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# THE 4 TYPES OF B2B CONTENT MARKETING AGENCY

## (AND WHICH IS RIGHT FOR YOU)

# B2B CONTENT MARKETING IS A FAST-DEVELOPING DISCIPLINE.

While it's true to say that business marketers have pretty much always used content in some form or other (at least we struggle to remember a time of content-free marketing) the way it's created and deployed today is tangibly different from previous eras.

# IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT THERE ARE NOW TANGIBLY DIFFERENT FLAVOURS OF CONTENT MARKETING AVAILABLE (ESPECIALLY IN BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS).

Depending on your start point, objectives and general philosophy, you may take a very different approach to others in your industry. If you are running your entire content operation in house, this is unlikely to be an issue as it will be easier to take a slightly pick-and-mix approach.

However, if you are partnering with a ‘B2B content marketing agency’, your partner’s core approach will radically affect the kinds of activity you will undertake, the timescales you’ll work to, and the kind of results you’ll see.

# TO BE CLEAR, WHILE WE TAKE A PARTICULAR VIEW ON HOW CONTENT MARKETING SHOULD BE DONE, THERE IS NO SINGLE RIGHT APPROACH THAT APPLIES TO ALL B2B ORGANISATIONS.

As such, the right agency for one client may be entirely the wrong one for another (even in the same industry).

In this guide, we aim to offer a balanced view of the options open to today's marketers. While there are many slight variations on the types of agency you'll encounter, for ease of analysis, we've grouped them together into four main buckets. For each, we'll outline how they tend to approach content, why you might choose them, and why you might not.

# 1. INBOUND CONTENT MARKETING AGENCIES

# WHEN CONTENT MARKETING REALLY BEGAN TO SEE TRACTION AS A NEW(-ISH) WAY OF MARKETING, IT WAS **INBOUND** THAT CAPTURED MOST OF THE LIMELIGHT.

Driven by the clever folks at the **Content Marketing Institute** and the marketing machine at **HubSpot**, inbound is seen by many as the default way to do content marketing today.

The core focus of an inbound approach is that we should not market to people before they are ready. Instead, we should create content that enables them to find us when they have a need. In this way we will be more relevant to their needs and, subsequently, more likely to close the deal (after all, they will already see us as thought leaders in our space due to our content).

# AN INBOUND CONTENT MARKETING AGENCY WILL TEND TO FOCUS ON BLOGGING AND ARTICLES AS THE CORE FOUNDATION LAYER FOR THEIR ACTIVITY.

They normally operate on a monthly fee and work to an agreed editorial calendar. They will often create a core content asset and then re-purpose and 'atomise' it to make it work across multiple media and formats.

An inbound agency will measure and track content effectiveness through how well it performs in terms of the number of views and shares, and some will track this through to sales (especially where there is a marketing automation platform in place that is hooked up to the client's CRM system).

# MANY INBOUND AGENCIES WILL HAVE A HEAVY PRO-SOCIAL FOCUS AND WILL USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO HELP AMPLIFY THE CONTENT THEY CREATE.

In B2B, this will tend to revolve around Twitter and LinkedIn (although the more enlightened will also look at specialist communities).

In addition, some traditional search marketing agencies have moved into content marketing as the SEO space has become more difficult to compete within. For these, inbound is a natural focus (if geared more towards rankings than people).

# WHY SHOULD YOU CHOOSE AN INBOUND CONTENT MARKETING AGENCY?

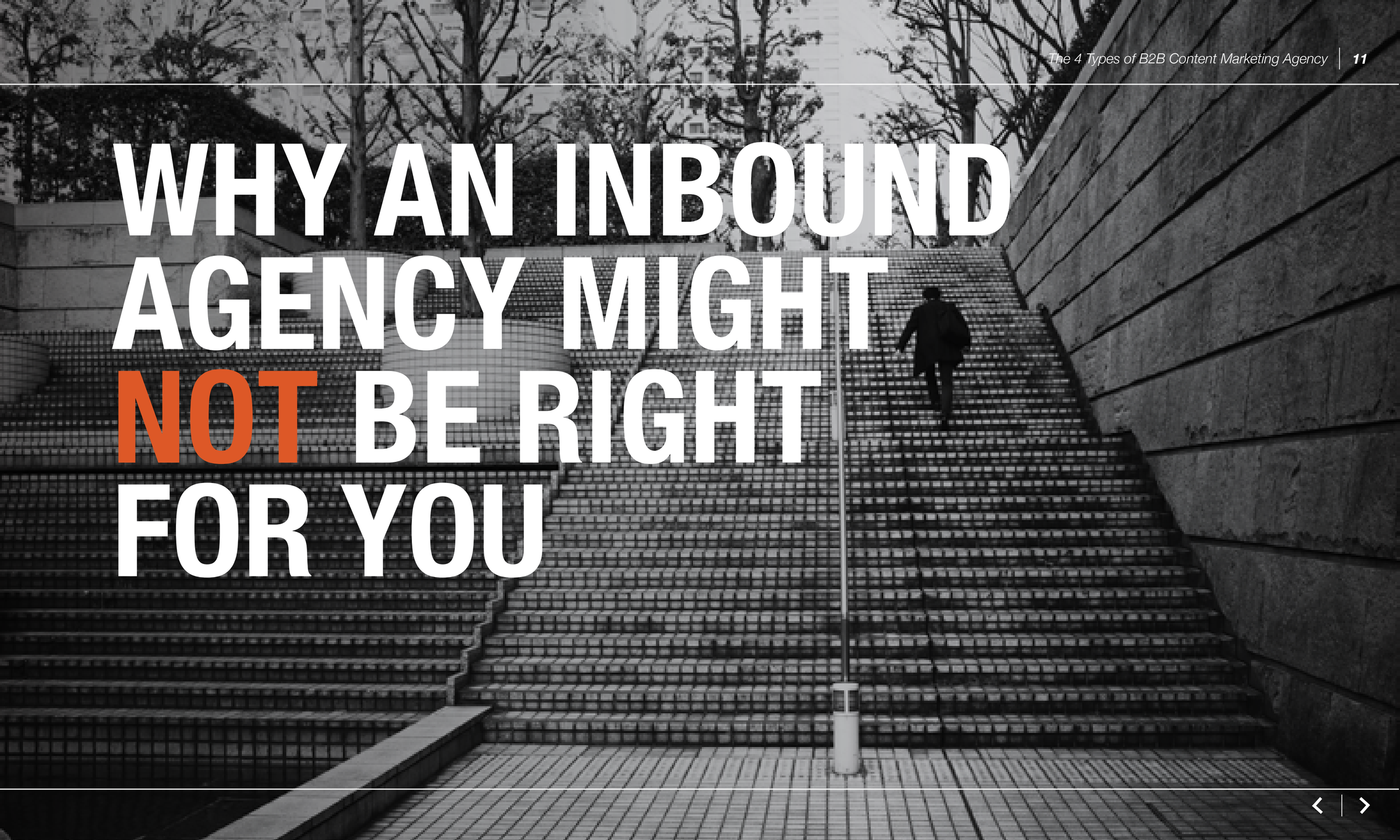
# AN INBOUND AGENCY WILL PROBABLY SUIT YOU IF YOU ARE ABLE TO TAKE A LONGER TERM VIEW OF YOUR CONTENT PROGRAMME.

The approach works but it takes time — it is more of a marathon than a sprint. You will see increasing results as you create higher volumes of relevant content. It will also suit you if you plan to take the activity in-house at some later stage as an inbound agency will give you the running start you need to get some valuable momentum. Then, later, you can hire your own inbound team and transition it across.

It will also suit you if you believe that social media will be a critical driving force for your marketing in the months and years to come.

Finally, the monthly fee-based approach to charging means that you have a predictable recurring cost for all your activity.

# WHY AN INBOUND AGENCY MIGHT NOT BE RIGHT FOR YOU



# AS MENTIONED ABOVE, INBOUND IS ABOUT PLAYING THE LONG GAME. IT IS LESS SUITED TO DEMAND GENERATION ACTIVITY THAT REVOLVES AROUND QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE.

The kind of content inbound agencies produce seems to work better for smaller businesses, or those in niche industries. The tendency to focus on quantity and consistent posting schedules has led to variable quality in some areas (though the better agencies will be able to clearly demonstrate they can work to a high quality on a consistent basis).

And the monthly billing, while predictable, can prove costly and restrictive in the long run.

# 2. OUTBOUND CONTENT MARKETING AGENCIES

# BEFORE WE START THIS SECTION, FULL DISCLOSURE: CONSIDERED CONTENT IS AN OUTBOUND B2B CONTENT MARKETING AGENCY.

Fundamentally, an outbound-focused agency will take a campaign-based approach (even if these are always-on, perpetual programmes). Normally this will involve creating a number of content assets (often targeted at different stages of the buying cycle) and then promoting them via email, advertising and other paid activity. Many of these programmes will be structured through a marketing automation system such as Marketo, Pardot or Eloqua.

An outbound-focused agency should be able to structure the best flow for the campaign and know all the techniques for optimising effectiveness at each touch-point. They'll also be able to plan out both calendared and triggered campaigns (or hybrids that have an element of both).

# IN ADDITION TO PURE DEMAND GENERATION, AN OUTBOUND AGENCY WILL ALSO RUN NURTURE AND DRIP CAMPAIGNS, USING CONTENT TO SCORE AND MOVE PROSPECTS TOWARDS BEING A MARKETING QUALIFIED LEAD (MQL) THAT IS READY TO BE PASSED TO SALES (ALONG WITH ALL THE HISTORY OF THE LEAD TO THAT POINT).

# WHILE THERE WILL OFTEN BE QUARTERLY THEMES IN PLACE, OUTBOUND AGENCIES TEND NOT TO FOCUS ON DEVELOPING EDITORIAL CALENDARS.

Instead, the approach will work back from the specific campaign results we want to see within the specified timeframe.

Traditional integrated marketing agencies and account based marketing (ABM) firms tend to fall into the outbound category (though not always).

# WHY SHOULD YOU CHOOSE AN OUTBOUND CONTENT MARKETING AGENCY?

**AN OUTBOUND-FOCUSED AGENCY WILL SUIT YOU IF YOUR KEY OBJECTIVES REVOLVE AROUND DEMAND GENERATION AND LEAD NURTURING — PARTICULARLY IF YOU ARE QUARTERLY-DRIVEN IN TERMS OF DELIVERING RESULTS (THE ABILITY TO CLEARLY DEMONSTRATE EFFECTIVENESS IS A BONUS FOR SALES- AND RESULTS-FOCUSED CULTURES).**

# OUTBOUND ALSO WORKS WELL FOR COMPANIES THAT HAVE INVESTED IN MARKETING AUTOMATION AND NEED TO PLAN AND FEED PROGRAMMES.

It should enable you to move your automation on from a simple email service provider replacement to a more intelligent system that can add increasing value over time.

If your agency works on project-based remuneration (vs open-ended hours-based billing) you should also be able to more accurately track expenditure against return.

# WHY AN OUTBOUND AGENCY MIGHT NOT BE RIGHT FOR YOU

# IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO TAKE STEPS TO USE THIRD-PARTY DATA OR PARTNER WITH A MEDIA OWNER, AN OUTBOUND CONTENT AGENCY IS UNLIKELY TO BE ABLE TO DELIVER THE RESULTS YOU NEED.

Likewise, if you do not have the ability to execute – either via a marketing automation system or using a combination of email provider (eg **MailChimp**) and landing page system (eg **Unbounce**) – then, again, outbound won't be the way to go.

And if you're fundamentally opposed to interruption marketing, you'll be better off taking an inbound approach.

# 3. MEDIA-LED CONTENT MARKETING AGENCIES

# MEDIA-LED CONTENT MARKETING AGENCIES HAVE EVOLVED OUT OF MORE TRADITIONAL MEDIA BUYING FIRMS.

These agencies primarily work with media owners on a paid basis to create and promote content assets to the publisher's readership.

The assets themselves may be developed by the publication/site's creative and writing teams or developed as a piece of native advertising by the agency — one that looks and feels a lot like the site it appears on (very much like a modern advertorial).

Services will also include paid search and paid social placement (and all the planning and strategy that sits beneath this). There will often be an element of email distribution sent direct from the publisher who may also manage the initial leads this generates.

This may go further to include cost-per-lead activity where the publisher commits to a certain level of performance for a price agreed with the client.

# WHY SHOULD YOU CHOOSE A MEDIA-LED CONTENT MARKETING AGENCY?

# IF YOU DO NOT HAVE GOOD DATA OR ARE ENTERING A NEW MARKET SEGMENT, A MEDIA-LED APPROACH CAN QUICKLY GIVE YOU ACCESS TO THE PEOPLE YOU NEED TO GET IN FRONT OF.

The brand reputation of the media you partner with can also deliver a halo effect around your own content.

If you are committed to a heavy social media element, a media agency will help you amplify your message with smart pay-to-play approaches.

Good media agencies will also be skilled in reporting and analytics, showing you the results you're getting for your money.

# WHY A MEDIA-LED AGENCY MIGHT NOT BE RIGHT FOR YOU

# IF YOU ARE PARTNERING WITH A MEDIA PUBLISHER TO HOST AND PROMOTE YOUR CONTENT, YOU WILL NEED TO BE COMFORTABLE WITH THE FACT THAT THE DESTINATION FOR LEADS (AND THE VALUE YOUR CONTENT DELIVERS) WILL BE THE MEDIA OWNER'S PROPERTY IN THE FIRST INSTANCE.

# AS WITH TRADITIONAL MEDIA, YOU ARE ALSO DEPENDENT ON THE MEDIA OWNER'S AUDIENCES BEING AS ENGAGED AND COMMITTED AS THEY WOULD HAVE YOU BELIEVE.

Finally, media-led approaches can be an expensive option, depending on the publisher and the competitiveness of your marketplace. (This is less so for simple PPC-style and limited retargeting campaigns.)

# 4. PR-LED CONTENT MARKETING AGENCIES

# PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS WERE ONE OF THE FIRST TO FULLY REALISE THE VALUE OF GETTING CONTENT INTO THE RIGHT HANDS — IT'S PRETTY MUCH BEEN THEIR FOCUS ALL ALONG.

In moving more explicitly into the content marketing arena, they've taken their eye for a newsworthy story and applied it to content creation.

PR-led agencies will look to blend their client's objectives with what journalists and analysts will see as valuable for their audiences. Of course, the definition of a media channel is changing rapidly, so PR-led agencies will normally also include outreach to key influencers on social media as part of their approach.

Good PR professionals are skilled at making connections. They will focus on getting into a meaningful dialogue with journalists and influencers (not just spamming them with pitches for their latest release). In doing so, they can create a valuable two-way conversation that will amplify results over time.

# WHY SHOULD YOU CHOOSE A PR-LED CONTENT MARKETING AGENCY?

# PR-LED APPROACHES ARE PARTICULARLY VALUABLE TO BUSINESSES THAT NEED TO BUILD CREDIBILITY FAST.

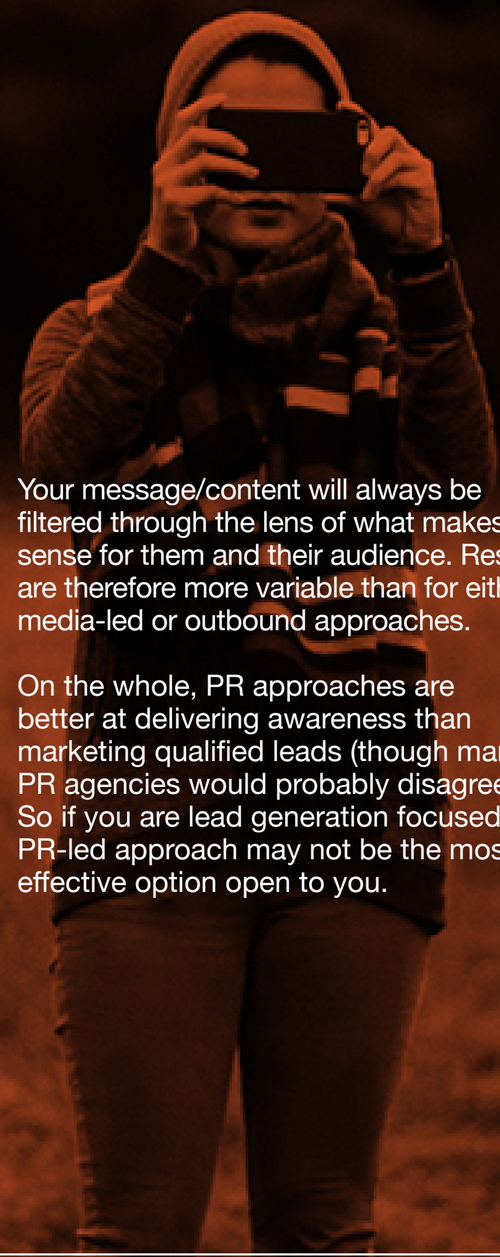
The ability to have key influencers talk about your products and viewpoints in a positive way offers significant value. Likewise, becoming a go-to source for quotes from a key publication can turn your people into respected thought leaders.

This also offers a way to drive greater awareness of your brand and products within a tighter timescale than some other approaches (particularly inbound).

And the monthly fee-based remuneration offers a predictable cost model.

# WHY A PR-LED AGENCY MIGHT NOT BE RIGHT FOR YOU

# ULTIMATELY, PR APPROACHES ARE HIGHLY DEPENDENT ON THE VIEWS AND ATTITUDES OF JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS, ANALYSTS AND OTHER INFLUENCERS.



Your message/content will always be filtered through the lens of what makes sense for them and their audience. Results are therefore more variable than for either media-led or outbound approaches.

On the whole, PR approaches are better at delivering awareness than marketing qualified leads (though many PR agencies would probably disagree). So if you are lead generation focused, a PR-led approach may not be the most effective option open to you.

# WHAT EVERY GOOD CONTENT MARKETING AGENCY SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO

# WHILE WE'VE LOOKED TO HIGHLIGHT THE RELATIVE STRENGTHS OF DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO B2B CONTENT MARKETING USED BY AGENCIES TODAY, WHICHEVER APPROACH YOU TAKE, THERE ARE CERTAIN ABILITIES THAT SHOULD BE MANDATORY:

Ultimately, B2B content marketing offers a highly effective way of moving prospects and customers from ignorance to interest to sale. The challenge is find the right partner for your objectives, timescales and corporate culture.

If you think that the right approach is outbound, we'd love to talk. You can reach us at hello@consideredcontent.com. Alternatively, if one of the other approaches looks better suited to your needs, get in touch and we'll introduce you to an agency we recommend.

## 01

The agency should be able to understand your business, your markets and your buyers

## 02

They should have outstanding copywriting abilities — **bad writing is where B2B content goes to die**

## 03

They should be able to help you get to the core of your message and positioning (and give you a hard time if you aren't sure yourself)

## 04

They should be able to create cycles of content focused on the sales funnel — think campaigns first, triggers second and air cover third

## 05

They should be clear about what success looks like with their approach (and be just as clear on potential stumbling blocks)

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# WE SHOULD TALK

If you're already investing in B2B content but not seeing the return you need, the good news is there are a ton of ways to improve its performance. Of course, sometimes it can be difficult knowing where to begin.

We start with coffee and a chat (or tea if you prefer). Your place or ours, no PowerPoint, no big sales pitch – just an open conversation about the challenges you face. Then, if we can help and there's a good fit, we'll go from there.

Drop us a line at hello@consideredcontent.com and we'll set up a time.