

ENTERPRISE

CONTENT MARKETING

BENCHMARKS, BUDGETS,
AND TRENDS



imagination.



INSIGHTS FOR 2022

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SURVEY TERM DEFINITIONS

Content Marketing: A strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience—and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.

Success: Achieving your organization’s desired/targeted results.

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Welcome to the Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends: Insights for 2022 report. This report looks back on the last 12 months and includes expectations for 2022.

The research suggested that, due to lockdowns and work-from-home mandates, content marketing piqued the interest of many who were previously unaware of its power. With more people than ever spending time online, content marketing presented a prime opportunity to get and stay in front of audiences.

As in the previous year, nearly one in three enterprise marketers said their organization was extremely or very successful with content marketing. These marketers, our “top performers,” have certain characteristics that set them apart from their peers (see page 4). A few of

the biggest things they do are to differentiate their content and use content collaboration/calendaring/workflow tools.

No matter how successful they are at content marketing, most respondents plan to invest in video in 2022: 72% of all enterprise respondents forecast investment in this area followed by investment in events (62%), paid media (59%), and owned-media assets (55%).

And, yes, challenges remain. The top challenge, which is the same as it was two years ago, is internal communication between teams/silos (57%). It indicates a pressing need to formalize content operations in enterprises that have not yet done so.

Here’s to a prosperous 2022!

How Enterprise Content Marketing Top Performers* Describe Their Organizations – At a Glance

This chart shows key areas where we observed a gap of at least 10 percentage points between all enterprise marketers and the top performers among them.

	Top Enterprise Respondents	All Enterprise Respondents
Has a documented content marketing strategy	58%	43%
Characterizes their content marketing as sophisticated/mature	77%	44%
Has a centralized content marketing group	44%	30%
Has 11+ full-time content marketing employees	27%	15%
Uses content creation/calendaring/collaboration/workflow tools	89%	77%
Uses a customer relationship management system (CRM)	62%	50%
Measures content performance	93%	78%
Characterizes team’s ability to demonstrate ROI for content marketing initiatives as excellent/very good	61%	36%
Spends 50% or more of total marketing budget on content marketing	34%	19%
Expected 2022 content marketing budget to increase over 2021	64%	52%
Increased spending on paid content distribution in last 12 months	58%	44%
Strongly/somewhat agrees:		
Organization values creativity and craft in content creation and production	83%	67%
Organization provides customers with a consistent experience across their journey	70%	51%
Always/frequently:		
Differentiates content from the competition	72%	49%
Prioritizes audience’s informational needs over their own organization’s	79%	61%
Crafts content based on specific stages of the buyer’s journey	69%	51%
Uses content marketing successfully to:		
Build loyalty with existing customers/clients	75%	60%
Nurture subscribers/audiences/leads	66%	52%
Generate sales/revenue	56%	39%

Chart term definitions: A top performer (aka “most successful”) is a respondent who characterizes their organization’s overall content marketing approach as extremely or very successful.

Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

KEY FINDINGS

Most enterprise marketers are feeling successful with content marketing.

Nearly one in three enterprise marketers (32%) said their organization was extremely or very successful in the last 12 months. Another 58% said they were moderately successful. The top factor contributing to that success was “the value our content provides” (70%).

Top-performing enterprise marketers stand out by differentiating their content.

72% of the top performers said their organization always/frequently differentiates its content from the competition vs. only 49% of all enterprise respondents. In addition, 69% always/frequently craft content based on specific stages of the buyer’s journey vs. 51% of all respondents.

Top-performing enterprise marketers use more content marketing technologies.

One of the widest gaps between top performers and all enterprise

respondents was the use of content creation/calendaring/collaboration/workflow tools (89% vs. 77%).

Nearly all top performers measure content performance and 61% say they’re doing an excellent/very good job at it.

93% of top performers said they measure content performance compared with 78% of all enterprise respondents. The top performers are also confident in their measurement efforts, with 61% saying they do an excellent/very good job vs. 36% of all enterprise respondents.

Internal communication and overcoming the traditional marketing and sales mindset are top challenges.

Enterprise marketers said their top two content marketing challenges were internal communication between teams/silos (57%) and overcoming the traditional marketing and sales mindset (48%).

Video is the top predicted area of content marketing investment for 2022.

Enterprise marketers indicated video would be a top content marketing area of investment by far: 72% predicted their organization will invest in video in 2022, followed by events (62%), paid media (59%), and owned-media assets (55%).

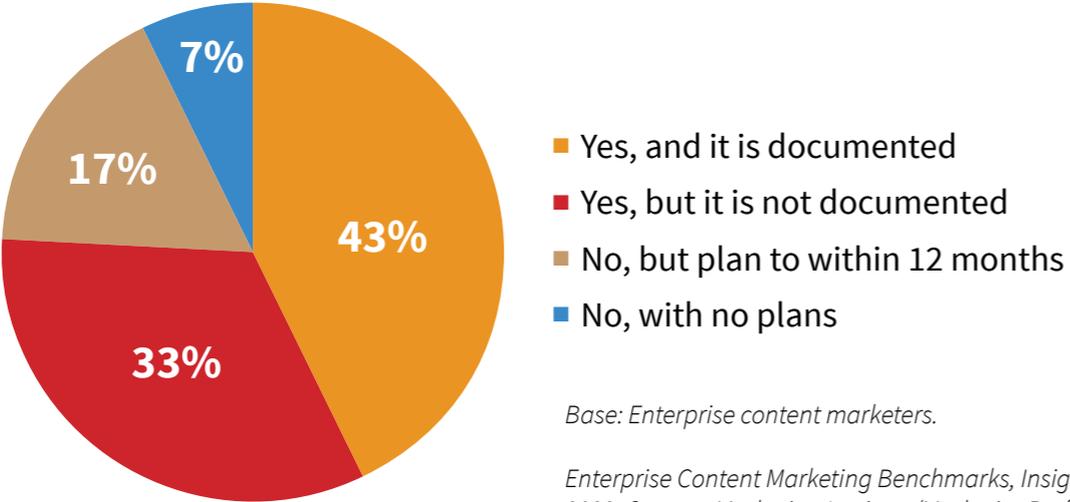


STRATEGY, OPINIONS & OVERALL SUCCESS



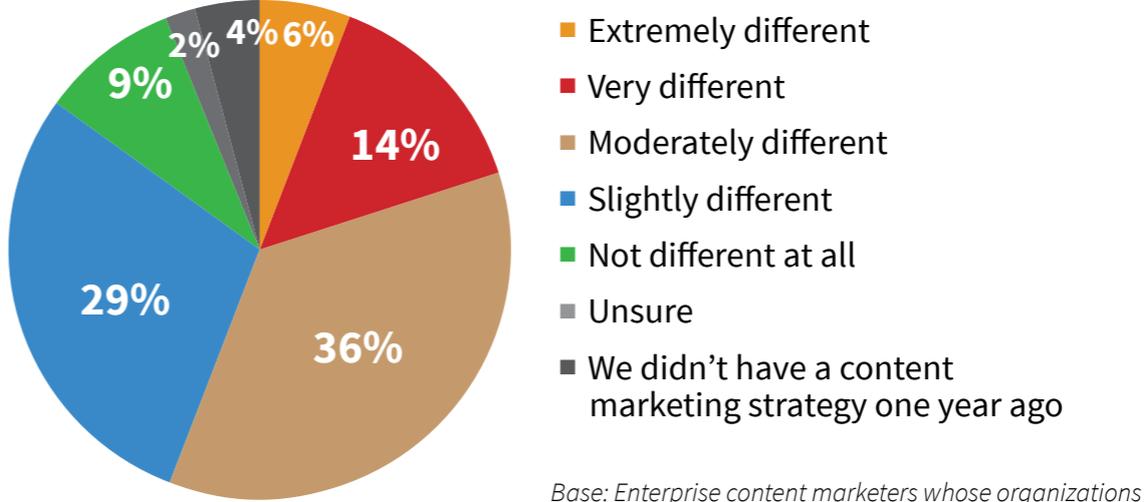
76% of enterprise respondents reported that their organization has a content marketing strategy. Of those, 20% said their strategy is extremely/very different now versus pre-pandemic.

Percentage of Enterprise Marketers With a Content Marketing Strategy



Base: Enterprise content marketers.
 Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

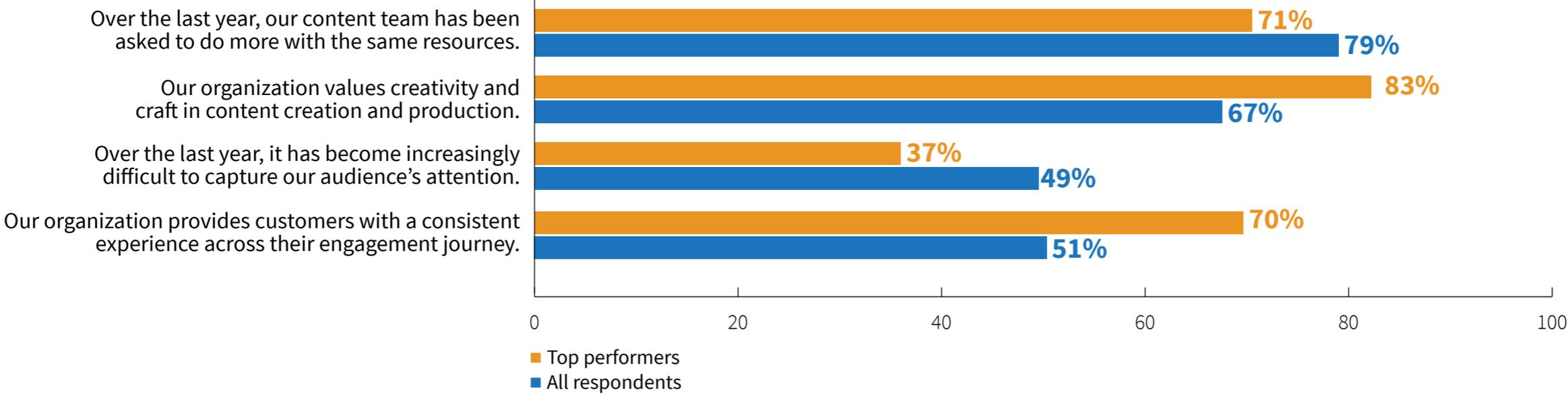
Difference in Enterprise Content Marketing Strategy Now Vs. Pre-Pandemic



Base: Enterprise content marketers whose organizations have a content marketing strategy.
 Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

Over the last year, 79% of enterprise marketers have been asked to do more with the same resources.

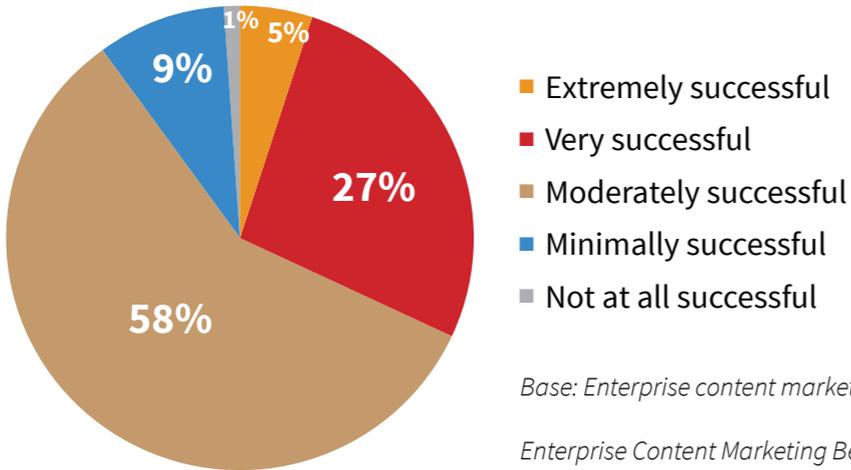
Enterprise Marketers' Opinions About Content Marketing in Their Organizations (Strongly/Somewhat Agree)



Base: Enterprise content marketers who answered each statement.
Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingPros, July 2021

Nearly one in three enterprise marketers (32%) said their organization was extremely or very successful with content marketing in the last 12 months. The top contributing factor was the value their content provides.

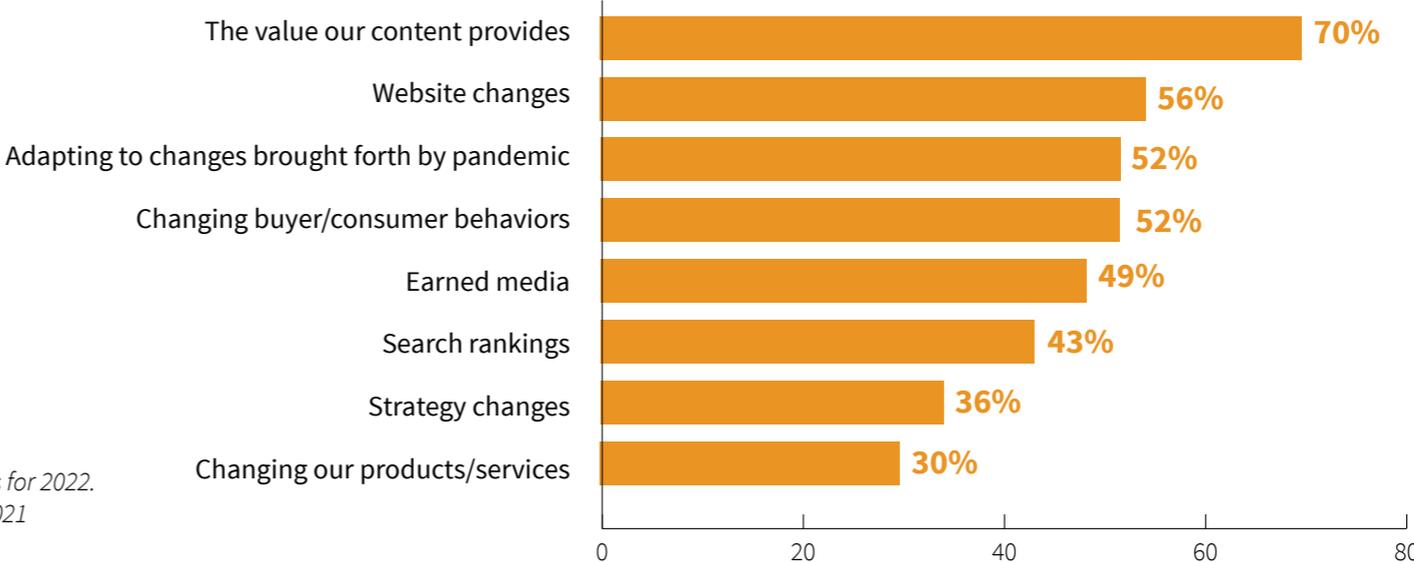
How Enterprise Marketers Rate Their Organization’s Overall Level of Content Marketing Success in Last 12 Months



- Extremely successful
- Very successful
- Moderately successful
- Minimally successful
- Not at all successful

Base: Enterprise content marketers.
 Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022.
 Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

Factors Contributing to Enterprise Content Marketing Success in Last 12 Months



Base: Enterprise content marketers who said their organizations were extremely/very successful with content marketing.

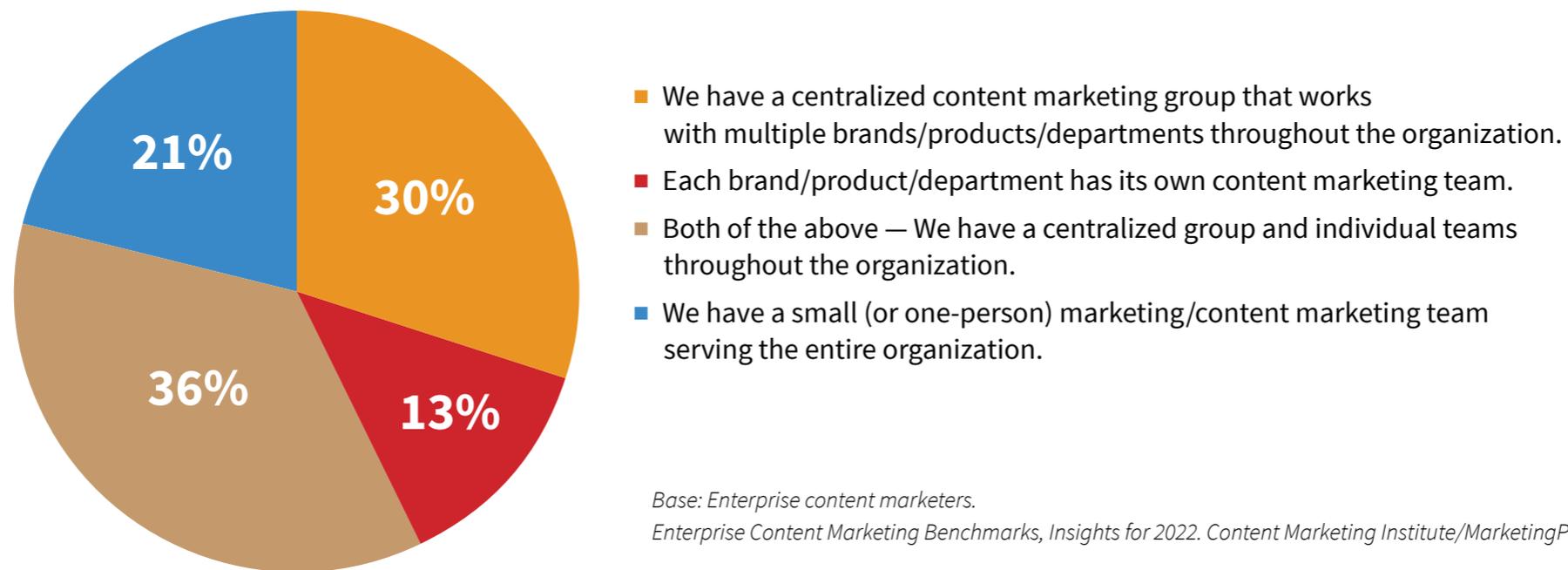
Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022.
 Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

TEAM STRUCTURE & OUTSOURCING



36% of enterprise marketers said they have both a centralized group and individual content marketing teams throughout the organization.

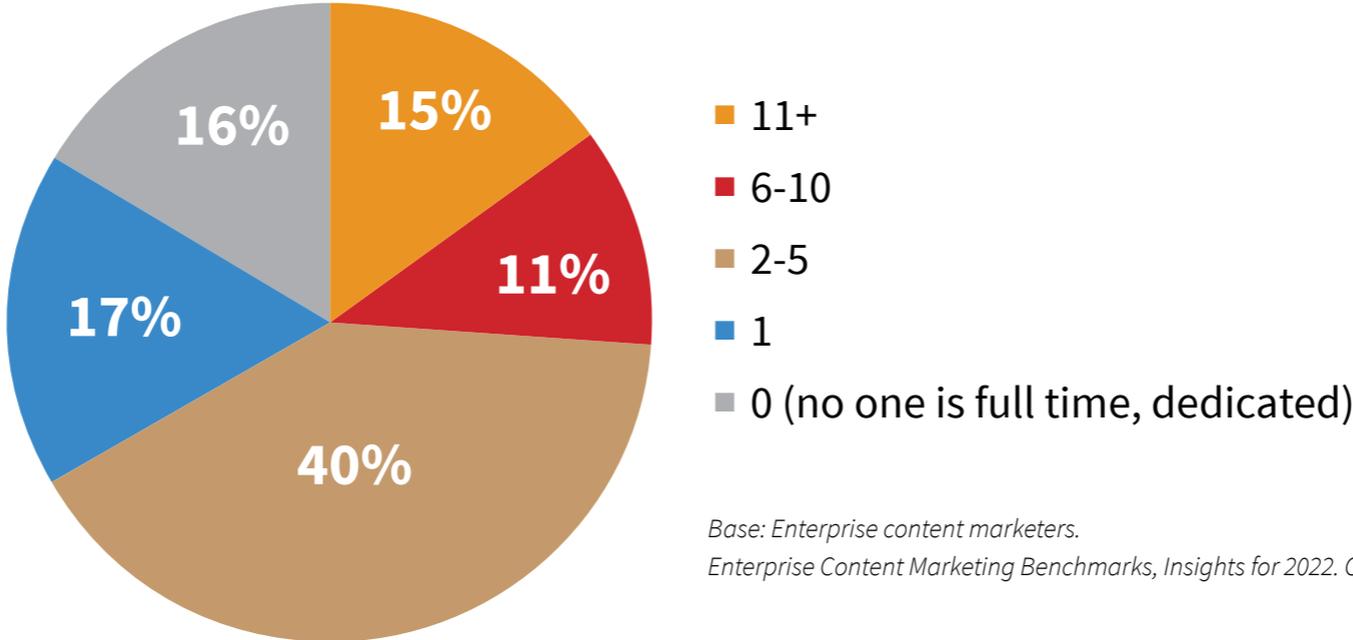
Enterprise Organizations' Content Marketing Team Structure



Base: Enterprise content marketers.
Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

40% of enterprise respondents said their organization has two to five full-time employees dedicated to content marketing.

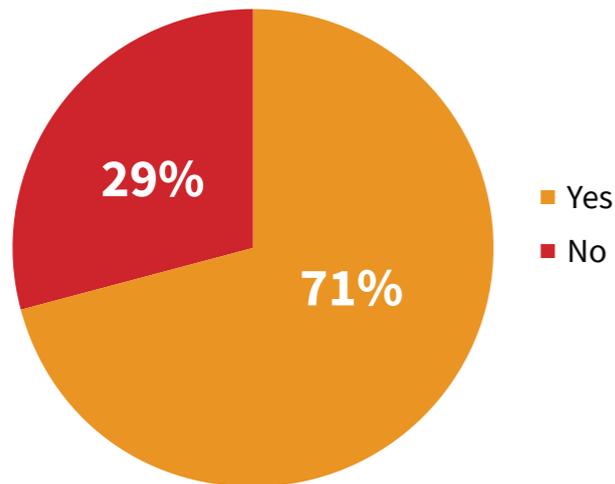
Enterprise Organizations' Content Marketing Team Size (Full-Time/Dedicated to Content Marketing)



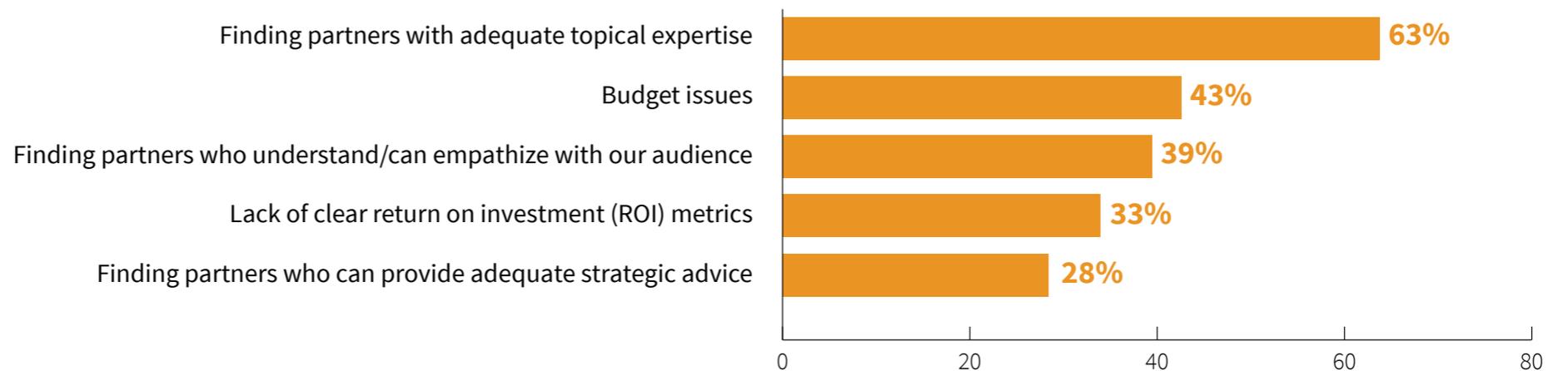
Base: Enterprise content marketers.
Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

Nearly three out of four enterprise marketers (71%) said their organization outsources at least one content marketing activity. Their top two challenges are finding partners with adequate topical expertise (63%) and budget issues (43%).

Does Your Enterprise Organization Outsource Any Content Marketing Activities?



Top 5 Challenges When Seeking Outsourced Enterprise Content Marketing Help



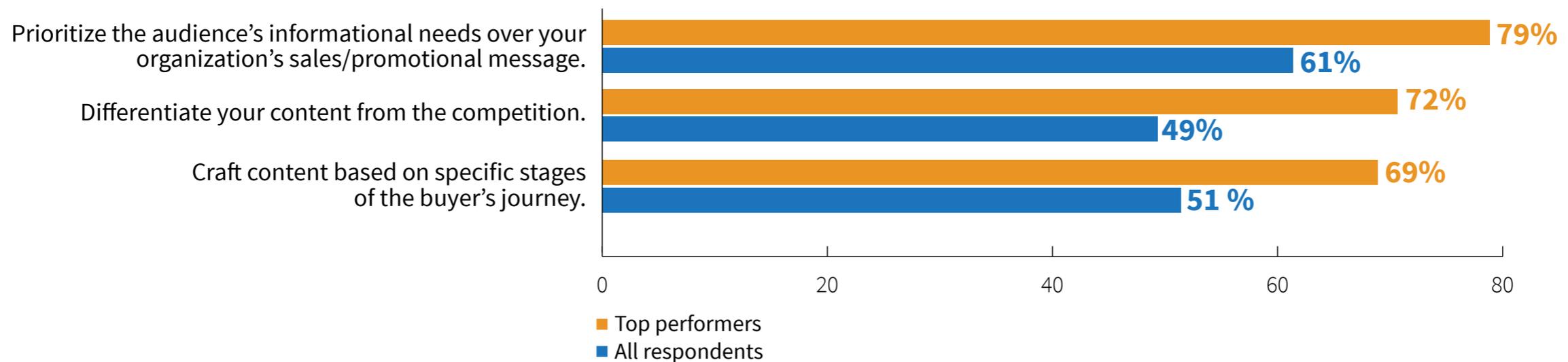
Base: Enterprise content marketers who outsourced at least one content marketing activity. Aided list; up to five responses permitted. Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

CONTENT CREATION & DISTRIBUTION



61% of enterprise marketers always/frequently prioritize the audience’s informational needs over their organization’s sales/promotional message; the remainder only do so sometimes, rarely, or never.

Concepts Enterprise Marketers Take Into Account While Creating Content for Their Organization (Always/Frequently)



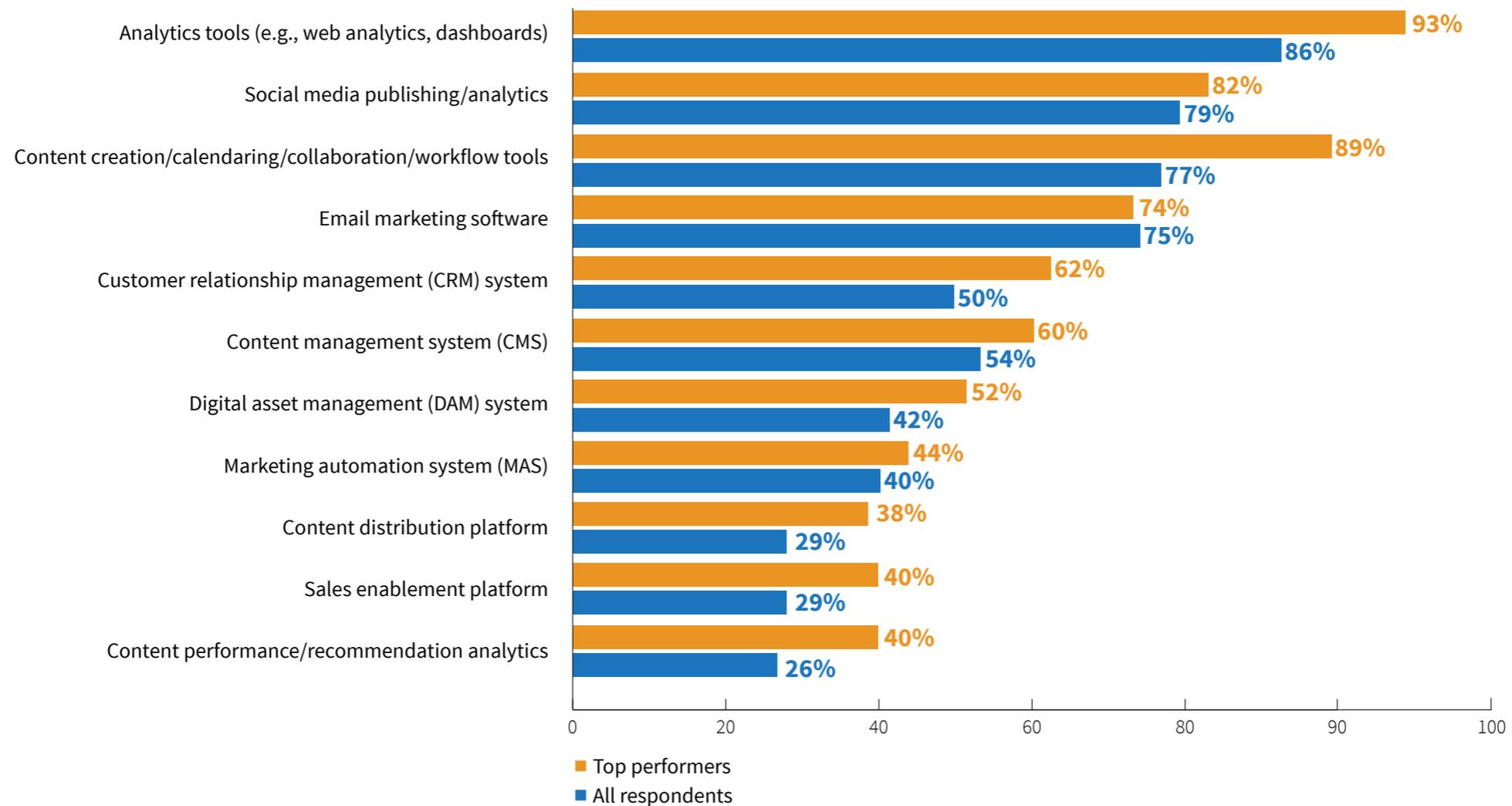
Base: Enterprise content marketers who answered each statement.
Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

CONTENT CREATION & DISTRIBUTION

The top technologies enterprise organizations use to assist with content marketing are analytics tools (86%), social media publishing/analytics (79%), content creation/calendaring/collaboration/workflow tools (77%), and email marketing software (75%).

Top-performing enterprise marketers have higher adoption rates for numerous content marketing technologies. One of the widest gaps is in the use of content creation/calendaring/collaboration/workflow tools (89% vs. 77%).

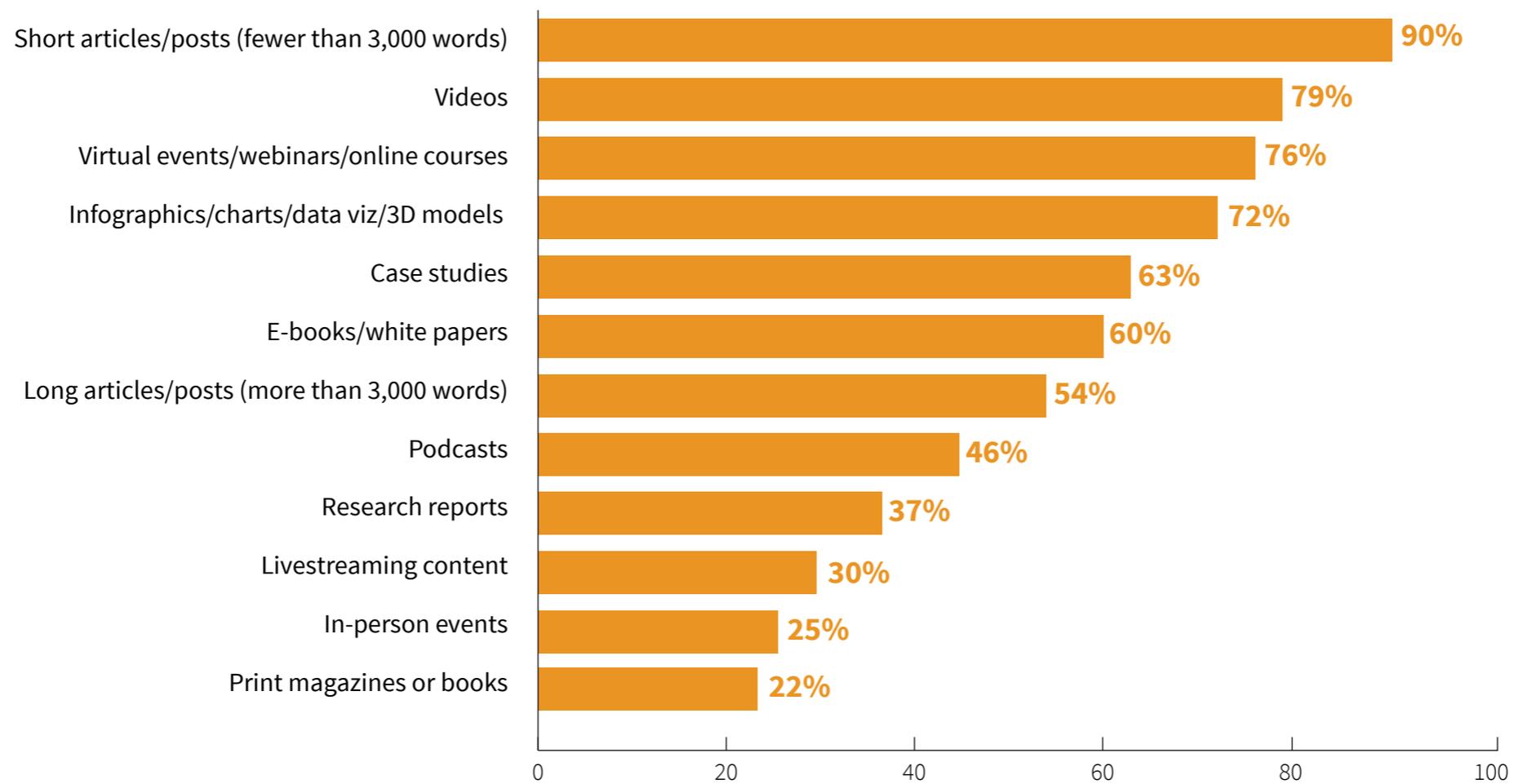
Technologies Enterprise Organizations Use to Assist With Content Marketing



Base: Enterprise content marketers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.
Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

Short articles/posts (90%) and videos (79%) are the top two content types enterprise marketers used in the last 12 months.

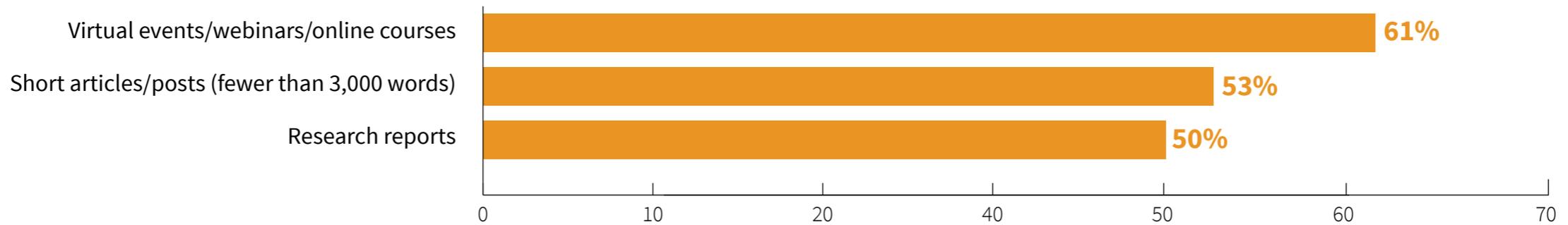
Content Assets Enterprise Marketers Created/Used in Last 12 Months



Base: Enterprise content marketers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.
 Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

Enterprise marketers said virtual events/webinars/online courses produced the best results for their content marketing in the last 12 months (61%).

Enterprise Content Assets That Produced the Best Results in Last 12 Months (Top 3)

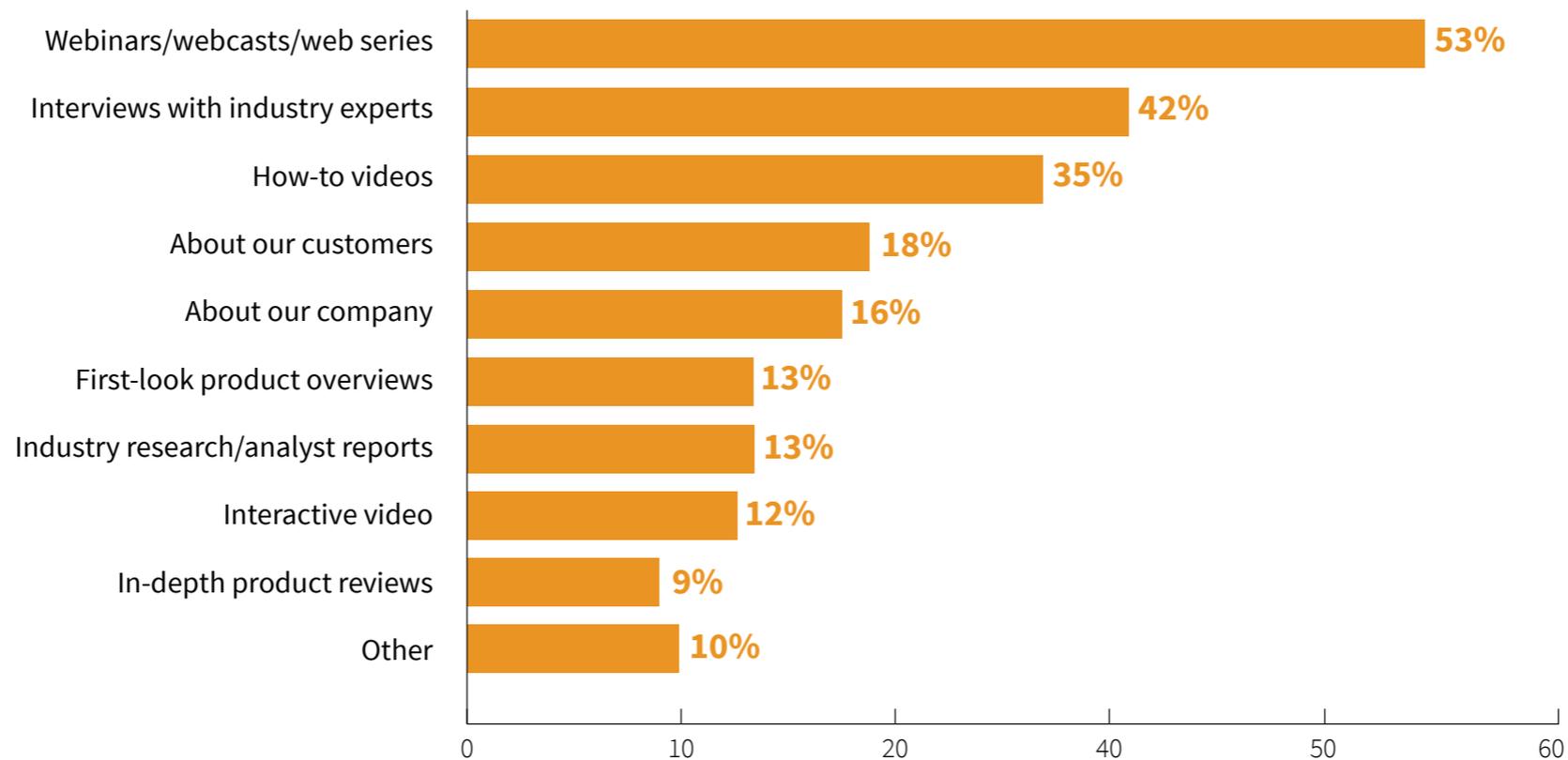


Note: Respondents were shown a display list of the content types they used in the last 12 months and asked, "Which content assets produced the best results for your content marketing in the last 12 months? (Select all that apply.)"

Base: Enterprise content marketers who use each content asset listed. Multiple responses permitted.
Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

Among the video formats they used, enterprise marketers said webinars/webcasts/web series produced the best content marketing results in the last 12 months (53%).

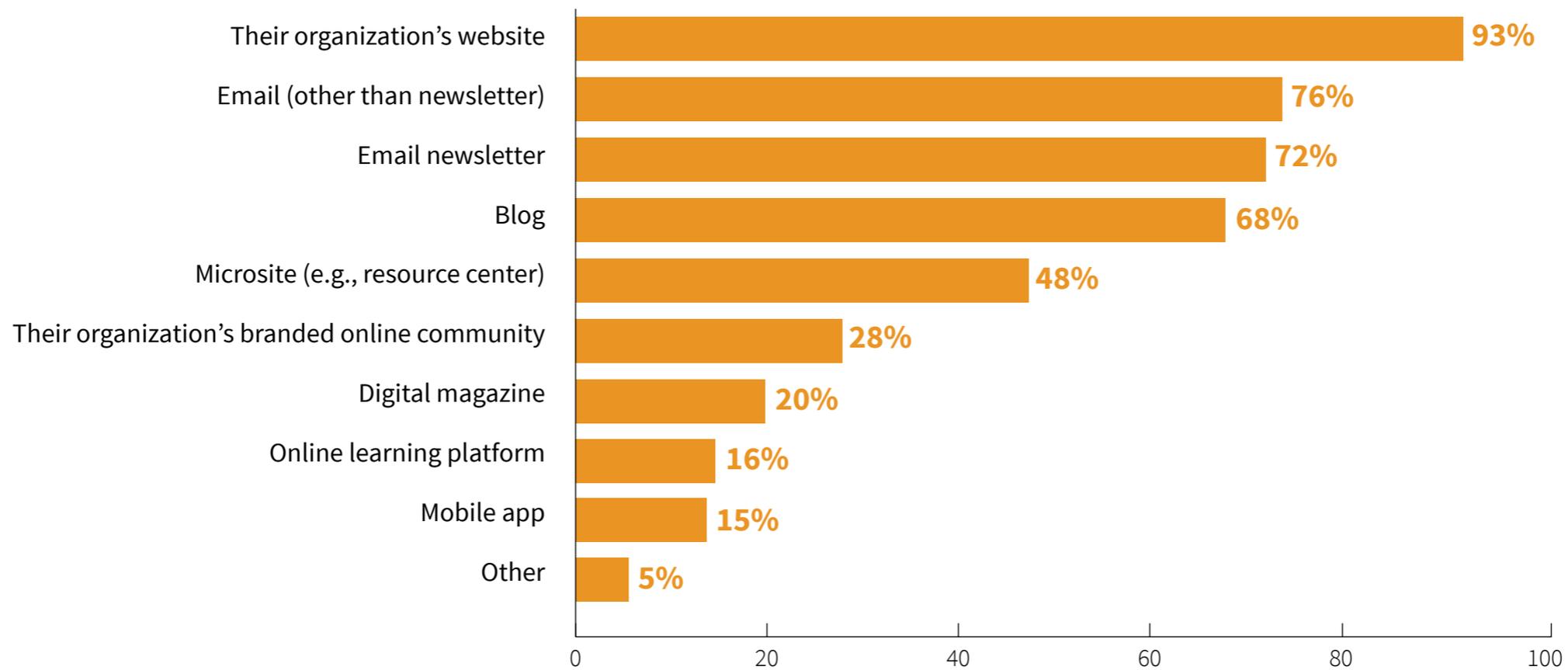
Enterprise Video Formats That Produced the Best Results in Last 12 Months



Base: Enterprise content marketers who used videos in the last 12 months. Aided list; multiple responses permitted. Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

In addition to using their organization’s website to distribute content in the last 12 months, more than 65% of enterprise marketers used email, email newsletters, and blogs.

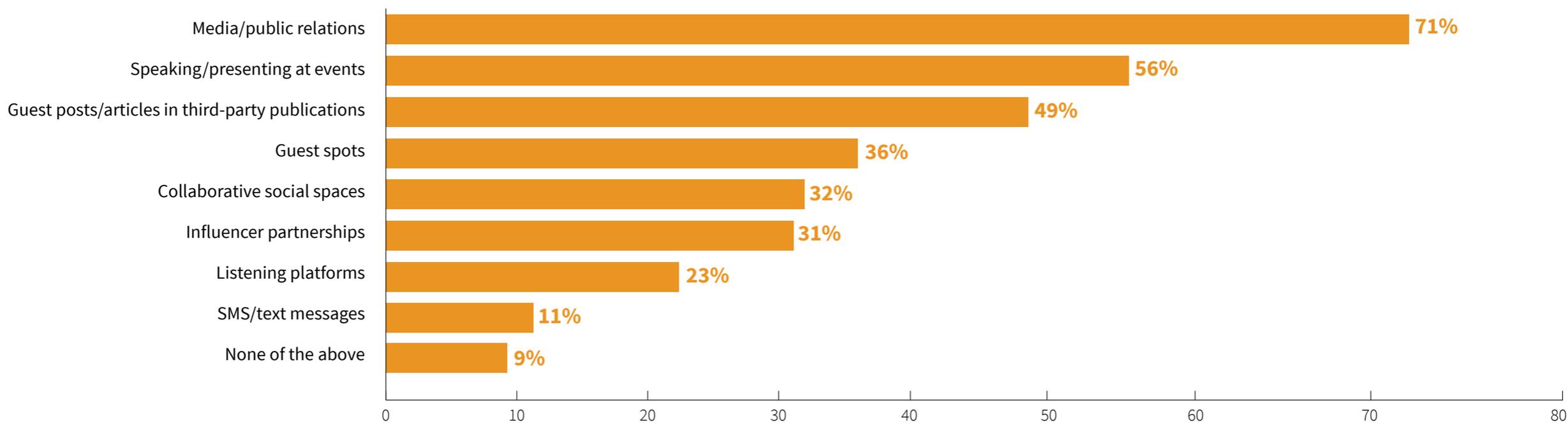
Owned-Media Platforms Enterprise Marketers Used to Distribute Content in Last 12 Months



Base: Enterprise content marketers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.
Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

71% of enterprise marketers used media/public relations to distribute content in the last 12 months.

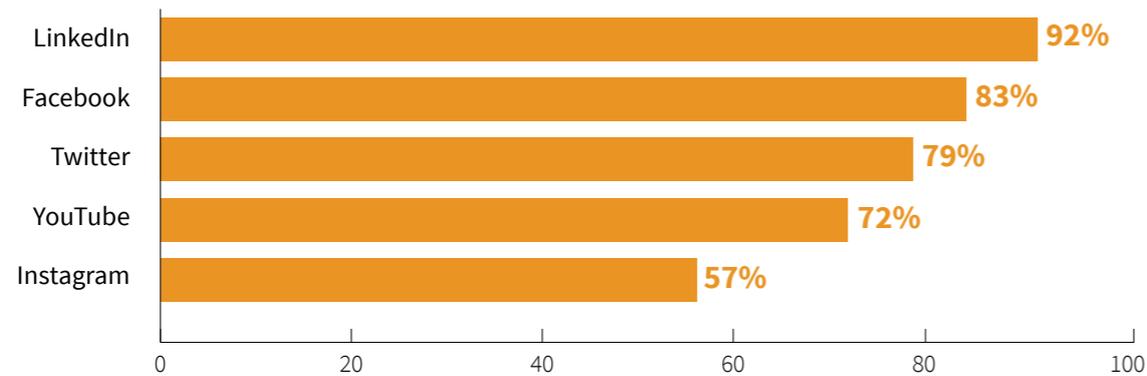
Organic (Nonpaid) Platforms Enterprise Marketers Used to Distribute Content in Last 12 Months



Base: Enterprise content marketers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.
Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

LinkedIn is the organic social media platform that enterprise content marketers used the most and the one they said produced the best results.

Organic (Nonpaid) Social Media Platforms Enterprise Marketers Used to Distribute Content in Last 12 Months



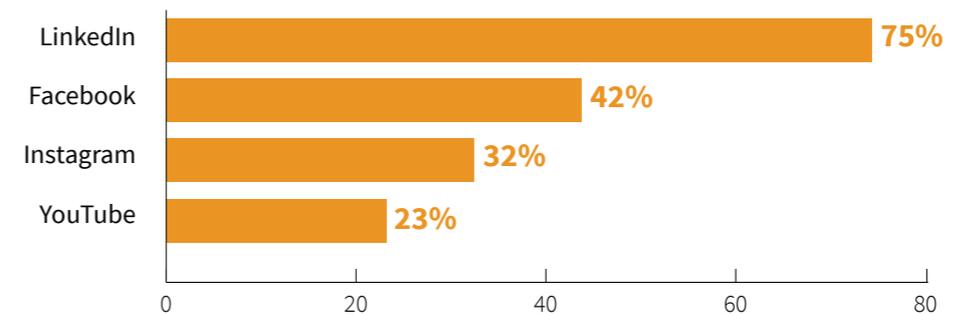
Base: Enterprise content marketers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.

Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

Other organic social media platforms used in last 12 months:

Pinterest (12%), TikTok (7%), Medium (4%), Twitter Spaces (4%), Reddit (3%), Snapchat (3%), Discord (1%), Quora (1%), and Other (3%).

Organic (Nonpaid) Social Media Platforms That Produced Best Results for Enterprise Marketers in Last 12 Months (Top 4)



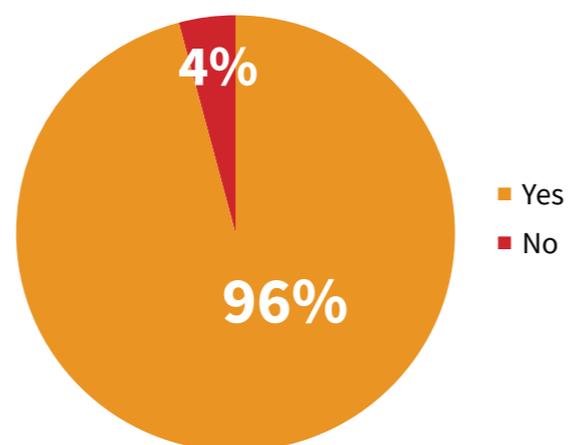
Base: Content marketers who used the nonpaid social media platforms listed to distribute content in the last 12 months.

Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

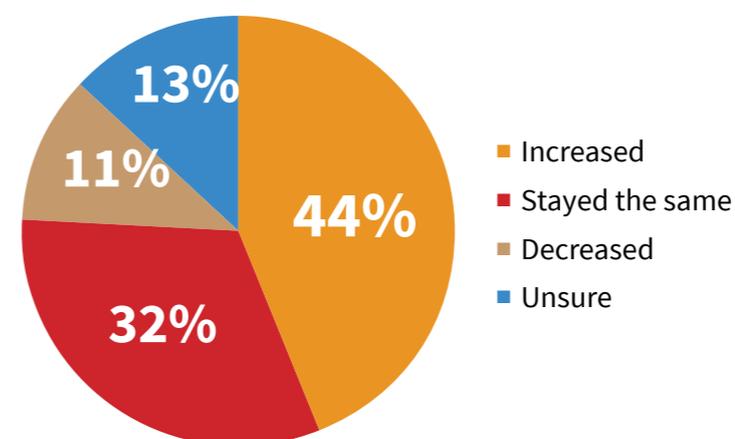
Among the enterprise marketers who used paid content distribution channels:

- 44% said their organization increased spending on paid distribution in the last 12 months
- 77% used social media advertising/promoted posts

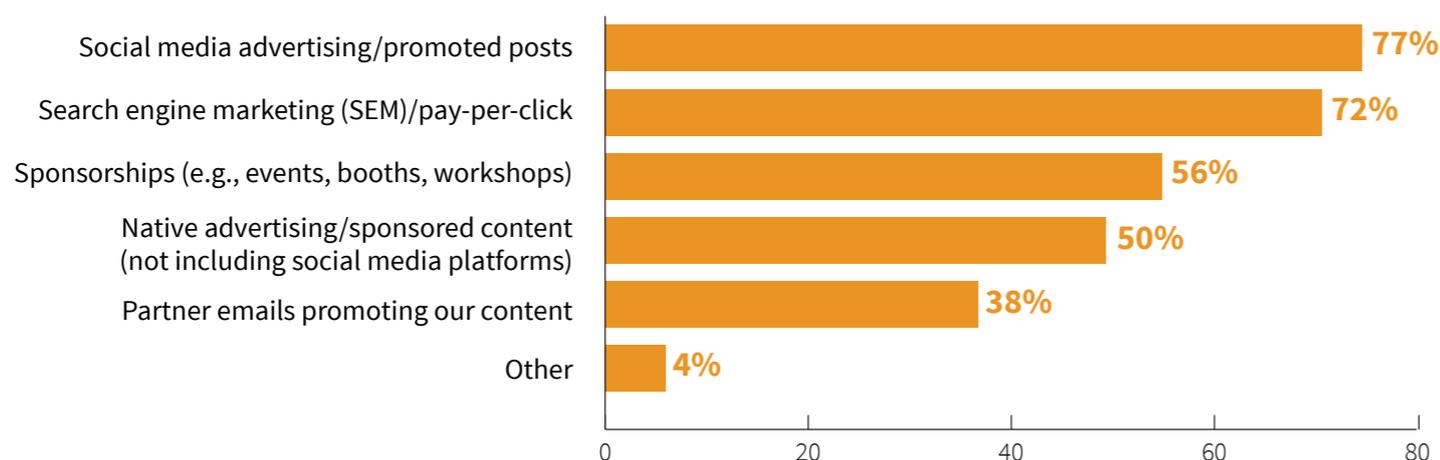
Do You Use Paid Methods to Promote Content?



Over the Last 12 Months, How Has Your Spending on Paid Content Distribution Channels Evolved?



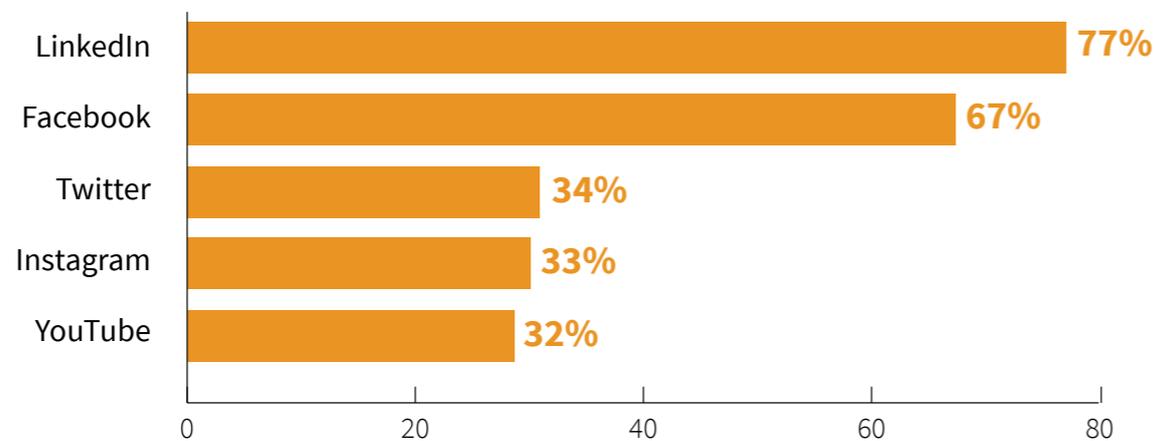
Paid Content Distribution Channels Enterprise Marketers Used in Last 12 Months



Base: Enterprise content marketers who use paid channels. Aided list; multiple responses permitted. Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

Among the enterprise marketers who used paid social media platforms, the majority chose LinkedIn (77%) and Facebook (67%). Respondents said LinkedIn produced the best results.

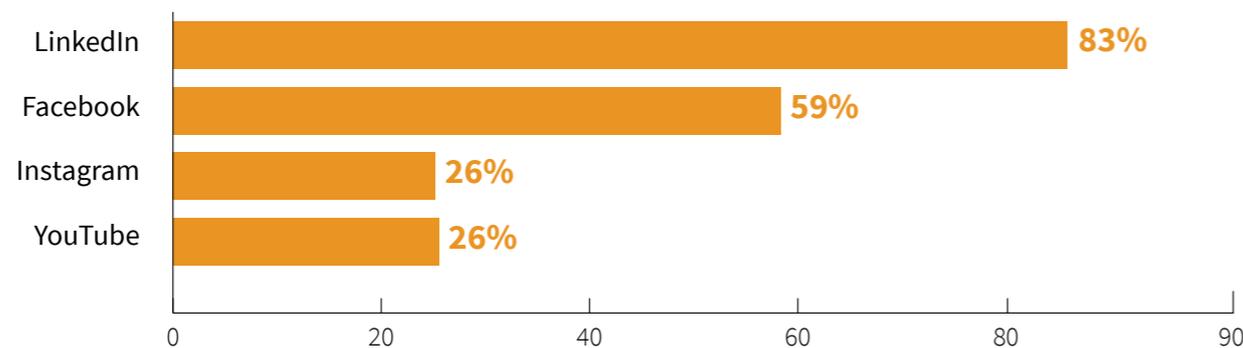
Paid Social Media Platforms Enterprise Marketers Used in Last 12 Months (Top 5)



Base: Enterprise content marketers who used social media platforms for paid content promotion in the last 12 months. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.

Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

Paid Social Media Platforms That Produced Best Results for Enterprise Marketers in Last 12 Months (Top 4)



Base: Enterprise content marketers who used the social media platforms listed for paid content promotion in the last 12 months. Multiple responses permitted.

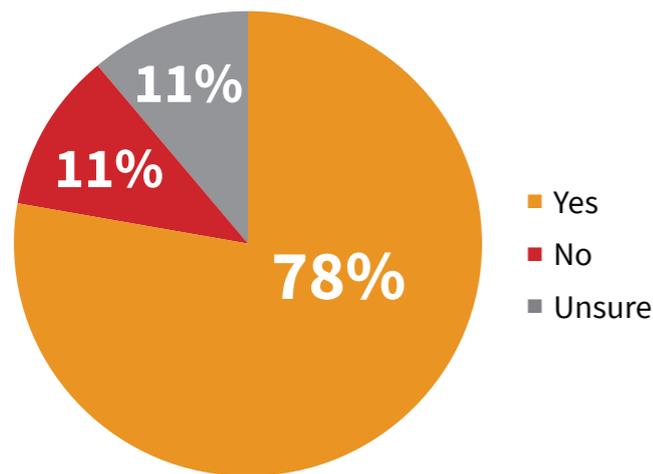
Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

METRICS & GOALS



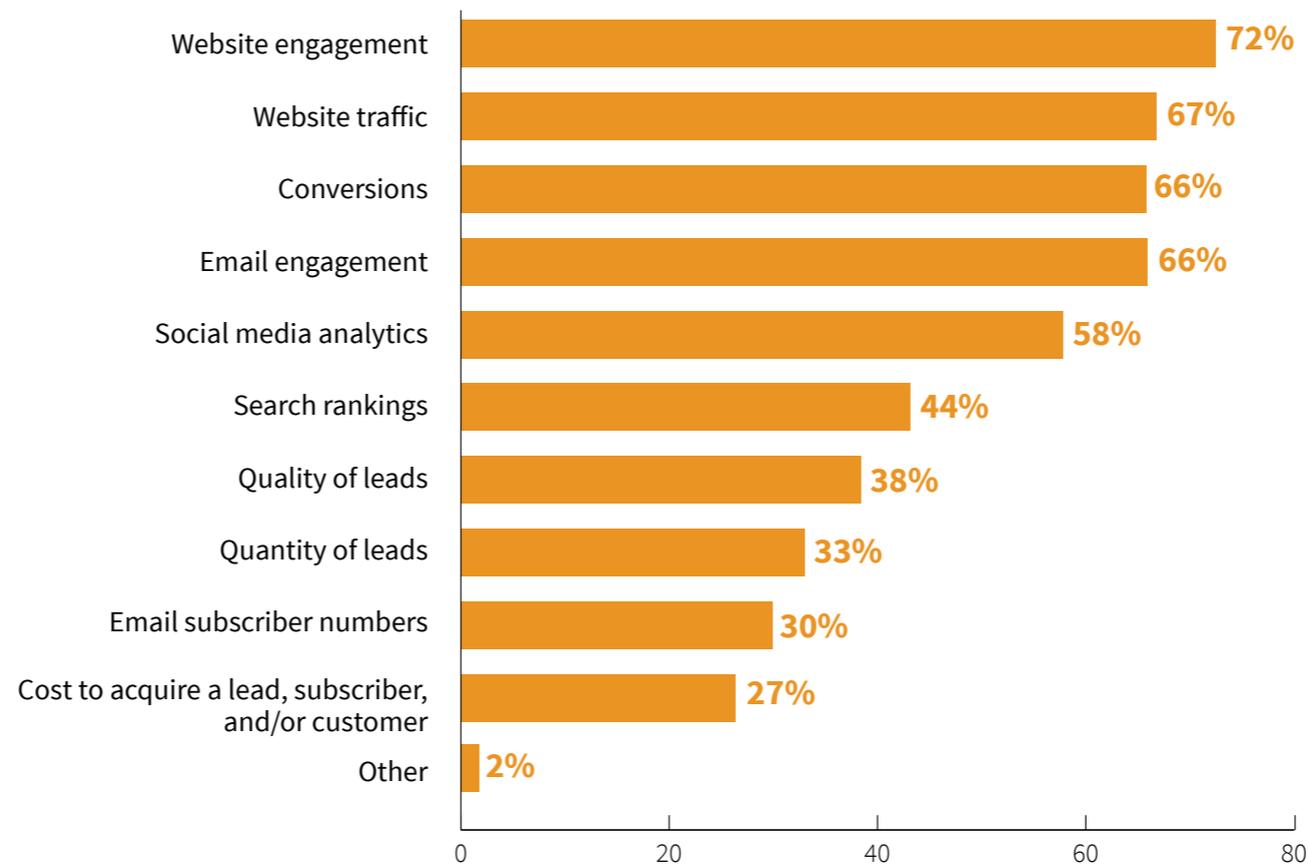
78% of enterprise marketers said their organization measures content performance. Among those, 72% said website engagement provided the most insight into performance.

Does Your Enterprise Organization Measure Content Performance?



Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

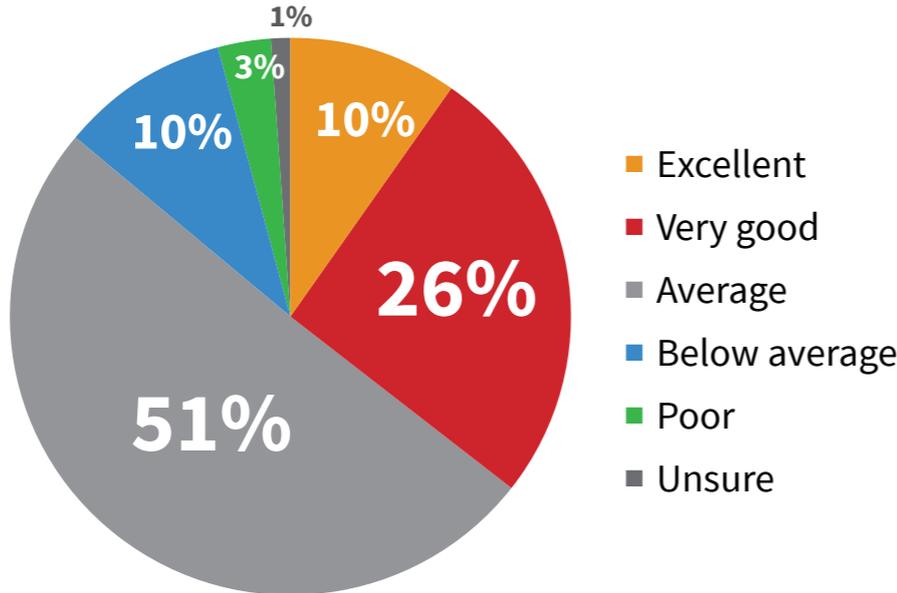
Metrics That Have Provided Most Insight Into Enterprise Content Performance in Last 12 Months



Base: Enterprise content marketers who measure content performance. Aided list; multiple responses permitted. Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

Among the 78% of enterprise marketers who measured content performance, 36% indicated they're doing an excellent or very good job.

How Manufacturers Characterize Their Team's Ability to Demonstrate Content Marketing ROI



Base: Enterprise content marketers who measure content performance. Aided list. Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

Excellent — We have measurement data showing ROI on overall content marketing approach.

Very good — We have measurement data showing ROI on at least one content marketing initiative with well-informed insights in other areas.

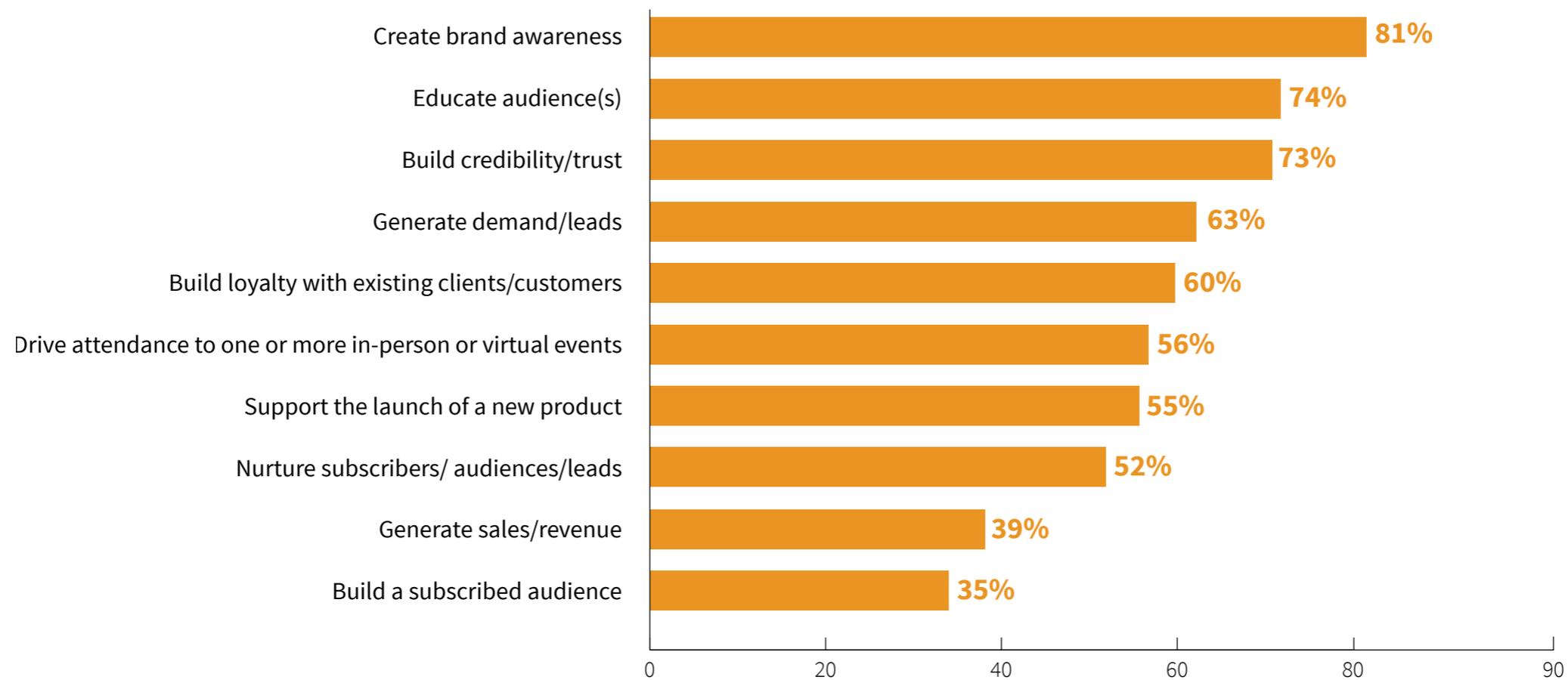
Average — We have well-informed insights, but lack measurement data showing ROI.

Below average — We have only speculative insights at this point.

Poor — We have little insight into what works and what doesn't.

Enterprise marketers say the top three goals content marketing helps them achieve are creating brand awareness, educating audience(s), and building credibility/trust.

Goals Enterprise Marketers Have Achieved by Using Content Marketing Successfully in Last 12 Months



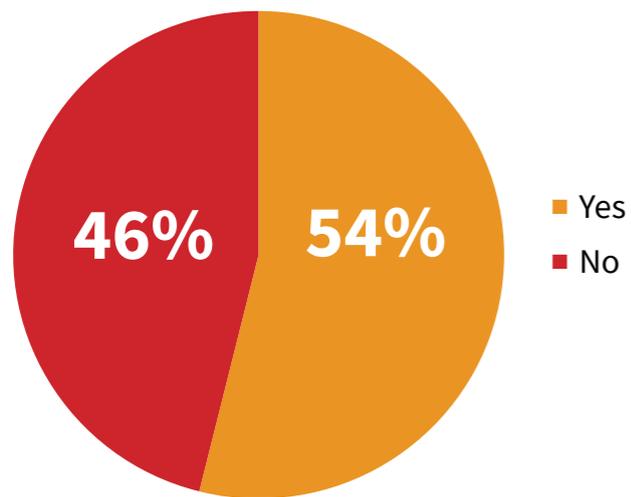
Base: Enterprise content marketers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.
 Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/
 MarketingProfs, July 2021

BUDGETS & SPENDING



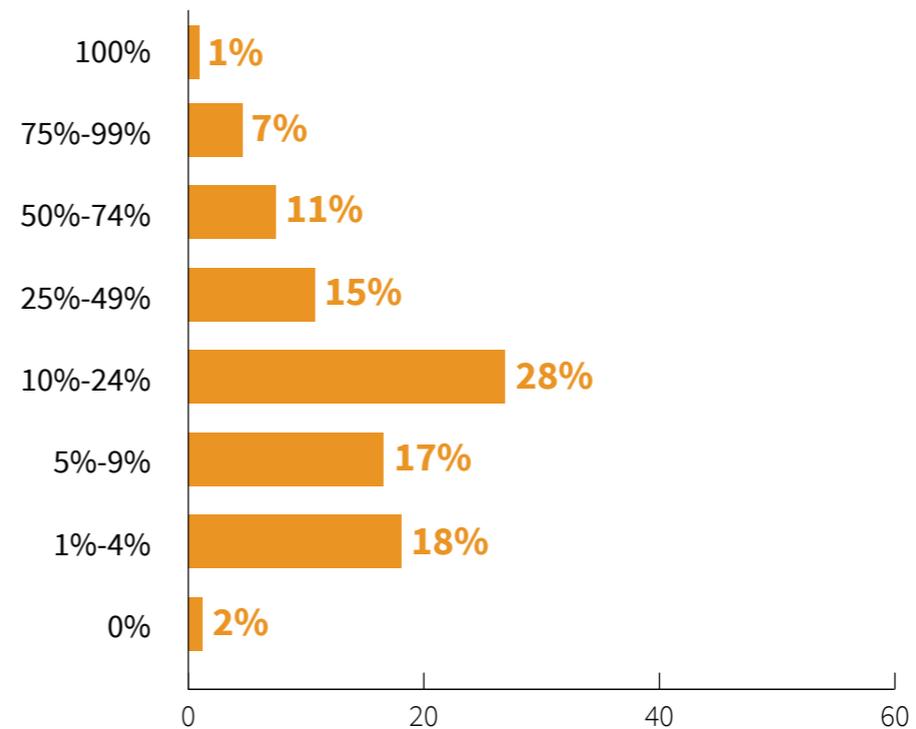
54% of enterprise marketers said they had knowledge of their company’s content marketing budget.

Do You Have Knowledge of Your Organization’s Budget/Budgeting Process for Content Marketing?



Base: Enterprise content marketers.
Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

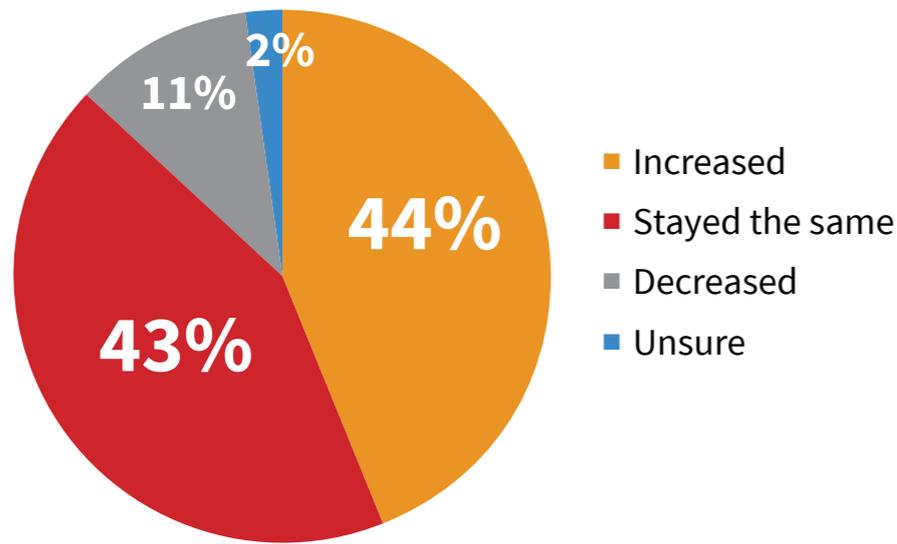
Percentage of Total Marketing Budget Spent on Enterprise Content Marketing



Base: Enterprise content marketers who know their organizations’ budget/budgeting process for content marketing. Aided list.
Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

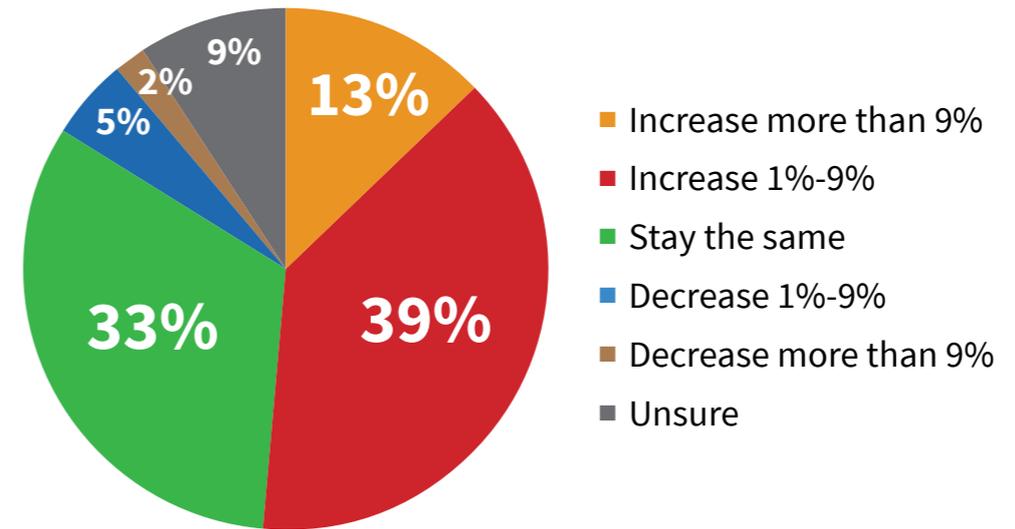
52% of enterprise marketers said their 2022 content marketing budget would be more than their 2021 budget.

How 2021 Enterprise Content Marketing Budget Compares With 2020



Base: Enterprise content marketers who know their organizations' budget/budgeting process for content marketing.
 Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

How Enterprise Content Marketing Budget Will Change in 2022 Compared With 2021



Base: Enterprise content marketers who know their organizations' budget/budgeting process for content marketing.
 Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

- ▶ In a post-COVID-vaccine business environment, investment is expected to increase in in-person events (44%).
- ▶ Investment in hybrid events is expected to increase (44%) more so than stay the same (29%), even though 11% do not use hybrid events at all.
- ▶ Regarding digital events, many marketers appear to want to stay the course (43% say spending will stay the same), although 27% plan to increase spending.

How Enterprise Organizations' Investment Will Change in Following Areas Post-Vaccine

	Increase	Stay the same	Decrease	Will be a new area of investment	Do not/will not use
Digital/virtual events	27%	43%	23%	3%	4%
In-person events	44%	23%	24%	3%	6%
Hybrid events	44%	29%	5%	12%	11%

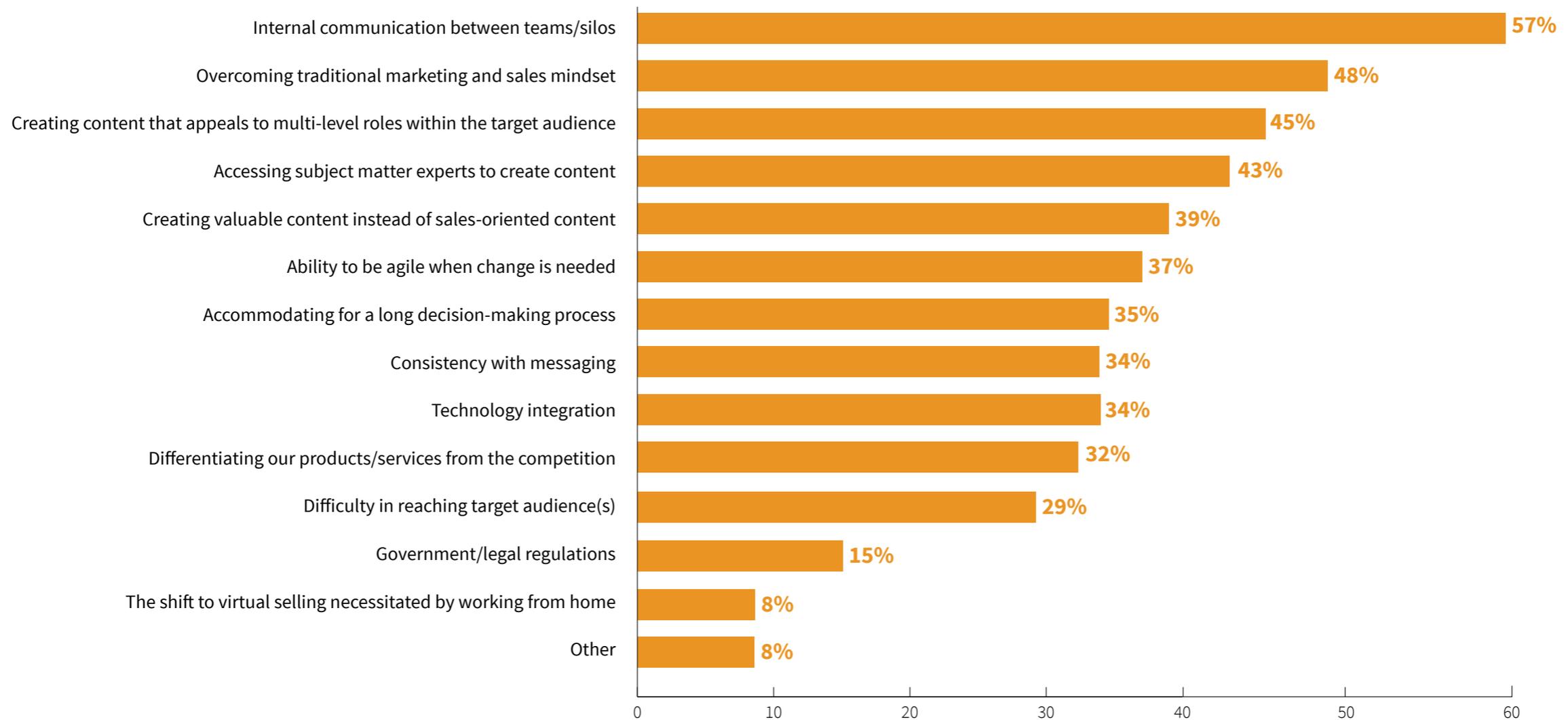
Base: Enterprise content marketers who know their organizations' budget/budgeting process for content marketing. Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

LOOKING FORWARD



Respondents said their top two content marketing challenges were internal communication between teams/silos (57%) and overcoming the traditional marketing and sales mindset (48%).

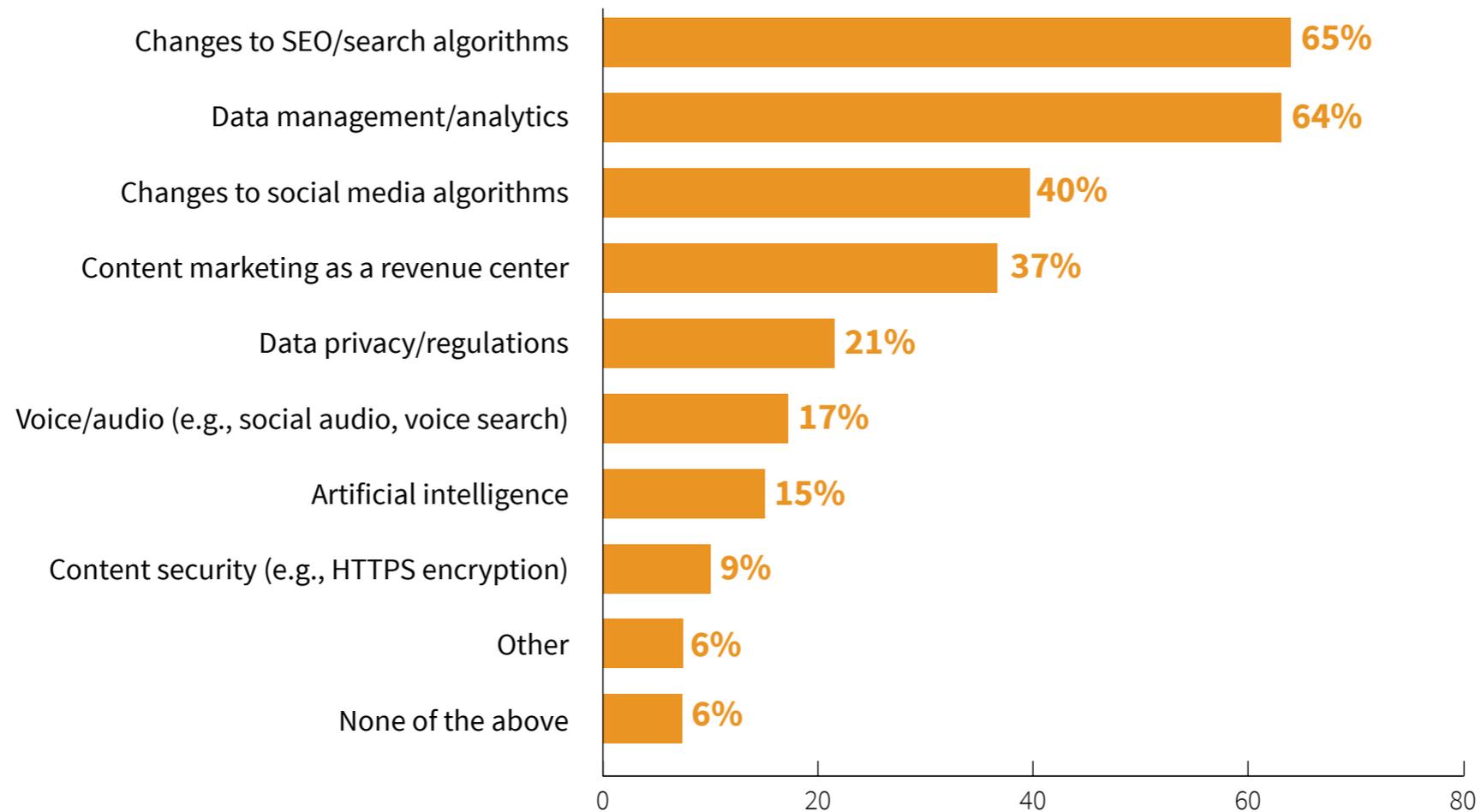
Enterprise Organizations' Current Content Marketing Challenges



Base: Enterprise content marketers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.
 Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/
 MarketingProfs, July 2021

Changes to SEO/search algorithms (65%) and data management/analytics (64%) are top of mind for enterprise marketers in 2021/2022.

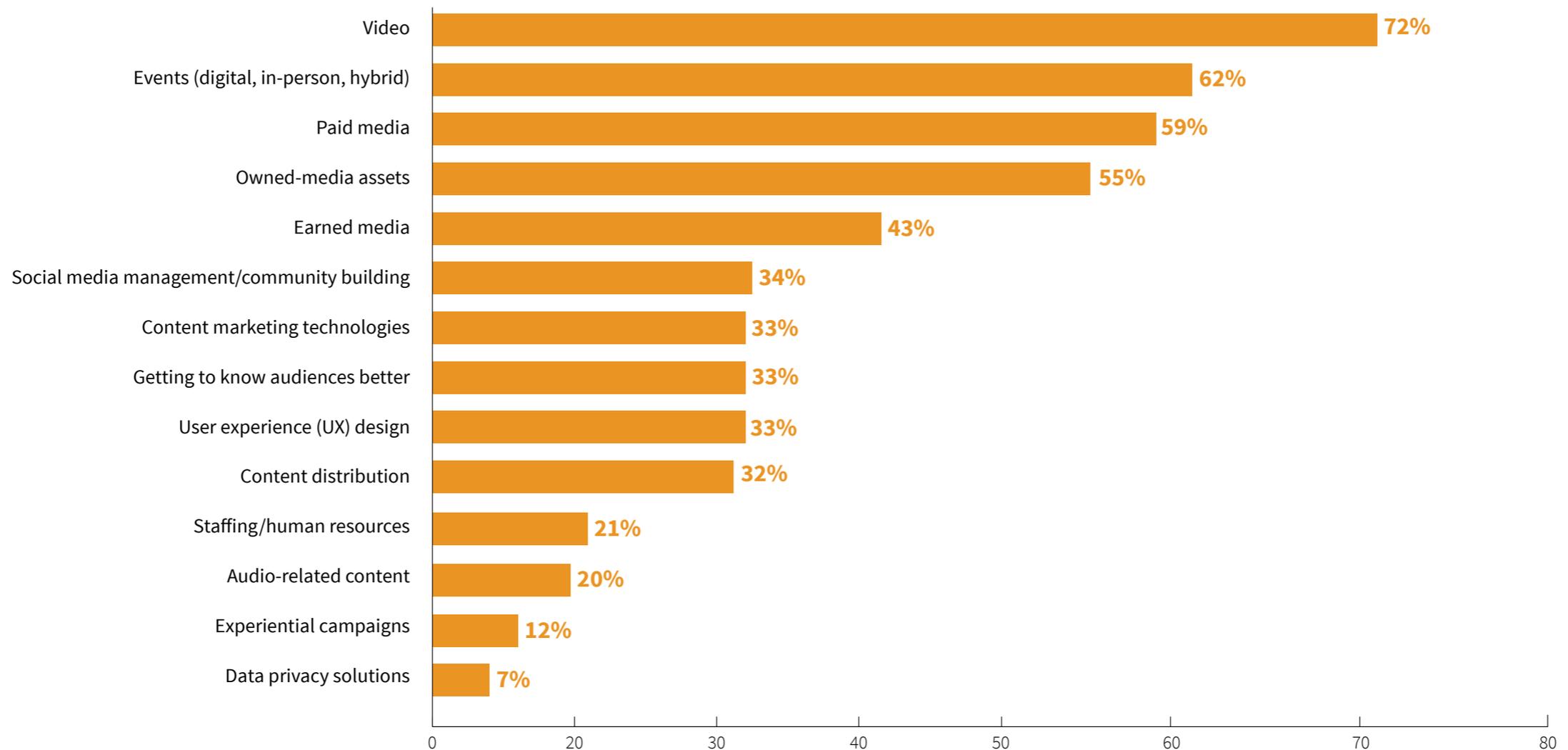
Content Marketing-Related Areas That Will Be Most Important to Enterprise Organizations in 2021/2022



Base: Enterprise content marketers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.
Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/
MarketingProfs, July 2021

Enterprise marketers indicated video would be a top content marketing area of investment by far: 72% predicted their organization will invest in video in 2022, followed by events (62%), paid media (59%), and owned-media assets (55%).

Areas of Enterprise Content Marketing Investment in 2022



Base: Enterprise content marketers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.

Enterprise Content Marketing Benchmarks, Insights for 2022. Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, July 2021

Our research points to transformational shifts to make content marketing an ever more important part of the integrated marketing mix.



Robert Rose
Chief Strategy Advisor
Content Marketing Institute

But what can go unnoticed are the dangers that lurk when we're so close. There's a wonderful scene in the movie *"Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade"* when the rich investor, Walter Donovan, is trying to convince Indy to go after the Holy Grail. He says, "We're on the verge of completing a quest that began almost 2,000 years ago. We're just one step away." Indy responds, "That's usually when the ground falls out from underneath your feet."

In business today, everyone creates content — from the web team to the marketing automation/demand gen executives, even front-line account representatives. It's probably easier to count who DOESN'T create content-driven experiences for customers these days.

But we must realize that this explosive trend is *our* quest. Our attempts to complete it require us to develop not just great content, but an operational strategy that supports all content. Without a strategy, an inconsistent voice and inability to measure success make our failure imminent.

But don't overcorrect and let the ground fall out from underneath you. When businesses create a content strategy, there is a tendency to limit the production of content and remove the voices of all front-line managers. We centralize the storytelling function, and not only centralize the creation of the voice but the expression of it as well.

What happens? Increasingly we see companies creating much more consistent and customer-centric sets of content. They get their voice and story back. But unfortunately, they remove their best storytellers — the rest of the business — from telling it. And as a friend of mine who was cut from a huge Hollywood movie once told me, "It's hard to be excited about a story that you were removed from telling."

My advice?

A scalable, successful, and differentiating content marketing strategy will help you more easily create, manage, activate, and measure digital content. You will define success by how well the content marketing strategy empowers everybody on the front lines (sales, account reps, executives, and even accounting and legal) to tell your stories — and the best "next stories" — to your audience.

A strategic content marketing operation isn't the storyteller of the business. It enables everyone else to be the storytellers.

Remember: It's your story — don't forget that you need everyone to tell it well.

METHODOLOGY & DEMOGRAPHICS

This report was produced by **Content Marketing Institute (CMI)**.

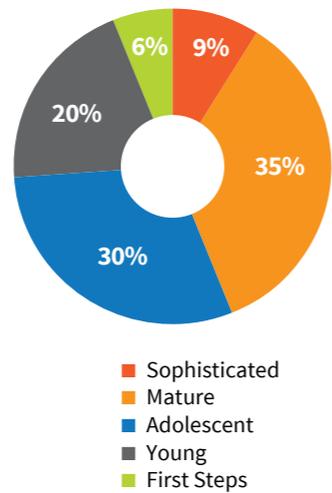
The results are from the CMI/MarketingProfs 12th Annual Content Marketing Survey. The online survey was emailed to a sample of marketers using lists from CMI and MarketingProfs.

A total of 1,275 recipients from around the globe — representing a range of industries, functional areas, and company sizes — replied to the survey during July 2021.

This report presents the findings from the 228 marketers who indicated their organization employs 1,000 or more people and that they are a content marketer, involved with the content marketing function, and/or someone to whom content marketing reports. Most of the respondents were from North America.

Special thanks to MarketingProfs for their assistance with the survey and the B2B and B2C annual content marketing reports. Find all our past research at ContentMarketingInstitute.com/research.

Enterprise Respondent Profile by Organization's Content Marketing Maturity Level



SOPHISTICATED

Providing accurate measurement to the business, scaling across the organization

MATURE

Finding success, yet challenged with integration across the organization

ADOLESCENT

Have developed a business case, seeing early success, becoming more sophisticated with measurement and scaling

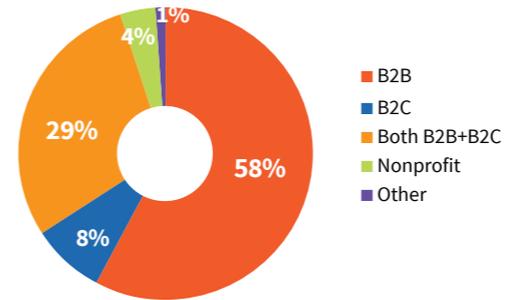
YOUNG

Growing pains, challenged with creating a cohesive strategy and a measurement plan

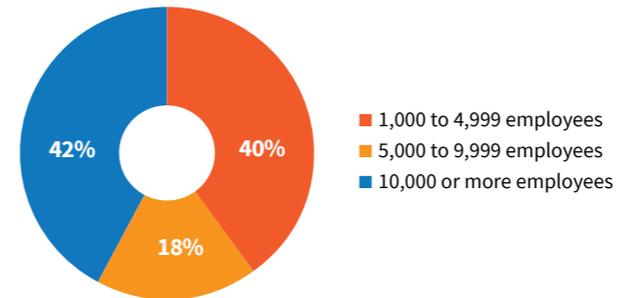
FIRST STEPS

Doing some aspects of content, but have not yet begun to make content marketing a process

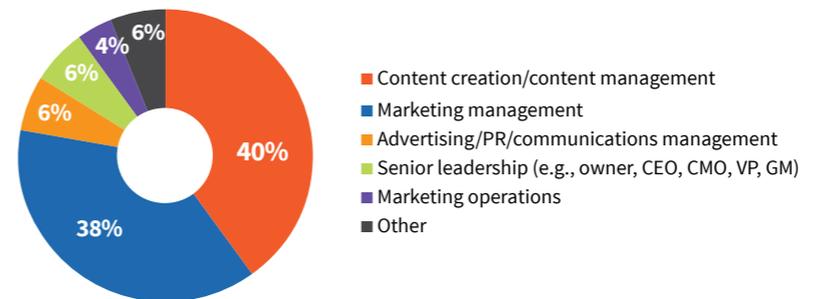
Nature of Enterprise Organization



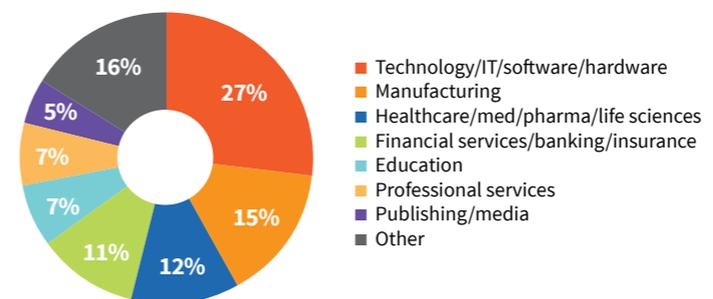
Size of Enterprise Organization (by employees)



Enterprise Job Function



Enterprise Industry Classification



Thanks to the survey participants, who made this research possible, and to everyone who helps disseminate these findings throughout the content marketing industry.

About Content Marketing Institute

[Content Marketing Institute \(CMI\)](#) exists to do one thing: advance the practice of content marketing through online education and in-person and digital events. We create and curate content experiences that teach marketers and creators from enterprise brands, small businesses, and agencies how to attract and retain customers through compelling, multichannel storytelling. Global brands turn to CMI for strategic consultation, training, and research. Organizations from around the world send teams to Content Marketing World, the largest content marketing-focused event, ContentTECH Summit, and CMI virtual events. Our community of 215,000+ content marketers shares camaraderie and conversation. CMI is organized by Informa Connect. To learn more, visit www.contentmarketinginstitute.com.

About Informa Connect

Informa Connect is a specialist in content-driven events and digital communities that allow professionals to meet, connect, learn, and share knowledge. We operate major branded events in Marketing, Global Finance, Life Sciences and Pharma, Construction and Real Estate, and in a number of other specialist markets and connect communities online year-round.

About MarketingProfs

MarketingProfs has been fueling the success of marketers at some of the world's most iconic brands since 2000 — first through webinars, newsletters, and other content; then world-class training; and best-in-class consulting services.

The products and delivery have evolved, yet throughout we have been laser-focused on helping marketers and their teams set priorities, solve problems, and fuel business growth.

We focus also on something equally important: Helping marketers do work they're proud of. Learn why 700,000+ marketers rely on MarketingProfs as their partner in marketing. Our clients speak for themselves. Find out how we can help you at MarketingProfs.com.

About Imagination

At Imagination, our mission is to fuel your brand's success through the power of insightful, creative and original content that meets the highest standards of journalistic integrity. Our creatives and strategists are experts in financial services, B2B, retail and associations. Working as an extension of your marketing team, we unite content, creativity and strategy to surpass your goals and cultivate a deeper connection between your brand and your audience.

What do you want your content to do? See what's possible at imaginepub.com.

imagination.

Imagination Has 3 Ideas for Marketers To Keep in Mind This Year

What's the marketing X-factor for today's most successful brands? According to the minds at Imagination, a Chicago-based agency that works with both emerging and household brands, it's all about execution.

This year, Imagination wants marketers to tune out the noise, embrace agility and focus on creating audience-first content. Below, the award-winning agency shares three ways to do just that.

1. Glance at the competition. Don't obsess over them.

An analysis of what your biggest competitors are doing can certainly inform your content strategy. It can show you how they organize their content, how often they publish, the topics they've covered and the media types they like to use. Most of the time, however, your competitors aren't doing anything too groundbreaking. There are always innumerable topics that they haven't covered yet, and with a little creativity you can even breathe new life into well-worn terrain. So rather than obsess over your competition, quickly take stock of them before designing and executing your own content strategy.

2. Create, measure and adapt. Avoid strategy paralysis.

Data is helpful, but remember that it's always looking backward in time. The most impactful content marketing campaigns originate from an understanding of your audience and a great idea. So don't let a shortage of data hold you back from creating amazing, one-of-a-kind content. Instead, use data to measure the impact of what you're publishing. Those signals can help you decide what to do more of, what to do less of, and what to optimize and repurpose.

3. Add metrics within your control to your KPI list.

When most marketers think of key performance indicators, they tend to assume that the "performance" part relates to their content and campaigns. What about your team's performance? It's measurable if you track KPIs such as pieces of content published per month and introduce content quality scores based on peer reviews and audience feedback. Try focusing on those KPIs within your team's direct control, and you'll likely see improvement across more traditional KPIs such as traffic, shares and conversions.

As you can see, execution is the name of the game this year. To get more content marketing insights delivered directly to your inbox, **subscribe to The Spark**, Imagination's bi-weekly newsletter.