

# To Gate, or Not to Gate? That's Not the Question.

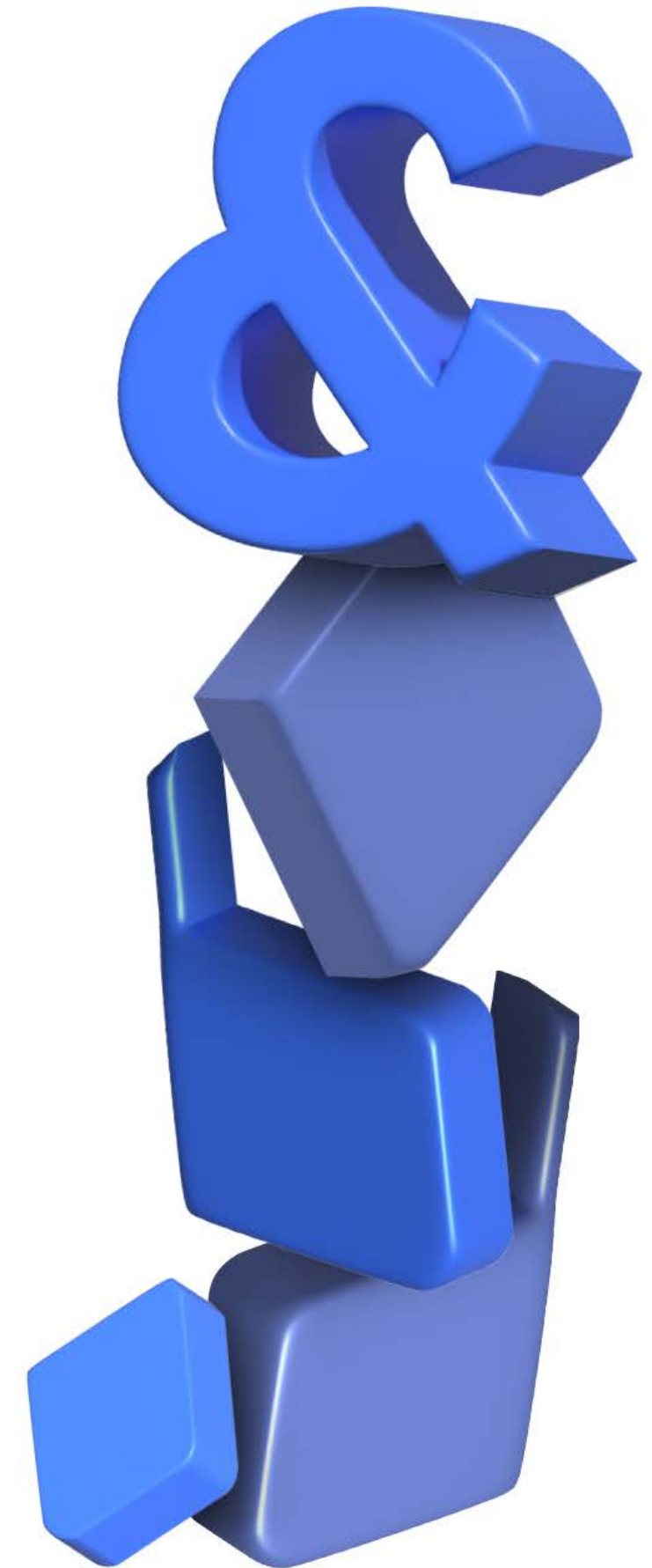
Shifting the focus of content  
marketing from demand  
generation to value creation.



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# Introduction

## Something's rotten in the State of Denmark

"To be, or not to be: that is the question." Hamlet's ontological query is perhaps William Shakespeare's most famous soliloquy, and it also reminds us at Park & Battery of an existential debate in B2B content marketing: what content, if any, should be gated?

"Gated content" refers to any asset – be it a white paper, an infographic, a video, a case study, a webinar, a demo, etc. – that requires a user to fill out a form before they are allowed to access the content. Typically, this means providing at least a name, title, company, and a work email address. Naturally, "ungated content" is anything that a user can freely access with just a click to read, play or download.

For the better part of a decade, the prevailing practice among marketers has been to gate as much content as possible. This practice has been at the heart of the inbound marketing model for demand generation: collect contacts, assess them (aka qualify them) and pass the so-called marketing qualified leads (MQLs) on to sales. Marketing is held accountable for generating the MQLs. Sales is responsible for further qualifying the leads and closing them. Winner, winner, chicken dinner.

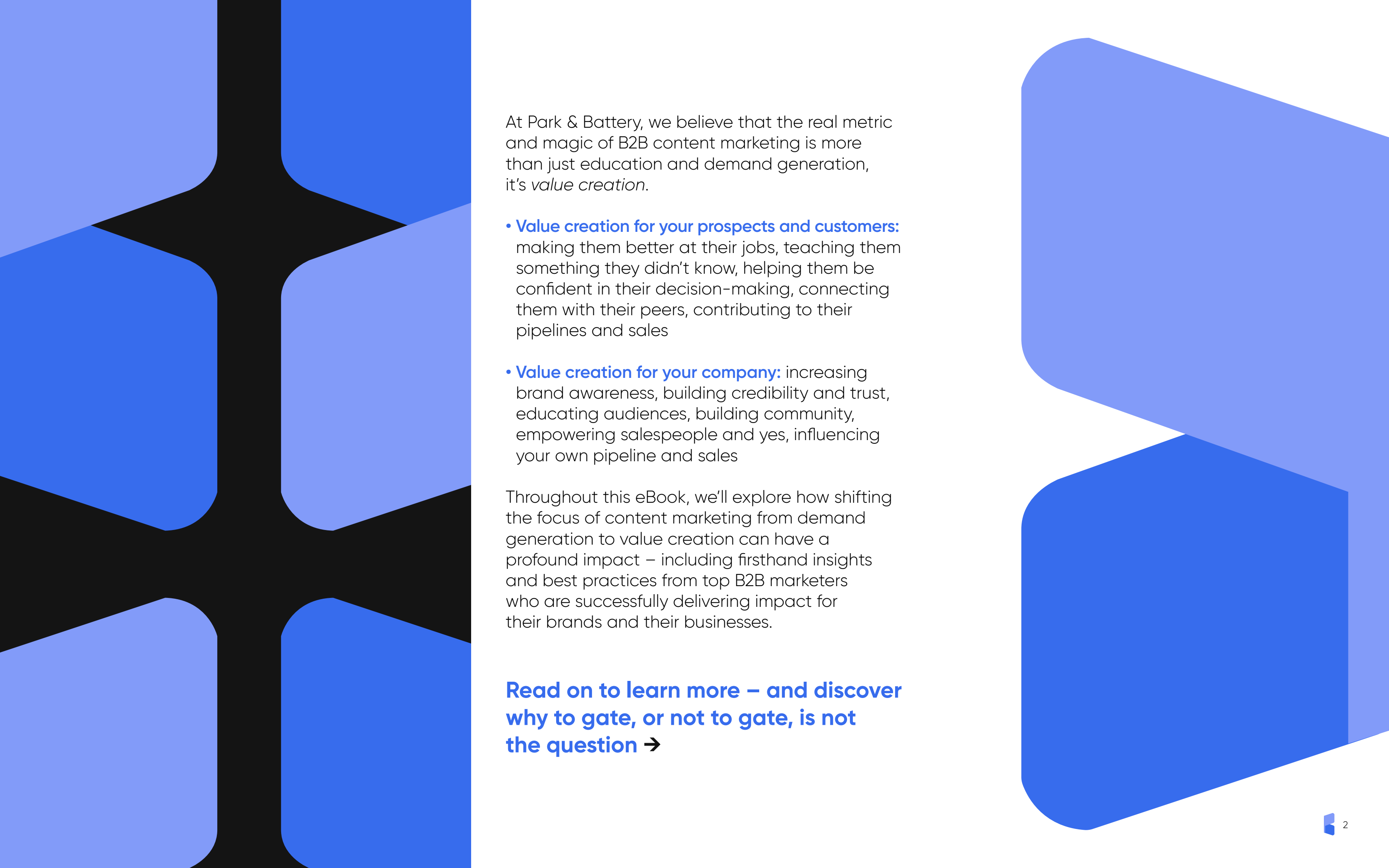
*Or not.* As *Hamlet's* Marcellus observes, something is rotten in the State of Denmark.

If you follow the trail, how many marketing qualified leads generated actually convert into customers? All too often, a prospect engages with a piece of content from a brand; let's say they download a white paper or attend a webinar. Marketing qualifies the lead and hands it off to sales. Sales then contacts the lead, and the opportunity dies on the vine because the buyer wasn't really ready to buy yet.

Why? Because [LinkedIn B2B buyer research](#) shows that only 1 in 5 buyers are in active buying mode at any given time. The other eighty percent of B2B buyers continue to engage with content to gather information, to boost their knowledge, to gain skills, or to participate in a community. This means the model for content creation and how content is measured must be different from traditional demand generation benchmarks.

***"Only 1 in 5 buyers are in active buying mode at any given time."***

*– LinkedIn B2B Buyer Research*



At Park & Battery, we believe that the real metric and magic of B2B content marketing is more than just education and demand generation, it's *value creation*.

- **Value creation for your prospects and customers:** making them better at their jobs, teaching them something they didn't know, helping them be confident in their decision-making, connecting them with their peers, contributing to their pipelines and sales
- **Value creation for your company:** increasing brand awareness, building credibility and trust, educating audiences, building community, empowering salespeople and yes, influencing your own pipeline and sales

Throughout this eBook, we'll explore how shifting the focus of content marketing from demand generation to value creation can have a profound impact – including firsthand insights and best practices from top B2B marketers who are successfully delivering impact for their brands and their businesses.

**Read on to learn more – and discover why to gate, or not to gate, is not the question →**

# The Need for More and *Better* Content

## Welcome to The Upside Down

Traditionally, B2B vendors had leverage in establishing any sales conversation. Even in the not-so-early days of the Internet, buyers needed to engage with sales to gain access to information about products and services. As digital connectivity proliferated and expanded via mobile devices, vendors ceded some ground; buyers still largely needed to access content via a vendor's website. This allowed vendors to gate content in order to allow access.

Over time, the balance of power continually shifted – with a particular acceleration in the last several years with the broad adoption and growth of B2B social media, peer review sites and thriving online professional communities. According to the prevailing estimates by Forrester and Sirius Decisions, two thirds to 90% of the B2B buyer journey is complete before a prospect is ready to engage with a sales team. In the parlance of the adventurous kids in Stranger Things, we've entered The Upside Down.

In this new dimension, B2B buyers consume content more voraciously than a demogorgon devours a Hawkins, Indiana teen. Over the course of the buyer journey, including once sales has engaged, Gartner estimates that there will be

20 or more customer interactions; Forrester says 17-27 buying interactions! And the average B2B buyer will consume 13 pieces of content – eight vendor-created pieces and five from third parties, on average.

"Generating great, highly accessible content is not only necessary, it's the gift that keeps on giving," says Kyall Mai, SVP and Chief Innovation Officer at Esquire Bank. "When used successfully, content is replicating your best sales person over and over, using technology to get the message out."

According to Demand Gen Report's annual content preferences survey, the most popular content types by research stage are:

| Early-stage           | Mid-stage             | Late-stage               |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Infographics<br>(62%) | Assessments<br>(49%)  | User reviews<br>(29%)    |
| Blogs<br>(58%)        | Webinars<br>(48%)     | Analyst reports<br>(29%) |
| Podcasts<br>(56%)     | Case studies<br>(44%) | ROI calculators<br>(26%) |

"There is no other way to educate a market at scale than content," echoes Jeremy Stinson, VP Demand Generation at Indico Data, a leader in AI-driven process automation. "You can't do it with sales going one-to-one to prospects. The main goal is education and getting prospects moved through the buyer journey in a way they want to do it, on their terms and on their timeline."

Optimistically, B2B brands are recognizing the value of content and the need for publishing great volumes of it. And, like many digital transformations accelerated by the impact of Covid-19, online content has increased exponentially through the pandemic. According to HubSpot's State of Media & Content Planning in 2022 report, almost half (49%) of marketing teams allocate between 30% and 50% of their budget to content. What's more, two thirds of marketers expect to increase their content marketing budget this year.

### Volume doesn't equal value

Unfortunately, the increasing quantity of online content hasn't yielded a boost in quality. Edelman and LinkedIn's most recent B2B Thought Leadership Impact Study describes, "a pandemic-induced glut of low-quality content diluting the perceived value of thought leadership among B2B decision-makers."

**"Almost half (49%) of marketing teams allocate between 30% and 50% of their budget to content."**

– HubSpot Research

According to the research, nearly four in ten (38%) final decision-makers say there is more thought leadership content than they can manage or keep up with – and the vast majority of decision makers (71%) say that less than half of the thought leadership they consume gives them valuable insights.

Forrester research echoes LinkedIn Edelman: across all areas, more respondents agreed vendor content has gotten worse, and that the materials did not meet their needs or expectations when compared to the year prior. Specifically, brands are creating content that does not align with buyer stages, is not backed by research or actionable recommendations, and are too focused on selling product.



"Content marketing is a lot like dating," says Kristen Kremkau, Content Director at Park & Battery. "You need to build up to big commitments like demos and sales consultations with content that's appropriate for the stage in the relationship – or you risk scaring your audience away."

No one wants to waste someone else's time. No one wants to feel sold to. In fact, Demand Gen Report's research reveals that two of the top recommendations B2B decision makers would make to improve the quality of content created by B2B vendors are: curb the sales messages (#1) and focus less on product specifics and more on value (#5). This makes perfect sense when considering LinkedIn's finding that only 20% of B2B buyers are active. What's more, it suggests that the over-protective gating of content is an outdated and restrictive strategy. Building on her dating analogy, our Kristen Kremkau adds, "Content at the top of the sales funnel is meant to create awareness. It's here that you want to attract your audience with content that covers issues that are keeping them up at night or bring attention to great opportunities for their business. It's important to be patient and keep the focus on topics your audience cares about rather than hard selling products and services. After all, first

dates are for talking about interests and hobbies, not marriage and kids."

"You shouldn't have to give up your social security number to get an eBook," adds Jeremy Stinson. "Vendors don't hold the power. People don't buy that way anymore. They consume content on their own time and, when they're ready, they'll talk to sales."

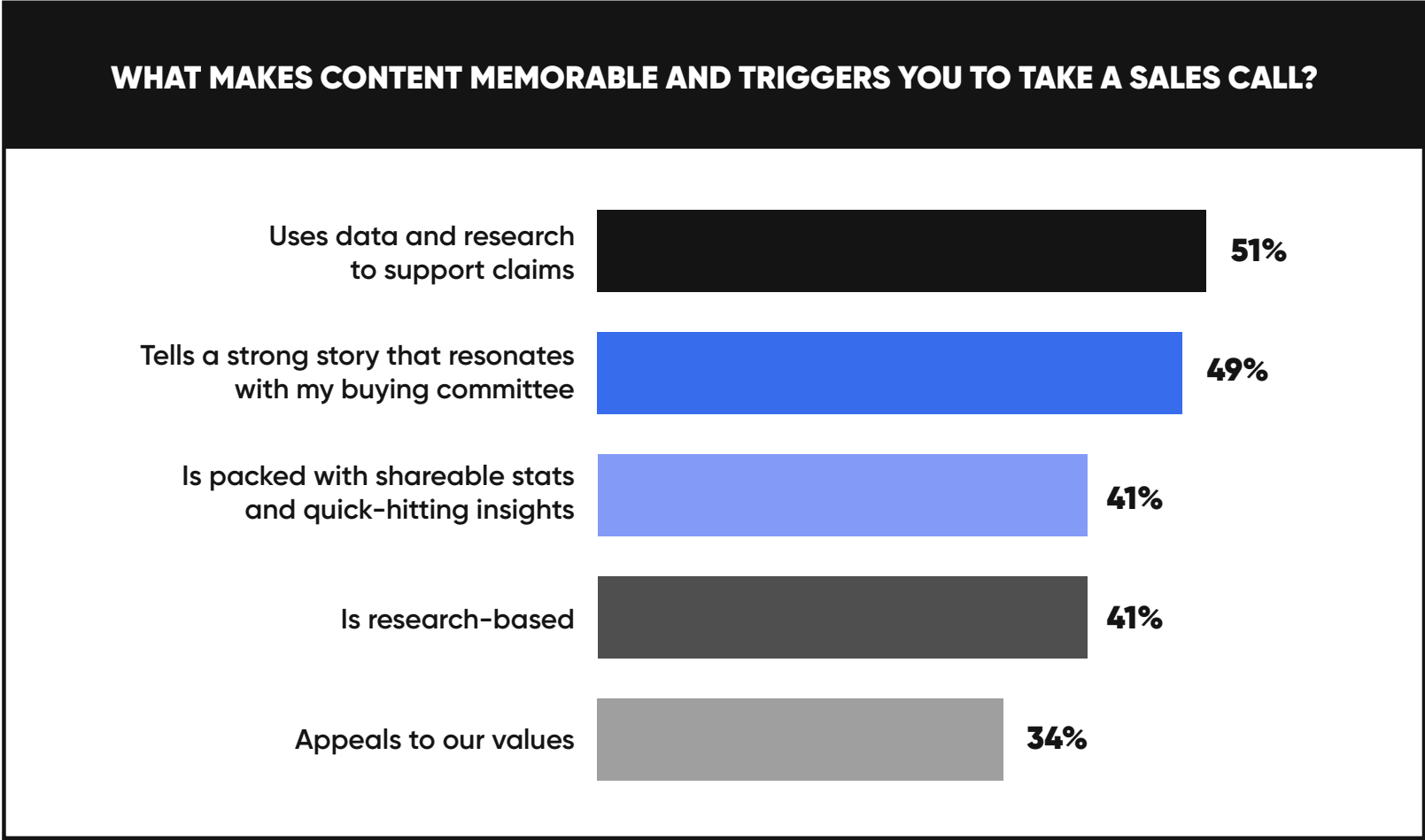
How can content help trigger a sales call? According to DGR's content preferences survey, more than half of respondents (51%) said the content should use data and research to support its claims, while 41% said the content itself should be research-based. Another common theme was the desire to share the content with the buying team; 49% of respondents said the content must tell a strong story that resonates with their buying committee and 41% said the content should be packed with shareable stats and quick-hitting insights.

Park & Battery President and Chief Creative Officer Michael Ruby comments, "There is such an abundance of content out there, and it's growing exponentially. So much volume, so much chatter – and, unfortunately, so much sameness.



A sea of assets that are too often focused on hard selling products or ‘boosting SEO’ instead of addressing the issues that really keep buyers

up at night. You have to add or create value, or you’re not only missing the point, you’re missing out with customers.”



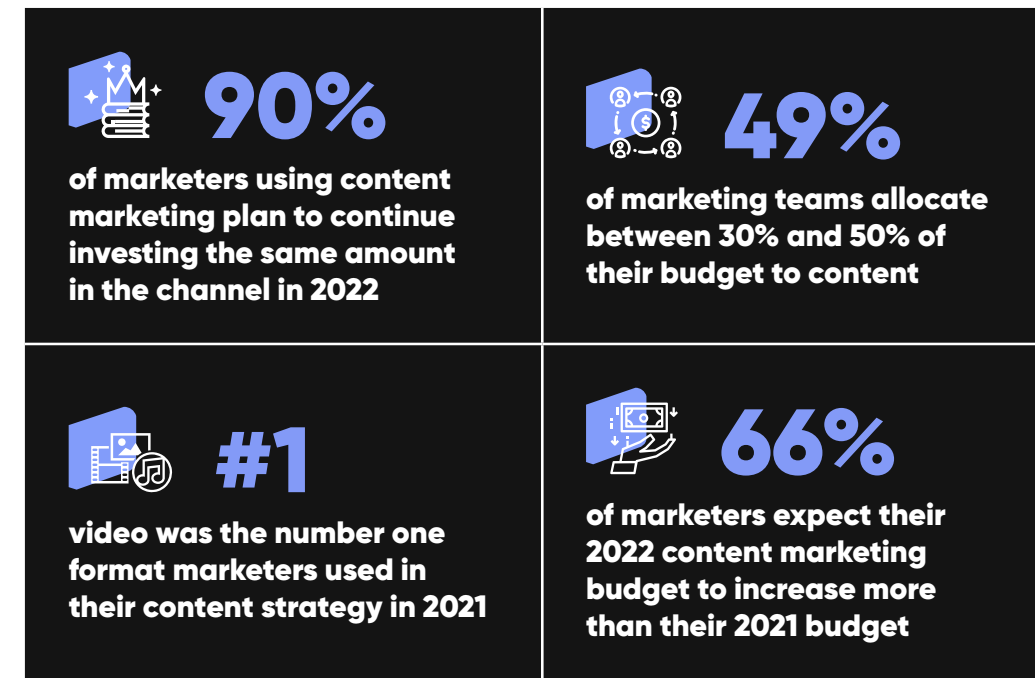
Source: Demand Gen Report 2022 Content Preferences Survey Report

Up next: a new outlook on measurement →

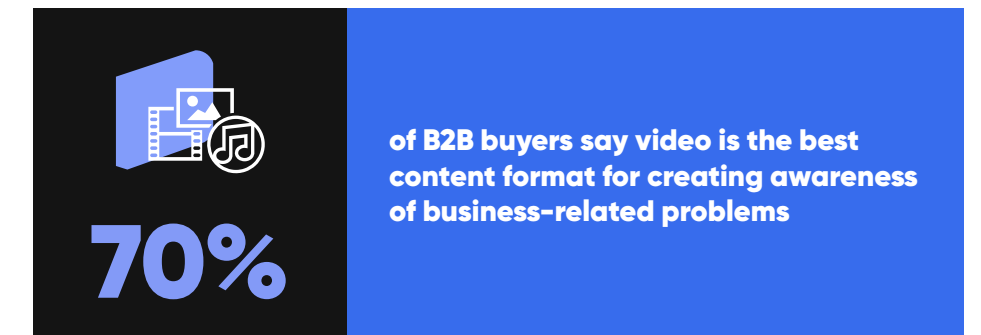


# Facts & Figures

How much are B2B marketers spending on content? And what are they creating? Two recent studies (among many) show that marketing leaders continue to increase their investments in content – and that video has crossed the chasm as the format of choice.

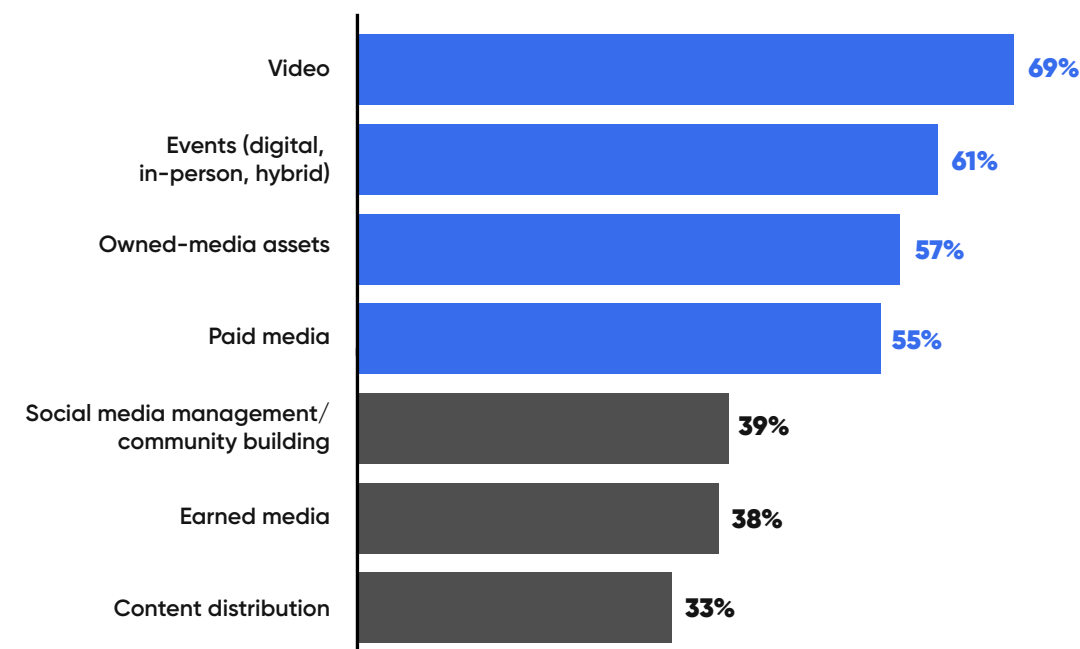


Source: [HubSpot State of Media & Content Planning in 2022 Report](#)

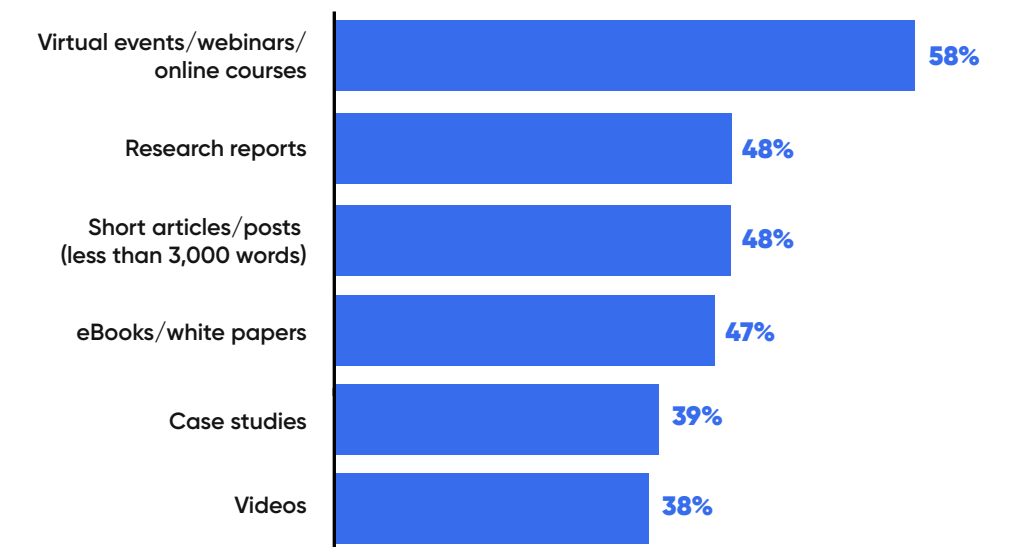


Source: [Brightcove/Ascend2, The Power of Video in the B2B Buyer's Journey](#)

## AREAS OF B2B CONTENT MARKETING INVESTMENT IN 2022



## B2B CONTENT ASSETS THAT PRODUCED THE BEST RESULTS IN LAST 12 MONTHS



Source: [12th Annual Content Marketing Survey, Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs](#)

# Forsaking Three-Letter Acronyms for Fulfilling Customer Needs

## Modern marketing goes awry

In a keynote at last year’s [B2B Ignite Conference](#), Ogilvy’s Vice Chairman [Rory Sutherland](#) quoted his agency’s namesake, comparing the overreliance on data to the way “a drunkard uses a lamp post for support, rather than for illumination. It’s ass covering disguised as rigor.”

The widespread adoption of marketing technology, the foundation of so-called “Modern Marketing” has been a blessing and equally a curse for B2B marketers, especially as it relates to the efficacy of content. The quest for measurement and accountability has turned the MQL into the ultimate CYA tool – while also creating unintended challenges and conflicts.

“Marketers are in a real tough situation – a lot of questions about marketing effectiveness and not a lot of good answers, forcing really bad marketing,” observes Indico’s Jeremy Stinson. “Businesses expect a dollar in, dollar out correlation. The problem is, that’s what led us to what I call the ‘MQL hamster wheel,’ where prospects who aren’t actually ready to buy are run in circles by marketing and sales. Yes, I can track that process, but that doesn’t drive pipeline and revenue.” Esquire’s Kyall Mai also sympathizes with the hamster wheel, saying, “It creates an adversarial relationship between sales and marketing. Sales often says, ‘Marketing isn’t generating enough good leads.’ Marketing says, ‘Hey sales, we gave you 1000 MQLs. WTF? Why haven’t these moved into the opportunity pipeline?’ And so the vicious cycle


continues. Instead of focusing on a unidirectional funnel, we need to think of using content to help move unready buyers through the buying lifecycle – from awareness to education and from education to sales engagement.”

## Getting off the hamster wheel

Part of the problem is that content marketers are also measuring themselves against metrics they don’t necessarily fully believe in. The [top three goals](#) marketers achieve through successful content marketing are generating brand awareness, building credibility and trust, and educating audiences, well above generating leads.

| GOALS B2B MARKETERS HAVE ACHIEVED BY USING CONTENT MARKETING SUCCESSFULLY IN LAST 12 MONTHS |     |
|---|-----|
| Create brand awareness  | 80% |
| Build credibility/trust   | 75% |
| Educate audience(s)   | 70% |
| Build loyalty with existing clients/customers   | 60% |
| Generate demand/leads   | 60% |
| Nurture subscribers/audience/leads  | 49% |
| Drive attendance to one or more in-person or virtual events                                 | 47% |
| Generate sales/revenue  | 42% |
| Support the launch of a new product   | 42% |
| Build a subscribed audience   | 37% |
| None of the above   | 2%  |

Source: [12th Annual Content Marketing Survey, Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs](#)



Park & Battery's CMO In Residence Karyn Scott believes there needs to be a mindset shift – allowing content to do what it does best, and creating value and driving buyers to a sale not because they want to purchase, but because they feel a necessity to buy.

"Prospects and even suspects don't want to be immediately thrust into the proverbial sales cycle until they are ready; they want to buy something because they feel like they need the thing right now," Scott contends. "You could say it's about using content to engage when customers are sales ready, but I think it's more than that. A better spin on content marketing or demand marketing would be to focus on *fulfillment marketing*. Or *fulfillment readiness*. We create value with content so that we're simply fulfilling needs throughout the buyer journey – at first, fulfilling with information and resources, then fulfilling purchases with products, services and solutions."

### **Make and measure what matters most**

Viewing content marketing from the perspective of value creation means two things. First, quality counts, perhaps more than ever before. Content has to be useful, sharable and/or participatory. As B2B buyers tell us in DGR's research, the content should be data- and research-driven, be easy to digest and tell a strong story that resonates. This is the intrinsic value of the content you create.

The extrinsic value you create should be the brand halo and business impact your content delivers. Use engagement and conversion metrics to help drive the ways in which you create content, but ultimately measure the impact in terms of short- and long-term value to the business. The reasons why should be clear: according to [McKinsey research](#), nearly half of CFOs surveyed said the reason marketing proposals have been declined or not fully funded in the past is because they didn't demonstrate a clear line to value. As McKinsey writes: "Build business cases with metrics that reflect meaningful financial value (sales opportunities, ROI, customer lifetime value, revenue run rate) rather than more prevalent but less valid – in the CFO's eyes, anyway – indicators."

"We're moving away from MQL and SQL toward identifying customer lifecycle stages against every lead in our CRM – and measuring performance based on how effectively we move people forward from one stage to the next and on to purchase," says Esquire Bank's Kyall Mai. "After all, that shouldn't be just the goal of marketing, that's the goal of every business!"

Based on her experiences as a senior marketing executive at Cisco, Salesforce, Flexport and Kloudspot, our Karyn Scott agrees: "There is so much information available. Today's audiences are so discerning. A better measure of impact is how well we deliver people who are ready to buy,

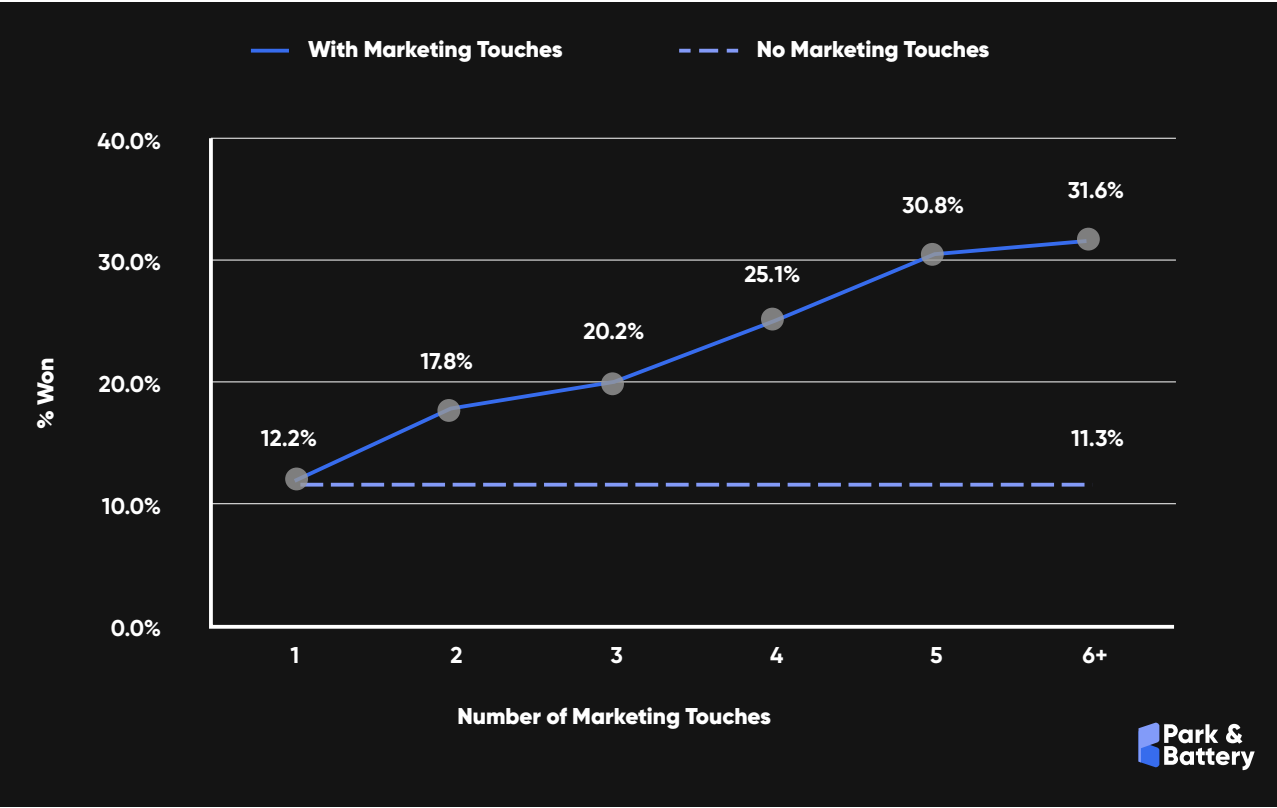
as opposed to those who are just looking. The key is that, whether it takes two or twenty touches, we want to keep serving up content where and when people want it so that they're hungry for more."

Scott, along with Park & Battery's Michael Ruby, experienced this firsthand while spearheading marketing at Flexport, a digital pioneer in the logistics and supply chain industry and one of the Time 100 Most Influential Companies of 2022. Together, they developed a value-based content model: high-volume content production, catered to each of Flexport's customer personas, with assets for every stage of the sales funnel. The more marketing touches and content consumed, the higher the percentage of closing a deal – from 12% with one piece to nearly 32% with six or more.

Kyall Mai has experienced this firsthand at Esquire Bank:

- When sales perform their own outreach to prospects (cold call), they get a 1% response rate
- When marketing passes leads to sales from a single content engagement, it is 8x more effective than a cold call
- When marketing generates a 'contact us' lead via multiple content engagements, it is 46x more effective than a cold call

"Different communications and content are relevant at different stages," states Kyall Mai. "Depending on the content they've consumed and what lifecycle stage they're at, that should be a more holistic determinant for intent and readiness rather than saying you're an MQL for downloading something."





# A New, Proven Model for Value Creation

## Triangulating value

B2B brands need enough content to sustain the entire customer journey, meeting prospects where they are at every stage. They can't just sell with content. And they can't assume a one-size-fits all model of thought leadership. They need different topics, different focuses, different formats to make sure they and their prospects don't end up endlessly running in place. And, they need all of this for all of their different buyer personas.

"Creating relevant content that is hyper-personalized for B2B buyers requires a mixture of customer lifecycle marketing," suggests Kyall Mai. "You need to use technology that enables you to be cognizant of the stages where people are in their journey. Then, based on where they're at and additional segmentation-related details, you can serve up content that adds and creates value – for you and for your buyers."

Jeremy Stinson adds, "Content strategy should be built around a grid that takes multiple factors into account. We want content that fills every box on that grid, so that we can help move our prospective customers toward a successful sales conversation."

Looking at it another way, you can think of a triangle as the organizing principle for creating value-based content.

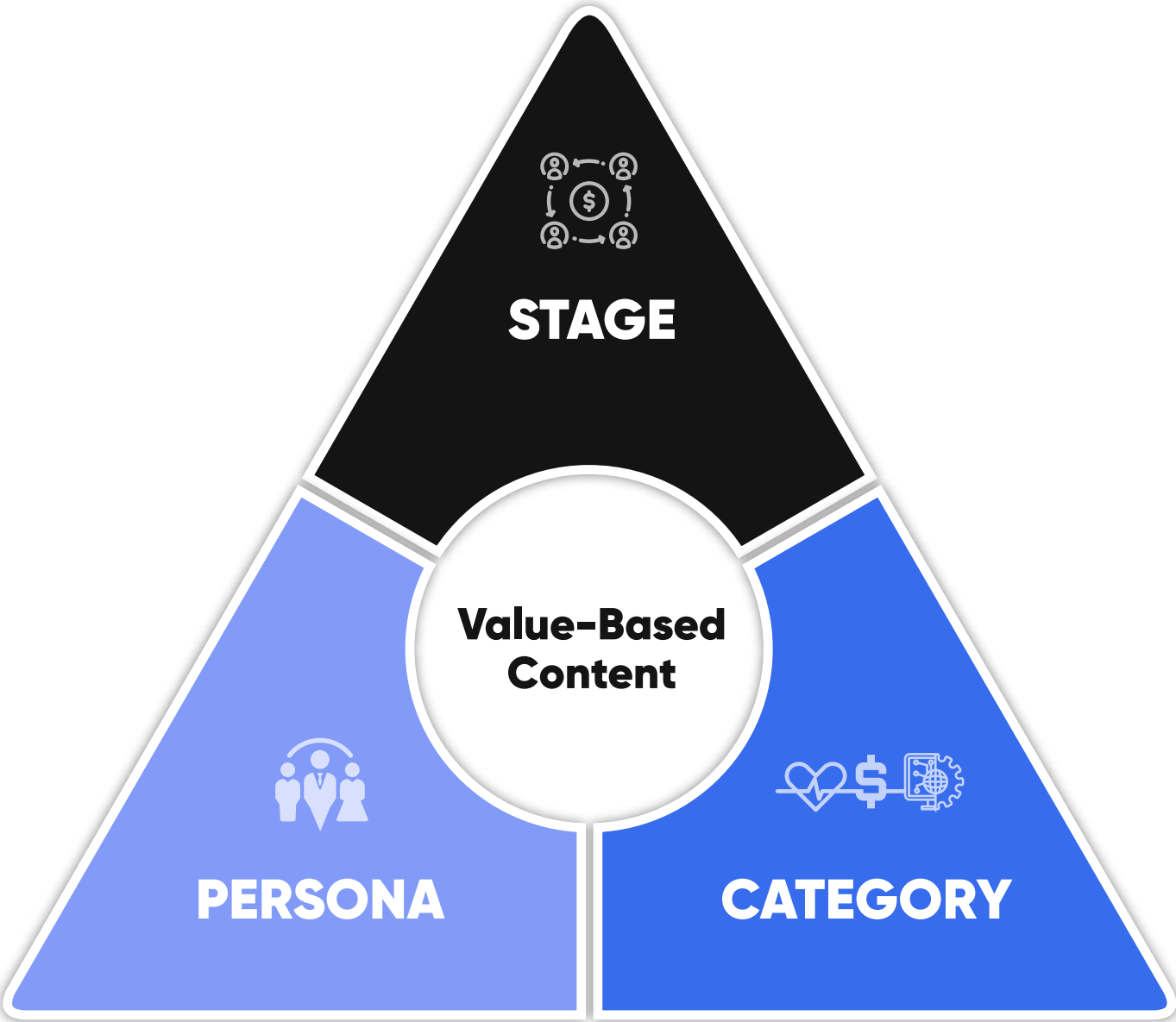
At the foundation, start with your customer persona(s). Who are you creating for? What are their challenges? What do they need? You'll obviously need to speak to different people in different ways, perhaps in different formats, addressing their different needs and learning styles. For example, an IT manager and a CIO have very different content and information needs. Some people gravitate to written formats, while others prefer audio or visual.

Next, consider the category of customer. Categorization can be defined by vertical industry (such as financial services versus healthcare). It could be delineated by organization size or type (enterprise versus mid-market or small business). You might even consider advanced attitudinal or behavioral segmentation that crosses sectors or business sizes.



Lastly, at the tip of the spear, your buyers within each segment need content that meets them where they are at every stage of the buyer journey – helping move them from being problem aware to solution aware to product and brand aware.

The best part? Developing content through this lens of value creation works. Read on to see how Indico Data and Esquire Bank are developing content, measuring impact and demonstrating value at scale.





## 10x-ing opportunities

Indico Data is The Unstructured Data Company.™ Through its innovative AI-driven software, Indico gives enterprises a single solution that allows them to ingest and structure a diverse range of unstructured digital formats – text, CSVs, videos, audio files, PDFs, contracts, emails, and much more – and gain rich insights, as well as maximize the value of their existing software investments, including RPA, CRM, ERP, analytics, and more.

### Indico's value journey

In his first year at Indico Data, VP of Demand Generation Jeremy Stinson ran the traditional lead gen playbook. Gate an eBook. Promote in digital channels like LinkedIn. Drive to a landing page. Collect form fill. Send the lead to a sales development rep in hopes of getting a meeting. The results were eye-opening – and not in a good way.

Stinson recalls, "I had used my initial approach with prior companies, but was too far removed from sales in those roles to see the impact, or lack thereof. We used to get the MQL and pat ourselves on the back. Now, when my most important KPI was generating sales demos, it wasn't working."

## Meet Indico Data

### Website:

[www.indicodata.ai](http://www.indicodata.ai)

### Sector:

Digital Process Automation

### Industries Served:

Insurance  
Financial Services  
Commercial Real Estate  
Healthcare

### Ownership Status:

Privately Held, Venture Capital-Backed

### The Tech Stack:





"I shared the data in my first review with our CEO. He didn't freak out, he just asked what we were going to do differently. I said we're going to do the opposite. Instead of using our channels and feeds to convince people to click, we're going to use our content to educate."

Stinson flipped the script, ungating all content and focusing instead on creating even more content with even greater accessibility. Hyper-targeting prospects with buyer intent data from 6Sense, he began giving away large swaths of his eBooks, infographics and online guides directly in Indico's LinkedIn stream with carousel ads and via increasing production of video assets. The litmus test for all content: would it "stop the scroll?"

At the heart of it all was the value-based content triangle – developing enough content to align with every persona, within every key vertical, at every stage of the buyer journey. Within one quarter, Stinson boasts, "We began to see a huge increase in demo requests."

### Indico's value created

Today, Indico Data has delivered exponential impact against its primary KPI, increasing sales demos more than 10x per quarter.

"The reason it works is it's aligned with how people want to buy and self educate," says Stinson. "It's all about putting the customer first. That's what's more important than anything. Helping customers find solutions to problems instead of being self-serving."

Indico's new approach is heralded now, but Stinson admits there was initial skepticism. "The challenge on the MQL hamster wheel is that it's really hard to get off. When you shift focus, MQLs will go away and you'll see a gap when the leads dry up. You'll have to convince sales and leadership that it's gonna come back and be okay."

Stinson also worked with leadership to establish new KPIs that would instill confidence and provide predictive benchmarks for sales. "Inbound demo requests are my North Star, aside from pipeline. But that's a lagging indicator. So we also look at pageview data on high-intent web pages on our site, such as 'Contact Us' or 'Request a Demo.' If those views go up, we know that it translates into inbound requests."





## Hyper-personalization driving demand and revenue generation

Esquire Bank is a full-service commercial bank dedicated to serving the financial needs of the legal industry and small businesses nationally, consistently rated one of the top performing community banks in the country. As a digital-first disruptor, Esquire is unique in that it is technology driven, branchless and executes digital marketing campaigns using an industry leading martech stack, combined with content marketing to deliver hyper-personalized communications at scale.

### Esquire's value journey

Prior to joining Esquire Bank as SVP and Chief Innovation Officer, Kyall Mai built advanced, data-driven sales and marketing solutions for over two decades for Fortune 500 organizations. The application of customer lifecycle marketing and hyper-personalized strategies from his past experience was a key priority for a bank with a niche audience requiring highly tailored educational content – convincing lawyers who typically self-finance the growth of their law firms to consider alternative financing options.

The first step for the bank was creating a customer-centric technology stack, with Salesforce CRM and Salesforce Marketing Cloud at the core. From here, the team began to develop

## Meet Esquire Bank

### Website:

[www.esquirebank.com](http://www.esquirebank.com)

### Sector:

Financial Services/Fintech

### Industries Served:

Law Firms  
Payment Processing  
Commercial Real Estate

### Ownership Status:

Publicly Traded (NASDAQ: ESQ)

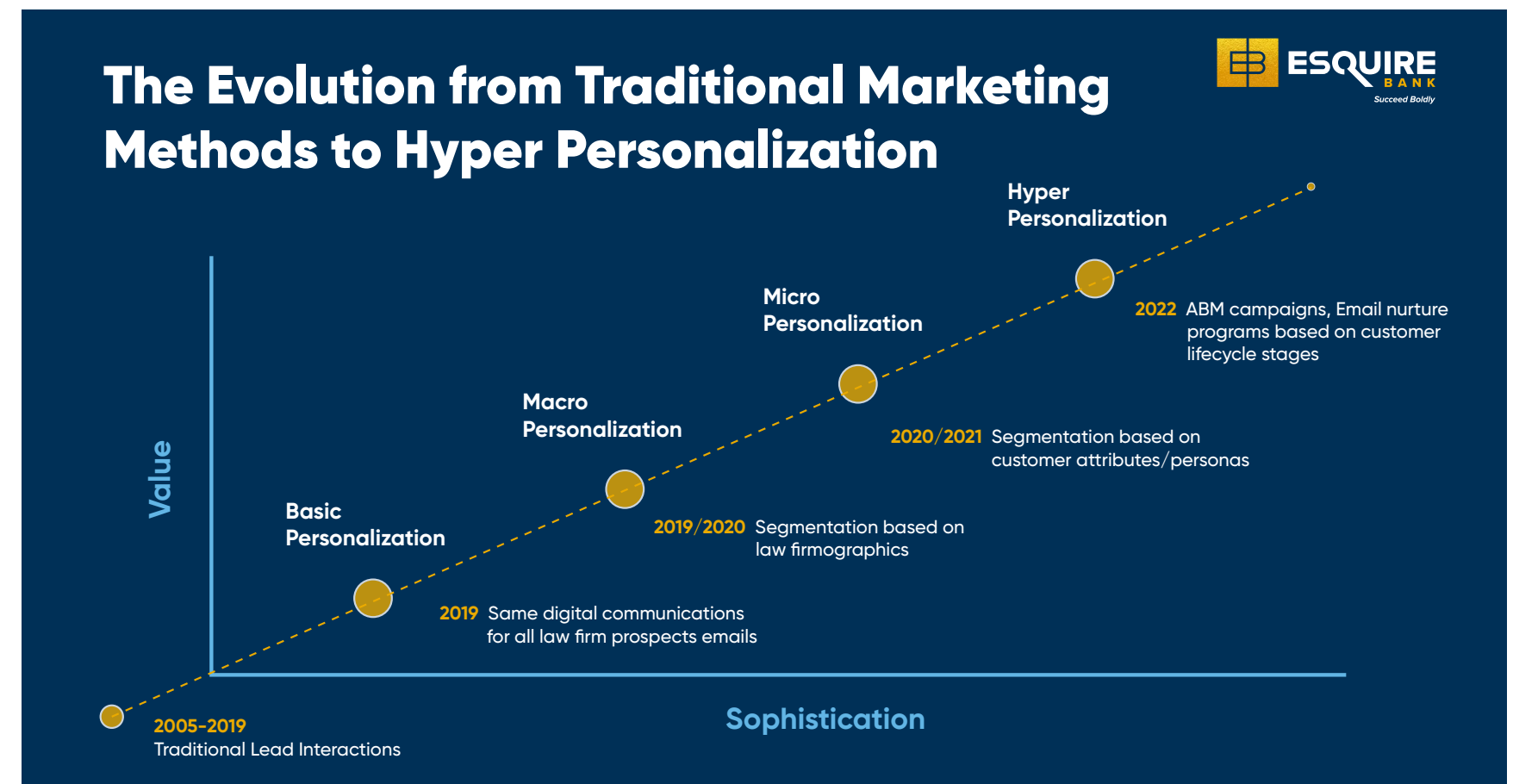
### The Tech Stack:





content within a similar rubric to Stinson's at Indico Data, within that value-based triangle. Esquire's go-to-market strategy takes the ideal customer profile at the persona level, and combines segmentation variables available from data vendors like ZoomInfo, and marries these characteristics with the stage of the customer lifecycle.

The team then uses the Salesforce Marketing Cloud email journeys to hyper-target based on these profiles to engage prospects with content that is cognizant of their customer lifecycle stage and profile, wants, needs and interests.





"We have the technology and industry know-how to hyper-personalize our communications at a one-to-one level," shared Kyall. "But to evolve your content marketing with confidence, you need to start with a foundation of consistently well-written content. Content for B2B marketers is one of the key components to any hyper-personalization strategy, and the payback on content (like white papers, ebooks, case studies) easily justifies the expense – it's the gift that keep on giving."

The team generated significant amounts of multi-format content by atomizing, repackaging and repurposing assets. For example, from one webinar featuring renowned industry thought leaders and Esquire experts, they would create multiple blogs/articles, video snippets, case studies, and more – all of which would fuel hyper-personalized email, social and paid search campaigns. The content production became so prolific that Esquire created its own content brand, LawyerIQ, as the industry's premier online destination for content on the business of running a law firm.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the goal is to drive more law firm targets to the LawyerIQ content hub than the bank's main website. "We want lawyers to know or understand that we are their business partners for growth, and that we

understand the challenges they face and are there with them facing those challenges together. We know that trying to push a lawyer into a decision won't work, instead our strategy is to stay top of mind for when they are ready – and the strategy works."

### Esquire's value created

"Our loan size for law firms runs into the tens of millions," adds Kyall. "By integrating our marketing technology and our expanding library of topical, customer-centric content, we've armed the business with laser-guided content – and we've been able to consistently deliver results."

Within two years of implementing Salesforce and value-based content, Esquire Bank now generates more than 50% of law firm lending clients from digital marketing initiatives.

Esquire has been awarded the prestigious Community Bankers Cup as the #1 Top Performing Community Bank two of the past three years by Raymond James & Associates. This ranks 229 publicly listed community banks based on a range of financial metrics and performance.

Want to talk more about how you can create additional value for your brand and your business? In the immortal words of Captain America, we can do this all day.

Visit our blog at [ParkandBattery.com](https://parkandbattery.com) for more insights, connect with us [on LinkedIn](#), or email [letschat@parkandbattery.com](mailto:letschat@parkandbattery.com)



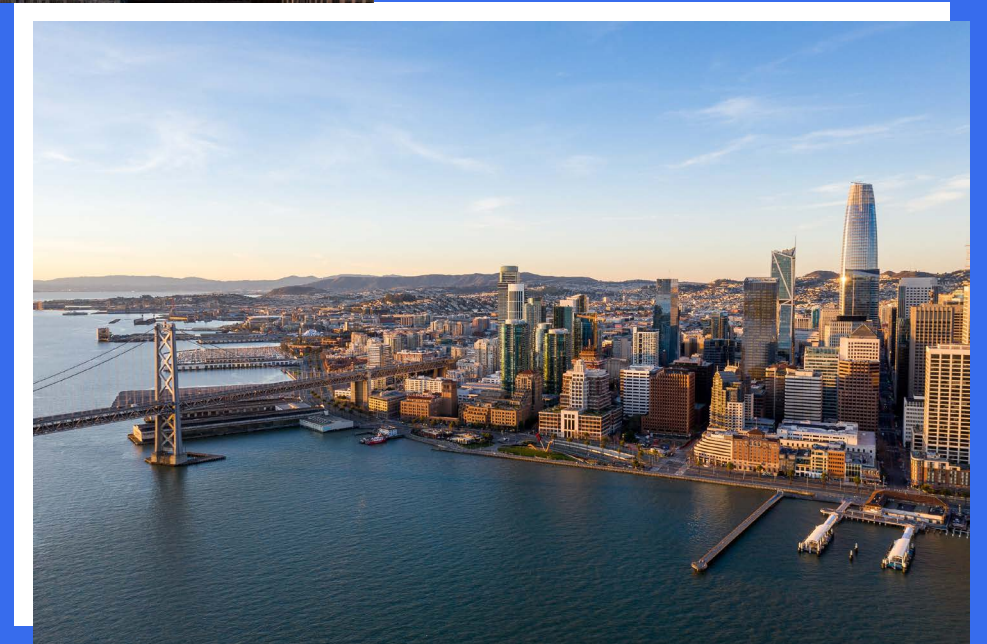
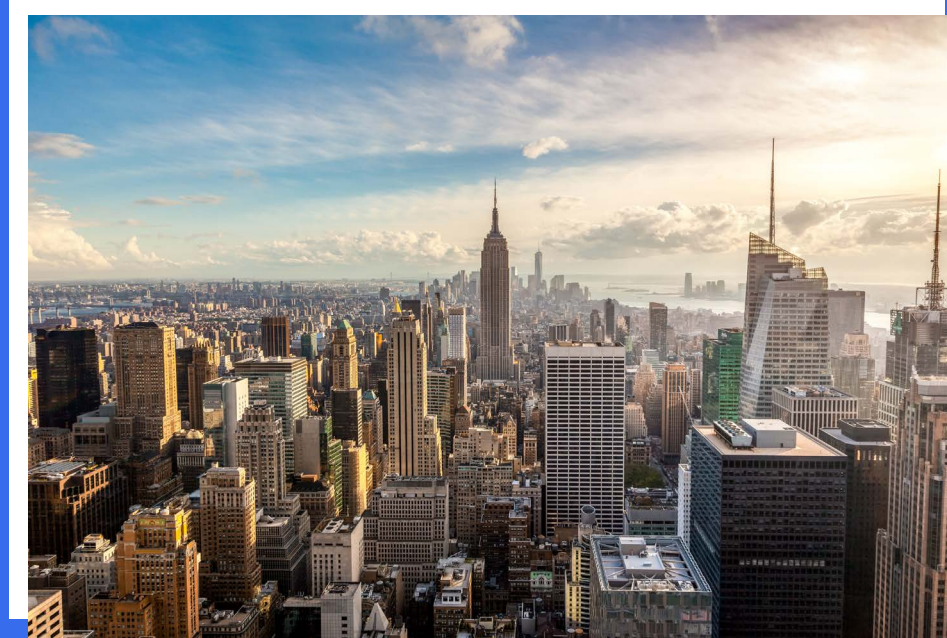


# About Park & Battery

Park & Battery is a brand, marketing and content agency that harnesses perspectives to create value for brands and businesses globally.

With teammates in the San Francisco Bay Area, New York City, Salt Lake City and Miami, Park & Battery specializes in creating brands, launches, and experiences that deliver big impact, from strategy and messaging through to creative/design, content, and media/go-to-market.

Leading and hypergrowth brands partner alike with Park & Battery, including Meta, PPD (a Thermo Fisher Scientific Company), Transfix, KBI Biopharma, Esquire Bank, Indico Data, Semtech, Truepic and Dandy. Visit us at [ParkandBattery.com](https://ParkandBattery.com)



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