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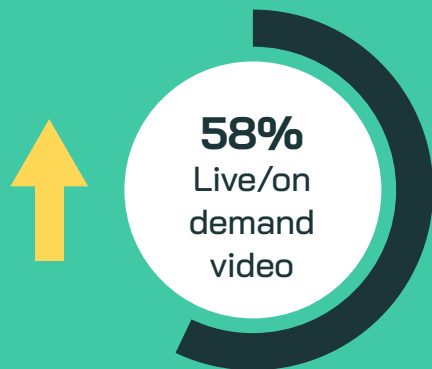
A brief guide to...

Research for content



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The changing face of content marketing



Increasing content consumption in 2020



Content marketing isn't new. According to the Content Marketing Institute the concept has been around for hundreds of years with some examples dating back as far as 1672.

Over the last 20 years in particular, its popularity has grown exponentially, and it now plays an important role in disseminating information and building the relationships between organisations and their customers. In research we conducted in 2020, many ITDMs reported that their consumption of digital content had increased since the start of that year. Most notably, over half had increased consumption on live/on demand video (58%) and webinars/conferences (56%).

But as demand for this content grows, organisations face the constant battle of differentiating their content from that of their competitors. The question remains: how can you generate content that is valuable, relevant and impactful to your audience? The answer... market research.

Market research to the rescue?

Well-designed market research provides qualitative and quantitative data and insights into industry issues, trends, opportunities, and priorities as well as other metrics relating to topics of interest to your target audience.

If executed well, a market research survey can provide data points that can be used to create many different stories and forms of content, from infographics through to whitepapers and statistical models. These can feed into multiple marketing campaigns and can be distributed via both online and offline channels depending on the need.



The principles for creating credible research

There are a number of principals to consider when creating an effective market research project. Most importantly, it is necessary to have clarity on:

- » Your research objectives
- » Who to interview when conducting the research
- » How to design an effective quantitative research questionnaire or qualitative research discussion guide
- » The best way in which to deploy your research in order to engage with your target market

By paying attention to these principals, you stand the best chance of achieving success with your content marketing strategy. Credible market research should strengthen the perspective of your brand in the market. Discredited market research will have the opposite effect.



Clarifying your research objectives

It is a fundamental principal that your content research should be based on clear objectives derived from the marketing campaign it will support. This may sound obvious, but when content marketing is deployed across multiple territories, industry sectors or markets then the number of stakeholders involved in the process can result in a confusion of topics. Clarity of purpose will ensure that the research outcomes are substantive and therefore compelling to the intended audience.

Having a clear understanding of the topics that are central to the campaign, an understanding of the audience that the campaign is targeted at and of the engagement strategy and communications channels for the campaign will ensure that all of the key aspects of research – the survey questionnaire or discussion guide, the profile of the respondents or interviewees, the analysis, and the deliverables – are all designed to achieve an optimal outcome.

Who to interview?

Interviewee profile



It's always worthwhile spending some time thinking about the type of interviewee that would deliver the insights that have biggest impact on your campaign messages. The person being interviewed should, of course, have knowledge of the topic but (and perhaps more crucially) also be of interest to the target reader.

For example, you may wish to execute some research on distributed working for a campaign targeted at an audience of Chief Information Security Officers (CISOs). The default is usually to interview other CISOs or IT security professionals as the target audience is often very interested in the views and experiences of their peers. However, other perspectives – those of employees or senior executives, for example – can often add real value and insight to the research and so interviews with these groups might also be considered.

Similar considerations should be made when selecting the industry sector that interviewees operate in or other factors relating to their profile.

A clear understanding of what's important and relevant to your research objectives is key to determining which interviewees will provide the most impact.

Who to interview?

Geography



If your campaign is restricted to a single market, then determining the geography in which interviewees should be located is a fairly straightforward process. However, if you are running a global campaign or one that covers a wide region, then undertaking research in each and every market is often impractical as well as expensive. Under these circumstances, there are a number of factors that should be considered when determining the specific markets from which to glean insights. These include:

Which are the
major markets in
the region?

Which are the
growth markets?

Are there markets
which might
be considered
broadly
representative
of a basket of
smaller markets?

Which are your
target markets?

When selecting markets in this way it is important to be considered when extrapolating the research findings more widely – either regionally or globally.

Who to interview?

How many people to interview?



For quantitative research generally, the goal is to achieve a respondent sample (the group of people completing the survey questionnaire) that is representative of your target market and to interview a sufficient number of people to ensure that the research results are robust and credible.

In B2B market research, market profiles are usually unknown and so it is impossible to determine exactly what a representative sample would look like. An effective approach is to use a combination of Random Probability Sampling (individuals randomly selected within your target industry or sector) with some pragmatic quota sampling to ensure that there is no untoward bias in your respondent sample but that there is also sufficient data in particular groups of interest to support robust analysis within those groups.

At Vanson Bourne we use both a top-down and bottom-up approach when determining optimal sample sizes for the research we undertake. Working bottom-up, we apply a minimum respondent sample size to our quota groups and working top-down, we reflect the information we can gather on the size of the target market(s) and reflect (mass market vs. niche market, for example).

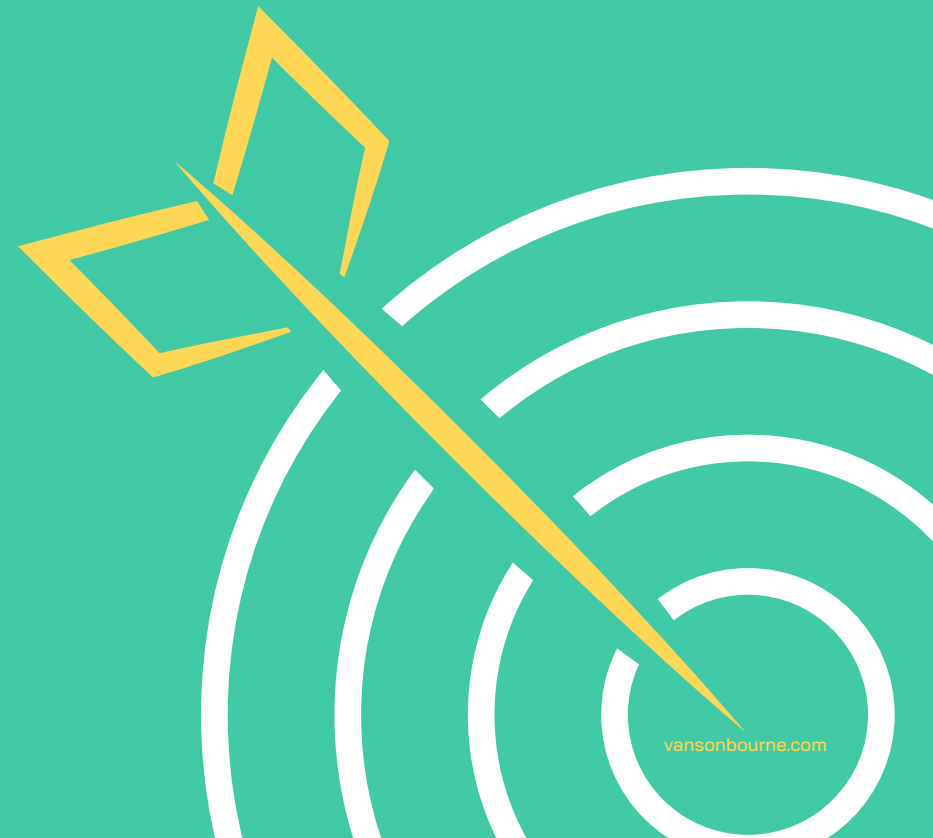
Ultimately, your brand is attached to the content research that you publish so it is important that the research has credibility and is underpinned by a robust respondent sample.

Designing an effective questionnaire

When designing the quantitative questionnaire for your research for content study, there are some core principles that apply. Once written, it is best practice to test questions with a small number of your target audience and ask for feedback. This allows you to see how well the questions are being received and if any tweaks are needed in order to ensure that it is properly addressing your desired headlines and wider campaign objectives.

Core principles for content-driven questionnaire design

- » **Build the questionnaire around the news-worthy facts that support your campaign objectives**
- » **Challenge those objectives when necessary. Questionnaire design should be agile and adapt as ideas emerge**
- » **Include context that feeds into the overall story, ensuring that the narrative you create is as strong as it can be**
- » **Design the survey to be engaging for the respondent; pay attention to the flow of the survey and introduce topic changes sensitively**
- » **Use language which is appropriate to the target audience**



Producing engaging content

From whitepapers to webinars, from infographics to videos and interactive microsites, there are any number of assets that can be produced for your content marketing campaign. Each one plays a different role in enabling you to engage with your target market in a way that is accessible to them and that allows you to achieve the objectives that you have for your brand.

Producing engaging content



Visual deliverables

The research is going to generate a lot of hard-hitting stats. If you are looking to showcase key stats in a visual way (on social media for example) the use of animated videos, tiles and infographics are great content for you to explore. They can capture the attention of your target audience and direct them to other collateral where they can find out more.



Longer written content

At the centre of any research project sits the 'hero asset'. More often than not, this takes the form of a longer piece of written content. This might be an executive summary, a topic-led report, or a whitepaper/eBook. These written assets are great for delving into a topic, theme, or specific data split. When gated, they are an excellent way of generating leads for your sales team.



Enhancing your analysis

The use of statistical modelling is yet another way in which you can utilise the data gathered to further drive interest to your content. A great example of this is maturity modelling.

This type of model allows for prospective customers to benchmark themselves against the data gathered during the fieldwork. The results can be used as a direct sales tool, as part of a scoping conversation between your sales representative and your prospect client, providing yet another way to engage with your audience.

Planning your next research for content project

By taking these principles into account, the research you design and commission will be well thought out, hit the required objectives, and deliver ROI for your business.

Of course, it goes without saying that undertaking a research for content project can be a big investment for organisations so getting it right the first time is key.

Working with a research agency to support and deliver a project can be seen as a prerequisite for most organisations. If this is the route you choose, view them as an extension of your marketing function. They will have extensive knowledge which you should take full advantage of and by immersing them into your wider organisation's objectives, they can map this knowledge to your needs.

Investing the time at the start of the project will pay off during the design and content creation phases.

Want to know more? Get in touch with us to discuss how we can help you create content that captivates:

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vansonbourne.com