White paper

Customer Engagement Study 2024

Driving engagement and trust with today's IT buyers

FOUNDRY
an IDG, Inc. company

A global survey of IT decision-makers (ITDMs) conducted by Foundry reveals that technology vendors that respond quickly to interest expressed by prospective customers have a better chance of winning an audience and making the shortlist than those who dally. Timeliness is particularly important among the youngest IT professionals, 65% of whom expect to receive follow-up to an information request within 12 hours compared to 29% of Boomers. Just 5% of all respondents consider it acceptable for vendors to wait up to three days to follow up.

But winning business is about more than just alacrity. Buyers also expect vendors to do the homework needed to understand their industry and even the individual needs of their companies. Vendors that monitor interest signals such as search patterns and download histories will be better prepared to earn an audience and consideration.

Those are among the highlights of the results of Foundry's 11th Customer Engagement Study, which seeks to understand the types of content IT buyers consume throughout the purchase process and their preferences for vendor outreach and follow-up.

Generational forces

The survey of 670 global ITDMs found that certain preferences and behaviors have changed little over time. Buyers consult online resources, including vendor content, to inform their decisions. Content preferences change as they move through the buying process. Vendor-supplied content has high perceived value, particularly if it is presented as advice that informs the buying decision rather than sales collateral.

However, some preferences are changing as a new generation of IT professionals

> 85%
> of tech buyers say it's challenging to find high-quality content on IT products and services.
> **Why? They're wary the content might be AI-generated.**

enters the enterprise. The youngest survey respondents—those born after 1996—are significantly more likely to consult social media to inform their business decisions than their older cohorts.

One finding that has mostly stayed the same in recent years is that IT buyers are challenged to find what they consider to be high-quality, trusted information on enterprise IT products and services. An overwhelming 85% said the task is extremely, very, or somewhat challenging, a finding that aligns with the 87% who said that in 2023 and down only slightly from 90% in 2021. However, the number is up from 79% in 2017.

Quality issues

The reasons content is perceived as poor quality have changed over the last two years. In 2022, 36% of respondents said that the biggest issue was the lack of independent, unbiased information. That number fell to 21% this year, bumping it from first place, down to number 8 on the list of challenges. Similarly, complaints that information was too general fell from 32% to 16%, and complaints about content containing too much marketing hype dropped from 35% to 29%.

Interestingly, the number one challenge buyers cited this year is uncertainty about whether content is AI-generated. Previous surveys before 2023 did not include that option, as generative AI had yet to enter the mainstream, but last year it ranked ninth on the list of choices at 18%

The overall trend indicates that technology marketers are doing a better job of delivering useful advice in their content marketing and that handing the task off to ChatGPT or one of the alternatives is frowned upon. Notably, just 10% of respondents complained that too many assets are gated.

This AI uncertainty continues when comparing the challenges of (SMBs) with larger enterprises. More ITDMs at larger companies with over 1,000 employees find it difficult to sift through Gen AI suggestions when searching online (26%) compared to 18% of SMBs.

Altogether, 48% of work-related content ITDMs downloaded over the past 6–12 months contained what buyers perceived as actionable information.

When IT decision-makers find valuable content they...

- Research the product on tech content sites **(50%)**
- Visit the vendor's website **(50%)**
- Participate in a product demo **(35%)**

The qualities that buyers value most are good structure (cited by 53%), technical relevance (51%), supporting research (51%), and authenticity (42%).

Actionable content

Upon finding valuable content, exactly half of the respondents researched the product on technology content sites or visited the vendor's website. Just over one-third participate in a product demo, and a similar number add the vendor to a short list or register to receive related content. A smaller but still significant 28% forwarded the content to others, pointing to the importance of including sharing links in content assets.

Just under three-quarters (73%) of buyers say they're more likely to consider an IT vendor who educates them throughout each stage of the decision-making process, a number that was virtually unchanged from last year. Conversely, 70% regard a vendor's failure to supply educational research as a negative, also in line with the previous year.

The types of content buyers rely upon most throughout the tech purchase process are product tests/reviews/opinions, vendor presentations and product demos/literature, all noted by more than 40% of respondents. Other useful content includes tech news (38%), analyst research (35%) and case studies (31%).

Preferred content types have changed little over the past several surveys, but it's worth noting that vendor presentations ranked second this year, up from fifth in

Educating tech buyers is key

73% are more likely to consider an IT vendor who educates them through each stage of the purchase process.

70% say if a vendor does not supply educational content during research, it negatively impacts their impression.

the 2021 survey. Also noteworthy is that 11 different content types were mentioned by at least one-quarter of buyers, including webcasts, product literature and online forums/social media. These results indicate that breadth is important to successful marketing programs.

Older buyers preferred product tests/reviews and vendor presentations more than younger ones, while younger buyers preferred quizzes, infographics, videos, and data visualizations.

Content alignment to the buying cycle

A breakdown of content preferences across seven buying cycle stages further underscores the value of breadth. For example, product tests and reviews are seen as useful in nearly every stage, but technology news articles are only ranked among the most useful sources when determining business needs, specifying technical requirements and evaluating products and services.

Vendor presentations also figure prominently throughout the cycle, earning the top value rating when determining business needs and recommending/selecting vendors. They ranked in the top five most useful assets at every stage and number one in post-sales engagement. Analyst research was also a top-five pick at every stage until post-sales engagement. Product demos topped the value list when selling internally.

Demos, reviews, vendor presentations, and case studies continue to have value after the sale, as do digestible content forms such as how-to information and product literature. These assets are important to maintaining customer relationships by helping buyers get the most from their investments.

Social networks are an important tool that buyers use to share ideas and recommendations with trusted associates. LinkedIn is their go-to destination, and 78% of respondents use it. YouTube closely follows at 70%, with Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) well behind at 49%.

Unsurprisingly, there are significant variances by age on this question. Gen Z respondents rely on Instagram twice as

Content that's relied on most throughout the purchase process

Product testing/reviews/opinions	**46%**
Vendor presentations	**43%**
Product demos	**41%**
Technology news articles	**38%**
Analyst research reports	**35%**

much as Boomers; their Tik-Tok usage is four times higher. Apart from LinkedIn, Boomer and Gen X buyers are significantly less likely to use social channels altogether.

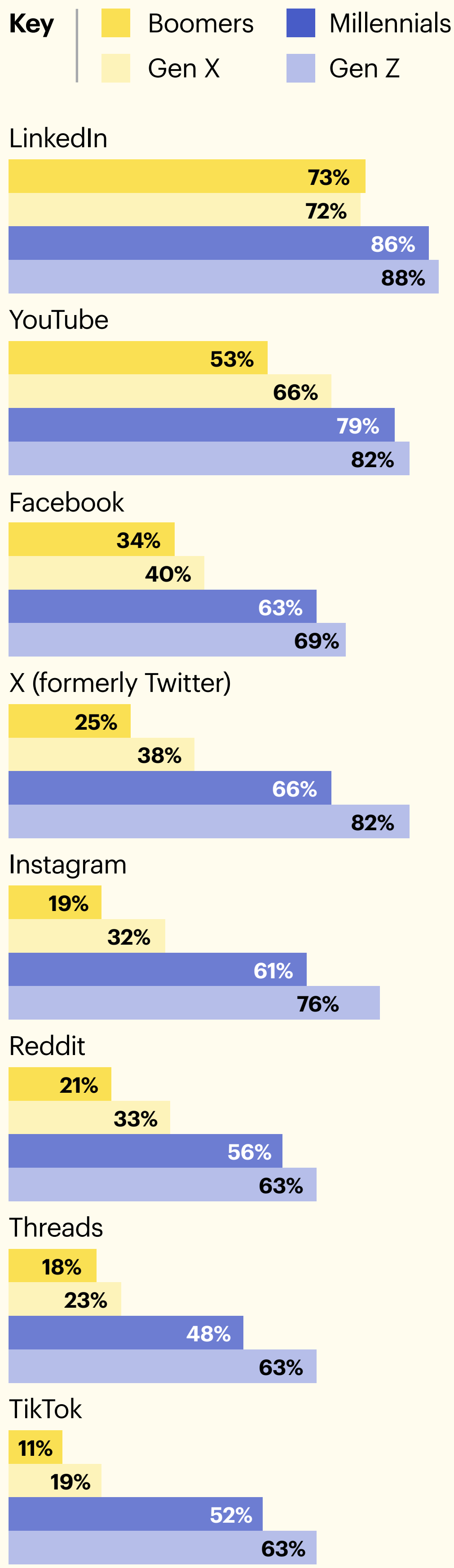
Topical preferences

The topics that command buyers' attention change as they work through the funnel. Information about the skills needed to deploy and support technology is considered the most critical during the earliest stages. During the product evaluation stage, interest shifts to understanding the business value of technology, validating choices through case studies and understanding the pain points a solution addresses. Interest in case studies and skills requirements then falls sharply and is replaced by total cost of ownership concerns during the authorization and approval stages.

The message for marketers is that content needs to be created with the buyer's journey in mind. For example, case studies are best targeted at the early stages, while ROI calculators perform better when decisions are approved.

Product demos are an essential content type, with 98% of ITDMs saying they have received value from them. In-person demonstrations are preferred (by 59% and 65% among respondents from the largest companies), followed

Social site use by generation



93%

of IT decision-makers say they are willing to share their info with a tech vendor to gain access to content. This is **up from 90% in 2023** and **87% in 2021**.

closely by limited-time, full-function trials (58%). Well behind are virtual live and on-demand demos (both 44%). (13)

In the same way content preferences shift during the buying process, so do information needs.

- When determining the business need, ITDMs look ahead to the skills they'll need to deploy and support the technology. They are also intent on understanding the business value of the technology and the pain points it will address.
- Skills remain a top concern while determining technical requirements, but migration and integration insights demand greater attention.
- When evaluating products, they want to learn from customer case studies.
- As vendors are selected, costs and return on investment issues take center stage.
- When the time comes to sell and approve the decision internally, business value and the pain points the technology addresses become top concerns.

Areas of interest ebb and flow. While 47% of respondents said skills information is important when determining the business need, only 25% consider it an important issue after selecting the vendor. Similarly, over 40% cited migration and integration insights as critical issues during the technical requirements phase, but just 19% after the decision was approved.

Getting the meeting

Once a marketing message catches a decision-maker's eye, how likely will the person become a prospect? On this question, there's good news. An overwhelming 93% of ITDMs said they are willing to register/share their information with a tech vendor to gain access to content, a number that is higher than last year's 90% and up from 87% in 2021.

The content they are most likely to register to receive are product demos (cited by 33%), product tests/reviews (31%), analyst research (30%), vendor presentations (29%) and online courses (28%). However, third-party research, white papers, technology news articles, case studies and webcasts also performed well on this question.

Content specific to their industry or technology platforms already installed at the organization was preferred by 56% and 54% of respondents, respectively. They indicated somewhat lower preference for content based on their search behavior, responsibilities or where the organization is in the purchase process.

The preference for industry vertical content has become more evident in recent surveys. When asked how tech companies should tailor engagement, the top response was "based on industry," at 32%. Platforms already installed in the organization (28%), content previously searched (26%), and geography/region (26%) are also influencing factors.

Marketers should consider this when choosing events and promoting content on vertical industry sites. Context is important, and the context that most matters to buyers is their industry.

Reputation matters

Familiarity is your friend. Recent surveys have asked about the importance of trust and brand reputation in winning a place on the shortlist. This year, 78% of ITDMs said trust factors into the decision. That's up from 73% last year and consistent with 80% in 2019. Just 5% disagreed that trust matters. Nearly three-quarters said they are more willing to exchange contact details with a company with which they already have a relationship.

Peers can be an enormous asset if managed wisely. Not only are they

> **96%**
> are willing to share info about a tech vendor with their peers, especially if the content has in-depth information on important topics/ technologies

credible, but word-of-mouth marketing is free. Overall, 96% of ITDMs said they are willing to share information about an IT vendor with their peers, the same percentage who said they have responded to outreach from a potential vendor. The content and experiences they are most willing to share include in-depth information/primers on important topics/ technologies (cited by 43%), how-to information (41%), timely content (41%), and great customer experiences (41%).

Age plays a role in determining what influences ITDMs to share. Older generations indicated a preference for the practical value of content compared to their younger counterparts, while Gen Z respondents were more than twice as likely to share content that stirs an emotional reaction than Gen Xers.

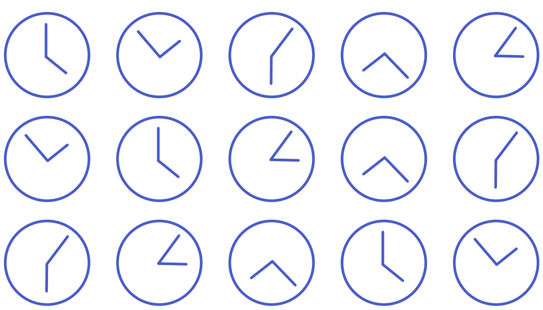
Need for speed

Underscoring the value of speed and responsiveness, 68% said the vendor who responds to their questions quickly and thoughtfully usually gets the business. The factors that are most likely to drive engagement are that the vendor is knowledgeable about their business/specific challenges (cited by 42%), has shared valuable content (39%), demonstrated honesty and transparency (37%), offered a product demo or trial (35%), or reached out at the right time (35%).

The importance of timing was evident in what ITDMs consider an acceptable timeframe for receiving a response to a request for information. The average was 15 hours this year, down significantly from 17.5 hours last year. Nearly half (48%) expect a response within 12 hours. By age, Millennials born between 1981 and 1996 are the least patient, with a mean expected response time of 11.2 hours compared to 19.5 hours for Boomers. Executives are also relatively impatient, expecting a response within about 13 hours compared to 20 hours for business executives.

This finding underscores the importance of having a system to filter requests and furnish resources the sales team can use to respond knowledgeably.

Timing matters



15 hours is the average timeframe for follow-up ITDMs expect from a vendor. This is **down from 17.5 hours** last year.

Baby Boomers	**17**
Gen X	**19**
Millennials	**11**
Gen Z	**13**

The return of live events

As the world shifted to virtual events during the pandemic, many questioned whether live events would ever fully rebound. The Customer Engagement study indicates that conferences, trade shows and workshops are alive and well, but virtual interactions are now solidly entrenched.

There's good reason for vendors to encourage prospects to attend events. Two-thirds of ITDMs said in-person demos, one-on-one meetings, showcase floors, and peer-based roundtables simplify and shorten the technology purchase process.

Overall, 86% of IT buyers have attended an in-person job-related event in the past 6-12 months, down from 96% in 2022 but up from 82% in 2023. A similar 83% have attended a virtual job-related event in the past 12 months, up from 77% last year. Altogether, 93% have attended at least one event during that time.

Almost all, 97%, of ITDMs report seeing benefits from virtual-style events. The top perceived benefits include time savings (cited by 58%), cost savings (54%), the opportunity to attend more events (46%) and the ability to select sessions and topics of interest (37%).

IT executives attend more in-person events in general than IT managers; 55% attended a one-day conference, and 47% attended a multi-day conference, compared to 40% and 23% of mid-level IT managers, respectively.

Format—whether in person or virtual—appears to have little impact on preferences. One-day conferences were cited as the most valuable type of in-person event but also the second most favored virtual event. There was a stronger preference for virtual training workshops and roundtable-style events than live. In-person dinner meetings were strongly favored over virtual ones.

97%

of IT decision-makers say they benefit from a virtual event format.

Why tech buyers are attending events:

- To hear from industry experts
- See new products
- Connect with IT colleagues at all levels
- Get introduced to new vendors
- Bring back value to their business
- Connect with peers at their level

The top reasons ITDMs attend an event of any kind are to hear from industry experts (cited by 52%) and see new products (48%). Further down the list were connecting with IT colleagues (38%), being introduced to new vendors and offerings (38%), bringing value back to the business (36%), and connecting with peers (35%).

Because events allow vendors to connect directly with prospects and customers, we wanted to know which factors influence the likelihood that a buyer will meet one-on-one with a tech company. Providing a clear and immediate business benefit was the top factor, cited by 46%. Other motivators include the vendor having innovative or cutting-edge technology (40%), an opportunity for demonstration or hands-on experience (40%), and gaining personalized

> 93%
> of ITDMs have taken additional actions after seeing an advertisement from a technology provider.

insights or solutions relevant to current challenges (36%). Responses were consistent across age groups and titles.

Advertising still works

In a media world where an abundance of choice has atomized, it's reasonable that marketers may be questioning the value of advertising. This year's study should allay their concerns. Altogether, 93% of ITDMs have taken action after seeing an advertisement from a technology provider, led by conducting further online research (49% globally and 57% in North America) and visiting a vendor's website (46% overall and 58% in North America).

Not surprisingly, Gen Z respondents, who have grown up in a media-rich world, exhibit somewhat different behaviors. They are less likely to visit a vendor's website but more likely to sign up for a newsletter. They are slightly more inclined to interact with ads on social media platforms and share ads with friends. They're also significantly more likely to purchase directly through an ad. This may stem from their facility with e-commerce, but it may also be influenced by the likelihood that younger IT pros make smaller purchases than their more senior colleagues.

When engaging with ads, the driving factors are the same as other types of content. Addressing current challenges or addressing business objectives is the top motivator (cited by 45%), followed by ads being relevant to the surrounding content (39%), related to something the buyer has recently researched (36%), and that the product being advertised is comparable to an existing product (32%).

Upping your game

Foundry's 11th Customer Engagement Study highlights the importance of speed, relevance, and quality in vendor interactions. Younger ITDMs, especially Gen Z, demand rapid response and personalized, industry-specific content. High-value content throughout the sales funnel includes product demos, reviews, and research, with actionable insights and authenticity being paramount.

Social media plays a growing role, with Gen Z favoring platforms like Instagram and TikTok, while LinkedIn remains dominant across generations. Trust and peer recommendations heavily influence buying decisions, with 96% of ITDMs willing to share vendor information.

The study also underscores the value of live and virtual events for fostering engagement, with nearly all respondents attending job-related events in the past year. Marketers should strive to align content with the buying journey, leverage diverse formats and emphasize relevance, speed, and personalization to capture and retain ITDM interest.

About the survey

Foundry's 11th annual Customer Engagement Study was conducted among the audience of 669 IT and business decision-makers. Foundry conducted this survey online throughout September 2024 to better understand the various types and volume of content consumed throughout the purchase process for major technology products and services. It also looks to gain insight into the preferences of IT decision-makers regarding IT vendor contact and follow-up during the purchase process. All respondents had IT or management titles, with 41% based in North America, 42% in Asia/Pacific (APAC) regions, and 14% from Europe/Middle East/Africa (EMEA).

Key global differences

For many survey questions, IT buyers report similar results across all three regions surveyed. However, a few key points of difference stick out.

North America

42% of work-related content downloaded by North America ITDMs in the past 6–12 months has provided them with actionable information

86% say it is challenging to find enough high-quality, trusted information on major IT products and services to make informed purchase decisions. Mostly due to too much marketing hype/ empty buzzwords and uncertainty if marketing content is AI generated.

74% of ITDMs say if a vendor does not supply (or they are not able to find) educational content during research, it negatively impacts their impression.

81% are more likely to consider an IT vendor who educates them through each stage of the decision process.

65% say attending industry or job-related events helps shorten and simplify the technology purchase process.

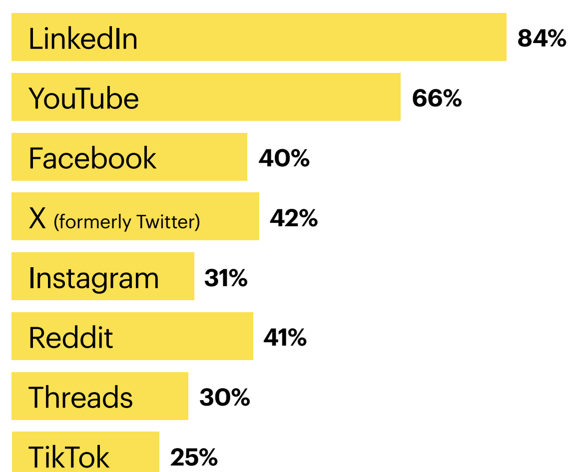
IT decision-makers in North America are willing to register/ share their contact information for a variety of content, including:

- Product demos
- Vendor presentations
- Product testing/reviews/opinions
- Analyst research reports
- Webinars
- Third-party research reports

92% of North America ITDMs have taken additional actions after seeing an advertisement for technology solutions. They prefer their ads to:

- Address current challenges or business objectives
- Be relevant to the content user experience
- Be something they have recently researched

91% of ITDMs in North America say they use social media for business-related purposes



EMEA

44% of work-related content downloaded by EMEA ITDMs in the past 6–12 months has provided them with actionable information

80% say it is challenging to find enough high-quality, trusted information on major IT products and services to make informed purchase decisions. Mostly due to lack of relevant information and too much marketing hype/empty buzzwords.

73% of ITDMs say if a vendor does not supply (or they are not able to find) educational content during research, it negatively impacts their impression.

69% are more likely to consider an IT vendor who educates them through each stage of the decision process.

71% say attending industry or job-related events helps shorten and simplify the technology purchase process.

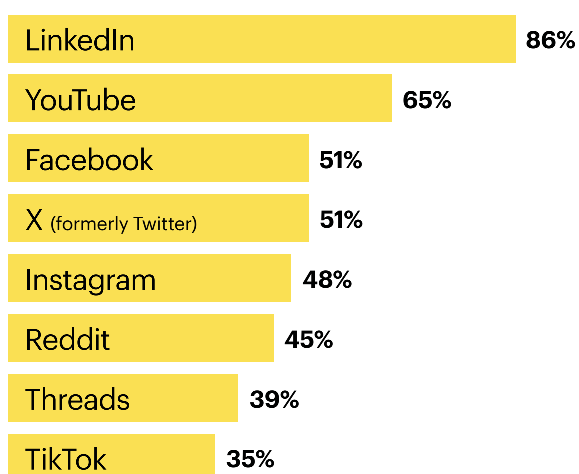
IT decision-makers in EMEA are willing to register/share their contact information for a variety of content, including:

- Product testing/reviews/opinions
- Case studies
- Peer presentations
- Online courses
- Product demos

92% of EMEA ITDMs have taken additional actions after seeing an advertisement for technology solutions. They prefer their ads to:

- Address current challenges or business objectives
- Be relevant to the content user experience
- Be something they have recently researched
- Be tailored based on their job title

93% of ITDMs in EMEA say they use social media for business-related purposes



APAC

54% of work-related content downloaded by APAC ITDMs in the past 6–12 months has provided them with actionable information.

86% say it is challenging to find enough high-quality, trusted information on major IT products and services to make informed purchase decisions. Mostly due to lack of relevant information or their search doesn't surface relevant content.

63% of ITDMs say if a vendor does not supply (or they are not able to find) educational content during research, it negatively impacts their impression.

67% are more likely to consider an IT vendor who educates them through each stage of the decision process.

71% say attending industry or job-related events helps shorten and simplify the technology purchase process.

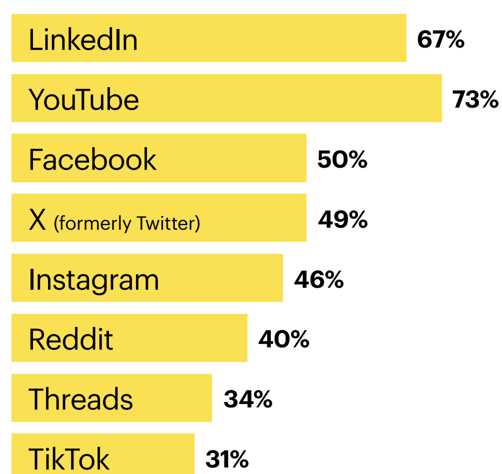
IT decision-makers in APAC are willing to register/share their contact information for a variety of content, including:

- Product demos
- Product testing/reviews/opinions
- Analyst research reports
- Case studies
- Vendor presentations
- Webinars

92% of APAC ITDMs have taken additional actions after seeing an advertisement for technology solutions. They prefer their ads to:

- Address current challenges or business objectives
- Be relevant to the content user experience
- Be informational content

88% of ITDMs in APAC say they use social media for business-related purposes.



Examining the marketplace

Research is an invaluable way for marketers to better understand customers and prospects, with the goal of building quality connections. At Foundry this is one way we are focused on building bridges between tech buyers and sellers. Our first-party relationships with the most important tech buyers and influencers around the world, allows us to apply value across our customers marketing stack. Our research portfolio explores our audiences' perspectives and challenges around specific technologies—from analytics and cloud, to IoT and security—and examines the changing roles within the IT purchase process, arming tech marketers with the information they need to identify opportunities.

To see what research is available, visit foundryco.com/tools-for-marketers.
For a presentation of full results from any of these studies, contact your Foundry sales executive or go to foundryco.com/contact-us.

Buying process

Each year we take a deep dive into the enterprise IT purchase process to learn more about who is involved and who influences decision-making, what sources purchasers rely on to keep up to date with technology—and throughout the purchase process—and how they want to engage with the vendors they are working with. Visit foundryco.com/customerjourney for more information.

Buying process studies

- Customer Engagement
- Role and Influence of the Technology Decision-Maker

Technology insights

Each year we explore the technologies that are top of mind among our audiences to understand the business challenges, drivers, and adoption within the enterprise. These research studies are designed to help IT marketers understand what their customers are focused on and where the market is moving.

Role and priority studies

- CIO Tech Poll: Tech Priorities
- State of the CIO

Technology-specific studies

- AI Priorities
- Cloud Computing
- Security Priorities
- Partner Marketing

Stay in touch with us

Email: Sign up for Foundry's newsletters and receive media and marketing trends as well as our proprietary research, product and event information direct to your inbox.
Go to resources.foundryco.com/the-intersection-subscribe

LinkedIn: For research, services and events announcements, visit us on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/foundryidg

Find it all on foundryco.com

About Foundry

Foundry's vision is to make the world a better place by enabling the right use of technology, because we believe that the right use of technology can be a powerful force for good.

Foundry (an IDG, Inc. company) is a trusted and dependable editorial voice, creating quality content to generate knowledge, engagement and deep relationships with our community of the most influential technology and security decision-makers. Our premium media brands, including CIO®, Computerworld®, CSO®, InfoWorld®, Macworld®, Network World®, PCWorld® and Tech Hive®, engage a quality audience of the most powerful technology buyers with essential guidance on the evolving technology landscape.

Our trusted brands inform our global data intelligence platform to identify and activate purchasing intent, powering our clients' success. Our marketing services create custom content with marketing impact across video, mobile, social and digital. We simplify complex campaigns that fulfill marketers' global ambitions seamlessly, with consistency that delivers quality results and wins awards. Additional information about Foundry is available at foundryco.com.