

**Merritt**GROUP



# MARKETING & SELLING TO THE CISO

*The 2018 Edition*



*So the question remains:*

# WHAT IS THE HOLY GRAIL TO EFFECTIVELY MARKETING AND SELLING TO THE CISO?

Chief Information Security Officers (CISOs) can hold the ultimate purchasing power in the cybersecurity solution buyer's journey. While exact data isn't available, it's a good bet that the cybersecurity industry spends tens of millions of dollars each year marketing to the CISO. However, with thousands of cybersecurity vendors in the market vying for attention and using similar messages in their marketing, closing the deal can be a nearly impossible task.

Marketing and selling in today's cybersecurity landscape can be sheer chaos, but there is tremendous potential when it's done right. If vendor sales and marketing execs reach the CISO at the right time, with the right story with the right solution, the chances of closing the deal can rise exponentially.

*So the question remains:*

## WHAT IS THE HOLY GRAIL TO EFFECTIVELY MARKETING AND SELLING TO THE CISO?

**To answer this question**, two organizations with deep roots in cybersecurity marketing and sales, [Merritt Group, Inc.](#) and [T.E.N.](#), conducted a targeted survey of more than 100 top CISOs, capturing key pain points in the marketing and sales process, preferred engagement methods, which market influencers they trust and more. In addition, Merritt Group conducted follow-up interviews with several CISOs for added context on what works, and doesn't work, when marketing to business technology decision makers.

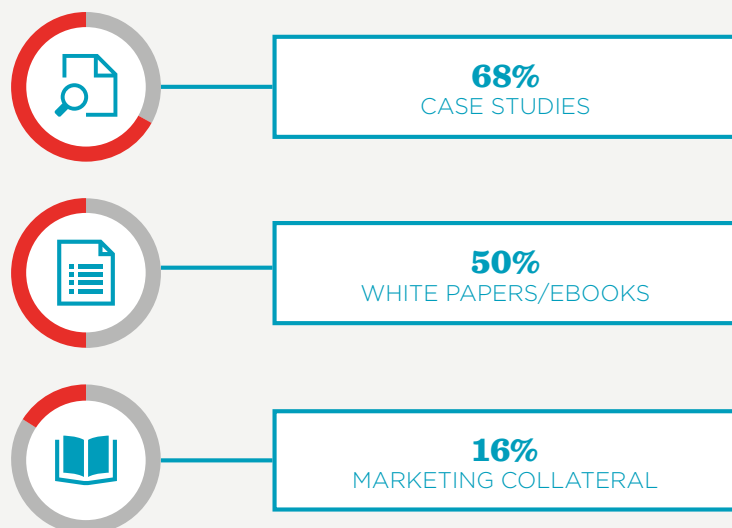
The findings from this survey inform what drives the CISO buyer, with the goal of improving sales and marketing strategies for the cybersecurity marketing and sales executive — and ultimately the cybersecurity vendor's overall bottom line.

# BREAKING THROUGH THE NOISE: KEY INSIGHTS TO REACH THE CISO

*Taken together, the survey results provide key insights on how CISOs perceive their industry, gather information and make decisions on buying solutions:*

## CISOs Have a “Prove It” Mentality When Assessing Solutions and Vendor Options —

Today’s CISOs really want to understand how their peers handled security problems before being sold to and seem increasingly savvy in wading through marketing hype by heading straight to cases studies, product demonstrations and other concrete measures of how security solutions will perform. “I do have a ‘prove it’ mindset. I want to hear why your firewall or other product is the best,” one CISO for a Fortune 500 company told us in an interview. “You also need to prove integration; the days of selling point solutions are over. Single, stand alone products just don’t work as well.” To the question of how executives prefer to learn about vendor solutions and content offerings, **marketing collateral ranked low in the survey, at only 16%**. By contrast, **cases studies were the top choice (at 68%)** and **white papers/ebooks (which often contain use cases) came in second at 50%**.



**The “Show Me” Ethic Prevails** — If you’re trying to structure your sales pitch to a CISO, **product demonstrations beat out emails and in-person meetings (26% versus 21%)**, with **digital meetings cited as the most preferred method of follow up** for CISOs interested in learning more about security solutions. “I need to see a proof of concept. For me, it’s all about where the rubber meets the road,” said the former CISO at a major financial exchange. “I need to see capabilities demonstrated: Show me how quickly can you deploy? Show me how exactly my analysts are going to use the technology? Lots of questions along those lines need to be answered.”



**26 percent**  
prefer product  
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### Executives Seek Different Information Sources to Follow Industry Trends—

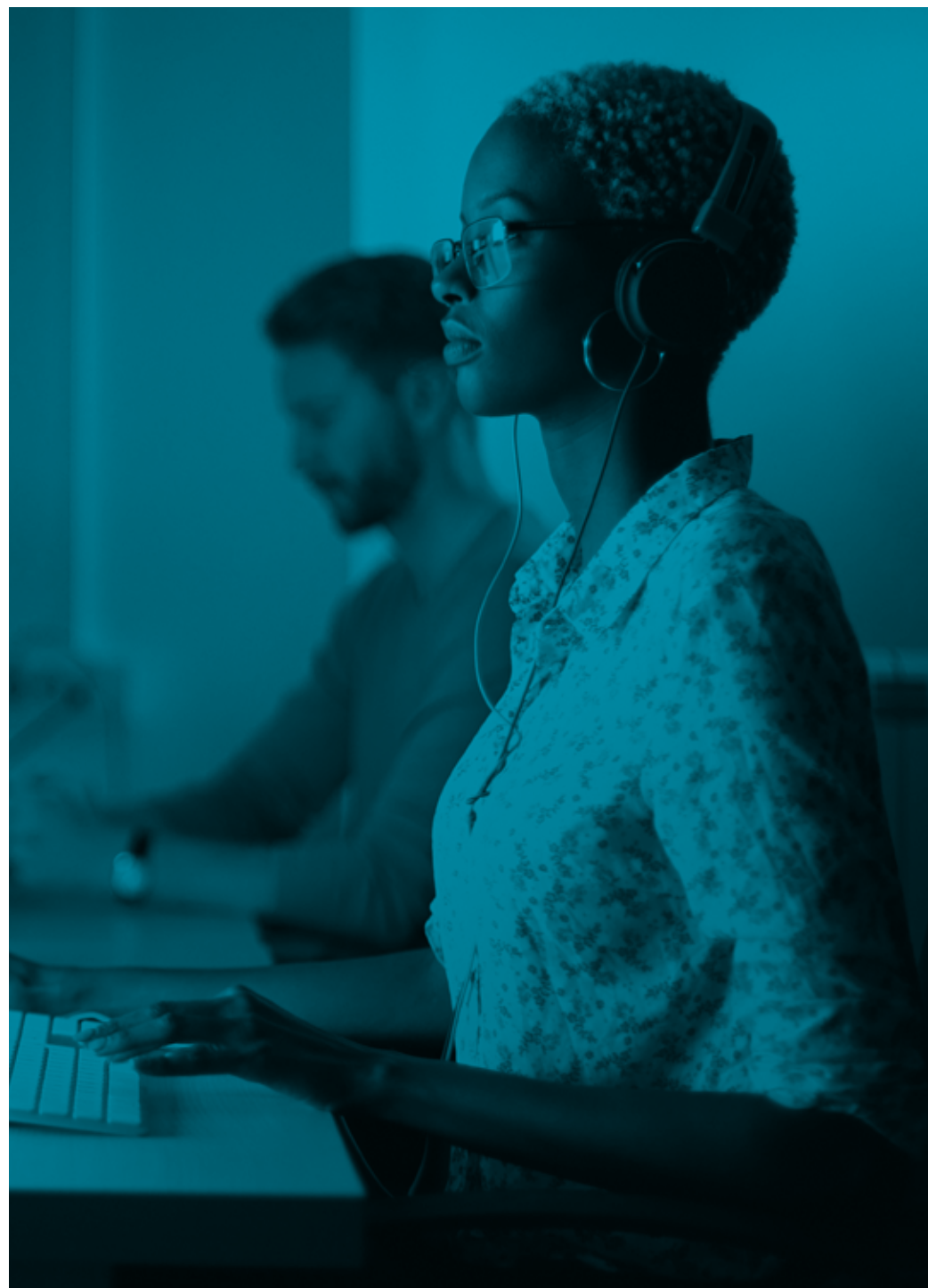
CISOs leverage a sophisticated blend of information sources to understand their industry.

*Top ranking sources for understanding overall security trends are **online news outlets (70%), blogs (55%) and social media (47%)**. Further, **86% of CISOs** indicated their Board and CEOs look to **The Wall Street Journal** to get informed on cybersecurity. The former financial exchange CISO told us, “**I have customized RSS feeds and — whatever the source — I need bite-sized content because I’m always busy.**”*

### CISOs find Peer-to-Peer Discussion and Industry Conferences to be Some of the Best Ways to Learn about New Security Products and Vendors —

When it comes time to learn more about the effectiveness of security products and what vendors they should connect with, CISOs rely heavily on a mix of discussion with their industry peers and security conferences and events. Top ranking information security events include **T.E.N.’s ISE® Programs and ISE® Private Dinners (71%), RSA® (44%), and Gartner Security Summits (33%)**.

“It’s good for peers to connect at industry dinners or on panels,” one CISO told us. Indeed, in a world replete with information sources, the trusted opinions of peers and colleagues remain the most powerful driver of product decision making. “It’s all about trusted relationships,” said another executive, a former CISO at a major bank who now runs a security consultancy. “I deal with people I know and trust. And if I don’t know them, I’ll reach out to my peers for advice.”



# THREE INDUSTRY TRENDS ON THE MIND OF TODAY'S CISOs

**From a list of 27 different options in ranking CISOs' most pressing security concerns, the top four choices that executives identified —**

- Third Party Vendor Risk Management
- Cloud Security
- Data Loss Prevention
- Identity & Access Management



**62%**  
IMPROVING CYBER HYGIENE



**40%**  
TRANSITIONING TO/STAYING  
SECURE IN THE CLOUD



**54%**  
FILLING CYBER TALENT GAP

*The survey results also reveal several dynamics that are shaping opinions and decisions among today's top cybersecurity leaders. Below are additional insights on CISOs' most pressing cybersecurity challenges, how they make purchasing decisions and where they go for cybersecurity vendor and product information:*

**Cloud Issues Dominate the List of Security and Risk Concerns** — From a list of 27 different options in ranking CISOs' most pressing security concerns, the top four choices that executives identified — **Third Party Vendor Risk Management, Cloud Security, Data Loss Prevention and Identity & Access Management** — are all closely related to transitioning to the cloud. This reflects a growing realization that, along with the cloud's expanded capabilities, comes an expanded attack surface fraught with vulnerabilities and new breach vectors. In fact, according to a recent [Intel report](#), in 2017, just **23% of organizations indicated they trust public clouds to keep their data secure.**

**Despite These Concerns, CISOs are Dedicated to More Cloud Adoption** — As clearly as CISOs understand the security risks that come with the cloud, they are also clearly committed to pressing forward nonetheless with cloud adoption — so long as the right cyber hygiene is in place. This dynamic became clear in a question about CISOs' top initiatives this year. From a list of eight priorities, the executives ranked **"Improving Cyber Hygiene" highest (at 62%)**, followed by **"Transitioning To/Staying Secure in the Cloud" (40%)**. This reflects a value proposition of cloud benefits outweighing the aforementioned risks.

**The Cyber Talent Gap Remains a Critical Challenge** — When asked to name today's toughest challenges they faced in their roles, CISOs ranked budget constraints and finding products that work and integrate well at 50% and 51%, respectively. However, **hiring challenges and the need to fill the cyber talent gap beat out both of those familiar hurdles, at 54%**. This talent gap is well established in numerous workforce assessments and industry reports — and CISOs are feeling the firsthand effects as they struggle to fill vacancies with the right talent.

# SOME QUICK SALES TIPS FOR CYBERSECURITY VENDORS TO ENGAGE WITH CISOs



**Bring your CEO along to the meeting.** If a CISO is making a major investment, they want to meet the head of the company and maybe even deal with the CEO directly.



Show how your product not only works in a Proof-of-Concept (POC), but also enriches other existing solutions. **Integration is key.**



**Don't bypass the CISO** to get a deal done and go over his head. That never ends well.



**Don't bash your competitors.** Explain why your product is the best (but keep in mind most products do exactly the same thing).



**Display honesty and trustworthiness** and don't use scare tactics with a CISO...ever.



# CONCLUSION

CISOs sit at the intersection of an organization's most promising aspirations and its most perilous risks. Given this, they need to have the right solutions at the right time to stay a step ahead of evolving threats and bad actors. At the same time, they must foster technology innovation as a mission-critical priority in a competitive marketplace, while keeping cyber threats at bay. The more that cybersecurity vendor sales and marketing teams can have a pulse on what drives the CISO buyer's journey - the better armed our industry will be in turning the tide in the cyber war.

## STRUGGLING TO REACH THE CISO?

*Get in touch with  
Merritt Group and T.E.N.*

info@merrittgrp.com | [www.merrittgrp.com](http://www.merrittgrp.com)  
sales@ten-inc.com | [www.ten-inc.com](http://www.ten-inc.com)