
Trends Report

What Today's Marketers Are Focused On in 2020



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Marrying a creative and empathetic mindset and analytical decision making is what makes a successful marketer in 2020.

Aleksandar Atanasov,
Head of Marketing at Cylindo

Foreword from the CMO

It's that time of year. We lock ourselves in a room to figure out the strategy that will ensure we win. Executives attend countless meetings, departments sync on ways to rally, and companies gather as a whole for that motivational fiscal kickoff.

Regardless of which group you're a part of, there's no question that the new year is a time to reflect and look forward. With all the focus on starting fresh, we cannot help but talk about the trends that are happening around us and, fingers crossed, the ones that can set us apart.

Although looking at trends can give us an edge, it can also take us off track. The end of the year doesn't always mean we're done executing on an existing strategy or that we have to drop everything for a clean start. More often, it's a time to reflect on small tweaks that can make our existing bets more successful.

In the survey that led to this report that feeling was quite true. Take content as an example. Many of us don't plan to stop creating content, but we do want better ROI from our content investment. So without some new trend or hot three-letter acronym, what can we do to be better in the new year?

Here's where I'm focused and where I suggest you rally as a team: we need to realize that content is not a go-to-market strategy, but a destination. This doesn't mean we should stop creating content or adopt some new format—video is still important, blogs have their place and ebooks (although they're now called guides) are still, debatably, worth gating. :)



Randy Frisch
President and CMO
Uberflip

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Marketers specifically don't need a new trend to chase but they can benefit from tips to be more effective at where they've already made big bets.

The shift needed is a subtle, but highly strategic one. We need to start thinking more about how we engage with content and where we direct people. This concept, which has arisen over the past few years, is content experience. In fact, last year [G2 created a Content Experience category](#) and, as we head into 2020, has unveiled yet another that shows the importance of the concept to strategies like ABM, named the [Account-Based Web and Content Experiences Software category](#).

But what does this mean for you as the CMO, VP, Director or even Manager? It starts with realizing that, although content is *created* by content marketers, ultimately content is *owned* by demand marketers. Whether we maintain our strategy or start anew, we will always tweak the mix of channels we use (email, social, direct mail, paid ads, and others), but every channel will have a destination. When we think more strategically about those destinations, we realize they are almost always a piece of content.

But leading to a piece of content is just the start. Demand marketers must take control and make time to think about what should be surfaced next. This is no different than Spotify playing that next song that hooks us or Netflix starting that next episode in 3, 2, 1... to ground you firmly on the couch. As marketers we need to deliver that next piece to keep our audience engaged in our ability to solve. When we build experiences with this mindset we can reduce the number of touchpoints needed to engage across the journey. This leads to lower cost of acquisition and a more accelerated buyer journey—a win for all!

So if you're among the group sitting in a boardroom planning to be better without starting from scratch, put your focus not on what content to create but on who will own the end-to-end experience. And make it authentic. And personalized.



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It starts with realizing that, although content is *created* by content marketers, ultimately content is *owned* by demand marketers.

Introduction

The Trouble with Trends

Ahh trends. I have a love/hate relationship with the concept. While instinctively most of us are fascinated by the shiny and new, it can be easy to fall into the trend trap.

And while we all aim to keep on top of what's trending in our industry, I think today's marketers are far more strategic than that.

For this year's trends report, we surveyed B2B marketers across North America and asked them an open-ended question, "What are the top three marketing trends you would advise marketers to focus on for 2020 and why?" After reviewing all 330 responses, a common theme emerged—marketers are not overly focused on trends. Instead, they simply want to improve their marketing and generate results.

Things like using data to provide a personalized experience and getting their team aligned with sales to create both an account-based approach and to facilitate revenue, retention, and referrals were what emerged. None of what I read in marketers' responses seemed particularly "trendy." Instead, their answers were thoughtful, practical, and relatable.

Is it (finally) fair to say that we can put the aspirational aside—the "cool stuff" companies with big budgets and bandwidth adopt as quickly as they drop last year's next big thing?

In particular, I think Sarah A. Parker, Content Marketing Manager at Cision put it best, "Focus on refining what you know is actually working for your team/brand, instead of chasing anything just because it's trendy."

I couldn't agree more.

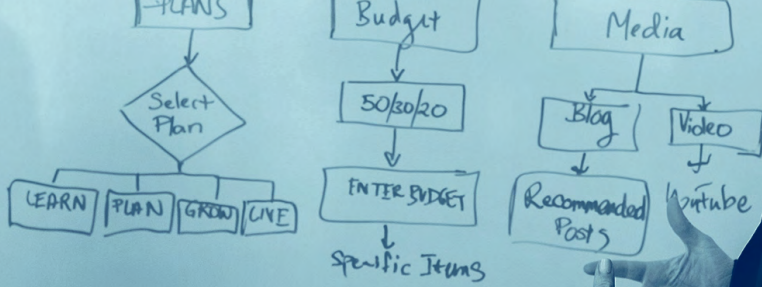


Christine Otsuka
Senior Content Marketing Manager
Uberflip

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Insight-Driven Marketing



This year, marketers will be more data focused than ever and will be using insights and analytics to inform who their customer is, who they should target, what their interests are and whether they're ready for the content or campaigns set to be delivered. No more guesswork. No more shots in the dark.

Marketers are laser focused on using intelligence, insights, predictive analytics and every data set at their disposal to generate results. They're doubling down on what campaigns have worked in the past, using data to optimize, pinpointing problem areas in the funnel, and using all of the information at their disposal to inform what they should do next.

But in order to do any of the above effectively, marketers need to start capturing and consolidating data from across departments such as sales, marketing, and the customer team. That way, all of the data will be under one roof and marketers, as well as the organization, will have a central source of truth that's both accessible and actionable.

The question is whether this data is readily available. With [half of all marketers](#) looking to improve their data capabilities, I'd say it's about time we started making data capture and cleanup a priority.

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“With a new focus on offering personalized experiences at scale, marketers will be adding data quality technology and processes to their workflows. To implement any effective marketing campaign, you have to be sure you are targeting the right audience and have insight into whether that audience even wants to hear from you.”

Kristine Plemmons
Global Demand Generation Manager, Trimble

What You Should Do About It

Pay strict attention to data hygiene, data quality and have a plan in place for maintenance, because you can't do anything else effectively if your data is not in a good place. Take the time to audit your data and clean up both your CRM and your database so you can be confident in both your segmentation and targeting. Clean data is the first step to a personalized experience.

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Get a handle on all your marketing data. Can you actually bring together all your profile and interaction data, map a buyer journey, and, most importantly, get insights to improve? Figure out how to make your data work for you and hire the right people to do it.



John Whiteside
AVP Marketing, HighRadius

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Being Human in Our Approach



No matter if you're in B2B or B2C, we're all simply marketing to humans at the end of the day. And in 2020, marketers want to get back to putting the buyer, the customer, the human at the center of their strategies. Who are they? What do they care about? What do they need? How can you offer them value? What can you do for them? And not the other way around.

If you don't adopt a [human approach](#) and don't actually care about the humans you're marketing to, you're going to waste time, money, and resources. There are simply too many vendors out there who talk about themselves, their product or service, or use gimmicks to garner attention. Modern buyers are far too smart for that. They want an experience that puts their needs first and adapts to their interests, not the company's.

What might that look like? Similar to the experiences and convenience B2C buyers receive when they online shop, all buyers want to be able to research online, at their own pace, easily and without friction. No emails or calls from sales until they're ready. No shouting brand messages. Instead, build trust and connections through putting the human first and connect with buyers and customers on a human level, not based on their job title. Some marketers said they saw engaging experiences, content bingeing and ungating assets as ways to put the buyer first.

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“Today's B2B consumers are more savvy and skeptical than ever. Gimmicky marketing tactics no longer work—it's tough to cut through the noise. To make connections with your audience, you have to be human and prioritize the strength of your connections with your target audience over being the “loudest” or most prolific.”

Megan Eales Monroe
Content Marketing Manager, AppFolio

What You Should Do About It

Put the human at the center of the equation and focus on the experience. Provide content in the formats your buyers want, speak to their pain, consider the user experience and streamline what it takes to get them engaged. If they prefer to manage a longer stretch of the buyer journey, redesign the funnel to reflect that. Be responsive.

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Putting customers at the heart of what we do gives real meaning to our work and drives us to focus on the stuff that truly matters to the people who we depend on for growth.



Rena Tan

Head of Marketing and Communications,
Randstad Singapore, Malaysia and Greater China

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Account-Based Everything

As marketing teams look to contribute more aggressively to generating and influencing pipeline, account-based marketing takes center stage. And it makes sense considering that 87% of B2B marketers say ABM [delivers a higher ROI](#) than other marketing activities. In addition, companies [using ABM generate 200% more revenue](#) for their marketing efforts compared to those that don't. What marketing team in the world isn't looking to drive higher ROI, increase revenue, and promote alignment between sales and marketing departments?

But it's not just buyers that require an account-based approach. Customers are also expecting that same level of targeting. So when we say account-based everything, we mean it. Taking a truly account-based approach should not just be

a sales and marketing effort. In 2020, companies who adopted ABM in the past will be looking to adopt an account-based strategy for their customer teams.

Think this doesn't affect you? Think again. The prevalence of ABM has raised the expectations of buyers and customers to receive an elevated level of personalization and customization from the companies they work with.

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“ABM is becoming B2B marketing. In 2020, brands will need to continue to evolve their ABM tactics or risk being left behind.”

Megan Murray
Director, Demand Generation, Equifax

What You Should Do About It

How you approach this strategy will depend on your organization's ABM maturity. If you haven't started yet, nail segmented marketing first.

Refine your ideal customer or account profile, come up with a list of targeted accounts, get sales, marketing and leadership buy-in and start flipping that funnel. And if you've tested or adopted ABM, work to find ways to increase engagement in your target accounts through personalization. Use the first two "trends"—insights and treating prospects like humans—to drive engagement. Creating trackable, measurable personalized [destinations for your ABM campaigns](#) is one area we've seen success in.

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Account-based marketing isn't coming; it's here. Paying the right kind of attention (meaning spend) to ABM technologies can keep companies competitive in the consideration phase and earlier. After that, you're already too late.



Jordan Castle

Brand and Communications Manager,
Silverline CRM

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Relevant, Timely, Contextual Personalization



Personalization—some marketers hate the term, while others love it. Why is it so divisive? Likely because it means different things to different people. This year's trends survey told us that marketers are over the "first name" or "company name" style of personalization because it lacks a real understanding of the person and their needs. Just because you know a person's name or business doesn't mean there will be a connection with the user. Plus, with so many marketers using surface-level personalization, it'll be harder and harder to stand out amongst competitors.

2020 is the year of relevant, timely, contextual personalization. Survey respondents told us the best way to personalize is by understanding the buyer, addressing their needs, serving them content and offers that align with their interests, and [do it all at the right time](#). A deep understanding of your site visitors, buyers, and customers backed by data will help you achieve this level of personalization.

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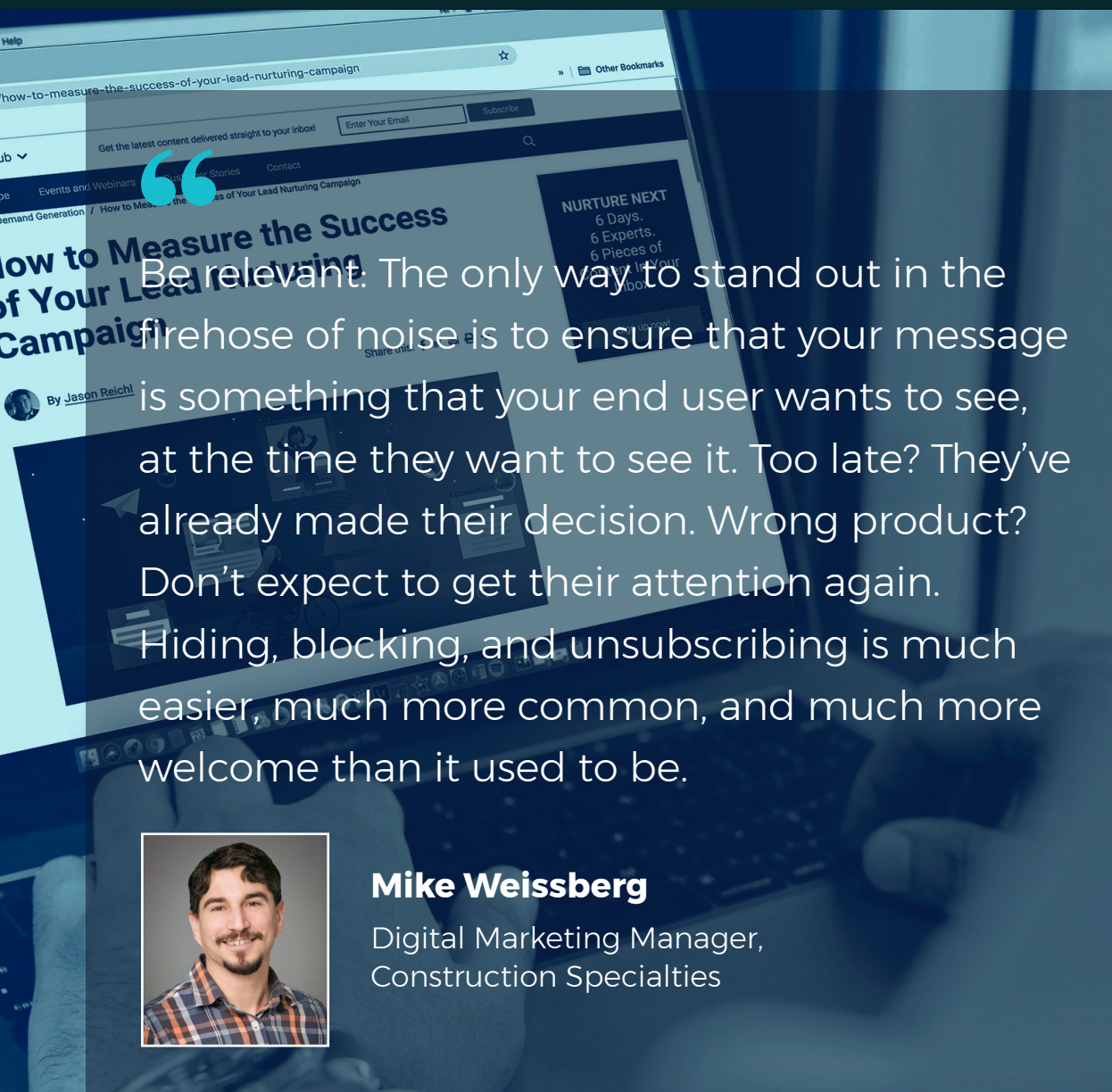


“Use personalization to serve up content that’s relevant to your consumer. It’s not necessarily about knowing their name, it’s about giving them the information they didn’t even realize they needed. Solve their problem for them!”

Shawna Dennis
VP, Marketing & Communications, MD Financial Management

What You Should Do About It

Invest in technology to help you capture data, learn about your customers and personalize the experience for them quickly and at scale. Whether you use AI, predictive analytics, your MAP, an A/B testing tool, a platform like Uberflip, chatbots, or all of the above, you're going to want to leverage technology to empower your team to personalize in the way buyers have come to expect.



“Be relevant. The only way to stand out in the firehose of noise is to ensure that your message is something that your end user wants to see, at the time they want to see it. Too late? They've already made their decision. Wrong product? Don't expect to get their attention again. Hiding, blocking, and unsubscribing is much easier, much more common, and much more welcome than it used to be.



Mike Weissberg

Digital Marketing Manager,
Construction Specialties

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Marketing To and Through the Customer



Your customers are your biggest allies. Not only do they already see the value in your product, but they have the power to generate pipeline and revenue for your business through referrals and advocacy. A happy customer can provide a customer story, testimonial, reference call or written review, speak on your behalf, or tweet about how much they love your company. Word-of-mouth marketing isn't just a happy byproduct of a good relationship with your customers. Marketing through your customers can be a strategic, deliberate practice and one that marketers will be leveraging more and more in 2020.

But the first step to advocacy is maintaining happy customers. Marketers in this year's survey told us they were turning their attention to creating marketing programs specifically for customers—client nurtures, education campaigns, renewal and upsell campaigns, and content specifically for their customer base. Content marketers, then, are taking on a more customer-focused role as the same rigor is beginning to be applied to content throughout the customer lifecycle.

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“Your customers can be your best advocates, and with everyone with an internet connection and a phone having the power to be an influencer or content creator, you want to not only serve your customers but also delight them. That way they'll be inclined to not only talk about your brand positively but also express it online.”

Veronika Baranovska
Inbound Marketing Manager, Sendible

What You Should Do About It

Make customers a priority. If you don't have the ability or approval to shift resources and budget from acquisition to customer marketing, leverage existing budget for acquisition to start a referral program and incentivize happy customers to refer highly-qualified prospects. Dig into the data you have on customers and put time and attention into their experience as both a retention effort and a future-state acquisition or expansion effort.

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From retention to referral programs, making the most of what you already have will be increasingly important in 2020.



Chris Brubaker
SVP, Marketing, Suki

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Truly Uniting Sales and Marketing

In order to build and maintain a well-oiled revenue-driving machine, organizations need [sales and marketing alignment](#). We all know this to be true. But in this year's survey, marketers were shouting this message from the top of their lungs. Forget traffic, leads, even MQLs. The stuff that sales teams historically complained about is out. Today's marketers are much more revenue focused and interested in what's going to convert. So naturally, alignment follows.

What's driving this new or renewed focus on marketing-sourced pipeline and revenue? As companies continually increase their growth targets and marketing's budget comes under

the microscope, executives and boards will be looking at marketing teams to zero in on what works and what's most attributable to the bottom line. If marketing teams want to keep their headcount they'll need to prove their value in clear and certain terms.

But just because it's a no-brainer doesn't mean it's easy or that marketing agrees on the right approach to get that alignment or buy-in.

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“Marketing is failing if sales is failing. Vanity metrics won't save you. It doesn't matter how many followers you have if it doesn't convert into deals. Aligning with sales isn't a nice-to-have, it's imperative.”

Georgina Gottlieb
VP of Marketing, Squelch

What You Should Do About It

First and foremost, change the mindset. It's no longer marketing versus sales or inbound versus

outbound. It's one team working toward one goal. They may exist in different departments but the processes and KPIs should be the same. Start by aligning on your target accounts, getting buy-in on how to help them reach their numbers, report on full-funnel metrics, incentivize your team with marketing-sourced opportunities, align on target accounts, and communicate early and often. Prove that you're on the same team and that you win when they win.

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Marketing teams now own the revenue number more than we ever have before. Sure you can still keep tabs on 'inbound versus outbound' and those types of KPIs, but focus mostly on the 'one number' and 'one team' approach.



Brad Beutler

Director of Marketing, Sigstr

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Scaling Through Partnerships

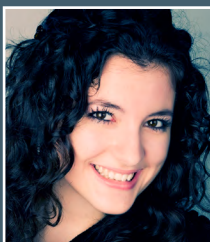
Let's face it, the laundry list of activities, campaigns, and programs today's marketing teams have on their to-do list is endless, in part because our goals are just that big. Unless you have enviable resources or more hours in a day than Beyoncé then you're going to need a little help from your friends.

Big goals become crushable with small teams if you build a solid partner network. Need a scalable way to create premium assets and thought-leadership content? Partner with a company that has a writing staff and similar audience. Want to get an asset or event in front of a wider audience? Leverage another company's distribution network.

Working together on projects that are mutually beneficial or leveraging each other's networks where possible can ensure you're getting more for the effort you put in.

Finally, marketers who answered our survey also pointed to partner networks as a channel to watch for referrals. Working with complementary vendors can leave the door open for your partners' customers to become your customers.

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“Making connections and leveraging each other's networks and expertise will make us all better in the long run.”

Laura Bakopolus Goldstone
Manager of Content Marketing, AdDaptive

What You Should Do About It

If you already have a strong partner ecosystem, find ways to leverage it for content, lead-sharing campaigns, added distribution and event team-ups. Co-producing and promoting a webinar

is an easy way to scale through partnerships. But if your partner system is non-existent or simply untapped, start with simple outreach. Identify partners you'd like to work with based on audience similarities and complementary messaging. Pitch a couple of ways to get involved where the benefit is mutual and see what happens. If you're not sure where to start, identify some strong customers and find out what other products or services they're leveraging. Those vendors or agencies could be a good fit for your partner outreach since you share clientele.

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Working with other like-minded brands and affiliates is the most efficient and quickest way to scale. It allows for creative and out-of-the-box thinking and has added benefits of brand awareness, growth, press, and referrals.



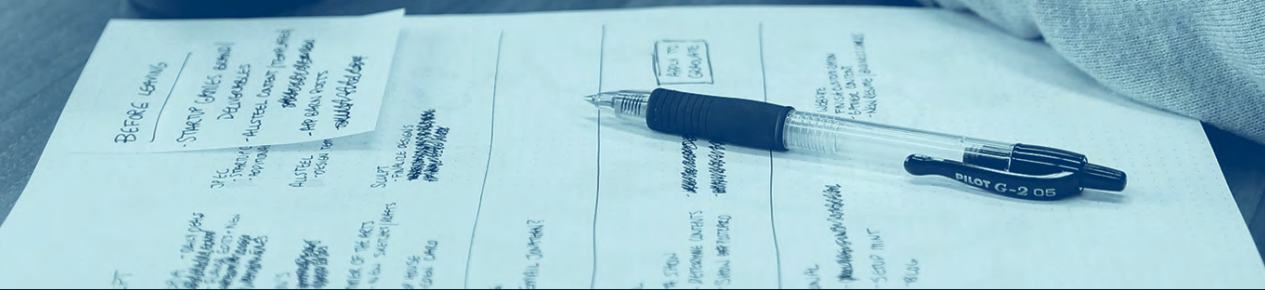
Kate Chippindale

Partnerships Marketing Lead, Wealthsimple

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**Less
(but Effective)
Is More**





We've heard the old adage: Less is more. Quality over quantity. These cliches, while cringeworthy, are at the heart of where today's marketers' heads are at. The constant need to grow has left teams doing more and more and more—whether it's campaigns, content, emails, ads... the list goes on and on.

This year, marketers want to focus on doing less but zeroing in on what's effective (back to that data point!). If you're in demand, that means finding campaigns and programs that move the needle, and having the data to say yes these ones do and no these ones don't. If you're in content, that means focusing on the quality content

that will attract and engage the right audience at the right time. [Thoughtful distribution takes precedence over churning out more content](#) to fill an editorial calendar and content activation becomes the key to ensuring what's being created actually gets used. And if you're in a strategic role, well, this should already be clear. Focusing on what works over what doesn't is common sense but sometimes it takes a well-placed reminder to remember that.

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“Content shock is real. Creating more content isn't going to get more attention. To get noticed, try toning it down, creating less, and being more strategic about where and how you distribute your content.”

Kathryn Aragon
Head of Content, Sales Hacker

What You Should Do About It

If you're going to focus on the effective, you're going to need to dig into the data to know what's working and what's not. Data can win just about

any argument with colleagues, higher ups or yourself, so start there. Assess needs, figure out where to invest energy and resources, and start getting buy-in. Need more late-stage content? Get after it. Ran a successful webinar? Repurpose it. But this doesn't just hold true for content. If there were campaigns that worked last year, optimize them and turn them into programs this year. Whatever your focus, remember that doing more for the sake of doing more accomplishes nothing but more work.

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Marketers are producing more content than ever, but it's not always delivering optimal ROI. We need to focus on how to redistribute, refresh, and repurpose great content to see more value from our investment.



Hayden Jackson

Director of Content Strategy, DemandLab

Where Do We Go From Here?

Today's marketers have a lot on their minds. They're looking at every channel, every avenue, every revenue stream available to them to help their companies meet their goals. But despite all the bright and shiny and new, very few "trends" really entered their headspace. What rang true for marketers this year was the practical and pragmatic—perhaps out of necessity or pure survival or maybe they're just in search of meaningful contribution. Any way you slice it, marketers are focused and aligned on what matters to the business.

The fluff, the high-gloss exterior, the vanity metrics have been checked at the door. What marketers are focused on in 2020 is driving results and having the data to execute and optimize the strategies they know will work.



Data-driven marketing. Personalization. An account-based approach. Repurposing content to build experiences.

See how Uberflip's content experience platform can help you implement these strategies in 2020.

[Learn more](#)

