How The Pandemic Transformed B2B Buying

The business landscape has changed dramatically in recent years, and B2B buying has changed along with it.

Forrester’s latest B2B Buying Survey revealed how the pandemic shaped B2B purchasing and amplified long-term trends that already were in play. Buyers now exercise more due diligence than ever before, conducting more research and engaging in more conversations with vendors and third parties. More people are involved in today’s buying process as well, with executives playing a greater role than in the past.
The number of buying journey interactions has soared.

The average number of buying interactions — online research, conversations with providers, and other steps taken to learn about offerings or vendors — jumped nearly 60%.

The critical nature of business purchases during the pandemic — along with people working from home and having more time to conduct research — led to greater scrutiny and due diligence of those purchases.


Base (2021): 957 functional leaders and professionals in B2B organizations across more than 15 industries

Base (2019): 924 functional leaders and professionals in B2B organizations across more than 15 industries
Digital buying interactions outstrip human interactions.

Online, self-guided buying interactions continue to grow at a faster pace than human interactions.

Self-Guided Interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Human Interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The proliferation of digital content types and buyer resources, including review sites and user community sites, has contributed to this shift — as has the additional time buyers have had for online exploration.

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However, buyers value both types of interactions more than ever.

The share of buyers who found both human and self-guided interactions helpful during the buying cycle rose by 20 percentage points since before the pandemic.

Buyers who found human interactions valuable

- 2019: 35%
- 2021: 55%

Buyers who found self-guided interactions valuable

- 2019: 33%
- 2021: 53%

Buyers may need guidance after conducting self-guided research. They also crave interpersonal connection — perhaps even more so during the pandemic.


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Buying scenarios have grown more complex.

In recent years, purchasing decisions involving multiple people and departments have become more common, while the simplest scenarios, involving just one or two people, have dwindled.

Highly complex buying scenarios

- 2021: 43%
- 2017: 24%

Simplest buying scenarios

- 2021: 18%
- 2017: 41%

The rise of complex buying groups preceded the pandemic. More recently, workers unable to travel have had more time to get involved in purchase decisions, while an increase in technology purchases has also driven broader participation.


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Executives, finance, and IT — groups that cut across functions — are most often involved in B2B purchases.

Executives increased their role as decision-maker.

- 2017: 58%
- 2021: 75%

Finance increased their role as decision-maker.

- 2017: 35%
- 2021: 51%

IT leaders held steady in their decision-making role.

- 2017 and 2021: 63%

Greater scrutiny of purchase decisions — and heightened focus on the bottom line — have shaped who leads those decisions. Other roles are often important in influencing or ratifying buying decisions.
Take action to engage and win today’s B2B buyers.

The trends highlighted above will likely endure beyond the pandemic. To engage B2B buyers, be sure to:

• Provide a mix of digital content assets, including case studies, articles, reports, and interactive tools to reach buyers who are seeking information online.

• Prioritize enabling not only sellers, but also customer success managers, product managers, engineers, and other roles that discerning buyers are keen to speak with.

• Understand who is in your target buying groups and which members have the influence and/or authority to sway the purchase decision.

• Cultivate strong relationships with influencers such as industry analysts and publications.

• Build a robust customer advocacy program.
Master Changing Buyer Dynamics

A keen understanding of buyers is foundational to marketing success. Forrester can help you build that understanding to thrive in a continually evolving landscape.

We partner with B2B marketing executives and functional leaders to develop strategies that drive measurable impact on growth and customer loyalty. Explore our Forrester Decisions services for B2B marketing:

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- Forrester Decisions for Marketing Operations
- Forrester Decisions for Demand & ABM
- Forrester Decisions for Portfolio Marketing
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READY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP?

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