down to the marketing qualified lead stage. Then, you can get to the sales qualified lead stage or the equivalent.

Generally, our clients have a longer business cycle, so we can't go to return on ad spend immediately. But if we pick an intermediate metrics like sales qualified leads, for instance, we can do a cost per sales qualified lead.

Branding is naturally going to happen when you're showing your brand and your content to your real ideal target market.

Tom: Like A.J., we understand that demand and brand go hand in hand, particularly when advertising across LinkedIn. In Touch is very demand generation focused and very ROI driven. Our key marketing metric is the return on ad spend. I've done a lot of work on trying to drive the highest volume of leads for the most cost-effective price on a CPA basis.



Q: On what are you spending most of your marketing budget these days?

A.J.: For some clients, they've already maxed out other platforms, and so LinkedIn is an expansion opportunity for them. So, if they're on search channels, there just aren't any more people typing that keyword on average per month. So maybe they're going on Facebook as well. The B2B targeting on Facebook is a lot rougher (than on LinkedIn) and—so at some point, you're going to try to turn that knob up on Facebook, and it won't go up anymore.

LinkedIn is the obvious place to go.

We also have quite a few clients who come to us where LinkedIn is the only network that it makes sense for them to advertise on, because they're talking to such a specific type of user and in that case it's 100% of their spend or 90% of their ad spend.

Lauren: I think the beginning of this year was definitely paid performance, so it was on Google AdWords, it was on LinkedIn. We're now moving into events, hosting our own events. These events can also include webinars as well as content, particularly video. We are definitely promoting those events on LinkedIn when it's relevant.

Marina: We devote our budget to LinkedIn, Facebook, Google Ads and YouTube with a focus on videos and lead generation.

Tom: We predominantly spend most on paid social and search.



Q: Do you expect your marketing budget to grow in the next year?

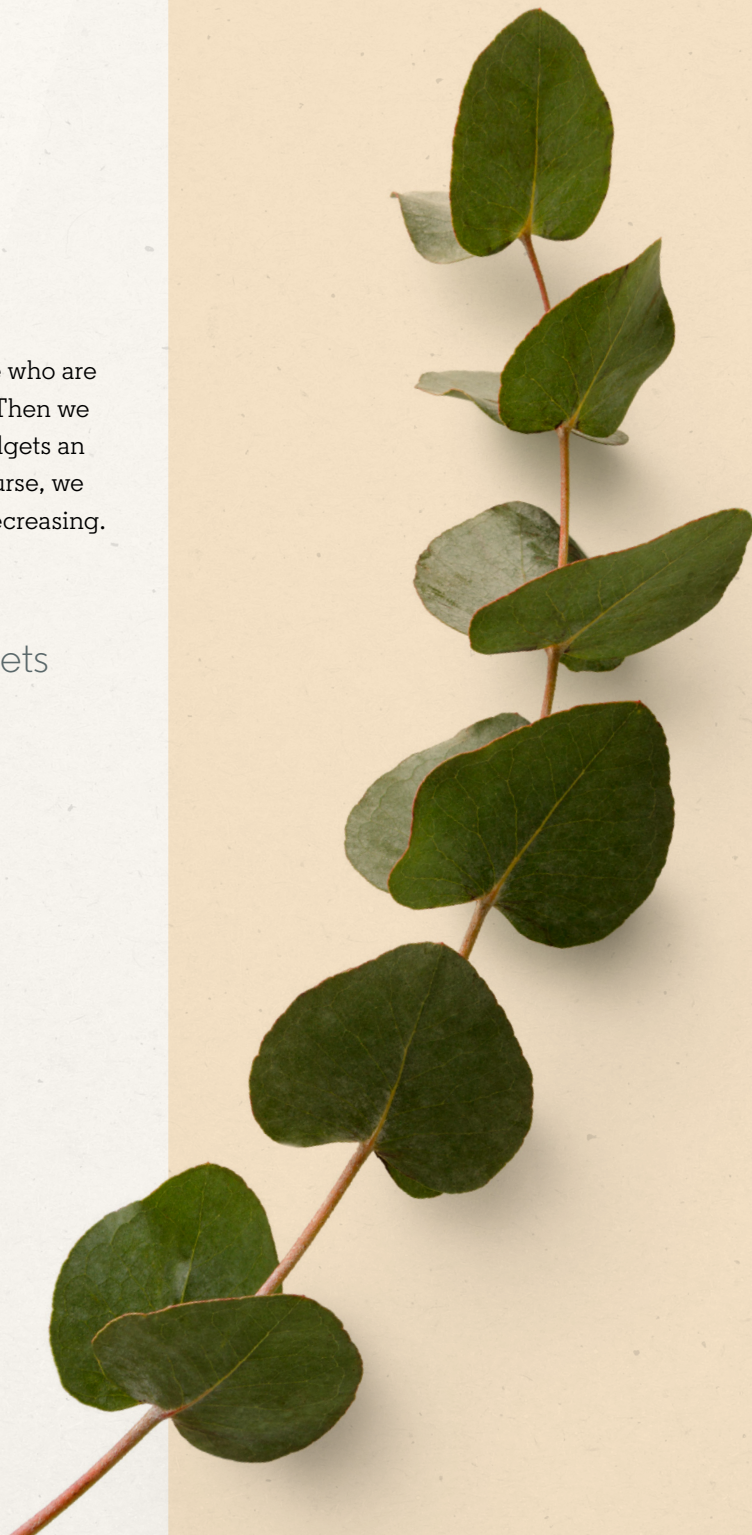
Tom: It's hard to say, but with the consolidation of the domains, we will be looking to add more focus to brand awareness activity. Alongside that, we're doing a lot of work on how to improve the product. More webinars, more courses, more focus on helping our members develop.

Marina: We don't know yet. We are still analyzing 2018, so we don't know yet.

Lauren: I think the marketing budget is always up in the air. I don't think you're ever anymore going to get a 12-month budget to work with—particularly for SMEs. And if you are a startup and you're working in tech, we are very reliant on sales performance. So, if all of our plans go ahead, if our sales team is selling and closing and our customer success team are retaining clients, then absolutely my plan is to be growing the marketing budget.

A.J.: Of our 30 clients, we have a couple who are raising their budgets by 100% or 200%. Then we have a large chunk that are growing budgets an incremental 10%, 15%, 20%. Then, of course, we got some who are staying flat or even decreasing.

On average, we're seeing increasing marketing budgets in the double digits.



Q: How are you using LinkedIn in your marketing program?

A.J.: Definitely our bread and butter is Sponsored Content and text ads. Text ads have low interaction rates, but the cost per lead is almost always better. They also tend to be more of a bottom of the funnel type of lead. On the other hand, with LinkedIn Sponsored Content, we can drive a lot more volume and those tend to be great for those content assets that we're recommending pushing.

We'll probably keep sticking with them, but testing new things here and there on LinkedIn, like video, Lead Gen Forms, and carousel ads.

Marina: We are using paid advertising on LinkedIn—Sponsored Content and text ads—to show our courses. LinkedIn has fewer conversions, but it's a unique tool to help us find our target.

One of our key targets is executives, and with LinkedIn, we can know exactly where people are working, what people are doing, and how long they are working. All this information helps us to find the correct people.



Q: How are you using LinkedIn in your marketing program?

Tom: We're probably looking to do some more remarketing and testing different ad formats and video across our marketing strategy.

Lauren: We are doing both organic and paid on LinkedIn. I believe we need both to see results. LinkedIn isn't necessarily seen for us as a conversion tool.

We always work off the hypothesis that a qualified lead must hit at least five different touch points before they are ready to speak to sales and into the sales funnel.

So, I would say LinkedIn is one of the vital tools that we need to reach our target audience.

We use our Company Page, but we also use our own personal profiles. Our message is actually more effective when it comes from an individual person. So, whether it's our CEO & Founder or it's our sales team, we actually encourage everybody in our company to share and interact with our content. As for paid on LinkedIn, we have done text ads in the past and now we currently use just Sponsored Content.

We've been using the standard ad as well as the carousel ads. We don't have good numbers for conversions, but in terms of brand awareness metrics, it's doing really well. Our salespeople regularly tell us that a new prospect will say, 'Oh, I saw your LinkedIn ad,'—not even just, 'Oh, I saw a post from somebody in your company,' they'll say, 'I saw your ad on LinkedIn.'



Q: What are you planning to do differently on LinkedIn in the coming year?

Tom: To be more creative. We need to be more innovative with brand awareness relating to our business model and with that more disruptive in our approach to testing new creative ideas. One area we have driven forward as a team is testing across every possible variable; whether that is ad copy, CTA's or imagery, we look to find sweet spots across the campaigns and improve results, month on month. We have further ideas to improve testing even further in the coming year.

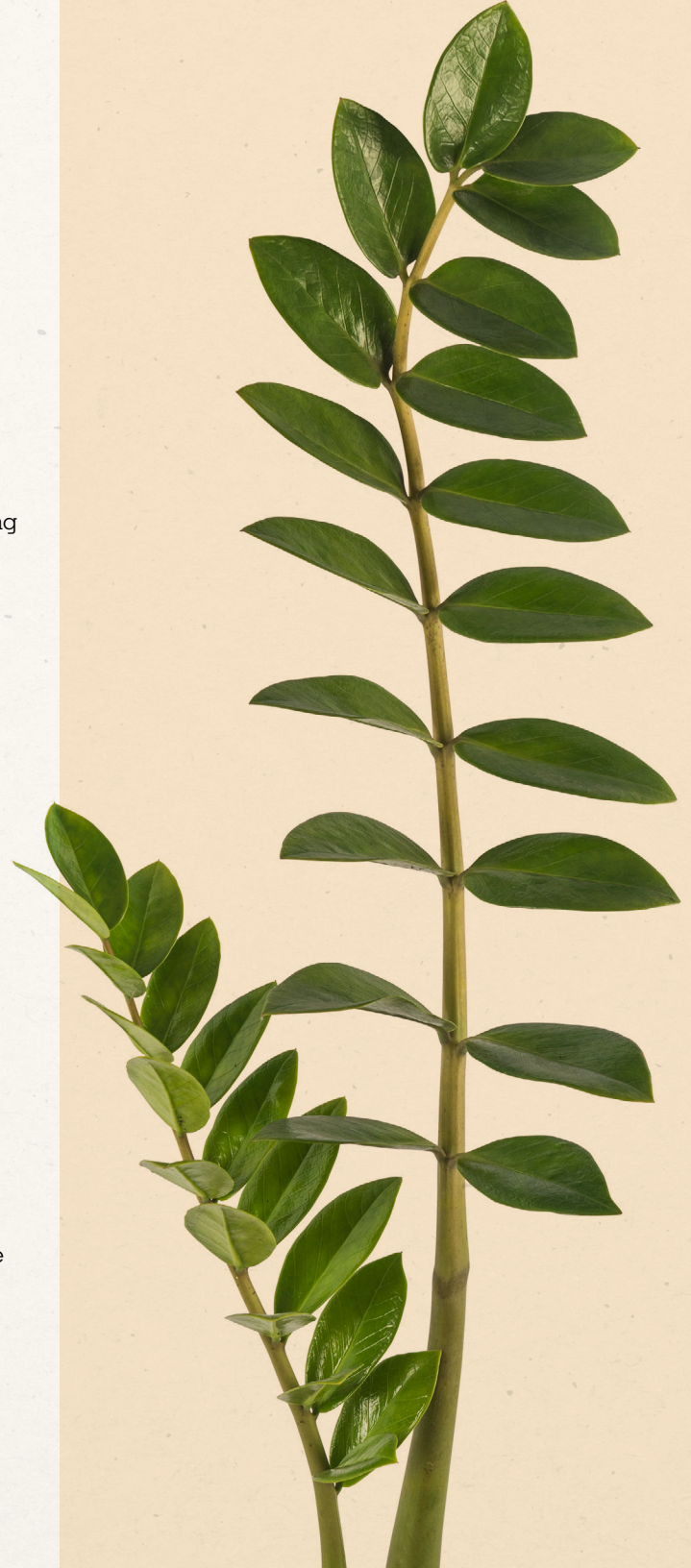
A.J.: I think our strategy is pretty sound for our clients. We're going to keep doing what we're doing and then incorporating any additional efficiency we can find. **We are using Website Demographics. To give you an idea of its effectiveness, for Sponsored Content the average click through rate is a .35%, and when we run website retargeting we're oftentimes getting over a 1% click through rate. We love website retargeting for that.**

Marina: This year we did a lot of tests, because it was the first year. Everything was new for us, but now we are ready and have enough knowledge to do something different next year. When we have an event to recruit our students, we take all

the testimonials and put them on YouTube and LinkedIn to show everyone it's not Digital House talking about Digital House, it's our students talking about Digital House. So, we want to test more formats: Carousel Ads and Sponsored InMail.

Plus, we already use our employees to share campaigns on LinkedIn: We want to do that with more intelligence.

Lauren: I would like to be sharing more video content on LinkedIn, both organically and paid. One thing I would love to see on LinkedIn is live video. As part of our strategy we are doing a lot of events or webinars or, you know, having conversations with people in the industry. We would love to be sharing that live, I feel like LinkedIn would be a good platform. We are definitely going to spend less on SEM and more on building relevant content that we can promote on social media, so we can drive engagement. We want to also experiment with different event and content types for different stages of the funnel.



LinkedIn Marketing Solutions

About LinkedIn

LinkedIn operates the world's largest professional network on the Internet with more than 590 million members in over 200 countries and territories. This represents the largest group anywhere of influential, affluent and educated people.

Relationships Matter

With LinkedIn Marketing Solutions, brands build relationships with the world's professionals by using accurate targeting to deliver relevant content and communications. As today's connected professionals seek out ideas and insights from the people and brands they trust, marketers use LinkedIn to target advertising and publish relevant content in a professional context. Brands extend reach through the social sharing that occurs naturally on LinkedIn.

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