

Time-Starved B2B Buyers Move Toward Shorter, More Targeted Experiences



INTRODUCTION

Content consumption habits among buyers continue to shift, and while buying cycles have grown longer and more complex, buyers—like marketers—have less time to devote to researching purchases than in the past. More than one-third of buyers strongly agreed they have fewer hours in the day to read up on potential purchases.

It's no surprise that shorter formats, on-demand and bundled content, mobile-friendly formats and visual and interactive content top their list of preferred content assets with what little time they can carve out. Buyers are also inclined to check trustworthiness of sources, and analyst reports and third-party independent content are preferred by a wide margin among buyers.

Given their limited timeframe for doing research, buyers want to get right to the meat of content assets that will help them most in their journey. When we asked what type of content they want, prescriptive content that lays out a formula for success was the most popular type of content among buyers.

In addition, this year, case studies led the pack in terms of the content format that resonates strongest with buyers. They've signaled their hunger to benchmark their own experiences against others who've tackled similar challenges. An overall desire for more data and benchmarking research also resonated strongly in terms of buyers' recommendations for content improvement, all tying back to the time-starved challenges.

Influencer content has also become of paramount importance; 87% of survey respondents said they give more credence to industry influencer content. Hand in hand with that, buyers also indicated they give more credence to peer reviews, third-party publications and user-generated feedback; more than two-thirds (68%) of buyers said they frequently give credence to peer reviews and user-generated feedback, while 60% give credence to content authored by a third-party publication or analyst.

34%
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on purchases.



BUYER TIME CONSTRAINTS DRIVE NEED FOR SHORTER, ON-DEMAND FORMATS

Time is a precious commodity for most buyers. Roughly one-third (34%) strongly agreed that they “have less time to devote to reading/research” in the past year. That’s more than double the 16% who strongly agreed with that statement in last year’s survey.

Buyers continue to be overwhelmed with the amount of content available to them: 46% strongly agreed. That’s up from 38% in 2016.

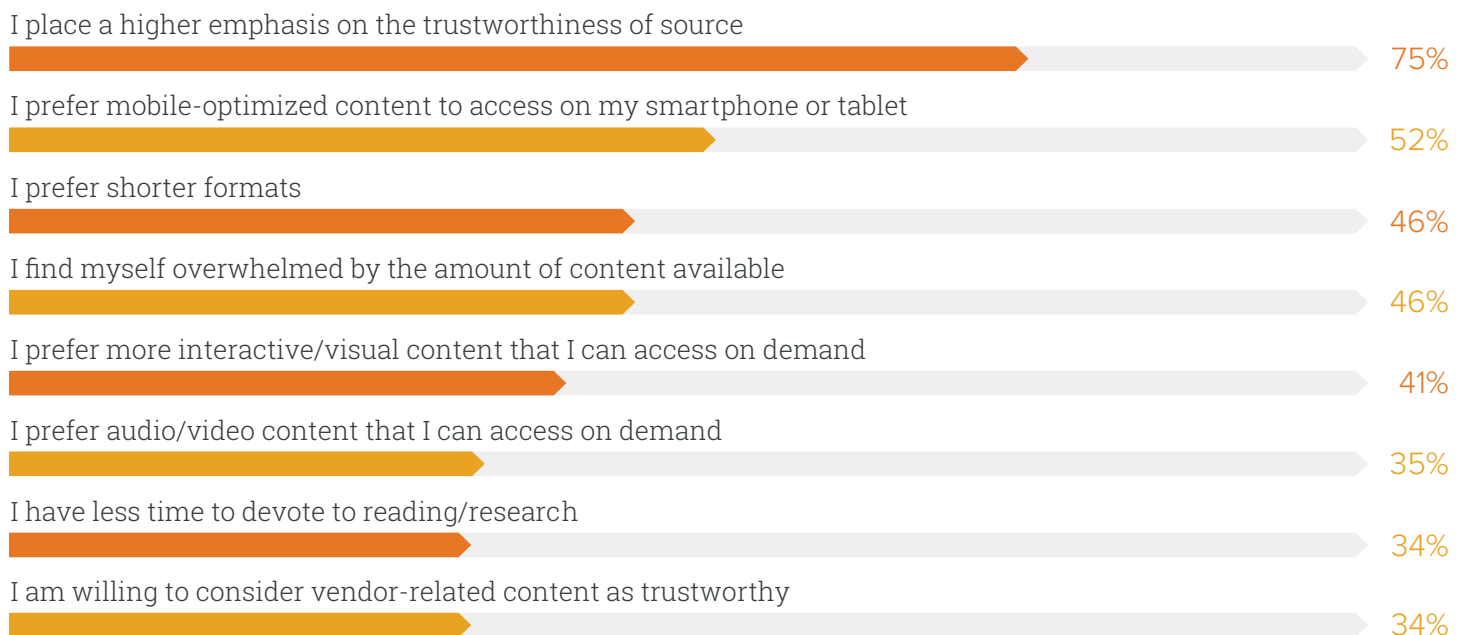
Given those constraints, it’s not surprising that buyers are gravitating to shorter formats (46%), interactive and visual content accessible on-demand (41%) and audio/video content accessible on demand (35%).

Three-quarters of buyers (75%) also place a higher emphasis on the trustworthiness of the source in order to research efficiently. But like last year’s survey, one-third (34%) of buyers are willing to consider vendor-related content as trustworthy.

And more and more buyers prefer mobile-optimized content they can on-the-go access through tablets and smartphones. More than half (52%) cited they strongly agree with that preference, up from 47% in 2016.

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How have your B2B content consumption habits changed over the past year? (Strongly Agreed)



B2B BUYERS RELY MORE ON CONTENT FOR RESEARCH, DEMAND GREATER RELEVANCY

Content is still of paramount importance to self-educating B2B buyers, according to this year's survey findings, but those who relied more on content to research buying decisions is leveling off. It's necessary to factor it into their day-to-day.

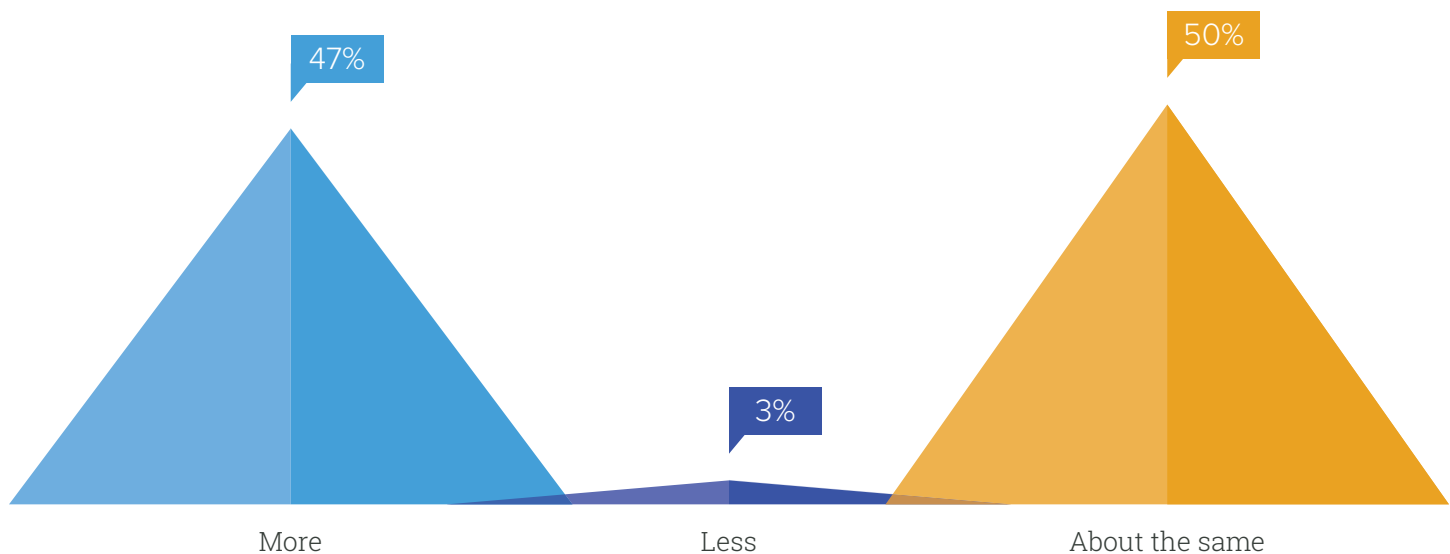
Forty-seven percent of B2B buyers relied more on content to research buying decisions this year, while 50% said their reliance on content for buying-decision research is about the same year over year.

However, they're asking marketers to provide relevant content tailored to them:

- 67% of buyers prefer content organized by business role
- 64% prefer content organized by industry
- 49% prefer content by specific vertical

47%
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Compared to a year ago, do you now rely more or less on content to research and make B2B purchasing decisions?



BENCHMARKING CONTENT MOST VALUABLE TO BUYERS

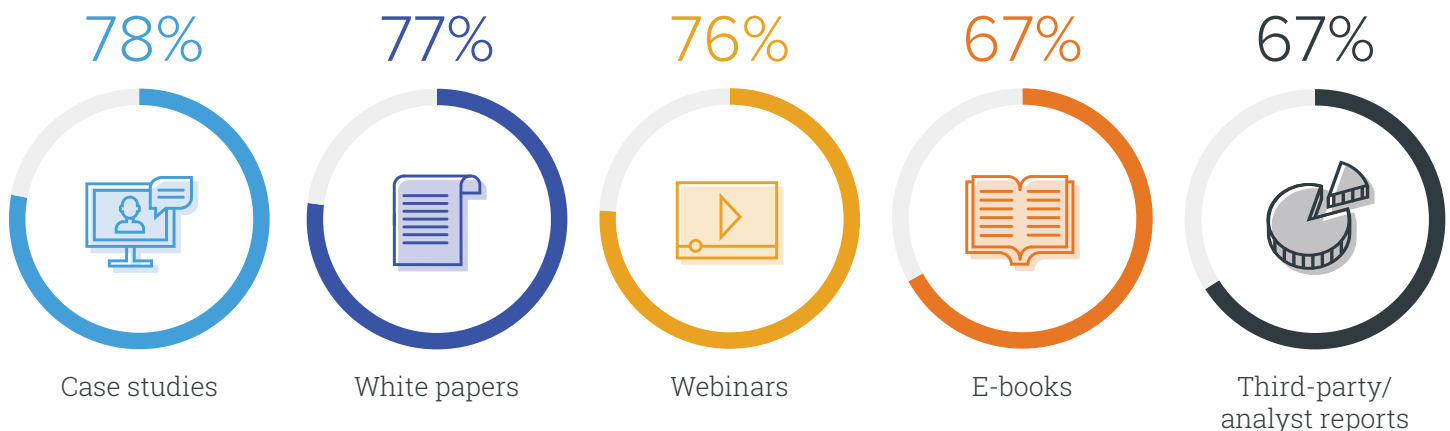
This year's survey illustrates buyers' need to benchmark themselves against their peers and study real-world examples of solutions in action. Case studies emerged as the top content type, with 78% of buyers accessing this format type as they researched purchases in the past 12 months. (vs. 72% in 2016) Buyers also continue to rely on white papers, webinars and E-book formats for research.

Shorter formats—including blog posts, infographics and ROI calculators—remained steady among buyers year over year, while third-party/analyst reports were cited by more than two-thirds of buyers (67%) for research this past year, up from 62% last year. Another strong benchmarking format, assessments, also saw steady growth, gaining seven percentage points to 32% of respondents vs. the 2016 survey.

When we specifically asked which sources and formats are *most valuable* for research, case studies again emerged on top, with 48% of respondents indicating them as most valuable, followed by third-party/analyst reports (44%) and white papers (35%).

Analyst reports, assessments, case studies and ROI calculators cited as key for benchmarking among buyers.

Which types of content have you used during the past 12 months to research B2B purchasing decisions? (Check all that apply)



ACCESSIBLE CONTENT AND THOUGHT LEADER INSIGHTS PREFERRED BY BUYERS

Buyers are interested in content that is easy to access, will help them compare their efforts with their peers or justify their investment. Among the top recommendations they would give marketers in order to improve content quality were: use more data and research, and more benchmarking data.

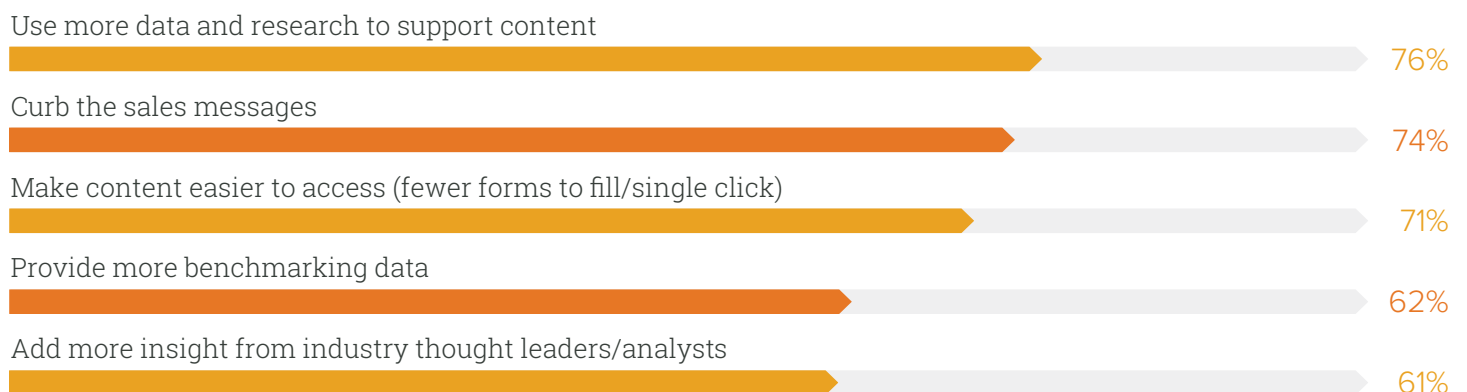
Buyers also want to be able to access additional content on-demand. A total of 58% of buyers recommended marketers package related content together. Forty-four percent suggested more mobile-friendly content.

Ninety-nine percent said they want content with insight from industry thought leaders and analysts. Of that, 61% strongly agree with that sentiment (chart below).

Buyers give the most credence to peer reviews and user generated feedback; 68% of respondents said they frequently give credence to this form of content, while 60% give credence to content authored by a third-party publication or analyst.

71% said they want content that is easier to access, while 62% want more benchmarking data.

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

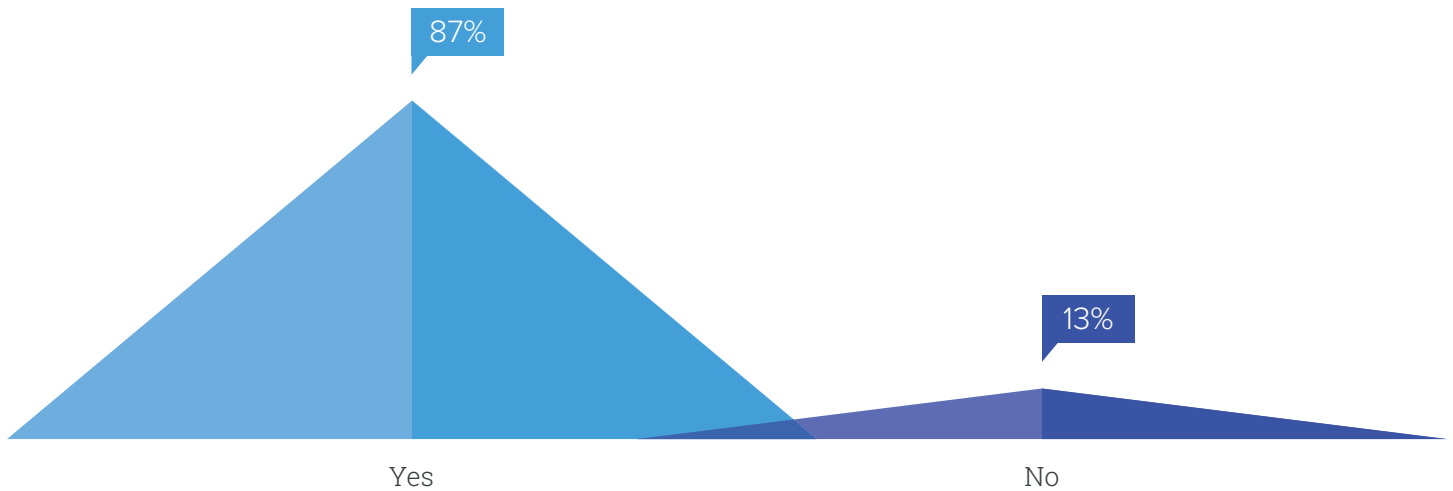


Content shared by an industry influencer is given more credence when buyers consider how much time and weight to devote to a piece of content. An overwhelming 87% of buyers said they give more credence to industry influencer content. Last year, 35% of buyers said they gave more credence to content shared by an influencer, and 58% said it depends on the content/influencer.

87%

of buyers give more credence to industry influencer content.

When considering how much time/weight to devote to a piece of content, do you give more credence to content that is shared by an industry influencer?

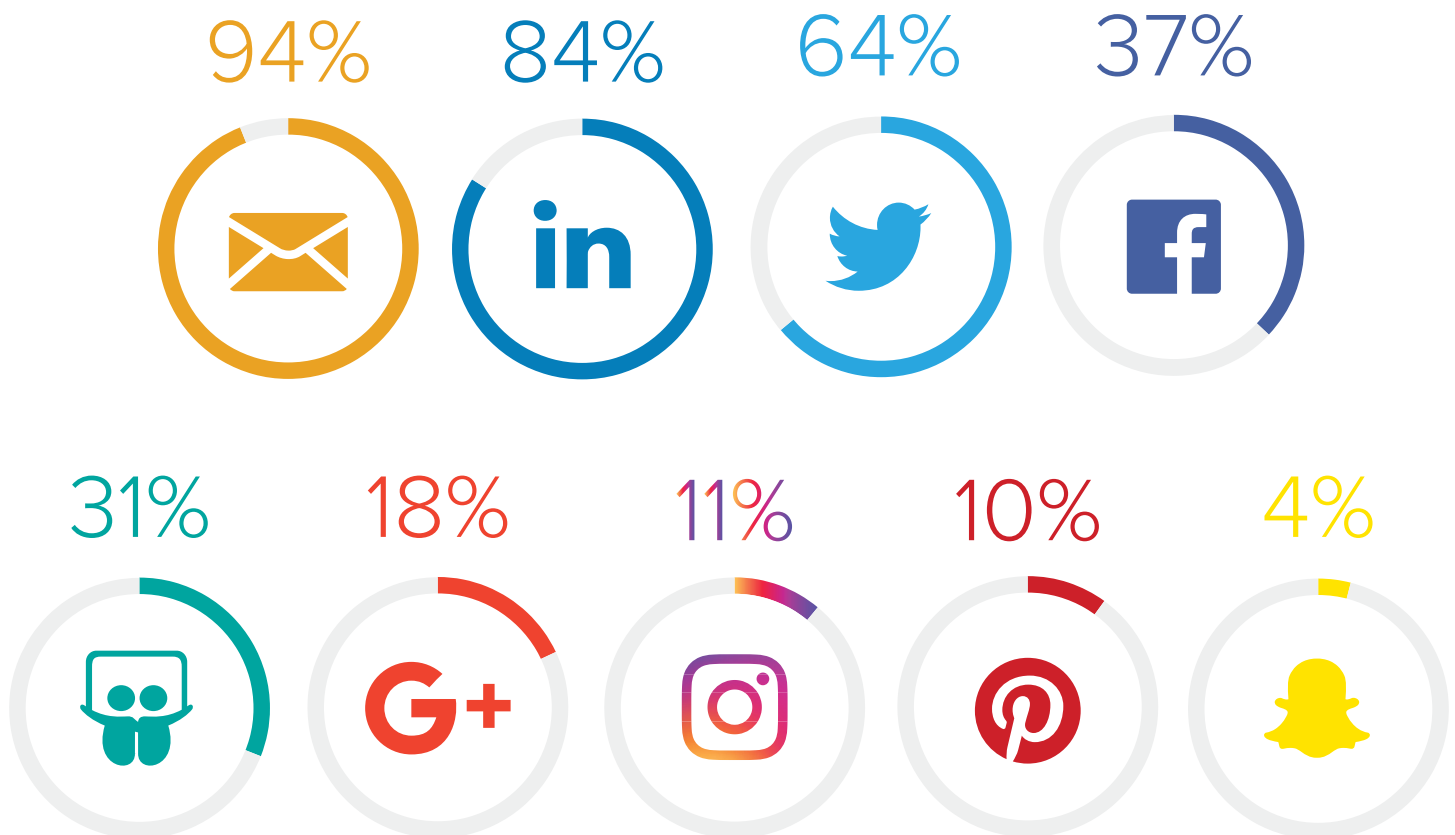


LINKEDIN REMAINS TOP SOCIAL PLATFORM FOR SHARING BUSINESS-RELATED CONTENT

LinkedIn remains the top social network buyers rely on for sharing business-related content. A total of 84% of buyers said they occasionally or frequently share business content on LinkedIn. Email is still the channel most buyers employ to share content: 94% cited email as their number one channel for sharing. Facebook held steady, cited by 37% of respondents, while Twitter saw a small increase to 64% this year, compared with 62% of respondents last year saying they frequently or occasionally used the platform.

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Which channels do you use to share business-related content? (Frequently Or Occasionally)



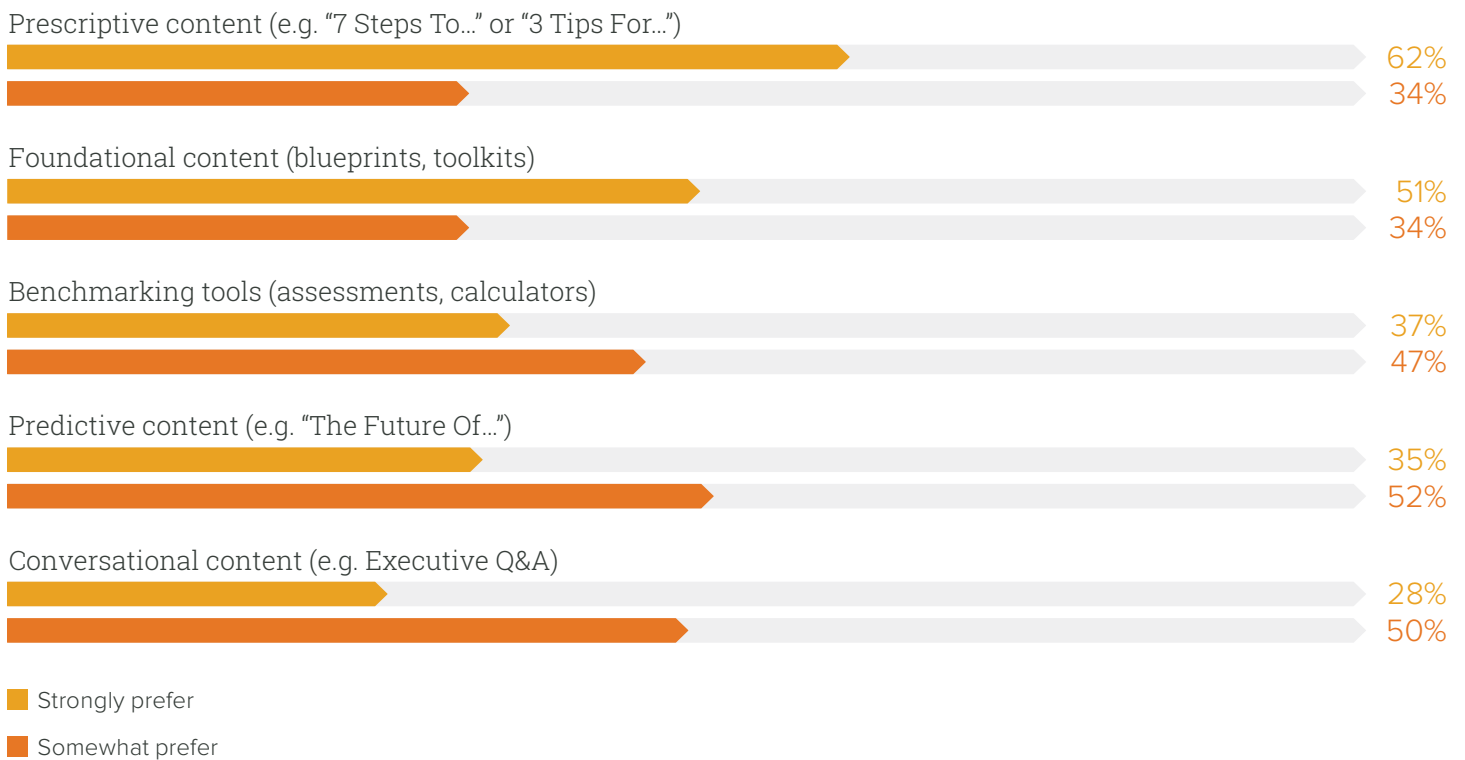
PRESCRIPTIVE AND PREDICTIVE CONTENT ARE TOP PREFERENCE AMONG BUYERS

As far as the types of content buyers prefer, prescriptive content that recommends a formulaic solution came out on top for the third year in a row, with 97% citing it.

Predictive content—content with titles like “The Future Of...”—was cited by 87%, mirroring the results of our 2016 and 2015 surveys. Foundational content – i.e., toolkits and blueprints -- came in third, with 85%.

A majority (97%) of buyers prefer prescriptive content.

Please describe your preferences for the following general content types:



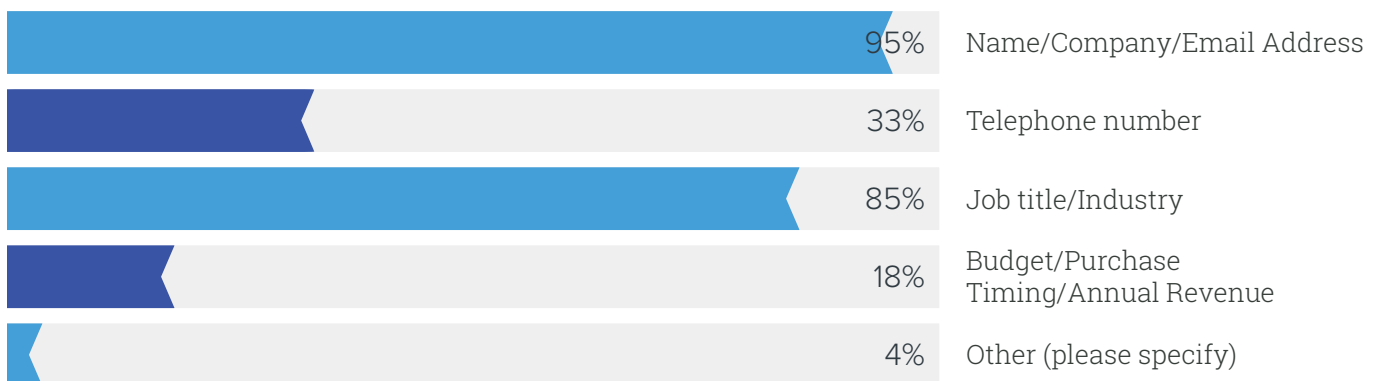
BUYERS INCLINED TO SHARE ONLY BASIC INFORMATION IN CONTENT VALUE EXCHANGE

Buyers indicated they are willing to share basic information about themselves in exchange for content; 95% of buyers said they would share their name/company/ email address. Eighty-five percent were also willing to give job title and industry, but just 33% were willing to give up their phone number. Even less (18%) said they would give their budget, purchase timing and annual revenue.

In terms of content asset types, buyers said they are most willing to register for and share information about themselves in exchange for white papers (76% said they will share information), E-books (63%), webinars (79%), case studies (57%) and third-party/analyst reports (66%). They're less willing to register for asset types such as podcasts (19%), video (19%) and infographics (24%).

Only one-third of buyers are willing to share their phone number in exchange for content.

When you are willing to share information in exchange for content, what information are you willing to share about yourself? (Check all that apply)



OPTIMIZE THE CONTENT EXPERIENCE TO ENGAGE CUSTOMERS

Buyers today are looking for content that is mobile optimized, well-organized and easily discoverable. They also want content in an engaging format that doesn't lead to a dead end, but rather recommends the next relevant piece of content. No one wants to go through intricate lead gen forms and processes; we want easily accessible content. Think about the last time you wanted to watch a movie at home. None of us are still driving our families to the local Blockbuster to wander the aisles of alphabetized DVDs. Instead we turn on Netflix and pick from recommendations of new movies and shows that suit our tastes. The expectations for B2B content aren't much different.

The problem is that most B2B organizations lack the infrastructure to create, tailor and control the content experiences that their buyers are looking for. Many B2B marketers are stuck offering their buyers a homogenous experience rather than a personalized one. They see limited ROI from their content efforts, because they lack the ability to optimize the content experience and are sacrificing conversions and engagement.

Content is the most effective way to ignite meaningful relationships, but even the greatest content must be combined with a remarkable experience to reach its full potential. A great content experience keeps your buyers engaged by allowing them to easily choose the content journey that makes sense for them. B2B marketers need to create remarkable content experiences across the entire buyer journey – starting with marketing, and expanding to sales and customer success.



Shannon Dougall,
VP Marketing, Uberflip


Shannon Dougall is an adventurer, scientist, and artist in the field of marketing. She has been compared to a Swiss Army Knife, using her experiences and learnings towards an all-in-one type of demand generation and customer acquisition.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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[Read more from Carol.](#)


ABOUT THE SURVEY

The *2017 Content Preferences Survey* polled 189 buyers of B2B products and services about their use of content in making purchasing decisions. One-third of respondents serve the technology/software industry, and 28% offer business services/consulting. Fifty-nine percent of respondents were from companies with annual revenue of more than \$10 million. More than half (52%) of the respondents hold C-level, VP-level or Director-level positions at their companies.

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