

SENIOR MARKETER EDITION

The Content Playbook for 2026 / 2027

Top-of-funnel content that creates revenue, not just reach. Built for B2B and high-consideration brands navigating a buyer-led, AI-shaped, video-first world.

95%

of B2B buyers are not in-market at any given moment

Edelman

67%

of B2B buyers now prefer a rep-free experience

Gartner

95%

of hidden decision-makers say strong thought leadership makes them more receptive

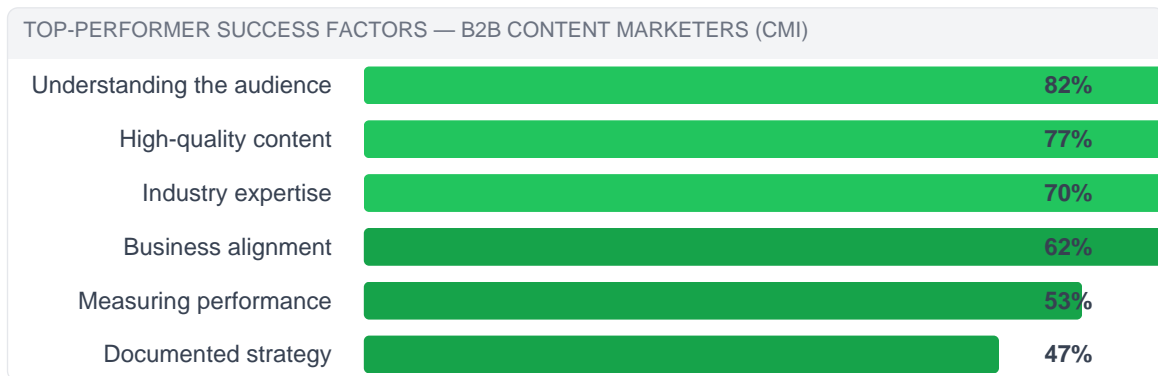
Edelman/LinkedIn

Win minds before buyers raise hands

The big shift is this: TOFU is no longer mainly about "awareness." It is about **shaping buyer preference before a buyer is ready to talk to sales**. The teams that win in 2026/2027 will look less like blog factories and more like a hybrid of newsroom, studio, and measurement lab.

"The most important content moment is not when a buyer reaches out. It is the six months before they do."

CMI's top performers attribute their success to a clear set of factors:



The five strategic rules

01 Build memory before demand capture — Create recall, trust, and internal advocacy among buyers who are not ready to convert yet.

02 Treat video podcasting as the hub — Long-form creates conviction. Short-form creates discovery. Written assets create retrieval.

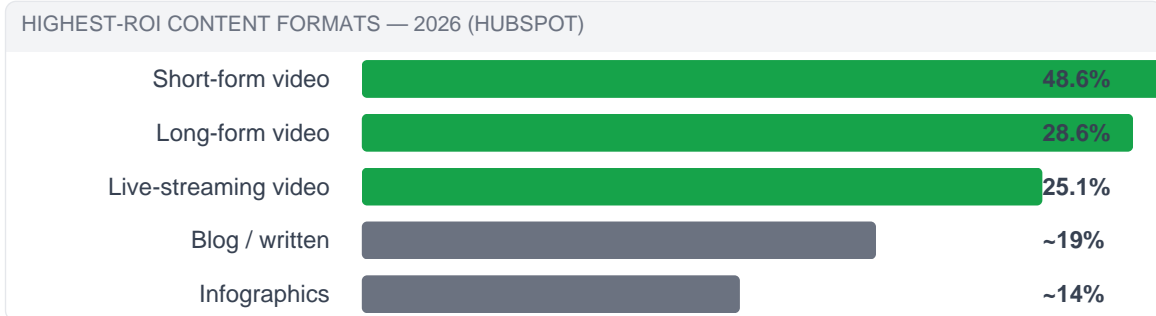
03 Optimise for forwardability — The most valuable clip is the one pasted into Slack, WhatsApp, or a buying-committee deck.

04 Use hosts as trust infrastructure — In 2026/2027, the host is the trust interface between brand and buyer.

05 Measure influence, not just last-click — Perfect attribution is fantasy. Decision-grade attribution is enough.

Video is no longer a supporting asset

HubSpot's 2026 data is unambiguous: the three highest-ROI content formats are all video-based. The flagship content asset for 2026/2027 should be a **video podcast or episodic show**.



The four-layer content system

One flagship episode should systematically generate content across all four layers.

Flagship Episode (35-75 min)

The anchor asset — full depth, full conviction, full story

Mid-form Segments (5-15 min)

Conversion & nurture — 5-30 min videos average a 10% conversion rate (Wistia)

Short-form Clips (15-90 sec)

Discovery & dark-social forwarding — Under-1-min videos average 50% engagement

Written Companion Assets

Search, AI retrieval & internal shareability

OPERATING RULE

One episode → One full show + 3-5 mid-form cuts + 8-20 short clips + 1 article/memo + 1 email + 1 sales-forwardable asset

03 — PARASOCIAL TRUST

Design for parasocial connection deliberately

Parasocial trust is not fluff. It is a demand-creation mechanism.



PRINCIPLE	WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE	WHY IT MATTERS
Recurring hosts	One or two consistent hosts, not a parade of interchangeable spokespeople	Trust compounds with familiarity
Host has a real job	Translate complexity, frame stakes, ask the question the buyer is asking	Competence + relatability = credibility
Human texture	Let the host show working, uncertainty, judgment, lived experience	Over-scripted brand content kills trust
Recognisable rituals	Recurring segments, repeated opening questions	Repetition makes the show easy to remember
Protect the relationship	No forced sponsor logic, no bait-and-switch hooks	Parasocial trust compounds slowly and collapses quickly

04 — REVENUE-GRADE TOFU

Top-of-funnel that actually moves revenue

High-performing TOFU is not generic educational content. It is content that helps the buyer group see the problem, explain the stakes internally, and justify a direction.



HIDDEN BUYER PRIORITIES AT FINAL VENDOR SELECTION (EDELMAN/LINKEDIN 2025)



The TOFU format portfolio

Category Reframes — Content that explains why the old mental model is broken. Creates "why change."

Buyer-Committee Translation — Episodes that explain what finance, security, ops will care about. Arms champions.

Diagnostic Teardowns — Break down why launches fail, why attribution breaks. Diagnose before prescribe.

Benchmarks & Research — Original data gives buyers language and charts they can reuse internally.

Contrarian Debates — Two smart people disagree respectfully. Generates saves, forwards, discussion.

Buyer Guides — "How leaders should evaluate X in 2026." Feels like TOFU, secretly a sales asset.

THE TOFU CONTENT FORMULA

Teach + Diagnose + Reframe + Equip + Invite

If the content doesn't give the buyer something they can reuse internally, it's probably not revenue-grade TOFU yet.

What dark social is and why it matters

Dark social is what happens when your content moves through private spaces: WhatsApp, Slack, Teams, DMs, text messages, forwarded emails, copied links, and internal docs.

KEY INSIGHT

In a SparkToro experiment, **100% of visits from TikTok, Slack, Discord, and WhatsApp were marked as "direct" in Google Analytics.** Your analytics platform is structurally undercounting content-driven traffic.

ATTRIBUTION LOSS BY CHANNEL — % APPEARING AS "DIRECT" IN GA (SPARKTORO)



Six ways to make dark social measurable

TACTIC	IMPLEMENTATION	WHAT IT TELLS YOU
UTM taxonomy	Episode-, guest-, and host-specific URLs with pre-tagged share buttons	Where private shares originate
Deep landing pages	Link to specific episode pages, not homepage	Spikes in direct = dark-social movement
Self-reported attribution	"Where did you first hear about us?" with podcast/colleague options	What analytics can't see
Sales involvement	"How did this account hear about us?" as required CRM field	Content touches invisible to marketing
Dark-social proxies	Branded search lift, copy-link click volume, clip-to-site rate	Directional signal of private sharing
Cohort & lift analysis	Exposed vs. unexposed: compare meeting rate, win rate, cycle length	TOFU's financial legibility



"Deterministic where possible. Probabilistic where necessary. Commercial at the end."

The four-layer measurement scorecard

Your scorecard should move from attention quality all the way to revenue impact.

Layer 1 — Attention Quality

Watch time & average % viewed · Consumption hours · Completion rate · Returning viewers · Live watch behaviour

Layer 2 — Relationship Depth

Follower/subscriber growth · Repeat viewers · Newsletter opt-ins · Comments, saves, participation · Episode-to-episode retention

Layer 3 — Dark-Funnel Movement

Direct deep-link ratio · Branded search lift · Self-reported mentions · Episode-assist rate in CRM · Copy-link click volume

Layer 4 — Revenue Impact

Opportunity creation (influenced) · Exposed-account win rate lift · Sales-cycle compression · ACV delta: exposed vs. unexposed · Influenced pipeline per pillar

Advanced KPI stack

KPI	SCORECARD LAYER	WHY IT MATTERS
Return viewer rate	Attention + Relationship	Proxy for audience loyalty
Follower growth	Relationship	Followers consume 4x more episodes
Direct deep-link ratio	Dark Funnel	Reveals private sharing behaviour
Self-reported source %	Dark Funnel	Captures invisible influence
Episode mention rate	Dark Funnel + Revenue	Links content to accounts
Meeting-rate lift	Revenue	Shows content improves sales access
Win-rate lift	Revenue	Most commercially credible TOFU metric
Pipeline per pillar	Revenue	Informs content investment allocation

The studio with revenue ops attached

Over 40% of companies create at least one video per week, almost 60% are increasing video budgets, and 71% handle video production in-house. CMI says 45% of B2B marketers still lack a scalable model. **That gap is your opportunity.**

Minimum viable team

ROLE	CORE RESPONSIBILITY	KEY OUTPUT
Editorial Lead	Show thesis, editorial calendar, guest selection	Narrative coherence
Host or Host Pair	Creates intimacy, credibility, emotional recall	Trust interface
Producer-Editor	Records, edits, clips — runs production system	All derivative formats
Distribution Lead	Publication, scheduling, platform optimisation	Multi-platform reach
Designer / Motion	Thumbnails, captions, graphics, visual identity	Scroll-stopping assets
Marketing Ops	UTM architecture, attribution, scorecard, CRM	Pipeline reporting
Sales Liaison	Trains reps on clip usage, CRM mentions	Content in sales convos

AI: right use cases vs. wrong use cases

✓ **Right:** Transcript cleanup, title variants, clip selection, metadata, captions, translation, repurposing drafts, research clustering

✗ **Wrong:** Outsourcing your POV, manufacturing originality, replacing host voice, publishing unreviewed AI copy as thought leadership

CONTEXT

HubSpot 2026: 80% of marketers use AI for content creation. CMI: only 4% have high trust in AI output, 43% struggle to differentiate content. **Use AI to remove toil — not to manufacture your point of view.**

The 90-day rollout

Days 1-30: Foundation

Define ICP, buying jobs, show thesis, host roles. Build measurement framework. Lock UTM taxonomy before publishing.

Days 31-60: Production

Record 4-6 episodes before launch. Build template systems for all formats. Train sales on clip usage.

Days 61-90: Launch

Launch in batches. Watch for direct traffic, branded search, self-reported mentions. Double down on themes that get forwarded privately.

Content that drives sales looks like trust media.

Strong point of view. Strong host. Strong long-form core. Aggressive short-form distribution. Low-friction private sharing. Measurement built for imperfect visibility.

Content Marketing Playbook 2026/2027 — Sources: Edelman, Gartner, HubSpot, CMI, Wistia, Spotify, YouTube, SparkToro, Edison Research, LinkedIn