Content Marketing

# METRICS THAT MATTER

(And Those That Don't)

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# CONTENTS

# KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Content marketing is awash in data, yet most companies don't have the proper processes in place to compile, analyze and report this data in a meaningful way that supports business objectives.

Even worse, some firms misreport metrics or have only a surface-level understanding of their marketing KPIs. Needless to say, how do you prove the value of your actions if there's no internal definition of "value" at your company?

This dilemma could stem from a relative "immaturity" still existing within the content marketing space.

Though **91 percent** of B2B marketers employ content marketing, just **34 percent** qualify their efforts as "sophisticated" or "mature."

The rest – the vast majority – do not have detailed content programs, cohesive strategies or functional measurement capabilities. And that's a problem in dire need of solving.

# CONTENT MARKETING ROI AT A GLANCE

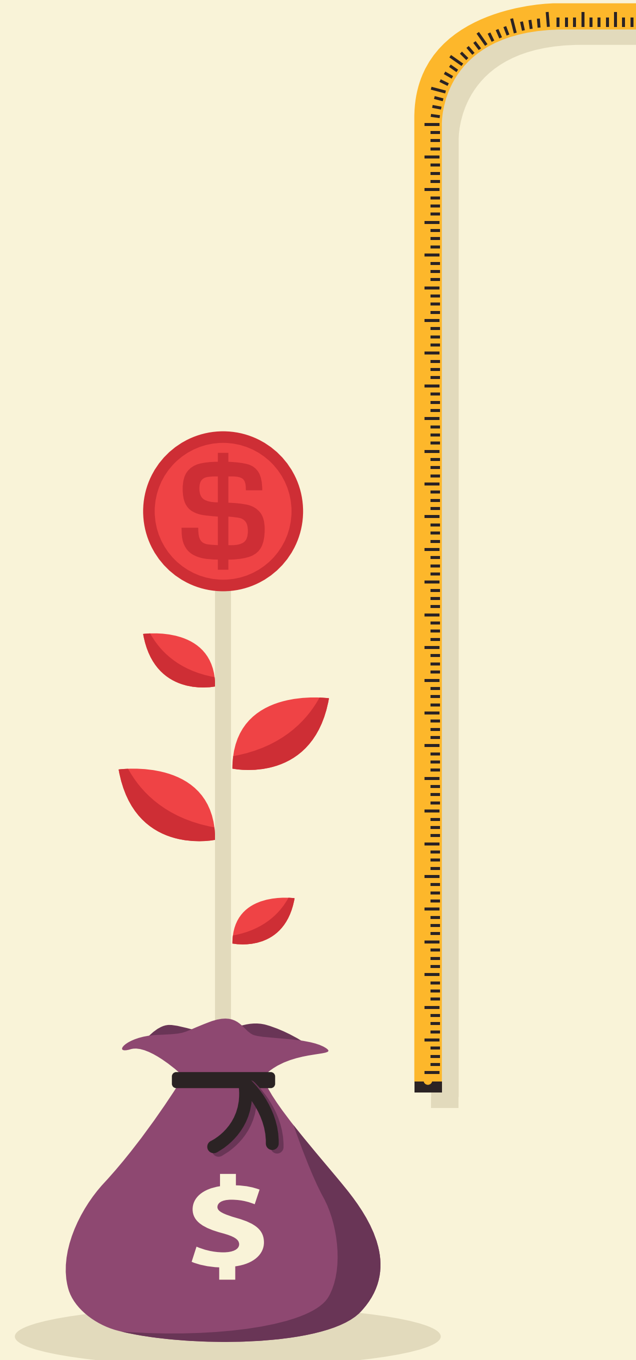
Despite the resource challenges that many companies face, the ultimate goal of content marketing is, of course, ROI.

Nearly half of B2B marketers outsource content creation, while approximately **44 percent** conduct all content marketing activities in-house. Surprisingly, just **11 percent** outsource content measurement, meaning they do so in-house or not at all.

Given how much investment is devoted to upfront creation and promotion, the serious dearth of metrics-tracking follow-through implies a core component of content marketing is largely under the radar.

B2B firms intend to address this shortcoming, however, as **35 percent** state their ability to show measurable results is improving.

Content marketing, as a methodology, is **62 percent** cheaper than outbound marketing and produces three times as many leads. That's a great statline to show your boss. But if commanded to reproduce those results for your company in six months' time, could you do it? Would you know precisely which metrics to analyze?



# COMMON CONTENT MARKETING METRICS

There are dozens of standard metrics marketers use to populate their analytics reports, many of which are a combination of:

**Traffic/Traffic Medium:** Number of users who land on a site and the mediums in which they found you (e.g., referral, direct, search).

**Pageviews:** Total number of times a single page was viewed.

**Bounce Rate:** Percentage of users who leave a website after viewing only one page.

**Pages/Session:** Total number of pages a user visits in one sitting while on your site.

**Time on Site:** Duration of time users remain on site.

**Goal Completions:** Number of times a dedicated goal is achieved (e.g., eBook download, newsletter subscription).

**Clicks:** Number of clicks a given link received.

**Email Open Rate:** Percentage of email recipients that opened.

**Social Shares:** Any type of “share” on social media platforms.

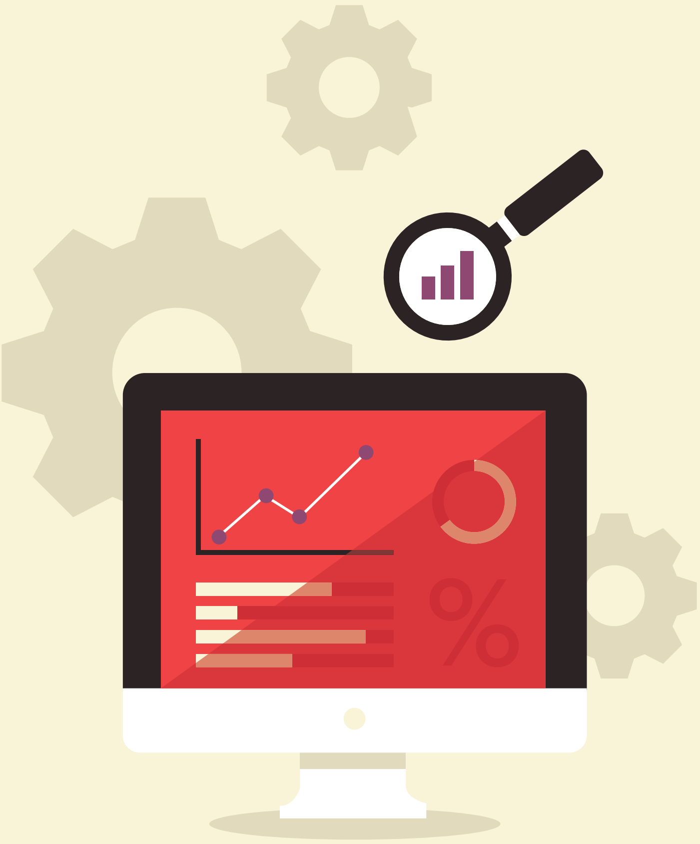
**Geography:** Location of your visitors.

**Backlinks:** Number of incoming links to your site.

**Users:** Number of unique visitors to your site.

But are these go-to indicators always the best options? Do they provide complete visibility into the true performance of your site and its content?

# WHY MEASURE, AND HOW TO DO IT



If we spent all day trying to avoid this specific cliche, we still wouldn't be able to come up with something as succinct and accurate as: "You can't manage what you can't measure."

It's true. The sheer output of content these days must likewise scale with the ability of organizations to measure the effectiveness of each asset.

Automating data-tracking and reporting is standard operating procedure. Use:

- **Google Analytics.**
- **Google Search Console.**
- **Native Social Media Analytics Platforms** (Twitter Analytics, YouTube Analytics, Facebook Page Insights, etc.).
- **Social Media Management Software** (Sprout Social, Hootsuite, Buzzsumo).
- **SEMrush.**
- **Pardot/Constant Contact.**

# WHAT ARE VANITY METRICS?

Vanity metrics are indicators that don't serve an actionable purpose.

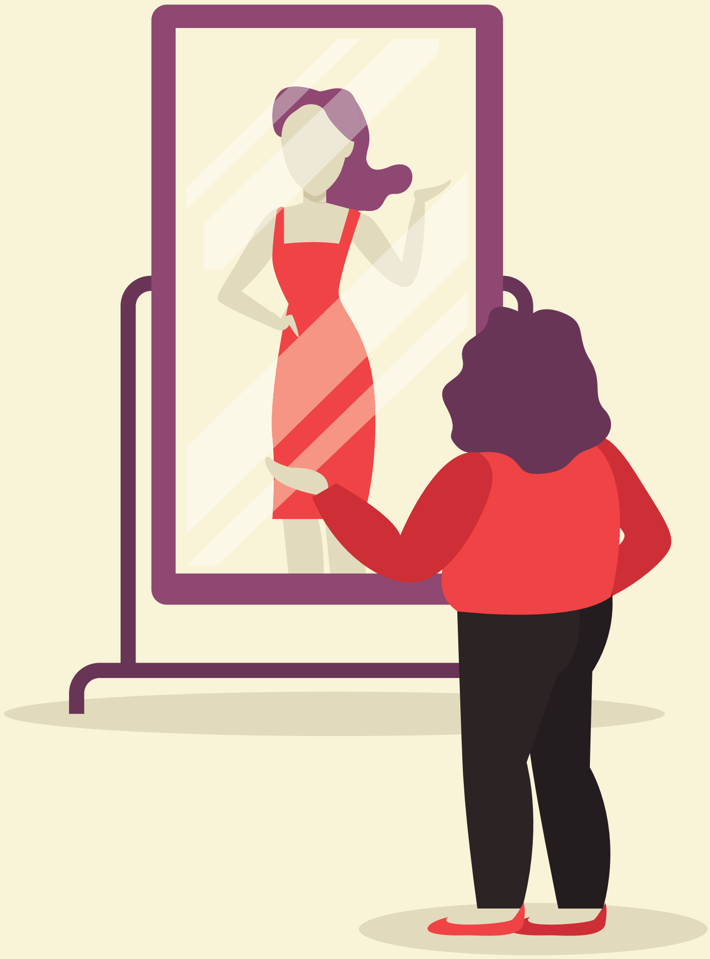
Data may look great on paper or in a spreadsheet, but if it is just a number that can be easily manipulated, you can't make business decisions based on it. The direct causal relationship between metric and success simply isn't there.

Taken at face value, vanity metrics merely disguise the real trends occurring beneath the surface.

These metrics are often reported as ROI, but rarely useful:

- **Pageviews.**
- **Social Media Likes.**
- **Bounce Rate.**
- **Social Media Followers.**
- **Site Visitors.**
- **Organic Traffic Growth.**
- **Keyword Rankings.**

Vanity metrics may be referred to as engagement or consumption metrics: They can measure non-transactional activity, but they do not correlate in any way to revenue. View these metrics in the context of audience engagement and behavior to better understand how your content is being received (not whether it is or isn't making you money).



# METRICS THAT CORRELATE TO A DOLLAR VALUE

To report vanity metrics in a business setting is to over-represent web performance or misinform other stakeholders. On the other hand, vanity metrics are useful indicators to measure brand awareness.

But to accurately report ROI, you must look at metrics that actually matter to the bottom line. Depending on their role within the sales funnel, these are sometimes known as conversion, optimization or revenue metrics.

These metrics may include:

- **Average Search Position for commercial-intent keywords.**
- **eBook Downloads.**
- **Marketing-Qualified Leads.**
- **Sales-Qualified Leads.**
- **Conversion Rate.**
- **Customer Acquisition Cost.**
- **Customer Lifetime Value.**

By closely measuring these KPIs, you gain a better sense of what's really happening under the hood of your site. You are also able to better target channels and leads that are likely to generate the most revenue.

If at the end of the quarter, your boss says, "What's the dollar-in, dollar-out of this content marketing program?" you should be able to quickly respond with a single dollar value.

# WHY DOLLAR-DRIVEN METRICS MATTER

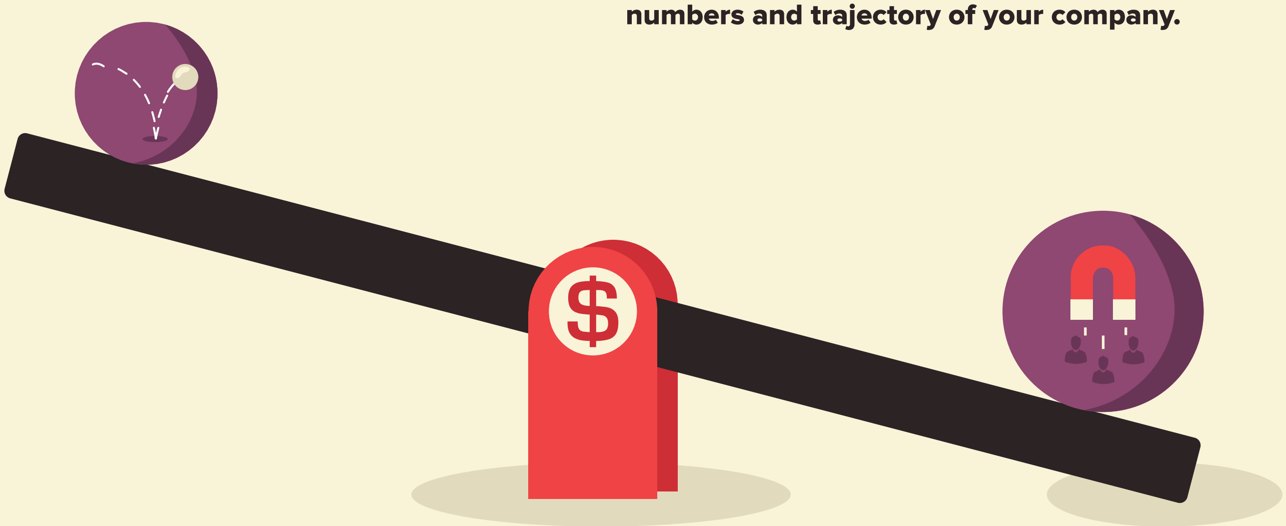
While there is inherent value in ALL data points, some naturally hold more weight during business conversations that include other departments beyond marketing.

That's why metrics tied to revenue streams are enormously more impactful, as they contribute to the fundamental financial sustainability of the business as a whole. Take, for instance, this common scenario: A website's organic traffic plummets 17 percent year over year and the bounce rate goes through the roof. Red flags, right?

**Well, no.** Traffic and bounce rate have no impact on customer subscriptions or revenue. The above numbers actually reflect what happened to Brafton.com in 2017.

But here's the kicker: We increased inbound leads **105 percent** during the same timeframe.

Had we chosen to report traffic or bounce rate in our analytics reports, we would have targets on our back.



But by showing the metric that actually matters to the bottom line, inbound leads, our digital outlook is completely different in the best way possible.

This isn't about cherry-picking only positive performance metrics; it's about **accuracy in numbers and trajectory of your company.**

# BUILDING A MEASURABLE SALES FUNNEL

The shift in thinking, from metrics that don't matter to those that do, should be an **organization-wide initiative.**

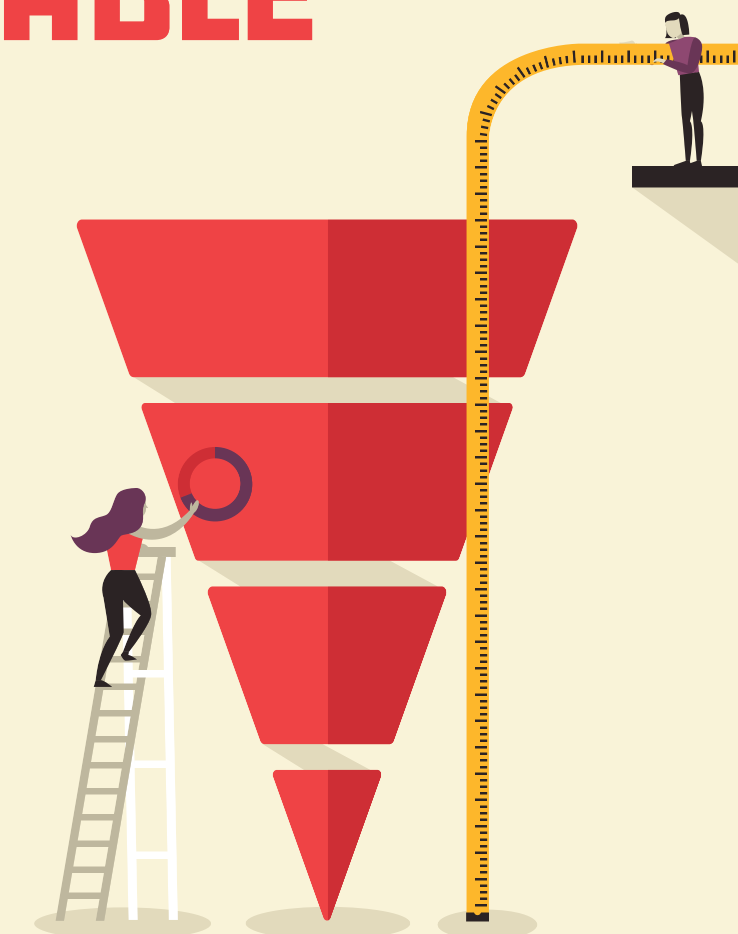
Knowing whether your sales funnel is working as efficiently as possible directly correlates to closing more deals or unwittingly turning away warming leads.

Content marketing shortens the sales cycle but only if it's deployed properly at each stage of the funnel. A **Time to Purchase** metric illustrates the amount of time it takes for a user to officially make a purchase or sign a contract.

To reduce this number, all touchpoints in the sales process need to be mapped to specific types of content, and companies need to be able to measure the effectiveness of the content as well.

Additionally, setting up **Goal Completions for Assisted Conversions** provides insight into the monetary value of conversions facilitated by content and allows you to properly attribute ROI to content that was a user's final interaction with your company before he or she completed a goal.

Tiered, sales-specific metrics are critical to driving content marketing ROI.



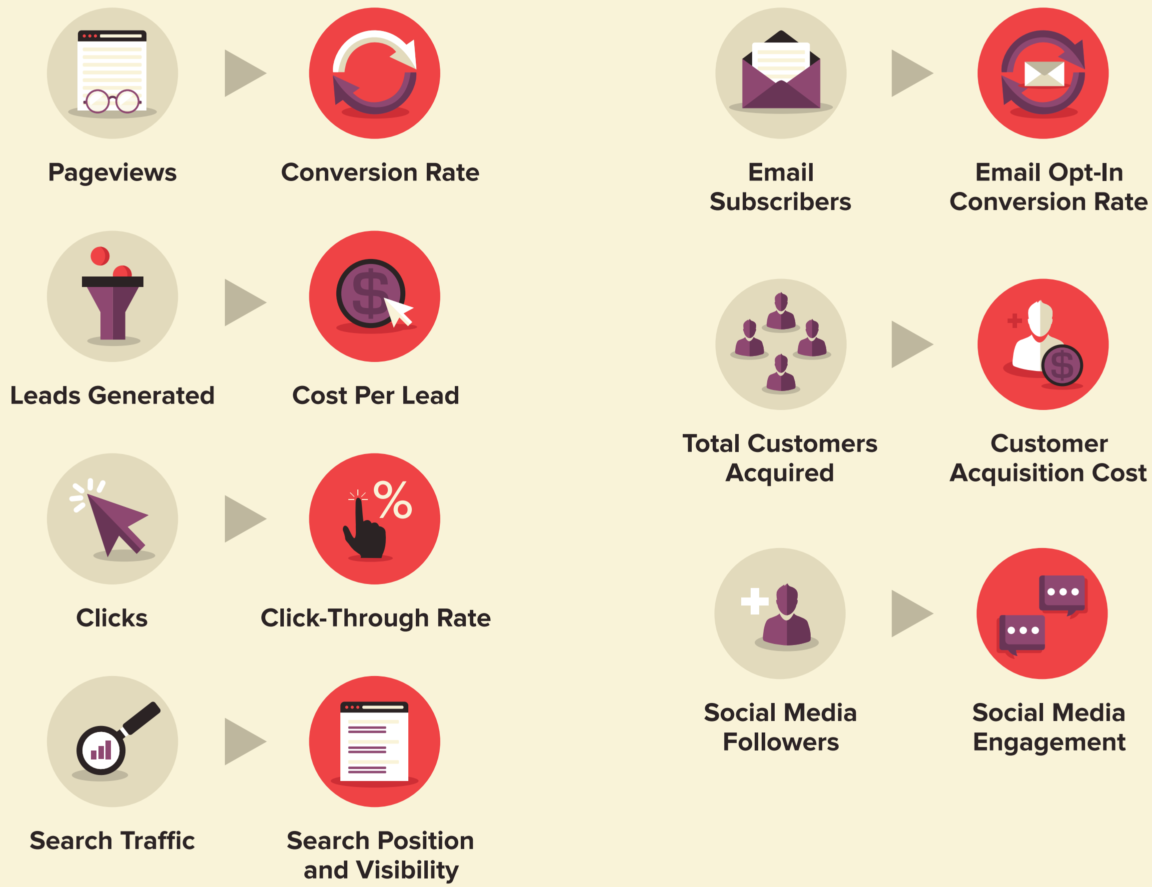
# MAKING METRICS ACTIONABLE TO YOUR BUSINESS

Eschewing certain metrics for others makes business sense. But, you can also subtly adjust metrics you're already tracking to be more in line with ROI you're hoping to report.

Because vanity metrics are effectively on-paper indicators with no real-world takeaways, they're not practical or actionable for your business.

You can still collect all the information you currently do, but the key is to measure and report it in a different light, one that encourages action or additional investment.

Consider making vanity metrics actionable by swapping:



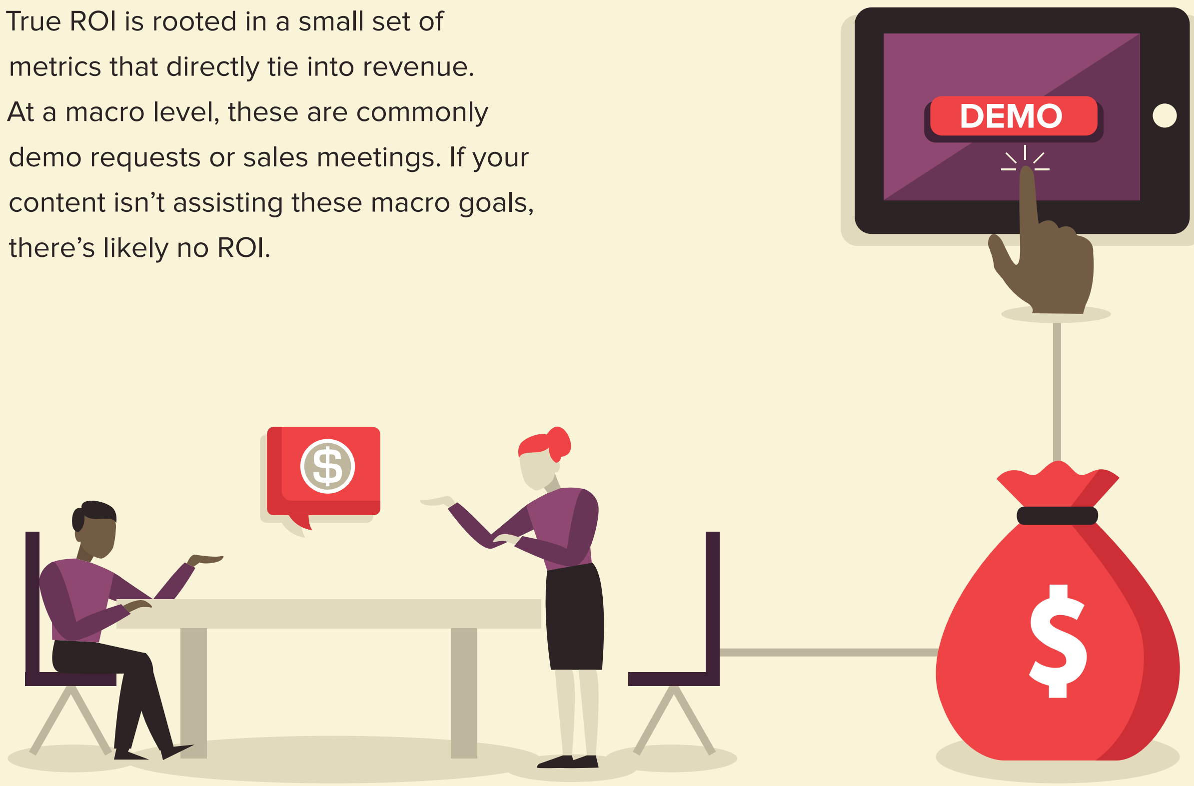
# WHAT IS "TRUE" ROI?

Leaving behind everything you know about web analytics, you should ask yourself one simple question: "Why does my website exist?"

The answer is: **to make money.**

By treating all your web activities in the same way you handle other business assets, you gain a better understanding of what to measure and how to attribute ROI.

True ROI is rooted in a small set of metrics that directly tie into revenue. At a macro level, these are commonly demo requests or sales meetings. If your content isn't assisting these macro goals, there's likely no ROI.



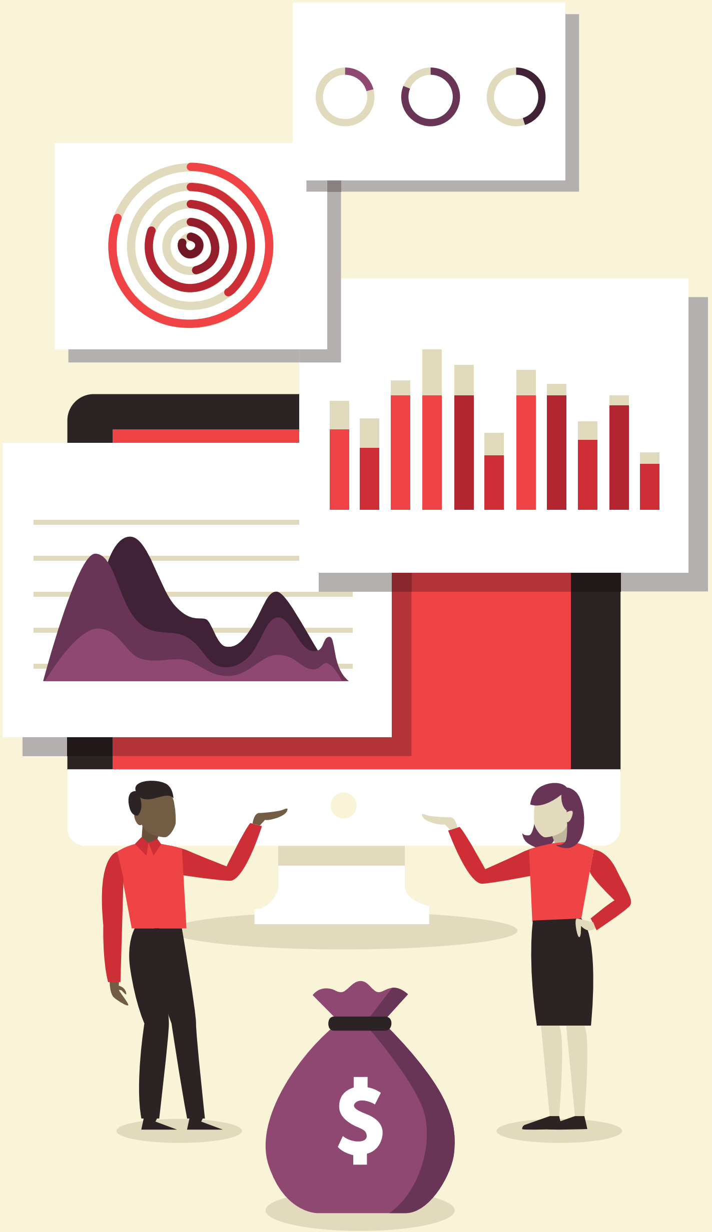
# CONCLUSION

B2B companies that report successful content marketing results allocate **40 percent** of their total marketing budget to this specific initiative. The industry average is 26 percent, so it's clear that those that invest more are seeing higher ROI.

Another **38 percent** of B2B marketers intend to ramp up their content marketing investments as well.

With the budgets and buy-in to produce high-quality content, marketers should be placing more emphasis on securing those future investments by properly attributing ROI on an asset-level basis.

Just remember, some web metrics matter more than others, so construct your analytics dashboards accordingly.



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