

How Content Influences *the* Purchasing Process

SURVEY SHOWS
DECISION-MAKERS
WANT CONTENT
THAT SPEAKS
TO THEIR NEEDS

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Business leaders review many types of content when making purchase decisions. They want content that addresses their specific needs and pain points.

It should be practical and educational as opposed to promotional in nature. In many cases, the source of the content doesn't matter, as long as the information is credible.

Those are among the key insights SmartBrief and Content Marketing Institute (CMI), a UBM company, uncovered in a May 2017 online survey of more than 1,200 SmartBrief subscribers who are involved with purchasing decisions in their organization. The sample included business leaders across 18 verticals, approximately 75% of whom hold manager-level or more senior positions. Respondents, primarily from North America, represented both for-profit and nonprofit organizations of all sizes, with approximately 40% indicating 500-plus employees.

Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents said they are responsible for determining the need for products/services within their organizations, though the decision to make a purchase often involves others. Only 7% of respondents said they make purchasing decisions independently.

Here are the key takeaways from the SmartBrief/CMI survey.

DECISION-MAKERS DO RESEARCH BEFORE CONTACTING VENDORS

The research reinforces the value of content marketing in guiding prospects during the purchasing process. Among survey respondents, 81% said they generally conduct research before they bring a vendor in to discuss a project.

Timing for Contacting Vendors During Purchasing Process

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree



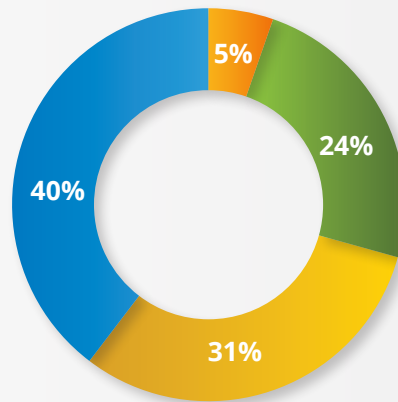
It's clear that business leaders are looking for information in a variety of places, and vendors can take advantage of that period of discovery by offering educational content that is niche, credible, and relevant.



BUYERS SEEK INFORMATION FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES

As the chart on page 3 shows, 66% of respondents said they use sources other than vendors to initially collect information when purchasing products/services. Forty percent indicated that as long as the information is credible, the source doesn't matter.

Information-Gathering Preferences During Purchasing Process



- The source does not matter to me as long as the information is credible**
- I prefer the information to come from an unbiased source**
- I prefer information to come from the manufacturer/vendor we are considering**
- I prefer information to come from any manufacturer/vendor in this space**

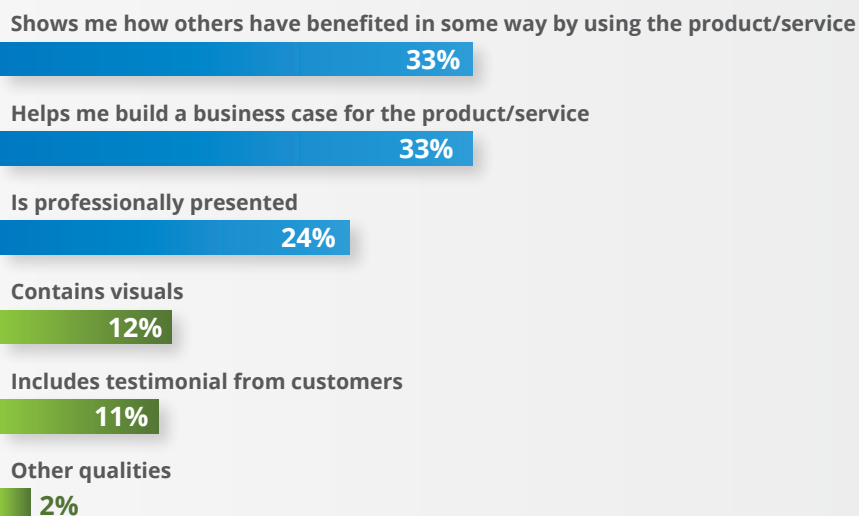


People are looking for credible information wherever they can find it. Vendors should ensure their websites are up-to-date, and also take the time to examine how their brand is presented in all channels.

TO BE USEFUL, CONTENT NEEDS TO SPEAK TO THE AUDIENCE

Marketers are missing an opportunity if they only create generalized content that doesn't address specific situations. They need to understand their audience's pain points and craft content that addresses those issues.

Three Most Important Qualities of Content Reviewed in the Purchasing Decision-Making Process



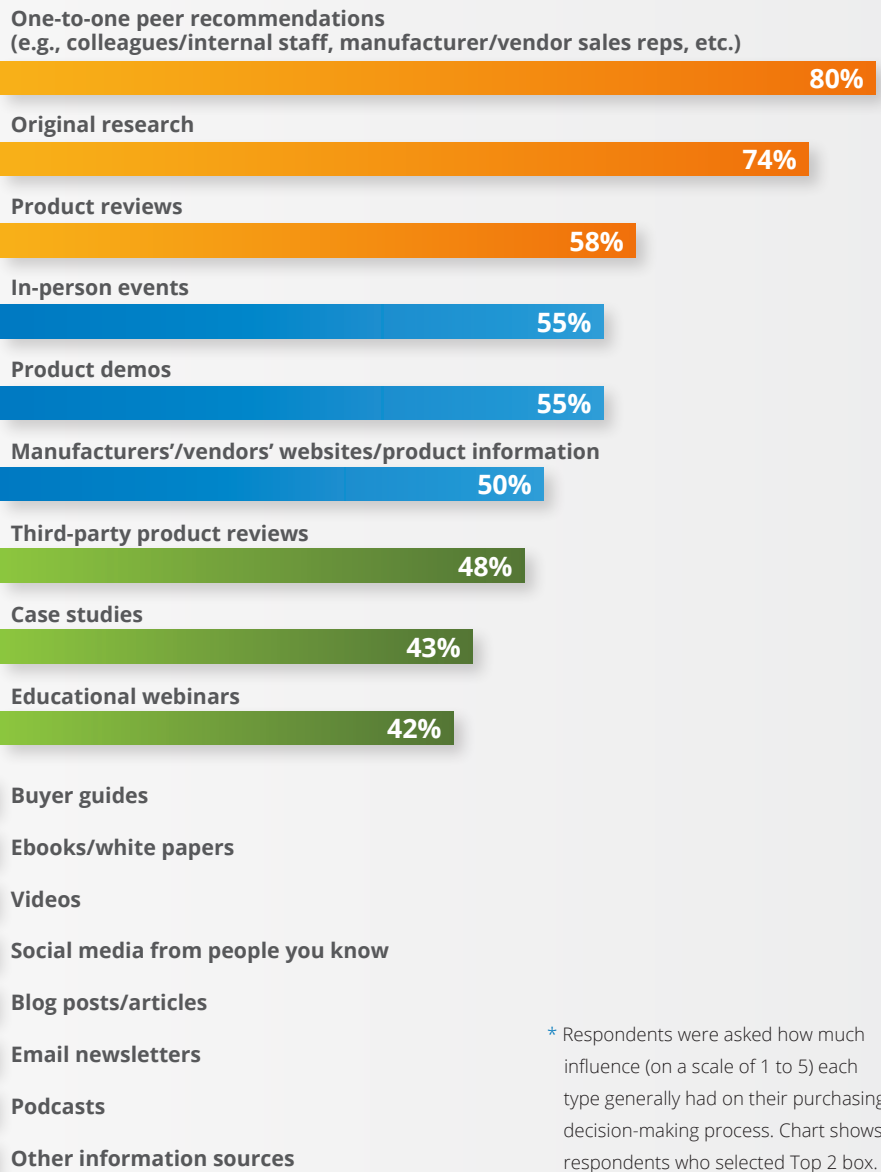
When marketers get specific, they create better connections with decision-makers.



DECISION-MAKERS PREFER A MIX OF EDUCATIONAL CONTENT

When asked how much influence various types of content have on their purchasing decisions, respondents ranked peer recommendations and original research as the most influential. Other content-marketing formats that ranked highly were in-person events (55%), case studies (43%), and educational webinars (42%).

Influence of Content on Purchasing Decisions*



* Respondents were asked how much influence (on a scale of 1 to 5) each type generally had on their purchasing decision-making process. Chart shows respondents who selected Top 2 box.

Although they are not typical content-marketing tactics, product reviews (58%), product demos (55%), and vendor websites (50%) also ranked high on the list, making it clear that decision-makers look for a mix of educational content, regardless of how it's classified.

MOST INFORMATION-SHARING HAPPENS VIA EMAIL

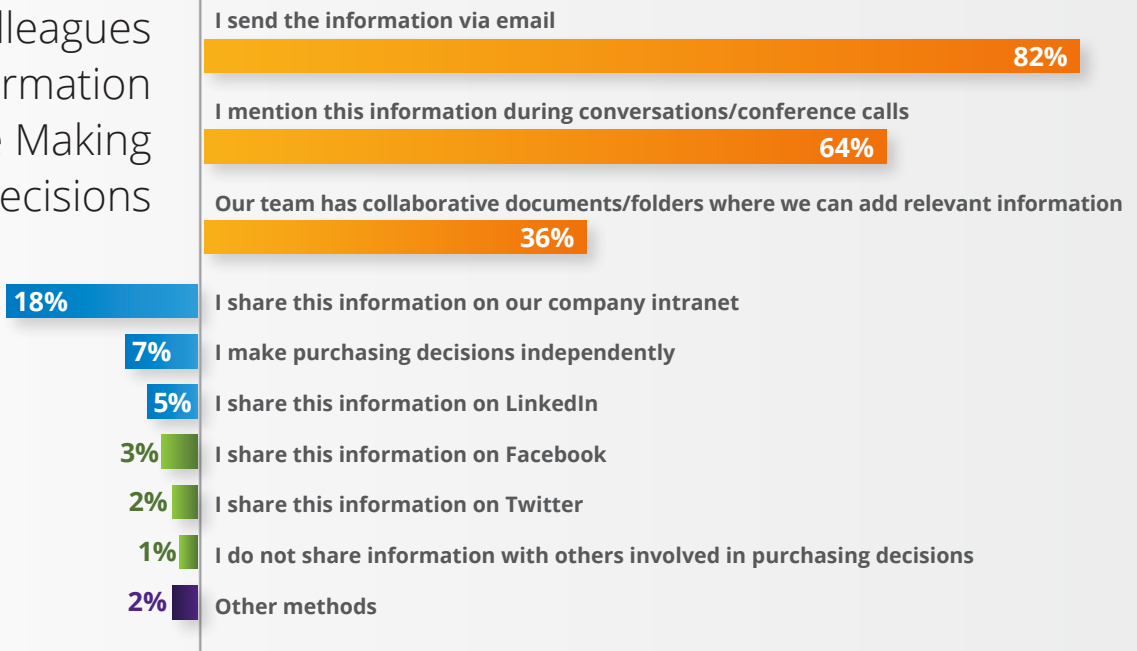


Purchasing decisions are often a shared responsibility. Evaluating prospective vendors often requires discussion among managers, directors, and leaders at the vice president and C-suite level.

And though many marketers are focused on tracking social sharing, few decision-makers share purchasing-related information via traditional social channels. Rather, they primarily rely on email (82%), conversations/conference calls (64%), and collaborative documents (36%) to share information.

Thus, marketers should consider how they can better design content so it is easily shared in those ways.

How Colleagues Share Information While Making Purchasing Decisions



These data indicate that most buyers have already done their homework before reaching out to potential vendors. Therefore, vendors should understand the type of information that customers are seeking and try to meet that need, says Michele Linn, vice president of content at CMI. Peer recommendations and product reviews may not be in the vendor’s control, but original research, in-person events, and product demos are examples of opportunities that are.

“Couple that with the qualities that buyers look for in content. The top three attributes are speaking to the specific needs of customers, the inclusion of product and service specs, and content that is educational instead of promotional,” Linn says. “Ask yourself if you are providing your potential customers with this type of information.”



ABOUT



**CONTENT
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[Content Marketing Institute](#) is the leading global content marketing education and training organization, teaching enterprise brands how to attract and retain customers through compelling, multichannel storytelling. CMI's [Content Marketing World](#) event, the largest content marketing-focused event, is held every September in Cleveland, Ohio, USA, and the [Intelligent Content Conference](#) event is held every spring. CMI publishes the bi-monthly magazine [Chief Content Officer](#), and provides strategic consulting and content marketing research for some of the best-known brands in the world. Watch this [video](#) to learn more about CMI, a UBM company.

ABOUT

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