

Decision-Makers Speak Out: Content Works Best When It's Actionable

In the age of information overload, in-house counsel and C-suite executives are resolute in valuing utility above other content attributes. That these busy decision-makers prioritize actionable information and insights is understandable – but how the two groups define utility is quite different, according to the **2019 State of Digital & Content Marketing Survey**.

The survey, by strategic communications firm **Greentarget** and consulting firm **Zeughauser Group**, compares the two groups' information consumption preferences. This yielded important takeaways in an era when C-suite executives can be as engaged in hiring a law firm as in-house legal officers, who can wield heavy influence in hiring consulting, accounting and other professional services firms.

At a high level, the two groups are in lockstep – but there are significant differences. They prefer different types of content, have varying thoughts on why content misses the mark and diverge about how they can be effectively targeted on social or other digital media. The survey – in its ninth edition since its initial release in 2010 – is the first to offer such an in-depth, side-by-side comparison.

“Over the past decade, we’ve unearthed important insights about the content preferences of decision-makers, and the 2019 study offers our most compelling findings to date that professional services marketers can’t afford to ignore,” said John Corey, founding partner of Greentarget. “This year, by comparing the likes and dislikes of in-house counsel and C-suite executives, we’re providing greater context for

marketers along with actionable guidance on the ever-elusive pursuit of bringing the right content to the right audiences on the right platforms at the right time.”

Comparing In-House Counsel and C-Suite Executives

- **Traditional Media Still Highly Trusted – and Accessed:** Both in-house counsel and C-suite executives highly value traditional media, even in the age of so-called “fake news.” C-suite executives placed the highest value on traditional media at 82 percent (up from 74 percent in the 2018 survey). Additionally, 79 percent of in-house counsel said traditional media is most valuable, about the same as the 80 percent who responded that way last year. The findings speak to this audience’s continued desire for curation and the role professional editors play in determining what stories and topics are most important.

- **In-House Counsel Like Articles, but the C-Suite Prefers Interactive Charts:**

In a revealing comparison about both the personalities and job responsibilities of the two groups surveyed, in-house counsel said their preferred content type was articles and C-suite executives picked interactive charts. Relatedly, in-house counsel picked educational as their most valued content attribute while C-suite executives chose relevance and ease of access. This makes sense as lawyers tend to take in longer-form information, and interactive charts enable C-level executives to quickly absorb complex information.

- **What Makes Content Miss:** The two groups also differed on why content can miss the mark. Fifty-one percent of in-house counsel said content misses most often because it’s “too salesy” while the same percentage of C-suite executives chose “not sufficiently relevant.”

- **LinkedIn Lessons:** Fifty-three percent of in-house counsel said they find value in LinkedIn as a platform, but just 29

percent agree that it is effectively used by outside law firms. C-suite executives were more satisfied with LinkedIn's content targeting, with 63 percent saying it is effective.

- Do Law Firms Overemphasize Rankings? CMOs say peer-driven rankings or listing services command more resources than any category of firm content aside from trade publications and traditional media. But just 9 percent of in-house counsel find the rankings "very important" when researching firms for potential hire. Forty-one percent say the rankings are "somewhat important," which may suggest that such rankings are limited to a validation effect, an important consideration for CMOs allocating resources.

A Continued Lack of Documented Content Strategy

This year's survey, which queried 100 in-house counsel and 100 C-suite executives, was also the first since 2017 to query law firm chief marketing officers (30 in total) about, among other things, their approaches to content strategy and marketing resource allocation, among other topics. While firms need strategic roadmaps to guide their content development and distribution efforts more than ever, just 25 percent of the law firm marketing officers said they had documented content strategies. That's slightly down from two years ago.

"Law firms, just like all professional service organizations, understand how content can help build their brands and differentiate their organizations – but many are creating more content without documented strategies," said Mary K. Young, a partner with Zeughauser Group. "Their reliance on implicit strategy is likely a response to the complexities of prioritizing certain practices or sectors within firms. Though it may be difficult for marketers to publicly prioritize certain practices, we encourage them to emphasize the types of content and distribution preferences that best meet the needs of audiences most critical to the firm's success."

