



# Analysis

## Opinion-based Content Provides the Best Engagement

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### Biography

Yogesh Shah is the CEO of iResearch Services (<https://www.iresearchservices.com/>) and an established business professional with an extensive background in consulting, market research, data analytics, and business leadership. Throughout his career, he has leveraged his skillset in advanced research methodologies and project management to provide business professionals with trend-setting insights.

As a CEO, Yogesh has helped iResearch Services grow into a marketing-first agency helping Fortune 500 brands to build digital trust with their modern consumer through thought leadership. He provides guidance & strategic direction to all cross-functional teams at iResearch Services and is keenly involved in developing new initiatives that help in improving customer experience. He is committed to creating a sustainable future for iResearch Services by staying on cutting-edge of emerging tech.

He initiated Giving for Good Foundation, a charity supporting disadvantaged children for education & sports, and having a sustainable environmental mission. He actively steers several campaigns through this award-winning social venture which has underpinned & enriched lives of more than 10,000 children in 2019.

Yogesh is an active investor, a tech optimist, mentor to young entrepreneurs and a future enthusiast – always looking for more comfortable, better and more efficient ways to solve problems. He holds an MBA, has also undergone leadership training at London Business School and actively shares his insights on Forbes, LinkedIn and Medium. Before working with iResearch Services, Yogesh worked in senior leadership roles in sales and marketing with technology firms and banks.

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**Paper type** Research

### Abstract

Tumultuous times for brands and businesses such as those that the pandemic has created, shifted more attention to the marketing department. Budgets need to convert to ROI – and fast – else marketers will be shown the door. Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) want to reach their target markets in the most effective way – an obvious point. But how can they achieve this most efficiently and effectively? To answer this question, iResearch Services conducted an independent survey<sup>1</sup> of 500 CMOs/-1 professionals from the UK and USA to gather their insights on content, budgets, ROI and best practice.

### Introduction

Brands are axing marketing budgets and spending amid a market downturn – and they will do more if they do not get a decent ROI from this department anytime



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soon. Informed, data-backed decisions will do the most for CMOs and other marketers right now. The goal is not only to find where the marketing budget can be invested for short term gains. It is also to determine the areas where capacity can be built for an improved success model in the long term.

We have undergone a survey to understand not only the 'whens' and 'wheres' of marketing budget allocation for the best effects but the 'hows', too.

In the survey we asked experienced marketing professionals:

- Which form of marketing engages with their audience most successfully?
- What budget is allocated to each area?
- What are your preferred strategic marketing techniques to research and reach your target audience?
- What types of content provide the best engagement?



Our research identified the top performing channels marketers have at their disposal and presented them to the survey audience to choose from:

- Content marketing
- Direct marketing
- Search Engine Marketing (SEM)
- Database marketing
- Social media marketing
- Product marketing



### **Content marketing tops the list for audience engagement**

The marketers surveyed believe that content marketing delivers the highest levels of audience engagement compared to other forms of marketing, followed by search engine marketing in second place. Content marketing also receives the biggest marketing budget allocation (23.5%) compared to only 10% spent on product marketing and social media marketing, respectively.

### **Thought leadership leads the way**

One third (34%) of marketers believe opinion-based content provides the best engagement and almost three quarters (71%) believe thought leadership provides the best results for sentiment and relationship building, yet two thirds (67%) of marketers still believe advertising is an effective element of a marketing strategy.

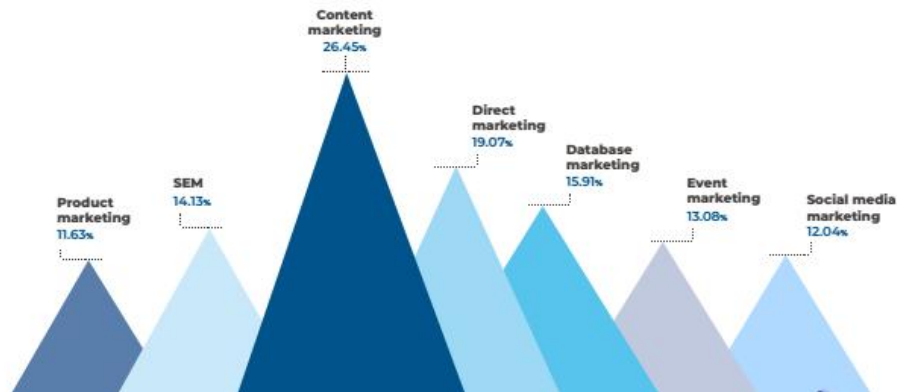
### **The important of proper research**

Over 60% (61%) of marketers believe that issues-led content that shows an understanding of the audience's business or industry challenges receives higher engagement. Primary research is the most popular way CMOs research their target audiences to generate insights for thought leadership, at 20.7%, closely followed by secondary research at 17.7%. This is unsurprising, as the importance of getting to know your audience in depth before targeting them with marketing campaigns cannot be underestimated.



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Figure 1: Percentage budget allocated to each area



Source: iResearch Services

### Where are the biggest budgets?

Content marketing takes a larger share of the marketing spend at 23.5% and is clearly a growing area for marketing investment – compare this to only 12.6% for SEM and 10.7% for social media marketing, and it seems content is still king.

Alongside content marketing activity, direct marketing also (16.9%) tops search engine marketing (12.5%) for budget allocation. Organic search marketing is still up there with the best way to generate leads. However, it takes time to generate results and is dependent on the search engine to work. There are methods to ensure your SEM is effective, but it remains a gamble. Direct marketing, on the other hand, gets the brand right in the face of its target market, and when combined with killer content, strengthens a brand's proposition while engaging with audiences on a more in-depth level.

For these elements of the marketing mix to work you need a deeper understanding of your target audience. Your various datasets should have identified those clients that are not only willing but able to engage with your offerings. Those are the audiences to which direct marketing is best suited and should have a tailored and segmented content strategy in place.

### Keeping it socially distanced

The research shows that the way in which people are consuming content is changing, with more CMOs utilizing content marketing (23.5%) as opposed to investing in event marketing (11.6%) as focus remains on virtual events because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The drive to online events automatically brings together the content and digital strategies, offering opportunities to reach clients and potential clients at each stage of their journey.



It is not surprising that social media is a popular method of driving engagement. While social media marketing can stand on its own, it is always best to include this as an integrated part of the overall content marketing strategy<sup>2</sup> for improved and more measurable success, matched with each stage of your client journey.



### **Thought leadership: creating content that resonates**

Marketers have highlighted the need to create content that is relatable and addresses issues-led matters frequently; after all, the challenges businesses face change daily. Successful organizations position themselves as industry leaders by sharing their expertise with their community and beyond. As part of a data-driven thought leadership strategy, this will not only ensure they can effectively communicate with their target audience but will strengthen the sales pipeline.

The fact that marketers believe that content marketing delivers the highest levels of audience engagement compared to other forms of marketing speaks volumes; but we know that the way that audiences consume content is continuously changing. This makes it more important for CMOs to review, test and adjust their strategies frequently to ensure they are still driving value and achieving results through their content marketing activity.

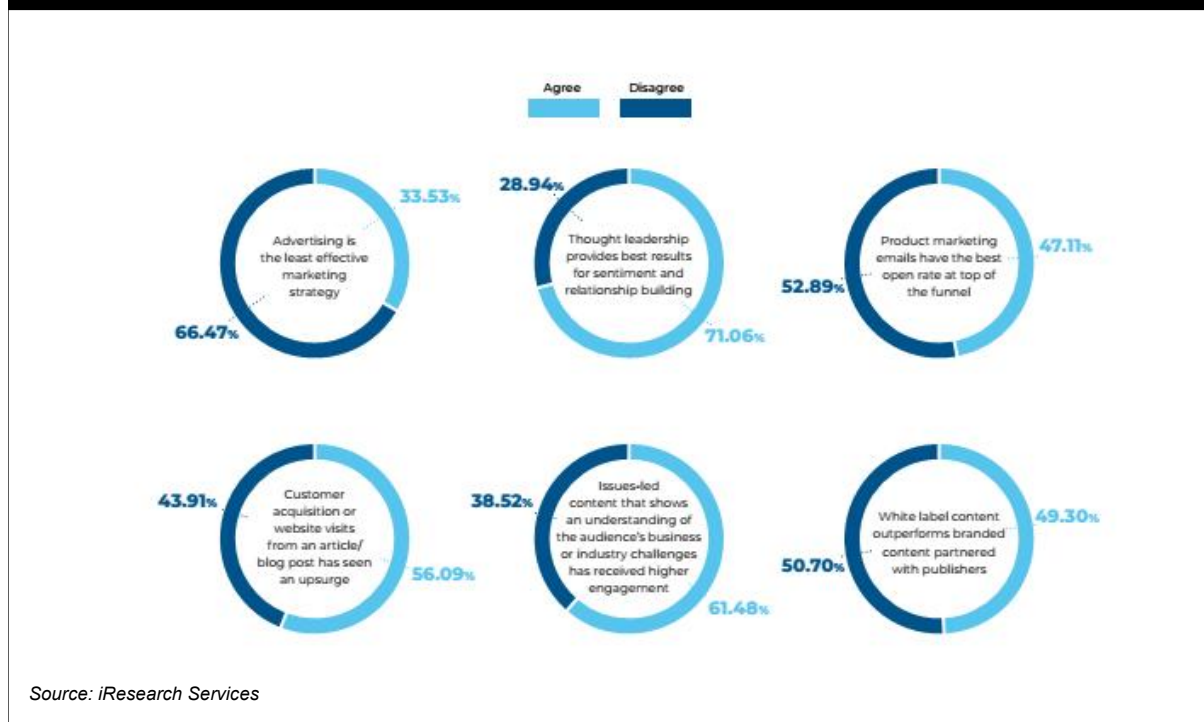
It is important for us to continue to address the needs of CMOs and to ensure they can effectively communicate with their target audience and therefore strengthen their sales pipeline. Creating relatable, issues-led content is key to this and it is



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clearly a form of content that is an integral part of all marketing strategies. Organizations need to position themselves as industry leaders by sharing their expertise, and a data-driven thought leadership strategy is exactly the way to do that.

Figure 2: Type of content that provides the best engagement



### Five tips to create valuable, issues-led content

1. **Think about your audience** – Content marketing enables businesses to demonstrate their knowledge and area authority, but also provides a chance to focus on specific audience groups, to build engagement and customer relationships. CMOs therefore need to ask themselves: who am I trying to target with my content, and what messages do they want to hear? This is the first step to consider; and shapes the rest of the content strategy.
2. **Talk about the challenge, not the product** – Product-led content will only make your audience think they are receiving a sales pitch. Talk about what is going on in their world; what challenges are they facing every day and how can you help these challenges to be addressed? After all, we now know that over 6 in 10 marketers believe that issues-led content will receive higher engagement.
3. **Drive it with data** – Data-driven content will show your audience that it is not just your opinion, but that your thoughts are proven and mirrored by the rest of the industry. It will also help to show your audience that they are not alone, as many others may be facing the same challenges.



4. **Consider where they will see your content** – Would your issues-led, data-driven content be best placed on your website, or within your cornerstone content? Should it be sent via an email marketing campaign to prospects, or placed on a highly ranked, authoritative publication that is read by your target market? As you defined your audience in step one, this will inform the best content placements and channels.
5. **Measure engagement levels for continued success** – We know that thought leadership content is far more engaging, especially for B2B audiences, but it is important to measure how the content is performing and use this analysis to inform future pieces of content and campaigns.

### In summary

Effective thought leadership puts the brand up as a force to be reckoned with, one to be trusted and sought out for insight on particular topics, and must assist brands in identifying their thought leadership positioning, defining their strategic approach, and building lead generation campaigns; by providing consultancy on best practices and educating on what true thought leadership is.

In addition, they need to create and deliver value by conducting thorough research (both quantitative and qualitative) to understand what their audience believes, the pain points, challenges they face, and future industry trends. Conveying a well-informed point of view, or maybe even a disruptive idea, can spark discussion and debate and ultimately inspire action from the audience.

Thought leadership allows brands to become highly influential in their chosen market, effectively unearthing consumer challenges and societal issues to drive impressive business growth and development in real-time.

### Reference

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