



WHY DIDN'T THEY BUY?

A DEEP DIVE into BUYER PREFERENCES and
the IMPLICATIONS for SALESPEOPLE

Researched and Written by Steve W. Martin Sponsored by DiscoverOrg

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INTRODUCTION

DiscoverOrg is excited to partner once again with noted sales researcher Steve W. Martin. As a data business, we know that solid, accurate, and comprehensive data drives the best decisions, and even seasoned sales professionals can improve their results by diving into the numbers. This objective study explores the multifaceted and complex buyer persona to reveal which sales approaches are effective and which aren't—all informed by deep insights into human behavior and rationalization.

This research goes beyond techniques to explore the complex perception buyers have of salespeople—perceptions which vary greatly by industry and department. Understanding the buyer persona means examining the perspective, assumptions, and motivations of these target prospects. The questions in this study go beyond buyer experience, although it's a significant factor in purchase selection.

salespeople think buyers are instinctual purchasers, for example, buyers see themselves as far more logic-driven.

This study speaks to the complexity of human buying behavior: our choices aren't made in a vacuum. Even the most instinctive buyers are responding to past experiences during the purchase process, and are subject to the influence of others—which means perceptive sales and marketing professionals can affect the purchase process.

Just as the buyer persona is a colorful spectrum resulting from a lifetime of experience, so, too, is the salesperson's approach. We hope these compelling findings will help you continue to refine your selling approach and accelerate your revenue growth.

—HENRY SCHUCK, DISCOVERORG CO-FOUNDER & CEO

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Aversion to conflict, willingness to take a chance on the under-dog, group behavior, and preference for a particular selling style all influence the buyer's decision to purchase. Although most

OVERVIEW

I've had the privilege of interviewing over 1000 decision makers as part of the win-loss analysis research I conduct on behalf of my clients. It's always fascinating to listen to these buyers share their honest thoughts about how they made their decisions and why they selected the vendors they did.

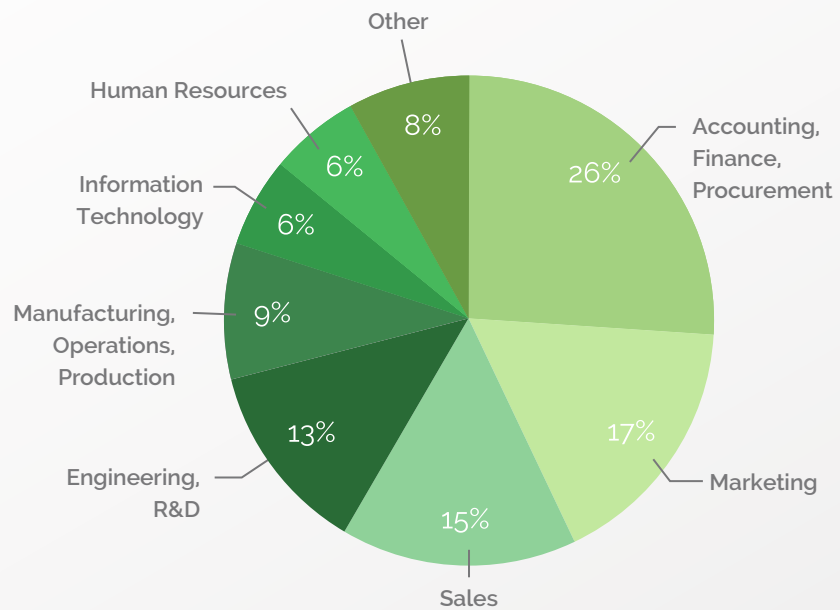
One of the most interesting parts is learning why the competing salespeople lost. There's a tendency to assume that the salesperson lost because their product was inferior in some way. However, in the majority of interviews, buyers rank all the feature sets of the competing products as being roughly equal. This suggests that other factors separate the winner from the losers, with some being out of the salesperson's control.

The impetus to conduct this buyer persona research project was to identify and quantifiably measure these hidden factors. The research goals were to:

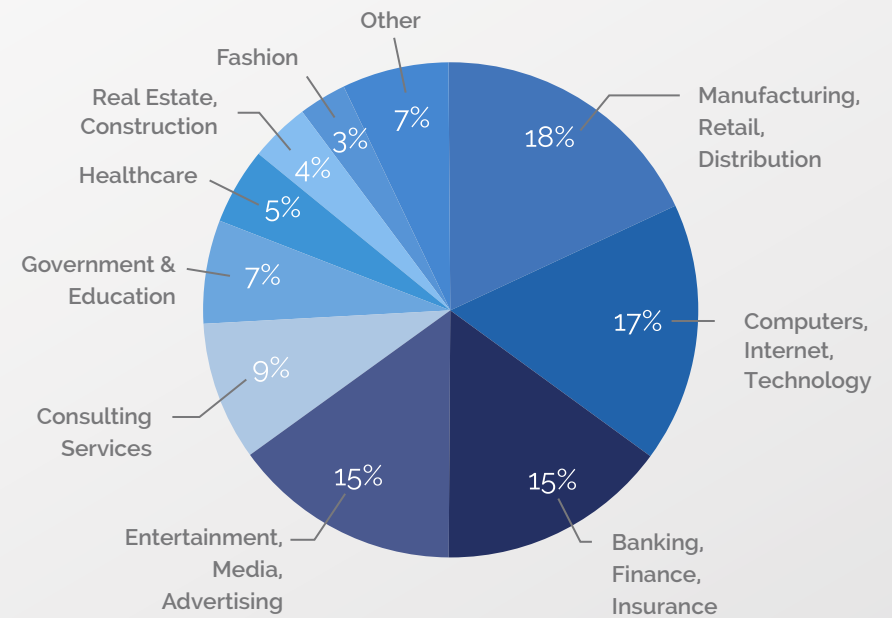
- 1** Understand how buyers perceive the sales sales people they meet with
- 2** Explore the circumstances that determine which vendor is selected
- 3** Learn how different company departments and vertical industries make buying decisions

To accomplish these goals, over 230 business professionals who evaluate the products and services their companies use participated in this research project. The survey group was 59% men and 41% women, who work within the following industries and departments shown on the following page.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS BY DEPARTMENT



STUDY PARTICIPANTS BY INDUSTRY



THE FOLLOWING TOPICS ARE COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- 1 Risk:**
Only 35% of buyers have a favorable view of salespeople—and those buyers are likely to take more risks in the buying process.
- 2 Group dynamics:**
90% of the time, salespeople only need to convince one person in a buying committee: the dominant influencer.
- 3 Vendor market position advantages:**
Sales and marketing are more likely to give upstart products a chance, while IT is more risk-averse and brand sensitive.
- 4 Website:**
Reviews, testimonials, and competitor comparisons top the list of what buyers want to see on a vendor website.
- 5 Selling style:**
Most buyers prefer friendly and moderately knowledgeable salespeople over those who are personally cold but highly knowledgeable.
- 6 Buyer's regret:**
Buyer's remorse is real—but 92% of the time, it's not the salesperson's fault.

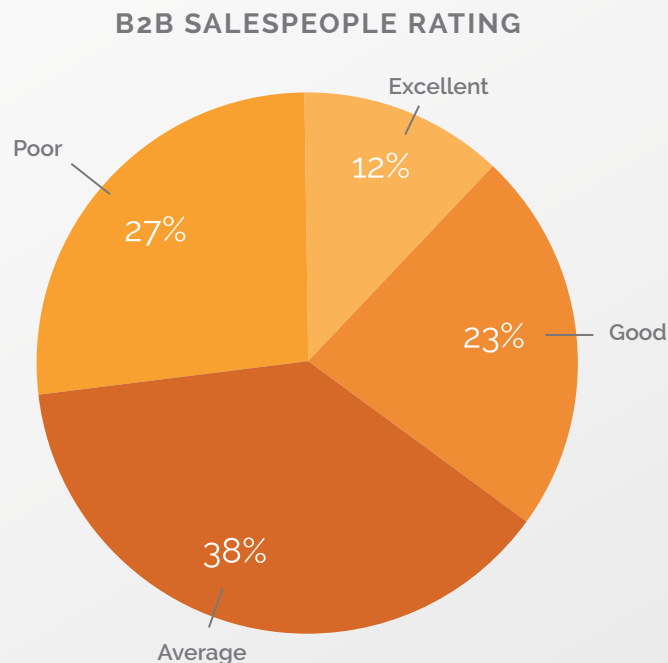
Study participants completed an extensive 76-part survey on subjects including how they interact with salespeople, the dynamics of team evaluation, their opinions on real-world sales scenarios, and a variety of questions surrounding personal beliefs. The questions differed from traditional buying-behavior questions because I wanted to discover underlying psychological and behavioral tendencies. In other words, participants were asked unusual questions in order to test a variety of customer decision-making hypotheses.

1. Risk

1. RISK

Only 35% of buyers have a favorable view of salespeople—and those buyers are likely to take more risks in the buying process.

Put yourself in the position of the experienced buyer who has met with hundreds of salespeople. What percentage of salespeople would you say are excellent, good, average or poor?



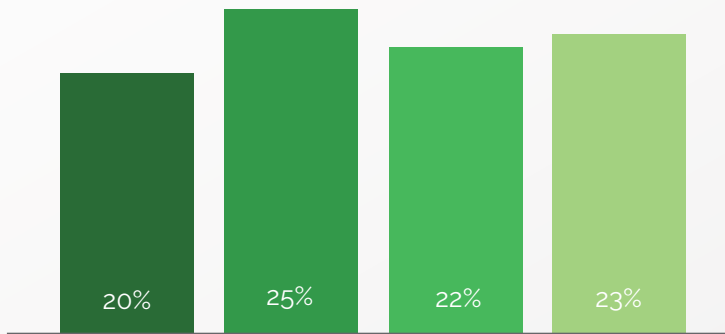
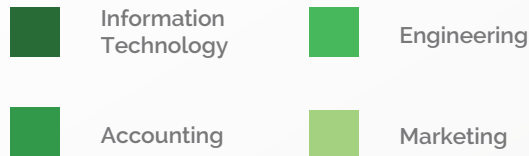
Overall, study participants rated 12% excellent, 23% good, 38% average, and 27% poor.

Think about those figures: What are the implications of nearly 2/3 of B2B salespeople being considered average or poor? Buyers have been conditioned to be skeptical and not to trust salespeople in general. Therefore many buyers have immense RFPs and laborious spreadsheets that vendors must complete. They require each product feature and operation to be fully documented, and meticulous hands-on evaluation of each product. The goal is risk mitigation: reducing the uncertainty associated with selecting a vendor and making the purchase.

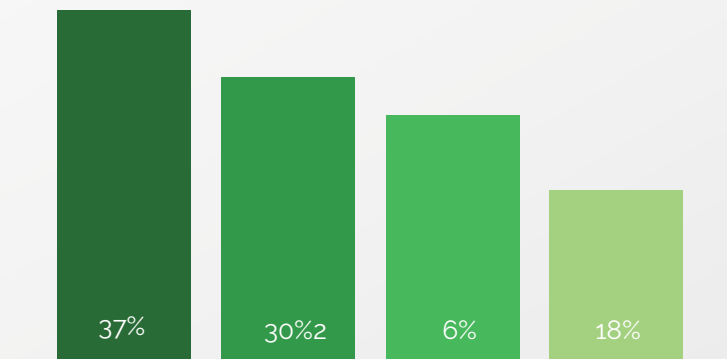
They won't buy until they are completely satisfied, and when they meet with salespeople, they become proctors, cross-examiners rather than collaborators. For example, a purchasing manager may punish vendors who violate the selection process. This obviously creates a challenge because the salesperson's goal is to implement a strategy that changes the selection process to his or her benefit.

When you look at ratings of salespeople from the perspective of departmental buyers, a pattern emerges. Evaluators who are part of IT, Engineering, and Accounting are more critical of the salespeople than those from less-scientific, process-oriented departments such as Marketing. Since analytical buyers are more likely to have advanced degrees in hard science, such as computers, finance, or engineering, they are more likely to be skeptical and consequently more demanding of salespeople.

RISK



GOOD RATINGS



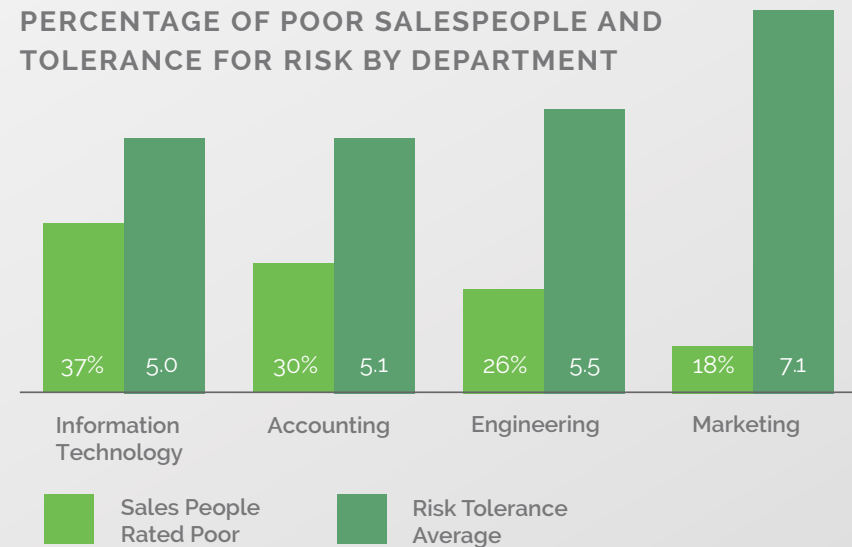
POOR RATINGS

An interesting pattern emerges when tolerance for risk is analyzed by department: There's a correlation between the ratings of salespeople and tolerance for risk. Specifically, the higher negative rating of salespeople is inversely related to a department's tolerance for risk; for example, IT buyers rated 37% of all salespeople as poor—higher than any other department - while their risk tolerance average was a low 5%.

Conversely, Marketing rated 18% of salespeople as poor—the lowest "poor" rating in the group - while their tolerance for risk rating was much higher, at 7.1%.

It can be inferred from these metrics that these two departments interact with salespeople and analyze vendors in different ways, and with varying levels of due diligence. The figure below shows how buyers' poor perception of salespeople is inversely related to their appetite for risk.

PERCENTAGE OF POOR SALESPEOPLE AND TOLERANCE FOR RISK BY DEPARTMENT



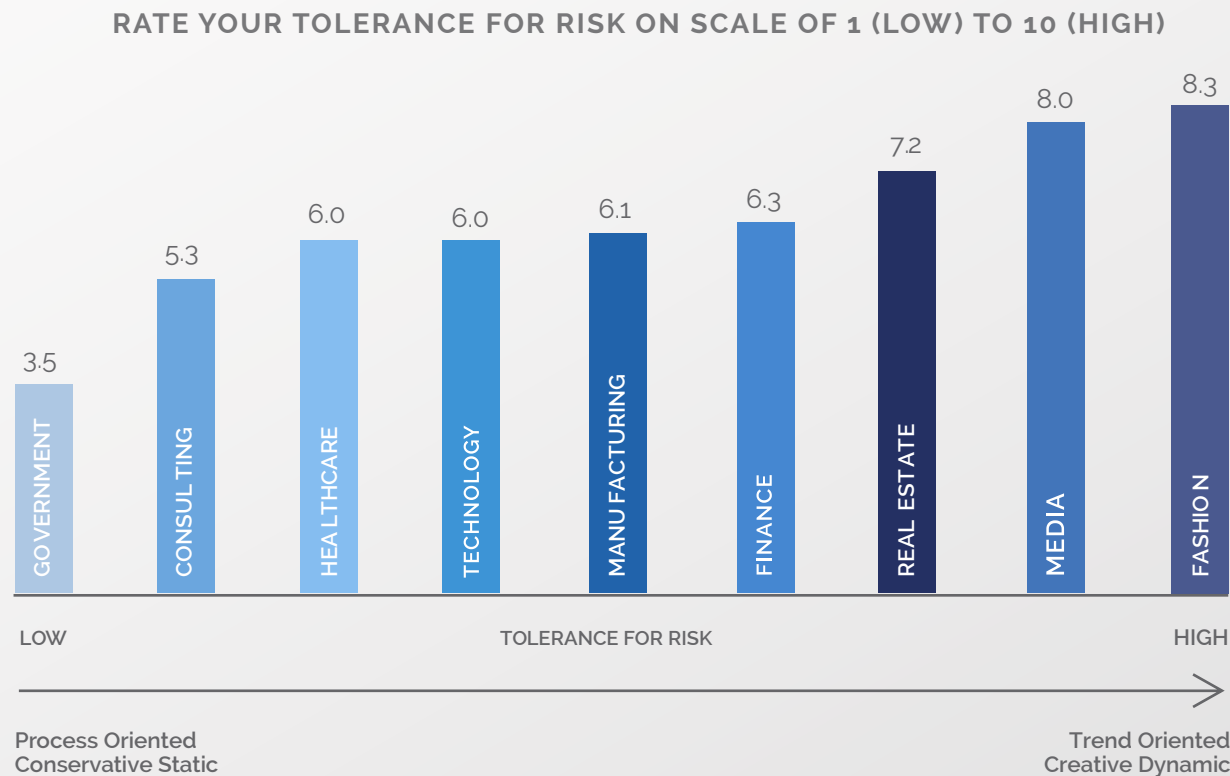
RISK

The tolerance for risk varies greatly by industry as well. Dynamic, creative, trend-oriented industries such as Fashion, Media, and Real Estate have the highest risk tolerance averages. More conservative, static, and process-oriented industries such as Government, Consulting, and Healthcare have the lowest risk tolerance averages.

Again, this demonstrates that buyers interact with salespeople and analyze vendors with varying levels of due diligence based on the buyer's industry and subsequent tolerance for risk.

Buyers go to great lengths to reduce the risk of buying. They may list their needs in documents that are hundreds of pages long; they hire consultants to verify that they are making the right decisions; and they conduct lengthy evaluations to test products, talking to existing users and doing pilot tests—all in an effort to eliminate fear, uncertainty, and risk.

The B2B buyer is fixated on risk mitigation—and your reception as a sales professional depends on the department you're selling to.



2. Group Dynamics

2. GROUP DYNAMICS

70% of the time, salespeople only need to convince one person in a buying committee: the dominant influencer.

Whenever a company makes a purchase decision that involves a team of people, self-interest, politics, and group dynamics influence the final decision. Tension, drama, and conflict are normal parts of group dynamics, because purchase decisions are not typically made unanimously.

Of the hundreds of sales cycles I have analyzed, I've found that one member of the selection team is able to exert his or her will and determine the vendor selected. I have coined the term "bully with the juice" for this person. This is not necessarily a negative term, nor does it mean that the person is physically intimidating. It is simply a description of a person who will tenaciously fight for their cause in order to get their way. This person isn't afraid to be politically incorrect or ruffle some feathers to ensure their personal desire is met.

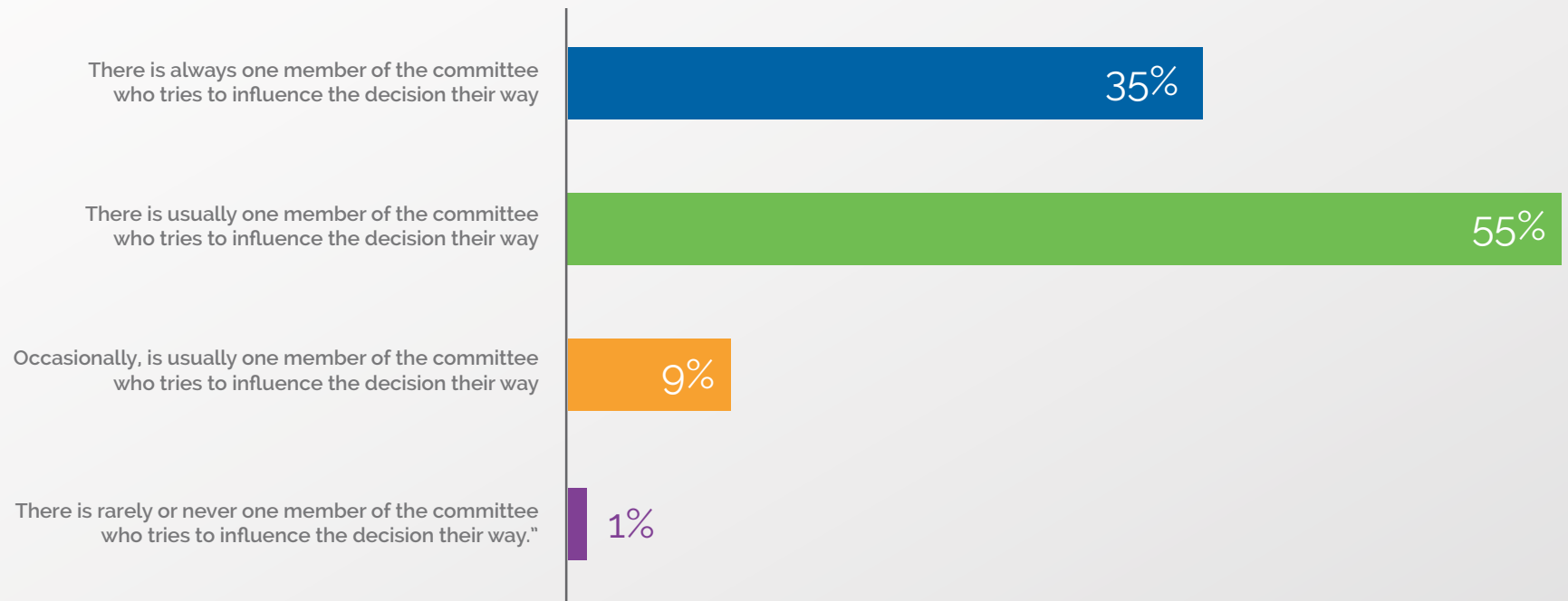
Simply put, this person has charisma and is a natural leader. These buyers are not always the highest-ranking people involved in an evaluation, but they are usually on the winning side. Typically, only one member of the customer's evaluation team fits this description. Single-handedly, they impart their own will on the selection process by choosing the vendor and pushing the purchase through the procurement process.

At the other end of the spectrum are buyers who are accommodating. They are more apathetic about whatever solution is purchased and less likely to advocate for a single vendor during the selection process. The degree to which people are assertive or accommodating may depend on the effect the purchase decision has on them, their span of control, their position in the company, or their ability to perform their jobs. A buyer is more likely to act in a dominant way when they have an elevated status, such as domain expertise or title, within the evaluation team.



GROUP DYNAMICS

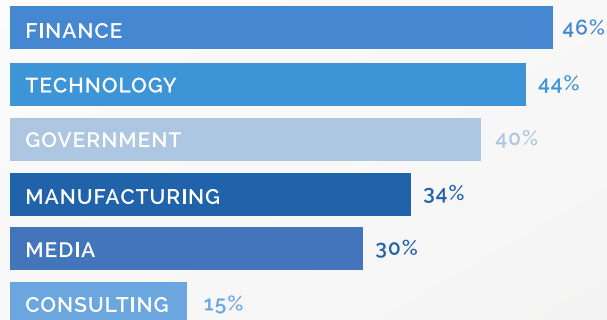
In order to quantify the frequency of when a single personality, or “bully with the juice,” dominates the evaluation, study participants were asked about their selection committee experiences. Overall, 90% of respondents confirmed that there is always or usually one member of the committee who tries to influence the decision their way.



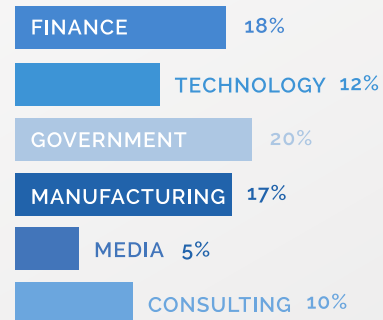
GROUP DYNAMICS

The occurrence of this dominant, influential person varies based upon vertical industry. Finance and Technology industries have the highest response rate indicating there is always one committee member who tries to influence the decision; while Entertainment and Consulting have the lowest.

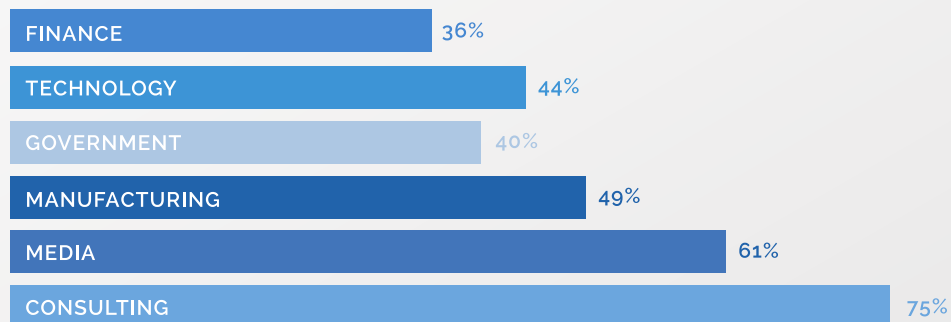
THERE IS ALWAYS ONE MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE WHO TRIES TO INFLUENCE THE DECISION THEIR WAY



THERE IS OCCASIONALLY ONE MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE WHO TRIES TO INFLUENCE THE DECISION THEIR WAY



THERE IS USUALLY ONE MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE WHO TRIES TO INFLUENCE THE DECISION THEIR WAY

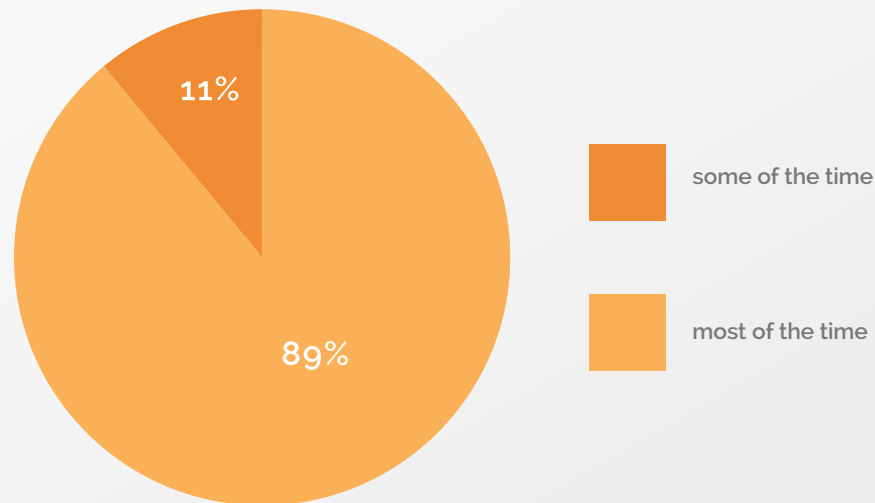


GROUP DYNAMICS

How often is the dominant person, or the “bully with the juice,” successful in getting the outcome they want? Eighty-nine percent of participants said this person is successful most of the time, while 11% selected “some of the time.”

In practicality, it can be said that a salesperson doesn't have to win over the entire selection committee; they only have to win over the right person.

“WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE TIME DOES THE VENDOR WHOM THE ‘BULLY WITH THE JUICE’ IS PROMOTING GET SELECTED?”



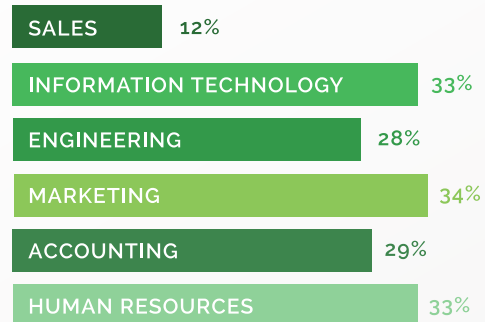
One of the most formidable enemies facing salespeople today is no decision. What prevents prospective buyers from making a purchase, even after they have conducted a lengthy evaluation process? Every initiative and its associated expenditure is competing against all the other projects requesting funding.

What is the ability of different departments of a company to push through their purchases and defeat the company's bureaucratic tendency not to buy? Let's look at the profiles of the various departments in terms of how they ranked their leadership ability as a predictor of their department's ability to promote their internal agenda. Here are department responses that strongly agreed with the statement, “I am often a leader in groups.”

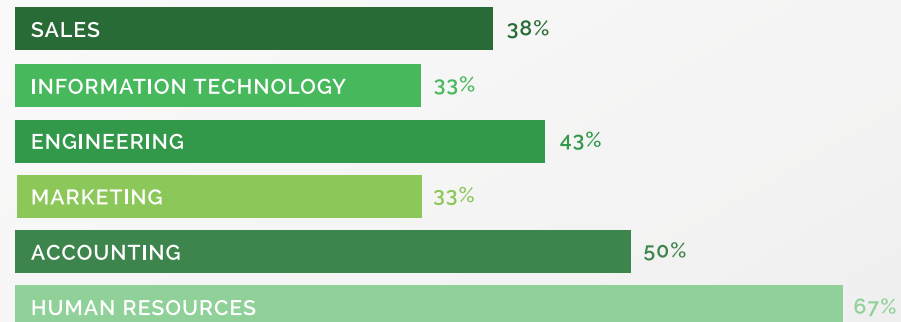
GROUP DYNAMICS

"I AM OFTEN A LEADER IN GROUPS"

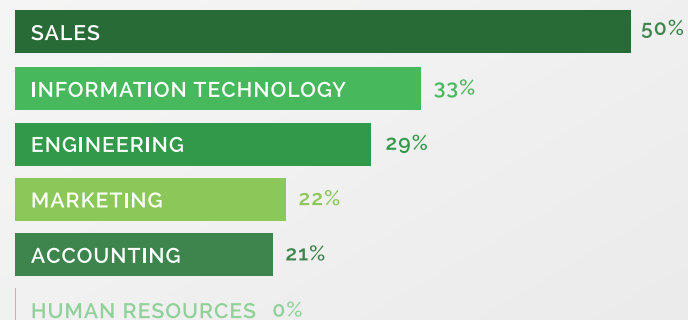
Disagree



Agree



Strongly Agree



Beyond their formal titles and position on organization charts, people take on specific roles when they are part of a selection committee. Some take control of the group and steer the decision toward their preference.

Based on the research results, you might expect Sales, Information Technology, and Engineering to have more internal clout to push through their projects than Marketing or Human Resources. Therefore, they're better departments to sell into from the salesperson's perspective. As a president of a company once told me during a win-loss interview,

"At the end of the day, a project will or won't get approved depending upon who is pushing it."

3. Vendor Market Position Advantages

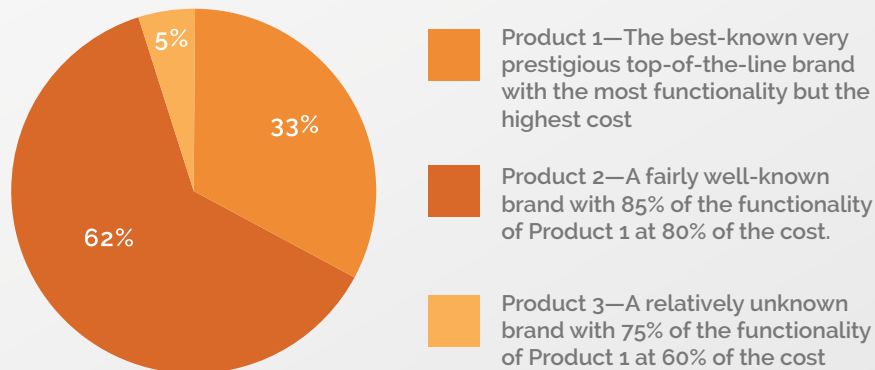
3. VENDOR MARKET POSITION ADVANTAGES

Sales and marketing are more likely to give upstart products a chance, while IT is more risk-averse and brand sensitive.

In most industries, a single company dominates the market. Compared to their competitors, they have a much larger market share, top-of-the-line products, greater marketing budget and reach, and more company caché. For salespeople who have to compete against these industry giants, life can be very intimidating indeed.

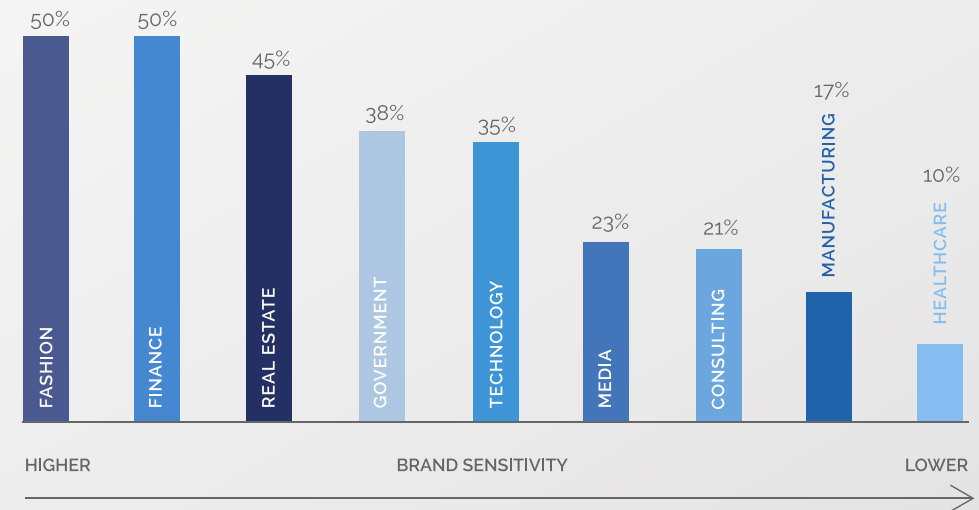
However, the study results provide some good news in this regard. Buyers aren't necessarily fixated on the market leader and are more than willing to select second-tier competitors than one might expect.

LET'S SAY YOU ARE GOING TO SELECT AN EXPENSIVE PRODUCT WHICH YOU USE EVERYDAY FROM ONE OF THREE ON THE LIST BELOW. WHICH ONE WOULD YOU CHOOSE?



In fact, only 33% of participants indicated they prefer the most prestigious, best-known brand with the highest functionality and cost. Conversely, 63% said they would select a fairly well-known brand with 85% of the functionality at 80% of the cost. However, only 5% would select a relatively unknown brand with 75% of the functionality at 60% of the cost of the best-known brand.

INDUSTRY PERCENTAGE INDICATING THEY WOULD BUY THE BEST-KNOWN TOP-OF-THE-LINE PRODUCT WITH THE HIGHEST FUNCTIONALITY AND COST

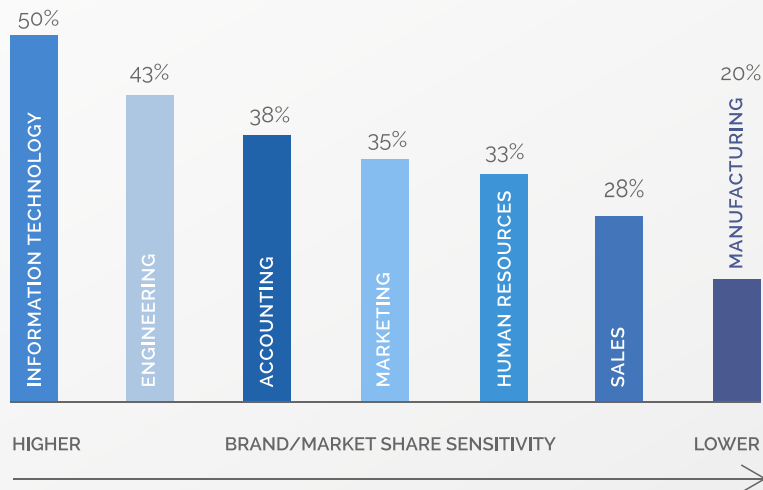


Not surprisingly, the answer to this question differed by industry. The Fashion and Finance verticals had the highest propensity to select the best-known, top-of-the-line product, while Manufacturing and Healthcare had the lowest.

VENDOR MARKET POSITION ADVANTAGES

Respondents from the Information Technology and Engineering departments were most likely to select the best-known, top-of-the-line product, while Manufacturing and Sales were least likely.

DEPARTMENT PERCENTAGE INDICATING THEY WOULD BUY THE BEST-KNOWN TOP-OF-THE-LINE PRODUCT WITH THE HIGHEST FUNCTIONALITY AND COST



Conversely, Manufacturing and Sales would be most likely to buy lesser-known brands with slightly reduced functionality if they were priced accordingly.

PERCENTAGE INDICATING THEY WOULD BUY A FAIRLY WELL-KNOWN BRAND WITH 85% OF THE FUNCTIONALITY AT 80% OF THE COST OR A RELATIVELY UNKNOWN BRAND WITH 75% OF THE FUNCTIONALITY AT 60% OF THE COST OF THE BEST-KNOWN BRAND



VENDOR MARKET POSITION ADVANTAGES

The impact of price in decision-making

Price plays an important role in every sales cycle. Since it is a frequent topic during buyer conversations, salespeople can become fixated on the price of their product and believe they have to be lowest. However, decision makers have different propensities to buy, and the importance of price falls into three categories.

For “price-conscious” buyers, product price is a top decision-making factor. For “price-sensitive” buyers, product price is secondary to other decision-making factors such as functionality and vendor capability. For “price-immune” buyers, price becomes an issue only when the solution they want is priced far more than the others being considered.

Here are the industry and departmental pricing classifications based upon pricing decision scenarios and questions.

	INDUSTRY	DEPARTMENT
Price Immune	Government	Engineering
Price Sensitive	Finance Technology Consulting	Marketing Sales
Price Conscious	Real Estate Manufacturing Healthcare Fashion	Manufacturing IT HR Accounting

4. Website

4. WEBSITE

Reviews, testimonials, and competitor comparisons top the list of what buyers want to see on a vendor website.

Every major B2B purchase progresses through four sales cycle stages, and different types of influencers determine which vendor is in the lead at each stage. Vendor websites are most influential at the beginning of the sales cycle in the Buyer research stage, while the influence of internal politics and evaluation group dynamics become more important as the sales cycle progresses.



Buyer research stage

The customer conducts independent research on the vendors, underlying technologies, and methodologies via the Internet, analyst reports, product reviews, industry news, member associations, and elsewhere.

Product stage

Based upon their research, the buyer contacts a select number of vendors and meets with their salespeople to learn more about the products. The buyer is validating their initial research and augmenting their knowledge of the respective products through interactions with each salesperson competing for the business.

Business stage

As the sales process progresses, buyers assess which vendors offer the best business value and are a philosophical fit for their business.

Political stage

The last stage is making a final decision among the top two or three vendors. The final decision is typically influenced by many political factors beyond the attributes evaluated in the product and business stages.

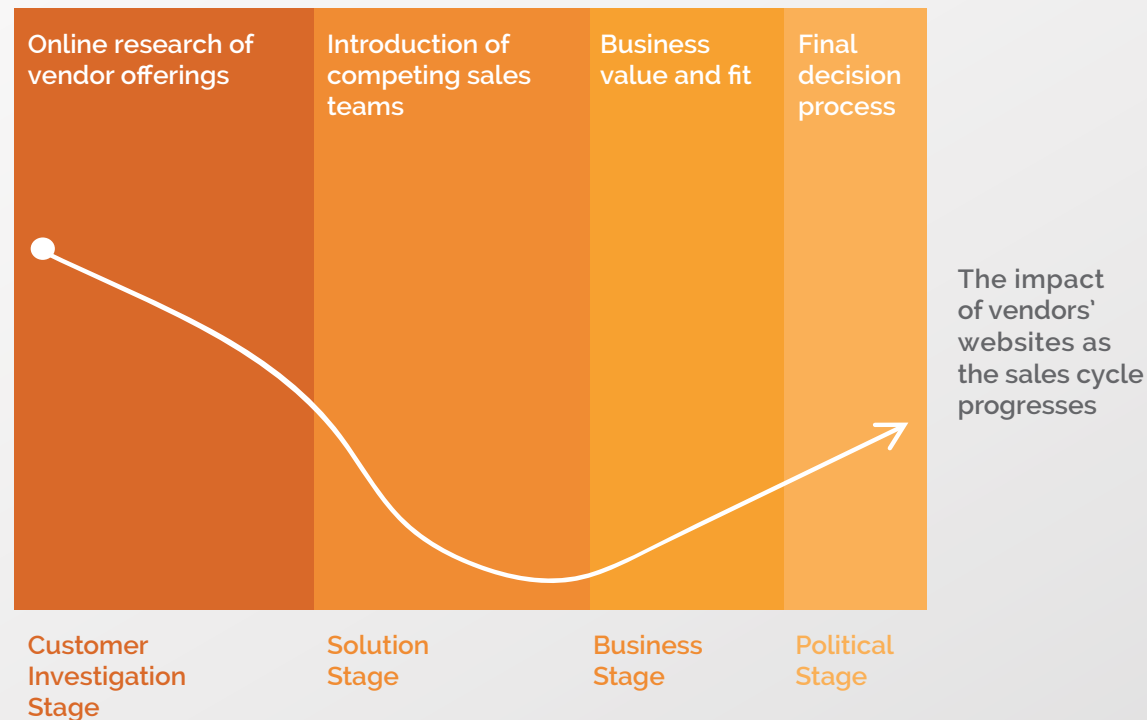
WEBSITE

During each stage, the importance of the vendor's website varies. Early on, the website plays a pivotal role as buyers decide which vendors are qualified. In the Product stage, when the sales team provides most of the information directly to the buyer, the website serves as a validation check point. The website's importance increases during the business and political stages, as senior-level executives who weren't part of the evaluation team review the findings and recommendation.

With these four stages in mind, study participants were asked, "Do vendor websites influence the final vendor selection you make?"

Overall, 61% of study participants said the website definitely influenced their final decision, while 37% indicated it somewhat influenced their final decision. Only 2% said it had no influence at all.

PROGRESSION OF THE SALES CYCLE



WEBSITE

DO VENDOR WEBSITES INFLUENCE THE FINAL VENDOR SELECTION YOU MAKE?



This ratio was nearly identical across each department.

What aspects of a website do buyers consider most influential, and does it differ by industry? Study participants were asked to rate how eight different website topics influence their purchase decisions. The top three items for Finance, Technology, and Consulting industries were customer testimonials and success stories, competitive comparisons by industry analysts, and positive reviews.

The top three items for Media and Fashion industries were the look and feel of the website, competitive comparisons by industry analysts, and positive reviews.

Manufacturing and Healthcare prioritized the look and feel of the website, customer testimonials and success stories, and positive reviews.

The most important three aspects for Government were unique and included company background and history information, detailed technical information such as data sheets and manuals, and competitive comparisons by industry analysts.

Finally, Real Estate was the only industry to include quality of the leadership team and interviews with key execs in their top three, along with competitive comparisons by industry analysts and positive reviews.

The full list highlights the top three aspects, on a 100 point scale, in which the higher number is more important.

WEBSITE

A website is more than an online reference platform; it's an extension of the sales force. It sets the stage to ensure their sales teams are invited to participate in the customer's evaluation. It provides validation while the sales team discusses products and business capabilities with prospective

buyers. It provides affirmation to senior-level decision makers who may not meet the sales force that they can confidently move forward with their purchase.

WHAT VENDOR WEBSITE ELEMENTS INFLUENCE YOUR PURCHASE DECISION?

	ALL	Finance	Technology	Consulting	Media	Fashion	Government	Healthcare	Manufacturing	Real Estate
Detailed technical information such as data sheets and manuals	59	51	62	59	58	45	63	50	68	63
Positive review/news by press and periodicals	70	69	72	70	73	73	60	61	69	78
Competitive comparisons by industry analysis	73	74	74	72	72	73	67	74	76	72
Customer testimonials and success stories	70	67	80	71	69	75	52	71	70	68
Company background and history information	48	48	48	46	47	57	70	33	49	55
Best practices and insights that might be found on a blog	57	52	58	57	60	48	57	64	61	58
The look and feel of the web site	67	62	60	67	70	85	53	66	75	60
The quality of the leadership team and interviews with key execs	54	57	56	52	51	60	40	30	58	72

5. SELLING STYLE

Most buyers prefer friendly and moderately knowledgeable salespeople over those who are personally cold but highly knowledgeable; and charismatic but not very knowledgeable.

In some sales situations, it is necessary to align with the buyer's thought process in order to win; these buyers are experienced and knowledgeable about their business and technical fields. In other situations, the buyer's thought process must be transformed and gently shaped over the course of the sales cycle. Finally, just as a doctor must sometimes prescribe a painful treatment to heal a patient, in some sales situations you must control prospective buyers in order to help them.

What selling style do prospective buyers prefer? The survey shows 40% of study participants prefer a salesperson who listens, understands, then matches their solution to solve a specific problem. Another 30% prefer a salesperson who earns their trust by making them feel comfortable, like they will take care of the customer's long-term needs. Another 30% want a salesperson who challenges their thoughts and perceptions, and then prescribes a solution that they may not have known about.

WHICH STATEMENT DO YOU AGREE WITH MOST?

I prefer a salesperson who listens, understands, and then matches their solution to solve my specific problem

40%

I prefer a salesperson who challenges my thoughts, perceptions, and then prescribes a solution that I may not have thought of or didn't know about

30%

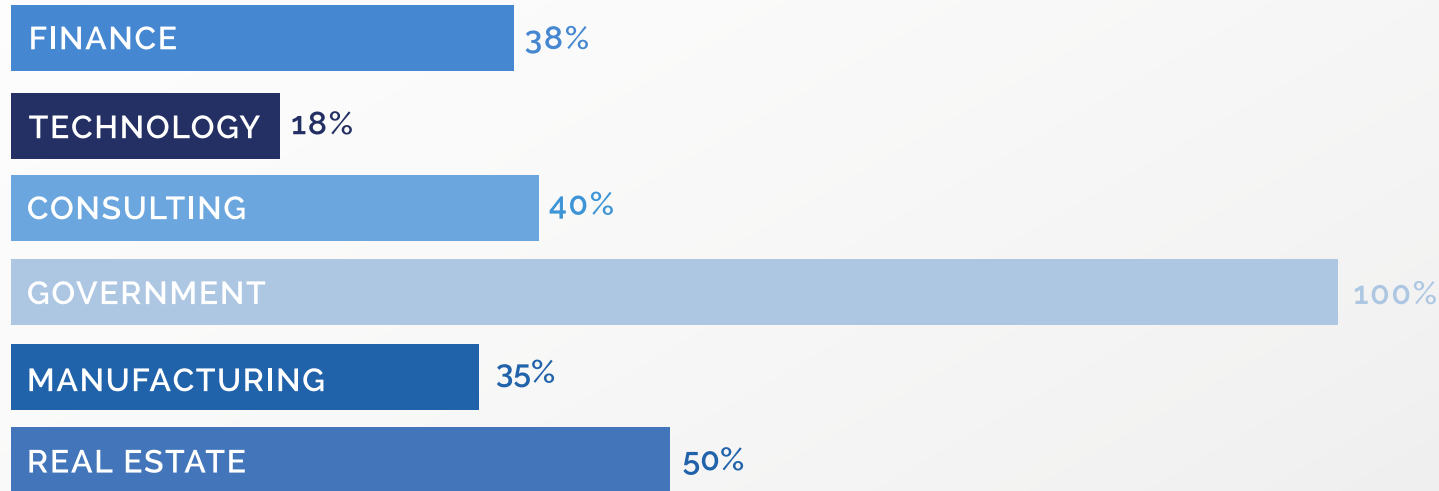
I prefer a salesperson who earns my trust by making me feel comfortable that they will take care of my long term needs

30%

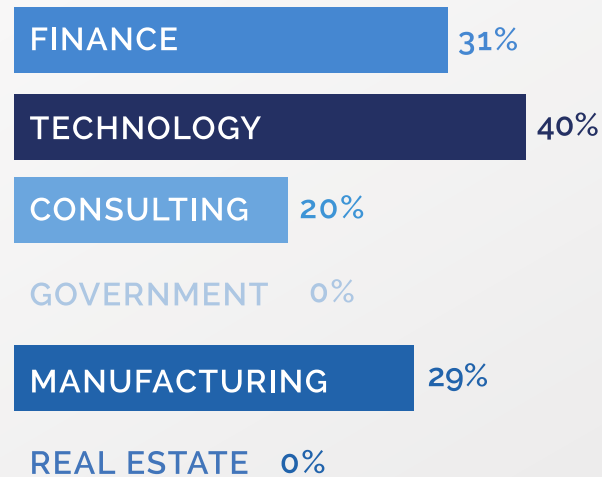
There were significant differences in selling preferences by industry. While Finance and Manufacturing preferences were fairly evenly split among all three styles, the Government vertical solely selected a salesperson who would listen and solve their specific needs. Technology preferred a salesperson who would challenge their thinking or someone who will work with them successfully over the long term. Only 20% of the Consulting industry wanted a salesperson to challenge them; the Real Estate vertical doesn't want to be challenged at all.

SELLING STYLE

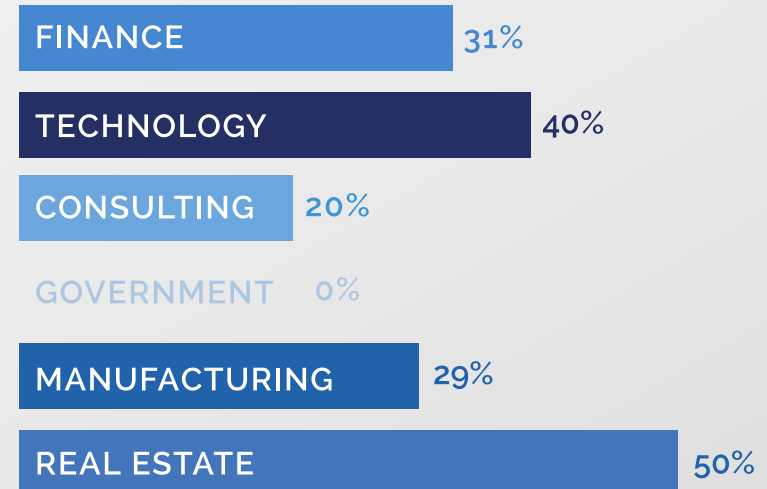
"I PREFER A SALESPERSON WHO UNDERSTANDS MY SPECIFIC PROBLEM AND MATCHES A SOLUTION"



"I PREFER A SALESPERSON WHO CHALLENGES MY THOUGHTS AND OFFERS A SOLUTION I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT"



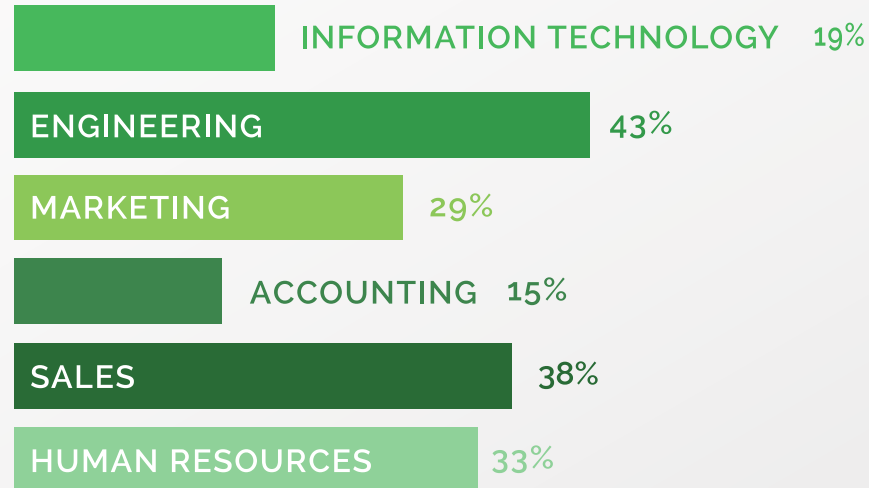
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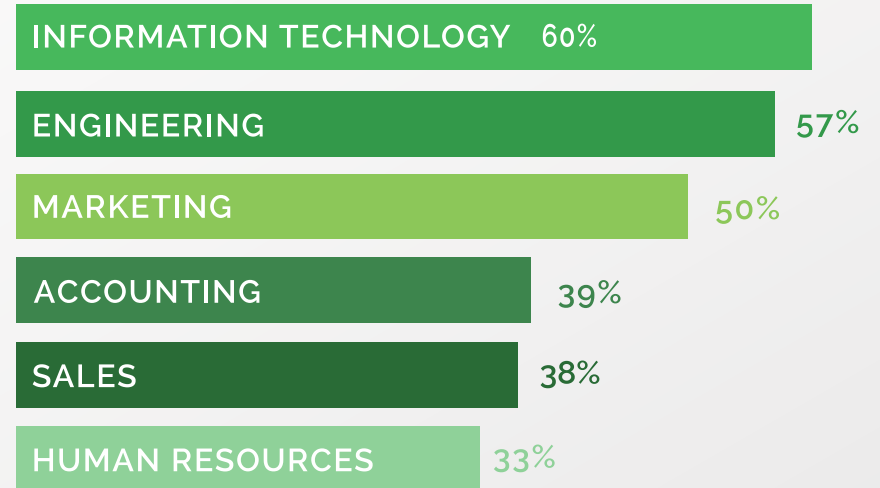
SELLING STYLE

From a departmental perspective, under 20% of Accounting and Information Technology members want to be challenged, while 43% of the Engineering department does. Over 50% of Marketing, Information Technology, and Engineering prefer a salesperson who would listen and match their solution to solve their specific needs. The Sales department equally preferred a salesperson who listened and solved their needs and to be challenged; while Human Resources was equally split across all three selling styles.

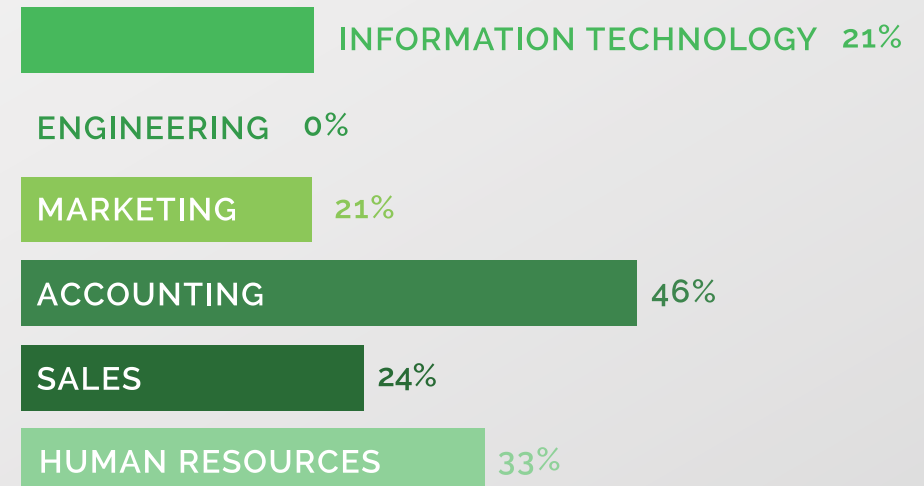
"I PREFER A SALESPERSON WHO CHALLENGES MY THOUGHTS AND OFFERS ME A SOLUTION I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT."



"I PREFER A SALESPERSON WHO UNDERSTANDS MY SPECIFIC PROBLEM AND MATCHES A SOLUTION"



"I PREFER A SALESPERSON WHO EARNS MY TRUST AND IS AVAILABLE LONG-TERM"



SELLING STYLE

There's an interesting explanation for selling styles preferences which is based on whether the buyer is comfortable with conflict. Seventy-eight percent of participants who preferred a salesperson who would listen and solve their specific needs agreed with the statement: "I try to avoid conflict as much as I can." Conversely, 64% of participants who preferred a salesperson who challenges their thoughts disagreed with the statement and are more comfortable with conflict.

I TRY TO AVOID CONFLICT AS MUCH AS I CAN



Now let's examine how buyers responded to this scenario: Three salespeople gave you a presentation about the product their company offers. After the presentations, you determine that each of the products are very similar in functionality and price.

WHICH SALESPERSON WOULD YOU RATHER DO BUSINESS WITH?

- 1** A professional salesperson who knows their product inside and out but is not necessarily someone you would consider befriending.
- 2** A friendly salesperson who is likable and proficient in explaining their product.
- 3** A charismatic salesperson who you truly enjoyed being with but is are not the most knowledgeable about their product.

SELLING STYLE

Three salespeople gave you a presentation about the product their company offers. After presentations, you determine that each of the products are very similar in functionality and price.

WHICH SALESPERSON WOULD YOU RATHER DO BUSINESS WITH?

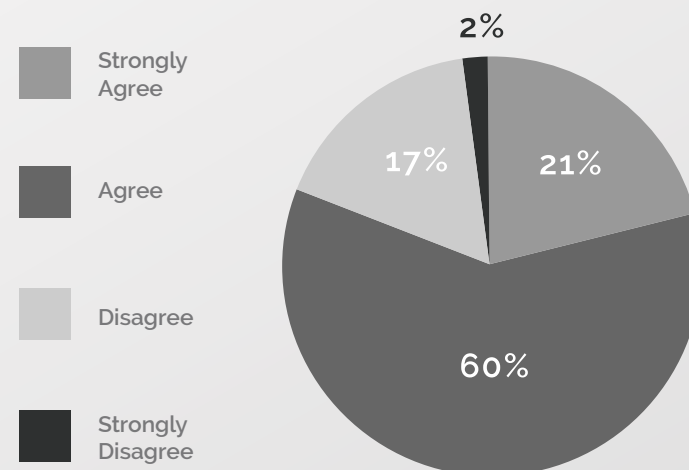


Sixty-six percent of survey participants selected the friendly salesperson, 23% the professional salesperson, and 11% the charismatic salesperson.

While top selection of buyers from every industry was the friendly salesperson, it is interesting to note that the Media and Fashion industries selected the highest percentage of "charismatic salesperson" responses, and Manufacturing and Healthcare industries had the highest percentage of "professional salesperson" responses.

The reality is that prospective buyers will choose to do business with someone who is likeable over one who is solely considered professional or another who is more charismatic. That's because they want to feel comfortable communicating with the person, and they value this characteristic the most. For instance, 81% of buyers would rather talk with someone who has the same mannerisms as they do.

"I'D RATHER TALK TO SOMEONE WHO HAS THE SAME MANNERISMS AS I HAVE"



6. Buyer's Regret

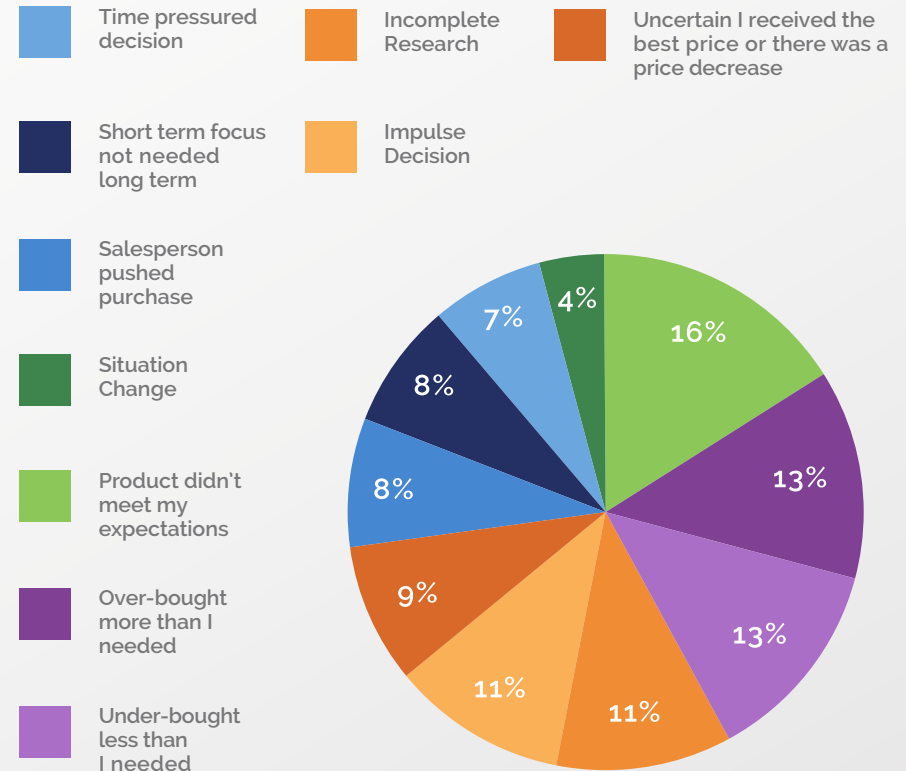
6. BUYER'S REGRET

Buyer's remorse is real—but most of the time, it's not the salesperson's fault.

To better understand the impact of human nature on buyers, study participants were asked to recount the last time they experienced significant buyer's remorse. Buyer's remorse occurs after the purchase is made when the buyer feels a sense of regret, guilt, or anger, and they second-guess their decision.

Most people mistakenly associate buyer's remorse with an impulsive purchase, or assume it was caused by the pressure tactics of a salesperson. When each example was laboriously analyzed, a pattern emerged. The source of buyer's remorse can be categorized into nine different root causes. However, it is the buyer's action which actually caused remorse in over 70% of the examples - not the salesperson or the product that was sold.

Sixteen percent of buyer's remorse scenarios recounted a scenario in which the product or company did not perform to their expectations. Thirteen percent of buyers felt they over-bought more features or capacity than they needed, while an equal percentage thought they under-bought less than they should have. Eleven percent faulted themselves because they didn't do enough research during the sales cycle, and another 11% felt they bought too impulsively. Nine percent later experienced remorse because they didn't negotiate the best price or found out there actually was a price decrease. Eight percent blamed their salesperson for pushing them to buy, and another 8% thought they were too focused on short-term outcomes and should have had a longer-term perspective in hindsight. A critical deadline or event pressured 7% to buy when they weren't ready, and a fundamental situational change caused 4% to question their decision.



It is the collection of these negative sales experiences over the course of a buyer's lifetime that shapes how they buy and who they prefer to do business with. As a result, buyers experience a mental tug-of-war when deciding which product to select and confusion about whether they should even make a purchase at all. Therefore, they adopt coping mechanisms facing the stressful situation of selecting between salespeople and their solutions.

Coping mechanisms are psychological and behavioral strategies people use to manage stress and threatening situations, a psychological strategy for avoiding buyer's remorse. Here's a list of the common buyer coping mechanisms salespeople encounter on sales calls:

BUYER'S REGRET

- **Attack**

Some buyers categorize all salespeople as unethical evildoers. Generalizing all salespeople into a single group helps them handle the ordeal of buying, and a salesperson should not take this attack personally.

- **Avoidance**

Certain buyers seek to avoid the people and situations that cause distress. They keep the conversation solely at the surface level and won't answer tough questions. Confronting buyers who use this coping mechanism causes them to avoid the salesperson even more.

- **Business-level conversation**

Some buyers instinctively try to keep the conversation at a business level with the non-favored salespeople. They do this to protect themselves, because they don't want to let anyone down. This is one of the more prevalent coping mechanisms buyers use to deal with salespeople.

- **Compensation**

Buyers sometimes make up for a weakness in one area by overemphasizing another. For example, a prospective buyer may fixate on a unique feature of a competitor's product even though their product is less capable overall.

- **Intellectualization**

Some buyers avoid showing any emotion and focus instead on facts and logic. However, even the most analytical and unemotional buyers have a sentimental favorite that they want to win.

- **Passive aggression**

Some buyers project a friendly superficial presence but are secretly plotting against the salesperson. This is one of the worst predicaments to be in.

- **Rationalization**

Certain buyers use logical reasons in an illogical way to publicly validate their emotional favorite. For example, they'll say they can't use a product because it doesn't support international monetary conversions, even though they don't conduct any international business.

- **Reaction formation**

Some buyers take a polar opposite position to every thing a salesperson says. They simply don't want to buy from him or her.

- **Trivialization**

Some buyers trivialize a favored vendor's major deficiency while maximizing the minor shortcomings of another. This is a sure sign that they have a favorite vendor.

BUYER'S REGRET

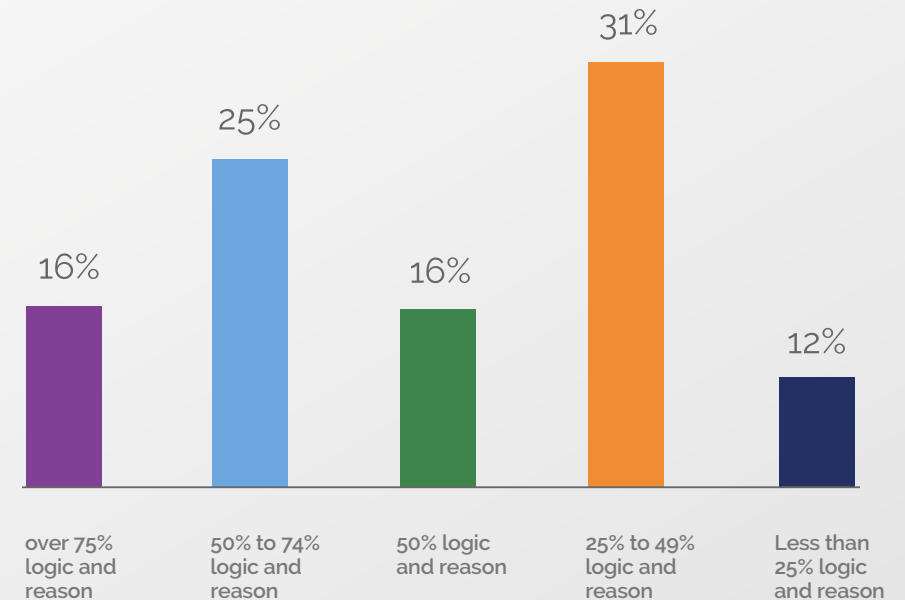
Buyers are never 100% sure they are purchasing the right product. Regardless of their confident demeanor, on the inside they are experiencing fear, uncertainty, and doubt.

All salespeople need to understand this lowest common denominator of human decision making.

Do salespeople truly understand the impact of human nature on the sales cycle? In a recent study, I asked over 1000 salespeople to answer the following statement : "I would say that most buyers base their final purchase decision on X% logic and reason versus human nature (emotion/politics/personal biases)."

SURVEY OF 1000+ SALES PROFESSIONALS

"I WOULD SAY THAT MOST BUYERS BASE THEIR FINAL PURCHASE DECISION ON X% LOGIC AND REASON VERSUS HUMAN NATURE (EMOTION/POLITICS/PERSONAL BIASES)"



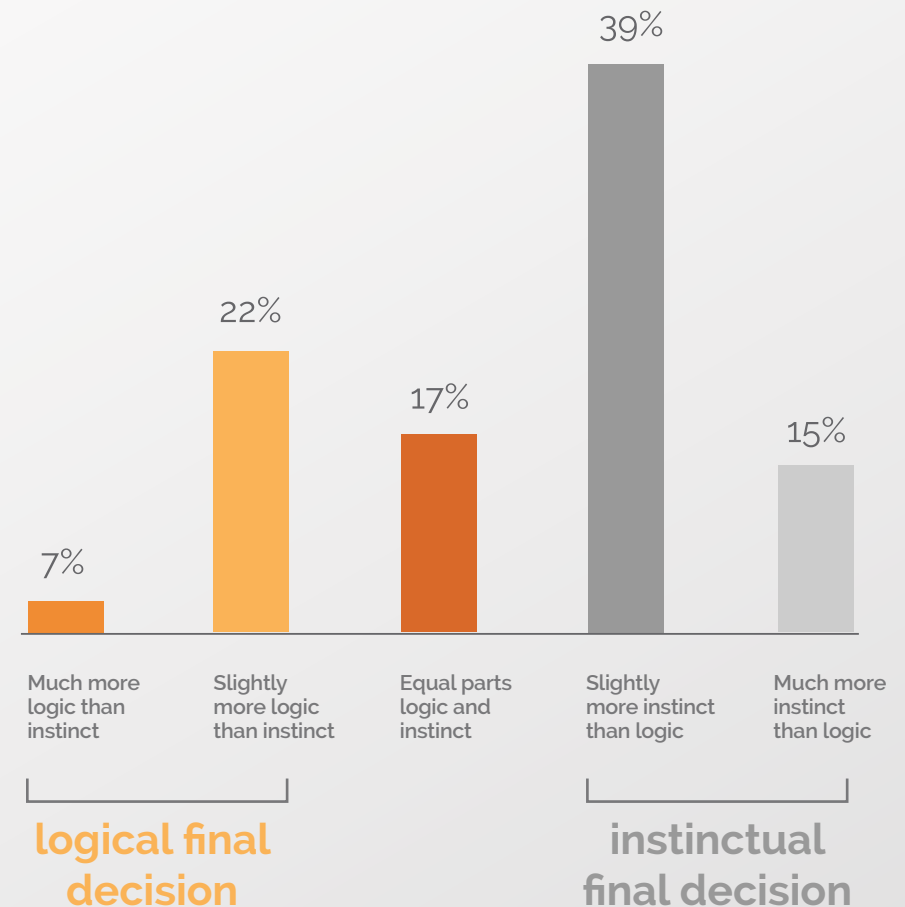
BUYER'S REGRET

Now let's compare the results to what buyers actually think when they were asked, "Let's say you have to choose between two similar vendors with products that are very similar in features, functionality, and price. Would your final decision be based on logic or human nature?"

A comparison of answers shows that salespeople intuitively understand how prospective buyers behave in general. The only difference is that buyers are slightly more instinctive than salespeople believe. Furthermore, their responses can be divided into logical and instinctual decision-makers

Two very important points need to be made regarding the groups of logical and instinctual final decision makers: First, both groups conduct their evaluations in the same basic manner with the same level of due diligence. Therefore, it is difficult for the salesperson working on the sales cycle to determine which type of decision-maker they are dealing with beforehand. Second, the groups gravitate to different types of vendors. The instinctual decision-maker has a higher tendency to select the better-known, top-of-the line goliath vendor, while the logical decision-maker is far more open to selecting the lesser-known brands. A theory behind this is that instinctual final decision-makers play it safe and follow the herd within their industry. Conversely, reason and common sense motivate the logical decision-makers to purchase the most efficient solution.

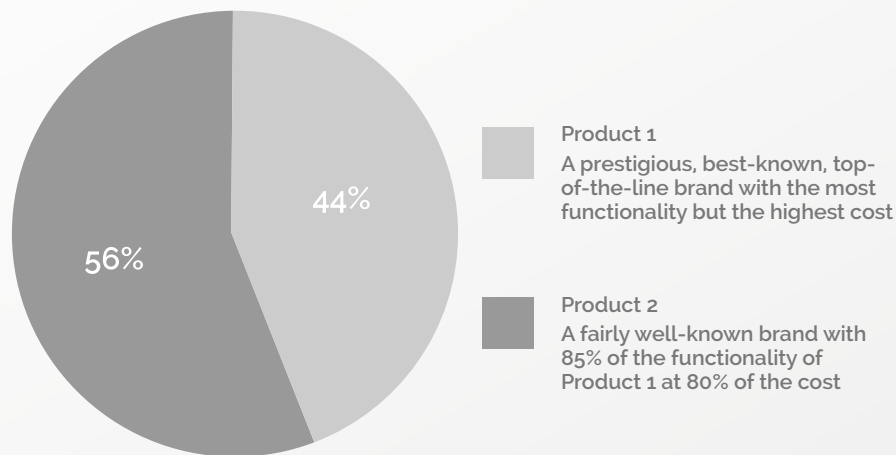
LET'S SAY YOU HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN TWO SIMILAR VENDORS WITH PRODUCTS THAT ARE VERY SIMILAR IN FEATURES, FUNCTIONALITY, AND PRICE. WHAT WOULD YOUR FINAL DECISION BE BASED ON?



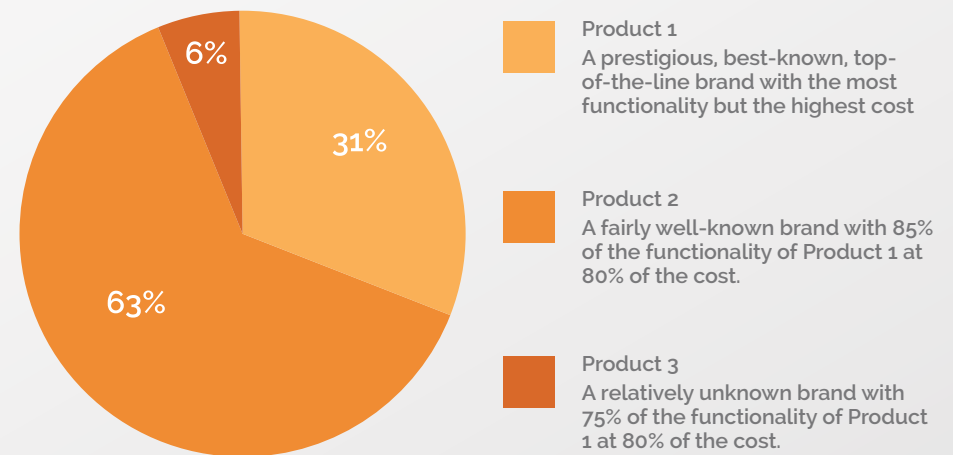
BUYER'S REGRET

"Suppose you're going to select an expensive everyday product. Which one would you choose?"

INSTINCTUAL FINAL DECISION MAKER



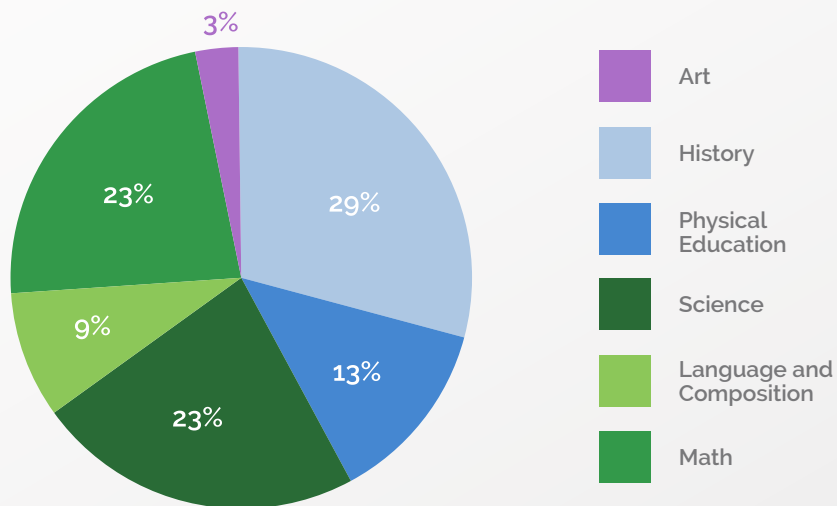
LOGICAL DECISION MAKER



BUYER'S REGRET

However, there is another facet of personality in which salespeople and buyers are quite different. These salespeople were next asked, "Which of the following subjects was your favorite when you were in school?" Their answer reveals a lot about how they process information, think, and make decisions. Salespeople prefer history, science, math, physical education, language and composition, and art.

SURVEY OF SALES PROFESSIONALS' FAVORITE SUBJECTS IN SCHOOL



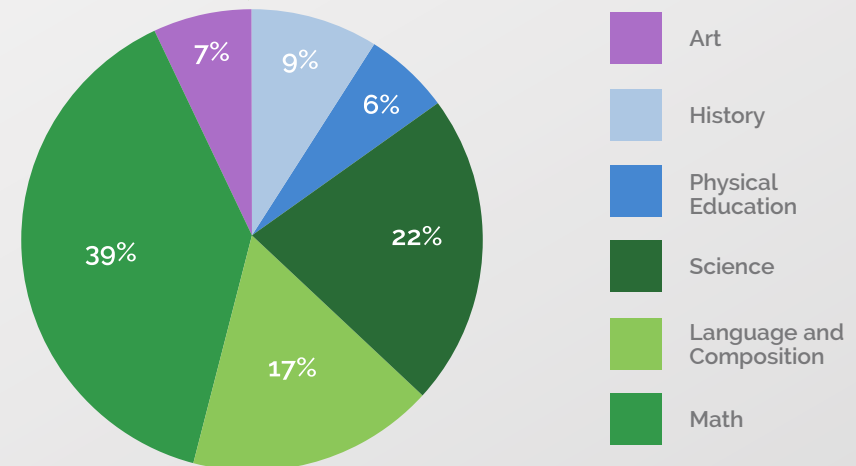
History is based on the study of important events, times, people, and places from the past. In essence, history is based on a form of storytelling; this favorite is indicative of a person's high level of verbal orientation. Therefore, it should not be surprising history was the top selection. (By the way, salespeople talk for a living.) Science is the process of discovery and exploration based on a systematic methodology of observation, measurement, and testing. Through this process, science-

lovers attempt to organize the chaos that occurs naturally during the sales cycle. Math is based on formulas, frameworks, and regimentation. Math lovers have an analytical orientation that is consumed with predictable outcomes based upon concrete terms. Physical education is indicative of someone who is action-oriented and likes being part of team. Language and composition and the arts are based on self-expression and tend to be associated with mental, spiritual, and out-of-the-box thinking.

Now let's look at buyers' and favorite subjects. Thirty-nine percent preferred math (there's a big difference between historians and mathematicians!). Twice as many buyers as salespeople prefer language and composition and art; while half as many prefer physical education.

Unfortunately, salespeople are taught to deliver the same message in the same way to everyone, even though buyers learn, process information, and communicate in vastly different ways than they do.

SURVEY OF BUYERS' FAVORITE SUBJECTS IN SCHOOL



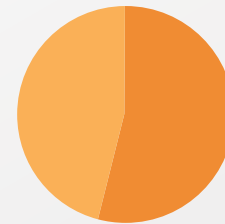
BUYER'S REGRET

Salespeople viewed as trusted advisors enjoy significant advantages

In the final analysis, it is the quality of the salesperson that should be considered the deciding factor that determines which vendor wins the business, because the salesperson sets the tone for the relationship with the prospective buyer. The buyer can think of a salesperson as someone who is trying to sell something, a supplier with whom they do business, a strategic partner who is of significant importance to their business, or a trusted advisor whose opinions on business and personal matters are sought out and listened to. Obviously, a trusted advisor enjoys significant advantages over the competing salespeople.

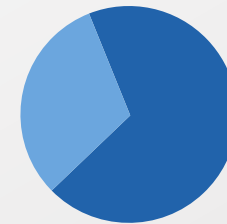
When buyers were asked to evaluate the salespeople they met over the past year, they said that 54% of salespeople could clearly explain how their solution positively impacted their business; 31% were able to converse effectively with the senior executives of their company—and only 18% would be classified as trusted advisors whom they respect.

"OVER THE PAST YEAR, SALESPEOPLE I MET WITH..."



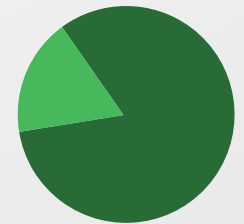
54%

Could clearly explain how their solution positively impacts your business



31%

Are able to converse effectively with senior executives



18%

Would be classified as trusted advisors whom I respect

FINAL THOUGHTS

Within every company, each department has its own “buyers.” For example, Marketing defines product requirements for Engineering; Engineering builds a prototype for Manufacturing; IT provides the systems Manufacturing needs; and Finance provides funds for IT. For the most part, each department’s buyers are internal to the company, both physically and culturally. The Sales department is unique. Sales is focused solely on external buyers who are geographic and cultural outsiders to the organization.

Within many companies, buyer persona profiles are created by Sales Enablement to provide messaging and information on how the salespeople should interact with the various types of prospects they meet.

While most of these buyers personas are predicated on the customer being a rational decision maker, in reality, it is human nature that determines how buyers evaluate and who they ultimately select. There is an entirely intangible, human side to the sales process . And it is the mastery of the intuitive human element of the buyer relationship that separates the winner from losers.





ABOUT STEVE W. MARTIN

Steve W. Martin is the foremost expert on “Sales Linguistics,” the study of how customers use language during the complex decision-making process. His “Heavy Hitter” series of books on the human nature of complex sales has helped over 100,000 salespeople become top revenue producers. His latest book is titled Heavy Hitter I.T. Sales Strategy: Competitive Insights from Interviews with 1,000+ Key Information Technology Decision Makers and Top Technology Salespeople. Steve is a regular contributor to the Harvard Business Review and teaches at the University of Southern California Marshall School of Business MBA Program. You can learn more about Steve at stevevmartin.com.



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