

Content Marketing in Times of Uncertainty

How to adapt your strategy and navigate forward



What does content marketing look like in the wake of unprecedented change?

With businesses quickly shifting their strategy and events cancelled until further notice, B2B marketing is leaning even more heavily into digital. At the same time, your audience's needs have changed, which means they are researching the solutions they need to adapt.

It's why revisiting or developing your content marketing strategy is probably the smartest investment you can make in your brand.

This guide will help you optimise your B2B content strategy to adapt to these unprecedented, uncertain, and extraordinary times.

Because by providing real value during your prospects' time of need, you can simultaneously drive your own brand awareness, generate demand and convert sales as the economy recovers.

Ready to learn how?



Grace MacDonald
Content Marketer,
LinkedIn



Jane Fleming
Content Marketer,
LinkedIn

"As marketing and sales professionals, we face huge challenges. But we're also in a position where our skills, creativity and determination can make a real difference for our customers, businesses and colleagues. At LinkedIn, we're committed to helping our customers make that difference."

Josh Graff

UK Country Manager, & VP EMEA & LATAM at LinkedIn



Last year, 54% of B2B businesses planned on hosting more events.¹



Now, up to 78% of marketers expect budget increases for online content.



52% of marketers said managing shifting priorities/strategies was their biggest challenge during the pandemic.²



Why content marketing matters more than ever

Building trust during challenging times is key to your recovery



Take steps now for your brand's future

In times of uncertainty, a strong content marketing strategy is about having a long-term plan to drive growth for your business. The initial shock is over, so now it's time to plot a course for recovery.

That's why boosting your share of voice, brand awareness and trust in your business are all so important. Building and maintaining customer relationships will continue to pay-off as the world continues to adjust over the coming months.

Content marketing involves publishing content in a variety of forms, on the channels where your audience spends the most time, so you can address their interests and concerns.

You don't need to push out huge volumes of text every week. The key is to create a single block of strong content and use it in different ways to add value to your audience and continue the conversation, boosted by curating other forms of content from trusted sources.

If you can find ways to help your audience in their own recovery while remaining faithful to your brand identity, you're in a stronger position to attract, engage and convert new customers in the future.



Why is content marketing fundamental to your strategy?

Bian Salins

EMEA Lead, Content Marketing Consulting, LinkedIn

"Content marketing first rose in popularity with the need to be discoverable in search, engaging on social, and trusted enough to create affinity and loyalty. These are tactics every business should apply given that in the face of an oncoming recession, trust will be the deciding factor in business recovery and growth."

Think how your audience's needs have changed

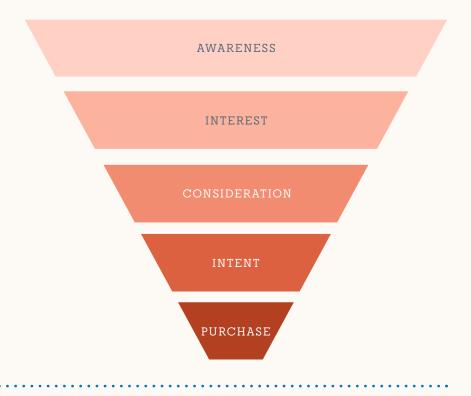
Full funnel content marketing is about anticipating and solving your audience's needs at every stage of the buyer's journey.

At the top of the funnel, your focus is on building favourable awareness and recall of your company among prospects who are currently unfamiliar with your brand or not in the market for your offerings.

As prospects move closer to a purchase decision, their needs evolve and your content should too, continuing to build trust and nurturing them towards a sale.

Because your audience's needs have shifted and they are only focusing on solutions which help them succeed in their new working world, your content needs to adjust too if you want to keep them engaged - and this applies throughout the funnel.

This guide explains the change in audience expectations and how you can adapt your strategy in these uncertain times.





Social media use has increased 21% worldwide since the start of the pandemic,³ making it the natural channel to expand the reach of your blog posts and other content.



Video content is just as important, with YouTube reporting a 500% increase in views for videos with the terms "at home" or #withme. 4



Targeting display advertising at prospects is a proven way to introduce your brand at scale, but consider what you want your audience to do once they've clicked through.



White papers, eBooks and webinars all offer the chance to help your prospects cope in different ways, and can act as gated content for traffic generated by display ads.

Know why – and how – you're executing your strategy

Document what you expect to achieve with your content marketing in the current climate. You also need to be able to justify your expectations.

Do you want to raise brand awareness? Drive higher quality leads? Establish your organisation as a thought-leader in your industry? Better engage prospective buyers? How about just offering help?

It's critical to understand how your content will help you move prospective customers along the path to purchase.

Put another way, it's important to track how well you are answering prospects' questions at every stage of their journey—and ultimately converting them to customers.

Create a Big Rock foundation

Start with a single piece of content that can power your demand-gen engine for months on end. We call this a Big Rock. You fill it with all the wisdom and insights you have to share on the topic, leaving you with a hefty piece of content that makes it clear you know what you're talking about.

However, not everyone will download your Big Rock... some people may prefer to read a short blog post, glance over an infographic or tune in for a webinar. Your job is to get it to them in the format they prefer by 'turkey slicing' it into smaller, derivative content assets.

This is about juicing your content for all it's worth and making sure all your sage advice and expertise finds its way into prospective customers' hands

3 questions to ask yourself about your advertising now:

- 1. Does my ad still connect in today's world?
- **2.** What if I need to develop a new campaign?
- **3.** How can I insure myself against this problem in the future?

3 lessons on how to advertise in a recession:

- 1. Focus on brand advertising over short-term sales activation
- 2. Feature humanity, generosity, emotions and humour in your messaging
- **3.** Demonstrate humanity and generosity in your behaviour. Ask 'how can we help?'

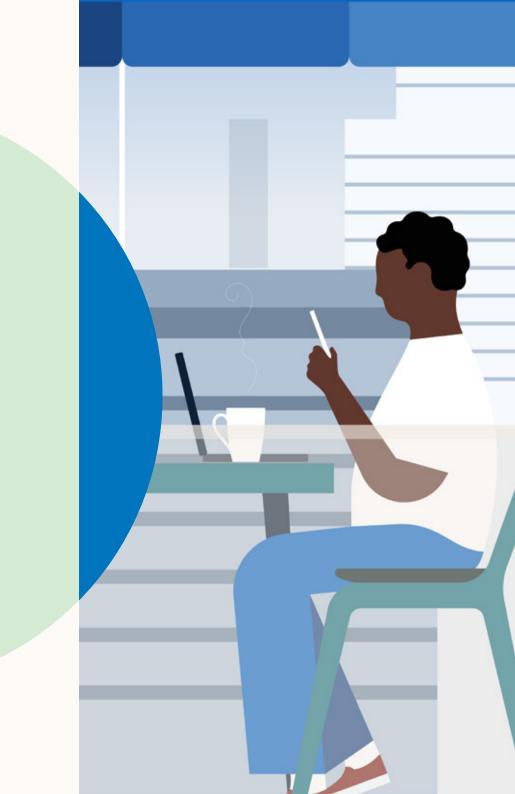
Peter Field, 'Advertising in Recession — Long, Short, or Dark?

A Guide to Advertising Best Practice in Recession', B2B Institute, (2020)



Adapting your content marketing

Put your audience's needs first and keep your messaging informative, empathetic and helpful



It's a matter of trust

Just because your products and solutions might see a drop in demand, that doesn't mean your audience has dropped their expectations of you as a brand - they've just changed, which means you need to adjust your strategy. In the 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: Brands and the Coronavirus, more than eight out of ten respondents said they wanted brands to:

- Act as a reliable news source
- Use social media channels to facilitate a sense of community and offer social support
- Educate their audience

It means that as long as it's in line with your tone of voice, brand mission and purpose, you should think about pivoting your content to focus on providing help, building trust and contributing to your prospects' recovery.

Strive for sales & marketing alignment, especially at a time of change

Pivoting successfully means making sure everyone is pulling in the same direction, so once prospects move down your funnel, they get a consistent and reassuring brand experience. In a 2020 study of EMEA sales and marketing professionals commissioned by LinkedIn, Forrester Consulting found that **nearly nine out of ten managers and directors** agreed:

- Aligning sales and marketing initiatives meant they were better at meeting customer needs
- Aligning messages and initiatives positively impacted the customer experience
- Sales and marketing collaboration enables critical business growth

Your recovery from the crisis is inextricably linked to your customers' revival, which is why every relevant stakeholder needs to be aligned in achieving that objective.

What do you see as critical for teams now?

Elizabeth Knights-Ward

Group Marketing Manager, Content Marketing at LinkedIn "Sales and Marketing alignment is more critical than ever – at a time where marketers need clear direction about where to focus resources, the sales org can act as a north star. Sales is not just a channel to distribute content to or handover a long list of leads - they are the pulse of the customer, hear their questions and challenges, and know first-hand where the most support or guidance is needed. Couple a strong partnership with your content performance data and you'll have a solid way to sense check where to pivot your content marketing strategy."

Your audience is looking for empathy

Analysis by the market research company, System1, suggests that most people don't feel alienated by ads that are set in a time before lockdowns and social distancing. System1's Chief Innovation Officer, Orlando Wood, argues that recent events are bringing about a "right-brain reset", whereby audiences are less inclined to see things in terms of black and white, right or wrong. Before COVID-19, the historically dominant left brain had presided over a shift in creative towards its preference for more literal messaging. However, periods of rapid change have tended to coincide with a more empathetic and relatable outlook as the right brain begins to take over.

"Brands must today, more than ever, show their generosity, spontaneity, humility and self-awareness, even give people something to smile about. It is these most human of characteristics that advertisers need to adopt, if they are to come out of the crisis, and come out of it stronger."

Orlando Wood

Chief Innovation Officer, Systeml Group



Five features of ads that perform well in today's context

- 1. Established brand characters
- 2. Repeated or familiar scenarios
- 3. Ads set in the past
- 4. Ads celebrating human connections and showing self-awareness
- 5. Ads with strong connection to place and community

Five features of ads that are less effective in today's context⁵

- 1. The direct 'hard sell' ad, focused on price or promotion
- 2. Ads focusing on things over people
- 3. Ads that pander to vanity or self-image
- 4. Ads reliant on words & rhythm
- 5. Aggressive, competitive or performance-focused ads

⁵ Orlando Wood, 'Are People responding to ads any differently?', B2B Institute, (2020)

Are you hitting the right notes?



Just 8% of consumers think brands should stop advertising during the crisis.⁶

The evidence suggests that B2B audiences are no different. Systeml's research found absolutely no reduction in advertising's ability to connect with people. So while you don't have to stop your campaigns, you do need to make sure they're saying the right things.

Your first port of call should be a content audit. Check your pre-existing creative to make sure it's hitting the right kind of empathetic tone and adjust it if necessary. Steer clear of hard-sell tactics or vanity messages and make sure you have a strong approvals process so that you're confident of putting it in the public domain.

Long form content doesn't have to be completely rewritten, but it's a good idea to add an editorial note or change the introduction to acknowledge the new circumstances and point out why this piece is still relevant.

"The (marketing) things that work in general times, work three, four and five times better in recessionary times."

Jon Lombardo

Global Lead. LinkedIn B2B Institute

Motivating brands in action:

To build a famous brand, aim to be strikingly original: bring out the most innovative points in your proposition and communicate them in a way that's different to everybody else in your category. If you can connect to audiences' emotions successfully, you're most of the way there.

When HP Enterprise decided to build its advertising for hybrid cloud solutions around a large red, furry monster, it ensured that people would recognise, remember and talk about their campaigns, whether they worked in IT or not.





Brand to Demand

Harmonising long-term brand strategy with short-term activation tactics



Show your emotions

Short-term sales activation messages are unlikely to be a hit right now, which is why your brand is more important than ever. Binet and Field are two of B2B marketing's leading thinkers on brand effectiveness, and they are pretty clear on what works.

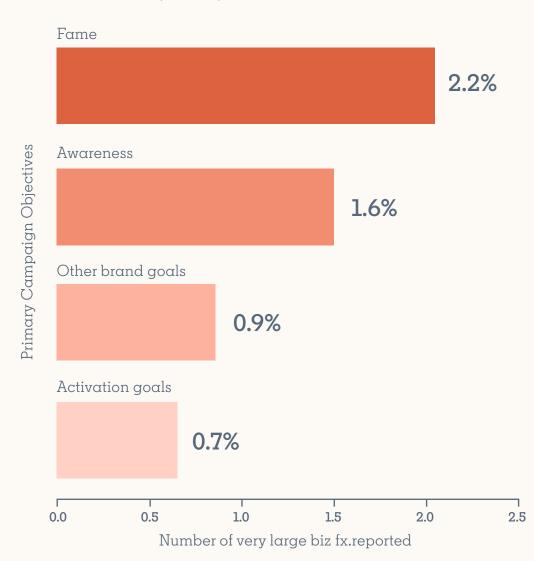
Brand building – broader messaging that works on an emotional level – is far more effective at driving long-term growth. And that's exactly what content marketing can help you achieve. Just as importantly, those emotions are absolutely crucial to realising the kind of fame that puts you at the forefront of your audience's mind.

Binet and Field also talk about two other important features of brand campaigns: The Availability Heuristic and The Affect Heuristic. The former means that we tend to favour brands that come to our mind more easily, while the latter means that if we like a brand then our assessment of its benefits is also positively impacted.

Your audience is already searching for empathetic and helpful solutions to their current predicament. By connecting with these emotions in the right way, you can increase the mental availability of your brand and simultaneously improve how your prospects perceive your company and offering.

Mental availability drives growth in B2B

Source: IPA Databank, 1998 - 2018, B2B Cases



Play the long game

Before we were treated to the novelty of the lockdown haircut, B2B companies were allocating around 45% of their budget towards long-term brand marketing, with the rest going towards short-term sales activation. But just like anyone who mistakenly reached for the hair clippers, you should definitely keep things long for now.

The average B2B sales cycle lasts around six months. This is not your average cycle, but it can be reasonably assumed that you need to plan your new content around this timescale if you want to give yourself the best chance of success.⁷

The same approach also needs to be taken when it comes to measuring your ROI. We know that 96% of marketers wait no longer than three months before attempting to measure the impact of brand campaigns.

The only real measure of marketing ROI is the financial return generated by your marketing efforts during the sales cycle, divided by the cost of your marketing investment during the sales cycle.

Have the courage to wait until your sales cycle comes to an end before measuring the success of your content marketing.

⁷The Long and Short of ROI, LinkedIn, (2020)

Grow your voice

While the temptation can be to 'hyper-target' your content to hit a narrow range of buyers, the success of your content marketing also hinges on reaching a broader audience to grow your share of voice.

The key metric here is called eSOV, which is the difference between your share of voice and share of market. The former should be larger - Binet and Field's research found that this is the key to growing your business. In fact, reach is the biggest predictor of growth in B2B.

69% of marketers do not believe that broad targeting is more effective than hyper-targeting. But, if you aren't reaching more customers than you have, you cannot grow.

4 steps to B2B brand marketing



Connect with emotion



Broaden your reach



Plan long term



Grow your share of voice

Why invest in your brand?

Binet and Field

The 5 Principles Of Growth in B2B Marketing, The B2B Institute

"Brand building excels at driving long-term growth; it usually works on an emotional level to create long-term memories and associations that continue to influence purchase decisions long after the advertising runs. This is a bigger task than sales activation, requiring much broader reach and repeated exposure. But brand building is ultimately more effective."



Organic marketing tactics that make a difference

Improve brand awareness and nourish your long-term growth



Organic is good for you

Organic marketing is like a slow-cooker. It takes patience, but eventually you get some very satisfying results. And with every bit of organic content that helps your prospects survive and thrive during a crisis, you're adding another ingredient to your brand awareness pot.

Here are some organic marketing tactics you can action today that will help you improve brand awareness and nourish your long-term growth:

- Keep your LinkedIn active, post regularly and respond with both speed and empathy to any queries
- Post images, videos and pdfs that both compliment your brand's unique message and chime with the changing needs of your customers
- **Update your audience on changes** to opening hours, cancelled events and product availability via your LinkedIn Page, Google My Business profile and any other listings
- Spend time working on your website's on-page and technical SEO to boost its organic rankings. Can you improve your page load speed?

 Are you generating traffic from keywords that you can capitalise on further?
- Gauge your audience's response or use features like LinkedIn Content Suggestions to spot trends that you can use to fuel further content
- Boost your brand awareness by @ mentioning people that are affiliated with specific content, adding hashtags to join trending conversations and sharing your own best @ mentions
- Remember people like interacting with people. Content shared by employees has twice the engagement rate of a company and a typical employee base has ten times the social reach of corporate channels

Companies that are engaged on social media are



more likely to be perceived as competitive compared to those who are not.8

⁸ LinkedIn, (2020)

Let prospects watch what you say with video

With face-to-face meetings now off the table and your audiences working from home, there really isn't another platform as powerful and engaging for sharing your ideas as video.

It has the potential to bring a human connection to your expertise and breathe life into your brand and product narratives. It also offers the best opportunity to put your executives in front of prospects to demonstrate thought-leadership in the most authentic way possible.

Don't worry about creating the perfect video. Your audience is going to recognise the limitations of recording in the current climate, and as long as your ideas resonate, it won't matter if the production seems a little rough.

Focus on the essentials:

- 1. Rehearse what you're going to say
- 2. Invest in a clip-on microphone for better audio
- 3. Choose an uncluttered background
- 4. Position yourself off-centre of the camera
- 5. Try facing a window for better lighting
- 6. If you're pre-recording, remember to add subtitles

If you publish through a LinkedIn Page you can also increase your online audience through our Events feature, which allows you to include a broadcast link, invite private attendees or make your video visible to anyone on LinkedIn.



90%

of the C-suite executives and **88% of business decisionmakers** say their respect and admiration of an organisation increases after engaging with thought-leadership content.⁹

⁹ Executive Thought-Leadership Playbook, LinkedIn

Should we be sharing video content?

Scott Jackson

Managing Director at Through The I

"We're seeing a real appetite among marketers for doing this better, doing something different and more creative. We're going to see this kind of video content become a lot more engaging in a short space of time." LinkedIn Live videos get, on average:

more reactions

24 X more comments

compared to native videos produced by the same broadcasters.



Get more engagement by going live

Use LinkedIn Live to stream live video content and drive record engagement with your professional audience. Coupled with LinkedIn Events, you can bring your community together, safely, and in real-time.

Treat LinkedIn Live like a fresh channel for your existing content ideas. Use it to help launch new products, showcase the people behind your brand, or demonstrate your thought-leadership. Whatever you choose, the magic is in making it interactive.

See how it can work for your team here*.

See more on LinkedIn Live

* Live video broadcasting is available for a limited number of members and LinkedIn Pages. Please <u>fill out an application to apply</u> to stream live video on LinkedIn.



Organic to Paid

An integrated organic and paid content marketing strategy is key to growing your brand



Get to the heart of your ideal audience

Content marketing is all about getting the right content in front of prospects at different stages of your funnel. Leveraging first-party member generated data, LinkedIn's ads let you reach your unique audience at scale when they are most engaged.

LinkedIn Targeting Options: Company, Work Experience, Groups, Interests, Location, Industry, Job Function, Seniority & more.

By combining mass reach with precise targeting, LinkedIn ads enable you to:

- Increase awareness, credibility and impact of your content through the power of social proof
- Engage your target audience composed of influencers, decision-makers and executives
- Drive traffic and leads to your site when the time is right

But remember, there's always a trade-off between targeting and audience size. If your targeting criteria is too narrow, your content may reach a very small audience. Research by Binet and Field¹⁰ tells us that when you're focusing on long-term growth, you need to grow your share of voice by keeping both your messaging and audience broad.

Tip:

The most successful LinkedIn campaigns have an audience range between **60K - 400K**.

¹⁰ Binet & Field, 5 Principles Of Growth In B2B Marketing, B2B Institute, (2019)

Brand-building takes time. Finding the right tool shouldn't

Here's a quick guide to the paid solutions best suited to your content marketing campaign

Sponsored Content: Single image, video and carousel ads

Sponsored Content allows you to publish relevant content and reach a targeted audience of professionals beyond just your LinkedIn Page followers.

Direct Sponsored Content is a feature which allows you to share content directly in the feed, giving you the ability to AB test. Make your content more relevant by sending personalised messages to specific audiences. Then test and retest a variety of content in real-time to optimise performance. Here's what you should be sharing:

- Links to your latest and greatest whitepapers
- eBooks
- Case studies
- Industry articles
- Helpful how-to content
- Bright visual video content





80% of Sponsored Content engagement comes from mobile devices. Make sure your website or landing page design is responsive.

Sponsored Messaging:

Message ads & conversation ads

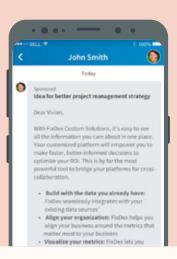
Engage your prospects in LinkedIn Messaging, where professional conversations happen. With Sponsored Messaging, you can reach your prospects on LinkedIn with attention-grabbing, highly personalised messages that speak directly to their interests.

Sponsored Messaging comes in two ad formats:

- **Message ads** deliver a targeted message with a single call-to-action.
- **Conversation ads** allow you to start quality conversations with a choose-your-own-path experience.

They are ideal for:

- Boosting conversions
 with targeted product and
 service promotions
- Promoting content your audience wants to see, such as infographics, whitepapers, and reports
- Personalising invitations to webinars and other virtual events



LinkedIn Text Ads

LinkedIn Text Ads are intuitive, self-service pay per click (PPC) ad formats that enable you to easily create, manage, and optimise customised campaigns in a matter of minutes. Text Ads are well suited for targeting a premium professional audience with:

- eBook launches
- Product one-sheeters
- Webinar and virtual event invitations
- Programme demos and certification enrolment
- Infographics
- Blog subscription campaigns

Dynamic Ads for personalised targeting

Message relevancy is critical to successfully connecting with target audiences and driving desired actions.

Dynamic Ads make it possible to accurately target decision-makers and deal influencers with highly relevant, dynamically generated, customisable creative.



Matched Audiences targeting

Matched Audiences provides three targeting tools to connect with your audiences on LinkedIn, giving you the unique ability to combine LinkedIn's powerful professional data with your own data:

- Website retargeting: Create target audiences from your website visitors to nurture them with always-on campaigns.
- Account targeting: This lets you support your account-based marketing programs by reaching decision-makers at your target accounts.
- Contact targeting: Engage prospects and contacts on LinkedIn through integration with Marketo, Oracle Eloqua or LiveRamp platforms.



Joan Calabia

Director Brand Marketing, Dockers Europe "LinkedIn fitted our strategy like a glove: highly relevant and with great targeting capabilities. Our brand tracking showed that it could deliver the emotional message we needed, associating our brand with an entrepreneurial mindset and getting out of your comfort zone."



Measuring & proving ROI

Reporting the returns of your content marketing strategy to stakeholders takes time and a clear set of metrics



Proving the value of your campaign

Measuring the success of your content marketing strategy starts with how you defined your objective. But whether you were aiming to strengthen your brand awareness, establish yourself as a thought-leader or add value to your community, the ultimate goal of any campaign is for your business to grow.

The baseline metric that most marketers use to demonstrate the impact of a campaign is return on investment (ROI). But content marketing traditionally focuses initial efforts at the top of the funnel where very few prospects are likely to convert immediately.

And herein lies the problem. The average B2B sales cycle length is 6 months or more, yet:

- 77% of marketers measure ROI during month 1 of their campaign.
- \bullet Of those, 55% of marketers had a sales cycle 3 or more months long.
- Only 4% of marketers measure ROI over 6 months or longer.¹¹

It's obvious that your stakeholders need both short-term reassurance and long-term value. So how can you meet both needs?



Dealing with the pressure to prove value

When your brand is navigating a new reality, the pressure to show short-term results can feel overwhelming. As resources dwindle, it can feel like your budget allocation both now and in the future depends on how your current campaign performs just weeks post-launch.

The key to overcoming this short-termism is to educate your stakeholders on the distinction between KPIs and ROI:

Key Performance Indicator

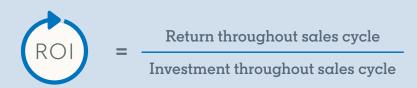
Results are short term reassurances for decisions made

Short-term signposting for campaign performance

Awareness: Impressions / Reach / Ad recall / Frequency/ Brand awareness lift / Favourability lift / Consideration lift/ Association lift / Share of voice / Brand sentiment

Consideration: Social engagement / Company followers/ Website visitors / Page views / Bounce rate / Dwell time/ Open rate / CPC / CPV / CTR

Conversion: Leads created / Conversion rate / CPL / CPA / Lead quality score / Website conversions / Offsite conversions



The only real measure of marketing ROI is the financial return generated by your marketing efforts during the sales cycle, divided by the cost of your marketing investment for that cycle.

Return on Investment

Long term value to the business

Success achieved over the length of your entire sales cycle

Marketing-attributed bookings

Closed/won deals

Average deal size

Cost per customer acquisition

Win rate

Share of market

Return on ad spend

Take a long-term view

This is especially important for brand-focused content marketing. As Peter Field points out, B2B brand associations created during a period of downturn are likely to bring the greatest sales benefit during the recovery period. When Binet and Field¹³ compared short-term sales activation versus brand building campaigns, they found the effects of brand campaigns:

- Last longer
- Accumulate over time
- Reduce price sensitivity
- Increase margins
- Drive long term growth and profit

By taking a long-term view of ROI metrics, you are far more likely to be able to properly assess the benefit of your content strategy.

¹³ Binet & Field, 5 Principles Of Growth In B2B Marketing, (2019)

Value is a team sport

One of the common features of the ROI metrics you may notice is that they cannot be achieved without the successful alignment of both sales and marketing teams.

As our recent study with Forrester Consulting found, about **5 in 10 organisations** across EMEA are planning to implement or expand initiatives in the next 12 months for marketing and sales to:

- Work on a full-funnel strategy together
- Take joint ownership of the bottom of the funnel
- Share KPIs
- Report to the same leader

It's also a fact that confidence in ROI rises by 20% when it is calculated in partnership with stakeholder teams. So make sure your report is a collaborative effort.





What's the ultimate objective of marketing?

Sabrina Rodriguez

Head of Digital Marketing, Dentsu Aegis Network

"[Our ultimate objective] is about driving growth for our company, but not just in terms of sales, it's equally in terms of how we enhance client relationships, drive retention and build reputation"

Linked in

As marketers, we enjoy talking about seismic shifts. But 99 times out of 100, the reality is barely a tremor. Well, this time everything really has changed, and will continue to do so.

Content marketing's core appeal has always been that it solves your customers' problems, which is why it should be one of the most important pillars of your recovery strategy.

Times might be unprecedented, uncertain and extraordinary, but your content strategy doesn't have to be. It's just about getting the fundamentals right, planning for the long-term and focusing on your customers' needs.

And that's what you would have been doing anyway, right?

Get Started with LinkedIn Ads.

Get started today

For the first time in the history of media, you can reach the world's professionals all in one place. More than 690M people worldwide gather on LinkedIn to stay connected and informed, advance their careers, and work smarter. Together they comprise the largest global community of business professionals. These are the decision-makers, influencers, and the leaders of today and tomorrow - precisely the people you want to target.

For more information, visit marketing.linkedin.com