

RESEARCH AS CONTENT

A GUIDE FOR B2B MARKETERS



Research as Content: A Guide for B2B Marketers

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CHAPTER 1:

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO USE RESEARCH AS CONTENT?

When it comes to choosing *how* to deliver marketing content, today's B2B marketer sits in the catbird seat. With so many effective options and strategies available, the bigger question becomes *what* to deliver? What kind of marketing content will set your solution apart?

Ideally, it would be a curated mix of value-adding information that helps the B2B buyer (often a committee) step through the selection and buying process. Information that provides a clear path through a complex technical maze, connects the buyer's problem to your solution, and provides external validation for that solution.

No matter what mix of information is right for your audience, the demand for high-quality content is strong and ongoing. Wouldn't it be great to get ahead of the curve?

Research-based content can provide a remarkably durable leg for a firm's content marketing platform. Defined as "an organization's thought leadership, packaged with empirical data to support marketing and branding efforts," research-based content gives your brand and reputation a powerful credibility boost—and could be the factor that seals your next deal.

For over a decade, Hinge has conducted and published primary research, and we've used that research as part of the firm's marketing and branding strategy. This guide shares what we've learned about how to make the most of research-based content, including findings from our [latest study on B2B and professional services firms](https://hingemarketing.com/library/article/2020-high-growth-study-executive-summary).*

RESEARCH-BASED CONTENT IS AN ORGANIZATION'S THOUGHT LEADERSHIP, PACKAGED WITH EMPIRICAL DATA TO SUPPORT MARKETING AND BRANDING EFFORTS.

* <https://hingemarketing.com/library/article/2020-high-growth-study-executive-summary>

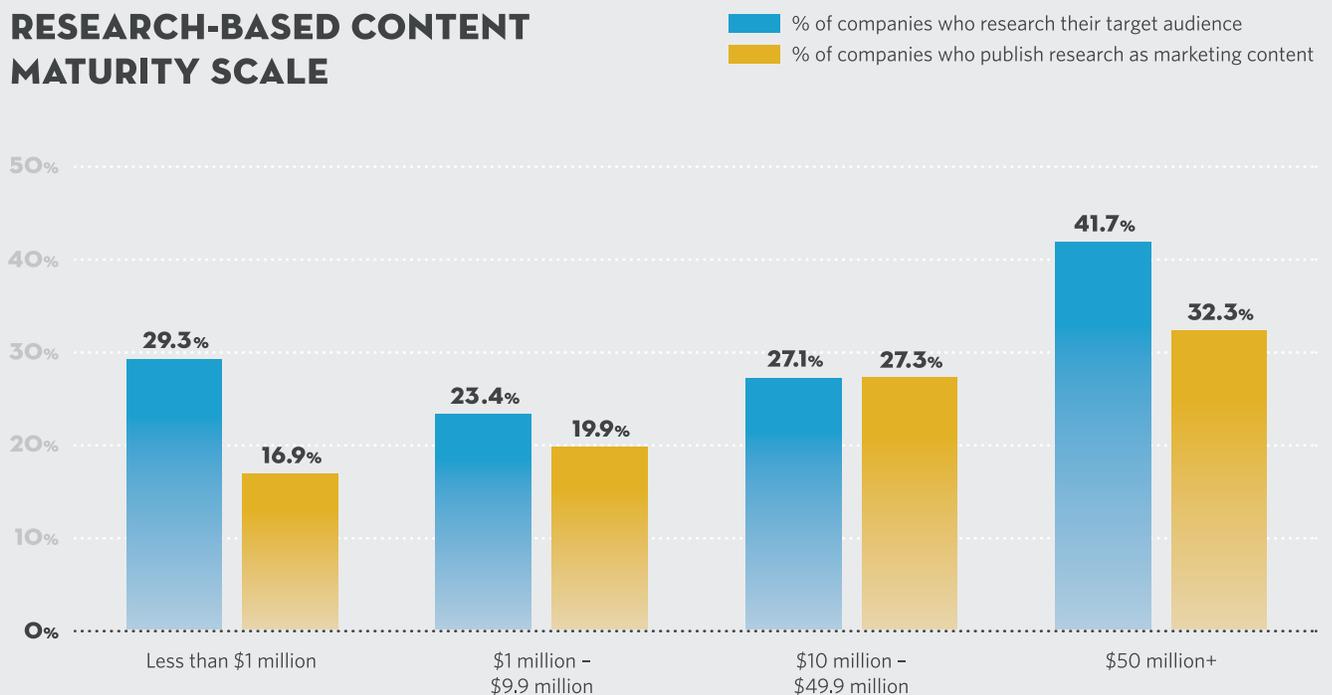
Publishing research findings yourself is only the initial phase of a multi-layered marketing opportunity. And if doing your own research seems beyond the pale, you have plenty of other options, too:

- Licensing third-party research with external distribution rights
- Partnering with another company on an original, co-branded study
- Sponsoring a third party's study

We'll cover these options in a later section.

While large firms have a natural advantage when conducting and publishing research, smaller firms can—and do—engage in research that produces useful content.

RESEARCH-BASED CONTENT MATURITY SCALE



Companies of every size report they conduct target-audience research. Using research as marketing content is more common among larger companies, but such research is still unusual—which means it's an opportunity set your business apart.

CHAPTER 2:

INVESTING IN RESEARCH AS CONTENT: MAKING THE INTERNAL CASE

If you're like many B2B marketers, your need for high-quality content—content that attracts new audiences, differentiates your firm and demonstrates your expertise—has grown year after year. Hinge's 2020 High Growth Study found that content creation and brand differentiation were top priorities for B2B and professional services firms (see the chart on the next page).

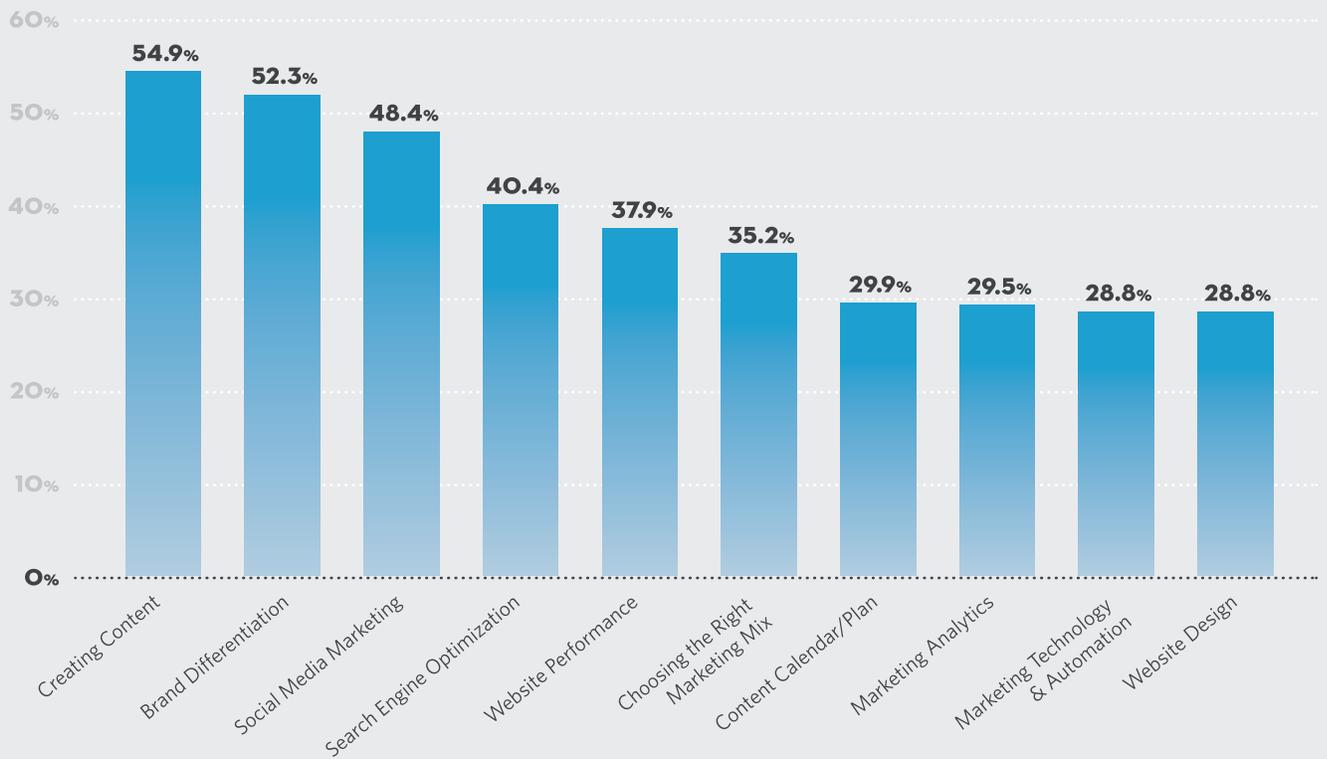
What's more, you may have noticed that the digital space is saturated with content. Savvy marketers know that repetitive promotional content can overwhelm prospective buyers. Instead, they focus on serving up information that:

- adds insight to the buyer journey,
- provides a broad industry context and
- addresses emerging trends and opportunities.



TOP 10 MARKETING PRIORITIES OF B2B & PROFESSIONAL SERVICES COMPANIES

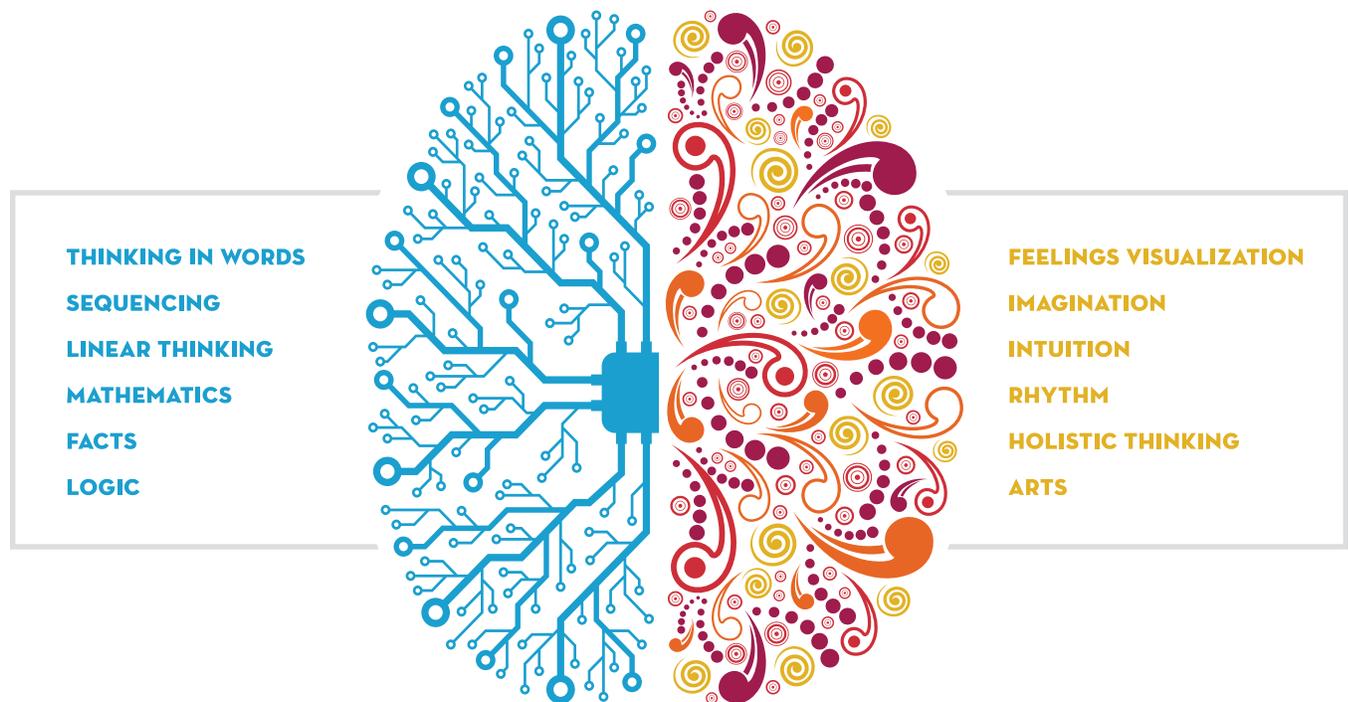
B2B & Professional Services Firms



From Hinge's 2020 High Growth Study: over half of surveyed B2B and professional services firms plan to prioritize content and brand differentiation as they enter the new decade.

Enter research as content. It offers many benefits:

1. Using original, primary research in marketing content allows you to present unique insights found nowhere else and moves your thought leadership to the head of the pack.
2. Research-based content provides the left-brain empirical evidence, linear facts and logic your buyers need to make decisions with confidence.
3. One in five B2B and professional services companies publishes some form of primary research. That number has increased over the past three years, which suggests that research continues to serve their business goals.
4. Firms experiencing the fastest growth—an average annual rate of 41.5%—were three times more likely than their slower-growing peers to publish original research as marketing content (from Hinge's 2019 High Growth Study).
5. B2B companies that research their target markets at least quarterly grow faster and are more profitable than companies that conduct research infrequently or not at all.

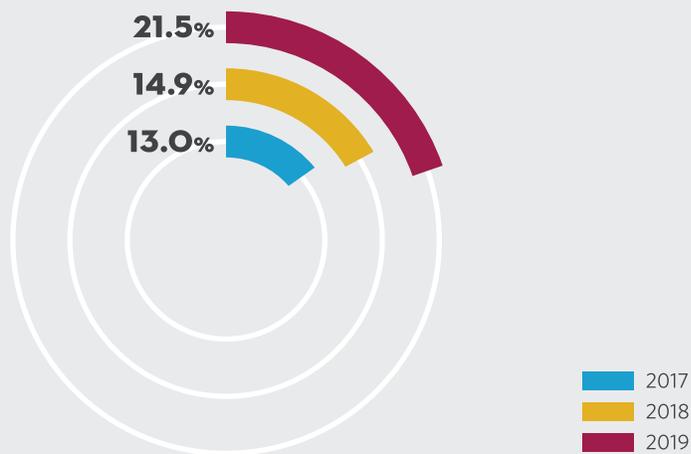


The most effective B2B marketing messages anticipate and respond to both sides of the brain. The right hemisphere seeks confirmation through intuition and feelings, while the left hemisphere processes facts, logic and linear ideas. Research-based findings are a powerful left-lobe persuader.

The bottom line? Thoughtful, targeted primary research adds two types of fuel to the marketing machine. First, it gives you a nuanced understanding of your target customers and their priorities, which can help you make a stronger, more convincing case for your solution.

Second, findings from primary research can provide the fresh perspective and ideas you need to develop content your audience cares about. When your content is founded upon hard data, it's far easier to build credibility and gain your audience's trust. And if you refresh your research on a regular basis, you can simply update much of your content with the new data—which is a lot more efficient than creating new content from scratch!

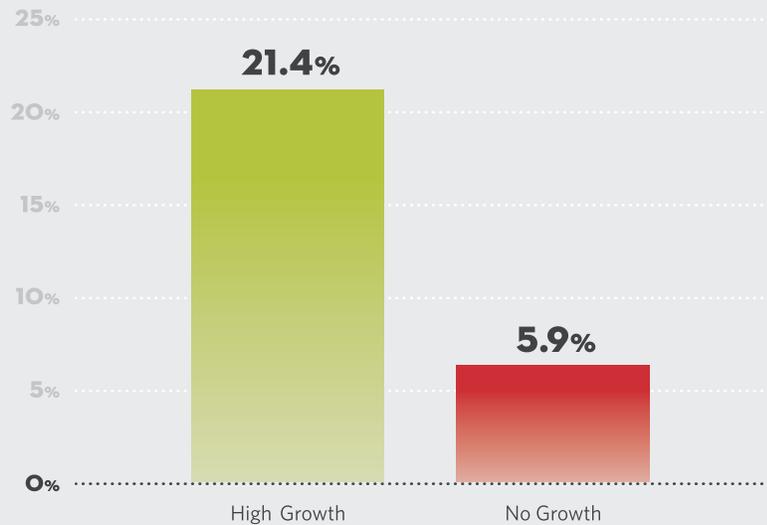
B2B & PROFESSIONAL SERVICES FIRMS WHO PUBLISH PRIMARY RESEARCH



PRIMARY RESEARCH CONTINUES TO GROW AS A POPULAR TOOL FOR B2B AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES FIRMS.

Primary research continues to grow as a popular tool for B2B and professional services firms. More than 20% of organizations surveyed in Hinge's 2020 High Growth Study indicated they publish primary research, up from just 13% in 2017.

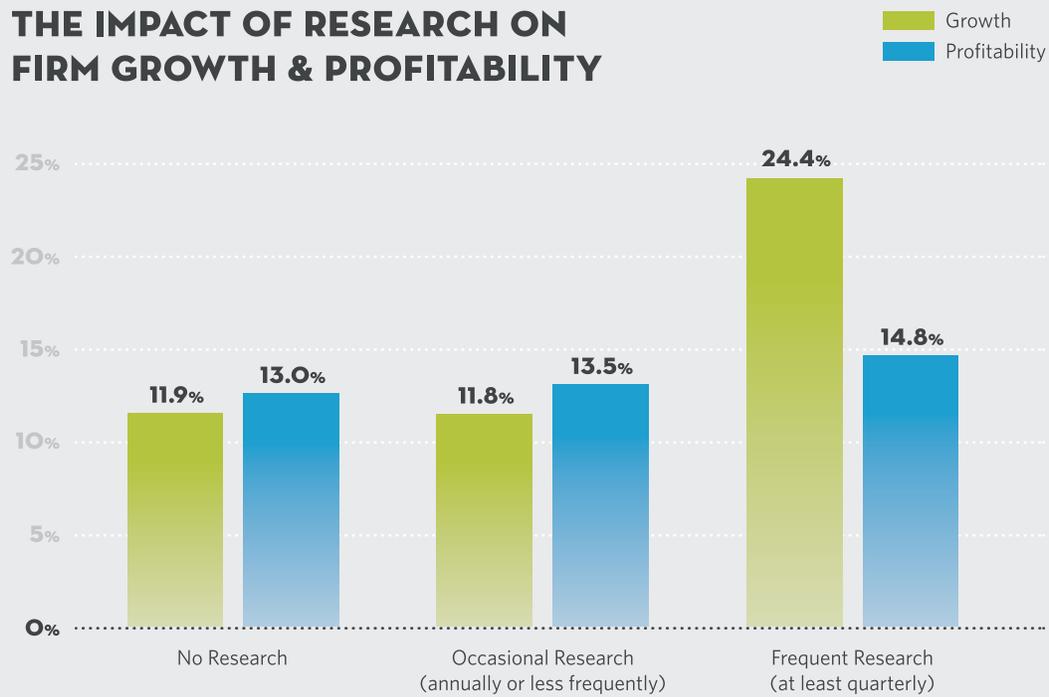
PROFESSIONAL SERVICES COMPANIES WHO USE ORIGINAL RESEARCH IN THEIR MARKETING STRATEGY



HIGH-GROWTH FIRMS ARE 3X MORE LIKELY TO USE ORIGINAL B2B RESEARCH AS CONTENT.

High-growth firms are three times more likely to use original research as part of their content marketing strategy than firms experiencing no growth.

THE IMPACT OF RESEARCH ON FIRM GROWTH & PROFITABILITY



Firms committed to frequent research grew at least twice as quickly as firms that conducted research less often, and they delivered stronger annual profits.

CHAPTER 3:

CONDUCT AND PUBLISH YOUR OWN RESEARCH: BREAKING DOWN THE PROCESS

THE RESEARCH PROCESS



What does the process of conducting and publishing research actually entail? After more than a decade of doing it, we've broken it into six key stages. As you might expect, planning what issue(s) you want to explore is the first step.

1. RESEARCH DESIGN

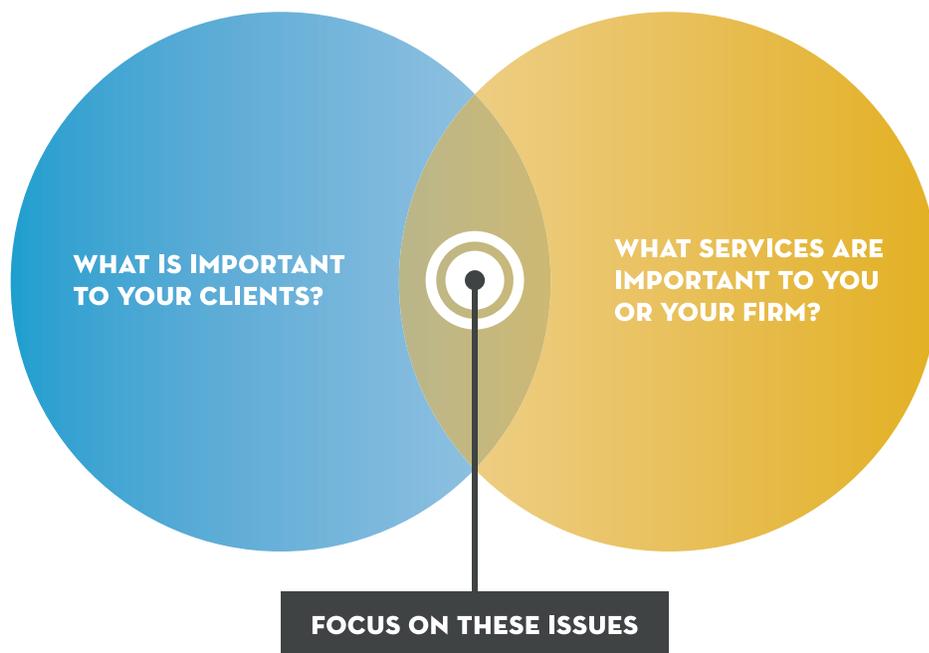
What questions would you ask? Who is your audience? What types and sizes of business do they come from, and what positions do they fill in their businesses? What do you expect to learn? How will these findings support your market position?

The focus of your primary research needs to align with your organization's brand and marketing strategy.

To determine what issues to research, start by thinking about what's important to your client: what's getting in the way of their internal productivity, or what's impeding their ability to grow or operate more profitably?

With those pain points in mind, where's the overlap with your firm's solutions or services? That's the most fertile ground for your research.

WHAT ISSUES SHOULD YOU RESEARCH?



You will find the most productive issues to research where your clients' high-priority concerns overlap the services your firm offers.

THE FOCUS OF YOUR PRIMARY RESEARCH NEEDS TO ALIGN WITH YOUR ORGANIZATION'S BRAND AND MARKETING STRATEGY.

2. DATA COLLECTION

What methods will you use to collect data? Do you have the technology to conduct an accurate survey? What is your target sample size, and what needs to happen to make sure you hit it?

There are pros and cons to every method of data collection. Online surveys come together quickly and can be completed for little or no hard costs. Live, in-depth interviews and focus groups can yield rich insights, but they involve time, money and professional expertise. It's also possible, and often desirable, to employ both forms of data collection to reach your goals. For a more in-depth discussion of these options, read the [Marketing Director's Guide to Brand Research Data Collection](#).*

3. ANALYSIS

You've gathered your data. Now you want to know what it all means. How will you interpret the results? What findings are truly insightful, and which ones could be misleading because the responses are inconsistent or otherwise suspect? Which ones support existing research?

Depending on the depth and complexity of your questions, interpretation could require a trained research analyst. And to get the most useful insights from your findings, you may want to consult experts both inside and outside your organization.

You may also find it valuable to seek out other available research data to see how it supports—or challenges—your own research findings.



* <https://hingemarketing.com/blog/story/in-depth-interviews-vs-online-surveys-a-marketing-directors-guide-for-brand>

4. NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT

For the purposes of marketing content, findings are only findings until there's a context in which to place them and a story to tell. What stories can your data bring to life? How will these stories get written?

Before you develop any stories, you need to have a clear-eyed understanding of your brand's position in the marketplace. How do you want to advance that position, and where do you want to be a year after you've published your research? Published research can have a long shelf life, so it's a great tool for building your brand over time.

What if your research doesn't agree with other third-party marketplace data? Your insights may present a different kind of content opportunity—to take a contrarian point of view. If faced with this situation, you'll have to decide if taking an unconventional stand fits your brand.

PUBLISHED RESEARCH CAN HAVE A LONG SHELF LIFE, SO IT'S A GREAT TOOL FOR BUILDING YOUR BRAND OVER TIME.

5. REPORT DESIGN

How will you package and present your research findings and the narrative you've developed?

To most of your target audience, data is just numbers until it's transformed into charts and graphs that tell the story in an easy-to-understand way. What's the best way to visualize your data? What themes or colors should you use?

If the research narrative tells a cautionary tale, you may want to use warm colors like red and yellow that people associate with danger. For an optimistic forecast, you might consider a combination of blue and green.

6. PUBLISHING & PROMOTION

You've created an interesting and insightful report. Now it's time to maximize your research investment by putting it to work.

Where will the report live on your website? It needs to be easy to find—think about where it might make sense to promote the report on your site so that interested people can discover it. And what information will you ask the user to exchange for a download? In general, that more personal information you require, the fewer people will complete the form.

If your website has a Resources or Insights section (or their equivalent), make that the home for your report. If you don't have such a section, find a logical place in your website to house the report PDF.

For a variety of reasons, you may decide not make sense to make the report available to the general public. In that case, think about who the report is for and how will you deliver it report to them. If plan to do *any* sort of promotion—even to a very small audience—you may still need a landing page that describes the report.

Get Started with Research

Work with the Hinge Research Institute to turn research into powerful marketing assets that drive your content strategy.

[Request Your Free Consultation](#)

Or call **703-391-8870**

CHAPTER 4:

LEVERAGE YOUR RESEARCH FINDINGS: MARKETING STRATEGY & PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

You have the final research report in hand. Now it's time to use it to amp up your marketing content. Taken as a whole or broken out one idea at a time, the report is a rich source of ideas to energize your editorial calendar.

The full report is news-worthy, and upon its release you should promote it across a variety of internal and industry channels.

But its parts are just as valuable. You can pull out individual ideas to develop into other marketing content, such as blog posts, infographics and social media factoids.

Perhaps most exciting, your report can serve as the platform for interactive events—live presentations and webinars—where your subject matter experts can engage more directly with your target audience.

**RESEARCH
OFFERS A RICH
SOURCE OF IDEAS
TO ENERGIZE
YOUR EDITORIAL
CALENDAR.**

For more ideas to make the most of your research findings, take a look at [27 Content Distribution Ideas to Promote Primary Research](#).^{*} Many will dovetail nicely with your existing marketing content program and some may even encourage you to experiment with new formats or techniques.

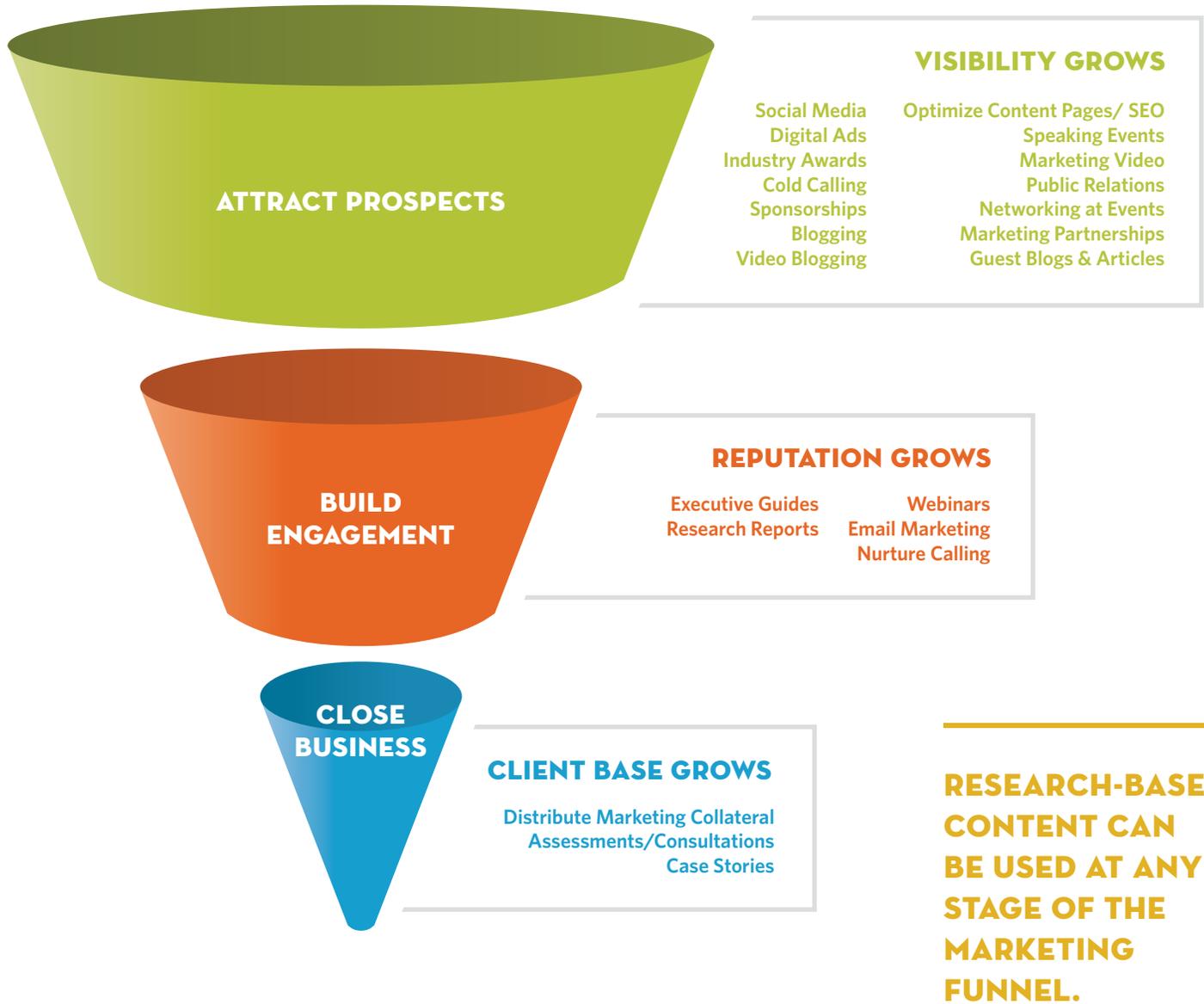
RESEARCH AS CONTENT (RAC) FRAMEWORK



Even a small, tightly focused research study generates a range of content opportunities for the B2B marketer. First is the study itself, which becomes a lead magnet, produced as a report or white paper. Then pull out study insights for blog and social media posts. The report also provides anchor material for podcasts, webinars, live events and other outreach activities.

^{*} <https://hingemarketing.com/blog/story/27-content-distribution-ideas-to-promote-primary-research>

THE MARKETING FUNNEL



Content from your research report is relevant at every stage of the marketing funnel. Its unique insights can elevate your content mix to attract prospects, while deeper dives build engagement and provide the credibility-building components that help close business.

SAMPLE CALENDAR OF CONTENT SOURCED FROM RESEARCH STUDY

Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4
LAUNCH PDF REPORT	BLOG POST #1	WEBINAR #1	BLOG POST #2
Month 5	Month 6	Month 7	Month 8
SPEAKING ENGAGEMENT #1	PLAYBOOK, GUIDE, OR BREAKOUT REPORT	BLOG POST #3	WEBINAR #2
Month 9	Month 10	Month 11	Month 12
BLOG POST #4	SPEAKING ENGAGEMENT #2	BLOG POST #5	BLOG POST #6

Strategically packaged and delivered, content derived from your research report can serve as the foundation for your editorial calendar for many months.

CHAPTER 5:

ADDITIONAL CONTENT OPPORTUNITIES USING PRIMARY RESEARCH

As described in the previous section, research-based marketing content can enhance your marketing program on many levels. These opportunities are by no means restricted to proprietary research conducted at or on behalf of your firm. You can also tap into research from other industry sources to create new content pipelines. Or collaborate with another organization on a co-branded research project.

LICENSE EXISTING B2B RESEARCH

Chances are, you've seen industry research published by professional research firms or trade organizations. It's often possible to purchase a distribution license from the publisher, allowing you to use the study's insights and statistics for your own purposes—without the risk of infringing on copyrighted intellectual property.

Licensing offers a host of benefits:

- As you might expect, it costs considerably less than doing customized research from scratch. The price you pay to license someone else's research will depend on your intended use and how widely you plan to distribute it, but the fees are usually a fraction of the cost to conduct your own study.
- When you license an existing study, you gain immediate access to the information and can start using it to frame your own content right away—no waiting for results and analysis.
- When you deploy research findings from a credible industry source, you add an important layer to your organization's own credibility.

LICENSED RESEARCH COSTS CONSIDERABLY LESS AND IS AVAILABLE IMMEDIATELY.

Credible, third-party information from a recognized source can provide important validation for your solution, which marketers can leverage in the short term for branding and lead generation campaigns.

CASE EXAMPLE:

ON24 LICENSED EXISTING RESEARCH TO SUPPORT TIGHTLY TARGETED MARKETING

Digital media and online engagement platform ON24 needed targeted research to inform how the firm should market digital solutions to accounting and legal firms. The question: How are firms in the industry using digital marketing and webinars to accelerate growth?

ON24 licensed the breakout report from Hinge's 2019 High Growth Study that aggregated responses from the accounting and financial services sector. They repackaged the report to fit ON24 brand style guidelines, and offered it for download on their website.



CASE EXAMPLE:

DELTEK BUILT A VERTICAL-SPECIFIC MARKETING CAMPAIGN USING EXISTING RESEARCH

Project management software developer Deltek needed input from research to strengthen its marketing efforts to consulting firms. To meet this need, Deltek licensed consulting industry breakout reports from Hinge's 2019 and 2020 High Growth Studies.

In addition, Deltek convened a panel of experts and hosted a live event to discuss growth-related topics such as marketing, business development, project management, staffing, recruiting and leveraging technology.

Deltek collaborated with Hinge to present a series of co-branded webinars for consultants focused on how to effectively choose and deploy technology for faster growth.



CO-BRANDED RESEARCH EXTENDS YOUR CONTENT'S REACH

Consider collaborating with a research firm or industry organization to produce a research study. For instance, you might sponsor another firm's upcoming study, tying your brand to the study whenever it's mentioned. You gain visibility and associate your brand with a trusted source, enhancing your firm's perception as an industry leader.

Another way to leverage industry research is to collaborate on a co-branded study. In a co-branded study, you work with a research firm to produce a joint study focused on an industry trend, hot topic or emerging market. You take a more active role—which means you can help shape the survey so the study's end product will be more relevant to your audience and business goals.

Another benefit of the co-branded study is ownership: You are free to repurpose study findings in supplementary reports, in which you can offer your firm's own perspective and analysis.

**CO-BRANDING
IN RESEARCH
INCREASES
VISIBILITY AND
ALIGNS YOUR
BRAND WITH
A TRUSTED
SOURCE.**

Alternatively, you can bring a highly credible outsider's brand to your own custom research. For instance, you might team up with a recognized industry expert to present a webinar that explores your study's findings. You gain the halo effect and implied endorsement of the expert—plus your report will be promoted to a broader audience.

Perhaps the true genius of a co-branded study is how well it scales your effort and investment. You have a partner entity with whom you can share the heavy lifting—planning, execution and promotion—as well as any hard costs.

CASE EXAMPLE:

SEISMIC SOUGHT MARKET INTELLIGENCE ABOUT HOW CONSULTING FIRMS LEVERAGE AUTOMATION

SaaS provider Seismic offers a digital content management platform to support sales teams. Among their targets? Large consulting firms. Seismic wanted to understand the challenges these firms face as they bring automation tools further into the business development process.

Seismic worked with Hinge to develop a co-branded research report titled *Accelerating Growth: How Consulting Firms Can Use Technology to Optimize Business Development*.



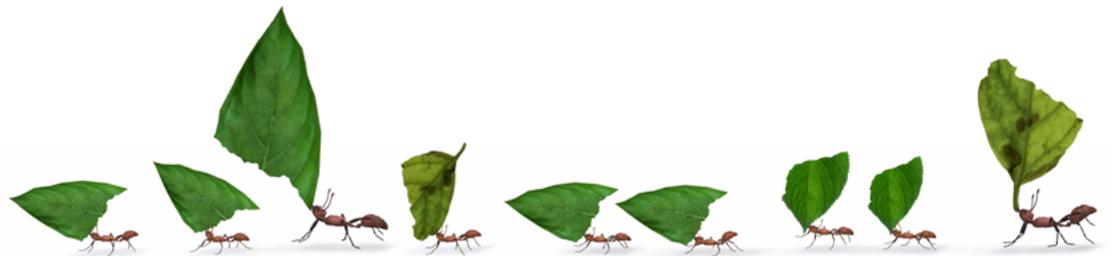
Wherever your research originates, allying your business with a credible third party can create high-leverage opportunities for marketing content.

Learn more here: [Co-branding with Research: Making Your B2B Content Stand Out*](#)

CASE EXAMPLE:

BILL.COM & CPA.COM CO-BRAND RESEARCH ABOUT CPA FIRM REPOSITIONING

Payments platform Bill.com and accounting firm consultant CPA.com came together to co-brand a research report for publication on the CPA.com website. The study offered insights on how accounting firms can package and position their services differently to provide greater value to clients and improve the bottom line.



* <https://hingemarketing.com/blog/story/co-branding-with-research-making-your-b2b-content-stand-out>

CHAPTER 6:

FAQS ABOUT GETTING STARTED WITH RESEARCH AS CONTENT

Q1. We want to explore developing a research study to boost the reach and effectiveness of our marketing program. What type of study is most likely to produce ROI fast and build internal support?

Consider focusing on one core issue or challenge facing your ideal customers. Design your research to look at breaking down that challenge and ask how companies plan to address it. Use a key performance metric—one that’s readily recognized in the market—to group your audience into “top performers” versus “poor performers.” With relative ease, you’ll be able to identify the strategies used by the most successful companies.

Q2. What’s a reasonable timeline for a research study, from study design to published report?

Each stage of the research process (described in Chapter 3) can be expedited—or impeded—by a variety of factors. Speaking generally, the more “cooks you have in the kitchen” the slower the process will be. We’ve completed research studies in less than a month, and we have worked on others that took a full year to finish.

Q3. What should we do to prepare for a custom research study—one we plan to use for content marketing?

Start by generating a list of pain points facing your target customers. What are their obstacles do they face? What could they achieve if those obstacles were out of the way? Research the gap between. If you can figure out how other companies get from point A to point B successfully, determining the right questions to ask will be easy.

Q4. What factors affect the cost of a typical research study?

First, It's important to look at any research investment in the right time scale. Publishing a research report as marketing content has a multi-year shelf life. It does not depreciate as quickly as other marketing assets. That being said, the most common cost drivers are 1) how many questions you are trying to answer, 2) who or what personas you need to sample, 3) how many subjects you need to sample, 4) the extent to which you want to analyze the data, 5) how you want to package and present the research and 6) how heavily you intend to promote the research.

HOW THE HINGE RESEARCH INSTITUTE CAN HELP

The Hinge Research Institute provides comprehensive marketing research services to advance branding, market intelligence and marketing initiatives for professional services organizations. HRI offers:



- Custom research studies
- Co-branded webinars and live events with senior research analyst participation
- Exclusive study sponsorships
- Licensing of Hinge's existing and future content
- Promotional access to Hinge's extensive database
- Research-based content development
- Research advisory

Get Started with Research

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Or call **703-391-8870**



ABOUT THE HINGE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

At the Hinge Research Institute (HRI), we conduct and publish independent research on professional services firms. This groundbreaking research is available nowhere else. HRI is dedicated to achieving three goals:



1. Uncovering the marketing strategies and business challenges of high-growth professional services firms.
2. Giving B2B companies and associations the data and insights they need to understand and profit from the professional services industry.
3. Showing organizations how they can use research not only as branding intelligence for themselves—but as content for target audiences to drive content initiatives, leads and sales opportunities.

To view our full library of research reports, whitepapers, webinars and articles, please visit www.hingemarketing.com/library.

<https://hingemarketing.com/research-institute>

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