The State of Contributed Content

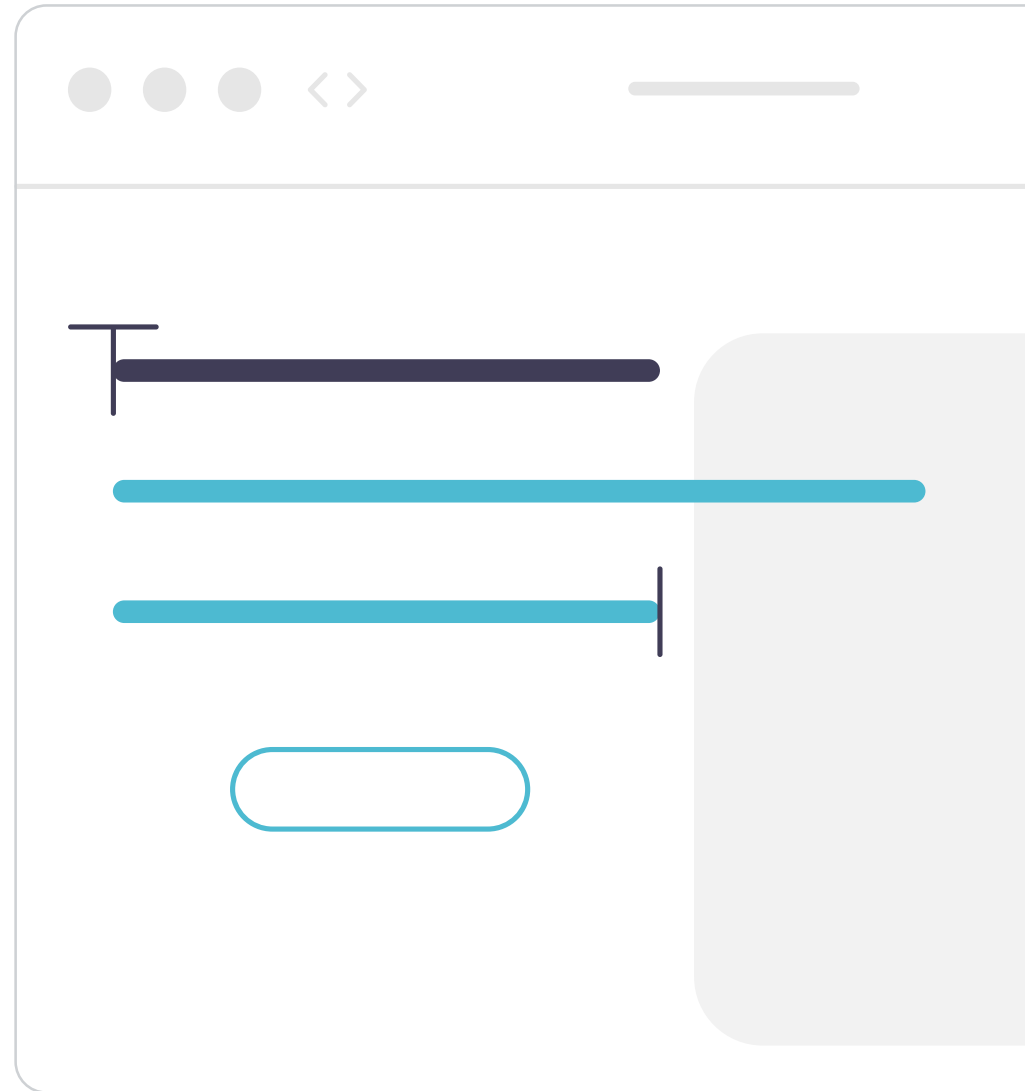## 2023

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Intro

The state of contributed content is ever-changing. As technology continues to evolve, so, too, does content marketing.

One such change is the rise of artificial intelligence. In the content marketing space, marketers are dipping their toes in the AI waters and exploring what it could look like to partner with AI to create the content their audiences crave more efficiently.

However, publications are continuing to look for *expert* content to share with their readers, and AI-generated content simply doesn't cut it. Unique expertise fueled by firsthand experiences and stories is a must.

This is actually great news for industry experts looking to share their insights with their audiences.

Nearly 98% of publication editors are planning to publish as much guest-contributed content as last year or more in 2023.
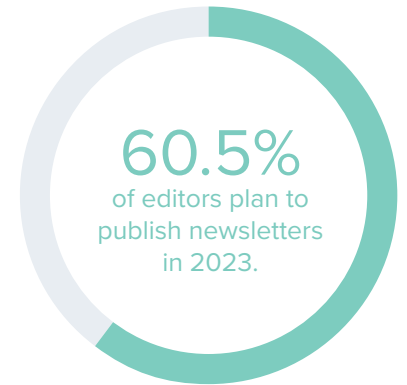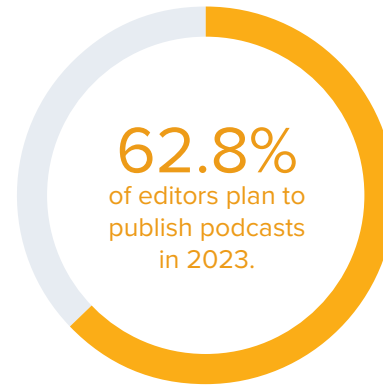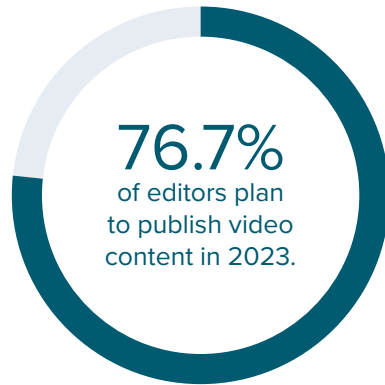
This means true experts have more opportunities than ever to reach their audiences with thoughtful, relevant, engaging content and work toward their thought leadership, lead generation, SEO, and sales-enablement content-marketing goals.

But achieving those goals requires insights into what's working and what might need our attention in the future. That's why the Influence & Co. team has created its "The State of Contributed Content 2023" report.

Driven by survey responses from 46 online publication editors across industries and an analysis of more than 113,000 pieces of content published in 2022, this report provides a snapshot of the current state of contributed content. It aims to offer insights that content creators, marketers, and publishers can use to better serve their audiences and achieve their goals.

Read on for the full findings from our research.

Key Findings

97.5% of editors plan to publish the same amount or more guest content in 2023.

76.7% of editors plan to publish video content in 2023.

62.8% of editors plan to publish podcasts in 2023.

60.5% of editors plan to publish newsletters in 2023.

The average **word count** of the most-shared content in 2022 was

792

The average **headline word count** of the most-shared articles in 2022 was

10.5

Part 1:
Editor Survey

If you're looking to get your brand and your content in front of a targeted audience of engaged readers, you've probably considered adding earned media to your strategy.

In this report, we'll focus on **guest posts**, which are pieces of content that you contribute to third-party publications. This content positions the author as an expert by placing their original ideas in publications that validate their work and help them reach their audience.

Online publications are a natural place to reach your audience members and engage them with content. And when properly integrated into your content-marketing strategy, guest posting can help you build industry leadership, drive qualified traffic to your site, and contribute to a funnel of opportunity.

But a successful earned-media strategy requires an understanding of which publications your audience reads, what kind of content editors crave, and how to craft content that engages your audience *and* meets editors' guidelines.

To help, we surveyed publication editors from a variety of industries. Read on to learn more about what they said.

Contributed Content Opportunities in 2023

The success of your earned-media strategy relies on two critical factors: your ability to provide amazing content and publications' willingness to accept content from expert guest contributors like you.

Thankfully, editors report that they plan to accept and publish a healthy number of guest posts in 2023.

A whopping **97.5% of editors** say they're planning to publish the same amount of guest content or more in 2023. This is up from 93.3% in our 2021 report. When asked about the exact quantity, here's what the publication editors had to say:

How Many Guest Posts Editors Publish Each Week
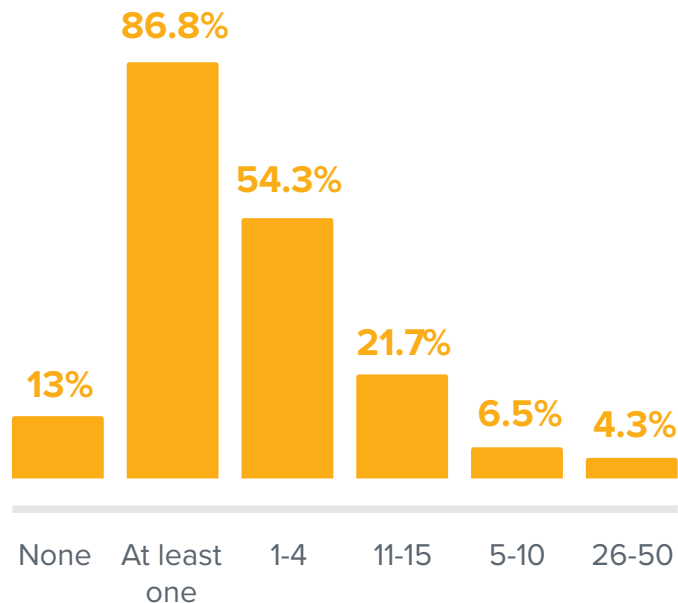
It's worth noting that "none" increased from 0% in our 2021 report to 13% this year. This increase could be an indication that **editors are being more selective** about the guest content they're choosing to publish.

> Audiences have already changed the way they find and access content, so it's time for the rest of us to catch up before it's too late.
>
> **— Ben Watts, managing editor at IQPC Digital**

The Takeaway:

There's a lot of opportunity for thought leaders to contribute their insights to online publications and position themselves and their companies as industry experts in front of their target audiences. But that content better be unique and high-quality if it's going to be accepted.

Why Media Outlets Publish Guest Posts

Every publication is different. Each has its own unique needs and goals, and each serves a specific audience. Still, there are some benefits of publishing guest content and press mentions that editors and contributors across outlets and industries agree on.

The biggest reason publication editors accept and publish guest content is to share firsthand insights, fresh perspectives, expert opinions, real-world advice, and a diverse range of voices in the content they provide their audiences.
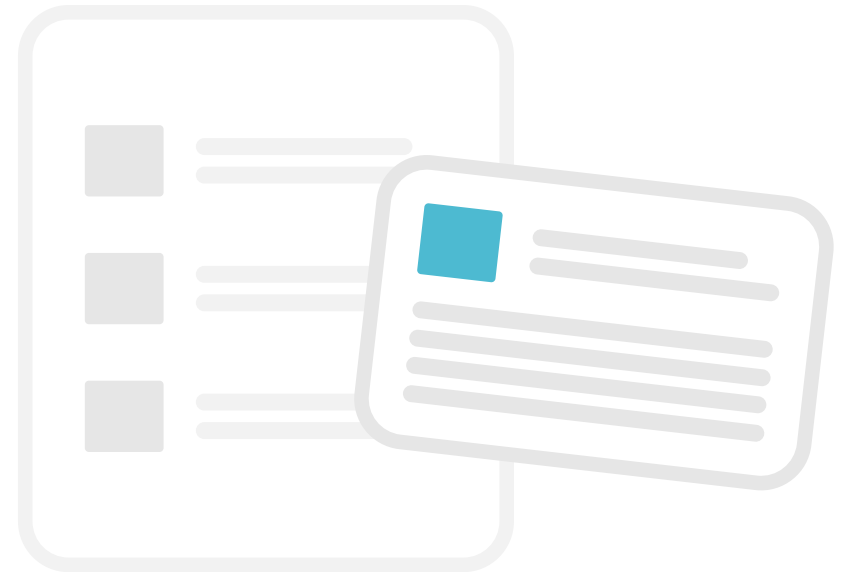
> We like to have firsthand insight from executives inside the industry we cover.
>
> **— Jennifer Runyon, content director at POWERGRID International**

> We publish guest posts to have diverse perspectives on the topics we cover, as well as to share interesting and insightful firsthand accounts of destinations and trip types we'd like to feature.
>
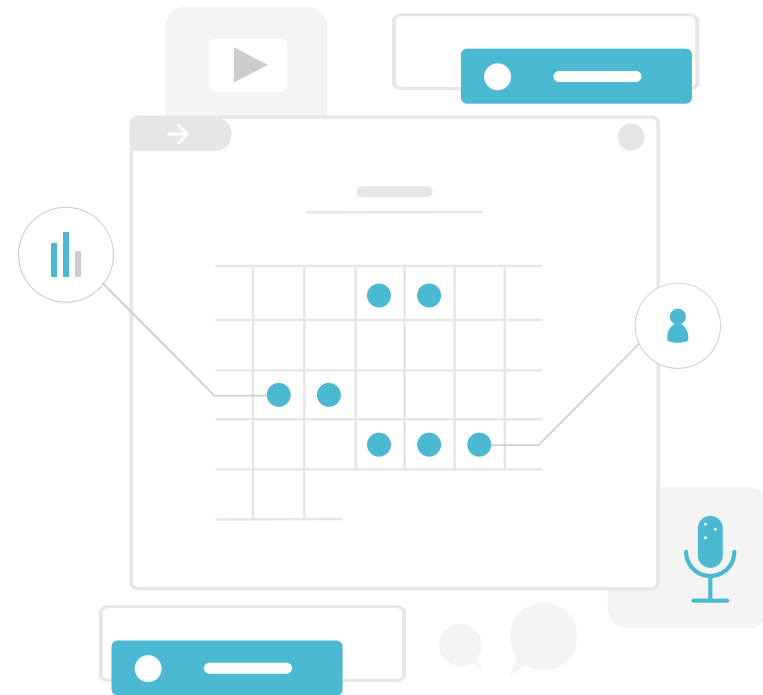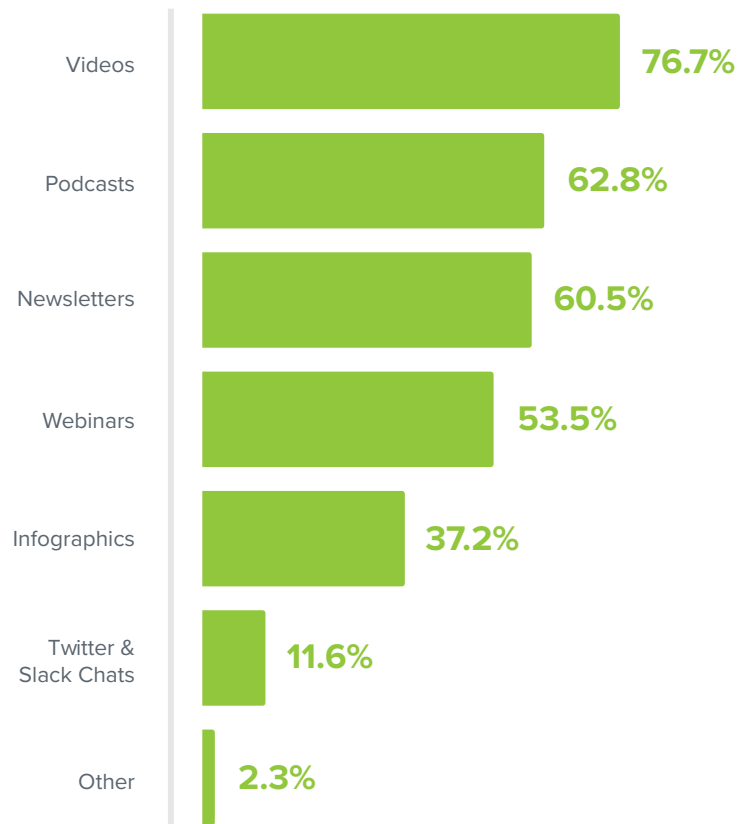> **— Sarah Stone, managing director at Frayed Passport**

> It's great having a publication where my community can share with each other to get different perspectives across the industry.
>
> **— Douglas Karr, founder of Martech Zone**

Content Types Editors Plan to Publish This Year

Written content is incredibly effective and easily scalable — but it's not the only way audiences enjoy consuming content. And because audiences consume different content types, editors are looking to meet those needs by publishing a variety of content.

When we asked what other forms of media editors plan to publish in 2023, here's what they said:

Content Type	Percentage
Videos	76.7%
Podcasts	62.8%
Newsletters	60.5%
Webinars	53.5%
Infographics	37.2%
Twitter & Slack Chats	11.6%
Other	2.3%

All of these numbers increased compared to our 2021 report. More reliance on content and virtual engagements during the pandemic likely contributed to publications looking into diversifying their content mixes.

Publication editors are looking to meet their audiences' varying needs. If you can help them do so by contributing original, relevant ideas in a variety of formats, you'll have a better chance of earning acceptance.

Why Editors Read Pitches

Just because guest content can benefit audiences, editors, and thought leaders alike, does not mean all guest content is guaranteed to be accepted and published. Even if the content you create and the insights you share are unique and valuable to a publication's audience, they might not get published if you don't nail the pitch email.

When asked what makes them want to actually read a pitch email from a guest author, publication editors said the pitch has to succinctly communicate that the author has insights to share that are relevant to the publication's audience and are not overtly promotional. It's also important for the pitch to be short and to the point and showcase a fresh or unexpected angle.

> The pitch should be in line with what we cover in our editorial calendars and be to the point.
>
> **— Marina Mayer, editor-in-chief at Food Logistics**

> Contributors should take a couple extra seconds to at least clean up the email instead of obviously using an unedited mail merge. Also, because almost all guest posts are promotional in some way, they should be clear what links they want to include and why. We know it needs to be mutually beneficial, so just being honest will at least result in a response from us. Generic 'this will be a high-quality piece tailored to your audience' messages go right into the trash. So do emails from obviously fake Gmail addresses.
>
> **— Sarah Stone, managing director at Frayed Passport**

It's worth noting that some publication editors say they'll only accept content from people they know. That's where working with a content partner can be helpful. **If you'd like to talk about what it might look like to work with a content partner to tap into our publication relationships, <u>get in touch with us today</u>!**
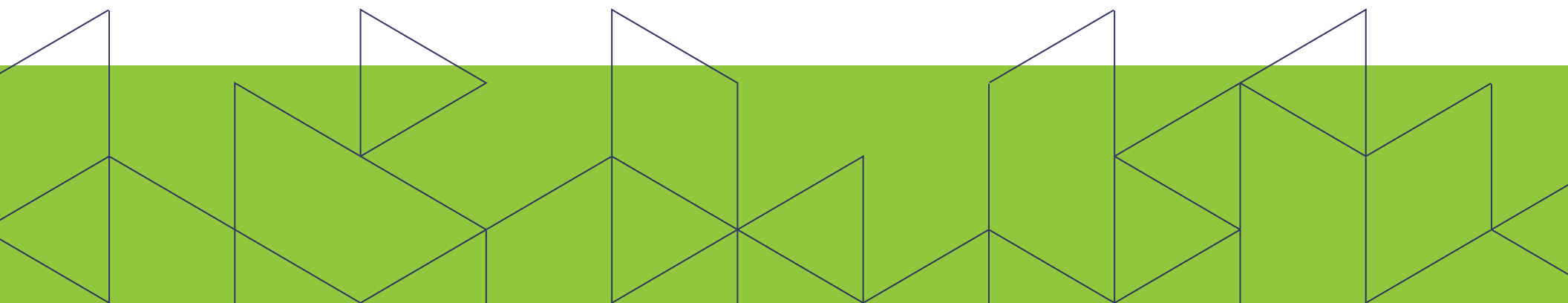
What Great Guest Content Looks Like, According to Editors

The guest-contributed content that editors love to publish shares three critical qualities:

1.

It's high-quality and non-promotional.
Successful guest posts are well-written and engaging and share new ideas and fresh perspectives with audiences — not self-serving advertisements and promotions.

2.

The topic is a fit for the publication's readership.
Every publication is unique, and editors expect guest posts to speak to their specific audiences and meet those folks' particular needs.

3.

It shares original, expert-level, real-world insights.
Editors are looking for guest posts that are chock-full of relevant stories, examples, and original insights that come directly from you, the expert, as well as research to back up your claims.

AI and Content Creation

We live in a technology-centric world — there's no denying that. Artificial intelligence has made life and work simpler in so many ways, from Netflix recommending the next series you might enjoy based on your viewing habits to chatbots answering website visitors' common questions. But what might this look like in content creation?

> As of this writing, it seems like everyone is playing with ChatGPT. Using artificial intelligence is going to quickly change the digital media and publishing industry. While we're not looking for AI to publish finished pieces, we certainly will use it for first drafts. Imagine what that does to an industry if the humans aren't careful about publishing the same exact content as their competitors.
>
> **— Gini Dietrich, founder and CEO at Spin Sucks**

Like Dietrich said, AI can be a powerful tool — to an extent. But AI should not replace human insight or your thought leaders' expertise, and it's certainly not going to be able to provide the cutting-edge, highly unique content that your audience and publications' audiences are looking for.

Even if you tap into AI for topic ideation, first drafts, or other early-stage, surface-level tasks, you will need expert commentary and highly skilled writing and editing if you're going to get your insights published in your target audience's favorite publications, provide real value to your audience, and make progress toward your content marketing goals.
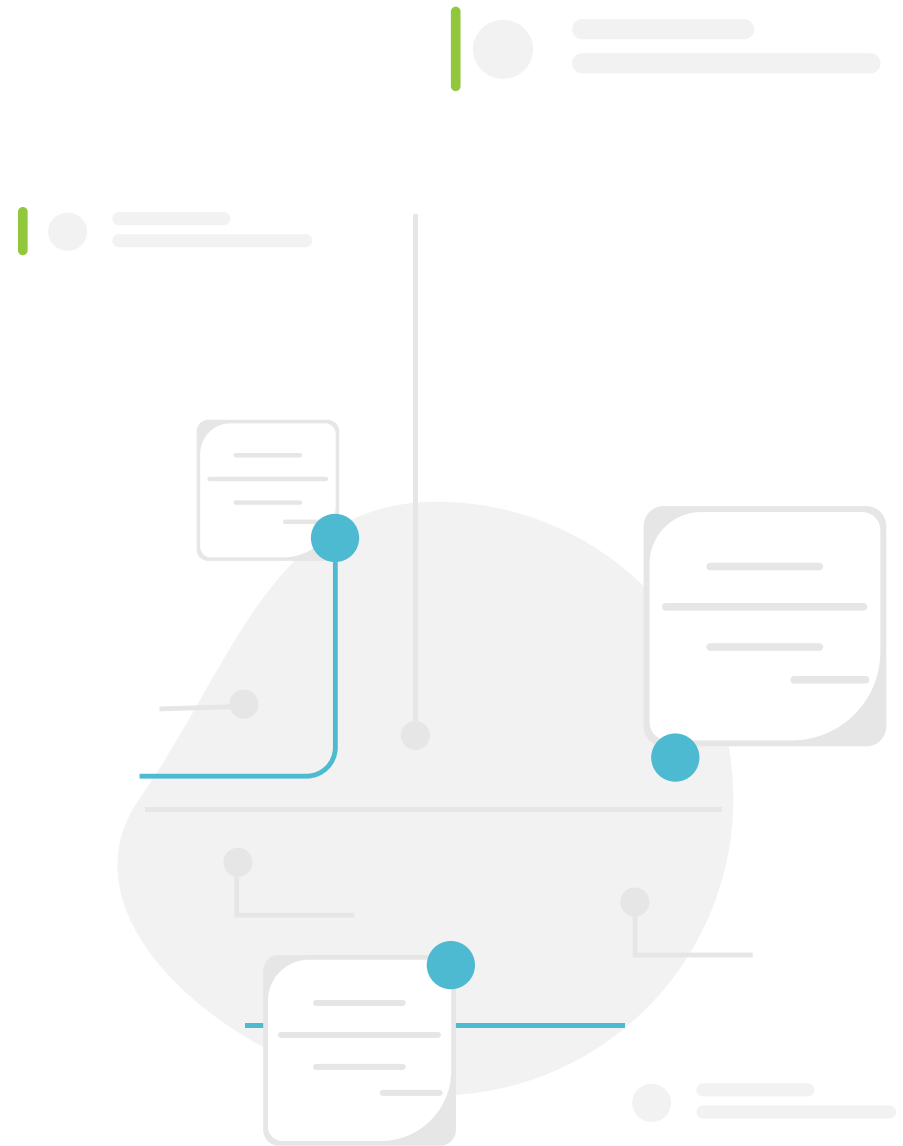
Part 2:
Published Content Analysis

Regardless of how groundbreaking your content is or how many editors accept and publish your guest posts, guest-contributed content alone usually isn't enough to accomplish a full range of business goals. A robust content strategy that drives results includes a variety of earned and owned content that's amplified in numerous ways.

This section includes an analysis of **more than 113,000 pieces of content** published last year and uncovers some of the best practices you can use to maximize the effectiveness of your content strategy.

Headline and Word Count Trends

Every content creator knows how important headlines are: Not only is the headline the first thing a reader sees, but it's also what determines whether a reader will consume your content or scroll right past it. And with so much marketing and communication taking place in a virtual or digital format, it's more important than ever that your headlines command attention.

That's a lot of pressure, but it's not impossible to craft a headline worth reading. We reviewed thousands of pieces of content, collected headline data from the most widely shared articles, and analyzed those trends to see what they had in common.

> **Among the most-shared pieces of content, the average headline word count was 10.5.**

Headlines aren't the only word-count consideration to heed when creating content, though.

> **The average word count of the most-shared content was 792.**

The Takeaway:

Readers appear to be more engaged with content that fully covers a given topic — without rambling. Audiences place value on diving into a subject and gaining a solid understanding of how or why to do something. But be warned that readers will not wade through wordy content that doesn't get to the point. If content isn't concise and easy to consume, readers might bounce to another resource that's easier to engage with.

When Content Is Published

Countless factors affect when content is published, and just as many factors (if not more) affect when, why, and how readers engage with it. You might not be able to control exactly when each piece of content in your strategy is published, but being aware of when most content is published and when audiences engage with it can help you optimize the efforts you *can* control.

Let's start with a weekly view.

In 2022, content published toward the middle of the week received more social shares. However, Monday and Friday still had high numbers, so if you need to publish on these days, you should still see decent engagement. However, avoid publishing on weekends if you can.

Social Shares by Day

Day	Shares
Mon.	1,744
Tues.	1,989
Wed.	1,992
Thurs.	1,988
Fri.	1,805
Sat.	845
Sun.	963
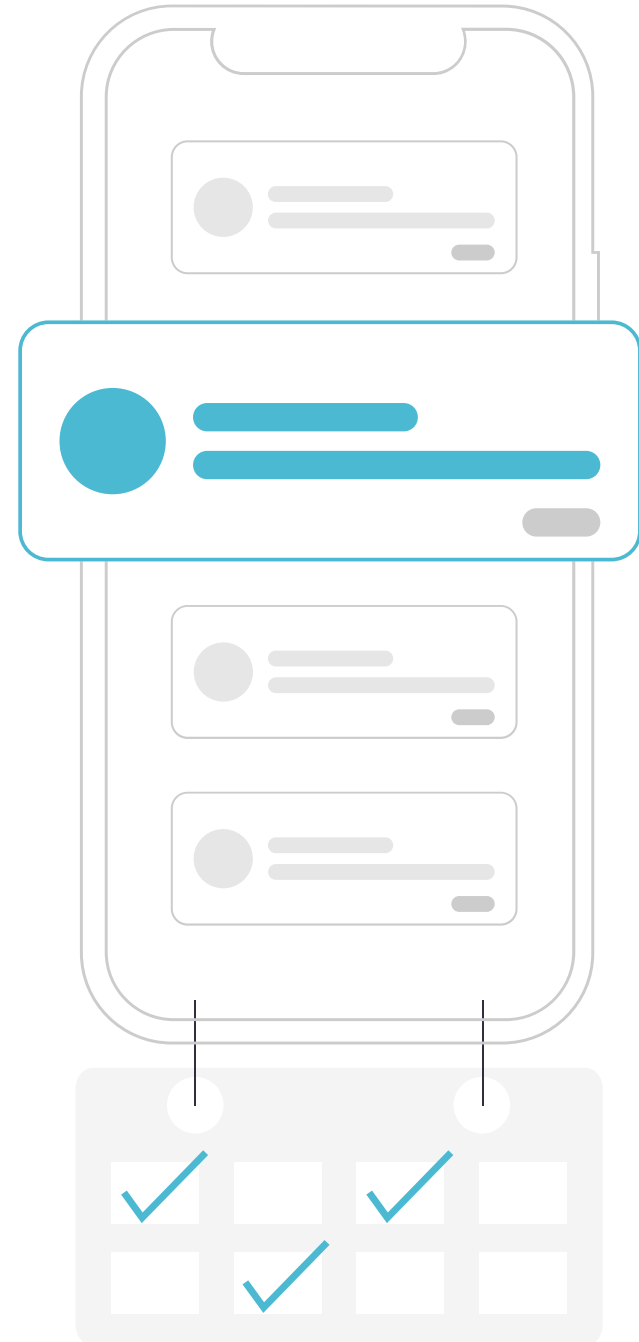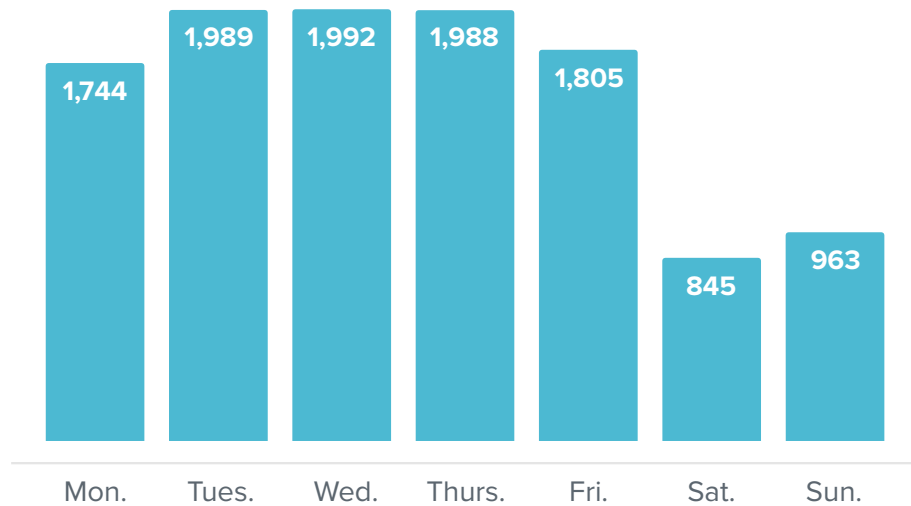
Methodology

This report was compiled using survey results from 46 online publication editors across industries, along with proprietary data from Influence & Co.'s content marketing software, ICo. Core, and an analysis of more than 113,000 pieces of content published in 2022. This means true experts have more opportunities than ever to reach their audiences with thoughtful, relevant, engaging content and work toward their thought leadership, lead generation, SEO, and sales-enablement content-marketing goals.

As with any survey, this data is not absolute. Please remember that these insights are based on self-reported responses from publication editors, including some with whom Influence & Co. works and others with whom we do not currently have relationships. These results do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the publishing industry as a whole.

46 online publication editors

ICo. Core

113,000 pieces of content
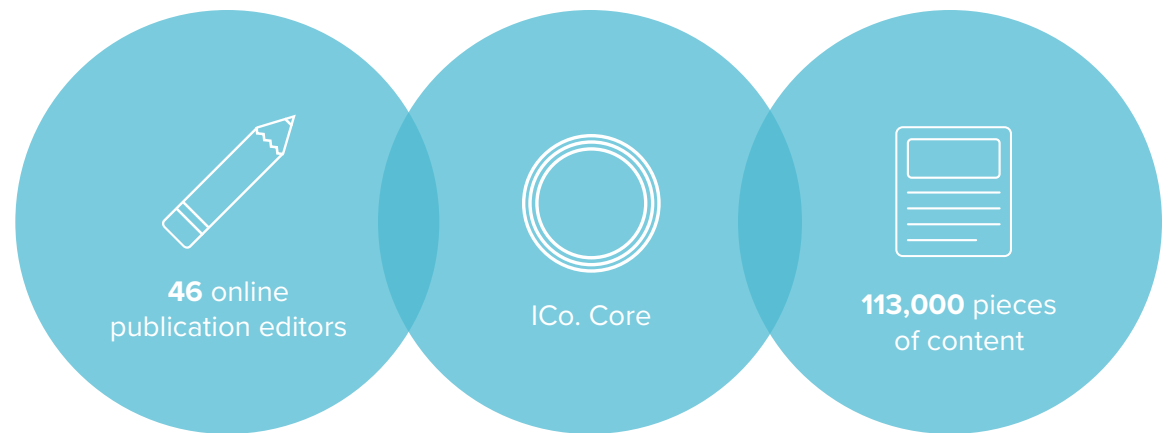
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