EXCLUSIVE RESEARCH FROM IDG

THE STATE OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT: IT'S COMPLICATED

Results from the 2017 Customer Engagement Study provide a roadmap to get it right

CIO COMPUTERWORLD CSO InfoWorld ITWORLD NETWORKWORLD

IN AN ELECTION year that was dominated by the phenomenon of fake news, the question of whom to trust loomed large. Trust issues also dominate the IT buying market, where buyers are wrestling with more choices than ever, less time to make decisions and bigger business outcomes at stake.

The 2017 IDG Customer Engagement Study, now in its fifth year, contains good news and bad news for technology marketers.

On the plus side, buyers across both the IT and business spectrum exhibit receptive attitudes toward useful information regardless of the source. Vendors who demonstrate excellent knowledge of the buyer's industry, the customer's technology platforms and business needs can quickly transition to the hallowed short list. Don't be afraid to reach out, either; 98% of the 800 IT decision-makers (ITDMs) and business decision-makers (BDMs) surveyed have engaged with a potential vendor who contacted them first.

On the other hand, buyers who are more pressed for time than ever, have shorter attention spans and less patience to deal with irrelevant messages. Continuing a pattern that has pervaded the four previous surveys, a significant minority (38%) say they are hesitant to download content for fear of unwanted sales follow-up, a figure that's up slightly from

IT'S COMPLICATED, BUT A ROADMAP WILL HELP

83% HAVE REGISTERED FOR TECH-RELATED INFO IN THE PAST 6 MONTHS

58% will register for content that will help them make more informed buying decisions

7 *Average number of assets downloaded during the purchase process*

EMAIL IS THE PREFERRED METHOD OF FOLLOW-UP

49% don't want to be contacted by phone (ever)

62% WANT ADDITIONAL INFO SPECIFIC TO CONTENT THEY REGISTERED FOR

1/3 give their business to the first person who answers their questions around a solution

AFTER CONTENT IS CONSUMED, SALES SHOULD **FOLLOW UP IN 6+ DAYS**

EDUCATION **7**

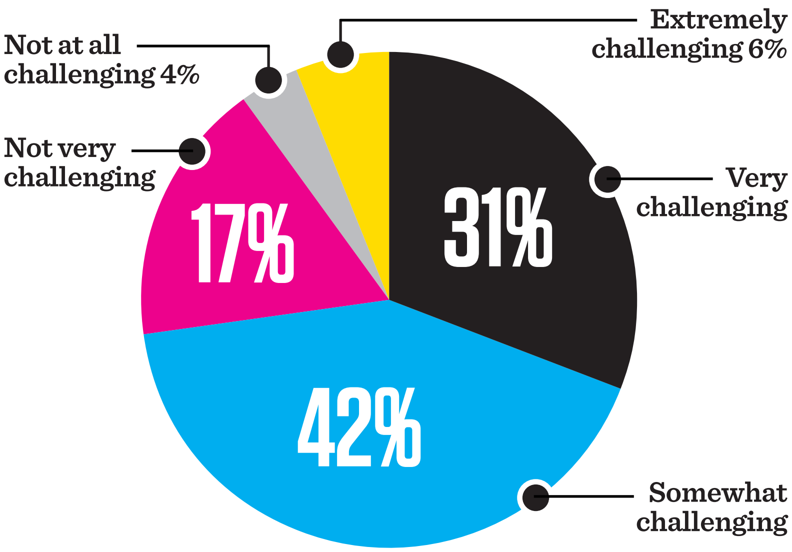
MANUFACTURING **7**

GOVT/NON-PROFIT **8**

76% say their likelihood of purchase is impacted by the salesperson contacting them within their desired timeframe

UP FROM 68% IN 2016

ITDMs FIND IT CHALLENGING TO FIND INFORMATION THEY NEED



Too much marketing hype or empty buzzwords	56%
Lack of truly independent, unbiased information	46%
Hesitant to download because I don't want the sales follow-up	38%
Information is too general	37%
Incomplete or inconsistent technical info	30%
Too time consuming to figure out if source is reliable, trustworthy	28%
Lack of relevant information	22%

36% in 2016. The good news is that inbound marketing and robust customer profiling can create a foundation of trust engagement with customers and prospects.

For vendors who do successfully connect, it's all about being in the right place at the right time. More than three-quarters of decision-makers say their likelihood of purchase is impacted by the timing of the salesperson, up from 68% last year. One remarkable finding was that one-third of IT and business decision-makers will give their business to the first person who offers a solution, a finding that attests to the compressed time frames many are dealing with.

Buyers particularly appreciate being offered additional information about topics in which they've already shown interest, along with demonstrated awareness of their business and general information about other products the company offers. Nearly three-quarters say they particularly appreciate a vendor that provides a consistent experience and information flow through a variety of channels.

But their attitude toward technology marketers is complex. On the one hand, decision-makers fear that marketers will take advantage of the interest they show in filling out a registration form to send them irrelevant messages. On the other, they value useful content from vendors as much as from any other source.

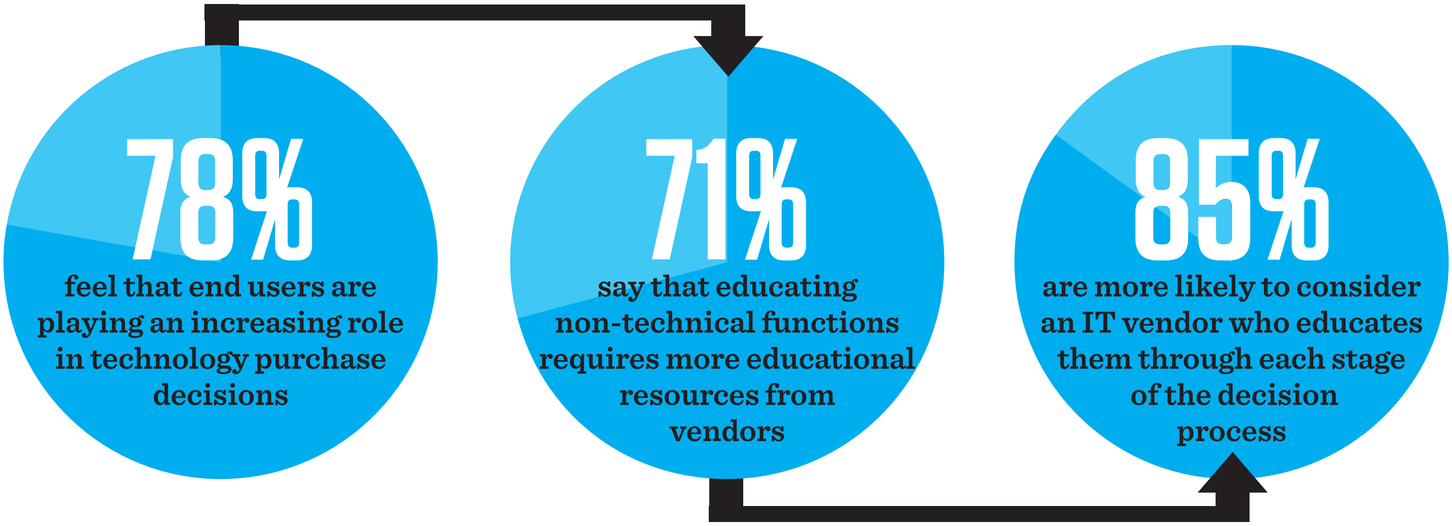
Inbound marketing and robust customer profiling can create a foundation of trust engagement with customers and prospects.

Digital Tightrope

IT ORGANIZATIONS TODAY are walking a tightrope driven by the twin factors of digital transformation and user self-service. Technology decisions are critical to the digital transformation initiatives that many organizations are now undergoing, but IT departments are no longer the sole arbiter of technology decisions. Nearly eight in ten respondents to our survey told us that end users are playing an increasingly important role in technology purchase decisions, and 71% said they need more content that helps them educate others within their organizations.

Here, again, technology providers are falling short. Fifty-six percent of ITDMs told us their search for quality information was frustrated by "too much marketing hype/empty buzzwords" and 46% blamed "lack of truly independent,

EDUCATION IS ESSENTIAL TO THE PURCHASE PROCESS



unbiased information." There were some stark differences between business and IT titles in this area. IT management respondents are considerably less concerned with finding unbiased information than their counterparts on the business side, but they're significantly more critical of vendor-provided information that's too general. This points to an imbalance in information needs, with IT seeking depth while business users want a broader understanding of the decisions they need to make.

Marketers need to map their content to the buying stage, being aware that business and IT influencers have different needs at different times. In general, thought leadership content is more valuable to BDMs, while ITDMs want hard data that demonstrates the value the solutions provide.

The Age of Content

CONTENT HAS BECOME the new advertising. An overwhelming 92% of B2B buyers frequently or sometimes use third-party content to maintain a vendor relationship or advocate the use of a vendor's products, according to the CMO Council. An encouraging finding of our study is that buyers say they're nearly as receptive to information from technology vendors as from publications and industry analysts. In fact, 85% tell us that IT vendors that educate them through each stage of the decision process are more likely to get their business.

Early-funnel investigation typically begins with a search engine, meaning that search-optimizing thought-leadership content is particularly important. Despite the proliferation of new channels to reach the customer, search continues to be the second-largest lead generation vehicle at B2B companies, according to a recent DemandWave survey. Input from trusted sources and peers heavily influences the content buyers choose to consume as they move through the buying cycle. This makes it critical that technology vendors make their content easy to discover and to share. Many still have work to do, however, as the percentage of respondents who told us it's extremely or very challenging to find valuable, trusted information rose from to 37% this year from 30% in the 2016 survey.

The influence of friends' recommendations on trust was validated by a recent Media Insight Project study that con-

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cluded that the amount of trust that people invest in content is determined less by who creates it than by who shares it. The same dynamics apply to technology decision-making.

Three-quarters of decision-makers told us that peer recommendations influence trust, making it by far the most important factor in their judgment criteria. That was followed by association with a known and familiar source (66%) and design/navigation (57%). Ironically, social media appears to be declining as of a factor in content sharing, even as the volume of content shared through social channels grows. This year we saw across-the-board declines in the percentage of decision-makers who forward content to friends, search in social channels, comment on websites and link to content from social networks. A variety of factors may be at work here, including privacy concerns, trolling and content overload as the volume of traffic streaming across Twitter and Facebook increases.

Yet there's no evidence that decision-makers are reducing their use of social networks. In fact, 87% of respondents use social media sites for business purposes, up from 82% in 2016. Use of LinkedIn and YouTube both grew between 2016 and 2017, while Facebook and Twitter held steady. Our survey validated the importance of LinkedIn as a B2B channel, with three-quarters of executive IT and two-thirds of IT management survey-takers saying they use it.

There was interesting news for social media marketers in some of the disparities shown between marketing investment and buyer usage.* While the 95% of marketers who use LinkedIn would appear to be on the right track, the 89% who use Facebook and 94% who use Twitter may be overspending on those channels. Both get regular attention of only about one quarter of the decision-makers we surveyed.

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Follow the Funnel

DEPENDING UPON THEIR stage in the buying cycle, buyers express different content needs, platform preferences and willingness to spend time with content. Predictably, their interests narrow from general information at the top of the funnel to hands-on demos, ROI calculators and other decision-making tools as purchase time approaches.

CONTENT TYPES USED BY TECH DECISION-MAKERS

EXEC IT		IT MGMT		IT PRO		BIZ MGMT	
85%	Product testing/ reviews/opinions	91%	Product testing/ reviews/opinions	87%	Product testing/ reviews/opinions	70%	Product testing/ reviews/opinions
83%	Product demo/ product literature	91%	Product demo/ product literature	83%	Product demo/ product literature	77%	Product demo/ product literature
80%	Technology news	80%	Analyst research	79%	Technology news	67%	Technology news
76%	Vendor presentations	77%	Case studies	71%	Vendor presentations	65%	Vendor presentations
75%	Case studies	75%	Vendor presentations	69%	How-to content/ information	64%	Analyst research
	Feature article about technologies		Interviews with technology experts				

* Source: Technology Content Marketing 2016: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America, Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs.

> **Tests/reviews/opinions and demos/product literature rank number one and two in perceived value.**

Our survey uncovered somewhat different preferences between IT and business decision-makers, and also between people at different levels in the IT organization, but the same content types were generally popular with both groups.

In general, buyers in the early stage of research rely on technology news, trend articles, case studies and analyst reports. It will interest marketers to know that "vendor presentations" and "product literature" tied with "analyst research" at this stage, indicating that decision-makers are open to any information that points them in the right direction, regardless of the source.

As they move into the process of determining technical requirements, evaluating products and selecting vendors, product-specific information assumes a more-prominent role. In fact, at all three of those critical decision-making stages our research found that tests, reviews, opinions and demos rank number one and two in perceived value. Vendor presentations also assume a prominent role in the evaluation and vendor selection phases.

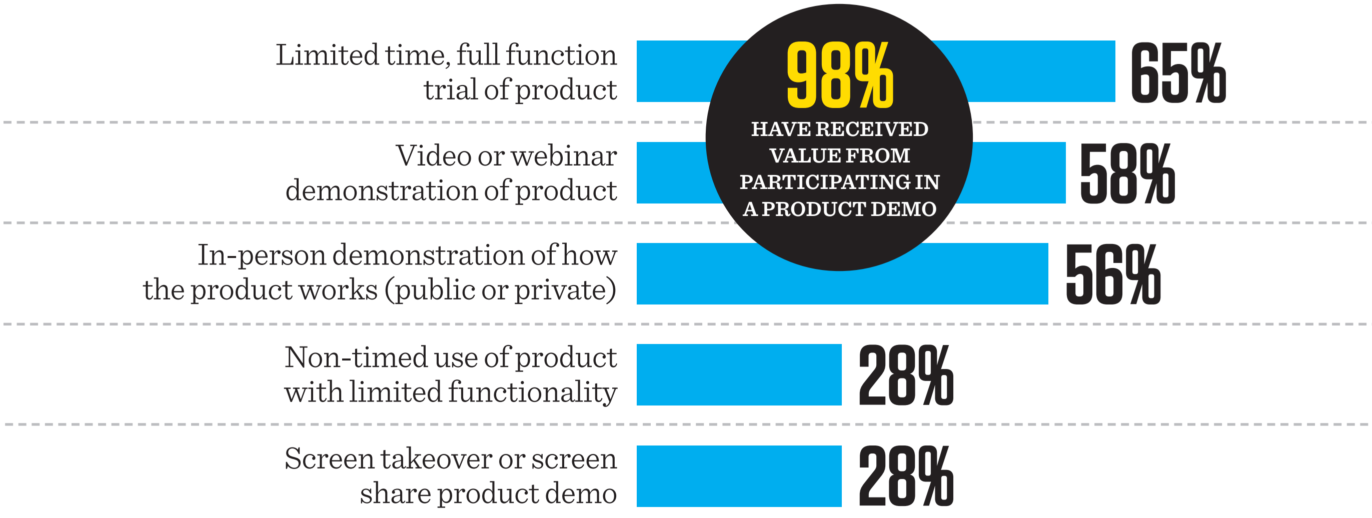
In the final two stages of the funnel – selling internally and approving purchase – product specific demonstrations and testing information are king. However, case studies, ROI tools and product literature also feature prominently at this point, when ITDMs are seeking validation and support for decisions they have already made.

Looking at favored content types across the funnel, we see that product demos, literature, testing and reviews are critical to the mid-funnel stages that shape decisions. Thought leadership content, such as feature articles, third-party research and buyers' guides, are most useful in the "determine need" stage, but fall off sharply after that. This is worth noting, since many technology companies invest more heavily in thought leadership content than in other areas. While these

CONTENT TYPES BY PURCHASE STAGE

Rank	1 Determine Business Need	2 Determine Technical Requirements	3 Evaluate Products & Services	4 Recommend & Select Vendors	5 Sell Internally	6 Approve & Authorize Purchase
1	Technology news	Product demo/product literature	Product testing/reviews/opinions	Product testing/reviews/opinions	Product demo/product literature	Product testing/reviews/opinions
2	Feature article about trends, strategies, management	Product testing/reviews/opinions	Product demo/product literature	Product demo/product literature	Case studies	ROI tool, calculator, other assessment tool
3	Case studies	Technology news	Vendor presentations	Vendor presentations	ROI tool, calculator, other assessment tool	Product demo/product literature
4	Feature article about technologies	Feature article about technologies	Peer presentations	Analyst research	Analyst research	Analyst research
5	Analyst research	How-to content/information	Technology news	Technology news	Product testing/reviews/opinions	Vendor presentations
	Vendor presentations		Case studies	Case studies		
	Product demo/product literature			Interviews with technology experts		
				Peer presentations		

DEMO TYPES THAT PROVIDE THE MOST VALUE



investments may be doing a good job of attracting early-stage buyers, they aren't necessarily helping to close the deal.

Demos generally take one of two forms: a guided walk-through driven by a company representative or a "try before you buy" demo version that the prospective customer can download and use independently. Decision-makers find value in both of these approaches, with 65% favoring full function trials followed closely by video or webinar demonstrations at 58%. IT executives favor full-function trials over video demos by a six-to-five margin, but IT pros and business managers find more value in guided demos than in trial products. Decision-makers at large companies also show preference for in-person demonstrations, while SMB buyers prefer product trials. The popularity of product demonstrations across the board indicates that video assets that show your products in action should be easily discoverable by buyers, since they are likely at the crucial decision-making stage.

It's worth noting that preferences can vary significantly depending upon functional role and geography. For example, business managers are far less interested in free trials than their peers on the IT side, but show more interest in case studies. Non-U.S. respondents value case studies more than people in the US by 58% to 45%.

In many cases, buyers are asked to fill out a registration form in exchange for content. As we noted earlier, many approach this process with trepidation. Marketers must balance their desire to learn as much as possible about a prospect with the buyer's tolerance for giving up information. On average, buyers say five questions on a registration form is about right. Fortunately, this is right in line with the results of the B2B Technology Marketing Community on LinkedIn's 2015 Lead Generation survey, which found that 79% of marketers feel three to five fields is about right.

Sales and marketing professionals need to proceed delicately in following up on lead generation forms. Buyers overwhelmingly prefer email follow-up to contact by telephone. In fact, 49% say it is never acceptable to call them under any circumstance. Email follow-up should be limited to once per month, as less than one-third of buyers say they will tolerate more-frequent contact. This year's

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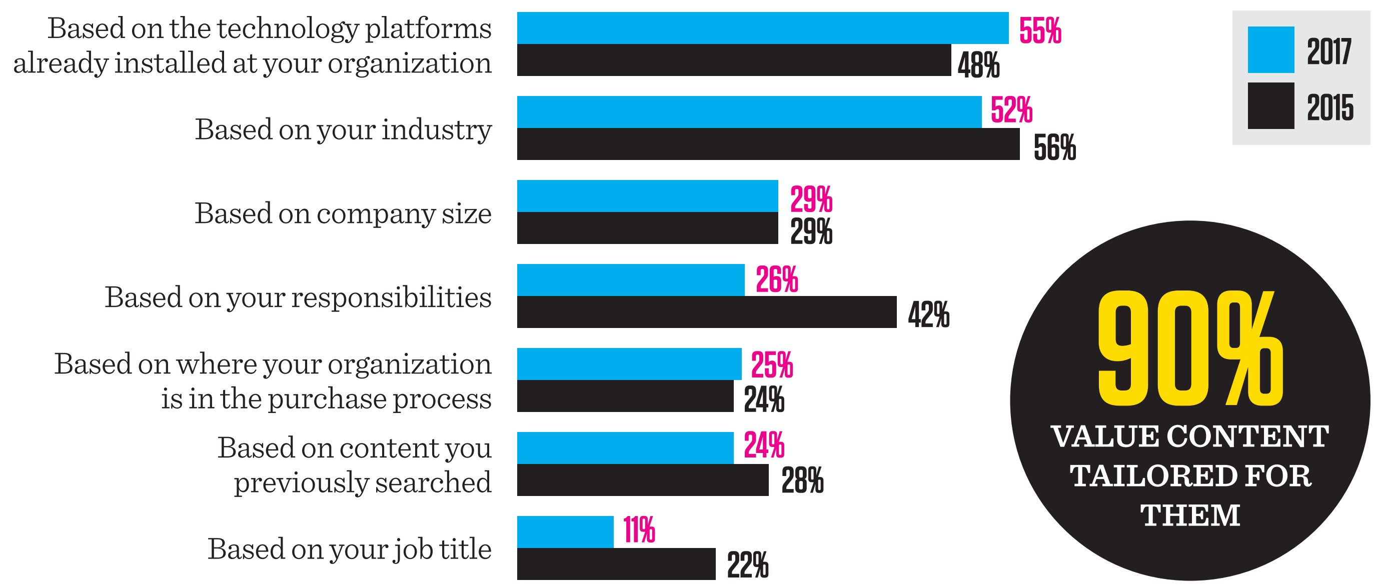
HOW DO YOU LIKE YOUR CONTENT TAILORED?



study was the first to ask about contact by text, and the response was overwhelming: 74% of respondents said it is never acceptable to text them. It appears that texting is considered a private space and one that is off limits to those who lack permission.

When following up, personalized messages are appreciated. Fortunately, big data and analytics tools have introduced unprecedented opportunities to do just that. It's not surprising that spending on marketing analytics is expected to leap from 4.6% to almost 22% of marketing budgets over the next three years, according to a recent Fuqua/Duke Business School CMO survey. Our findings indicate that not only do ITDM's appreciate tailored content, but they are coming to expect it.

An overwhelming 90% of respondents say they want content customized to their unique needs, up from 83% in our survey three years ago. The two customization criteria that most interest them are the platform(s) they use and their industry. In fact, no other factors even come close in importance. Notably, buyer interest in content tailored to responsibilities and titles fell considerably year-over-year – down by nearly half. This may indicate that business transformation and IT democratization driven by cloud-based services and "bring your own device" policies are making formal titles and responsibilities more fluid and less meaningful. The decline in the importance of titles will be an interesting trend to watch in future surveys.

Old and New Platforms

OUR SURVEY DELVED into two platforms that buyers frequently use to help them in the research process: The venerable event and the still-maturing medium of online video. We found that both are alive and well.

You might remember the days when the internet was expected to make trade shows and conferences obsolete. Judging by the results of our survey, it will be a long time before that happens. Two-thirds of decision-makers said they plan to either increase or hold steady their attendance

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at trade shows this year. Just 17% expect to attend fewer events. Factoring out the 17% who never attend events at all, 80% will attend at least as many forums in 2017 as they did last year. Regional events are holding up particularly well.

And here's good news for marketers: Vendor road shows are the most popular events of all, with 59% of decision-makers planning to either maintain or increase attendance. Trade shows and conferences produced by independent third parties also show strength.

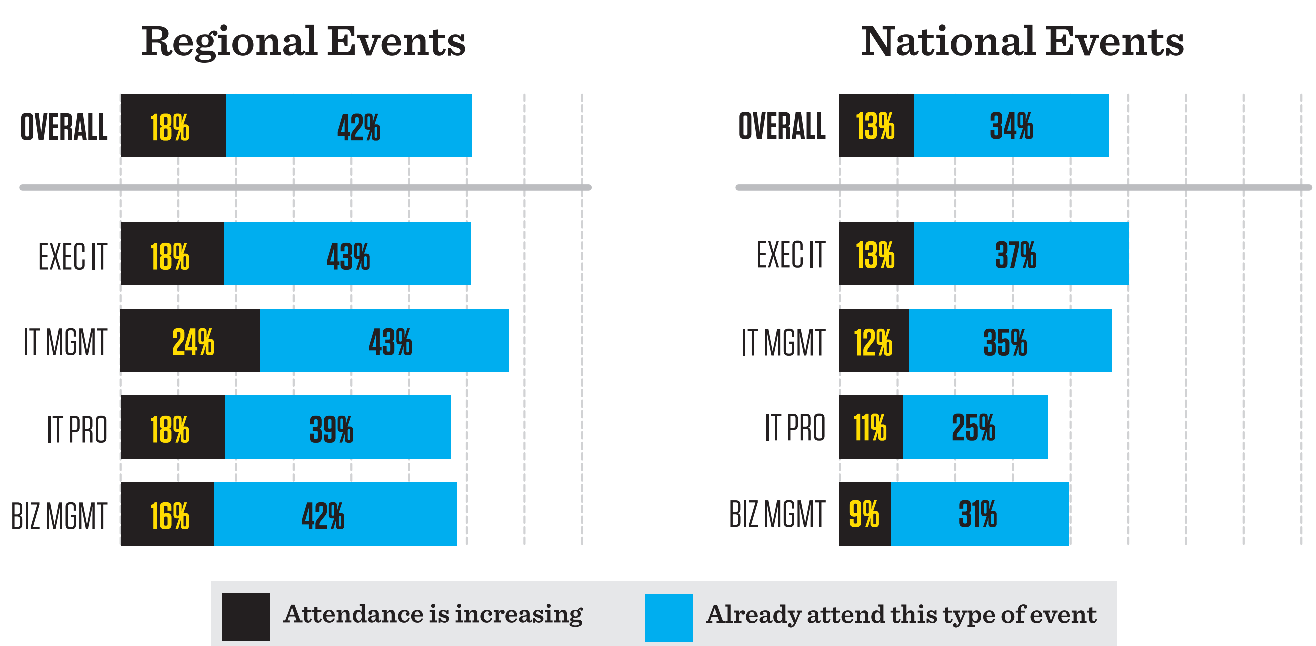
The top benefits of events are seen as interaction with products and vendors, with the opportunity to see/try new products mentioned by 64% of respondents. Enterprise ITDMs have more aggressive plans to increase event attendance than those that SMB companies.

Online video has gone mainstream as a tool that decision-makers use across the sales cycle, with 95% of respondents saying they watch technology-related video content. Video is used most often to evaluate products and services (cited by 84% of respondents) but 72% also use it when determining business need, 77% when defining technical requirements and 68% when recommending and selecting vendors. Usage declines in the lower funnel after decisions have already been made. The two most popular platforms for viewing video are vendor websites (used by 71%) and third-party technology content sites (64%).

> **The top benefits of events are seen as interaction with products and vendors, with the opportunity to see and try new products.**

What they watch and how long they spend watching varies widely according to the objective. Buyers exhibit the most patience when viewing webcasts, devoting an average of 16.52 minutes to them, which is up slightly from the previous year's 16.2 minutes. However, time spent viewing is down in nearly every other category. First-look product videos get an average of 6.63 minutes of attention,

REGIONAL EVENTS SEE A RISE IN INTEREST



Content marketing represents a sea change in the way vendors approach their prospects and customers...when done well, it can establish a new trust plateau based on conversation, empathy and shared commitment to success.

down from 8.1 minutes. Time spent with in-depth product reviews is down by nearly two minutes, and how-to videos are getting an average of one minute less attention this year compared to last. Time spent on industry news reports dropped dramatically, from 9.5 minutes to 6.9 minutes. These findings are consistent with other evidence in the study that indicates the buyers simply have less time to conduct research.

Marketers would do well to hire video professionals or invest in good quality equipment. Nearly half of the decision-makers we surveyed say video production quality is critical or very important, compared to only 10% who say it doesn't matter much at all. Young professionals are more demanding than their older counterparts; 21% of respondents between the ages of 18 and 34 rate production quality as critical compared to only 6% of those between the ages of 45 and 49.

Conclusions

AS WE NOTED at the outset, technology decision-makers have a conflicted view toward technology vendors. Having had unpleasant sales experiences in the past, they are skeptical that marketers and salespeople can truly be allies in decision-making. However, they do find value in marketing content if it is customized to their specific needs.

Marketing and sales organizations need to be more closely aligned than ever in the quest to deliver consistent, helpful information that makes buyers successful. They also need to revisit some traditional ways of doing business in order to define a sales process that centers on what is important to the buyer rather than the seller. So much technology is changing so quickly that successful sales and marketing teams will be those that can identify organizations in a state of flux and recommend solutions rather than respond to RFPs. They need to be able to demonstrate understanding of the buyer's problem and business and to address those specific needs. Canned sales pitches will be tuned out.

Technology sales and marketing professionals also need to pay more attention to existing customers. Our research surfaced a potentially significant disconnect between marketers' tactics and customer needs in the area of retention marketing. Buyers told us that when working with familiar vendors, they make decisions nearly twice as fast as when the vendor is unknown to them. Yet the primary focus of most content marketing campaigns continues to be on new lead generation. When asked to define their content marketing goals, marketers said the top five all related to lead generation, while the bottom three were about customer retention.*

This dovetails with recent research by sales training firm Corporate Visions that found that 80% of B2B companies don't differentiate their messages between existing customers and first-time prospects. Since we all know that it's easier to generate more business from existing customers than to find new ones, this lack of attention to cultivating existing sources of business is puzzling. The tactics we use to get the attention of a stranger are very different from the ones we employ to open a discussion with a friend. By failing to differentiate messaging to these valuable current customers, marketers are leaving money on the table.

Content marketing represents a sea change in the way vendors approach their prospects and customers. The 2017 Customer Engagement Survey shows that, when done well, it can establish a new trust plateau based on conversation, empathy and shared commitment to success.

* Source: Technology Content Marketing 2016: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America, Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs.

CONTENT MARKETING **SOLUTIONS**

Tech marketers cite lack of bandwidth to create valuable content as one of their biggest challenges. Whether it is a need for more content, help with orchestrating the distribution across the funnel, or a lack of focus on key touch points most important to your target audience that is causing missed engagement opportunities, we can help!

Our Strategic Marketing Services provide full-service global digital marketing services which leverage IDG's 50+ years of expertise in engaging and acquiring audiences through high-quality content.

We create high-quality content marketing solutions that drive technology buyers to take action. Through the broad range of services from content strategy and development to customized integrated marketing solutions that engage audiences on social, native, mobile and desktop platforms, we combine our institutional knowledge with data intelligence to build relevance, context and impact.

- **Content assessment**
- **Funnel analysis**
- **Messaging alignment**
- **Content integration guide**
- **Content calendar**
- **Measurement and optimization**

- **Design and production services**
- **Image creation**

- **Topic and audience analysis**
- **Primary research studies**

HIGH VALUE CONTENT
- **White papers and dossiers**
- **Interviews**
- **ebooks**
- **Presentations/Slideshare**
- **Webinars/Webcasts**

PREMIUM CONTENT
- **Articles & Blogs**
- **Case Studies**
- **Infographics/Motion Graphics**
- **Video/Series**
- **Crowd Sources Content**
- **Sales Enablement Tools**

Modifying and repurposing assets:
- **Localization**
- **Translation**
- **Verticalization**
- **New formats**

We are uniquely positioned to help you create and optimize content, leveraging the multitude of tools and platforms needed to reach your goals. For more information contact your sales executive or visit us online at: www.idg.com/marketingservices

EXAMINING THE **MARKETPLACE**

We think research is invaluable in helping to connect marketers with customers and prospects. Our research portfolio explores our audiences' perspectives and challenges around specific technologies, examines the changing roles within the IT purchase process, and arms IT marketers with the information they need to identify opportunities. To review the presentation of full results from any of these studies, contact your IDG sales executive or **Sue Yanovitch, VP, Marketing at sue_yanovitch@idg.com.**

BUYING PROCESS

Each year we take a deep dive into the enterprise IT purchase process to learn more about who is involved and who influences decision-making, what sources purchasers rely on to keep up to date with technology—and throughout the purchase process—and how they feel about the vendors they're working with.

- **Role & Influence of the Technology Decision-Maker**
  The annual IDG Role & Influence of the Technology Decision-Maker survey is conducted to gain insight into the evolving role and influence of IT decision-makers in today's corporations. The research examines the involvement of IT decision-makers during each stage of the IT purchase process and the primary influences and information sources they rely on throughout the purchase process.
- **Customer Engagement**
  The IDG Customer Engagement survey looks at the role content consumption plays in the purchase process for major technology products and services, and provides insights to IT marketers to map their engagement touchpoints to customers information needs. The survey looks at how a wide variety of content types are used throughout the individual stages of the IT purchase process and how that content is consumed, discussed and shared.

TECHNOLOGY INSIGHTS

Each year we explore the technologies that are top of mind among our audiences to understand the business challenges, drivers, and adoption within the enterprise. Each research study is designed to help IT marketers understand what their customers are focused on and where the market is moving.

- **Role & Priority Studies**
  CIO Tech Poll: Economic Outlook
  CIO Tech Poll: Tech Priorities
  CIO/CMO Partnership
  Computerworld Forecast Study
  Cyber Security Watch Survey
  Global Information Security Survey
  State of the CIO
  Architect Persona
  Developer Persona
  State of the Network
- **Technology Specific Studies:**
  Big Data & Analytics: Insights into Initiatives & Strategies Driving Data Investments
  Cloud Computing: Key Trends and Future Effects
  Consumerization of IT in the Enterprise
  The Mobile First Enterprise
  Unified Communications & Collaboration
  Security Priorities

CUSTOMER JOURNEY POSTER

Want to know which content drives IT decision-makers and fuels their engagement during the IT purchase process? IDG's Customer Journey poster serves as your content marketing guide to strategically reach your target customers.
Request a copy of the poster at www.idgenterprise.com/report/customer-journey-poster

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