

2022 SURVEY RESEARCH

WHAT BUYERS WANT FROM BRAND EXPERIENCES



SKYWORD

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THIS REPORT 2

CONTENT’S IMPACT ON THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE 3

INSIGHTS FOR B2C BRANDS 4

INSIGHTS FOR B2B BRANDS 12

THE FORMULA FOR A BEST-IN-CLASS CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE 20



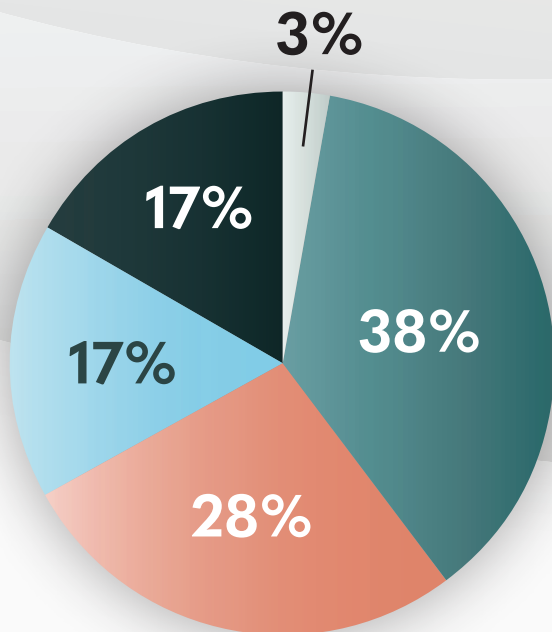
ABOUT THIS REPORT

These report findings are drawn from two 2022 surveys of consumers and business buyers, respectively. The surveys were fielded online from January 24 to February 7, 2022 using Suzy™ enterprise market research software.

1128 CONSUMERS

are included in these results and met the following criteria:

- Over 21 years of age
- Employed full-time
- Regularly purchase products online



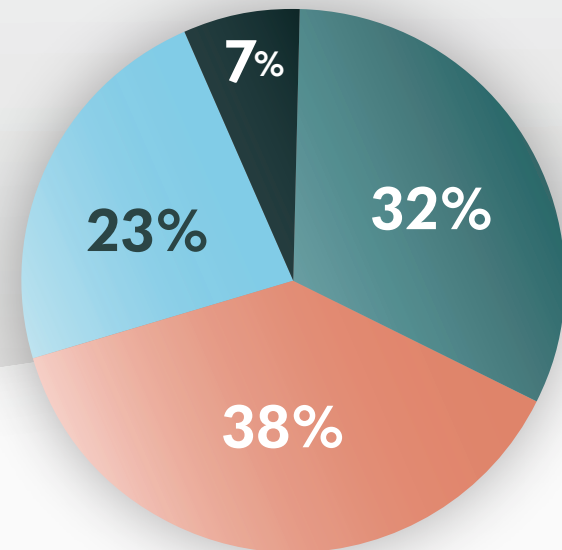
RESPONDENTS BY AGE



334 BUSINESS BUYERS

are included in these results and met the following criteria:

- Over 21 years of age
- Employed full-time for an organization making over \$10M in annual revenue
- Are directly responsible for making and/or influencing business purchasing decisions



WHY CONTENT MATTERS IN THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Post-pandemic, and at a time when every dollar has to count, CEOs are heavily invested in ensuring their brands offer a best-in-class customer experience. That's elevated customer-centricity and customer-centric content to an enterprise-wide priority.

Marketers are in the best position to own the connection of content across all the touchpoints that make up the customer experience. But what should that experience look like?

To answer that question, we asked actual consumers and business decision buyers to explain how brand experiences do and don't meet their needs during the research and purchase process. In this report, we've distilled those findings for B2C and B2B brands, respectively.

It's clear that content plays a crucial role in enabling the self-directed purchase experience that most buyers in both segments seek. Generally, buyers mistrust tactics designed to influence their decision-making and value brands that make it easy for them to make well-informed decisions at their own pace.

Check out page 20 to see our formula for using content to create a best-in-class customer experience.

Enjoy!

Andrew Wheeler



The **quality and authority of a brand's content** ranked as the factor most likely to significantly impact buyers' purchasing decisions.



INSIGHTS FOR B2C BRANDS

Generally, consumers are skeptical of brand promises. Instead, they look for visual, informational, and social proof that the brands they purchase from are trustworthy.

Authenticity and transparency are paramount to consumers, who want assurance that products actually do what brands claim and that materials, ingredients, and services are high quality.

As they research, consumers seek quick access to content that shows (rather than tells) how products work in real life, that helps them determine which products are best-suited to their needs, and that breaks down how similar products compare to one another.

Consumers value brands that make the process of researching, choosing, and purchasing products as frictionless as possible.



THE CONSUMER MINDSET:

*Prove that your
products **will**
work for me—and
make the purchase
process **seamless**.*



WHICH FACTORS HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY INFLUENCED WHETHER OR NOT YOU PURCHASE FROM A BRAND?

TRUSTWORTHINESS AND EASE

Over half of consumers **(51%)** said the quality and authority of a brand's content have significantly impacted their decision to purchase.

A large share **(48%)** of consumers were also more inclined to purchase from brands that minimized the need to interact with a salesperson.

Forty-two percent of consumers have been swayed by the look and feel of a brand's website and communications.

Factors selected in rank order (respondents could select all that apply):



TOP CHALLENGE WHEN RESEARCHING A SPECIFIC BRAND OR PRODUCT

FINDING PERSONAL FIT

When asked to identify their single most significant challenge (among six options, including “Other”), consumers’ most common struggle was validating if a brand or product has worked for others *like them*.

Particularly in a digital context, brands should consider segmenting results, reviews, and tutorial content so that customers can more easily identify the ‘proof’ that resonates with them as individuals.

Showing how products work in different application scenarios or for people with varied needs helps customers feel confident that the way products appear online will match what they will experience in the real world.

The single biggest challenge for 84% of consumer respondents (in rank order):

- 1 Validating if the brand or product has worked for others like me**
- 2 Easily finding/accessing the product information I need on their website**
- 3 Finding the solution they offer that’s right for me**
- 4 Understanding how the [product or brand] is different from similar offerings**

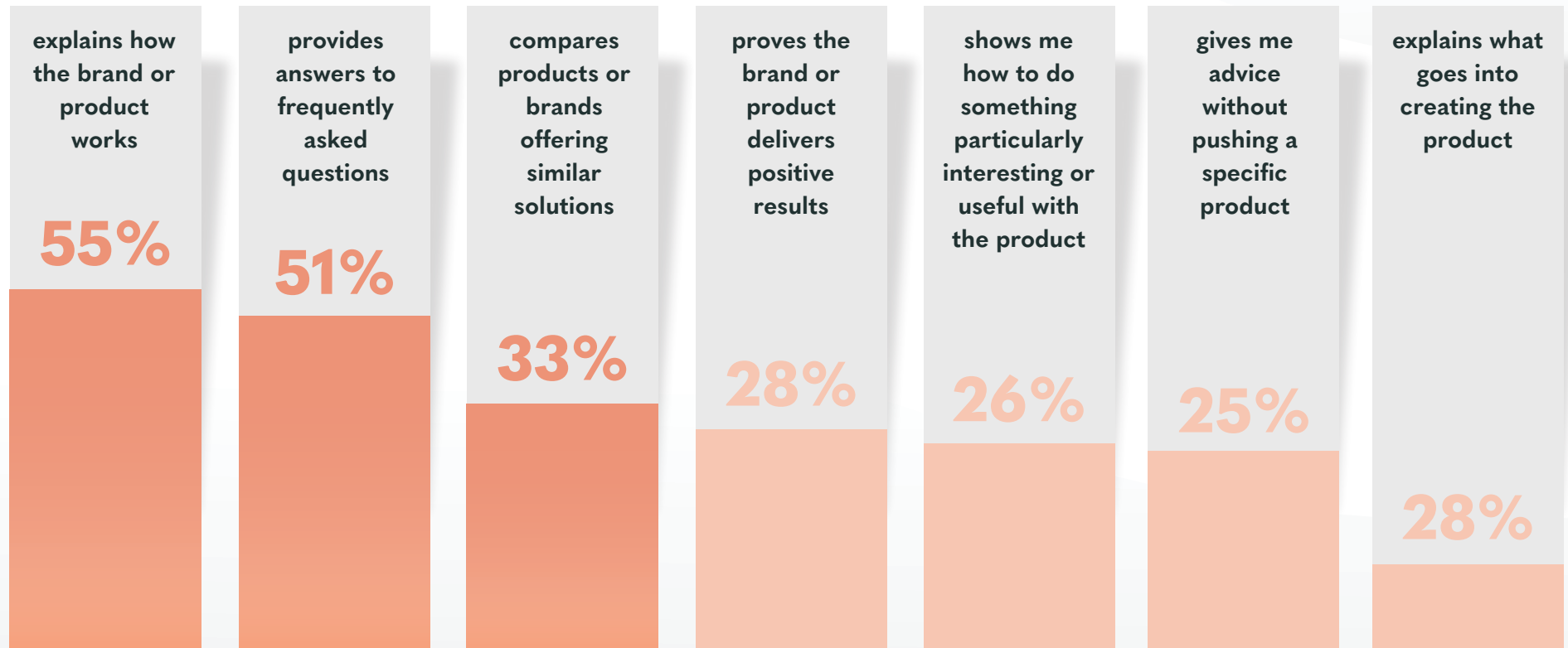


WHICH TYPES OF CONTENT ARE MOST HELPFUL?

Consumers place a premium on content that helps them make their own value judgments, including content that explains precisely how products work, answers their frequently asked questions, and helps them evaluate similar products against one another. This is consistent with **consumers' desire for clear "evidence"**—beyond ads and testimonials—that those products will meet their needs and offer good value.

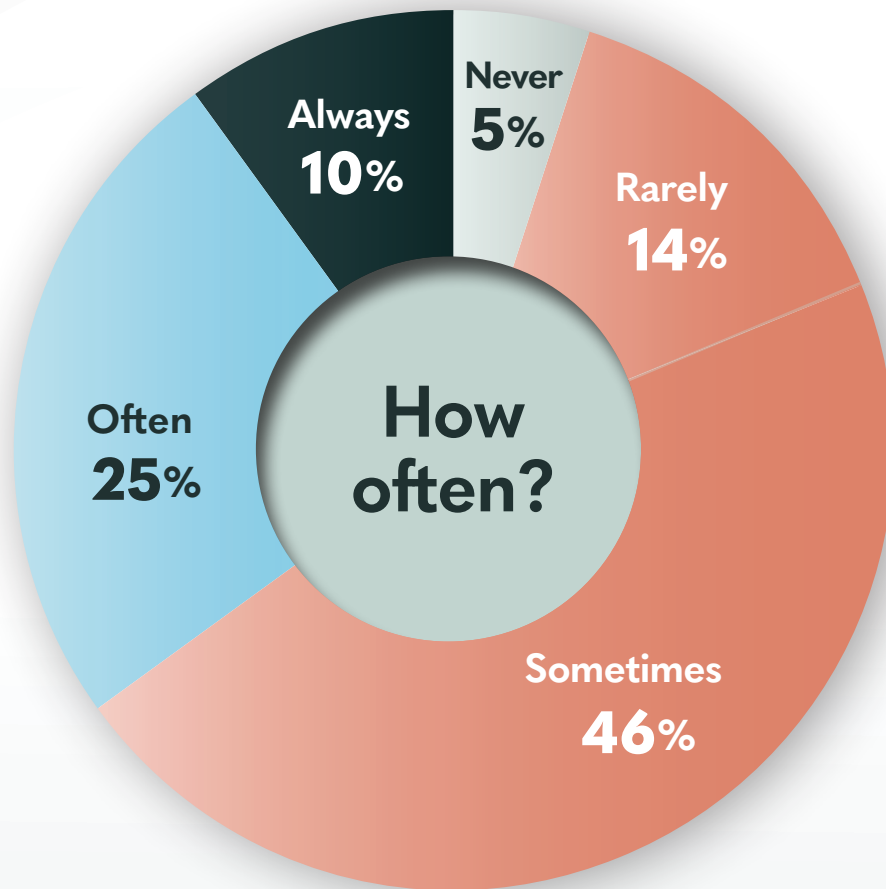


Content that...



HOW OFTEN DO YOU CONSULT OTHER RESOURCES?

A significant portion of consumers **(60%)** only rarely or sometimes consult other resources when making their purchasing decisions. By meeting all their core information needs, B2C brands have an excellent opportunity to keep these consumers from seeking content elsewhere during the purchase process.



What resources?

1. Google
2. Review Sites
3. Social Media
(especially YouTube & Reddit)
4. Friends & Family



WHAT INFORMATION ARE CONSUMERS USUALLY MISSING?

RELIABLE REVIEWS & PRODUCT DETAILS

Consumers suspect that brands' reviews and testimonials are either fabricated or curated. Therefore, brands should go the extra mile to present customer content that conveys authenticity.

Consumers also want more access to the details about a product that are important to them. That includes information on how and where products are made to evaluate the quality of ingredients or materials and anticipate shipping times.

Consumers also want brands to provide more images and video content showing how products look and operate in real life.

Top 3 open response themes:



HONEST
REVIEWS &
TESTIMONIALS



DETAILS ON
HOW AND WHERE
PRODUCTS ARE
MADE



VIDEOS/IMAGES
OF PRODUCTS
AND HOW
TO USE THEM



WHAT B2C BRANDS SHOULD STOP DOING

Brand marketers should stop using spray and pray tactics to capture customers' attention and avoid content that feels overly promotional. While some of these tactics may be proven to move product, they deter a significant number of potential customers from interacting with the brand.

OPEN RESPONSE THEMES	% OF RESPONSES	CONSUMERS IN THEIR OWN WORDS:		
USING OBTRUSIVE ADS & EMAIL TACTICS	43%	<i>"Brands often bombard me with emails, which turns me off."</i>	<i>"Putting ads all over apps and websites makes me not want to purchase those items. Ever."</i>	<i>"I get so many emails from some companies that I want to stop doing business with them."</i>
BURYING THE VALUABLE INFORMATION	21%	<i>"Useful content is overrun with useless information. I don't want 20 paragraphs telling me why I should buy something. "</i>	<i>"I don't have time to waste; I need to get the info I need ASAP."</i>	<i>"STOP treating me like I'm so easily influenced! Give me the true benefits vs. the fluff."</i>
COMING OFF AS INAUTHENTIC	13%	<i>"Don't misrepresent the product because that is an immediate turn off for me. I need honesty and the experiences of real people."</i>	<i>"Make certain that the experiences are really accurate and not just fake advertising."</i>	<i>"Using fake reviews or social media influencers to promote the product."</i>



WHAT B2C BRANDS SHOULD **START DOING**

Brand marketers should strive to be direct, specific, and authentic when communicating with consumers. When individuals see their specific needs reflected in brand experiences, videos, and images, they feel more confident in the value and integrity of the products. While consumers do value a creative, frictionless experience, content that reflects "real life" is preferred and trusted over campaigns and celebrity endorsements.

OPEN RESPONSE THEMES	% OF RESPONSES	CONSUMERS IN THEIR OWN WORDS:		
SHARING REAL-LIFE VIDEOS & IMAGES	23%	<i>"I love to see videos on products that I want to purchase. It helps me in making my decision."</i>	<i>"Have videos of real-life users."</i>	<i>"Use videos of regular consumers actually using the products to make it more authentic and honest."</i>
BEING MORE HONEST & DIRECT	21%	<i>"They need to be more to the point about what the product is, what it does, and who the product primarily has worked for."</i>	<i>"I don't want to sort through a bunch of surface information. I'd like easy access to the information I actually want."</i>	<i>"Be honest and direct. I want to feel valued and not 'sold to.'"</i>
TAILORING TO THE INDIVIDUAL	12%	<i>"I appreciate digital experiences that feel made for me and unique."</i>	<i>"Let me know when new products come in that I would like."</i>	<i>"I like to know what other people like me think or like and dislike in a product."</i>



INSIGHTS FOR B2B BRANDS

Business buyers are used to being pursued by brands and have little patience for grandiose claims or poorly tailored outreach.

Relevance and demonstrated expertise are paramount to the business buyer, who wants guarantees that solutions meet their business requirements and that the brands they're dealing with are reputable.

As they research, business buyers want to be spared the inconvenience of hunting for information or waiting for answers to their follow-up questions.

These buyers value brands that offer tailored advice and a consultative experience, making it easy to grasp the value proposition for their business.



THE BUSINESS BUYER MINDSET:

*Prove **you're qualified** to improve my business, and make it **easy to get help** quickly if I need it.*



WHICH FACTORS HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY INFLUENCED WHETHER OR NOT YOU PURCHASE FROM A BRAND?

EXPERTISE AND ADVICE

A majority of business buyers **(54%)** said the quality and authority of a brand's content have significantly impacted their decision to purchase.

A large share **(45%)** have been swayed by brands that consistently tailored their content and communications to their needs.

Forty-four percent said brands who provided advice above and beyond what was required gained an advantage in the purchase process.

Factors selected in rank order (respondents could select all that apply):



TOP CHALLENGE WHEN RESEARCHING A SPECIFIC BRAND

EVALUATING SOLUTIONS

When asked to identify their single most significant challenge (among six options, including “Other”), the most common struggle among business buyers is finding the solution the brand offers that is right for them.

Brands should ensure that their content is segmented by use case and/or business type so that professionals can easily find the information most relevant to their needs.

Content experiences should also clearly indicate which solutions align to different challenges and types of business, and the purposes they serve.

The single biggest challenge for 85% of business respondents (in rank order):

- 1 Finding the solution they offer that’s right for me**
- 2 Easily finding/accessing the vendor information I need on their website**
- 3 Understanding how the vendor or solution is different from similar offerings**
- 4 Validating if the product or solution has worked for others like me**

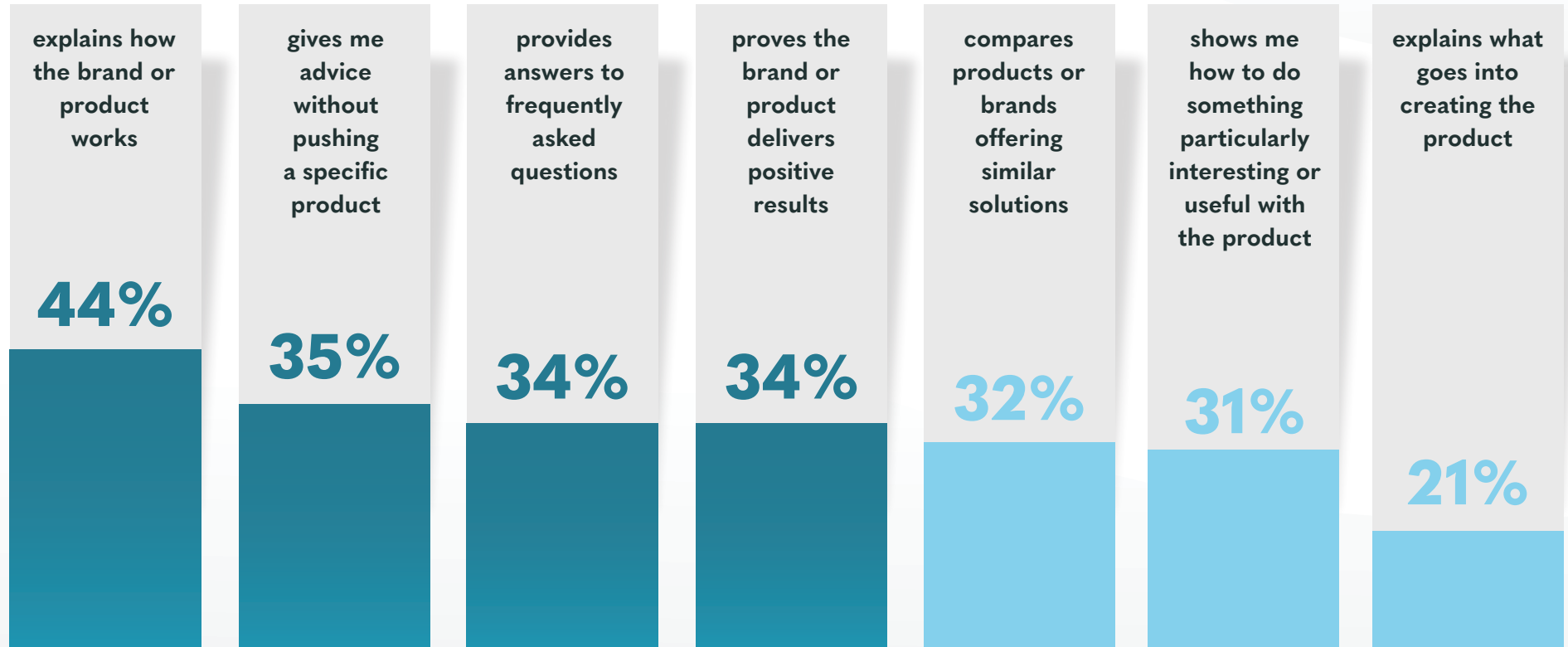


WHICH TYPES OF CONTENT ARE MOST HELPFUL?

Business buyers place a premium on content that **helps them understand how solutions work**, offers advice without pushing products, and answers common follow-up questions. This is consistent with their desire to quickly and easily assess a solution's relevance and their preference for brands who have the expertise to anticipate their questions and play a consultative role in the decision-making process.

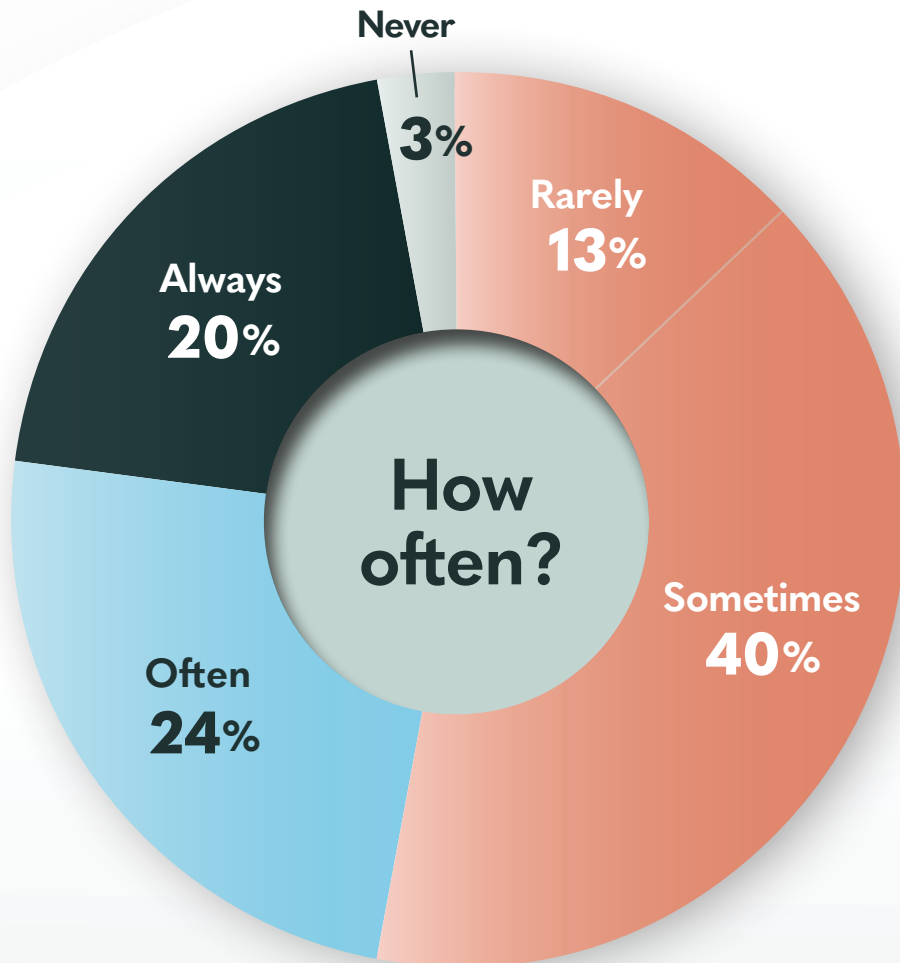


Content that...



HOW OFTEN DO YOU CONSULT OTHER RESOURCES?

A significant portion of business buyers **(53%)** only rarely or sometimes consult other resources when making their purchasing decisions. By meeting all of their core information needs, B2B brands have an excellent opportunity to keep these buyers from going elsewhere for advice or confirmation as they research and make their purchase decisions.



What resources?

1. Google
2. Social Media
(especially YouTube)
3. Review Sites
4. Friends & Peers



WHAT INFORMATION ARE BUSINESS BUYERS USUALLY MISSING?

DETAILS & BRAND BACKGROUND

Business buyers lament the need to request pricing details and technical specifications rather than having them provided upfront.

These buyers also want brands to provide more information about their industry background and reputation, which they use to build confidence in purchasing decisions.

A lack of consolidated information on how solutions work and who to contact for more detail is frustrating for business buyers who indicate they seek a self-directed purchase experience accompanied by on-demand service.

Top 3 open response themes:



PRICING &
SPECIFICATIONS



BRAND
BACKGROUND
& REPUTATION



HOW
SOLUTIONS
WORK & HOW
TO GET HELP



WHAT B2B BRANDS SHOULD STOP DOING

Brand marketers should avoid hyping products and using high-pressure sales tactics. Business buyers value hyper-relevant information and will quickly dismiss brands who appear to disregard or be unfamiliar with their unique business challenges.

OPEN RESPONSE THEMES	% OF RESPONSES	BUSINESS BUYERS IN THEIR OWN WORDS:		
USING PUSHY TACTICS & OVER-HYPING	34%	<i>"Selling on hype and exaggerating benefits."</i>	<i>"Stop pushing traditional sales practices into the online experience."</i>	<i>"Stop pushing me to buy right away. Let me weigh the options."</i>
USING OBTRUSIVE ADVERTISING	21%	<i>"Avoid so much advertising. It disturbs my ability to absorb the content."</i>	<i>"Stop with all the popups and making ads that keep me on the site, it does the opposite."</i>	<i>"Fewer ads and more focus on the innovation."</i>
SHARING IRRELEVANT CONTENT	15%	<i>"Stop wasting my time with content that doesn't relate to my business."</i>	<i>"Stop adding information that's irrelevant to what I'm researching."</i>	<i>"Stop assuming all clients have the same basic needs."</i>



WHAT B2B BRANDS SHOULD START DOING

Brand marketers should frame content around a consultative, customized sales approach. When business buyers are presented with credible facts and tailored advice, they gain confidence in the expertise of the vendor. Content that prescribes specific solutions to nuanced challenges is more likely to capture their interest than broad brand messaging.

OPEN RESPONSE THEMES	% OF RESPONSES	BUSINESS BUYERS IN THEIR OWN WORDS:		
TAKING A CONSULTATIVE APPROACH	23%	<i>"Listen first, then respond with information on customized solutions."</i>	<i>"Let me drive the conversation, but provide helpful articles and advice."</i>	<i>"Let me peruse content at my leisure and have nonintrusive help available immediately if need be."</i>
PROVIDING RELIABLE SPECIFICS	22%	<i>"State facts, not opinions."</i>	<i>"Give me specific information about the market segment in question. Don't generalize."</i>	<i>"Don't make me look elsewhere for answers to lingering questions."</i>
TAILORING CONTENT TO SPECIFIC NEEDS	17%	<i>"Focus on quality content that is targeted to my needs. Do videos, publish whitepapers, get info from clients."</i>	<i>"Have the content reviewed with industry experts. Understand trends and offer specific products/services as per the industry need."</i>	<i>"Refine content based on my needs and give examples."</i>



THE FORMULA FOR A BEST-IN-CLASS BRAND EXPERIENCE



Improve your brand experience by applying these 5 principles.

HERE'S HOW...



#1

TREAT CONTENT LIKE A UTILITY, NOT A COMMODITY.

Generally, customers prefer a self-directed purchase journey. While one-off assets and campaigns may catch their attention, they depend on a wealth of fresh informational content to research and weigh options when they reach your brand's site.

Seize this opportunity by creating always-on content to stand in where sales consultants and an in-store experience cannot. As your library of content grows, so will the scale of your topic authority—in the eyes of customers and search engines.

Keep in mind that content quality and staging play critical roles in this experience. Based on your content, customers make value judgments about your brand and products—that our research proves has a significant impact on whether or not they buy.



#2

ALIGN CONTENT TO HELPING MOMENTS, NOT BUYING STAGES.

Focus on using content to give customers the right help at the right time, rather than trying to enforce a linear buyers' journey.

Specifically, buyers want content that helps them understand how your products work, how they differ from similar solutions, and that answers their frequently asked questions.

Business buyers, in particular, value expert advice that helps them stay informed without pushing any specific product or service.

Think about how you can deploy content from an informational and experiential perspective to make your customers' discovery process seamless and meet them where they are with the information they're most likely to need next.

#3

BE RELEVANT AT EVERY TOUCHPOINT.

Especially when it comes to making first impressions, it's important to package content—down to the detail—in a way that triggers an immediate sense of self-recognition and personal alignment with your target customers.

Remember, consumers base relevance on alignment with their individual needs and interests, while business buyers gauge relevance based on your understanding of their industry, budget, and/or business model.

Create suites of assets around specific customer personas, industries, or segments to fuel personalized journeys that make customers feel well catered to and more inclined to purchase.



#4

EARN UP-STREAM CREDIBILITY WITH EXPERT CREATORS.

Buyers are more inclined to trust information from experts or experienced peers than information solely from your brand.

By incorporating the voices of these “micro-influencers” into your content, your brand is more likely to be perceived as credible and authentic early in the decision-making process, which helps relieve customer doubt closer to the point of purchase.

#5

SET UP A HIGH-VELOCITY CONTENT CREATION MODEL.

Successful brands plant their flag on the themes and topics they want to own in the market but use fast insights—like search intent, social listening, and real-time voice of the customer data—to calibrate their content to day-to-day customer needs.

Consider adding external content creators to your workflow to improve your ability to act on these insights and get content into market quickly. These resources can be activated on-demand to deliver content at scale and speed when business needs inevitably shift.



For more information or help scaling your brand content,
email learnmore@skyword.com or visit www.skyword.com



SKYWORD

©2022 Skyword Inc. • 33 Arch Street, Boston, MA 02110