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# Guiding The New B2B Buyer From Attraction To Advocacy

Evolve Your Approach By Tackling Barriers  
Around Data, Systems, And Processes



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B2B marketers and sellers can no longer expect to convince predictable buyers to purchase with linear and static campaigns.

## Executive Summary

The new B2B buyer is armed with access to information and heightened expectations when it comes to their buying experience. In fact, the modern B2B buyer acts more like a consumer every day.<sup>1</sup> As all customers continue to grow and transform in response to these changing times and as the lines between B2B and B2C marketing continue to blur, B2B marketers and sellers can no longer expect to convince predictable buyers to purchase with linear and static campaigns. Instead, today's B2B buyer journey is nuanced, with the added complexity and unpredictability of individuals ("consumer-like" buyers) in buying teams. Thus, B2B practitioners must come prepared to steward their customers effectively through their unique buying journeys — from attraction to advocacy.

Adobe commissioned Forrester Consulting to evaluate the B2B buyer journey landscape. Forrester conducted an online survey with 1,023 global business executives with responsibility for enabling, creating, or participating in customer experience (CX) and engagement to explore this topic. We interviewed a mix of both B2C and B2B practitioners. This study was conducted during the global COVID-19 outbreak, from April 6 to May 8, 2020.

We found that while most organizations have made many of the strategy changes and technology investments required to succeed with modern B2B buyers, marketers still struggle to glean the actionable insights that fuel personalized, contextual engagement. Effectively stewarding buyers through their journeys requires organizations to finally solve this insights challenge through improvements in their core systems and processes for data collection, analysis, and activation.

### KEY FINDINGS

- › **B2B practitioners shift their focus to customer-centricity, but they fall short in execution and measurement.** A linear and static approach to designing, observing, and interpreting B2B buyer journeys is collapsing under its own weight. To adapt, most of the surveyed B2B practitioners (51%) plan to increase their use of data and analytics tools to achieve their customer engagements goals. However, 66% are hindered by marketing and sales alignment challenges when it comes to engaging their customers effectively throughout the buying journey. Though customer loyalty and customer-centricity are top goals of the respondents' companies, they are the last things practitioners measure.
- › **Companies are handcuffed by challenges around data, systems, and processes.** There may be many tools in the customer engagement toolbox, but practitioners still struggle to build optimal, personalized customer journeys. In the same way, though capabilities are readily available in organizations, most respondents find that leveraging data and systems and processes to personalize their engagement strategy poses a challenge. Disjointed CX (54%), limited ability to create and nurture personalized content (54%), and turning data into insights (58%) are some of the biggest challenges that companies face.

- › **Companies should invest in addressing challenges to achieve key business outcomes.** In fact, surveyed practitioners believe the most important challenges their organizations must prioritize are delivering personalized content (89%) and turning data into insights (89%). To create better CX and deliver on key business outcomes such as customer loyalty, practitioners must address barriers around the use of data, systems, and processes. This includes investments in advanced data management and analytics solutions to deliver personalization at scale.<sup>2</sup>

# B2B Practitioners Shift Their Focus To Customer-Centricity, But They Fall Short In Execution And Measurement

Today’s B2B buyer landscape is complex, and it demands a focus on customer-centricity that is easier said than done. Though today’s B2B buyer has similar needs and expectations as traditional consumers, the B2B buyer journey is more nuanced and complex. Throughout this study, we found that B2B practitioners are challenged to own the engagement process for a greater portion of their customers’ journeys and to steward them accordingly. However, they miss the mark when it comes to measuring CX, and thus opportunities to optimize and execute on their strategies.

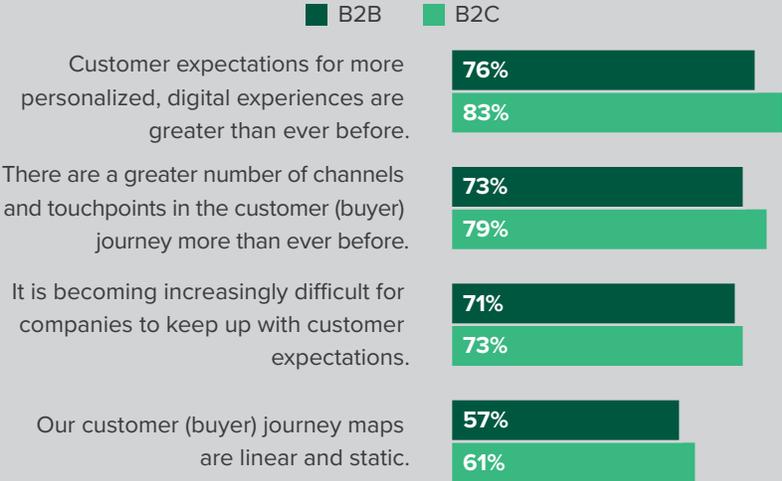


In surveying 1,023 B2B and B2C business executives with responsibility in CX and customer engagement, we found that:

- Consumer and business buyers alike both have increasingly complex needs and expectations in their buying journey.** B2B and B2C organizations share similar attitudes and behaviors when it comes to customer expectations. Overall, 76% of surveyed B2B practitioners and 83% of surveyed B2C practitioners find customer expectations for more personalized and digital experiences are greater than ever before (see Figure 1). Like consumers, B2B buyers are also demanding more of their providers and marketers are struggling to keep up. Both B2B and B2C practitioners also believe it is becoming increasingly difficult to keep up with customer expectations. However, although customer expectations are at an all-time high, many B2B respondents (57%) said their organization still operates with linear and static journey maps.

**Figure 1: Customer Expectations**

“Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.” (Showing net “Agree”)



Base: 1,023 business executives with responsibility for enabling, creating, or participating in CX and customer engagement (B2B n=611, B2C n=412)  
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, May 2020

76% of B2B practitioners find customer expectations for more personalized, digital experiences are greater than ever before.

- › **B2B practitioners must steward customers through a complex and long buyer journey.** Though the B2B buyer is increasingly consumer-like, B2B marketers and sellers are increasingly challenged with personalizing experiences that fit the various, individual needs within buying teams. This makes the buying journey more nuanced and complex. Throughout different stages of the customer journey, B2B companies navigate a more complex web of touchpoints with their customers than B2C companies do (see Figure 2).<sup>3</sup> For B2B companies, on average, it takes about nine months before a prospect becomes a lead, and about 10 months before a lead becomes a sales qualified lead, and 10 months before a sales qualified lead becomes a closed sale. More than half of respondents (55%) said marketing to a buying team is difficult (see Figure 5). Overall, these various lengthy stages demand efficient processes as well as special attention to retaining customers.
- › **Practitioners are leveraging data and analytics to achieve their engagement goals.** Customer loyalty as well as marketing productivity and segmentation lead the way as main priorities for respondents' organizations (see Figure 3). Again, we see that these results are across all company types. When asked what tactics practitioners plan to use to execute on these priorities, most respondents said their company plans to increase the use of analytics and metrics to meet their customer engagement goals (see Figure 4). This suggests that marketing practitioners are becoming more data-driven overall, and they value better data when it comes to achieving their strategies.

Figure 2



Base: Variable business executives with responsibility for enabling, creating, or participating in CX and customer engagement.  
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, May 2020

Figure 3

“Which of the following are likely to be your organization’s top customer engagement marketing goals over the next 12 months? Rank order your top 3.” (Showing top five ranked No. 1)

-  **1** Increasing customer loyalty
- 2** Improving marketing productivity and output
- 3** Improving our ability to segment and target our high-value audience
- 4** Improving customer personalization
- 5** Focusing on upsell/cross-sell opportunities

Base: Variable business executives with responsibility for enabling, creating, or participating in customer experience and engagement  
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, May 2020

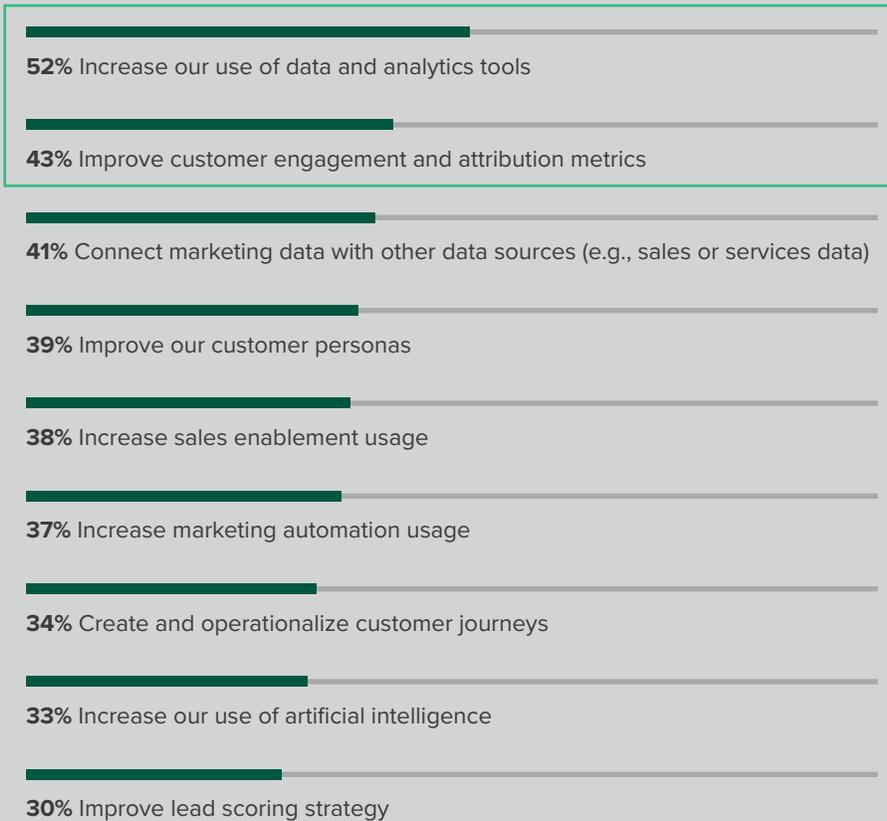
› **Though customer loyalty and customer-centricity are top goals, companies fall short in measurement.** Customer loyalty tops the list of customer engagement marketing goals over the next year. However, customer loyalty does not always top the list when it comes to measurement. When asked about metrics currently used at their organizations, respondents said customer experience metrics (e.g., customer satisfaction score) falls to the bottom of the list (51%). Measuring CX is key for professionals tasked with executing and optimizing customer engagement strategies.



Increasing customer loyalty is the No. 1 customer engagement marketing goal over the next 12 months, but it's the last thing marketers measure.

**Figure 4: Tactics To Achieve Customer Engagement Goals**

“Which of the following **tactics** do you plan to utilize to execute your customer engagement goals?”

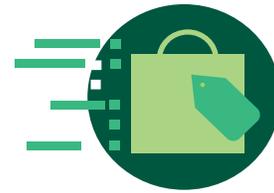


Base: 1,023 business executives with responsibility for enabling, creating, or participating in customer experience and engagement (B2B n=611)  
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, May 2020

# Companies Are Handcuffed By Challenges Around Data, Systems, And Processes

Marketing organizations understand that customer-centricity is required to address increasingly complex expectations. Most respondents said their company has data, systems, and process capabilities at the ready. However, the majority, are challenged when it comes to *leveraging* these to personalize their engagement strategy. We found:

- > **Though marketing organizations are ready to evolve their approach, most find it difficult to figure out how to market to a buying team.** Most marketing organizations are ready to adapt their engagement strategy based on customer behavior and new data and insights. These companies are not only nimble in their approach, but 66% of B2B respondents said their company has successfully pivoted from product-focused marketing to audience-focused marketing (see Figure 5). Companies seem poised to adapt their strategies, but more than half of surveyed B2B practitioners (55%) still find it difficult to market to a buying team. This suggests opportunity for B2B companies to optimize tactics to execute on these evolving strategies through a two-part process that focuses their data and analytics efforts to identify and connect the individual contacts associated with a specific opportunity, and then creates personalized experiences, content, and engagement based on each buying team member’s role in the purchase journey.



**55%** of B2B respondents said their company finds it difficult to figure out how to market to a buying team.

Figure 5

“Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements about your ability to deliver your customers (buyers) a personalized experience in their buying journey.”

(Showing “Strongly agree” and “Agree”)

■ B2B

**76%** We can dynamically adapt our engagement strategy based upon customer behavior.

**71%** We can dynamically adapt our engagement strategy based upon new data and insights.

**66%** We have successfully made the pivot from product-focused marketing to audience-focused marketing.

**55%** It’s difficult to figure out how to market to a buying team.

Base: Variable business executives with responsibility for enabling, creating, or participating in customer experience and engagement  
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, May 2020



› **Most respondents find capabilities and data readily available in their organizations.** Companies are poised to adapt their customer engagement strategies, and respondents believe that capabilities are mature in their organizations. In fact, a central repository of high-quality customer data is the most readily available of data capabilities when looking at the sample overall. The ability to operationalize insights with analytics and manage “always on” nurturing through rules are less readily available in organizations (see Figure 6).



**Figure 6**

Availability Of Capabilities In Organizations

DATA		SYSTEMS & PROCESS	
	Total		Total
A central repository of high-quality customer data	4.4	Ability to manage “always on” nurturing through adaptive analytics or AI	4.5
A central repository that brings in high-quality data from multiple systems	4.1	The ability to personalize names in email	4.5
The ability to transform data into insights with analytics	4.0	The ability to offer recommendations based on prior behaviors	4.2
The ability to operationalize insights in engagement decisions	3.9	Ability to manage “always on” nurturing through rules	4.0

Base: Variable business executives with responsibility for enabling, creating, or participating in customer experience and engagement  
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, May 2020



› **But leveraging data, systems, and processes poses a challenge.**

Simply because capabilities may be mature in organizations, it does not mean that they are doing the job. Overall, data analysis for insights is a core challenge in leveraging data. Companies with high-complexity buyer journeys are significantly more challenged when leveraging data than companies with medium-complexity journeys (see Figure 7).

Similarly, when it comes to challenges in leveraging systems and processes, disjointed CX between marketing and sales engagements, and “always on” nurturing limitations are core challenges (see Figure 8). Companies that manage high-complexity buyer journeys are much more challenged leveraging tools than companies with those that manage medium-complexity buyer journeys. The complexity of the buyer journey as well as internal alignment issues are key drivers of challenges leveraging data, systems, and processes.

As one director of web development at an enterprise software company noted, the tools are there, but internal issues with alignment is what slows down progress on personalization.

“[Our biggest barrier around data, systems, processes is] around processes. We’ve got the data. It’s just a matter of how the data gets disseminated for us to take the proper actions on it. So, I think it’s a process.”

Further, working across departments also introduces more alignment and visibility challenges for customer engagement practitioners. As one marketing manager at a small and medium-sized business (SMB) retail company noted:

“The processes aren’t defined enough internally. For example, with our rewards program . . . there were so many technical considerations that had to go through our IT organization and implement with new companies that came in to help with our rewards portal. I think the process internally just isn’t defined well enough, and maybe our tech isn’t understood well enough.”

There is an opportunity for greater visibility and integration of technology, systems, and processes within cross-functional organizations.

The complexity of the buyer journey as well as internal alignment issues are some key drivers of challenges leveraging data, systems, and processes.

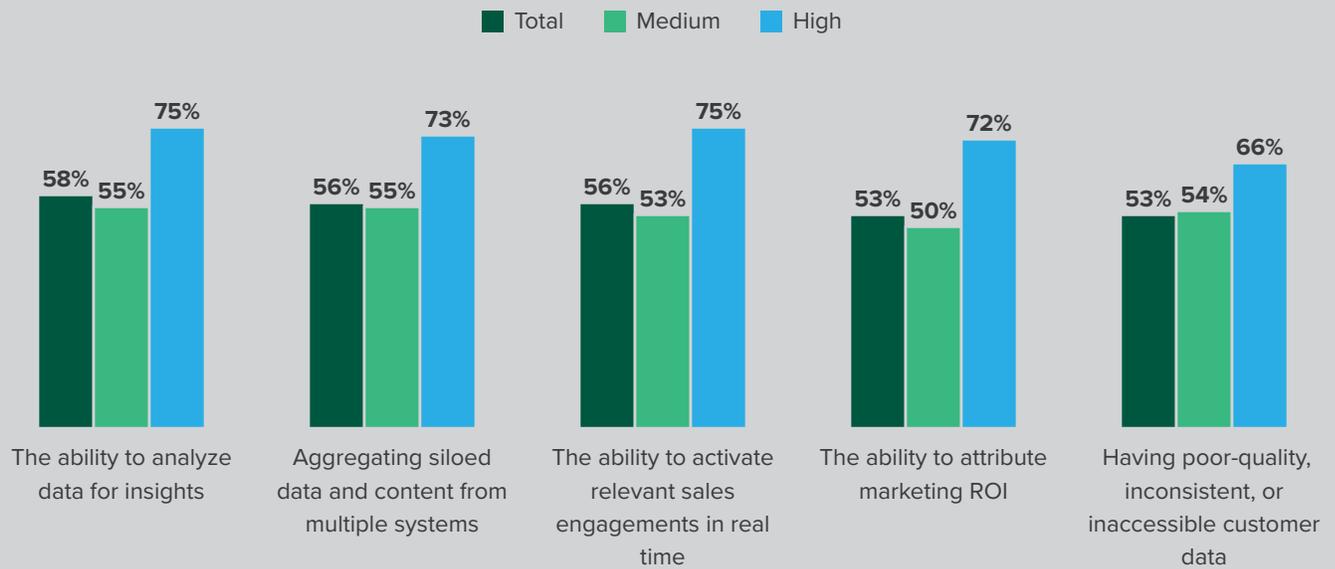
“I think the process internally just isn’t defined well enough, and maybe our tech isn’t understood well enough.”

*Marketing director at an SMB retail company*



Figure 7

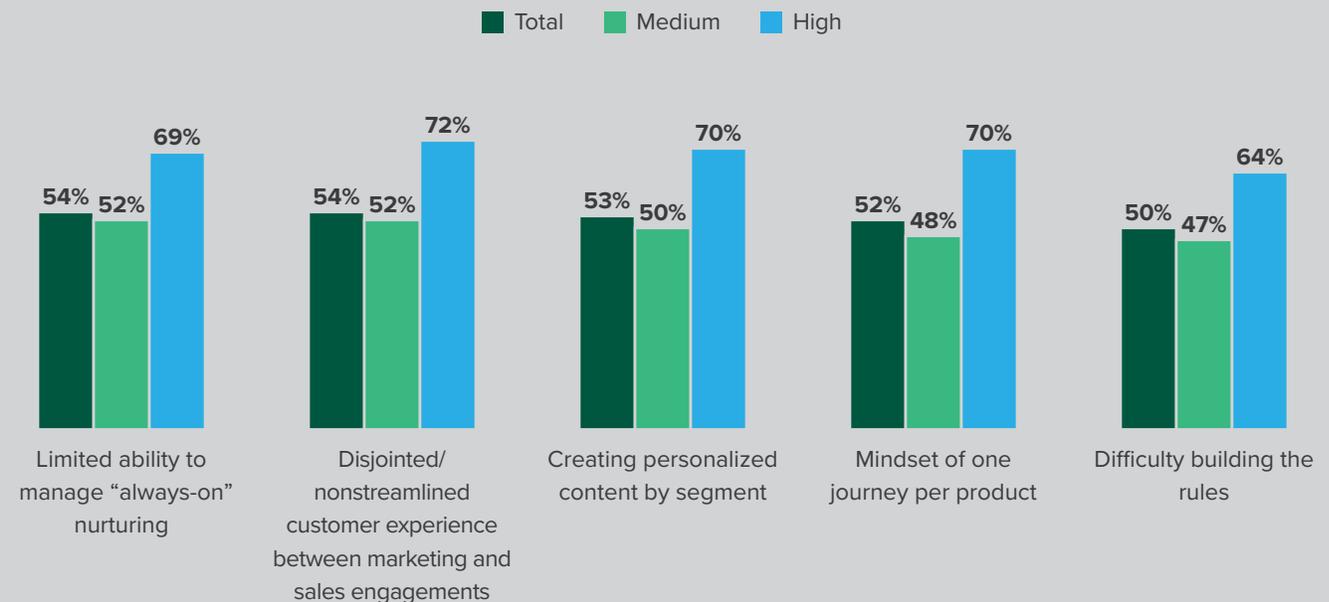
“Please rate the following challenges as they relate leveraging data to personalize your engagement strategy to match customer (buyer) behavior over the next 12 months.” (Showing top two net “Challenging”)



Base: 1,023 business executives with responsibility for enabling, creating, or participating in CX and customer engagement (High complexity n=227, Medium n=660)  
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, May 2020

Figure 8

“Please rate the following challenges as they relate to leveraging systems and processes to personalize your engagement strategy to match customer (buyer) behavior over the next 12 months.” (Showing top two net “Challenging”)



Base: 1,023 business executives with responsibility for enabling, creating, or participating in CX and customer engagement (High complexity n=227, Medium n=660)  
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, May 2020

# Invest In Addressing Data, Systems, And Process Challenges To Achieve Business Outcomes



Have you ever gotten all dressed up for an exciting night out, only to have your date stand you up or meet you late? That experience may have left you longing for a date who shows up for you on time every time, delivering on the perfect night out. In a similar way, companies can have all of the tools and technology at their disposal, but it does not necessarily translate to showing up and delivering their customer that perfect night out: a fully optimized engagement experience. Regardless of if your company is B2B, B2C, B2C considered, or a mix, addressing current challenges with data, systems, and processes will be paramount to creating more efficient, personalized CX. Addressing these barriers is the first step in being helpful and confident stewards of the customer journey: moving customers from attraction to advocacy. Given these uncertain and changing times, it will become more important than ever to hold a customer's hand through a buying journey that is personal, seamless, and smart.

- › **Improved customer loyalty is a top business benefit companies seek from future investments.** Future investments in mapping and analyzing customer journeys should focus on understanding and engaging current customers. Nearly a third of respondents from B2B companies (31%) believe that future investments in customer journey mapping will “greatly deliver” on improved customer loyalty, closely followed by “forecasting customer activity more accurately” (see Figure 9). In addition, practitioners strive for relevancy as an expected benefit and goal.

As one practitioner said, “It’s really relevancy: ‘This is the content that should be surfaced for a *particular* user at the *right* time of the journey.’” Respondents said forging a buyer-seller relationship in their engagements with customers is both a desire and expectation.

- › **Addressing data, systems, and processes challenges head on.** Again, practitioners underscore the importance of creating personalized content and the ability to derive insights. Addressing challenges around creating personalized content (89%) and the ability to analyze data for insights (89%) are high and critical priorities for companies. B2B respondents believe personalization would greatly improve their organization’s engagement strategies at the account level (75%) and at the individual level (71%).
- › **Urgency to address the buyer journey is only amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic.** Our data suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic underscores the need to invest in addressing the buyer journey across the entire lifecycle. Companies should continue to be agile and pivot their strategy based on customer behavior, data, and the world around them. We found that sending frequent personalized and relevant communications while leveraging insights from analytics are focal points following the pandemic. Similarly, 83% of respondents believe “sensitivity to a customer’s journey is more critical than ever” (see Figure 10). Moving forward, retaining and growing customers will serve as a foundation to pandemic recovery. For marketers, shifting priorities from customer retention to customer advocacy will become a critical next step.<sup>4</sup>

“It’s really relevancy: ‘This is the content that should be surfaced for a particular user at the right time of the journey.’”

*Director of web development  
at an enterprise software  
company*



Figure 9

“The following are potential business benefits from future investments in mapping and analyzing customer journeys. How well do you think they will deliver on the following outcomes?” (Showing “Greatly deliver”)



Nearly a third of respondents from B2B companies (31%) believe that future investments in customer journey mapping will “greatly deliver” on improved customer loyalty.

Base: 1,023 business executives with responsibility for enabling, creating, or participating in CX and customer engagement (B2B n=611, B2C n=412)  
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, May 2020

Figure 10: Implications Given COVID-19

“How much of an impact do you think COVID-19 will have on how your organization addresses your customer’s buying journey?”



“Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.” (Showing net “agree”)

83%

Sensitivity to a customer’s buying journey is more critical than ever.

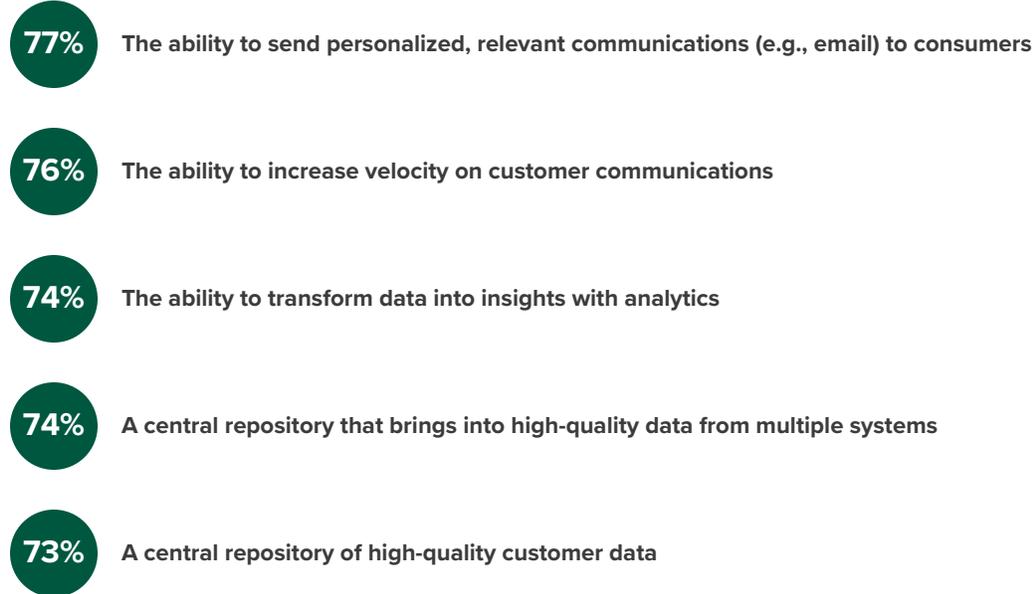
73%

Our team is actively rethinking our communication plan.

Base: 1,023 business executives with responsibility for enabling, creating, or participating in CX and customer engagement  
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, May 2020

Figure 11

“Organizations are seeking to adapt and pivot in response to COVID-19. How important will the following capabilities become when addressing a customer’s buying journey?” (Showing top two “Important”)



Base: 1,023 business executives with responsibility for enabling, creating, or participating in CX and customer engagement  
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, May 2020

The “new B2B buyer” and the “new normal” are before us today. As the lines between the traditional B2B buyer and the consumer continue to blur, it will become critical to invest in designing, observing, and interpreting customers’ unique journeys. Building out engagement strategies and having tools at the ready are not enough to optimize and deliver personalized CX. Executives must understand the complex and nuanced needs and expectations of buyers today and address data, system, and process barriers that halt the personalization and insights necessary today.



# Key Recommendations

Forrester's in-depth survey of business executives with responsibility for enabling, creating, or participating in CX and customer engagement supported several important recommendations:



## **Foster a culture that worships customer data, insights, and knowledge.**

You will only realize the full potential of your customer-obsessed pivot when you calibrate all customer interactions to the customer's current context and historical interaction with your company. Develop initiatives to gather real customer insight with buyer journey mapping and customer use-case interviews. Leverage solutions with advanced analytics and artificial intelligence to gain insights and pinpoint opportunities. Always go back to the data.



**Plan for processes that create connected CX.** As marketing's responsibility for engagement increases and goes further into the buying cycle, marketers must engage buyers who proactively seek the information they need — through a mix of human, digital, and social channels — to advance their decision process. Establish processes across sales and marketing silos to engage buyers via content, channels, and tactics that deliver the best buyer experience. Seek solutions with insights and capabilities that allow you to bridge process gaps between sales and marketing teams.



## **Calibrate to the customer to deliver the optimal buying experience.**

Pick up the gauntlet for more personalized and valuable engagement that your empowered customers have thrown down. Create personas and journey maps for the highest-value segments. B2B buyer personas consolidate customer insight into an intellectually accessible format to increase customer understanding across the organization. Combined with buyer journey maps, the result is a set of clear instructions to design a dynamic customer engagement strategy for each distinct phase of the customer journey, across all members of the buying team.



**Let buyers drive your systems.** B2B buyers are creating their own journeys, so you can no longer be a helicopter marketer and guide the B2B consumer along the path you created for them only to make a quick handoff to sales. Adopt journey mapping to facilitate planning and content creation strategies. But expect every buyer to forge a unique path and leverage your data, analytics, and engagement systems (to the max) to deliver a personalized and contextual experience. Invest in integrated solutions to execute entire personalization strategies across marketing and sales teams, not just one-off personalization tactics.

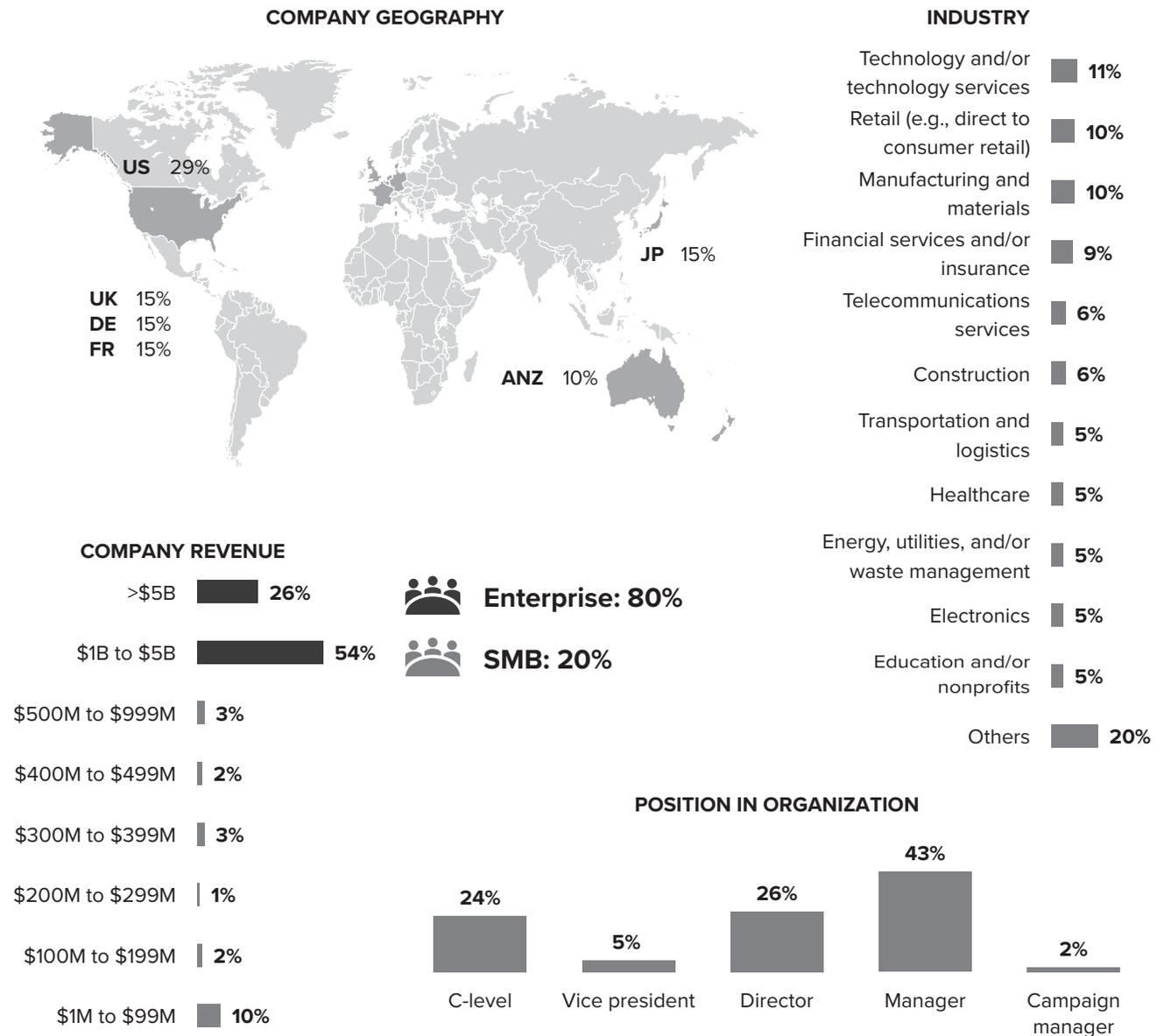


**Step up to the change management challenge.** B2B marketing execs leading the marketing transformation face resistance to change on many fronts: product management, field marketing, line-of-business heads, sales, geography sales execs, and so on. But you can't serve many masters well. When you decide to serve one master — the customer — very well, you're going to upset some internal stakeholders. Explain all your decisions in terms of better customer engagement to drive revenue and lifetime value. It's an unassailable position.

# Appendix A: Methodology

In this study, Forrester conducted qualitative interviews and an online survey of 1,023 business executives in marketing, operations, and IT in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand to evaluate how their organization addresses their customers' buyer journey. Survey participants included decision makers with responsibility for enabling, creating, or participating in CX and customer engagement. Questions provided to the participants asked about their customers' expectations, goals, and challenges regarding engaging customers on their buyer journey. The study began in April 2020 and was completed in May 2020.

# Appendix B: Demographics



Base: 1,023 business executives with responsibility for enabling, creating, or participating in customer experience and engagement  
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, May 2020

# Appendix C: Supplemental Material

## RELATED FORRESTER RESEARCH

“What B2B Buyers Crave,” Forrester Research, Inc., May 4, 2020

“Customer Marketing Elevates B2B Post-Sale Experiences And Buyer Value,” Forrester Research, Inc., March 31, 2020

# Appendix D: Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “The B2B Consumer Grows Up,” Forrester Research, Inc., March 2, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> “AI Will Enable B2B Marketers To Deliver Customer-Driven Engagement At Scale,” Forrester Research, Inc., October 25, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> B2C alone is defined by respondents who answered that the audience they primarily focus on in their role is “consumers” instead of “businesses” or “both business and consumers.”

<sup>4</sup> “What Are The Sustained Implications Of COVID-19? Here’s What Our B2B Marketing And Sales Analysts See,” Forrester Research, Inc., June 23, 2020.