

# FROM ANCHOR TO ASSET

How Large Agencies Build Data-Driven Content Systems







ATLANTA  
BEIJING  
BOGOTÁ  
CAPE TOWN  
CHICAGO

GUANGZHOU  
JAKARTA  
JOHANNESBURG  
KALAMAZOO  
KANSAS CITY

KRAKOW  
KUALA LUMPUR  
LONDON  
MEMPHIS  
MEXICO CITY

MILAN  
MUMBAI  
NASHVILLE  
NEW DELHI  
NEW YORK

SAN FRANCISCO  
SÃO PAULO  
SEATTLE  
SHANGHAI  
SINGAPORE

SYDNEY  
TOKYO  
WARSAW  
WHITE SALMON

2,600+ VMLERS // 29 LOCATIONS

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@VML

#MOZCON





**A  
LIST  
2017  
AdAge**

**2017  
CANNES  
LIONS**



**2017 AWARDED WORK  
27 LIONS & 26 SHORTLISTS**

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## No. 5 VML

By Lindsay Stein

(Clockwise) The multifaceted team at VML, showed fans to virtually dunk themselves in Gatorade with a Snapchat lens, worked with Sprint to reimagine the path to purchase across its web and mobile touchpoints; and, for the International Olympic Committee, took inspiration from its rings symbol by bringing five recording artists from five regions of the world together to create one song.

VML has long been known for its digital heritage. But after picking up lead creative accounts for big-name brands in 2015, followed by even more last year, the Kansas City, Mo.-based shop is proving how well it can adapt to a broader and increasingly competitive marketplace.

Zooming up to No. 5 on Ad Age's A-List from No. 9 last year, VML continued to turn heads in 2016, particularly when Wendy's named it lead creative agency in March. The WPP shop had been taking on more and more Wendy's work for some time, and the client's decision to shift all creative from Publicis came because the agency had "proven that it can tell the Wendy's story in a modern and compelling way that drives winning business results," said Kurt Kane, chief concept and marketing officer of the fast feeder at the time.

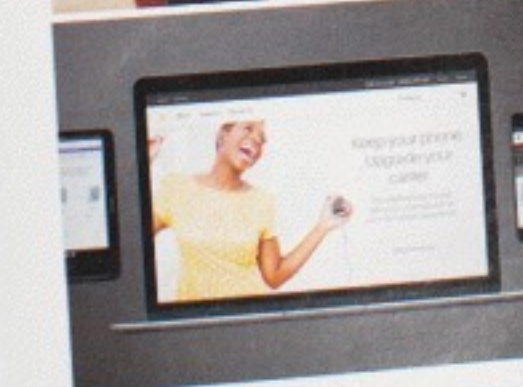
The Wendy's appointment kicked off a series of lead creative account wins last year, including PepsiCo's Brisk Tea, New Balance, Electrolux, Frigidaire, Tyson and Miami tourism. Those followed VML being named lead creative agency for Motorola, Kellogg's Kashi, the International Olympic Committee and Keurig in 2015.

displaying creative. "It isn't necessarily about the campaign, but the effectiveness of the tools and tactics in which you execute," said Mr. Ladd. VML's first work for New Balance will run in the third quarter.

For Sprint, VML transformed the brand's internal digital organization, making it more agile, cross-functional and ready for the future. In partnership with McKinsey, the agency coached and trained stakeholders and Sprint team members and integrated within IT, ultimately helping digital sales grow by 200%.

Mr. Cook said VML's Global Advisory Practice, which specializes in business strategy and transformational consulting, has seen great success in the past couple of years, and he plans to expand it and integrate it across the agency. The practice is "at the heart" of Bridgestone's commercial business around the world, he said, adding that the work goes way beyond messaging and looks at how to change a company's infrastructure and the way it delivers products and services and engages consumers.

With 28 offices worldwide, Mr. Cook said the agency isn't looking to expand geographically in



New business, combined with organic growth, helped VML achieve an estimated 19% U.S. revenue growth and 16% global growth last year.

"We've always had a unique blend of creativity and technology, but in 2016, it was something that was so much more relevant and needed in the world, and the client receptivity of the impact that creativity and technology coming together could make was so high," said Global CEO Jon Cook.

During the pitch for New Balance's global creative account, Chris Ladd, exec VP-consumer experience and demand creation at the sneaker company, said VML stood out because of how it takes a "digital and consumer-first perspective."

He added that VML went into the pitch and, unlike its competitors, showed the company exactly how to sell more footwear and apparel rather than just

2017, but it does plan on "amplifying and bringing the global perspective of VML more to clients," so they can benefit from all the cultures and diversity within the shop. Nearly half, 45%, of the agency's 2,600 employees worldwide are women and 11% are multicultural, while 37% of creatives are female and 15% are multicultural. At the beginning of 2017, the shop promoted John Godsey and Mike Wente to the roles of North American chief creative officers, and hired Craig Badyne from DigitasLBI as director-creative recruiting.

VML is looking to attract talent this year that can thrive using both technology and creativity, said Mr. Cook, who's been at VML for 21 of the agency's 25 years in existence.

"The most important thing to me through all of these years is being relevant, and it's the hardest thing to achieve as an agency, so it's a point of pride for me that after 25 years, we're as relevant as we've ever been," he said. "I literally have never been more excited about what we are and our capabilities."

JANUARY 23, 2017 • 15



# ENTERPRISE AGENCY CLIENTS





# IT WAS CHAOS.

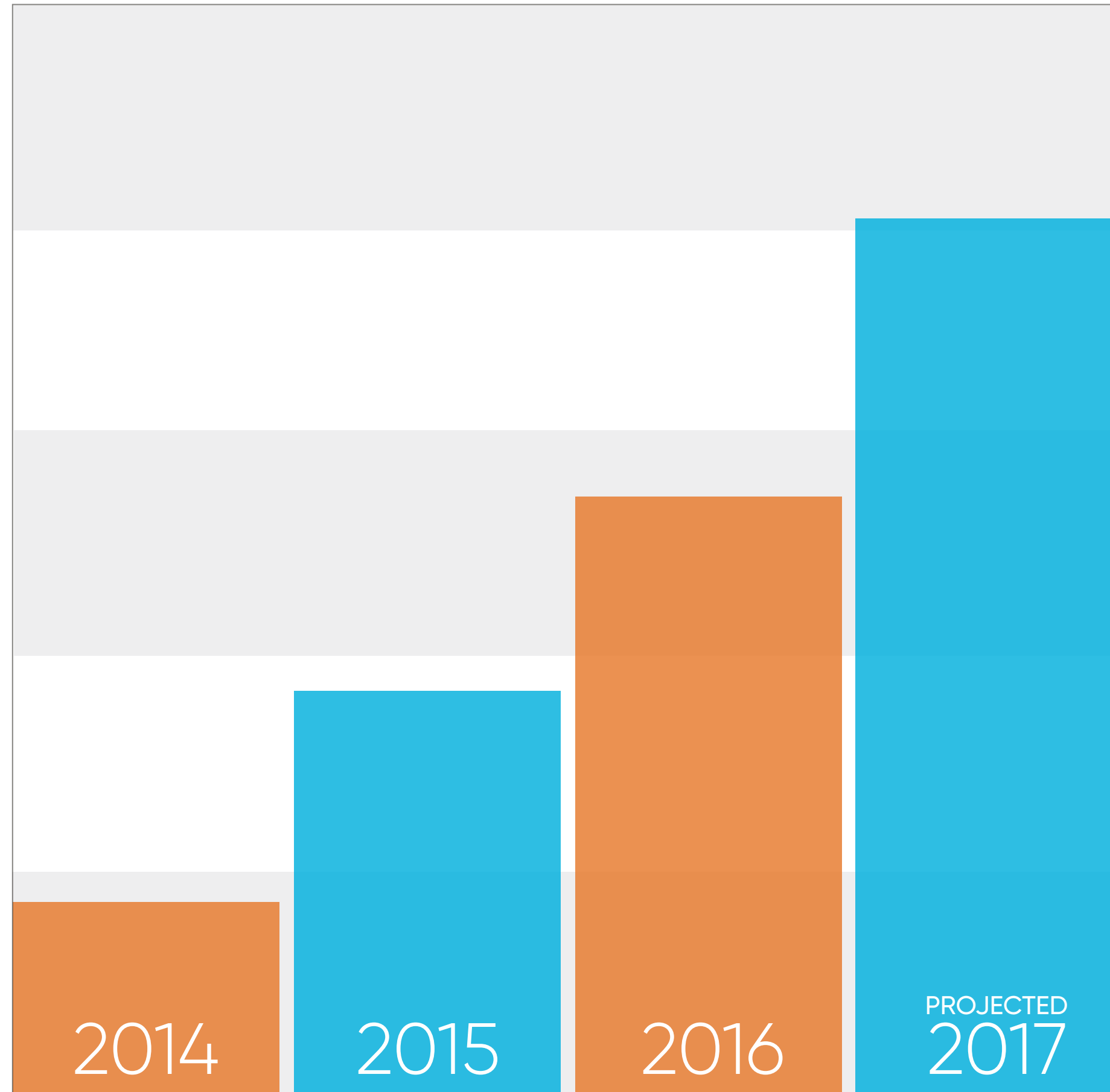
What the hell am I doing here?



**SO I DID THE ONE  
THING I KNEW  
HOW TO DO.**

**I started optimizing.**





**80% GROWTH**  
2 CONSECUTIVE YEARS

**PACING 40% GROWTH**  
THIS YEAR

FROM **1 EMPLOYEE** IN 2014  
**TO 12** IN 2017





HEATHER



TYLER



ANDRES



JEFF



BRITT



KRISTINA



LAUREN



ELGIN



CHRIS



KASEY



SHAYANNA



AUSTIN





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**THEN WE HIT A CEILING.**



# SEO 101 ONLY TAKES CLIENTS SO FAR.

Are the search partnerships we sold  
our clients worth it?



# TECHNICAL?



**TECHNICAL? CHECK.**



# ON-PAGE?



**ON-PAGE? CHECK.**



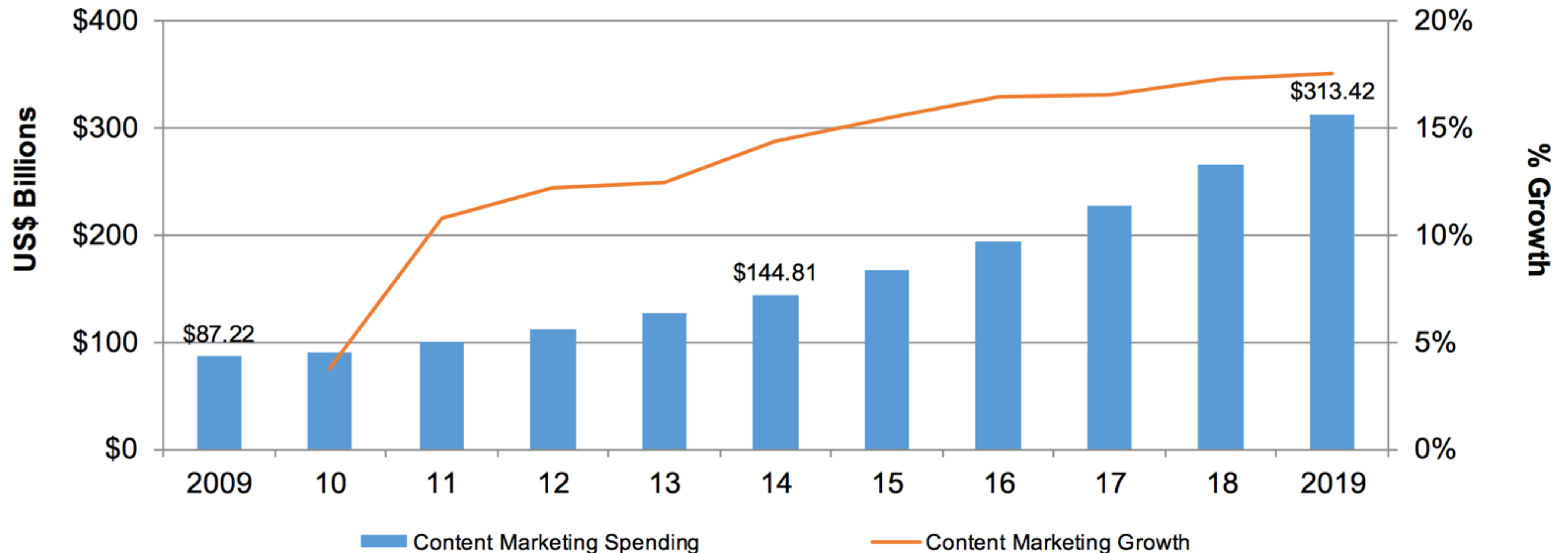
# CONTENT?



**CONTENT? CRAP.**



# CONTENT BUDGETS ARE GROWING



Source: PQ Media

\*Includes amount brands spend in-house & on contractors for content marketing

Source: PQ Media Global Content Marketing Forecast 2015 to 2019, almost 1500 content marketing agencies, publishers, affiliates and service firms in 80 countries.

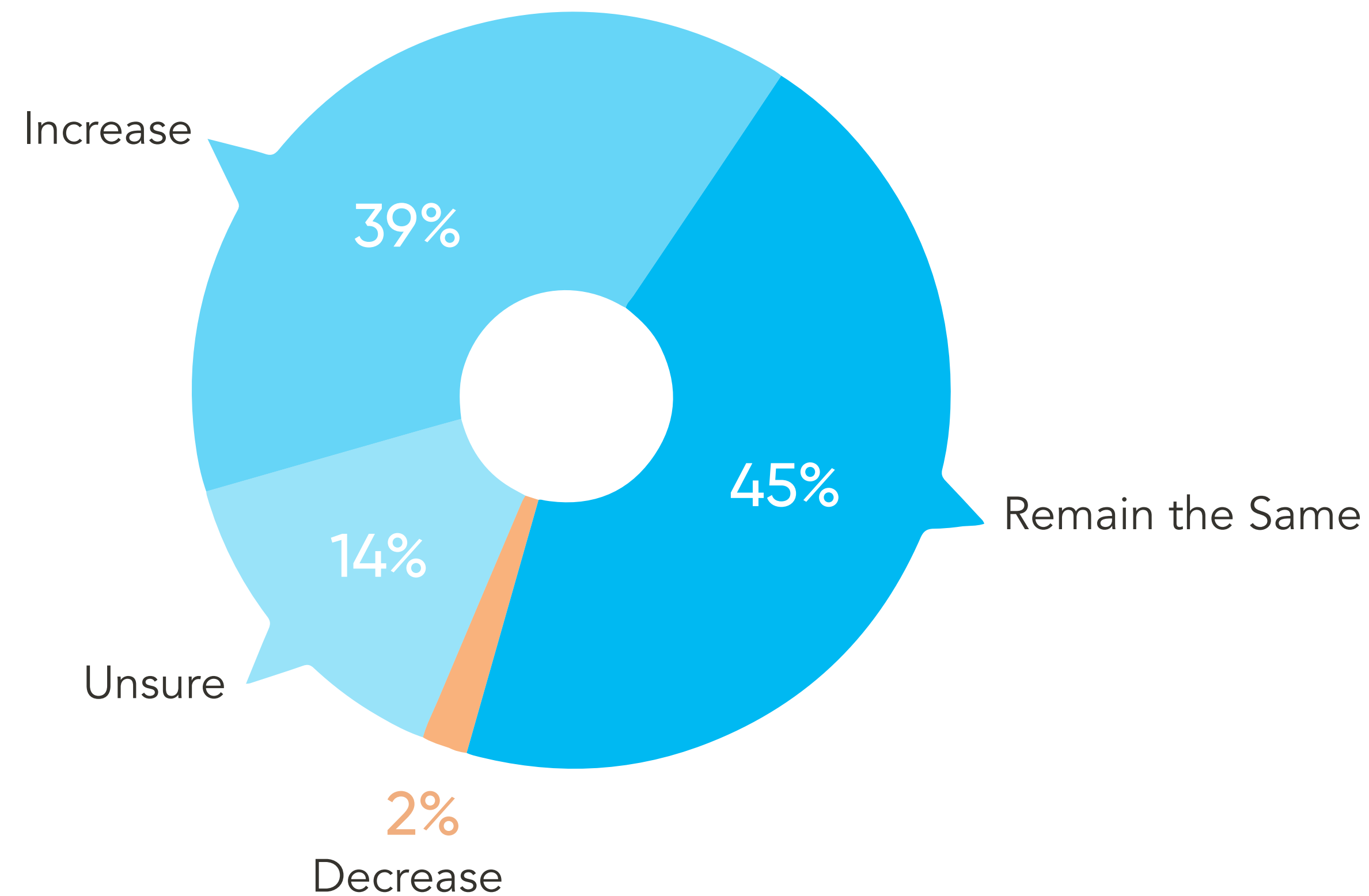
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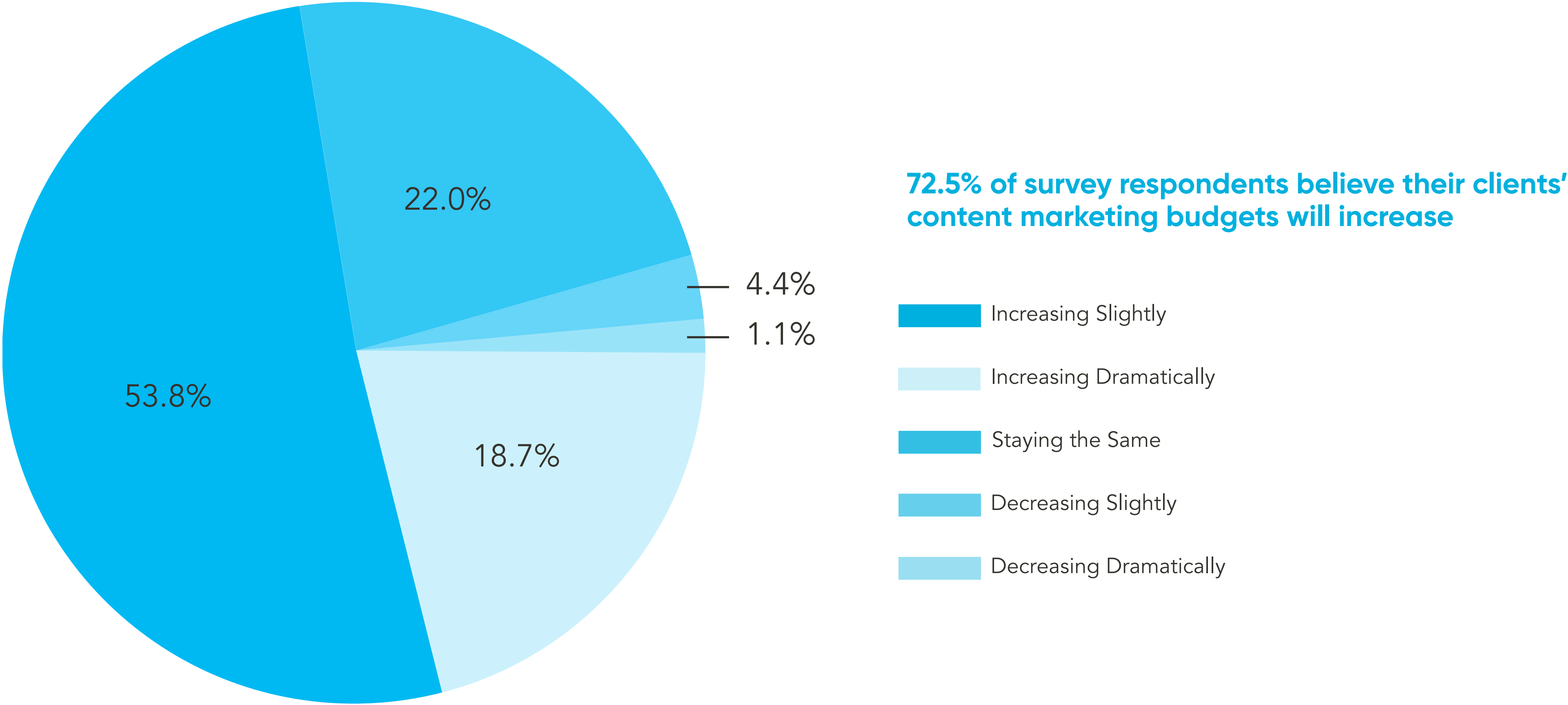
# CONTENT BUDGETS ARE GROWING



Source: 2017 B2B Content Marketing Trends—North America: Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs



# CONTENT BUDGETS ARE GROWING



Source: Online survey of digital marketing professionals at advertising agencies conducted by Heather Physioc, March to June 2017, n=91.

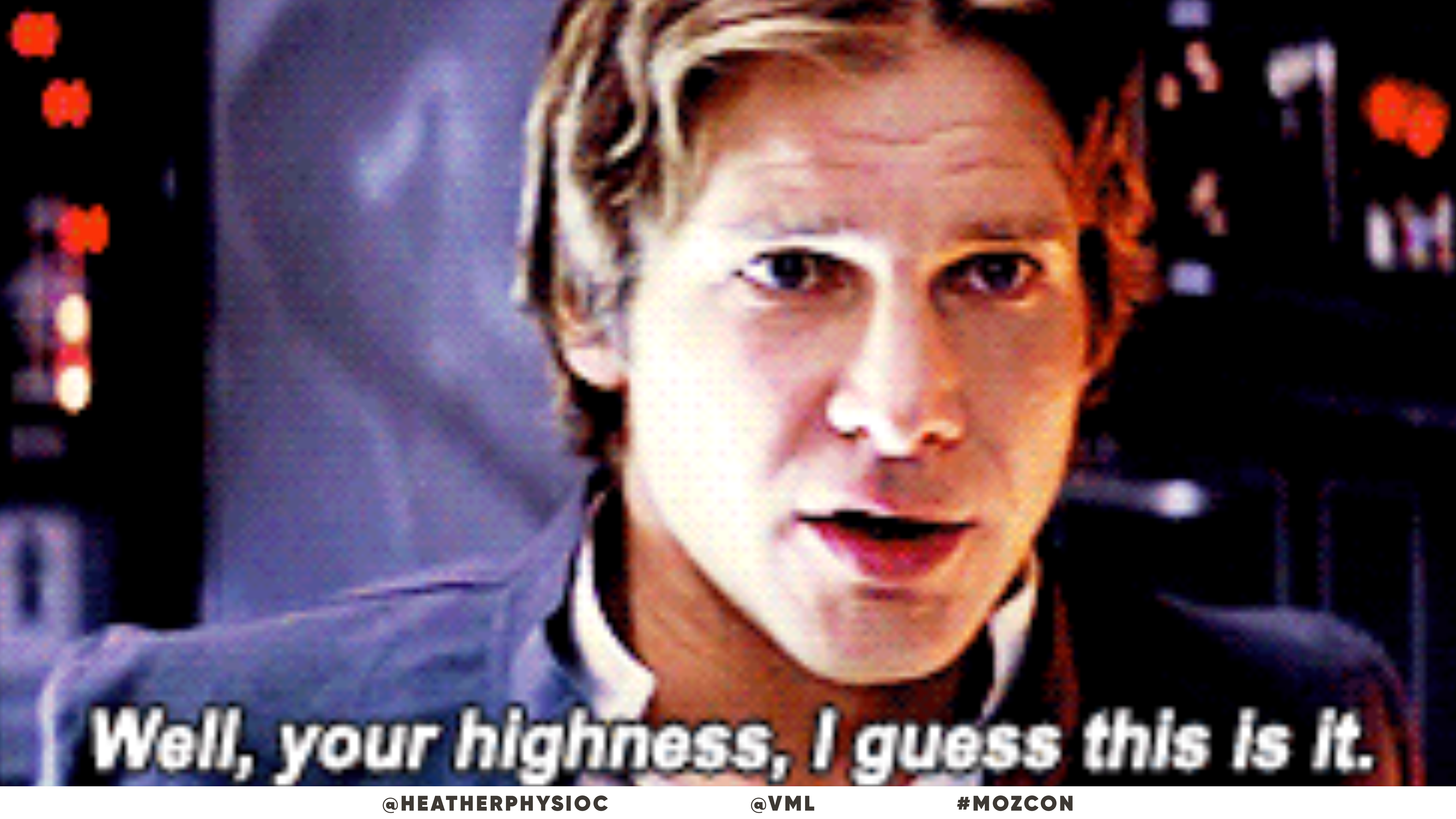


**CONTENT IS STILL  
ESSENTIAL TO PERFORM  
WELL IN SEARCH.**



**BUT WE SUCKED AT IT.**





*Well, your highness, I guess this is it.*

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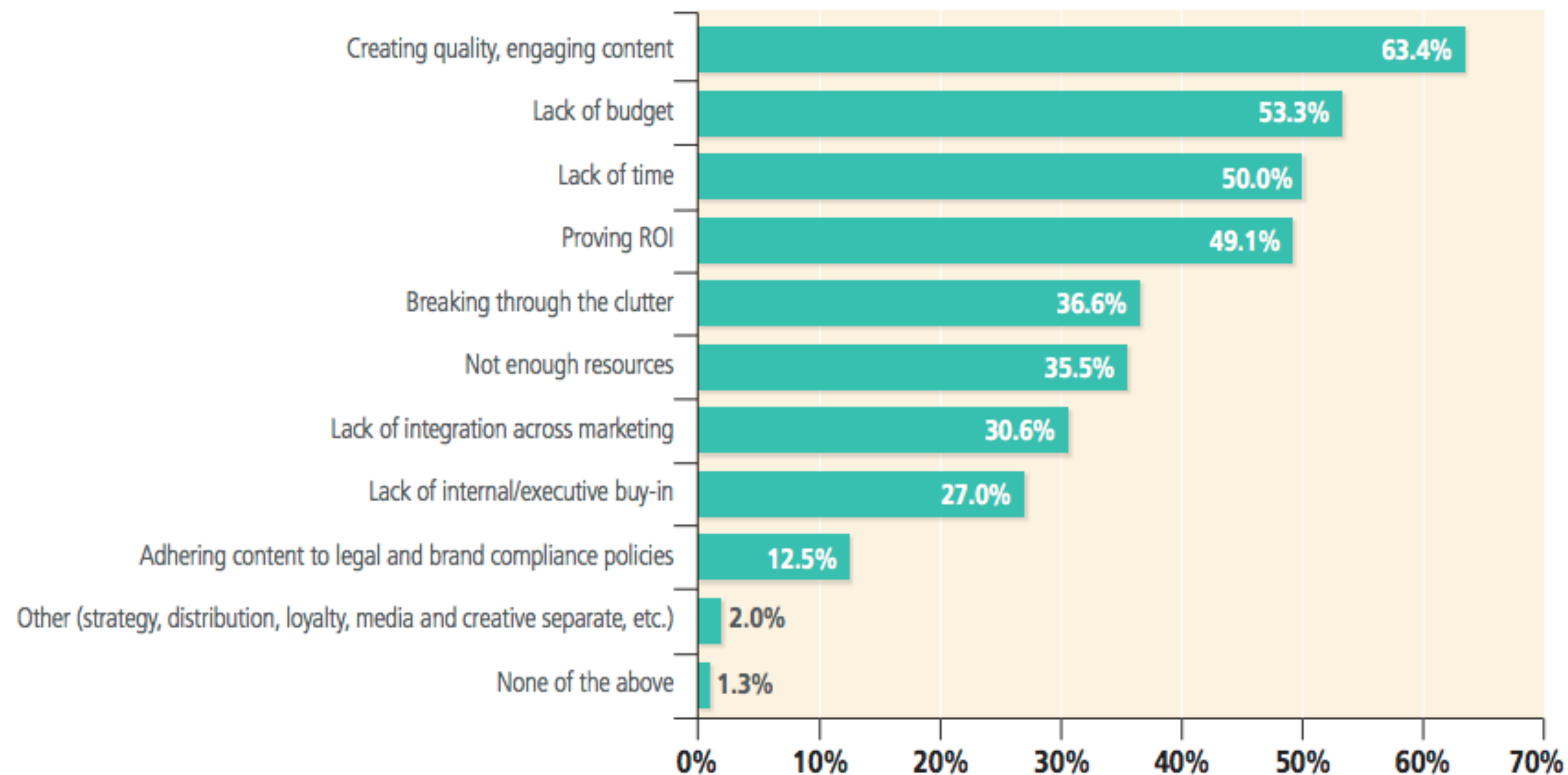
**BUT WE WEREN'T  
ALONE.**



**AGENCIES REPORT  
HAVING TROUBLE WITH  
EVERY PART OF THE  
CONTENT WORKFLOW.**



# #CONTENTPROBS AMIRIGHT?



Source: Ad Age Content Strategy Studio, "The Future of Content" by The Content Council, June 2015. n=448

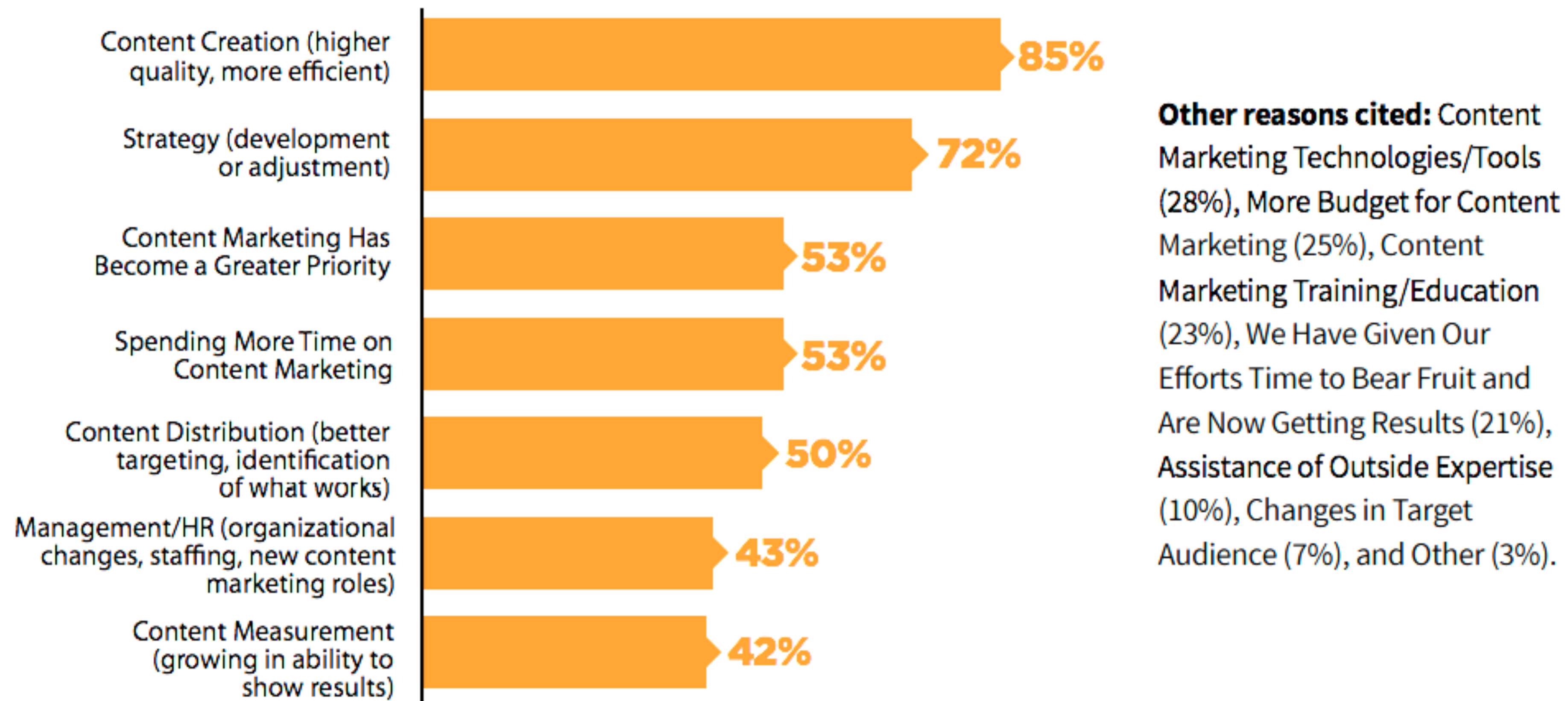
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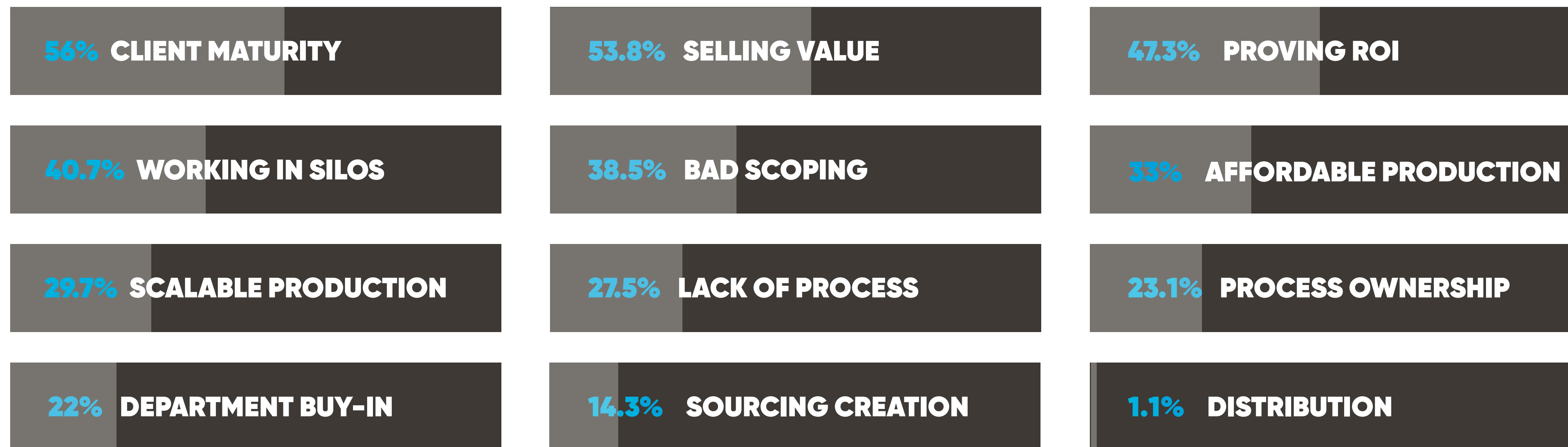
# #CONTENTPROBS AMIRIGHT?



Source: 2017 B2B Content Marketing Trends—North America: Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs



# #CONTENTPROBS AMIRIGHT?



Source: Online survey of digital marketing professionals at advertising agencies conducted by Heather Physioc, March to June 2017, n=91.



**IF THERE'S A PROBLEM...**





**YO, I'LL SOLVE IT.**

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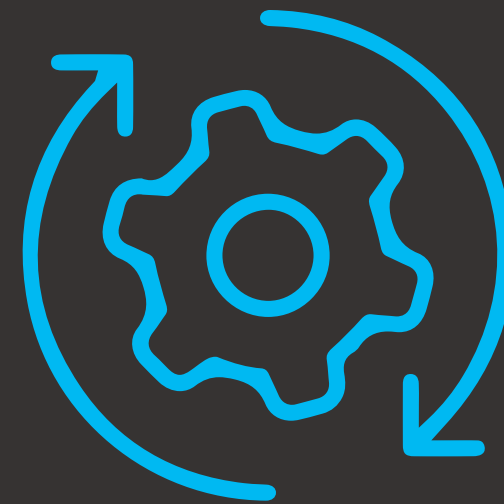
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# LET'S FOCUS ON...



PROVING VALUE



CREATING PROCESS



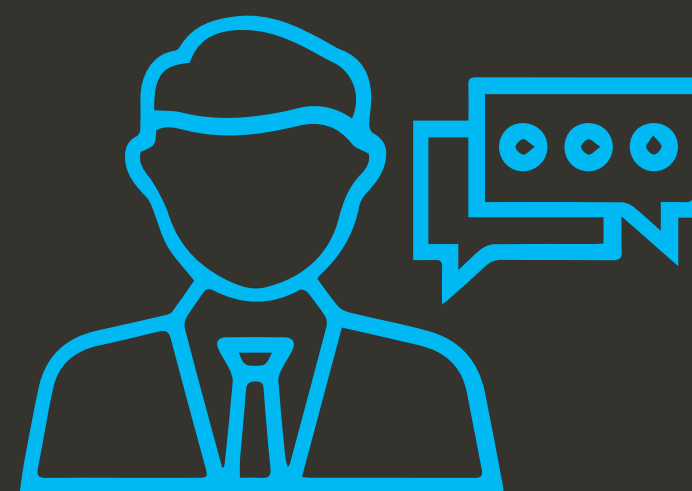
SOURCING CONTENT



# AGENCY ASSUMPTIONS



Fueled by creativity  
and chaos – not  
rigid process



No one-size-fits-all  
approach for every  
agency or client



Content formats and  
platforms will continue  
to evolve

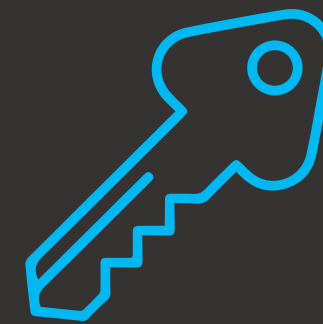




# TERRITORY

Every department thinks  
they own content.

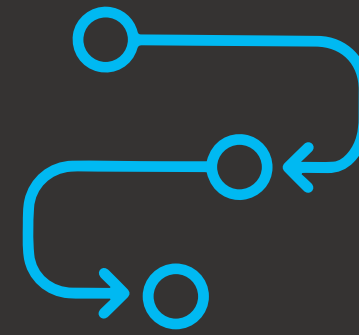




# OWNERSHIP

Everyone and no one  
owns content.

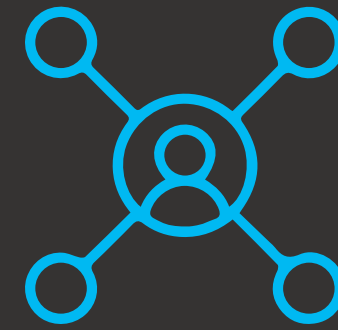




# PROCESS

We need to implement structure  
without sacrificing creativity.





# SOURCING

We need to create content  
continuously & affordably.



# PROVING VALUE

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SO...

Not everyone agrees on  
what "content" even means







# **CAMPAIGN** **VS.** **CONTINUOUS**

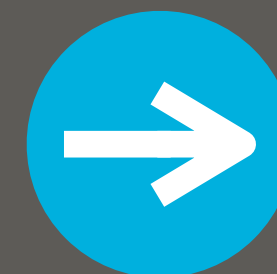


**ASPIRATIONAL**



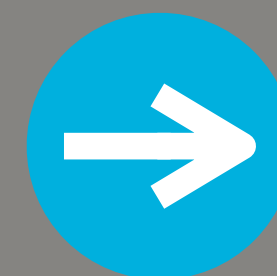
**CONSUMPTIVE**

**CREATIVE**



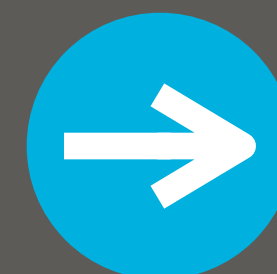
**FUNCTIONAL**

**SINGLE STREAM**



**MULTI-CHANNEL**

**SHORT-TERM**



**CONTINUOUS**

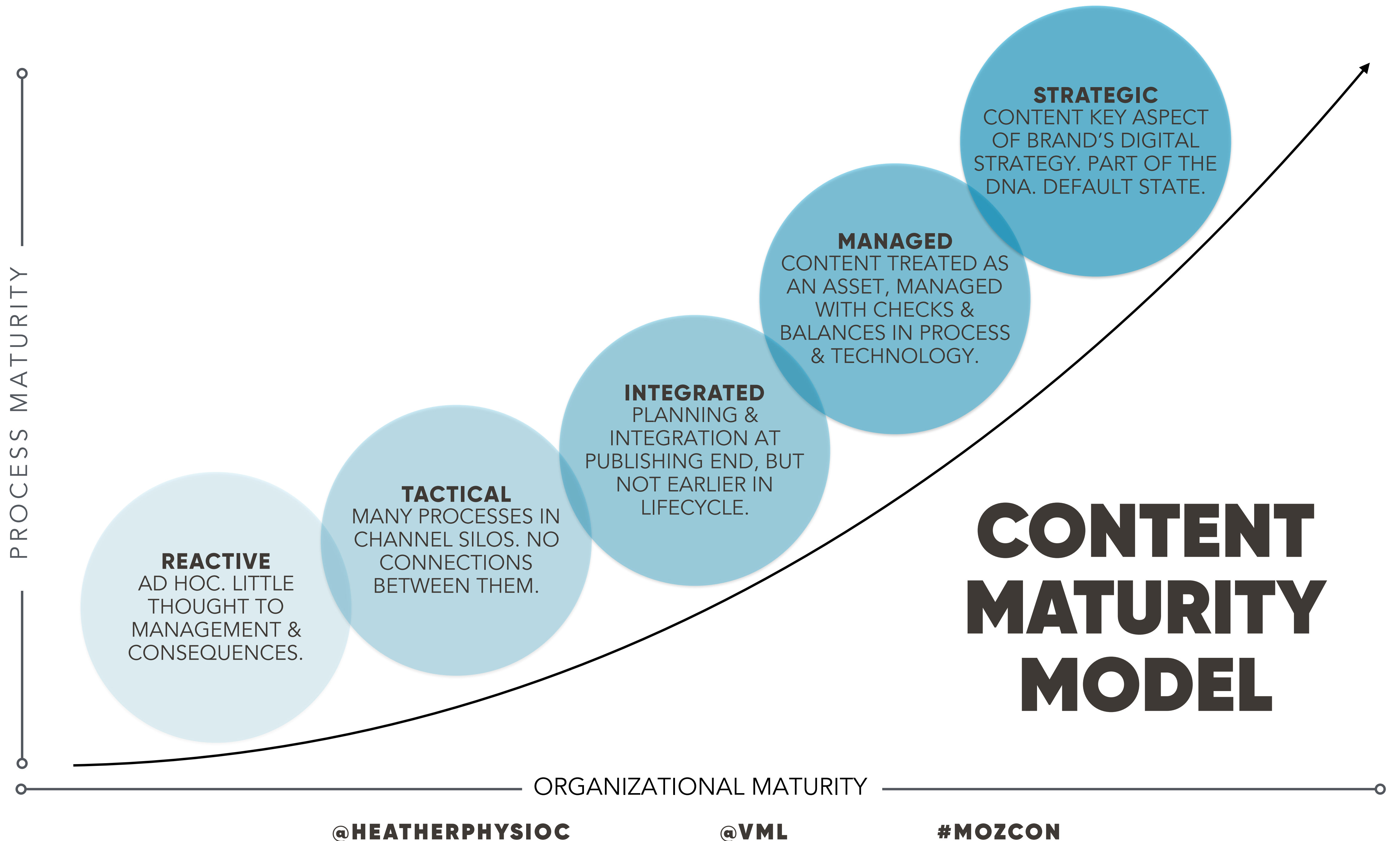


**NOW THAT WE'VE DEFINED  
"CONTENT" CLEARLY,  
HOW DO WE GET CLIENTS TO  
INVEST IN IT?**



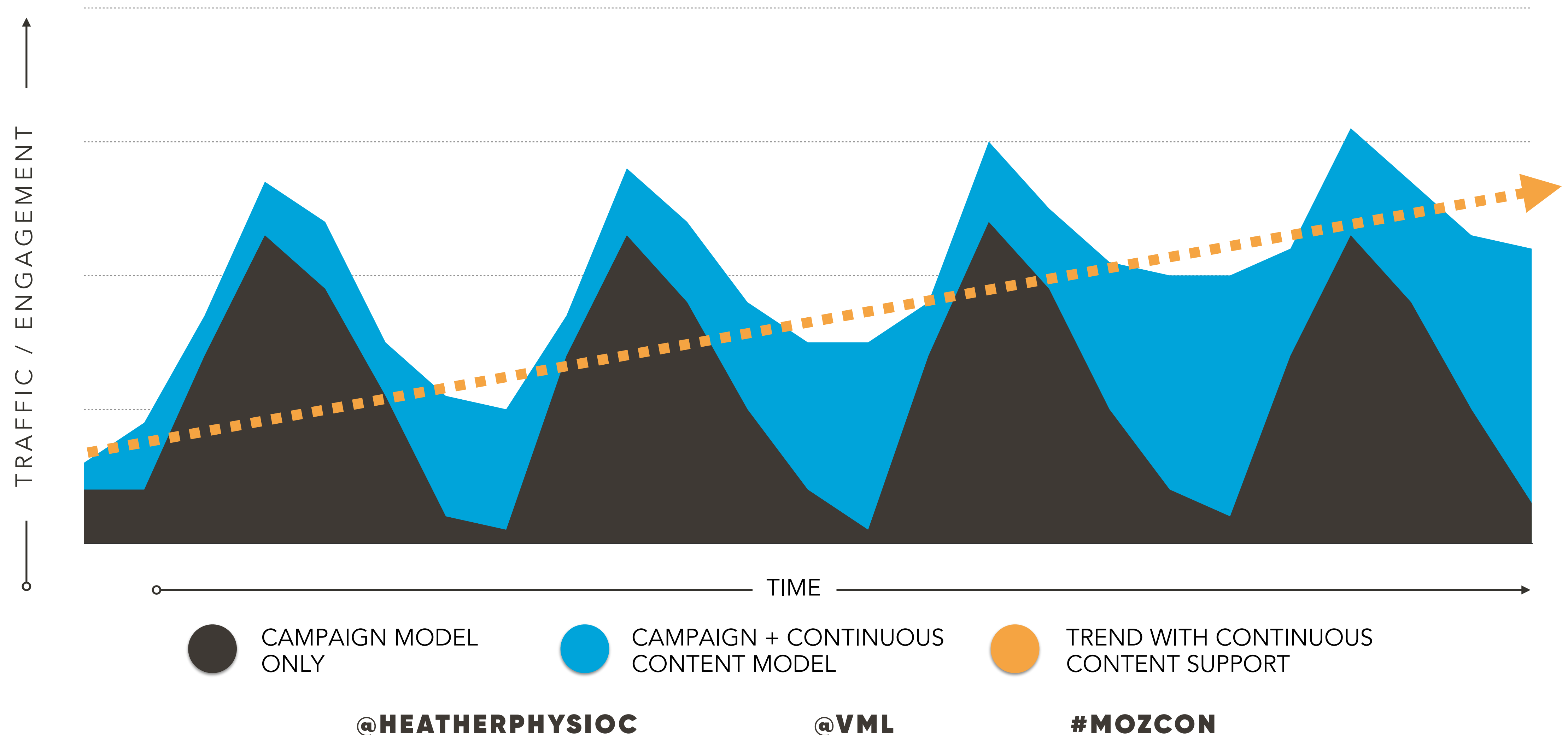
**PRO-TIP:**  
**CLICKS DON'T**  
**MEAN JACK.**  
**MONEY TALKS.**





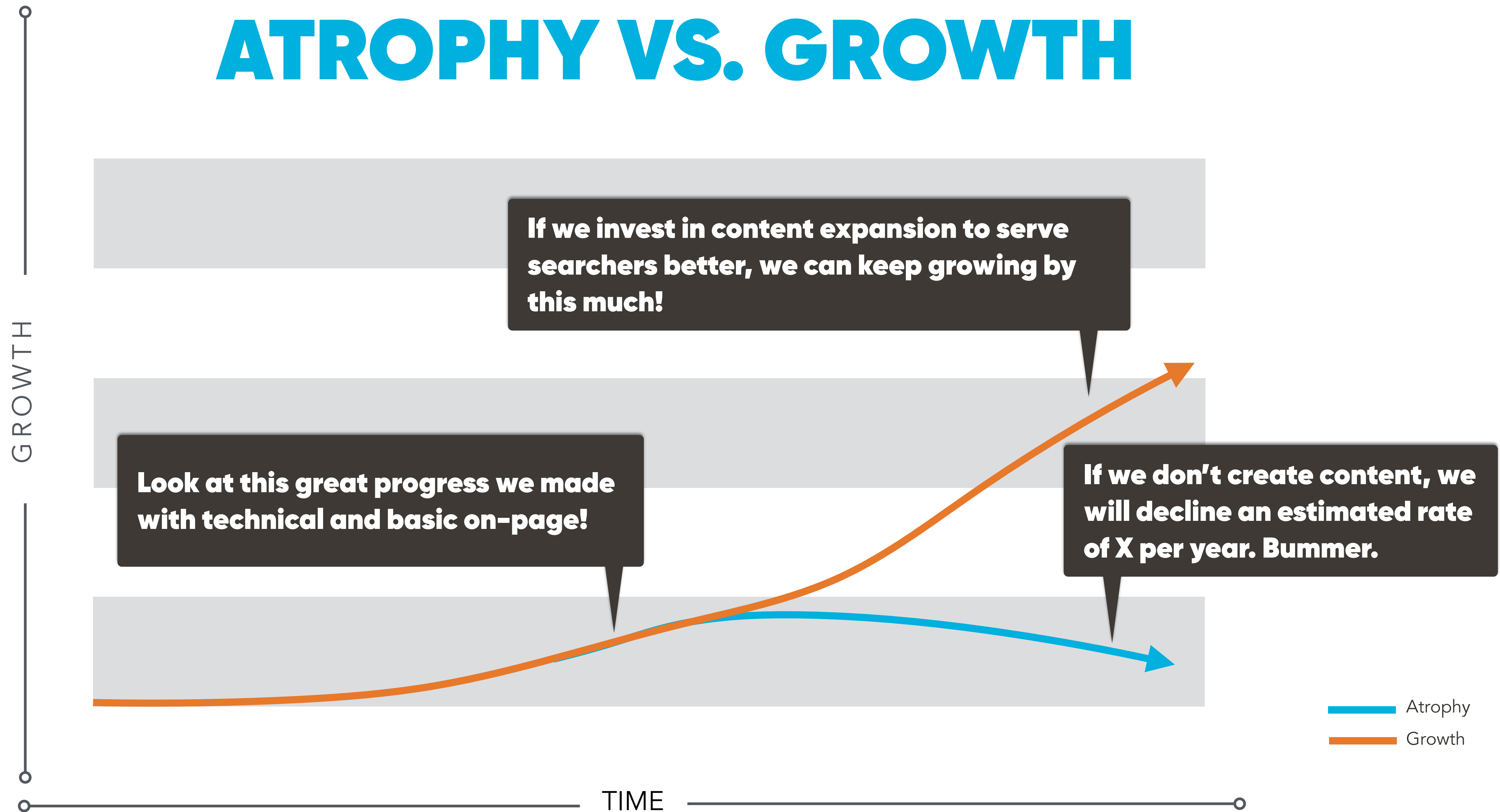


# CONTENT MARKETING: GROWING BASE VS. BUYING SPIKES





# ATROPHY VS. GROWTH



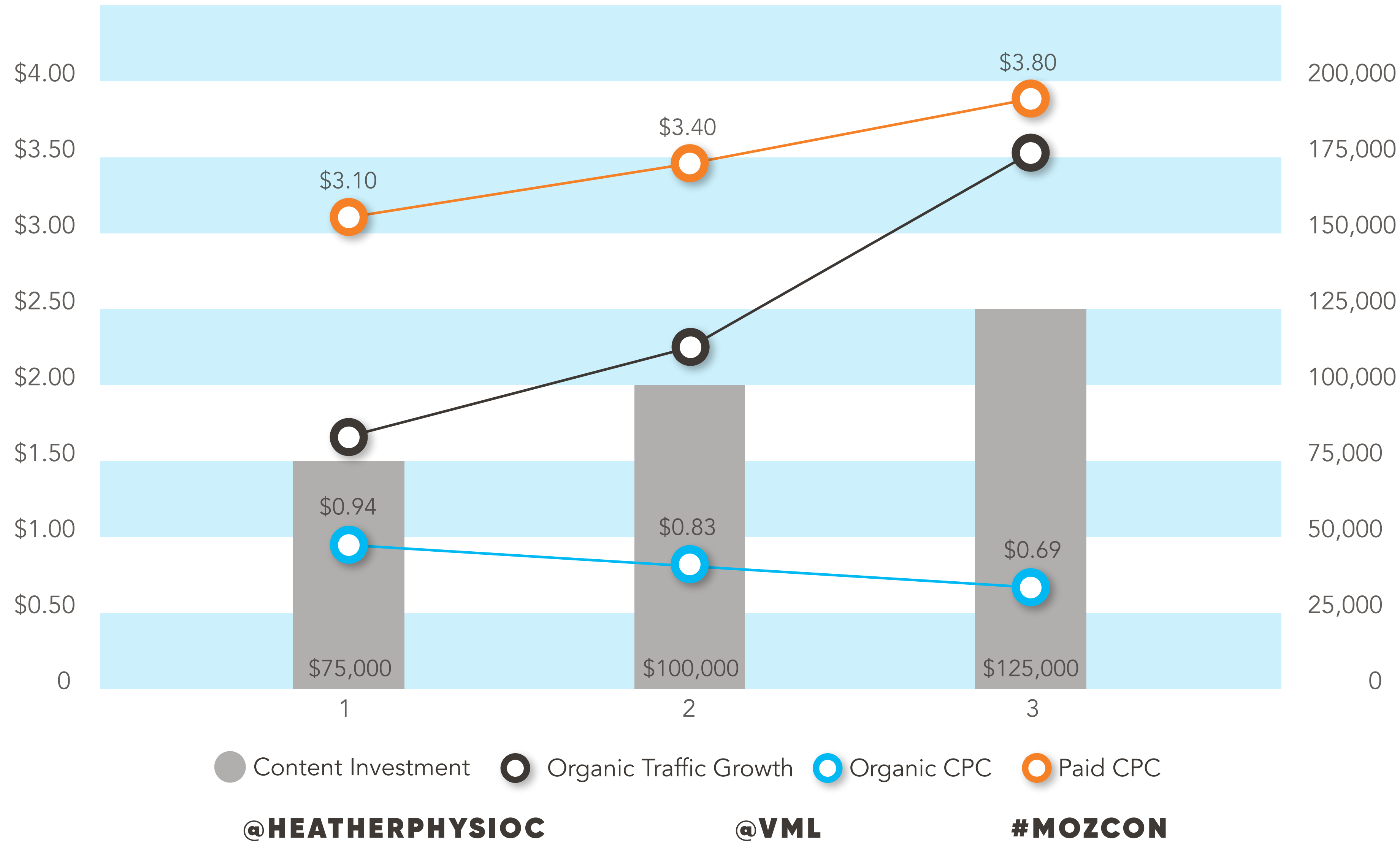
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# DIGITAL CONTENT STRATEGY ORANIC TRAFFIC PROJECTIONS AND ROI VS. PAID MEDIA





# **BUILDING A SYSTEM**

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# SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

- ✓ Sustainable, repeatable process
- ✓ Easy to adopt and scale for large brands
- ✓ Custom-tailored to every client
- ✓ Stays true to agency's creative roots
- ✓ Adaptable to current and new content formats



# THE AGENCY CONTENT FLYWHEEL

**"EDITOR IN CHIEF" OVERSEES PROCESS**

**AGENCY BRIEF**

**CHANNEL INPUTS**

**CONTENT  
PLAYBOOK**

**APPROVALS AND  
AMPLIFICATION**

**PRODUCTION**

**CONTENT  
CALENDAR**

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# THE AGENCY CONTENT FLYWHEEL

**"EDITOR IN CHIEF" OVERSEES PROCESS**

## AGENCY BRIEF

Audience Personas  
Brand Research  
Competitive

## CHANNEL INPUTS

Keyword Research  
Social Listening Data  
Creative Insights  
PR Threats and Opportunities  
Media Channel Data  
Web Analytics Data  
User Experience Behavior Data

## CONTENT PLAYBOOK

Content Pillars  
Content Types  
Content Cadence  
Digital Channels  
Measurement and KPIs

## APPROVALS AND AMPLIFICATION

Route for Optimization  
Route for Approvals  
Route for Publication  
& Amplification

## PRODUCTION

Sourced for Creation  
(In-house, Outsource, Client-created,  
Influencers, AI, etc.)

## CONTENT CALENDAR

Over-arching Strategy  
Content Calendar (Subject,  
Keywords, Format, Specs/lengths, etc)



**"YO, THIS  
LOOKS  
HARD."**

**THESE THINGS ARE  
ALREADY HAPPENING  
AT AGENCIES.**

**IN SILOS.**



**NOT EVERY AGENCY  
WILL HAVE THESE  
RESOURCES.**



**NOT EVERY CLIENT  
WILL HAVE THESE  
BUDGETS.**



**THIS IS A SKELETON**  
**ADAPT FOR YOUR REALITY**



# SOURCING CONTENT

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# IN-HOUSE CREATIVE

+

Message Control

Creativity

Completely Custom

-

Single Campaign

Slow To Execute

Costly To Clients



# IN-HOUSE PRODUCTION

+

Quality Control

Speed To Market

Less Costly

Multi-Format

-

Competing Demands

Less Creativity

Customization

# OUTSOURCE

+

Content Specialty

Demand Flexibility

End-To-End System

Speed To Market

-

Extra Steps

Profit Margin

Quality Control

Less Creativity



# A.I.

+

Automated & Easy

Multiple Platforms

Learns Over Time

-

Limited By Inputs

Lacks Judgement

Quality Control



# MAKE VS. BUY DECISION MODEL

Method	Cost to Client	Control	Speed to Market	Creativity
Creative	X-High	High	Low	High
Production	High	High	Medium	Low
Outsource	Medium	Medium	High	Low
Client	Low	Low	Low	Low

Other Possible Criteria:

Difficulty to Implement  
Production Quality

Service Reliability  
Scoping Ease & Accuracy

Profitability  
Adaptability



# **BIG TAKEAWAYS**

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**DEFINE CONTENT AND ALIGN  
COLLEAGUES AND CLIENTS**



**BUILD A FLEXIBLE SKELETON  
PROCESS WITH BUY-IN FROM  
ACROSS THE SHOP.**



**DO THE COST/BENEFIT  
ANALYSIS TO CHOOSE  
MAKE/BUY FOR EACH CLIENT.**



# GOODIES!

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# PARTY ON.



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