



**DEMAND**  **GEN**<sup>®</sup>  
REPORT

# WHAT'S WORKING IN PAID/EARNED MEDIA

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The Significance Of Social Media, Consumer-Generated  
Content & Convergence

# INTRODUCTION

B2B marketers are focusing on a way to utilize both earned and paid media to develop a well-rounded marketing strategy. The goal of earned media is to gain third-party validation from media outlets to ultimately help increase brand awareness and enhance credibility while paid media comes with a price tag. Due to ever-shifting consumer demands, [marketing strategies for B2B companies](#) are constantly evolving.

According to [Gartner](#), 72% of the marketing budget is now going to purely digital channels including owned, paid and earned digital media. These are the five B2B marketing trends that will drive 2022:

- Marketing budget spending is shifting;
- CMO priorities are changing;
- Adoption of B2B marketing channels is growing;
- Metrics and analysis are reshaping; and
- Content marketing is advancing.

“Once you figure out who you’re trying to reach, it becomes a little bit easier,” said [Tim Clark](#), Head of Brand Journalism at [SAP](#). “Remember: You can’t be everything to everyone because that means you’re nothing to no one. You need to home in on what you want to say and who you want to reach. It’s not enough to just go viral for the sake of going viral; you really must look at the results and tie it back to the business in some way.”

In this special report, we will dive deeper into new benchmark research and provide insights and perspectives on emerging trends in paid and earned media. The report will spotlight data and analysis of:

- Shifts in spending patterns between paid and earned media;
- The growing imperative for digital channels;
- The top trends shaping the future of paid and earned media; and
- Why change is the only constant in B2B marketing.



## SOCIAL MEDIA CONTINUES TO REVOLUTIONIZE THE MARKETING INDUSTRY

One of the biggest trends marketers are seeing when it comes to paid and earned media is the growing use of social media. According to Sprout Social, **74% of consumers rely on social media to make their buying decisions**. Paid media is content you pay to place in front of an audience as an ad or sponsorship, while earned is free. Both methods are impactful because individuals respond best to multi-platform marketing campaigns.

“Social media has been a great ally to paid media and can be used as an accelerant to create even better results,” said Clark. “For example, we publish a lot of different stories for **Forbes** every single day on different forums like Twitter and LinkedIn. It helps generate awareness for that content and draws people back to that platform. Social media only enhances earned and paid media efforts and it’s critical in getting a brand’s word out there.”

**The Harris Poll, on behalf of Sprout Social**, surveyed more than 1,000 U.S. consumers and 250 business executives to better understand how people use social media, the importance of social media marketing and how its influence will change in the coming years. Some findings include:

- 91% of executives anticipate their company’s social media marketing budget will increase over the next three years and the majority expect it will increase by more than 50%;
- 85% of executives report that social data will be a primary source of business intelligence for their company moving forward; and
- 78% of consumers are more willing to buy from a brand and 77% will choose a brand over a competitor after a positive experience with a brand on social media.

In this digital age, human attention spans have become shorter, so people aren't spending an abundance of time on just one piece of content. However, if an individual keeps seeing the same content across multiple platforms, it's more likely to pique their interest and ultimately create more traction.

"Social media platforms have amplified both paid and earned media," said Putney Cloos, CMO at [Cision](#). "It's one of the primary ways in which millions of voices can earn immediate media well beyond a journalist's potential. Social media has been an enormous tool in terms of listening and understanding how your story is being told and how your stakeholders feel about your reputation. It can and should be used as an opportunity to optimize and amplify your story."

Social media has created an outlet for marketers to reach audiences on a grand scale. YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and other platforms provide an open line of communication between the buyer and the seller. There's a reason why companies devote an entire department to the social media side of marketing because that's where most paid and earned media shines.

## **Case In Point:**

[Identiv](#) is a global leader in seamless authentication and security solutions. In 2021, the company launched the "Not Tom Cruise: Mission Possible" campaign, which featured nine YouTube episodes starring the most recognizable and decorated Tom Cruise impersonator who acted as a spokesperson for the company's video management system product, Velocity Vision. The videos were syndicated on Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook.

Since launch in June, the campaign generated:

- 27,827 views on YouTube, 617.5 hours of watch time, 109 subscribers and 7.3K impressions;
- 10,360 impressions and 44.17 reach per post across Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn;
- 183K accounts reached and 167 accounts engaged on Instagram; followers up +13.1% from 2020 313 unique email clicks; and
- \$2,700,410 in revenue share.

# THE RISE OF EARNED & PAID CONVERGENCE

To carry out a well-rounded marketing strategy, it's important to recognize that paid and earned media were dealt with separately... until now. The lines have become more blurred and marketers are beginning to connect the dots between the two approaches.

The integration of earned and paid can open the door to new sales opportunities that wouldn't be accessible otherwise. A couple of decades ago, companies were printing and physically mailing press releases, often wasting their money and never hearing back from journalists. Now, advances in tech and data have allowed for an effective marketing mix where earned is no longer a black hole.

"The biggest trend that we see here at Cision is the convergence of paid and earned media and the impact that has on the way brands tell their stories," said Cloos. "There is a push and pull effect there because the media landscape has changed so much over the years that the very definition of earned media has changed. It's not just publications anymore, there is a whole gamut of voices, whether it's from journalists or influencers or the millions of human voices out there that speak about a brand, a story or an event. One force is the media landscape *changing the definition* of earned media and the impact that has on corporate communicators and brand storytellers."

According to Cision's [2022 Global State of the Media Report](#), "18% of journalists say their relationships with PR professionals have gotten more valuable in the last year." As the marketing landscape changes rapidly, it's crucial to change with it.

"I'm seeing a combination of both media strategies that you have to really mix into," said [Briana Holmes](#), Marketing and Communications Manager at [NextUp](#). "The more you're leveraging your own earned and paid media, the more you're going to have to really think about the comprehensive marketing strategy behind it. Seventy-five percent of budgets are coming to digital, but TikToks, Reels, posts, stories, emails, Google ads, Facebook ads, Twitter ads and LinkedIn posts have to be strategic and look effortless."



## Case In Point:

**AutomotiveMastermind** (aM) wanted to shift its content strategy to support dealers faced with inventory constraints. The company created 58 content assets, including blog posts, E-books, white papers, live webinars, earned media opportunities and video podcasts, with product messaging focused on equipping dealers with the tools needed to adapt to evolving inventory challenges. AM also distributed a press release announcing how its product expansions were helping dealers drive sales and acquire inventory from untapped sources amid ongoing inventory shortages.

From January through December 2021, the inventory content stream generated:

- 9,213 pageviews and 6,892 sessions;
- 465 form submissions, with a 13% conversion rate on gated assets;
- 2.18 million search impressions and 138,000 clicks from search; and
- 165 placements while targeted pitching resulted in seven media placements in aM's target dealership/tech media outlets.



# CONSUMER-GENERATED MEDIA IS BULLDOZING INFLUENCER CONTENT

Whether customers realize it or not, consumer-generated media is everywhere. Any written, audio or video content made available by consumers to online platforms is consumer-generated media. Now, content created from your customers is toppling over influencer-generated content, with [research](#) showing:

- 92% of consumers turn to people they know for referrals above any other source;
- 90% of consumers say authenticity is important when deciding which brands they like; and
- 84% of consumers say they trust peer recommendations above all other sources of advertising.

“The biggest thing I’m seeing as it pertains to paid media is consumer-generated media,” said Holmes. “Nobody wants to post for brands anymore. However, individuals who are getting free products and already believe in these brands are more than happy to post on their personal pages and make it look a little more like organic content.”

Consumer-generated content has proven to be highly effective for expanding a company’s reach, however, some organizations have yet to harness this content correctly or even at all. Content generated by customers or employees is seen as more authentic to society and is even more cost-efficient.

“Consumers get to see the brands that they like with normal people and not just celebrity influencers, which is a trend that’s declining,” added Holmes. “People are tired of only seeing celebrities be influencers. *People want to see their reflection.* They want to feel like they can relate to the people being promoted and that they’re a part of something. How do we do that? The consumer must generate that. The consumer must provide the photos and the videos and the TikTok’s because that’s what’s going to help sell it.”

## Case In Point:

**Digital Pi**, a Merkle company, is a leading full-service B2B digital marketing agency focused on marketing automation. In 2021, the company launched its PiPerformers program, which recognizes customer advocates who drive best-practice marketing and thought leadership to inspire change within their organization. Twenty-six PiPerformers were handpicked by Digital Pi colleagues for their extraordinary work in embracing the advocacy program. These influencers showcased their thought leadership to help others succeed in their respective roles.

Since the launch of PiPerformers, Digital Pi saw:

- 26 passionate supporters advocate the brand inside and outside their organizations;
- 51% of 2021 revenue was generated from PiPerformer companies;
- At least 35%+ of 2021 revenue was influenced by advocates, including several PiPerformers;
- The average deal size of PiPerformer companies was 2.3X more than other companies; and
- 66% of current customer pipeline came from PiPerformer companies.

“People are tired of only seeing celebrities be influencers; people want to see their reflection.”

**BRIANA HOLMES, NEXTUP**





# PAID OR EARNED: WHICH DRIVES MORE ROI?

The big question when it comes to paid and earned media is which outlet delivers more ROI? Unfortunately, the answer to this question is there is no answer. The outcome all depends on the company and can fluctuate throughout marketing landscapes.

Yet, owned media takes the top position in terms of the most consistent ROI but businesses will find the most success when they leverage them all together. The top five areas B2B marketers invested in the most in 2021, according to a [CMI report](#), were content creation (70%), website enhancements (66%), events (48%), organic/nonpaid content (46%) and social media (39%). Paid content distribution came in at 38% while earned media landed in at 29%.

“True earned media is going to come from those mentions, shares, reposts and reviews from your everyday people,” said Holmes. “I primarily try to run ads on stuff with the content we already have. Since it’s all organic, it’s not something that I’m going in and having to film content for and create an advertisement for. This method is simpler... and free.”

A popular form of paid media that companies are utilizing is native advertising, which gives brands the opportunity to get their marketing messages out there in an authentic way. Native advertising spend in the U.S. jumped 37% in 2021, and is expected to reach \$98.59 billion in 2023, according to [eMarketer](#).

“At SAP, we have a long-standing partnership with *Forbes* where we have full access to publish whatever we want, whenever we want on their platform and it’s branded as such,” said Clark. “The reader knows that this is a paid-for endeavor so there is no confusion that this information is coming from an advertiser. The editorial strategy is to take on the form and function of *Forbes* so that the content looks like any other *Forbes* story that people would find interesting, and therefore, would click on.

“The great thing about that is you build up a lot of trust and at this point, we’ve been doing it for so long that we have a huge following on *Forbes*. Readers don’t really make the connection anymore, nor do they care that the content is coming from an advertiser because they know the content is good.”

## Case In Point:

**Adobe** partnered with Agent3 to create a virtual book club called “The Power of Customer Experience” by Martin Newman. A reading experience for Adobe’s executive audience was created that would build momentum toward a live book club event and copies were sent to attendees prior to this live event. Podcasts, videos and interactive sheets created an opportunity for the target audience to engage with that content and new podcasts, blogs and pre-existing content shared through content syndication created further engagement and started new conversations.

The book club generated:

- A total of 161 MQL leads (surpassing its goal of 100);
- 596 visits to the events page;
- 176 engaged readers;
- 76 peak reader connections with a live event reach of 58,094;
- 556 total engagements via LinkedIn and 273 conversations via LinkedIn InMail;
- 722 engaged readers; and
- 87 event registrations.

“True earned media is going to come from those mentions, shares, reposts and reviews from your everyday people.”

**BRIANA HOLMES, NEXTUP**



## CONCLUSION

A healthy mix of paid and earned media is necessary when it comes to creating a successful marketing strategy. Adjusting an entire company doesn't require a complete reorganization because compelling content already exists within your business. The key is to change the focus on what's important right now.

The consumer is the most important piece of the puzzle, and they are the ones on the receiving end of the content. Unfortunately, marketers haven't adapted to technological changes and buyer independence and instead, they've rushed to adopt the latest tech trends without a process for creating, distributing, optimizing and measuring content geared toward buyers.

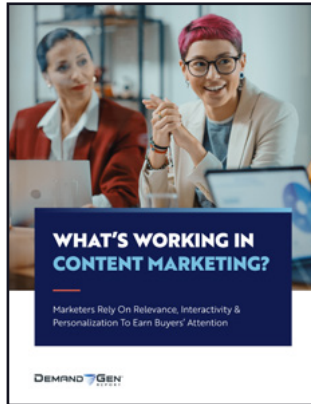
In fact, Upland reported **91% of B2B marketers** are crafting content to fill up channels – which is probably why 60% to 70% of B2B content goes unused. Buyers are then expected to navigate a disorganized journey that is saturated with repetitive, irrelevant content. Paid and earned media should be utilized to benefit the brand as a whole and not hurt it.

"Take your time, write it out, plot it out and execute," said NextUp's Holmes. "I'm a firm believer that to create the perfect marketing strategy you can't just think about it as yourself. You must think about it like every other person. Even the people who aren't your target audience because when you're putting something out there in the universe, it's something that is going to be there forever."

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*Demand Gen Report* is a targeted online publication that uncovers the strategies and solutions that help companies better align their sales and marketing organizations, and ultimately, drive growth. A key component of the publication's editorial coverage focuses on the sales and marketing automation tools that enable companies to better measure and manage their multichannel demand generation efforts.

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