

How organisations purchase technology – mapping the journey with real-life insights

A Kingpin Report

Kingpin

Contents

Introduction 3

1. When do companies engage? 4

2. Most effective formats for engagement 5

3. Hot tech topics for engagement 7

4. The geographical differences among buyers 8

5. How buyers consume content 9

6. Attribution and ROI 13

Summary 15

About 16

Introduction

Knowing why and how organisations purchase technology is vital in creating a successful marketing and sales strategy. It goes far beyond knowing what content a CIO is reading. What are their staff doing? Who is doing the research? When are budgets released and much more?

For marketers, unlocking this information is no easy feat. But when done successfully, it can transform your marketing strategy from being hit and hope into a finely tuned generator of pipeline and revenue.

As a marketing agency dedicated to helping B2B technology brands connect with audiences throughout the buying journey, Kingpin has a wealth of experience with data and determining actionable insights. These help us understand how audiences behave, and how best to engage them at various stages of the complex buying process.

In this report, we have drawn on several Kingpin data sources and campaign reports to shed some light on this buying journey. Critically, much of the following report is based on our proprietary data and insights platform, which means it documents what buyers actually do, rather than typical research that shows what buyers say they do. Our goal: to help technology brands better understand the people, content formats, topics and triggers for engagement that all contribute to B2B technology-buying decisions today.

Among the issues the report explores are:

- The broader consumption and engagement habits of the multiple stakeholders involved in an organisation's buying team.
- The geographical differences among IT buyers, and their technology priorities and preferences on formats to engage with.
- The importance of an organisation's channel partners in buying decisions.
- How best to measure attribution and ROI.

1. When do companies engage?

The timing of B2B marketing efforts is an important consideration for any campaign. Get it right and content is produced at that sweet spot where budgets are signed off and buyers are actively looking to engage. Get it wrong – when budgets haven't yet been approved or have already been spent – and the content is wasted, blowing like tumbleweed across an empty buying landscape.

Predicting the best time to launch a campaign need not be finger-in-the-air guesswork or gut instinct. Data exists that can help identify when target companies and sectors are more likely to engage with marketing content.

Kingpin data shows one clear event that appears to be a trigger for organisations to engage with content. Our engagements summary data for a large telco in 2017-18 [Figure 1] shows a spike in engagement across some of the most common types of content formats – top-funnel whitepapers, web events, events and case studies – in April, just after the organisation's financial year end.

This suggests that buying teams within an organisation are more actively engaging with vendor marketing efforts at the start of their financial year, just after their new annual budgets have been approved. There is also a small spike in engagement again around September and October, which could signal renewed buying activity after half-year financials and budget reviews.

This kind of insight is particularly important for an account-based marketing (ABM) play, where it's best practice to get to know as much as possible about an organisation, or small group of organisations, and the buying team.

However, the financial year is just one example of an engagement trigger and shouldn't be interpreted as being the only time to target organisations.

Buying and sales cycles are long. And many people across different departments and at different levels of seniority will be involved at various stages as part of the buying team. Marketers must ensure there are enough constant communications going on to hit the right people at the right point in the cycle across all organisations, whether that is the start of the new financial year or some other key point.

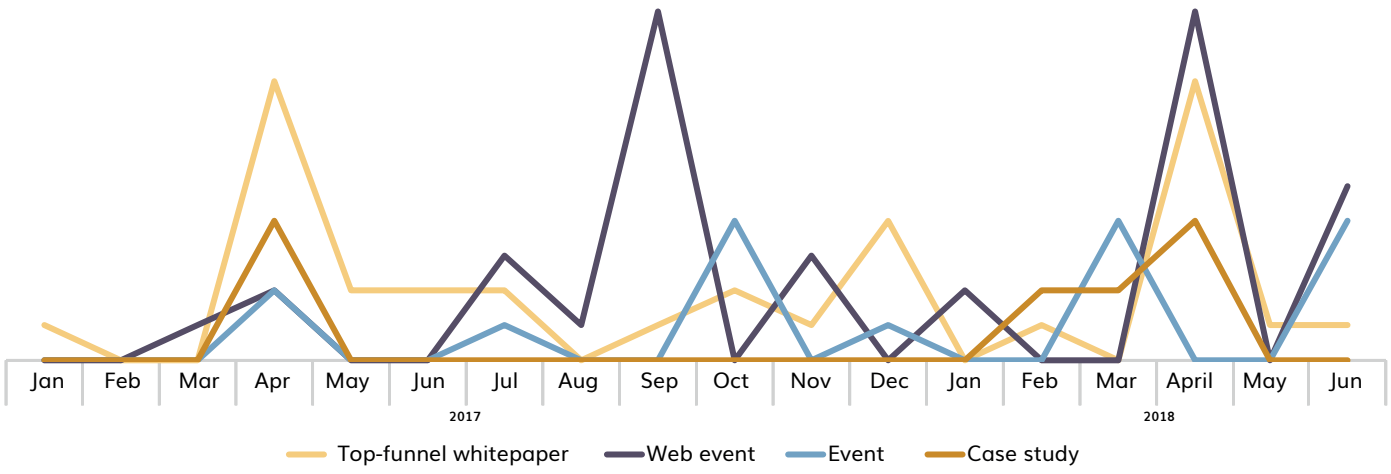


Figure 1: 2017-2018 engagements summary timeline
(Source: Kingpin)

2. Most effective formats for engagement

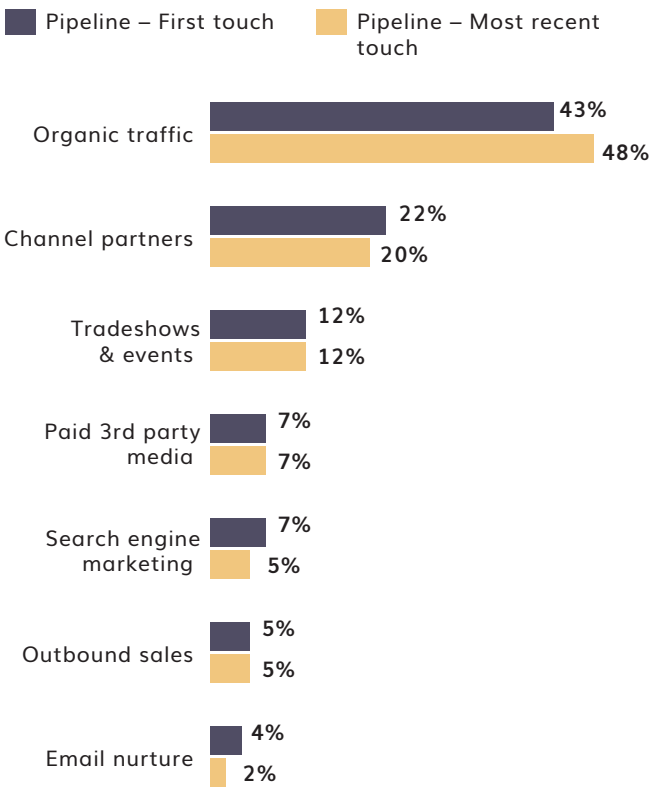
With content format, there is no single silver bullet to ensure engagement with B2B buyers. It should be no surprise that the most appropriate format will vary at any given time depending on the company, industry sector and roles being targeted. Any campaign will therefore likely need a broad mix of formats for engagement with various touchpoints within any given target company. As we highlighted in the previous section, it's about using content to ensure constant communication with buying teams across a sales cycle.

Attribution analysis from a range of Kingpin clients with indirect sales models shows some of the most effective formats for engaging buyers, across both vendor-driven push programmes and user-initiated programmes such as PPC and organic search. More importantly, it's a mix. Not one type of format drives pipeline.

The effectiveness of content formats and channels can be seen in the first touch and most recent lead source data for both pipeline [Figure 2] and revenue [Figure 3].

Organic traffic is the best performing tactic for generating pipeline, closely followed by channel partners. And, across both pipeline and revenue generation, channel is the best performing tactic.

Figure 2: Pipeline by first touch
(Source: Kingpin)



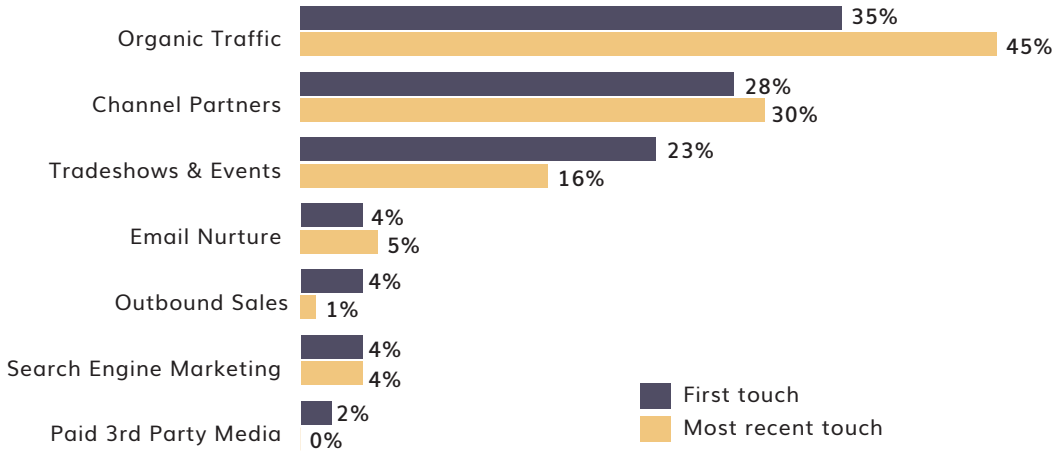


Figure 3: Revenue by first and most recent touch
(Source: Kingpin)

This highlights the importance of targeting not only the internal buying team at an organisation but also third-party channel partners and systems integrators (SIs). The one thing to note on all of the above, however, is that something needs to provoke the web visit or channel conversation. Remember that people research and businesses purchase.

What formats do different job titles engage with most?

Kingpin data from more than 56,000 responses across purely vendor-driven push activity – as opposed to inbound user-initiated activity – gives an insight into how different people across a buying team engage with different formats across the buying cycle [Figure 4].

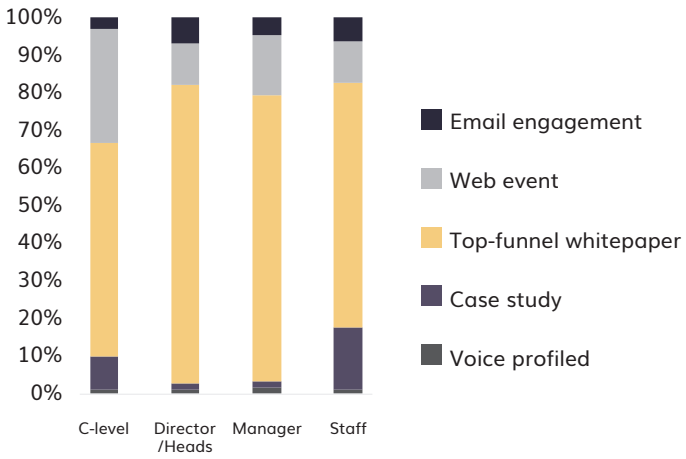


Figure 4: Type of engagement by job role and seniority
(Source: Kingpin)

Top-funnel whitepapers are dominant across all roles, particularly at the director and head of department level (80 per cent) and among managers (76 per cent). But there are some notable differences among job titles when it comes to engagement with other formats.

The C-level has a slightly lower level of engagement with top-funnel whitepapers (56 per cent) than other job titles, but then has a greater level of engagement with web events (30 per cent) and case studies (nine per cent), compared to others. Managers are also relatively high on engagement with web events (16 per cent). A far greater proportion of staff engages with case studies (16 per cent) than all the other more senior job titles. This highlights the importance of having content to serve the entire buying process – discovery, consideration and validation.

3. Hot tech topics for engagement

Knowing the buying priorities of your target audience is also vital to being able to deliver timely and relevant content formats for engagement.

In any given year, myriad industry and analyst research reports promise insight into the key B2B technology priorities for CIOs and other senior IT decision-makers. And these are certainly useful reference points.

Take the 2019 IDG CIO Tech Poll of tech priorities, for example, which explores the upcoming tech spending plans and budgets for organisations and outlines the technology areas IT leaders expect their budgets to focus on.[1]

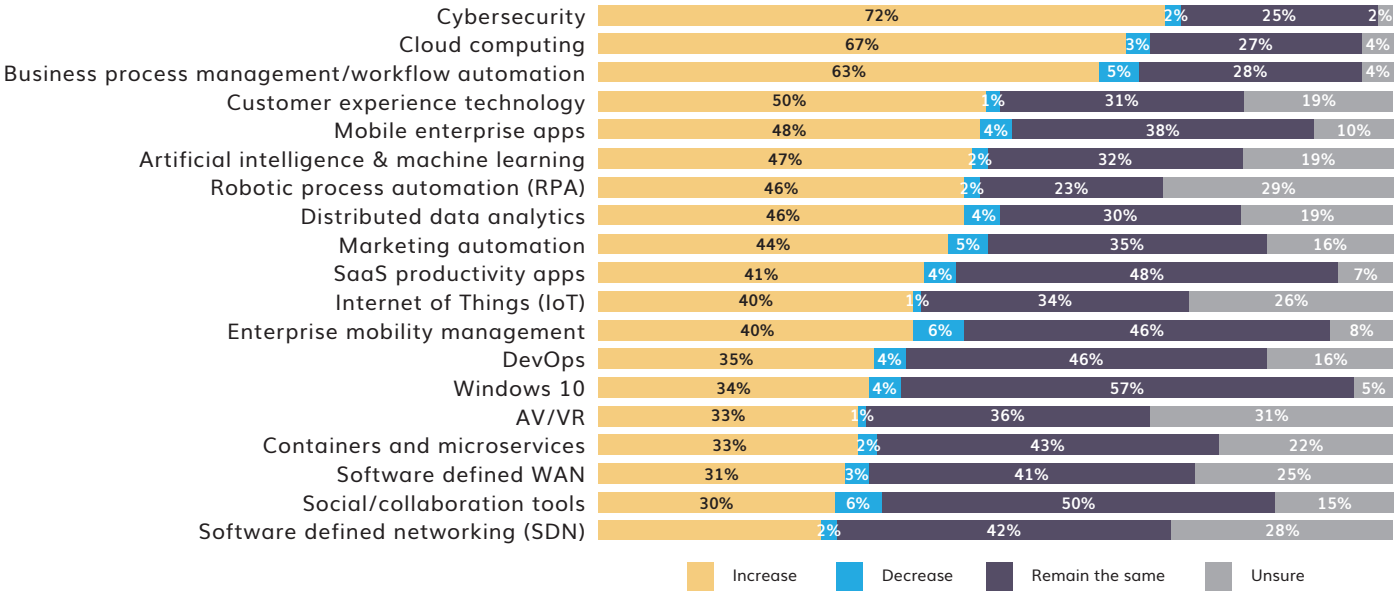


Figure 5: Forecast increase or decrease in tech spending in the next 12 months
(Source: IDG CIO Tech Poll: Tech Priorities 2019)

The IDG study shows that CIOs and IT leaders expect the greatest spending increases to be in cybersecurity (72 per cent), cloud computing strategies (67 per cent), business process management and workflow automation (63 per cent) and customer experience technology (50 per cent).

Almost two-thirds (60 per cent) of IT leaders say AI and machine learning will be the most disruptive technology, followed by big data and analytics (40 per cent), IoT and M2M (34 per cent) and blockchain (33 per cent). Out of these disruptive technologies, IT leaders say AI and machine learning are expected to have the most significant impact on their business in the next three-to-five years.

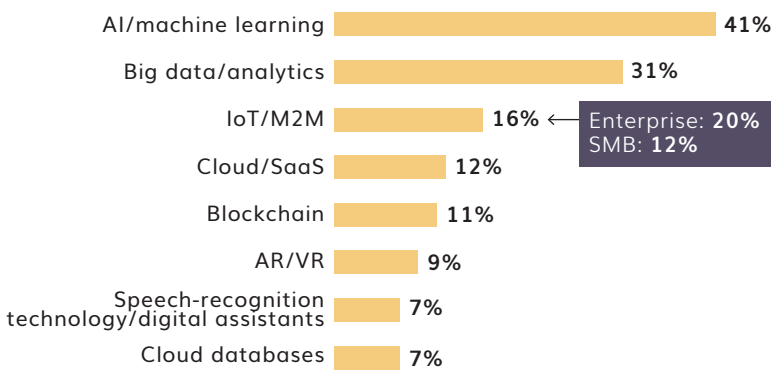


Figure 6: Disruptive technologies forecast to have the most significant impact on organisations in the next three-to-five years
(Source: IDG CIO Tech Poll: Tech Priorities 2019)

[1] https://www.idg.com/tools-for-marketers/cio-tech-poll-tech-priorities-2019/

Engagement across IT security topics

Analysis of Kingpin data across various campaigns for IT security clients reveals some interesting insights.

Across all companies, the overall data [Figure 7] shows the IT security topics with the highest levels of engagement were IT threats and vulnerabilities (3,566), threat prevention (2,423), authentication and access systems (1,349), ransomware (1,050), compliance (923) and malware (857).

The data also reveals how this varies by company. For example, a large construction group had the highest engagement (37 pieces of content), focused on email security, authentication and access systems, endpoint, threat prevention, compliance and threat detection. The second-highest company for engagement was an international IT services firm, which engaged with 32 pieces of content – but only on SIEM. A global insurance company was third-highest for engagement, with 29 pieces of content around security operations, cloud security, authentication and access systems, and ransomware.

A range of roles engaged with security content, from staff up to the C-level [Figure 8]. And there was an almost identical split for engagement with security topics across all roles. All roles engaged most with IT threats and vulnerabilities and cloud security. There was then some variation, however. For example, the C-Level focuses on more strategic areas such as compliance and risk management, whereas other roles focus on more tech-oriented topics such as endpoint, authentication and access systems, and ransomware.

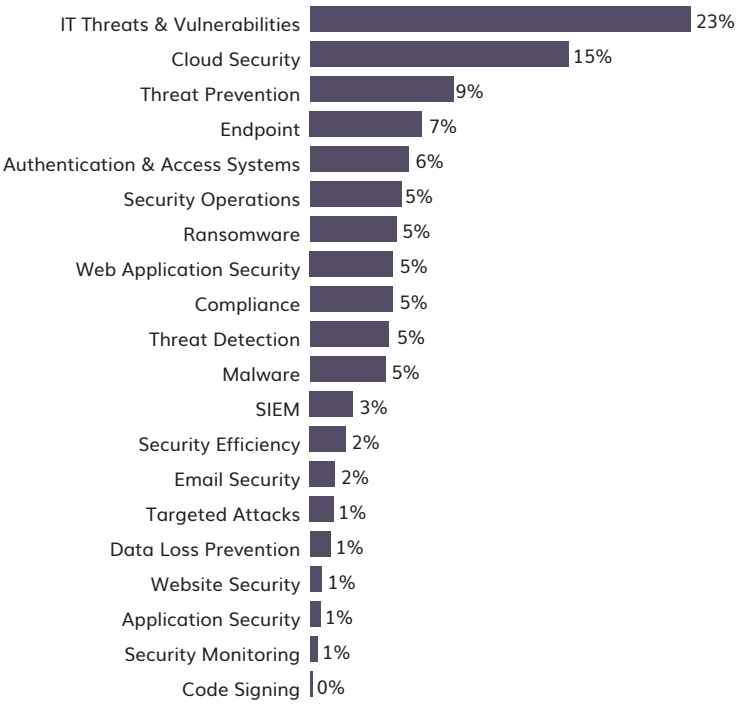


Figure 7: What security topics have been engaged with?
(Source: Kingpin)

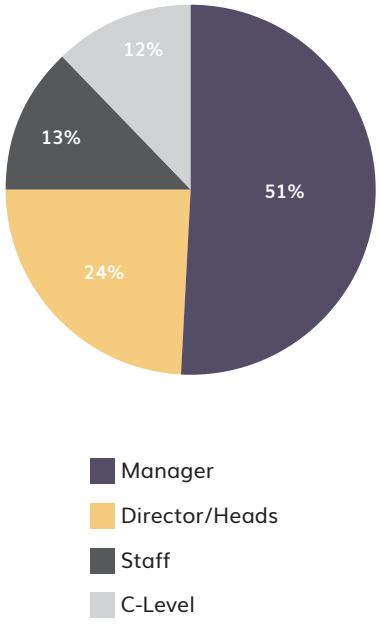


Figure 8: Who is taking security content?
(Source: Kingpin)

4. The geographical differences among buyers

How significant are geographical boundaries when it comes to creating B2B marketing content formats? The most important lesson here is that one size definitely does not fit all.

A study of the enterprise audience (companies with more than 1,000 seats) in Europe shows most are based in the central, northern and southern parts of the continent. That's an area that encompasses more than seven languages for content and messaging. Content therefore needs to be easily localised or repurposed across this market in any wider regional or international campaign.

For example, Kingpin data on the sources of opportunity creation by region across Europe highlights some interesting differences in types of engagement in different countries [Figure 9]. Channel partners are one of the top sources of opportunity in France, Germany and the UK. This data reinforces the importance of the role of channel partners in buying decisions, particularly in these countries. For example, prospects and customers may carry out initial vendor research and engagement themselves but then use their incumbent SIs and other partners to validate.

However, note that channel partners aren't as important in the buying journey in the Benelux and Nordic regions. Organic web and outbound sales are key ways to engage in the Nordics, while organic web is significantly higher than all other sources of opportunity in the Benelux region.

The key takeaway from these figures is make sure you know your regional markets and know the different ways they prefer to engage.

This same principle applies to the most-engaged topics across different countries. Take Kingpin data from IT security campaigns, for example. The data highlights how one topic does not resonate with all, and how different countries have different priorities when it comes to IT security. For example, in the UK, top priorities include IT threats and vulnerabilities and ransomware. But the most-engaged topic by far in Germany, Italy and Austria is malware. In Spain, it's zero-day threats, and in the US, it's threat detection. These differences across countries are particularly important to understand in an ABM-centric world, where enterprises and multinational organisations are on 99 per cent of target account lists.

The European enterprise audience is scattered across multiple countries, cultures and languages. Multiple internal and external stakeholders are involved in IT infrastructure- and security-related decisions. And they are spread across the region, all with their own priorities and consumption preferences. Whereas linear transactional approaches work more effectively in SME-driven sales, the enterprise clearly has a much more complex approach with many touchpoints and longer sales cycles.

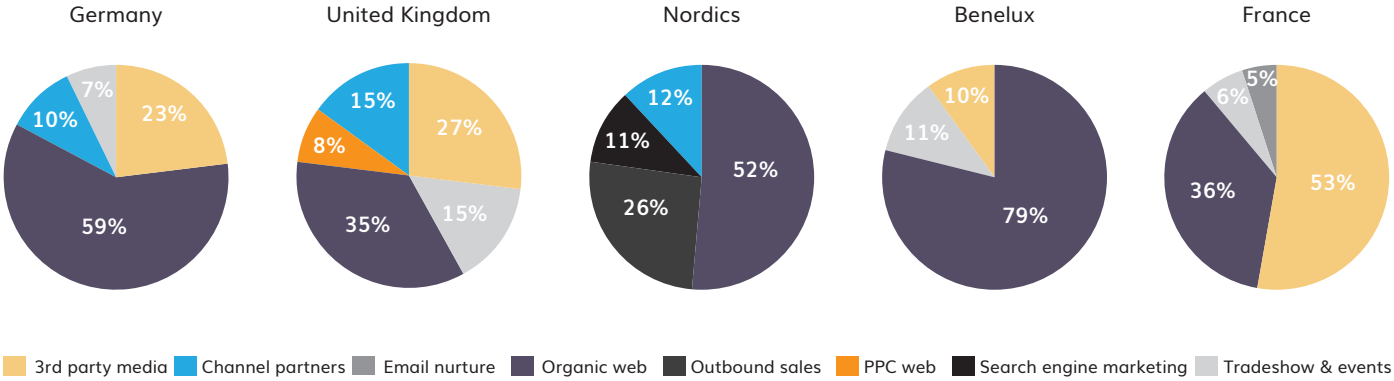


Figure 9: Sources of opportunity creation by region
(Source: Kingpin)

5. How do buyers engage with and consume content?

As the previous section showed, there are multiple stakeholders involved in B2B tech- and security-buying decisions at various levels in any organisation. However, the Kingpin data shows that the managerial level is particularly important, accounting for just over half (51 per cent) of content consumed. It's no surprise managers are the key evaluators in the buying process. They are the gatekeepers and fulcrum of most tech rollouts in larger companies, often responding to the organisation's tech priorities.

However, it's not just about targeting managers. Content is also consumed by directors and department heads (24 per cent), staff (13 per cent) and the C-level (12 per cent).

How buyers gather information

Online presence – earned or paid – is important, according to a Kingpin study looking at how buyers of managed IT services gather information when selecting technology, and how buyers interact with vendors [Figure 10].

Web research (57 per cent) was cited as the top method of gathering information when selecting technology. This initial web research is also often carried out using Google and Bing with no vendor engagement and highlights the importance of having a strong online presence through content, search engine marketing (SEM) and its cousin, search engine optimisation (SEO). And when asked how they interact with technology vendors, buyers ranked vendor websites (27 per cent) and online IT publications (26 per cent) almost the same. This reinforces the importance for vendors of using their own websites and owned channels in addition to the online IT media for delivering content to customers. However, it's also worth noting that traditional direct engagement came out as the top three ways of interacting with technology vendors: email (34 per cent), one-to-one meetings (32 per cent) and direct contact (31 per cent).

Another Kingpin US tech buyer study asked respondents where they go to research solutions to their IT problems [Figure 11].

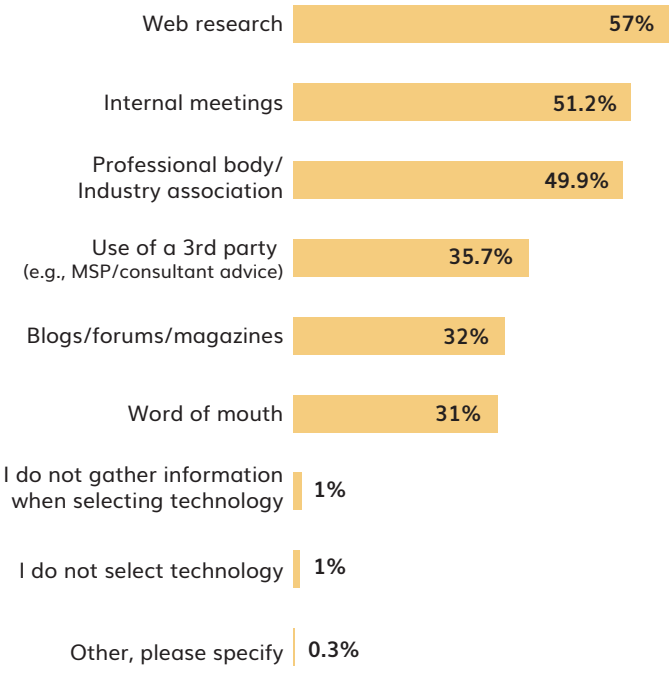


Figure 10: How do you gather information when selecting technology?
(Source: Kingpin)

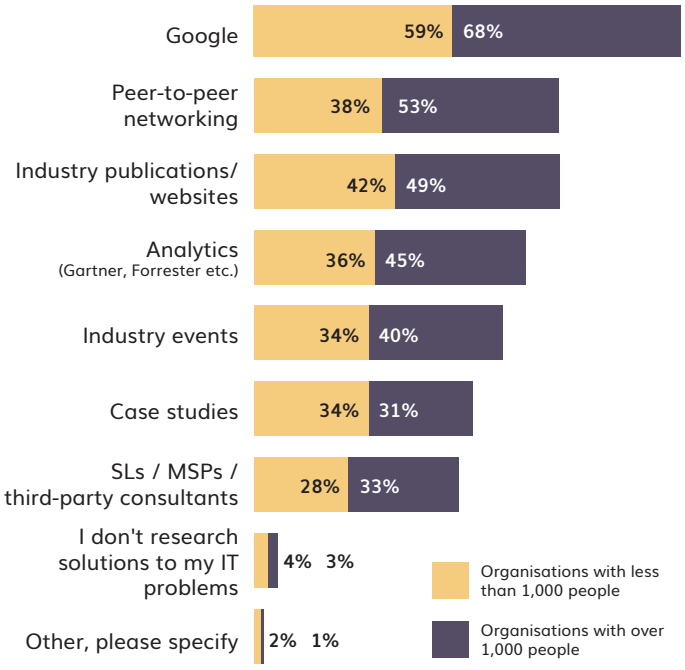


Figure 11: Where do you go to research solutions to your IT problems?
(Source: Kingpin)

The top answer was Google, followed by peer-to-peer networking, industry publications and websites, analysts and industry events. When asked which publications – print or online – they read most frequently for industry knowledge, more respondents identified general tech publications, rather than pure B2B tech publications. The top answer was Wired (35 per cent), followed by CNET (12 per cent) and Google (nine per cent). General business publications also featured in the top responses, including Forbes (eight per cent), the Wall Street Journal (three per cent) and Bloomberg (two per cent). It is worth noting that some 17 per cent of respondents said they don't read any publications regularly. The data appears to show more loyalty to Google than individual publications, with buyers landing wherever the search engine takes them. Again, this reinforces the importance of content, SEM and SEO for vendors.

Who engages – the importance of multiple stakeholders and the 'buying team'

What's clear across all of the research cited in this report? No single person or job title holds the key to buying decisions.

There is perhaps a sweet spot for targeting managers. The US study, which had nearly two-thirds of responses from middle and senior management, found that almost a third of those are involved in approving final purchases, as well as in influencing, evaluating and short-listing.

However, the study of buyers in the UK IT managed services market shows involvement in making purchasing decisions across managers, the C-suite, at department level and the board [Figure 12]. And while the IT department is the main function involved in those purchasing decisions, the business owner or MD, finance, line of business and procurement are also involved.

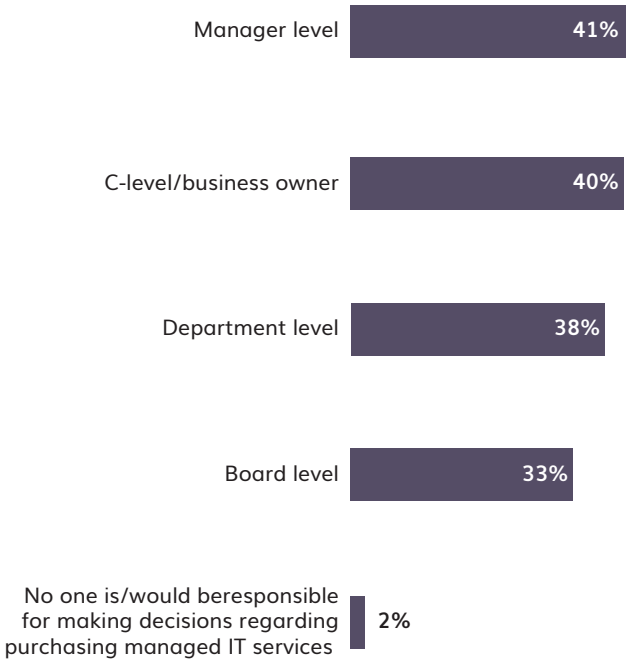


Figure 12: Who is/would be responsible for making decisions regarding managed IT services?
(Source: Kingpin, UK respondents only)

This is also supported by the Kingpin study of IT security buyers across EMEA, with multiple stakeholders involved in the process, from non-managerial staff up to the boardroom.

The lesson here is not to obsess over one single job title when targeting buyers. It's important to take an account overview and use a range of content formats. These should be aimed at different people at different stages of what is a collective buying process.

This is perhaps the most important metric for any campaign – how much revenue or pipeline can be attributed to the various formats used and stakeholders engaged. Another key is impact on the average deal length.

Anatomy of engagement: Large global telecommunications company

When
There were spikes in engagement in April and May at the start of the new financial year.

What
The top format for engagement was 3rd party media (69 per cent), followed by tradeshows and events (20 per cent), email nurture (five per cent), search engine marketing (four per cent) and organic traffic (two per cent).

Who
The most-engaged roles at this company were at the managerial and director level – manager or director of IT, systems or security (48 per cent). These were followed by VP of IT or security (14 per cent), then consultant (five per cent) and IT security engineer or architect (five per cent). Engagement with C-level roles was relatively low, with CISO at four per cent and CIO/CTO at two per cent.

How
For the first touchpoint – the initial lead source – engagement varied across content formats and job roles. For third party media the highest engagement by far (70%) was with managerial roles. There was a more even spread of first touchpoint engagement across job titles for tradeshows and events, with the highest (33 per cent) among IT or security engineers and architects. However, the only engagement at the C-suite level was with CISOs for third party media (two per cent).

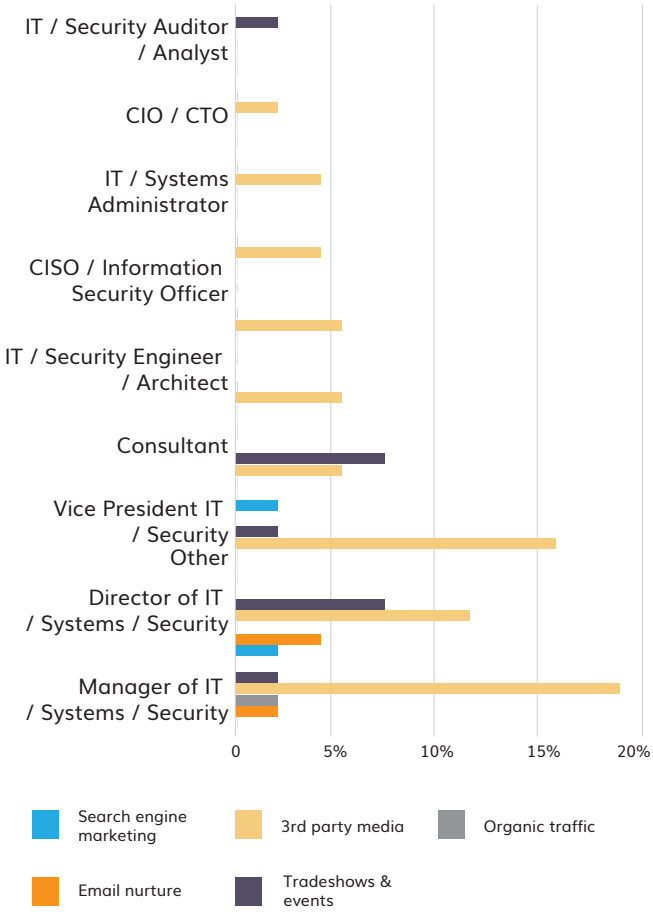


Figure 13: Most recent lead source
(Source: Kingpin)

For the last touchpoint – the most recent lead source [Figure 13] – the highest engagement (29 per cent) was with 3rd party media among managers and directors of IT, systems or security. This most recent lead source channel was also the most engaged generally among all the other roles, although to a lesser extent than managers and directors. Tradeshows and events were most popular with directors of IT, systems or security and VPs of IT or security.

Why?
When an opportunity shows itself there is typically an increased level of engagement from an organisation as the wider buying team gets involved. There are multiple engagements from different roles and across different types of content. A variety of formats are needed at different stages to hit all these people involved in the buying decision and to reinforce the opportunity at the table.

6. Attribution and ROI

One Kingpin study found a huge ROI on both pipeline and revenue through media investments. Content-based marketing is a key driver and influencer of that ROI, based on direct and indirect attribution. And standard content syndication proved to be the most successful tactic for generating revenue.

The campaign data from one client also reveals the opportunity sourcing touchpoints [Figure 14]. The top sources were organic web (39 per cent), channel partners (21 per cent) and tradeshows and events (15 per cent).

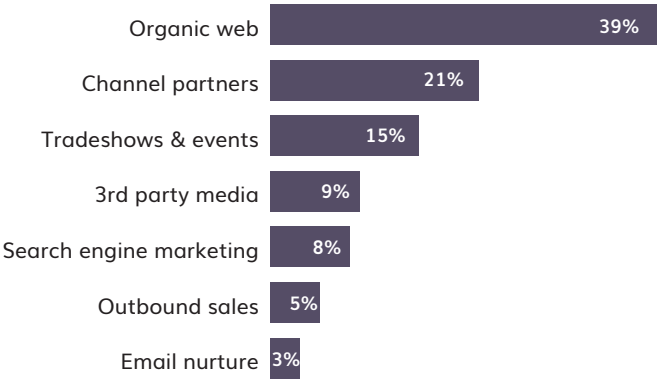


Figure 14: Opportunity source touchpoints
(Source: Kingpin)

However, it is important to point out that using direct attribution only, i.e., opportunities that show only first or last touch, does not give a full picture of the buying cycle. For example, using indirect attribution measurement saw attribution for one lead source for a client increase from five per cent of total pipeline (when looking only at direct attribution metrics) to 32 per cent.

The challenge is around attribution and how to measure it correctly. There are lots of touchpoints across the buying cycle and marketers need to look at the wider picture and score all tactics across the journey and buying team. There has been too much focus purely on first touch and last touch attribution,

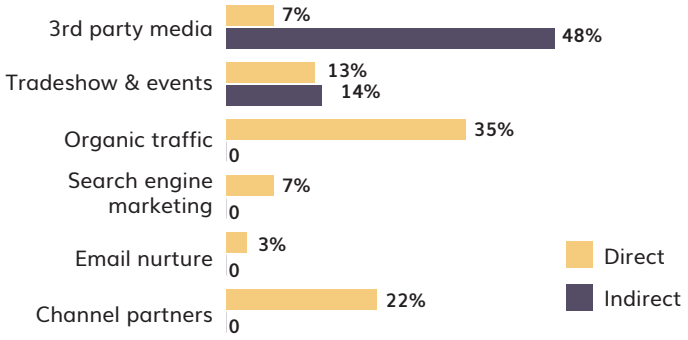


Figure 15: Key tactics/channels for direct and indirect opportunities
(Source: Kingpin)

which gives uneven credit to, say a PPC first touch contact or the last touch contact by a sales person. But what about everything in between, during that buying cycle? What about the webinar a CIO attended, the conference that the IT manager went to, the white paper that was downloaded during the research and validation process?

The campaign also reveals the key tactics and channels for direct and indirect opportunities [Figure 15]. The big differences between direct and indirect opportunities, particularly with 3rd party media, suggests vendor-driven content is consumed and engaged with heavily – post-opportunity creation – as part of the research and validation process rather than as a first touch activity.

The data from this campaign also shows how many more contacts are involved in successful opportunities, with more than four in both generation of pipeline (4.12) and closed deals that were won (4.51). That compares to an average of just 2.47 contacts in deals that were lost.

This highlights how much activity is going on behind the scenes during a buying journey and why marketers must look beyond typical first and last touch contacts. One person at an organisation might do the initial organic web contact but there will then be at least three or four other people behind the scenes engaging with other formats and tactics as the buying cycle progresses.

This emphasises the importance of knowing key stakeholders across the buying team. The perils of not knowing them could blindside a campaign to potential blockers behind the scenes in the organisation. A lot can happen in the gap between first touch and last touch, and it's vital to use a variety of content formats and tactics to ensure constant engagement throughout the buying journey.

Anatomy of engagement: Large global bank

When

There was the traditional spike in engagement during the first quarter of the new financial year between April and June, as well as another spike in October just after the half-year financials.

What

The top formats for engagement were third party media (69 per cent), tradeshows and events (20 per cent), email nurture (five per cent), search engine marketing (four per cent) and organic traffic (two per cent).

Who

The importance of the managerial level is highlighted again here. The most-engaged roles (48 per cent) at this bank were managers and directors of IT, systems or security. They were followed by VPs of IT or security (15 per cent), consultants (five per cent) and IT or security engineers and architects (five per cent).

How

For the initial lead source, touchpoint engagement again varied across formats and job roles [Figure 16]. Third party media was the most engaged format across all job roles, although to a greater extent among managers and directors of IT, systems or security (29 per cent). Tradeshows and events were most popular among directors and VPs of IT, systems or security.

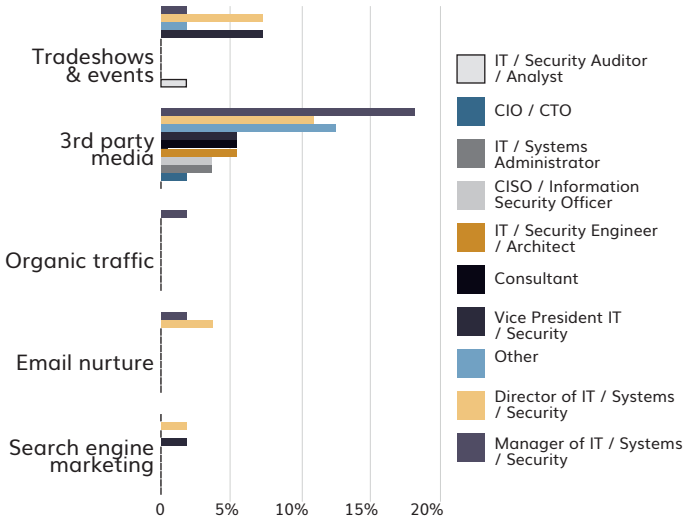


Figure 16: Initial lead source
(Source: Kingpin)

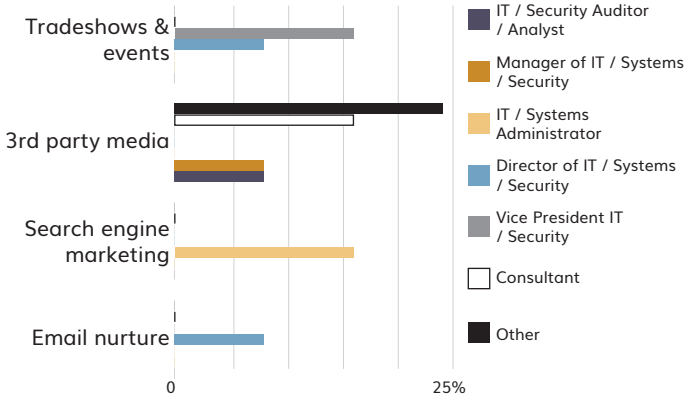


Figure 17: Most recent lead source
(Source: Kingpin)

Seeing the highest engagement for the most recent lead source were third party media for consultants (15 per cent), tradeshows and events for VPs of IT or security (15 per cent), and search engine marketing for IT or systems administrators (15 per cent) [Figure 17].

Comparing the initial and most recent lead sources for this large bank, it is noticeable that the C-level executives appear to be engaged at the initial lead source stage but not for the most recent lead source – note the absence of CIO and CISO in Figure 17. This shows that, for this bank at least, projects are kicked off by the more senior executives but then the ongoing research is done by less-senior staff across the IT department such as managers, analysts, consultants and administrators.

Why?

Again, there is a wide variety of engagement across different content formats by different members of the organisation's buying team. This reflects the different roles each member plays at different stages of the process, from initial research and validation through to trying the product and turning up at the vendor's stand at an event to see it in action.

Summary

As this report shows, the buying journey for B2B tech is complex. For tech brands marketing to such buyers, there are no single killer formats, topics or job titles that hold the key to sealing the deal.

But Kingpin's data does reveal some critical insights. These point to ways in which tech brands can better engage those involved in the buying process and ensure maximum return on their media and marketing investments.

Timing of campaigns is important. A significant trigger for higher levels of engagement appears in the first quarter of an organisation's new financial year, when budgets have been signed off and the buying process kicks into action. This is particularly important in an ABM context. However, that is just one example of an engagement trigger. Buying cycles are long and marketers must plan campaigns to hit various members of a buying team at different touchpoints across the cycle.

When we look at vendor-driven push activity, there is no single content format that is key to engaging B2B tech buyers. Top-funnel whitepapers remain popular, but there is also significant engagement with other formats such as web events, case studies and email.

It's not just about the internal buying team, however. Across both pipeline and revenue generation, channel is the best performing tactic. Buyers will often engage their channel and SI partners in the validation and selection process. That means marketers must also factor in targeting an organisation's channel partners and SIs.

There is also no single person responsible for buying decisions. Our data shows engagement across these various formats at every level, from non-managerial staff right up to the boardroom and across different departments. If there is a sweet spot, it is at the middle and senior management level. These are often the gatekeepers and the fulcrum of buying decisions. However, that doesn't mean ignoring more junior and more senior job titles that still have a role to play in the buying journey. So, remember: know and look for the buying team. And, particularly for large organisations, be prepared for responses to come in from all levels of seniority and from different departments.

When creating content, tech brands also need to consider regional and geographical differences. Our EMEA data shows an audience across multiple countries, cultures and languages, each with its own priorities and consumption preferences. Brands therefore need to ensure the content they create is easy to localise and transfer across those geographical boundaries.

Finally, in terms of how buyers consume content, our data shows the importance of an online presence – earned or paid – for tech vendors. So don't forget: web research is the most popular method of gathering information, and vendor websites rank higher than online IT publications among buyers. This reinforces how important it is for vendors to have a strong online presence, good content and use SEM and SEO tactics.

About

Kingpin are the strategic marketing activation partner for B2B tech brands. We help B2B tech marketers harness data, AI and MarTech to identify audiences, map-out customer buying journeys, uncover in-market prospects and build and execute strategic, insight-driven marketing campaigns that engage, nurture and acquire business customers and partners.

We are more than just a service agency.

We are tech enthusiasts and data geeks. Consultants and friends. Transparent and honest.

We are Kingpin.

Interested in finding out how Kingpin can help your business grow?

Whether it's lead generation, brand awareness, ABM, PPC, content, audience mapping or simply some friendly advice and guidance, feel free to get in touch. We always love a chat.

You can contact us on:

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+44 (0)20 7803 1000

Kingpin

Awards and accreditations

B2B Marketing Top 15 UK B2B marcomms agency 2019

Chief Marketer 200 – The Top Marketing Agencies of 2019

computing Tech Marketing & Innovation Awards 2018 WINNER – B2B Tech Marketing Agency of the Year

computing Tech Marketing & Innovation Awards 2018 WINNER – Lead Generation Programme of the Year

The Drum Recommended

The Drum B2B Awards Finalist 2018

A selection of clients we work with

8x8, brightcove, ClickSoftware, COMMVAULT, CYLANCE, dynatrace, EPICOR, First Data, infor, LogRhythm The Security Intelligence Company, McAfee, Microsoft, Optimizely, proofpoint, Quest, SONICWALL, TREND MICRO, VEEAM, vmware, worldpay