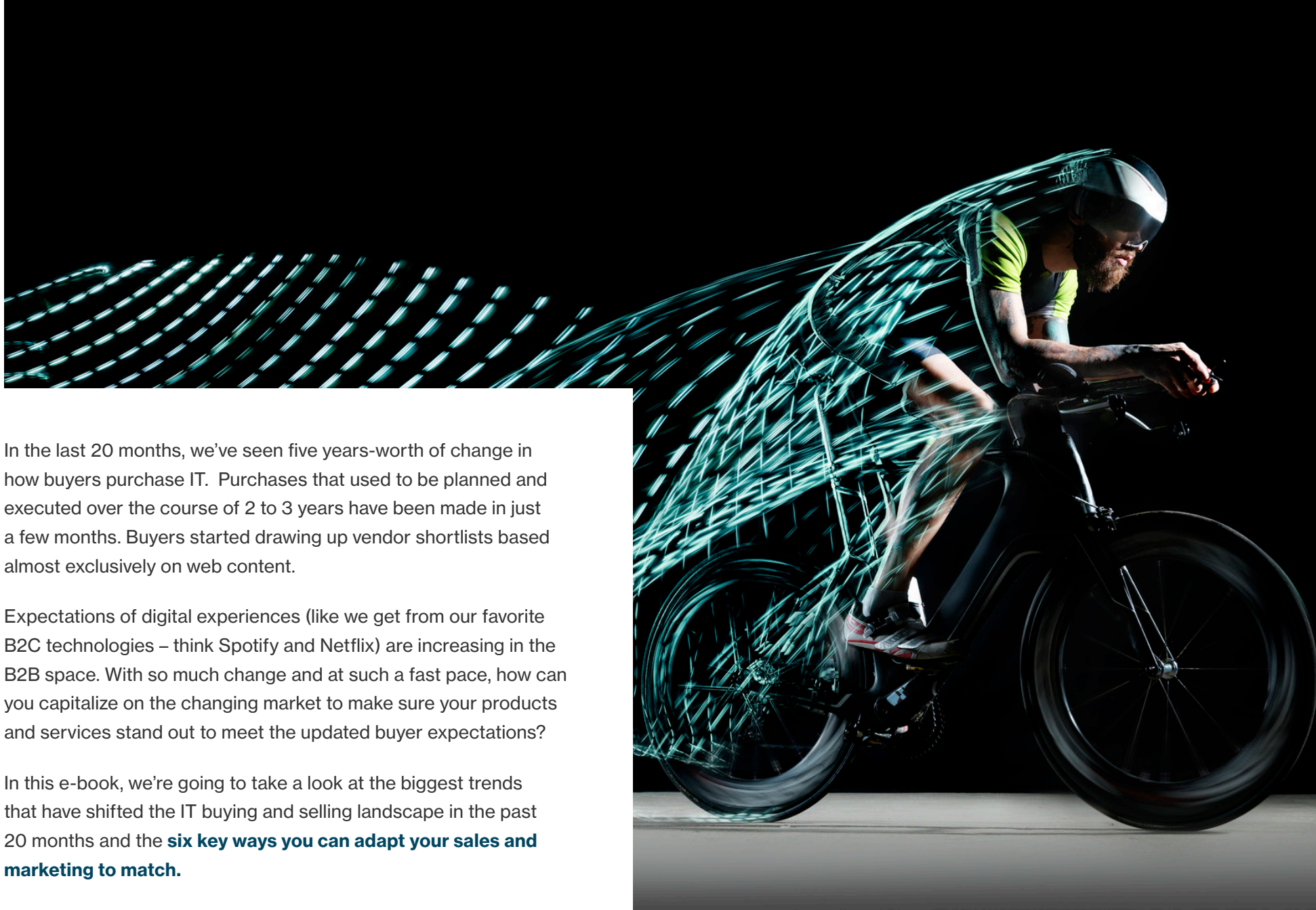




# Adapting to the Speed of Change

Six strategic habits to adopt in your sales  
and marketing planning



In the last 20 months, we've seen five years-worth of change in how buyers purchase IT. Purchases that used to be planned and executed over the course of 2 to 3 years have been made in just a few months. Buyers started drawing up vendor shortlists based almost exclusively on web content.

Expectations of digital experiences (like we get from our favorite B2C technologies – think Spotify and Netflix) are increasing in the B2B space. With so much change and at such a fast pace, how can you capitalize on the changing market to make sure your products and services stand out to meet the updated buyer expectations?

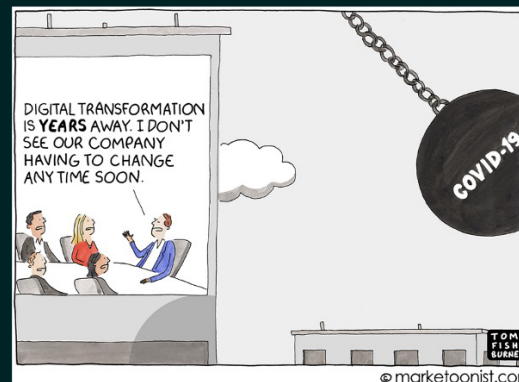
In this e-book, we're going to take a look at the biggest trends that have shifted the IT buying and selling landscape in the past 20 months and the **six key ways you can adapt your sales and marketing to match.**



## The change in buyer research and purchase speed

Previously, digital transformation projects took years. The process has always been long and complex with multiple levels of approvals and careful strategies implemented one step at a time. But when the pandemic hit, businesses turned on a dime and made huge investments in technology in just weeks to make it possible to work remotely and do business exclusively online. And like the pandemic, this acceleration was a global phenomenon.

### The Pandemic Chaos of 2020 created some important shifts impacting B2B Marketers and Sellers



KPMG – Computer Weekly interview, October 2021

*"Gone are the days when businesses say they want to embark on an enterprise transformation programme that is going to last three years and cost several hundred million. Actually, what they are needing to do is drive change very quickly...it is the most exciting time in my 25-year career to be in technology."*

Lisa Heneghan,  
Chief digital officer, UK



The primary knock-on effect of speedy purchasing was how buyers conducted their research. Because the purchases were made quickly, there wasn't time to go through a long-winded B2B sales cycle of multiple demos, tests, Q&A sessions, etc. Buyers needed to rely on web content - websites, reviews, online demos, etc. - to rapidly create vendor shortlists.

With the buying decision made largely online and self-nurtured, TechTarget saw a dramatic shift in research habits. 60% of buyers are now creating vendor shortlists based solely on the digital content they consume. 90% of buyers now cite vendor websites as the top information source; this was previously cited at 70%.



This change in researching and purchasing habits is going to demand a more deliberately crafted, self-nurturing journey from vendors that delivers the right content at the right time to prospects. Marketing needs to become agile and highly attuned to the actions of prospects.

To add complexity to this issue, we are also seeing that buying groups are becoming larger and more diverse in terms of the number of departments involved in the decision making. Vendors who are adapting and delivering a self-nurturing experience are already seeing better results.

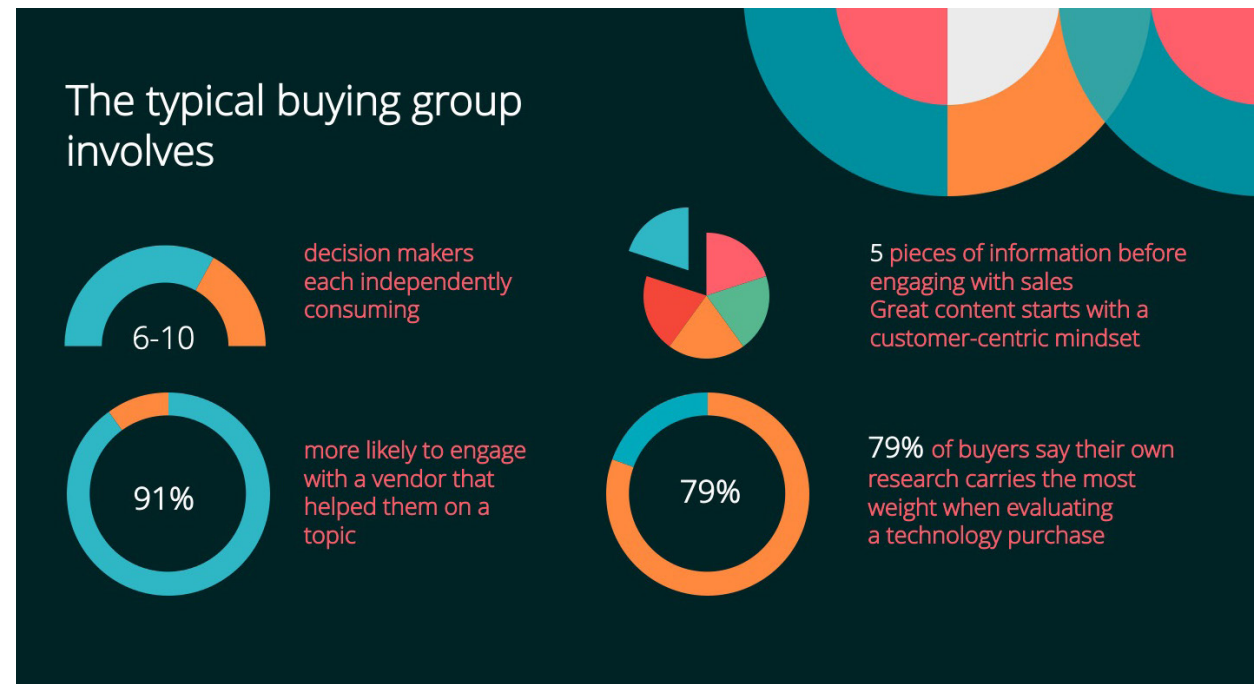
## 6 ways to strategically move with the new buying habits

Due to purchasing shifts, B2B tech Sales and Marketing need to know how to adapt to the new 'digital normal' state of IT buying.

To stay relevant and at the forefront of your market, here are 6 strategic ways you can shift to digital-first.

## 1. Understand and map the new buyer journey

First, you need to understand the changed landscape of the buyers' journey. You'll need to re-map it, but this will take some digging. We recognize that this is a tough process because marketers and salespeople have honed their knowledge of the IT buyer over years, but it's all changing.





## Review recent purchases

First, look at the last ten deals you've closed and ask: who was involved in the buying team? Buying teams are getting bigger and more departments are involved than ever before. We are seeing the typical buying team made up of 6-10 people, all individually consuming content to make decisions.

Once you know who your buying teams were in your latest deals, find out where they did their research on you and your competitors. With this information, you can create relevant content and distribute it where it will be found – consider what stage of the buying journey each piece of content is for and where prospects are researching at those stages.

## Create a strategy

Once you know who is doing the research and buying and where they're finding their information, you need to set up a solid marketing strategy.

With your research, you can map what the customer experience for each of your products needs to be and determine how to achieve the maximum self-service journey, including how the sales and marketing teams could work together to nurture the leads.



## Remap the customer experience

The customer experience needs to be less about you as a vendor being in control and all about giving the buyer the illusion of complete control. Moreover, think of the journey as the 'business experience' not just the 'customer experience' because there is more than one person in the business involved in the research. Collectively, the whole business buying team needs to be brought on a journey that delights them and makes it easy to choose you.

Re-mapping your buyer journey will take time. If you can understand the journey to create the right content for the right decision makers and set the framework for going forward, you will see huge efficiency gains when going to market.

## 2. Understand and map the new buyer journey

As with all departments, Sales and Marketing are increasingly technology-driven. To deliver on the level of the personalized, digital experience that customers are coming to expect in B2B technology, you need the right technology behind you.

## Empower Marketing

You need to know how prospects are finding you, what topics they are researching, and how high their purchasing intent is so you can deliver a largely self-sufficient purchasing process.

- Where are they engaging?
- What types of content and topics are they finding most useful?
- What are the sources of traffic to your content?
- How far through nurture tracks are people making it and where are the sticking points?
- How many touch points and pieces of content are they consuming before they are ready to engage with a salesperson?

These questions are all pointing toward intent and how you leverage information to further educate buyers. You need to get the right content to the right place at the right time and be able to track the engagement.

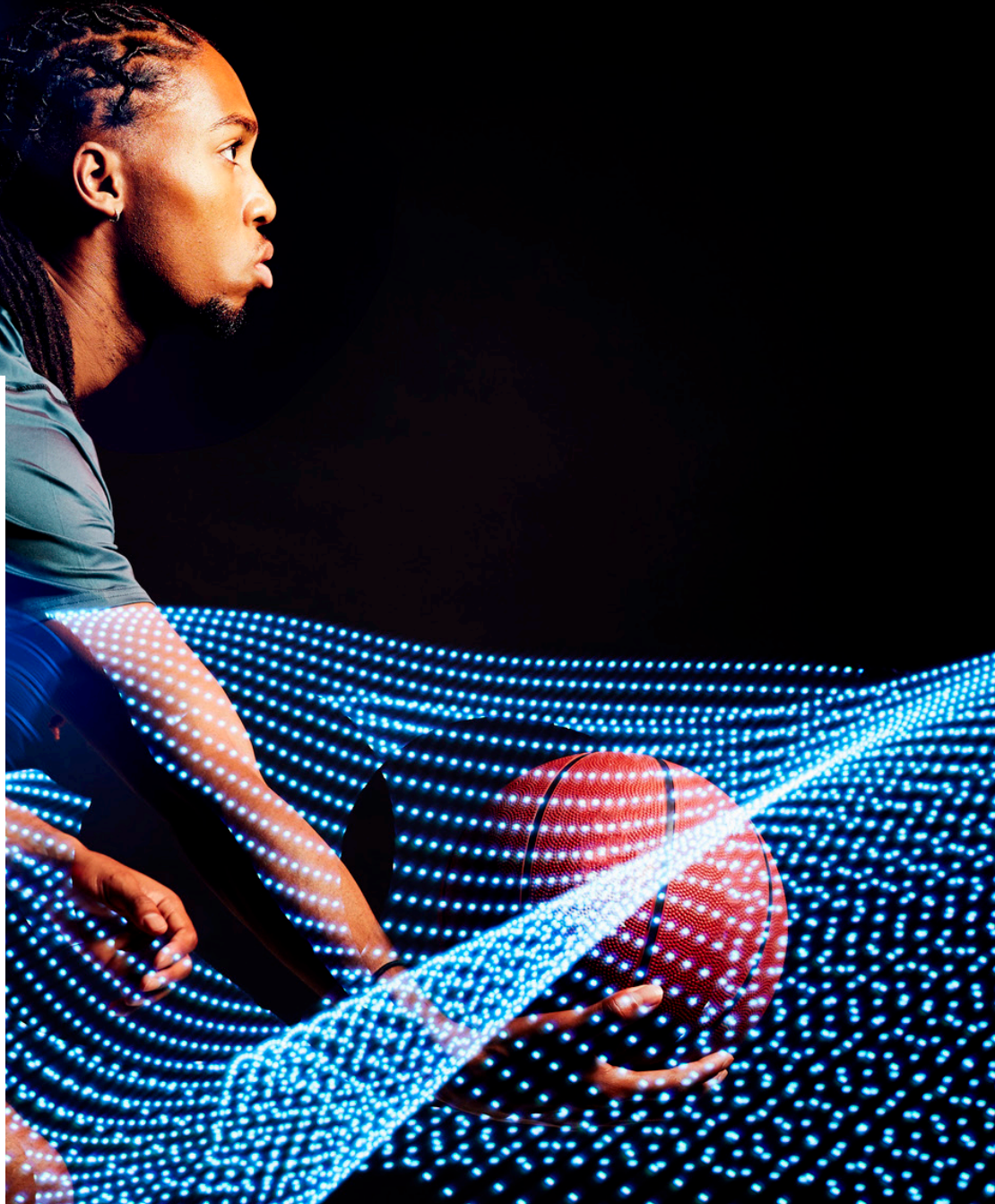


With accurate and granular intent information, you can then focus marketing time and budget on opportunities you know are qualified as a whole account.

It is hard to make content relevant. With intent data you can create content based on topics you see being searched. By meeting prospects with more relevant content, you can nurture prospects further along the journey, more intelligently, to create truly sales-ready leads. And, with the use of intent data that reveals prospects' interests, you can work with Sales to help them craft tailored outreach underpinned by data.

### Empower Sales

Next, you need to empower Sales to use the intent data in their interactions with prospects. Human interaction in the buying journey is still incredibly important, especially in enterprise projects. People are not willing to seal multi-million dollar deals without meeting with a salesperson.







Previously, account-based marketing (ABM) has been conducted by choosing the biggest players in a niche you are targeting and going after them with no verification of a project. But if your ABM efforts are underpinned by granular intent data, you can **wait to engage with an organization through sales until they raise their hand**, in effect, through their combined interactions with your content.

From the result of the Media Consumption survey 2021, it's clear that buying teams still like human engagement. They just don't like the engagement they're currently getting because it's not personalized and it's not when they're ready to engage. 79% of respondents say they would return a phone call if the voicemail was relevant, however, they're receiving more sales outreaches than ever before. They are getting 83% more online outreach from IT vendors, and they receive around 69 unsolicited messages per week.

Sales need to know exactly why an account is on their list and who all the key players in the purchasing team are. Plus, insight into which topics have been most interacted with helps them form the outreach messaging angle. Data like this is becoming crucial if Sales want to be relevant.

Marketing and Sales need to align closely on their use of intent data and the technology underpinning those insights so they can work hand-in-hand to leverage the knowledge that provides an

opening for a conversation, guidance on how to customize the outreach and be relevant and add value, and eventually close the deal.

This helps Sales be more efficient. Using intent data to signal interest and project viability allows Sales to:

- Be more efficient as there is no need for lists of MQLs at every stage of the buyer journey, from research to decision

- Increase the chance of human interaction because the leads are already hot
- Spend 3-4x of Sales' time on highly qualified accounts rather than treating hundreds of MQLs the same in outreach

### 3. Shape a new content journey

With a new sales and marketing strategy in place, based on the granular intent data that informs you of how prospects are educating themselves, you now need a map of the types of content each stakeholder in the buying team would need for each of your products.

Each stakeholder has different needs. Depending on whether you are trying to influence someone in HR or someone in Finance, they are going to gravitate to very different types of content; however, they all want to undertake a largely self-sufficient research journey. This adds complexity to the content because the buying unit is disjointed. This means creating relevant content will require more time, input, and volume.

## Where should you start?

Buyers are willing to spend big using remote or self-service

Maximum order value you would purchase through end-to-end digital self-service and remote human interactions for a new product or service category<sup>1,2</sup> % of respondents

\$50K to \$500k  
Amount 32% are  
willing to spend

\$50K to \$500k  
Amount 12% are  
willing to spend

\$50K to \$500k  
Amount 15% are  
willing to spend

<sup>1</sup>Q: "What the maximum order value that you would purchase through end-to-end digital self-service and remote human interactions for a new product or service category?"

<sup>2</sup>Numbers do not add to 100% because "I don't know" was not included for analysis.  
Source: McKinsey COVID-19 B2B Decision-Maker Pulse #3 7/27-8/11/2020 (n = 3,626)



See, for example, this real buyer journey happening on the TechTarget network. There are 12 active researchers in one organization who have collectively take over 150 actions in the last six months - most of these being content consumption with a mix of vendor and independent content.

Content is key to **the digital buyer experience because this will be a prospect's primary way of interacting with your brand**

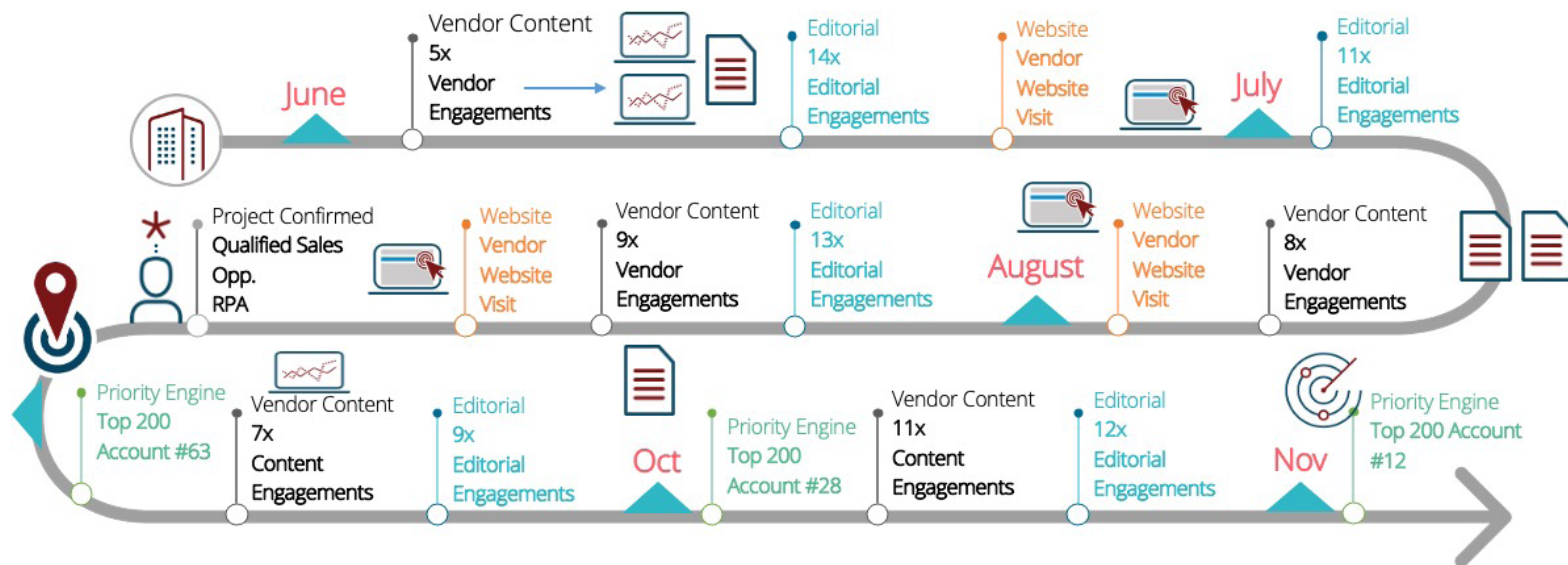
and getting to know your products as they self-serve. TechTarget reached out to this organization, shown in the diagram, who confirmed that there was a project and approved budget. Notice though, that the organization's research didn't stop then. Content is critical at every stage of the buyer journey.

When buyers were asked: "What carries the most weight in your decision making when you're doing a technology purchase?"

## Current RPA buyer journey, from research to verified project

12 **active researchers**

150+ **activities taken over 6 months**





Overwhelmingly, the top answer was 'their own research' (79%). If you can influence that research by adding value to the buyers, you will get ahead of the competition.

Your website needs to become a content hub - an information destination - for buyers at every stage of the journey. It is also worth looking into translations of your content. TechTarget research shows that local language content demonstrates an organization's authority in the region and makes them seem more trustworthy.

Getting the right content in the right place and tracked for engagement will give you the competitive advantage. Often, it's hard to justify the cost of more content creation because there has typically been a lack of data around how it influences the buyer journey. First, get the technology in place that shows the data around content you create and the intent that interactions demonstrate. Then you can request more budget for content creation as attribution can be demonstrated.



#### 4. Integrate sales and marketing in a new way of operating

All this change to using intent data to hyper-target active accounts sounds logical, but how does this change how Sales and Marketing interact and pass off leads?

With the noticeable shift to self-serve digital buying, there's an opportunity to rethink how Marketing gathers leads and how Sales is integrated into a digital-dominant journey.

Historically, Marketing has been in charge of generating as many leads as possible and Sales has been tasked with following up with them all and closing as many as possible. In this scenario, MQL quality isn't always great because there isn't a joined-up way to measure the intent. This is due to having multiple fragmented sources, and sales being given little direction on which accounts to pursue first. In a digital-first world, both teams need to be aligned and share the revenue function.

Now, with the powerful use of intent data, Sales can be more agile and come closer to real-time interaction with prospects. Together, Sales and Marketing can use all the granular data generated by prospects interacting with marketing to their advantage. Marketing can flag people and accounts that are particularly active rather than leaving Sales to dig for a possible project. And Sales, when setting strategies, can come to Marketing for updates on which leads are hottest.



When a direct Sales interaction is needed, you can start with value-based selling (giving more than you ask for in return) via messaging on exact topics you have seen each individual interact with online. This is much more effective than initiating a sales call as soon as someone has interacted a couple of times with digital assets.

Better cohesion between Marketing and Sales helps bridge the gap in the buyer experience. The best Sales has a marketing mindset, which asks: “How can we offer value that really engages the prospect?” Buyers are most open to speaking with someone that has educated them throughout the journey.

## 5. Reinroduce the human factor

Despite the buyer journey becoming more and more digital, the human factor won't be eliminated. [Research from McKinsey](#) states that 15% of people are willing to spend over a million dollars via a solely digital, self-service process, which means that 85% still want Sales to engage with them. The human factor is still crucial. We buy from humans because we want the personal touch of someone answering our specific questions and also someone to be a tangible contact point - it signals trust.

The problem with current engagement is that buyers are getting bombarded with dozens of sales messages on social media, email, and phone calls.

The difference with the digital-dominant journey is that the human engagement will happen later in the journey. Marketing will have supplied more content than ever to answer many questions up front. The prospect will usually have drawn up their top two or three vendors before reaching the point of wanting to talk to Sales. Truly understanding the buyer's specific needs will be essential to closing the deal.

You'd be amazed at how few people tailor their messages to prospects with relevant challenges to the industry and role of the buyer; however, nothing can replace the power of a face-to-face interaction to build trust. Though it is now harder than ever to get that in-person meeting, it's worth pursuing wherever possible.

## 6. Create a frictionless digital experience

To keep growing as a B2B tech vendor in the ever-changing digital landscape, you need to be constantly asking: How do we make the customer experience frictionless across all our channels?

1. Think like a B2C consumer. You want to find honest reviews, have in-depth product details and FAQs, and perhaps the option for online Q&A.
2. Make sure you segment your data by persona - you will be surprised by how few do.





There are huge possibilities before us as B2B tech marketers and salespeople. In fact, it can seem overwhelming when you start to think of auto-personalization of your website for every user and segmenting every dataset you own into granular personas. But start with finding the little wins you can create along the way. Small steps are better than no steps.

The next generation of decision makers will be immersed in the self-nurture world, which we are starting to see become a movement in B2B.

## What will your first step be?

Now is the time to start taking the first steps to creating a digital-first, self-service customer experience.

You can quickly stand out with personalized outreach tailored to the industry and role of each prospect. If you can be intelligent and relevant to the individual's process, they will be more willing to engage.

Secondly, get the right intent data technology in place so you can use it as the guide for when and how to reach out to prospects.

You can then see when individuals and accounts are actively researching in your space of expertise. Remember, if an account is not showing intent or interest, take them off your account list, regardless of how 'big' the account could be!

Thirdly, start to enable self-service as much as possible. Start with a crystal-clear map of how your customers will research your products, and your competitors' products, and make their short list. Then, create the content and strategically place it where it is most helpful in the research process - on your website, in nurture tracks, syndicated on third-party websites, etc.

Finally, try for the face-to-face meeting. It won't always be possible or feasible, but don't forget about the power of in-person meetings just because they haven't been the norm for a couple of years.

The change to a digital-first, self-service buyer journey is happening with or without you, so it's up to you to take advantage of the shift first to get ahead of the competition.

## What small step will you take first? And what can you do each quarter to prepare for the future?

## About TechTarget

TechTarget (Nasdaq: TTGT) is the global leader in purchase intent-driven marketing and sales services that deliver business impact for enterprise technology companies. By creating abundant, high-quality editorial content across more than 150 highly targeted technology-specific websites and 1,125 channels, TechTarget attracts and nurtures communities of technology buyers researching their companies' information technology needs. By understanding these buyers' content consumption behaviors, TechTarget creates the purchase intent insights that fuel efficient and effective marketing and sales activities for clients around the world.

TechTarget has offices in Boston, London, Munich, New York, Paris, San Francisco, Singapore and Sydney.

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