B2B Content Preferences Survey

2014

Mobile-Optimized Content With Visual Appeal
Catches The Attention Of B2B Buyers

Demand Gen Report
RESEARCH

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INTRO

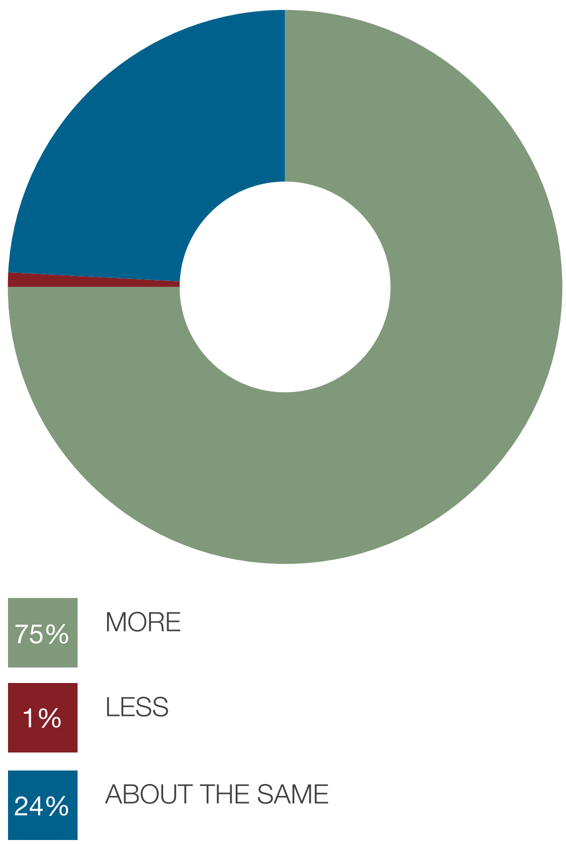
Today's B2B buyers are favoring more visually aesthetic content types, and are intent on viewing them through as many venues as possible. Content marketers are now put up to the challenge of reaching buyers through not only desktops, but also through smartphones and tablets.

For the second year in a row, B2B buyers are relying more on content to assist in their research and purchasing decisions. Three fourths of marketers (75%) rely more on content than they did a year ago, with a minuscule 1% saying they rely less on content. In other words, it's an extreme rarity to be involved in the B2B buying process without consuming content.

As part of the increasing reliance on content, buyers are beginning to favor even more content formats than last year. The 2014 survey revealed that a higher percentage of respondents are using and sharing visually appealing content, such as videos, infographics and interactive presentations. With more than half of buyers (52%) now viewing infographics at some point in their purchasing decisions, there are now seven types of content used by a majority of the respondents.

Unlike last year, the two most popular content formats dipped in popularity, with white papers and webinars dipping 5% and 10% respectively. These findings may indicate that buyers have access to more types of content, particularly formats that provide information in a way that is quicker and easier to digest.

Compared to a year ago, do you now rely more or less on content to research and make B2B purchasing decisions?

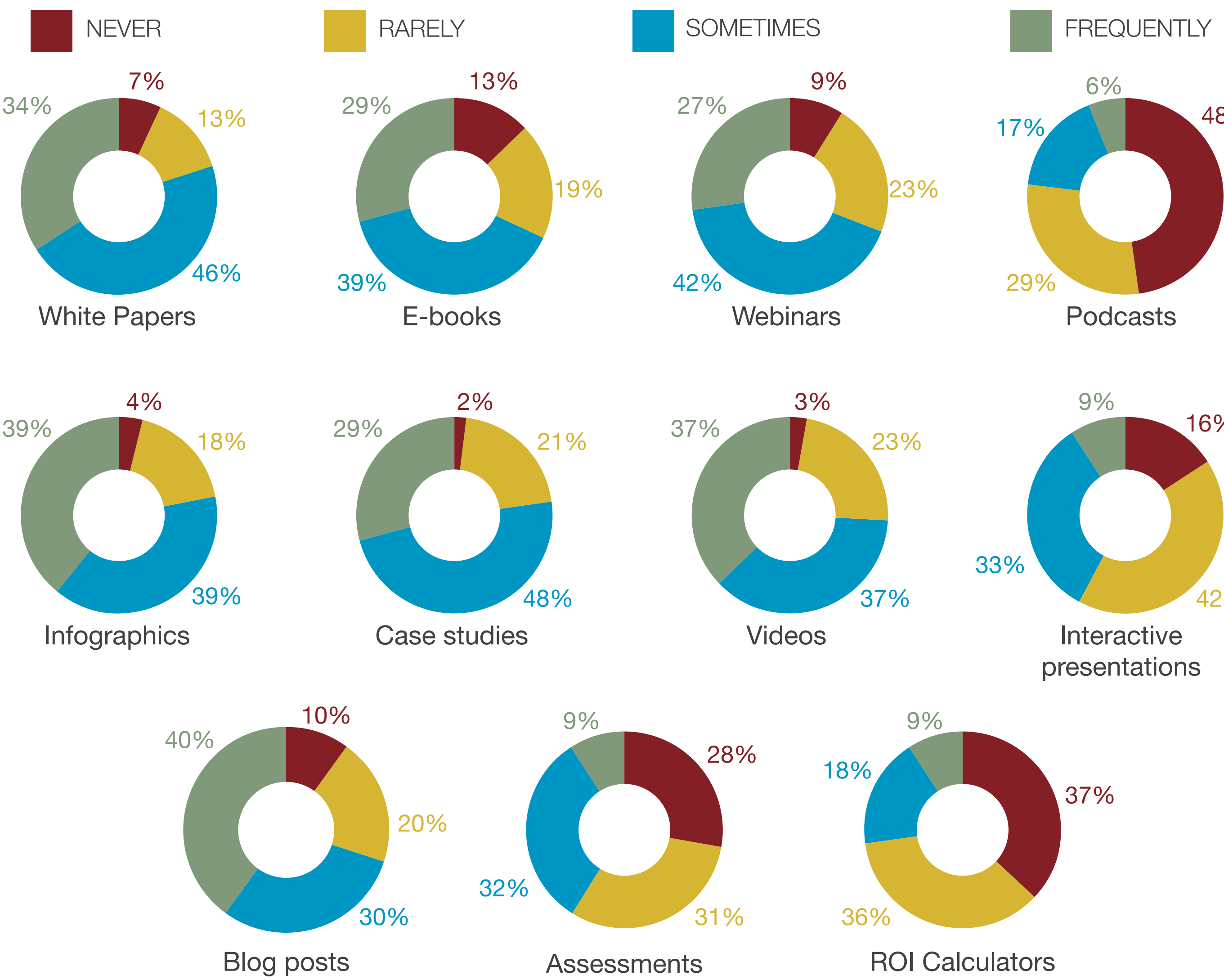


BLOG POSTS AND INFOGRAPHICS FREQUENTLY SHARED

B2B buyers are most likely to share blog posts, with 40% of them identifying that they share them frequently. Infographics (39%) and videos (37%) come right behind blog posts, with all three leapfrogging last year's most-shared content type, white papers. Frequent infographic sharing had a YOY increase of 15%, while frequent video shares increased 15%. Surprisingly, fewer buyers shared interactive presentations than last year, with 42% of respondents "rarely" sharing.

This year we added two new content types to the survey: assessments and ROI calculators. Predictably, neither type broke major ground from a sharing standpoint.

I share the following content types with my colleagues.



BUYERS REQUIRE MOBILE OPTIMIZATION MORE THAN EVER

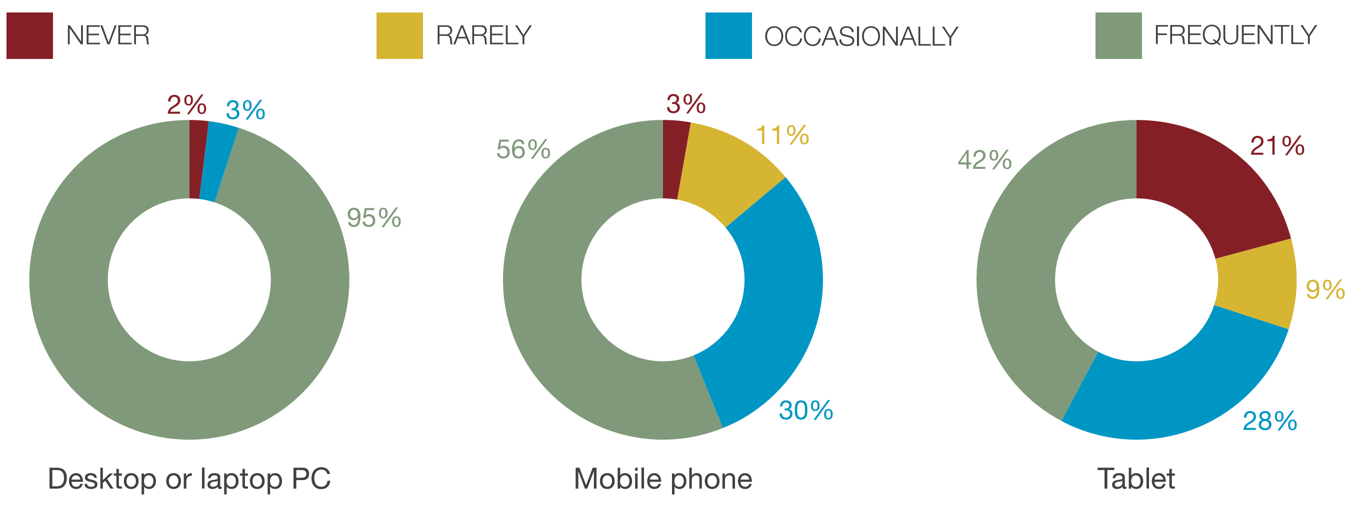
This year's survey saw a dramatic shift in buyer perception of mobile as a content medium. A shade above 85% of buyers in 2014 say they **strongly or somewhat agree that they require content optimized for a mobile device**, compared to almost 69% in 2013. The survey also revealed that almost 90% of buyers believed that content provided by B2B marketers needs to be more mobile friendly.

Content can be downloaded and viewed on numerous devices, and is geared more toward the demands of on-the-go mobile users than ever before. Marketers are now implementing new design practices capable of adapting content to the small screen as a means to creating an entirely new experience for buyers.

Desktop and laptop PCs certainly still dominate from a content accessing standpoint, as 95% of respondents said they "frequently" access business-related content on those devices. However, mobile phones and tablets are certainly catching up on their more-established counterparts. Respondents who frequently use mobile phones to access content jumped from 43% in 2013 to **56%** in 2014, while frequent tablet users jumped from 31% to **42%** during the same time period.

The results match the sentiments that **buyers are not only willing, but determined to view potential content in as many channels as they can.** With more of an emphasis over the past year on content consumption over different online channels, combined with a further sophistication of mobile and tablet technology, we can expect that buyers will consume B2B content at an even more frequent rate in 2015.

What devices do you use, and how often, to access business-related content?



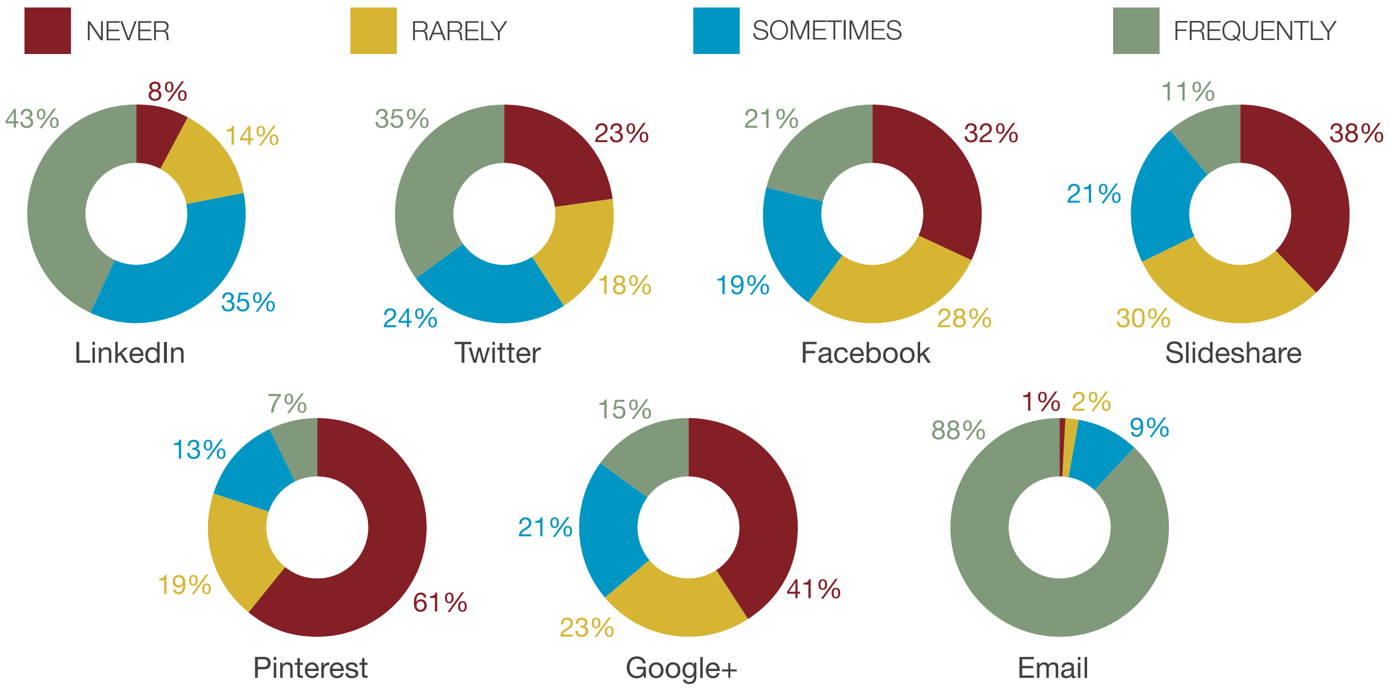
EMAIL TOPS FOR SHARING CONTENT

We also asked respondents where they are sharing their content, with **email once again dominating the other methods of content sharing.** The 88% of respondents who frequently share content via email once again doubles the sharing rate of the next highest channel: LinkedIn (43%).

For B2B buyers, LinkedIn and Twitter serve as the primary content sharing hubs, with the plurality of respondents still never having shared content through Facebook, Pinterest or Google+.

Although interactive presentations are still in the early stages of adoption, more buyers are frequently utilizing SlideShare, supporting our 2013 prediction that presentation tools, such as Brainshark and SlideShare, would be more widely adopted in the content sharing space.

I share content over the following channels:

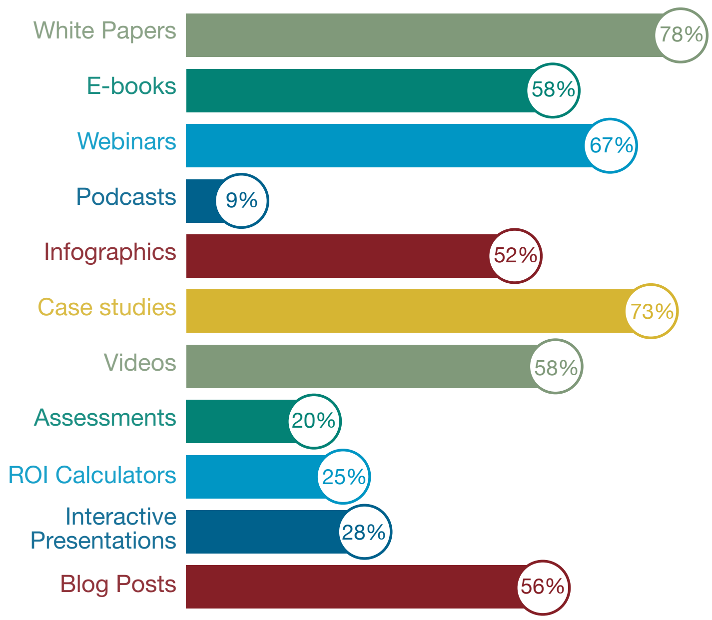


SHORTER CONTENT FORMATS GAINING GROUND

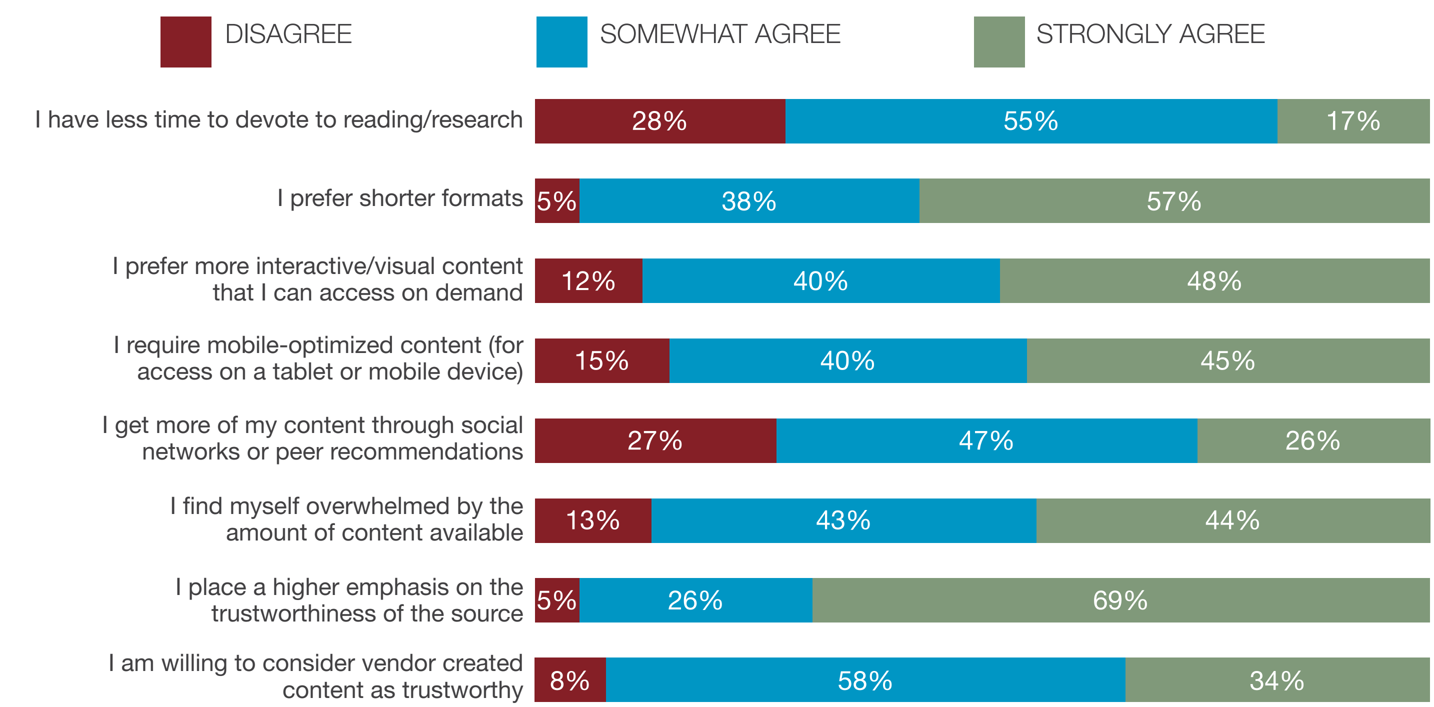
Buyers also expressed a desire for interactive/visual content that can be accessed on demand. The amount of buyers who strongly agreed with these sentiments increased from 34% in last year's survey to 48% in 2014.

In line with the decline of popularity of white papers and webinars, almost all (95%) B2B buyers in the survey at least somewhat agreed that they preferred shorter content formats. For the most part, buyers still largely agree that they have less time to devote to researching content. In an interesting turn of events, 9% more buyers actually disagree that they have less research time than last year.

Which types of content have you used during the past 12 months to research B2B purchasing decisions?



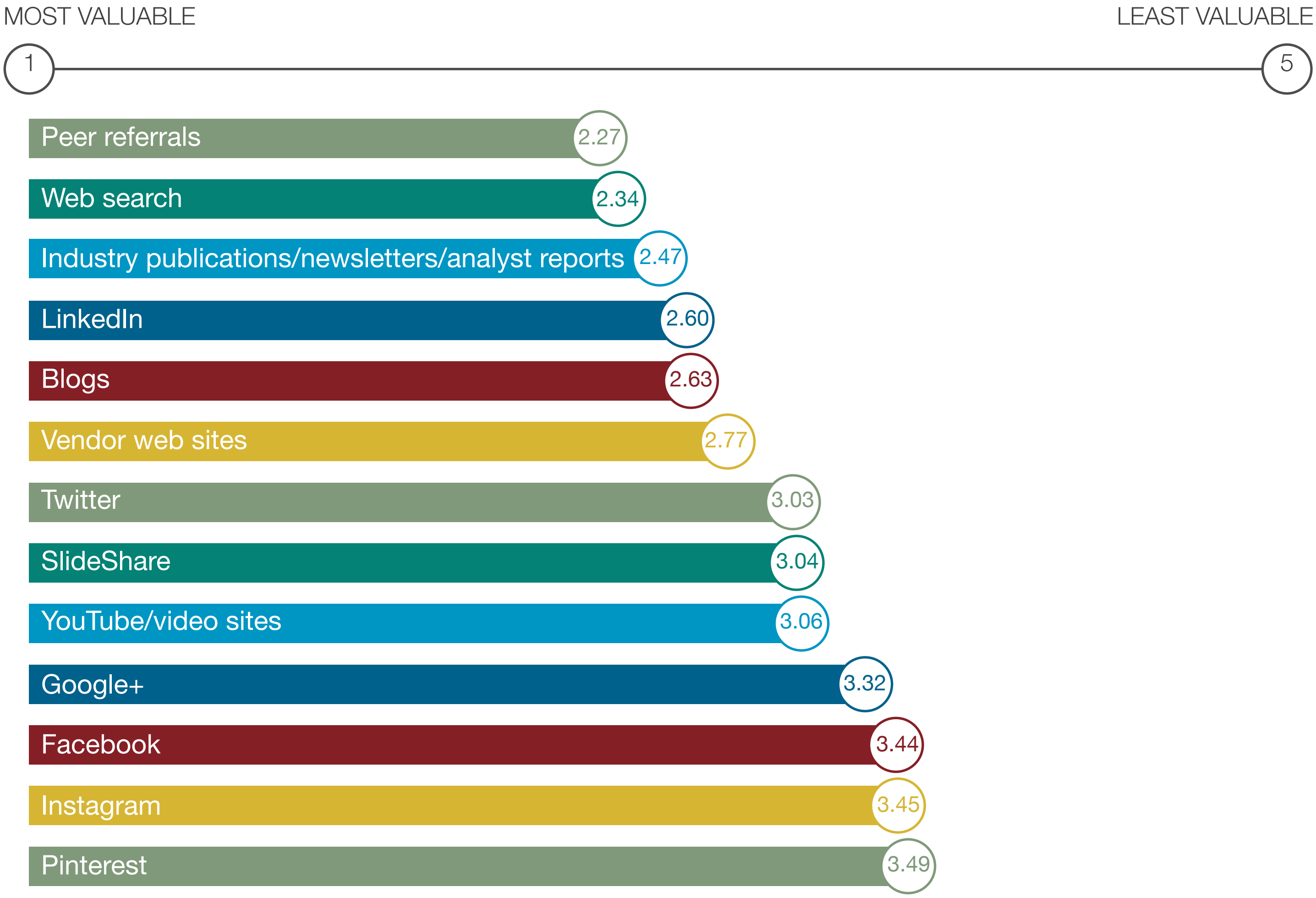
How have your B2B content consumption habits changed over the past year?



BUYERS STILL TRUST PEERS ABOVE ALL ELSE

The B2B purchasing decision has its fair share of outside influences, particularly referrals by friends, family members, coworkers or acquaintances. When we asked respondents to rate specific channels they used to find the relevant content to make the purchase on a scale of 1-5 (1 being most valuable), **they gave "peer referrals" the highest average rate of 2.27.**

Please rank the following channels or sources you use to find relevant content for making B2B purchasing decisions:

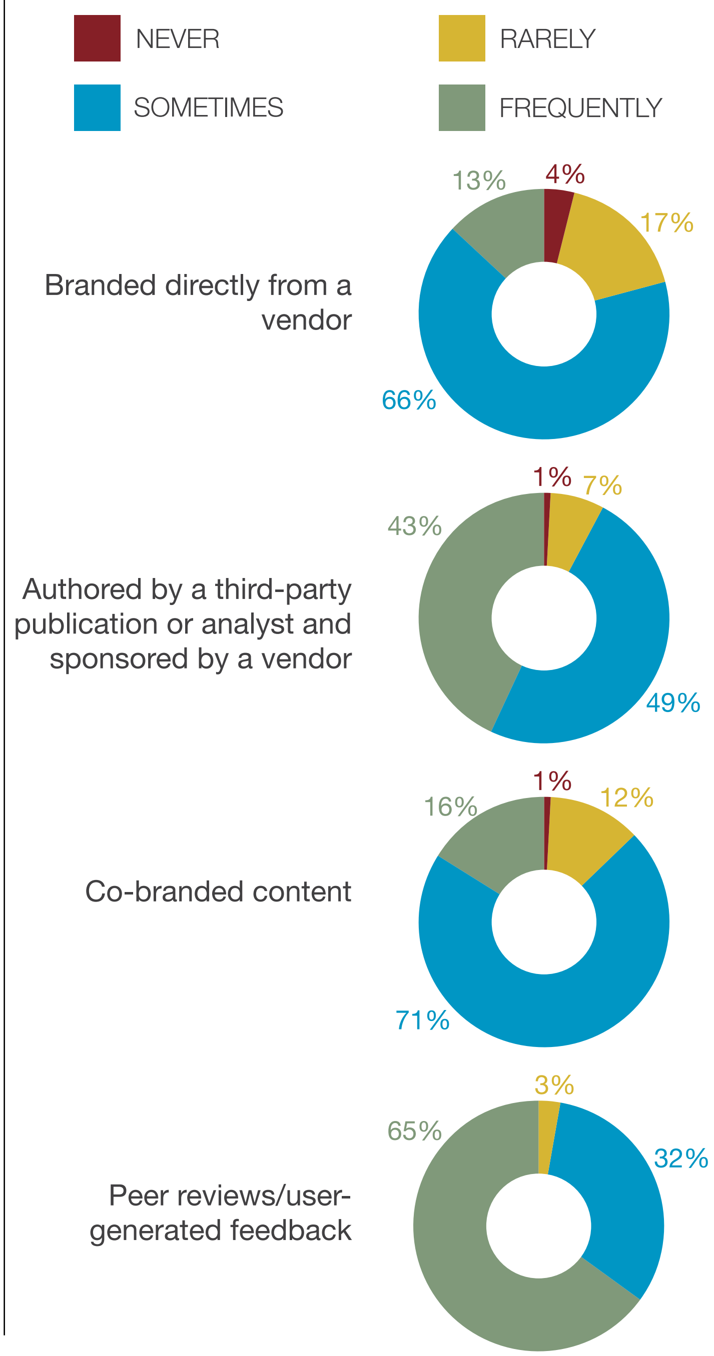


BUYERS STILL TRUST PEERS ABOVE ALL ELSE (CONT.)

Aside for LinkedIn, social media still has a long way to go if it wants to serve as a valuable asset in influencing the B2B buyer process. Similar to content sharing, most buyers aren't visiting major social networks for help in making major purchasing decisions.

Almost all (97%) buyers said **they give more credence to content that includes peer reviews and user-generated feedback.**

Which of the following types of content do you give more credence to?

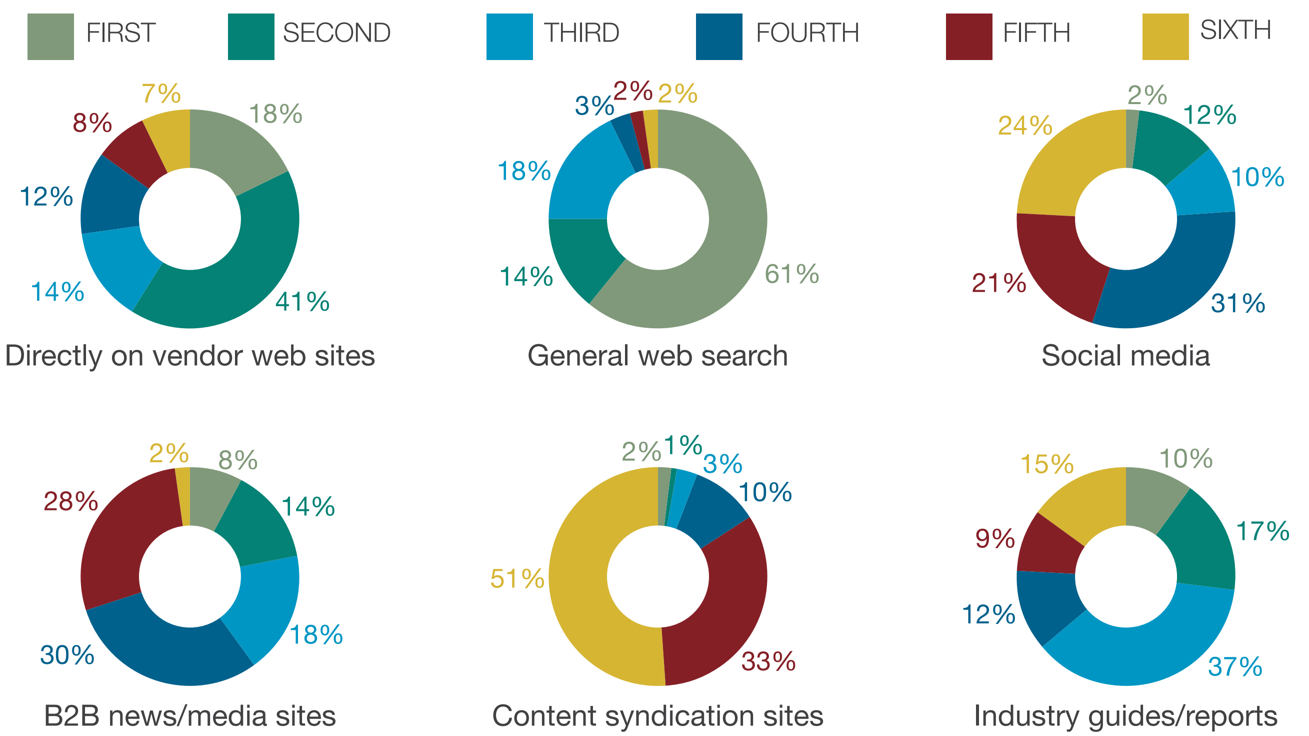


THE BUYER'S JOURNEY STILL BEGINS WITH A GENERAL WEB SEARCH

For the majority of B2B buyers, the purchasing process may be inspired by referrals, but actually begins at the point of general web search. That emphasizes the need to create content that will be found through search engines, especially with Google's new algorithms that put an emphasis on question-based queries.

While we asked respondents to rank their top three responses, it turned out to be a one-horse race, with 61% of buyers preferring general web search. Research that goes into a purchasing decision can easily be accomplished through browsing a popular search engine, such as Google, Bing or Yahoo.

Where do you go to begin the process of researching a B2B purchasing decision? (rank your responses)

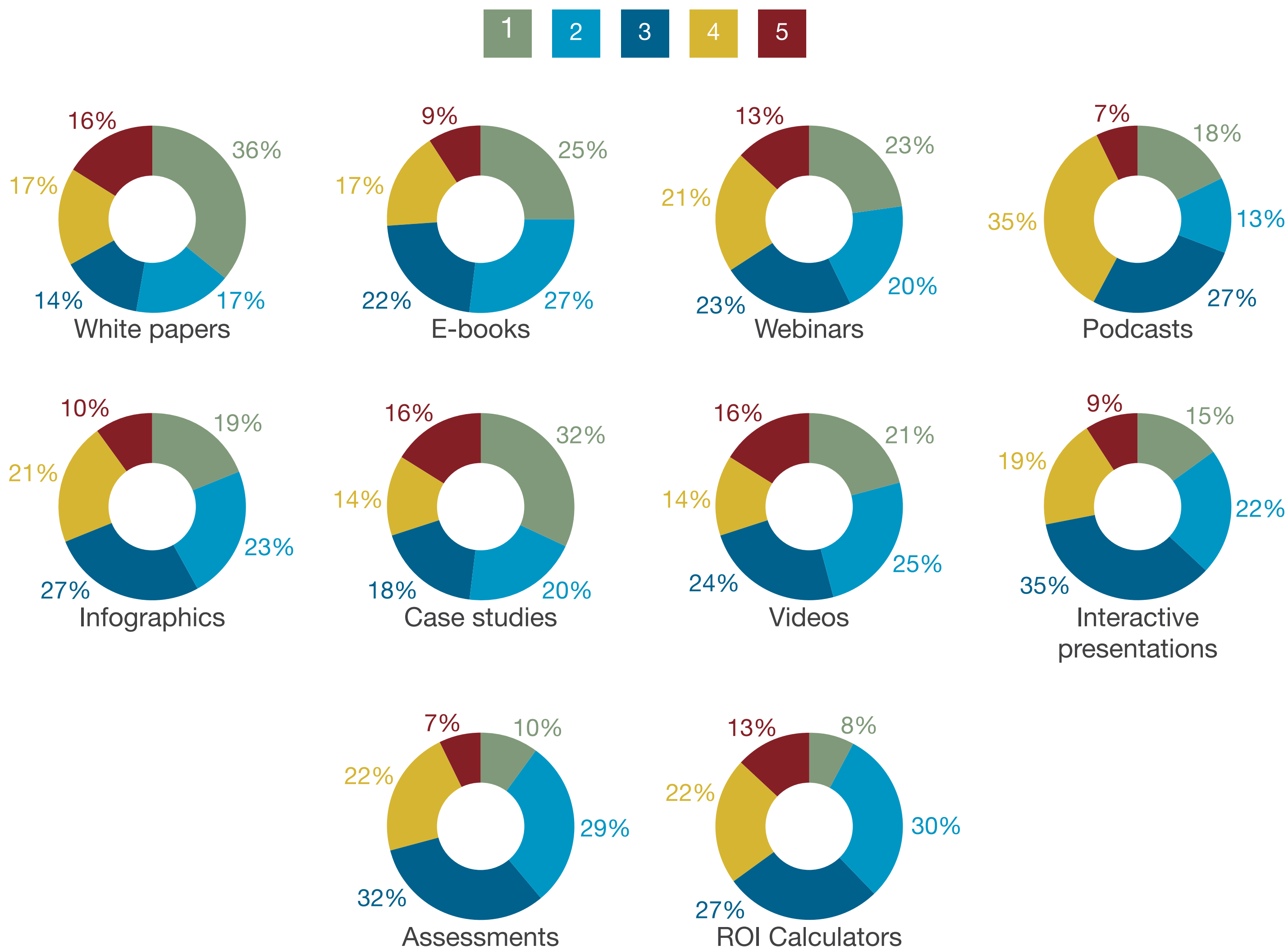


THE BUYER'S JOURNEY STILL BEGINS WITH A GENERAL WEB SEARCH (CONT.)

The other major option to begin the process is to search directly on vendor websites (18%). Either way, the buyer is at the point where they are taking it in their hands to learn more about the product/solution.

By the same token, marketers must ensure that their site is optimized for all channels so that content can be accessed clearly at every entrance point.

What do you feel are the most valuable online content formats for researching B2B purchases? (rate on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1=most effective)



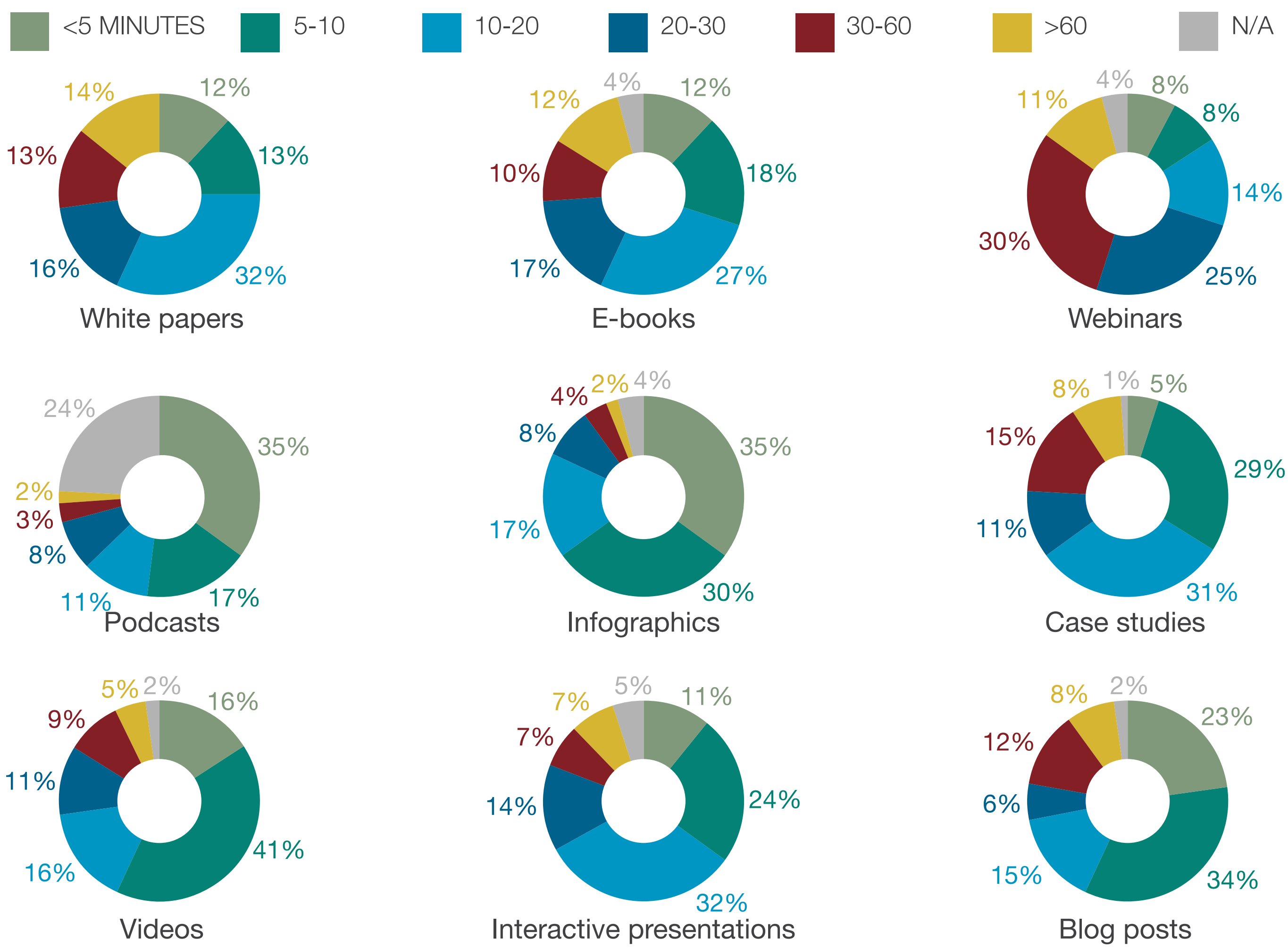
BUYERS SPENDING MORE TIME WITH INTERACTIVE CONTENT

We have indicated that B2B buyers in 2014 are more interested in accessing interactive, easily digestible content through a variety of channels, particularly mobile.

As was suggested through previous data, interactive presentations as a whole are more prevalent throughout B2B content marketing. In 2013, 19% of buyers didn't spend any time reviewing these presentations, a number which dropped considerably to 5% this year.

Although still relatively small compared to other times, buyers in 2014 are more open to reviewing content for more than an hour. The amount of users in 2014 who spent more than an hour reviewing content increased in every category from last year's totals, with the biggest jump coming from the 10% who started reading white papers.

When researching a B2B purchase, how much time do you typically spend reviewing content in the following formats?

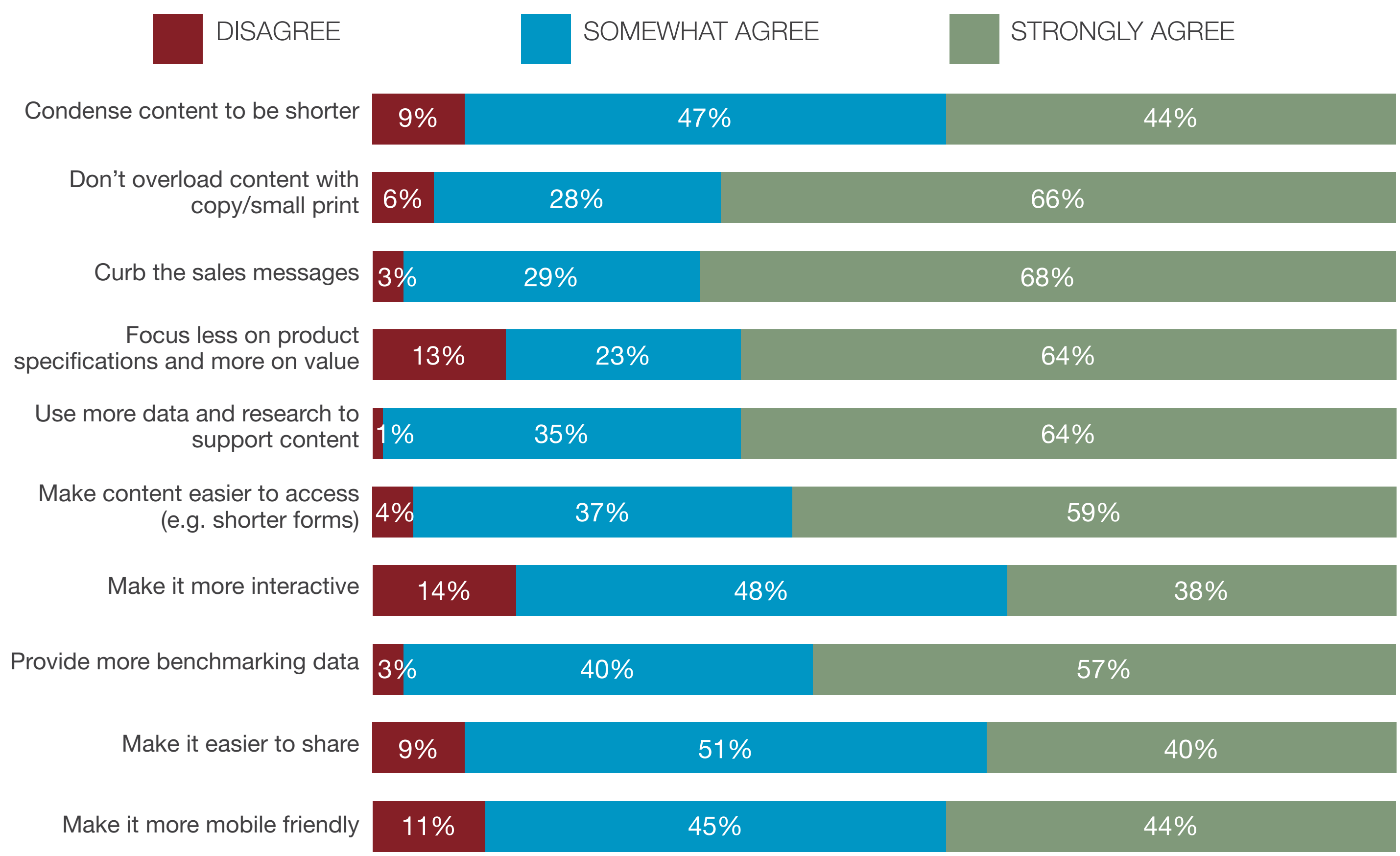


BUYERS' PERCEPTION OF QUALITY LARGELY REMAINS THE SAME

As far as content quality goes, buyers have given numerous recommendations as to how the product can be improved. Compared to last year's survey, the majority of recommendations stayed within three percentage points. The only notable difference is that 8% more customers strongly agree that marketers need to make content easier to access. This wish certainly aligns with the expectations we are seeing from this year's buyer, in which they want to review any form of content in the simplest, most efficient manner.

Four recommendations were added to this year's survey to properly represent the current state of B2B content marketing: **make it more interactive, provide more benchmarking data, make it easier to share and make it more mobile friendly.** Respondents of the survey agreed with the new recommendations for the most part, although not as strongly as the original questions. Out of the four added recommendations, three of them had the most respondents answer with "somewhat agree" instead of "strongly agree."

What recommendations would you make to improve the quality of the content created/provided by B2B vendors?

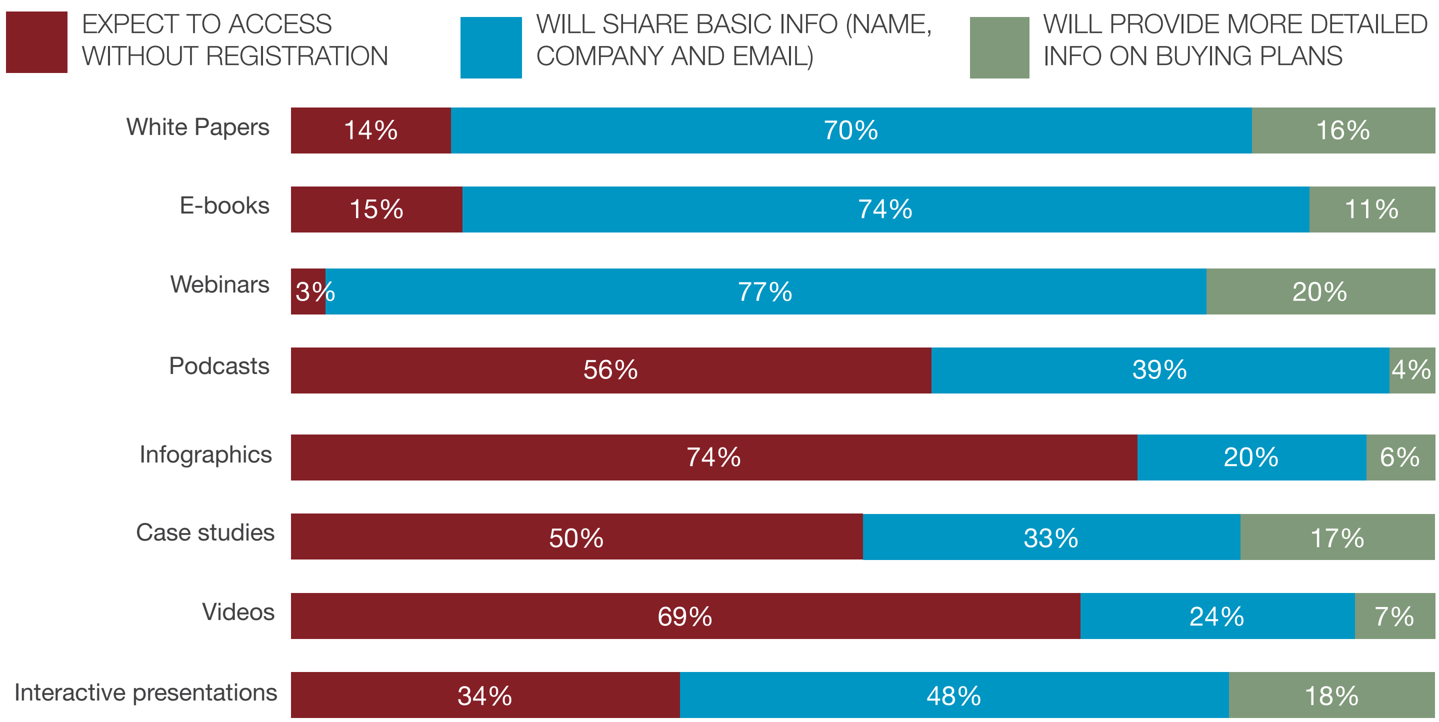


MORE BUYERS EXPECT TO REGISTER TO ACCESS CONTENT

More buyers are getting used to the fact that downloading content may often result in divulging a degree of personal information during the registration period. Usually, vendors are interested in learning the bare bones of their potential customers in order to tailor content further in the buyer process.

This year, fewer buyers expect to access any type of content without registration. White papers (6%), case studies (9%) and interactive presentations (9%) experienced the biggest YOY increases in buyers who were willing to provide detailed information into their purchasing plans.

Which types of content assets are you willing to register for and share information about you and/or your company?



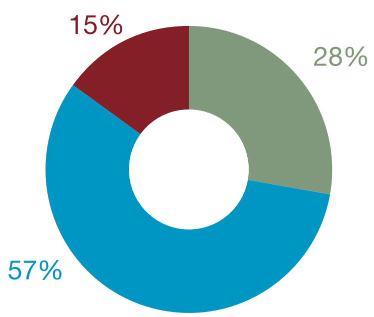
FOUNDATIONAL CONTENT MAKES WAVES

This year, we introduced two new content types to the survey under the categories **benchmarking tools** and **foundational content**.

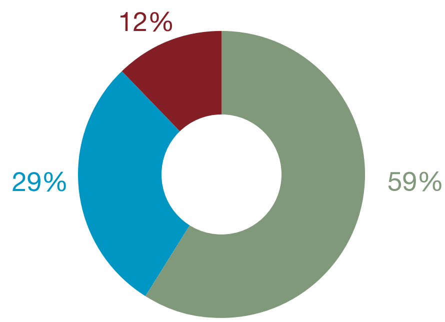
Foundational content turned out to be a major hit as the second-most preferred content type, while benchmarking tools, such as assessments and calculators, still had more than one fifth (21%) of buyers skeptical. This is notable considering the agreement of 97% of buyers who recommended that content quality could be improved by providing more benchmarking data. Perhaps present benchmarking tools aren't providing the sufficient data or know-how that today's buyers have come to expect.

Please describe your preferences for the following general content types:

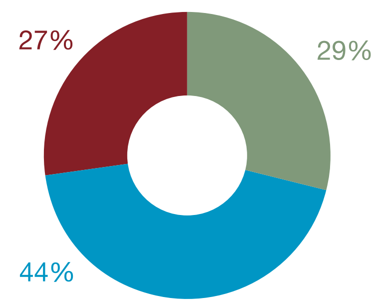
STRONGLY PREFER | SOMEWHAT PREFER | RARELY PREFER



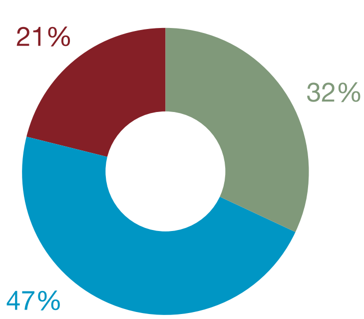
Predictive content (e.g. "The Future Of…")



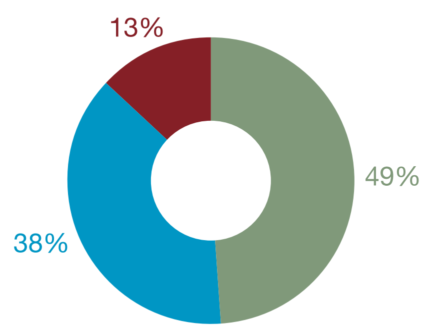
Prescriptive content (e.g. "7 Steps To…" or "3 Tips For…")



Conversational content (e.g. Executive Q&A)



Benchmarking tools (assessments, calculators)

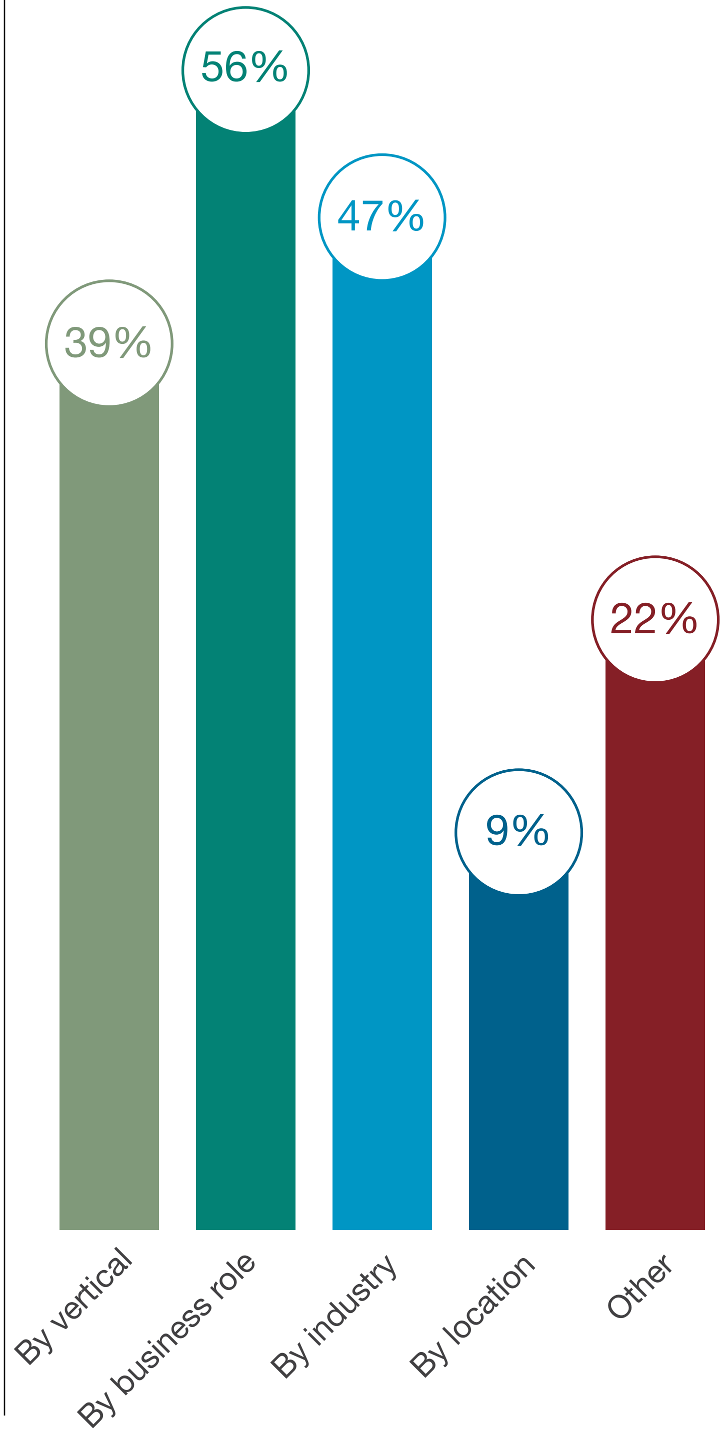


Foundational content (blueprints, toolkits)

ORGANIZATION STILL HAS ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

B2B buyers are still not convinced that solution providers are putting forward their best effort in organizing and presenting content online. The overwhelming majority (88%) feel that vendors do either a "good" or "average" job when it comes to content organization, with more buyers than last year (48%) slanting towards "average."

How would you like to see B2B vendors organize the content on their web sites?



CONCLUSION

MARKETERS NEED TO PROVIDE VISUAL CONTENT AND CATER TO MOBILE

B2B buyers have more access to content than ever before, thus, vendors will have to not only match, but exceed the expectations brought upon them. With so much content in the buyer's line of sight, it has become evermore important to make sure that your content **stands out.** Content pieces, such as videos, infographics and interactive presentations, are on the rise, but the popularity of those formats can't be utilized to their full effectiveness if they aren't designed to be appealing to the eye.

Perhaps more importantly, marketers need to continue their efforts in **adapting their content toward the mobile audience.** This audience continues to increase at a rate where it is likely that mobile-optimized content will become not only a major priority, but the major priority for content marketers.

As marketers consider this specific direction that buyers are gravitating toward, they should gain a better understanding of the areas where they need to be more proactive. The marketers who are most willing to analyze buyer tendencies will likely have a much easier time attracting potential buyers with their content.

SURVEY DETAILS

The *2014 Content Preferences Survey* polled 105 buyers of B2B products and services about their use of content in making purchasing decisions. Approximately 38% of the respondents held C-level or VP-level positions at their companies, while almost 27% held director-level positions.

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Content4Demand is a division of G3 Communications, a B2B firm specializing in e-media and custom content solutions.

Since 2007, we have published Demand Gen Report (www.demandgenreport.com), an e-newsletter that reports on best practices in sales and marketing automation. Because we live and breathe in the space every day, we have an in-depth understanding of demand generation and lead nurturing, and have close relationships with the automation solutions providers that drive the industry today.

Over the past five years, we have used our knowledge of content marketing and our publishing background to grow an expertise in custom content strategy and development. In that time, we have created hundreds of E-books, white papers, webinars, case studies, executive briefs and other forms of custom content for B2B solution providers, such as Oracle, Marketo, Eloqua, SAS, FIS, Citrix, NCR, Hubspot, Salesforce and many more. Our engagements with clients vary from a single piece of focused content to a quarterly or yearly integrated campaign.

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