MARKET REPORT JULY 2019

ENTIGING THE IT BUYER

PETRI.COM AUDIENCE RESEARCH

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INTRO

For tech professionals, software and hardware purchases require more than their organization's money: They also require an investment of their professional reputations and — as the folks who have to keep the new gear up and running — their own quality of life.

In fact, it's not overstating the case to say that when it comes to major purchases, most IT decision-makers start thinking deeply about their own job security. While it's always nice to bask in professional glory for a job well done, IT buyers tend to be a prudent bunch whose careers are built on looking ahead to the worst-case scenario.

That means high-stakes technology buys are often less of a shot at prestige in the organization than a potential hazard that — if they make the wrong choice — could be a career-delimiting move. Or as one C-level IT pro said discussing his career, "This job is a never-ending pursuit to not screw up." While it's always nice to bask in professional glory for a job well done, IT buyers tend to be a prudent bunch whose careers are built on looking ahead to the worst-case scenario.

So what are the factors influencing professional-strength technology purchases? And what can aspiring market partners do to get the inside track when it comes to an organization's ultimate choice?

Petri.com recently polled audiences to get a line on their role in the purchase process and the most important factors in their choices. The results suggest smart moves for tech brands that want to be trusted partners to the key decision-makers, the IT Professionals deciding, installing and maintaining those tech solutions.



WHO IS PETRI.COM'S AUDIENCE?

Our poll painted a clear picture of the audience consuming Petri.com's content.

The membership is divided almost evenly among employees of small (<99), medium (100-999) and enterprise-level (1K to >10K) businesses.

Almost two-thirds (65.14%) are IT Professionals, and most work either in the senior ranks of middle management or as consultants or owners.

Question: HOW MANY EMPLOYEES ARE IN YOUR ORGANIZATION?



NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION

Question: WHAT IS YOUR JOB LEVEL AT YOUR ORGANIZATION?

The overwhelming majority of the respondents reported significant involvement in technology purchase decisions made at their own organizations or the organizations they advise, from determining business needs to making final recommendations. What's more, a full third of readers are directly responsible for authorizing and/or approving





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Question: WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN IT PURCHASES IN YOUR ORGANIZATION? (CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY.)

Most feel their input is listened to, and half said that (whether or not they had final approval) their choices resulted in a purchase.



Marketer Takeaway:

Brands that advertise on Petri.com are connecting with a cohort of Senior IT Professionals who wield great influence over the technology purchases at their organizations. What's more, they tend to be the people who actually have to interact directly with the software and hardware they've recommended.

And increasingly, those pros are making their decisions as part of a broader professional cohort focused on business goals.



Question: DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE YOUR VIEWS WERE RESPECTED DURING THE TECH SOLUTION PURCHASE PROCESS? Consider the perspective of one Petri.com audience member, a Group IT manager for a U.K. based global construction equipment manufacturer:

"Historically, Group IT has largely done its own thing and 'pushed' solutions we've chosen to the rest of the business. That has been changing over the past couple of years, and now we actively seek out and solicit requests for IT solutions through a portal developed in house by another team.

Now in 2019, I like to think that Group IT is an enabler for the rest of the business, and I find myself being invited to meetings in other departments to discuss their needs on a more regular basis."

And here's how Dustin Sneath, Superintendent of IT for the Elk Grove (Illinois) Park District, describes his role in purchasing decisions:

"Annually, as part of our budget process, I do sit down with the heads of every other department and discuss what ideas they have that might fall under my department's discretion in the upcoming year.

We discuss the reasons behind their projects, and it's at this point that we usually start trying to find commonality between departments so we can avoid making redundant purchases or deployments.

For example, we run a water park and a children's theme park. These facilities have very unique needs, but last year when both facilities indicated they wanted improvements to their surveillance systems, we opted to purchase a large enterprisegrade NVR solution that could accommodate both facilities rather than allow each to deploy their own localized systems; this resulted in significant cost savings and gave my team the 'single pane of glass' into both facilities, rather than having to manage separate systems with different interfaces and different caveats."





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Group IT manager for a U.K. based global construction equipment manufacturer

The obvious lesson here is that marketers must understand the ins and outs of their products' real-world applications and be able to discuss them in a way that connects technical specifications, implementation and business needs on the ground.

IT pros are notoriously averse to jargon, so trying to dazzle them with the latest industry catchphrases is actually more likely to irritate them. This isn't a TED talk — it's shop talk!

Less obvious, perhaps, is the importance of staying focused on that advantages of living with your brand for the long term. Remember that decision-makers from the IT department are already looking for the worst case — and any hint that they may be purchasing a product that will take all their energy to support sufficiently to justify their recommendation is sure to send them running to another alternative.

Look at it this way: at an implementation level, IT pros are less interested in what went right and how to get there than in what went wrong and how to avoid it. If you can demonstrate you understand what it means when a technology decision goes very wrong, you're well on your way to establishing a substantial relationship with the people on the front lines.



WHAT ARE OUR AUDIENCE MEMBERS LOOKING FOR, AND HOW ARE THEY FINDING IT? When asked about their most recent technology purchase decisions, respondents cited a variety of hardware and software solutions. Among the most frequent answers:

Hardware:

- Servers
- Laptops and desktops
- Routers and switches
- High-capacity storage & storage arrays
- Printers

Software:

- Virtualization software
- Productivity suites
- Backup and DR solutions
- Enterprise software

Across product categories, the most important factors that prompted organizations to make a purchase were performance (29%); IT and end-user features (19%); and reliability (15%).

Meanwhile, the most important factors in selecting a solution from a field of competitors were seamless integration, cost and ease of implementation.

To identify that solution, most readers did their own research, and 64% consulted with business stakeholders, including C-suite executives, the organization's board of directors, the finance team, client managers, and business architects.

Question: DO YOU CONSULT WITH ANY BUSINESS STAKEHOLDERS IN YOUR ORGANIZATION ABOUT YOUR TECHNOLOGY PURCHASE DECISIONS?

While fewer consult other users besides stakeholders, a substantial number (33%) reported they broaden their inquiry about user requirements to a variety of end users outside the immediate circle of business decisionmakers.



Question: DID YOU CONSULT WITH ANY END USERS OUTSIDE OF BUSINESS STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT THIS TECHNOLOGY DECISION?



Marketer Takeaway:

For a wide assortment of major purchases, senior IT Professionals are looking beyond their own concerns to the business' bottom line — and they're weighing the feedback from a broad range of colleagues up and down the org chart.

IT leaders often find it challenging to communicate the advantages of a product to colleagues outside of tech, let alone solicit feedback. Savvy brands will support those efforts by supplying these decision-makers with sound business arguments and descriptions of their solutions that minimize tech jargon and emphasize end-user advantages.

WHEN TECH BUYERS

YES

DID YOU CONSULT WITH AN OEM^S ABOUT THIS PURCHASE?

When evaluating their purchase options, almost half of Petri.com survey respondents said they consulted with OEMs.



46%

IF YES, WERE THE OEMS CURRENT, NEW, OR BOTH?

Most of those talked to both new and current OEMs – but for those who focused on one, most turned to their current OEMs. 25

CURRENT

^{New} 7.5%

67.5%

DID YOU CONSULT WITH ANY VARS ON THIS PURCHASE?

In addition, more than one-third consulted with VARs.



63.5%



The largest segment of those readers talked to both new and current VARs, but almost as many looked only to their current VARs for answers.



Marketer Takeaway:

Tech decision-makers trust their own experiences first, and the most successful of them are also attuned to the desires of the key players in their companies. That means they're generally your window into the business — a window that's colored by their own professional self-interest.

The good news for aspiring market partners: These tech buyers are generally hungry for information from brands — and when they find a brand they trust, they're also likelier to make it a partner in future purchase decisions.



According to the U.K. Group IT Manager,

"We have a small group of defined core IT vendors who cater to the majority of our needs. If they cannot assist directly, they generally know somebody else who can.

"While we do generally always go back to this core vendor group, we have recently enacted a SOP to 'sanity check' quotations and proposals with two other vendors to ensure the company is continuing to receive a good service that is value for money. This has recently driven down a number of purchase prices after some tough conversations."

For Brodie Krause, IT Manager with Greenwood Inc., interaction with vendors depends on the nature of the purchase:

> "For most hardware (PCs, cell phones, network hardware, etc.), I have a good enough grasp on what's out there and what works for us that I don't need to go through any kind of research phase with OEMs.

> "If it comes to making a major platform change, like moving from on-premise Exchange to Office 365, or from a home-grown VMware solution to a hyperconverged system, that is when I'll reach out and ask an OEM or VAR to aid me in building out a good solution. I'll also go through a VAR for licensing, since the licensing waters can be so difficult to navigate."



Dustin Sneath at the Elk Grove Park District describes his relationship to a core set of vendors and his caution about taking on new ones:

"Our organization has long-standing relationships with three or four VARs. Each is an expert in the segment we use them for; i.e. our networking VAR is a Cisco partner, our Windows Server/VMware VAR is a Microsoft Gold Partner and VMware partner, etc. They do overlap somewhat, which allows me to bounce numbers between them and get the best possible price, but we generally rely on one VAR for each type of work.

"When we do approach other vendors or new VARs, I usually have to go in with cost at top of mind (small government agency...) but the next thing I'm looking for is some signal that they want a long-term business relationship, not just a quick sale with a support agreement. Government I.T. doesn't have the agility that business I.T. does, so we rely a lot on momentum.

"If I can get a small project rolling with a vendor this year, I can convince the board to let me get a bigger one going next year, and a bigger one the next, and on and on. Making jumps from one vendor to another, or one solution to another, leads to a chaotic budget process and costs us more money in the end."

In fact, IT Pros' deeply cautious streak ("I'm never going to get fired for recommending Company X") means that if you demonstrate your ability to solve their problems, the chances are high indeed that you'll establish a relationship that will accompany rising stars of IT as they gain greater influence within their current companies — or move on to new companies that may not be as familiar with your brand.

Earn that trust by presenting yourself as a resource beyond closing the deal. If you can establish a line of communication about the real-world business implications of purchase decisions, you'll have pride of place when the next opportunity arises.

CONCLUSION

Petri.com audience members have great influence over the IT purchase decisions their organizations make – decisions that tend to be driven by *cost and efficiency and stability*.

Most of them also rely on existing vendor relationships for guidance on purchases. Engaging with Petri.com to make value-driven arguments about purchasing decisions gives marketers a tremendous opportunity to win over IT Pros who may not otherwise look beyond upgrades to current solutions.

These readers are your ultimate "in" when it comes to establishing enterprise-wide relationships ... and if you build those partnerships in a way that helps ensure IT buyers' confidence in a career win, you'll create brand ambassadors who will turn to you again and again at their current organizations or their next.

Want to talk about about what this report means for your Marketing practice and your company?

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