

3RD ANNUAL RESEARCH REPORT - Q1, 2017

CONTENT

CONTENT

HOW TO DELIVER THE RIGHT MESSAGES
AT THE RIGHT TIME



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UBM CONTENT CONNECTS RESEARCH

The annual report studies the content consumption habits of technology professionals, identifying the range of content formats that inform IT buyers and measuring the actions that content inspires. Research was conducted in October 2016 by UBM; analysis and report provided by MarketingProfs. Final data is based on an online survey of 235 qualified IT and business respondents in North America from all sized companies.

DID YOU KNOW THAT IT BUYERS CONTROL AND INFLUENCE **\$2.5 TRILLION** IN BUDGETS EACH YEAR?¹

Although that's a staggering amount, it doesn't make it any easier to get them to buy your technologies and solutions. In reality, it takes a lot of hard work, discipline, and perseverance. That's because in today's highly competitive world, IT buyers have more choices than ever. Plus, since so much of the information they need to inform their purchasing decisions is digital and readily available online, they're progressing much further through the buyer journey on their own before they ever engage with sales.

For these reasons, content has a critical role to play throughout the IT buying cycle. After all, it's your lifeline for communicating with your customers and prospects, and it's an essential tool for engaging and shepherding the many decision-makers involved in large-scale tech purchases.

But simply creating content isn't enough. You've got to know what kinds of content to create and when. You've also got to know how to optimize that content so that it builds your credibility, fosters trust, and ultimately inspires potential buyers to take action.

To shed some light on this topic and gain some insights into what content is most effective when selling to IT buyers, we conducted our annual Content Connects survey of more than 200 business technology professionals. In this report, we analyze the key findings from the survey results and share practical recommendations for how to best use content to engage your target audience, whether at an event, online, or through any other medium.

Content has a critical role to play throughout the IT buying cycle. But you've got to know what kinds of content to create and when.

¹ Dan King, "3 Common IT Buyer Myths Tech Marketers Always Fall For," UBM, July 8, 2016.

HIGH-LEVEL FINDINGS

5 types of content

IT buyers use an average of 5 types of content to make a purchase decision.



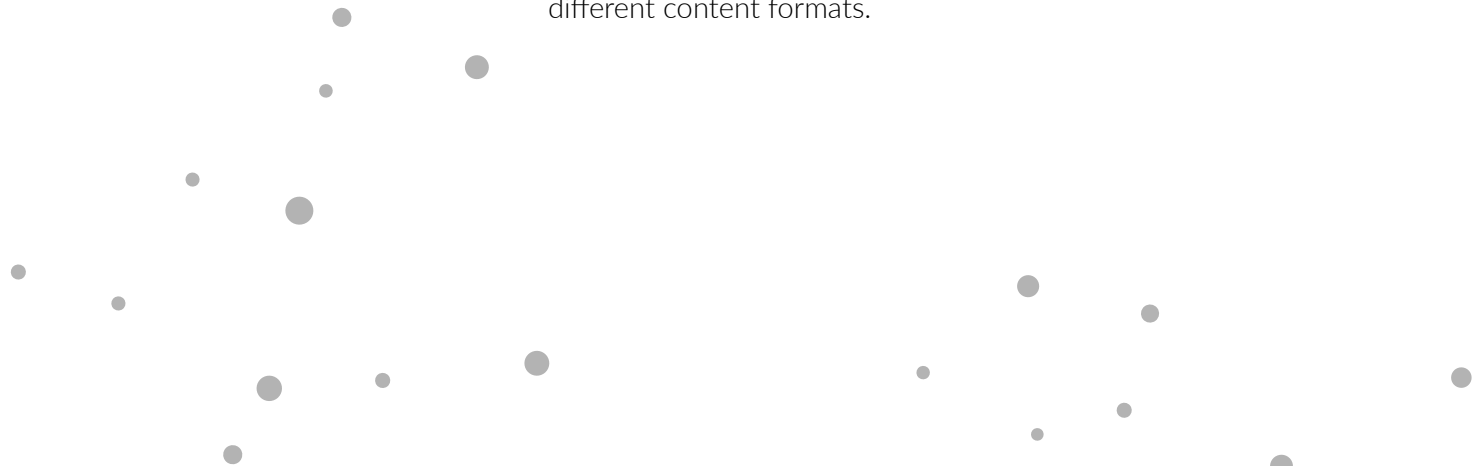
IT buyers are sophisticated and well informed. Regardless if they are quick to make a purchase decision or take their time, they always do their homework. Typically that includes gathering information about their own industry and what their competitors are doing, new technologies that are emerging to solve their problems, and who the best vendors are to bring those technologies to their business.

40%

of IT buyers use 5 or more types of content.



Practically speaking, what this means from a content marketing perspective is that you've got to diversify. Considering that IT buyers use an average of five types of content to make a purchase decision (in fact, 40 percent use five types or more), you absolutely need to spread your messages across a variety of different content formats.





SO, WHICH CONTENT FORMATS ARE MOST EFFECTIVE?

The short answer, of course, is that it depends. One of the key factors to effective content is understanding where your buyers are on their journey and knowing when to introduce the right content at the right time. To help clarify, take a look at the following types of content and when IT buyers find them most useful in the buying process:

PRODUCT INFO & SPECS



- ✓ Implementing technology
- ✓ Evaluating or recommending product, vendor, or solution
- ✓ Selecting a single vendor or solution

JUSTIFICATION MATERIALS



- ✓ Evaluating or recommending product, vendor, or solution
- ✓ Approving the purchase
- ✓ Selecting a single vendor or solution

CASE STUDIES



- ✓ Determining the need
- ✓ Defining business and technical requirements
- ✓ Evaluating or recommending product, vendor, or solution

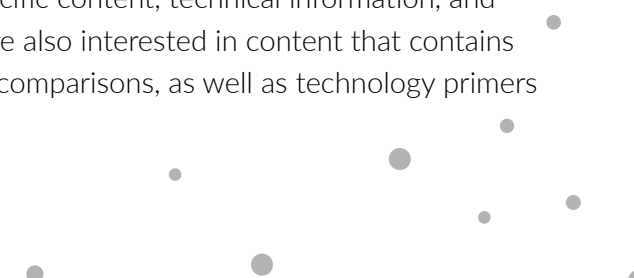
MARKET RESEARCH



- ✓ Researching a technology or product category
- ✓ Defining a vendor short list
- ✓ Continuing education

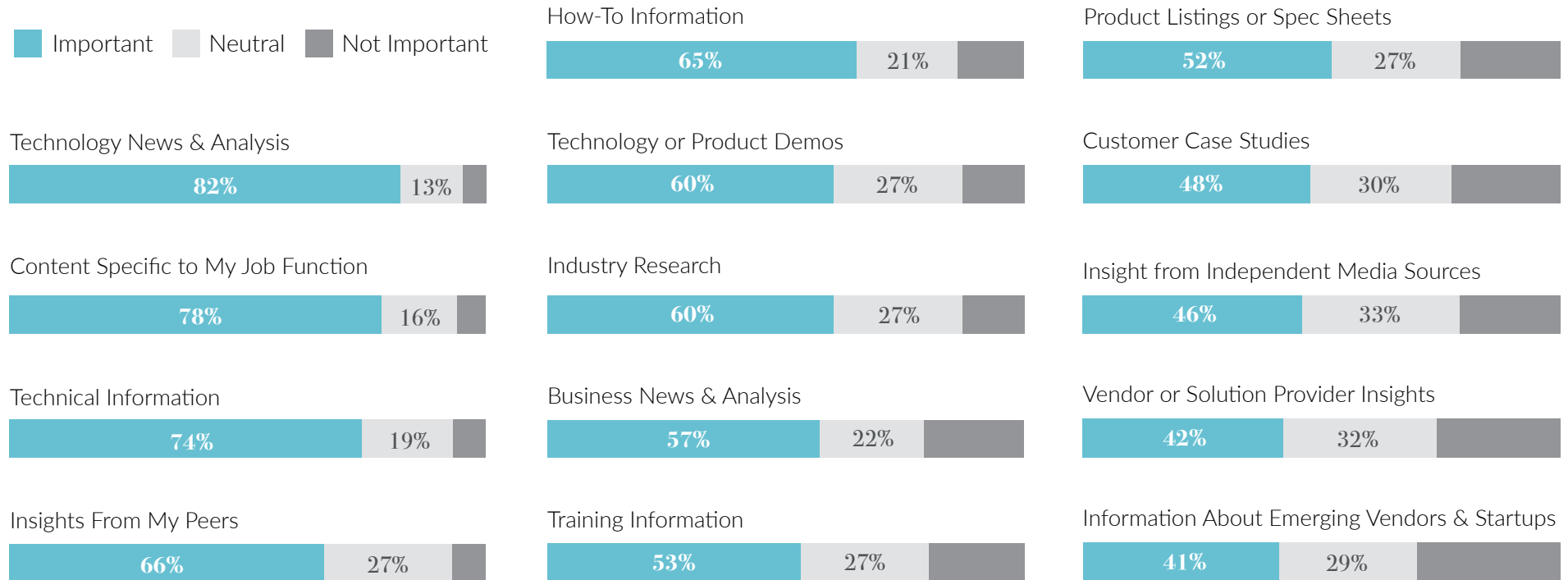
To be clear, there's no single rule of thumb to follow in all cases. Content needs will vary by industry vertical and the nature of your sales cycle, among other factors. Having said that, our research points to some high-level conclusions. For example, IT buyers favor certain kinds of content, such as in-person and virtual events, topic-specific websites, online training courses, and whitepapers.

What it boils down to is that they gravitate toward content that contains tech news and analysis, job-specific content, technical information, and insights from their peers. They're also interested in content that contains best practices and competitive comparisons, as well as technology primers and how-to content.





HOW IMPORTANT IS EACH TYPE OF INFORMATION IN YOUR DAILY JOB?



THE BOTTOM LINE

Always ensure that you're using a variety of content types to reach IT buyers. And make sure that you focus on creating valuable content that's informative, covers topics that your audience is interested in, and provides useful insights that they can use in their day-to-day jobs. If you can present that content in interactive, educational, and engaging formats like live events and online training courses, all the better.





REACHING IT BUYERS AT EVERY STAGE OF THE DECISION-MAKING JOURNEY

IT buyers' expectations around content vary as they progress through the buying journey, and, not surprisingly, their needs inform the kinds of content that they're after.

Early on, for example, they're interested in researching and learning. They want to better understand specific technologies and solutions as well as their own needs, while also defining their business and technical requirements. Suffice it to say that it's important to provide relevant content early on, often before your buyers show any purchase intent.

By the time that they're mid-way through the process, IT buyers tend to be most interested in competitive comparisons and product demos—the kind of content that will help them understand if they need new services or an upgrade.

We asked our survey respondents which types of content they find most useful at each of the buying stages. The most frequent responses were webinars, vendor websites, research reports, and conferences with focused content, and you can see the full range of top choices by stage of the buyer journey in the table to the right.

| Stage of the Purchase Process | Top 3 Content Choices | | |
|--|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Researching or learning about a tech or product category | Webinars | Whitepapers or Case Studies | Vendor Websites |
| Determining the need | Webinars | Research Reports | Conferences |
| Defining business and technical requirements | Research Reports | Conferences | Webinars |
| Defining vendor short list | Vendor Websites | Research Reports | Conferences |
| Evaluating or recommending product, vendor, or solution | Vendor Websites | Research Reports | Webinars |
| Selecting a single vendor or solution | Vendor Websites | Research Reports | Whitepapers or Case Studies |
| Approving the purchase | Vendor Websites | Research Reports | Whitepapers or Case Studies |
| Implementing the technology | Online Training or Courses | Vendor Websites | Webinars |
| Continuing education | Webinars | Online Training or Courses | Conferences |



THE 411 ON SHARING

DID YOU KNOW?

69%

of IT buyers have shared content they read or downloaded with a colleague.

57%

of them have done so with a boss.

Research-based content is the most likely type of content to be shared.

Content is more likely to be shared early in the buyer journey rather than at later stages.

Now that you've taken that all in, take a moment to think about it. How much effort do you put into keeping your website up-to-date? Are you putting the same effort into creating and maintaining your webinars, research reports, and event strategies? Considering how much IT buyers rely on them—particularly early on in the process—you probably should be.

As we move a bit further down the buyer journey, IT buyers want to narrow down their choice of vendor. As a result, we see a greater desire for product demos and case studies. And, by the time they reach the final stages of the journey—where they're making a purchase and implementing the technology—they're generally most interested in training courses, webinars, and other educational pieces of content that will help them get the most out of their technology.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Focus on creating hard-hitting content early on. If you miss the early stages of the buying process, there's not much time to recover. IT buyers are looking for in-depth content that demonstrates technical expertise and that's easily relatable thanks to lots of real-world examples. Remember to keep your early stage content shareable, while gating the more sensitive content that IT buyers need most as they move closer to making a purchase.



TIPS FOR GETTING YOUR CONTENT RIGHT

WEBINARS | RESEARCH | WHITEPAPERS

Now that we know just how important content is, what content to create, and when it is most used, what's the secret to creating great content? Let's look at a few best practices for getting some of the most important types of content for IT buyers right.

According to IT buyers, webinars are the most useful type of content format at the early stages of the buying process. 76 percent of them say that they have used webinars to get information for their job. Additionally, 54 percent say that they find vendors more credible if they've heard about their products on a webinar.

So what actually drives IT professionals to tune in to a webinar?



This means you need to have compelling content that your audience really cares about. In addition, you should always remember to:

- ✓ Have a visually engaging presentation that's easy to follow.
- ✓ Ensure that presenters are well rehearsed so that they sound natural and confident.
- ✓ Make your webinars interactive by using polls and taking live questions.
- ✓ Use the right technology to ensure a seamless, high-quality production for your audience.
- ✓ Give attendees real examples of how your customers are benefiting from your solutions. Better yet, invite a customer to speak.



WEBINARS | **RESEARCH** | WHITEPAPERS

Research is another very effective form of content among IT tech buyers. Consider that 55 percent of respondents use research to get info on their jobs, and a third decide to join virtual events or webinars based on whether or not research is being released. It's also the type of content they most frequently share with a colleague or boss (cited by 59 percent of respondents).

55%

of IT buyers use research to get info on their jobs.



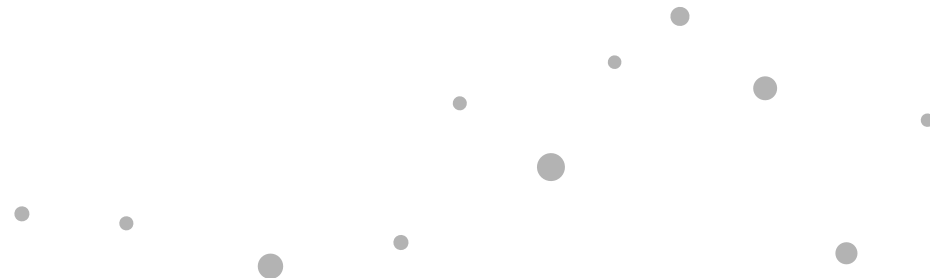
1/3

of survey respondents decide to join virtual events or webinars based on whether research is being released.



When it comes to research, the way to get it right is to:

- ✓ Conduct proprietary surveys to gain new, unique insights, making sure that you have a large enough sample size to draw meaningful conclusions.
- ✓ Partner with third parties to gain additional data or conduct independent research.
- ✓ Always cite any third-party research that you may be using to augment your own findings.
- ✓ Use a combination of text, charts, and other data visualizations to make it as easy as possible for people to understand your data.



WEBINARS | RESEARCH | **WHITEPAPERS**

Whitepapers are another popular form of content among IT buyers. Did you know, for example, that 61 percent of the IT buyers we surveyed read whitepapers to get information for their jobs? Not only that, but 49 percent read whitepapers sponsored by vendors, and more than 60 percent rely on whitepapers or case studies when selecting a single vendor or solution.

Whitepapers are especially important for events:

Prior to attending a face-to-face event, what types of tailored content would you like to get to prepare for the event?

71%

Whitepapers that showcase what vendors will be exhibiting or discussing

63%

Industry-specific information

52%

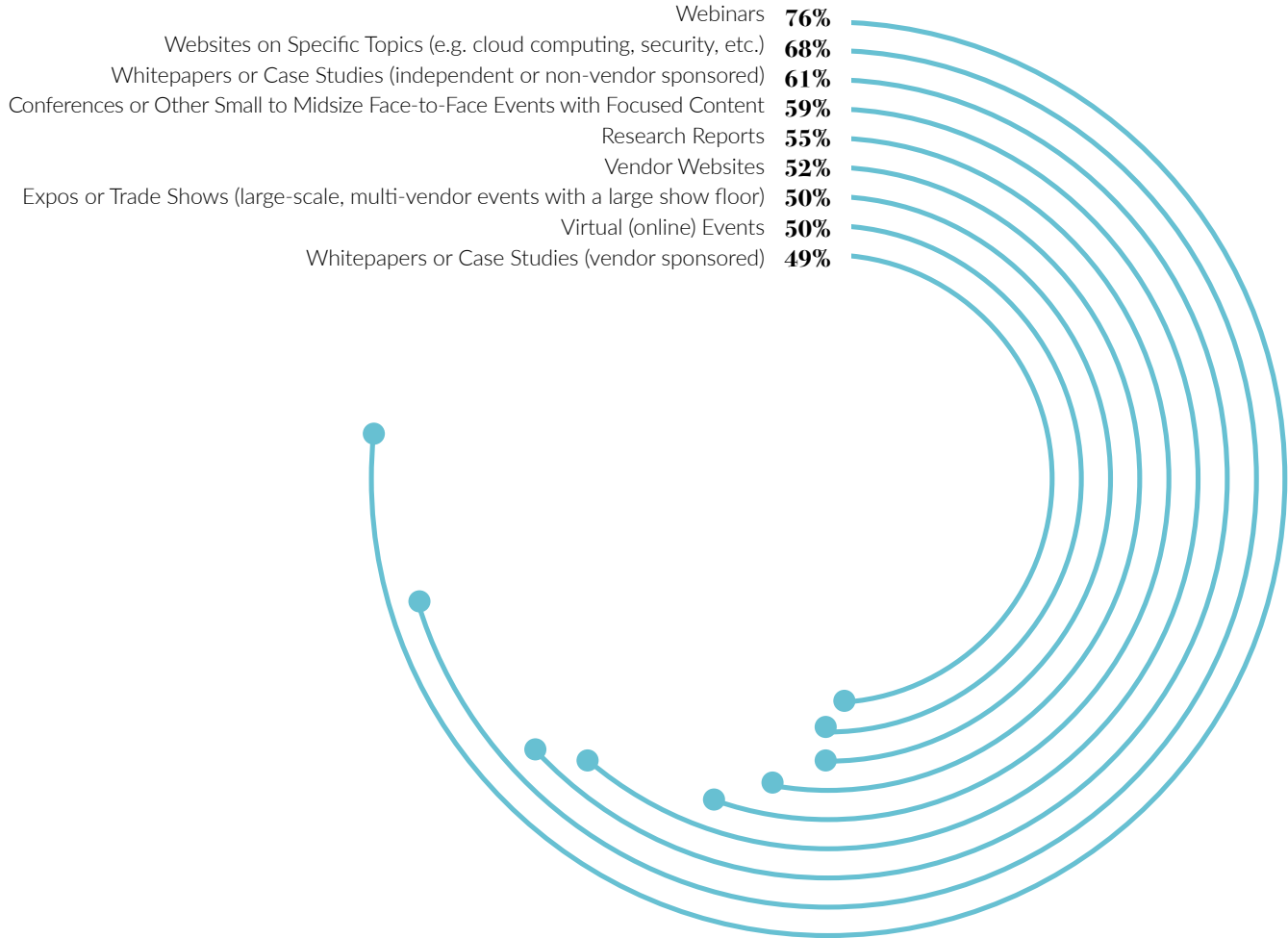
Videos that summarize content at the show

If you're planning to develop a whitepaper, make sure to follow these tips to get the best results:

- ✓ Wherever possible, adopt a conversational tone that makes your whitepapers easier and more enjoyable to read.
- ✓ Write a compelling executive summary or abstract. 70 percent of survey respondents noted that the abstract or executive summary was the most important factor to influence whether or not they download a piece of content.
- ✓ Turn your content into a standard PDF. It's the preferred whitepaper format for 85 percent of IT buyers.
- ✓ Leverage great design so your whitepapers are visually engaging. Just because it's called a "whitepaper" doesn't mean it has to be boring. Color, images, call-outs, charts, graphics, diagrams, sidebars, and headings can all make the content easier to consume.
- ✓ Remember to include a call to action. Point to additional resources, invite readers to participate in a community discussion or live event, or suggest they join your LinkedIn or Facebook group.

USING CONTENT TO HELP FUEL EVENTS

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF INFORMATION FORMATS OR SOURCES DO YOU USE TO GET INFORMATION AS PART OF YOUR JOB?



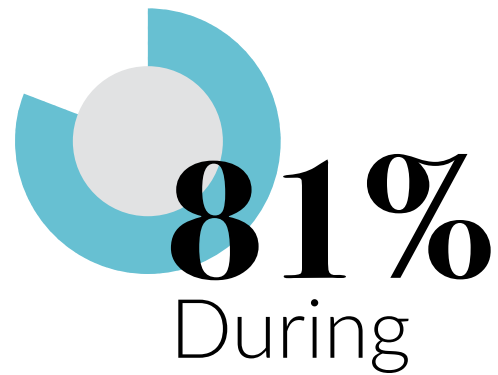
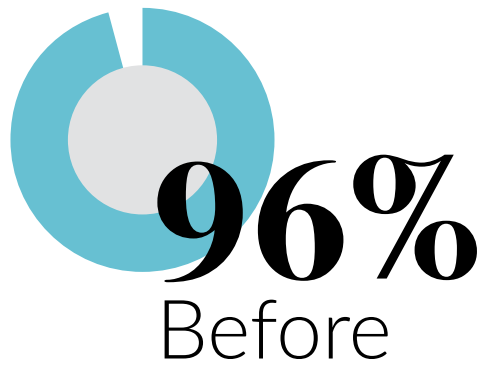
According to our research, live events are some of the most effective ways to engage IT buyers. That includes everything from conferences and webinars to expos, tradeshow, and virtual events.

But to get the most out of your events, you need to support them with content. In fact, most respondents said that content is the single most important factor in contributing to a positive event experience. Content for events goes beyond the collateral at your booth: It can be the presentation in a session, a tech demonstration, and even the content you share before and after events. For example, 96 percent of event attendees visit an event (or parent company) website before the event, while 90 percent continue to do so after.

Content is the single most important factor in contributing to having a positive event experience.



DO YOU GO TO THE WEBSITE OF AN EXPO, CONFERENCE, OR EVENT (OR PARENT COMPANY SITE) FOR INFORMATION PRIOR TO, DURING, OR AFTER ATTENDING AN EVENT?

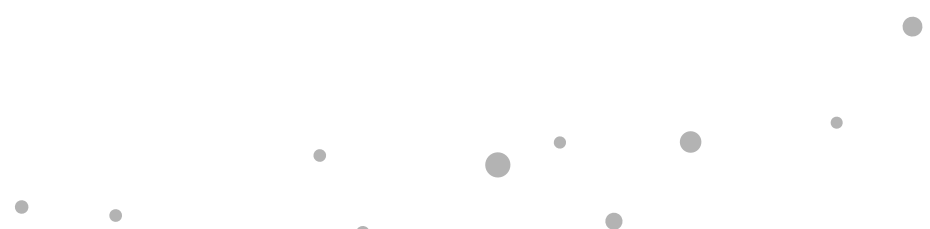


Prior to attending a face-to-face event (expo, trade show, or conference), business technology professionals look to content to help them prepare for the event. Most often, that content includes whitepapers, industry-specific information, and videos. Meanwhile, 85 percent of respondents noted that it is important for events to connect to a corresponding editorial site where they can access new insights or content both during the event and all year long.

Interestingly, 90 percent of respondents said they would benefit from having a “crash course” or online summary of an event that they could refer to for events they missed or to refresh their memory after attending.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Events are an incredibly effective way to get in front of IT buyers, establish credibility with them, and progress them down the path to purchase. To make your events effective, you’ve got to complement them with high-quality content.



USING CONTENT TO REACH YOUR IT BUYERS

Content can be an incredibly useful way to engage IT buyers and shepherd them down the path to purchase. The trick is knowing what types of content to use when, and then making sure that your content is as compelling and useful to your audience as possible. Manage that, and you'll find that you have buyers knocking down your door.



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INSPIRING THE GLOBAL TECH INDUSTRY



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