



**2021 B2B
MARKETING
TRENDS IN
TECH &
SAAS**

**2021 B2B
MARKETING
TRENDS &
RESEARCH**

1. The impact of COVID on B2B tech marketing in 2020

"75% Of B2B tech companies have been able to meet or outperform their marketing targets in 2020"

Despite the complexity, uncertainty and challenges, it seems most B2B tech companies have been able to achieve what they originally set out to do this year. In 2020 over 75% of businesses have been able to meet or outperform their targets. On the other hand, just under a quarter of marketers struggled to meet their targets. But then in any given year, we might expect to see a similar number of businesses fail to hit their targets, so it's hard to say that those who have underperformed have done so as a direct result of Covid.

"I'M NOT SURPRISED THAT ENTERPRISE BUYERS HAVE RESPONDED TO THE PANDEMIC BY BRINGING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIES FORWARD, WITH OBVIOUS BENEFITS TO B2B COMPANIES WITH INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS. AT POLYAI FOR EXAMPLE, WE'VE SEEN INCREASED INTEREST IN OUR CONTACT CENTRE AUTOMATION SOLUTIONS. I'M DELIGHTED THAT SO MUCH OF THE FINITE COMMUNITY HAS SEEN SUCCESS IN SPITE OF MASS JOB LOSSES AND BUDGET CUTS, AND HOPE THAT WE CONTINUE TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER DURING THIS AWFUL GLOBAL CRISIS."

Kylie Whitehead, Marketing Lead, PolyAI

"63% of B2B marketers have a positive outlook going into 2021"

Looking ahead into 2021 it seems the majority of our members are generally positive in outlook. About 5% of our members have a negative outlook for 2021, but even as we were gathering this data in November, positive news about a vaccine was beginning to appear. Hopefully positive vaccine news and a good Christmas break will get everyone feeling positive by the start of 2021!

WHICH MARKETING CHANNELS HAVE GROWN IN IMPORTANCE THE MOST SINCE COVID STRUCK?

Webinars 57%

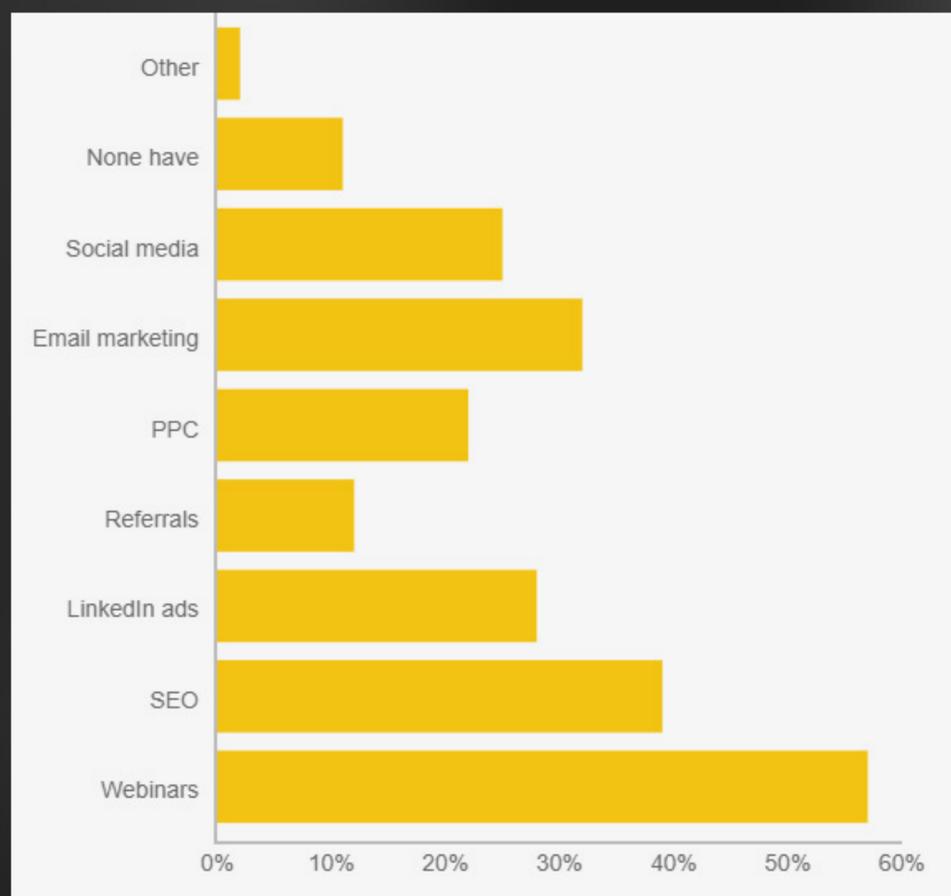
57% of B2B tech marketers felt that webinars have increased in importance the most since Covid began

SEO 39%

39% of B2B tech marketers felt that SEO has increased in importance the most since Covid began

Email 32%

32% of B2B tech marketers believe email marketing has grown in importance the most since Covid began



This was one of the questions we were most interested to see the data for. As events and conferences have been cancelled, field marketing budgets have either been put on hold or reallocated to other marketing channels – predominantly digital channels.

It's fair to say that webinars might be a bit of an obvious answer given the impact of Covid, with nearly 60% of the marketers we surveyed saying they had increased in importance for them. More interestingly, SEO seems to be the channel that lots of B2B tech marketers have been turning to. From discussions with our members we know this to be true. Given the time SEO can take to build and start delivering ROI, lots of marketers wish they had started working on it many months ago.

It's interesting to see more B2B marketers realising that organic search can be a big driver of awareness, engagement and lead generation.

Aside from SEO the other channels that have increased in importance for B2B tech marketers are email marketing, LinkedIn ads, social media and PPC advertising.

We also continued to invest in SEO as 39% of the survey respondents did. Personally, I think this is a very sensible approach given a number of reasons:

- SEO is one of the cheapest, most cost-effective marketing channels. If you don't have the budget for any other marketing campaigns you can still utilise SEO to generate traffic/leads/sales at nearly no additional cost at all.
- SEO is a long-term effort and takes time from implementation to seeing results. The more competitive your industry is the more you need to put in an effort continuously. So stopping isn't really an option.
- When everything stands still it is an opportunity to clean up old SEO-debt. While everyone is busy and campaigns are running more general non-campaign related tasks (such as updating your website's CMS, cleaning up tech-debt, updating old content) tend to get pushed down the priority list as nice-to-haves/do-later. With things potentially being a bit quieter, now is the time to go through those lists and prepare for full speed again." **Kerstin Reichert, SEO Digital Marketing Manager, Tide**

2. STATE OF AI AND MARTECH IN B2B TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES

“73% OF B2B TECH MARKETERS FEEL THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED DIGITAL FATIGUE SINCE THE OUTBREAK OF COVID”

Lots of feedback we've had from marketers has been that 'digital fatigue' has become more of a problem over the last few months. From falling digital engagement numbers, to lower webinar turnout as the year progressed.

Whilst we initially saw a surge in engagement off the back of everyone spending more time at their computers, this seems to have gradually been in decline since. In a world where every business has been investing in digital, it seems it's harder to stand out from the crowd. Quality of content and uniqueness of digital experience are more important than ever.

“AT LOOPUP, WE HAVE INCREASED DIGITAL SPEND DURING LOCKDOWN BECAUSE OTHER CHANNELS LIKE OUT-OF-HOME AND TRADE SHOWS HAVE BEEN UNAVAILABLE – A STRATEGY THAT PROBABLY MANY B2B TECH COMPANIES TOOK, CONTRIBUTING TO DIGITAL CONTENT SATURATION, AND CREATING A NEED FOR MARKETERS TO ‘CUT THROUGH THE NOISE’. TO DO THIS, WE HAVE INVESTED IN THE QUALITY OF OUR CONTENT TO MAINTAIN ENGAGEMENT IN A MORE CROWDED ONLINE ENVIRONMENT – LIKELY SOMETHING THAT ALL MARKETERS WILL NEED TO DO ON SOME LEVEL GOING INTO 2021.”

ROBERT JARDINE, CMO, LOOPUP

“65% OF B2B TECH MARKETERS ARE LOOKING TO INCREASE THEIR USE OF MARKETING TECHNOLOGY IN 2021”

We've all seen the ever growing MarTech landscape that Scott Brinker puts together each year. Navigating the technology landscape is not easy for marketers. Either way, the majority of B2B tech marketers we surveyed were looking to increase their investment in MarTech in 2021. 64.4% B2B tech marketers are looking to increase the amount of MarTech they will be using in 2021, whilst only 2.2% said they would be cutting back.

“MARKETERS ARE GOING TO INCREASE THEIR MARTECH BUDGET AND USAGE NEXT YEAR TO KEEP UP WITH DIGITAL DEMAND. THIS WILL BE PRIMARILY DRIVEN BY THE TRANSITION TO DIGITAL-ONLY EXPERIENCES, BUT YOU’LL ALSO SEE MARKETERS PUTTING A STRONGER EMPHASIS ON OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS AND PRODUCTIVITY. GIVEN THAT, I FORESEE A BIG SPIKE IN INVESTMENT IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND WORKFLOW MANAGEMENT TOOLS IN 2021.”

DARRELL ALFONSO, GLOBAL MARKETING OPERATIONS MANAGER, AMAZON WEB SERVICES

“35% OF B2B TECH MARKETERS ARE CERTAIN THAT THEY WILL BE MAKING GREATER USE OF AI TECHNOLOGIES IN 2021”

It seems nearly every new piece of MarTech seems to claim to use AI in some form or another. And in fairness, lots of MarTech could be making use of AI without us even knowing. We thought we would ask the question to see how many B2B tech marketers are actively seeking out artificial intelligence tools within their marketing. Lots of marketers seem unsure, whilst about one-third believe that they will make use of more AI in their marketing technology in 2021.

“I LOVE TO USE A “CHERRY PICKER” PROCESS TO CLASSIFY PROJECTS AND TACTICS BY COMPLEXITY AND VALUE TO EXPLOIT THE HIGHEST VALUE AND LOWEST COMPLEXITY INITIATIVES. AS MARKETERS TODAY, WE HAVE A LOT OF FRUIT TO PICK FROM, AND THERE’S ALWAYS RIPE EASY TO REACH CHERRY’S LEFT ON THE TREE. IT’S NOT SURPRISING MANY MARKETERS STILL DON’T FEEL IT’S TIME TO REPLACE THE MORE TRIED AND TESTED OPTIONS WITH MATURING AI BASED TECHNOLOGIES. FOR NOW, AT LEAST!” RHYS PRIESTMAN, DIRECTOR MARKETING OPERATIONS, ENSTOA

“75% OF B2B TECH MARKETERS ARE GOING TO FOCUS ON PERSONALISATION IN THE FUTURE”

Personalization has been on the rise for years. But whilst it’s been on B2B marketers to do lists, it’s often been somewhere near the bottom. Let’s face it – marketers have enough to do, and diving deeper into personalization can be a complex and time consuming activity. The impact of Covid has driven closer sales and marketing alignment underpinned by a need to stay closer to customers than ever before. As a result, for 75% of B2B tech marketers, personalization remains a priority going into 2021. The ever increasing amount of data and technology available to marketers is also helping to enable personalization.

“One third of B2B tech marketers say chatbots and virtual assistants will become a more important part of the B2B customer journey in 2021”

USE OF TOOLS SUCH AS CHATBOTS SEEMS TO HAVE SPLIT OUR AUDIENCE THREE WAYS. WHILST CHATBOTS HAVE BEEN RISING IN POPULARITY OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, THERE’S A QUESTION MARK AROUND HOW MUCH THEIR VALUE HAS REALLY BEEN PROVEN WHEN COMPARED TO OTHER CHANNELS OR INVESTMENTS IN A B2B SPACE. NONETHELESS, A THIRD OF B2B MARKETERS WE SURVEYED FEEL CHATBOTS WILL BECOME A MORE IMPORTANT PART OF THE B2B CUSTOMER JOURNEY IN 2021.

3. MARKETING TACTICS AND CHANNELS IN 2021

“Only 35% of B2B tech marketers are planning to use direct mail in 2021”

WHEN COVID STRUCK AND MOST COUNTRIES WERE FORCED INTO SOME FORM OF WORKING FROM HOME, DIRECT MAIL MARKETING BECAME A REAL CHALLENGE IN THE B2B ENVIRONMENT. MARKETERS WE SPEAK TO WITHIN OUR FINITE COMMUNITY REGULARLY EXPRESS HOW EFFECTIVE IT CAN BE WHEN DONE PROPERLY. WITH THIS IN MIND, 36.5% OF MARKETERS ARE PLANNING TO BEGIN USING DIRECT MAIL AGAIN IN 2021, BUT NEARLY 45% ARE NOT PLANNING ON DOING SO.

“37% OF B2B TECH MARKETERS PLAN TO USE INFLUENCERS AS A PART OF THEIR MARKETING TACTICS FOR 2021”

Influencer marketing is everywhere in the B2C world, but much less so in B2B. Yet 37.5% of marketers think influencer marketing will be a part of their strategy in 2021. With the complexity of B2B decision making and the importance of trust in particular in B2B tech marketing, we're interested in seeing how B2B businesses approach influencer marketing over the years to come.

“Nearly 70% of B2B tech marketers feel their website has become more important as part of their marketing since COVID began”

EVENTS, CONFERENCES AND OTHER FORMS OF FIELD MARKETING HAVE TRADITIONALLY BEEN BIG DRIVERS OF PIPELINE FOR B2B TECH COMPANIES, BUT WITH THEM ALL ON PAUSE THIS YEAR, WE'VE SEEN JUST HOW IMPORTANT DIGITAL CHANNELS HAVE BECOME. AND YET UNLESS YOUR WEBSITE IS OPTIMISED, AN INCREASED INVESTMENT IN DIGITAL CHANNELS RISKS OFFERING POOR ROI. WITH 70% OF B2B MARKETERS CONFIRMING THAT THEIR BUSINESS WEBSITE HAS BECOME MORE IMPORTANT AS THE HUB OF THEIR MARKETING SINCE COVID ARRIVED, IT SEEMS SAVVY B2B MARKETERS HAVE REALISED THAT A WEBSITE IS NO LONGER JUST A SHOP WINDOW – IT NEEDS TO PERFORM AS A DIGITAL MARKETING MACHINE, STRATEGICALLY SUPPORTING THE B2B BUYER JOURNEY FROM END TO END.

4. STATE OF EVENTS IN 2020 AND 2021

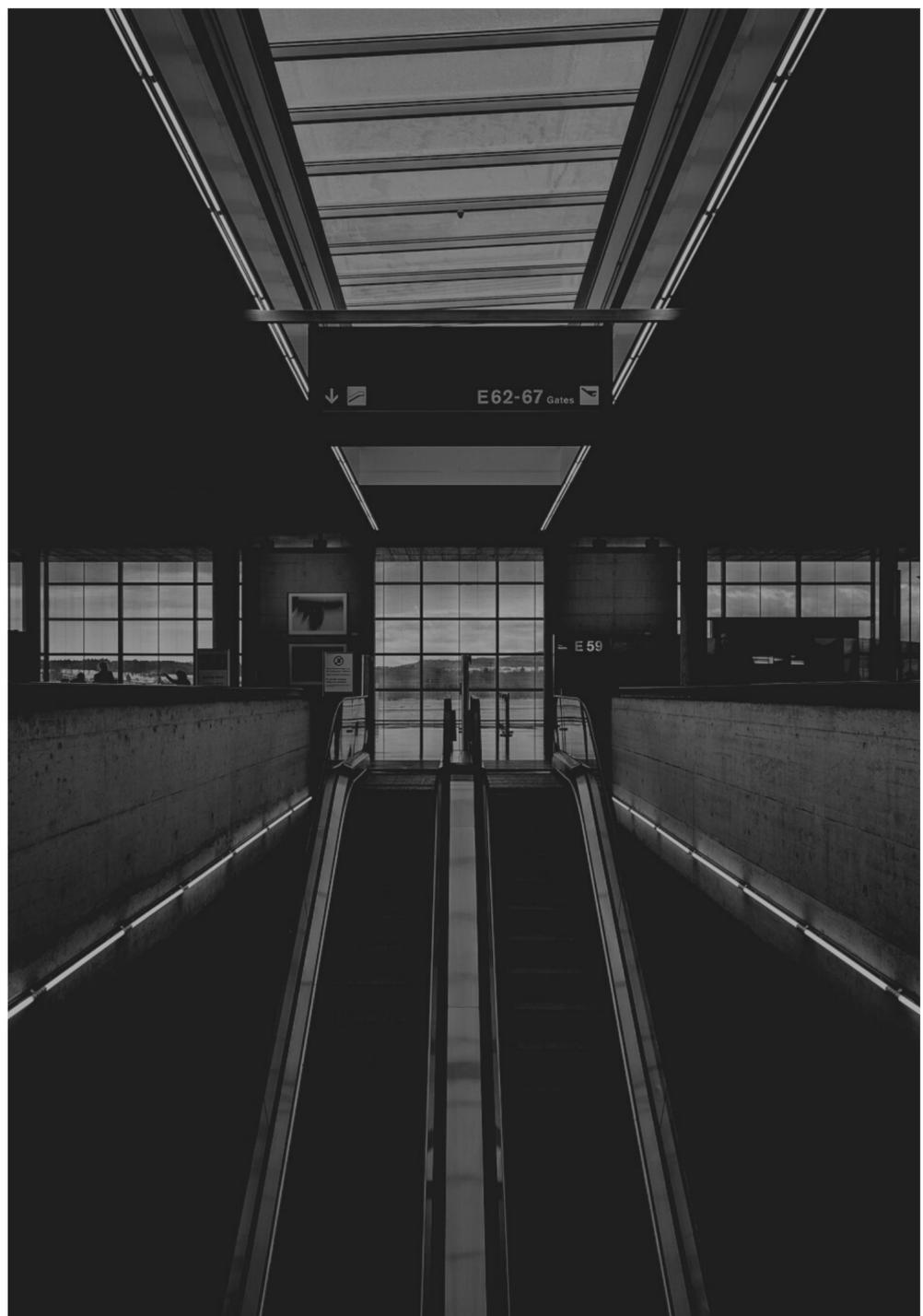
“65% of B2B tech marketers claim digital events will still be a part of their marketing strategy even if physical events return in 2021”

It's been hard to go more than an hour without seeing the word 'webinar' this year. But it looks like digital events are here to stay, with about 65% of B2B marketers planning on continuing to run digital events even if physical events return. It will be interesting to see if marketers look to combine physical and digital events in the future, or to run physical events and webinars separate from one another.

“This survey result captures the transformation of events as a B2B marketing channel. The switch to digital events was made out of necessity, but with many businesses successfully rethinking their formats, they've proven to allow for engaging touch points with customers and prospects alike. This without the financial and environmental cost of travel, and limitations that physical spaces bring. The event experiences in 2020 have also shown us that it's complicated to mimic face-to-face networking and the relationships which it builds. I believe that the 'hybrid' event, which combines a local in-person event with an online component, could evolve to be standard for B2B tech events in the future.” Robert Van Der Pluijm, Event Marketing Manager, Permutive

“37% OF B2B TECH MARKETERS REALLOCATED THEIR 2020 FACE-TO-FACE MARKETING BUDGET TO DIGITAL CHANNELS INSTEAD”

With budgets for events, conferences and other field marketing not being spent, we wanted to see what had happened to this budget in the year gone by. 37.5% of B2B marketers have reallocated this budget to digital channels instead, again demonstrating the increased investment in all things digital. 25% have increased their investment in virtual events, whilst 29.2% have been more cautious and not spent the budget at all.



5. BUDGETS OF B2B MARKETERS IN TECHNOLOGY & SAAS COMPANIES

“35% of B2B tech marketers are increasing their marketing budgets for 2021”

The question everyone wants to know the answer to! This one paints a generally optimistic picture, with only 15.6% of B2B marketers saying their budgets are decreasing in 2021.

Meanwhile 50% of those surveyed will keep budgets the same as in 2020. And most positively of all 34.4% of our members will be increasing their investment in marketing next year.

6. BIGGEST CHALLENGES FOR B2B TECH MARKETERS IN 2021

BALANCING QUALITY & QUANTITY 47%

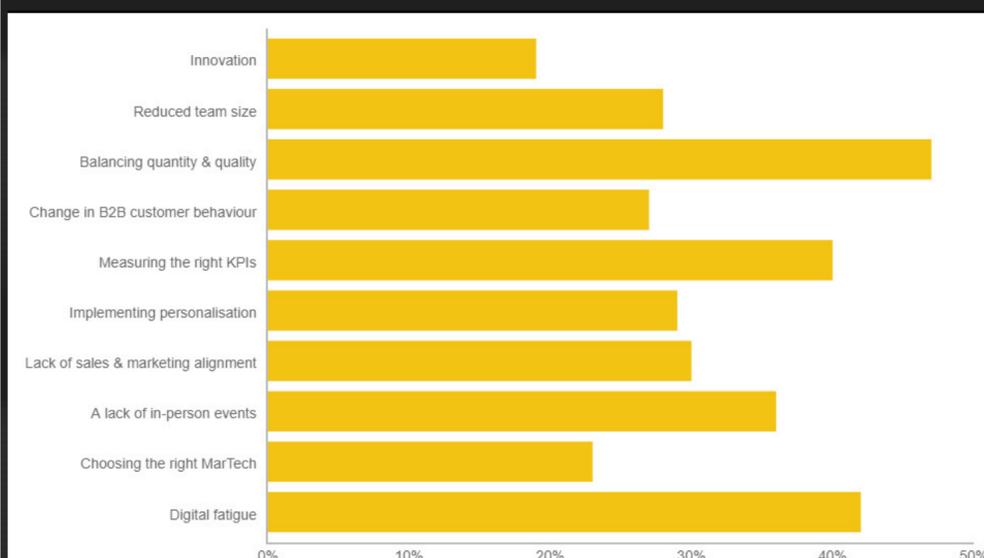
47% OF B2B TECH MARKETERS THINK THEIR BIGGEST CHALLENGE FOR 2021 WILL BE ‘BALANCING QUALITY AND QUANTITY’ WITHIN THEIR MARKETING

DIGITAL FATIGUE 44%

44% OF B2B TECH MARKETERS THINK THEIR BIGGEST CHALLENGE GOING INTO 2021 WILL BE TACKLING ‘DIGITAL FATIGUE’

MEASURING THE RIGHT KPIS 40%

40% OF B2B TECH MARKETERS THINK THEIR BIGGEST CHALLENGE FOR 2021 WILL BE MEASURING THE RIGHT KPIS



Finally we asked our community what they felt their biggest challenges were heading into 2021. The winner, with 47.9% of the votes was ‘Balancing quality and quantity’. As the number of channels B2B marketers have to manage increases in quantity, and the amount of content needed to fuel B2B marketing also rises, trying to balance overall quality and quantity of output is clearly a challenge. Next, ‘digital fatigue’ received 43.8% of the votes, indicating that a year of everything being digital is taking its toll on engagement and making it harder to cut through the noise.

In third place with 39.6% of the votes was ‘Measuring the right KPIs’. It’s clear that despite all of the marketing technology and analytics tools we have access to, marketers are still often struggling to know what to measure, and how best to measure them, when it comes to reporting on the success of marketing.

And following up in 4th place, B2B marketers acknowledged that a lack of in person events was continuing to be a challenge. Events have been a big driver of pipeline for B2B tech companies for a long time, and it's clear many marketers are still struggling to replace them.

"2021 will be all about focus. This year saw all B2B marketers become digital marketers overnight. It was unexpected, and it was quick – no plan or strategy had been pressure tested for this. Marketers pivoted to meet the needs of their customers, creating a lot of new programmes and assets. It's no surprise that the top two challenges are linked back to the 'noise' of 2020 – the only way to cut-through is to laser focus on your customer. B2B marketers need to get back to basics, reassess their audience and their new needs, and focus their marketing strategy. Whatever you knew to be true about your audience last year, is probably more uncertain today."

**Grace MacDonald, Marketing Manager,
Content & Social, LinkedIn**

