
considered
content.
THE 7 MYTHS
OF B2B CONTENT
MARKETING

HOSTAGE TO THE HYPE CURVE



Content marketing is hot. Even the most cursory look across today's B2B marketing sites will show you that almost everyone is claiming content is king (or queen or pope or <insert other very important type of person here>). You'll hear breathless proclamations that unless you're doing content, you're not doing marketing. And you'll find all manner of consultants, agencies and software providers falling over themselves to show you how it's done (or at the very least highlighting that, if you haven't become a fully paid up member of the Content Marketing Appreciation Society, you really, really need to get your act together).

And you know what? In many ways they're absolutely right.



FEEL THE POWER

Content has become a major driver of B2B marketing success – powering stellar results for an ever-increasing number of companies. It's what customers are searching for (and represents the kind of material Google wants in its rankings). And, as a result, it's what today's savvy B2B marketers are spending their budgets on.

But…

There is a lot of hype around content marketing. This takes a number of forms:

- 'Thought leaders' fitting the facts to what they happen to be selling (whether this is their individual skillset, new book or their latest piece of Google-friendly blogging software)
- Wish-fulfilment – where commentators paint a picture of a world in which companies no longer have to sell, where customers magically appear riding on the coattails of the latest infographic
- Social media-itis that judges success by follower counts and Likes over tangible leads and income (you know, the stuff that keeps the business running and pays everyone's salaries)
- Magic formulas pretending that if you simply blog X times a week, create headlines connecting your business to something irrelevant but search-worthy, and tweet your little heart out, success will automatically follow

The list goes on and on.

BACK IN THE REAL WORLD

The problem, of course, is the real world of B2B marketing just isn't like that. While customers are hungry for content, they don't necessarily follow the script that many content marketing gurus would like them to. As a result, too many B2B marketers are seeing too few results (and spending too much money on the wrong things).

Now, you may be thinking: Hold on, isn't this written by a content marketing agency? And yes it is. But we hope we've been around long enough and seen enough 'latest must-do things' come and go to be able to put this into perspective. We also have a vested interest in B2B marketers getting content marketing right. If they do, they'll succeed and spend more money with agencies such as Considered Content. Of course, if they don't, they won't – and that'd be bad.

RAINING ON THE HYPE PARADE

In this guide, we're going to take a sharp pin to seven of the most common bubbles we see in B2B content marketing today. In their place, we'll try to erect a few first principles that should help you realise greater success from your content marketing efforts.

As we highlight above, there is no magic formula. What works fantastically for one company may deliver average results for another. It all comes down to the specifics of your business, your market and your customers. What we are sure of is that when it's done right, content marketing can deliver greater long-term success than virtually any other option available to the modern B2B marketer.



Myth #1

CONTENT MARKETING = INBOUND MARKETING



Back in the day, to get a message through to potential customers, you'd need to interrupt what they were doing and persuade them to give your communications some of their attention instead. You might use advertising in a trade journal or direct mail to their desk or some other ingenious ruse that screamed, "Look at me!"

Now, the problem with this approach is that most people don't particularly like being interrupted. They're busy. They've got stuff to do. And each day stubbornly refuses to contain more than 24 hours.

CUSTOMERS IN CONTROL

Then came search. Customers could simply go out and find what they needed when they needed it. They blocked pop-ups, registered with do-not-call services and generally filtered out anything they didn't want to see.

Of course, these same people still need to find out stuff that will help them in their businesses. They just want it to be heavier on the usefulness and lighter on the hype. It's why Google relentlessly tweaks its algorithm to favour this kind of content and punish spam.

THE INBOUND UTOPIA

Smart marketers quickly latched on and changed their approach. They'd now use valuable content as a carrot to lure in new customers from search. Inbound marketing was born.

It's a lovely picture. But for the fact that things don't quite work that way. Well, let's be clear, in certain circumstances they do:

- For large well-known brands who have already built a following
- For niche players in information-driven markets
- For companies that invest a significant amount in creating a content capability that rivals many small media publications

In these circumstances, inbound-only can be a perfect solution.

THE OUTBOUND NECESSITY

Sadly, for the rest of us, there will always be a need for a certain level of outbound ‘interruption’ marketing. In fact, download anything from one of the big inbound players and you’ll soon see just how much outbound they really do.

What we can do, however, is only interrupt people with things they find useful and valuable. We can tone down the sales patter until a more appropriate (and effective) time. We can be helpful.

Ultimately, for all the talk of inbound, the number one performing marketing tactic today is still email. Not spam. Not empty bubble-headed communications that offer nothing. But hard-working messages offering valuable content.

Until companies get over the myth that if they build it, their customers will come, they will never realise the full potential of their content marketing efforts.



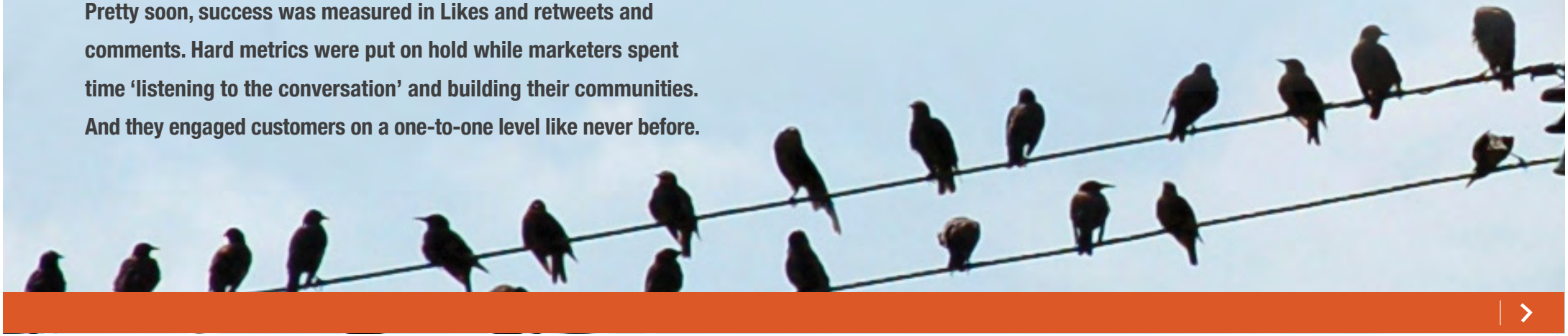
Myth #2

IT'S ALL ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

We blame the Cluetrain Manifesto. If you haven't read it, the Cluetrain Manifesto is a list of 95 theses that sets out a new vision for how companies and customers should engage with each other in the digital world. While most people never get past the first 10 or so, this has been an amazingly influential set of ideas (it was originally published back in 1999).

The first thesis on the list is: *Markets are conversations.* While this certainly didn't create social media, it did have a huge effect on how companies reacted to it. Ok, they thought, we need to be in this conversation. So they began tweeting and blogging and trying to be Liked on Facebook. Some built sizable followings. Some made catastrophic errors. And quite a few devoted a vast amount of time and resources in the process.

Pretty soon, success was measured in Likes and retweets and comments. Hard metrics were put on hold while marketers spent time 'listening to the conversation' and building their communities. And they engaged customers on a one-to-one level like never before.



GAINING SOME PERSPECTIVE

So are we about to tell you that you should abandon social media? No, not at all. But we would urge you to take a highly pragmatic approach prior to placing any really large bets. So before throwing any sizable budget at a social media programme, ask yourself:

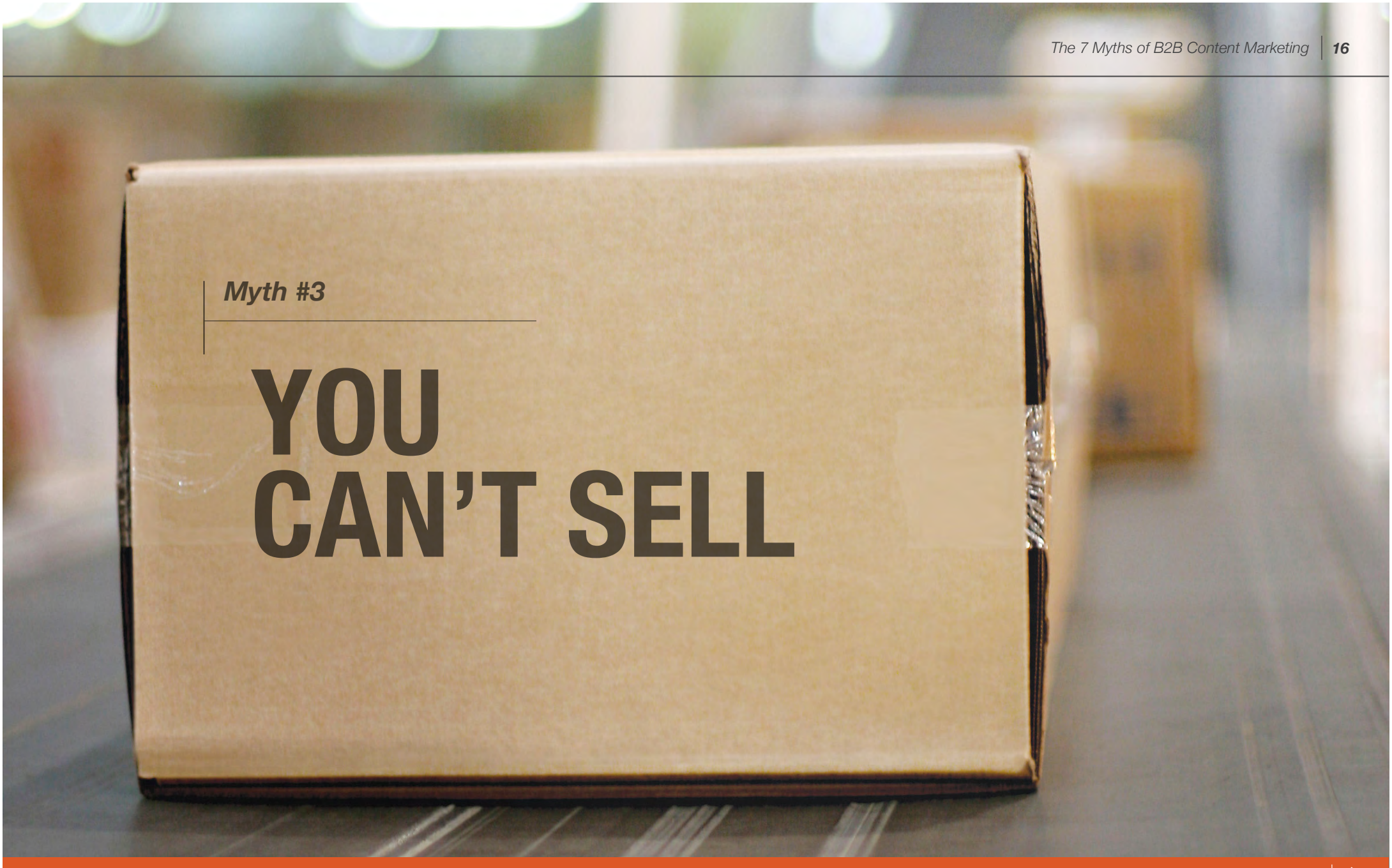
- Are the right people there?
- Are they there in the right context?
- What do you expect to gain for the business?
- How will this be evidenced?
- By when?
- For how much cost (time and money)?

With the answers to these questions, you can properly begin assessing how much of your effort should be devoted to social channels. You'll be able to take a real-world view of what's working (and what's not). And you'll be in a better position to invest resources where they will count.

BEYOND THE USUAL SUSPECTS

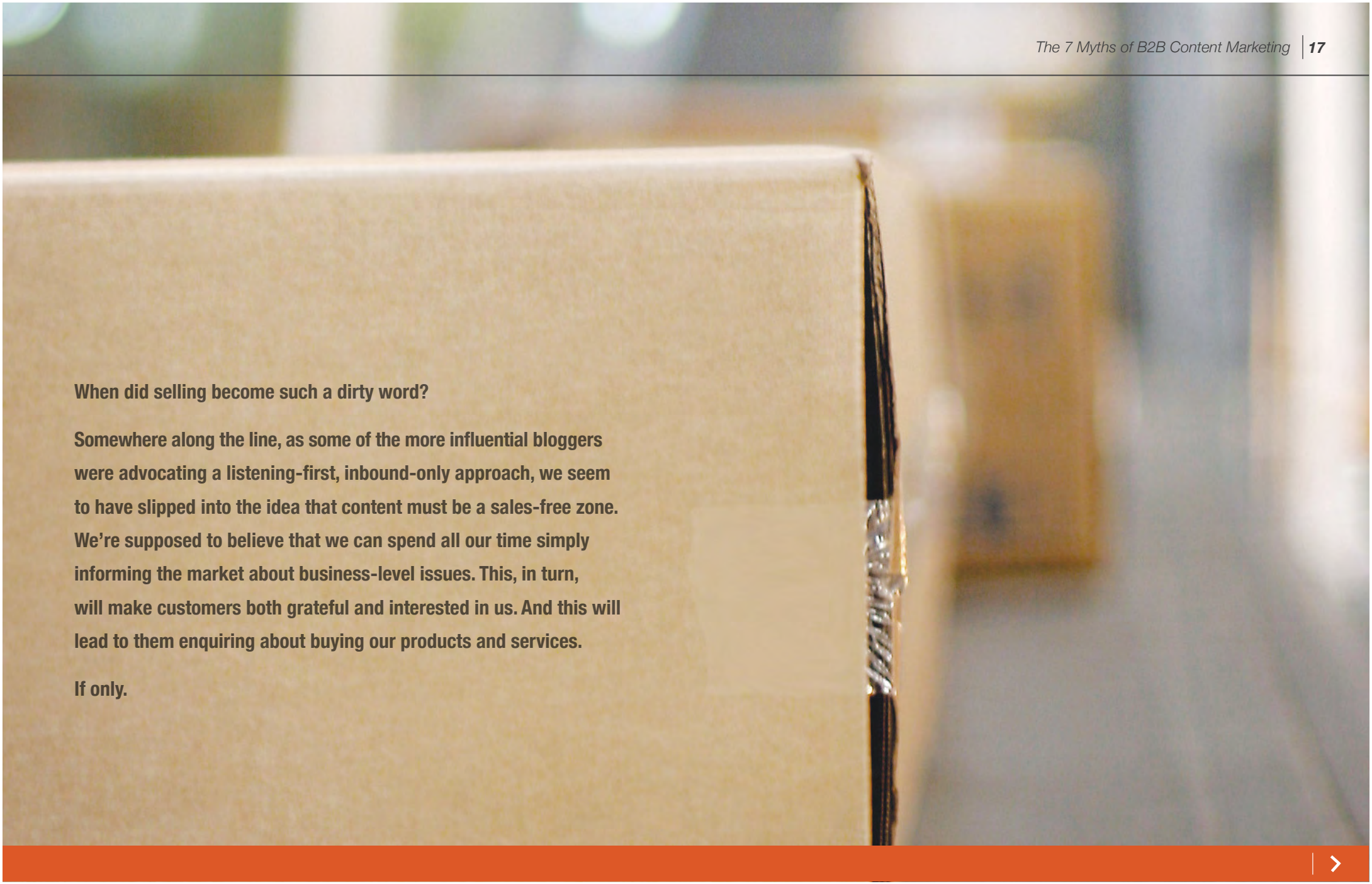
Importantly for B2B marketers, don't restrict yourself simply to the big three of Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. For example, in the IT arena, Spiceworks and Toolbox are thriving networks of tech-heads. In healthcare there's DoctorsHangout and MedicalMingle. And in finance and accounting there's iShade and linkedFA. Each of these offers opportunities to engage the right people in the right context (without the deafening noise of several million other irrelevant conversations).

So let's be clear: We're not saying you shouldn't use social media. Just make sure you use it in a considered way that's directly tied to tangible business outcomes.



Myth #3

YOU CAN'T SELL



When did selling become such a dirty word?

Somewhere along the line, as some of the more influential bloggers were advocating a listening-first, inbound-only approach, we seem to have slipped into the idea that content must be a sales-free zone. We're supposed to believe that we can spend all our time simply informing the market about business-level issues. This, in turn, will make customers both grateful and interested in us. And this will lead to them enquiring about buying our products and services.

If only.

MUCH TOO MUCH
MUCH TOO EARLY

The thing is, within this myth, as with many others, there is a grain of truth. Presenting too much of a sales message too early can not only be ineffective, it can actually damage your long-term results. It will poison your thought leadership activity, creating immediate suspicion and devaluing what could otherwise be genuinely useful content for your customers. It's all a matter of getting the balance and timing right.

A LITTLE FUNNEL VISION

Let's think of this in terms of a classic marketing funnel (there are problems with this as a metaphor, but it's good enough for what we need right now).

At the top of the funnel, customers are not only broadly unaware of your solution, they are unaware they even have a problem. So the question your content needs to answer is: *Why?* Why should they pay attention? Why does this issue matter to them and their company? At this stage, we're talking predominantly about business-focused content. The split will be around 90% issue and 10% product.

Moving down the funnel, we get to the midsection. Customers here will recognise they have a problem and that it is worth their time to begin looking for a fix. In the mid-funnel, your content must answer the question: *How?* How should they begin to address the issue? How have others done it? Importantly, at this stage we're talking more about process than product. So the split here will be in the range of 80% process and 20% product.

Then we get to the bottom of the funnel. This is where leads are traditionally handed off to sales. The customer knows they have a problem, understands the process of fixing it and is now selecting a solution. So the question your content must answer is: *What?* What do they need to buy? What makes your solutions better than other options? Here, we move into more overtly sales-focused content where the split becomes somewhere around 60% product and 40% business issue.

ADDING VALUE AT EVERY LEVEL

You'll notice that, even at the bottom end of the marketing funnel, we're not going all-in for product. It is still important that your content adds value to your customers' business-level thinking. In fact, even when the lead moves into sales, we would still retain a healthy amount of business-focused content.

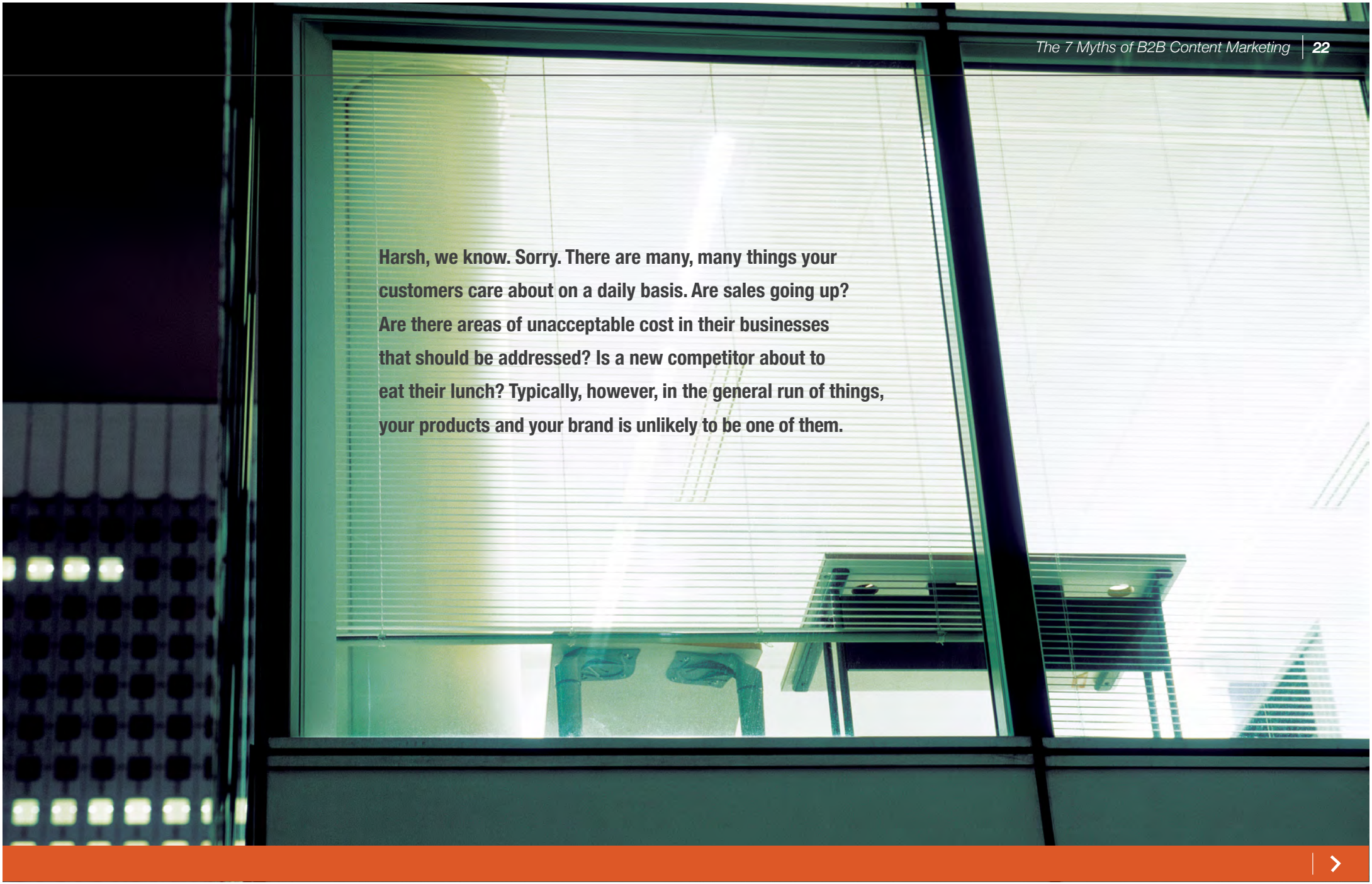
A fascinating study by the Sales Executive Board found that salespeople who can educate customers and challenge their thinking out-perform the average by some 200%. So it pays to arm your sales team with more than just some datasheets and a PowerPoint deck.

Ultimately, content marketing exists to help you sell. Without a tangible bottom-line impact, at best it will be a public service, at worst a money-pit. However, as we show above, it is critical you get the balance and timing of your sales messages right if you're to have the greatest effect.



Myth #4

YOUR CUSTOMERS CARE ABOUT YOU



Harsh, we know. Sorry. There are many, many things your customers care about on a daily basis. Are sales going up? Are there areas of unacceptable cost in their businesses that should be addressed? Is a new competitor about to eat their lunch? Typically, however, in the general run of things, your products and your brand is unlikely to be one of them.

DOING THE (MATH)

Just stop for a moment. Spend just a minute or two thinking about a typical customer for your business. Let's say they spend in the region of 40 hours in work-related activity each week. On an average week, how many minutes do they spend thinking about your product or service?

For most businesses, the answer will be: not very many (if any).

GAINING SOME FOCUS

Ok, maybe we're being too strict. After all, not all those potential customers are likely to buy no matter what. So let's remove all those who do not have any kind of need for your product or who are unlikely to buy in the next two years. That bumps up the numbers a bit.

However, let's also remove any that are existing, active customers or who are already in a conversation with sales (there's a role for content here too but let's park that for now). Who are we left with?

We're now into a group who may have a business challenge they need to address and who could potentially use your products or services to do so. Again, how many of their 2,400 average working minutes each week do they spend thinking about your product or brand? Sadly, the answer is still likely to be: not very many (if any).

So should we all just give up and go home? Fortunately not.

WHAT CUSTOMERS REALLY CARE ABOUT

While these prospective customers may not spend much time on average thinking about you or your products. They will spend time thinking about themselves, their businesses and the specific challenges your products and services could help them solve (if only they knew about them).

Too many companies make the mistake of assuming their customers care. So they produce self-serving product-focused content. They make it a long, detailed and dense read (it's almost always text). And they wonder why it's failing to deliver results.

If we know that what customers really care about is their businesses and their challenges, then that's the kind of content we should spend more of our time developing. We should look at the big issues. We should unearth hidden problems. We should demonstrate how customers can begin to plan a way out of their predicaments.

Ultimately, our content should be helpful and useful. Importantly, it should focus on what customers actually care about rather than what we wished they cared about.

Myth #5

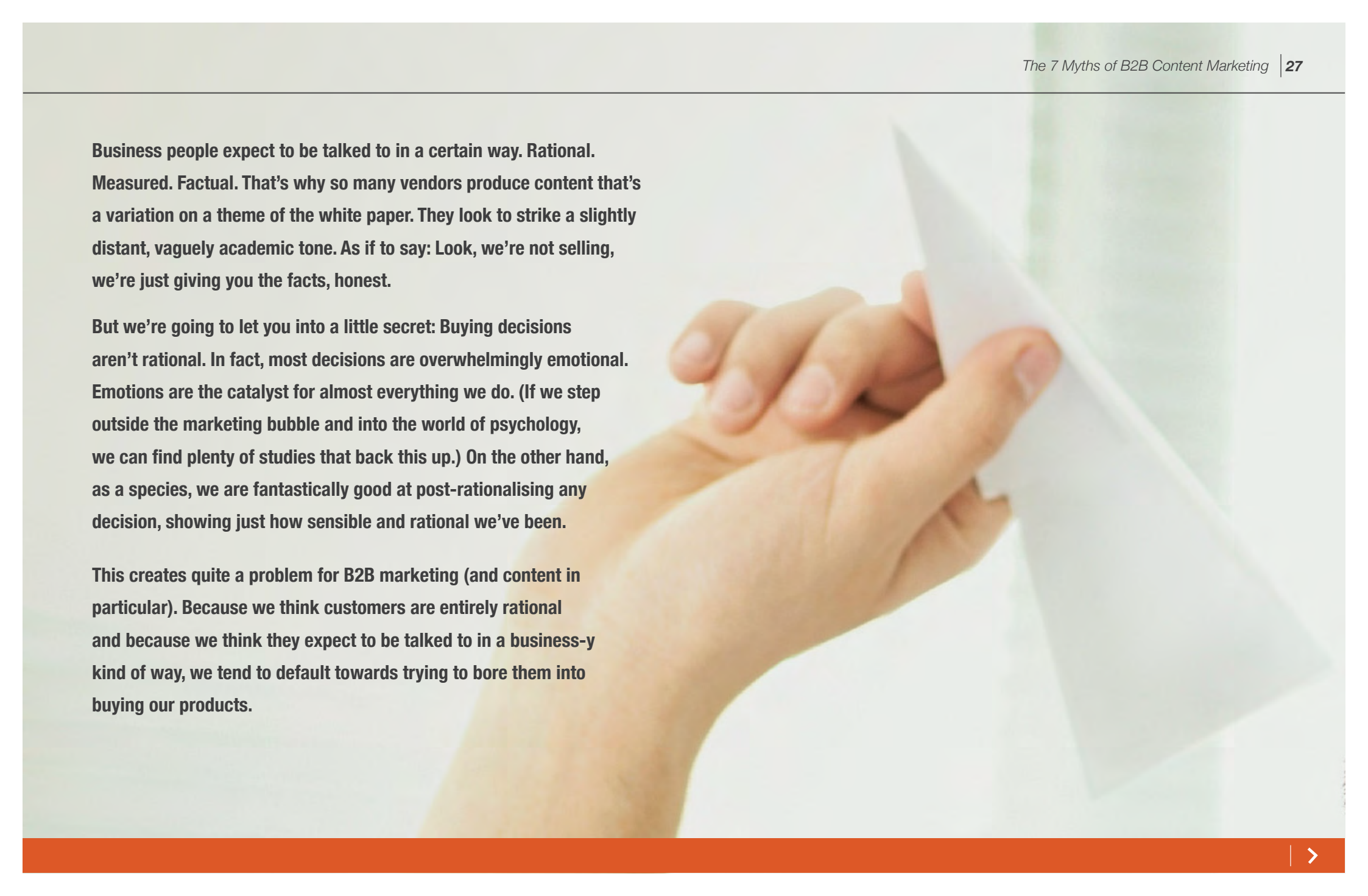
B2B CONTENT MUST BE BORING

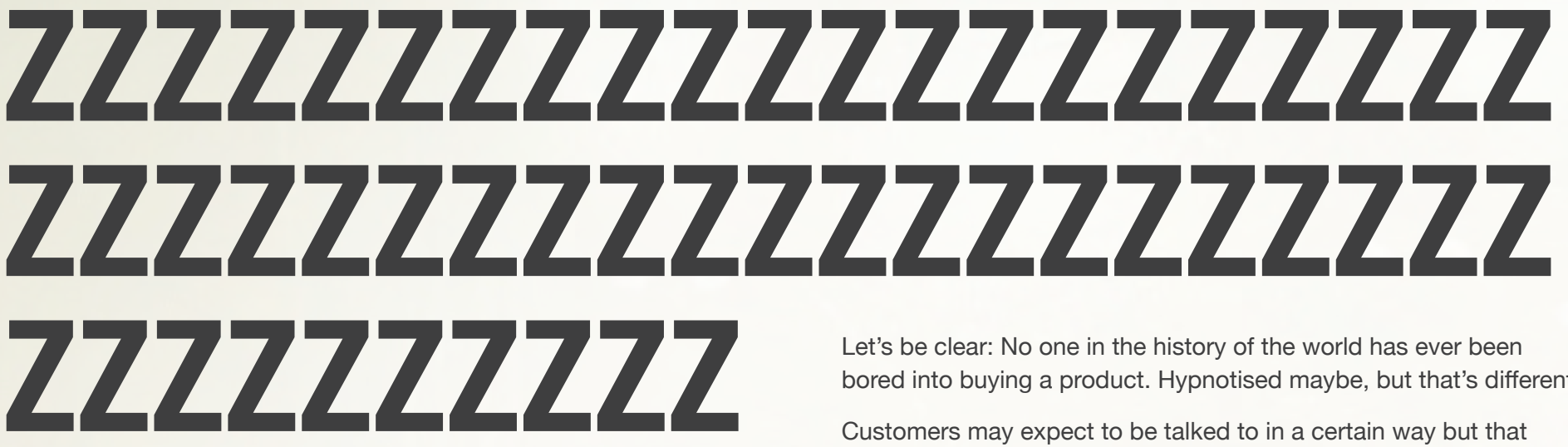


Business people expect to be talked to in a certain way. Rational. Measured. Factual. That's why so many vendors produce content that's a variation on a theme of the white paper. They look to strike a slightly distant, vaguely academic tone. As if to say: Look, we're not selling, we're just giving you the facts, honest.

But we're going to let you into a little secret: Buying decisions aren't rational. In fact, most decisions are overwhelmingly emotional. Emotions are the catalyst for almost everything we do. (If we step outside the marketing bubble and into the world of psychology, we can find plenty of studies that back this up.) On the other hand, as a species, we are fantastically good at post-rationalising any decision, showing just how sensible and rational we've been.

This creates quite a problem for B2B marketing (and content in particular). Because we think customers are entirely rational and because we think they expect to be talked to in a business-y kind of way, we tend to default towards trying to bore them into buying our products.





Let's be clear: No one in the history of the world has ever been bored into buying a product. Hypnotised maybe, but that's different.

Customers may expect to be talked to in a certain way but that doesn't mean they like being talked to that way. And when everyone is talking to them that way, most B2B content will simply sink into a mass of blah, blah, blah.

TIME TO GET HUMAN

In the real world, people buy people (not factories, not businesses, people). They like being talked to as humans in a human way. They respond well to new things, interesting things and stuff that stands out from the crowd. They're emotional.

This doesn't mean you have to focus all your attention on producing wacky content that helps people get in touch with their feelings. But it does mean you need to be more creative, more human and not be afraid to get noticed (this is marketing after all).

The best performing content talks to real people in everyday language about the stuff that matters to them. It understands that their actions are driven by emotion (worry, ambition, fear, joy, anger) and addresses this while not playing on it. And it's not afraid to entertain – rewarding them for taking time out of their busy day to pay attention.

Put this one myth to bed and you'll out-perform the vast majority of B2B content on the market.

Myth #6

IT'S ALL ABOUT QUANTITY IT'S ALL ABOUT QUALITY





Time and again, when asked about their approach to content marketing, B2B marketers name two challenges they struggle with on a daily basis:

1. How can I produce enough content?

2. How can I produce sufficiently high quality content?

This has led to a response from the emerging content marketing industry that talks about how you can create a content marketing machine or how content curation is the answer to all your problems or how to leverage the power of in-house experts.

THE NEED FOR QUANTITY

Now, when it comes to some aspects of inbound activity, quantity or (perhaps more accurately) frequency, matters. Research from HubSpot has found that:

- Businesses with 51 to 100 pages on their site generate 48% more traffic than those with 50 or under pages
- B2B companies that blog just once or twice a month get 70% more leads than those that don't blog
- And businesses with over 200 blog articles have over five times the leads of those with 10 or fewer

All of which shows that you have to be in it to win it. Of course, the headlong rush for quantity has led to a lot of utter rubbish flooding the internet. Keyword-stuffed, news-jacked, irrelevant drivel that purports to tell you seven things you can learn about moving to a SaaS ERP from the music of the Grateful Dead.

THE DEMAND FOR QUALITY

Which brings us to quality. In B2B, quality counts. Quality is what customers want from your content. But, let's face it, real quality is hard to deliver. It takes time, money and requires access to people who really know their stuff. It's been suggested that when you create content you should ask yourself: Would a customer actually pay for this? It's a very high bar.

A MORE BALANCED APPROACH

The answer lies in getting the balance right. To focus on the right kind of content at the right stage – to be pragmatic and understand what's achievable within any given timescale. At Considered Content, we break content into four main types:

1. **Created content** – the high value, highly considered material that forms the basis of your demand generation and content branding efforts
2. **Curated content** – adding value to customers' thinking by finding, assembling and commenting on existing content
3. **Commissioned content** – having someone else produce content for you (such as a freelance journalist, guest blogger or researcher) or buying in content from third-parties (eg analyst reports)
4. **Re-created content** – adapting or reusing content you already have into new formats or extending its use into new areas (eg using a PowerPoint deck from an event on Slideshare or repurposing an internally-focused training guide as an externally-focused how-to)

Each type requires a different investment in time and money but, by focusing on getting the right overall mix, you can maximise both quantity and quality.

Myth #7

THERE IS A SINGLE BEST PRACTICE



Every company is unique. Even similar marketing challenges may require different approaches if we're to achieve the best results. Anyone who pretends there is some kind of all-purpose cookie-cutter approach to content marketing that works probably needs to spend more time running campaigns and less time talking about them.

There is a worrying amount produced on content marketing by companies whose sole purpose is to teach marketers about content marketing. Less visible (but more valuable) is the thinking of actual practitioners. This tends to be where the real insights can be found. So whenever you read anything on content marketing, stop for a moment to check whether the author is practicing what they preach for anyone other than their own personal brand.



NOT JUST FOR THE LITTLE GUYS

It's important to recognise that much of what gets written about content marketing (together with all the templates and checklists) is very much focused on small businesses with relatively simple sales cycles. While much of this is still relevant to larger, more complex B2B sales (and we'd be the first to recommend you learn whatever you can) not all of it can simply be ported over.

Having said all this, there are some approaches and tactics that work better than others most of the time. We are beginning to see valuable research on the relative effectiveness of different tactics. So, to give some very limited examples:

- For B2B, Twitter is the best performing social media channel for lead generation, outperforming Facebook and LinkedIn 9-to-1 (though LinkedIn delivers higher engagement)
- Yet (despite the hype) social media itself contributes just 5% of B2B traffic and leads
- Organic search is the number one traffic driver to B2B websites but accounts for a lower proportion of visits (41%) than many people assume
- Multiple studies show that email is still the single highest converting medium for B2B (with the offer of compelling content the number one most effective tactic)
- The most effective type of content for UK marketers is still the case study (with research reports coming a close second)

Sources: Optify, HubSpot, CMI

The precise results vary from one report to another depending on the mix of respondents and their markets. However, there is now solid evidence on which individual tactics tend to perform well and which don't – enough that no one need blindly guess anymore. But again, the right combination of tactics will depend on your specific business context, individual marketing challenges and available budget.

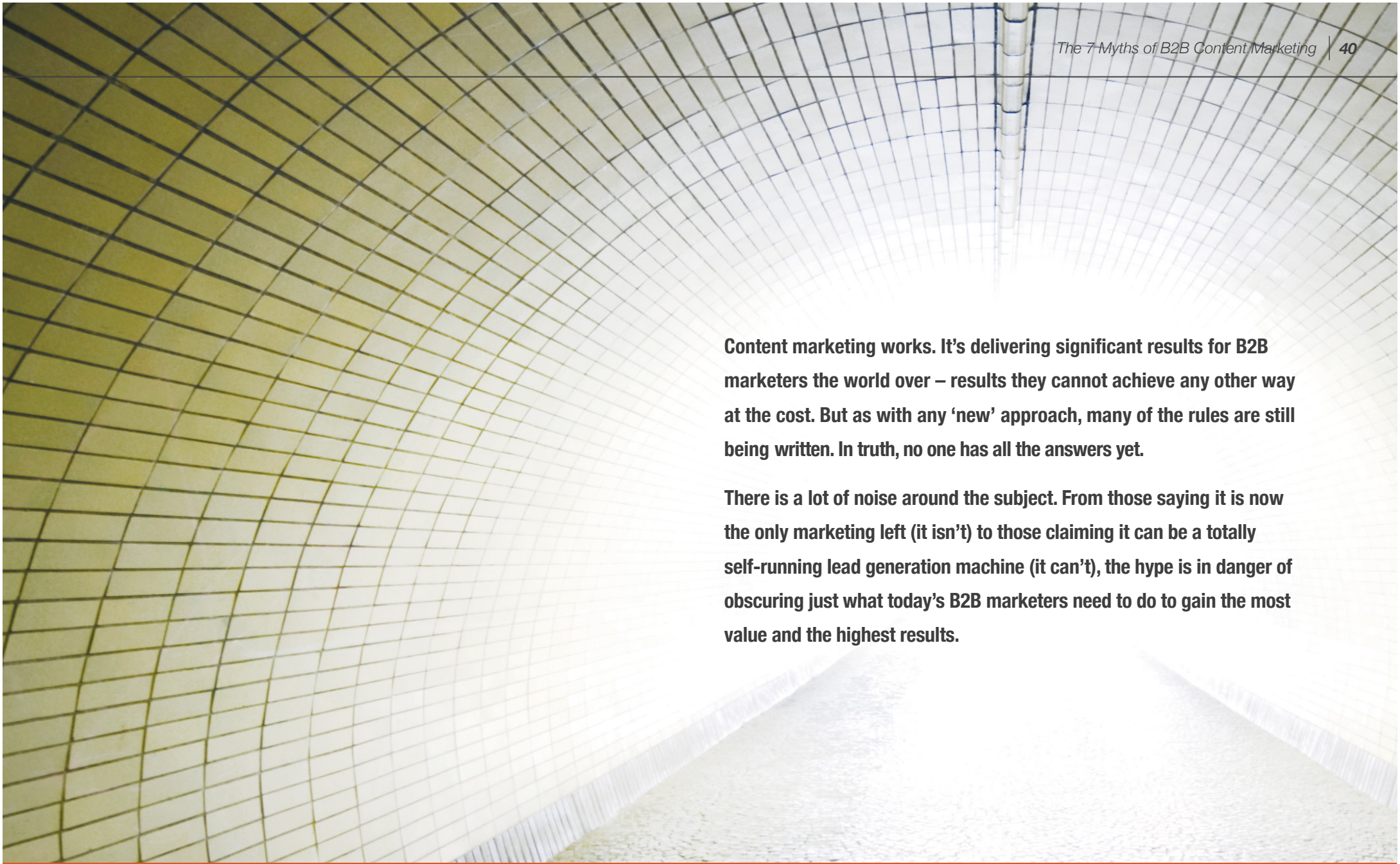
EXPANDING FROM THE CORE

We would always advocate starting from a robust core of hard-working content and expanding from there. It is important to test new formats, approaches and channels but not at the expense of baseline effectiveness. And wherever you can A/B test anything, do it.

The right approach will be about finding the best practice for *your* business and *your* challenges. It's about keeping your options open and being able to pivot into what will deliver ever greater results. And it's about resisting complacency, never assuming that there is only one way to achieve standout success.

B2B CONTENT MARKETING BEYOND THE MYTH





Content marketing works. It's delivering significant results for B2B marketers the world over – results they cannot achieve any other way at the cost. But as with any 'new' approach, many of the rules are still being written. In truth, no one has all the answers yet.

There is a lot of noise around the subject. From those saying it is now the only marketing left (it isn't) to those claiming it can be a totally self-running lead generation machine (it can't), the hype is in danger of obscuring just what today's B2B marketers need to do to gain the most value and the highest results.

TAKING THE LONG VIEW

While individual pieces of content can and do perform well (especially when supported by effective outbound communications), content marketing is a long term approach. It demands a commitment to developing high quality material on a regular basis – you cannot hit and run. We always recommend that our clients spend less but do it consistently over time rather than splurge all their budget on one or two items in a single quarter.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BRAND

In recent years it's become less fashionable to talk in terms of brand. With the rise of social media it's often assumed that, because customers can have unfettered direct access to businesses, any notion of a constructed brand is at best unnecessary and at worst counterproductive. This is wrong.

If we think of brand as simply who you are and what that means, it's just as important today as it's ever been. People do business with people. They want to understand your relevance to what they're trying to achieve. In a B2B context, creating high-value customer-focused content that helps real people get real stuff done on a day-to-day basis is one of the surest ways of growing a powerful brand in the market.

TAKING A MORE CONSIDERED APPROACH

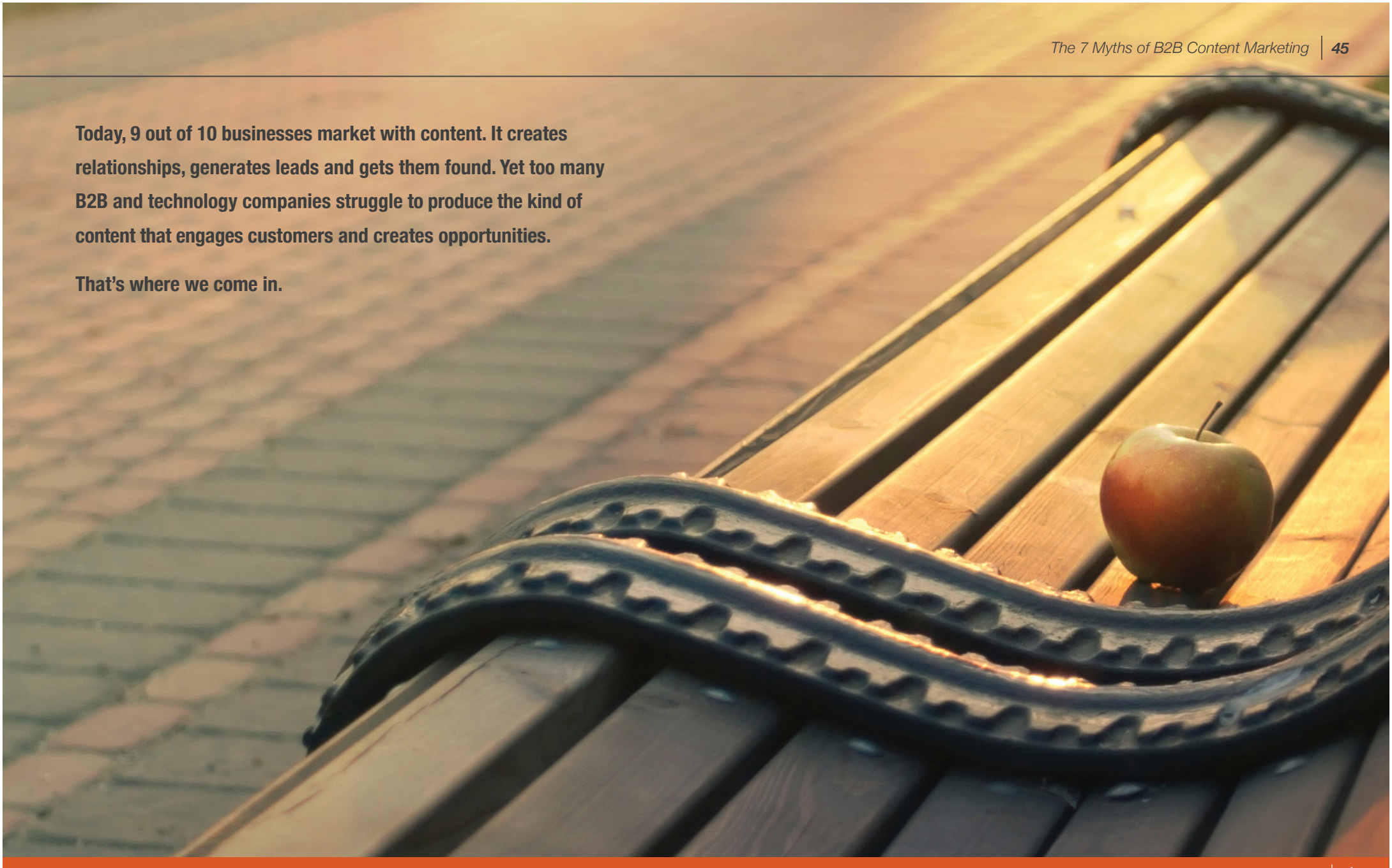
Across the planet, enlightened businesses are moving beyond the myths and taking the first steps to creating powerfully effective content-centred brands.

Isn't it time you joined them?



RIDDING THE WORLD OF CRAPPY B2B CONTENT

(ONE BRAND AT A TIME)



Today, 9 out of 10 businesses market with content. It creates relationships, generates leads and gets them found. Yet too many B2B and technology companies struggle to produce the kind of content that engages customers and creates opportunities.

That's where we come in.

considered content.

LET'S TALK ABOUT YOU

We'd love to talk with you about what you're trying to achieve with your marketing and how we might be able to help. We can show you what's worked for other companies like yours and discuss how you can make content work harder for your business.

Interested?

Contact us at **hello@consideredcontent.com** and we'll arrange a time to chat.

Speak to you soon.