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INTRODUCTION

We've found that when it comes to search, the business to business (B2B) market is largely ignored. That was the reason we did our initial B2B survey back in 2004. While we never expected it to become a seminal work in understanding B2B buying decisions, because of the sheer lack of other research in the area it has come to be regarded as such. Over the past year, we've had a number of people ask us to conduct the site study again so we would have a more recent point of reference in trying to understand how search plays a part in B2B buying decisions. Thanks to the help of supporting partners (see Methodology); we're now happy to share the initial results from the survey with you.

There are some significant differences from the 2004 B2B survey. As we learned more about business to business, we found that it was important to dissect B2B buying decisions in a few different ways. In the survey, we made sure we identified the role that our respondents played in their respective organizational buying decisions. We identified four major roles within an organization that are typical. For the purpose of this survey, we called them the economic buyer, the technical buyer, the user buyer and the coach buyer.

The economic buyer is the person who ultimately makes the buying decisions and signs the check.

The technical buyer is a person within an organization who is tasked with ensuring that whatever solution that is purchased needs the technical requirements of the company. For technology purchases this would often be an IT professional. For accounting software you would typically be a controller or financial officer. And for sales relationship management software it would be sales manager. While these people usually don't have final financial approval they are integral to the purchase process as they are the ones that ensure the potential solution is the right match with the organization’s needs and requirements.

The user buyer is the person on the front lines who will actually use the solution or product purchased. It's often this person the first identifies the need it makes the organization aware that they have to explore potential solutions. And, after the purchase is this person who has to ensure that they implemented solution is the right fit for their need.

Finally, there's the coach buyer. Often this is an internal champion who helps move the sales process along and usually has a vested interest in the purchase of the solution.

Another difference from the 2004 B2B survey to this survey was that we carefully determined what phase of the purchase cycle our respondents were in. We divided the purchase process into four phases, awareness, research, negotiation and purchase. We believed that there could be significant differences in the influence of different factors on the purchase process depending on what phase the buyer within. The impact of a vendor website, a trade publication or attending a trade show could be significantly different for an organization that's at the very early phases of awareness as opposed to an organization that was deep in the intricacies of the final negotiation. As much as possible, we wanted to provide a timeline of the purchasing process based both on the role of the individual involved and the type of industry they were in.

In this initial report, we'll cover off our findings at a high level. We'll provide quick insight into the significant findings and notable trends that we saw. But, in analyzing the data, we found that there is a lot here to cover in one white paper. For that reason, we decided to release three subsequent white papers that will provide further insight and analysis based on the three primary roles we saw emerge in the survey data. We had significant numbers of respondents in the economic buyer, technical buyer and user buyer categories. We found it would be most useful for the marketer to focus individually on each of these roles and provide a much more comprehensive picture of purchase behavior and how that translates into both online and offline activity. We'll be releasing these three subsequent white papers over the coming three months.

We hope that the enclosed information proves useful to B2B marketers. One of the reasons we wanted to do this survey is that we've found B2B transactions, particularly those that involve a significant amount of research, can be much more complex then consumer purchase decisions. There is an unfortunate lack of solid research in this area and we hope that this survey helps fill the void. It is our intention to continue to provide more insight into B2B purchase decisions and we welcome any feedback or comments any of our readers might have in this regard.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this study, we were looking for the answer to one question, with several different parts: How important is online research in business to business (B2B) purchase decisions? We certainly believed it to be important, but even we were surprised by just how important respondents to our survey indicated it was to them. We found a heavy reliance on online research in all aspects of the purchase cycle. We also found that as prospects become aware of potential offerings through offline channels, they naturally turn to online sources to find out more about them. For example, a prospect may become aware of a potential offering at a trade show and the first thing they do is go online to find out more about that offering. One of the more interesting findings of the study was just how important those online influencers could be, in many cases matching the influence of traditional offline factors. A vendor website, together with the perennial offline winner, and word-of-mouth from a colleague or peer, were both indicated as the most important influencers in a purchase decision. Close behind were search engines, distributor websites, word-of-mouth from friends or paid consultants and online and offline trade journals.

Another significant finding was where this research tends to happen online. General search engines are often the first place people turn to begin their online research session and among the general search engines, Google holds a dominant position, being the first choice of 77.7% of respondents. As researchers begin to research their purchase, they rely heavily on information from the vendor’s own website. Also, as they enter the later research phase and start compiling information to begin the actual negotiation, many purchasers rely on B2B vertical engines to help gather detailed information they require. Other sources of heavily relied upon information included industry websites, distributor websites and offline channels such as trade journals and other industry publications.

An important finding for website developers was the type of information that purchasers want to access on the vendor’s website. Without exception, they preferred to access information in a text format that was easily downloadable and transferable to others within their organization. Critical information included pricing, extensive product information, technical specifications, information on customer service and support and searchable knowledgebases. Less important to the buyer were presentations of information that relied more heavily on rich media, online video and podcasts. In the case of the B2B buyer, simpler is better.

A rather surprising finding was the percentage of B2B buyers who actually convert online. In most categories, we found close to a 50-50 split of online versus offline conversions. The one exception was in the parts category, where 70% of the respondents indicated that they actually made a purchase online. This was one data point in a fairly extensive survey and because the result was rather unexpected, it would require further research to provide more insight around this particular point. As we look at purchase behaviors amongst individual roles, we may be able to find out more about exactly where and how conversions take place.

Finally, we look at the actual interactions on the search results page. Here we found a remarkable consistency in click through patterns from our previous studies. The ratios we found fall remarkably close to those we've seen in the past. For example, we saw 74.4 % of respondents choose an organic link and 18.7% choose a sponsored link. 12.2% clicked on one of the top ads presented and 6.5% clicked on one of the ads appearing on the right rail. The top four organic listings captured 52.6% of all the click throughs, with the number one organic result capturing 27.1%. Position again proves to be important in the sponsored listings, with the top PPC ad capturing twice the number of click throughs as the number two ad (7.4% versus 3.4%).

In summary, we found nothing in the study that contradicted any of the findings in our previous B2B study. What we found was a three-year evolution in the importance of online in B2B purchases. Online resources are critical in the business purchasing process and a few of them stand head and shoulders above the rest, notably vendor websites and search engines. If you want to influence the B2B purchaser, provide lots of information in an easily accessible, text-based format that can be passed from individual to individual within the organization. Understand that there are different types of buyers and their level of interest in certain types of information, including pricing, can vary, depending on where they are in the purchase cycle.

METHODOLOGY

Enquiro, along with the help of supporting partners, collected survey data in March 2007 from a select list of North American contacts.

Survey Sampling International provided the sample of 1086 professionals.

We screened the participants by asking:

Are you considering making a business to business purchase from one of the following categories within the next year?
Parts and Components (i.e., parts for assembly, semi-conductors, motherboards etc.)
Equipment (i.e., test or measurement equipment, manufacturing, medical etc.)
Business Services (i.e., accounting, legal, logistics and shipping etc.)
Supplies (i.e., industrial or office supplies, furniture, tools etc.)
Software (i.e., enterprise software etc.)
Hardware (i.e., enterprise hardware etc.)

Is this product or service worth over $1,000?

The participants completed the online survey that consisted of over 100 questions. Each participant answered questions based on what phase of the purchase cycle they were currently in.

An added feature of the survey allowed participants to launch live search queries. This allowed the survey to capture important search behavior such keyword analysis, position and rank of search engine result pages.

Enquiro acknowledges the support of the following partners who helped underwrite some of the expense of conducting a study: Zoom Information Inc., Google Inc., Survey Sampling International LLC (SSI), and MarketingSherpa Inc. While these partners helped to subsidize the cost and provided some suggestions in the earliest phases of the study, they were not directly involved in the design of the study, the collection of the data or the analysis of that same data.

The survey questions are available upon request.

RESULTS

This paper is a report of the general findings of the survey. Where appropriate, we've added additional analysis to provide some insight into what the numbers are telling us.

We plan to publish a series of follow up white papers, to provide additional insight from the perspective of three types of buyer: the economic buyer, the technical buyer and user buyer.

General Participant Characteristics

The sample provided by SSI was a generally diverse B2B sample. We covered purchases in a wide number of product categories. This allowed us to look at how purchase decisions were made for various types of purchases. We divided all respondents into the following product categories.

The supplies category had the greatest number of respondents but it was also the least defined of the categories. Types of purchases falling into it included significant purchases of office and business supplies (in excess of $1000).

Industry Product Categories	n (%)
Supplies	406 (37.4)
Software	169 (15.6)
Hardware	157 (14.5)
Business Services	144 (13.3)
Equipment	118 (10.9)
Parts and Components	92 (8.5)

We also wanted to get a sense of the size of the purchases that made up the dataset for the study. The majority of them (63.2%) fell into the $1,000-$10,000 category.

Budget for considered purchases	n (%)
1,000 to 9,999	686 (63.2)
10,000 to 49,999	260 (23.9)
50,000 to 100,000	78 (7.2)
100,000 or more	62 (5.7)

Gender, Age and Education

Responders averaged 43 years old with a gender split of 63% women and 37% men.

Having more females in the sample is consistent with past survey work we've done. It seems to be more an artifact of online survey methodology than any significant finding on B2B purchasing behavior.

Gender	n (%)	Mean Age (± SD)
Female	682 (63)	41.7 (11.3)
Male	404 (37)	46.2 (13.1)

Education levels seem to follow generally representative patterns.

Highest Level of Education	n (%)
High School Diploma	120 (11.1)
Some College	344 (31.7)
University Degree	392 (36.1)
Masters Degree	186 (17.1)
Doctoral Degree	39 (3.6)

Phase versus Role

One of the primary objectives of the study was to gain further understanding of organizational B2B purchase behavior goals by phase of the purchase cycle and by role of the individual involved.

We asked each participant indicate in the study where they were in a current purchase cycle based on the following definitions of phase:

Awareness: This is where you first learn about needs or opportunities. You learn you have a pain that needs to be solved.

Research / Consideration: Information and/or data gathering, defining of requirements, vetting, screening of options, creation of a short list of candidate solutions.

Negotiation / Vendor Finalization: Reviewing vendors' offerings before making recommendations, negotiating the best price, finalizing specifics of final purchase.

Purchase: Approval of purchase, recommendations and authorizing purchases. Completing required paperwork for procurement.

We also asked participants to identify the role they played in the purchase based on the following definitions:

Economic Buyer: This buyer releases the money and has ultimate power of veto in the selection of the purchased brand. i.e. Executive Management.

User Buyer: This buyer judges the impact on the job. The user buyer considers a brand in terms of who within the company will personally use or supervise the use of a product or service. i.e. Sales personnel for CRM software, Project Management personnel for Project Management software.

Technical Buyer: The role of this buyer is to screen out various brands from consideration. This type of buyer makes judgements about the technicalities of a product or service versus another offering as a way of screening out vendors and brands. i.e. logistics and shipping services, Financial personnel for accounting software, etc.

Coach Buyer: This buyer is an internal guide who helps direct an outside business on the internal process required to make a specific sale. Also called a Champion by the outside vendor.

Participants were chosen from a broad range of roles, phase of the purchasing cycle and industry sectors. Nearly 46% classified themselves as Economic Buyers, 28% User Buyers, 27% Technical Buyers and less than 3% Coach Buyers.

Just less then half of the respondents, 49%, were in the research phase of the purchase cycle with the remaining split between the purchase, 20%, negotiation, 15% and awareness phase, 12%.

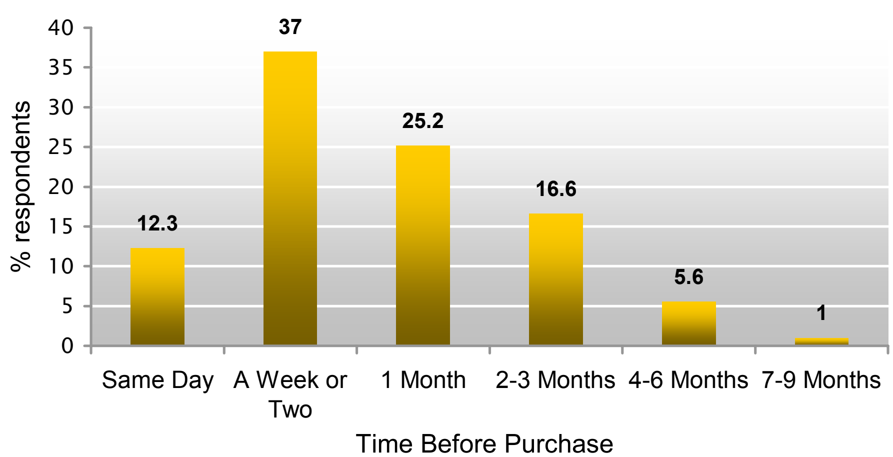
Phase of Purchasing Cycle versus Role

The majority of participants were in the research phase of a current purchase. When analyzing this by role we found (somewhat predictably) that technical buyers were slightly more likely to be in the research phase, and economic buyers were slightly more likely to be involved in the purchase phase.

Phase/ Role	Economic n (%)	Technical n (%)	User n (%)	Coach n (%)	Total n (%)
Awareness	99 (19.8)	20 (8.2)	38 (12.3)	6 (18.8)	163 (15.0)
Research	228 (45.7)	138 (56.3)	154 (49.7)	15 (46.9)	535 (49.3)
Negotiation	43 (8.6)	40 (16.3)	57 (18.4)	3 (9.4)	143 (13.2)
Purchase	119 (23.9)	45 (18.4)	54 (17.4)	7 (21.9)	225 (20.7)
Total	**499 (45.9)**	**295 (27.2)**	**310 (28.5)**	**32 (2.9)**	**1086 (100)**

How Soon Before the Purchase Does Research Begin?

When we look at the length of time between when research begins and when the purchases are made, we found a relatively even split between short-term purchase cycles and long-term purchase cycles. 49.3% of the respondents indicated they made the purchase with less than two weeks of research, and 48.4% indicated that they started researching a month or more before the purchase.



Online versus Offline Conversion

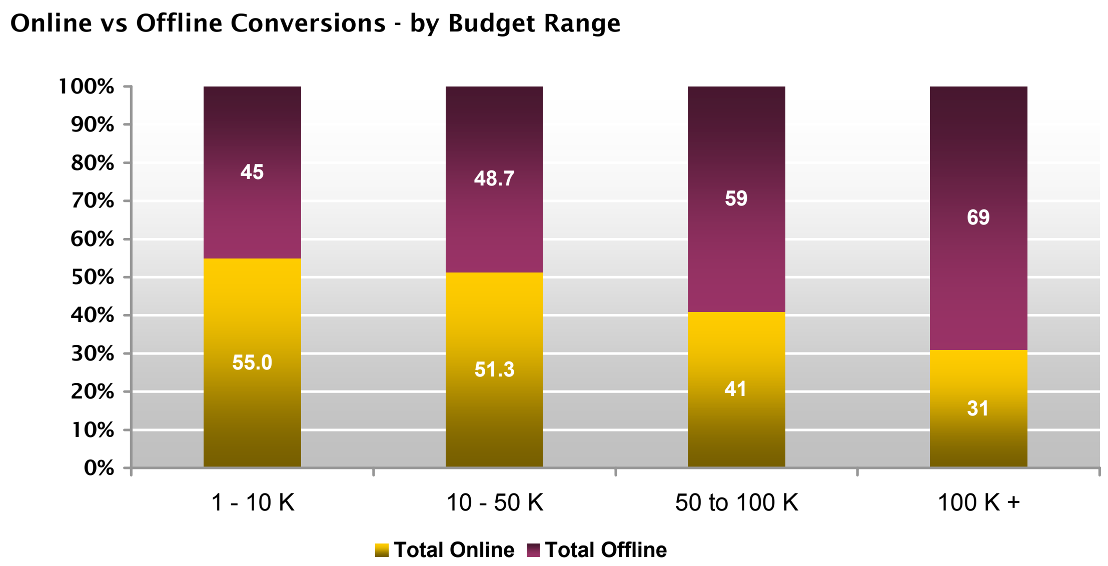
A surprisingly high number of respondents indicated they made their purchase online after conducting online research. Almost 47% indicated this as the outcome of their research online. This was significantly higher than the percentage of online conversions we've seen in other studies (although the majority of those have been consumer based).

Where did you end up making your purchase (2007)	n (%)
Found vendor online, purchased online	313 (46.92)
Found vendor online, purchased offline	243 (36.4)
Found vendor offline, purchased online	26 (3.9)
Found vendor offline, purchased offline	66 (9.9)
Don't Recall	19 (2.9)

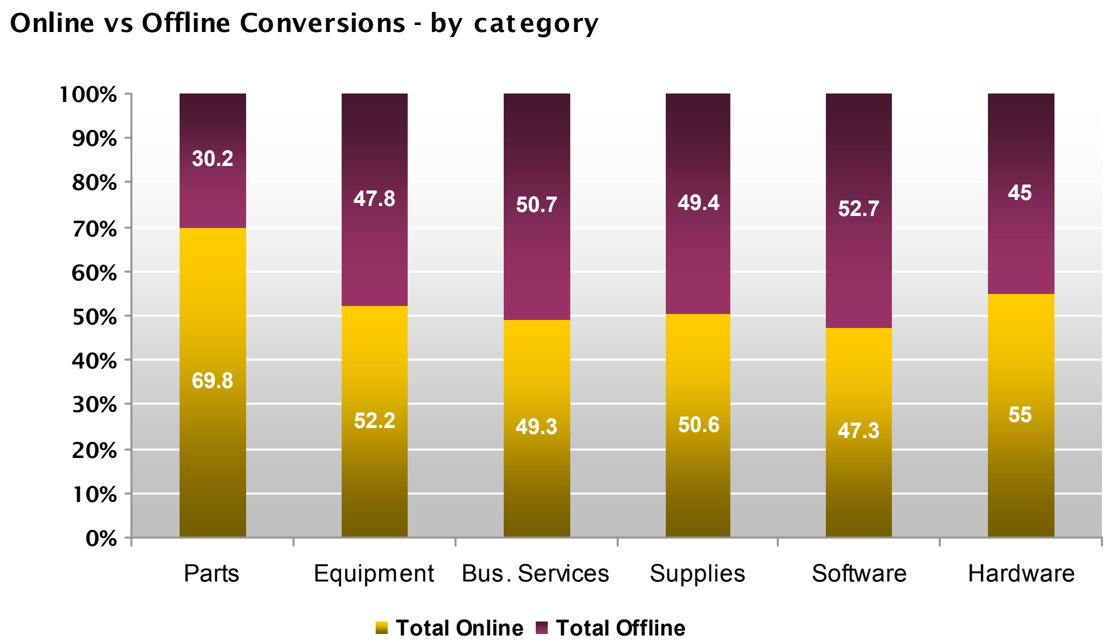
There is some consistency with our previous study conducted in 2004, although we phrased the question slightly differently. In that case, we asked the outcome of the online research was. As you can see from the table below, in this case online purchases were also more common that offline.

What was the result of your online research (2004)		(%)
Valid	I never found what looking for	7.9
	Researched online, purchased offline	27.3
	Researched and purchased online	36.8
	Still researching	28.0

Therefore, we tried to break this down a little more to see what might be happening. Predictably, the number of online conversions was tied somewhat to the size of the budget involved with the purchase. Smaller purchases were much more likely to be conducted online.



We also compared by category, thinking that some categories would be more conducive to online purchasing. We found remarkable consistency across the categories, with close to a 50/50 split in online and offline purchasing, with the exception of the Parts category, which had a 70/30 split, favoring online.



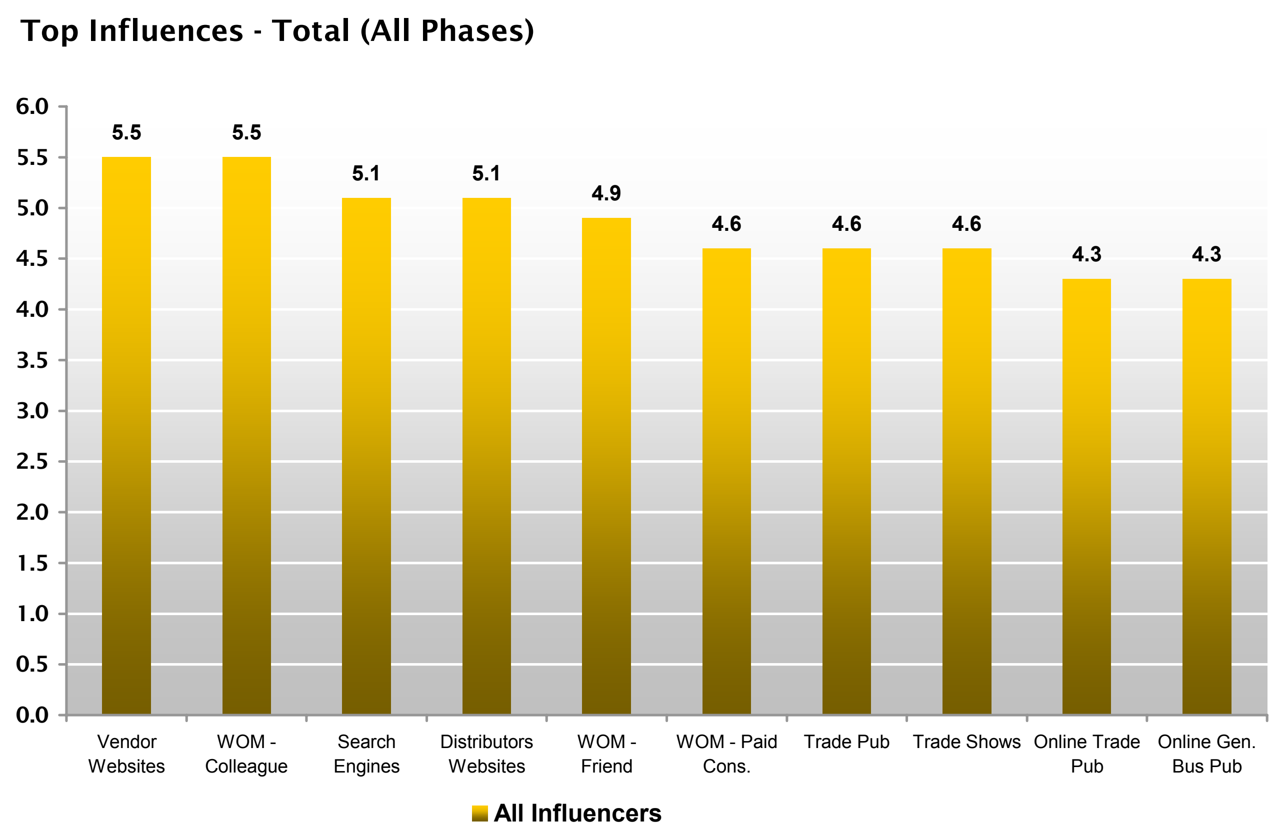
It does seem that B2B buyers are more likely to purchase online. This result was somewhat surprising to us, but it's beyond the scope of this study to provide any more insight. We've definitely flagged it as a data point to explore further in future studies, because if this does prove to be a trend, it's a very important one for B2B marketers to keep track of.

The Importance of Online versus Offline Influencing Factors

When looking at influencing factors as a whole, we were struck by how integral online research is, and how it virtually mirrors the influence of traditional highly influential factors, such as word of mouth, trade shows and trade publications. The chart below shows the twelve most influential factors, both online and offline, amongst all participants.

There seems to be a common offline/online complimentary approach to B2B purchase research. A recommendation by a friend or colleague, an encounter at a trade show or an ad or feature in a trade publication can first make you aware of a product or service. Then the natural inclination is to turn to the Web to find out more. And when that happens, search is one of the first places prospects turn to. Then, as prospects move through the conversion path, there are a mix of influences that help shape the ultimate decision.

Primary amongst these is the Vendor's website itself. In understanding the balance between online and offline influencing factors, the B2B marketer can begin to leverage the strengths of one against the other. Paramount in this is understanding that as awareness is formed, a large percentage of prospects will turn online to find out more and will use search to locate the vendor's site. Search visibility is essential in intersecting the prospect at this point.

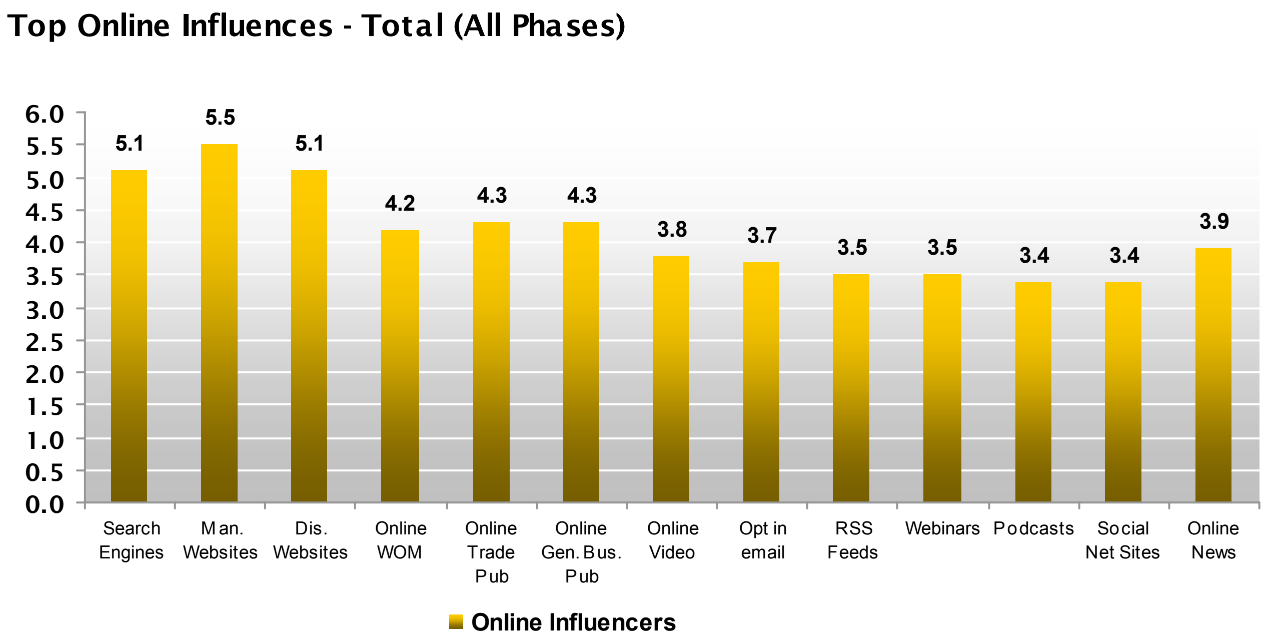


Online Influencing Factors by Phase

All Phases

When asked what the top influences were on the purchase decision, respondents across all phases indicated that the website of the vendor, followed by distributor websites and search engines were the most important influencers. Other sources of objective information also rated quite highly, including online word-of-mouth (i.e. support forums and newsgroups), online trade publications and online general business publications as well as online news portals.

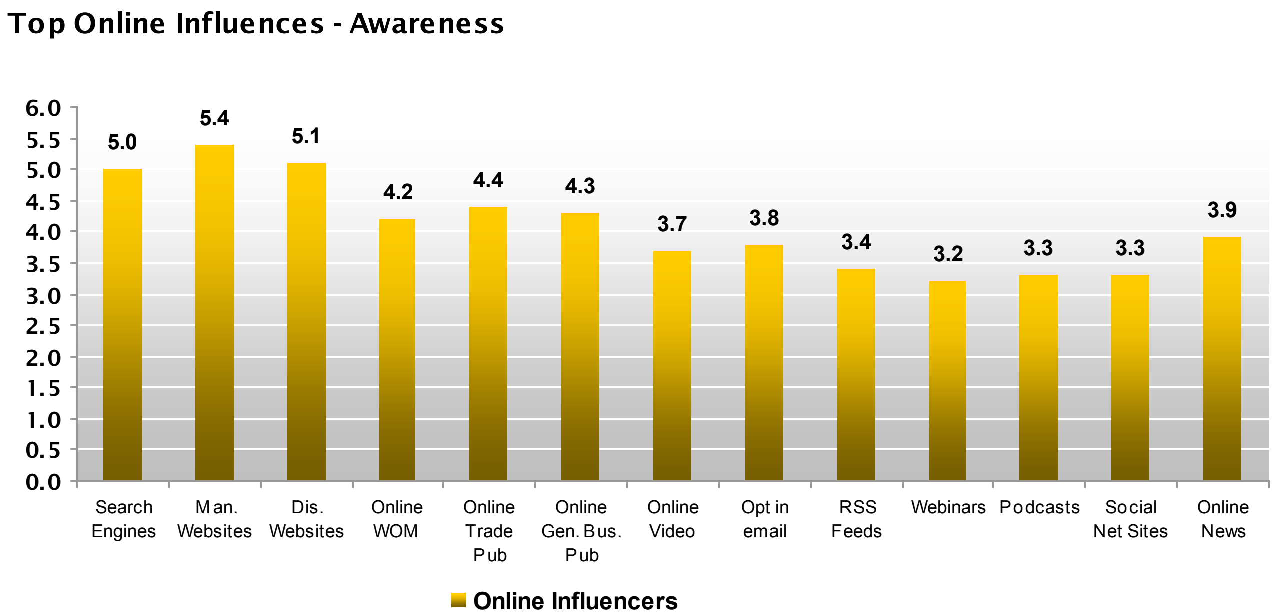
Influencing factors that have emerged in the last few years were generally rated as less influential; these included online video, RSS feeds, webinars, podcasts and social networking sites.



On a scale of 1 to 7

Online Influences - Awareness

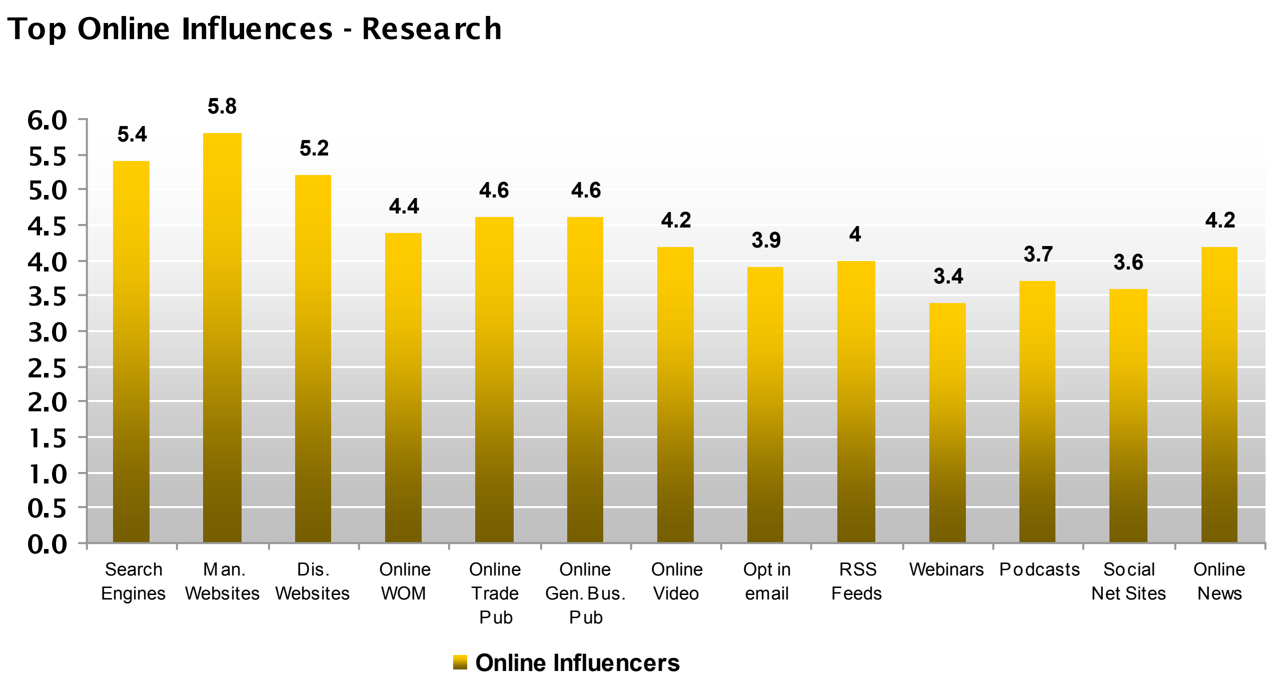
When asked about online factors that influenced them, participants who were in the awareness phase, rated the actual vendor/manufacturer website is the most influential factor. Distributor websites and search engines followed this. Sites that presented information in a more traditional form, i.e. in text based presentations (information in online newsletters, forums, etc) tended to be more influential than those that presented information in a multimedia format, i.e. in webinars, podcasts or online video.



On a scale of 1 to 7

Online Influences - Research

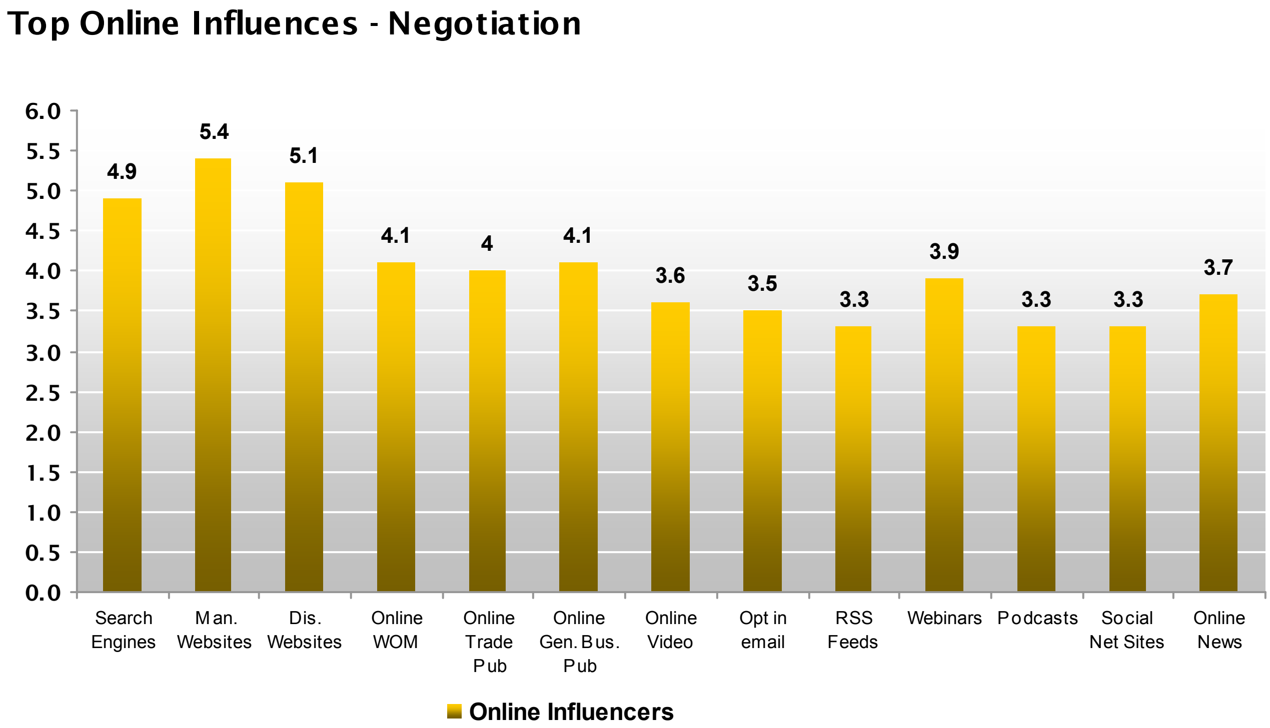
Looking at respondents in the research phase we found the similar pattern emerge again. If anything, the respondents in this phase were even more reliant on the presentation of information in a straightforward traditional way. Participants in this phase said the vendor/manufacturer website is highly influential, giving it the highest score across all influencing factors in phases. Search engines were also highly influential in this phase.



On a scale of 1 to 7

Online Influences - Negotiation

As we look at the respondents in the negotiation phase we see few surprises here. One thing to note is that search engines did become a little less influential to this group and webinars seemed to increase in influence, although in both cases the variance was marginal.



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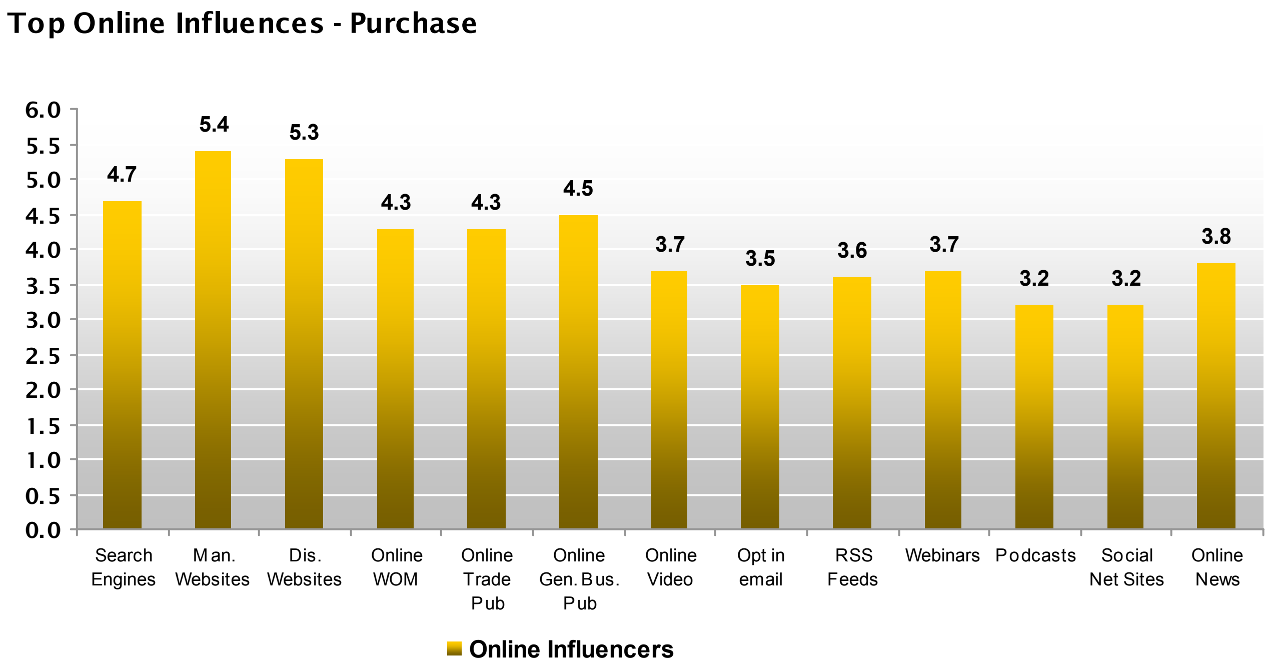
Online Influences - Purchase

In the final phase of the purchase cycle we see increased influence from online destinations that could offer competitive pricing information. This includes distributor websites and other online publications that could compare alternatives. The assumption here is that buyers are arming themselves with objective pricing information to help capture the best price possible.

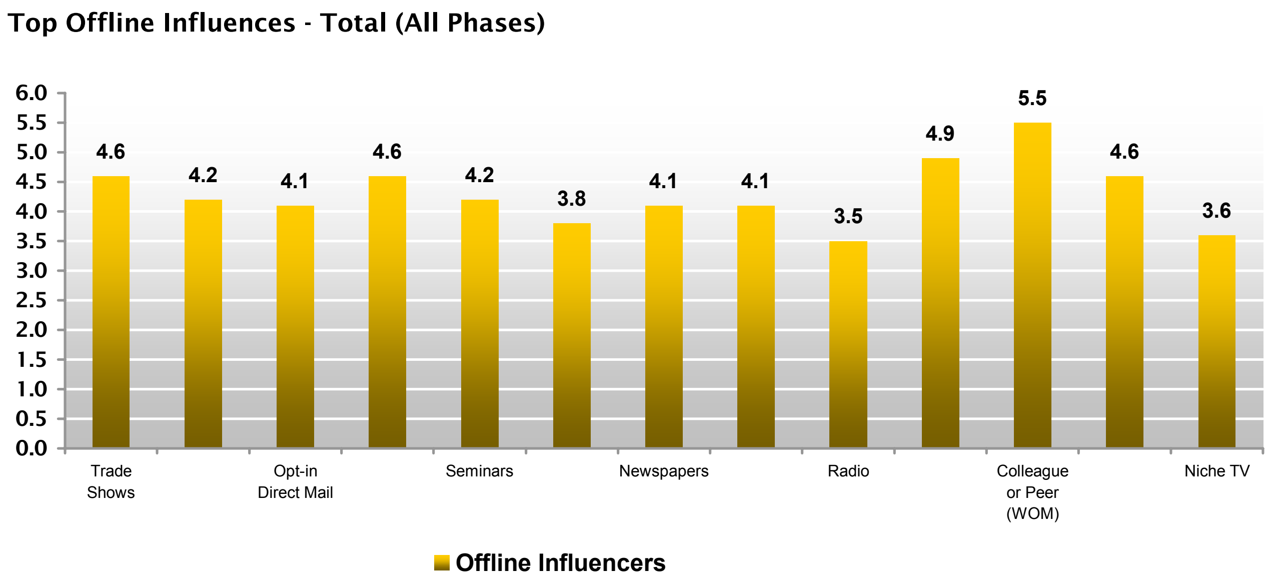


On a scale of 1 to 7

Offline Influencing Factors by Phase

In B2B purchasing, a personal recommendation, particularly from a colleague or co-worker, is highly influential. Respondents ranked it as the most influential factor in the purchase decision, (tied with the vendor's website - see online influences) as the number one influencer, both online and online. After that comes a personal recommendation from a friend or relative. Then there is a tie between word-of-mouth from a paid consultant, trade shows and trade publications. In general, offline factors are more influential when they're aligned to the industry segment in question. Non-vertical influencers, such as broadcast TV and radio were rated as less influential. In addition, there seems to be a preference for printed media over electronic media.

All Phases



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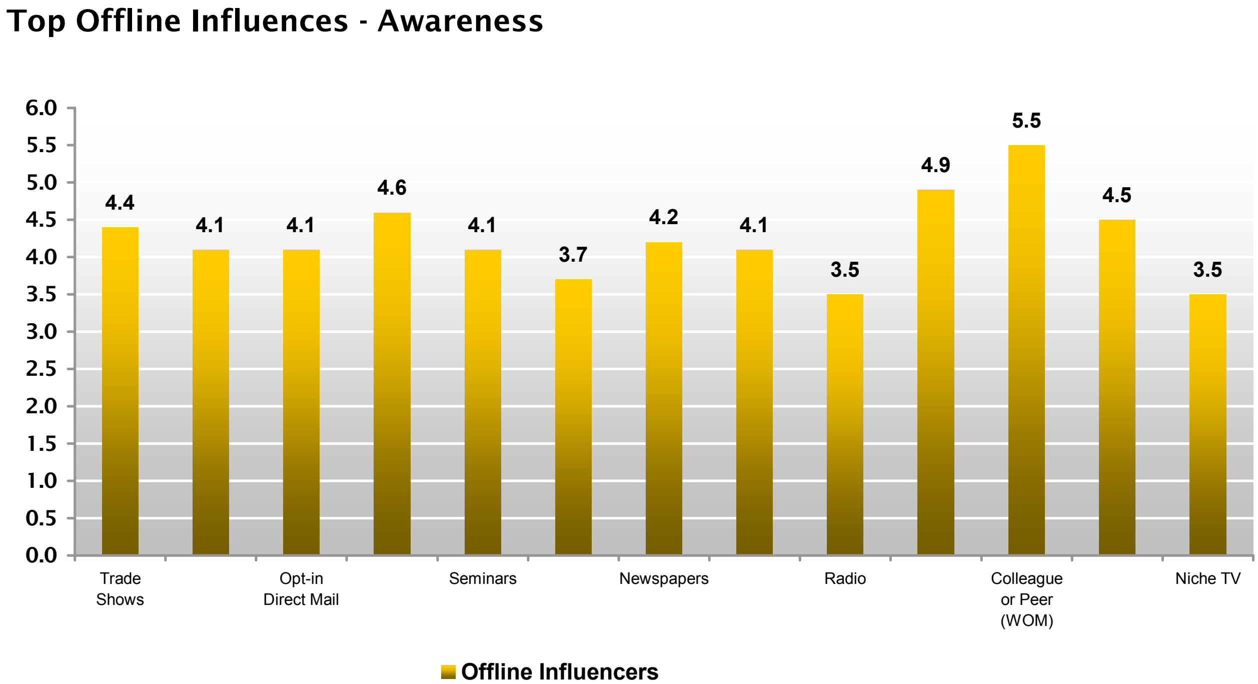
Offline Influences - Awareness

When we focused on respondents in the Awareness state, we didn't see any significant variations. Trade shows were a little less influential here than across all phases, but word of mouth, particularly from colleagues and friends and family, was still considered highly influential.

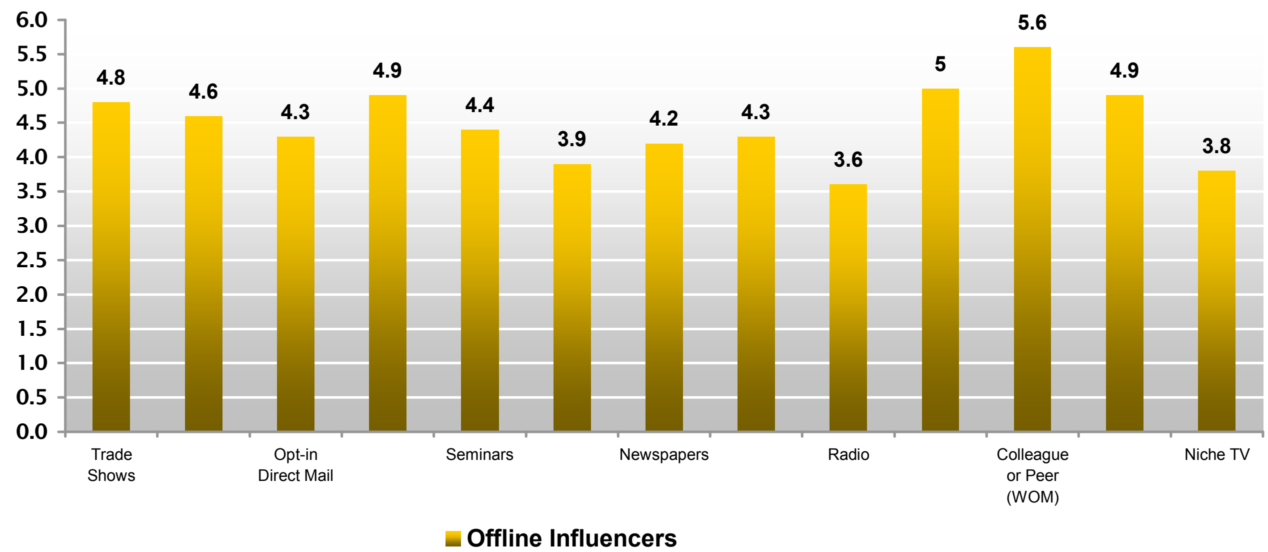


On a scale of 1 to 7

Offline Influences - Research

During the research phase, Trade Shows and Trade Publications take on an increased importance, indicating that both of these serve as a resource to learn more about possible alternatives. At this point, researchers also place increased important on company information contained in press releases and attending seminars.

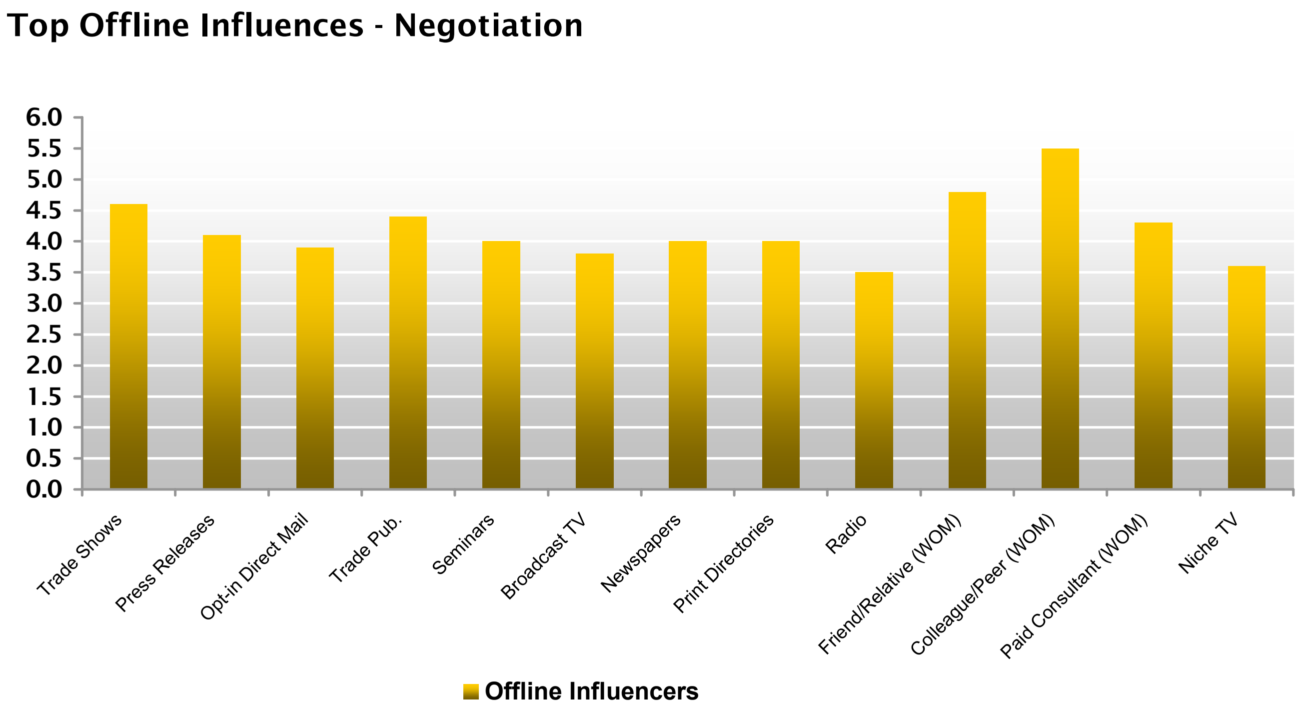
Top Offline Influences - Research



On a scale of 1 to 7

Offline Influences - Negotiation

The offline influencers in the negotiation phase appeared to follow the general trend we saw through the other phases. Once again, word-of-mouth from a colleague or coworker is by far the most influential. It was interesting to note that we saw more significant variation in online influences at this phase than we saw with the offline influencers. One assumption could be that at this point in the purchase process, much of the information gathering and additional research is happening online, particularly on the vendor website, as the organization compiles information to enable them to negotiate the best price possible.



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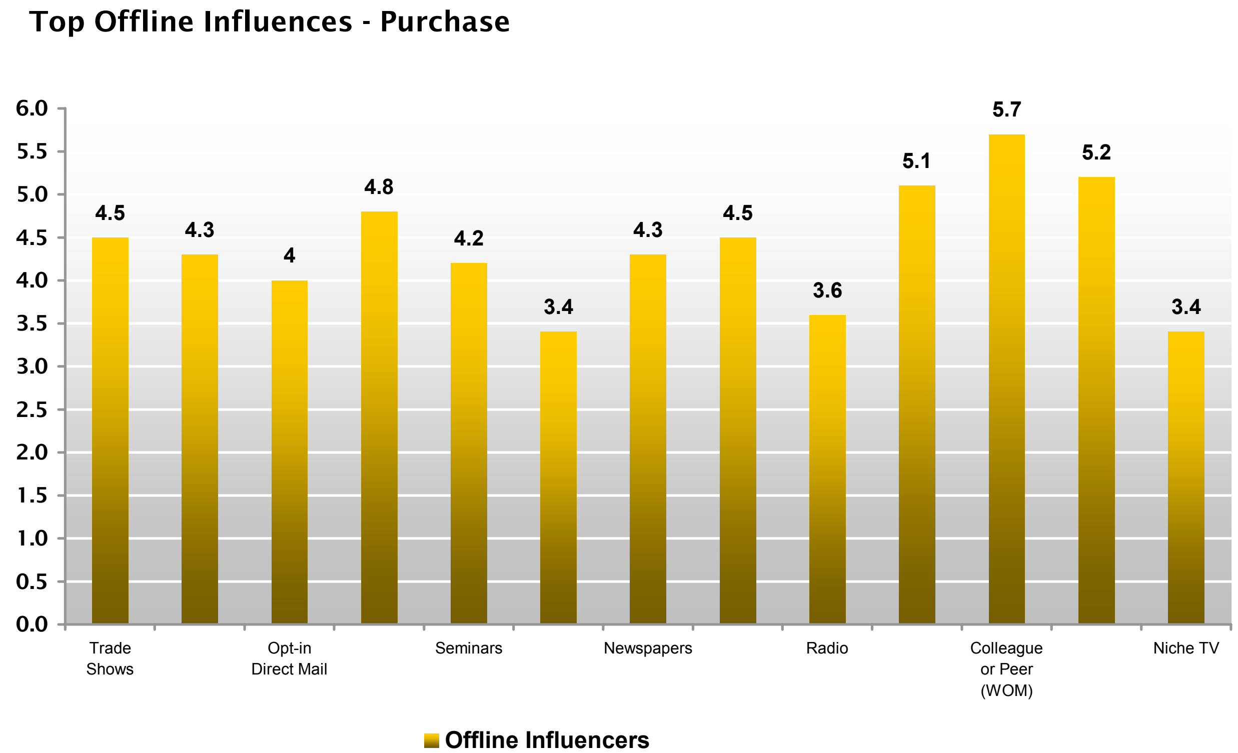
Offline Influences - Purchase

In the purchase phase, we saw that word-of-mouth takes on increased importance here, indicating that buyers seek an external opinion before committing to a purchase. In addition, we see trade publications, print directories and trade shows all considered quite influential at this phase, indicating that buyers are actively reinforcing their decision with additional information from these sources



On a scale of 1 to 7

Would They Go Online?

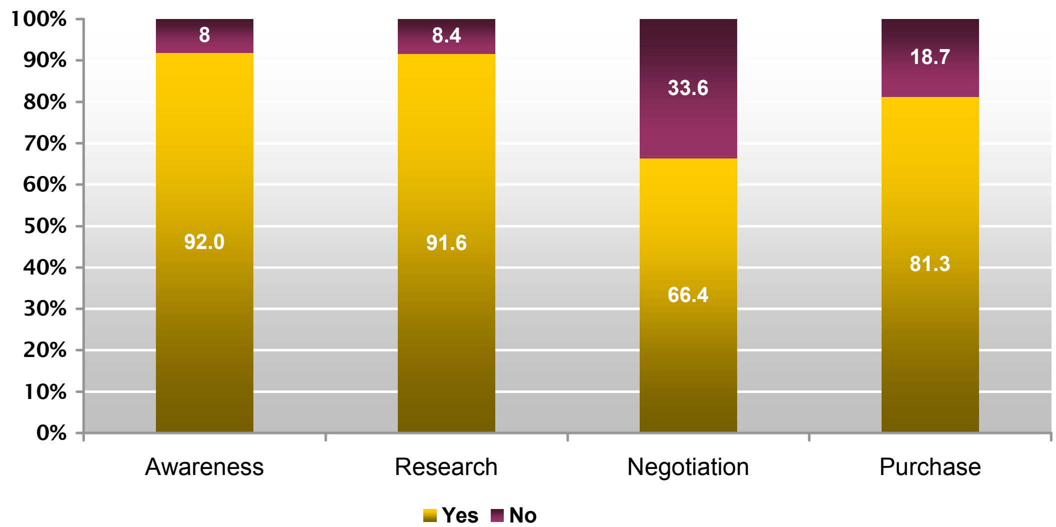
One of the fundamental questions of the study was, "How important is online research in B2B purchase decisions? Would purchasers go online? The answer was overwhelming (85.3%) yes.

Would they go online?	n (%)
Yes	926 (85.3)
No	155 (14.2)
Don't Recall	5 (0.5)

All Phases

In what purchasing cycle phase were the participants more likely to use online resources? We found the likelihood remained high across all phases, with somewhat of an exception for Negotiation. However, even in this phase, two out of every three participants would go online to help them in this phase of the purchase cycle.

Would They Use Online - by Phase



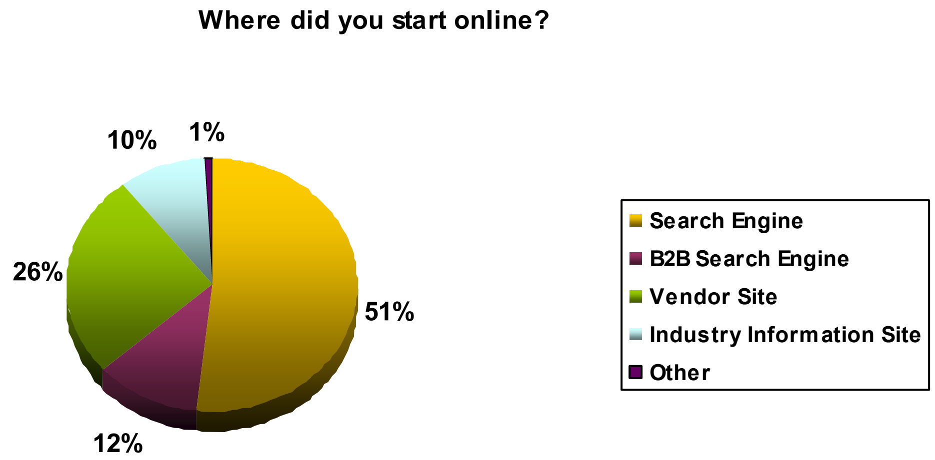
To us, the surprise in this was the strong reliance on online research throughout the purchase cycle. In our 2004 study, we found users were most likely to use online during the research phase. But by capturing the data based on current involvement with a purchase, and then examining it by phase, we found although reliance on online research does drop a bit as you move through the purchase cycle, it does remain an important resource for the majority of buyers.

Evolution of Online Activity Based on the Purchase Phase

Where Did You Start Your Online Research?

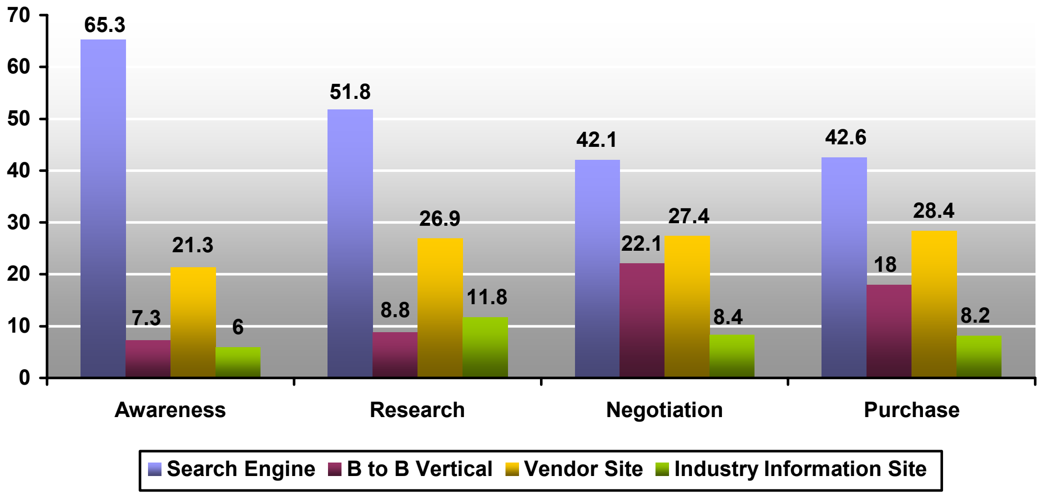
All Phases (Not including Past Purchase)

One of the significant findings of this study was the overwhelming preference of people to start their online research with a search. While approximately one in three participants indicated they would go directly to a non-search site (either a vendor or industry information site), two thirds would go directly to a search engine (either general or a B2B vertical) to start their research activities. It should be noted that even when users wanted to go to a non-search site, about 25% of them used a search to navigate to it. This gives us well over 70% of B2B prospects starting out from a search engine.



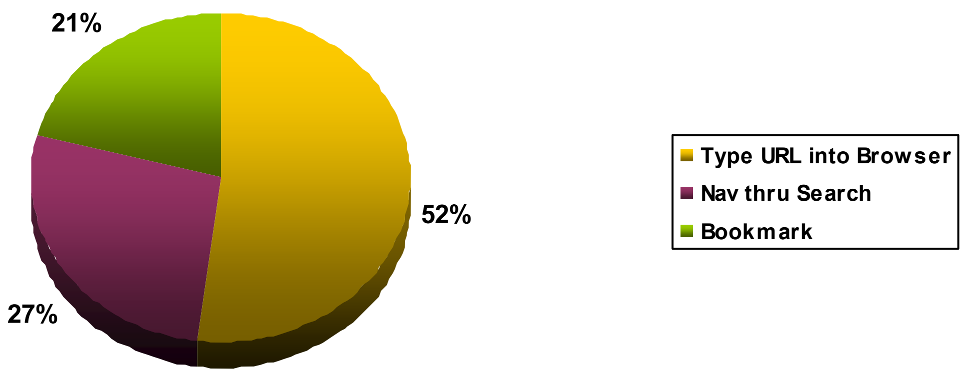
Where did you start your online research? By Phase

It also becomes interesting to explore the nature of this search activity by phase. In the early phases of the process, particularly in the Awareness phase, there's a heavy reliance on general search, with 65.3% indicating that this would be their first destination. However, as users progress through the purchase cycle, the reliance on general search decreases. What increases is usage of B2B vertical engines. As prospects move through the Research and Negotiation phases, they use B2B vertical engines to a greater extent to do further research on their alternatives and find specific information about them. This progression from online resource to resource becomes interesting when you look at it by role. This is something we'll be doing in greater depth in the subsequent role-based white papers.



Where Did They Start if not a Search Engine (and How Did They Get There)?

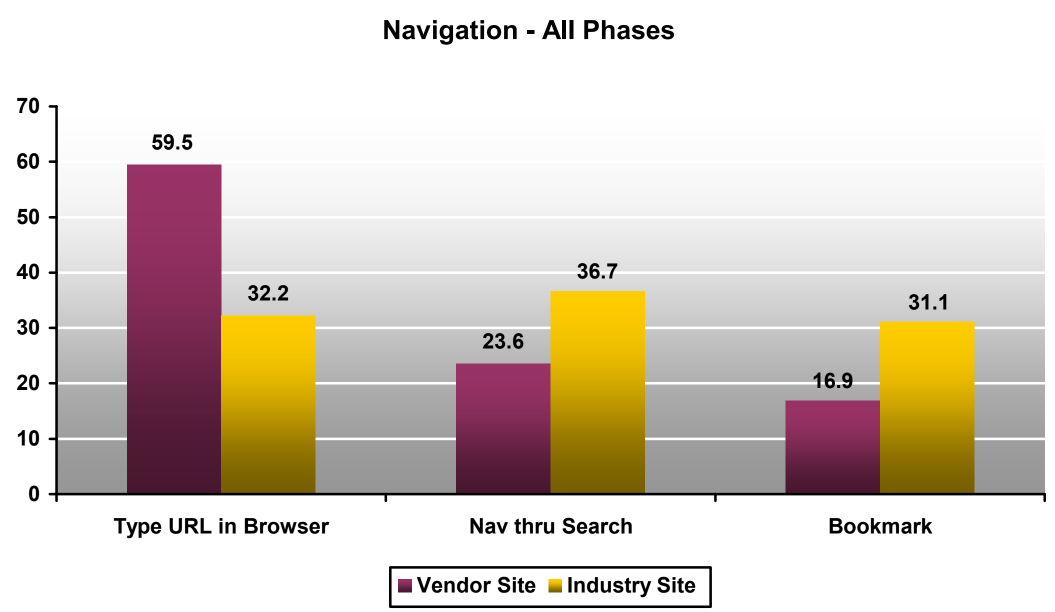
Even when respondents indicated that they wouldn't use search as a starting point for their online research, many of them (just over 27%) still used search to navigate to a vendor's or industry information site. In many cases, it may be easier to use the built-in search functionality of the browser, a search box on their home page or an installed toolbar to navigate to the intended site.

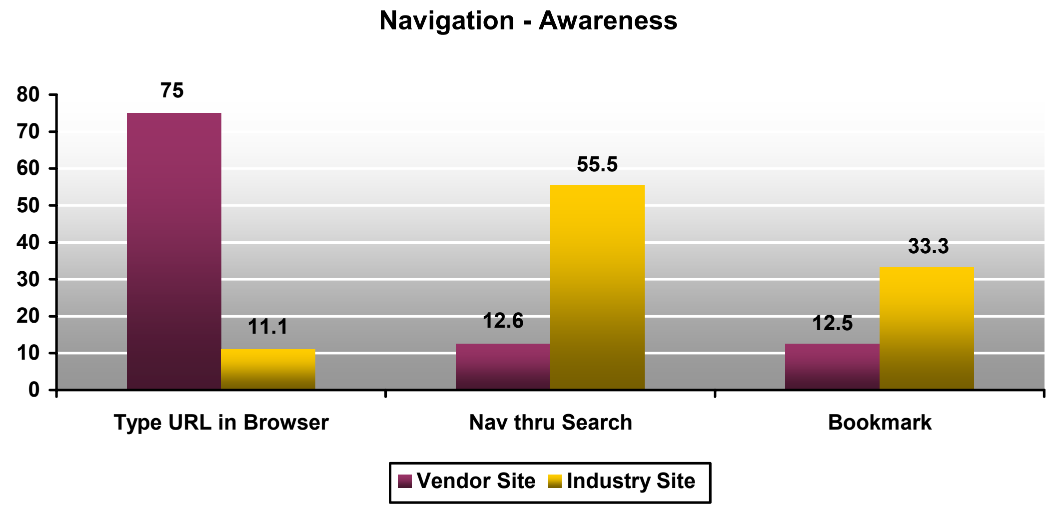


The likelihood to use a search engine to navigate to another site very significantly by the type of site that people were navigating to (whether it was a vendor site or industry information site) and by which phase of the purchase cycle they were asked. In the following graphs we break this down in more detail.

Below, when navigating to a vendor site, many buyers would already be aware of the vendor's name and would be likely to just type it as a website address into the browser. It should be noted here that this was self-reported behavior not observed behavior. Our suspicion is that the incidence of using search to navigate to a site would be higher if we were actually observing behavior. Relatively few buyers would have a vendor's website bookmarked.

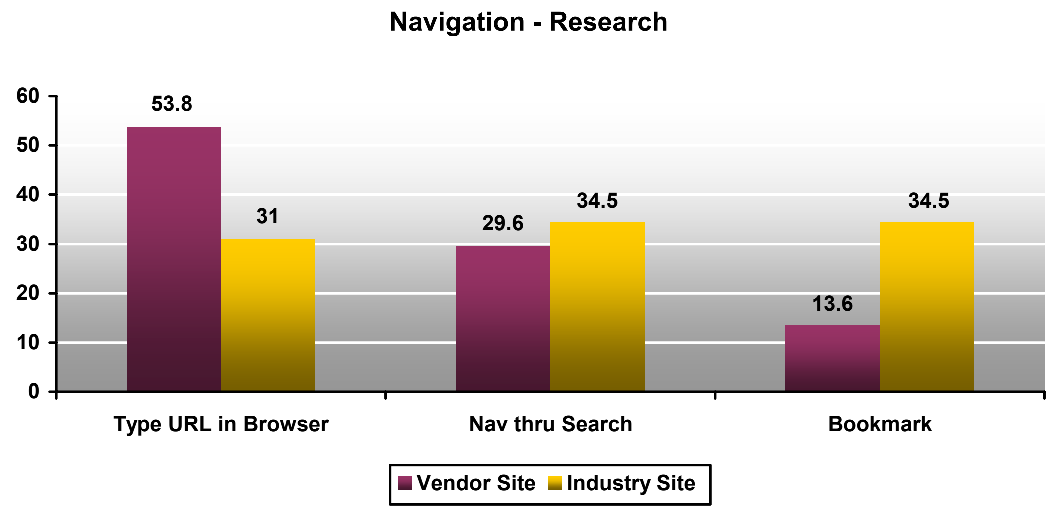
However, when users indicated that they would be going to an industry information site the navigation options change significantly. In this case, many would not be aware of the leading information sites in a particular industry or might be unsure of the actual URL, so they would use search to find them. One wouldn't have an actual brand to use as the starting point for typing a URL into the browser. However, if users had been researching in this particular vertical there's a strong likelihood that they might have bookmarked information sites that proved to be useful.





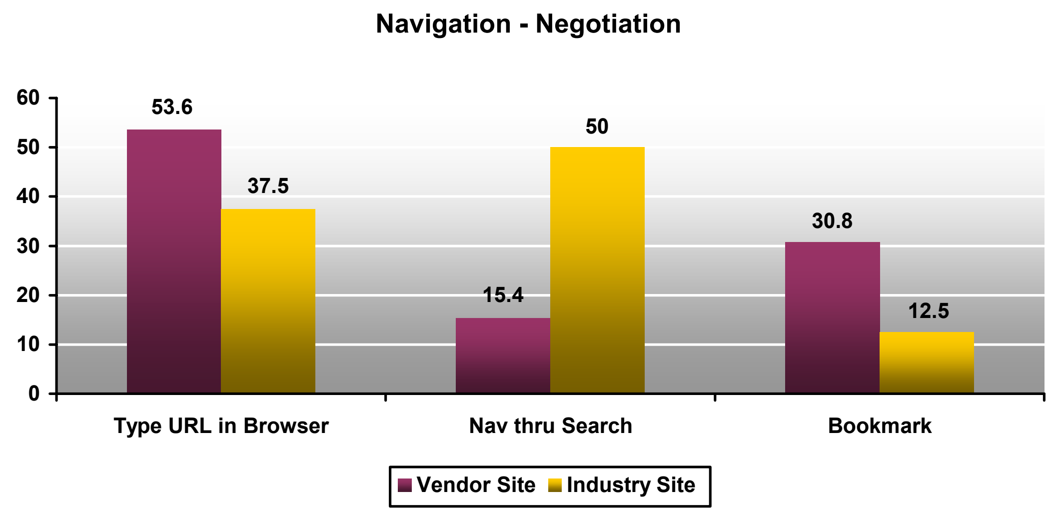
Now let's look at the awareness phase. If someone was looking for a vendor site and they chose not to use a search engine then there's a high likelihood they already have one vendor in mind and they would type the URL (brand name plus .com) directly into the browser bar. 75% of the respondents indicated that this would be their first action. Only 12.5% would have a vendor site bookmarked. An equal number would navigate through search functionality.

But the picture changes dramatically when we're talking about industry information sites. Early in the awareness phase most buyers would not be familiar with the leading information sites so they would not have URL in mind to type directly into the browser bar. However, if they have purchased previously in that vertical they may have bookmarked a particularly useful information sites. In this instance, navigating through search was the most popular option with respondents.



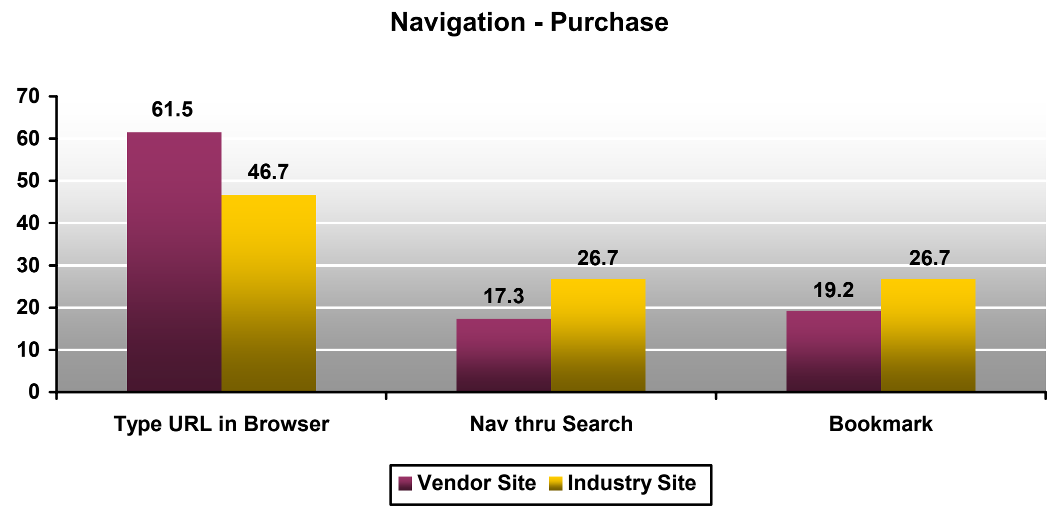
At the research phase, users would be more likely to use some sort of search functionality to get to a vendor or industry information site. Only 53.8% of respondents indicated they would type the URL directly into their browser to get to a vendor site. This could indicate that there researching beyond their first vendor choice and they're using a search engine because they're not as familiar with what the right URL might be.

Because we're moving to a later phase in the purchase cycle, the likelihood of the buyer knowing the right URL for an industry information site increases from what we found at the Awareness phase. Therefore, the reliance on search as a navigation option drops at this point.



As respondents moved into the negotiation phase, there is a greater likelihood that by this point they've bookmarked the vendor site. Almost 31% indicated this is how they would navigate to the vendor URL. Almost 54% would still type the URL directly into the browser bar. Reliance on searches and navigation option to get to the vendor site is relatively minimal at this point.

When we look at industry information sites, again, an increased familiarity increases the odds of the buyer typing the URL directly into the browser. The increase in usage of search as a navigation option at this point could be an artifact of a relatively small number of people in this particular segment or it could indicate that buyers are turning to these sites for the first time (therefore their lack of confidence in typing the URL directly into the browser) to find additional vendor options as they try to find the best possible price.

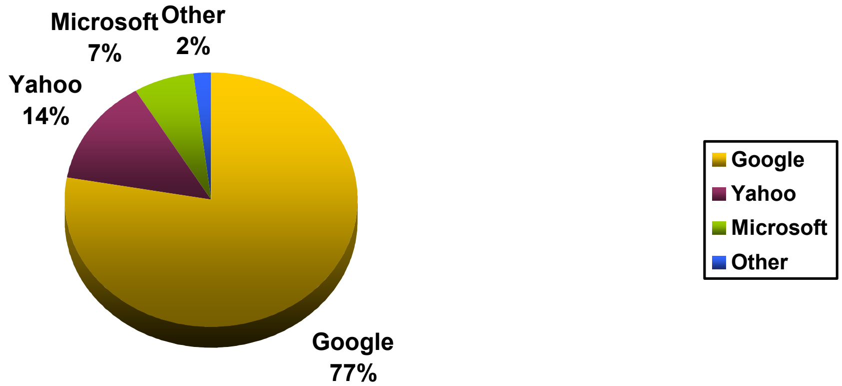


By the purchase phase, the odds of direct navigation (either through typing the URL in the browser bar or by using a bookmark) continues to increase. The buyer has a high degree of familiarity with the sites they've been accessing of the need to use a search engine to navigate is that a relatively low point.

Navigate to Non Search Engine Site	n (%)					
	Type into Browser Bar	Built in Search Function	Tool Bar Installed	Search Box on Home Page	Bookmark	Other
Awareness						
Vendor Site	24 (75.0)	3 (9.4)	0 (0.0)	1 (3.2)	4 (12.5)	0 (0.0)
Industry Site	1 (11.1)	3 (33.3)	1 (11.1)	1 (11.1)	3 (33.3)	0 (0.0)
Other	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Research						
Vendor Site	71 (53.8)	15 (11.4)	8 (6.1)	16 (12.1)	18 (13.6)	4 (3.0)
Industry Site	18 (31.0)	10 (17.2)	8 (13.8)	2 (3.5)	20 (34.5)	0 (0.0)
Other	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Negotiation						
Vendor Site	14 (53.6)	2 (7.7)	0 (0.0)	2 (7.7)	8 (30.8)	0 (0.0)
Industry Site	3 (37.5)	2 (25.0)	2 (25.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (12.5)	0 (0.0)
Other	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Purchase						
Vendor Site	32 (61.5)	1 (1.9)	5 (9.6)	3 (5.8)	10 (19.2)	0 (0.0)
Industry Site	7 (46.7)	1 (6.7)	1 (6.7)	2 (13.3)	4 (26.7)	0 (0.0)
Other	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)

Preferred General Search Property

It became exceedingly clear in the study that Google is still the preferred engine for the B2B purchaser. In the survey, we allowed users to launch an actual search and choose their preferred engine. Across all five scenarios, Google emerged as the favorite engine, with an overall 77.7% of respondents choosing it to launch their search. Yahoo came in second place with 13.8% and Windows Live Search came in third with 6.6%.



Google's domination in B2B online purchase research makes it a critical part of any B2B marketing strategy. When you combine the likelihood to use a search engine as a starting point for B2B research with Google's share of the searches, you end up with the fact that at the awareness phase, one out of every two people going online to find out more about a product or service start with Google. At the research phase it's four out of every 10 people, at the negotiation and purchase phases, it's almost 1 out of every three people. This is a tremendous opportunity for marketers to gain visibility with a significant percentage of their potential market early in the online research session.

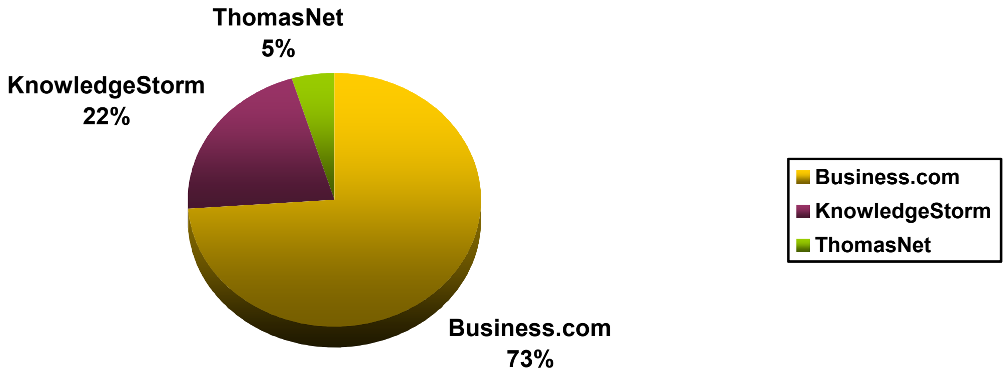
Preferred general search property	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4	Scenario 5	Overall
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	%
Google	78 (79.6)	31 (77.5)	61 (73.5)	206 (80.1)	474 (77.9)	77.7
Windows Live Search	2 (2.0)	5 (12.5)	5 (6.0)	10 (3.9)	53 (8.7)	6.6
Yahoo	18 (18.4)	4 (10.0)	17(20.5)	41 (16.0)	81 (13.3)	13.8

Reason for Search Engine Choice (Five Reasons Each)

Why did you choose the search engine you did?
Google
I am most familiar with that search engine and I feel I get good results.
Ease of use
I am just used to the format and like the results it gives.
Google has everything
Thats the number one search engine on the net. And thats my view!
Yahoo
Have always used Yahoo and am comfortable with its search results
Prior experience, ease of use, less likely to take over the world than Google
I always use yahoo, they host my site.
OUR SITE RANKS HIGH IN THE YAHOO SEARCH ENGINE THEREFORE WE USE THERE SEARCH ENGINE FOR OUR NEEDS. SCRATCH MY BACK AND I'LL SCRATCH YOURS.
Habit.
Windows Live Search
I use MSN, so I have gotten used to using the MSN search engine. Most times I find it to be easier to find the proiduct that I am researching
My home page is MSN so it was already up and running.
MSN search engine has always done well for me in the past.
Most familiar with use and results
To get different results

Preferred Vertical Search Engine

As we've mentioned before, vertical B2B engines definitely have a place in the purchase process. Typically, the initial query is done on a general engine (typically Google) and then as participants moved through the research phase, they tend to interact more and more with vertical engines specific to their industry.



In the engines mentioned, the percentages indicating usage of the engine probably have much to do with the verticals each of these engines serve. Business.com is a directory of products and services common to all business, no matter the vertical. This makes them a rather "horizontal" vertical engine and would account for the generally high level of usage and awareness amongst our respondents. For example, looking for supplies or services that are appropriate to almost any business (office supplies, legal services, accounting software, etc) is an activity well suited to Business.com. On the other hand, KnowledgeStorm tends to focus on technology purchases, particularly enterprise software and hardware. And ThomasNet focuses on industrial and manufacturing solutions. This would account for their lower percentages of usage in our study. In addition, there are a number of other vertical engines that have their own areas of focus and would become useful resources for prospects, but didn't have enough users within our sample to register.

Reasons for Choosing B2B Search Engine

Reason for choosing B2B Search Engine	
Business.com	They are more reliable and dependable, and I am more familiar with them. Direct communication and elimination of third channel. Easier and more specific. It's a business site It is important that I get the right information when purchasing for my business and this is a knowledgeable place to start.
KnowledgeStorm	Efficient, good returns, past success with it. Best central location to find a variety of vendors/contacts for the resources I'm looking for. Breadth of knowledge It's better
ThomasNet	Thomas Register is on of the oldest B2B research companies out there. More info and detailed Because its the bomb Narrows down the results for more business related websites and purchasing websites for software

Site Factors

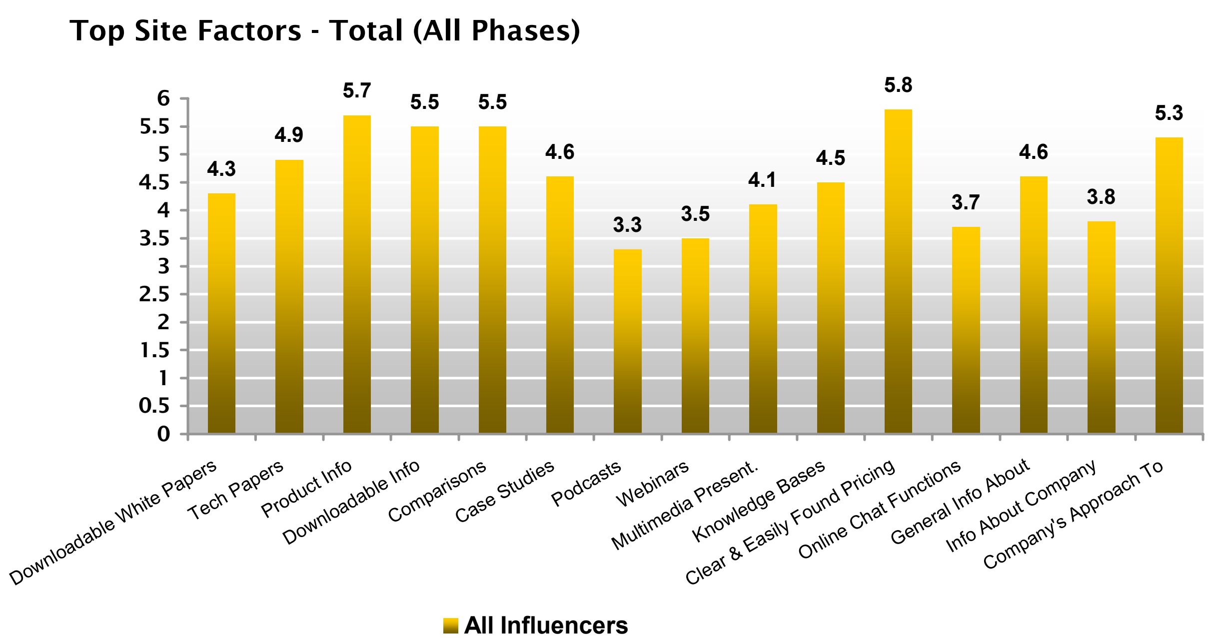
With the vendor's actual website being one of the top influencers in the purchase decision, it is important to understand what information buyers are looking for on the actual website. We asked participants to rate a number of factors on a scale of one to seven based on their importance in influencing the purchase decision. The following graphs show how these factors rank across the phases.

The most significant finding here is the importance of relatively straightforward presentations of product information. Across all phases price was considered the most important piece of information to be passed along. Product information in a straightforward, text based format followed closely behind. After product information, information about the company's approach to customer service was the next most important factor.

There was a cluster of factors that could be considered "support information" that ranked next in terms of importance. These included general information about the company, case studies, downloadable white papers and knowledge bases.

Finally, the lowest rank factors were generally more multimedia "bells and whistles", including podcasts, webinars, online chat functions and multimedia presentations.

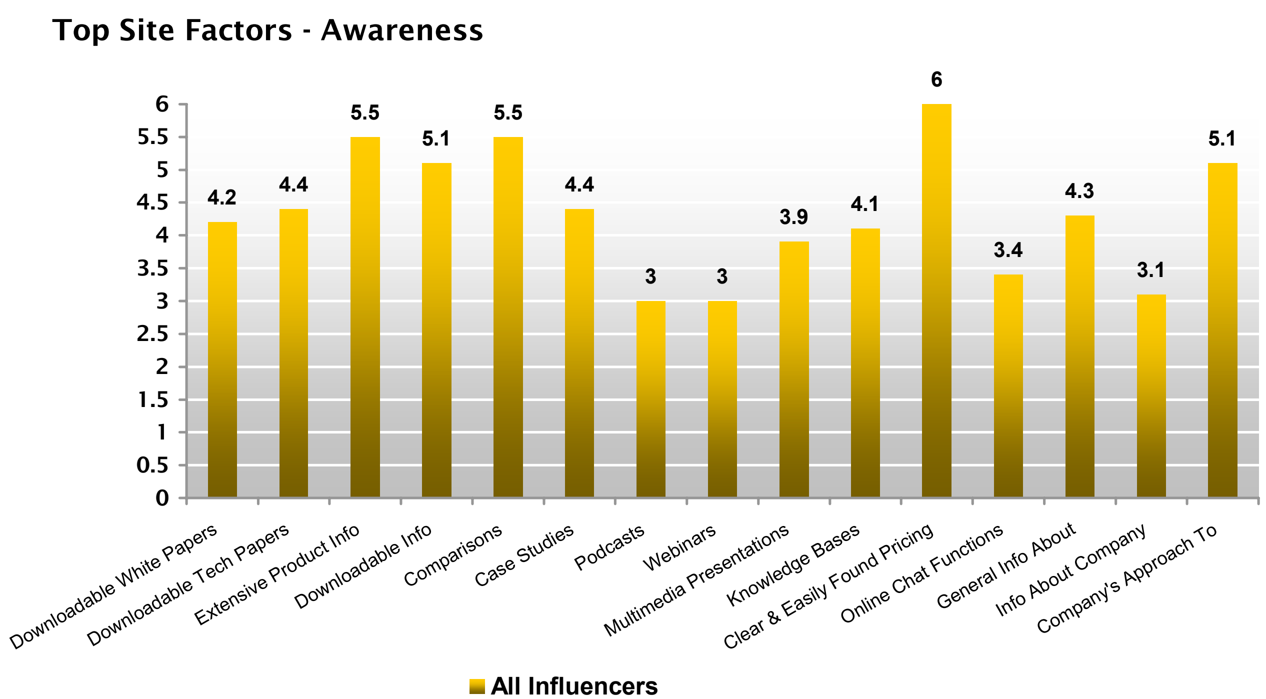
The findings seem to clearly indicate that when it comes to influencing B2B buyers in all phases of the purchase cycle, simple, extensive and clear product information should be the first priority for content developers, website architects and the marketing team.



Top Site Factors - Awareness

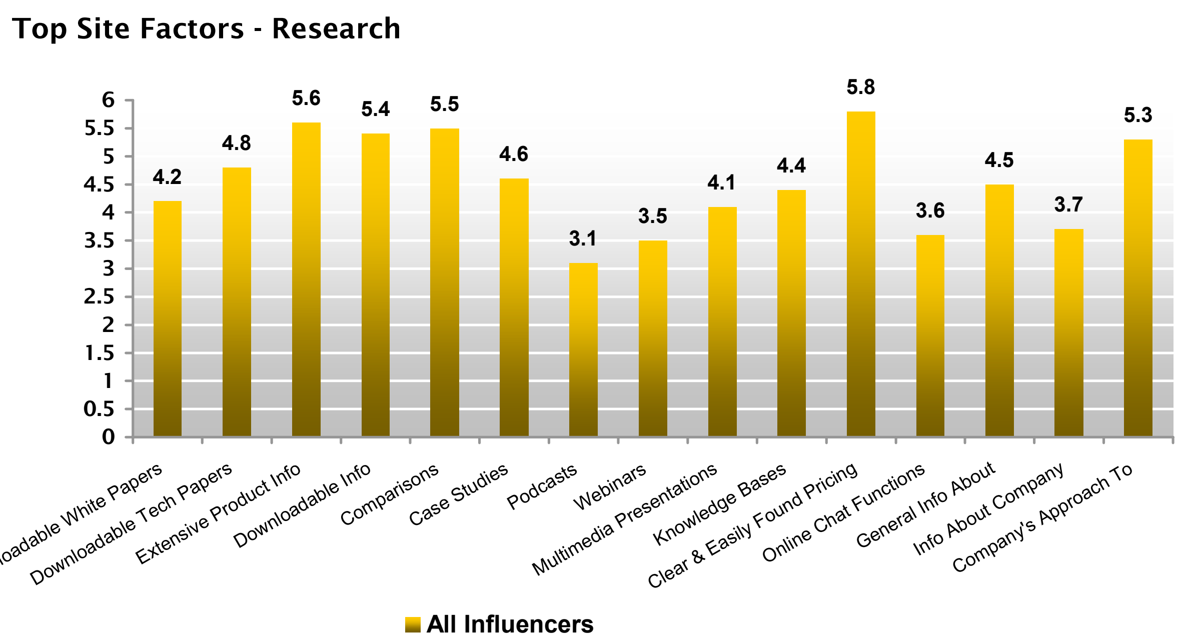
At the awareness phase, pricing information is by far the most important factor to be found on the website. Unfortunately, this is often the piece of information that is the most difficult to find on B2B websites. Reasons are understandable; after all B2B solutions are generally complex and tough to attach a price tag to. However, it's critical to understand that the buyer needs to know if a product offering is in their budget range. Therefore, they need to access some type of pricing information in order to qualify a vendor as an option worth considering. It's also important to understand that at the awareness phase the buyer is not looking for a final price but rather is just looking for budget ranges. Remember, the person who tends to be doing the research at the awareness phase is often not ultimately the decision maker and won't be involved in negotiation of the final price. Rather they need to determine if the price falls within the budget limits reasonable for their organization.

Other important factors at this point include extensive product information, comparisons with the competition and downloadable information that could be passed along within the company. Another important factor at this point is the company's approach to customer service. Remember at the awareness phase it's often the user who's doing the research and so the degree of customer support available is very important to them.



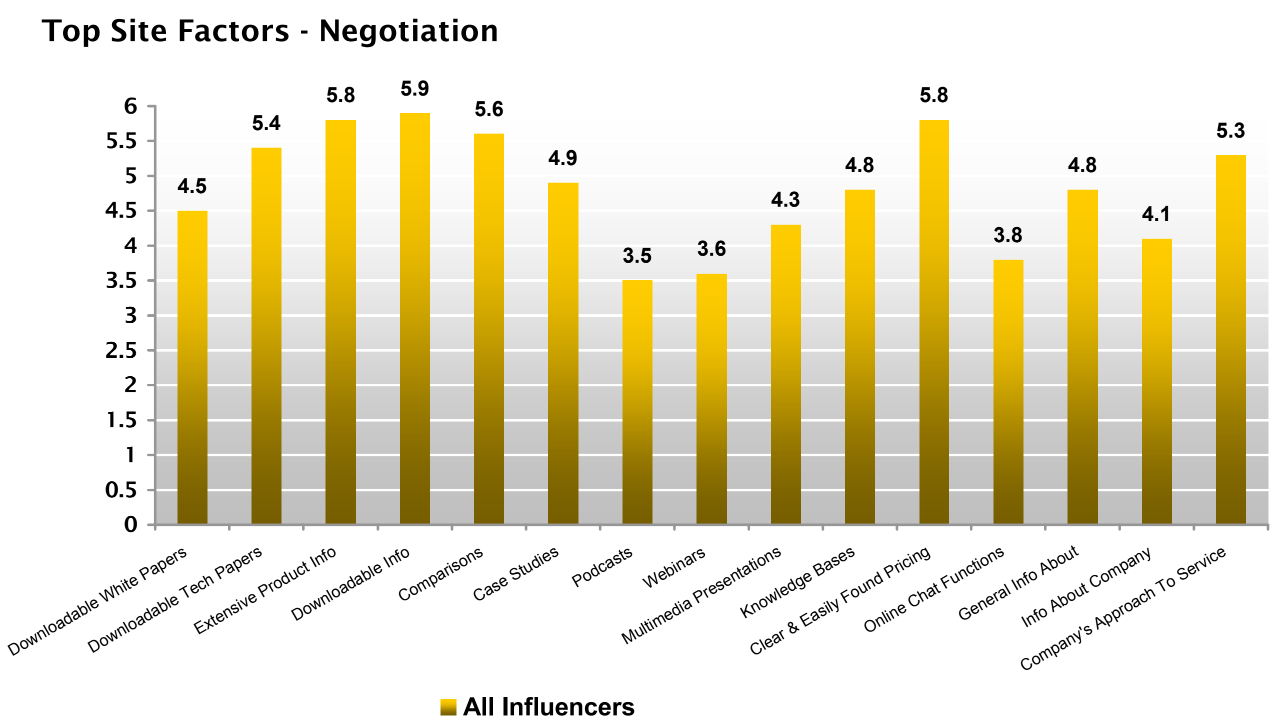
Top Site Factors - Research

While pricing information remains critical of the research phase, other factors become important. It's at this phase where the requirements and selection criteria are set for the research process. When you look at the factors ranked as highly important, you see that any information about the product qualifies. Again, the company's approach to customer service is another critical element to consider at this point. As with all the phases, "bells and whistles" content tend to be less influential.



Top Site Factors - Negotiation

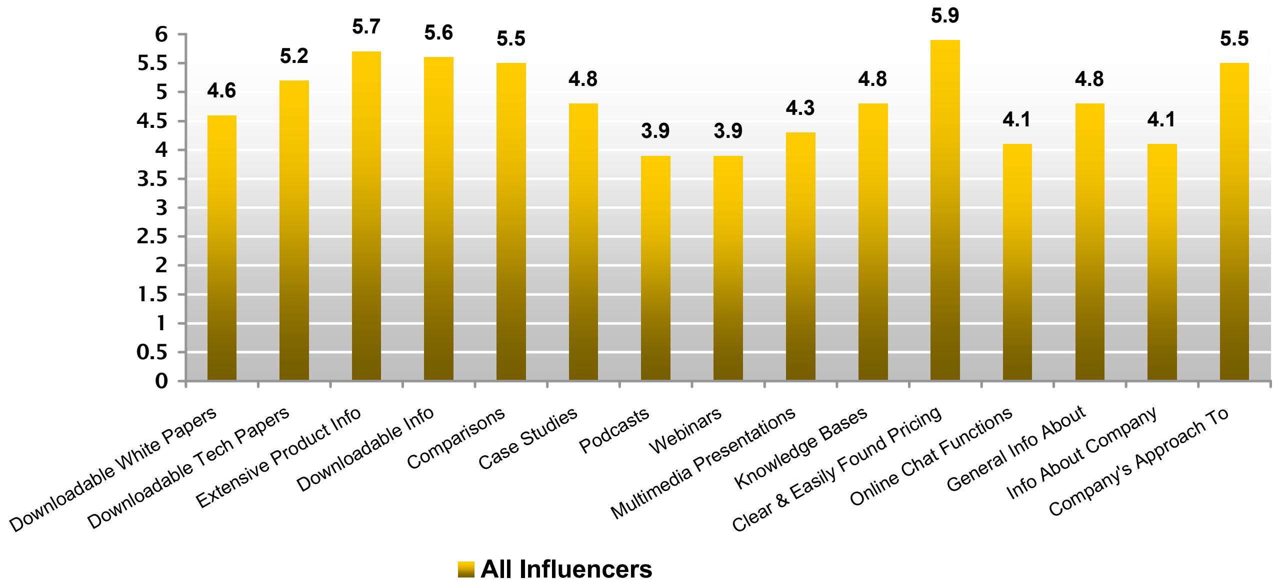
Predictably, pricing information is critical during the negotiation. However, we also see increased importance of the actual product information. Notice how important downloadable product information becomes at this point. This could be because negotiation typically marks the phase of the purchase process where information gathered by one influencer is passed along to the individual or group who will actually be negotiating the final purchase. It's this "hand-off" of information that marks a moving from one distinct phase of the purchase process to another.



Top Site Factors - Purchase

Finally, in the purchase phase, we don't see any significant variation in the factors deemed important. One item of interest is the bump in the importance of information about the company's approach to customer service.

Top Site Factors - Purchase



Installation of Toolbars

One of the data points that we wanted to examined in this study was installation of toolbars. Our belief is that toolbars represent an increasingly common navigation option and will dramatically impact search share in the future. Therefore, the toolbar if people choose will ultimately decide search market share. In this area Google again had the lead, although not by as great a margin as we saw in the choice of a general search property. 41.2% of respondents have the Google toolbar installed, 28.7% of them had the Yahoo toolbar installed and 11.8% of them had a Windows live search toolbar installed.

Installation of Toolbars	n (%)
Google	634 (41.2)
Yahoo	442 (28.7)
Windows Live Search	182 (11.8)
None	214 (13.9)
Don't Know	12 (1.0)
Other	54 (3.5)

Interactions on the Search Results Pages

We saw a remarkably stable pattern in click throughs by position, compared to other studies we've done. This marks the third study in which we've tracked click through by position, and as you can see from the table below, percentages by position have generally be fairly consistent, especially in the top of page positions, both organic and sponsored. The first table shows the click throughs from this latest study, and the second table compares the click throughs seen in this study with previous studies.

Organic vs. Sponsored Click Through

Organic vs. Sponsored Click Through	n (%)
Summary	
Organic	806 (74.2)
Pay Per Click Top	132 (12.2)
Pay Per Click Right	71 (6.5)
Pay Per Click Bottom	2 (0.2)
Missing	75 (6.9)
Result + Position	
Organic:1	294 (27.1)
Organic:2	127 (11.7)
Organic:3	94 (8.7)
Organic:4	55 (5.1)
Organic:5	43 (4.0)
Organic:6	45 (4.1)
Organic:7	44 (4.1)
Organic:8	35 (3.2)
Organic:9	30 (2.8)
Organic:10	39 (3.6)
PPCTop:1	80 (7.4)
PPCTop:2	37 (3.4)
PPCTop:3	12 (1.1)
PPCTop:4	3 (0.3)
PPCRight:1	28 (2.6)
PPCRight:2	10 (0.9)
PPCRight:3	18 (1.7)
PPCRight:4	4 (0.4)
PPCRight:5	1 (0.1)
PPCRight:6	4 (0.4)
PPCRight:7	3 (0.3)
PPCRight:8	3 (0.3)
PPCBottom:1	2 (0.2)
Missing	75 (6.9)

Comparison of Click Throughs by Study

	Eye Tracking I	Eye Tracking II	This B2B Survey
PPCTop:1	7.8	8.75	7.4
PPCTop:2	3.9	3.62	3.4
PPCTop:3	NA	NA	1.1
PPCTop:4	NA	NA	0.3
PPCRight:1	1.96	0.96	2.6
PPCRight:2	0.39	0.19	0.9
PPCRight:3	0.79	0.38	1.7
PPCRight:4	0.39	0.19	0.4
PPCRight:5	0.0	1.2	0.1
PPCRight:6	1.2	0.6	0.4
PPCRight:7	0.39	0.19	0.3
PPCRight:8	NA	NA	0.3
Organic:1	26.0	26.35	27.1
Organic:2	4.7	13.05	11.7
Organic:3	5.9	10.2	8.7
Organic:4	5.5	5.35	5.1
Organic:5	3.9	5.4	4.0
Organic:6	1.6	5.65	4.1
Organic:7	2.8	0.8	4.1
Organic:8	1.2	0.7	3.2
Organic:9	0.39	2.75	2.8
Organic:10	1.6	1.7	3.6
Total Top PPC	11.7	12.37	12.2
Total Right PPC	5.1	3.71	6.5
Total PPC	16.8	16.08	18.7
Total Top 4 Organic	42.1	54.95	52.6
Total Bottom 6 Organic	11.5	17.0	21.8
Total Organic	53.6	71.95	74.4
Other	27.6	11.97	3.8

Importance of Factors in Click Through

With this question, we try to get some insight (into the individual factors that present themselves in a listing) to try to determine which of these factors were more important in generating the click through. It's always difficult when presenting a question like this in the survey-based format to interpret the results.

The results of this question have to be taken in the context of a greater understanding about how people interact with search results. The fact is, most users do not really consider which of the factors caused them to click through, unless we force the issue in a survey-based question like this. And then, we draw an undue amount of attention to the process, causing the respondent to over think their response.

In reality, although things like ranking and title were indicated as being less important then brand and description, these are essential elements in the listing being seen in the first place. For instance, unless a listing shows in the top results of the search page, our eye tracking research shows that it may never be seen. So although ranking may not be mentioned as an important factor, the fact is you can't click on what you don't see. And when one looks at the distribution of clicks based on position in the previous section, obviously ranking plays a vital role in click throughs.

The same is true for title. It's the appearance of information scent in the title (usually through the bolded presence of the query just used) that causes users to read the description. And if they never scan the description, they would never see the brand, indicated by respondents as the most important factor.

We have found a similarly worded question can lead to misleading results in previous research done by other firms. This is one of the dangers of relying on one particular methodology. If we hadn't done extensive eye tracking work, we wouldn't know how all these elements work together.

In fact, according to this survey, one would conclude the most important elements of a listing would be (in order of decreasing importance):

Brand
Description
Title
Ranking

In fact, the complete reverse is true, due to the mechanics of how users scan a result. Here is how that happens:

Ranking (The majority of scanning appears on the top of the page. We start on the top and scan down looking for the result that appears to be the best match. This is why the #1 organic result typically gets more than twice the click throughs of the #2, and so on)

Title (We first scan the titles of the listings, very quickly looking for information scent indicated by a bolding of relevant terms, usually the query we just used)

Description (If the title catches our eye, we then scan for clusters of words that appear in the description. But the fact is, there's far more scanning of titles than descriptions by the average user)

Brand (only if all the above factors work to attract the attention of a user, does that user have a chance to even see the brand presented. If all else works correctly, then brand can "close the deal" and capture the click through)

For those interested in learning more about the mechanics of how users interact with search results we would recommend our two eye tracking studies. All of the above principles are described in depth in those studies.

Importance of Factors in Click Through	N	Mean (±SD)
Title	1086	3.8 (±1.16)
Brand	1086	4.4 (±0.85)
Description	1086	3.9 (±1.10)
Ranking	1086	3.4 (±1.26)

Note: Importance was measured on a scale from 1-5 with 5 being the most important.

Intent For Search

We also wanted to get some idea of why potential B2B buyers turn to search. As can be seen from the table below, information gathering is the primary objective. Over 70% of respondents turned to search to either learn more about a product or service or compare it against alternatives. When we add reading reviews as a possible intent, the total is over 80%. These all indicate that search activity will precede the actual purchase, sometimes by a significant period of time.

Intent For Search	n (%)
To learn more about a product/service (pricing, availability, requirements, features, specifications)	220 (46.0)
To compare products/services against each other	118 (24.7)
To read reviews about the product/service	46 (9.6)
To navigate to a particular site	31 (6.5)
To purchase a product/service	42 (8.8)
Don't know	7 (1.5)
Other	4 (0.8)

Note: Not all participants answered this question as it was not presented for past purchases.

Successful Search Experience?

Finally, did people find what they were looking for through a search engine? It appears that in the majority of cases, the answer was either a complete or a qualified yes. 95.8% said they found either everything they were looking for online through a search engine (61.3%) or some information online, supplemented by offline information (34.5%). Less than 1% said the experience was unsuccessful.

Successful Search Experience?	n (%)
Yes, I found all the information I needed to make the purchase decision	409 (61.3)
Yes, I found some of the information I needed but had to use other sources before I could make a purchase decision	230 (34.5)
No, I never found what I was looking for online and had to use other sources before I could make a purchase decision	6 (0.9)
Don't Recall	22 (3.3)