

The State of B2B Buyer Journeys

**WHAT 14000 BUYERS TEACH US ABOUT
GO-TO-MARKET IN 2026**

Synthesized Research from 6sense, G2, Dreamdata & Consensus

Hello there,

If you're planning go-to-market for 2026, understanding how buyers actually buy is foundational. Every GTM decision you make - literally everything - from channel allocation to content strategy to sales process should start with the question: "*what do our buyers want and need at this stage?*"

Here's the problem: there's a ton of buyer behavior research out there. Some of it's excellent, some garbage, and much of it appears to contradict itself. That's a headache when you're trying to make real decisions about where to invest your limited budget to "do more with less".

So we did the heavy lifting for you. We analyzed the four most comprehensive, trustworthy B2B buyer journey studies from 2025 - covering over 14,000 buyers and millions of interactions - and resolved the apparent contradictions to give you one clear picture of how AI and other forces are reshaping B2B buying behavior.

This matters because 2026 GTM strategy can't be built on outdated assumptions about how buyers research, evaluate, and choose vendors.

We dove deep into at least 29 studies, but the below research documents are the ones we analyzed thoroughly and compiled:

- [6sense 2025 Buyer Experience Report](#)
- [G2 2025 Buyer Behavior Report](#)
- [Dreamdata LinkedIn Ads Benchmarks Report 2025](#)
- [Consensus Buyer Behavior Report 2025](#)

My hope is that you can use this thinking to make more data-driven decisions and leave less room for guesswork. My secret hope is that more leaders see the hard data and realize: showing up in the market with exceptional value and experiences is no longer optional; it's not a luxury for the cool kids with large budgets.



Let's dig in.

Dan Rényi, Electric B2B

Oh, and before we dive in:

This guide is sponsored by:



If all of this feels overwhelming (it will!) you're not alone. Most small B2B marketing teams are drowning in half-executed channels and wondering why pipeline dried up 6 months ago.

New North specializes in building high-ROI buyer journeys for scrappy B2B teams who need execution, not more strategy decks.

They handle the full stack: content, paid, ABM, ops - and are really good at the 107-day nurture infrastructure and dark funnel positioning that actually converts in 2026. (More on those 107 days in the report below.)

If you're tired of agencies that talk and don't ship, check out newnorth.com - they're one of Inc.'s fastest-growing marketing agencies for a reason.

Part 1: The 60% Problem

The most critical finding across all four studies that much of the data rolls up to is this:

60-80% of B2B deals are essentially decided before your sales team ever makes contact.

This isn't speculation, it's consistent across 14,000+ surveyed buyers and 220,000+ tracked customer journeys in these studies. The 6sense study (4,510 buyers, 49% VP+) found that

- 95% of buyers create mental shortlists before engaging vendors, with
- 80% win rates for the vendor who makes that Day One list.

The Winner-Take-All Pre-Selection

6sense data shows that **nearly all buying groups rank their preferred vendors before first contact**, and they ultimately purchase from that preliminary favorite **77% of the time**.

The 'No Shortlist' trend, where a buyer identifies a single vendor and proceeds directly to purchase, has doubled from 4% to 8% year-over-year. These are folks who only contact ONE vendor - when purchasing.

This trend makes sense - vendors who help buyers self-serve will attract buyers that prefer serving themselves with minimal/no interaction.

If your GTM strategy relies on 'winning the demo' or out-pricing competitors in a formal evaluation, you are fighting for the remaining ~23% of deals.

The vast majority of revenue is determined in the "dark" research phase when the only telling signal may be the identified website visits from buyers.

What This Means For You

- Your brand presence in research channels (G2, peer networks, LinkedIn) is more important than your sales pitch

- Content marketing isn't just 'awareness' - it's where shortlisting happens
- The 'sales' in your GTM strategy should focus on not losing deals, not winning them from scratch

Part 2: The Anatomy of the 211-Day Journey

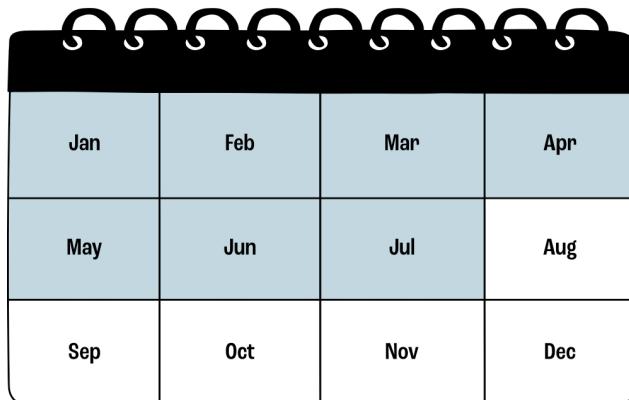
The average B2B customer journey is a marathon, not a sprint.

Dreamdata tracked over 220,000 customer journeys and found the median time from first identifiable touchpoint to closed-won deal is **211 days** (approximately 7 months).

Tracking the length of the B2B customer journey

The standard customer journey is

211 days



Based on our aggregated customer data, the standard B2B customer journey stretches for 211 days (approx. 7 months) from the first touch to closed-won.

In especially complex journeys, the process can take over 12 months.

Source: Dreamdata LinkedIn Ads Benchmarks Report 2025

Journey Duration Benchmarks

Table 1: B2B Journey Duration Benchmarks & Strategic Implications

Journey Phase	Duration	Strategic Implication
First Touch to Closed-Won	211 Days	Marketing ROI calculations must look back 2-3 quarters. Short-term ROAS is misleading for B2B.
First Impression to Revenue	320 Days	Paid media (LinkedIn) is a long-term demand generation play, not a faucet for immediate leads.
MQL to SQL Gap	107 Days	The 'Zone of Attrition' — this 3.5-month gap is where most companies lose prospects due to lack of engagement.
Sales Pipeline (SQL to Close)	62 Days	Once sales engages, the process is relatively fast. The delay is upstream in the anonymous research phase.

Source: Dreamdata LinkedIn Ads Benchmarks Report 2025

The 107-Day Zone of Attrition

The most critical insight is the **107-day gap between MQL and SQL**. This 'Zone of Attrition' is where the battle for growth is won or lost.

Typically, a startup marketing team generates a lead, the SDR team aggressively follows up for two weeks, and if no meeting is booked, the lead is marked 'unresponsive' and abandoned. But the buyer isn't unresponsive - they're in a research holding pattern. They've signaled interest but aren't ready to buy.

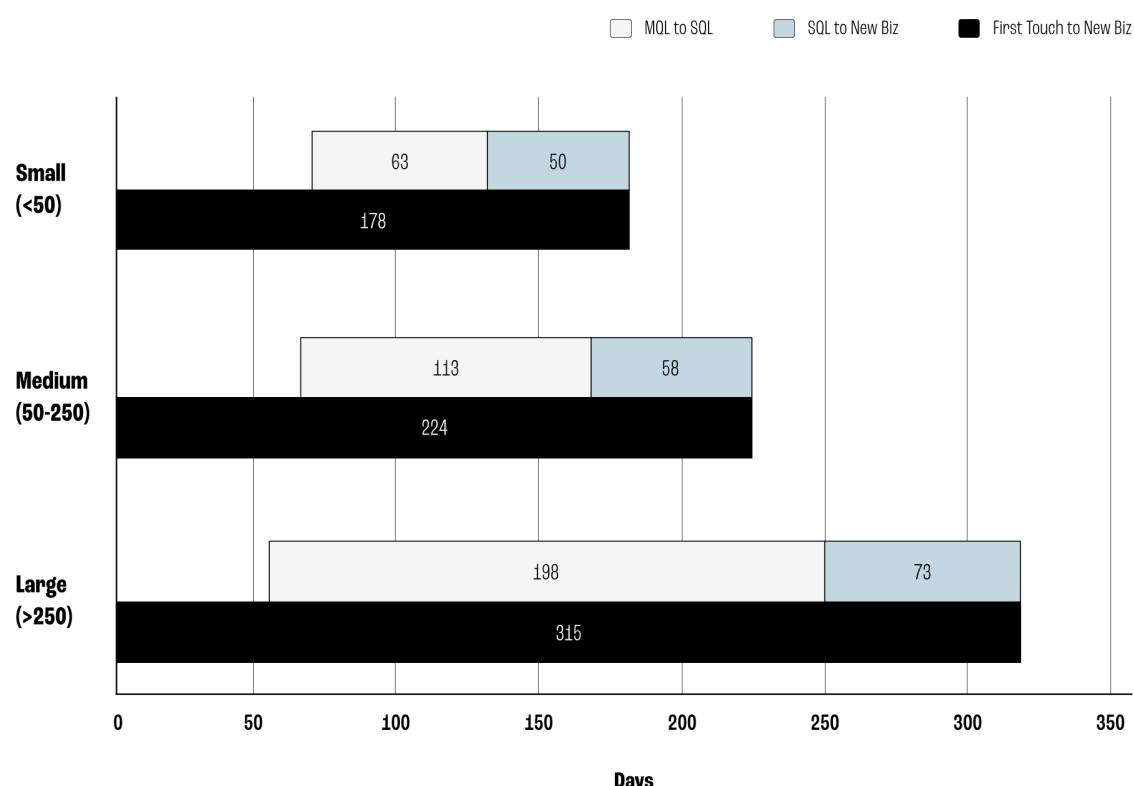
Take-away: Instead of hiring more SDRs to badger early-stage leads, deploy capital into (sometimes) automated, low-pressure nurture infrastructure - newsletters, events, product updates, educational content, mini-courses - that can sustain brand presence for 3-4 months without burning expensive sales capacity.

The Touchpoint Density

The journey is not just long; it's dense. The average B2B journey involves **76 distinct touchpoints across ~3.7 channels**. This multi-touch reality debunks the 'silver bullet' theory of attribution—the idea that one specific ad or email caused the sale. Revenue is the cumulative result of consistent, multi-channel "pressure".

Journey Length by Company Size

Larger companies take way longer to buy:



Source: Dreamdata LinkedIn Ads Benchmarks Report 2025

The 60:40 Reality (Not 95:5)

Standard marketing theory (the Ehrenberg-Bass 95-5 rule) suggests 95% of buyers are out-of-market at any time.

But: 6sense data corrects this for B2B: roughly **60% are truly dormant, while 40% are in some stage of the buying journey** (Awareness, Consideration, Decision, Purchase).

This is really good news - the addressable market of 'active' buyers is larger than traditional models suggest. But because most are in early phases (the Dark Funnel), they're invisible to a sales-only motion. To capture the 40%, you need marketing that broadcasts value to the entire market.

Take-away: this doesn't directly contradict the 95-5 rule or the more commonly used Buyer readiness pyramid by Chet Holmes:



Source: Chet Holmes

Being problem aware, in a way, is in-market, and even when not yet actively looking for a solution, these accounts resonate with the right type of communication.

Part 3: The Dark Funnel

The 'Dark Funnel' refers to all buying activity that happens before and outside your marketing attribution. Dreamdata's analysis reveals that **70% of the customer journey takes place outside the sales pipeline**.

Where Decisions Really Happen

- **Peer networks (36.8% influence)** — Conversations you never see
- **Review sites (32.5%)** — G2, Capterra, TrustRadius
- **Vendor websites (37.3%)** — Direct research
- **GenAI chatbots (17.1%)** — Growing fastest

Yes, AI is hyped now - for a good reason - but look at the data: 82.9% of the decision making still happens in places you (should) have been optimizing for: peer networks, review sites and your own website and media assets. Do not neglect those.

The AI Research Shift

29% of buyers now start their research journey in AI search tools (ChatGPT, Perplexity, Claude) rather than Google. However, 6sense data shows LLM usage peaks mid-journey for comparison and validation, not initial discovery—suggesting buyers already know their options and use AI to validate and compare.

You Know What's Bigger Than AI? Prior Experience

This is the greatest of all shockers in this entire report. Few would have thought how much a vendor shortlisting or purchase decision is fueled by **previous experience with the brand**. Perhaps the most “dramatic” table:

⊕ Type of Prior Experience with Winning Vendor by Solution Purchased ⊕

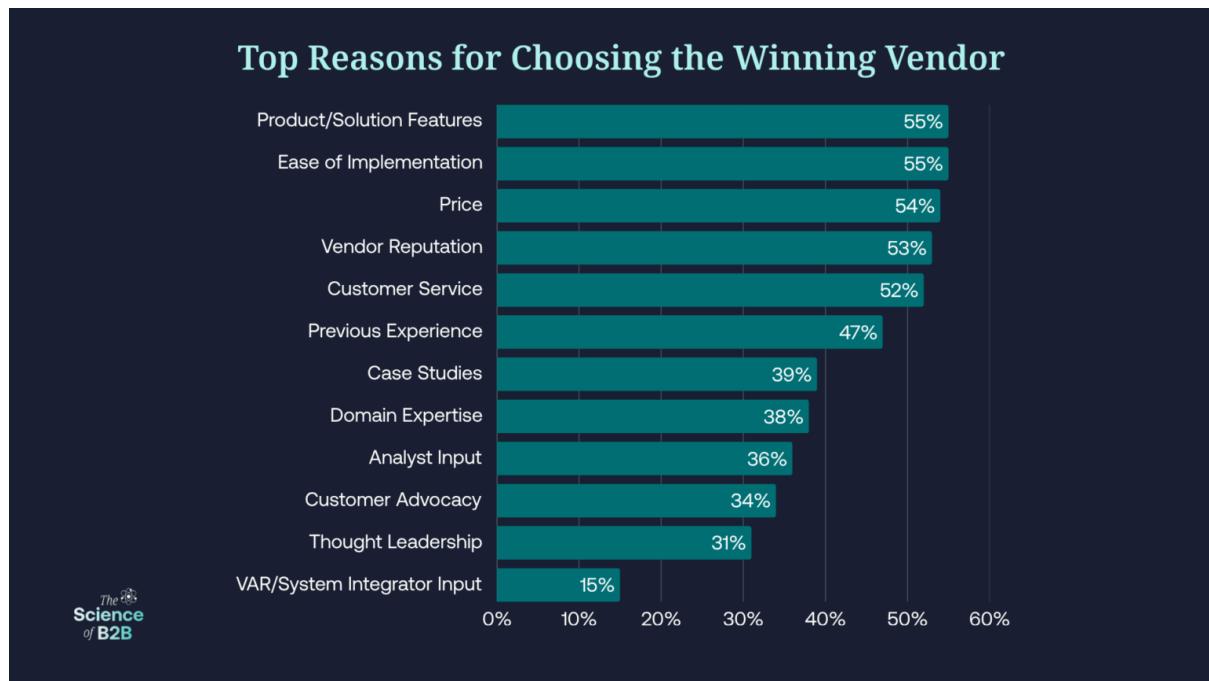
Type of Prior Experience with Winning Vendor	Physical Goods	Services	Software
We previously evaluated and purchased from this vendor	74.2%	55.7%	66.7%
We previously evaluated this vendor but did not purchase from them	12%	27.7%	18.9%
I used this vendor at a different company	8.9%	12.4%	11.1%
No direct experience, but I was familiar with the vendor (e.g., known brand, seen their content, heard from peers)	3.7%	3.8%	2.7%
Other personal experience	1.2%	0.4%	0.6%

Source: 6sense

Most important points:

1. Repeat purchases rule - no surprise there, but look at this:
2. Closed lost deals are never truly lost... or closed - because 19% of software sales and a whopping 27% of service sales go to these (this includes active deals or previous "casual shopping" or "just looking".)
3. Line 3 shows you why tracking buyers who switch companies is a worthwhile thing to do. Add over 10% in sales.
4. Once the active searching part of the buyer journey begins, and your brand is not

Once your brand passes the mega-important familiarity test, here are the self-reported criteria for winning a deal:



Source: 6sense

I want to emphasize "self-reported" because countless other studies contradict the notion that features or price play prominent roles in most B2B purchases. People like to think they're responsible, rational professionals. So take this one with a pinch of salt.

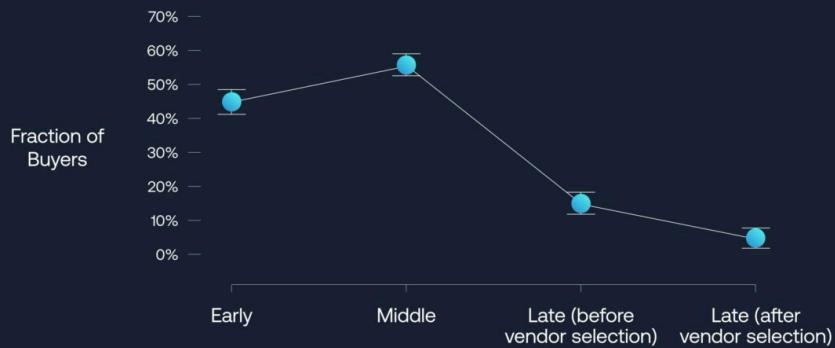
Are Buyers Talking Less To Vendors Because of AI?

Clearly not. 94% of buyers are using LLMs to buy stuff, but that hasn't made them stop talking to us, vendors - digitally or otherwise. Every year, when 6sense asked how many times buyers connected with the vendor they chose, the answer was 16 interactions.

It has been the same both in '23 and '24. The human element isn't going anywhere for now.

As the research notes, LLM use is additive (and doesn't replace any buying phase yet) - and it skews to the beginning of the buyer journey:

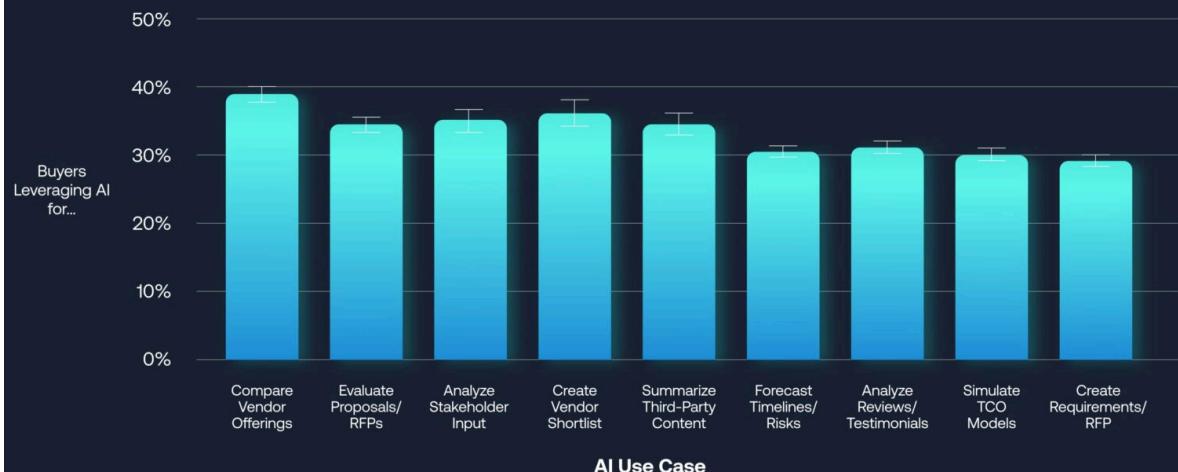
⊕ AI Use Peaks in the Beginning and Middle of the Buying Journey ⊕



Source: 6sense

And just WHAT are buyers doing in ChatGPT during this time? (Thought you'd ask.)

⊕ LLM Use Cases in the Buying Journey ⊕



Source: 6sense

Note, that statistically there is little difference between the “popularity” of each of these use cases - the whole thing deviates between 29-39%.

Part 4: The New Trust Architecture

An important thing to understand is: you're now building trust differently in the early stages of the buyer journey. The most significant shift in 2025: **GenAI Chatbots have surpassed all other sources as the most trusted advisor at the decision stage.**

Most Trusted Sources at Decision Time

Table 2: Most Trusted Sources at Decision Time

Rank	Source	Trust Level	Why It Matters
1	GenAI Chatbots	17.2%	Viewed as objective synthesizers, free from sales pressure and bias.
2	Software Review Sites	13.4%	Peer validation critical; buyers trust aggregate user voice over vendor claims.
3	Peers/Colleagues	13.0%	High-trust but limited by the buyer's network size.
4	Vendor Websites	12.6%	Viewed with skepticism; used for specs and pricing verification only.
5	Salespeople	<8.8%	Lost status as information gatekeepers. Now transaction facilitators.

Source: G2 2025 Buyer Behavior Report

The AI Trust Paradox: Buyers trust AI chatbots because they perceive them as neutral. But - guess what LLMs are trained on? Especially when it comes to comparing software?

Yup. Primarily, software review sites. Your G2/Capterra etc. presence isn't just for human readers; it's feeding the AI that advises buyers. If ChatGPT can't find consistent, high-rated reviews about your product, you're being filtered out before a human ever sees your logo.

Yes, the above implication comes from a review site, but it's hard to argue with the point: review site success ~ LLM success.

The Declining Influence of Sales Reps

The data is quite clear on this.

- 2024: 43% of buyers wanted contact during the research stage.
- 2025: this dropped to **31%**. On the other hand,
- **62% now prefer sales contact only in evaluation/decision phases.**

GenAI chatbots are now **2x as influential as salespeople** in creating vendor shortlists (17.1% vs 8.8%). This necessitates a new discipline: Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) - or to use another common acronym, AEO.

OK, but this contradicts the conclusion from Part 3... Keep reading.

Part 5: The Buying Committee Paradox

A conflict exists in the data: G2 reports committees are shrinking to 3-4 active deciders, while 6sense and Dreamdata report committees are expanding to 10+ stakeholders. This isn't a contradiction—it's a nuance.

Resolution: The Core vs. The Blast Radius

In enterprise-land, the buying committee is actually split into two distinct groups:

The Core (3-4 people):

To move fast and avoid 'consensus paralysis,' organizations empower smaller teams to make the *functional decision*: 'Does this software solve our problem?' This includes the Department Head, User Champion, and Project Lead. They focus on agility, speed, and usability.

The Blast Radius (10+ people):

Once the Core decides, a massive layer of *compliance and risk stakeholders* enter the picture: Security (CISO), Legal, IT Ops, Finance, Procurement. They aren't selecting the vendor, they're looking for the risk. They don't care about features; they care about SOC2, GDPR, DPA, and indemnification.



The visible decision-makers are just the tip

Two Parallel Messaging Tracks

Track A (Functional) — Target the Core:

- Focus on speed, ROI, ease of use, competitive advantage

- Delivered via LinkedIn Ads, Review Sites, Interactive Demos

Track B (Risk/Compliance) — Target the Blast Radius:

- Focus on security, compliance, integration stability, cost governance
- Delivered via a “Trust Center” content hub: technical whitepapers, security documentation. The easier you make it for them to get what they need, the better for everybody.

Failure to address Track B is why deals often 'slip' at the last minute. The Core wants to buy, but the CISO blocks it because security documentation was insufficient.

Part 6: Channel Performance

LinkedIn Ad Influence by Pipeline Stage

When it comes to influencing B2B buyers with paid means, nothing beats LinkedIn - which is probably a reason why Dreamdata's research focuses on it.

A good question is: how are LinkedIn Ads being used to influence different stages of the buyer journey?

Table 3: LinkedIn Ad Influence Across the Funnel

Pipeline Stage	LinkedIn Ad Influence	Strategic Role
MQL (Marketing Qualified)	30%	High intensity. Heavy reliance on ads, social, and search to build awareness.
SQL (Sales Qualified)	28%	Sustained intensity. Retargeting and case studies reinforce business case during the 107-day nurture gap.
New Biz (Closing)	15%	Closing support. Digital influence declines but ads keep brand top-of-mind for buying committee.

Source: Dreamdata LinkedIn Ads Benchmarks Report 2025

Key Insight: LinkedIn influence remains remarkably high (28%) even at SQL stage. 'Turning off' marketing when pipeline looks full removes the 'air cover' that sales reps need. When marketing stops, SQL velocity slows, creating a revenue air pocket 6-9 months later.

Platform Comparison: LinkedIn vs. Google vs. Meta

Dreamdata's research (in collaboration with LinkedIn, but hey, they have the data to back it up!) makes the case for LinkedIn Ads.

Table 4: Ad Network Performance Comparison (B2B SaaS)

Metric	LinkedIn	Google Search	Meta
CPC (Cost Per Click)	€5.35 (Highest)	€3.95	€1.81 (Lowest)
Cost Per Company Influenced	€154 (Lowest)	€222	€299 (Highest)
ROAS	113%	78%	29%
Pipeline Influence	35% of New Biz	25% of New Biz	2% of New Biz

Source: Dreamdata LinkedIn Ads Benchmarks Report 2025

The Efficiency Argument: While LinkedIn clicks are expensive (€5.35), **Cost Per Company Influenced is the lowest (€154)**. This is the metric that matters for B2B. LinkedIn's firmographic targeting ensures you aren't paying for clicks from irrelevant audiences. Meta is cheap but 'noisy'—influencing only 2% of actual pipeline.

The 'Google Tax'

Dreamdata notes that **7% of total ad spend goes to branded search terms**; effectively a tax to prevent competitors from poaching high-intent traffic searching for your company name.

Part 7: Content Engagement That Closes Deals

Demo Views Predict Close Rates

Consensus, a demo platform analyzed 6M+ demo interactions and found a powerful correlation between content engagement and deal outcomes. The average demo **view time** is just **5 minutes 44 seconds**, yet average demo length is 15+ minutes. Talk about a massive misalignment.

But: measuring demo-success doesn't stop at single sessions - a high ticket software purchase will have multiple views from multiple stakeholders. The number of views per target account is an obvious indicator of deal probability.

Table 5: Demo Engagement Depth vs. Deal Outcomes

Demos Viewed	Close Rate	Strategic Implication
0-1 Demos	<5%	Low intent. Prospect is in early research or unqualified. Do not forecast these deals.
2-4 Demos	~21%	Consideration phase. Buying committee forming. Requires active nurturing and multi-threading.
9+ Demos	>55%	High intent. Buying committee fully activated. The deal is 'yours to lose.' 8-10x improvement.

Source: *Consensus Buyer Behavior Report 2025*

Yes, an obvious point; but this not:

Critical Finding: Deals with 9+ demo views see close rates **8-10x higher** than average. The 5-day content open delay after sharing predicts deal velocity. If they're not engaging within 5 days, the deal is likely stalled.

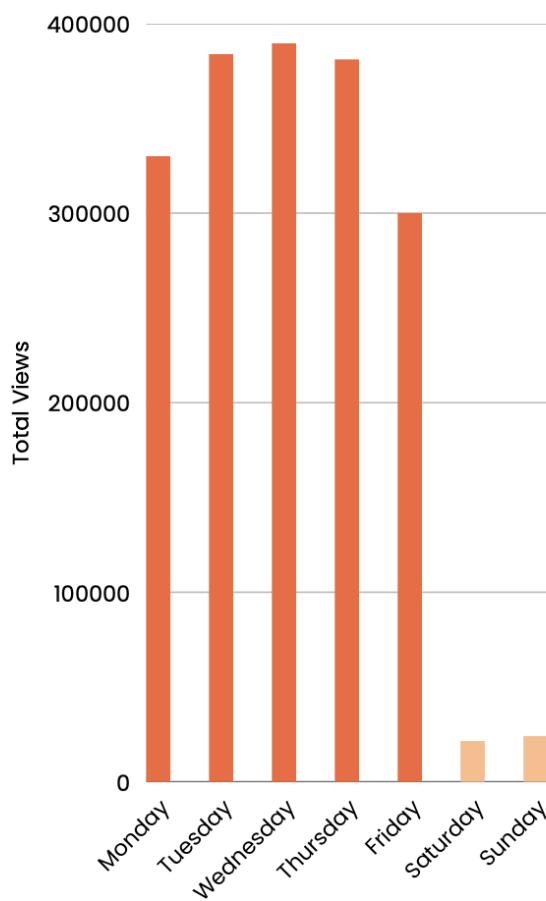
Stakeholder Discovery Through Demos

When a champion shares a product tour, they map the buying committee for you. On average, **11 stakeholders are discovered per deal** through demo sharing. For every 1 demo sent, roughly **4 unique stakeholders** are uncovered.

When Buyers Engage

Keep in mind, this is gated sales content inside deals, not just general content.

Views by Day of the Week



Best Engagement Days

- ⌚ Across all time zones, we've found that the days people engage with demos or tour content rarely deviate.
- ▶ Forget what the calendar says—**Tuesday is the real Monday**. While Monday sees decent demo engagement, Tuesday takes the lead, likely because people are playing catch-up and kicking into gear.
- 🚀 But the real power players? **Wednesday and Thursday**. These two are neck-and-neck for the highest demo views, making them the ultimate mid-week momentum days. If you're looking for peak engagement, this is your window.
- 😴 By contrast, **Friday falls off**, as people start mentally checking out—even if they're still technically online.
- 🌵 And the weekend? It's a desert. Engagement on **Saturday and Sunday** drops off dramatically, proving that demos are very much a workweek activity.

Source: *Consensus Buyer Behavior Report 2025*

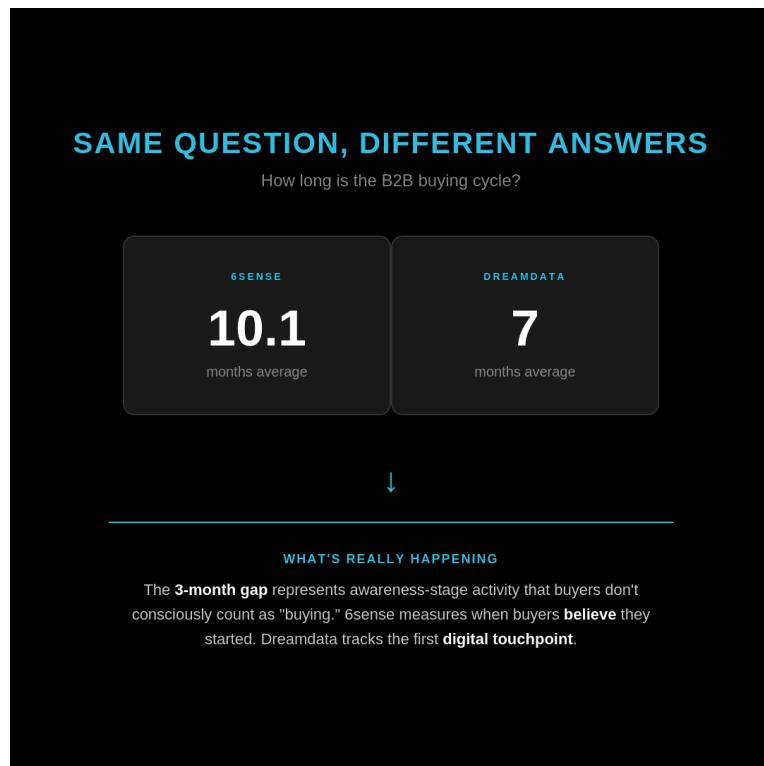
Best Times: Engagement peaks mid-week (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday) during mid-morning (10-11 AM) and mid-afternoon (2-3 PM). Fridays drop significantly as people mentally check out.

Part 8: Where the Research Disagrees

If you're a founder/CEO, feel free to skip this part: it's GTM geekery where we dive into some of the contradictions in the compiled data. If you're a marketer, you'll appreciate... the GTM geekery here.

Different studies measure different things. Understanding these methodological differences helps you apply the right data to your context.

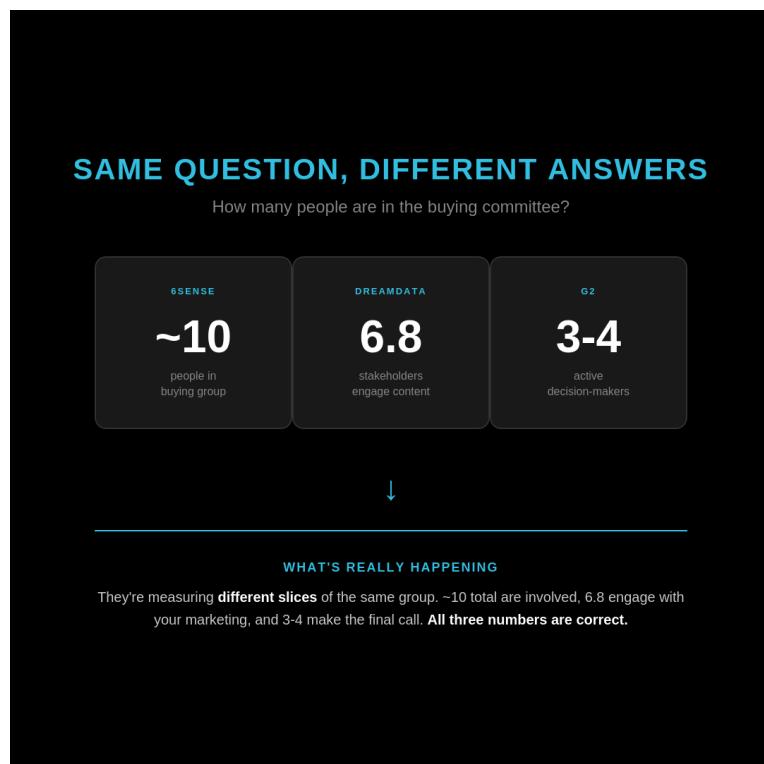
1. Buying Cycle Length: 10.1 Months vs. 7 Months



Klear B2B Analysis

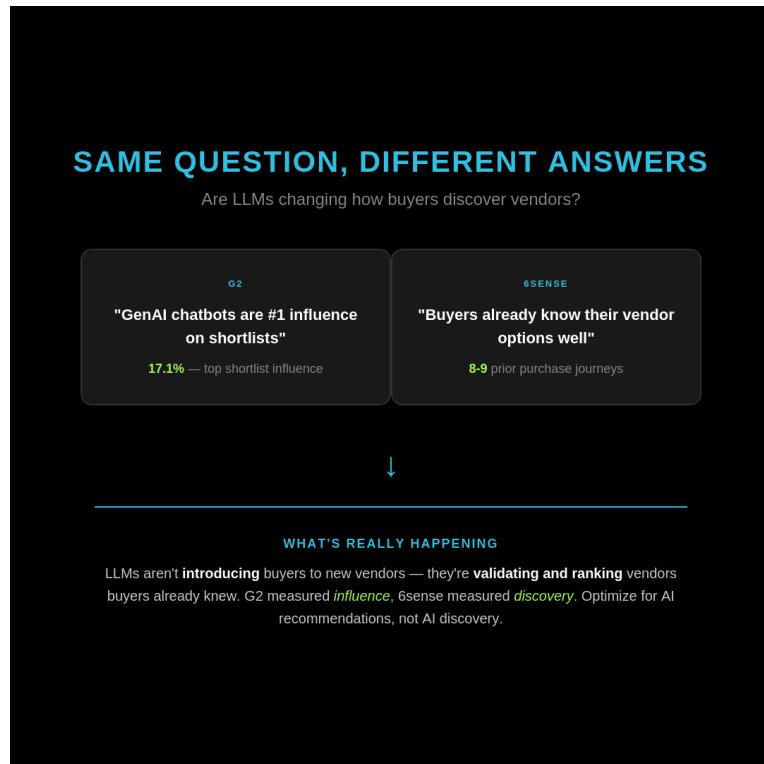
6sense measures perceived buying journey (10.1 months); Dreamdata tracks from first digital touchpoint (211 days ≈ 7 months). The 3-month gap represents awareness activity buyers don't consciously count as 'buying.'

2. Committee Size: ~10 vs. 6.8 vs. 3-4



All three are correct—they measure different things. ~10 stakeholders touch the deal, 6.8 actively engage content, 3-4 hold final decision power. Think 'Core Committee' vs 'Blast Radius'.

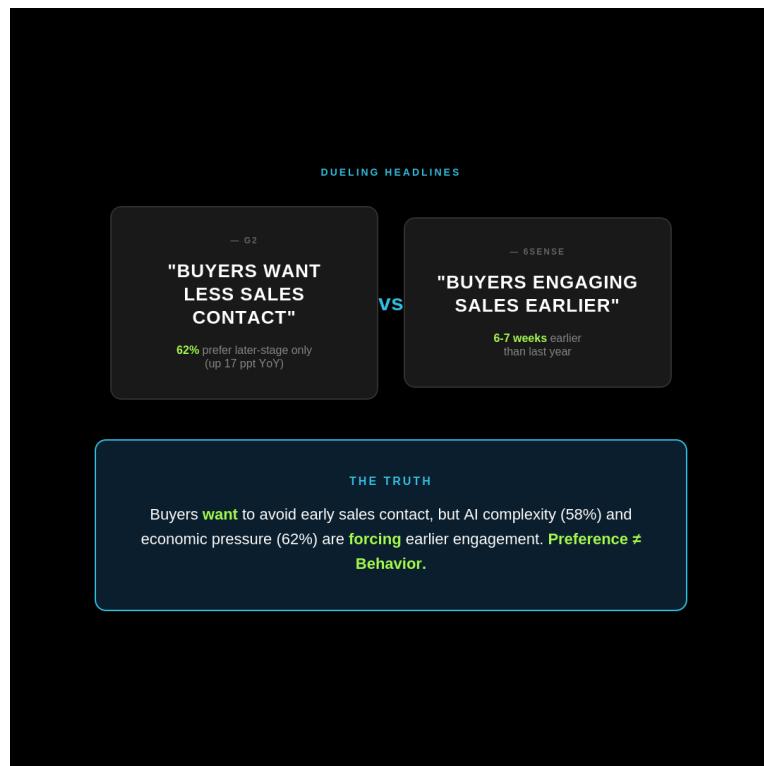
3. AI Search Role: Discovery vs. Validation



G2 ranks GenAI #1 for shortlist influence; 6sense shows LLMs peak mid-journey.

Resolution: AI validates and ranks vendors buyers already know, not introducing new ones.

4. Sales Contact Timing: Earlier vs. Later



Klear B2B Analysis

G2: 62% prefer later-stage contact. 6sense: buyers engage 6-7 weeks *earlier* than before. Both true at the same time. What we have here is preference vs. behavior. Economic pressure and AI validation needs force earlier engagement despite stated preferences.

5. Shortlist Size: More or Fewer Vendors?



6sense: more vendors evaluated (5.1 vs 4.5 YoY). G2: shortlists shrinking (2-3 most common). Resolution: Buyers research broadly but narrow faster. Supports Day One shortlist finding.

Which Source to Use

- **6sense:** Enterprise strategy, VP+ buying behavior, committee dynamics
- **G2:** SMB/mid-market research patterns, channel preferences, shortlisting behavior
- **Dreamdata:** Digital attribution, journey timing, channel ROAS
- **Consensus:** Demo engagement optimization, content velocity metrics

Part 9: Practical Actions for €1-10M ARR Founders and GTM Leaders

Priorities

Every company is different and one size does not fit all, but here are five items that should show up in Buyer Journey/Go-To-Market conversations:

1. Win Before First Contact

- With 60-80% of deals decided before sales engagement and
- 95% of buyers creating mental shortlists pre-contact, your brand positioning in "dark funnel" channels (G2, peer networks, LinkedIn, AI search) is where revenue is actually won.
- If you're not on the Day One shortlist (80% win rate for those who are), you're fighting for the remaining 23% of deals. Shift resources from late-stage sales optimization to early-stage brand presence and validation assets/programs.

2. Build for the 107-Day Zone of Attrition

- The gap between MQL and SQL averages 107 days; this is where most companies lose deals by going silent or over-pushing.
- Instead of hiring more SDRs,
 - deploy resources into, low-pressure, high-value nurture assets (newsletters, events, educational content) that
 - sustain brand presence for 3-4 months
 - without burning expensive sales capacity
 - (or your brand)

3. Optimize for AI Validation, Not AI Discovery

- 29% of buyers now start research in AI tools, but
- LLM usage peaks mid-journey for comparison and validation.
 - Buyers already know their options and use AI to validate choices.
- Your AI presence depends heavily on review site dominance (G2/Capterra feeds LLMs), so prioritize fresh, high-quality reviews over quantity.

4. Deploy Dual-Track Messaging: Core + Blast Radius

The buying committee splits into 3-4 functional decision-makers:

- (the Core) who choose based on ROI/speed/features, and
- compliance stakeholders (the Blast Radius) who veto based on security/legal/integration risk.
- Create parallel content tracks: Track A targets the Core with competitive positioning and demos; Track B (most bottom-of-funnel) targets the Blast Radius with trust center content, security documentation, and compliance frameworks.

5. Measure What Actually Matters: Cost Per Company Influenced

With 211-day average journey lengths and 320 days from first impression to revenue,

- short-term ROAS metrics are meaningless for B2B.

- Shift from "Cost Per Lead" to "Cost Per Company Influenced". Look back 2-3 quarters for marketing ROI calculations.

PPC Prioritization

- **LinkedIn first:** 113% ROAS, lowest cost per company influenced (€154), highest B2B intent
- **Google for demand capture:** 78% ROAS, captures active searchers, but beware the 7% 'Google Tax' on branded terms

Content Timing

- Send important content Tuesday-Thursday, 10am-3pm
- Avoid Friday sends, as engagement drops significantly
- Monitor 5-day open rates as a leading indicator of deal health

Reset ROI Expectations

Remember: first impression to revenue takes **320 days**. Marketing ROI calculations must look back 2-3 quarters. Shift KPIs from 'Cost Per Lead' to 'Cost Per Company Influenced' and 'Pipeline Influence.'

The Bottom Line

The game is won or lost before sales contact. Your job isn't to convince. It's to be on the shortlist when they're ready to buy. Focus on being visible, credible, and easy to validate in the channels where your buyers actually research.

Sources

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- [G2 2025 Buyer Behavior Report](#)
- [Dreamdata LinkedIn Ads Benchmarks Report 2025](#)
- [Consensus Buyer Behavior Report 2025](#)