2020 CONTENT MARKETING FOR DEMAND GENERATION SURVEY

MARKET BRIEF

ARCHITECTING DESIRE:

CONNECTING CONTENT MARKETING EXPERIENCES TO GENERATE THE BEST NEXT STEPS ALONG THE BUYER'S JOURNEY

Marketers that will be successful in 2021 are working hard to create and connect content-driven experiences that are focused on what prospective customers care about based on passions, questions, needs, and wants.

BY ROBERT ROSE

Chief Strategy Advisor, Content Marketing Institute

CONTENT MARKETING INSTITUTE™

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MAKE THE CONTENT CONNECTION

There's one question on every marketer's mind: "How do I connect?"

We've all been seeking connection this year. Stuck at home, working from kitchen tables and converted closets, marketers have been fighting to create and maintain connections with their audiences.

Despite all the upheaval, content remains a tried and true way to generate demand. After all, it's content-driven experiences that build those precious connections, no matter what's going on in the world outside.

Connection is more important than ever. And as you'll find out in this report, marketers are turning to storytelling and emotion to build those connections.

This year has been one of the toughest ever. One negative headline after another has drained audiences' emotional reserves. They need an escape. Marketing content can offer that empathetic, emotionally stirring olive branch they're searching for.

As you read on, you'll discover that blogs, articles, and videos are the content types that are most effective at the early stages of the buyer's journey, where brands are fighting to establish customer awareness and audience interest.

The reason is simple: these content types foster connection. They tell a story, they evoke emotion, and they present a face that the audience can relate to. And the strength of the connections that these content types create helps carry buyers through the rest of their journey on a wave of engagement and investment.

In conclusion: connection lies in content. Last year's Content Marketing for Demand Generation survey talked about *holding* attention, not just *grabbing* it, and this year is no different. By providing audiences with earnest and engaging content, you can build lasting connections in 2020 and beyond that drive demand to new heights.

INTRODUCTION

2020 is a weird year.

If businesses were under the impression that digital marketing was changing fast in 2019, 2020 just said "hold my beer." The acceleration of change in the way marketers use content to drive demand has been exponential this year. We have seen not only an increased pressure to create trustworthy, differentiating content, but also to increase demand. At the same time, we've been challenged with finding ever-more agile tools and technologies to help us achieve our goals.

Put simply, marketers have had to evolve within the evolution. Our goals leading up to 2020 were to create content that could be found through search, and to satisfy the information needs of prospective customers. Well, that's no longer good enough. In 2020, we have to inspire all new questions and desires and serve up the best "next experiences" with which to satisfy them.

In the current digital-dominant world, frontline workers now play a more important role than perhaps ever before. Today's content-driven digital experiences are managed and fed by both controlled and uncontrolled content from the likes of influencers, executives, marketing, sales, customer service managers, and even other customers.

So, the myriad digital content experiences created by the business to generate demand for products and services are inexorably connected, and directly reflect (well or poorly) on the business' ability to create cohesive integrated value.

Today, marketers must now architect more desire into demand generation programs.

Today, marketers must now architect more desire into demand generation programs. They must inspire audiences to be so actively engaged that they want to experience and share more from that brand. Put simply: It's no longer enough to satisfy the prospect. We have to create fans.

THE RACE IS ON

2020 is almost over. As we begin to reawaken to a changed world, we will find the digital and content landscape more pressurized than ever.

Last year, when we reported the results of our second annual Content Marketing for Demand Generation Survey, we discussed the challenges of internal silos:

"The only way to change the customer's experience is to reorganize ourselves to be inherently more customer-centric."

In that report, we concluded that one of the clearest paths to success was to invest in the creation of new governance processes, technologies, and skills to ensure that marketers could scale and measure those efforts. Well, 2020 has been like a vice grip on those plans. And, now, as we approach 2021, demand gen marketers find themselves working from home, having to organize their efforts around the customer journey – with more pressure than ever to grow the top of the funnel.

As a result, this year's research reflects many of the same findings from last year. And, there are distinct lessons to be pulled. If 2020 is a year that marketers would like to reset, recalibrate, and reboot, then perhaps the biggest lesson we can lean on, is that the time is now. Content marketing-driven demand generation came into the spotlight during 2020. And everyone was held back from the starting gun. The good news? Everyone was left at the starting line. The bad news? We're already behind.

Bang.

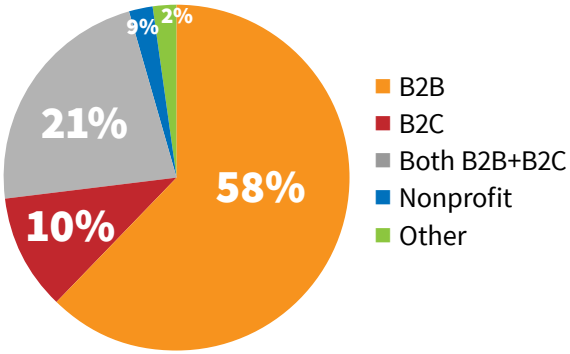
METHODOLOGY

In August 2020, the CMI research team conducted its third annual Content Marketing for Demand Generation survey to learn how marketers are using content marketing for demand generation purposes.

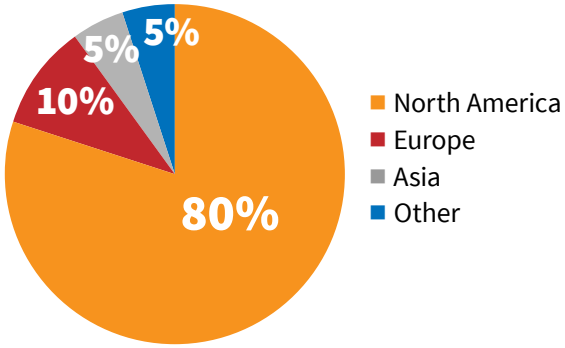
CMI sent email invitations to a random slice of its total opt-in subscriber list. A total of 229 global responses (representing 24 countries) were qualified for analysis. Qualified respondents were those who indicated their company uses content marketing to generate demand from buyers (create and/or nurture leads or potential customers) at the top, middle, and/or bottom of the buying funnel.

Qualified respondents represented a range of industries, functional areas, and company sizes. Most were B2B marketers in the U.S.

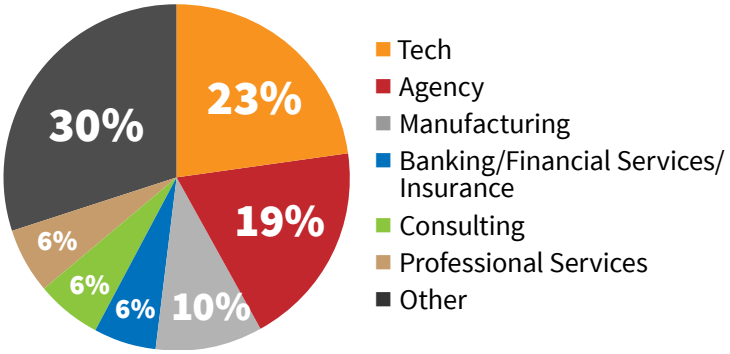
Nature of Organization



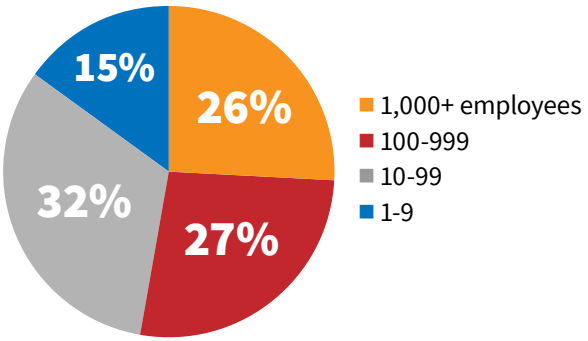
Locations



Industry



Company Size
(By Employees)



FINDINGS

A YEAR IN THE UPSIDE DOWN

Many of the findings from this year's demand generation survey mirror much of what we found last year, pre-pandemic. However, the overall observation is that demand gen marketers were much more focused on determining how to navigate the challenges of 2020, than on changing their approach to using content to create demand generation programs.

Very much like 2019, many marketers (86%) we surveyed said they use content marketing to generate leads at the top of the buying funnel. However, the number one reason this year, by a fraction, was to generate brand awareness (88%), which came in second last year.

One interesting observation is the continued trend of decreasing focus on the nurturing of leads in the middle of the funnel. In 2018, the percentage of marketers focusing on this was 73%. It's fallen four points in the ensuing two years to 69%. (CMI noted this same decrease in using content marketing for nurturing purpose in our broader annual B2B content marketing research conducted in July 2020.)

Reasons Organizations Use Content Marketing for Demand Generation

	2020	2019	2018
Generate brand awareness	**88%**	**86%**	**82%**
Generate leads/potential customers at the top of the funnel	**86%**	**88%**	**87%**
Position organization as a thought leader	**80%**	**79%**	**78%**
Nurture leads/potential customers at the middle of the funnel	**69%**	**71%**	**73%**
Convince/persuade leads to evaluate/purchase in the late stage of the customer journey	**55%**	**51%**	**60%**

Base: All respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.
Source: 2020 Content Marketing for Demand Generation Survey, Content Marketing Institute

When we asked about the stage in the buyer's journey where organizations receive the most value from content marketing for demand generation, here again, as last year, respondents indicated the early stage (generating awareness/interest) is the highest driver of value (54%).

Stage in Buyer's Journey Where Organization Receives Most Value from Content Marketing Used for Demand Generation

	2020	2019	2018
Early stage (generating awareness/interest)	54%	57%	51%
Middle stage (consideration/intent)	30%	28%	28%
Late stage (evaluation/purchase)	4%	6%	8%
Unsure	12%	9%	12%

Base: All respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers; aided list.
Source: 2020 Content Marketing for Demand Generation Survey, Content Marketing Institute

Interestingly, when we compare where the biggest value is being created, and where most demand generation marketers are focusing their content creation efforts, there does seem to be an effort to improve late stage evaluation.

While only 4% of this year's respondents said the biggest value comes from the late stage (evaluation/purchase) portion of the buyer's journey, they also said they would focus 17% of their content creation efforts on this stage.

Estimated Percentage of Total 2020 Content That Organization Will Create for Each Stage of Buyer's Journey

	2020	2019	2018
Early stage (generating awareness/interest)	49%	52%	47%
Middle stage (consideration/ intent)	29%	27%	29%
Late stage (evaluation/ purchase)	17%	17%	21%
Other stages	5%	4%	3%

Base: All respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers; aided list. Responses were required to equal 100%.
Source: 2020 Content Marketing for Demand Generation Survey, Content Marketing Institute

This continues to support last year's finding that marketers are attempting to create scale for their efforts at this stage of the buying journey but are having more difficulty in creating results (or proving them).

Next, we asked demand generation marketers if they segment their demand generation activities by personas. More than half (52%) said they do. This percentage was up from 45% in 2019, while the percentage who said "no" was down. This suggests there were a good number of marketers who used 2020 to recalibrate their audience segmentation strategy.

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Do you segment demand generation activities by personas?

	2020	2019	2018
Yes	**52%**	**45%**	**46%**
No, but plan to this year	**26%**	**31%**	**35%**
No, with no plans this year	**22%**	**24%**	**19%**

Base: All respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers. S
Source: 2020 Content Marketing for Demand Generation Survey, Content Marketing Institute

When we then asked marketers which content types were most effective at various stages of the buying journey, we found their answers to be similar to last year's as well.

The only notable difference was for e-books, which were rated more effective in the middle stage (50%) than in the early stage (40%). The opposite was true last year, when e-books were rated more effective in the early stage (56%) than in the middle stage (35%). This finding suggests that demand generation marketers are using e-books farther down the funnel (after awareness has been created), to serve "meatier" content during the nurturing phase of the customer journey.

In which stage of the buyer's journey is each content type most effective* when used for demand generation purposes?

	Early Stage (awareness/interest)	Middle Stage (consideration/intent)	Late Stage (evaluation/purchase)
Blog posts/articles	**72%**	**26%**	**2%**
Case studies	**15%**	**46%**	**39%**
E-books	**40%**	**50%**	**10%**
Events (e.g., virtual, in-person)	**34%**	**45%**	**21%**
Interactive content	**50%**	**38%**	**12%**
Podcasts	**60%**	**32%**	**9%**
Videos	**66%**	**26%**	**7%**
Webinars	**32%**	**53%**	**15%**
White papers	**34%**	**47%**	**20%**
Other types of content	**42%**	**31%**	**28%**

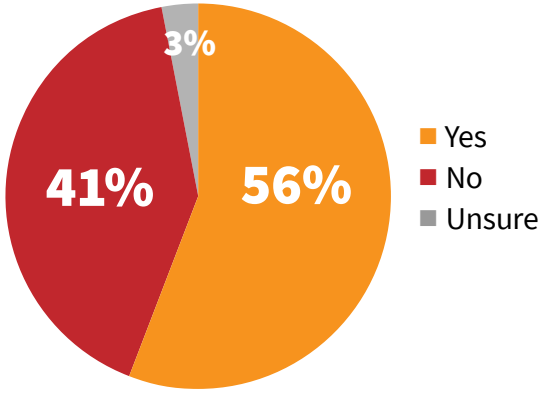
**Effective was defined as succeeding at moving leads/potential customers to the next stage (e.g., generating an initial inquiry, nurturing a lead through the process, or convincing/persuading someone to make a purchase) based on your organization's specific objectives.*

Base: Respondents who use each type of content listed. Nonusers of each type were removed from counts.
Source: 2020 Content Marketing for Demand Generation Survey, Content Marketing Institute

Next, we presented a question specific to the pandemic-influenced environment of 2020. We asked respondents if their organization had sponsored any virtual events (for demand generation purposes) in the last 12 months. Slightly more than half (56%) said yes. Forty-one percent said no.

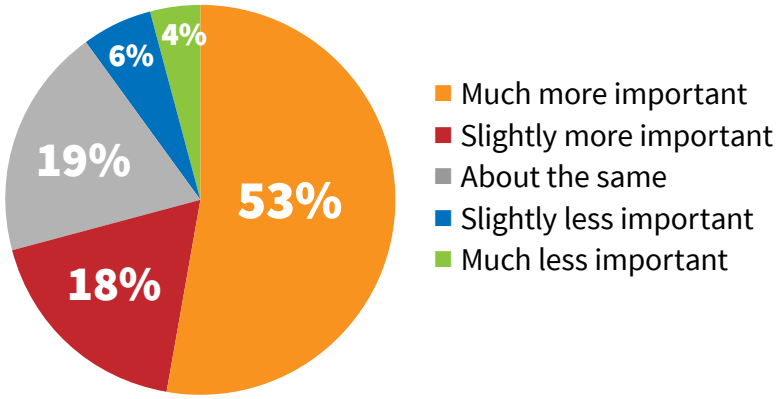
Because we didn't have any previous year's data, we couldn't determine whether there was growth due to the circumstances of 2020. But we did ask those who had sponsored virtual events how they would rate the importance of those events compared with that of in-person events held pre-pandemic. Interestingly, but perhaps unsurprisingly, more than half (53%) said they were much more important. Only 4% said they were much less important.

Has your organization sponsored any virtual events (for demand generation purposes) in the last 12 months?



Of those who said yes…

How would you rate the importance of virtual events compared with the importance of in-person events held pre-pandemic?



Base: Respondents whose organizations sponsored any virtual events (for demand generation purposes) in the last 12 months.
Source: 2020 Content Marketing for Demand Generation Survey, Content Marketing Institute

Later in the survey, we asked respondents which content marketing-related methods their organizations use specifically to nurture audiences through the customer's journey. Very much like last year, email/email campaigns were the top response (85%), followed by clear calls-to-action (71%) and paid advertising (54%).

One interesting finding is that the percentage using storytelling/evoking emotion increased significantly this year. In 2019, only 39% said they used it to nurture audiences. This year, the percentage was close to half (49%), suggesting that demand gen marketers are doing more to appeal to emotions and develop empathetic content pieces.

The percentage of demand gen content marketers who use storytelling/evoking emotion to nurture audiences increased to 49% in 2020 versus 39% in 2019.

Content Marketing-Related Method(s) Organizations Use to Nurture Audiences

	2020	2019
Email/email campaigns (e.g., welcome series, drip campaigns)	**85%**	**85%**
Clear calls-to-action (CTAs) for next steps	**71%**	**83%**
Paid advertising (e.g., print, digital, social media)	**54%**	**61%**
Sponsored events (virtual, in-person)	**45%**	**42%**
Storytelling/evoking emotion	**49%**	**39%**
Community building/audience participation	**31%**	**31%**
Offers/incentives/membership perks	**19%**	**25%**

Note: This question was new on the 2019 survey.
Base: All respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.
Source: 2020 Content Marketing for Demand Generation Survey, Content Marketing Institute

Regarding the metrics they use, 75% of respondents said they look at conversions, making it the top metric in both 2019 and 2020 ("conversions" was not on the aided list of metrics on the 2018 survey). Interestingly, and in line with the finding on storytelling/evoking emotion mentioned earlier, audience engagement increased to 64% from 55% in 2019.

Metrics Organizations Use to Measure the Impact of Content Marketing on Demand Generation

	2020	2019	2018
Conversions (e.g., traffic to subscribers, leads to sales)	75%	80%	N/A
Website traffic	74%	77%	67%
Audience engagement	64%	55%	58%
Quality of leads	56%	62%	56%
Quantity of leads	53%	60%	57%
Revenue growth	47%	48%	38%
Pipeline growth	44%	42%	37%
Cost per lead	39%	39%	39%
PR mentions/media coverage	29%	29%	N/A
Market research data (e.g., surveys, sentiment studies)	19%	21%	N/A
Other	4%	15%	16%
Unsure	2%	4%	4%

Base: All respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.
Source: 2020 Content Marketing for Demand Generation Survey, Content Marketing Institute

All these results suggest that 2020 brought about a bit of a softer, more brand-focused effort when it came to demand generation practices.

TECHNOLOGY ON HOLD IN 2020

Regarding the technologies that demand generation marketers use for content marketing, in many ways it seems that 2020 has been a year of "let's keep what we got." Once again, social media publishing/analytics, web analytics, email marketing software, customer relationship management (CRM) software, and content management systems (CMS) topped the list. The use of social media publishing/analytics and web analytics both increased by eight percentage points, but both have been the top two since 2018. The most notable increase was for email marketing software, which jumped to 83% from 72% in 2019.

Technologies Organizations Use to Aid Content Marketing Efforts to Create Leads and Nurture Potential Customers

	2020	2019	2018
Social media publishing/analytics	**87%**	**79%**	**68%**
Analytics (e.g., web analytics, dashboards)	**86%**	**78%**	**82%**
Email marketing software	**83%**	**72%**	**65%**
Customer relationship management (CRM) software	**63%**	**61%**	**57%**
Content management system (CMS)	**57%**	**61%**	**60%**
Marketing automation system (MAS)	**38%**	**41%**	**48%**
Content optimization	**35%**	**36%**	**22%**
Account-based management	**28%**	**30%**	**N/A**
Content performance/recommendation analytics	**27%**	**23%**	**N/A**
Content distribution platform	**23%**	**33%**	**N/A**
Other	**5%**	**11%**	**N/A**

Base: All for-profit respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers. Aided list; multiple responses permitted.
Source: 2020 Content Marketing for Demand Generation Survey, Content Marketing Institute

Interestingly, this was supported in a follow-up question. We asked demand gen marketers which, if any, of the technologies they use (as shown on the aided list in the chart) did their organization reevaluate due to the shift of remote work among employees. Slightly more than half (52%) said none of the above, and 15% were unsure. Of the remaining 33% of respondents, the top two technologies reevaluated were social media publishing/analytics (16%) and web analytics/dashboards (13%).

IN A DIFFICULT YEAR, SUCCESS HOLDS STEADY

As we had the previous two years, we asked respondents about their organization's overall success with using content marketing for demand generation. And, perhaps a bit surprisingly, we found that slightly more marketers are feeling successful: 26% rated their organization as extremely or very successful, compared with 22% in 2019 and 21% in 2018. While certainly not a big jump, it is notable that in this very difficult year, the number didn't go markedly down.

76% say their organization views content marketing as extremely or very important to its demand generation efforts.

The same held true for how organizations view the importance of content as part of a demand generation program. In 2019, 77% said that the organization saw it as extremely or very important. And, in 2020, almost an exact percentage (76%) said the same.

Success of Organization's Current Overall Content Marketing Approach for Demand Generation

	2020	2019	2018
Extremely successful	2%	5%	3%
Very successful	24%	17%	18%
Moderately successful	55%	58%	58%
Minimally successful	18%	16%	15%
Not at all successful	1%	4%	6%

Base: All respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers.
Source: 2020 Content Marketing for Demand Generation Survey, Content Marketing Institute

How does your organization view the importance of content as part of its demand generation efforts?

	2020	2019
Extremely important	33%	36%
Very important	43%	41%
Moderately important	21%	15%
Minimally important	4%	6%
Not at all important	0%	2%

Note: This question was new on the 2019 survey.
Base: All respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers.
Source: 2020 Content Marketing for Demand Generation Survey, Content Marketing Institute

One of the reasons for this feeling of success may have to do with how much content is being created. It was interesting to see that 41% of those surveyed felt their organization had enough content to meet its current demand generation goals – up from 33% in 2019.

Do you feel your organization has enough content to meet its current demand generation goals?

	2020	2019
Yes, enough	41%	33%
Yes, too much	5%	4%
No, not enough	54%	63%

Note: This question was new on the 2019 survey.
Base: All respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers. Source: 2020 Content Marketing for Demand Generation Survey, Content Marketing Institute

And, the good news is that with that quantity increase, perceived quality has not suffered. When we asked these marketers how they would rate the overall quality of the content the organization has to meet its demand generation goals, 84% said it was excellent, very good, or good – three points higher than in 2019 (81%).

How would you rate the overall quality of the content your organization has available to meet its current demand generation goals?

	2020	2019
Excellent	**10%**	**11%**
Very good	**32%**	**34%**
Good	**42%**	**36%**
Fair	**14%**	**17%**
Poor	**2%**	**2%**

Note: This question was new on the 2019 survey.
Base: All respondents whose organizations use content marketing to generate demand from buyers. Source: 2020 Content Marketing for Demand Generation Survey, Content Marketing Institute

CONCLUSION

THE RACE BEGINS – AGAIN!

We know the track, we know where the pitstops need to be, and we know who the other racers are. The only thing that's changed is that we have a lost year in between.

Businesses that will be successful in 2021 are working hard to create and connect content-driven experiences that are focused on what prospective customers care about based on passions, questions, needs, and wants. They will fuel this organizational capability by approaching their digital experience infrastructure to create much more measurable scale.

As we said last year, the creation of high-quality content is inherently more expensive, takes longer, and requires a different skill set than traditional advertising or other demand generation techniques. If content marketing is to be a meaningful – and growing – part of any company's demand generation operation, the company must invest in it the same as they would any other vital business strategy.

We know this.

So, what's different?

We're already late. The business case has been made. The C-suite no longer has to be convinced that this "pivot" to content marketing is a good idea. It's up to marketers now to make it work effectively and efficiently.

Maybe, in hindsight, we'll see 2020 as a bit of a blessing in disguise. Perhaps we'll see it as a time when all the "smoke" and "hype" came off of content marketing and we really started to see it work. Now, all we have to do is evolve to be the best in the world at it.

No small task. But, it's time. The race is on.

About Content Marketing Institute

Content Marketing Institute is the leading global content marketing education and training organization, teaching enterprise brands how to attract and retain customers through compelling, multichannel storytelling. CMI's Content Marketing World event, the largest content marketing-focused event, is held every fall in Cleveland, Ohio, and ContentTECH Summit event is held every spring in San Diego, California. CMI publishes Chief Content Officer for executives and provides strategic consulting and content marketing research for some of the best-known brands in the world. Content Marketing Institute is organized by Informa Connect. Learn more at ContentMarketinginstitute.com

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Informa Connect is a specialist in content-driven events and digital communities that allow professionals to meet, connect, learn, and share knowledge. We operate major branded events in Marketing, Global Finance, Life Sciences and Pharma, Construction & Real Estate, and in a number of other specialist markets and connect communities online year-round.

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