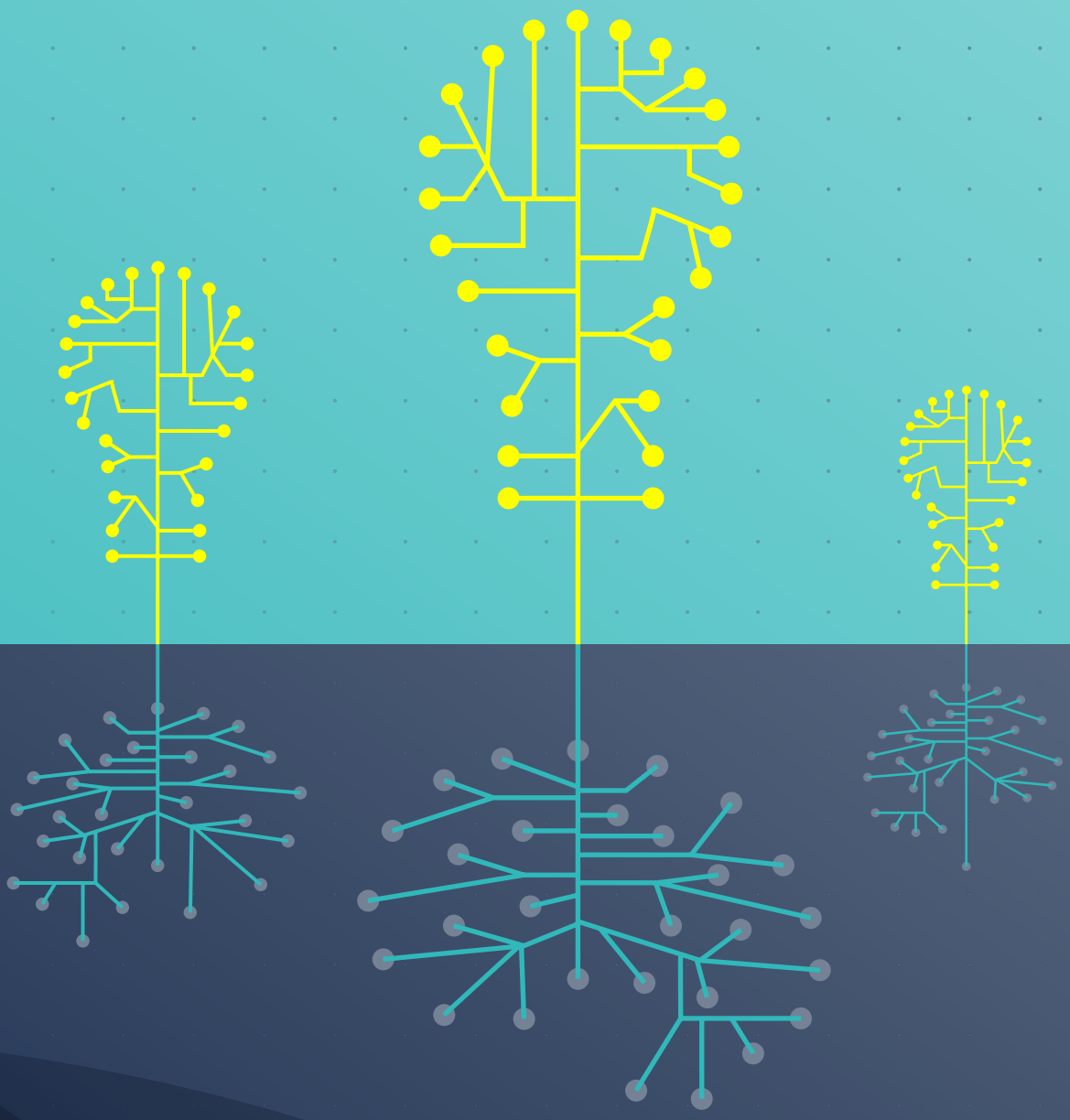
Research: Is data the key to content success?



TOMORROW PEOPLE
INBOUND MARKETING AGENCY

B2B Marketing

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Introduction

Unsurprisingly, given its name, content marketing tends to encourage a focus on creating and distributing good quality content. But smart marketers are increasingly aware that such a literal understanding of the discipline is not good enough. Content for content's sake will not do.

Without data being positioned at the heart of content strategy, it is impossible to secure the best returns. And it is with this belief very much front and centre that B2B Marketing and Tomorrow People set out to benchmark the level of commitment to data that currently exists when it comes to B2B content marketing.

Data should provide the foundations for everything that goes into content marketing; from deciding what to produce and where to share it in the first place, through to evaluating whether your efforts have been worthwhile.

Data is the fuel that allows content's fire to burn brightly. But are B2B marketers using it to maximum effect?

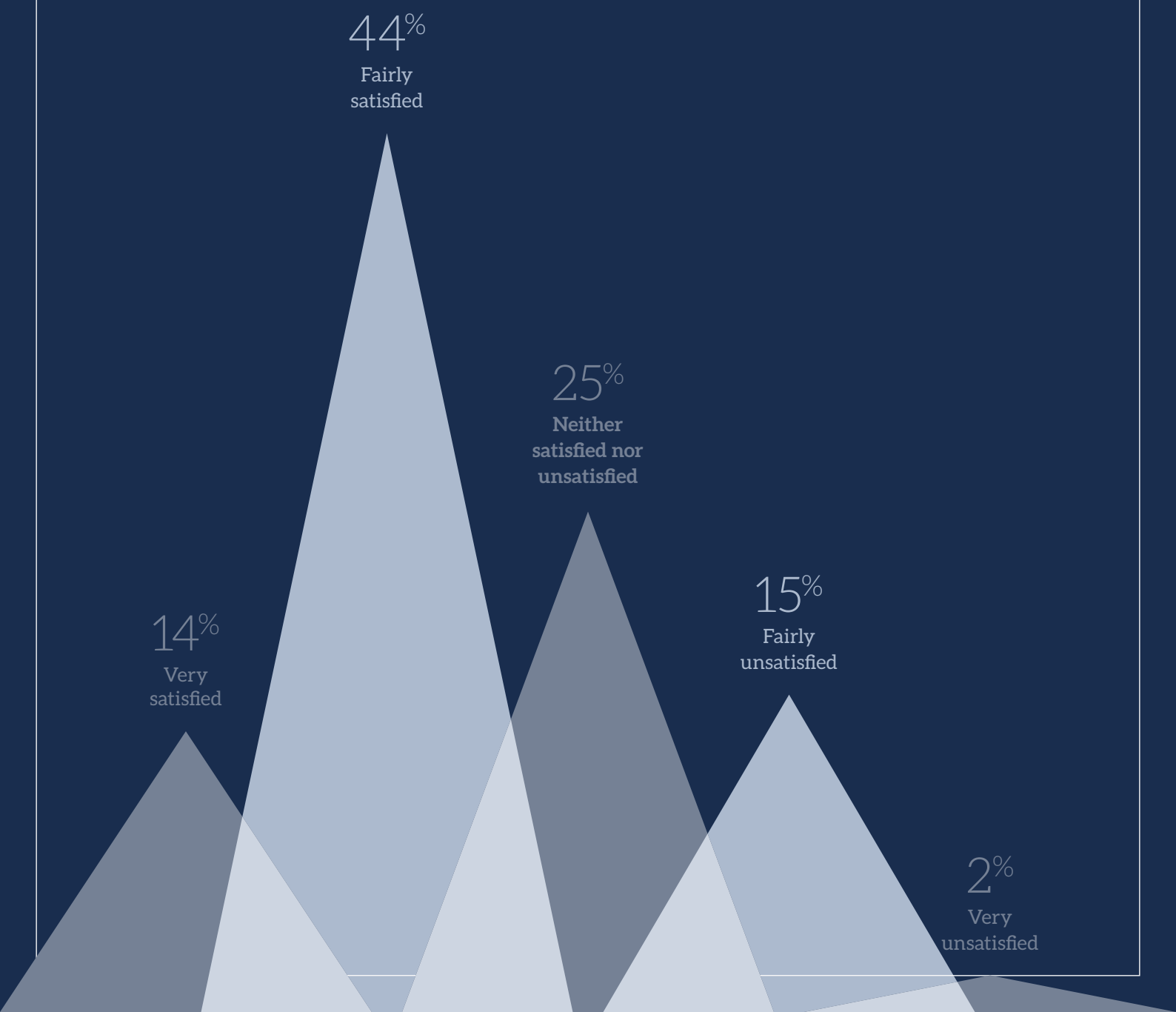
ANALYSIS

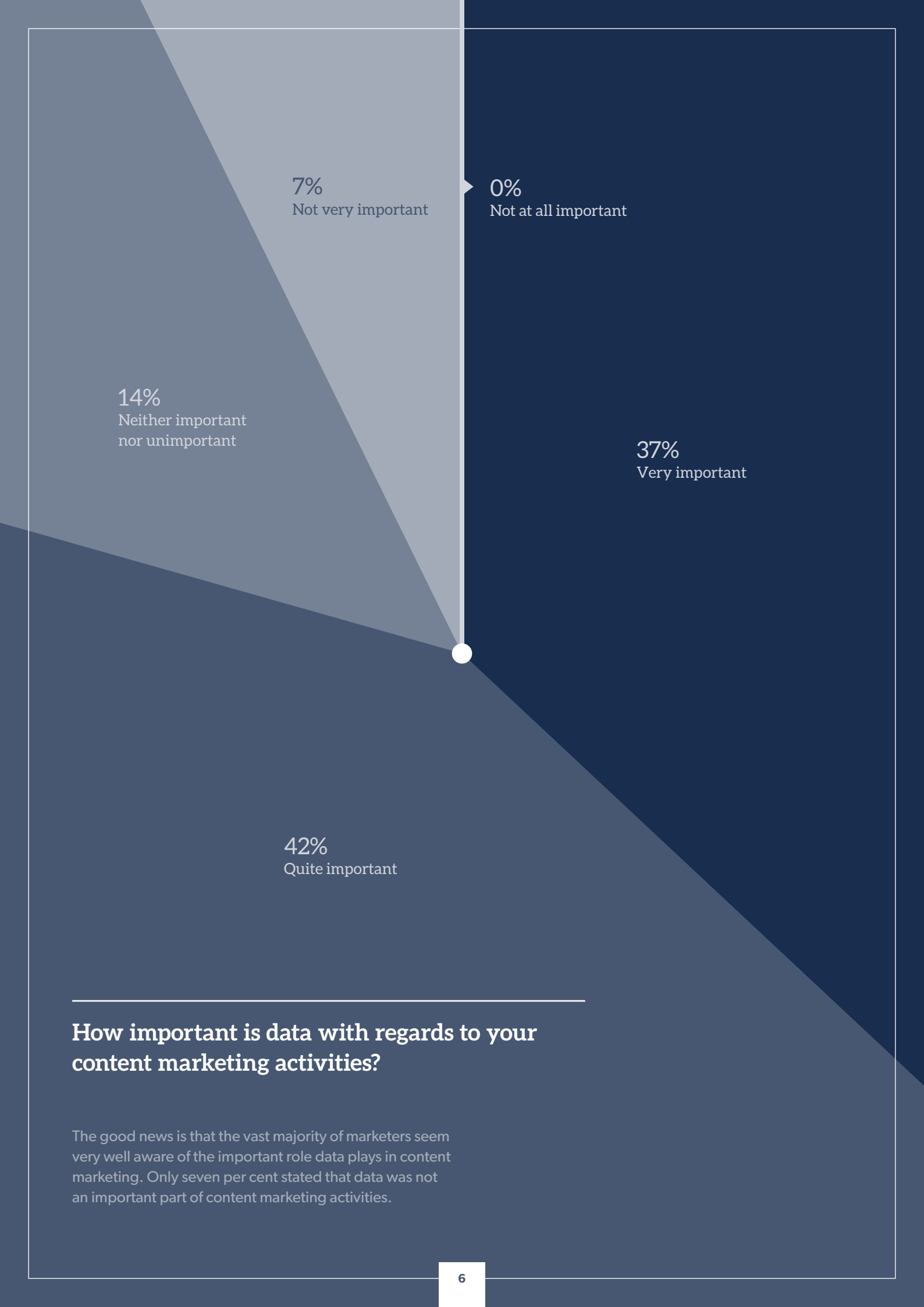
Is data the key to content success?

I. STRATEGY

How satisfied are you with the performance of your content marketing activities?

The starting point for this project was to evaluate broadly the level of satisfaction that currently exists with regard to current content marketing efforts. As might be expected, results were mixed. While 58 per cent did report some level of satisfaction with their current performance, 42 per cent were left wishing for more. Data, clearly, has a role to play here.





How important is data with regards to your content marketing activities?

The good news is that the vast majority of marketers seem very well aware of the important role data plays in content marketing. Only seven per cent stated that data was not an important part of content marketing activities.

9% We do not have a content strategy

29% No, data analysis is not a key component of our content strategy

62% Yes, data analysis is a key component of our content strategy

Is data analysis a key component of your content strategy?

While marketers claim to be placing emphasis on data, this is not seeping through into the content strategies that guide activity in enough instances. Almost one third of our respondents stated that data analysis was not a key element of their content strategy. Even more alarmingly, nine per cent admitted that they didn't even have a content strategy in place.

40% No, our content marketing operation is not data-driven

3% We don't know if our content marketing operation is data-driven

57% Yes, our content marketing operation is data-driven

Would you describe your content marketing operation as being data-driven?

Perhaps as a direct result of the fact that data isn't front and centre in strategic planning, a significant percentage of B2B marketers admit that their content programmes aren't data driven. Forty per cent of our respondents fell into this camp. These are the people that most need to pay attention to this research project.

5% We don't know if our organisation has a content strategy in place that clearly defines what success looks like

46% Yes, our organisation has a content strategy in place that clearly defines what success looks like

49% No, our organisation does not have a content strategy in place that clearly defines what success looks like

Does your organisation have a content strategy in place that clearly defines what success looks like?

Another issue likely to be contributing to the mixed satisfaction B2B marketers are reporting with regard to their content efforts is the fact that many are not working to plans that specifically define what success looks like.

Less than half (46 per cent) answered yes when asked whether their content strategy clearly defined what success looks like. Again, there is room here for significant improvement.

ANALYSIS

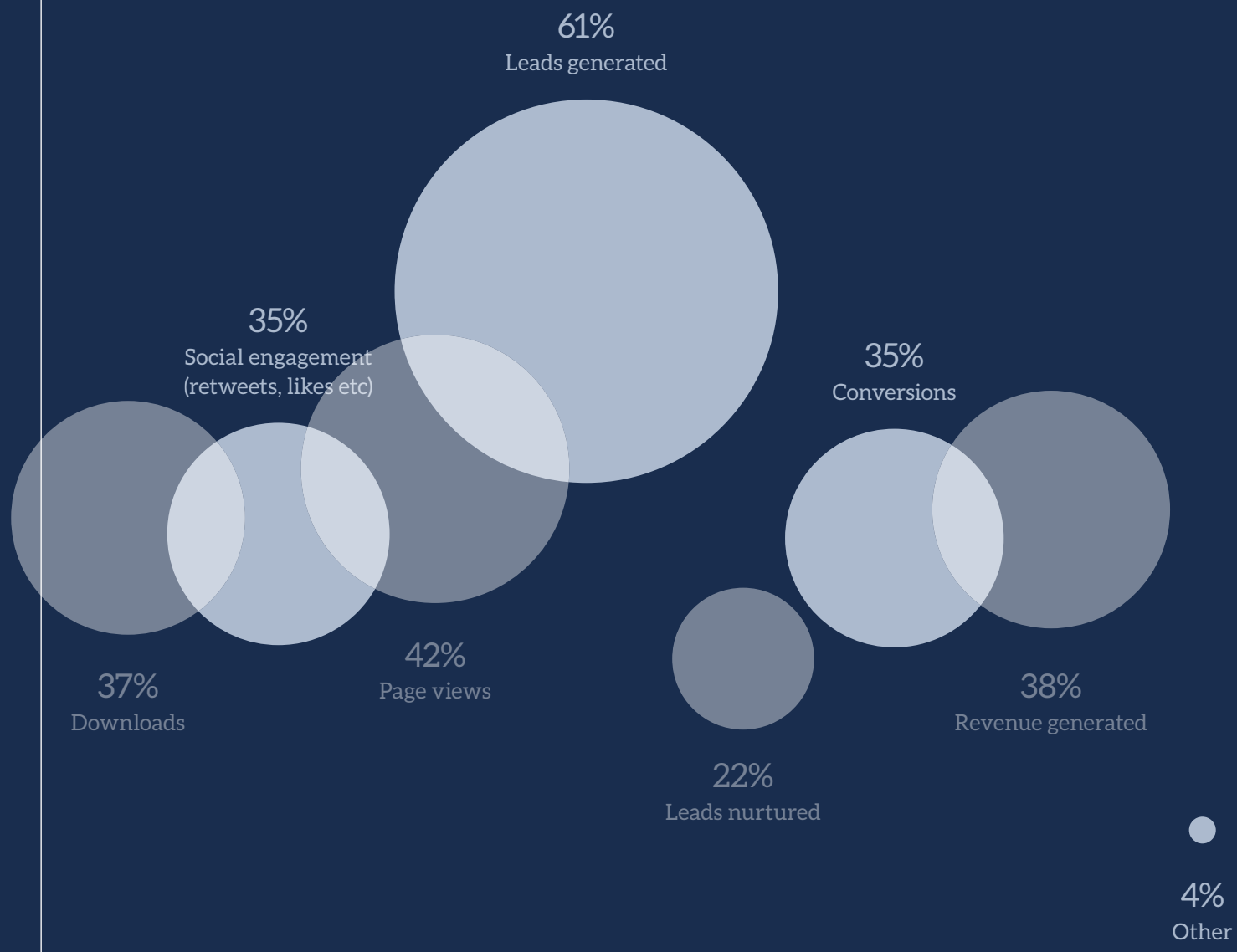
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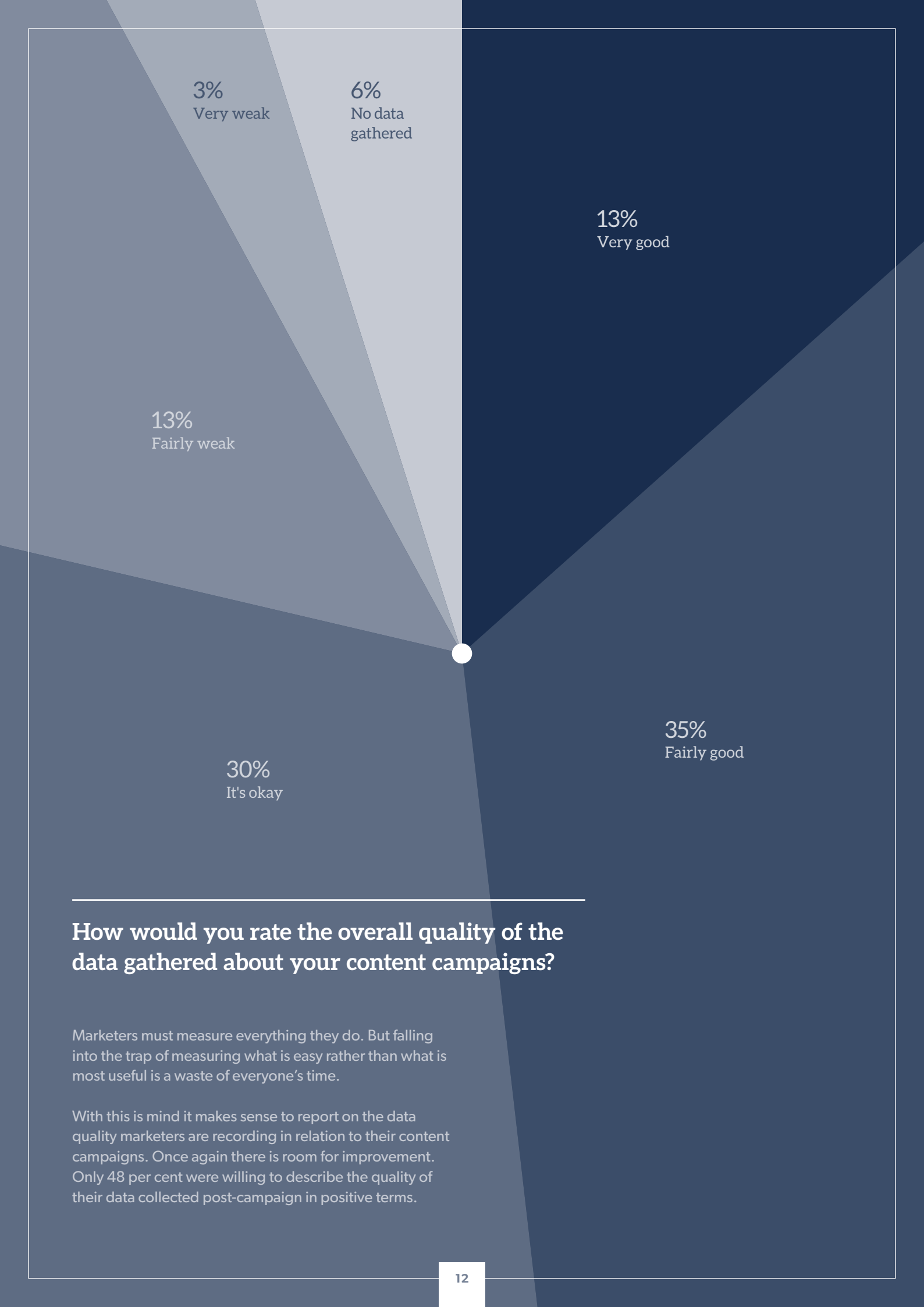
II. TACTICS

Which three of the following metrics do you use most frequently for measuring the performance of your content?

There are a huge number of potential metrics with which marketers can evaluate the success of their content activities, some tied down with revenue, others usefully examining conversion and lead progression and others simply scratching the surface. There appears to be a disconnect between what marketers believe they should be measuring and what they are actually looking at, however.

The top three most measured metrics were highlighted as being 'leads generated', 'page views' and 'revenue.' However, when we asked which metrics were regarded as being most important 'page views' slides way down to fifth place.





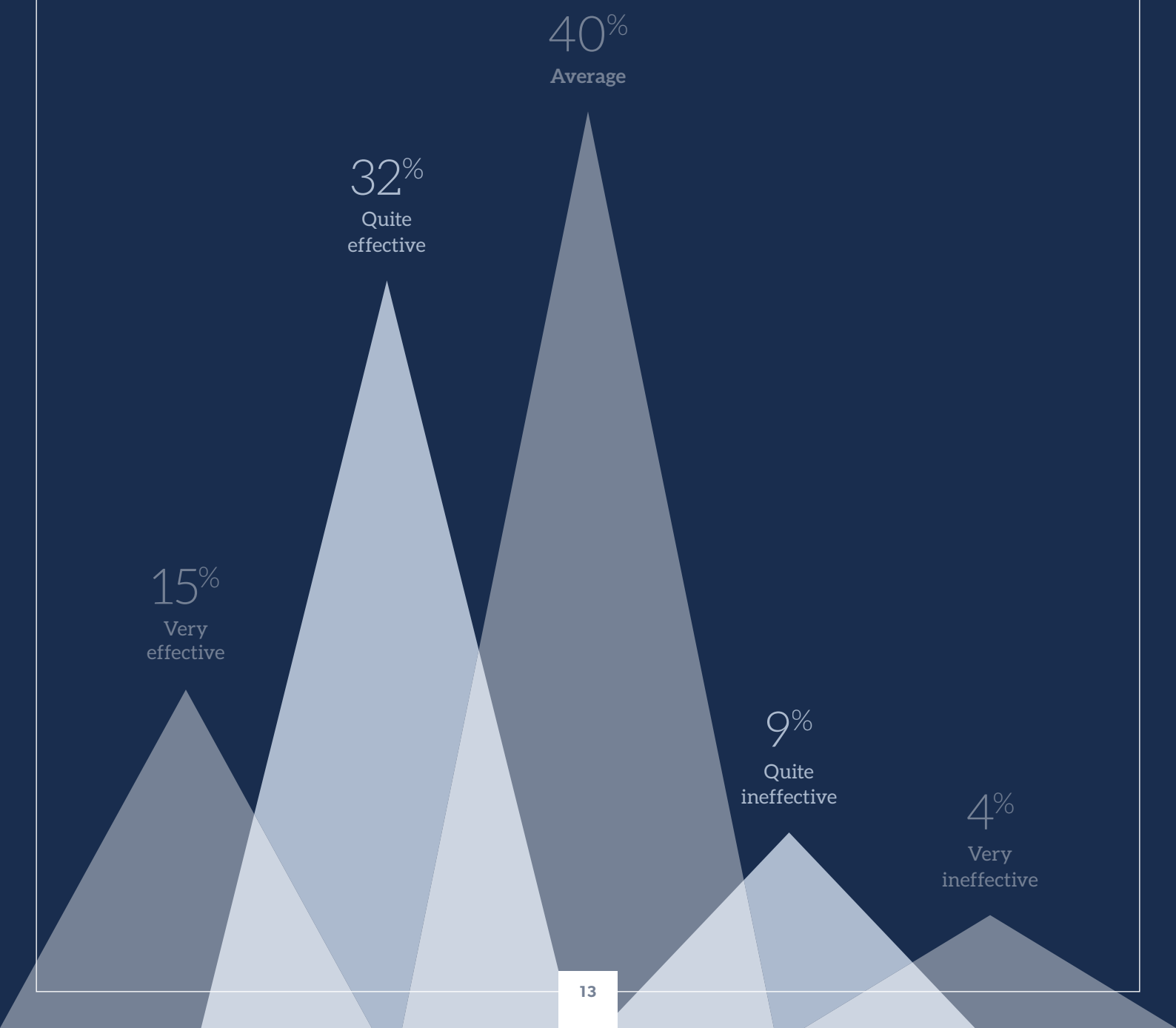
How would you rate the overall quality of the data gathered about your content campaigns?

Marketers must measure everything they do. But falling into the trap of measuring what is easy rather than what is most useful is a waste of everyone's time.

With this is mind it makes sense to report on the data quality marketers are recording in relation to their content campaigns. Once again there is room for improvement. Only 48 per cent were willing to describe the quality of their data collected post-campaign in positive terms.

How effective is your post-campaign results analysis?

Similarly uninspiring responses were provided when we asked respondents to critique their own post-campaign results analysis. Less than half described their analysis as being effective. So we're looking at a situation where many marketers are spending time evaluating the wrong things, and not even doing a particularly good job of it. The insights hidden in campaign data are clearly not being used as best they could.



12% We regularly repeat mistakes

36% We are committed to learning from previous performances and make changes accordingly

52% We sometimes implement changes based on previous results

Which of these sentences best describes your content operation?

The scenario described thus far where, despite widespread acknowledgement of its importance, marketers are failing to use their data efficiently is leading to a cycle of mediocrity. Lessons are not being learnt. Sixty-four per cent admit to repeating the same mistakes with their content operations. The 36 per cent reporting a 'commitment to learning from previous performance and making changes accordingly' are much more in line with industry best practice when it comes to data-centric content marketing.

40% Yes, we have a formal feedback process in place

2% We don't know if we have a formal feedback process in place

58% No, we have no formal feedback process in place

Do you have a formal feedback process in place allowing your organisation to learn from and implement change based on its content successes and failures?

One factor that may well be contributing to the unwelcome mistake repetition is the fact that only 40 per cent of B2B marketers have formalised feedback processes in place allowing them to implement change and learn from previous successes and failures. While data skills and properly mapped out models of success are essential, if the time isn't found to adapt and change, progress is incredibly unlikely.

ANALYSIS

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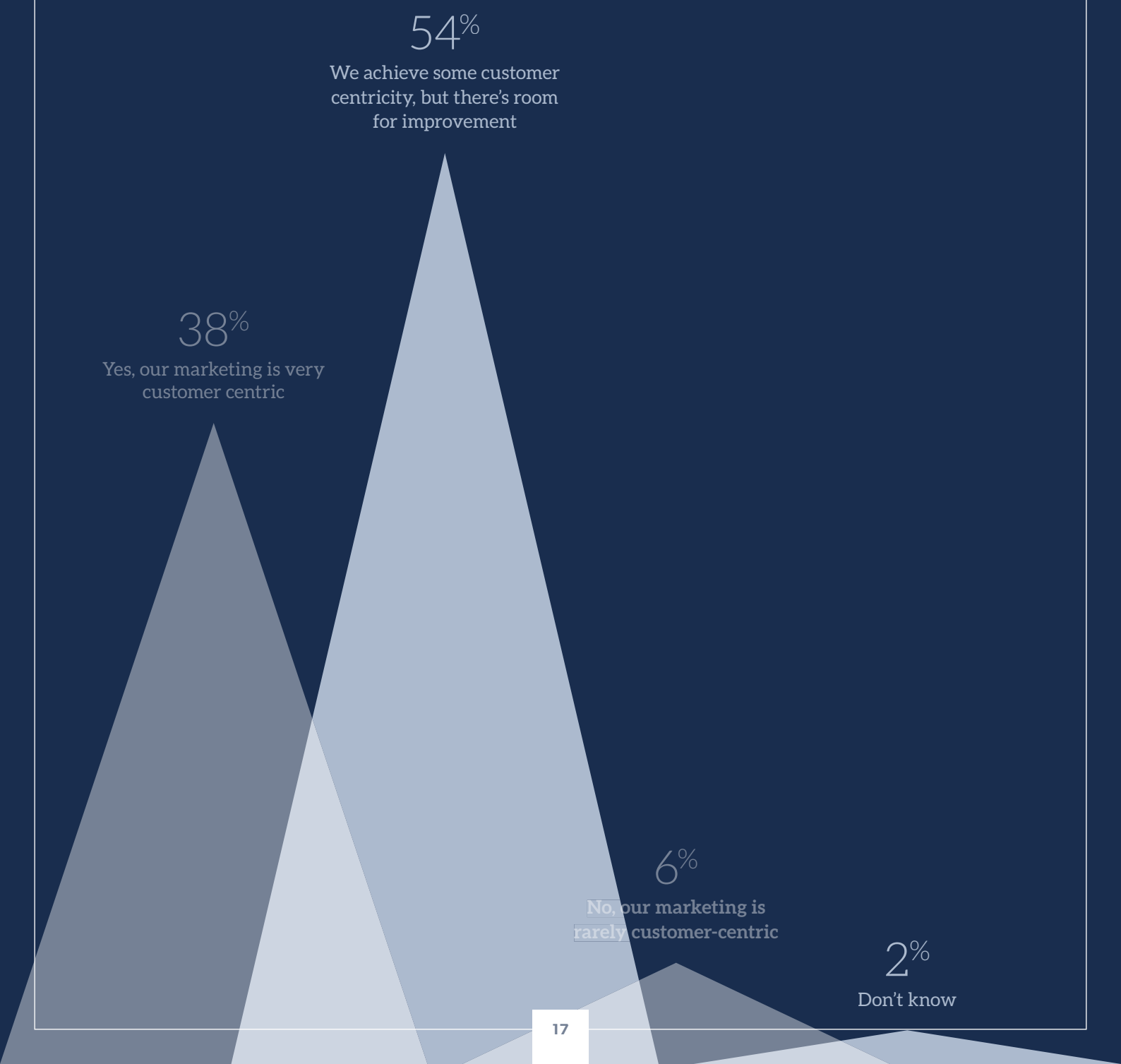
III. THE FUTURE

Are your organisation's marketing efforts customer-centric?

Of course, one of the main points of positioning data at the centre of your marketing operation is to maximise the impact it's all going to have on your prospects and customers. Data and customer centricity go hand-in-hand.

Our respondents recognise the value of customer centricity, but once again they also acknowledge their shortcomings.

Only 38 per cent of our respondents stated that their marketing efforts were 'very customer-centric.' This leaves a significant majority acknowledging that there remains room for improvement. One area they may be well advised to focus on is the creation of buyer personas. Surprisingly, we're still looking at a scenario where 50 per cent of B2B brands are marketing without buyer personas in place.



6% We don't know if our content efforts should be more customer-centric

13% No, we don't believe our content efforts should be more customer-centric

81% Yes, we believe our content efforts should be more customer-centric

Do you believe your content efforts should be more customer-centric?

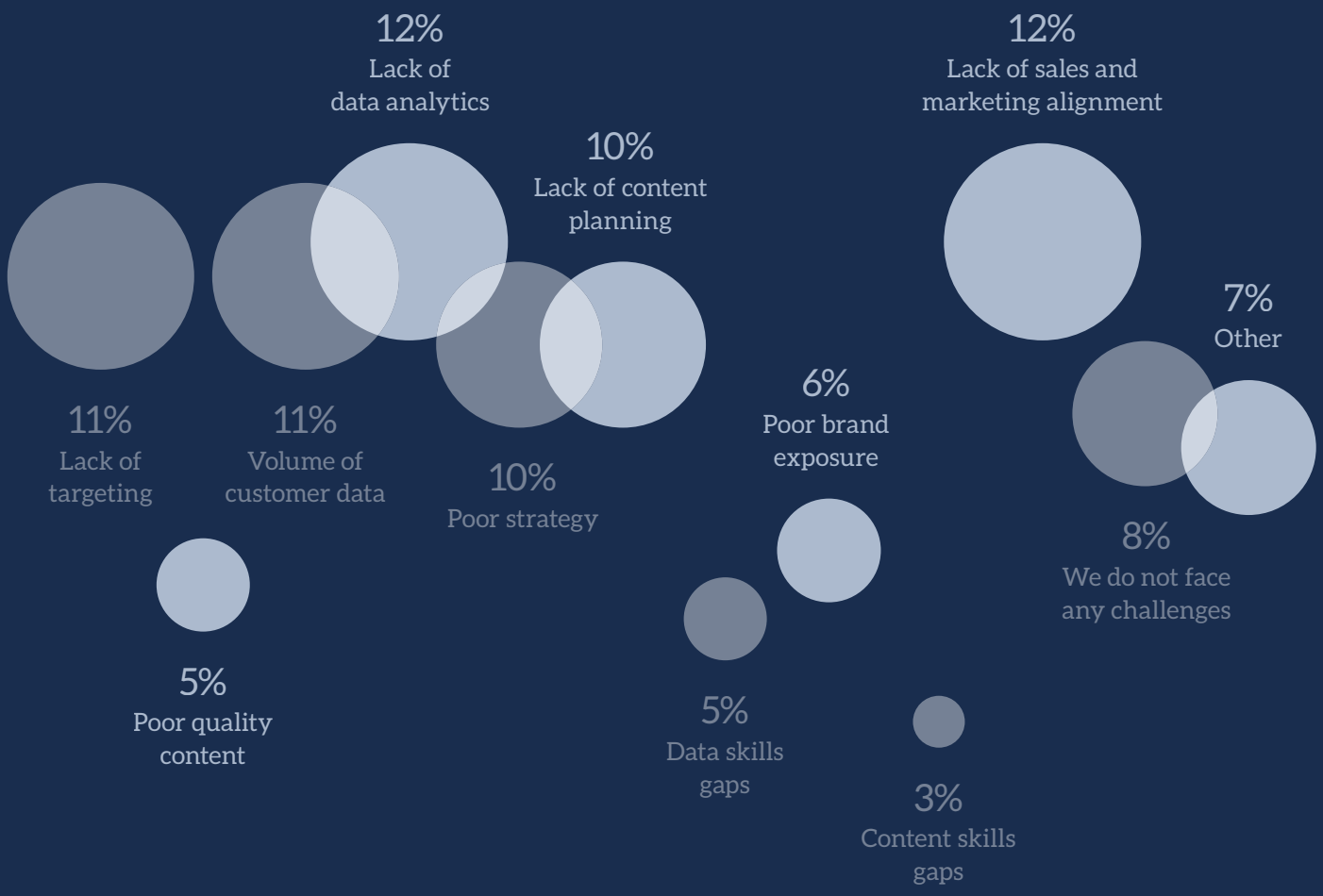
The good news here is that there exists an acknowledgment that customer centricity is vital for content to succeed in the digital age. Eighty-one per cent stated that their content efforts should be more customer-centric. Perhaps the remaining 19 per cent work for organisations doing everything they can for their customers. But either way, customer and campaign data and a robust evaluation of the vital information it holds are the key to ramping up customer centricity.

Aside from a lack of resources, what single factor is currently limiting the success of your content marketing efforts?

Our research has broadly flagged a situation where B2B marketers are well aware of the benefits of data- and customer-centric content campaigns. But we have also uncovered substandard performances across strategic, process and data management that is limiting success. For several reasons, company data is not being utilised to maximum effect.

When we asked respondents what single factor was limiting the success of their content marketing, a broad range of responses were recorded. However, data related challenges – be they regarding the volume of available data or a lack of the requisite analysis to make the most of existing data – were highlighted by over one-fifth (23 per cent) of respondents.

And when asked what was preventing B2B content operations becoming more data-driven, a similar 22 per cent flagged a lack of data skills as being to blame. Nineteen per cent also flagged a 'lack of prospect insight' and 14 per cent cited poor technology systems. These issues are very obviously all interrelated.



32% Yes, we have a data specialist in our marketing team

34% No, and we have no current plans to recruit one

34% No, but we have plans to recruit one

Do you have a data specialist in your marketing team?

It's impossible to reach the end of this report without concluding that, in the vast majority of cases, B2B marketing departments, despite being well aware of the potential benefits, are ill equipped to process, analyse and act upon the data they hold on their customers and prospects.

In many cases, this skills gap is holding back performance, impeding lead generation and nurturing activities, limiting the relevance of content output and hitting the bottom line of the businesses in question. The obvious answer is to invest where skills gaps are present. And it seems there may well be reason to believe that if we were to repeat this study in 12 months time we could be reflecting on an improved situation.

When we asked marketers to report on the level of data talent present in their marketing team at present, just under one-third (32 per cent) claimed they already had a data specialist in their department. Of the remaining two thirds who couldn't already claim data expertise, just over half stated they were currently planning to address the skills shortage.

If this intention comes to pass, we could soon be looking at a scenario where two-thirds of marketing departments will be able to call upon data-specific skills to help ensure their content marketing efforts better meet their targets.

It should then only be a matter of time before the slower-to-act organisations are either forced to follow suit or accept their decreasing market share.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Marketers describe success in content marketing

In their own words

We asked our respondents to describe, in their own words, what success in content marketing looks like. Here's what they said.

"Success in content marketing at our organisation means that we've used content to attract potential clients, help them understand what we do, why we're valuable for their business, and convince them to buy so that a sales conversation becomes the last step with someone that's already vested in the product we're providing."

"Original content, with an informative/educational bias, promoted across all channels in a co-ordinated fashion, linking into CRM and analytics programs that can measure whether set KPIs and conversions are being achieved"

"Educated customers we can convert and who are brand aware"

"To be able to deliver the right content at the right time to the right people"

"Content that directly provides leads with sufficient information to hand off to business development team"

"A repeat customer – one that comes back to the organisation to consume more"

"Brand awareness, brand desirability, customer/client enquires and purchase of services, repeat business"

"Well-targeted and customer centric content, that delivers brand awareness, extended reach/shares and hits KPIs"

"Engaged readers, who want to find out more and want to talk to us"

"Success means being able to capture valuable customer data (website journeys, data etc), then being able to use this to refine our customer journey mapping and therefore being able to further tailor the experience, which should lead to higher levels of engagement and finally better quality leads. It's quality of leads rather than quantity which is the KPI."

"Increased brand awareness, longer time on page, repeat visits, sharing of content, increased visits to site, and content shares, likes and favourites"

"Good content that is insightful and engages and that leads to measurable results in the market place"

COMMENT

Alistair Norman, marketing director of Tomorrow People, comments on the findings

Data: the key to content success



Alistair Norman, marketing director, Tomorrow People, comments on the results of our survey

B2B marketer? Address the elephant in the room

According to a new survey by *B2B Marketing* and *Tomorrow People,* 60 per cent of marketers describe themselves as data-driven. The same percentage said they used insights from data to *shape* their marketing campaigns.

But the survey revealed a core problem. Despite this commitment to being data-driven, just 15 per cent described the *quality* of their data as 'very good', while 80 per cent believed leveraging data would lead to better customer focus. They want to use data – but they haven't got a grip on it. **It's the data elephant in the room.**

Great customer relationships start with great data

Despite businesses collecting 44 per cent of their data in-house where it should be easiest to deal with, just 48 per cent used defined customer personas in their marketing plans. Roughly the same number are able to serve truly personalised content to people in different demos, psychos, and geos.

Perhaps as a result, only around a third or so (35 to 41 per cent) thought their *own* content was insightful or educational. Asked further about their marketing, respondents were brutally honest with themselves: 80 per cent believed they could do more to achieve customer-centricity, and 10 per cent even admitted their content was 'boring'. Less than half had a **content strategy** in place that painted a picture of what success looked like.

Average data and average usage, of course, leads to average content. If this data elephant cannot be addressed, the foundations of most future content strategies will be fundamentally flawed. So taking content from average to great will be the marketer's biggest challenge in 2016 and beyond.

Content marketing is dead – long live the content experience

Great content is more than marketing. It's about delivering an *experience,* which differentiates, engages, and builds an emotional bond with your customers, prospects and employees. But to achieve this holy grail, **data** must be front and centre.

To that end we must end our obsession with the sales funnel and customer decision journey. Instead we must think about creating **experience-driven touchpoints** that go beyond the products and services we sell.

We can't restrict our efforts to what drives the immediate sales leads, because that limits what we do. Don't focus on persuading and promoting in order to sell. Rather think about enabling and empowering *experiences,* **with data at the core.**

About

B2B Marketing

B2B Marketing is the comprehensive information resource for B2B marketers. Its mission is to provide practitioners with the information they need to perform better and achieve more, whatever sector of the B2B space they are operating in.

Launched in 2004 as B2B Marketing magazine, it has since evolved into a multi-faceted resource, delivering a broad range of content in a variety of different forms and formats.

Its key products are:

- Online community
- Magazine
- Awards
- Research and reports
- Training
- Events
- Membership

For more information on any of these products or services go to b2bmarketing.net or call +44 (0)20 7014 4920

B2B Marketing

Tomorrow People

Birmingham-based inbound marketing agency Tomorrow People exists at the cutting edge of modern inbound marketing. They are a privately funded and leading player in the sphere of current marketing practice and thinking; creating strategies that build brands, generate sales-ready leads and increase revenue.

Tomorrow People brings together a team of experienced marketing strategists, innovators and creatives; each member a specialist in their own field. Its track record within the marketing industry is second to none.

It is the high calibre and expertise of this carefully assembled collective of marketing professionals that has seen the organisation, over the years, develop into a leading UK inbound marketing agency.

Situated in Birmingham, at the heart of the UK, Tomorrow People builds powerful online presences for businesses and organisations across all industries. Companies of all sizes are currently benefiting from its inbound marketing expertise.

For more information visit: tomorrow-people.com

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