Impact of SEO and Content Marketing

in partnership with:

ClickZ

www.conductor.com
Introduction

Making forecasts and predictions in such a rapidly changing marketing ecosystem is a challenge. Yet, as concerns grow around a looming recession and budgets across virtually all industries are being reconsidered, it is clear the future of digital marketing will look markedly different than it did three years ago.

Adding to wider economic issues, staff shortages continue to negatively impact the sector and limit the ability for some firms to scale-up and make the most out of innovative new technologies like generative AI. The introduction of ChatGPT last year is already showing signs of promise around helping marketers with content ideas and content creation, but it’s also bringing up ethical issues that will need to be addressed before its usage becomes mainstream.

“From looking at our data, we really do believe SEO and content marketing are places that are great to invest in during times of economic uncertainty, because you will always recoup on the investment over time,” explains Allie Bhutani, Director of Brand at Conductor. To provide marketers with a deeper understanding of the impact of SEO and content marketing on business growth over the last 12 months, as well how likely these strategies will play into marketing approaches in the year ahead, ClickZ and Conductor carried out the Impact of SEO and Content Marketing Survey.

A total of 117 senior marketers participated in this survey; 65% were located in North America, 30% in Europe and the remainder across Asia, Africa and Oceania. Respondents occupy a range of job positions from C-Suite (28%), Director (28%) and Manager (26%) to VP (7.5%) and individual contractor (11%).
Key Findings

- 55% of respondents said content marketing had a large positive impact on their marketing performance and goals in 2022.

- 51% of respondents found generating leads to be the top challenge they face with content marketing.

- Half of respondents expect the budget for SEO and content to increase this year.

- In 2023, close to 80% of respondents expect the scope of their marketing goals to increase.

- Over 47% of marketers say their organization’s current approach to SEO reporting is either advanced or comprehensive.

- More than one in four respondents believe that AI and machine learning will aid in topic generation and research in 2023.
More than 80% of respondents say SEO has either a large positive impact or slight positive impact on their marketing performance and goals in 2022. Around 86% of respondents said SEO had either a large positive impact or slight positive impact on content marketing last year.

Independently SEO and content marketing are instrumental to strong marketing strategies. But when SEOs and content marketers align to form a joint strategy, it not only benefits the organic marketing channel, but marketing campaigns on the whole become more effective.

SEO is extremely useful in helping uncover your audience’s intent and using that to inform content and marketing strategies, no matter what types of content, whether that be blog posts, white papers, or other content, are being deployed to engage the right target audience.

Survey respondents report that SEO had a positive impact on both content marketing and general marketing performance.
For many organizations, SEO and content marketing now form the foundation for how they strategize across channels, with a wider marketing plan built upon these techniques, due to the benefits they offer. The ability for SEO to boost the reach and visibility of a website, and in the process increase traffic from potential customers, is perhaps one of the central attractions of SEO for businesses.

As opposed to other forms of marketing, such as paying for advertising space or clicks, SEO often proves to be a cost-effective way to drive relevant traffic to a company’s website. Paid media campaigns can result in a well-defined return on investment, but results from paid are extremely short-term and time-bound. Once the initial investment in a paid campaign is complete, it stops performing. With SEO and content marketing, web pages and content continue to perform long after the initial investment is complete.

For Jasper Martens, Chief Marketing Officer of PensionBee, an online pension provider, the benefits from utilizing SEO can be felt for years. “Utilizing SEO and a clever content marketing strategy is a cost-effective way to maximize your reach, while building trust with prospective and existing customers,” he says.

While the full benefits of SEO and content marketing may take some time to be realized, according to Martens, they pay dividends in the long-term. “While they’re hard to execute and get right, once you do, they’re long lasting. This is especially true in financial services where it’s key to build trust with those consuming your content,” he adds.
Beyond the measurable financial return that SEO can bring, this form of marketing offers clear insights into what your audiences want and are interested in. As it is based on first party data, pain points and priorities can be understood quickly, giving marketers the opportunity to optimize and create content to reach their target consumer in a range of different ways.

Martens agrees that content marketing has far broader benefits than SEO alone, as it also allows firms to educate their customers. “With products such as pensions, you must educate your customers a lot. By helping them become more pension confident, we can build trust, and help them save for a happy retirement. Content presented at the right moment in time to the relevant customers is key to success in marketing,” he explains.

When marketers were asked what they saw as the top challenges they face with content marketing, more than half (51%) said generating leads, with 44% saying driving traffic to their website and 44% naming measuring content ROI.

What are the top challenges you face with content marketing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generating leads</td>
<td>52.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing new ideas for content</td>
<td>31.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving traffic to your website</td>
<td>46.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving engagement on social media</td>
<td>38.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content distribution</td>
<td>20.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimising content for SEO</td>
<td>30.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring content ROI</td>
<td>47.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of bandwidth or resources</td>
<td>31.70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In an environment where many marketers see issues with measuring and lead generation, there is clearly a need for new data visibility tools that can help turn data into insights. Several other factors play into the need for marketers to adopt cutting edge tools that not only make their job easier, but ensure they are well placed to thrive in an industry that is changing rapidly.

It is no secret that more and more businesses are turning online to attract new consumers and leads, especially in a post-pandemic business environment. Increasing levels of competition will make the marketing landscape even more crowded and lead to marketers having to find innovative ways to stand out from the crowd and attract new customers.

In recent years, online adverts have grown rapidly in number, with many shoppers becoming desensitized to an often-overwhelming number of adverts, with some even turning to adblockers that make the task of reaching the right customers even trickier.

Consumers no longer just turn to digital platforms to buy items, with major changes in customer behavior leading to researching potential products online becoming a major part of the digital buying process. Savvy marketers will be re-formulating strategies to engage with customers at every stage of this purchasing journey.
Regulatory challenges are another issue that marketers will be faced with in the near future. From privacy and data regulations like GDPR and CCPA, generating leads is expected to become harder and more restrictions will be placed on data access. While paid media is often subject to regulations on third party data making targeting even more difficult and less accurate, organic marketing strategies like SEO and content will provide firms with first-party data and insights about their audience.

Overall, SEO and content marketing are both essential components of a successful digital marketing strategy, and they work together to help businesses reach their target audience, generate leads, and increase conversions.
Section 2: Budgets and goals

Few businesses were left unchanged from the impact of the pandemic, with many marketing plans having to be fundamentally rethought as people remained at home for extended periods. While some organizations made the decision to cut back on their marketing spend, others refocused their efforts and sought out to reach customers through digital platforms.

For Bhutani, the pandemic was a catalyst for innovative uses of digital marketing. “No matter how legacy brick and mortar your brand may be, everyone now needs an online presence to stay competitive. I would say that if you do not invest in digital marketing, you are certainly falling behind the competition,” she says.

The exact marketing mix depends on the goals of each organization, with some embarking on a ‘market-share’ strategy, where they attempt to grow their market share by increasing their advertising budgets. Businesses that forecast a relatively poor return on investment for large-scale marketing campaigns may refine their budgets and cut back on certain advertising expenses.

Despite facing a range of challenging market conditions and a looming recession, close to 80% of survey respondents said they expect to keep their marketing budgets the same, or increase them, this year. Companies are clearly seeing the value that investing in marketing can bring, even at a time when budgets, and often headcount, are being reduced.
In an increasingly post-pandemic business operating environment, the use of digital marketing has become a more effective and powerful tool as more and more consumers turn to online channels not just to buy items, but also research the products that are available to them.

“Folks are not just using search engines and different channels online to purchase - they’re using them to find information. And there’s a growing awareness that if you’re not showing up, you’re losing out on market share,” adds Bhutani.

Unlike other forms of marketing, digital marketing can impact the entire customer journey, all the way from helping consumers become aware of a brand before they are ready to make a purchase, to the final interaction they have before becoming a fully-fledged customer.

Marketers appear to be turning to SEO and content marketing over paid media, according to the survey results. While half of respondents say the budget for SEO and content will increase this year, only 33% report that paid media spending will increase, with almost 36% saying paid media budgets will fall.

In 2023, how do you expect the budget of your marketing channels to change:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall marketing budget</th>
<th>SEO &amp; Content</th>
<th>Paid media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>Decrease</td>
<td>Stay the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

09.
Section 3 : SEO Reporting

Results from the survey show that one in four marketers are using comprehensive SEO reporting, with less than 7% of respondents not reporting at all. Content marketers often have a hard time reporting on success metrics and the ROI of content marketing, mainly because it’s beneficial to all parts of a marketing strategy and is typically used across marketing channels.

By either starting SEO reporting or making this reporting more comprehensive, businesses can gain several benefits. One of the first benefits that business leaders are usually interested in is being able to measure the progress of search engine optimization efforts over time and get a better insight into what’s working and what isn’t. Marketers can then search for ways to improve the return on investment and refocus their time on areas that are providing the highest ROI.

For Francisco Chamorro, Director of Web/Digital marketing at master data management company Stibo Systems, top search engine rankings continue to be a primary source of web traffic for most organizations.

“Digital marketing has always been important for any organization looking for growth. The pandemic certainly accelerated areas of digital commerce, making e-commerce much more common place and viable than before. The crux for digital marketing is to now break through the noise,” he explains.
Which of the following best describes your organization's current approach to SEO reporting:

- **25.40%** Comprehensive (i.e., Advanced role-based reporting, high confidence, widely distributed)
- **6.00%** No Reporting
- **17.90%** Ad-Hoc (i.e., Inconsistent reporting, low confidence, minimal distribution)
- **25.40%** Advanced (i.e., Team based-reporting, medium confidence, some distribution)
- **25.40%** Foundational (i.e., Siloed reporting, medium confidence, minimal distribution)
Section 4: Use of MarTech

In the marketing profession, even a relatively small, competitive advantage can result in outsized benefits; marketers have been paying close attention to developments in artificial intelligence. The recent rise of generative AI tools, such as the much-hyped ChatGPT, go beyond simply analyzing data and can be used to create all types of content from blog posts to content ideas.

At a time of increasing customer expectations, marketing professionals are acutely aware of the pressing need to not just offer personalization, but real-time personalization. Through machine learning and AI, any changes in customer behavior can be immediately responded to, so that marketing approaches are as targeted and relevant as possible.

Many of these tools hold a great deal of potential, but they also face challenges and are not a substitute for a human touch. When survey respondents were asked “What role do you see AI/machine learning playing in content marketing in 2023?,” more than one in four said it could aid in topic generation and research, with almost 20% believing it could support content creation.
What role do you see AI / machine learning playing in content marketing in 2023?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aiding in topic generation/research</td>
<td>22.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiding in content creation (writing, editing)</td>
<td>14.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiding in analysing data to create customer profiles and segments</td>
<td>23.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support website personalisation</td>
<td>9.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To support quality customer service (chattbots)</td>
<td>7.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refreshing outdated/old content</td>
<td>7.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>14.30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During a recent ClickZ webinar, senior marketing executives were asked whether they advocate the use of generative AI specifically in SEO/content marketing. While 15% responded ‘very strongly’, a large share (65%) remained ‘on the fence’, albeit encouraged testing.

The use of generative AI in SEO and content marketing is still a relatively new phenomenon, and many marketers are still exploring its potential benefits and limitations. While some marketers are excited by the possibilities of using AI to streamline their marketing efforts and create more personalised content, others are clearly still hesitant to adopt this technology due to concerns around accuracy.

Webinar participants were also asked what role AI and machine learning would play in content marketing in the year ahead. Most of the participants (50%) believed that AI and ML would aid in content creation, which suggests that these tools may be used to automate certain aspects of content creation such as topic generation, research, and even writing.

Additionally, a smaller proportion of respondents noted the potential of these tools in website personalisation (16%), indicating these tools may be used to create more personalised content experiences for individual users.
Conclusion

While core tenants of marketing remain consistent, such as that most marketers know content is king and view understanding as much as possible about customers as essential to effective SEO, most marketers budgets are stagnant and goals are higher. For marketers to thrive in the new business environment, they must identify areas of opportunity and invest in content and SEO to drive long-term growth.

“It is important to get a comprehensive reporting solution in place to show the impact that you’re having, but also show the growth over time and monitor how your SEO efforts are affecting your website. This will help you identify any kind of core problems or any successes and then double down in areas that are beneficial to you,” concludes Bhutani.