



**2016 MIDDLE EAST
CONTENT MARKETING
SURVEY**



The results for the Zeentree 2016 Middle East Content Marketing Survey are in!

During the 2016 STEP Conference for Entrepreneurship in Dubai, Zeentree surveyed 41 start-ups and entrepreneurs to find out how they are using custom content to drive customer engagement, and what their biggest challenges are.

In its second year running, the Zeentree survey provided us with much-needed data to understand the content marketing landscape in the Middle East and the regions' appetite for content marketing as a way to reach out and market to consumers.

For a multilingual content creation service such as Zeentree the data we've gathered is gold. It helps us get to grips with the shortcomings and advances in digital marketing in the region, but we're happy that savvy marketers will also pick up on these findings and use them to measure outputs and efforts in online brand building and customer engagement. Which markets are Middle Eastern brands targeting? Which channels do they use? And what types of content are they using to reach and engage with customers?

The answers to these important questions are just some of the insights we've gained with this year's survey. As Ipsos Connect Chief Digital Officer Andrew Bradford said at the recent Dubai Arabnet Digital Forum: "Digital media is a clearly defined area of doubt and uncertainty."

Our survey interrogates that area of doubt and uncertainty so that markets have a clearer idea of what constitutes a great content marketing strategy, and what success in the field looks like.

“71% expect content marketing to be very important in the near future”

Introduction

Content marketing is the ‘art of communication with your customers without selling’¹. Done right, it deepens customer engagement and increases brand awareness by providing useful, memorable, engaging content; the type of content customers want and that draws them to a brand or business.

[Read: Zeentree Managing Director Lee Mancini on What it takes to be a truly global Search Optimised Content Agency](#)

As part of an overall marketing strategy, content marketing drives customer action and allows brands to own their own media. Consumers, on the other hand, have shown to prefer content marketing above traditional marketing messages.

With over three billion Internet users browsing over one billion websites today, it’s clear that brands will have a tough time standing out.

The way to do that is, in a nutshell, consistently publishing original, fresh, quality content, presented in multiple formats and languages, with solid SEO and distribution support.

“Consumers have shown preference for content marketing above advertising”

1. <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/what-is-content-marketing/>

Overview of respondents

The annual STEP Conference brings together tech start-ups, entrepreneurs and marketers from across the region to understand trends and innovations in technology, media, and design. 29% of respondents worked for agencies, and 71% came from brands.



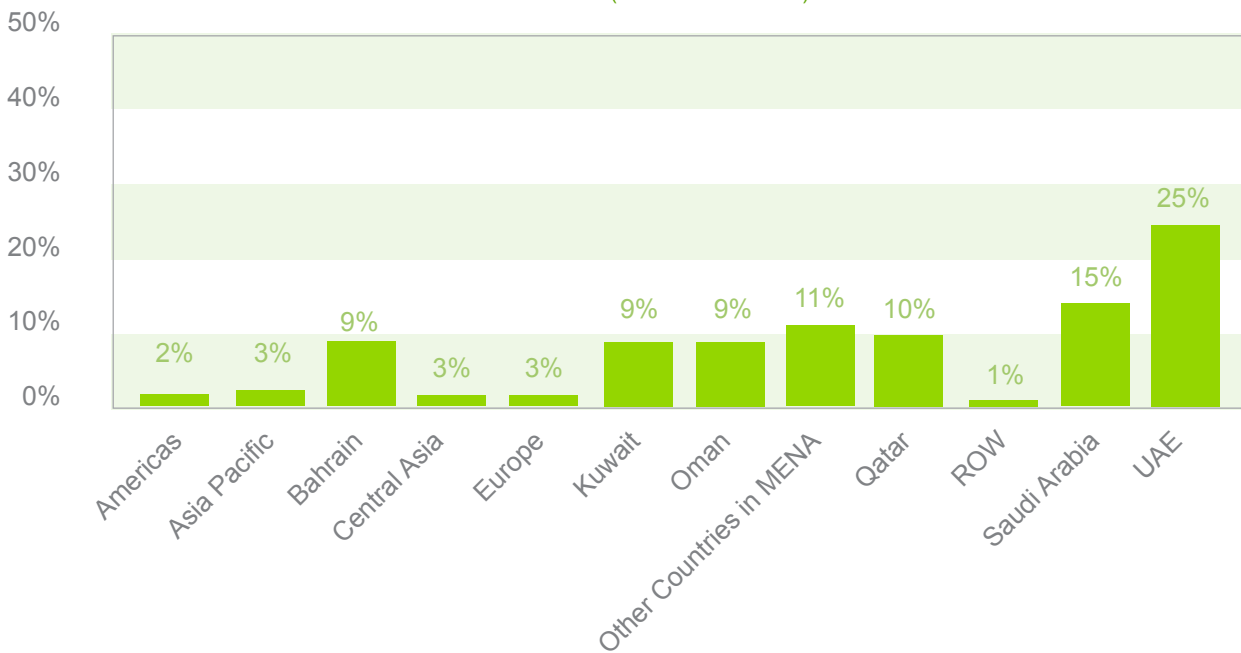
Which markets does your brand/client target?

Start-ups focus on the UAE, but may miss opportunities in Saudi Arabia

Most survey respondents focus on countries in the MENA region, with the largest number (25%) working in the UAE. This is unsurprising given the UAE’s presence as a hub for many startups and agencies targeting the region. Saudi Arabia was the focus of just 15% of the respondents, surprising given its size as the largest country in the Gulf and one of the wealthiest. A requirement for Arabic communications may be a reason.

Activity outside of MENA is low. Just 3% of respondents work in Europe, 3% in Central Asia, 3% in Asia Pacific, and 2% in the Americas.

FIGURE 1: MARKETS BRANDS ARE TARGETING (RESPONSES IN %)



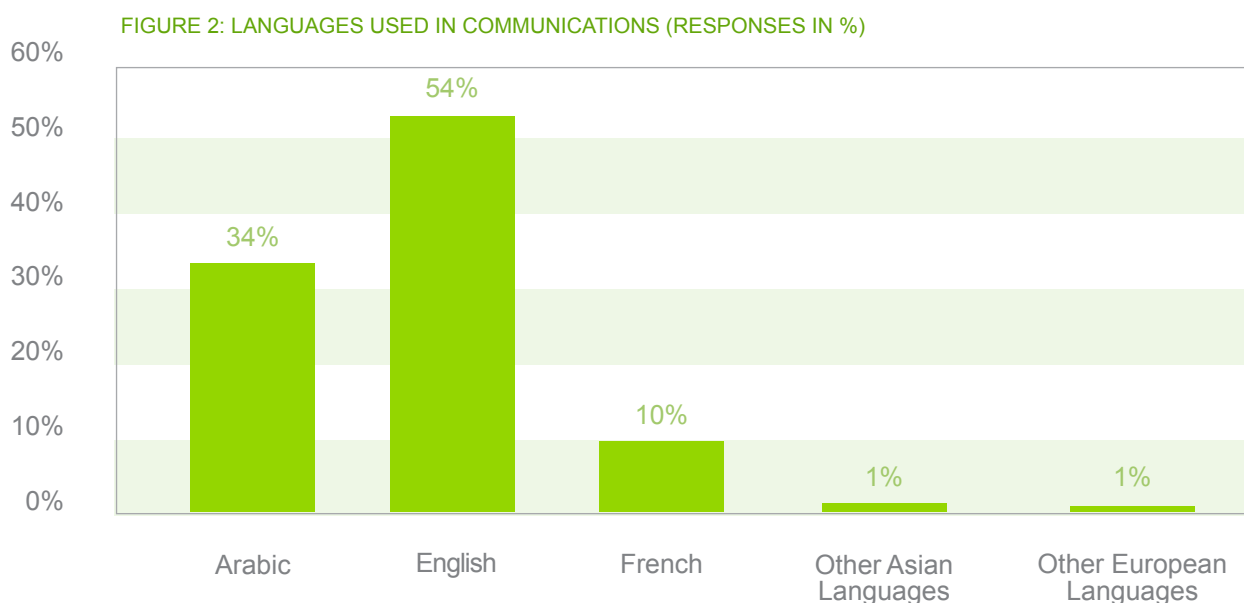
What languages does your brand/client use for communications?

Lack of quality translations means English remains the language of communication.

Most (54%) of the respondents use English for their communication, which is not unusual for companies in Dubai. But just 34% use Arabic for brand or client work, which means that many Arabic-only countries are not being targeted. In a region which includes 80 million Arabic speaking people, not producing Arabic content can be a major oversight. French was cited by just 10% of respondents, a low number considering that Lebanon, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia also make up the region.

Challenges for entrepreneurs that communicate in multiple languages include difficulty in maintaining quality assurance (reported by 36% of respondents), the time it takes to produce (20%), and its relatively high cost (18%).

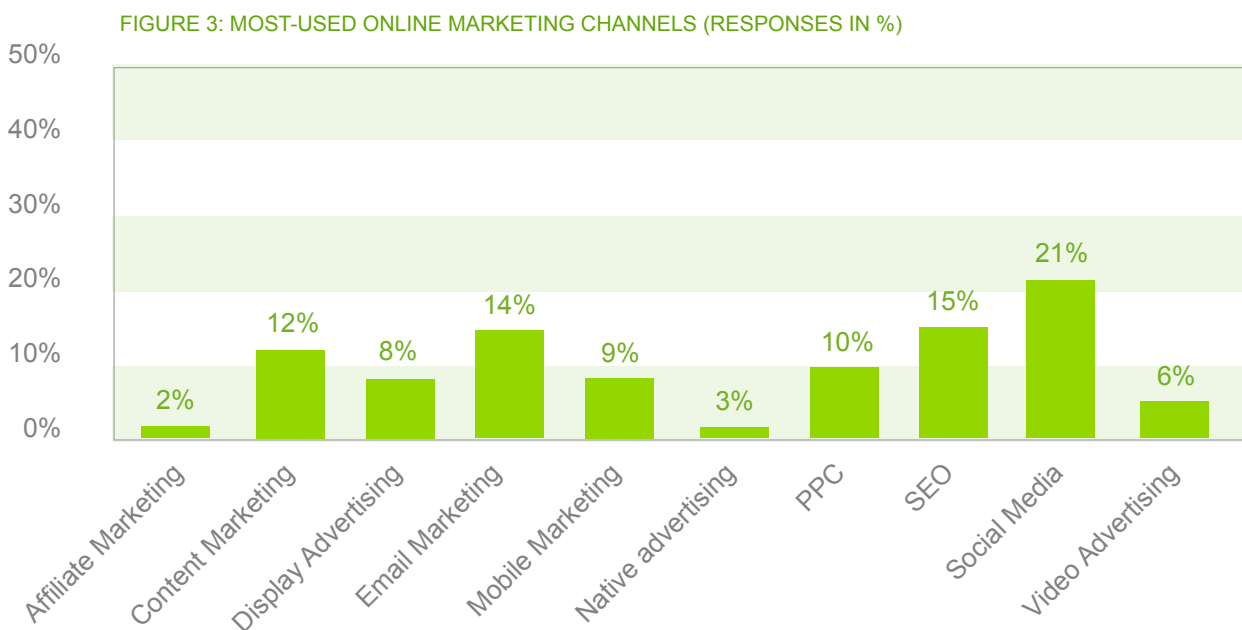
Other issues that were reported include the difficulty in assessing ROI (12%), limited internal resources (6%), and low ROI expectations (4%).



Which of the online marketing channels below do you use?

Entrepreneurs love social media, but rate content marketing fourth.

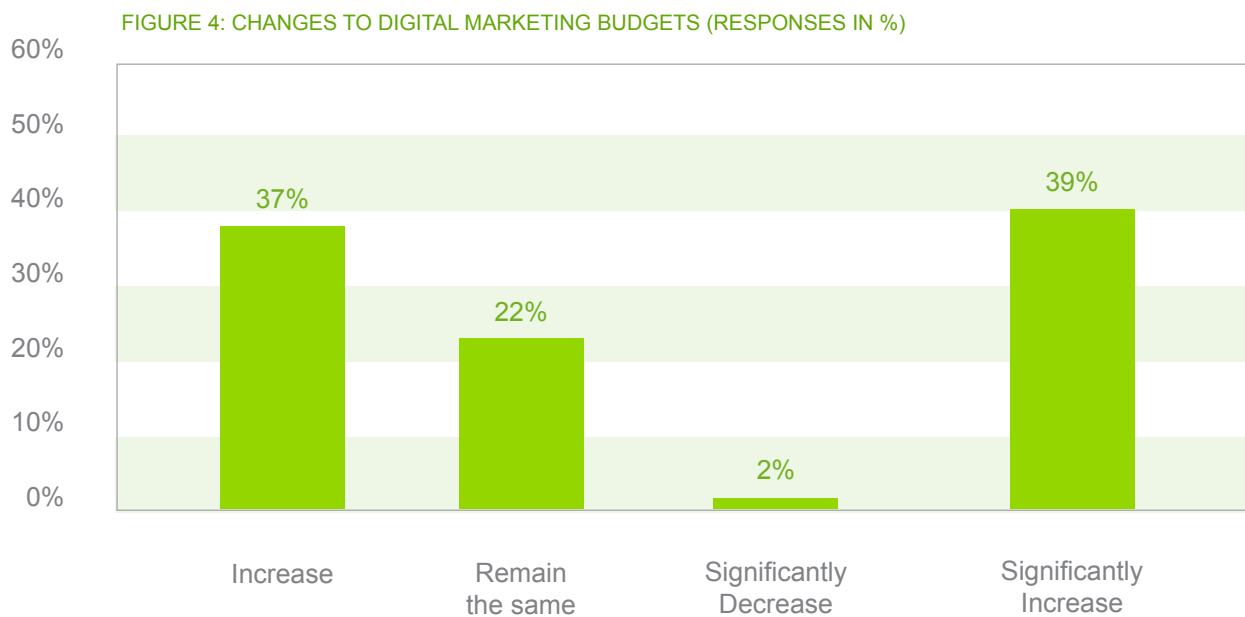
Social media remains the primary channel that entrepreneurs use, with 21% of respondents citing it as a way to reach audiences. SEO comes second with 15% of respondents relying on this method, and 14% using email marketing. Content marketing is in fourth place, despite its potential to cultivate a highly engaged customer base. Standard methods like pay-per-click (PPC, 10% of respondents) join newcomers like mobile marketing (9%) in importance. Use of mobile marketing will likely rise as social media and content platforms form more sophisticated mobile strategies. Advertising remains a core channel, with display advertising (8%), video advertising (6%), and native advertising (3%).



How do you expect your company's digital marketing budget to change for 2016 compared to 2015?

76% of start-up entrepreneurs will increase their digital marketing budget next year.

The majority of respondents believe digital marketing is set to grow. 39% of them expect that digital marketing budgets will increase 'significantly' in 2016 relative to last year's budget, with another 37% expecting it to increase 'somewhat'. 22% of respondents felt that the budgets would stay where they are, while just 2% of marketers expected their digital marketing budgets to decrease significantly. With this growth in digital marketing budgets, content marketing is well positioned to grow alongside it.



How important do you expect content marketing to be to your future marketing efforts?

Content marketing is very important for 71% of start-ups

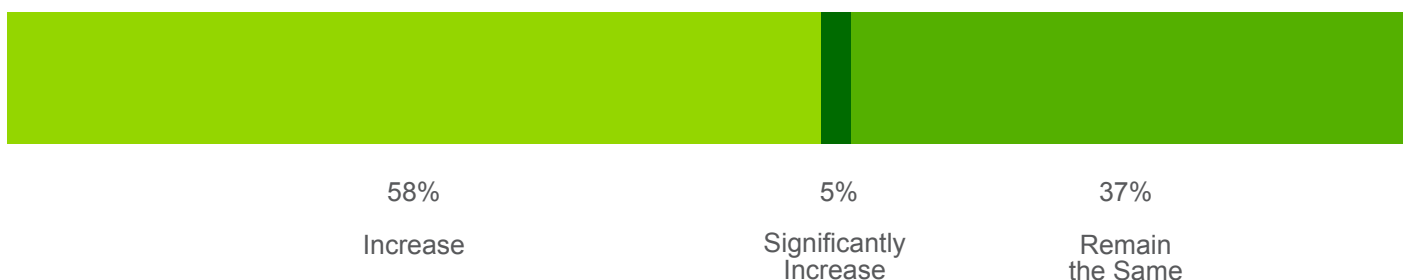
More than a just a passing trend, content marketing is quickly becoming a core part of marketing activity, reaching audiences in ways other methods cannot. Nearly all respondents acknowledged that content marketing would be important in to their marketing activity in the future, and an overwhelming majority (71%) expect content marketing to be 'very important' in the future.



How do you expect your Content Budget to change in 2016/17?

64% of start-ups are increasing budgets for content marketing next year

The vast majority of entrepreneurs surveyed expect their content marketing budgets will increase next year, showing that content marketing is becoming a bigger priority in marketing budgets. In total, 63% responded that their content marketing budgets will increase, with 5% highlighting that they are expected to increase significantly. Around 37% of marketers believe that their budget for content marketing will remain the same.

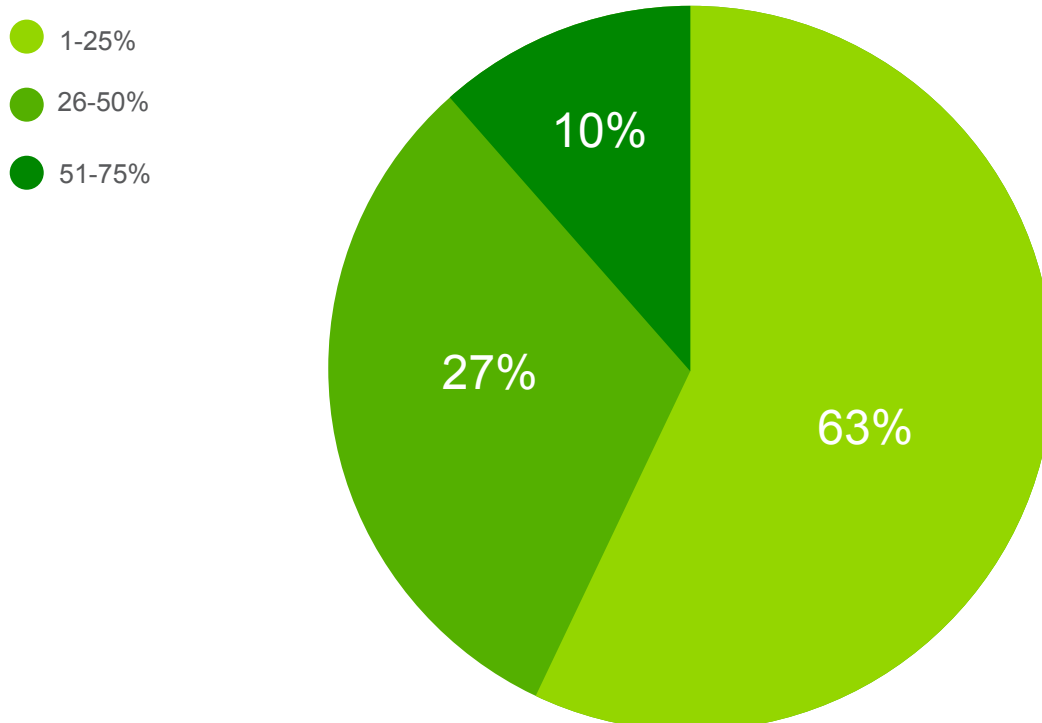


What % of your digital marketing budget will be spent on Content in 2016/17?

Majority of businesses are spending up to ¼ of their budgets on content marketing.

63% of respondents saw content marketing forming up to 25% of the coming year's digital marketing budget. Highlighting content marketing's growing popularity in marketing, 27% believe it will make up between 25% and 50% of digital marketing budgets. Perhaps more impressively, 10% believe it will make up greater than 50% of their digital marketing budget, suggesting that some entrepreneurs rely on content marketing as their primary tool to reach digital audiences. Where budgets lead, spending follows, and the region can expect that content marketing will see growing importance in the marketing arsenal.

FIGURE 5: BUDGET SPEND ON CONTENT IN 2016/2017 (%)



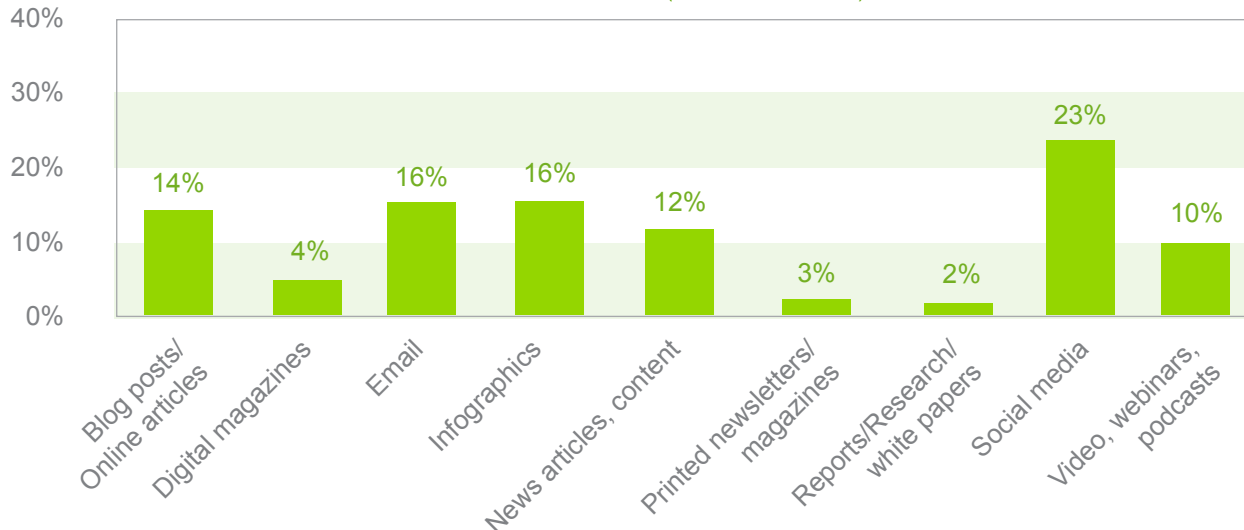
Which types of content has your brand developed during the past year?

Social media, e-newsletters and infographics are the top content types for young businesses.

As trends in media and media consumption change, so do the tactics that are used to form a content marketing strategy. In this survey, social media was cited as the top content type for content marketing (23% of respondents). However, a wide number of other methods also form part of the strategy, such as email (16% of respondents), infographics (16%), and blog posts and online articles (14%). While email may be declining as a medium to reach people, published content such as infographics and online articles is likely to rise.

News articles and content was reported by 12% of respondents, and video/webinars/podcasts by 10% of respondents. While traditional news outlets may be seeing declining readership, online content like videos, webinars and podcasts are growing in importance in digital media consumption. Digital magazines form a small niche at 4%, though their targeted nature makes them ideal for reaching specific audiences. Printed newsletters and magazines (3%) and reports/research/white papers (2%) did not show strong mentions, perhaps due to the decline in printed media and the effort required for reports and white papers.

FIGURE 6: CONTENT TYPES USED FOR MARKETING (RESPONSES IN %)



Who produces your company's/client's content?

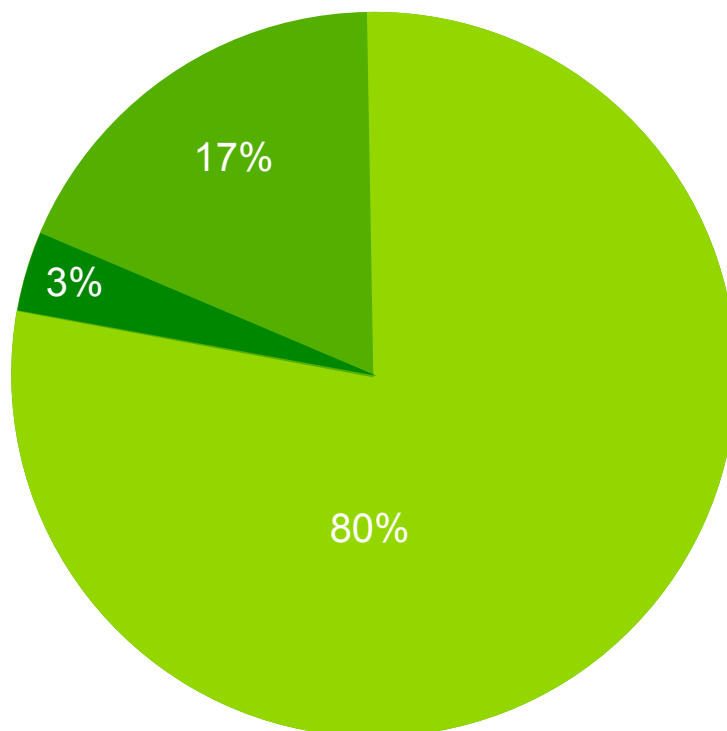
80% of start-ups produce content in-house.

Producing content regularly enough to retain customer engagement requires significant effort, so marketers must decide what the best way to do this is. In this survey, 80% of respondents reported handling their content in-house. Most of the others (17%) used agencies to produce content, and just 3% used freelancers.

As content marketing continues to grow in importance and budgets, keeping production in-house will likely present challenges in recruiting and retaining top talent capable of keeping up. Marketers may find that outsourcing to an agency becomes more attractive to ensure that they are getting consistent and quality work, although this will likely impact cost.

FIGURE 7: CONTENT CREATION SOURCES (RESPONSES IN %)

● In-house department: 80% ● Content marketing agency: 17% ● Freelancer: 3%



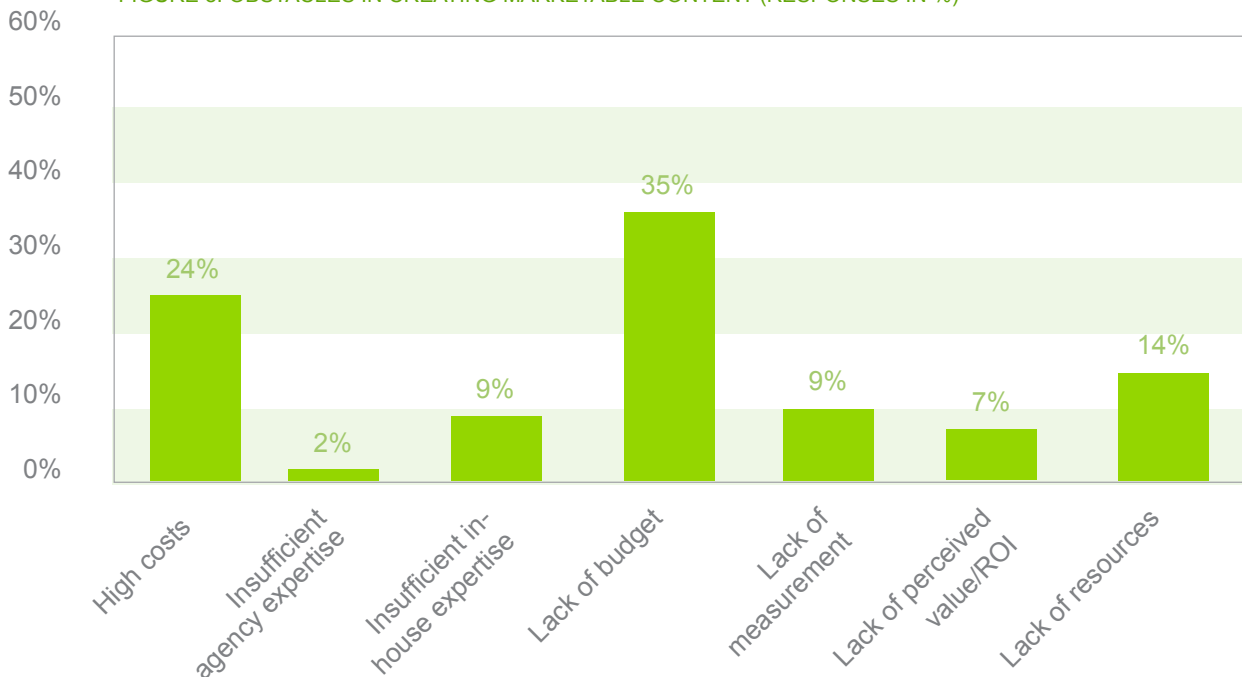
What obstacles does your company face when creating content for marketing purposes

Lack of budget is the greatest barrier against creating content for start-ups

Budgetary concerns remain the biggest challenge to producing content for marketing, with 35% of respondents reporting this limitation.

Similarly, the relatively high costs to produce content marketing was highlighted by 24% of respondents. A lack of resources was cited by 14% of respondents as a challenge. Taken together, this suggests that while marketers would like to devote more focus to content marketing, limitations on resources remain a key obstacle. Investing in resources and focusing on budgets will make the process of using high-quality content marketing easier and more effective.

FIGURE 8: OBSTACLES IN CREATING MARKETABLE CONTENT (RESPONSES IN %)



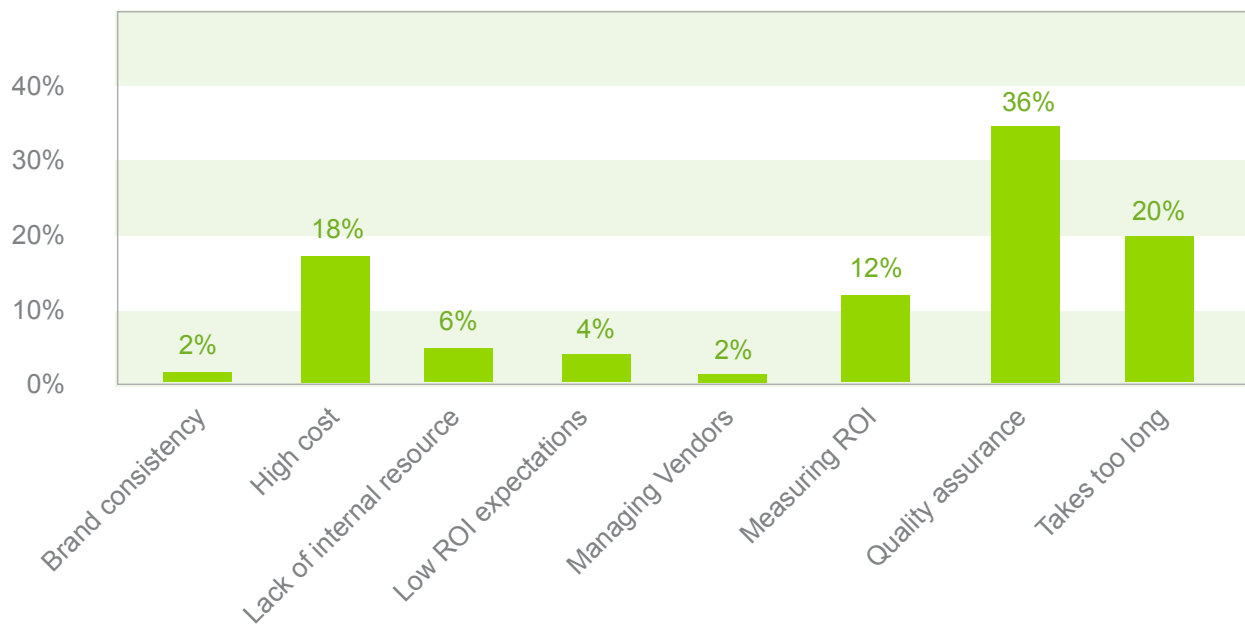
What are your brand's biggest challenges in creating content in multiple languages?

Quality assurance presents the biggest challenge for multi-lingual content

Respondents largely have a lack of confidence in the quality of content available in multiple languages, with an overwhelming 36% citing this as their biggest concern. This is followed by a perception among 20% that it takes too long to create. The high cost of multi-lingual content was reported as the third biggest obstacle (18%).

Only 12% of respondents were not convinced that they could adequately measure the ROI. This is encouraging as it suggests the majority of start-ups completing this survey are acknowledging the fact that going global, or indeed even reaching an audience that speaks languages other than English in the region (i.e. Arabic) is essential to reach these markets. Brand consistency and managing vendors did not realistically feature as issues, which means they either had not thought of these aspects, or were confident that they could achieve them.

FIGURE 9: BRAND'S BIGGEST CHALLENGES FOR MULTI-LINGUAL CONTENT (RESPONSES IN %)



The Future

It's clear the Middle East and North Africa are waking up to the possibilities of digital content marketing, but also that the region has a lot of catching up to do if it wants to make the most of the enormous opportunities that are within arms' length.

We found that, as more and more marketers focus on localisation, custom content in multiple languages has become a critical way to reach customers. Do marketers understand how content marketing is evolving and how to use it effectively?

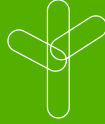
The Content Marketing Institute conducted a B2C (Business to Consumer) survey for 2016 titled: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends in North America, that showed marketers are allocating 32% of their total marketing budget, on average, to content marketing (vs. 25% last year).

In the Middle East about a third of respondents are allocating over 25% of their digital marketing budgets on content marketing in the next year, which shows that the region is catching up to international trends, and it is an increase on what they were wanting to invest in 2015.

Considering that Arabic is the most common spoken language in the MENA region, with around 280 million speakers from Morocco to Iraq, and over 400 million Arabic-speaking people online right now,² it's astonishing that only around 2% of digital content is in this audience's native tongue.

As the Internet and smartphone explosion gathers momentum in the MENA region, there is no better time to capture the native market with relevant, localised content packaged with a comprehensive, cost-effective content marketing strategy that targets one of the most economically powerful audiences in the world.

2. <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm>



“The sooner local brands and publishers start investing in regularly publishing quality content in multiple languages, and adjusting their content marketing strategy according to performance data, the sooner they’ll see a ROI that’s guaranteed to outpace that of advertising spend.

By understanding the value of using trusted and premium content production services such as Zeentree.com, content creation will become a more valued part of any marketing plan and the secret weapon to expand successfully into multi-lingual markets.”

Lee Mancini
Managing Director
Zeentree.com