



FLEISHMANHILLARD  
FISHBURN

# ***THE TOP-LINE GROWTH IMPERATIVE***

***How effective communications impacts  
the B2B technology sales funnel***

*“If I was down  
to my last dollar  
I would spend  
it on PR”*

**BILL GATES**

Bill Gates understood that public relations is one of the most powerful ways to jumpstart and drive sales. He knew that a strategic communications plan focused on corporate reputation and brand marketing can impact a company's bottom line.

In 2019, businesses are facing greater competition and more scrutiny than ever before. As a result, today's C-suite are taking note of Bill Gates and paying closer attention to the role of communications. And they expect more from their senior communications team when it comes to delivering insights, strategy, creative content and – above all – results that drive lead generation and sales. In fact, according to The Holmes Report, while lead generation and sales garnered zero responses in 2017, in 2018 it was cited as one of the ways the C-suite now measure the success of PR by a solid 17% of respondents.<sup>1</sup>

What's more, with digital transformation projects impacting every industry – from healthcare, to auto, to manufacturing, to transport – no company can make, deliver or market its products or services effectively without technology. Both hardware and software are therefore critical purchases for a business to make if they are to succeed in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

To better understand the role of integrated communications in influencing the B2B technology sales funnel, FleishmanHillard Fishburn, in partnership with the TRUE Global Intelligence team, conducted its own proprietary research among 250 UK business decision-makers alongside interviews with members of the C-suite.

Our research looked at who is involved in the decision-making process, the influencers they turn to for guidance, the challenges decision-makers face and the role of PR and marketing across the sales journey.

The B2B sales process is long and complex, but what really came through in our research is that decision-makers don't leave their emotions and personalities at the door when they enter the office each day to don their B2B tech buyer hat. Our research shows that modern B2B marketing for technological products and solutions needs to appeal to both hearts and minds.

Stakes are high when people recommend a big-ticket purchase to their employer. It can feel like their professional reputation, success and career trajectory is on the line. These buyers need confidence in your brand to feel like they're making the right decision.

We believe that building and protecting brand reputation is just as critical as brand and product marketing – and by doing both incredibly well, we help our clients to stand out and succeed in an increasingly competitive market.



**CLAUDIA BATE**

Head of Technology,  
Director and Partner at  
FleishmanHillard Fishburn



<sup>1</sup> Holmes Report

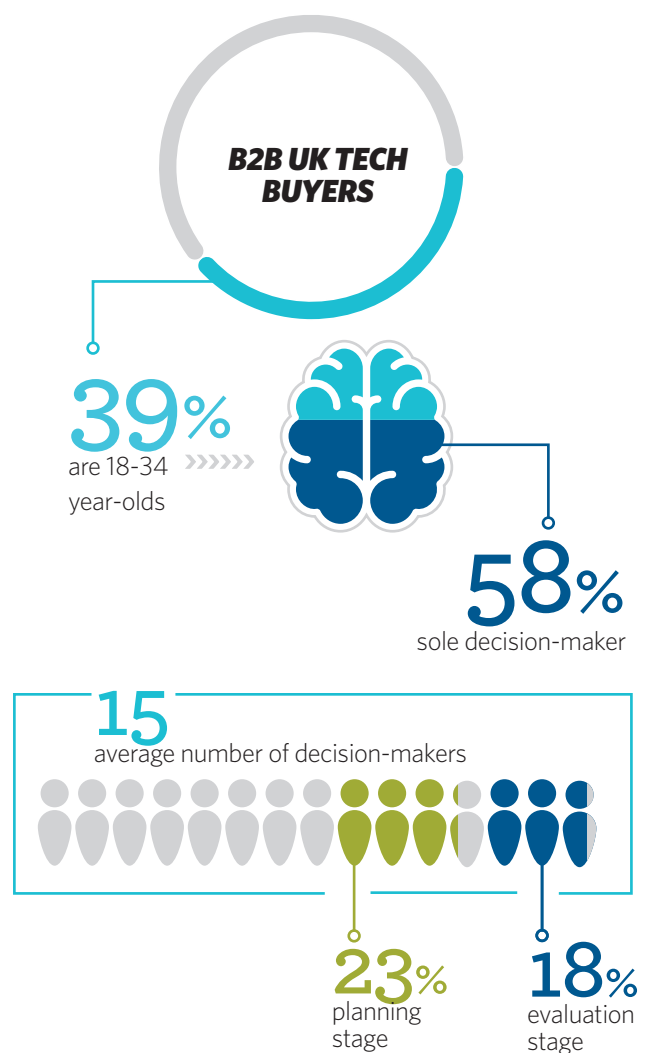
# MILLENNIALS

## The new B2B buyers on the block

Millennials are having a big impact on the B2B buying process. According to our survey, 39% of B2B technology buyers in the UK are 18-34-year-olds, 58% of whom are the sole decision-maker. It probably comes as no surprise that this generation of buyers heavily relies on digital channels to research products, which can include websites but also online reviews and social media. In fact, 67% of the buying decision journey is now online, with a third of decision-makers expecting a supplier's website to be the most helpful channel in their buying process<sup>2</sup>.

Overall, the average number of decision-makers involved in the technology purchase process is 15, with most people typically involved in the planning stage (23%) and the evaluation stage (18%). As expected, the bigger the business, the larger the number of internal stakeholders who take part in the tech purchase process. On average, small businesses see four people involved, while very large businesses have purchase decision teams of 29 people on average.

These decision-makers are often in the C-suite, but they can also be found in procurement, HR, finance, IT, operations, sales, manufacturing, R&D and marketing.







*“CIOs are having to build bridges with all other functions. It’s a partnership. Whatever you buy has to integrate into your current ecosystem successfully.”*

**EDYTA MALESZA-MALATRA**  
**HEAD OF INDUSTRY MARKETING, SAP**

*“These days, CTOs need to understand the broader business and the differentiation factors that technology can offer.”*

**CTO OF A LEADING ASSET**  
**MANAGEMENT BUSINESS**

Among very large businesses, IT is predominantly involved in the evaluation stage of new technology. For businesses of other sizes, responses were much more mixed, however the IT team remains a critical stakeholder at every stage of the process.

While the high number of people involved in the process could add to the complexity, businesses believe that tech purchases are too important to be left to a single department to make the decision (62%). That said, most (84%) of the time, there is one ‘champion’ who has the most influence in the group<sup>3</sup>.

Overall, 63% of UK decision-makers believe their company does a good job in finding and selecting the right technology partners.

This implies that the current process is working in terms of how new vendors are selected and brought on board.

# “Show me the ROI!”

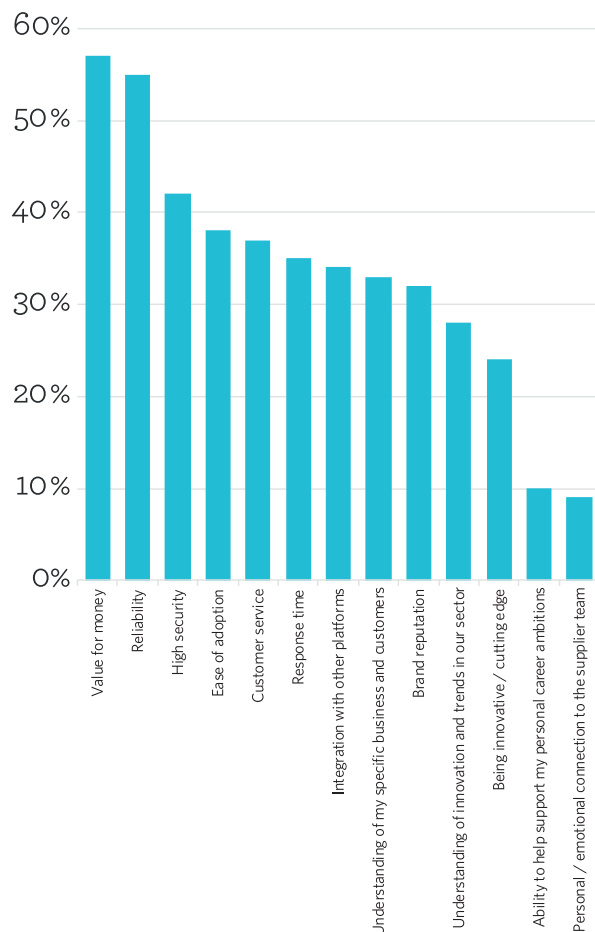
## CRITICAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE DECISION-MAKING

Unsurprisingly, cost is one of the most important factors when it comes to companies looking to switch providers. Value for money was the most popular attribute required in a new supplier (57%).

For very large businesses, critical factors also focused on seeking a technology partner that understands their own specific needs (47%), followed by reliability and high security (42%).

When asked about their top pain points during the buying process, respondents from large businesses cited the long implementation process and stakeholders' lack of technical understanding as their key issues. In addition, from an internal comms perspective, large businesses also said misaligned priorities across the company could hinder the buying process.

### What are the key attributes you're looking for from a supplier?\*



\* Responses taken from small, medium, large and very large businesses



**~6in10**

**WANT CLEAR, RELEVANT  
PRODUCT INFORMATION**

**52%**

**WANT QUICK  
ANSWERS FROM A  
SUPPLIER**

**44%**

**ENJOYED AN  
IN-PERSON DEMO**

Almost six in ten (58%) respondents cited that one of the most influential tactics a supplier can implement is to have clear and relevant information about their product or service. Decision-makers ultimately look for a consistent story and experience across all channels, media and devices, throughout their buying journey.

Over half (52%) said being able to answer questions quickly also painted suppliers in a favourable light, followed by an in-person demo (44%).

*“The ability to collaborate, and step-up when required. Can you scale, depending on our needs?”*

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**EDYTA MALESZA-MALATRA**  
**HEAD OF INDUSTRY MARKETING, SAP**

*“It’s about implementation. A failed implementation can end a career. In that sense, it’s more important than innovation.”*

.....  
**JOHN PALMIERO, CONSULTANT**

*“For me, it’s three things: One, do you meet the need? Two, how much does it cost?*

*IT is a cost centre, not a profit centre, so we need to keep this down. And three, how are you going to support me over the long term?”*

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**RAVI NAIK, CIO, SEAGATE**

# B2B

## TECH BUYERS ARE PEOPLE TOO

B2B decision-makers and influencers expect content that forms an emotive, personal connection. To drive cut through and move away from price differentiation, B2B brands need to make an emotional impact with decision-makers – companies that do this have twice the impact over marketers focused on business and functional value alone<sup>4</sup>.

According to Harvard Business Review, 64% of B2B buyers cite shared values as the main reason they have a relationship with a brand, and prefer content that takes a bold, counter-intuitive or provocative point of view.

People buy from people and credible influencers in the form of peers and colleagues (62%) and industry experts (66%) were cited as the most influential sources in a company's decision-making process.

With digital innovation continuing to transform every business and industry, purchasing new solutions that will deliver that transformation successfully is a high-stakes decision. On average, purchase decisions often take 6+ months and some take 12+ months<sup>5</sup>. Communicators who arm themselves with robust knowledge about who they are talking to and the messages those audiences want to hear will stand a better chance of success when it comes to driving leads and sales for the business.





*“For us, it’s about culture.*

*We have a very strong culture, and we want to work with a like-minded partner.”*

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**CTO OF A LEADING ASSET MANAGEMENT BUSINESS**

# Transforming the sales journey with **COMMUNICATIONS**

According to UK B2B decision-makers, it's rare for businesses to consider more than five suppliers when purchasing new technology. With fierce competition from different providers, it's critical a business stands out from the start to make it to the shortlist. So how do decision-makers decide who's in and who's out?

Decision-makers will search online 12 times before engaging with a B2B brand<sup>6</sup>. They seek information from a range of trusted sources, with a clear emphasis on earned media, industry reports and influencer word-of-mouth (in this case, industry analysts, management consultancies and other business intermediaries, including lawyers and accountants). More than 50% of buying influencers view at least eight pieces of online content during their decision making<sup>7</sup>. And 70% watch videos throughout their path to purchase – nearly half of which will watch 30+ minutes of video content<sup>8</sup>.

Among very large businesses, influencers, peers, events and tech media were more influential than in smaller businesses. In addition, there is a clear distinction in the role of social between small and larger businesses – the bigger the company, the more likely they are to say that social channels (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook) influence their decision-making process on tech purchases. This trend was also true when it comes to direct mail.

When looking at which communications are most effective at shaping the path to purchase our respondents ranked the following:



**58%**  
Technology publications



**58%**  
Industry events



**56%**  
IT Forums / blogs



**44%**  
Direct emails



**44%**  
Mainstream news publications



**33%**  
Social

*“LinkedIn could be used more effectively, for influencing the early stages of the buying process. Use it to deploy targeted content that makes a potential customer ask themselves what their current need is, and start the buying journey.”*

**CUSTOMER SCIENCE DIRECTOR**

**6** Google      **7** Forrester      **8** Google  
 Small business: 1-99 employees  
 Medium business: 100 - 499 employees  
 Large business: 500 - 2499 employees  
 Very large business: 2500 - 25,000 or more employees





# B2B doesn't have to mean boring

# **MEDIOCRE**

# **CONTENT HURTS**

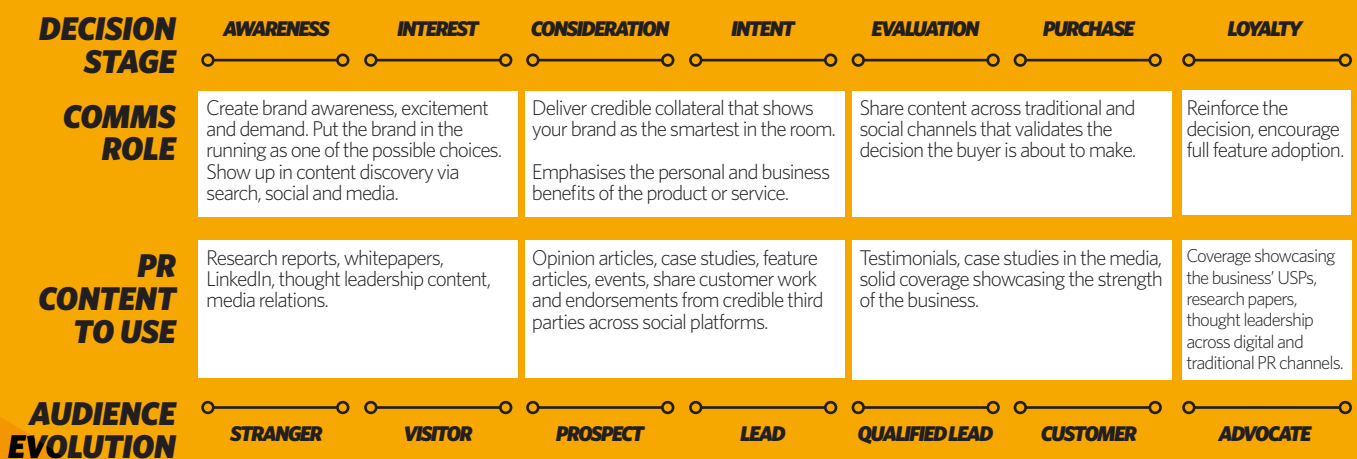
B2B buyers (64%) believe that thought leadership from a brand influences their buying decisions. However, nearly half of our respondents agreed that most B2B content they see is boring and repetitive and over half agreed that branded online content often lacks credibility.

In a world where content is now king, it's clear that not just any B2B content will do – it must be credible and engaging. Each piece of content created must work hard to address the needs of multiple stakeholders, with nuanced messaging for each person's role within an organisation. Brands that can deliver compelling content that is authentic and credible will have a major advantage over the competition.

This is where the B2B communications teams come in. They can influence the sales journey by:

- Gathering data to build a picture of the needs of the buyer and their perception of the brand
- Creating brand narratives and storytelling platforms to create a credible position from which your brand can connect with buyer needs
- Elevating executives and employees to be the face and voice of the brand and its culture
- Delivering creative editorial content to support a buyer throughout their decision journey and putting that content into the hands of those can most influence the decision-making
- Integrating PR and digital communications into the overall marketing and sales strategy to drive results to the brand's bottom line

Creating a comprehensive 360-degree PR, marketing and content plan that provides authoritative information to key decision-makers at every step of the sales journey will have a positive impact on lead generation and conversion.



# SUCCESS IS A SCIENCE

If you have the conditions,  
you get the results!

From an implementation perspective, increases in productivity and IT performance are the most important metrics for determining the technology's ROI. Typically, businesses will wait six months to a year to measure financial savings from a new tool. However, improvements in customer service and productivity are expected to be much faster, and can be measured on a timescale of between three and six months.

In addition, 62% of UK tech decision-makers believe it's important that the products and solutions they implement impact their company's sales and marketing funnel; this increases to 76% among very large businesses.

Once the decision has been made to purchase new technology, the role of PR becomes even more crucial. Customers need to see regular messages through both owned and earned channels to help validate their decision and for the business to drive repeat purchases.

For PR teams, a successful measurement strategy starts with setting clear communications objectives. It's important that those objectives are set in the context of, and in relation to, what the business is trying to achieve overall, such as revenue or market growth.



**62%**

want solutions that  
impact sales and  
marketing funnel >>>>>



**76%**

among very large  
businesses!





**WHEN IT COMES TO ALIGNING B2B COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE SALES FUNNEL IT'S IMPORTANT TO MEASURE CAMPAIGN PERFORMANCE AT EACH STAGE OF THE JOURNEY:**

**Awareness / Interest**

PR programmes are designed to help brands build share of voice in competitive markets and win over hearts and minds. Communications measurement here should focus on output metrics such as volume of coverage, social posts and content generated, share of voice and/or conversation, and website visitors.

**Consideration / Intent**

At this stage, communications is demonstrating the unique value your brand brings. Here we should report on metrics that speak to the delivery of benefits such as key messages, video views, content downloads / shares, and bounce rate.

**Evaluation / Purchase**

At this stage a prospective buyer is looking to validate their decision, therefore we should focus on metrics that speak to action and intent.

For example, capturing people's name, company, title and email from 'gated' content such as white papers will provide the sales and marketing team with qualified leads to follow up with.

**Loyalty**

Once we've converted a prospect to a customer, our measurement should focus on business metrics such as retention, loyalty and satisfaction. This could include looking at the net promoter score (NPS) of clients delivered by communications, as well as the lifetime value of those customers.

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To measure and report at each stage, it's necessary to collect data and content from earned and social media, rigorously evaluate paid and owned channel analytics, ensure the website is optimised, integrate web and search analytics, and of course connect these systems with existing CRM and sales processes.

# B2B PR AS A SALES TOOL

PR is the most credible sales tool in the B2B marketing communications mix and a strong B2B public relations programme has a direct link to increased sales performance. Throughout the buying decision journey, PR builds brand awareness, increases credibility of your brand, deepens trust amongst your prospects, and ultimately drives commercial success.

To find out more about how FleishmanHillard Fishburn can work with your team and partners to integrate PR into your marketing and sales programmes please get in touch:

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