

# 2017 B2B Marketing ROI Roundtable

4 Marketing thought leaders discuss content,  
social media, and generating revenue



# How to thrive in the age of ROI

Marketers have always known in their bones that advertising and marketing work. Now we're able to prove it with data. We recently sat down with four experts on B2B marketing in our ROI Roundtable. We discussed content marketing, metrics, and social media with a special emphasis on LinkedIn. No matter the topic, the conversation always returned to ROI and bottom-line performance. Read on to gain valuable, actionable insight from our four panelists on how you can prove ROI in your own marketing.



**AJ Wilcox**  
Founder  
B2Linked.com



**Arthur Sweetser**  
CMO  
eDataSource



**Bhavisha Oza**  
Director of Digital Marketing,  
Global Demand Creation  
Genesys



**Marcus Andrews**  
Senior Product  
Marketing Manager  
HubSpot

**LINKEDIN:**

Welcome, everybody, to the LinkedIn B2B Marketing ROI Roundtable. Let's dive right in.

**What role does content marketing play in your overall marketing strategy?**





### AJ WILCOX:

For B2Linked, content marketing is the vast majority of what we do. We have found video, podcasts, webinars, and blog posts to be valuable to us. But then on the client side, because our clients are advertising on LinkedIn, we generally recommend white papers, ebooks, and webinars — the kind of gated content that can be shared on LinkedIn.

“ In short, the answer is content is everything.



### BHAVISHA OZA:

Content marketing is core to our digital demand gen strategy here at Genesys. Our goal is to provide buyers with content that will help them overcome their challenges and pain points. We develop content by persona and for all three stages of the buying cycle — awareness, consideration, and preference. Especially for B2B enterprise software, which has long sales cycles, and where 60 to 90 percent of the buying process is completed even before the vendors are contacted, it is very important to promote digital content across all channels — social networks, company website, and emails — with a mobile-first mindset. So content marketing is an integral part of our digital demand gen strategy.



### MARCUS ANDREWS:

Content marketing is huge for us. HubSpot is synonymous with inbound marketing and the whole movement away from interruptive, annoying marketing towards marketing that is helpful and educational. Content marketing is really at the core of that. Content marketing has established us as thought leaders, helped us build a really strong community, and still creates the majority of our leads. It's essential to everything that we do at HubSpot and a core competency of everyone on our marketing team: We're all content creators.

“ We're all content creators.



### ARTHUR SWEETSER:

The core of our business is email intelligence. We enable Macy's to understand what The Gap sent last week. What did they mail, how did it perform, how can you benefit from knowing? We just finished a study that showed people who use email intelligence perform three times better on revenue versus those who don't. In short, the answer is content is everything.





**LINKEDIN:**

**How critical is marketing measurement,  
and what are your key performance  
indicators (KPIs)?**



**BHAVISHA:**

We look at MCLs (Marketing Captured Leads), and we turn them into MQLs (Marketing Qualified Leads), opportunities, and then pipeline. We work very closely with the LinkedIn team to continuously optimize click-through rates and conversions.

For a recent LinkedIn ABM (account-based marketing) Sponsored Content campaign, we drove an average conversion rate of 2.7 percent, which in my opinion is very good for paid social, especially for our industry and target audience. The conversion rate varies by content piece (that we're offering via sponsored post). There are certain offers that perform at a 4 percent or 5 percent conversion rate.



**MARCUS:**

We're very focused on measurement as part of everything we do and have established a strong framework for it. We're mainly looking at metrics like weekly active users for our products. We're also measuring NPS (Net Promoter Score). When it comes to ads results, we're looking at the entire funnel. Our big objective is to go past click metrics and get to proper acquisition costs and really try to tie each ad to a person, a lead, and a deal. We want to understand the entire customer journey and the role the ad played. We've been able to do that with LinkedIn ads and the integration with the HubSpot platform.

“ We track quite religiously — anything the client gives us access to.



**AJ:**

LinkedIn is a high cost-per-click media, and because of that, measurement is absolutely crucial. I found that when you're comparing other media like Facebook and AdWords, LinkedIn is going to produce a higher quality of leads, and it's going to close larger deal sizes. But if you're not measuring anything past cost-per-lead, you see very disparate CPL numbers and probably end up shifting funds away from LinkedIn. We track quite religiously — anything the client gives us access to.

For the less sophisticated marketers, it's probably going to start with CPL, but if they have a customer relationship management (CRM) tool, then we're progressing down to a cost per marketing qualified lead, a cost per sales qualified lead, cost per opportunity, and a cost per close. Each client tends to call these things something a little bit different, but that's what we're tracking.



## LINKEDIN:

When you sit down with your clients, do you lay your point of view on the table right away? Do you say, “If you’re going to use these various social media sites, here are the things you should measure, and here’s what you should be keeping in mind about what the measurements tell you?”



**AJ:**

Yes, I lay out the different personalities of each of the different channels and what I’ve seen in the past. For instance, I know that AdWords leads are going to see the highest acceleration through the funnel, because people are coming to Google with an intent. But we’re going to see LinkedIn leads closing larger deal sizes.

AdWords is going to close some smaller deal sizes. Facebook is going to have really low cost-per-lead, but the sales team is going to complain to me a little bit about the quality of leads that are coming through (from Facebook).





LINKEDIN:

Q: Can you tell us about measurement and the KPIs that you're interested in?



ARTHUR:

We measure leads. We look at inbound and outbound. I'm always very focused on ratios. How do leads really turn into (product) demos? From demos, we then qualify them as opportunities, and opportunities to wins. What's really important to me is as you expand the relationship with a marketing platform — as we have with LinkedIn — do you maintain the level of quality? I'm pleased that our lead-to-demo ratio is about 35 percent to 40 percent. So, a lead almost half the time turns into a demo. A demo to an opportunity is about an

80 percent ratio, and an opportunity to close is about 30 percent. So, to me what's important is we have the opportunity to target the audience, which LinkedIn honestly does better than any medium I use. But the question is, do I maintain the quality ratios, because we look at cost-per-click, which is important, and LinkedIn competes very well with Google AdWords. But ultimately it's cost-per-acquisition. We got 25 percent more efficient the second half of the year, and LinkedIn contributed to that.

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... we have the opportunity to target the audience, which LinkedIn honestly does better than any medium I use.”

## LINKEDIN:

In measuring your marketing, especially your digital marketing, can you gauge how much of your advertising is working and specifically which ads are working?



### ARTHUR:

Yes and no. My overall concern is the CEO asking, so tell me which banner generated the \$27,000 sale? It doesn't quite work that way in my opinion. Yes, every seven days, I take a screenshot of LinkedIn, and I want everybody to know what we got for impressions, what we got for clicks. I totally believe in that transparency. But in a B2B market,

it's about what they saw on LinkedIn, what they may have found on search, what they found on a vertical site, and what they saw at a trade show. Yes, you should track and measure, but particularly in a B2B market, where the average sale is \$25,000, it's usually multiple touch points that affect and close a sale.

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**BHAVISHA:**

Measurement is easy, as well as it is difficult. B2B sale cycles can be very long, and there are many different marketing programs that influence an opportunity along the way. I think multi-touch attribution is the next big thing as far as digital marketing is concerned. Currently we look at first touch attribution and track marketing sourced opportunities.



**AJ:**

This is actually why I like B2B so much. It leaves so much open to analysis. I feel like consumer e-commerce marketers have it so easy. You know at the end of the day how much you spent and how much you sold. But in B2B, because we have those offline conversion events, and because we have the longer sales cycles, it forces us to be very data driven.

“ I think multi-touch attribution is the next big thing.





**LINKEDIN:**

**Q:** How do you plan to change your marketing in 2017?

Will you be doing anything differently based on what you learned in 2016?



**MARCUS:**

A lot of our content strategy is really moving towards topics over keywords. We really want to own individual topics and be less keyword oriented. A lot of things are changing from a consumer standpoint, from a B2B buyer standpoint, and from a search standpoint. Things like conversational UI are reshaping search, there's a lot more video involved in how people are researching topics and how people are learning about software. So, we are moving towards topics in how we think about content strategy. We also really want to nail video and make sure it that it's as high quality as possible. And we're

definitely evolving our ad strategy too.

There's more to take advantage of in terms of new technology. Targeting and the ad units that are available for B2B are evolving way faster than they have in a long time, and we're absolutely going to take advantage of it.



**ARTHUR:**

More content, more places — that's kind of our thing in 2017. We publish every week now. We're obviously pleased with what we do with LinkedIn, but we're looking at verticals very targeted within our industry, and then we have about six other marketing channels that we use.



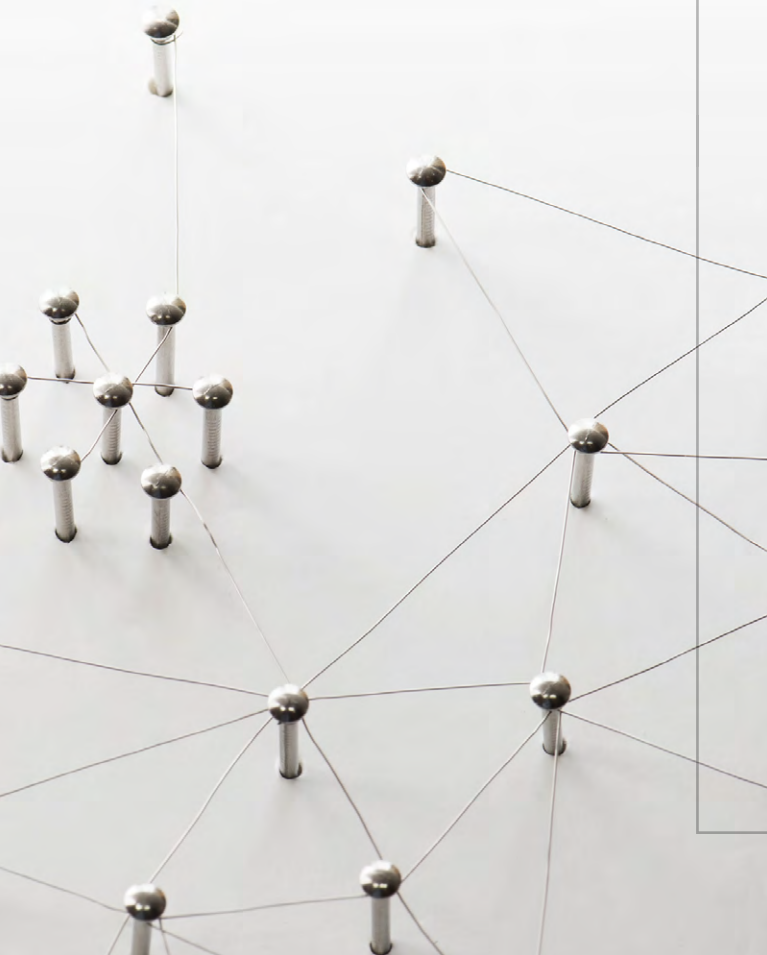
**AJ:**

I'm seeing a massive shift towards account-based marketing, and I expect I'll have the vast majority of our clients running at least one ABM campaign in 2017 to take advantage of LinkedIn's unique, scalable targeting here. It's very rare when I see a company that doesn't have a good use-case for account-based marketing.

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“ Content is the atomic particle of marketing.



**LINKEDIN:**

So, Arthur, you're spending more on content marketing, period. Are you also expanding your spending on content marketing as a percentage of your budget?



**ARTHUR:**

I don't really look at content as separate from the other marketing. I look at content as sort of the core product that we need to deliver that we then use across multiple channels.

**LINKEDIN:**

We love that answer. There was a great quote last year from Tom McConnon of Domo: "Content is the atomic particle of marketing." That's especially true for a lot of B2B companies. So Bhavisha, how are you going to change how Genesys does its marketing in 2017?



**BHAVISHA:**

We will continue to invest in content marketing across all digital channels, we have even greater focus on integrated ABM programs. I would like to see us do more bottom-funnel tactics — do more demo webinars, create more bottom-funnel content like demo videos, and create more interactive content. I'm looking to implement integrated multichannel marketing campaigns. What I mean by this is that you have the same offer, such as an online assessment or an ROI calculator, to promote across all digital channels — email, webinar, website, third-party online media publishers, paid social, organic social, and retargeting — in an integrated fashion. Another concept I'm excited about is content bingeing. When prospects are in the consideration stage, they consume a lot of content from everywhere. To me the concept of content bingeing is really exciting, and I'm looking forward to executing it.

## LINKEDIN:

Right, so it's like the B2B form of bingeing on "Game of Thrones."

AJ, we'll ask you this question first: How are your customers using LinkedIn, both organic and paid, in their marketing?



### AJ:

We're probably like a 60/40 split right now between LinkedIn Sponsored Content and LinkedIn Text Ads. The one big advantage Text Ads have is that the traffic is 95 percent from desktop devices, so, that's really helpful for people with more involved signup processes. For the vast majority of clients, I'm recommending Sponsored Content, because it has the best engagement rates and it's easiest to get started. Self-service advertisers also just recently got access to LinkedIn Sponsored InMail, and we're definitely running some tests with InMail.



### ARTHUR:

We were using Text Ads, and they were doing fine. But your account person recommended LinkedIn Sponsored Content, and the numbers took off from there. I'm reporting every week on something new (in email performance): Mother's Day, Christmas, Trump. So, with my ability to deliver timely content with LinkedIn Sponsored Content, the numbers spoke for themselves. We are also testing LinkedIn Dynamic Ads and are interested in their potential.



### BHAVISHA:

In the first quarter of 2016, we started with Sponsored Content. Then in the second quarter until the end of the fourth quarter, we ran ABM Sponsored Content programs, which targeted specific, predetermined accounts and did exceptionally well. We also ran Sponsored Content retargeting campaigns. In addition, we actively monitor our LinkedIn Content Marketing Score to make sure that we have a healthy mix of company updates and Sponsored Content that employees share.





**MARCUS:**

We absolutely love being on LinkedIn for organic reach and engagement. We have a really strong inbound marketing community there. We are reaching the right audience, and it's an important distribution and engagement channel for content. The types of conversations that we can have with the audience on LinkedIn are unique compared to some other channels. When it comes to paid, I'll echo some of the other marketers on the Roundtable when they said that they had a lot of success with account-based Sponsored Content. We've had some great results from it as well. We're creating a lot of content that helps us focus on leadership and community around the different product launches and categories that we're entering into. We're also reaching our customers through Sponsored Content with offers. We want to use it as a way to drive some action. It's really easy to assess its effectiveness. LinkedIn is definitely a great place to have that conversation with your audience.

**LINKEDIN:**

Could you explain in more detail what you mean by account-based marketing on LinkedIn?



**MARCUS:**

We've been working with LinkedIn to build audiences of the companies that make up our customer base. LinkedIn enabled us to go deeper inside a company, spread across the company, and reach more influencers inside that company.



**BHAVISHA:**

For us at Genesys, we gave our ABM, focus, and target account database to LinkedIn. LinkedIn did a company match of that database, and we ran Sponsored Content programs to that database.

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LinkedIn enabled us to go deeper inside a company, spread across the company, and reach more influencers inside that company.

## LINKEDIN:

Can you describe how well your LinkedIn advertising worked in 2016?



### ARTHUR:

It's considered one of our best performing marketing channels.



### BHAVISHA:

LinkedIn was very helpful in driving top-of-funnel leads for our ABM, focus, and target accounts. Of the inquiries generated, we saw a 60 percent conversion to MCLs, which means that the LinkedIn ABM campaign generated net new leads within the ABM, focus, and target accounts that the sales team did not have before. Marketing was able to deliver these additional leads to sales to enable them to do a deeper account mapping. One other aspect I would like to highlight is that LinkedIn gives us this unique opportunity for our brand to directly engage with the buyer persona. No other platform gives you this opportunity.



### MARCUS:

At HubSpot, we have an integration with LinkedIn as part of our HubSpot Ads tool. We're able to look across a few thousand customers who use the tool and analyze click and conversion rates. What we see is that, yes, LinkedIn's cost-per-click is definitely more expensive than other channels, but at the same time the conversion rate is way better for LinkedIn. Globally we saw a 9 percent conversion rate for LinkedIn, which pretty much blew us away. The quality of the leads driven from LinkedIn is higher than what we've seen from other ads that we show our customers.

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## LINKEDIN:

How are you planning to change how you use LinkedIn in 2017?



### BHAVISHA:

We are continuing what we've been doing in terms of ABM with LinkedIn Sponsored Content and retargeting. What we will change is optimizing more aggressively and paying more attention to follow up.



### MARCUS:

At HubSpot, we have found a channel (in LinkedIn) that we really like, and now we need to think about it more strategically and tie in the ROI to larger campaigns. Similarly, for our customers, people need to do more testing and know what works to really home in on ROI.



### AJ:

We're not planning on changing too much in 2017. But we're really excited for the new functionality and tools that we're getting from LinkedIn in 2017. I also expect to see some of the changes starting to occur from the Microsoft acquisition, probably towards the end of the year. I know those things take quite a bit of time, but I'm excited to see what happens there. One thing that I know has been publicized is account-based marketing being available on the LinkedIn self-service platform.



**LINKEDIN:**

For a company that is getting started with LinkedIn or content marketing in general, what would you advise them to do?



**MARCUS:**

For content strategy and LinkedIn, you really have to understand your audience if you're just getting started. Put more time than you think you'll need into research and strategy. You'll never say to yourself, "We put too much time into research and strategy." The better prepared you are, the faster you'll execute. You want to know your audience, and you want to have a game plan as you go into it. For smaller businesses and lead-generation marketers

that are more sensitive with their budgets, I recommend using organic as a way to better understand your audience and what's working. When you do find something that works and you've looked at the data and you've tapped into something that's ROI positive, don't be afraid to put some paid budget behind it. If you're putting in a dollar and getting two dollars out, and you've created a machine that can do that, don't be shy about increasing your spend.

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**AJ:**

I find a lot of companies wanting to make sure that their content strategy is on point, so they're going to spend lots and lots of time figuring out what the piece of content is to feature. I think you just need to get started.



**ARTHUR:**

I would tell you: Use LinkedIn resources. I felt like I went from C-grade level to an A-level in like 30 days when I was leveraging some of the talented people and resources that LinkedIn has. I agree with the idea of crawl, walk, run on the budgeting. I go back and forth on the targeting, broader versus smaller, and I do agree with the comment: once you have something working, don't screw with it — spend more money on it.



... once you have something working, don't screw with it — spend more money on it.



**BHAVISHA:**

Spend time to identify who your target audience is and then market to them. I would also say, optimize aggressively. Don't just look at clicks and click-through rates, go beyond to conversion rates. And I would say don't be afraid to make mistakes, because when you're trying new things, you would make mistakes, but the important thing is to launch, then adjust. Fail fast, fail forward until you succeed!

**LINKEDIN:**

**Thank you, everyone, for participating and sharing your insight into content marketing, metrics, social media, and LinkedIn.**





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