

2021 B2B MARKETING TRENDS REPORT:

HOW TO DEAL WITH DIGITAL BURNOUT



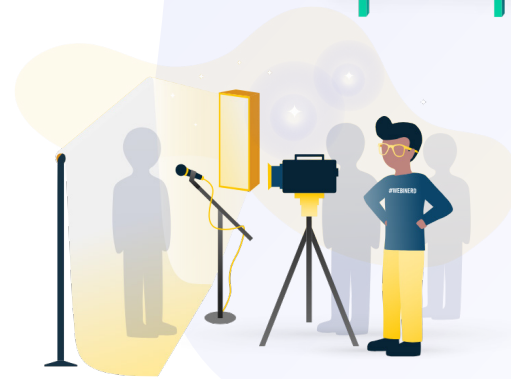
**Fresh Tips to Reengage
Your Audience**



ON24

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Let's face it. We're all facing burnout right now. The same old marketing routines are sapping your energy and no longer delivering results. Your audience isn't responding to your content and you're losing the drive to keep on creating.

So, what can we do to fight digital fatigue, lift spirits and get motivated to tackle 2021? To answer this question, ON24 and NetLine sat down with marketing expert Caroline Vandyke, Senior Content Manager at RollWorks. This report summarizes their thoughts and the input shared by the audience.

Here are a few highlights from the discussion:

DEALING WITH BURNOUT MEANS ACKNOWLEDGING IT.

While burnout might have been a sensitive topic in the past, it's obvious to many that the sudden and elongated shift to remote work and digital channels have worn audiences down.

In fact, marketing audiences have slashed content consumption dramatically since

March 2020. A recent [RollWorks survey](#) found **half of marketers have experienced burnout** at some point in 2020. This is an issue affecting every marketer, and addressing the problem within both your team and the experiences you provide for your audience is the first key step in overcoming burnout.

MARKETERS ARE PROVING BURNOUT CAN BE OVERCOME.

Across both the B2B and B2C landscape, our experts have identified leading examples of marketing tactics that **rise above digital burnout**.

Brands like **Nike** and **EF Pro Cycling** are setting the bar for creative and bold thinking, while experiences provided by ON24 and RollWorks are taking **digital experiences to the next level**.

TOOLS ARE AVAILABLE TO DEAL WITH CHALLENGES.

It's no question that B2B marketers are finding it hard to deal with digital burnout — in an ON24 poll, **nearly half (46%) shared that a lack of creative ideas was one of their biggest challenges** in keeping audiences engaged this year.

But our experts have come together to highlight a range of creative, practical and emotional tools for you to employ and refresh your marketing approach.

WHEN BUILDING YOUR PLAN TO FIGHT BURNOUT, QUESTION YOUR NORMS.

Among a number of tactics for fighting audience burnout, the largest share (35%) of B2B marketers surveyed by ON24 said that **being bolder and crazier with messaging is working well** for them.

In fact, **boldness and fearlessness tend to break the status quo** and, as a theme, runs through each of our experts' recommendations for building a plan to tackle digital burnout. Being prepared to rethink the length, format, goals and parameters of your digital experiences will help you and your team to get out of a funk and to reach your audience in new ways.

HOW TO LEARN MORE:

The webinar generating these insights is always-on and ready to view. [Register now to hear more.](#)

To sign up for future sessions, [visit www.on24.com/resources/upcoming-webinars](http://www.on24.com/resources/upcoming-webinars).

Tessa Barron, VP Marketing at ON24 and David Fortino, SVP Audience and Product at NetLine would also like to thank Caroline Vandyke, Senior Content Manager at RollWorks for joining the discussion and providing valuable recommendations for today's B2B professionals.

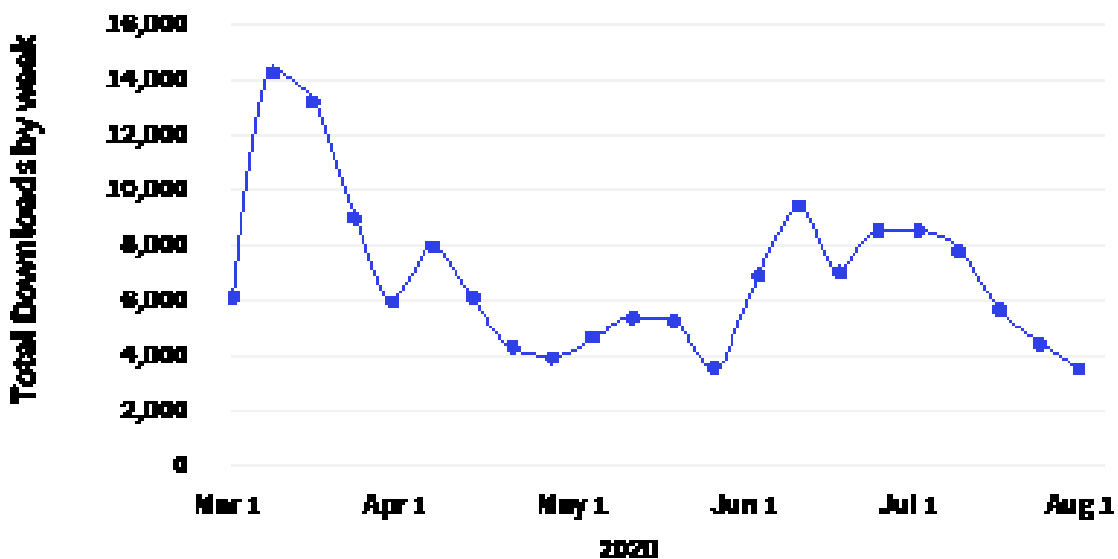
THE CONTEXT

In January 2019, a [viral BuzzFeed News article](#) on 'How Millennials Became The Burnout Generation' shot the concept of burnout to buzzword status. It shone a spotlight on the reality of burnout in professional life and brought discussions that might previously have been skirted around to the fore.

And once more, in 2020, the concept has taken on a whole new meaning — enter digital burnout. At the start of 2020, as working life changed across the world, marketers and prospects alike were inundated with the results of accelerated digital transformation. From content consumption to online calls to e-commerce, this digital volume clearly wasn't sustainable.

COVID-19 CONTENT DEMAND BY WEEK:

Consumption Amid Covid-19 Outbreak in the U.S. since March



Source: MeltThe828 Content Consumption First-Party Data

As [NetLine data illustrates](#), B2B content consumption dramatically peaked in March with more than 14,000 downloads per week via its platform. And while this consumption saw somewhat of a second wave in June, latest figures see it falling once again.

These weekly figures saw higher consumption year-over-year. Professionals are being asked to consume more digital content than ever before, and their interest is dwindling.

Tessa acknowledged this reality with her honest introduction:



I'M SURE EVERYONE IS THINKING TO THEMSELVES – NOT ANOTHER WEBINAR.”

For Tessa and the team at ON24, attempting to surpass digital burnout meant putting the very experiences it powers to the test. While webinars and virtual experiences are more of an essential tool for marketers this year than ever before, innovation and creativity are what will make these experiences stand out going forward.

INSPIRE YOUR TEAM AS WELL AS YOUR AUDIENCE.

David reminds marketers that there are two sides to avoiding digital burnout. On the one hand, it's about creating inspiring content outputs for prospects, clients and sales enablement. On the other, it's helping your fellow marketers feel inspired to do the same.

With the need for creativity top of mind, Caroline acknowledges that many marketers are struggling to be inventive right now — and the numbers back this up. More than a third (34%) of marketers responding to [a RollWorks survey](#) shared that they and their team are finding it more difficult to come up with creative ideas, and only a minority (22%) feel that the lines between work and personal life have become more blurred in a positive way.

Our experts agree that digital burnout impacting virtual channels does not mean digital efforts should be discounted. Rather, addressing the challenge of burnout head-on should inspire marketers to rethink the possibilities of what can be achieved.

DIGITAL BURNOUT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A GIVEN

In a recent webinar on digital burnout, ON24 decided to walk the walk. For example, the webinar which inspired this report was customized to resemble a drive-in theater.

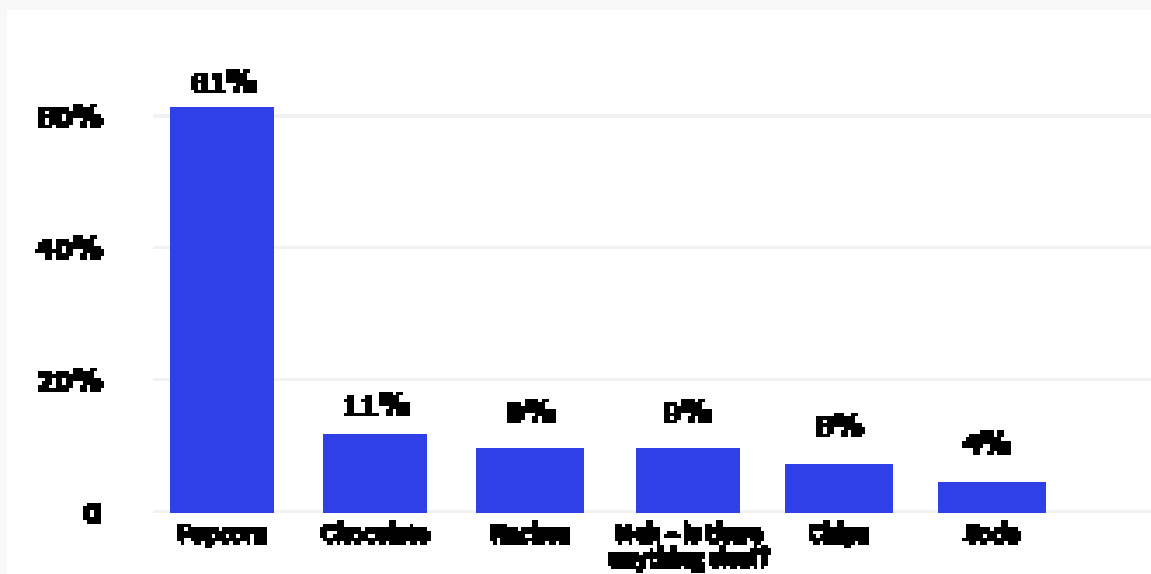
Furthermore, to drive engagement in a different fashion, the audience was asked to list their favorite refreshment.

Speaker David Fortino even had his own bowl of popcorn to join the 61% of attendees who chose it as their favorite. And, to drive engagement and excitement within the webinar, the hosts

let participants know that the first attendee to respond to a poll would win a fun prize.



WHAT'S YOUR GO-TO REFRESHMENT WHEN ENJOYING A MOVIE?



MARKETERS ARE ALREADY RISING ABOVE BURNOUT.

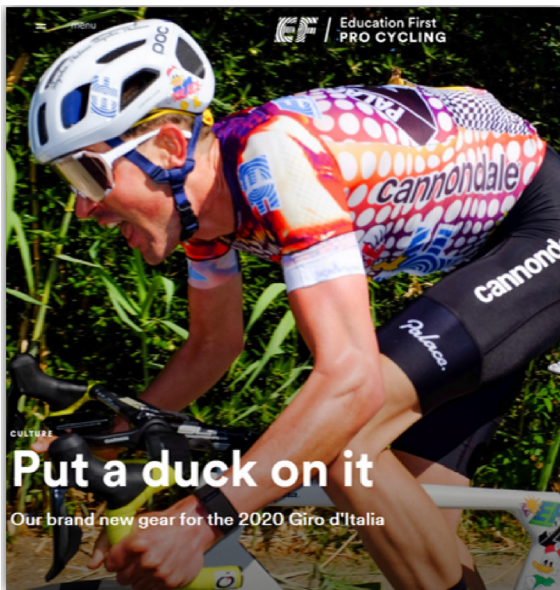
Another great way to avoid digital burnout is to look for inspiration from your fellow marketers, irrespective of the industry they're in. For Tessa, looking to a B2C example such as Nike's recent Google Slides experience with Footlocker is case in point.

Nike turned a format that might typically be seen as uninspiring — the slide deck — into a creative and engaging content experience.



THIS IS A BILLBOARD FOR THE INTERNET HIGHWAY. IT'S DIFFERENT. IT'S SOMETHING FOR YOUR EYE TO LOOK AT WITHOUT A BUNCH OF POP-UP ADVERTISEMENTS. IT MAKES YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE."

Tessa adds that recreating an experience like this most likely involves leveraging slides and artwork that already exist and presenting them in a fresh and unique way.

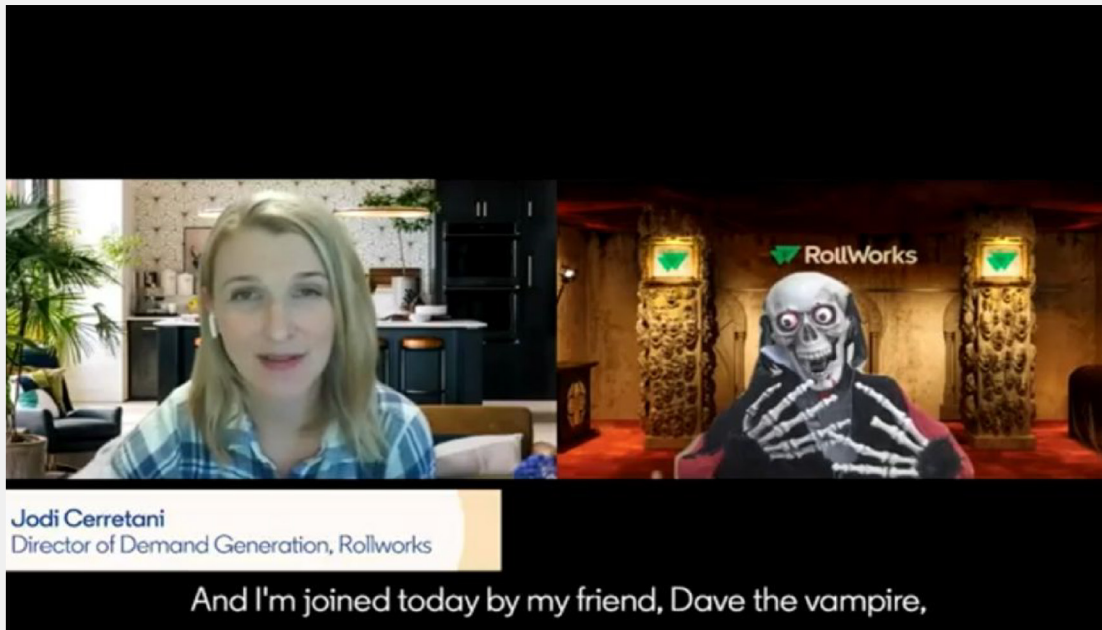


David similarly feels that looking beyond B2B vendors and into consumer landscapes can not only be great for a marketing team's creativity but for personal creativity too. He cites EF Pro Cycling's collaboration with Palace Skateboards and high-end fashion brand Rapha as a great example of uncommon brands sharing a common marketing goal.

The initiative, 'Put a duck on it,' refreshed EF's kit by, well, putting a duck on everything. This led to every custom piece of content and material created to sell out. David notes:



THIS ACHIEVED LIFT IN PERCEPTION, LIFT IN BRAND REPUTATION, A LIFT IN CONVERSIONS, AND IT ELEVATED THEIR POSITION GLOBALLY WITHIN THAT COMMUNITY. SO SOMETHING CREATIVE AND GOOFY CAN HAVE MEANINGFUL BUSINESS OUTCOMES IF YOU JUST ALLOW YOURSELF TO THINK THAT WAY."



Playfulness is a running theme in leading examples of refreshed marketing. When RollWorks was invited to take part in a 'day of content' at LinkedIn, rather than simply presenting ABM plays, speaker Jodi Cerretani spoke to company mascot Dave the Vampire for advice.

According to Caroline, the approach saw a notable increase in engagement, with attendees actively reaching out to thank RollWorks for its fun and lighthearted approach.



NOW, PEOPLE REALLY DON'T WANT TO BE GIVEN ALL THE FLUFF. THEY WANT YOU TO GET STRAIGHT TO THE POINT, AND THEY KNOW YOU'RE MARKETING TO THEM, SO BE HONEST ABOUT IT. YOU DON'T ALWAYS NEED A VAMPIRE,

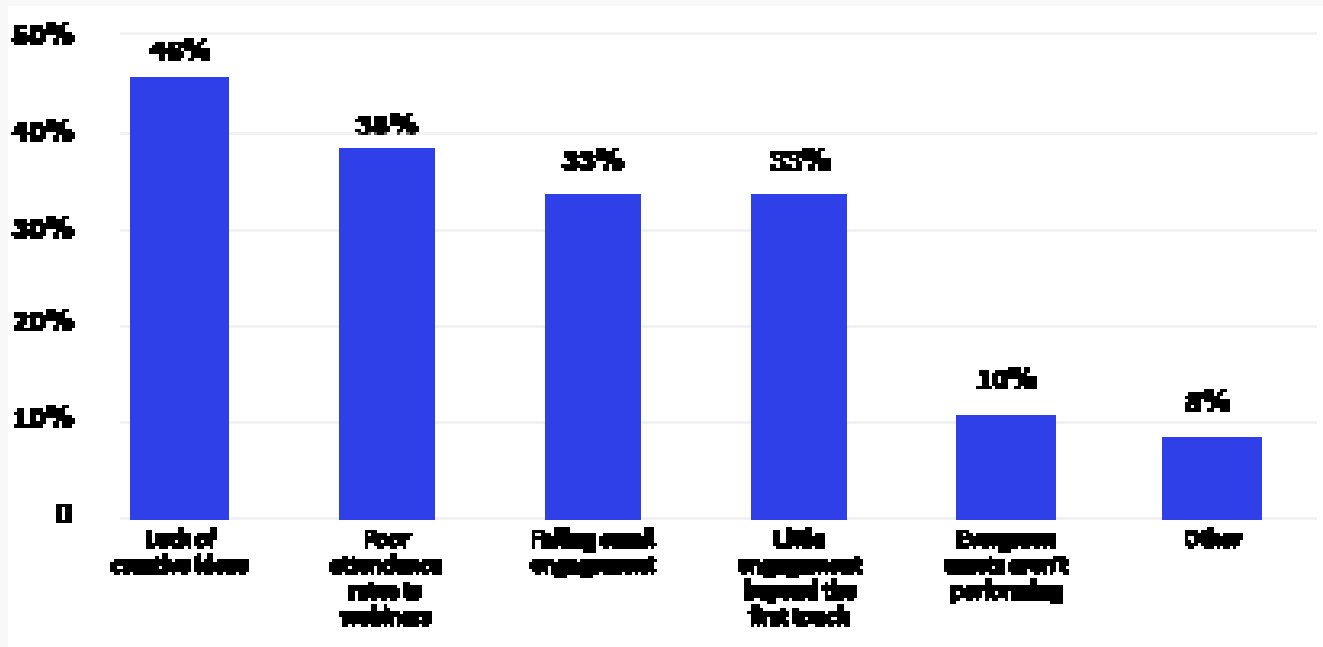
BUT SOMETHING ELSE TO THROW SOME FLAVOR IN THERE."

Realize that creating net-new assets to avoid burning out a digital audience doesn't have to be a given. As David suggests, getting scrappy with your marketing means revisiting and unlocking the huge potential sitting in the assets you have on hand.

TOOLS TO FIGHT BURNOUT

An important step in starting to tackle digital burnout is to identify the areas in which your marketing team is currently struggling. In response to the webinar poll, B2B marketers shared the challenges they face as a result of digital burnout:

WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN KEEPING YOUR AUDIENCE ENGAGED THIS YEAR?



As discussed above, an overwhelming problem for marketers right now is a struggle with creativity and a lack of creative ideas (46%). Nearly four in 10 (38%) are also experiencing poor attendance rates to webinars. In fact, according to [RollWorks data](#) even though more than half of marketers are hosting over 50% more webinars than earlier this year, some 65% are seeing a drop in attendance rates.

A third of marketers are also seeing falling email engagement (33%) and little engagement beyond the first touch (33%). [With SiriusDecisions](#) finding that on average B2B buyers have 17 meaningful interactions when completing a purchase.

But overcoming these challenges is achievable. Our experts have come together to provide some meaningful tools and insights to fight digital burnout.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF AND YOUR AUDIENCE.

David brings up a tool that reaches beyond burnt-out marketers and speaks to the wider issue of professional burnout in a difficult time. His first instruction? Look after yourself. No marketer will be able to make content that pushes creative boundaries and inspires their team to do the same unless they have the energy to find creativity within themselves.

Tools that David himself uses to aid this are meditation apps, background-noise generators and exercise tracking software.

Tessa recommends marketers take into account burnout as a universal experience. With that understanding, marketers can then use that empathy to inform their digital content in ways that they might not have been comfortable with before.



WE'RE LITERALLY ALL IN THE SAME SITUATION RIGHT NOW. THE ABILITY TO CREATE EXPERIENCES THAT TOUCH DIRECTLY ON THE CHALLENGES PEOPLE ARE FACING IS TREMENDOUS AS A MARKETER. IT'S AN OPPORTUNITY TO REACH OUT IN WAYS THAT MAKE SENSE NOW, BUT THAT BEFORE PERHAPS FELT A LITTLE INTRUSIVE."

LEVERAGE YOUR LANGUAGE.

This empathy can filter into the language used in campaigns. Caroline uses the example of RollWorks' "Not Another Webinar," guide. The guide got creative with honest and lighthearted language, starting its conclusion with the question: "Did you make it this far?" and inviting readers to "Give your eyes a break" half-way through the report. Caroline says:



IT'S LIKE THERE'S AN ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM. TALKING MORE PERSONALLY TO PEOPLE AND ACKNOWLEDGING WHAT'S GOING ON RATHER THAN IGNORING IT IS THE BEST APPROACH."

In terms of practical tools to harness, David mentions NetLine's "Audience Explorer," a free and ungated tool allowing B2B marketers to get a deep understanding of content consumption behaviors right now, including specific data reports by industry and job title.

And, of course, marketers shouldn't forget the range of tools and widgets at their disposal when creating virtual experiences via the ON24 Digital Experience Platform, including Q&As, polls, custom branding and more.

With personal health in order, an understanding of audience pain points and tools under their belt, marketers can turn to an important approach that David encourages — fearlessness. He says:

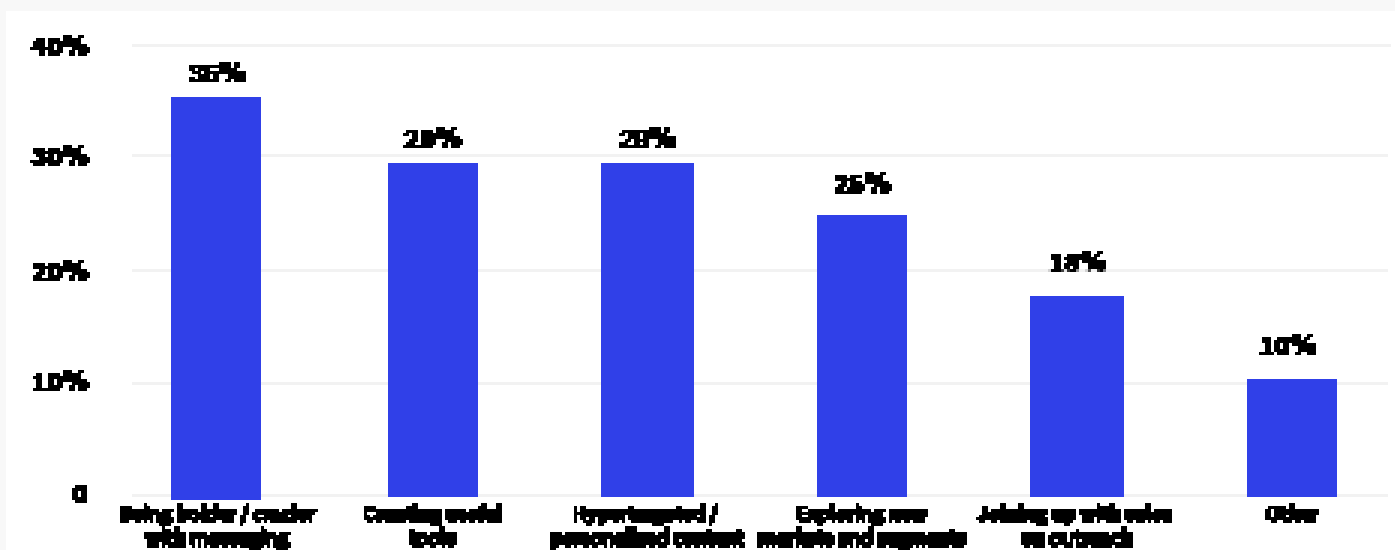


IT TAKES COGNIZANT DECISION MAKING ON YOU, YOUR BRAND OR YOUR GROUP'S BEHALF TO BE COMFORTABLE WITH DOING SOMETHING DIFFERENT. HOPEFULLY EVERYONE WALKS AWAY FROM THIS WITH A LITTLE BIT MORE CONFIDENCE TO PUSH TO DO SOME OF THESE THINGS."

BUILDING A PLAN TO REENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE

In a recent ON24 poll, B2B marketers shared the tactics that worked for them in dealing with digital burnout.

WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND HAS WORKED WELL IN TACKLING AUDIENCE BURNOUT?



If you have found the confidence and drive to utilize every tool at your disposal to overcome digital burnout, then now is time to make a plan.

For the largest share (35%) of respondents, being bolder and crazier with messaging has been an effective tactic. Around three in 10 have benefited

from creating useful tools (29%) and hyper-targeted / personalized content (29%), while one quarter is exploring new markets and segments. Just under two in 10 (18%) have found joining up with sales on outreach to work well.

QUESTION THE NORM.

Caroline believes marketers should be honest about what will really work with their audience, even if it means going against their usual approach or industry averages.

This might involve questioning the length of your webinars. At RollWorks, ‘webinines’ have challenged the idea that webinars need to be 30-40 minutes long, packing content into low-commitment, nine-minute episodes that are high in value.

Or, it could require an honest rethink of whether your digital experience really gives audiences what they need. In some cases, this could be giving visitors the option to be frank about why they’ve come to your experience. RollWorks’ chatbot, for example, asks webinar registrants if they simply want to receive a recording of the webinar instead of attending. Rather than being discouraged by disappointing attendance rates, the approach shifts marketing expectations and meets audiences where they are.

Similarly, Tessa and ON24 are testing interactive registration pages that use a webinar’s PowerPoint slides to offer a taster of the full experience, but acknowledge that this might be all the content that some people need and offering them a separate call to action. As Tessa says:



THE WEBINAR IS NOT THE DESTINATION. IT’S A REALLY IMPORTANT, ENGAGING EXPERIENCE THAT WE USE TO ACCELERATE THE BUYER ALONG THAT JOURNEY.”

RECYCLE CONTENT.

Caroline reminds marketers that there’s no harm in making their jobs easier possible at a time when they might have less bandwidth.

Rather than having a whole team create an e-book on InDesign, for example, repurposing a deck used in a webinar by making minor retouches and using templates help marketers to produce content quickly and react to trends.

The time saved gives you and your team more energy for creativity and testing out new ideas.

DON’T FEAR DEBATE.

Conversational experiences can be more effective than simple presentations. Actively planning for conversation and debate is also a great way to harness the honesty that audiences want to hear.

Tessa notes that for ON24, RollWorks’ “Not Another Webinar,” guide represented an opportunity to start a valuable discussion about digital burnout, rather than being something to shy away from. In fact, opportunities for debate and dialogue are organized quarterly by ON24, in an attempt to move past jargon and “fluffy” marketing discussions.

RETHINK WHAT WILL CAPTURE ATTENTION.

Part of dealing with digital burnout is recognizing the sheer volume of digital experiences out there. To capture attention, Tessa suggests adding both a sense of urgency and timeliness to your messaging.

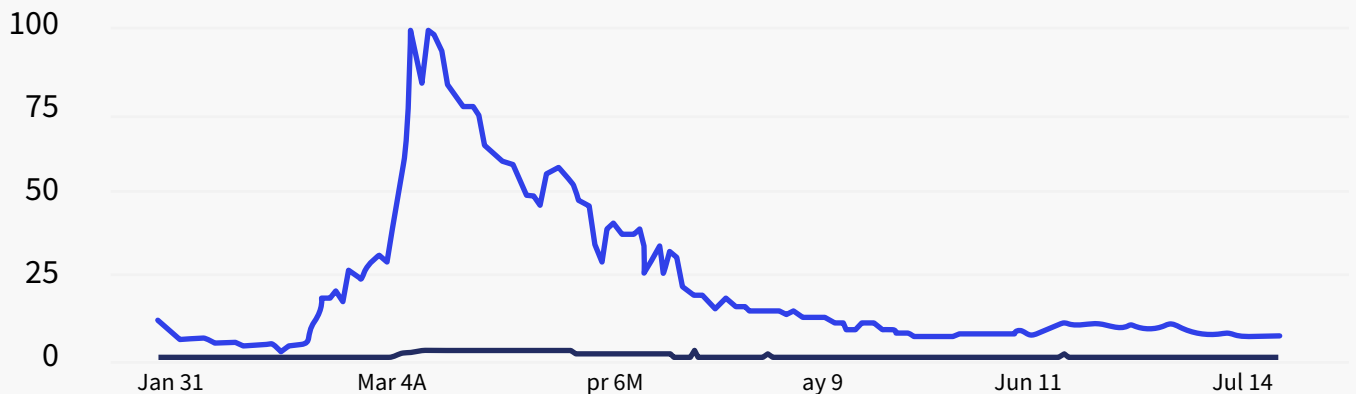
Planning for seasonal content triggers is a great way to do this — a recent on-demand webinar by ON24 presented on Halloween became a “Hexperience,” sent out via email with the option to immediately enter the experience. It turned a light demo into a fun but hard-hitting piece of engagement that didn’t leave attendees waiting around. Tessa says:

“IT WAS A BIG LESSON FOR US. WE’RE GOING TO BE PLAYING MORE WITH INSTANT, SHOPPABLE VIDEO WHICH IS POWERED BY A WEBINAR, BUT IS TOTALLY DIFFERENT TO A NORMAL WEBINAR EXPERIENCE.”

You may have also noticed throughout the report the absence of the word “COVID.” This is because David raises a valid point we all need to hear: **It’s time to steer clear of pandemic-focused content.**

INTEREST OVER TIME

• Coronavirus • COVID-19



United States. 1/31/20 - 7/31/20. web Search

As Google Trends shows, interest in the very words relating to the pandemic has drastically reduced since earlier in the year. Marketers looking to refresh their content should take this into account. In David’s words:



IT’S NOT THAT THE PROBLEM IS GOING AWAY, AND IT’S NOT THAT BUSINESSES AREN’T FACING THE SAME CHALLENGES. THEY CERTAINLY ARE, AND IF ANYTHING THEY’RE GETTING HARDER. IT’S JUST THAT THE TOPIC ITSELF IS EXHAUSTING, IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES AND PROFESSIONALLY.”

As David notes, many companies are choosing to skip talking about their customer’s problems and are going straight to addressing them, for example, by giving away services for free to help industries that are struggling to stay afloat.

FINAL TAKEAWAYS

TAKE CARE.

For his top tip, David once again emphasizes the importance of marketers looking out for their health and wellbeing:



IF YOU'RE NOT SOUND BOTH PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY TO RECEIVE INPUTS AND SIGNALS TO DRIVE CREATIVITY, NOTHING WILL EVER BE YIELDED."

ADD A MAGNIFYING GLASS TO EVERYTHING YOU DO.

For Caroline, this is the time for marketers to embrace honesty and have conversations about approaches that might not have been working so well in the first place:



NOW'S THE TIME TO STOP AND PAUSE, WHICH GIVES YOU THE ABILITY TO HAVE THOSE HONEST CONVERSATIONS AND A LITTLE BIT MORE CONFIDENCE TO SAY, 'I THINK WE SHOULD DO SOMETHING DIFFERENTLY.'"

TAKE WHAT WORKS, AND MAKE IT EVEN BETTER.

Tessa's top tip is that while experimenting and finding the next greatest format can take you so far, using channels that are proven to work and rethinking your approach within those channels is a resourceful way to overcome burnout:



IT'S ABOUT MARKETERS RETHINKING THE OLD AND GOING ABOUT IT IN A NEW WAY. IT'S CHANGING UP THE APPROACH, NOT NECESSARILY THE CHANNEL ALTOGETHER."