

16th ANNUAL



# B2B CONTENT & MARKETING TRENDS

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**INSIGHTS FOR 2026**

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# 9 Takeaways and Insights From the 2026 B2B Content and Marketing Trends Report

AI doesn't dominate the newly released B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026 report. Over 1,000 B2B marketers reveal what they're doing with and without AI, the impact of their programs, and their plans for next year.

By Robert Rose

AI has hijacked the marketing conversation. It's the headline, the panel topic, the silver bullet everyone swears they're loading. If you believed the hype, you'd think everything else in marketing had been pushed to the margins.

But plenty is happening in B2B content and marketing that isn't AI — and those shifts matter just as much as AI — as CMI's B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026 report shows.

The headlining takeaway from the survey of 1,015 B2B marketers, conducted with MarketingProfs and sponsored by Storyblok, reads:

*Teams winning in 2026 aren't playing with prompts, churning out more content, or managing to the algorithms. They're building stronger muscles in marketing fundamentals, then letting AI breathe more creative life into those efforts.*

This year, we changed our approach to the B2B research. Instead of slicing marketers by budgets or reporting lines, we segmented them by how well they're aligning to trends shaping the next few years.

The result is a rich set of takeaways. Use this table of contents to navigate to the sections most relevant to you.

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- [Marketing effectiveness](#)
- [Content strategy effectiveness](#)

- [AI-powered marketing tools](#)
- [Thought leadership](#)
- [First-party data and governance](#)
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We define the stages of marketers across survey categories as follows:

- **Exploratory:** Initial implementation with preliminary results being gathered
- **Developing:** Basic implementation with mixed early outcomes
- **Established:** Consistent implementation with measurable results
- **Advanced:** Optimized implementation with strong ROI
- **Leading:** Industry-leading implementation with exceptional measurable outcomes

Throughout this report, you'll see the term "pacesetters." These marketers rate themselves in the established, advanced, or leading stages of adoption in that respective category.

The 2026 story isn't who shouts "AI" the loudest. It is who can breathe with it — the teams that have built the lungs for endurance, not just the hype for headlines. AI may be oxygen, but oxygen without lungs is useless.

Let's get into it.

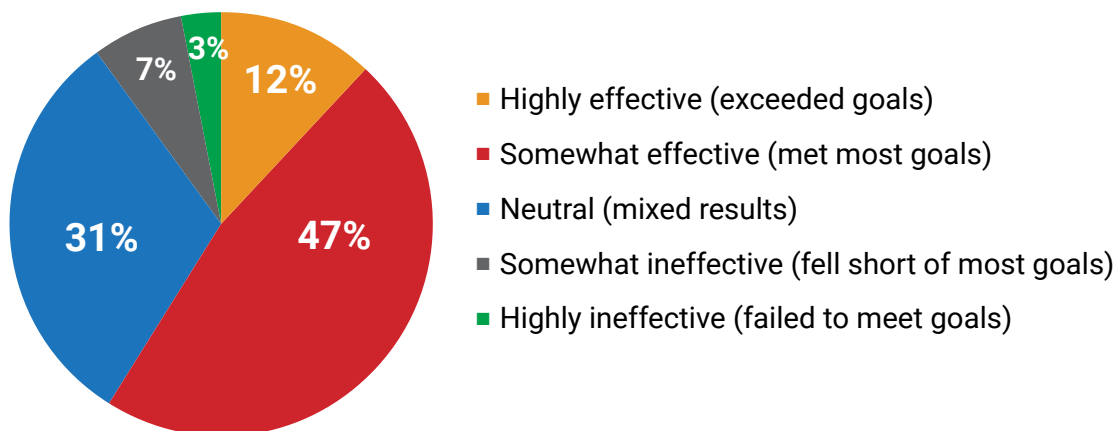
# 1. Marketing effectiveness is decent, but underinvestment in needle movers exists

How do marketers rate their effectiveness over the last 12 months? Here's what the research finds:

- 12% say they're highly effective (exceeded goals).
- 47% say they're somewhat effective (met most goals).
- 31% say they're neutral (mixed results).
- 7% say they're somewhat ineffective (fell short of most goals).
- 3% say they're highly ineffective (failed to meet goals).

Over half (59%) of marketers think their efforts are at least "somewhat effective." That's encouraging. But it also means nearly half are stuck in neutral or struggling.

## B2B marketers' effectiveness in the last 12 months



Q: How would you rate the overall effectiveness of your organization's marketing efforts over the last 12 months?

Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



Here's the interesting twist: When asked what moved the needle, more than half of the effective teams point to content relevance and quality (65%) and team skills and capabilities (53%), followed by:

- Alignment with sales (45%)
- Technology and tools (43%)
- Customer understanding and segmentation (40%)
- Measurement and reporting (40%)
- Channel selection and optimization (36%)
- Competitive positioning (33%)
- Data quality and analytics capabilities (27%)
- Budget allocation (20%)
- Market conditions (16%)

The two most common responses emphasize people, not budget, not market conditions, not even technology.

### Factors that improved B2B marketers' effectiveness



Q: If there have been any factors that improved your marketing effectiveness in the last 12 months, please indicate. (Select all that apply.)

Base: B2B marketers who rated their marketing effectiveness as high or somewhat effective in the last 12 months.

Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



I'll cover more on that later in this report, but know that marketers rank new headcount, training, and team development among the lowest 2026 budget priorities.

For all the talk about tech stacks and tools, most improvements came from teams getting better at their work. They've grown their skills, cross-functional muscles, and ability to adapt.

In other words, effectiveness is less about what you bought and more about *what your people can do with it*. AI won't magically fix a lack of capability. If anything, it makes capability gaps more obvious.

Nowhere is that dilemma more visible than in content strategy itself.

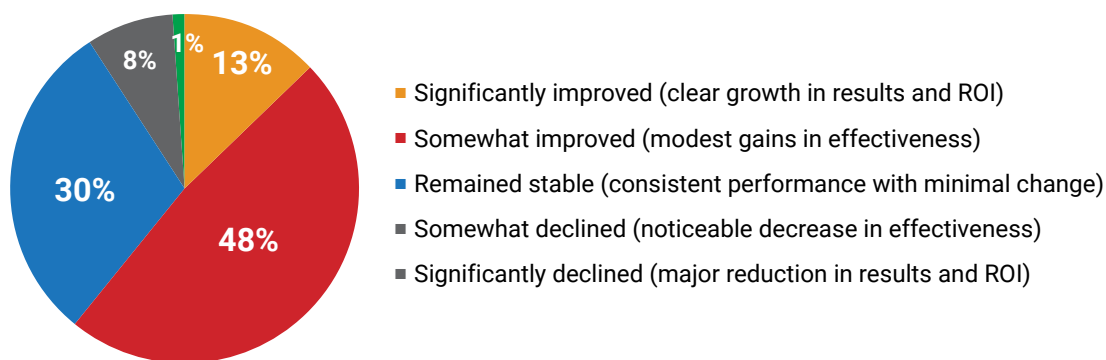
## 2. Content strategy effectiveness is up, thanks to tech *and* people

Last year, marketers were "meh" about their content strategies — a lot of average, a lot of stability, not much movement.

This year? A different story. Ninety-seven percent of marketers told us they have a content strategy (only 3% don't). Among those with a strategy:

- 13% say it significantly improved (clear growth in results and ROI).
- 48% say it somewhat improved (modest gains in effectiveness).
- 30% say it remained stable (consistent performance with minimal change).
- 8% say it somewhat declined (noticeable decrease in effectiveness).
- 1% say it significantly declined (major reduction in results and ROI).

### How B2B marketers' content strategy effectiveness changed



Q: How has your organization's content strategy effectiveness changed in the last 12 months?

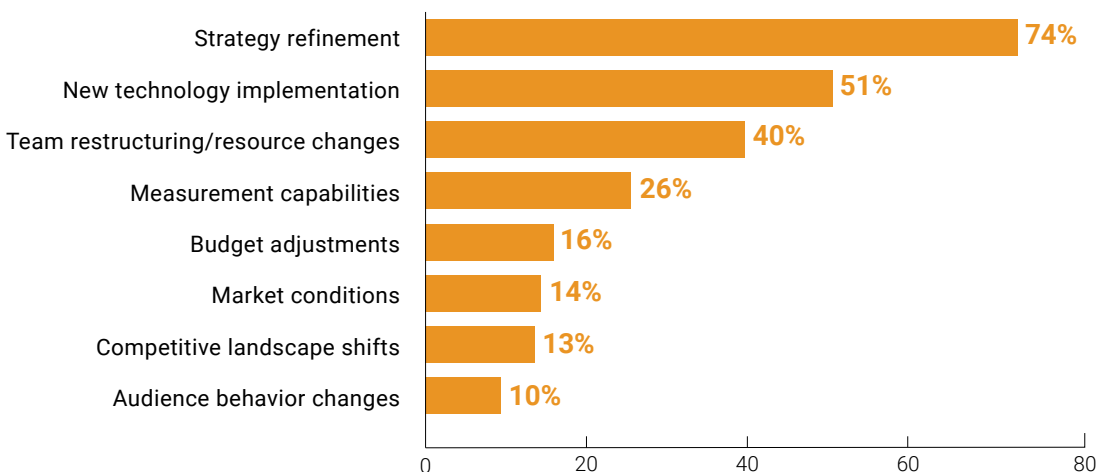
Base: B2B marketers whose organizations have a content strategy.

Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



That's 61% of marketers who report improvement. Yes, new technology played a role (51% credited new technology implementation). But look closer. The biggest driver of improvement is people-related, with 74% pointing to strategy refinement. In addition, 40% cite team restructuring and resource changes (another people factor), followed by measurement capabilities (26%), budget adjustments (16%), market conditions (14%), competitive landscape shifts (13%), and audience behavior changes (10%).

## Factors that contributed to B2B marketers' improved content strategy effectiveness



Q: If you selected a change in content strategy effectiveness, which factors have most contributed to this change? (Select all that apply.)

Base: B2B marketers whose content strategy effectiveness significantly or somewhat improved in the last 12 months.

Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



In other words, technology helped, but [human choices sharpened the strategy](#) that moved the needle. This is the payoff of getting intentional.

Marketers finally moved beyond the stage of “do we even have a strategy?” and improved on the one they’ve got. Two points stand out:

- **Strategy beats scale.** The biggest driver of improvement wasn’t more budget; it was refining the plan. Translation: fewer random acts of content, more coordinated direction.
- **Tech is only half the story.** Yes, 51% credited new tools (AI, automation, etc.) as a contributing factor, but that choice lagged behind good old-fashioned strategic refinement. Tools don’t create strategy; they amplify it.

The irony? The marketers who upgraded their strategy now have a fighting chance of getting [ROI out of their tech](#). Without that strategic backbone, even the flashiest AI tool is just lipstick on a PDF.



Success in marketing isn't about talent **or** technology. It's about talent **and** technology. Teams must keep pace with innovation while celebrating and empowering professionals who are bold, clever, creative, and dynamic, bringing exceptional work and energy to everything they do.

— [Bria Bell](#), vice president, industry engagement marketing, JPMorgan Chase & Co.

## Challenges marketers still can't shake

Progress aside, hurdles still exist. When asked to select their top three content marketing challenges, B2B marketers say:

- Creating content that prompts a desired action — e.g., conversion (40%)
- Resource constraints — time, people, budget (39%)
- Measuring content effectiveness (33%)

Other challenges include creating enough quality content to meet our organizational needs (28%), differentiating content from competitors (24%), aligning content with the buyer's journey (23%), cross-department collaboration (21%), understanding audience informational needs (20%), developing a content strategy and plan (16%), aligning with sales objectives (15%), technology integration (8%), and content governance and compliance (6%).

### B2B marketers' biggest content marketing challenges



Q: What are your organization's three biggest content marketing challenges? (Select top three.)  
Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



What jumps out in these results is their sheer *familiarity*. The most common challenges are the same as those identified in last year's survey. That tells me two things:

- 1. Tools don't erase fundamentals.** Marketers are drowning in AI and automation demos, but the biggest barrier is still human: How do you [make content](#) that someone wants to click, read, or act on?
- 2. Measurement is the canary in the coal mine.** A third of marketers admit they struggle with measuring effectiveness. If you can't measure, you can't prove value. And if you can't prove value, you'll always be first in line for budget cuts.

Here's the kicker: Resource constraints and measurement aren't separate challenges – they're the same problem. Teams without clear measurement frameworks look like they're doing "a lot" without showing "enough." Cue the CFO tightening the purse strings.

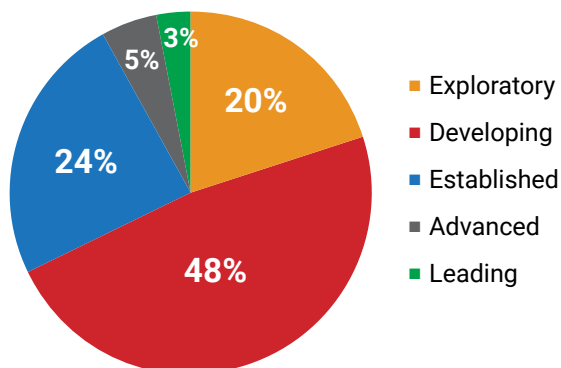
That brings me to the first new trend. It's the one that promises to solve everything or almost everything: AI.

### 3. AI is making marketing faster. But is it better or just weirder?

AI isn't just in the room anymore. It is the room. According to our research, 95% of B2B marketers say their organizations use AI-powered applications. Here's where their implementation stands:

- Exploratory (20%)
- Developing (48%)
- Established (24%)
- Advanced (5%)
- Leading (3%)

#### Current implementation stage: B2B marketers' use of AI-powered marketing applications



Q: At what stage would you place your organization's implementation of AI-powered marketing applications?

Base: B2B marketers whose organizations use AI-powered marketing applications.

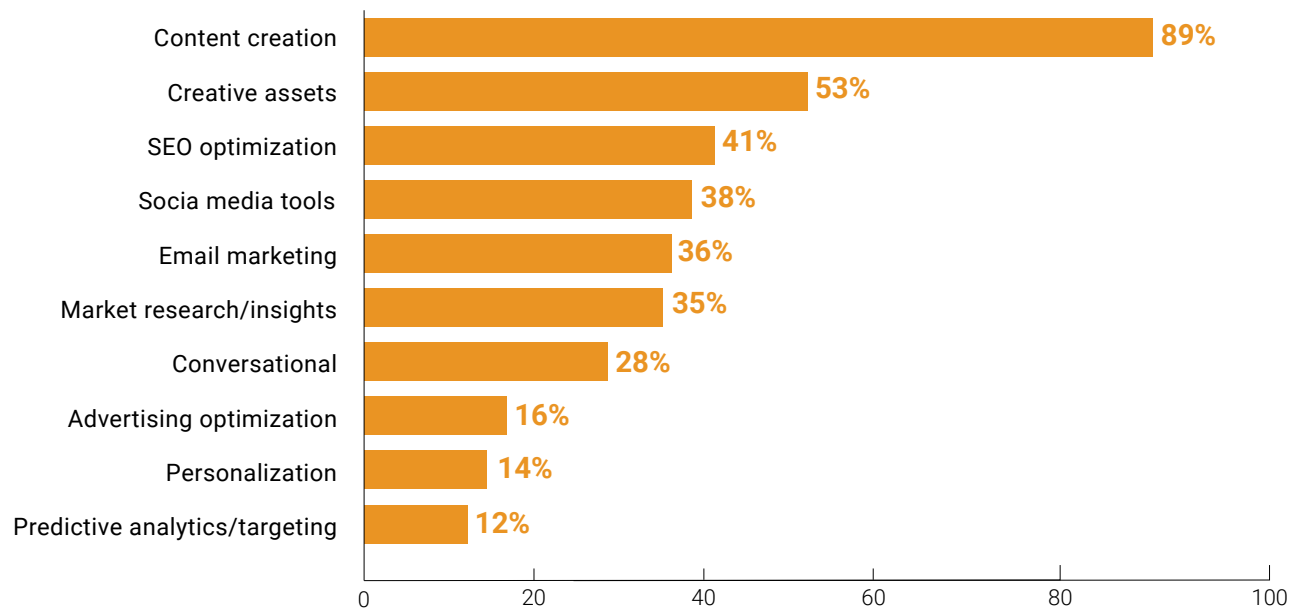
Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



OK, so far, no surprise. Most marketers are exploring or [developing their AI approach](#). So, what are they using?

- Content creation tools for generating or optimizing marketing copy/written content (89%)
- Creative asset tools for generating and editing images, videos, and visual materials (53%)
- SEO tools for analyzing search patterns, recommending keywords, optimizing content for search engines, and predicting ranking improvements (41%)
- Social media tools for content scheduling, analysis, and automated posting (38%)
- Email marketing tools for campaign optimization and personalized email content (36%)
- Market research/insights tools for analyzing trends, consumer behavior, and customer sentiment (35%)
- [Conversational tools](#) for automating customer dialogue (chatbots, virtual assistants) (28%)
- Advertising optimization tools for campaign performance analysis/ad spend (16%)
- Personalization tools for customizing experiences based on individual preferences (14%)
- Predictive analytics/targeting tools for forecasting customer behavior/optimizing targeting (12%)

## AI-powered marketing applications that B2B marketers use or are actively implementing



Q: Which AI-powered marketing applications are your organization currently using or actively implementing? (Select all that apply.)

Base: B2B marketers whose organizations use AI-powered marketing applications.

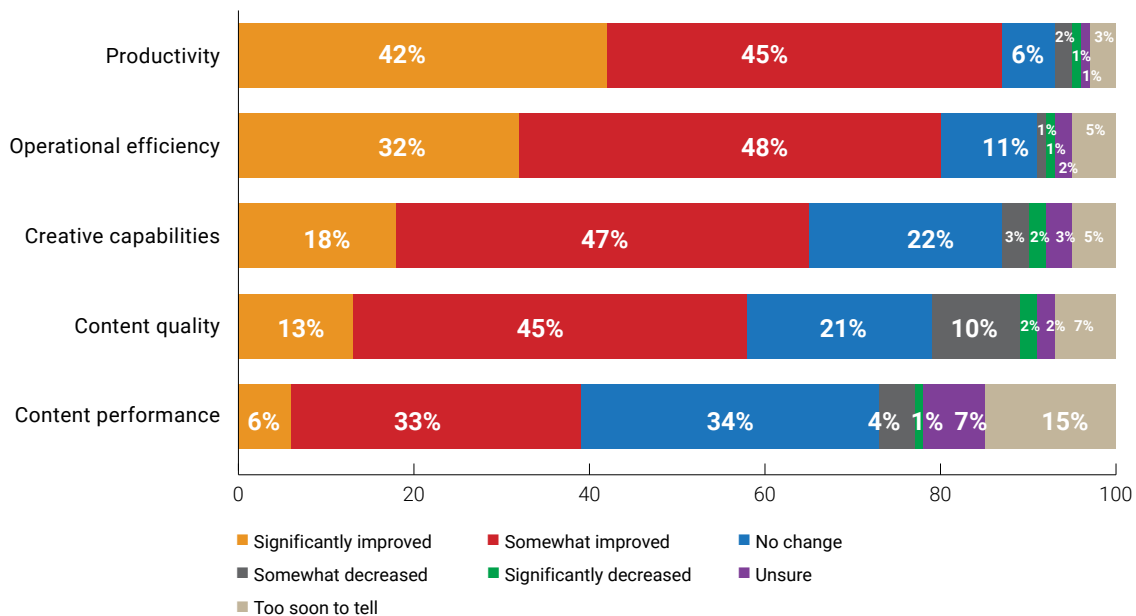
Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



Among the marketers using AI for content creation:

- 87% say productivity has improved, 6% say there’s been no change, 3% say it’s decreased, 1% are unsure, and 3% say it’s too soon to tell.
- 80% say operational efficiency has improved, 11% say there’s been no change, 2% say it’s decreased, 2% are unsure, and 5% say it’s too soon to tell.
- 65% say creative capabilities have improved, 22% say there’s been no change, 5% say they’ve decreased, 3% are unsure, and 5% say it’s too soon to tell.
- 58% say content quality has improved, 21% say there’s been no change, 12% say it’s decreased, 2% are unsure, and 7% say it’s too soon to tell.
- 39% say content performance has improved, 34% say there’s been no change, 5% say it’s decreased, 7% are unsure, and 15% say it’s too soon to tell.

### How AI-assisted content creation has impacted aspects of B2B marketing operations



Q: How has AI-assisted content creation impacted the following aspects of your marketing operations?  
 Base: B2B marketers whose organizations use AI-assisted content creation tools.  
 Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



These results are telling. While 68% of marketers say they’re exploring or developing their AI approach, almost nine in 10 already use AI to crank out written content, and half use it to develop or edit creative assets, like images, videos, and visual materials.

In other words, marketers experiment with AI strategy while barreling ahead with AI production. The impact tracks with that split. The big wins? Productivity and operational efficiency. You're faster. You're leaner. You're producing more.

But looking at the deeper measures – creativity, content quality, and performance – the numbers drop. In fact, 12% say the quality of their content decreased with AI.

In addition:

- About a fifth of users don't see AI moving the needle on creativity (22%) or content quality (21%), hinting that AI might be helpful, but not yet a game-changer in these areas.

Content performance shows the highest combined uncertainty – 22% scratch their heads or say “ask me later” – suggesting they need more time to see how AI impacts content effectiveness.

As AI implementation matures, we may see improvements in these deeper metrics, but as it stands, for the most part, AI helps marketers type faster, not think better.



*Efficiency is only the first chapter of the AI marketing story – not the ending. Actually, maybe it's the prologue. AI is like giving every marketer a turbo-charged typewriter. Hooray! We can all crank out words faster. But the bigger prize is what we do with the time saved: the slower, deeper work of thinking. The bold ideas. The genuine human that no machine can automate. This research suggests ... the choice is yours.*

– [Ann Handley](#), chief content officer, MarketingProfs

## Agentic AI is on the rise

While content creation is the low-hanging AI fruit, smart teams look beyond words on a page. More than a quarter (28%) of B2B marketers say they experiment with AI agents. Pacesetters (established, advanced, and leading marketers in the category) are more likely to use them, with 43% saying they experiment with AI agents.

A small but growing slice (3% of B2B marketers overall and 6% of pacesetters) say agents are core to their strategies.

What results do those experimenting with AI agents see?

- 52% report improved operational efficiency.
- 21% see better customer engagement.
- 19% cite increased campaign performance and ROI.

Of course, it's not all smooth sailing. Among the challenges:

- 19% flag data quality or compliance issues.
- 14% point to cost, integration, or team adaptation.

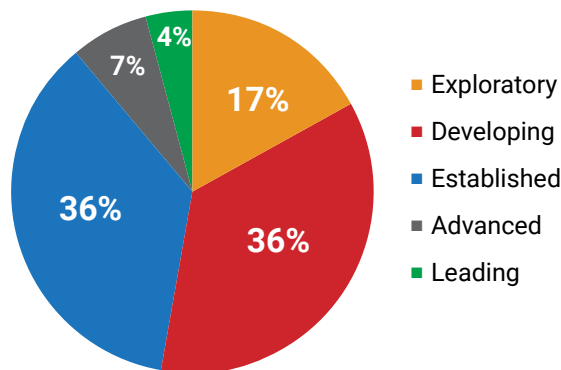
Right now, AI is oxygen. Every marketer is breathing it. But pacesetters turn that oxygen into endurance – building systems where agents, predictive tools, and content creation aren't just faster but smarter.

## 4. Everyone creates thought leadership, but few manage it at scale

Nearly every B2B marketer (96%) says their organization creates thought leadership content. But not all thought leadership is created equal. Here's how marketers rate the status of their programs:

- Exploratory (17%)
- Developing (36%)
- Established (36%)
- Advanced (7%)
- Leading (4%)

### Current implementation stage: B2B marketers' thought leadership programs



Q: How would you describe the current stage of your organization's thought leadership program?

Base: B2B marketers whose organizations create thought leadership content.

Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



And employee participation?

- 37% say minimal (less than 5% of employees with specialized knowledge or expertise actively contribute).
- 30% say limited (5 to 15% contribute).
- 15% say moderate (16 to 30% contribute).
- 8% say substantial (31 to 50% contribute).
- 10% say widespread (greater than 50% contribute).

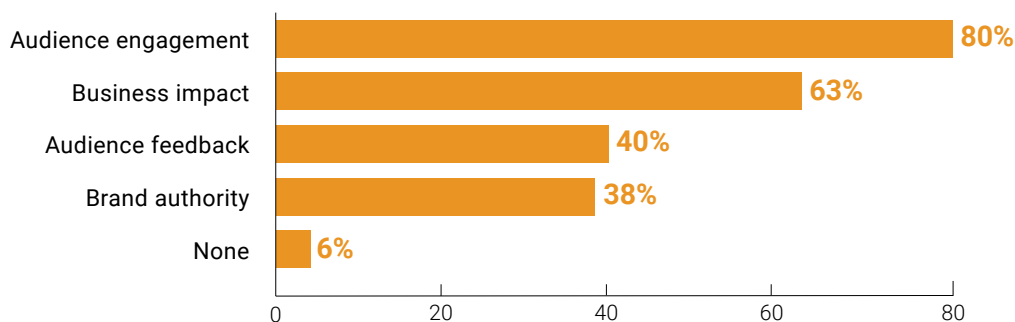
Where do marketers publish their thought leadership? They say the three most effective channels are:

- LinkedIn (76%)
- Email newsletters (54%)
- Speaking events/webinars (52%)

How do marketers [measure the success](#) of their thought leadership?

- Audience engagement – views, downloads, shares (80%)
- Business impact – leads, pipeline influence (63%)
- Audience feedback – client/prospect feedback, sentiment analysis (40%)
- Brand authority – speaking/media opportunities, publication citations (38%)

### Metrics B2B marketers use to measure success of thought leadership content



Q: Which metrics do you use to measure the success of your thought leadership content? (Select all that apply.)

Base: B2B marketers whose organizations create thought leadership content.

Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



These numbers tell a familiar story: Everyone does thought leadership, but few do it at scale or with depth. Minimal employee participation is the giveaway. If fewer than 5% of your employees with specialized knowledge or expertise are involved, you don't have a thought leadership program; you have a content team trying to look smart on LinkedIn.

What separates the pacesetters in thought leadership is how they treat it as a strategic asset, not a content bucket. They:

- **Involve more of the organization's expertise:** 24% report substantial or widespread participation vs. 18% overall.
- **Measure more than just clicks:** 75% of pacesetters track business impact (vs. 63% overall), and 51% track brand authority (vs. 38% overall).

[Thought leadership](#) is evolving from a marketing tactic to a *business differentiator*. In crowded B2B markets, your ability to create a unique point of view, put your people out front, and build communities keeps you from sounding like everybody else.

The irony? The more personal thought leadership feels, the more scalable it becomes. When leaders in the company empower employees to have a voice, it's not just marketing speaking; it's the business thinking out loud.

If thought leadership is how brands distinguish themselves in noisy markets, then data is the fuel that makes that differentiation meaningful. You can't personalize, segment, or even tell the right story without knowing who you're talking to.



*The brands that win are those brave enough to challenge conventional wisdom with research-backed insights leaders can trust and act on. The most effective thought leadership supports decision-making with memorable mental models and frameworks. Each high-quality, actionable piece of thought leadership earns you compound trust and compound credibility. Everyone's trying to get their ideas noticed and remembered, so it's about winning the mind to win the market. In this context, LinkedIn's 76% effectiveness rating becomes even more significant. It's the perfect platform for building compound credibility over time, turning ideas into lasting competitive advantage.*

— [Ty Heath](#), director, market engagement, The B2B Institute @ LinkedIn

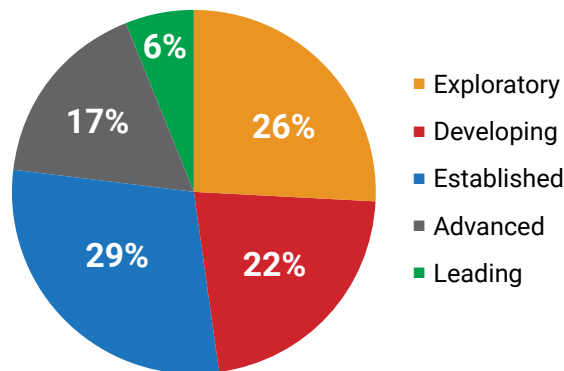
## 5. First-party data collection is common; data governance and strategy not so much

Before I delve into first-party data use, too many marketers overlook its foundation: governance.

More than half (52%) of B2B marketers put themselves in the pacesetter category, meaning their governance strategy is established (29%), advanced (17%), or leading (6%).

The other 48%? They're still in the exploratory (26%) or developing (22%) phases.

## Current implementation stage: B2B marketers' data governance strategy



Q: At what implementation stage is your organization's data governance strategy?

Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



Why does governance matter? If your governance is shaky, your first-party data strategy is built on sand. Collecting more data without [clear standards](#) for quality, access, and compliance isn't just the absence of a strategy; it's a liability.

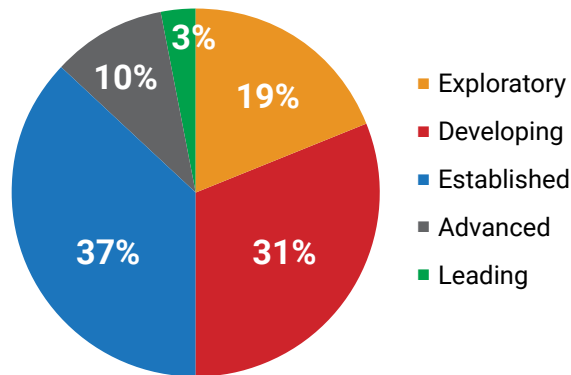
Marketers love shiny tactics like personalization and predictive analytics. But without governance, all that data ends up siloed, inconsistent, or noncompliant. It's like racing to build a smart home on top of faulty wiring. Your app might turn the lights on, but you don't want to test the circuit breaker.

Yes, first-party data is the fuel for differentiation, but governance is the tank. Get that wrong, and you'll spill more than you store.

### First-party data all around, but where's the strategy?

With that said, 91% of B2B marketers report collecting first-party data, but half admit their strategy is still in the exploratory (19%) or developing (31%) stages. The other half have reached established (37%), advanced (10%), or leading (3%) maturity.

## Current implementation stage: B2B marketers' first-party data strategy



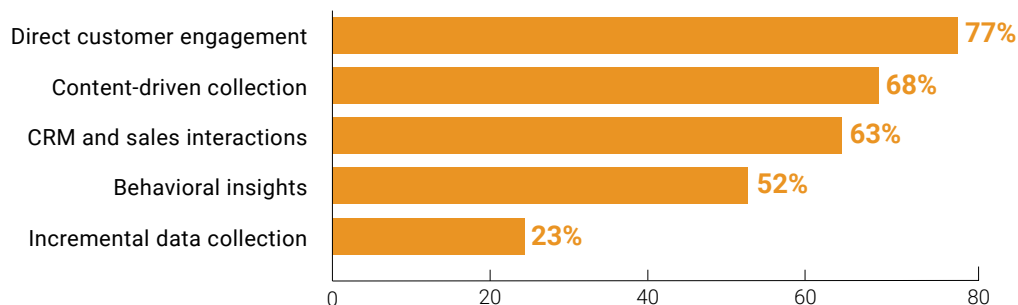
Q: At what implementation stage is your organization's first-party data strategy?  
 Base: B2B marketers whose organizations collect first-party data.  
 Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



### How are they collecting data?

- Direct customer engagement – subscriptions, loyalty programs, communities (77%)
- Content-driven collection – gated assets, webinars, interactive tools (68%)
- CRM and sales interactions – customer service records, conversations (63%)
- Behavioral insights – site activity, usage history (52%)
- Incremental collection – progressive forms, incentives (23%)

## How B2B marketers collect first-party data



Q: How does your organization collect first-party data? (Select all that apply.)  
 Base: B2B marketers whose organizations collect first-party data.  
 Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



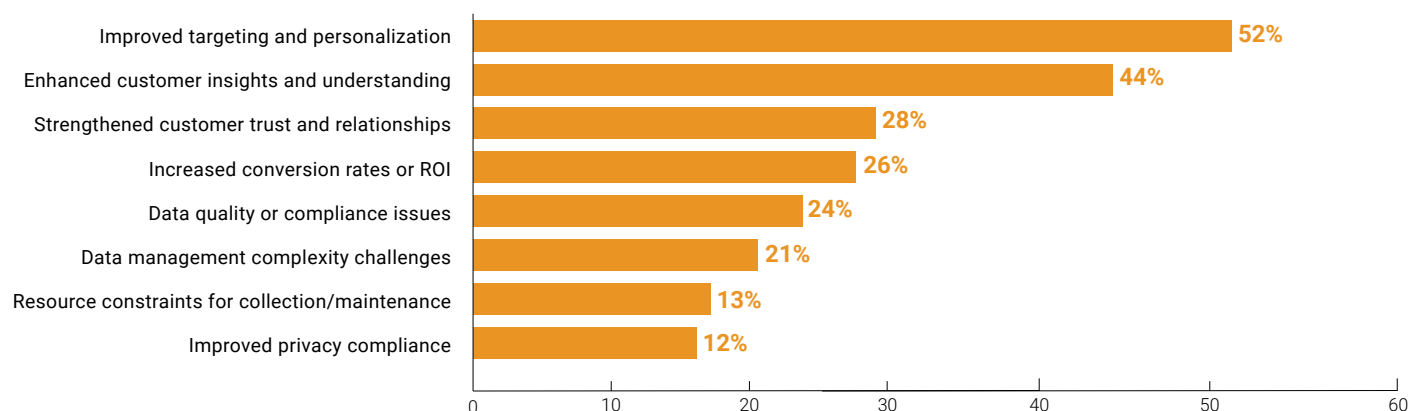
Among the reported payoffs from first-party data collection:

- Improved targeting and personalization (52%)
- Enhanced customer insights and understanding (44%)
- Strengthened customer trust and relationships (28%)
- Increased conversion rates or ROI (26%)
- Improved privacy compliance (12%)

And the headaches:

- Data quality or compliance issues (24%)
- Data management complexity challenges (21%)
- Resource constraints for collection/maintenance (13%)

### Outcomes B2B marketers have experienced from using first-party data



Q: Which outcomes has your organization experienced from using first-party data? (Select all that apply.)

Base: B2B marketers whose organizations collect first-party data.

Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



Put all of that together, and you can see that marketers don't have a problem doing the thing.

With content, the thing is creation, and marketers are awash in it. With first-party data, the thing is collection, and nearly everyone does that, too.

On both fronts, the real struggle happens when their business value plateaus. Content becomes meaningful only when it drives performance and differentiation. Data becomes valuable only when it builds trust and ROI.

Notice that the most common positive outcome – better targeting and personalization – is the one that makes most customers wary because it can feel creepy or careless. Having first-party data isn't the competitive advantage; using that data creatively and responsibly is.

Pacesetters understand that. They aren't doing more things; they're making the things they do matter. They're not gating more PDFs; they're expanding how they collect and connect data, such as deeper CRM use, more behavioral signals, and smarter incremental collection. They're also admitting that complexity increases with maturity. It's not a bug, it's a feature. Complexity means you deal with real data, not vanity spreadsheets.

Winning brands won't have the biggest databases. They have customers who trust them to handle their data and turn it into meaningful experiences, not better-targeted ads.



*To build an effective personalization strategy, you must first have a strong marketing data strategy. You must have the ability to capture the right data to tell you who your best customers are, what they care about, and what touchpoints help them convert and/or become brand loyal. Many organizations think that data is a given in today's digital-first age. But the truth is that, without a deliberate strategy, most organizations don't have the right people, tools, and hypotheses in place to become good at collecting valuable data and turning that data into personalized experiences that move the needle.*

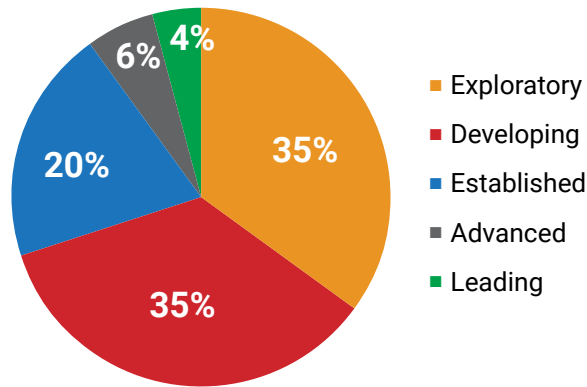
– [Zontee Hou](#), author of *Data Driven Personalization*, president and chief strategist, Media Volery

## 6. Experiential marketing roars back

After years of digital-first everything, marketers are rediscovering the power of showing up. Whether it's events, workshops, demos, or onboarding experiences, brands that show up in person (even virtually) can earn more trust and build deeper loyalty.

More than two-thirds (78%) of B2B marketers report allocating budget to experiential marketing. But less than a third (30%) rate their efforts as established (20%), advanced (6%), or leading (4%). The rest are stuck in exploratory (35%) or developing (35%) stages.

## B2B marketers' experiential marketing efforts



Q: At what development stage would you place your organization's experiential marketing efforts?

Base: B2B marketers whose organizations allocated marketing budget to experiential marketing activities in 2025.

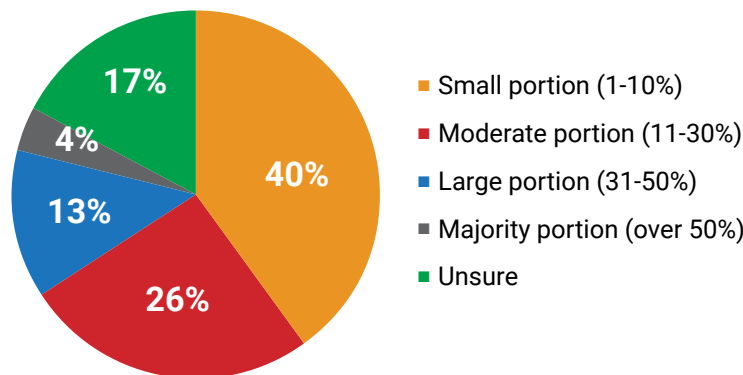
Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



When asked what percentage of their marketing budget they allocate to experiential activities in 2025, B2B marketers say:

- 40% budget 1 to 10% of spend.
- 26% allocate 11 to 30% of the budget.
- 13% budget 31 to 50% of spend.
- 4% allocate more than half the budget.
- 17% aren't sure how much is budgeted.

## Percentage of B2B marketing budget allocated to experiential marketing activities in 2025



Q: Approximately what percentage of your 2025 marketing budget is allocated to experiential marketing activities?

Base: B2B marketers whose organizations allocated marketing budget to experiential marketing activities in 2025.

Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



How are they measuring the impact of those experiences?

- Engagement — attendance, participation, digital interaction (70%)
- Customer feedback — surveys, net promoter score, qualitative input (46%)
- Revenue — ROI calculation, cost-to-revenue (46%)
- Content performance — consumption, sharing (39%)
- Brand impact — awareness, sentiment, social engagement (34%)

The takeaway? Experiential marketing is hard. It takes more planning, more budget, and more risk than the publication of another blog article or an AI-driven campaign.

That may explain why so many programs are stuck in the early stages. It's easier and safer to churn out more content than to design an experience people will remember. But that's the trap. In chasing efficiency, marketers let some of the fundamentals slip.

Differentiation happens in the moments where brands show up — in person, in real time, with real stakes. That's why the marketers who win will be brave enough to create experiences worth showing up for.

## What about sales timelines and experiences?

We also asked marketers to compare deals with and without experiential touchpoints. Many punted: 27% haven't measured it, and another 27% are unsure. But among those who have measured experiential touchpoints:

- 16% say the sales process is significantly shorter.
- 35% say it is somewhat shorter.
- 16% say they see no consistent differences.
- 5% say it is somewhat longer.
- 1% say it is significantly longer.
- 27% say timeline patterns vary by situation.

Pacesetters tell a clearer story. Eighty-nine percent (compared to 73% overall) measure the experiential impact on sales timelines. While half of both groups say the sales process is shorter with experiential touchpoints (53% of pacesetters and 51% overall), pacesetters allocate bigger budgets, treat experiences like products, and hold them accountable to outcomes, not just did-people-show-up metrics.

But most organizations still dabble in experiential marketing. Budgets stay small, maturity is low, and nearly half don't measure beyond attendance. That's event planning with fancier lanyards. Fear likely creeps in because experiences are harder to design, riskier to execute, and easier to postpone.

However, the movement in experiences isn't about going back to events. It's about recognizing experiences as the connective tissue between digital and physical — the moments that build trust and loyalty.

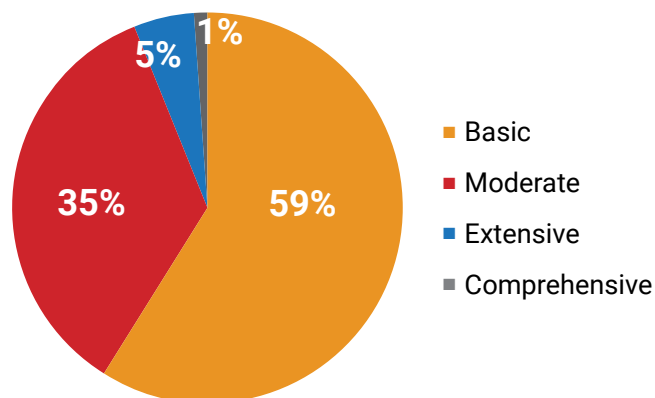
The best personalization algorithm in the world can't replace shaking someone's hand or at least looking them in the eye on a screen.

## 7. Dear [first name], let's get personal

Personalization isn't new, but it's still more aspirational than reality in B2B marketing. Most (89%) say their organizations [personalize content](#), but they don't go far with it:

- 59% describe their use of personalization as basic (simple personalization in one to two channels, minimal integration).
- 35% say it's moderate (multi-channel, partial automation, some behavioral data).
- 5% label it extensive (advanced personalization across most touchpoints, AI, and real-time features).
- 1% say it's comprehensive (full journey personalization with AI-driven experiences across all channels).

### How B2B marketers describe their organization's use of personalization



Q: How would you describe your organization's use of personalization?

Base: B2B marketers whose organizations use personalization.

Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



#### Where do B2B marketers use personalization?

- Email campaigns (85%)
- Social media content (34%)
- Websites/landing pages (33%)
- Digital advertising (31%)
- Content marketing (blogs, white papers, etc.) (28%)
- Experiential/event marketing (23%)
- Webinars (22%)
- Video (15%)

Personalization is table stakes, but most marketers are barely playing the game.

Nearly 60% personalize in only one or two channels, aka they add the recipient's name on an email and call it personalization.

Meanwhile, the pacesetters (those who describe their personalization as moderate, extensive, or comprehensive) spread it across more channels. They weave it into social media, websites, ads, and content marketing.

Here's the rub: Personalization isn't about how many channels you touch; it's about how *consistently* and *contextually* you do it.

Customers can sniff out shallow personalization a mile away. A subject line that says, "Hi Robert," and serves me irrelevant content isn't personalization – it's spam with a mail merge. The opportunity isn't to chase real-time, AI-powered everything. It's to make sure the personalization you already use feels personal.

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## 8. ABM and ABX create personal experiences for the win

If basic personalization makes content feel relevant to someone, account-based marketing (ABM) and its newer cousin, account-based experience (ABX), make it feel indispensable to the right ones. ABM is personalization's grown-up and B2B-specific sibling. But most programs are still in kindergarten.

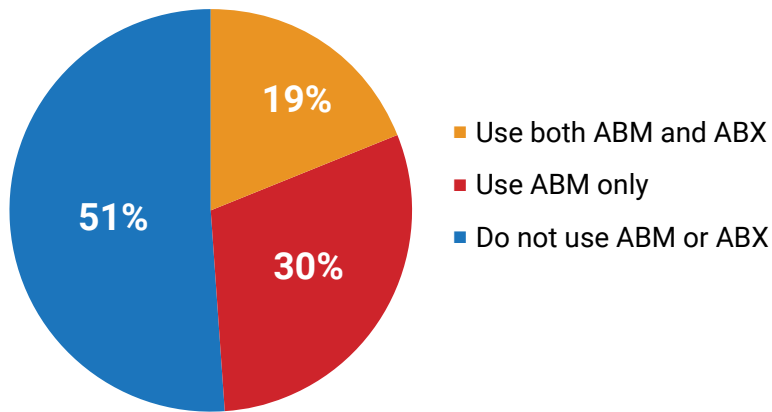
For this survey, we defined:

- ABM as a targeted strategy that aligns marketing and sales to create personalized experiences for specific high-value accounts rather than broader market segments.
- ABX as a targeted strategy that goes after a smaller set of those accounts – ones spiking with intent or interest – and personalizes engagement at every touchpoint of their journey.

According to the research:

- 19% use both [ABM and ABX](#).
- 30% use ABM only.
- 51% use neither.

## Percentage of B2B marketers who use ABM/ABX



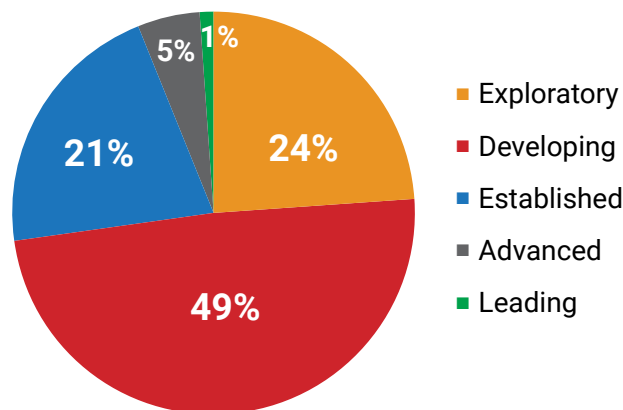
Q: Does your organization use account-based marketing (ABM)/account-based experience (ABX)?  
 Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



With nearly three-quarters of ABM-only users still exploring (24%) or developing (49%) its use, most efforts default to the targeted role or industry. Useful? Sure. Differentiated? Not really.

Less than one-third of ABM-only users skew to mature stages: established (21%), advanced (5%), and leading (1%).

## Current implementation stage: B2B marketers' use of ABM



Q: How would you describe the maturity stage of your organization's ABM program?  
 Base: B2B marketers whose organizations use ABM.  
 Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



So how do ABM marketers personalize?

- 70% use basic personalization (industry/vertical, company size, location).
- 65% use role-based details (title, seniority, department).
- 40% focus on account specifics (custom content for priority accounts).
- 33% make it journey specific (buying stage, engagement level).
- 26% use behavioral signals (website activity, engagement).
- 5% use advanced personalization (individual preferences, tech stack).
- 2% use AI-driven personalization (dynamic content, real-time).

And how does ABM compare to traditional campaigns? Among the ABM users who have measured:

- 18% say ABM significantly outperforms traditional marketing.
- 47% say it somewhat outperforms.
- 16% say it performs about the same.
- 3% say it somewhat underperforms.
- 3% say it significantly underperforms.
- 13% say performance varies by account type/industry.



*Performance is where ABM's relevance magic comes in. When you've created a cluster of accounts based on the problem the customer is trying to solve, you can create content that demonstrates your surpassing understanding of their needs, along with your fitness as a partner to solve that problem. It's no mystery why this kind of content outperforms traditional marketing.*

— [Stephanie Losee](#), director, executive editor, Salesforce

Here's the upside: Even in the early stages, ABM gives lift: Sixty-five percent of ABM users say their campaigns outperform traditional marketing.

But here's the trap: If marketers treat ABM as a more expensive way to blast content at smaller lists, it won't work. True ABM (or ABX) orchestrates the experience across every touchpoint; it doesn't just slap an industry name on a white paper.

The promise of ABM isn't scale. It's focus. When done right, ABM forces marketing and sales to align on who matters most and then create experiences for them that feel less like campaigns and more like conversations.

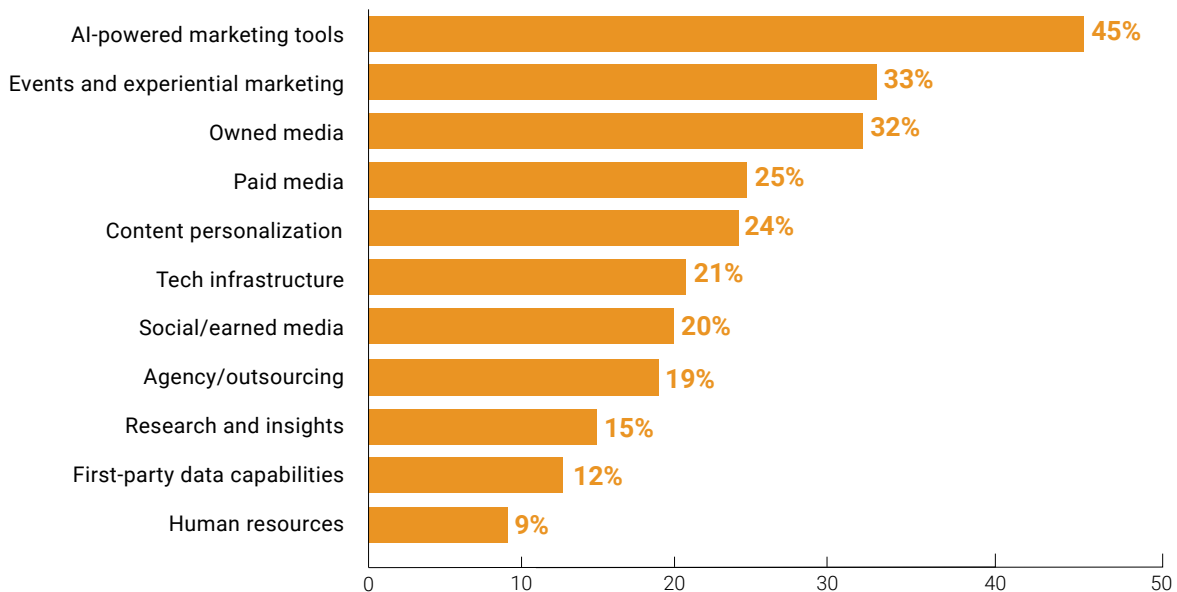
## 9. AI investments top the 2026 marketing budget priority list

I can't close this report without coming back to the oxygen in the room. Where are marketers putting their budgets to build their lungs in 2026?

When asked which top three areas they plan to increase investment in during 2026, B2B marketers included AI most often. Here's the complete list:

- 45% on AI-powered marketing tools (generative AI, predictive analytics)
- 33% on events and experiential marketing
- 32% on owned media (content assets, website, blog, email)
- 25% on paid media
- 24% on content personalization
- 21% on tech infrastructure (martech stack, analytics, CRM)
- 20% on social/earned media
- 19% on agency/outourcing
- 15% on research and insights
- 12% on first-party data capabilities
- 9% on human resources (salaries, training, development)

### Top investment areas for B2B marketers in 2026



Q: In which three areas do you expect your organization to make the most investments or increase investment in 2026? (Select top three.)

Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



The investment story for 2026 is telling. AI tools lead at 45%, but events and experiential marketing (33%) and owned media (32%) are right behind.

That's good news: After years of underinvestment, marketers are finally putting weight behind the channels they control – the events, communities, and content platforms that build long-term trust.

But here's the disheartening part: Human resources (salaries, training, and development) sit last at 9%.

So, organizations pour money into more buttons to push, more algorithms to serve, and more content to churn, but hesitate to [invest in the people](#) who make the strategy real. This is a mistake.

Better technology won't save mediocre teams. Without skilled, empowered marketers, all AI can do is make mediocrity faster, louder, and more efficient. If B2B marketers don't fight for investment in teams, they'll end up with sharper tools but duller strategies.

If AI is oxygen, then people are the lungs. You can invest in the world's finest air purifier, but without the ability to breathe deeply and steadily, it won't do you much good.



*Soft skills, which we call essential capabilities, are critical for employment and organizational success – especially as we look toward AI and automation tools. Human skills can't be replaced. So, when you're thinking about skilling up your team ... those essential capabilities like creativity, critical thinking, communication, and presentation skills are more important than the hard skills moving forward.*

– [Molly Soat](#), vice president, professional development, American Marketing Association

## What changes does the research suggest?

With all these numbers and trends, the temptation is to search for one big answer. Resist that instinct.

Marketing has never been about one tool, one technology, or one channel. It's always been a mix. In 1948, James Culliton, who coined the term "marketing mix," likened marketers to bartenders. The job isn't to pour a single perfect ingredient; it is to combine them into something stronger, more balanced, and far more interesting than any element on its own. The advantage is in the mix.

What should you do with all this? A few places to start:

1. **Rebalance the mix.** Fund the things you control ([owned media](#) and [experiences](#)) and manage them like products. Give them charters, roadmaps, and outcome metrics beyond “did people show up?”
2. **Invest in people.** Be the zig to everyone else’s zag. Upskill the team, clarify roles, and align with sales. Tools amplify talent; they don’t replace it. If the budget is tight, prioritize training and measurement chops over one more software license.
3. **Make AI deliberate, not decorative.** Move beyond faster drafts. Pick a few high-value use cases (e.g., predictive insights, smarter routing, agent automation), set guardrails, and measure lift in *performance*, not volume.
4. **Focus on first-party data.** Governance first, then use cases. Kill vanity gates, connect the signals you already have (CRM + behavior), and use them to power trust-building personalization – not creepiness.

## The last word

AI may be the oxygen in the room, but it’s your people, your processes, and your portfolio of experiences that form the lungs. Exercise those well, and you won’t just ride the trend – you’ll have the endurance to outlast it.

## About Robert Rose



Robert Rose is the chief troublemaker at [Seventh Bear](#), where he helps businesses break free from stale marketing, rediscover their creativity, and actually make an impact. He’s been called a strategist, an innovator, and—by at least one former boss - “a dangerous amount of fun.” Since 2010, he’s been the chief strategy advisor at the Content Marketing Institute, where he helped shape it into the world’s leading content marketing education and training organization. Robert has helped business leaders balance the art and science of content and marketing, guiding over 500 companies - including Salesforce, SAP, Roche, Capital Group, and Adidas. As a fractional marketing leader, he specializes in modern marketing that doesn’t rely on spammy funnels, soulless automation, or whatever the latest “hack” is that’ll be obsolete by next Tuesday. You can connect with Robert on [LinkedIn](#), or follow him on Bluesky at [@Robertrose.me](#).

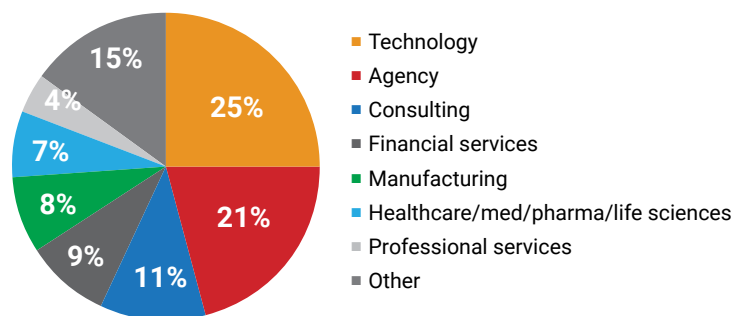
## Methodology

The 16th annual content marketing survey was conducted by Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs. The survey was fielded between June 24 and August 14, 2025, and was sponsored by Storyblok. The survey drew 1,229 global responses. This article reports on the 1,015 B2B marketers, mostly from North America.

The industries represented include:

- Technology (25%)
- Agency (21%)
- Consulting (11%)
- Financial services (9%)
- Manufacturing (8%)
- Healthcare/med/pharma/life sciences (7%)
- Professional services (4%)
- Other (15%)

### B2B industry classification



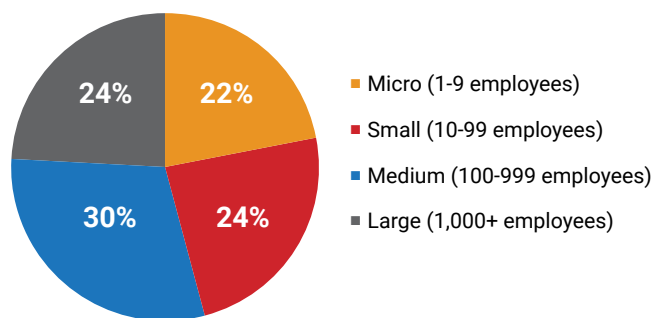
Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



The B2B marketers surveyed work in these organizational sizes:

- Micro – one to nine employees (22%)
- Small – 10 to 99 employees (24%)
- Medium – 100 to 999 employees (30%)
- Large – 1,000-plus employees (24%)

### Size of B2B company (by employees)



Source: B2B Content and Marketing Trends: Insights for 2026



## About Content Marketing Institute



Content Marketing Institute (CMI) exists to advance the practice of content marketing through online education and 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, and CMI virtual events. Our community of 215,000+ content marketers shares camaraderie and conversation. CMI is organized by Informa.

To learn more, visit [contentmarketinginstitute.com](https://contentmarketinginstitute.com).

## About MarketingProfs



More than 600,000 marketing professionals worldwide rely on MarketingProfs for B2B Marketing training and education backed by data science, psychology, and real-world experience. Access free B2B marketing publications, virtual conferences, podcasts, daily newsletters (and more), and check out the MarketingProfs B2B Forum – the flagship in-person event for B2B Marketing training and education at [MarketingProfs.com](https://MarketingProfs.com).

## About Storyblok



Storyblok is a headless CMS that enables marketers and developers to create with joy and succeed in the AI-driven content era. It empowers you to deliver structured and consistent content everywhere: websites, apps, AI search, and beyond. Marketers get a visual editor with reusable components, in-context preview, and workflows to launch fast and stay on brand. Developers have the freedom to use their favorite frameworks and integrate with anything through the API-first platform. Brands get one source of truth for content that is accurate, flexible, and measurable. Legendary brands like Virgin Media O2, Oatly, and TomTom use Storyblok to make a bigger, faster market impact. It's Joyful Headless™, and it changes everything. To learn more, visit [storyblok.com](https://storyblok.com).