

↓ 64%

Highbrook.

The Stats That Matter in 2025

The numbers keeping marketers awake at night and some solutions to those issues

\$36m

>45%

0.004

€20m

20%

Clever content. Made by humans



Welcome

Hello and welcome to The Stats That Matter in 2025.

On the following pages, we look at the issues inspiring and agitating content marketers – fake news, social media TOV, content goals and AI search – and suggest solutions.

Michael Pilgrim *Chairman, Highbrook Media*

Q1 2025

59%

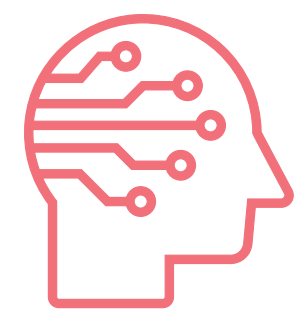
of consumers are concerned about what's real and what's fake when it comes to online news

* REUTERS DIGITAL NEWS REPORT 2024

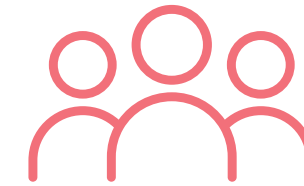
Commercial content: a question of trust?

Consumers are concerned about what's real and what's fake online. The bad news? **The rise of AI** looks set to exacerbate these feelings, particularly in political and conflict reporting. There is good news, though – and it comes in the form of branded content.

Branded content has moved far beyond cheesy advertorials, awkward talking head videos and artlessly shoehorned-in product references. It's being used as a tool for enhancing transparency, removing bias and increasing trust. (As well as for marketing client products and services, of course). Here's how:



It's free from the restrictions of news formats. Brief articles and straight reportage can only go so far in digging into the nuances of certain topics. Branded content has the **time and space** to use multiple formats (videos, infographics, long reads) and explore the implications of complex themes. This gives audiences richer context.



It can feature **diverse voices**. The time pressures of news reporting mean it's often reported from one angle. Commercial content can include lots of different – and opposing – voices alongside the client's, giving a wider range of perspectives.



Interactivity is taking centre stage in branded content – and it does more than increase engagement. Presenting the stories behind the news in formats like **polls and Q&As** allows audiences to actively respond to the topics and ask questions, which means they can form their own opinions.



Finally, let's talk **budgets**. Commercial content usually has more in the kitty to pay for large-scale research pieces, which means clients and audiences alike get access to a wide range of opinions and diversity of thought. Not for them, a stat found on the internet.

Commercial content has grown up. It has the power to sell stuff, but it can also **inform, explain and clarify**. Indeed it has a duty to do so, morally and legally. That can only make it more powerful for its practitioners.

Rachael Adams

443%

of organisations tried
a new tone of voice,
personality, or persona
on social last year

*HOOTSUITE SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS 2025

Going against brand isn't always bad. It might even be smart

It is, in some eyes, the greatest sin.

Countless months have been spent **perfecting a brand's visuals** and tone of voice – down to a tenth a millimetre extra space round the logo. All enforced by **strict guidelines**.

Now people are – shudder – messing around with that brand voice.

There's worse. The most adventurous brands surveyed also confessed they had tested tones so distinct that their social content **barely resembled** their brand personality on other marketing channels.

Barely resembled!! Bring us the smelling salts.

This is, in truth, nothing new. Highbrook has been saying it for the decade we've been around. The trend for content is away from the formal, even for finance, law and real estate brands. It should be **more concise, but no less intelligent**. And that trend goes further on social, where the brand voice should be in its trainers loafing in an armchair.

It's a natural response to social media. A carousel of 28 frames, 1,000 words and 37 bar charts will not gather followers. Not even bots.

There are, of course, subtler ways to vary one's brand on social such as:



using a group of executives or experts, talking about the product or service on their own profiles



making it less detailed, less polished, more raw, brighter, faster, looser



binning the jargon



publishing the work without it being savaged by a dozen approvers.

But let's look at this another way. There are brands that are informal and happy-go-lucky all the time. Innocent smoothies, in its heyday, Monzo, Oatly. They're doing well.

So rather than turning a blind eye to what goes on social, brand leaders might consider what an **honest and human representation** of the company really looks like and use that online, in advertising and in sales collateral.

Shouldn't the whole thing be more like social media?

Michael Pilgrim

442%


of B2B marketers who rate their content strategy as moderately effective, or worse, blame a lack of clear goals


*CONTENT MARKETING INSTITUTE


Show us the way to go

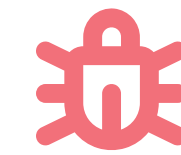
Thirty-nine per cent said it was because it wasn't tied to the customer journey and 29% cited "ineffective audience research".

No one wants to waste money on content that is poorly planned. So make sure you're crystal clear on the following:

 **The objective.** Is it to download a thought leadership report to capture potential customer data? To gather email subscribers? To sell a product or service? Or simply raise awareness and create a halo of positive vibes around your brand?

 **Target audience.** This one is vital but it's amazing how often marketers struggle to clearly specify their audience. Get into the heads of your audience. What interests them? What are their ambitions and their deepest fears? Ensure your content resonates with them. What social media channels do they use?

 Which leads us to, how are you going to reach them? What's the likely customer journey and what **distribution strategy** fits this best? It's no use publishing loads of blogs on a website that no one is going to be able to find. Make it multi-pronged so that brand recognition builds.



And ensure your **SEO strategy** is tip top. Check that there aren't any gremlins in the way your website is set up that's preventing the robots finding your content.



Work out what **type of content** will work best for your audience. A mixture of short, snappy engaging digital assets backed by expert, in-depth, longer-form content often works best.

If you can get all of this mapped out in advance, your content will fly. People will erect marble statues in your honour. Epic songs will be written to celebrate your achievements. You'll just need to work out how you will measure all that success.

Tamsin Brown

600%

of Google searches
end on the search
engine results page

*DENTSU 2025 MEDIA TRENDS

Yes, people will still visit your site

Finding answers to everyday queries – such as celebrity heights or a director’s filmography – was once a multi-step ordeal of searching. Clicking, scrolling, then possibly repeating the process, sometimes many times, before reaching the right information.

In 2016, Google introduced **featured snippets**. When you searched for, say, “Jason Schwartzman height”, you would now receive the answer, 5’6”, directly on the search results page. You didn’t need to click on other links – the featured snippet box appeared before the top 10.

In 2024, AI overviews took this **a step further**. If you search for a more complex query, such as, “Can I visit cat island?” an answer, ‘yes’, and a summary of the things to know before your trip now appears in place of (or sometimes above) a featured snippet.

AI overviews have reignited the anxieties featured snippets once provoked, such as: will I lose all my traffic? Will anyone ever click through to a site again?

Simple queries may have driven traffic to sites in the distant past. But this traffic usually left after finding their answers – **they weren’t staying onsite** and clicking around, or taking the first step on a purchase journey.

Visits that began and ended with those queries now take place **entirely on Google**.

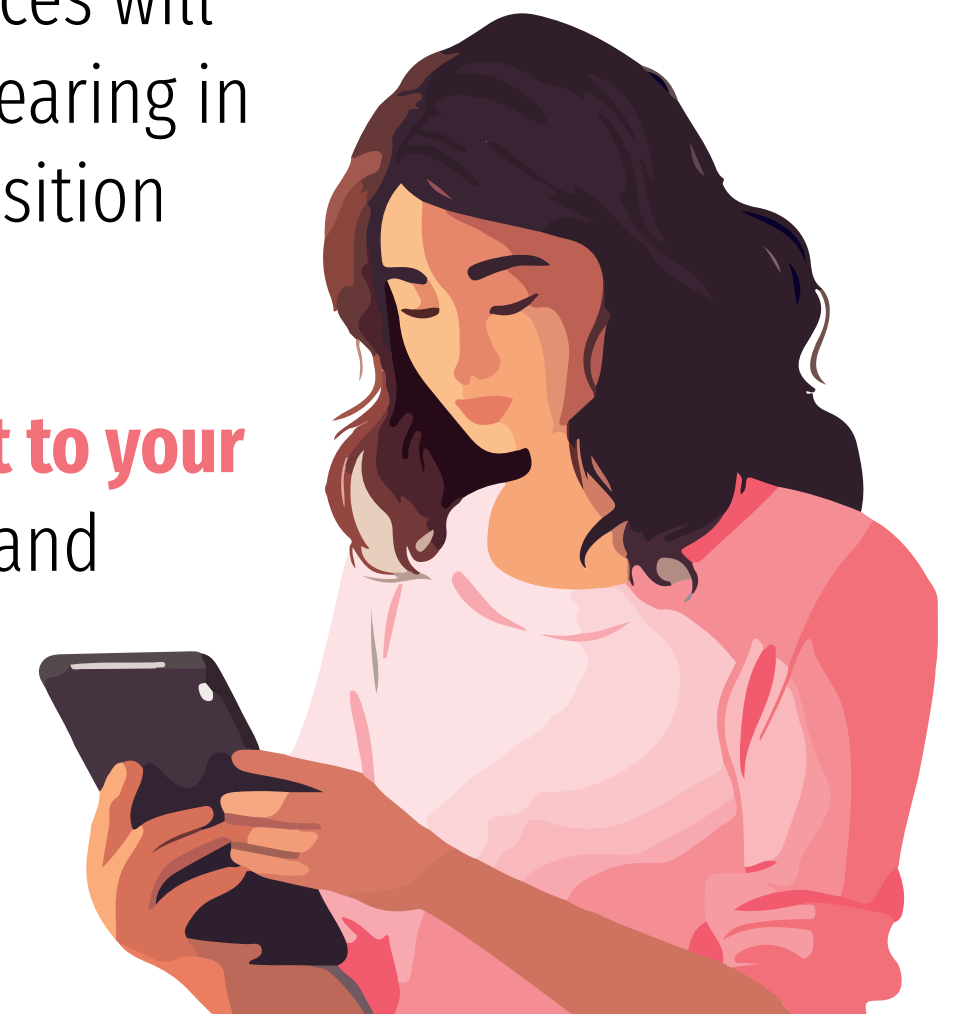
Similarly, the top 10 pages for high-volume generic keywords often appear nearly identical – an AI overview can summarise all those similarities into a few succinct paragraphs.

The answer, then, is to focus on what sets you apart – and the **real people** you’re trying to reach (not the robots you imagine you should appease).

Well-written content supported by best practices will improve your chances of **ranking well** and appearing in featured snippets or AI overviews – a link in position zero.

And for **qualified traffic**, create pieces **relevant to your offering** that address your audience’s needs – and share the human perspectives AI can’t provide.

Nicola Derse



The authors



Michael Pilgrim

Chairman

Formerly editor, Observer magazine; commercial editorial director, Telegraph Media Group; executive comms at WPP

michael.pilgrim@hbrk.co.uk



Tamsin Brown

CEO

Formerly with HSBC's corporate publishing team. Ex financial writer for the Mail, Express, Financial News

tamsin.brown@hbrk.co.uk



Rachael Adams

Director of Content

Former head of content strategy, Reuters; Telegraph, Incisive Media, Which?

rachael.adams@hbrk.co.uk



Nicola Derse

Editor and SEO consultant

Formerly at Ascendant, the Whiskey & Wealth Club, Reprise and Dentsu X.

nicola.derse@hbrk.co.uk



Highbrook.

www.highbrook.media

Highbrook Media Ltd. info@hbrk.co.uk
Vox Studios, 1-45 Durham Street, London SE11 5JH UK.
Registered in England & Wales at 2nd Floor, Stanford Gate,
South Road, Brighton BN1 6SB UK.

Registered number: 09550567.

Clever content. Made by humans