

The Impact of Content Effectiveness on Sales & Marketing

August 2015

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INTRODUCTION

Content is a nexus between the sales and marketing functions in most organizations. The traditional content model calls for marketing to produce content assets and sales to use them. Having this model work well requires a great deal of intentionality on the part of both functions: **marketing must endeavor to understand customer content needs and how well the assets they produce engages those customers.** Then, the sales team must diligently provide feedback to marketing so that content quality and effectiveness rises.

While this model is conceptually simple, there are challenges related to alignment that impact content effectiveness in the form of visibility, communications, feedback, process, tools and even culture. The statistics tell the story: **when the level of sales/marketing alignment is high, 81% of study participants report that marketing content meets sales' needs well. However, when alignment is poor or non-existent, the content effectiveness percentage drops to 35%.**

Quality content that is easy for sales to find and use is a critical success factor in sales interactions. The dynamics of the content process are not difficult to understand, but the content creation, deployment, usage and feedback loop is often a point of friction between sales and marketing. This friction is not one-sided; marketing is frustrated when it has limited feedback and visibility into the use of content assets. The sales team gets frustrated when content assets don't meet customers' need, or those assets are hard to find and use. This frustration is more than just an inconvenience: **70% of sales teams acknowledge that the lack of effective content negatively impacts the outcome of a sales conversation.**

Since content is so often the key to successful sales interactions, it merits constant attention and improvement efforts. Demand Metric and Showpad together conducted research to understand the sales-marketing relationship around content, and how it affects sales interactions. This research shares key insights, such as when marketing has little or no visibility into sales conversations, **only 32% of the content produced meets the needs of sales team well.** This research will help organizations understand how to get better results from their marketing content.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The data for this content impact and effectiveness study was collected through an online survey whose participants came largely from B-to-B organizations across a range of industries. Almost equal numbers of respondents came from sales and marketing roles. Over three-fourths of respondents reported revenue growth in the most recently completed fiscal year. These organizations range in size from less to \$10 million to over \$1 billion.

The analysis of this study's data provides these key findings:

- **51% of sales organizations studied feel that their feedback is not utilized well by the marketing team** to optimize content creation.
- Marketing teams that get regular or constant feedback from sales on content usefulness experience **a 31% increase in content usage** compared to marketing teams that never or rarely get feedback.
- When marketing and sales organizations are **highly aligned**, marketing created content **meets sales' needs 81% of the time**, in sharp contrast to **poorly aligned organizations**, where content meets needs **just 35% of the time**.
- High alignment also creates a better environment for feedback sharing and usage. **When alignment is high, marketing uses the content quality feedback it gets from sales well or very well 63% of the time**, compared to just **4% of the time when alignment is poor or non-existent**.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

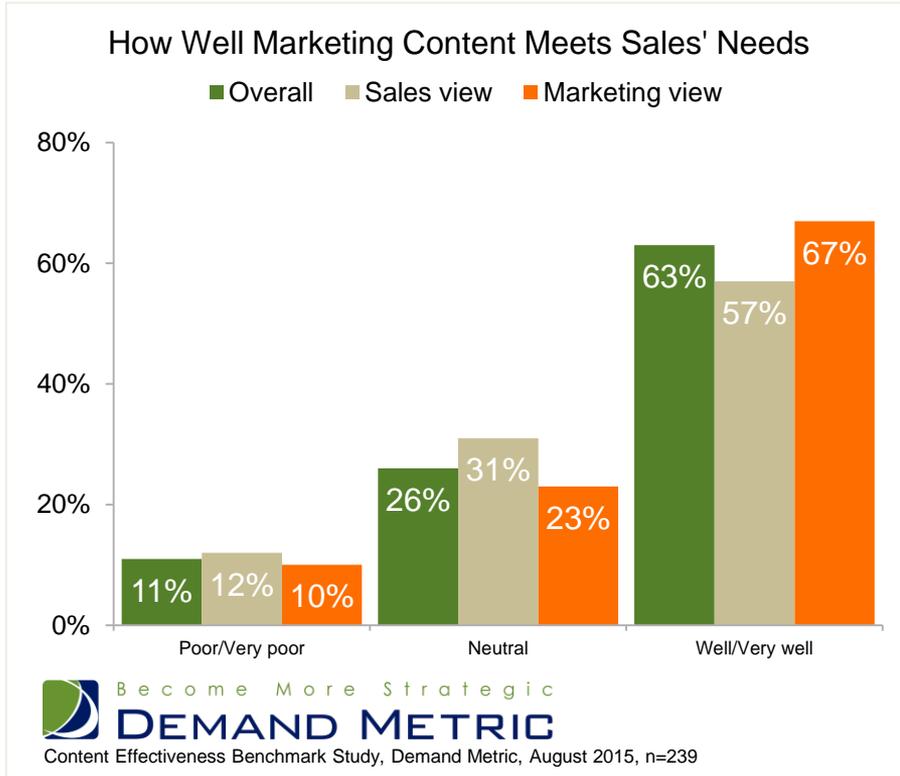
- **Sales representatives spend an average of 11 hours per week logging meeting notes and customer data into CRM systems.** However, only **23%** of organizations studied rate the quality of the customer interaction data in their CRM systems as high or very high.
- **70% of sales teams** studied believe that **not having access** to needed content **negatively impacts** sales conversations.
- Participants estimate that the average, **additional revenue** potential of having the right content always available is **44%**.

This report details the results and insights from the analysis of the study data. For more detail on the survey participants, please refer to the Appendix.



THE CONTENT PROCESS

Figure 1: Minor differences of opinion exist between sales and marketing.



Understanding how well the content that marketing creates meets the needs of the sales team is an excellent barometer of content marketing effectiveness. *Figure 1* provides us with this gauge.

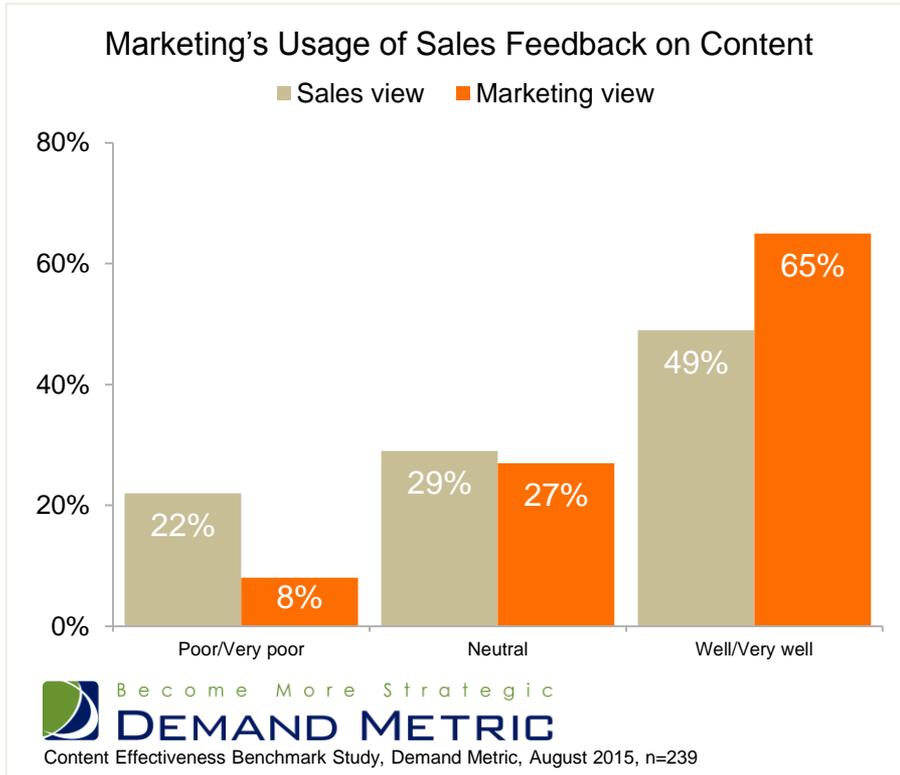
The majority view of the overall survey sample is that marketing content meets the needs of the sales team well or very well. This figure is, ironically skewed by a misalignment between sales and marketing. The sales respondents were more pessimistic in their assessment: **43% feel that marketing content does not do a good job of meeting the sales team's needs.**

The data in *Figure 1* seems to conclude there's no significant content problem to address, because a majority of sales teams are satisfied with how well marketing's content meets sales' needs. This conclusion, however, is deceptive because, as this report will show, the additional revenue opportunity associated with improving content is quite substantial. **Failing to improve content results is leaving significant revenue on the table.**



THE CONTENT PROCESS

Figure 2: The difference of opinion between sales and marketing is noticeable.



What's crucial to making the content process work effectively is feedback. Ideally, when marketing develops and deploys content, the sales team finds it, uses it and then provides feedback to marketing on its quality. Most marketers want and even seek this feedback from the sales team. It's one thing to get this feedback, but quite another to use it. The marketing team that does not use feedback essentially conditions the sales team not to provide it.

Figure 2 shows how well participants say that marketing uses the sales team's feedback to improve content quality.

Sales and marketing have different opinions about how well marketing uses the content feedback that sales provides: **51% of the sales reps polled are neutral or believe that marketing does a poor or very poor job of utilizing feedback.** If sales makes the effort to provide feedback, it's incumbent upon marketing to either use that feedback or provide reasons as to why it won't or can't. Having an effective feedback loop in place for content – **where sales shares, marketing listens then improves** – is a key determinant of how much content actually gets used.



THE CONTENT PROCESS

Figure 3: The relationship between how well marketing uses the content quality feedback it gets from sales and the usage rate of marketing-provided content.

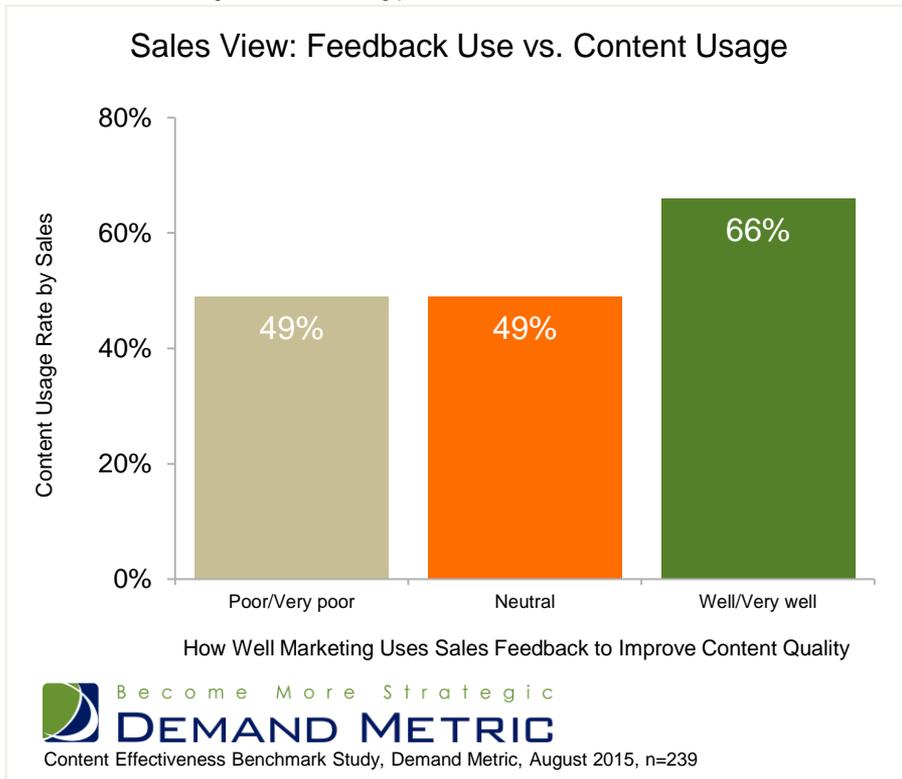


Figure 3 shows the relationship between how well marketing uses the sales team's feedback and the sales team's perception of content usefulness.

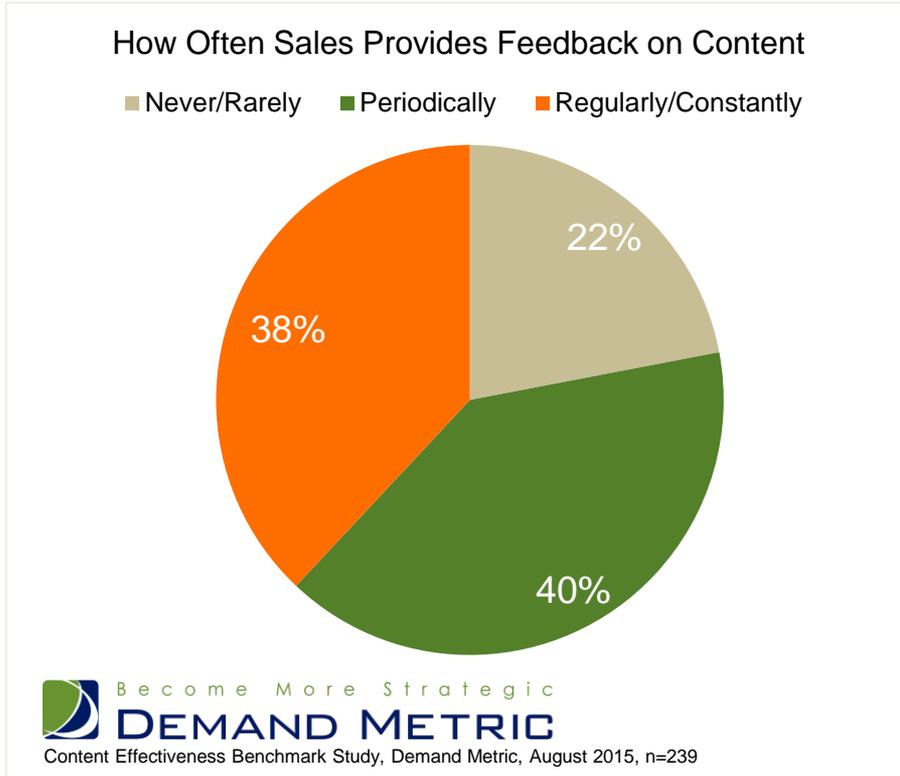
Two things become very clear from reviewing Figure 3:

1. Unless marketing uses the sales team's feedback well or very well, the sales team will use **less than 50%** of the content that marketing produces for sales. A lukewarm effort by marketing to use the sales team's feedback, represented by the neutral responses in Figure 3, has the same result as no effort at all. **When marketing does a great job with this feedback, content usage jumps from less than 50% to 66%.**
2. There is a serious ROI implication of this usage data. Production of various content assets by marketing represents a sunk cost. **The better job that marketing does using the feedback that sales provides, the more likely it is that the material sees use,** and therefore, maximizes the return on marketing's investment in content.



THE CONTENT PROCESS

Figure 4: Almost one-fourth of participants never or rarely get feedback from sales on content quality.



As an organization becomes better at evolving their sales and marketing content based on the content quality feedback that sales provides, a greater percentage of this content will see use by the sales team. Feedback usage is one dimension of content feedback to consider. Another important dimension is the frequency of that feedback.

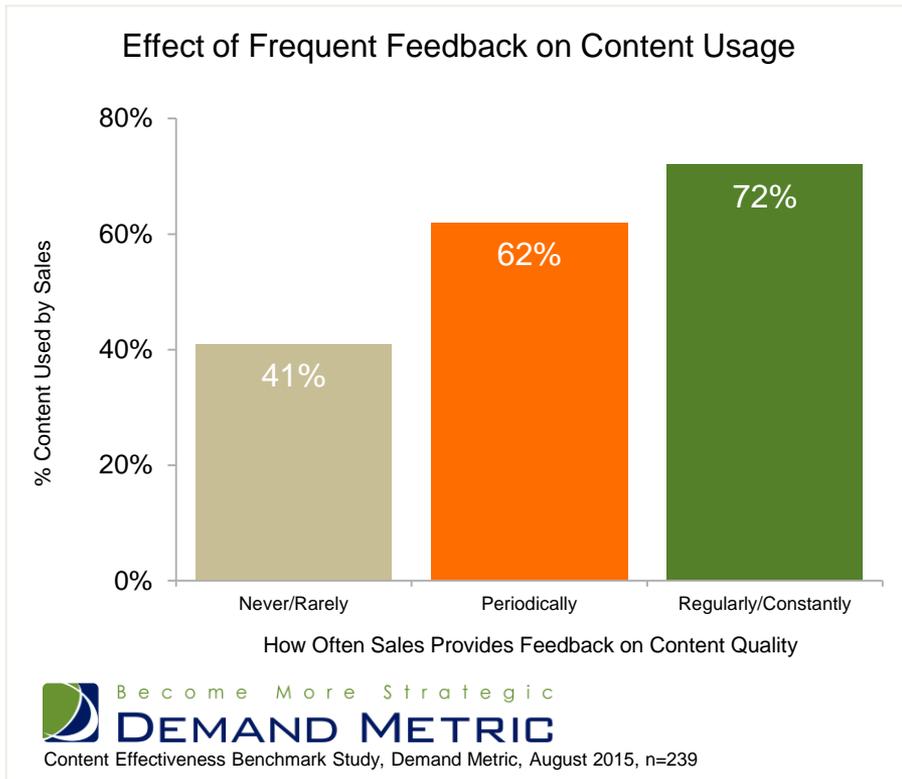
Figure 4 provides a relative scale of how often sales provides feedback on marketing-created content.

Figure 4 reveals the reality for frequency of feedback, and to know if this data is encouraging or troubling, a comparison to the ideal is necessary. The reality is that **only 38% of companies in this study are regularly getting feedback.** Marketing teams that don't get quantitative or qualitative feedback are at a disadvantage when it comes to improving the quality of anything they do. Without frequent feedback, their content improvement efforts are essentially educated guesses.



THE CONTENT PROCESS

Figure 5: Content usage rates jump dramatically as feedback frequency increases.



The ideal is for marketing to get quantitative and actionable data on the usage of all content it produces, but this may seem like an undue burden on the sales team. **Systems that streamline or even automate the content feedback loop, therefore, become very important because feedback frequency and consistency matter.**

As *Figure 5* reveals, in the same way feedback usage affects the rate at which content is used (*Figure 3*), a similar, more pronounced relationship exists between feedback frequency and the content usage rate.

The percent of marketing's content that is utilized ranges from 41% to 72%, based on how much information sales provides to marketing. There are a number of barriers to quality communication and frequent feedback – alignment, organizational impact, structure, etc. The feedback process is often a victim of the busy-ness of sales or how actionable the feedback is when delivered.

The data in *Figure 5* makes a compelling case for investing in a feedback process that works for sales and marketing.

THE CONTENT PROCESS

The third and final dimension of content feedback this study examined was the type of feedback provided: **qualitative and quantitative**. Ideally, both types of feedback are available, as both have value:

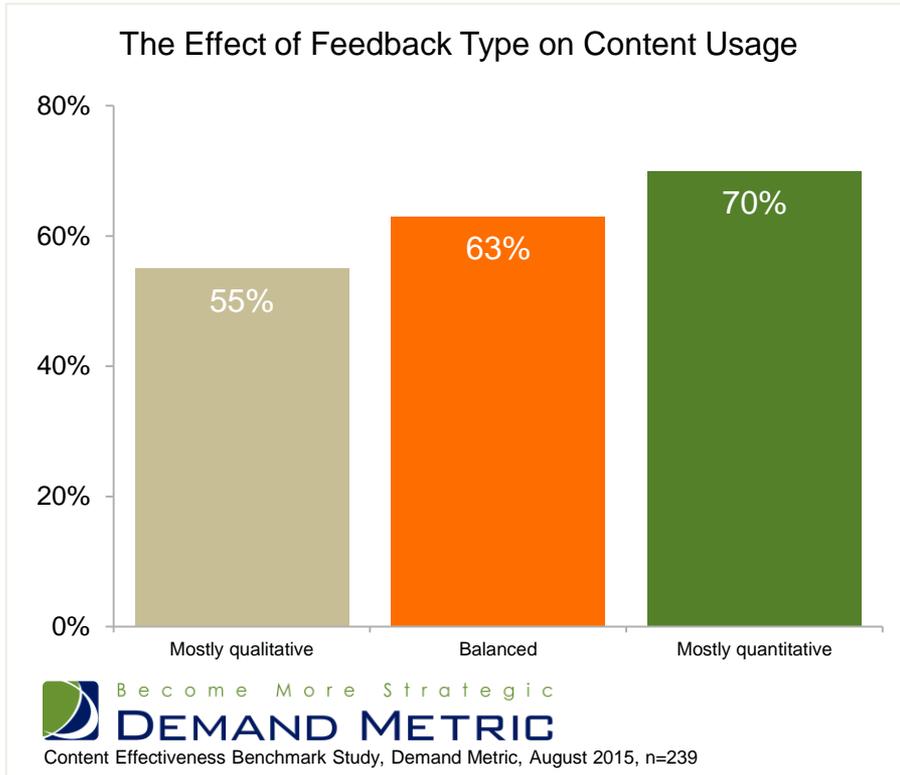
- **Qualitative feedback** is generally informal and unstructured, something as simple as a water cooler exchange. It's generally the easiest type to get; but this kind of input is hard to prioritize and often falls by the wayside.
- **Quantitative feedback** implies the existence of metrics and analytics about content usage and effectiveness. Quantitative feedback, however, is usually harder to come by **because the systems and mechanisms for tracking consumption and engagement with content usually don't exist or are simply not in use.**

This study shows that qualitative is the more prevalent type, **with 38% of participants reporting the sales team's feedback is qualitative, compared to 20% reporting quantitative.** The remaining 42% report getting and giving balanced feedback.



THE CONTENT PROCESS

Figure 6: Quantitative feedback is linked to greater content usage.



If both kinds of feedback – qualitative and quantitative – have value, why does the input type matter?

Figure 6 provides the answer.

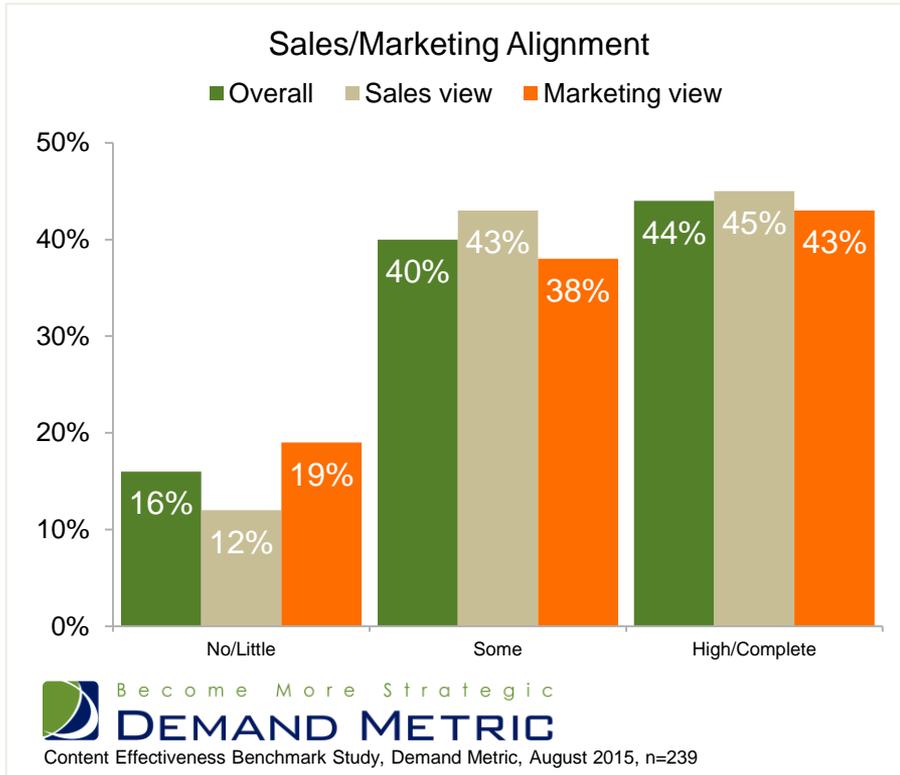
When marketing's content report card from sales is mostly quantitative, **it results in greater usage of the overall body of content – from 55% to 70%**. Quantitative feedback equips marketing with the means to measure progress and performance with precision as well as prioritize changes.

Without content metrics, marketers can only guess at how the content they create is really performing. For this reason, tools and **systems that help track and report on how sales uses content assets are imperative** for the organization that wants to tune the content process to the highest level of performance.



CONTENT PROCESS SUCCESS FACTORS

Figure 7: Alignment remains a work in progress for more than half of the organizations in this study.



A quantitative feedback loop is one of the critical success factors for the content process, but there are others. **Perhaps the most foundational factor that increases the effectiveness of content is sales and marketing alignment**, where alignment is “effective teamwork and communication around achieving common goals.”

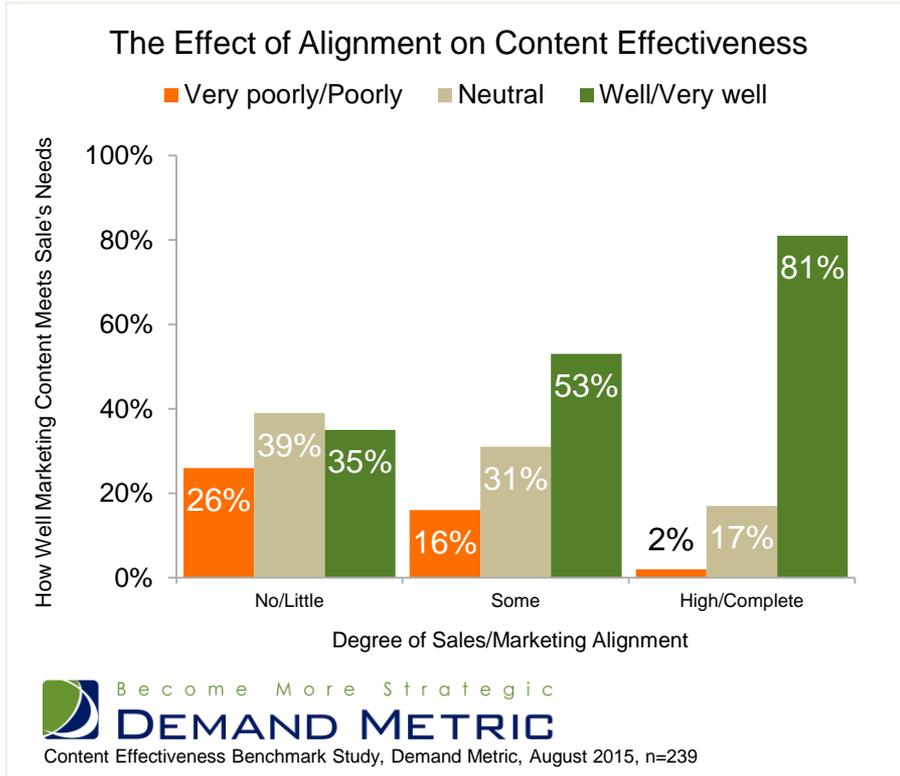
This study explored how the alignment between sales and marketing teams affects the content process. There is a powerful relationship between business alignment and content, and understanding it starts with looking at the current state of participant alignment, shown in *Figure 7*.

The view of alignment doesn't differ significantly from sales to marketing. Philosophically, there is virtually no disagreement in sales and marketing circles about the need for high alignment between these organizations.



CONTENT PROCESS SUCCESS FACTORS

Figure 8: Higher alignment and more effective content are related.



Alignment, or the lack thereof, impacts every aspect of the sales and marketing relationship, including the content process.

An indicator of how important alignment is to helping marketing produce content that meets the needs of the sales team is shown in *Figure 8*.

Figure 8 makes the relationship between sales and marketing alignment and useful content clear.

Does alignment create the environment that results in better content, or does the push for more useful content create better alignment?



CONTENT PROCESS SUCCESS FACTORS

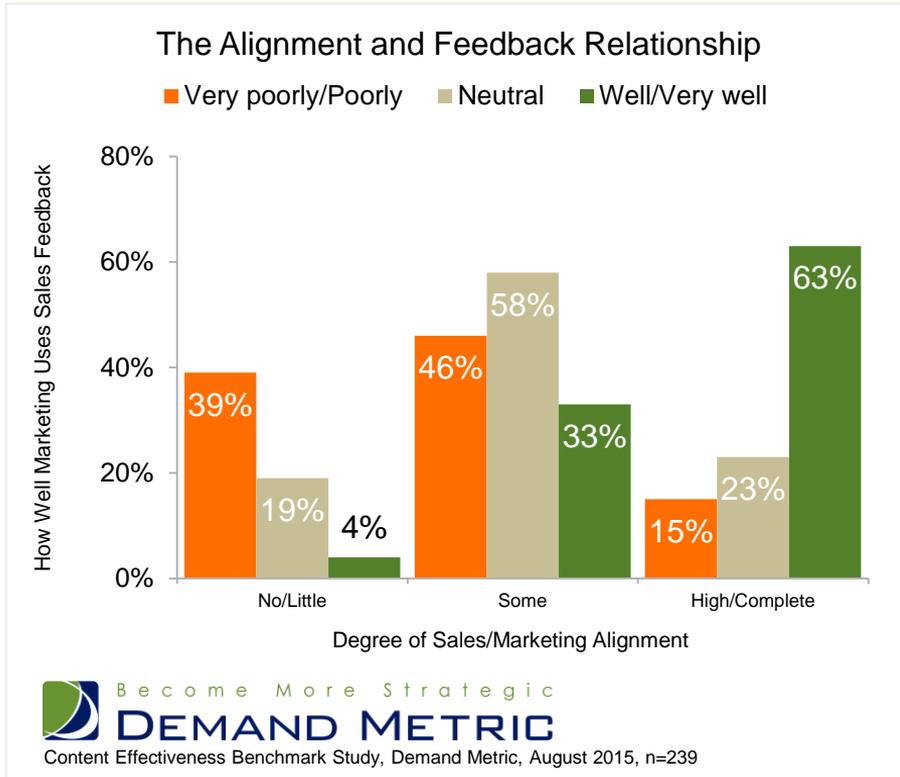
Both are true, and the culture of an organization will determine which one drives the other. **Organizations that are very strategically oriented are likely to recognize the value of sales and marketing alignment and prioritize it, producing benefits for content production and many other areas.** Organizations that are operationally oriented are likely to see dissatisfaction with the content process and trigger changes that produce better alignment. This study did not attempt to determine which scenario is more common, but the end result is greater alignment and better content.

What is certain is that when sales and marketing enjoy high or complete alignment, the organization also enjoys more useful content that better meets sales' needs. *Figure 8* confirms that **with high or complete alignment** comes an environment that virtually assures that **marketing content meets the sales team's needs 81% of the time** in this study. Conversely, **when there is little or no alignment** between sales and marketing, **only 35% report that the content which marketing produces works well for sales.** Alignment of course does not automatically guarantee that the content process will work well, but it does create the best set of conditions to allow the content process to flourish.



CONTENT PROCESS SUCCESS FACTORS

Figure 9: A content feedback loop encourages alignment and vice-versa.



As previously noted, feedback – frequency, type and usage – is critical to the content process. Alignment also has a strong relationship to the feedback loop, and vice versa.

Efforts to create and maintain an effective feedback loop will improve alignment. It's clear that closer alignment is an enabler of the feedback loop in this symbiotic relationship. *Figure 9* illustrates this relationship.

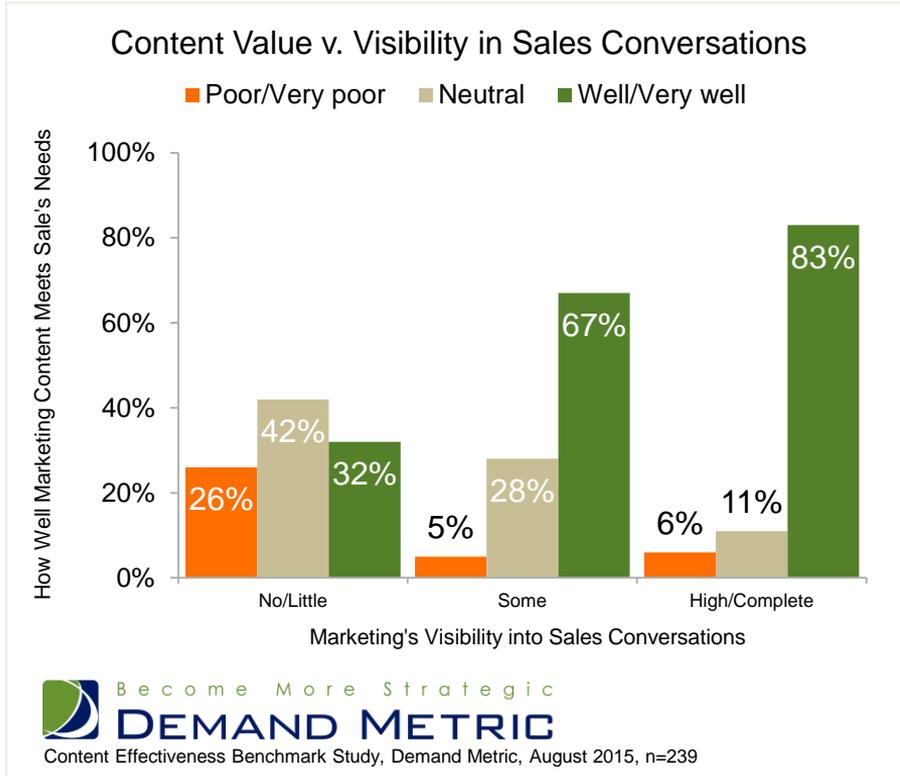
Organizations that have achieved high or complete sales/marketing alignment are almost **twice as likely to have a content feedback loop** that works well or very well compared to organizations reporting just “some” alignment. They are over 15 times as likely compared to those who report no or little alignment.

The inescapable conclusion from *Figures 8 and 9* is that it's virtually impossible to have an impactful content process without strong alignment.



CONTENT PROCESS SUCCESS FACTORS

Figure 10: Helping marketing get high or complete visibility into sales conversations provides a great return in better content.



Another factor for the content process is **the visibility that marketing has into the sales conversations** that are occurring with customers and prospects. The sales team is a direct participant in these conversations, and except for progressive companies, marketing is at best an observer.

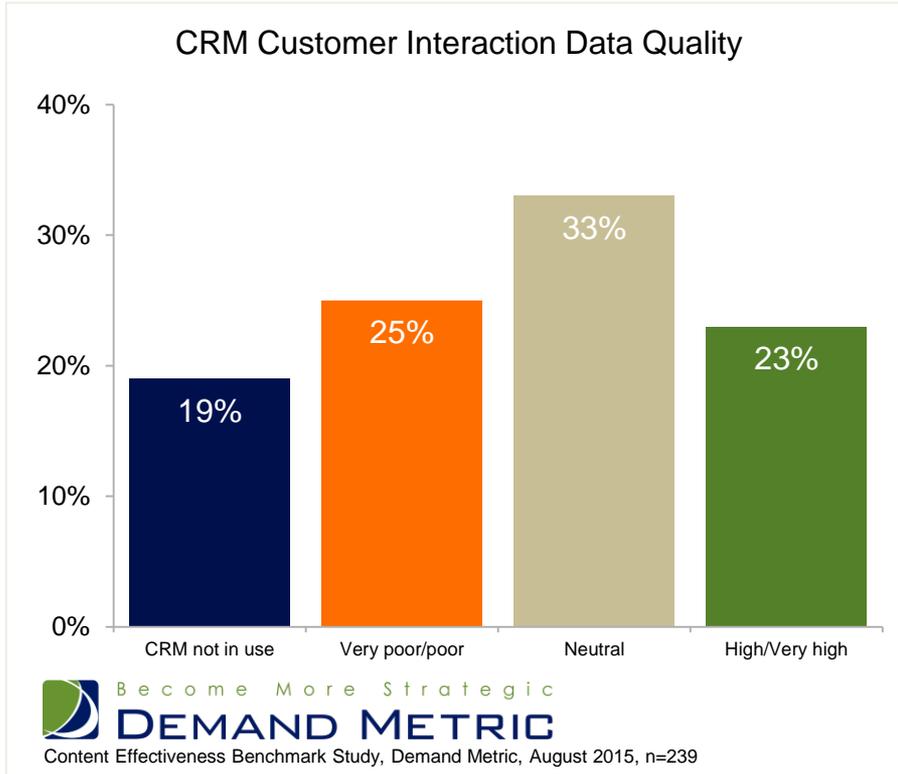
Furthermore, marketing seeks a unique set of insights from visibility into these conversations: it wants to understand how content creates influence and produces conversions. The sales team's agenda is straightforward: to drive as much revenue as possible. *Figure 10 shows that as marketing gets greater visibility into these sales conversations, it is able to produce better content.*

As *Figure 1* shows, 63% of companies report that marketing content meets the sales team's needs well or very well. In *Figure 10*, when visibility is factored into the content process, that percentage jumps to 83%. Conversely, when marketing has little to no visibility into sales conversations, less than one-third of the content marketing produces meets the needs of the sales team well or very well: a delta of over 50 points.



CONTENT PROCESS SUCCESS FACTORS

Figure 11: Less than one-fourth of organizations studied report that the quality of customer interaction data in their CRMs is high or very high.



The organization that is concerned about providing its sales team with the best possible set of content must determine how to provide this visibility. Many organizations want to believe that the answer is as simple as **providing the marketing team with access to the CRM system** and all the data therein.

In theory, this strategy should work, but in reality, the visibility marketing gets into sales conversations by reviewing CRM data is limited: **the view is only as good as the data in the system.**

Figure 11 shows how study participants rated the quality, completeness and accuracy of CRM data about customer or prospect interactions.



CONTENT PROCESS SUCCESS FACTORS

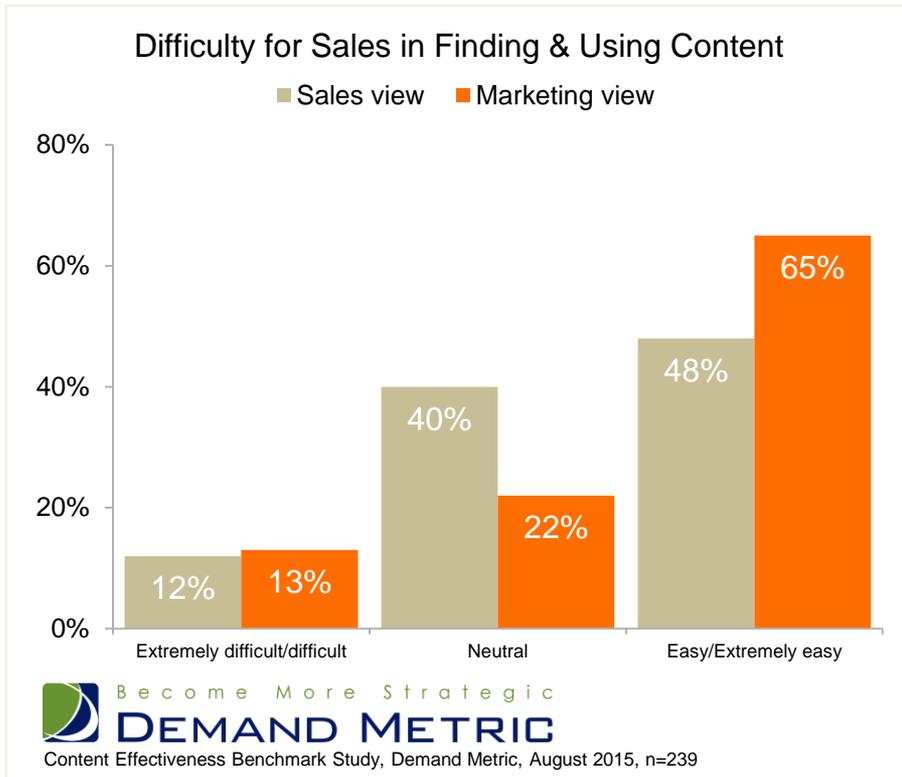
Using the CRM system to provide marketing visibility into sales conversations isn't a doomed approach, but in practice it's not working well. For most companies, data quality poses too great a challenge for the CRM system to serve as the information hub for marketing. It might seem that a simple solution is to simply exhort the sales team to try harder to log this data into the CRM system. As this study discovered, for organizations that use a CRM system, **sales team members are already spending about 11 hours per week logging client data and meeting notes into the system.**

Asking sales reps, which are **already spending one-fourth of their time logging this data into the CRM**, to spend even more time recording exactly what and how much content was reviewed during and after customer interactions is unsustainable. Instead, systems that automate as much of this data capture as possible are a much better approach that will help keep sales reps selling, not performing data entry.



CONTENT USE

Figure 12: Views on the difficulty of finding and using content assets differ.



It is not enough for content to simply exist; it is only of value to the business when it is easy to find and use.

The benefits of a process that produces great quality content is never realized if that content is effectively hidden from the sales team.

For this reason, this study investigated how easy it is for the sales team to find and use the content assets that marketing creates to support sales efforts. These results are shared in *Figure 12*.

Only 48% of the sales team respondents to this survey shared that content was easy for them to find and use. This contrasts with **two-thirds of the marketers responsible for creating this content that felt their content was easy to find and use**. Alignment is a factor in making content easy to find and use. **When alignment is high or complete (Figure 7), the percentage of sales team members in this study reporting that content is easy or extremely easy to find jumps to 62%**, almost matching the marketing view shown in *Figure 12*.

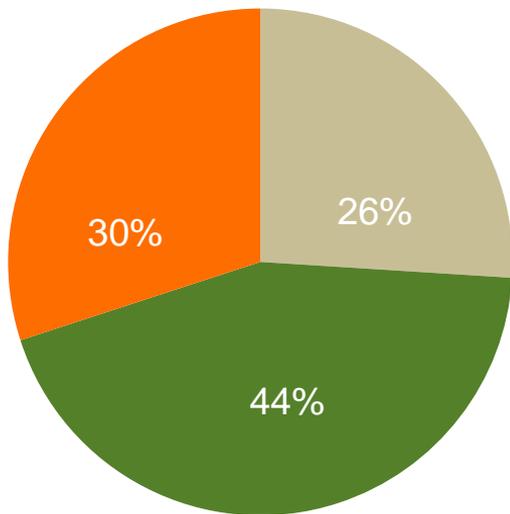


CONTENT USE

Figure 13: Sales team members in this study whose sales conversations are rarely or never impacted by lack of content are in the minority.

How Lack of Content Negatively Impacts Sales

■ Always/Regularly ■ Sometimes ■ Rarely/Never



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Content Effectiveness Benchmark Study, Demand Metric, August 2015, n=239

The implication of the gap shown in *Figure 12* is that sales conversations are affected when sales can't find and use content. *Figure 13* shows the full impact of this gap.

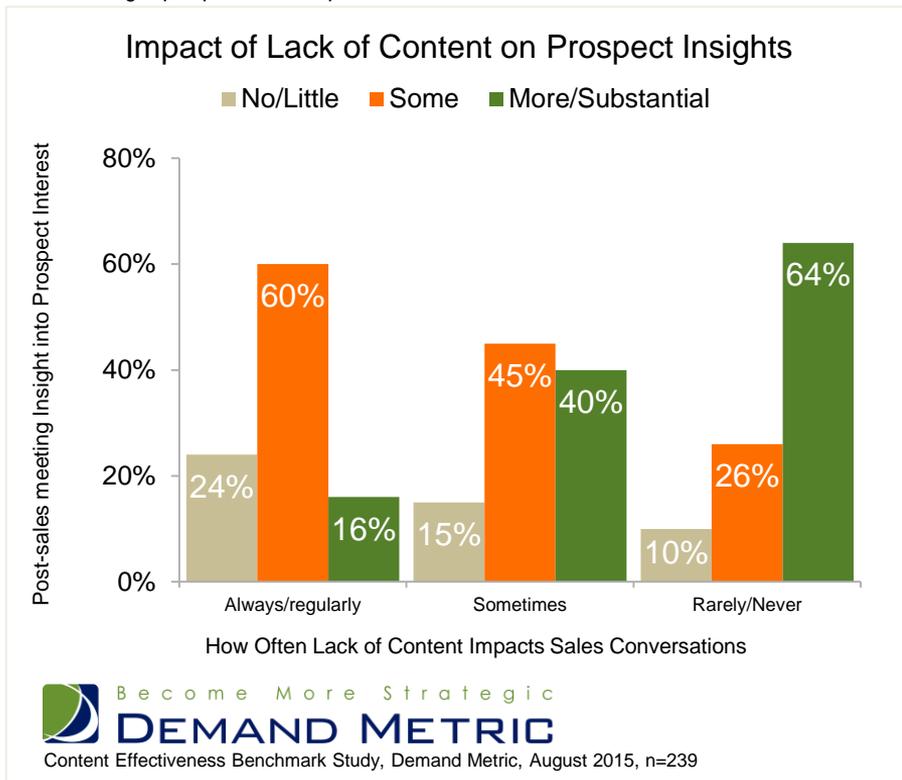
Figure 13 shows the scope of impact on sales team members when they lack the content they need. When the sales team is unable to find and use content, it isn't just inconvenient or annoying; **it negatively affects the outcome of sales conversations 70% of the time.**

One of the many interesting relationships the data in *Figure 13* had in this study was the visibility that sales reps have, after sales meetings occur, into a prospect's true level of interest. This study found that overall, **56% of participants report having only some or no insight** into the level of prospect interest after sales meetings.



CONTENT USE

Figure 14: When lack of content rarely or never impacts a sales conversation, a window of understanding to prospect interest opens.



When the impact of the content availability shown in *Figure 13* is factored in, the role of content in helping reveal a prospect's interest becomes clear, as *Figure 14* shows.

The lack of effective marketing content makes a dramatic impact on the sales team's ability to discern true prospect interest following a sales conversation. In *Figure 14*, **when the lack of content is rarely or never an issue, the sales team has more or substantial insight into a prospect's true interest almost two-thirds of the time.**

Contrast this with the situation **where the lack of content is always or regularly an issue, and the sales team has the highest level of insight just 16% of the time.**

This data shows how important content is a mechanism for revealing and conveying a prospect's true level of interest.

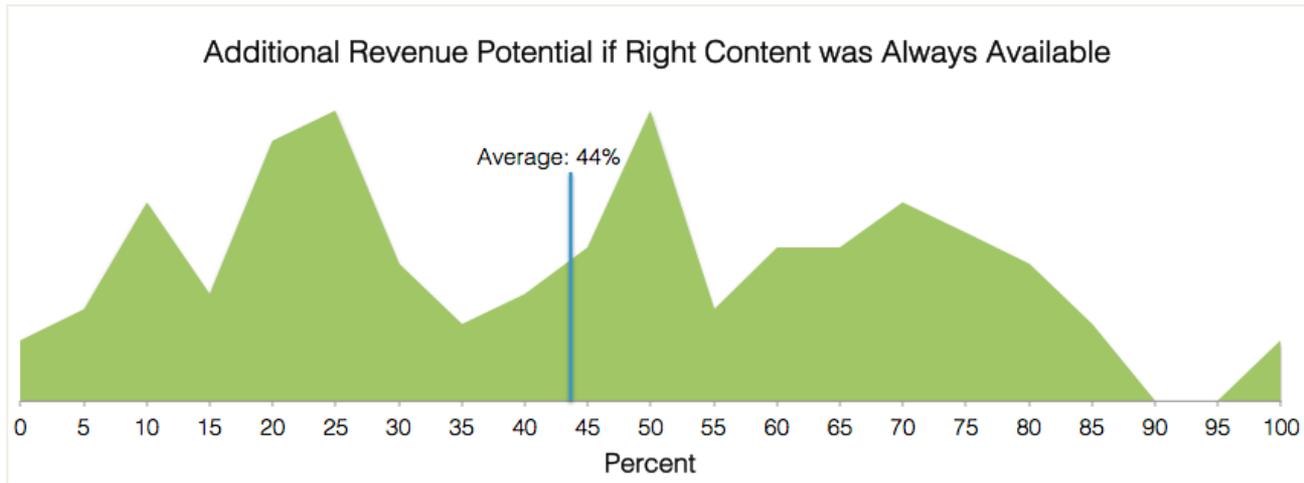


CONTENT IMPACT ON REVENUE

This study has already examined several areas of impact that content can have: alignment, visibility, and true prospect interest. Each of these areas is important in their own right, but **the area that matters the most is impact on revenue**. Properly resourcing and managing the content process requires a firm understanding of the way the process directly influences revenue.

The relationship between content and revenue is known, but accurate measures of how content influences the sales pipeline are difficult to obtain. The approach taken in this study was to ask participants to estimate how much additional revenue their companies could earn IF the right marketing content or assets were always available. *Figure 15* shows the results of this query.

Figure 15: The revenue impact of always having the right marketing content available is staggering.



CONTENT IMPACT ON REVENUE

The **additional revenue** potential identified in *Figure 15* by survey participants is not incremental, but **substantial enough to cause any organization that doesn't have its content house in order to make some investments.**

The place to make these investments is in the development area to make sure the right content exists and in the systems and overall process to ensure that content is easy to find, use, provide feedback on and track engagement. **With an average 44% revenue increase estimate on the line, the return for such an investment is too strong to ignore.**



ANALYST BOTTOM LINE

There's no shortage of research to show that content marketing is an effective strategy. Furthermore, the best practices around content development and usage are well known and available to any who seek them. Fundamentally, organizations that understand the audience for their content well and know how that audience wishes to consume content through the sales cycle can have success with the strategy.

Less focus has been on the internal sales and marketing content interface, which is precisely where more focus is needed. Too often, marketing teams just assume that the content they develop meets the needs of sales and that it is easy to find and use. **The reality is that when a busy marketing team tries to satisfy the content needs of a busy sales team and doesn't have the right processes, alignment and systems in place, the impact is devastating.** If this study does nothing else, it sheds light on just how much revenue opportunity is lost when the content process isn't optimized. The solution for revving the content process isn't complex, but it does require some discipline to execute:

- **Feedback.** This study establishes the relationship between sales feedback and its use by marketing as a critical success factor. The feedback process cannot be left to chance, nor be too informal. A system or process of **regularly channeling qualitative and quantitative feedback to marketing will dramatically increase the usefulness** of what marketing produces.
- **Visibility.** The customer-facing sales team directly participates in sales conversations with customers and prospects. Most marketing teams, however, are lucky to get second-hand news of what transpires in these conversations. It is imperative that marketing gain visibility into these conversations so that it can produce content that supports and advances the sales dialogue. **Giving marketing access to the CRM is the default mechanism for providing this visibility, but this only works when the CRM contains quality and rich data about customer interactions.** Organizations should make sure that the tools the sales team uses integrate and automate the capture of data into the CRM system. If not, then sales must find another way to give marketing the visibility it needs.

ANALYST BOTTOM LINE

- **Access.** Making content easy to find and use is imperative. **The ideal is to have a system that makes it easy for marketing to deploy content, and easy for sales to find and use the latest versions through the tools they already use.** Content distribution mechanisms, such as posting to the company intranet or sending an email with an attachment to the sales group, are brittle and unreliable.

The overarching benefit to optimizing the feedback loop, visibility and access is alignment. In the symbiotic relationship between alignment and the content process, improvements in one results in improvements in the other: **better alignment results in better content.** Improving the content process results in better alignment. Better alignment produces benefits all across the organization. Even staying within the boundaries of the content process, making the right content always available has such a big payback that investing whatever it takes to do that should move to the top of the priority list.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Demand Metric is grateful to Showpad for sponsoring this benchmarking study and for those participants that took the time to provide their input to it.



ABOUT SHOWPAD

Showpad is a sales enablement solution that gives marketing control over content and messaging while providing the sales team with up-to-date content to present and share with prospects. Both sales and prospects' interaction with content is captured, and actionable insights are provided to ensure every sales interaction counts.

The mobile-first SaaS company has offices in San Francisco, London and Ghent, Belgium. It was founded in 2011 and is one of the fastest growing technology companies with more than 750 customers in over 40 countries, including Xerox, Intel, BASF, Siemens, Heineken and Audi.

For more about Showpad, visit www.showpad.com.



ABOUT DEMAND METRIC

Demand Metric is a marketing research and advisory firm serving a membership community of over 70,000 marketing professionals and consultants in 75 countries.

Offering consulting methodologies, advisory services, and 500+ premium marketing tools and templates, Demand Metric resources and expertise help the marketing community plan more efficiently and effectively, answer the difficult questions about their work with authority and conviction and complete marketing projects more quickly and with greater confidence, boosting the respect of the marketing team and making it easier to justify resources the team needs to succeed.

To learn more about Demand Metric, please visit: www.demandmetric.com.



APPENDIX: SURVEY BACKGROUND

This Impact of Content Effectiveness on Sales and Marketing Benchmark Study survey was administered online during the period of June 4, 2015 through July 6, 2015. During this period, 295 responses were collected, 239 of which were complete enough for inclusion in the analysis. The data was analyzed to identify insightful relationships between variables in the study and to ensure the statistical validity of the findings. The representativeness of these results depends on the similarity of the sample to environments in which this survey data is used for comparison or guidance. Key respondent data is summarized below:

Annual Sales:

- Less than \$10 million (39%)
- \$10 to \$24 million (19%)
- \$25 to \$99 million (12%)
- \$100 to \$499 million (12%)
- \$500 million to \$999 million (5%)
- \$1 billion or more (13%)

Type of Organization:

- Primarily B2B (67%)
- Primarily B2C (12%)
- Mixed B2B/B2C (21%)

Primary Role of Respondent:

- Marketing (59%)
- Sales (41%)

Revenue Growth (Most Recent Fiscal Year):

- Significant increase (28%)
- Slight increase (50%)
- Flat (16%)
- Slight decline (6%)
- Significant decline (1%)



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