SITECORE®

QUICK GUIDE

Closing the customer experience gap

The 6 pillars of content operations excellence

The content experience *is* the customer experience.

And that means, to get experiences right – to make them memorable, engaging, and capable of driving business – brands must have a strong content foundation. A foundation that can drive personalization and growth.

But given the ever-increasing number of channels and touchpoints, the pressure is growing on marketers to deliver. For many
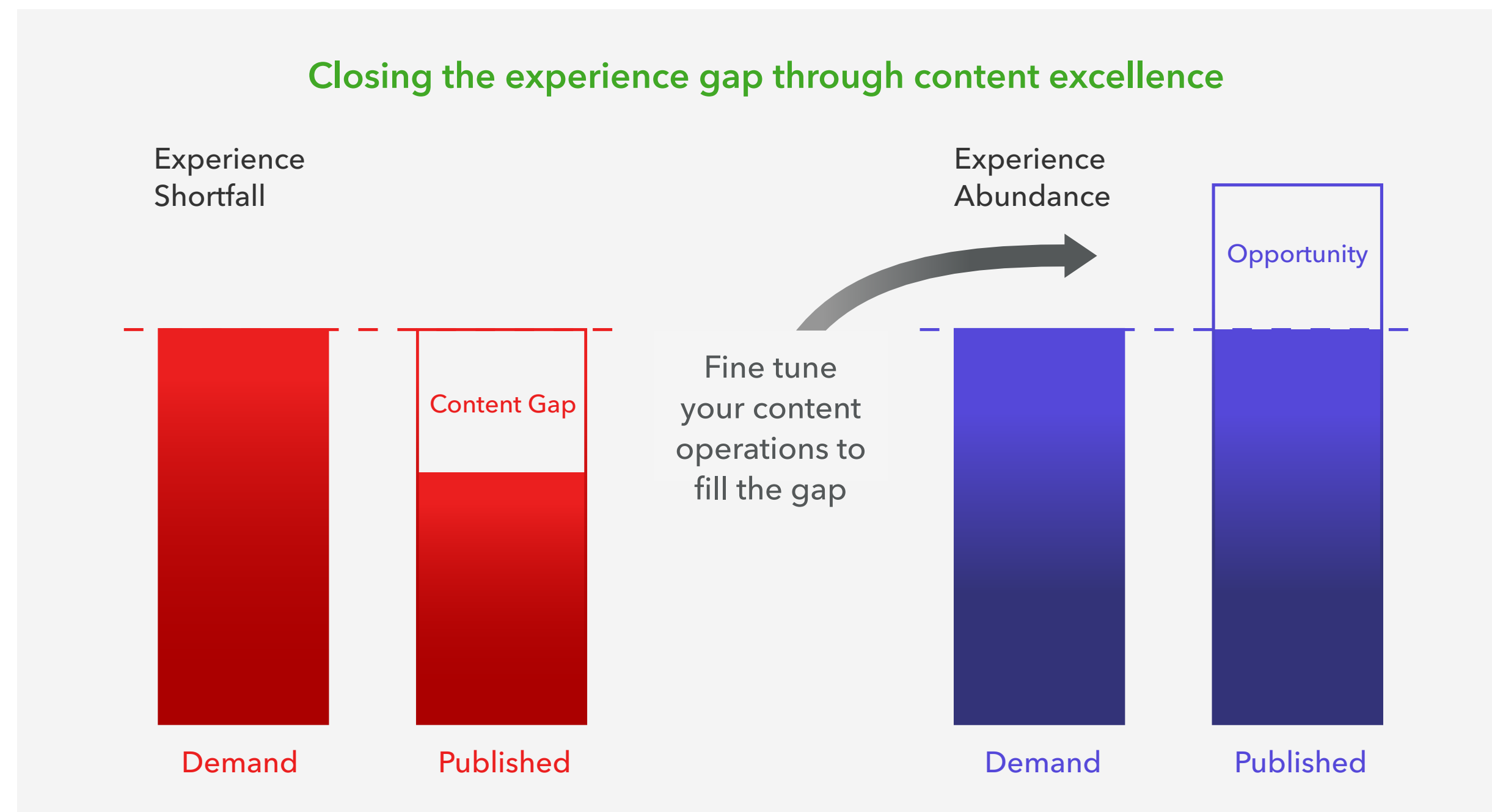
brands, this has led to a content crisis. A widening gap between the number of digital experiences needed and the volume of content available to create them, as seen in the diagram below.

The problem for most organizations is that content planning, creation, personalization, and execution workflows are disconnected.

Only **6% of decision makers have a comprehensive, well-integrated digital experience platform that addresses the entire content lifecycle**.

Organizations with operations that are more mature and agile in this respect are three times more likely to outperform their key competitors in digital performance metrics (e.g., net sales, sales growth) and are more than five times more likely to meet or exceed customer experience (CX) targets. Therefore, understanding and managing the best practices associated with these operations is critical to ensuring an optimal customer experience that drives business growth.

That's why Sitecore has created this guide to best practices for managing content operations – to help you understand the end-to-end process from planning and creation to publishing and integration, as seen in the diagram on page 3. The best practices associated with the pillars of content operations and strategy outlined in this guide are your keys to digital experience excellence.

Closing the experience gap through content excellence

Experience Shortfall

Experience Abundance

Opportunity

Content Gap

Fine tune your content operations to fill the gap

Demand   Published

Demand   Published

Introduction:
The content experience *is* the customer experience

Pillar #1:
Content planning

Pillar #2:
Content creation

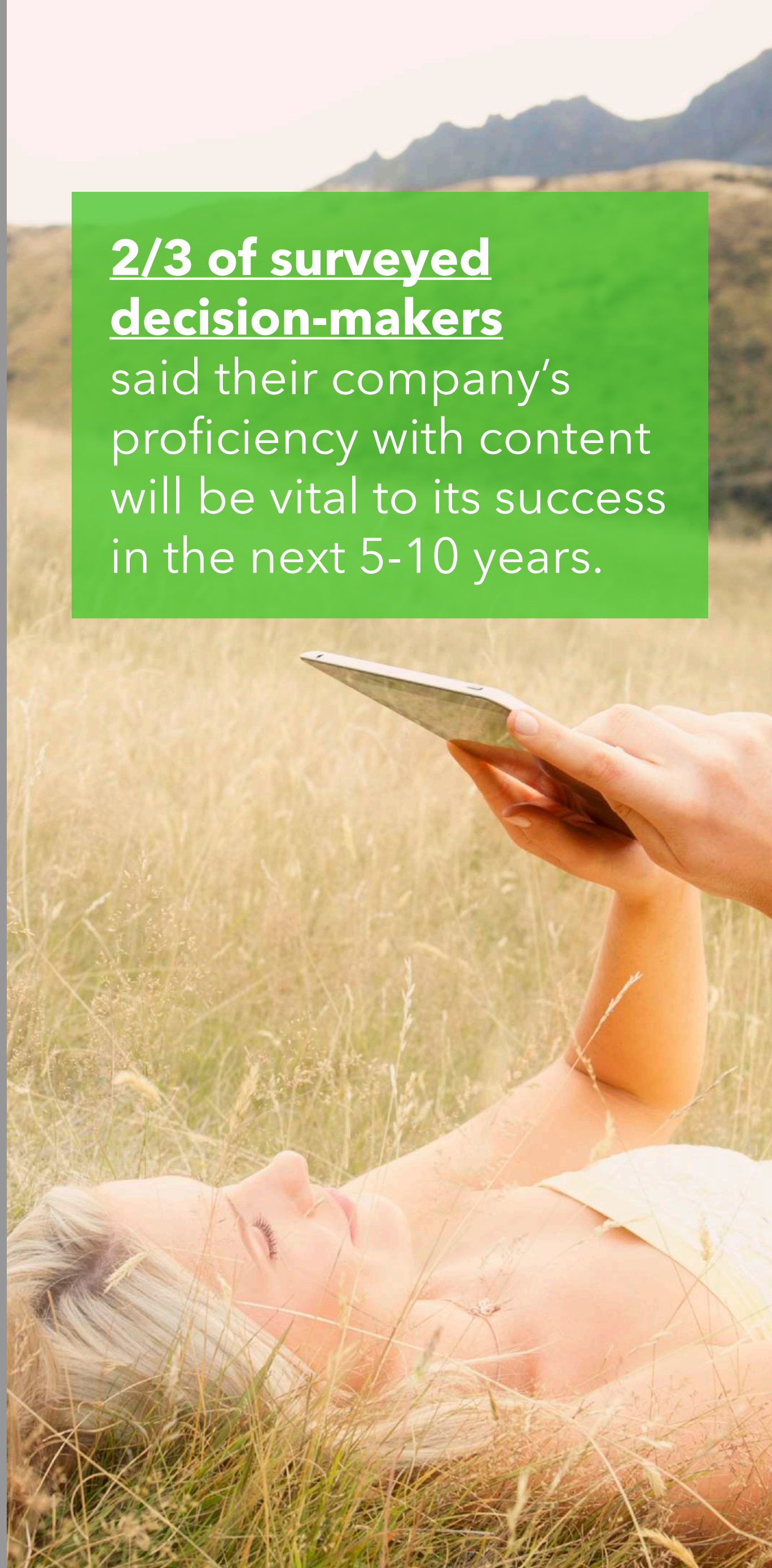**Pillar #3**
Collaboration

Pillar #4:
Content publishing

Pillar #5:
Integration

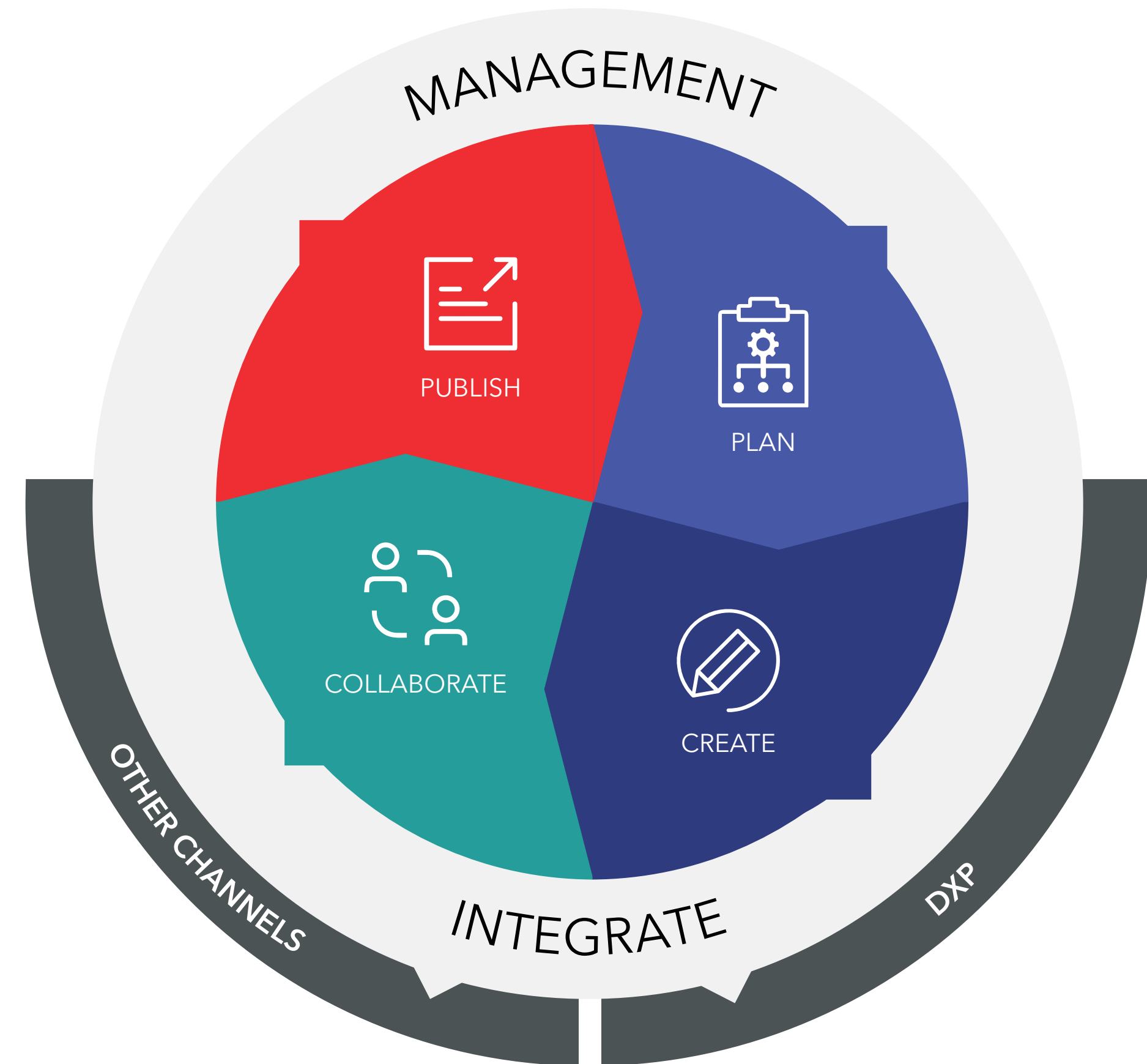**Pillar #6:**
Content project management

Conclusion:
Reduce, reuse, repurpose

Regain control of content operations

2/3 of surveyed decision-makers said their company's proficiency with content will be vital to its success in the next 5-10 years.

The pillars of content operations: Content planning, content creation, collaboration, content publishing, integration, project management

MANAGEMENT

PUBLISH

PLAN

COLLABORATE

CREATE

OTHER CHANNELS

INTEGRATE

DXP

PILLAR #1

Content planning

Map out your content strategy

What does this pillar involve?

Strategizing and generating ideas for content as well as determining the resources and time required for projects.

Why is it needed?

Planning helps ensure that content gaps in the customer journey are identified and offers a clear view of all scheduled content creation based on channel, audience, and purpose. It also helps with identifying and mitigating resource constraints early on.

What problems am I likely to face with content planning?

Content planning for a specific customer journey is complex. You must have visibility into any gaps that need filling, understand when content needs to be updated or retired, and recognize when new content is required. Plus, a particular customer journey may include additional content needs or considerations for different products, customer segments, geographies, and channels.

Many organizations manage content planning in spreadsheets that are disconnected from the rest of the content operations process.

The volume of content, metadata, and overlays inherent in the planning process means treating this as a siloed activity leads to complexity and human error.

Best practices for content planning:

- A cloud-based CMS can serve as a central hub to connect all the pieces of your tech stack and help all content teams work together more closely. With everyone having access to the same information, collaboration is streamlined, making planning efforts more quicker and more efficient.

- Create visual maps of customer journeys that identify the content needed at each stage. These maps should then be populated with any suitable content that already exists. This technique will make it easier to identify gaps and prioritize content production.

- Search for currently available content that may be suitable to be reused or repurposed at each stage in a given journey. For many topics, content may already exist with approved messaging, copy blocks, images, and meta data. Not only do you save time with reuse, but you also reduce costs associated with new reviews and approvals.

- If you haven't done so already, centralize your content in a digital asset management (DAM) system or Sitecore Content Hub™. This will allow you to make use of visual tools that automatically leverage accurate, up-to-date content.

The benefits of optimizing content planning include:

- Faster content creation
- Faster delivery of experiences
- Greater likelihood of approval without the need for content changes
- Ability to minimize delays or bottlenecks caused by lack of resource availability

PILLAR #2

Content creation

Streamline your content production

74% of senior marketers say they can't produce the sheer volume and variety of content required for personalization fast enough.

What does content creation involve?

Creation and production of the content.

Why is it needed?

Creating new or revised content is necessary to address gaps in the customer journey or to create customer journeys for new products, audiences, or channels.

What problems am I likely to face with content creation?

Content is often created and edited using disconnected, siloed systems, which can make workflow and version control cumbersome – particularly when external teams are part of

the process. If just one person changes the wrong version or omits a key stakeholder from an approval thread, the whole process can fall apart.

Best practices for content creation:

• Use a tool such as a content marketing platform (CMP) that manages content centrally, with workflow, version control, and an interface designed for content creators.

• If using third-party content creation tools, use those that are seamlessly integrated with your DAM to ensure that all team members are working from one centralized version of the truth.

• Within the CMP, consider leveraging templates to structure content elements. Doing so allows content elements or atomic content to be created in a predictable way and leads to easier reuse for a similar topic or campaign.

• Separate content from presentation. For example, images and copy for a web page viewed on a desktop are often unsuitable when viewed on a mobile device. As a result, some organizations create them separately in different systems. Though this may achieve the right result, it is inefficient and time-consuming. A better solution is to use a shared set of images, copy, and assets that all channels can access through your DAM or CMP and then scale them up or down as needed.

The benefits of optimizing content creation include:

• A more agile process that saves time, money, and people resources
• Improved ability to scale and meet production deadlines
• Improved content quality
• Infrastructure that better supports reusing and repurposing content

PILLAR #3

Collaboration

Strengthen team connections
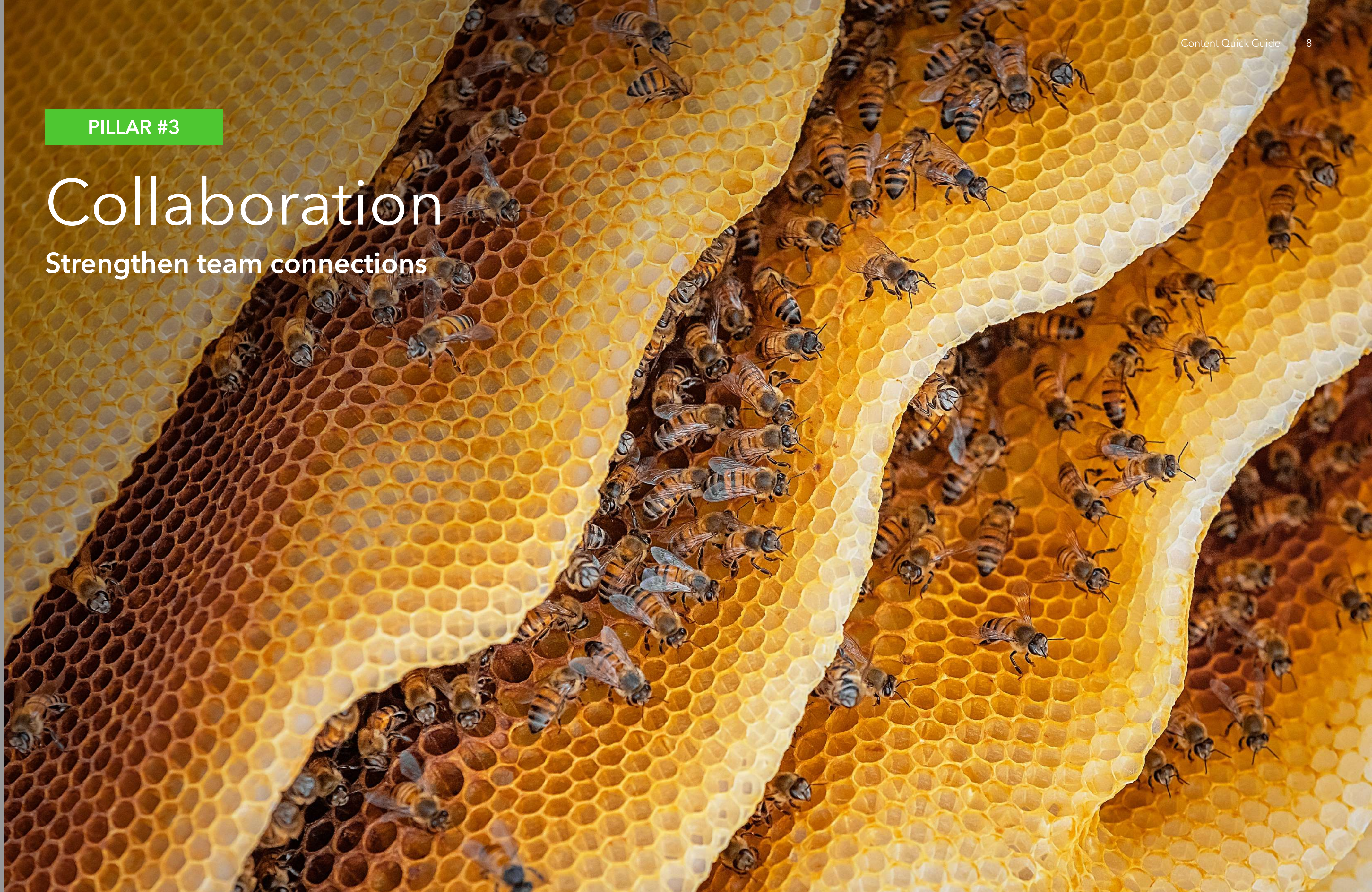
What does collaboration involve?

Collaboration among departments and stakeholders to review, finalize, and approve content.

Why is it needed?

The number of people and teams involved in content production can be significant. An inefficient collaboration process impacts quality and can lead to duplicated and wasted effort.

What problems am I likely to face with collaboration?

Workflow and approvals of projects with multiple stakeholders can be complex and time-consuming.

Best practices for collaboration:

- Adopt a CMP or marketing resource management (MRM) solution that gives team members the agility to review, annotate, and approve content in real time.

- Provide teams with shared dashboards, calendars, and task lists to efficiently manage and optimize workflow.

The benefits of optimizing collaboration include:

- Minimize back-and-forth between stakeholders to accelerate approvals
- Provide better visibility to resolve production content bottlenecks
- Improve employee satisfaction through optimized workflows

PILLAR #4

Content publishing

Distribute personalized content effortlessly

What does content publishing involve?

Distributing content to the target audience and channel.

Why is it needed?

Content publishing supports the delivery of personalized content through the appropriate channel at the optimal stage in the customer journey.

What problems am I likely to face in content publishing?

When targeting various audiences with differentiated messages and content, it can be difficult to find just the right content variant. Many times, just a small tweak to the original is enough to differentiate the message, but that tweaked variant may not be available when needed.

Ideally, you will need a direct feed for content from your DAM or CMP into relevant channels, such as your digital experience platform (DXP), email platforms, social media channels, and so on. Without a real-time direct feed, the publishing process can consume more time, money, and other resources than necessary to produce and distribute content.

Plus, in addition to publishing new content, the process of updating existing content can be cumbersome: identifying the different places where content may be published and then manually updating each one.
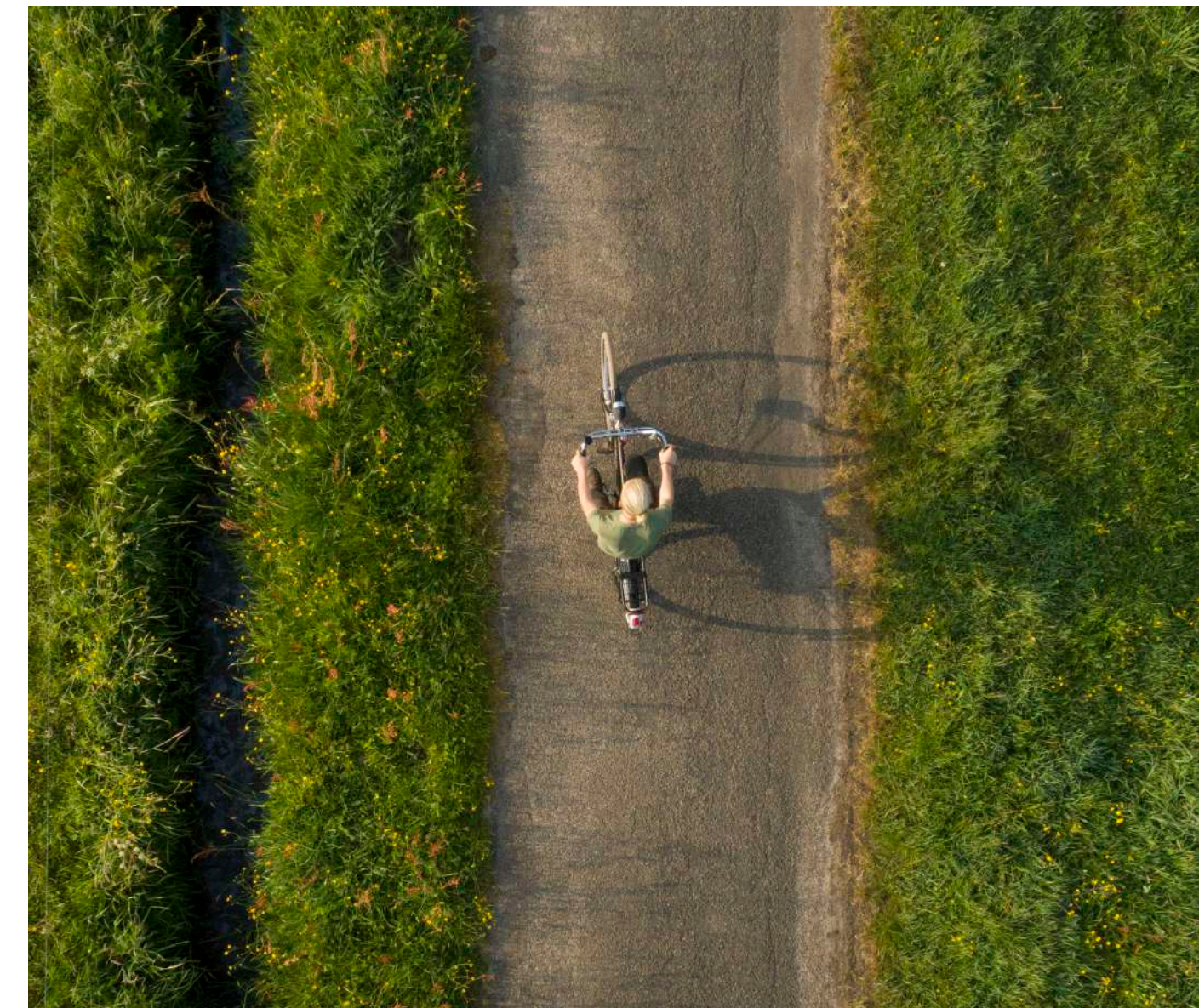
Best practices for content publishing:

- If you are looking for speed, then a cloud-based CMS is something to consider. From implementation, set-up, and integration to adoption and usage – this all happens at a way faster pace with cloud-based systems.

- Use public links to assets stored in the DAM instead of publishing binaries of the asset themselves — to ensure that any updates made to the asset are automatically reflected without having to manually update the assets where they have been published.

- Reuse or repurpose assets from one channel, audience, market, or geography to another.

- Have enough variants of content items to meet the needs of target segments, channels, markets, and geographies — enabling personalization engines to access and publish in real time.

- Leverage AI when appropriate to recommend the "right" content to publish.

The benefits of optimizing content publishing include:

- Reduce time to market for delivering content to new channels
- Improve customer experience through the ability to publish more consistent and targeted content across channels
- Minimize stale content caused by inadvertently failing to update already-published content

PILLAR #5

Integration

Unify your content channels

What does integration involve?

Integrating the tools that are part of your content operations to centralize content and data from siloed channels.

Why is it needed?

A modern content operations architecture allows content to be easily pushed out to different channels and platforms from a centralized location. This architecture should also support the collection of content performance information such as pages views, engagement, and conversion data by your DAM or Content Hub.

What problems am I likely to face with integration?

Without the right tools, it can prove difficult to push content out to certain channels, and you could be missing crucial customer information. When you don't know how your content is performing, it's impossible to refine your content strategy to meet customer needs.

Best practices for integration:

Invest in the solutions that will complement your DAM, such as a CMP or MRM that supports rich, robust integrations. Headless solutions, where creating and managing content is decoupled from the delivery of that content, allow you to push content to nontraditional channels such as kiosks, digital billboards, and smart assistants. These tend to use more modern frameworks and architectures, offering a more seamless integration path.

The benefits of optimizing integration include:

- Faster content personalization
- Improved content strategy through gathering valuable data about customer needs
- Ability to push content to newer, nontraditional channels
- Improve ROI for content and campaigns through better content analytics

PILLAR #6

Content project management

Flawless execution of your content strategy

Nearly a **third** of survey respondents told us their content creation, management, and delivery processes were disconnected.

What does content project management involve?

Management, assignment, and visibility of the people, roles, and tasks involved in the content operations and production process.

Why is it needed?

Content project management tools provide visibility into, and address, all the tasks and teams involved in the content production and operations process. With this view, you can ensure projects are fully resourced, timelines are optimized, and the costs and revenue associated with any given content or campaign are understood.

What problems am I likely to face with project management?

Efficient and effective project management depends on your resource management tools. Without the right tools and processes, you can run over budget, experience project delays, and overextend your teams.

It is essential to centralize project management, so everyone has access to a single source of truth around content operations. This capability gives you better visibility into

capacity and resource availability – whether that be people with the right skillset, dollars, or time. That, in turn, allows you to record and report on the true costs and resources required to produce a piece of content or a campaign and to get a better picture of ROI.

Best practices for project management:

- Use a pre-existing project template or build your projects from scratch with chained and parallel activities, briefings, and deliverables.

- Implement solutions that provide a complete view of your progress and budget for every step of the content production process. This visibility allows project managers to drive efficiency through the various project stages and associated workflows.

- Assign tasks to your team, with project managers following up and submitting progress reports through a central dashboard.

The benefits of optimizing project management include:

- Allows all stakeholders to share a single version of truth
- Creates an environment that facilitates continuous iteration and measurement of content strategy
- Contributes to a better understanding of content workflows, as well as the customer needs and expectations that can guide content production
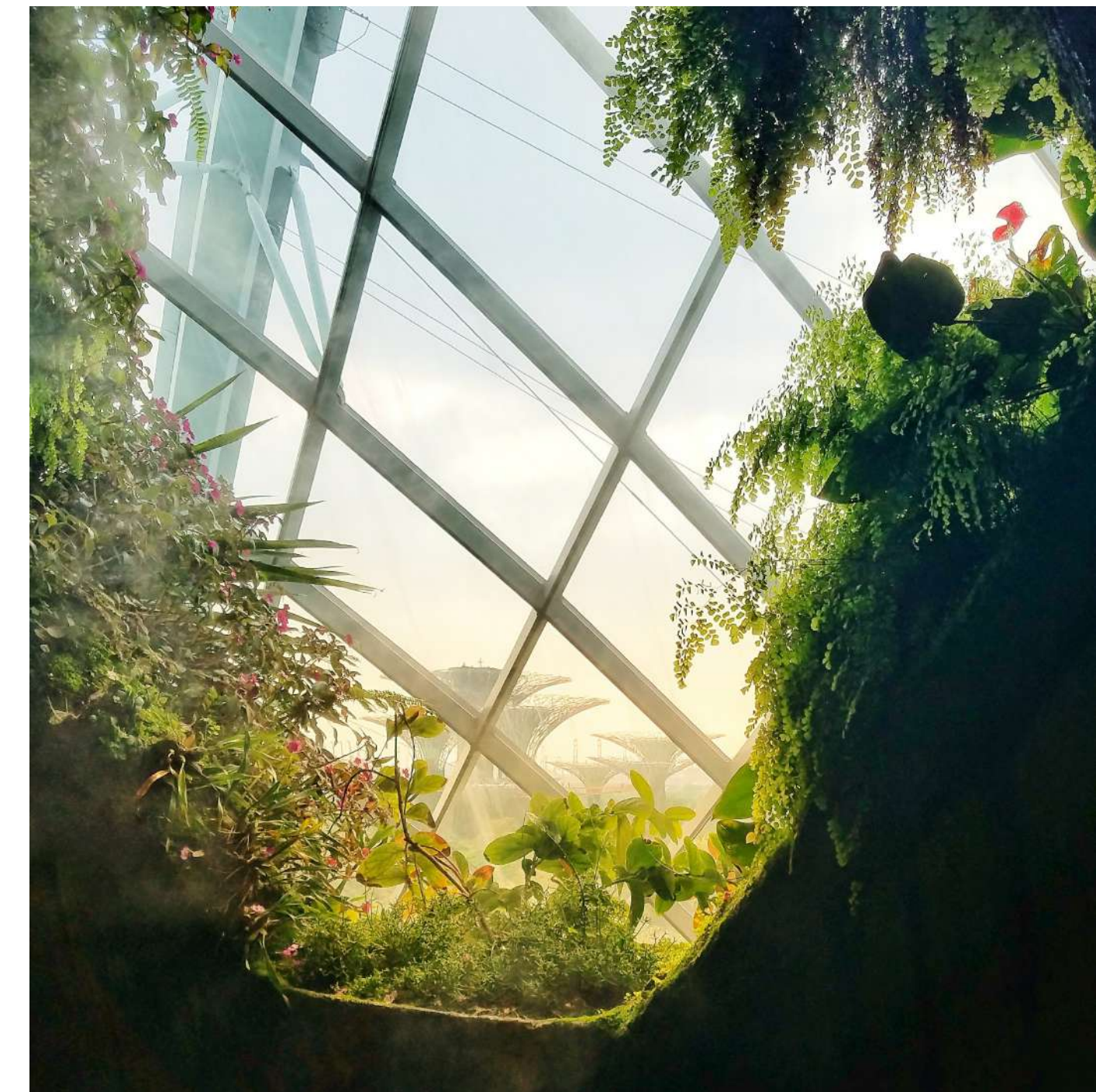
Reduce, reuse, repurpose

At Sitecore, we believe in driving business growth with a sustainable content strategy based on the three Rs - reduce, reuse, repurpose. And when you optimize the six pillars to improve your content operations, you will find the three Rs are much easier to implement.

- **Reduce** the need to create new content and the cost of creation when you do.
- **Reuse** content and assets.
- **Repurpose** your content.

With all the content created, managed, and stored in a content hub, you can easily locate what you need, improve production speed, scale, and quality; and maximize content value.

This approach to content production encourages you to work smarter, not harder. It allows you to deliver the volume and quality of content you require, without overwhelming your marketing team or bombarding your customers in the process.

Regain control of content operations

By optimizing and integrating your content operations through a centralized content hub, you can collaborate effortlessly on content strategy, creation, and analytics; remove bottlenecks; and increase content velocity to close the experience gap:

- **Simplifying strategy**
  Take control of strategy and planning – from goals and audiences to themes and formats.

- **Collaborating powerfully**
  Transform global content creation with seamless collaboration and workflows.

- **Optimizing performance**
  Measure the impact of all your content and create the most effective campaigns.

- **Managing resources effectively**
  Quickly understand and manage resource availability and constraints.

- **Gaining complete visibility**
  Gain transparency across the content lifecycle to identify opportunities to save time and money.

- **Leveraging omnichannel delivery**
  Integrate with your DXP/CMS and all your channels easily via GraphQL APIs and a global content delivery network.

For a personalized view on the impact and ROI possible for your business associated with implementing the best practices in this guide, see our Content Hub ROI calculator.

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