From Anchor to Asset: How Agencies Can Wisely Create Data-Driven Content

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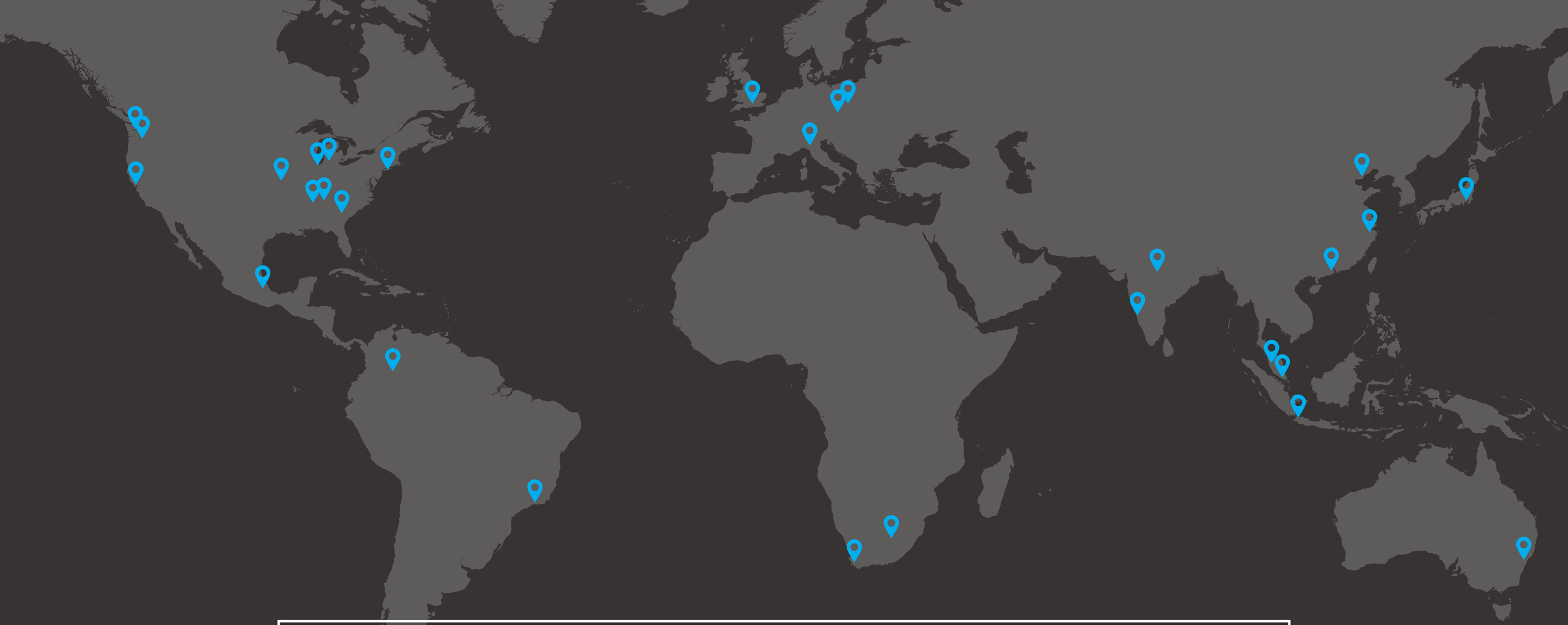
MOZCON 2017

FROM ANCHOR TO ASSET

How Large Agencies Build Data-Driven Content Systems



ATLANTA
BEIJING
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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

VML

2017
CANNES
LIONS

A LIST 2017
AdAge

2017 AWARDED WORK

27 LIONS & 26 SHORTLISTS

No. 5 VML

By Lindsay Stein

(Clockwise) The multifaceted team at VML allowed 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 ft, 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 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 Badynee 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."

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

JANUARY 25, 2017 • 15

ADVERTISING AGE

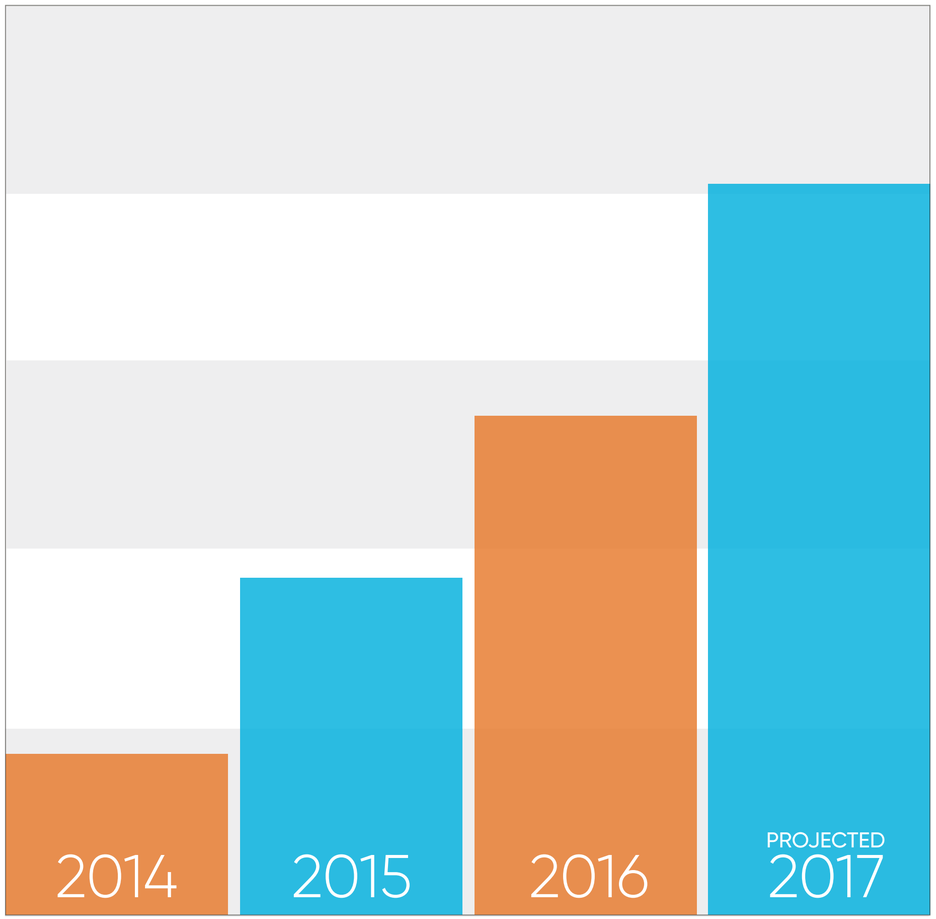
ENTERPRISE AGENCY CLIENTS

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

@HEATHERPHYSIOC @VML #MOZCON

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.

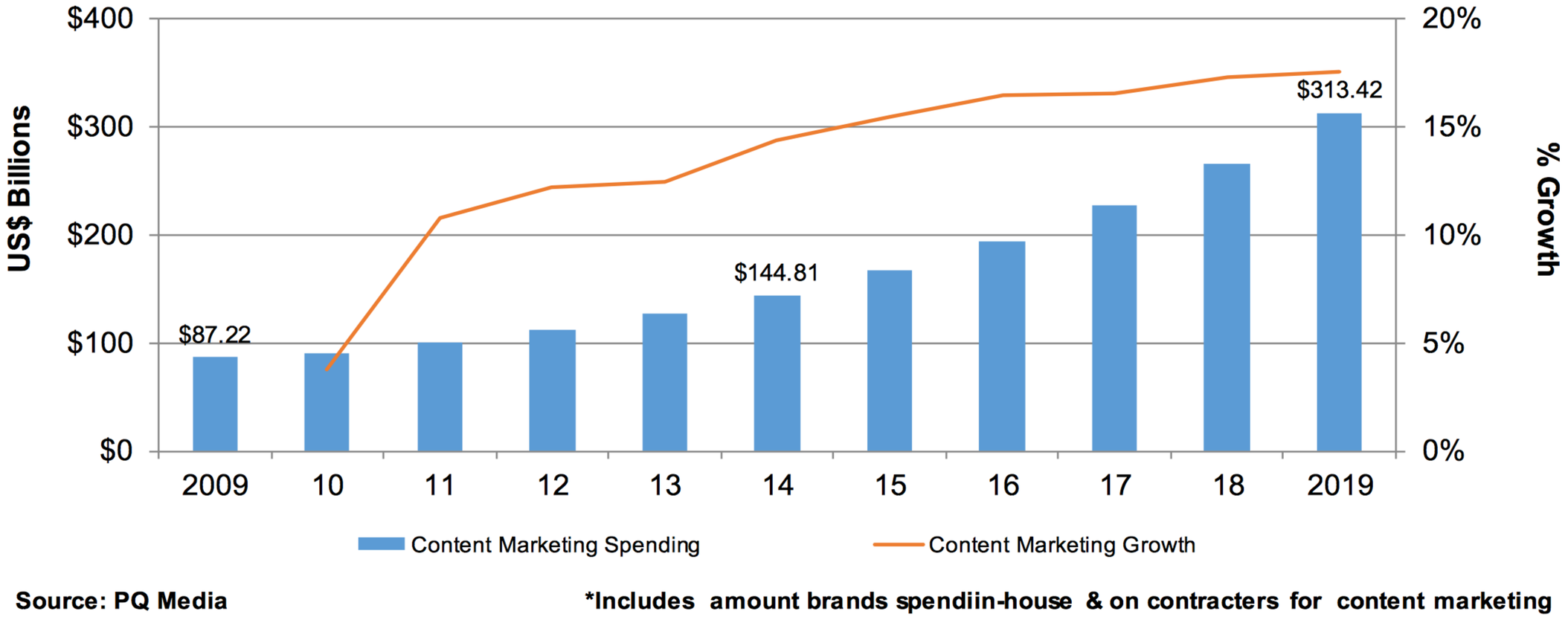
ON-PAGE?

ON-PAGE? CHECK.

CONTENT?

CONTENT? CRAP.

CONTENT BUDGETS ARE GROWING

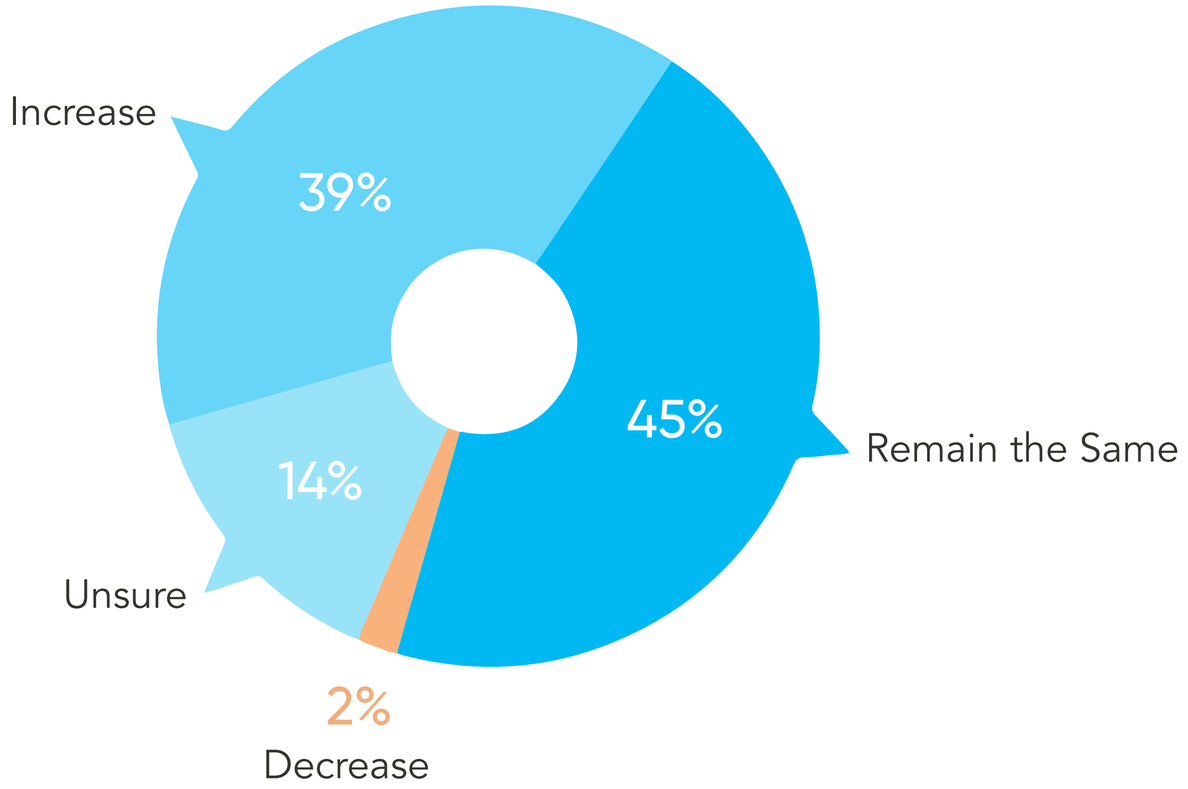


Source: PQ Media

***Includes amount brands spendiin-house & on contracters for content marketing**

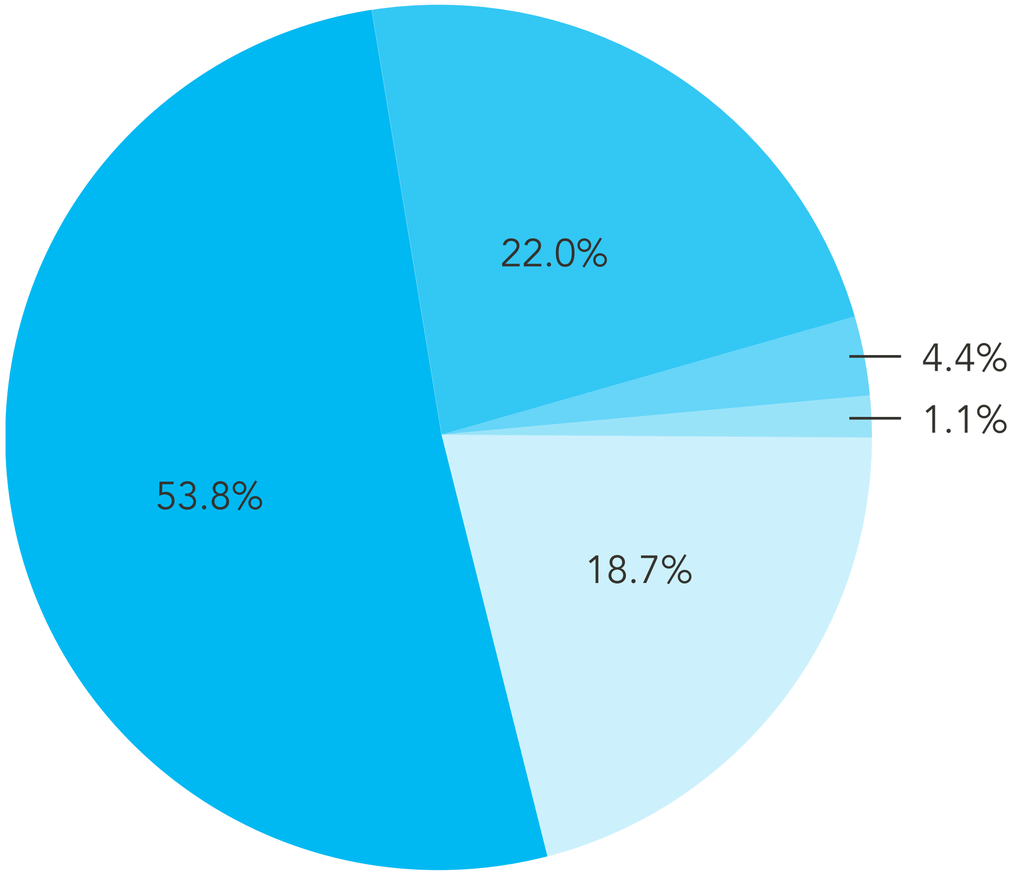
Source: PQ Media Global Content Marketing Forecast 2015 to 2019, almost 1500 content marketing agencies, publishers, affiliates and service firms in 80 countries.

CONTENT BUDGETS ARE GROWING



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

CONTENT BUDGETS ARE GROWING

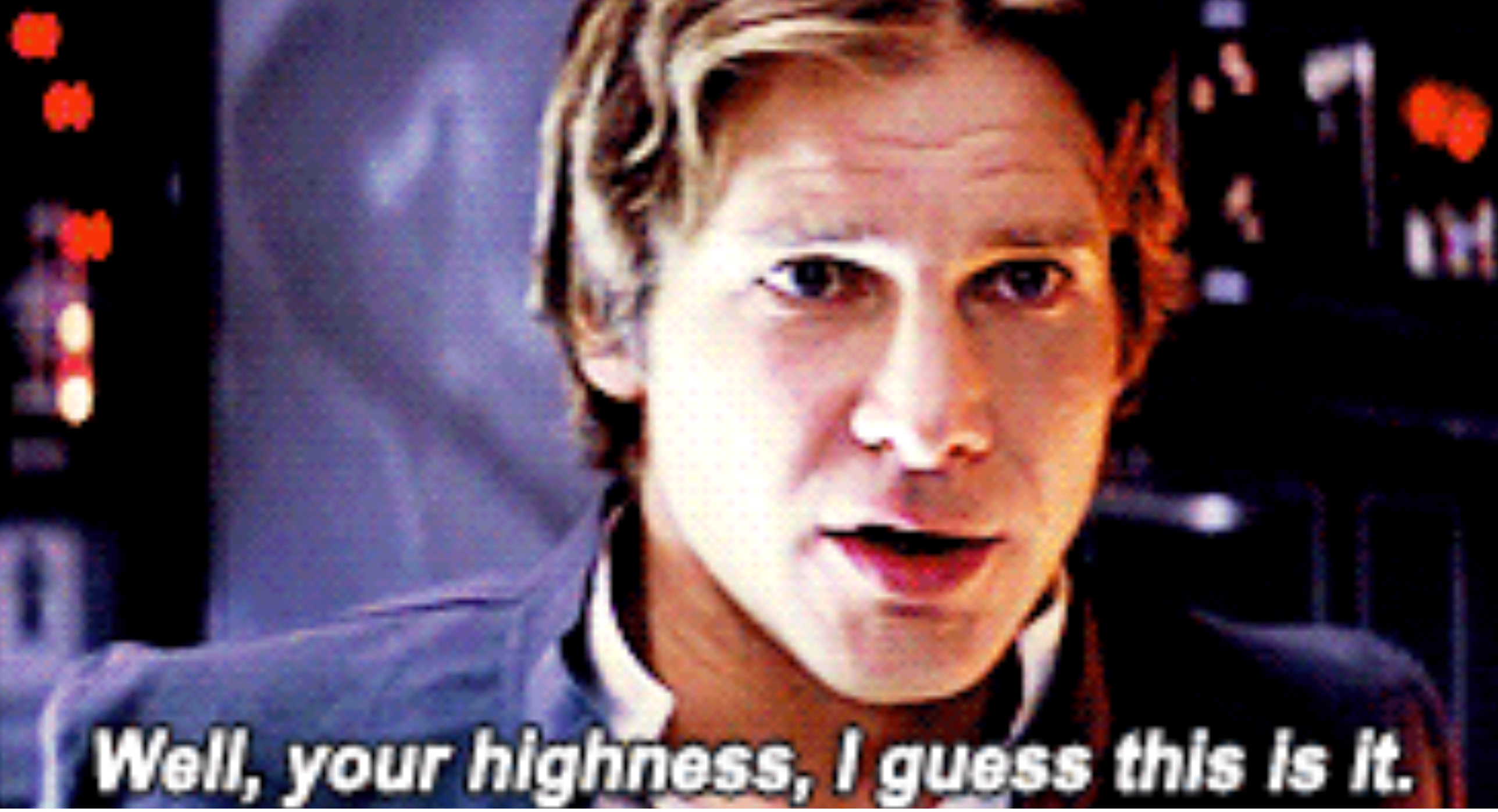


72.5% of survey respondents believe their clients' content marketing budgets will increase

- Increasing Slightly
- Increasing Dramatically
- Staying the Same
- Decreasing Slightly
- Decreasing Dramatically

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

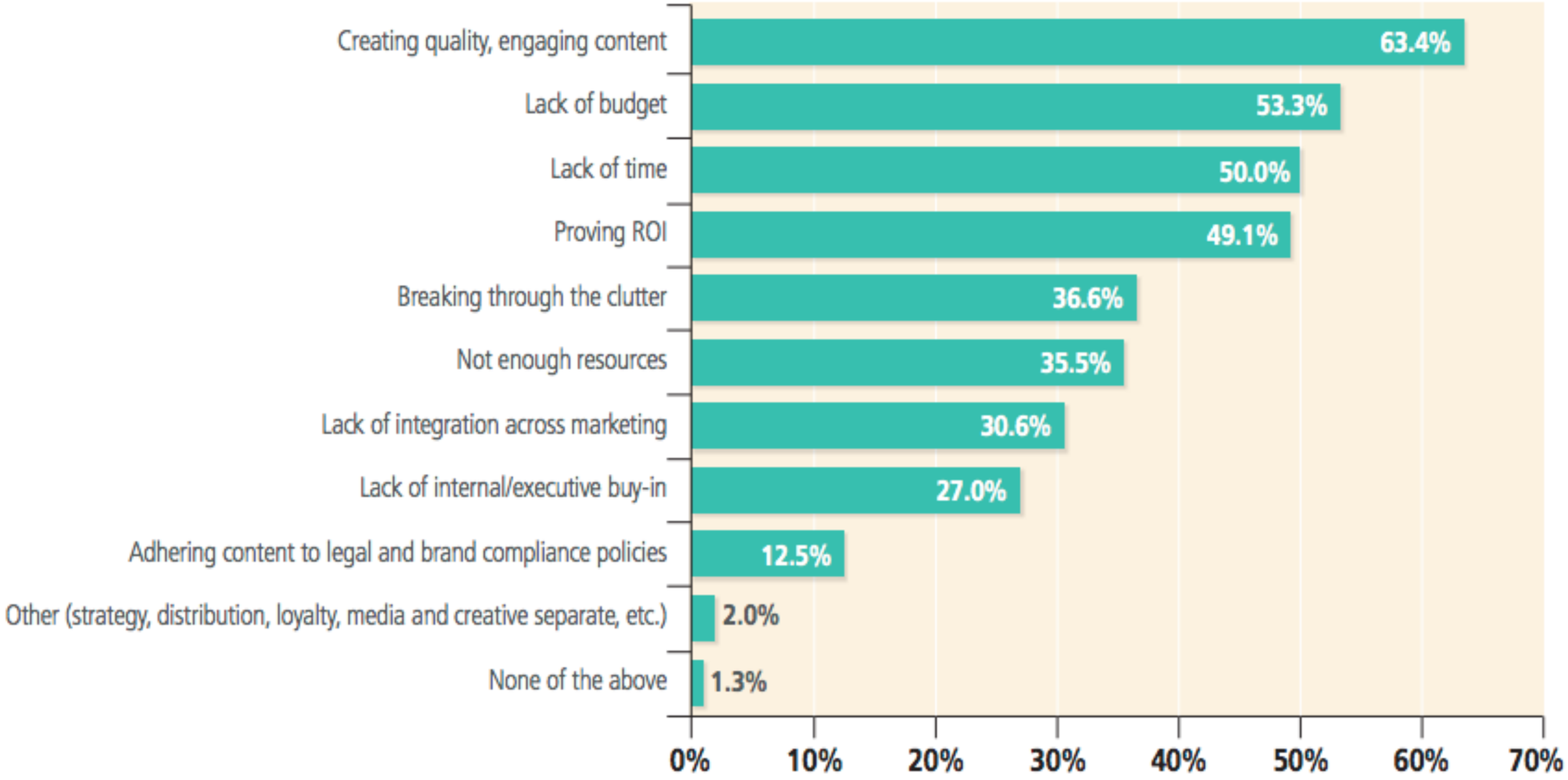
BUT WE SUCKED AT IT.


Well, your highness, I guess this is it.

BUT WE WEREN'T ALONE.

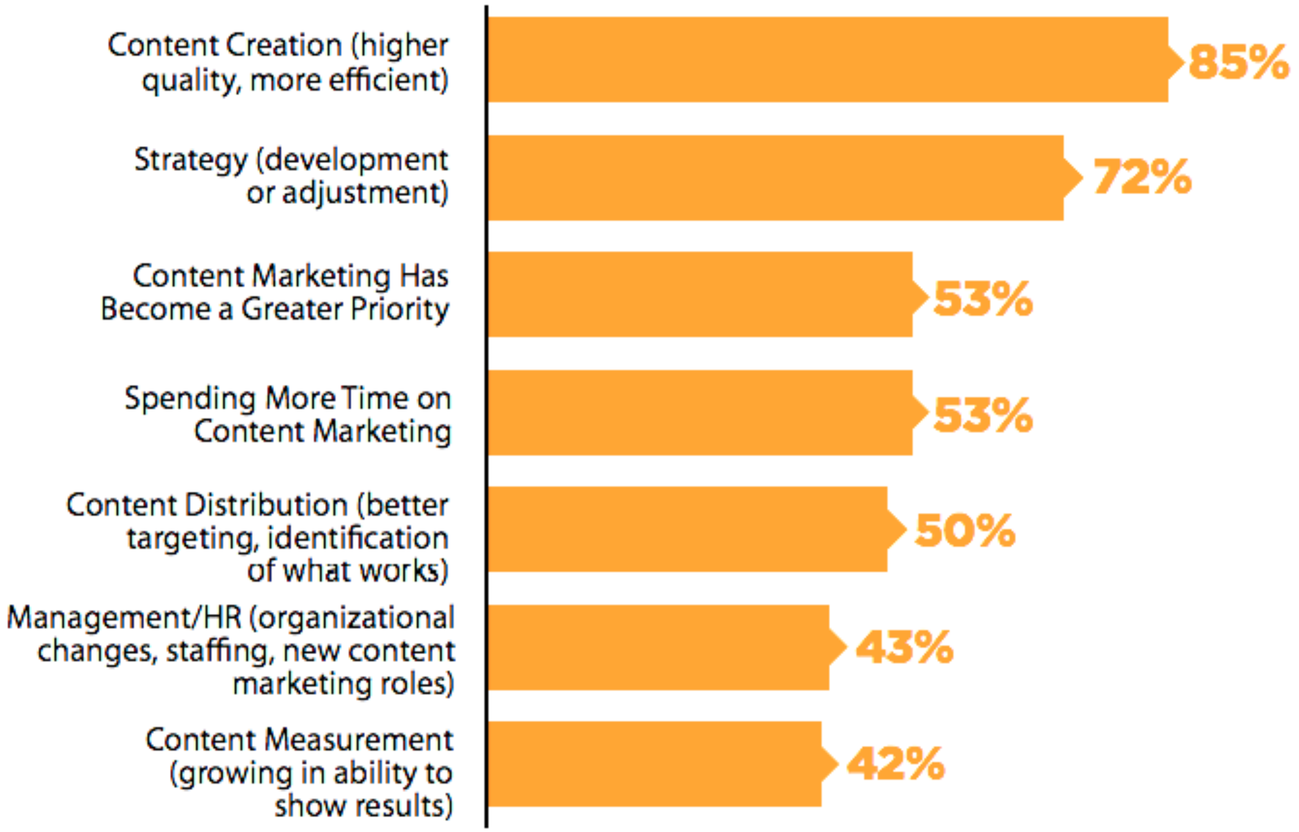
AGENCIES REPORT HAVING TROUBLE WITH EVERY PART OF THE CONTENT WORKFLOW.

#CONTENTPROBS AMIRIGHT?



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

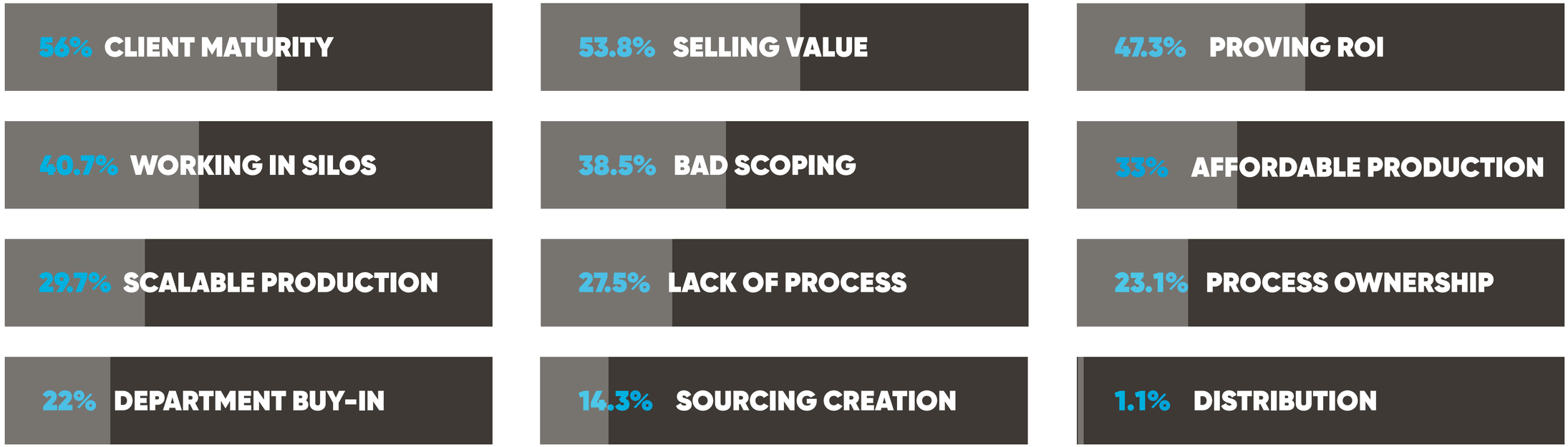
#CONTENTPROBS AMIRIGHT?



Other reasons cited: Content Marketing Technologies/Tools (28%), More Budget for Content Marketing (25%), Content Marketing Training/Education (23%), We Have Given Our Efforts Time to Bear Fruit and Are Now Getting Results (21%), Assistance of Outside Expertise (10%), Changes in Target Audience (7%), and Other (3%).

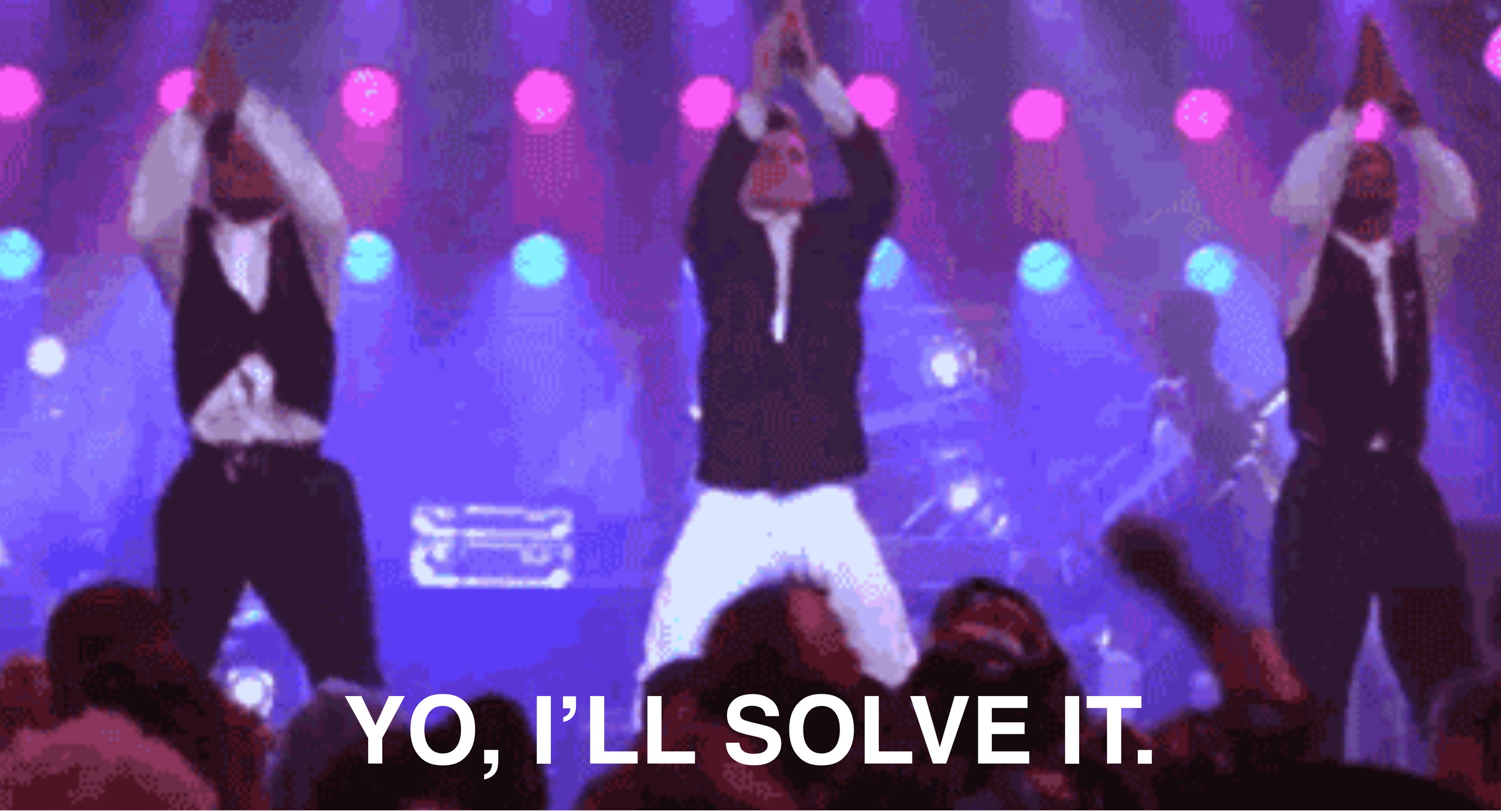
Source: 2017 B2B Content Marketing Trends—North America: Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs

#CONTENTPROBS AMIRIGHT?



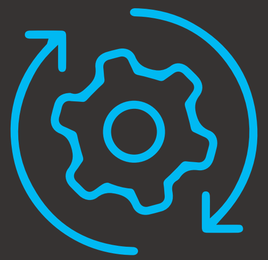
Source: Online survey of digital marketing professionals at advertising agencies conducted by Heather Physioc, March to June 2017, n=91.

IF THERE'S A PROBLEM...

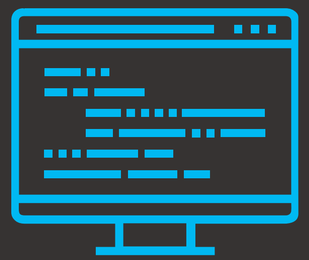

YO, I'LL SOLVE IT.

LET'S FOCUS ON...

PROVING VALUE



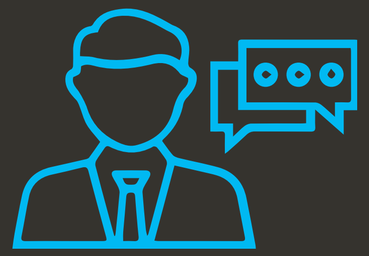
CREATING PROCESS



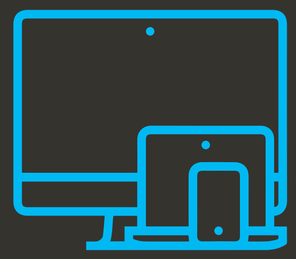
SOURCING CONTENT

AGENCY ASSUMPTIONS

Fueled by creativity and chaos - not rigid process



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



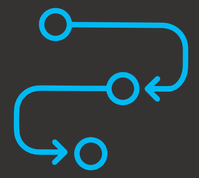
Content formats and platforms will continue to evolve

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

so...

Not everyone agrees on
what “content” even means

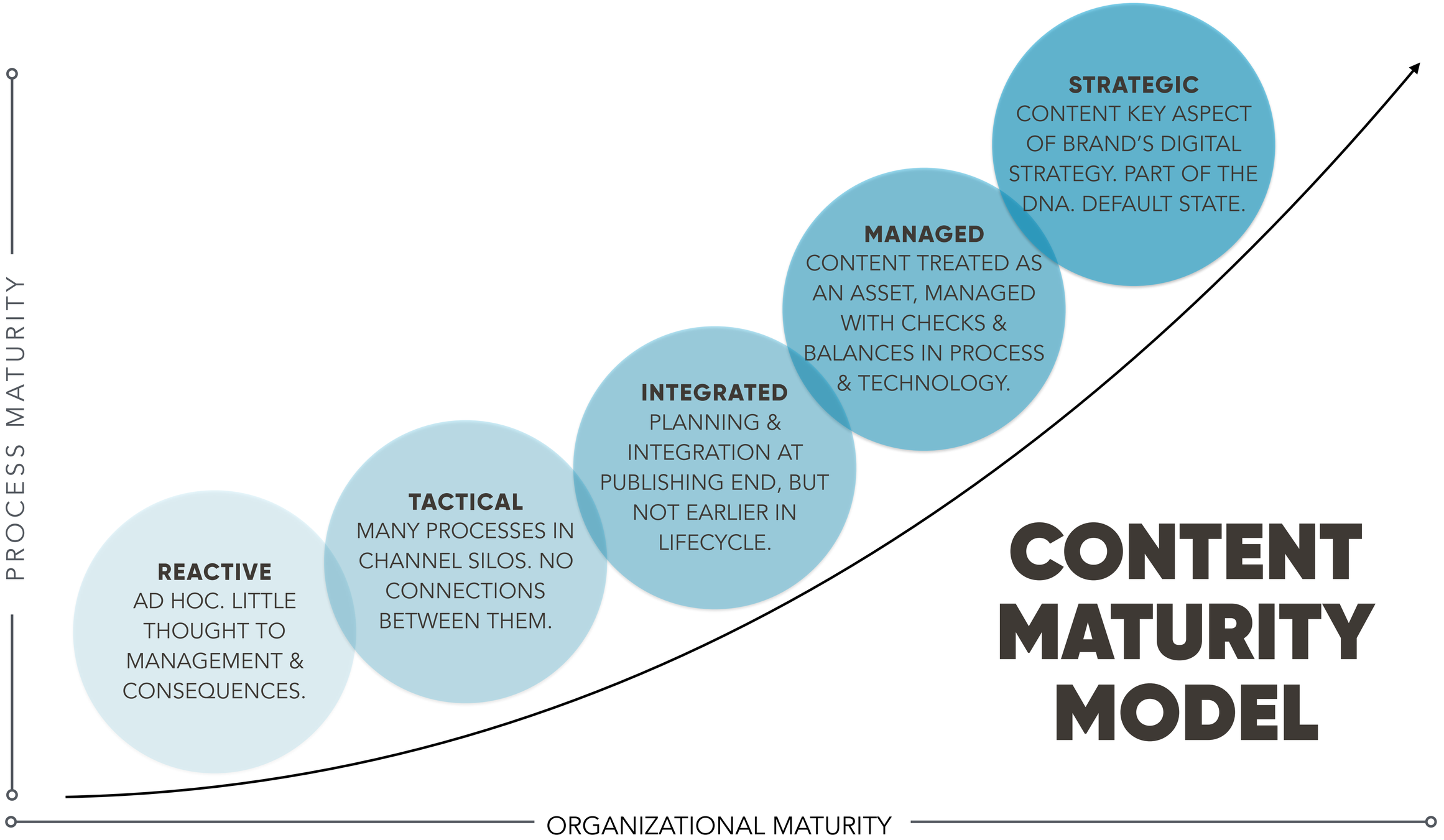
CONTENT
USE
QUESTIONS
ASSETS
CREATING
RIGHT
TRAFFIC
MARKETING
DIGITAL
RELEVANT
JOURNEY
TARGET
CUSTOMER
USING
LEADS
COPY
SPECIFIC
CUSTOMERS
AUDIENCE
CHANNELS
STRATEGIC
ANSWERS
WRITTEN
BRAND
CREATION

CAMPAIGN
VS.
CONTINUOUS

CAMPAIGN		CONTINUOUS
ASPIRATIONAL	→	CONSUMPTIVE
CREATIVE	→	FUNCTIONAL
SINGLE STREAM	→	MULTI-CHANNEL
SHORT-TERM	→	CONTINUOUS

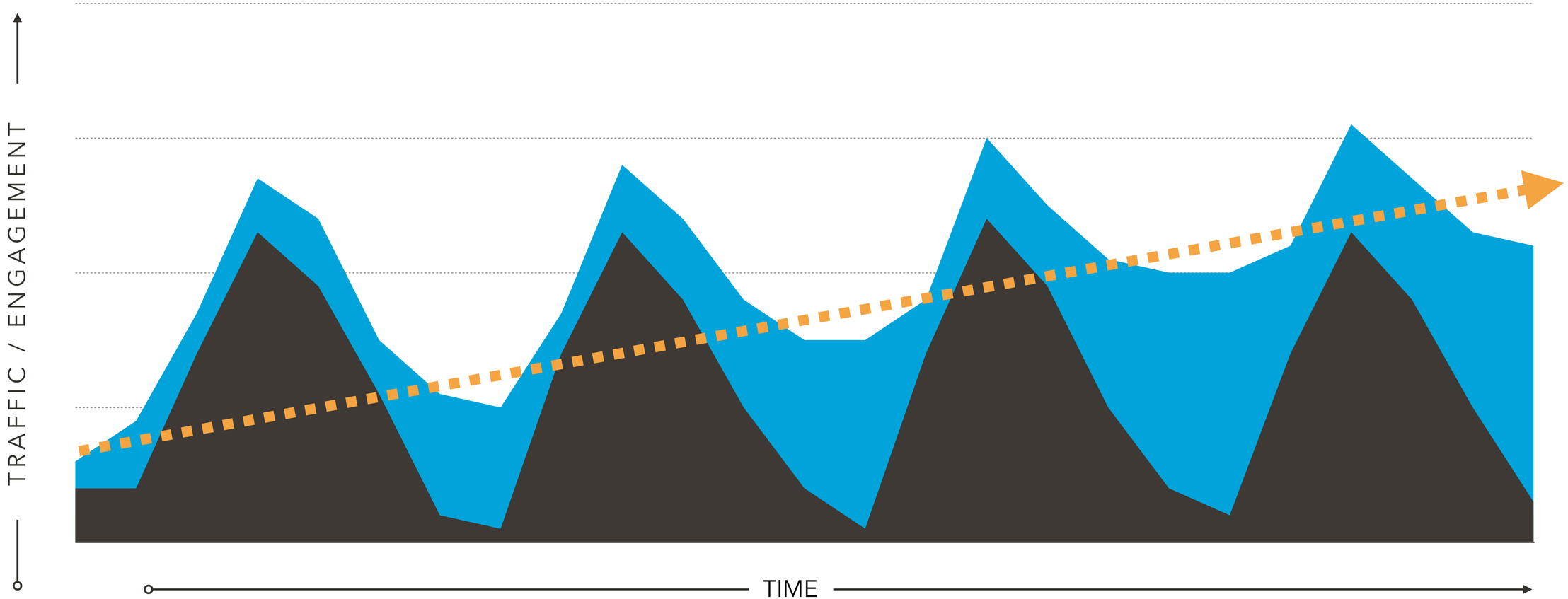
NOW THAT WE'VE DEFINED "CONTENT" CLEARLY, HOW DO WE GET CLIENTS TO INVEST IN IT?

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

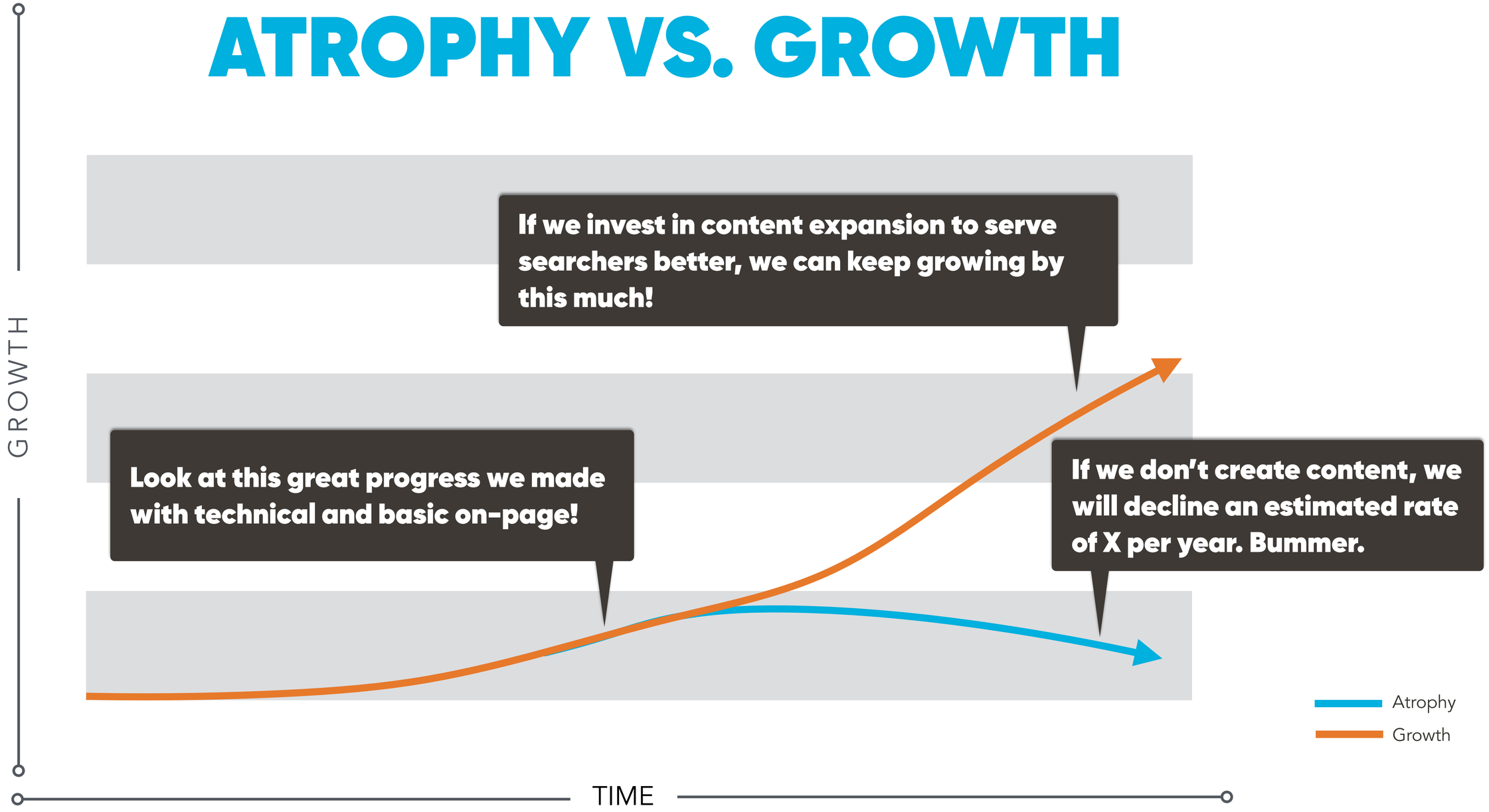


CONTENT MATURITY MODEL

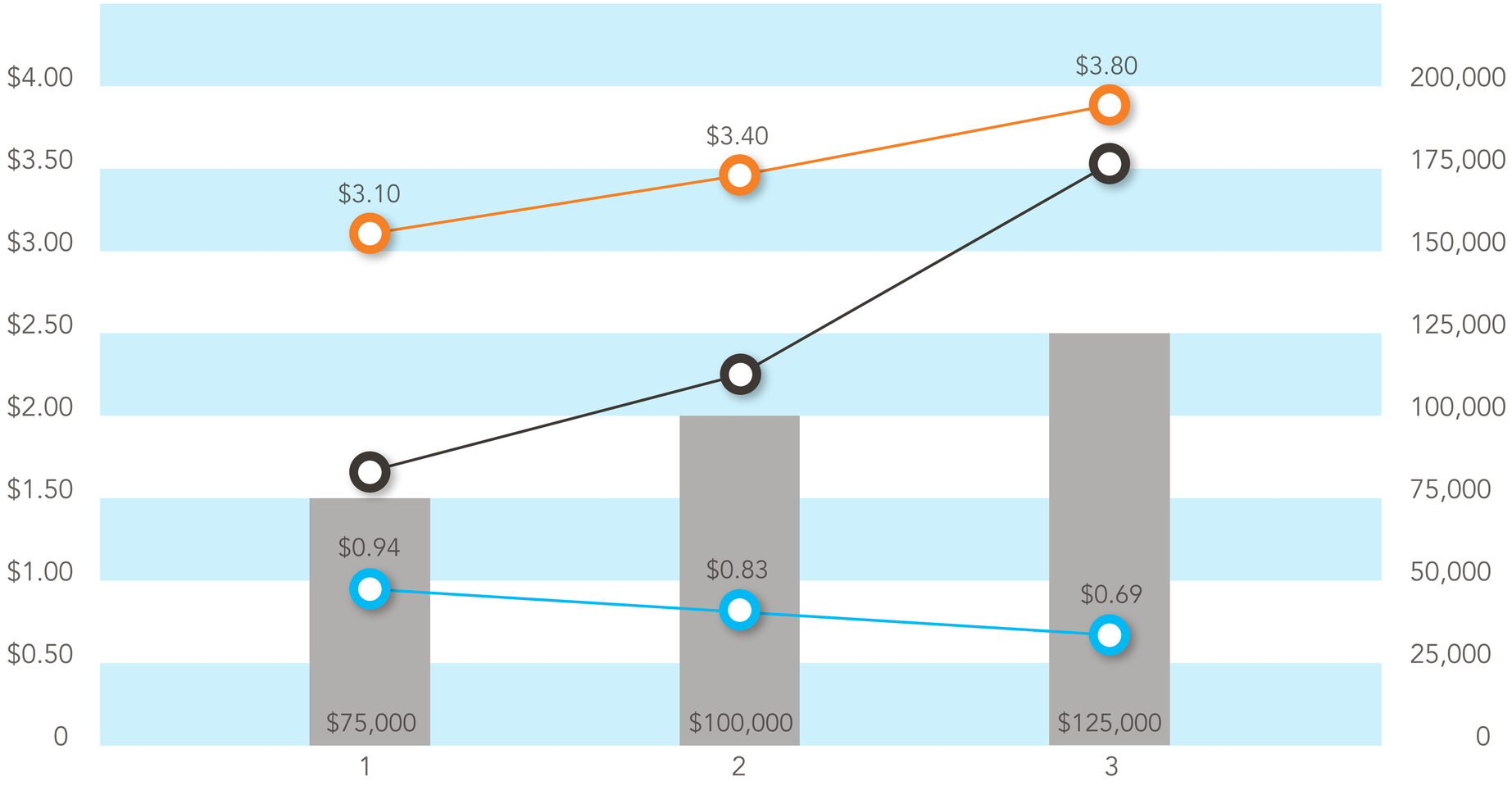
GROWING BASE VS. BUYING SPIKES



ATROPHY VS. GROWTH



CHANNEL ROI COMPARISON



BUILDING A SYSTEM

THE AGENCY CONTENT FLYWHEEL

"EDITOR IN CHIEF" OVERSEES PROCESS

AGENCY BRIEF

CHANNEL INPUTS

CONTENT PLAYBOOK

CONTENT CALENDAR

PRODUCTION

APPROVALS AND AMPLIFICATION

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

IN-HOUSE CREATIVE

+	-
Message Control	Single Campaign
Creativity	Slow To Execute
Completely Custom	Costly To Clients

OUTSOURCE

+	-
Content Specialty	Extra Steps
Demand Flexibility	Profit Margin
End-To-End System	Quality Control
Speed To Market	Less Creativity

A.I.

+	-
Automated & Easy	Limited By Inputs
Multiple Platforms	Lacks Judgment
Learns Over Time	Quality Control

MAKE VS. BUY DECISION MODEL

Method	Cost to Create	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

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.
VML

Thank You

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