TrustRadius

BRIDGING THE TRUST GAP

B2B Tech Buying in the Age of AI

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Executive Foreword

For nearly a decade, we've studied how B2B buyers research technology products and how vendors adapt to their shifts in behavior and preferences.

Years of market research reveal a persistent gap between what buyers seek and how vendors engage and a lag in how quickly vendors react to change, especially with disruptive changes.

2025 will be known as the year that GenAI completely changed B2B technology buying. In 2024, **68% of the buyers we surveyed reported that generative AI tools had _no_ impact on their B2B technology buying process**, with only 20% saying GenAI was helpful. Trust was a key barrier. Fast-forward just one year, and **72% of buyers now report encountering Google's AI Overviews in search** and 7% reported using LLMs like ChatGPT as part of their buying process. For now, search still plays a far more dominant role than the direct usage of LLMs.

Yet a majority of those buyers, certainly anyone making a considered purchase, wants to fact-check what they read in AI overviews. **90% of buyers click through to sources featured in AI overviews**. As marketers, influencing AI Overviews is clearly now very important, but beyond that, serving the need for buyers to fact-check is also critical. It reinforces the value of getting your customers to give public testimony and to serve as references.

AI Overviews and increasingly LLMs are reshaping brand discoverability, turning many brands' SEO strategies on their heads, increasing the use of paid search, and driving higher customer acquisition costs. Brands will need to find new strategies to identify and target in-market buyers.

Last year we introduced a "magic wand" question: _"If one thing could change about tech buying, what would it be?"_ For two years running, buyers have overwhelmingly said they don't want to be contacted by sales until they're ready to purchase. Yet 72% of vendors persist in believing outreach is effective— a number that grew 13% year-over-year. Despite this, sales outreach still doesn't rank among the top five resources buyers consult during their decision-making process.

Buyer research means nothing without the action that follows. It's about aligning buyer preferences with sales and marketing efforts—so it's a win-win.

Vinay Bhagat
Founder and CEO
TrustRadius

How AI Is Shaping the Buyer Experience (for Better or Worse)

Let's get straight to the good stuff. Artificial intelligence (AI) technology has exploded in the past year. It seems that every vendor wants to be on the cutting edge of AI technology, either through leveraging it in their workflows or by releasing AI features. #AIpowered

Tech buyers are not immune to this trend. New AI search engines such as Perplexity have burst onto the scene and Google introduced AI Overviews, bringing generative AI content into the spotlight. Last year, our survey data indicated that tech buyers were beginning to experiment with AI tools in both their day-to-day roles and their tech buying process. This year, AI content is inescapable, and buyers are encountering it in their research process, whether they seek it out or not.

Google's AI Overviews Disrupted Search Behavior

Over the past year, Google made numerous changes to its search algorithms and added the AI Overview feature to search pages. According to Google, these overviews leverage generative AI to summarize relevant content across multiple sites and are intended to answer the searcher's question immediately. And these overviews are everywhere. **Overall, 72% of buyers in our sample reported encountering Google's AI Overviews**, meaning that **most buyers interact with AI-generated content** during their research. This data varied across regions. Buyers in the EMEA region encountered them least often (59%) and APAC buyers encountered them most often (84%). U.S.-based buyers came in the middle, at 73%. We anticipate that many more buyers in Europe will encounter AI Overviews in the coming months, as Google finished rolling them out in this region in early April 2025.

> The era of volume traffic is over. I don't think it takes a PhD to see the traffic tsunami coming. However, purchase intent won't simply vanish. What's going away are clicks from the super early stage of the buyer journey. But people will click through visit sites eventually. So, I think we'll see a lot less traffic, but the traffic that still arrives will be of higher quality (think stronger intent). Thinking a step further, higher-quality traffic means we'll get a much better understanding of which content resonates. But the mindset shift will take a few calories."
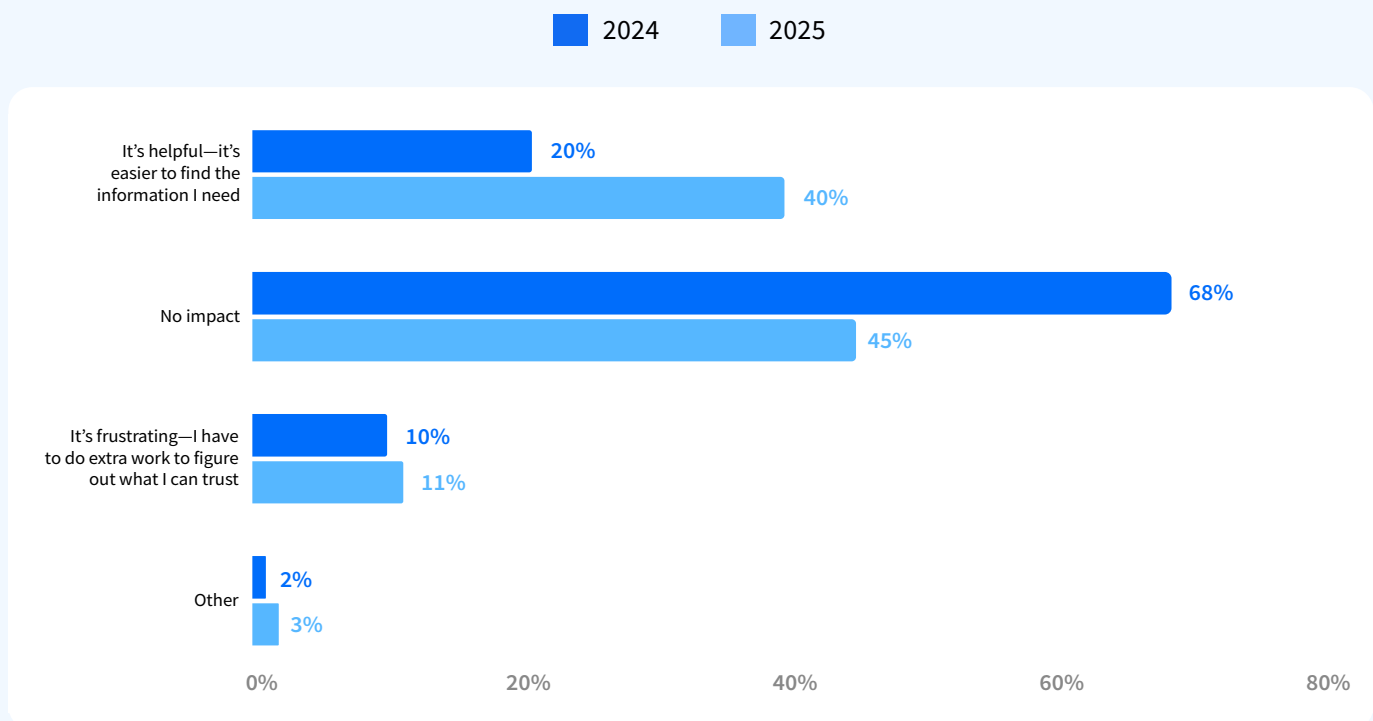
—**Kevin Indig, Organic Growth Advisor, Growth Memo**

If you read that last paragraph and thought, "Yikes!," we totally understand. Now that Google's AI Overviews can answer simple queries, buyers no longer need to click into search results to get their questions answered. Many vendors have experienced dramatic traffic fluctuations as a result of these changes and are struggling to maintain visibility in the post-AI Overview world. In addition, search engine optimization (SEO) has become increasingly hard for brands to manage, leading to higher search engine marketing (SEM) spend and rising customer acquisition costs (CAC). However, this isn't the end of the world for brand discoverability. These overviews cite sources, and **90% of buyers surveyed said that they click through the sources** cited in AI Overviews for fact-checking purposes. Buyers are clearly wanting to fact-check. They also want to consult with their peers, which we'll get into later.

How Technology Buyers Are (and Aren't) Leveraging AI in the Buyer Journey

Last year, buyers were beginning to explore AI tools both in their day-to-day roles and in their buying journey. At that time, buyers had to actively seek out an AI tool to leverage it in their purchase process. This year is different. Buyers are encountering AI-generated content in their search process and report using AI tools more in their day-to-day lives. More buyers are indicating that AI impacts their buying journey, and most report a positive impact.

AI Impact on the Buying Process, 2024 vs. 2025

■ 2024   ■ 2025

It's helpful—it's easier to find the information I need: 20% (2024), 40% (2025)

No impact: 68% (2024), 45% (2025)

It's frustrating—I have to do extra work to figure out what I can trust: 10% (2024), 11% (2025)

Other: 2% (2024), 3% (2025)

40% of buyers say it's easier to find the information they need because of AI, which is double what we saw last year. Likewise, we saw a drop in the number of buyers who said AI had no impact on their buying process and saw only a 1% increase in buyers who said that AI made their research harder.

Occasional AI use has increased from 17% in 2024 to 30% in 2025, and non-use has decreased. Frequent usage has increased slightly but remains low (4% to 8%). Buyers also report increased trust in AI tools, with 80% of buyers reporting that they trust AI tools at least sometimes, a **19% increase from last year**.

How Often Buyers Trust AI Content, 2024 vs. 2025

2024 ■ 2025 ■

	Always	Very often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
2024	0%	9%	52%	28%	11%
2025	2%	20%	58%	15%	6%
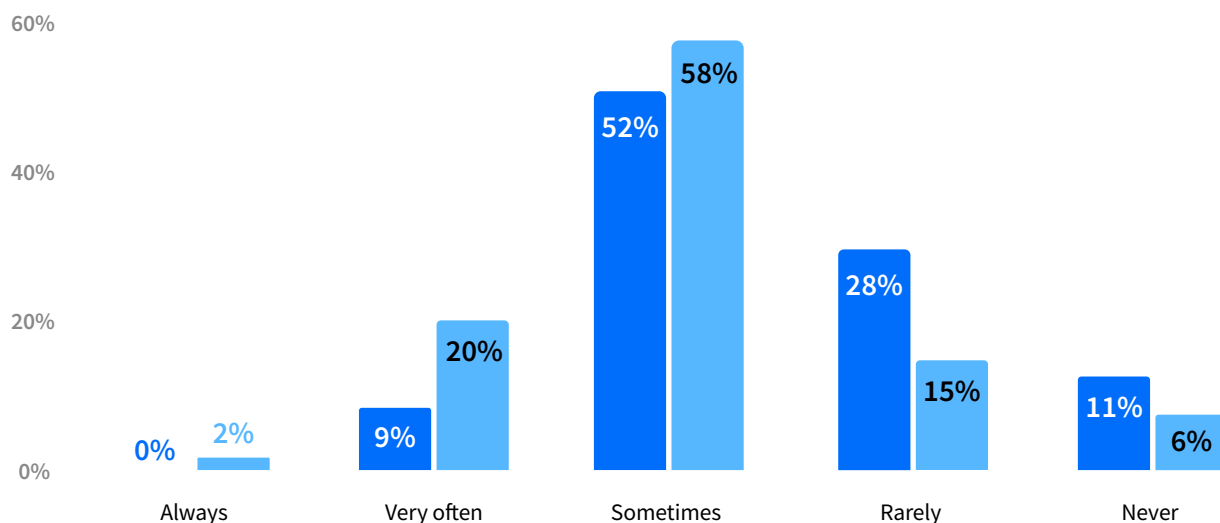
That said, the most frequent users of AI tools are the most skeptical and report the highest levels of fact-checking, with 62% of frequent AI users reporting that they always or very often fact-check.

Frequency of AI Use vs. Frequency of Fact-Checking

Legend: ■ Always ■ Very often ■ Sometimes ■ Rarely □ Never

Frequency of AI use	Always	Very often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
A lot	28%	34%	30%	6%	1%
A little bit	19%	42%	29%	8%	2%
Tried, but it wasn't helpful	23%	41%	24%	10%	2%
Not at all	22%	33%	27%	9%	10%

Frequency of fact-checking (0% – 125%)
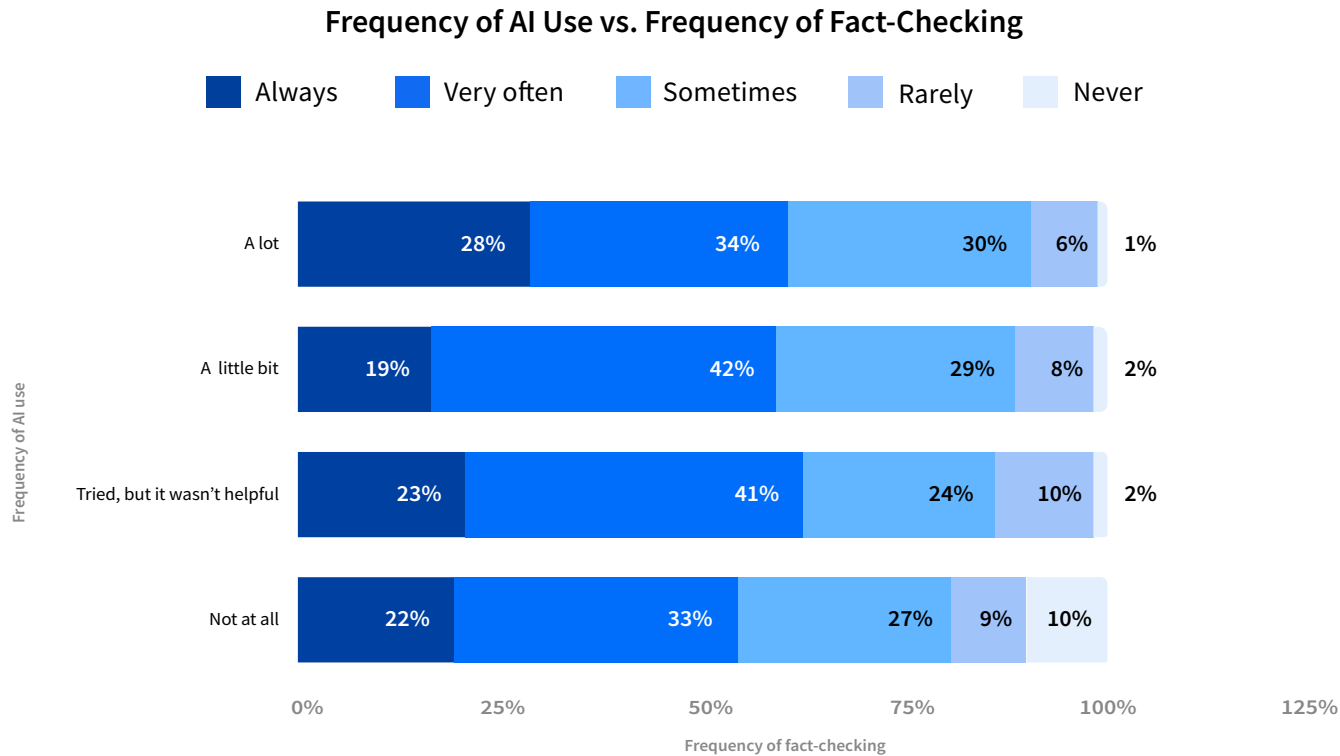
Notably, the Gen Z buyers in our sample were more likely to use and trust AI tools. 15% of Gen Z buyers use AI a lot, nearly double the 8% of all surveyed buyers, and 30% say they "always" or "very often" trust AI-generated content, as opposed to 20% of all surveyed buyers. This generational shift is unsurprising, given Gen Z are typically early adopters of new technology (hello TikTok), and are considerably more "online" than other generations. We should expect the trend of increased AI usage to continue in years to come as Gen Z buyers gain influence.

" AI forms an opinion before buyers do, scanning trust signals from everywhere. Be present where they already look: trusted communities, influencers, social, and events. Be genuinely helpful. When we lead by solving, not selling, we'll be remembered when they're ready. Push too soon, and we're forgotten before the short-list. Trust is the new currency. And, ironically, AI will push us to be more human than ever in how we show up, solve problems, and serve."

—Liza Adams, AI & Exec Advisor and Fractional CMO, GrowthPath Partners

Large enterprise organizations are often slow to adopt new technology and have stricter compliance rules around which tools they can use, but from what we've seen, this hasn't slowed down their adoption of AI tools. Enterprise buyers (those who purchased products that cost $100,000/year or more) were also more likely to use AI occasionally. **39% of enterprise buyers used AI "a little bit," as opposed to 30% of the total population**. This further indicates that AI usage may increase in the coming years as tools become more accessible to smaller organizations.

Most buyers we surveyed were open to AI as a tool, with several acknowledging that it could save them time, even if they don't fully trust it yet. When asked why, the most frequent reasons cited were that the technology is still too new and a lack of certainty around when the models were last trained. Since these models need to be trained, which is a time-intensive process, buyers expressed concern that the model might not have up-to-date knowledge of new or emerging technologies.

Read real buyer perspectives on the role of AI in the buying journey and why they do (or don't) trust it.

"I have seen a lot of Google AI results with bad info. It's still new, and I would want to vet and verify any data from any source with multiple sources."

—*Individual contributor at an enterprise company (1,001-5,000 employees)*

"I trust the info provided but do not rely only on that information to make a decision."

—*Director at an enterprise company (5,001-10,000 employees)*

"This [AI Overview] really helps to get quick information about a subject. The link to the source is also awesome because it allows us to quickly get more info."

—*Manager at an enterprise company (10,001+ employees)*

Yes, we will experience more zero-click searches and decreased click-through rates, but we will also learn that impressions count and are crucial to the conversation. When your buyer is researching a solution, you really want to be everywhere: classic organic rankings, appearing in LLMs, ads, review sites, and listicles as well as press mentions and features. And the good news, our B2B SaaS clients have proven that the traffic that still comes to your website converts incredibly well—up to 2.3% conversion rate across all content formats and funnel stages."

—**Viola Eva, Founder, Flow Agency**

How Vendors Can Remain Discoverable in the Age of AI

Luckily, the vendors we surveyed are in touch with buyers when it comes to AI usage. **Vendors estimated that roughly 34% of their buyers were leveraging AI, while 38% of buyers indicated that they use AI at least some of the time**. While Google's AI Overviews are disrupting search behavior and traffic to vendor sites, most vendors feel that AI has had an overall positive impact on their product's discoverability, with only 5% of vendors reporting that AI has hurt discoverability.

Perceived Impact of AI on Product Discoverability

Category	Percentage
Very positive	12%
Somewhat	42%
No impact	26%
Somewhat	5%
Very negative	0%
Unsure	15%
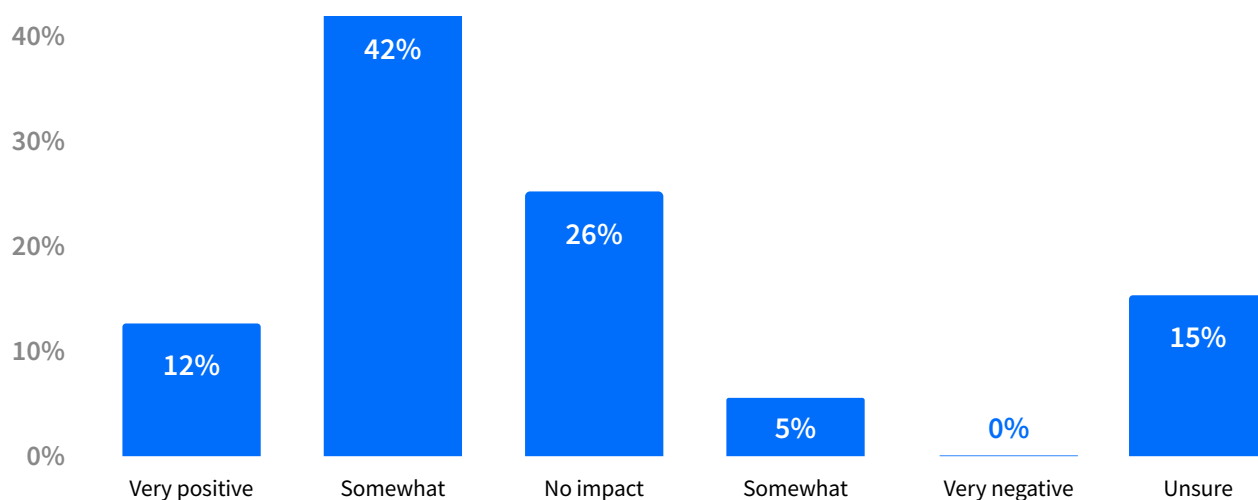
There is a notable disconnect with vendors on how AI models are trained, with many reporting that they believe AI models have access to both ungated and gated resources on their site. This is incorrect, as AI models are only able to access publicly available data for training purposes.

Why is this important?

Many vendors leverage gated assets to drive leads and collect contact information from potential buyers. We're certainly not advocating for vendors to abandon this practice, but vendors must find the right balance between gated and ungated content to maintain discoverability in the age of AI.

> **VENDOR TIP**
> Save those gated assets for your highest-quality lead sources and ensure there's plenty of ungated information available for late-funnel buyers.

This leaves us with the question of what vendors should do to maintain their visibility and discoverability in the age of AI, especially with Google's new practices. We anticipate that Google will continue to try and keep traffic on search engine results pages (SERPs) by improving AI Overviews over time, however, this doesn't spell gloom for technology vendors.

Sources Vendors Believe Are Used to Train AI Models

gated sources

Source	Percentage
Company/product website	79%
User reviews	50%
Marketing collateral (e.g., e-books, whitepapers, webinars)	44%
Third-party publications and independent media	41%
Social media	41%
Communities and forums	35%
Analyst rankings and reports	32%
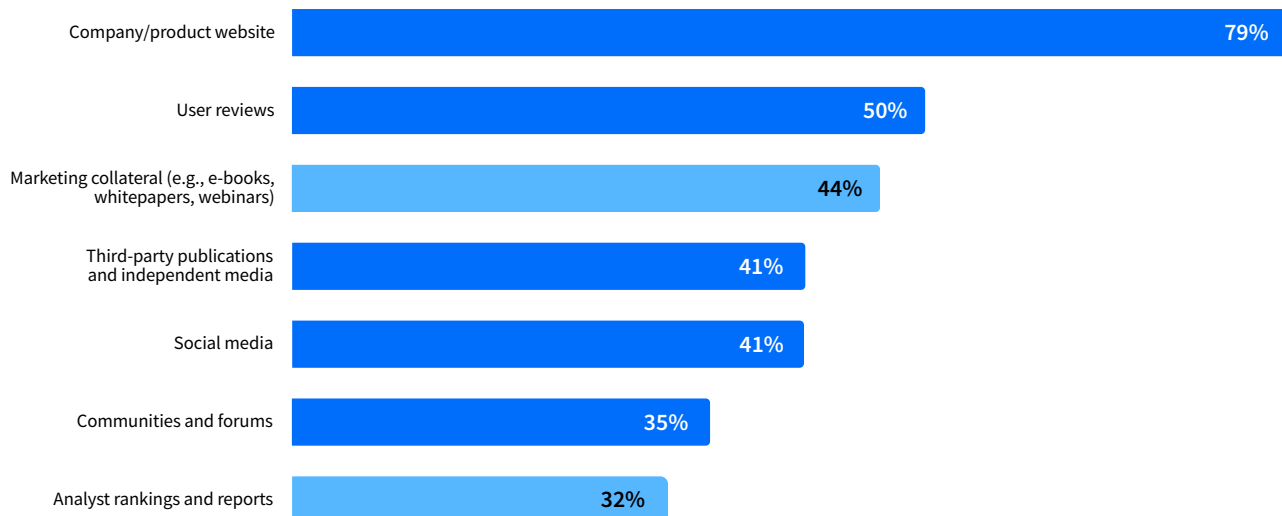
Large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT are excellent at summarizing data and answering simple, top-of-funnel questions. We anticipate that Google's AI Overviews, AI search, and AI tools will continue their takeover for these simple queries. That doesn't mean vendors should stop answering them though! Answering these questions clearly on your website (or on a third-party technology site) can help your chances of being cited in an AI Overview. **Buyers who used AI Overviews reported clicking on these source links 90% of the time**, meaning that if you're cited for a category-level search term, you could get visibility that your competition doesn't have.

This presents a meaningful opportunity for technology vendors, as these simple queries are only the beginning of the technology buying process. Vendors can fill the gap in these tools' capabilities by providing buyers with content that answers their later-stage buying questions, including use case-specific content or detailed pricing information. **Vendors who gatekeep information about their product (think case studies and pricing) lose out to competitors who provide frictionless access to key details**.

AI tools aren't just training on vendor sites, however. Many AI Overviews cite third-party technology sites as sources. Optimizing content for AI-driven search by prioritizing authoritative, experience-based content on multiple channels (other than your own) can increase visibility too.

VENDOR TIP
Create content that is optimized for both AI Overviews and mid- to late-funnel buyers and distribute it across multiple channels. Ensuring that buyers have the information they need throughout the buying journey builds trust and helps you maintain visibility.

"

We analyzed over 300K B2B resources and found that ungated content outperforms gated content by 26%. Old-fashioned thinking relies on this old-fashioned habit of gating what we believe is high-quality content. But nowhere else in our consumer lives are we being asked to go through this type of exchange for information. There are better ways and better technologies that can provide value to both the content consumer and creator. Use them!"

— **Jonathan Gandolf, CEO, AudiencePlus**
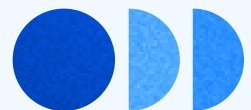
How Search Behavior Is Impacting Brand-Led Growth

With AI democratizing the playing field in terms of market research, accessibility of content and information about your brand via LLMs or AI Overviews may be a brand tactic in and of itself.

In the coming years, we speculate that successful brand-led growth strategies will involve investments in content that feed the LLMs and AI search engines that surface your brand and product during the buyer research process.

Vendors report spending 38% of their discretionary budget on brand awareness and 53% on demand generation. Is it that vendors aren't adjusting their strategies to new buyer search preferences, or is buyer trust degrading faster than the market can keep up?

Where GTM Efforts Miss the Mark

The top five tactics vendors use to drive sales are product demos, sales representatives, their websites, case studies, and other forms of marketing collateral. However, only demos and company websites are among the top five resources consulted for buyers. This means that many **vendors are making substantial investments in marketing tactics that don't move the needle for their prospects.**

Top Five Marketing Tactics Vendors Use

Tactic	Percentage
Product demos	76%
Sales representative	72%
Company/product website	71%
Case studies	71%
Marketing collateral	67%
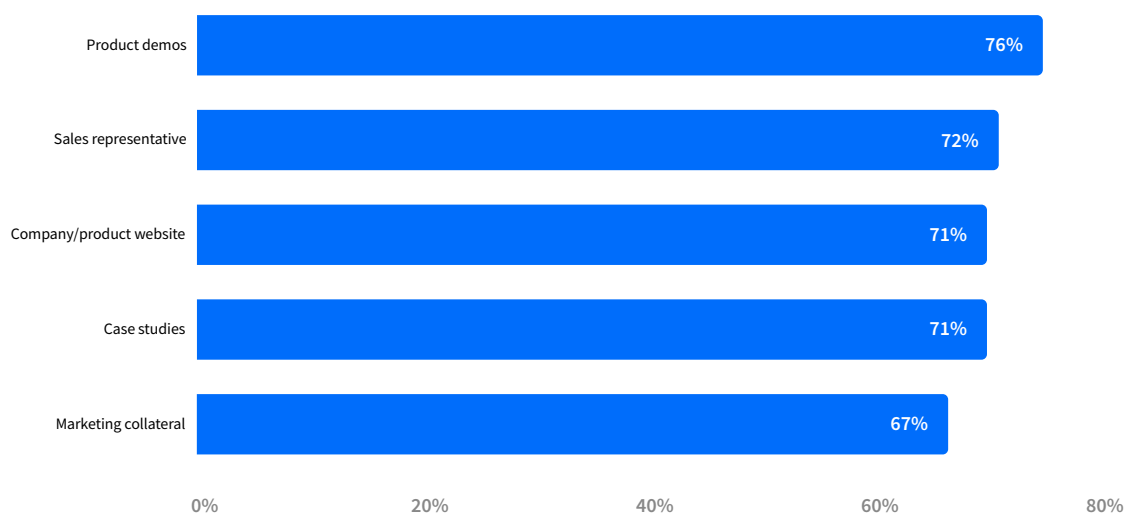
It seems that vendors are aware of these mismatches, as we saw a decrease in vendors' self-assessed go-to-market (GTM) grades this year, with more vendors giving themselves a C or lower this year compared to last year.

GTM Grades, 2024 vs. 2025

■ 2024   ■ 2025

Grade	2024	2025
A+	5%	4%
A	15%	15%
A-	11%	12%
B+	18%	19%
B	22%	17%
B-	9%	8%
C+	10%	7%
C	4%	9%
C- and lower	5%	9%
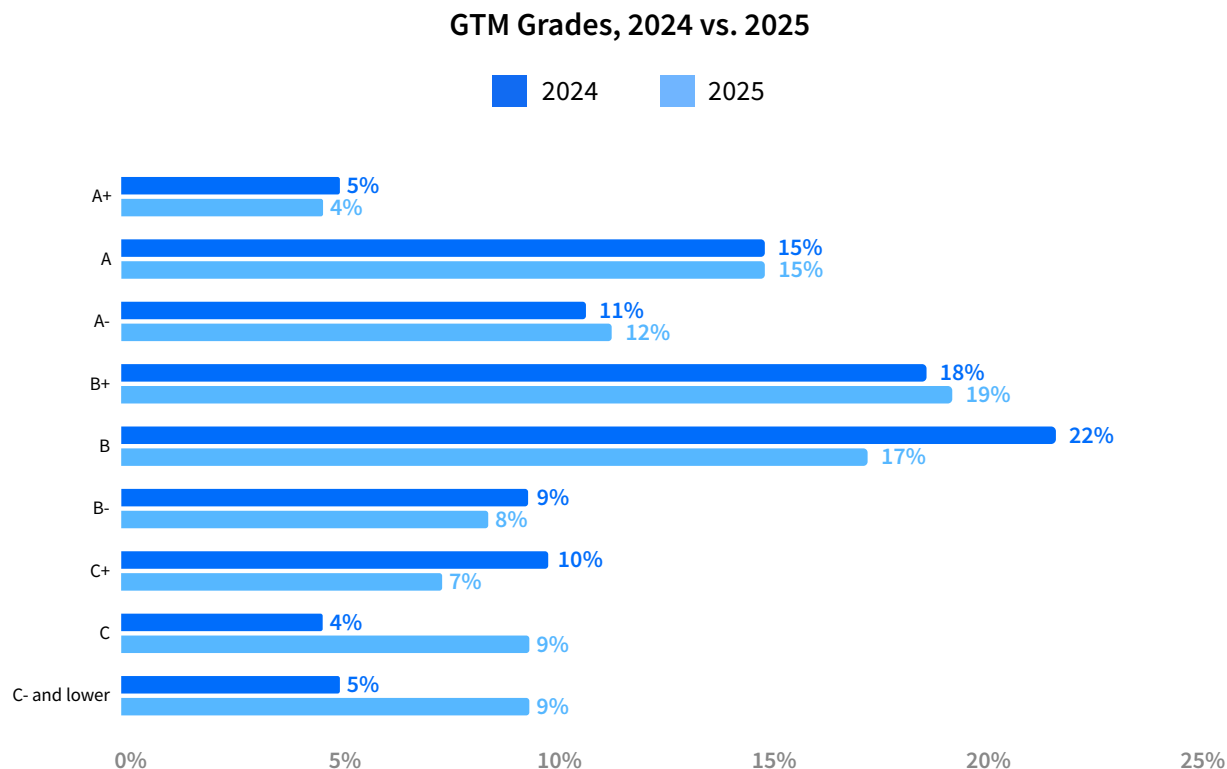
Despite this shift, **31% of vendors gave themselves an A- or higher**. What are these vendors doing differently? One notable difference is that these vendors are more likely to leverage user reviews and equally likely to use free trials, both of which appear on the buyer's top five list. They use fewer tactics overall, so these are the only two tactics they use as much or more often than the total surveyed population of vendors. It seems that A-rated vendors are adapting to buyer preferences—and are seeing the results.

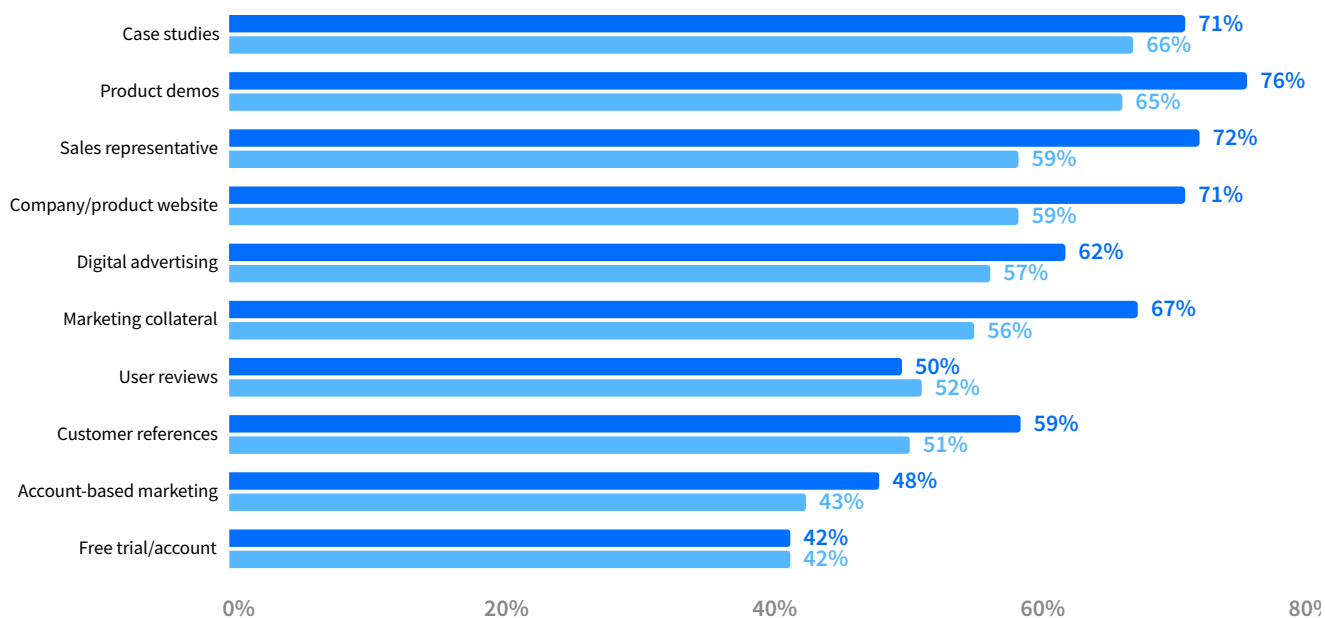> This research exposes a shocking reality: Marketers are wasting millions on tactics buyers ignore, and with search shifting to LLMs, it's only going to get worse. True competitive advantage requires the courage to stop asking, "what's everyone else doing?" and start asking, "what do our buyers actually need?"—even when the answer means dismantling your existing GTM strategy."

—Drew Neisser, Founder, CMO Huddles

Top 10 Tactics Used, All Vendors vs. A-Rated Vendors

■ All vendors   ■ A-rated vendors

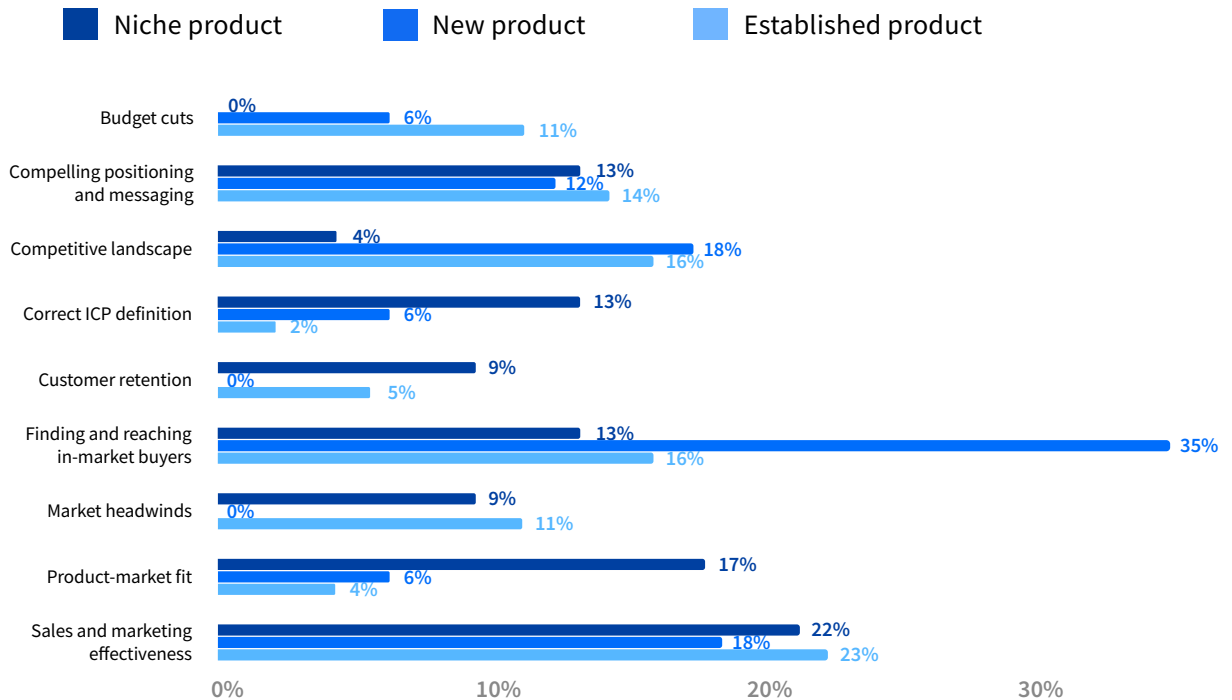| Tactic	All vendors	A-rated vendors
Case studies	71%	66%
Product demos	76%	65%
Sales representative	72%	59%
Company/product website	71%	59%
Digital advertising	62%	57%
Marketing collateral	67%	56%
User reviews	50%	52%
Customer references	59%	51%
Account-based marketing	48%	43%
Free trial/account	42%	42%

VENDOR TIP

Marketing needs to be buyer enablement. Create and make the resources that buyers want to consult readily available. Demos and free trials will give them hands-on experience while peer reviews help build confidence that the product will work for their unique use case.

GTM Challenges in the Age of AI

Every organization has its GTM challenges, but we've found that these challenges vary widely. Unsurprisingly, newer vendors struggle most with finding and reaching in-market buyers, while both niche and established brands cite issues with sales and marketing effectiveness.

Notably, vendors who rated their GTM tactics A- or higher were more likely to be concerned with customer retention than other vendors. To us, this indicates that some vendors have cracked the code in buyer trust and are instead focused on keeping those customers happy once they've signed on. This is also important given that companies are focused on net revenue retention (NRR) and not just annual recurring revenue (ARR).

Vendors' Biggest GTM Challenges by Market Segment

Legend: ■ Niche product ■ New product ■ Established product

Challenge	Niche product	New product	Established product
Budget cuts	0%	6%	11%
Compelling positioning and messaging	13%	12%	14%
Competitive landscape	4%	18%	16%
Correct ICP definition	13%	6%	2%
Customer retention	9%	0%	5%
Finding and reaching in-market buyers	13%	35%	16%
Market headwinds	9%	0%	11%
Product-market fit	17%	6%	4%
Sales and marketing effectiveness	22%	18%	23%

When aggregated, GTM challenges seem to vary widely across organizations, though sales and marketing effectiveness and finding and reaching in-market buyers top the list. This makes sense to us. With the changes we've seen from Google's AI Overviews and overall buyer search behavior, it's no surprise that marketers are concerned with getting their prospect's attention and ensuring their message is effective. If you remember from our 2024 report, buyers have overwhelmingly said they don't want to be contacted by sales until they're ready to purchase. **Given budget constraints, marketers have to find quality lead sources that have high yield. Gone are the days of sheer volume and lackluster conversion rates**.
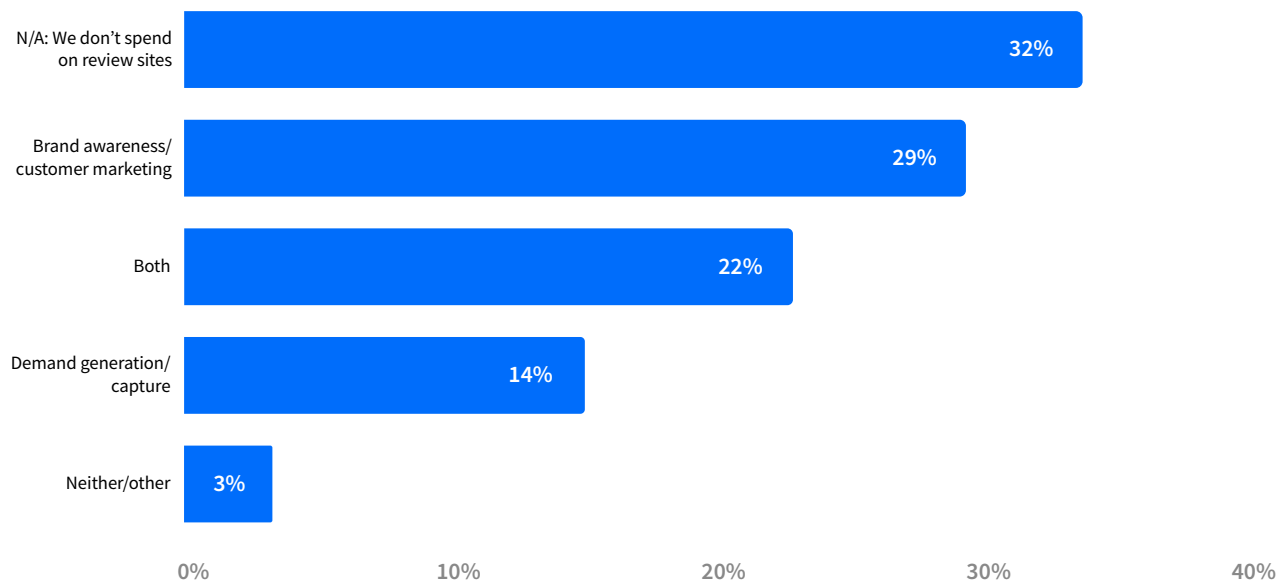
VENDOR TIP
Knowing when to reach out to buyers when they are in-market will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of your sales and marketing efforts. Look for quality lead generation programs that have reliable intent data to use for targeting. Also, be intentional with the content you use to target that audience based on the intent signals. This will help with nurture and follow-up on those leads.

"
Adding AI into your GTM motion isn't about blasting your entire market as fast as possible. It's about running unique, targeted plays that stand out from your competitors. Your GTM should be like a science, where you hypothesize, test, learn, and iterate."

—**Everett Berry, Head of GTM Engineering, Clay**

Review Site Spend Allocation

Category	Percentage
N/A: We don't spend on review sites	32%
Brand awareness/ customer marketing	29%
Both	22%
Demand generation/ capture	14%
Neither/other	3%

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%

Review Sites As Part of a Brand-Led Growth Strategy

Of the vendors we surveyed, 68% of them invested in review sites. This number is higher amongst A-graded vendors, at 77%. Most vendors classify review site spending as brand awareness, but a decent portion classify it as both or purely demand gen. We anticipate that this may vary based on how businesses leverage these review platforms, since many offer lead-generation capabilities and buyer intent data.

Don't take our word for it—here's how sales and marketing professionals view their review site investments.

> " I have observed that leads [from] review websites [are] later in the sales process, when a demo is done and leads are confused between 2-3 potential competitors to go forward to."

Manager at a mid-sized company (51-200 employees) (allocates review site spending to brand awareness/ customer marketing)

> " They support brand awareness/ customer marketing by establishing long-term trust and credibility, while also fueling demand generation by influencing buying decisions and pushing customers down the funnel."

Manager at an enterprise company (5,001-10,000 employees) (allocates review site spending to both)

> " We have research that shows our ICP checks review sites immediately before proceeding toward a free trial or demo."

Vice president at a mid-sized company (51-200 employees) (allocates review site spending to demand generation)

> " Once the audience is on the review site for the product, it is safe to assume that they are problem- and solution-aware to a certain degree, and maybe product- aware as well. So the logical step is to capture their details."

Manager at a mid-sized company (51-200 employees) (allocates review site spending to demand generation)

VENDOR TIP

Ensure that you're getting the most out of your review site investment by leveraging both the social proof and high-quality lead generation opportunities these platforms provide. Engaging buyers when they are researching you is a fast way to get leads that convert at a higher rate.

> " Smart vendors treat review sites as a two-for-one: They build long-term trust for brand while also driving late-stage conversion. Buyers check them early for discovery and again before saying yes—so showing up matters across the funnel."

—Joe Kevens, Director of Marketing at Wisedocs and Founder of B2B SaaS Reviews

Capturing Buyer Mindshare Is Essential to Making the Short-List

As the sales cycle continues to evolve with buyer preferences, do you understand what is changing?

The average number of products on a short-list is 2.6, with only 14% of buyers reporting a short-list with four or more products. **82% of buyers had a top product in mind when they made their short-list and 70% of buyers purchased that product**. 79% of all buyers and 89% of enterprise buyers knew about the product they purchased before they started their research.

Further, deal cycles are moving quickly, with buyers reporting an average deal cycle of 3.8 months and 86% of deals closing in six months or less. Those higher-ticket enterprise deals still take a little longer, though. The average cycle length for an enterprise deal extends to 6.6 months, and 65% are over in six months or less. All of this is great news if you're an established brand with a strong market presence, but could present challenges to new or disruptor brands.

Brand-Led Growth in the AI Era

To sum it up, if you aren't top of mind when a buyer begins their research, you probably won't get a chance to make that sale.

So what can vendors do about it? Here's some good news: While most buyers start their search journey on Google, 52% report using vendor websites as a source in their buying journey, and a further 13% say it's the first resource they consult, meaning that vendors have an opportunity to build buyer trust more often than not.

Ensuring the resources that buyers want the most are both easy to find on your website and optimized for AI search can help you build trust and improve discoverability at the same time. Which resources do buyers want?

> To engage early-stage buyers and build brand in the age of AI, we need to focus on things AI cannot summarize, namely experiences, relationships, and original content. Create meaningful human experiences; recognize the source information will be more valuable than the content itself, so nurture relationships through partners, communities, and influencers; and publish original content and research that AI simply cannot generate."

—John Miller, Founder and CEO, Stealth AI Martech Startup

Bridging the Trust Gap:
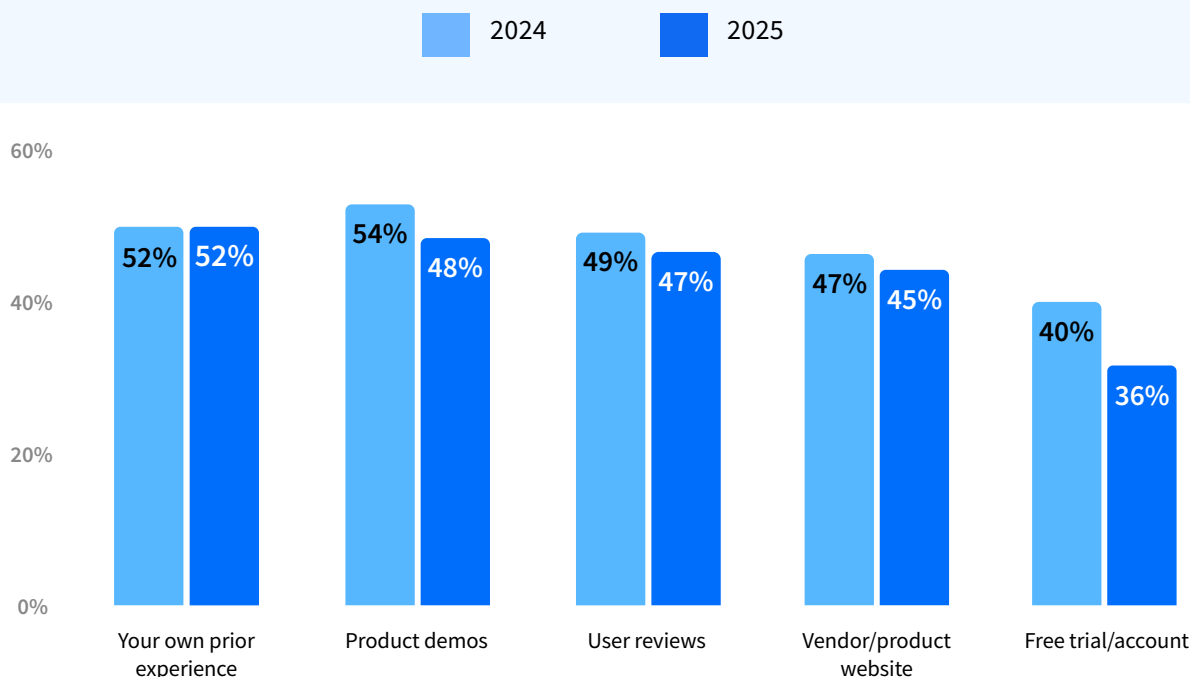# Why Gaining Buyer Trust Is a Necessity

The single biggest theme we saw in our buyer responses this year is that they are seeking resources that will give them confidence in their purchase decision.

Vendor-supplied resources simply aren't helping in that regard because they aren't optimized to build buyer trust. Budgets are still under scrutiny in the tech world. 66% of buyers said that a VP or C-Level executive was involved in their purchase decision, indicating that senior leaders still hold the purse strings at most organizations. With this level of scrutiny on budgets, buyers want to ensure they don't make a mistake or recommend the wrong product.

Buyers Trust Their Gut Instincts

For the first time, "your own prior experience" is the resource most frequently consulted by buyers, meaning buyers are more likely to purchase a product they've had first-hand experience with. This certainly helps explain the short deal cycles and even shorter short-lists reported, since buyers probably don't need to dedicate large amounts of time to researching a product if they've used it before and know it will work for them.

Top Resources Consulted, 2024 and 2025

2024 ■ 2025 ■

Resource	2024	2025
Your own prior experience	52%	52%
Product demos	54%	48%
User reviews	49%	47%
Vendor/product website	47%	45%
Free trial/account	40%	36%

Beyond prior experience, buyers prioritize sources that will give them use case-specific information.

Watching a demo or utilizing a free version of a product builds confidence that the product has the necessary features for a buyer's unique needs. Likewise, reviews from similar users or industry-specific solution pages on a vendor's website can help build confidence too.

We see similar patterns for enterprise purchases, however, "vendor sales reps" replaces "free trials." This is likely because these higher-ticket software products aren't out-of-the-box and often require a lengthy implementation process, and therefore aren't well-suited for a free trial. The top five resources consulted by enterprise buyers were:

55%
Product demos

54%
Your own prior experience

43%
Vendor/product website

43%
User reviews

41%
Vendor sales reps

The data looked a little different when we asked buyers what the most influential resource they consulted was. "Own prior experience" ranked number one, making it both the most frequently consulted and the most influential resource this year. When it comes to influence, buyers trust their gut more than any other resource. Vendor sites also dropped out of the top five—replaced by consulting a friend or peer.

> "
> The inbound SDR role is dying because showing beats telling every time. Buyers don't want qualification calls—they want to explore your product on their own terms. Interactive demos on your website are now doing what inbound SDRs did, letting buyers self-educate without surrendering contact info or enduring multiple calls. It's clear: Give buyers that hands-on experience early and ungated and you'll win their confidence in ways no sales pitch or qualification call ever could."

—Madhav Bhandari, Head of Marketing, Storylane

Most Influential Resources
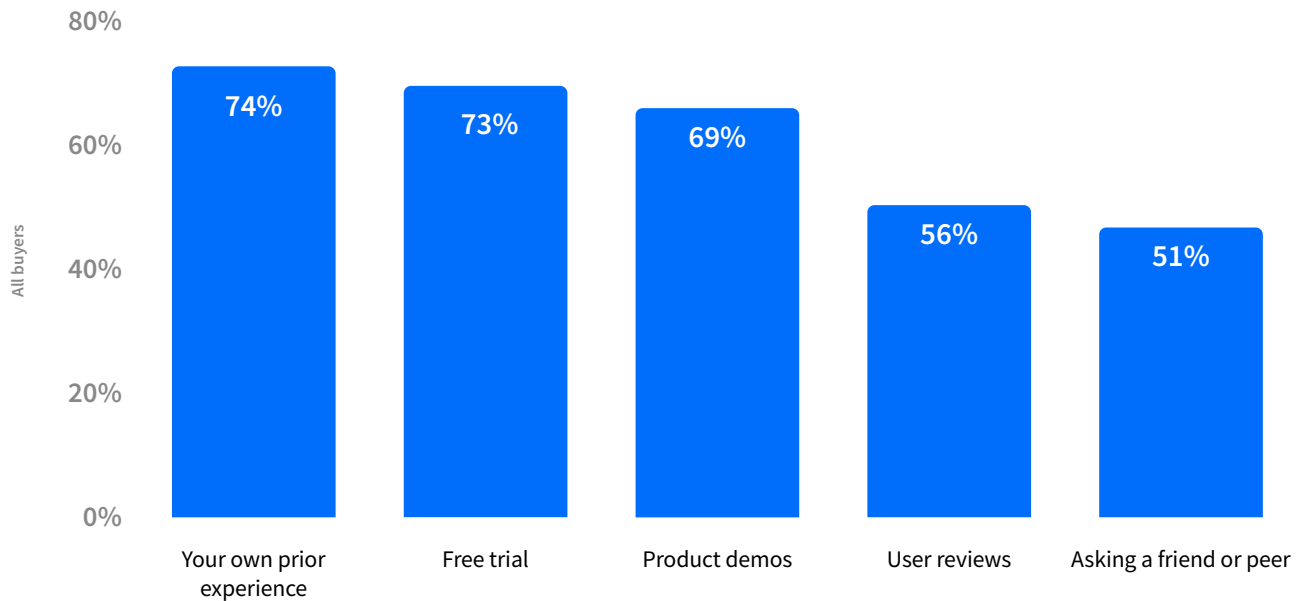
Based on this data, vendor-produced content is frequently consulted but doesn't often sway buyers' decision-making, indicating a growing trust gap. Further, social proof meaningfully impacts the buying process, since both "user reviews" and "asking a friend or peer" made the top five list.

> With vendor-produced content becoming less effective, we need to change how we approach content creation and the role of vendor-branded channels. Personal brands are the new key to content success. The content team's number one priority should be developing repeatable, episodic content that allows SMEs to execute, distribute, and grow their audience with minimal effort. When these concepts blend subtle product/feature demos with education (or entertainment), it creates a scalable way to turn SMEs into trusted voices within your ICP community. In my experience, once you reach this tipping point, prospects will seek out your SMEs like peers or friends for their advice."

—Todd Clouser, **The Worst Marketer in the World**

Percent of Buyers Using Analyst Rankings and Reports Over Time
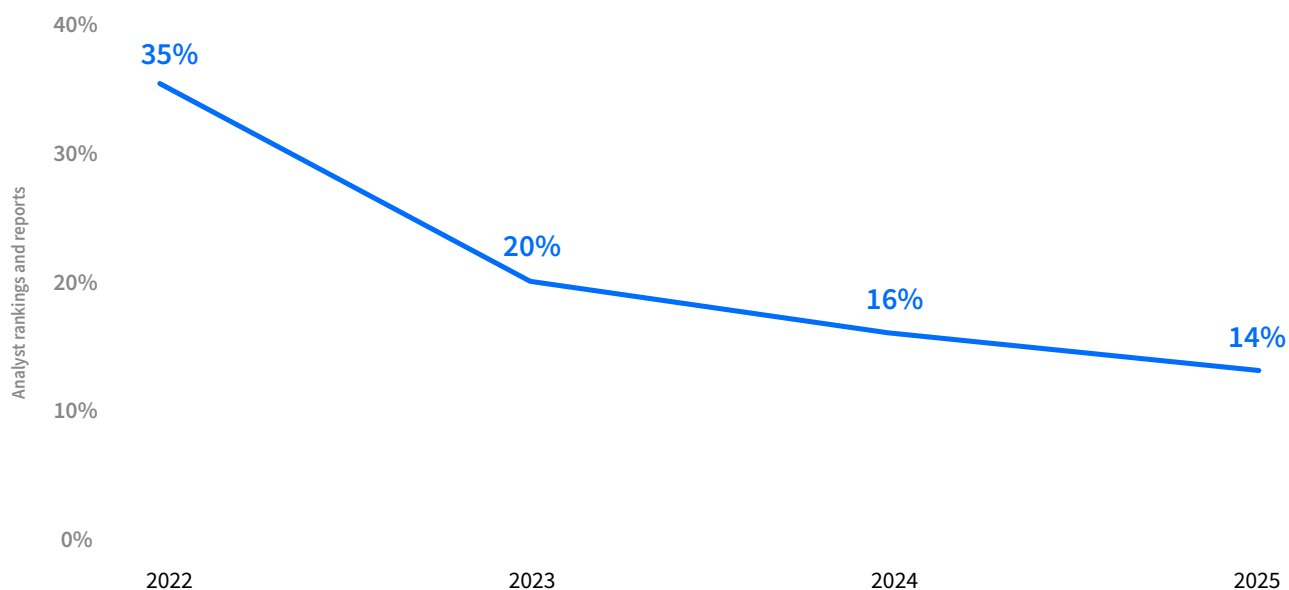
Notably, usage of analyst reports is at an all-time low of only 14%.

This represents a 60% decrease since 2022. To us, this indicates that not only do buyers not trust vendors, they don't trust third parties they believe are pay-to-play.

Demonstrating ROI Can Make or Break a Deal

When asked what they would change about the buying process, **33% of buyers said they wished it was easier to calculate return on investment (ROI)**. This number increases as buyer age decreases, as 37% of Gen Z respondents wanted easier ROI calculation during the purchase process.

This trend makes sense. Gen Z buyers are in their mid/late 20s, they've likely had a job or two but are early in their career, and are likely being brought into strategic decisions for the first time. For this group, the risk of making the wrong purchase decision is much higher.

As we saw last year, calculating ROI is more important for enterprise buyers as well. 48% of buyers purchasing high-priced software wish it was easier to calculate ROI. This makes sense as well: The larger the investment, the more important it is to prove its value.

> **VENDOR TIP**
> Help prospects calculate the potential ROI of your product. Supplement with examples from your customers if possible, including industry-specific or category use cases, to help personalize the ROI for potential buyers, as social proof is a trusted resource for buyers.

How to Adapt to Changes in Buyer Decision-Making

Self-serve research continues to be the default for most buyers as they gravitate toward resources that allow them to either get hands-on experience with a product or hear from someone who uses that product. This isn't new, and by now, most companies are realizing the benefit of empowering their buyers with product information in the channels they use for research. It's not the "what" that's interesting year over year, it's the "how."
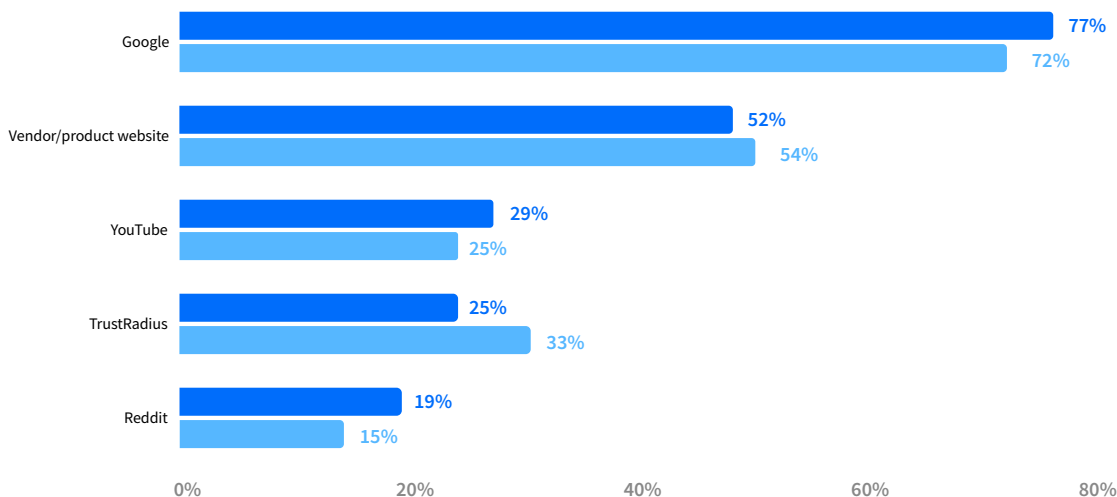
How Buyers Make Decisions

Even with the explosion of new AI-based sources, buyers reported visiting the same number of sources as they did last year. **This furthers our hypothesis that buyers are relying less on vendor-supplied resources and analyst reports and more on trusted sources that they perceive as less biased**.

Unsurprisingly, most buyers report visiting Google as well as vendor websites. YouTube is also frequently consulted by buyers, likely as a source of demos or user reviews. Gen Z buyers are more likely to consult Reddit compared to previous generations.

Sites Visited Directly by All Buyers and Enterprise Buyers
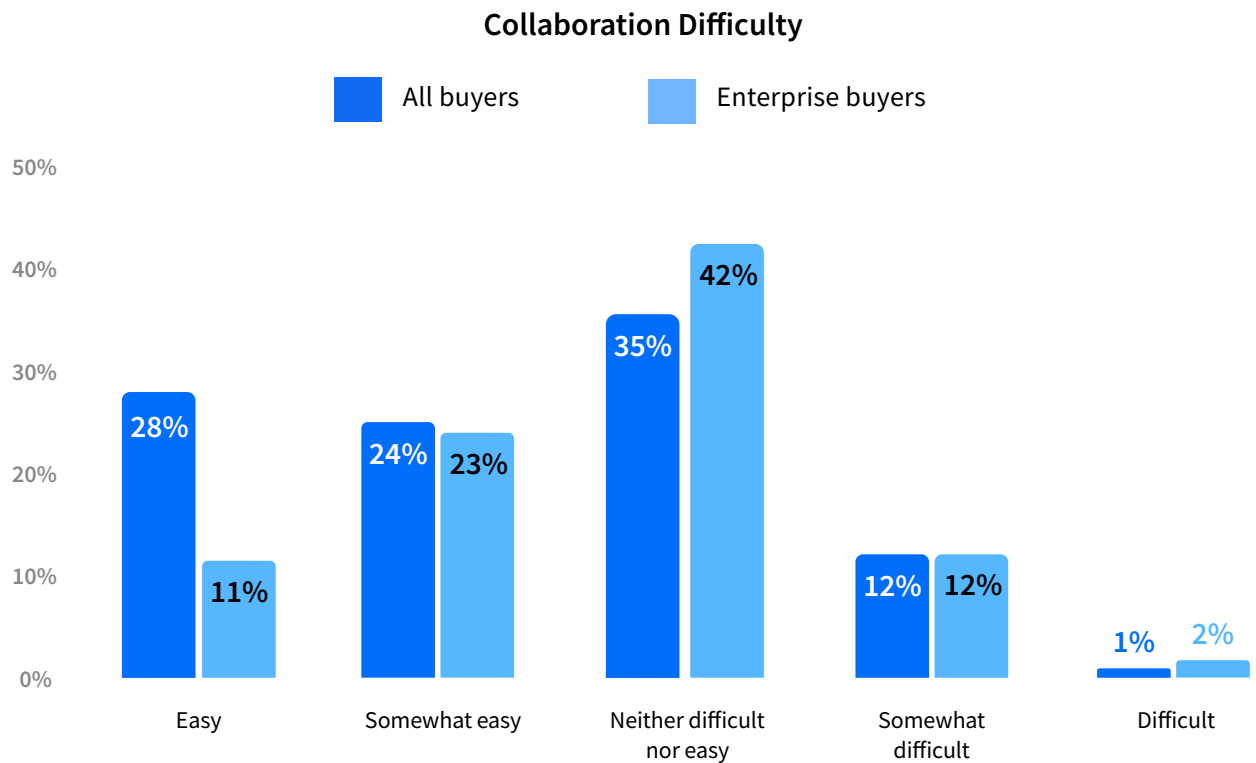
■ All buyers   ■ Enterprise buyers

Site	All buyers	Enterprise buyers
Google	77%	72%
Vendor/product website	52%	54%
YouTube	29%	25%
TrustRadius	25%	33%
Reddit	19%	15%

Our research indicates that buyers don't find collaboration with their buying group to be particularly difficult. Given that buyers are usually working in small buying groups and relying on prior experience, this makes perfect sense.

Buyers reported an average buying group size of 4.8 people, and 79% reported that their buying group consisted of five or fewer people.

When it comes to making the final decision, most buyers select the product that meets their needs for the best price.

Collaboration Difficulty

■ All buyers ■ Enterprise buyers

	Easy	Somewhat easy	Neither difficult nor easy	Somewhat difficult	Difficult
All buyers	28%	24%	35%	12%	1%
Enterprise buyers	11%	23%	42%	12%	2%

"There's a major shift happening in the market: the rise of **services as software**. Buyers no longer just want tools—they want **solutions they can test quickly and pay for as services**. Vendors offering tech without embedded services to make it stick will soon find themselves replaced. The future belongs to those who deliver outcomes, not just features."

—**Sangram Vajre, CEO, GTM Partners**

Reasons for Making the Purchase

Reason	Percentage
It met our needs for the best price	66%
It was the safest, most trusted option	33%
We already had a relationship with the vendor	31%
Their customer reviews gave us confidence	24%
Word of mouth, it came highly recommended by a peer	20%
Their demo blew us away	13%
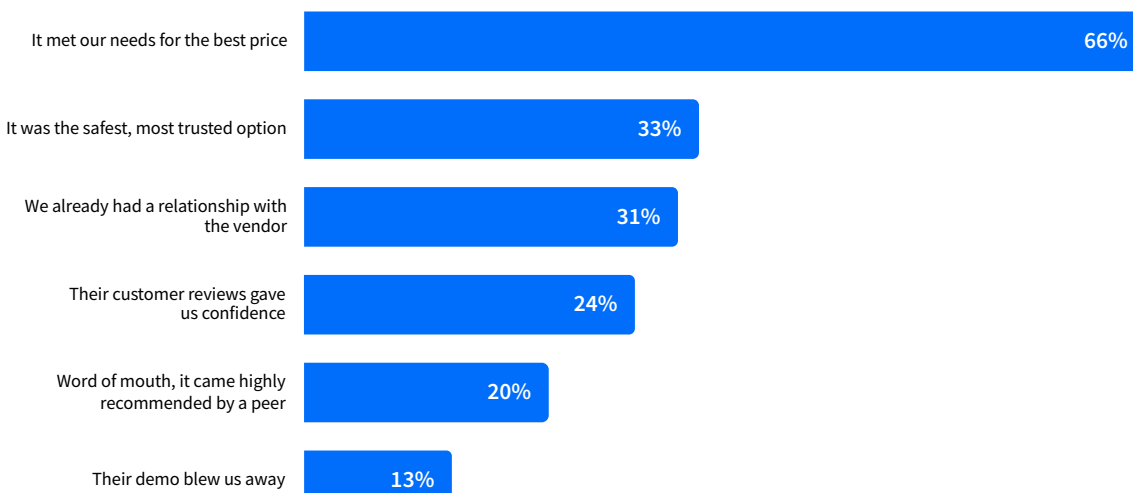
There were some notable discrepancies across different populations. Gen Z buyers were more likely to base their decisions on customer reviews than any other group, demonstrating that this new generation of buyers is more easily swayed by social proof. Enterprise buyers relied more heavily on existing vendor relationships than buyers purchasing lower-cost software.

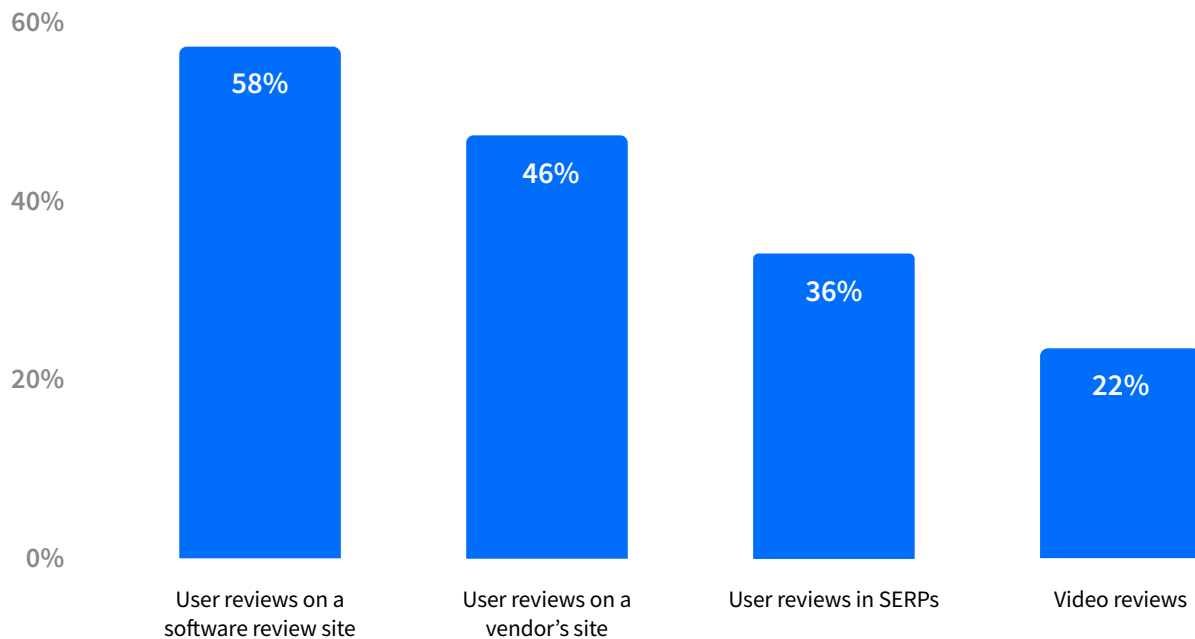## Your Customers Are Your Best Asset

Social proof, such as user reviews, is a great way to provide prospective buyers with use case-specific insights into how a product functions and increase buyer confidence. **77% of buyers reported reading user reviews during their buying journey.**

> In today's rapidly shifting buyer landscape, the decision-making process is rooted in trust, authenticity, and long-term value. Buyers are increasingly seeking partners—not just products—who understand their evolving needs and can grow with them. As a community evangelist, I've witnessed the power of fostering deep, genuine relationships where honest feedback and transparent communication are paramount. To truly adapt to changing buyer behavior, companies must prioritize trust, invest in meaningful engagement, and position themselves as long-term collaborators, not just vendors."

—**Kalina Bryant, Forbes Under 30 North America Enterprise Technology Honoree, Founder of UnapologeTECH**

Types of Reviews Buyers Used

Category	Percentage
User reviews on a software review site	58%
User reviews on a vendor's site	46%
User reviews in SERPs	36%
Video reviews	22%

Buyers most frequently visited review sites to read reviews, but almost half reported seeking out customer review content on a vendor's website. Others encountered review content on SERPs (possibly cited in an AI Overview). Given that 29% of buyers reported visiting YouTube as a part of their research process, it's no surprise that a substantial number of buyers sought out video reviews.

What do buyers want when they visit review sites? It turns out they want more than just review content. Buyers are looking for other self-serve information, like product demos or pricing, and value both the review's content and the reviewer's relatability over the product's score or award badges.

> As buyer behavior becomes even more nuanced and self-guided, the best review strategies are also increasingly multi-channel and multi-modal. A mix of evergreen, drip, and point-in-time review campaigns designed to activate the right customer at the opportune moment in their customer journey are a winning combination."

—Deena Zenyk, Co-Founder & Chief Customer Officer, Captivate Collective

19%

Availability of self-service information like product demos or pricing.

18%

Review content (qualitative feedback).

17%

Reviewers relatable to me (company size, industry, role, etc).

VENDOR TIP
Optimize your profile on review sites so your buyers can find product information such as demos, pricing, and user feedback in one place. Don't over-index on scores or badges—our research shows that buyers don't value these as much as authentic, in-depth user feedback.

Reviewer testimony is only step one for most buyers, as the majority of software buyers report seeking out a conversation with someone who uses the product. This trend is stronger in younger buyers as well as buyers purchasing enterprise software.

This quote from one of our buyers sums it up:

> " When making a large purchase, I want to hear directly from real people with experience in using the product."
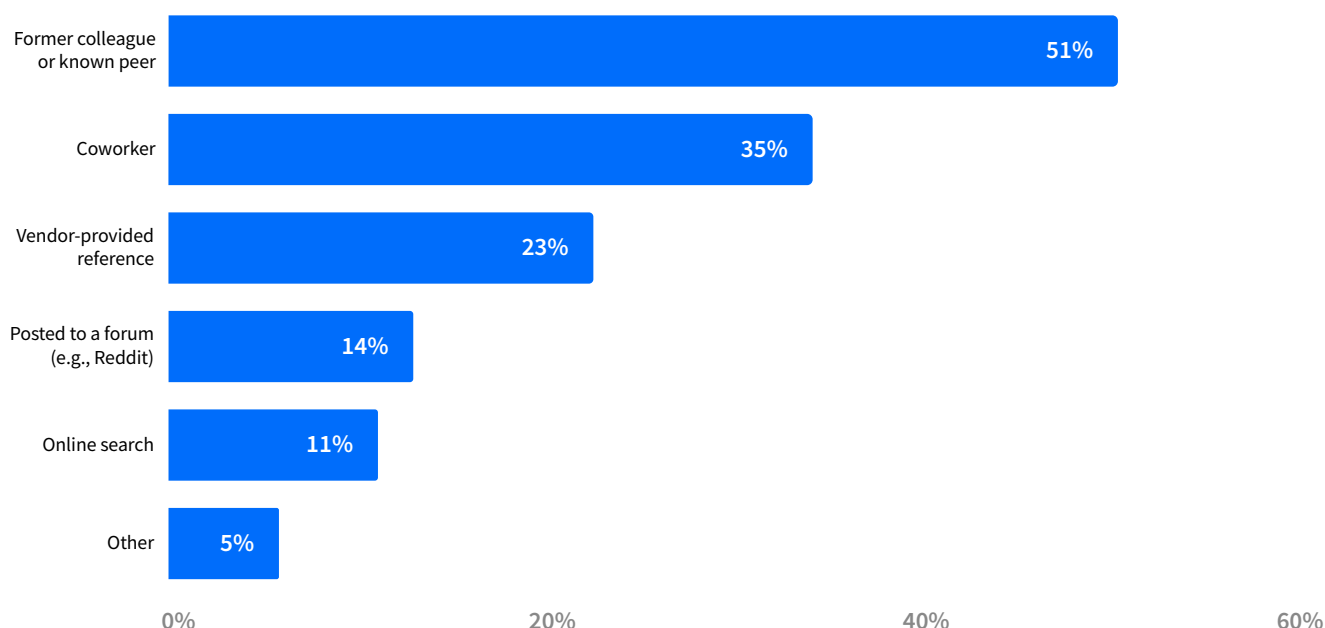>
> —**Director at a mid-sized company (51-200 employees)**

Percent of Buyers Who Had User Conversations By Age

Age	Percent
Boomer	49%
Gen X	52%
Millennial	56%
Gen Z	57%
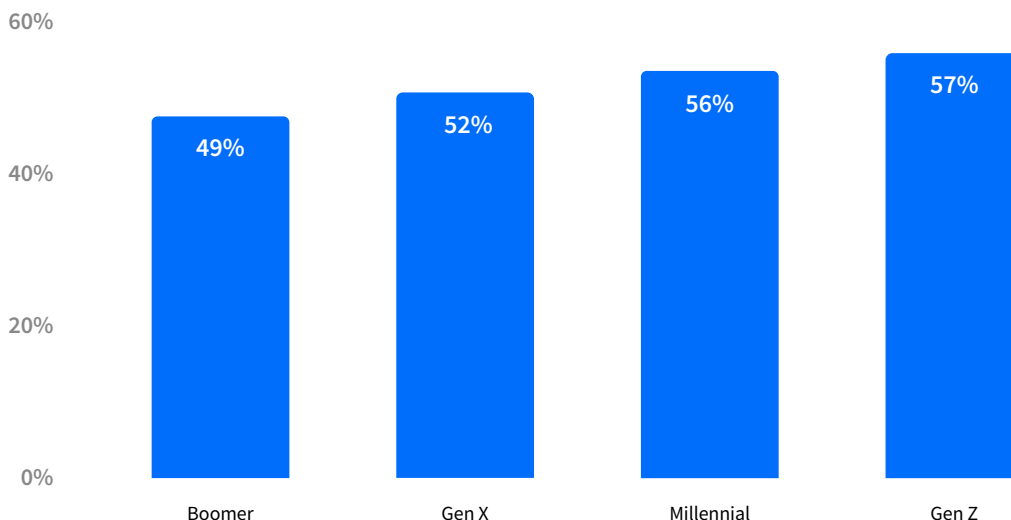
While 54% of buyers report having a conversation with a user before purchasing a product, vendors believe this number is much lower, at 38%. What's the reason for the disconnect? Most vendors likely underestimate the number of their prospects having user conversations because **most buyers don't speak to vendor-supplied references**. We'd guess that the majority of these conversations happen in communities and in "untraceable" research sources like LinkedIn InMails, messaging platforms like Slack or Teams, online forums like Reddit, emails, and text messages.

The vast majority of buyers sought out peer conversations through their professional networks or spoke with a coworker, and only 23% spoke with a vendor-supplied reference. Notably, younger buyers were more likely to post to a forum.

How Buyers Found Users to Talk To

Category	Percentage
Former colleague or known peer	51%
Coworker	35%
Vendor-provided reference	23%
Posted to a forum (e.g., Reddit)	14%
Online search	11%
Other	5%

Buyers backchannel to find and evaluate new products. This is the fastest-growing B2B sales channel, and vendors are MIA. Marketers still think they can engineer every step of the funnel, but buyers are self-educating, backchanneling, and making decisions without them."

—Rahul Jain, CEO & Co-Founder, Noble

These conversations are driving a major impact, as most buyers reported that they were helpful or very helpful in making buying decisions. The vendors we surveyed agreed, indicating that they thought user conversations were helpful 90% of the time.

What about the buyers who didn't have a peer conversation? 69% indicated it was because they didn't need to. With the increased reliance on prior experience, this isn't surprising. You don't need to talk to someone who uses a software product if you've used it yourself and know it will work for you.

> **VENDOR TIP**
> Influencing peer conversations can be tough—buyers can sniff it out. The best way is to let customers do the talking for you. Asking customized questions when generating reviews allows you to get your customer on the record highlighting your key differentiators.
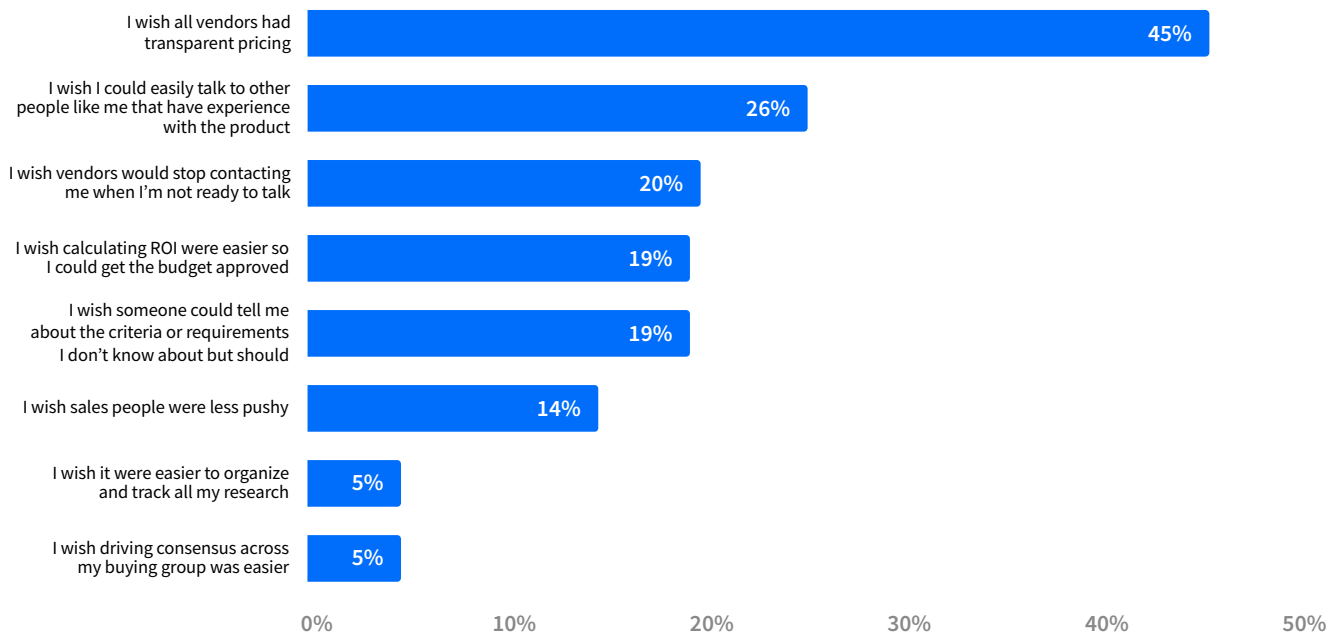
Help Buyers Build Confidence by Prioritizing Transparency

Buyers want to make confident purchase decisions, and there's a massive opportunity for vendors to bridge the trust gap by providing resources that build buyer confidence. When asked what they'd change about the buying process, the number one answer is that they want more transparent pricing information.

Transparent pricing can be a challenge for vendors with complex models, especially in the enterprise range where pricing depends on many factors. That said, vendors can help buyers by giving them a ballpark range or base level for pricing. It's a waste of everyone's time if a buyer enters a sales conversation for a $50,000 product with a $10,000 budget.

What Buyers Wish They Could Change About the Buying Process

Statement	Percentage
I wish all vendors had transparent pricing	45%
I wish I could easily talk to other people like me that have experience with the product	26%
I wish vendors would stop contacting me when I'm not ready to talk	20%
I wish calculating ROI were easier so I could get the budget approved	19%
I wish someone could tell me about the criteria or requirements I don't know about but should	19%
I wish sales people were less pushy	14%
I wish it were easier to organize and track all my research	5%
I wish driving consensus across my buying group was easier	5%

Based on the previous section, we know that user reviews and conversations are highly impactful in the buying process, but finding users to speak to can be challenging for some buyers. Vendors can help bridge this gap by ensuring that customer testimonials are easy to find on their website. Nearly half of buyers sought out review content on vendor websites, meaning you can build buyer trust by ensuring this information is easily accessible.

It's vital to invest in customer advocacy programs. Get your customers on the record through user reviews and encourage them to list your product as a skill on LinkedIn. This way, you're helping buyers figure out who uses your product and facilitating user conversations, even if your prospects aren't asking for references.

> **VENDOR TIP**
> Ensure buyers can find the information they need to make a confident decision by providing ballpark pricing and user feedback across multiple channels, such as your website and third-party technology sites.
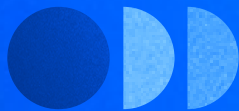
"At Vendr, we've seen that deals close 33% faster when sellers lead with fair, transparent pricing up front. In sales, time kills all deals—and transparency is the antidote. When buyers know the price, **they move faster and convert at higher rates.**"

—**Ryan Neu, Founder & CEO, Vendr**

What's Next? Our Predictions for the Future of Software Buying

The combination of more Gen Z buyers and advancements in AI technology will disrupt and transform the technology industry in years to come. What do we think will happen next?

- Brands will pivot to creating long form content on their owned properties with hopes of increasing visibility in SERPs, hopefully driving higher quality traffic but at a much lower volume.

- Marketing will become about buyer enablement to build trust and brand preference rather than purely brand awareness.

- The need for social proof will rise as the Generation Z population increases in the workforce.

- Original, proprietary content especially from your customers will be the fuel that feeds your brand-led growth strategies.

- AI Overviews and increasingly LLMs are reshaping brand discoverability, turning SEO strategies for many brands on their heads, increasing the use of paid search, and driving higher customer acquisition costs. Brands will need to find new strategies to identify and target in-market buyers.
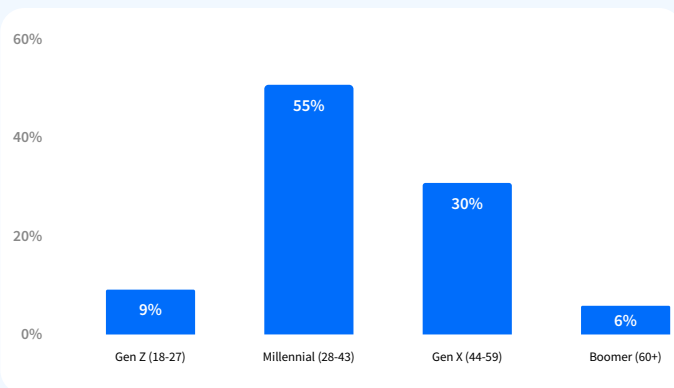
Top 10 Takeaways

1 **77% of buyers** looked at user reviews when making a software purchase.

2 **Only 14% of buyers consult analyst reports** during their purchase process; a 60% drop since 2022.

3 Both buyers and vendors believe that **AI is positively impacting the software buying process**.

4 **54% of buyers speak with a user before purchasing a SaaS tool**. Vendors estimate this number is lower, at 38%.

5 **72% of buyers encountered Google's AI Overviews** during their research process and 90% clicked through to at least one of the sources cited.

6 **Prior experience** is both the most frequent and most influential resource consulted by buyers, indicating a growing trust gap.

7 **80% of buyers trust content that is generated by AI** at least some of the time.

8 **Occasional AI use has increased** from 17% in 2024 to 30% in 2025, and non-use has decreased.

9 49% of software buyers said the number one thing they would change is the **lack of availability of transparent pricing** information.

10 **Gen Z is more heavily influenced by social proof**, indicating a stronger preference for user reviews, peer conversations, and forums (e.g., Reddit) than older generations.
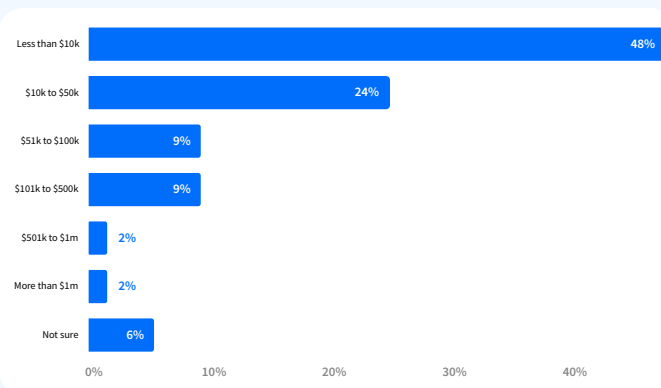
Methodology

Data for TrustRadius' 2025 buyer research report, Bridging the Trust Gap: B2B Tech Buying in the Age of AI, was sourced from the TrustRadius global network via an online survey. In January 2025, we sent online surveys to professionals who were involved in a software or hardware purchase for their organization in the past year. We sent a separate survey to members of go-to-market teams for technology vendors.

We received complete, verified responses from 2,058 technology buyers and 490 technology vendors. All respondents were offered a nominal incentive ($10 gift card) as a thank-you for their time. We've included information below on the demographics of our survey respondents. For a full list of survey questions and answer choices, or if you have any questions about the data, email us at research@trustradius.com.

Buyer Age Groups

Age Group	Percentage
Gen Z (18-27)	9%
Millennial (28-43)	55%
Gen X (44-59)	30%
Boomer (60+)	6%

Buyer Product Purchase Prices

Price Range	Percentage
Less than $10k	48%
$10k to $50k	24%
$51k to $100k	9%
$101k to $500k	9%
$501k to $1m	2%
More than $1m	2%
Not sure	6%

Vendor Roles

Role	Percentage
C-Suite	13%
Marketing leadership	24%
Sales leadership	13%
Demand generation	26%
Customer marketing/ customer advocacy	18%
Public relations/ communications/ analyst relations	7%
Product marketing	21%
Sales enablement	14%
Customer references	6%
Account executive	12%
MDR/BDR/SDR	5%