

2015 CONTENT PREFERENCES SURVEY

BUYERS PLACE HIGH VALUE ON INTERACTIVE
CONTENT FORMATS AND CONTENT PACKAGES

INTRO

The content marketing landscape has seen some dramatic changes since our initial *Content Preferences Survey* in 2012. While white papers and webinars remain among the most popular types of content for engaging prospects, buyers are increasingly relying on infographics, videos and other interactive content, such as ROI calculators and assessments, as they make their buying decisions.

It is no surprise that about two thirds (67%) rely more on content to research and make purchasing decisions than they did a year ago. Buyers are consuming a wider variety of content types depending on where they are in the decision-making process. While a webinar may draw in a prospect during the early stages of their research, they want more detailed and industry-specific information as they make their way through the sales funnel.

As buyers view more content, they want it to be easily digestible, such as packages of related content that they can refer to as they progress through the buying cycle. Shorter,

interactive formats continue to win the day, as nearly three quarters (74%) report that they have less time to view content than they did a year ago.

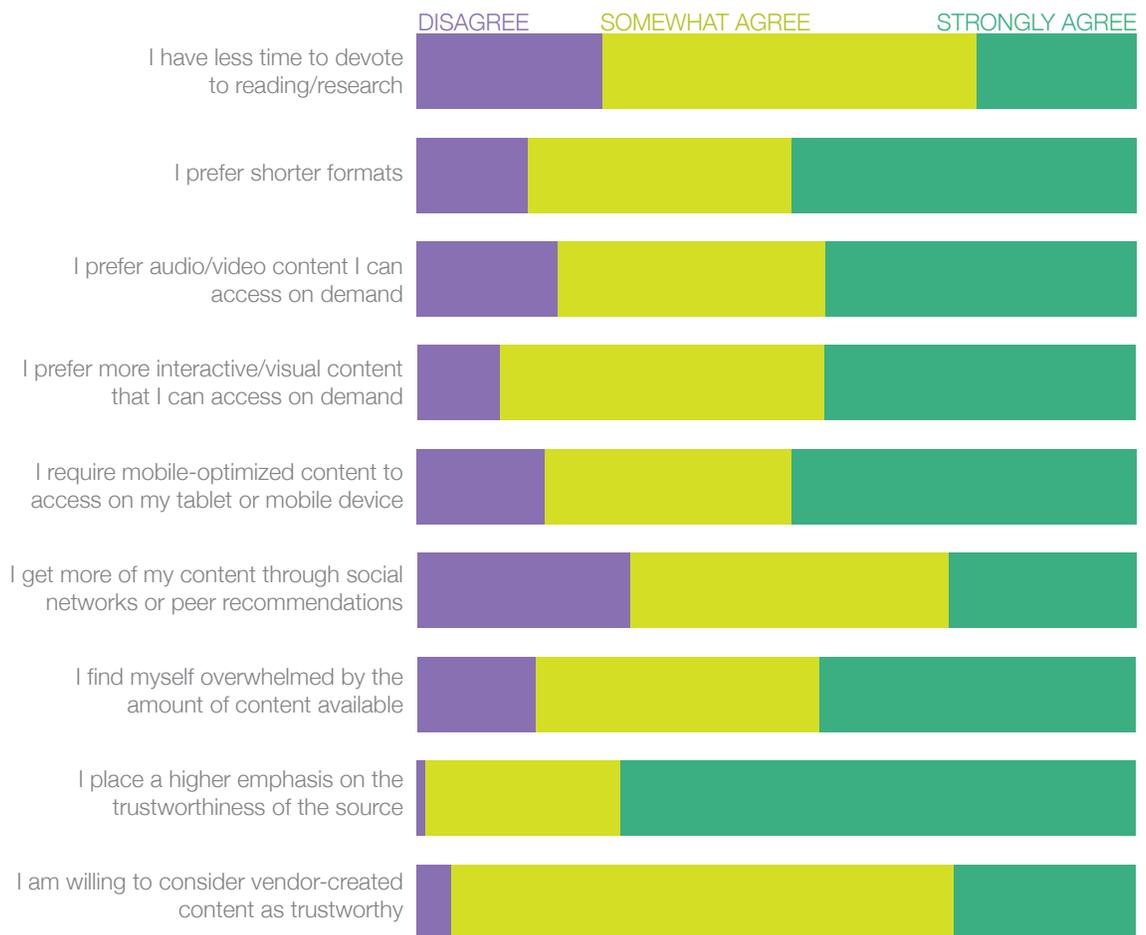
Buyers are also broadening the channels through which they consume and share content. They increasingly rely on peer recommendations and social networks for their content.

Mobile devices — particularly tablets — are the way that many buyers are consuming business-related content. There was a significant rise in tablet use over the past year, with 60% saying they occasionally or frequently use tablets to view content, compared to just 37% over the previous year. An overwhelming majority (86%) said they occasionally or frequently accessed content on mobile phones in our 2014 survey, and that number remained steady this year.



INTERACTIVE FORMATS GAIN GROUND

How have your B2B content consumption habits changed over the past year?



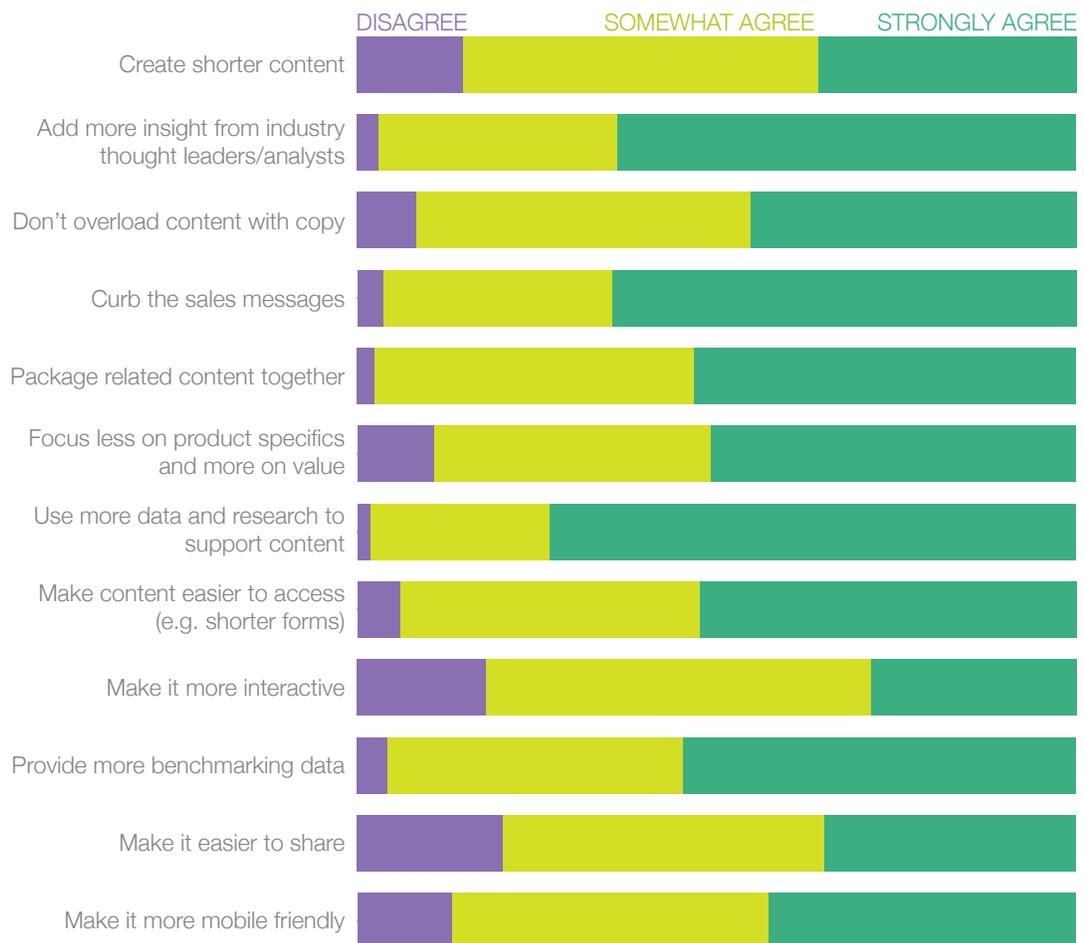
When asked to share how their content consumption habits have changed over the past year, there was little variance from the previous year. An overwhelming number of buyers (91%) agree or strongly agree that they prefer more interactive/visual content that can be accessed on demand, up from 88% the previous year.

In a year-over-year comparison, slightly fewer respondents (87% in 2014 vs. 83% in 2015) said they felt overwhelmed by the amount of content available.

While shorter content is still preferred by the majority (85%), that number is down slightly from the 95% of the previous year.

BUYERS WANT PACKAGES OF RELATED CONTENT

What recommendations would you make to improve the quality of the content created/provided by B2B vendors?



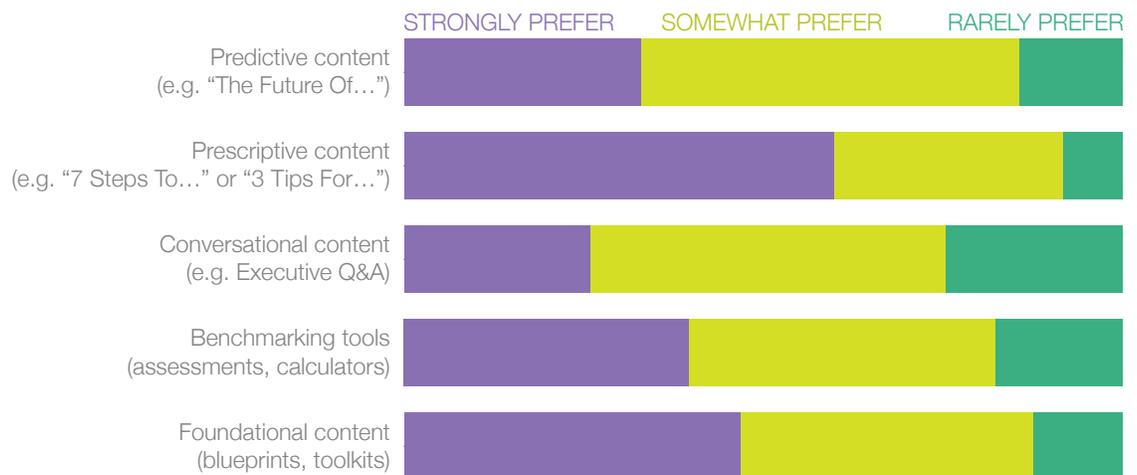
Buyers don't typically rely on just one white paper or infographic to help them make their buying decision. When asked how vendors could improve the quality of their content, 53% strongly recommend that marketers package related content together, and another 44% somewhat agree.

Also high on the list of suggested improvements was the use of more research to support content, with 73% stating that they strongly agree and 25% somewhat agree.

As in years past, buyers are looking for less sales-oriented content, with nearly three quarters (65%) saying they strongly recommend curbing the sales message, and 32% somewhat agree.

BUYERS PREFER PRESCRIPTIVE AND FOUNDATIONAL CONTENT

Please describe your preferences for the following general content types.



When evaluating general content types, respondents had the highest preference for prescriptive content, with 92% stating that they gravitate toward this type of content, a slight increase from the previous year.

Just a few percentage points behind was foundational content. An overwhelming majority (88%) stated a preference for this type of content, mirroring the results of the previous year.

Conversational content, such as executive Q&As, also resonated with most respondents, as 75% stated a preference for this type of content, which closely aligned with results from the previous survey.

3 TOP CONTENT TYPES

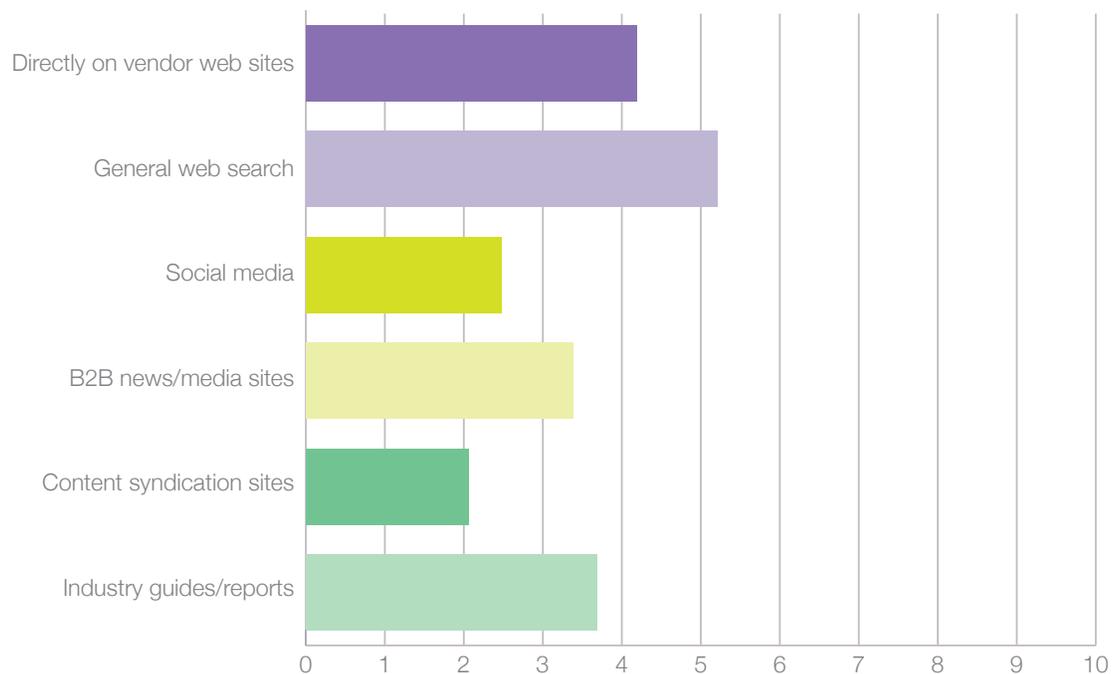
- Foundational content
- Prescriptive content
- Conversational content



WEB SEARCH FIRST STOP FOR RESEARCH

Where do you go to begin the process of researching a B2B purchasing decision?

(Rank between 1 and 6, with 6 = top priority.)



When asked where they go to begin the process of researching a buying decision, a general web search is still the starting point for 61% of respondents, which is in line with the previous year's results.

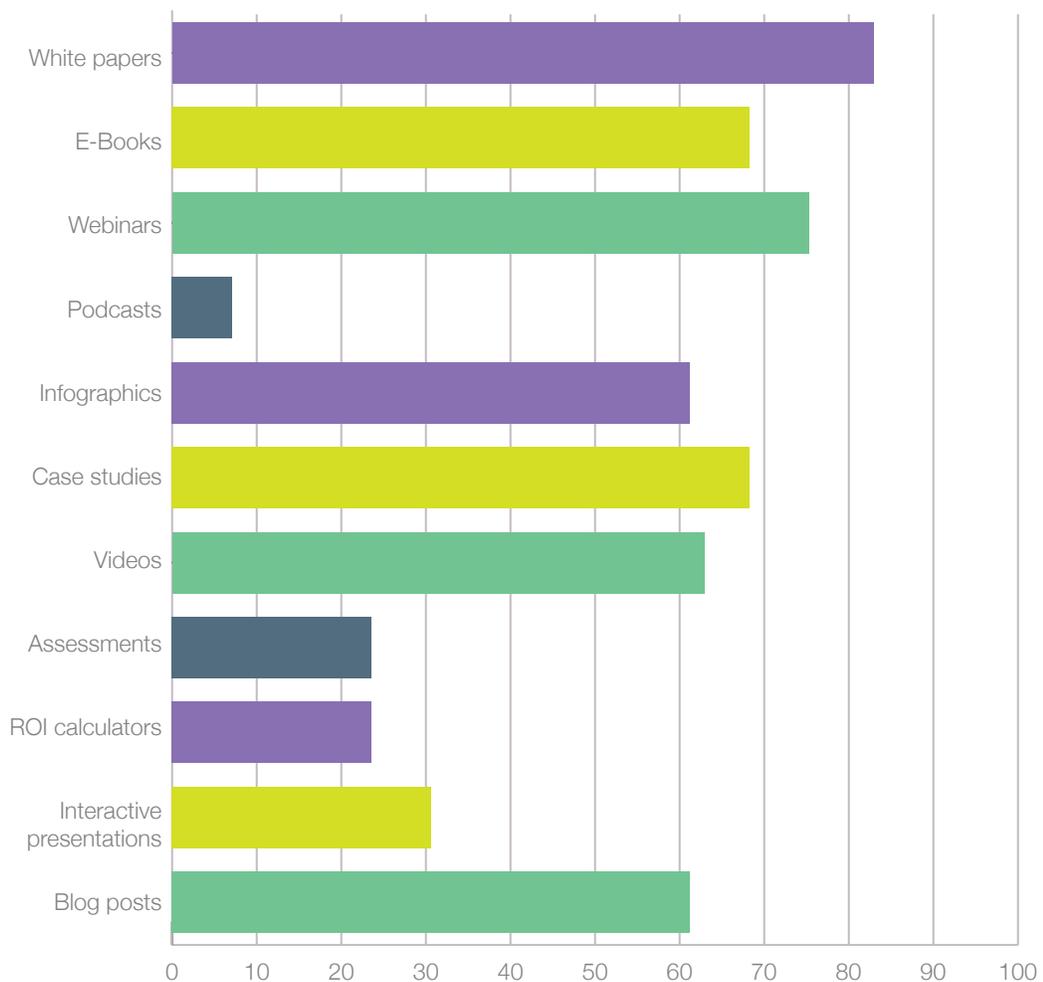
While marketers have invested more time and energy in social media, buyers are still not using the channel during their initial investigation of a purchase. While 70% said they get more of their content through

social media and peer recommendations, they are turning to social networks later in the buying cycle.

One quarter ranked social media among their top three choices, which was essentially flat from the previous year. And even more respondents ranked it as their sixth choice, with 36% ranking it as their last choice this year, compared to 24% in 2014.

MORE BUYERS ACCESS INTERACTIVE CONTENT

Which types of content have you used during the past 12 months to research B2B purchasing decisions? (check all that apply)



White papers, E-Books and webinars are still the go-to content types, and buyers still rank these among the top three content formats that they have accessed over the past 12 months. White papers were at 83%, compared to 78% from the previous year. E-Books made an even

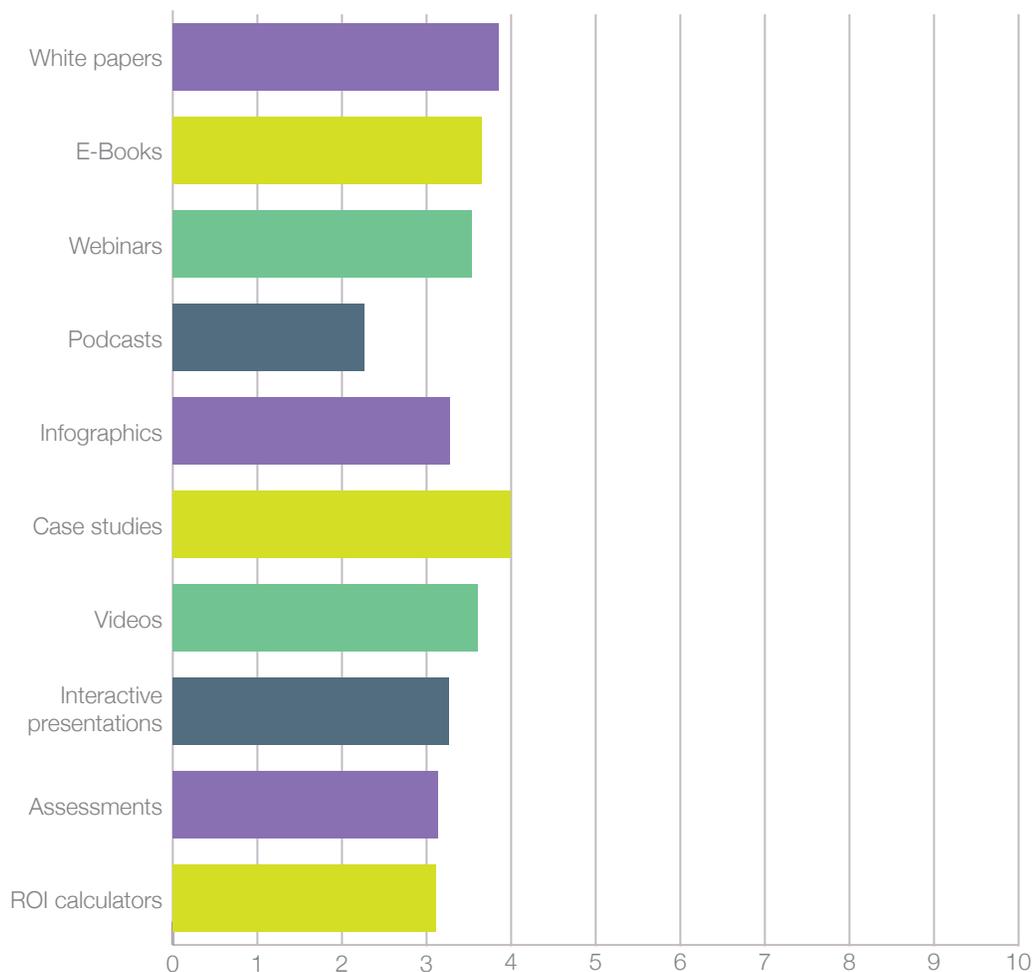
more significant jump, rising to 68%, compared to 58% the year before.

Interactive presentations, ROI calculators and assessments made some small gains, each up a few percentage points from the previous year.

INTERACTIVE TOOLS RISING IN VALUE

What do you feel are the most valuable online content formats for researching B2B purchases?

(rate on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5=most effective)



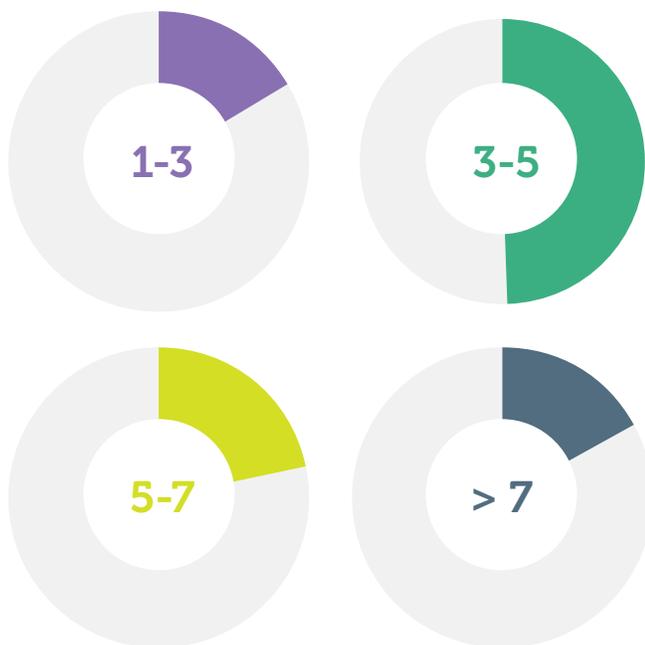
While interactive presentations, ROI calculators and assessment tools ranked below the more traditional content formats, buyers assigned a high value to these tools.

Nearly half (45%) of respondents ranked interactive presentations a four or five on a scale of five, while only 31% had accessed

this type of content in the past 12 months. Although only 23% had used an ROI calculator in the past year, 42% had ranked them a four or five. Assessments followed a similar pattern, with 24% having accessed an assessment over the past year, but 40% placed a high value on this content type.

MOST BUYERS VIEW THREE TO FIVE PIECES OF CONTENT BEFORE ENGAGING

How many pieces of content have you typically consumed before engaging with a salesperson?



Nearly half (45%) of buyers reported that they have viewed three to five pieces of content before engaging with a salesperson. Almost one quarter (22%) of respondents consumed five to seven pieces of content before contacting a salesperson.

More than half (56%) of respondents reported that over the past year they consumed more content before speaking with a salesperson. More than two thirds (40%) said they consumed about the same amount, and only 4% said they view fewer pieces of content.

56%

of respondents reported that they consumed more content before speaking with a salesperson over the past year.

BLOGS, WHITE PAPERS AND E-BOOKS MOST WIDELY SHARED

I share the following content types with my colleagues. (check all that apply)

■ Never ■ Rarely ■ Sometimes ■ Frequently



It stands to reason that the most widely viewed content is also the content that buyers are most likely to share. White papers, E-Books and webinars are high on the list of content types that buyers are frequently bringing to the attention of their peers.

While those content types are shared often, blog posts remain the most frequently shared pieces of content, with 40% sharing them frequently and 33% sharing them sometimes.

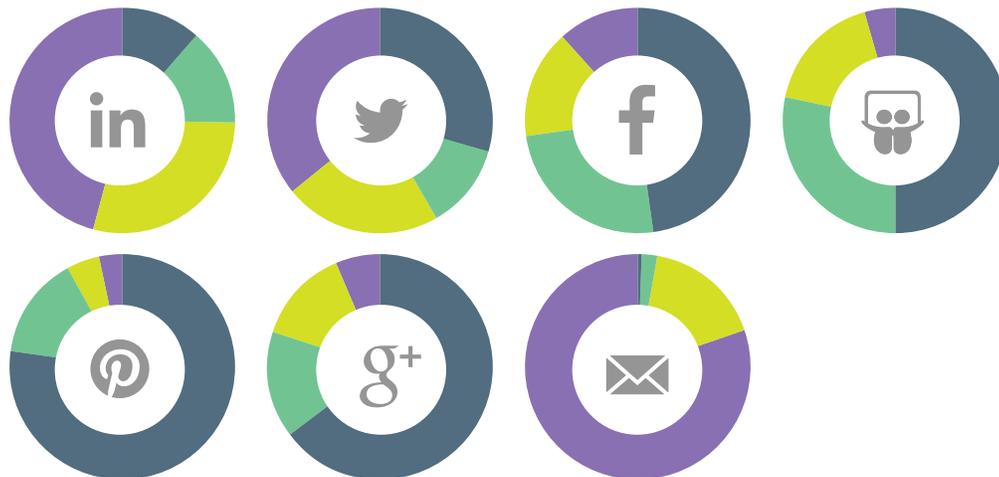
This is only a small change from the previous year, when blog posts were also the most shared content type.

Videos were also often shared, with 50% of respondents reporting that they shared them often and another 20% saying that they shared them frequently. This is down just a few percentage points from the previous survey.

LINKEDIN TOPS SOCIAL NETWORK FOR CONTENT SHARING

I share B2B content over the following channels:

■ Never ■ Rarely ■ Sometimes ■ Frequently



Email is still the most frequent way that buyers share content, with 97% of buyers reporting that they share content with their peers via this channel.

Not surprisingly, when buyers share content with their peers, LinkedIn is the most popular social network. With 76% reporting that they frequently or occasionally use LinkedIn to share content, which is consistent with the previous year. Twitter came in again at number two with 58%, which was nearly identical to the previous year.

Google+ actually lost some ground among this year's respondents, dropping to 20% from 36% the previous year. Facebook also tumbled a bit, dropping to 27% from 38%.

97%

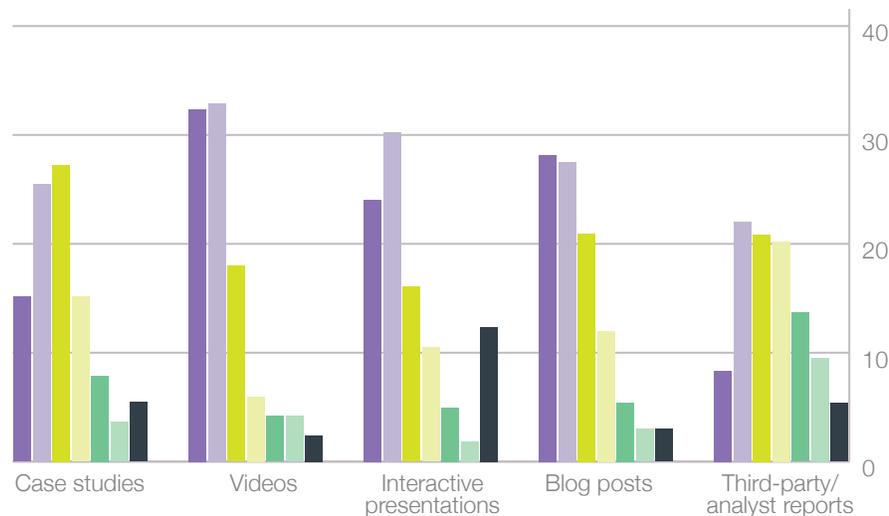
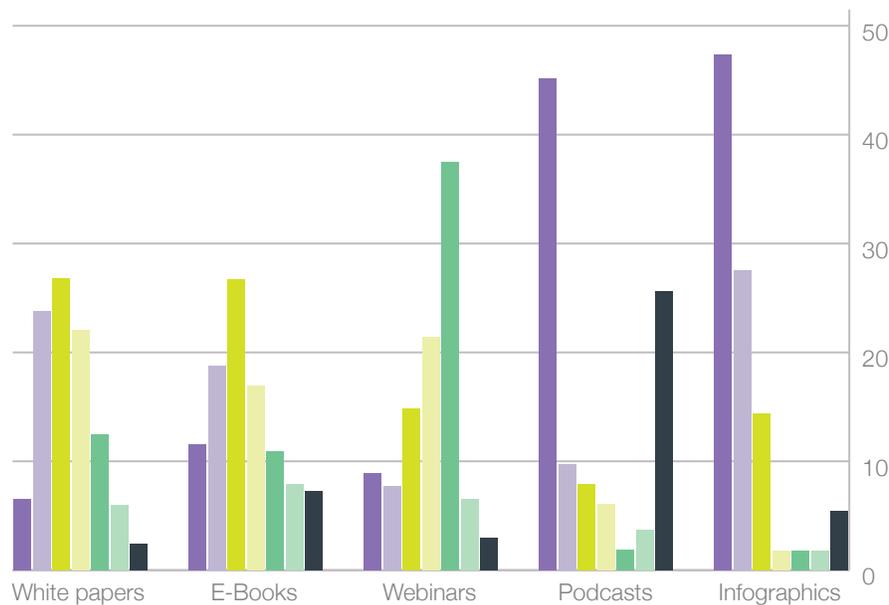
of respondents said email is the most frequent way they share content with their peers.



BUYERS SPEND THE MOST TIME WITH ANALYST REPORTS, E-BOOKS

When researching a B2B purchase, how much time do you typically spend reviewing content in the following formats?

■ < 5 minutes ■ 5 - 10 ■ 10 - 20 ■ 20 - 30 ■ 30 - 60 ■ > 60 ■ N/A



While most buyers indicated that they have less time to spend reviewing content than they did in the previous year, they are still willing to dedicate the time when they find a worthwhile piece of content.

There are very few content types that will capture the attention of buyers for more than an hour, but 10% indicated that they typically spend more than an hour viewing third-party/analyst reports.

Marketers are also willing to carve time out of their schedules for E-Books, with 8% reporting that they typically spend more than an hour with this content format. That is down from 12% in 2014.

When it came to white papers also 6% of respondents noted that they typically spent more than an hour with this type of asset, down from 14% the previous year.

HOW MILLENNIALS CONSUME CONTENT DIFFERENTLY

As more millennials moved into decision-making roles in their organizations, marketers will look to adjust their content strategies to appeal to this group. While their content preferences are not that far afield from the group as a whole, there are some notable differences:

Some ways that millennials differ in the types of content they value (21-29 vs. 40-plus):

- Assessments/ROI Calculators (47% vs. 32%)
- E-books (45% vs. 21%)
- Webinars (29% vs. 15%)
- Infographics (32% vs. 13%)

Their use of social networks also varies from other groups (21-29 vs. 40-plus):

- LinkedIn (50% vs. 42%)
- Twitter (39% vs. 36%)
- SlideShare (15% vs. 1%)
- Facebook (15% vs. 10%)



PEER-REVIEWED CONTENT CARRIES THE MOST WEIGHT

Respondents gave the most credence to peer reviews and user-generated content, with 94% noting that they give this type of content the most weight, which is a few points down from the previous year.

Content authored by a third-party publication or analyst ranked second, with 90% saying that they give credence to this type of asset.

Vendor-branded content did not fare as well, with 74% giving it credence, compared to 79% in the previous survey.

94%

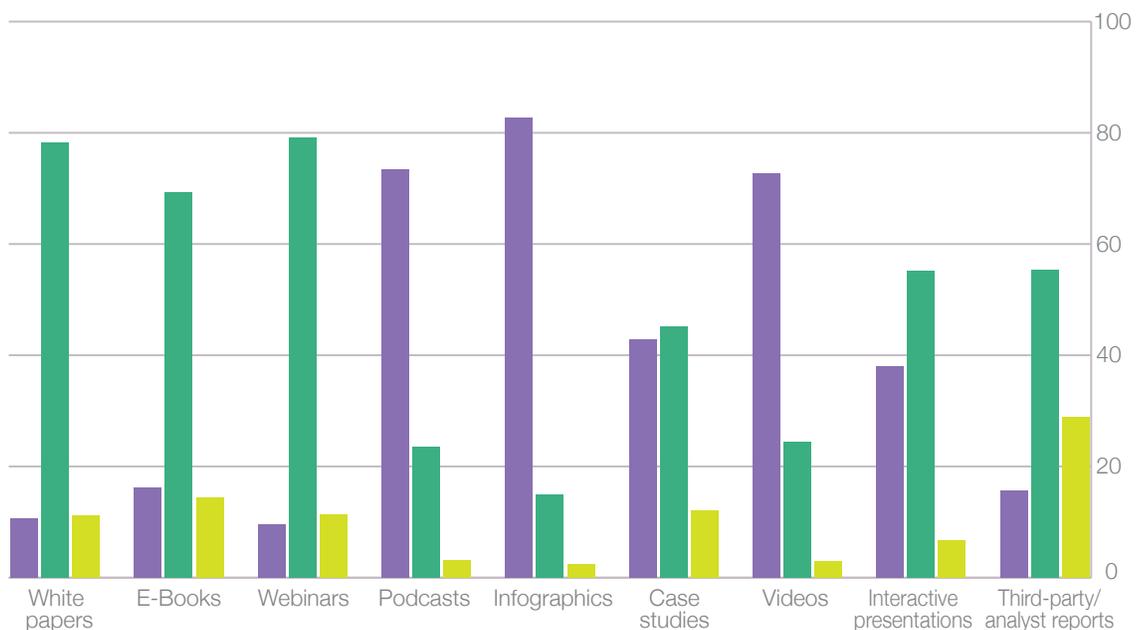
of respondents gave the most credence to peer reviews and user-generated content.



MORE THAN ONE QUARTER WILL SHARE BUYING PLANS FOR ANALYST REPORT ACCESS

Which types of content assets are you willing to register for and share information about you and/or your company?

- Expect to access without registration
- Will share basic info (name, company and email)
- Will provide more detailed info on buying plans



Buyers remain cautious about giving up their contact information or sharing their buying plans in exchange for content, unless that content is highly valuable. More than one quarter (29%) would be willing to give up specifics about their buying plans for access to third-party/analyst reports.

When it comes to white papers, fewer buyers are willing to give up detailed buying plans for access (11% in 2015 vs. 16% in 2014), but more are willing to give up some basic

information (78% vs. 70%), such as name and email address.

To gain webinar access, 79% of buyers expect to have to provide some basic contact information, but only 20% are willing to share detailed buying plans for access. These figures mirror last year's numbers.

Buyers continue to expect access to infographics, videos and podcasts without registration.

CONCLUSION

Buyers continue to crave content, but they want content that educates them rather than pushes product features. This is evidenced by the fact that more than half of respondents strongly recommend that vendors package similar content together to help them along the buyer's journey.

Shorter, more interactive formats, such as assessments and ROI calculators, continue to gain favor with buyers, and they want to mix those formats with more traditional assets, such as white papers, webinars and E-Books.

As in previous surveys, buyers want content that is trustworthy and that keeps the sales message to a minimum. The content they trust the most comes from their peers.

SURVEY DETAILS

The 2015 Content Preferences Survey surveyed 177 buyers of products and services about their use of content in making purchasing decisions.

Approximately 32% of the respondents held C-level or VP-level positions at their companies, while 25% held director-level positions.



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