Measuring Content Marketing ROI: How to Make the Case for a Bigger Budget

Parse.ly

Introduction

Are you struggling to get leadership buy-in for a bigger budget? *You* know your content is crucial to driving revenue, but how can you track its performance and explain those results to the rest of your organization?

According to a [recent study](#), 88% of prospective customers are researching you online through your content before making their first contact.

Executives are looking to invest in strategies that yield the biggest results and cut funding to the ones that don't. Proving the value of your content is key to:

1. Improving the customer experience

2. Obtaining a bigger budget

And those two outcomes contribute to:

1. Creating more impactful content

2. Generating more revenue through content

So logically, how customers perceive the value of your content is directly tied to winning more deals. That's great, but how do you measure the value of your content? That's where return on investment (ROI) comes in. Now's the time to evaluate how content has impacted your bottom line and leverage that data to secure your budget for next year.

Wondering what you should be measuring and how to get started?

Marketing professionals often propose projects and content, but before jumping into those ideas, ask your team: What is the *why* behind the content? What value does it bring to the customer? What is the ROI? Asking these questions will help lead you through the rest of the steps outlined later.

Meet our expert contributors

Throughout this ebook, you'll find insight and expertise shared by these marketing leaders during one of our recent partner webinars:

Lindsey Tishgart, Chief Marketing Officer, InsightSquared

Lindsey is a senior marketing leader focused on full-funnel marketing programs, supporting the revenue team from lead to opportunity, cross-sell to renewal. Prior to InsightSquared, she spent her 20+ year career partnering with a wide range of companies from startups to Fortune 500, SaaS to live music, and more.

Jary Carter, Chief Revenue Officer, WordPress VIP

Jary oversees sales, marketing, and go-to-market strategy. He's also the Co-Founder of Oro (the creators of OroCommerce). Previously, he was the VP of Worldwide Sales and Channel for Magento. He is a proven leader in open source with a clear understanding of customer experience management.
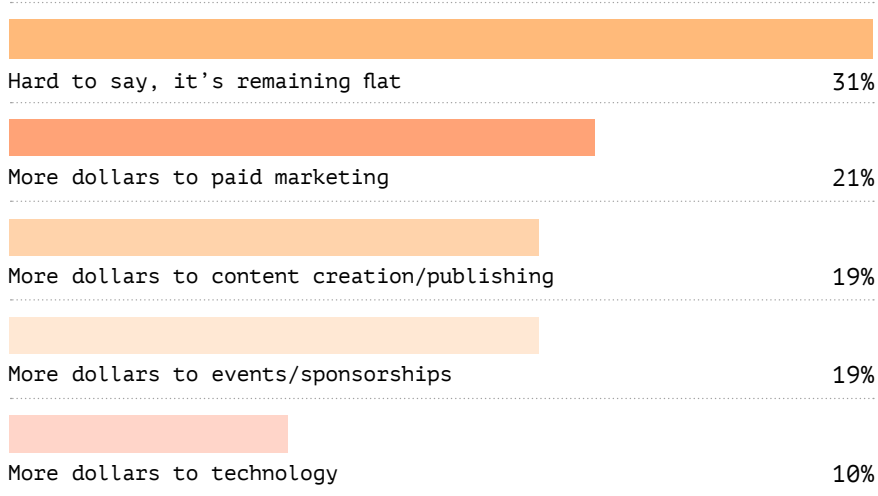
David Cardiel, VP of Marketing, WordPress VIP

David has spent the past two decades building high-performing revenue marketing teams and installing demand gen engines at both startup and enterprise organizations. Companies like Silicon Labs, Hoover's (D&B), National Instruments, Blackbaud, and TrendKite (Cision) have all retained his services to build revenue-producing marketing teams to achieve their goals.

A look at industry budget trends

How do you expect your marketing budget to shift next year?

We polled our webinar attendees, and here's how they responded:

Hard to say, it's remaining flat	31%
More dollars to paid marketing	21%
More dollars to content creation/publishing	19%
More dollars to events/sponsorships	19%
More dollars to technology	10%

How do the poll results align with industry trends?

Technology is important. People don't *want* to spend money on marketing technology, but it's becoming increasingly important in driving strategy and tracking ROI. While only 10% said they're allocating more dollars to technology, overall technology spend has actually increased industry wide. The problem lies in implementation; it's difficult to apply new technology if you don't have the appropriate staff or resources for a successful launch.

Event uncertainty. Many marketers are cautiously optimistic about in-person events. A lot of attendees are requesting hybrid events, but running those is 30% more expensive than in-person events, and the ROI for virtual events is often disappointing. So is it worth it? Some are earmarking part of the budget for events in case they *can* happen in person and deciding with the team whether it's worth the extra time and effort for a hybrid option. A more popular solution (until event uncertainty eases) is moving typical event budgets into paid digital advertising instead.

How does your budget compare?

Almost one-third of respondents said they weren't sure how their budget was going to shift. If you're also feeling uncertain, keep reading to learn why increasing your budget for content is worth it.

The shift in marketing structure. Recently, many organizations are aligning and consolidating their platforms to more thoroughly track projects and performance. Unifying and streamlining your digital marketing stack can make your team's jobs much easier and allow you to better showcase overall performance. Plus, as marketing and sales teams continue to blend, marketing efforts are moving further down the funnel, which requires more transparent access to the sales cycle for all stakeholders.

Content ROI: basic FAQs

Before starting the process of measuring your content marketing ROI, let's take a moment to cover frequently asked questions and common content misconceptions.

Why is content important?

We're living in a digital climate, so content drives just about everything in the sales cycle. From lead generation to closing a sale, content provides value to your prospects and customers alike. Read more about the importance of content in our *Content Matters 2022 Report*.

What is content ROI, and why should you track it?

Content marketing ROI measures the revenue your business earns compared to what you spent on your content marketing efforts. You can use this basic formula to get started.

$$ROI = \left(\frac{(Return - Investment)}{Investment} \right) \times 100$$

Return on Investment (%)

Looks simple, right?

The bad news. Content marketing ROI is difficult to measure and track. The content journey is never the same path or speed across buyers, and content marketing is a long-term process with multiple customer actions that can lead to ROI. Because of that, attribution is tough to determine if you don't have the right models and tools (hint: Google Analytics won't give you all the data you need).

The good news. Money is not the *only* measure of a successful return, which we'll talk more about later. If you find the connection between your content and the revenue-related conversion actions users take on your site, you'll be able to get a clear picture of your content marketing ROI.

Knowing the ROI of your content will help you make the case to your executives for additional resources, budget, and overall buy-in. Acquiring a larger budget gives you more options for content creation and distribution, such as outsourcing creators, planning additional events, investing in paid advertising, etc.

What counts as a conversion?

Typical "conversion" actions vary across industries and look different for each organization, ranging from lead-generation form completions and trial downloads to ecommerce sales and premium subscriptions.

But for each business, these conversion actions are what lead to revenue. And content is what drives those actions. Therefore, to understand the ROI of your content, you need to understand what content converts. [Parse.ly](#), part of the [WordPress VIP platform](#), refers to these conversions as content conversions. So, any time we use the word "conversion," we mean a *content* conversion.

How do you make the case for a bigger budget using content ROI?

Asking for a larger budget may seem daunting, but we've segmented the preparation process into three steps that will help you feel more confident.

1. Understand your customer and map the customer journey.

2. Track and report on the *right* content metrics.

3. Remove friction from the buying process and fill any gaps with content.

Now that we've covered the basics, let's dive in.

Step 1: Understand your customer

How do your customers engage?

Much of the customer experience comes from how they engage with your content and how they find, use, and eventually advocate for your product. Always provide the customer with continuous engagement opportunities so you can learn more about their interactions.

While evaluating their engagement, ask yourself:

- How are they accessing our content?

- What content is getting the most attention, and from where?

- At what point are customers leaving the content? Are they moving to other content, or leaving altogether?

- Are they actually using the product we offer? How?

- If the customer has been offboarded, what was their reason for leaving?

And most importantly: what content leads to conversions?

> "Customer experience is the only source of sustainable competitive advantage."
>
> **— Jary Carter
> Chief Revenue Officer
> WordPress VIP**

As we mentioned earlier, content = ROI through conversions, which is why you need analytics tools that are specifically designed for measuring content conversions. Don't worry, we get to this in Step 2.

Once you have a solid grasp of how your customers are engaging with your content, you can start mapping their journey.

Map your customer journey

According to [Salesforce](#), 80% of people find a company's customer experience just as important as its products, which is why your primary goal when mapping the customer journey should be to understand their experience.
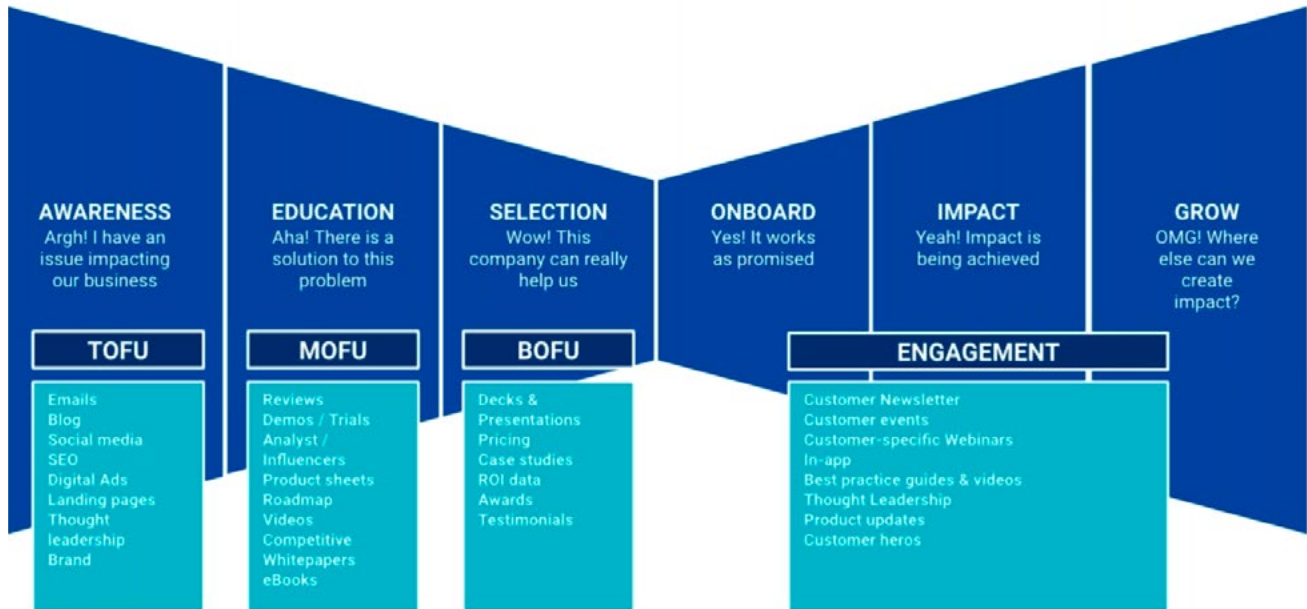
Perhaps that sounds obvious, but it's easy to be distracted by plotting out journey milestones instead of getting to the underlying emotions that cause the journey to advance. Brand loyalty waxes and wanes each year, so fully understanding the customer experience—and how it connects to the journey and sales cycle—is crucial to both generating new leads and retaining current customers.

Once you've created a journey map, it's important to understand the role marketing plays at each step so you can provide impactful and conversion-worthy content along the way.

Marketing's role across the customer journey

In this graphic provided by InsightSquared, you'll see the bowtie-shaped customer journey with descriptions of marketing's role and examples of helpful content at each stage.

AWARENESS	EDUCATION	SELECTION	ONBOARD	IMPACT	GROW
Argh! I have an issue impacting our business	Aha! There is a solution to this problem	Wow! This company can really help us	Yes! It works as promised	Yeah! Impact is being achieved	OMG! Where else can we create impact?

TOFU	**MOFU**	**BOFU**	**ENGAGEMENT**		
Emails Blog Social media SEO Digital Ads Landing pages Thought leadership Brand	Reviews Demos / Trials Analyst / Influencers Product sheets Roadmap Videos Competitive Whitepapers eBooks	Decks & Presentations Pricing Case studies ROI data Awards Testimonials	Customer Newsletter Customer events Customer-specific Webinars In-app Best practice guides & videos Thought Leadership Product updates Customer heros		

TOFU: Top of Funnel
MOFU: Middle of Funnel
BOFU: Bottom of Funnel

Infographic from InsightSquared during the Measuring Content ROI webinar.

Step 2: Track and report on the right metrics

Without content analytics, you don't know what works

Actually measuring and reporting your content marketing ROI is the hardest part. Everyone wants to say their metrics are moving up and to the right, but that isn't always reality. The key is to measure the right things that are meaningful to ROI (hint: site traffic and impressions don't count). Vanity metrics sound and look good, but they won't help your team set goals or justify a larger budget.

Content ROI tracking tools

Google Analytics is the go-to for most marketers, but unfortunately, it can't offer the full picture of content marketing ROI. It was built to track digital marketing campaigns and paid ad spend for ecommerce brands, using a last-touch attribution model, so it's difficult and time-consuming to set up an attribution function that gives you a realistic picture of content ROI.

Use other content analytics tools that offer more content-focused attribution models, such as Parse.ly Content Conversions. With it, you can leverage a *linear attribution model*, which gives credit to every page viewed within 30 days of a conversion, except the page where the final conversion occurred.

Parse.ly also offers an easy dashboard to visualize your content performance across social, search, web and mobile platforms, video, and more, so you can do more of what works and less of what doesn't.

Measure impact over activity

Identify the impact of content during different parts of the sales cycle to provide a more accurate view of content ROI. Start by looking at the following conversion actions:

- Subscription sign-ups

- Newsletter sign-ups

- Lead-generation form fills

- Link clicks (if you're tracking outbound affiliate clicks)

- Any other event that matters to your business's bottom line

InsightSquared's metric mistake (and how they fixed it)

InsightSquared was ranking for things that weren't necessarily important to their business, which meant traffic was high, but engagement and conversion rates were low.

While the traffic looked good on the surface, the impact metrics told a different story. After diving into the right metrics and auditing their content, bounce rates and conversions improved despite lower traffic.

Read more about important engagement metrics in Parse.ly's blog on content marketing ROI.

Step 3: Remove friction from the buying process

Now that you have a good understanding of content engagement and conversion data, it's time to improve the customer experience.

Open the floor for team discussion

Bring everyone together, including leadership, to identify any friction in the buying process or gaps in the customer journey that can be filled with content.

Sales and support feedback

Talk to your sales team to see where prospects are stalling in the sales cycle, and where content can help make the cycle easier and faster.

Some helpful questions to ask:

- Are you giving prospects impactful content *before* you ask for the sale?

- What questions can be proactively answered through top-of-funnel content?

- What content is helpful for follow-up reading after demos?

Then, survey your customer support team to learn what questions customers are asking the most, and what pain points are most common. Remember: customer retention is just as important to ROI as new business. What content can you publish to help the support team keep customers happy? How can you help the buyer *at each stage of their journey*?

Compile your content wishlist

Based on your conversations with other teams, put together a list of the content you can create to remove friction in the buying process. Include content that will fit potential customers' needs at the right time, allowing them to consume it at their own pace, no matter their stage in the journey or sales cycle.

This wishlist should be curated with your content conversion data in mind.

> "Time is the biggest investment you're asking of anyone today —whatever content they're consuming, are you making it worth their time?"
>
> — **Lindsey Tishgart**
> **Chief Marketing Officer**
> **InsightSquared**

The content journey is key

According to [Forrester](#), a consumer engages with 11.4 pieces of content prior to making a purchase. That's why the content journey *is* the customer journey.

Evaluate your content strategy

Now that you have your content wishlist to help remove friction in the customer experience, you're probably thinking "*Oh no, this is a long and scary list.*" That's okay!

Take your list and separate it into segments. This will make the list less overwhelming and help you avoid decision paralysis. You can separate it by type of content, topic, journey milestone, purpose, etc.—whatever makes the most sense for your organization and team.

But as you evaluate your list, focus on the *why* behind your content; how is it helping you achieve your goals? This, too, can help separate your list into manageable pieces, so you can forge ahead with your strategy.

Infographic from InsightSquared during the Measuring Content ROI webinar.

Distribution method matters

Perfecting distribution helps remove friction in the customer journey. Once you begin crafting content, pay attention to your publishing and distribution method.

Food for thought

Is gating your content behind a contact form actually hindering the customer experience? For highly conversational pieces, it may be. Allowing people to share it across Slack channels or social media could increase engagement, leading to more value than a single email contact.

Analyze content performance across channels, with content analytics tools like Parse.ly, to identify the optimal distribution method for each type of content you're publishing. It's also important to follow accessibility best practices and ensure all the images are sized correctly and optimized for web/mobile, social media, etc., so none of your message is lost.

Tip: If social media is your channel of choice, consider sharing from one of your internal expert's accounts rather than your own brand account. People like to follow people, not brands. Consumers are more likely to click on content coming from experts because of the unconscious authority associated with a person rather than a company.

What's next?

So you've completed Steps 1-3, now what? Here are the key takeaways to keep in mind as you continue on your content marketing journey.

Align your goals

As a marketing team, come up with two to three things you want to accomplish for your business and then focus all your effort and energy on those. Marketing teams are notorious for taking on way too much without understanding the impact of those things. People align around simplicity—customers and employees alike—so focusing your efforts will make life easier for everyone.

Don't create content for content's sake

Remember to tie your content back to your *why*. Always come back to your customer journey and create the content your customers want and need during their journey. But be smart about it; if your competitors already have an "ultimate guide" on a topic you want to cover, consider making a condensed version or another format that will set you apart.

Measure what matters

You know the drill: always prioritize impact over activity. It will be easy to fall into old habits of looking at things like traffic and impressions, but now you know those things aren't effective at telling your performance story. As long as you're measuring what matters, you'll have the justification you need to ask for that bigger budget.

The grand finale: Make your budget ask

It's time!

Before you ask for a *bigger* budget, it's important that you feel confident about writing a content marketing budget in general. If you're nervous about how leadership will receive your budget, Parse.ly's guide to writing a content marketing budget (and getting it approved) is a great resource.

Once you feel comfortable with your budget, organize a meeting with executives to showcase the journey map you've created. Cover the shortcomings you've identified, present your content ideas, and report on your content-specific metrics. Help them understand why content is important to conversions, and then suggest your budget. Be sure to include your goals and how the budget will help you achieve them.

Need help creating a thorough performance report? Check out this guide from Parse.ly.

Next steps

For more information on measuring your content marketing ROI, watch the webinar that inspired this ebook or read the companion webinar recap.

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Part of WordPress VIP

About Parse.ly

Parse.ly is the analytics platform built for content creators.

Parse.ly gives creators, marketers and developers the tools to understand content performance, prove content value, and deliver tailored content experiences that drive meaningful results.

With Parse.ly, your writers and marketers don't have to turn to the analyst team for answers—they can be data-driven themselves.

Learn more about Parse.ly