Tech Heads

B2B Nation

The Content Pinch Point

TECH HEADS

Intro

Tech Heads is an annual study of trends in content consumption and buyer behaviours for B2B businesses. It's a survey of the people that our clients do business with.

As the appetite for content continues to grow, conventional approaches to marketing and sales are changing. We feel the best way to make sense of that change is to understand what B2B buyers are up to.

This year's findings reveal that marketing in 2015 is defined by a contradiction: reaching audiences has never been easier; connecting with them has never been harder.

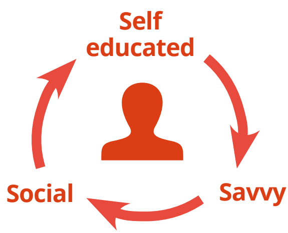
At the heart of the issue resides technology. The digital age has brought wave after wave of innovation and change, all of which produce a greater array of tools, formats and channels designed to reach out to people. However, that ensemble is available to all - it's very noisy out there.

A key paradox in our data this year is that attention spans are shortening, but decision making time is extending. Noise is a big problem if you need to be relevant quicker and for longer.

Tech Heads is now in its fourth year. Traditionally looking at tech buyers' behaviours, this year we've expanded the research's respondent base to the typical buying decision makers within any organisation – namely C-suite, Finance, HR & Sales. So we get to see how these stakeholders consume information and, critically, how they buy.

Technology is pervasive in the B2B world. Gartner predicts that by 2020, 80% of IT decisions will be made by non-IT professionals. Beyond buying decisions, our research shows that technology is an integral part of commercial B2B life:

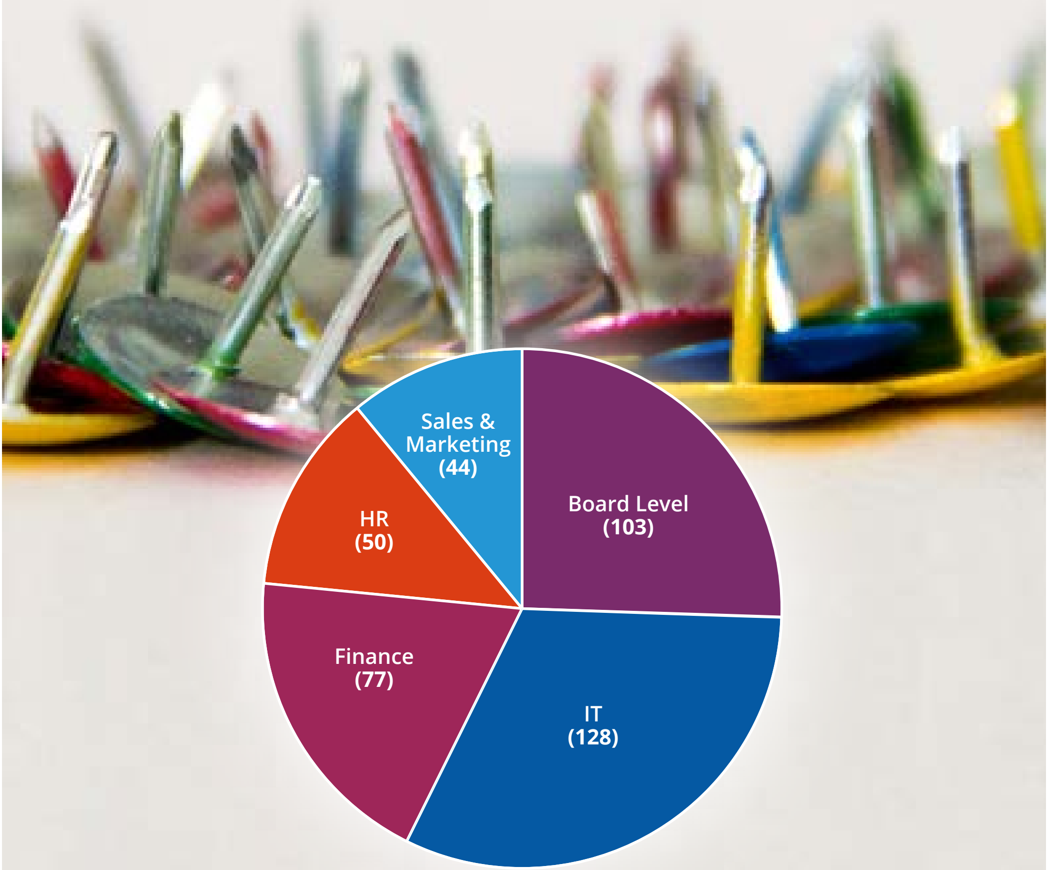
- **Self-educated: 80%** say it is increasingly important they know more about technology in order to make informed decisions about the suppliers they do business with
- **Savvy: 77%** think it is increasingly important they know more about technology in order to do their job
- **Social: 73%** use social networks for business research (69% in 2014)



To find out more about how these technology and services buyers tick, please read on for the Tech Heads key findings.

Octopus Group

Methodology



402 key decision makers responsible for choosing and purchasing products and services for their company completed a survey during August 2015.

Board Level (103), IT – the original Tech Heads! (128), Finance (77), HR (50), Sales & Marketing (44).

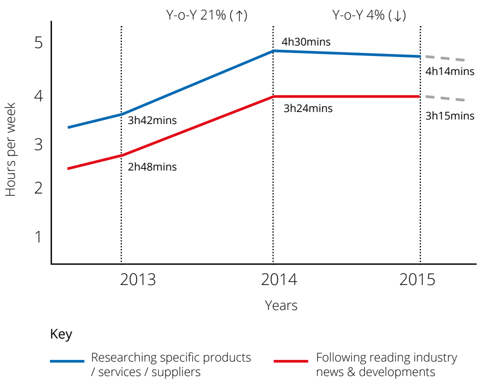
Research conducted by Loudhouse Research, an independent consultancy based in the UK.

Findings
Keep It Simple

The key themes from the research can be reduced down to one core principle: **Simplicity.** There are many drivers that create the demand for simplicity:

Time to capture attention is decreasing

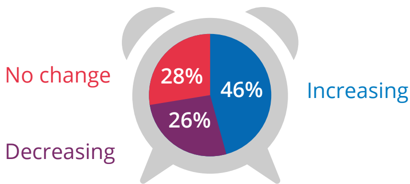
53% have less time to devote to reading and research than they did a year ago. Only 18% believe they have more time. For CIOs, total average time spent on information gathering is down 4%, from 4hrs 30mins to 4hrs 14mins per week.



Average time spent per week gathering information.

It takes longer to make decisions

Nearly half of respondents (46%) stated that time taken to select new suppliers is increasing.

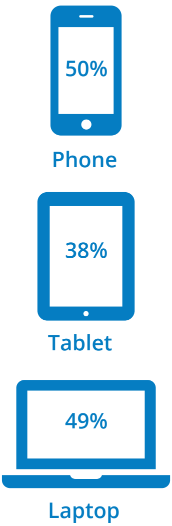


83% of buyers say they shortlist or decide on a supplier before making contact with that supplier at least half the time. The average time from information gathering to face-to-face meeting is 14 weeks, or 98 days, or 2,352 hours!

THIS PRESENTS A PINCH POINT. PROSPECTS HAVE LESS TIME TO CONSUME CONTENT, BUT TAKE LONGER TO BUY.

Information on the move is increasing

To tackle time constraints, 50% of respondents use their smartphone more for information gathering than 12 months ago.



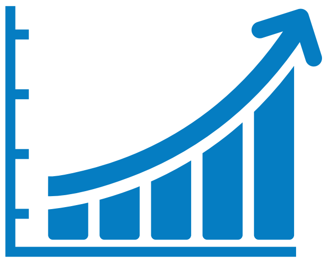
Devices that show the highest increases in use by respondents for industry information gathering over the past 12 months.

The demand for content is strong

Information gathering influences supplier shortlisting / selection for 93% of buyers.

57% of respondents rely more on content to inform purchase decisions than a year ago.

73% think vendors should make more effort to publish their own content.



These key trends start to define the challenge:

Content must be succinct and relevant to capture limited time

Extended sales cycles demand a more nurturing approach

Smart people are using smartphones more

The audience is discerning and hungry for information

...to connect in a short space of time, you need to know who you are talking to...

Audience Differentiators
Not All Tech Heads Are Equal…

If time pressures are on and you need to make that connection, we can see immediately that the window of opportunity diminishes depending on who you speak to.

There is a clear and distinct difference in the time invested by each professional group in order to inform purchasing, or influence a decision.

It's interesting to note that infamously 'hard to reach' board level prospects are investing more time in information gathering and news tracking than any other group.

	Board Level	IT	Finance	HR	Sales / Marketing
Following / reading industry news and developments	4hr 28m	3hr 15m	2hr 46m	2hr 41m	2hr 44m
Researching specific products, services and suppliers	5hr 11m	4hr 14m	3hr	3hr	3hr 34m

Competition In The Game

"Number one, cash is king... number two, communicate... number three, buy or bury the competition."

(Jack Welch, CEO, GE, 1981 – 2001)

'Life' Competition

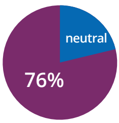
Information gathering sits amongst an array of other communications needs and disruptions. Somebody reading an article on a smartphone can be tweeting, texting, taking a call, listening to music and toggling between browsers as one simultaneous activity.

It's what makes the old models of interruptive marketing so difficult. Prospects prefer to find their own way to you.

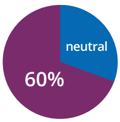
'Commercial' Competition

Every company has its competitors. By definition, these businesses are meeting the same needs in the same market...more or less! Therefore, standing out against the competition is a critical requirement in a time-poor world.

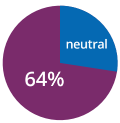
When asking our respondents to consider the best approach, one finding in particular tells a very clear story:



76% agreed they would like suppliers to treat them more as a person rather than a potential sale
- **82%** - Board level



60% believe, as a sales tool, online content levels the playing field for customer engagement between challenger brands and large business
- **71%** - Board level



64% believe digital marketing enables businesses to punch above their weight when competing for their attention
- **74%** - Board level

Based on this, it also appears that the competitive playing field is being levelled by digital and content marketing techniques, especially at board level.

Content Snapshot

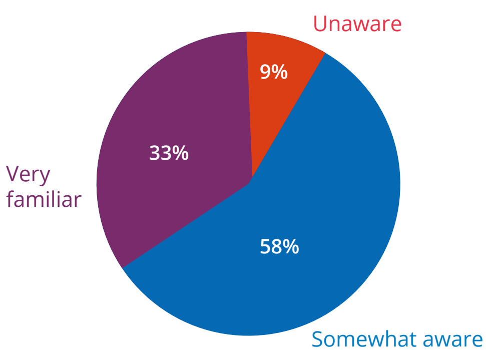
Buyers are a discerning and sophisticated group of information gatherers.
They clearly use different sources of information across the buying cycle.

	Useful for initial research into solutions to meet our business needs	Useful for short-listing potential vendors	Useful for making/validating final decision as to which vendor to use	Not useful at any stage
Peer group/Professional network	25%	46%	26%	3%
Face to face meetings	23%	35%	38%	3%
Online media	40%	34%	23%	3%
Print media	39%	42%	12%	7%
Industry opinion formers	24%	45%	24%	7%
Social media	26%	22%	18%	34%

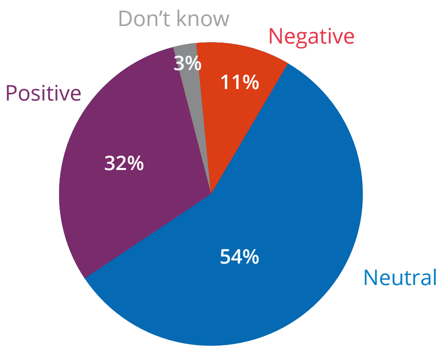
At which points in your decision making process to buy products and services do you find each of the following information sources useful?

They know when online content has been placed, not earned...and they don't seem to mind.

Awareness



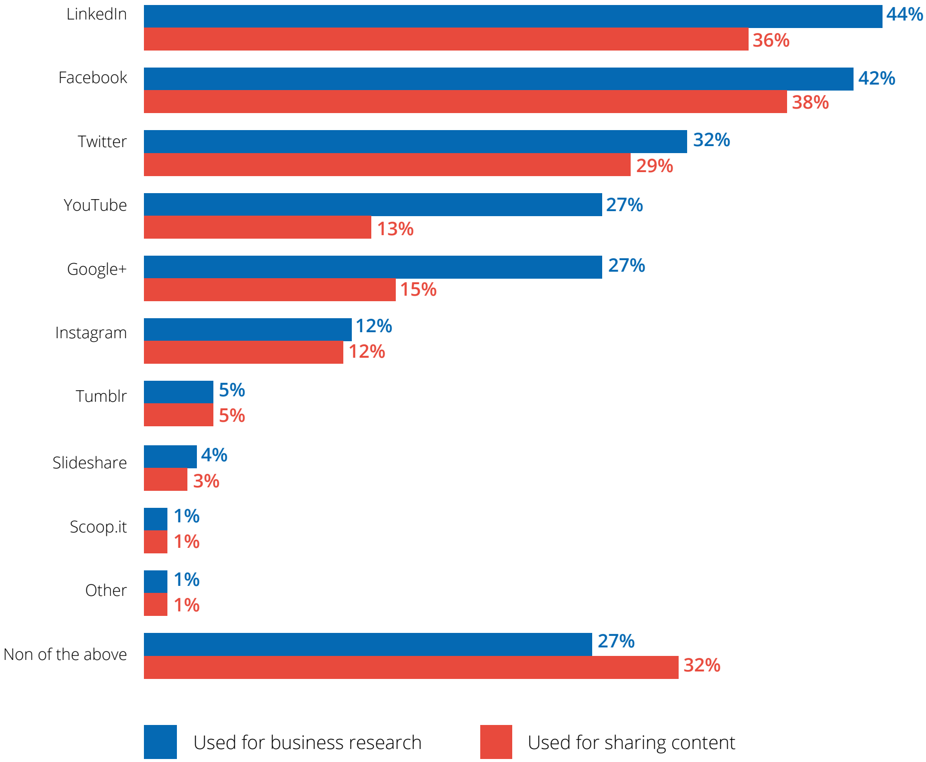
Impact on supplier



Some of the information and opinions you will read may have been paid for or placed by vendors/suppliers to engage you from a sales perspective. a) How aware of this practice are you? b) If the information is relevant how much does this impact your view of the supplier?

They access and share an array of social media channels...but not all the time.

Which of the following social networks do you use to find out about products, services or suppliers? And which do you personally use to share content about products, services and suppliers with others?



73%
of buyers use social networks for business research (69% in 2014)

68%
use social networks to share content about products, services and suppliers (63% in 2014)

Reaching The B2B Nation
What Do We Do About All This?

1. Decisions take longer

Create stickiness and multiple touch points

The relevance of channels and types of audience engagement change over time. If the time to decide on supplier selection is lengthening, this requires that specific consideration is given to activity that keeps you relevant across the buying process.

2. Time for researching is down

Be clearer with content – get to the point

The window of opportunity to bring a prospect closer to you as a business via content is open for, on average, 48 minutes per day. The biggest turn-offs for respondents were: quantity over quality (38%), poorly targeted content and generic content (32%).

3. Competitive pressures increase

Stand out from a crowd of solutions pitches

73% of sales and marketing professionals believe there are businesses in their market that have an evident strategic advantage driven by better use of customer data, analytics and engagement.

4. Device flexibility is up

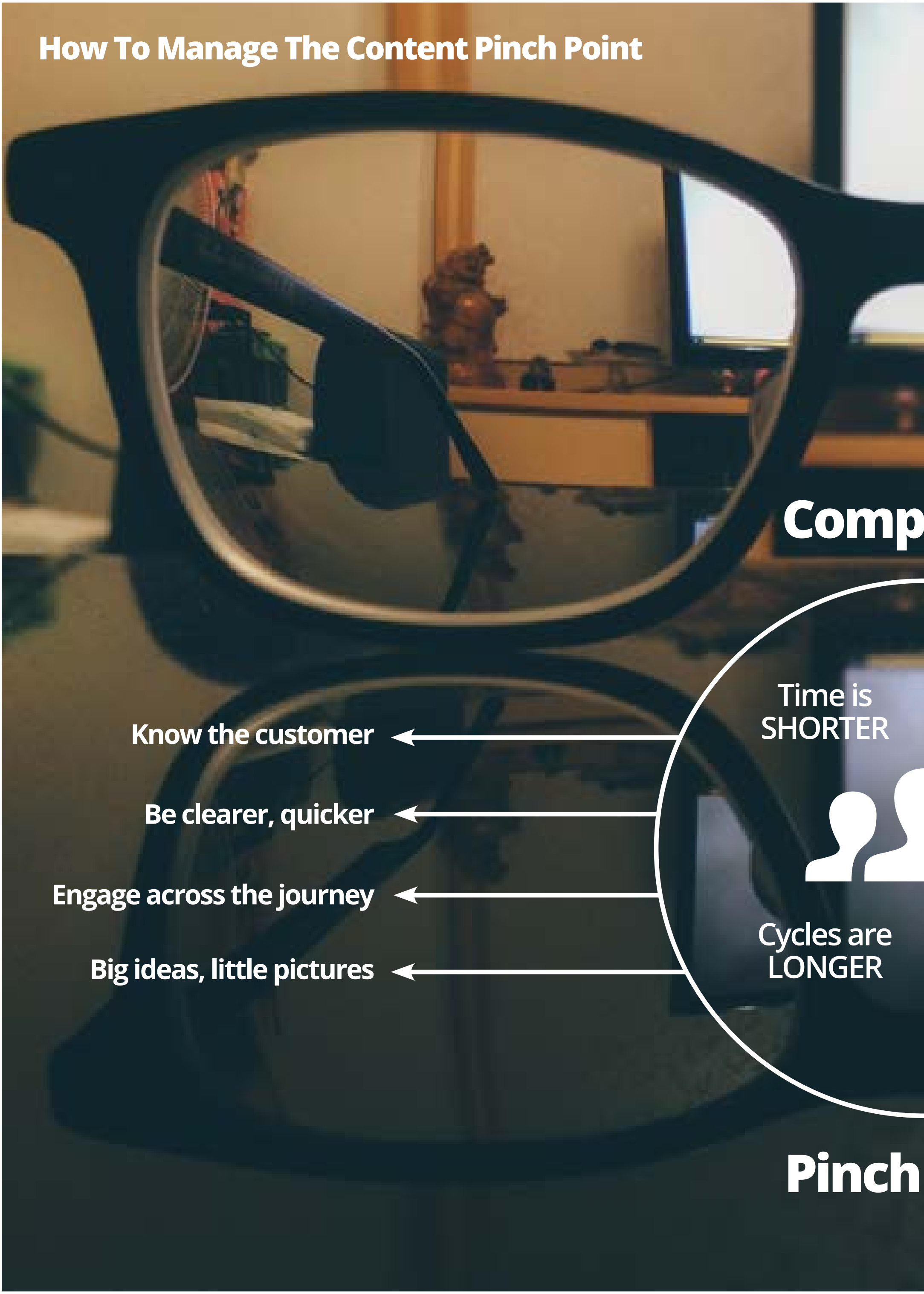
Simple and interactive

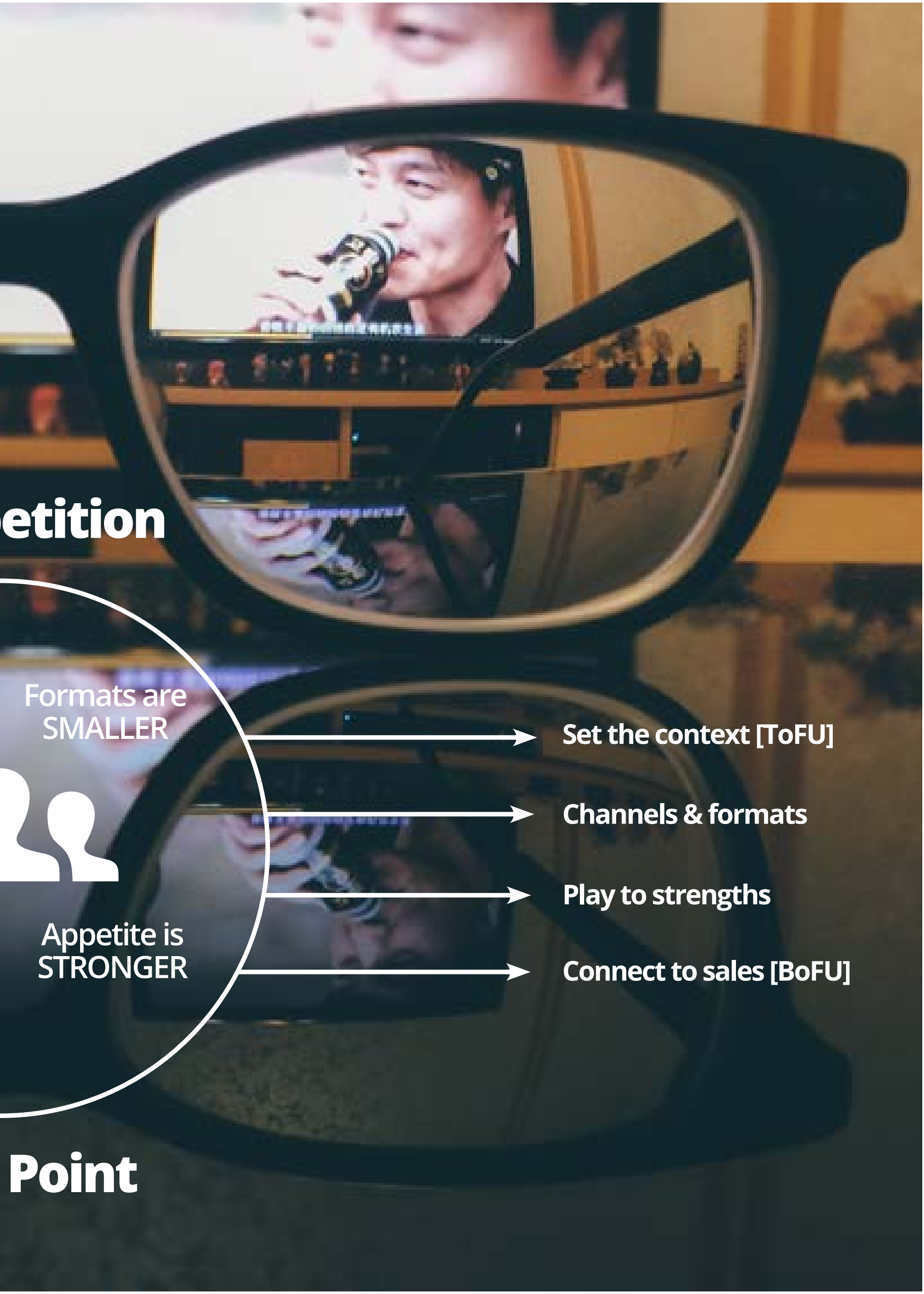
Form factors and the location or content preference of an audience are now informing how B2B businesses connect with them. Simple apps can engage more on mobile than weighty white papers. The implications of how device flexibility influences a strategy extend beyond the simple premise of mobile-first development.

5. More reliance on content

Be relevant across the journey

The best news is that B2B buyers are immersed in information gathering and they value content across the buying process. Capturing attention, creating the right context and maintaining attention over time are the foundations for content delivering a competitive edge. Content marketing does impact the sales pipeline!


How To Manage The Content Pinch Point
Comp
Time is SHORTER
Know the customer
Be clearer, quicker
Engage across the journey
Big ideas, little pictures
Cycles are LONGER
Pinch


etition
Formats are SMALLER
Appetite is STRONGER
Set the context [ToFU]
Channels & formats
Play to strengths
Connect to sales [BoFU]
Point

Five Key Questions For 2016 Based On Our Findings

1

Do we know our prospect?

Who is the funnel?

Most businesses start campaigns without knowing who they are really talking to. Segmenting your marketing is not a means of connecting with it. Audience knowledge is key.

2

Are we setting the right context for prospects?

What does the top of the funnel look like?

Communications is all based on creating the right context for your audience when you grab their attention. It's where thought leadership helps you set the agenda and expectation in the wilds of early engagement.

3

Is it a form or a formula?

What tools do we engage them with?

Form factors and content types are as important as messaging and planning. B2B marketers need an arsenal of tools to stand out in a busy, distracting digital world.

4

Is our campaign based on a sales outcome?

Is there a thread taking prospects through a sales process?

Not all campaigns are designed for sales leads directly, but activity across the audience building, education and sales process should be linked together. Continuity is essential to avoid confusion.

5

Are we David or Goliath?

Use relative strengths to your advantage

Execute activity based on what you are good at, and what can make a difference. Great marketing sits somewhere between aspirational, achievable and affordable!

Avoid The Pinch In 2016

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