

Understanding the Empowered Buyer



A Playbook for Earning
Trust in Today's B2B
Buyer Journey

October 2025



About this playbook



B2B buying is changing rapidly. Buyers have more information available to them and move faster than ever. They use AI, traditional Google Search, social media creator content, and peer recommendations to compare vendors and understand how to get the most value out of each product. Per our research, around three in four B2B buyers finish their journey in *12 weeks or less*.

The B2B playbook of the early 2020s no longer works, so we wrote a new one.

Our playbook draws on a survey conducted by Google and National Research Group that looked at 2,063 senior leaders in the US from a wide array of industries, who made purchases spanning enterprise, SaaS, web services, and retail in the last six months. **It explores the new rules of B2B buying in this accelerated, AI-powered, trust-first environment—and offers practical guidance for advertisers and vendors who want to get on (and stay on) the Day 1 List.** Unless otherwise noted, all statistics in this playbook come from this study.

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Meet the Empowered Buyer



B2B buyers are sharper and more discerning than ever

Today's buyers leverage generative AI to speed up research and decision-making. They want to learn about brands where they already do research: on Google, YouTube, social platforms, and review sites. They expect clear evidence, credible insights, and great overall experiences—or they may walk away.

Touchpoints Used During the Research Phase of the Journey Among Total



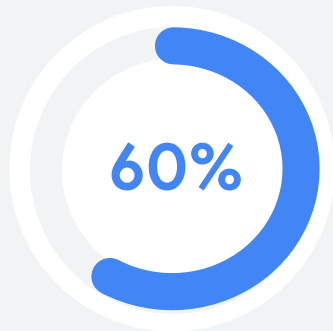
With AI tools and community platforms now widely available, buyers have more ways to fact-check and compare. Every claim is scrutinized across multiple touchpoints, and the process is rarely linear.

Instead, **the B2B journey has become iterative and always-on, with AI accelerating early research** and helping buyers ask sharper questions sooner. These are capable, thoughtful people who come to the table well-prepared, with tougher questions, higher expectations, and a clear desire for vendors that respect their time and offer real value.

AI is a key amplifier

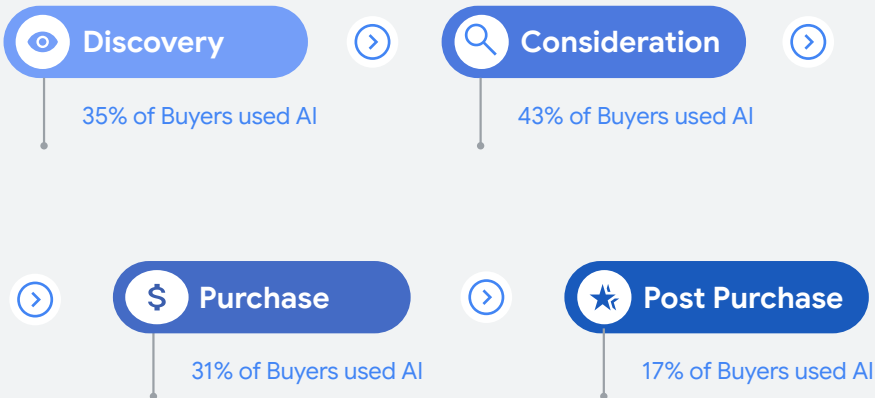
AI tools are now embedded in the purchase journey from the very first search to post-purchase follow-up. Around 60% of respondents use tools like ChatGPT or Gemini to augment vendor lists, summarize content, or surface competitors.¹ They use AI to arm themselves with information—and enter vendor meetings knowing exactly what they want.

AI Touchpoints Used During the Journey
Among Total



Of B2B buyers use **AI tools** during the purchase process

AI Tools Used at Each Stage⁴
Among Total





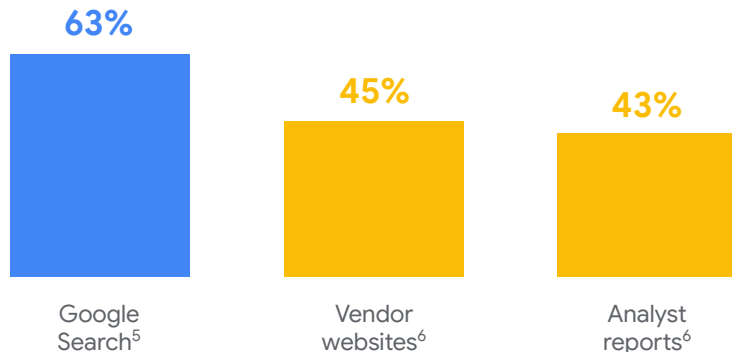
Printers are becoming very commoditized and it's really hard to differentiate between the different feature sets... Typically, I'd start with an AI tool to get an initial list. And then I take that list do some searches based on the parameters that you get back from AI. That gives you an idea of what things to look for and put into your Google search. And then you use the Google search to then say, okay, who are the potential vendors?"

Google as a source of truth

Even with AI in the mix, most buyers still turn to Google Search to double-check results. They use it to validate AI outputs, cross-check vendor claims, and make sure they're looking at the right solutions.⁵ AI has changed the world—but traditional Google Search is still the path to ground truth in B2B buying decisions.

Top 3 Tools Used to Validate AI Findings

Among those who used AI tools



Google is Google... it's a core search engine of the internet."

Medium Web Builder/ Design Final-Decision Maker,
CIO, Financial Services

I use Google to find additional information and ensure the AI is not providing incorrect data. AI is not perfect and gets you 60-70% of the way there."

Small SaaS Final Decision-Maker, IT Director,
Construction Services

Buying cycles are getting shorter and faster

AI tools are compressing timelines even further, with 84% of buyers saying these tools speed up their process. And notably, most complete their journey within just 12 weeks.⁷

At the same time, AI is accelerating product cycles and changing how buyers engage. As 60% now use AI tools, they're likely relying less on slower, relationship-led channels and more on self-directed digital research. This shift compresses the early funnel and moves influence from sales-led to marketing-led engagement—strengthening the case for greater investment in marketing overall.

77%

said that their buying journey took 12 weeks or less.



Switching is easier, so trust matters even more

In the past, vendors could rely on inertia to keep customers—buyers with longstanding relationships simply wouldn't leave their preferred vendor. But now the buyer journey is a few short weeks and it's easier than ever to switch vendors. Indeed, 58% of B2B buyers who purchased a B2B product in the past six months report switching in *the last six months alone*.⁸

58%

Switched vendors in the last six months.



Simple, human content builds trust

The best response to this fast-moving, information-overloaded purchasing journey: unfiltered, human-first content. When a buyer finds information that feels real, relatable and honest, they respond.

As NRG's *Rise of the Workfluencer* report shows, people connect most with creators who share both wins and missteps openly, and who keep their content genuine and consistent.

Businesses need to show up with content that feels natural to the spaces where buyers already spend time, with voices they already trust.



I've worked across a lot of different areas of the creator economy—from lifestyle influencers to more B2B-oriented spaces. And right now, all of it's merging together; creators are looking across that whole landscape, seeing what works, and taking best practices from all of it."

Brand Director, Content Marketing Agency

Ch 1

TL;DR

Today's B2B buyers are empowered, moving faster with AI tools, validating everything on Google, and turning to creators for authentic insights that show how a product performs when the rubber meets the road. To win their trust, vendors and advertisers must show up with clear, human, proof-driven content.

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New Rules of Engagement



The new rules of engagement

Most B2B buyers begin their journey armed with a Day 1 List. They have a shortlist of vendors they know and trust before the formal process even begins. Notably, many start with a trusted shortlist, and 82% ultimately buy from it.⁹ Brands have two challenges: earning a spot on the list and staying there.

82%

Ultimately chose a product or service from the Day 1 List



The five rules of engagement

01. Clarity
02. Proof
03. Relevance
04. Simplicity
05. Peer validation

To cut through the noise, there need to be clear rules of engagement. Specifically, what to lean into and what to avoid if you're planning to get—and remain—on that Day 1 List.



01

Clarity matters

First, be clear. Buyers fact-check *everything*. Content that is straightforward, clearly sourced, and prioritizes transparent labeling (even for AI-generated summaries), reassures them that they are in safe hands.

02



Proof matters

Then, add evidence. Buyers truly value proof such as ROI metrics, benchmarks, and real-world case studies. For B2B buyers, product specifications and features are the top reason they click on an ad.

03

Relevance matters

Generic messaging is generally ignored. Buyers engage when content feels tailored and speaks directly to their role, industry, and pain points—especially when it's delivered at the right moment in their journey.

Platform	Key uses
	Discovery, validation, pricing, reviews
	Tutorials, onboarding, troubleshooting

04

Simplicity matters

Buyers don't want glossy, overproduced assets. They want short, clear, and useful content that solves problems and shows functionality. YouTube is a go-to for straightforward tutorials and demos, with 63% of buyers visiting a brand's website and 60% watching a tutorial on the product or service.¹⁰

05

Peer validation matters

Customers are human. They place weight on the opinions of others. Word of mouth has always shaped B2B decisions but today, niche creators and “workfluencers” are part of the informal conversation that surrounds purchases. They shape buyers' views in the same way that a friend or colleague might.

For vendors, the message is simple: peer validation works best when you empower credible voices to share their stories where buyers already spend their time by showing up in ways that feel genuine, human, and resonate with buyers' pain points.



People outside the cybersecurity community probably think of it as a very dry, very technical space. But there's a shared sense of humor within the community. And incorporating memes and jokes into your content helps to prove that you understand that humor—that you're a true part of the community.”

MD, Cybersecurity Vendor

Ch 2 TL; DR

What to do

Do	What	How	Why
Empower independent exploration	Provide demos, sandboxes, and evergreen educational content across Google and YouTube	Offer interactive walkthroughs, tutorials, and campaigns segmented by role or industry	Helps buyers learn at their own pace and positions brands as trusted partners, not just sellers
Lead with proof and validation	Highlight ROI metrics, benchmarks, testimonials, and outcome-based case studies	Share customer stories, peer reviews, and data-driven examples across social and search/display assets	Buyers trust peers and performance evidence more than promotion
Build trust via transparency and credibility	Clearly label all content and reference credible third-party data and expert sources	Cite AI/sponsored content, link to analyst reports, and reference reputable sites or experts within messaging	Transparent sourcing and credible validation ensure claims withstand scrutiny and strengthen brand integrity
Match the message to the moment	Deliver content that aligns with buyer role, industry, and journey stage	Use segmentation, contextual targeting, and retargeting that serves helpful next steps or validation content	Buyers act on content that feels timely and relevant; well-targeted creative supports confident progression
Keep content clear and efficient	Use concise, utility-driven creative formats that emphasize clarity over volume	Produce short (under two-minute) videos, straightforward visuals, and copy focused on functionality and outcomes	Brevity and simplicity cut through clutter, improving engagement and recall across all buyer touchpoints

Ch 2 TL; DR

What not to do

Don't	What	Why not
Rely on awareness-only content	Limit messaging to high-level brand introductions without depth or utility	Buyers expect guidance and substance to navigate complexity, not just name recognition
Use overly promotional or vague messaging	Push generic claims, buzzwords or sales-heavy copy with little proof to follow	Content that feels too 'salesy' or empty erodes credibility and can be dismissed easily
Overproduce or prioritize polish	Invest heavily in flashy, high-production creative that doesn't demonstrate real utility	Buyers value clarity and functionality; overproduced assets can feel like marketing spin
Retarget excessively or irrelevantly	Serve repetitive ads or outreach not based on buyer signals	Poorly timed or irrelevant retargeting creates fatigue, frustration, and distrust

01

02

Chapter

03

The Retention Imperative



Purchase is not the end of the journey—it's just the beginning

Because buyers are empowered, they are constantly looking for new ways to maximize value from the products and services they bring into their organizations. That might mean uncovering new use cases through tutorial videos, exploring additional features through search, or finding ways to deploy solutions across more teams.



switched vendors in the last six months.¹¹

At the same time, as mentioned, switching vendors has never been easier. If a buyer doesn't see ongoing value, they can—and will—move on.



You would get a ping from one of our SLT members on this initiative going, “Hey, I just thought of, can it do this?” So, I would usually look to find a video that was well reviewed. [The reviewer in the video] looked like they were on the current version of the software [we bought], and would say, “Yes, it can be done after all.” I'm seeing multiple videos with this expertise or this capability being demonstrated. A lot of that was helpful to visualize with a tool like YouTube.”

Large SaaS Primary Decision-Maker, Senior Director,
Financial Services

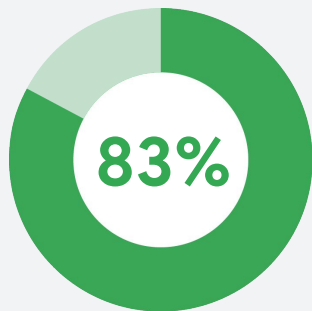
The empowered buyer doesn't stop after purchase

They don't stop at procurement but remain engaged, informed, and curious. Post-purchase activity is high, with 83% using Google and YouTube to better understand their product post-purchase. And when buyers do engage positively after the sale, the payoff is significant:

88%

B2B buyers who use Google tools (e.g. Search, YouTube, Gemini) post-purchase say they are **extremely/very likely to recommend their purchased product to others.**¹³

Platforms Used for Post-Purchase Value Discovery¹²
Among Total



Of B2B Buyers say **Google Search or YouTube** helped them uncover new use cases or get more value from the purchased product or solution

Google 68%

YouTube 44%



I spent time looking on YouTube to see any kind of tutorials they had.”

Large Web Builder/Design Collaborator, Business Development Executive, Insurance Industry

*Buyer used YouTube to learn how to use their purchased product more effectively

YouTube’s probably the most relevant—like, when a new product’s getting used and someone’s trying to figure out, how the heck do I connect this? Or what’s a good practice? There are folks who share that stuff.”

Small B2B Retail Final Decision-Maker, COO, Technology

Retention requires proactive support

The most successful vendors don't just sell—they help unlock value by guiding buyers to the best uses of products. They serve as tutors and partners to their clients, surfacing educational resources, practical how-to content, and examples of new ways to apply solutions inside their business. Vendors who provide this kind of support can avoid the churn that makes business so hard—increasing their likelihood of earning repeat revenue within just a few months.

60%

Expect to repeat their
B2B retail purchase
within four months.¹⁴



Ch 3

TL;DR

Retention is no longer guaranteed. Buyers are empowered, informed, and open to switching when the next buying cycle comes around or when technology advancements trigger a review. To keep them, vendors must invest in post-purchase trust by helping buyers maximize value, discover new opportunities, and feel supported well after concluding the sale.

Empowered growth

Today's empowered buyers move quickly, validate everything, and put their trust in proof and peer voices over polished pitches. **The B2B Content Journey Map is your shortcut**, a clear guide to what buyers expect at each stage, and how to meet them with the right content and context on the right platforms—earning trust and driving long-term growth.



The B2B Content Journey Map

What's changed

AI acts as a research partner

Among surveyed B2B buyers, 60% say that they use AI tools in their journey of purchasing business solutions or products¹

Trust anchors matter

Empowered buyers validate with search to cross-check their choices

Buyers move faster

77% complete within 12 weeks²; AI shortens this further

The purchasing process is iterative and always on: Buyers revisit steps and cross-check constantly

Peer validation has broadened: Creators and communities play a bigger role than traditional analysts/colleagues alone



Content type on what platform

- **Google Search:** Product category pages, clear pricing, comparisons
- **YouTube:** Short explainer videos, early thought leadership
- **AI tools:** Vendor list generation, quick summaries
- **Communities:** Peer questions/posts
- **Review sites:** Early category scans
- **Google Search:** ROI calculators, case studies, analyst reports
- **YouTube:** Deeper demos, comparison walkthroughs
- **Vendor website:** Detailed product specs, industry/role-specific content
- **Communities:** Testimonials, unpolished peer insights and reviews
- **AI tools:** Summaries of analyst reports or asking for any unknowns to be aware of
- **Vendor websites:** Pricing sheets, FAQs, security/technical specs
- **Google Search:** Competitive checks, validation queries
- **YouTube:** Onboarding previews, customer testimonials
- **Review sites:** Final credibility checks
- **LinkedIn/socials:** Vetting sales reps.
- **AI tools:** Proposal summaries, negotiation and pricing prep
- **YouTube:** Tutorials, troubleshooting, best practice videos
- **Google Search:** Unlocking any new use-cases or other integration tips
- **Communities:** Peer-to-peer problem solving
- **Vendor sites:** Customer service/portals, product updates
- **AI tools:** Summarizing onboarding docs, creating any checklists for successful integration and added development

Appendix

What this playbook is

A practical guide for advertisers and vendors to understand how today's B2B tech buyers navigate their purchase journey.

A framework that explains what buyers expect from marketing content, and why clarity, transparency, and proof matter.

A set of evidence-based recommendations—rooted in data that show how to earn trust, build credibility, and convert intent into action.

A journey map for aligning with the “Day 1 List” mindset and how to get on it, stay on it, and build long-term trust (even after purchase) to drive retention.

What this playbook is NOT

A one-size-fits-all checklist: vendors and advertisers should adapt the principles in this playbook to fit their sector, role, and context.

The final word: the B2B journey is constantly changing. This playbook should serve as a guide to navigating today's evolving purchasing journey.



Methodology

Quantitative approach (June & July 2025)

2,063 FT senior leaders

C-suite, executives, or upper-level managers:

- Tech business and professional services
- Financial services
- Healthcare
- Hospitality
- Manufacturing
- Media
- Retail
- Telecom
- Transportation
- Utilities
- Energy
- Agriculture
- Construction

Involved in B2B purchasing decisions across the following verticals:

- Enterprise (n=697)
- SaaS (n=535)
- Web services/builders (n=317)
- B2B retail (n=514)

Roughly n=100 from key subgroups

Enterprise

Cloud services, business intelligence, analytics, edge computing, computing, database, market research, ERP/EPM, CRM

SaaS

CRM, video conferencing, file hosting, customer support platforms, project planning and productivity, anti-virus/security


Web Services/Builders


Domains, web hosting, web design

B2B Retail

Printing and promo, shipping and logistics, industrial supplies, office supplies

Qualitative approach (July 2025)

Qualitative IDs to demonstrate key insights and claims with the voice of the B2B buyer 

One-hour online in-depth interviews with 20 B2B buyers (n=5 per vertical) 



Resources

For more on tech trends, download:

- Rise of the Workfluencer: how today's "workfluencers" are transforming what influence looks like in a professional context.
- The ROI of Gen AI: benchmarks the impact of gen AI on business, and how select global enterprises are achieving breakout success with AI.
- The Enterprise AI Journey: guides AI vendors on how to strategically communicate with organizations about how to leverage this evolving technology.
- The Accountable AI Playbook: an expert-driven framework for approaching AI responsibly, balancing innovation with accountability.

Credits

Contributors

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About NRG: National Research Group is a global insights and strategy firm trusted by the world's leading technology brands. Rooted in four decades of expertise, we provide actionable research and guidance across devices, services, and digital platforms – helping companies stay ahead in a fast-changing world.

Claims Appendix

Claim #	Claim	Source / Notes
1	Among surveyed B2B buyers, 60% say that they use AI tools in their journey of purchasing business solutions or products.	Google/NRG B2B New Buyer Journey Study, US, Q2 2025. n=2063 B2B buyers and decision makers
2	Among surveyed US B2B buyers, 59% used social media during the research stage of their purchase journey.	Google/NRG B2B New Buyer Journey Study, US, Q2 2025. n=2063 B2B buyers and decision makers
3	Among surveyed B2B buyers, 94% of those who searched for a product online said that they used Google Search.	Google/NRG B2B New Buyer Journey Study, US, Q2 2025. n=165 B2B buyers and decision makers who first heard about the product they purchased by looking it up online
4	Among surveyed US B2B buyers, 35% used AI tools during discovery, 43% during consideration, 31% during purchase, and 17% during the post-purchase stage of the buyer journey.	Google/NRG B2B New Buyer Journey Study, US, Q2 2025. n=2063 B2B buyers and decision makers
5	Among surveyed B2B buyers that used AI tools in their journey, 63% said that they use Google Search to validate or cross-check information generated by AI tools during their journey.	Google/NRG B2B New Buyer Journey Study, US, Q2 2025. n=1861 B2B buyers and decision makers who used AI in their journey
6	Among surveyed US B2B buyers that used AI tools in their journey, 45% said that they use vendor websites and 43% said that they use analyst reports to validate or cross-check information generated by AI tools during their journey.	Google/NRG B2B New Buyer Journey Study, US, Q2 2025. n=1861 B2B buyers and decision makers who used AI in their purchase decision
7	Among surveyed B2B buyers, 77% said that their buying journey took 12 weeks or less.	Google/NRG B2B New Buyer Journey Study, US, Q2 2025. n=2063 B2B buyers and decision makers
8	Among surveyed US B2B buyers, 58% who purchased a B2B product report switching in the last six months.	Google/NRG B2B New Buyer Journey Study, US, Q2 2025. n=2063 B2B buyers and decision makers
9	Among surveyed B2B buyers, 82% said that they ultimately purchased a product or solution that had been on their mind at the start of their research.	Google/NRG B2B New Buyer Journey Study, US, Q2 2025. n=1305 B2B buyers and decision makers who had a Day 1 list but also looked at other options along the way
10	According to a survey conducted by NRG in the US, YouTube is a go-to for straightforward tutorials and demos, with 63% of surveyed B2B buyers visiting a brand's website and 60% watching a tutorial on the product or service.	Google/NRG B2B New Buyer Journey Study, US, Q2 2025. n=720 B2B buyers and decision makers who used YouTube while researching the product they purchased
11	Among surveyed US B2B buyers, 58% who purchased a B2B product report switching in the last six months.	Google/NRG B2B New Buyer Journey Study, US, Q2 2025. n=2063 B2B buyers and decision makers
12	According to a survey conducted by NRG in the US, 83% of surveyed B2B buyers used Google and YouTube to better understand their product post-purchase - 68% say Google Search and 44% say YouTube helped them uncover new use cases or get more value from the purchased product or solution.	Google/NRG B2B New Buyer Journey Study, US, Q2 2025. n=2063 B2B buyers and decision makers
13	According to a survey conducted by NRG in the US, 88% of surveyed B2B buyers who use Google tools (e.g. Search, YouTube, Gemini) post-purchase say they are extremely/very likely to recommend their purchased product to others.	Google/NRG B2B New Buyer Journey Study, US, Q2 2025. n=446 B2B buyers and decision makers who use any Google tools post-purchase
14	Among surveyed US B2B buyers who made a B2B Retail purchase in the past 6 months, 60% expect to purchase this product again for their business within 4 months.	Google/NRG B2B New Buyer Journey Study, US, Q2 2025. n=563 B2B buyers and decision makers who made a B2B Retail purchase in the past 6 months