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TOP 6 FINDINGS ON WHAT USERS LOOK FOR
WHEN SEARCHING ONLINE

2015 Research Study White Paper

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How much do ISV marketers really know about which online resources Dynamics customers value most highly?

According to new research measuring the actual resource preferences of Dynamics users, ISV marketers still have a lot to learn.

This report evaluates results of a new survey of Microsoft Dynamics customers and ISV marketers to identify similarities and disconnects in the perceived value of various marketing resources. The results will likely surprise ISV marketers - Dynamics users peruse ISV and third-party websites as part of their buying process much differently than marketers imagine.

These findings will provide ISV marketers with insight into how to improve their marketing plans to most effectively influence and capture the interest of their target customers. They also point to current trends in how users approach online sources and how they relate to advertiser-supplied content.

One trend that emerges in this study is that users' interest and need for content changes based on the stage of their buying process. In early stages, informational content like whitepapers and webcasts are needed and later in short-list and final decision stage

they are looking for vendor comparisons and product trials. This finding has been borne out in numerous research studies in the technology sector, and should reinforce with ISV marketers how essential it is to have a full content portfolio that includes informational, comparison, and product-oriented content choices.

The major findings from the study reveal:

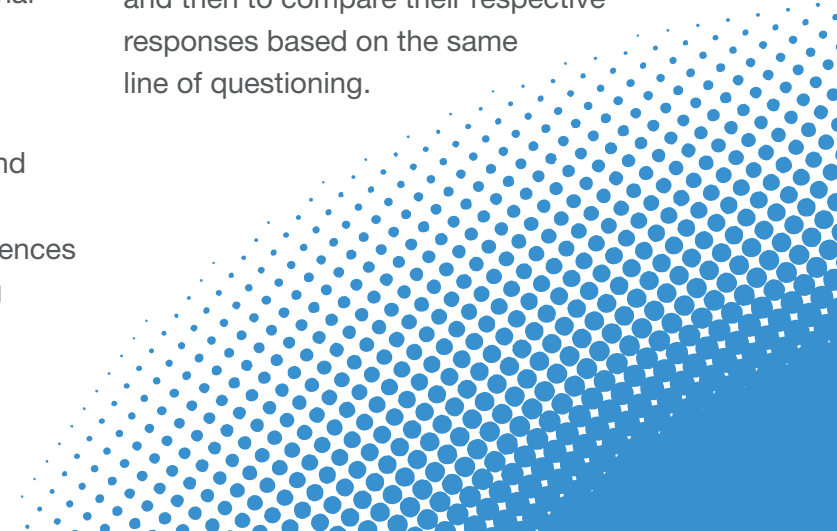
1. IT users prefer email follow-up to phone calls
2. Major implications in Dynamics users' neutral sentiment on display ads (pop-ups or interstitials)
3. Wide differences in how Dynamics users and marketers see the value of ISV web sites
4. Dynamics users visit third-party editorial web sites much more frequently than marketers realize
5. Customer Reviews and Product Trials seen as a must-have by both users and marketers in final buying stage
6. Dynamics users value industry conferences differently than marketers when doing research to solve problems related to Dynamics offerings



The remainder of this study describes the 6 key findings from the survey and provides Spotlight Commentary from survey respondents who participated in the study. Their perspectives have been reflected in some of the exec summary comments as well. The complete findings are contained in the Appendix at the end.

Methodology & Goals

An online survey gathered data from 126 Microsoft Dynamics ERP and CRM users and 60 people who work for Dynamics ISVs ("ISV marketers"). Based on the type of survey participant, questions were positioned to either gather personal attitudes (for Dynamics users) or perceived attitudes of users (for ISV marketers). The goal of the survey was to question users and marketers independently and then to compare their respective responses based on the same line of questioning.



KEY FINDINGS

The study resulted in six main research findings. We have also provided recommended best practices related to each finding



Follow-up and Nurturing Practices—marketers want to phone, but users prefer email at early stage.

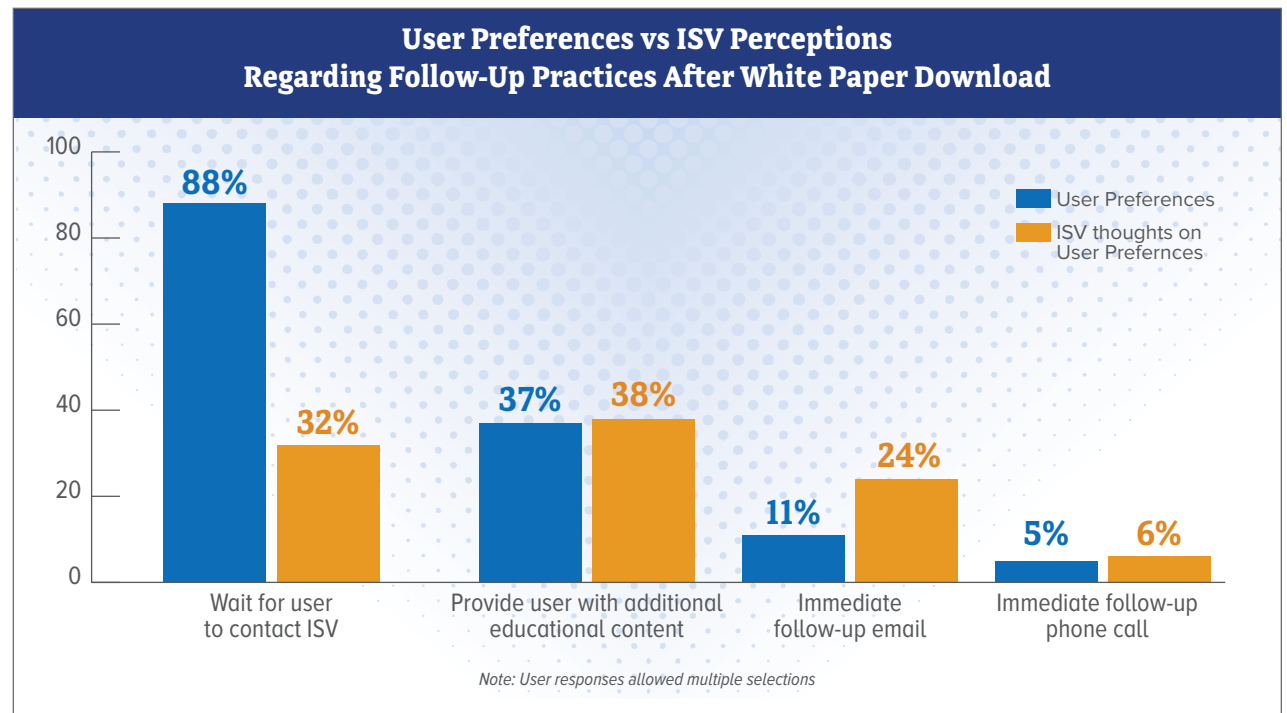
ISVs understand that most prospects do not want a sales call after downloading a white paper, and that immediate email follow-up is not the most effective engagement strategy. But there is still a tension between marketers and users when it comes to the ideal follow-up after downloading a white paper. The majority of users (88%) indicate they prefer to choose when to reach out to the ISV for more content or to have a discussion. The majority of marketers (38%) believe the best course of action is to provide the prospect with further educational content, while roughly a third recognize the user would prefer to contact them.



Best Practice

Users have indicated that they do not want phone calls from sales people when they are at an early stage in their buying process. They are not ready to even have a conversation with any specific vendor/ISV and they prefer to contact the ISV when they are ready. If an ISV is going to follow up with unsolicited communication, it should be with an offer of

substantive content like a white paper, case study, or webinar or newsletter invite. This last point suggests ISV marketers should consider built-in nurturing activity for every online program they run. Once they get that initial response from a user, they should have appropriate follow-on content ready to email to nurture and lead the user through their sales pipeline.



KEY FINDINGS



Dynamics users neutral toward display ads (pop-ups or interstitials), which creates marketer opportunity.

While the promotion of higher value content like white papers and webcasts ranked highest among users—and ISV marketers likewise understood this preference—another less expected type of advertising options also rose to the top of the list according to user responses. The majority of users indicated a neutral or agreeable view of unobtrusive, relevant display ads served up in an editorial context and on a desktop or tablet form factor. Sentiment dropped steeply for ads shown on mobile devices or for more disruptive popup ads.

ISV marketers appear to understand that prospects dislike mobile ads. But marketers underestimate users’ willingness to be exposed to less intrusive display ads. By contrast, users indicated they are more strongly opposed to popup or interstitial ads, even if they feature relevant content or use re-targeting.

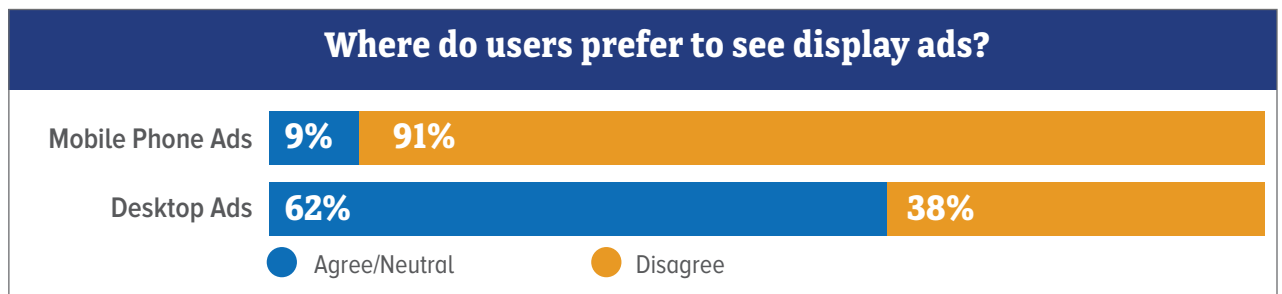


Best Practice

User receptiveness to display ads in the right context—i.e., ads run alongside editorial material that is relevant to their interest—suggests that they remain a good marketing

option for reaching a targeted audience with substantive offers (white paper, trials, etc.). To maximize impact and minimize negative sentiments, ISV marketers should remain vigilant about where their ads are displayed and the quality of the message or offer conveyed.

Differences in User Preferences vs ISV Perceptions Regarding Display Ads			
User Ranking		ISV Ranking	
1	ISV emails offering a white paper or webcast download	1	
2	Display or banner ads on editorial website	3	
3	Pop-up ads that appear based on search queries	2	



KEY FINDINGS

3

Dynamics users and marketers differ on value of ISV web sites

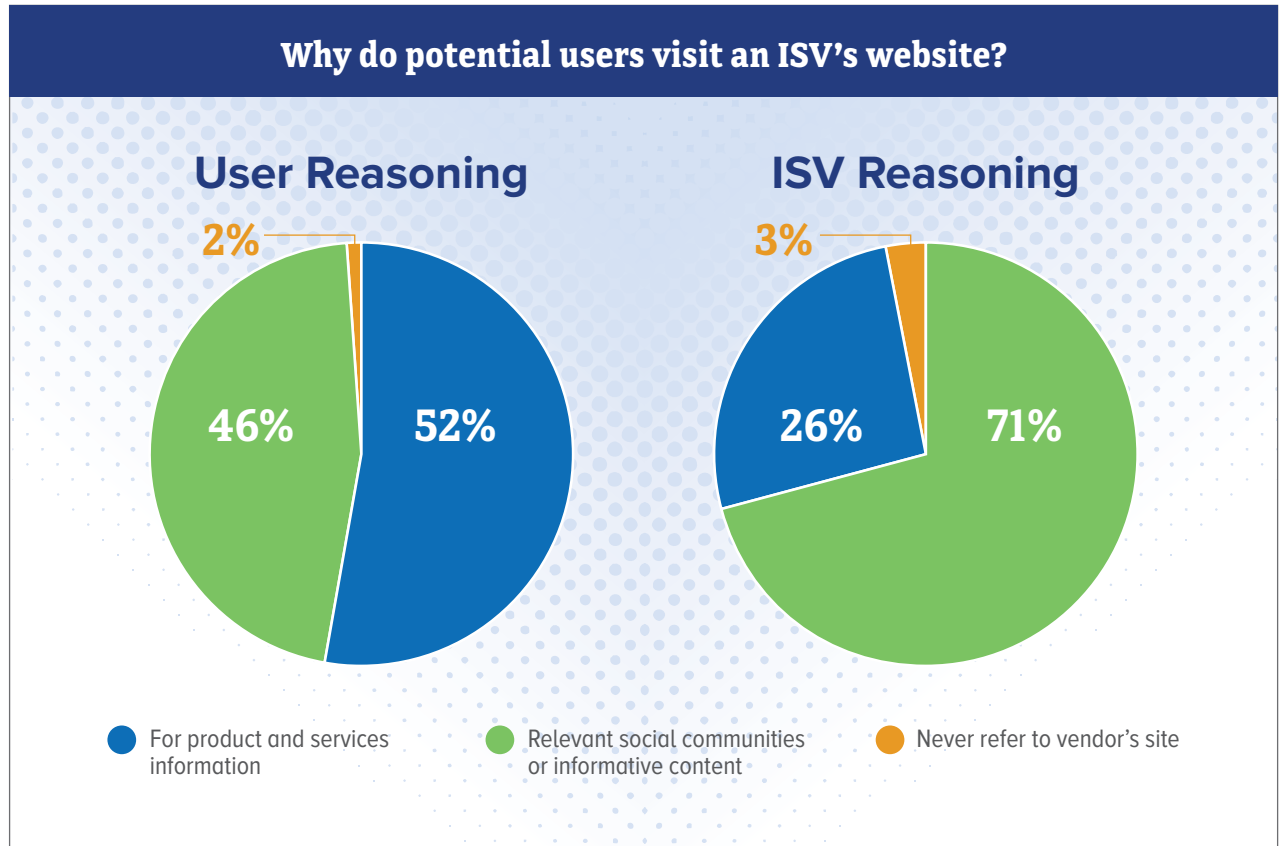
One of the most notable disconnects exists around marketers' perceptions of why users frequent vendor websites. The majority of the marketers sampled (71%) perceive that users are looking for product info and 26% indicated they believe users are looking for social networking opportunities.

The users are split on their reasons for visiting a vendor website, with 52% indicating they are looking for social networking, customer reviews and expert opinions and 46% indicating it is for product info. Those looking for product information prefer to see it through customer reviews in open forums.

BP

Best Practice

The best solution may be for marketers to provide product information and expert opinions via third-party web sites, as well as offering landing pages on their own site with access to high value informational content alongside chat and blog opportunities.



KEY FINDINGS

4

Dynamics Users visit Third-Party Editorial Sites much more often than ISVs realize.

53% of users state they visit a third party editorial site like MSDW once a day or week, whereas they typically visit vendor sites on a monthly basis.

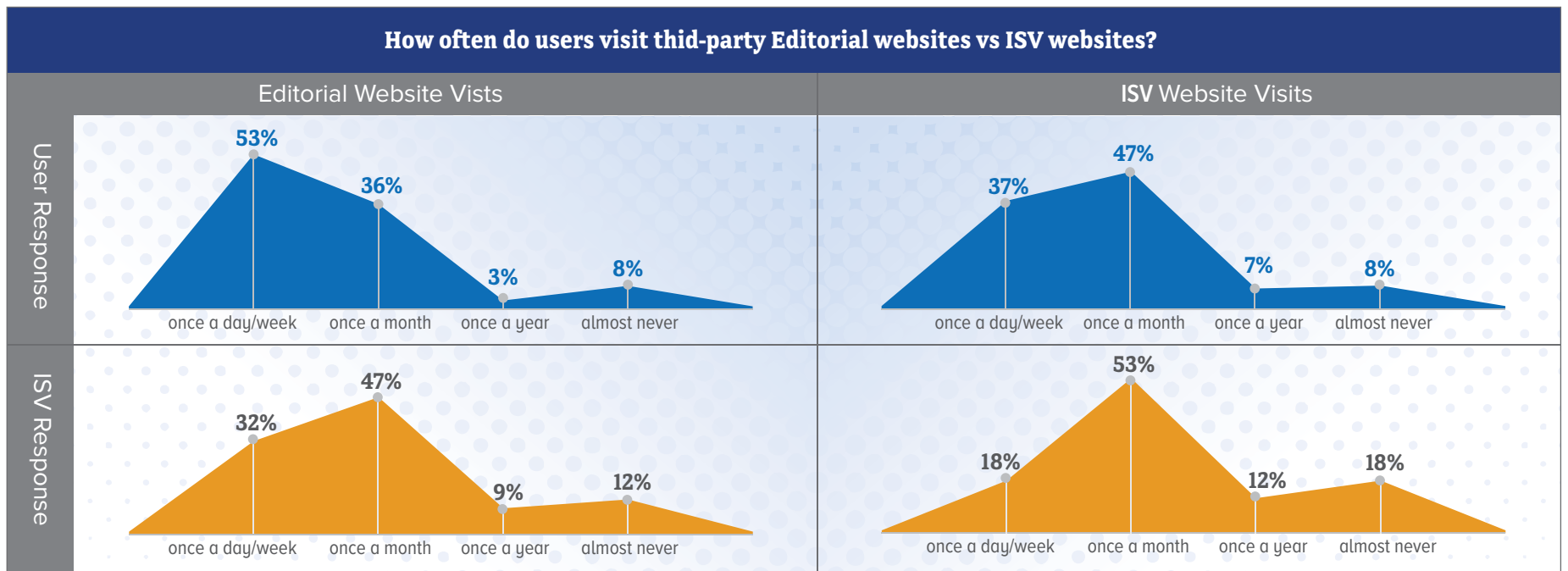
Marketers underestimate how frequently users and prospects visit both third party editorial sites and their own sites, though there appears to be a recognition among vendors that third party sites attract more frequent readership.

BP

Best Practice

Feedback from users indicates that they visit editorial sites more often because of their need to stay on top of recent news and developments. They also note that these sites provide them with an unbiased view of happenings in the Dynamics community at large. Independent sites also give users access to various vendors' solution information based on their buying stage needs, whereas a specific vendor website provides them only with a specific view of their product

line, rather than context about how that one solution fits into their overall buying needs. This is why it's important for ISV marketers to have a consistent marketing presence on third party editorial sites and a solid nurturing program to lead prospects from those sites back to your own corporate website.



KEY FINDINGS



Customer Reviews and Product Trials seen as a must-have by both users and vendors in final buy stage.

For users, trials ranked number 1 in both comparison and final decision stages. By contrast, marketers ranked case studies first and trials third in the comparison stage.

In the final decision stage, marketers ranked customer reviews as the top source used by buyers, followed by trials. Users agreed that customer reviews are important in final stage giving them a number 2 rank.

Best Practice



Given the demand for product trials, marketers should consider their options for incorporating trials into their larger lead nurture strategy. They should look for opportunities to make trial offers to qualified leads, as well as pursuing broader offers via channels like display ads and email promotions. They can allow the user to “trial” a product either in their own cloud/hosted environment or in the user’s environment, based on the platform and solution requirements. Research has shown that users who participate in a trial offer are typically in end stages of their buying process,

making these leads extremely valuable to marketers and their sales pipeline. Most organizations use telemarketing services to follow up with trial participants or dedicated sales people ready to close a sale.

Based on this research finding it would be best to also direct a trial user to your own customer reviews section of your website or to a Q&A

with customers so that they may answer any last questions the user may have on reliability, user experience, and related issues.

When Microsoft Dynamics users are comparing solution providers, what are the top three types of content downloaded?

User Ranking	ISV Ranking
1 Product Trials/Demos	1 Case Studies
2 Informational White Papers	2 Product Webinars
3 Product Webinars	3 Product Trials/Demos

When making a final decision on a solution/vendor, which of the following types of content do users refer to?

User Ranking	ISV Ranking
1 Product Trials/Demos	1 Customer Reviews
2 Customer Reviews	2 Product Trials/Demos
3 Product Webinars	3 Case Studies

KEY FINDINGS

6

Dynamics users value industry conferences differently than marketers when doing research to solve problems related to Dynamics offerings

Users value Microsoft's own web site, peer advice, IT editorial and association websites and conferences - in that order. Marketers indicated the same order of importance, except that they ranked peers higher than Microsoft.

There is a disconnect between the value that users assign to conferences and the perceived value indicated by marketers. Although both groups give it a #4 rank, comments from the sample and the interviewed users suggest that users value conferences primarily for networking and gathering information on the latest Microsoft and ISV products. Online sources are valued for providing continuous help throughout the users' buy process with information relevant and timely to their buying needs.

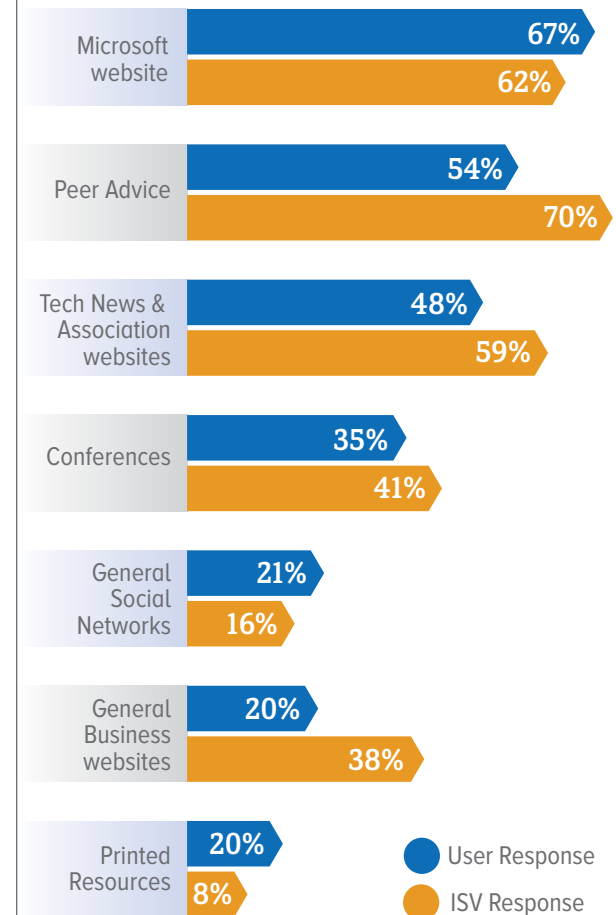
If we were to group the rankings for responses favoring online sources in the aggregate, (IT publications, association sites, and social/forum web sites) the user sample highly favors online sources over conferences.

BP

Best Practice

Live conferences still play an important role in the Dynamics ERP and CRM ecosystem, but users view them primarily as networking and high level information gathering events. Depending on which stage the user is in for researching a solution, different sources play a role. Users are increasingly turning to online sources for research that is in line with their present needs. For optimal results in promoting a conference to your users, integrate your online efforts (email, web presence) to drive attendance and awareness.

Which sources are the most valuable to Dynamics users when looking to solve a problem?



SPOTLIGHT ON SURVEY RESPONDENTS



The following excerpts are the result of follow-up interview with respondents who elaborated on points relevant to the major findings of the survey. They have given us their permission to use their comments.

On Conferences

Tom Weaver

Financial Systems Manager, Excelsior College

“I’m 50/50 on the role of conferences.

GPUG and Convergence provide networking opportunities and valuable information but they only happen once a year and due to budget cuts sometimes I can only attend every other year. Sometimes budget cuts make attending them cost prohibitive. I wish MSDW would bring back “Decisions” virtual conference format as an alternative to attending a live one.”

Teri Stora

CRM Manager, Rehmann

“Conferences are great for interacting with my peers and provide quality social time as well. However, personally I haven’t attended Microsoft’s Convergence conference in the last two years due to its high cost. When I am looking for information I go online first. I’m also interested in any type of training session

offered online. Virtual conferences are also great and tend to be inexpensive or even free!”

Michael J. Leiden

*Associate CIO Information Systems,
Archdiocese of Philadelphia*

“Convergence always has played an important role but now they are walking away from the Dynamics piece and changing their model to be more about “Microsoft” in general. When I go to an event I am looking to get educated in a very specific way , especially related to Dynamics GP so I will want information that provides that level of specificity.”

On White Papers/Webinars and follow-up Practices from Marketers

Tom Weaver

Financial Systems Manager, Excelsior College

“When it comes to downloading white papers I am generally more receptive to doing so on a third party editorial site like MSDW. That’s because I view that resource as a kind of “golden rule” for where to turn to for credible information. I take what they say as “gospel” so I am more receptive to sign up for vendor webinars or white papers in their environment. I’m not really receptive to cold-calling

emails from vendors that ask me to download or register.

Once I do register for an event or paper I prefer the sponsor not call me immediately. It creates too much pressure. It’s all about timing. When I am in the early stages of investigation, I want an objective source first and then in my own time I will go to the ISV’s website either to trial a product demo or to hear what their customers have to say about them. The vendor can eventually follow-up with email and send me more relevant information.”

Teri Stora

CRM Manager, Rehmann

“I am more receptive to responding to emails in a vendor neutral environment like MSDW, which is where I go to get information on Dynamics issues that help me develop my own expertise and that I can easily share with my colleagues. I prefer to go there to seek industry white papers or webinars when I am receptive to hearing them and I believe they are more vetted in this type of editorial environment. Cold emails from vendors don’t always seem to represent the entire truth and frankly I am drowning in them, there’s so many being sent out all the time.”

SPOTLIGHT ON SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Michael J. Leiden

*Associate CIO Information Systems,
Archdiocese of Philadelphia*

“In general I don’t think vendors make it easy to consume or appreciate their information. I don’t agree with the practice of requiring me to login or register for their white papers. For example, a company like McKinsey often sends me their email whitepapers or webinars and they don’t require me to register. They make it easy for me to peruse their information and/or pass it along but it’s up to me to decide what I want to do next. I find this practice less invasive than being forced to register and then take phone calls right after I download something, most of which I take to be polite but then to be faced with a salesperson who doesn’t even understand what I do or which specific aspect of Dynamics I’m interested in, forcing me to explain all of it .It’s too much work. Vendors often forget they are not the only ones to offer info thru emails most of which I delete. In general the offers I get have to do with Dynamics in general and aren’t specific to my area of expertise in Business Apps. I’d be more receptive to an invite to get a newsletter from them that requires nothing except for me to read it.”

On the Role of Banner Ads

Teri Stora

CRM Manager, Rehmann

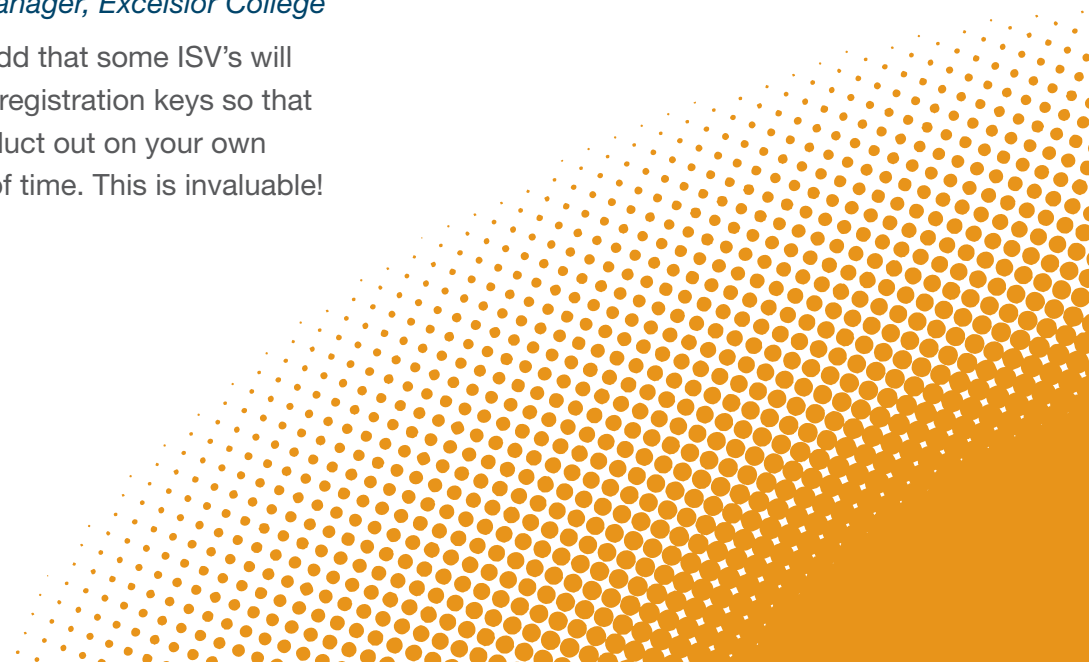
“I don’t view display ads as a means to get an offer but rather as a way for the vendor to let me know they are part of the landscape. Ads provide me with a sense of who the players are and help me figure out in the early stage of my buy process who I should be considering. If a vendor had an offer I’d be more receptive to clicking on it in a third party editorial environment website like MSDW.”

On the Role of Product Trials

Tom Weaver

Financial Systems Manager, Excelsior College

“I would also like to add that some ISV’s will grant you temporary registration keys so that you can try their product out on your own system for a period of time. This is invaluable!”



ABOUT MSDW AND THE AUTHOR



About MSDW

MSDynamicsWorld.com, a GuidePoint Media publication, is the world's leading independent online resource for Microsoft Dynamics news and information. Uniquely-focused on building an online community, we offer essential, executive level insights to over 50,000 active Dynamics users, partners, and consultants who register to access the content and news most critical and relevant to their business decision-making roles.

Our guiding mission is to be a strategic partner to the marketing departments of Dynamics ISVs. By combining our result-driven approach to online marketing with a range of turnkey lead generation and advertising programs, we can guarantee you positive results. And, you can count on the delivery of highly-targeted and qualified leads, ready to fill your sales pipeline, shorten your sales cycles, and increase your company's revenue.

For more information, call 508-259-9143 or email info@msdynamicsworld.com.

About the Author

Marilou Barsam, with more than 25 years of experience in both traditional and online marketing, has held myriad executive-level advertising jobs on both the client and agency side. Based on her research on the technology buyer's media consumption habits, she is frequently called upon to address how to achieve marketing ROI, online media performance, the technology purchase process, and content marketing.

She has contributed to a series of books published by Aspatore Books on C-level business and marketing intelligence, as well as hosting numerous webcasts and writing her own blog entitled "My Educated Guess". Marilou is also the author of *The Evolution of Online Marketing and the Marketer's Quest for ROI*. Currently, she is teaching at Bentley University and working as a marketing consultant.

Marilou is a graduate of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and received her MBA in marketing from Bentley College.

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