



# Measuring and Proving Content Marketing ROI

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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There is a common goal among many content marketing teams — the quest for return on investment. A positive ROI number can mean great things: the business is producing the right content, directing it to the right audiences, promoting it properly online and through social media and inspiring conversions and sales.

A low ROI, on the other hand, can be deflating. Money is going out, but not coming back in the way that we hope and need it to. That can cause doubt in the overall marketing strategy. And here's a sobering statistic, courtesy of [Neil Patel](#): *Just 41 percent of marketers see a positive ROI for their efforts in content marketing.*

Adding to all that is the fact that ROI can be difficult to measure and hard to prove, which can then make it a confusing prospect to chase.

Those factors may cause some to throw up their hands and declare surrender. But if they can fight through some of these difficulties, they can gain a greater appreciation of what ROI is. Understanding the benefits of ROI — and the areas of improvement it can show — can make the struggle worthwhile.

Content marketing isn't going anywhere; its importance is ever-growing. Research by Technavio, as reported by [The Drum](#), showed that global content marketing will grow significantly in the next few

years, estimating a total valuation of \$412.88 billion by 2021. That's up from \$195.58 billion in 2016.

*"Content marketing is the most economical and effective means of building brand awareness among consumers," Technavio lead analyst Ujjwal Doshi said. "If an audience can rely on a company for information, then they will most likely buy products from the same company."*

That's the goal. Let's explore why content marketing ROI is so important and yet at times perplexing.

When it comes to companies making a name for themselves, content marketing is an excellent way to create some buzz. Content marketing can elevate a business' exposure, highlight its strengths and help to associate it with thought leadership.

For something that important, it would be natural to think that the methods and reasoning behind measuring success would be simple, well-established and widely understood. But that's not always the case.

It can be difficult to gauge the success of content marketing. It's not an easy,  $A+B=C$  transaction.

Let's explore some of the reason why.

# THE RISE OF CONTENT MARKETING

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First, let's step back in time a bit. Those who grew up prior to the late 1990s know that the primary way for businesses to attract attention was through traditional advertising (television, radio, newspapers and other print publications). Many will likely recall the intense interest in the Sears catalog, a brick of a publication which children often used to circle items on their Christmas wish list each year.

As with so many things in business and in our culture, the Internet changed all that. Advertising is now something we can actively try to block, from pop-up ads online to skipping commercials on our DVRs. Direct mail advertising efforts often make a swift trip to the recycling bin.

Print advertising is still a factor, of course, but its role has been greatly diminished by the ease and speed of online shopping.

E-commerce has had a dramatic impact on our shopping habits. For example, take the holiday shopping season, and narrow it down to Thanksgiving Day through Cyber Monday.



As [Digital Commerce 360](#) reports, online sales estimates for 2018 were \$22.55 billion, a 19 percent increase from 2017. That's a long way from a telephone-book-styled catalog.

So traditional marketing methods had to evolve, and that opened the door to the rise of content marketing. This isn't the same brand of in-your-face, buy-our-product messaging, but rather reaching a targeted audience with valuable information.

It's all about strategy. By developing ways to deliver relevant information, a connection can be made with potential clients. That's not a guarantee, and there can be twists and turns in proving a return on investment. But the content is the entry point for a targeted audience.

A strong method in attracting this audience is the use of [evergreen content](#), which has a long shelf life and is often presented in easy-to-digest formats including lists, how-to guides, case studies and historical pieces. More current topics can play into the content mix as well, though the shelf life is understandably shorter. The keywords and search engine optimization involved in both of these methods play a large role in bringing in readers. Make a positive impression, and that reader may come back for more. Even if that doesn't translate into a conversion or purchase, the connection is there. Stronger web traffic can improve the site's search rankings, and that can then help to build a client base.

Marketers can deliver this information in a variety of formats, including blogs, white papers, ebooks, infographics, podcasts and videos. It can go even further than that. Take this interesting example, courtesy of Josh Steimle in [Forbes](#). He proposes the hit 2014 film The Lego Movie is "one of the greatest examples" of content marketing: "Oh, you thought they made that movie in order to sell movie tickets? Think again. That was a 100-minute toy commercial, and rather than using a DVR to skip it, you

paid good money to watch it.”

The influence of social media has only enhanced the opportunity for content marketing. The ability to target a specific audience through social media advertising is significant, as is having the ability to track the interest through analytics. According to the [Content Marketing Institute](#), LinkedIn tops the list for B2B marketers at 97 percent, followed by Twitter (87 percent), Facebook (86 percent), YouTube (60 percent) and Instagram (30 percent).

The size of a business has an obvious impact on its ability to develop and engage with content marketing. The CMI [report](#) showed some of the reasons why some B2B marketers do not plan to use content marketing strategy in the near future. Topping the list was “small team” at 67 percent and “lack of time” at 44 percent.



A small business owner may have to do the work of many, and the staffing structure may not allow for roles devoted to marketing. A modest, patient strategy to begin a content marketing plan could serve as a clue to what is possible. It’s an uphill battle, but a battle worth fighting.

For medium-sized companies, the staffing scenario can be improved. As Darrell Alfonso notes on [Business 2 Community](#), this can also come with expectations: “This means that your content budget should be aimed at

achieving quantitative, measurable goals while tying them back to the critical objectives that leadership deem important,” he says. He suggests enlisting freelance writers to help with the content creation.

With large companies, the staffing structure should be there, but the larger size also comes with larger challenges. Communication is essential. Bjorn Owen Glad examines this for [Spoon](#), writing that companies should “tear down the company’s silos physically and mentally.”

“When one hand doesn’t know what the other hand is doing, nothing gets done,” he wrote. “Unfortunately the same applies to many large companies with complex communication challenges. Different functions and roles are physically and mentally separated by different departments and completely different strategies.”

The silos “must be broken down” for communication to improve and for a content strategy to succeed, he says.

# CONTENT MARKETING IS HERE TO STAY

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The impact that content marketing can have is undeniable. Research shows that it benefits a majority of marketers and companies. Let's turn to some statistics to get a closer look.

From the [Content Marketing Institute's 2018 report](#) on B2B content marketing:

- 91 percent of those surveyed use content marketing. Of that 9 percent that doesn't, more than half said they were planning to use it in the next year.
- The majority of B2B organizations are committed to content marketing: 20 percent are "extremely committed," 36 percent are "very committed," 36 percent are "somewhat committed."
- Content-marketing success is attributed to higher-quality content (78 percent), strategy development (72 percent), improved distribution (50 percent), prioritizing it (49 percent) and devoting more time to it (46 percent).

A [CMI article by Julia McCoy](#) shows that 61 percent of online customers have made a purchase after reading recommendations in a blog item. The story also references a study by Kapost, which notes content marketing gets three times the amount of leads per dollar as paid search, McCoy writes, along with its smaller costs and longer benefits.

Some more statistics, courtesy of [HubSpot](#) research:

- 55 percent of marketers name blog content as their top priority for inbound marketing.
- Businesses that put out more than 16 blog posts in a month earned nearly 3.5 times more traffic than those that published four or less. Those 16 posts also helped to earn 4.5 times more leads.
- B2B companies with more than 11 blog posts in a month earned nearly three times more traffic than companies that published minimal blogs (one or none).

An infographic by [Demand Metric](#) shows the relationship that content marketing can help create with potential clients.

- 80 percent of people "appreciate learning about a company through custom content."
- Content marketing costs 62 percent less than traditional, yet per dollar spent it generates three times as many leads.
- 70 percent report they would prefer to learn more about a company through articles rather than ads.
- 82 percent say they "feel more positive about a company" by reading custom content.



# STRUGGLES IN SHOWING ROI

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For all of content marketing's positive points, it's a work in progress when proving return on investment. Question marks and confusion can surround it, and make some hesitant to pursue clarity.

Take the [Content Marketing Institute report](#), which showed that 47 percent of surveyed B2B content marketers do not measure ROI on content marketing. That easily tops the 35 percent that do measure it, and 18 percent are "unsure." (It's not the best sign when a notable number of marketers aren't sure if they even measure ROI.)

For those who said they don't measure it, the top answers as to why are:

- "no formal justification required" (38 percent)
- "we need an easier way to do this" (38 percent)
- "we don't know how to do this" (27 percent)
- "too time-consuming" (21 percent).

There is validity in those shrugs-as-answers. It's not easy, it takes time and it can be tricky to prove.

As Barb Mosher Zinck described for [Diginomica](#), ROI can be more qualitative, and *"doesn't necessarily equate to a dollar value."* This is through brand awareness, thought leadership, customer and employee advocacy, she writes: "... Instead of looking at ROI in terms of costs, look at ROI in terms of quality of content. Is my content the best content for my customers? My employees? Am I supplying them with the most relevant information they need? Am I developing strong relationships?"



# HARD TO PROVE

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Let's go a little further into why ROI is difficult to prove. It's not as simple as a standard ad click.

Take attribution models, which track a customer from introduction to conversion, and are measurable through Google Analytics.

## **Last-click attribution:**

This is the simplest version. The last page visited on the site before the conversion is the one that gets credit for that conversion.

## **First-click attribution:**

This is the broader form, marking the initial entry point when a customer first engages with a website.

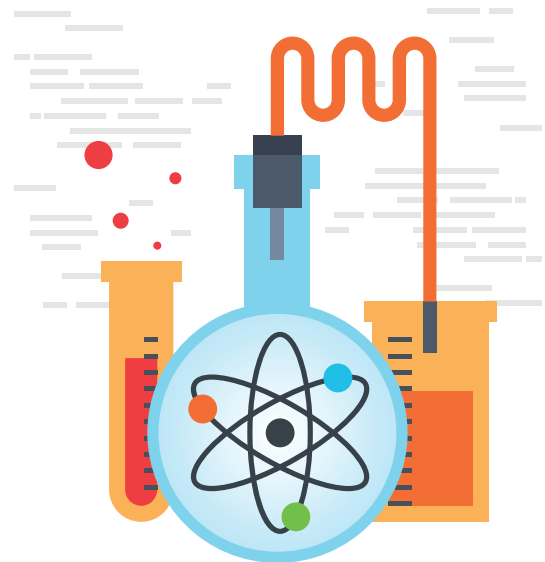
## **Linear attribution:**

This spreads the credit to all the pages on the website the customer visits prior to conversion.

## **Time-decay attribution:**

This counts all the previous stops the client made on the website, but gives a larger share of the credit to the most recent.

There is value with each of these, but also question marks. Keep in mind that plenty of clients will take their time before signing up for an email newsletter or making a purchase, and they may examine a site multiple times over many days. The idea that potential clients find a site and sign up or purchase something in that exact same session isn't always a realistic one.



Strategy and goals play a large role with ROI. A variety of factors are at play, but ROI should start with one: There has to be a sound strategy in place. For those lacking inspiration, check out the competition, as [Neil Patel](#) suggests:

“Why has their content been successful? Emulate that. Where have they shared their content? Mimic that. Who’s sharing their content? Reach those prospects. Your success in content marketing has everything to do with creating a strategy and delivering on your objectives.”

The goals for this content should be realistic. ROI is generally not an instant-gratification scenario.

“Your goals and metrics should fit your company and what you want to achieve,” Patel says. “If you’re a small plumbing company in rural Oklahoma, it’s unlikely that you’ll have over a million Instagram followers. Those goals and metrics just aren’t right for your company.”

There also can be flaws involved with ROI. A story by [CFI](#) explains that one of these is that it disregards time. Two investments can have the same ROI, but if one achieves it in much less time, it has the advantage over another that took longer. It can also be prone to manipulation by leaving out costs that aren’t top of mind (legal costs, property taxes, sales fees). The story advises to go for “true ROI, which accounts for all possible costs incurred when each investment increases in value.”

## HOW TO MEASURE CONTENT MARKETING ROI

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There is a general formula for determining return on investment. Calculate the return, subtract the investment, then divide that number by the investment, and the result is shown as a percentage.

Sounds easy enough, but there’s more to it than that.

A great example of the intricacies is explored in a story by author and marketer Jay Baer on his [Convince & Convert](#) website.

He poses a scenario in which ROI is being determined for a business podcast. The podcast is “the door opener,” he writes, along with an ebook “as the data collection magnet.” Each podcast promotes the ebook.

In adding up the costs, Baer includes:

- The monthly pay rate/cost for the staff involved, and overhead costs
- Podcast hosting and software costs
- Social media advertising costs
- The cost of the ebook, stretched over 12 months for its relevance
- The total monthly investment, which is \$7,850

For the return, Baer incorporates the following elements:

- Ebook downloads that were a direct result of the podcast (tracked by the podcast page, which links to a landing page for the ebook)
- New subscribers from the podcast email newsletter
- The conversion rate from the ebook to sales
- The percentage of newsletter subscribers who typically become customers
- The number of customers brought in by the podcast
- The amount of money those customers spend on average
- The average profit margin
- The average net revenue, which is \$24,000

“Your average customer spends \$40,000 over the course of their relationship with the company, and your profit margin averages 15 percent,” Baer explains. “This means that each customer is worth \$6,000 to the organization (\$40,000 x 15 percent). Your podcast brings in an average of \$24,000 per month in net revenue to the company. That is your return.”

So in following the formula, the monthly

investment (\$7,850) is subtracted from the return (\$24,000). That number is divided by the investment number (\$7,850) and expressed as a percentage. The result is 2.05, so the ROI is 205 percent.

There are other ways to measure ROI and metrics that are closely related. Try ROI with cost of goods sold. [Hootsuite](#) breaks down one of these scenarios:

- A business’ Facebook ads cost \$100 (that’s the marketing investment). The business sold 10 products, each for \$25 (total revenue: \$250). Cost of goods sold is \$10 per unit, multiplied by 10 products, for \$100.
- Subtract cost of goods sold and marketing investment from total revenue. So \$250 minus \$100, and then subtract another \$100. Total cost of goods sold is \$50.
- Divide \$50 by the marketing investment (\$100), which comes to 0.5. Multiply that by 100 for the ROI percentage, which is 50 percent.



Hootsuite's [social ROI calculator](#) equation goes like this:

- Calculate the return (Facebook visits from the campaign, landing page conversion rates, close rate, lifetime customer value) and the investment (total ad spend, content creation costs, labor costs).
- Then go back to the main ROI formula and insert those figures: total revenue minus total investment, divided by total investment. That's the social ROI.

On a similar wavelength is customer acquisition cost, which determines how much it costs to get a new customer. As explained by [Uhuru Network](#), take the combined costs (including salaries, tools and software) and divide by the number of customers brought in by the content marketing.

(To get the number of customers, take the traffic generated by the content, multiply that by the conversion rate to leads, and multiply that by the conversion rate to customers.)

So in the Uhuru example:

- 5,000 unique visits were created by 10 articles. So multiply 5,000 by the business' 5 percent conversion rate. That equals 250 leads. 250 multiplied by the 10 percent conversion rate to paid customers comes to 25 customers.
- The monthly content costs in this example come to \$6,140, and 25 customers were brought in by it. Divide \$6,140 by 25. The resulting \$245.60 is the cost to acquire each customer.

# METRICS FOR MEASURING CONTENT MARKETING ROI

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ROI is not a one-size-fits-all proposition, so businesses may emphasize different aspects. Here are several that can play a role in determining the return.

## Sales:

For obvious reasons, this is the ultimate test of content marketing ROI. There's no return on investment without the actual "return."

## Conversion:

A vital step on the way to revenue. Provide content that interests potential clients enough to make return visits, subscribe to an email newsletter or download a white paper. Those

efforts — actually clicking, signing up and downloading — can lead to sales.

### **Web traffic:**

As with sales, there is no ROI without web traffic. The more eyes that see the content, the more possibilities for conversions and sales.

### **Leads:**

Strong content and traffic can translate to leads. There can be low- and high-quality leads, however. Low-quality leads are identified by a high bounce rate and low conversions, according to Sharon Hurley Hall for [OptinMonster](#). High-quality leads can include people who do more exploring, including searching for pricing and other pertinent pages.

### **Keywords and backlinks:**

Evergreen content needs to incorporate the right keywords so that more people will find it through a search engine. That brings in more traffic, and more possibilities for conversions and sales. A successful piece may inspire backlinks from other sites, which can provide an enormous boost to web traffic and ROI as well.

### **Bounce rate:**

If a site is showing an abundance of one-and-done web visitors, it could be a sign to re-evaluate the content. Give people a reason to stick around and to explore other parts of the site. Promoting related evergreen content throughout the site is a good way to do this.

### **Time on site:**

Just as a high bounce rate shows that the content isn't connecting with readers, how long users spend on the site can be a good indication of how useful the content is.

### **Subscribers:**

We all want people to sign up for email newsletters and other content, and the number of people who do offer a good indication of the audience reached. The same goes for those who unsubscribe, which may help to re-evaluate the content being produced.

### **Engagement:**

It's a broad term, but there are ways to drill down in how engaged readers are. Are they commenting on the stories? If not on the site, then on social media? This feedback can be instrumental in better understanding the audience reached.

### **Social media:**

The social networks offer a strong indication of how an audience is receiving content. Facebook is often regarded as the dominant force, but LinkedIn has major value. As [Duct Tape Marketing](#) notes, *"It's a professional network where people are more interested in reading interesting content than in just skimming through headlines on adlines on the timeline."*

# METHODS AND IDEAS

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## 1) Have a clear strategy

A business that has a firm grasp of what it hopes to accomplish with content marketing will have a better shot at understanding and reaching a desired level of ROI.

What is the target audience, and how can that audience best be served? What has worked in the past, and what has failed? How can SEO best be used to bring in a larger audience? What content management system is best for this? How can social media help this mission?.

## 2) Go evergreen

Content that has a long shelf life is essential for a content marketing plan. Consider formats including lists, how-to guides, best practices, case studies, history pieces and influencer advice.

That's not to say that current topics and news of the day shouldn't be explored, but those stories will have shorter-term impact. Evergreen stories can provide an ideal benefit to ROI, because once the piece is done — and incorporates SEO and is promoted properly — it can continue to bring in consistent traffic for years.

## 3) Repurpose and build on content

Shake up an old piece of content by repurposing it. Take a white paper and use it to develop a list, or a colorful infographic. Take a small detail within it and drill down even deeper, creating a new piece of content. Add a link to the old piece from the new, and vice versa.

## 4) Test out formats

Businesses can experiment with different presentation methods. Perhaps ebooks will make a greater impact with a certain audience. Blogs, white papers, infographics, videos, podcasts — all may reach desired demographics.

## 5) Emphasize call to action

A great piece of content won't have a great effect without providing an opportunity for conversions or sales. Prioritize making a clear call to action — for comments and social media shares, for instance, or for ebook downloads and for signing up for email new

# EXAMPLES OF COMPANIES WHO HAVE DEMONSTRATED ROI IN CONTENT MARKETING

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ROI is not a one-size-fits-all proposition, so businesses may emphasize different aspects. Here are several that can play a role in determining the return.

## 1) Shutterstock



When talking about content marketing, we generally mean a series of stories, white papers, ebooks, videos. There is also potential value in a single, well-executed and targeted piece of content. This brings us to Shutterstock and its scores of royalty-free stock images.

As detailed by Leslie Carruthers and Casandra Campbell for the [Content Marketing Institute](#), Shutterstock boosted its annual Creative Trends Report with detailed customer analysis. This included search and download data to show trends and predictions. The results were presented in an infographic.

The trending information came from

Shutterstock's proprietary data, and the authors note this provides value to both customers looking for photos and to the photographers who take the photos.

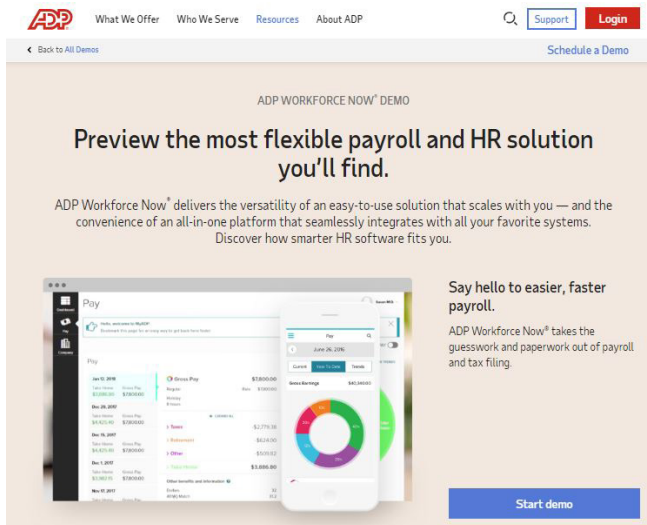
The results are significant.

The 2017 Creative Trends infographic was mentioned in more than 100 articles, earned 6 billion unique site visits, 5,300 social media shares and 11,000 social media engagements, according to the CMI story.

The 2019 Creative Trends Report was released in January. A [press release](#) notes that the data analysis came from searches and downloads of 225 million images. And, for the curious, "80s opulence" was a big topic, with "elegance pattern" searches up 1,060 percent, "leopard print" up 167 percent and "snakeskin" up 157 percent.



## 2) ADP



The HR and payroll solutions company worked with Stein IAS agency in 2012 to develop a digital content campaign for the fourth version of its Workforce Now management software, which was aimed at mid-sized businesses that employed between 50 and 999 people.

According to Kate Maddox in [Ad Age](#), it was the company's first effort with trackable metrics. ADP's research into human resources topics, including hotly debated healthcare issues, led to a series of white papers, infographics, videos and case studies, along with display advertising. The ads led to a landing page where users could sign up for a white paper download. The interest in the healthcare debate led to ADP refocusing its efforts to emphasize that, which sparked five-times greater conversion rates, Maddox wrote.

"We refocused the entire campaign on five strategies to help navigate healthcare reform — specifically for midsize businesses," Jim Ferraulo, head of ADP brand management and advertising, said in the Adweek story. "We did a lot of optimization along the way — pulling out

elements that just weren't working — and the response rate went way up,"

The [American Society of Professional Education's](#) Katie Cothran reports that the results were strong, including \$1 million in new sales opportunities. The company credited content marketing for \$3.7 million in closed business, Cothran says, and an ROI of 905 percent for the first three quarters of 2014.

## 3) Xerox

# Chief Optimist



A sunny bit of optimism can serve a company well. Just take a look at Xerox's Get Optimistic campaign, which aimed to put a positive spin — focusing on solutions, not dwelling on problems — in business. This was designed initially as a content microsite, which Xerox boosted through targeted emails, according to [Solutions Insights](#). That led to phone calls for webinar and meeting opportunities. It evolved to a full-fledged magazine called Chief Optimist, which was targeted to different industries with print and digital versions and developed in partnership with Forbes.

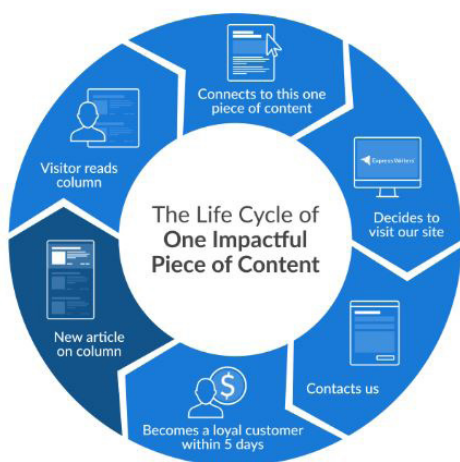
Xerox hit the road for a series of live events, which helped clients to better understand what the company offers, [Demodia](#) reports.

Xerox's Jeannine Rossignol told [Ad Age](#) that the primary goal was "to have insights to share, so our representatives can bring relevance to a meeting. If a representative doesn't have a lot of information about a company before a meeting, then they can bring these insights to the table. It gives them a competitive edge. ... [Chief Optimist content] helps give our salespeople a reason to call. It changes the dynamic of the conversation. It's really helped open doors."

The results? Rob Petersen of [Biznology](#) reports that the microsite attracted 70 percent of targeted companies. That led to a huge boost in readership — 300 to 400 percent more than other email campaigns. Xerox got 20,000 contacts, more than a thousand appointments and a whopping \$1.3 billion in pipeline revenue, Petersen wrote.

## 4) [Express Writers](#)

The Life Cycle of One Impactful Piece of Content



Sometimes the greatest successes can come from the simplest of plans. [Express Writers](#) has achieved success by just focusing on creating great content. The writing agency was launched in 2011 by Julia McCoy, with an investment of \$75. It has since grown to include more than 90 writers and strategists.

Express Writers has focused solely on organic growth, creating and publishing its own content, and not paying for Google advertising.

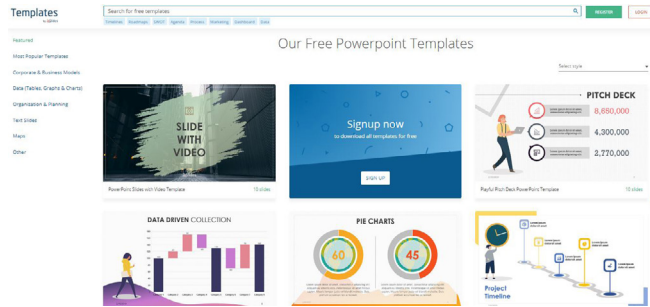
"Call me crazy, untypical, you-name-it ... but it's worked for us — extraordinarily well," McCoy writes.

The site publishes content ("from bulk SEO content for agencies to resell to their clientele, to expert copy for niche firms") each weekday, along with guest blogs. The results have been positive. McCoy notes that the site outranks its major competitors, has achieved high keyword rankings in Google and has more than 300 keywords indexed in Google's top 10. The company has more than 1,000 clients across the globe, and handles hundreds of web pages per week.

The site earns the bulk of its traffic and conversions from this original long-form content. McCoy says she writes more than 30 of these pieces per month — 20 for her site and the rest as a guest blogger for "high-quality, large audience guest blog networks," which include Search Engine Journal, Huffington Post and Business.com.

"It really isn't about advertising anymore. It isn't about creating a funnel and a sales process on rinse and repeat," McCoy writes. "It's about relationships. Creating meaningful content. Building a community, over time. Answering questions. Helping people."

## 5) [24Slides](#)



Here's a different kind of content marketing being given away for free. [24slides](#) focuses on PowerPoint designs "to showcase the incredible talent and competitiveness of designers in emerging countries by giving them the tools to compete in the global market."

As detailed by Leslie Carruthers and Casandra Campbell for [Content Marketing Institute](#), 24Slides aimed to increase its email database. So it created a free 20-slide PowerPoint template package. It [promoted the template on LinkedIn](#), and asked people to reply "yes," or to share the LinkedIn Pulse article, and then supply their name and email address to get access.

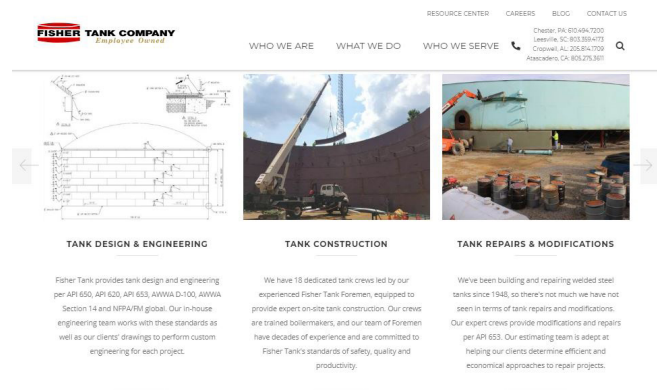
That was a success: 24Slides earned more than 500,000 reads on LinkedIn, 60,000 comments and 80,000 email leads, Carruthers and Campbell report. The company has done a few of these campaigns, boosting its list to 130,000 subscribers.

"... This is a great way to build a fast email list," the authors wrote. "Rented lists are the worst. With this campaign, 24Slides is giving away one of its core services. That's a risky-feeling move that many companies don't make. But 24Slides wasn't focused on the potential cost of the campaign. It was focused on building a

monster email list quickly."

The LinkedIn elements had a benefit as well: "The more people interact with a LinkedIn article, the more likely the platform's algorithm will designate it a useful piece of content and serve it to more people," they wrote.

## 6) [Fisher Tank](#)



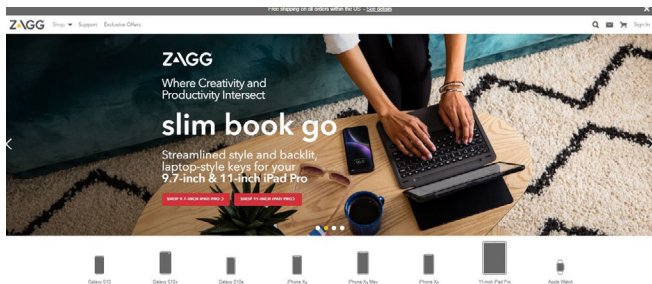
Let's talk above-ground steel tanks. Because believe it or not, content marketing made a large impact for this storage tank business. As David Moth examined for [Econsultancy.com](#), Fisher Tank shifted from relying on traditional sales to exploring content marketing, which included a brand new website, blog articles and downloadable content.

The impact was swift. Moth makes a side note that the numbers cannot be completely connected to the content marketing, but it surely made a significant difference.

In 12 weeks, web traffic rose 119 percent, and organic search traffic was up 70 percent. Social media traffic skyrocketed (4,800 percent increase), as did lead conversions (3,900 percent increase), page-one keyword rankings (600 percent increase) and quote requests (500 percent increase). And content marketing

is credited with a qualified sales opportunities value of \$3.4 million, according to Moth.

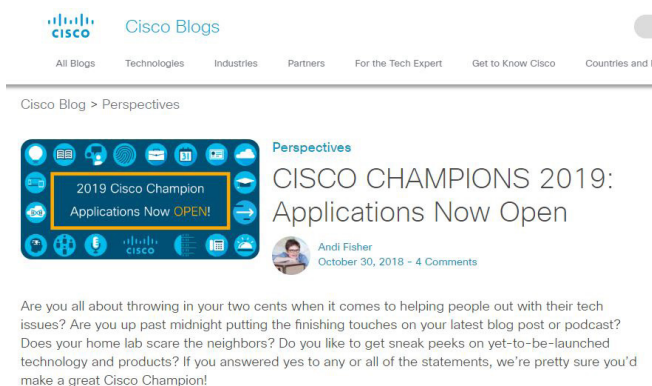
## 7) Zagg



The online retailer has enjoyed success with the power of blogging. As a case study by [Marketing Sherpa](#) showed, Zagg's blogging was extensive, with 25 to 35 posts weekly by offsite writers in categories defined as "news," "how to," "entertaining" and "promotional." Content was selectively pushed out through email and social media.

The result of this content focus was an ROI increase of 172 percent via the blog, which attracted 10 percent of site traffic, according to the case study. Sixty percent of that traffic came from new visitors.

## 8) Cisco



The technology giant has paid tribute to some of its dedicated users with the now-annual Cisco Champions program. Brian Mechem described the program's beginnings in a story for [Grin](#), writing that campaign gave people in IT "a chance to talk about their expertise and showcase their knowledge of Cisco products."

[Cisco defines the program](#) as being created to "nurture a network of people who are passionate about Cisco and enjoy sharing their knowledge, expertise, and thoughts across the social web and with Cisco."

That included blog posts, Twitter chats, a series of videos, podcasts and events. Mechem reported the results included more than 8,000 mentions on social media, 55,000 tweets about the brand and blog posts that earned more than 44,000 hits.

## 9) Logicalis



The business technology solutions company had a clear need, according to a story by Allison Banko for [Marketing Sherpa](#): "pipeline in a series of strategic product and solution categories and increase its Hewlett Packard sales."

Banko featured Lisa Dreher, the company's vice president of marketing, who said that in addition to driving results, the company wanted

*“to provide valuable information to our customers and prospects about where technology is going and how to leverage it.”*

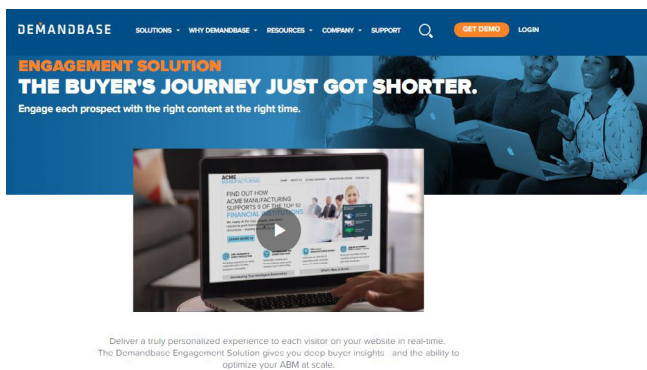
This led to an ebook (*Elements of Design: How the Data Center of Today Can Be the Data Center for Tomorrow*) and an email campaign promoting it, as well as a “nurturing program” to provide prospects with more information, Banko wrote. A microsite tackled such topics as managing big data, cloud computing, and “next-generation” networks.

The results after 12 weeks, according to Banko: *“\$8 million in closed and new pipeline business for Logicalis, while the microsite generated a 15% click-to-open rate for the microsite. The emails achieved a 10% open rate while views and forwards clocked in at 15%.”*

SlideShare and a live presentation event. The results, he says: “1,700 leads, 125 webinar participants, 5,000 views on Slideshare and \$1 million in new business.”

On the [Demandbase website](#), Rachel Balik shared some of the company’s marketing philosophy: “As a marketer, when it comes to engaging your audience, you need to make sure that you understand the things that matter to them and how they like to communicate. Then, create content to fill the different buckets and make sure it’s accessible to each audience segment.”

## 10) [Demandbase](#)



The marketing and personalization platform describes itself as “passionately dedicated to helping B2B marketers achieve greater business impact.”

Lee Odden of [Top Rank Marketing](#) wrote of a Demandbase campaign that aimed to help marketers with content investments. This included a white paper, webinar, infographic,

# TOOLS AND SOLUTIONS

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Here's a look at ways to measure content marketing ROI, and other factors that contribute to return on investment.

## 1) Google Analytics:

The business solutions leader has many capabilities that can help with content marketing ROI, including measuring traffic, audience demographics, bounce rate and assessing ROI and conversion rates.

## 2) Fronetics:

Offers a monthly marketing reporting template; metrics include website visits, leads, customers, visit-to-lead conversion rate, lead-to-customer conversion rate and competitive analysis.

## 3) Hoot Suite:

Try Hoot Suite's [ROI calculator](#). Though not all businesses measure ROI in the same way, this is worth a look. The format incorporates a social media campaign and landing page conversion rate with a "lead capture" element for conversions.

## 4) Ahrefs' Content Explorer:

This tool can help users to see metrics from related content on other sites, including social media shares, organic search traffic and referring domains. These results can be matched up with a business' own for comparison, and for potential inspiration on

additional content marketing.

## 5) HubSpot:

This site aims to help marketers attract and track customers, convert leads, manage SEO and calls to action. Also provides all-in-one software for blogging, analytics, landing pages and social media.

## 6) Hotjar:

Measures customer website activity through heat maps. The ability to see what areas a customer is exploring (and avoiding) could be beneficial in determining why certain content pieces have a lower ROI.



## 7) Buzzsumo:

Businesses will have a better shot at a good ROI if they emphasize research in the early stages of content development. Buzzsumo's [Content Analyzer tool](#) allows you search for the proposed topic and find related evergreen stories that have performed well through links and shares.

## 8) SpyFu:

A look at the competition could help to inspire content ideas or other tactics to benefit ROI. SpyFu gives an instant monthly domain report of a site's performance, keyword strengths and backlinks.

## 9) Disqus:

Audience engagement is a good indication of content marketing success and ROI, and that includes commentary from readers. The Disqus plugin makes commenting easy, some might even say fun, with "upvotes and downvotes," threaded replies and the ability to insert rich media as comments. Benefits for the commenters include being notified when someone else has made a reply, which can keep them coming back to the site.



## 10) Hootsuite Analytics:

Hootsuite's social analytics package includes tracking how social media posts are performing, understanding the performance across channels, building custom reports and exporting those results to others in a variety of formats. That information can then help better understand how social media contributes to ROI.

## 11) Twitter analytics:

Speaking of social media's contributions to ROI, this measures tweet engagement (link clicks, retweets, likes, replies), explores the demographics of Twitter followers and offers tips on reaching more people.

## 12) Facebook insights:

Gives the breakdown of Facebook post engagement (likes, shares and comments), along with how many people click through to your website or a call to action. Also offers demographic information and how posts have performed over time. Engagement numbers can tie into ROI of social campaigns.

## 13) YouTube Studio:

For video content, YouTube offers a breakdown of top performers, subscriber numbers, impressions, how long people watch and traffic sources. Also provides audience retention and overall demographics information.

## 14) Moz:

Taking a closer look at link metrics can give marketers a better understanding of web traffic patterns and ROI success. Enter a URL, and Moz's [Link Explorer](#) offers analysis for the

website (yours or a competitor's), including top performing content, backlinks and broken links.

### **15) Atomic Reach:**

A business aiming to maximize its content and its ROI can benefit from [Atomic Reach's content audit](#). This includes topic and readability analysis, advice on word counts and strong headlines, and learning more about presenting the right amount of emotional intensity for your audience. Once you deduce this information, you are then able to apply these insights to past content to make them more compelling and evergreen.

### **16) Kissmetrics:**

Provides data to increase sales, drive engagement and increase customer retention, all factors in content marketing and ROI success. Kissmetrics creates Facebook audiences, automates email campaigns and analyzes customer behavior and key insights.

### **17) Mailchimp:**

This platform offers a marketing-data headquarters, with all relevant information (emails, landing pages, ads, automations) in one spot. ROI benefits include revenue reports that "track sales from a click in your campaign all the way to purchase."

### **18) Social Mention:**

Content marketing can get a boost from an awareness of what topics are making an impact on social media. This search platform aggregates content across blogs and social networks. Enter a topic and see a variety of stories pop up, along with stats on strength ("the likelihood that your brand is being

discussed in social media"), top keywords and sources.

### **19) Cyfe:**

This cloud-based service creates an "all-in-one business dashboard," so that business data, which can tie into ROI, is centralized in one location. Cyfe's widgets can pull data from sources including Google and Facebook, and Cyfe can make dashboards for web analytics, marketing and social media.

### **20) Kapost:**

Try this site's ambitiously titled "[Building & Operating Your Own Content Marketing Machine](#)," which features an ROI calculator. That calculator incorporates a revenue goal, average revenue per sale, the percentage of the revenue goal from marketing, the percentage of conversions that turn to leads, and the percentage of leads that turn to customers.





# CONCLUSION

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We hear “ROI” all the time in marketing matters, and it often seems like it should be an easy, slam-dunk of a statistic. The complexity of content marketing — putting a priority on free, valuable information and aiming to establish a reliable reputation — makes it a trickier proposition.

Even the usual formula (return minus investment, divided by the investment) is more complex than it appears, depending on how other metrics play into those elements.

But the importance of ROI outweighs any difficulties involved. It’s an ideal way to understand how a business is doing, what kind of content is being created and how that content is being received.

It also helps establish the groundwork for future budgets and content marketing campaigns. Increasing content marketing ROI can open new doors of opportunity down the line.