Rethink

The B2B Buyer's Journey

The Transformed Relationship Between Buyers, Marketers and Salespeople

LinkedIn

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THE BUYER'S
JOURNEY HAS
changed

INTRODUCTION

RETHINK THE B2B BUYER'S JOURNEY

The B2B buyer's journey is complex and in flux – for buyers, marketers, and salespeople. Technology, ranging from the ubiquity of the Internet to the rise of marketing automation and customer relationship management platforms, is driving much of this change.

With the Internet, social media, and mobile, buyers have new ways to research their purchases, educate themselves on options in the market, and buy products and services. Forrester Research says that 90 percent of the buyer's journey may be complete before a prospect reaches out to a salesperson.

Marketers have marketing automation, data management platforms, and other technologies to gain insight into and help shape buyer behavior. Ashu Garg, partner at Foundation Capital, estimates that CMOs will be spending $120 billion per year on marketing technology by 2025. Marketers are often investing in this technology to boost their multi-channel nurturing efforts (via email, display and social advertising), which have become more important as so much of the buyer's journey has moved online.

And salespeople have customer relationship management software and other technologies to optimize the selling process and identify buyers (and influencers) most likely to purchase. According to Forbes Insights research, 55 percent of executives are investing in sales enablement technology to boost sales productivity, and 53 percent are investing specifically in customer relationship management software.

All of these advances in technology have changed the way buyers, marketers, and salespeople act – and interact with each other.

With this research, we have examined how the buyer's journey has changed, how it has impacted the relationships between buyers, marketers, and salespeople, and – ultimately – how sales and marketing teams must rethink their relationships with buyers and with each other.

We conducted a global study that involved surveying more than 6,000 buyers, marketers, and salespeople in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, India, the United Kingdom, and the United States. (All data in this report is global). This extensive research examined how the buyer's journey has changed and how it has affected the relationships between all three groups.

The research indicates that marketers must rethink three main elements of their strategies:

- RETHINK THE B2B BUYING PROCESS
- RETHINK CONTENT MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA
- RETHINK SALES AND MARKETING ALIGNMENT

RETHINK THE B2B BUYING PROCESS

Our research indicates that buyers are surprisingly positive about their relationships with vendors, but there is room for improvement. Buyers desire more expertise and consultation about the factors transforming their industries. Because making buying decisions is a team game involving many parts of the organization, vendors need to deliver the knowledge the buyers crave throughout the organizations they're targeting.

Buyers like their vendors more than you might think, with 84 percent describing their relationship with vendors as "very good" or "good." There is, however, room for improvement, because 56 percent of buyers say that the relationship is simply "good."

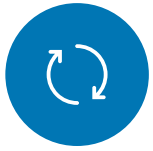
It's a complex world, and buyers thirst for knowledge: "subject matter expert" and "provides valuable consulting, education, and tools" rank high in what buyers want from vendors

There are many internal influences on buying decisions. Our research shows, based on the industry, 3.1 to 4.6 additional groups, such as IT, finance, and HR, inside a company influence the purchase process, which means that marketers and salespeople must educate more than the primary decision maker.

RETHINK CONTENT MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

It's true buyers want product information, but this type of info is table stakes. Buyers also want deeper knowledge in the form of thought leadership, and marketers need to deliver it. In developing and distributing a variety of content, marketers should not overlook the power of social media, which factors in every stage of the purchase process, from awareness to implementation.

There's a disconnect between buyers and marketers as to what constitutes effective content. Marketers lean toward case studies, while buyers prefer product information and product demos to help them make purchase decisions.



Influential content varies at different stages of the buying process, but social media is front and center at every stage, from awareness to selection to implementation.

RETHINK SALES AND MARKETING ALIGNMENT AND NURTURING

Nurturing leads has changed. Once the sole domain of the sales team, nurturing is increasingly a task for marketing as the buyer's journey has moved online. Sales and marketing agree that nurturing involves relationship building, but on average marketers use an expanded definition of what nurturing involves, pointing to an opportunity for further alignment.

86 percent of marketers report aligned relationships with salespeople, and 80 percent of salespeople report aligned relationships with marketing.

Where divergence occurs between marketing and sales is in their views on what constitutes lead nurturing. Compared with salespeople, marketers tend to have a broader definition of lead nurturing that includes segmenting audiences, synchronizing messages, and using a variety of online tactics, such as automated email messaging and targeted display, and social advertising.

Read on to take a deeper dive in the complex buyer's journey and how buyers, marketers and salespeople must rethink how they interact in this age of incredible technological growth and rapidly evolving best practices.

Rethink
The B2B Buying Process

CHAPTER 2

RETHINK THE B2B BUYING PROCESS

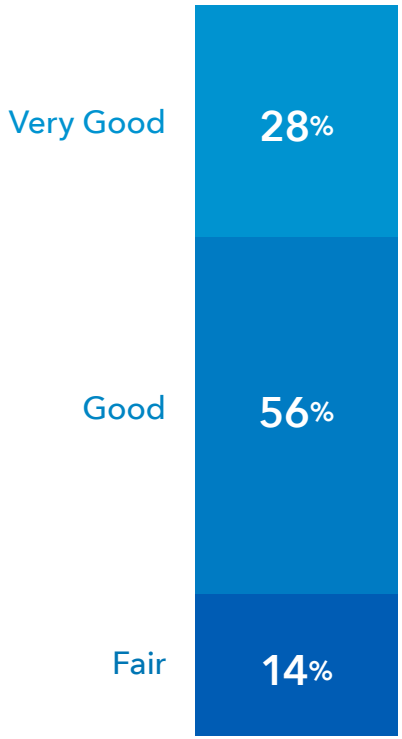
ATTENTION VENDORS: BUYERS LIKE YOU, THEY REALLY LIKE YOU

(BUT THERE'S ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT)

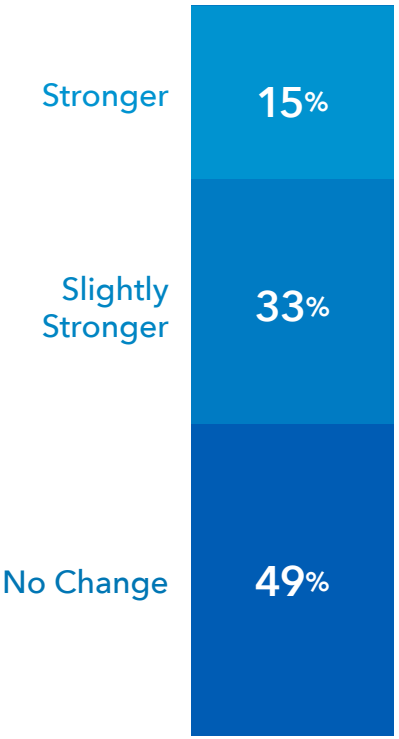
This may be the most surprising finding in this survey: The overwhelming majority of buyers say their relationships with vendors are either very good (28 percent) or good (56 percent). That's 84 percent. Perhaps, after years of preaching customer-focus, B2B marketers and salespeople are doing more than talking the talk and are finally walking the walk of taking care of customers. It's also likely that technology, multiple communication channels, and online help centers and community sites have helped scale customer support.

At the same time, there is room for improvement. Only about a quarter of buyers said their relationships were "very good" with twice as many describing their relationships with their vendors as simply "good."

How Buyers Rate Their Relationships with Vendors

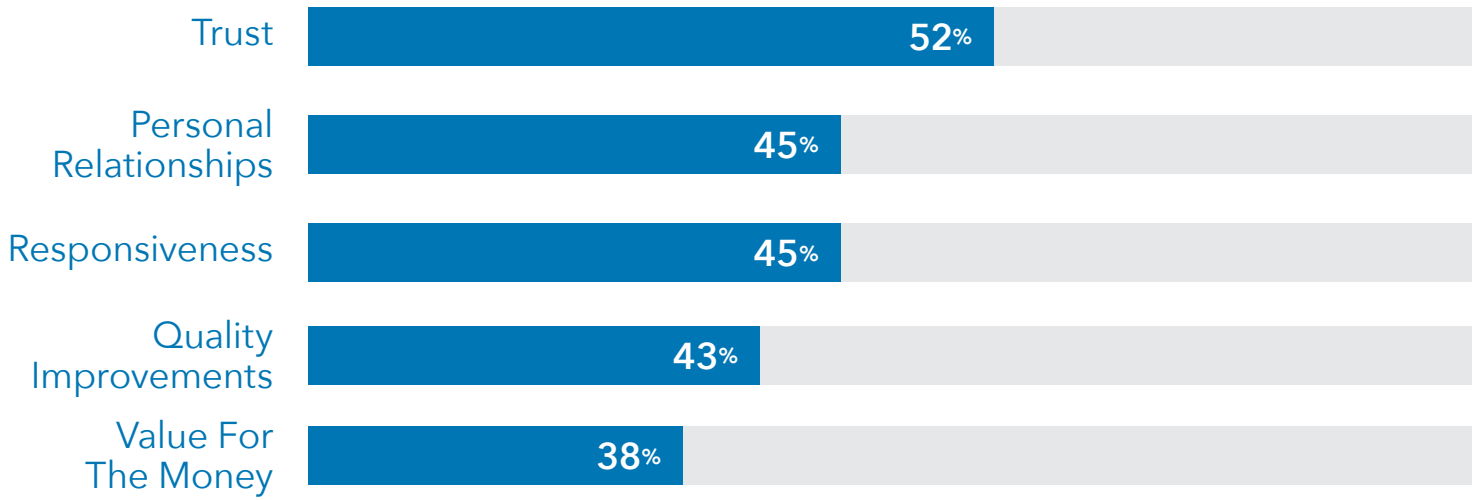


How Buyers Rate Their Relationships with Vendors Over Time



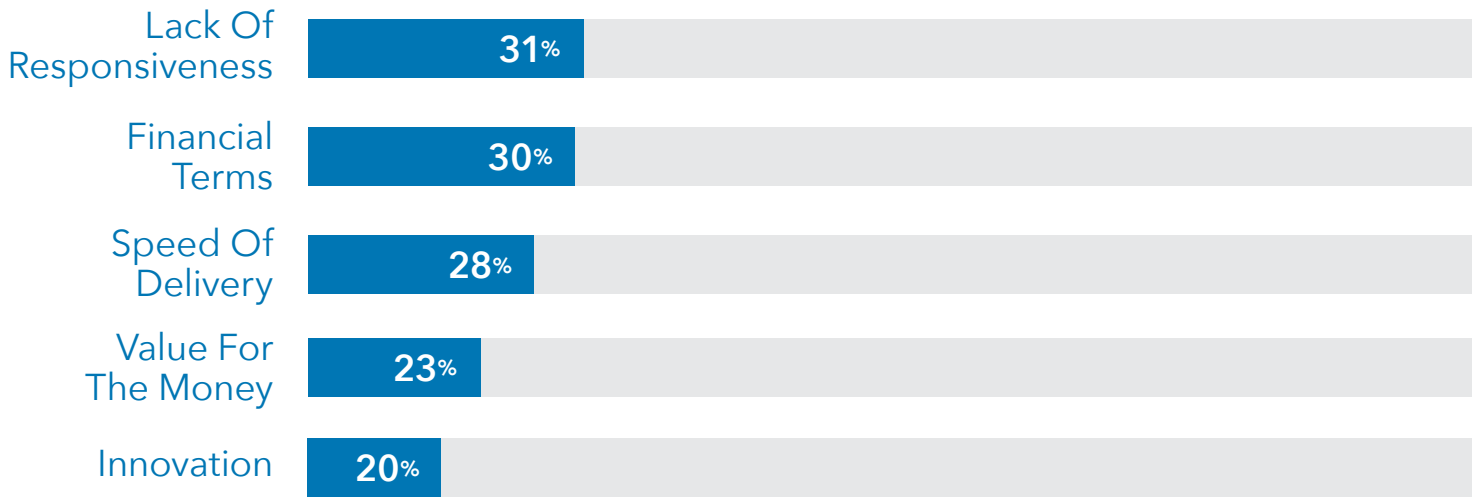
It may even be more surprising that almost half of buyers (48 percent) said their relationships with vendors are either growing "stronger" or "slightly stronger." Only 3 percent said their relationships with vendors were in decline. At the top of the reasons for these buyer-vendor relationships growing stronger were trust (52 percent) and personal relationships (45 percent).

REASONS BUYERS GIVE FOR VENDOR RELATIONSHIPS GETTING STRONGER



In the few cases where the buyer-vendor relationship was getting weaker, the top two reasons for the decline were "lack of responsiveness" (31 percent) and "financial terms" (30 percent).

REASONS BUYERS GIVE FOR VENDOR RELATIONSHIPS GETTING WEAKER



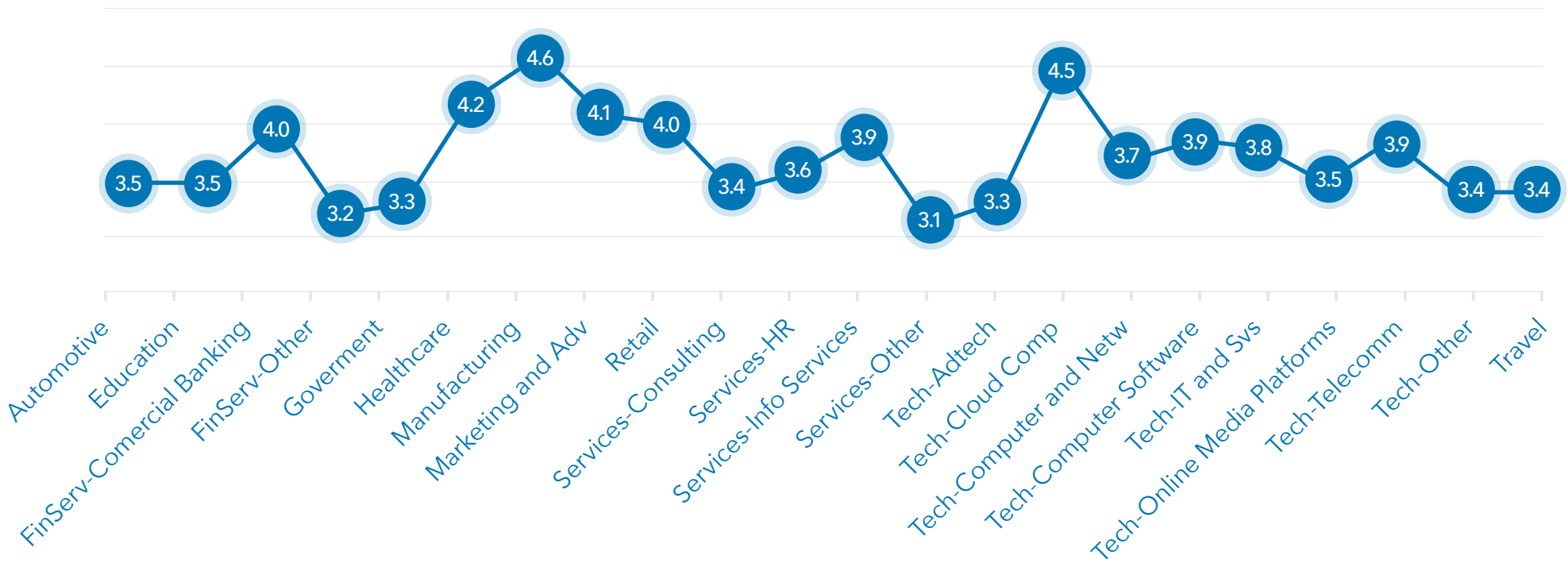
RULES OF ENGAGEMENT: BUYERS WANT KNOWLEDGE

Understanding precisely what buyers want from their vendors and why they engage with them has separated great companies from also-rans. We asked the question of buyers, "What are the important factors in your willingness to engage with a vendor?" Their top four answers, shown below, provide some insight.

THE 4 MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS FOR BUYERS' WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE WITH A VENDOR

The top four answers from buyers indicate that what buyers really want is to know more. Each of the top four answers has language that refers to knowledge in some way: "understands," "subject matter expert," "knows," and "provides valuable… education." The answers to this question support the concept put forward in the book, *The Challenger Sale*, which makes the case that the most successful B2B salespeople are challengers who show their prospects that there's a better way than the status quo. The most effective salespeople – and the most successful companies – make their customers smarter and give them an edge on their competition.

DEPARTMENTS IMPACTING THE PURCHASE DECISION VARY BY INDUSTRY



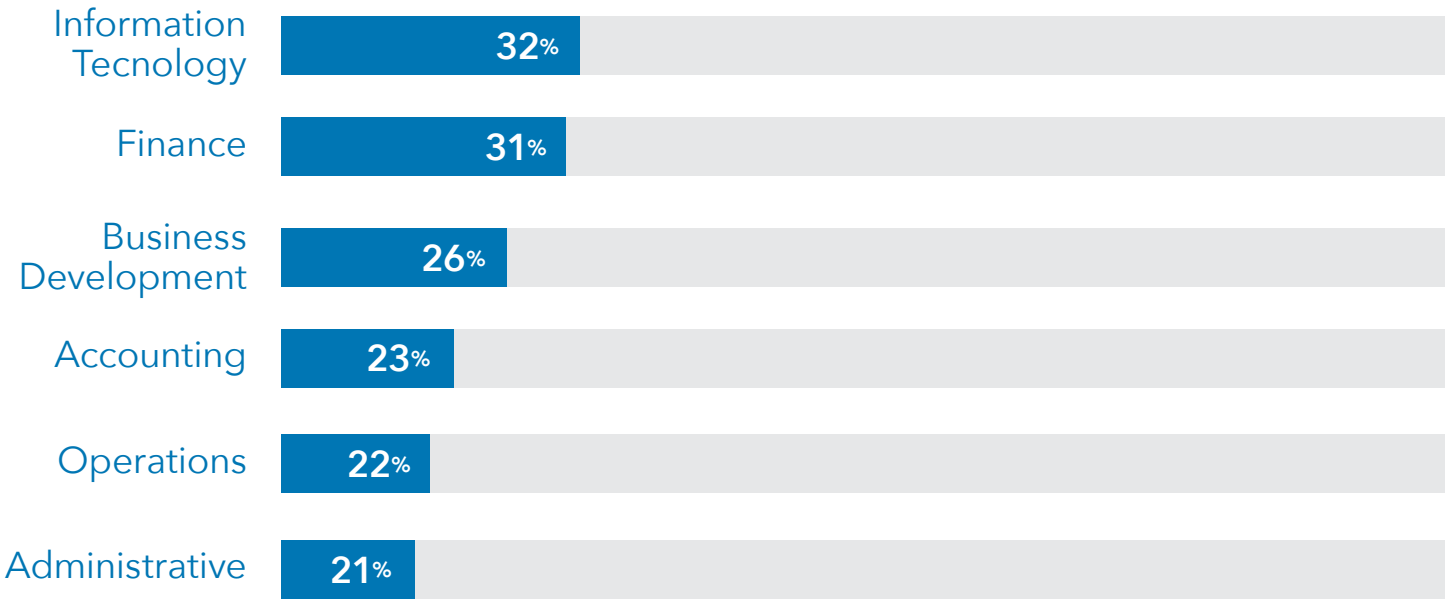
IF VENDORS AREN'T KNOWN COMPANY WIDE, THEY'RE NOT KNOWN

The B2B buying process is a collaborative one. In addition to consulting peers on social media, B2B buyers work with colleagues inside their companies when making purchase decisions. Our research showed that the number of additional groups (such as information technology, finance, and human resources) inside a company that influence a purchase decision ranges from 3.1 in the services sector to 4.6 in manufacturing or 4.5 in cloud computing. Healthcare (4.2), marketing and advertising (4.1), and financial services-commercial banking (4.0) also ranked high for collaborative buying.

The takeaway from this research finding is that marketers – and salespeople – cannot be content with finding the key decision maker and directing the message at him or her. B2B marketers must reach the broader buying group, which means targeted their message at scale to every part of a company that can wield influence on the final buying decision.

The chart below shows that the departments that have the most influence on buying decisions across vertical industries. Information technology, finance, and business development are the three departments that wield the most influence on buying decisions.

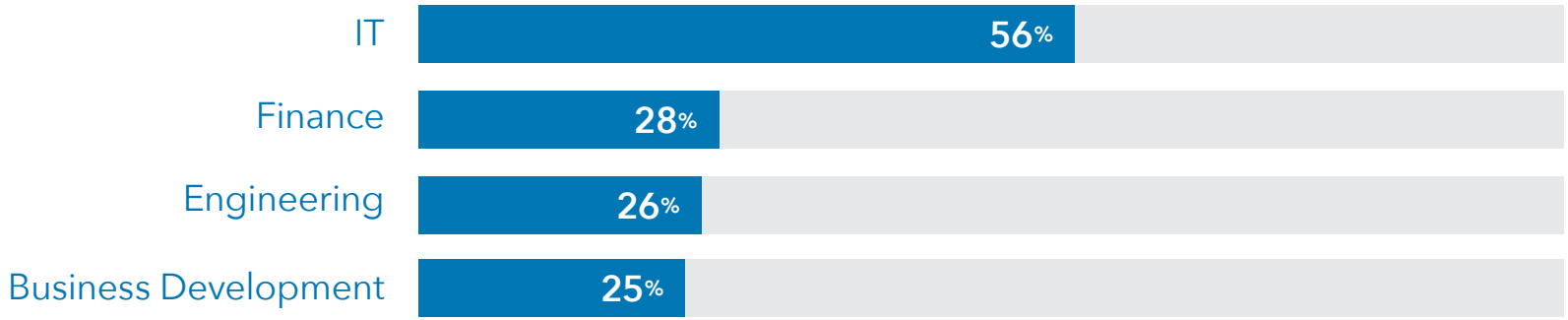
TOP DEPARTMENTS INCLUDED IN THE TYPICAL BUYING DECISION



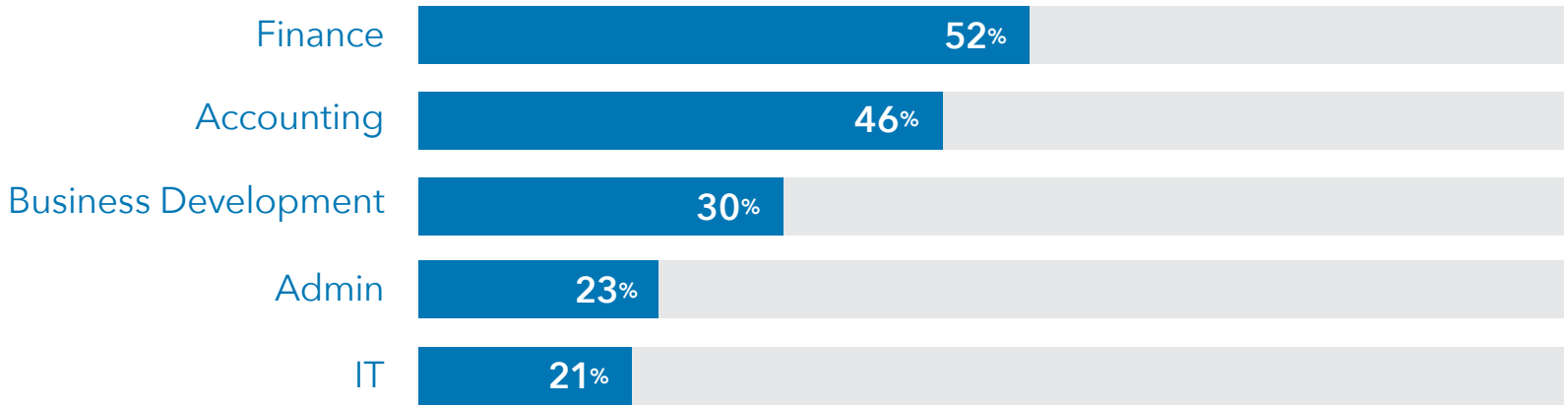
REASONS BUYERS GIVE FOR VENDOR RELATIONSHIPS GETTING STRONGER

The departments that most impact the purchase decision vary from industry to industry. In the technology industry, for instance, the top three departments with influence on the buying decision are information technology, finance, and engineering. But in the financial services vertical, the top three departments influencing purchase decisions are finance, accounting, and business development. The implications are clear: Buying decisions are made across the organization, and that means that marketers and salespeople must get their message to all the influential groups in the organization.

MOST INFLUENTIAL DEPARTMENTS ON TECHNOLOGY BUYING DECISIONS



MOST INFLUENTIAL DEPARTMENTS ON FINANCIAL SERVICES BUYING DECISIONS



RETHINK CONTENT
MARKETING
and
SOCIAL MEDIA

CHAPTER 3

RETHINK CONTENT MARKETING

IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S YOUR CONTENT

Buyers crave information. But the information they're getting from marketers and salespeople is not necessarily the information they want served to them at the time they want it. Our research indicates that there is not complete alignment in what is the most useful and effective content in the buying process.

Marketers and advertising agencies have long disparaged "speeds-and-feeds" advertising that touts features over benefits. But our research shows that buyers do want this kind of detailed product information – as they perform their own online research, they eventually crave technical details about products and how they work. In identifying the three types of content they preferred, buyers most often selected "product info, features, functions" (35 percent), followed by "demos" (31 percent).

The content buyers say they want differs from the content marketers and sellers believe is effective. For instance, only 24 percent of marketers believe product info makes for effective sales content, which is 11 percentage points lower than the opinion of buyers. Similarly, just 18 percent of marketers say that demos are effective, which is 13 percentage points lower than buyers. Salespeople are more in alignment with buyers – off 4 percentage points on product info content and 8 percentage points on demo content. (Part of the problem may be that marketers and salespeople aren't using the right metrics to measure the impact of their tactics – so they don't fully grasp what is working, and what isn't).

The content that marketers believe is most effective is the case study. Twenty-seven percent of marketers place case studies in their top three, while just 19 percent of buyers do, a differential of 8 percent. Salespeople are big believers in peer testimonials, but their support (23 percent) differs by seven percentage points compared to the value that buyers place on that particular content format (16 percent).

Marketers know that they generate massive downloads from thought leadership and educational content, so it's clear that buyers do want this kind of upper funnel content from their vendors. The bottom line is that buyers want both product information and thought leadership content. Common sense shows that buyers need both kinds of content to make their purchase decisions. Product information, data sheets and demos, are table stakes – the baseline information necessary to be among the consideration set. But buyers also need broader information to help them on the way to making the final purchase decision.

The implication for marketers is that they must have their message present throughout the full funnel, from awareness and thought leadership content in the upper funnel to data sheets and demos in the lower funnel. This is how to assemble a complete marketing program.

MOST EFFECTIVE SALES CONTENT

Sales and Marketing emphasize case studies and testimonials.
Buyers find product information and demos effective.

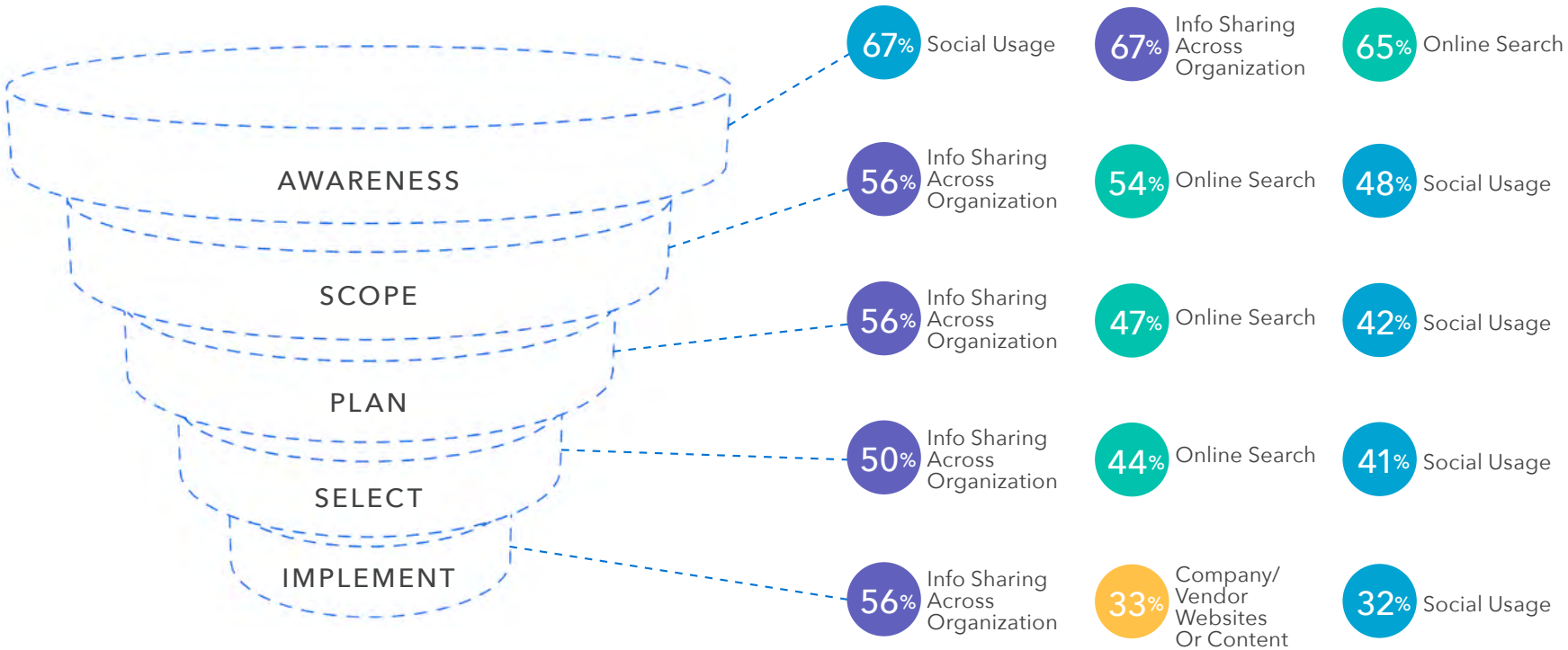
TYPE OF CONTENT*	BUYERS	SALES	Difference between Sales and Buyers △	MARKETING	Difference between Marketing and Buyers △
Product info, Features, Functions	35%	31%	-4%	24%	-11%
Demos	31%	23%	-8%	18%	-13%
Best Practices	20%	18%	-2%	13%	-7%
Case Studies	19%	24%	5%	27%	8%
Expert Opinions	18%	19%	1%	18%	0
Product Ratings/Reviews	16%	13%	-3%	14%	-2%
Peer Testimonials	16%	23%	7%	18%	2%

** Buyers, salespeople, and marketers each chose their top three content preferences.*

INFLUENTIAL CONTENT CHANNELS VARY BY BUYING STAGE

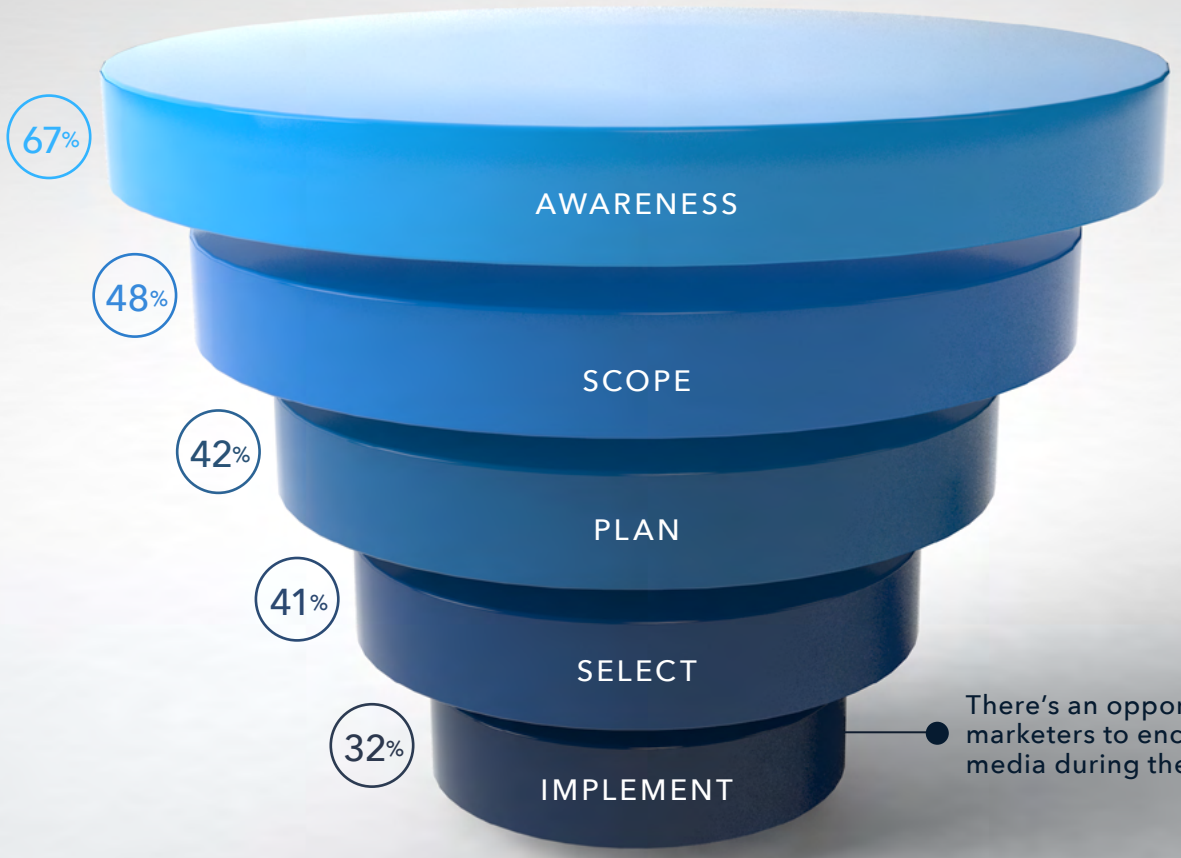
It's clear that buyers desire a range of content types. Now, let's examine what our research showed about what content channels buyers use and at what point in the buying process they use specific channels.

TOP 3 CONTENT CHANNELS PREFERRED BY BUYERS IN EACH STAGE OF THE FUNNEL



The preferred content channel varies by buying stage. Our research found that only social media and information sharing across the buyer's organization figured in the top three content sources in each of the five stages of the path to purchase: awareness, scope, plan, select, implement. The fact that social media and information sharing across the buyer's organization are top content sources shows that the B2B buying process is extremely collaborative: It is a team sport. Buyers are increasingly looking to social channels for information and guidance from their peers and broader networks. Decision makers consult their peers and colleagues both inside and outside of their companies to gather information about the products and services they are considering.

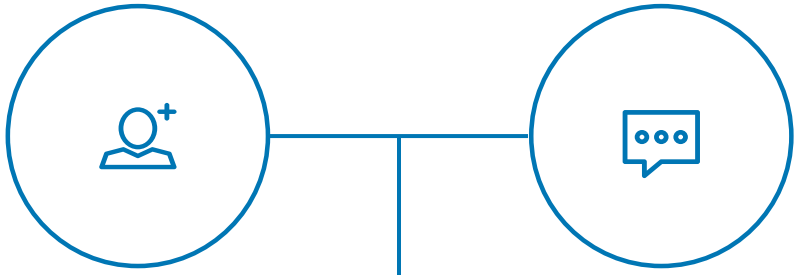
BUYER'S SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE BY PURCHASE PROCESS PHASE



There's an opportunity for salespeople and marketers to encourage the use of social media during the implementation phase.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING SOCIAL

Our research found a strong correlation between buyers who used social media and those who have stronger relationships with their vendors. Further, LinkedIn research found that buyers who are LinkedIn members tend to be extremely engaged with the social network. They are, for instance, 9.2 times more likely than the average LinkedIn user to share content, 2.2 times more likely to read Pulse, and more likely to engage with mobile, viewing 7.2 times more pages more pages on smartphones.



Buyers Are 7.2X
More Connected than the Typical LinkedIn Member

Buyers Are 9.2X
More Likely to Share than the Typical LinkedIn Member

THEY ARE ALSO MORE HIGHLY ENGAGED THAN THE AVERAGE LINKEDIN MEMBER

5.8X More Likely To **Follow** Companies

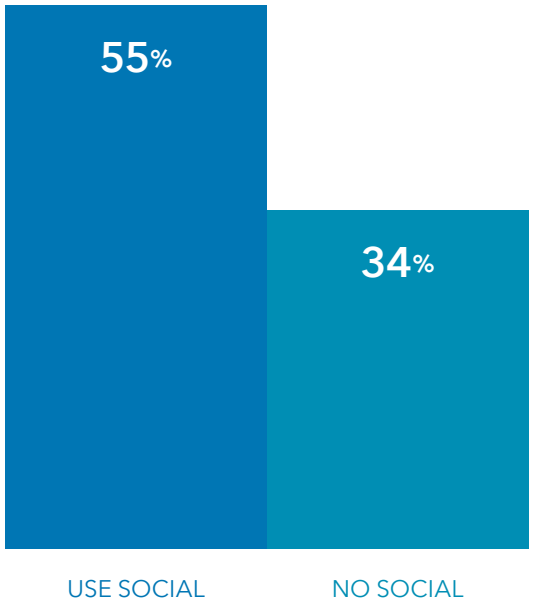
2.9X More Likely To **Engage** With InMail

7.2X More **Mobile** Page Views

SOCIAL MEDIA'S POSITIVE IMPACT ON BUYER-VENDOR RELATIONSHIPS

Social media usage also appears to have a positive impact on the strength of buyer-vendor relationships. The overall number of buyers who said their relationship with vendors was growing stronger over time totaled 48 percent. If those buyers used social, that figure increased to 55 percent. If those buyers did not use social, that figure tumbled to 34 percent.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL USAGE ON BUYER RELATIONSHIPS



Relationships with vendors growing stronger versus last year

Rethink
Sales and Marketing Alignment

CHAPTER 4

RETHINK SALES AND MARKETING ALIGNMENT

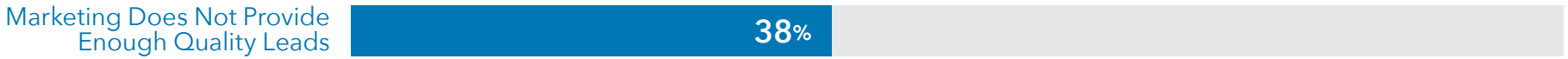
MARKETING AND SALES ARE ALIGNED, BUT NOT COMPLETELY

Marketing departments and sales departments have often struggled for alignment. Sales often says that marketing's leads could be better, and marketing thinks sales could follow up on leads more diligently. But our research found, somewhat surprisingly, that sales and marketing do get along. Almost nine in 10 marketers (86 percent) report aligned relationships with sales, and 80 percent of salespeople report the same of their relationship with marketing.

86% Of Marketers Report Aligned Relationships With Sales

80% Of Sellers Report Aligned Relationships With Marketing

But all is not in perfect alignment between sales and marketing. Even though 80 percent of salespeople said they were aligned with marketing, many of the same issues as always persist. Almost four in 10 salespeople (38 percent) say that marketing does not provide enough quality leads.



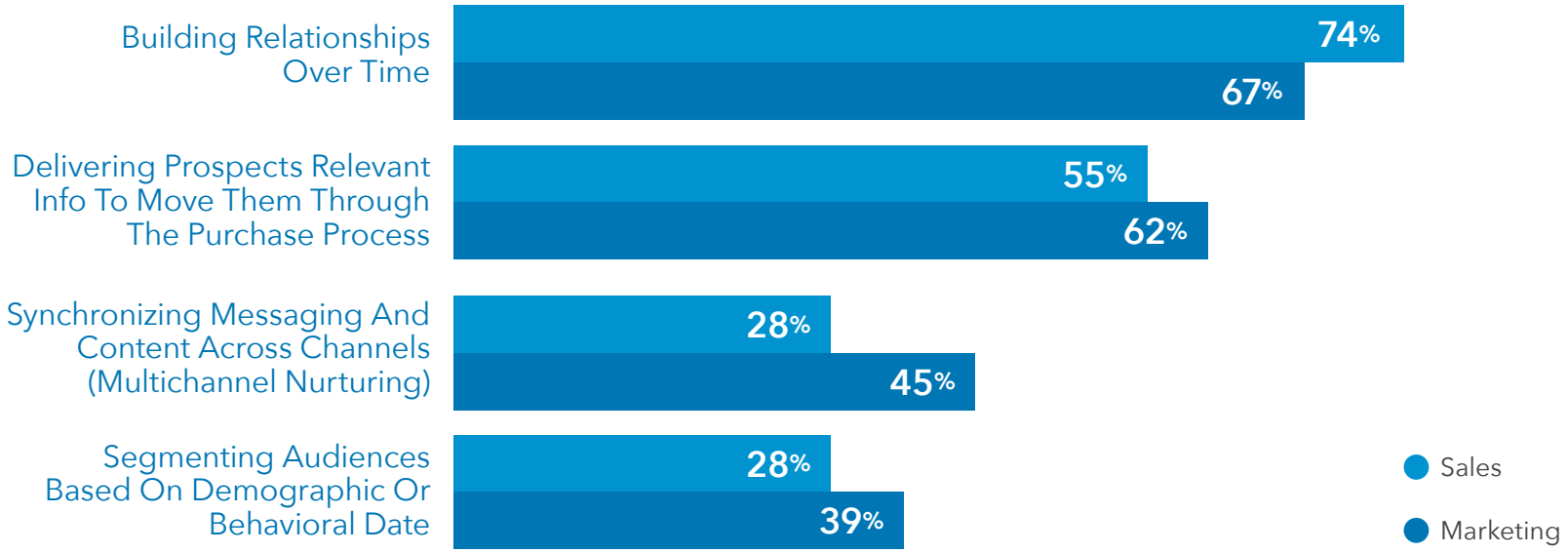
MARKETERS ARE A NURTURING GROUP

Lead nurturing has changed. Prior to the Internet age, marketers generated leads and salespeople nurtured them – often during mythic three-martini lunches. At these lunches, salespeople entertained prospects, filled them in on industry information, and ultimately tried to sell their product. Now, because the buyer's journey has shifted online, much of the lead nurturing process takes place in the digital world, where marketers – often through content marketing, which some have called the new three-martini lunch – engage, entertain, educate, and attempt to sell prospects.

The conventional wisdom confines lead nurturing to email. But many marketers now nurture prospects via multi-channel nurturing, which is the act of communicating with prospects not yet ready to buy through a wide variety of channels beyond email – such as display and social advertising, search, and mobile ads.

The chart below shows a granular look at how marketers and salespeople differ in their definitions of lead nurturing. Salespeople view lead nurturing through the lens of building relationships. Marketers see lead nurturing in that way, too, but they are more likely to look at the online techniques of lead nurturing, which includes the processes of synchronizing messaging and segmenting audiences.

HOW SALES AND MARKETING DIFFER IN THEIR DEFINITIONS OF LEAD NURTURING

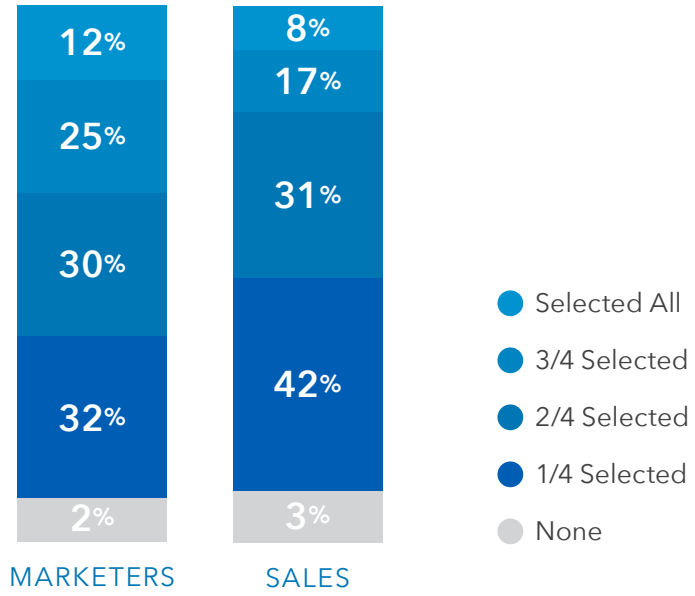


MARKETERS HAVE BROADER DEFINITIONS OF LEAD NURTURING THAN SALESPEOPLE DO

Our research found that marketers, who are living on the front lines of multi-channel lead nurturing, define lead nurturing much more broadly than salespeople do. In the survey, 37 percent of marketers selected three-quarters or more of the definitions of lead nurturing (which include email, telephone and display and social advertising), while only 25 percent of salespeople did.

This next chart shows that salespeople who have a broader definition of multi-channel nurturing are in organizations that have a stronger alignment between the sales and marketing teams. This disconnect between sales and marketing regarding multi-channel nurturing implies that some salespeople may not fully grasp how marketing is adding value through scaled nurturing activity and readying prospects to speak to sales, which may explain some of the misalignment between sales and marketing. It also is a missed opportunity for improving that alignment. The remedy is for both sides to embrace the broader definition of lead nurturing and implement processes to help marketing nurture prospects more effectively to deliver to sales leads that are far more likely to turn into paying customers.

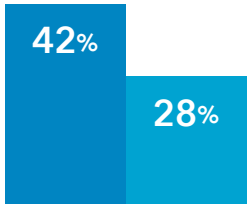
HOW BROAD ARE SALESPEOPLE'S AND MARKETERS' DEFINITIONS OF LEAD NURTURING?



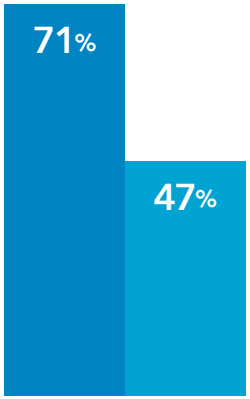
USE OF MULTI-CHANNEL NURTURING BY SALESPEOPLE INDICATES STRONGER ALIGNMENT WITH MARKETING

The use of multi-channel nurturing by salespeople is an indicator of strong alignment between sales and marketing. Of salespeople who embrace multi-channel nurturing, 42 percent report a "well aligned" relationship with marketing. Among those in sales who did not use multi-channel marketing, just 28 percent said they had a "well aligned" relationship with marketing. Similarly, 71 percent of salespeople who use multi-channel nurturing reported their relationship with marketing is growing stronger, while just 47 percent of salespeople who do not use multi-channel nurturing say their relationship with marketing is growing stronger.

SALESPEOPLE WHO REPORTED A "WELL ALIGNED" RELATIONSHIP WITH MARKETING



SALESPEOPLE WHO REPORTED THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH MARKETING IS GETTING STRONGER



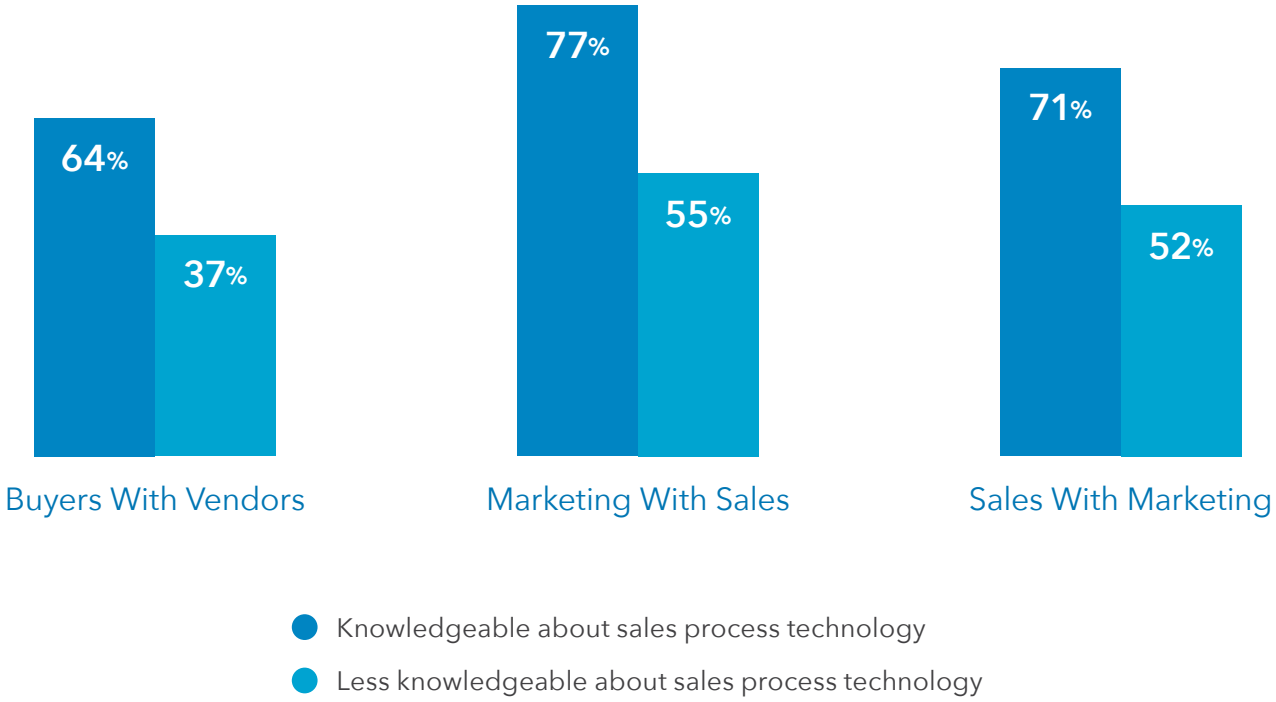
- Salespeople who use multi-channel nurturing
- Salespeople who don't use multi-channel nurturing

TECHNOLOGY DRIVES CLOSER RELATIONSHIPS AND ALIGNMENT

Sales process technology -- the most prominent example of which is customer relationship management platforms -- is still growing in adoption. One theory holds that a key benefit of these technologies is that their installation provides an opportunity for sales and marketing departments to work together and to have a common view of the buyer's journey. And in working together, these teams can arrive at an agreement on how these technologies will be used to improve their alignment and to sharpen their focus on the customer. Our research supports this theory. Across the board, buyers, marketers, and salespeople who report they are knowledgeable about sales technology have significantly stronger relationships – and the technology itself appears to be a catalyst for bolstering those relationships.

Across all groups, those who are knowledgeable about sales technology (dark blue) were far more likely to report relationships that have grown stronger in the past year compared with those who are less knowledgeable about sales process technology (light blue).

PERCENT REPORTING RELATIONSHIPS GROWING STRONGER IN THE PAST YEAR



Rethink
The B2B Buyer's Journey

CONCLUSION

RETHINK THE B2B BUYER'S JOURNEY

Our research confirmed that technology has transformed the buyer's journey and how buyers, marketers, and salespeople interact. The conclusions should lead marketers to rethink the way they approach buying teams, how they create content and use social media, how they deploy multi-channel nurturing, and how they align with their sales teams.

RETHINK THE BUYING TEAM

Although buyers are surprisingly positive about their relationships with vendors, there's room for improvement. Because our research found that buyers desire more knowledge about the products and services that are transforming their industries, both the marketing and sales teams should strive to provide the information their prospects crave. And vendors can't be content providing this information only to the main decision makers – this information has to be delivered throughout the organization to reach the entire buying team. Remember that making buying decisions is a team game, which clearly means that marketers must deliver relevant messages to the entire buying team.

TAKEAWAYS FOR MARKETERS:

- *Prioritize delivering authentic and helpful knowledge your prospects crave*
- *Strive to reach the entire buying team, not just the key decision maker*

RETHINK CONTENT MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The research indicates that buyers want product information, but this kind of information is table stakes. Buyers also want deeper knowledge – "thought leadership" and "education" from their vendors – so marketers must deliver a variety of content, which ranges from product demos to sophisticated thought leadership offers. In developing and distributing content, marketers should not overlook the power of social media, which buyers say they use in every stage of the purchase process, from awareness to implementation. In particular, research showed that buyers are extremely engaged with LinkedIn as a platform to connect with peers and to share content.

TAKEAWAYS FOR MARKETERS:

- *Deliver a full range of content, from product demos to case studies to thought leadership*
- *Leverage social media throughout the entire buying process*

RETHINK NURTURING AND SALES ALIGNMENT

Nurturing has changed. That's clear. What used to be the sole domain of the sales team is increasingly marketing's bailiwick as the buyer's journey has moved online. And effective marketers are moving their nurturing efforts beyond email nurturing to display and social advertising and other forms of multi-channel nurturing. With marketing more involved in the nurturing phase of the buyer's journey, alignment between marketing and sales is more important than ever. Our research shows that the higher level of sophistication that marketers and salespeople have in multi-channel nurturing indicates greater alignment between the two teams.

TAKEAWAYS FOR MARKETERS:

- *Sales and marketing should align on a broader definition of nurturing – beyond classic relationship building*
- *Deploy marketing and sales technology to drive better alignment and stronger results*

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

For this research, we conducted 6,375 10-minute online surveys. About half of the sample (3,210) were LinkedIn members, and the other half (3,165) were selected from Ipsos' database (many of whom also happened to be LinkedIn members. The surveys were in the field from July-August 2015. The targets were B2B buyers, marketers, and salespeople at mid-sized to enterprise companies around the globe.

Methodology

Global 10-Minute Online Survey
Using LinkedIn and External
B2B Sample

Research

Total Global Sample: n=6,375

LinkedIn Sample: n=3,210
Ipsos External Sample: n=3,165

Fieldwork: July - Aug, 2015

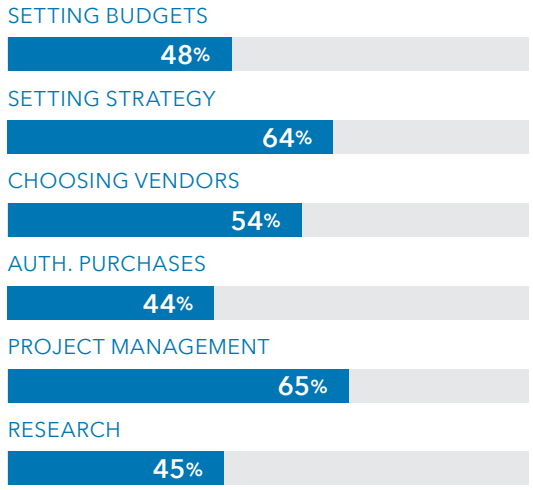
Targeting

Mid-size To Enterprise
Employees Who Classify As A Buyer,
Marketer, Or Seller To B2B Clients

BUYERS

All of the buyers surveyed are involved in B2B purchases with 64 percent setting strategy and 44 percent authorizing purchases. Almost nine in 10 were manager level and above, and the majority (57 percent) worked at enterprise companies with 1,000 or more employees. And about one-quarter is from the tech sector.

Decision Maker Stage Involvement



57% From Enterprises (1000+)

87% Manager Level Or Above

Top Industries

22% From Tech Industry

22% Financial Services

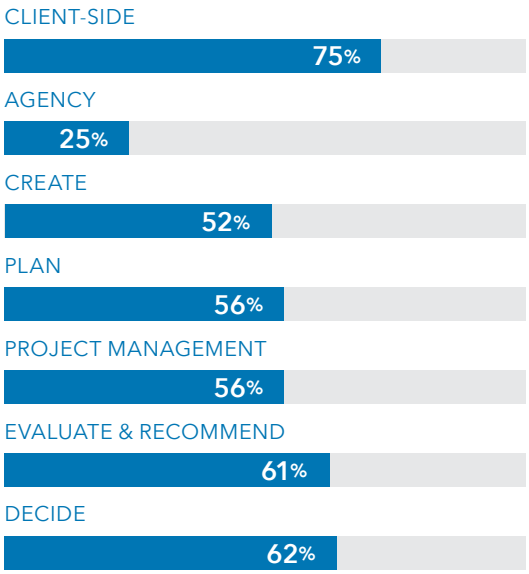
14% From Services

14% From Manufacturing

MARKETERS

The majority of the B2B marketers surveyed had responsibility for online marketing programs, with 62 percent as decision makers and 61 percent evaluating and recommending programs. A large majority of marketers surveyed were client-side, with 25 percent coming from the agency side. About half (46 percent) were from enterprises, and almost nine in 10 were manager level and above. And about one-quarter is from the tech sector.

Online Marketing Programs Responsibility



46% From Enterprises (1000+)

87% Manager Level Or Above

Top Industries

22% From Tech Industry

12% Financial Services

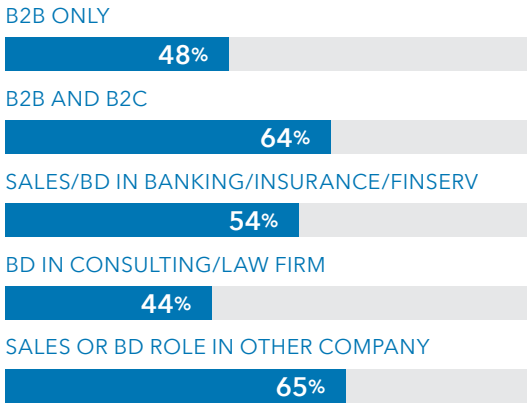
13% From Services

11% From Manufacturing

SALESPEOPLE

All of the salespeople surveyed sell B2B products or services but a significant minority (45 percent) also sell B2C products or services. About half (46 percent) work at enterprise companies, and almost nine in 10 are manager level or above. And about one-quarter are from the tech sector.

Sales Role



46% From Enterprises (1000+)

87% Manager Level Or Above

Top Industries

23% From Tech Industry

20% Financial Services

14% From Services

12% From Manufacturing

Today, LinkedIn members number more than 400+ million professionals. That's over one-half of the 600 million professionals on the planet, representing the largest group anywhere of influential, affluent and educated people.

For more information, visit marketing.linkedin.com

Rethink
The B2B Buyer's Journey