



YOU NEED TO KNOW HOW TO TELL STORIES ABOUT YOURSELF

**RESULTS OF
COMPREHENSIVE
PIONEERING RESEARCH ON
THE CONTENT AND DIGITAL
MARKETING OF MEETING
DESTINATIONS**



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NEW EUROPE MEETINGS INDUSTRY MAGAZINE

GUIDE ON CONTENT MARKETING OF MEETING DESTINATIONS AFTER THE CORONA CRISIS

This file is directed at key stakeholders:

- general managers and communication managers in convention bureaus
- general managers and communication and marketing heads of congress venues
- event organisers
- all key stakeholders in the meetings industry that are involved in marketing and communication
- all who are interested in the meetings industry

Introduction

Content marketing is considered to be the heart and the fuel of modern digital marketing. Its importance has become especially clear now when we are trying to exit the Corona crisis. Rather than

generic information about destinations, meeting planners want to know about ways that destinations can solve their problems. This is also why we often say that content is the most used, reused,

misused, and abused word in marketing. Such situations are a challenge for our team to make content marketing more valuable and effective and shine a light on this subject from various perspectives.



The research department of Toleranca Marketing rose to the challenge and divided the research into two phases:

— **Phase 1:** Content analysis on the websites of 135 meeting destinations

— **Phase 2:** Online survey completed by 63 convention bureaus

We were positively surprised by the reactions of the destinations. **Out of 135 destinations invited to participate in the research, 47.67% of them responded, which represents a statistically credible sample.**

By conducting the research, we wanted to examine whether our thesis “More Content - More Contracts” is true. Whether good content sells, if it is important for digital marketing, what it means to have good content marketing on social media, how to measure results and what are the best-case examples. Furthermore, the research provided answers to a whole series of new questions that we will share with the community.

The research showed that there is room for improvement when it comes to the content marketing of meetings destinations. More than half of meeting destinations (55.6%) do not use content marketing, although they are aware of its importance (92.1%).

Furthermore, the research proved that content marketing is often equated with writing texts and social media management, which is far from the truth. Some time ago, we were able to live decently with a simple website. Today, however, the holistic user experience through the use of all channels is crucial. The positive news of the research is that destinations using content marketing effectively are highly successful and are ranked as the best on numerous lists.

Below, we will present why content marketing is crucial for meeting destinations and what the future holds.

Content analysis of destination websites

We analysed the content marketing of 135 convention bureaus. The starting point was ICCA's International Destination Competitive Index. In our opinion, it is a truly representative sample that includes destinations from around the world. Moreover, it includes convention bureaus of various types and hierarchies.

44.4% of convention bureaus regularly refresh the information on their websites and offer compelling content to event organisers. This data coincides with the reach of their websites. In comparison with inactive convention bureaus, they have significantly more traffic.

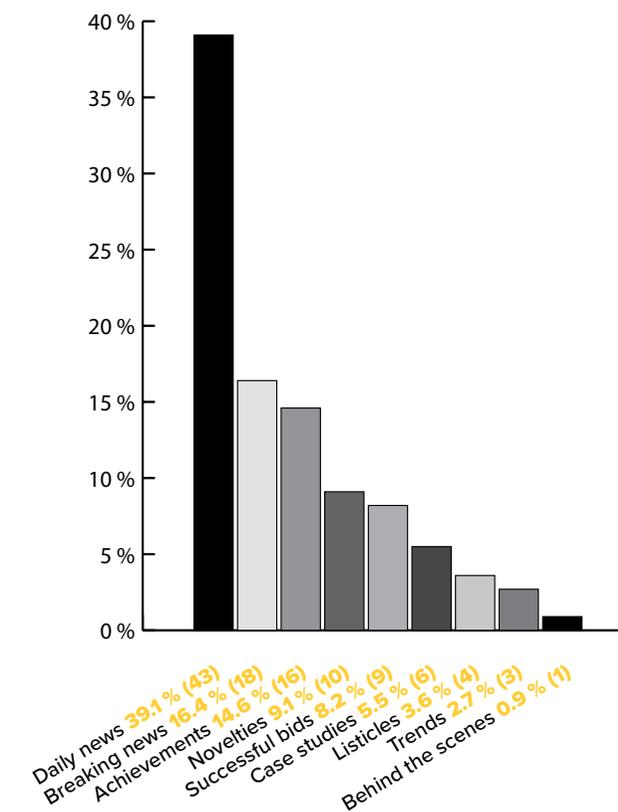
The analysis showed the following structure of their websites:

- **44.4 %** (60) Portals with dynamic and regularly updated MICE content*
- **31.9 %** (43) Portals with static and occasionally updated texts on the destination
- **17.8 %** (24) Portals with dynamic content on tourism in general
- **5.9 %** (8) Destinations without web sites

*MICE content is considered to be news, blogs, recommendations, interviews, white papers, case studies, news on acquired events, and the like.

What type of stories do we prepare for event organisers?

As part of the analysis, we took an in-depth, editorial look at 110 stories. The structure is interesting and is indicative of a basic pattern of communication with potential buyers: event organisers.



Equally interesting is the average mark of key criteria that makes content newsworthy. We have marked this with an index from 1 to 10. The mark is, needless to say, subjective; however, the marks are a representation of the current situation. The mark is based on 15 years of experience in this specific area, as well as on the analytics of individual articles. In our honest belief, these are key criteria, according to which we also evaluate the content of other media editors and organisers. Above all, the concern of every editor is to thrill their readers (event organisers) with their stories.

We have calculated average marks for all 110 stories:

- Mark 9.4** Reality and actuality
- Mark 8.4** Timing and novelty
- Mark 7.3** Impact and relevance
- Mark 7.2** Importance and value for meeting planners
- Mark 7.0** Public interest
- Mark 6.8** General content quality
- Mark 6.4** Content shareability
- Mark 5.0** UEP (Unique Emotional Proposition)

Timing and novelty (8.4) and **reality and actuality (9.4)** are the highest marked criteria. Convention bureaus are more or less doing a good job in this field. Only certain bureaus are problematic, as they post outdated stories. Content from before the Corona crisis is undoubtedly irrelevant.

Impact and relevance (7.3), importance and value for meeting planners (7.2), and **public interest (7.0)** were criteria that were marked as solid or average. They are intertwining criteria that are extremely important when it comes to optimisation. When writing stories, we must find the answer to the question of why. Experience has shown that this kind of answer-seeking is not always the case.

General content quality (6.8) and **Content shareability (6.4)** are two criteria that have an average grade. We will write more about how to improve in this area below. For starters, professionalised content preparation could be a great help. Convention bureaus that have a professional content manager in their team have a major advantage.

UEP - Unique Emotional Proposition (5.0) received the lowest marks regarding stories. One of the reasons why this area is rarely found is political correctness. Yet it is exactly this segment that is crucial for finding the path to the hearts of event organisers. It can affect numerous issues, and it has the greatest impact on the low shareability of stories on social media.

You need to know how to tell stories about yourself

Results have shown that the ratio between quality and quantity is dreadful. Prevalent content (daily news and accolades) has the lowest marks. Therefore, there is much room for improvement and for an optimal time for a rise in quality. Below are the results of the best and worst results of stories:

- **index 8.56** Ideas listicles
- **index 7.92** Breaking news
- **index 7.58** Future trends
- **index 7.51** Destination novelties
- **index 7.33** Case studies
- **index 6.89** Successful bidding
- **index 6.82** Daily news
- **index 6.72** Achievements and awards

We have excluded the segment, Behind the scenes, as we only evaluated one such article. The single article, however, received one of the highest marks - 9.25. To make a comparison, we would need at least three or more content-related stories.

The most newsworthy and viewed news of convention bureaus is **practical ideas for organisers, trends, and case studies**, which cannot be found in other media channels. Exclusive stories and stories that reach the hearts of event organisers are the winning combinations.

Content relevance is more important than content length

The average length of individual articles we analysed is also intriguing. The average article length is 530 words, whereas the average title length is 9.3 words.

The situation according to individual categories is as follows:

———	Achievements	content 460.4 words/title 9.8 words
———	Case studies	content 476.5 words/title 8.5 words
———	Novelties	content 478.8 words/title 7.8 words
———	Daily news	content 508.1 words/title 9.9 words
———	Future trends	content 528.7 words/title 9.0 words
———	Successful bidding	content 562.9 words/title 9.4 words
———	Breaking news	content 574.9 words/title 9.5 words
———	Ideas listicles	content 864.0 words/title 5.8 words

The information regarding the length of the content does not tell the whole story. What is more important is the content itself. The best-rated articles in our analysis meet all prerequisites, which we have assembled into ten simple recommendations.

1. Use short titles. Those that trigger curiosity and address the problems of event organisers.
2. The first paragraph is crucial. The best stories give enough information in the introductory paragraph; however, not all at once. Intros should only be a few sentences long.
3. Stories have to be diverse. We can achieve this by using subtitles, stress marks, or bullet points.
4. Short paragraphs are of the utmost importance. Too many stories we analysed were full of unforgettably-long paragraphs.
5. Engaging writing is effective. We like to feel that someone is talking and addressing us directly. It feels more personal and active.

6. The text needs to be concise, understandable, and without fancy words in order for readers to understand it.

7. A novelty or a new perspective is a good basis for the content to become successful. Such novelties were frequent during the Corona crisis.

We also recommend testing the text before publishing it. You can do so by asking a few individuals, who will dare to say if there is anything that is unclear after reading it.

The average length of the ten most-read articles in our analysis is **520.9 words**, while the length of titles is **8.1 words**.

Content is the main aspect of website optimisation

We also delved into the relevance of published articles. The oldest story we found was from the distant May 2019. Stories from the past three months can be counted as relevant. There are around 65.4% of such stories, which is a mediocre result and a wake-up call for destinations to start publishing up-to-date stories.

— **30.0** % of stories were published in **JANUARY 2021**

— **21.8** % of stories were published in **FEBRUARY 2021**

— **13.6** % of stories were published in **DECEMBER 2020**

— **19.1** % of stories were published in **NOVEMBER 2020**

— **15.5** % of stories were published before **NOVEMBER 2020**

The digital beast has an insatiable hunger for good content. Content marketing needs to be included in all marketing processes. It is the prerequisite for the success of sales activities. Therefore, the rhythm and relevance of stories are of the utmost importance.

The meetings & Events world is full of stories that are waiting to be written

The structure of the quality of the articles is also interesting. We have divided them into five categories, among which the majority of media channels would publish stories ranked six or higher. On the other hand, if the articles had a lower mark, they would only publish them conditionally.

— **22.7 %** (25) mark above 8 -
Very good newsworthiness

— **61.8 %** (58) mark 6 to 8 -
Reasonable newsworthiness

— **15.5 %** (16) mark 4 to 6 -
Weak newsworthiness

— **14.6 %** (11) mark 3 to 4 -
Very weak newsworthiness

— **0.0 %** (0) mark 1 to 2 -
Not newsworthy

The main challenge is how to transform the majority of content (61.8%) into stories that event organisers will enjoy reading. We estimate that just by applying professional copy, major progress could be made. The issue at hand is articles that have weak or very weak newsworthiness. There are 30.1% of such stories, which should be re-written.

In any case, the key question of whether you know how to step into the shoes of event organisers remains. If your clients are predominantly from the local market, then it is logical that you will localise your content and language accordingly. That also applies to specific markets such as the Russian market and the like.

Can you still afford a life without content marketing?

Further recommendations based on our content analysis:

1. Reading time: measure the time for reading the content and clearly communicate it with readers. We recommend that you highlight reading time, preferably at the start of the text.

2. Construct dynamic content: Differentiate between PR articles and partner news or other stories. By doing so, you will strongly improve the user experience for readers.

3. Publish stories frequently: We recommend that you publish new stories at least every fortnight. A weekly dynamic of posting is even better; however, it depends on set objectives.

4. Direct promotion: If content “smells” like the promotion of a particular destination, event organisers will avoid it at all costs.

5. Content exclusivity: Ensure content exclusivity that readers can only find in your communication system and social media.

6. Wordiness: Avoid wordiness or saying much but telling little. The rule of thumb is short and concise sentences with convincing content.

7. Communication style: Ensure that your destination has a personalised style of communication in storytelling, explaining, and substantiating.

8. Multipurpose content: Create content with a clearly-set redistribution strategy on social media and other channels of communication.

9. Content anchor: Drop your content anchor and meticulously sustain and edit it. Do not sacrifice quality for quantity.

10. Analytics: Follow and analyse the reach of your content through all channels. That is the only way to improve marketing effectiveness.

Most importantly, respect your readers and communicate with this better here. em in a language they understand. Therefore, you should know your focus group, find out what their interests are, and what content they like to read.

Content is the capital of your destination

Good content is the communication capital of your destination. Just think about the incentive programmes that you have developed and possibly licensed. It is a sort of seed capital that can bear rich fruits. However, this capital is completely useless if you do not ensure suitable content distribution. This is where digital marketing comes into play.

The best destinations take distribution into their own hands and become new editors. By doing so, they ensure the happiness of congress organisers. Moreover, they ensure appealing quality content.

It is appropriate to feature some of the best convention bureaus in this field. All the mentioned destinations below have brilliantly optimised websites:

- Estonia** <https://www.ecb.ee/>
- Glasgow** <https://glasgowconventionbureau.com/>
- Melbourne** <https://www.melbournecb.com.au/>
- Montreal** <https://meetings.mtl.org/en>
- Salzburg** <https://www.salzburgcb.com/en/>
- Sydney** <https://www.besydney.com.au/>
- Vienna** <https://www.vienna.convention.at/en>

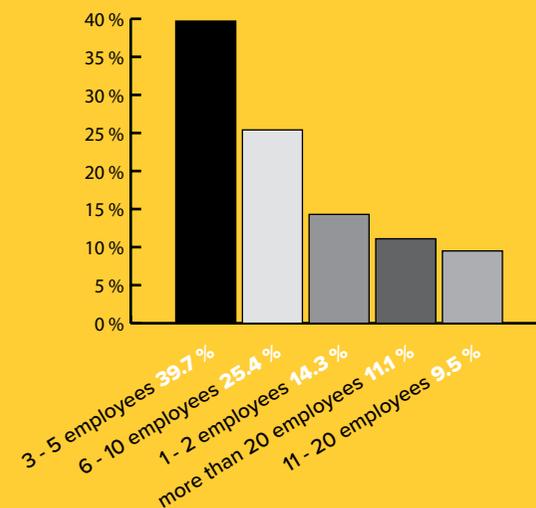
ONLINE SURVEY FOR CONVENTION BUREAUS

The online survey took place from 27th January to 12th February 2021. The survey was completed by 63 convention bureaus out of 135 invited. They are the same convention bureaus we analysed from the viewpoint of their published content. 46.67% of answers is a representative sample and speaks to the importance of the problem for convention bureaus. Once again, we want to thank all the convention bureaus that participated and took the survey.

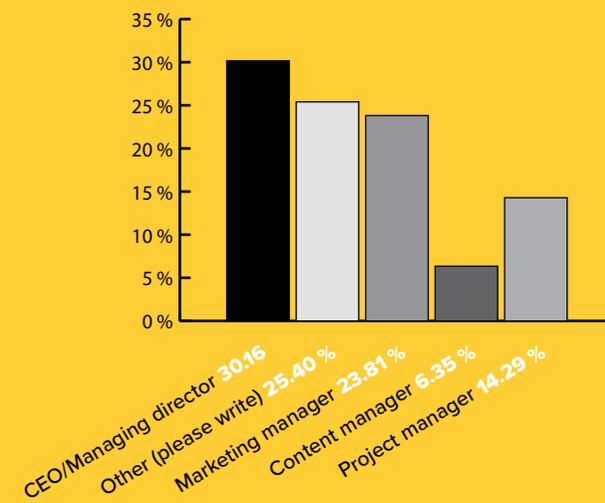
1. Respondents' structure

The vast majority of convention bureaus (65.1%) have from three to ten employees. The employee structure is closely linked to this. Larger convention bureaus have professional content managers or social media managers, whereas smaller convention bureaus have staff who are responsible for marketing in general. The survey was taken by a diverse group of profiles, which is proof that content and digital marketing do not have a clearly defined meaning and place in organisations. Predominantly, employees in charge of marketing and sales deal with content and digital marketing.

1.1. Size of your CVB?



1.2. What is your job title?

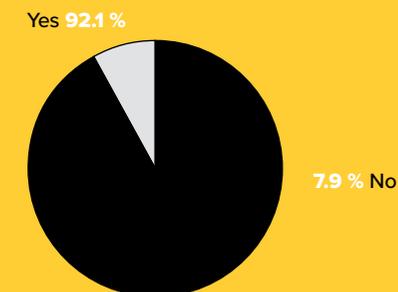


2. State of content marketing

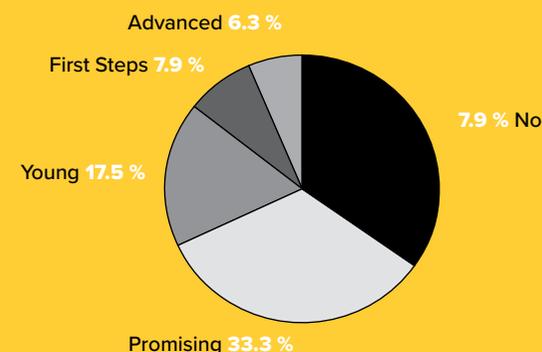
Almost all convention bureaus (92.1%) use content marketing as one of their destination marketing tools. A more detailed analysis shows a more realistic state. 41.2% of respondents evaluated the development state of content marketing as mature or advanced. This information goes hand in hand with our content analysis, where we found that 44.4% of convention bureaus regularly refresh the information on their websites and use content marketing. The percentage of destinations that have no experience in this area is relatively high. 25.4% of respondents evaluated their maturity state as young or as first steps. The percentage of those that do not have a developed strategy for content marketing is identical (25.4%).

Awareness regarding the significance of content marketing is immense. The challenge is the actual use of content marketing tools and techniques. More than half of convention bureaus (57.1%) do not have a developed content marketing strategy.

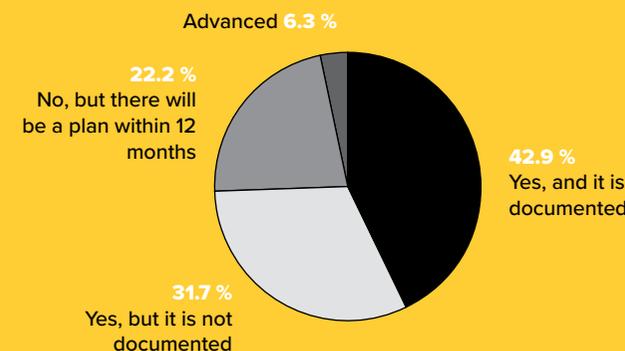
2.1. Are you using content marketing as a marketing approach in your destination?



2.2. Rate your destination's content marketing maturity level:



2.3. Do you have a content marketing strategy for your destination?

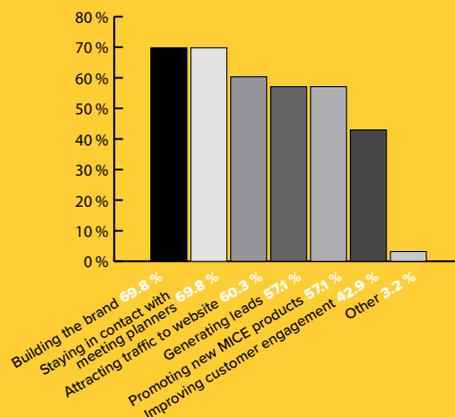


3. Strategy and tactics

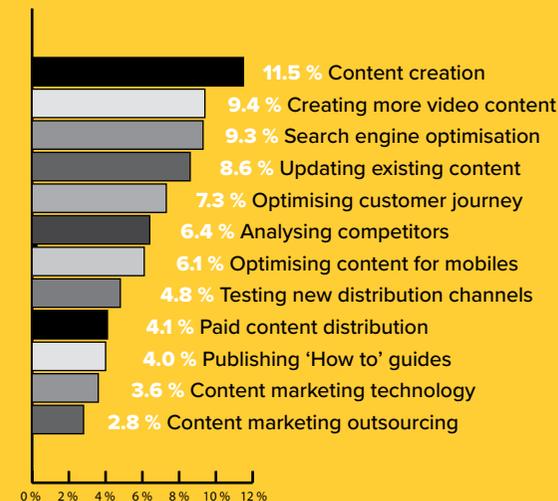
Important objectives of destination content marketing are harmonised. Among them, content marketing is highlighted as a tool for building brand image, as well as a key tool for keeping in touch with event organisers. Furthermore, respondents evaluated building a community as a prioritised goal. During the pandemic, community-building was manifested by joining online conversations (25.4%) and attending webinars (23.8%). The respondents are aware that creating content is key for quality content marketing. In addition, they ranked video content and SEO highly. In our opinion, there is much yet to be done in UX and the quality of content, alongside optimisation and the improvement of current content.

Lead generation is one of the crucial aspects of B2B marketing. It is fuelled by content marketing and is predominantly featured on landing pages. The survey showed that this aspect of marketing is not used enough nor strategically supported.

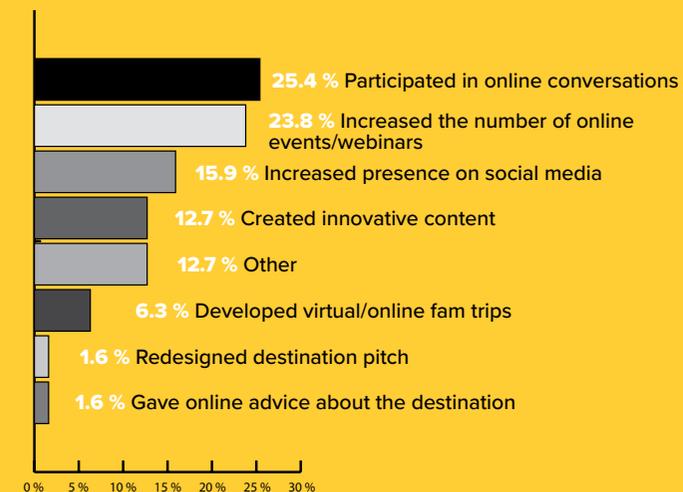
3.1. What are your priority goals with content marketing in 2021?



3.2. What are the most effective content marketing tactics for meeting destinations?



3.3. Throughout this pandemic, how has your destination interacted with meeting planners?

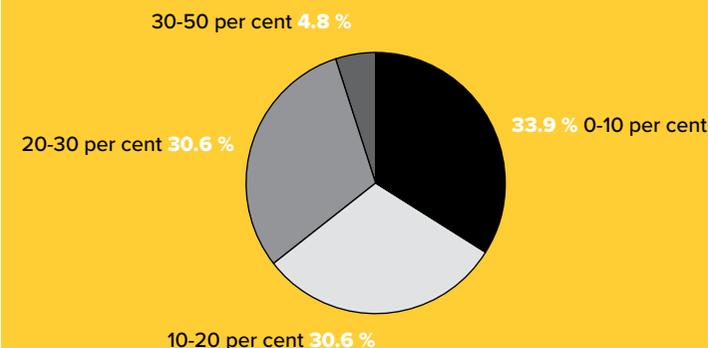


4. ROI and budget for content marketing

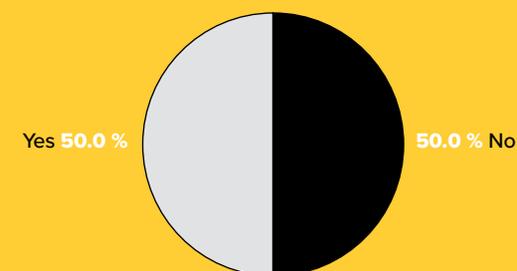
Analysis of the percentage of the marketing budget allocated to content marketing showed that it represents between 10 to 30 per cent of the entire budget. **Half of the respondents intend to increase their budget in 2021.** The answers regarding the success rate of content marketing were intriguing. Only 15.9% of respondents do not evaluate it as successful, while 27.4% of respondents do not measure ROI.

Among the key information for measuring ROI are web traffic, social media analysis, and similar information regarding content reach through various channels. In our opinion, in the future, there will be more concrete information such as the number of RFPs, lead quality, and actual sales results. It is wise to support your KPIs with suitable ROI information. You should ask for this if you use paid methods of content distribution (63.5%).

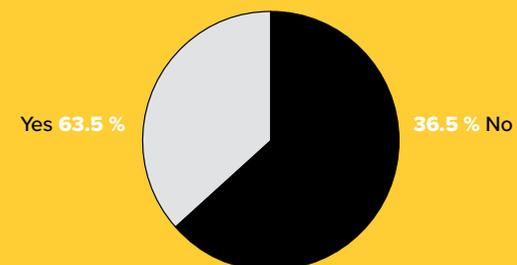
4.1. What percentage of your marketing budget do you allocate for content marketing?



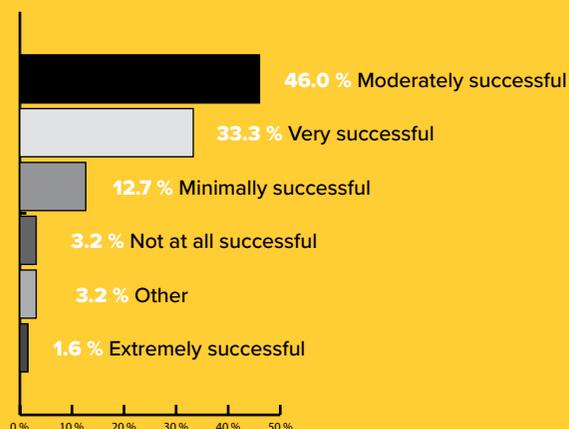
4.2. Do you intend to increase your content marketing budget in 2021?



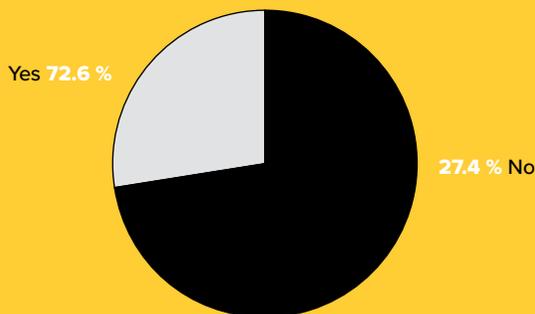
4.3. Have you ever used paid methods to distribute content in the last 12 months?



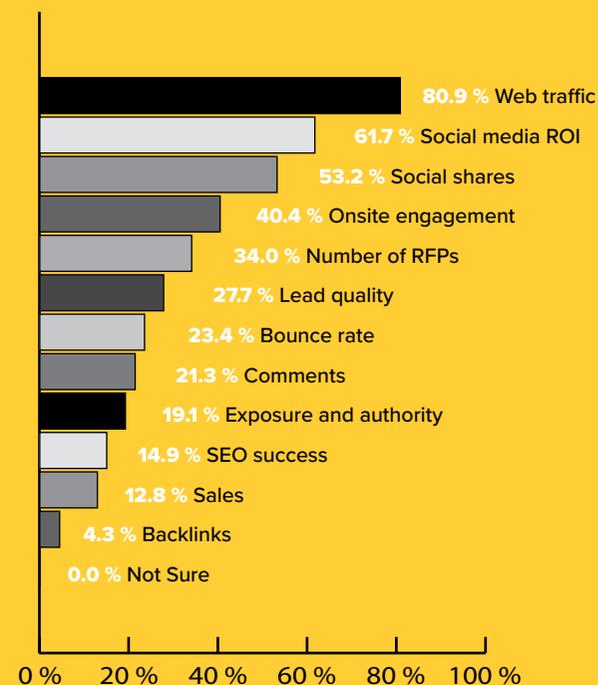
4.4. How do you rate your organisation's overall level of content marketing success?



4.5. Do you measure content marketing ROI?



4.6. If yes, which ROI metrics matter the most to you?



80.9% of respondents evaluate their content marketing activities as successful.

72.6% of them actually measure their activities with the help of various tools for measuring ROI.

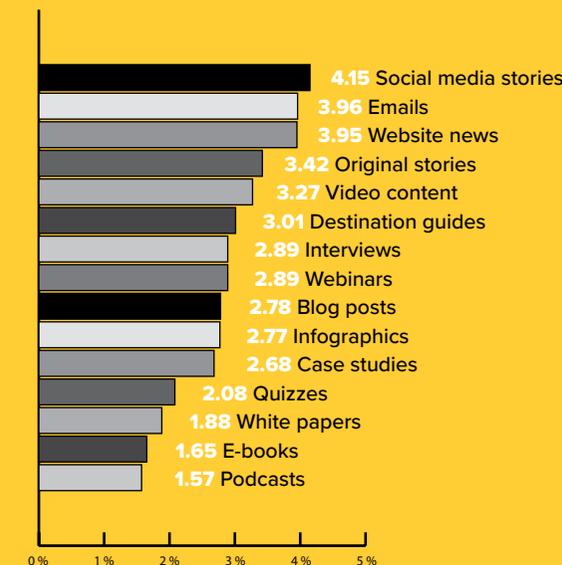
5. Content types and effectiveness

The survey on the consistency of posts showed that the majority of convention bureaus use traditional content formats. In particular, they use media stories, emails, website news, and original stories. An increasing number of destinations prepare video content. However, more demanding formats are hard to come across. For instance, infographics, podcasts and white papers are rare.

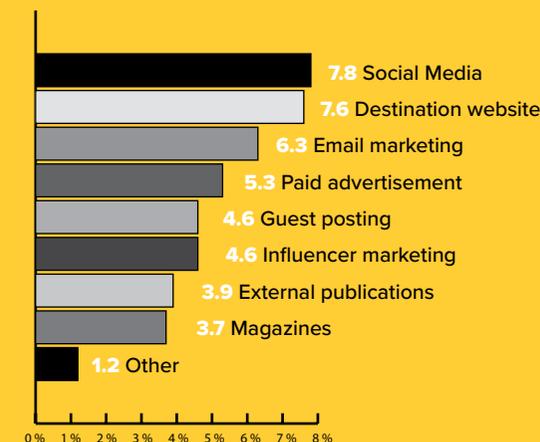
From the viewpoint of distribution effectiveness, most destinations are loyal to social media, websites, or e-marketing. We also posed a provocative question to participants - whether printed advertising will die out. The answers were dispersed, and the 50.8% of respondents that were undecided proved there is uncertainty in this field. **Amongst social media, LinkedIn is the outright winner, followed by Facebook and Instagram, respectively.** We will delve into social media in some of our next research in the future.

5.1. How often do you produce the following pieces of content?

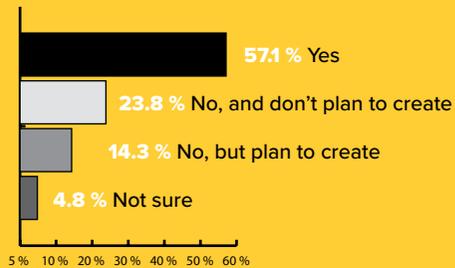
1 Never - 5 On a daily basis



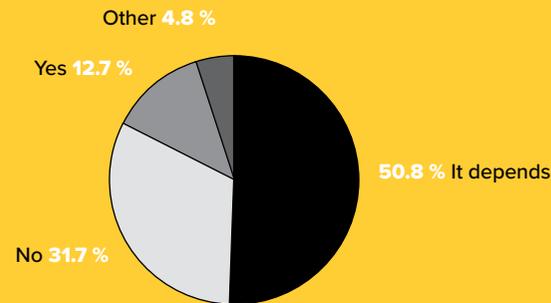
5.2. Rank the following channels according to their effectiveness for content distribution:



5.3. Is your content in regional languages?

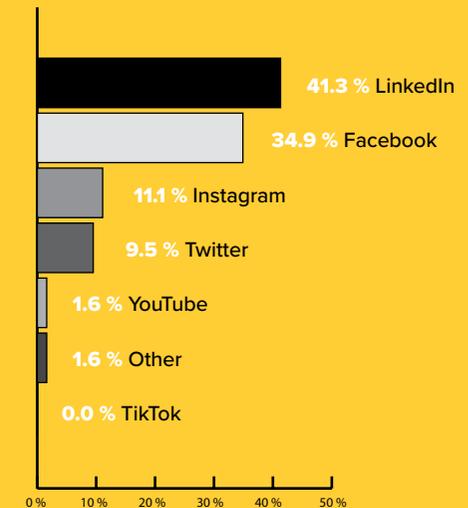


5.4. Is print advertising for destinations dead? *



*It depends on how markets will recover, most probably yes as a prediction
*is the TA the right TA?
*Advertising yes, Advertorials no

5.5. Which social media channel has proven to be the most effective for your destination?



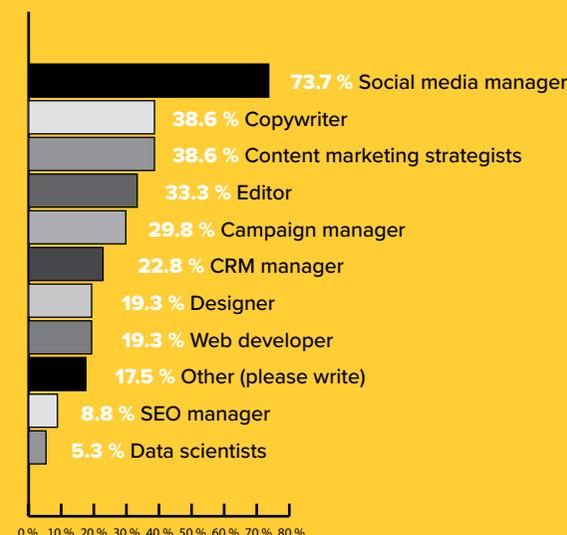
The research has shown that language localisation of content is vital. A whopping **65.1%** of respondents prepare their content in local languages or plan to do so in the future. This coincides with the regionalisation of congress markets.

A brief overview of the situation shows results regarding the question on content marketing profiles that convention bureaux employ. The biggest group are social media managers. Thus, social media channels have been given the greatest attention up to now. Nevertheless, there are also other interesting employee profiles such as growth hackers. Most often though, one person embodies multiple functions, as we figured out in the beginning. Half of the respondents outsource their content preparation. Outsourcing is most prevalent when it comes to video production, graphic design, translation, copywriting, and SEO optimisation.

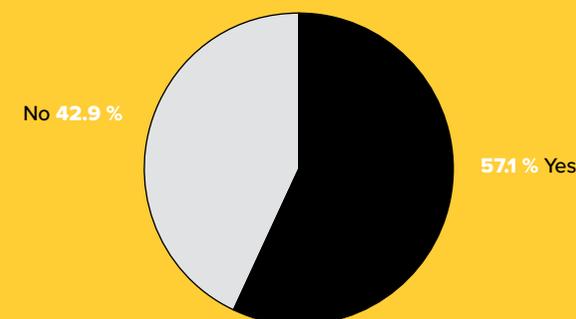
The respondents are aware that they will need to invest more in the technical support of content marketing, in particular in analytics and automatization tools. Although they are not completely aware, they are already using numerous tools that have been built on the foundations of artificial intelligence, such as supervised learning or natural language processing (NLP). It is evident that this field is yet relatively unknown and will demand more learning and more researching.

6. Where we are and how to move forward

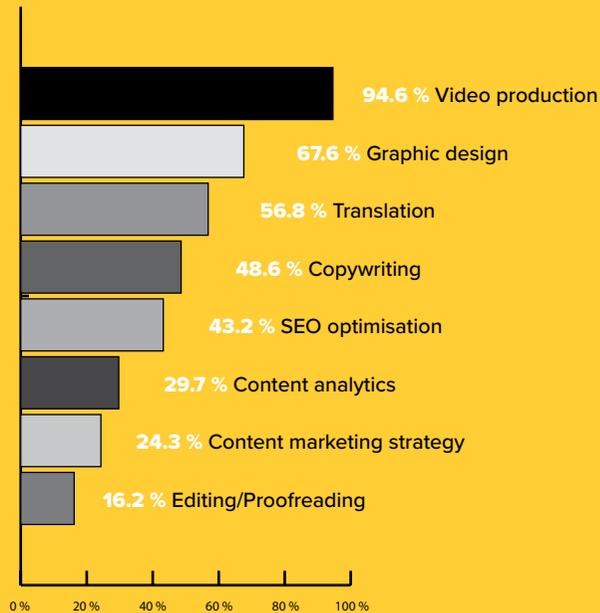
6.1. Which content marketing profiles do you have in your team?



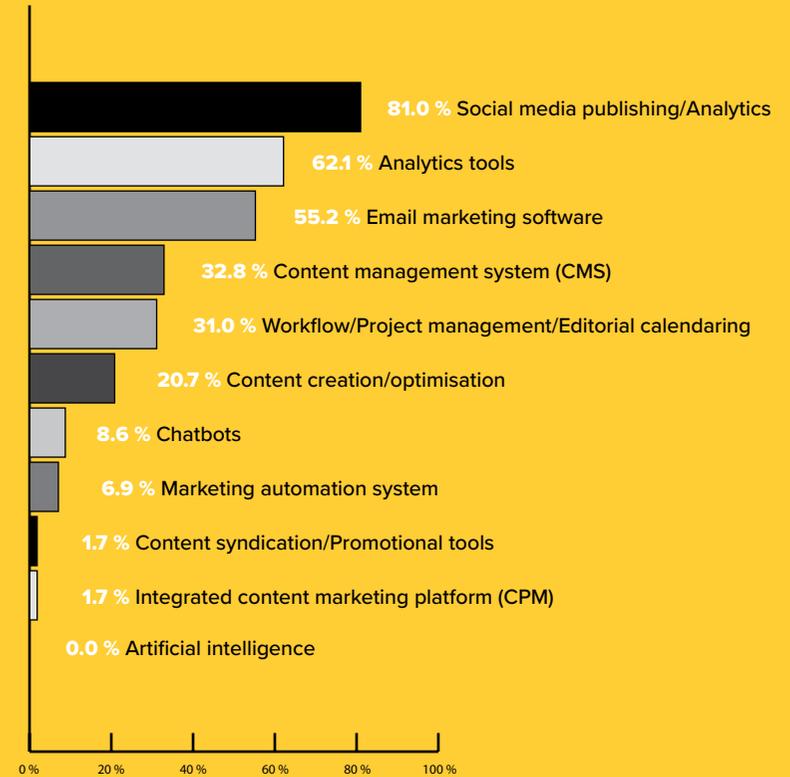
6.2. Do you outsource content creation?



6.3. If yes, which services do you outsource?



6.4. What technology do you use to assist with the management of content marketing?



7. Video has great potential, but it's not magic

We asked the respondents for their opinion regarding video content. The assertion was: Developing original (video) content with an authentic voice by DMOs to engage with clients has become increasingly important and will remain so even after the pandemic.

It is generally acknowledged that videos are an extremely effective tool that is not used enough.

Below are some of the most interesting statements and comments:

“Well, ROI in video marketing is really worthy. Over 85% of businesses are using video as a marketing tool, and this will go up. Video marketing can help many companies to achieve at least 60% returning customers.”

“Video content is of high importance. Not just since yesterday. Especially for the presentation of destinations, locations, congress hotels and incentive ideas in an international environment, it is essential. Video content helps to highlight unique selling points and to get a better understanding of what an event could look like without physically visiting the destination. BUT from our point of view, it doesn't make other content less important.”

“In general terms, video is very tricky for making such a statement. It varies from GIFs, sometimes very short and fast-cut videos, then sometimes slightly longer vid-

eos that are documentary-style etc. And still, after all the planning, it doesn't always have the desired effect. I agree that video is engaging, but the length of time customers watch seems to have decreased. Videos over 30 seconds seem too long now!” “Personally, I think video content is something people are already used to and expect to see instead of long “boring” articles. On the other hand, not all of the audience is video-focused and, still, video creation is for some companies too expensive to do often and at a very good level.”

“We also think that providing interesting video content is important. You have more possibilities to show your destination and create emotions and engagement with video content than with “just” pictures.”

“I agree because videos are getting more and more popular day by day. Various platforms such as TikTok and Instagram stories are gaining more and more of an audience and becoming great marketing instruments. However, the success of the videos depends on their quality, content, and length.”

Instead of a conclusion:

The respondents evaluated the development level of content marketing as mature and proved they knew the basic principles of content marketing. An in-depth look, however, shows a much more complex situation. Next to COVID-19, our fates are decided by artificial intelligence, which is increasingly helping us create personalised content.

Destinations that will swear by old-fashioned tricks and approaches will quickly lose the battle due to the rapid advance of algorithms that will offer users tailored content. On the upside, if we adapt and use new technologies to prepare better content and content strategies, we will enjoy the fruits of our labour in this new age of content marketing.

If you are still sceptical, you can take a look at the strategy Red Bull uses. They are the absolute winners in this area and are unrivalled. You can find out more at their website: <https://www.redbullcontentpool.com/>

Above all, make sure to write and publish quality, relevant, and up-to-date content that is appealing to event organisers. We are sure that the positive results will be a pleasant surprise.

How effective are you in content marketing in comparison to the competition?

The analysis is the first and most important step toward maximising your content potential.

The analysis will be a quick preventive outlook that will show the strong and weak points of your content marketing. Furthermore, it will serve as a guideline for the future. You will receive an overview of your content effectiveness, comparison with the competition, as well as our findings, evaluations, and recommendations.

Contact:
Toleranca Marketing d.o.o
Štihova 4, 1000 Ljubljana

360° MICE ACTIVATION - CONSULTING:

FEASIBILITY STUDIES

Conceptualisation and pre-opening planning for venues

BENCHMARK

Meeting destination experience index

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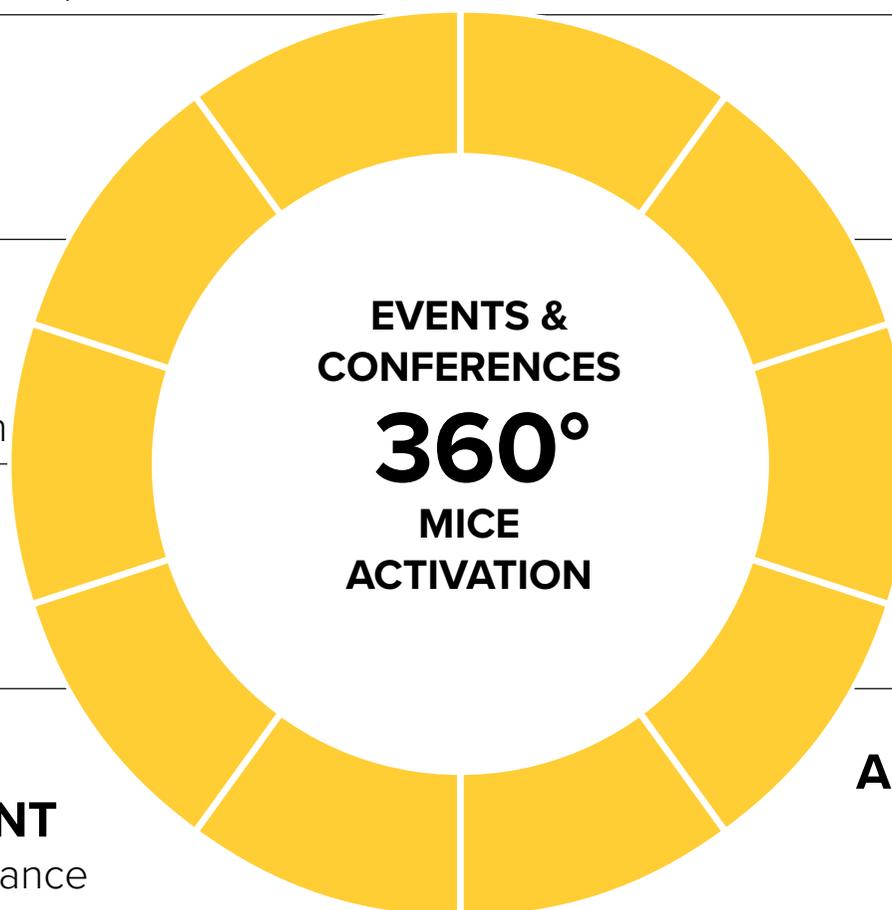
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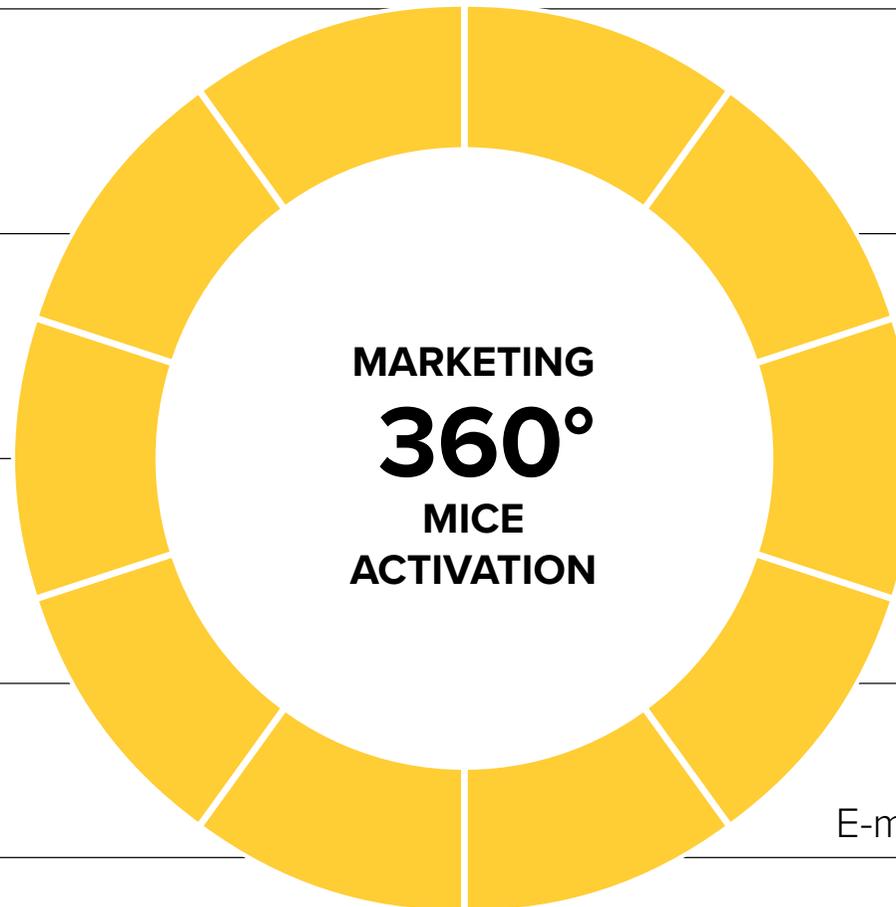
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We want to help you overcome this crisis and become MICE bestsellers

If you want more ideas, please contact us

Toleranca Marketing is an independent, integrated marketing and consulting agency specialised in the meetings industry in New Europe. We act as invisible hands; we are always in the right place at the right time.



Gorazd Čad
Editor-in-chief



Natalija Bah Čad
Meetings and
Event Manager



Aljaž Čad
Digital Marketing
Manager



Jasmina Jerant
Content writer



Barbara Dimec
Graphic designer

Best for recovery - stay relevant