INCITE GROUP

The State of Marketing

2017

THE INCITE MARKETING REPORT 2017

Personalization, Content, Storytelling and Attribution as the Core Competencies of the Marketing Department of the future

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Introduction

Welcome to Incite Group's second State of Marketing Report. This comprehensive white paper is based on original research. It provides keen current market insights and importantly, it also compares shifts in the market as well as in priorities from last year's report.

The research highlights these changes as well as identifies new trends and areas of interest. These benchmarks will be useful in sizing up your strategies with those of your peers around the globe.

Incite Group recognizes that different users have different use cases and so we separate the corporate end-user marketers from the broader marketing community.

The international survey features respondents from every geographical region and across industry sectors including agencies, B2B & B2C marketers, and digital social media.

The report focuses on three major areas that are key to marketing success: content and story-telling, marketing attribution, and personalization. These three topics remain the most important priorities for leaders in this field.

In fact, these three major themes are spotlighted, with each featuring an independent conference track, at the upcoming Incite Marketing Summit. It will be held in New York on October 24 and 25.

The summit focuses on essential changes needed to market effectively, engaging customers who are tired of marketing. The agenda is built around the priorities of in-house marketers and features more than 60 senior executives from household name brands (American Express, Chobani, Denny's, Hiscox, GE).

Methodology

The report is based solely on responses to a wide-ranging survey conducted from February through mid-April of this year. There were nearly 1,400 respondents to the survey, a 23% increase from last year, with very high participation levels completing the entire survey.

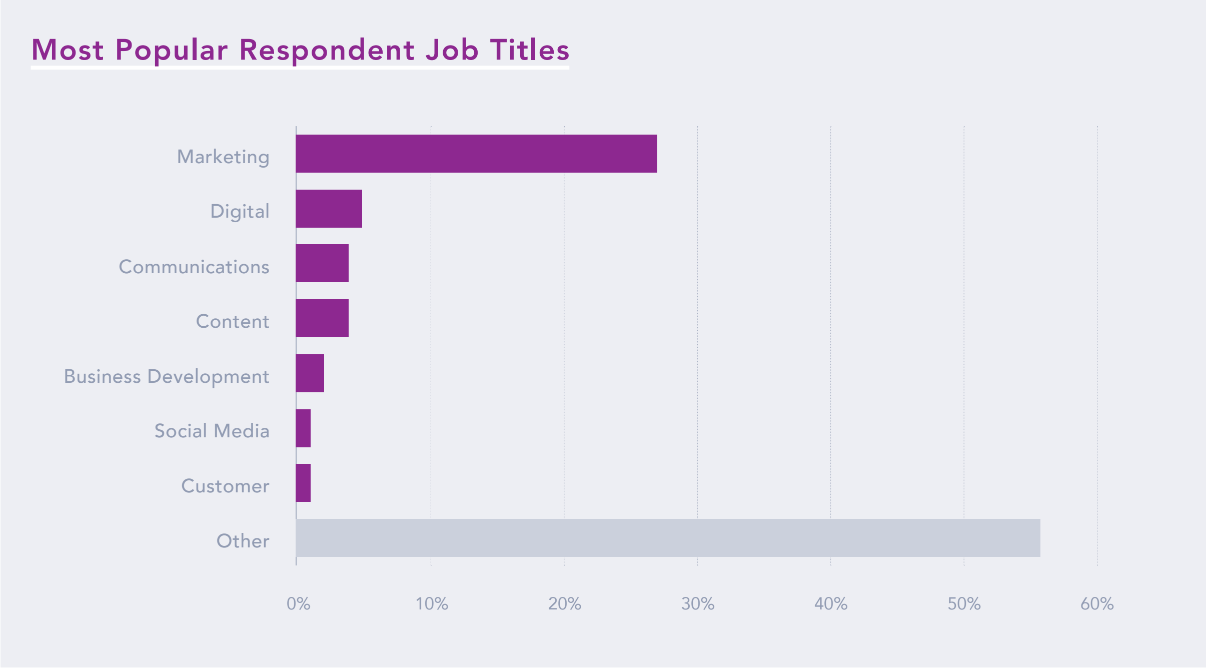
The survey was sent exclusively to the Incite Group's readership, with no attempts to focus on specific job titles or geographies (though given our primary focus on marketing and customer experience, it's not surprising that these functions made strong showings among respondents).

The majority of the questions were closed and the available answers were produced by the research with in-house marketing professionals conducted by the Incite Group year-round. Some open-ended questions were asked, though the only responses used in the white paper are those regarding an individual's job title.

Throughout the survey we separated out the 'in-house' marketers from the rest of the marketing community. The respondents chose their classification through self-selection from their answers to the question "What type of company do you work for?" Those answering "corporate/end user" defined themselves by choosing that answer.

Who responded?

The Incite Group survey was conducted over a two-month period with 1,372 professionals taking part. They came from a variety of companies, industries, and locations from around the globe.



Given the nature of the survey and Incite Group's target audience, it was not surprising that more than a quarter of respondents were marketers—far more than the next several groups combined.

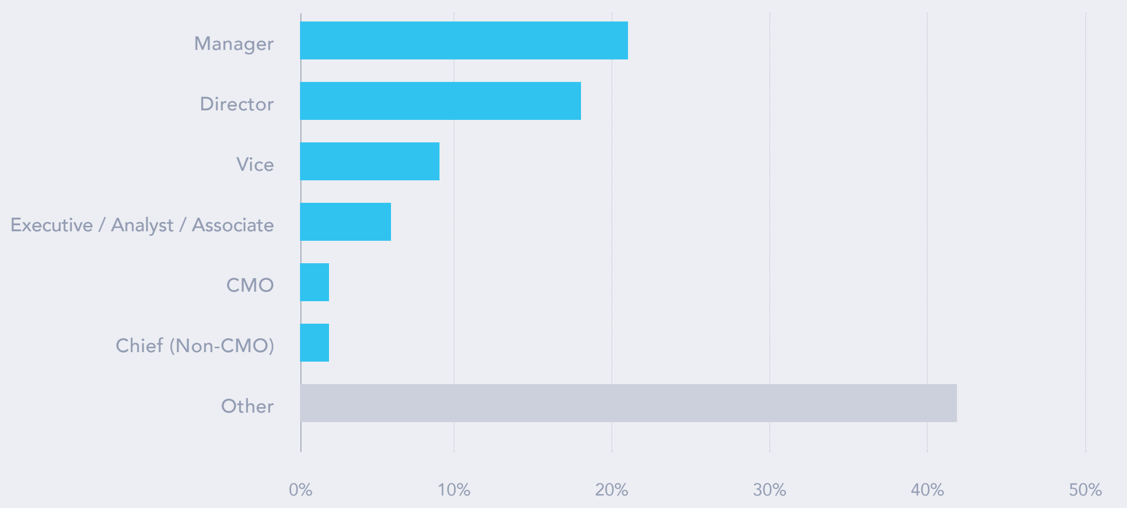
The next most popular job titles were digital, communications, content, and business development, respectively.

There was a common theme among all respondents as the lion's share function to create and provide exceptional customer experiences.

In subsequent sections of this white paper we break out corporate responses from the rest of the marketing community. This is done to highlight differences in approach and in opinion between in-house marketers and those in the broader marketing community. This highlights where there are parallels and distinct departures.

You can see where each group stands on the issues and consider whether the in-house side has moved too slowly to adopt new trends or technologies or perhaps just deliberately enough where results have not been proven. After all, the rest of the marketing community is trying to sell the in-house marketer on something and it will be their job to persuade in-house counterparts to make moves in mobile marketing with demonstrable results.

Most Popular Respondent Seniority



As for corporate hierarchy, the respondents ranged from veterans in the C-suite to junior associates just cutting their teeth.

While there were a number of CEOs and other senior executives, managers and directors again dominated the self-identified seniority levels. Those two categories combined to account for four out of ten respondents.

Geography

For the second straight year, respondents hailed from all around the world. Marketing specialists from the USA and Canada led the way, followed by mainland Europe, the UK, with Asia just behind.

Respondent Industry

Given Incite Group's large reach to a global, diverse audience of marketers, the survey respondents were again from a variety of industries.

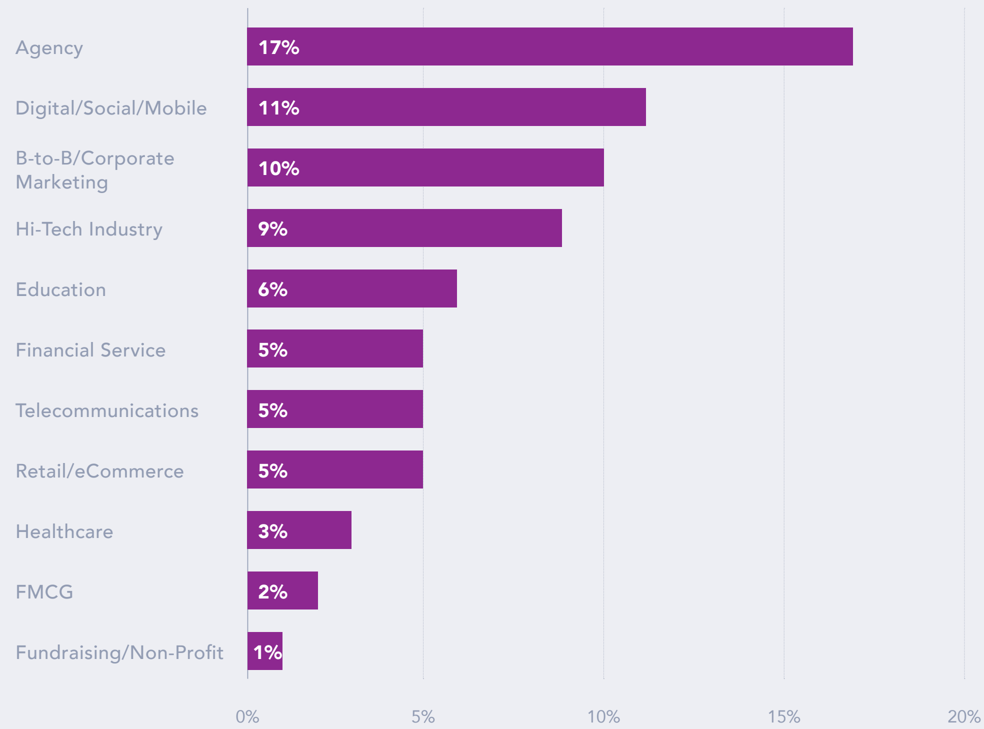
But before we drill down into sectors, we asked respondents to broadly categorize their company.

The Corporate/Brand designation topped the charts with Agency/Service Provider a close second. Together they accounted for 70% of respondents with MarTech firms third at 10%.

There wasn't much change in terms of which industry groups they hailed from, with the lion's share representing Incite Group's core audience: the end user marketer that works for a large corporate brand.

The biggest constituency came from the agency/service providers at 17%, unchanged from last year, and marketing tech firms again came third biggest group at 10%. Digital/social media/mobile jumped one spot to second place with 11%.

Most Popular Respondent Industry



The best-represented industry, as one may expect, was technology. It was followed by education, retail/eCommerce, and financial services tied with telecomm.

We asked respondents to self-select the type of company they worked for and whether they are an 'end user,' 'in-house' corporation or brand; an agency or service provider; a marketing technology firm; or something else.

As we continue our analysis, in many instances we break out the corporate responses from the rest of the marketing community. We do this to identify divergences in opinion as well as ideas where the groups are in lockstep. This may present some enterprising marketers with inspiration and ideas for campaigns to bridge the gaps. But it may also offer instructive opportunities to hit pause and reconsider whether some trends and ideas are effective in marketing to the corporate sector.

The most pressing issues in marketing right now

Brands can identify and communicate with loyal and so-called "super users" on mobile more easily than ever. But the upshot is those same consumers can and do readily drop brands and quickly cut off direct communications (by deleting apps or unsubscribing from emails) if there are problems with mobile communications and/or there are disappointing experiences.

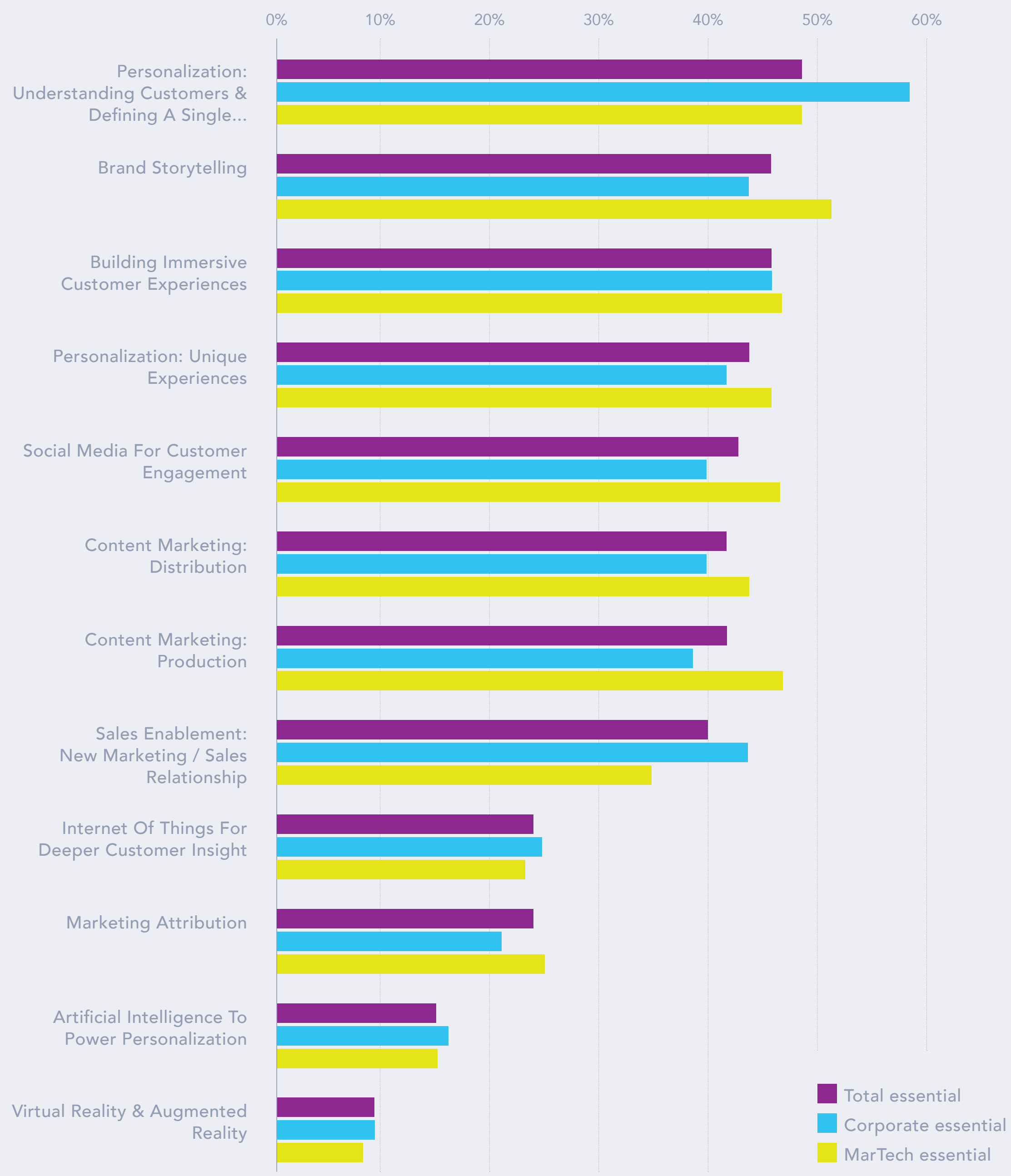
The most successful brands are tapping into this unprecedented amount of data about their customers and creating custom content and marketing to cater to the power user and often create evangelizing opportunities as well.

And marketers tell Incite Group that the most pressing issues have changed a little bit in the past year since we conducted the first survey. One major change is the amount of topics that were high vote getters.

Check out the results below for greater insight.

Eight different categories received votes of at least 40% or more of all marketer respondents, classifying them as "essential" for this year and beyond. Part of that was structural as a couple of categories were split to get more detailed interest in personalization and content marketing. By comparison, just one issue received 40% of votes a year ago.

Which Issues are Essential in 2017



That topic--Content marketing--was the clear leader a year ago and it remains a major focus, but this year we broke that out into two distinct areas: production and distribution. Perhaps the narrower focus kept it out of the top five topics. Instead, Personalization: understanding customers and defining a single customer view led the way with nearly half of respondents citing it as the biggest issue for 2017.

Brand storytelling made a big jump, up some six percentage points, to the second biggest issue from fourth place a year ago. The focus was particularly stark among MarTech firms, with 52% of these respondents citing it as crucial. That was the highest reading of any issue with either MarTech or Corporate respondents.

A newcomer to the survey—Building Immersive Customer Experiences—finished with a strong third-place showing, garnering votes from 46% of all marketers.

The biggest overall leap was for Social Media for Customer Engagement, which is clearly becoming table stakes for many brands. It rang up a 43% reading as essential this year, jumping from below 30% in 2016. And MarTech execs said it was an even higher priority, with a 47% vote tally.

It's not a huge surprise that immersive brand stories told via social media would attract votes. Clearly there is even greater emphasis on controlling the message and targeting specific consumers with creative content rather than simply sending ads or offers.

The biggest slide in the past year is Sales Enablement: the new marketing/sales relationship dropped a full 10 percentage points this year from 2016. It still registered a 40% reading, but as more companies, especially in the B2B industry, have removed silos and encouraged greater collaboration between the marketing and sales teams, it may simply not be considered as an essential issue for 2017 since the integration is already in place. In fact, some marketing executives have said as much to Incite Group reporters and on stage at the group's conferences.

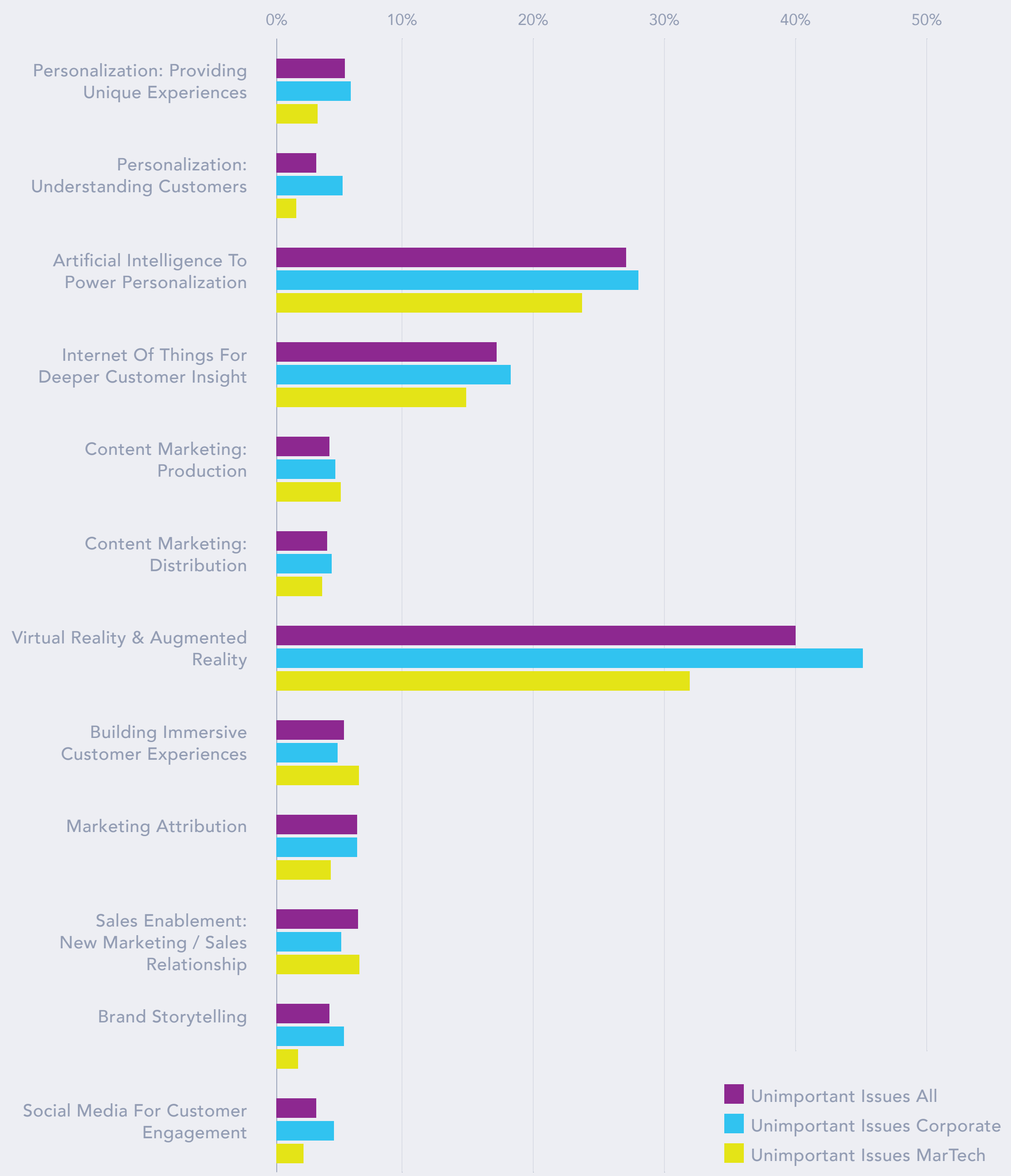
Still it clearly remains an issue for corporate marketers, 44% of them cited it as a major issue. That's the third highest total among corporate issues and a full 10 percentage points higher than the MarTech reading.

Interestingly, the Internet of Things for Deeper Customer Insight led some other new categories with 24% giving it the nod, while Artificial Intelligence to Power Personalization and Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality brought up the rear. That indicates that many marketers don't see AI, VR/AR as viable near-term channels but given the emphasis on immersive customer experiences and storytelling, these are categories to keep an eye on.

Least Important Issues

In fact, these three categories were deemed the least important issues this year. VR/AR received an overwhelming 40% of all respondents saying "Not Important" and that includes a whopping 45% of in-house marketers vs. just 31% in MarTech. Meanwhile AI was the next least important issue, pulling 27% overall. IoT wasn't quite as negative at 17%, but that total is still less than its "essential" votes.

Which Issues are Unimportant in 2017



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What Matters Most

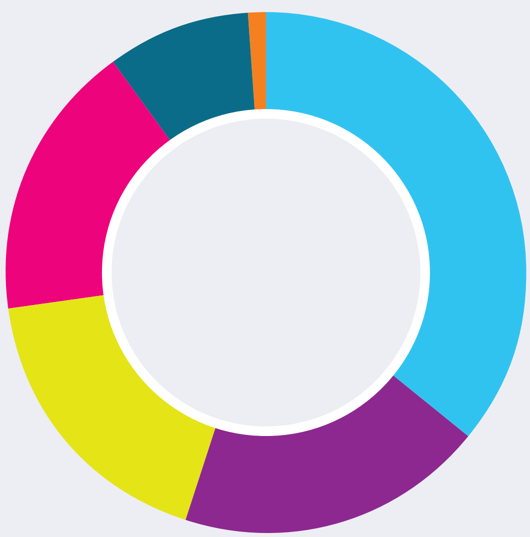
For 2017, Incite Group expanded the scope for the most important, broader themes, which we will expand upon in the rest of this report. We asked everyone to let us know what the most pressing issue will be for them in 2017. One thing is clear, the laser focus on better identifying, tracking, and using data to convert consumers is top of the charts.

More than a third of corporate respondents selected "understanding customers -and their journey - better". In fact, the issue racked up about the same amount of votes as the next two topics combined: the move Towards One-to-One Marketing and Content Marketing: Scale Production and Effective Distribution. Brand Storytelling was a close fourth while Marketing Attribution and Understanding the Interplay Between Channels and Platforms brought up the rear.

It is interesting to note that Content Marketing dominated the corporate responses in 2016 with 44% of the votes for Most Important Issue of the Year. It garnered just about 18% this year. Understanding Customers was not one of the response options a year ago but clearly is weighing the most on the minds of in-house marketers.

Which Issue is Most Important in 2017?

Understanding customers - and their journey - better	36%
Towards one-to-one marketing and unique customer experiences	19%
Content Marketing: Scale production and effective distribution	18%
Brand Storytelling: Craft an authentic story that resonates	17%
Marketing Attribution & understanding interplay between channels and platforms	9%
Other	1%



Corporate respondents only

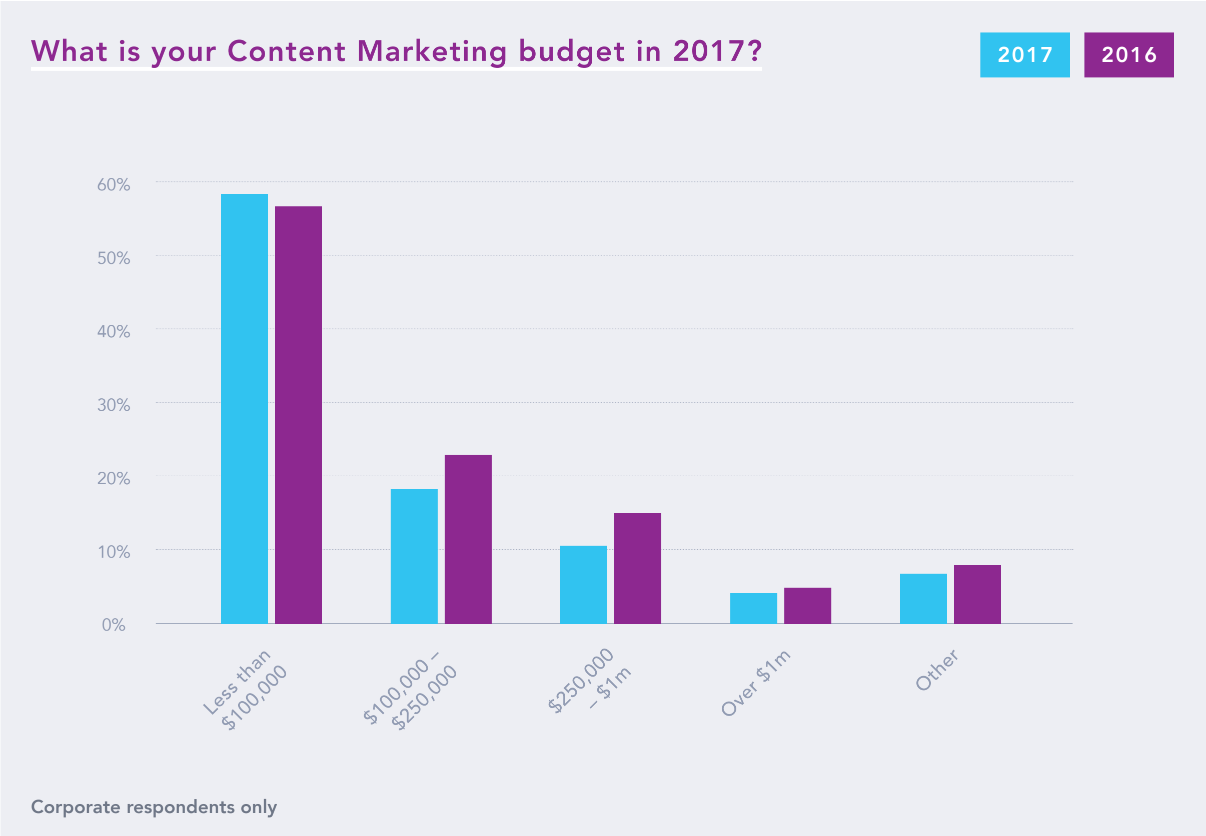
Opportunity to learn more

At the **Incite Marketing Summit** (NYC, 24-25 October), speakers from the world's biggest and most successful brands will be sharing their insight – and skin-in-the-game experience – on how to leverage the unique benefits of personalization, attribution and content marketing. You can join them!

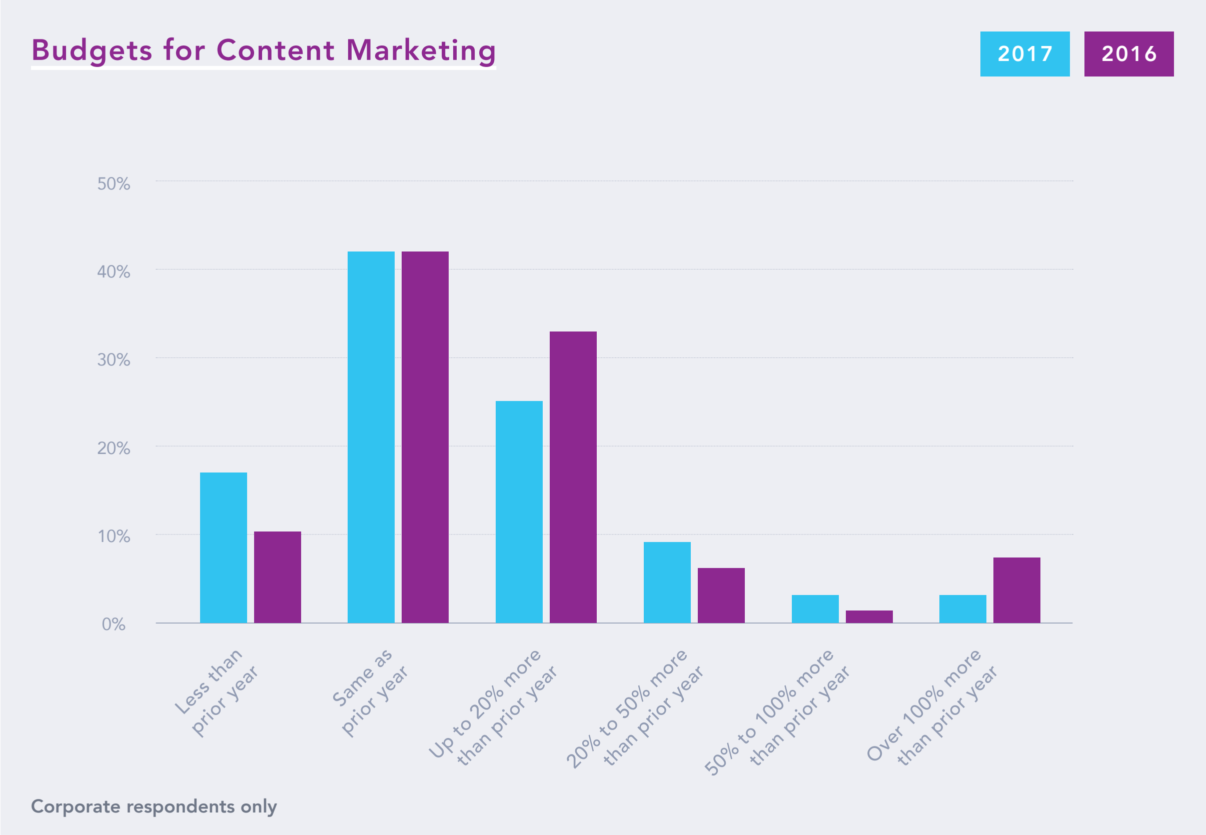
Click here to find out more

Content Marketing

What Is Your Budget for Content Marketing in 2017?



When examining content marketing budgets for corporate respondents, it becomes apparent that the amount of money earmarked this year trails 2016's set-asides. The only increase for 2017 is for budgets below $100,000, higher budgets decreased across the board while the number of budgets north of $1 million was little changed.



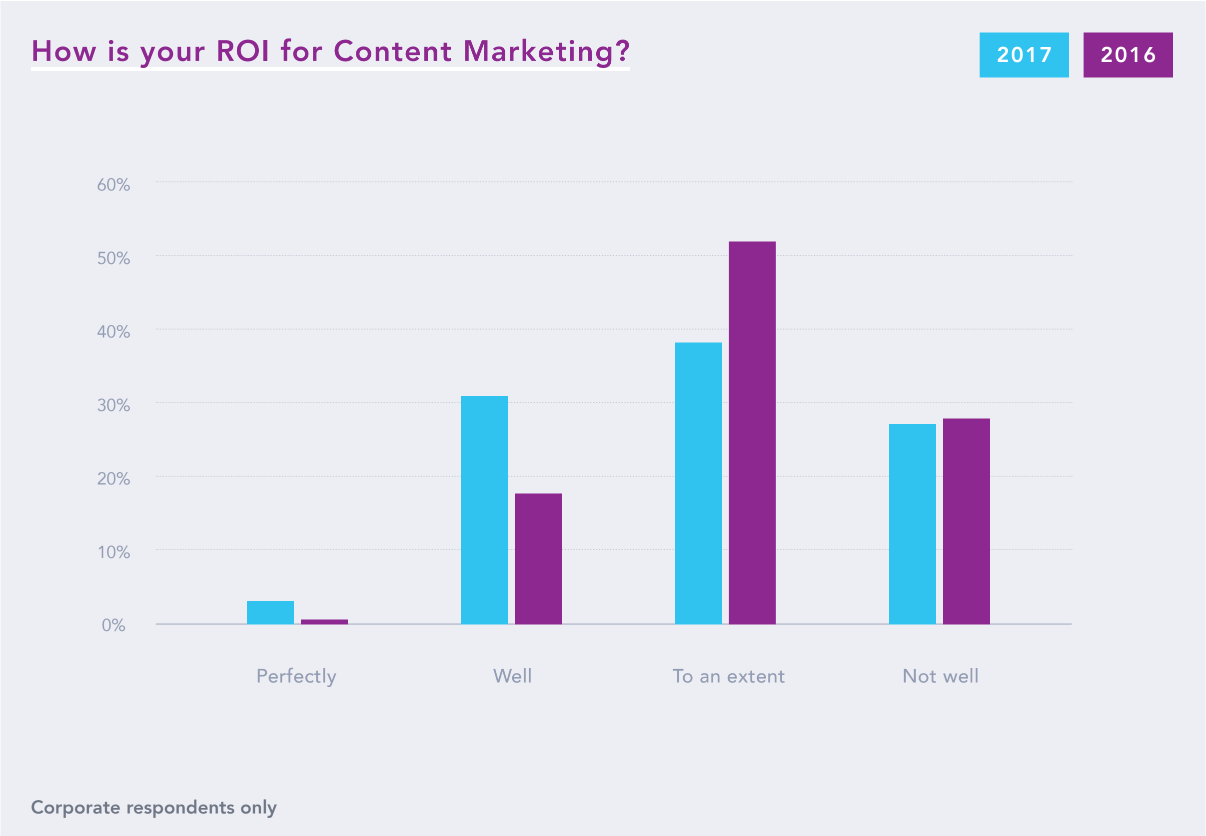
Examining the budgetary plans more closely, you can see this trend illustrated in the chart above. Not only are fewer marketers spending big on content marketing, underscored by far fewer firms doubling their budgets, but many of them are not even spending as much this year as in 2016.

The number of in-house marketers spending less than the prior year jumped seven percentage points to 17% in 2017.

The sky's not falling, however, as the lion's share of firms plan to spend the same as the prior year. That group represented 40% of votes, unchanged from 2016's reading. And the number of respondents seeing a year-over-year increase between 20% and 50% as well as those forecasting bumps of 50% to 100% over the year ago period both rose in this year's survey from 2016's.

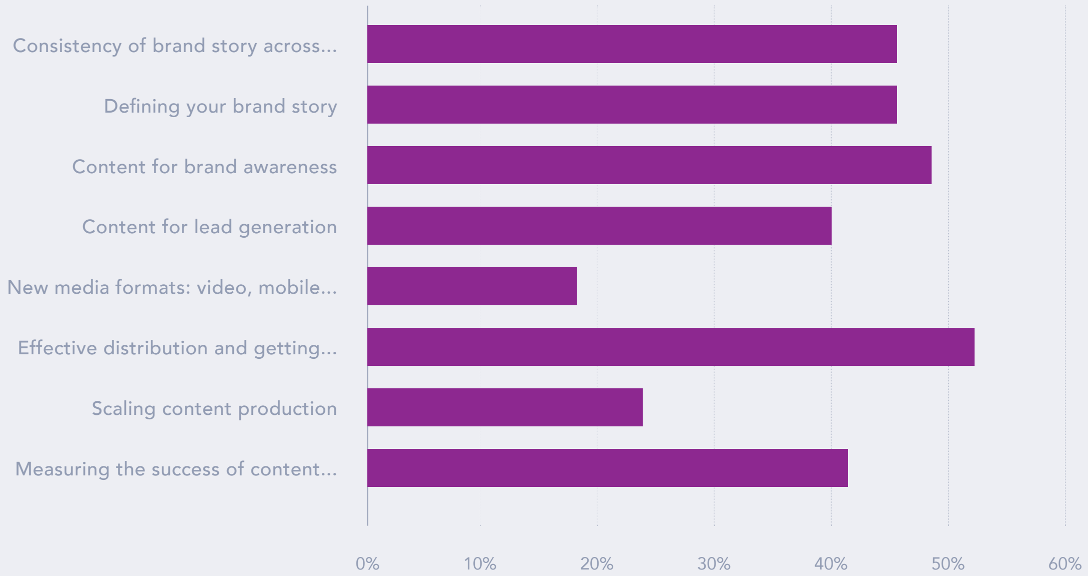
At face value it appears the total number of dollars from these two different groups of respondents is expected to be lower in 2017 than last year, with fewer bigger bets, but toes and even ankles are getting into the water with more medium-sized increases over last year. Marketers should also keep in mind that these are forecasts, we know that what people say in surveys, polls and even budgetary meetings are different from what they do.

Perhaps skepticism remains on the validity of content marketing? Or chieftains are not yet convinced by the ability to quantify its effects.



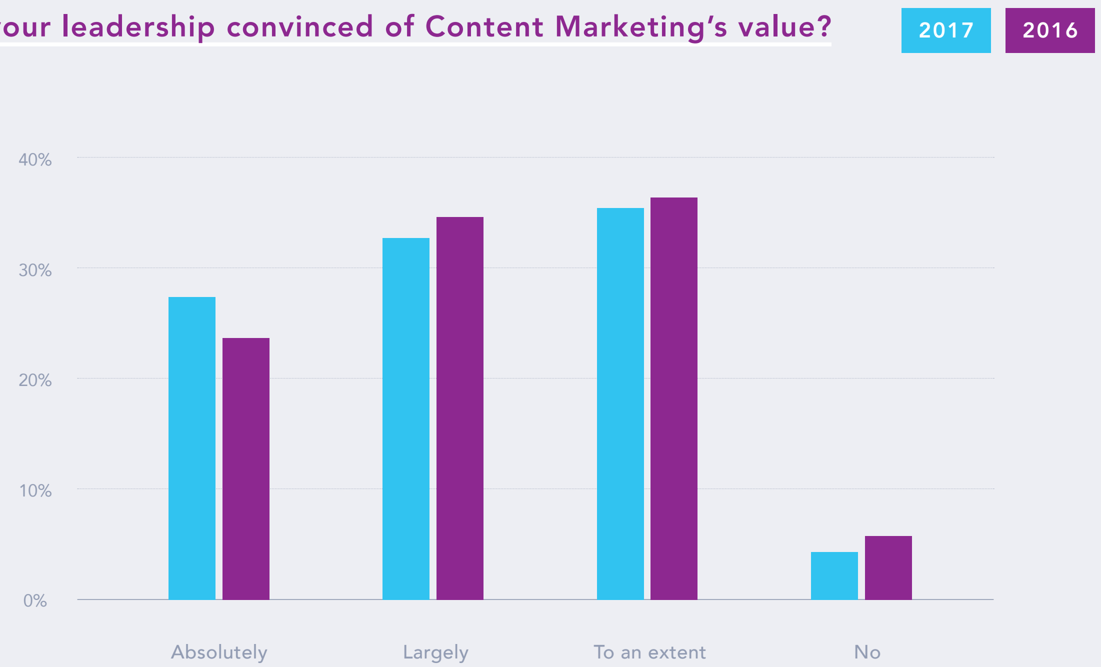
There were signs of improvements in the ability to measure the ROI of content marketing in this year's survey versus 2016. The number of those who answered "well" to this question of measurement surged by more than half again as much to a reading of 31%, while those saying "perfectly' tripled off of a marginal base to 3% this year. Perhaps this increase is responsible for fewer people this year selecting the non-endorsement response "to an extent." The naysayers weren't much moved, however, with the "not well category" still above one-quarter of respondents.

How important are these issues?



Corporate respondents only

Is your leadership convinced of Content Marketing's value?



Corporate respondents only

But notice leadership, among respondents, is taking notice and endorsing the tactical use of content marketing. There was a marked increase in this year's survey from 2016 for those who "Absolutely" are convinced of the value, apparently stealing some voters from the "Largely" and milquetoast "To an Extent" answers. Plus there were fewer responses with flat-out "No's."

Content Is Still King

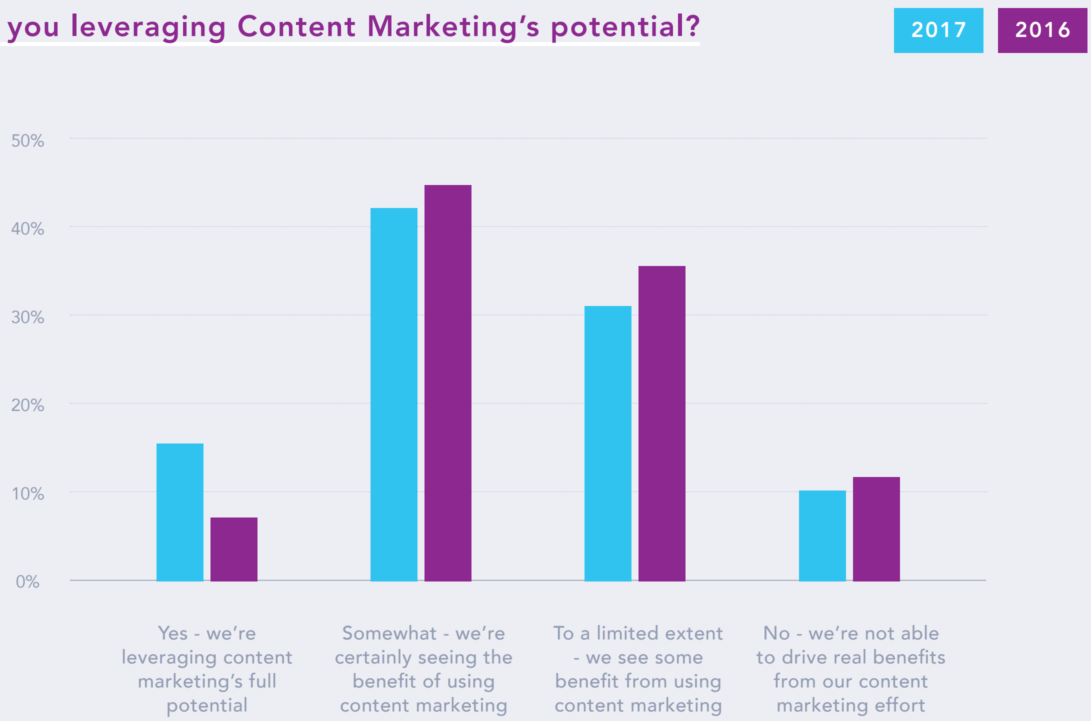
While assigning a value on the effectiveness of content marketing is clearly an issue, there's little doubt that the content itself, remains of paramount importance.
The most essential issue in Content Marketing, as cited by more than half of in-house respondents, is "Effective Distribution and Getting Content in the Right Places."

That is closely followed by "Content for Brand Awareness." The next two issues go hand in hand, "Consistency of Brand Across the Organization" and "Defining Your Brand Story."

So creating a clearly defined brand identity and connecting content that tells that story directly to the correct consumer is the current Holy Grail for content marketing.

It's only after these responses that the issues of creating "Content for Lead Generation" and "Measuring the Success of Content Marketing" come into play among respondents.

Are you leveraging Content Marketing's potential?



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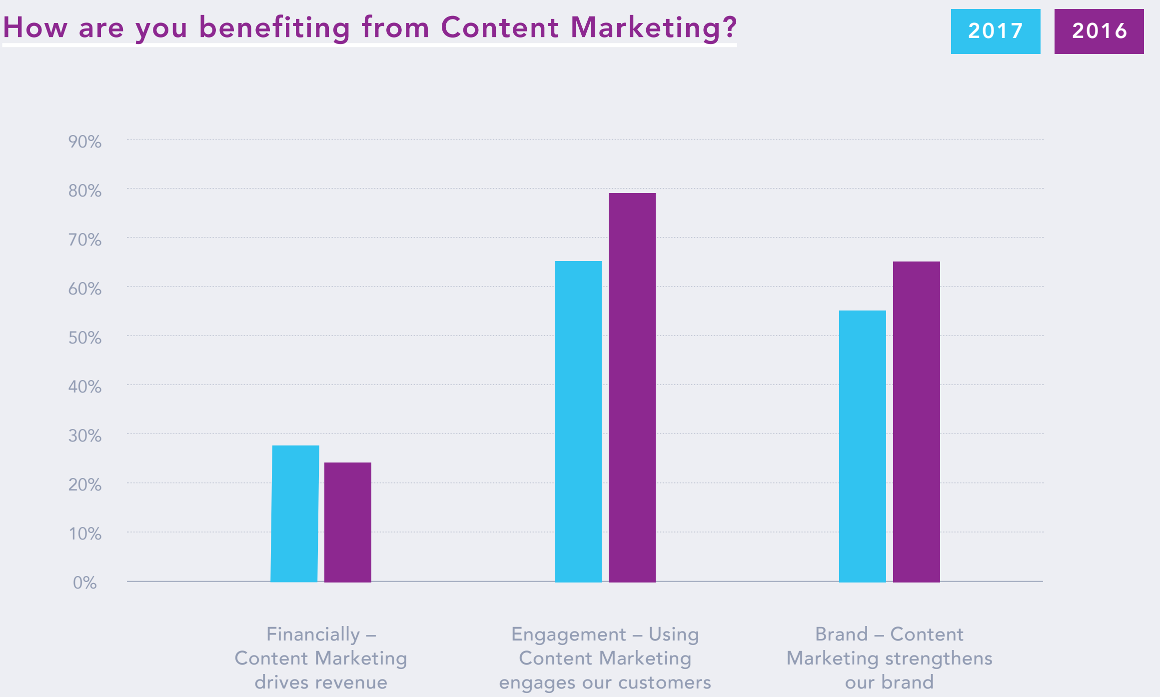
How are you benefiting from Content Marketing?



Corporate respondents only

Meanwhile, despite a slight dip in the number of votes, two-thirds of those surveyed still see the biggest benefit from content marketing is engaging customers, followed by a strengthening of the brand.

Even as those two groups declined from 2016, the number of corporate marketers seeing financial rewards from increased revenue was on the rise. Still at just 27%, it remains a smaller number than many in the industry would expect. That may also go a long ways towards explaining the shrinking budgets and fewer bigger bets on content marketing.

The bottom line is clearly whether content marketing can move the revenue needle and clearly there remains skepticism among decision-makers and the ability to apply financial metrics creating visibility for clear ROI.

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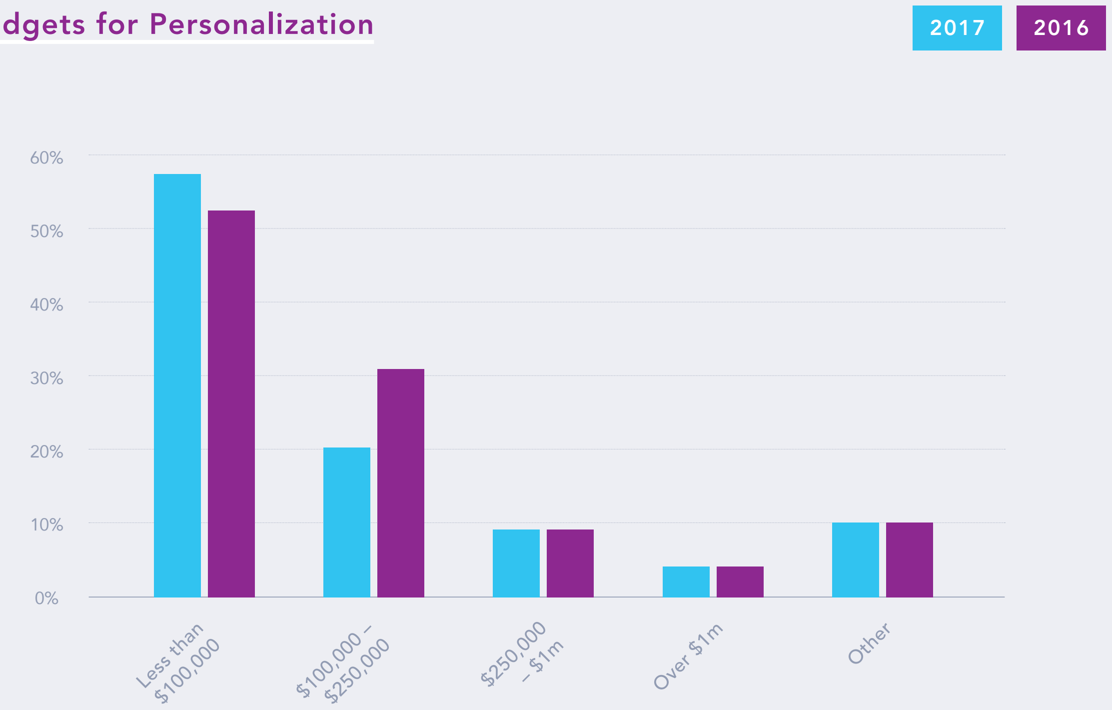
Personalization and the Single Customer View

The importance of personalization and delivering relevant, valuable customer experience remains a fundamental driver of the content spend we have been discussing.

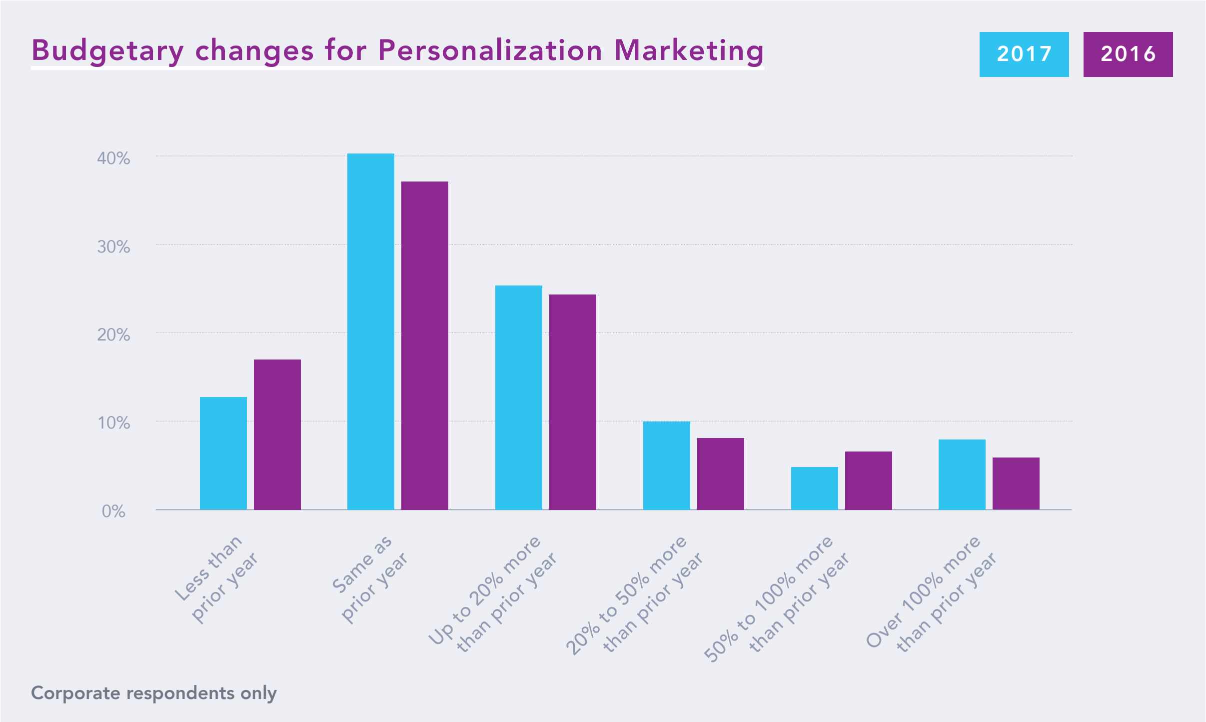
After all, corporate survey responders indicated that creating content to match a consistent brand strategy and marketing it effectively to the "right places" is what they most care about.

Yet for all the talk of Personalization, there remains a disconnect when it comes to laying out cash. More than half of corporate marketers that weighed in for Incite said that they would spend less than $100,000 with more targeted, custom contact and campaigns. That was actually higher than a year ago but in keeping with other budgetary trends, fewer companies are boosting budgets when it comes to spend above $100,000. The outlier is the lack of change among those spending north of $1 million.

Budgets for Personalization



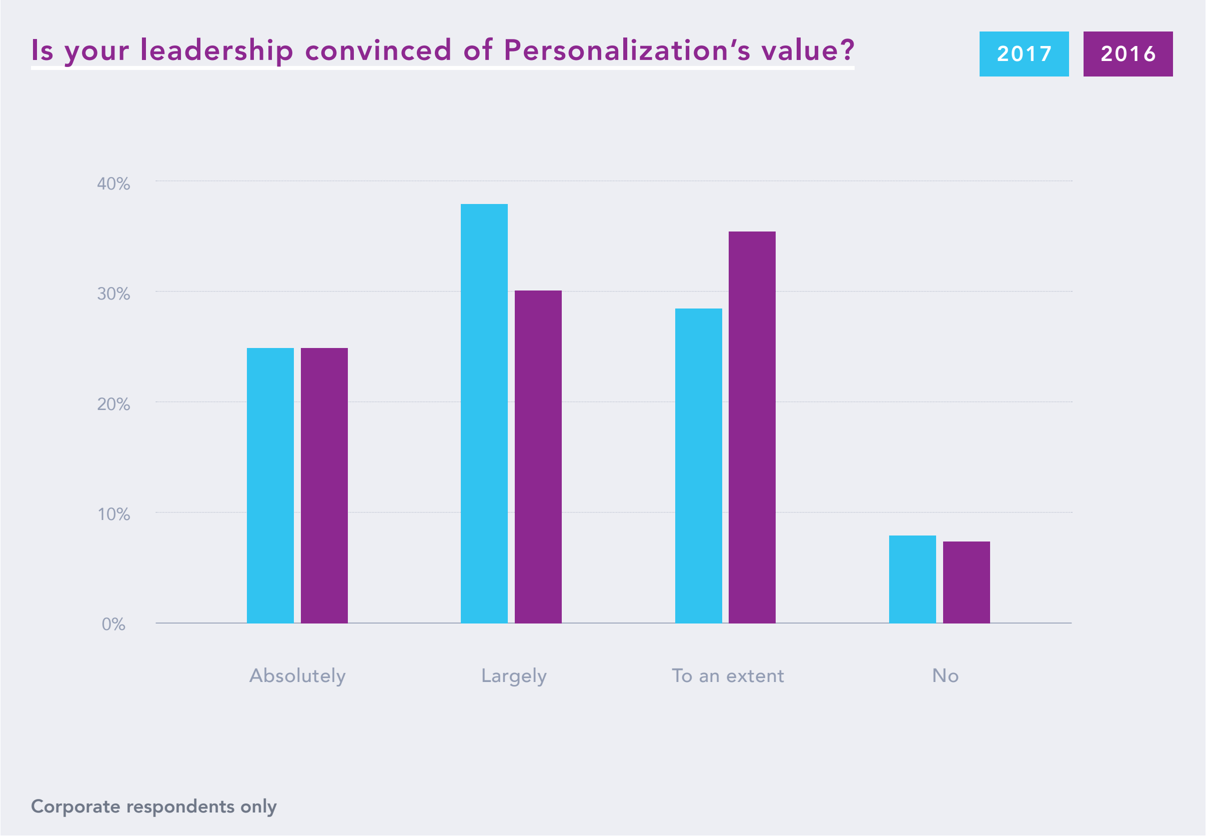
Corporate respondents only



There may be fewer big budgets for increasing personalization, but overall the trend shows faster growth than in content marketing in this area. Take a look at the graphic and you can see fewer companies cutting spend on personalization than in 2016, more companies are holding the line on their budgets, and overall growth including those firms doubling their investment in personalization shows an increase over the rate of change from 2015 into 2016.

Personalization and single customer view are efforts to fine tune marketing campaigns to more precise demographic groups but not actually creating individual messages for each customer as well as pulling data from across departments into one comprehensive, illustrative view of the customer in order to enable personalization efforts.

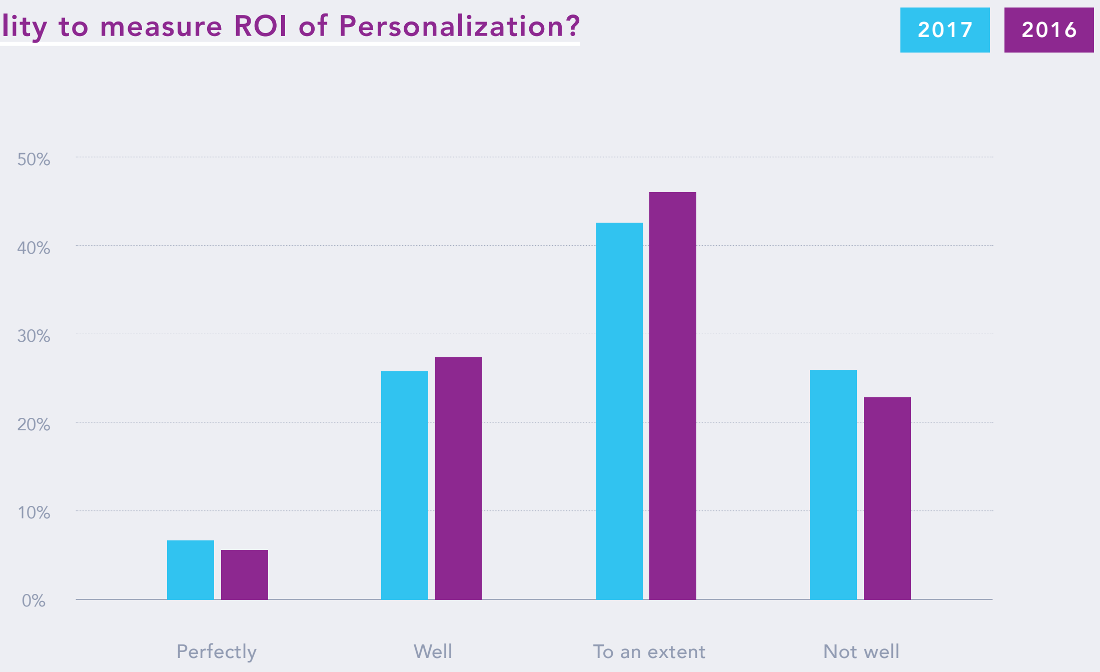
It is interesting to note that the ability to gauge the ROI for Personalization remains fairly low in the eyes of the Incite survey takers. While the number of those saying "Perfectly" ticked up one slightly, there are still four times as many saying "Not Well". The bulk of respondents still answered "Well" and "To Some Extent" but in both cases it was to a lesser extent than in 2016.



Nonetheless, nearly two-thirds of corporate marketers who responded indicate their executives see the value in personalization in slightly bigger numbers than just last year. That's a pretty high level of confidence given the low ratings for measuring Personalization's ROI.

Similarly, marketers say the rewards are not necessarily pecuniary but they do note Personalization is benefiting their brands through greater engagement and strengthening the brand itself.

Ability to measure ROI of Personalization?



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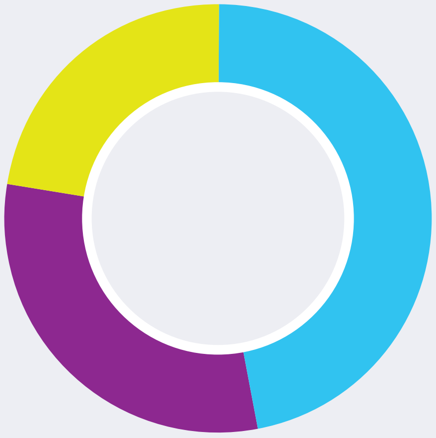
How are you benefitting from personalization?

Engagement – Using personalization engages our customers	**72%**
Brand – Personalization engage our customers	**47%**
Financially – Personalization drives revenue	**35%**



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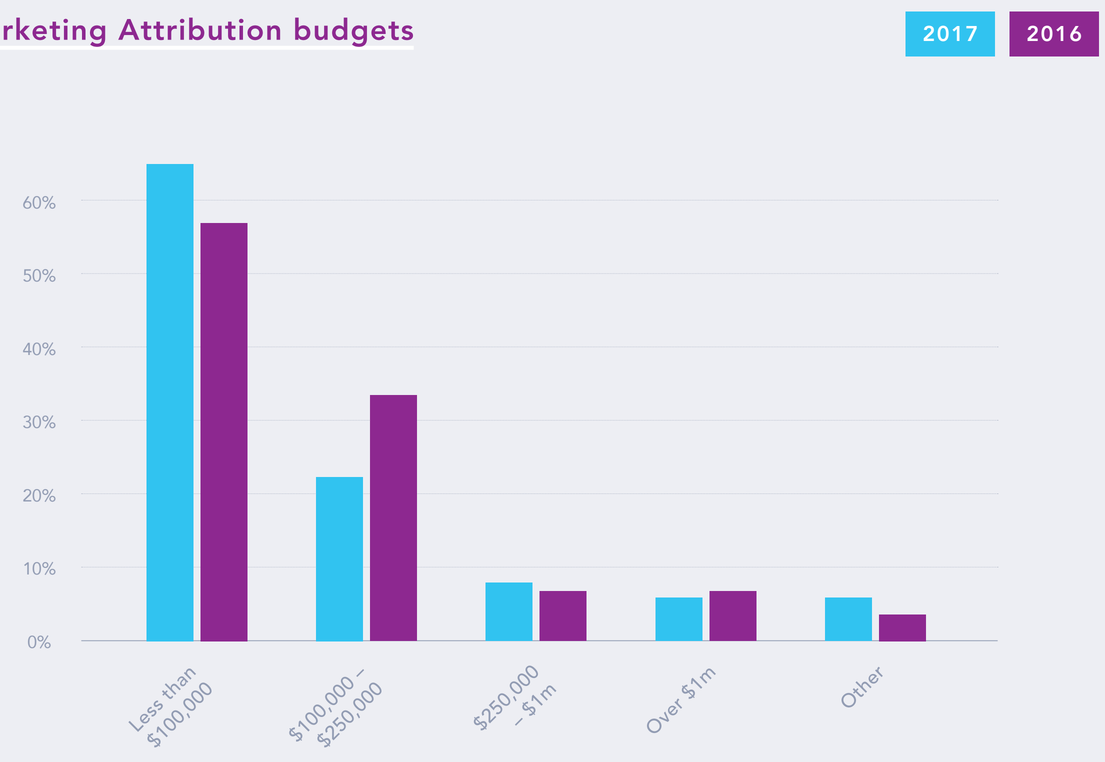
These factors all play into the Customer Journey, which marketers are focusing on so closely to try and boost those financial rewards by better understanding customer behavior on digital platforms. That is using available data and consumer preferences to surface and deliver more relevant and personalized experiences that in turn ring up more sales.

Marketing Attribution

"Marketing Attribution" marries analytics with modern marketing skills (Personalization and Content). It is clearly the most data-centric area featuring Incite Group's survey and upcoming conference: the Incite Marketing Conference East. These tactics are currently employed by a smaller group of marketers, but may be considered the wave of the future. After all, CMOs readily say how marketing is transforming into a data-led industry and new hires must be able to work seamlessly with data-analysis and traditional marketing teams.

Marketing Attribution budgets



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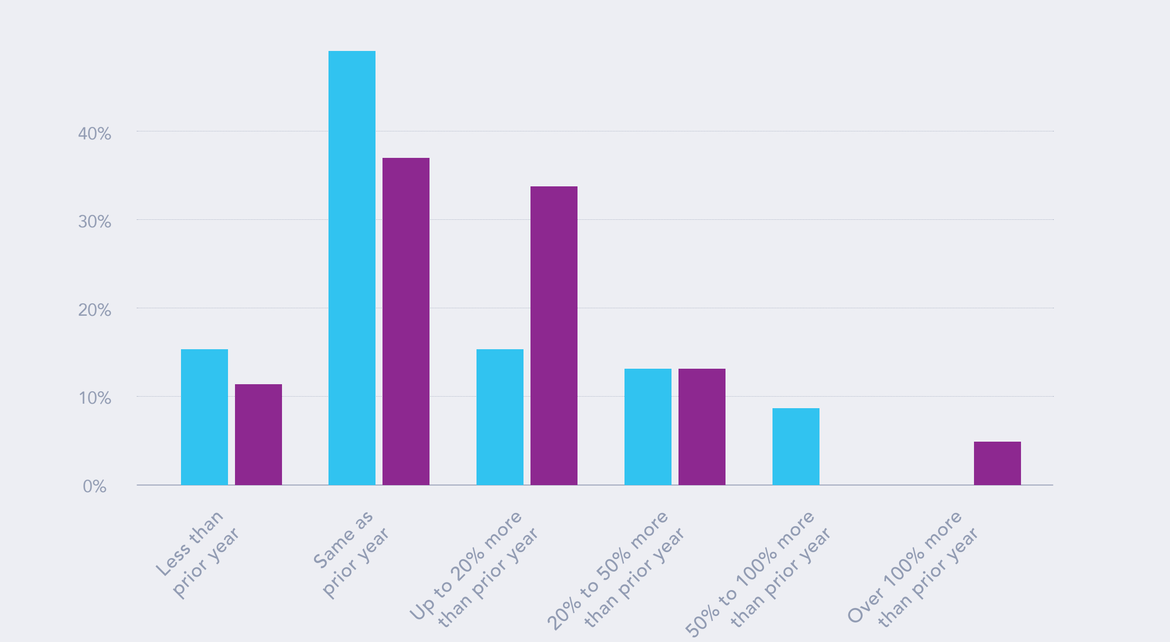
Almost two-thirds of corporate respondents less than $100,000 in their budgets for Marketing Attribution as firms are allocating fewer dollars in this direction. The next bucket had a sizeable drop, where just 21% of respondents have six-figure budgets up to a quarter of a million bucks. That's down from almost one-third last year. There was a slight gain for budgets in the $250,000 to one million dollar range.

Marketing Attribution budgetary changes



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Clearly decision makers are taking a wait and see attitude. A growing number, nearly half of corporate respondents, said their firm's year-over-year change in spending would be unchanged. But the second biggest group of survey takers, 15%, said they see a drop in this type of spending compared to 2016's annual change. There were no respondents expecting to double their spending or increase it by more than that amount, while a handful do see large increases of between 50% and 100% (that category had 0 respondents in 2016).

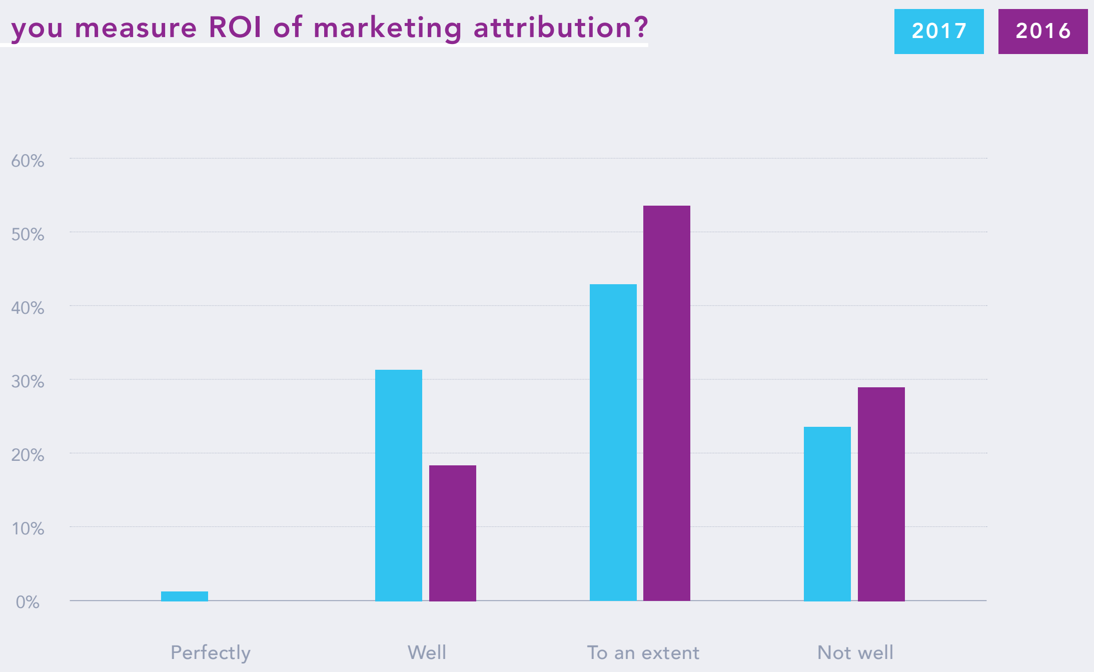
The tide is turning somewhat, albeit slowly, if you look at responses to the question about measuring ROI. Those measuring it "Well" improved by more than 50% while respondents who say they can track returns "Perfectly" registered a small 2% but that was a vast improvement over 0 a year ago.

Still it continues to trail the ability to accurately attribute ROI in other major segments, Personalization (6% said Perfectly) and Content Marketing (3%).

The numbers reporting "Not Well" or "To an Extent" dropped, but still make up nearly half of the survey answerers.

Leadership support appears to remain cautiously optimistic this year compared to 2016 even as the bosses are not apparently putting greater resources into this area. Interestingly, 32% of answers indicated leadership was "Absolutely" convinced of marketing attribution's effectiveness. That was higher than Personalization (25%) and 10 times Content's 3% reading. The song remains the same for brand bosses apparently, as our survey found for the second straight year that they have communicated greater support for the efficacy of Market Attribution over Personalization and Content Marketing combined.

Can you measure ROI of marketing attribution?



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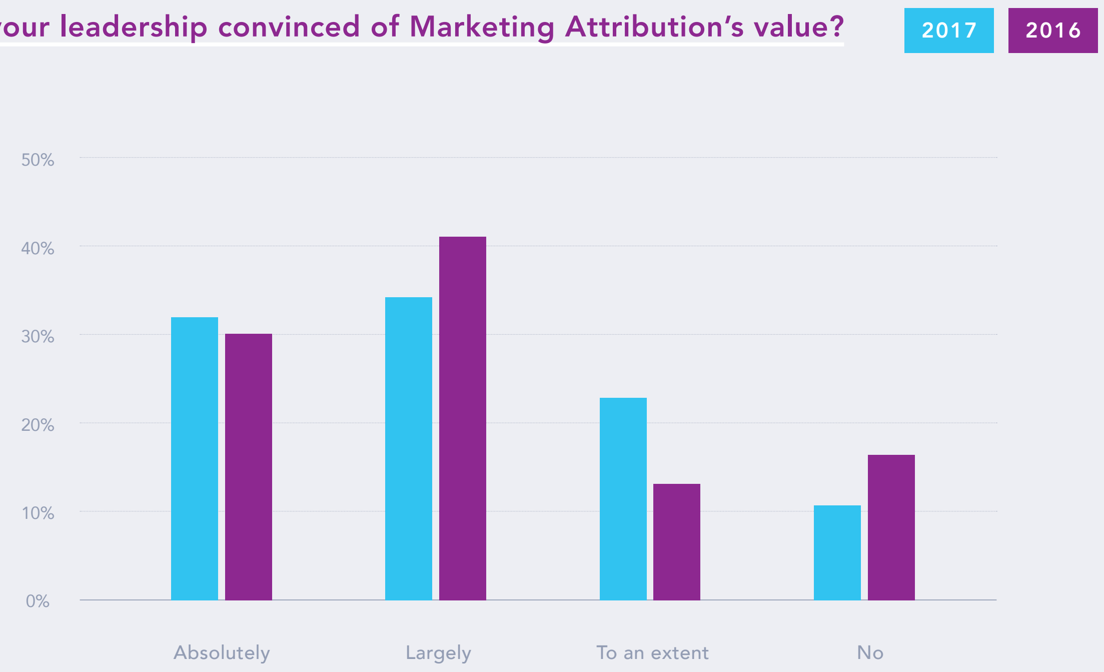
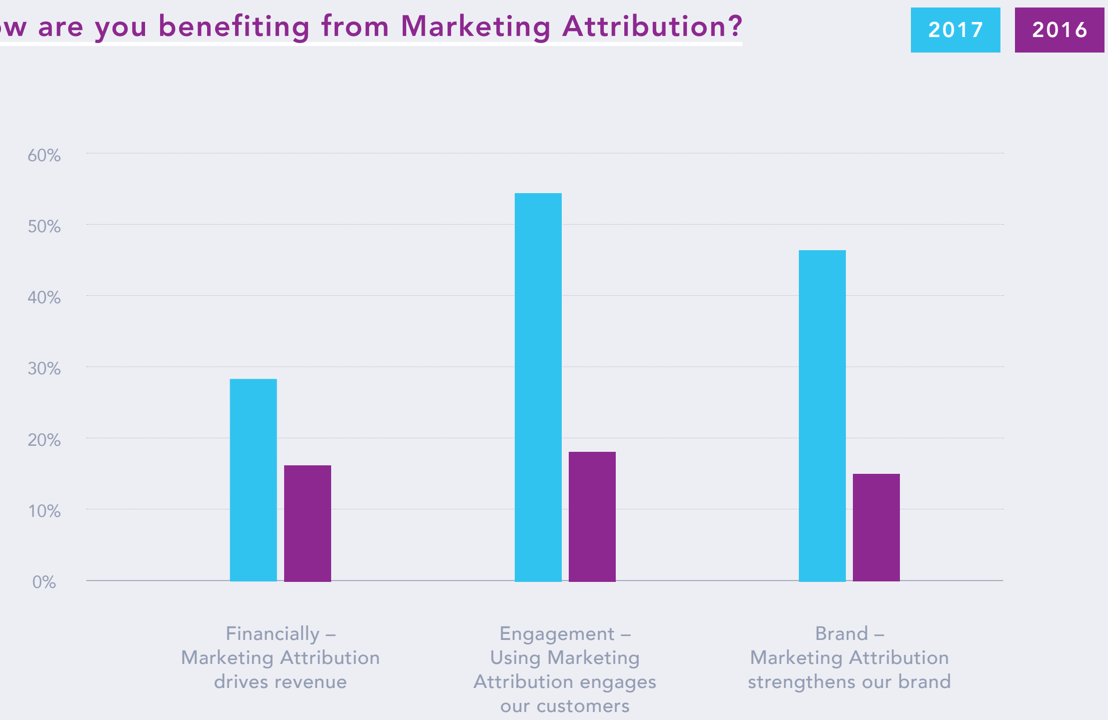
Is your leadership convinced of Marketing Attribution's value?



Corporate respondents only

Additionally, there was an uptick across the board in quantifying how in-house marketers were benefiting from marketing attribution. Those completing this section told Incite that the biggest change was a change in engagement, while brand strengthening and financial gains were also increasing this year versus 2016.

How are you benefiting from Marketing Attribution?



Corporate respondents only

Opportunity to learn more

At the **Incite Marketing Summit** (NYC, 24-25 October), speakers from the world's biggest and most successful brands will be sharing their insight – and skin-in-the-game experience – on how to leverage the unique benefits of personalization, attribution and content marketing. You can join them!

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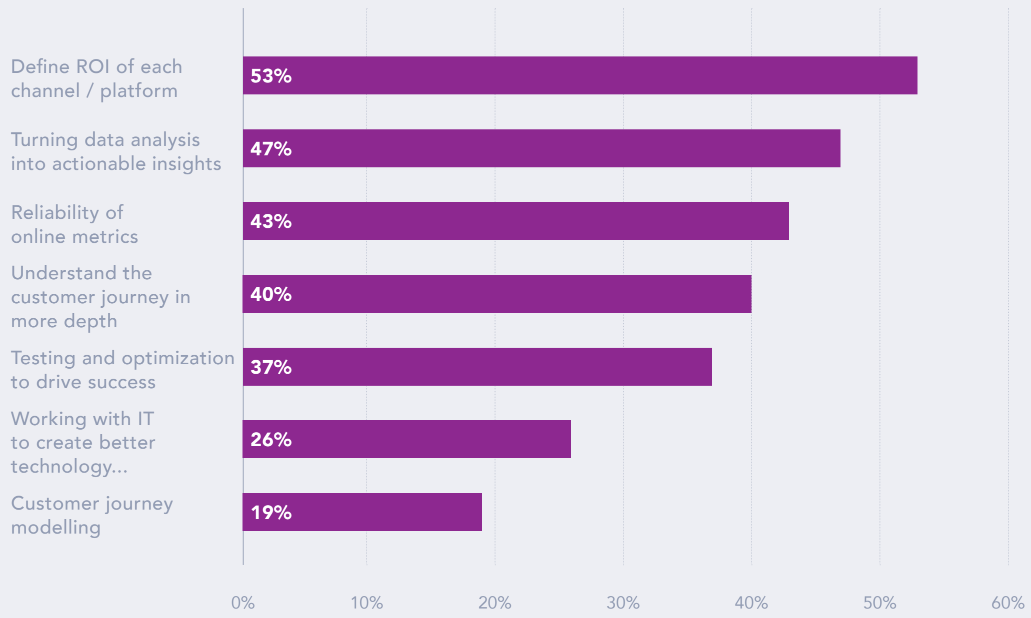
What's the most essential issue in Marketing Attribution?



Corporate respondents only

Given the overall insights into Market Attribution it's not a big surprise that in-house marketers see the most essential issues in this category as "Defining ROI of each platform," followed by "Turning Data Insights into Actionable Information," and then "Reliability of online metrics." In other words tracking the marketing spend and figuring out how to efficiently and effectively market with the data gleaned through marketing activities.

Conclusion

Marketers in all types of shops: in-house and MarTech remain intensely focused in their efforts on Personalization, Content Marketing, and Marketing Attribution.

One divergence to keep an eye on is the apparent voicing of confidence by leadership in all of these areas but that is not translating into money where their mouths are, perhaps a sign that they are waiting for more visibility in ROI as respondents indicated engagement and brand strengthening are outpacing financial returns or this disparity in spending may presage an economic slowdown ahead.

Regardless it's a signal that strategic campaigns may win the day. While there are clearly differing opinions between different types of shops as well as executives and marketers as to the extent of investment in each category, there appears to be unanimity that these major themes and some slight variations will carry the industry closer to true personalization with custom content that can be more accurately tracked and quantified through tighter collaboration between market and data analysis.

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