

A person is shown in profile, wearing a red VR headset. The background is a vibrant, surreal digital landscape. A large, blue, textured sphere resembling a planet or a large eye dominates the center. To the left, there's a structure that looks like a city or a complex of buildings. The sky is filled with orange and red clouds, and several orange spheres are floating in the air. The overall color palette is dominated by blues, oranges, and reds, creating a futuristic and immersive atmosphere.

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Cybersecurity Marketing in 2023: 12 Industry Experts Look Ahead

The Growing Threat Landscape

We often hear how the cybersecurity profession is extremely broad, however, most people think that it all centers around catching malicious actors, and protecting networks. There is a business side to cybersecurity as well. Your company may make the latest, greatest tool, but without good marketing, it can languish in obscurity. The business of cybersecurity marketing can mean the difference between an organization's success, or failure.

We asked a group of cybersecurity marketing professionals about how they approach some of the challenges, as well as their approach to helping a business succeed.



Question 1

What are the key challenges cybersecurity marketing teams face now and in the next 12 months, and what are you implementing to mitigate these challenges, whilst helping the growth of your business?



Andra Zaharia

Cybersecurity content specialist & creator of the Cyber Empathy podcast

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By far the biggest obstacle for marketers in cybersecurity is fatigue.

Information security professionals have developed an almost instinctive repulsion towards marketing, often rightfully so. A combination of familiarity bias and pushy marketing tactics have only strengthened the resistance security specialists have towards being approached and sold to.

The more marketing we throw at them, the stronger the resistance becomes. And so, a paradox emerges: the more we seek to stimulate growth through marketing, the harder it becomes to do it.

And there's another factor that makes it more difficult for marketers to achieve their goals: the uncertainty and stress in InfoSec specialists' lives.

My approach is to scale back. I'm focusing on the following:

- Spending more time with product teams.
- Bringing their expertise into the limelight (in their own words).
- Cultivating one-on-one relationships in the community.

It's not spectacular, it doesn't scale very well, but the results are long-lasting, and they compound like nothing else does.



Michelle Schafer

Partner and Senior Vice President at Merritt Group

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The recession is most definitely here, and cyber marketers are being impacted with less staff, less budget, and of course, increased demands from Boards and C-levels. We're having to do more with less, which means we need to get creative and prioritize marketing dollars. The days of celebrity headliners at cybersecurity conventions are going to be few and far between in 2023, as budgets tighten.

At my firm, Merritt Group, we're listening carefully to our client's needs to help them weather the economic crisis, and because we're a full-service marketing communications firm, we can pivot to offer other services to our clients. This is especially important if some of our clients don't have as many resources internally due to downsizing.

It all comes down to giving them great client service and finding creative ways to reach their target audiences. Our process of diving in deep to understand our clients' key marketing objectives, who their core buyer is, and building targeted (and creative!) Public Relations (PR) and marketing campaigns have been successful time and time again.



Wiebke Macrae (continued overleaf)

Head of DemOps, EMEA at Thales

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The key challenges are that everyone is looking to reach the same target audience and the same persona. Cutting through the noise is the major task as it is really difficult to grab people's attention - because they get inundated with messages every day and there are so many things that companies have tried already. As a result - how do you really grab the attention of someone and make it stick? Then, how do you get them to convert?

Lots of research about products and solutions is actually done under the radar, as part of the "dark funnel". So we don't even know who's looking for what. And when they surface, they often have already made their buying decision as they have done all their research in secret. The challenge here is threefold: how do you grab attention at the right point in time, be relevant, and have a good call to action to get them to convert? Offering just a PDF about your products or solutions is not really

something people want to trade their contact information for anymore. What can you offer them in return for a form fill with honest information? These challenges are not new, and they will stay with for the foreseeable future as well.

For us at Thales, we aim to engage our prospects and customers by using an account-based marketing approach. If you do it right, you really have a great chance to connect with customers and prospects. We've invested heavily in our tech stack in the last year to support our approach and to automate as much as we can. This goes much further than just marketing, we are providing these tools to the sales function too to be more targeted in their outreach as well.

The human factor though is really important as well, and that's of course a big focus at Thales. If you use account-based marketing, you can



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pre-empt most of the challenges I mentioned before because it will help you to find out who in the market is actively looking for your solution. But you need highly skilled marketers to analyse that data and use it to its full potential. Only then, you have the information to be relevant and to grab their attention when they do their research, be it through display advertising, on LinkedIn, or in user forums. For example, we've done work with Bora Marketing on peer-review sites as obviously, people tend to trust their peers more than they may trust companies. It's important to be where the prospects and customers are, to know who's currently in the market. Our martech stack helps us to find out that intent and act upon it.

Our account based marketing approach covers the whole spectrum from demand generation to 1:1 ABM. We're doing everything, from always-on campaigns to 1:few campaigns as well as 1:1 outreach. Going forward, our focus will be on a more verticalized, 1:few approach - once companies crystallize out of these campaigns and show that they really are in the market for our solutions, we will then move to a more one-to-one approach as well as supporting sales reps to close deals by being top of mind with prospects and customers. It doesn't stop there. Another way to mitigate the challenges is to keep close to your existing customers and to use upsell and cross-sell techniques. **Marketing doesn't stop once you've landed the customer; it goes much further.**



Kelsey Arhart

Marketing Director at Fortra

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There are a multitude of cybersecurity vendors in the market, all with similar messaging and a common purpose of boosting security, but most are only addressing just a small sliver of the challenges that organizations face on a daily basis. **Cybersecurity is complex, and no two organizations are the same.**

At Fortra, we're bringing together a full portfolio of strong cybersecurity solutions from one provider, and continually adapting to stay ahead of the evolving threat landscape. This allows us to truly partner with our customers to find the best integrated and scalable solutions that are right for their business without them having to go to multiple vendors.



Michelle Gunter

Director of Field and Channel Marketing - EMEA & NA at VIPRE Security Group

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The role of marketing has expanded, with teams being asked to do more with less, be that smaller teams or smaller budgets. Cybersecurity is a huge topic area with many different providers offering a wide variety of technologies and solutions, consultants and analysts providing extensive research, and a wide range of publications offering an ever-wider variety of opinions about the latest trends. Our customers and prospects are bombarded daily with messages from our direct competitors and those who want to steer budgets away from a particular area of cybersecurity to another, making marketing much more interesting. We are finding ourselves working harder to compete for the budget that our target audience has to spend.

Understanding who to market to, and which method to champion is critical, but this takes metrics, ROI statistics, and data points to add a layer of sophistication to our gut feeling built up over years of experience. There are many different routes to market for our messages: email, social, Pay-Per-Click (PPC), web, telemarketing, collaterals, special offers, and blogs. Getting the balance right between all mediums to result in the highest number of good-quality leads for our sales teams requires expertise, mixed with creativity.



Stella Tsitsoula

Senior Communications Consultant, Founder & Managing Partner at RED Communications, Vice-President & Comms Lead at Women4Cyber Greece

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I have worked for several years with many cybersecurity companies and organizations here in Greece. I have seen first-hand the challenges of the marketing in this area. When it comes to security, we need to stand out, for sure, but at the same time, we have to be careful with it because you must find the right balance to communicate to the different roles throughout the whole organization. This includes the C-level, executives, managers, admins, and everyone else. The most important problem for marketing agencies is that we are struggling to communicate the messages to all the parts because we are always talking about innovative solutions, and it is very difficult for people to understand the differentiation of several solutions.

One way that we approach the challenge is through superior content creation. We are trying to create uncomplicated content to make it more understandable for the crowd. We avoid technical

jargon, because if you start with too many technical terms, nobody understands the message at the end. However, it is also important to have not only easy content, but also valuable content.

We ask our clients if they have good testimonials from their customers, as well as case studies that we can use for sales and marketing processes. This is the best way to communicate a technical solution or a product, or a service. The key is to make it as understandable as possible for our audience.

Content is king for everyone in marketing. If we have a lot of qualitative content, and varied content, it enables us to target several different areas. For example, if we have educational content, that can be used to appeal to general purchasers. And, if we have more technical content, we can use that for system administrators. We differentiate the content for every marketing message.



Joe Pettit (continued overleaf)

Director at Bora Cybersecurity Marketing

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Cybersecurity marketing teams will be facing several challenges in the next 12 months. Most challenges will be centred around how impactful the recession will hit. No market is completely immune from a recession, but cybersecurity is now such an important component, organizations will continue to invest. However, there will be consequences.

Some organizations may have to reduce budgets when it comes to spending on cybersecurity tools – so, marketing teams will have their work cut out to ensure their tools and products aren't the ones being cut. Those who have a more robust portfolio of products will certainly look to prosper as security teams consolidate their tools and maximize the return on what they already have.

Marketing teams will have to get creative in their messaging to ensure that when they attract visitors to their site, it's clear how they would add value.

Many organizations will be looking to replace the existing solutions they have, so making sure the messaging is conscious of their needs will ensure that new visitors don't bounce, and then take some sort of action to learn more and start the nurturing process.

Another challenge will be to cut through the noise when it comes to driving leads. Social media is almost a fully-fledged advertising platform now. Unless you're spending actual money on advertising, it's going to be hard to generate a lot of new leads. The same must be said for SEO. So many organizations are looking to create content that drives organic traffic – but as more companies are implementing the right tactics, it's harder to rank and gain traction.



Joe Pettit

Director at Bora Cybersecurity Marketing

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It's becoming so important to be creative in how you reach your audience, but the need to capture their data remains as strong as ever. Expecting all new visitors to go directly to your Contact Us form is too much of a leap. The key is to implement various tactics to give people the option to engage on a level that works for them. It might be just signing up for a monthly newsletter because they like your blog content or offering them an industry-focused eBook with comments from their peers. Having the ability to serve multiple options across different areas of your site, will only help improve your conversions and drive more qualified leads for your sales team to engage with.



Hannah Tufts

Owner at Exhale Global

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Certainly not unique to the cybersecurity industry – right now marketing teams are competing with the need to invest in product development, while under pressure to sustain momentum and visibility in an increasingly crowded marketplace.

I think now's a great time to be bold. Dramatic shifts in the way we operate due to massive global events should inspire courage to hang up the rule book and design one that's much truer to what you originally hoped your brand would be.

We're seeing way more willingness to be playful and welcoming more opportunities to be disruptive with brand identity. That's a lot of fun!

Inviting a much broader base of experience into my team has characterized the last 12 months, and will absolutely shape the future of how we service our clients. When faced with high demand for a relative niche combination of technical marketing disciplines and subject-matter expertise specific to this industry, time becomes a luxury, and getting

creative about how we innovate is a necessity. Looking outside of our niche corner and challenging the norms is something we're able to achieve every day of the week (even as a dispersed team), thanks to a growing, potent team that combines decades of experience in tech, cybersecurity, finance, hospitality, wellbeing, journalism, and transformation.

We'll continue to look inwards and focus on storytelling because product development can easily become part of any successful and engaging marketing strategy when there's an insightful story to be shared that others can learn from. So far, this is proving to be an effective way to double-up and work with stretched budgets.



Mike Devine

Chief Marketing Officer at Fortra

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Cybersecurity professionals have their heads spinning and guts aching. They are terrified of a breach. They know there are weak spots in their environment. They are scrambling to avoid or lessen risk. They have products and vendors galore. But they are struggling to keep up. As marketers, we don't help the situation if all we do is pile on, giving them more reasons to worry. And if that's all we do, shame on us. We'll surely get ignored.

Instead, **we need to get pragmatic and work with cybersecurity aces to help them systematically become more secure and lighten their load.** That means we need to share how others have done it in a very simple step-by-step approach. That also means we need to lend cybersecurity pros a helping hand – letting them know about things like security services. Because, the reason they are scrambling is simple; there isn't enough staff to help.



Margaret Pacheco

Global Chief Marketing Officer at OA Group

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Cybersecurity professionals must be the most discerning, yet impatient bunch you will ever market to. Try to be too clever or aggressively oversell, and they'll shut you out. Unsolicited email blasts with embedded links or generically targeted programmatic ads are also ill-advised. Do you really think a cyber pro is going to click through an unsolicited hyperlink?

This industry values credibility and privacy above all, so you have to get super-creative with your design thinking. We've found that cybersecurity marketing is most effective when it's end-user-driven. We spend an extraordinary amount of time talking with our clients' customers, learning their challenges, where they hang out, and what media keeps them engaged.

The cybersecurity professionals tell us that the messaging from all the top players sounds the same and is mostly fear-based. CISOs have become numb to all the stats about phishing attempts and data breaches. They want to hear about solutions and use cases. They want to know what tools a colleague from their affinity group uses as part of their cybersecurity tech stack, and whether the colleague would recommend them.

Cybersecurity professionals treasure their human network, person-to-person, and they stay current on technology by engaging with like-minded professionals on certain social media platforms. So, we go where they hang out ... trade shows, association meetings, and cybersecurity channels.



Stefanie Scott

Senior Director of Product Marketing

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The key challenges I see will be tightening marketing budgets to promote solutions, and for purchase budgets. Marketers will have to do more with less and be more persuasive than ever, as CISOs don't have time or energy to deal with lengthy sales cycles of complex solutions.

Cybersecurity companies will need to simplify the entire buying process, and marketers will need to pave this path. Threats are growing, and breaches are more expensive than ever. Marketers need to be crisp with their message of how their solution will protect, save time, save money, and simplify the CISO's role. CISOs are lacking talent and time, so a wise marketer will bundle their pitch with real-time hands-on experience. **Earn the client's trust by cutting through the buying process and artifices to help them get the spend approved.**



Kassia Clifford

Owner at Kassia Clifford Consulting

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The market is becoming more and more saturated with vendors, and buyers are becoming more and more frustrated with being sold tools and services that don't meet their needs. The looming recession predictions, lay-offs, the continued demand on individuals and families related to the pandemic, education strikes (in Canada), and life, in general, are weighing heavily on people.

It's difficult to stand out AND have your unique value proposition understood quickly and trusted with ease. Word-of-mouth referrals continue to be a significant source of sales-qualified leads in an industry that relies so heavily on trust. However, this leaves teams at the mercy of their previous clients' memories and their interest in assisting, variables that are challenging to measure and track to marketing key performance indicators.

To mitigate this, I'm asking for client testimonials via social platforms, or a written contribution for my marketing assets. I'm also investing in continuing education in my field to assist with building external credibility in addition to solidifying knowledge.

My mission is to make cybersecurity digestible, accessible, and fun. As such, I use the simplest language possible within my marketing assets and include personality and approach. This reduces misalignment in business strategy and communication, which can lead to an unfavorable experience for all parties.



Question 2

If you were given a budget and told to prioritize only one area in 2023, what marketing activity would you focus your time and budget on?



Andra Zaharia

Cybersecurity content specialist & creator of the Cyber Empathy podcast

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Small, in-person community events and cohort-based courses (online or offline) are two versions of educational projects I would put all my resources behind.

There is a deep, unfulfilled need for connection and meaning that everyone is experiencing. No matter how introverted many of us are, we still crave meaningful human interaction with groups of people who share our challenges, our ambitions, and our worries.

Some of the most impactful and transformative experiences I've had were related to these two ways of engaging with others. So, I know first-hand how they:

- Help people build self-awareness and self-confidence.
- Accelerate learning through shared experiences and accountability.
- Create long-lasting relationships based on shared values and trust.
- Cultivate empathy and compassion, broadening and enriching perspectives.

These are high-effort experiences, but they're also high reward and provide tons of insights that fuel many other growth areas for companies, from content marketing to employer branding, product development, and beyond.



Michelle Schafer

Partner and Senior Vice President at Merritt Group

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Let's face it: to do their jobs successfully, the sales team needs strong brand visibility and awareness, and it's up to the marketing and PR team to make that happen. To get through this tough time, leaning on creative, educational content to drive marketing campaigns will help to elevate your brand and may likely have the most impact.

I'd recommend investing in a data-driven report or survey that can serve as "tent-pole content" that can be used for a multitude of marketing campaigns – white papers, reports, blogs, infographics, webinars, email marketing, and social media campaigns, press releases, media outreach, and more. This content should speak directly to the pain points of your buyers and give your sales

team excellent materials to share with prospects and customers. **If the campaign is executed properly and the data tells a great story, it can drive headlines in the news, and that will also drive brand visibility.**

You can also break the data into two or three separate campaigns to get the most out of your investment – perhaps focusing on a specific vertical your company is selling to, including fintech, healthcare, government, and others. Finally, I'd recommend shopping around the project with a few notable research firms before settling on one of them to conduct the survey or report. If budget is a major concern, you want to really weigh your options carefully, as some of these data-driven reports can be expensive.



Wiebke Macrae

Head of DemOps, EMEA at Thales

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I am a strong advocate of the value of account-based marketing (ABM). This is a wide area, and I know it's easy to cite as a good value because you can fit so much under this umbrella term. But I think that it's vital to be relevant for prospects and customers and ABM is a great approach to be just that. With the support of a good tech stack, **ABM is the way to learn about who is currently in the market for your solutions even if they have not visited your website yet** – once the data has been analysed and interpreted, and you have worked through your ideal customer profile as well you will be able to target messaging and value propositions to your audience and grab their attention. To basically be there at every step of the journey. This will give you the best opportunity to convert prospects into customers and also stay top of mind of existing customers.

It does not all have to be digital in account-based marketing though, once you have narrowed down your target group, you can create smaller forums such as "lunch and learn" sessions, workshops or executive round tables that come out of the account-based marketing activity. This is a good way to engage prospects at further stages in the funnel and to create a face to face interaction. This is also great to reactivate existing customers and to do cross-sell and upsell.



Kelsey Arhart

Marketing Director at Fortra

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My first response will always be to prioritize the website. If you can't be found online, or if your website is not easy to understand, your leads will suffer drastically. I don't mean just throwing more budget at paid ads to get people on the website, but rather, investing in resources to optimize the performance of the website such as site speed, URL structure, cross-linking strategy, intuitive site navigation, and proper tagging.

Equally important for the website is having resources to continually develop and update meaningful content to help boost organic SEO efforts. It's

important to take the time to dig into what people are searching for and ensure that you have content that explains those keywords in easily understandable ways.

You're guaranteed to have website visitors at varying stages of the buying process, so **it's extremely important to have a website structure in place that intuitively walks people to the next step** and having a breadth of meaningful content available helps tremendously in building a powerful website.



Michelle Gunter

Director of Field and Channel Marketing - EMEA & NA at VIPRE Security Group

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I would create content that was relevant to our target market housed in the locations where they naturally go looking for education. Be that blog content within a newsletter they subscribe to, great quality web content to answer the questions that they have at the touch of a button, or a simple sales call once a request for a demonstration form has been submitted.

Prospective clients are also having to do more with less, we consistently hear about the cybersecurity skills gap, making the need for us to take the message directly to our audience much more important than them having to self-serve. Our content needs to showcase the benefits of using our solution and be transparent in terms of exactly

what they will get if they partner with us. **Long, convoluted content that needs to be read multiple times to be understood is a thing of the past.** Small, bite-sized content, either written or video, with the sole aim to educate and share successful best practices, is where we need to invest in any year.



Stella Tsitsoula

Senior Communications Consultant, Founder & Managing Partner at RED Communications, Vice-President & Comms Lead at Women4Cyber Greece

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It's a good question because we are focusing a lot on cybersecurity, and we are trying to build programs for cybersecurity awareness and strong cybersecurity culture because there is no singular approach to minimize human risk. So, **we have to educate employees in companies to be cybersecurity aware.** It's a big challenge for us to build these programs and these services in our agency.

In Greece, for example, worldwide cybersecurity threats gain high notoriety when the victim is a million-dollar company, but small and medium-sized companies are also victims. Yet, when ransomware statistics are counted, these ransomware attacks against small and medium businesses are often overlooked because the business was so damaged by the attack that the business had to close down.

Joe Pettit

Director at Bora Cybersecurity Marketing

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I would focus on customer advocacy. Most buying decisions are heavily influenced by reputation or peer reviews. When looking at new tools, security teams will be looking to the industry to help guide them on where they are going to get the best return on their investment.

Leveraging platforms like Gartner Peer Insights, G2, TrustRadius, PeerSpot, and others is a good place to start. But also building your own channels that include testimonials, case studies, and **creating brand champions will be extremely important**. If I had a limited budget to spend, I would pull back from investing huge sums in large events and focus on customer advocacy to build trust within the industry.



Hannah Tufts

Owner at Exhale Global

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I'm an advocate for getting to know your audience in greater depth than you ever have before. Developing detailed buyer personas or expanding on existing audience profiles needs to be part of the huge change we're all still evolving through, since the pandemic altered our idea of normal. **Your audience lives life differently now. So, we must talk to them differently, too,** with more empathy, if nothing else.

Getting to know your audience also means pulling up the analytics. Understanding behaviours around content consumption allows you to get ultra-efficient with how you operate and where you innovate. Plus, putting those metrics front and centre makes it easier for your stakeholders to get on board and support a more holistic way of doing things far beyond marketing, across the whole business.



Mike Devine

Chief Marketing Officer at Fortra

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Customers are telling us they want to focus on these four categories: securing data, securing infrastructure, security awareness training, and operational support. So, that makes it simple to prioritize getting them clear guidance about how to do that. That means more marketing on websites and in-person gatherings where we are connecting our brilliant bench of experts with our cybersecurity customers and getting started now – not waiting. There is no time like the present to start chipping away at these problems.



Margaret Pacheco

Global Chief Marketing Officer at OA Group

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It would have to be content and storytelling, whether that be case stories, long-form videos, podcasts, or CISO guest posts. You need to involve subject-matter experts with industry credibility because whatever method you use to communicate, you need to make it worth the audience's time.

We focus on developing engaging storylines that address the very real, daily pain points that CISOs and IT Directors face, from staffing challenges, and employee training, to tool sprawl, noisy SIEMs, and Defence in Depth. Content that embraces Google's Expertise, Authority, and Trustworthiness (E-A-T) guidelines is most likely to deliver maximum organic search growth.



Stefanie Scott

Senior Director of Product Marketing

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I would focus my time and energy on interactive demos that are heavy on solving business issues as we walk through pain points in the solution. This involves being a master storyteller and tour guide, which is no easy task. The story needs to have the right search terms embedded for organic SEO to improve search performance. At the centre of this is strong content and thought leadership to pull a purchaser through the buying cycle.



Kassia Clifford

Owner at Kassia Clifford Consulting

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I would focus my 2023 budget on Inbound marketing efforts tied to a CRM where both Sales and Marketing collaborate on campaigns. The produced assets would include gated downloadable freebies, leveraging animation, gifs, and memes, inserted into a pre-planned 6-month content strategy (blogs, white papers, case studies), tied to campaigns that include social media and email marketing.

This goes back to building trust and credibility. Characteristics that go a long way towards achieving this include high-value content paired with a system where sales and marketing teams work together to feed insights from customers, and leads back into content creation, and leverages clicks on marketing assets for direct, warmer outreach. Cybersecurity marketing teams are under great pressure – and always will be – due to the innate nature of buyers who distrust those selling to them, especially in a field that is so grey but acts black and white.

When every answer to every question a buyer asks is “it depends”, then the buyer and customer journey will always benefit from continued efforts from the vendor to build and maintain trust, credibility, and, at the end of the day, likeability. If you can offer those three things with your marketing budget and activities - this helps raise your value to stand out in a sea of vendors.



Conclusion

Cybersecurity marketing sits on the periphery of the cybersecurity profession. While it may not seem as action-packed as working in a laboratory, reverse-engineering the latest malware strain, or worrying about the possibility of the next ransomware attack, it has its own unique challenges, and its own rewards as well.

Few businesses succeed merely by awaiting the arrival of the "big client". Most businesses need to market their services to attract a client-base of all sizes to sustain the business. Cybersecurity vendors face a greater challenge, since their customers are extremely discerning, due to the high-stakes at play. A good marketing team, and a solid marketing strategy can elevate a great product into one that people will seek.

A person is shown in profile, wearing red VR goggles. The lenses of the goggles show a vibrant, surreal cosmic scene with a large blue planet, a bright sun, and a smaller planet in the distance. The background of the entire image is a dark, deep blue space with a large, glowing orange and red nebula or galaxy on the right side. In the top right corner, there are several white diagonal lines. The person's face is partially visible, and they appear to be looking intently at the virtual reality experience.

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