

# 5 Ways to Streamline and Personalize Your Nonlinear Buyer's Journey

Use the strategies described in this eBook to make it easier for business buyers to choose you.

## Today's business buyers have more choices than ever before.

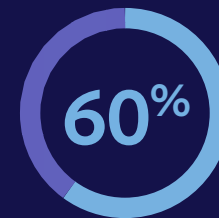
They can find product information and compare features on company websites, product review sites, marketplaces, and social media and in industry analyst and news publications. They also strongly prefer having information at their fingertips, any time they want, without having to go through a gatekeeper. For example, **60 percent** of business buyers would rather not communicate with sales reps as their primary information source.<sup>1</sup> And **83 percent** access digital channels even in the late purchasing stages.<sup>2</sup>

But having more choices and more information has not made the B2B buying process any easier. Most business buyers (**77 percent**) say B2B shopping is complex,<sup>3</sup> and **75 percent** report they are spending more time researching purchases.<sup>4</sup> Overall, business buyers are feeling overwhelmed — and that isn't good for them or you.

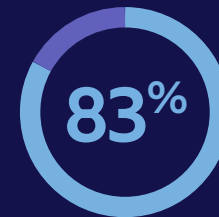
Fortunately, the B2B buyer's journey doesn't have to be an exhausting slog; the right strategies can make it easier to navigate, more personalized, and more straightforward.

This eBook covers the evolution of the B2B buyer's journey and offers five strategies for making it a whole lot better.

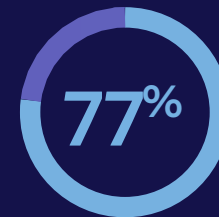
### Of today's business buyers:



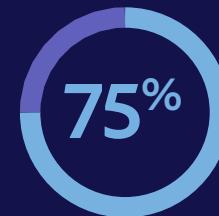
prefer not to use sales reps as their primary source of information<sup>1</sup>



access digital channels even in the late purchasing stages<sup>2</sup>

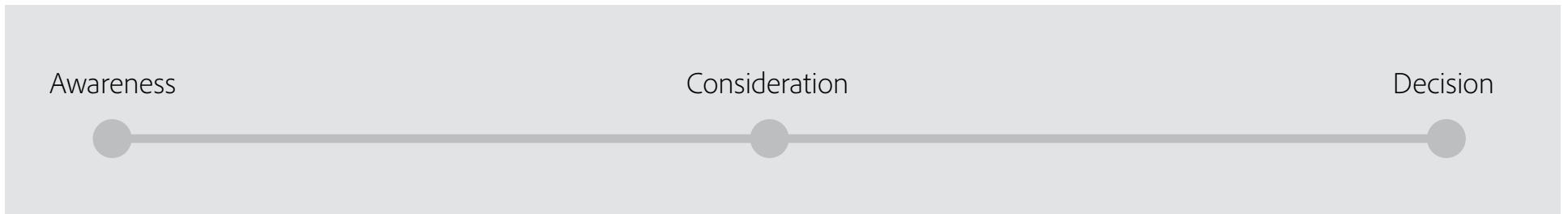


view B2B shopping as complex<sup>3</sup>



spend more time researching their purchases<sup>4</sup>

# The classic buyer's journey doesn't exist anymore.



Many business schools still depict the buyer's journey as a line, with consecutive, well-defined stages:

- **AWARENESS:** See what products are out there.
- **CONSIDERATION:** Research individual products and develop a short list. Have phone conversations with several sales reps.
- **DECISION:** Meet with sales reps in person, view proposals, and choose a vendor.

That traditional buyer's journey was conceptualized before the internet. When it comes to how businesses buy, today's sales reps play a different role than they used to — while online resources are much more important. And many business buyers have adopted a DIY approach to discovering and evaluating new products. More than **70 percent** of B2B buyers have fully defined their needs before engaging with a sales representative,<sup>5</sup> and almost **50 percent** of them have already made a decision before reaching out.<sup>5</sup> Only **23 percent** of B2B buyers view vendors as a top resource for solving business problems.<sup>5</sup>

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# The “more of everything” problem

Today's B2B buying experience has more of everything: more content, more touchpoints, and even more people trying to navigate it. But “more of everything” is a problem when your business is trying to stand out. Tellingly, **68 percent** of business buyers see little to no difference between vendors.<sup>5</sup>



## More content

Today's business buyers are spending more time reviewing and comparing content from vendors and third parties. This is true regardless of how good or bad the information is. In fact, **88 percent** of B2B buyers report that the information they encountered during a recent successful purchase decision was high quality.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, B2B buyers can spend a full **15 percent** of their buying cycle time reconciling conflicting information.<sup>2</sup>



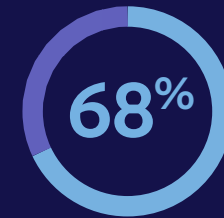
## More touchpoints

Business buyers no longer rely solely on vendors for information about their products. Instead, they rely on analyst reports, review sites, social media, and marketplaces to get unfiltered opinions from well-known experts as well as people who use the product. Almost three-quarters (**73 percent**) of today's B2B buyers say that they are relying on more sources to research and evaluate purchases.<sup>4</sup> On average, they interact with **7.9 touchpoints** before making a decision.<sup>6</sup>



## More people

Perhaps because there is so much more information now to evaluate, business purchases today involve more people than ever before. Buyers groups include multiple stakeholders, each with a specific area of expertise such as IT, finance, sales, marketing, procurement, etc. Today, **75 percent** of buyers agree or strongly agree that their purchase involved people in a wide variety of roles, teams, and locations.<sup>2</sup> The typical buyers group for a complex B2B solution includes six to ten people with different goals, each reviewing four to five pieces of information.<sup>3</sup>



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# What does today's buyer's journey look like?

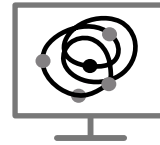
Visualized, a B2B buyer's journey today is definitely non-linear. If not managed correctly, the journey could be a messy, confusing squiggle (bad) or an infinite content loop (worse).



## A squiggle

Buyers get a squiggle when they don't get the information or experience that's right for them. Instead, they slog along on a generic marketing journey that may include broadly focused email content and lots of content written for a "general audience."

When they finally interact with sales, they may encounter a sales rep who's entirely unaware of the buyer's previous marketing touchpoints because the B2B's marketing and sales are not aligned. They may hear conflicting messages — and find themselves having to explain their need over, and over, and over again.



## An infinite content loop

Buyers who find themselves in an infinite content loop never make it from marketing to sales. Instead, they get lost in a forest of lengthy, outdated, and even contradictory content. They read a white paper, find it doesn't really answer their question, and then try again. After reading hundreds of pages, they still may not have the answers they need.

Eventually, those buyers exit the content loop, cross you off their short list, and move on to another vendor.

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# What a buyer's journey should look like today (part 1)

The buyer's journey should be easy for both individuals and teams to navigate. It should provide content customized for different roles, so everyone in your customer's buyers group gets what they need. It should feel consistent and virtually effortless to buyers. It can be visualized as a checklist — or as an infinitely repeating loop of education and purchase, fueled by customer loyalty. Both options provide a framework for building a more effective buyer's journey.



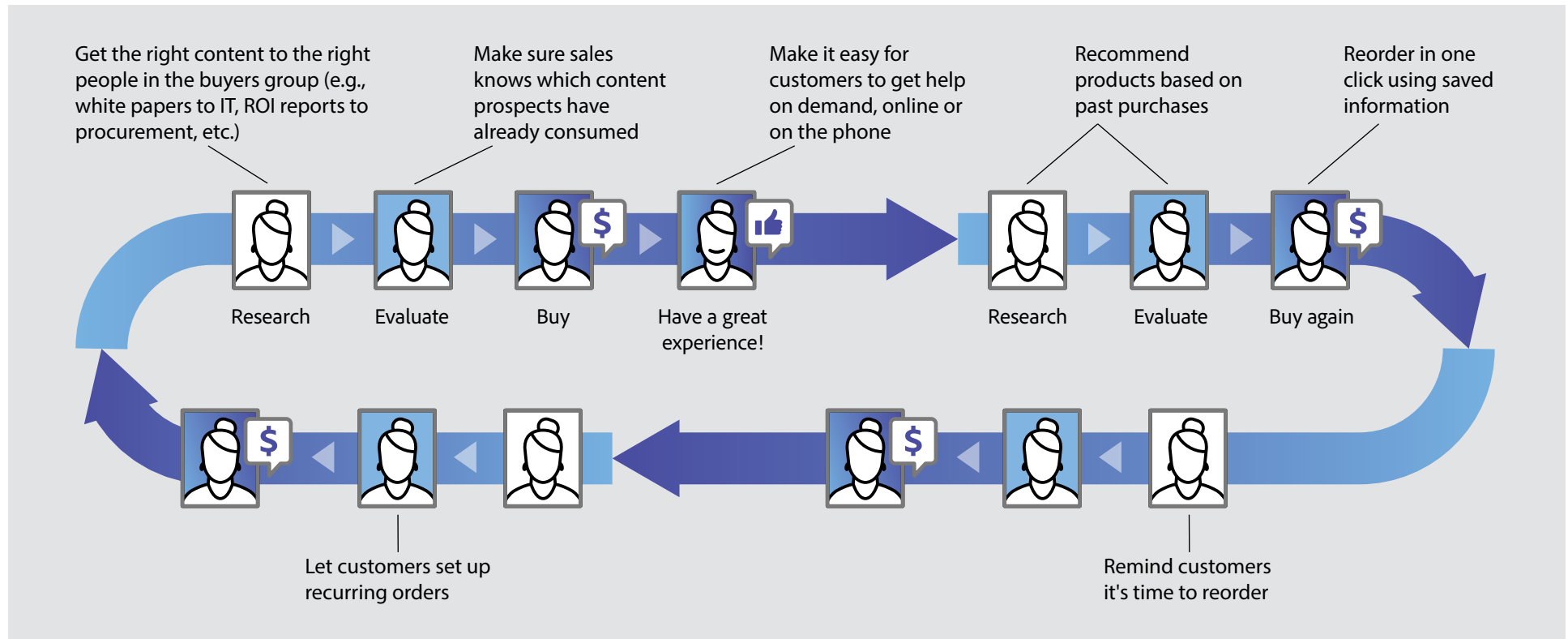
## A checklist

Gartner characterizes the B2B buyer's journey as a checklist.<sup>3</sup> Each member of the buyers group must check items off their list. These include:

- Identifying the problem
- Exploring solutions
- Building requirements
- Choosing suppliers

Unlike in the traditional buyer's journey, these different steps can happen in any order. Meanwhile, the buyers group members all work together to validate conclusions, check for inconsistencies, and build consensus. An effective buyer's journey makes it easy for buyers, regardless of their individual role, to complete these tasks.

# What a buyer's journey should look like today (part 2)



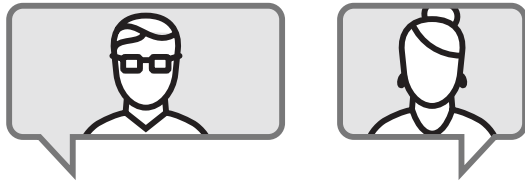
## An infinite *purchase* loop

Another way to look at the buyer's journey is the infinite purchase loop. In this case, your B2B buyers journeys never really end. Instead, you transform prospects into customers — and customers into advocates and repeat customers. Typically, achieving

this transformation requires a laser focus on integrating marketing and sales into an excellent day-to-day customer experience.

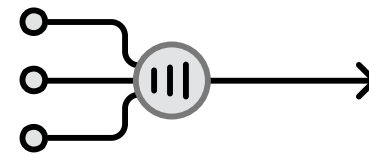
# Take the next step: personalize and streamline your buyer's journey

How can you start making the buyer's journey more effective for your customers and more profitable for you? A growing number of B2Bs are focused on personalizing and streamlining the buyer's journey.



## Personalize: no more one-size-fits all buyer's journeys

**Personalization** means you provide an experience that answers each prospect's specific questions. It should be relevant to their role, their company size, and their industry. In fact, **70 percent** of business buyers say that personalized recommendations help them to obtain more value from their vendors — and **53 percent** say that they would pay as much as **5 percent** more for them.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, **76 percent** of B2B buyers express a strong desire for “content that speaks directly to their company.”<sup>8</sup>



## Streamline: a more straightforward experience

**Streamlining** the buyer's journey means removing unnecessary steps, redundant or extraneous content, and artificial barriers. For example, a sales team may routinely send out a white paper that prospects have already seen because sales doesn't have insight into how those prospects engaged with marketing. In addition to wasting prospects' time, duplicate information can make your company look like it's out of touch with buyers.

Another important aspect of streamlining the customer journey is providing the right content at the right time so that it naturally transitions buyers from one state to the next. For example, after reading a thought leadership paper on the value of marketing automation, a prospect may want some more actionable information about how businesses can incorporate marketing automation into their quarterly strategies.



# 5 ways to personalize and streamline the buyer's journey

The following five strategies can help you begin the process of transforming the journey your buyers take from one that overwhelms and confuses buyers to one that makes it easier to buy:

**1 Create content for specific goals and roles.** Because buyers groups are made up of people with many different roles, it's important to offer content that's tailored for different buyer personas. For example, you might build an ROI report for procurement, an infrastructure overview for IT, and a trends report for the director of marketing. You may also consider creating custom content for buyers in different industries as well as C-level influencers. At the same time, content must also be tailored to where your prospects are in the customer journey. In most cases, you'll want to create roughly equal amounts of content for the top, middle, and bottom of your sales funnel.

**2 Use marketing automation to match each buyer with the right content.** Once you have custom content, you need to get it to the right people — and only the right people. If you create content for, say, CFOs, you don't want to send it to marketing managers or blast it out to your entire prospect list. By ensuring buyers see only content that's relevant to them, you limit the amount of information they must consume and avoid appearing out of touch with their needs. AI-powered content personalization can ensure that your websites and emails deliver the right content to each buyer.

**3 Design highly personalized marketing programs.** Campaigns should be carefully tailored to each individual prospect, the ways they interact with content, and their place on their buyer's journey. Triggered email campaigns and personalized ads can connect buyers with content based on their interests and behaviors. You can also use engagement data to better understand which content is most effective for which buyers. For example, you may discover that developers often call sales — and move ahead in their journey — after a self-serve demo, but that operations managers do not.

4

**Use marketing automation to nurture leads.**

Business buyers may speed up or slow down their journey based on changing business needs. But slowing down doesn't always, or even usually, mean stopping. Letting prospects take the buyer's journey at their own pace and nurturing them over time can yield significant rewards. Using automation to nurture leads and connect them with helpful resources can help produce, on average, **20 percent** more sales opportunities than non-nurtured leads.<sup>8</sup>

5

**Design your customer experience to support self-guided needs.**

B2B buyers spend most of their time doing online research, and they prefer to experience your content on their terms. Ideally, you should offer prospects a self-guided experience that integrates your website, self-guided demos, chat bots, social media, and even partner websites. All of these elements should work seamlessly together and consistently reflect your company's key messages and values.

Your self-guided experience is also a prime opportunity to differentiate yourself from competitors. Here are some ways to optimize the experience:

- Create digestible content experiences.
- Remove outdated or conflicting content.
- Organize online resources so that buyers can find what they need fast.
- Offer a guided or interactive experience that provides options based on visitors' answers to a few simple questions.
- Use predictive content to personalize your web, email, and mobile experience.

## Key takeaways

- The buyer's journey today is more complex — and involves more people, touchpoints, and content — than ever before.
- B2B buyers like having lots of options online, but they also find the buying process complex.
- Personalizing and streamlining the buyer's journey can make it easier for your prospects to make a good decision in less time.

# Ready to learn more?

These helpful resources can help you personalize and streamline the buyer's journey:

Marketo Engage:

[www.marketo.com/marketo-engage/](http://www.marketo.com/marketo-engage/)

Marketing automation:

[www.marketo.com/software/marketing-automation/](http://www.marketo.com/software/marketing-automation/)

Email marketing:

[www.marketo.com/software/email-marketing/](http://www.marketo.com/software/email-marketing/)

Personalized content:

[www.marketo.com/software/predictive-content/](http://www.marketo.com/software/predictive-content/)

Marketo Engage, as part of Adobe Experience Cloud, offers the solution of choice for lead management and B2B marketing professionals seeking to transform customer experiences by engaging across every stage of complex buying journeys. Natively supporting both lead and account-based marketing strategies, Marketo Engage brings together marketing and sales in a comprehensive solution designed to orchestrate personalized experiences, optimize content, and measure business impact across every channel, from consideration to conversion and beyond.

To learn more about Marketo Engage, the vast community of passionate marketers in the Marketing Nation, and our robust partner ecosystem, visit:

[www.marketo.com](http://www.marketo.com)

<sup>1</sup> Lori Wizzo, "The Ways And Means Of B2B Buyer Journey Maps: We're Going Deep at Forrester's B2B Forum," Forrester, August 21, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Jordan Bryan, "What Sales Should Know about Modern B2B Buyers," Gartner, March 22, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> "The New B2B Buying Journey," Gartner, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> 2019 B2B Buyers Survey, Demand Gen.

<sup>5</sup> "The Growing Buyer-Seller Gap: Results of the 2018 Buyer Preferences Study", Miller Heiman Group, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> "B2B and B2C Companies Can Face Similar Hurdles With Complex Buyer Journeys," Forrester, May 2019.

<sup>7</sup> "What B2B Buyers Want in 2019: Speed, Personalization and Intelligence," survey of 1,000 procurement and purchasing leaders, Hanover Group (sponsored by PROS).

<sup>8</sup> 2018 B2B Buyers Survey, Demand Gen.



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