Role and Influence of the Technology Decision-Maker Study 2023

With complexity growing, IT decision-makers enlist vendors to help smooth the process

FOUNDRY

an IDG, Inc. company

One of the most striking findings of Foundry's 2023 Role and Influence of the Technology Decision-Maker study was the response to a new question about the complexity of the purchase process for technology products and services. A majority, 61% of the 846 IT decision-makers (ITDMs) who responded to the study agreed that the process is becoming more complex; among enterprise firms (those with more than 1,000 employees) that figure rose to 66%. Just 11% of respondents disagree with the premise.

The finding is a dramatic statement about the challenges tech buyers face as they race to contextualize innovations like OpenAI's ChatGPT that attract millions of users in a matter of days and spawn dozens of competitors in weeks. Their organizations are responding, in part, by growing the size of buying committees at the expense of a slightly longer decision cycle. However, some dynamics of the buying process have changed little across the 14 years the study has been conducted. IT executives still drive the buying process and rely on trusted sources and research to assist them with their information needs throughout the cycle.

This global study is intended to provide tech marketers with in-depth information about the evolving role and influence of IT decision-makers in organizations of all sizes, and how to reach and engage with them. This year, 61% of respondents came from North America, 21% from Europe/Africa/Middle East (EMEA), and 13% from Asia-Pacific (APAC). The average respondent's company has been in business for more than 16 years, employs 14,732 people, and has $336 million in revenue.

Spending remains strong

Despite the uncertain economy, IT spending is looking resilient with 88% of ITDMs saying their tech budgets will either increase or remain the same over the next 12 months and exactly half expecting an increase. More than nine in 10 ITDMs said their organization's revenue will either increase or remain the same over the next 12 months. The overall figure is consistent with last year's study and well ahead of the 76% who reported an increase or no change in the IT budget in 2020. The finding was consistent across all company sizes.

Despite the uncertain economy, IT spending is resilient with 88% of ITDMs saying their tech budgets are stable.

Large enterprises are more bullish than their SMB counterparts, with 57% of the biggest firms expecting an IT spending increase compared to 44% of the smallest. However, the disparity is offset by the greater number of SMBs that expect their budgets to stay unchanged.

The march to the cloud continues, with 82% of all ITDMs—and 87% at enterprise companies—planning to accelerate their adoption of cloud and as-a-service capabilities, as a result of a possible recession. Just over two-thirds overall (and 78% at enterprise companies) also plan to accelerate their use of outsourcing or other managed services. A smaller group, 58%, of SMBs plan to do the same.
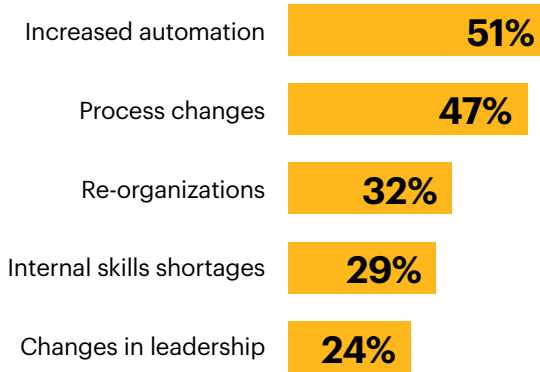
When asked what factors are driving their current IT strategy/roadmap, respondents said, on average, that 36% of their resources are devoted to maintaining their existing environments followed by 31% that go to responding to internal events and 28% responding to external events. These results are almost the same as in the 2022 and 2020 studies and up from 2019 when just 28% of strategy was driven by keeping the lights on. Given the new normal businesses are adjusting to in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, this increased focus on process is not surprising.

When segmented by job title, IT executives unsurprisingly are more focused on responding to internal and external stimuli than IT professionals, who are more preoccupied with the status quo.
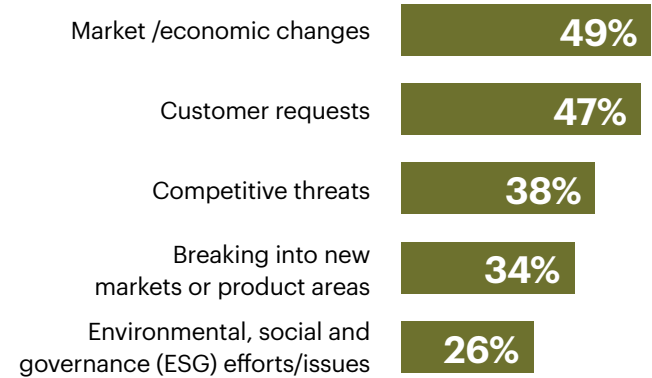
Asked which internal factors influence tech purchase decisions over the next 12 months the most, respondents cited increased automation, process change, and reorganization as the top three. The most important external forces were market/economic changes, customer requests, and competitive threats.

Which internal and external events do you expect will influence tech purchase decisions over the next 12 months?

Internal events

Increased automation	**51%**
Process changes	**47%**
Re-organizations	**32%**
Internal skills shortages	**29%**
Changes in leadership	**24%**

External events

Market /economic changes	**49%**
Customer requests	**47%**
Competitive threats	**38%**
Breaking into new markets or product areas	**34%**
Environmental, social and governance (ESG) efforts/issues	**26%**

There were some interesting variances between large and small companies on this question, with enterprise firms pointing to increased automation, reorganizations, competitive threats, and environmental/social/governance (ESG) issues as purchase influencers, to a greater degree than small businesses. Conversely, smaller companies are more influenced by process and market changes than their larger brethren.

Complexity's impact

The fact that 61% of ITDMs said the purchase process is becoming increasingly complex begs the question of where in the buying cycle decisions tend to stall. This year's study for the first time attempted to identify and cross-reference the biggest impediments along the six

stages of the buying cycle—determining business need, determining technical requirements, evaluating products, selecting vendors, selling the decision internally, and authorizing a purchase.

Large enterprises reported a greater likelihood of a sale stalling than did their SMB counterparts at five of the six stages, led by requirements determination, product evaluation, and purchase approval. Each was cited by 35% of ITDMs. SMBs pointed to difficulties selling the solution internally and gaining purchase authorization as the biggest choke points. Notably, 61% of respondents (and 69% at enterprise companies) said they work with vendors to help develop the business case around technology investment. This spells an

opportunity for vendors that can position themselves as trusted advisors.

Not surprisingly, the average number of resources buyers consult to help them decide correlates with the risk of that decision stalling. On average, buyers use about four sources during the product evaluation phase and rely much more heavily on vendor assistance at that time than they do in other stages. Twice as many respondents at enterprise organizations said they need assistance from vendors during the evaluation stage as they do when they need to select a vendor for purchase. This underscores the importance of the trust equation: Providing valuable advice during the evaluation phase is more likely to sway the customer toward the source of that advice.

The average number of sources used throughout the buying process is 5.6 overall and 6.2 among buyers at enterprise

## Vendors can position themselves as trusted advisors

companies. Usage differs by stage with 4.1 sources used during the evaluation stage and drops to 2.3 at the approval stage. Almost across the board, buyers at enterprise companies use a greater number of sources than buyers at small companies, perhaps to educate the larger buying team participants.

Although complexity transcends geographic boundaries, there are some important differences by region. APAC buyers use fewer sources of information during the first five stages of the process than their counterparts elsewhere. EMEA buyers tend to use slightly more sources. EMEA buyers also indicated a generally higher need for additional resources from a vendor than did those in North America and the APAC region. Notably, just 14% of APAC buyers said they turn to vendors for assistance selling their decisions internally, or about half the number that do so in the two other regions.

Purchase process lengthening

Given the growing complexity of technology purchases, it's not surprising that the length of time companies spend on decisions is increasing. The average

Increasing length of time for purchase process

2019	2022	2023
4.9 months	6.2 months	6.5 months
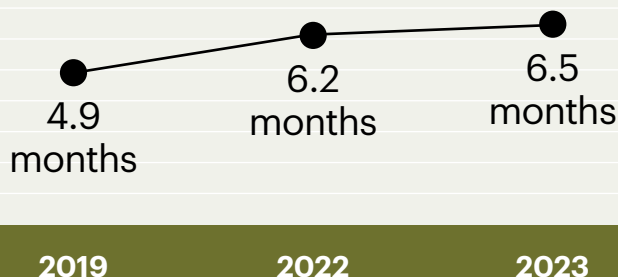
purchase process in this survey was 6.5 months, up slightly from 6.2 months in 2022 and 4.9 months in 2019. Executive IT respondents reported that the purchase process extends to 6.1 months, compared with the 7.6 months cited by both mid-level IT and IT pros. This may indicate that top executives are less aware of activity earlier in the buying cycle than those below them. Time frames were nearly identical across both large and small companies.

The reason for these lengthening cycle times is evident in observing the number

More voices are being heard during the purchase process

	IT	LOB	Total
Cloud Computing	15	13	28
Data & Analytics	15	13	28
Networking	13	14	27
Enterprise Software (non-SaaS)	14	12	26
Enterprise Software (SaaS)	13	13	26
Internet of Things	12	13	26
Web Applications	12	13	25
Servers/Storage	12	13	25
Unified Communications/UCaas	12	12	24
Mobile	11	13	23
Security	12	11	23
Telecommunications	12	10	21
Desktop/Laptops	11	11	21

The **average buying team** is comprised of 25 people, up from 21 in 2019 and just 16 in 2017

of people involved. The average buying team in this survey included 25 people, up from 21 in 2019 and just 16 in 2017. Buying committees in most cases are fairly evenly balanced between IT and line-of-business professionals, although additional research indicates that IT typically plays a more prominent role when it comes to making decisions.

There's a dramatic contrast in this data point between SMBs, which average 7 IT and 8 LOB people on buying committees, and larger enterprises that report 17 IT and 16 LOB representatives. This presumably reflects the greater impact of enterprise buying decisions across multiple departments and divisions.

Purchases related to cloud computing and data/analytics (both with 28 representatives), networking (27), internet of things products (25), and enterprise on-premises software (24) support the largest buying committees. Servers and desktop/laptop purchases have the smallest, at 17 and 16 representatives, respectively.

CIOs still lead

Buying committees may be expanding in size but CIOs still call most of the shots. The top IT executive leads all stages of the IT purchase process except for two: determining technical requirements and evaluating technology options. Even in areas they don't lead, CIOs are second to other players. One exception is determining technical requirements, where IT managers and staff take the reins.

Despite their growing influence in purchasing decisions, line-of-business (LOB) managers and CEOs are involved mainly in determining the business need and approval stages, with a much-diminished role elsewhere in the process. The elevated involvement of non-IT titles in determining business priorities aligns with the fact that requests from LOB leaders drive 23% of purchases, although that figure is down from 32% last year and 39% in 2020.

It is worth noting that, new this year, security staff are among the top influencers at four stages. This probably reflects the growing sensitivity to security issues among enterprises in particular, given the rise in threats and privacy/security regulations. This is a significant change from last year's study, in which security staff were significantly less influential across the board.

The reasons for considering new purchases have remained relatively stable over the years. This year respondents said 37% of new technology purchases will be additive, 35% will be upgrades and 28% will be replacements. This compares to 34% additive, 27% upgrades, and 21% replacements in 2020.

APAC respondents were somewhat more likely to be planning to adopt new technology by a 41%-to-37% margin over North American buyers and a 41%-to-33% margin over those in EMEA.

Incumbents have an advantage in purchasing decisions as evidenced by the 57% of buyers who expect to purchase

What would prompt you to seek a new vendor for any technology purchase?

1. New vendor product is more innovative or feature-rich **(48%)**

2. Current product or service no longer met our business needs **(40%)**

3. Poor customer service **(35%)**

4. Increased cost or level of investment required by current vendor **(33%)**

5. Current product or service did not meet our security requirements **(29%)**

from an existing vendor compared to the 43% who plan to seek a new vendor. Those numbers are statistically unchanged over the past three studies.

When buyers venture outside their current vendor list, the most common reason is to take advantage of innovative or feature-rich technology, a factor that was cited by 48% of respondents. Other top drivers include current technologies failing to meet business needs, poor customer service from an existing vendor, and cost increases for entrenched solutions.

Vendors are significant influencers in the decision-making process—the ability to provide content that is useful and relevant is a major factor in buyer engagement.

Regional breakdowns are notable in this question. APAC respondents indicate greater loyalty as just 32% said they have changed vendors because current products no longer met business needs. That compares to 42% in North America and 44% in EMEA. The 39% of North American respondents who indicated that customer service was an issue was considerably higher than the 29% of EMEA and 26% of APAC buyers who said the same. Finally, 31% of respondents in both

North America and EMEA cited security concerns as a factor in making a switch compared to 24% in APAC. This may reflect the fact that the locus of recent privacy regulations has been in those two regions.

Innovation is a top motivator for buyers to seek new vendors, and this is fairly consistent across product types. Innovation is the number one reason ITDMs seek alternative vendors for security products, cloud computing services, enterprise software-as-a-service, IT services, networking, desktop/laptop devices, internet of things products, unified communications, and Web applications.

The outliers are telecom and mobile services, where the inability of current products to meet business needs and poor customer service are the top two factors in making a switch.

An industry breakdown shows that manufacturers exhibit the greatest interest in switching vendors to take advantage of product innovation followed by respondents in the government/nonprofit and retail sectors. Manufacturing buyers are also somewhat more motivated by factors related to perceived shortcomings of existing products, such as poor customer service, increased costs, and poor alignment with digital transformation efforts.

Trust drives decisions

Each of the annual Role & Influence studies has measured the impact of content on buying decisions. Given that vendors are significant influencers in the decision-making process, their ability to provide content that is perceived as useful and relevant is a major factor in buyer engagement.

65%

typically spend more time consuming content from known and trusted brands

65%

agree that when all stakeholders are aware of a brand, it makes the internal sell through process easier

63%

are more likely to trust information read online if it was a recommendation from peers

Brand awareness and trust are critical, as evidenced by the 65% of buyers who said they typically spend more of their time-consuming content from known and trusted brands and an identical number who said that when all stakeholders are aware of a brand it makes the internal sell-through process easier. A nearly identical 63% said they're more likely to trust online information recommended by peers. This underscores the need for vendors to not only develop engaging content but to make it easily shareable.

Awareness and engagement are positively influenced by product reviews (cited by 68% of respondents), case studies (49%), third-party market research (44%), and technology-related videos such as product demos and interviews (44%).

Over the years there has been little change in the number of content items downloaded during the purchase process. The average this year was six. A majority, 63% download at least three items of content, a number that was unchanged from last year but up from 57% in 2020. Notably, enterprise buyers download an average of 6.2 content items compared to 4.8 for SMBs, a figure that may correlate to the somewhat faster decision cycles in smaller companies.

The sources buyers rely upon the most have also changed remarkably little over

the years. The list is led by technology content sites, which were cited by 43% of respondents overall. This resource is particularly favored by executive IT buyers but to a significantly lesser extent by mid-level and lower-level IT staff.

White papers are next on the list with 37% of respondents calling them useful. Tied at 33% each are webcasts, direct interactions with technology vendors, and vendor websites. Online communities garnered

The state of conferences has been in some turmoil since the pandemic, but the survey results indicate that the situation is rapidly returning to normal.

30% of mentions, although it's worth noting that they were cited by 36% of executive IT respondents compared to 22% of all others.

Peers, newsletters, meetings with technology vendors, and executive conferences round out the top-10 list, with APAC buyers expressing a somewhat greater preference for in-person meetings than their peers in other regions.

The state of conferences has been in some turmoil since the pandemic, but the survey results indicate that the situation is rapidly returning to normal.

While 68% of respondents said virtual events will continue to be an important source of information, 58% said they are also likely to increase their attendance at physical events over the next year.

Information needs are dynamic and the research has consistently found that they change throughout the buying cycle. During the first three stages (determining the business need through evaluating products), ITDMs rely on technology content sites more than any other source. The educational nature of these sites with their market overviews, product reviews, and opinions make them a natural choice when buyers are initially weighing their options. White papers are also among the top three sources during these exploratory and educational stages.

As they enter the recommendation stage, buyers list peers and direct interaction with technology vendors as their top two sources followed by technology content sites and vendor websites. When it comes time to sell internally, analyst firms leap to the top of the influence list, presumably because they are perceived as authoritative sources. Interestingly, analyst firms are only among the top five influence factors in one other category: recommending vendors.

Once a vendor is selected and moves into the approval process, ITDMs turn

to peers and technology vendors for information and insights that justify their decision. Unsurprisingly, technology vendors are also the dominant information source after the sale has been made.

This year's study was also the first to break down responses by the age of the buyer: Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), GenX (1965 – 1980), Millennials (1981 – 1996), and GenZ (1997 – 2010). Content preferences among the older age groups are fairly consistent, but they change radically with GenZ respondents.

Although technology content sites are their number-one source for everyone, the youngest buyers list their other top preferences as online communities, peers outside the company consulted via electronic media, infographics, and podcasts. Just one of those sources – online communities – made the top-five list in any other age group (Boomers listed them fifth). It should be noted, however, that GenZers comprised only 6% of the respondent base compared to 41% of GenXers, who are in the prime of their careers.

Generational shifts in information sources relied upon

	Boomer 1946-1964	GenX 1965-1980	Millennials 1981-1996	GenZ 1997-2010
1	Technology content sites	Technology content sites	Technology content sites	Technology content sites
2	White papers	White papers	Webcasts/Webinars	Online communities, discussion forums
3	Technology vendors (via vendor web site)	Webcasts/Webinars	Technology vendors (via vendor web site)	Peers outside your company (via phone, email, video conference)
4	Webcasts/Webinars	Technology vendors (via phone, email, video conference)	Technology vendors (in-person)	Infographics
5	Online communities, discussion forums Technology vendors (via phone, email, video conference)	Technology vendors (via vendor web site)	Technology vendors (via phone, email, video conference)	Podcasts Technology vendors (in-person) Technology vendors (via social/business networking sites)

Provide content that helps the evaluation stage

	Average number of sources of information used by stage	Stage(s) of the process most likely to stall	Stage(s) of the process you need additional resources or assistance from a vendor
Determine the business need	3.4	29%	22%
Determine technical requirements	3.4	29%	42%
Evaluate products/services	4.1	33%	48%
Recommend or select vendors for purchase	3.2	22%	23%
Sell internally (e.g., outside of the IT team)	3.0	29%	23%
Authorize or approve the purchase of products and services	2.3	34%	16%
Post sales engagement (e.g. adoption, maintenance, renewals, additions)	2.6	–	29%

Webcasts have become established as a mainstream source with 67% of respondents having registered for at least one over the past 12 months. That figure increases to 72% among IT executives and falls to 44% among IT pros.

Podcasts have also come into their own in recent years. While they rate near the bottom of the list of relied-upon sources during the purchase process, 83% of ITDMs have listened to them for business information (87% of enterprises), and 43% have used them to find out about emerging technology. IT executives tune in more often for business trends (24%) and thought leadership topics (23%) than do their lower-level colleagues.

Stalled processes impact information needs

A cross-reference of information sources by the stages at which the buying process is most likely to stall yields an interesting insight. The "evaluate products/services" stage is where one-third of decisions grind to a halt and information needs increase significantly, with 48% of buyers saying they are more likely to need additional resources or assistance from vendors during that stage. In contrast, just 23% said they need additional assistance during the vendor selection and internal selling stages, and 22% when determining business needs.

There are notable variances by organization size. Large companies are more likely to

stall when determining tech requirements than small ones by a margin of 35% to 22%. EMEA companies stall more often during technical requirements determination (41% vs. 26% in North America) while North American users stall more often during authorization/approval (cited by 38% compared to 25% in EMEA and 31% in APAC).

Conclusions

Technology may be becoming more complex, but human behavior changes at a slower rate. One insight that 14 years of Role & Influence research has consistently revealed is that trust and value are the essential factors in influencing purchase decisions. Although the sources of content buyers consult changes over time, the reasons they go back to those sources, again and again, change little.

Foundry's research has documented an ongoing erosion in vendor loyalty. Although buyers still prefer to go with trusted brands, they are more open than ever to alternatives that demonstrate innovation and attention to their specific needs. This should be a call to action for vendor marketers.

Trust and value are the essential factors in influencing purchase decisions.

One of the more encouraging findings of Foundry's research is that vendor content can attain trust ratings that rival those of independent news sources and technology analysts. While buyers are wary of sponsored content in general, they are more than willing to engage with a source that appears to be more interested in their success than in closing a sale. Marketers who keep that objective first in mind will see the greatest payoffs.

About the survey

Foundry's 2023 Role and Influence of the Technology Decision-Maker Research was conducted online among the audiences of Foundry's B2B brands (CIO, Computerworld, CSO, InfoWorld, and Network World) representing IT and security decision-makers involved in the IT purchase process for their organization. Results in this study are based on 846 respondents, all involved in the purchase process for major IT or security products and services, to the 32 question survey across multiple industries and countries.

Regional key takeaways

Is your marketing scope region-specific? Explore the key research findings from North America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific. Contact us to dive deeper into the regional results.

North America

Tech budget 12-month projections

48%
Increase

40%
Remain the same

12%
Decrease
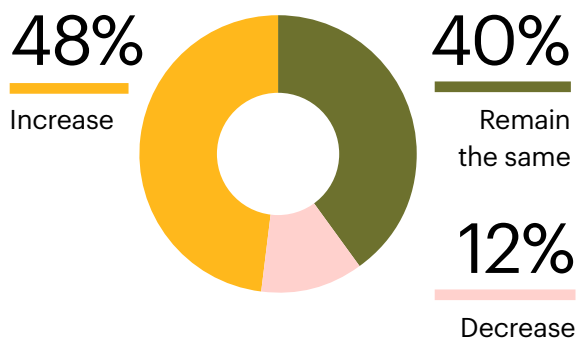
60% agree that the purchase process for technology products and services is becoming increasingly complex.
- **6.0 months** is the average length of the tech purchase process
- **22** average number of influencers in the buying team (11 IT; 11 LOB)

Tech purchase process most likely to stall during the authorization/approval stage **(38%)**.

47% of ITDMs need additional resources or assistance from a vendor during the product evaluation stage of the purchase process.

62% say that they work with vendors to help develop the business case around investment in their technology.

ITDMs in NA are more engaged with webcasts **(76%)** than their counterparts in other regions.

70% agree that given the ease of attending, virtual events will continue to be an important source of information.

Brand awareness is important—**66%** typically spend more time consuming content from known and trusted brands and **66%** agree that when all stakeholders are aware of a brand it makes the internal sell through process easier.

**Top 3 reasons to seek a new vendor for tech purchases**
- New vendor/product is more innovative or feature rich **(50%)**
- Current product/service no longer met business needs **(42%)**
- Poor customer service **(39%)**

Top 5 information sources used to keep up-to-date with new technologies
- Tech content sites **(46%)**
- White papers **(39%)**
- Online communities, discussion forums **(36%)**
- Webcasts/webinars **(35%)**
- Tech vendors (via web site) **(35%)**

EMEA

Tech budget 12-month projections

60%
Increase

29%
Remain
the same

11%
Decrease
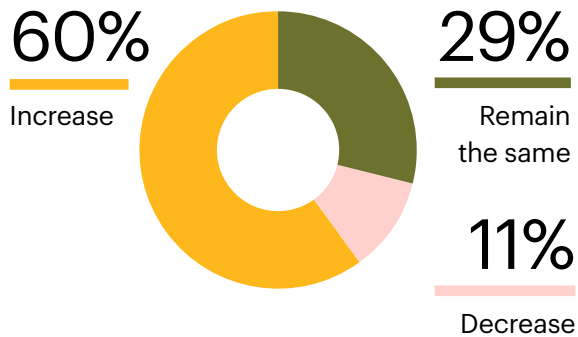
63% agree that the purchase process for technology products and services is becoming increasingly complex.
- **5.5 months** is the average length of the tech purchase process
- **29** average number of influencers in the buying team (16 IT; 13 LOB)

Tech purchase process most likely to stall during the technical requirements stage **(41%)**.

56% of ITDMs need additional resources or assistance from a vendor during the product evaluation stage of the purchase process.

66% agree that given the ease of attending, virtual events will continue to be an important source of information.

62% say that they work with vendors to help develop the business case around investment in their technology.

Brand awareness is important—**67%** typically spend more time consuming content from known and trusted brands and **67%** agree that when all stakeholders are aware of a brand it makes the internal sell through process easier.

### Top 3 reasons to seek a new vendor for tech purchases
- New vendor/product is more innovative or feature rich **(45%)**
- Current product/service no longer met business needs **(44%)**
- Increased cost/level of investment required by current vendor **(34%)**

Top 5 information sources used to keep up-to-date with new technologies
- White papers **(41%)**
- Tech content sites **(35%)**
- Webcasts/webinars **(33%)**
- Tech vendors (via phone, emails, video conf.) **(30%)**
- Technology print publications **(30%)**

APAC

Tech budget 12-month projections

50%
Increase

38%
Remain the same

11%
Decrease
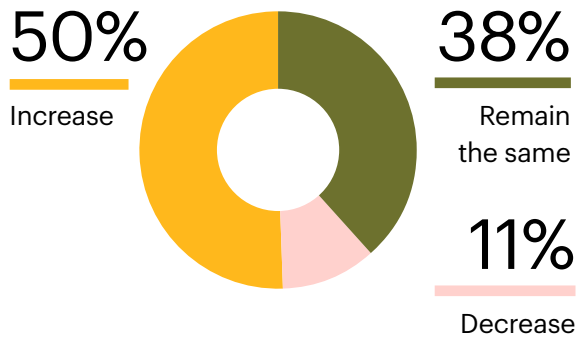
88% of of ITDMs say their tech budgets will either increase or remain the same over the next 12 months (**50%** increase; **38%** remain the same).

61% agree that the purchase process for technology products and services is becoming increasingly complex.

- **7.8 months** is the average length of the tech purchase process
- **29** average number of influencers in the buying team (15 IT; 14 LOB)

Tech purchase process most likely to stall during the product evaluation stage **(37%)**.

The #1 stage when ITDMs need additional resources or assistance from a vendor is when determining technical requirements **(48%)** followed by the product evaluation stage **(47%)**.

65% agree that given the ease of attending, virtual events will continue to be an important source of information.

61% say that they work with vendors to help develop the business case around investment in their technology.

Brand awareness is important—**59%** typically spend more time-consuming content from known and trusted brands and **62%** agree that when all stakeholders are aware of a brand it makes the internal sell through process easier.

Top 3 reasons to seek a new vendor for tech purchases

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Top 5 information sources used to keep up-to-date with new technologies

- Tech content sites **(42%)**
- Tech vendors (in-person) **(34%)**
- Tech vendors (via phone, emails, video conf.) **(32%)**
- Tech vendors (via web site) **(31%)**
- White papers **(30%)**
- Webcasts/webinars **(30%)**

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

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.

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

Technology-specific studies
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- Cloud Computing
- Digital Business
- Security Priorities

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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.