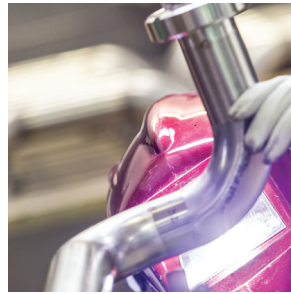
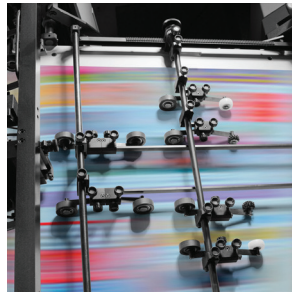


# 2023 MANUFACTURING CONTENT BENCHMARK REPORT



**w**inbound

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## INTRODUCTION

This report is actually inspired by a report last year from the [Content Marketing Institute](#) (CMI).

In their report on [manufacturing content marketing](#), CMI found that manufacturers who had successfully used digital content in their marketing approach reported the following:

- 88% created brand awareness
- 67% built credibility/trust
- 63% educated their audience

Those are great results if you want your marketing to help drive sales.

But how many **small to mid-sized manufacturers** were actually using content in the first place?

To find out, we reviewed more than 420 websites of small, mid-sized, and large manufacturers. (Small manufacturers were classified as less than \$25 million in revenue; mid-sized manufacturers were \$25 million–\$100 million; and large manufacturers were more than \$100 million).

We looked to see if content elements were present in three critical stages of the sales and marketing process:

- Do manufacturers have “*top-of-funnel*” content that creates awareness and gets prospects to **Know You**?
- Do manufacturers have “*middle-of-funnel*” content that provides insights and gets prospects to **Like You**?
- Do manufacturers have “*bottom-of-funnel*” content, such as case studies and testimonials, that gets prospects to **Trust You**?

Our goal was not to determine the effectiveness of their content at each of these stages, only to determine if the content assets were present.

We also looked at how active they were with their content. We defined “active” in the following ways:

- Over the last three months, have they published at least once on a blog or YouTube channel?
- On social media, have they published at least twice per month over the last three months on at least one channel?

## KEY FINDINGS

### *Surprising and not surprising*

Our findings were both surprising and not surprising. Overall, we were **not surprised** to find that many of the websites lacked active content assets – especially in mid- to smaller-sized manufacturing companies.

These companies have typically relied on their sales teams to drive leads and new business, and they've relied heavily on trade shows and cold-calling as their marketing channels.

Perhaps that's why we found:

- Only **33%** of all manufacturers – and this includes some of the country's biggest manufacturers – had regularly updated top-of-funnel content, which is typically found on blogs, YouTube channels, or social media.
- Only **47%** had middle-of-funnel content, like white papers, guides, or checklists.
- Only **20%** had bottom-of-funnel content, such as case studies, testimonials, and pricing.

Given the traditional approach, results like those weren't surprising. But **what was surprising** was how much manufacturers seem to be ignoring that their prospects are shifting toward digital channels.

For example, in the business world where manufacturers operate:

- Over **57%** percent of the customer journey will be completed *before a meaningful interaction with a salesperson*. ([Challenger Sales Model](#))
- **80%** of B2B sales interactions between suppliers and buyers *will occur in digital channels*. ([Gartner](#))
- Only **17%** of the total purchase journey *is spent meeting with potential suppliers*. ([Gartner](#))

***In other words, the amount of strategic content assets that we saw on these websites did not correspond to the ways prospects are looking for information.***

Not only are the manufacturers we sampled not following the playbook of the manufacturers successfully using content (remember the CMI report we referenced earlier), they're not adhering to the trends of today's buyers.

## GENERAL FINDINGS

Before we get into the specifics, keep in mind the following general findings:

- **Fewer than half of manufacturers had the content assets vital to digital marketing.** Fewer than half of manufacturers of all sizes, incomes, and types had a full complement of content-marketing tools as described above.
- **We excluded small (less than five employees) manufacturers.** Almost every business with fewer than five employees did not have any of the content assets listed above on their site, so they were excluded from further study. ***The threshold of being too small to do content marketing appears to be five employees in the manufacturing sector.***
- **Larger companies were more likely to have the content assets, but not by much.** Larger companies were more likely to have all components of a content-marketing program, but the gaps between them and smaller companies were not large.

Okay, let's take a look at the specific asset findings.

## TOP-OF-FUNNEL CONTENT

### **Only 33% of manufacturers had active blogs, YouTube channels, and social media**

The majority of manufacturers aren't regularly publishing content on their blogs, YouTube channels, or social media. Their digital content was typically confined to their website -- and that's where the marketing stopped.

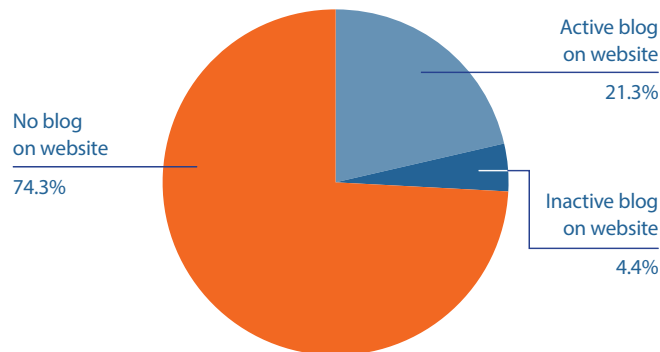
**Reminder:** Our definition of "active" for blogs and YouTube pages is posting once in the last three months.

### **Just over 21% of manufacturers have an active blog.**

Blogs typically contain articles and in-depth answers to customer questions. They typically can attract traffic from search engines and can be used for thought leadership.

Yet only 25.7% of manufacturers have a blog, and only 21.3% of manufacturers have an *active* blog.

**Percentage of manufacturing websites with a blog**



### **Breakout by Company Size**

When the results are broken out by business type and size, larger and more profitable companies are unsurprisingly more likely to have a blog.

	Yes	Yes, inactive	No
<b>Under \$25MM</b>	11.34%	3.09%	85.57%
<b>\$25MM to \$100MM</b>	13.16%	3.95%	82.89%
<b>\$100MM+</b>	31.84%	6.36%	61.78%

## Why this is important

In contrast, [Backlinko](#) found that 72% of B2B companies (not specifically manufacturing) have a blog, which is considered the main hub for organic traffic, much of which comes from search engines like Google. That's why blogging is so critical for channels such as search engine optimization (SEO).

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Andy Crestodina, [Orbit Media](#)

*"If you have no content program, you have no hope of ranking for any of the information intent keyphrases. You are deliberately letting your competitors win that huge amount of visibility and traffic. It's the content marketers that get the [real traction in SEO](#). Websites with content programs that do SEO are nearly twice as likely to report success as those that do not."*

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**Curt Anderson** also notes many of the benefits of blogging:

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Curt Anderson, [B2Btail](#)

*"Blogging plays a critical role with any B2B marketing strategy and delivers powerful results for numerous reasons. Benefits of blogging include:*

- *Tremendous SEO Value*
- *Customer engagement*
- *Educate customers*
- *Inform potential prospects on your company, products, services and solutions*

*The Ultimate Goal: Provide all of the necessary information to help your ideal prospect make a buying decision on a Friday night at midnight without needing to wait for you to open your doors on Monday morning."*

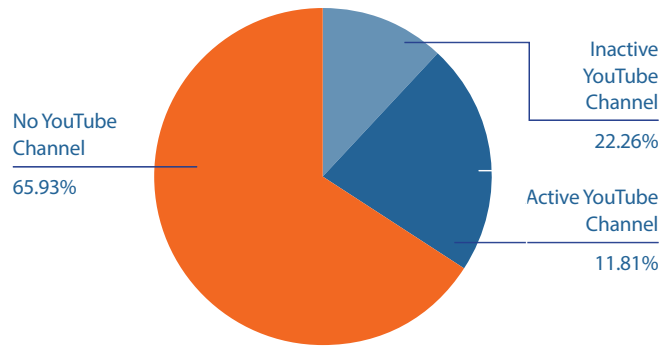
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**22% of manufacturers have a YouTube page, but just over 11% actively post to it.**

YouTube was a more popular medium than blogs for the manufacturers we studied. However, manufacturers found it difficult to stay active, as gaps between having a YouTube channel and keeping it active were significant.

**Reminder:** Our definition of “active” for blogs and YouTube pages is posting once in the last three months.

**Percentage of manufacturing websites with a YouTube channel**



**Breakout by Company Size**

We see the regular patterns following suit here:

	Yes	Yes, inactive	No
<b>Under \$25MM</b>	8.72%	19.63%	71.65%
<b>\$25MM to \$100MM</b>	19.74%	28.94%	51.32%
<b>\$100MM+</b>	41.40%	6.37%	52.23%



## Why this is important

The CMI report found that videos are the content asset that produced the best results for manufacturers in 2022, yet few manufacturers are producing them.



Jeff Long, [True Focus Media](#)

*"To achieve a high return on investment for your videos, you'll want to create video content that addresses frequently asked questions, common problems and solutions, industry trends, product demos, and short interviews with subject matter experts. It's important to create videos that align with your buyer's needs and help them solve the problems they're trying to fix.*

*Because people prefer consuming videos, sites like Google and LinkedIn prioritize video content by showing it more than other forms of media. That's why 87% of B2B marketers publish videos on LinkedIn as part of their content marketing strategy, according to the results of Wyzowl.com's B2B survey. And video platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram are booming because video content is so effective. If your company isn't using video content yet to help drive marketing and sales, it's still one of the best opportunities for manufacturers to leverage."*

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**Tim Wilborne**, whose [YouTube channel](#) has over 62K subscribers, echoes Jeff's comments, and notes that a video might not result directly in a purchase, but it informs customers searching for answers. And that includes video *without* high-end production value.



Tim Wilborne, [TW Controls](#)

*Video is a great platform to connect with your current and potential customers. Here are the two most common reasons I hear that companies don't use video:*

*"Our customers don't go to YouTube when they need to purchase our product." That may be so, but customers are more likely to purchase from a company that they have heard of than not. They search to gather information when making decisions. And don't forget, YouTube is the #2 search engine in the world.*

*We plan on hiring a video production company in the future but it isn't in the budget right now." Viewers are more interested in information from genuine people than professional edited content. People ask me all the time, what equipment should I buy if I want to start a YouTube channel? All you need is to pull your phone out and hit the record button. You could make a video talking about your product ... or better yet, make a video talking about the problem that your product solves."*



### **39.5% of manufacturers don't use social media at all**

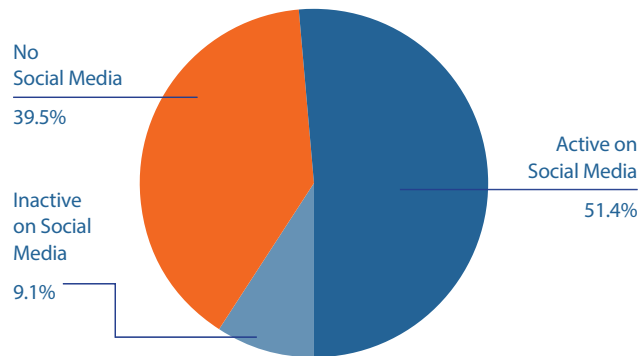
Social media not only can be used to inform customers of new products and services, but it can also be used to engage with potential prospects through social selling.

The good news is that 51.4% of manufacturers are using social media and keeping it active.

The bad news is that 39.5% of manufacturers aren't using social media at all.

**Reminder:** Our definition of "active" for social media is publishing at least twice per month over the last three months on at least one channel.

### **Percentage of manufacturers using social media**



### **Breakout by Company Size**

Not surprisingly, the bigger manufacturers see the value of social. Three-quarters of large and half of medium-sized manufacturers keep up with their social media. On the other hand, only about one-quarter of small manufacturers do.

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes, inactive</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Under \$25MM</b>	29.74%	11.8%	58.46%
<b>\$25MM to \$100MM</b>	50.00%	21.05%	28.95%
<b>\$100MM+</b>	77.07%	1.91%	21.02%

## Why this is important

Social media is the most effective B2B channel for driving revenues in 2023, according to 60% of US B2B marketers ([Wpromote and Ascend2](#)).

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**Jake Hall**, “The Manufacturing Millennial” and a huge presence on social media, put it in terms that should hit home with manufacturers who rely ONLY on trade shows and traditional sales outreach to drive their business.

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### Jake Hall, [The Manufacturing Millennial](#)

*“After attending a trade show, I reviewed all the exhibitors’ websites. I found 23% did not have a LinkedIn page, 64% did not post on social media before the show, and 37% hadn’t posted a video in the last 90 days. So no one was talking about being at the trade show -- despite spending \$10K to \$30K plus in total costs to exhibit there.*

*Then I did another survey of engineers and decision-makers, and asked where they got their information. Over 50% said they got it from videos or YouTube, and 36% got it from Google or a company website. Only 7% percent said they talk to the sales rep.*

*That’s almost 70% - 80% getting their answers from social media based, online information. So, yes, do trade shows to meet people and exchange information. But if you are only doing that AND NOT using social media, you are wasting money and losing customers.”*

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**Eddie Saunders Jr.**, the self-proclaimed (and actual, in our eyes) “mascot of manufacturing,” adds in the value of a platform that guarantees delivery and data.

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### Eddie Saunders Jr.

*“Too many manufacturers are missing the mark and losing opportunities by being dormant or non-existent on socials. Many have simply become comfortable with the old way of doing things because it’s not “broken” (or at least they don’t think it is). Little do they know that this can and will come back to bite them in the future.*

*What many fail to realize is that being active on social media provides numerous benefits to your brand and allows you to capitalize on attention you wouldn’t be receiving otherwise. It’s one of the few platforms that essentially guarantees delivery and good data behind it. For the minimal work involved in participating, you’d think manufacturers would run towards it.”*

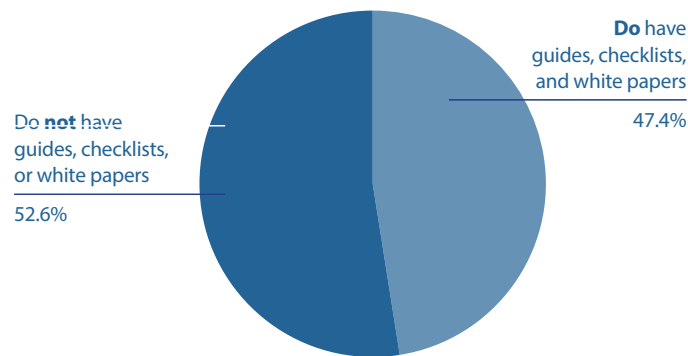
## MIDDLE-OF-FUNNEL CONTENT

### **47.4% of manufacturers are providing white papers, guides, and tools like configurators**

Middle-of-funnel content typically consists of white papers, guides, checklists, and tools like configurators. These are used to share important business insights on how your product or service can provide a solution to manufacturers.

Customers use this content to make buying decisions, but they weren't present on the majority of manufacturing websites.

### **Percentage of manufacturers' websites with guides, checklists, and white papers**



### **Breakout by Company Size**

Use of these tools is directly related to company revenues. The more you sell, the more likely you are to have selling tools like guides and checklists available.

	Yes	No
<b>Under \$25MM</b>	28.72%	71.28%
<b>\$25MM to \$100MM</b>	53.95%	46.05%
<b>\$100MM+</b>	71.34%	28.66%

## Why this is important

As we noted earlier, because 58% of the customer journey is completed online before a meaningful interaction with a salesperson, you need to provide the content that can help buyers make an informed decision.

And in complex sales -- which are typical to manufacturers -- insights in your middle-of-funnel content can help customers make decisions.



**Matt Dixon**, Founding Partner, **DCM Insights**  
Co-author of *The Challenger Sale* and *The JOLT Effect*

*"If you are a manufacturer with a complex product, asking prospective buyers to switch from their regular way of doing business to your product or service is a huge challenge.*

*What you have to do is show them that the pain of sticking with the status quo is far greater than the pain of changing their ways and using your product. The only way to do that is to provide them with unique, data-backed insights that illustrate the difference you are making.*

*Creating an in-depth report with your insights can help them not only understand the solution, but they can use it to convince other members of the decision-making team."*

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These online tools are an important part of the purchasing process. Online, self-service is the name of the game, especially in e-commerce.



**Kris Harrington**, CEO, **GenAlpha Technologies**

*"It's not surprising that only 47.4% of the manufacturing sites studied have white papers and tools like online product configurators available for customers today. Companies we speak with are just now realizing the power of these solutions, mainly to boost efficiency, enhance customer experiences, and grow revenue.*

*We're in an era where digital tools are reshaping B2B industries. The convergence of self-service trends and online expectations serves as a reminder of the need to leverage all available channels to connect with customers. I encourage manufacturers to see these changes and integrate these solutions into their strategies. Those who adapt will thrive, while those who don't might lose out to more forward-looking competitors."*

**BOTTOM-OF-FUNNEL CONTENT**

**Only 19.5% publish case studies, testimonials, and pricing**

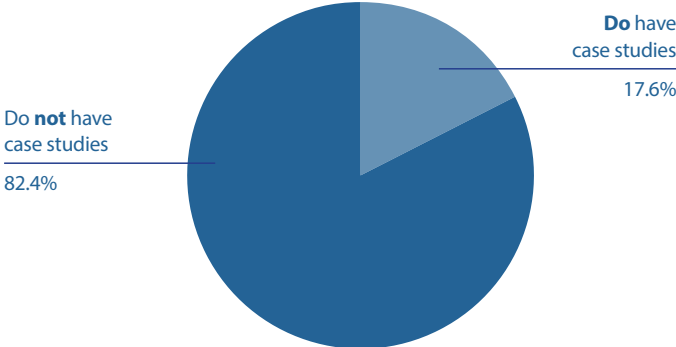
What is important for customers to see just before they decide to buy? Typically this includes information on how the product, service, or company performed in real-world situations ... and what it costs.

Case studies, testimonials, and pricing help build trust at this stage in the buying process – but manufacturers do not offer significant amounts of deal-sealing assets on their websites. Overall, only 19.5% published case studies, testimonials, and pricing information on their websites.

**17.6% of manufacturers publish case studies**

Case studies typically involve actual customer results and success stories. They are often difficult for manufacturers to get, either because of non-disclosure policies on the part of clients, or lack of effort in obtaining them from clients. That’s probably why their usage is low.

**Percentage of manufacturers’ websites with case studies**



**Breakout by Company Size**

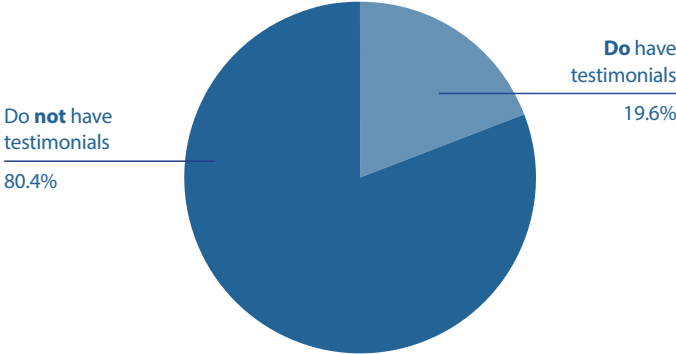
Small manufacturers and those with less than \$25 million in revenue don't use case studies; larger companies with higher revenues do.

	Yes	No
<b>Under \$25MM</b>	12.31%	87.69%
<b>\$25MM to \$100MM</b>	27.63%	72.37%
<b>\$100MM+</b>	39.49%	60.51%

**19.6% of manufacturers publish testimonials on their website**

Testimonials can include a quote from a satisfied customer. They are typically much easier to obtain than a case study, but even so, usage of testimonials was lower than case studies.

**Percentage of manufacturers' websites with testimonials**



Once again, larger manufacturers with higher revenues are more likely to use testimonials.

**Breakout by Company Size**

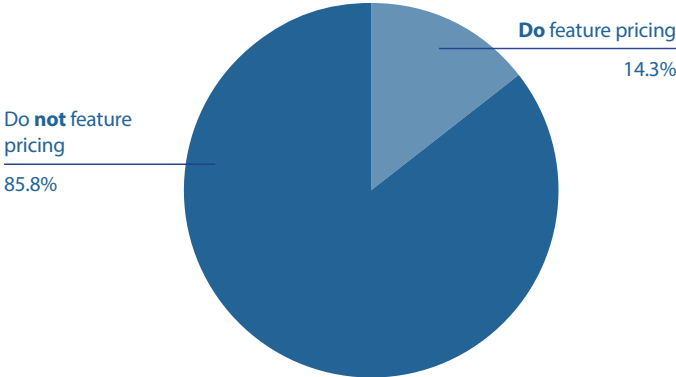
	Yes	No
<b>Under \$25MM</b>	12.31%	87.69%
<b>\$25MM to \$100MM</b>	19.74%	80.26%
<b>\$100MM+</b>	28.66%	71.34%

**Only 14.3% of manufacturers publish any type of pricing**

Pricing is the most interesting component when it comes to bottom-of-funnel content. Many manufacturers are reluctant to share their pricing. On the other hand, companies in some manufacturing-adjacent industries such as publishing are more than willing to post prices.

The fact that large, high-revenue manufacturers don't usually share pricing means scant support for this content type.

**Percentage of manufacturers' websites featuring pricing**



**Breakout by Company Size**

	Yes	No
<b>Under \$25MM</b>	15.9%	84.10%
<b>\$25MM to \$100MM</b>	13.16%	86.84%
<b>\$100MM+</b>	12.74%	87.26%



## Why this is important

A [Demand Gen Report](#) reveals 62% of B2B buyers cited a need for valid sources -- such as case studies and testimonials -- that offer a third-party perspective on the products they are evaluating.

We can answer it in one word: trust. People won't do business with you unless they **Know You, Like You, and Trust You**. And case studies and testimonials are critical for establishing trust.

So why did we also include pricing as part of the equation? Let's turn to sales and marketing expert Marcus Sheridan:

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Marcus Sheridan, author of [They Ask, You Answer](#)

*"The reason why so few manufacturers discuss pricing on their website is because they feel it will 'commoditize' what they sell. Furthermore, they have the belief that discussing pricing is almost an impossibility because there are multiple factors that dictate the actual price of a manufactured good (like shipping, quantity, etc.)."*

*The problem with this mindset is that by never discussing pricing at all, manufacturers are allowing ignorance to breed in the marketplace. This ignorance leads to a lack of understanding as to the factors that drive cost up and down in an industry (quality being the biggest example), which in turn means buyers, due to a lack of knowledge, end up choosing the cheapest option.*

*If a manufacturer is getting undercut by a cheaper competitor, especially one that is overseas, but has yet to actually explain to the world how quality affects pricing for their product(s), they have no right to complain."*

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But let's not forget the people who have to sell those products and services: the sales force. According to David J.P. Fisher, these trust-building pieces of content are essential in the sales process.

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David J.P. Fisher, President of [RockStar Consulting](#)

*"Trust allows us to take action when the outcome is uncertain. We trust that what we're buying, and who we're buying it from, is going to solve our needs."*

*The rise of digital enables us to share our message even earlier with a potential customer. Assets like case studies and testimonials are the social proof that start the trust-building process. If someone else has worked with you in the past, maybe the prospect can trust you to help them as well?*

*This interaction is usually happening well before they have even reached out to us. So the more we can provide information, including case studies, testimonials, even so far as pricing or other details, the more confidence we instill in that potential buyer... right from the very beginning."*

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## CONCLUSIONS

This research reveals that a significant portion of manufacturing websites continue the age-old trend of relying on sales to drive their business.

That might have worked well in the past and is also keeping things afloat in the present. However, the research regarding the customer journey shifting online is overwhelming. (Hopefully, we've provided enough research data here to prove the point.)

So we'll leave you with a few takeaways.

### ***Other manufacturers are having success using content***

The [CMI](#) report we cited earlier found that 81% of manufacturers who use content say they've enjoyed some amount of success with it. These are your peers who are aware of the shifting purchasing habits of customers.

### ***Other B2B industries are having success -- manufacturing should follow their lead***

The need is understood in other industries. According to **Lisa Murton Beets** of the [Content Marketing Institute](#), 62% of top-performing B2B marketers surveyed by CMI said they've used content marketing successfully to generate sales/revenue in the last 12 months.

### ***Manufacturers must do more than just produce content***

Larger companies are more likely to have assets, but that does not link to success. Only 33% of manufacturers report having driven leads from their content marketing efforts. You must have a good strategy to go with your content, and you must [align with your sales team](#) to make it work.

### ***And finally, why these results represent a golden opportunity ...***

If you're not generating content and using it in your sales and marketing, take heart. Many of your competitors aren't, so you can stake your claim in what we call the Digital Territory.

And if you are creating content, this study shows that you should keep your foot on the gas and widen the gap between you and your competitors.

Either way, we feel there's gold in them thar hills -- but only for the smart manufacturers who go out and mine it.

## **METHODOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHICS**

We profiled more than 420 U.S.-based businesses whose primary SIC code align with manufacturing and manufacturing processes.

In doing so, we wound up profiling a handful of distributors, and some subsidiary companies. However, we controlled for that in part by restricting some analyses to pure manufacturing businesses.

We examined the websites and social accounts of all businesses selected for:

- Active social accounts, not including YouTube
- A YouTube channel
- A blog on their website
- Checklists, guides, and other sales materials available on their website
- Case studies available on their website
- Testimonials on their website
- Product pricing on their website

Revenue numbers were extrapolated when necessary from publicly available sources, and employee counts were supplied in the research database.

Results were inputted into the Qualtrics research platform for cross-tabulation and analysis.

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS REPORT



[Winbound](#) is a digital sales and marketing agency. We help sales and marketing teams use content to create a “digital twin” of their sales team. The approach includes collaborating with clients to produce sales-driven content, then using marketing to distribute the content to prospects.

Winbound specializes in working with manufacturing and industrial clients, but the approach works for any B2B company with complex sales.

Winbound’s clients have enjoyed double- and triple-digit increases in website traffic and qualified leads.



[Polymath Research + Marketing](#) is a market-research and marketing firm specializing in unique, data-based approaches to market and brand assessments, product development, and content marketing. PR+M strives to deliver actionable results – and then puts those results into action efficiently and economically.



Data for this study was provided by [MNI](#), compiler and publisher of detailed profiles of the nation’s 400,000 manufacturers. MNI helps industrial buyers and sellers make new connections in the industrial sphere.

## GET YOUR OWN CONTENT ANALYSIS AND SEE HOW YOU STACK UP AGAINST YOUR DIRECT COMPETITORS!

Winbound will be happy to provide you with a customized assessment that includes:

- A content audit of your website
- An SEO snapshot of your site and your top 3 competitors
- A DIY sales and marketing alignment checklist

That sales and alignment element is critical, because without it, your leads won’t turn into customers!

***[Yes, I want my own customized assessment!](#)***



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