ENTERPRISE TECHNOLOGY DECISIONS BECOME A BUSINESS PRIORITY

If any doubts remain that information technology buying decisions are now very much a business issue, the **2016 IDG Role & Influence of the technology decision-maker** survey should put them to rest.

CIO COMPUTERWORLD CSO InfoWorld ITWORLD NETWORKWORLD

NOW IN ITS 10TH YEAR, the Role & Influence of the Technology Decision-Maker study documents an IT buying process that is increasingly collaborative, with both IT and business influencers involving themselves in all aspects of technology decisions and even moving back and forth between departments. While many traditional role delineations are still in place, rigid distinctions are becoming harder to come by.

And influence is more diffuse as well. An average of more than 18 decision-makers now participate in a typical IT purchase decision, with an almost even split between IT and the business.

Our survey also finds that the buying funnel is becoming more fluid, with business and IT functions involved at all stages of the buying process. While IT professionals continue to have principal responsibility for decisions regarding platforms and technologies, they are also more likely to be involved with defining business objectives than they have been in the past.

Organizations are becoming more changeable as well. Just over half of respondents said they've moved from an IT to a business role or vice versa, and nearly six in 10 IT and business leaders alike have moved roles, perhaps pointing to the fact that gaining experience in both disciplines is good for their careers. Among business managers, that movement is up significantly from just one year ago.

Business-side users are increasingly involved in – and in some cases, driving – IT decisions, particularly in areas like big data analytics and cloud computing. But business influencer involvement isn't consistent across the process. Different people within the organization influence decisions at different stages of the buying cycle. The challenge for marketers is knowing who to target with messages at each stage. We provide a more detailed breakdown of influence levels at different stages of the funnel later in this document.

52% have moved from an IT to a BUSINESS role or vice versa

One thing that hasn't changed for decades is that influencers rely heavily upon peer advice, particularly at the beginning and end of the buying process. However, technology vendors and independent publishers continue to be important sources of information, especially when features comparisons are being made.

Buyers rely upon a variety of media for their research. There, too, preferences vary according to their stage in the buying funnel. Marketers who carefully map content, media and platform choices to those preferred at different stages of the buying funnel can realize greater spending efficiencies.

A total of 751 influencers responded to the survey, representing a wide range of industries and company sizes. Four out of five (80%) hold executive IT or IT management titles. The respondents were split nearly evenly between enterprises (1,000 or more employees) and small/midsize businesses (fewer than 1,000 employees). The survey had a margin of error of plus or minus 3.57%.

Technology's Role Expands

IT DECISION-MAKERS (ITDMS) are involved with technology decision-making across the spectrum , with their greatest influence being in the areas of setting policy, managing budget and negotiating with vendors. However, their influence in roles typically thought of as being in the business domain is growing in significance. In fact, more senior IT executives told us that they "collaborate with departments outside of IT on projects or technology needs" than perform any other task, including managing technology. Overall, more than one-third are actively involved with setting business goals.

Not surprisingly, CIOs are involved more broadly with the business than IT managers or staff professionals, whose focus is more likely to be on technology decisions. In fact, of 11 categories of technology and business decision-making processes measured by the study, IT executives are more involved than their business-side peers in nine of them. They are also nearly twice as likely to meet with boards of directors.

CIOs drive the process of determining business need, selecting vendors, selling internally and approving purchases, while IT staff are most heavily involved in determining technology requirements and evaluating products and services. This indicates that marketers should target IT staff with messages about product features and functions, but focus on business value when speaking to senior IT leaders.

IT also owns the "short list," or the roster of vendors whose solutions reach the later stages of the consideration cycle. For vendors, failing to make the short list has long been seen as a lost sale, but our research suggests that short lists are quite fluid. Nearly three-quarters of respondents said new vendors can make the short list even after the list is in place. This openness to change may be in response to the large amount of startup activity and new technology currently entering the market.

In 11 categories of technology and business decision-making processes measured by the study, IT executives are more involved than their business-side peers in nine of them.

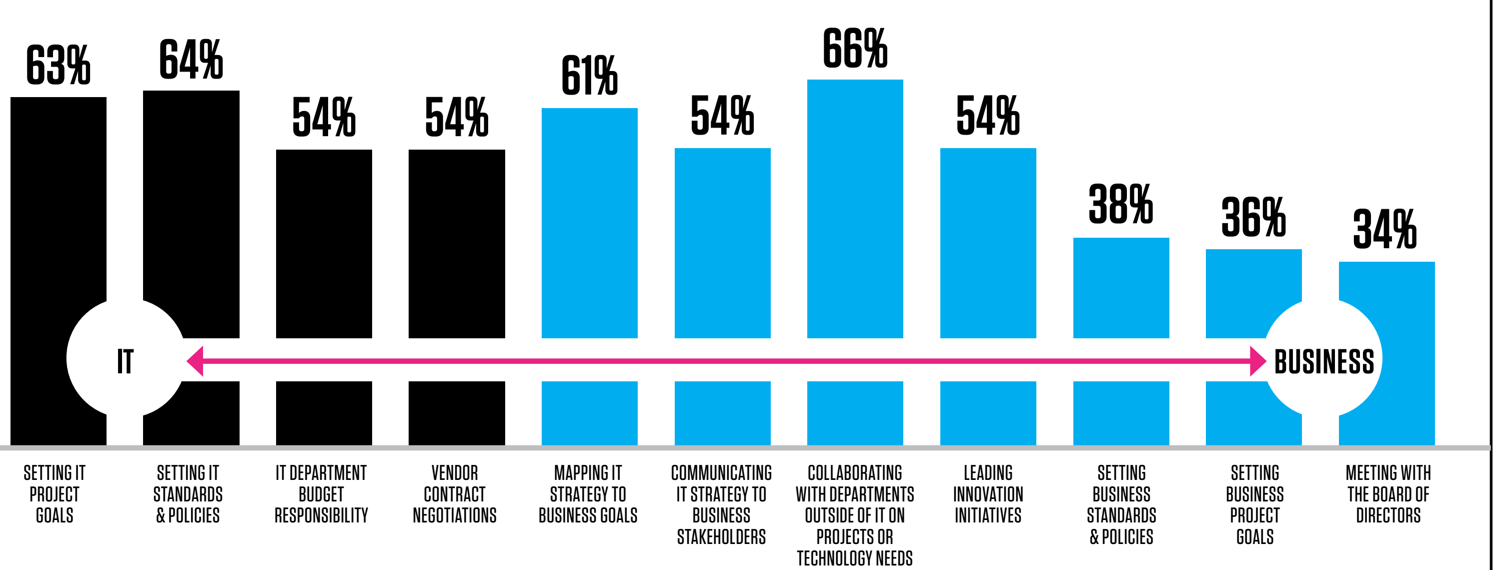
Organization Matters

IT DEPARTMENTS ARE typically organized in one of three ways:

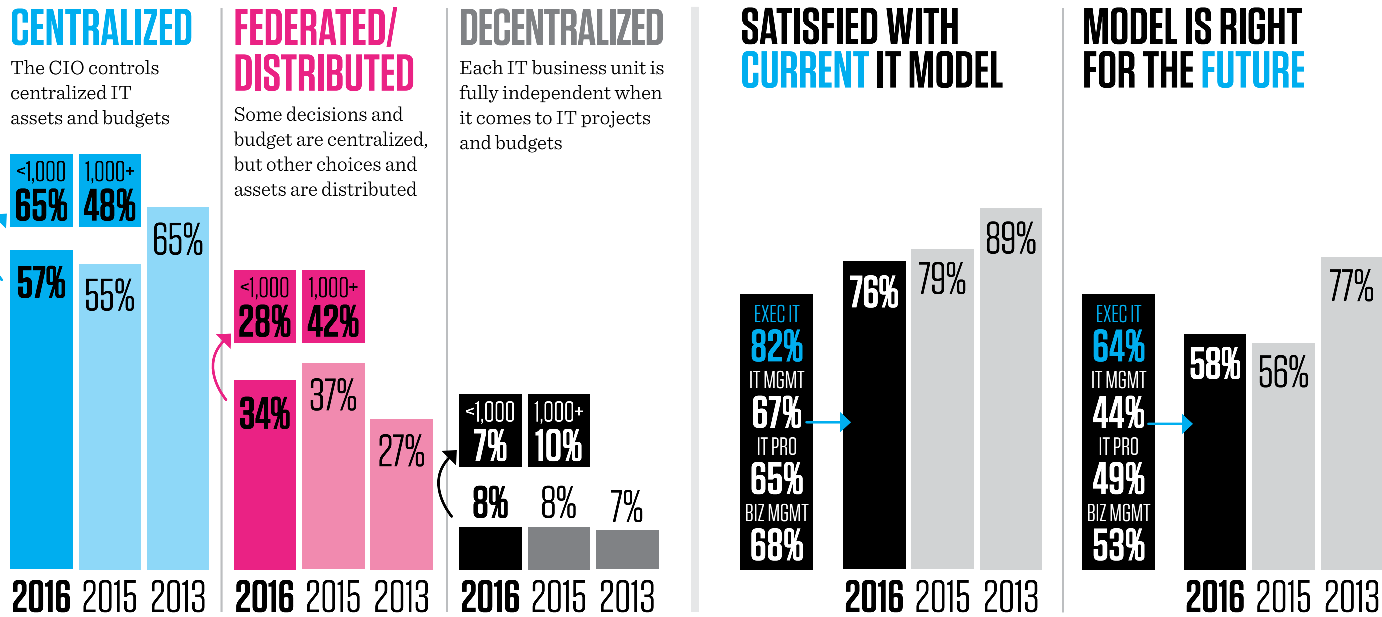
1. Centralized, with IT assets and budgets controlled at the top;
2. Federated (also referred to as Distributed), with some decisions and budget centralized, but other choices and assets distributed; and
3. Decentralized, with each business unit making its own decisions.

Our research indicates that organizational model influences buying behavior, but that the structures themselves are undergoing some reconsideration right now. A majority (57%) of the IT organizations we surveyed are central-

IT DECISION-MAKERS' ROLES EXPAND OUTSIDE OF TRADITIONAL TECH BOUNDARIES



IT ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS ARE FLUID BY DESIGN



ized, but that figure is down from 65% in 2013. About one-third of IT organizations are federated, which is down slightly from last year, but up significantly from 2013. Decentralized organizations make up only 8% of the sample, a number that's consistent with previous studies.

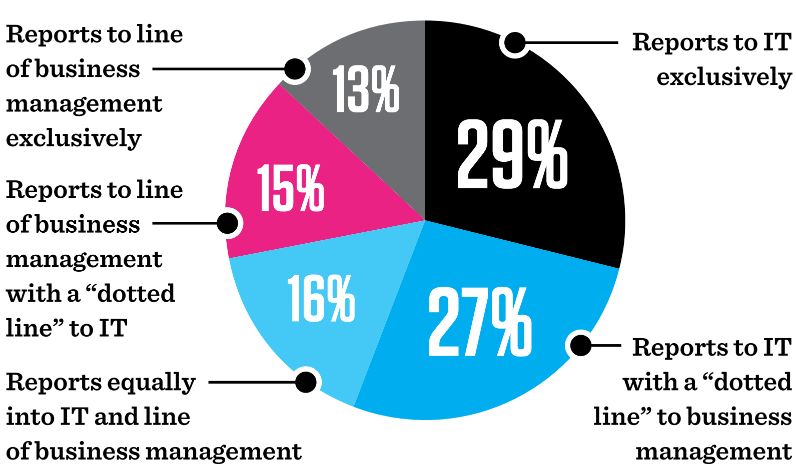
Centralized organizations involve fewer decision-makers in the process than do federated ones. Small and midsize businesses (SMBs) are much more likely to have a centralized organizational model (65%, compared to 57% overall), while enterprise organizations are much more likely to federate their IT function (42% compared to 34% overall). We can infer from this that smaller companies lend themselves better to a centralized approach given the central control their smaller scale can afford.

Fifty-eight percent of companies have an IT steering committee that prioritizes product needs, creates strategic plans and approves IT projects. Among enterprises, the figure is 73%. Interestingly, the use of steering committees is down across all company sizes from previous years. This may indicate that technology and business priorities now change too quickly to be guided by a master plan as they were in the past.

More than half of organizations also have an IT liaison, or a person who identifies technologies that can benefit the business. This is the first year the study has asked about the liaison role. While there are no historical statistics, it is interesting that twice as many liaisons (56%) report to IT as to the line of business.

There is evidence that organizational structures are in flux. While most re-

51% OF ORGS HAVE AN IT LIAISON ROLE. OF THOSE, THE IT LIAISON REPORTING STRUCTURE IS...



ITDMs COLLABORATE WITH

5.8

FUNCTIONS/TITLES

AND WITH THESE INDIVIDUALS

LOB 7.7 + IT 7.7 = TOTAL 15.5

spondents are satisfied with their current structure, they are far less convinced that it will serve the company best in the future. The percentage of respondents who believe their current structure has staying power has fallen significantly from 77% in 2013 to 58% in 2016. The growing promise of cloud computing and big data analytics to position IT as a source of competitive advantage probably explains some of the shift, with line-of-business (LOB) professionals expecting to exert more influence on IT decisions.

Regardless of who makes the final decision, collaboration is clearly growing in importance. The number of functions and titles involved in the collaboration process is up significantly across both enterprise and SMB organizations. ITDMs collaborate with 5.8 functions/titles on average and 15.5 discrete people. Exactly as many LOB people are involved in the average collaboration as IT people. Historical comparisons are not possible to make because previous studies asked the question differently, but the data supports the conclusion that IT decisions are heavily influenced by perceived business value.

ITDMs at smaller organizations are much more likely to collaborate with senior executives than do their enterprise counterparts. This is probably a function of having fewer layers of management in place.

Who makes the decisions?

IT EXECUTIVES ARE the ultimate decision-makers across all technology areas, but IT managers, IT pros and business managers all influence the process at different stages, and certain technology areas clearly attract greater interest and involvement by business decision-makers.

One of these categories is big data analytics, a set of technologies that promise to significantly influence business decisions. Our research finds that IT pros are less involved in big data decisions than their business-side colleagues. In

IT DECISION-MAKERS VALUE KNOWLEDGE SHARING BY VENDORS

		EXEC IT	IT MGMT	IT PROS	BIZ MGMT
Respond quickly to questions or requests for information	67%	66%	68%	65%	66%
Offer free trials or test drive of products	64%	64%	63%	67%	51%
Offer timely, relevant information	56%	59%	45%	47%	55%
Offer advice and best practices	53%	57%	51%	41%	47%
Provide case studies	50%	52%	49%	26%	57%
Avoid direct sales pitches	47%	48%	41%	37%	55%
Keep digital content (videos, whitepapers, etc.) up-to-date	46%	45%	46%	44%	53%
Create educational assets I can find easily when researching solutions	46%	47%	44%	36%	47%
Provide references	46%	47%	44%	26%	49%
Ask questions of me and show interest in my business	36%	40%	31%	15%	26%
Offer ROI or financial calculators	35%	38%	35%	26%	34%

fact, big data was the only technology area in which business managers exert more influence than IT pros.

Those involved in big data analytics and cloud solutions are also more likely to be involved in innovation initiatives, again reflecting the perceived strategic value of those technologies.

Not surprisingly, IT pros are significantly more involved in infrastructure decisions in general, and hardware and networking decisions in particular. The average respondent – both on the business and IT side - is personally involved in vetting solutions and vendors within 7.3 technology areas, indicating a diversity of interest and expertise.

What do they value in a supplier?

HAVING FOCUSED ON structures and responsibilities thus far, the second half of our survey turned to the qualities that buyers look for in a prospective supplier.

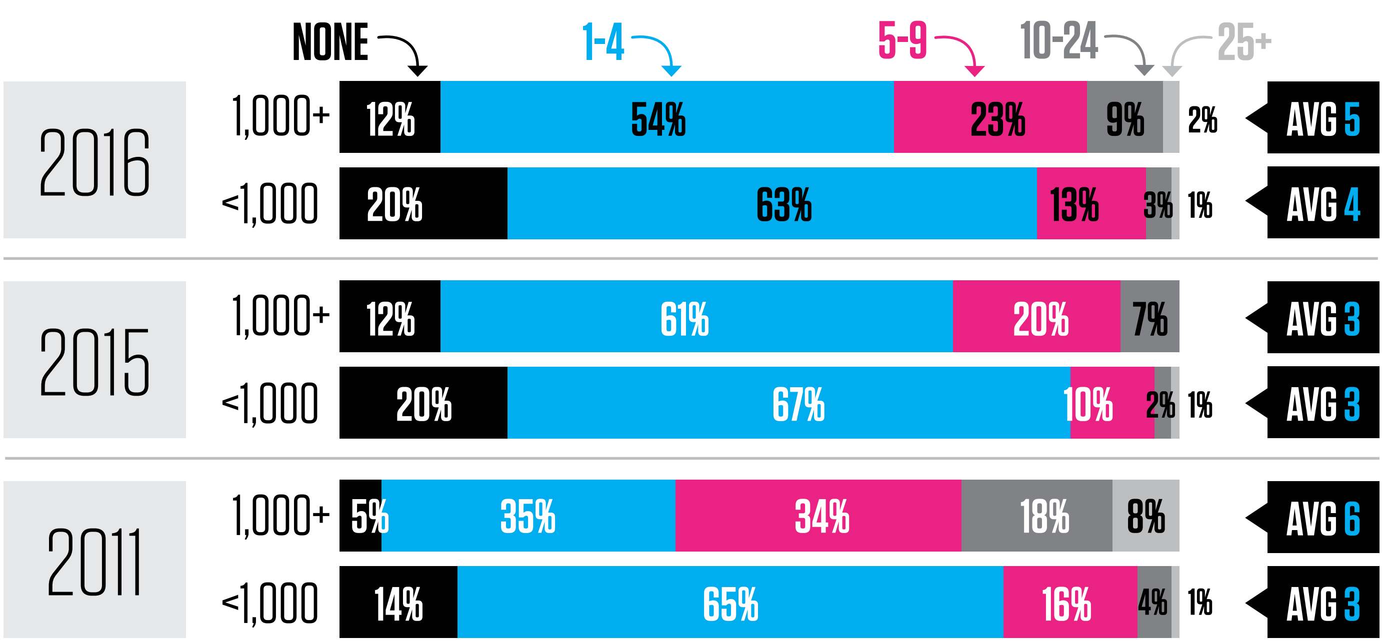
Respondents told us that the most valuable thing an IT vendor can do is to respond quickly to questions or requests for information. The types of information decision-makers consider most valuable are free trials and test drives, relevant information delivered on a timely basis, advice/best practices and case studies. All were mentioned by at least half of the respondents.

Time spent with vendors is up across the board from previous studies, which perhaps points to increased scrutiny of existing systems in light of emerging options.

When broken down by job function, the priorities change somewhat. IT executives place the greatest value on customer experience, with two-thirds rating it as the most important element of a quality relationship. Business managers differ somewhat, favoring helpful answers to questions. ITDMs in the U.S. are somewhat more demanding than their overseas non-US counterparts; they place higher value on customer service/response time (66% vs. 59% non-U.S.) as well as post-sales support/services (61% vs. 53% non-U.S.).

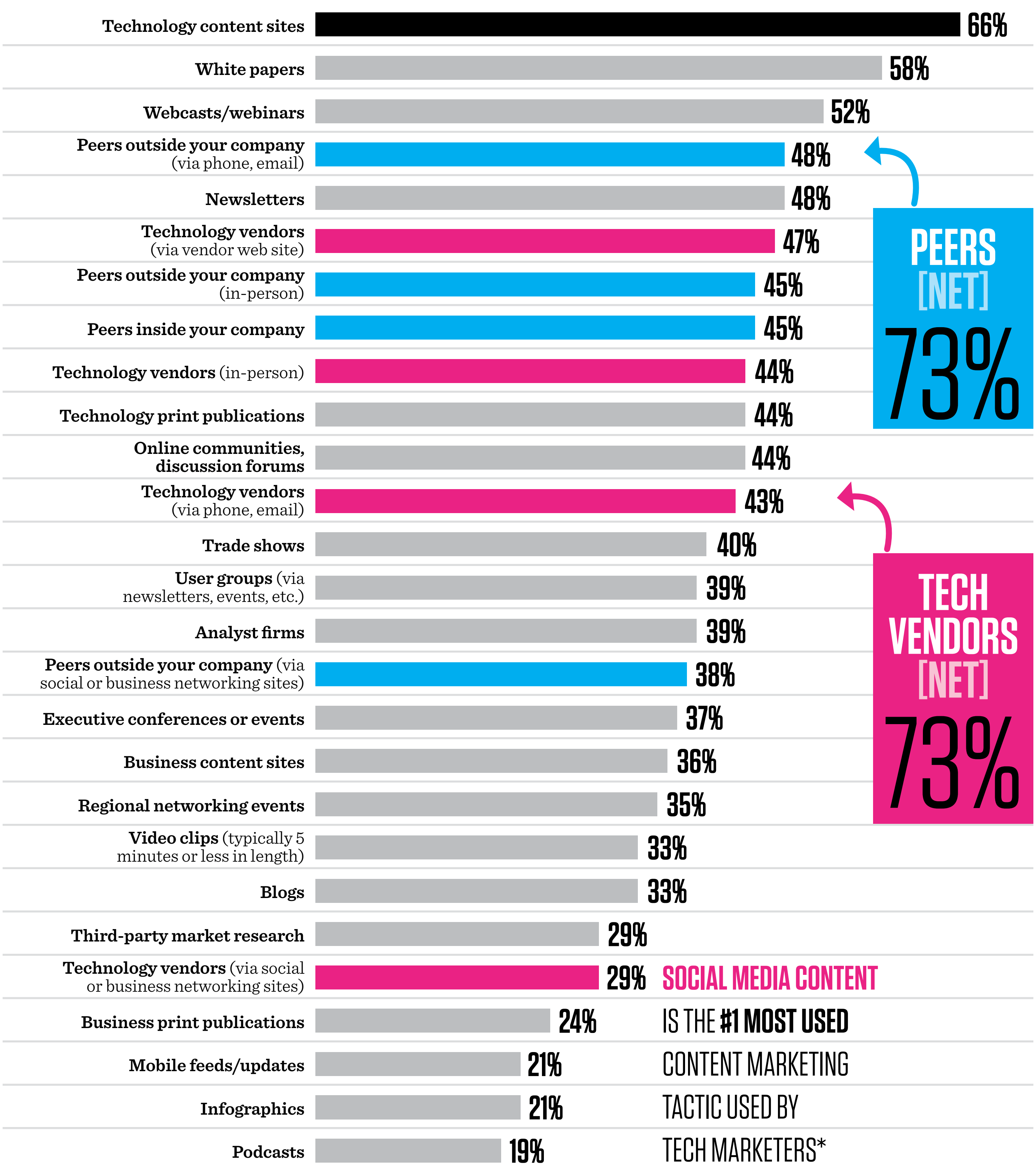
Buyers of all stripes spend a lot of time with their suppliers, an average of almost five hours per week. They also spend nearly three hours meeting with prospective vendors. Time spent with vendors is up across the board from previous studies, which perhaps points to increased scrutiny of existing systems in light of emerging options. This would be

THE NUMBER OF CURRENT VENDORS CONSIDERED TO BE STRATEGIC PARTNERS IS IN FLUX



TECH CONTENT SITES ARE THE #1 SOURCE FOR INFO

INFORMATION SOURCES USED TO KEEP UP-TO-DATE WITH TECHNOLOGY



*Source: B2B Content Marketing: Technology, CMI and Marketing Profs, 2016 consistent with other research finding that cloud computing and software-as-a-service are becoming increasingly attractive alternatives to legacy technologies.

The average company considers between three and five vendors to be a "strategic partner," which are defined as "a strategically important vendor that has gone beyond effective delivery of systems and services to become a consistently responsive, agile, and trusted collaborator in creating value." Larger enterprises have more strategic partners than smaller ones.

Qualities that make a vendor strategic include rapid response to service requests, understanding of business goals and objectives, post-sales support and service, long-term viability and knowledge of the product portfolio. Interestingly, business managers place a greater emphasis on long-term viability, vertical industry knowledge and technology expertise than do either IT management or IT pros, who tend to favor operational excellence.

Companies that work extensively with channel partners take a more hands-on role in all aspects of engagement than do companies that deal directly with suppliers. They are significantly more involved in setting IT project goals, negotiating contracts and managing IT budgets. This could be because companies that work with resellers are more likely to be smaller and have broader IT job definitions than large enterprises.

What sources do they trust?

PEER ADVICE IS always the most trusted source of information, but it it's not always the richest. Survey respondents cite a variety of other trusted sources that help them create their short lists.

Vendors rank highly on the usefulness scale overall. In fact, they tie with peers as the most important information source, with 73% of respondents rating them highly. When broken down by the type of interaction, however, vendor resources are seen as somewhat less useful. For example,

Companies that work extensively with channel partners take a more hands-on role in all aspects of engagement than do companies that deal directly with suppliers.

66%

say technology content sites are their #1 source of information for keeping up-to-date with new technology

independent technology content sites, white papers and webcasts rank well ahead of vendor websites in usefulness.

Only 47% of respondents say they use individual technology vendor websites to keep up with developments in their fields of interest, compared to 66% that use independent content sites. This indicate that independent sources are helpful for tracking news and trends, while vendor websites come to the fore when buyers are diving deep for details. ITDMs get the least value out of interactions with vendors on social networking sites.

The high perceived usefulness of white papers and webcasts, in particular, indicates an opportunity for vendors. These vehicles are typically sponsored and the message is controlled, yet their value is seen as being significantly greater than that of branded vendor websites. Sponsoring white papers and webcasts are opportunities for marketers to leverage trusted platforms while still controlling the message.

The study also highlights a disconnect between the vehicles buyers prefer for keeping up-to-date with new technologies and those that marketers use to disseminate information. For example, events and webcasts, which are the top two vehicles marketers use according to the CMI/MarketingProfs 2016 content marketing research, are fifth and sixth in buyer rankings of effective tactics, behind peer recommendations, vendor-branded channels, independent content sites and white papers. Video clips, which are the fourth most-preferred marketer vehicle, rate all the way down in 14th place on the buyer preference list.

The results indicate that vendors are missing some opportunities to leverage their marketing spending more effectively. Buyers' strong preference for peer recommendations and branded assets suggests that vendors could benefit from investing in word-of-mouth marketing, building up content libraries on their own websites and placing valued content with credible third-party sources.

Dynamics gets even more complex when media preferences are matched to stages of the buying funnel. For example, ITDMs rate independent technology sites highly useful for determining technical requirements and business need. However, those sources are of little value when it comes to selling a solution internally. At that stage, peers, analyst firms and tech vendors assume more value.

Peers inside the company are valuable for determining business need, selling internally and authorizing and approving purchase. However, they're less influential in the evaluation stage, when features and specs are typically being compared.

The bottom line is that marketers can optimize their spending by matching platforms and media to the stage of the buying funnel they're targeting.

Marketers should also be aware of the optimal attention span of buyers using different platforms. Our survey indicates that it varies greatly. To some degree this is a function of media type – after all, short articles are quicker to digest than webcasts – but the data indicates that lower-

The bottom line is that marketers can optimize their spending by matching platforms and media to the stage of the buying funnel they're targeting.

funnel content focused on comparisons and demonstrations commands the greatest amount of buyer attention as measured by time.

When attention span is broken down by job function, we see that IT professionals spend more time on research and devote more of their attention to content than other groups. This isn't surprising, given that those influencers are most often the ones charged with detailed product investigation. IT pros devote an average of 17.14 minutes to in-depth product reviews, which is significantly greater than the overall average of 15.35 minutes. They are also more willing to spend time with webcasts.

Video appears to be an excellent gateway vendors can use to get to the consideration stage. Nearly nine in 10 respondents have watched a technology-related video in the

TECH CONTENT SITES, PEERS, VENDORS ARE **MOST RELIED ON** SOURCES

INFORMATION SOURCES USED AT EACH STAGE OF THE PURCHASE PROCESS

SOURCES TO KEEP UP-TO-DATE WITH TECHNOLOGY

1 Tech content sites
2 White papers
3 Webcasts or Webinars
4 Peers outside your company (via phone, email)
Newsletters
5 Tech vendors (via vendor website)

1 DETERMINE THE BUSINESS NEED

1 Peers inside your company
2 Tech content sites
3 Peers outside your company (via phone, email)
4 White papers
5 Tech vendors (in-person)
Executive conferences or events

2 DETERMINE TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

1 Tech content sites
White papers
3 Tech vendors (via vendor website)
Tech vendors (via phone, email)
5 Peers inside your company

3 EVALUATE PRODUCTS & SERVICES

1 Tech vendors (via vendor website)
2 Tech vendors (in-person)
3 Tech content sites
4 Tech vendors (via phone, email)
5 Peers inside your company

4 RECOMMEND & SELECT VENDORS

1 Tech vendors (in-person)
2 Peers outside your company (via phone, email)
3 Peers outside your company (in-person)
Peers inside your company
5 Tech vendors (via vendor website)

5 SELL INTERNALLY

1 Peers inside your company
2 Analyst firms
3 Tech vendors (in-person)
4 White papers
5 Tech content sites

6 APPROVE & AUTHORIZE PURCHASE

1 Peers inside your company
2 Tech vendors (in-person)
3 Peers outside your company (in-person)
Tech vendors (via phone, email)
5 Peers outside your company (via phone, email)

past three months, and 57% of buyers said that action led them either to research a product in greater depth or visit a vendor website (48%). In general, buyers with IT titles are more likely to take action based upon watching a video than those with business titles.

It's also worth noting some interesting age variations. Respondents aged 45 to 49 are somewhat more likely to follow up a video by researching a product than influencers in other age groups. They are also significantly more likely to visit a vendor website.

Respondents between the ages of 18 and 34 are much more likely to add a vendor to a short list, purchase a product, or take a social action - such as liking or commenting upon a video - than older colleagues. This indicates that they place a higher level of trust in video content and are more comfortable with social channels in general.

Summary and Conclusions

THE IDG ROLE & INFLUENCE STUDY documents what most marketers know instinctively – the buying process is complex and involves many stages and players. Savvy marketers will match tactics to stages of the buying funnel and to the influencers they are trying to reach.

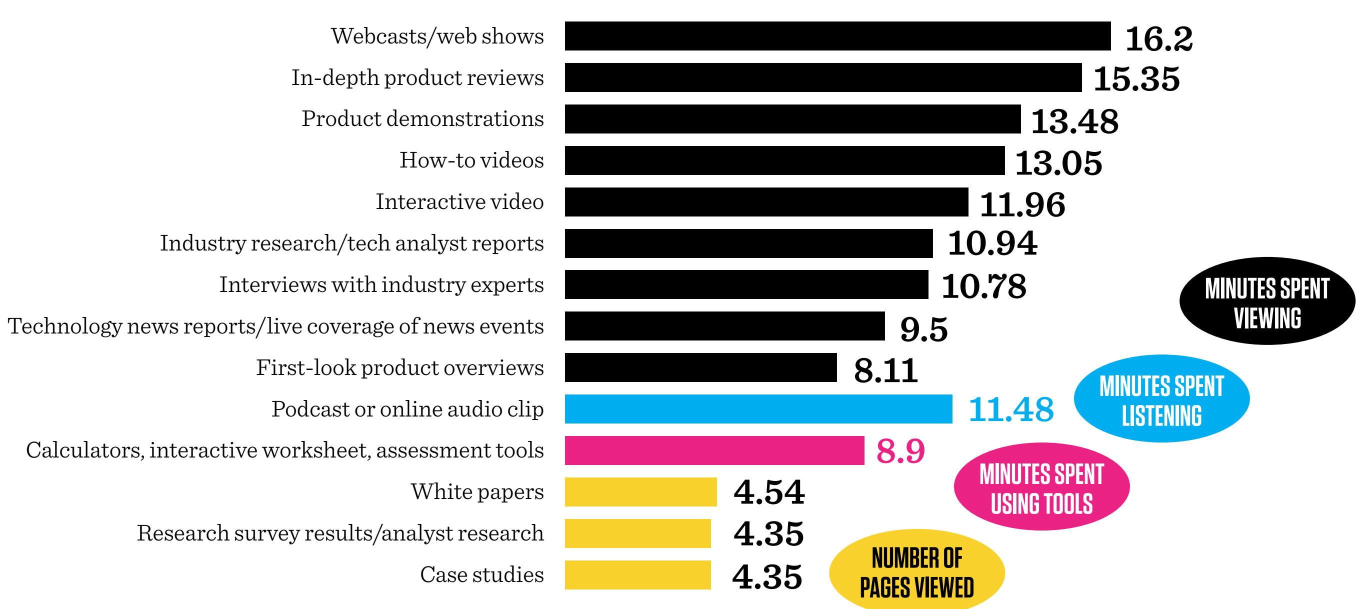
But even that is a moving target. The study clearly shows that IT and business decision-makers are collaborating more closely than ever across a wider range of processes. New technologies that have perceived business transformation value – like cloud and big data – see correspondingly higher levels of business-side involvement. Marketers should be careful to target messages in those areas both to traditional IT audiences and to the emerging class of business-side decision-makers.

Broadly speaking, ITDMs rely heavily on peer advice for determining need, selling a solution internally and authorizing purchase. But they rely upon external sources - including media, vendors and analyst firms - in the research stages. This suggests that word-of-mouth marketing and influencer relations are most appropriate at the top and the bottom of the funnel, while detailed technical information is best communicated through media channels.

Marketers can improve both cost-effectiveness and results by delivering content across a wide range of platforms and vehicles, taking care to match their choices to the preferences of buyers at each stage of the buying process. Big data and analytics can be valuable allies in sharpening the focus on buyers, platforms and messages.

ATTENTION SPAN REMAINS LONGER THAN EXPECTED

THE MAXIMUM LENGTH PREFERRED FOR TECHNOLOGY-RELATED CONTENT



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!

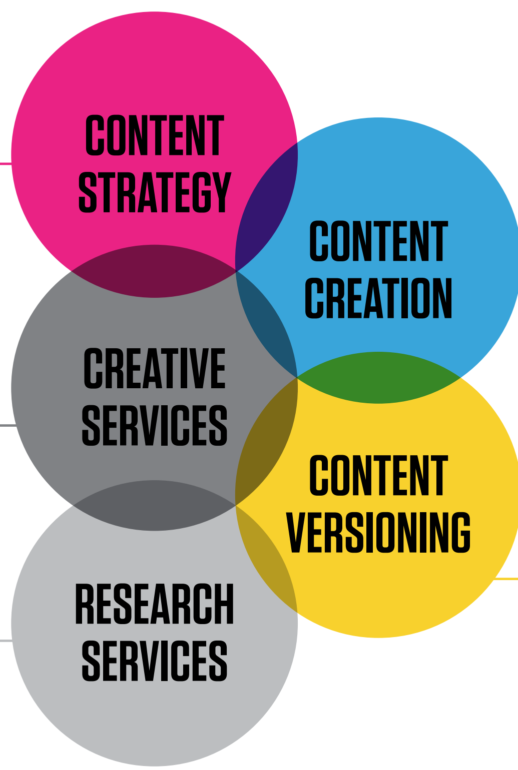
Our Strategic Marketing Services provide full-service global digital marketing services which leverage IDG's 50+ years of expertise in engaging and acquiring audiences through high-quality content.

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**

ADDITIONAL WAYS TO STAY ON TOP OF INFORMATION FROM IDG:

- **Sign up** for IDG's newsletters and receive media and marketing trends as well as our proprietary research, product and event information direct to your inbox. **Go to www.idg.com/newsletter**
- To get results from IDG research when it happens, or any other news, follow us on Twitter: **@IDGEnterprise**
- Visit us on LinkedIn for research, services and events announcements: **linkedin.com/company/idg-enterprise**