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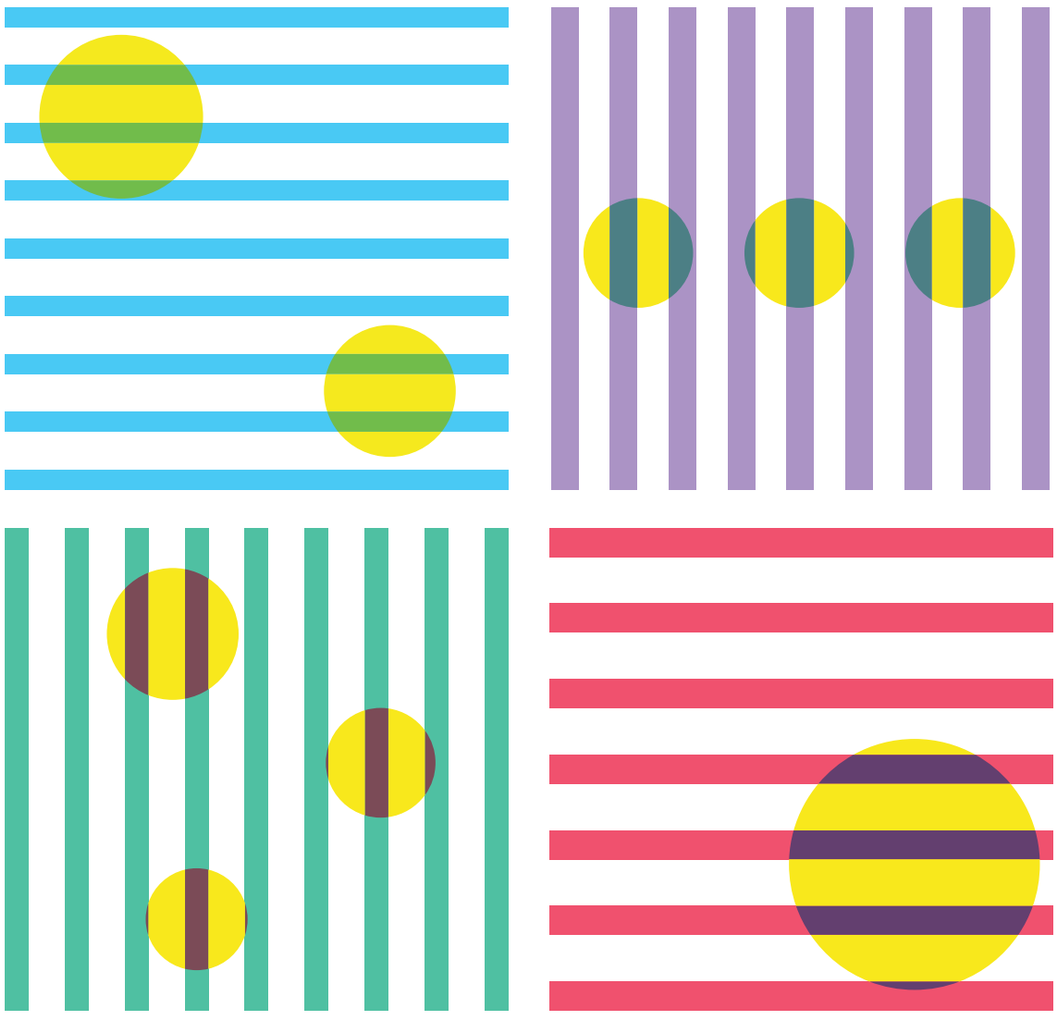

The CMO Guide

B2B Content Marketing

Go From Crawling to Running

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Introduction

Considering the rate at which content is being consumed today, it could prove to be a strategic lapse on the part of organizations not to invest in content marketing. Content marketing is not something new; however, in recent times, more and more organizations are relying on content marketing to drive leads and allow buyers to educate themselves as they move along the buyer journey. In a recent study done by Regalix, 'The State of Content Marketing 2019,'[1] 86% of organizations reported having invested in content marketing.

The challenge arises when the content that enterprises create is not engaging enough or does not have the expected traction with the target audience. According to the CMI study, 'Technology Content Marketing 2019,' 68% of tech content marketers found creating appealing content for different user groups within the target audience to be their most challenging task. However, the good news is that despite the challenges faced by organizations in developing the right kind of content, 75% of those in the above study also said that they were more successful with content marketing today than they were one year ago.

Before exploring the subject of content marketing further, let's consider some of the other key challenges that practitioners face today.

According to CMI's '2017 Content Management & Strategy Survey,'[2] while 92% of the organizations in the study viewed content as a business asset, only 46% of them said they had a documented strategy for managing it as a business asset. Moreover, only 18% of the respondents felt their organization had the right technology in place to manage their content marketing efforts.

Let's consider the Regalix study. 50% of the respondents in the survey cited producing quality content as one of their top content marketing challenges, while 44% mentioned mapping the content to stages in the buyer's journey. Only 28% of the marketers in the study reported having a content maturity model in their organization.

While content marketing has been in practice for a long time, marketers are still coming to terms with the blistering pace of change that the discipline has seen in recent years in terms of technology, rising consumer expectations and rapid growth in the number of channels and touchpoints in the consumer journey.

Did You Know?

The term "content marketing" was first used in 1996 by John F. Oppedahl during a roundtable discussion for journalists at the American Society for Newspaper Editors.[3]

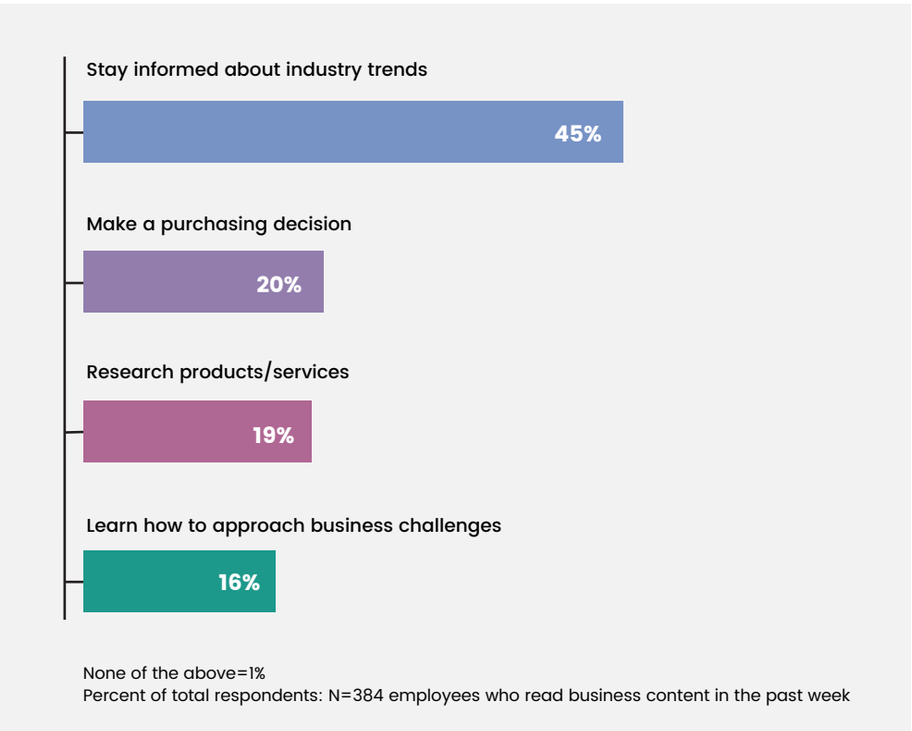
The need for content

The first thing marketers need to understand when an enterprise sets out to create content is why any B2B buyer might want to read business content.

According to the Clutch '2018 Consumer Content Marketing Survey,'[4] 45% of the B2B audience surveyed read content to stay informed about industry trends, while 20% read content to make a purchase decision. 19% wanted to research products and services, and 16% wanted to learn how to meet business challenges.

Figure-1

Why B2B audiences read business content online



Source: *Clutch 2018 Customer Content Marketing Survey*

Getting the right content mix

Before developing marketing content, deciding upon a content marketing strategy should be the first step for any B2B marketer. Broadly, there are two types of content that an organization needs to consider developing through the course of its business journey.

Marketing content: Marketing content is content created by sales and marketing teams to be used as lead-generation assets. These include ads, PRs, product data sheets, company profiles and sales enablement material. This kind of content is

important when you are making a direct marketing push or an announcement about the launch of a new product or service.

Branded content: Branded content, on the other hand, is all about storytelling and being helpful to your audience, beyond the call of duty. This type of content is meant to engage with the customer without directly pushing a product or a service. Branded content is content that does not involve traditional advertising. It can include articles, videos, podcasts and even live elements that bring value to the consumer. Branded content is where the B2B marketer presents solutions to product-related issues. It is meant for nurturing relationships with customers.

Authors of the book 'The Definitive Guide to Strategic Content Marketing,' Lazar Dzamic and Justin Kirby, define branded content as something that is "funded or at least endorsed by the legal owner of the brand that promotes the owner's brand values and makes audiences choose to engage with the brand based on a pull logic due to its entertainment, information and/or education value."

In simpler terms, branded content is content that is sticky and emotionally engaging. It's increasingly gaining significance in content marketing. Here are some examples.

Picture this:

Barclays Corporate Banking takes to storytelling for small businesses[5]

Fun and engaging content that does not sell a product or service directly need not only be for B2C companies. Barclays Corporate Banking used the tactic to engage small businesses. Take the case of Low Cost Vans. The bank could have told the story through a simple, dry case study about how it supported Low Cost Vans, a small van-leasing business which is one of Barclays' clients. It's a story which, presumably, most would pass on.

Instead, Barclays chose to tell the story of Low Cost Vans' Managing Director, Rod Lloyd. The content is in the form of a video. The tone is very personal. The video doesn't start with a history of the company or of Barclay's involvement with the company. Instead, it starts with a quote from Lloyd, "I think every young lad has a dream of playing for his local club. My dream as a child was to play for Swansea City." Then it goes on to show how the business grew with the help of Barclays, and in turn, how the company was able to support local football.

Through this very human storytelling, Barclays was able to convey what it does for small businesses, what its values are and how it helped Low Cost

Vans succeed. And the story is far more effective, even emotionally moving, than the alternative. This created a connection with small businesses in a way regular corporate content wouldn't have. You can see this and many more of Barclays' stories on their YouTube channel.[6]

GE shares information through interesting stories[7]

Another great example of branded content is GE Reports. GE launched GE Reports to tell interesting stories related to their industry. GE Reports features articles of many different voices. They talk about innovation, digital transformation and also business at GE. One thing they don't do here is advertise their products. It is a trustworthy source for news and information, not direct sales. It provides content that is of great benefit to consumers.

Marketing content and branded content are both relevant to content marketing. As we've seen, while one is rather direct, the other is more about bringing value to the audience – something that they may want to engage and interact with. Branded content is the one that would get more likes, shares and comments from consumers.

Smart B2B marketers will use branded content in their content marketing strategy to attract a customer, while marketing content will provide the actual information about the solution the customer might be looking for in the first place. Both will be successful only if they are contextually relevant to the customer.

Putting a robust content strategy in place

Content marketing is not just about creating content and sharing it on various digital channels. That is tantamount to throwing balls in the dark in the hope that someone will catch and play. The chances of that are rather slim, and all the content marketing effort – no matter how good the content – can go waste.

To be effective, any content marketing initiative should have a content strategy in place. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Even before you start developing the content, it's necessary to figure out what your current content maturity level is. The content maturity model is a good tool to use to determine this. It helps you see where your challenges and opportunities are around creating content. It

guides you through the practices that you need to put in place to move up the maturity curve and provides some structure and support for you to get started. There are many types of content maturity models in practice. Figure 2 shows one such model developed by Content Strategy Inc.

- Having defined your practices, you need to identify the audiences that your content is going to speak to. It could be a set of existing buyers whom you need to nurture or a new set of prospective customers. The content needs for both are different. So working out the audience profile will help in determining the line of thought to take.

- If you are developing content for your existing set of buyers, then developing branded content that preempts a potential problem with a solution or explores a new trend in technology or business is good content to look at. This gets your audience to engage with your content.

- When focusing on a new audience, it could be a blend of branded and marketing content.

- Once the type of audience and type of content have been worked out, it's important to decide on the various formats in which the content will be presented to the audience. It could be a blog post on your website, an article in the media, a how-to video, an infographic, an e-book or just an emailer.

- With the format in place, you need to look at moving the content into the right channels. Mapping the different kinds of content to the different phases of a buyer's journey can provide a workable blueprint.

Did You Know?

Organizations and brands are creating large amounts of content, with 60% of marketers publishing at least one piece of content each day.[18]

Figure-2

Level	1. Ad hoc	2. Rudimentary	3. Organized & repeatable	4. Managed & sustainable	5. Optimized	Efficiency & consistency
Characteristics	Lack of structure and uniform practice with regard to content development. Writers are often hired and managed by someone from another field. Quality of writing is entirely dependent on the individual writer. Little or no opportunity to understand customer needs.	Some content support structures are in place. New management brings together formerly isolated content developers. Begins to implement quality assurance practices, including copy editing, developmental editing and peer reviews. New practices are often abandoned under pressure deadlines, constantly changing requirements and resistance to change.	Most of the staff members are committed to following uniform processes, templates and standards. Support of a strong leader who has a vision for the organization and sees the importance of content in achieving this vision. Planning and quality assurance activities are routine and incorporated into every project. Opportunities are found to redesign legacy content, carry out customer studies and content testing, and provide staff with continuing education.	Leadership may change without a loss of commitment to planning, quality assurance, hiring and training, and budgetary controls. Increasingly sophisticated methods of handling customer studies, needs analysis, usability analysis and ROI. Recognized as effective by the larger organization and often plays a significant role across organizational silos, such as product design, marketing, support and CX.	Actively involved in promoting the benefits of quality content throughout the organization. The team acknowledges, embraces and fosters content measurements and analytics. Content strategy is closely aligned to the corporation's business strategy. The team provides content leadership within the organization and also within the content community.	
How to progress	Build cooperation among individual content developers and assign a manager to initiate common processes and design standards.	Management needs a firm commitment to implement and follow standard templates, a style guide, a project workflow and project management practices.	Management needs a firm commitment to follow high-quality practices, including project management practices, even under time pressures. Actively evangelize for customer studies and take every opportunity to bring customer needs into content development.	Leadership team needs to increase its business understanding and commitment to increased productivity, cost reduction, customer satisfaction and strategic business alliance.	This level is very difficult to sustain. Mergers and changes to leadership can cause significant setbacks.	

Content people want to work here!

Source: *Content Maturity Model*[8]

***Picture this*:**

Cisco moves to customer-centric content marketing[9]

Three years ago, the Cisco marketing team woke up to a real-life situation. Like many B2B companies, it was focused on product marketing, and each business unit would market to customers on their own. The business units were well acquainted with the nature of the customers and their needs, but this was only in relation to specific product lines. There was a disconnect between the business units.

Unfortunately, this disconnect led to multiple marketing programs within Cisco, all targeting the same B2B prospect from many angles, with various product and service offerings. It was bad in terms of customer experience – totally fragmented, uncoordinated and sometimes even delivering conflicting information. The approach was – create content first, then decide what to do with it.

Cisco's CMO then tasked a team of 20 marketing and communication leaders from across the company to reverse the framework and create a

genuine audience-first model instead. That is what the team did – they put content creation last in their content marketing plan.

Putting content creation last helped the team streamline the entire content marketing process and end the confusing experiences that sprang from muddled marketing silos. Today, for Cisco, the content process starts with a detailed analysis of the audience before any content gets created.

In fact, Cisco worked with the Buyer Persona Institute to conduct blind interviews with customers to get better acquainted with its target audiences. These interviews helped the team understand their audience's real needs.

It was a revelation for the team to find the glaring difference between Cisco's perception of client need, viewed from the narrow vision of a single product line, as opposed to their actual requirement. This, along with hard data on customer behavior, helped Cisco devise an overall content strategy and content marketing plan.

Today, their content marketing team is equipped to create a smart channel strategy that delivers to customers the right content through the right channel at precisely the right moment.

WeWork uses video for content marketing[10]

The rate of consumption of video as a content format is growing at a rapid pace, not just in the B2C space, but also in B2B. Despite being a resource-intensive type of content, B2B companies need to invest in video. This is because B2B buyers now watch videos for reviews and product information.

WeWork, the shared workspaces company, chose the video format for its content delivery and made the most of it by delivering it in small modules that told its B2B customer stories in short bursts. The same content could be cut into short-form videos, which could be shown on social media, or shown in long form to create a compelling customer story.

WeWork's video campaign shows how a marketer can squeeze every bit of utility from video investment. The company created a series of 30-second videos illustrating how small businesses can level up their office space. The spots also appeared in shorter 15- and 6-second versions, and in GIFs and static images, on digital channels and social media including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube.

Designing an effective content marketing framework

Here are eight key steps to planning and executing an effective content marketing program:

#1: Define a goal – *Why do you need content marketing? A marketer should have the answer to this. Setting a goal before starting the initiative helps in visualizing and developing the right sort of content. So there will be one umbrella content marketing strategy, under which will be various content marketing initiatives to achieve a business goal. Once this is defined, the workflow becomes clearer and more focused.*

#2: Identify target persona – *With every initiative, there has to be a target audience. The content marketing team needs to define who the recipient of the content will be and what the content will achieve for the audience. Having a target persona helps develop the tone of the content, and it also means better success rates with audience engagement.*

#3: Develop the content plan – *Chart out the kind of content formats that will be used to target the audience. Define the various content initiatives based on whether it's for informing, educating or engaging with the audience, or for creating a strong brand recall; decide on whether you will use branded content or marketing content, and*

whether it will be a blog, a video, an article or an emailer.

#4: Audition your content – *Want to figure out if your content will work or not? Sample it to your audience via Twitter. It's called social validation. Sharing the topic and a few points about it can help elicit an audience response, which will enable you to gauge if your planned content is engaging enough or not.*

#5: Set up a content management system – *This will help in content creation, curation, sharing, managing and gauging engagement metrics. The system has to be a combination of content management tools and strategy.*

#6: Optimize and share – *87% of B2B audiences engage with business content through search engines. So, search engine optimization, or SEO, is an important aspect of any content marketing initiative. Similarly, 85% of audiences access content through social shares or social media, so here again, a social media marketing strategy for the content has to be put in place.*[11]

#7: Audit your content – *Once you have run your content for a while, it's a good idea to audit the performance of the content. Analyze the level of engagement that the content has elicited. Was it able to meet the business goal that was initially decided upon? Updating old content to match current trends also helps reengage the target audience.*

#8: Redefine plan if needed – *No content marketing plan or content strategy is set in stone. Being flexible with a willingness to relook and redefine in the case of a below-par performance is a good way to remain successful and get the maximum return on your investment.*

Did You Know?

Content marketing is a cost-effective marketing strategy; it costs 62% less than traditional marketing and generates about three times as many leads.[19]

Popular content marketing platforms:[12]

***Curata* CMP –** Is designed specifically for B2B marketers to drive leads and revenue from content. Key components of Curata Content Marketing Platform (CMP) include strategy, production and comprehensive analytics.

NewsCred – Helps brands manage the entire content marketing process using one platform. By managing content creation, distribution and measurement, you can scale and streamline the entire customer experience.

***Percolate* –** A social relationship management platform that also offers unique content management capabilities for large B2C companies.

***Contently* –** An online platform for content marketing that allows you to find and collaborate with high-quality freelance writers, manage payments and assignments, and more.

***Kapost* –** Kapost's content marketing platform allows marketers to collaborate, distribute and analyze all content types using a single platform.

Preparing for an uncertain future

Even as organizations put their content marketing plans in place, B2B buyers' content needs are constantly changing. So, while there is still demand for traditional content and a need for content marketing, the flavor will change. Here are three emerging trends that we see coming:

The content Center of Excellence (CoE) will drive content strategy

B2B enterprises have come to realize the disadvantage of content creation in silos. Most of these enterprises have different lines of businesses and departments which create and curate content specific to their needs, without any kind of content governance. The result is often content that is repetitive, underdeveloped and contradictory in nature, undermining the content efforts of the enterprise and creating confusion in the customer's mind.

Joe Lazauskas of Contently, the content creation company, says that to avoid this chaos, organizations should have a centralized content team or content council. This will be a kind of CoE for content, in which team members continuously work on creating and curating content for individual lines of business. This CoE is then

responsible for setting clear content strategies, a measurement framework and processes for content creation and distribution.[13]

AI will lead content creation

In the future, content creation will be influenced to a great extent by AI. According to Gartner,[14] by 2022, AI will boost the content generation process. Content creators will produce more than 30% of their digital content with the help of AI content-generation techniques. The positive side of this is increased productivity and advertising effectiveness. On the downside, it will disrupt the creative process.

So why will AI be used in content generation? The amount of time and money required to create personalized content is one of the biggest challenges for B2B marketers. It hinders them from creating effective personalization at scale for each set of target audiences. The Gartner report says that overcoming this challenge is the target of some of the most impactful breakthroughs in AI – specifically, generative content creation in which AI techniques are used to synthesize realistic videos, audio, images and text. Generative algorithms can produce thousands of variants, test and evaluate them against specific target groups or individuals and optimize campaign content in hours or days. "While this will certainly change the role humans play in the creative process, it's not a forecast of the wholesale replacement of talent with technology. Human oversight and judgment will still be required for the foreseeable future, but many roles will shift and new skills will be required," states the Gartner report.

Content marketing will be about buyer enablement

In a Gartner post on B2B content marketing,[15] the author writes that as the B2B buying journey has moved to the online space, marketers need to rethink their content portfolio. They need to move away from traditional content and toward content for buyer enablement.

How will that help? It will ease the decision-making process, increase deal sizes and decrease purchase regret, which even B2B buyers experience. B2B buyers now have no dearth of content as organizations realize the importance of content marketing; however, the utility of the majority of that content is questionable. While a lot of the content available is created to help marketers sell their products and services, it does not help customers buy.

Forrester Consulting's 'Q1 2018 Global Marketing Content Credibility Study'[16] shows that 57% of B2B buyers feel content that reaches them is useless and 66% feel that vendors send out too much material and content to read and sort through. "For the third consecutive year, B2B marketing content continues to underwhelm business consumers. It's sad that buyers disdain marketing content so completely. Part of the

explanation is that marketers haven't kept pace with buyers' preferences," says the Forrester report.

The report further goes on to say that 60% of B2B buyers don't want to interact with a sales rep and 62% claim that they can finalize their purchase selection criteria based solely on digital content. This means that the B2B marketer must create content that will fill the interaction gap.

This is where buyer enablement content will have to evolve. Gartner defines it as "content that provides the information and tools customers need to more easily complete critical buying jobs, such as identifying problems and selecting suppliers." Unfortunately, most of the content produced today do not meet these criteria. In a Gartner review of over 500 supplier content assets, only 20% of the content was categorized as buyer enablement, while 42% was devoted to lead capture and nurturing.

Components of buyer enablement content[17]

B2B marketers need to rebalance their content marketing to include buyer enablement. Gartner gives us the following checklist:

- **Calculator:** Provides a simple, structured way to analyze data
- **Simulator:** Demonstrates how the solution will work in the customer's context
- **Recommender:** Provides a clear, prioritized set of options for a particular purchase task that is based on customer inputs
- **Benchmark:** Provides customers with hard-to-find data for peer comparison
- **Diagnostic:** Provides customers with a useful framework for assessing performance or identifying their options

Did You Know?

According to Content Marketing Institute (CMI), 78% of B2B marketers say LinkedIn is a very effective social media tool for content marketing.[20]

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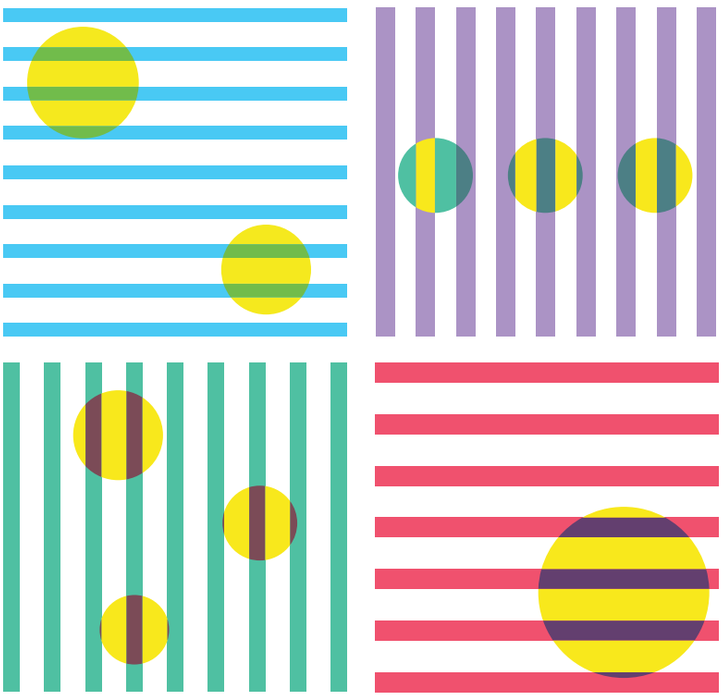

About Regalix

Regalix is a customer acquisition and customer success company that re-imagines digital experiences across hi-tech, ad-tech and retail domains. The company has partnered with some of the largest global B2B organizations in their efforts at customer acquisition, growth and retention. Regalix works with businesses, supporting their customers through the entire journey to deliver reliable products and services in today's subscription-based economy.

Regalix has a long history of creating award-winning ventures with enterprises through co-innovation and idea-driven frameworks that inspire companies to think different. Headquartered in Silicon Valley — Palo Alto, California — Regalix has offices in Europe and Asia.

For more information

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