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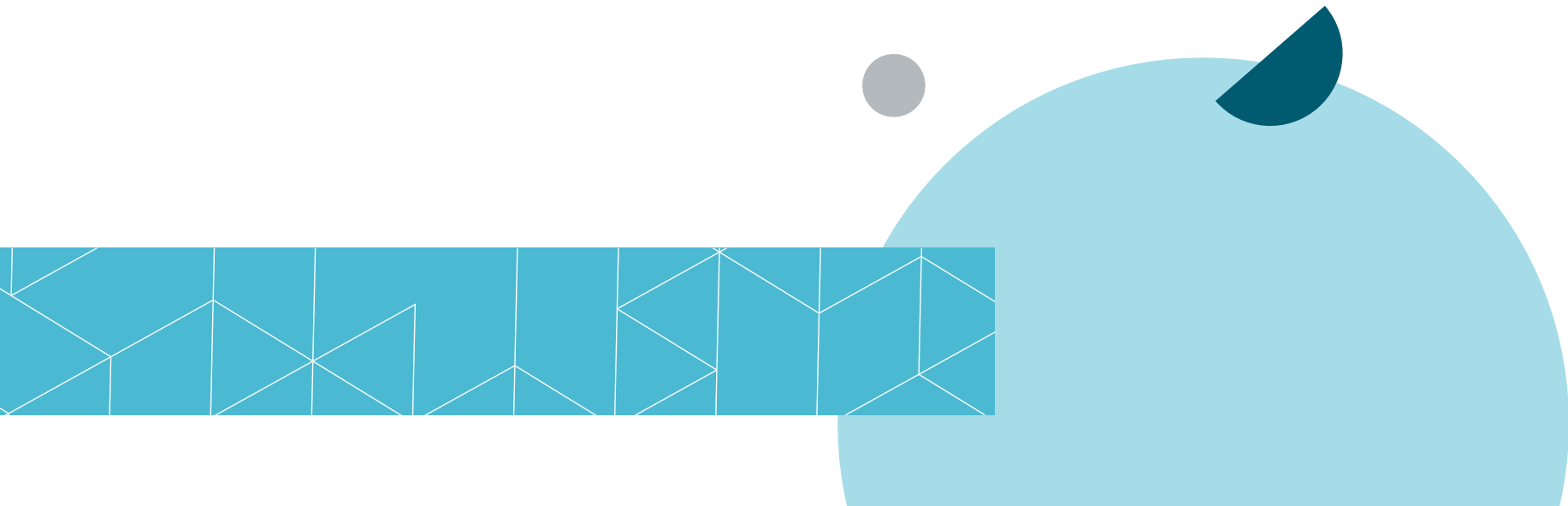
2021

The State of Digital Media

*Industry Insights to Help You Create Content
That Serves Your Audience and Achieves Your Goals*

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Intro

2020 threw us all for a loop.

Industries were turned on their heads in the wake of the coronavirus health crisis. As a result, the economy took a turn in the wrong direction. The businesses that were able to stay open had to adapt, and digital marketing approaches stepped into the spotlight.

In a world where in-person marketing tactics could be risky, virtual approaches such as content marketing have surged in importance for businesses that want to reach their target audiences, engage potential customers, and continue to provide value to existing clientele.

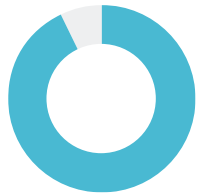
But achieving those goals requires insight into what's working and what might need our attention in the future. That's why the Influence & Co. team has created its "State of Digital Media 2021" report.

Driven by survey responses from 15 online publication editors and 41 content contributors across industries and an analysis of more than 127,000 pieces of content published in 2020, this report provides a snapshot of the current state of 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



93%

of editors plan to publish the same amount of guest content or more in 2021.



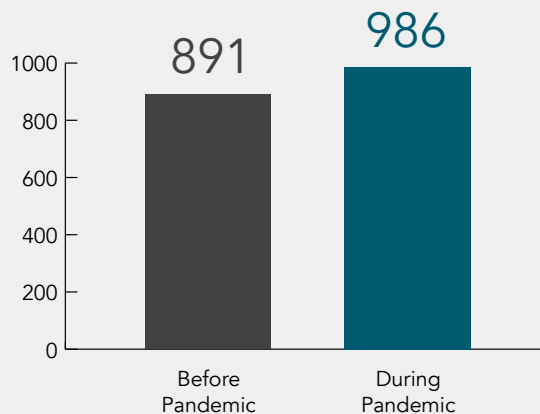
33%

of editors plan to publish video content in 2021, while 20% plan to publish infographics, newsletters, and podcasts.



38%

of journalists and contributors plan to quote or feature more industry experts and companies in their content in 2021, while 62% plan to feature the same number as last year.



The average word count of content with **more than 1,000 shares** was **891 before COVID-19**, and that number increased to **986** words during the pandemic.

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.

Guest-contributed content is content that you contribute to a third-party publication. 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.

Press mentions are mentions of an expert or company in the press. These might constitute a mention of a company's products or services, a quote from an executive, or even a full-length feature article highlighting what the business or the thought leader has to offer.

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 and press mentions 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 and contributors crave, and how to craft content that engages your audience as well as meeting editors' and contributors' guidelines.

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

Media Opportunity in 2021

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 guest authors and experts like you.

Thankfully, editors and contributors alike report that they plan to accept and publish a healthy number of guest posts and press mentions in 2021.

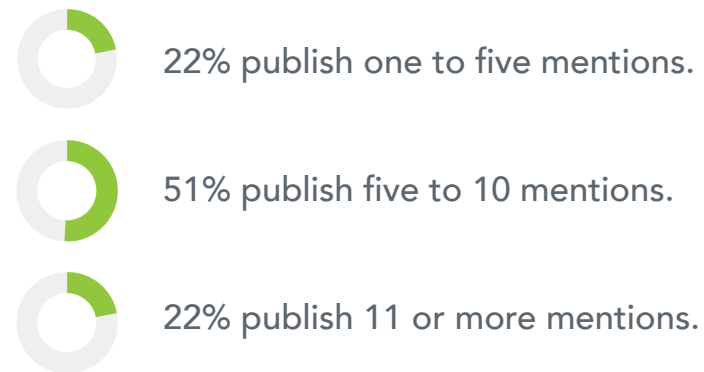
67% **93%** **95%**

of editors publish one to 10 guest articles each week. On top of that ...

of editors say that in 2021, they plan to increase or maintain the volume of guest content they publish.

of journalists and contributors publish at least one press mention or feature each week.

Broken down further, that looks like this:



On top of that, **39% of journalists and contributors** say they plan to increase the number of mentions or features they publish in 2021. Meanwhile, 61% say they plan to publish mentions at the same rate.

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.

Why Media Outlets Publish Guest Posts and Press Mentions

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 fresh perspectives, expert opinions, and variety** in the content they provide their audiences.

But what about journalists and contributors? Why do they mention and feature subject matter experts and companies in their content?

The biggest reasons journalists and contributors include press mentions in their articles are to **diversify opinions, provide unbiased views and a wider perspective, infuse authenticity into their content, and add third-party credibility.**



“Guest posts must be ahead of the trends. By the time we get article offers on a hot topic, we have already known about that topic and published articles on it.”

— **Jim Davis, editor at HR Daily Advisor**



“We publish guest posts to present thought leadership from experts in their industry, provide benefit to our members, and promote our organization as a trusted resource.”

— **Libby Rutkey, editor at The EO Blog**



“One of my main jobs is to help the industry share ideas and clinical education with its own members, as well as with people in affiliated industries and government segments. Directly quoting clinicians, funding experts, consumers, and the like guarantees that the information I publish is accurate.”

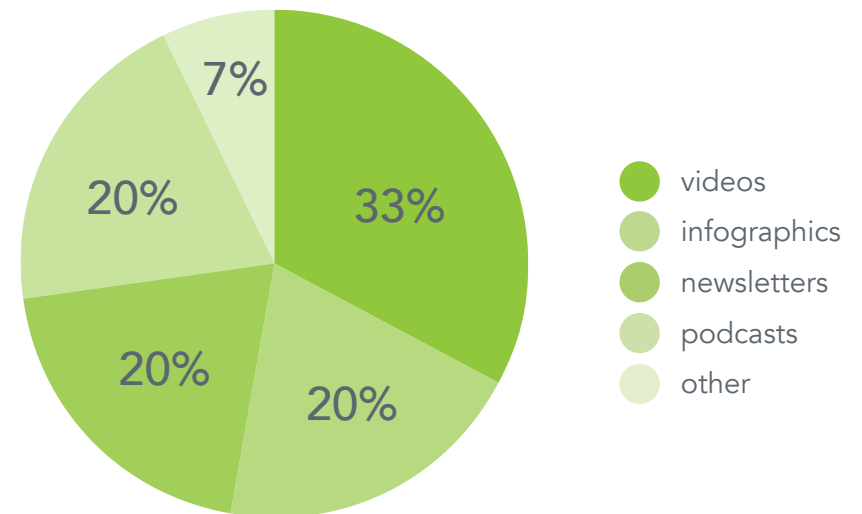
— **Laurie Watanabe, editor at Mobility Management**



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 various content types, editors are looking to meet those needs by accepting a variety of content.

When we asked what other forms of media editors plan to publish in 2021, here's what they said:



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

Why Editors and Contributors Read Pitches

Just because guest content can benefit audiences, editors, journalists, and thought leaders alike, that does not mean all guest content is guaranteed to be accepted and published. Even if the content you create or the insights you share are unique and valuable to a publication's or journalist's audience, they might not get picked up 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 unique, fresh angle.

When it comes to reading press mention pitch emails from industry experts, journalists and contributors said the pitch must **be detailed and provide a fresh angle**. Also, pitches should be short and to the point and show that the thought leader has done their homework.



"I'm more likely to read a pitch on a strong topic that is pertinent to our audience and is not blatantly self-serving."

— Paul Nolan, editor at Sales & Marketing Management



"I'm more likely to read a pitch if it's clear that the person knows what I cover, reads our publication, and has relevant and high-level executives who are willing to chat on record."

— Allison Schiff, senior editor at AdExchanger

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 non-promotional.

Successful guest posts 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 and media outlet is unique, and editors expect guest-contributed content to speak to their specific audiences and meet those audiences' particular needs.

3. It shares original, expert-level insights.

Editors are looking for guest content that's full of relevant stories, examples, and original insights that come directly from you, the expert, as well as research to back up your claims.



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 **127,000 pieces of content** published last year and uncovers some of the best practices you can use to maximize the effectiveness of your content strategy.

Because 2020 was such an unpredictable and unprecedented year, we chose to look at two data sets. For pre-COVID-19 data, we looked at **59,440 pieces of content** published between September 2019 and February 2020. For data during COVID-19, we looked at **67,892 pieces of content** published between March and August 2020.

Headline and Word Count Trends

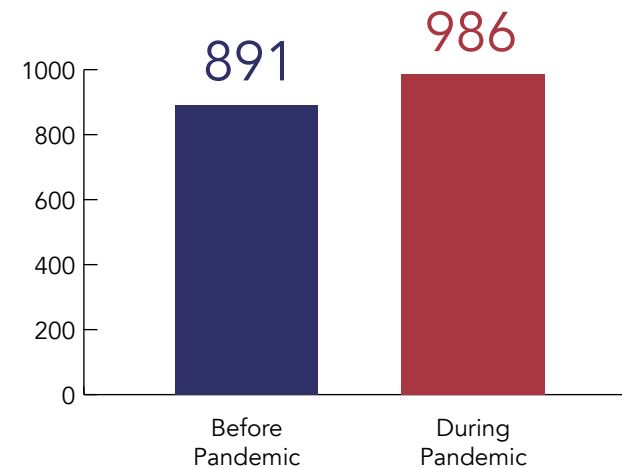
Every content creator knows how important headlines are: Not only is the headline the first thing a reader sees, but it's also what determines whether a reader will consume your content or scroll past it. And now that nearly all marketing and communication needs to be done in a virtual or digital format, 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 1,000 pieces of content that received the most social shares, 85% had a headline word count of six to 15 words both before and during COVID-19, making the sweet spot 11 words.



Headlines aren't the only word count consideration to heed when creating content, though. The average word count of content with more than 1,000 shares was 891 before COVID-19, and that number increased to 986 words during the pandemic. Both numbers are greater than 2017's average of 722 words.



The Takeaway:

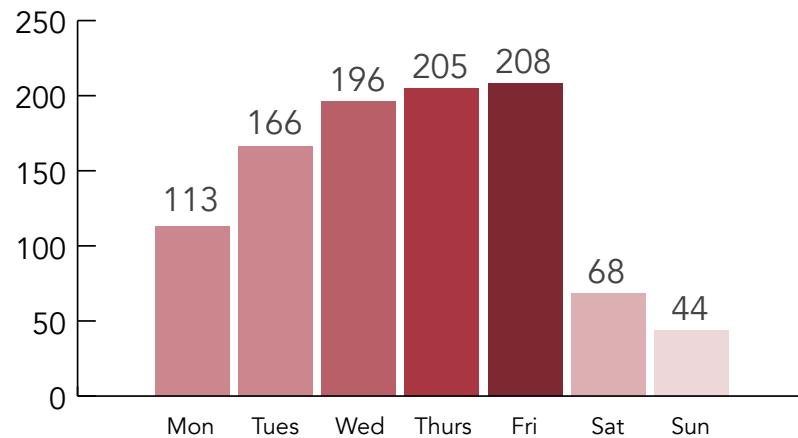
Readers appear to be more engaged with content that fully covers a given topic. Audiences place value on diving into a subject and gaining a solid understanding of how or why to do something. But be warned that readers' recent engagement with longer content doesn't give you license to ramble: If content isn't concise and easy to consume, readers may 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 consumers 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.

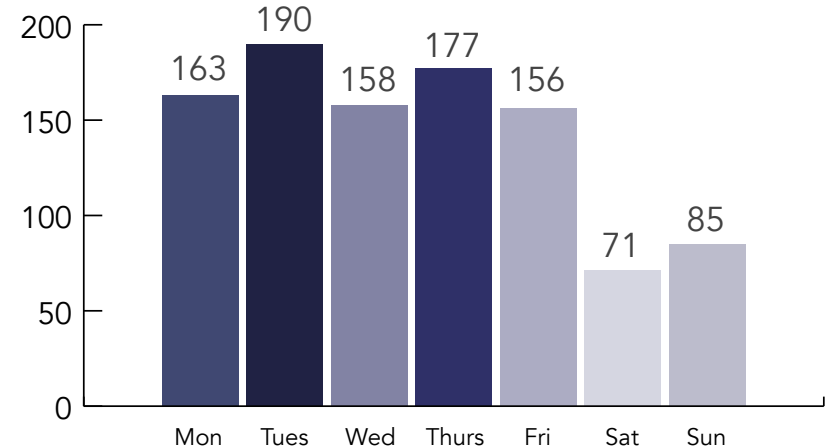
Let's start with a weekly view.

Engagement Before the Pandemic

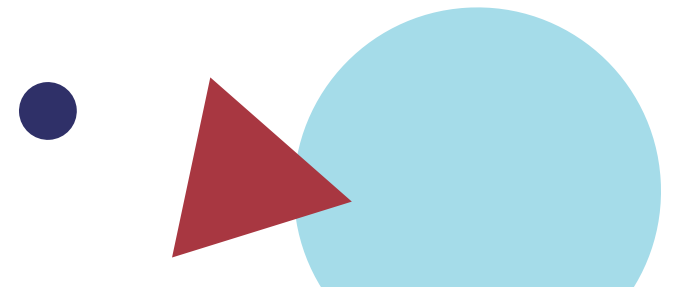


During the period in 2020 before COVID-19, **content published toward the end of the week received more engagement**, with an uptick on Fridays.

Engagement During the Pandemic



During the period in 2020 after the pandemic began, **the most popular day of the week for sharing articles was on Tuesdays**, but Thursday was also a good day for publishing.



Social Platform Popularity

We analyzed thousands of pieces of content to understand where the highest-performing content is engaged with the most.

Facebook remains a powerful social network for sharing and engaging with content. This could be because it offers users several ways to engage by liking, reacting, sharing, and commenting.

Unfortunately, LinkedIn doesn't share its analytics. But compared with Twitter, articles are being shared at a much higher rate on Facebook.

Though we don't have access to analytics information from LinkedIn, it's well-known that LinkedIn is a great place for professionals and industry experts to share insights and discuss content.

Test sharing articles on multiple platforms to see where your specific audience engages the most.



Methodology

This report was compiled using survey results from 15 online publication editors and 41 content contributors across industries, along with proprietary data from Influence & Co.'s content marketing software, ICo. Core, and an analysis of more than 127,000 pieces of content published in 2020.

As with any survey, this data is not absolute. Please remember that these insights are based on self-reported responses from publication editors, journalists, and contributors, 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.



Influence&Co.

Influence & Co. is a woman-owned, results-driven content marketing agency that's been helping its clients use content to achieve their business goals since 2011. As an extension of your marketing team, Influence & Co. can help your business generate a measurable return on your content marketing investment, whether you're focusing on thought leadership, lead generation, sales enablement, or SEO.

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