eBook

State of Content Operations 2020

Strategy, Creation, & Technology

upland Kapost

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2018, we at Upland Kapost launched the Content Operations Self-Assessment, a free online tool that helps B2B marketing teams benchmark their content ops maturity.

Since then, hundreds of teams around the world have taken the time to answer questions about their approach to content strategy, production, distribution, and more, in order to pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses and identify how to improve.

So, early this year, when we asked ourselves, how are B2B *marketers meeting the challenges confronting them today*?, we realized we didn't need to speculate–the answer was right in front of us. We aggregated and anonymized the data from our assessment.

The result was a birds-eye view of how people are faring in our brave new customer-centric world.

We grouped our findings into four key categories:

STRATEGY
How well are marketers able to prioritize their work around larger business objectives, consider the needs and wants of stakeholders, and measure the success of their work to inform future planning?

PRODUCTION
How well do teams work cross-functionally to get the right work done efficiently and well?

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE
How do customers and prospects receive content? When they do, is their experience personalized and consistent?

BEST PRACTICES
How well are marketers setting themselves up for success across technology, personnel, and taxonomy?

CONTENTS

Still need to assess your own team?

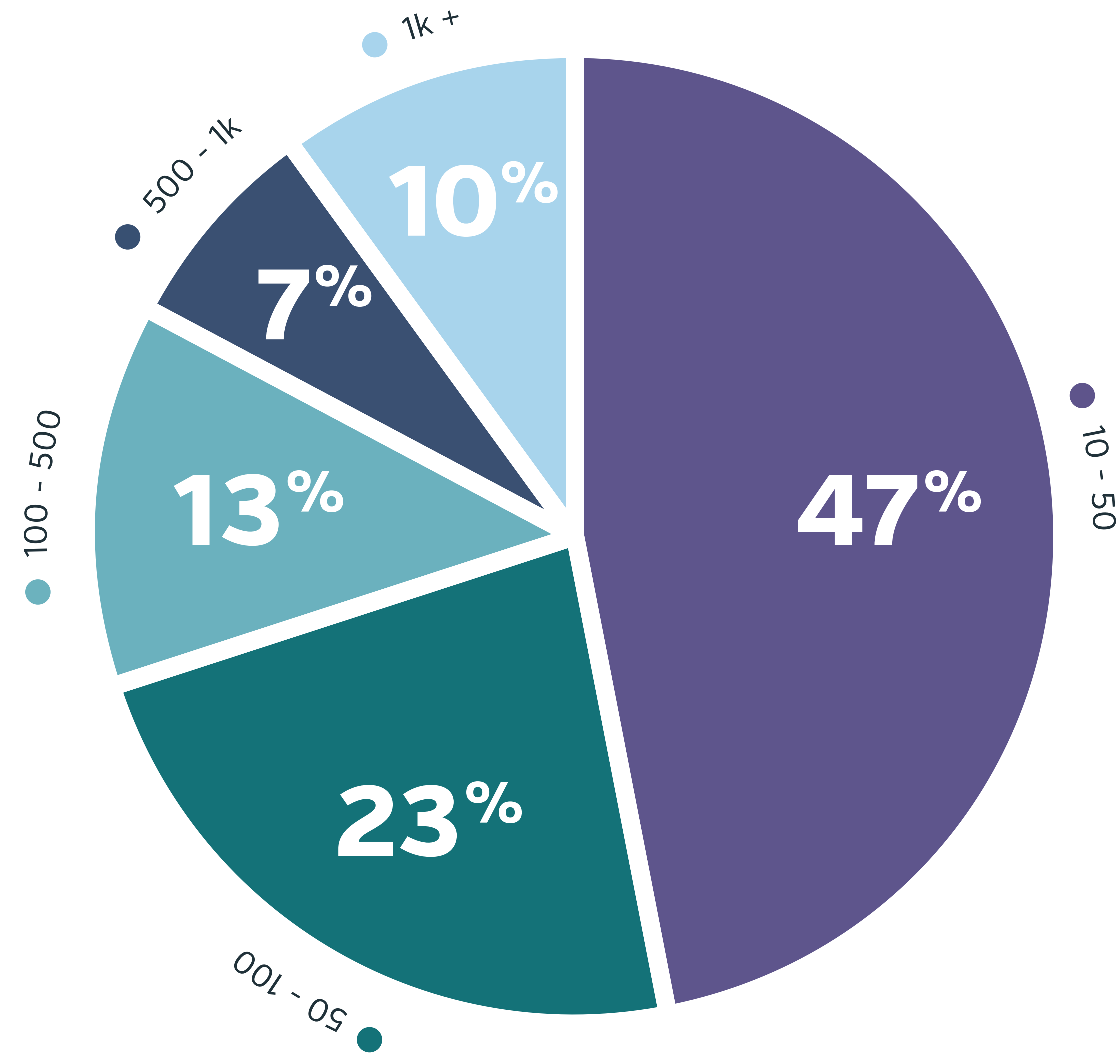
Take the Content Operations Self-Assessment

DEMOGRAPHICS

All told, we analyzed the 398 responses.
Here's who they represent:

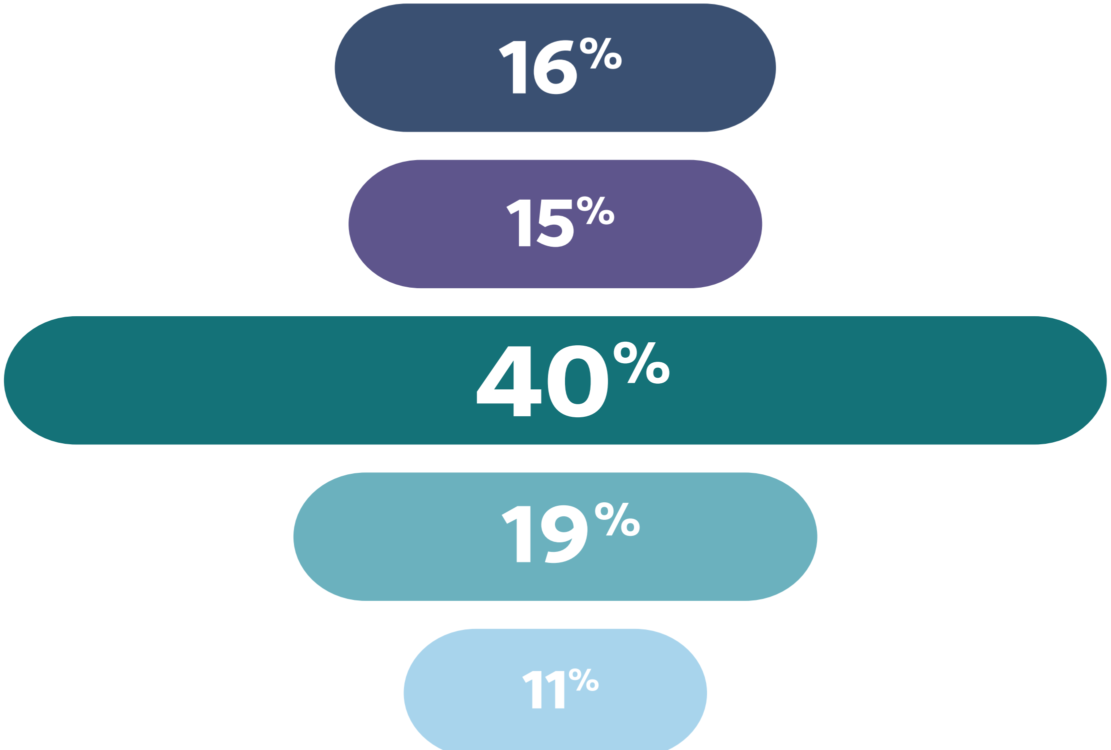
Team Size
We threw out responses from those working on teams smaller than ten people to focus on the challenges facing mid-sized and enterprise marketing organizations.

Role
Content marketers and content strategists made up the majority of our respondents, but we also heard from those who represent the broad reaches of revenue teams, from sales and sales enablement to digital marketers, demand generation, and customer success.



- 18% Sales
- 13% Sales Enablement
- 62% Content Strategy
- 98% Content Marketing
- 62% Web/digital Marketing
- 26% Demand Generation
- 28% Product Marketing:
- 18% Corporate Communications/PR
- 18% Creative/Design
- 17% Customer Success
- 8% Field Marketing
- 31% Other [SEO, operations, etc.]

STRATEGY Focus or Flailing?



How does your organization prioritize content plans?

- We handle requests as they come in
- We have plans, but they are not prioritized against company objectives
- We have plans and try to prioritize the ones that match with organizational objective
- We only plan content campaigns and programs based on organizational objectives
- We plan content campaigns based on organizational objectives and prioritize by those that fill strategic gaps

Whatever your strategic prerogatives, there are tried and true ways to operationalize strategy and ensure that your teams are chasing aligned goals, have procedures in pace to handle ad hoc requests and feedback, and measure their success to inform future activity.

Prioritizing Strategic Plans

While only 11% of teams plan both against business priorities and contextual gaps in their existing content library, the majority are at least considering the bigger picture when it comes to designing strategic goals.

STRATEGY Focus or Flailing?

How does your organization make decisions on ad hoc requests from other departments?

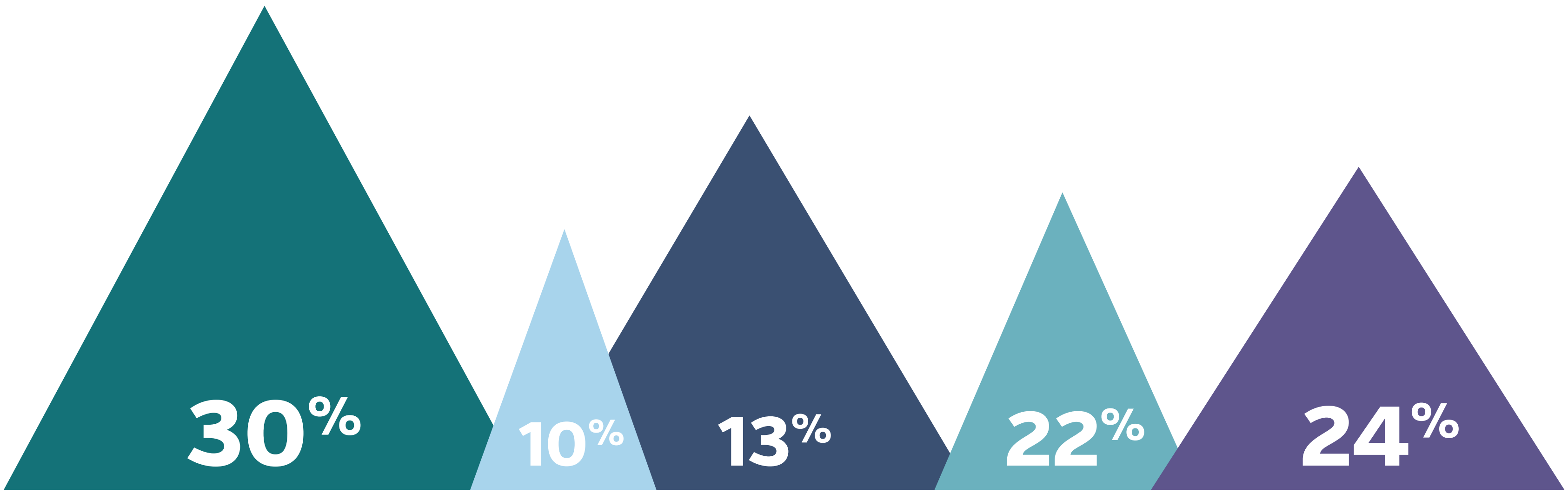
- We handle requests as they come in
- We handle them when we have extra time
- Ad hoc requests are escalated to management for prioritization, but there's no real policy for what gets approved
- Management reviews ad hoc requests and prioritizes those that meet certain requirements
- Management reviews and prioritizes requests that align with organizational objectives and de-prioritizes others

Managing Ad Hoc Requests

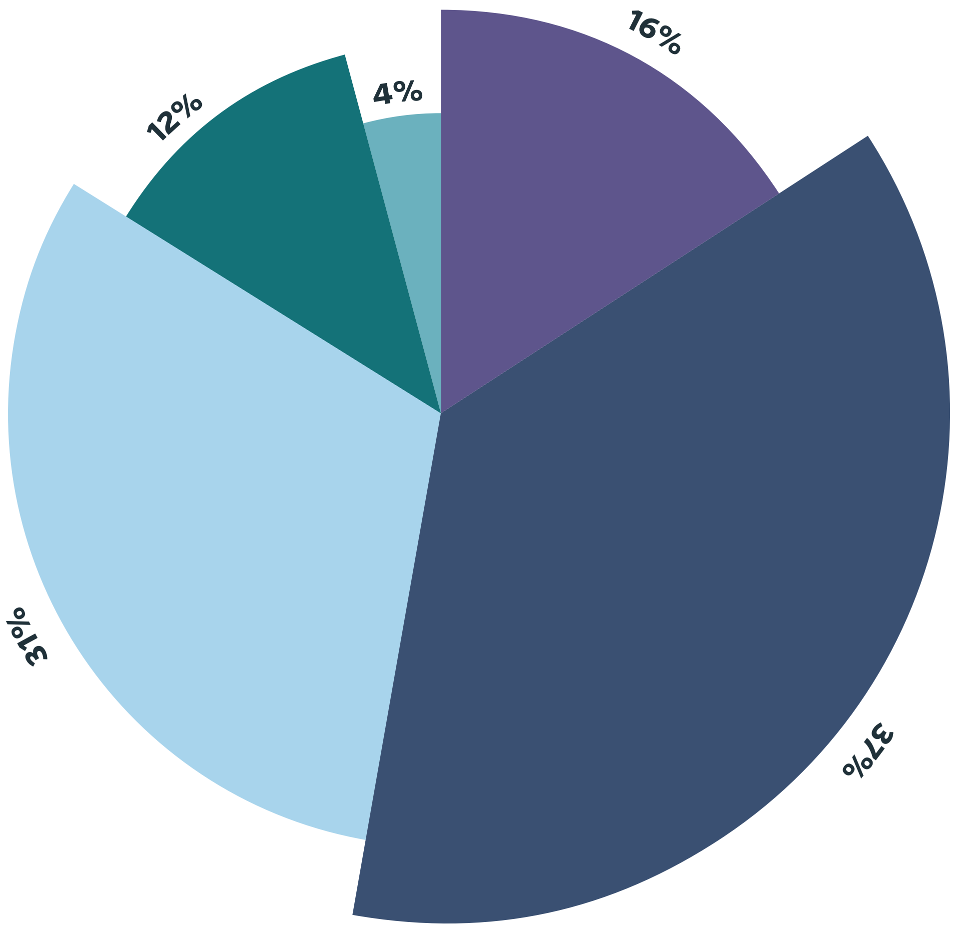
Having solid strategic plans is a great first step, but will only take you so far. From the moment they're agreed to, plans compete against a slew of ad hoc ideas for your attention.

With more than half of respondents reporting that they lack formal processes, most marketers would do well to standardize response procedures for these inevitable requests.

Note: The best policy isn't simply shutting down ideas that come from outside marketing. Priorities change, and your plans should be built with a level of pliability. That said, if you allow your strategy to become completely derailed by ad hoc asks, you'll create chaos internally—and inconsistent customer experiences for your audience.



STRATEGY Focus or Flailing?



How well do teams know how their work (and that of other teams) connects to organizational objectives?

- We don't
- Goal spreadsheets, decks, or briefs are shared by my team leader, but not from others
- All teams have access to shared spreadsheets, decks, or briefs, but they aren't always up to date
- All teams are regularly briefed via up-to-date spreadsheets, slide decks, or campaign briefs
- All teams have access to up-to-date plans organized by objectives in a dynamic tool

Connecting Individual Effort to Company Goals

The good news: Only 16% of respondents say they don't know how their work levels up to larger company goals. The bad news: A full 37% report that they can't see outside of their own team's efforts.

The nearly one third of folks who have access to shared documents that track big-picture insights are on a better track, at least in theory. But when shared plans are static and regularly out-of-date, they quickly lose their power.

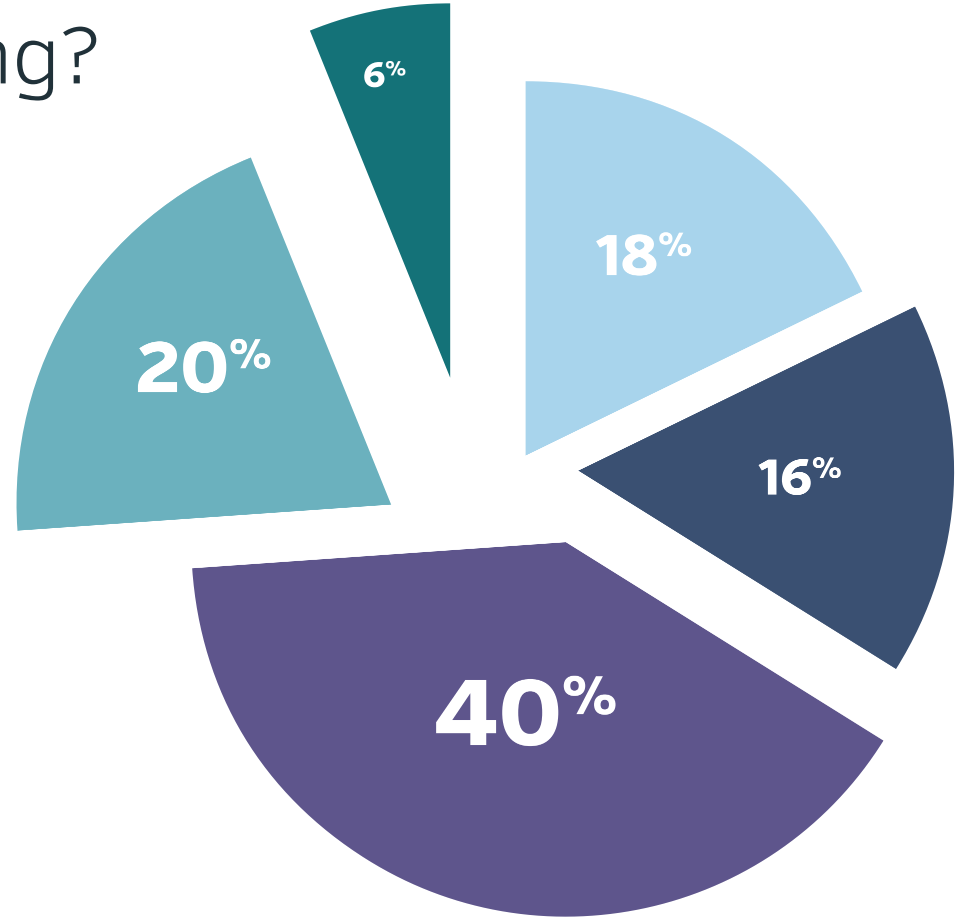
STRATEGY Focus or Flailing?

Soliciting Feedback

A solid 40% of revenue teams say they do meet occasionally with sales and other teams to gather feedback and ideas, but that these meetings are limited to discussions around big initiatives.

More valuable are the meetings another 20% of revenue teams are having to discuss roadmaps and performance. Having these broader-scoped meetings allows non-content teams to contribute insights earlier in the process, rather than limit their insights to specific projects. Bringing in diverse perspectives regularly helps content teams better plan and execute crucial customer-centric content that will help grow and accelerate revenue.

Better yet, 6% of organizations have a dedicated system that allows for clear process around idea submission and follow-ups. This way, people can contribute ideas–and others can assess those ideas–on their own time, with full visibility and tracking.



How does marketing gather ideas or feedback from teams like sales?

- We handle requests as they come in
- We handle them when we hav e extra time
- Ad hoc meetings for large campaigns
- Management reviews ad hoc requests and prioritizes those that meet certain requirements
- Regular meetings + dedicated system for idea submission, feedback, and status tracking

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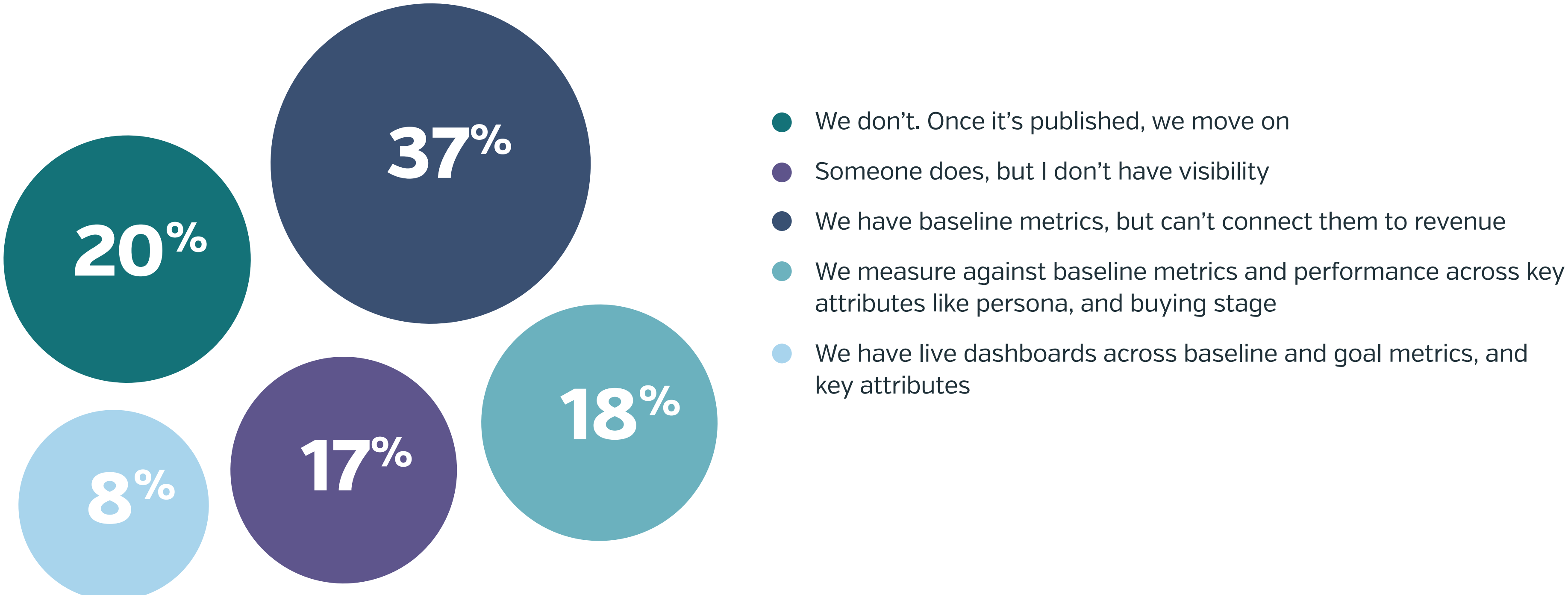
STRATEGY Focus or Flailing?

How does your organization demonstrate content ROI?



Assessing the Return on Content

Proving the ROI of content remains elusive for the vast majority of marketing teams. Just a quarter of organizations apply clear measurements to their content to determine its success, either through routinely pulling metrics or with live dashboards that track progress and encourage agile responses.

These results are unsurprising: Putting a single number on the value of content is difficult. But being able to demonstrate the material impact of your content operation is crucial to secure buy-in from leadership and earn the resources–from people to technology–you need to grow your impact.

PRODUCTION Alignment or Silos?

Content production eats up the majority of marketing teams' time and budget. And it makes sense: This is the stage in which your planning comes to fruition and your message is crafted into the material that prospects and customers will consume as they assess your organization.

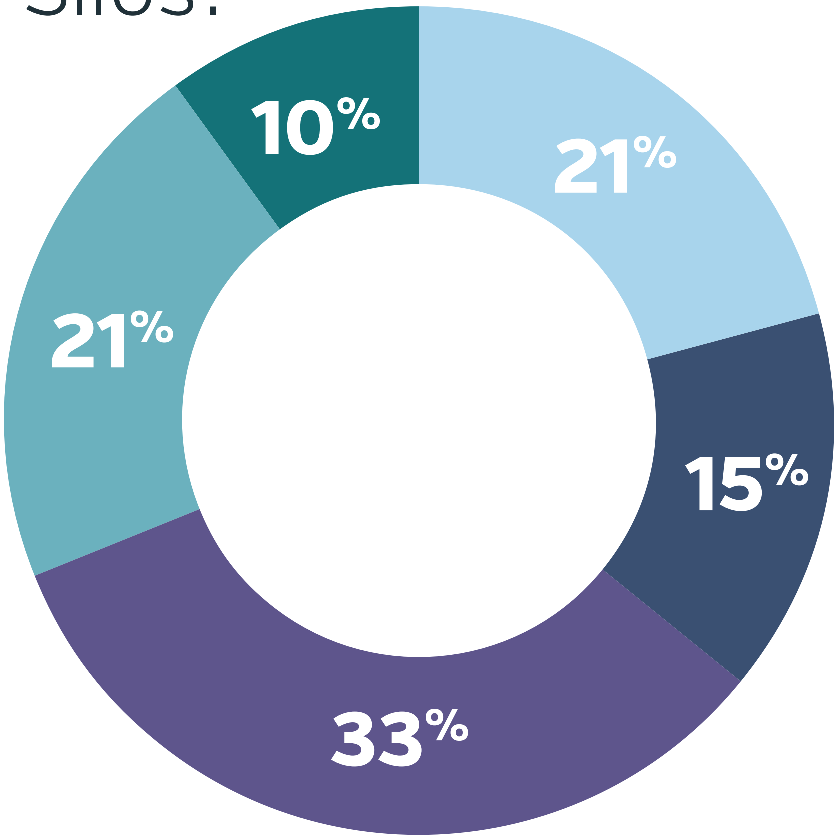
It's also where waste and misalignment often rear their ugly heads.

Keeping Stakeholders in the Loop

Much like the responses we saw about gathering feedback from tangential teams in the previous section, one-third of marketing organizations share major updates around content and campaigns via ad hoc meetings. Another 20% opt for a living document that can be accessed at will.

These are both good steps to alignment, ensuring that teams that use content are aware of what's coming and can build trust and understanding in the work of the marketing team.

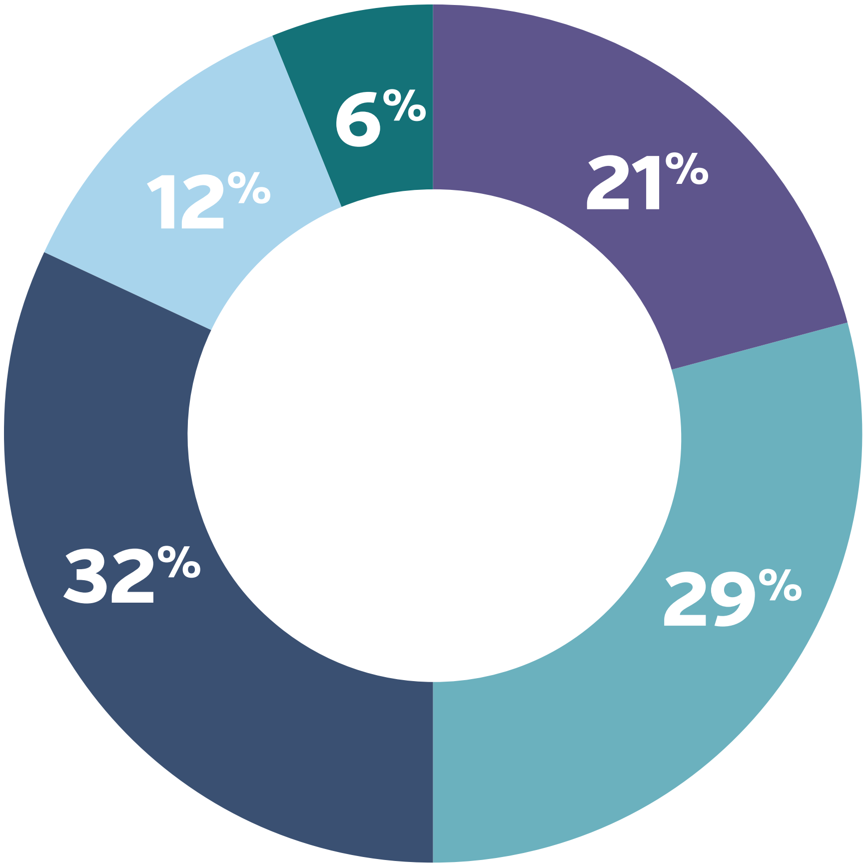
Meanwhile, twice as many marketing teams (20%) admit they don't have a consistent process as those who benefit from real-time status dashboards and an accessible editorial calendar (10%).



How does your team communicate the status of content and campaigns to other teams and stakeholders?

- We don't have a consistent process
- We track status and dates, but don't share them externally
- We share major dates and updates in meetings when needed
- We share status updates in a shared doc accessible to all stakeholders
- Real-time status dashboards and an editorial calendar accessible to stakeholders

PRODUCTION Alignment or Silos?



Standardized Workflows

Many teams have some a reasonably clear view of how the creation of assets and campaigns can and should get done in their organizations, though few follow these agreed-upon processes religiously.

But remember: Standardized workflows are important, but they should never stay rigid. The best workflows are in a constant state of evolution, and the most effective teams make an effort to consider what's working, what isn't, and how existing workflows should be adjusted to reflect the makeup of the team and the success or failure of existing processes.

Does your team have standard workflows for content and campaigns?

- No, we notify the next person in line when it is their turn
- We have documented approval requirements, but no way to track them
- Yes, but we don't consistently use them
- Yes, our team follows them to a T
- Yes, and we regularly review and update them

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE Delightful or Disjointed?

Distributing Content

Most marketing teams distribute content through the standard channels: social media, the company website, a blog, and via marketing automation like emails and landing pages.

One crucial trend to note is the number of marketing teams distributing content internally, via DAMs or other repositories to their sales, field marketing, and customer success teams, to name a few. Doing so is a critical piece of content distribution often overlooked by marketing teams. If properly activated, these customer-facing teams are a major distribution channel for content, helping expand your reach beyond the top of the funnel and drive real, measurable revenue.

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE Delightful or Disjointed?

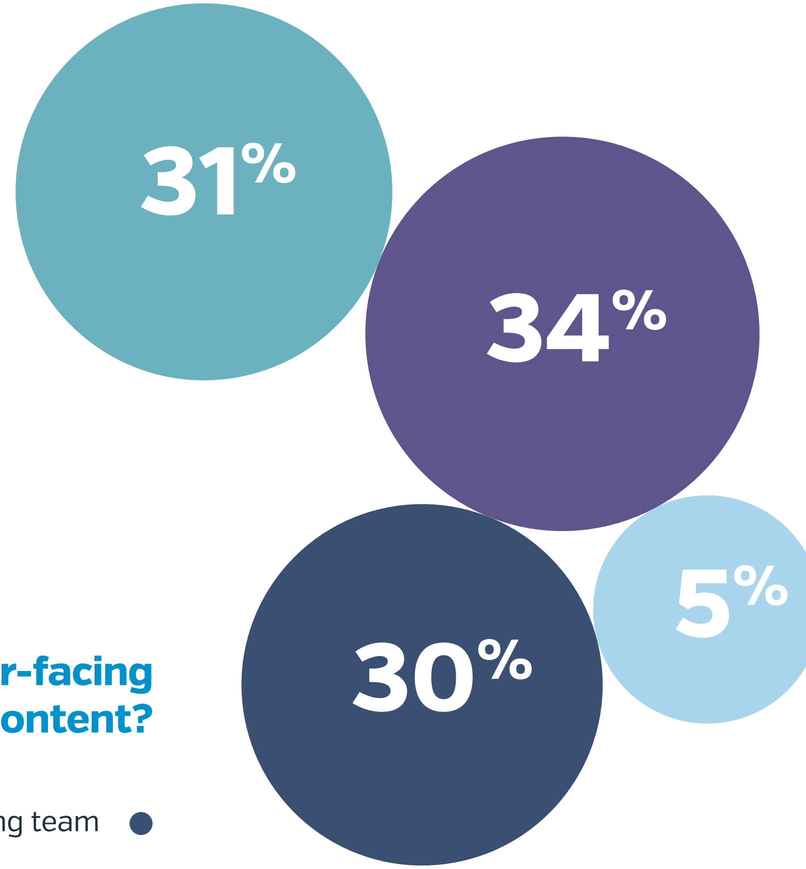
Empowering Internal Distributors

Getting content in the hands of customer-facing teams is one thing. Empowering them to find, contextualize, and share it is another.

So it's alarming that a full 61% of organizations suffer from the confusion of multiple repositories and the uncertainty of what happens to assets once they're accessed by customer-facing teams.

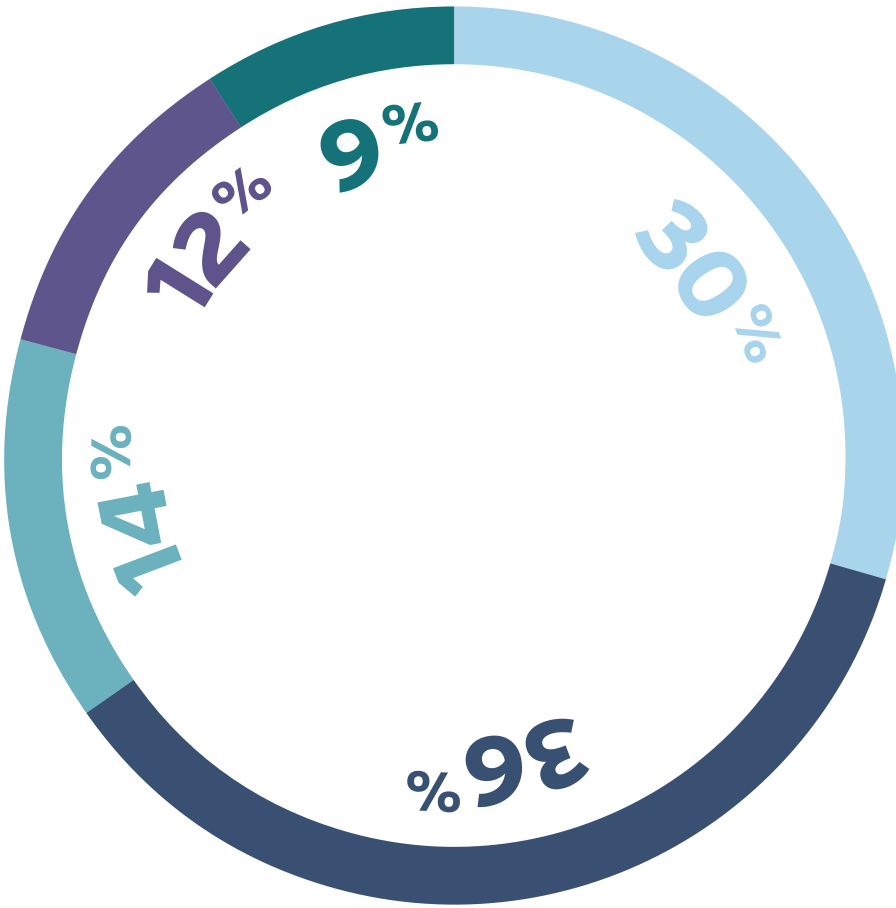
But things are looking up: More than a third of teams confine their finalized content to a single, organized location where customer-facing teams can customize content without going rogue.

How do you enable customer-facing teams to share content?



- Multiple repositories and directly via the marketing team
- A few, searchable repositories, but many users modify content outside of brand guidelines
- A single repository where customer-facing teams can find content via search or custom tags and customize it
- A single repository with contextual recommendations where teams can search, sort, and customize

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE Delightful or Disjointed?



Personalization

We hear a lot about personalization, but few B2B organizations have yet figured out how to fully personalize their customer journeys. In fact, early one-third of respondents report that they don't personalize their customer experiences in any way. Another 36% say they employ personas and adjust individual content pieces to fit the needs of these personas.

What winning with B2B personalization looks like remains to be seen. Less than 10% say they employ multiple connected systems to connect experiences and dynamically deliver individualized experiences with content.location where customer-facing teams can customize content without going rogue.

How do you personalize the customer experience?

- We don't
- We have distinct buyer personas and personalize a few static content types
- We use historical buyer journey data to create nurture programs
- We use historical data combined with real-time behavior tracking to personalize sections of our website
- Multiple connected systems create perfectly personalized content experiences from component parts

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE Delightful or Disjointed?

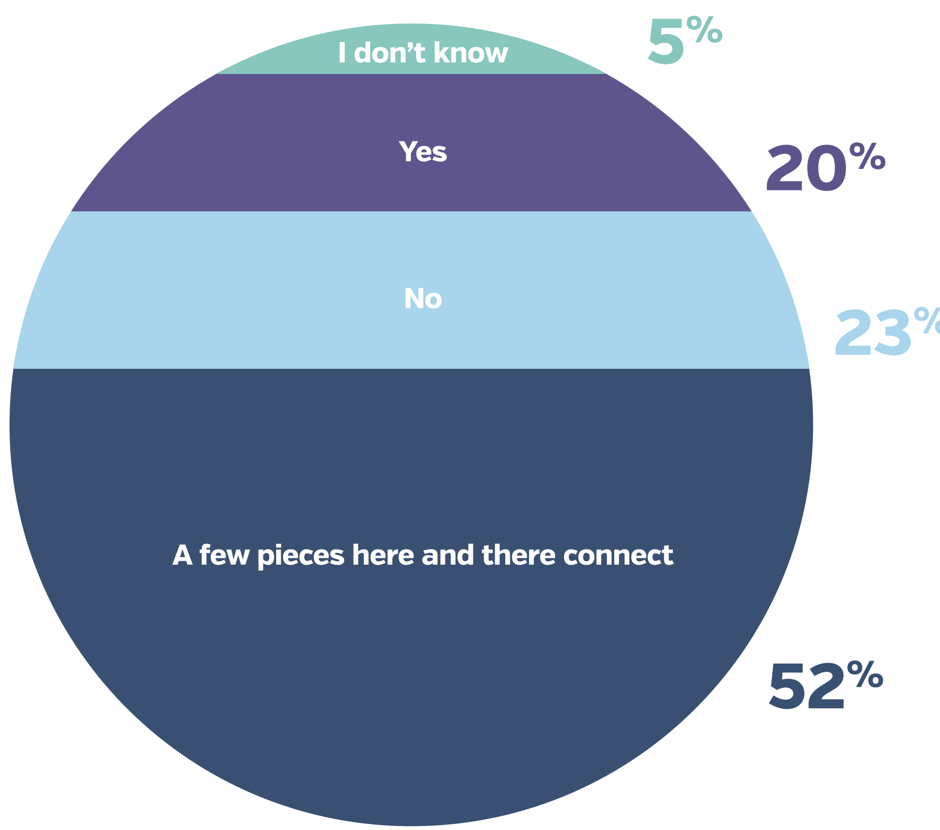
Message Consistency

In one of the most evenly divided questions of our survey, one fifth of our respondents came down on either end of the spectrum when asked to assess the consistency of their content.

20% believe their content tells a consistent story, another 20% think it doesn't, and more than half rated their efforts smack dab in the middle, believing they've been able to connect a few distinct pieces but haven't yet succeeded in delivering on a grand vision.

Consistency is one of the most important priorities of B2B marketing teams. With long sales cycles and multiple hand-offs as customers move down the funnel, it's essential that your audience hear a united story all the way through. Otherwise, you risk confusing and turning away potential buyers.

Does your content deliver a cohesive message?



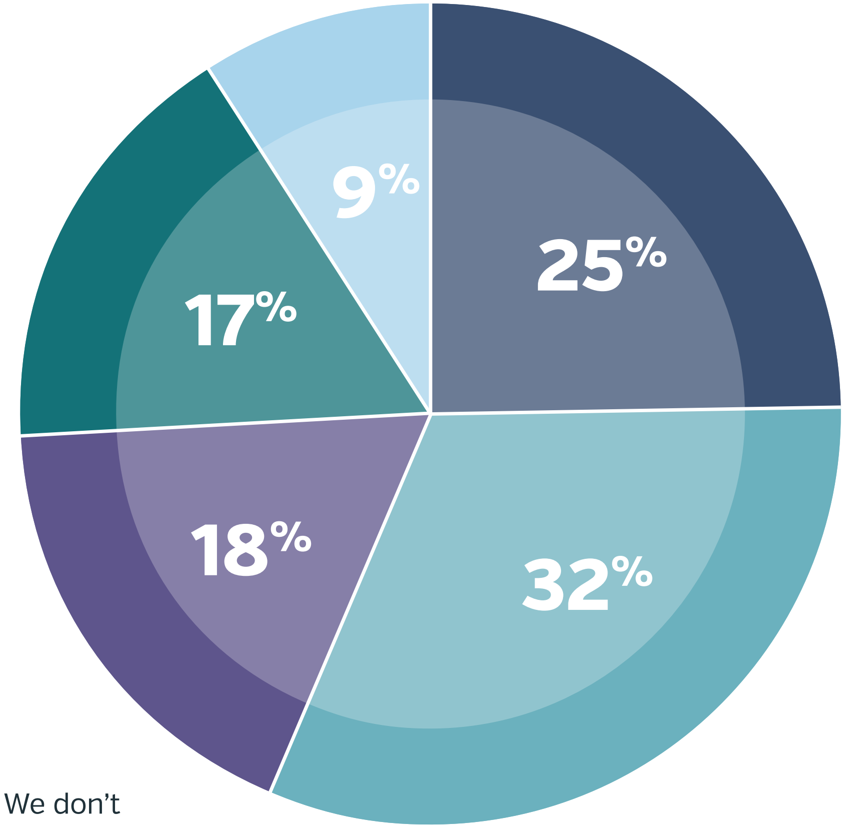
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE Delightful or Disjointed?

Measuring Message Consistency
Respondents were also divided on the question of how to assess their hunches about the consistency of their content, but, the most common answer came from those who believed their teams were more or less "on the same page."

But with so many respondents serving in teams of at least 50, it's a stretch to think teams are truly as aligned as their members wish to believe.

Analyzing message consistency across the vast array of content served to prospects and customers is a tall order. Many of the most advanced content operations today still rely on manual reviews to keep an eye out for inconsistency, even in addition to tools that do so.

How do you evaluate message alignment across programs and distribution channels?



- We don't
- Our teams are generally on the same page
- Someone manually reviews all content for consistency
- We have review steps built into our workflows and tools that help us identify inconsistency
- System[s] analyze content across strategic priorities in real time

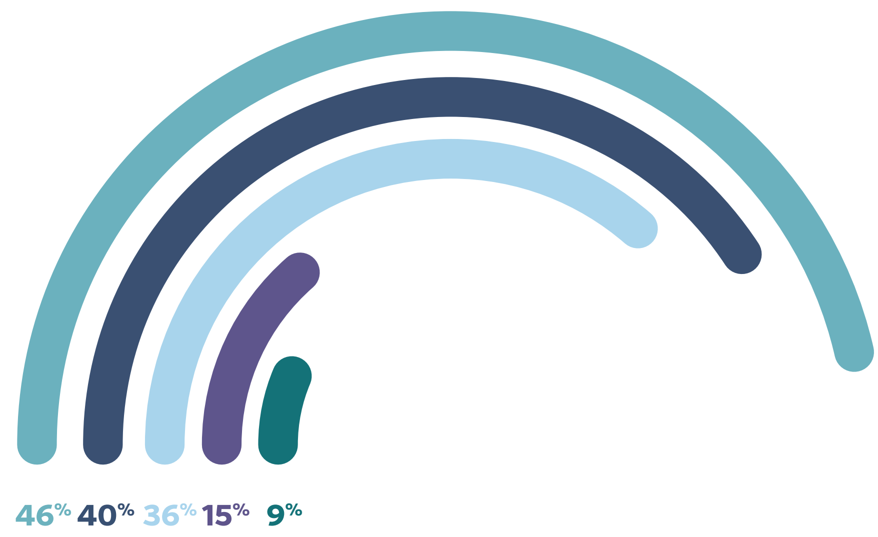
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE Delightful or Disjointed?

Keeping Content Fresh

The answer to how teams manage outdated content is more telling than one might think. For the third of folks who don't have a process for identifying and dealing with outdated content, it's safe to assume that their customer journeys aren't as seamless as they wish.

Finding old, off-brand content and deciding what to do with it (retire it? Refresh it? What will this do to our current marketing programs?) can feel like a chore that never quite deserves prioritization. But with old content still cropping up across web properties and seller portals, you risk confusing buyers, telling an inconsistent story, and driving dollars away from your company.

For highly regulated industries, the risk is far greater: Old content may make claims that are no longer accurate or point to products you no longer offer.



How does your team manage out-of-date content?

- We don't. There is a lot of dated, unused content floating around
- We do a manual audit when we have time, which is rare
- We stumble upon old/bad content and deal with it when we find it
- We have a regular process to manually audit content
- We have a system to provide real-time analytics on content age and performance

BEST PRACTICES

Finally, let's take a few minutes to consider how well marketers are laying the foundation for their success.

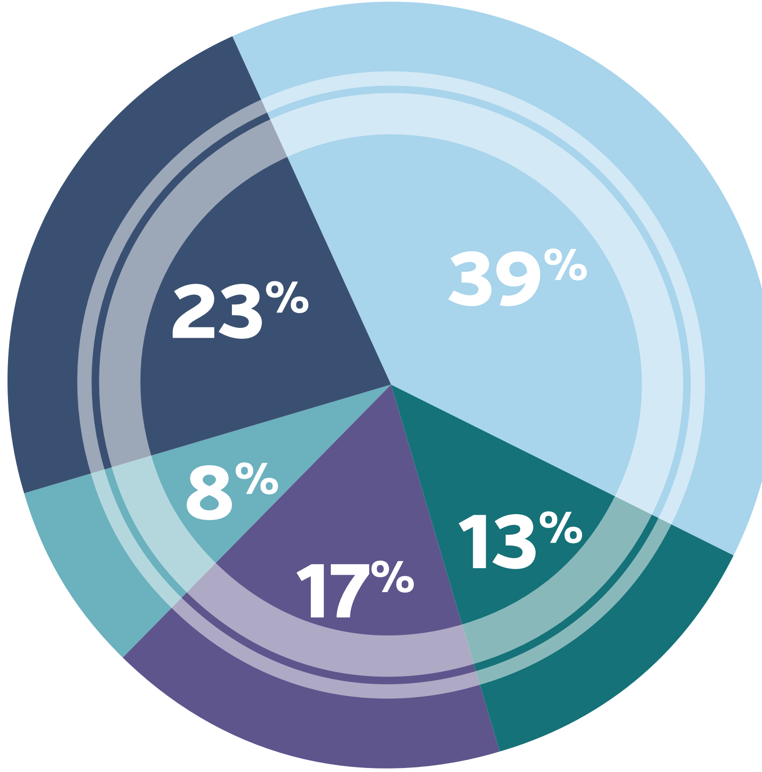
These considerations may not seem exciting, but it's impossible to create a high-functioning content operation without them.

Taxonomy

Most teams are using some sort of taxonomy, though many have tagging systems that are isolated to individual teams.

Just under a quarter, though, have a unified taxonomy that spans teams and tools alike. This is a big step, and requires alignment and agreement around shared goals.

Of those with unified taxonomies, only a third have fully realized the benefits that come with these well-vetted, well-socialized tagging systems. The other two-thirds who admit to disparities between how different users understand tagging are still on the right track. However, they won't be able to confidently use this data to get a bird's-eye view of their content inventory (which they can use to assess coverage and automate distribution) until everyone is on the same page.



How does your company think about marketing taxonomy?

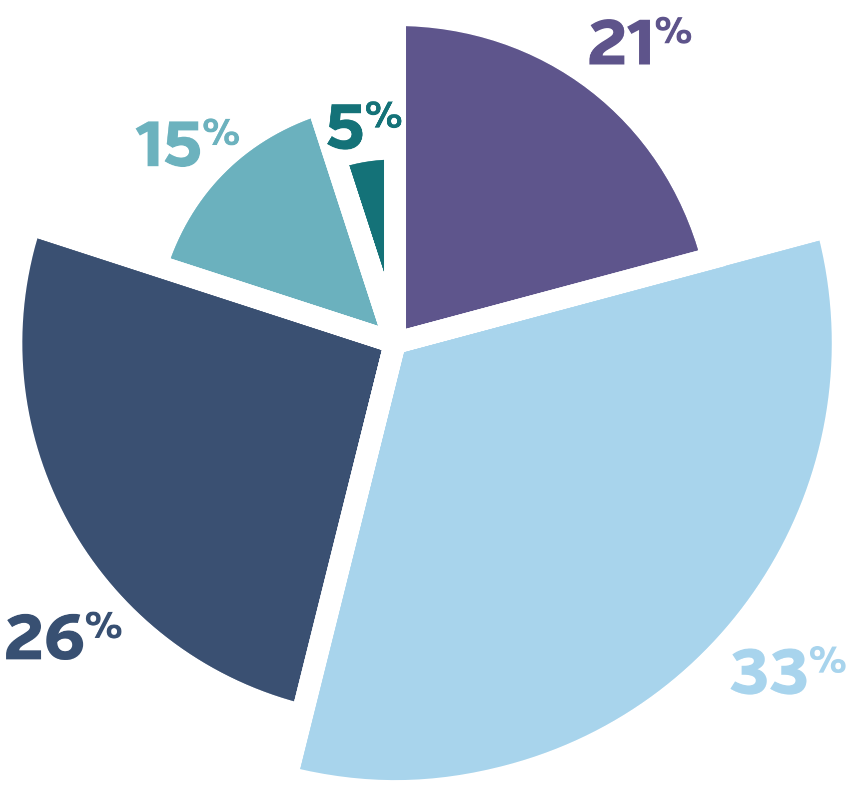
- I don't know what that means
- My team uses a few tags, but I don't know about other teams use
- Teams use taxonomies, but they're all separate
- We have a unified taxonomy across most teams and tools, but there isn't shared understanding of definitions
- We have a unified taxonomy that enables dynamic reports and visibility

BEST PRACTICES

MarTech

Many marketers (about one-third) have an integrated tech stack—at least at a basic level via off-the-shelf integrations. Our second largest slice of the pie belongs to those who benefit from the oversight of a dedicated system admin, but still fail to see their data represented accurately and consistently across all their programs.

If aligning teams is a priority for your organization, aligning your tech should be, too. After all, how can teams expect to work together if the technology they're using doesn't?



How well is you MarTech stack integrated and managed?

- None of our tools are integrated on the back end
- Some of our key tools are integrated via off-the-shelf integrations
- Most tools are integrated and managed by a dedicated admin, but the data are inconsistent
- We have dedicated integrations people, but they don't always have time to get me the data I need or fix broken integrations
- We have a dedicated team, some customization, and I always trust data is accurate

BEST PRACTICES

Content Ops Team

A content operations admin. or team is there to see the big picture, make sure stakeholders are aligned, orchestrate the many tools, teams, and processes required to make delivering seamless customer experiences through content a reality.

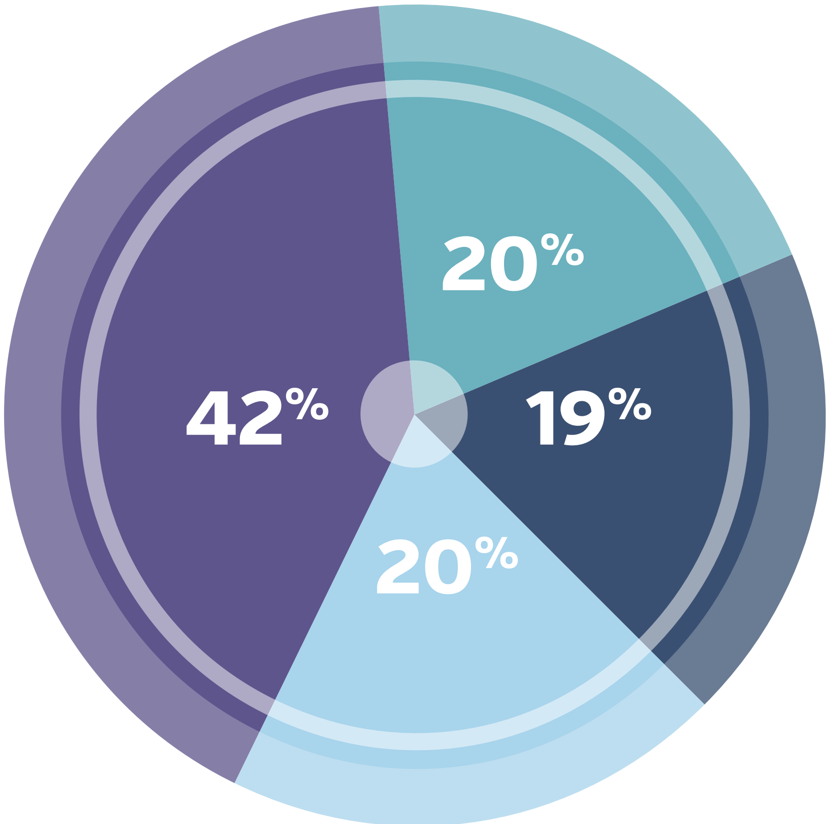
While a fifth of respondents simply didn't know whether anyone took this role in their organizations, nearly half had at least one person on their team who was making an effort to oversee thoughtful content operations.

The most encouraging news? A full 20% reported having a cross-functional team that directs content strategy and operations.

Takeaways

If we take one lesson from the data presented here, it's that the arms race for strategic content operations isn't over. If your team is struggling to bring strategy and order into the chaos of ad hoc content, you're not alone.

But you're now armed with a crucial advantage: The knowledge of where you stand and a peek into where you need to go next. Take these numbers as inspiration and strive to make it into the minority of those creating revenue-driving customer experiences—before they become the majority.



Does your organization have a dedicated content operations team?

- I don't know
- Sort of, we have one person who tries to connect all the dots
- Yes, but they don't have much buy-in or power
- Yes, and this cross-functional team directs our content strategy

Still need to assess your own team?

Take the Content Operations Self-Assessment →

upland Kapost

About Upland Kapost

Upland Kapost unites revenue teams to speak in one voice across each customer journey. With Kapost's software and services, B2B enterprises create seamless customer experiences with content.

About Upland

Upland Software (Nasdaq: UPLD) is a leader in cloud-based enterprise work management software. Upland provides seven enterprise cloud solution suites that enable more than one million users at over 9,000 accounts to win and engage customers, automate business operations, manage projects and IT costs, and share knowledge throughout the enterprise. All of Upland's solutions are backed by a 100 percent customer success commitment and the UplandOne platform, which puts customers at the center of everything we do.

Want to learn more?

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