TECH B2B BUYERS HAVE SPOKEN!

WHAT CONTENT IS HOT IN 2022?

The Isoline 2022 content marketing survey

ISOLINE

Introduction

Content marketing is here to stay. It is a key driver of leads, thought leadership, and awareness for the world's major B2B brands. And if you're in B2B marketing, the chances are that you've been busy generating content of every form to cover all the stages of the purchase cycle.

But what content do B2B purchase decision-makers around the world want to read?

We believe passionately in data-driven audience insights to inform tech B2B content marketing.
This spring, we investigated these questions by surveying 161 B2B decision-makers from the UK, EU, and US in the technology, telecommunications, internet, and electronics industries, and spanning a range of company sizes. We asked them a number of in-depth questions about how they were responding to B2B tech content. What resonated, what was falling flat?

The results are now in, and not surprisingly, some changes in content consumption catalysed by the pandemic have persisted, while others have subsided or been replaced.

So, what's working for those decision-makers, and what seems to be taking a lesser role now?
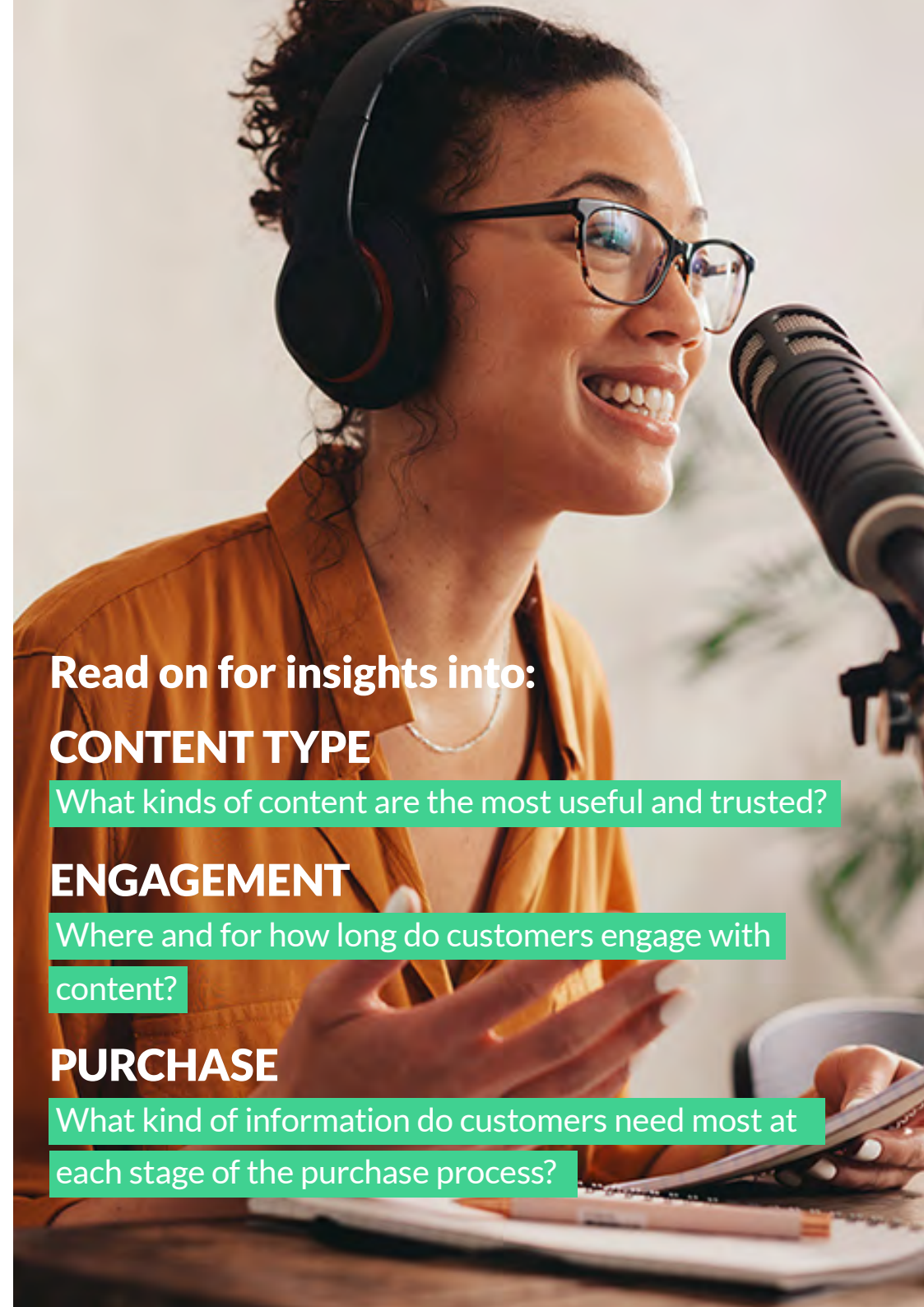
Read on for insights into:

CONTENT TYPE
What kinds of content are the most useful and trusted?

ENGAGEMENT
Where and for how long do customers engage with content?

PURCHASE
What kind of information do customers need most at each stage of the purchase process?

CONTENT TYPE

Content type is a key factor for tech B2B content marketers. What are your audiences reading — or watching — the most? What makes content useful, memorable, and shareable? And what type of content is the most likely to trigger a conversation with the sales team?

Videos and webinars are the most useful

55% of B2B buyers around the world find video the most useful type of content. While the importance of video cannot be understated, nor is its impact likely to decrease substantially any time soon, our results revealed some noticeable shifts.

New numbers reflect that **decisionmakers find webinars almost as important (54%) as video.**

Just two years ago, case studies reigned supreme as the favoured type of content among tech B2B marketers. These are still helpful, but savvy marketing professionals would do well to put forward some creative, insightful conversations in the webinar space as well.

When considering a technology B2B purchase, what types of content are **most useful** to you?

Video content
55%

Webinars
54%

Case studies
50%

Whitepapers	47%
Blogs	43%
Third party reports	42%
Interviews	40%
Infographics	39%
Podcasts	37%

Demographic differences

63% found infographics to be the most useful type of content.

63% preferred video content.

Webinars got the most votes from B2B decisionmakers, with **59%**.

Blogs were the least useful, with only **31%** of respondents finding them useful.

Expert reports and testimonials highly trusted

Independent third-party reviews, such as those provided by analysts, are considered the most trustworthy source of content with **66%** of respondents finding them useful. Branded content coming directly from the supplier takes second place (60%). In 2019, a large majority (60%) of individuals making purchasing decisions in the tech B2B space relied on peer reviews, reflecting another shift away from the norm.

What content do you trust most?

Independent publication or analyst (e.g Gartner)

66%

Branded directly from potential supplier

60%

Peer reviews / user generated feedback

56%

Co-branded content sponsored by potential supplier

55%

There are a few reasons third-party reviews appeal to businesses looking at major purchasing decisions. While peer reviews will tell decision-makers how a product or service has worked for them, their applicability stops there. There's no definitive input about other details that might make the product relevant — or problematic — for another company.

Talent firm Toptal provides a succinct rationale behind some of the reasons third-party analysts are so important:

> " … major analysts will often define [a product's] nature and functions, how it integrates with or stands alone from other technologies, how users should interact with its features, and whether it is an emerging market trend or a flash in the pan.

For IT decision-makers, third-party independent reviews can bridge the communications gap between management and the IT development team. According to Communications of the Association for Computing Machinery,

> " … the independent technical reviewer [is] someone who possesses technical skills but isn't tied directly to the development team, and someone who puts the business leader's interests first and foremost.

It's this combination of proven results and unbiased feedback that is driving trust in independent analysis firms.

Demographic differences

🇫🇷 🇺🇸

French (**67%**) and American (**69%**) respondents placed more trust in content directly from the potential supplier

🇩🇪 🇬🇧

German (**74%**) and UK (**69%**) respondents strongly favoured independent reviews.

What type of B2B content is most likely to be shared?

The playing field is fairly level with respect to the types of B2B marketing content users are most likely to share. **Videos and webinars are the most likely to be shared: 53% and 52%** of respondents would be likely to pass these on, respectively.

But **blogs, interviews, and podcasts all came close,** garnering approval from **42-45%** of respondents.

But compelling does not necessarily equal brief. According to an analysis of content marketing strategies, long-form content containing lists and images is most widely shared, and generates most leads.

Interestingly, case studies were least likely to be shared, with only 20% of respondents saying they would do so.

What type(s) of content are you most likely to share?

Video content
53%

Webinars
52%

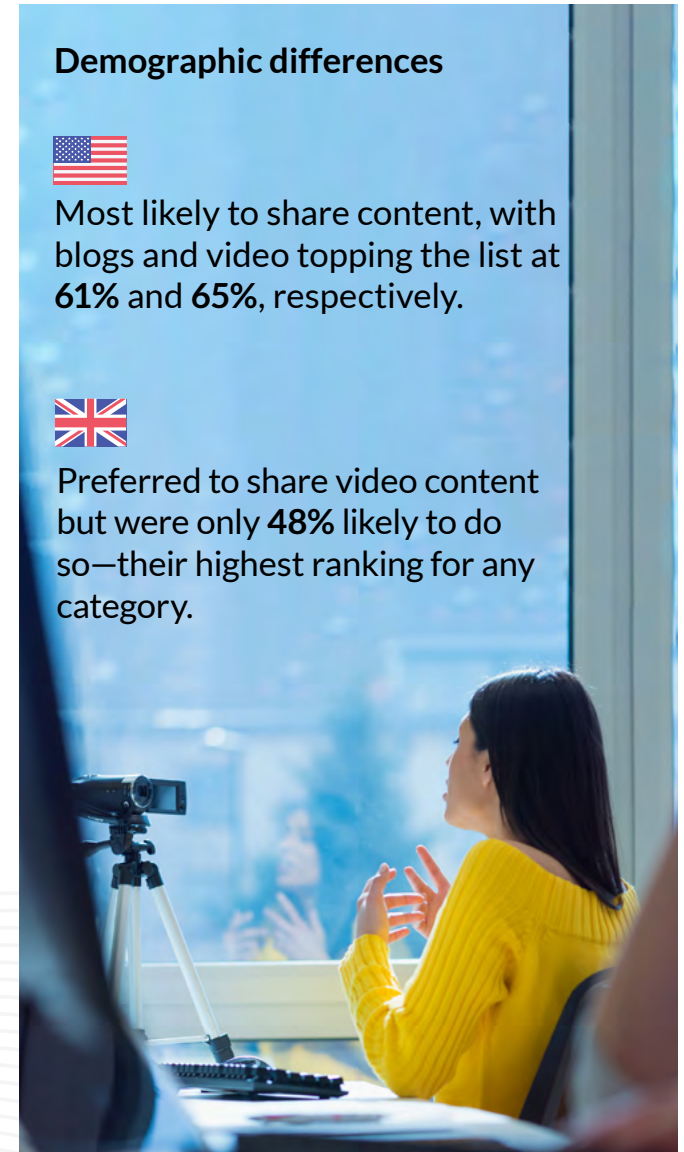|	
Interviews	45%
Blogs	43%
Podcasts	42%
Whitepapers	34%
Infographics	26%
Case studies	20%

Demographic differences

Most likely to share content, with blogs and video topping the list at **61%** and **65%**, respectively.

Preferred to share video content but were only **48%** likely to do so—their highest ranking for any category.

What type of content generates the most leads?

Content that accurately reflects the customer's pain points ranks as the most memorable and likely to prompt a sales call, eliciting a positive response from **57%** of respondents.

Other factors that swing this all-important decision include creativity, data-driven insight, and easy to understand, all valued by more than 50% of respondents.

As BusinessCollective states:

> *...Marketing is not about picking channels and running broad marketing campaigns with generic messages. Successful marketing strategies start with understanding your target customer and designing effective messaging that resonates.*

What makes content memorable and triggers you to take a sales call?

Understands my pain points

57%

Bold, creative content

55%

Unique data and insights	53%
Easy to understand	52%
Comes at the right time	19%

Demographic differences

🇺🇸

Valued material that was easy to understand across the organisation (**71%**).

🇩🇪

Responded best to boldness and creativity (**56%**).

🇫🇷

Placed equal weight on unique data and insight and an understanding of their pain points (**54%**).

🇬🇧

More likely to take a sales call when content addressed pain points (**54%**).

Making a good thing even better

Even when the content marketing campaign is hitting all the right marks, there's always room for improvement. That's why we asked our respondents what they wanted to see in the tech B2B marketing content they received.

While MarketingProfs counsels content teams to curb the sales messaging, our survey revealed a few interesting insights among global tech B2B audiences.

Data does tip the scales slightly. **55% of respondents wanted to see more data and research in the content they consume.** But these users would like to see the **information that addresses pain points specifically (52%)**: no surprises that this results in more sales leads.

How would technology vendors improve the content they produce?

Use more data and research
55%

Content organised by specific pain points and topics
52%

Provide more banchmarking data	45%
Focus less on product specifics and more on value	43%
Package relevant content together	42%
More insights from industry thought leaders/analysts	33%
More relevant customer examples or case studies	16%

Demographic differences

Americans would most like to see content organised by topic/pain points (**63%**), whereas the French chose this category the least among all respondents (**38%**).

ENGAGEMENT

Our second area of focus was engagement. How and where are customers engaging with the content, for how long, via what devices, and what role does it all play in their purchasing decisions?

How much content do users read?

Few consumers, if any, reach out to suppliers after the first piece of marketing content crosses their path. But what are the magic numbers? How many pieces of content does a potential customer typically consume before contacting the supplier, how much time do buyers spend researching, and how much time are they willing to spend consuming content related to a purchasing decision?

Most respondents (58%) consumed three to five pieces of content before contacting a supplier (with the average being 4.5 pieces). This number is slightly higher than in 2019, but not by much. This seems to indicate that they want to conduct adequate research but don't have the time to painstakingly comb through everything available in the market.

Before contacting a supplier, how many pieces of content will you typically consume?

- 1-3
- 3-5
- 5-7
- More than 7
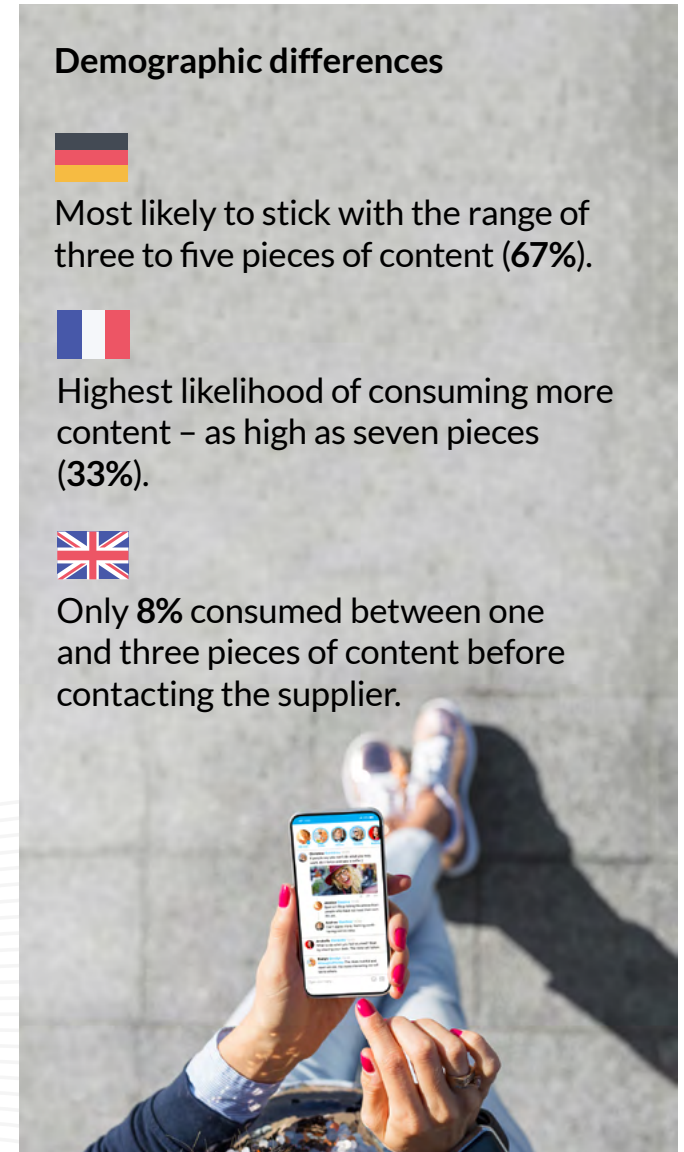
14%
58%
19%
9%
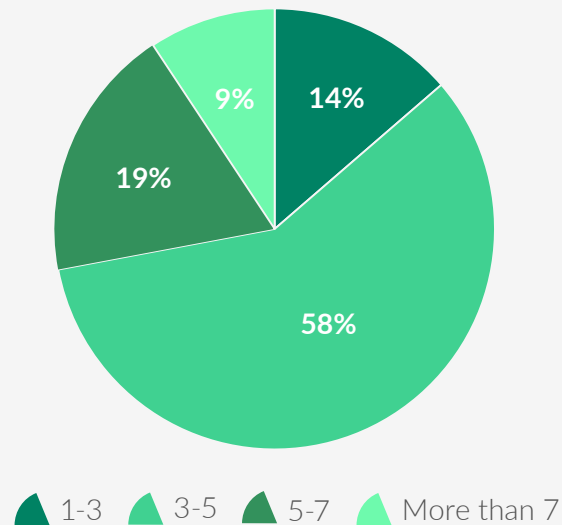
Demographic differences

🇩🇪 Most likely to stick with the range of three to five pieces of content (**67%**).

🇫🇷 Highest likelihood of consuming more content – as high as seven pieces (**33%**).

🇬🇧 Only **8%** consumed between one and three pieces of content before contacting the supplier.

How long are buyers willing to invest in reading content?

73% of respondents are spending more or much more time researching potential suppliers than they spent last year.

39% only spend half an hour to an hour with those key pieces of content.

This time crunch seems to be increasing: the percentage of participants who were willing to spend as much time as they needed with engaging content diminished from 26% in 2019 to 20% in the current survey.

Are you spending more or less time researching potential suppliers than you were 12 months ago?

More
44%

About the same
27%

Much more
29%
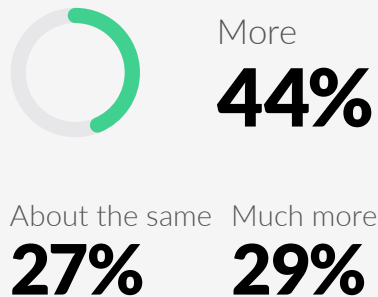
How much time are you willing to invest in consuming content related to a potential purchase?

5%
26%
20%
10%
39%

- 5-10
- 15-30
- 30-60
- 60
- Engaging content, as long as it takes
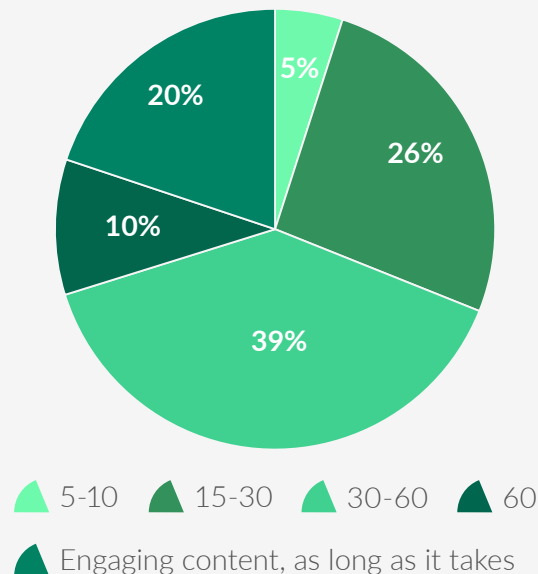
Demographic differences

41% are spending substantially more time in the research process.

59% of German and **54%** of UK participants said they spend more time researching.

The Germans and Americans were the most willing – **52%** and **51%** – to invest between 30-60 minutes consuming content related to a potential purchase.

Prefer to keep their sessions brief, between 15-30 minutes – **33%**.

On what?

The Content Marketing Association (CMA) lists some of the top trends for content strategy in today's market, including repurposing material across multiple channels; prioritising evergreen, reactive, and always-on content.

Although participants still seem desk-bound — **62% indicated desktop or laptop as their primary means to consume content** — mobile continues its steady rise.

This means it's critical that any content can render properly on multiple platforms so consumers can engage with them in a variety of ways.

What is your primary device for consuming content?

- ▲ Mobile
- ▲ Desktop / Laptop
- ▲ Tablet

7%
30%
62%
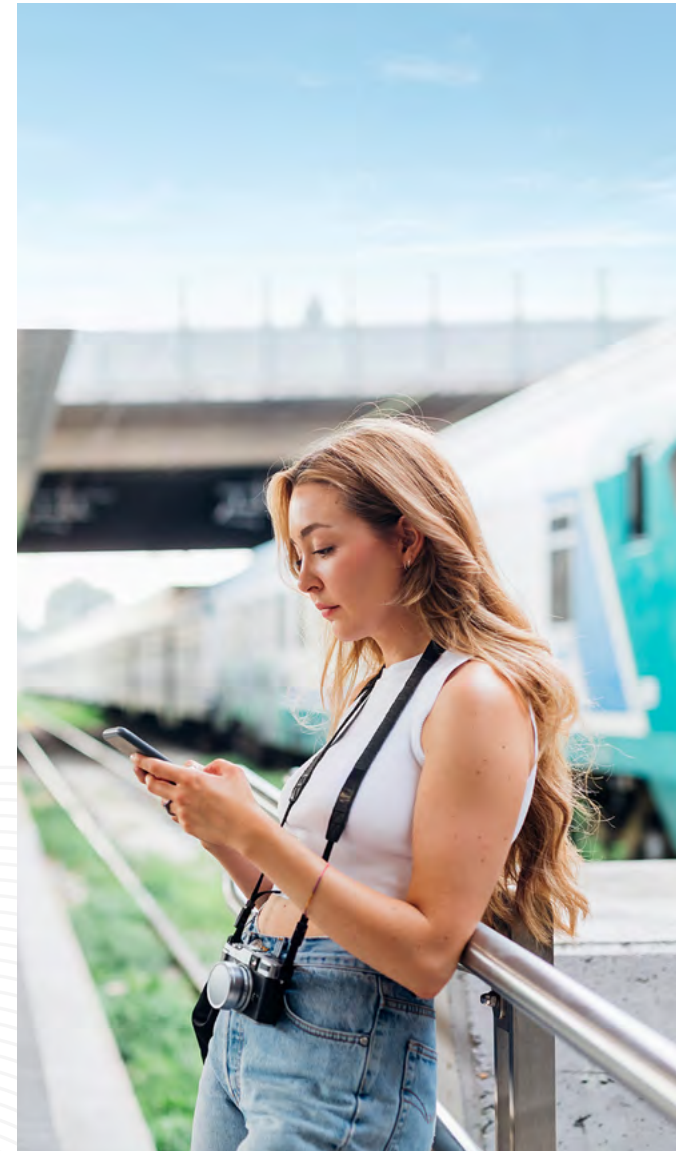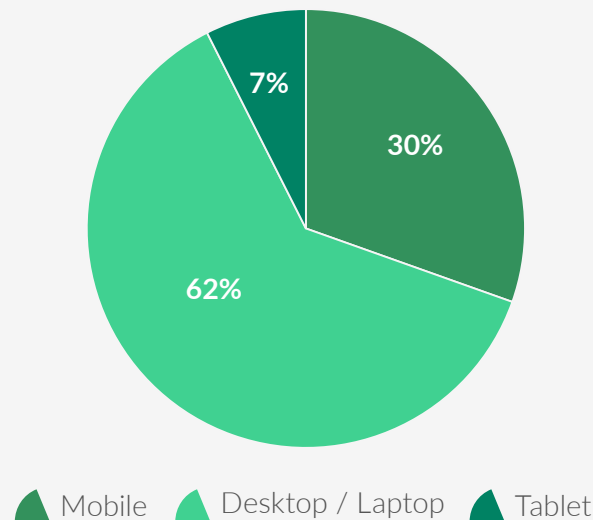
Which channels are most effective?

B2B marketing content needs to have a broad reach, extending outside the corporate website and traditional outreach campaigns to include social media, the podcast space, and SEO optimization for organic search results.

A company's website (including blog posts) remains its greatest content asset: **63% of survey respondents report keeping up with relevant content by going directly to a company's website.**

But tech B2B customers are busy, and their attention is distributed among just about every form of content. **Between 39% and 44%** of participants report staying abreast of relevant content **through company newsletters, social media posts, podcasts, consumer reports, and organic searches.**

Be sure the sales team remains looped into content updates as well: 48% of respondents keep up with company updates via their connections with sales teams.

How do you keep up to speed with relevant content from potential suppliers and influencers?

Website/ blog
63%

Sales team
48%

Social media profiles	44%
Subscribe to newsletter	42%
Consumer reports	42%
Google	40%
Podcasts	39%

Demographic differences

More likely – **61%** – to keep up with relevant content via corporate newsletters than their overseas counterparts (between 30-38%)

What role does content play in decision making?

Nearly 70% of B2B decision makers use content to learn about the technology, the landscape and other educational aspects. This means materials must ensure the product or service's differentiators and value really shine through.

Other key reasons for content consumption include preparation ahead of a meeting with the vendor, and to plan the deployment. It plays a critical role in the later part of the purchase process, when different vendors are being compared.

What role does content play in your purchase process?

Learn about the technology

68%

Plan my deployment and purchase	59%
Show value & potential impact to senior management in my company	55%
Arm myself with some insights before contacting the vendor	51%
Evaluate different suppliers	48%
Understand if the solution can have an impact in my business	32%

Demographic differences

Most likely to use content to show the value and potential impact of the technology to senior management in their companies (**62%**) rather than any other reason.

PURCHASE

The role of content marketing doesn't end once the initial content has done its job. Tech B2B purchasers will continue to turn to content at each phase of the purchase process.

But it is clear they use different types of content for different reasons.

What content works best at each stage of the sales cycle?

Concise technical information about the product or service they are buying, as well as expert analyses from trusted industry sources, is important at the **start of the purchase process**.

While it needs to be presented in a simple, easy-to-understand way, don't forget about the technical angle.

By the **middle of the process**, customers are looking more for specific details about how this technology can help them address their own unique pain points, and industry analysis remains a strong draw.
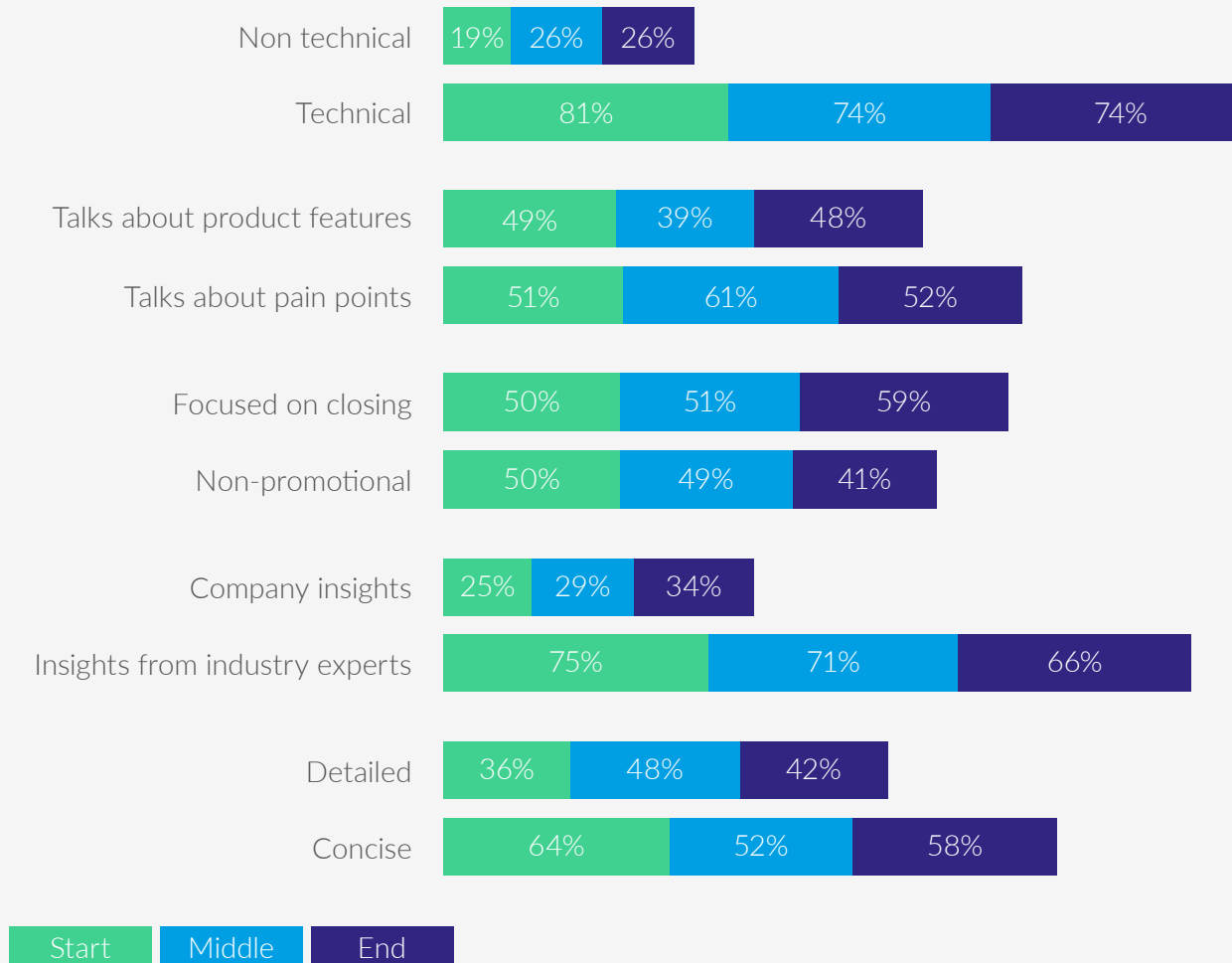
And as the purchase process nears its **conclusion**, customers again seek out concise material focused on closing.

The lesson here is not to drop off content quality or quantity once a customer has expressed interest. Blogs may bring them to the door, but now those ultra-techy data sheets and white papers are needed.

Make sure there is appropriate content to carry prospects through the purchase process.

What type of content do you prefer at the start, middle, and end of the purchase process?

Category	Start	Middle	End
Non technical	19%	26%	26%
Technical	81%	74%	74%
Talks about product features	49%	39%	48%
Talks about pain points	51%	61%	52%
Focused on closing	50%	51%	59%
Non-promotional	50%	49%	41%
Company insights	25%	29%	34%
Insights from industry experts	75%	71%	66%
Detailed	36%	48%	42%
Concise	64%	52%	58%

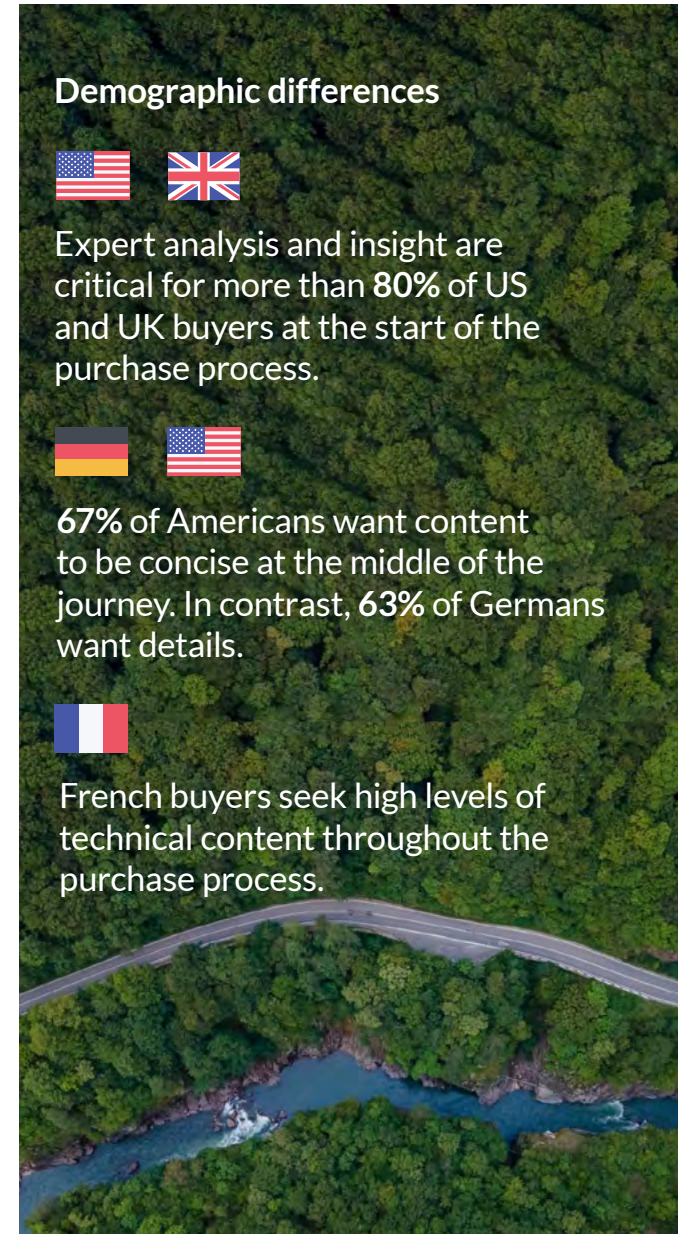**Start** | **Middle** | **End**

Demographic differences

🇺🇸 🇬🇧

Expert analysis and insight are critical for more than **80%** of US and UK buyers at the start of the purchase process.

🇩🇪 🇺🇸

67% of Americans want content to be concise at the middle of the journey. In contrast, **63%** of Germans want details.

🇫🇷

French buyers seek high levels of technical content throughout the purchase process.

Takeaways

Content marketing agencies and teams have a vast range of content options to create for tech B2B buyers, across a lot of platforms. This material should be trustworthy, informative, and technical; but simple to understand and its focus should shift subtly throughout the purchase process. Content creators should be able to offer at least three to five pieces, with enough variety to keep potential customers engaged while respecting their time constraints, to spark their interest enough to connect with the sales team.

That's a lot. But keep in mind that concise insightful and helpful information is the core of the tech B2B customers' decision-making process. Therefore, it's imperative to understand the audience's pain points and create content that demonstrates the expertise, products, and services to solve their challenges.

If you'd like to discuss these survey findings or need help creating a highly effective B2B content marketing strategy, please reach out to us at hello@isolinecomms.com.