



# THE 2014 B2B BUYER BEHAVIOR SURVEY

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How content and social media are  
impacting the buyer journey

## Introduction

While B2B buyers strategically browse social media discussions during their research, web search remains a top source of information.

Additionally, nearly two-thirds of buyers indicate that content had a significant influence on a decision. While the buying process is getting longer and buyers continued to wait to engage with sales, B2B buyers are more satisfied with the process than they were a year ago.

Those are just some of the results of Demand Gen Report's 2014 B2B Buyer Behavior Survey. A total of 150 B2B buyers were involved in a major purchase during the past 12 months, revealing some significant trends that impact the purchasing process:

- The number of respondents who said they were satisfied with their last purchasing experience surged by 57% over 2012 totals;
- As many as 40% of respondents said they waited longer than last year to initiate contact with B2B vendors;

- As many as 34% of respondents said the number of team members involved in the B2B purchase process increased over the past year;
- Almost two thirds (64%) of respondents said the winning vendor's content had a significant impact on their buying decision;and
- More than two thirds (68%) of respondents agreed that the number of sources used to research and evaluate purchase has increased over the past year.

These findings — along with many other insights from the report — explain some of the trends that are taking place throughout the B2B purchasing spectrum, which includes increasing buyer awareness of purchasing options and a growing need for vendors to produce engaging educational content at every touch point.

Please describe how the following aspects of your purchase process have changed over the past year:

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL
We use more sources to research and evaluate purchases.	37%		
We spend more time researching purchases.		32%	
We rely more on peer recommendations.		36%	
We spent more time using social media to research vendors and solutions.			31%
We conduct a more detailed ROI analysis before making a final decision.		36%	

## How The Buying Process Has Evolved

Perhaps the most important trend for B2B marketers, the 2014 study revealed encouraging statistics regarding buyer satisfaction levels, spurred by a noticeable increase in approval of the B2B buying process.

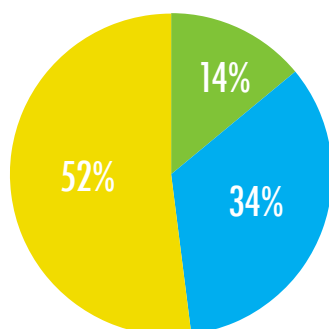
Buyers who were asked to rate the overall experience of their last major B2B purchase on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being "very positive") answered with an average rating of 4, with 79% of buyers rating their experience with a positive "4" or "5." This is a vast improvement from the previous survey, in which only 21% of buyers felt either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their last purchasing experience.

When looking deeper into the results, there are a number of factors that contributed to this turnaround. For one, buyers are savvier in how they are approaching research processes now that there are more outlets to explore. Between vendor web sites, search engines, and recommendations via social media and trade publications, there is a plethora of data for a potential buyer to determine what solution is the right fit for their needs.

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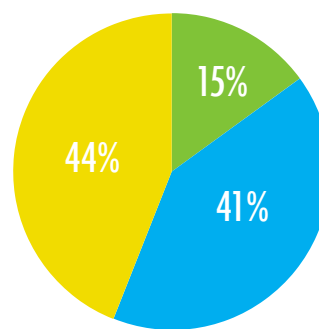
The previous survey results indicated that the buying process was not only taking more time, but becoming more complex due to diverse buyer decision-making along the way. That trend has continued this year, with buyers specifically going out of their way to spend more time researching sources and purchases, using social media and conducting ROI analysis before any final decision is made. Almost half (46%) of buyers create a short list of potential vendors and 33% conduct initial research on solution options before the first communication with a sales rep.

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



- Decreased
- Increased
- Not sure

Do you wait longer to initiate contact with B2B vendors, on average, than you did a year ago?



- Yes
- No
- Not sure

## How The Buying Process Has Evolved

The 68% of respondents who said they used more sources to research and evaluate purchases represents only a small increase over those who shared the same sentiment in 2012 (66%). However, there were increases across the board for other aspects of the buying process:

- 58% of buyers agreed with the statement that they spent more time researching purchases, compared to 48%;
- 53% of buyers said they relied more on peer recommendations, versus only 19% of buyers surveyed in 2012;
- 37% of buyers said they spent more time using social media to research solutions, almost double the 20% of respondents to the previous; and
- 51% of buyers conducted a more detailed ROI analysis before making a final decision, compared to 30% in 2012.

Participation in the purchase process remained relatively unchanged from the earlier report. Processes involving eight or more people slightly declined from 12% to 8%, while processes involving one to three people slightly increased from 50% to 55%. While overall participation change was minimal, more respondents said there was an increase in team members involved in the process (34%) than said there was a decrease (14%).

Buyers are paying closer attention to how they budget for B2B purchases than they did in the previous survey. In 2012, 48% of respondents said their purchases were initially unbudgeted, and that they allocated funds only after building an internal business case; in 2014, that number dropped to 34%. The amount of companies who pre-approve their budget at the start of the fiscal year also dipped from 23% to 14%.

Not surprisingly, budget allocation plans vary depending on company revenue. Companies with annual revenue above \$100 million are inclined to allocate the budget from a larger line item at a rate of 43%. On the other hand, 40% of companies with annual revenue below \$100 million initially enter the purchase without a budget.



## Social Media: More Up Close And Personal

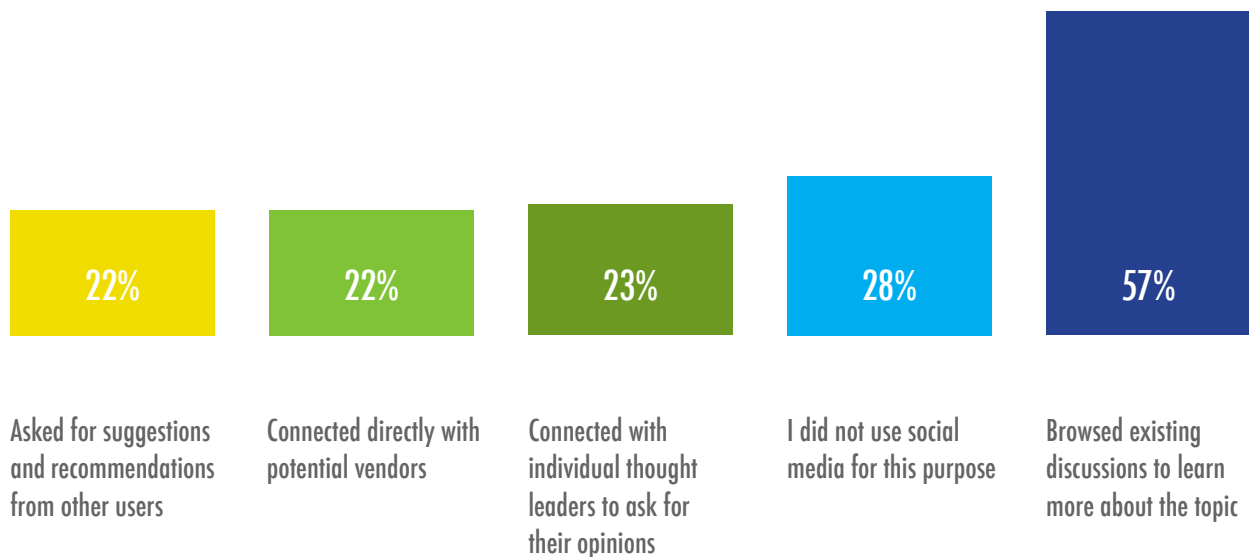
In 2014, 72% of respondents said they used social media to research the solution purchase, a total that has gone unchanged since last year's survey. However, the amount of respondents who connected directly with potential solution providers via social networking channels increased by more than 57%.

LinkedIn is the top choice among senior executives who look to connect via social media, whereas blogs are the top choice for non-executives. One third (33%) of executives place Facebook at the bottom of their social media priority list with an influence score (on a 1 to 7 scale) of 5, preferring to go the more professional route. Regardless of demographic, the emerging Google+ social media channel always had the lowest influence score with a 6 average.

Respondents who didn't believe the winning vendor's content had a significant impact on their purchasing decision unsurprisingly ranked YouTube/Vimeo almost a full point lower (5) than respondents who did (4).

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### What role did social media play in your research process? (Check all that apply)



## What Content Wins More Deals?

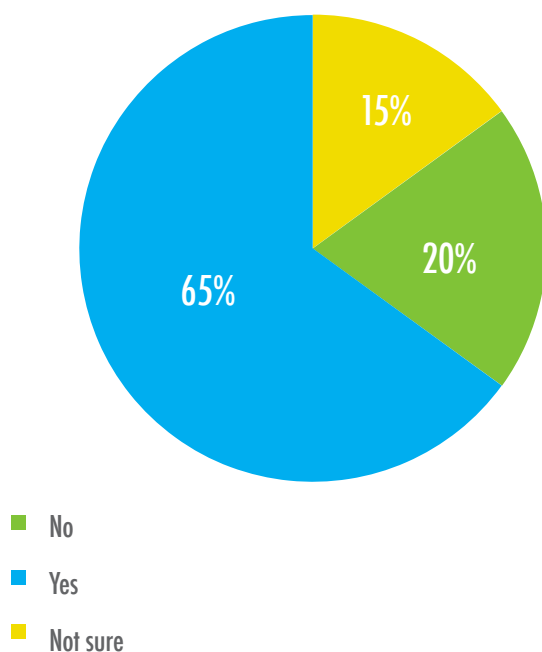
When comparing the eventual winning vendor to the rest of the considered vendors, 61% of respondents agreed that the winning vendor delivered a better mix of content appropriate for each stage of the purchasing process. This variety enables the vendor to touch on as many issues as possible that may capture a potential buyer's interest in a solution. According to the study, 66% of buyers agreed that the winning vendor provided higher-quality content and 63% said the winning vendor's content was more conducive to building a business case for the purchase.

In terms of content production, vendors still have to hit the right chords with potential buyers before taking further steps. Close to half (42%) of respondents neither agree nor disagree with the statement that the

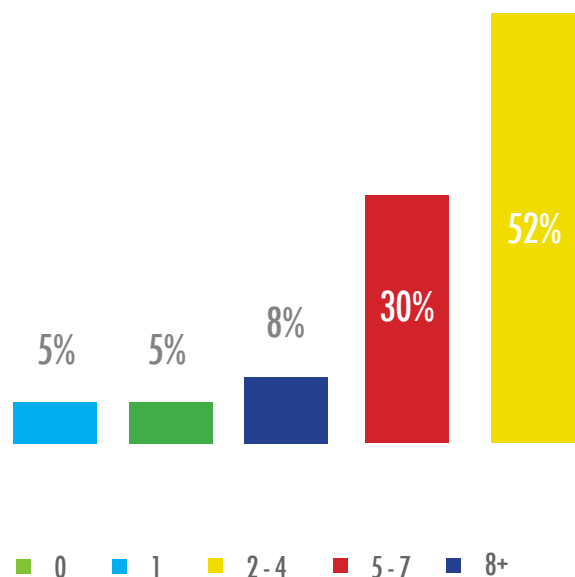
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winning vendor provided more content during the purchasing process. This is a sign that the amount of distributed content isn't as relevant to buyers as the quality.

Did the winning vendor's content have a significant impact on your buying decision?



How many pieces of content (e.g. white papers, articles, videos, etc.) did you view from the winning vendor?



## Discoverability Key To Success At Top Of Funnel

When buyers encounter the research process, they often search the web and observe numerous solutions to really gauge what could be the best fit. In fact, 46% of buyers use web search engines as their first source when starting their research. After web search, vendor web sites are the leading choice for both the second and third source among buyers.

While social media comes in dead last as a first source of information for B2B buyers, more are turning to social media when it comes to second and third sources as they begin their research. Web search, vendor web site and peers/colleagues still dominate the sources consulted during initial research.

Once purchasers reach the vendor web site, they expect to be able to hear more information about the product and service there than anywhere else. More than one third of respondents (37%) ranked general educational content such as white papers and infographics to be the most important aspect featured on a vendor web site.

General educational content is vendor-neutral, and focuses particularly on the industry itself and how solutions provide some sort of assistance or convenience to the user. Individuals wading through this process aren't looking for a sales pitch, but rather are seeking generic information to help them get up to speed.

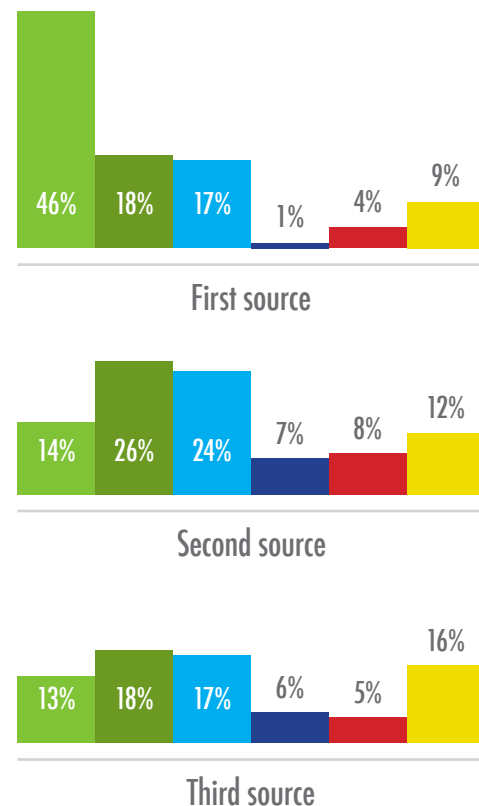
The growing complexities of the buying process over the past two years can certainly be attributed to the number of solution vendors now available, in addition to the upsurge in means by which these vendors can publicize themselves. For the second year in a row, respondents ranked vendor response timeliness and ability to provide relevant content as the two biggest impact drivers of the vendor selection process.

At least 76% of those surveyed believed a timely response from the vendor was important, while 71% emphasized the importance of relevant information. Buyers then listed reviews and references from industry peers (66%) and the vendor's reputation as an industry thought leader (61%) as additional major drivers of the process.

With timeliness and content being so vital in helping buyers complete the selection process, vendors have to find ways to deliver their service in an efficient manner to compete. This service could be improved

through a multitude of methods, whether that entails implementing new sales and marketing automation technologies more in tune with the individual buyers, training salespeople to be more adherent to buyer needs or enhancing the marketing department to provide more relevant content.

### What were the first three sources of information you used when you began your solution research, in order of importance?



- Web search
- Vendor web site
- Peers/colleagues
- Social media/networks
- Trade or business media
- Industry experts/analysts

## Execs And Smaller Companies Value Content

An overwhelming majority (82%) of senior executives who took the survey reported content as a significant driver of their buying decision, a noticeably higher rate than the 54% of non-executives who believed it held a major impact. While both executives and non-executives believed the winning vendor provided a better mix of content to help through each stage, the executives who took the poll were more ambivalent than non-executives across the board when it comes to content characteristics.

Almost half (47%) of executives didn't even take into account whether content by the winning vendor had any bias. The survey responses suggest that while senior executives believe content had a substantial impact on their buying decision, there may be other factors also significant enough to drive a purchase.

Executives also viewed fewer pieces of content compared to non-executives. Of the non-executives, 11% had viewed at least eight pieces of content, whereas no executive looked at that many.

Companies earning less than \$25 million per year comprised 61% of buyers who said the winning vendor's content had a significant impact on the buying decision. This is a far cry from the percentage of companies earning less than \$25 million per year who didn't think content had a big impact on their purchase (26%). On the other end, 11% of buyers speaking largely of the content's impact earned annual revenues of more than \$500 million. The same demographic encompassed 26% of buyers who feel content didn't have a noteworthy impact.

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### About The Survey

The 2014 B2B Buyer Behavior Survey includes responses from more than 150 respondents actively involved in purchasing a business solution within the last 12 months.

Of the respondents, almost half of them (49.5%) reported annual company revenue of less than \$25 million, while 20.6% reported revenue of \$25-\$100 million. Approximately 16.5% reported revenue of \$100-\$500 million, and 13.4% reported revenue greater than \$500 million.

Primary decision-makers comprised 47% of the respondents, while 40% identified themselves as influencers/recommenders. The final 20% described their role as team members with equal influence on the purchase decision.



### Conclusion: Keeping Buyers Happy

With satisfaction levels rising over previous years, B2B marketers must continue to produce content that is trustworthy and relevant for every stage in the process.

With buyers now waiting longer to reach out to vendors, it is up to the vendor to provide top-notch content that can deliver all the information a buyer needs to know about a solution. Vendors need to interact with the selective buyer at every touch point.

Since the level of consumer satisfaction in 2014 was remarkably higher than in the previous survey, it is clear that vendors are excelling in capturing the buyer's attention and gaining their trust. In 2014, vendors have the task of not only continuing the success, but further refining the process of tailoring their message to each buyer at every stage in the process.

Relevant content, combined with a heightened level of communication between the departments responsible for customer touch points (such as sales/marketing, operations and information technology), gives vendors the ability to build the trust necessary for a successful relationship with the buyer.



### About Demand Gen Report

Demand Gen Report is a targeted e-media publication spotlighting the strategies and solutions that help companies better align their sales and marketing organizations, and ultimately, drive growth. A key component of the publication's editorial coverage focuses on the sales and marketing automation tools that enable companies to better measure and manage their multi-channel demand generation efforts.



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