B2B RESEARCH



Digital marketing and the new buying process

Research, analysis, best practice

In association with:



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INTRODUCTION

It will come as little surprise to B2B marketers to hear that the balance of power in the buying process, over which they used to exert a certain level of control, has now tipped firmly in favour of the people doing the buying.

Where once trade shows, printed brochures and well-placed press advertisements were all that were required to persuade a prospect that your organisation was the one for them, these days prospects turn to a plethora of social platforms, search results pages and peer review sites, as well as the dizzying amount of content churned out by competing businesses jostling for their attention.

Perhaps the good news for the marketer trying to ensure their brand makes it on to the shortlist when a prospect decides to make contact is that the proliferation of digital channels and techniques has spawned a raft of solutions offering to make life easier. Innovations such as marketing automation, CRM systems and social media monitoring platforms are all vital tools in a marketer's arsenal. But there is one digital property that sits centrally to all these options and even provides the marketer with an opportunity to wrestle back some agency in the buying process: their website.

This research focuses on how B2B marketers are going about unlocking the benefits that a well-thought out company website, and strategy for digital channels, can bring. After all, a website is one of the very few areas of the digital world that a brand can still regard as being something they can own. And since very few B2B purchasing decisions take place without prospective buyers interacting with a company's website, at some point in the buying process, it makes sense to make sure yours is pulling its weight.

So, how are B2B brands doing when it comes to aligning their business objectives behind effective web presences? Our research suggests that, as a whole, B2B companies are getting the basics right: product pages and 'about us' content seem to get a lot of attention. But the story does tend to end there. Relatively low levels of sales leads are generated through B2B websites and the industry is well behind the curve when it comes to securing deals digitally.

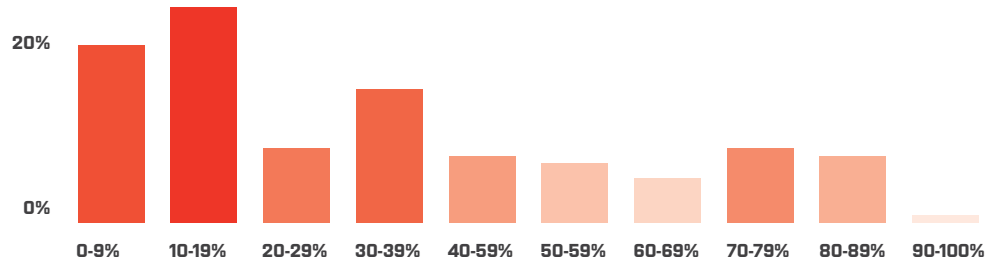
Encouragingly our research paints a picture of an industry eager to change and embrace opportunities such as increasing personalisation, improving customer journeys and delivering websites better able to respond to the increasingly complex demands of an empowered buyer landscape.

The research for the report was carried out in November 2013, and included the survey responses of 125 B2B marketers. Responses were collected from organisations, large and small, across the B2B industry, but with particular take up from technology, media and financial services verticals

DIGITAL MARKETING AND THE NEW BUYING PROCESS

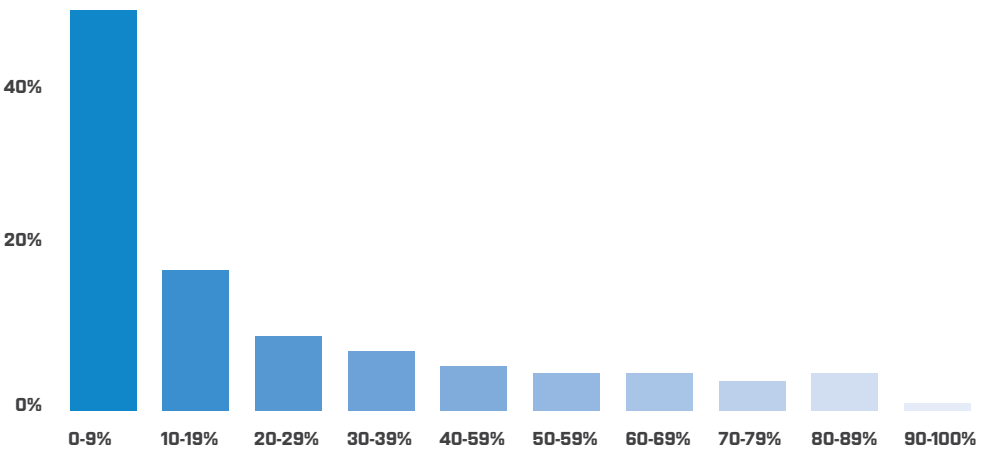
Digital leads under-leveraged

Our research reveals that B2B businesses are not leveraging lead generation opportunities brought about by digital channels, with 43 per cent stating that less than 20 per cent of sales leads come via a digital route. In fact, almost one fifth of respondents (19 per cent) attributed digital channels to less than 10 per cent of sales enquiries. One reason B2B organisations are not making the most of digitally-driven lead generation possibilities could be down to inadequate website functionality. More than two-fifths of those surveyed rated their current website's performance for generating sales leads as either 'poor' or 'very poor'.



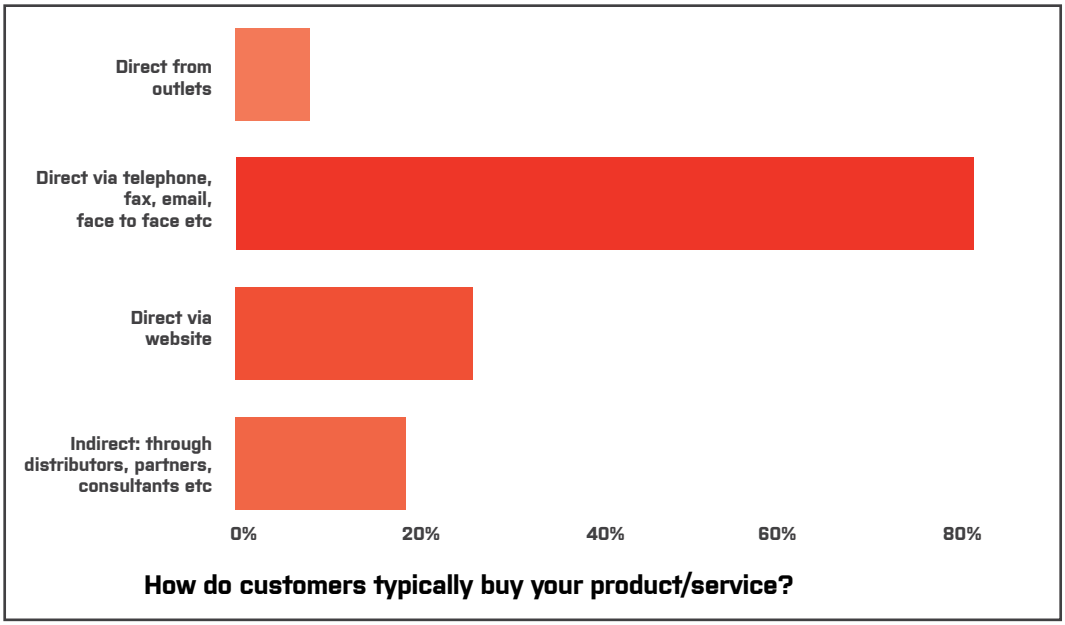
What percentage of your sales enquiries come via digital channels?

In terms of actual sales orders to come through via digital channels, nearly three quarters of respondents (72 per cent) revealed this figure to be less than 30 per cent. Looking more closely at the results, nearly half of all those surveyed (49 per cent) admitted digitally-led sales orders amount to just 10 per cent.



What percentage of your sales orders come via digital channels?

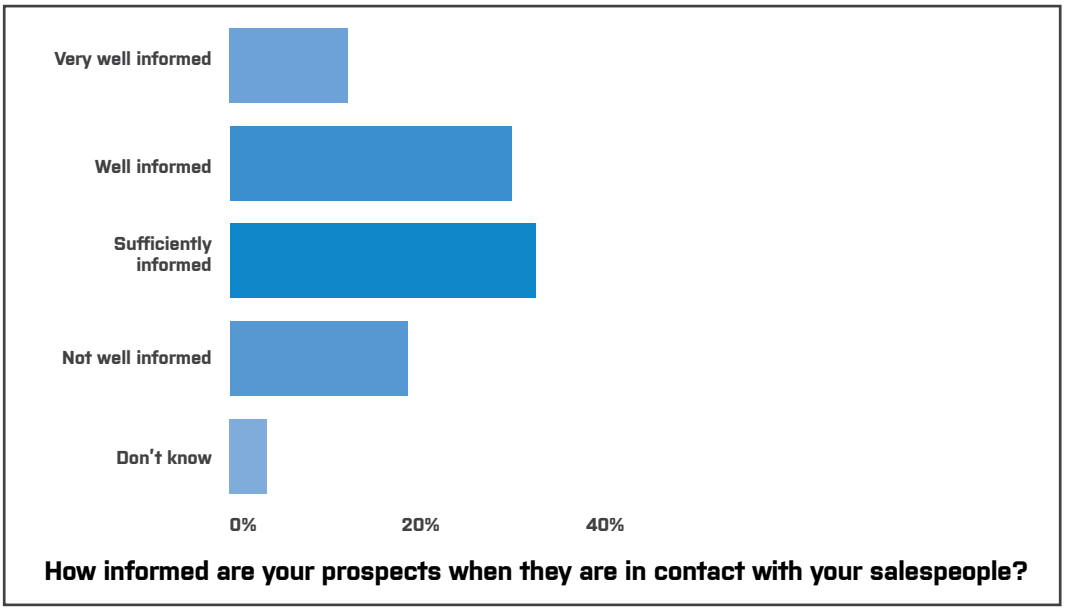
The fact ecommerce in B2B remains low is unsurprising given only one in four businesses offers an option to buy direct from their website. Instead, 80 per cent of respondents state the majority of B2B purchases are made using the more traditional channels of telephone, fax, email and face-to-face. Rather than imply traditional channels are favoured among B2B buyers, the findings suggest routes to purchase are limited by a lack of ecommerce functionality. This does not mean to say face-to-face contact is becoming less important, but may be more relevant later on in the sale as the buying process changes, engaging sales later.



How do customers typically buy your product/service?

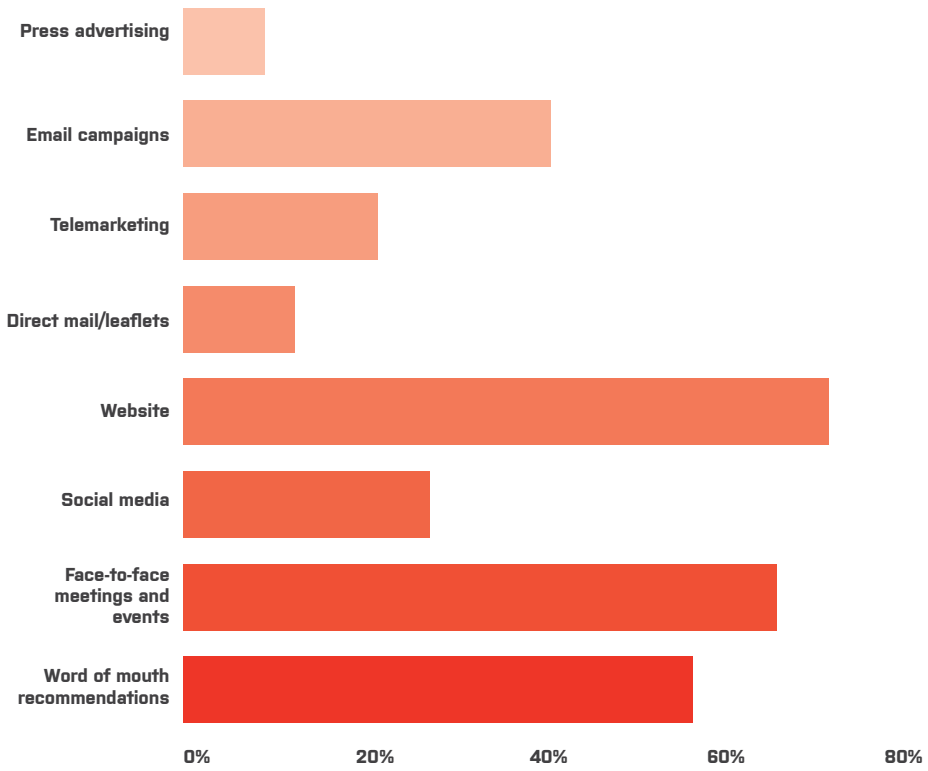
Buyer behaviour

B2B prospects and customers are now much further along the buying cycle when they first engage with a business. This is evident by the fact that 43 per cent of respondents said their prospects are 'very well informed' or 'well informed' when they first interact with one of their sales representatives. Buyers will now ensure that they always do their homework about a business before engaging sales. These findings support well documented research about the increasing power of the B2B buyer, who is less reliant on traditional sales engagement in the early stages of the buying cycle.



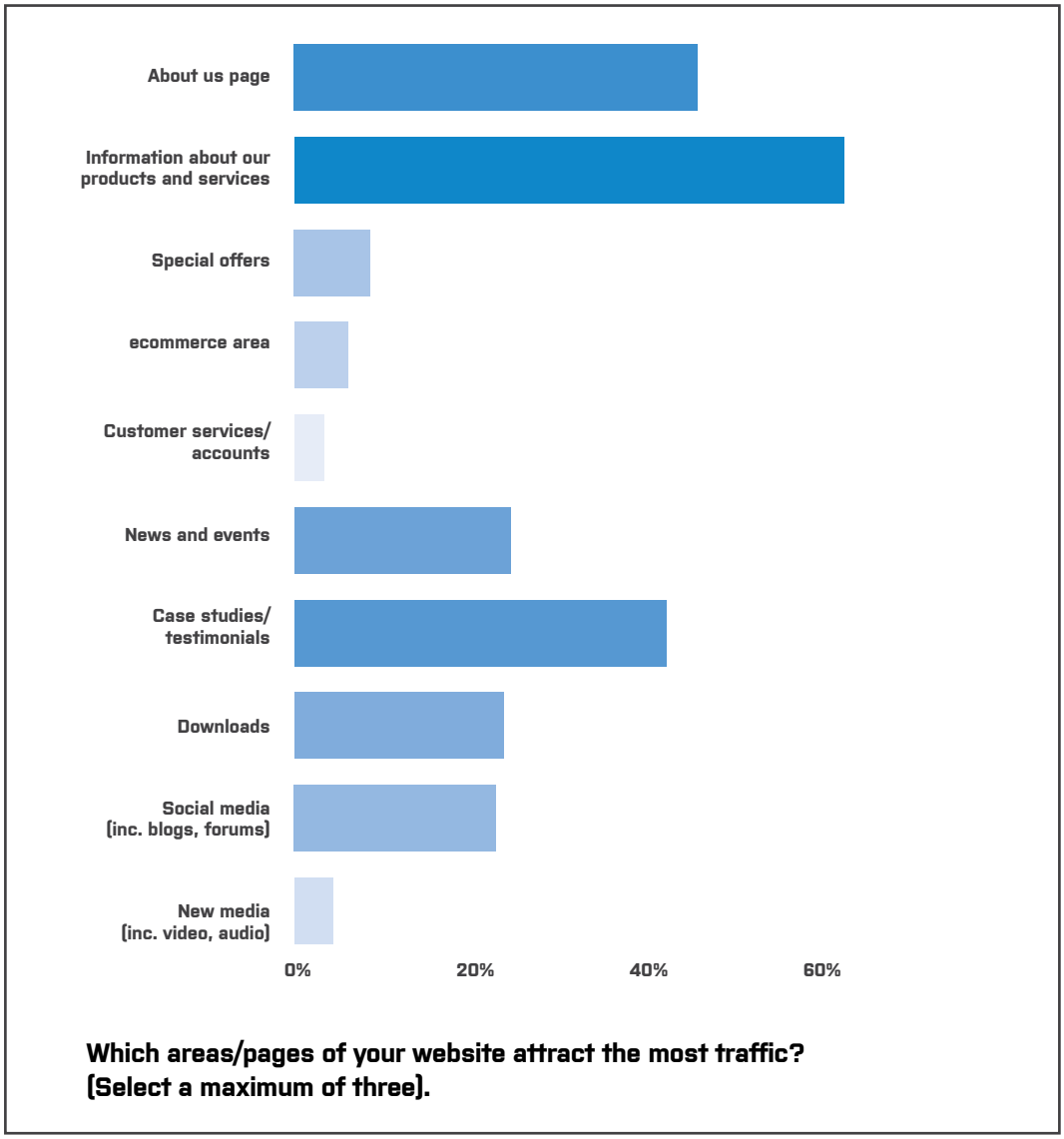
How informed are your prospects when they are in contact with your salespeople?

When asked about the main ways prospects and customers find out about their business, nearly 70 per cent of respondents indicated their websites as the primary source of information. This was followed by face-to-face interactions (64 per cent) and word-of-mouth recommendations (22 per cent).



What are the main three ways customers and prospects find out about your business? (Select a maximum of three).

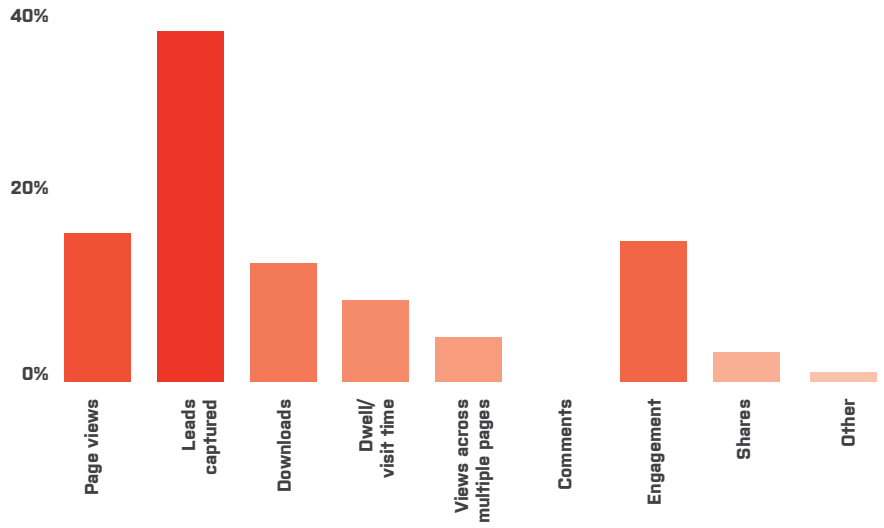
With regards to websites being the main source of information, respondents indicated web pages that attracted the most online traffic were those that related to details about products/services (60 per cent), 'About us' pages (44 per cent) and case studies/testimonials (40 per cent). The fact more B2B buyers are consulting company websites, as well as the types of web pages/sections they are visiting the most, again demonstrates the growing practice of self-education by B2B buyers. These web site areas are universal to most sites, and the question arises whether B2B brands selling more complex products and services need to embrace a more solution-based approach to their website and its content.



Which areas/pages of your website attract the most traffic? (Select a maximum of three).

Measurement and engagement

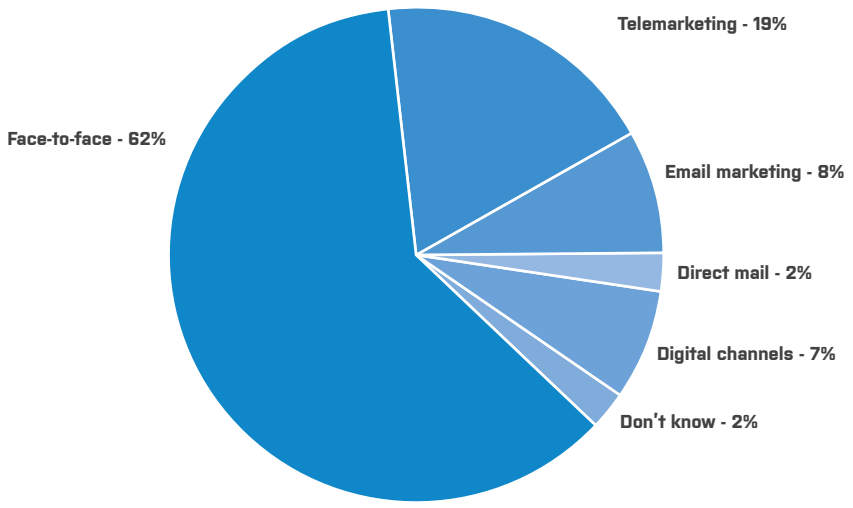
In terms of how businesses measure the success of their web content, leads captured proved the most popular metric – cited by 38 per cent of respondents. However, evidence of online visitors actually engaging with a business online did not prove as important a metric, which perhaps identifies where brands could improve their digital experiences. General 'engagement' was only cited by 15 per cent of those surveyed as a key metric to determine if content is a success, suggesting that moving beyond simple clicks and download metrics, and moving to measuring the value of a visitor's engagement with the website is becoming more important. 'Downloads' scored 13 per cent and 'shares' was opted by just three per cent of respondents.



What is the most important metric when assessing how successful different pieces of content are on your website?

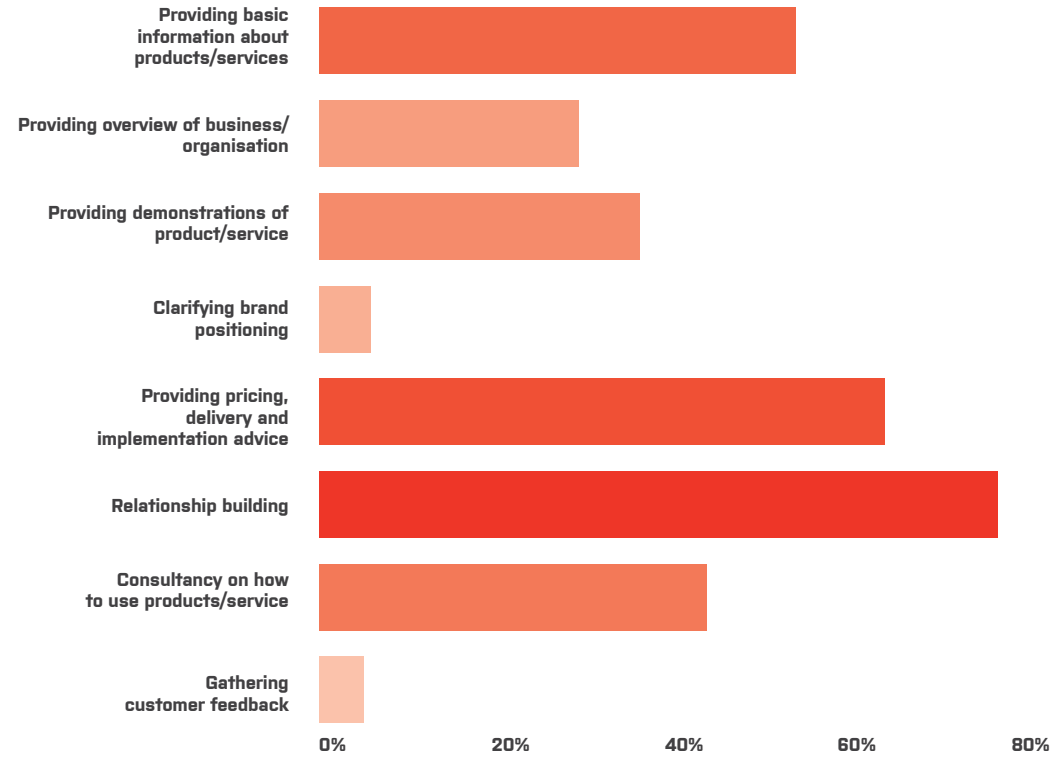
The role of sales

This research reveals that sales teams favour traditional communication channels, with the exception of direct mail. The main communication channel used by sales teams is that of face-to-face - selected by 62 per cent of respondents. Telemarketing scored the next highest with just under one-fifth (19 per cent) of respondents citing this channel preference. Email featured third with eight per cent selecting this as their sales team's main communications channel for sales engagement. Digital channels appeared notably side-lined by sales teams with only seven per cent leveraging these in favour of the more traditional options.



What is the main selling communication channel used by your sales team?

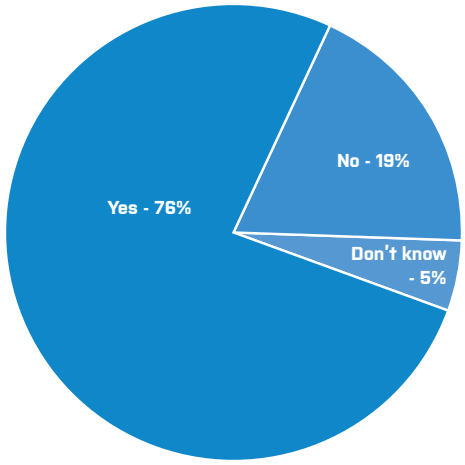
The theme of traditional sales continues as 73 per cent of respondents name 'relationship building' as one of the three main communications roles performed by their sales teams. Interestingly, the other two main responsibilities relate to providing information about products/services, including basic information (cited by 52 per cent) as well as pricing, delivery and implementation advice (61 per cent). These are both areas well suited to being delivered via digital channels, which, if enabled, would allow sales teams to focus on building relationships with prospects/customers even more.



What are the most important metrics when assessing how successful different pieces of content are on your website?

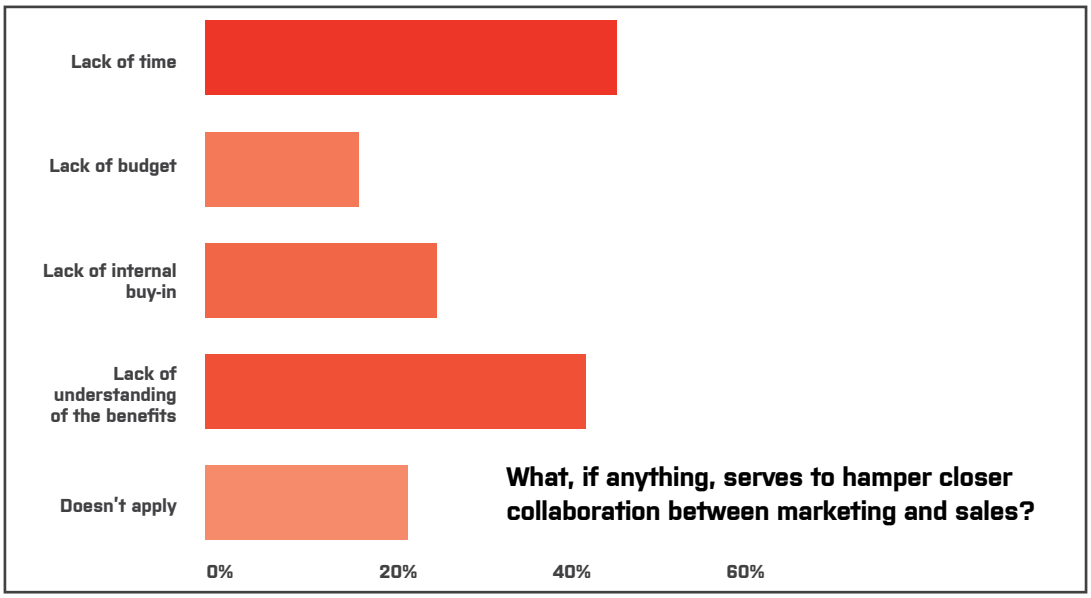
Sales and marketing alignment

Sales and marketing integration remains a challenge for the majority of businesses, with 62 per cent stating these business functions were only partially integrated. Encouragingly, more than a quarter of respondents (28 per cent) said their sales and marketing teams were fully aligned. Also encouraging was the fact that over three-quarters of businesses stated there was a desire for closer working between sales and marketing, even if this hasn't yet been fully achieved.



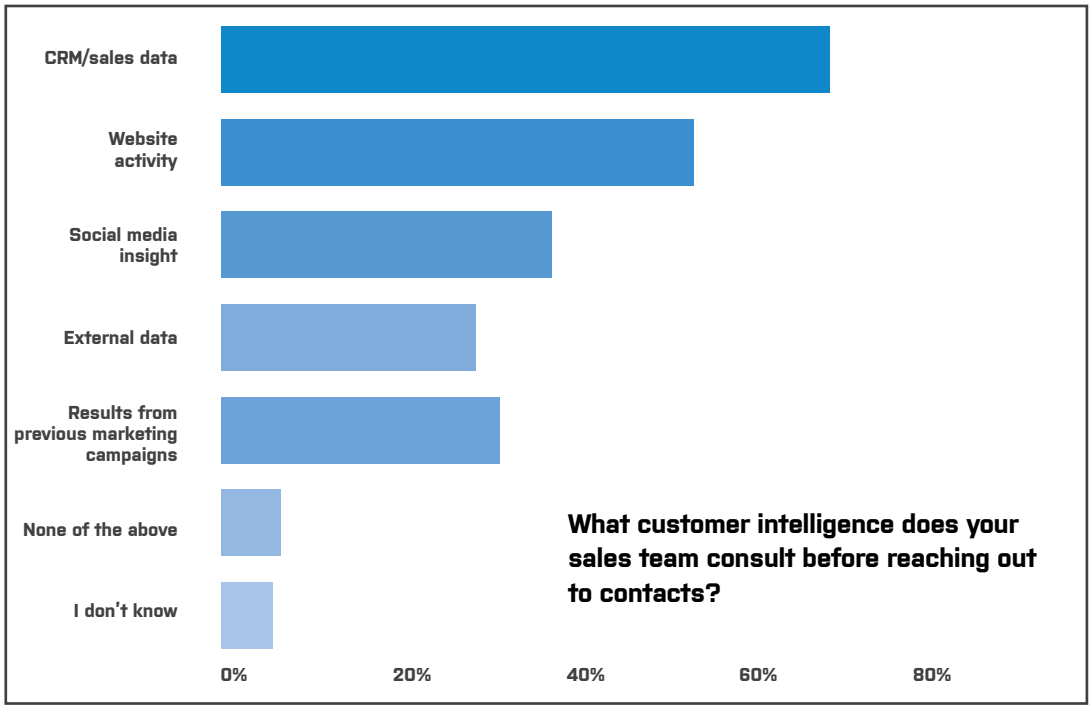
Is there a desire within your organisation to facilitate closer working between marketing and sales colleagues?

The main barriers to closer sales and marketing collaboration were cited as being a lack of time (45 per cent) and a lack of understanding of the benefits (41 per cent). A lack of internal buy-in was also stated by more than a quarter of respondents. Presumably, if the benefits were made more widely known, not only would buy-in be achieved but subsequently the sales and marketing teams would allocate more time to ensuring its success.



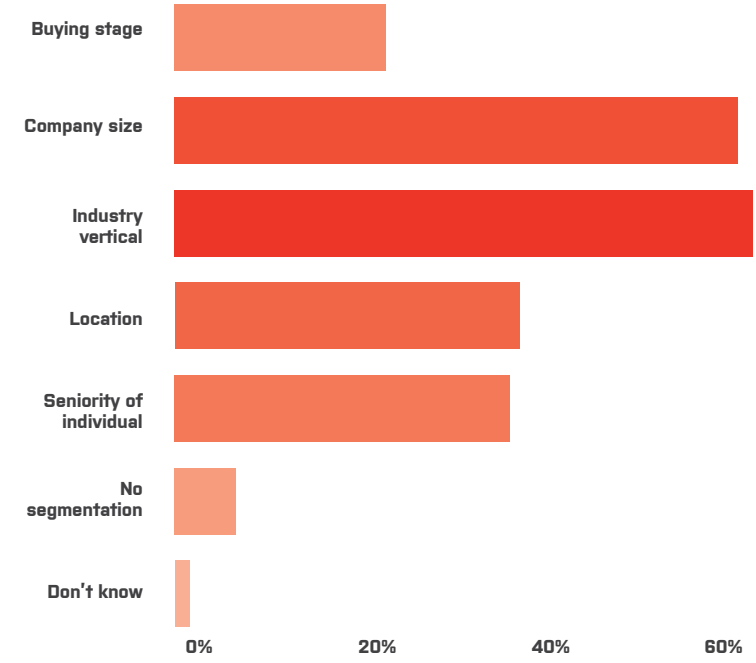
Data, segmentation and profiling

In terms of how organisations are leveraging the raft of data available on prospects and customers, 66 per cent of those surveyed state CRM/sales data is the main source of customer intelligence their sales teams consult prior to reaching out to buyers. This was followed by just over half (51 per cent) of the respondents selecting website activity. The real challenge is to integrate different data sources and systems to provide a single, comprehensive view that sales and marketing teams can plan actions upon.



Despite the fact sales teams rely on customer intelligence from websites, capturing this in the first instance remains challenging for businesses. Over 40 per cent of respondents rated their website's performance for capturing visitor data as 'poor' or 'very poor'.

Another challenge surrounding the issue of data handling is highlighted by questions surrounding segmentation, profiling and personalisation. Our research reveals that businesses are segmenting their prospects and customers – by vertical (62 per cent), business size (61 per cent) and location (38 per cent), however, this data is not being leveraged effectively. Only 11 per cent of respondents said they personalise web content for online visitors and only 14 per cent offer the option to select a persona type.



How do you segment your target audience? (Tick all that apply)

While 42 per cent of respondents say their website's performance at delivering relevant content is either 'good' or 'excellent', this indicates businesses are more adept at providing relevant content to a broad audience as oppose to tailored or personalised web collateral.

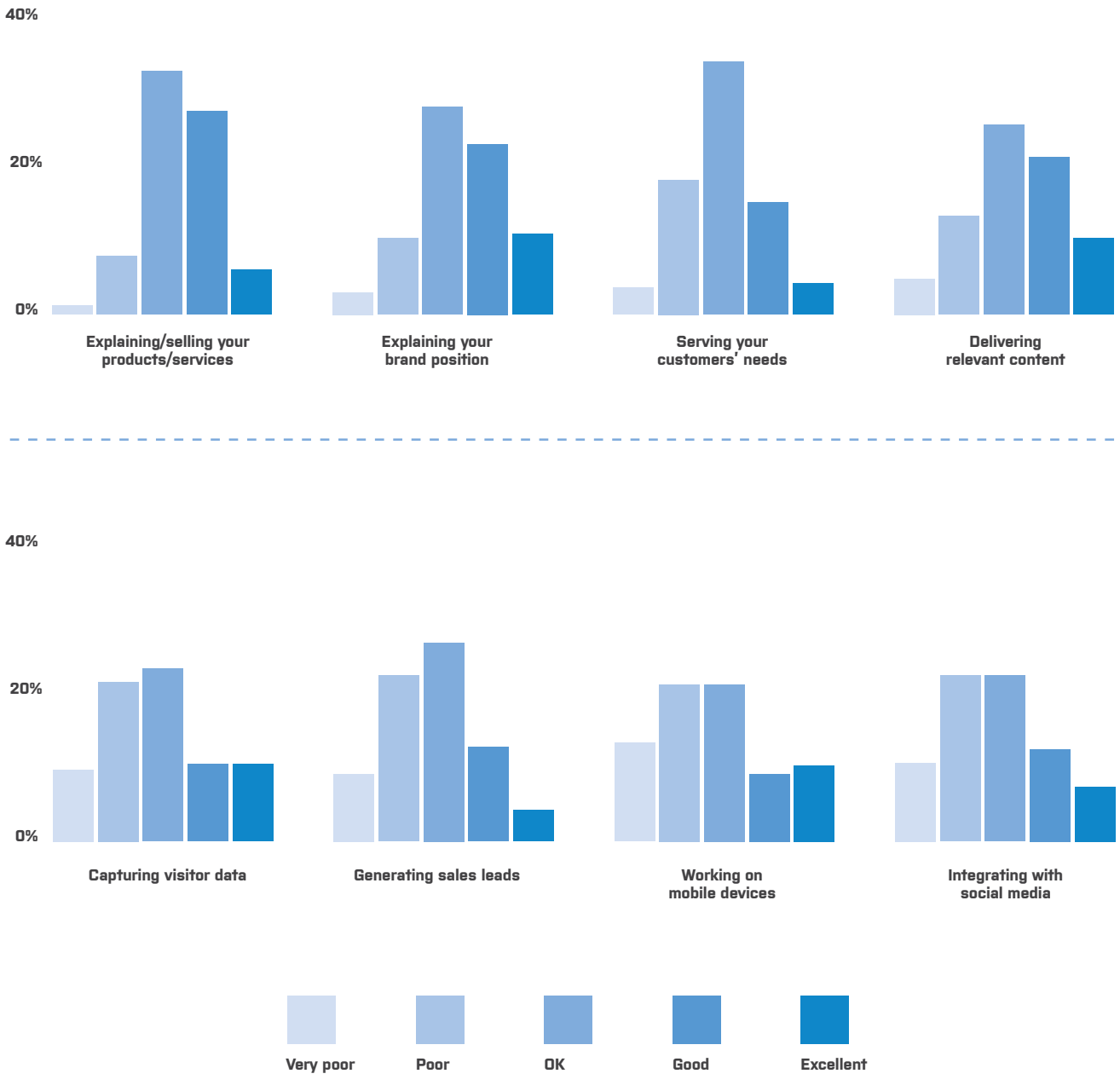
Social, mobile and video

Social media was selected by 27 per cent of those surveyed as being one of the main ways prospects/customers find out about their business but for buyers, social media is proving vital in terms of rating new suppliers, as they find out from other customers how good the product or service is. Just under a quarter of businesses (22 per cent) also stated social media (blogs, forums etc) was one of the most visited areas of their website. While these figures aren't huge, they do indicate a propensity for buyers to engage with a brand via these channels.

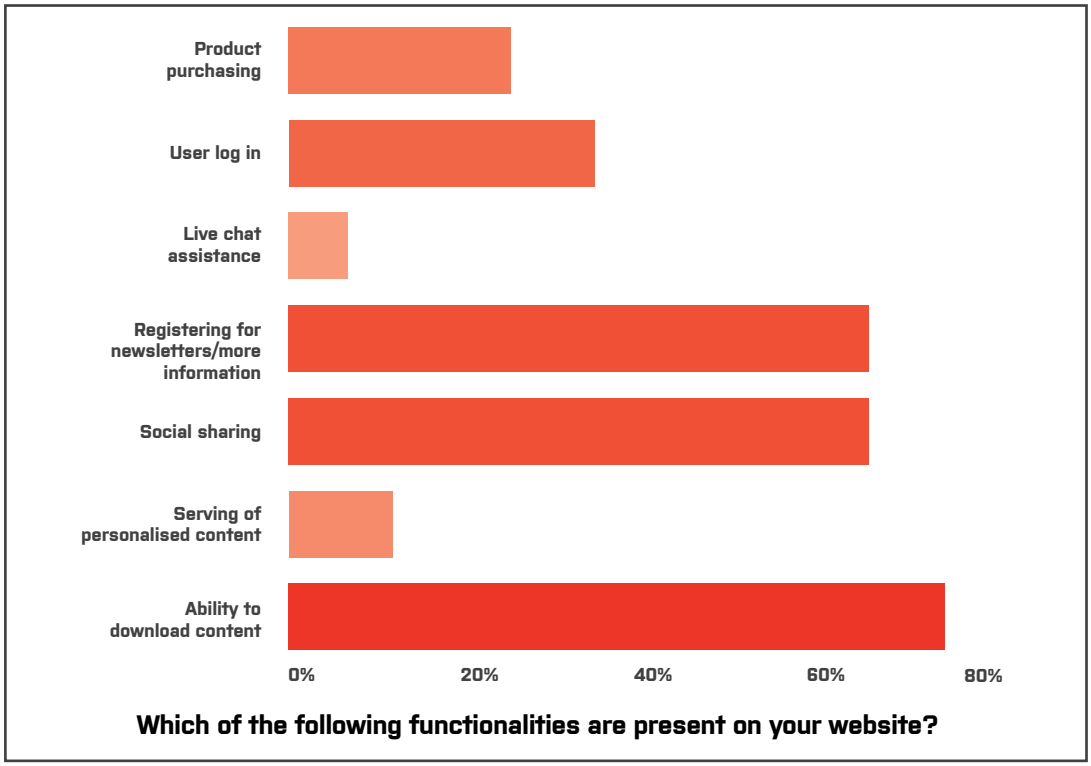
Social media and website integration remains challenging for B2B organisations. Forty-four per cent of businesses rated it as either 'very poor' or 'poor'; less than 10 per cent could claim their website and social media integration is 'excellent'. No surprise then that integrating social platforms was identified by over 30 per cent of respondents as being part of planned website upgrades over the next 12 months.

Website performance

Rate your website's performance in the following areas:

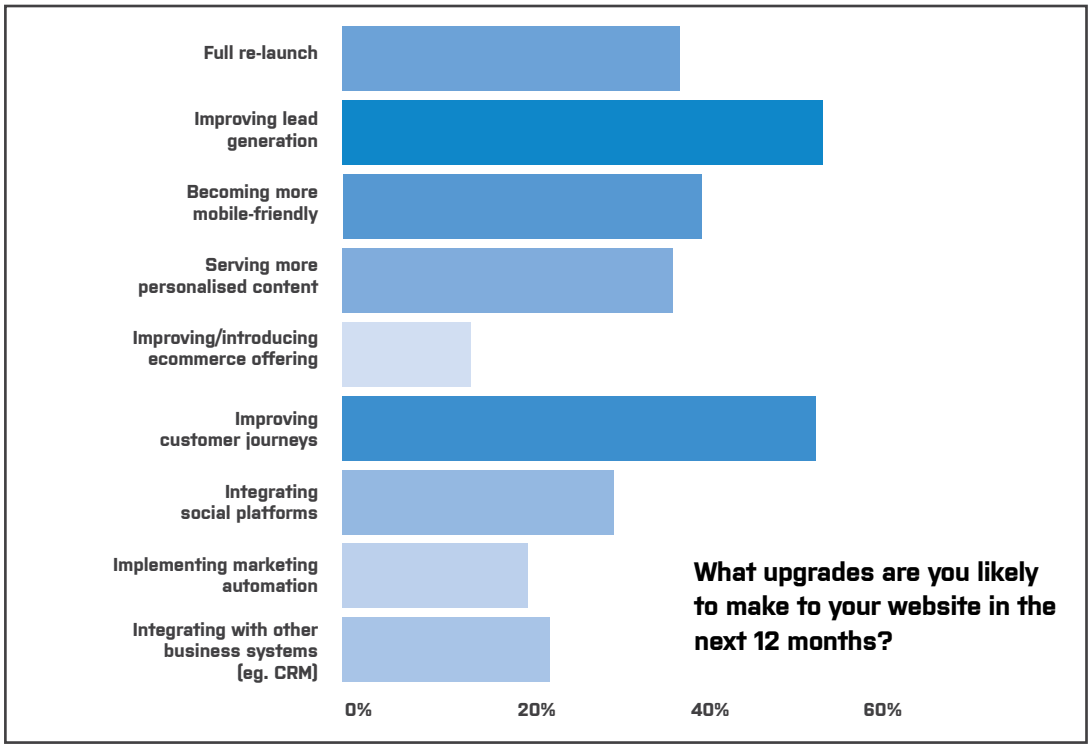


The majority of businesses surveyed provide social sharing functionality, as stated by 63 per cent of respondents. This result was the third most popular functionality present on businesses' websites, which suggests these organisations acknowledge the value of providing social sharing, although they perhaps don't leverage the opportunities effectively, or necessarily measure the activity.



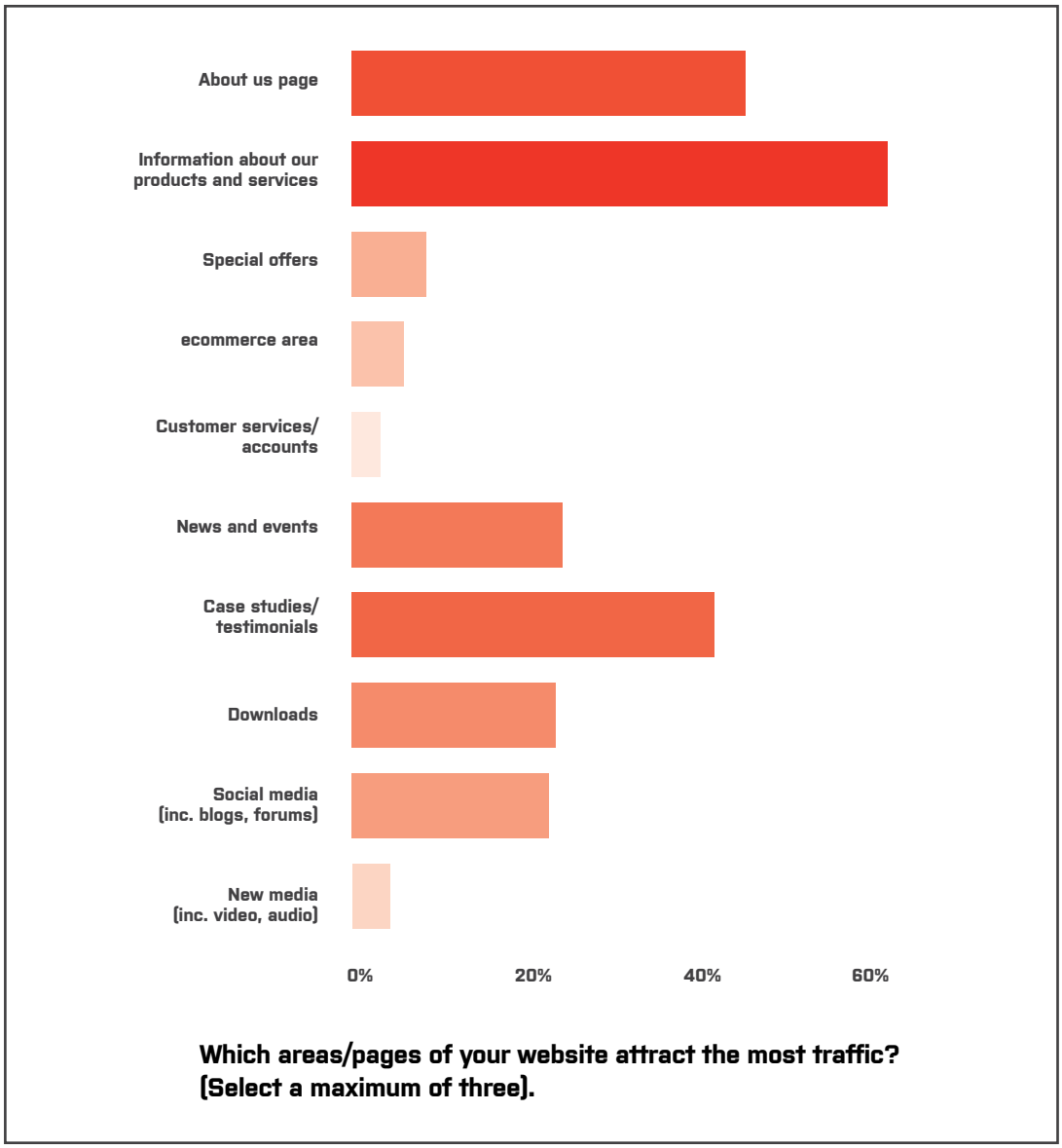
Which of the following functionalities are present on your website?

Mobile presents another challenging channel for businesses. Forty-six per cent of respondents admitted their mobile web offering was either 'very poor' or 'poor'. However, the channel is clearly high on many businesses' agenda; 40 per cent stated they would be upgrading their current websites over the coming year in order to be more mobile friendly.



What upgrades are you likely to make to your website in the next 12 months?

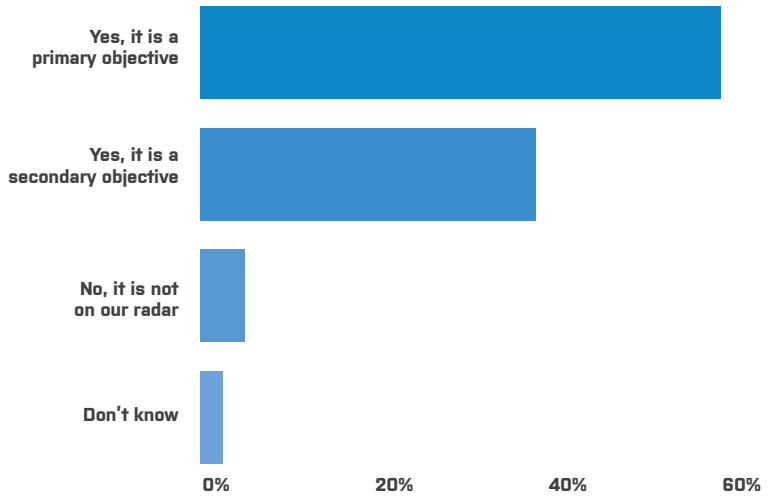
New media (video, audio, etc) was only selected by four per cent of respondents as a popular area of their websites – only marginally less than ecommerce web pages. Just as with the case of low ecommerce results (highlighted earlier), we might assume a lack of traction of video content is a result of poor or absent functionality, rather than a lack of buyer interest to engage with this medium.



Which areas/pages of your website attract the most traffic? (Select a maximum of three).

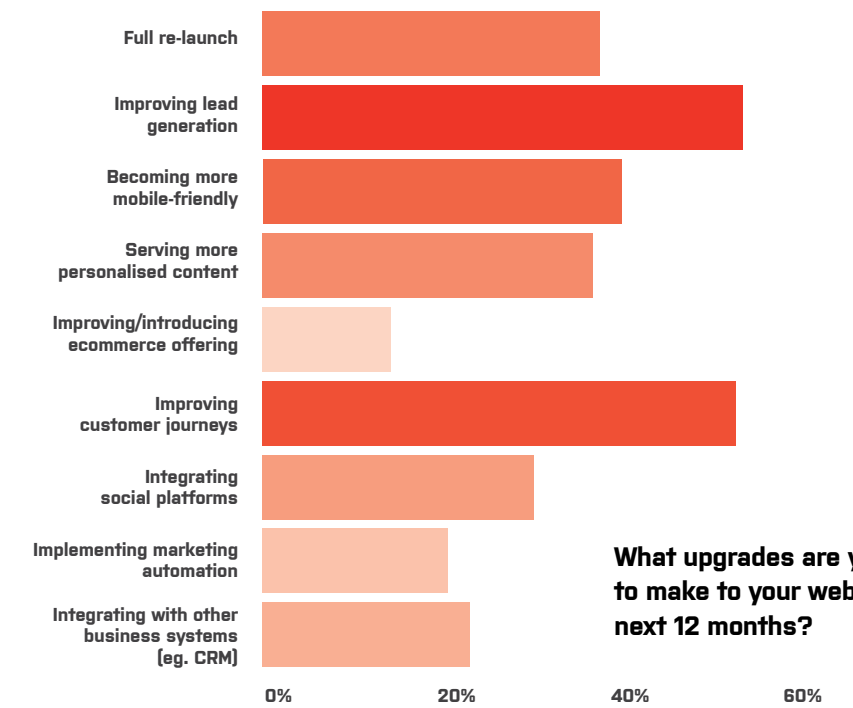
Planned digital investment

While businesses may currently not be using digital channels to their full potential to generate sales leads and orders, 93 per cent of respondents indicated they want to increase their use of digital channels over the next 12 months to address these issues. In fact, 56 per cent of those surveyed state lead generation via digital channels is a primary objective for the year ahead. In addition, 52 per cent of businesses want to convert more actionable business via their website.



Are you looking to increase sales enquiries and/or sales orders via digital channels in the next 12 months?

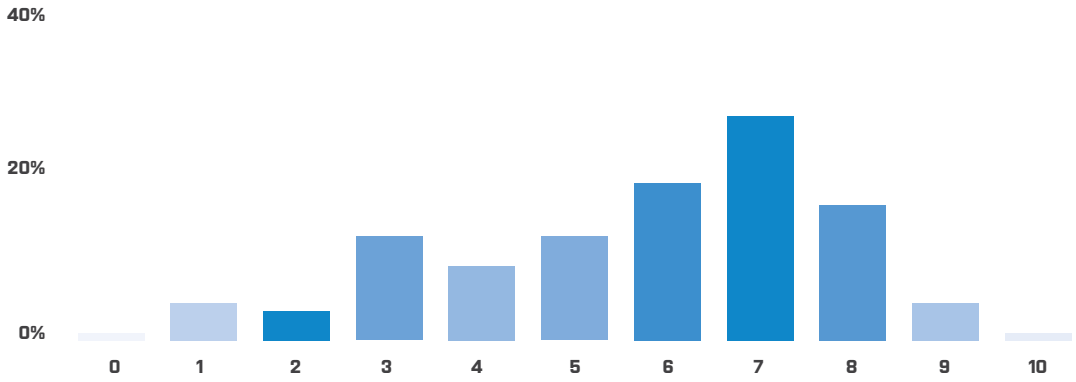
One way businesses may be looking to boost lead generation through digital channels is by improving their current websites. Over half of the respondents (54 per cent) said they would be implementing upgrades to their websites to improve lead generation over the next 12 months.



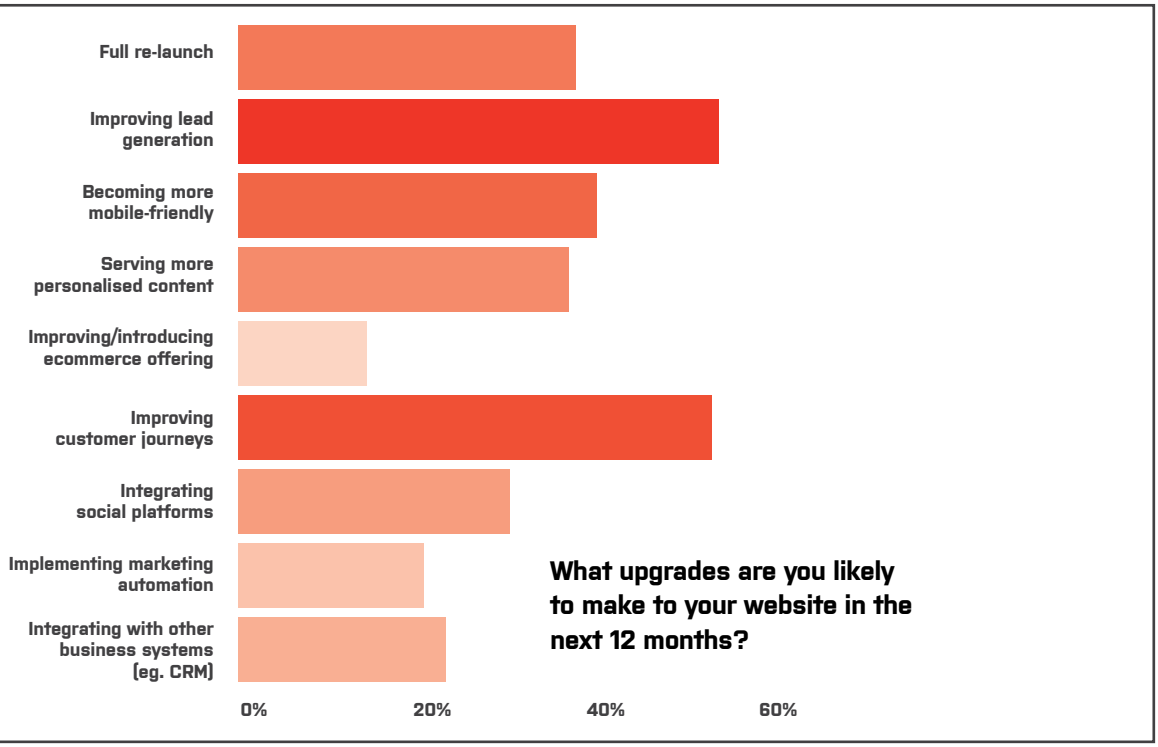
What upgrades are you likely to make to your website in the next 12 months?

It seems website upgrades are a key focus among the businesses surveyed for this report, the majority of which acknowledge there is currently room for improvement. This is shown when respondents were asked to rate their organisation's current website; the largest percentage of respondents opted for seven out of 10 (24 per cent), followed by six out of 10 (17 per cent) and five out of 10 (11 per cent) respectively.

While just over 30 per cent of respondents thought their company website was 'better' than other websites in their sector, a higher number of respondents (47 per cent) felt their websites were 'about the same' as their competitors. This result again implies an acknowledgement by almost half of the businesses surveyed that their websites are only of average rating and more can be done to improve them. But for buyers, social media is proving vital in terms of rating new suppliers, as they find out from other customers how good the product or service is.



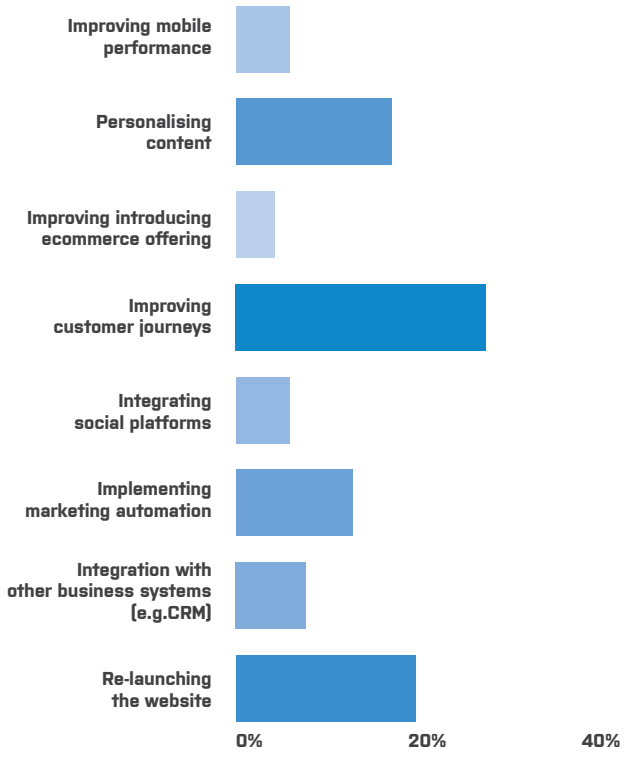
Out of ten, how would you rate your organisation's website? (10 = outstanding).



What upgrades are you likely to make to your website in the next 12 months?

Another reason for planned website improvements comes down to the issue of customer centricity. Fifty three per cent of respondents stated they intend to upgrade their web offerings in order to enhance the customer journey. Planned investment in this area was cited by over a quarter of all respondents (27 per cent).

In terms of what single web investment would have the most significant impact on increasing sales conversions, nearly 20 per cent of respondents cited a complete website relaunch. No wonder then that one of the most popular responses about planned web upgrades over the coming year corresponded to a full relaunch with just under 38 per cent of businesses having this intention.



What single web investment do you think would have the most significant impact on your web conversion metrics?

HOW TO: Build sales leads through your website

Websites are a marketing staple, they have been for years. **Shawn Cabral**, marketing director at Sitecore UK offers advice on making the most of the sales potential from your site

Research from Sitecore in conjunction with B2B Marketing shows B2B marketers know that their website is the main touch point for prospects wanting the find out more about their business, but 80 per cent of sales orders still come through via phone calls, faxes or emails.

Fifty per cent of B2B marketers report that less than 10 per cent of their sales orders come via their website, but 56 per cent of marketers say generating sales leads (and sales) is their primary objective for their website.

Our research shows that much of the website content B2B marketers feature on their website is focused around the core basics – the 'about us' section, product information, case studies and testimonials. All of which will give an effective overview of what a company does, but the visitor's website journey will typically stop at that point. B2B marketers need to work on the next stage of this journey, how to engage the visitor more effectively and how to work towards a 'conversion' goal, such as providing contact details, downloading relevant content or even making a purchase from the website.

Below are some pointers on how to begin to use websites more effectively as a sales lead generation engine, and convert more website visits into something more meaningful for your business.

1. First impressions matter

If you know your web visitor has come from a search engine and is looking for a specific product or service, use this information to show content on the first page they see that is relevant to that search. This will help to reduce bounce rates away from your site as the visitor will see exactly what they were searching for.

2. Make it easy

Some brands report 30-40 per cent of traffic to their website comes from mobile devices, but from our research, 46 per cent of B2B marketers rate their website experience on mobile devices as 'poor' or 'very poor'. If your web visitor struggles with your site on a mobile device, they will more than likely simply leave and increase your bounce rates. Using tools such as GEO-IP location look-up to see where your visitor comes from can help to show local information that may be useful to them, such as their nearest store.

3. Establish conversion goals

What would you like your visitors to do on your site? The more you orchestrate their visit towards meaningful goals for your site, the more likely you will achieve these goals. If you want to capture contact data, how do you begin to drive this, what steps does the visitor go through to leave contact data, what is their incentive to do this?

> "If you know someone is a returning visitor, use the knowledge you have about them and their previous visits to deepen the conversation"



SHAWN CABRAL
MARKETING DIRECTOR
SITECORE UK

Our research shows that B2B marketers actively segment their prospects by organisation size, vertical or seniority of the prospect. However, on their websites, most B2B companies will present the same content for every visitor. Give opportunities on your site for your visitors to tell you which vertical they represent or what the size of their business is. If you sell to many vertical sectors, once you know which sector is of interest to a particular visitor, you can present content tailored specifically to that sector – such as just showing automotive, rather than 20 other sectors.

5. Continue the conversation

Prospects who are interested in your business will probably return to your website a few times during their research. If you know they are a returning visitor, use the knowledge you have about the visitor and their previous visits to deepen the conversation with new, relevant content and start to introduce calls-to-action. Similar to a prospect who visits a sales showroom multiple times, this shows the prospect is interested in your brand and could be moving towards a purchase.

6. Sell on the site

Our research shows that half of B2B marketers report they get less than 10 per cent of sales from their website. As the growth in ecommerce shows, more and more consumers want to buy online. This trend is crossing over into B2B. Maybe your competitors are selling directly from their website. If you feel your product or service could be sold from your website, this could open a huge revenue stream for your business to not only generate sales leads but convert them to actual sales on your site.

Delivering a more effective customer experience online is an integral part of attracting and nurturing sales leads and generating sales through digital channels. Following these pointers will help your brand to achieve more on your website and start to use digital as a lead generation engine, with six out of 10 B2B marketers planning to focus on digital lead generation in 2014.

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Own the experience™

About B2B Marketing

B2B Marketing is the comprehensive information resource for B2B marketers. Its mission is to provide practitioners with the information they need to perform better and achieve more, whatever sector of the B2B space they are operating in.

Launched in 2004 as *B2B Marketing* magazine, it has since evolved into a multi-faceted resource, delivering a broad range of content in a variety of different forms and formats. Its key products are:

- Online community
- Magazine
- Awards
- Research
- Reports
- Training
- Events
- Membership

For more information on any of these products or services go to b2bmarketing.net or call +44 (0) 20 7438 1370

About Sitecore

Sitecore is the global leader in customer experience management software. Sitecore delivers highly relevant content and personalized digital experiences that delight audiences, build loyalty and drive revenue.

With Sitecore's Customer Experience Platform, marketers can own the experience of every customer that engages with their brand, across every channel. More than 3,000 of the world's leading brands – including American Express, Carnival Cruise Lines, easyJet, Heineken and Microsoft – trust Sitecore to help them deliver the meaningful interactions that win customers for life.

For more information visit: www.sitecore.net



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