



2014 B2B Web Usability Report

What B2B Buyers Want from Vendor Websites

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by Dianna Huff and KoMarketing Associates



INTRODUCTION

You can find a plethora of survey data showing the various tactics business-to-business (B2B) buyers use to find vendors who offer the products and services they need. Other survey reports explain buyer behavior within the sales funnel and how the Internet, technology and social media have changed buyer behavior and awareness over time.

But we wanted to know what buyers do once they get to a vendor website. Which elements increase a vendor's credibility in the mind of the buyer, which detract – and which cause them to leave the website? Do B2B vendor websites make it easy for buyers to take the next step in the sales process or do they hinder it – and how?

In October 2013, Dianna Huff of DH Communications, Inc., and Derek Edmond and Casie Gillette of KoMarketing Associates, with the help of Liza Semenova, a student at Northeastern University, issued a survey to their respective customers, prospects and others involved within B2B marketing. This report is the findings from that survey – along with our analysis.

We hope you find it useful. If you do, please share it with your peers and social networks. They can download their own copy at:

www.komarketingassociates.com/b2b-web-usability-report-2014

It's completely free. No registration required.

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Executive Summary

The first annual B2B Website Usability Report revealed that buyers approach vendor websites with one thought in mind: qualifying a vendor in order to begin the process of moving toward a purchase.

As veteran B2B marketers ourselves, we've spent years preaching how and why vendors should be creating websites in order to help buyers progress smoothly through the sales process. Once we saw the data to our survey, we were pleased – because it validated what we've been preaching – but we were also surprised.

B2B buyers need pricing and marketing collateral

Qualifying a vendor should be a straight-forward process – at least in the eyes of a buyer. Buyers, who are busy and efficient, follow certain behaviors when they arrive at a vendor website. They head directly to the products and services pages; they thoroughly dislike website elements that waste their time or distract them.

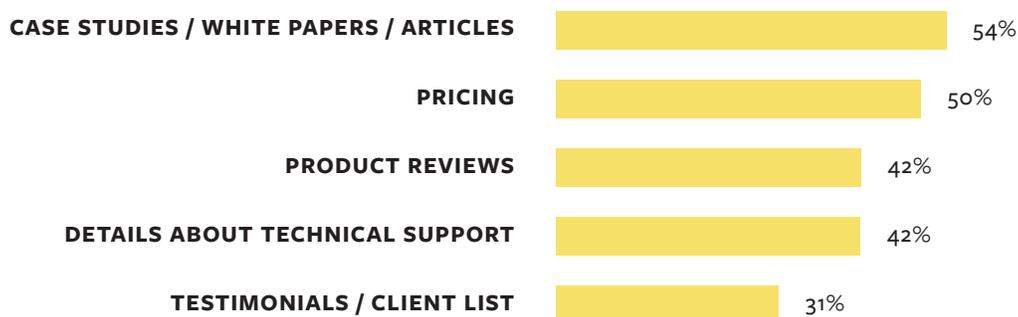
They also need specific types of information in order to take the next step in the buying process; this information, however, is often lacking on vendor websites. For example, when asked what types of information vendor websites “must have,” buyers indicated the following:

“Must have” content



Ask any vendor, “What do you want from your website?” and the answer almost always is “more leads and sales.” Yet, judging from the survey data, vendors are their own worst enemies when it comes to facilitating the buying process. Survey respondents indicated that vendor websites lack the crucial information they need. When asked, “What types of marketing collateral do you find to be lacking on most company sites”, respondents replied:

Content lacking on vendor websites



In addition, buyers need another important piece of information in order to move forward with a vendor: contact information! According to survey respondents, **68%** said that “Company Address and Contact Information” is critically important. Even more telling, survey respondents indicated they prefer to use email and the phone to contact vendors (**81%** and **57%** respectively). Yet, we often find that vendor websites lack this information – with vendors often forcing people to complete “contact us” forms rather than providing email or phone information. In fact, in a different question, **55%** of buyers indicated they’ll leave a vendor website if it lacks contact information! Clearly, vendors are turning away prospective customers – without knowing they do so.

Social media activity has minimal impact on the buying process

We were surprised to learn that a vendor’s lack of social media activity doesn’t impact the buying process. When asked, “How much does a company’s social media activity impact your vendor decision making process?” only **30%** stated it was “important but not a deal breaker,” with **37%** stating it “wasn’t a factor” and **26%** indicating they were “neutral” on the topic.

Social media’s impact on the buying process



Buyers don’t like to be interrupted

As we’ve already stated, buyers come to a vendor website with a stated purpose: to gather information, research a vendor, make a buying decision, etc. We wanted to know which website elements annoy buyers so much they’ll leave a site. Hands down: anything that moves or makes noise. Why? Annoying elements interrupt buyers’ train of thought.

Elements that cause buyers to leave vendor websites due to annoying them include video or audio that plays automatically (**93%**) and animated ads that crawl across a page or pop up (**88%**).

But then we asked *why* certain elements cause buyers to leave a vendor website. The data is interesting and telling as it shows that buyers come to a vendor website with a specific purpose in mind. Anything that prevents them from achieving that purpose – from wasting their time, interrupting their train of thought or reducing a vendor’s credibility – frustrates them.

Buyers Look at Products & Services First

The first set of survey questions asked respondents the actions they take once they arrive at a vendor website – however they get there (e.g. search engine, third party reference, etc.). We wanted to know how they orient themselves, which information they look for immediately, and what causes them to click back out.

One of the first questions we asked was, **“When you’re on the home page [of a vendor’s website] what information do you want to see available?”** The overwhelming majority of respondents, **90%**, indicated they want to see “Products and Services” information (**Figure 1**). This finding isn’t a surprise. Buyers visit a vendor website with a specific purpose in mind: to research products and services.

Buyers also want to see “About” or company information (**61%**), “Marketing Collateral” (**37%**) and “Testimonials” (**36%**). These responses lead us to believe that people look for this information as a form of supporting validation (e.g. “Should I continue to invest time looking at this company’s website?”). Interestingly, few buyers looked for “Social Media Buttons” (**24%**) or a blog (**22%**).

Because the home page is not always the first point of entry due to search, referrals from other websites, etc., we wanted to know, **“When you get to an internal page of a vendor website from a referral site or search engine, how do you ‘orient’ yourself? (e.g. how do you determine where you are in the site)?”**

Over two-thirds of respondents (**69%**) stated they first use the website’s navigation. Close to a third (**33%**) said they used the page headline and **30%** of respondents indicated they click on the company logo in order to arrive at the Home page.

90%
WANT TO SEE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Information people want to see available on a vendor website home page

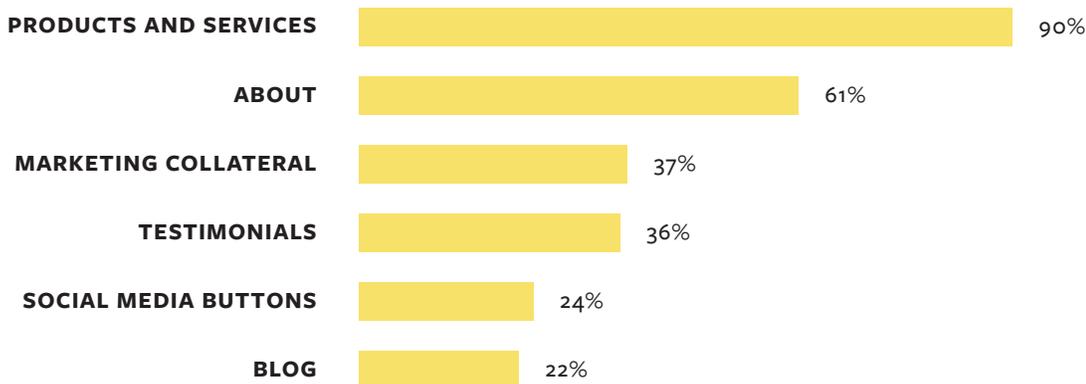


Figure 1
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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Adopt clear and concise navigation and provide prospects with an easy path to Products and Services.

Ensure that top navigational links to company information, marketing collateral, and testimonials are present.

Incorporate standard navigational elements, such as making the logo “clickable to home.”

Use descriptive headlines that help people quickly determine where they are in the website.

Buyers NEED Marketing Collateral and Pricing to Make Purchasing Decisions

We wanted to know what types of content and information B2B buyers want to see on vendor websites. We allowed respondents to select items based on four objectives: “Must Have,” “Somewhat Important” “Not Important,” and “It Depends.”

“MUST HAVE”

Pricing and Marketing Collateral

Over **40%** of respondents indicated they want pricing information as seen in **Figure 2**. Traditional marketing collateral, including case studies / white papers / articles / blog posts, also received high response, with **38%** indicating they wanted to find this information on vendor websites. Buyers also want technical information (**38%**) and shipping information (**37%**).

“NOT IMPORTANT”

CAD Drawings

In the “Not Important” column, **41%** of respondents indicated that CAD drawings weren’t necessary. For **23%** of respondents, news releases and online ordering were only “somewhat important” (**Figure 3**).

What is most interesting, however, is that while B2B buyers clearly know what they want from vendor websites, **the information they need to make purchasing decisions is clearly lacking (Figure 4)**.



43%

WANT PRICING INFORMATION

The “must have” collateral required by B2B buyers

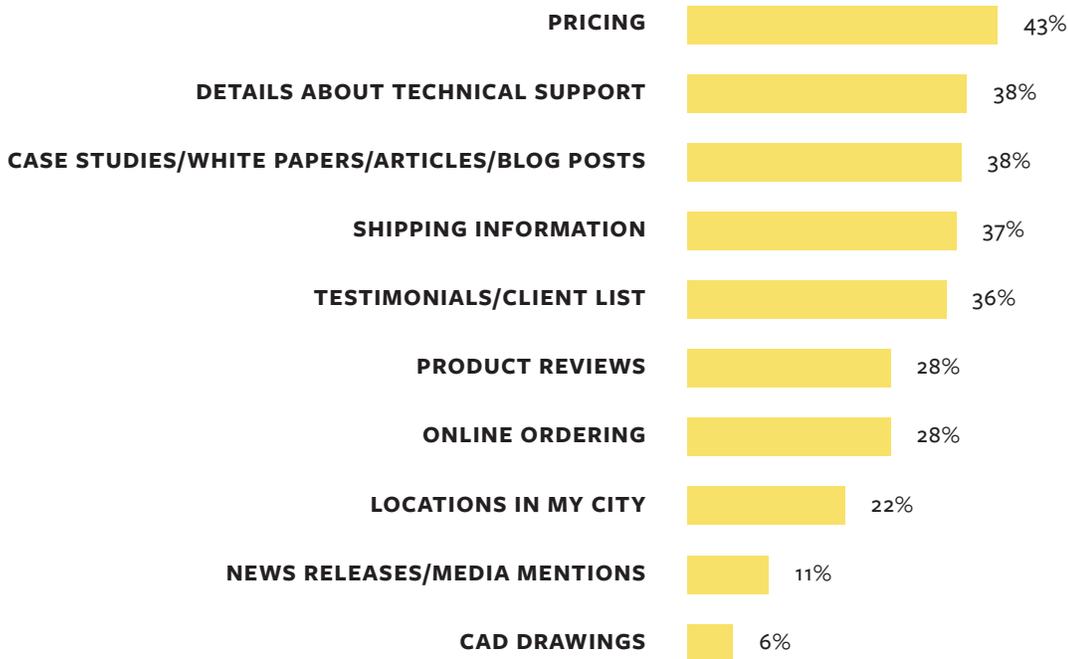


Figure 2

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Marketing collateral required by B2B buyers

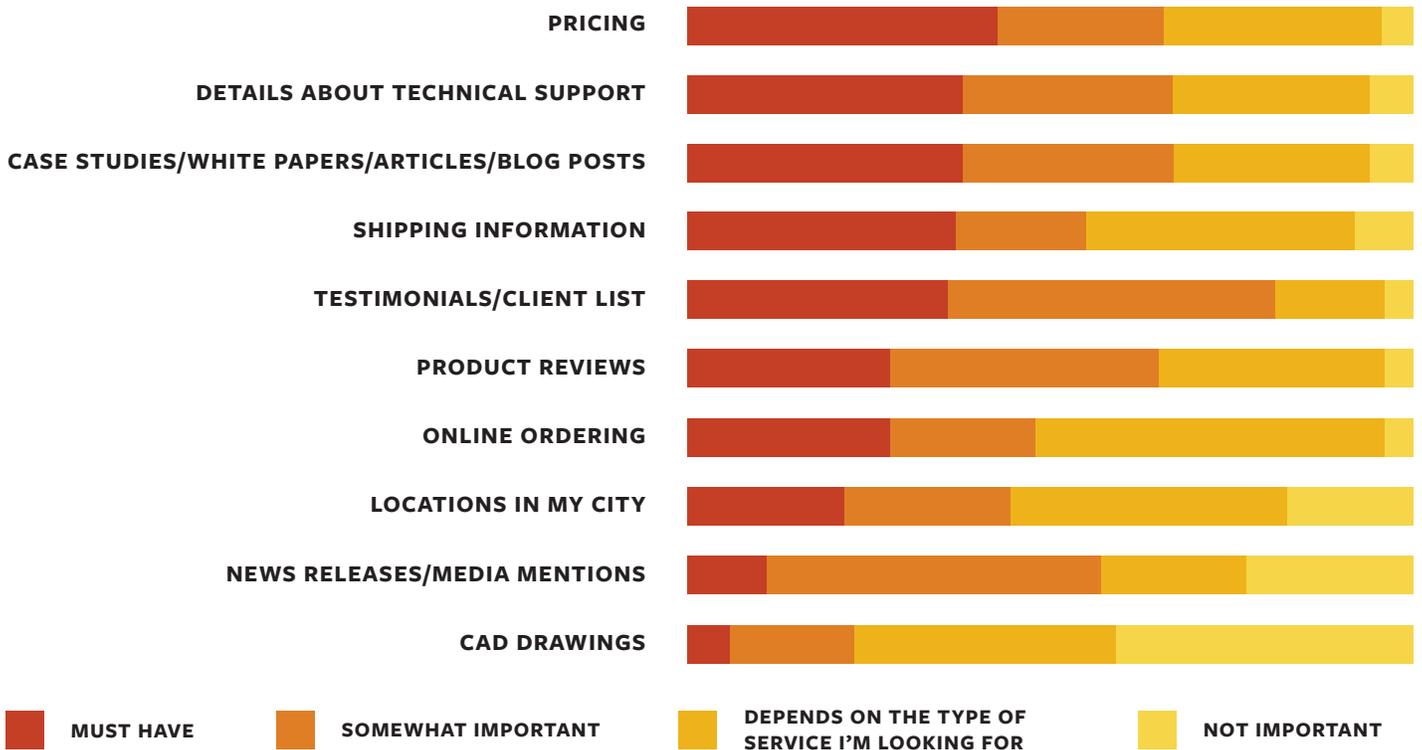


Figure 3

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Marketing collateral most lacking on vendor websites

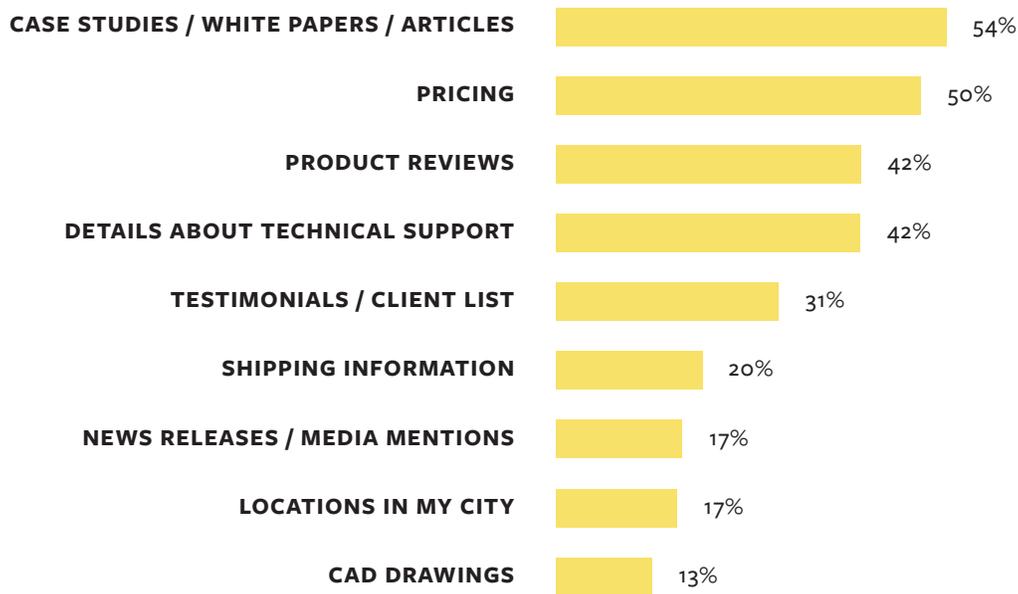


Figure 4

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When asked, **“What types of marketing collateral do you find to be lacking on most company sites?”** survey data shows:

Case studies, white papers, articles, and blog posts – **54%**
Pricing – **50%**
Product Reviews – **42%**
Technical Support Details – **42%**
Client List / Testimonials – **31%**

This data is of critical importance when paired with data from the next question from the survey: **“How important are the following items with regard to moving forward with a Request for Proposal / Quote?”** Items included: Company Address / Contact Information, Product Pricing, Lead or Ship Times, and Product Name.

According to survey respondents, **68%** indicated that “Company Address and Contact Information” is “Critically Important” followed by Product Pricing at **44%**.

Once buyers have a short list of suppliers, they’ll send these names to a purchasing agent or will send out RFQs. To develop these shortlists, they source vendors online. If a buyer can’t find the information needed to send out an RFQ, the vendor gets scratched and the buyer moves on – with the vendor never knowing the buyer was on the website.

In short, buyers pre-qualify vendors and suppliers and they do this using the information found on websites.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Give prospects the information they need to do business with your company, including pricing, full contact information, and marketing collateral.



Make producing marketing collateral a priority. Buyers want and need case studies, articles, white papers, product reviews, and technical information.

Buyers Prefer to Use Email and Phone to Contact Vendors

We asked survey respondents how they prefer to contact vendors. Overwhelming, people prefer to contact vendors through email (81%) with the phone being the second choice at 58%. Over one-third of respondents (39%) indicated they prefer to use a contact form; only 17% prefer live chat, and few – 11% – prefer to use an app to schedule an appointment (Figure 5).

Once people contact a vendor – whether through email, phone or a form – 62% expect a response within 24 hours while 27% indicated they expect a response the same business day.

We found it interesting that such a high percentage – over half – of respondents chose “phone” as their second preferred method of contact. We believe this is due to demographics: Fewer than 25% respondents were under the age of 35, with the majority being between the ages of 36 and 64. The age demographic could be why people prefer to pick up the phone to contact a vendor. This age group grew up pre-Internet, when using the phone was the main method of conducting business.



81%

PREFER TO CONTACT VIA EMAIL

How buyers prefer to contact vendors

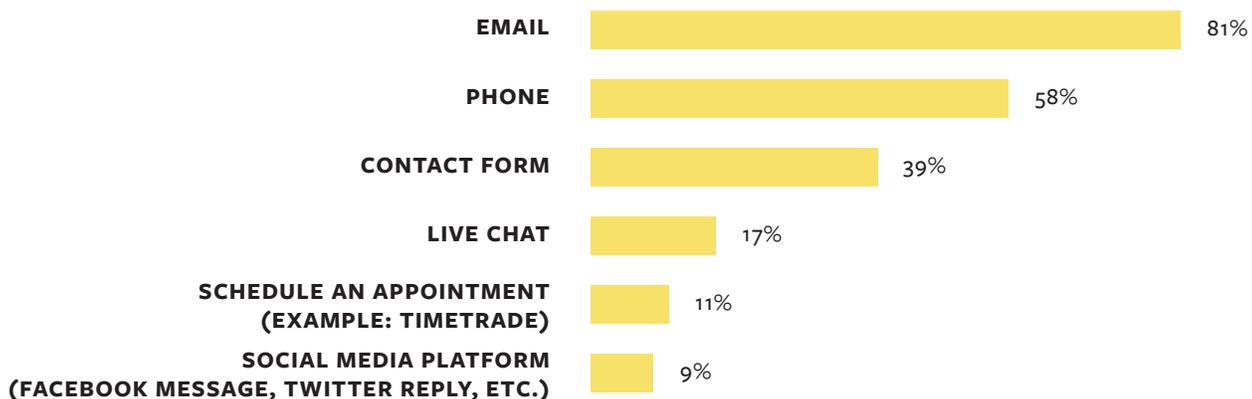


Figure 5

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Marketers should be aware of the age of the target audience. If over the age of 35, prominently placing your company phone number on each page of your website may help increase inquiries.

Give people multiple ways to contact your company: email, phone, and forms, and ensure your inquiry process includes same day response.

Test your website using a smartphone to ensure you can “tap” the phone number to have it automatically call your company.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Be wary of excessive information requests on forms.

Look for other ways to capture information – such as “click to call” tracking.

Third-party references and validation are important; prospects will leave a website at least one or two times before initiating contact.

Why Buyers Leave a Vendor Website

Website design is subjective: One person’s “wow!” is another person’s “ugh, that’s terrible.” Similarly, what some people find annoying on a vendor website, others do not. (At one point during the pre-survey discussions, Dianna mentioned she hated the way social icons move with the scroll bar. Casie remarked, “But a study proved they increase engagement.” Oy!)

With this caveat in mind, we asked survey takers, “Which website elements annoy you or cause you to click back out?” (Figure 7)

Hands down, video or audio that plays automatically was the top annoyance (93%), followed by animated ads that crawl across the page or pop ups (88%), lack of message (or can’t tell what a company offers) (83%), and surprising to us, **lack of contact information** (79%).



Which website elements annoy you or cause you to click back out?

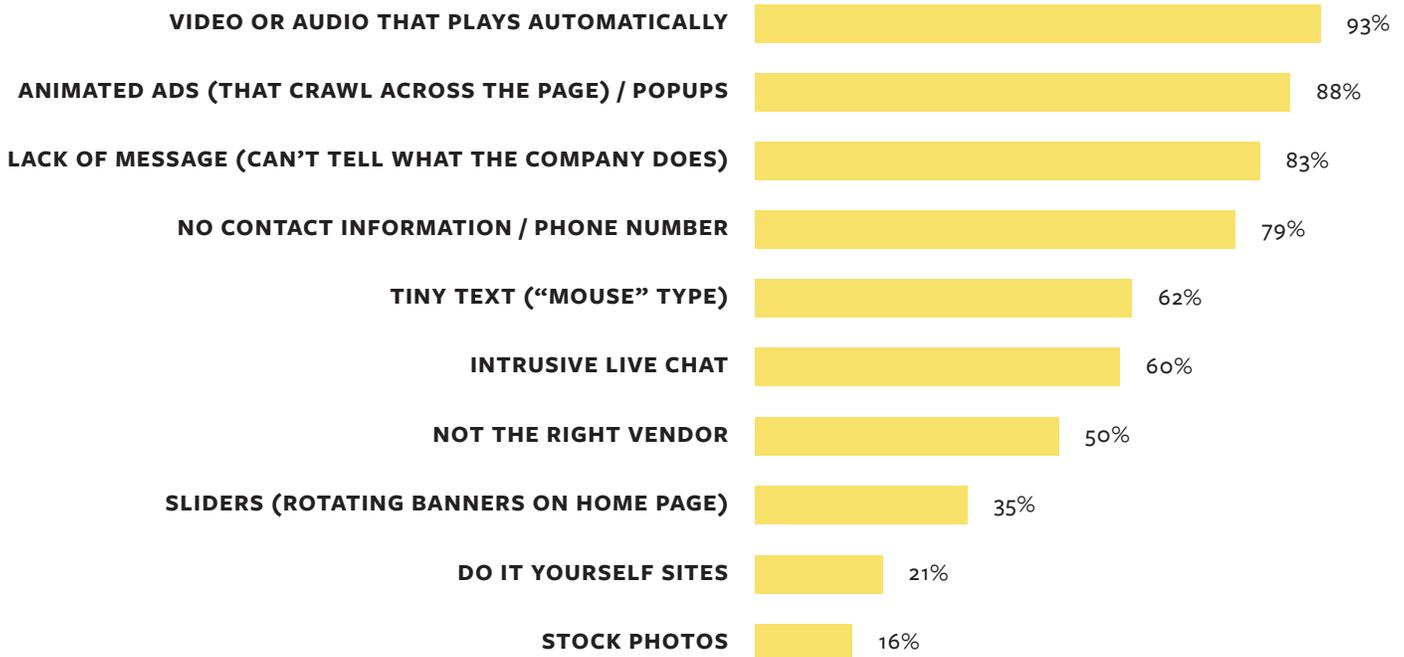


Figure 7
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People were pretty passionate about why they found automatic video and audio, popups and other elements annoying:

“Stop the flashy crap and TELL ME what you’re all about. HATE, HATE, HATE video/audio that plays automatically.”

“I hate pop up ads which you have to close before you can look at the site. I never even look at those.”

“I hate things that move (including Twitter feed) and things that make noise.”

*“My biggest turn-off is anything that *moves* (unless I choose to initiate the movement myself). That includes any kind or animation of rotating images.”*

People had mixed responses about live chat. Although 60% of respondents indicated they found “intrusive live chat” a definite turnoff, people did comment that they found live chat helpful when they needed it.

We also asked people why specific elements cause them to leave a website. For this question, we broke the responses down by reason: “Waste of my time,” “Interrupts my train of thought,” and “Reduces credibility.”

“WASTE OF MY TIME”

Lack of Message, No Contact Information

The top three responses that cause people to leave a website due to being a “waste of time” include “Not the right vendor” (57%), “Lack of message” (49%), and “No contact information / phone number” (37%). You can see the full data in **Figure 8**.

Elements that cause prospects to click back out due to “waste of my time”

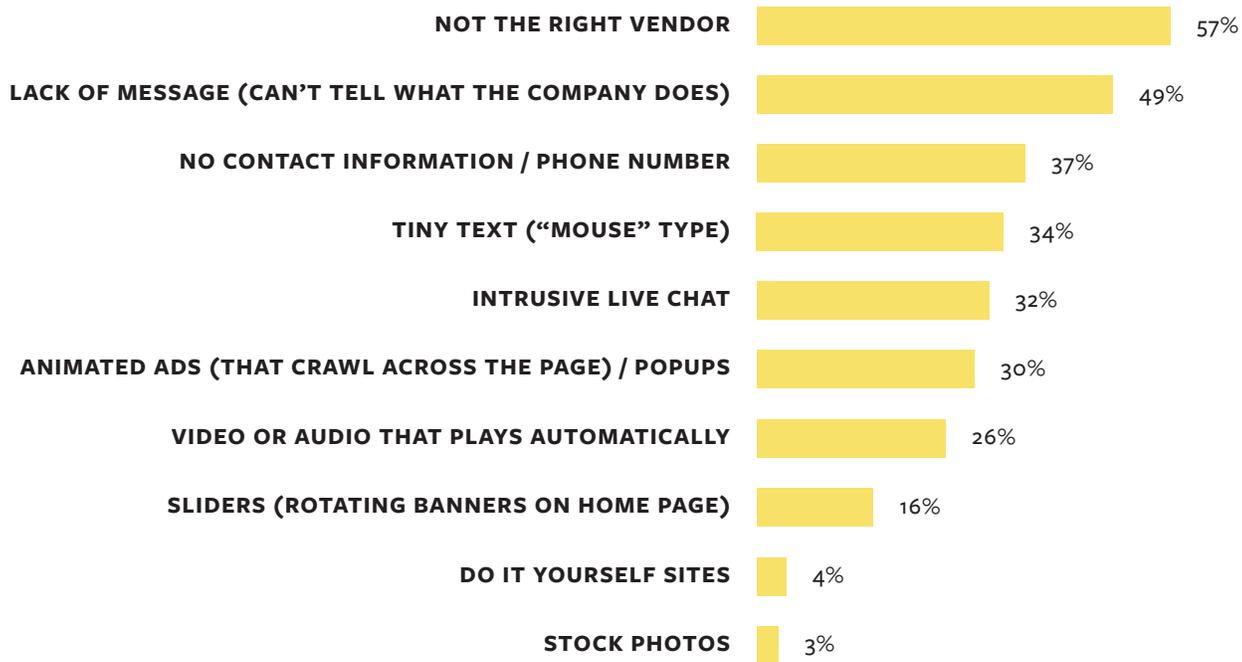


Figure 8

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When searching for products and services, people often begin with broad search terms and then narrow down as they click through websites looking for information. So it makes sense that a top reason people leave a website is due to the vendor not having what the person needs.

We were surprised, however, by the finding that people will **leave a website due to a lack of contact information and/or a phone number**. This finding makes sense as B2B buyers have short- and long-term goals in mind when they visit a vendor website.

If buyers don't see a phone number or email address – or are forced to initiate contact through a “Contact Us” form – they may believe that they won't be able to reach a “live” person or receive “on demand” technical support or help after the sale. For this reason and others, buyers may cross a vendor off their shortlist of prospective suppliers.

Lack of contact information – as you'll see in a later question – also makes it difficult for buyers to send out RFQs.

“INTERRUPTS MY TRAIN OF THOUGHT”

Automatic Video, Pop Ups

Because B2B buyers are busy and mission-focused, they don't like anything that “bugs” them or interrupts what they're trying to accomplish while in research mode (**Figure 9**). Website elements that “interrupt their train of thought,” and thus causes them to leave a website, include video or audio that plays automatically (**59%**), animated ads that crawl across the page or popups (**36%**), and intrusive live chat (**35%**).

During our pre-survey discussions, we talked at length about Sliders (also known as “carousels”) – those ubiquitous moving banners found on Home pages. We've read numerous research and usability testing articles that demonstrate people don't like them and generally ignore them. Our data shows that **29%** of respondents found them annoying enough to leave a site.

Elements that cause prospects to click back out due to “interrupting my train of thought”

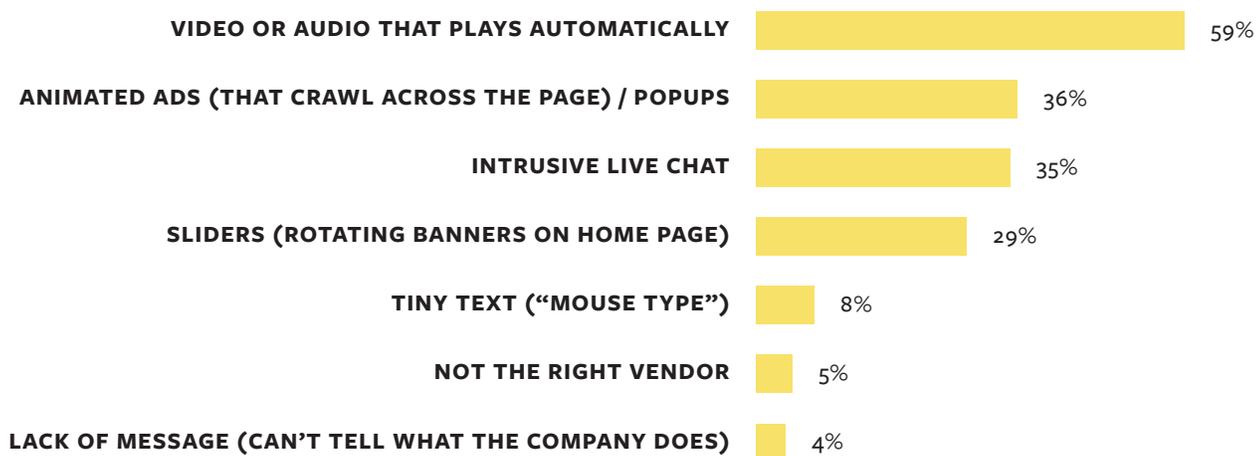


Figure 9

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“REDUCES CREDIBILITY”

No Contact Information

A vendor’s website serves many purposes: to present information, to educate prospects, and to encourage conversions or inquiries, to name a few. It also helps establish a company’s credibility in the eyes of the prospective buyer.

If buyers find certain elements lacking, the vendor’s credibility diminishes in the mind of the buyer – and can cause the buyer to leave a website (**Figure 10**). The big no-no’s include, “No Contact Information / Phone Number” (55%), “Lack of Message” (43%), “Do It Yourself Sites” (35%) and “Stock Photos” (30%).

We were somewhat surprised by the finding that a **lack of full contact information reduces credibility so significantly that it causes more than half of respondents to leave a vendor website** – but it does make sense. The lack of full contact information, which includes a company’s full mailing address, phone, fax, and email address, sends a vague message to the buyer: “Is this company a ‘real’ company with headquarters or office space? How do I reach a ‘live’ person? Will this company be responsive to our needs after the sale?”

Elements that cause prospects to click back out due to “reduces credibility”

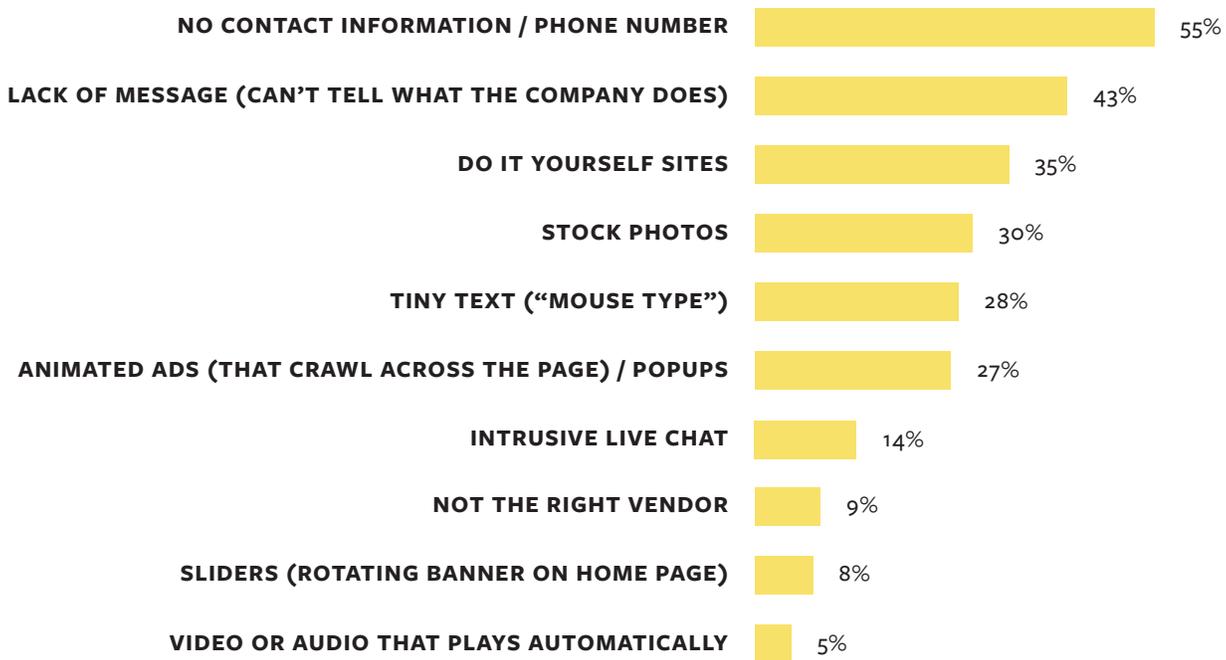


Figure 10

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ESTABLISHING CREDIBILITY

Contact and About Information is Key

As a corollary to the question on what reduces credibility, we asked, **“What types of content assets establish credibility when exploring vendors?”** Over half, **52%**, stated “thorough Contact or About Information” (**Figure 11**).

Other top elements, as seen in **Figure 11**, that establish credibility include Case Studies / White Papers / Articles (**31%**), Client List and Testimonials (**29%**), and Photos and Company Bios (**25%**).

Clearly, once prospects reach the website, they want to see information that supports the product and the company. It also appears from the data that prospects want to learn as much about the people behind the company as well as the solutions it offers.

One last data point that we found interesting: Contrary to accepted belief, social media activity, press releases and media mentions all play a lessor role in helping to establish credibility (**Figure 12**). Third-party validation of these types is simply not a factor when a prospect is viewing a vendor website.

Content assets that establish credibility

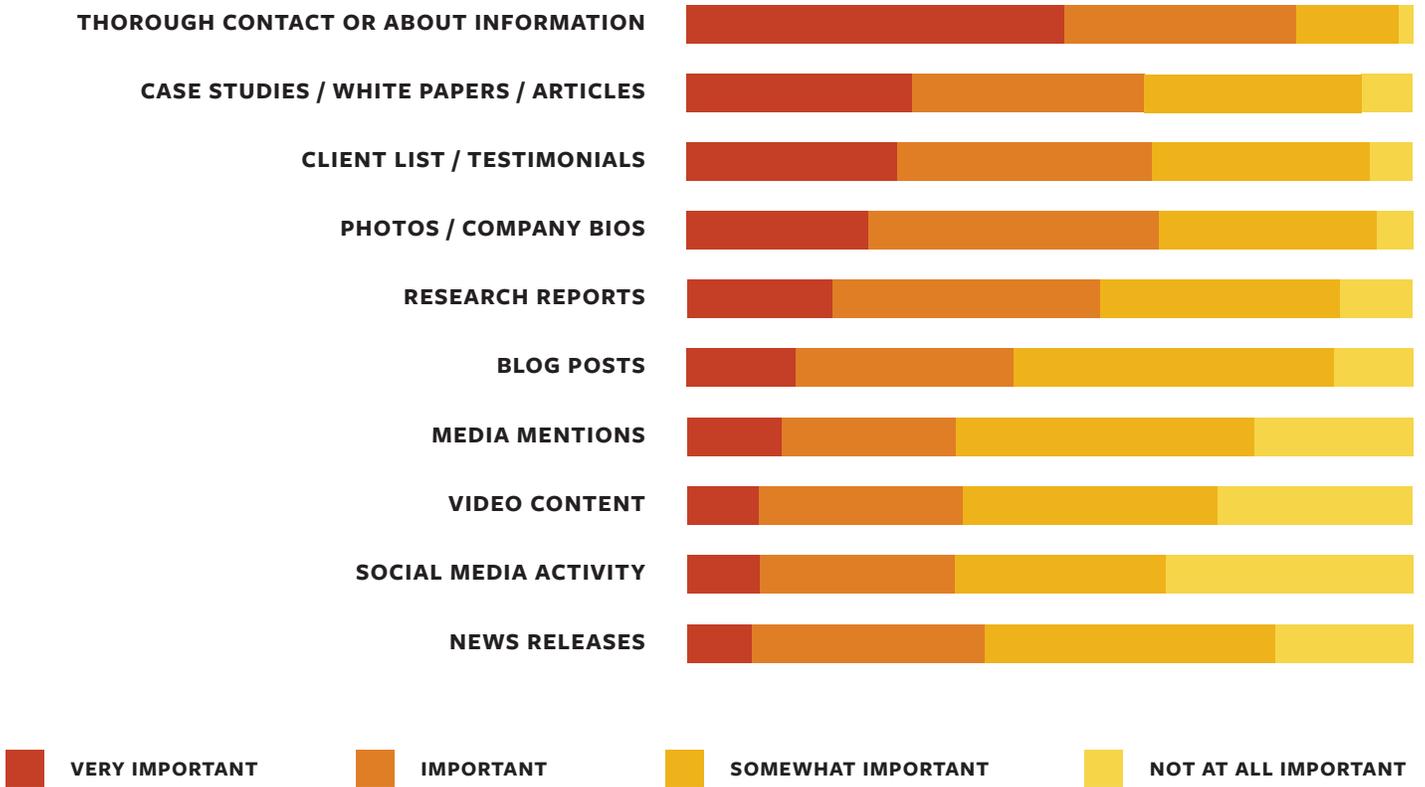


Figure 11
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Top content for establishing credibility

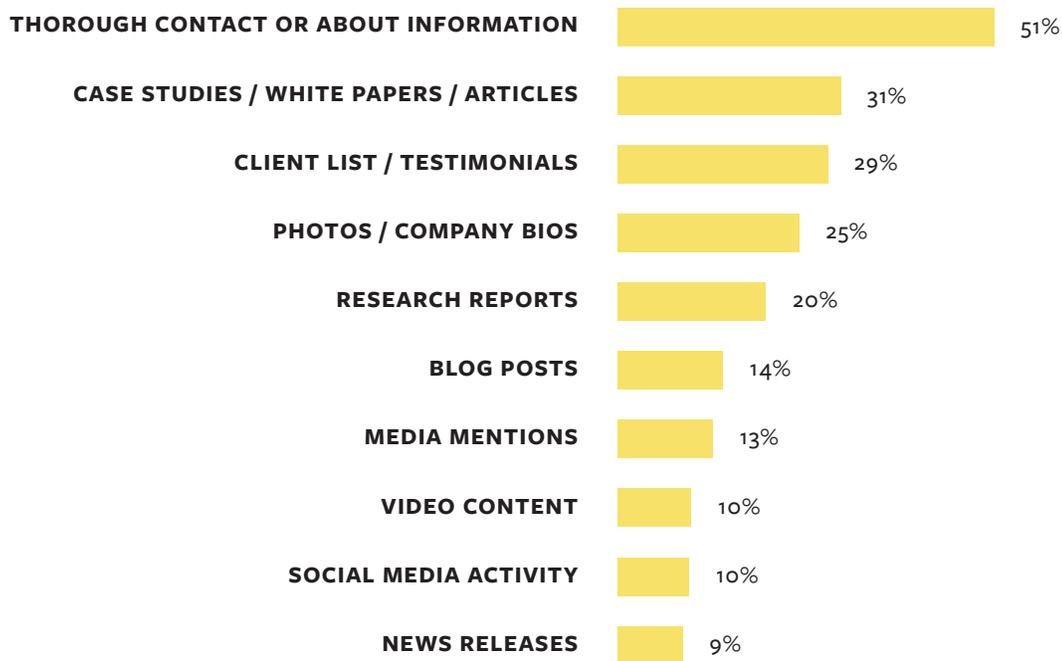


Figure 12

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Minimize or remove excessive animation that pulls attention away from prospects' reasons for visiting a vendor website.

Make it easy for prospects to contact your company, and establish credibility, by including full contact information, including information on key personnel

If content marketing funds are limited, put the bulk of resources into marketing collateral versus social media activity.

Lack of Social Media Activity Doesn't Impact Buying Process

As visible and heavy social media users ourselves, we wanted to know what importance B2B buyers place on social media activity and blogs – and whether they consider this activity important enough to make or break their objective in moving forward with a vendor.

As was already pointed out, buyers don't use social media icons or activity as a means of establishing credibility when first arriving at a vendor's website. (Only 10% of respondents considered it "Very Important;" 29% considered it "Somewhat Important.")

In fact, the data shows that a company's social media activity doesn't have that high an impact on a buyer's decision-making process either. When asked, **"How much does a company's social media activity impact your vendor decision making process?"** 37% indicated that social media activity wasn't a factor, 30% stated it was "important but not a deal breaker" and 26% were neutral (Figure 13).

Respondents view vendor blogs similarly with regard to establishing credibility: 14% indicated blog posts to be "Very Important" with 22% stating they were "Important." And, while 45% of respondents indicated they do subscribe to blogs, whether or not a vendor has a blog doesn't matter with regard to the buying process: 51% of respondents said "a blog was important but not a deal-breaker," 38% were "neutral" and 30% said "it wasn't a factor" (Figure 14).

When asked in a separate question if they believe that a blog helps establish a vendor's credibility, however, a whopping 85% said "yes."

A little confusing? Not really. What the data shows is that while having a blog does help, not having one isn't a deal breaker when a buyer is researching vendors. If your company posts high-value, insightful content that others are sharing, or you've created a community where recognizable people in your industry come to interact, then a blog **can raise your company's estimation and credibility** in the buyer's mind.



37%
**SAY SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY NOT
A FACTOR IN BUYING PROCESS**

Social media activity impact on buyers' decision making process

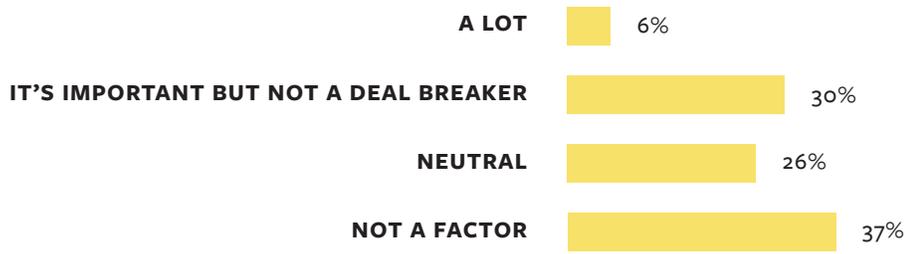


Figure 13

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Blog impact on buyers' decision making process

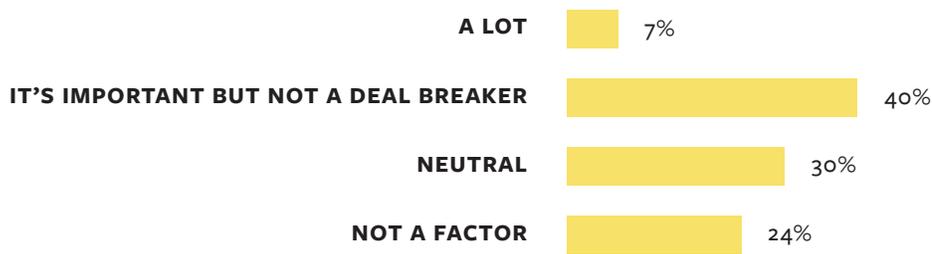


Figure 14

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Lack of social media activity and/or a blog isn't a deal breaker and has minimal impact on the buying process.

Having a blog can and does increase a company's credibility in the mind of the buyer so don't discount a blog's importance.

Mobile Gaining Traction But Desktops Still Rule

Although B2B mobile adoption rates are relatively low, B2B mobile use is increasing. Based on our experience with client accounts, we generally see about **25%** of traffic coming via mobile, which seems to be par based on anecdotal evidence.

We wanted to know, however, based on the proliferation of mobile devices, if B2B buyers were using these devices more often to research vendors.

When asked, **“Are you looking for B2B products / services using your smartphone?”** buyers are almost evenly split, with **49%** indicating they do not use a smartphone and **41%** indicating they do. When asked if they look for B2B products / services using a tablet, **41%** said “yes;” **36%** indicated they do not.

When asked, **“Is a vendor website designed specifically for smartphones important to you?”** again the response was evenly split, with **31%** indicating “it’s important but not a deal breaker” and **23%** indicating they were “neutral” and **37%** saying mobile capability wasn’t a factor (**Figure 15**).

Most interesting, **56%** of buyers stated a responsive website **does matter**, **26%** indicated it didn’t matter – and **18%** said they don’t know what “responsive” means.

(A “responsive” website is one that’s been designed to provide people with optimal viewing and navigation no matter which device is used or the size of the screen. A responsive site will automatically configure itself in order to minimize scrolling or zooming in (e.g. “spreading”) on a smartphone, for example.)



18%
**DON'T KNOW WHAT
“RESPONSIVE” MEANS**

A website’s mobile capability impact on buyers’ decision making process

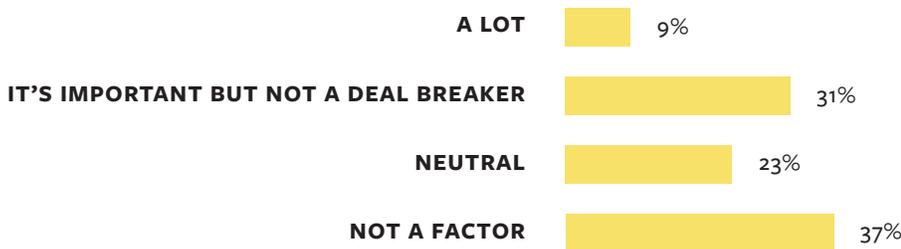


Figure 15
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What we found especially interesting, however, is the type of content respondents viewed based on the device. The reason we asked the following series of questions is due to Google's study, *The New Multi-screen World: Understanding Cross-platform Consumer Behavior*.

According to Google's research, we use our devices sequentially and simultaneously – and often both at the same time. We may move from phone to desktop as we travel from home to work (sequentially) or we may use both devices simultaneously (having our phone on the desk for texts while doing work on the desktop).

We also view our devices and their purposes differently. Phones are for quick tasks, such as catching up on email or responding to a text. Desktops are for focused work. And tablets are for shopping, browsing and “play” time. We wondered if these same general concepts held for B2B buyers. Survey results indicate that presently they do, but to a lesser extent. However, with mobile use growing, B2B behaviors will change – just as consumer behaviors have changed.

Question #1 in this series asked: **What types of vendor web content do you view on your desktop?** As you can see in **Figure 16**, buyers look at all forms of content on their desktops:

- Photos / Company Bios – **83%**
- Case Studies – **82%**
- Testimonials – **80%**
- Thorough Contact Information – **79%**
- White Papers – **78%**
- Research Reports – **76%**

Question #2 asked: **What types of vendor web content do you view on your tablet?** Since not all respondents own a tablet, and given that people don't do focused work on their tablets, the response to this question was considerably lower. However, respondents indicated they view vendor information similarly to how they view it on their desktop:

- Photos / Company Bios – **38%**
- Blog Posts – **37%**
- Articles – **32%**
- Thorough Contact and About Information – **31%**
- Case Studies, Video Content, and Testimonials – **29%**
- White Papers – **24%**

We assume that “Blog Posts” is the second highest for tablet viewing due to people engaging more in social media activity while on their “off” time.

Question #3 asked: **What types of vendor web content do you view on your iPhone?** As respondents pointed out, we made a tactical error with this question by using “iPhone” rather than “smartphone.” Notwithstanding, people do use their smartphones to view vendor content in much the same way they use their desktops and tablets and view:

- Through Contact Information – **38%**
- Photos / Company Bios and Blog Posts – **29%**
- Thorough About Information – **27%**
- Social Media Activity – **24%**
- Video Content – **21%**

Content viewing by device

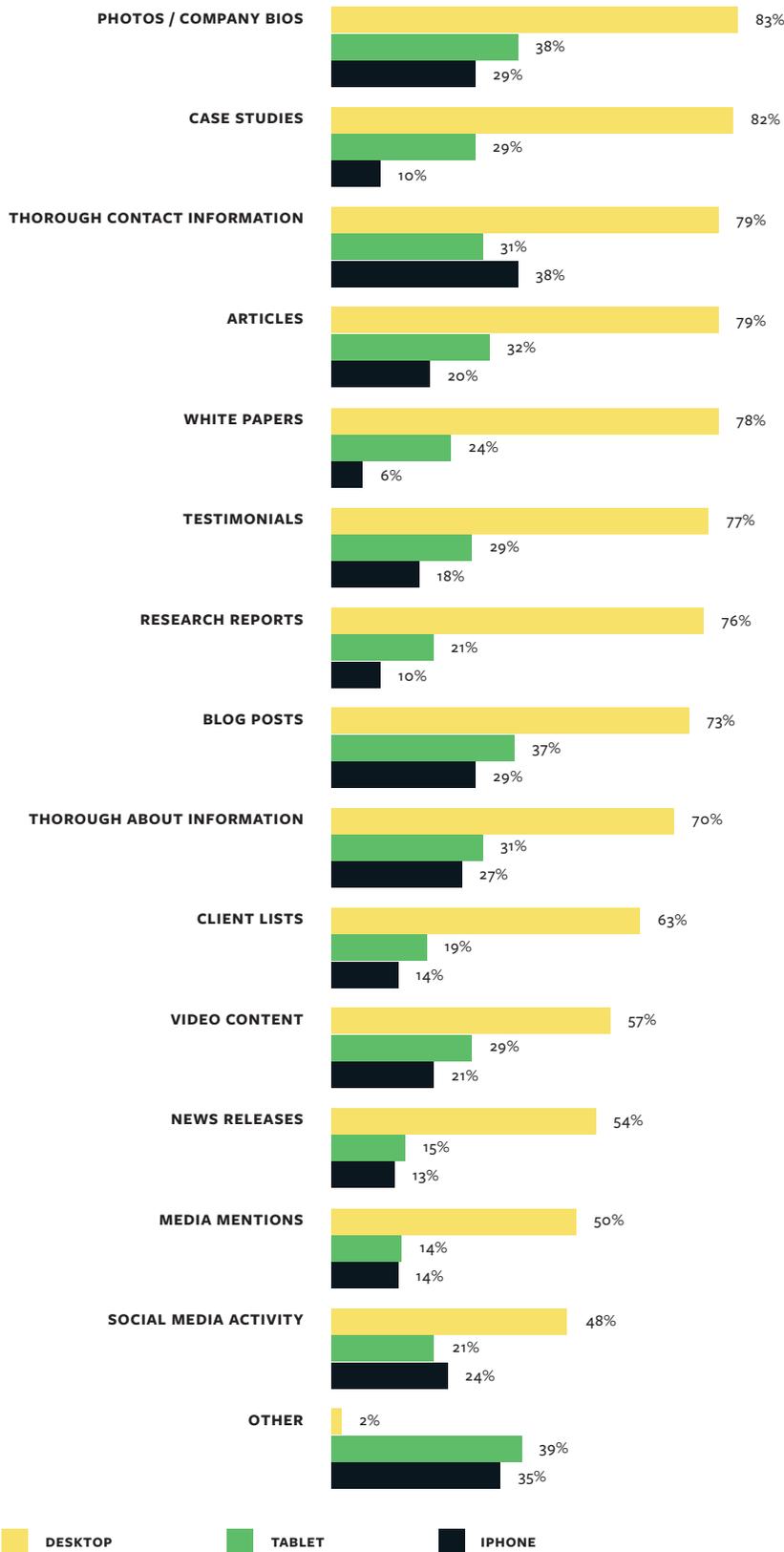


Figure 16

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Mobile is still a developing medium for B2B buyers.

Buyers incorporate mobile devices into their research and buying process but at a lesser extent than consumers (for now).

Whether or not a site is built around mobile devices isn't a deal-breaker (yet).



CONCLUSION

As the data shows, B2B buyers have specific needs when researching vendors and suppliers. In order to facilitate the buying process, vendors should develop websites that make it easy for buyers to move forward with a vendor. Specific tactics for improving the process for buyers include:

Adding contact information to each page of the website

To improve credibility with buyers and prevent the loss of potential leads, vendors must ensure phone and email is clearly visible, generally at the top of each page. Full contact information, including mailing address, should be on the “Contact” page.

Providing marketing collateral

Buyers need collateral in all forms. As such, vendors must make creating collateral a priority. Given the explosion of content marketing, vendors that ignore the importance of collateral as part of the buying process will continue to see a decline in inquiries.

Removing annoyances

Vendors would do well to test elements, from popups and sliders to live chat and audio/video, to ensure they’re not causing potential prospects to leave a site. When redesigning a website, vendors should keep buyers in mind: a static home page, while not “sexy,” may be just what’s needed to increase inquiries.

Ensuring navigation adheres to standard usability practices

Logos should be clickable to “home” so that no matter where buyers land within a site, they can easily find their way to the home page. Top or main navigation should include visible links to Products and Services, marketing collateral and other information buyers need.

Survey Demographics

Conducted in October of 2013, the survey was taken by 175 people. Survey respondents include Presidents and CEOs, COO/CFO/CTO/CMOs, Managers / Executives, Directors and VPs, Analysts and Specialists, and Consultants. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 64, with **4%** between age 18 and 24 and **9%** over age 65.

Title demographics

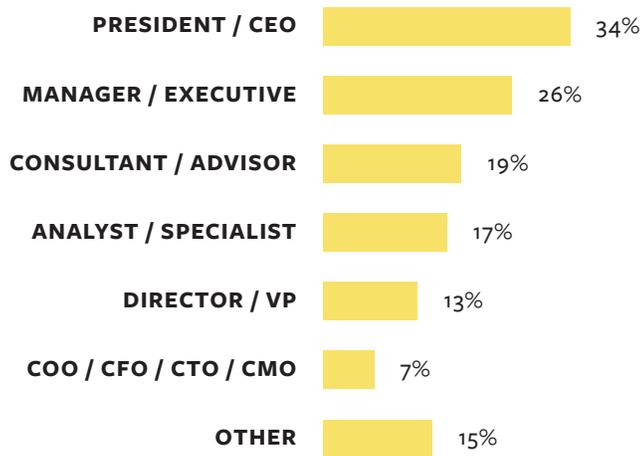


Figure 17

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How the Information was Gathered

We used a combination of email and social media to invite people to take the survey. We emailed our respective in-house lists as well as posted updates to our social media followers on Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and G+. RainToday generously included a link to the survey in one of their emails. (We would also like to thank them for giving us feedback on the survey questions.) Derek Edmond and Casie Gillette of KoMarketing Associates and Dianna Huff, of DH Communications, Inc. developed the survey and wrote the report. Data was initially analyzed and charted by KoMarketing Associates intern Liza Semenova.



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KoMarketing is a B2B online marketing agency specializing in search engine, social media, and content marketing. Celebrating over ten years of client success stories, KoMarketing helps build the connections that drive B2B business results through highly customized marketing programs. Casie Gillette, Director of Online Marketing, can be reached at casieg@komarketingassociates.com or Twitter [@CasieG](https://twitter.com/CasieG). Derek Edmond, Managing Partner, can be reached at derek@komarketingassociates.com or Twitter [@DerekEdmond](https://twitter.com/DerekEdmond). Follow KoMarketing on Twitter as well [@KoMarketing](https://twitter.com/KoMarketing).