White Paper

Customer Engagement Study

IT buyers seek value, trust, and clarity in an AI-saturated world

FOUNDRY

The world may be awash in artificial intelligence-generated content. Still, IT decision-makers (ITDMs) continue to struggle to find content with the levels of quality, relevance, and trust they need to inform buying decisions. Buyers demonstrate a clear willingness to engage with vendors that deliver educational, organized, and timely experiences throughout the purchase lifecycle, but they find that only about half of the downloaded content ultimately proves actionable.

Those are among the findings of Foundry's 2026 Customer Engagement Survey, a detailed study of how 676 ITDMs in North America, Europe/Middle East/Africa (EMEA), and the Asia-Pacific (APAC) regions choose and consume content, interact with vendors, and select the sources that guide them through major technology purchase cycles.

The survey, now in its 12th year, assesses the types and volumes of content used in IT purchase decisions, buyers' engagement preferences with technology vendors, the roles of events and multiple media types, advertising effectiveness, and trust in emerging tools such as large language models.

Several themes have remained consistent across multiple studies:

- ITDMs rely on different content formats at different stages of the buying process. This underscores the need for technology marketers to adopt portfolio-based content strategies spanning multiple channels and content types rather than single-asset campaigns.
- Trust, responsiveness, and reputation consistently outweigh

81%

of IT decision-makers find it challenging to find high-quality content from vendors when evaluating major IT products and services.

WHY?
Too much marketing hype and lack of un-biased information

promotional messaging when inviting vendor engagement.

- In-person and virtual events, advertising and even emerging tools such as large language models (LLMs) all influence purchasing behavior, but only when aligned with real buyer needs and expectations.
- Trusted third-party sources, including peers, academic journals, and analysts, are critical to validating decisions.
- Vendors that invest in relevance, education, and experience design continue to earn attention, trust and, ultimately, business.

Drowning in content

Search engines and generative AI have made it easier than ever for buyers to find content relevant to their decisions. However, an abundance of choice can also create noise and confusion. This year's survey found that 81% of respondents are challenged to find high-quality content from vendors when evaluating major IT products and services. That's down from 87% in 2023 and 90% in 2021, but still stubbornly high.

North American respondents reported the highest level of frustration: 49% said the process is extremely or very challenging, compared with 34% in EMEA and 28% in APAC. Buyers at companies with more than 1,000 employees said the process was extremely or very challenging by a 42% to 30% margin over those at the smallest companies. And half of Generation Z buyers born between 1997 and 2012 rated the task extremely or very challenging compared to 31% of boomers born between 1946 and 1964.

Interestingly, the challenge isn't a lack of content availability but an overabundance of undifferentiated assets that fail to provide clarity, depth, or practical guidance. Among the top impediments to finding high-quality information are marketing hype (cited by 31%), lack of unbiased information (25%), overly general information (24%), content overload (22%), overwhelming volume of search results (21%), and uncertainty about whether content is AI-generated (19%).

Gen Z respondents cited marketing hype as a problem far less than their Boomer peers (19% vs. 42%), but were nearly twice as critical of content overload (32% versus 17%).

The good news is that marketers appear to be taking heed. Asked to reflect on work-related content downloaded in the past 12 months, 51% said the information ultimately proved actionable. That's up substantially from the 30% who said so in 2019. This trend has been tracking steadily upward for the past several years and is consistent across regions and company sizes. Value perception increases with age, from a mean of less than 40% among boomers to nearly 56% among Gen Z.

Technical content has the highest perceived value, followed by well-structured, data-grounded, and authentic material. Visual appeal is seen as the least important quality. Buyers especially appreciate content that is relevant to a specific problem or stage of the buying process, educational in nature, and grounded in real-world use cases.

75%

of buyers say they are more likely to consider a vendor who educates them through each stage of the decision process.

When IT decision-makers find valuable content they...

1. Visit tech content sites for further research
2. Visit vendor websites or contact vendors
3. Add vendors to a consideration set

Of course, marketers can't anticipate the individual needs of each prospect. Still, a well-rounded content plan that addresses distinctive stages of the buying process has the best chance of attracting prospects and keeping them engaged. Three-quarters of buyers said they are more likely to consider a vendor who educates them through each stage of the decision process.

TAKEAWAYS ⟶ Map content strategies to the buying process, identify stakeholders at each stage and deliver advice in the formats they prefer.

Now that you have their attention...

When ITDMs encounter content they find valuable, their next steps follow predictable paths. About half visit technology content

Educating tech buyers is critical

75% are more likely to consider a vendor who educates them through each stage of the decision process.

64% say that vendors do a better job of educating non-technical functions within their organization.

sites for further research (57% in North America), while 46% visit vendor websites or contact vendors for more information. Much further down the list are adding vendors to a consideration set (31%), searching on social media (30%) and participating in a product demo (29%).

Millennial and Gen Z respondents are more likely to search for vendors on social sites but less inclined to visit vendor websites.

This behavior underscores the importance of using content as a gateway to deeper interaction. Information provided as a download or video should provide a simple path to a related web page that invites visitors to investigate choices more deeply and share additional information.

Vendors who provide clear, ongoing educational resources are more helpful and credible than those that rely on episodic or campaign-driven outreach. Three-quarters of buyers (and 79% at the largest companies) are more likely to consider a vendor who educates them through each stage of the decision process.

Notably, nearly two-thirds said that vendors can do a better job of educating non-technical functions within their organization. This finding is consistent with other Foundry research indicating that non-technical business users exert greater influence over buying decisions. Buyers at the largest companies consider end-user education a priority by a 71% to 54% margin over those at the smallest companies.

Navigating the buying journey

Enterprise IT purchase decisions have never been linear. Buyers move back and forth between stages as requirements evolve, stakeholders change, and new information emerges. The challenge for vendors is to anticipate changing information needs as ITDMs move through the funnel, anticipate new influences, and provide consistent messaging that helps buyers maintain confidence throughout the process.

Since its inception, the survey has tracked a detailed breakdown of the content types used at each of the seven stages of the purchase process (defined below). The choices differ at each stage.

The most consistently relied-upon formats include:

- Product testing, reviews and opinions
- Technology news articles
- Product demos
- Analyst research reports
- Third-party research reports
- Vendor presentations

All were cited as influential by at least 30% of respondents. These top six categories have changed little over the years.

However, the relative importance of different content types shifts by stage:

- Determining business need: Technology news articles and analyst research are favored to help frame the problem.
- Determining technical requirements: Technology news is still critical, but reviews, demos and third-party research support rise in significance to support feasibility and fit assessments. North American respondents show a somewhat greater preference for white papers than their peers in other regions. Millennials and Gen Z buyers exhibit a much higher preference for AI search and data visualizations than their older peers, but show less interest in white papers.
- Evaluating products and services: Product testing, demos and vendor presentations top the list of the most important sources at this stage, particularly at the smallest companies.
- Recommending and selecting vendors: The same sources also dominate this critical decision stage.
- Selling internally: Credible external content, such as news articles and analyst reports, becomes essential to build consensus around choices. Respondents from small companies favor testing and demos by a better-than-two-to-one margin compared to those at the largest companies. The youngest buyers rely significantly more on online discussion forums than their elders, but less on vendor presentations and product literature.
- Approval and authorization: Product tests and reviews dominate this stage, but risk-reducing sources like analysts and third-party research assume a larger role. The youngest buyers show a marked preference for case studies, third-party research and technology news articles over their older peers, who rely more on product literature and product testing.
- Post-sales engagement: Reviews, research and ongoing education help validate decisions and support adoption.

Technology news articles were cited as a top five influence factor in six of the seven buying stages this year.

North American buyers and those at the largest companies showed a significantly higher preference for third-party validation, such as analyst reports, technology news articles, and product reviews, than others. This may be because the sources of such information are concentrated in the U.S.

Notably, recent studies have documented a rise in the influence of technology news articles on buying decisions. This year, they were cited as a top five influence factor in six of the seven buying stages. That compares to just three stages in the 2023 and 2021 studies. This finding may indicate that the rapid pace of technology evolution is challenging buyers to stay current with new trends and rely more heavily on news sources.

76%

of respondents say they are more willing to exchange contact details with a company with whom they already have a relationship with.

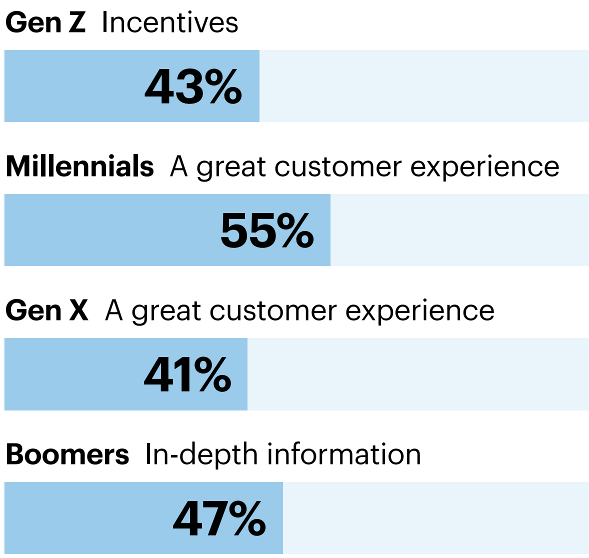
The content topics ITDMs prefer across the seven stages of the buying process also vary. In the early stages, buyers are most interested in understanding the skills needed to deploy and support technology, security capabilities, and business value. As they shift into the evaluation and recommendation stages, case studies and total cost of ownership comparisons exert greater influence. When selling internally and gaining approval, business value and return on investment are the primary areas of interest.

TAKEAWAYS ⟶ Interest in information sources varies as purchases progress. Early stages favor strategic context, industry trends and business outcomes. Later stages prioritize implementation details, integration, cost, security, and support. Vendors should optimize their spending decisions to match funnel stages. Investments in public and analyst relations help fortify those critical third-party influencers.

Trust in us

There is a reason big brands keep getting bigger: Businesses like working with vendors that have established track records and that have demonstrated value in the past. Customer Engagement research has consistently shown that trust and reputation materially influence buying decisions, and this year's survey was no different. Overall, 76% of respondents said they are more willing to exchange contact details with a company with whom they already have a relationship, and 75% said known

Generational differences on what influences ITDMs to share



and trusted brands are more likely to be added to the short list. These findings were virtually unchanged from the 2023 study and up from 69% in the 2021 research. The preference for education and experience is particularly strong among buyers at large companies and in the millennial age group.

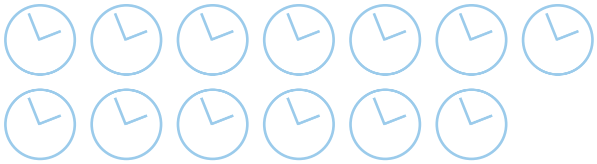
Trust is built less by branding than by behavior. Factors that strengthen trust include transparent, accurate information, responsiveness to follow-ups, consistent follow-through after engagement, and validation from peers and third parties. Customers are most likely to share information about an IT vendor with peers if they've had a great experience. Other factors that influence sharing decisions include the availability of useful "how to" information, timely and relevant content and in-depth information/primers. North American buyers showed a greater overall willingness to share content than those in other regions. Preferences are consistent across all age groups.

Buyers are also willing to experiment with new technologies. Nearly two-thirds are open to being among the first users of new technology products from an existing vendor, and 58% are willing to work with an emerging vendor. Receptivity is especially pronounced among the largest companies and those from North America and Europe. Millennials are far more open than Boomers to working with new vendors, by a 71%-to-31% margin.

Generational factors influence decision-making. Millennials are more likely than any other group to share great customer experiences, while Gen Z is much more inclined to share entertaining content. Boomers prefer to share in-depth information.

Turn-offs include aggressive sales tactics, delayed responses, and irrelevant outreach. Responsiveness is critical, as evidenced by the 71% who said the vendor that responds to their questions quickly and thoughtfully usually gets the business.

Younger ITDMs expect quicker follow-up than their elders. On average, respondents



Respondents expect a follow-up contact within 13 hours of submitting a request.

→ **11.4 HOURS FOR MILLENNIALS**

→ **9.8 HOURS FOR GEN Z**

expect a follow-up contact within 13 hours of submitting a request, a significant drop from the 17.5 hours they expected in 2023. That figure falls to 11.4 hours for millennials and 9.68 hours for Gen Z. These more aggressive expectations likely reflect the real-time digital experiences younger buyers see in their daily lives.

Despite ongoing concerns about data privacy, ITDMs demonstrate a strong willingness to register for content when the value is clear. The survey found that 95% of IT decision-makers are willing to share their information with a tech vendor to gain access to content. That figure rises to 99% at organizations with more than 1,000 employees.

95%

of ITDMs are willing to share their information with a tech vendor to gain access to content.

99% at orgs with 1,000+ employees

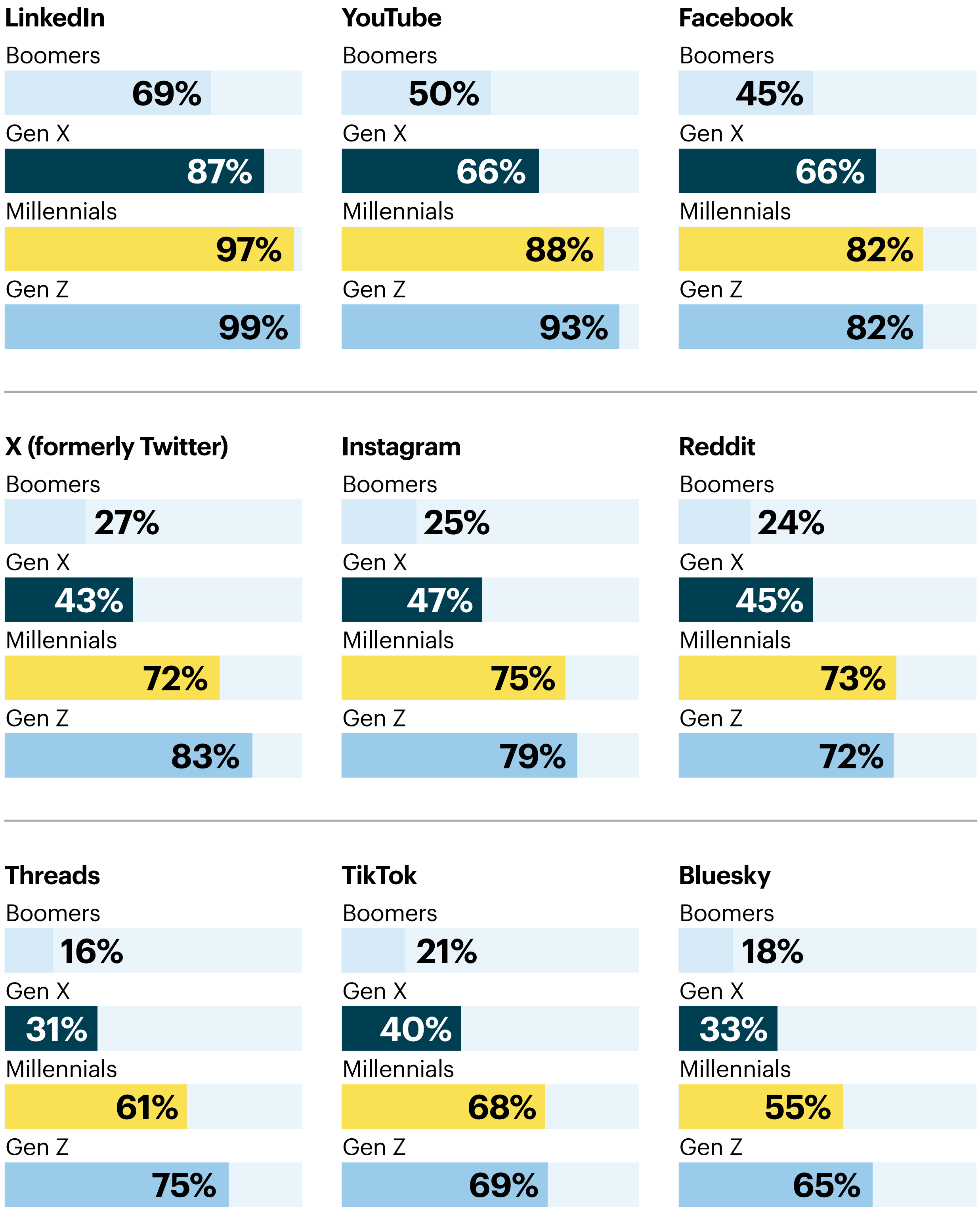
The deciding factor is not persistence, but quality. Their top reasons for responding are that the vendor shared valuable content with them (cited by 44%), was knowledgeable about the specific challenges (37%), demonstrated honesty/transparency (36%), described unique features or capabilities of their products (35%), and offered a demo or trial (34%). Influence factors are consistent across age groups and geographies.

TAKEAWAYS ⟶ More content does not mean more impact. ITDMs respond to vendors that deliver clear value, trustworthy information, and fast, relevant follow-up. Aggressive sales tactics and generic outreach can erode trust, while educational, transparent, and responsive experiences drive engagement. Vendors that focus on helping buyers make better decisions, rather than simply pushing messages, are far more likely to earn attention, credibility, and business.

Social media for business research

Social platforms continue to play a role in professional research, though usage varies by generation. Overall, 75% of ITDMs report using social sites for business purposes, particularly to consume, share, and post job-related content. Generational differences are evident, with younger ITDMs more likely to engage across a broader range of platforms.

Social site use by generation



LinkedIn is the overall king of the hill for business use, with 75% of all respondents consulting it and 99% of Gen Zers. YouTube follows at 70% adoption and is the top site in APAC. Facebook, Instagram, and X are each used by more than 55% overall. Use of all but the top three social sites is considerably lower among buyers at smaller companies.

In some cases, the generational divergence is stark; just 50% of Boomers report using YouTube, for example, compared to 93% of Gen Z. The popular video-sharing site TikTok is used by 69% of Gen Z and 68% of Millennial buyers, compared to just 21% of Boomers.

TAKEAWAYS ⟶ For vendors, this reinforces the importance of meeting buyers where they already consume information. Given that younger buying influencers are likely to be lower in the organization, channels like Instagram, TikTok and X are good choices for the technical content that appeals to practitioners.

97%

of IT decision-makers say they benefit from a virtual event format.

99% find value in webcasts.

Events remain central to engagement

In-person and virtual events continue to play a significant role in the IT purchasing process, and there are signs that their influence is growing.

- 92% attended at least one event in the past year
- 86% attended an in-person event, up from 82% in 2023.
- Eighty-one percent attended a virtual event, up from 77% in 2023.

Respondents from the largest companies were much more likely to have attended an event in the past year than their peers at the smallest companies. For example, 80% of large-company respondents said they had attended a multi-day trade show, compared with just 48% at the smallest firms. Younger buyers assigned greater value to events of all types than older buyers did. This reflects their relative lack of experience.

Virtual events are now part of the IT landscape, with 97% of respondents saying they deliver value. The primary

Why tech buyers are attending events:

- To hear from industry experts
- See new products
- Connect with IT colleagues
- Learn about new vendors and offerings
- Ask questions of current vendors
- Share ideas

benefits are time savings (cited by 55%), cost savings (50%) and the opportunity to attend more events (42%).

The top reasons ITDMs attend events are to hear from industry experts and to see new products, each cited by 48% of all respondents and 56% of North Americans. There is a broad range of other reasons somewhat lower in importance, including connecting with IT colleagues (34%), learning about new vendors and offerings (33%), asking questions of current vendors (32%) and sharing ideas (32%). Critically, 71% of buyers – and 79% of millennials - say events help shorten and simplify the technology purchase process.

Among webcasts, the most popular form of virtual events, case studies rank as the most valuable content, particularly in APAC, followed closely by access to related materials from the session and by interaction with presenters. Younger ITDMs favor interactive elements by nearly a three-to-one margin over boomers. Fully 99% of ITDMs find value in webcasts, making them an essential marketing tool.

The preferred webcast length average is 37.6 minutes, which is nearly double the 19.2 minutes buyers preferred in the 2019 survey. There was little variance by region or age. Despite buyers' apparently increasing tolerance for longer sessions, the results indicate that concise, focused events are more effective than extended presentations.

TAKEAWAYS ⟶ Events are a critical tool for marketers, and the rise of virtual events in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has given them some needed cost flexibility. In-person events work best when they allow buyers to connect with peers and experts. Virtual events are a useful option when communicating news, demonstrating features, and introducing buyers to new products and services.

Advertising works when it's relevant

Technology advertising has a significant influence on behavior, particularly in the early stages of the buying process. This year's survey found that 95% of ITDMs have taken additional actions after seeing an advertisement from a technology provider, virtually unchanged from the 90% who reported doing so in the 2023 survey.

Typical actions include visiting a vendor's website (noted by 58% overall and 65% of North Americans) and researching the vendor (51% but just 43% in EMEA). Younger buyers check out vendor social media accounts at more than three times the rate of older ones, indicating that this information is critical to include in ads and collateral.

95%

of ITDMs have taken additional actions after seeing an advertisement from a technology provider.

Engagement increases significantly when ads address current needs and educate buyers about technologies and issues. In both educational content and advertising, buyers favor informational value and relevance to their needs over novelty.

TAKEAWAYS ⟶ Treat trust as an operational discipline, not a branding exercise. Buyers reward companies that consistently deliver accurate, educational content, respond quickly, and follow through after engagement. Established brands had an edge, but emerging vendors can earn consideration by demonstrating relevance, transparency, and respect for buyers' time. Speed matters more than persistence. Tailor content and outreach by generation and role. Quality wins: Buyers are willing to share, explore, and engage when vendors prove they understand and can respond to their unique challenges.

Key takeaways for technology vendors

The Customer Engagement Survey highlights a buyer community that is engaged, informed, and selective. Several strategic implications for marketers emerge:

Design content around the buyer journey. Provide relevant, well-organized and educational content mapped to each stage of the purchase process. Align content, events and outreach to buyer intent so resources are easy to find and appropriate to decision readiness.

Prioritize quality, relevance and value. Focus on fewer, higher-value assets rather than high volumes of generic content. IT decision-makers will register and engage when content clearly demonstrates an understanding of their role, business challenges and needs.

Use diverse formats to reach diverse audiences. Content preferences vary by purchase stage, role, generation and company size. Create and promote a mix of formats and topics to ensure broad relevance and sustained engagement.

Build trust through experience, not messaging. Trust is earned through responsiveness, transparency, education, and thoughtful communication. Vendors that reduce complexity, respect buyers' time, and deliver consistent value are more likely to be considered and recommended.

Leverage events as learning and engagement channels. IT decision-makers continue to rely on in-person and virtual industry events to stay current. Include events in marketing strategies to ensure visibility where buyers actively seek information and peer insight.

The survey paints a picture of IT decision-makers who are not disengaged or overwhelmed to the point of inaction. Instead, they are navigating complexity with discernment. They reward vendors that deliver relevance, clarity and respect across every interaction.

As purchase processes grow more collaborative, the vendors that succeed will be those that view engagement not as a campaign but as an ongoing relationship built on education, trust, and experience.

About the survey

Foundry's 12th annual Customer Engagement survey was conducted among the audience of 676 IT and business decision-makers. Foundry conducted this survey online throughout December 2025 to better understand the various types and volume of content consumed throughout the purchase process for major technology products and services. It also looks to gain insight into the preferences of IT decision-makers regarding IT vendor contact and follow-up during the purchase process. All respondents had IT or management titles, with 35% based in North America, 42% in Asia/Pacific (APAC) regions, and 22% from Europe/Middle East/Africa (EMEA).

Key global difference

For many survey questions, IT buyers report similar results across all three regions surveyed. However, a few key points of difference stick out.

North America

49% say it is challenging to find enough, high-quality trusted information on major IT products to make informed purchase decisions. This is mostly due to too much marketing hype/ empty buzzwords and information being too general/non-technical.

81% are more likely to consider a vendor who educates them through each stage of the decision process.

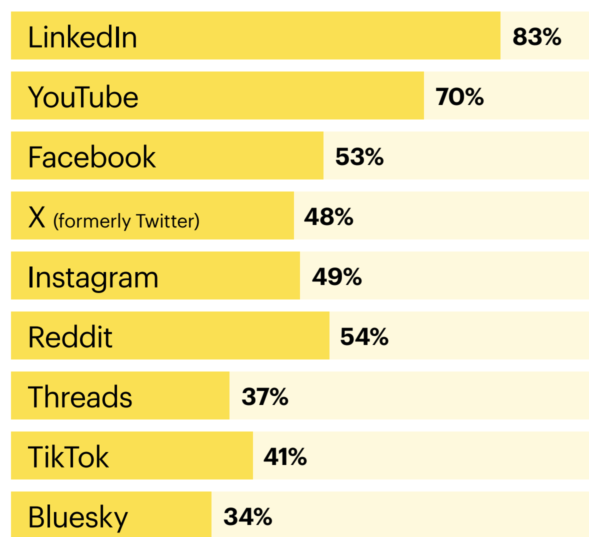
IT decision-makers in North America rely on a variety of content types throughout the purchase process, including:

- Product testing/reviews/opinions **(44%)**
- Product demos **(41%)**
- Technology news articles **(41%)**
- Vendor presentations **(39%)**
- Analyst research reports **(38%)**
- Third-party research reports **(38%)**

56% say seeing new products is the top reason for attending an industry or job-related event in the past 6–12 months.

66% of ITDMs say that they're open to being among the first users of a new technology product from an established vendor.

90% of ITDMs in North America say they use social media for business-related purposes



97% of North America ITDMs have taken additional actions after seeing an advertisement from a technology provider. They're most likely to:

- Visit their website
- Research the vendor
- Download a demo or trial version

EMEA

34% say it is challenging to find enough, high-quality trusted information on major IT products to make informed purchase decisions. This is mostly due to too much marketing hype/empty buzzwords and lack of relevant information.

75% are more likely to consider a vendor who educates them through each stage of the decision process.

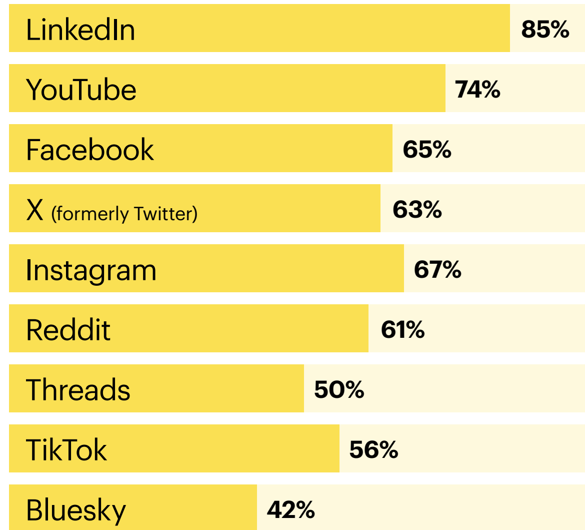
IT decision-makers in EMEA rely on a variety of content types throughout the purchase process, including:

- Product testing/reviews/opinions **(37%)**
- Technology news articles **(35%)**
- Product demos **(32%)**
- Customer case studies **(31%)**
- Analyst research reports **(27%)**
- Vendor presentations **(27%)**

43% say seeing new products is the top reason for attending an industry or job-related event in the past 6–12 months.

72% of ITDMs say that they're open to being among the first users of a new technology product from an established vendor.

93% of ITDMs in EMEA say they use social media for business-related purposes



95% of EMEA ITDMs have taken additional actions after seeing an advertisement from a technology provider. They're most likely to:

- Visit their website
- Research the vendor
- Click on the ad

APAC

28% say it is challenging to find enough, high-quality trusted information on major IT products to make informed purchase decisions. This is mostly due to lack of relevant information and too much marketing hype/empty buzzwords.

70% are more likely to consider a vendor who educates them through each stage of the decision process.

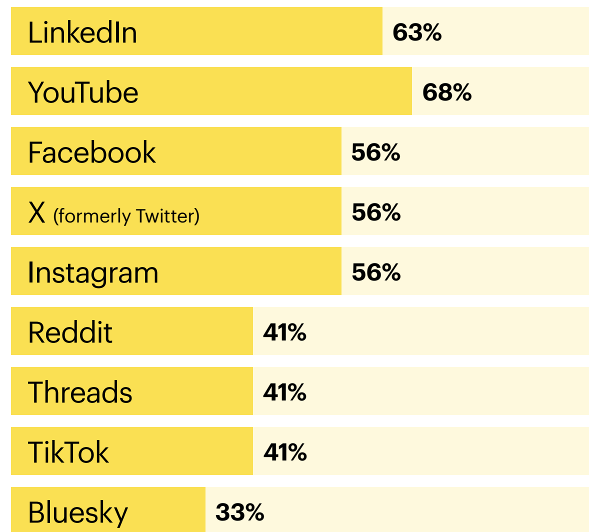
IT decision-makers in APAC rely on a variety of content types throughout the purchase process, including:

- Technology news articles **(41%)**
- Product testing/reviews/opinions **(38%)**
- Product demos **(32%)**
- Third-party research reports **(29%)**
- Analyst research reports **(28%)**
- Product literature **(25%)**

46% say hearing from industry experts is the top reason for attending an industry or job-related event in the past 6–12 months.

57% of ITDMs say that they're open to being among the first users of a new technology product from an established vendor.

85% of ITDMs in APAC say they use social media for business-related purposes



93% of APAC ITDMs have taken additional actions after seeing an advertisement from a technology provider. They're most likely to:

- Visit their website
- Research the vendor
- Sign up for a newsletter

Examining the marketplace

Research is an invaluable way for marketers to better understand customers and prospects, with the goal of building quality connections. At Foundry this is one way we are focused on building bridges between tech buyers and sellers. Our first-party relationships with the most important tech buyers and influencers around the world, allows us to apply value across our customers marketing stack. Our research portfolio explores our audiences' perspectives and challenges around specific technologies—from analytics and cloud, to IoT and security—and examines the changing roles within the IT purchase process, arming tech marketers with the information they need to identify opportunities.

To see what research is available, visit foundryco.com/tools-for-marketers.
For a presentation of full results from any of these studies, contact your Foundry sales executive or go to foundryco.com/contact-us.

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 want to engage with the vendors they are working with. Visit foundryco.com/customerjourney for more information.

Buying process studies

- Customer Engagement
- Role and Influence of the Technology Decision-Maker

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. These research studies are designed to help IT marketers understand what their customers are focused on and where the market is moving.

Role and priority studies

- CIO Tech Poll: Tech Priorities
- State of the CIO

Technology-specific studies

- AI Priorities
- Cloud Computing
- Security Priorities
- Partner Marketing

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About Foundry

Foundry's vision is to make the world a better place by enabling the right use of technology, because we believe that the right use of technology can be a powerful force for good.

Foundry is a trusted and dependable editorial voice, creating quality content to generate knowledge, engagement and deep relationships with our community of the most influential technology and security decision-makers. Our premium media brands, including CIO®, Computerworld®, CSO®, InfoWorld®, Macworld®, Network World®, PCWorld® and Tech Hive®, engage a quality audience of the most powerful technology buyers with essential guidance on the evolving technology landscape.

Our trusted brands inform our global data intelligence platform to identify and activate purchasing intent, powering our clients' success. Our marketing services create custom content with marketing impact across video, mobile, social and digital. We simplify complex campaigns that fulfill marketers' global ambitions seamlessly, with consistency that delivers quality results and wins awards. Additional information about Foundry is available at foundryco.com.