

Mapping the modern B2B tech buyer's journey

Key research insights

1



The buyer journey is now largely invisible to vendors



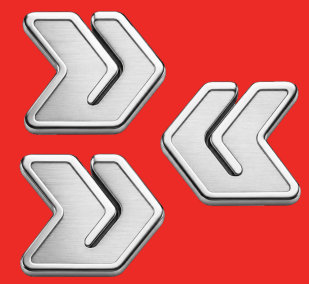
Around 80% of the B2B buying journey now happens without direct vendor contact.



81% of buyers already have a preferred vendor when they first reach out.



Buyers also tend to initiate contact themselves; roughly 80% of first outreach comes from the buyer, not the seller.



One of the most consistent findings across research is how much of the buying process happens before a vendor is even aware a buyer exists. This fundamentally changes marketing strategy.

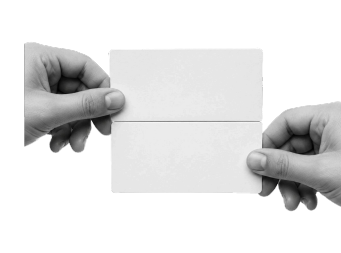
Problem recognition



Independent research



Internal alignment



Vendor shortlist



Validation



Purchase



Marketing's influence is strongest in the first three stages, when buyers are still anonymous.

2 Digital self-service dominates the research phase

Today's B2B buyers behave more like consumer shoppers: they self-educate.

Key research findings:

61%

of B2B buyers prefer a rep-free buying experience.

68%

prefer self-service research tools before speaking to sales.

90%

use search engines during vendor research.

This explains why content, reviews, analyst reports, and peer recommendations are so influential.

It also explains why irrelevant outbound marketing is increasingly counterproductive:

73% of buyers actively avoid suppliers who send irrelevant outreach.

The lesson for marketing teams:
The modern buyer journey is content-driven, not sales-driven.

3



Buying committees are bigger and more complex

A single buyer persona rarely exists anymore.

Research shows:

Buying committees now typically involve 8–13 stakeholders, nearly double the average from a decade ago.

These groups often include:

Technical evaluators
finance and procurement security/compliance
business unit leaders
IT architects

Each participant has different motivations and risk tolerances, which creates a complicated internal decision process.

For marketing teams, this means the buyer journey isn't just long — it's multi-threaded, with different stakeholders consuming different information at different times.

4



Younger digital-native buyers are reshaping expectations

Demographics are quietly transforming B2B buying behaviour.

Research shows:



Millennials and Gen Z now make up around 71% of B2B buyers.

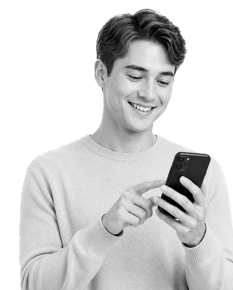


These buyers strongly prefer digital-first, self-service experiences.

Compared with previous generations, younger buyers:



trust peer reviews more than vendor claims



expect consumer-grade digital experiences



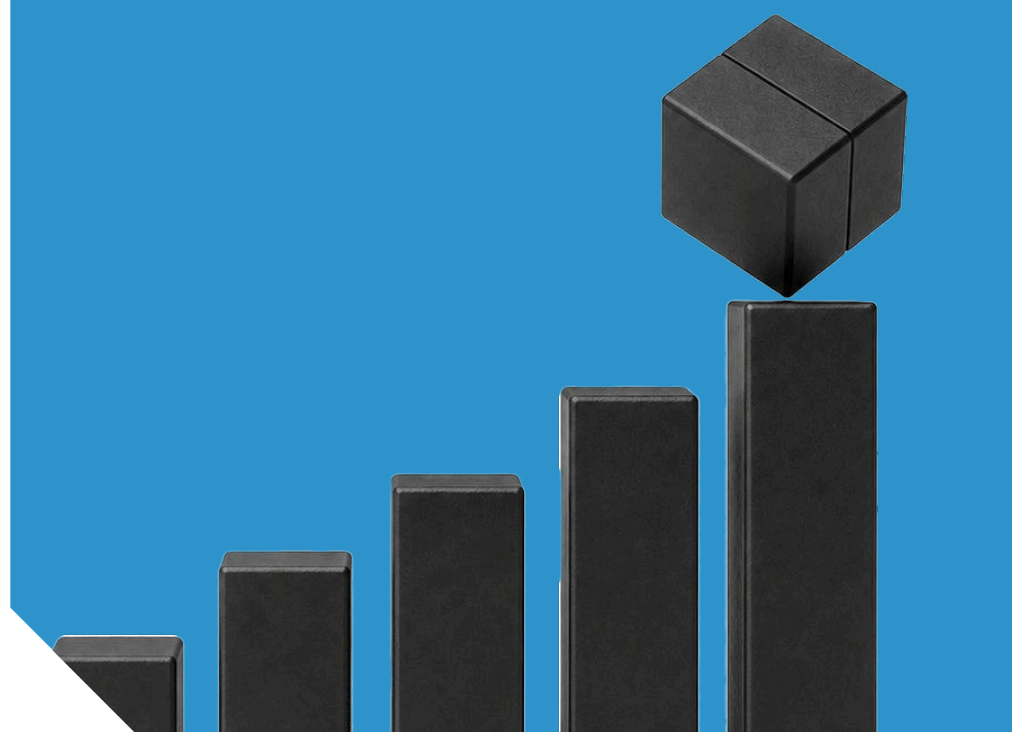
research extensively before contacting sales



move between channels rapidly

This generational shift explains the rise of:

product-led growth models



freemium SaaS trials



community-led buying



5 The journey is non-linear and unpredictable



The old funnel assumes a logical step-by-step progression. Real buying behaviour doesn't work that way. Research increasingly describes the journey as looping and chaotic.

Key characteristics:



buyers revisit stages repeatedly



new stakeholders join mid-process



external content influences decisions early



internal consensus building slows momentum

Studies suggest up to 90% of early influence comes from external sources, such as peer communities, analyst reports, and independent content.

That means brand perception and educational content often shape decisions before vendors appear on the shortlist.

6 Validation and risk reduction are now central



B2B tech purchases are expensive and risky, which drives buyers to seek proof.

Examples from recent research:



54% of technology buyers consult user reviews during the journey.

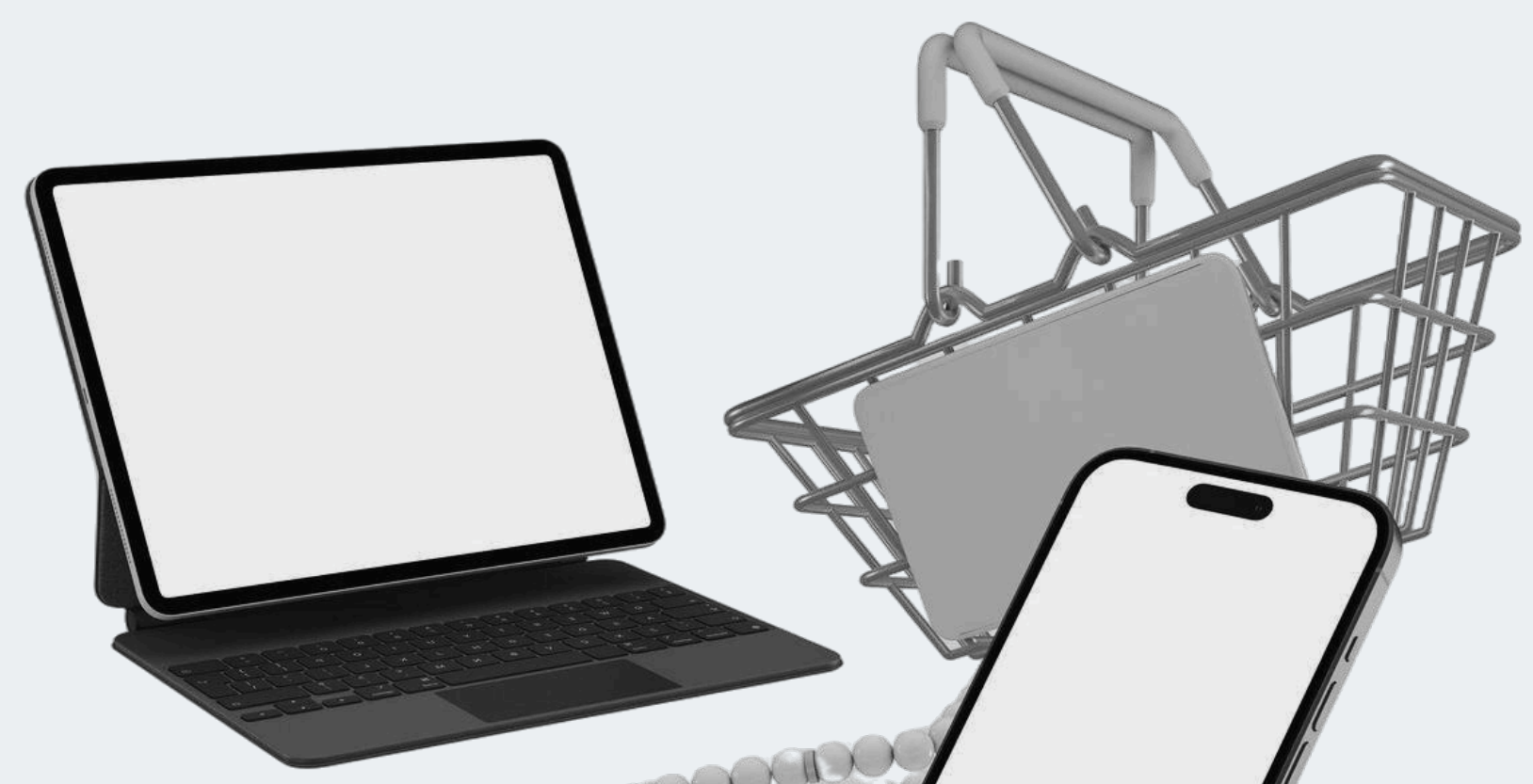
That's why:

- product demos
- case studies
- peer communities
- free trials
- proof-of-concept deployments

are becoming central to the decision process.

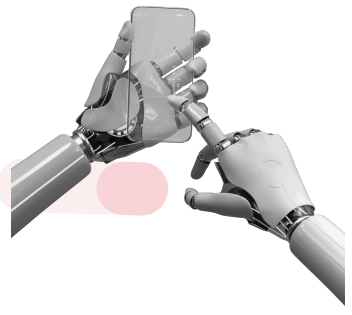


More than **60%** of buyers now evaluate solutions through trials or sandbox environments.

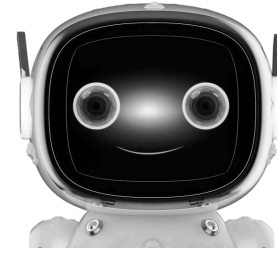


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Research indicates:



AI is starting to shape the early research stage

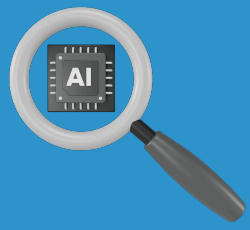


buyers increasingly use AI tools as a starting point for research



but they still validate AI-generated insights with peers and experts.

This suggests a new hybrid model:



AI discovery



Peer validation



Vendor engagement

Which means the earliest stage of the buyer journey may increasingly happen inside AI tools, not just search engines.



A simple way to frame the 2026 buyer journey

A useful conceptual model for your research piece could be:

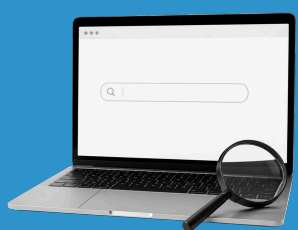
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Problem discovery

Buyers identify a challenge internally.

2



Independent research

Search, communities, AI tools, analyst reports.

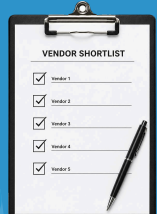
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Internal consensus

Stakeholders align around requirements.

4



Vendor shortlist

Often only 2–3 vendors are seriously considered.

5



Validation

Trials, demos, peer recommendations.

6



Purchase

Procurement and final negotiation.

The key shift is that marketing influence peaks early, while sales influence appears later.