


WEBINARS:

THEY'RE NOT JUST FOR LEADS ANYMORE

CONTENT MARKETING INSTITUTE research shows that marketers are finding new ways to use webinars to drive customer engagement at numerous phases of the buyer's journey.

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Adobe Connect is proud to sponsor the study and the resulting report, “Webinars: They’re Not Just for Leads Anymore”, in partnership with the Content Marketing Institute (CMI). When CMI’s B2B Content Marketing 2014: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America research report was released, it showed that webinars were ranked the third most effective content marketing tactic (tied with videos) and that 62% of marketers were using webinars (up from 59% in 2013). The following study was commissioned to 1) dig into why webinars are not used more often if they are so effective, and 2) how exactly marketers are successfully using webinars. The results of the study are enlightening and will hopefully give content marketers guidance on where to fit webinars into the marketing mix as well as how best to take advantage of this very effective tactic.

The process of engaging consumers has changed. It's almost a cliché at this point, but content—and how brands use it to interact with buyers at all stages of their engagement journey—is fundamentally reshaping every business' go-to-market strategy.

According to Sirius Decisions, business buyers now go through 67% of their buying process by consuming content online.¹ Forrester Research finds that buyers may be anywhere from “two-thirds to 90% of the way through their journey before they ever reach out to the vendor.”² Clearly the importance of content that engages, enriches, and creates value for these buyers before they become leads has never been more apparent.

We know this, right? This is one of the reasons why content marketing has become such an important approach into the broader practice of business communications. However, one of the biggest challenges is that while many of the channels by which this content is delivered are new, just as many are mature and have “tried and true” purposes. For many businesses, the website is still a direct marketing brochure, print is still only something that delivers promotions, television is still only for 30-second ads, and email is for newsletters. In a way similar to how early television shows were simply filmed radio programs, many content marketing tactics are simply “classic” marketing techniques within a new format.

Eight out of 10 marketers are using content to drive greater awareness to their approach to solving customers' needs and wants.

The percentage of how much a buyer's journey will be fulfilled through consumption of online content will vary across whatever is being considered for purchase. Given specific industries, the complexity of the product, or intricacy of the service, the buyer's process will be more or less influenced by content. In other words, it's highly unlikely that the purchaser of microprocessors—or someone looking for a banker to handle an extremely complex financial transaction—is going through two-thirds of his or her buying cycle by searching for and engaging with content online.

However, while content may not provide an important role in “greasing the funnel” for some products and services, it may play an extremely important role in higher-level engagement of the *influencers* of that purchase. Or, it may play an important role in educating the purchasers that a new approach or solution even exists.

This thought is supported by Content Marketing Institute (CMI) research. For the last four years, “brand awareness” has been consistently cited as a top goal for content marketers. Eight out of 10 marketers (both B2B and B2C) are primarily using content marketing to drive greater awareness to their approach to solving customers' needs and wants.³

WHAT ABOUT CONTENT DELIVERED THROUGH WEBINARS?

Webinars have been a method of online communication, literally, since the beginning of the Web. From a marketing and sales perspective, they have long been one of the more popular ways to deliver mid-funnel-focused content to prospective buyers. Traditionally, they've been used to present sales/product demonstrations, training, and online education illustrating thought leadership around particular topics. From a content marketing perspective, webinars have been a fairly popular tactic. CMI's broader research shows that while marketers have consistently rated webinars among the top 12 most frequently used tactics, they rate them among the top five most effective. Why the gap between usage and effectiveness? How are the most successful marketers using webinars as part of their content marketing strategy? Are webinars producing a good return on investment? To what degree are marketers experimenting with broader uses for webinars (e.g., to create engagement and brand awareness), and are those approaches effective? These are the questions we began asking ourselves prior to conducting this study.

Certainly, there is anecdotal evidence that the answers to most of these questions are positive. For example, consulting firm McKinsey asked its client base about the B2B sales process and found that:

*“Customers are becoming much more comfortable getting the information they need from sales resources through Web conferences. While customers haven't changed their criteria for making purchases, they have become more relaxed about and adept at basing their decisions on a mix of interaction types.”*⁴

Businesses that engage with audiences in the earliest stages of the buying process win three-quarters of the time.

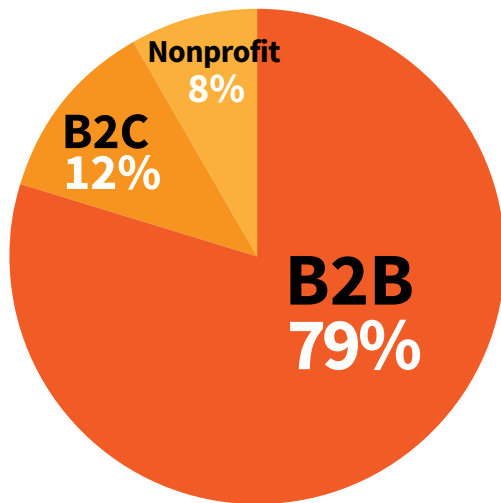
There is no doubt that early engagement and awareness are incredibly important parts of the engagement cycle. Forrester Research found that businesses that engage with audiences in the earliest stages of the buying process win three-quarters of the time versus only a quarter of those that win when engaging late in the process.⁵

Ultimately, CMI's hypothesis going into this study was that webinars can be effective tools for engaging audiences across multiple stages of the buying cycle. This research study sought to test that hypothesis.

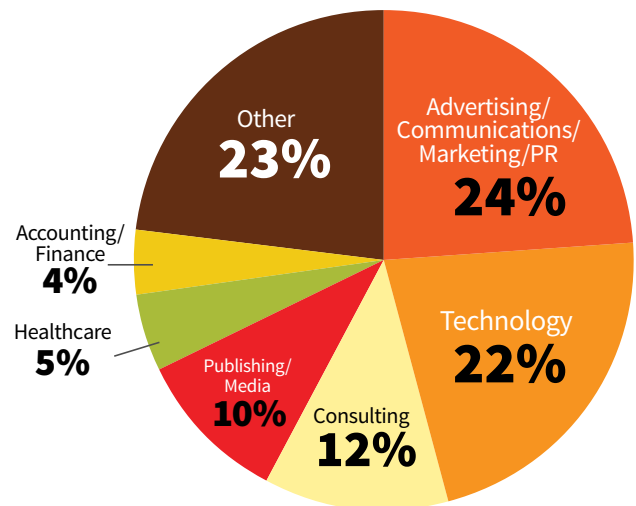
METHODOLOGY

To better understand how marketers are using webinars, we electronically surveyed a random sample of marketers from CMI's broader audience. Of the 227 respondents, 53% said they use webinars as a content marketing tactic and 47% said they do not. Nearly all respondents were from North America.

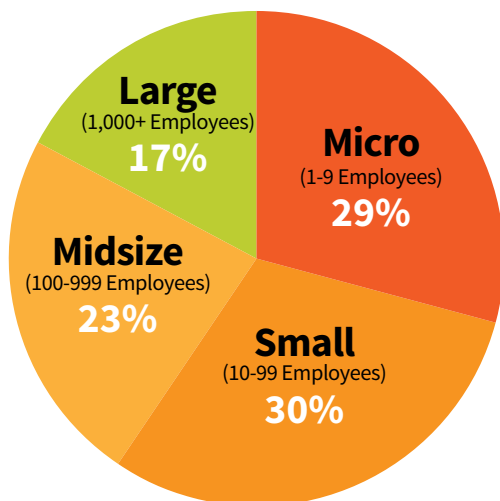
Nature of Organization



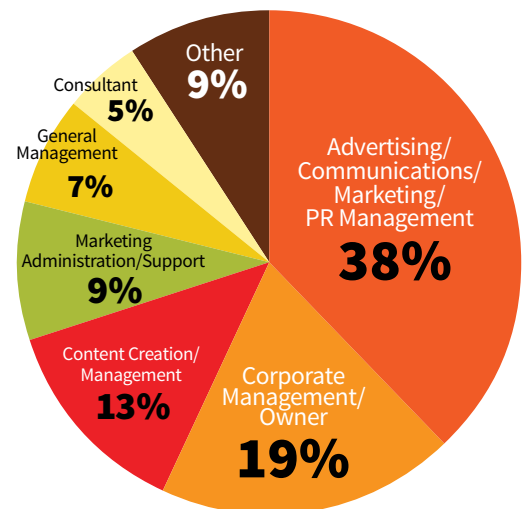
Industry Classification



Size of Organization



Title/Job Function



The survey was conducted throughout February 2014. Summary findings of this report were shared with content marketing thought leaders to get their insights and best practices on actionable items from the data.

FINDINGS

The Evolution of Webinars

Overall, the survey results pointed to a very clear trend: **Content marketers who are finding success with webinars are broadening the scope of how they use them and are applying them across the full spectrum of the buyer's journey.**

From an anecdotal perspective, these marketers are experimenting with different types of programming within the webinar format—from classic screen-sharing, to video, animation, and live in-studio webcasts. One respondent even said, *“We’re exploring the idea of the ‘flipped webinar’ concept, in which presentations are viewed in advance, and the interactive session is solely devoted to Q&A.”*

Speaking to the maturity of this platform for content delivery, 22% of the survey respondents who aren't currently using webinars have used them in the past. Many of these respondents did not stop using webinars because they were unsuccessful, but because their company reallocated budget (50%) or they lacked sufficient staff (42%).

When we took all this data, along with the answers to the survey's open-ended questions and the insights gleaned from content marketing thought leaders, we came away with a distinct feeling of *new and missed opportunities*. This can be summed up in five key takeaways:

- **Marketers who are not using webinars due to other priorities may be missing an opportunity** to broaden their use of webinars and extract even greater value than they may have achieved when using webinars for just one purpose (e.g., training).
- **Marketers who take the time to integrate webinars and document them into a cohesive content marketing strategy are realizing new opportunities** for engagement, brand awareness, and thought leadership; having a documented content strategy in place increases the chances for success.
- **Developing strategies around higher-funnel opportunities such as audience development, thought leadership, and relationship building** can reinvigorate or strengthen a webinar program.
- **Marketers who are broadening the scope of their webinars are finding more opportunity for ROI and cost-effectiveness from this approach.** Webinars are most cost-effective when integrated across the customer's buying journey.

- Generating content and audience development are the biggest challenges for marketers using webinars. However, **those with strong, integrated content marketing strategies are less challenged with attracting audiences, which gives them more time to develop quality content.**

The opportunity to derive great value out of a (now) classic, mature, and well-worn media channel is here. Webinar tools have evolved, and so too must the content marketer's use of them.

1. It's a Failure to Launch—Not a Failure to Land

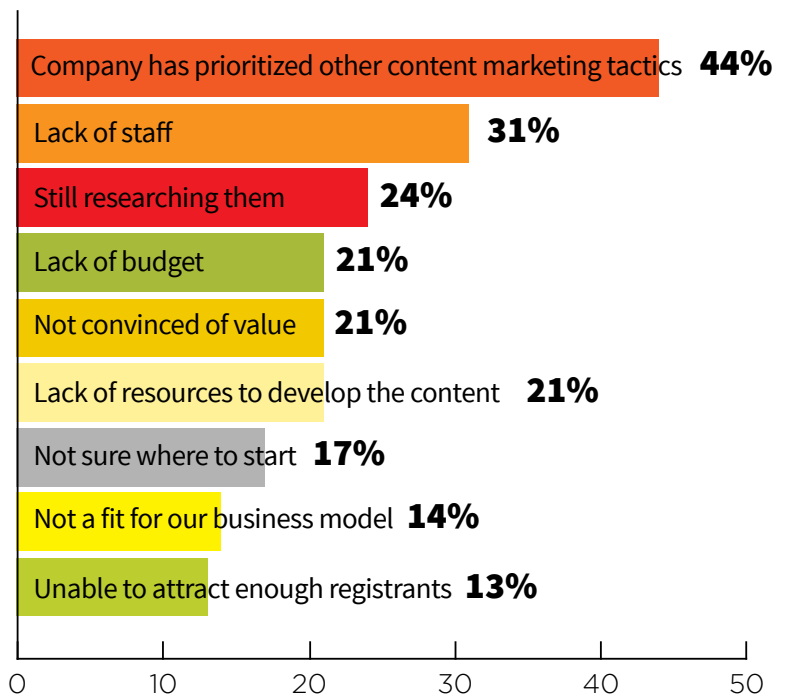
Failure to meet goals is not the reason why webinars aren't used.

As mentioned in the introduction, we not only examined webinar users, but also looked at those who had used them in the past as well as those who had never used them.

Of the non-users, 78% had never tried webinars. Fourteen percent said they had tried webinars, had success, but then stopped for reasons such as budget, lack of staff, etc. The remaining 8% had tried webinars but stopped because they didn't achieve success.

Interestingly, of the non-users who had tried webinars in the past, the vast majority (75%) used them for classic webinar purposes such as online training and education versus high-level content marketing activities (brand awareness or thought leadership).

Reasons Why Marketers Don't Use Webinars



This suggests that if there were evidence to show that webinars could be successfully applied to other aspects of the marketing funnel (and as we'll see, there seems to be), webinars could be more broadly applied across a content marketing effort.

Ironically, the biggest reason why non-users don't currently use webinars is that budgets have been "reprioritized" (44%) and "lack of staff" (31%). This suggests that if businesses could broaden the scope for how webinars are used within their organizations, the ROI could result in more budget for webinars and an investment in more training or staff to manage the effort.

Actionable Takeaway

"We shouldn't be looking at a delivery mechanism as a content type. Just because webinars are great at delivering demonstrations and trainings, it doesn't mean that's all they should be used for. We'll get the greatest value out of our tools if we figure out how to continually focus on building a more engaged audience."—Joe Pulizzi, founder of Content Marketing Institute and author of *Epic Content Marketing*

If you want to reinvigorate a webinar program, formulate some higher-level engagement goals. If you use webinars in more ways, you may be able to extract more value from them and make them a higher priority. A more holistic strategy can help justify costs and investment in training, and increase the chances for success.

2. Align Your Webinar Goals With the Bigger Picture

Most webinar users do not have a documented strategy; however, those who do are more successful.

According to the CMI/MarketingProfs report, *B2B Content Marketing: 2014 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America*, 66% of the most effective content marketers have a documented strategy to back it up. Additionally, these marketers use more tactics than their less effective counterparts, and they are far less challenged with producing engaging content.⁶

“Webinars are a means to an end, not an end unto themselves.”

—Jay Baer

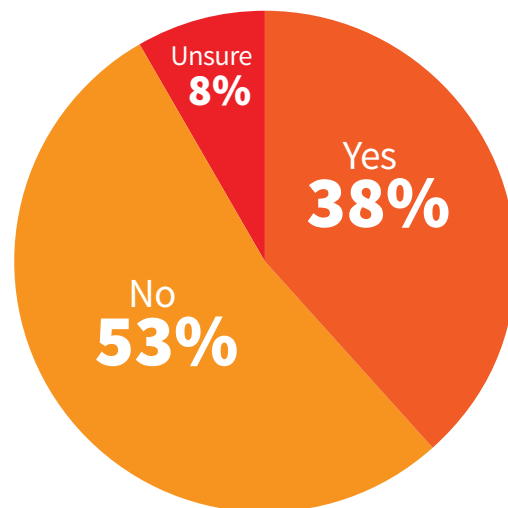
Among webinar users in this study, only 38% have a documented strategy. Of those who have a documented strategy, 71% find webinars effective versus 42% of those who do not have a documented strategy.

Actionable Takeaway

*“The challenge with most webinar programs is that marketers treat them as a magic bullet, when they’re really a means to an end, not an end unto themselves.”—Jay Baer, content marketing thought leader and author of *Youtility: Why Smart Marketing Is About Help Not Hype**

Taking the time to document a strategy for your webinar program greatly increases your chances for success. This is especially true if you haven’t tried webinars yet, or if you’ve tried them in the past with limited success. As you review and/or reinvigorate a webinar program, the key recommendation is to align your goals for webinars into the larger content marketing picture, and not look at webinars as the end (and only) handoff point to a sales process.

Percentage of Marketers Who Have a Documented Strategy for Webinars



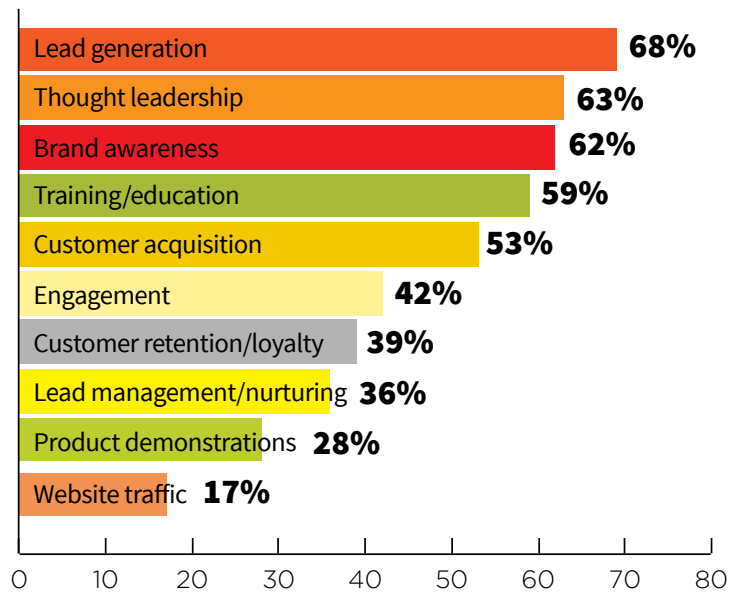
3. Look Down for Grounding, and Up for New Opportunity

Webinars prove their worth with classic applications, and new opportunities are available at the highest ends of the sales funnel.

Prior studies have shown that webinars can be an effective way to engage customers for demonstrations, training, and other deeper-funnel activities. This study was no exception. Almost half of the marketers surveyed said they will host more, or significantly more, webinars over the next year. Only 10% said webinars were ineffective for their needs.

One of the most interesting findings of this study was how many marketers are finding value in webinars and where, specifically, they find that value. Classic goals such as lead generation and training/education are still important objectives. However, an impressive number of marketers cite higher-funnel content marketing-focused goals as well (e.g., thought leadership and brand awareness), and give those attributes high marks in terms of effectiveness. In fact, 85% of marketers strongly agree that webinars help build thought leadership. Seventy-eight percent say webinars create brand awareness and are useful for relationship building.

Marketers' Goals for Webinars



Actionable Takeaway

“Webinars can be a great way to explain valuable concepts your buyers care about throughout the entire buying process. With audio, visual, and (hopefully) not too much text, they can help your customers become more engaged and spend more time with your company’s ideas every step of the way.”—Ardath Albee, B2B marketing thought leader and author of eMarketing Strategies for the Complex Sale

To use webinars more effectively, take a broader approach; look beyond “lead generation” at ways you can apply webinars more holistically. Thought leadership, brand awareness, and audience engagement are equally valuable objectives.

4. Broaden Your Vision to Increase Your Return

Webinars are most cost-effective when integrated more broadly across the customer's buying journey.

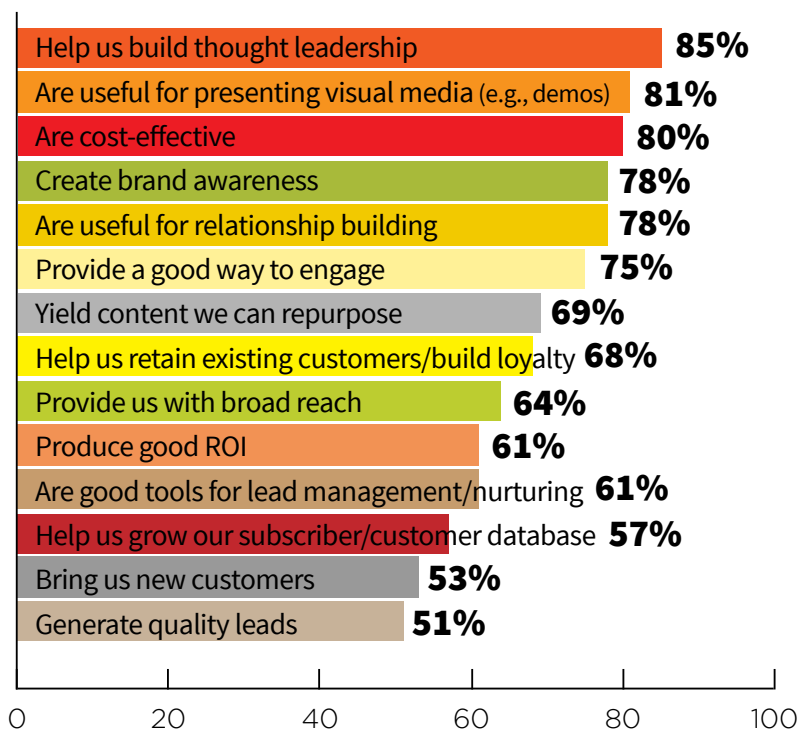
One of the biggest realities that many businesses must face, especially in today's noisy, fragmented media environment, is that building high-level awareness can be an expensive proposition. Sure, a particular tactic might be extraordinarily effective at reaching specific engagement goals—but is it cost-effective given everything else the marketer is doing?

That was a question we wanted to examine more closely. Are marketers who are using webinars finding them cost-effective when analyzing them against the actual goals they have set?

Generally speaking, webinar users are getting a good bang for their buck; 80% say they are “cost-effective” and 61% say they produce a “good return on investment.”

Most webinar users are spending less than 10% of their total marketing budget (not including staff) on webinars. Interestingly, there appears to be very little difference in budget spend between those who find webinars very effective versus those who do not, suggesting that no cost challenges exist here. The challenge seems to be how to execute webinars more effectively in order to extract even more value from them so that they become a priority for the business.

How Marketers Rate Webinar Effectiveness



Percentages shown here are marketers who rated +1 or +2 on a 5-point scale where +2 = Strongly Agree and -2 = Strongly Disagree

When we dug deeper into the cost-effectiveness versus goals question, we found further support for broadening the scope of webinars. The highest level of agreement between cost-effectiveness and reaching goals was at the highest level of the funnel—where “thought leadership,” “brand awareness,” “building relationships,” and “engaging with an audience” received higher agreement than “lead management/nurturing” and “lead generation.”

**“Webinars are great top-of-funnel magnets. They can be a friendly way for people to meet your brand ... they reveal brilliance, or expose shallowness.”
—Doug Kessler**

Actionable Takeaway

“Webinars are great top-of-funnel magnets. They can be a friendly way for people to meet your brand. They’re also a microcosm of your content strategy more holistically. They reveal brilliance, or expose shallowness.”—Doug Kessler, founder and creative director of Velocity Partners, a leading B2B content marketing agency

In addition to generating leads for sales, webinars can be an affordable and efficient way to drive engagement and thought leadership. The key is to align webinars with your content marketing approach so that webinars are used less often to sell—and more often to educate and engage.

5. Develop Great Content and Watch the Audience Arrive

Audience and content development are the biggest webinar challenges that marketers face.

Of course, the biggest opportunity with webinars—broadening the scope—aligns with the biggest challenges of developing successful webinars. As Joe Pulizzi and I discuss in our book *Managing Content Marketing*, one of the easiest things to forget as content marketers is that we have to “market the marketing.”

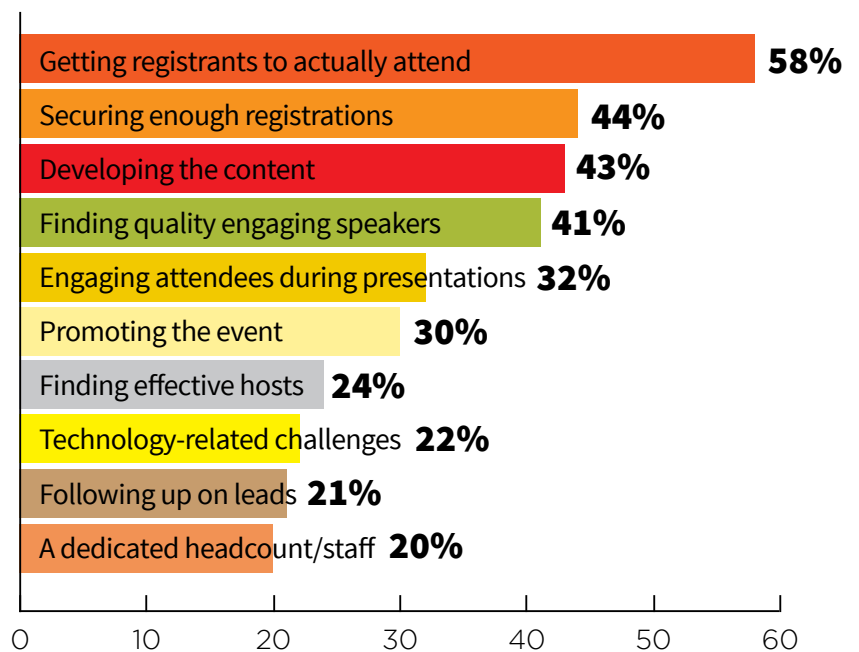
So, perhaps it comes as no surprise that 58% of marketers who produce webinars cite “getting enough registrants to attend” as a challenge. Another 44% say they are challenged with “securing enough registrations.” Other big challenges are “developing the content” (43%) and “finding quality engaging speakers” (41%).

When asked to name the single biggest challenge to a successful webinar effort, marketers said it was a tie between “developing the content” and “securing enough registrations.”

Of course, this is the classic dilemma across all content marketing. In fact, the two biggest content marketing challenges cited in CMI/MarketingProfs research over the last four years have been “producing enough content” and “producing engaging content.”

To put it simply: *Marketers struggle with developing great content and building an audience to consume it.*

Challenges for Webinar Users



Biggest Challenge for Webinar Users

	Most Effective	Least Effective
Developing the content	23%	8%
Securing enough registrations	11%	50%
Getting registrants to actually attend	16%	17%

- “Most Effective” = Respondents who rated webinars as 4 or 5 in terms of effectiveness (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being “Very Effective”)
- “Least Effective” = Respondents who rated webinars as 1 or 2 in terms of effectiveness (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “Not At All Effective”)

But in a really interesting twist, when we compared marketers based on how they rate webinars in terms of effectiveness, we discovered something fascinating: Fifty percent of those who say webinars are less effective say “securing enough registrations” is their biggest challenge, versus only 11% of those who rate webinars highly. This suggests that marketers who are successful with webinars have less difficulty attracting an audience, thus giving them more time to develop quality content.

Actionable Takeaway

*“Looking across the customer lifecycle from awareness to purchase to retention and advocacy, webinars provide a content experience that closes the gap between prospect and customer, customer and advocate like few other content marketing tactics.”—Lee Odden, CEO of TopRank Online Marketing and author of *Optimize: How to Attract and Engage More Customers by Integrating SEO, Social Media, and Content Marketing**

Successful content development starts with creating a strong editorial mission and identifying how content can be used across many different channels. Instead of looking at webinars as an end point, view them as another channel where content can be repurposed across different phases of the consumer’s engagement journey. When you have a documented strategy in place outlining how you will distribute content across all channels (including webinars), your effectiveness increases and audience development becomes less of a challenge, which gives you more time to focus on content creation.

CONCLUSION

Show, Don't Tell

As Joe Pulizzi has said many times, “We are in the early innings of content marketing.” Whether today’s marketers look at their strategy and say “we have some catching up to do,” or they feel like early adopters, the underlying theme in both scenarios is change.

Today’s buyers expect more from the companies they look to do business with. They want their experiences to be more personalized and more relevant to their real-time needs—and they want their purchases to be better than what they had before.

In response, marketers have to examine and re-examine tools, platforms, and new ways to interact with their audiences more rapidly than ever before. It will be crucial to leverage platforms (whether old or new) across all phases of the buyer’s journey. Marketers who continue to operate in a campaign-focused, command-and-control “messaging” hierarchy will, no doubt, risk alienating buyers, influencers, and other audiences they are trying to attract.

Webinars present myriad opportunities for marketers to change and interact in experimental ways. You just have to think beyond the traditional uses (simple screen sharing and demo-types of interaction) and find new ways to use webinars to build and engage audiences to ultimately drive marketing success.

There is a maxim in creating content for audiences that says “show, don’t tell.” It’s perhaps summed up best with a quote from writer Anton Chekhov who said, “Don’t tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.” As marketers, webinars are one of the most forward-leaning ways that we can show our audiences, rather than tell them, what we stand for, the story that we want to illustrate, and the differentiating value that we bring.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND BEST PRACTICES

The Content Marketer’s Guide to Webinars ebook: www.adobe.com/go/webinarbestpractices

The Essentials of a Documented Content Marketing Strategy: 36 Questions to Answer ebook:
<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/the-essentials-of-a-documented-content-marketing-strategy-36-questions-to-answer/>

Webinar best practices blog: www.adobe.com/go/webinarblog

About Content Marketing Institute

The [Content Marketing Institute \(CMI\)](#) is the leading global content marketing education and training organization. CMI teaches enterprise brands how to attract and retain customers through compelling, multi-channel storytelling. CMI's [Content Marketing World](#), the largest content marketing-focused event, is held every September, and Content Marketing World Sydney, every March. CMI also produces the quarterly magazine [Chief Content Officer](#), and provides strategic consulting and content marketing research for some of the best-known brands in the world. CMI is a 2012 and 2013 Inc. 500 company. View all original CMI research at www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/research.

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- Easy access from virtually any device