

Content Really is King: Content Consumption in the B2B Buyer's Journey

B2B Buyers Read 13 Pieces of Content Before Making a Decision



Overview

About eight years ago, **SiriusDecisions** (now owned by Forrester Research) did a study that proved that about 67% of the buyer's journey is now digital. While they were talking about B2B buying, the reliance on the internet for research and making buying decisions very much mirrored the behavior of consumers in their personal lives. Since then, content has become king – an essential pillar of marketing today.

More and more brands are investing in content marketing to influence consumers in an increasingly fragmented and competitive media landscape. This content is comprised of anything from emails, blogs, and social media posts to infographics, third-party reviews, and whitepapers. It allows marketers to own more of the customer buying narrative and is especially useful when selling complex B2B products like technology and software and in industries where the customer journey is multi-faceted—long and with multiple decision-makers. Thus, it's no surprise that industry estimates place content marketing at a **\$400 billion-plus** market by 2021.

That said, while many marketing departments are scrambling to create content, the role of content in the buyer's journey isn't fully understood, particularly within the complex realm of B2B marketing. To address this, we set out to understand the role and types of content used within the purchase journey for marketing technology.

We surveyed 243 marketing professionals, managers or higher, from companies with revenues of \$50M+. The participants influence departmental budgets and have purchased a marketing technology solution within the past year. They participated in a seven-minute online survey in December 2019.

Methodology

243 marketing professionals

\$50M+ in revenue

**Purchased MarTech
solution** in past year

Influencers on budget

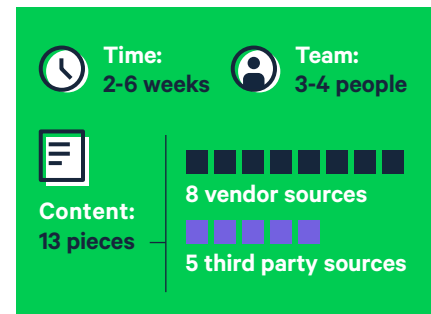
**Completed 7 minute
online survey**

Different content influences different buying stages

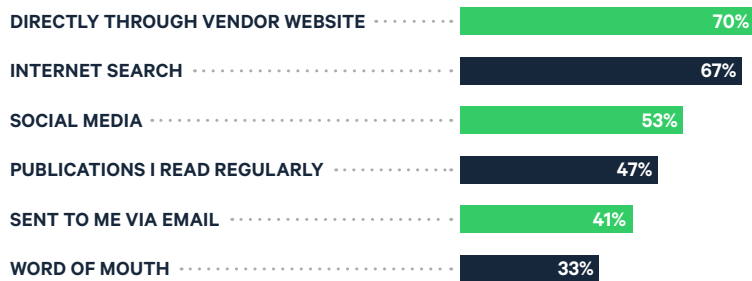
While each customer and product may have its unique journey, data from our B2B Content Consumption survey paints a picture of the B2B path to purchase.

Perhaps to be expected, the journey is long and complex, with the buying process generally taking between two and six weeks and involving three or four people on the buying team. Over this time, buyers consume an average of 13 pieces of content from many different sources: eight items from the vendor and five from various third parties.

THE PURCHASE JOURNEY



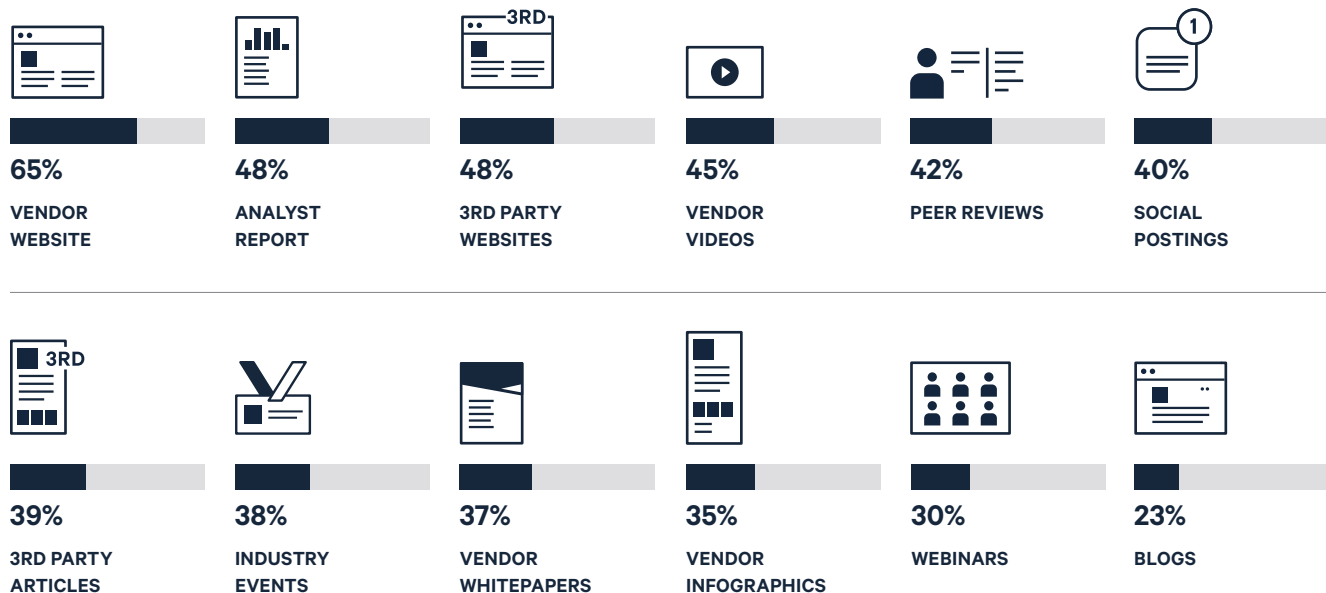
How Content is Sourced



So, how do they source this content? Interestingly, the number one source is directly through the vendors' websites, with 70% of participants selecting this channel. Internet search is a close runner up, with 67%. That said, several other channels are also in play: 53% via social media; 47% from news publications; and 41% through email.

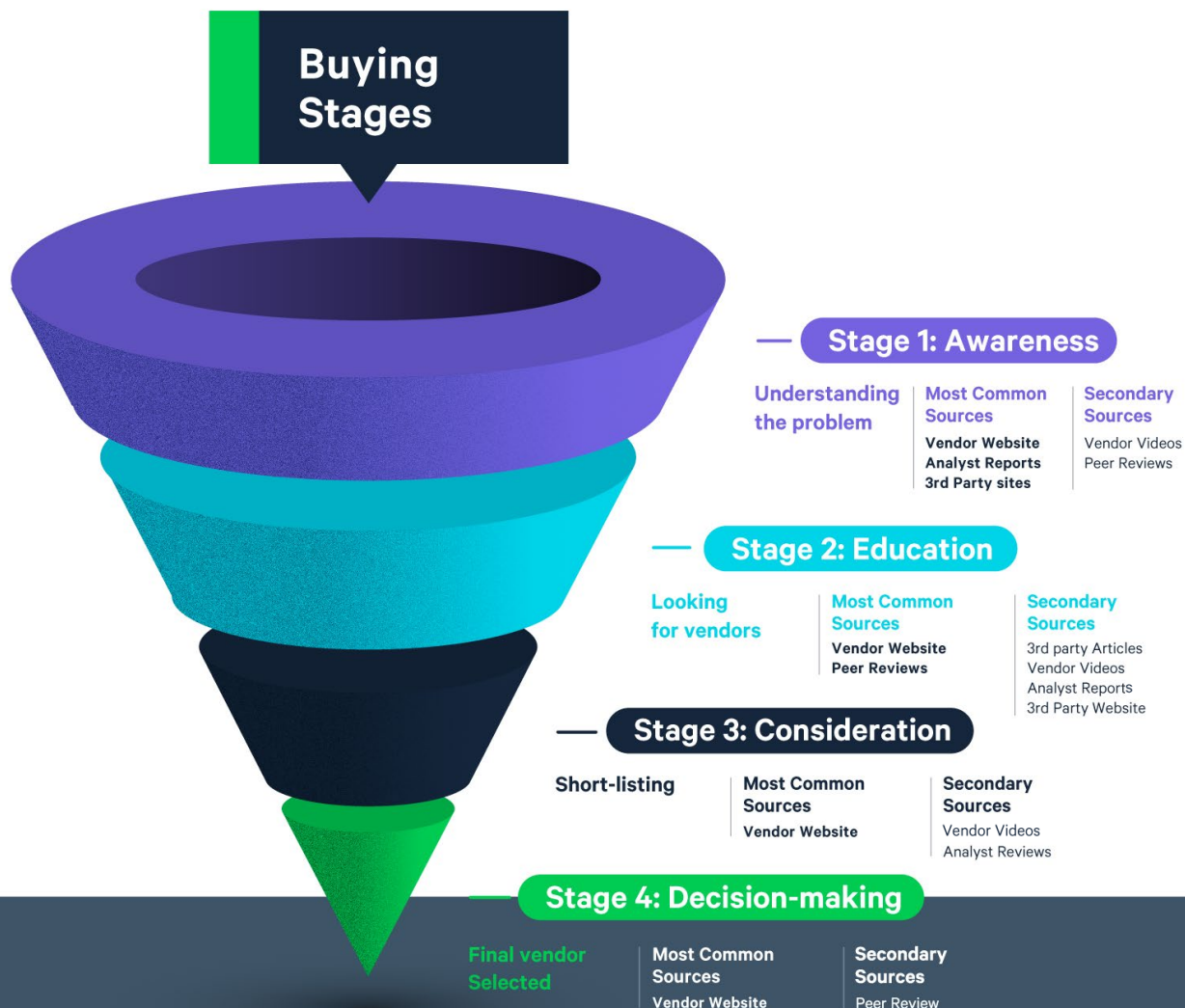
Content Reviewed During Purchase Journey

A broad range of first- and third-party content types are highly influential to B2B buyers, ranging from blogs, industry participants, and social postings to vendor whitepapers, videos, and infographics.



Each type of content plays a role at different stages in their journey.

The B2B buyer's journey can be placed into four broad buckets:



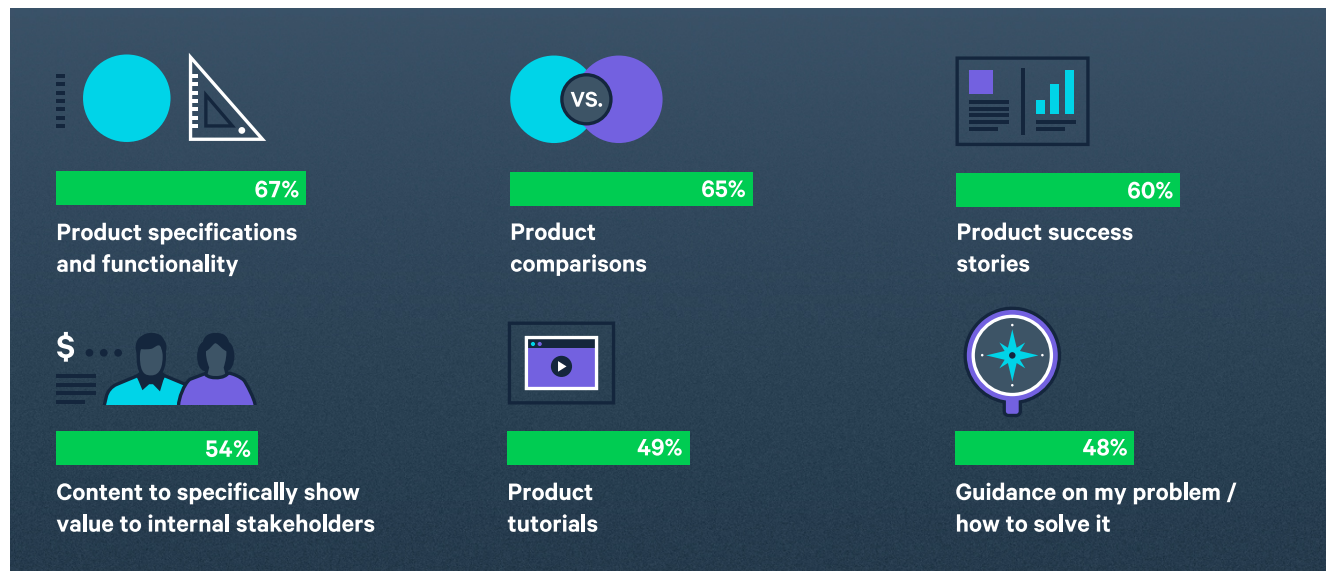
In the early stages of the purchase journey, buyers consume a wide variety of content to help them with their decision. In **Stage 1**, where they seek to understand the problem, buyers primarily look for information on vendor websites, analyst reports, and third-party websites, such as trade publications. Other pieces, such as vendor videos and peer reviews, are influential but secondary items during this stage.

Larger companies, with revenues above \$250 and \$500 million, displayed some differences from the average buyer being far more likely (nearly 50%) to rely on third-party sources such as industry websites, analyst reports, and news articles. In **Stage 2**, when buyers “look” for vendors, they primarily turn to peer reviews and vendor websites and rely less on third-party articles, analyst reports, and vendor videos.

In the later stages of the decision process (**Stage 3** Consideration and **Stage 4** Decision-making), the vendor website becomes the primary focal point, with some additional content from analyst reports and peer review layered in. ***“Vendors’ websites were very effective; the information helped us for shortlisting pretty quickly and effectively.”***

When sourcing vendor content, understanding product capabilities, and how it's used provides valuable information for buyers. Product specifications, comparisons, and success stories were among the most valued pieces of content, according to the survey participants. Larger companies rely on success stories as a way to show value to internal stakeholders who may influence a purchase.

Most Useful Types of Content for Purchase Decision



In all stages, video is repeatedly mentioned as helpful in the process. For example, one participant noted: ***“[I did an] initial google search, then I visited certain vendor websites and viewed reviews, videos, and specs on product. The videos were especially useful”***. Another relied on ***“Youtube video showing demonstrations and reviews from customers who have purchased the product.”***

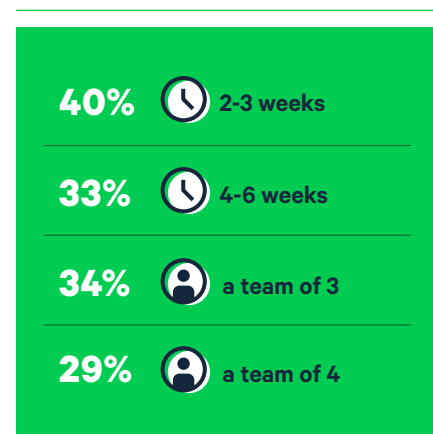
Consider the buying team and process

As noted earlier, it takes buyers, on average, between two to six weeks to complete the buying process.

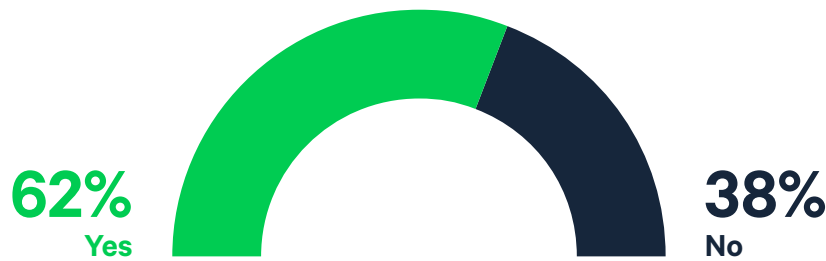
Our survey found that 40% of the survey participants cited a process of two to three weeks, and 33% said that it took four to six weeks to make a sale. Marketers can expect the need to tailor their pitch to multiple decision-makers, with 34% of buying teams comprised of three influencers and 29% a team of four.

More than half of the participants (52%) said that they are “definitely” more likely to buy from a vendor after reading content from a specific vendor.

An established relationship with a specific vendor also made buyers more likely to choose them. Sixty-two percent had prior experience with the vendor they purchased. This is likely because the buyer already trusts the vendor. Just like B2C buyers, B2B buyers seek out brands that: they can trust, are helpful and provide value. Customers who have a positive relationship with the brand are more likely to repurchase from that brand than from those they’ve never worked with.



Prior experience with vendor



Implications: Understand your customer

Much like B2C, B2B buyers spend increasing amounts of time in self-directed research. Buyers today expect brands to know what they want when they want it, and to deliver, B2B marketers need to understand the emotions that motivate business buyers. Just like in a B2C situation, emotion is a 1.5x more powerful predictor of customer loyalty, advocacy, and repeat purchases than any other datapoint, according to a [recent Forrester study](#) commissioned by FocusVision.

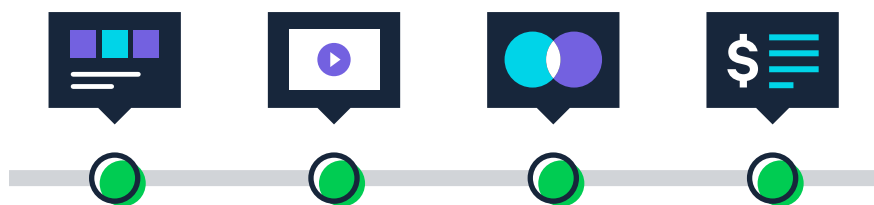
Marketers need to get into the minds of their customers to understand their journeys. Not just to understand their pain points and what they are trying to solve – what customers are thinking but also to know how they are feeling – frustrated, confused, overwhelmed, confident – to be able to create the right story that will help them on their buyer’s journey with the right content in the right place.

By doing this, you can identify what you already know and what you do not know about your customers: their aims and the complexity of their problem. Their unique needs, behaviors and triggers, and who they have to convince to spend that money. The content needs to instill confidence, make them feel educated, secure in their decision, and spending their budget in the right way. They need to feel 1.5x more powerful.

How to do this? First, review your big data – Google analytics on who is viewing what, for how long, and so on. But this shouldn’t be the only approach.

It’s important to ask.

Depending on where you are in building your content, you may wish to run a quick survey to understand how well the content as a whole is meeting their needs, and in turn, identify unmet needs. If at an earlier stage, diving deeper into their purchase journey through online research communities and online interviews will provide much-needed depth into why they do what they do and how to help them in their journey. (For more on asking, read this [getting started guide on Using Research to Inform Content Marketing](#))



Populate your website with useful, relevant content to address each stage within the journey

The research demonstrates the importance of vendor websites at all stages in the B2B buying journey. Content that helps buyers understand and refine their problem (**Stage 1**) leads to pieces that educate them on your offerings (**Stage 2**) provides detail (**stage 3**), and assists in the final decision (**Stage 4**) are all essential.

This content should be in a variety of formats, including whitepapers, infographics, blogs, and videos, to help people engage in a way that suits their learning style.

Once you've done this, look to address other elements, such as SEO and nurture campaigns.

Conclusion

Content plays a significant role in the B2B buyer's journey, and B2B buyers turn to particular sites and content types depending on where they are in the process, the role they play in it, and the size of the organization. Buyers actively seek out brands where trust and helpfulness have been established and are more likely to purchase from brands whose content they've engaged with. Smart marketers use data to map their journeys, understand how these personas think and feel, and produce content that addresses each influencers needs and triggers depending on where they are in the buying stage.



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