

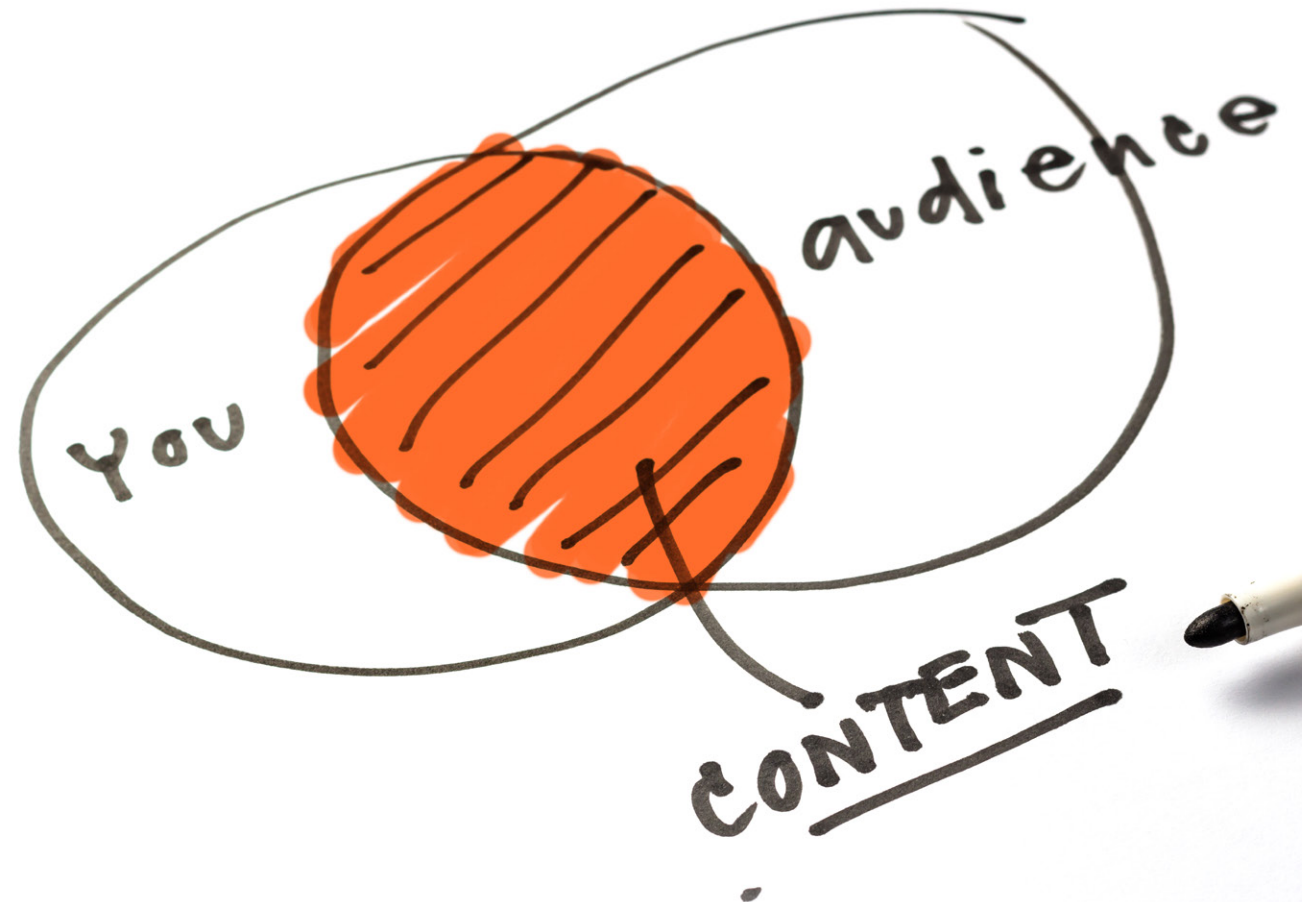
The difference between
winning and losing
in the B2B content battle

SPARK



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Introduction: How to be one in a million

In 2022, almost 600,000 technology companies were registered in the US and 50,000 in the UK. One Forrester analyst has predicted that by 2027, there will be one million software companies in existence around the globe.

The phrase “**a crowded marketplace**” doesn’t even come close.

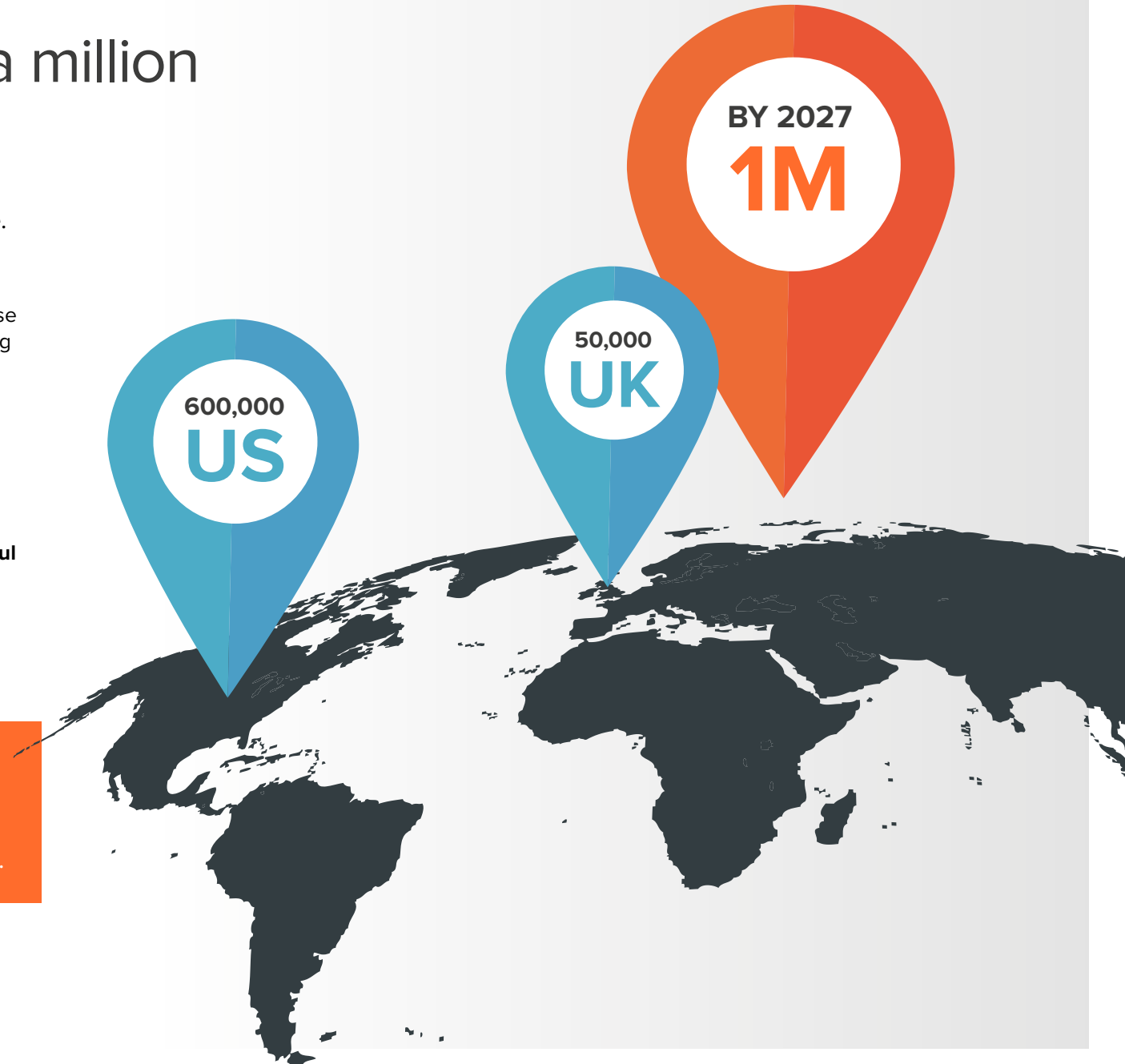
Most of these companies are vying for the attention of the same technology buyers. These buyers are savvy, well-informed individuals who are evidently spoiled for choice. Catching their eyes and ears to capture their hearts and minds is no easy feat. And content has become the fiercest battleground for their attention.

Buyers are being bombarded with content from more sources and in more formats than ever before. One of the biggest challenges facing technology marketing teams is making sure their content cuts through this noise to reach the right buyers and gain their trust.

But winning the content battle is hard. And the overwhelming majority of tech companies don’t have the marketing budgets or reach of what the *New York Times* calls the “**Frightful Five**” – Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google, and Microsoft. Knowing where to direct marketing spend and understanding what content will engage buyers is critical. Because without this knowledge, your content becomes just another drop in the ocean. To find out what tech buyers really want from content, we asked them. Here’s what they told us.

Research Methodology

Conducted by Sapio Research, Spark surveyed 200 senior IT decision makers at organisations across the US (100) and UK (100). Respondents came from private and public sector organisations with 1,000+ employees.



Buyers are bombarded with irrelevant material

While tech buyers are seemingly spoiled for choice when it comes to content, the reality is that most feel they are “constantly bombarded” with generic and irrelevant content they simply don’t engage with.



66%

of tech buyers are constantly bombarded with content from vendors, most of which they do not engage with



69%

of tech buyers are sent content that’s generic and not relevant to their industry and/or region

There is clearly much room for improvement on the part of technology suppliers and vendors. In fact, respondents say around half of the content they receive from tech vendors and suppliers isn’t useful.

Tech buyers say only 52% of content they receive is useful for their day-to-day job



Tech buyers are time-poor people who will not go searching for a needle in a very large content haystack. Businesses must deliver the right content to buyers at the right time – they won’t get a second chance.

By focusing on storytelling and ensuring the delivery of useful insights; marketing and communications professionals can drive far higher ROI from their content.

Search... **Great Content** |



Self-serving content erodes buyers' trust

Deluging recipients with irrelevant and badly targeted content has serious consequences. Buyers will simply “switch off” from a company’s output. If self-serving and irrelevant content was only being ignored, the situation would be recoverable with a targeted content strategy. But as well as being ignored, self-serving material erodes trust with buyers. And when you lose trust, you lose business.



Technology suppliers must design content strategies that give buyers confidence in what they are engaging with and that build trust. Companies will naturally want their content to communicate the benefits of their technology to buyers. But the benefits must be placed in context of what matters to buyers and what the “big picture” is. They can achieve this by understanding more clearly what subjects resonate with their audience.

Our research found that tech buyers are interested in content on subjects like cloud, digital transformation, and AI. But it also highlights that buyers are fed up with the buzzwords that plague enterprise technology marketing. Generic content on these topics will have a negative effect – communications must be targeted to specific industries and pain points to be useful to buyers.

INFORM | ENGAGE AVOID BUZZWORDS

What do tech buyers want to hear about?

Content must be aligned with subjects of most interest – the top three cited topics are **Cloud, Digital Transformation and AI.**

What turns tech buyers off?

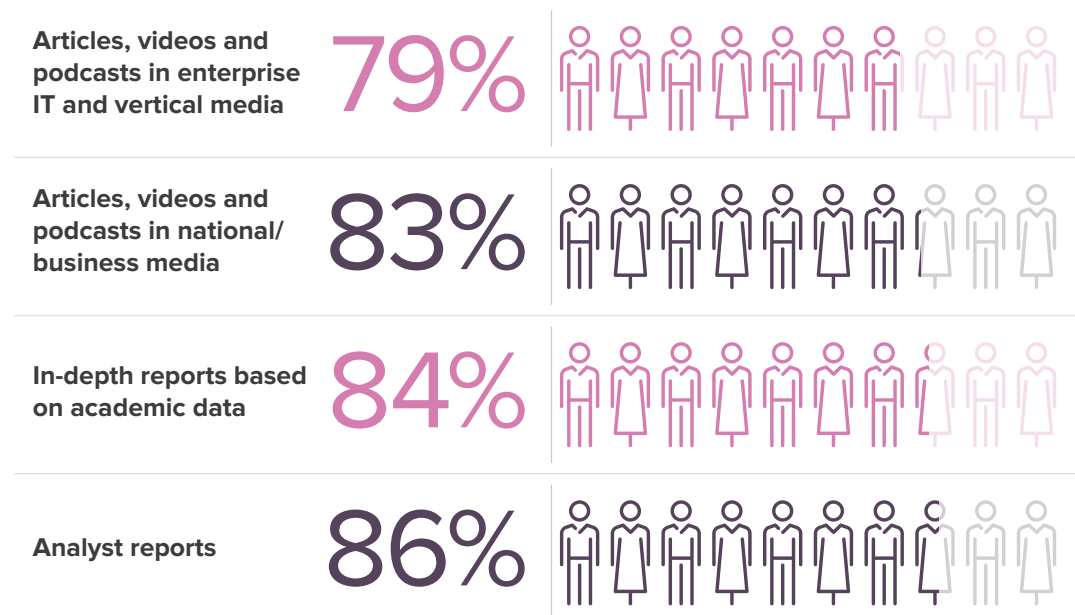
Enterprise technology is littered with buzz-words – **Innovative, Unique and Smart** were the most overused terms by tech suppliers.



Impartial and targeted content builds trust and wins business

The types of content buyers are more likely to value are impartial sources of information, such as analyst reports and academic publications. Similarly, earned media coverage is considered highly influential. Buyers place their trust in articles, videos and podcasts that appear in business and national media, as well as enterprise technology and vertical media.

Percentage of buyers that find the following types of content **“very valuable”**



83%

of tech buyers say seeing a tech supplier regularly named in the media increases their level of awareness of the company



59%

of tech buyers say brand recognition influences which companies they put on an RFP list

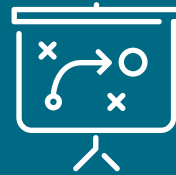
There's no doubt that gaining journalists' attention has become more difficult in recent years as their numbers have dwindled. But the impact of media coverage is beyond question. It's more important than ever for PR and communications strategies to be laser focused on results. For businesses working with a PR agency, that means selecting an agency that will be honest about what won't work in an increasingly competitive media market.



Design content strategies that educate, inform and engage

Today's buyers are under pressure to enable their organisations to innovate at speed, often on a tight budget. Competition is fierce, technology is advancing all the time, and their own customers' expectations continue to grow. Buyers want to feel these challenges are understood by technology suppliers.

81% of buyers want content from tech vendors that shows they understand the challenges of their job



Research and surveys have long since been part of the toolbox for marketing and comms professionals. Yet, we often hear questions about whether this content still works for buyers. The results clearly demonstrate it continues to be some of the most powerful content a business can invest in.

89%

of tech buyers find data and statistics “really useful”

When building a business case for new or increased investment, what sources do you cite?



Data and statistics from tech suppliers

96%



Analyst research

97%



Case studies that demonstrate success from similar investments

97%



Alongside third-party research, case studies are of huge value to the buyer community. It's critical these case studies are benefits-led.

Top tips for benefits-led case studies:

✓ 1.

Ensure the person interviewing your customer can **engage in a meaningful conversation** with them and coach them on telling their story.

✓ 2.

Make sure the interviewer prepares by **researching your customer and their industry**. Have they read your customer's latest annual report or searched for articles about their business strategy?

✓ 3.

Prepare a **list of ideal benefits** you want the customer to validate.





Sponsored content also plays an important role. Utilising the brand credibility of a publication helps drive engagement and trust. Ultimately though, sponsored content must demonstrate thought leadership and avoid self-serving narratives.

83% of tech buyers say sponsored content is a credible source of information

What content do buyers really want?

Buyers will seek content over different channels depending on their needs at a particular time. To educate themselves or stakeholders and stay ahead of industry developments, the most popular channels are academia and media. To build a business case, inform an RFP, or define their technology requirements and strategy, buyers cited analyst organisations and media as the top two channels. This is almost certainly why technology suppliers have typically prioritised investing in media and analyst relations activity.

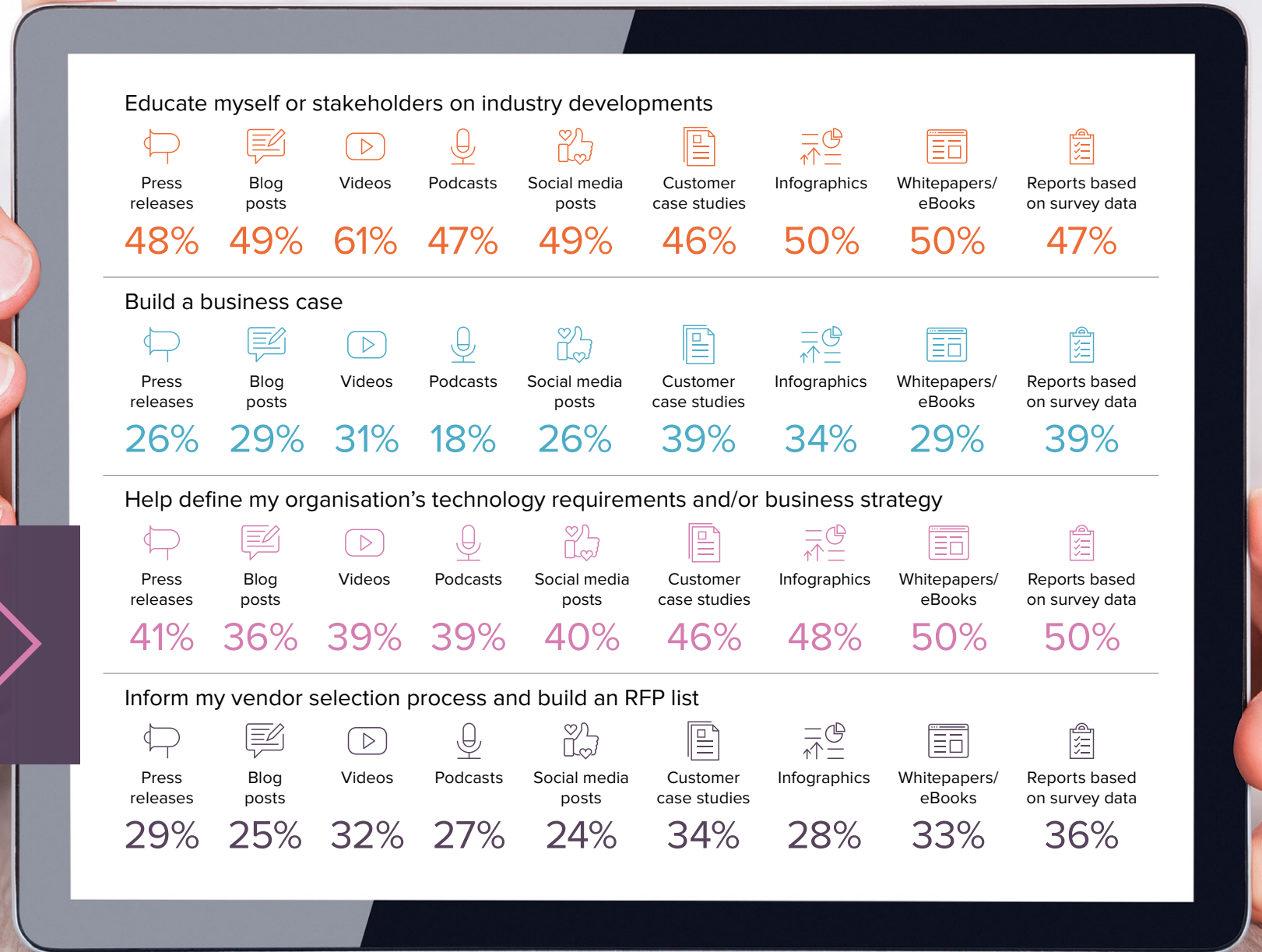
For what reason(s) do you seek content over each channel?

		Educate myself or stakeholders on industry developments	Build a business case	Help define my organisation's technology requirements and/or business strategy	Inform my vendor selection process and build an RFP list
Media		59%	36%	55%	38%
Influencers		48%	28%	51%	27%
Analyst		57%	36%	59%	43%
Academia		65%	26%	47%	25%

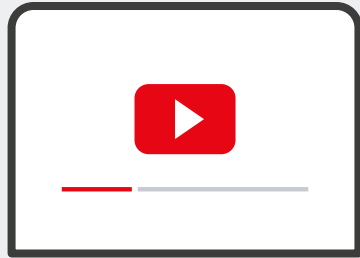
When it comes to content format, for strategic needs like building a business case, defining an organisation's technology requirements and strategy, and informing vendor selection, reports based on survey data are the most popular.

Two other forms of longform content – whitepapers and eBooks – are in demand among buyers for educating themselves and for developing the organisation's tech requirements and strategy. Customer case studies are useful for both staying ahead of industry trends and for defining organisational and business strategies.

For what reason(s) are different content formats useful to you?



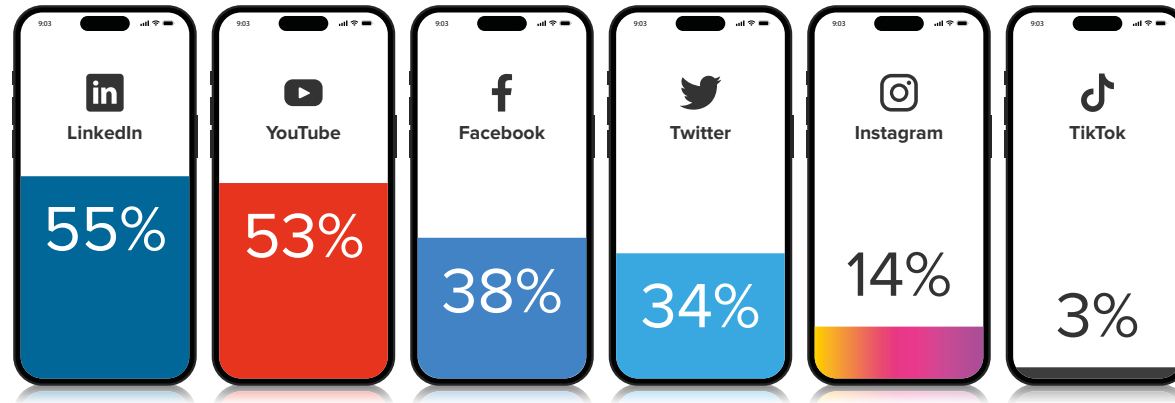
Reflecting the emergence of digital platforms in recent years – podcasts, video, and social media are important for a range of needs. Almost half of tech buyers find podcasts useful for educating themselves or stakeholders, but the single most popular content format for educational purposes is video.



Videos of **2 mins 30 seconds** are the ideal length to keep tech buyers' attention

The most used social channels for work purposes by tech buyers are LinkedIn and YouTube – further underlining that interest in video. Facebook was ranked ahead of Twitter – the influence of which has shrunk as platforms like Instagram and TikTok have gained traction.

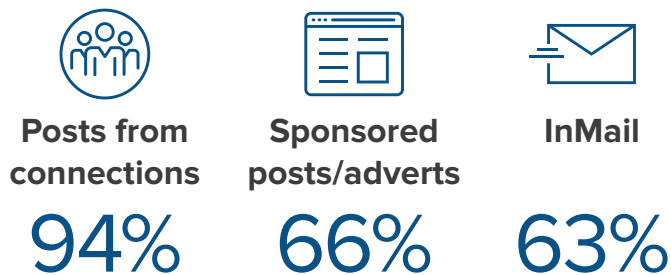
Which social media channels do buyers engage with most regularly for work purposes?



What works for tech buyers who use LinkedIn?



What content from tech suppliers do buyers engage with on LinkedIn?



What promoted content do tech buyers engage with?



Conclusion: Getting back to content basics

It's increasingly difficult for businesses to capture and keep buyers' attention. It is also easy to lose sight of what makes compelling communications. Our research shows that high-quality content, targeted accurately, and delivered by third parties and trusted media, is the way to win buyers' hearts and minds. In other words, businesses need to go back to content basics. If businesses can deliver engaging content, buyers are more likely to trust you and buy from you.

We know this is a challenge. Technology suppliers and vendors are trying to produce content at speed, while trying to explain complex and niche topics across multiple vertical markets in interesting ways. Moreover, content channels keep proliferating. Video has become expected, podcasts are gaining traction, and new social media platforms continue to emerge. Businesses need to be adaptable when it comes to content and be willing to try new avenues of delivery.

But there is an upside to the increase in the number of content channels and formats – businesses have more ways to fulfil the needs of their buyers. If a buyer wants to learn about a new technology, the traditional whitepaper can now be augmented with an accompanying video, eBook, social media promotion and thought leadership content in influential media.

And for a time-poor tech buyer audience, it's important to draw them in quickly. This is why independent research and data-driven content campaigns that get their attention can be so fruitful.



CONTENT
is king

Finally, the old adage of **quality over quantity** remains true. Businesses' content strategies must be founded on an editorial approach that places **substance firmly over style**.

About Spark Communications

Spark is an award-winning b2b technology and life sciences PR and content agency. Every campaign we build whether traditional media, digital or social starts with storytelling. We help you cut to the core of what's interesting and unique about you. We develop stories that are exciting, that you can be proud of and that deliver real business outcomes – from market development to attracting investment.

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