



# 2019 STATE OF DIGITAL & CONTENT MARKETING SURVEY

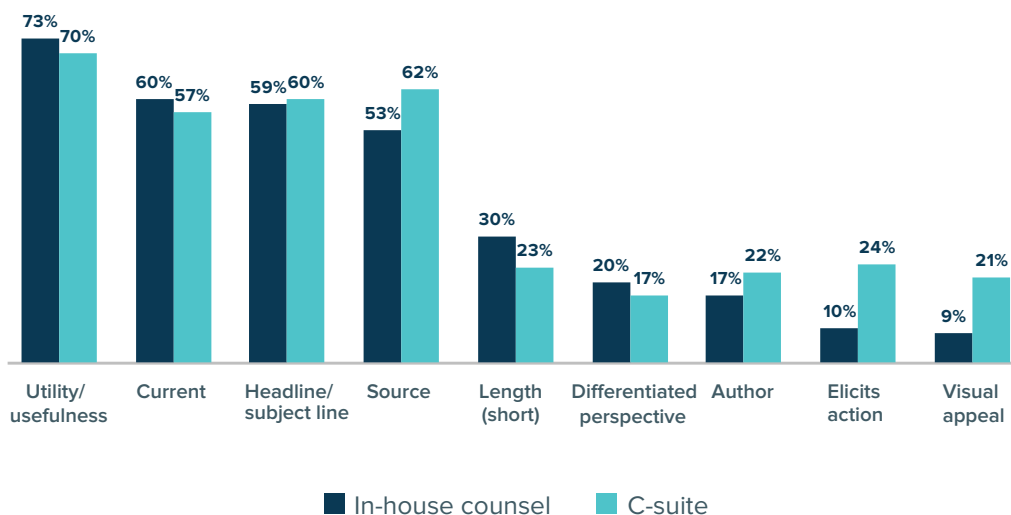


# DECISION-MAKERS WEIGH IN: What Makes Content Work (and Not Work)

## What Makes You Click?

For the second straight year, decision-makers in corporate legal departments and across the C-suite say it's not so much the length, headline or even the source that most attracts them to a piece of content, but rather one simple attribute: utility — information or insights they can act on.

What attracts you to the content that you consume most frequently?



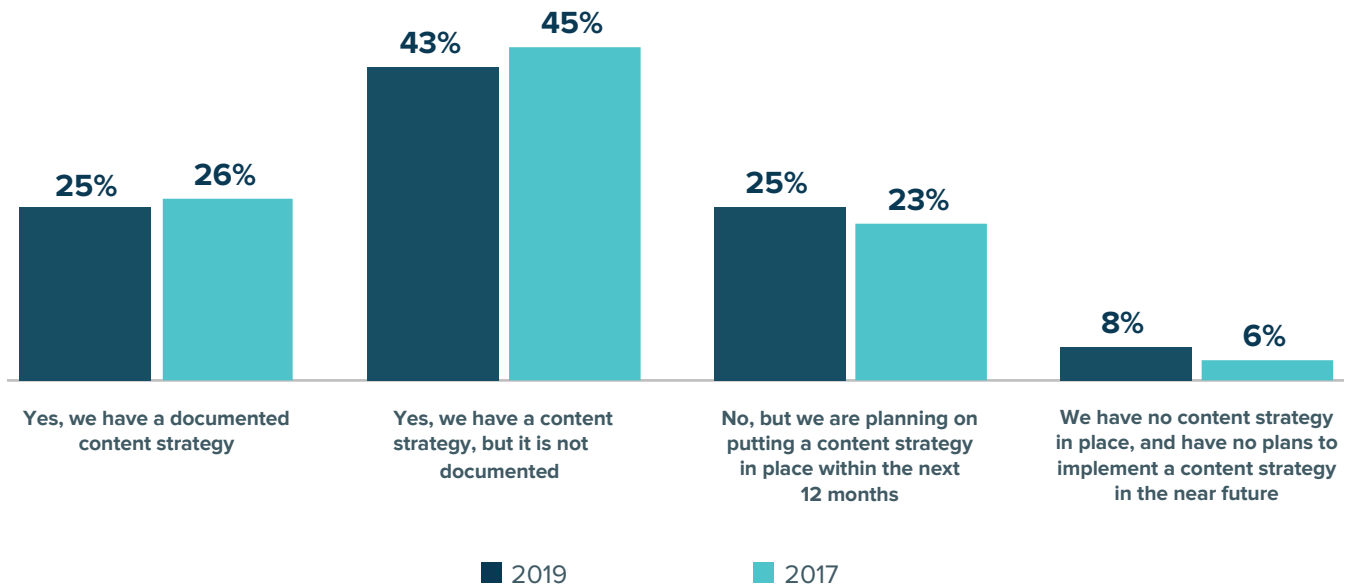
Or maybe it's not so simple. Viewed alongside 2019's full survey results, the finding gathers complexity, as it's clear that in-house counsel and C-suite officers define utility quite differently — and these differences reveal what they look for in specific content types, explain why certain content misses the mark and tell us how they can be engaged through social or other digital media.



**“Everyone’s trying to get into the content game, so they’re oversimplifying their content,”** says Randy Thorne, Vice President of Growth Initiatives at management advisory firm CBIZ. **“So, too many firms spend time defining the problem or issue, but don’t give enough meaningful insight behind the three to five things you need to do to solve that issue.”**

For law firm CMOs, whom we also surveyed, understanding these differences is more crucial than ever in an era when C-suite executives can be as engaged in choosing a law firm for hire as in-house legal officers, particularly in higher-value, bet-the-company matters. The same logic applies in reverse, as CMOs at consulting, accounting and other professional service firms need to understand differences in audience preferences as they increasingly market to in-house counsel along with their customary C-suite audiences.

### Does your law firm have an overarching content strategy?



Clearly, a strategic approach can help parse this challenging content landscape, but only 25 percent of the marketers we surveyed said they have documented content strategies, down slightly from 2017, the last year we surveyed that group.

The question is, why?

# Why No Documented Content Strategy?

## The Key Word Is ‘Documented’

It’s a universally recognized but often unspoken truth of the legal marketing field that getting firm leadership to sign off on documented strategic marketing and content priorities is a challenge, because in doing so they risk alienating practice groups that aren’t identified as a priority. We believe this is why a high percentage of CMOs say they have a content strategy, albeit one that isn’t documented.

Marketers are smart people, and while most would love to pour their full energy and focus into strategic priorities, it can be difficult to say no, especially if they do so in writing. But according to the Content Marketing Institute, those who take the time to document their strategies report greater effectiveness with their content marketing efforts. So as CMOs grapple with whether or not to document their content strategies by particular areas — which can be challenging for the above reasons — we encourage all to focus them on how content is created and distributed regardless of topic.

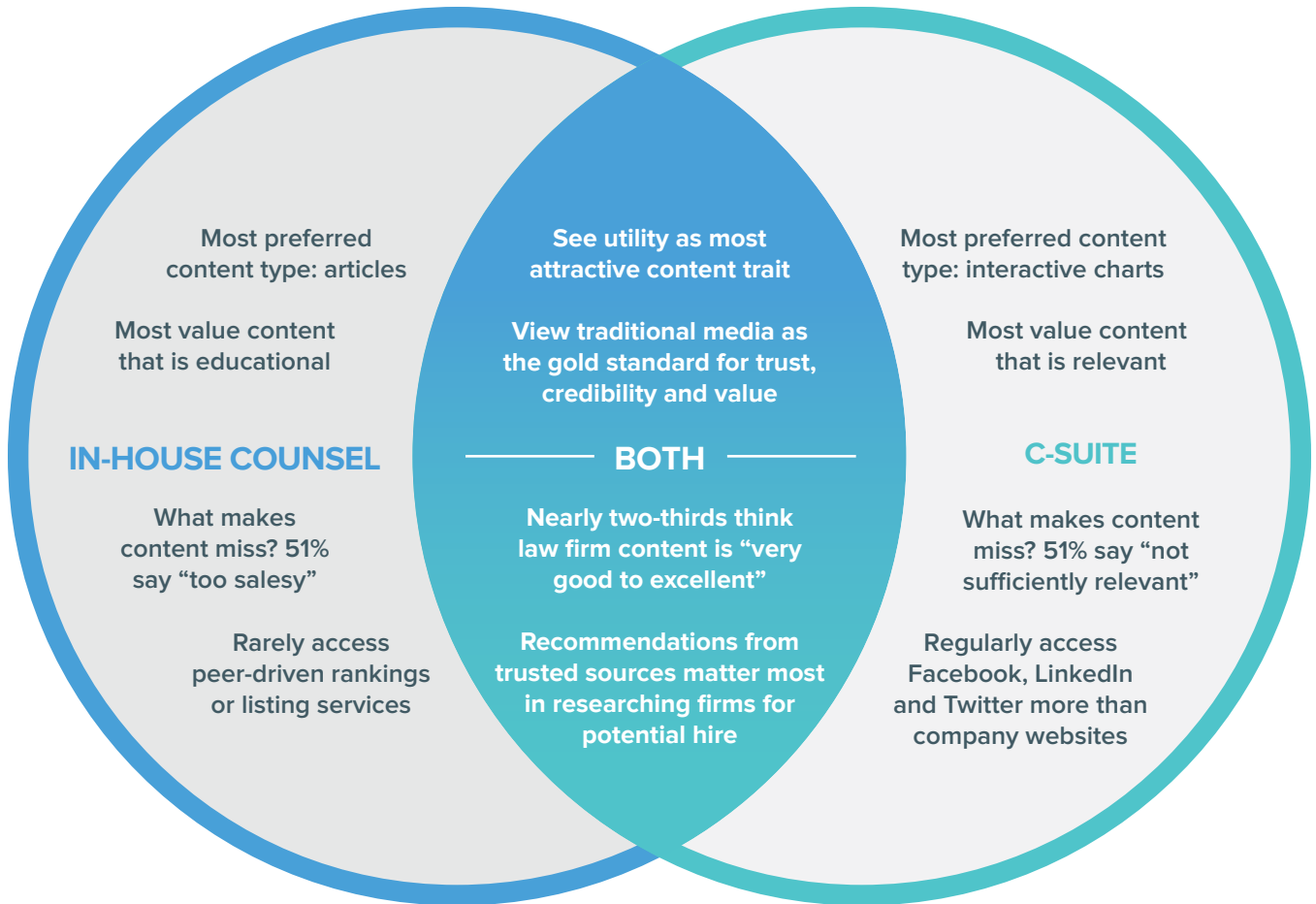
That’s why it’s helpful to know that in-house counsel tend to place the highest value on content that’s educational and prefer articles more than any other content type. C-suite members also highly value articles but want content that’s relevant and relatedly, they also prefer interactive charts. This makes sense, as the roles of in-house counsel are typically more narrowly defined, and they are therefore more inclined to value deep dives on relevant subjects, whereas many C-suite executives must engage with a wider variety of topics.

For law firms, there’s good news: Around 60 percent of in-house counsel and C-suite officers that we surveyed rate law firm content as “very good” to “excellent.” The clear opportunity — one that calls out for a documented content strategy — is for marketers to distribute this material to targeted audiences more effectively. For instance, while 95 percent of CMOs surveyed perceive LinkedIn as most valuable for marketing, only 29 percent of in-house counsel agree that targeting on LinkedIn is effective.



These are just a few of the key findings gleaned from this year’s report. In the pages that follow, we’ll expand on these and other significant points — with the hope that, above all, we can be useful too.

# Content Preferences: How In-House Counsel and C-Suite Executives Compare



## Read the report to learn:

- 1** What in-house counsel and C-suite officers look for in their content, where they agree, where they differ and what it all means
- 2** Where legal marketers are succeeding — and where they have an opportunity to improve — in distributing and creating content
- 3** How to successfully create and distribute content to in-house counsel and C-suite members in ways that will make them click, read and pay attention

## Articles and Educational Content Favored

Our survey findings show that in order for content to have utility for in-house counsel — the most important attribute it can have, according to 73 percent of respondents — it should first and foremost be educational. Shon Ramey, General Counsel at NAVEX Global, an ethics and compliance software and services company, sums it up this way: “There’s a reason I Googled the issue. I know it’s an issue. So tell me what I need to know and what I need to do with that information.”

Relevance and ease of reading are also important qualities; increasingly, so is a differentiated perspective — a content attribute seen as attractive by 20 percent of in-house counsel.

### Article Attribute Preferences

#### In-House Counsel

- 1 Educational (**90%**)
- 2 Relevant (**76%**)
- 3 Easy to read (**54%**)

#### C-Suite

- 1 Relevant (**70%**)
- 2 Educational (**68%**)
- 3 Timely (**49%**)

And while C-suite officers value these characteristics as well, in-house counsel’s focus on education across nearly all content types is significant. For instance, 90 percent of in-house counsel say articles — their preferred medium — should be educational, compared to only 68 percent of C-suite respondents.

These findings shine a light on the content in-house counsel want, not to mention where they want to read it and how they find it. Along with the key findings below, marketers would do well to consider those preferences when producing content and evolving their content strategies.

## What Makes Content Miss

For the first time, we asked in-house counsel what makes content created by professional service providers “anything less than excellent.” Fifty-one percent say “too salesy,” 37 percent say “not impartial” and 36 percent say “not sufficiently relevant” — a sign that the content may not be educational enough (an attribute in-house counsel clearly favor) in terms of its relevance and utility to their particular businesses.

Importantly, “too salesy” was the fifth most common choice for CMOs, at only 33 percent — suggesting a potential blind spot for some marketers. Their top choices were “not actionable” (55 percent), “not timely” (53 percent) and “not strategic” (50 percent). But “too salesy” might be at the root of each of those failings.

“I get that you’re trying to promote your expertise,” Ramey says. “But give me information I can use, not content that tells me how great and wonderful you are. The five competitors before you and the 10 after are saying the same thing — and I can’t do anything with that information.”



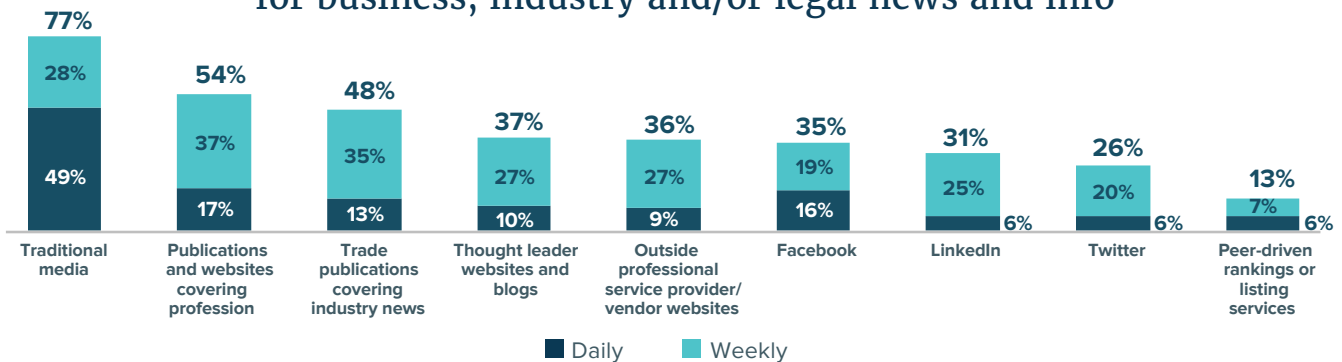
of respondents say if content is anything less than excellent it’s because it’s “too salesy”

## Traditional Media Still Highly Trusted and Accessed

For the second straight year, “fake news” rhetoric hasn’t blunted in-house counsel’s esteem for traditional media — 79 percent value it above all content sources, perhaps a sign of the value placed on journalistic standards like news judgment, impartiality and credentialed sourcing. It also speaks to this audience’s desire for curation and the role professional editors play in determining what stories and topics are most important.

In-house attorneys value publications covering their profession and trade publications only slightly less (at 75 percent and 74 percent, respectively). While C-suite respondents have similar preferences, that distance is wider, with traditional media at 82 percent, trade publications at 76 percent and publications covering the profession at 57 percent.

In-house counsel usage frequency of select sources for business, industry and/or legal news and info



Seventy-seven percent of in-house counsel respondents say they consume traditional media at least weekly, and 49 percent say they do so each day. Unsurprisingly, legal and C-suite officers access traditional media more often than any other source as well. Nothing else is accessed with close to the level of frequency for traditional media by in-house counsel, but publications covering their profession and industry trade publications both are accessed at least once a week by about 50 percent of respondents.



## Peer-Driven Rankings and Listing Services: Worth the Investment?

CMOs surveyed say peer-driven rankings or listing services command more resources than any category of firm content aside from LinkedIn (tied), trade publications and traditional media. But that doesn't seem to align with their intended audiences' preferences — when it comes to researching outside firms for potential hire, only 9 percent of in-house counsel say such rankings are “very important” while 41 percent say they are “somewhat important.” This suggests that such rankings are possibly limited to a validation effect, an important consideration for CMOs when allocating resources.

## An Opening for Search, LinkedIn?

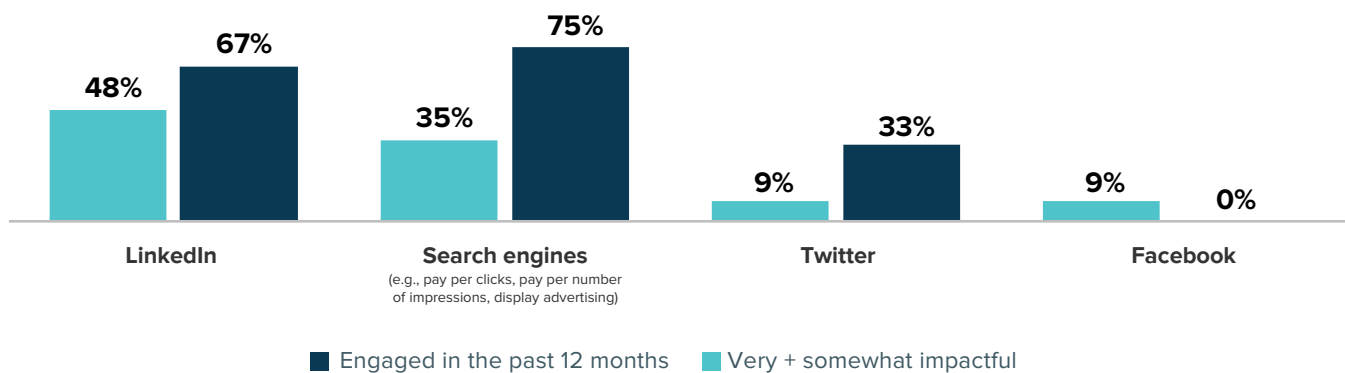
Our findings suggest that to reach in-house counsel, it may be time for legal marketers to allocate more resources toward search engine optimization — and refine their targeting efforts on LinkedIn.

For while in-house counsel rank search engines as the most valuable method for finding content (85 percent), only 35 percent of CMOs have engaged in a paid distribution campaign via search in the last year. Meanwhile, LinkedIn — 53 percent of in-house counsel find it valuable as a distribution platform, but only 29 percent agree that targeting on the platform is effectively used by professional service providers — has been used for paid distribution campaigns by nearly half of all CMOs, with less impact than that of search (67 percent versus 75 percent). The survey was conducted before LinkedIn's June 2019 announcement that it had changed its algorithm to cater to niche professional interests over viral content as part of a strategy to increase engagement.

29%

of in-house counsel say that LinkedIn targeting is effectively used by professional service providers

Correlation between engagement and perceived value by CMOs





## Utility Defined Differently

Like their counterparts in the legal department, C-suite officers value utility in the content they consume. But these busy executives place higher importance on relevance, personal connections and the ability to access information quickly. This explains some of the differences between in-house counsel and C-suites when it comes to preferred content types.

Content preferences – affinity ranking\*

Affinity Rank	In-House Counsel: Top Five	C-Suite: Top Five
1	 Articles	 Interactive charts
2	 Conferences, presentations, webinars	 Conferences, presentations, webinars
3	 Email newsletters	 Articles
4	 Interactive charts	 Email newsletters
5	 Podcasts	 Research reports

\* Affinity rank equates to those selecting scores of 4 or 5, where 5 = high preference

For instance, while in-house counsel most want their articles to be educational (90 percent), C-suite members value relevance the most (70 percent). This holds true even for email newsletters, where 61 percent of C-suite members prize relevance, compared to only 45 percent of in-house counsel respondents.

This also plays out in the types of content C-suite members say they prefer, or at least, which kinds they prefer most highly. Regarding what we call an affinity ranking — respondents selected 4 or 5 on a scale of 0 (low) to 5 (high) for content preferences — interactive charts ranked highest, followed by conferences and articles.

Additionally, C-suite members are more engaged with a wider variety of content, indicating that those executives must monitor a great deal of media and topics — even if they don't have time to dive in deeply.

“

**Executives are not one-dimensional people,”** CBIZ’s Thorne says, reflecting on our findings. **“They don’t mind having a broad spectrum of content to learn from — they actually enjoy it.”**”

## Relevance, Relevance, Relevance

Perhaps not surprisingly then, professional service firm content that's anything "less than excellent" in the eyes of C-suite members is mostly so because it's "not sufficiently relevant" (51 percent), followed by "too salesy" (41 percent) and "not timely" (39 percent).

CMOs are more closely aligned with this group on what holds their content back than with in-house counsel; they also pick "not timely" as among the biggest factors, at 53 percent. But "not sufficiently relevant" (38 percent) and "too salesy" (33 percent) were the marketers' fourth and fifth most common choices.



51%

of C-suites say that content that is "not sufficiently relevant" makes it less than excellent



For Mark Heintz, Principal at X9Y Consulting Group, relevance is an outgrowth of not having enough time. "I control what goes into my head, obsessively, to ensure that the right information is getting there," he says. "I want info that's relevant to me and that impacts me."

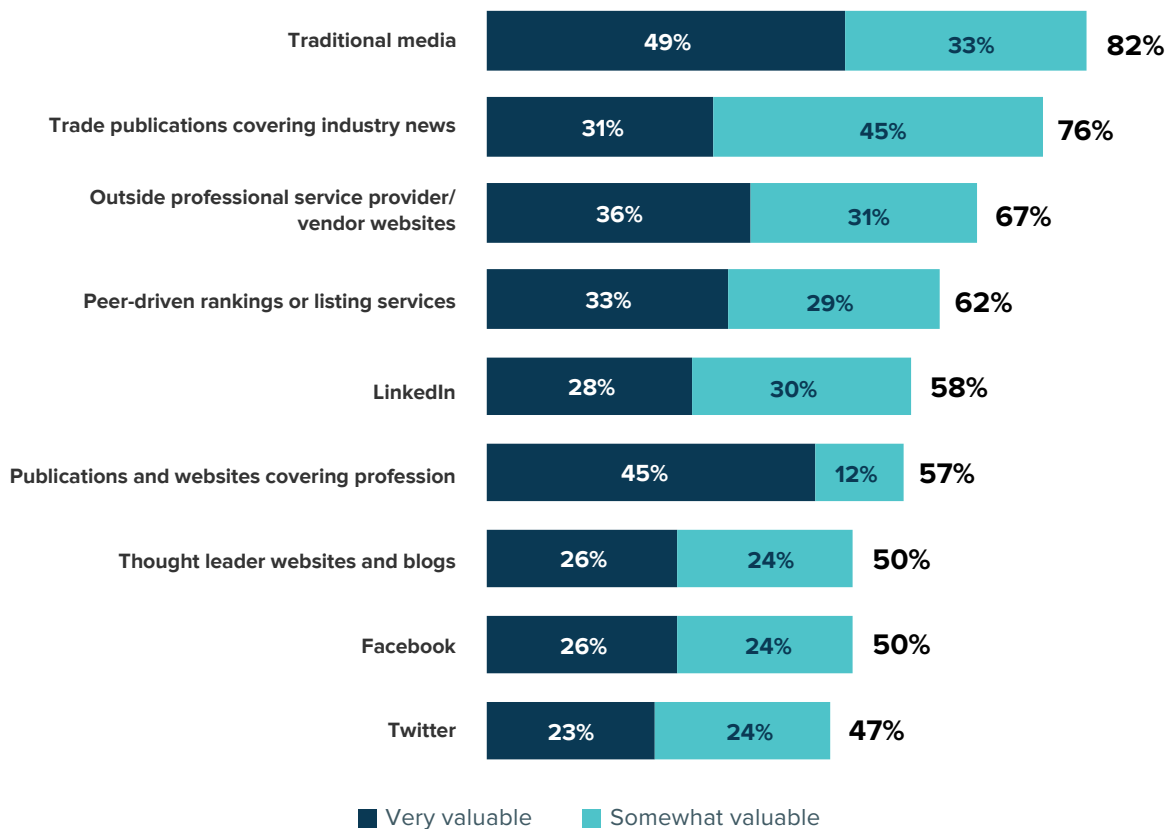
## Traditional Media Leads the Way — but Social Is Important Too

Even more than in-house counsel, C-suite members place the highest value on traditional media, at 82 percent — up from 74 percent in 2018. Not far behind are trade publications covering industry news, which jumped from 65 percent last year to 76 percent in 2019.

Traditional media again comes out on top for this group, with 78 percent saying they access it at least weekly and 47 percent doing so every day. And reinforcing the broader array of media (be it business, industry or legal news) consumed by the C-suite, members of that group use all the sources in the survey more regularly and evenly than in-house counsel do — a disparity that is especially pronounced when it comes to social media.

Not surprisingly, C-suite members more regularly access Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter than professional service provider websites. For instance, Heintz uses Twitter like he uses blogs. “I follow people [on Twitter] who give me ideas,” he says. “I call them wellsprings of information.”

### How valuable are the following sources of content for business, industry and/or legal news and information?



## A Preference for Interactive Charts

C-suite officers say they prefer interactive charts (58 percent), followed closely by conferences (56 percent), more than other vehicles for content.

And while a weighted ranking puts articles ahead of all content sources, looking only at the “high preference” level provides some important lessons in how the C-suite differs from in-house counsel. While lawyers tend to take in longer-form information, interactive charts enable C-level executives to quickly absorb complex information (like financial information and customer research results) — while conferences offer engaging content along with an opportunity to network and build personal relationships.

As for conferences, C-suite executives pick interactive as a top-three attribute (45 percent), whereas in-house counsel and CMOs are more interested in timeliness. CMOs should note the value placed on interactivity, particularly in planning for events aimed at more than just a legal audience.



**58%**  
of C-suite officers prefer  
interactive charts

## Effective Distribution on Email — but LinkedIn Is Even Better

The C-suite is fairly bullish on the effectiveness of LinkedIn content targeting, with 63 percent of respondents agreeing that professional service providers use it effectively (and another 22 percent saying they have no opinion). When it isn't working, C-suite respondents say it's “irrelevant.” Meanwhile, 57 percent of C-suite officers agree that email targeting is effective, and just 21 percent say it isn't.

Isaac Rogers, CEO of 20/20 Research, embodies this enthusiasm. “I don't even open the hard copies I get of *Adweek* or other subscription journals anymore,” he says, “because LinkedIn is driving me to the specific articles and thought leaders who are relevant to me.”

This should be somewhat reaffirming for CMOs, who understand the importance of both tools and think their firms are using them well (or at least better than their competitors). But given the acknowledged importance of both methods and the fact that in-house counsel aren't nearly as sanguine about what they're receiving, understanding how LinkedIn and email marketing are evolving will be crucial for marketers looking to make an impact in the coming years.



**63%**  
of C-suites say LinkedIn  
targeting is effective



**57%**  
of C-suites say email  
targeting is effective

# How to Develop a Content Strategy — Without Playing Favorites

By Mary K Young

**25%**

of CMOs say their firm has a documented content strategy

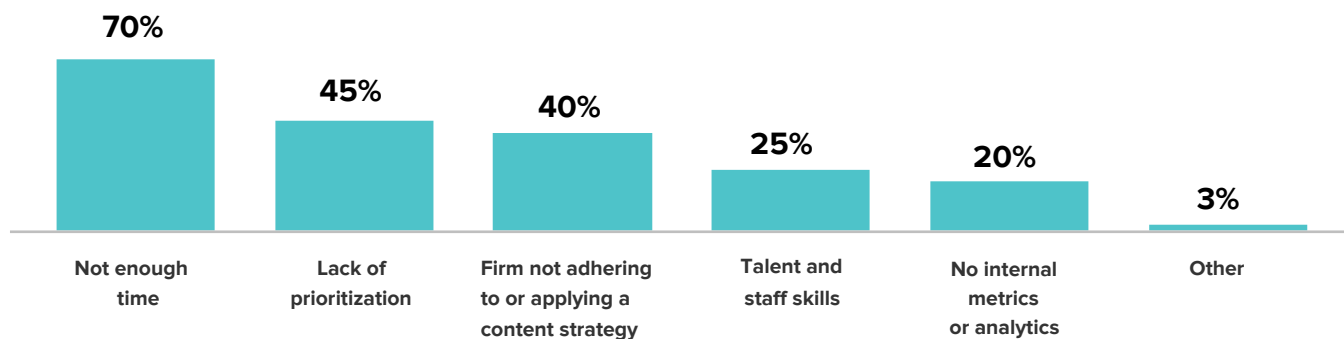
Despite the steady stream of content produced by law firms — an onslaught that no CMOs surveyed expect to decrease in 2019 — only a quarter of CMOs have a documented content strategy.

In other words, this group recognizes the value in content and believes it can help differentiate their firms and build their brands. They just face challenges in deploying, and perhaps documenting, it as strategically as they'd like. There's a reason that, when asked if their law firm is developing "its best, most differentiated content around the practices and industry groups that directly align with what is most important to the firm" — the majority of CMOs do not agree.

Though their greatest challenge is a lack of time (70 percent), not following or applying a content strategy is also a critical obstacle, according to 40 percent of respondents. As noted earlier, documenting such a strategy can be tricky, as law firm marketers are discouraged from prioritizing some practices, sectors and geographic markets over others.

The solution for many CMOs is relying on a strategy that is implicitly understood — one where all content is produced and disseminated through standard means, but with select campaigns built around more strategic content. This may mean allowing alerts, newsletters, webinars, articles and the like to proliferate, while simultaneously picking some of the topics represented in those communications to be distributed via a variety of different vehicles in a coordinated manner.

Please indicate which of the following are key internal content marketing challenges for your firm? (Select all that apply)



For instance, you may publish a topical report or survey, then create an event around it that includes a client panel, send individual emails to relevant recipients and publish a post on it to a targeted LinkedIn group. These choices should be made in alignment with the firm's growth strategies, whether it's burnishing the brand by associating with a high-profile practice or bringing attention to a geographic market where the firm is trying to get a foothold.

And while law firm leaders may be unwilling to publicly prioritize practices — another top challenge, according to 45 percent of CMOs — sector focus might be another productive solution. After all, most firms have already identified a handful of sectors on which to concentrate; because many lawyers touch upon any given number of subject areas, this approach will be more inclusive. If the firm has key client programs, its marketers can build sector-based campaigns to involve those important stakeholders as well.

At the end of the day, legal industry CMOs are sharp professionals who understand what needs to be done and the challenges that will arise in a law firm environment. For some, moving toward a documented content strategy might be the right move; for others, they'll have to maneuver around the obstacles in their path to direct a thoughtful, strategic approach that's implicit and inclusive.

*Mary K Young is a partner with Zeughauser Group.*

## **Make sure your content strategy is...**

- 1** Implicitly understood (even if undocumented)
- 2** Built around campaigns that distribute communications across several channels in a coordinated manner
- 3** Inclusive, by sector if not practice group

# A Turning Point for LinkedIn

By John E. Corey

Percentage who access LinkedIn at least weekly:

**31%**

**In-house counsel**

**59%**

**C-suite**

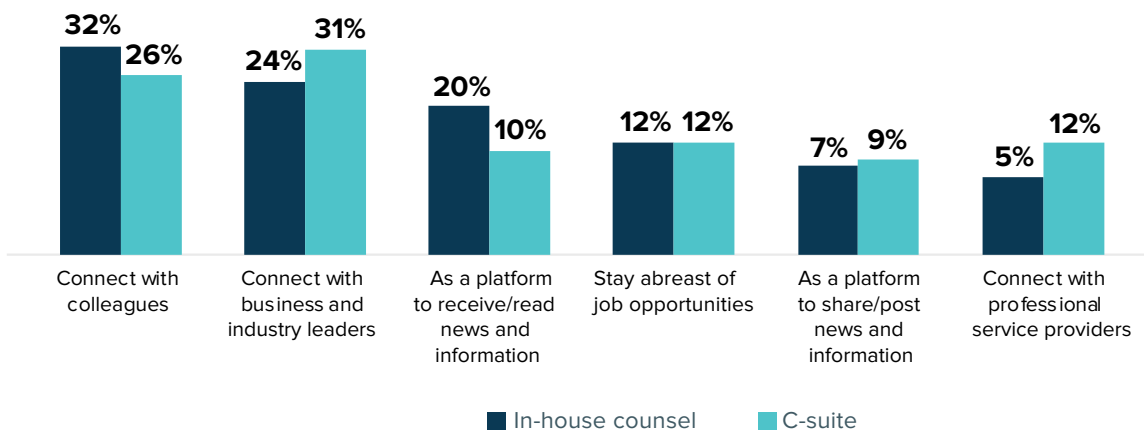
Nearly every single CMO we surveyed says LinkedIn is a valuable marketing tool and content distribution platform. And for good reason. Long the social media platform of choice for decision-makers in the business world, LinkedIn attracts plenty of eyeballs: 59 percent of C-suite officers access it at least weekly, as do 31 percent of in-house counsel.

But there are also good reasons why content marketers should think about honing their games if they want to reach a broader audience. While the decision-makers surveyed use LinkedIn to share and consume content, the platform is becoming increasingly cumbersome amid a growing volume of irrelevant copy.

LinkedIn is first and foremost a networking tool — C-suite executives and in-house counsel use it to connect with colleagues and other business leaders. For in-house counsel, it's a favored source for researching outside counsel. We know this because we asked respondents to pick only their most common use case this year.

In 2018, when we asked respondents to select all applicable use cases for LinkedIn, consuming and sharing content scored higher. This methodology change is likely part of the reason only 10 percent of C-suite officers say they use the platform to read news and information, and only 9 percent say they share that news and information themselves. For in-house counsel, the numbers are 20 percent and 7 percent, respectively.

## LinkedIn usage: in-house counsel and C-suite





Regardless of survey methodology, it's clear that LinkedIn content targeting (at least, as it's done by professional service providers) remains ineffectual. When asked in a free response question as to why professional service provider and law firm LinkedIn content distribution is not effective, C-suite executives say that targeting is often "irrelevant", while in-house counsel think it's "unfocused."

Gary Bazydlo, Regional General Counsel at Kimco Realty Corporation, lays out the issue succinctly: "LinkedIn is a strong source of reading material for me. But I'm largely ignoring the articles they think I want to read and reading my choices." LinkedIn clearly saw a problem with targeting, as the platform in late June 2019 announced algorithmic changes to cater to niche professional interests. But it's also a broader pain point for CMOs, who may have quality content on their hands but still haven't found the best ways to get it to desired audiences — only 36 percent believe distribution of content is very good to excellent.

Yet the opportunity to target content on LinkedIn is there for the taking. This is especially true for reaching C-suite executives, nearly a third of whom visit the site on a daily basis. Compared to in-house counsel —whose focus tends to be a bit narrower — C-suite members are likely attracted to LinkedIn for the variety it provides, the various connections it offers and the efficiency with which information can be consumed.

Remember, too, that this group highly values relevance across content types — they're busy, scrolling through their LinkedIn feeds, looking for something that will catch their eye. Knowing who these people are — drilling down past simple job title or industry or demographics — and delivering brief, actionable content on relevant topics is the only way to make sure they'll pay your content any mind.

*John E. Corey is the President and Founding Partner of Greentarget.*

## **How professional service organizations can use LinkedIn better:**

**1** Distribute relevant content to their connections — and take advantage of individual-only features, such as tagging accounts, posting in groups and publishing articles

**2** Use sponsored posts to strategically amplify high-performing content to valuable audiences

**3** Tap into Showcase Pages and Groups to reach niche audiences focused on singular topics

# Research Reports are Valuable — if You Can Find Them

By Betsy Hoag

Most CMOs, in-house counsel and C-suite officers agree they want research reports that are educational, in-depth and relevant. But actually finding those reports can prove surprisingly challenging.

For instance, while 68 percent of CMOs, 64 percent of C-suite executives and 51 percent of in-house counsel say they appreciate that research reports are “educational,” only 9 percent of the C-suite and 19 percent of in-house counsel identify the attribute “easy to access” as one that intuitively appeals when it comes to research reports.

## Attributes that appeal: research reports

In-House Counsel		C-Suite		CMO	
1	Relevant (54%)	1	Educational (64%)	1	Educational (68%)
2	Educational (51%)	2	In-depth (61%)	2	In-depth (65%)
3	In-depth (48%)	3	Technical (55%)	3	Relevant (65%)

What makes these valuable sources of information so difficult to find? The disconnect likely stems from how research reports are typically disseminated — and suggests that, instead of depending on readers to find the reports on a firm website or microsite, marketers should employ a mix of targeted earned and owned content (leaning heavily on interactive charts — which are especially appealing to C-suite members). Trade publication websites, websites from outside professional service providers and vendors, and podcasts represent three potential areas of opportunity.

Approximately three-fourths of both in-house counsel and C-suite officers highly value trade publications — both online and in print — that cover industry news, with a significant majority visiting these publications at least weekly. CMOs nearly unanimously (95 percent) agree that trade publications are a valuable marketing source. Strategic placement of select research findings in these publications — cited and hyperlinked in staff-written, bylined or sponsored articles, for example — provides an impactful, coordinated marketing opportunity.



Both C-suite executives (67 percent) and in-house counsel (63 percent) also consider professional service provider websites a high-value source for news and information — and research reports offer these providers a means of refreshing their website content. The key, however, is to draw targeted audiences to where a particular report lives on the site. One way to achieve this would be to use social media to promote select findings — via infographics or teasers, for example — replete with links to the full report.

Podcasts again made gains in 2019 among both C-suite executives and in-house counsel as a preferred content source. So marketers should seriously consider developing podcasts around select reports. A growing number of other professional service providers are already doing this, to great — and even award-winning — effect. Though some might think podcasts an unlikely medium for in-depth research, our survey found that nearly 70 percent of C-suite officers perceive them as “educational” — suggesting that this segment welcomes receiving research through this medium.

Beyond distribution, research reports face challenges related to timing: Both in-house counsel (60 percent) and C-suite officers (57 percent) place high value on content that is current. Interactive charts likely appeal to C-suite members in part because the reader often feels like this reporting is especially dynamic. Lengthier research reports, while providing the in-depth information that both survey groups may value, could be months or even years in the making. Upon publishing, the information may be — or appear to be — of little use to decision-makers.

As Isaac Rogers of 20/20 Research says, “Research providers might publish a year-end review, but I need something timely. They do good work, but by the time major publications are out, I already know what is covered in the report.”

Shorter, more frequent research reports provide a solution. And strategic distribution of timely, actionable content through diverse channels will help meet the goals and preferences of the C-suite, in-house counsel and CMOs alike.

*Betsy Hoag is the Director of Research and Planning at Greentarget.*

## **Ways to surface your research reports:**

- 1** Leverage research findings and reports with other forms of content
- 2** Disseminate through diverse distribution channels (earned media, interactive visuals and focused events/client panels)
- 3** Target selected findings to specific audiences

# Making Sure Thought Leadership is More than a Buzzword

By Brandon Copple

We say thought leadership too much in this business. We do it. Our clients do it. The whole industry does it. Last year thought leader even overcame leverage to win the title as the most overused term in PR.

Any term getting tossed around that much is bound to lose its punch and, eventually, its meaning. Thus you'll find plenty of voices advocating that we stop using the phrase thought leadership altogether.

While eliminating buzzwords is almost always a good thing, in this case there's a better way: We shouldn't stop saying thought leadership, we should start producing actual thought leadership.

Because the real problem is not the phrase itself, it's that there are too many people producing too much content, much of it bad, and calling it thought leadership. There are a lot of reasons for that of course. The most common is that would-be thought leaders too often get hung up on what they want to say, without stopping to consider what their audience wants to hear. Or they get lost in the forest of their expertise and wind up with content that amounts to, as one chief communications officer recently described it to us, "nerds talking to nerds about nerdy things."

Most of the time our key audiences — general counsel and others in the C-suite, typically — are not among the nerds. So overly nerdy content has almost no chance of engaging them or reeling in new business for our clients.

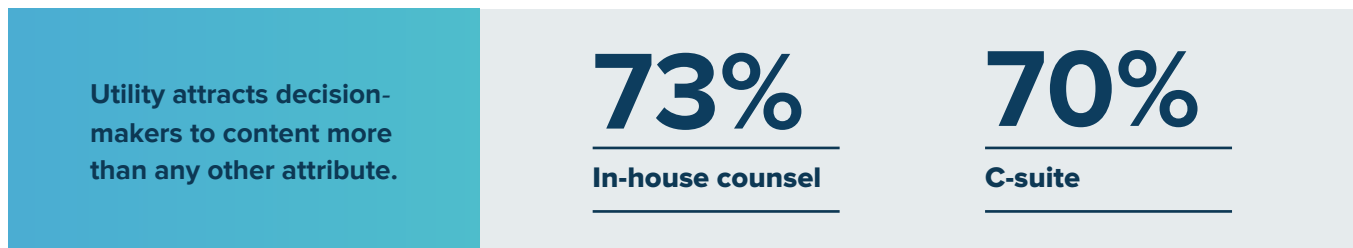
It's our job to explain to those subject-matter experts what real thought leadership looks like. To help us do that, Greentarget created the following framework, breaking it down into four attributes.



**Relevance** — Table stakes. If it's not relevant, why would anybody read it? Not surprisingly, relevance ranks among the top three attributes that both C-suite officers and in-house lawyers want in articles, newsletters, podcasts and in-person events — in other words, all the content professional service firms produce most.

**Novelty** — Telling your audience something they don't already know seems like an obvious requirement for any piece of content. Still, it can be easy to let this one slide – because your expert thinks nobody has ever said it the way they're saying it, for instance. We think it's worth fighting for; if there's one quality that separates the signal from the noise, it's novelty.

**Urgency** — How many times do you bookmark something or otherwise set it aside to read later — and then never read it at all? Content that's not important now is far less likely to win the battle for an executive's attention. For the second year in a row, both C-suite members and in-house counsel tell us they value content that's current over all but one other attribute....



**Utility** — It's the quality our audiences say they're most attracted to in content. We also believe it's the quality most likely to move them toward purchasing decisions. Content that tells them not just what happened, or what it means, but what they need to do about it is far more likely to make them call the author and say "I need you to help me do that."

At the end of the day, that's why we're producing thought leadership in the first place.

*Brandon Copple is the Director of Content and Editorial Strategy at Greentarget.*

## What content creators should do:

- 1** Educate subject-matter experts on thought leadership before talking about their ideas for content
- 2** Stress utility and audiences in headlines; embrace phrases like "how to" and the word "you"
- 3** Technology including SEO tools can help you zero in on the four qualities

# Taking the Next Steps with Distribution SEO

By J.M. Upton

“If a tree falls in a forest and there is no one around to hear it, does it make a sound?”

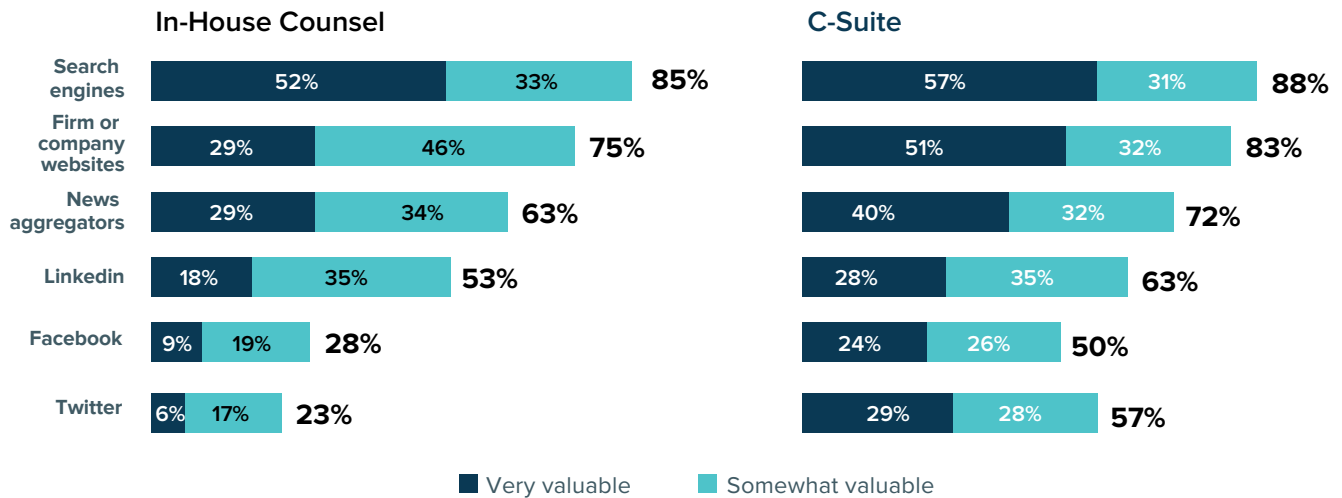
Philosophical thought experiments and legal marketing don’t appear to have much in common, but in a content ecosystem where every firm is vying for the mantle of “thought leader,” the comparison is pertinent. Most firms approach content marketing through attempting to create new, novel and valuable analysis on the issues of the day. But ignoring the leader angle — which implies cultivation of heavy readership within key audiences — raises the question, “If a firm publishes good content that no one reads, is it leadership?”

This year’s survey reveals increased preference for (and reliance on) vendor websites and blogs as sources of information. Both C-suite and in-house counsel audiences rely heavily on their owned channels to distribute content; because they control the message and publishing cadence, a firm’s website is a natural vehicle to host and promote thought leadership content. However, only 36 percent of CMOs believe they have “very good” to “excellent” distribution, which means that though they may be creating high-quality content on a regular basis, they are struggling to develop audiences for it.



A good way to bridge this gap is through search engine optimization. While C-suite and in-house audiences tend to access traditional media and trade publications on a regular cadence, they visit vendor websites and blogs in response to specific business or informational needs, most often preceded by a query on a search engine like Google. If your content isn’t showing up on the first page of results, it might as well be invisible. And since you’re not likely to get more than a few chances to serve business-winning content in response to a query, SEO can provide the advantage you need to start building a qualified audience.

## Value of content distribution platforms



Search engines are the content distribution platform most valued by C-suite executives and in-house counsel. And the beautiful thing about SEO is that while it requires an initial investment to develop competency and remediate issues with your website and content, the concepts are easy to grasp and will quickly become a core component of your standard publishing process. SEO research is often a proxy for user interests. Because queries represent informational needs, performing this type of analysis helps marketers identify the topics that matter, determine the key components of content that address those topics and ultimately answer a prospect's most burning questions. Including SEO techniques in your publishing process will lead not only to better search rankings for your content but also a deeper understanding of your customers and their current needs.

SEO is critical for lead generation and session quality as well. Organic traffic is almost always going to be more engaged than traffic from other channels because it is composed of users who are actively seeking content in response to a need, rather than clicking on an ad they were served or a post they stumbled across by accident. Optimizing the site for organic traffic means optimizing for strong user experience, and in an environment where dozens of firms with similar practice areas are frantically publishing similar content, making content findable, navigable and actionable is often the competitive edge that will establish your site as a destination for thought leadership.

*J.M. Upton is the Director of Digital and Analytics at Greentarget.*

### Three Things to Remember about SEO:

- 1 Ensure that content is effectively distributed to cultivate the audience
- 2 Remember that organic traffic has a built-in advantage when it comes to user engagement
- 3 Consider that search engine research and optimization extend thought leadership's reach and value



# Methodology

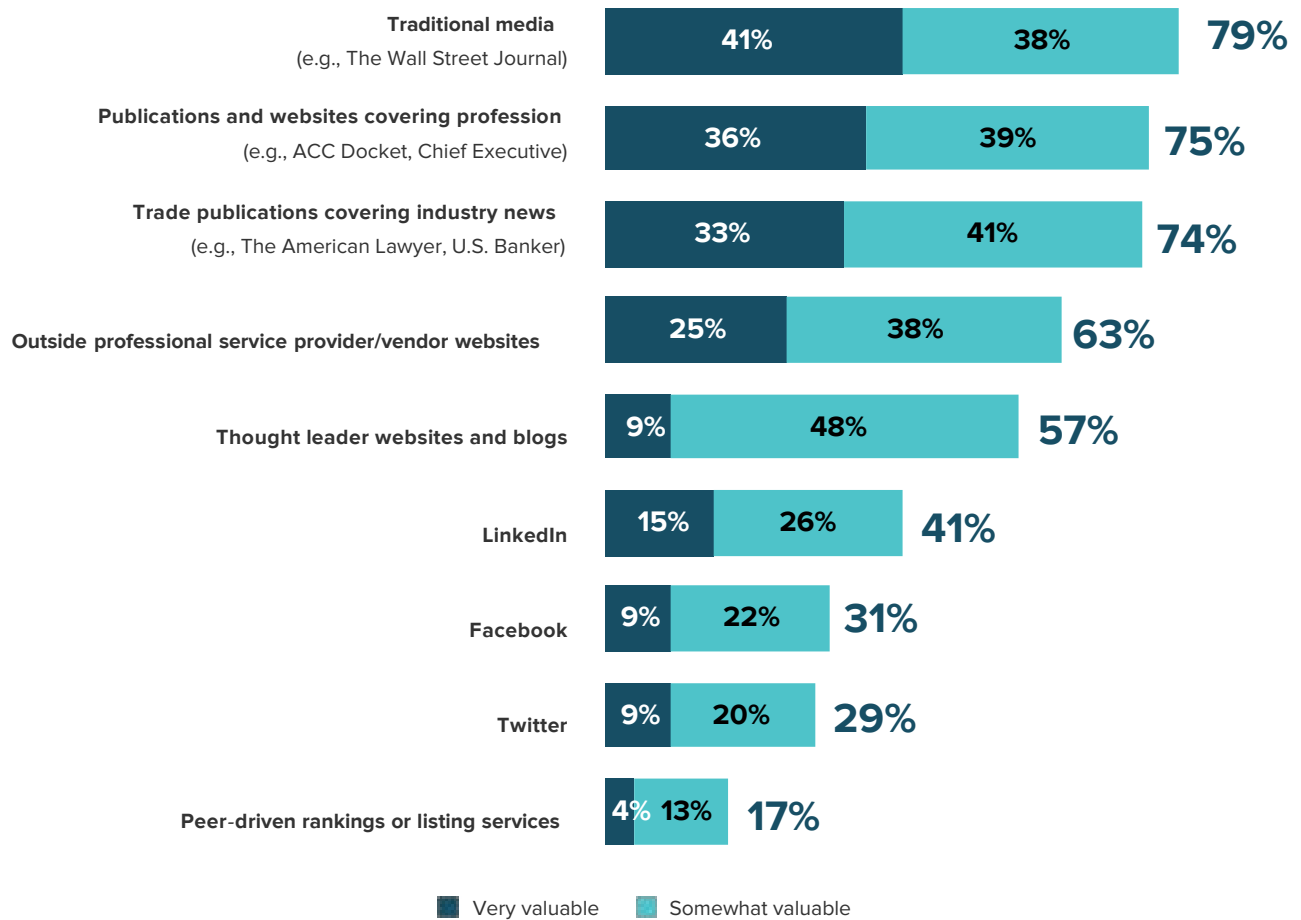
In April and May of 2019, Greentarget and Zeughauser Group distributed individual surveys to 200 executives (100 in-house counsel and 100 various C-suite officers) as well as 40 law firm chief marketing officers. The results were tabulated, analyzed and released in July 2019. Among the executives, more than a third were from companies with more than 1,000 employees. Percentages in certain questions exceed 100 percent because respondents were asked to check all that apply. Due to rounding, percentages used in some questions may not add up to 100 percent.

## IN-HOUSE COUNSEL & C-SUITE

### 2019 State of Digital & Content Marketing Survey – In-House Counsel and C-Suite Questions

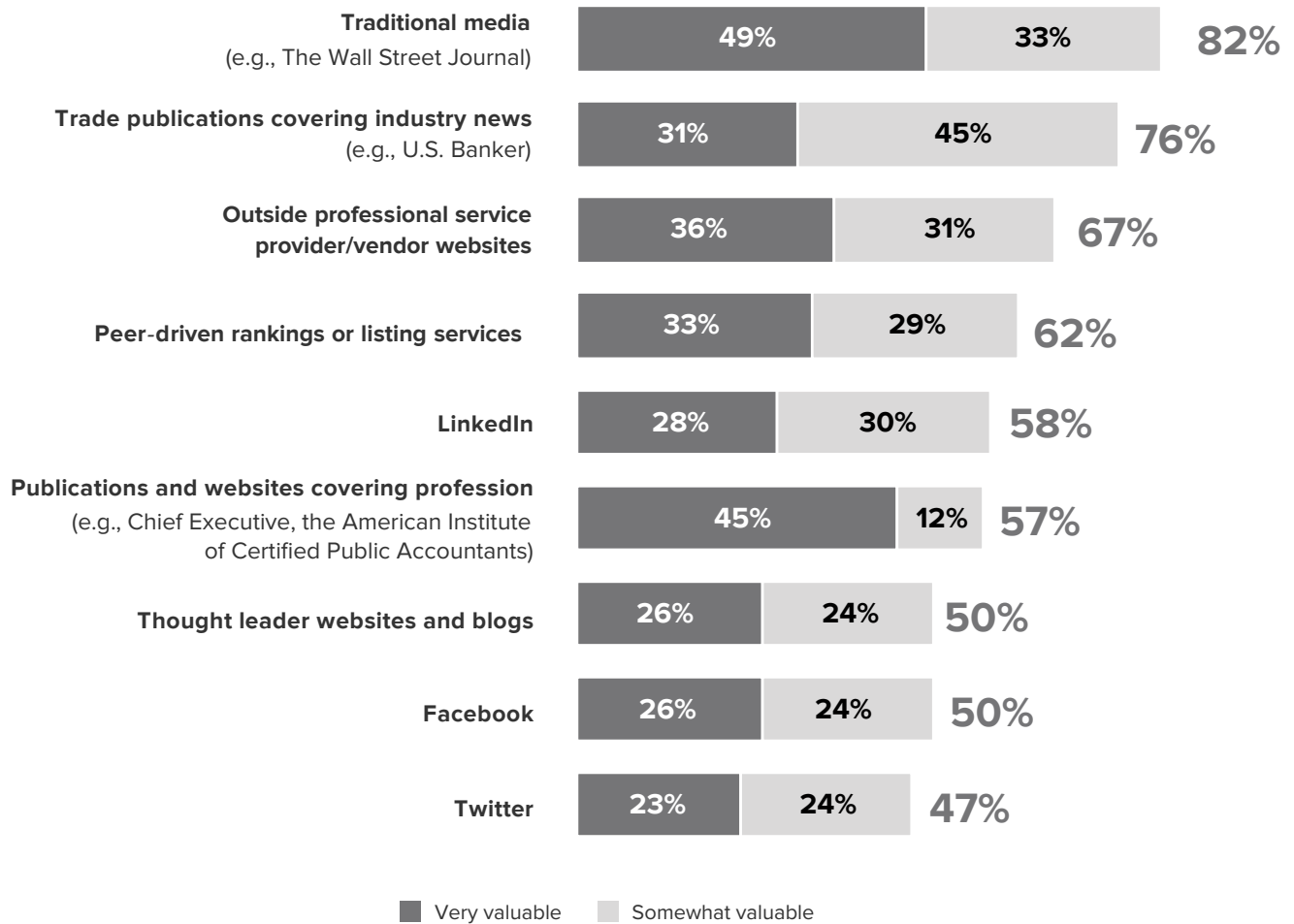
Q1. How valuable are the following sources of content for business, industry and/or legal news and information?

#### In-House Counsel



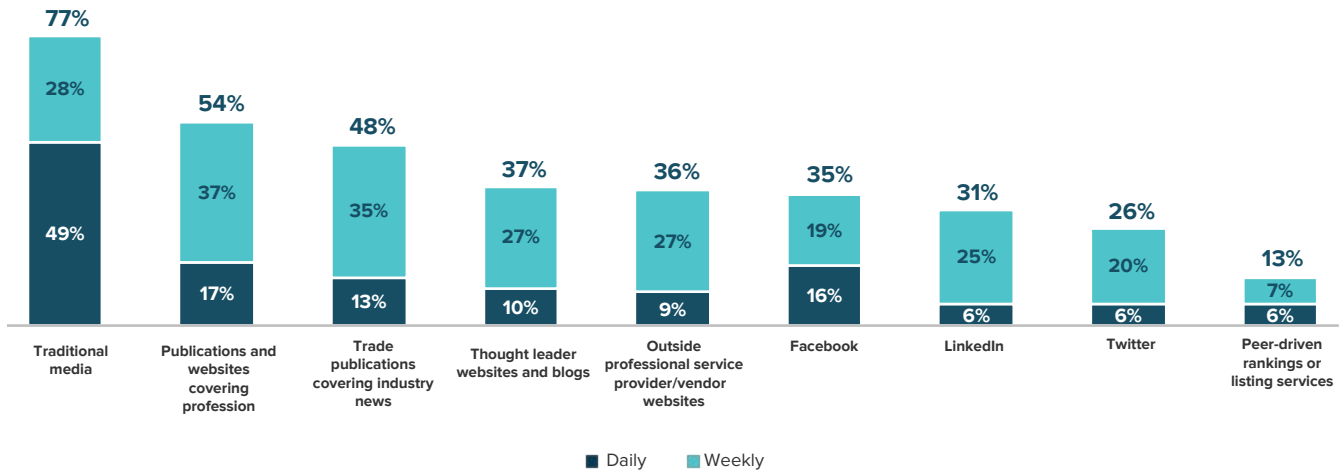
Q1. How valuable are the following sources of content for business, industry and/or legal news and information?

**C-Suite**

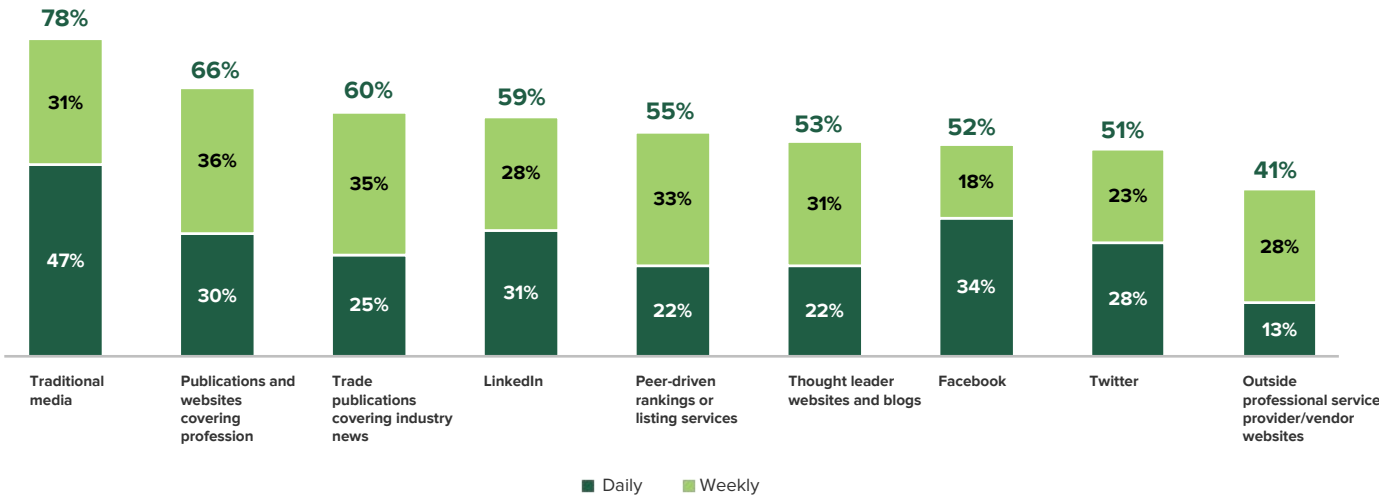


Q2. Please indicate the frequency with which you access the following sources for business, industry and/or legal news and information.

### In-House Counsel

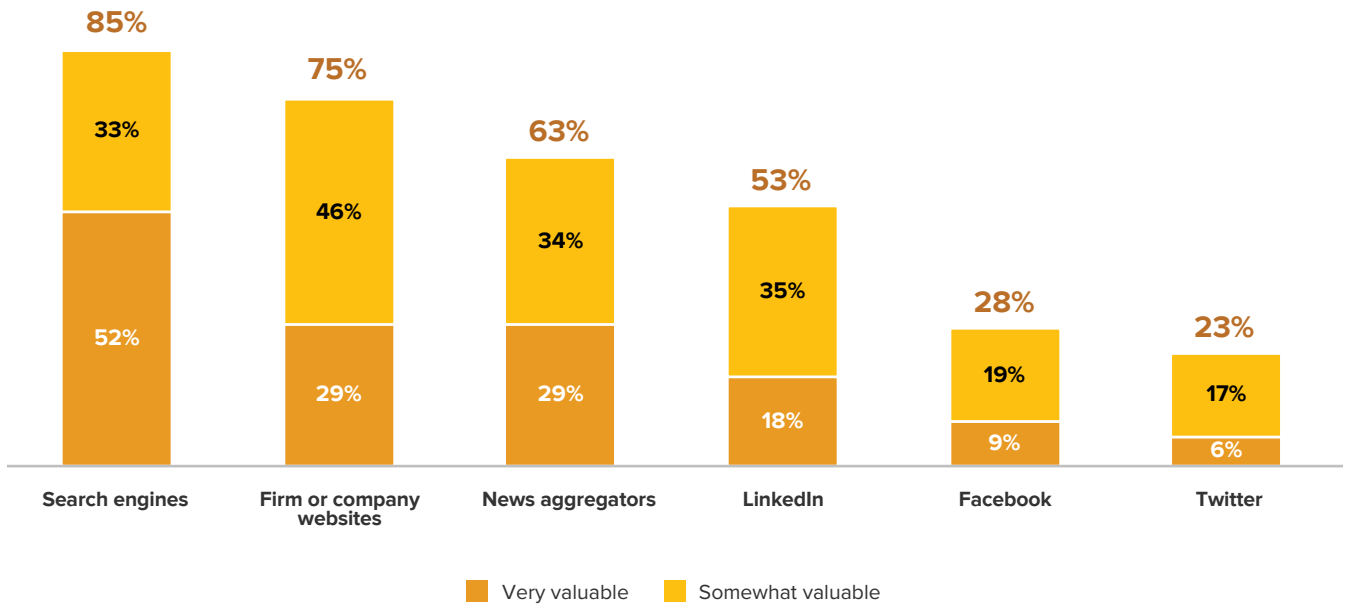


### C-Suite

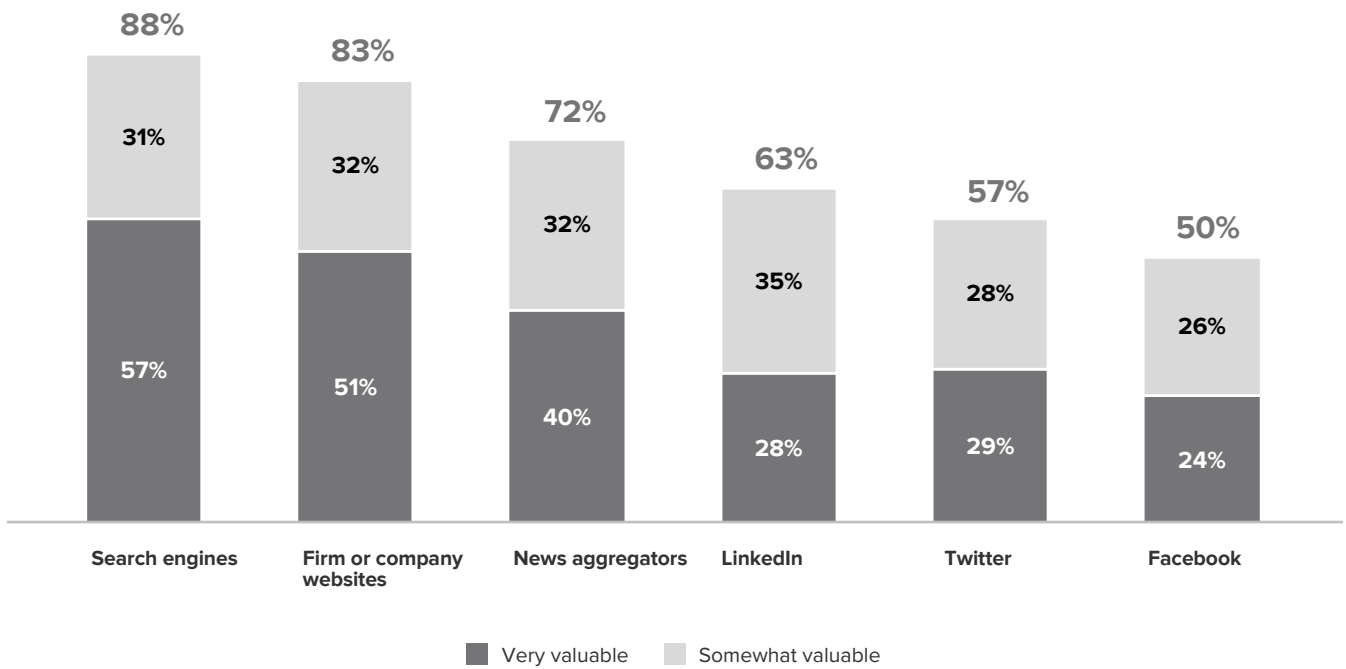


Q3. How valuable are the following content distribution platforms for business and industry news and information?

### In-House Counsel

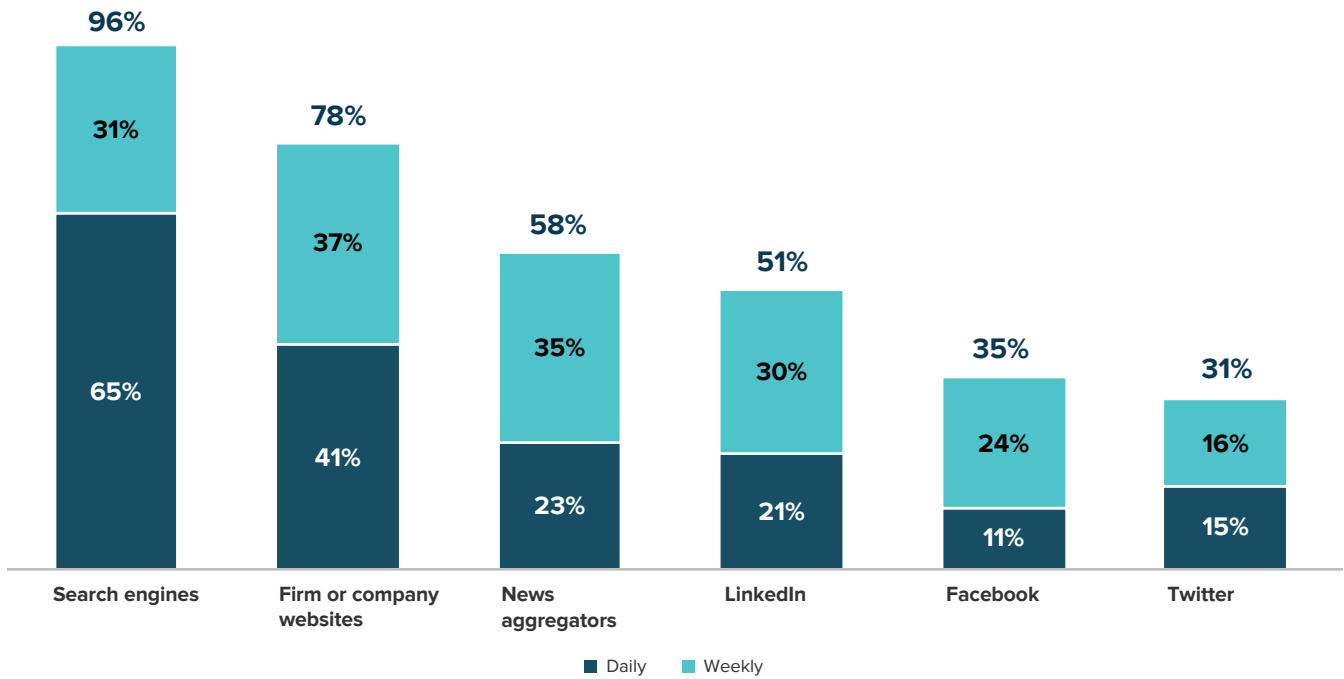


### C-Suite

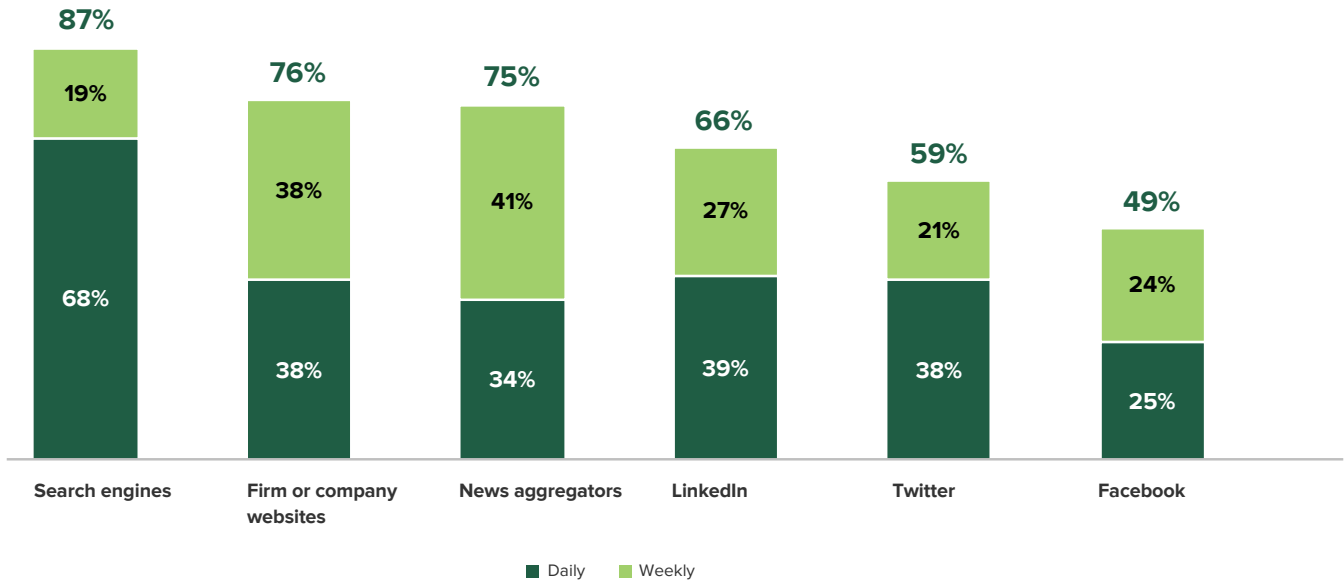


Q4. Please indicate the frequency with which you personally use the following content distribution platforms when it comes to business and industry news and information:

### In-House Counsel



### C-Suite



Q5. Please indicate your preference level for the following types of content:  
 Scale of 1 to 5, where 5 = high preference and 0 = low preference

**In-House Counsel**

Weighted rank	Affinity rank*	Content type
1	1	Articles
2	2	Conferences, presentations, webinars
3	3	Email newsletters
4	4	Interactive charts
5	5	Podcasts
6	6	Video
7	7	Website content
8	9	Infographics
9	8	Research reports

\*High preference scores of 4 + 5 = affinity rank

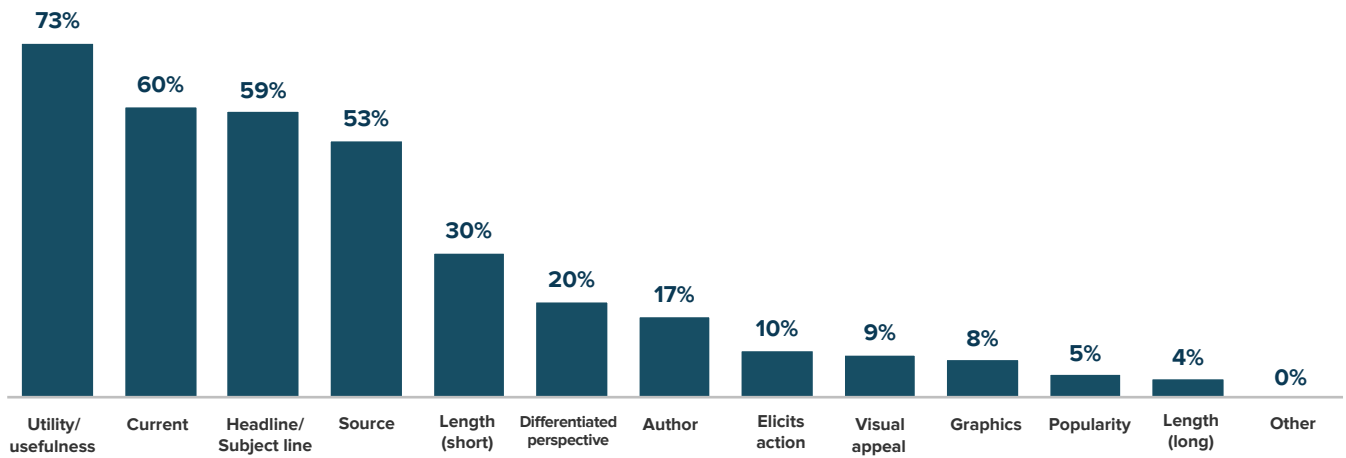
**C-Suite**

Weighted rank	Affinity rank*	Content type
1	3	Articles
2	1	Interactive charts
3	2	Conferences, presentations, webinars
4	4	Email newsletters
5	9	Podcasts
6	5	Research reports
7	7	Infographics
8	6	Website content
9	8	Video

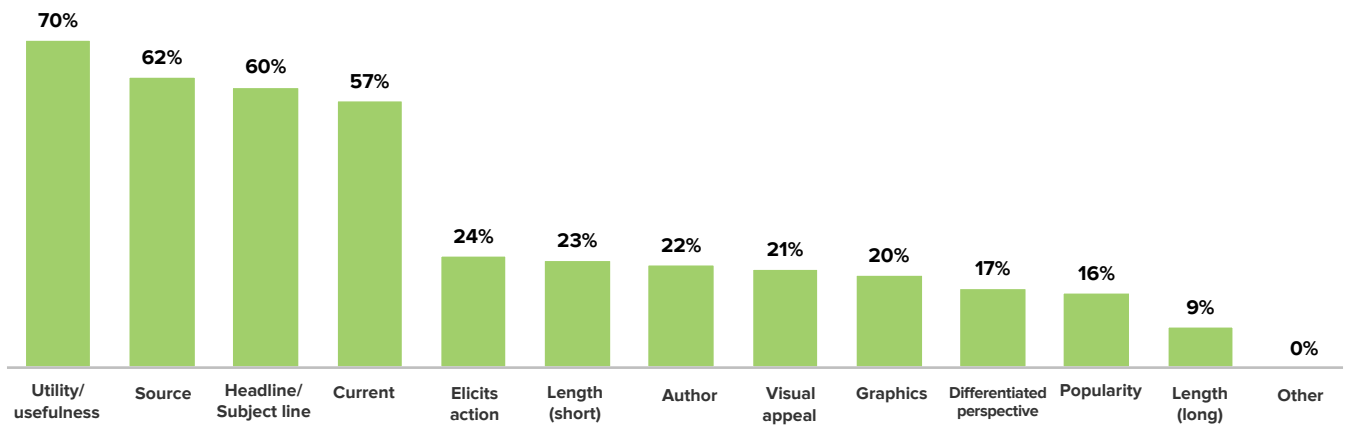
\*High preference scores of 4 + 5 = affinity rank

Q6. What attracts you to the content that you consume most frequently?

### In-House Counsel



### C-Suite





Q7. Select the attributes that you appreciate most when it comes to each of the following types of content:

## In-House Counsel

Articles	Conferences, Presentations, Webinars	Email Newsletters	Interactive Charts	Podcasts
1 Educational (90%)	1 Educational (56%)	1 Easy to read (58%)	1 Visual (57%)	1 Relevant (44%)
2 Relevant (76%)	2 Relevant (54%)	2 Brief (54%)	2 Educational (45%)	2 Entertaining (40%)
3 Easy to read (54%)	3 Timely (45%)	3 Relevant (45%)	3 Interactive (44%)	3 Educational (33%)

Video	Website Content	Infographics	Research Reports
1 Visual (64%)	1 Relevant (50%)	1 Visual (68%)	1 Relevant (54%)
2 Relevant (41%)	2 Easy to read (44%)	2 Brief (59%)	2 Educational (51%)
3 Brief (40%)	3 Educational (39%)	3 Interactive (47%)	3 In-depth (48%)

## C-Suite

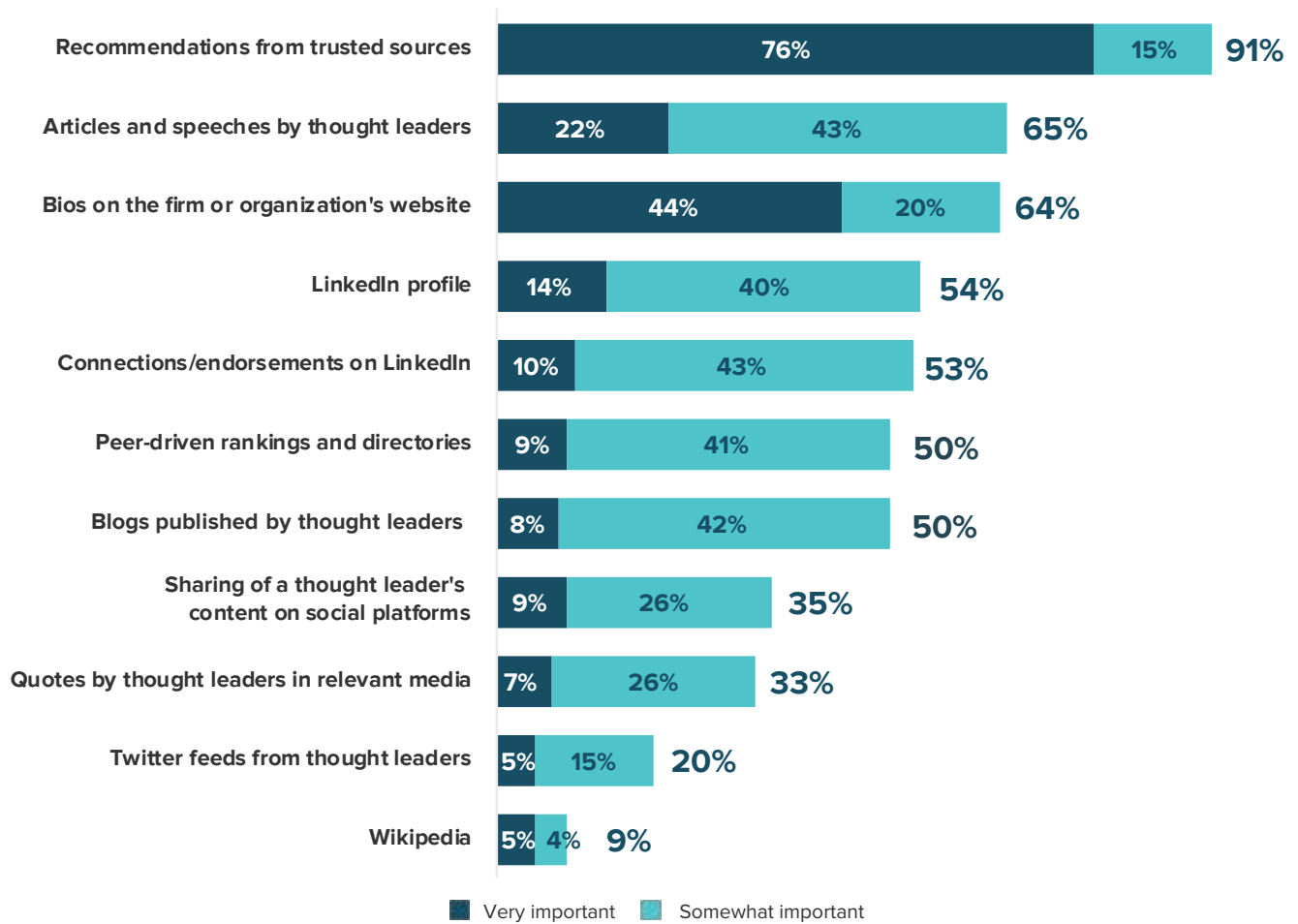
Articles	Interactive Charts	Conferences, Presentations, Webinars	Email Newsletters	Research Reports
1 Relevant (70%)	1 Interactive (74%)	1 Educational (70%)	1 Relevant (61%)	1 Educational (64%)
2 Educational (68%)	2 Visual (72%)	2 Relevant (58%)	2 Timely (43%)	2 In-depth (61%)
3 Timely (49%)	3 Educational (45%)	3 Interactive (45%)	3 Educational (41%)	3 Technical (55%)

Podcasts	Infographics	Website Content	Video
1 Educational (67%)	1 Visual (70%)	1 Relevant (63%)	1 Visual (71%)
2 Easy to access (64%)	2 Brief (61%)	2 Easy to access (46%)	2 Entertaining (54%)
3 Entertaining (56%)	3 Easy to read (58%)	3 Easy to read (46%)	3 Educational (47%)

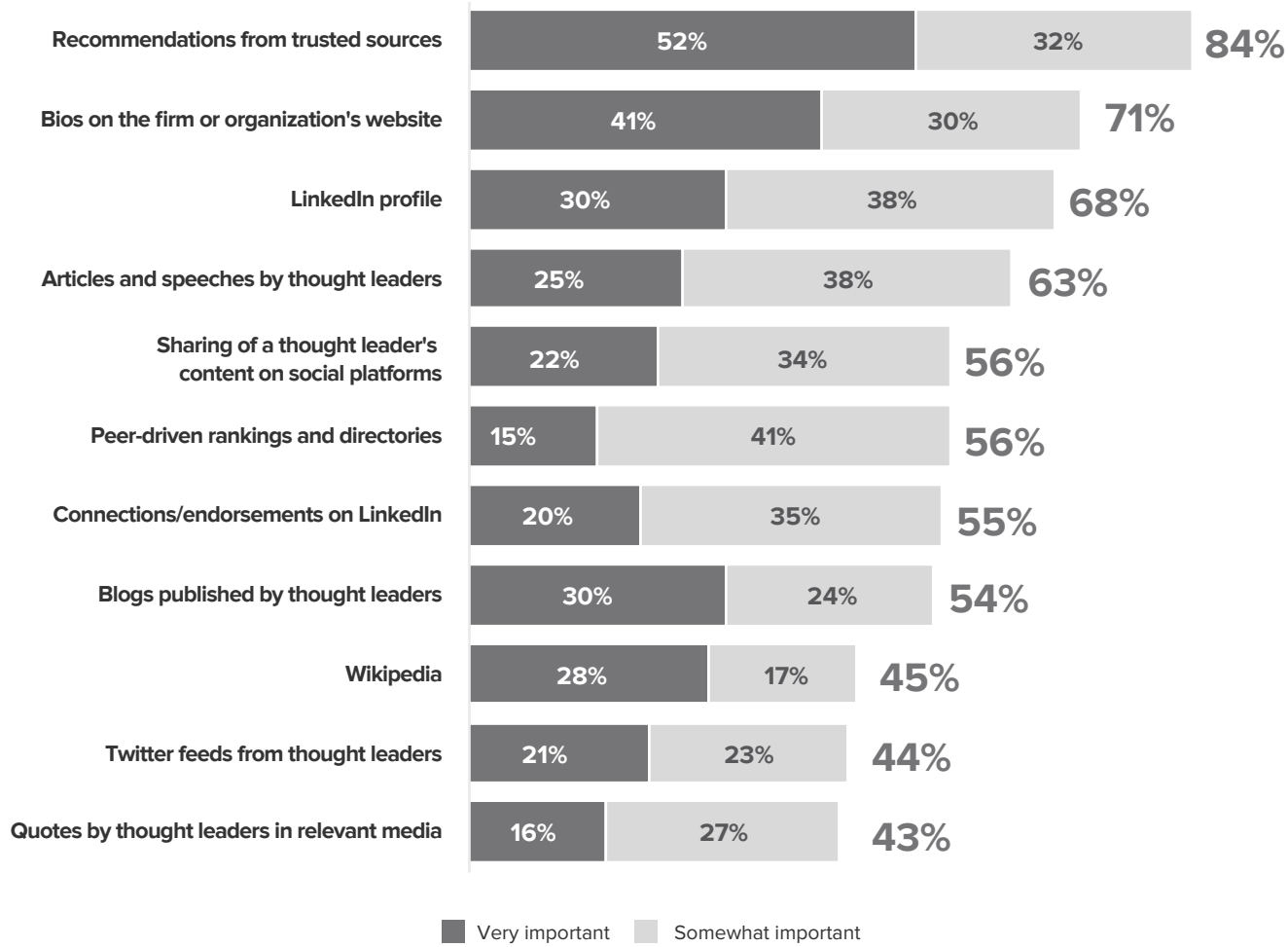
Q8. Please indicate the importance of the following in helping you to research outside firms/organizations for potential hire:

### In-House Counsel



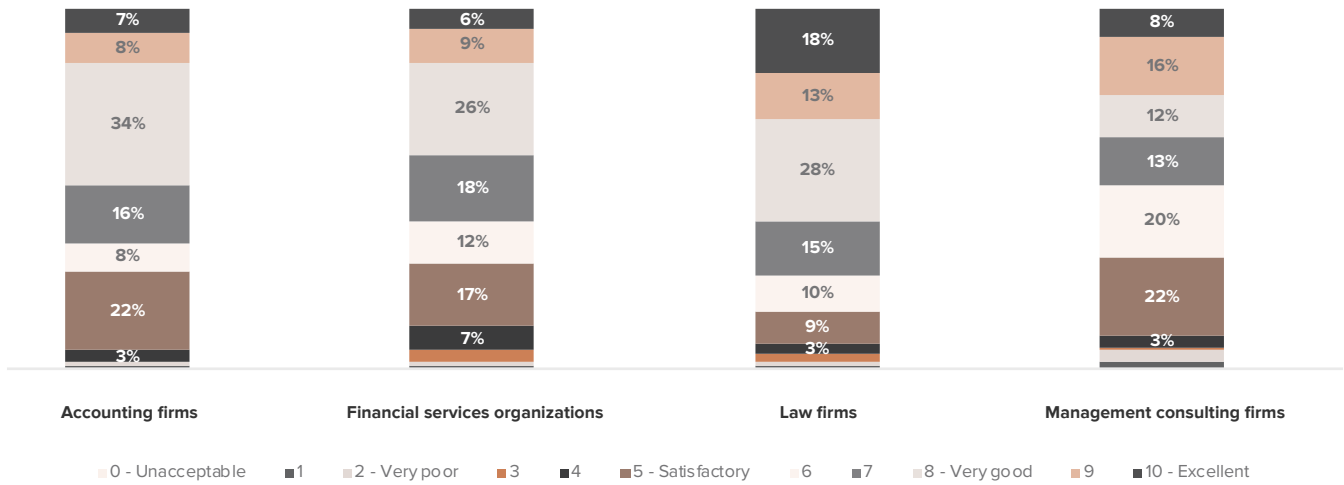
Q8. Please indicate the importance of the following in helping you to research outside firms/organizations for potential hire:

**C-Suite**

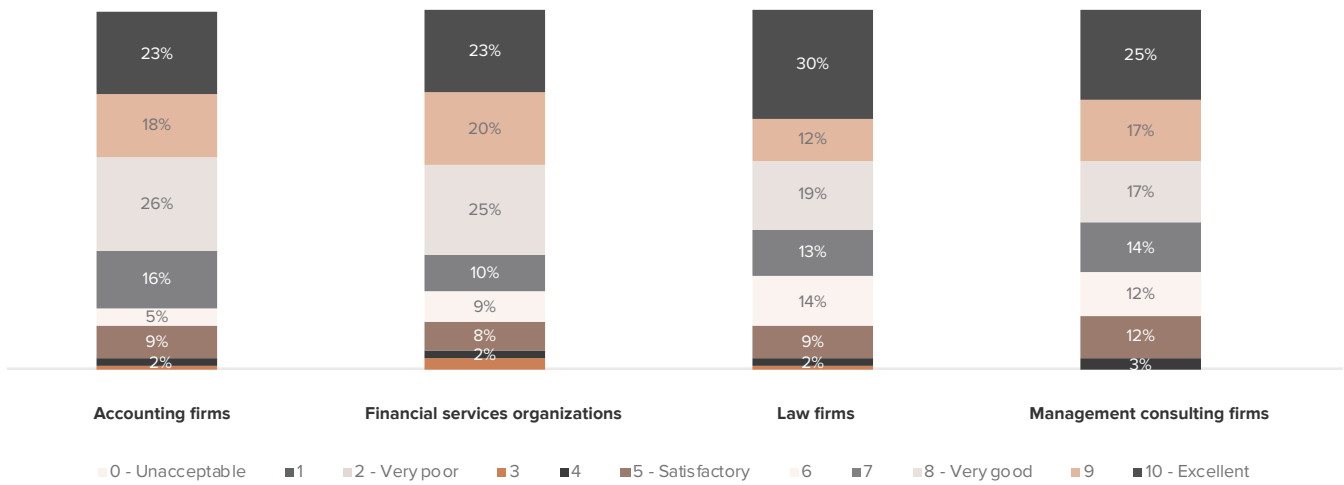


Q9. On a scale of 0 to 10, how would you characterize the overall value of the content produced by professional service providers (client alerts, newsletters, blogs, etc.)?

### In-House Counsel

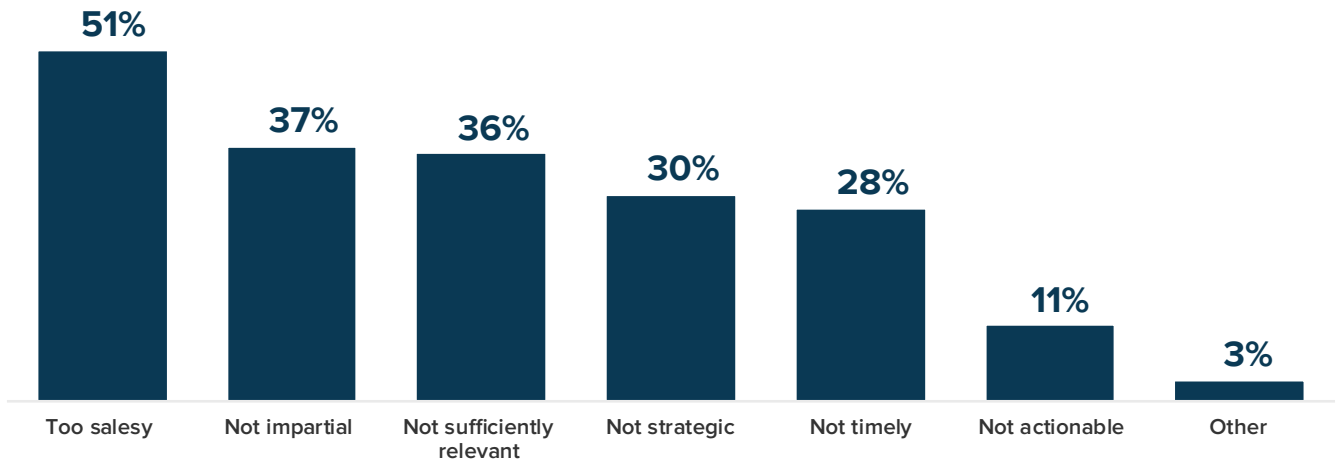


### C-Suite

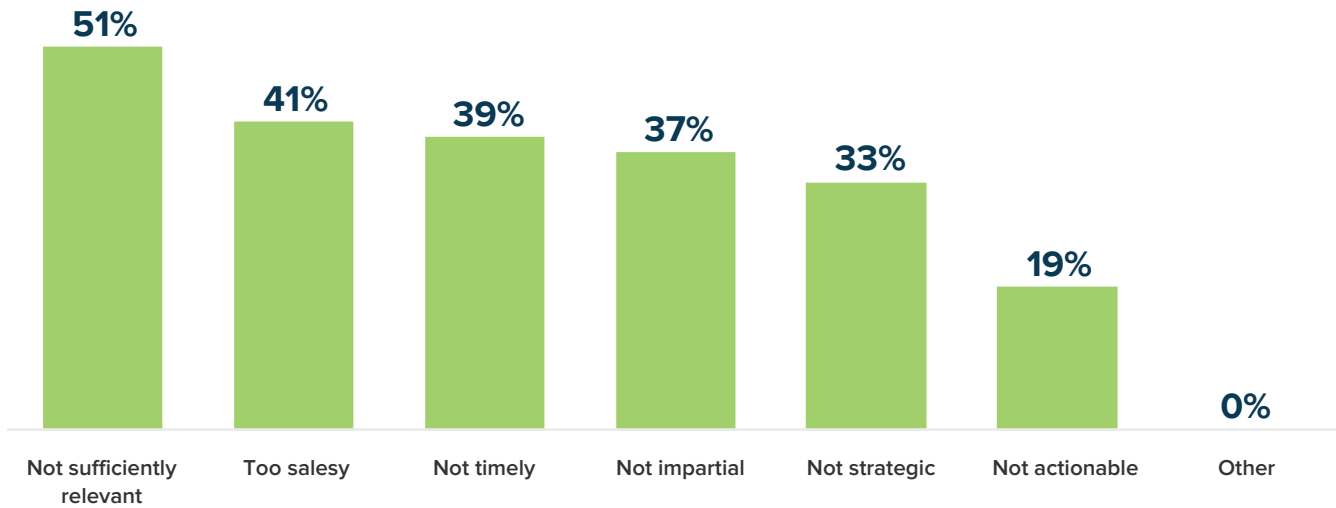


Q10. What would be the top reason(s) you find content from professional service providers to be anything less than excellent? (Select all that apply)

### In-House Counsel

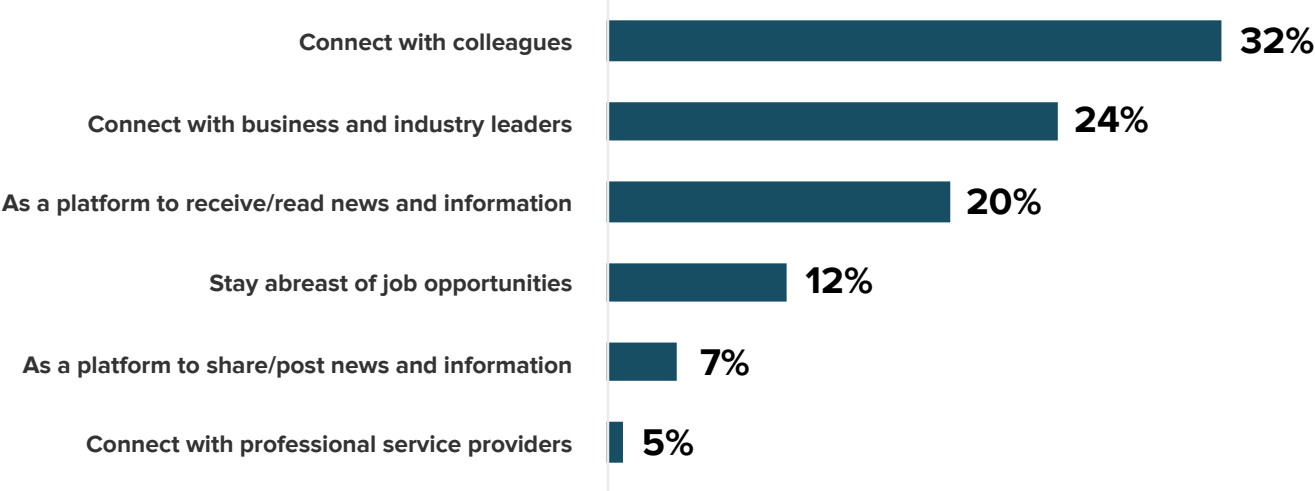


### C-Suite

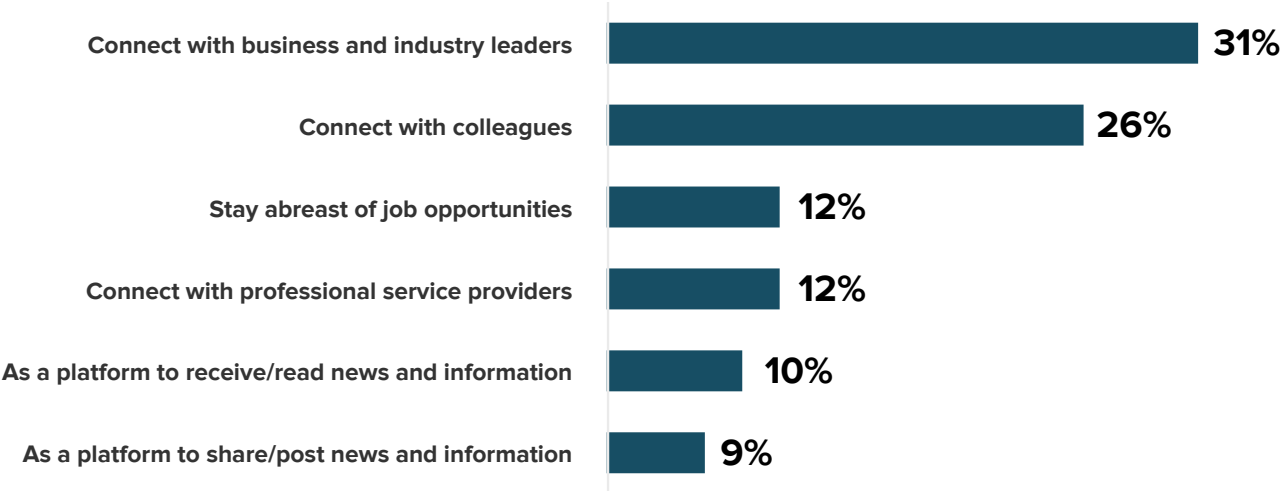


Q11. You indicated earlier that LinkedIn is a valuable source of business, industry and/or legal content for you. Which of the following best describes the way you use LinkedIn? (Select one option)

**In-House Counsel**

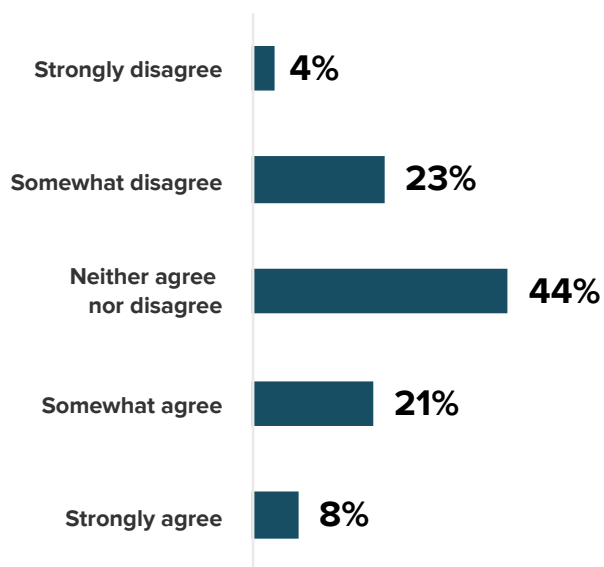


**C-Suite**

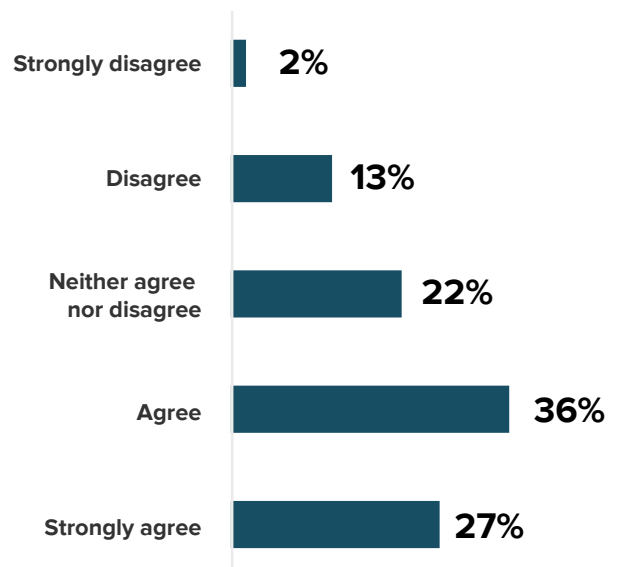


Q12. Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement: I believe that professional service providers/ law firms are using LinkedIn effectively to target people like me with highly relevant content.

**In-House Counsel**

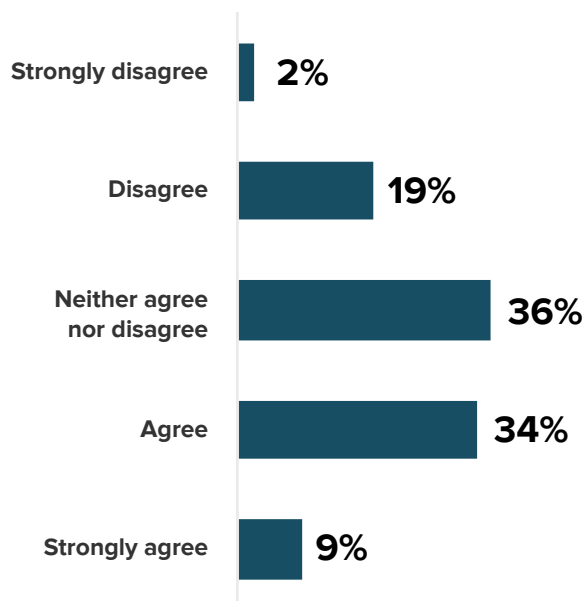


**C-Suite**

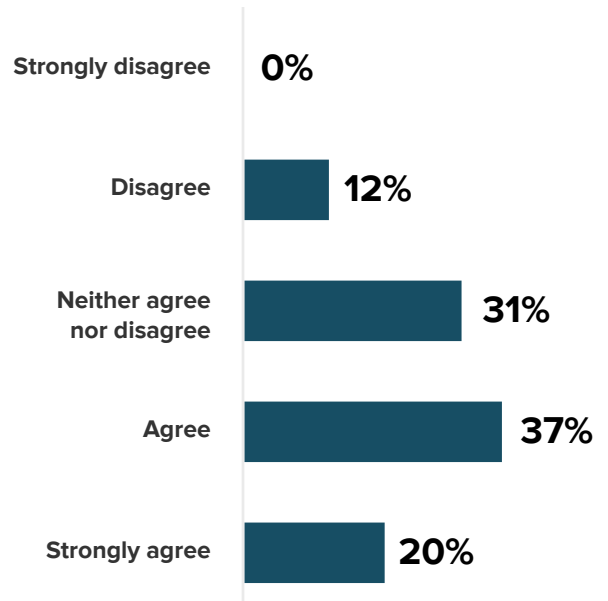


Q13. Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement: I believe that professional service providers/ law firms are using email effectively to target people like me with highly relevant content.

**In-House Counsel**

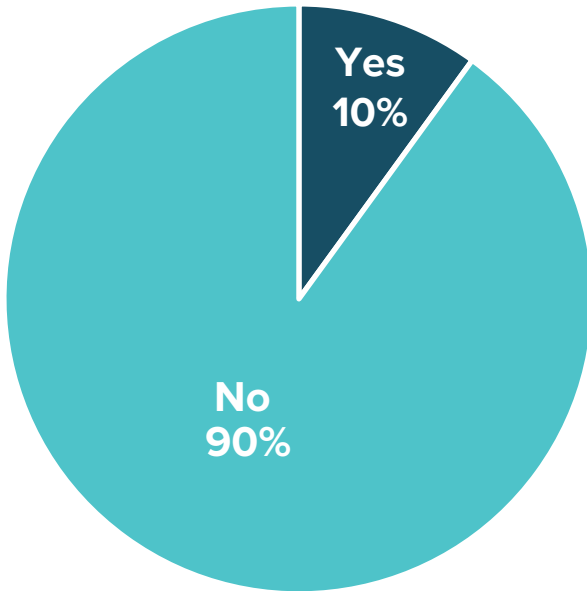


**C-Suite**



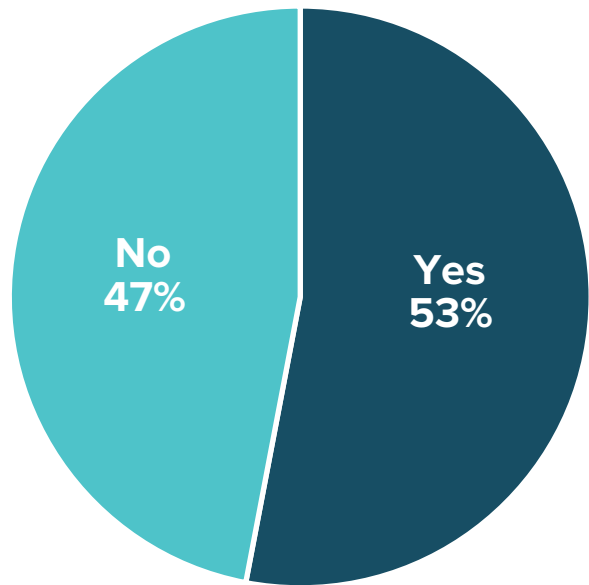
Q14. Are you a member of Corporate Legal Operations Consortium (CLOC)?

In-House Counsel



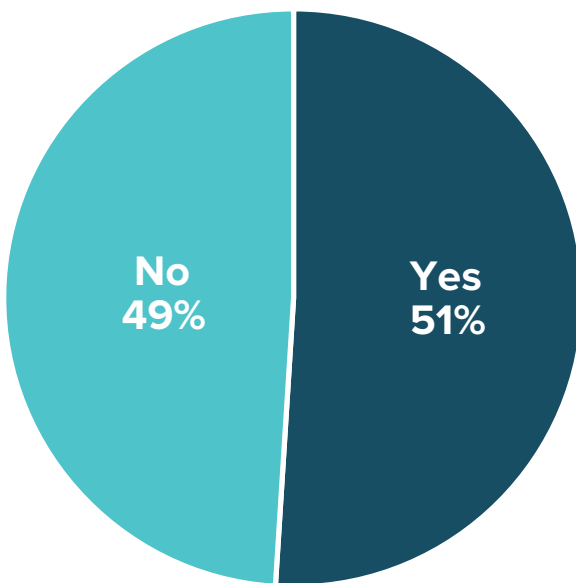
Q15. Do you receive content focused on legal operations from your outside law firms today?

In-House Counsel



Q16. Would you like to see more content focused on legal operations from your outside law firms?

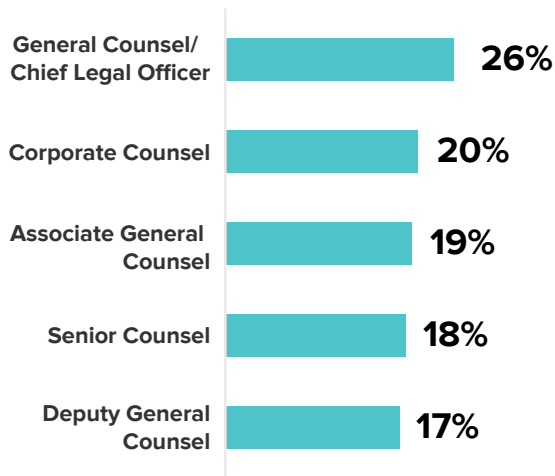
In-House Counsel



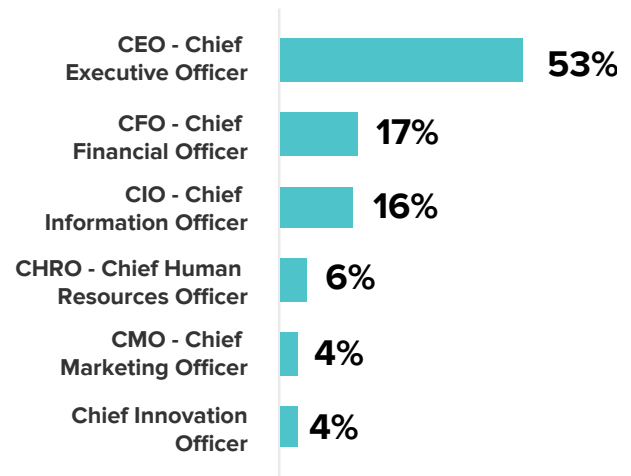


Q17. Which of the following most closely matches your job title?

**In-House Counsel**

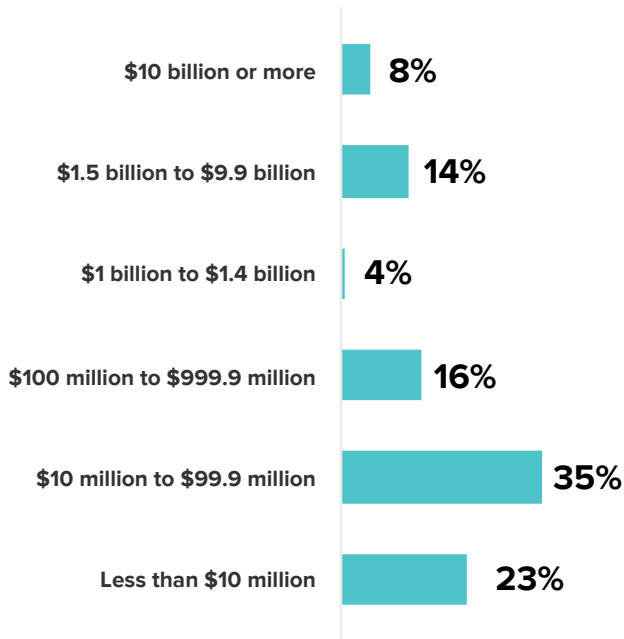


**C-Suite**

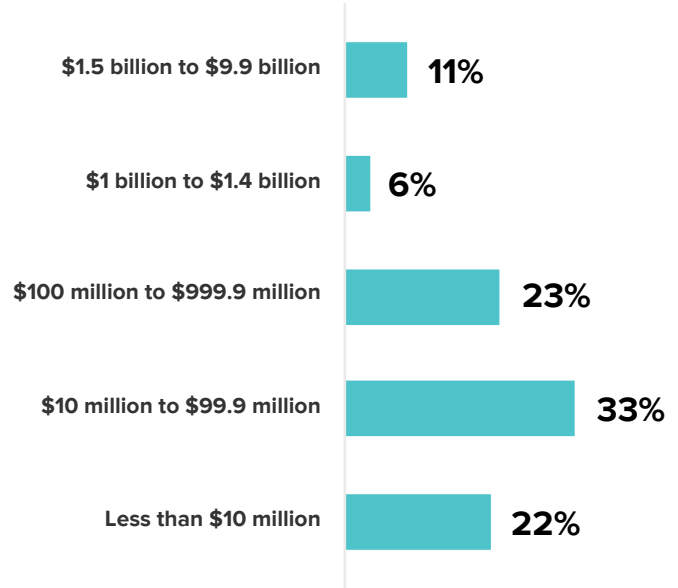


Q18. What were the FY 2018 revenues of your organization? (Select one option)

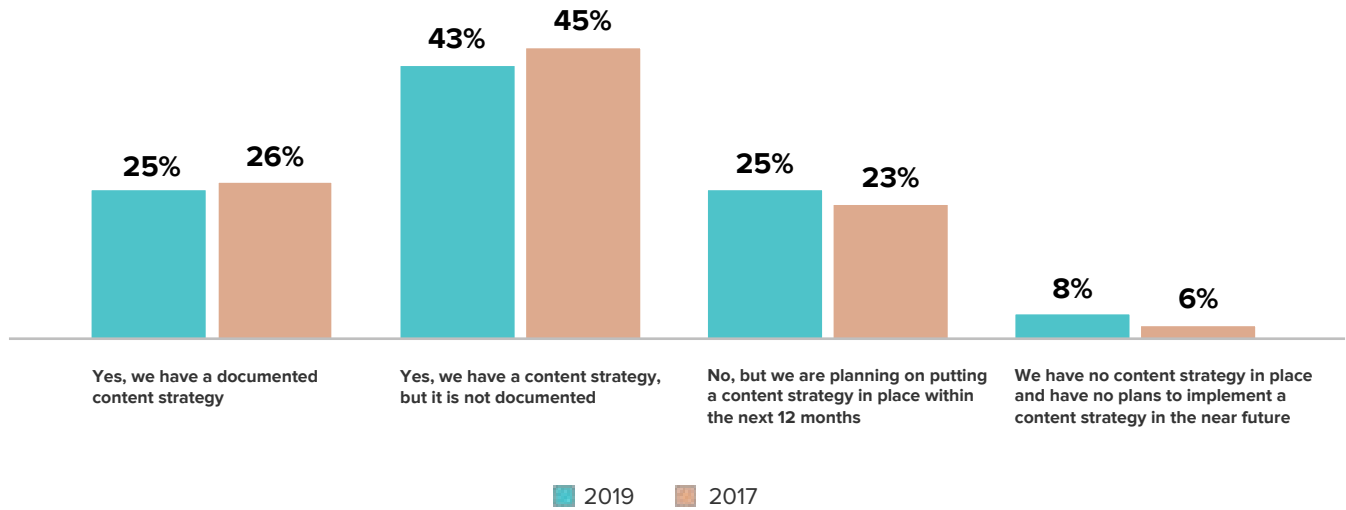
**In-House Counsel**



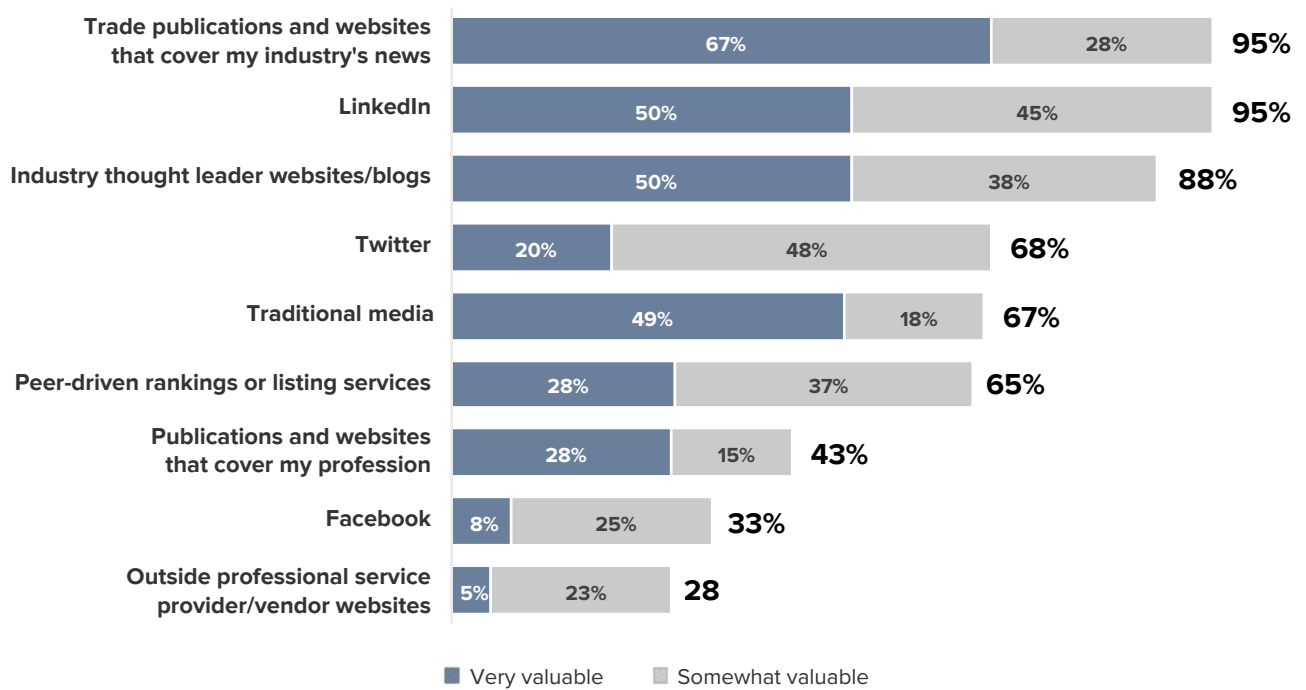
**C-Suite**



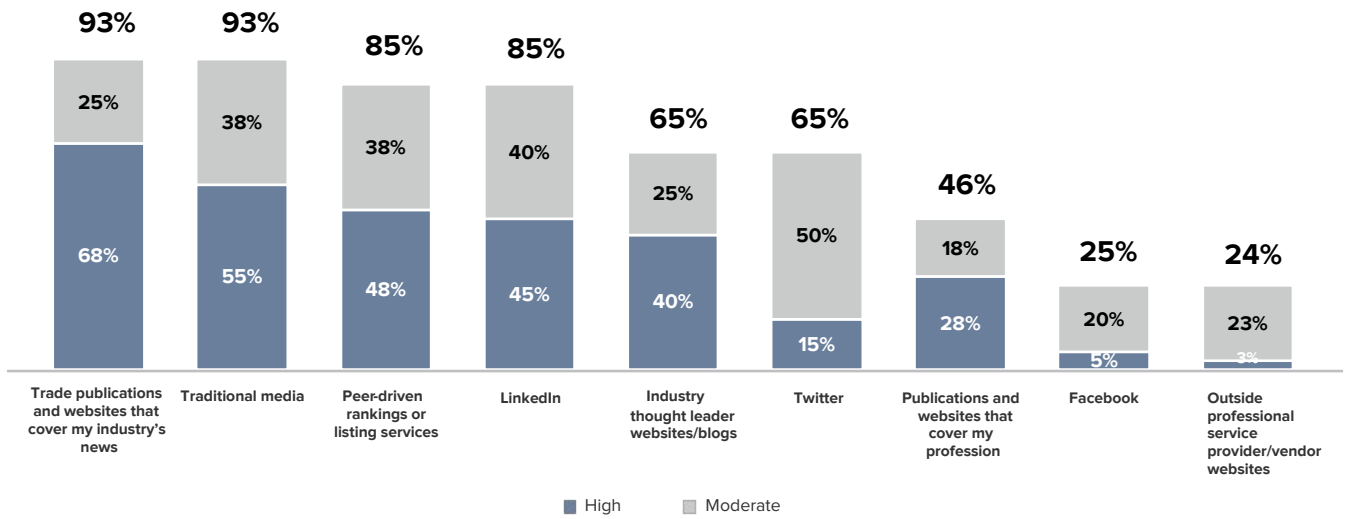
Q1. Does your law firm have an overarching content strategy in place? (Select one option)



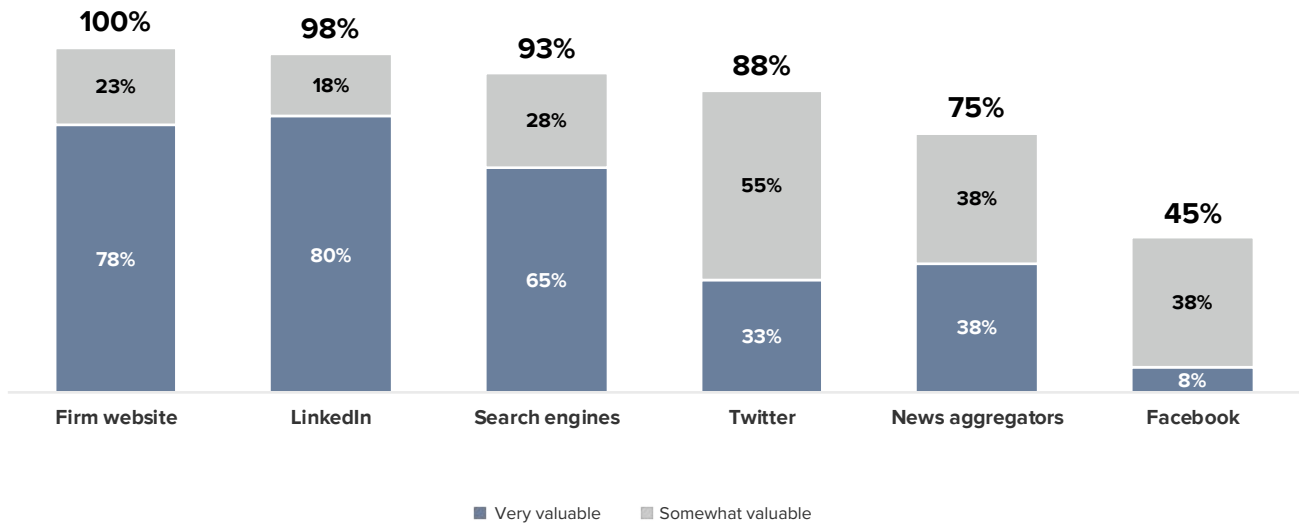
Q2. How valuable are the following sources of content for marketing your firm?



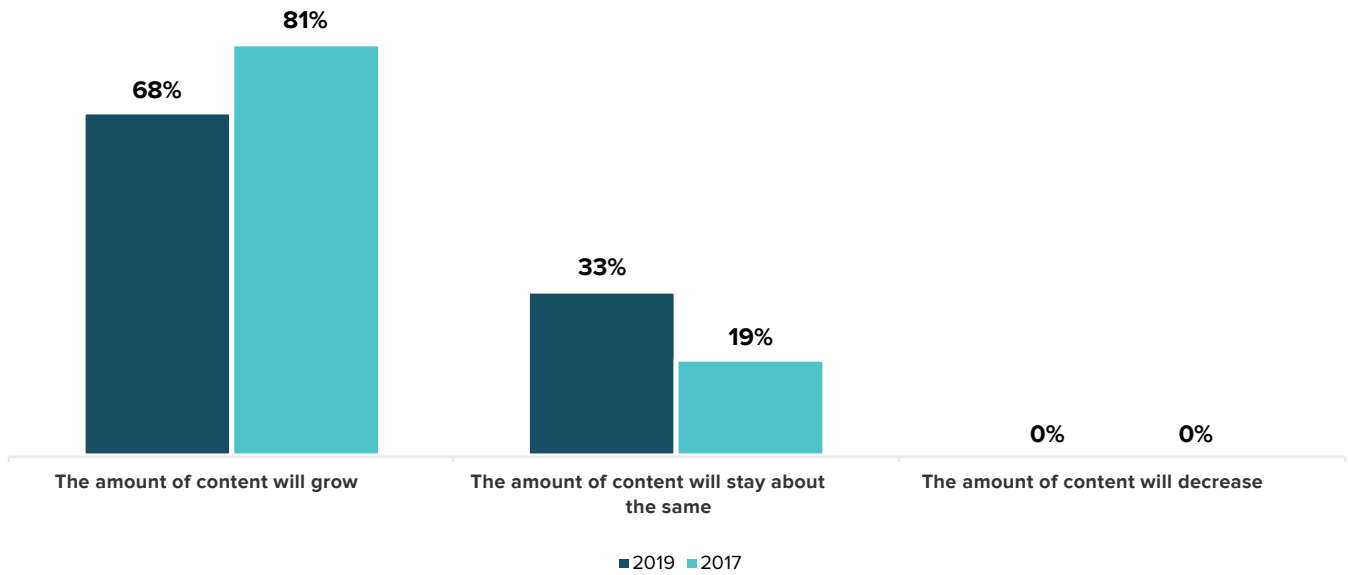
Q3. Please indicate the priority your firm places on each of the following content sources when it comes to resource allocation:



Q4. How valuable are the following platforms for content distribution purposes?



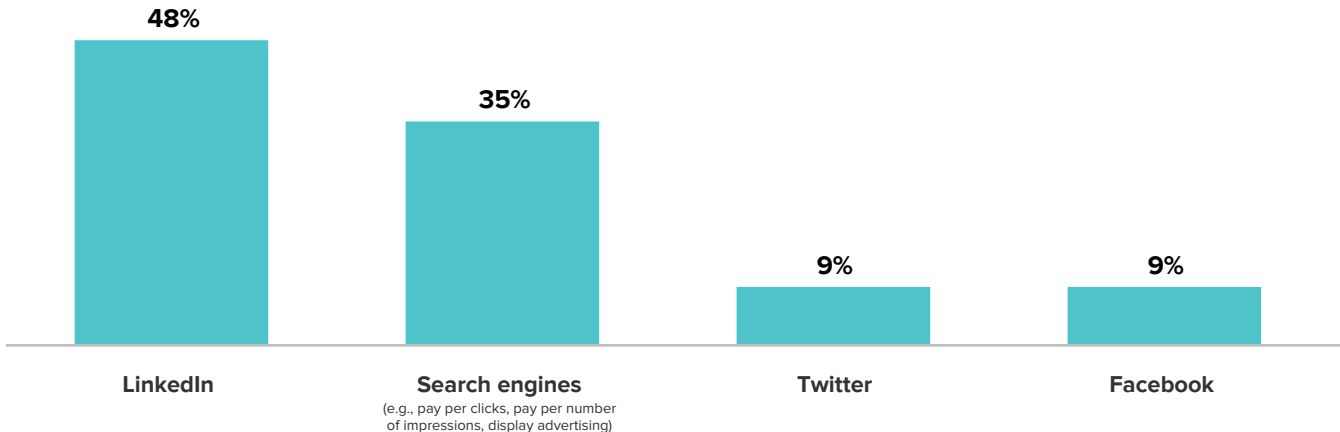
Q5. Which response best summarizes how you would forecast content production by your firm in 2019 versus 2017? (Select one option)



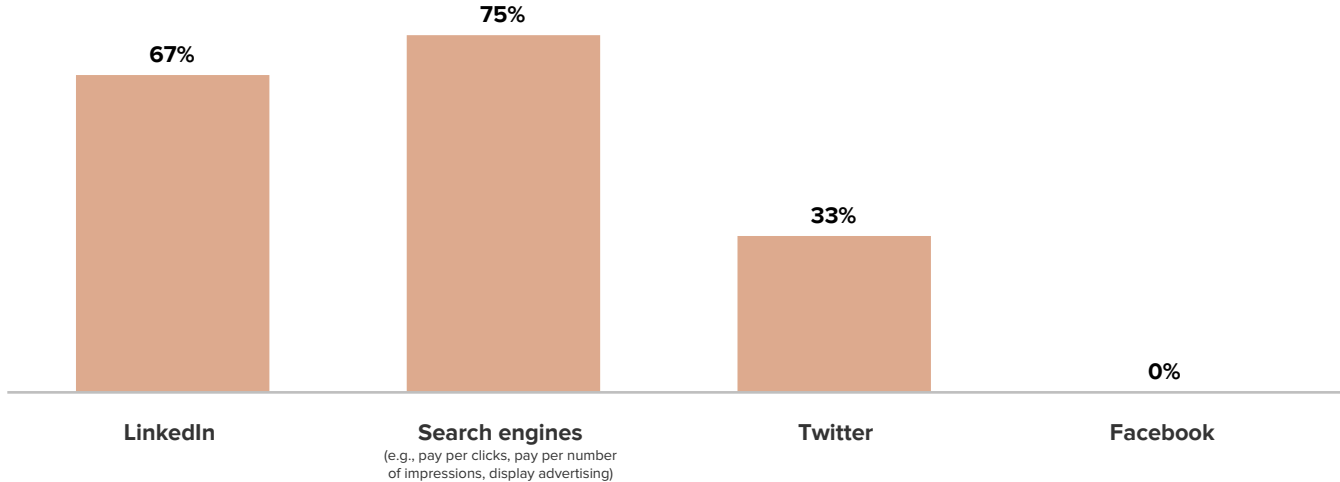
Q6. Which attributes do you believe readers/audiences appreciate most when it comes to each of the following types of content your firm produces? (Content types in order of in-house counsel preferences)

Articles	Conferences, presentations, webinars	Email newsletters	Interactive charts	Podcasts
1 Relevant (95%)	1 Educational (90%)	1 Timely (88%)	1 Interactive (68%)	1 Educational (65%)
2 Timely (90%)	2 Relevant (83%)	2 Relevant (83%)	2 Visual (60%)	2 Entertaining (58%)
3 Educational (85%)	3 Timely (68%)	3 Easy to read (68%)	3 Educational (55%)	3 Relevant (55%)
Video	Website content	Infographics	Research reports	
1 Brief (68%)	1 Easy to read (80%)	1 Visual (80%)	1 Educational (68%)	
2 Visual (68%)	2 Relevant (78%)	2 Relevant (60%)	2 In-depth (65%)	
3 Entertaining (65%)	3 Educational (58%)	3 Easy to read (55%)	3 Relevant (65%)	

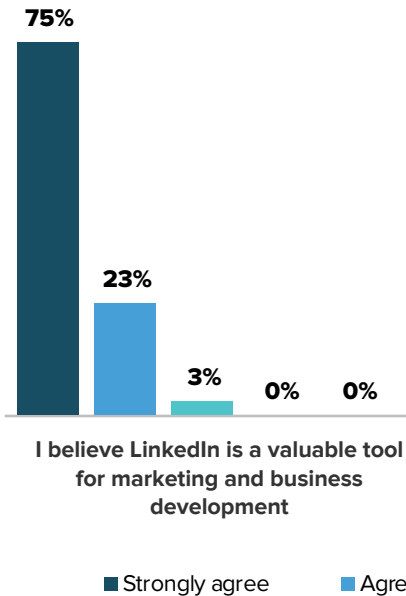
Q7. Have you engaged in any paid distribution campaigns in the past 12 months through any of the following platforms? (Select all that apply)



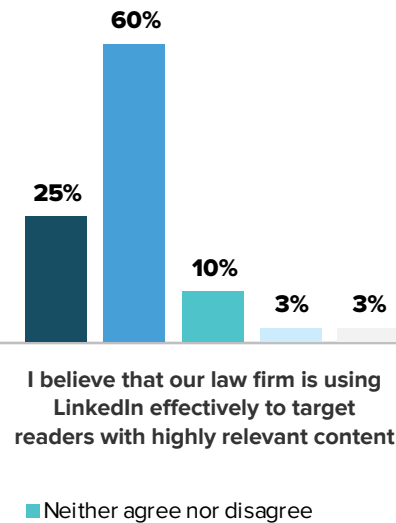
Q8. How impactful were the distribution campaigns that you employed on these specific platforms?



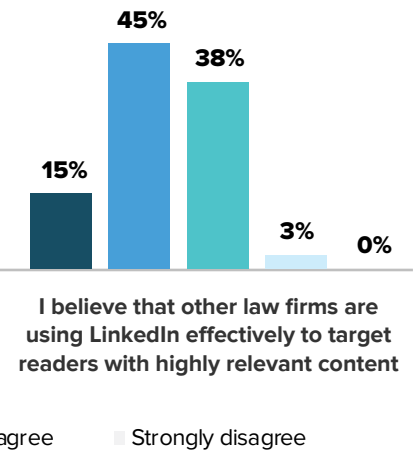
Q9. Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement:  
I believe LinkedIn is a valuable tool for marketing and business development. (Select one option)



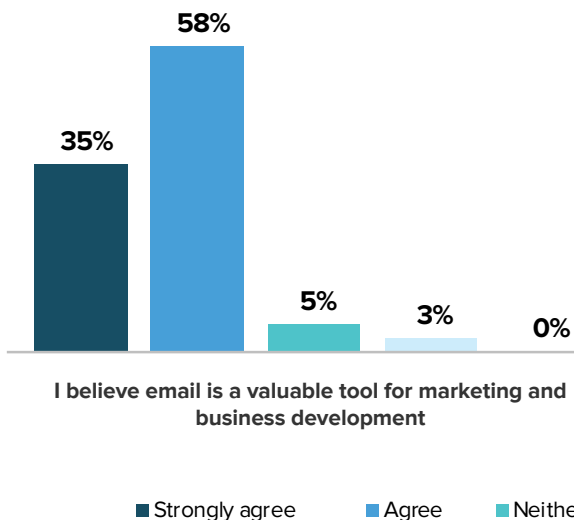
Q10. Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement:  
I believe that our law firm is using LinkedIn effectively to target readers with highly relevant content. (Select one option)



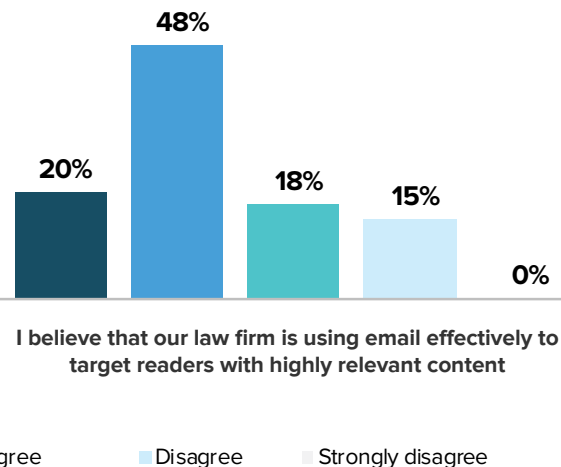
Q11. Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement: I believe that other law firms are using LinkedIn effectively to target readers with highly relevant content. (Select one option)



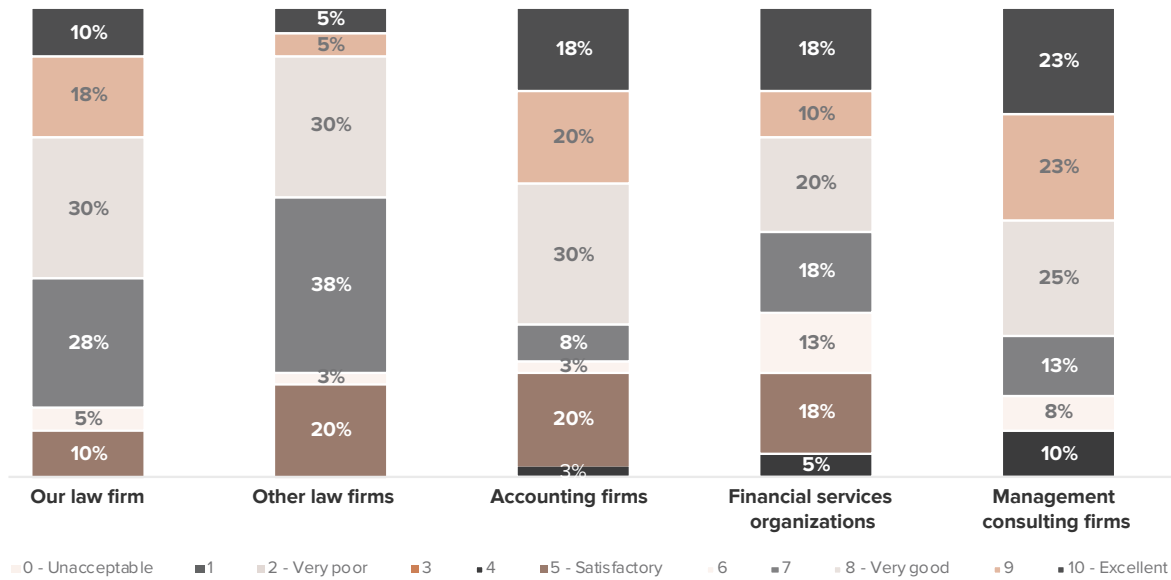
Q12. Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement:  
I believe email is a valuable tool for marketing and business development. (Select one option)



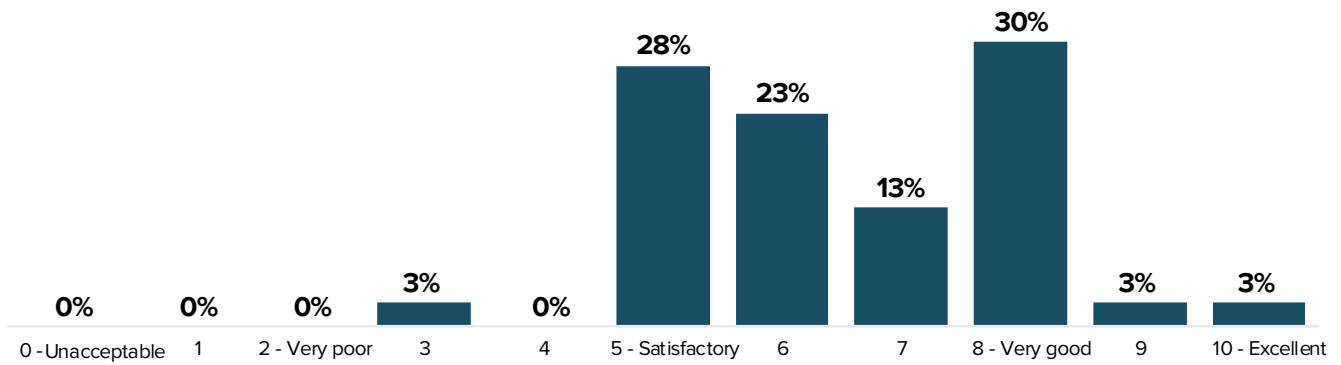
Q13. Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement:  
I believe that our law firm is using email effectively to target readers with highly relevant content. (Select one option)



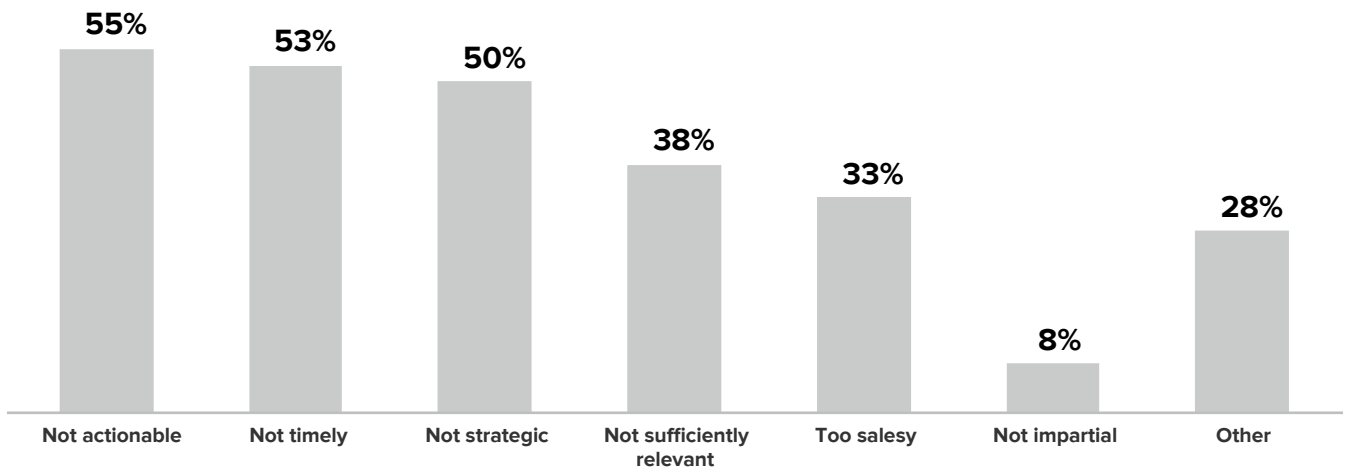
Q14. On a scale of 0 to 10 (10 being excellent), how would you characterize the overall value of the content produced by the following? (Select one option)



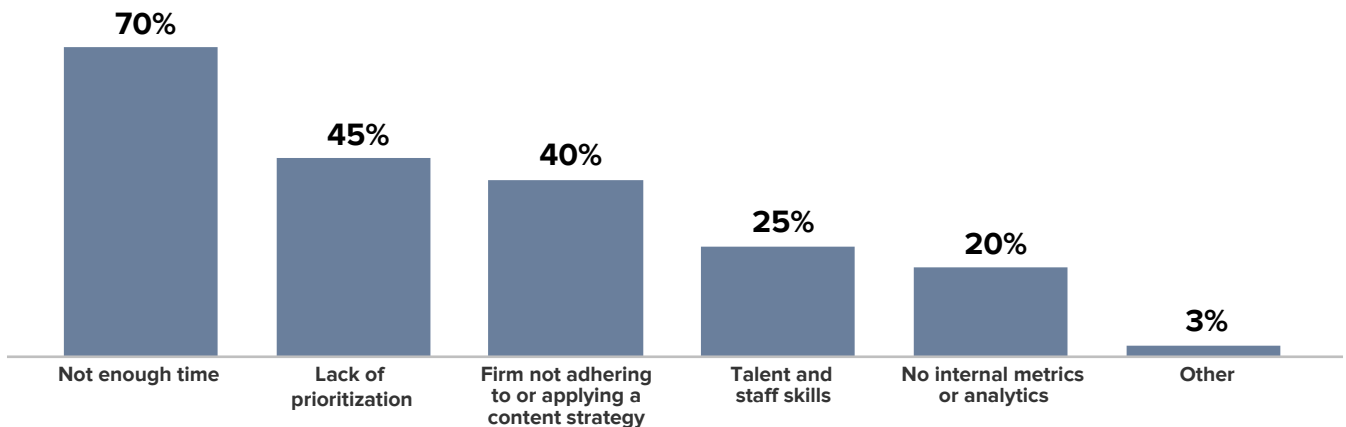
Q15. On a scale of 0 to 10 (10 being excellent), how would you characterize the overall quality of how law firms are distributing their content (email, LinkedIn posts, etc.)? (Select one option )



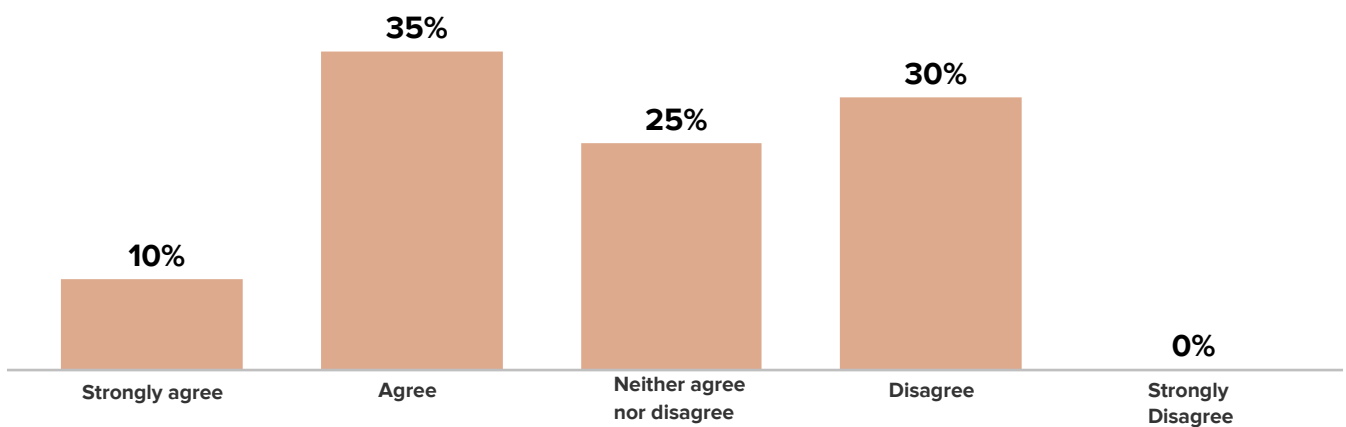
Q16. What would be the top reason(s) you find content produced by law firms to be anything less than excellent? (Select all that apply)



Q17. Please indicate which of the following are key internal content marketing challenges for your firm. (Select all that apply)

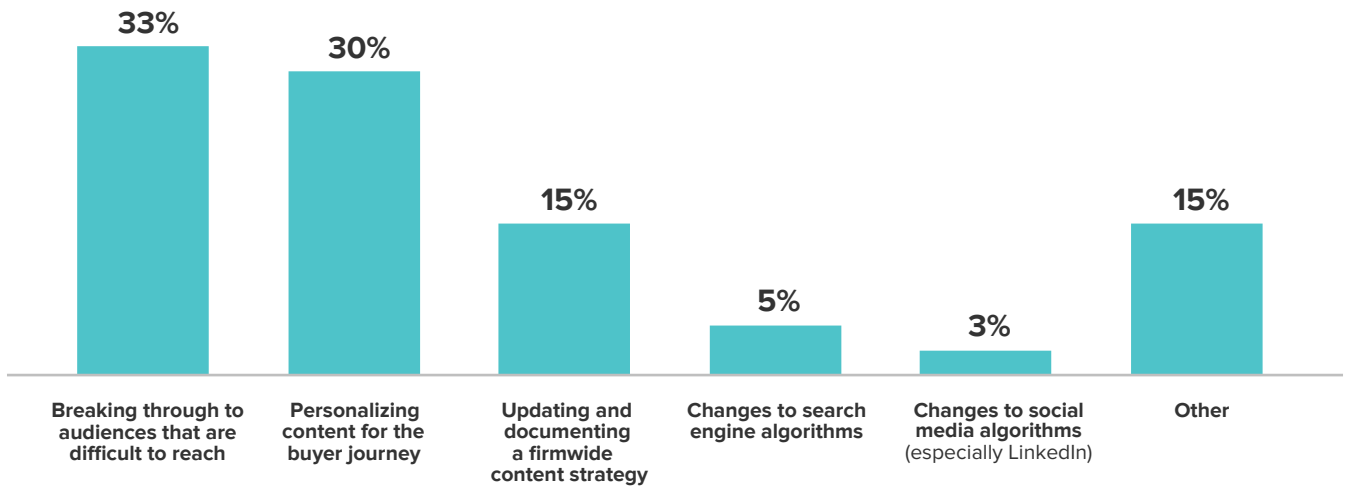


Q18. Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement: "I believe that our law firm is developing its best, most differentiated content around the practices and industry groups that are in direct alignment with what is most important to the firm."

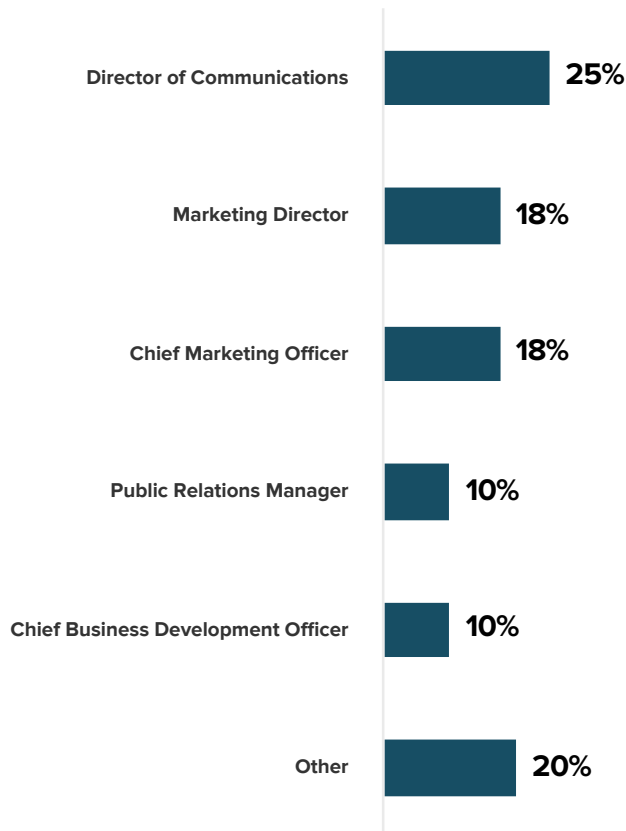




Q19. Please select the single greatest external content marketing challenge from your perspective.  
(Select one option)



Q20. Which of the following most closely matches your job title? (Select one option)



Q21. What were the FY 2018 revenues of your law firm? (Select one option)

