

CONTENT PREFERENCES SURVEY REPORT

BUYING COMMITTEES LOOK
FOR VISUAL, RESEARCH/
INFLUENCER-BACKED CONTENT
EXPERIENCES THAT TELL A
VALUABLE STORY

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Executive Summary

Content has long been a core component of go-to-market strategies. We've all heard the phrase "content is King" many times and agreed without hesitation. Modern B2B buyers have grown more independent and prefer to do their own research before speaking with a sales representative, and it's up to the marketing and sales organizations to guide them on the path to purchase with educational thought leadership content on the channels they frequent most, in the formats they want to consume it.

Content is even more critical in our digital-first world. When we conducted our *2020 Content Preferences Survey* in February of last year, the world was not prepared for what was to come in the months ahead. Now, a year into a pandemic that rocked our personal and professional lives, B2B organizations have pivoted to virtual engagement and digital content strategies to connect with buyers, prospects and customers amid social distancing mandates.

What's interesting is that the results from this year's survey mimic last year's responses pretty closely, proving that buyers have been demanding rich content experiences long before the pandemic hit. When asked if they rely more or less on content to research and make B2B purchase decisions, 62% of respondents to our *2021 Content Preferences Study* checked the "more" box, and just 27% stated their habits stayed the same. Many pointed to "practical" content, such as case studies, and visual content, such as webinars, to guide their buying decisions, citing a higher emphasis on the trustworthiness of the source.



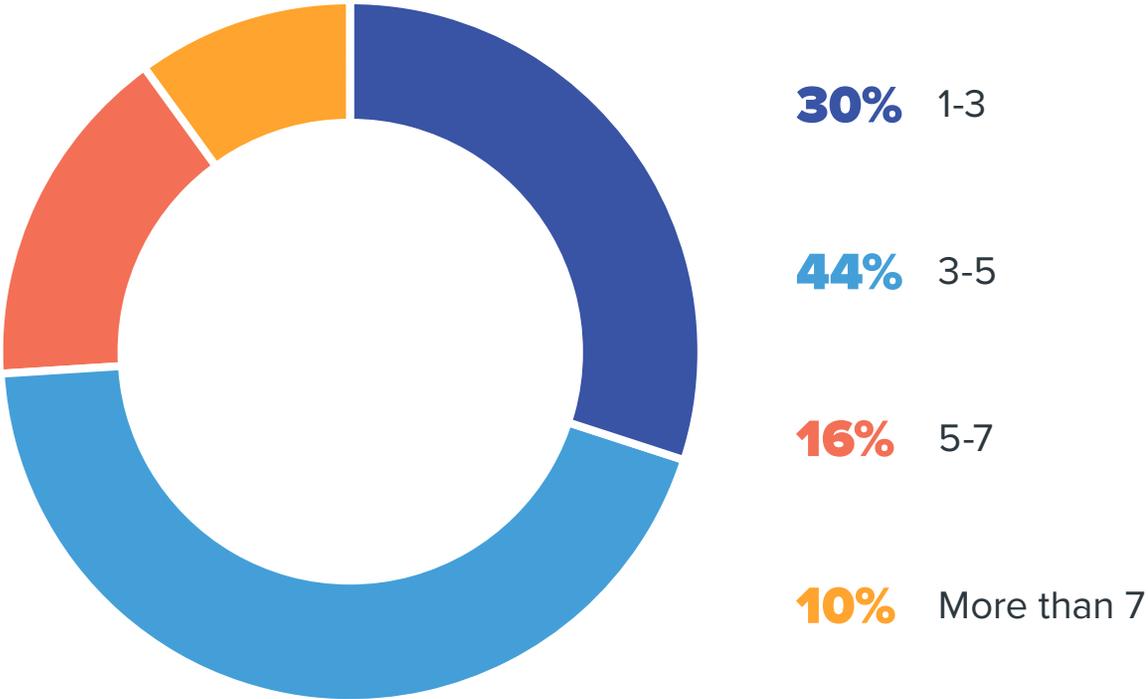
62% of marketers rely more on content to research and make B2B purchase decisions than they did last year.

In the following report, we will examine how buyers' content priorities shifted throughout 2020 and provide a deep dive into the survey results to get a clear picture of what they are looking for when researching purchase decisions in the virtual world.

Specifically, we'll reveal:

- The top content formats helping buyers self-navigate through their B2B purchasing journey;
- Key drivers that enable buyers to share content and take a sales call;
- The types of content that resonate within every stage of the buyer's journey (early, mid, late);
- Tips on how to best organize content for buyers; and
- Recommendations on how to improve the quality of content to better cater to buyers' needs.

How many pieces of content have you typically consumed before engaging with a salesperson when you are making a purchase decision?



Buyers Demand Credible, Short-Form Visual & Audio Content

Although 32% of respondents said they are overwhelmed at the amount of content available, a majority (44%) stated they typically consume three to five pieces of content before engaging with a vendor. This continues to be the “sweet spot” for buyers, as the amount has been top-rated in our survey in past years.

Short-form content is also preferable, as a majority of respondents stated they would commit five to 30 minutes to a piece of content (more than 50% of respondents chose this time frame for most content formats), with some going up to 60 minutes to review content.

The top content formats also have not changed too drastically, as white papers, E-books, research reports and webinars continue to rank high. This year, specifically, respondents pointed to:

- Webinars: 57% (compared to 54% in 2020);
- E-books: 57% (compared to 48% in 2020);
- White papers: 55% (compared to 60% in 2020);
- Research/survey reports: 52% (compared to 54% in 2020);
- Blog posts: 46% (compared to 56% in 2020); and
- Case studies: 46% (compared to 54% in 2020).



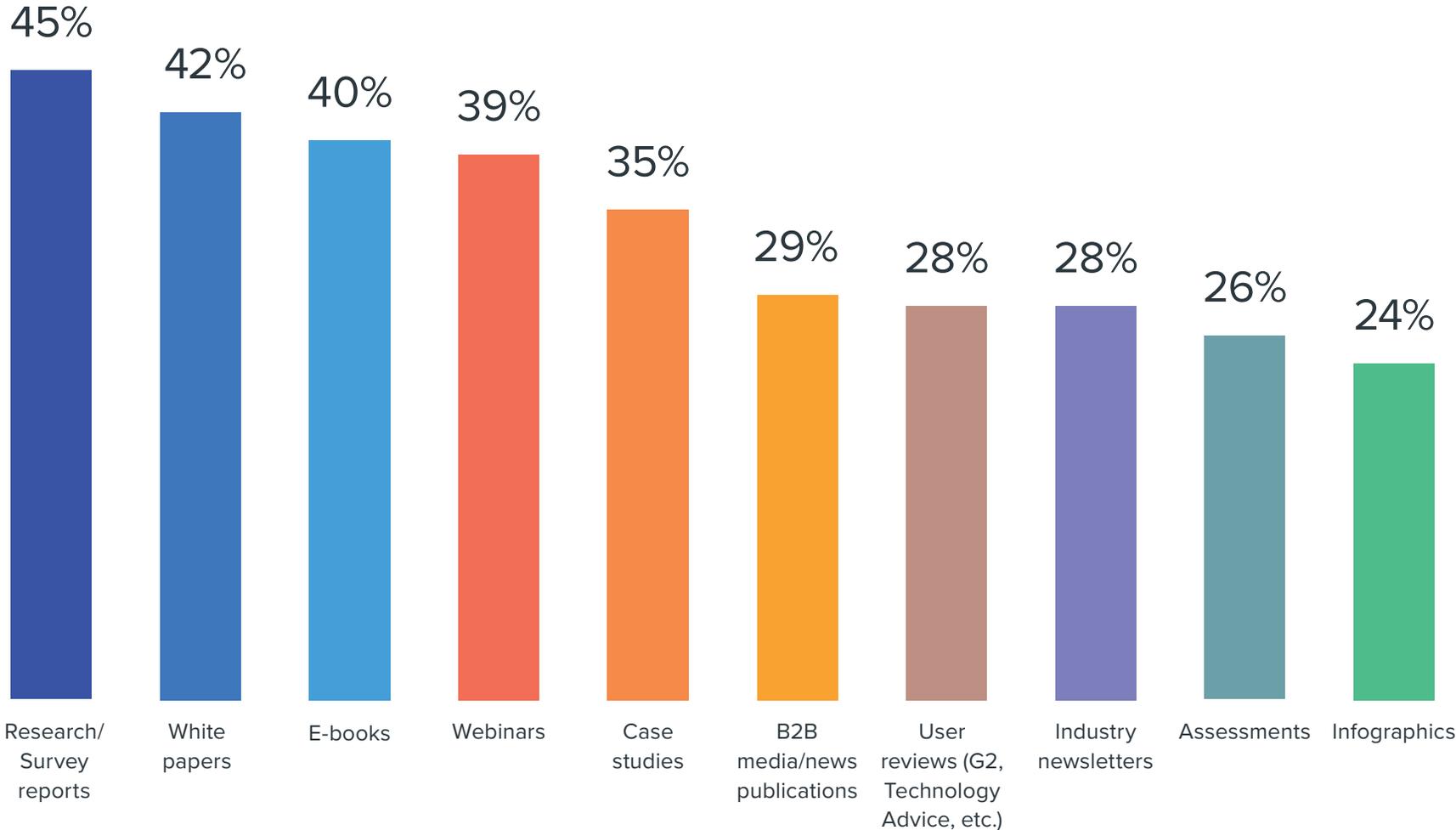
44% of respondents stated they place a higher emphasis on the trustworthiness of the source.

Podcasts also ranked high on the list, as 40% of respondents indicated they listened to audio content in the past year. This is a jump from last year's 37% and reveals the growing impact of podcasts on the B2B industry. Although buyers may not be commuting as much anymore, podcasts are still a valuable resource for them.

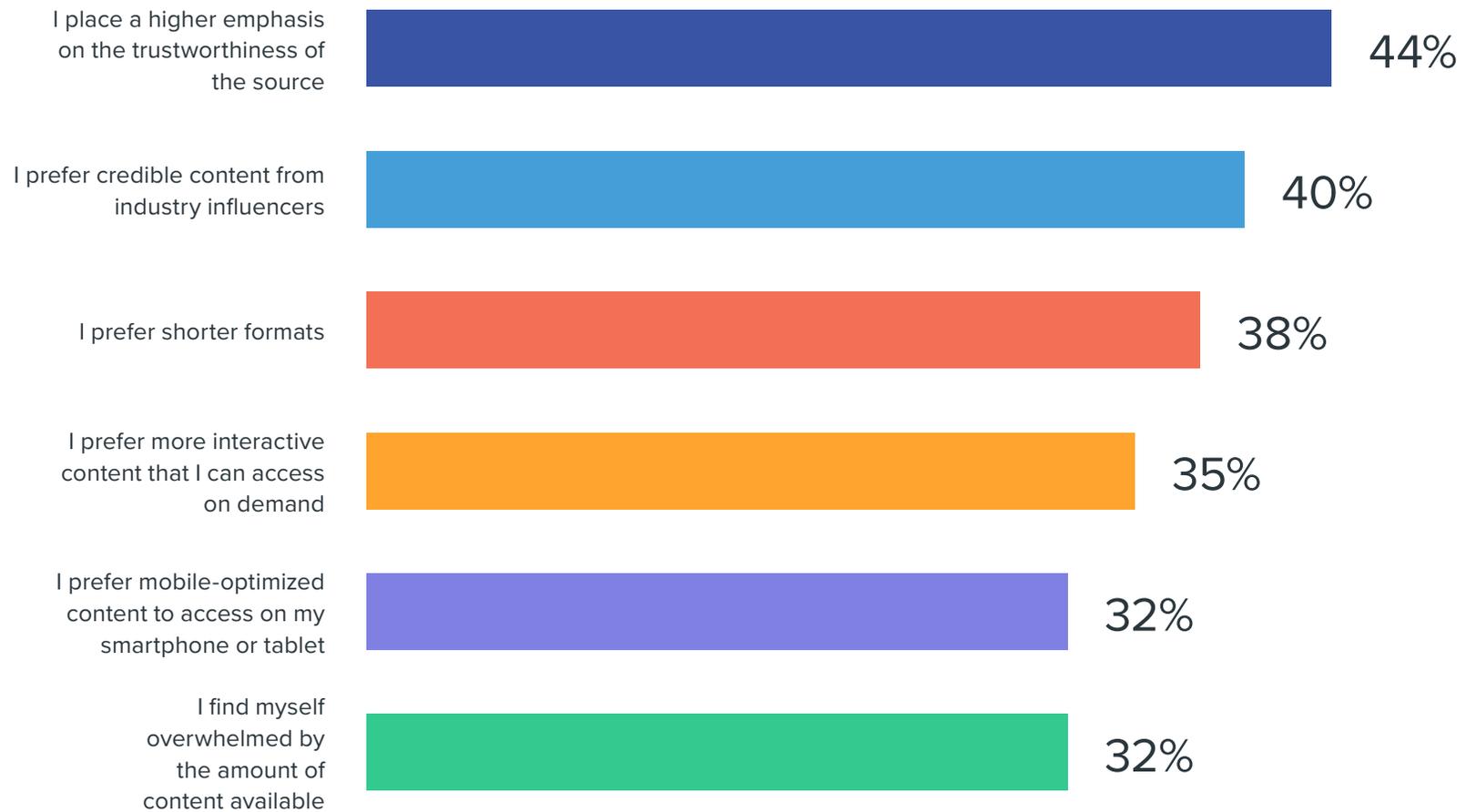
When asked how their content consumption habits changed in the past year, 44% of respondents stated they place a higher emphasis on the trustworthiness of the source. This is a slight dip to last year's 51%; however, trustworthiness ranked as the top factor both years. Additional factors include:

- Credible content from industry influencers (40%);
- Shorter formats (38%);
- Interactive content that can be accessed on-demand (35%);
- Mobile-optimized content (32%); and
- Peer-recommended content (32%).

What are the most valuable content formats and sources for researching your B2B purchases?



How have your B2B content consumption habits changed during the past year? (Check all that apply)



Early-, Mid-Stage Storytelling Content Drives Buyers To Engage With Vendors

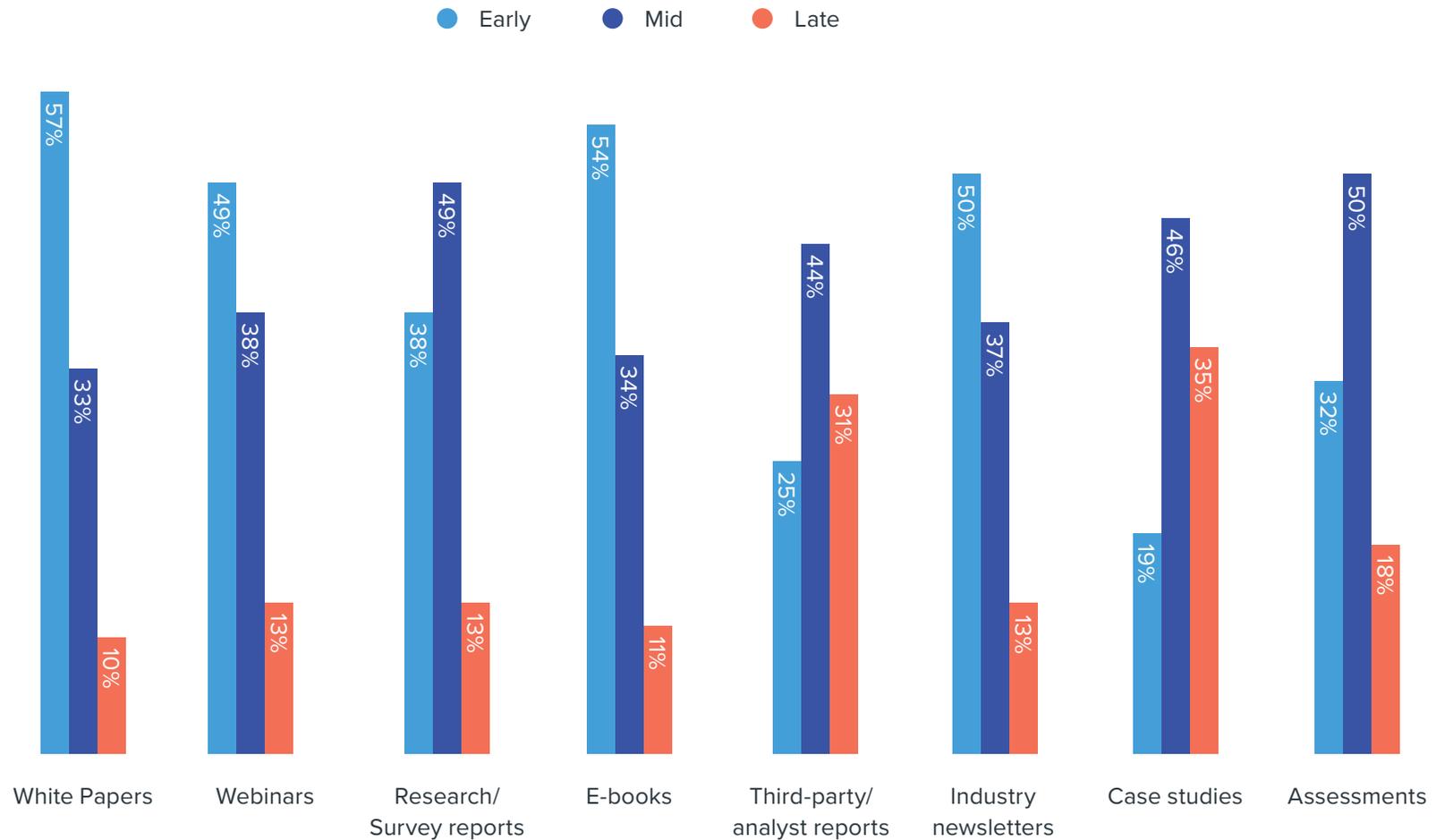
As buyers continue to self-navigate through their purchasing journey, the need for early- and mid-stage content is high. They're relying on a mix of long form thought leadership content such as white papers (57%) and E-books (54%), as well as shorter formats such as infographics (55%) and blog posts (54%) in the early stages.

Interactive content ranked high in the mid-stages of the buyer's journey, with 50% of respondents pointing to assessments, followed by interactive/video content (46%) and ROI calculators (41%). Case studies ranked as the top late-stage format for 35% of respondents, with some respondents indicating they "prefer more practical content such as case studies and examples of what people have done with something."

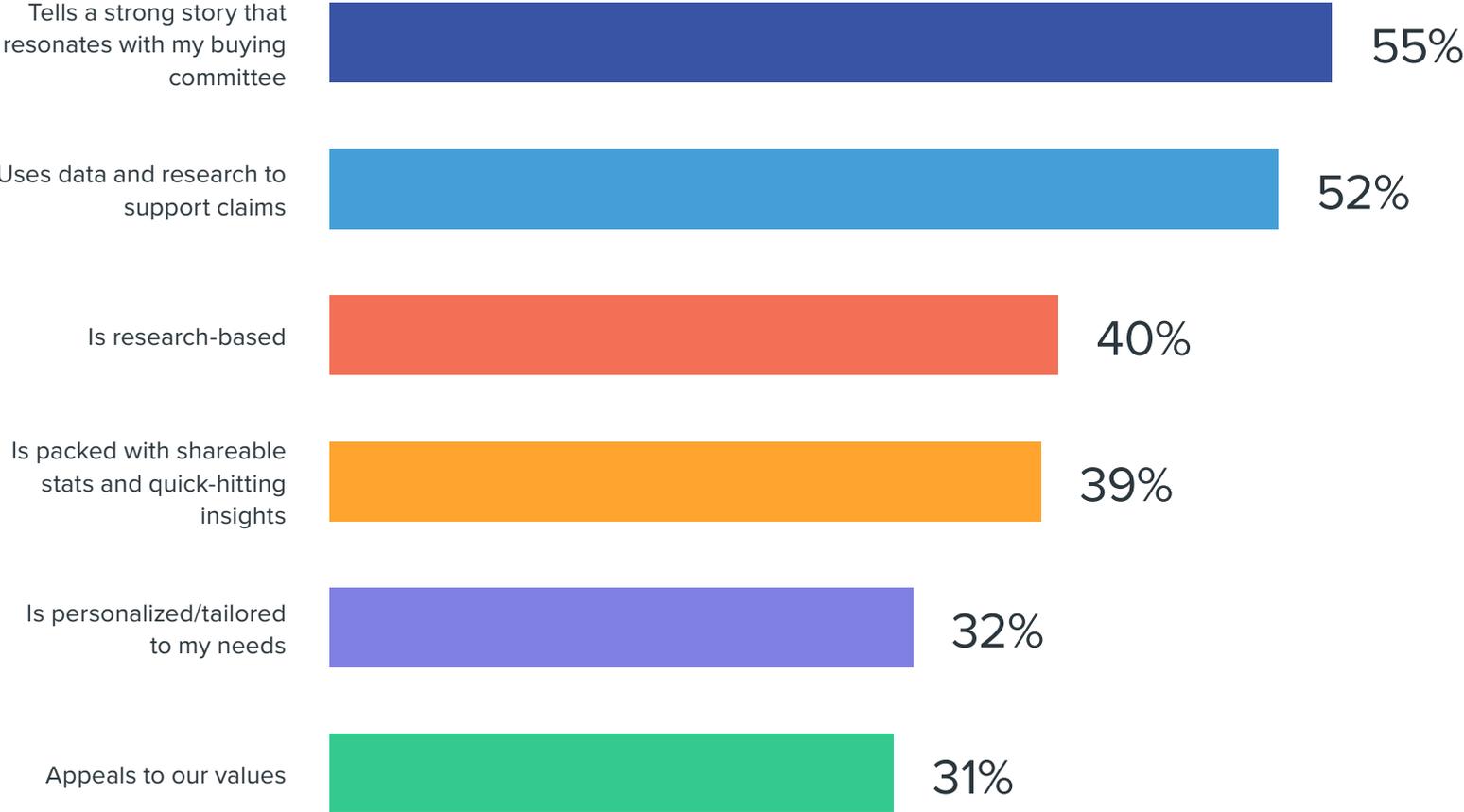
A common component of content preferences is the ability to deliver a memorable piece that tells a story and resonates with buyers' needs and pain points. When asked what made content memorable enough to warrant a sales call, respondents noted they want content that:

- Tells a strong story that resonates with buying committees (55%);
- Uses data and research to support claims (52%);
- Is research-based (40%);
- Is packed with shareable stats and quick-hitting insights (40%); and
- Is personalized/tailored to their needs (32%).

Of the following content formats, which do you find most valuable for early, mid and late stages of the buying process?



What makes content memorable and triggers you to take a sales call? (Check all that apply)



Email, Social Media Are Key Content Sharing Channels

With in-person, face-to-face engagement still on pause, it's no surprise that buyers rely on digital channels to engage with content and share it with their peers and colleagues. Respondents noted that content that shares easily and seamlessly via email, social media and internal collaboration platforms is important to them.

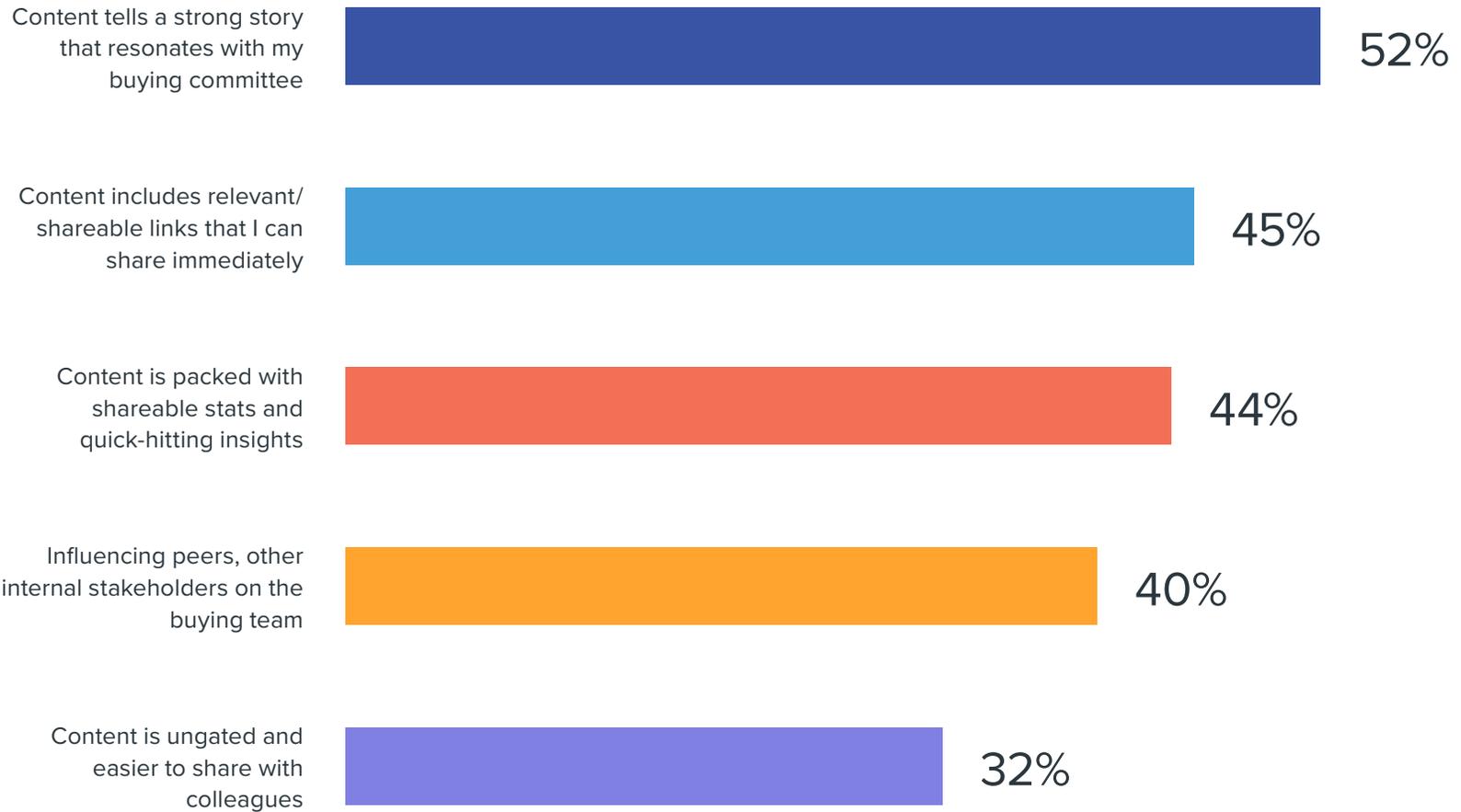
However, there are key things to consider when developing shareable content, including:

- Developing content that tells a strong story and resonates with buying committees (52%);
- Incorporating relevant/shareable links that allow for immediate sharing (45%); and
- Packing content with shareable stats and quick-hitting insights (44%).

Respondents also said they give credence to vendor content that is:

- Branded directly from a vendor (67%);
- Co-branded and sponsored by one or more vendors (63%); and
- Authored by a third-party publication and sponsored by a vendor (61%).

What are your key drivers for sharing content? (Select top 3)





43% of respondents said they share research/survey reports with their buying committees, and 71% chose LinkedIn as their top channel for sharing content.

When asked what channels they use to share business related content, respondents pointed to:

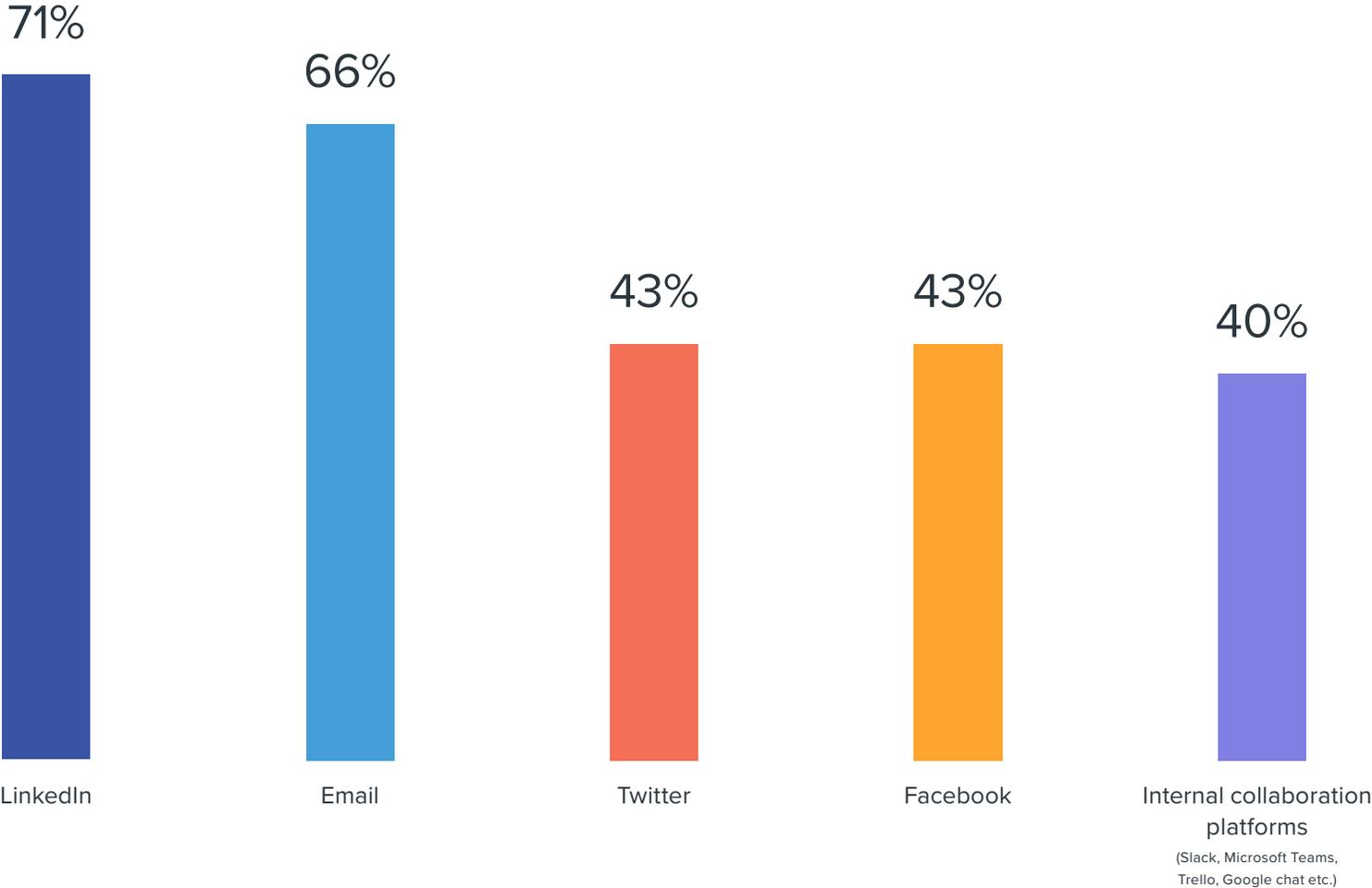
- LinkedIn (71%);
- Email (66%);
- Twitter (43%);
- Facebook (43%); and
- Internal collaboration platforms such as Slack, Trello, etc. (40%).

Long-form and interactive content were among the top content formats that respondents said they shared the most. One respondent noted that long-form content gets summarized prior to sharing, signaling that offering shorter versions of existing content (such as a quick-hitting blog post that spotlights key takeaways from a long-form white paper) is a valuable offering.

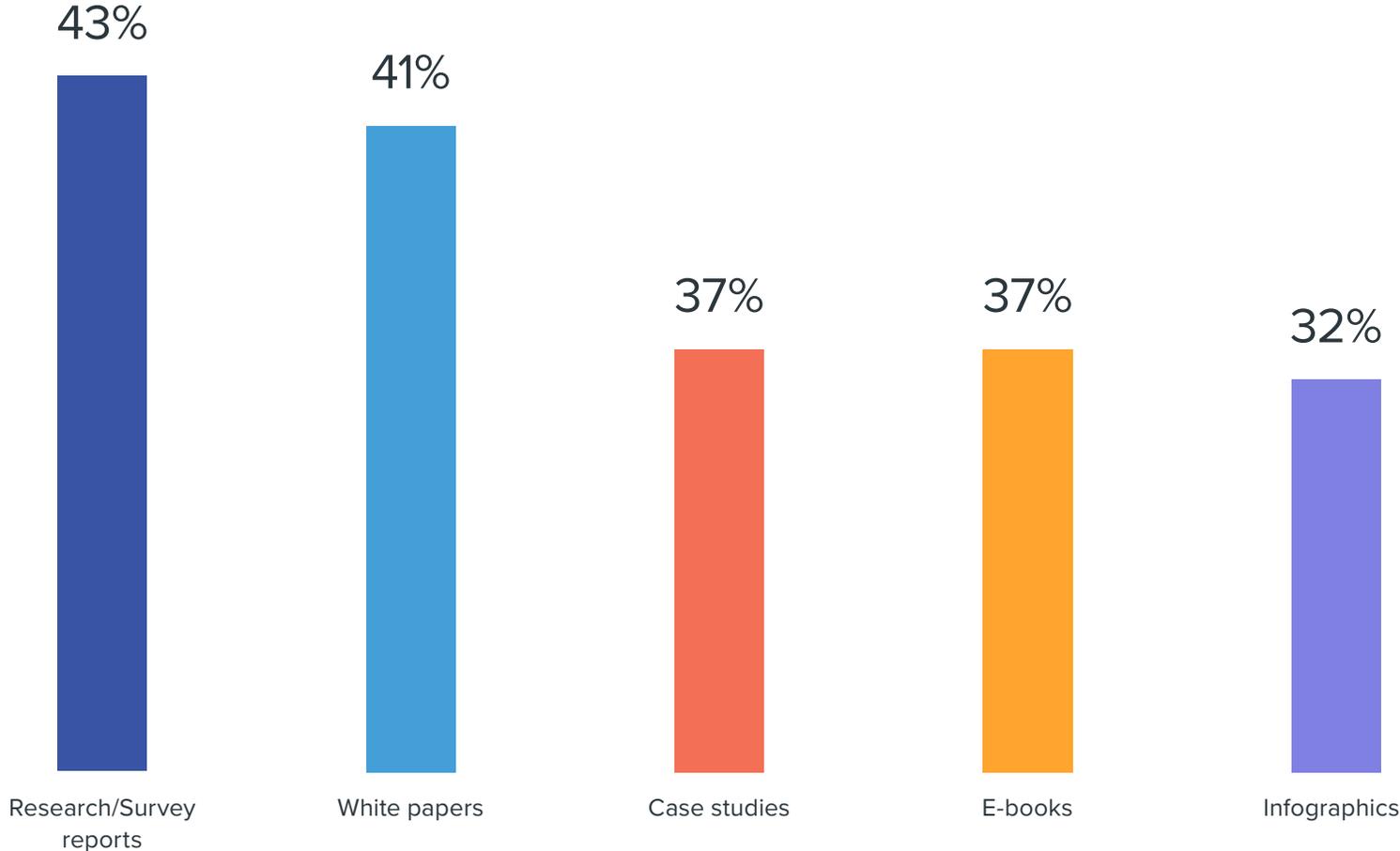
Top content formats shared among buying committees include:

- Research/Survey reports (43%);
- White papers (41%);
- Case studies (37%);
- E-books (37%); and
- Infographics (42%).

Which channels do you use to share business-related content? (Check all that apply)



I share the following content types with my colleagues/buying committee: (Check all that apply)



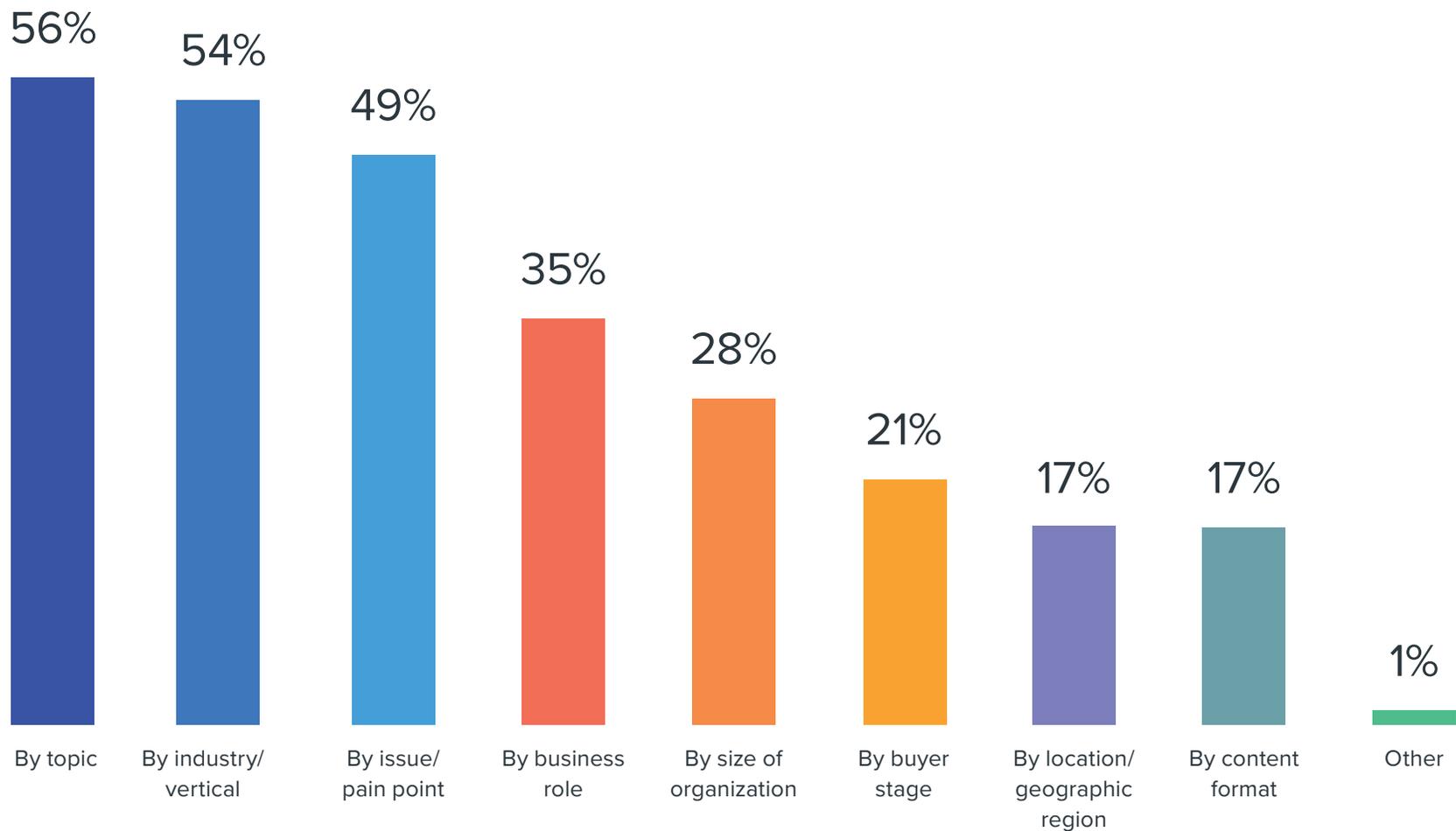
Organize Content By Topic & Vertical To Help Buyers Research On Their Own

Whether it's a long white paper or an interactive ROI calculator, buying committees want to see content bundled together by specific terms. Offering an option to search for content that is directly tied to a key theme or pain point makes it easier for the person(s) researching a purchase decision to navigate on their own terms. This is why content hubs have been a popular option of delivering content.

When asked how they would like to see B2B vendors organize content on their websites, respondents said they are looking for content that is organized by:

- Topic (56%);
- Industry/vertical (54%); and
- Issue/pain point (49%).

How would you like to see B2B vendors organize the content on their websites? (Check all that apply)



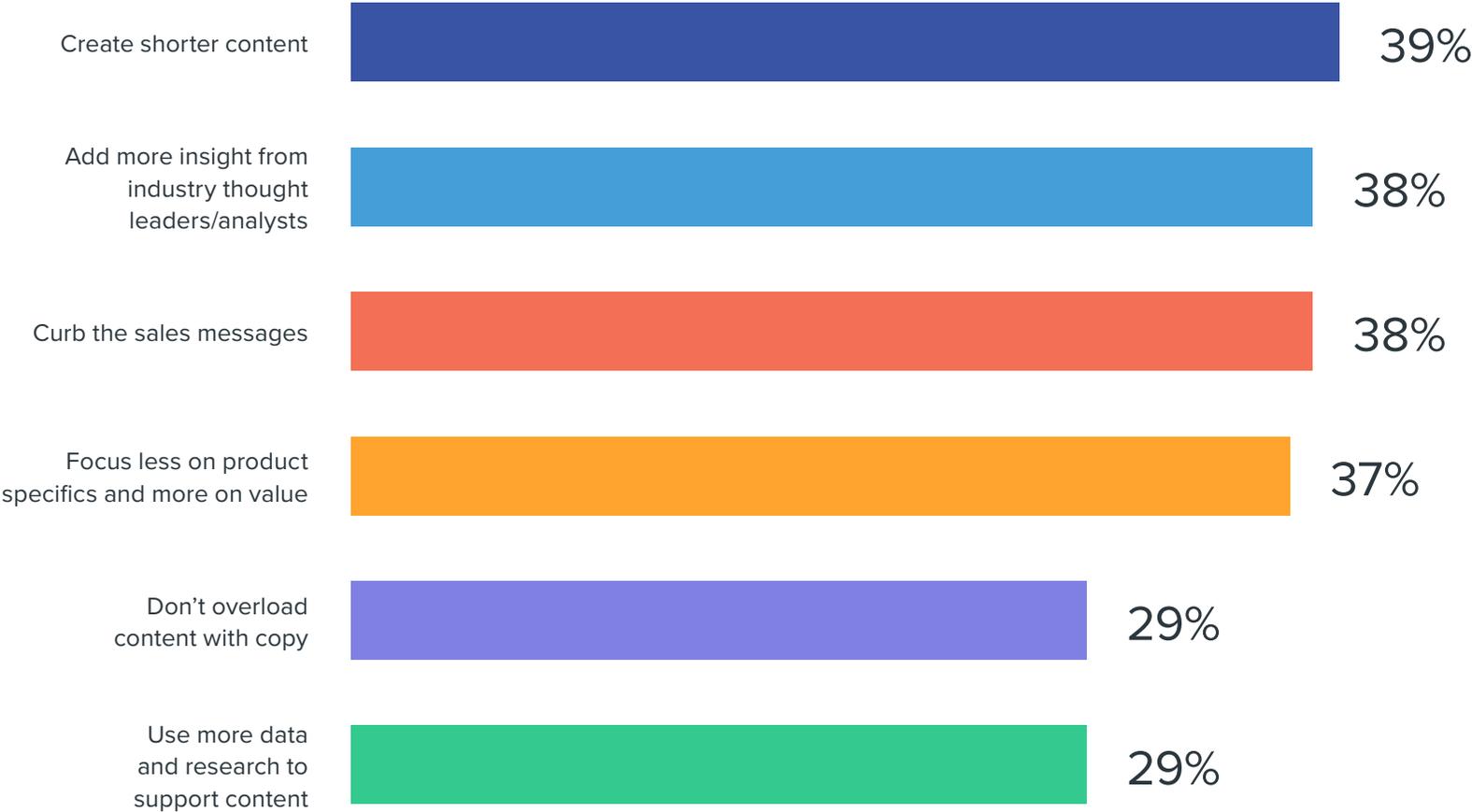
Conclusion: Maintain A Quality Over Quantity Content Mindset

B2B vendors realize that it's not about the quantity of content offerings. With most buyers feeling overwhelmed at the amount of content out there, the mindset has shifted to quality. Instead of pumping out more new content, vendors should consider re-purposing existing assets and organizing them in ways that cater to buyers' needs.

Short, visual and educational content will reign supreme. With buyers more informed than ever, vendors must curb the sales pitches and focus on delivering content that offers greater value. Key areas to consider when looking to improve content include:

- Creating shorter content (39%);
- Adding more insight from industry thought leaders/analysts (38%);
- Curbing the sales messages (38%);
- Focusing less on product specifics and more on value (37%); and
- Not overloading content with copy (29%).

What recommendations would you make to improve the quality of the content created/provided by B2B vendors? (Choose up to five)



About The Survey

Demand Gen Report surveyed 164 B2B executives during March 2021 from a variety of industries and company sizes to gauge their changing behaviors around content consumption and engagement following the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic.

The breakout of survey respondents included in the following industries:

- High-tech 30%
- Telecom 5%
- Financial services 8%
- Media/entertainment 2%
- Manufacturing 13%
- Professional Services 15%
- Healthcare 7%
- Business Services 6%
- Publishing 1%
- Other 13%

The survey respondents also presented the following mix of different sized organizations (in terms of annual revenue):

- Less than \$25M 44%
- \$25M - \$50M 15%
- \$50M - \$100M 12%
- \$100M - \$500M 12%
- \$500M - \$1B 6%
- More than \$1B 10%

Titles/roles of respondents include:

- Manager 31%
- Director 27%
- C-Level 18%
- Vice President 15%
- Other 10%



Demand Gen Report is a targeted online publication that uncovers the strategies and solutions that help companies better align their sales and marketing organizations, and ultimately, drive growth. A key component of the publication's editorial coverage focuses on the sales and marketing automation tools that enable companies to better measure and manage their multi-channel demand generation efforts.

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