THE 2015

B2B BUYER'S SURVEY REPORT

HOW CONTENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA ARE IMPACTING THE BUYER'S JOURNEY







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Survey Report

BUYERS TURN TO ANALYSTS, PEERS & OTHER TRUSTED RESOURCES WHEN RESEARCHING BUYING DECISIONS

Buyers are increasingly turning to trusted resources such as peers and industry influencers as they kick off their purchasing journey. According to the Fifth Annual *Demand Gen Report 2015 B2B Buyer's Survey*, buyers are now consulting directly with sources that are informed about a topic, but provide an independent point of view for analysis on solving a business challenge.

When asked to rank the first three resources that informed them about a solution they were considering, respondents cited industry experts/analysts (21%); peers/colleagues (20%); and web search (17%), according to the *Buyer's Survey*.

Some of the factors cited by buyers for this greater emphasis on third-party perspective earlier in the buying cycle included:

- A desire to accelerate their ability to narrow the list of vendors; and
- The continued push to self-educate in anonymous mode before connecting with a sales rep.

Much of the information buyers rely on to make their purchasing decisions is coming from discussions on social media as well. Social media is rising in power as it becomes common practice for B2B buyers to use sites such as LinkedIn and Quora to see how their peers are solving complex challenges. They are also leveraging social media to better understand the products and companies the influencers favor. In addition, social media is spilling over into the B2B buying process as more millennials take on decision-making roles and B2B buyers want their buying process to more closely match their personal buying process. Social media is no longer just a B2B marketing initiative.

As social takes on a more prominent role for B2B buyers, content remains critical to the buying process and buyers want more of it. B2B buyers are doing more careful research and they place a high value on content that can help them make the business case.

Other significant trends identified in the 2015 survey include:

- The growing significance of peers when buyers get to the stage where they are evaluating vendors;
- The growing complexity in the buying process as more stakeholders and connection points are considered; and
- The expanded list of buying triggers influencing vendor selection beyond price.

> "Industry experts are placed at the top because they provide the least biased reviews."

What were the first three resources that informed you about the solution in question, in order of importance?

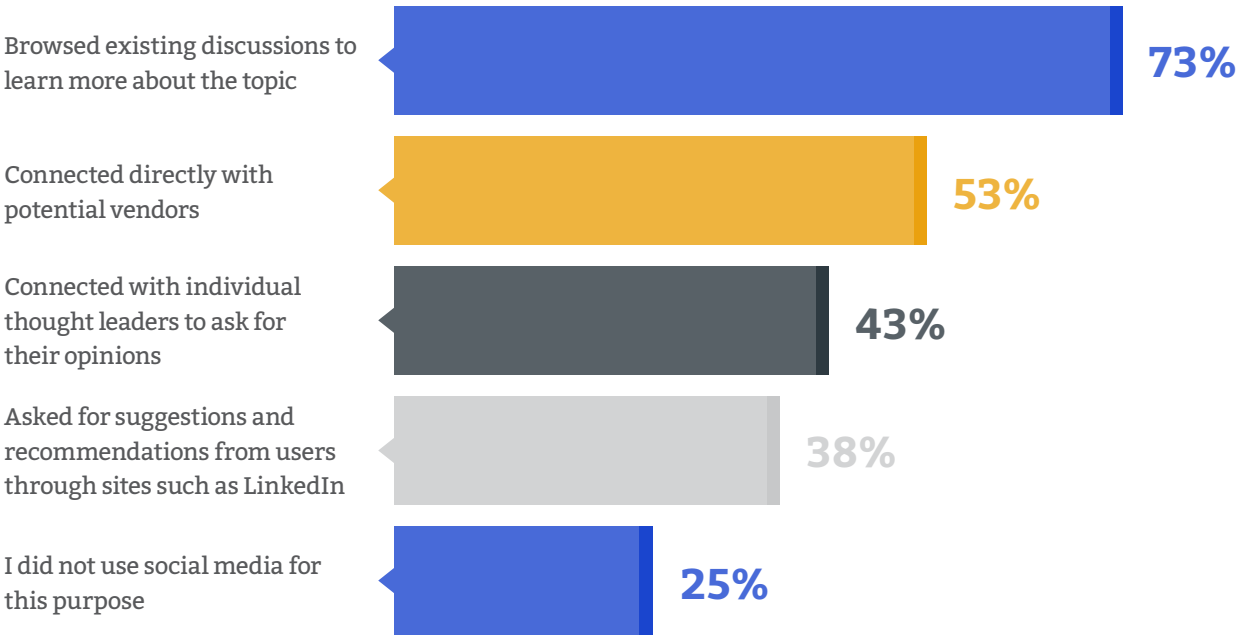




"I trust the recommendations of my peers, and if the vendor website has enough educational material, I can educate myself on the product or solution before I talk to the sales rep."

MORE THAN HALF OF BUYERS TURN TO SOCIAL MEDIA

What role did social media play in your research process?

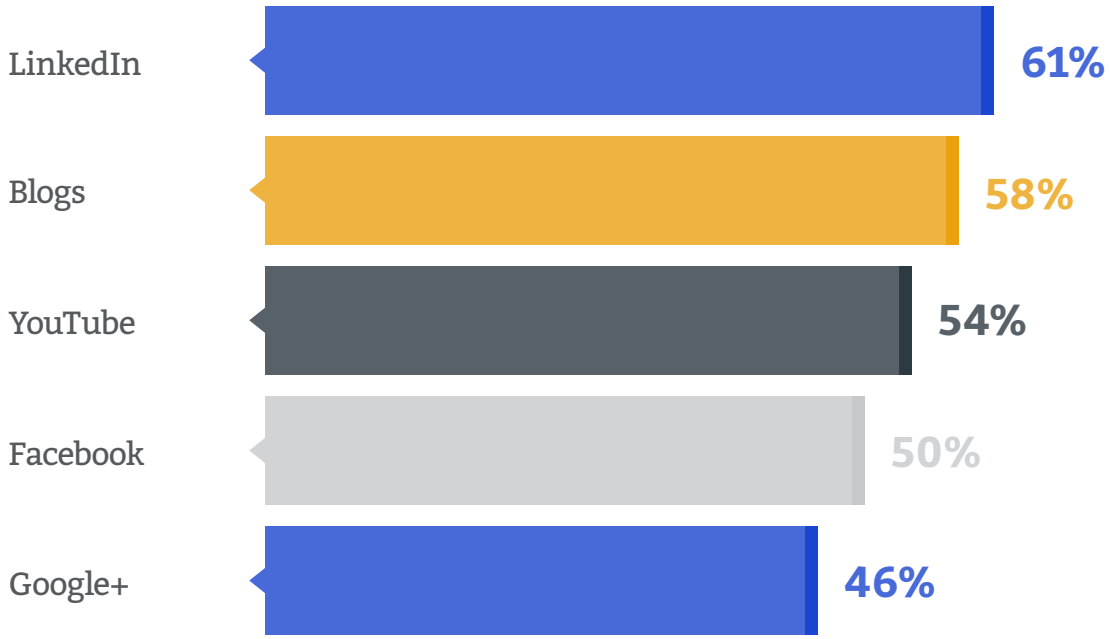


B2B buyers are placing more emphasis than ever on social media content as they make their buying decisions. More than half (53%) said that social media played a role in their assessment of various tools and technologies. Nearly a quarter (21%) said social media played a very important role in their research process, and almost a third (32%) said social media was somewhat important.

When asked for specific ways they used social media, 21% said that they browsed discussion groups on sites such as LinkedIn and Quora.

"It's easier to go back channel via LinkedIn to get peer inputs on products or agencies."

Which social media channels had the biggest impact on your research process?



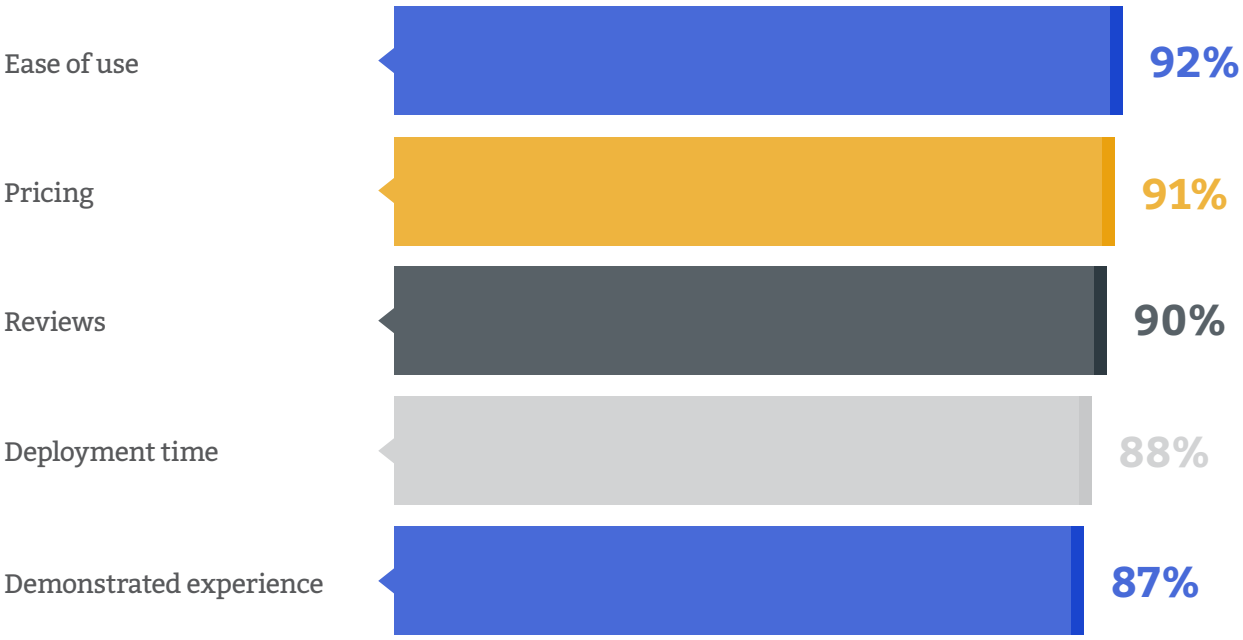
LinkedIn and blogs had the most impact on the research process for respondents. More than half of respondents said that LinkedIn (61%) and blogs (58%) were important resources during their initial learning process, followed by YouTube/Vimeo, Facebook, Google+ and Twitter. While Slideshare, Pinterest, Instagram and Quora also impacted that process, they did so to a lesser extent.

Once buyers have narrowed down their selection of vendors, they cited online reviews as one of the top factors influencing their opinions of the various vendors. While this is common practice for consumers, B2B buyers are now turning to peer reviews as a way to hone their list of vendors.

> "The collaboration via social media has magnified the relationship between companies."

PEER REVIEWS PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE LATER IN THE SELECTION PROCESS

Once you were at a point of evaluating a set list of solution providers, please rank how the following factors influenced your opinion of different vendors.



Just as B2B buyers are becoming more reliant on peers in the early stages of the decision-making process, peers are also now playing a critical role as they narrow down their vendor selection.

When asked how the following factors influenced their decisions as they narrowed down their choices, 90% rated reviews as very important

"We're giving more thought to quality and future business when we narrow down our choices of vendors."

or somewhat important as they compared a set list of vendors. It is clear that they value the unvarnished opinions of their colleagues.

Respondents also put a significant emphasis on pricing; 91% of those surveyed cited price as somewhat or very important.

When it comes to deployment, 88% said that it was a critical factor as they evaluated a select list of vendors. Once they have chosen a vendor, B2B buyers want to be confident that they are able to deliver on schedule.

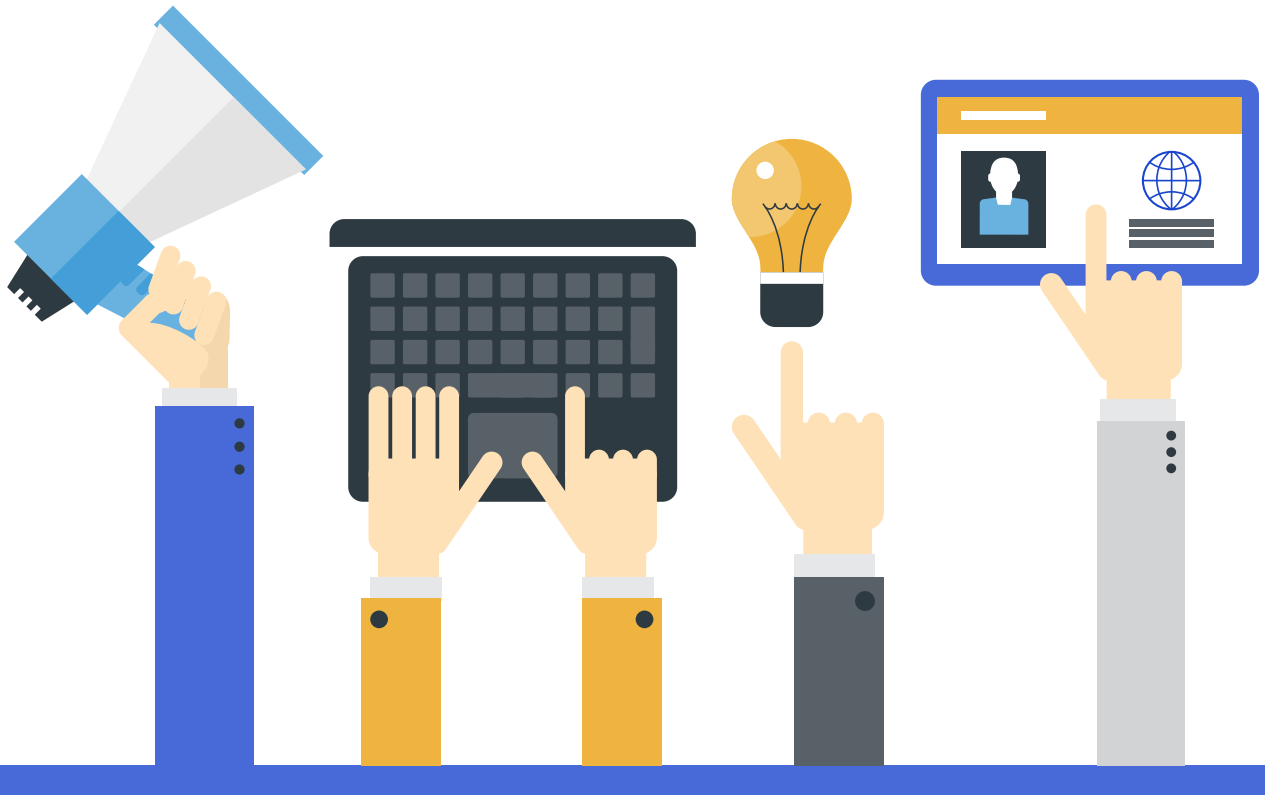
B2B buyers also expressed a strong preference to identify vendors with experience in their industry. This was cited as important to 87% of respondents, who said they wanted a vendor who had deployments in their line of business.

In addition, 85% said they were looking for a vendor with knowledge of their industry, placing a high value on vendors who are familiar with the challenges they face.

While peer reviews are on the radar of many B2B buyers, they also were interested in vendor-provided case studies and testimonials, with 83% rating them as an important factor when comparing a set list of vendors.

Supporting the trend toward objective input, 77% gave credence to analyst rankings.

Networking played the smallest role among B2B buyers, with just 62% saying that it was important for a vendor to have a connection to an executive in their company.



CONTENT CONTINUES TO MAKE A LASTING IMPRESSION

When it comes to the content that influences buying decisions, B2B buyers are looking for the facts. An overwhelming majority (86%) of the respondents to the *2015 B2B Buyer's Survey* reported that vendor-focused content, such as case studies and product data sheets are triggers that influence their purchase decisions.

Thought leadership content was also an important part of the mix, as 75% of respondents cited white papers and infographics among the top pieces of content that they review during the buying process.

Also clearly important to 87% of buyers was a better mix of content to help them through the research and decision-making stages. Content that built a business case or showed clear ROI for the purchase was cited as somewhat or very important by 83% buyers surveyed.

Multiple pieces of content also play a significant role in the decision-making process. More than half of all respondents (52%) indicated they view two to four pieces of content from the winning vendor. More than a quarter (28%) view five to seven pieces, while 10% view eight pieces or more.

Ultimately, content played an important role when making a final selection. An overwhelming majority (82%) of respondents indicated that the winning vendor's content had a significant impact on their buying decision, while just 16% noted that content did not sway their decision.

Influenced by their experience in researching consumer purchases, buyers want an intuitive experience when they visit B2B websites. In terms of vendor website content, 91% said search and navigation tools are somewhat or very important. They need to be able to access the necessary information quickly and easily.

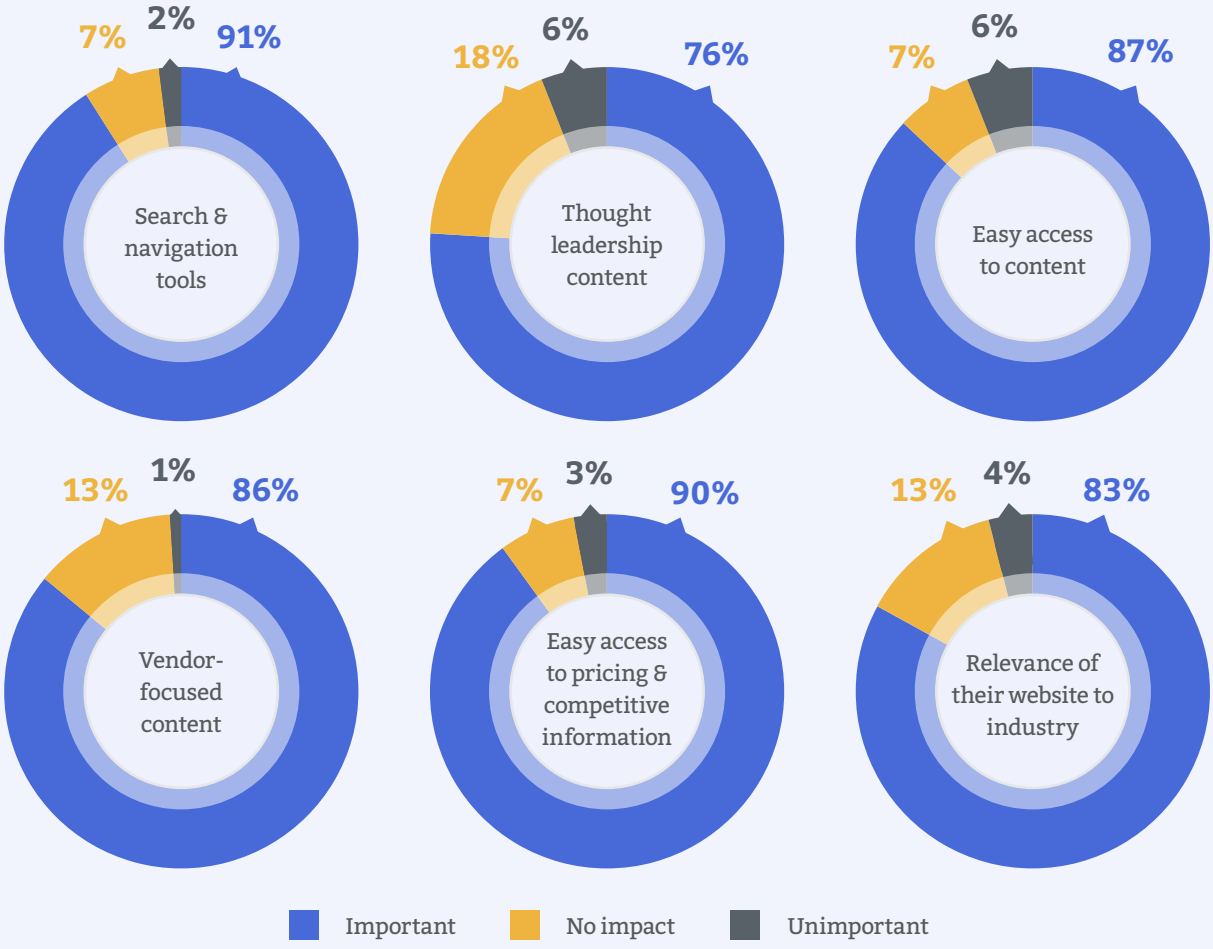
Another trend is the preference toward un-gated content. More buyers expect easy access to relevant content without long registration forms (87%) and easy access to pricing and competitive information (90%) were overwhelmingly cited as necessary.

Buyers also increasingly expect a more tailored and personalized experience when they visit a website. They want to be sure the website speaks to them and their industry, with 83% citing that as important. That underscores the need for B2B marketers to customize website content accordingly.



WEB RANKS AS A TOP DRIVER

Rank the importance of each of the following when you visit a vendor website to conduct research:



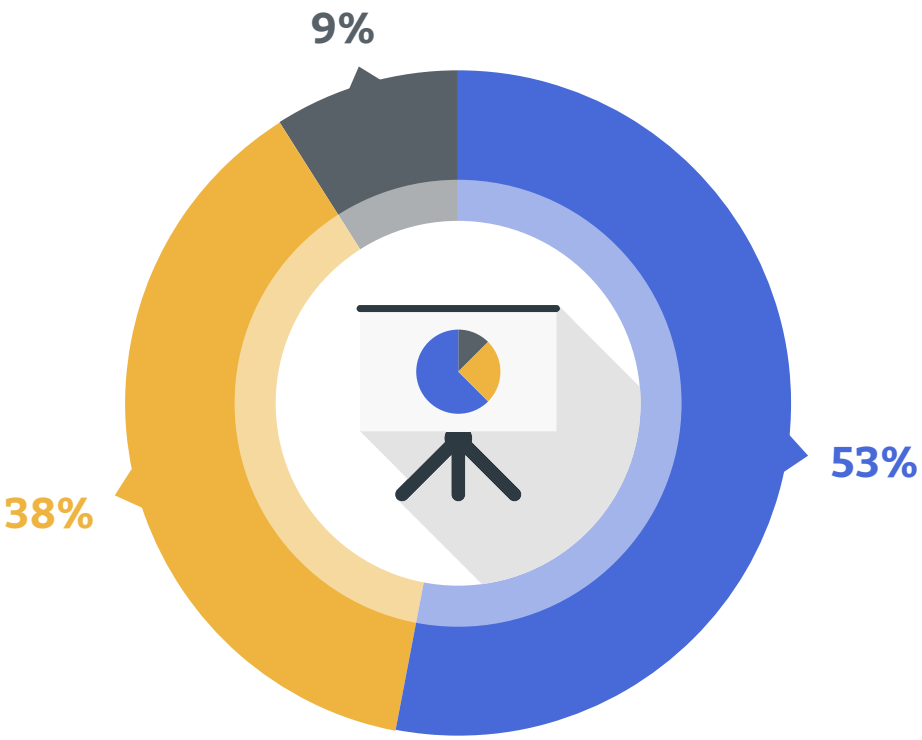
When buyers begin their research, the web is still a go-to place to learn more about the possible solutions and vendors to help their processes. Web search consistently ranks as a top resource, and vendor websites also rank very high in the early stages of the research process.

Some of the key elements buyers want in a vendor's website include:

- Easy access to pricing and competitive information to make it easy for them to assess how well the vendor fits their needs and budgets;
- Simple search and navigation tools to help find the appropriate materials; and
- Thought leadership content to provide a well-rounded view of the issues.

BUYING PROCESS GETS LONGER, MORE COMPLEX

How has the length of your B2B purchase cycle changed, on average, compared with a year ago?

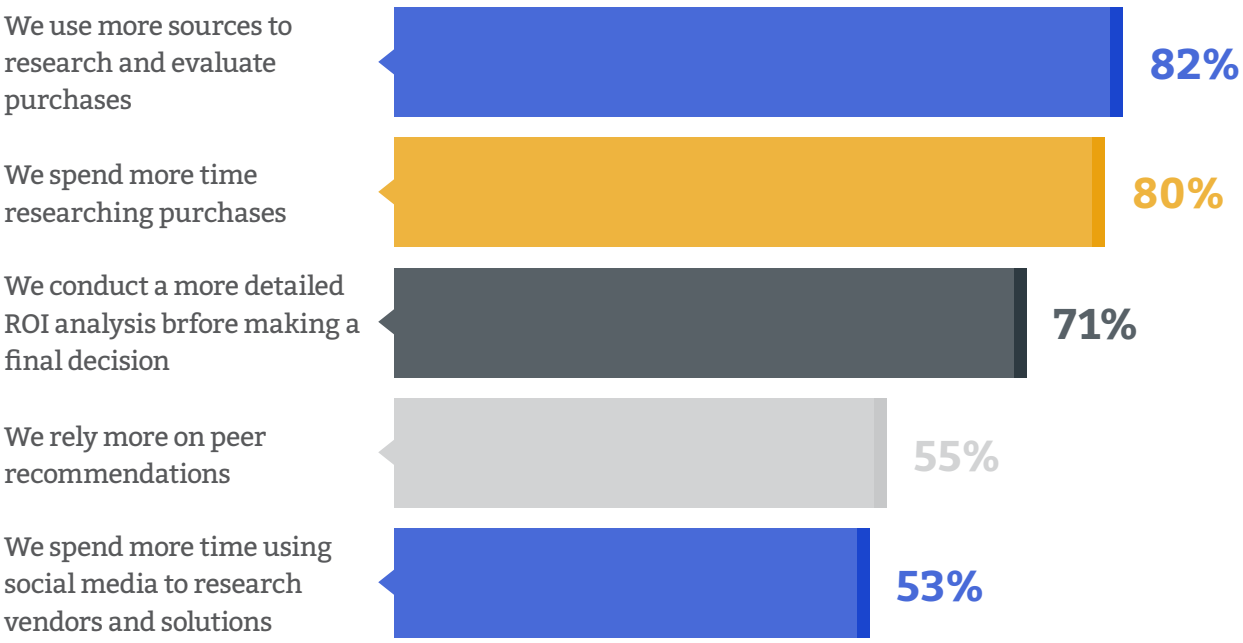


One of the major trends uncovered by this research is that the B2B buying process is becoming increasingly complex. An overwhelming majority (82%) of survey respondents said they are using more sources to research and evaluate purchases, and 80% said they spend more time researching alone. That is a huge jump from the previous survey, in which 58% of respondents said that they spent more time on research.

More than half (55%) are relying more on peer recommendations, while 53% of respondents said they spend more time using social media to research vendors and solutions.

A more detailed ROI analysis has become increasingly important for the buyers polled in the study. The majority (71%) of respondents said they conduct a more detailed ROI analysis before making a final decision.

How has each of the following aspects of your purchasing process changed over the past year?



Given today's complex buying landscape, it's no surprise that the buying cycle is getting longer. More than half (53%) said the length of the B2B purchase cycle has increased; 10% of those respondents indicated the increase was significant. More than a third (38%) of respondents said the length of the cycle has remained the same and only 9% cited a decrease. In the previous study, only one third

"More research and planning has led to slightly longer purchasing cycles and more price and feature comparison."

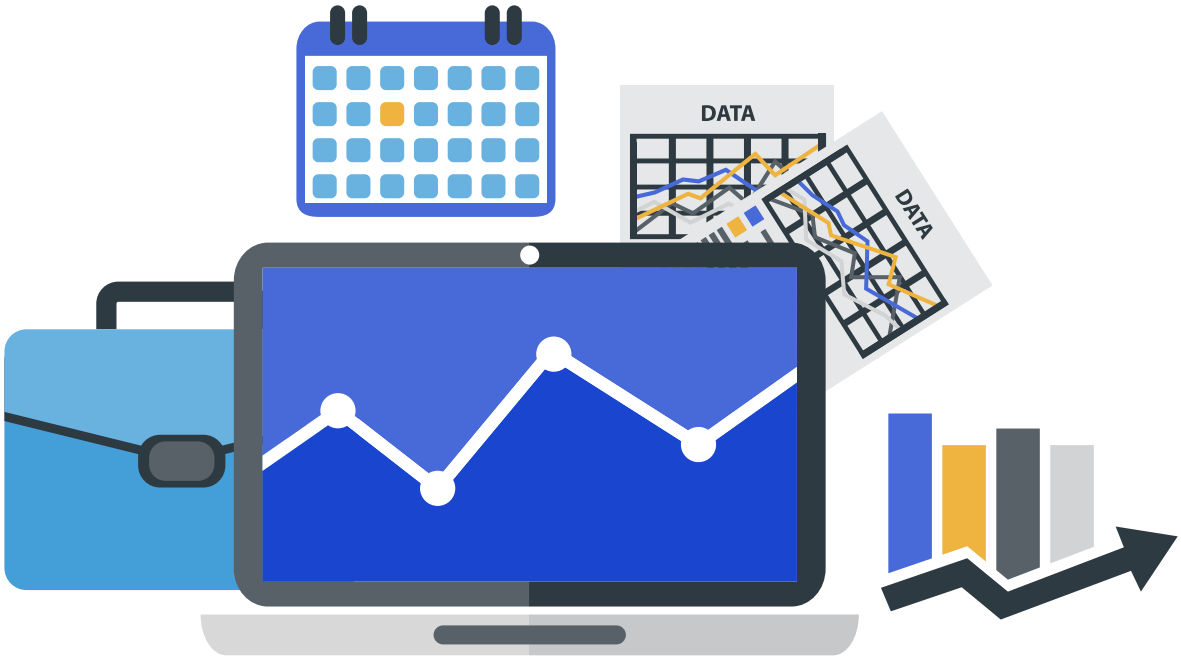
(33%) of respondents indicated that the buying cycle had increased, while 28% said it was shorter and 39% indicated it remained the same.

When it comes to specific steps in the process, accepting outreach from vendors and engaging in calls/demos occurred among 25% of respondents in under one month; 39% of respondents said it occurred within one to three months, while 27% did so in the three- to six-month timeframe.

Nearly a third (29%) sought industry analysts' and consultants' input in the first month; 40% said that timeline was one to three months; and 24% said three to six months.

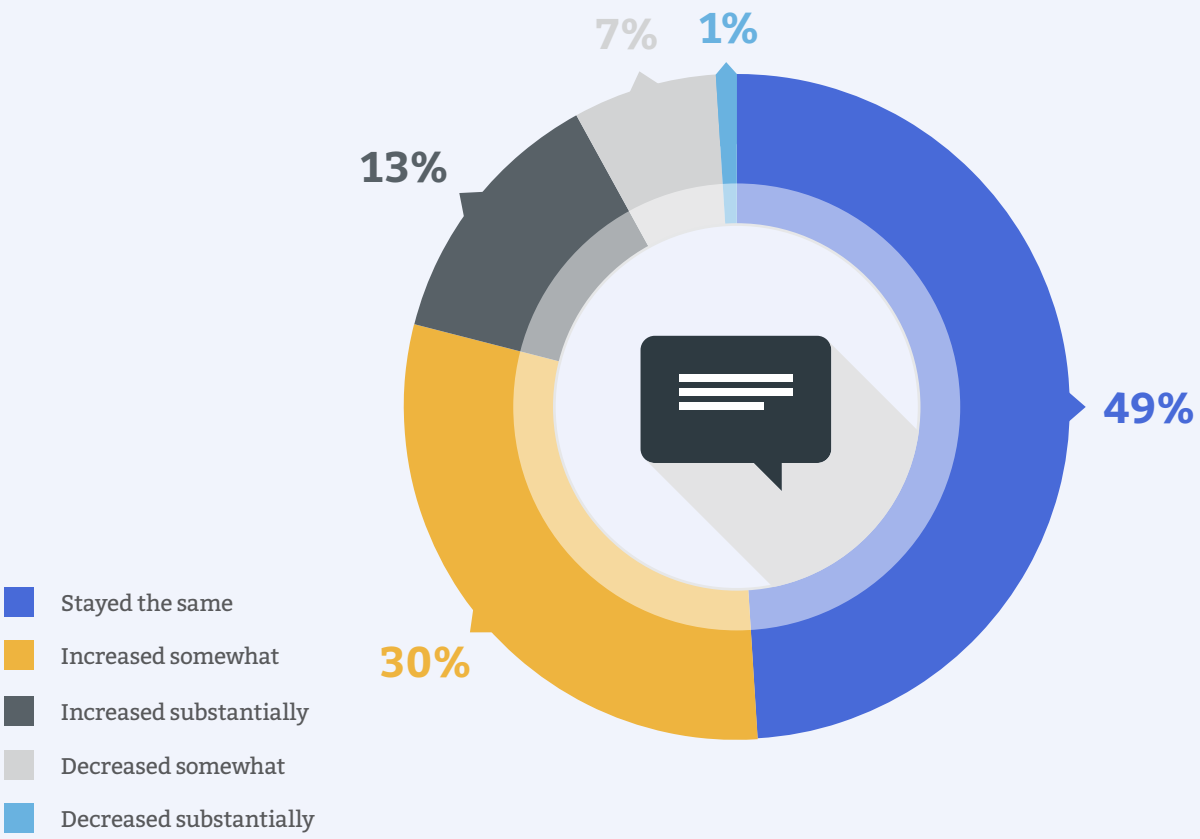
In terms of input from peers/existing users in the community, 27% performed this task within the first month; 41% said the timeline was one to three months; and 23% said three to six months.

Half of all respondents brought in other team members to help with the research process in the one- to three-month timeframe; 23% brought in other team members in the first month; and 19% brought other team members into the process in the three- to six-month timeframe.



MORE TEAM MEMBERS INVOLVED IN DECISIONS

How has the number of the team members usually involved in your B2B purchase process changed over the past year?



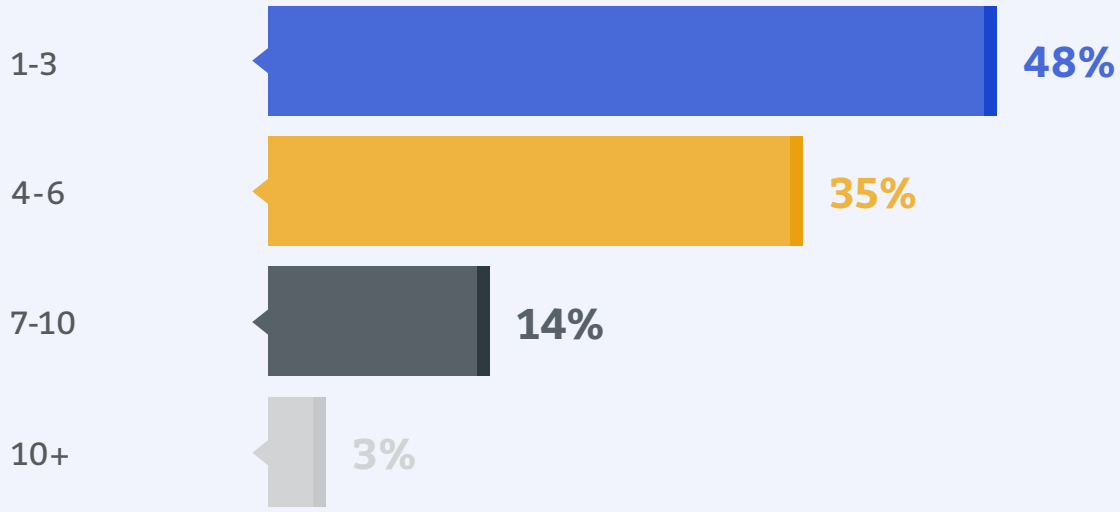
A significant trend that has emerged is that there are more people on the buying team and more departments are weighing in on B2B buying decisions.

Almost half (43%) of respondents said there were more team members involved in a B2B purchase than the previous year, with 13% noting that the number increased substantially. In the previous survey, 35% of respondents indicated the number of team members had increased.

Almost half (48%) of respondents to the survey said the purchase process included one to three people. A third (35%) said four to six people

"The number of influencers has grown."

How many people were involved in the purchase process for recent B2B solutions?



were involved, and just 14% cited a group of seven to 10 influencers. Three percent cited 10 or more purchase influencers.

Two thirds of respondents (67%) were the primary decision-maker in the purchase; just 27% influenced or recommended, while a mere 8% were part of a team with equal influence and 10% reviewed and approved the purchase terms.

"Our buying process is more collaborative. The organization is interested in getting a full 360-degree perspective."

MARKETING FLEXES ITS INFLUENCE ON THE BUYING PROCESS

The influence of the following departments has changed in relation to prioritizing new projects and selecting B2B solutions and services.



Marketing's influence in buying decisions continues to grow. More than a third (35%) said marketing's influence in purchases has increased somewhat, while another 14% indicated it has increased substantially.

Sales' influence is notable as well, which saw very similar increased influence. A total of 35% said sales' role has increased somewhat and 16% said it has increased substantially. Executive team members are also playing a key role in the process, with 30% of respondents indicating executives' roles have increased somewhat, and 15% indicating they have increased substantially.

The finance team's influence has grown as well, according to the survey, with 45% saying it has increased somewhat (32%) and substantially (13%).

The influence of the IT department. has also grown. More than one third (35%) of respondents indicated it has increased somewhat, and 16% said it increased substantially. Customer service's influence has grown somewhat for 29% of respondents, and 12% said it has grown substantially. Operations influence has grown somewhat for 31% of respondents, while 13% said it has grown substantially.

"I identify challenges internally and seek out solutions to resolve them. Often I ask colleagues if they know any solutions, then research them online to see if their value and feature sets would solve my challenges."

CONCLUSION

Throughout the five years that Demand Gen Report has conducted the *B2B Buyer Behavior Study*, several consistent trends have continued to appear and, in some cases, have become even more pronounced with the 2015 study, including:

- Buyers are using the power of the web to anonymously search for solutions;
- Content is increasingly important in forming early impressions for brands and helping to drive engagement at all stages; and
- B2B brands have to balance complex dynamics of extended sales cycles and growing buying teams and influencers.

However, this year saw a significant shift as the power of peers and influencers quickly became one of the most important factors in the B2B buying process. The power of peers and thought leaders had always been an important factor in the later validation stages, but this year's study shows that buyers are now using the power of their networks from the very first legs of the buying journey.

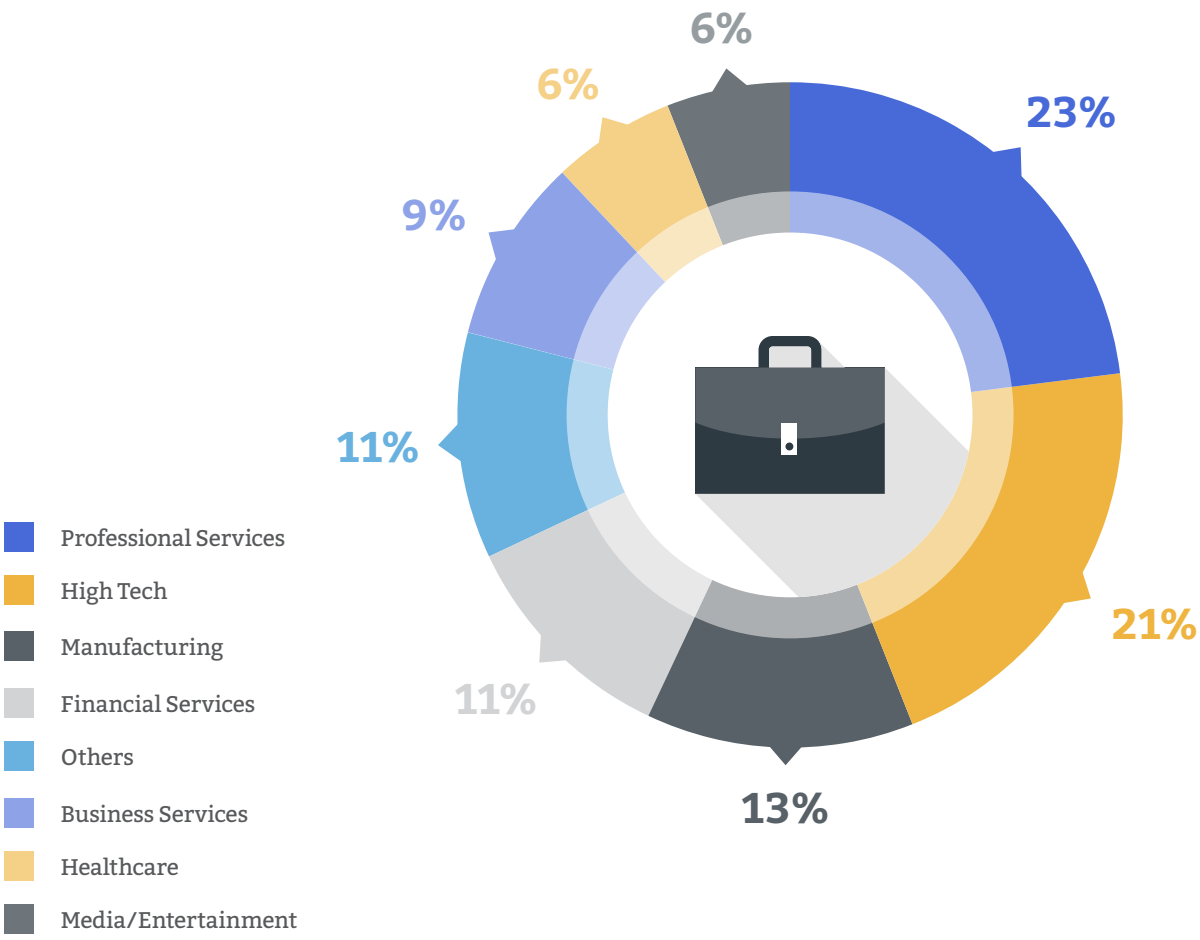
This trend has made social media a more vital part of the engagement process, and will also drive more brands to focus on the customer lifecycle and the advocacy stage.

In addition, as the bar continues to raise on buying complexity with more stakeholders and committees influencing decisions, account-based marketing will likely become an imperative for many B2B-focused organizations. B2B buyers are expecting vendors to be able to speak directly to their industry and consider how the purchase of a solution will impact strategy and outcomes for all lines of business.



ABOUT THE SURVEY

In which industry do you operate?



Demand Gen Report's 2015 B2B Buyer's Survey polled 173 marketing, sales and IT executives about their experiences in making B2B buying decisions.

The top three industries represented were professional services (23%); high-tech (21%) and manufacturing (13%).

Of the B2B purchase types made by respondents, almost two thirds (62%) were technology-related investments. Close to half (42%) have been software/technology purchases and another 20% were IT/Hardware purchases. Business and consulting services (15%) was distant second and Parts/Materials/Supplies (8%), Capital Equipment (6%), Promotional Items (5%) and Promo/Advertising/Media (5%) comprised a minority of investments.

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