

The Content Studio presents

# THE STATE OF *(Dis)*CONTENT

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# Contents

- 3-6. Introduction / Considerations / Methodology
- 7. **What is The State of (Dis)Content?**
  - 12. The Good News
  - 17. The Not So Good News
  - 29. The Really Bad News
  - 30. The Really Really Bad News
  - 31. The Worst News of All
  - 37. What has Content Marketers Discontent?
- 38. **Section 1: Outside Forces**
  - 39. Economy
  - 43. Management
  - 54. Career Trajectory
- 62. **Section 2: Relationships With Management and the Business**
  - 65. Leadership Buy-in Overview
  - 87. Mostly Bought In
  - 102. Extremely Bought In
  - 119. Indifferent
  - 135. Skeptical
  - 149. Doesn't See the Point
- 163. **Section 3: Career Satisfaction**
  - 179. Compensation Satisfaction
  - 187. Creative Fulfillment
- 201. Takeaways
- 218. Closing Thoughts
- 220. Acknowledgements

# Introduction

Our practice has always been something of a black sheep, but something's different now, isn't it?

Since 2022, there have been 276,508 tech layoffs, AI has executives scrutinizing content programs, and we've become slaves to unpredictable algorithms. We know "the playbook" is changing, yet in many cases employers and clients want to stick with "what works" while mandating we "do more with less"

For many, this is leading to creative unfulfillment, burnout, and career dissatisfaction.

To be clear, it's not all doom and gloom, while the focus of this report is about The State of (Dis)Content, you will see throughout there are many who are satisfied with their career, pay, and have buy-in from leadership.

Our goal throughout is to find the common themes behind the two groups, and perhaps find a way to push our industry forward.

# Tommy Walker

I'm the founder of The Content Studio, a content marketing consultancy for Fortune 1,000 companies and mid-market B2B SaaS startups.

Previously, I was the first marketing hire at Shopify Plus, the Global Editor-in-Chief at QuickBooks, and have consulted with brands like:

- GoDaddy
- LinkedIn
- Twitch
- Vimeo

*I've been in this field for nearly 20 years, have seen a ton of evolution, and am beyond thrilled to bring you this report.*





# Considerations

The nature of this very report is biased.

The name "The State of (Dis)Content" could create sample bias from those who are disproportionately upset.

However, we believe the data in this report tells a well balanced story that feels truthful, but nonetheless, it's worth mentioning.

It's also worth mentioning one question was missing an option in the data collection, therefore the data reported is simulated. We correlated multiple trends to arrive at a number that feels truthful, however the graph must be marked with a disclaimer.

Finally, this is one interpretation of the data. We encourage you to draw your own conclusions and share your interpretations.

# Methodology

We used the answers to these questions to conduct a multi-dimensional analysis, cross-referencing each of the data points with each other to create a comprehensive and nuanced model of where our industry is at right now.

We wanted to answer questions such as:

- **What is the effect of audience research on leadership buy-in?**
- **What is the average size of content teams at different scales of business?**
- **Does leadership buy-in change the expectation of output now that AI is involved?**

Because of this methodology and our own experiences, we feel this is a fairly accurate snapshot of our industry right now.

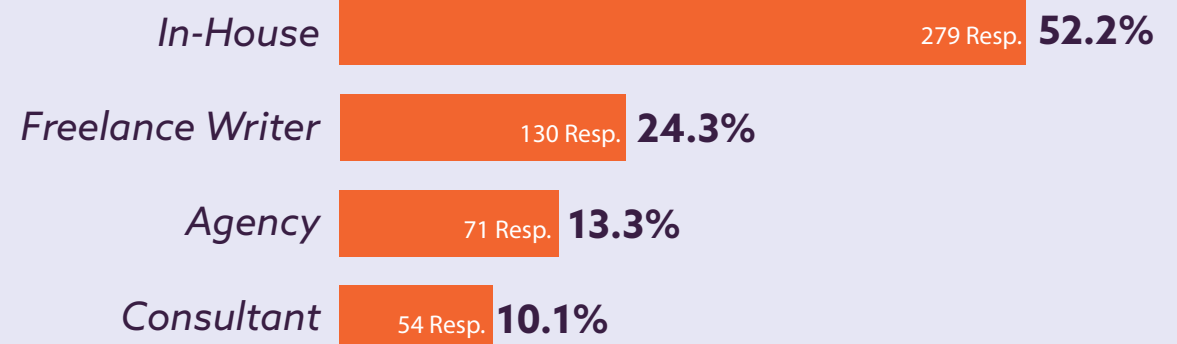
# What is The State of (Dis)Content

In July 2024, we asked content marketers **“What has you feeling discontent?”** and 545 of you responded.

A collective of content marketers from all backgrounds; In-house workers, freelancers, agencies, and consultants came together to share their raw, often emotional takes on the state of our industry.

## Which most closely describes your job

534 out of 545 people answered this question.



# What is the size of your company?

These content marketers came from businesses of all sizes, which helped us see the similarities and differences for content marketers working in all environments.

10.4%

Micro: 1-5  
Resp. 136

43.9%

Small: 10-99  
Resp. 152

33.5%

Medium: 100-999  
Resp. 116

12.1%

Large: 1000+  
Resp. 42

349 out of 545 people answered this question.

# How Many People Are Dedicated To Content Marketing?

We also wanted to know how many people were dedicated to content marketing in-house to determine if there were any trends among different group sizes.

## How many people are dedicated to content marketing?

346 out of 545 people answered this question.

0-1



2-5



6-10



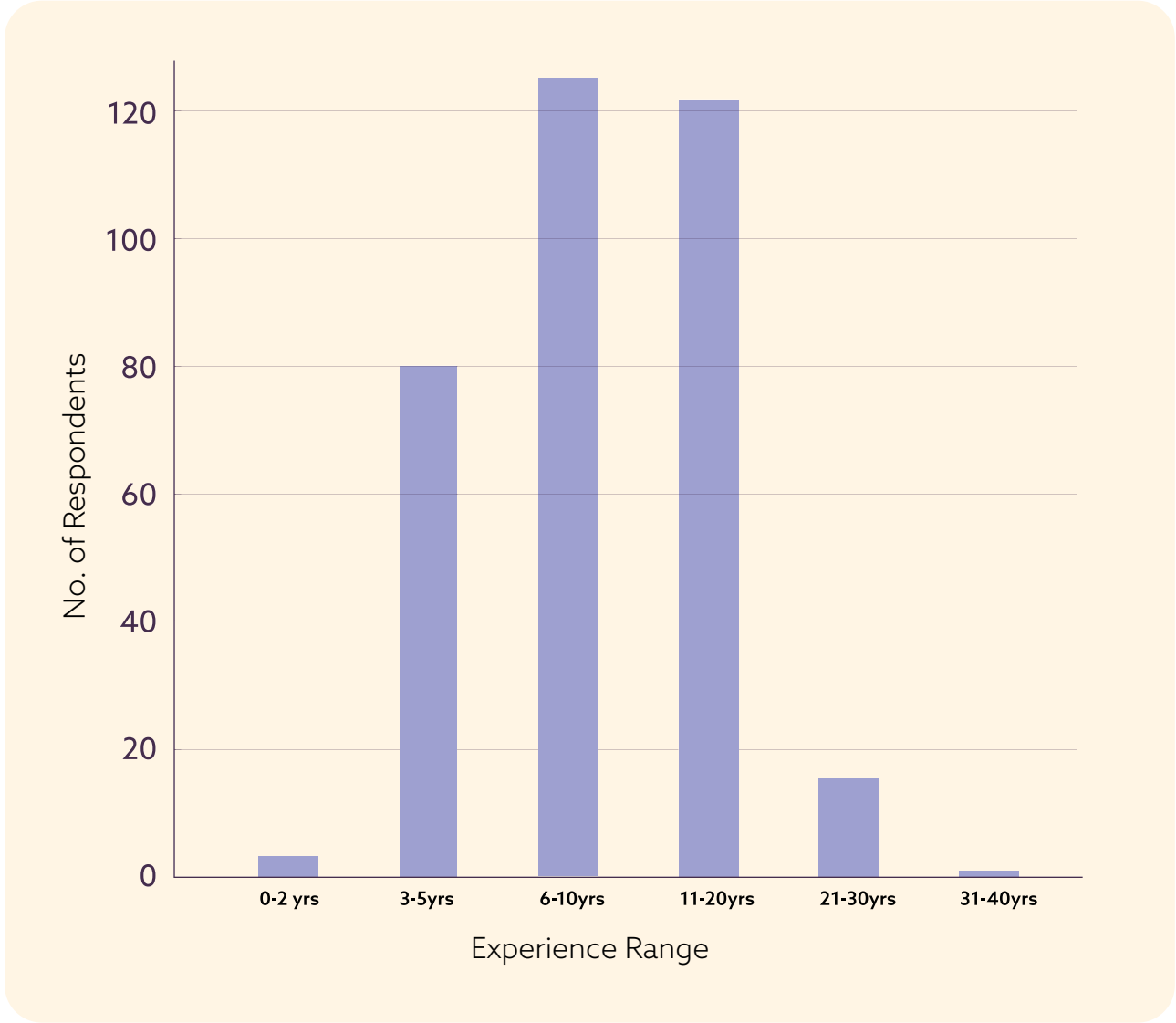
11+

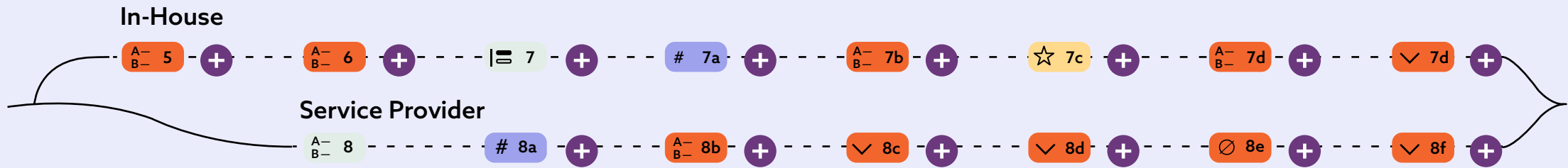




# Distribution of Years of Experience in Content Marketing

It was also important to us to capture the experience level of the people taking the survey to identify any trends across experience levels.





Finally, because the challenges between in-house employees and service providers like freelancers, agencies, and consultants, we asked a slightly different questions from each group.

This allowed us to determine if there were any significant differences between in-house employees and service providers, and if the challenges one group faced had any impact on the other.

# The Good News

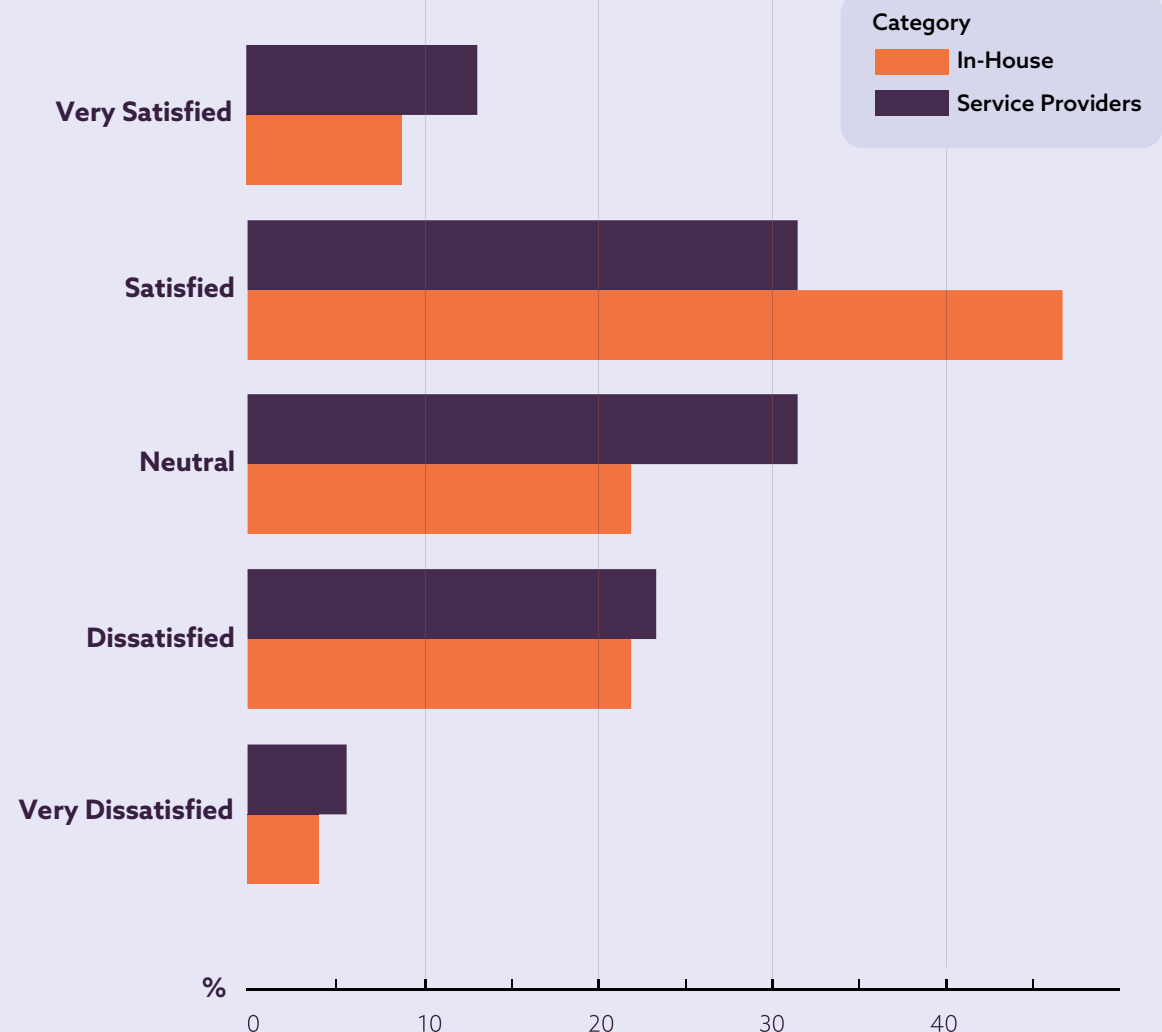
**49.24%** of the content marketing community reports being “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their salary.

Meanwhile, **26.46%** of people report feeling **neutral**, and **24.30%** feel **dissatisfied**.

We’ll discuss those common threads later in the report.

Note: Service providers lead the way with “very satisfied” likely due to the high risk / high reward nature of service work, but also report more neutrality and dissatisfaction, likely for the same reasons.

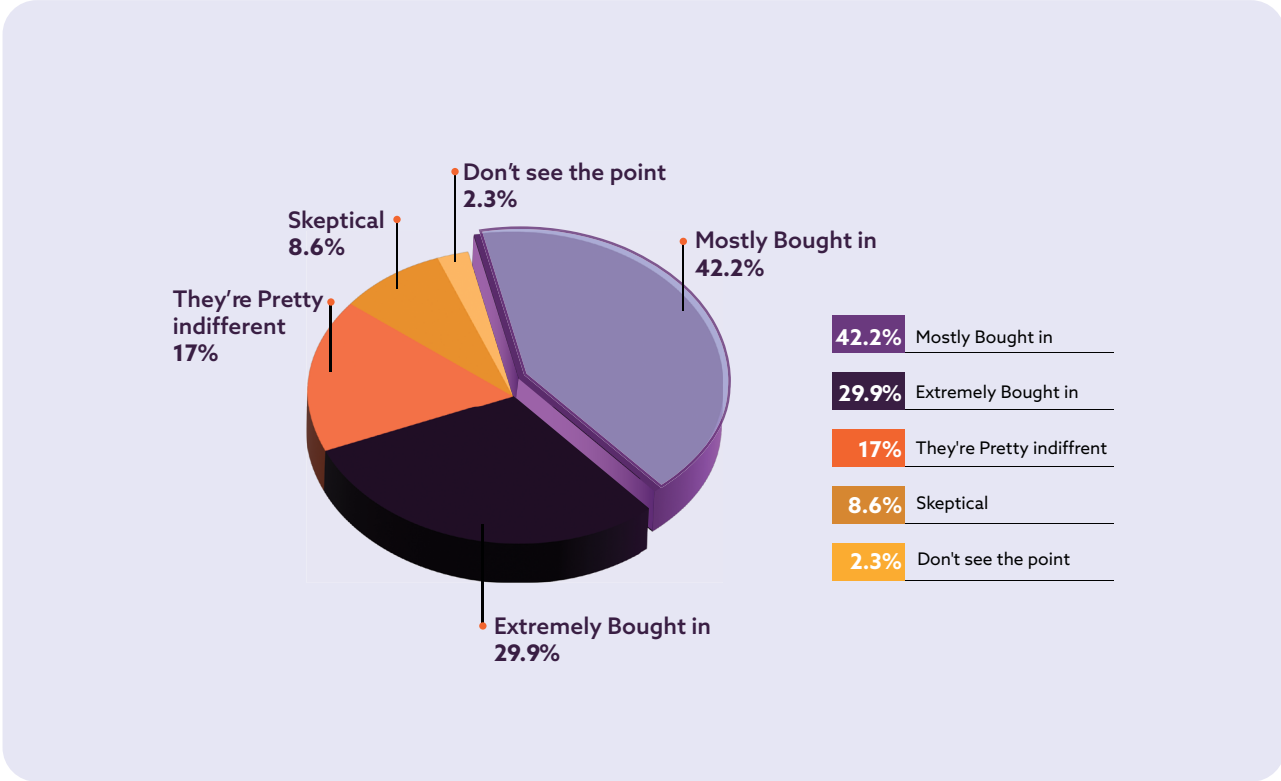
## Satisfaction with Compensation: In-House Employees vs Service providers



# The Good News

Additionally, at face value, it appears the majority of leadership is **mostly bought** into content marketing programs, indicating we're on the right side of the adoption curve.

The data paints a more nuanced picture, which we'll explore further throughout section 2.



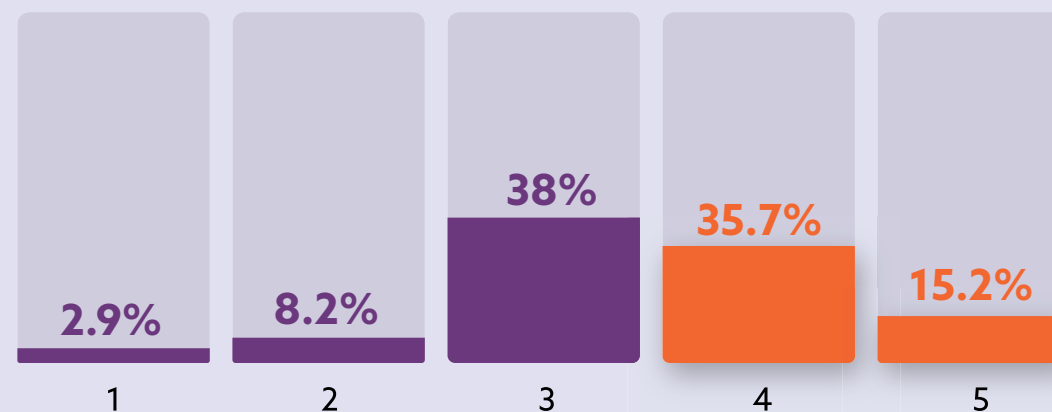
# The Good News

Also, just over half of in-house content marketers report having positive or very positive collaboration efforts within their organization.

As we dig deeper, we'll explore how leadership buy-in plays a role in this dynamic.

## Overall, how would you rate your collaboration efforts with other departments?

342 out of 545 people answered this question.





# The Good News

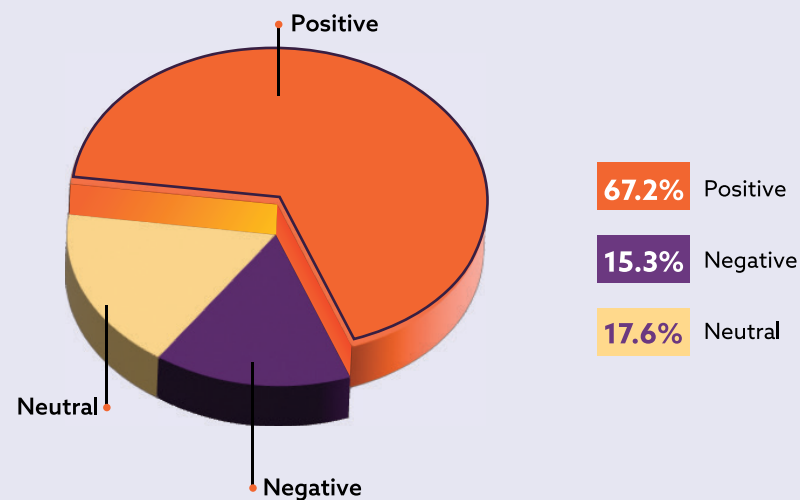
**The majority of sentiment around AI is neutral or positive.**

Content marketers believe in AI's utility and potential to be a force for good.

“

*"I think a lot of the cheap tricks and shiny objects in content will fade away, and AI will help us focus on real value."*

### Sentiment Analysis of AI's role in the next 5 Years



# The Good News

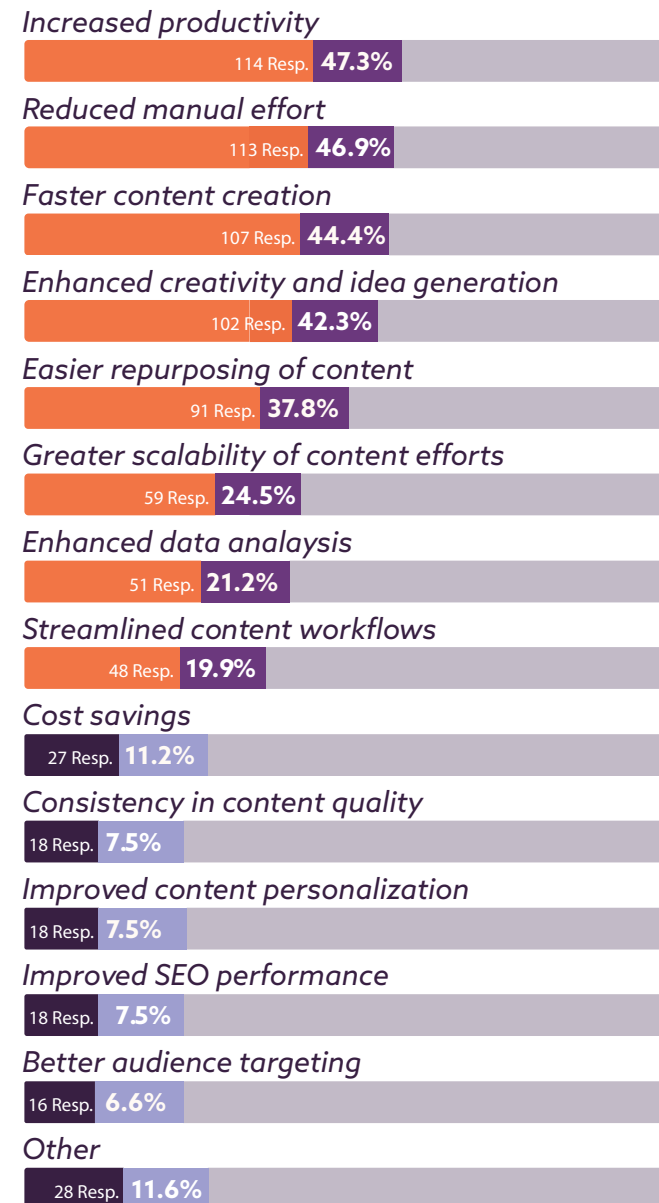
It's helped content marketers increase productivity, reduce manual effort, and create content faster, removing many minor inconveniences that has prevented us from doing more meaningful work.

“

*While AI's not a complete game-changer yet, it's certainly making certain processes faster and more efficient.”*

## What benefits have you experienced from using AI in content marketing?

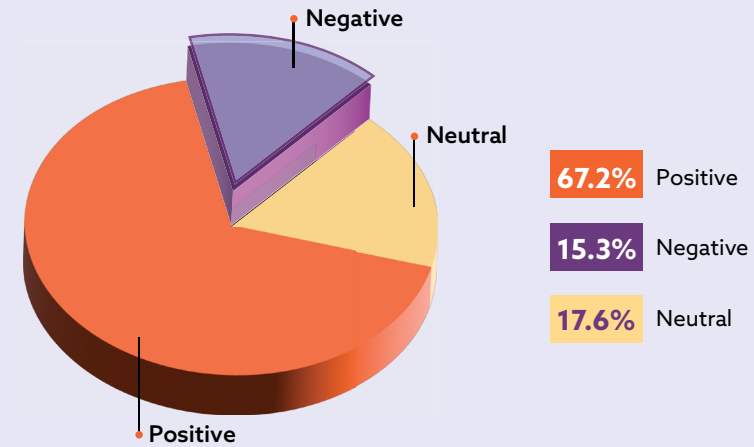
241 out of 545 people answered this question.



# The Not So Good News

However the **negative** feedback is quite valid and need to be taken into consideration.

### Sentiment Analysis of AI's role in the next 5 Years



“AI will be creating content for companies. It will take jobs away from writers.”

“If content marketing does not do enough to separate itself from AI-generated content, it will lose credibility.”

“It'd further lower the content creation entry barrier, leading to a flood of low-quality content.”

# The Not So Good News

Among the top concerns, is becoming too dependent on the technology, which could degrade the quality, accuracy, and originality of the work being produced.

“

*“It'd further lower the content creation entry barrier, leading to a flood of low-quality content.”*

## What drawbacks have you experienced with the adoption of AI?

249 out of 545 people answered this question.

### *Inaccurate information*



### *Loss of originality*



### *Decreased content quality*



### *Over-reliance on technology*



### *Limited creativity*



### *Other*



# The Not So Good News

## Downsides of AI: Devaluation of Content Marketing Expertise

AI is increasingly being seen as a convenient substitute for content marketers, especially in a climate where companies are under financial strain.

This has led to clients and employers increasingly questioning the need to pay skilled professionals, since AI can now perform many of the tasks that once required human expertise.

Or at least promises to do them quicker.

As a result, some content marketers worry about displacement, both by the rise of AI and by the economic realities that make it more appealing to businesses.

“

*“10 years ago people would knock down my door to buy my content. I’ve spent the last few months trying to sell 3 articles valued at \$1350 and I can’t even get \$300 for them. Fuck you AI.”*



# The Not So Good News

## Downsides of AI: Job Security and Skill Relevance:

Another growing concern is that AI could replace content marketers, particularly those whose skills are concentrated on writing and editing rather than broader strategic functions.

Some content marketers worry that AI will automate many of their core responsibilities, leaving those without strong strategy or technical skills vulnerable to job loss.

“

*“There’s this constant insecurity of like, is [AI] going to take my job?... But then constantly there’s this thing of like, wow, it’s improving, it’s getting better. And so I think this is on the back of people’s minds. And then the other part of AI is like, you know, is it going to degrade SEO or going to replace SEO... how your job changes, right? Is it still about writing? Do I need to get into video? Do I need to write other things than SEO?”*

# The Not So Good News

## Downsides of AI: Erosion of Long-term Vision and Content Quality:

There is also a fear that AI will degrade the quality of content. As AI generates quick, cost-effective content, marketers worry that the emphasis on thoughtful, strategic content that drives long-term success will be lost.

This erosion of quality could undermine the long-term value of content marketing as a discipline.

“

*“Beyond the old issue of attribution and value, AI has now brought a level of ‘ease’ and ‘anybody can do it’ to the job. Quality and long-term vision are not prioritized anymore.”*

# The Not So Good News

## Downsides of AI: Burnout and General Uncertainty:

Many content marketers are already feeling overwhelmed by the demands of their roles, and the rise of AI adds another layer of uncertainty.

They feel pressured to keep up with AI-driven changes, unsure of how these developments will affect their future in the industry.

**Or worse, if there will be a place for them in it.**

This uncertainty, combined with the already high demands of the job, is contributing to burnout.

“

*Content marketers are expected to be and do so much today... They feel like no one trusts their expertise, and they're not sure how much AI is going to completely eff them over in the next few years.”*

# The Not So Good News

This concern about AI is particularly valid because **60.3%** of content marketers are either **unsure or unconfident** about how recognizable their content would be on voice and tone alone.

## How confident are you people would recognize your content on voice and tone alone?

529 out of 545 people answered this question.

### Not sure

175 Resp. **33.1%**

### Fairly Confident

173 Resp. **32.7%**

### Somewhat unconfident

90 Resp. **17%**

### Not confident at all, it sounds like everyone

54 Resp. **10.2%**

### Extremely confident, nobody does it like me

37 Resp. **7%**

# What are your biggest challenges with content creation today?

478 out of 545 people answered this question.

Also, the top three content creation challenges for content marketers are **"differentiating content"** **"creating the right content"** and "creating 'quality' content," reflecting our ever present desire to create content that serves our audiences.

1. Differentiating Content

2. Creating the right content for our audience

3. Creating "Quality" content

4. Creating content consistently

5. Creating enough to keep up with internal demand

6. Creating content that requires technical skills

7. Optimizing for search

8. Creating enough content to keep up with external demand

9. Unwillingness to try new ideas





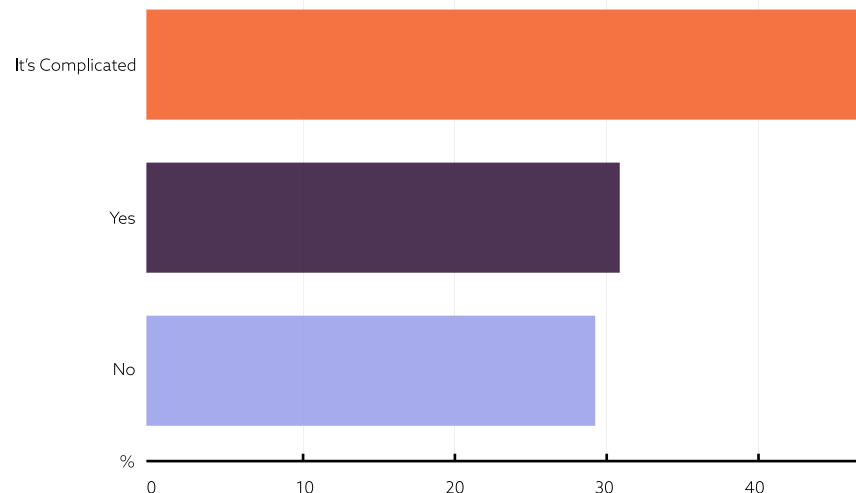
# The Not So Good News

Regardless if they are **in-house or service providers**, the majority of content marketers are also having complicated relationships with their career right now.

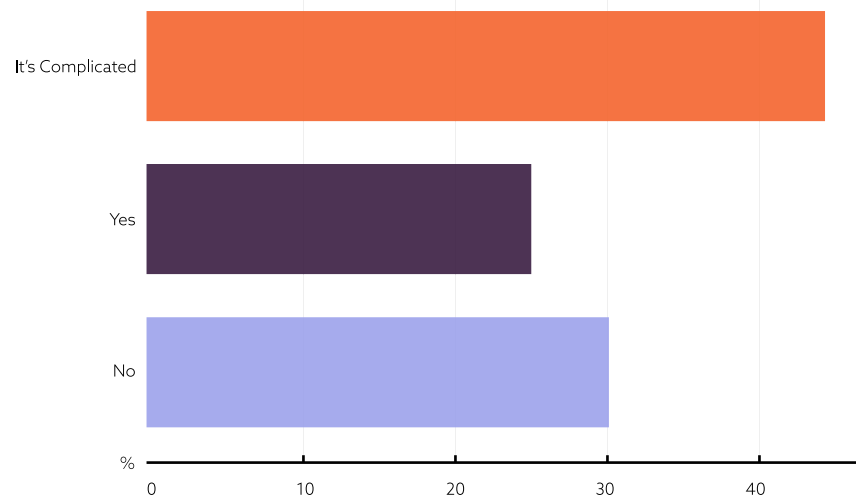
We'll discuss what's influencing career satisfaction further in Section 3.

\*Due to an oversight in data collection from service providers, the "it's complicated" category was simulated using trends from in-house employee career satisfaction, along with data on compensation and creative satisfaction. While this category is simulated, we believe it closely reflects the accuracy of other survey responses.

Career Satisfaction for In-House Employees



Estimated Career Satisfaction for Service Providers



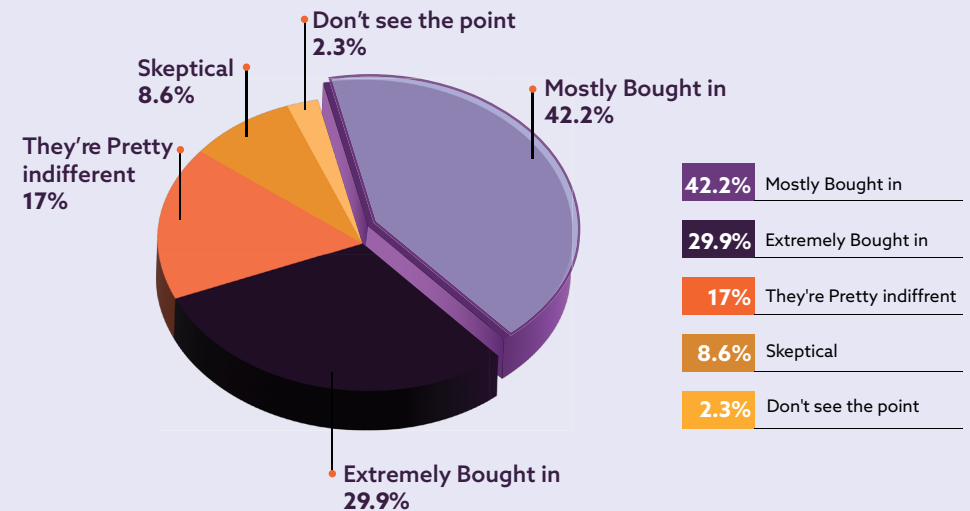
# Leadership Buy-in

Later in the report, we'll explore the correlations between **leadership buy-in and compensation, career, and creative satisfaction.**

In the next slide we'll also take a look at the correlation between leadership buy-in and respondents confidence in their voice and tone.

“

*If Sisyphus was a content marketer, he'd be doomed to re-optimize the same basic blog post over and over again for an eternity and then forced [to] re-share it to an audience that doesn't care.*



# The Not So Good News

While many content marketers feel fairly confident in their ability to create a distinct voice, a large portion still struggles to achieve the clarity and uniqueness needed to stand out. The issues of content differentiation and maintaining quality are closely tied to this uncertainty.

Even without focusing on leadership buy-in, the chart reveals that a considerable number of content marketers are unsure or even about their voice and tone. This points to broader creative struggles that may stem from insufficient resources, unclear creative direction, or an overwhelming pressure to constantly produce more content.

These challenges can lead to a lack of experimentation and innovation, as marketers feel constrained by operational demands rather than empowered to take creative risks.

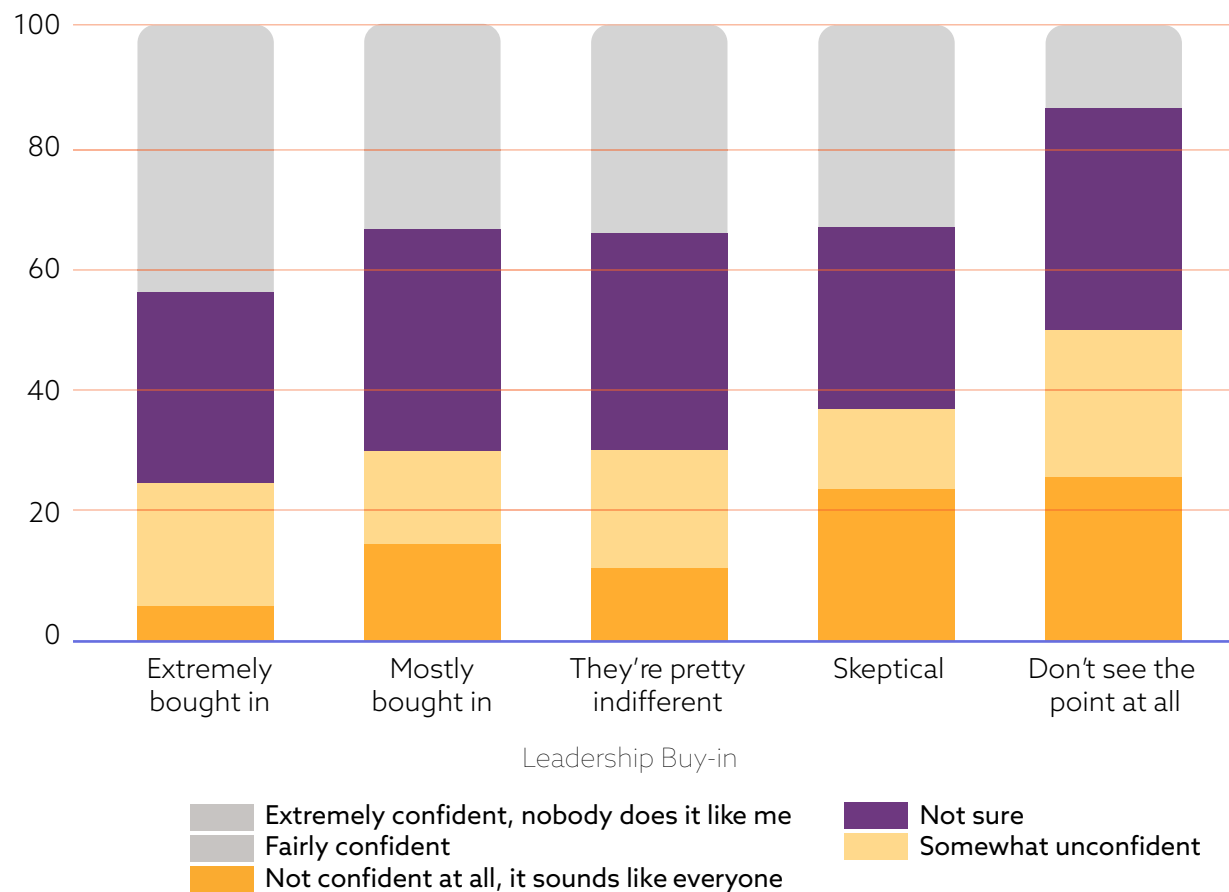
What this ultimately shows is a deeper struggle within content teams to confidently craft content that not only feels unique but also resonates with their target audience. The difficulty in establishing a clear voice amidst the growing demand for content

and the need to meet both internal and external expectations places significant pressure on these teams.

Additionally, the struggle to consistently produce high-quality content—whether it’s due to the need for technical expertise, optimizing for search, or simply generating enough content—further erodes confidence. Many content marketers feel under-equipped to meet evolving standards, which impacts their ability to deliver effective and

differentiated content.

In conclusion, while leadership support can help, the bigger issue lies in equipping content marketers with the right tools, guidance, and creative freedom to fully realize a strong, confident voice that stands out in a crowded landscape. This data reflects the tension between producing quantity and maintaining the quality and distinctiveness that’s essential for content to resonate.



# The Not So Good News

Meanwhile, the top 5 challenges content marketers face as it relates to managing the work are:

- ✓ Lack of resources
- ✓ Accessing subject matter experts
- ✓ Workflow issues / approval process
- ✓ Aligning efforts
- ✓ Lack of strategy

“**Lack of resources**” is unsurprising, however the following indicates many are facing industry standard “best practices.”

This could be why...

## What are some non-creation challenges you're facing?

513 out of 545 people answered this question.

### Lack of resources

286 Resp. 55.8%

### Accessing subject matter experts

249 Resp. 48.5%

### Workflow issues/approval process

224 Resp. 43.7%

### Aligning content efforts across multiple teams

222 Resp. 43.3%

### Lack of strategy

220 Resp. 42.9%

### Aligning content with buyer's journey

184 Resp. 35.9%

### Lack of buy-in

173 Resp. 33.7%

### Keeping up with technology

78 Resp. 15.2%

### Other

38 Resp. 7.4%

# The Really Bad News

...over half of content marketers have complicated relationships with the work they're producing...

## Are you happy with the work you're producing?

527 out of 545 people answered this question.

*It's complicated*



Yes



No

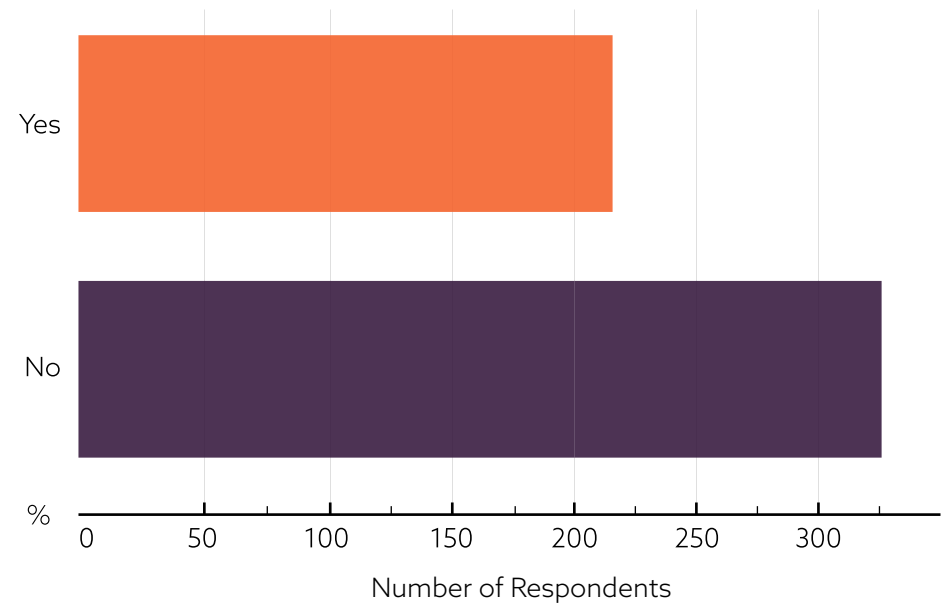


# The Really Really Bad News

...and report not being creatively fulfilled...

But the worst news of all is...

Are you creatively fulfilled?





# The Worst News Of All

The majority of content marketers report not doing their audience research **"nearly enough"**.

This lack of audience research has negative correlations across every vector of the survey including leadership buy-in, creative fulfillment, and career satisfaction, --- just to name a few.

We have three hypotheses as to why the majority of content marketers aren't doing their research "nearly enough"...

## Be honest, how often are you really doing audience research?

501 out of 545 people answered this question.

### Not Nearly Enough



### Monthly



### Quarterly



### Weekly



### Yearly



### Daily



# Hypothesis #1: There Isn't Enough Time

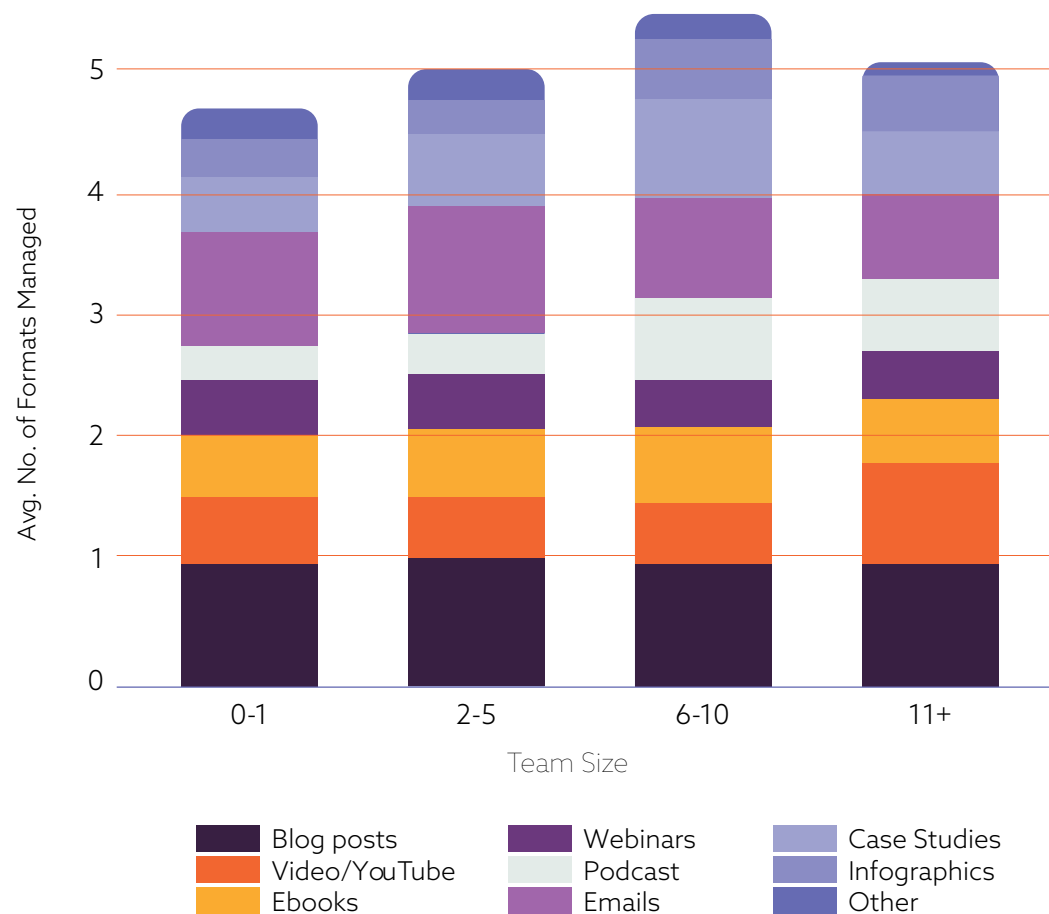
There are three things that lead us to this conclusion:

1. Regardless of company size, the average content team consists of 1-5 people
2. **"Creating content consistently"** and **"creating enough content to keep up with internal demand,"** are listed as top creation related challenges.
3. The average content team is managing 5 different formats.

This all indicates there is simply too much pressure on content marketers to conduct regular audience research.

Regardless, the lack of audience research still has negative correlations across many vectors of the research.

Average Number of Formats Managed by Team Size



"We are not using it enough. What we have we don't use effectively."

## Hypothesis #2: It Isn't Priority

“We are not using it enough. What we have we don't use effectively.”

“I feel like we basically don't now.”

“Mostly the insights are not distributed internally nor reflected in content”

“Attempts to do audience research are consistently blocked, one way or another.”

According to the data, many who report not doing their research “nearly enough” either say it's not their job, not a priority from leadership, or are unsure of the value.

This could stem from businesses “doing content marketing” because they view it as a necessary function, albeit with limited understanding.

If nearly **43%** of respondents report “**lack of strategy**” as a broader issue, it's unsurprising audience research for a content marketing program isn't deemed as a priority.

# Hypothesis #3: There Isn't Proper Training

“

*"Huh. I wonder what having research metrics would do for us."*

“

*"Honestly, not much. I've built a general understanding over time, but it's not formal."*

“

*"My intuition"*

Many content marketing practitioners were writers, journalists, or something else before getting into this field.

Because of that, many don't have extensive training or a formal research background. Between that and "audience research" being such a subjective phrase, it's created a situation where many don't know what they don't know, which makes it difficult find and/or communicate the details necessary to get appropriate buy-in.

Though it's very weak, we see positive correlations between years of experience and audience research frequency, as well as a weak positive correlation between years of experience and leadership buy-in, it suggests that as some content marketers spend more time in the field, they pick up enough research skills to get buy-in for their strategies.

# What Has Content Marketers Feeling Discontent?



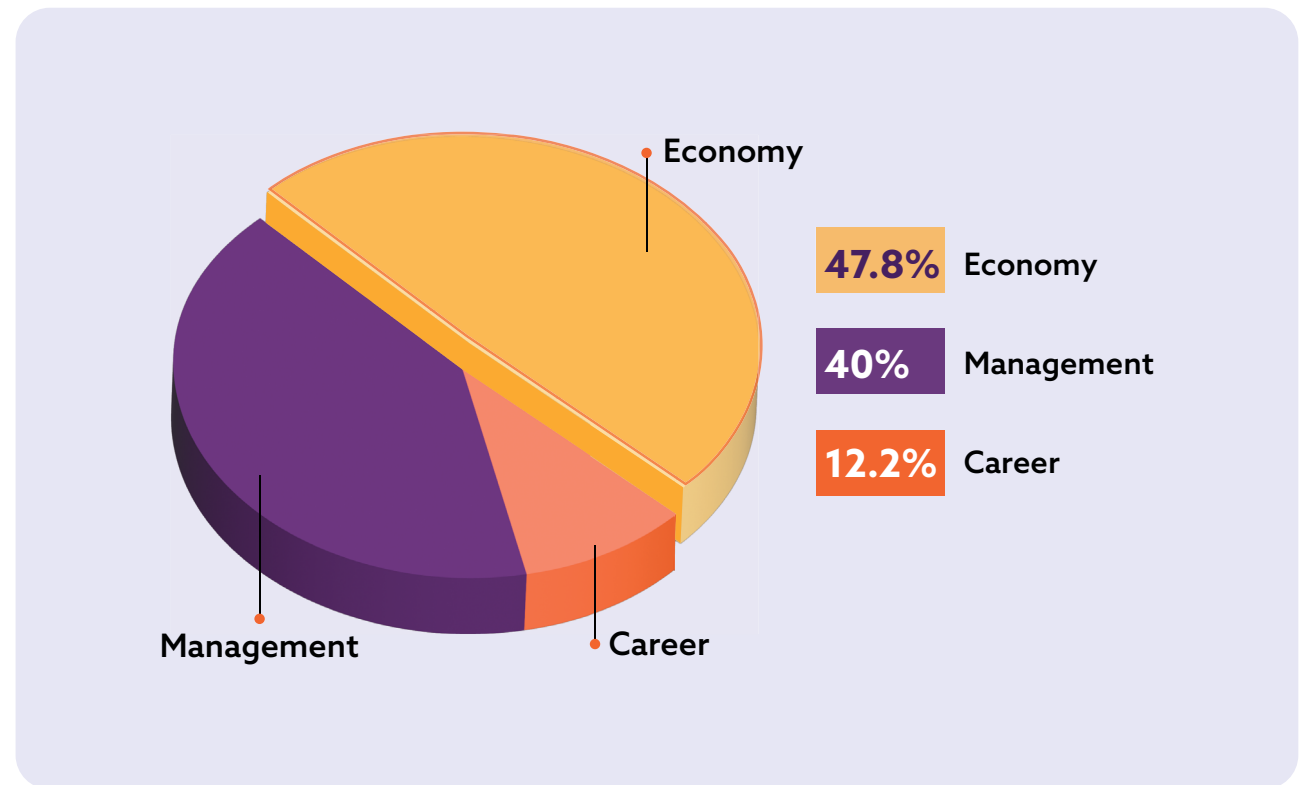
# What has content marketers feeling discontent?

We ran a linguistics analysis of over 452,000 words of qualitative feedback to find the common themes behind the question

“Why are content marketers discontent?”

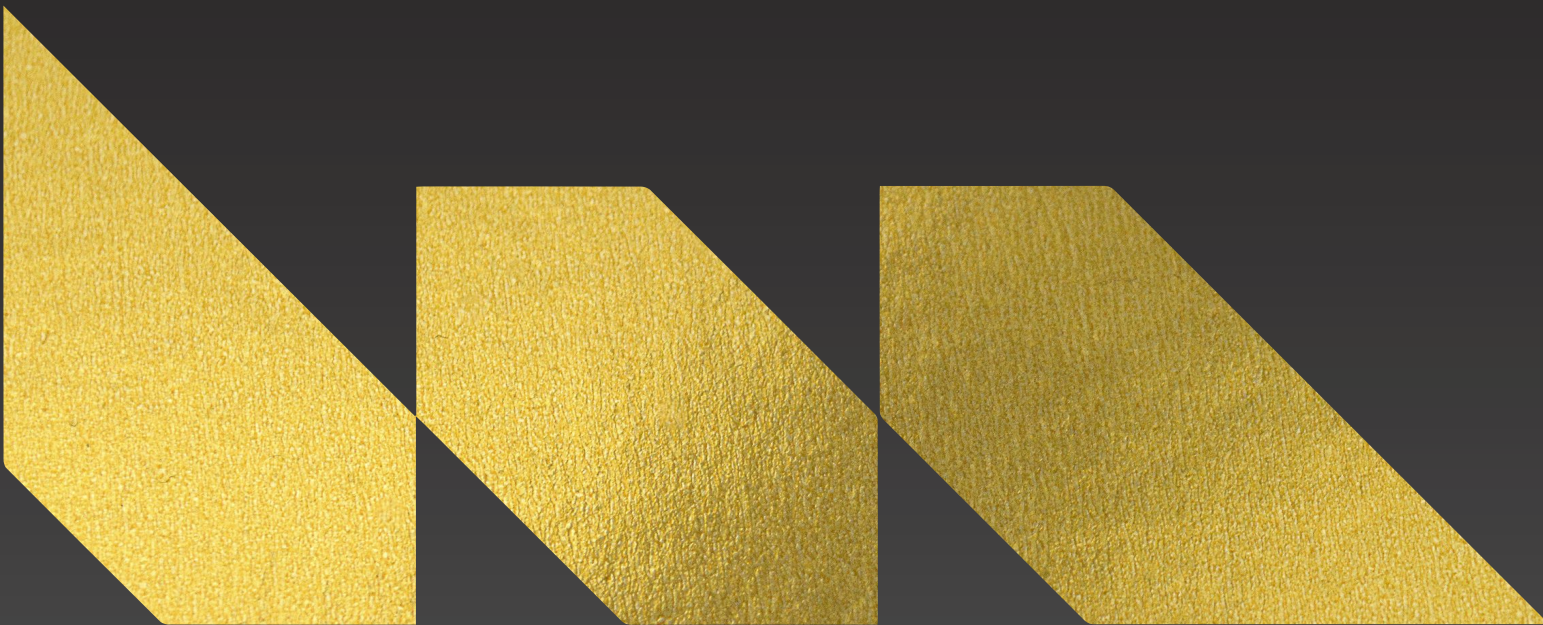
Answers fell into three broad categories:

- ✓ Market conditions
- ✓ Management & organization
- ✓ Career Satisfaction





# Section 1: Outside Forces







“Most content marketing is enshittified garbage made in service to the algorithms, but even that’s not working well for organizations anymore (and is easily replicated by AI anyway). Higher quality content is poorly understood, undervalued, and under-resourced by a lot of organizations who’re chasing “ROI” (vague as it is) in a down economy and can’t be bothered to understand or invest in brand or audience building.

All of this leaves content marketers feeling lesser, bound for life to a Sisyphean treadmill of shitty content production that we wouldn’t have endorsed if leadership ever bothered to ask.”



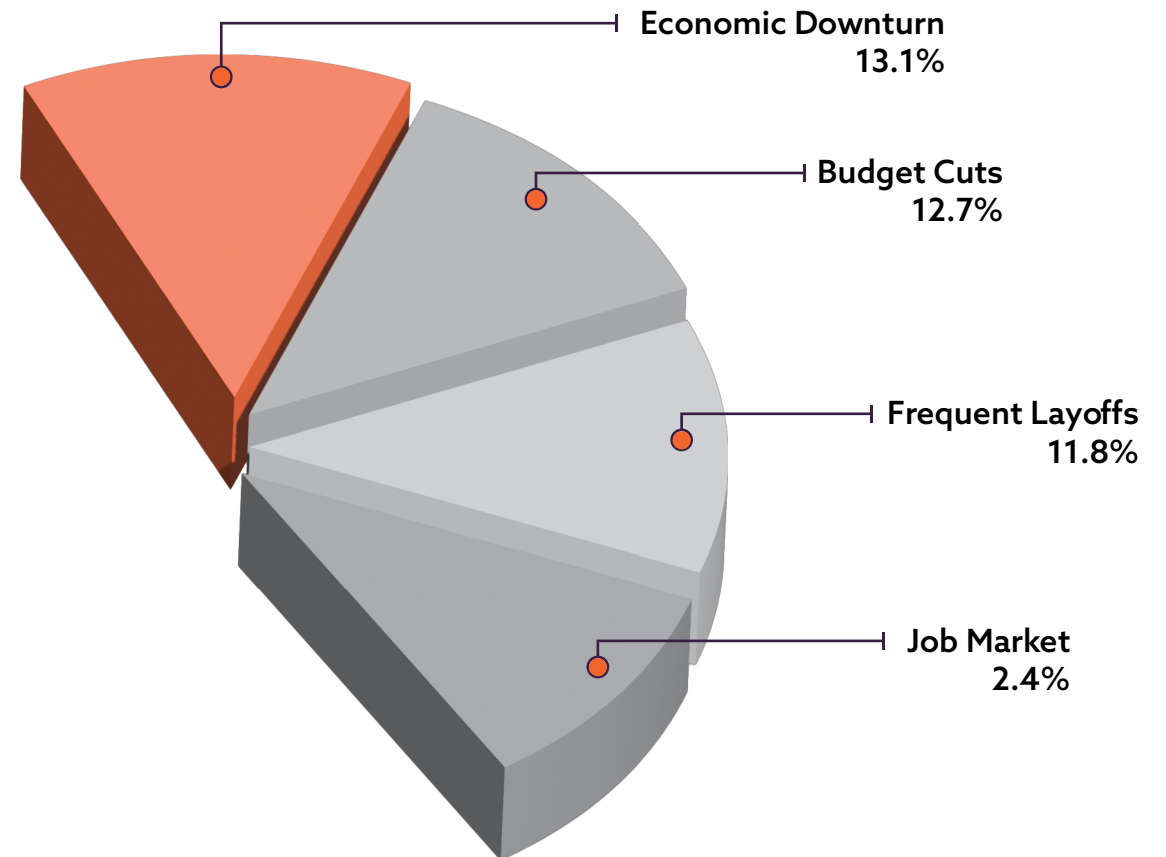
# Economic Challenges

## Economic Downturn and Uncertainty:

The economic challenges facing the industry are closely tied to broader economic conditions, such as market downturns and uncertainty. Marketers express concerns about the unpredictability of content marketing's future in these unstable environments.

“

Economic upheaval, uncertainty, layoffs, general anxiety? I know many people in the industry keep talking about the 'weirdness' of marketing these days... Projects dropped or on hold, way overdue payments...”



# Economic Challenges

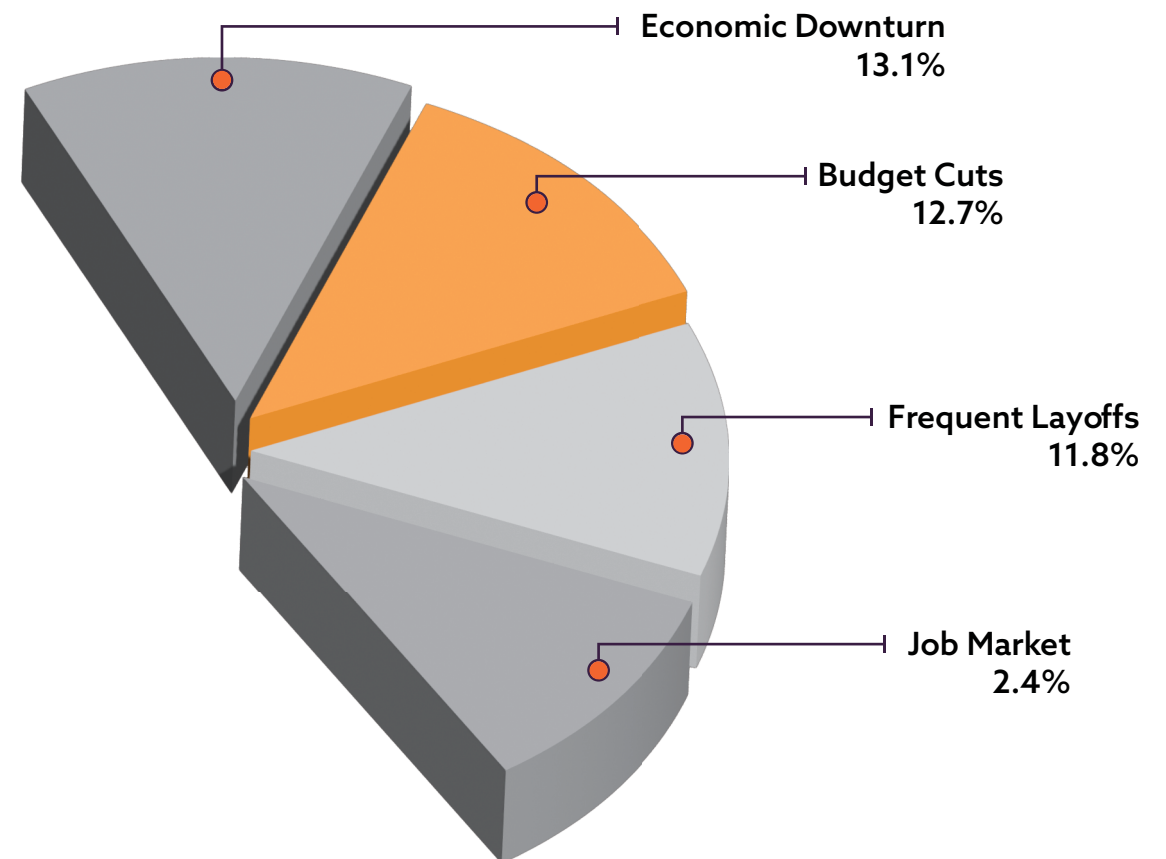
## Budget Cuts And Uncertainty:

Many respondents directly link their discontent due to budget reductions and lack of resources.

One marketer comments on the wider industry effects of such cuts:

“

*Initially, my contracts would go on for years, but with the unexpected budget cuts, marketing restructurizing, sudden layoffs... it's utterly chaotic.”*



# Economic Challenges

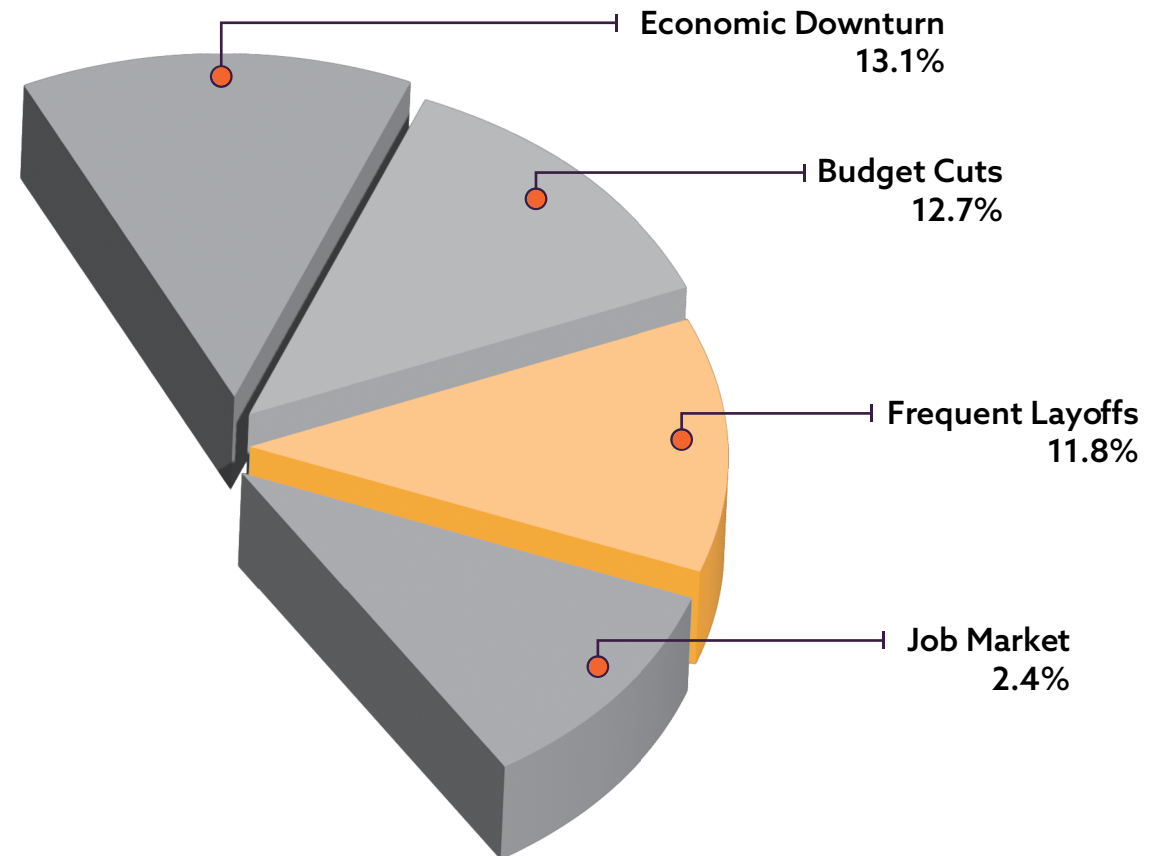
## Job Insecurity:

Job insecurity is a recurring theme. Many marketers feel vulnerable in the current job market due to frequent layoffs. This creates a sense of uncertainty about their careers.

One respondent describes this situation:

“

*"I think content marketers are not clear about what the future looks like... job security, job opportunities, growth opportunities... I don't think there's a clear-cut structure for them to follow."*



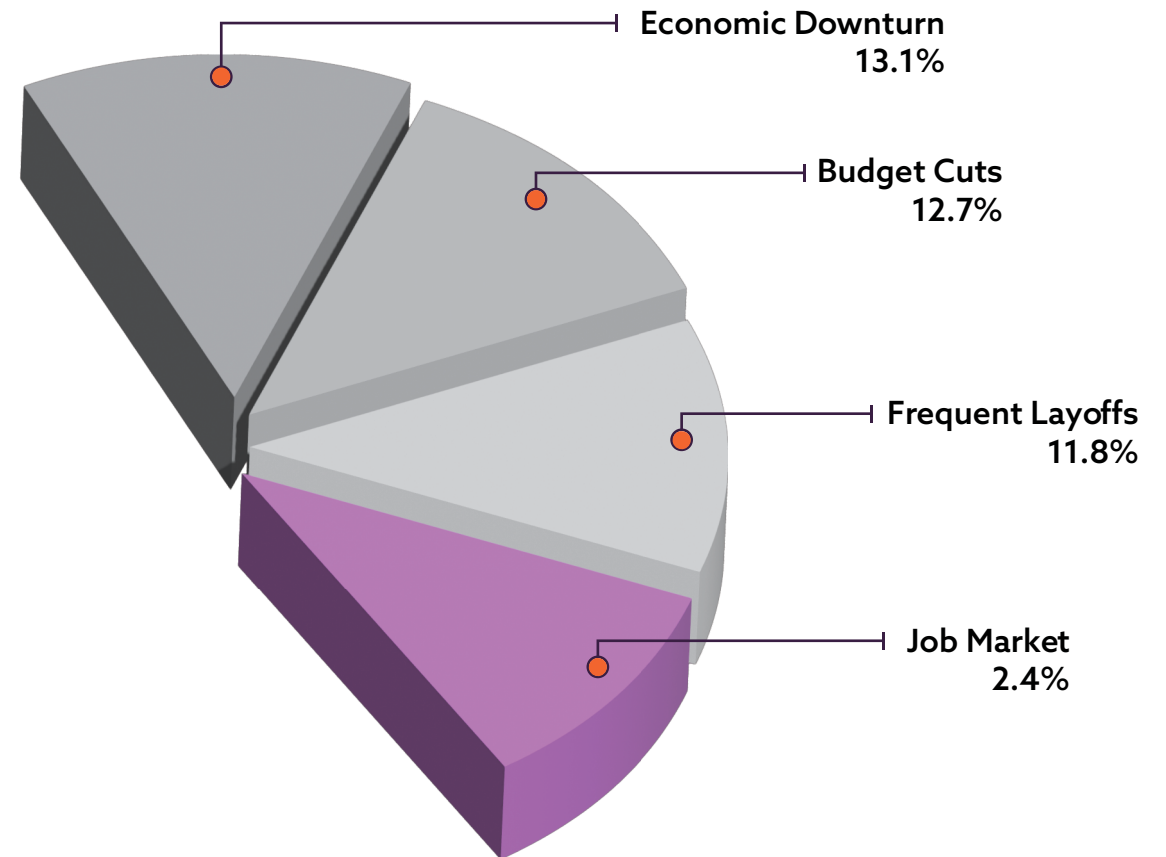
# Economic Challenges

## Saturated Job Market:

A saturated job market due to layoffs and budget cuts is exacerbating the competition for available positions. Freelancers and full-time employees alike face an increasingly competitive environment.

“

*Seeing the competition for gigs play out on LinkedIn and in Slack communities is brutal. All the posts with hundreds of comments, the calls for applications that don't receive responses – it's very clear to everyone that there's work out there, but they aren't getting it.”*





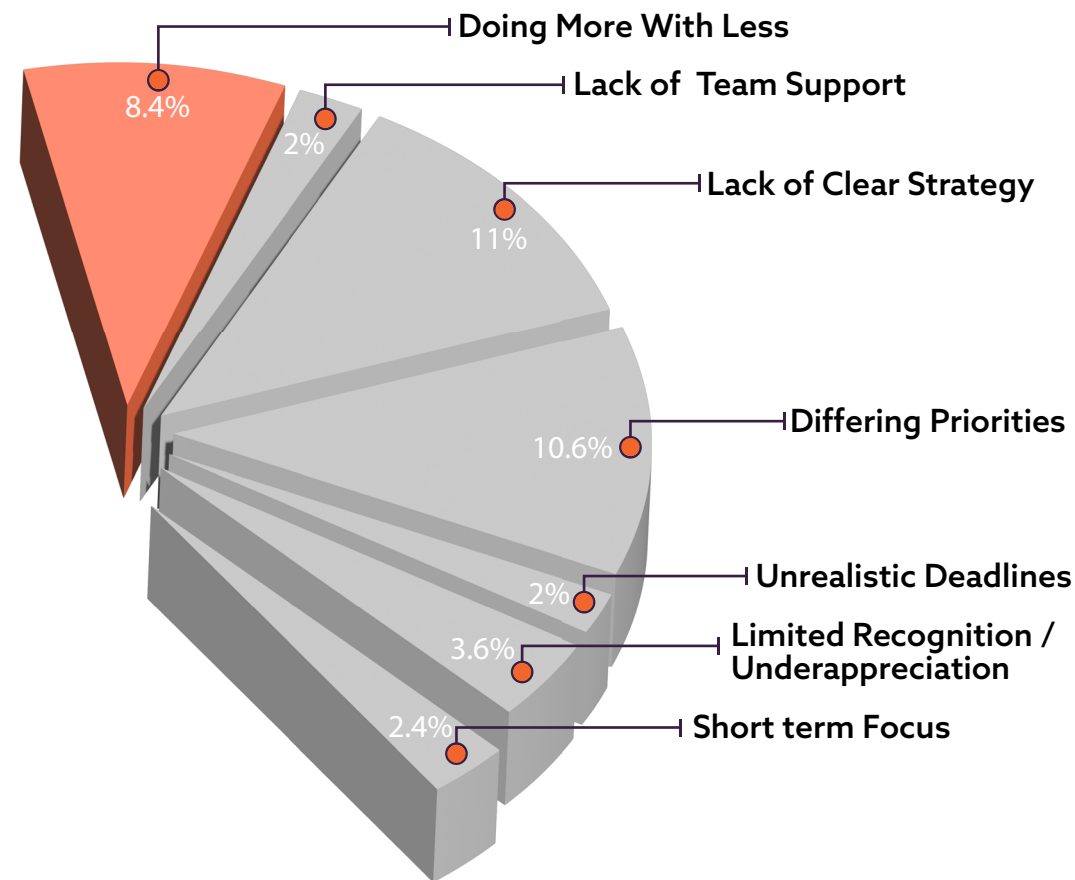
# Issues with Management

## Doing More with Less:

Budget constraints and reduced staffing have pushed content marketers to stretch their resources further than ever. Teams are often forced to adopt a “do more with less” mentality, juggling multiple roles and projects that extend beyond their core expertise. With increasing pressure to produce high-quality content at a rapid pace, many are struggling to balance strategic planning with the day-to-day grind. This relentless workload leaves little room for creativity or professional development, leading to burnout and a sense of frustration.

“

*Teams have shrunk and we have to do more with less, we're forced to be generalists. We're working across multiple channels and formats and there is little time to really craft and find pleasure in the work we do.”*



# Issues with Management

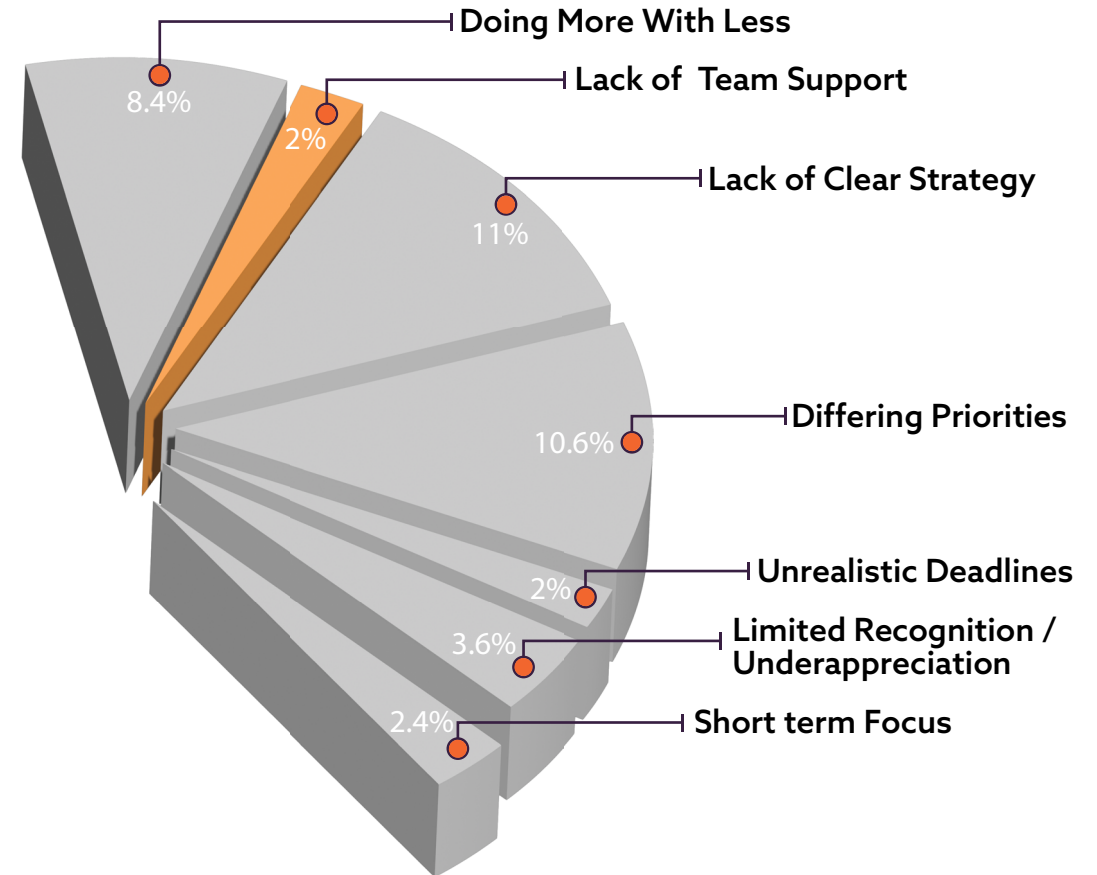
## Lack of Team Support:

Many teams are feeling the pressure to become more revenue-driven. Instead of being seen as strategic partners, content marketers are often relegated to the role of order-takers, servicing other departments without much autonomy.

This shift in focus leads to frustration, as marketers struggle to align their creative work with business.

“

*“Even in companies that invest in Content Marketing, Content Marketers are increasingly asked to be more revenue-driven... Content Marketing teams often end up being treated like an internal support function that services other teams.”*





# Issues with Management

## No Clear Strategy:

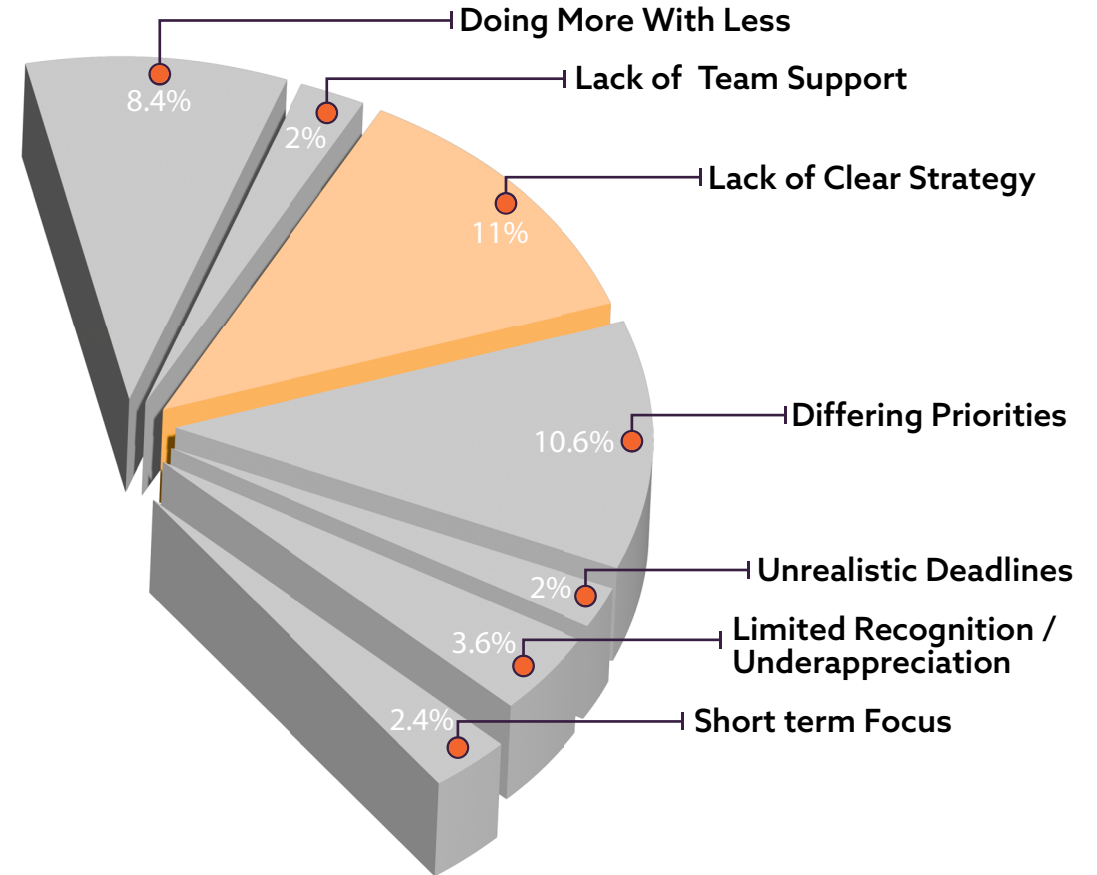
Without a clear strategic direction, content teams are left in a state of uncertainty.

Even when a long-term plan is in place, sudden shifts in priorities or leadership changes can derail progress, leaving teams unsure of their purpose and struggling to define their next steps.

This lack of a cohesive strategy leads to confusion around roles and responsibilities, making it difficult to maintain focus and momentum. As a result, content marketers are often forced to react rather than plan, caught in a cycle of producing content without understanding how it fits into the bigger picture.

“

*“Our business was heading in the direction of a content center of excellence... but all that has been turned on its head—without any vision for how to move forward from here.”*



# Issues with Management

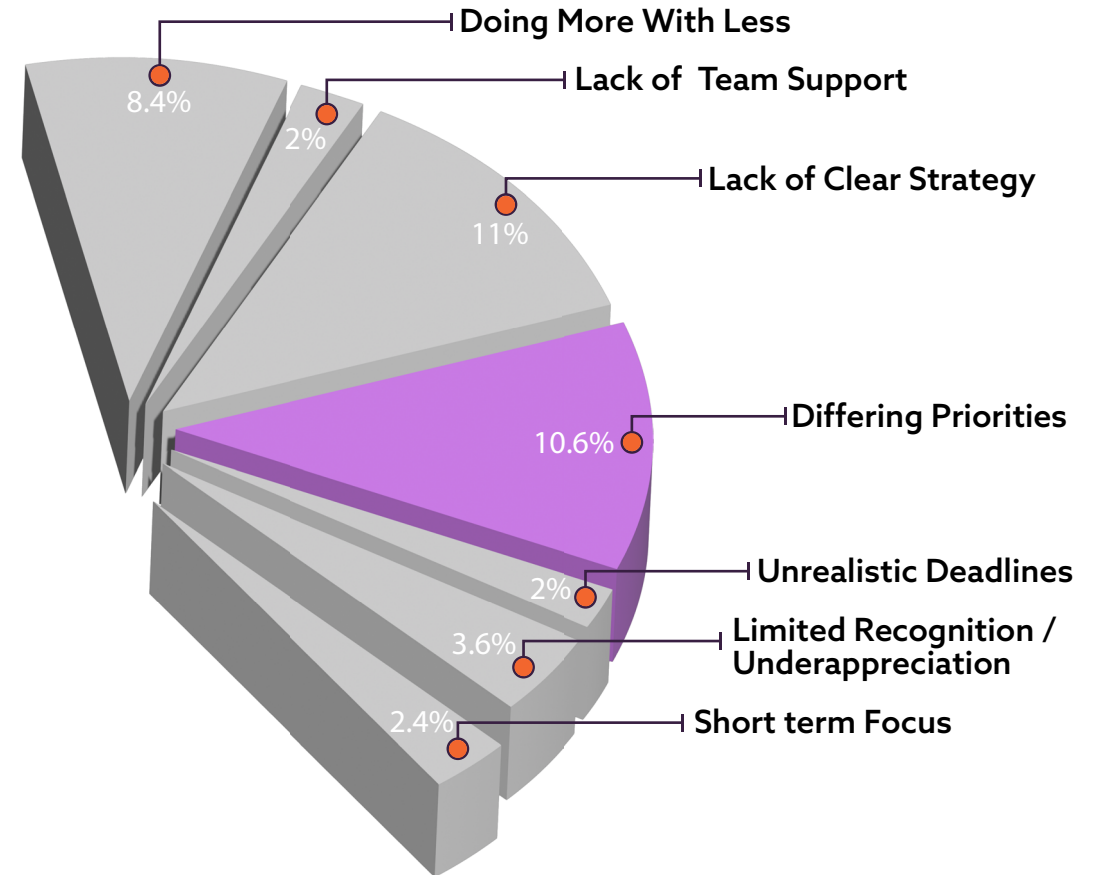
## Differing Priorities:

Without a clear strategic direction, content teams are left in a state of flux. With shifting expectations and no consistent strategic direction, teams are forced to juggle between short-term demands and long-term goals.

This lack of clarity leads to a reactive approach, leaving little room for impactful work or thoughtful planning.

“

*“Our team is constantly pulled in different directions. Leadership wants us to focus on lead generation one week, brand awareness the next, and then shift gears to support other departments. With no consistent strategy or clear priorities, it feels like we’re always scrambling to react instead of having the space to produce work that actually moves the needle.”*



# Issues with Management

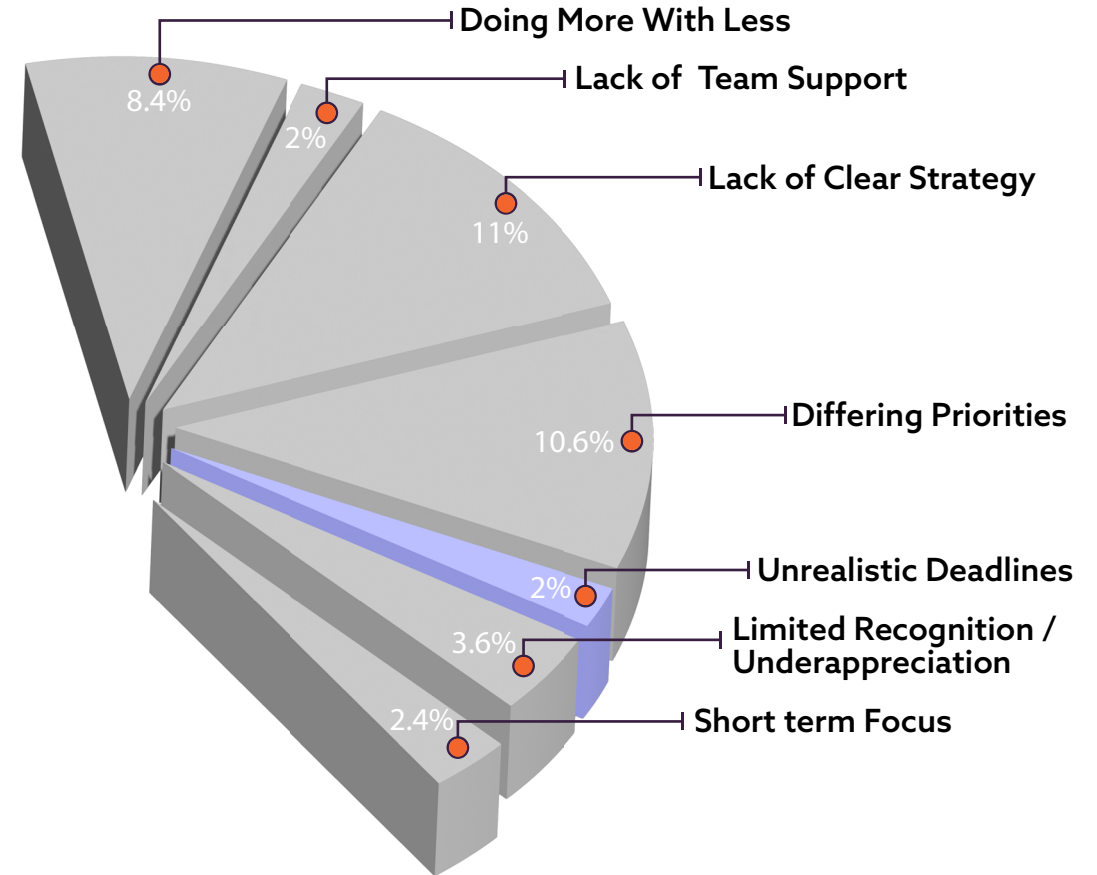
## Unrealistic Deadlines:

Content marketers are feeling the strain of delivering high volumes of content at unsustainable speeds. As expectations increase, there's little opportunity to prioritize quality or engage in thoughtful planning.

Instead, the focus shifts to simply meeting deadlines, creating a cycle of constant production. This pressure is taking a toll on creativity and causing many to feel disconnected from the value of their work.

“

*“We have to do more with less, and the timelines seem to be getting shorter and shorter. There's so much content out there... too much. I'm extremely overwhelmed by it all as a consumer and reader, and I feel terrible that my job actively makes the problem worse.”*



# Issues with Management

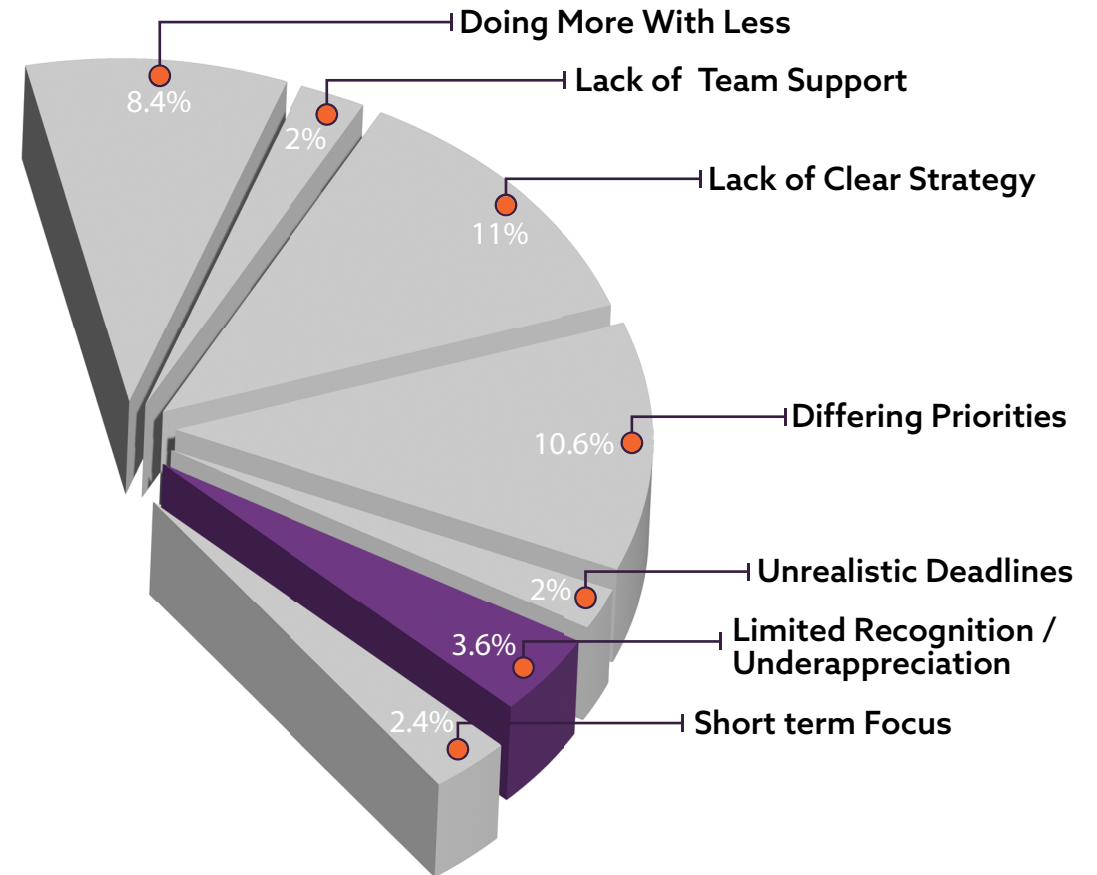
## Limited Recognition:

The nature of content marketing has shifted, reducing much of the work to meeting algorithmic needs rather than creating meaningful content. This perception of content being “easy” has led to a disheartening lack of recognition for the skill and effort it takes to produce high-quality pieces.

As a result, many content marketers feel their contributions are undervalued and their expertise discredited, making it difficult to find satisfaction in their work.

“

*“I’ve had an issue with the word ‘content’ itself for years. So much of content marketing is about making stuff for the algorithm—not necessarily creating things that are big or meaningful. Because content is just seen as stuff, it’s easy to discredit the amount of work that goes into making something really good.”*



# Issues with Management

## Short-Term Focus:

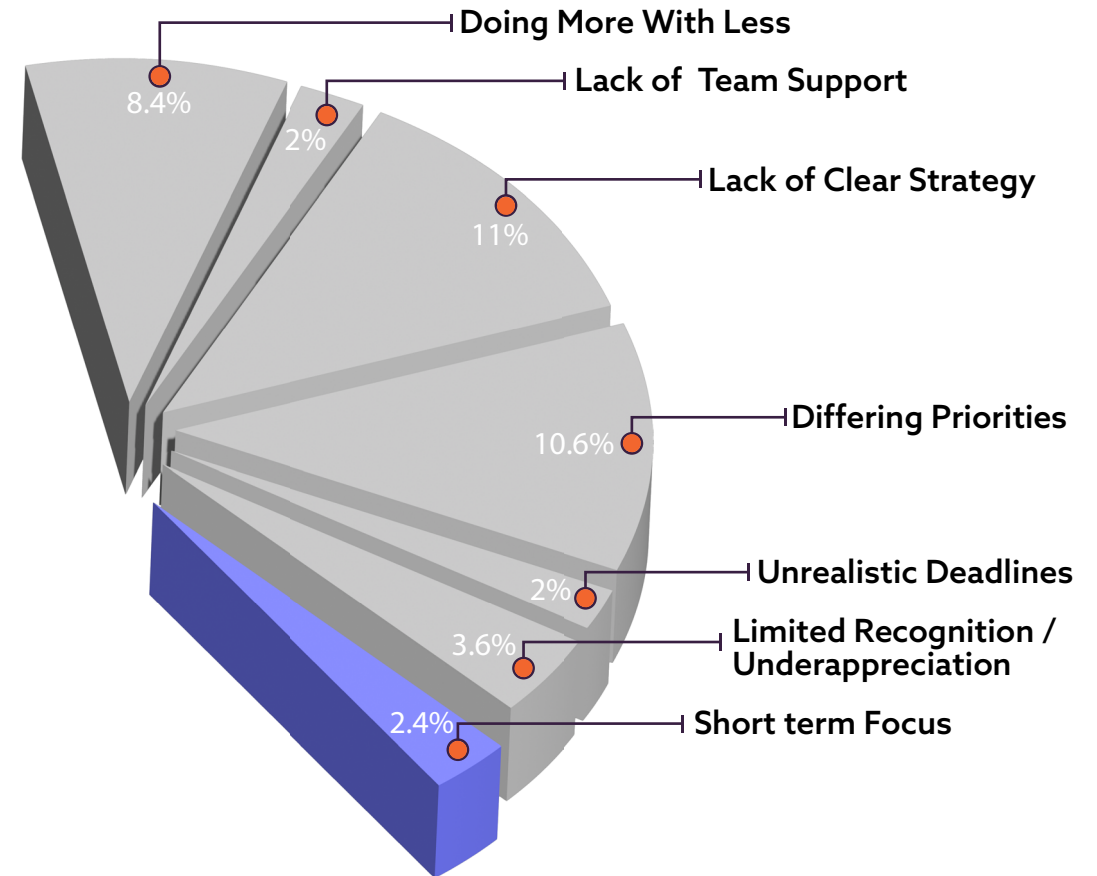
Many content marketers feel trapped in a cycle of tactical execution without a strategy to guide them.

With a growing emphasis on short term revenue goals, creative and brand-building initiatives often take a back seat.

As a result, teams feel stuck churning out undifferentiated content just to meet production quotas, rather than pursuing projects that could truly elevate their brand and careers.

“

*“We’ve over-indexed on two things: tactical execution and focusing only on revenue... Nobody wants to go after projects that could positively change their brand’s perception because it’s not a proven tactic. We’re all in a rut and are running through the conveyor belt of production without truly thinking about the actual impact we can have.”*





# Additional Uncertainty About the Future Of Content Marketing

## The “Proven” Methods Aren’t Working as Well:

There’s a sentiment that traditional, “proven” methods in content marketing are no longer working as effectively.

Changes in algorithms, privacy concerns, and content commoditization are forcing content marketers to rethink their strategies, creating uncertainty about the best path forward.

“

*“Our world has been turned upside down as our proven methods for content over the last 10 years is being challenged by algorithms... Content is more commoditized and less valuable than ever... Content marketers are at a crossroads for deciding what path we’ll take into the future.”*

# Additional Uncertainty About The Future Of Content Marketing

## Stagnation Due to Risk Aversion:

There's a growing need to pivot toward more innovative approaches, but this shift is met with resistance from leadership, who are hesitant to embrace untested strategies.

The reluctance to try new things perpetuates a cycle of underperformance and low investment.

“

*“Businesses are pulling back on spending... the future is fuzzy, and experimental marketing feels like the last thing they should invest in.*

*That leaves marketers with less room to be bold and try new things, so we're stuck doing what's 'proven,' which doesn't necessarily drive great results.”*



# Additional Uncertainty About The Future Of Content Marketing

## Shifts in Consumer Behavior:

As audiences shift away from traditional content platforms and look for more decentralized or authentic sources of information, such as Reddit or micro-influencers, content marketers are left uncertain about where to focus their efforts.

This change in consumer behavior makes it difficult to predict which platforms or content types will be relevant in the future.

“*Typical website content is oversaturated, so audiences are turning to things like Reddit and micro-influencers... Creators want to refocus efforts, but they're often at odds with leadership who don't want to put their dollars someplace new.*”

# Additional Uncertainty About The Future Of Content Marketing

## Market Saturation and Content Fatigue:

The overwhelming volume of content being produced has led to market saturation, where it's harder than ever for content to stand out. This leads to concerns about content fatigue, where both marketers and consumers are weary of the sheer amount of content available, making the future direction of content marketing uncertain.

“There’s a perception of ‘too much’ content, and that it’s harder to break through... Content fatigue is real, and it’s becoming increasingly difficult to justify creating more content.”

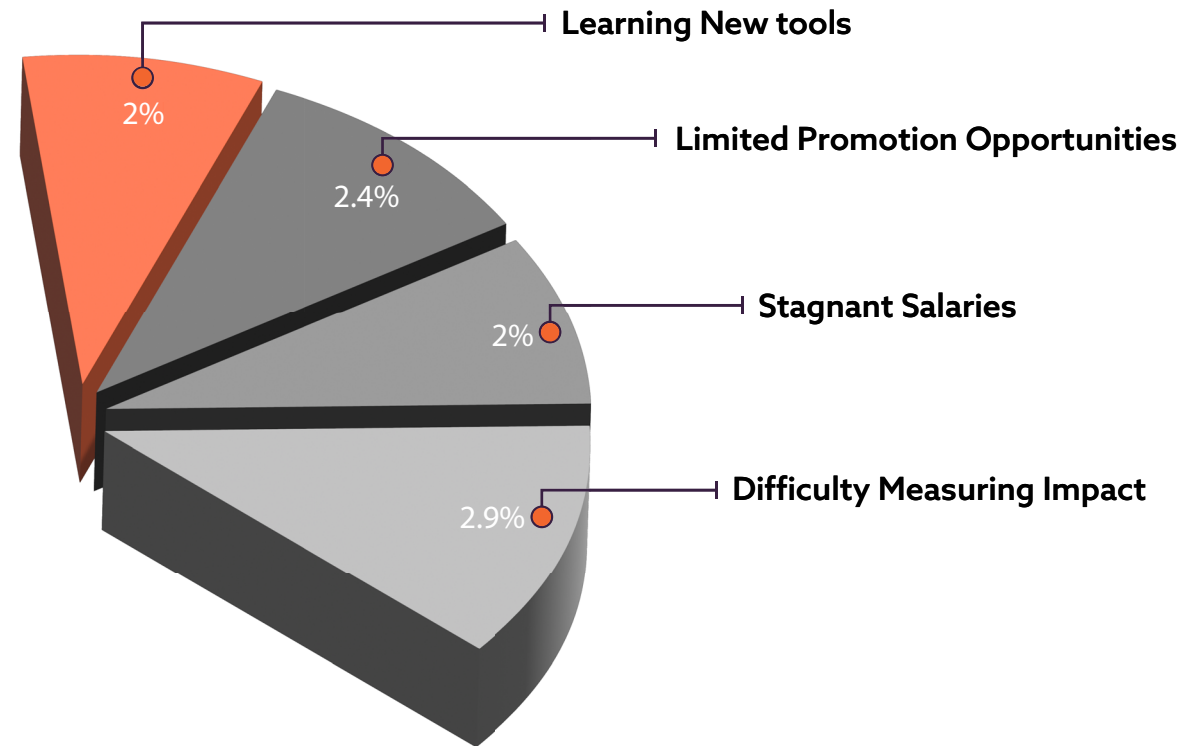
# Relationship with Career

## Learning New Tools:

With the rapid pace of change and little guidance on how to adapt, some are struggling to keep up and unsure how to navigate this shifting environment. The pressure to master these tools while maintaining high-quality output is creating uncertainty and confusion about what the future holds. projects that could truly elevate their brand and careers.

“

*“AI and all the new tools are adding a ton of complexity, and we don't know how to navigate this in the next years.”*



# Relationship with Career

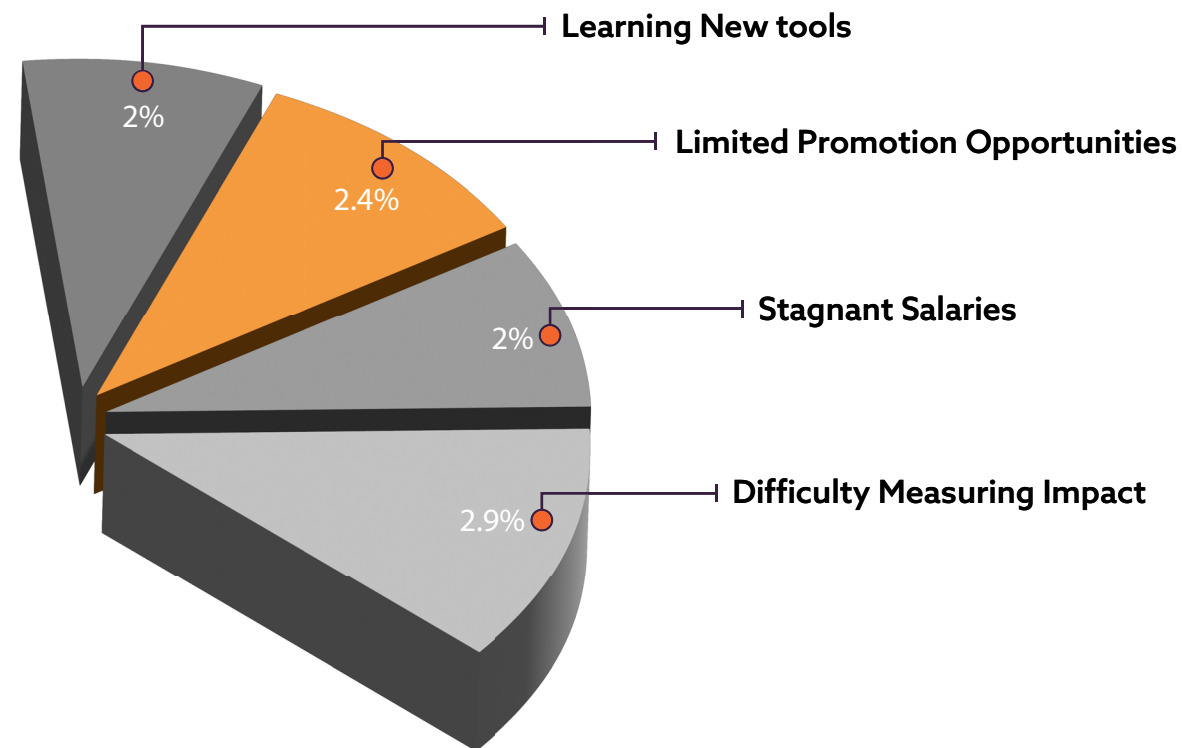
## Limited Promotion Opportunities:

Many content marketers struggle to see a viable future in their field. With few senior leadership roles available, they often feel boxed in, unsure if there's a path to higher-level positions.

This perception of limited upward mobility, combined with the constant pressure to prove their value, leaves many questioning whether they need to transition into more revenue-driven areas to secure their long-term career growth.

“

*“Lack of future potential—show me more than 10 well-known Chief Content Officers or CMOs that are content marketers. We are still seen as supportive and easy to outsource, so to be a CMO you can't just be a content marketer. Lack of career growth, lack of senior roles available, and an oversaturated industry—it feels like if you don't get out of content into a more stable or revenue-generating field, you'll be out of work after hitting Director level.”*



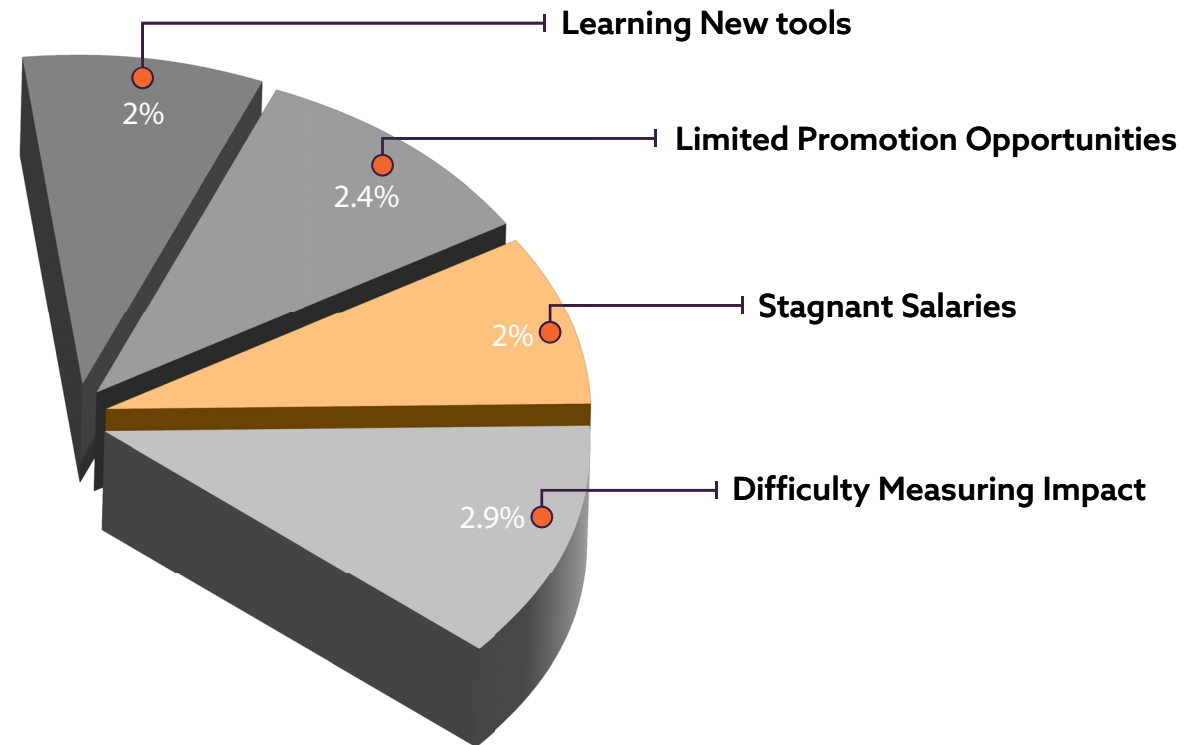
# Relationship with Career

## Stagnant Salaries And Lack of Clear Career Progression:

Many content marketers feel stuck after a few years, with no clear path to move up or evolve their roles, leading them to feel stagnant in their careers.

“

*“You hit the external growth ceiling, but you doubt that you’ll be able to find something better... The only path forward: 1) Battle the hell out of job hunting, 2) take a leap of faith, or 3) change your Marketing niche.”*



# Relationship with Career

## Difficulty Measuring Impact:

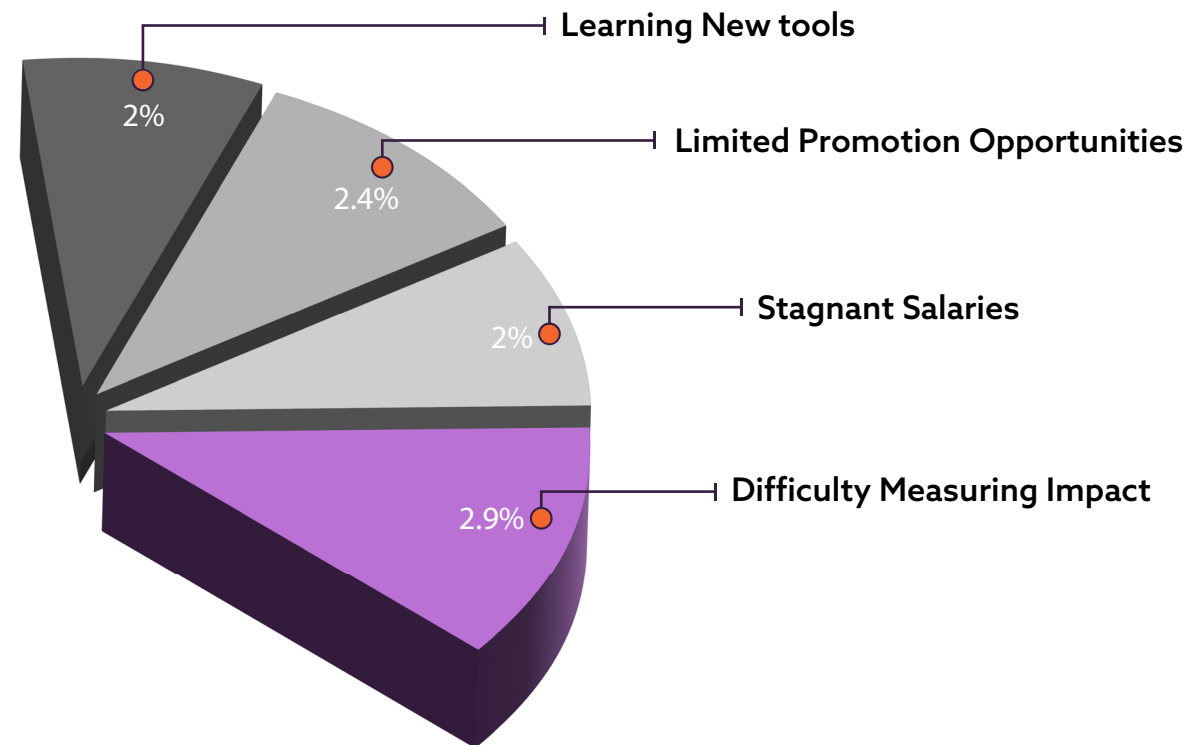
Content marketers often struggle to show the real impact of their work.

Standard ROI metrics don't always capture how content supports the entire buyer's journey, leading to a perception that it's less valuable than other tactics.

This makes it challenging for teams to get the credit they deserve, especially when their contributions are more about influence than direct conversions.

“

*Content marketing attribution has always been challenging, and some of the most conventional ways to show ROI, like gated content downloads, aren't as effective as they once were. Content typically influences deals along the way to closing, but it's undervalued because it's not counted as the lead source.”*





# Additional Concerns Around Career & The Job Market

## High Barriers To Entry For Good Jobs:

The few content marketing positions that are available often have extremely high requirements and expertise in a range of skills beyond content creation.

This creates a barrier to entry for many content marketers who may not meet every qualification, further limiting their options.

“

*“Good Content Marketing jobs are rare... The ones that are open are competitive and often require candidates to be bilingual or trilingual.”*



# Additional Concerns Around Career & The Job Market

## Freelancers Flooding The Market:

As full-time positions are reduced or eliminated, many former in-house content marketers are turning to freelancing.

This further saturates the freelance market, driving down rates and making it difficult to secure stable, high-paying work.

“Freelancers lost work due to client budget cuts, and people who were laid off turned to freelancing, glutting the market just as demand was decreasing.”

# Additional Concerns Around Career & The Job Market

## Being Locked-in:

Because the job market is so tumultuous, there is a significant portion of content marketers who are doing unfulfilling work while being being compensated fairly.

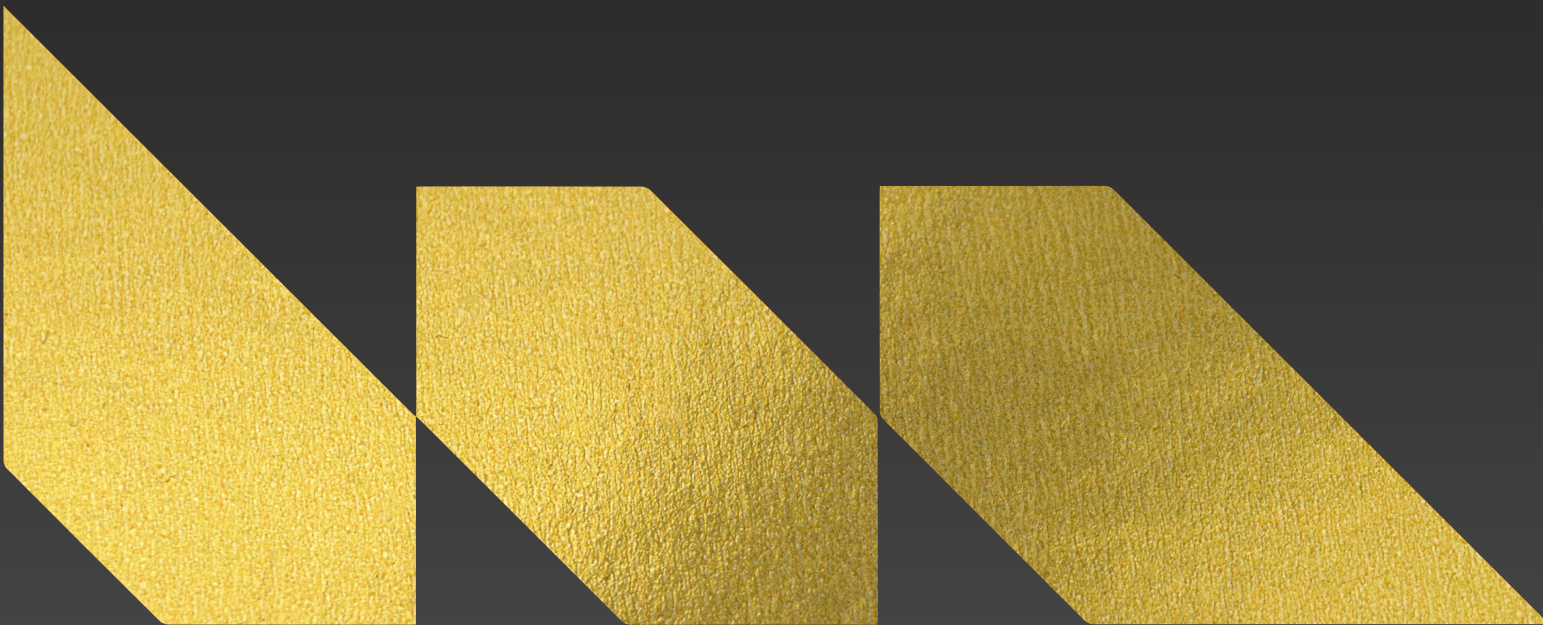
This is leading to a significant cohort of people feeling stuck in their current position, even if they're feeling dissatisfied.

“

*It's difficult to find companies that truly believe and invest in Content Marketing... When you find one, you stay because the world out there is scary af.”*

# But there's hope

"Even though there are challenges, I think we're at a point where content marketing can really evolve. [Many] companies are realizing that content isn't just about churning out articles—it's about building relationships, driving meaningful engagement, and contributing to long-term business goals. With better tools to measure success and align with business metrics, content marketers who can show that value are going to be in high demand."

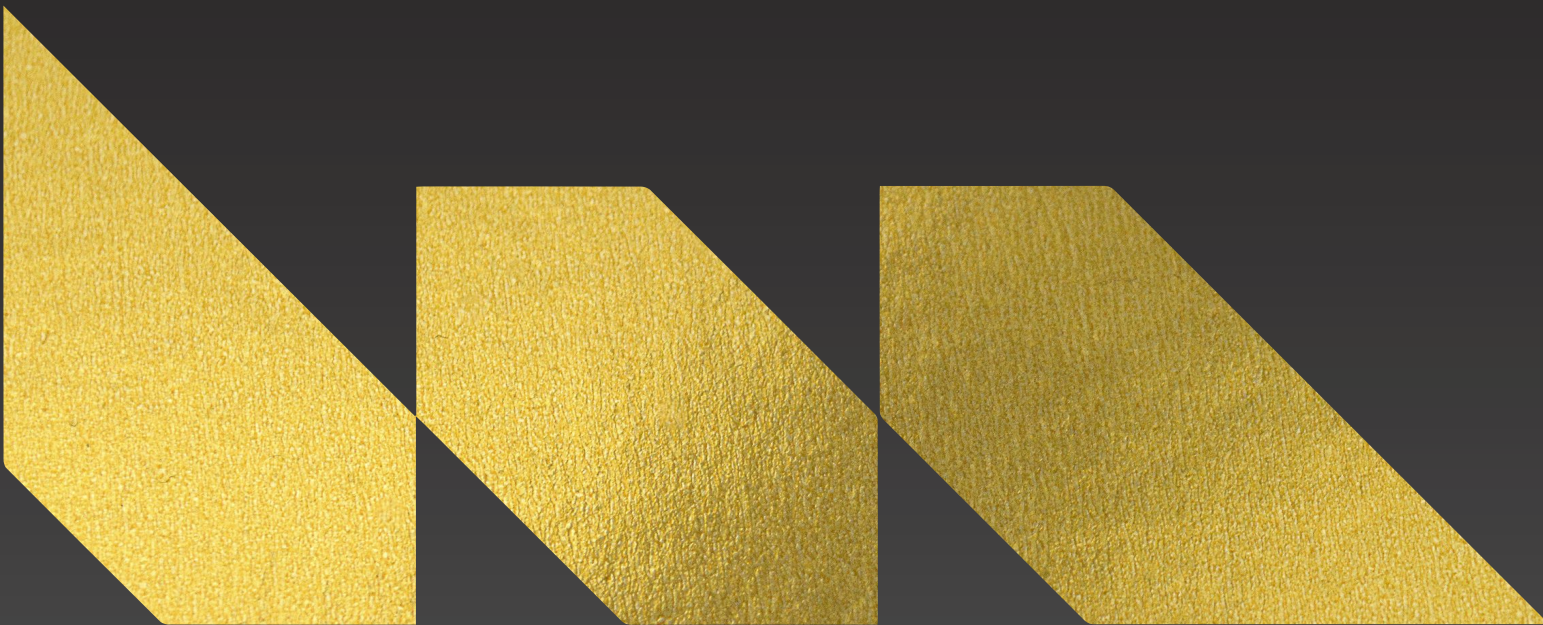


# Section 2: Relationship with Management and the Business





“Content marketing needs leadership buy-in. Without it, it feels like we’re fighting an uphill battle every day.”



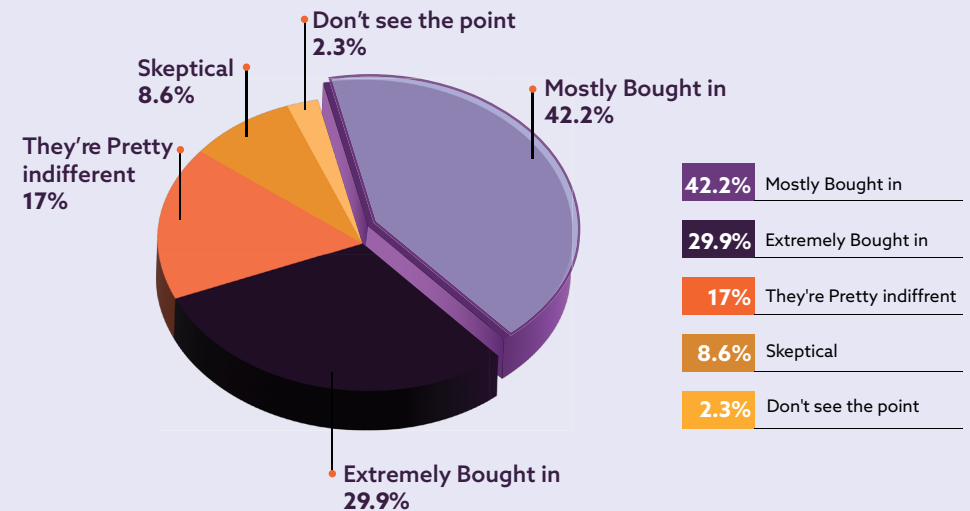
# Leadership Buy-in

Buy-in from leadership is a double-edged sword.

For those content marketers whose leaders are 'extremely bought in,' the focus shifts to aligning value and strategy with business goals.

But for others, the challenge is more fundamental: finding autonomy and proving the worth of content marketing in the first place.

This section dissects how varying levels of leadership buy-in—from full support to outright dismissal—shape the daily reality for content marketers, including the pressures, frustrations, and creative limitations they face.





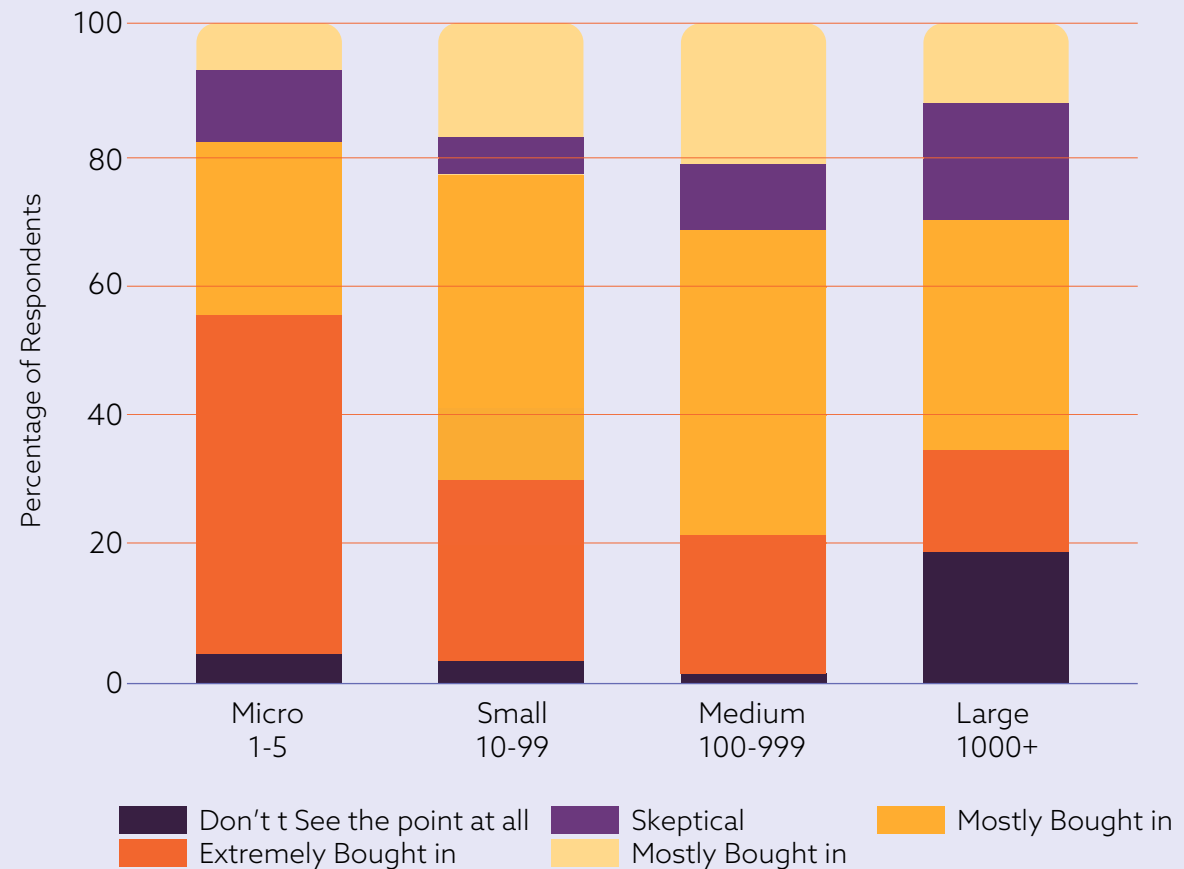
# Leadership Buy-in to Content Marketing by Company size

Buy-in from leadership is a double-edged sword.

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This section dissects how varying levels of leadership buy-in—from full support to outright dismissal—shape the daily reality for content marketers, including the pressures, frustrations, and creative limitations they face.



### Micro and Small Companies:

Leadership is most likely to be "Extremely bought in" (52.94% and 34.21%, respectively), suggesting strong support in smaller organizations.

### Medium and Large Companies:

While a significant portion of leadership is "Mostly bought in" (47.41% and 40.48%, respectively), there's also more skepticism and indifference, especially in large companies.

# Compensation Satisfaction Across Leadership Buy-in Levels

When we look at compensation satisfaction across different levels of leadership buy-in, a clear pattern emerges.



# Compensation Satisfaction Across Leadership Buy-in Levels

For those whose leadership is “Extremely bought in,” nearly 60% report being satisfied or very satisfied with their compensation. This suggests that when leadership is fully supportive, there’s a greater chance employees feel positively about their pay.



# Compensation Satisfaction Across Leadership Buy-in Levels

On the other hand, among respondents with **"Mostly bought in"** leadership, satisfaction drops. Around 47% are **satisfied**, and fewer than 6% are **very satisfied**.

A larger chunk (around 27%) feel **neutral** about their compensation, which indicates that while leadership is mostly on board, it doesn't always translate into pay satisfaction.



# Compensation Satisfaction Across Leadership Buy-in Levels

As leadership buy-in declines further to "Indifferent" or "Skeptical," dissatisfaction begins to grow. For instance, in companies where leadership is indifferent, about 30% are either **dissatisfied** or **very dissatisfied**. The proportion of those who feel "Satisfied" also shrinks compared to more engaged leadership.

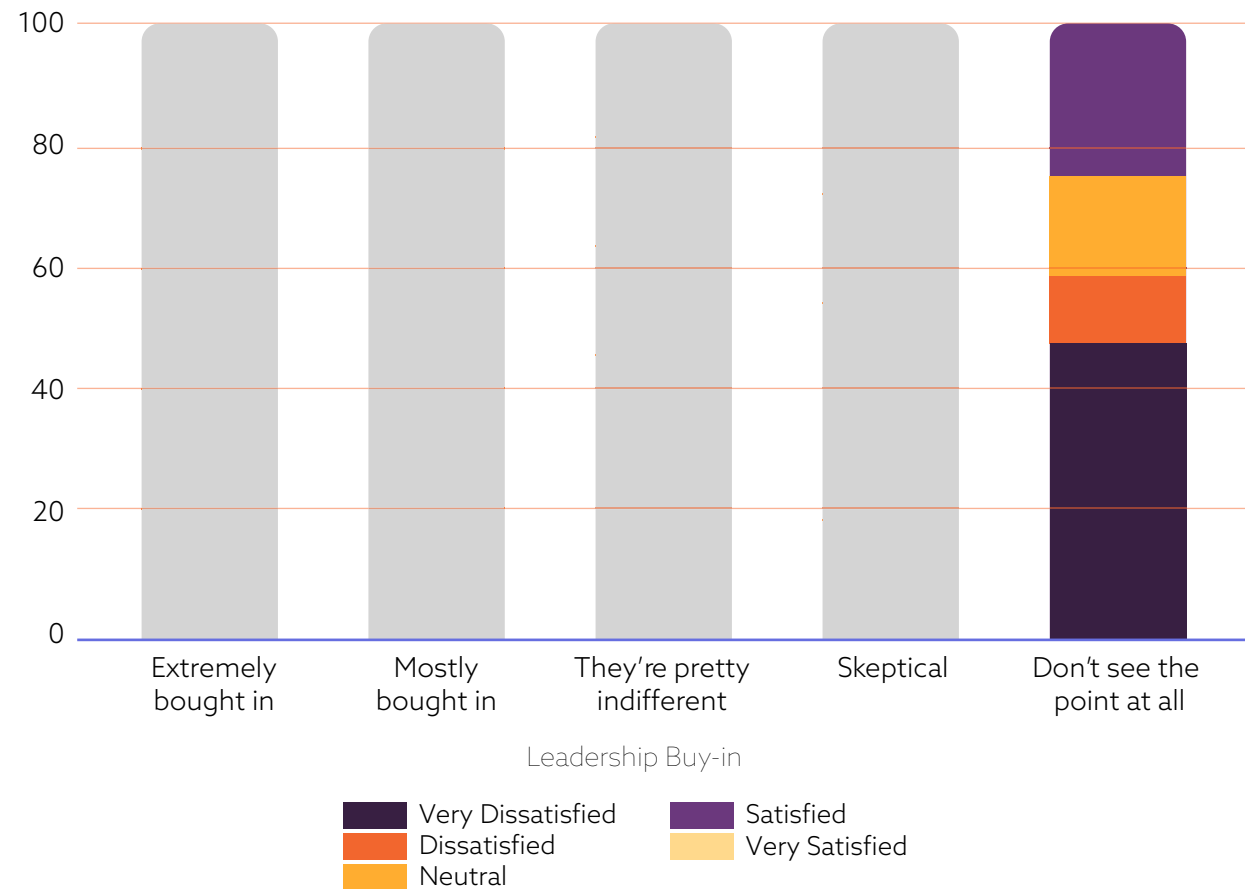


# Compensation Satisfaction Across Leadership Buy-in Levels

Finally, for those who say leadership **“Don’t see the point at all,”** dissatisfaction spikes. A notable 40% feel **dissatisfied or very dissatisfied** with their pay, and only about 30% report being **satisfied**, showing a strong link between a lack of leadership buy-in and negative feelings about compensation.

In short, the more leadership is bought in, the more likely employees are to feel satisfied with their compensation, while disengaged leadership often coincides with higher levels of dissatisfaction.

Compensation Satisfaction Across Leadership Buy-in Levels



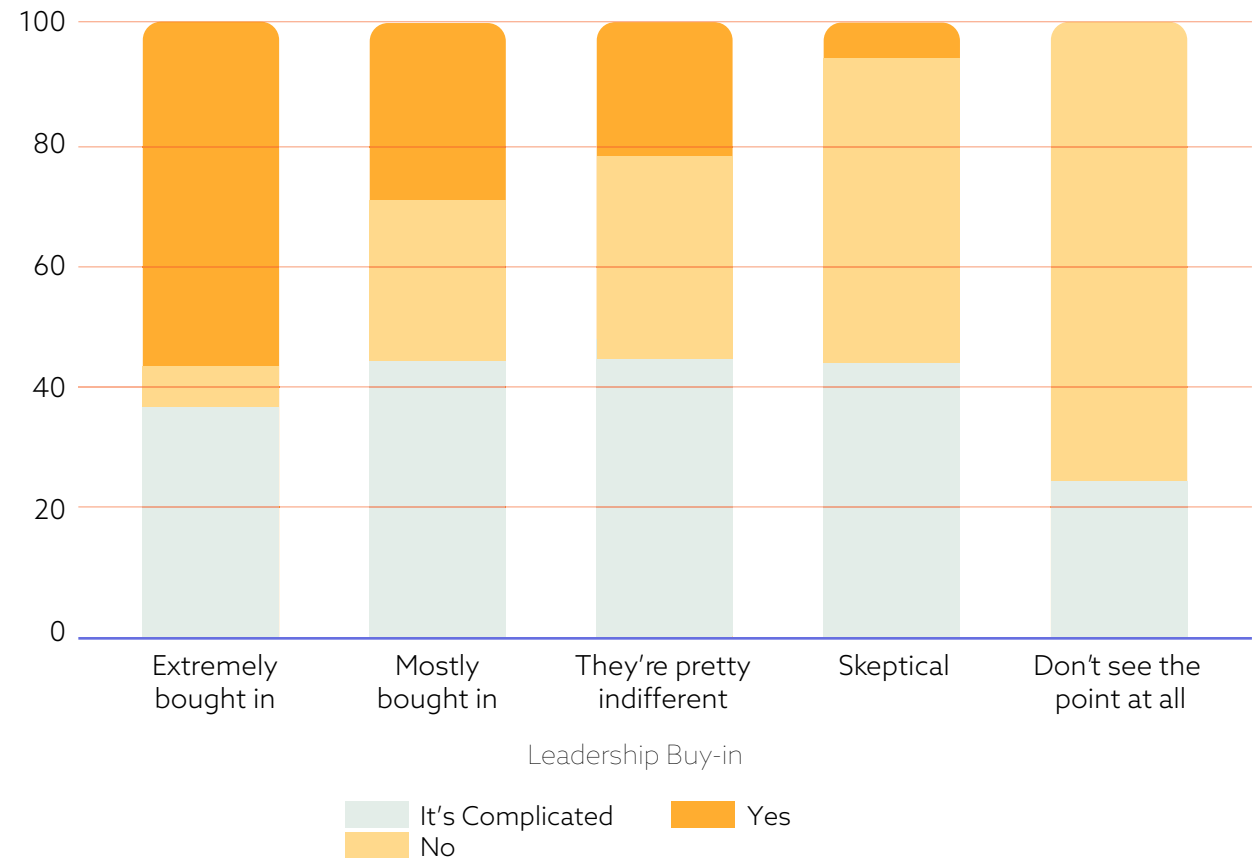


# Career Satisfaction Across Leadership Buy-in Levels

Career satisfaction among content marketers appears to be closely tied to leadership buy-in as well.

For those whose leaders are **“Extremely Bought in,”** content marketers generally feel more satisfied, with the focus shifting toward long-term goals and strategic alignment. In these environments, career satisfaction is high, and content marketers feel confident in their growth.

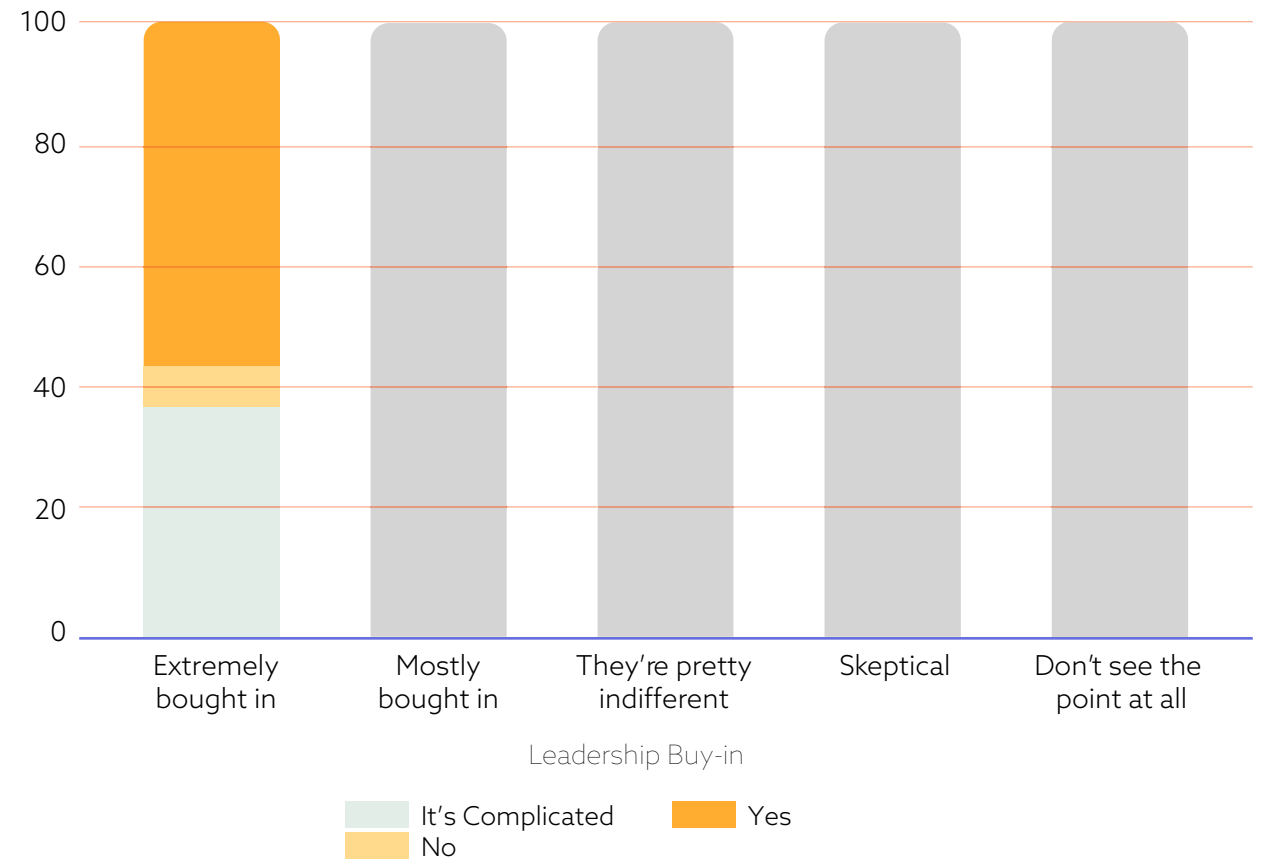
Career Satisfaction Across Leadership Buy-in Levels



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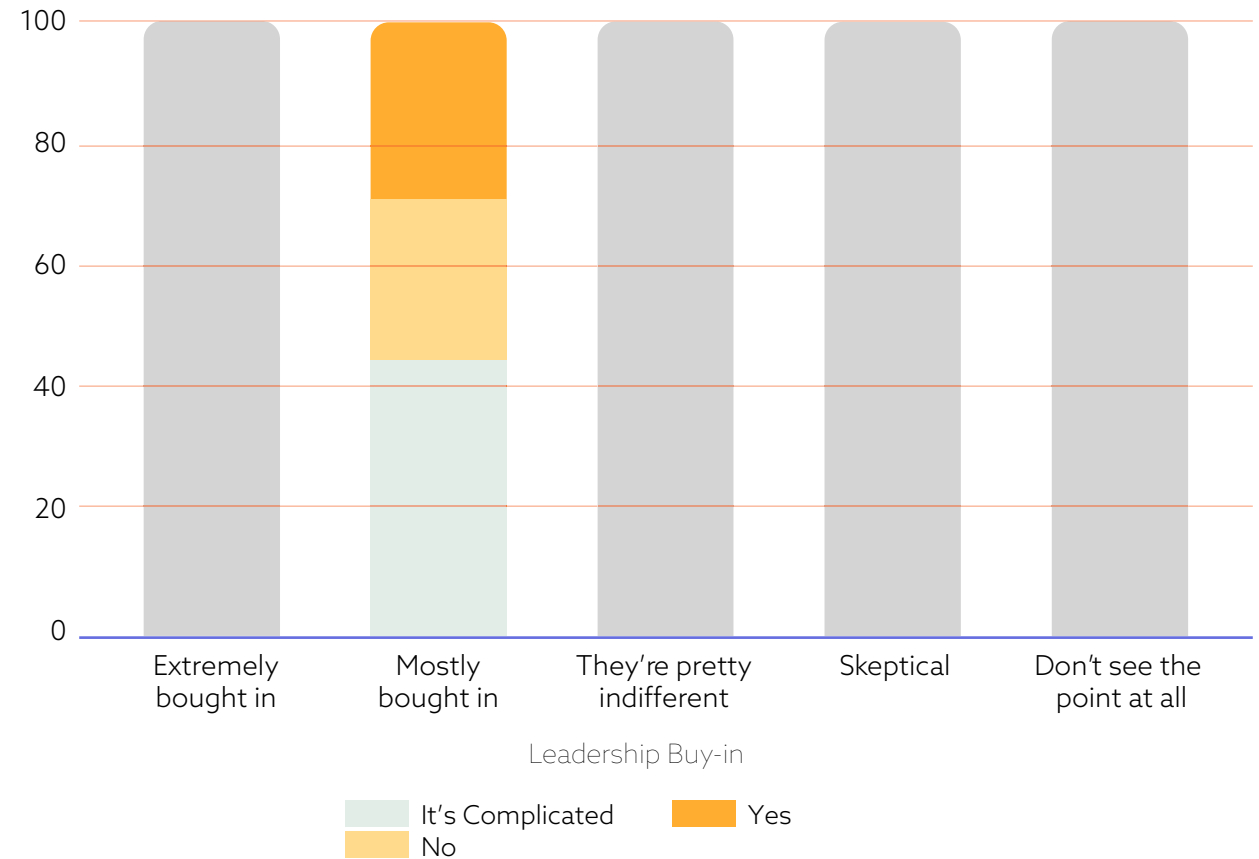
Career Satisfaction Across Leadership Buy-in Levels



# Career Satisfaction Across Leadership Buy-in Levels

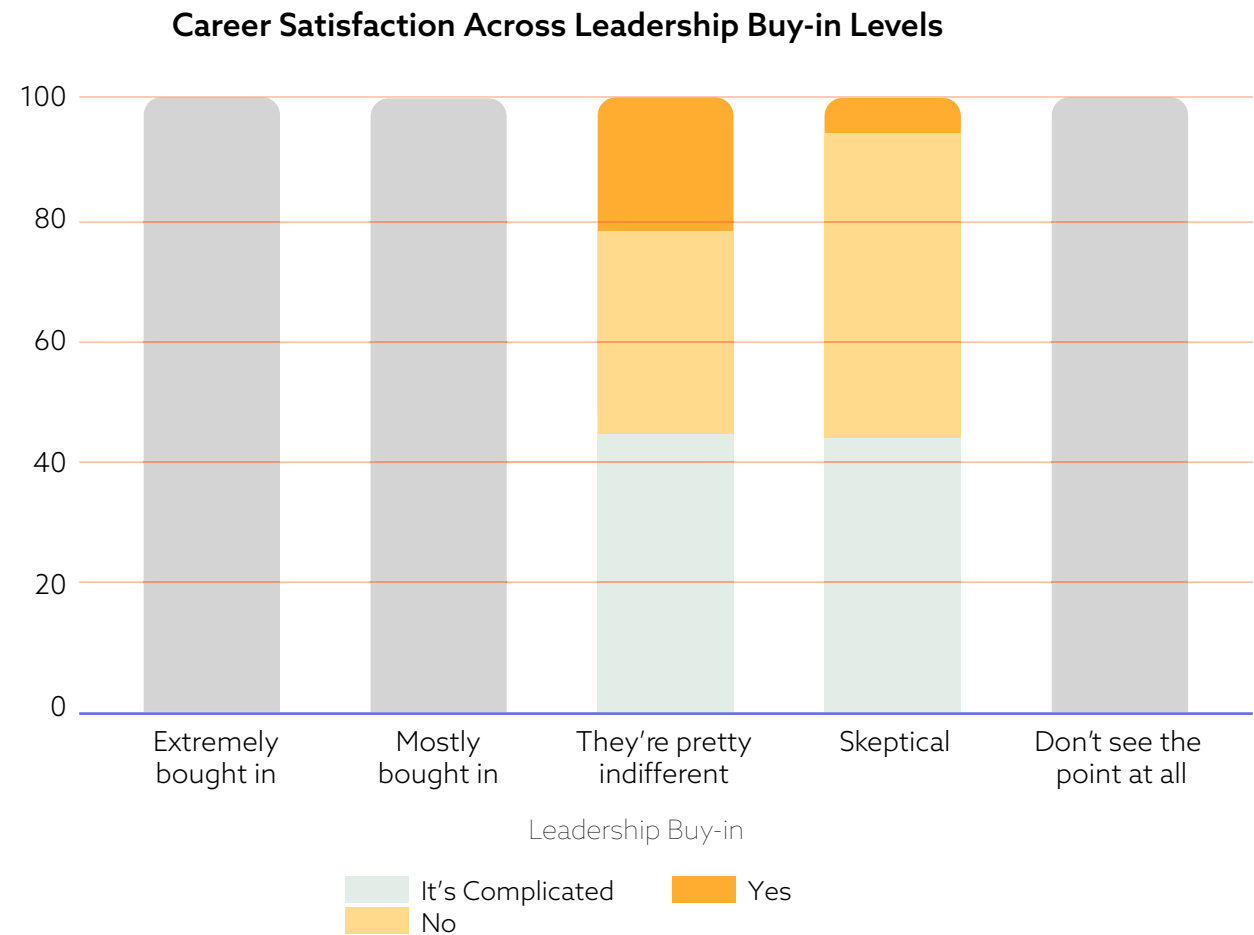
However, as leadership buy-in wanes, the situation becomes more complex. For those in the **"Mostly bought in"** group, career satisfaction is far more mixed. While some are happy with their progress, a notable portion express frustration or a lack of clarity in their career trajectory.

Career Satisfaction Across Leadership Buy-in Levels



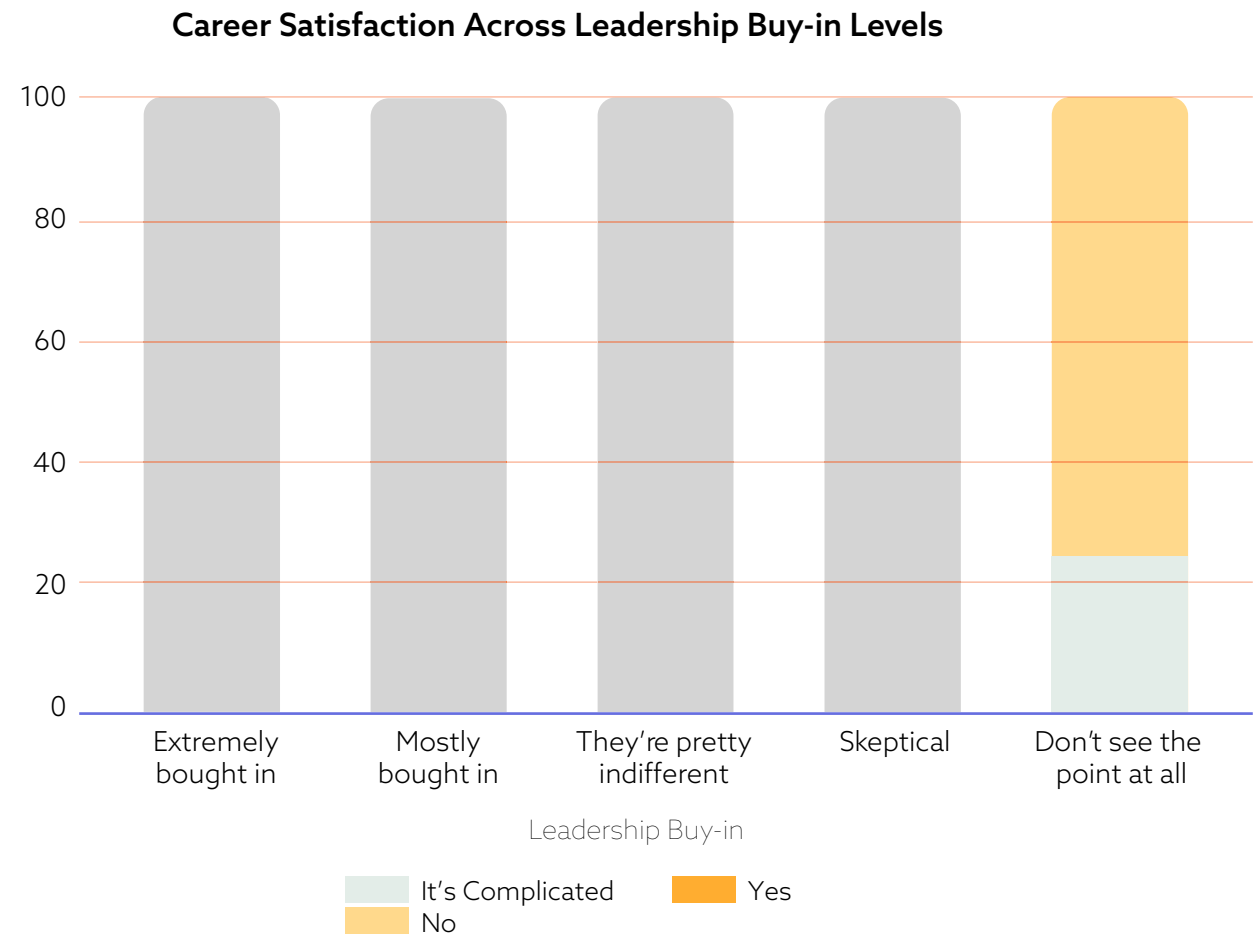
# Career Satisfaction Across Leadership Buy-in Levels

The dissatisfaction deepens among those with **“Indifferent”** or **“Skeptical”** leadership, where proving the value of content marketing and navigating leadership disinterest becomes a significant challenge. This leads to heightened discontent and uncertainty about their future.



# Career Satisfaction Across Leadership Buy-in Levels

At the lowest level of support, where leadership **"Doesn't see the point"** of content marketing, career satisfaction is at its worst, with a large majority reporting unhappiness or feeling stuck in their roles.



# Does Buy-in Affect Creative Fulfillment?

The correlation between leadership buy-in and leadership buy-in is fascinating to observe.

When leadership doesn't see the point of content marketing, only a third feel creatively fulfilled. The qualitative data found that those who responded this way also say they do not receive creative satisfaction from work.

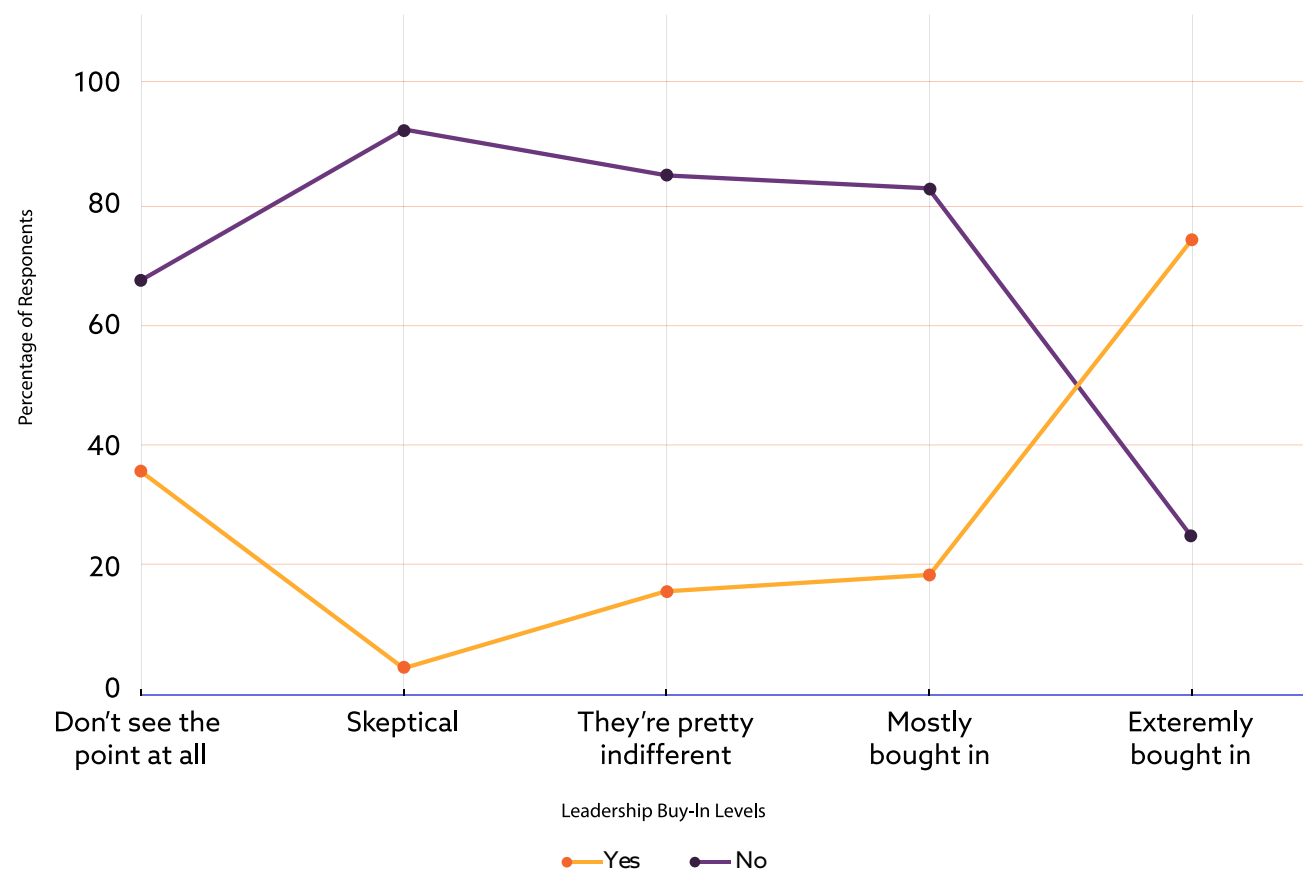
Under skeptical leadership, no one feels creatively satisfied.

Indifferent leadership also stifles creativity, though a small group still finds fulfillment.

Even when leadership is mostly supportive, creative fulfillment remains low.

The highest levels of satisfaction happen when leadership is fully bought in, highlighting how important strong support is for fostering creativity.

Creative Fulfillment Across Leadership Buy-in Levels





# Does AI Impact Output?

## Increased Expectations Across the Board:

Regardless of leadership buy-in level, the majority of respondents report that AI has led to increased output expectations. This suggests a broader industry trend toward expecting more content due to AI's role, even when leadership isn't fully on board.

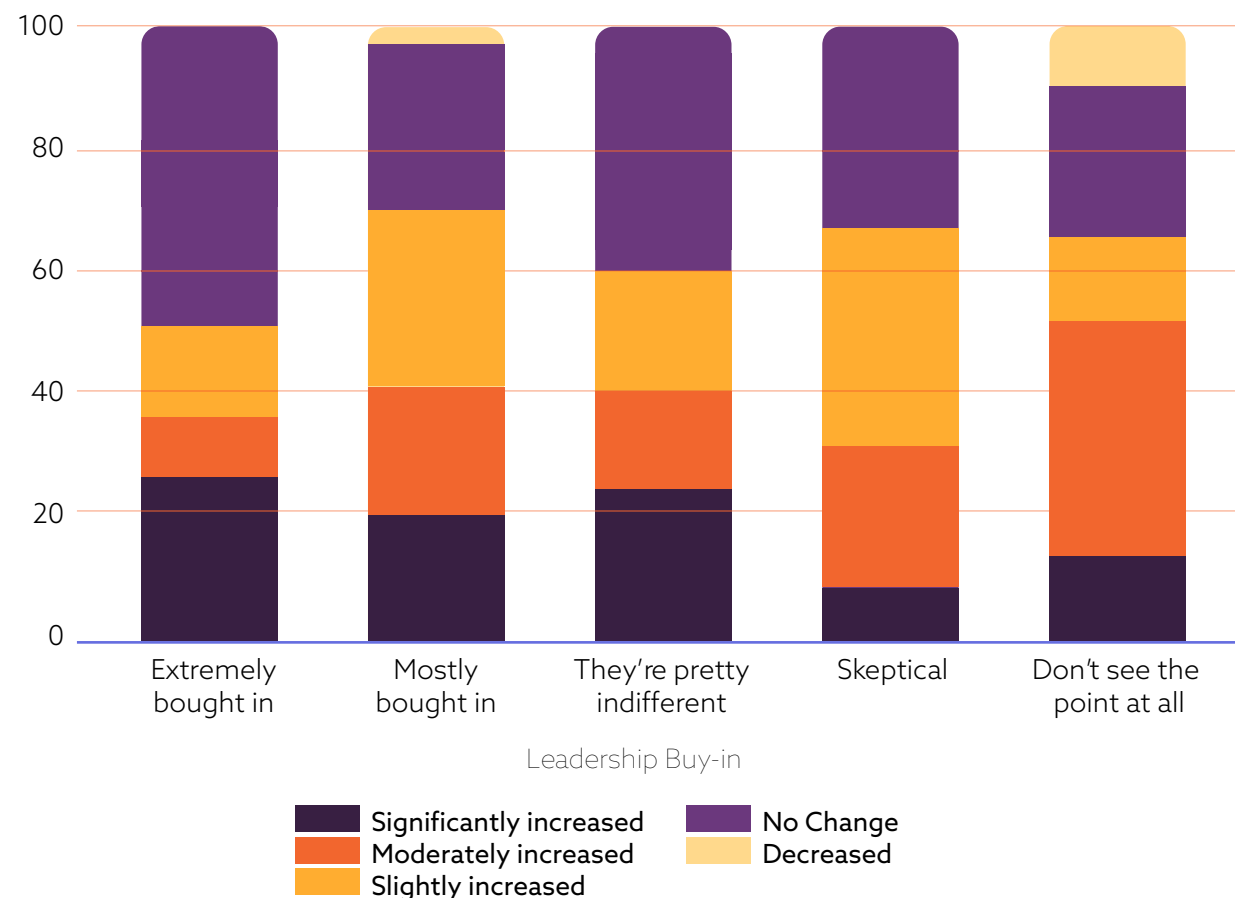
## Leadership Support Correlates with Pressure:

Leadership that is "mostly bought in" has the highest expectation of increased output, followed by skeptical leadership. We suspect that former group wants to increase output to lead while the other tries to keep up.

## Variation Based on Leadership's Approach:

The data shows that even when leadership is indifferent or skeptical, AI is still impacting content teams, although at a somewhat lower level than in extremely or mostly bought-in organizations.

Impact of AI on Output Expectations Based Leadership Buy-in



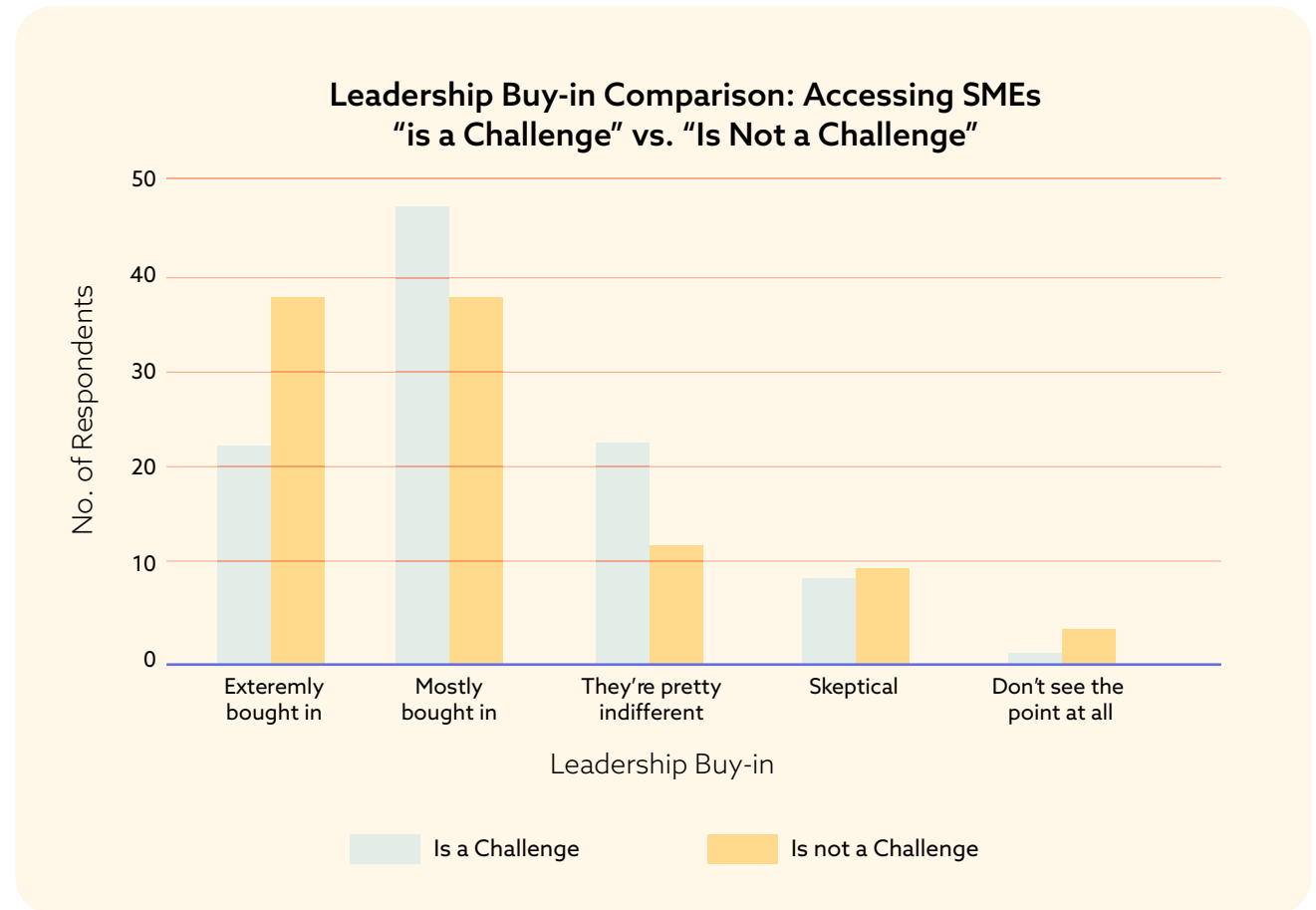
# Accessing Subject Matter Experts vs Leadership Buy-in

Accessing subject matter experts was listed as the second highest non-content creation issue.

Because collaboration is often driven by leadership, we hypothesized there would be fewer mentions of collaboration being a challenge the more support leadership gave to the content program.

The data proved that hypothesis correct, however, what was surprising was how small the gap was with moderate buy-in, and how fewer people report challenges with "skeptical" and "don't see the point" leadership.

What we'll see later is these two groups often have more autonomy, likely because of limited oversight, but often struggle with being recognized for their contribution.



# Does Research Affect Buy-in?

This graph compares the frequency of audience research across all five leadership buy-in levels:

**Extremely bought in:** This group conducts audience research most frequently, with higher percentages reporting monthly, weekly, and even daily research.

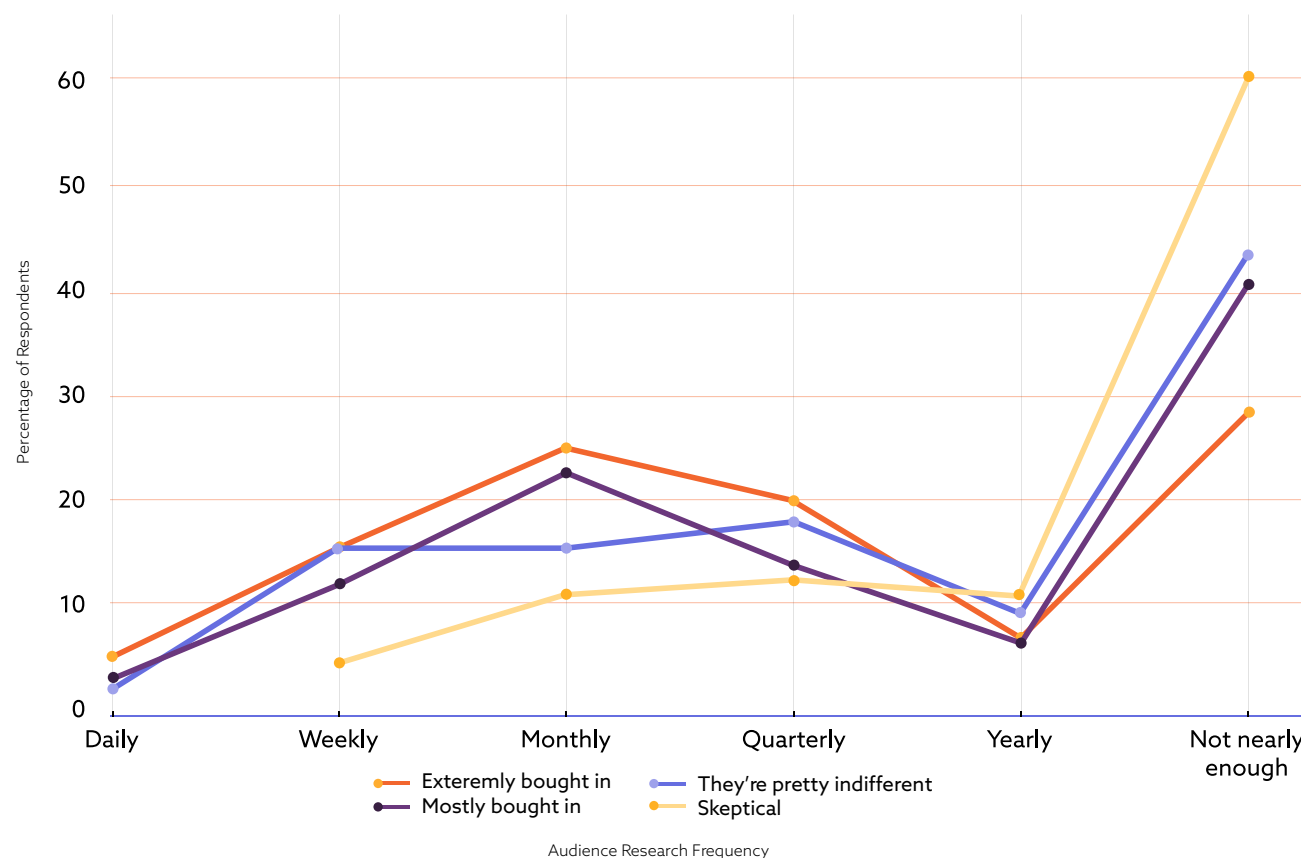
**Mostly bought in:** This group follows closely behind but shows a higher percentage of respondents who say they aren't doing enough research.

**Indifferent and Skeptical:** These groups show much lower frequencies of regular audience research and the highest percentages of respondents admitting they aren't conducting research nearly enough.

**Doesn't see the point:** This group is not listed because 100% of the people reporting this say they do not do their audience research "nearly enough"

The data suggests that as content teams engage more frequently in audience research, leadership tends to be more bought in and supportive of the content marketing efforts.

### Audience Research by Leadership Buy-in

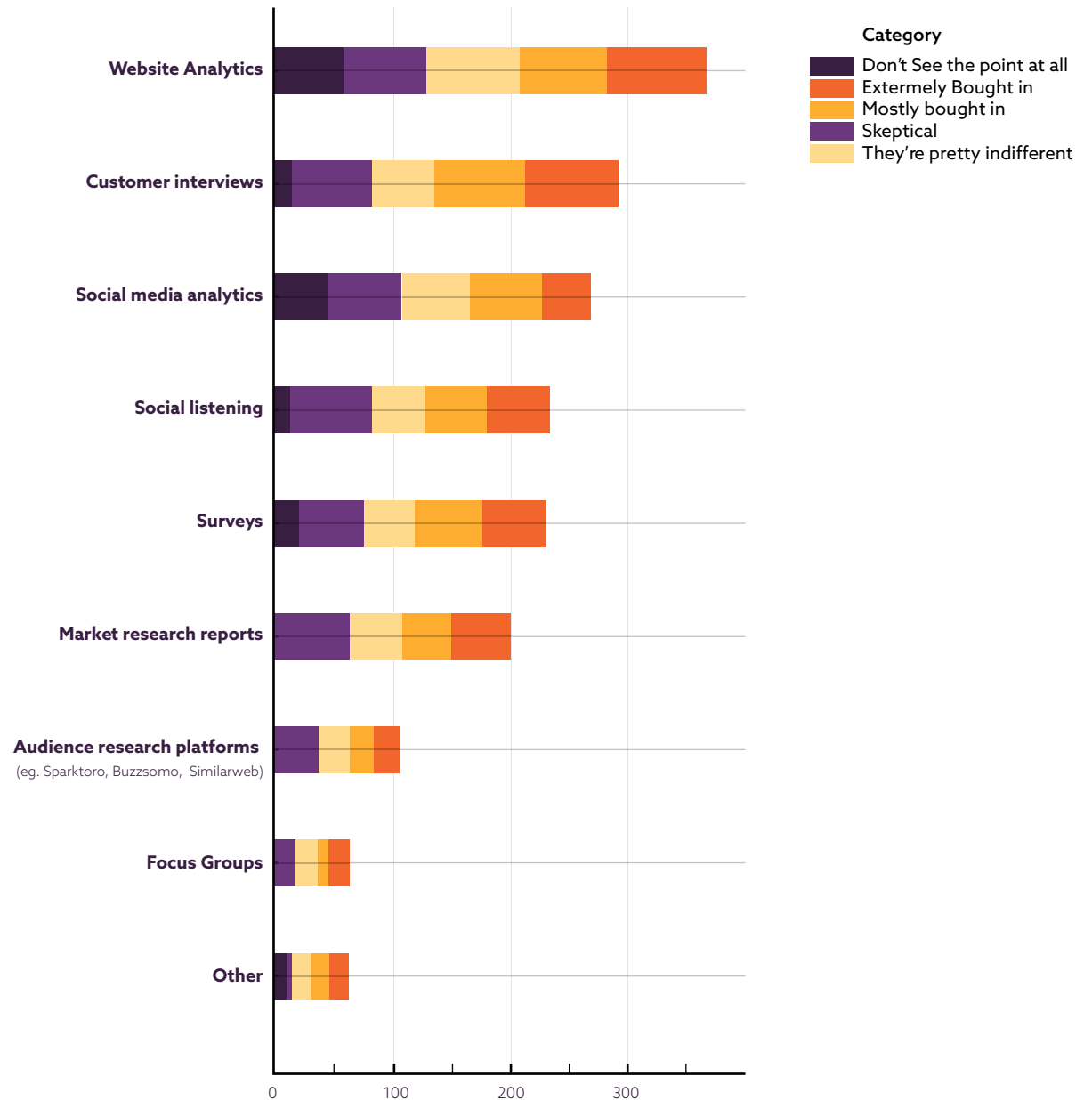


# Research Methods Being Used

The analysis of audience research methods across leadership buy-in segments highlights distinct trends in how teams gather information.

**Customer interviews** and **website analytics** are consistently the most commonly used methods, especially in groups where leadership is highly engaged in the content strategy.

Audience Research Methods by Leadership Buy-in Segmentation

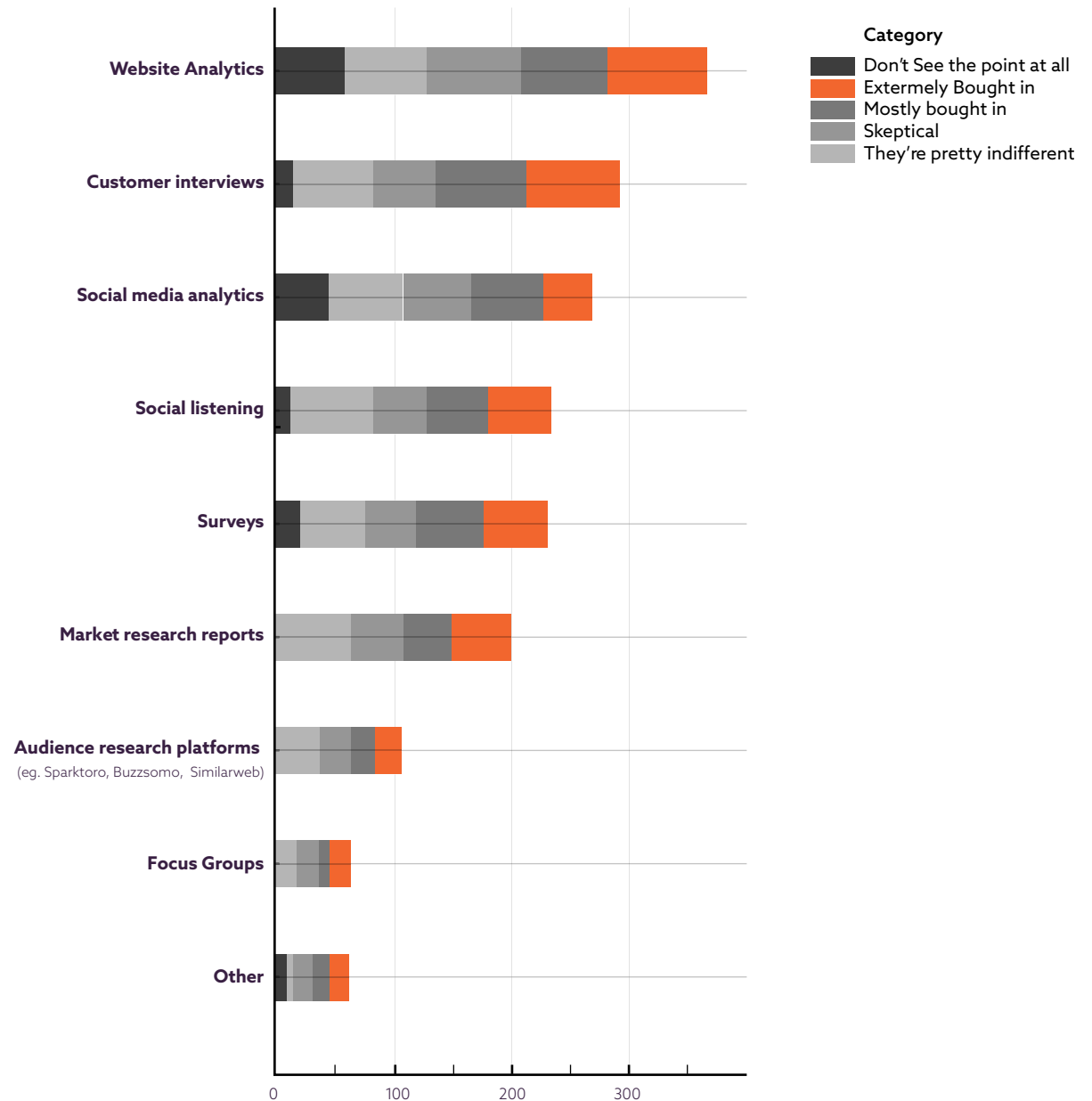


\* This data excludes answers from those who reported not doing their research "nearly enough"

# Research Methods Being Used

Teams with **“Extremely bought in”** leadership heavily on customer interviews and website analytics, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data to make informed content decisions. There’s a clear focus on understanding the audience deeply through direct feedback.

Audience Research Methods by Leadership Buy-in Segmentation



\* This data excludes answers from those who reported not doing their research **“nearly enough”**

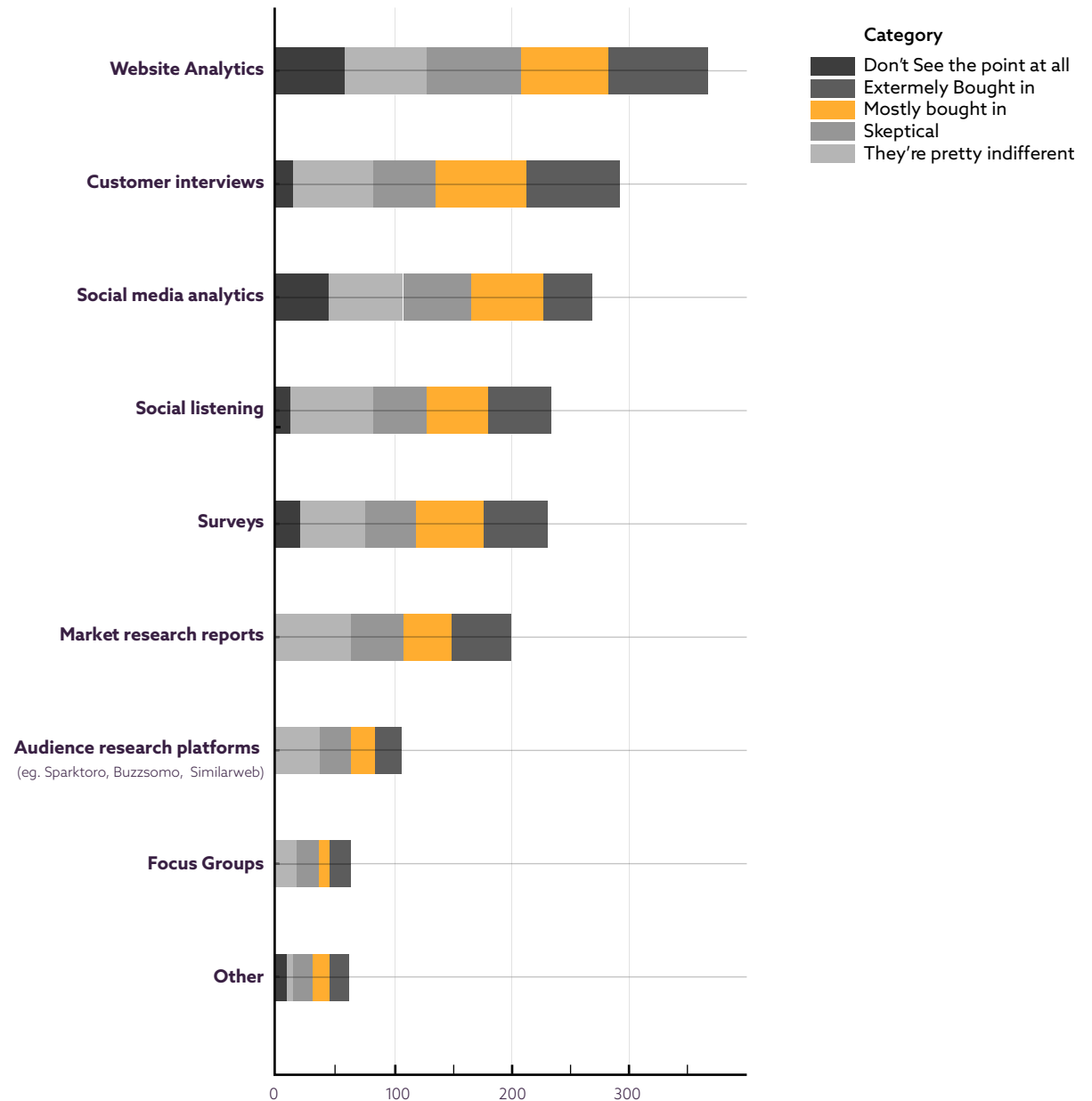
# Research Methods Being Used

For the **“Mostly bought in”** group, website analytics and customer interviews remain dominant, with social media analytics playing a more prominent role.

This indicates a balance between understanding audience behavior on digital platforms and gathering direct audience insights.

\* This data excludes answers from those who reported not doing their research **“nearly enough”**

Audience Research Methods by Leadership Buy-in Segmentation

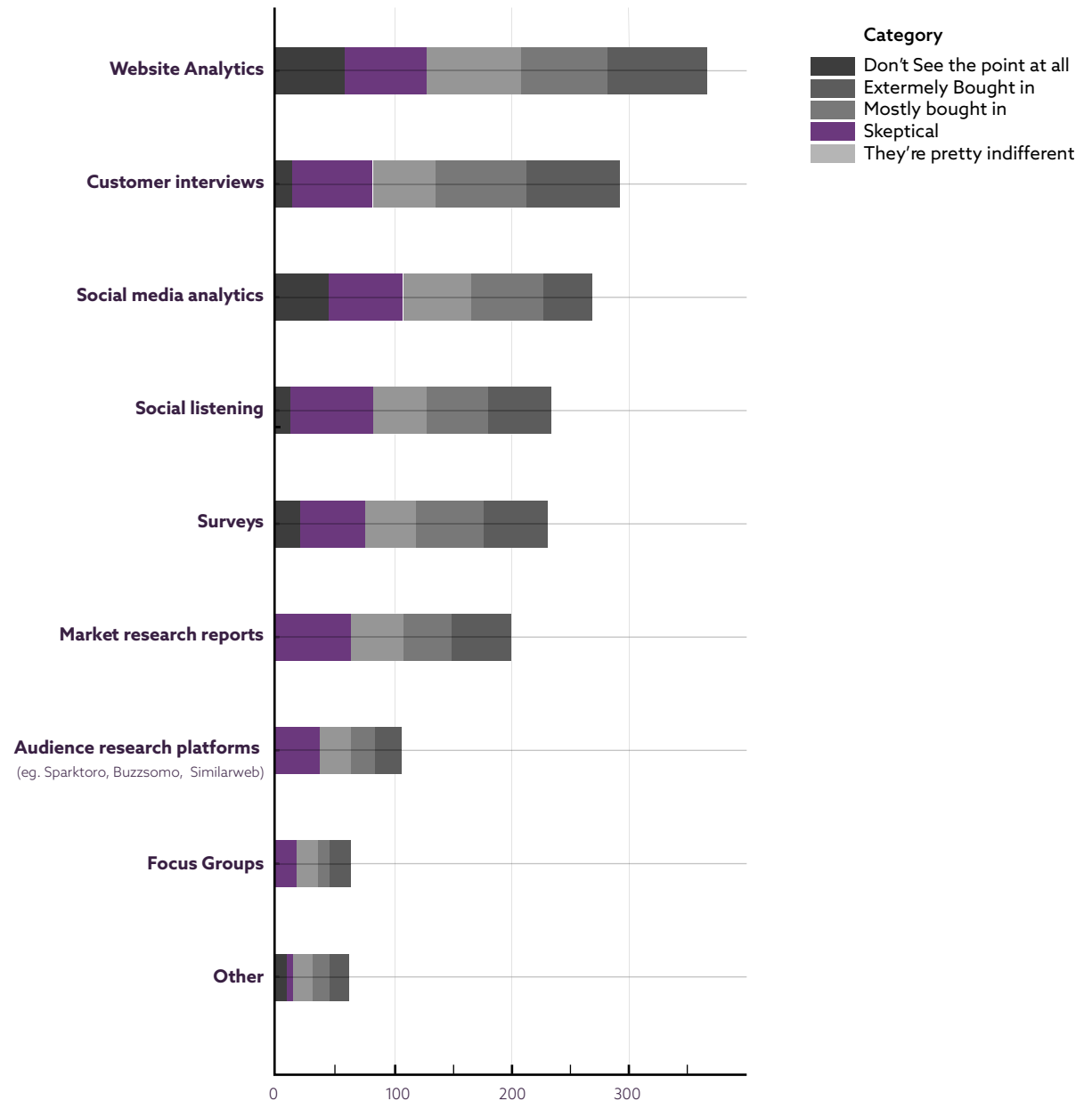




# Research Methods Being Used

Marketers with **"Indifferent"** leaders continue to prioritize website analytics and customer interviews, though there is a shift toward greater reliance on digital analytics tools like social media analytics and social listening. This reflects less direct engagement with audiences compared to groups with stronger leadership buy-in.

Audience Research Methods by Leadership Buy-in Segmentation



\* This data excludes answers from those who reported not doing their research **"nearly enough"**

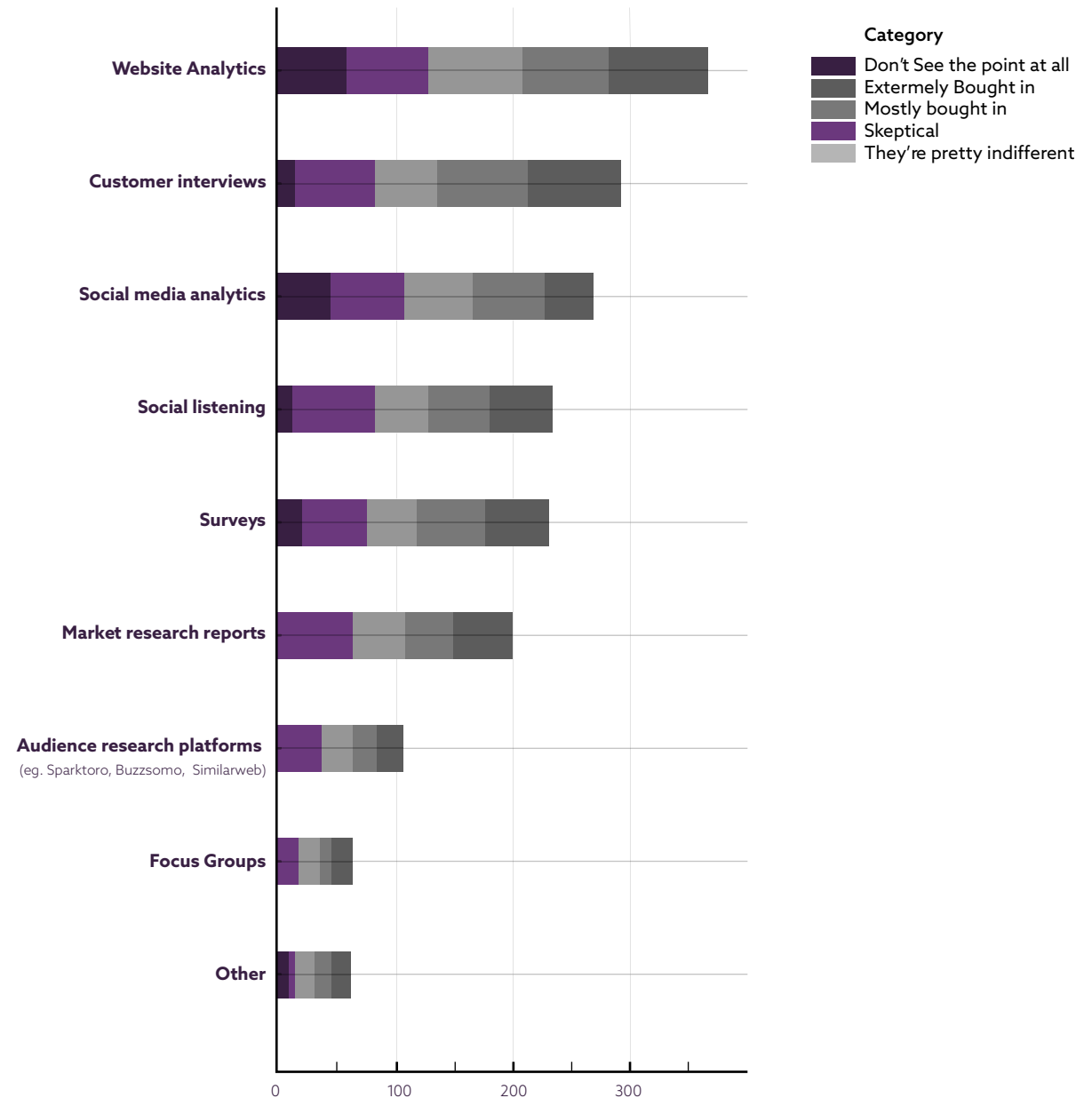
# Research Methods Being Used

Interestingly, as leadership buy-in decreases, analytics (especially website analytics) becomes more of a priority.

In the **“Skeptical”** and **“Don’t See the Point at All”** segments, teams rely heavily on website analytics and social media analytics while using methods like customer interviews far less. This shift may occur because analytics tools provide hard data that can be easily tracked and reported, offering more immediate and quantifiable insights without requiring the deeper investment of time and resources that methods like customer interviews or focus groups demand.

\* This data excludes answers from those who reported not doing their research **“nearly enough”**

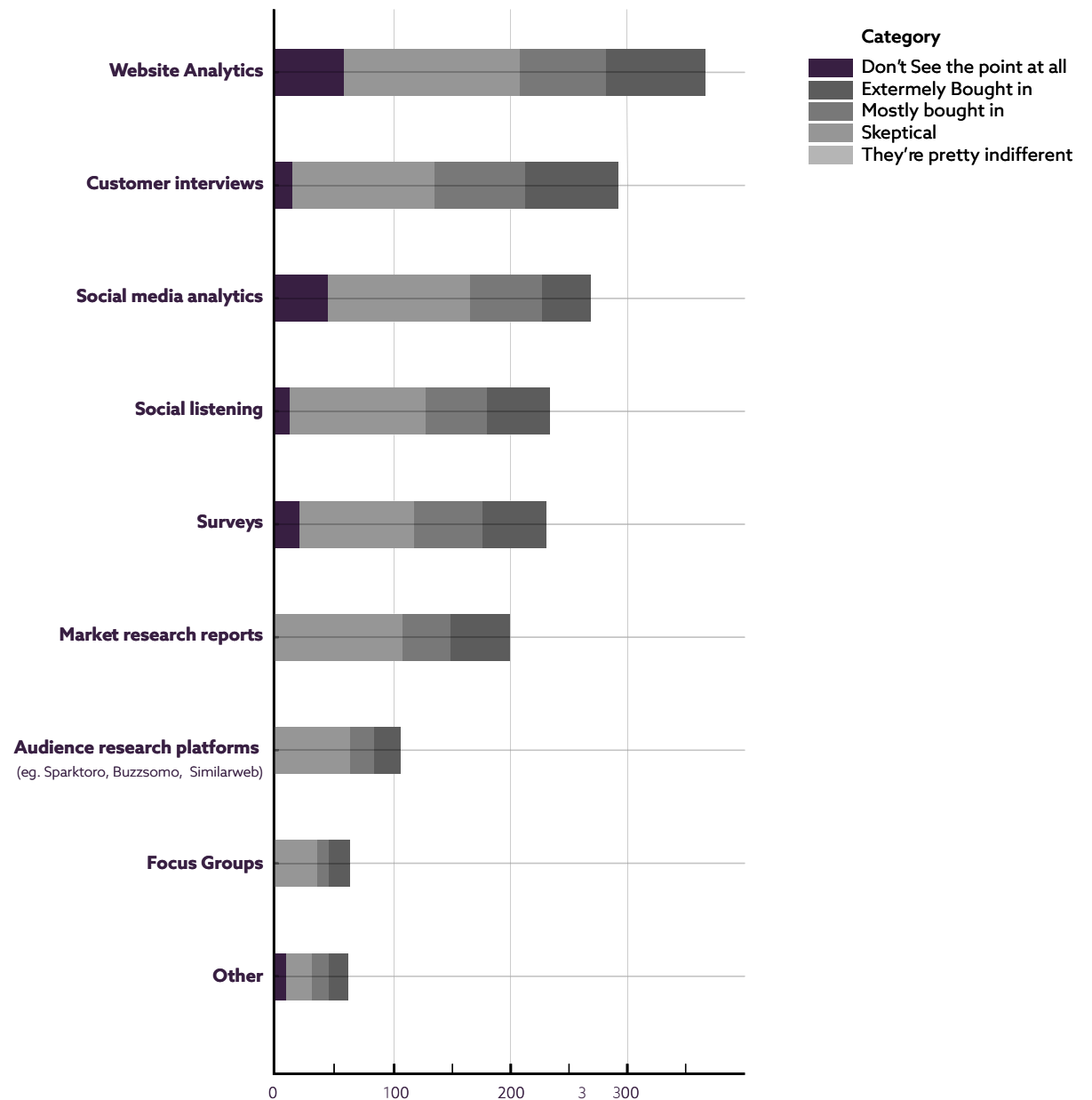
Audience Research Methods by Leadership Buy-in Segmentation



# Research Methods Being Used

For the **“Don’t see the point at all”** group, website analytics and social media analytics dominate, with minimal use of other research methods. This focus on analytics could reflect a preference for metrics that are easier to measure and communicate in organizations where leadership is skeptical or disengaged from content strategy.

Audience Research Methods by Leadership Buy-in Segmentation



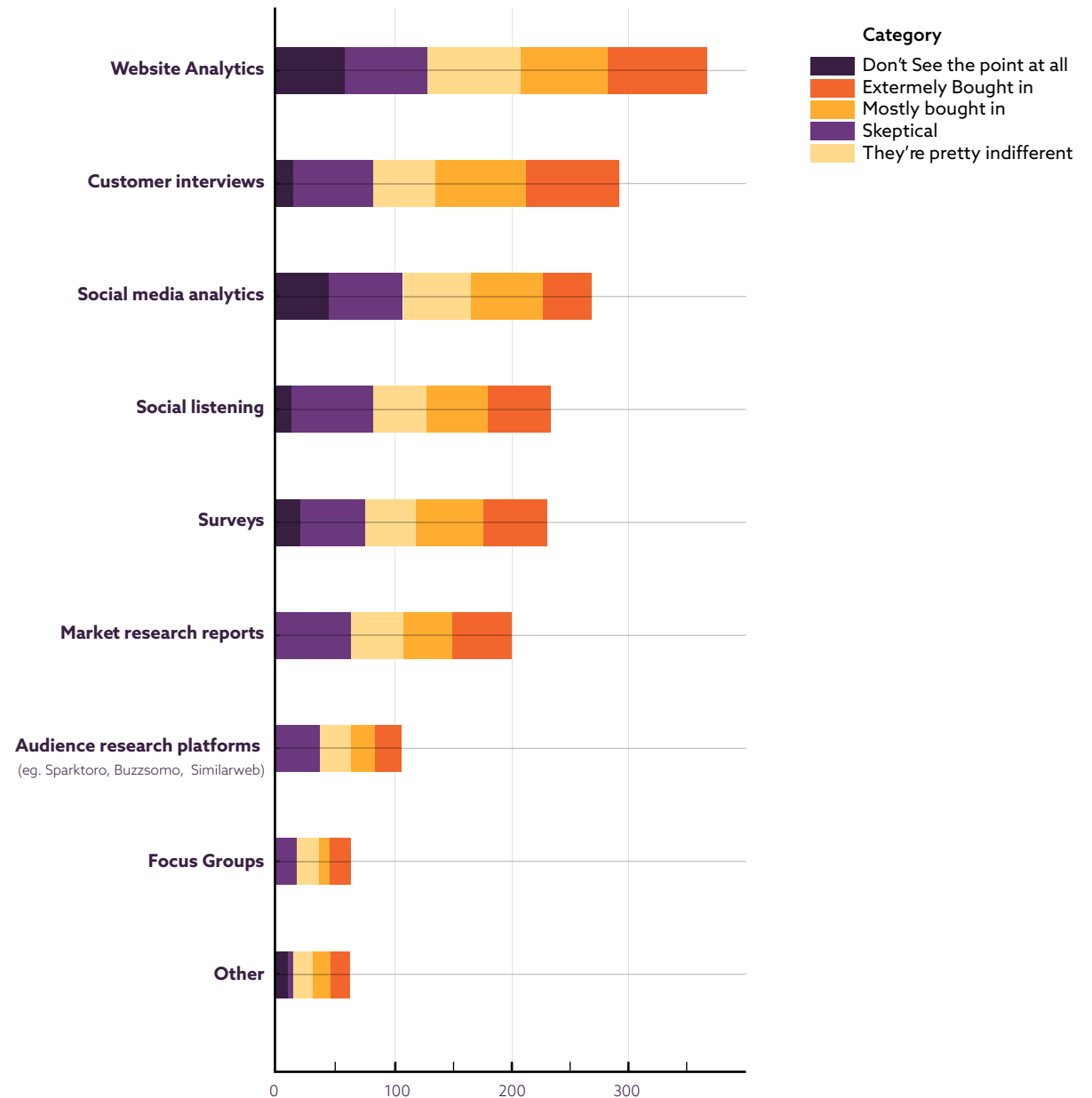
\* This data excludes answers from those who reported not doing their research **“nearly enough”**

# Research Methods Being Used

Overall, as leadership support decreases, content marketers drift further from qualitative feedback from customers and more toward quantitative methods.

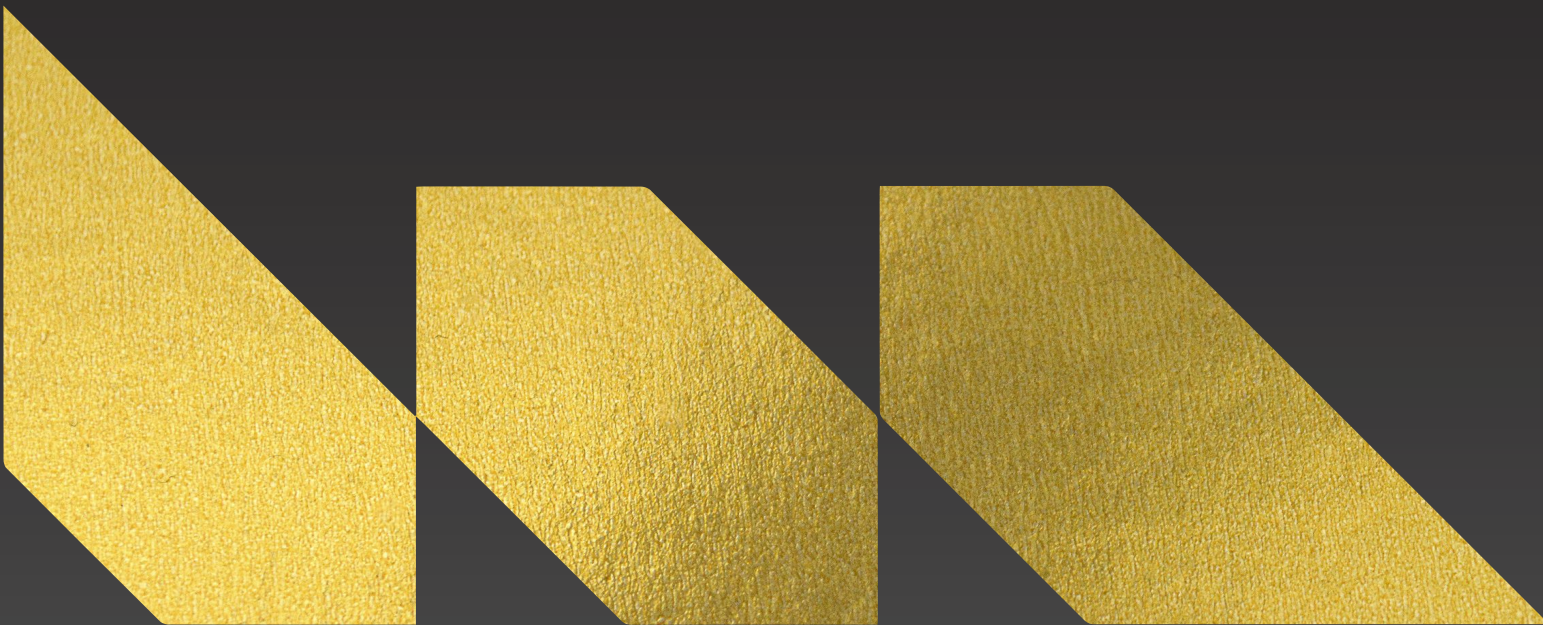
This suggests that as leadership buy-in declines, teams shift toward - or may be limited to - easily accessible, data-driven tools that provide clear metrics but potentially offering less depth in understanding audience behavior.

Audience Research Methods by Leadership Buy-in Segmentation



\* This data excludes answers from those who reported not doing their research **"nearly enough"**

Mostly bought in



# What “Mostly Bought in” Leadership Really Means

**Themes:** Strategic Direction, Quantity vs Quality, Pressure

**Key Words:** “Quality,” “Results,” “Produce,” “Understanding,” “Importance,” “Scrutiny,” “Volume”

**Elaboration:**

**Strategic Direction:** Concerns about the long-term strategic direction of content marketing are prevalent. Marketers in this group are worried about whether their efforts are aligned with broader business objectives and whether leadership truly understands the strategic importance of content.

**Quantity vs. Quality:** There’s a significant focus on the tension between producing more content and maintaining quality. Marketers feel the pressure to deliver high volumes while ensuring the content remains effective and valuable.

**Pressure:** The pressure to perform and deliver results is palpable. Content marketers feel they’re under constant scrutiny to justify their efforts, which adds to their discontent.

## How bought in is leadership to your content marketing program?

348 out of 545 people answered this question.

### Mostly Bought in



### Extremely Bought in



### They're Pretty Indifferent



### Skeptical



### Don't see the point at all





“Everyone defines content marketing differently, so it’s hard to align on a cohesive strategy.”



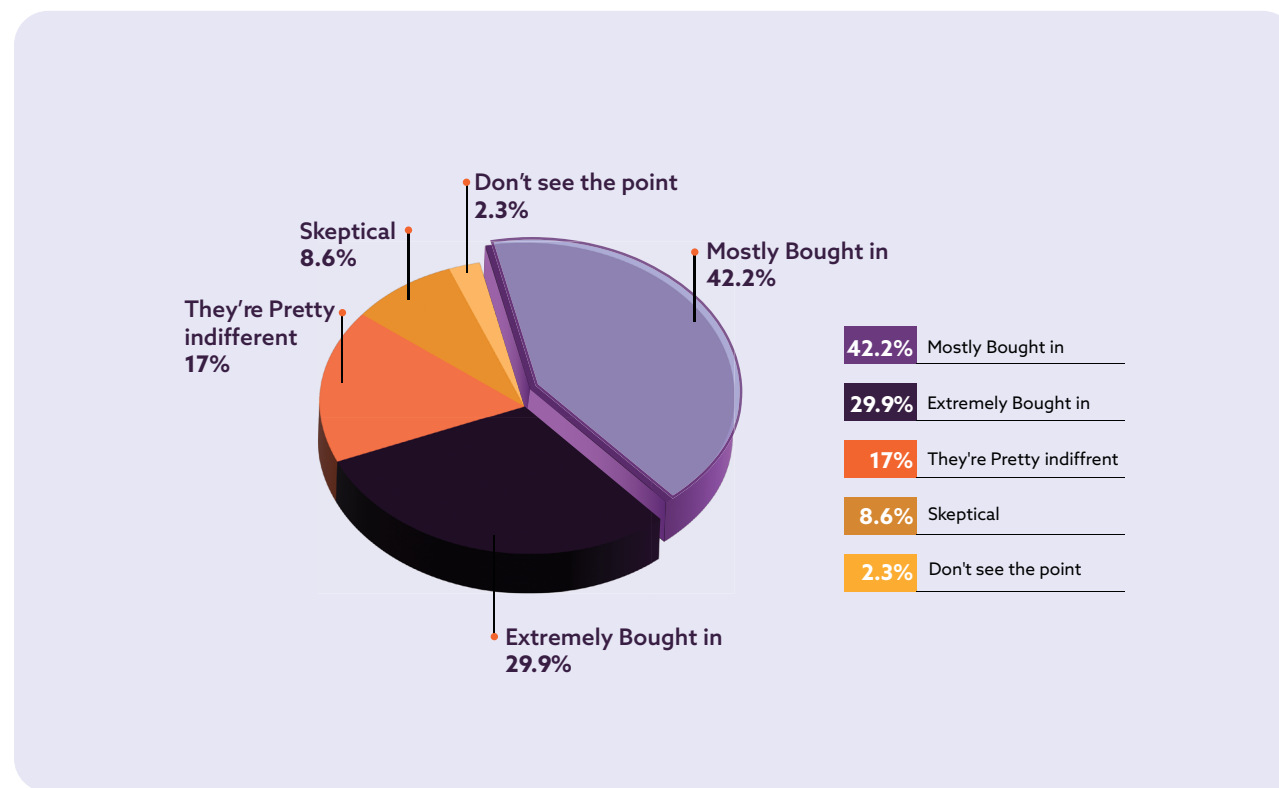
# Is Your Leadership Truly Bought in or Just Playing Along?

While it appears the majority of leadership is **"Mostly bought in"** when we cross-reference with the other data, we find this takes on a very different meaning.

For instance, of the 141 people who answered both questions about leadership buy-in and non-creation challenges, nearly a quarter report **"lack of buy-in"** still being an issue.

Additionally, sentiment analysis of the qualitative data reveals that 23% of respondents who answered this way, still report **"lack of buy-in"** being a problem.

Keeping this, our own professional experiences, and trends among other data, we're left to draw one conclusion.



**"Leadership is bought in, so long as it fits their definition of buy-in"**

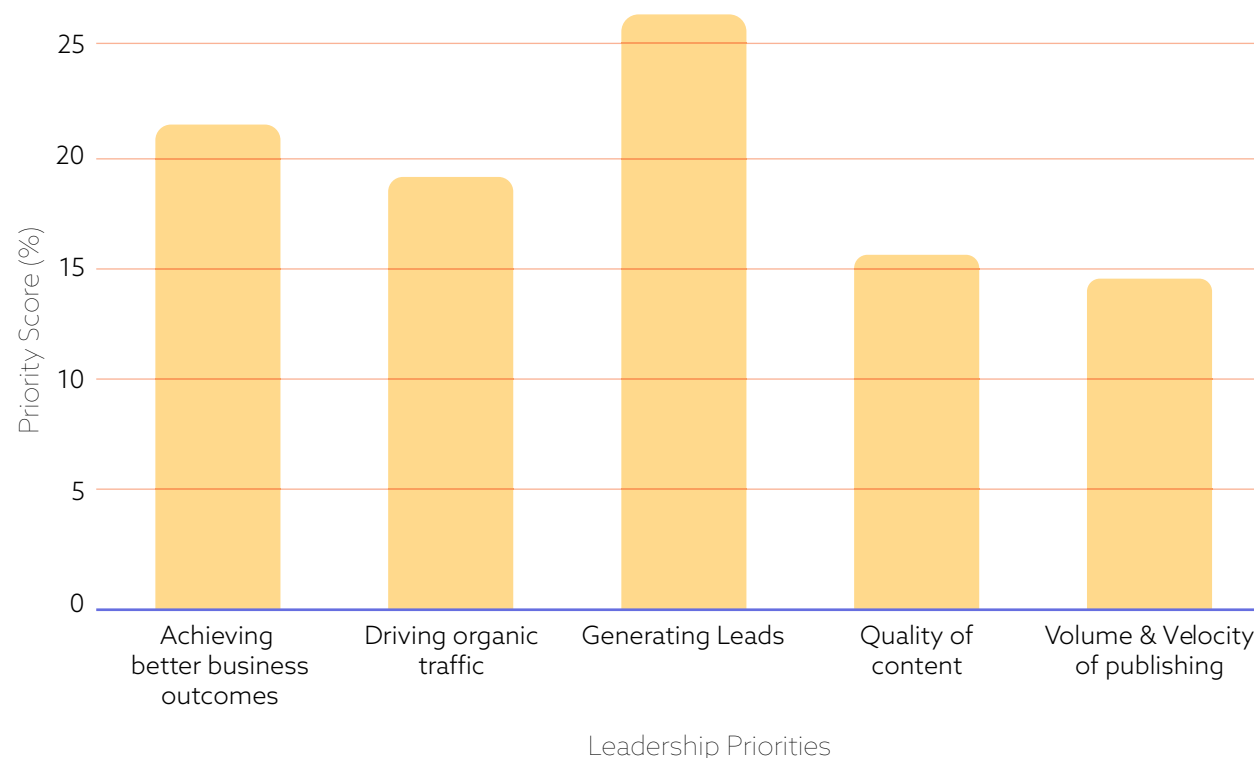
# Leadership's Real Priorities: Are They Aligned or Misaligned?

Content marketers with **"Mostly bought in"** leaders report **"Generating leads," "Achieving better business outcomes,"** and **"Driving organic traffic,"** as the top three priorities from leadership.

Qualitative feedback indicates leaders in this segment may have an outdated or underdeveloped view on the purpose of content marketing and have a lack of clarity as to the role content plays in the broader marketing organization.

This appears to have multiple downstream consequences for content marketers trying to find ways to make an impact.

Leadership Priorities for "Mostly Bought in"



Content is a byword for 'stuff'. And now stuff is extremely cheap and easy to produce. So there's too much stuff. And so now everyone hates stuff. And because you're the person in charge of something as vague as stuff no one thinks you're in charge of anything in particular.

# What Gets In The Way Of Creating Good Content?

1. Lack of resources
2. Aligning content efforts across multiple teams
3. Accessing subject matter experts
4. Lack of strategy
5. Aligning content with buyer's journey
6. Workflow issues/approval process
7. Lack of buy-in

Because “**lack of resources**” is consistently the top challenge across almost all segments, we’re going to look past it.

What’s more revealing—and what deserves our attention—is the frequency and emphasis placed on issues like team alignment and expert access. These challenges highlight a deeper issue: a gap between leadership’s buy-in and the operational support content teams require.

Struggles with team alignment and expert access point to an underlying disconnect between leadership’s conceptual buy-in and the practical support content teams need. These issues suggest that leadership buy-in is often more symbolic than actionable. While leaders may express theoretical support, the lack of tangible resources and strategic coordination shows that content marketers are still fighting many of the same battles as their peers with indifferent or skeptical leadership.

# Collaboration or Collision?

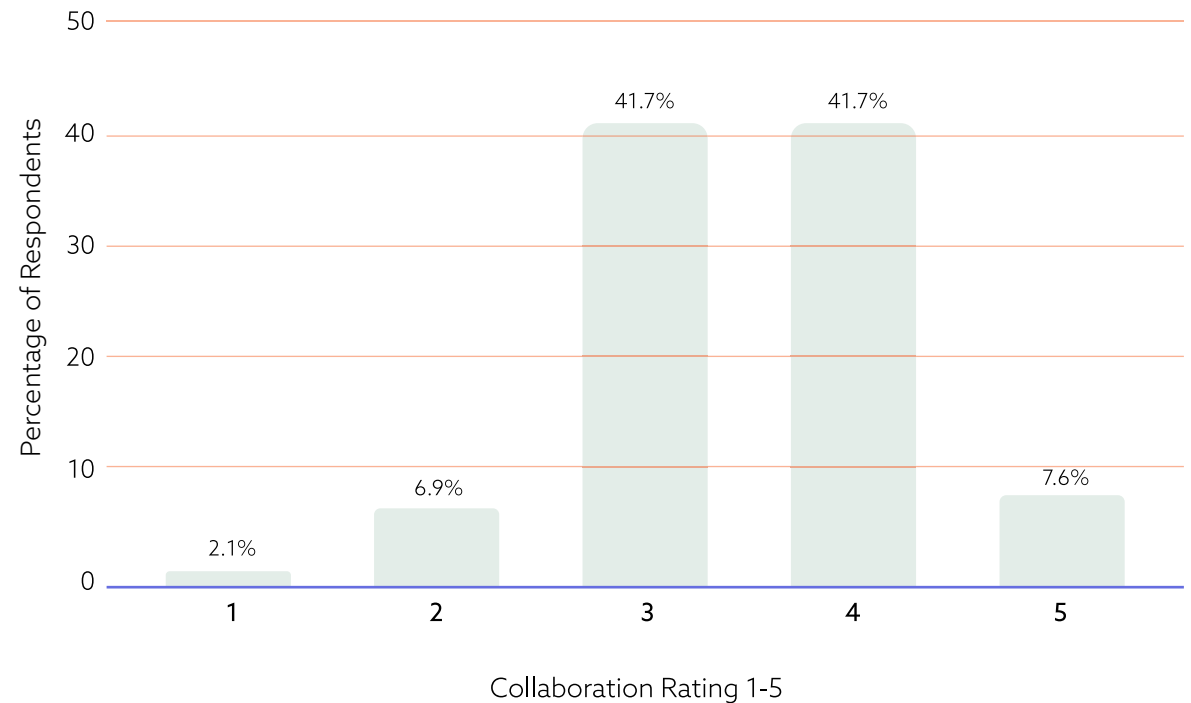
## How Teams Rate Cross-Department Efforts

This becomes particularly clear when we look at how content marketers rate their collaboration with other departments.

As the graph shows, a significant portion of respondents view their collaboration efforts favorably, yet an equally large group falls in the middle ground, suggesting that, while surface-level cooperation may exist, deeper alignment is still lacking.

In short, the positive perceptions mask underlying issues that hinder seamless content strategies. To move from **“theoretical”** to **“actionable”** support, true collaboration needs more than just goodwill; it needs dedicated resources and clear communication channels.

Overall, how would you rate your collaboration efforts with other departments?





# AI's Impact On Output Expectations:

With collaboration issues highlighting the gap between support and execution, it's clear that content teams are grappling with more than just departmental silos.

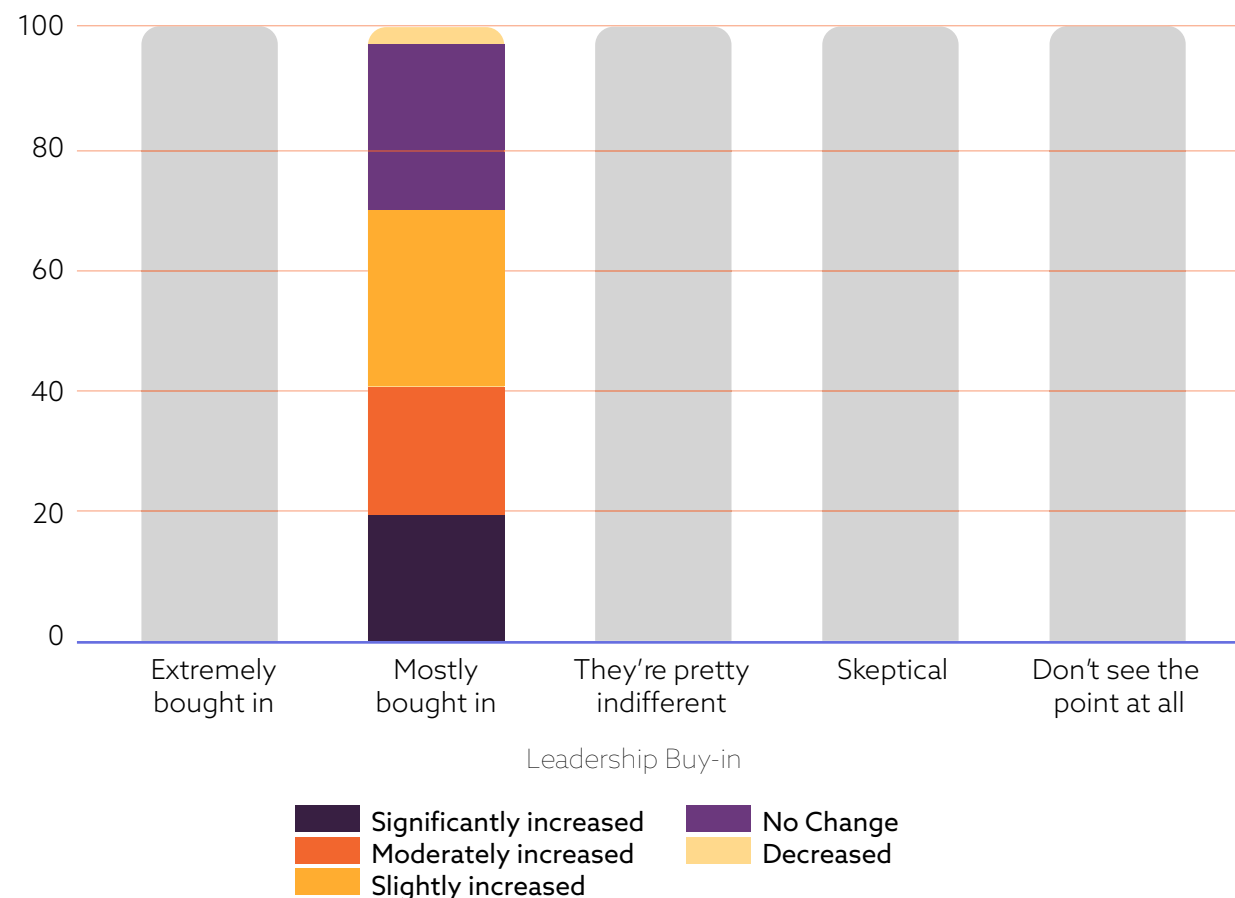
A common theme we noticed within this segment is that content marketing teams are often viewed more as service providers than strategic partners.

Keeping that in mind, it's unsurprising then that content marketers under "mostly bought in" leadership also report having the highest expectations of output increasing now that AI has become adopted throughout organizations.

This heightened expectation puts content teams in a delicate position—AI is meant to boost efficiency, but there's a constant tension between delivering more and maintaining quality. It raises a crucial question: are the benefits of AI truly being realized, or are teams just trying to keep up?

"[Content marketing] is seen as an execution team rather than a strategic partner. Content creators are asked to 'make it work' rather than being looped into decision making."

Impact of AI on Output Expectations Based on Leadership Buy-in





# AI Benefits For “Mostly Bought In” Leaders

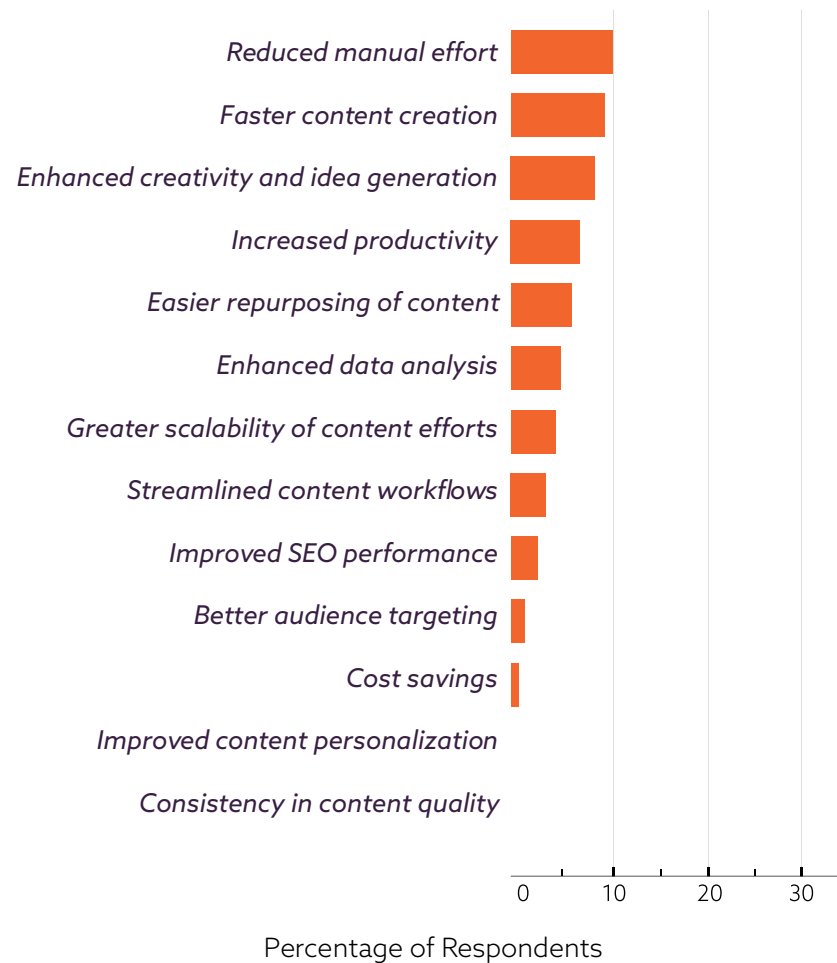
When looking at the reported benefits, teams under “**mostly bought in**” leadership frequently highlight faster content creation and reduced manual effort as the top advantages.

But there’s more nuance here.

While AI has undeniably helped streamline production, its greatest impact might be seen in areas like creative brainstorming and content repurposing—activities that are more strategic and less easily measured.

Yet, as we dig deeper, a familiar pattern emerges: leadership’s focus on output means these benefits often go unnoticed or underutilized, reinforcing the perception of content teams as production lines rather than strategic contributors.

This narrow focus on output efficiency shows that while the surface benefits of AI are well understood, there’s still a disconnect between leadership’s expectations and how teams can leverage AI for more strategic outcomes.



This disconnect becomes even more evident when we examine the drawbacks content marketers report when AI is integrated into their workflow.

# Drawbacks of AI for Content Marketers with “Mostly Bought In” Leadership

Despite the promise of AI, content teams are experiencing a set of challenges that undermine its perceived benefits.

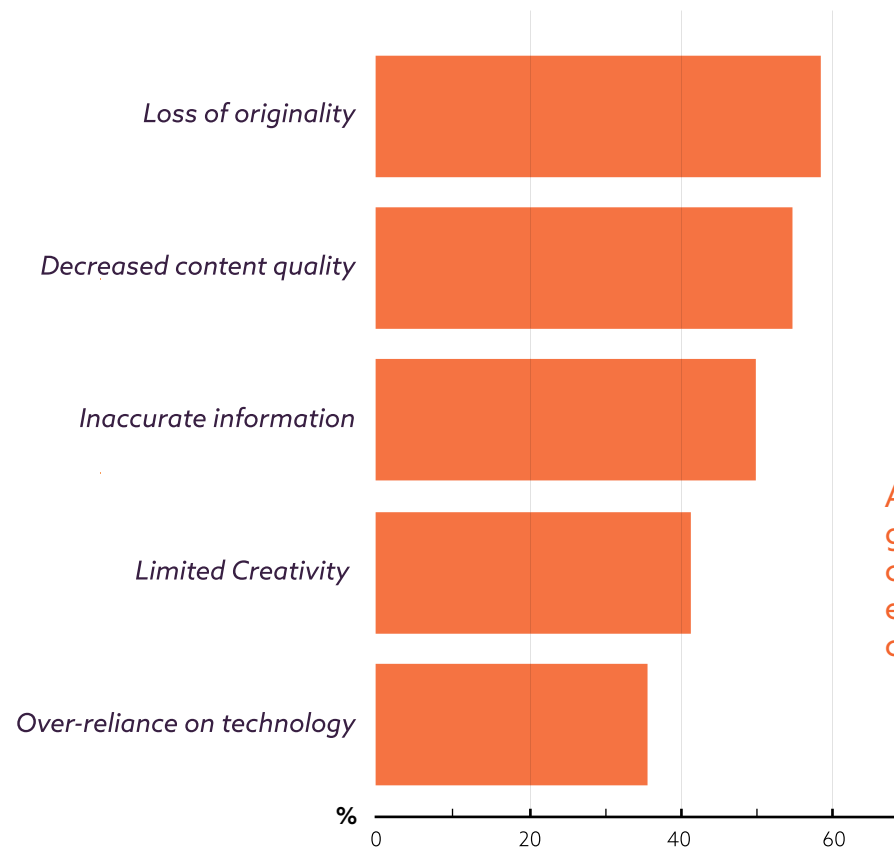
The most concerning of these is the potential erosion of originality and the risk of decreased content quality.

AI can accelerate production, but it often does so at the cost of unique creative expression, leaving teams feeling pressured to deliver high volumes without compromising the integrity of their brand.

Leadership may see AI as a quick win for efficiency, but the reality is more complex—content teams face the dual burden of maintaining creativity while meeting heightened output expectations.

The push for more output, paired with concerns over quality, has created a fundamental tension for content teams.

AI Drawbacks for “Mostly Bought In”



As a result, they are not only grappling with AI’s impact on creativity but also struggling with existential issues around content creation itself.

# Creation Related Issues for Mostly Bought in Leadership

1. Creating the right content for our audience
2. Differentiating content
3. Creating "Quality" content
4. Creating enough to keep up with internal demand
5. Creating content consistently
6. Creating content that requires technical skills
7. Creating enough content to keep up with external demand
8. Optimizing for search
9. Unwillingness to try new Ideas

The data shows that content teams in this segment rank "creating the right content for the audience," "differentiating content," and "maintaining quality" as their top challenges.

This means that even though demand is higher, and buy-in is moderate, these content marketers primary focus is still in service to the reader.

This disconnect isn't just a technical challenge—it's a strategic one.

Content teams are left trying to balance leadership's demand for more content with the need to create distinctive, high-impact pieces. Ultimately, it's not just about creating the right type of content—it's about doing so in a way that authentically represents the brand. And here's where the deeper issue lies: many content teams report feeling unsteady about their brand's voice and tone, revealing a surprising gap in confidence despite leadership's stated support.

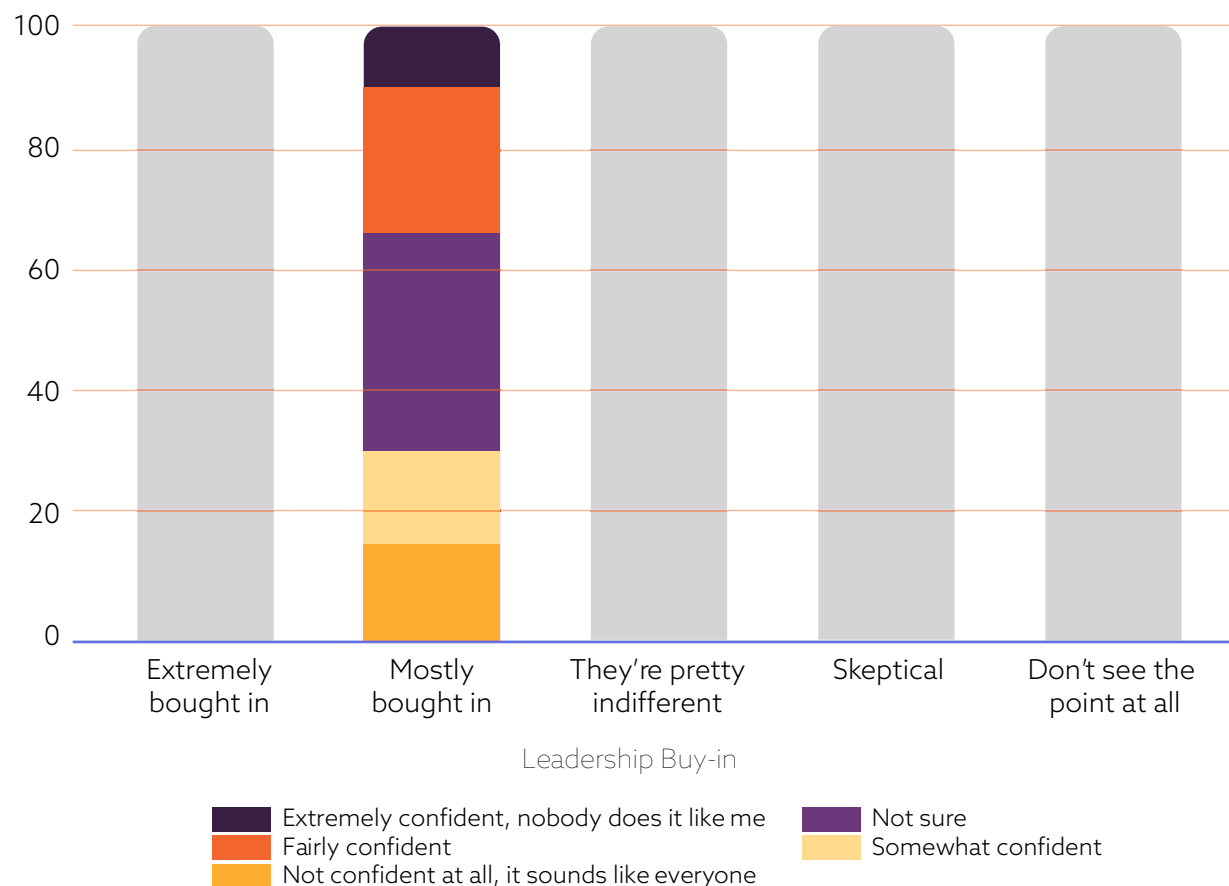
# Confidence In Voice & Tone

Although leadership is “mostly bought in,” a closer look at confidence in voice and tone reveals significant uncertainty within this group.

**36%** of respondents in the “**mostly bought in**” group were either “**not sure**” or “**not confident**” in their brand’s voice and tone.

This is strikingly similar to trends observed in the “indifferent leadership” group, where a lack of support is more expected.

Even when leadership is relatively supportive, content marketers still struggle to confidently express their brand’s identity.



*This lack of confidence in voice and tone is often a symptom of a deeper problem: insufficient audience research. Without regular, reliable insights into what the audience truly wants, it's no wonder content teams feel unanchored and uncertain. This brings us to a critical area that is consistently overlooked—how frequently content teams are engaging in structured audience research.*

# Audience Research Frequency Among “Mostly Bought in Leadership

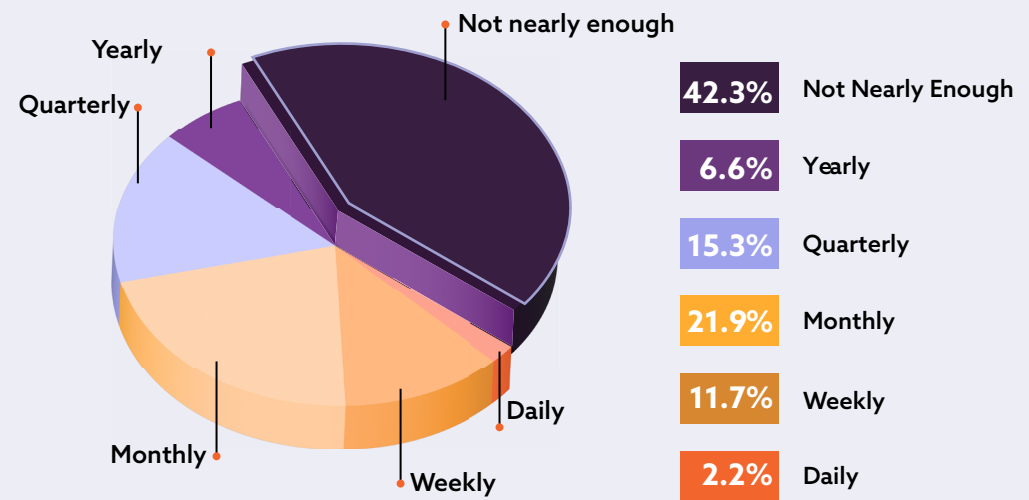
The data is clear: a majority of respondents report conducting audience research “not nearly enough” or only on a yearly basis.

This lack of regular research creates a blind spot that makes it difficult for teams to craft content that resonates.

Without ongoing insights, content efforts become disconnected from real audience needs, leaving teams reliant on assumptions and gut instincts.

More importantly, lack of audience research, and a clear way to present it, could be what turns leaders who are “mostly bought in” into “extremely bought in”

Audience Research Frequency Among “Mostly Bought In Leadership



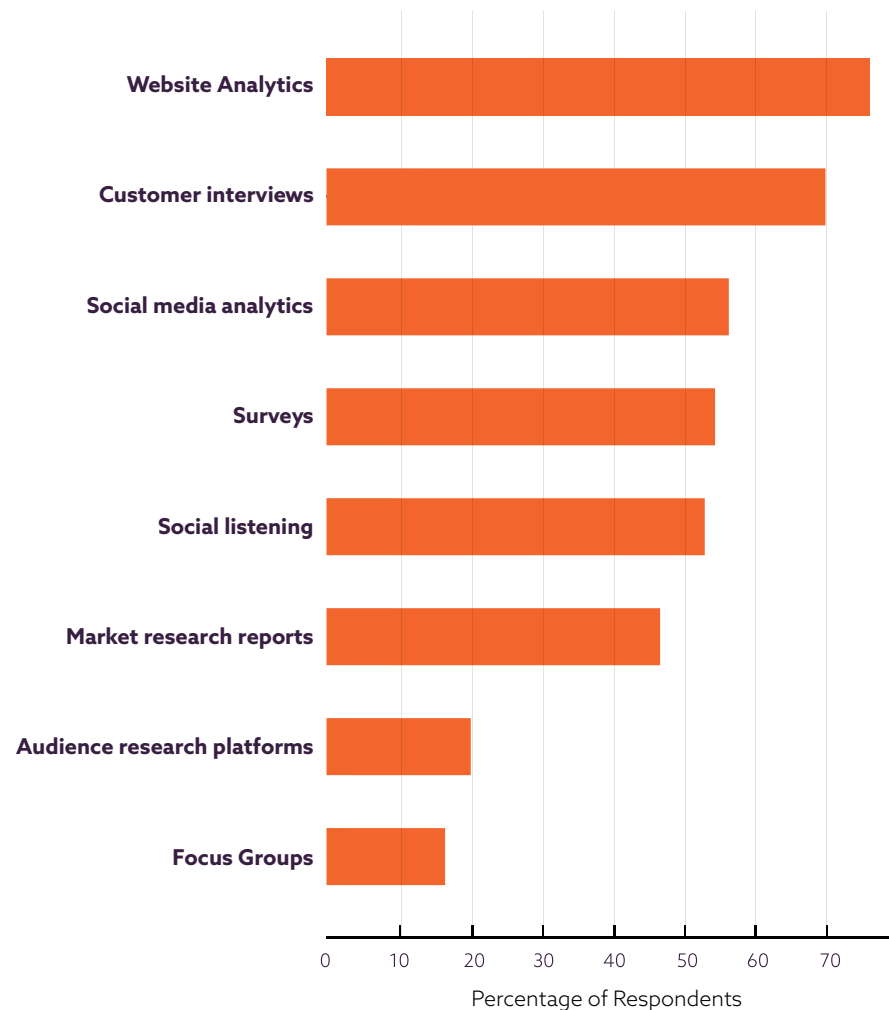
# How ‘Mostly Bought In’ Teams Use Data to Shape Strategy

When we examine the research methods used by content teams in this segment, there’s a notable balance between quantitative data (like website analytics and social media analytics) and qualitative insights (such as customer interviews and surveys).

Over 70% of respondents report using both types, indicating that teams are not just focusing on what their audience is doing, but also seeking to understand the ‘why’ behind these behaviors.

This balanced approach helps teams move beyond surface-level metrics, allowing them to craft content strategies that resonate on a deeper level. By combining hard data with real audience feedback, “mostly bought in” teams are better positioned to refine their voice, tone, and overall content strategy in ways that are both data-informed and human-centric.

Audience Research Frequency Among “Mostly Bought In” Respondents



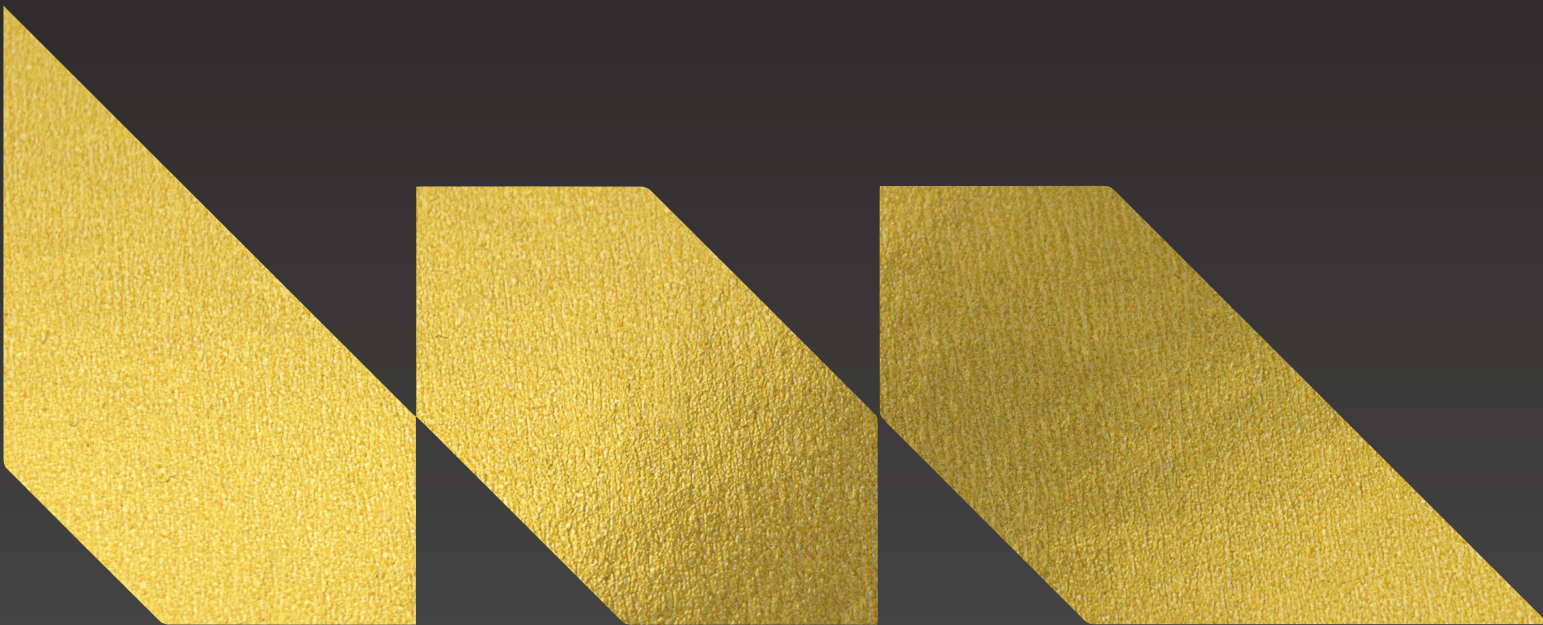


# From Tactical Support to Strategic Partnership

While “mostly bought in” leadership suggests a generally supportive environment for content teams, the reality is more complex. The analysis reveals that leadership’s focus is often misaligned with the strategic role content can play in driving business outcomes. This misalignment stems from a limited understanding of content’s true value beyond immediate results, creating a gap between high-level support and practical execution.

The root issue lies in leadership’s symbolic buy-in not translating into actionable support that empowers content teams to operate strategically. To turn “mostly bought in” into “extremely bought in,” content teams need a defined, structured audience research process that consistently informs both strategy and execution. With these deeper insights, content can evolve from being a tactical deliverable into a core driver of business growth, allowing teams to move from production units to strategic partners.

Extremely  
Bought in



# What “Extremely Bought in” Really Means

**Themes:** Reflection, Value, Strategy, Teamwork

**Key Words :** “Content,” “AI,” “Think,” “Marketing,” “Value,” “Teams,” “Strategy”

**Elaboration:**

**Reflection:** With leadership fully supporting the content marketing efforts, content marketers are more reflective about their challenges. They tend to think deeply about the evolving landscape, especially with the rise of AI and how it’s impacting their roles.

**Value and Strategy:** Even with strong support, there’s a recurring concern about ensuring the value of content marketing is fully realized. Content marketers in this group are focused on strategic alignment and ensuring their work contributes meaningfully to the broader business goals.

**Teamwork:** Collaboration and teamwork are emphasized. Marketers discuss the importance of working effectively within teams and the need for leadership to recognize and support these collaborative efforts.

## How bought in is leadership to your content marketing program?

348 out of 545 people answered this question.

### Mostly Bought in



### Extremely Bought in



### They're Pretty Indifferent



### Skeptical



### Don't see the point at all



“In my case, it’s mostly a question of the difficulty involved in getting eyeballs on our good content, especially since we’re in a niche industry.”





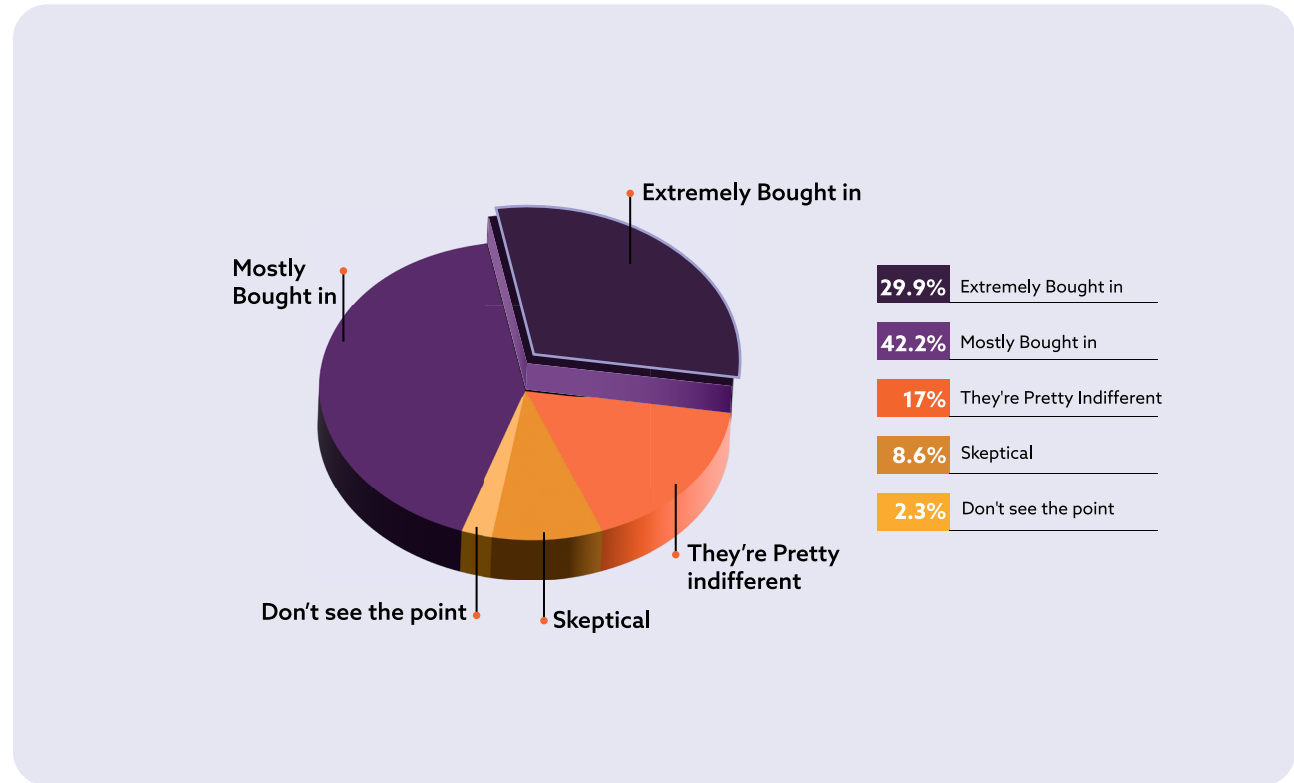
# Support With Strings Attached: Balancing Opportunity and Pressure

Leadership buy-in for the **“Extremely Bought In”** group brings both opportunity and challenge. On one hand, these content marketers benefit from strong support, with leadership fully backing content efforts. The focus often shifts toward **strategic alignment**—ensuring that content directly contributes to business goals and long-term growth.

However, this support comes with high expectations. Content teams still face significant pressures, including the need to **differentiate their content, optimize for performance, and meet growing demands.**

On a personal level, “extreme buy-in” also has a strong correlation on creative fulfillment, with 57.28% of respondents saying “yes” vs only 32.19% giving the same answer in the “mostly bought in” group.

This section explores how full leadership buy-in doesn’t eliminate challenges but reshapes them.



Content marketers in this group still navigate the pressures of proving value and delivering high-quality content, all while aligning their work with broader business objectives.

# Research Driven Success: The Impact of Knowing Your Audience

What immediately stands out as the difference between content marketers with “Extremely bought in” leadership is a marked difference in the frequency of audience research.

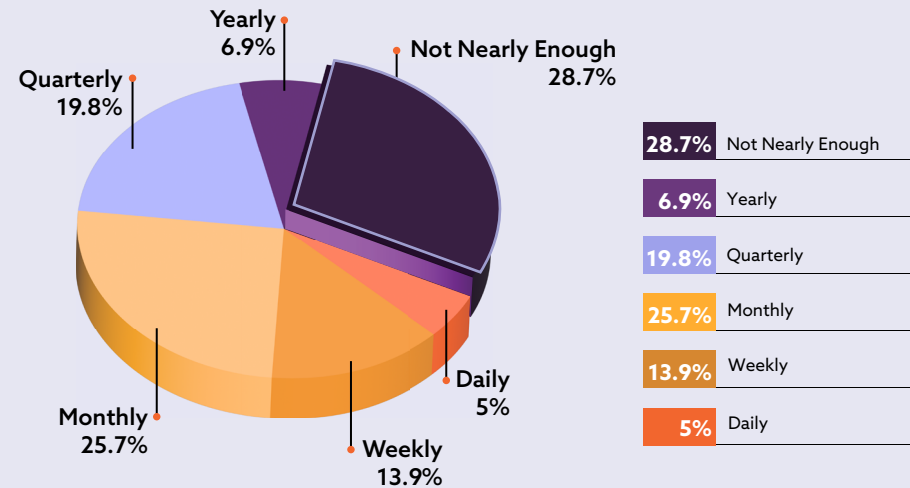
Only 29% of respondents report that they are “not nearly doing enough” research—the lowest percentage across all leadership segments. This suggests that the more audience research is conducted, the more convinced leadership becomes of content marketing’s value.

Teams that engage in regular research, with 26% doing so monthly and 20% quarterly, are likely better equipped to demonstrate

the impact of their efforts, helping to sustain leadership support.

While a smaller portion (5%) conducts research daily, and 14% do so weekly, the overall trend indicates that when audience research is done with consistency, leadership remains strongly invested in content strategy.

Audience Research Frequency Among “Extremely Bought In” Leadership



This shows a positive feedback loop: the more teams focus on understanding their audience, the easier it becomes to prove content marketing’s worth, which in turn reinforces leadership’s commitment.



# How Audience Research Frequency Correlates With Different In Buy-in

We see a significant difference in research frequency when compared to the “Mostly bought in” group.

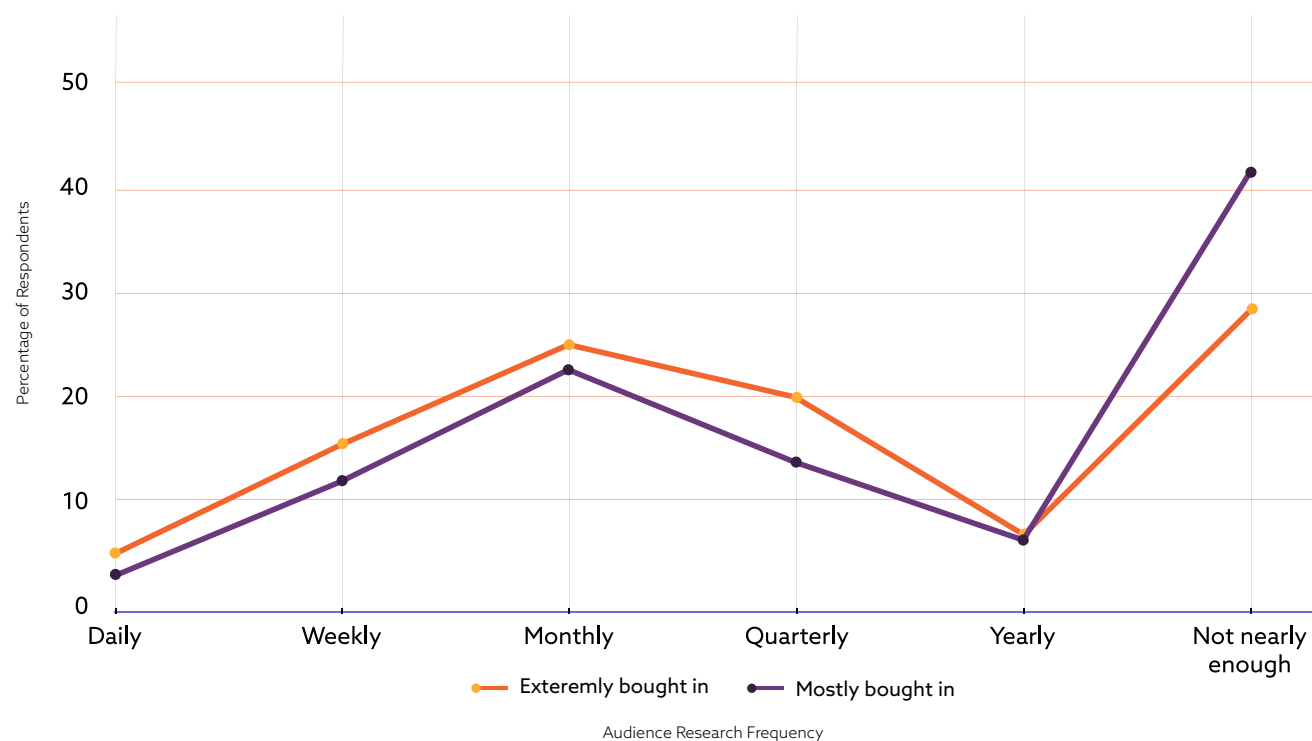
The most notable being the 13.6% gap between the respondents who answered doing their audience research “not nearly enough”.

The most pressing question we have when looking at this data is “who is leading who?”

As we’ve seen earlier, there can be institutional obstacles placed in front of content marketers that prevent them from conducting research.

Are content marketers in this group taking the research initiatives in their own hands, or are their leaders encouraging it because they understand how valuable it is to the creative process?

Audience Research by Leadership Buy-in



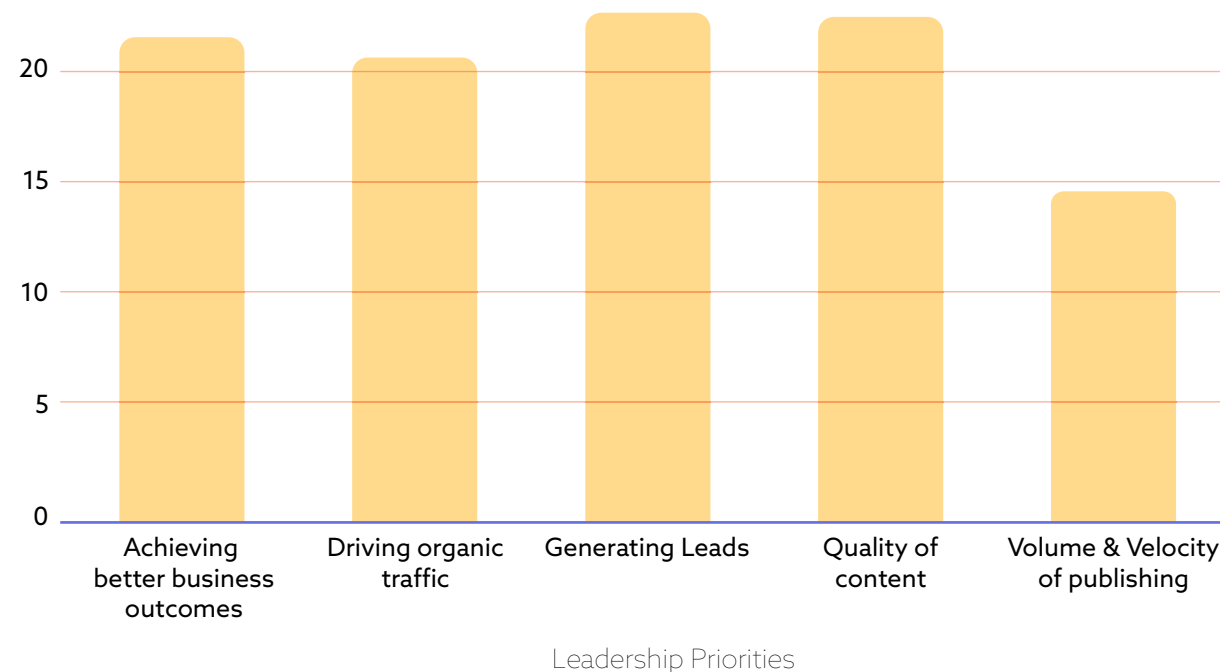
# Strategic Priorities: What sets: “Extremely Bought in” Leadership Apart

For the **“Extremely Bought In”** group, leadership priorities closely mirror those seen in the “Mostly Bought In” group, but with a few notable differences in emphasis.

Just like the “mostly bought in” segment, the top priorities are centered around Generating leads, Achieving better business outcomes, and Quality of content, all of which rank almost equally. This suggests that even with full leadership support, there is a strong focus on content’s ability to drive tangible business results.

However, what sets the “extremely bought in” group apart is a stronger commitment to Quality of content. While “mostly bought in” leadership prioritizes content’s impact on leads and outcomes, the “extremely bought in” group shows more balanced attention across Driving organic traffic and Quality of content, reflecting a broader understanding of content’s strategic role beyond short-term results.

Leadership Priorities for “Extremely Bought in”



In contrast to the “mostly bought in” group, Volume & velocity of publishing falls to the bottom of the priority list for “extremely bought in” leadership as well, but with an even greater gap. This reinforces the idea that for fully engaged leadership, it’s not about churning out content quickly, but about ensuring that the content is high-quality and strategically aligned.

# Core Content Challenges For Those With Extremely Bought In Leaders

Even in organizations with fully invested leadership, the same core challenges—lack of resources, difficulty accessing subject matter experts, and team alignment—remain pervasive.

However, what sets the “extremely bought-in” group apart is a noticeably lower concern around internal roadblocks like buy-in, workflow bottlenecks, and lack of strategy.

While the “Mostly bought-in” segment struggles more with resistance and operational friction, the “Extremely bought-in” group benefits from smoother processes and stronger strategic alignment.

This indicates that full leadership support does lead to clearer internal processes and collaboration, yet teams still face significant hurdles in areas that require more specialized resources or deeper expertise.

Content Marketing Aspects Selected by Respondents with “Extremely Bought in” Leadership



# How Buy-in Shapes Teamwork

This is reflected very clearly when we look at how in-house marketers in this category rate their collaboration efforts across other departments.

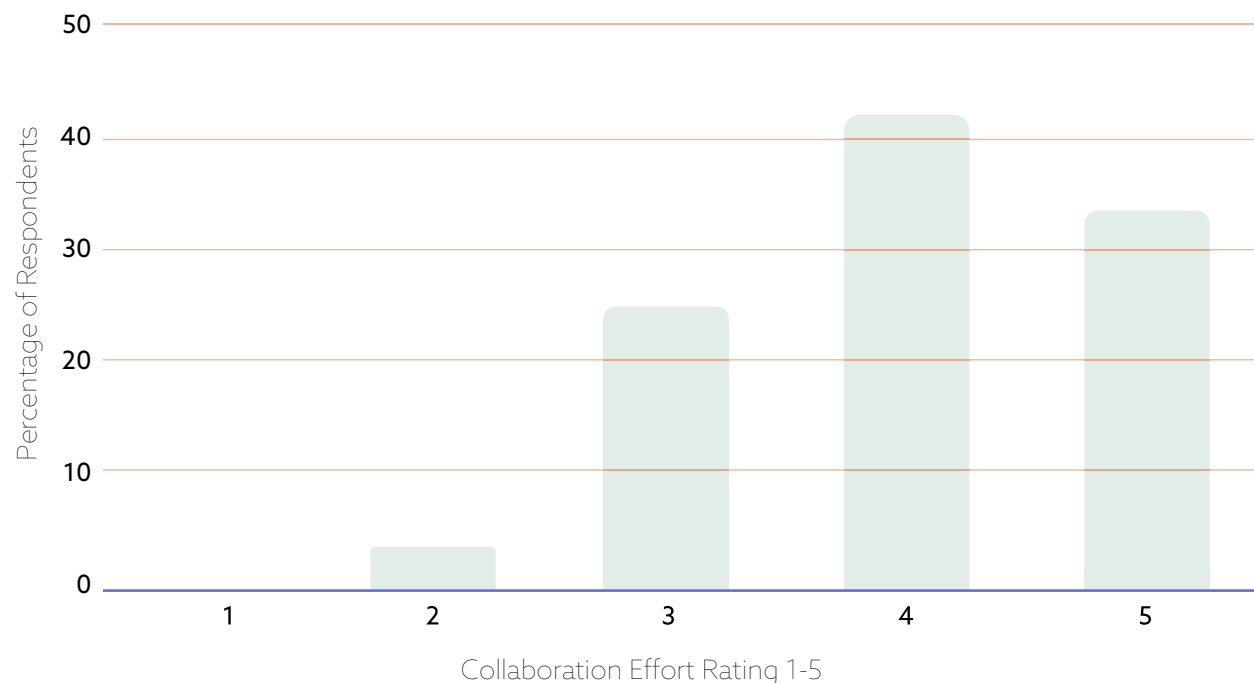
With leadership fully backing content efforts, these teams experience smoother integration with other departments, with **57%** of respondents rating their collaboration as highly effective (4 or 5 on a 5-point scale). However, full buy-in does not make collaboration effortless; it shapes expectations and adds pressure to maintain alignment.

Audience research may play a critical role in this dynamic, because these content marketers may make it easier for colleagues to understand their initiatives and the need for collaboration.

This alignment makes it easier to break down silos and work toward common business objectives.

Ultimately, audience research helps these marketers build credibility, which strengthens their ability to collaborate and secure leadership buy-in. It's a cycle: the more audience research they do, the more buy-in they get, which, in turn, enhances their collaborative efforts.

Collaboration Efforts Across Departments (Extremely Bought in Leadership)



# How Do Collaborative Efforts Compare?

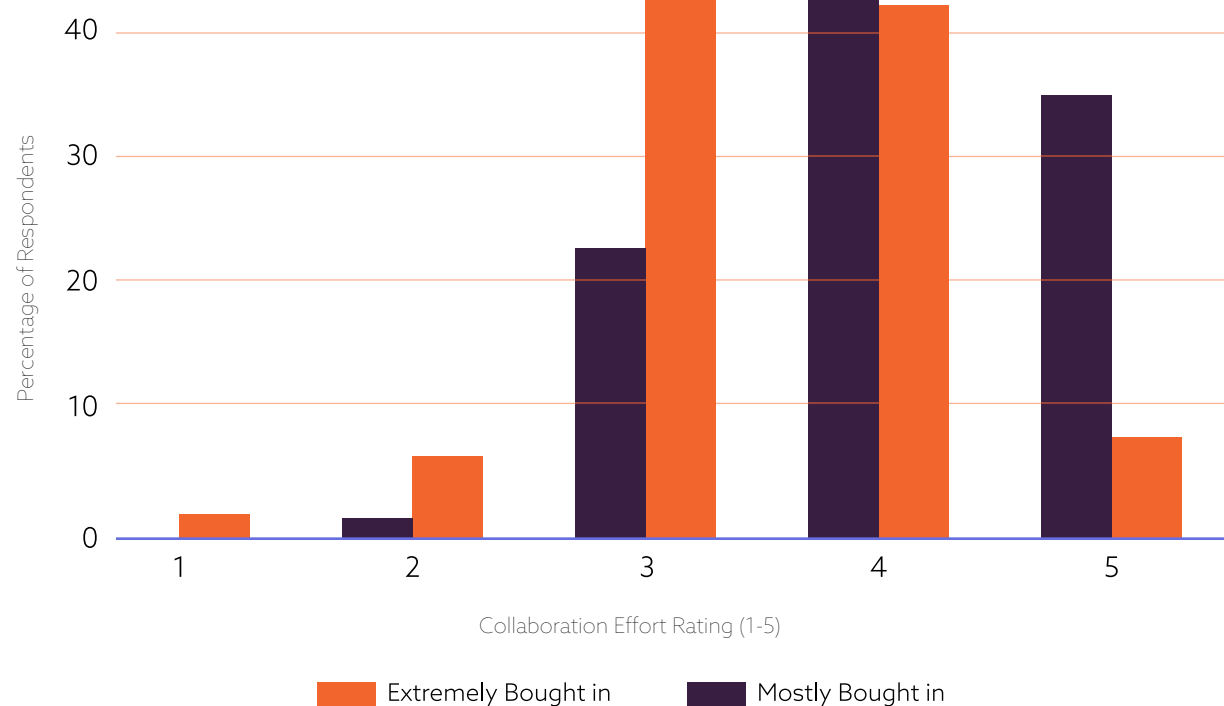
While both the **“Extremely bought in”** and **“Mostly bought in”** groups report similar ratings for collaboration at a level 4, there’s a striking difference at the highest level. Specifically, the “extremely bought in” group sees **25.37%** more respondents rating their collaboration as a 5, indicating far smoother teamwork and stronger alignment.

When we look at the mid to low range (ratings of 1, 2, and 3), the difference is even more pronounced.

Fewer people in the “Extremely bought in” group report struggling with collaboration, suggesting that leadership buy-in reduces friction between departments.

This supports our hypothesis that frequent audience research plays a critical role in gaining leadership buy-in and making cross-department collaboration more effective.

Comparison of Collaboration Efforts;  
“Extremely Bought in” vs “Mostly Bought in”



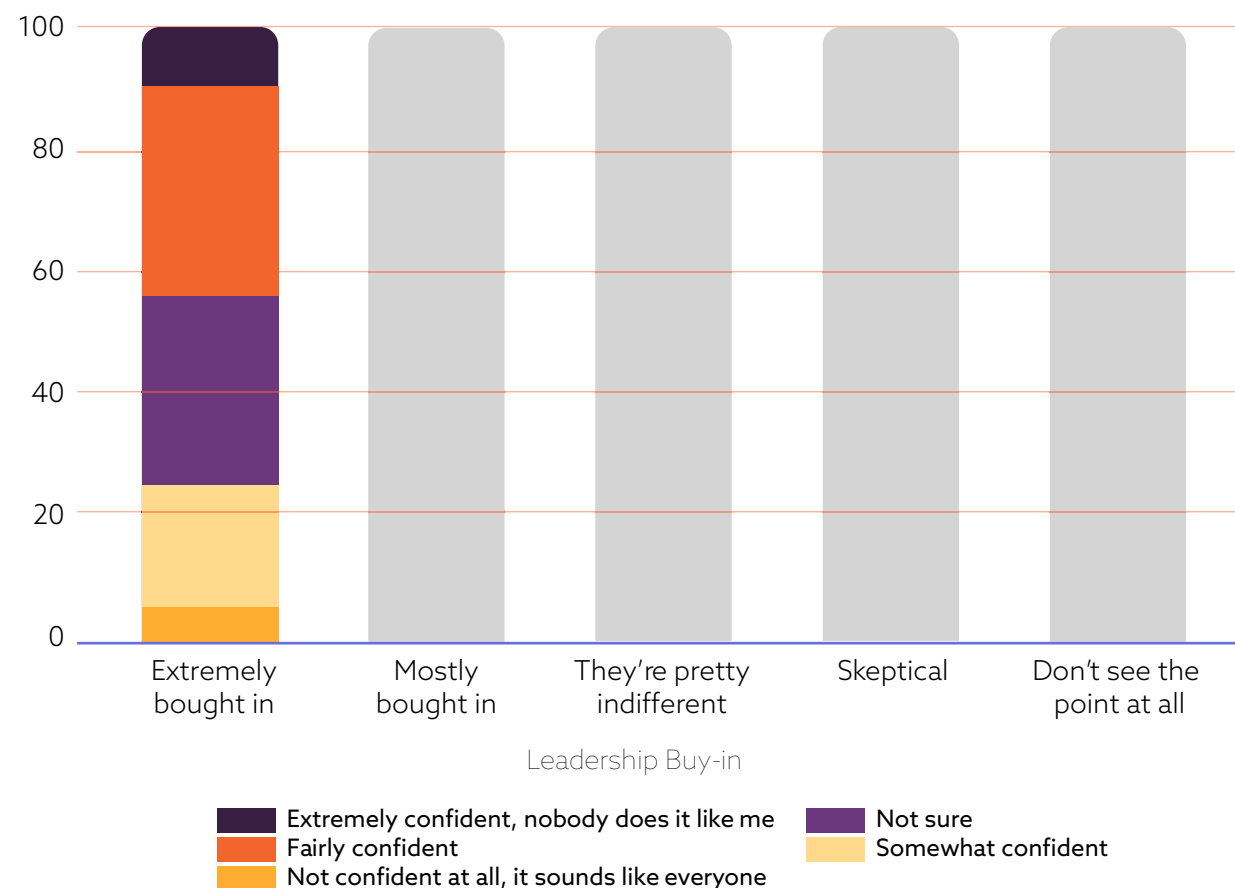
# Finding Confidence in Voice & Tone Content with Full Support

Content marketers in the **"Extremely bought in"** group also shows notably higher confidence in their voice and tone compared to other segments.

With full leadership support and more frequent audience research, it's likely these content marketers feel empowered to create content that aligns with business objectives, fostering a distinct brand voice.

This however could come with its own sets of challenges.

Confidence in Voice and Tone





# Shifting Leadership Demands and AI Expectations

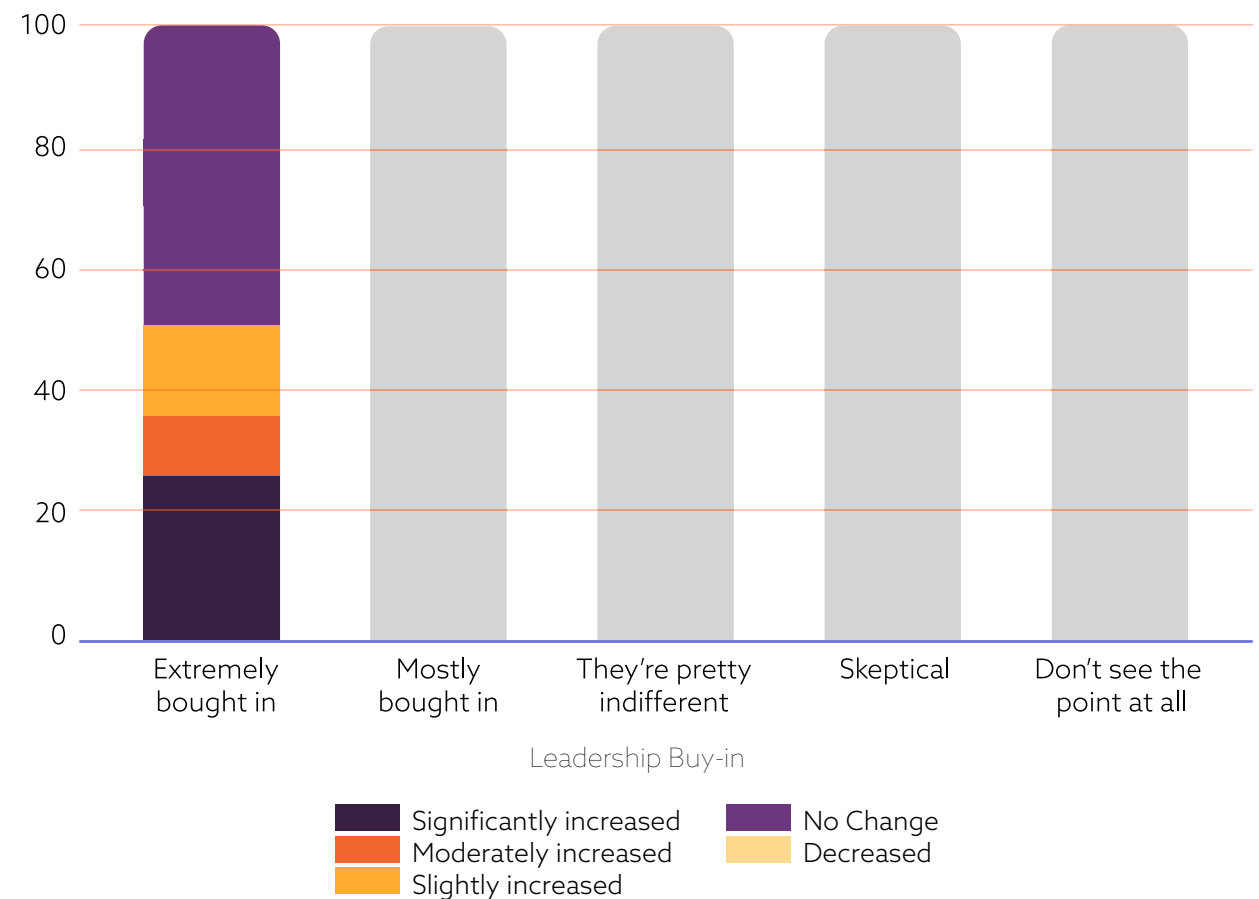
In the **extremely bought in** group, we see a very interesting story when it comes to leadership expectations on output due to AI.

On one hand, we see the largest group reporting 'No change' in their output expectations, suggesting some leaders want to let their team continue doing the work they're doing.

On the other hand, we also see the highest proportion of content marketers who report having "significantly increased" expectations of their output due to AI.

When we look into the reported benefits of AI, we start seeing a very clear difference in what this group values over all others.

Impact of AI on Output Expectations Based on Leadership Buy-in

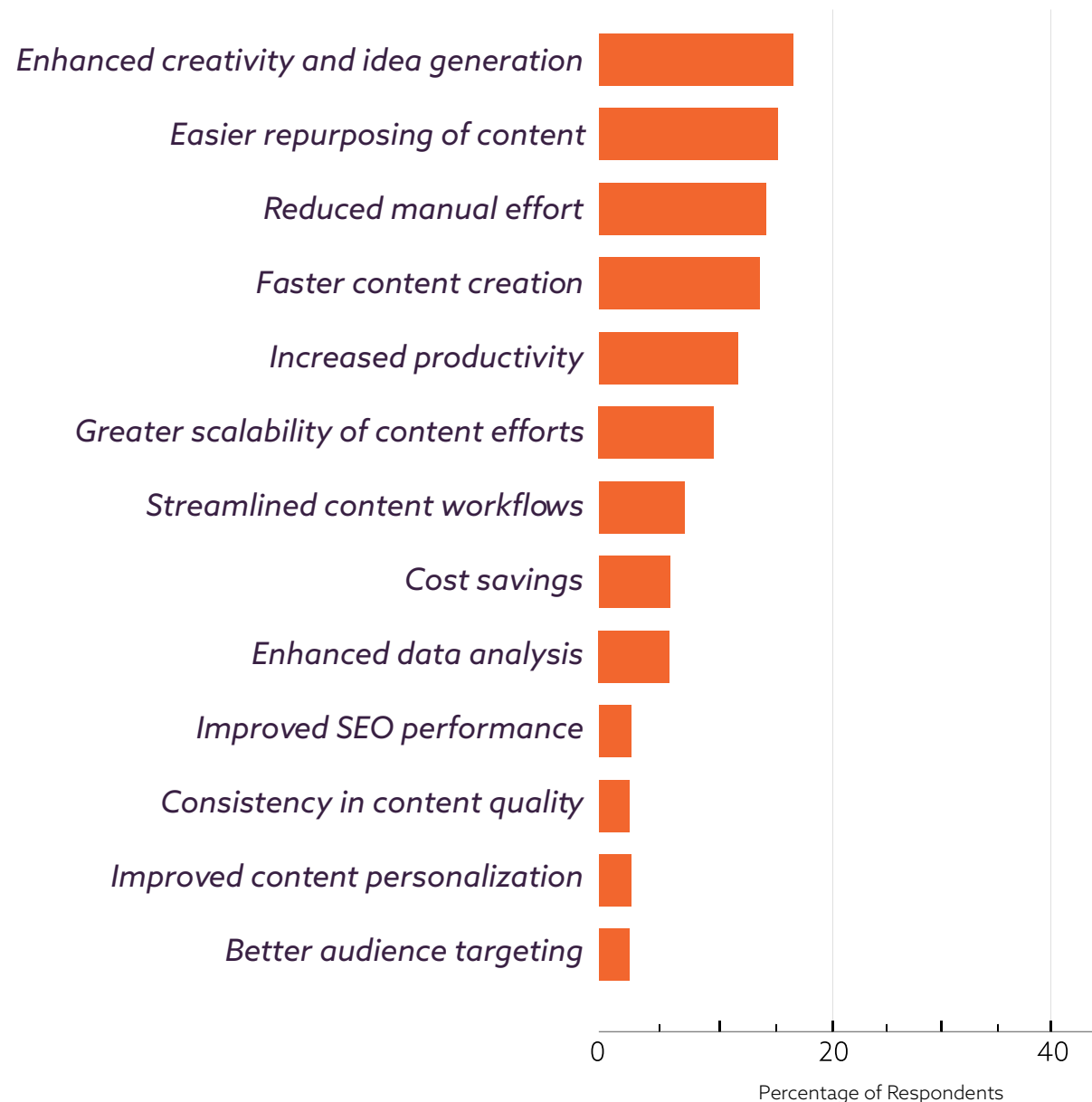


# Creativity and Productivity with AI

Compared to other segments that prioritize speed and productivity, content marketers with **“Extremely bought in”** leadership are the only group to elevate “enhanced creativity and idea generation” as a top priority, followed by **“easier repurposing of content.”** While this may suggest a greater freedom to focus on strategic, high-value work, it’s important to recognize that these expectations are still shaped by external leadership demands.

For these teams, the push for creativity and repurposing often comes with underlying pressure to justify leadership’s investment and consistently demonstrate content’s impact. Though AI is positioned as a way to unlock new possibilities, it’s also seen as a means to sustain high performance and ensure that every piece of content is working harder—ultimately serving a dual purpose of fostering innovation while still meeting leadership’s output expectations.

AI Benefits for Extremely Bought in



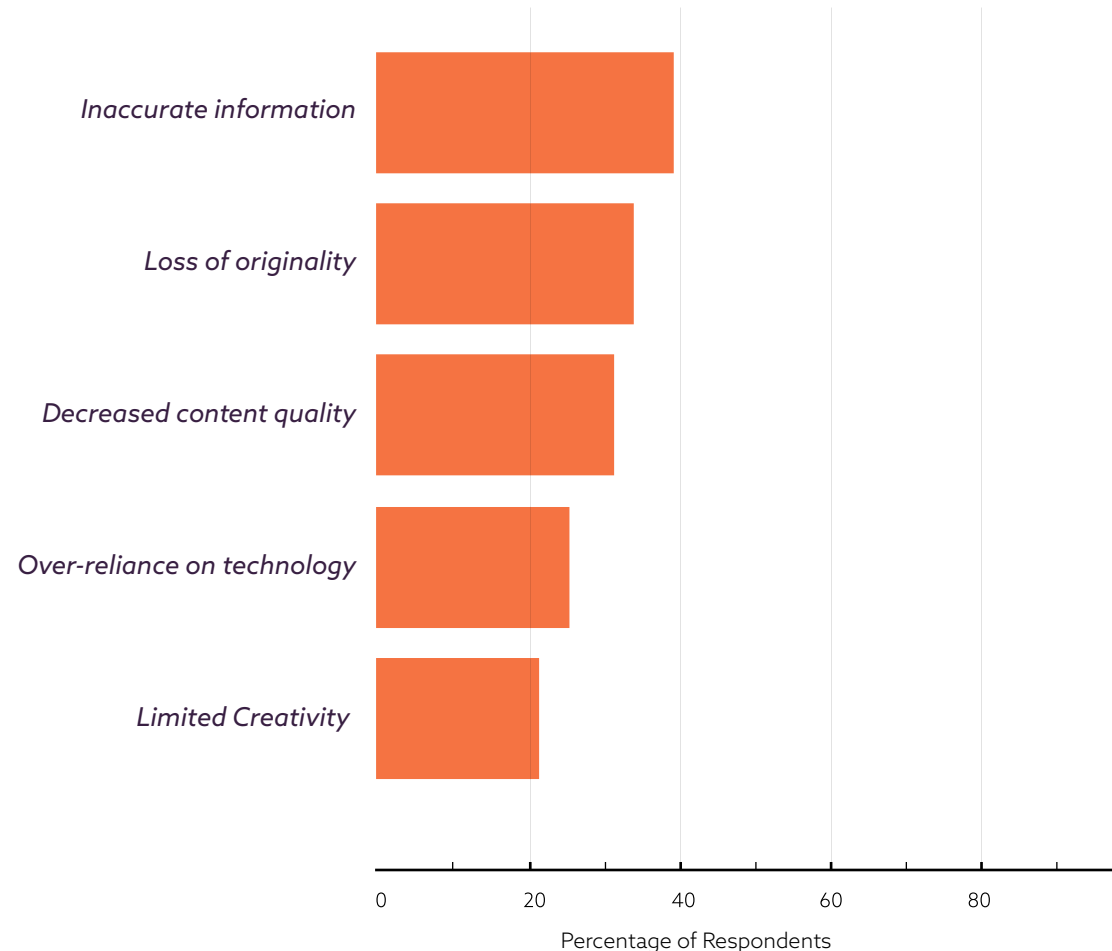
# AI Drawbacks for Content Marketers With “Extremely Bought In” Leadership

For content marketers working under “**Extremely bought in**” leadership, AI is widely embraced, but there are still notable concerns about its potential drawbacks. The most significant issue reported is **inaccurate information**, reflecting worries that AI could introduce errors or inconsistencies in content that require careful oversight. Interestingly, “loss of originality” shows up in the second position compared to the “Mostly bought in” segment, and “decreased content quality” and “limited creativity” are of less concern.

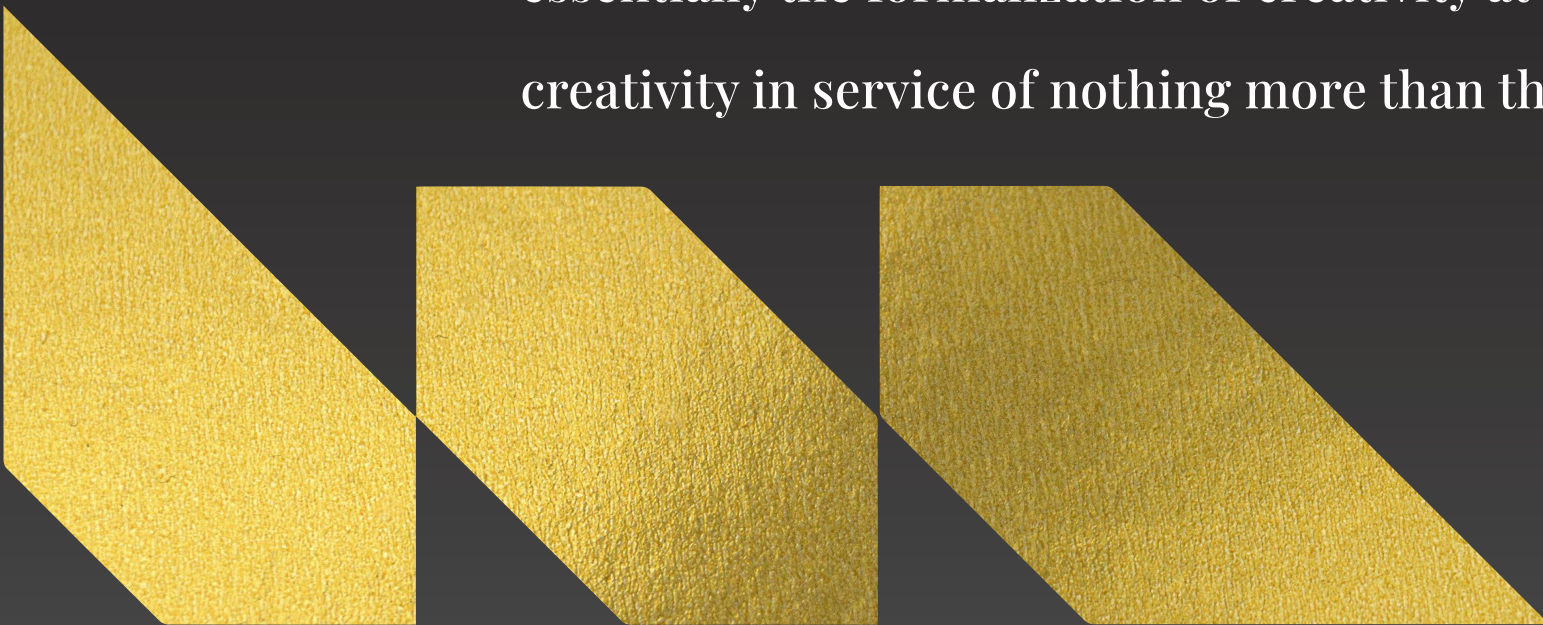
When we consider the greater proportion of content marketers who are comfortable with the recognizability of their content on voice and tone, it’s unsurprising challenges aren’t as pronounced as those whose leadership isn’t quite as supportive.

That said, there is still plenty of sentiment around AI changing leadership’s perceptions and commoditizing content, so while it’s not explicitly listed as a drawback in this question, perhaps the biggest downside of AI is how it’s changing perceptions of leaders.

AI Drawbacks for “Extremely Bought In”



“Feels like in 5 years, all those writing and storytelling skills you spent years honing will be unused and you’ll be nothing more than a prompt engineer peddling AI generated nonsense that is either overly idealistic or underwhelmingly vague. It’s essentially the formalization of creativity at the cost of human creativity in service of nothing more than the bottom line.”



# Same Creation Challenges For Different Reasons?

1. Creating the right content for our audience
2. Differentiating content
3. Creating "Quality" content
4. Creating enough to keep up with internal demand
5. Creating content consistently
6. Creating content that requires technical skills
7. Creating enough content to keep up with external demand
8. Optimizing for search
9. Unwillingness to try new Ideas

Like content marketers with "Mostly bought in" leaders, the top challenges for this group are related to creating unique, high-quality content for their audience.

Also like their "Mostly bought in" counterpart, "creating enough content to keep up with internal demand" and "creating content consistently" shows up in the fourth position, but in this case, the context clues from other data points may paint a different picture as to why this may be listed as challenges.

For instance, given that overall collaboration efforts are rated higher, and concerns are more strategic than production oriented, it could be that "keeping up with internal demand" for some of these content marketers is less about being viewed as a service org and more as a partner.

On the other hand, there is sentiment around growing pressure to "to leverage AI to do more, faster," meaning that just because leadership is "extremely bought in" doesn't mean these content marketers aren't facing the same pressures as everyone else.

No matter the context, the truth remains that the average team size is still between 1 and 5 people and demands to increase output are still challenging, no matter how bought in leadership is.



# How Research Drives Strategic Alignment

The “**Extremely bought in**” group benefits significantly from leadership’s support, which shapes their approach to content strategy, research, and collaboration. One of the most compelling findings is the clear link between consistent audience research and strong leadership buy-in. Teams that invest in regular research are not only better equipped to showcase content’s impact but also build a positive feedback loop that strengthens leadership commitment. To be clear, this group does face many of the same challenges, however alignment helps content teams move beyond the operational, achieving smoother cross-departmental collaboration and more impactful strategic outcomes.

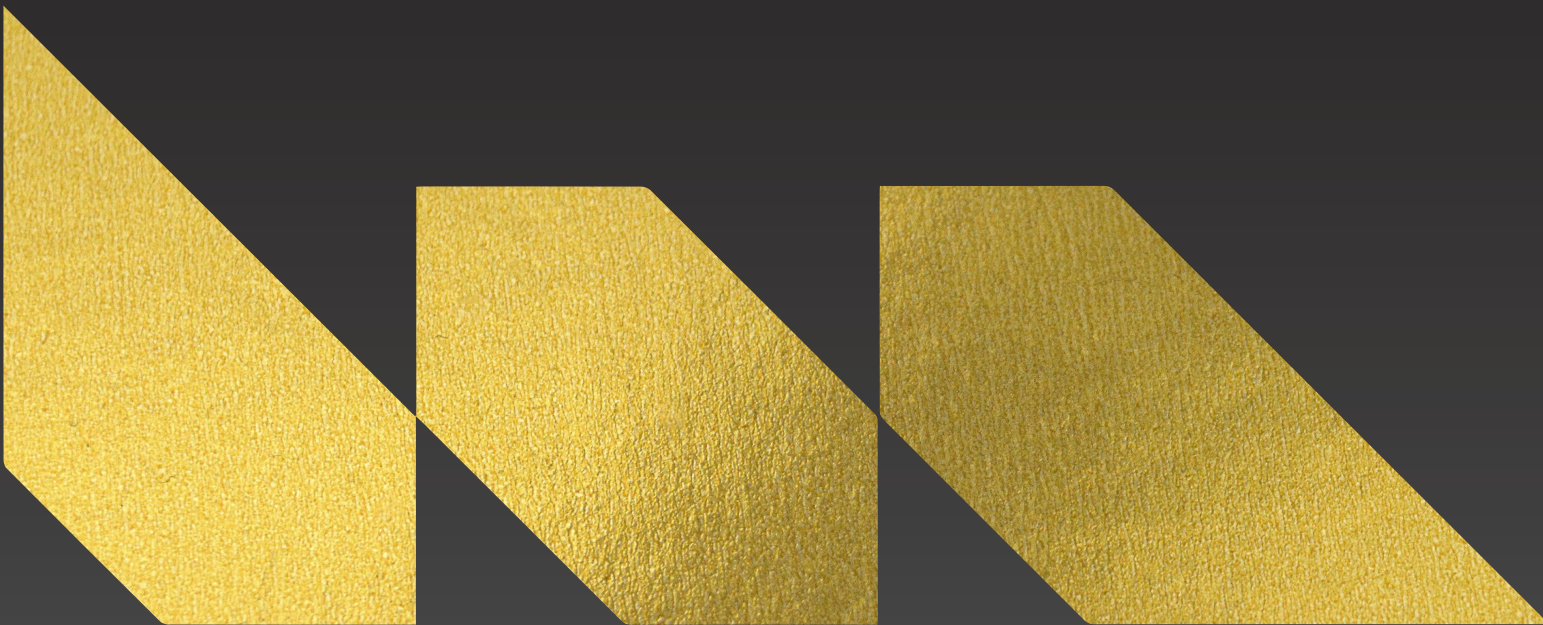
Research frequency stands out as the clearest differentiator for this group. While buy-in supports creativity and strategy, it’s the research that continuously demonstrates content’s value and keeps leadership invested in long-term growth.

However, while AI is viewed as a creative enabler, it also raises concerns around maintaining originality and addressing shifting leadership expectations on output. As the role of AI expands, research will be the important exercise in validating the strategic purpose and maintaining the level of buy-in these marketers have cultivated.

Ultimately, this segment shows that full leadership support, leads to more refined priorities, smoother alignment, and a better understanding of content’s strategic role—yet it doesn’t completely eliminate the pressure to deliver high-quality, differentiated content in an increasingly AI-driven landscape.



# Indifferent



# How Does “Indifferent” Leadership Impact Content Teams?

**Themes:** Indifference, Personal Frustrations, Lack of Recognition

**Key Words:** : “Leadership,” “Value,” “Lack,” “Team,” “Recognition”

**Elaboration:**

**Indifference:** With leadership showing indifference, marketers feel a significant lack of support. This indifference leads to feelings of being undervalued and unrecognized, which heavily contributes to their discontent.

**Personal Frustrations:** Many marketers express personal frustrations about their roles, feeling stuck or unable to advance due to leadership’s lack of interest. They also feel that their contributions aren’t acknowledged or appreciated.

**Lack of Recognition:** The absence of recognition from leadership exacerbates the feeling that content marketing is a low-priority function within the company. This leads to a lack of motivation and drive among marketers in this group.

## How bought in is leadership to your content marketing program?

348 out of 545 people answered this question.

### Mostly Bought in



### Extremely Bought in



### They're Pretty Indifferent



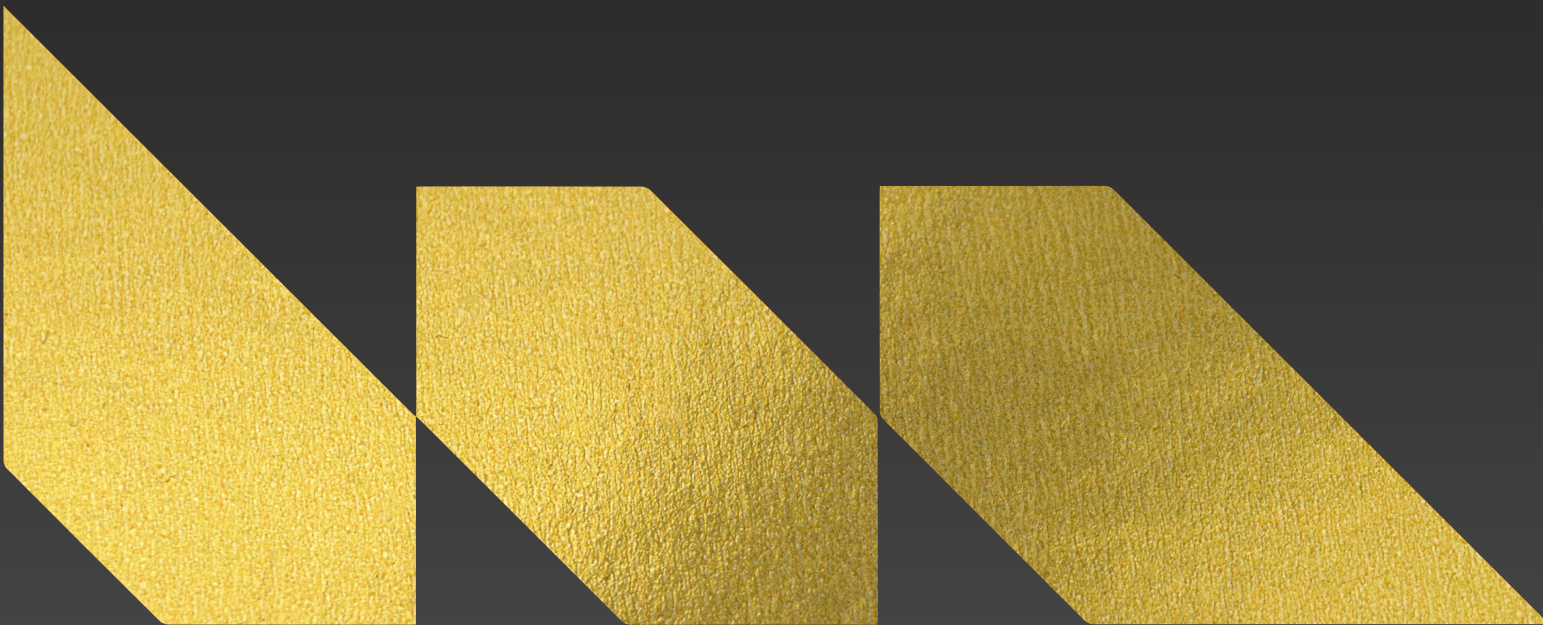
### Skeptical



### Don't see the point at all



“Outdated best practices, anxiety about experimentation, fear of AI (or the reverse – just throwing it all into ChatGPT) and no real organizational definition of what the content marketing function is.



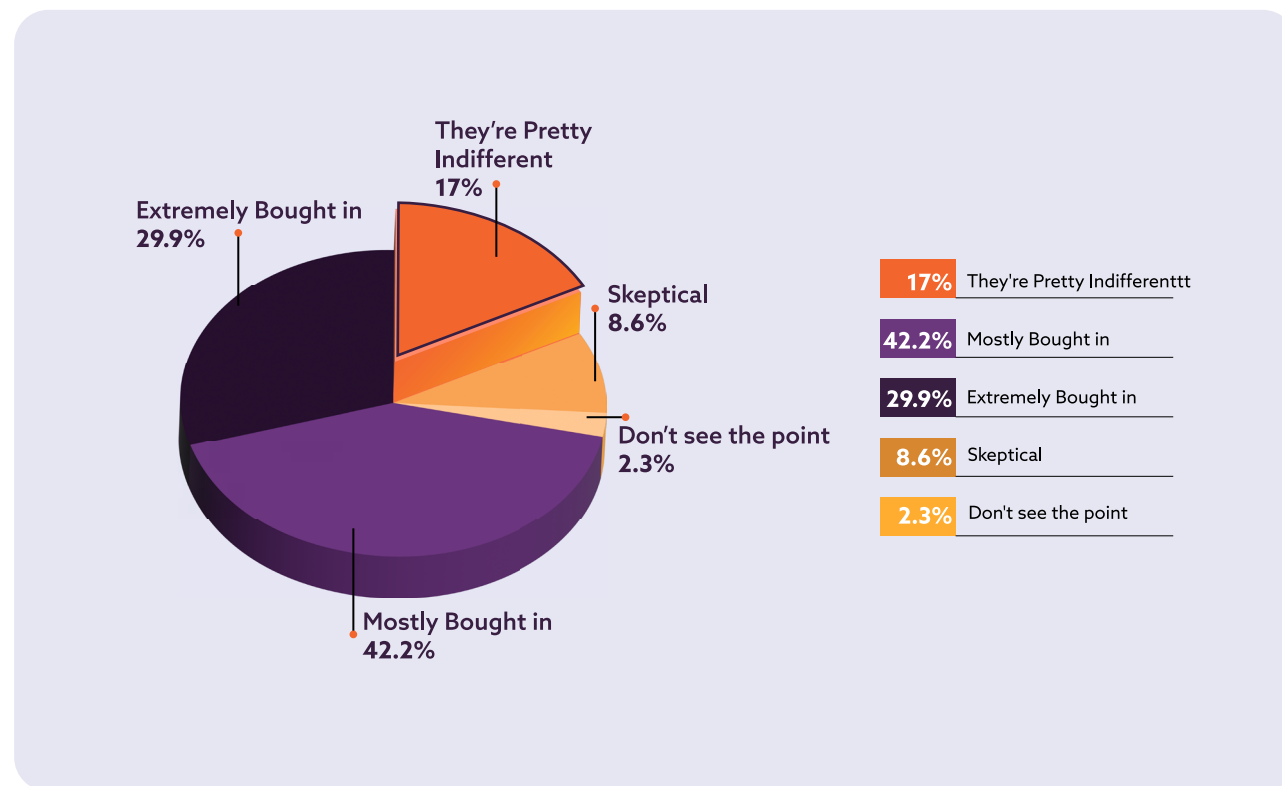
# A Misalignment on How to Achieve Success

**“Indifferent” leaders** really starts to show a fundamental disconnect between content marketers and leadership.

Where “mostly bought in” leaders at least see the point – even if it is about fitting within their definition of content marketing – “Indifferent” leaders really only care about results, and sometimes are using outdated assumptions of how to achieve success.

This group of content marketers is where we start to see an increase in mentions of AI and ChatGPT and the sentiment that leadership really begins to believe AI is capable of doing the content marketer’s job.

Additionally, we start to see “lack of strategy,” and “aligning content as the buyer’s journey,” rising as a non-creation challenge, with some stating there isn’t a broader marketing strategy that content should be fitting into.



What this amounts to for many content marketers is a narrow focus on achieving sales goals with unrealistic KPIs, an expectation to do it on few resources, a sense of a lack of appreciation for the work or strategic value content marketers could bring to the table.



# Chasing Results Without Commitment

For the **“Indifferent”** leadership group, the priorities around content marketing reveal a scattered and fragmented approach, especially when compared to other segments. While “Achieving better business outcomes” and “Generating leads” are still seen as important, their focus is sporadic and lacks a unified strategy.

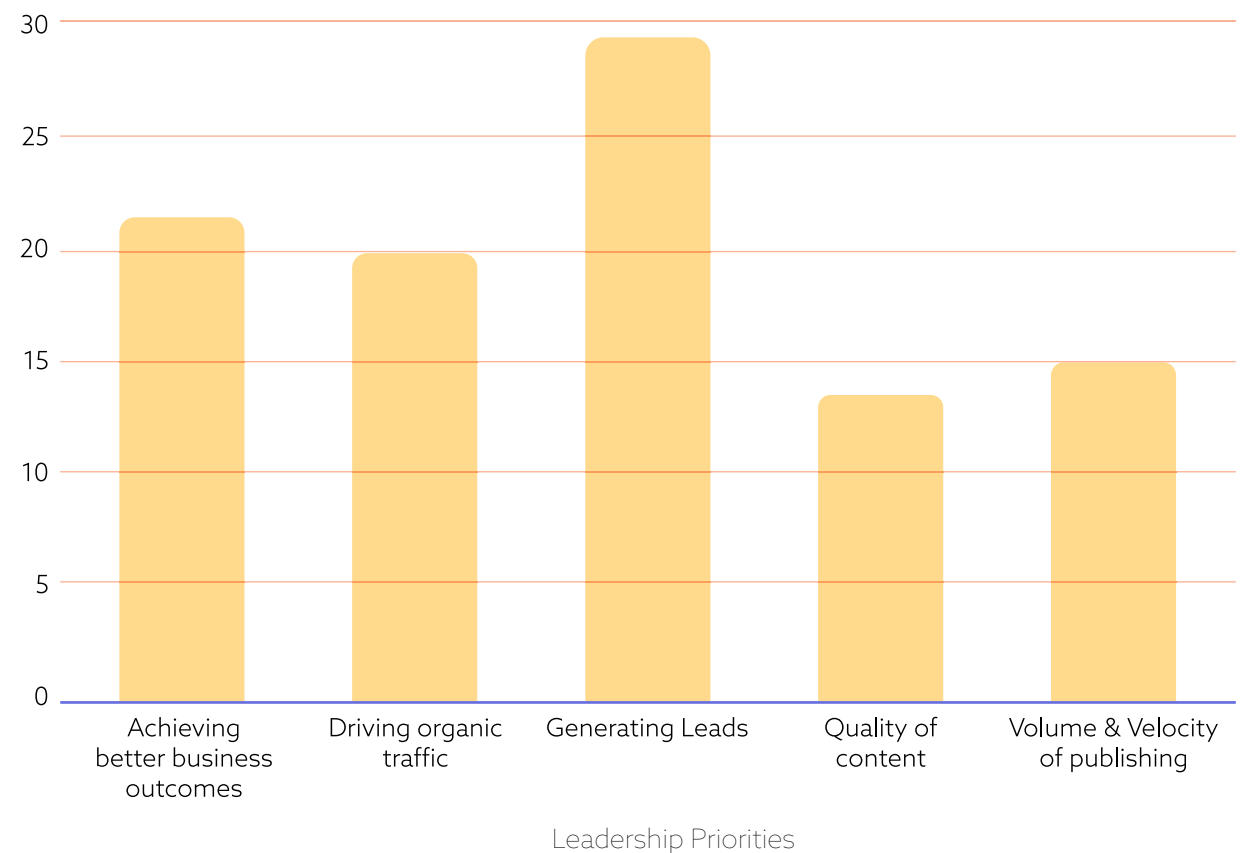
This suggests that leadership may recognize the potential of content, but without a strong direction, their efforts are inconsistent and disconnected from broader business goals.

Instead, there’s a notable emphasis on tactical metrics like “Driving organic traffic” and “Volume & velocity of publishing”—areas that rank close to the top priorities. This reflects a more transactional view of content, where leadership may be more interested in short-term gains like web traffic or sheer output rather than cultivating long-term impact.

It’s a mindset rooted in quantity over quality, and it’s reflected in how “Quality of content” is deprioritized, ranking the lowest in this segment compared to others.

This reveals a troubling disconnect: while content is being created, it’s often misaligned with audience needs and brand standards.

Leadership Priorities for “They’re pretty indifferent”



*“We’re asked to produce more content quickly, without much attention to whether it aligns with our audience’s needs.”*

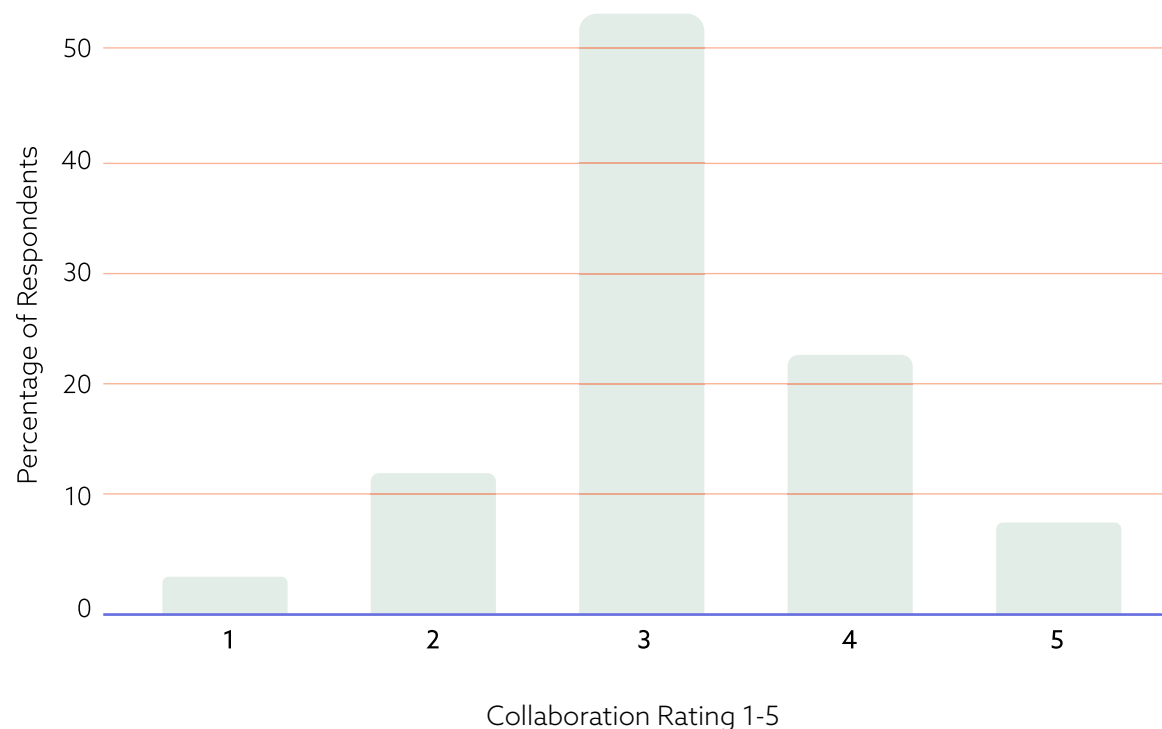
# Silos and Struggles in Cross-Team Collaboration

This misalignment extends beyond content itself, spilling over into how teams work together—or, rather, how they struggle to.

Collaboration across departments is weak and inconsistent, with most respondents rating it at a 2 or 3 out of 5. While there's some level of cooperation, it lacks the engagement needed to be effective. Without clear direction or prioritization from leadership, content teams find it difficult to secure support from other parts of the organization, leaving them isolated and their workflows fragmented.

This lack of integration has a ripple effect: when content efforts operate in isolation, they fail to drive the cohesive strategies needed to achieve meaningful business outcomes. In summary, the "Indifferent" group faces both strategic and operational gaps—fragmented priorities lead to fragmented teams. Until leadership steps up with a clearer vision and stronger support, content marketing will remain a volume game, rather than a strategic driver of growth.

Collaboration Efforts (Indifferent Leadership)





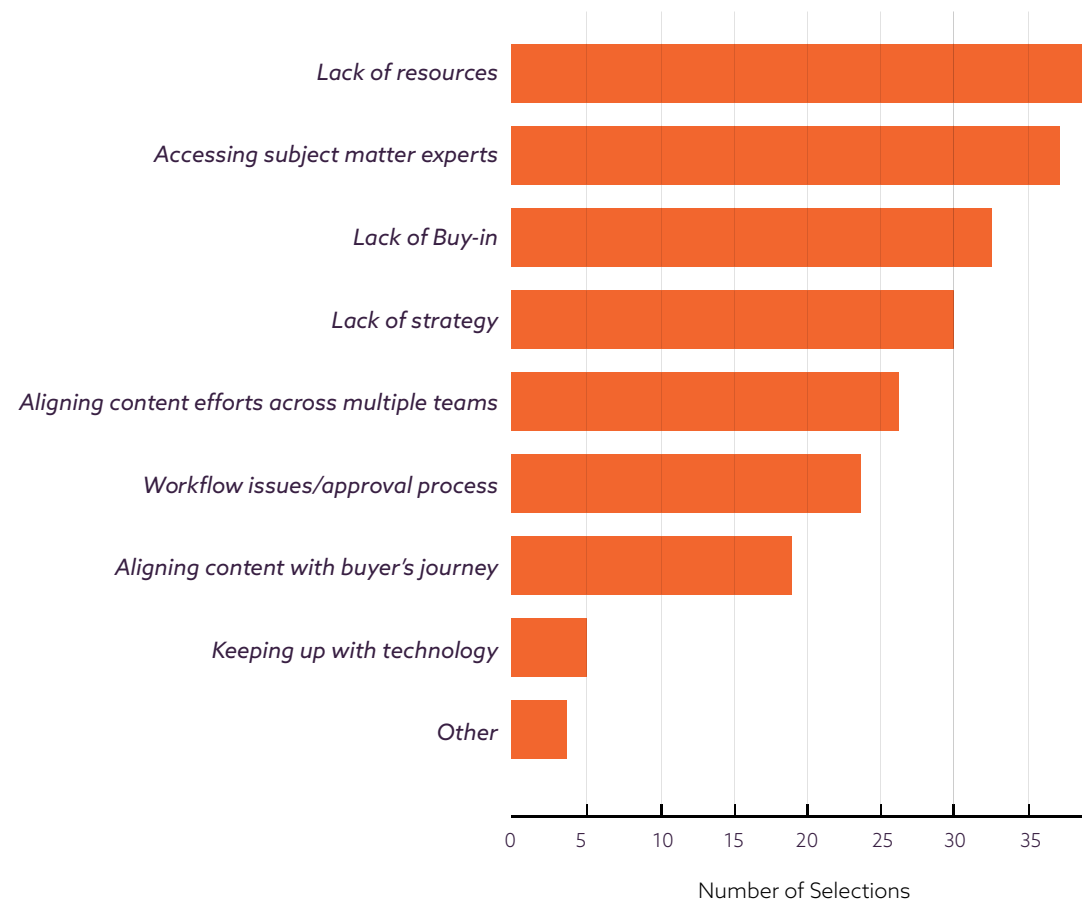
# Non-Creation Issues: Locked Out of Key Conversations

The scattered priorities and weak collaboration within the **"Indifferent"** leadership segment fundamentally disrupts how content teams operate on a day-to-day basis, leading to significant non-creation challenges that hamper their ability to deliver meaningful results.

Key issues like **"lack of strategy," "difficulty accessing subject matter experts,"** and **"misaligned content efforts across teams"** are not isolated pain points—they are symptoms of a deeper leadership disengagement. Because leadership doesn't prioritize strategic alignment, content marketers are left to navigate these obstacles largely on their own. This makes it difficult for teams to craft content that not only meets business goals but also resonates with their audience.

The result? Inefficient workflows, frustrating approval processes, and a constant struggle to gain the support they need. Teams end up operating in silos, disconnected from the expertise and resources that could elevate their work. Without a strong strategic foundation from leadership, they're left reacting to immediate demands rather than building content that supports long-term objectives.

They're Pretty Indifferent- Content Marketing Aspects Selected



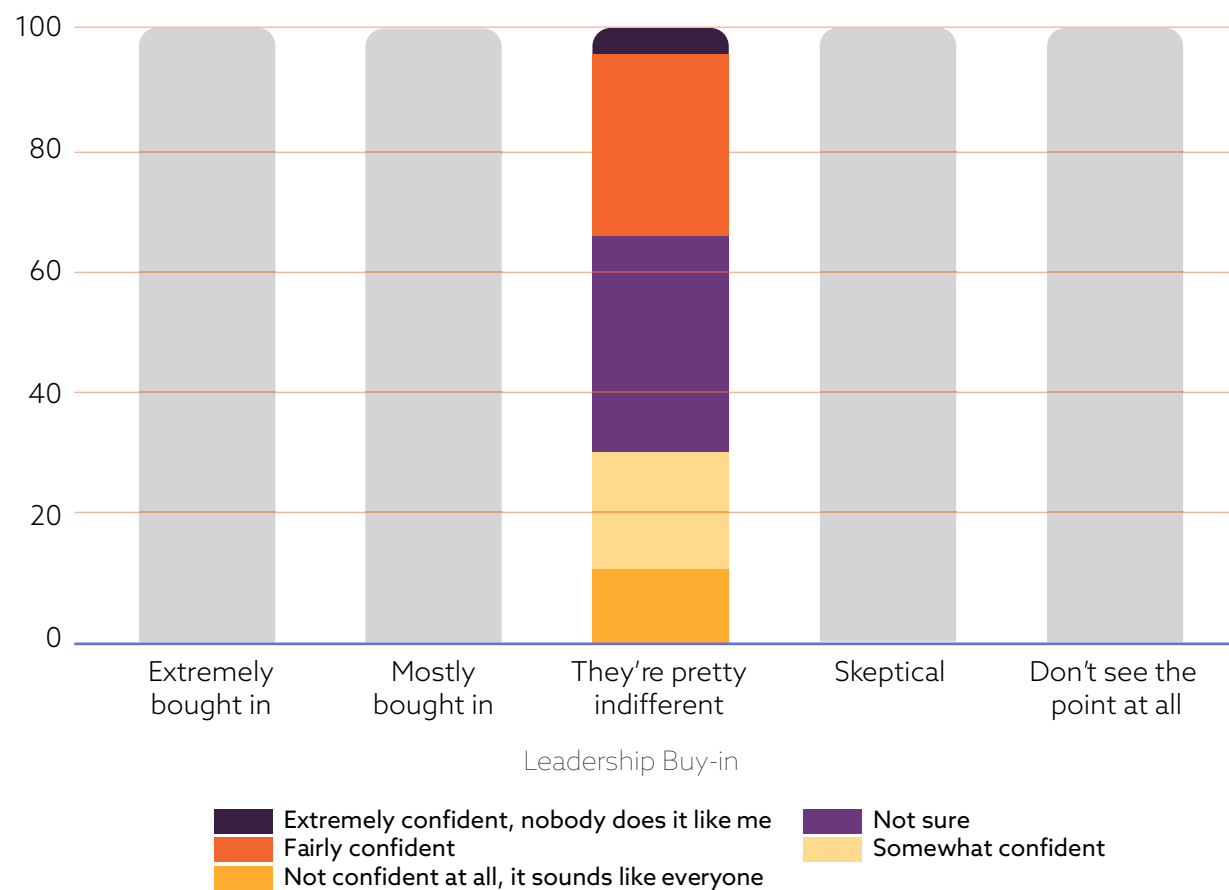
# Finding Voice Without Leadership

Interestingly though, more content marketers in this group report being “Fairly confident” and fewer **“Not confident at all”** in their voice and tone over their “mostly bought in” counterparts.

Without leadership buy-in, some content marketers may be taking matters into their own hands and putting their unique spin on it, though this is totally speculation on our part.

Overall though, the **“Indifferent”** group reflects a leadership style that offers little guidance or emphasis on content marketing, leaving the majority of content teams unsure in their ability to craft a strong and recognizable voice.

Confidence in Voice and Tone



# Quantity Over Quality or a Misguided Mandate?

1. Not enough resources
2. Creating enough to keep up with internal demand
3. Creating the right content for our audience
4. Differentiating content
5. Unwillingness to try new ideas
6. Creating "Quality" content
7. Creating content consistently
8. Optimizing for search
9. Creating content that requires technical skills

For the first time in the report, we start seeing **"creating enough content to keep up with internal demand"** show up as an issue outside **"not enough resources."**

This, combined with the middle placement of **"creating 'Quality' content"** and greater emphasis of "faster content creation" for AI benefits, shows a higher priority on quantity over quality, but could also be symptomatic of content marketers themselves subscribing to outdated ideologies.

Further, **"creating the right content for our audience"** being placed higher on the list than their counterparts with more bought in leaders may take on new meaning when we look at the other data, such as audience research frequency, which we'll cover later.

This is where we also start to question where the source of leadership's indifference; is it inherent, or could it be justified?

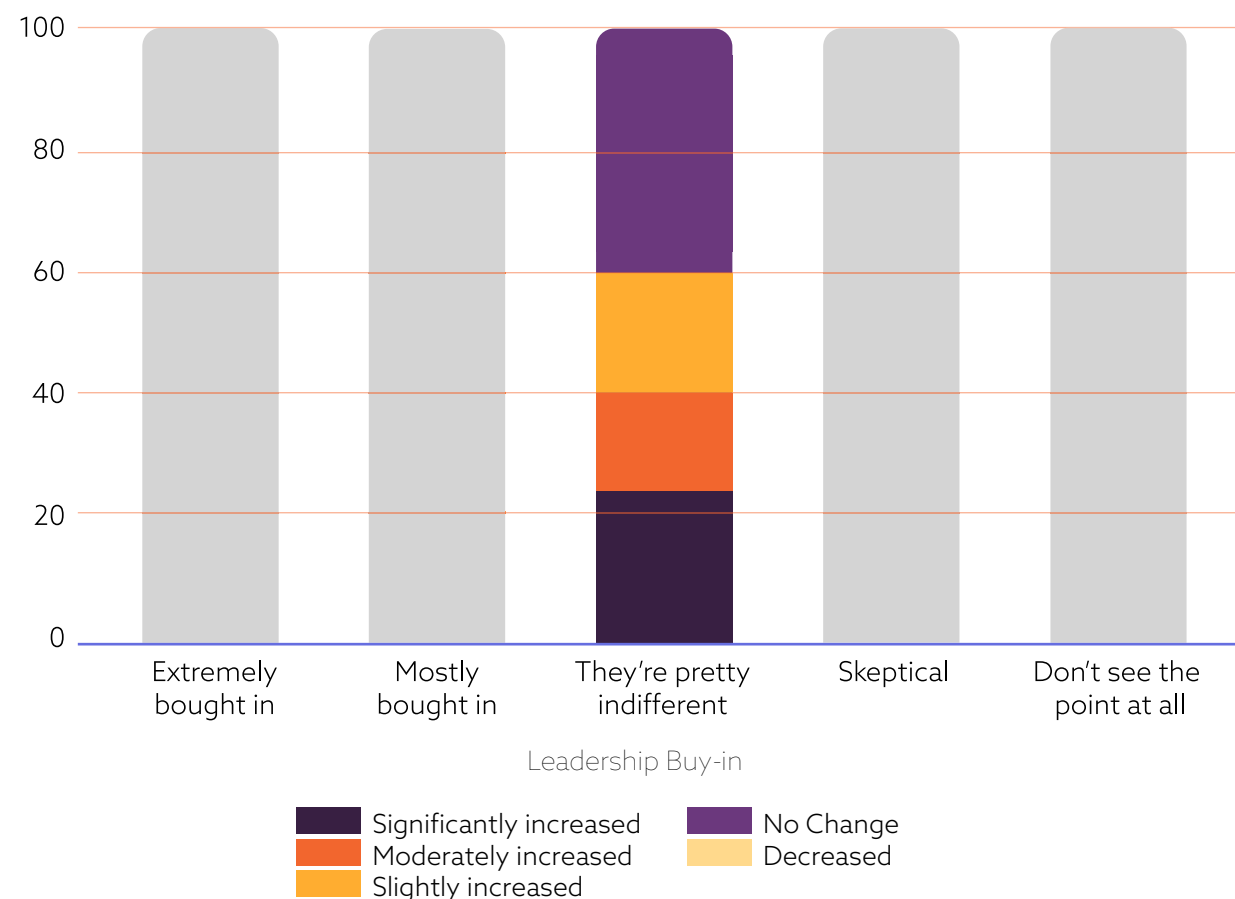
# AI's Impact on Output: A Tactical Tool or Strategic Asset?

Given what we know about **Indifferent leadership**, this data reveals an interesting dynamic between leadership's perception of AI and its impact on content output expectations.

The fact that **60% of respondents** report an increase in output expectations suggests that even in environments where leadership is not fully invested in content marketing, they still expect AI to drive more content production.

However, the **20%** reporting a **significant increase** is lower than what we might expect from more engaged leadership groups. This likely reflects leadership's lack of understanding of AI's broader strategic potential—while they see AI as a tool to increase volume, they don't necessarily push it to its full capability, focusing more on tactical gains rather than strategic benefits.

Impact of AI on Output Expectations Based on Leadership Buy-in

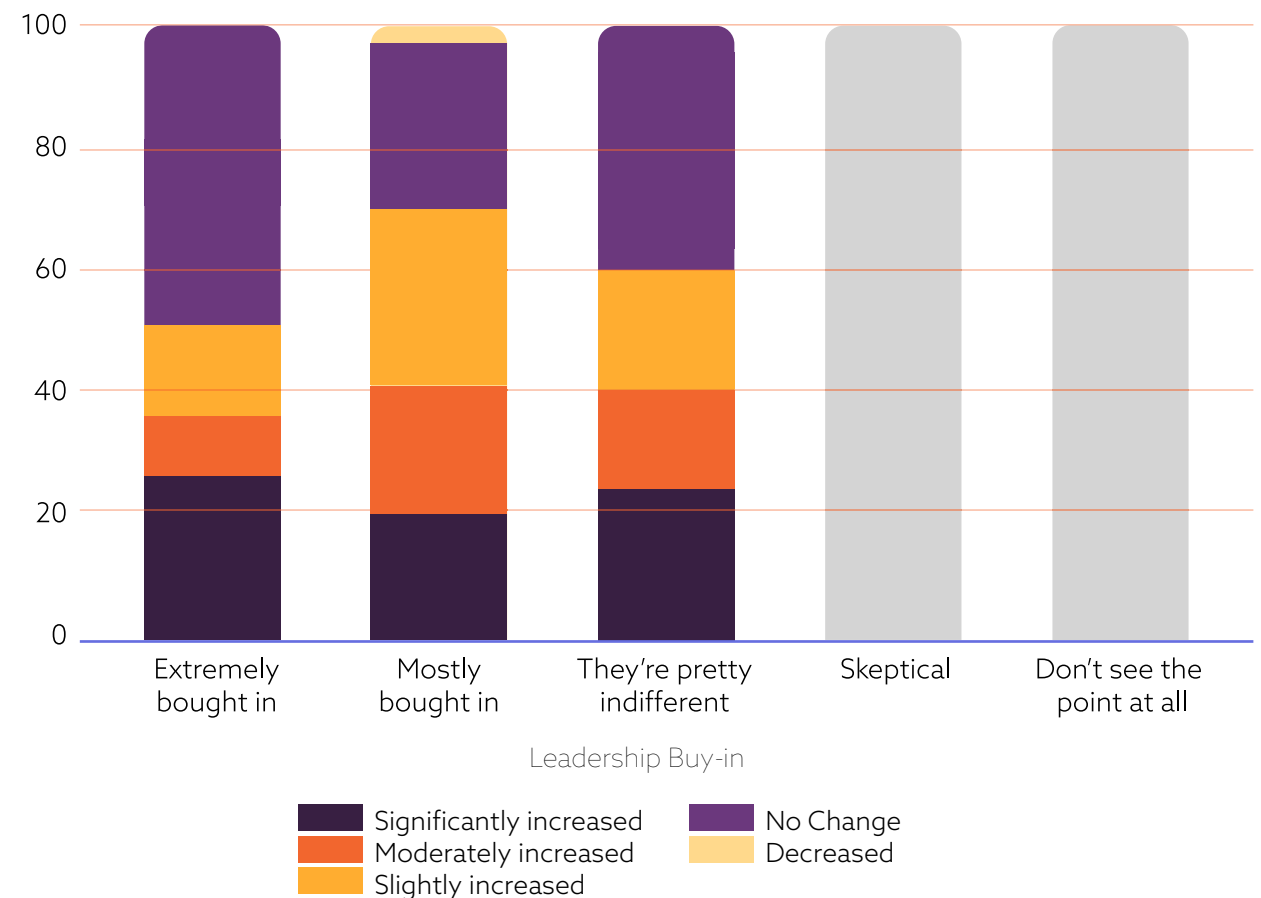


# AI's Impact on Output: A Tactical Tool or Strategic Asset?

This further supports our hypothesis of leadership operating under an outdated idea of content marketing by prioritizing volume over quantity, but also, given the similarities between **"Indifferent"** and **"Mostly bought in"** leadership, this also leads us to form an additional hypothesis.

**"Extremely bought in"** leadership has increased output while expectations to lead the way for their industries, **"Indifferent"** leaders are increasing expectations so they can keep up.

When taking the qualitative data into consideration, this could also highlight how leadership's misaligned focus on volume leads to AI being treated as a "quick fix" rather than a transformative tool.



# AI Benefits: Operational Efficiency Over Strategic Gains

The most prominent advantages are **“faster content creation”** and **“reduced manual effort”**, suggesting that even in environments where leadership isn’t fully engaged, AI is recognized for its ability to streamline repetitive tasks and speed up production.

However, compared to more supportive leadership segments, there’s less emphasis on AI’s potential to enhance creativity or scale content efforts.

Marketers in this group seem to use AI more as a tool for improving day-to-day operational efficiency rather than pushing strategic innovation. Content repurposing and improved workflows are less prioritized, indicating that without strong leadership buy-in, AI’s full potential remains underutilized.

AI Benefits for Indifferent



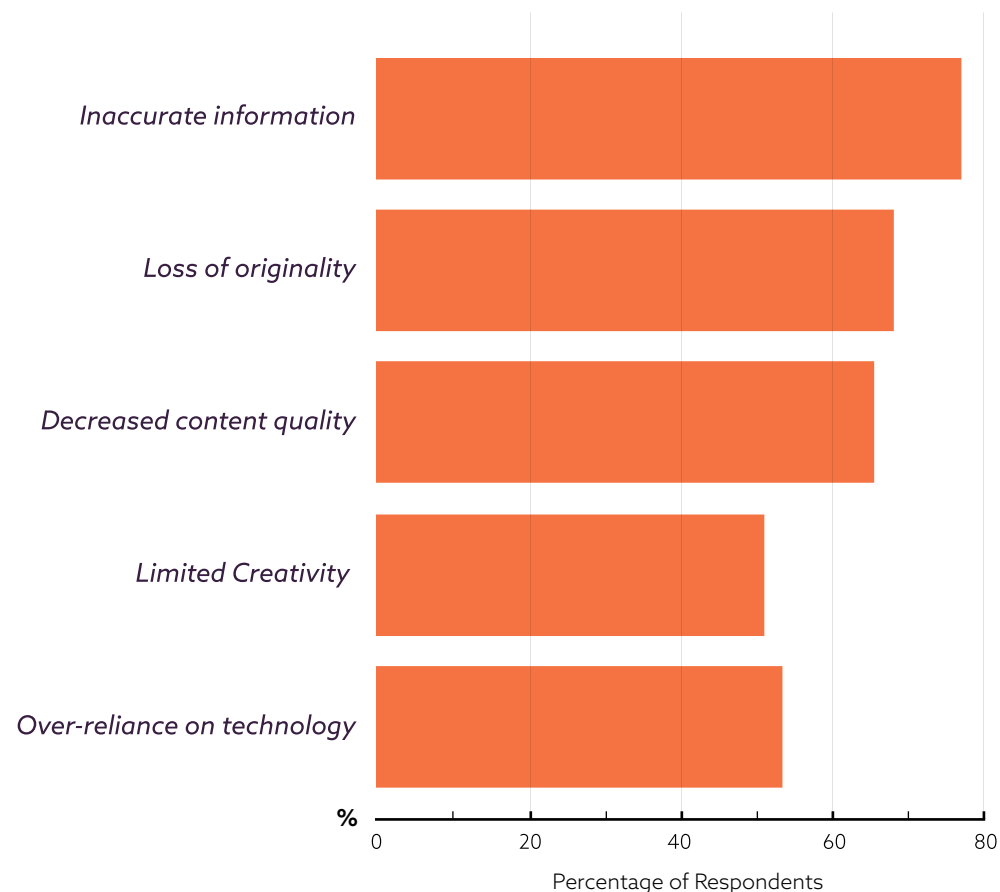


# What Are The Ai Drawbacks For Content Marketers With Indifferent Leaders?

The graph reveals that, in environments with indifferent leadership, the primary drawbacks of AI revolve around inaccurate information, loss of originality, and decreased content quality. This points to a recurring theme: AI is being used to increase content volume, but without the strategic foundation or data insights needed to guide its use effectively.

This insight ties directly to a larger problem—the absence of consistent audience research. Without a clear understanding of what resonates with their target audience, content teams are left relying on AI to fill the gaps, often leading to generic or misaligned content that misses the mark. The issues of limited creativity and over-reliance on technology further reflect a lack of confidence in using AI to create meaningful, audience-focused content.

AI Drawbacks as a Percentage of Respondents  
(Ranked from Lower to Highest)



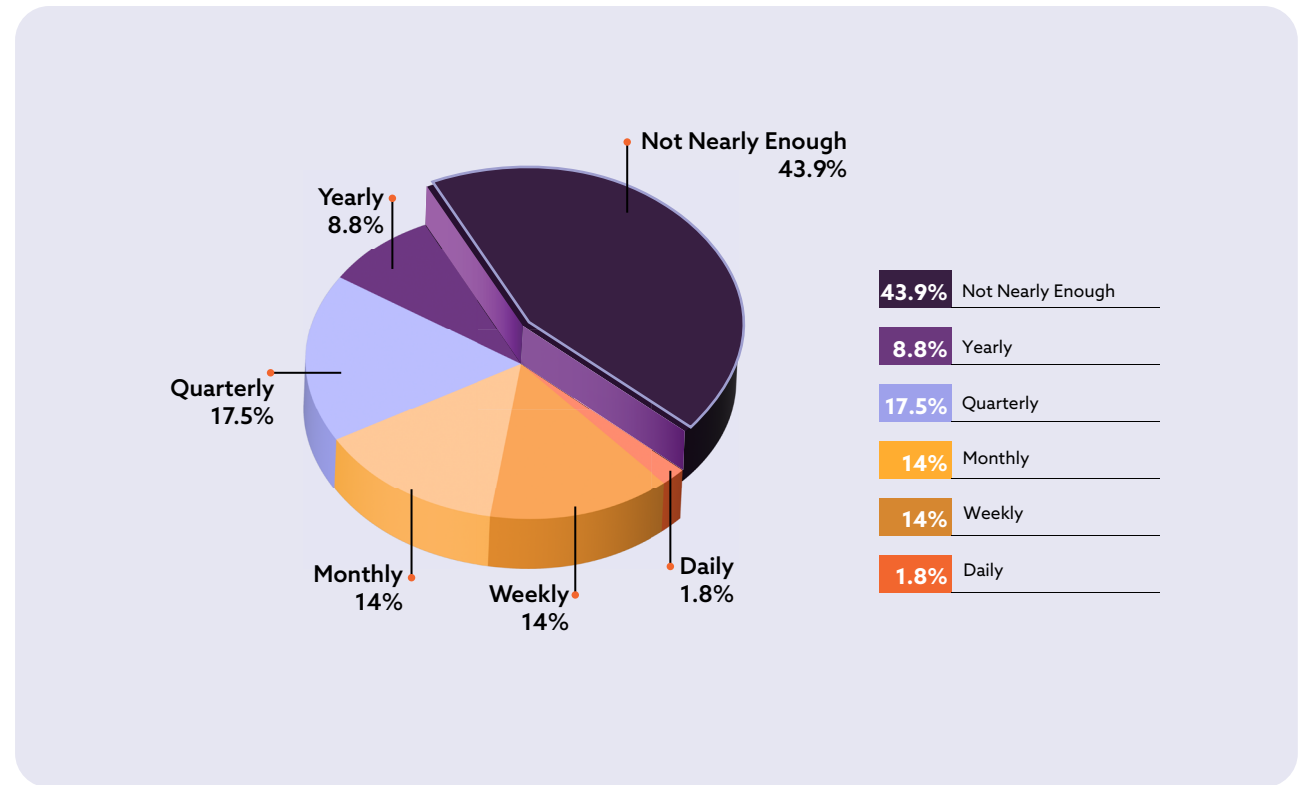
# Research Neglected And The Leadership Disconnect

When leadership is indifferent to content marketing, it's often a reflection of a deeper issue—content marketers themselves struggling to prioritize audience research.

Nearly 44% of respondents admit they are “not nearly doing enough” research, suggesting that the lack of leadership buy-in may stem from limited insights into audience behavior.

Without regular research, it becomes difficult to demonstrate the tangible impact of content marketing, creating a cycle where leadership remains unconvinced of its value. While some teams manage to conduct research on a monthly (14%) or quarterly (17.5%) basis, it's clear that many could be hindered by the lack of support from leadership, which further limits their ability to gather crucial audience data.

This suggests that without strong, consistent research, leadership may struggle to change their beliefs and see the return on investment, perpetuating a disconnection between leadership and content teams.



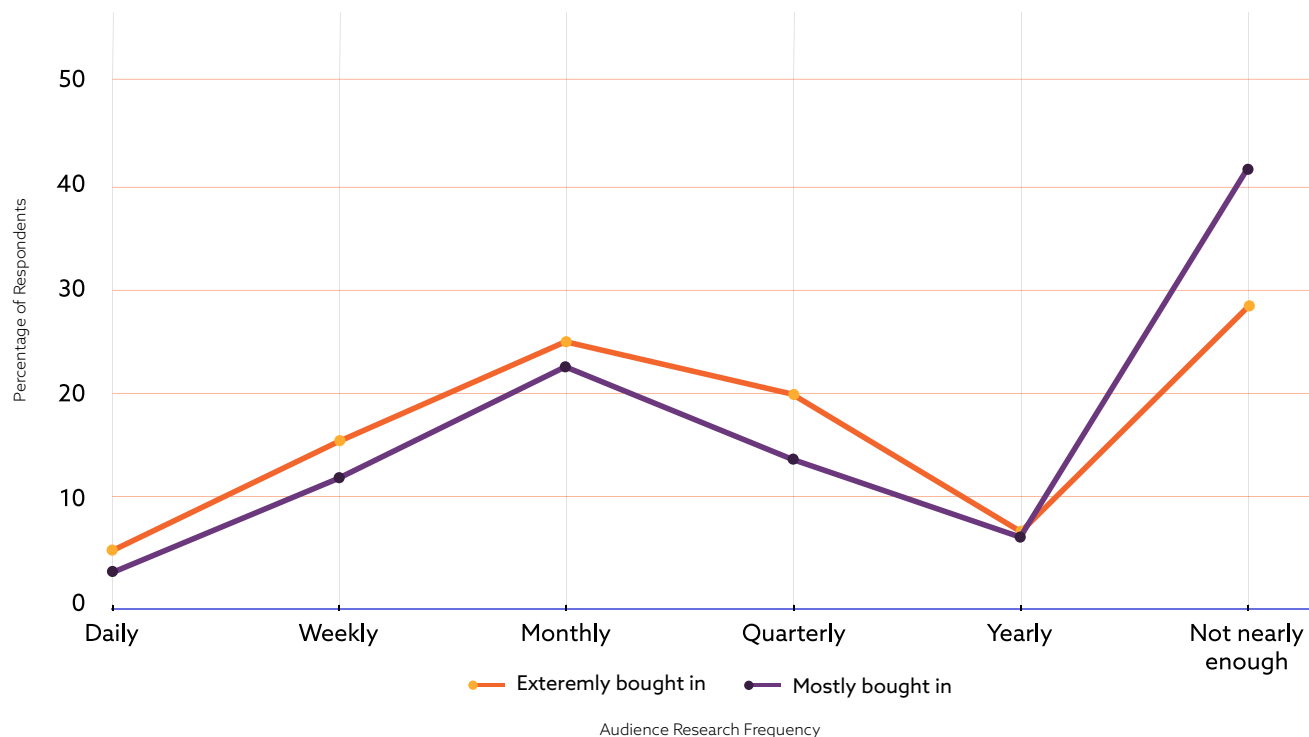
# The Difference Between Indifferent and Investment

Ultimately, the real issue isn't just how frequently content is produced—it's that content teams often lack the foundational audience insights needed to guide their efforts in the first place. Without these insights, teams end up relying on tools like AI to compensate, producing ineffective content that misses the mark, further reinforcing leadership's indifference.

But here's the catch: if content marketers aren't conducting regular audience research, it's no surprise that leadership doesn't see content marketing as a strategic priority. When research is inconsistent or sporadic, it becomes difficult to show tangible value, making it easy for leadership to disengage and view content efforts as low-impact.

In contrast, when research is prioritized, it doesn't just improve content—it shifts leadership's perception, helping them see the strategic potential of content marketing. Consistent audience insights can be the key to transforming a disengaged leadership into a deeply invested one, bridging the gap and turning content into a strategic driver.

Audience Research Frequency (%): "Extremely Bought in vs "The Pretty Indifferent"

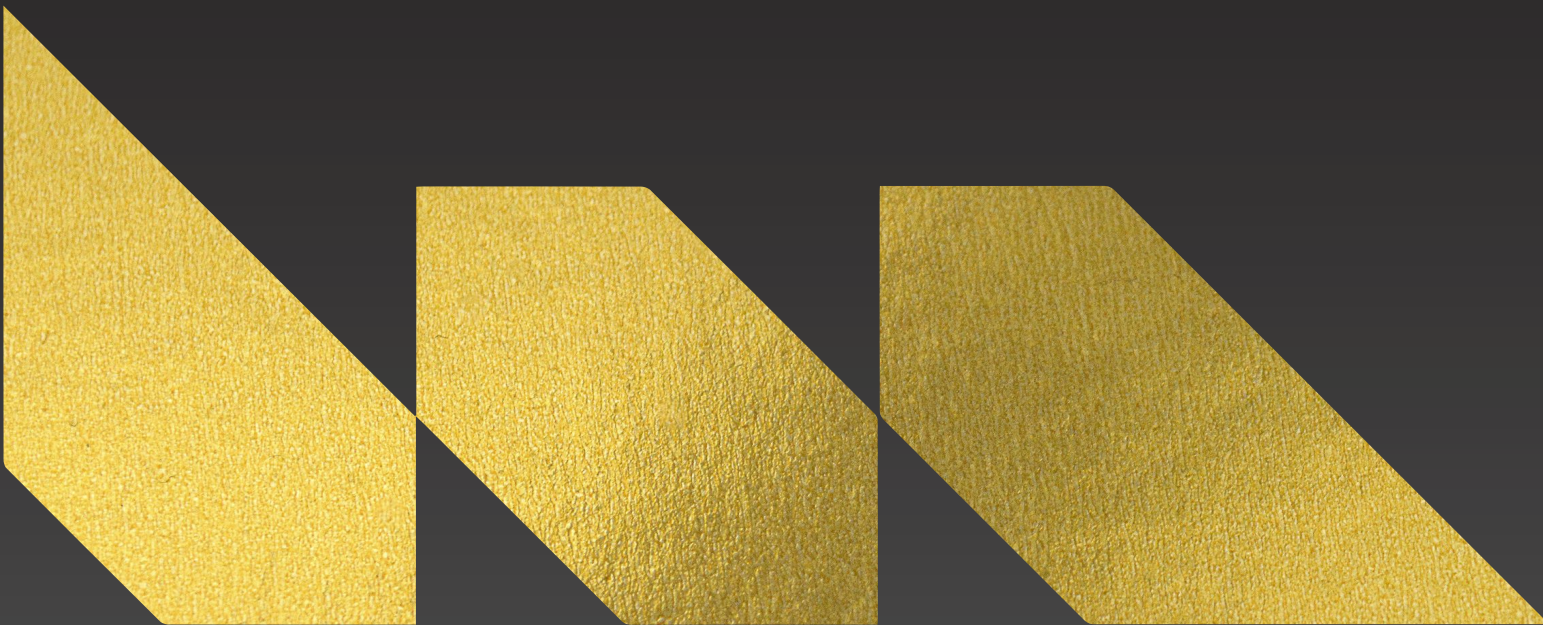


# Indifference to Impact: Shifting Perceptions with Strategic Content

The **“Indifferent”** leadership segment presents a challenging environment for content teams, defined by fragmented priorities and inconsistent support. While leadership may recognize content’s role in driving outcomes, their focus is tactical, driven by short-term gains rather than long-term impact. This results in content marketers being pushed to produce more, often at the cost of quality, with little alignment to broader strategic goals.

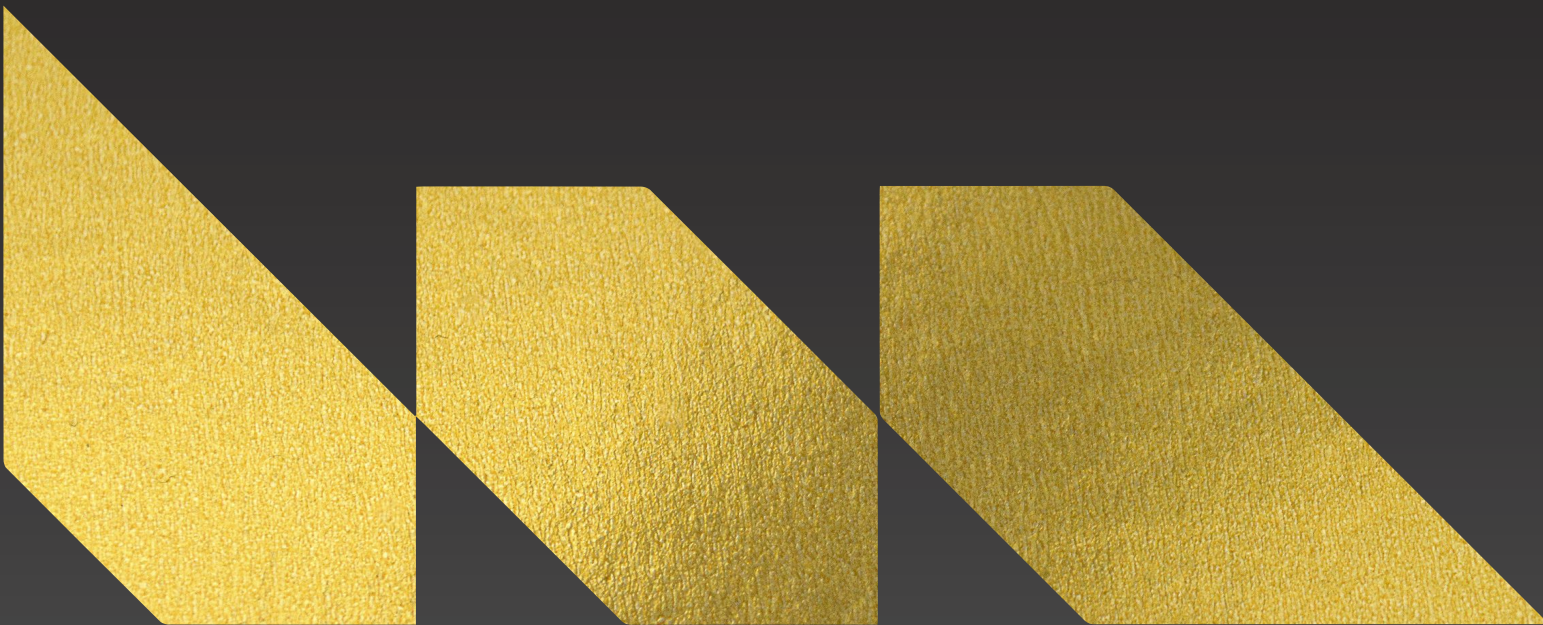
The real issue isn’t just leadership’s indifference—it’s the absence of a strong strategic foundation that leaves teams struggling to create content that resonates. Without regular audience research or cross-functional collaboration, content efforts become isolated, reactive, and ultimately ineffective. To bridge this gap, content marketers need to take the lead in showcasing the value of research-backed strategies. By building a clear link between quality content and business impact, teams can begin to shift leadership’s perception, transforming indifference into engagement and creating an environment where content serves as a strategic driver rather than a checkbox activity.

Skeptical





“We’re faced with a double whammy: existential pressure from AI tools and a lack of leadership buy-in, which makes it hard to prove the value of what we do.”





# When Leaders Question Your value

**Themes:** Proving Value, Results, Strategic Uncertainty

**Key Words:** : Content," "Marketing," "Leadership," "Hard," "Results," "Strategy"

**Elaboration:**

**Proving Value:** Marketers here struggle with proving the value of content marketing to skeptical leadership. They are often in positions where they have to justify their work and demonstrate tangible results, which can be challenging.

**Results:** There is a strong focus on the difficulty of delivering results that satisfy leadership. Marketers feel that no matter the effort, the results are often questioned or undervalued.

**Strategic Uncertainty:** Skepticism from leadership leads to uncertainty in strategic direction. Marketers in this group may feel that their strategies are not fully supported or understood, making it difficult to execute effectively.

## How bought in is leadership to your content marketing program?

348 out of 545 people answered this question.

### Mostly Bought in



### Extremely Bought in



### They're Pretty Indifferent



### Skeptical



### Don't see the point at all



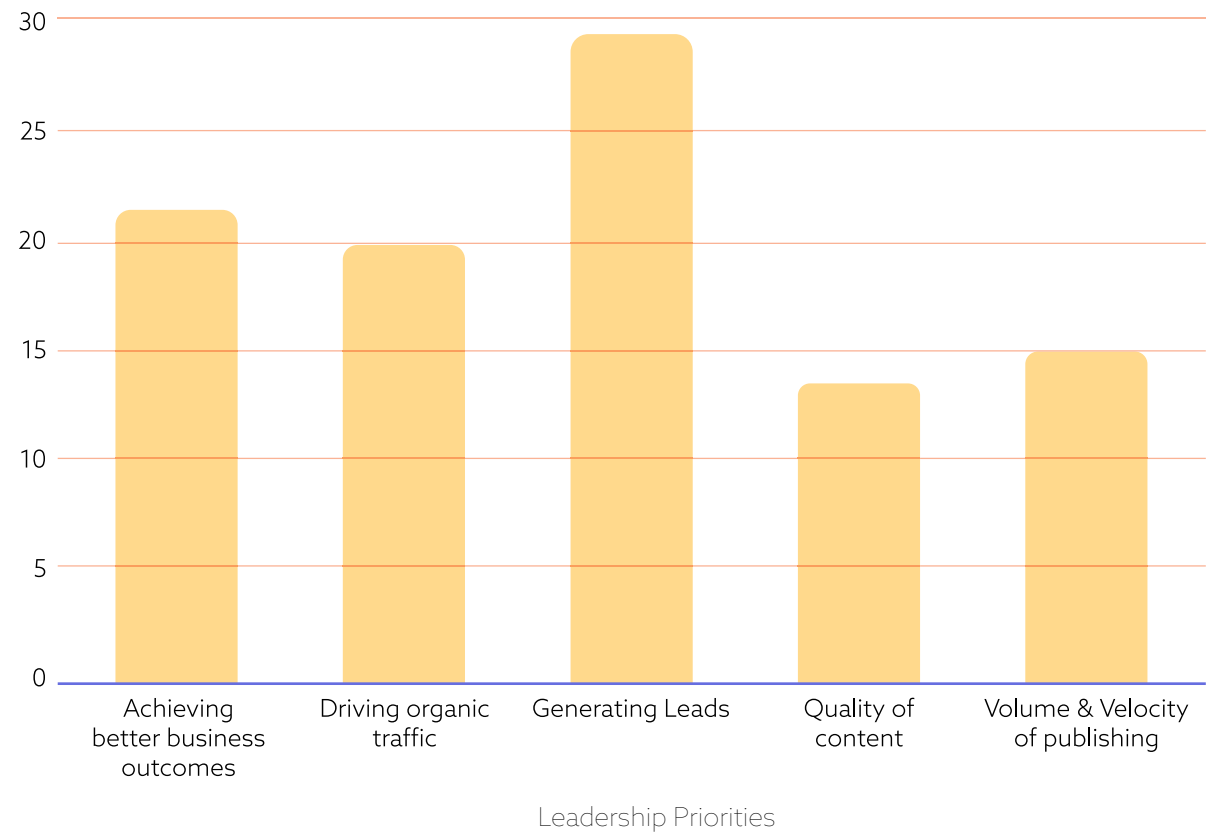
# Focusing On Outcomes, Missing the Strategy

While **“achieving better business outcomes”** and **“generating leads”** rank among the highest leadership priorities, further research indicates content marketers working under skeptical leadership are expected to produce results while struggling to communicate the long-term value of their program.

This group also reports leadership placing lower priority on content quality, implying they don't see it as an investment area or question its effectiveness. While **“volume & velocity”** ranks lowest here, as we'll see later, one of the top non-creation challenges is reported to “keeping up with internal demand,” as a top creation related challenge, while other non-creation related challenges indicate general difficulty getting content out the door.

In short, skeptical leaders prioritize outcomes but hesitate to invest in content strategy or execution, highlighting a disconnect that could undermine content's ability to drive meaningful results.

Leadership Priorities for “Skeptical”



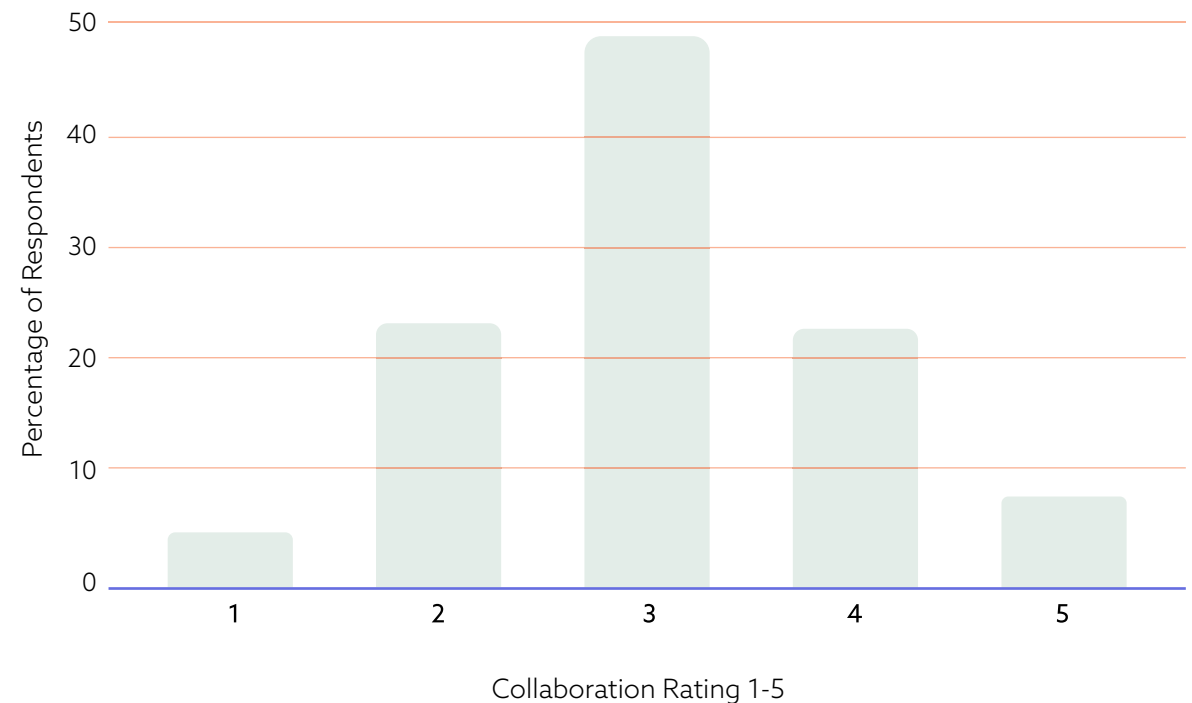
Content marketers are expected to know how to do everything from html to graphic design, to actual content writing, but are often offered a pathetic salary that doesn't even cover their rent or mortgage. Then, they're constantly having to justify their existence to leadership, and even when they complete massive amounts of work successfully, they somehow end up laid off or penalized for existing.

# Strained Collaboration in a Disconnected Environment

Content marketers with skeptical leaders report that collaboration across departments is more of a struggle than their counterparts with leaders with more buy-in.

Many respondents rating their efforts at 2 or 3 on a scale of 1 to 5. This indicates a lack of smooth coordination between content teams and other departments, likely due to leadership's hesitation to fully trust, and therefore champion, the value of content marketing. While there is some level of collaboration, additional research suggests that it's often strained or not as effective as it could be.

Without full leadership buy-in, content teams may struggle to get the resources or support they need to collaborate effectively, leading to breakdowns in communication and alignment. This can cause friction when trying to execute content strategies that rely on cross-functional cooperation.



This struggle is reflected in the non-creation issues we'll see on the next page.

# Non-Creation Barriers: A Symptom of Strategic Disengagement

1. Lack of buy-in

2. Lack of resources

3. Aligning content efforts across multiple teams

4. Workflow issues/approval process

5. Lack of strategy

6. Accessing subject matter experts

7. Aligning content with buyer's journey

8. Keeping up with technology

For the first and only time in this study, we see “lack of buy-in” emerge as the top challenge for content teams. This goes beyond the typical disconnect between leadership and content—it reflects an environment where resistance is active rather than passive.

The qualitative data suggests that, in some cases, there are forces actively working against content marketers, making it difficult to get content shipped or to gain internal support for initiatives. Whether it's due to lack of trust, competing priorities, or a perception that content marketing is a “nice-to-have” rather than a critical business function, the resistance is palpable.

Leadership's skepticism creates a vicious cycle. When content teams face pushback at every turn, it becomes almost impossible to prove their value. This reinforces the existing doubts that leadership has about content marketing, making it harder to build the very trust that's needed to turn skeptics into supporters.

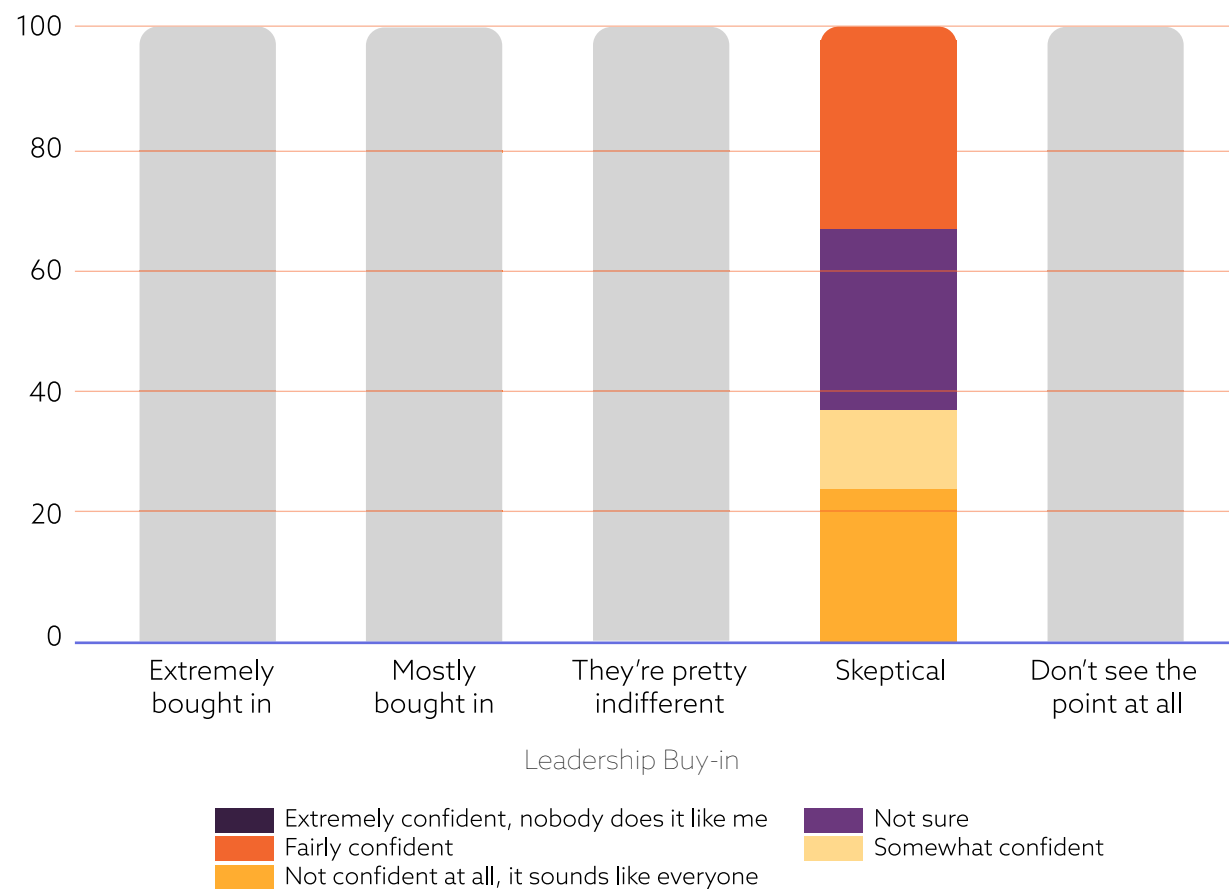
# Confidence in Voice & Tone

Surprisingly though, we see the highest percentage of marketers reporting they are **"fairly confident"** their content would stand out on voice and tone alone.

We do also see however the second highest level of **"not confident at all"** which indicates while some may be taking advantage of the lack of oversight to do what they think is best, while others may be put in a position where they have to play it safe.

Overall, leadership's skepticism as it relates to voice and tone seems appears to play a role in creating a fairly even split in content marketers confidence levels, which as we'll see later has dire consequences on these content marketers relationship with the work they're producing, creative fulfillment, and compensation satisfaction.

Confidence in Voice and Tone











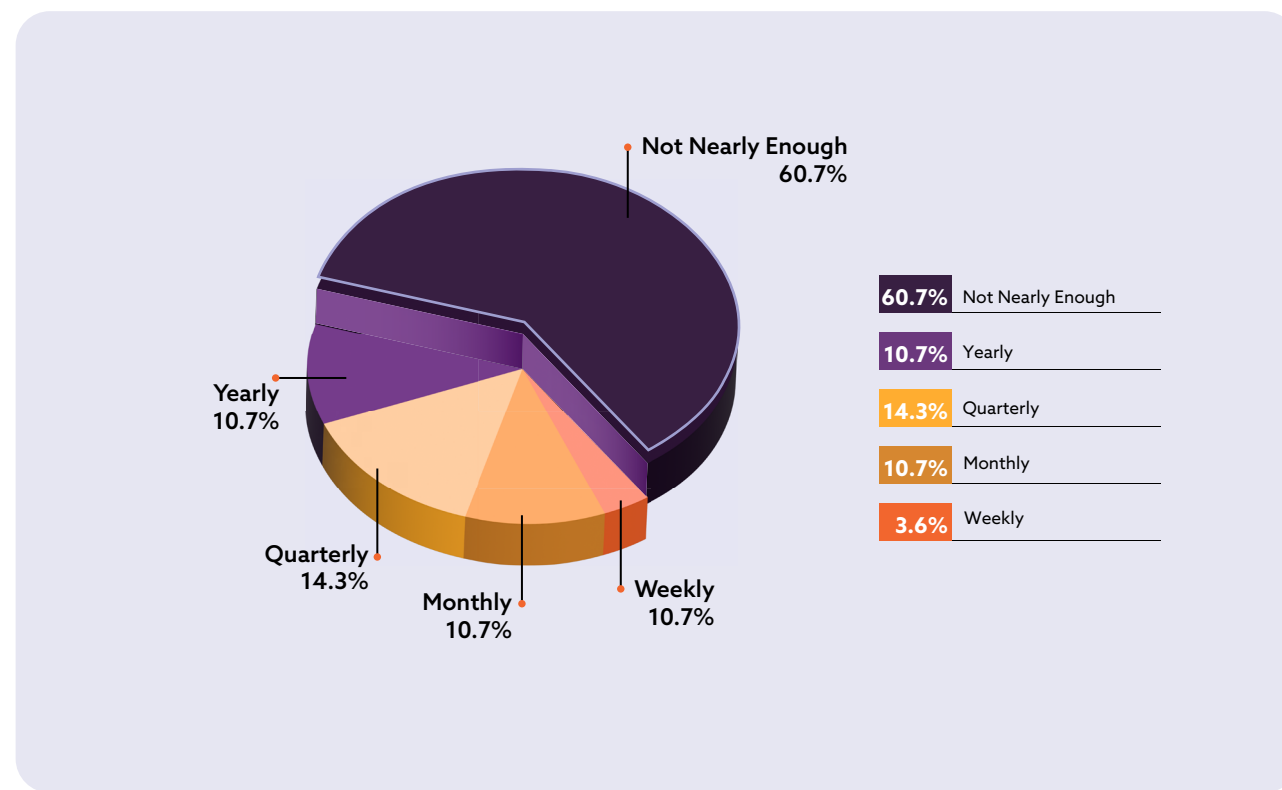


# How Often Are Content Marketers Doing Audience Research Under “Skeptical” Leadership?

Despite the pressure to produce more, content teams under skeptical leadership often lack a crucial foundation: data-driven audience insights. Most report that they’re not doing their research “nearly enough,” creating a significant gap in understanding their target audience. This lack of data may be a key factor driving leadership’s skepticism.

Without consistent research, content teams rely on assumptions rather than concrete data, which weakens their strategic impact. This makes it harder to demonstrate content’s value, reinforcing doubts and creating a cycle where limited insights lead to limited buy-in.

Most teams only engage in research sporadically—quarterly, monthly, or even less frequently—while few conduct research on a weekly basis. This infrequency means content’s effectiveness is harder to prove, giving leadership little reason to invest further.



Ultimately, the lack of regular audience insights may be a symptom and a cause of skeptical leadership. To break this cycle, content teams should prioritize research, using it to show real impact and turn skepticism into support.



# Navigating Skepticism to Unlock Strategic Impact

Skeptical leadership environments present unique challenges for content marketers—marked by an emphasis on immediate outcomes and operational efficiency over strategic depth.

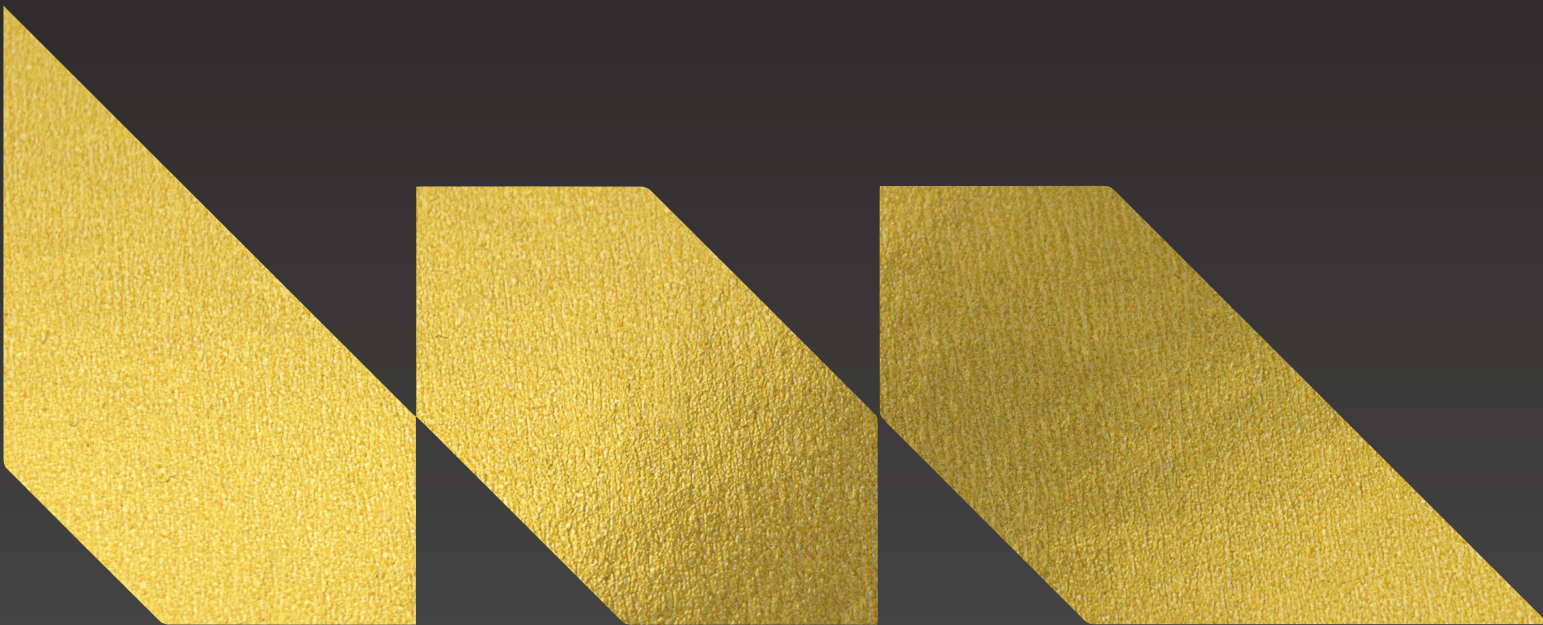
This resistance, whether passive or active, hinders collaboration, stifles creativity, and reinforces a cycle where value remains difficult to prove. While AI is seen as a tool for doing more with less, its potential to drive innovation is underutilized, limiting teams to incremental gains. Until leadership is convinced of content's long-term impact, marketers will continue to struggle to align efforts with larger business goals, leaving both strategy and execution disconnected from the outcomes they're asked to deliver.



Don't See The  
Point



“There is a lack of understanding around the value of content marketing.”





























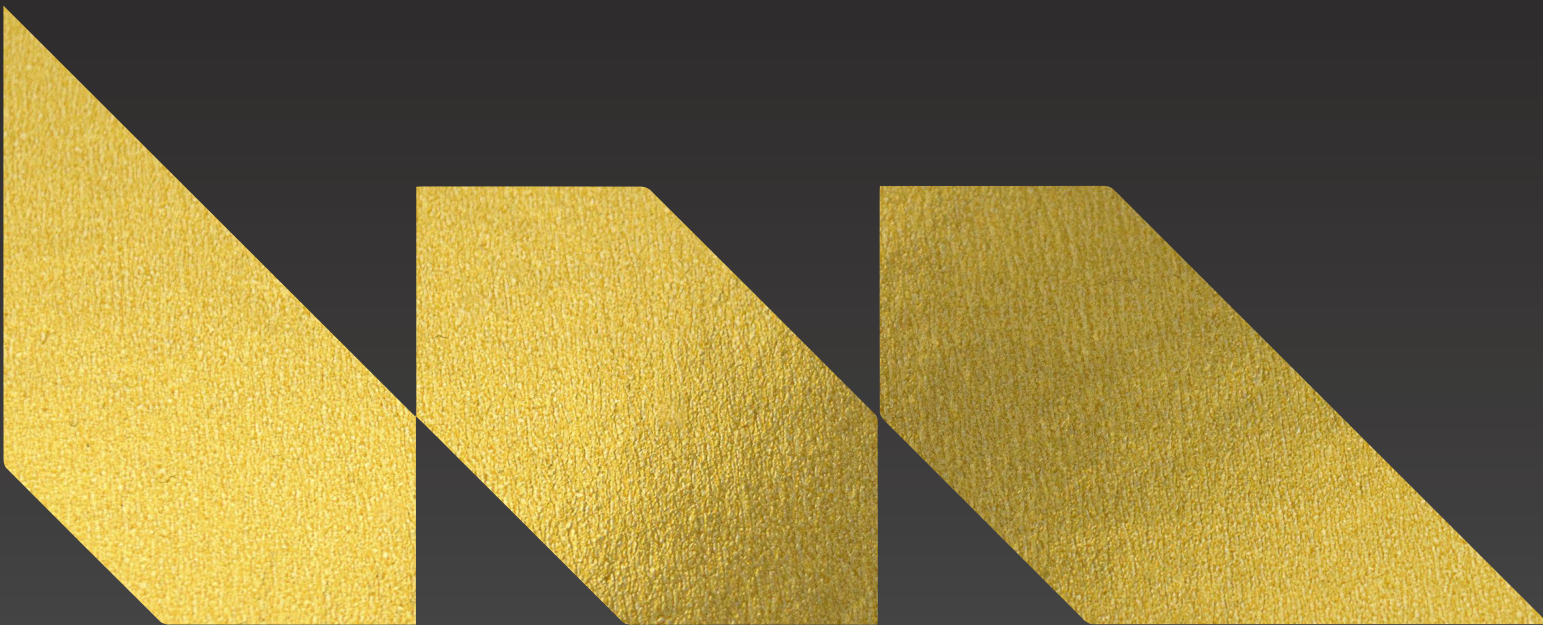
# (Re)Building The Case For Content

The current state of content marketing for teams operating under leadership that **“Doesn’t see the point”** leadership is undoubtedly challenging. From the lack of strategic direction and low investment to minimal collaboration and limited audience insights, content teams are left navigating a landscape where their work is undervalued and misunderstood. With creativity stifled and priorities skewed towards volume over quality, the resulting content risks being perceived as a tactical output rather than a strategic contributor.

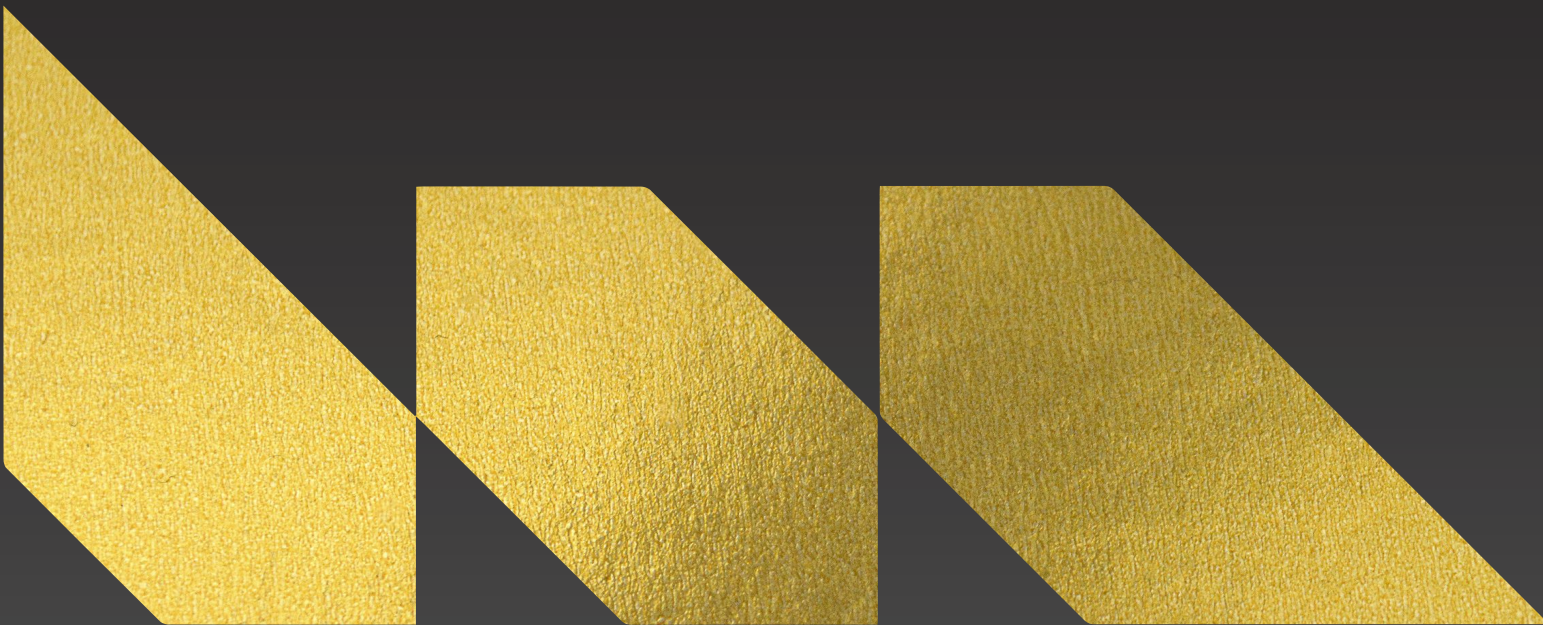
But it’s not an entirely hopeless scenario. While leadership disengagement may feel like an insurmountable barrier, it also presents a unique opportunity: the chance to use data and insights to shift perceptions. Educating leadership with tangible research—whether it’s demonstrating the impact of high-quality content on audience engagement or the effectiveness of consistent audience insights—can help bridge the gap. By showcasing clear, evidence-backed outcomes, content teams can start to build a compelling case for the strategic value of content marketing.

Change won’t happen overnight, but it starts with showing—not just telling—how content, when done right, can drive meaningful results. In an environment where leaders “don’t see the point,” perhaps the best way to influence them is to help them see exactly what they’ve been missing.

# Career Satisfaction



“Our work is simultaneously commodified and hard to quantify which I think gives us this sort of perpetual imposter syndrome – even though most of us do know our work brings extreme value.”

















# The Golden Handcuffs Effect

Through our analysis, we've begun to see a pattern emerge called **"The Golden Handcuffs Effect,"** where respondents report feeling financially secure and even satisfied with their compensation, yet struggle with deep dissatisfaction in other areas—primarily their creative fulfillment and overall happiness with the work they're producing.

For many who responded "It's complicated" when asked about their career satisfaction, a significant proportion are also satisfied with their paychecks. Yet, when asked about the quality of the work they're creating or their sense of creative fulfillment, the response is often a resounding "No" or **"It's complicated."**

This disconnect suggests that financial reward alone isn't enough to offset a lack of creative or personal fulfillment. They're financially comfortable but lack pride or engagement in their work—trapped in the "golden handcuffs."

The result is a group of professionals who feel conflicted, torn between staying for security or seeking opportunities for more meaningful work. It's a reminder that true career satisfaction needs more than just a healthy paycheck—it requires purpose and connection to the work itself.









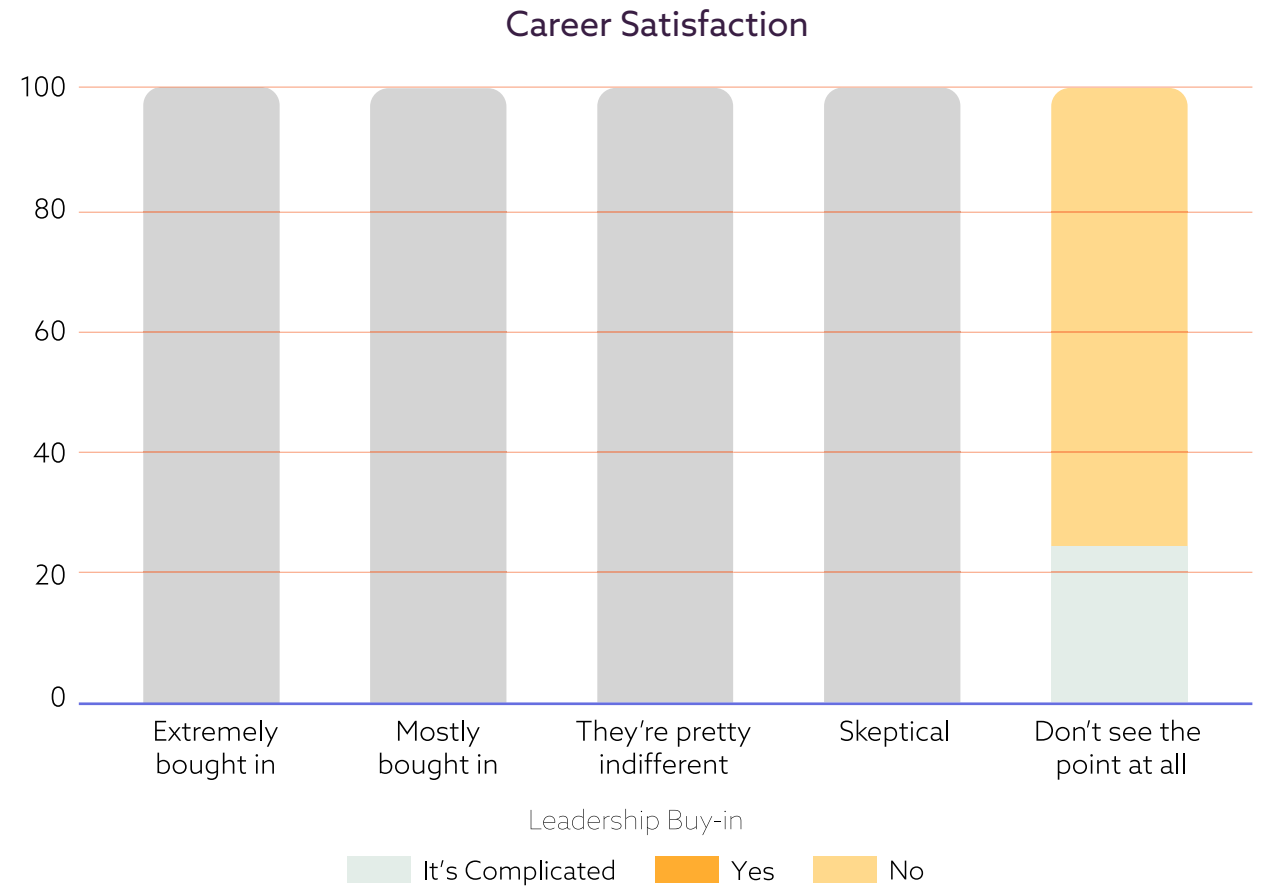




# Career Satisfaction Don't See The Point

For the **"Doesn't see the point"** leadership group, career satisfaction is low. Content marketers in this group often feel disconnected and siloed from the broader goals of the company, as leadership doesn't value or prioritize content marketing. This lack of buy-in from the top leaves content teams feeling underappreciated and unmotivated, as their work isn't seen as making a meaningful contribution.

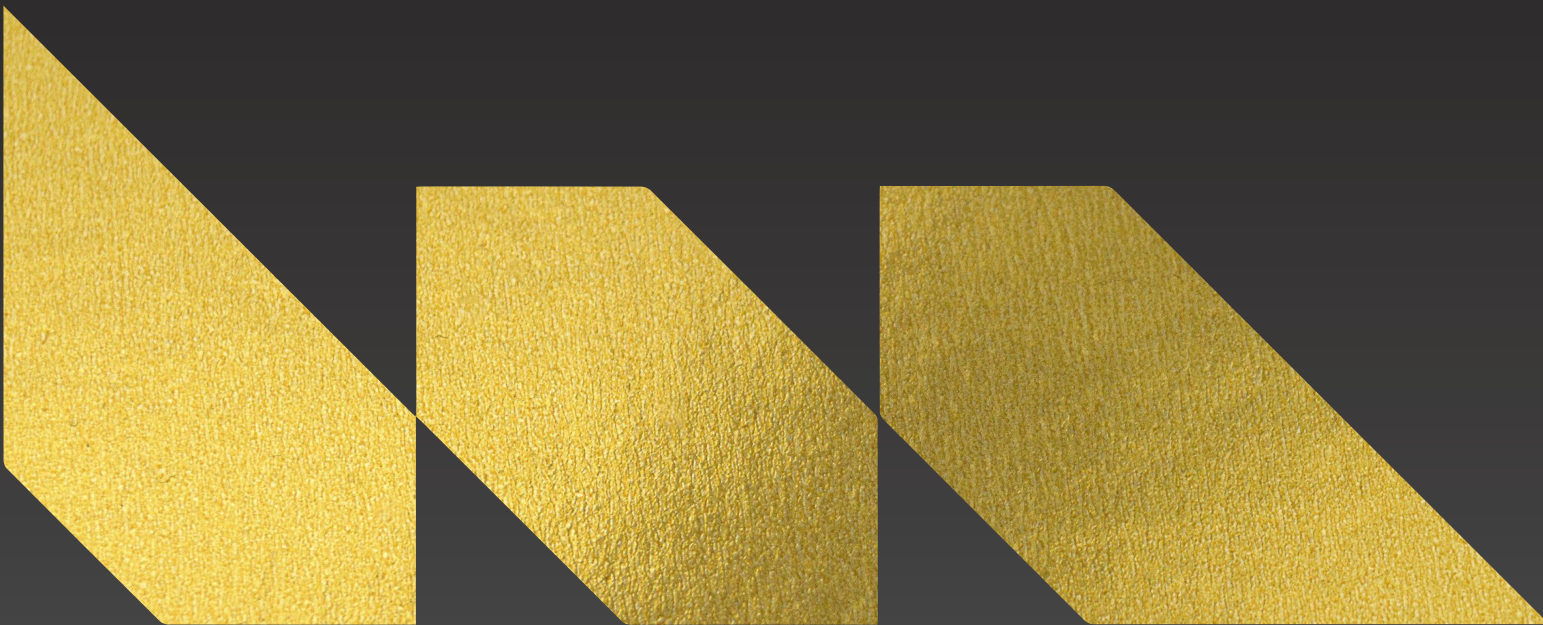
Without leadership support, career growth and fulfillment are limited. Content marketers in this group may struggle to find opportunities for development or to take on projects that challenge and inspire them. The absence of clear direction or recognition from leadership means that content marketing is viewed as an afterthought, which can stifle both creativity and job satisfaction.



“Content Marketing is viewed as an ‘easy’ job by other departments — it’s not often understood how many moving parts and steps are involved in building and executing content initiatives, especially when the company is not investing enough resources into it (e.g. 1-person team). It becomes taxing to juggle requests, expectations, and vouching for the value of content.”

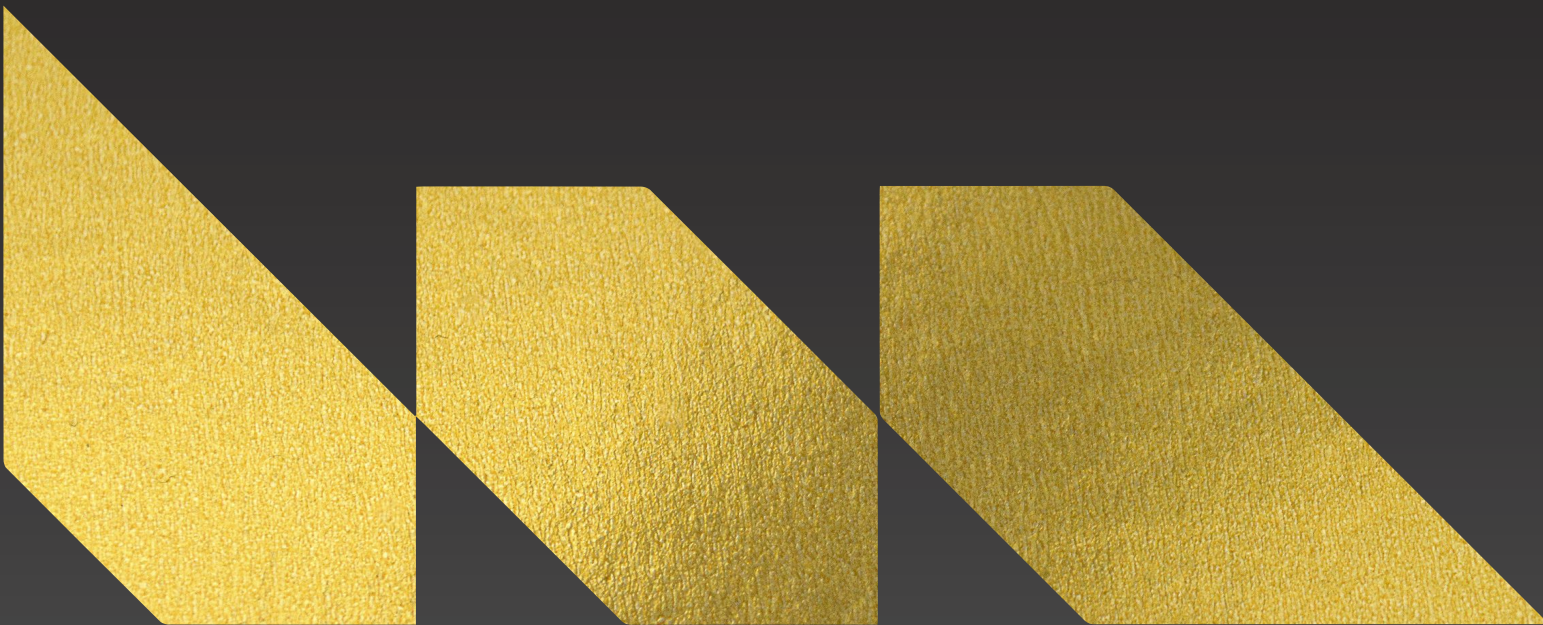


# Compensation Satisfaction





“We aren’t close enough to revenue or the business. We’re close to “the audience” but “the audience” doesn’t advocate for us to get raises or promotions.”



# Does Company Size Influence Salary Satisfaction?

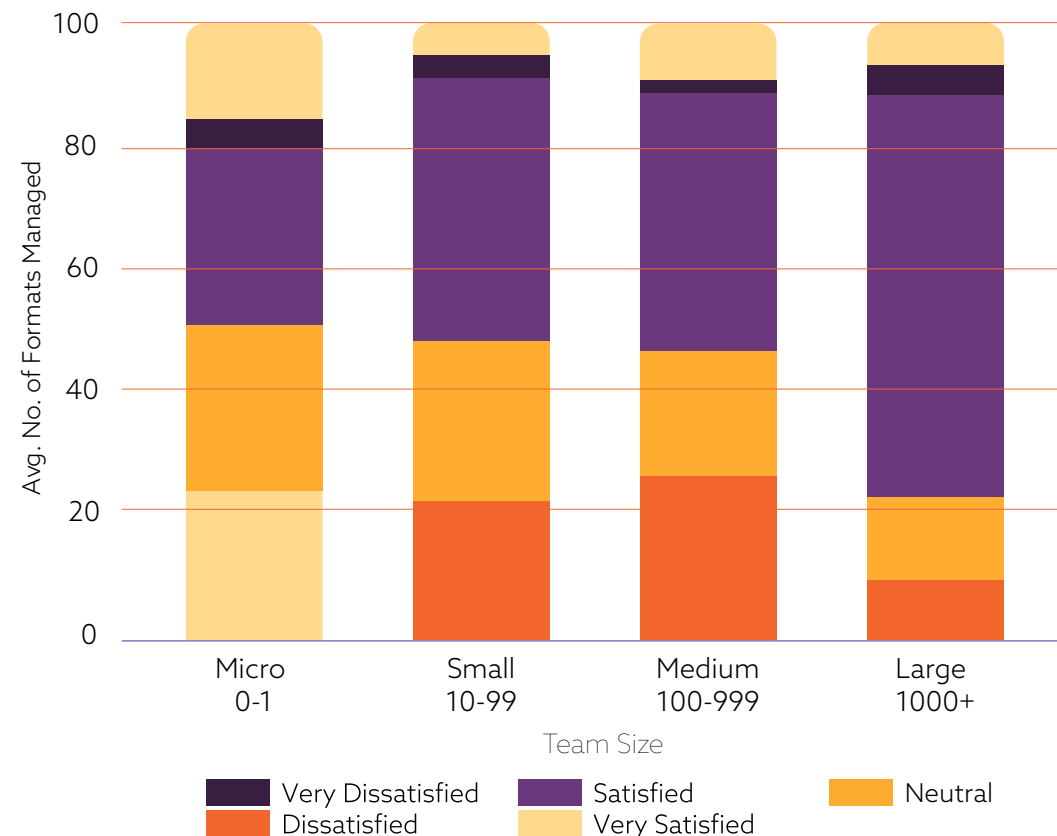
While the data looks similar across small and medium sized companies, a different story is told when we look at the extreme ends of the company size spectrum.

For example, a higher proportion of employees at large companies report being satisfied with their compensation. This is likely because larger companies can afford more generous compensation and benefits packages.

Micro companies, on the other hand, have a slight edge on all other company sizes for **"very satisfied"** employees, likely due to having a higher stake in the business revenues.

Conversely, employees at micro-companies also have slightly higher levels of "very-dissatisfied" than the other segments, likely because they feel the impact of down revenues at higher levels than their counterparts at larger organizations.

Salary Satisfaction Across Company Size



# Compensation Satisfaction By Leadership Buy-in Level

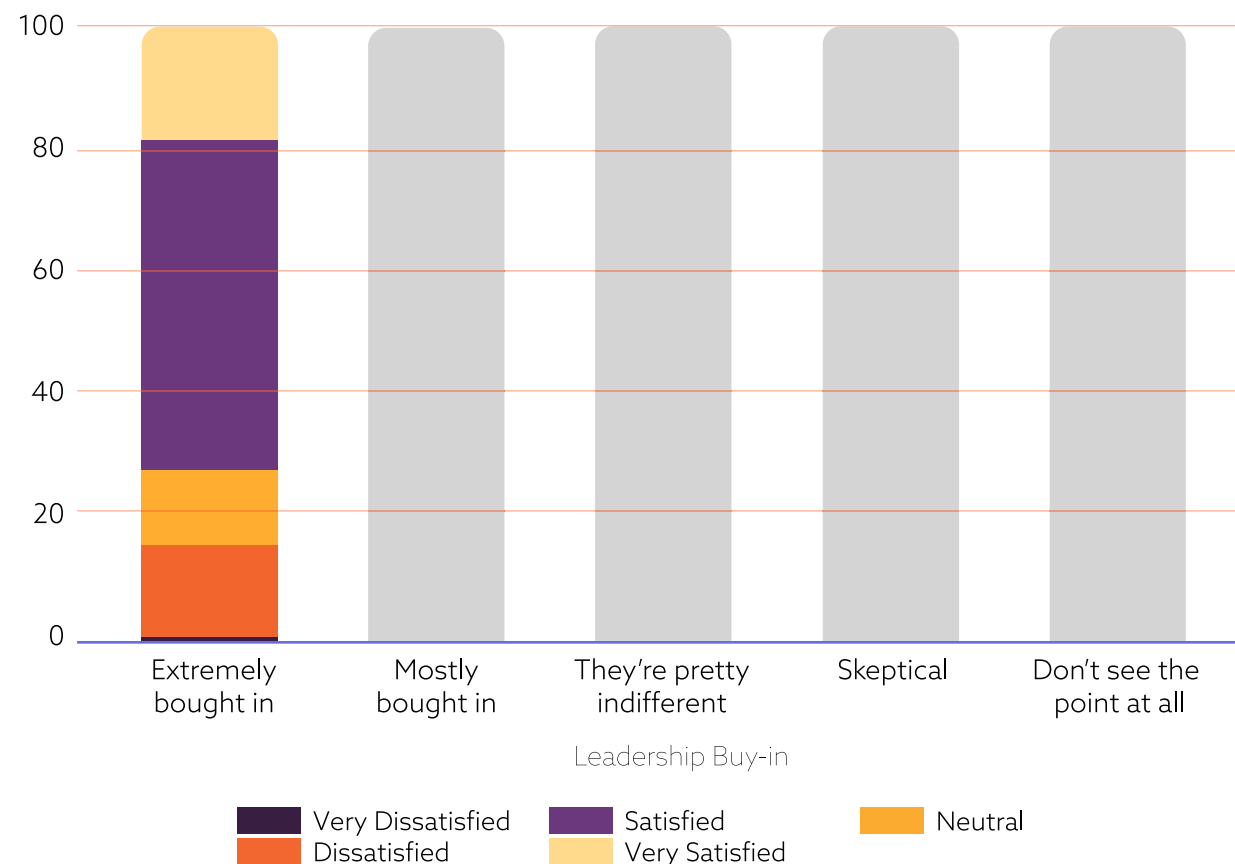
For the **“Extremely bought in”** group, compensation satisfaction is extremely positive, but mixed.

Leadership buy-in often leads to better compensation than in groups with less support, as content marketing is seen as valuable to the business.

Despite strong leadership backing, some content marketers report feeling undercompensated for the high expectations placed on them, such as producing results and maintaining quality. Even with buy-in, their pay doesn't always match the demands or reflect the value they bring, especially compared to departments like sales.

This just shows that even with the most bought-in of leadership, some challenges are universal among practitioners of content marketing.

Compensation Satisfaction from “Extremely Bought in” Leadership



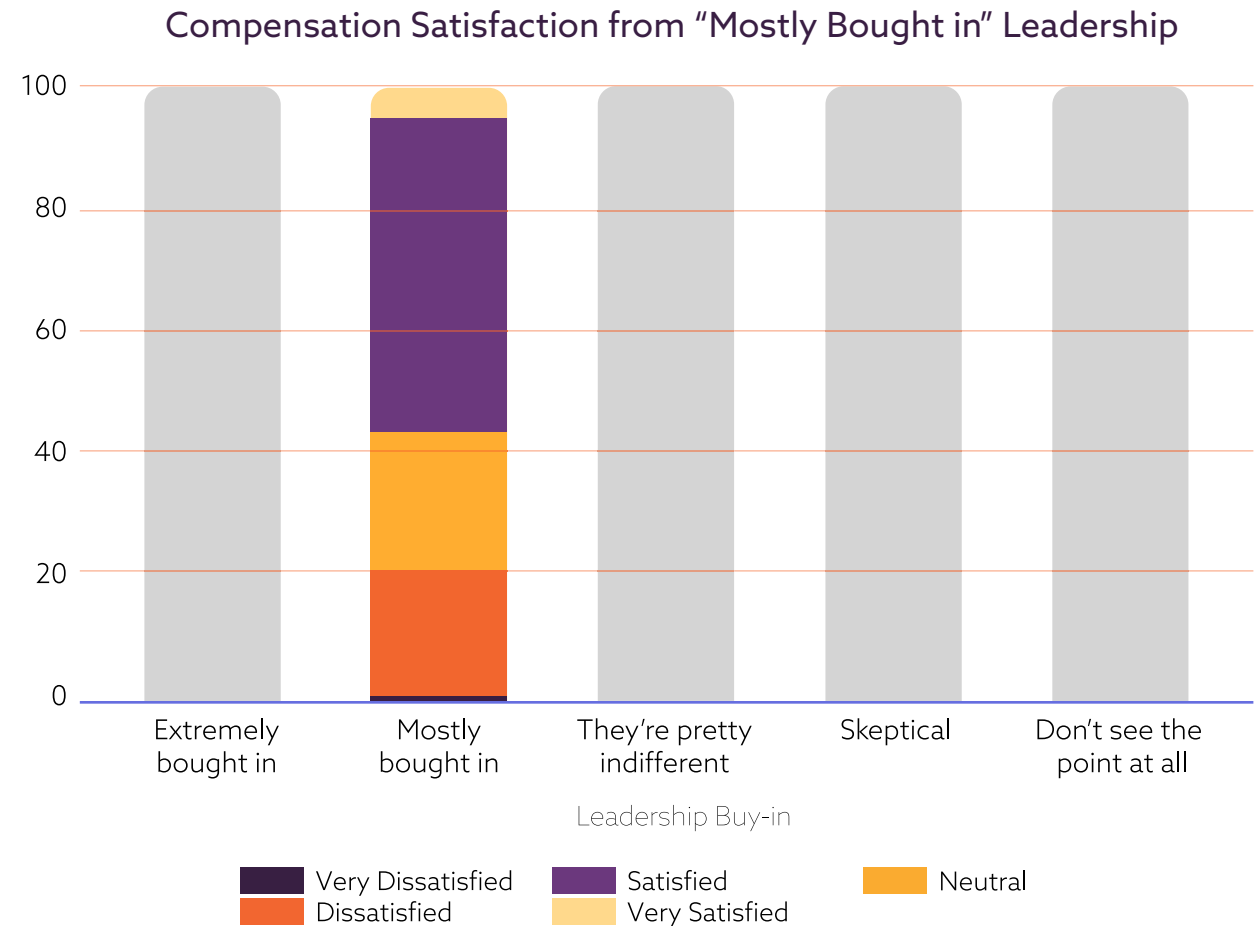
# Compensation Satisfaction By Leadership Buy-in Level

In the **“Mostly bought in”** group, compensation satisfaction is more divided and less positive compared to the **“Extremely bought in”** group.

While many respondents receive solid pay in environments with partial leadership support, fewer report feeling “very satisfied” and more report feeling “neutral”.

High expectations, paired with inconsistent support, can create friction, especially when compared to other departments.

This highlights that as buy-in decreases, discontentment around compensation is more pronounced, reflecting a growing frustration that their pay doesn’t fully match the demands or value they bring to the organization.



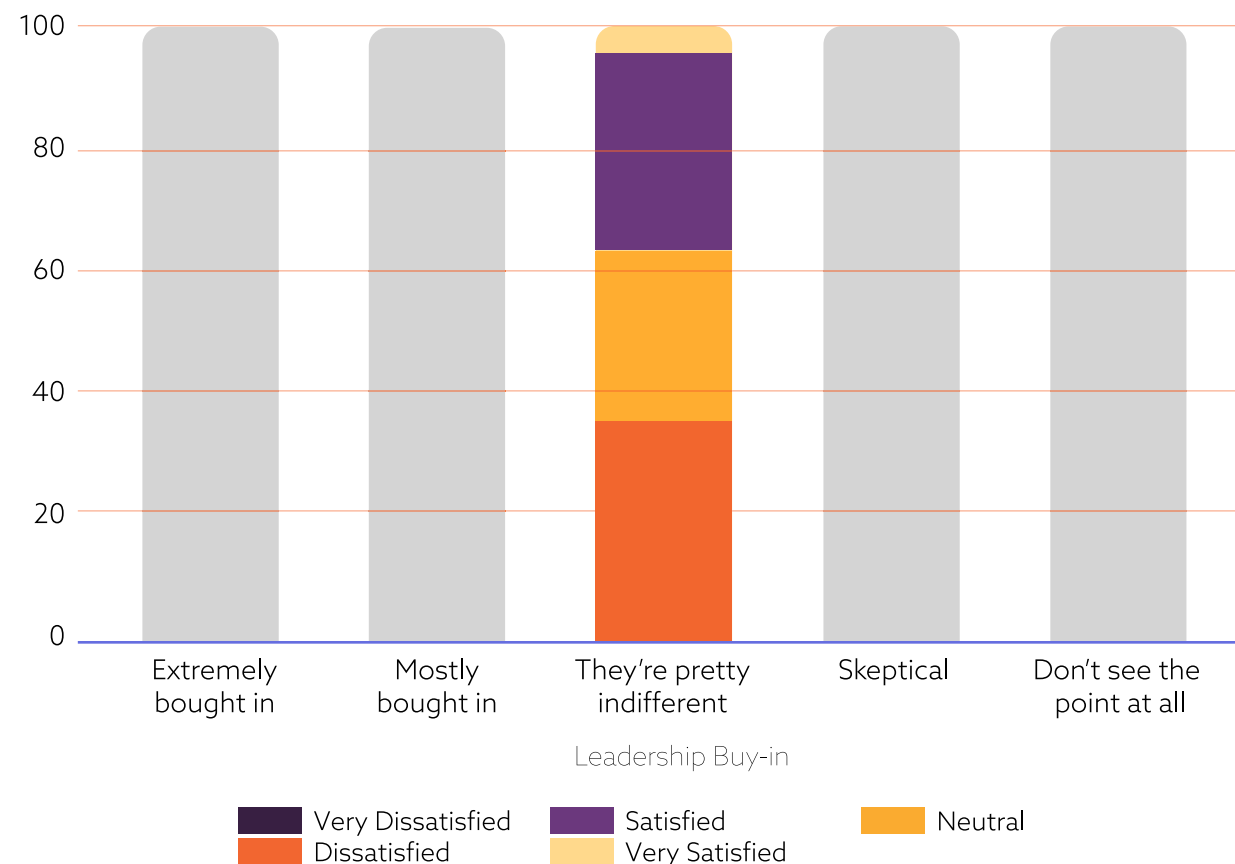
# Compensation Satisfaction By Leadership Buy-in Level

In the **“Indifferent”** group, compensation satisfaction is mixed and often neutral, reflecting the uncertainty that comes with a lack of engagement from leadership.

While some content marketers feel their pay is fair, many remain ambivalent or dissatisfied due to stagnant compensation and minimal recognition for their efforts. Without visible support, rewards tend to stay flat, leading to a sense that compensation is adequate but uninspired.

This pattern indicates that leadership’s indifference may prevent compensation from reaching a level that truly motivates and retains top talent, leaving many employees feeling undervalued despite the financial security. As a result, even average satisfaction in this group can mask a deeper disconnection between effort and reward.

Compensation Satisfaction from “Indifferent” Leadership



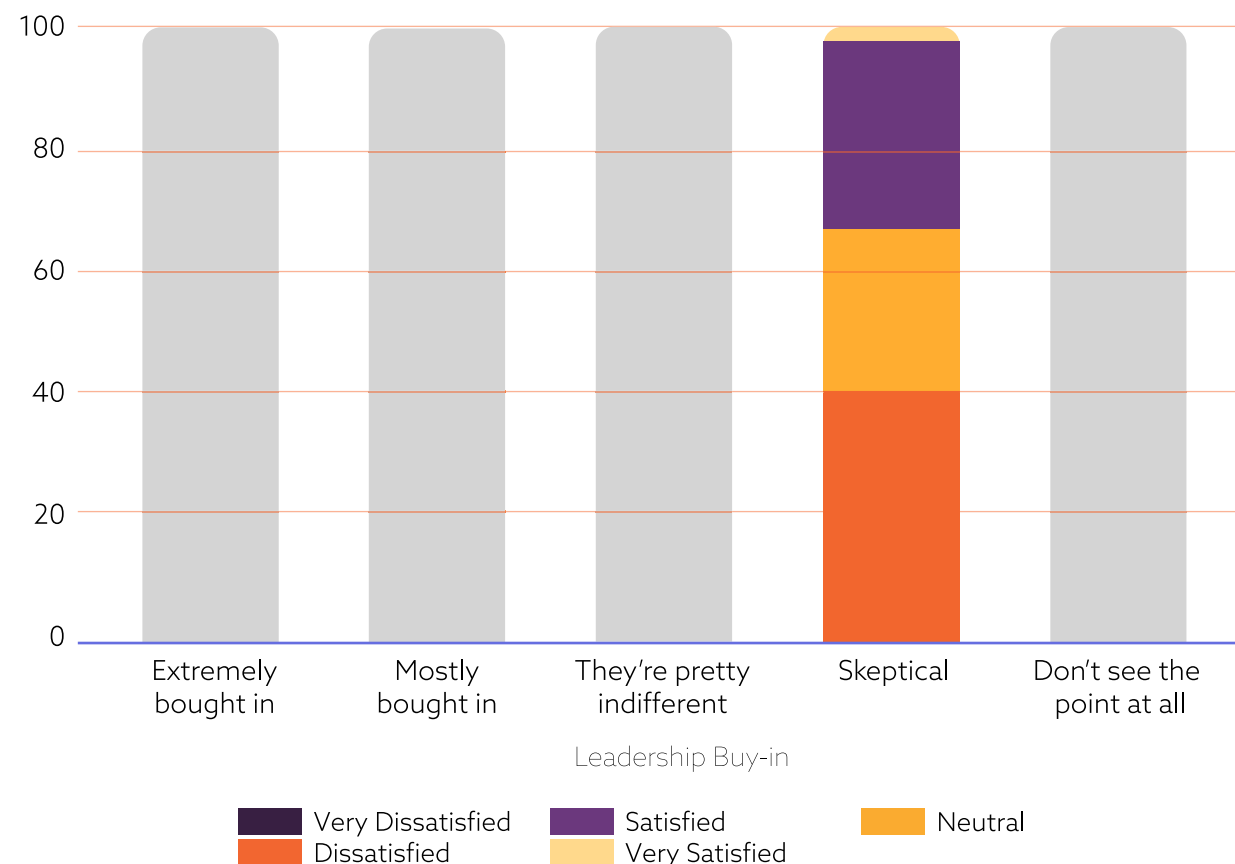


# Compensation Satisfaction By Leadership Buy-in Level

For the **"Skeptical"** leadership group, negative sentiment with compensation becomes far more pronounced.

Content marketers in this group often feel their pay doesn't align with the effort and value they bring. With leadership uncertain about the impact of content marketing, this lack of confidence trickles down, leaving many feeling that their work isn't fully appreciated or rewarded. There's a sense that while some content marketers are content with their compensation, a large portion feel dissatisfied or indifferent. The hesitancy from leadership to fully invest in content marketing translates to fewer financial rewards, creating a feeling of undercompensation for the level of work required.

Compensation Satisfaction from "Skeptical" Leadership







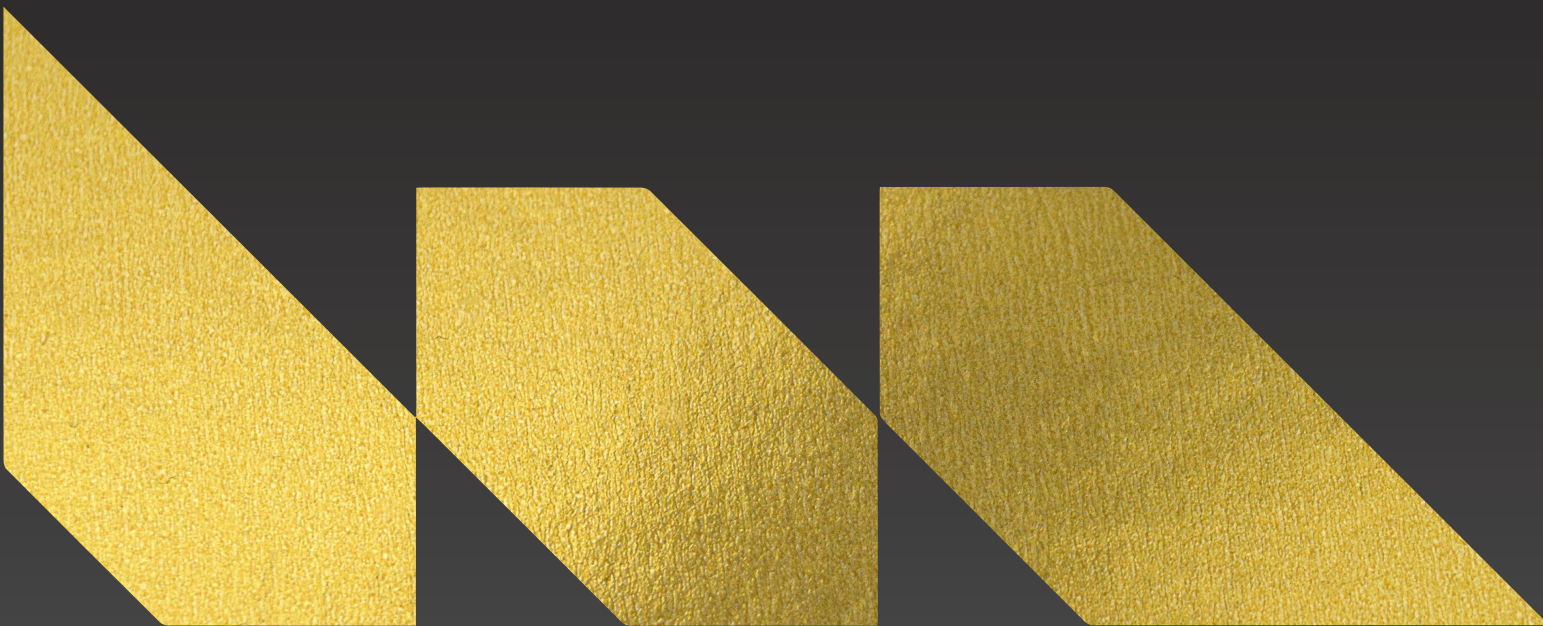
“Content marketers feel discontent because there’s sometimes no clear path to growth in some organisations.

Rather, we see a trend of one content marketer juggling the responsibilities of more than 2 persons, especially in startup environment with no increase in remuneration. This leads to stress, anxiety, unproductivity and discontentment with their career growth and trajectory.

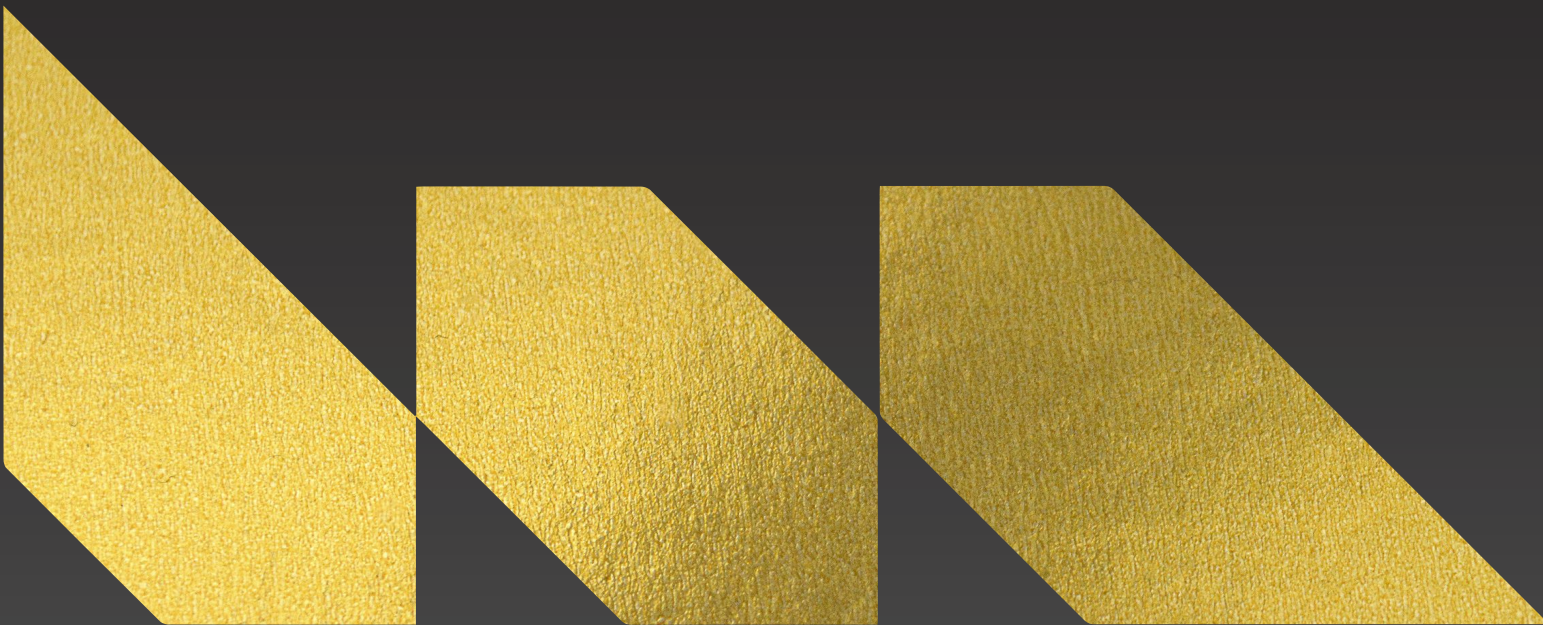
Also, some get too fatigued to learn new things or discover themselves again.”



# Creative Fulfillment



“My creativity is a slave to corporate bureaucracy. When it comes to work, my idea of creativity is shaped by the lens of my leadership. I’m only creative in ways they find interesting.”







# Does Company Size Affect Creative Fulfillment?

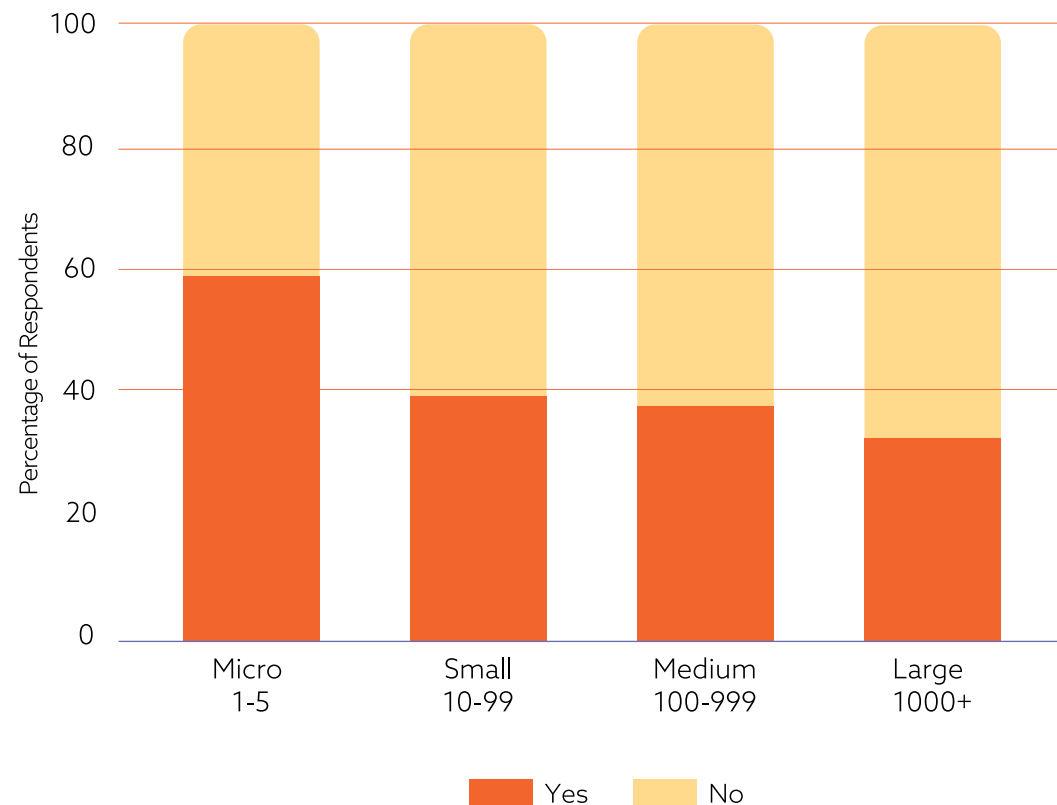
We wanted to see if there were any notable trends that may affect creative fulfillment.

We first looked across company size with the hypothesis that smaller company sizes might have higher instances of creative fulfillment.

While the hypothesis did hold true for micro-companies of 1-5 people, where there is likely more autonomy due to less bureaucracy, the difference was far less pronounced than we expected the larger the company grew.

While it is true creative fulfillment does go down, the margin was surprisingly smaller than we had expected.

Creative Fulfillment Across Different Company Sizes









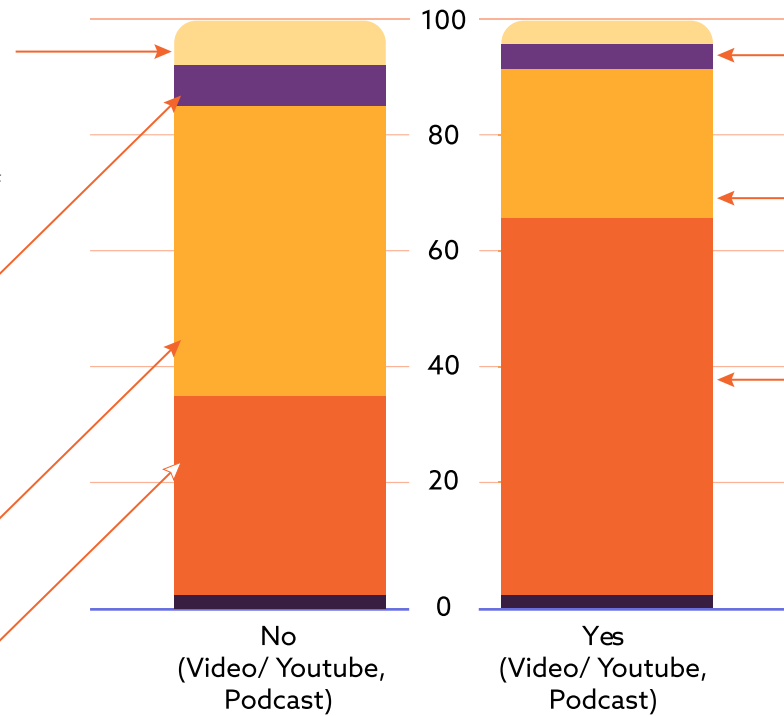
# Content Formats: Compensation Satisfaction By Leadership Buy-in Level

It's hard to stay energized and avoid burnout when you're on the hamster wheel of content creation. When you're the person strategizing, ideating, and executing, it's tough to make (as much space as I'd like) for creativity. It's tricky to maintain a fresh perspective within the more practical side of publishing deadlines. (10-99 employees)

I'm in an organization that publicly prides itself for being innovative but actually keeps us limited due to minimal buy-in, untimely review/approval processes, limited budget and mismanagement of resources within our team. (100 - 999 employees)

My new/current employer isn't giving me the freedom to create the sort of content I'm best at. (10-99 employees)

I left startups for a larger company and team. Big mistake but the pay is worth the dissatisfaction for the short term. It's glacial yet chaotic and ineffective. Silos kill creativity very quickly. (1000+ employees)



I have a life outside work. If it all revolved around content I would be miserable for sure (1-5 employees)

I get to work on different formats and have relative freedom to try new things. (10-99 employees.)

I have the freedom to create and come up with all sorts of content pieces and have 100% support from leadership (10-99 employees)

Creative Fulfillment

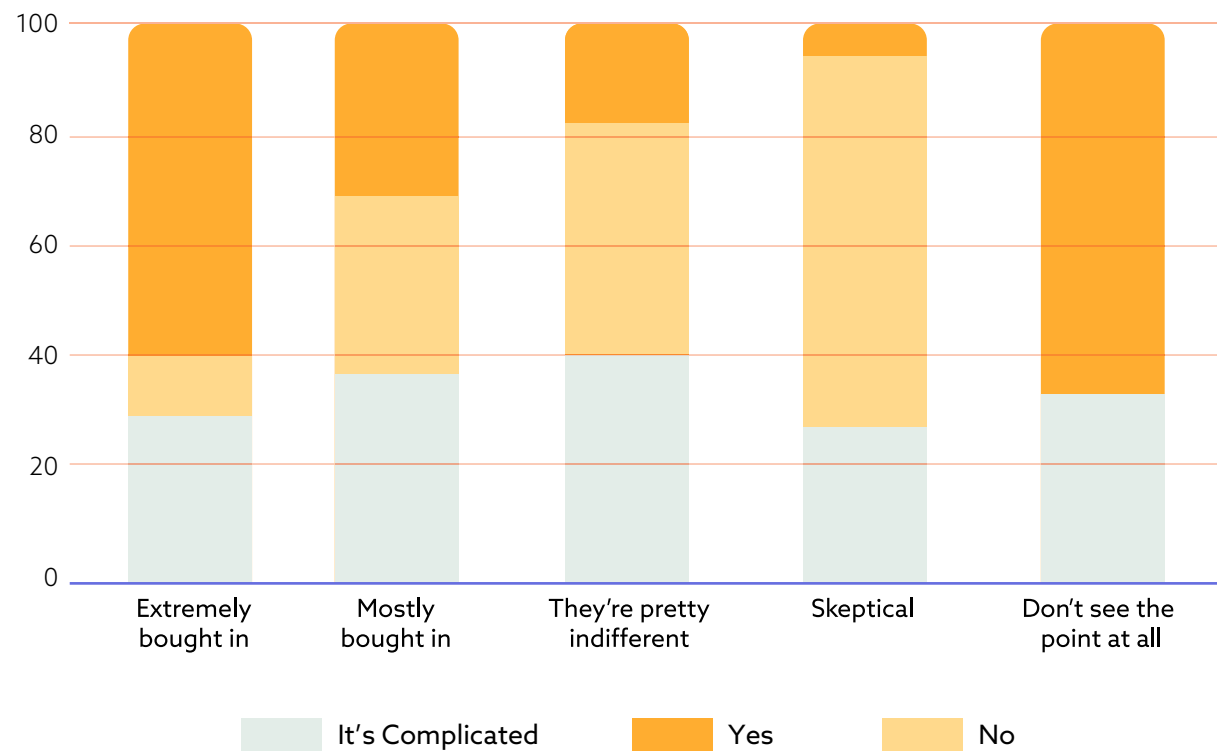
- Don't see the point at all
- Extremely Bought in
- Mostly Bought in
- Skeptical
- They're pretty indifferent

# Satisfaction With The Work vs Leadership Buy-in

As leadership buy-in grows, so does the proportion of marketers reporting satisfaction with the work they're producing.

However, even in organizations with higher leadership engagement, "It's complicated" remains a prominent feeling.

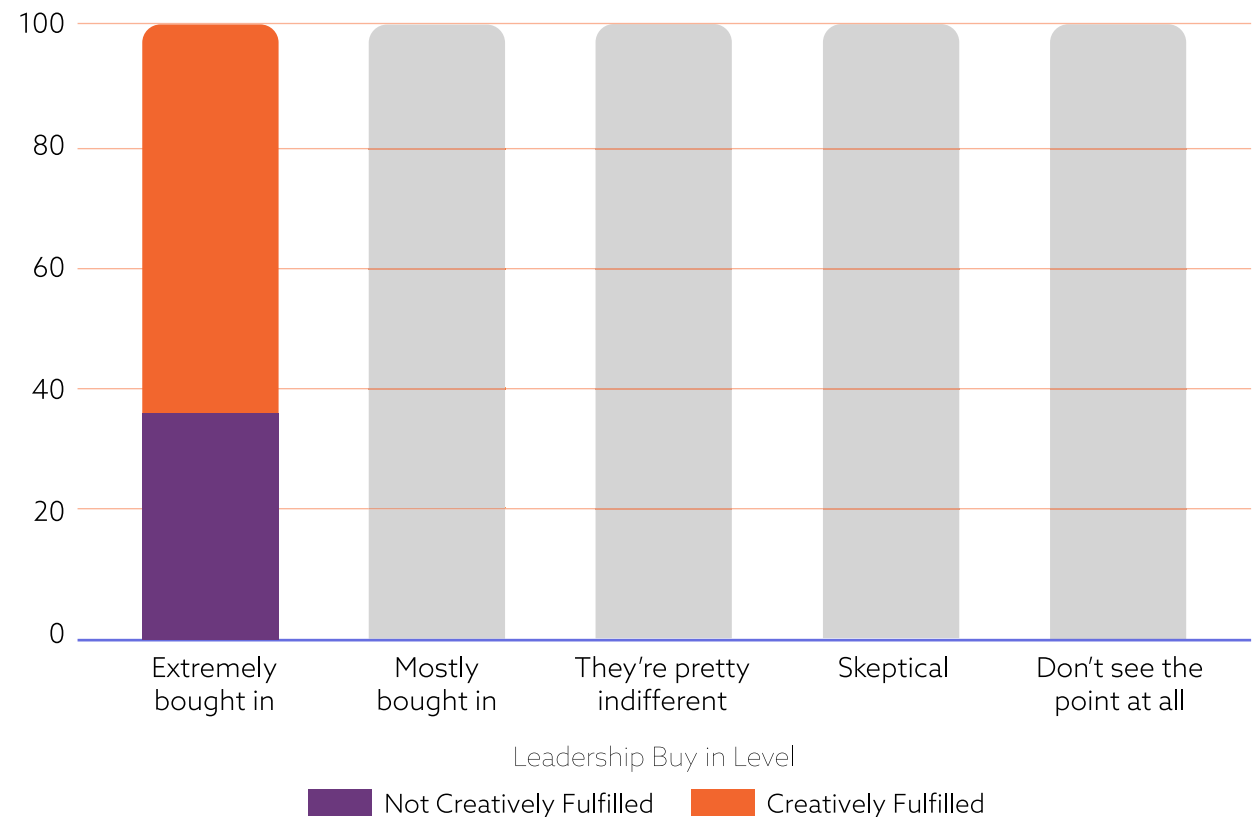
This suggests that, for many, satisfaction in their craft is tempered by other external factors – perhaps misalignment with company goals, industry challenges, or internal politics.



# Creative Fulfillment - Extremely Bought In

For the **“Extremely bought in”** leadership group, creative fulfillment is notably high. The majority of respondents in this group report feeling creatively fulfilled, with a significant rise in “Yes” responses compared to other leadership categories. This highlights the strong correlation between full leadership support and creative satisfaction. When leadership is fully invested in content marketing, content marketers are more empowered to take ownership of their work, align it with business goals, and express creativity.

However, while creative fulfillment is dominant in this group, a smaller portion still report feeling unfulfilled. This could be attributed to the high expectations that come with leadership buy-in, where content teams are pushed to consistently deliver high-quality, high-impact work, which can occasionally limit creative freedom or lead to stress.



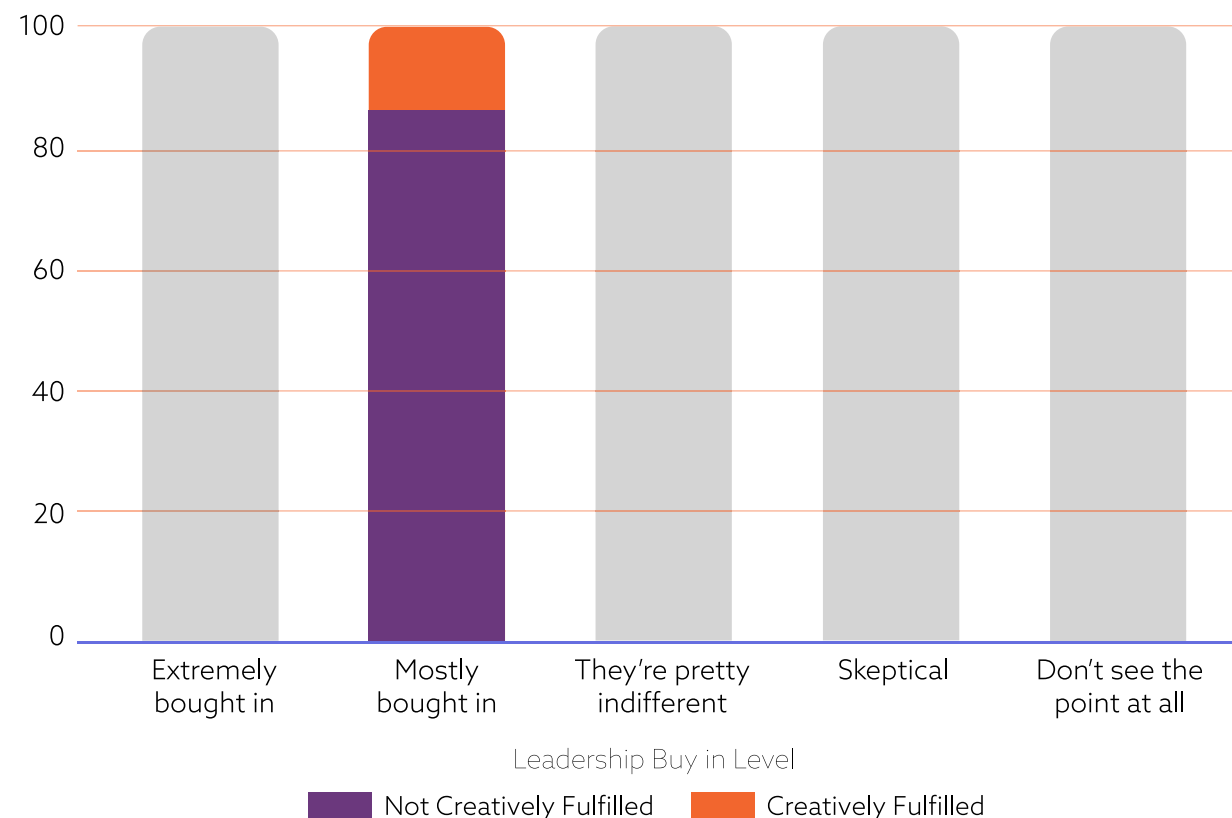
# Creative Fulfillment for “Mostly Bought In” leadership

In the “**Mostly bought in**” leadership group, creative fulfillment is a significant challenge:

A striking 83% of content marketers report that they are not creatively fulfilled. While leadership may be supportive in principle, many respondents feel constrained, perhaps due to the pressure to deliver results or focus on quantity over quality. This lack of creative freedom could be a key factor in their overall discontent.

Only 17% of respondents say they are creatively fulfilled. These individuals likely find ways to navigate leadership expectations while maintaining a degree of autonomy in their work, allowing them to express creativity within the constraints of their role.

This data suggests that even with leadership buy-in, content marketers in this group struggle to find the space for creative expression, leading to a sense of frustration and lack of fulfillment.





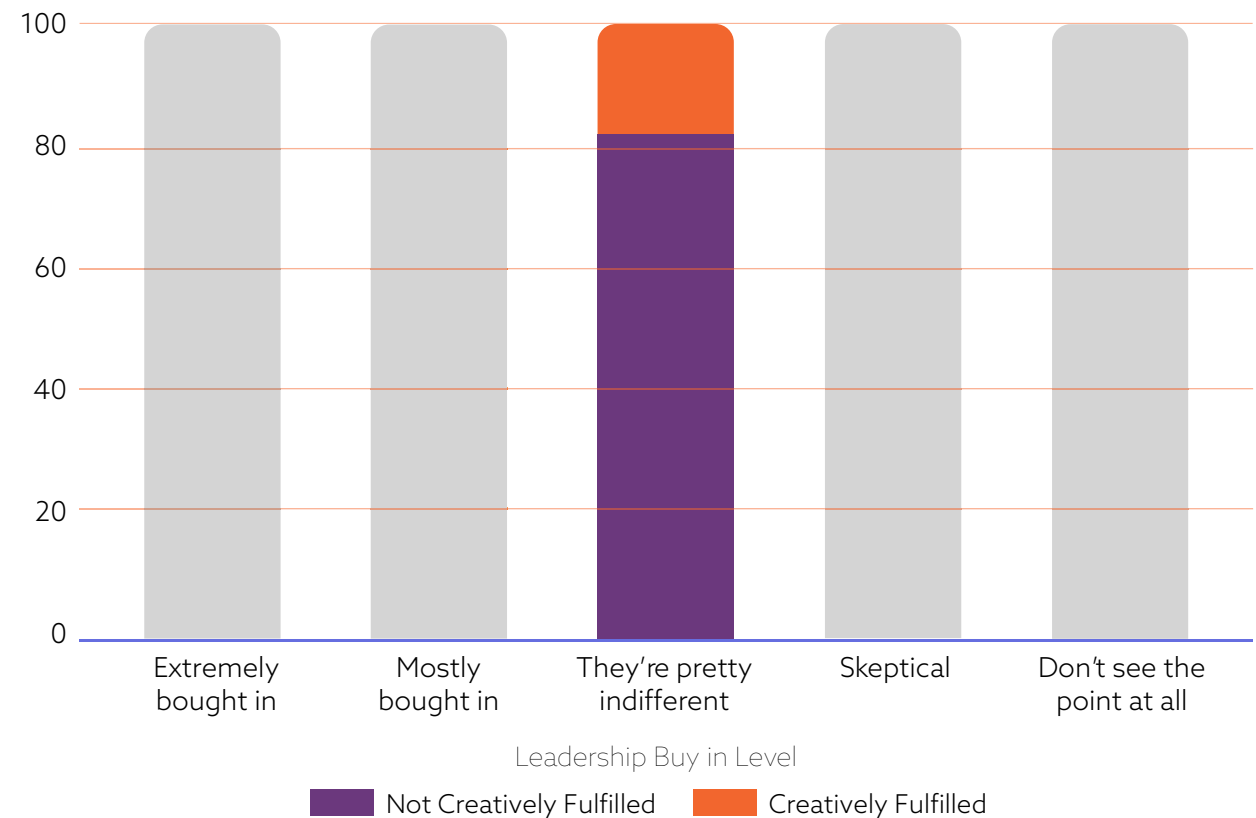
# Creative Fulfillment - Indifferent

In the **"Indifferent"** leadership group, creative fulfillment is slightly improved:

In this case 80% of content marketers report not being creatively fulfilled. This suggests that the lack of leadership engagement and recognition results in an environment where creative expression is not prioritized, leaving many feeling stagnant and uninspired.

That said, with 20% of respondents reporting creative fulfillment, this could be them using the indifference to do work they find interesting.

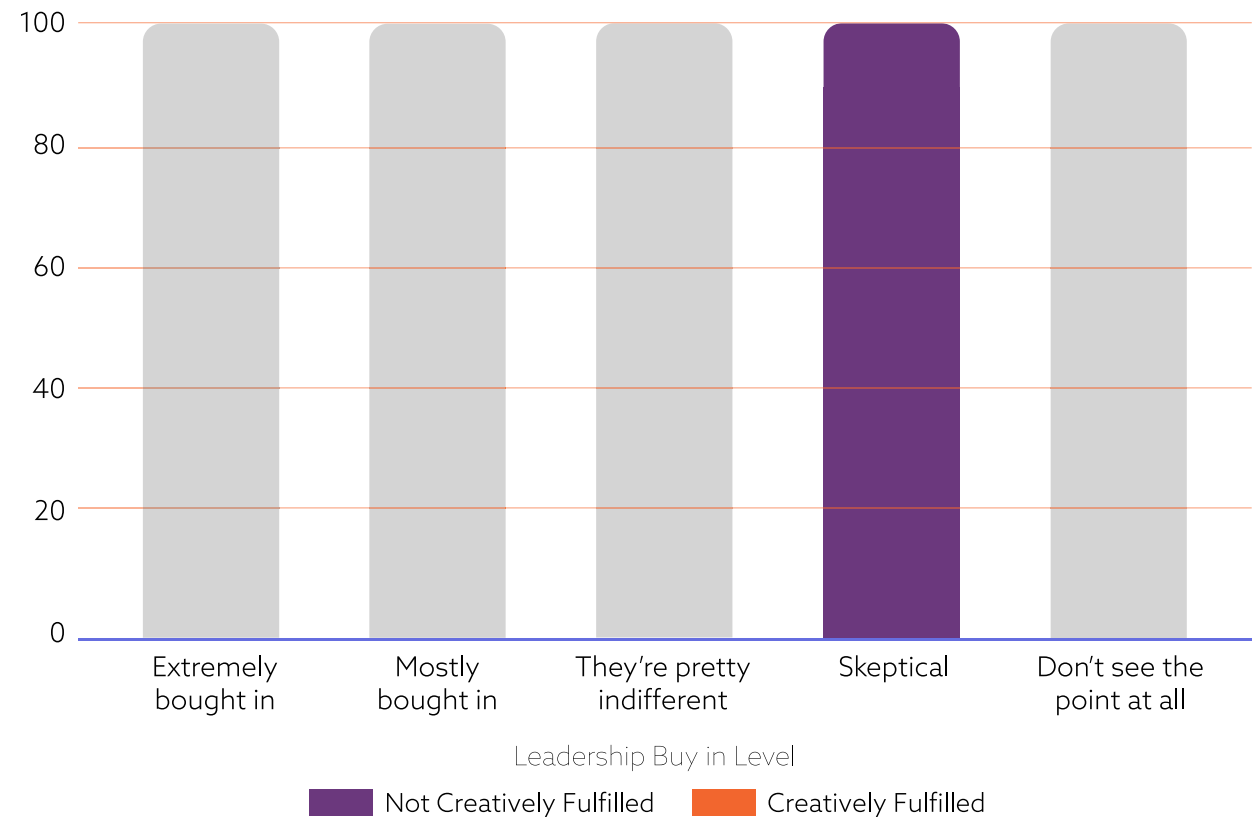
"It's a mild yes. I love that I get to do marketing, but it's not always the kind of marketing or content creation I enjoy. Plus, my industry is interesting, but not the stuff I'm passionate about. The podcast I host for work is by far my favorite creative output."



# Creative Fulfillment - Skeptical

When leadership is **Skeptical** of content marketing, creative fulfillment drops to its lowest point. A staggering 91.7% of respondents in this group report not feeling creatively fulfilled, with only 8.3% managing to find any satisfaction in their work. This could be because skepticism often means that the value of the content marketing function as a whole is under scrutiny. In such environments, content creators might feel their efforts are constantly questioned or undervalued, leading to a lack of inspiration and creative drive.

This pattern highlights the important role leadership plays in nurturing creativity. When leadership is skeptical or indifferent, content teams often feel creatively stifled. On the other hand, strong leadership buy-in creates an environment where creativity can flourish, and teams feel valued and inspired to produce their best work.



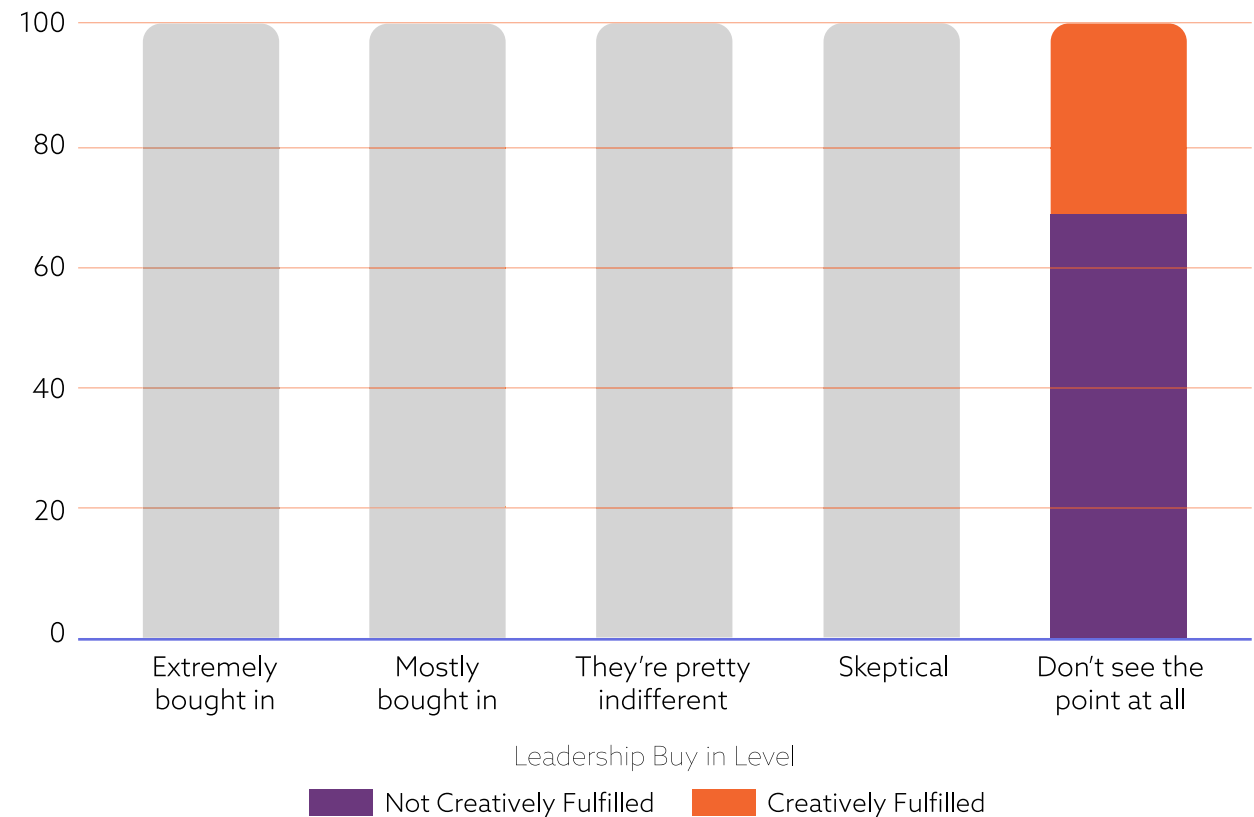
# Creative Fulfillment - Don't See The Point

For the **“Doesn't see the point”** leadership group, creative satisfaction is notably low. Since leadership doesn't prioritize or value content marketing, content teams in this segment often feel constrained, with little opportunity to explore creative ideas or push boundaries. Without leadership buy-in, there is minimal support for innovation, leaving content marketers feeling disconnected from their work.

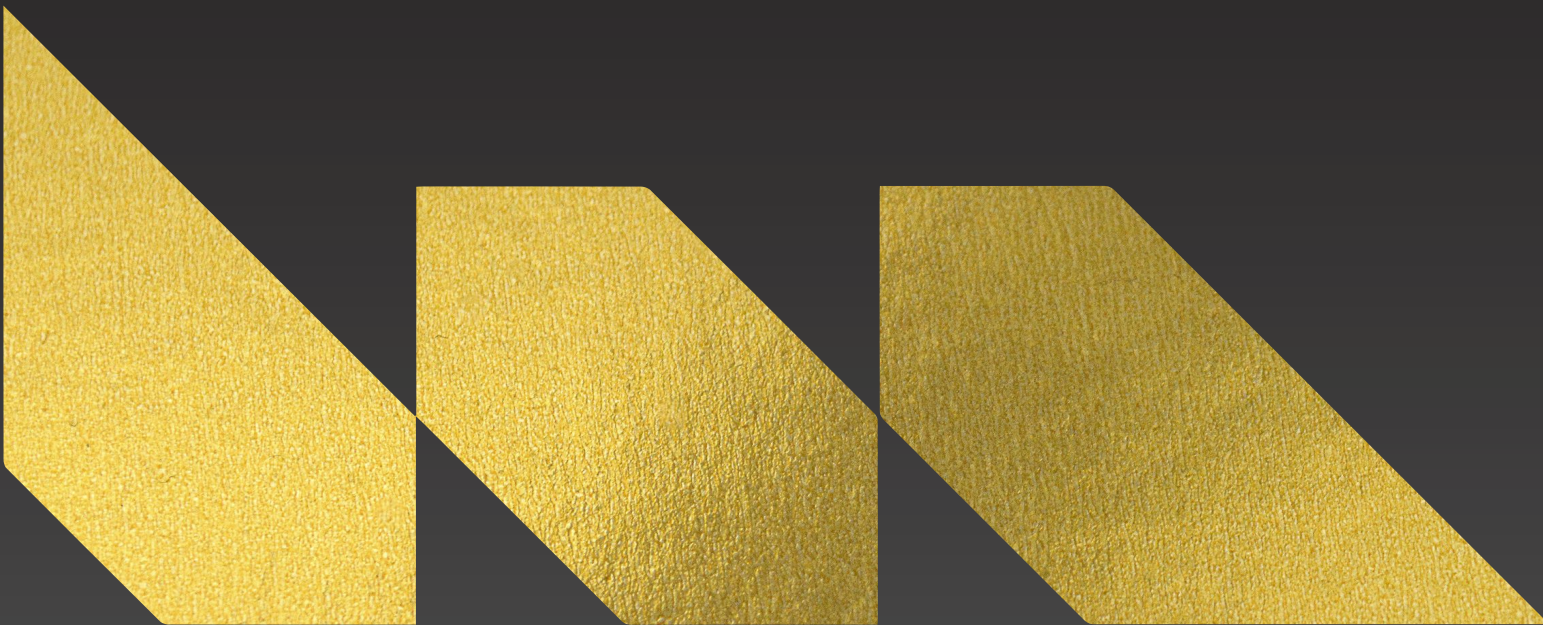
This lack of creative freedom results in a sense of frustration. Content teams may be tasked with routine, low-impact work rather than being empowered to experiment or create content that truly resonates with audiences.

Interestingly, though, some do mention being creatively fulfilled, but outside of the job.

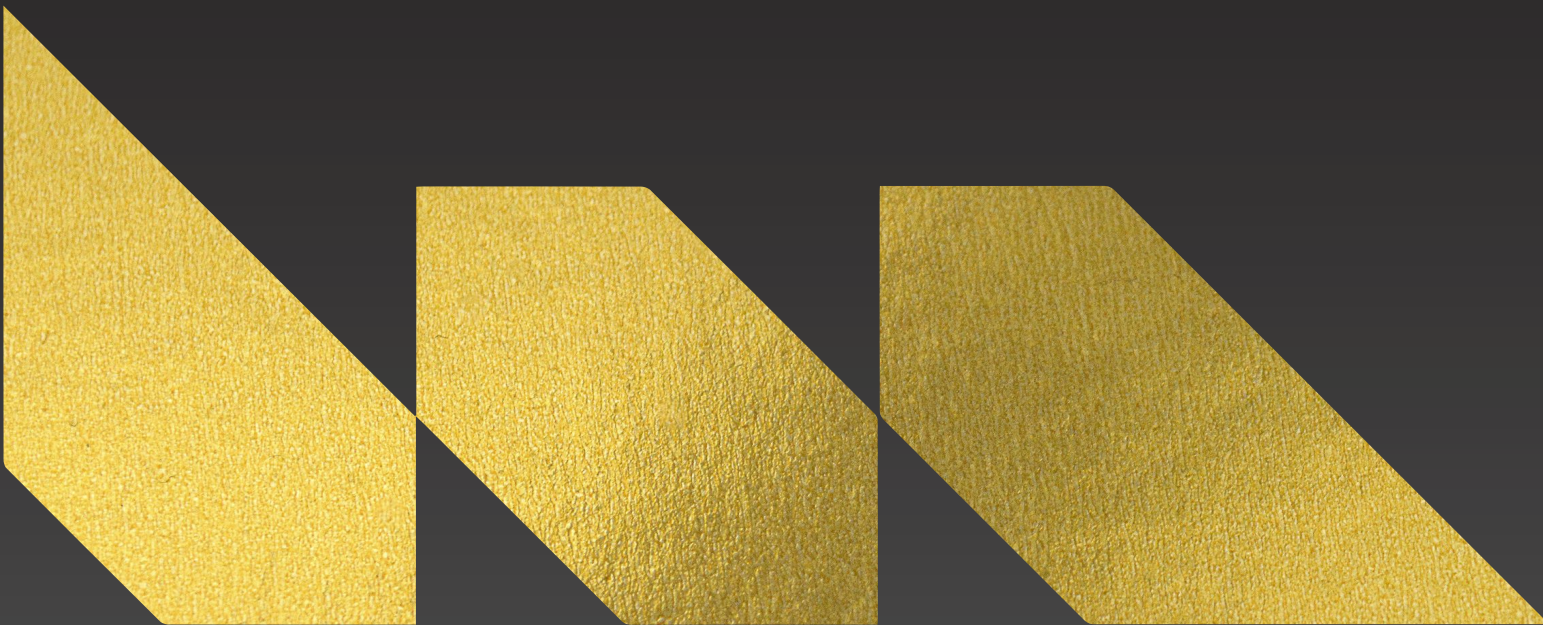
*“I carve out time to journal and think and share my thoughts on professional topics”*



“No one loves creating subpar work built using processes that are held together with spit and mud.”

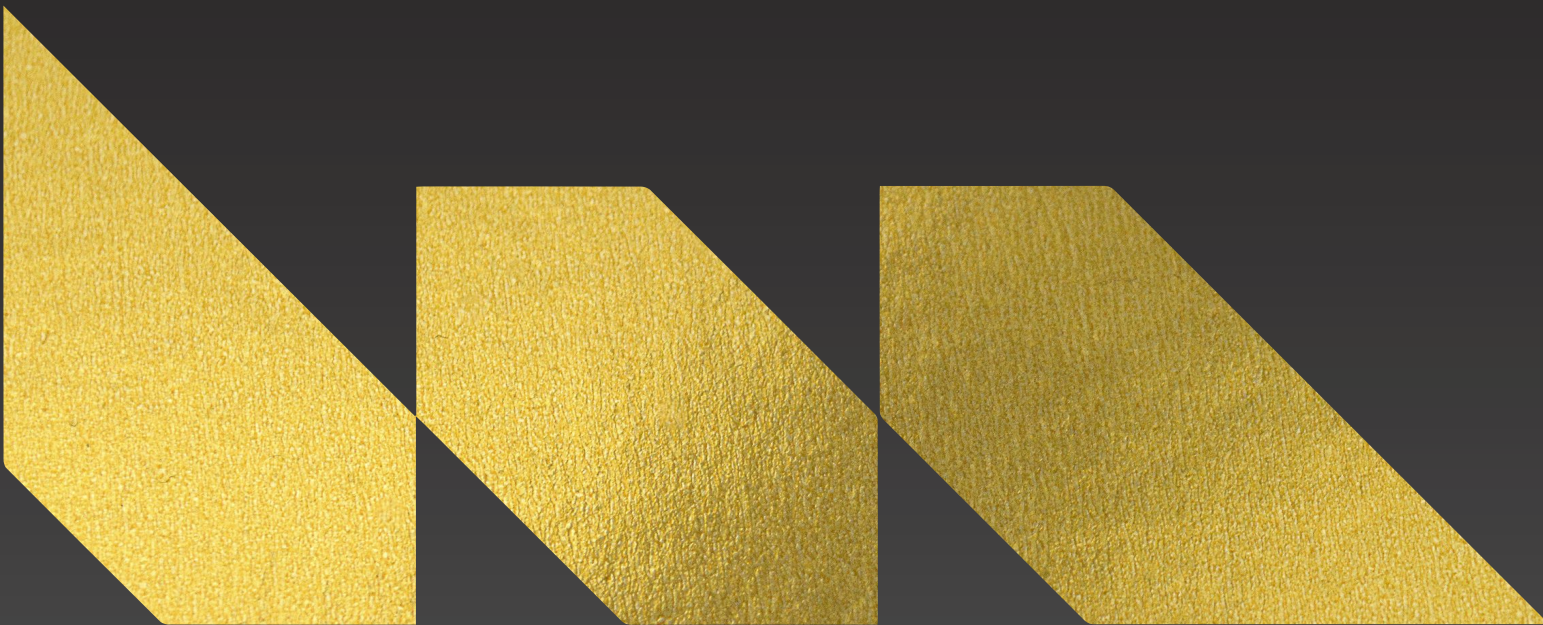


# Takeaways





# Do Your Audience Research



01



# Do Your Audience Research

From career satisfaction, leadership buy-in, collaboration, confidence in voice & tone... the lack of audience research has negative consequences across every vector of this survey.

But it wouldn't be fair to say "do research" and not provide any guidance.

If you don't have a structured method of doing audience research, consider using **The 8 Layer Market Research Process**.



# The 8 Layer Market Research Process

## 1. You:

Collaborate with your colleagues to find your four core brand narratives.



# The 8 Layer Market Research Process

## 2. Your customers

**Interview** your customers to identify what drives them, what they fear, and their strategies for success. These common personality traits will reveal their shared Jungian Archetypes, and the values you and they have in common.

- Innocent
- Sage
- E
- 
- 
- Caregiver
- Ruler
- Creator



# The 8 Layer Market Research Process

## 3. Your Direct Competitors

**Analyze** the following areas to reveal their strengths and weaknesses in how they appeal to authority, logic, and emotions.

**Products:**  
Features & Benefits

**Channels**

**Topics**

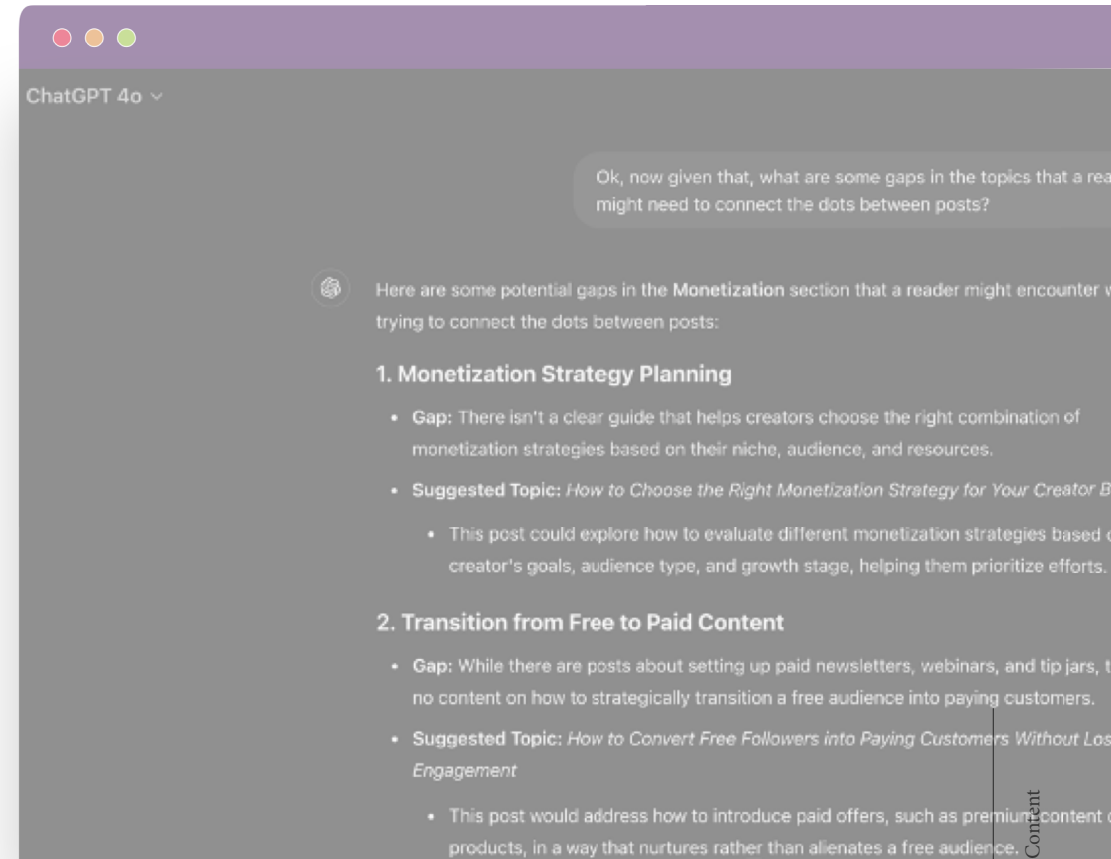
**Formats**

**Customer  
Feedback**

# The 8 Layer Market Research Process

## 4. Your Search Competitors

**Organize** the topics they cover like scenes in a larger story, then **identify** the narrative gaps. This will help you create more comprehensive coverage on the subject, and if they're not a direct competitor, help you find a potential content distribution partner.

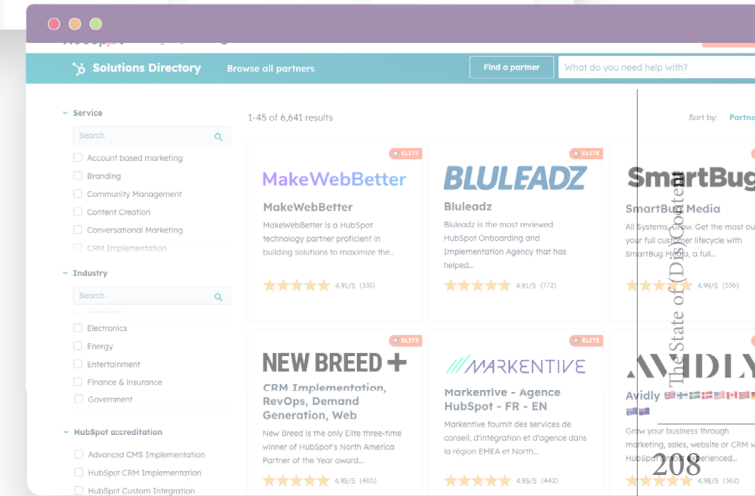
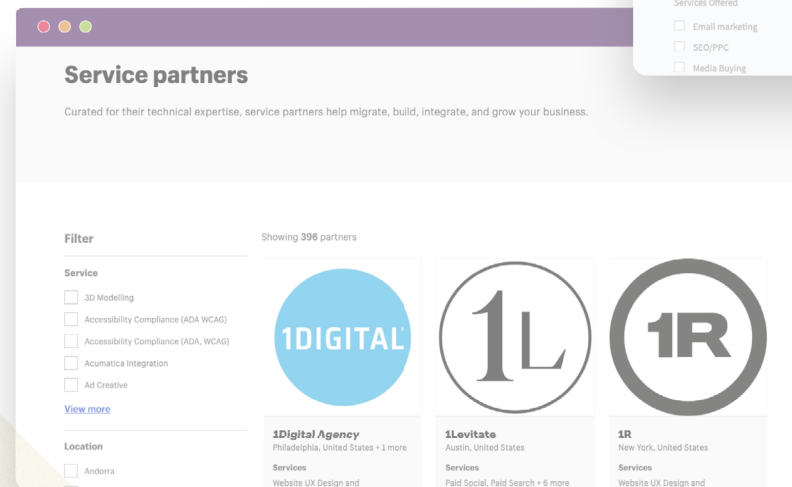
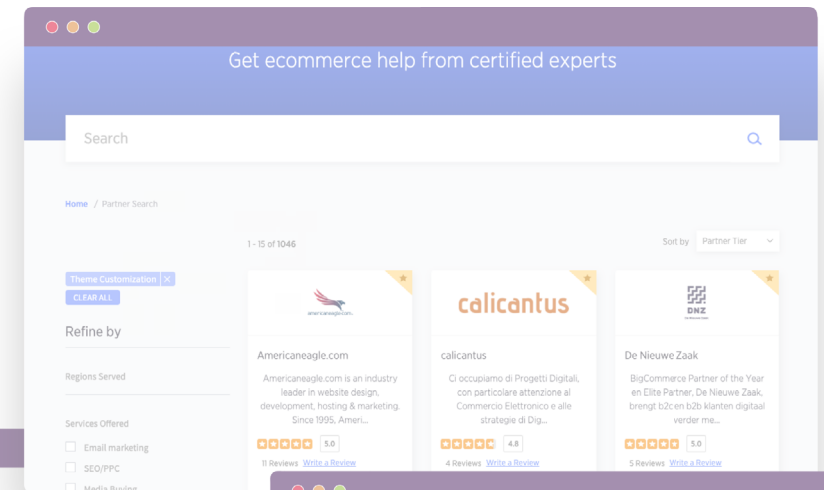




# The 8 Layer Market Research Process

## 5. Industry Adjacent

**Network** with agencies and technology companies that target the same kind of buyer you do. These are potential distributors of your content.



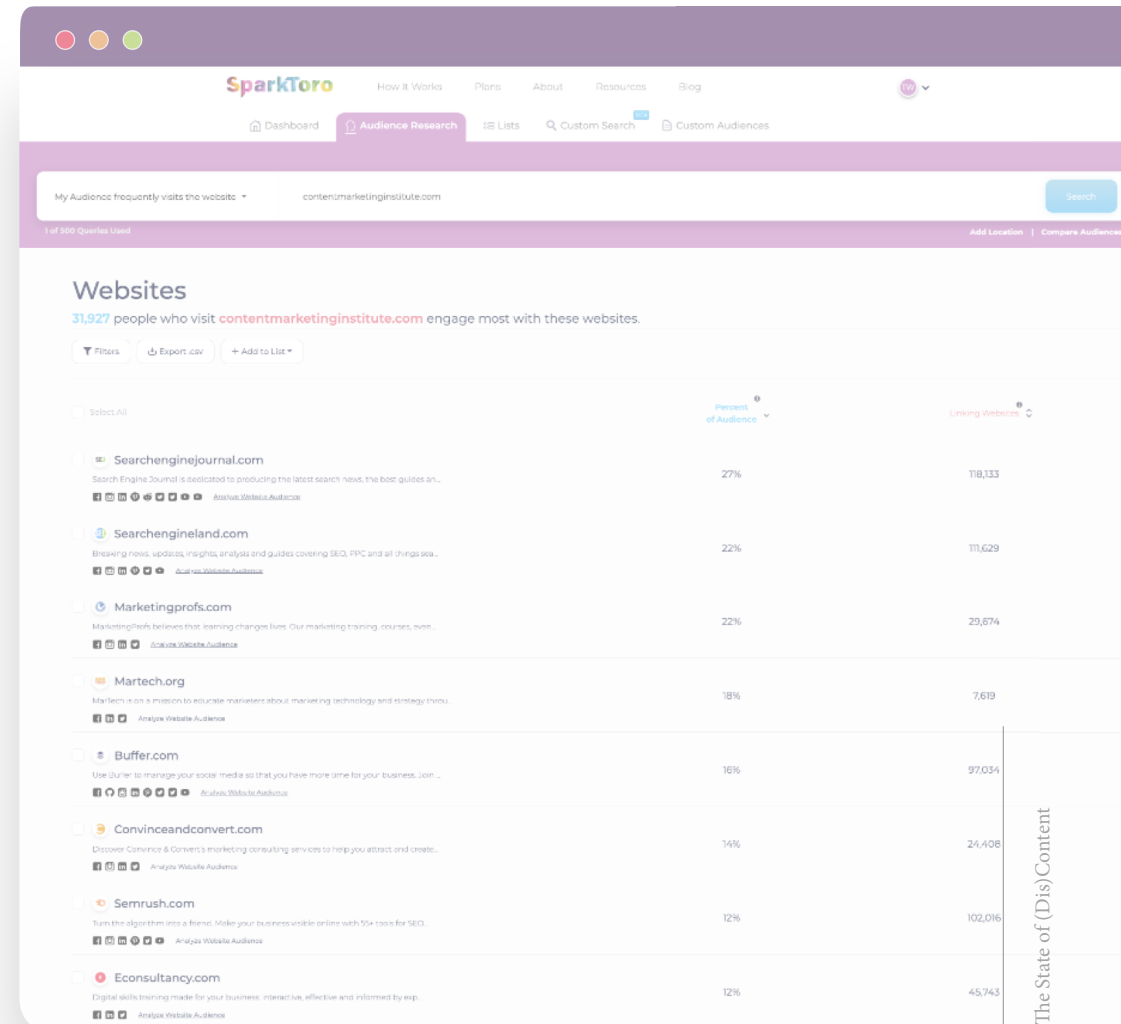


# The 8 Layer Market Research Process

## 6. News

**Use Sparktoro** to find the news outlets visitors to yours, your competitors, your search competitors, and agency / technology partners go to and spend their time.

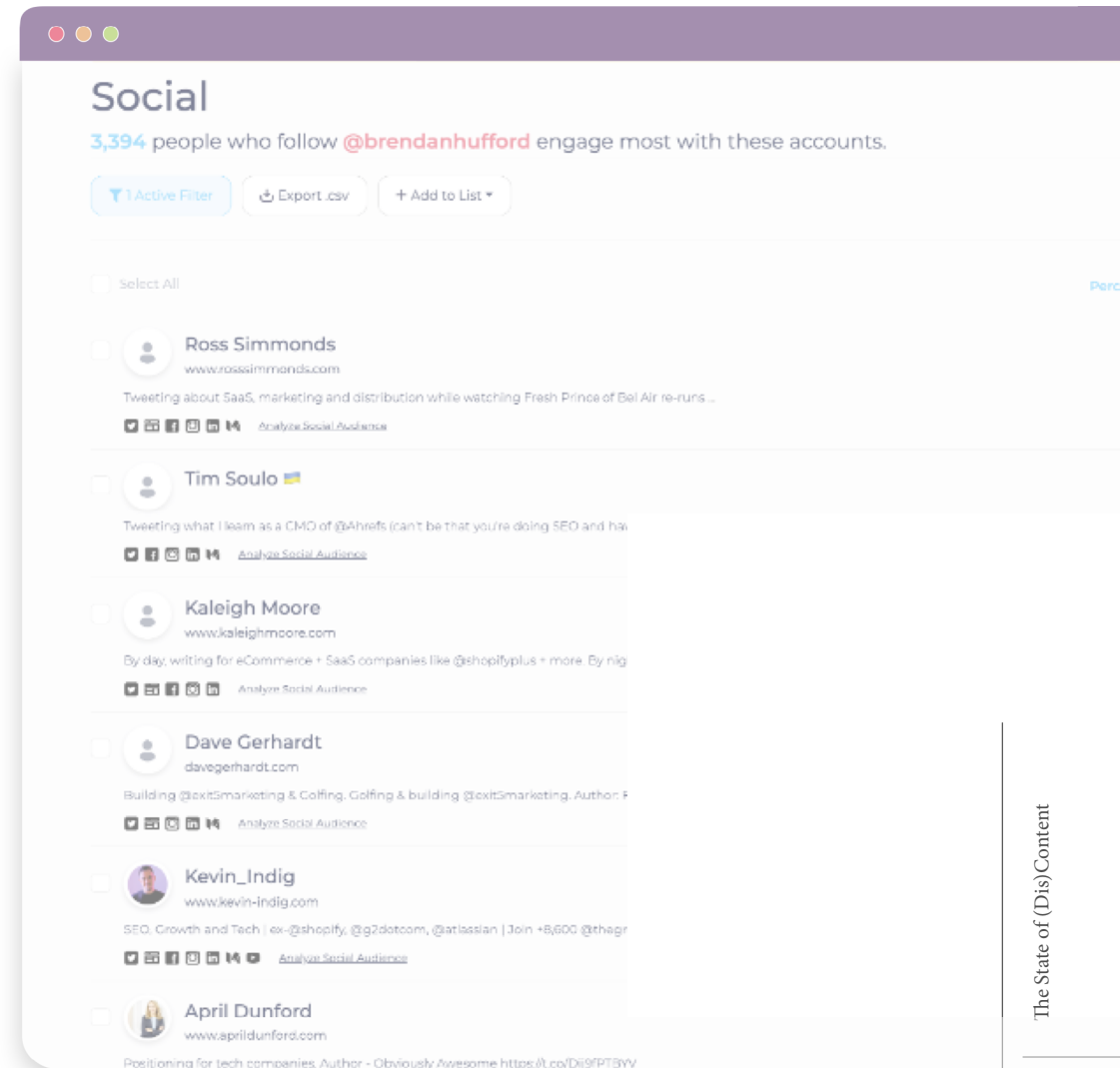
This will help you build a network of outlets you can reach out to for relevant content distribution partnerships.



# The 8 Layer Market Research Process

## 7. Influencers

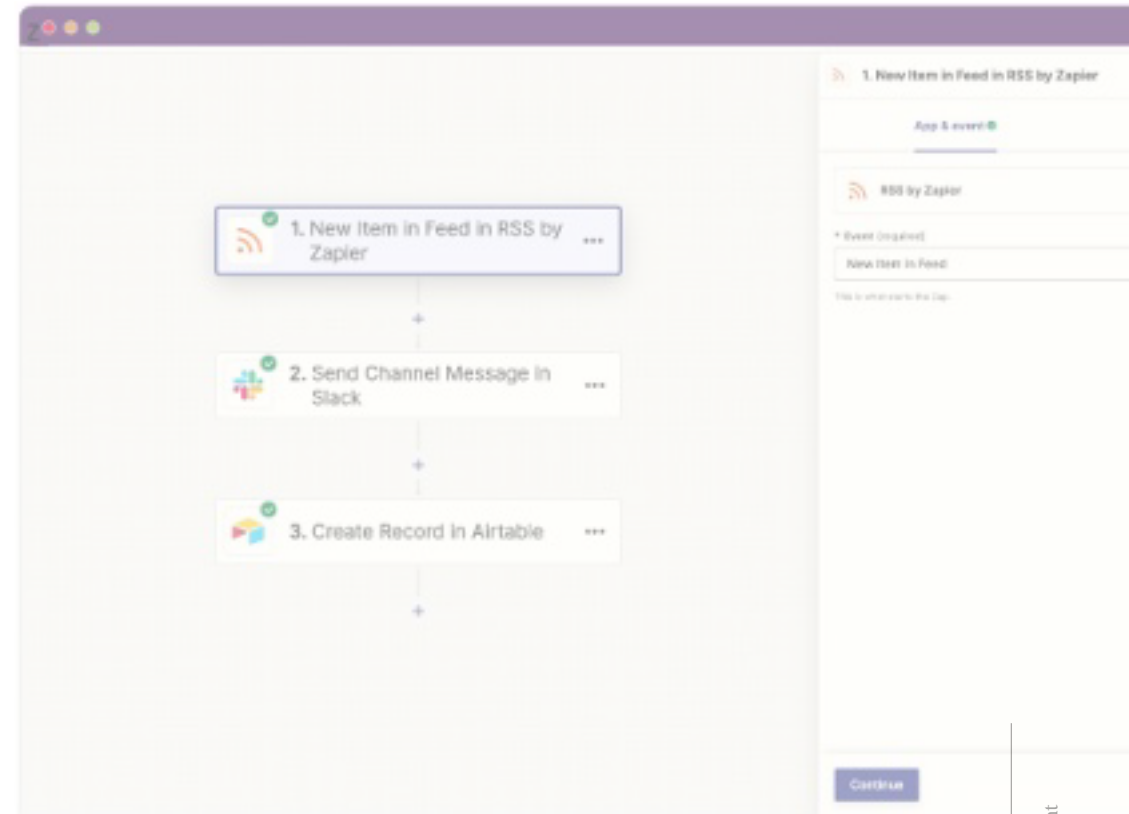
**Use Sparktoro** to also identify the influencers, Youtube channels, and podcasts your market consumes.



# The 8 Layer Market Research Process

## 8. Pulse

***Use Automation*** with Zapier to get notified of updates when anyone in any of these layers updates, so you can keep track of your market in real time.



Apply Your  
Market Research  
To The Creative  
Development  
Process.

02



# Create a Content Code

- Write a manifesto that is in the voice and tone of how you expect content to be created
- This is a set of 8 - 10 rules of how you engage the audience
- These are dos and don'ts based on direct observations you've made based on how others have approached the market.
- A foundational document that shows how to be what others are not.

Here's an example of  
[The Code by The Content Studio](#)



# Develop Unique Premises

When you look at the market, ask:

- What's everyone doing?
- What's nobody doing?
- What do we have the time & resources to produce?

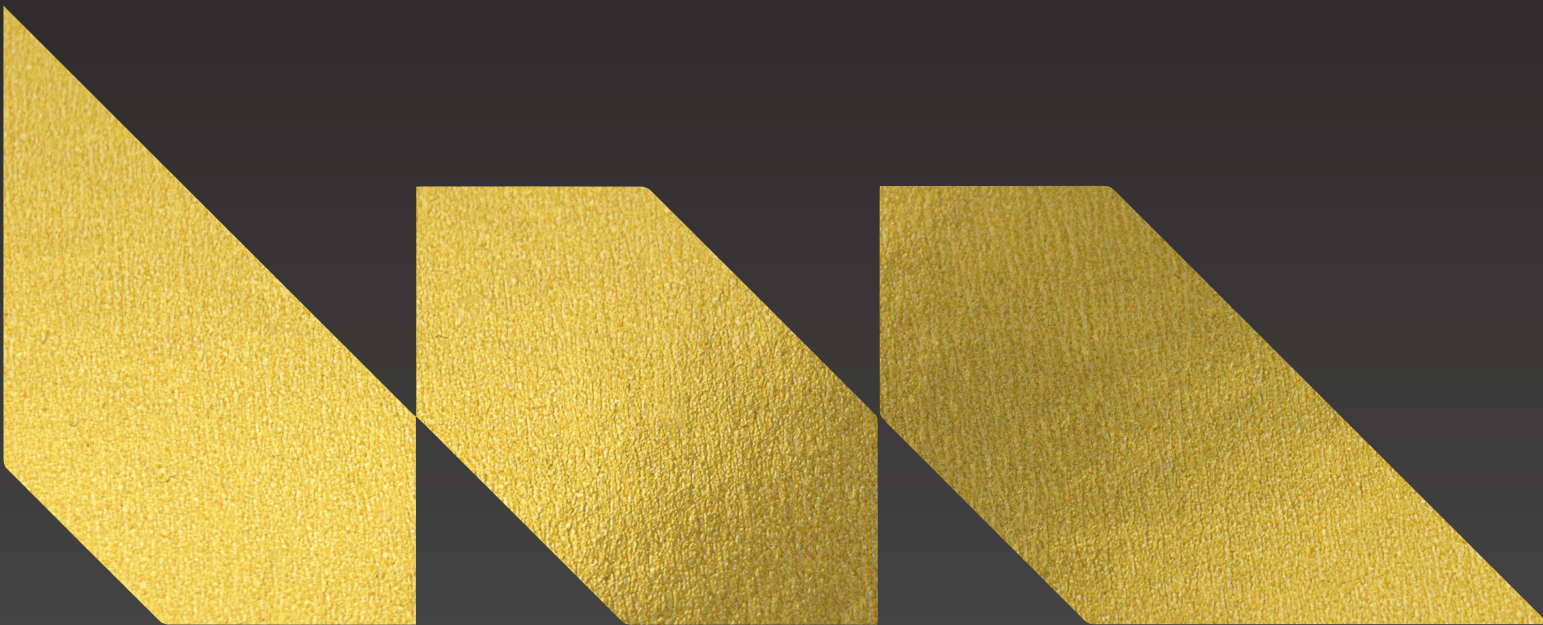
The goal is to find unique approaches to the formats everyone else is doing, while also developing unique properties that will stand out on premise alone.



# Validate Concepts Before Presenting Them To Leadership

- Ideas are cheap to pitch.
- Using the market research process, identify partners with whom a concept might resonate.
- Pitch the idea as a partnership.
- Set a threshold for pitches accepted before presenting to leadership (depending on your buy-in level)
- If the threshold is met, scope and develop the idea.
- For proof of this process working, look no further than this very report.

# Lead Change



03

# Most Leaders Don't Care About The Creativity

If this research taught us anything it was this.

What they ultimately care about is:

1. How much is it going to cost?
2. How much will it earn?
3. How long will it take to pay off?
4. How do we hedge our bets against failure?

The 8 Layer Market Research Process is intended develop and apply pressure to ideas, while also acting as a framework to present ideas and paint a clear picture of how these ideas will succeed.

# In Closing





# It's Time For A Change

This report was 6 months in the making and a labor of love.

If there's anything I hope you take away from this research, it's this – you are not alone.

We're in this together, we're all figuring it out, and I believe this is the perfect moment in time for us to all redefine together what "content marketing" really means, and take it to places it's never been before.

If you felt like this report resonated, you should know the entire experience – from how the survey was designed to how this report has gotten into your hands – was a byproduct of the process mentioned in the previous slides, and it falls under a larger umbrella we're calling Content Theory.

If you'd like to know more about Content Theory and how to become a Theorist yourself, shoot me an email at [Tommy@thecontentstudio.com](mailto:Tommy@thecontentstudio.com)

I look forward to seeing you around the internet.  
- Tommy Walker



# Acknowledgements:

These are the people who helped make this report happen.

If you liked this report, I recommend collaborating with any of these folks. Not only are they amazing at what they do, but they've been a joy to work with.



**Hassan Khalid** - Graphic Design  
[LinkedIn](#)



**Roxine Kee** - Email & Social Marketing  
[LinkedIn](#)



**Rob Carpenter** - Survey Promo  
[LinkedIn](#)



**Bani Kaur** - Writing Support  
[LinkedIn](#)



**Kriti Dugar** - Outreach  
[LinkedIn](#)



**Joshua Darling** - Data Analysis  
[LinkedIn](#)

THE STATE OF  
*(Dis)*CONTENT