

EBOOK

The vendor engagement report:

How B2B buyers want to interact



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Intro

How B2B buyers interact with vendors is evolving, but not always in ways vendors expect. While the rise of digital self-service has put more power in buyers' hands, it hasn't replaced the need for trust, responsiveness and meaningful interaction. In fact, the more informed and independent buyers become, the more pressure vendors face to deliver value at every stage of engagement.

What we're seeing isn't a shift from human to digital, but a demand for both with the added complexity of changing buyer expectations, expanding decision-making units, and a growing intolerance for friction. Buyers are still open to outreach, still willing to speak to sales, and still engaging with content. But only when it feels relevant, respectful and timely.

This isn't about optimising one channel or fixing a leaky funnel. It's about rethinking what meaningful engagement looks like when your buyers are more empowered, more pressed for time, and more sceptical than ever before.

The data in this report is from our 2025 [The B2B buyer report](#), where we surveyed over 500 B2B buyers from across business functions to share their insights into the B2B buying process.



THE FIRST VENDOR TOUCHPOINT IS A MATTER OF CHOICE



What we found:

When asked how they prefer to engage with a vendor for the first time, B2B buyers were almost evenly split:

- 30% want to speak directly to a sales representative
- 30% prefer to request a product demo or trial
- 20% choose to visit a vendor website and evaluate independently



What's your preferred way to engage with a vendor for the first time?

7%

Attend a webinar or event

12%

Download a piece of gated content

30%

Request a product demo or trial

30%

Speak directly to a sales representative

20%

Visit their website and evaluate independently

THE FIRST VENDOR TOUCHPOINT IS A MATTER OF CHOICE

What this tells us:

The split in preferences reflects a fundamental truth: modern buyers want to steer their own journeys. And more importantly, they expect vendors to offer the flexibility to do so.

This means creating a blend of direct and passive ways to engage, whether that's exploring independently, watching a demo, or connecting directly with a sales representative. One-size-fits-all journeys just don't cut it anymore.

Buyer role and stage also have a big impact on engagement preferences. For example, an initiator tasked with researching a specific challenge is far more likely to value self-directed web content, while a decision-maker later in the process may expect clear pricing and a tailored walkthrough. The format and timing of your engagement need to flex accordingly.

This is especially important given the growing complexity of B2B buying cycles. Buyers are shifting away from rigid, single-channel tactics and towards a multichannel engagement strategy that helps buyers self-navigate their path with less friction. They don't want to be funnelled, they want to feel supported, understood, and in control. And this shift isn't just about scale; it reflects how multichannel access helps buyers maintain control of their journey.

According to McKinsey, B2B buyers now use an average of ten interaction channels throughout the buying journey, double what it was in 2016. But it's not just about being everywhere, it's about being purposeful in how you show up.

By mapping out buyer roles, identifying intent signals, and balancing direct engagement with self-serve content, vendors can reduce friction and help buyers navigate on their own terms. When every interaction is aligned to a buyer's level of readiness, the next step feels natural, not forced.



ONE BUYING GROUP, MANY JOURNEYS

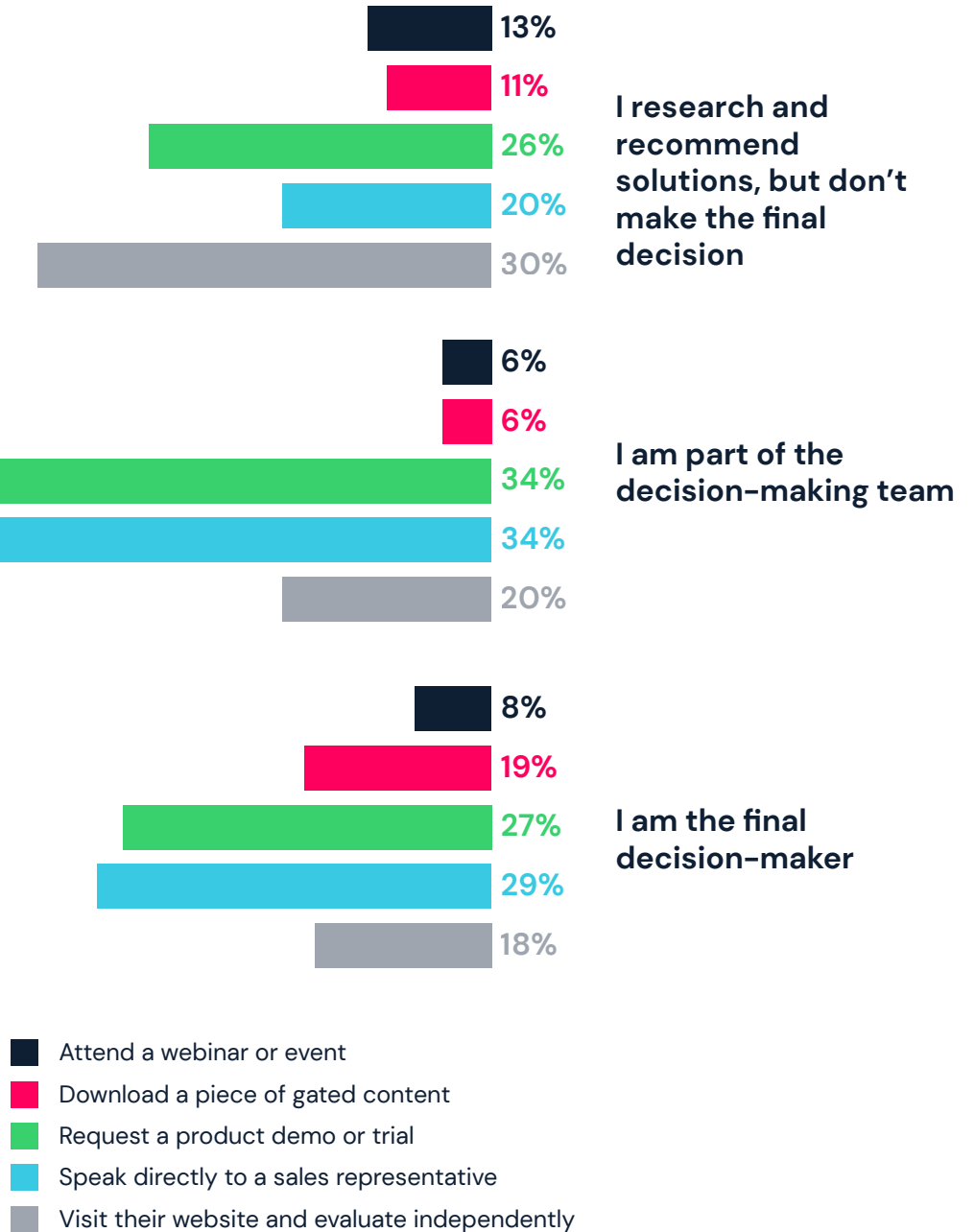


What we found:

- There is a clear link between a buyer's role in the decision-making process and their preferred engagement method:
- 30% of those conducting initial research prefer to evaluate independently via the vendor's website
- Final decision-makers are more likely to download gated content (19%) and prefer direct engagement with vendors



What's your preferred way to engage with a vendor for the first time?



ONE BUYING GROUP, MANY JOURNEYS

What this tells us:

The B2B buying group isn't a single audience, it's a network of stakeholders, each with their own goals, pain points and ways of engaging. Understanding this nuance is key to designing journeys that actually work.

Researchers value autonomy and exploration. They're gathering information to scope out solutions and prefer ungated content, product comparisons, and case studies. Meanwhile, decision-makers are looking for confidence: ROI proof points, pricing clarity, and the opportunity to ask questions directly.

As a result, the same piece of content or call to action (CTA) may land very differently depending on who is engaging with it.

Research by 6sense shows that the modern B2B buying committee continues to fragment, with distinct roles engaging at different times through different channels. Marketing leaders engage early and favour benchmarking resources, while operations or IT stakeholders dig into detailed specs later in the process. Tailoring vendor engagement strategies to each buyer role isn't a bonus, it's a baseline.

Building multichannel tactics into every stage of the buying process ensures that every stakeholder (regardless of role or readiness can choose how and when to engage. And when the next step aligns with their intent, buyers are significantly more likely to take it. It's no longer enough to meet your audience where they are. You have to offer them a next step that feels natural and useful.

So ask yourself: are your touchpoints truly aligned to different levels of buying readiness and need? Or are they built around your funnel, rather than your buyer?



ONE BUYING GROUP, MANY JOURNEYS

Action points:

Make your engagement strategy easier to apply by working through these key principles:

Map the journey by buyer role

Understand the distinct paths taken by researchers, influencers, and decision-makers. Use behavioural and intent scoring to identify the critical points where self-serve resources or human touchpoints are most effective.

Balance self-serve with direct interaction

Blend low-friction, exploratory options with more personal, high-touch support. Early-stage buyers may prefer ungated content or product pages, while later-stage buyers might want pricing clarity or a live conversation.

Plan multichannel tactics for every stage

Use a mix of channels (email, web, live chat, sales outreach, and social) to ensure buyers can engage how they want, when they want. This keeps them in control while helping you stay relevant at every step.

Align your touchpoints to buyer readiness

Ensure that your CTAs, content types, and follow-ups reflect the buyer's intent, not your internal timeline. Buyers are far more likely to act when the next step feels aligned to their needs and not forced into your funnel.

Buyers don't follow a straight line. So build flexibility into your engagement plan, and meet them wherever they are, with what they need.



WHAT TRIGGERS A BUYER TO WANT TO ENGAGE WITH A NEW VENDOR?



What we found:

58% of buyers said growth or scaling needs was the biggest trigger for searching for a new vendor.

The other top triggers were:

- A specific business challenge or pain point
- Dissatisfaction with a current vendor or solution



What typically triggers your search for a new solution or vendor? (Select 3)

50%

A specific business challenge or pain point

45%

Budgetary changes (e.g. cost reduction mandates)

49%

Dissatisfaction with a current vendor or solution

58%

Growth or scaling needs

30%

Industry or regulatory changes

31%

New leadership or strategic direction

WHAT TRIGGERS A BUYER TO WANT TO ENGAGE WITH A NEW VENDOR?

What this tells us:

Understanding the motivation behind why a buyer is in-market is crucial for ensuring vendors align their USPs to communicate their value to prospective customers. It also opens up a powerful opportunity to connect earlier in the buying cycle, when needs are still being shaped and vendor preferences haven't yet formed. Each of these triggers tells you something different about the buyer's mindset:

- A buyer driven by **growth** is looking for scalability, reliability, and a partner who can evolve with them.
- A buyer tackling a **specific challenge** likely needs technical credibility and content that shows how you've solved this before.
- A buyer who's **dissatisfied with an existing solution** may be highly motivated to switch, but will also be sensitive to overpromises and risk.

The more you can anticipate and reflect these motivations in your messaging, the easier it becomes to open meaningful conversations.

And it's not just about messaging. It's about timing. Vendors who can accurately identify when a company is about to enter a buying cycle have a significant first-mover advantage.



WHAT TRIGGERS A BUYER TO WANT TO ENGAGE WITH A NEW VENDOR?

Action points:

Make timing and intent part of your go-to-market planning:

Leverage buyer intelligence to understand why specific accounts are in-market

Use intent signals and historical triggers to build targeted messaging strategies that match real buyer motivation.

Use predictive analytics to prioritise accounts with the highest propensity to move in-market

Tools that track research patterns or compare behaviours across known buying cycles help you focus where the opportunity is strongest.

Match triggers to content and channels

A buyer researching due to dissatisfaction may want reassurance, reviews, and transparency. A buyer focused on growth may respond better to scalability case studies or future-proofing roadmaps.

Train commercial teams to recognise and respond to different trigger profiles

Don't treat every in-market signal the same. Equip your teams with context so their outreach feels timely and informed, not templated.

By shifting from reactive engagement to insight-led timing, you can intercept buyers before your competitors do, and build trust from the first interaction.



MAKE OR BREAK: THE SPEED OF YOUR INTERACTIONS MATTER



What we found:

Two of the biggest frustrations included:

- Aggressive or overly persistent follow-ups (63%)
- Slow response times (61%)

=



What are your top 3 frustrations when interacting with vendors?

63%

Aggressive or overly persistent follow-ups

61%

Slow response times to inquiries

MAKE OR BREAK: THE SPEED OF YOUR INTERACTIONS MATTER

What this tells us:

As human-led engagement becomes less common during the early stages of the B2B buyer journey, the moments when a buyer does choose to engage directly take on greater significance. These moments need to be handled with care, precision, and genuine responsiveness because they often set the tone for the entire relationship.

Timely, high-quality engagement isn't a nice-to-have; it's a dealmaker. As many as **35–50% of buyers** will choose the vendor that responds first. That means your speed of response can be just as important as your messaging or offering.

And while TrustRadius reports that 100% of B2B buyers want to self-serve at least part of their journey, they still expect quick, contextually relevant support when they do reach out. It's no longer enough to simply follow up; you have to follow up well.

Action point:

Make responsiveness measurable.

Prioritise follow-up speed and quality in your SLAs. Set benchmarks, review them regularly, and make lead response time a key performance indicator across commercial teams.



RELEVANT ENGAGEMENT IS ESSENTIAL TO DEAL PROGRESSION



What we found:

Relevancy is more important than ever, with buyers feeling frustrated by:

- Lack of transparent pricing (69%)
- Poor understanding of my business needs (56%)
- Overly generic or irrelevant communication (51%)



What are your top 3 frustrations when interacting with vendors?

69%

Lack of clear pricing information

51%

Overly generic or irrelevant communication

56%

Poor understanding of my business needs

RELEVANT ENGAGEMENT IS ESSENTIAL TO DEAL PROGRESSION

What this tells us:

These frustrations reveal a common thread: buyers feel unheard, undervalued, or even manipulated by vendor interactions that prioritise the seller's process over the buyer's experience. When outreach is impersonal, or irrelevant, it doesn't just fail to convert; it actively erodes trust.

The same goes for pricing that's hidden behind opaque processes or slow, impersonal replies that feel like an afterthought. In each case, the buyer is left feeling like a lead on a spreadsheet, not a professional making an informed business decision.

These pain points often stem from a breakdown in internal alignment. Marketing and sales may be operating on outdated lead scoring criteria or legacy workflows that ignore how buyers actually behave.

Pressure to convert quickly can lead to overzealous sales tactics, while overly templated messaging strips away any sense of relevance. Poor tech integration, underused CRM capabilities, and a lack of behavioural insight also contribute to missed cues and tone-deaf communication.

And crucially, many vendors are still designing outreach around what's easiest for their teams, not what's most helpful for their buyers.

Gartner reports that 77% of B2B buyers say their last purchase was very complex or difficult. In the same study, the top factor that helped simplify decisions was access to high-quality information delivered in a timely, digestible way. In other words, the vendors who make the buying process easier are the ones that win.

Action point:

Prioritise clarity, responsiveness, and contextual relevance across your funnel. That means rethinking lead handoffs, reviewing outreach cadence, and assessing whether your content and sales assets actually help buyers make progress. Empathy isn't soft, it's strategic. When baked into your approach, it creates a buying experience that builds confidence, not confusion.



THE FUTURE OF HUMAN-LED VENDOR ENGAGEMENT IS UNDER THREAT



What we found:

When looking at the role of AI in B2B buying, we found that:

- 84% of B2B buyers trust AI and automated tools to support their buying journey
- 55% rely on AI during the later stages of the buying process, not just early-stage discovery



How likely are you to trust AI or automated tools in guiding you through a buying journey?

34%

Very likely—I trust AI as long as it's relevant

50%

Somewhat likely—I'm open to it, but I prefer human guidance

4%

Not likely at all

12%

Not very likely—I don't rely on AI for these decisions

THE FUTURE OF HUMAN-LED VENDOR ENGAGEMENT IS UNDER THREAT

What this tells us:

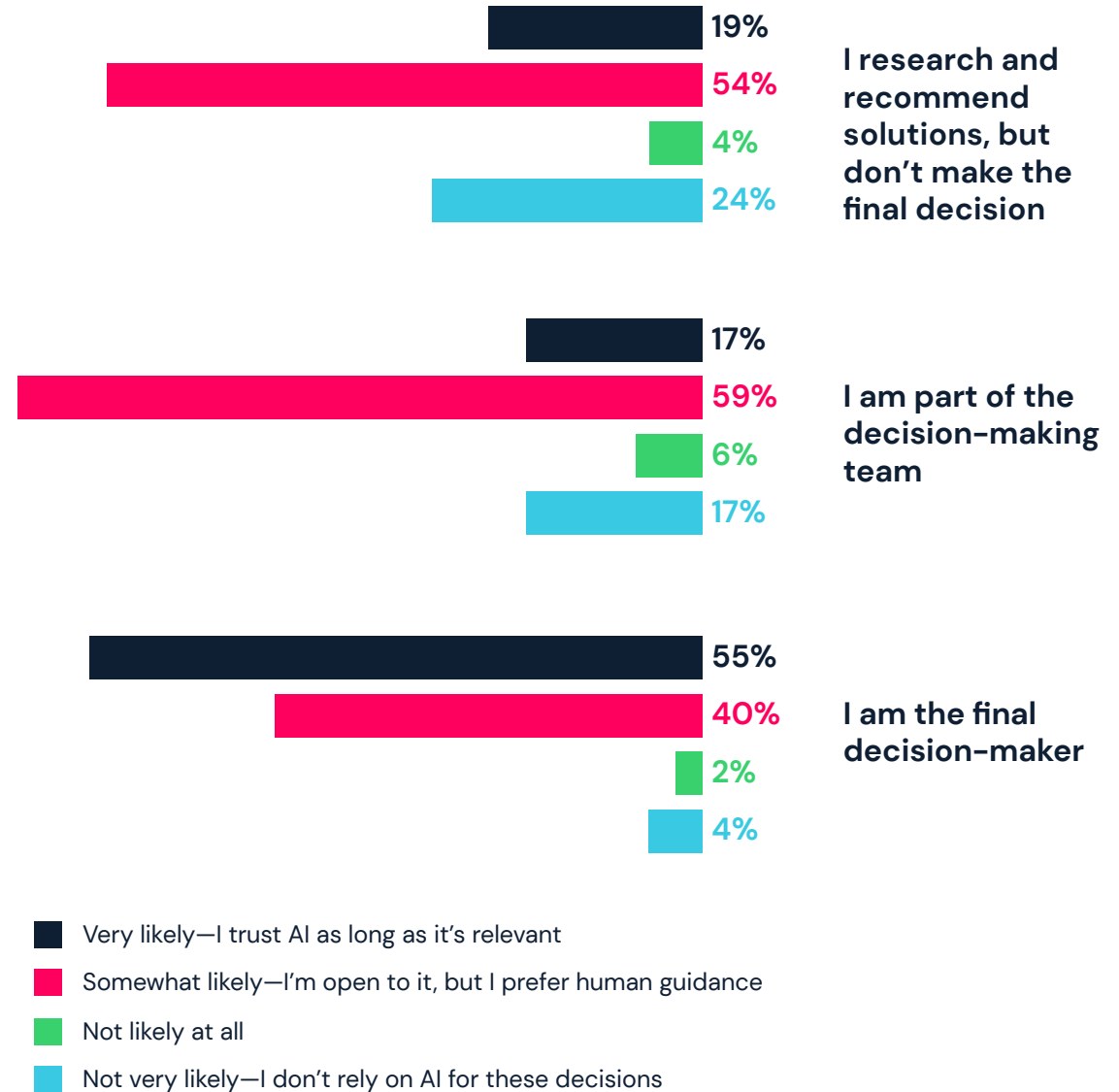
AI is no longer just a research assistant for early-stage buyers, it's influencing how decisions are made at every stage. Vendors can no longer assume that a personal touchpoint or well-timed outreach alone will seal the deal. Instead, the buying journey is being shaped by algorithms, predictive models, and recommendation engines that prioritise relevance, speed, and clarity.

This means vendors must evolve their content strategies and engagement channels to be AI-ready. That includes:

- Optimising web content to align with the conversational, intent-driven queries that AI tools are now prioritising and surfacing in results
- Structuring pricing and service information so it can be easily picked up and displayed by AI assistants
- Ensuring reviews, FAQs, and third-party content reflect consistent, accurate messaging

It also requires rethinking objection handling. Many buyers now reach the final vendor shortlist without ever speaking to sales, meaning misconceptions, concerns, or blockers need to be addressed in the content itself, not left to a sales rep to resolve.

How likely are you to trust AI or automated tools in guiding you through a buying journey?



THE FUTURE OF HUMAN-LED VENDOR ENGAGEMENT IS UNDER THREAT

Action points:

To stay competitive, vendors need to adapt to an environment where the first – and sometimes only – impression is mediated by AI. Here's how:

Adapt your channel strategy

Build a multichannel ecosystem that integrates human-led and digital touchpoints. Use tools like live chat, on-demand demos, community platforms, and AI-driven personalisation to support buyers at scale.

Embrace AI as an enabler

Use AI to identify patterns in behaviour, personalise outreach, and surface high-intent opportunities, but also ensure your content is AI-friendly. That means clarity, relevance, and structured data that supports indexing and visibility.

Build trust beyond the buying group

Influence happens before intent is clear. Focus on community engagement and industry thought leadership so your reputation precedes you online, in forums, and, yes, even through AI engines that prioritise trusted sources.

Reimagine human engagement

Use your human touchpoints more strategically. When buyers do speak to someone, they're often further along in their buying journey so make sure your team is armed with the insights and context to deliver value instantly.



WHAT THE BEST VENDORS DO DIFFERENTLY

Based on the data and broader industry trends, high-performing vendors are no longer treating engagement as a generic set of tactics. They're building responsive systems that prioritise flexibility, intelligence, and empathy. These vendors:



Offer multiple first-touch options that align with different levels of buying readiness, whether that's live chat for quick questions, product demos for evaluators, or SEO-optimised content for self-directed researchers.



Tailor messaging based on role, company size, and behavioural intent using insights from intent data, CRM segmentation, and real-time activity tracking.



Make pricing accessible early. They understand that obscurity breeds mistrust and that even indicative pricing or tiered ranges can reduce friction and build credibility.



Create a seamless bridge between marketing and sales, using shared frameworks, feedback loops, and buyer-centric KPIs to stay aligned throughout the funnel.



Calibrate follow-up cadences not by arbitrary timelines, but by actual buyer engagement, such as looking for signals like return visits, content downloads, or interaction with nurture flows.



Embrace AI and automation to enhance – not replace – human interactions. Use AI to surface intent signals, personalise outreach at scale, and adapt your messaging in real time based on behaviour.



Build adaptive channel strategies that flex based on buyer behaviour. Whether it's paid, organic, or outbound, vendors need to design orchestrated journeys that follow the buyer, not force them down a path.

They understand effective engagement isn't about being omnipresent. It's about being purposefully present, by offering value at the moment it matters most, and stepping back when it doesn't.

WHAT THE BEST VENDORS DO DIFFERENTLY

What this looks like in practice:

- A researcher discovers ungated technical content via organic search, with smart interlinking that nudges them deeper into the site
- A decision-maker receives a demo invitation personalised with ROI case studies relevant to their industry
- A procurement lead receives an auto-generated pricing breakdown tailored to their company size after requesting a case study
- A dormant lead is re-engaged with intent-triggered messaging based on recent company activity

Action point:

Don't treat engagement as a checklist. Treat it as an experience. Rebuild your strategy around the way buyers actually move, non-linear, unpredictable, and highly selective. Your goal isn't just to get their attention. It's to earn their time, their trust, and eventually, their business.



FINAL TAKEAWAYS

B2B buyers want to be in control of how and when they engage.
That means:

- Offering multiple paths to engage, whether that's direct contact with sales, self-directed research, or hands-on product trials.
- Demonstrating clear understanding of the buyer's industry, role, and business challenges from the very first touch.
- Recognising that engagement preferences shift depending on the stakeholder. A researcher exploring options needs different information and tone than a CFO nearing final approval.
- Avoiding common friction points like hidden pricing, boilerplate outreach, and unnecessary sales pressure. These mistakes don't just slow the deal, they risk killing it entirely.
- Delivering personalised, relevant, and timely interactions across the full journey. Buyers expect tailored experiences that reflect their intent, not just their email address.

To succeed in 2025 and beyond, vendors need to move beyond funnel thinking. It's not about stages and handoffs, it's about building trust through meaningful, respectful interactions. Buyers don't want to be pushed through a process. They want to be understood. And that begins with treating engagement not as a transaction, but as a conversation.



Clear guidance on **how to succeed** in demand generation

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Discover how to:

- Use intent-first targeting to identify buyers before they raise their hands
- Tailor your content strategy to align with specific job roles and research stages
- Deliver intelligent multitouch frameworks that extend engagement beyond the initial click

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