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FUTURE OF  
MARKETING

# THE NEW B2B

Omnichannel, Tech-friendly, and Woke

BY CRAIG CHARNEY AND RYAN KAWLES





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# THE NEW B2B:

OMNICHANNEL, TECH-FRIENDLY, AND WOKE

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This paper presents the findings from the American Marketing Association-New York's latest Future of Marketing Survey, conducted among B2B buyers. Following up on AMA-NY's prior Future of Marketing Study in 2019, previously released sections of the study explored trends in consumer and marketer attitudes towards marketing technology and brand purpose. The paper examining the techlash after the Covid pandemic is available [here](#), the paper on purpose [here](#).



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ✓ The majority of B2B buyers are Millennials but most are male, especially when big bucks are involved.
- ✓ The future of B2B buying is female, but women still have a ways to go to reach parity.
- ✓ Company websites have become the leading B2B purchase channel, although face-to-face contact between sellers and customers still matters for big purchases.
- ✓ B2B buyers divide their media time evenly between websites, streaming media, social media, TV, and outdoors, but use linear TV much less than consumers do.
- ✓ Top social media for B2B buyers are YouTube and Facebook, as with consumers, but B2B purchasers spend more of their media time on Twitter and LinkedIn.
- ✓ Ads and seller websites are the main B2B purchase information sources, while seller events, webinars, and white papers also matter for larger purchases.
- ✓ B2B customers are very positive to martech – even more than consumers are.
- ✓ B2B buyers see more benefits to martech and are less wary than consumers, though most acknowledge its negatives.
- ✓ Buyers massively expect B2B marketing to be mostly online in a decade.
- ✓ The top purposes B2B customers think companies should address – being good employers and corporate citizens, sustainability and racial equality – are like those consumers do.
- ✓ B2B buyers are even more woke than consumers: they are likelier to buy from companies doing well on social purpose.
- ✓ B2B purchasers are willing to pay higher prices to companies that pay attention to purpose – again more so than consumers.
- ✓ B2B purchasers are open to hearing from companies themselves about their brand purpose and achievements.

# FINDINGS



# FINDINGS

Business-to-business (B2B) marketing is the stepchild of the marketing world – but it doesn't deserve to be. Business investment in the US totaled \$2.5 trillion in 2019, according to an estimate by Deloitte, while e-Marketer reports that total B2B marketing spend is just reaching \$15 billion. In contrast, estimated consumer spend totals \$13.8 trillion this year, or almost six times as much as business, yet consumer advertising will total \$270 billion, or 18 times more!

Just as in the ad market, so too B2B buying is under-emphasized in market research. This may reflect an old mindset assuming that widgets and commodities sold themselves, or perhaps an attachment to traditional media and practices. Yet the B2B market nowadays is dynamic, with much change in who's involved, how to reach them, and their responses to concerns outside the marketplace.

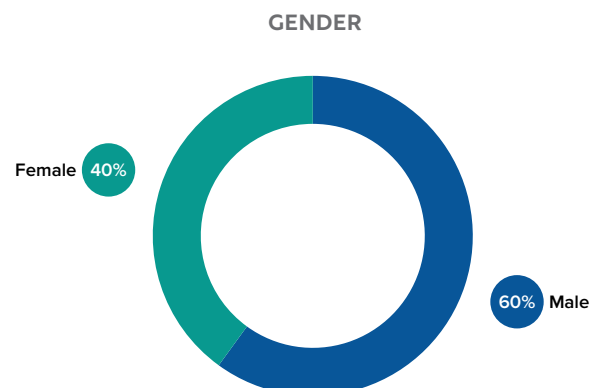
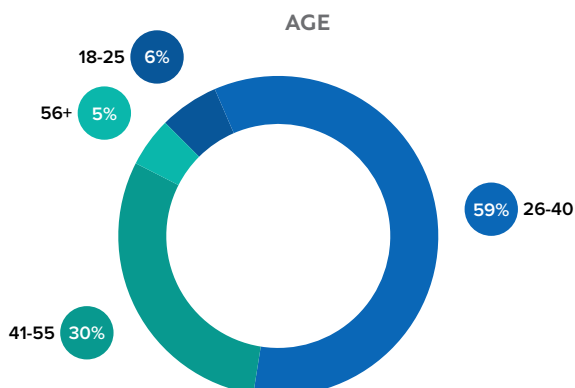
This study aims to shed light on how B2B marketing is evolving – and how marketers can most effectively respond. It explores demographic change, the media mix, innovative tech, and brand purpose in B2B today. It concludes with how marketers can thrive in the new B2B world.

## THE CHANGING B2B MARKET

**The majority of B2B buyers are Millennials but most are male, especially when big bucks are involved.**

The average corporate buyer looks like he traditionally has: under 40 (65%) and male (60%). The bulk are Millennials, between 26 and 40 (59%), while 6% are under 25. Of the rest, almost all are 41 to 55 (30%), with just 5% of B2B purchasers over 55. The masculine presence remains particularly strong among buyers in producer goods firms (82%), consumer durables (73%), and business services (66%). Men also handle 75% of big purchases (\$100,000+) and 58% of mid-sized ones (\$1,000 - \$100,000). They are responsible for 65% of buys in the largest firms by revenue (\$100 million+) and slightly more (67%) in medium-sized companies (\$1 million - \$100 million). In short, men still hold the commanding heights of B2B buying and most of the middle ground too.

### B2B BUYERS BY AGE AND GENDER



The future of B2B buying is female, but women still have a ways to go to reach parity.

Women have overtaken men among younger B2B purchasers – they make up 53% of the under-30s (as well as 56% of the over-50s). The difference is particularly striking among the youngest cohort, the 18-25s, where women form 82% of a small sub-sample. Females also dominate the low and high ends when firm size is measured by number of employees. They make up 59% of purchasers in small firms (under 50 workers) as well as 54% of those with the biggest head counts (over 5,000), who may make greater efforts at inclusion. Given their strong position among younger buyers, women are likely to dominate B2B buying a decade from now. However, when we look at purchases by size, today women dominate only the smallest (handling 60% of buys under \$1,000). Similarly, looking at companies by revenue, women predominate (59%) only among customers in the smallest category (under \$1-million). The only sectors where buyers are in majority women are the traditional female preserves of retail (71%) and consumer non-durables (54%), although they are close to parity with men in consumer services (45%). Women have made evident inroads and will continue to, but equally evident are the remaining glass ceilings.

PURCHASE CHANNELS

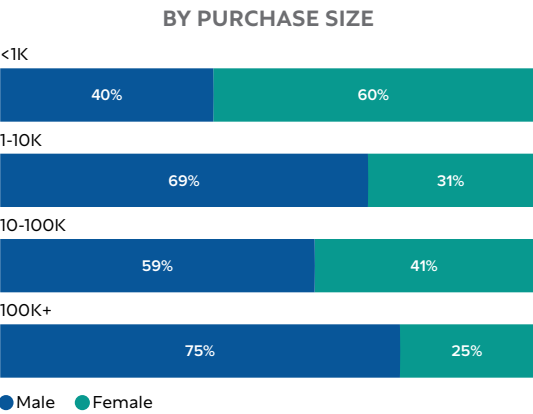
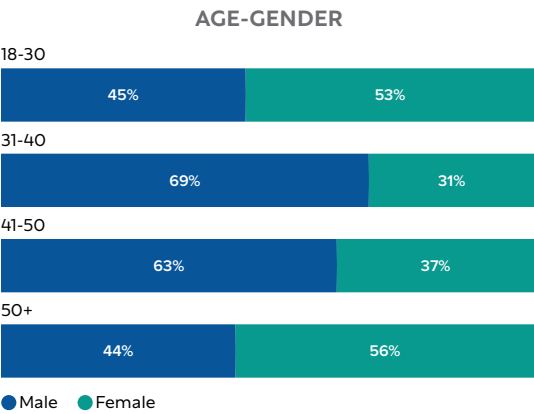
Company websites have become the leading B2B purchase channel, although face-to-face contact between sellers and customers still matters for big purchases.

The shift to online B2B buying is underlined by the fact that the selling company’s website is the prime purchase channel, used by 72% of purchasers in the month before the poll. This is 20 points more than purchasing in a store with cash, credit cards or checks, which 52% of buyers did. In other words, almost half of B2B buyers no longer buy in stores using conventional means of payment, while the vast majority make online buys.

PURCHASE CHANNELS USED IN LAST MONTH

	All B2B	Under \$1000	\$100K+
Company website, online	72%	51%	81%
Store with cash, check or credit	52%	51%	53%
Company mobile app	40%	29%	54%
Store with mobile payments	33%	18%	43%
Third-party website	29%	12%	41%
Customer service center	29%	11%	42%
Personal meetings with sales representatives or seller's staff	28%	9%	39%
Mail order or email	25%	9%	34%
Telephone marketing calls	20%	6%	38%

BUYER GENDER BY AGE AND PURCHASE SIZE



Next come several other forms of online purchase. These include mobile apps (40% used them), mobile payments in a store (33%), and via third party websites (29%). Interestingly, the buyers who make the biggest purchases (latest purchase over \$100,000) are the likeliest to use all digital means of payment, including these three as well as company websites. This is presumably because they make purchases of all sizes, large as well as small.

Traditional, in-person forms of B2B selling remain important, but primarily for the largest buys. Among those whose most recent buy was over \$100,000, 42% use customer service centers, 39% meet with sales reps, and 38% respond to phone marketing calls. Sales reps visit most frequently in the sectors of consumer durables (41%) and producer goods (35%), where larger purchases are made. What's more, few expect their use of in-person methods to change. For the biggest purchases, buyers may do research online, but marketing still involves personal contacts and will continue to do so in the future.

In-person contact with purchasers spending under \$1,000 is much rarer: 11% of customers go to service centers, 9% see sales reps, 9% use mail order, and just 6% speak with marketers by phone. For this smallest purchase category, stores are tied with online direct to customer as a purchase channel, both cited by 51%. Traditional purchase means are declining most rapidly for mid-sized buys and the smallest firms. For purchases from \$1,000 to \$10,000, 33% of buyers expect in three years to meet less often with sales reps and 31% to visit stores less. By firm size, the decline of these methods is happening quickest in those with under 50 workers: 38% of these buyers expect to see less of salespeople and 30% of stores in three years. Thus the shift away from older means of sales to quicker, easier online buying is moving up from small to mid-sized purchases and fastest in small companies.

## MEDIA USE

**B2B buyers divide their media time evenly between websites, streaming media, social media, TV, and outdoors, but use linear TV much less than consumers do.**

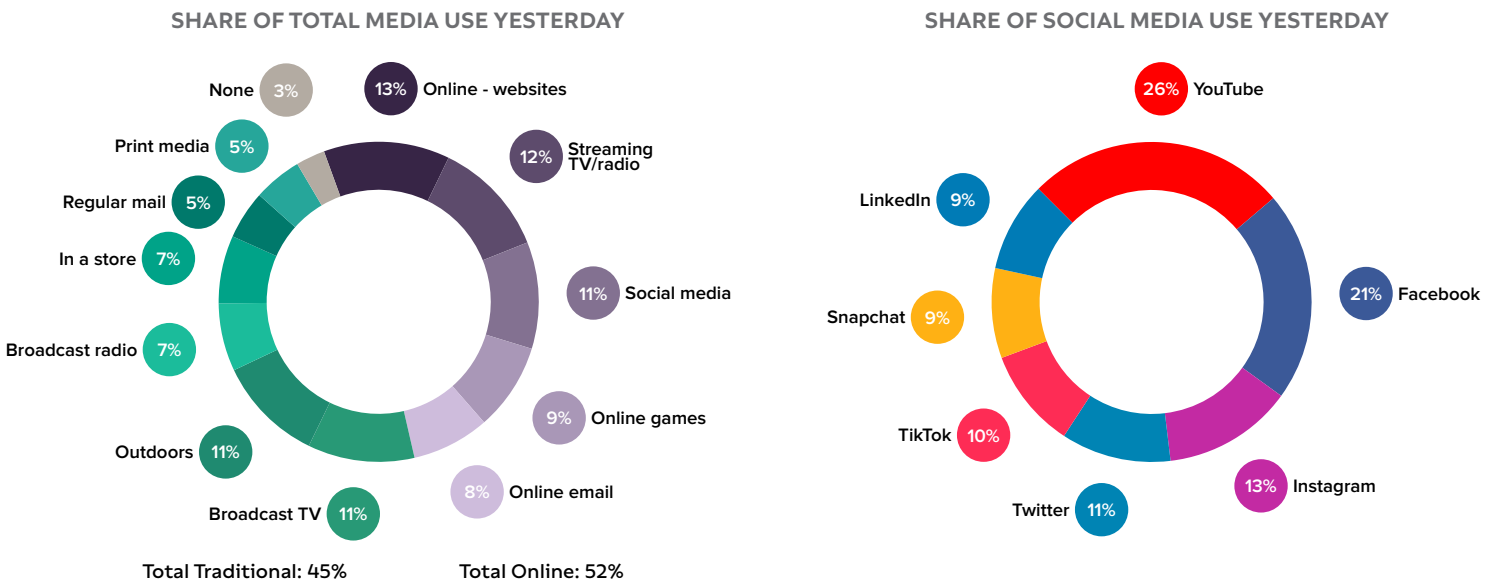
Asked about their media exposure, B2B purchasers say they spend roughly similar shares of their time on websites (13%), streaming media (12%), social media (11%), and outdoors (11%). These figures are quite close to those for consumers in general. There is a predictable age gap in media choice in B2B: buyers under 30 spend 15% of their media time on streaming TV or radio and 15% on websites, compared to 7% and 8% respectively for over- 50s.

However there is a sharp divergence between B2B customers and average consumers on broadcast or cable television use. B2B buyers spend only 11% of their media time on it, tying it for third place, while it remains the Number One medium for consumers, who spend 18% of media time there.

Other media get less than 10% of B2B buyers' exposure time. Online games get 9%, email 8%, broadcast radio and stores 7%, mail and print media 5% each. These track quite closely the time shares of consumers. The future for old media looks even dimmer: the media where the most expect further declines include linear TV (16%), print (also 16%), postal mail (14%), and broadcast radio (7%).



## B2B BUYER MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE



**Top social media for B2B buyers are YouTube and Facebook, as with consumers, but B2B purchasers spend more of their media time on Twitter and LinkedIn.**

The leading social media among B2B purchasers are YouTube and Facebook, as with the general population, but both get somewhat smaller shares of B2B buyers' social media time. B2B buyers spend 26% of their social media time on YouTube, against 29% for consumers, and they spend 21% on Facebook, compared to 28% for consumers.

B2B buyers do spend more of their social media time on the more professionally-oriented social networks than consumers do. Some 11% of their social media exposure is to the news-and-views site Twitter, and 9% on the work-oriented LinkedIn; corresponding shares for the general public are 7% and 5%.

Photo- and video-sharing sites also get a bit more emphasis from B2B buyers. They spend 13% of their social time on Instagram, 10% on TikTok, and 9% on Snapchat. Consumers devote 9%, 9%, and 6% of their social media exposure respectively on those sites.

**Ads and seller websites are the main B2B purchase information sources, while seller events, webinars, and white papers also matter for larger purchases.**

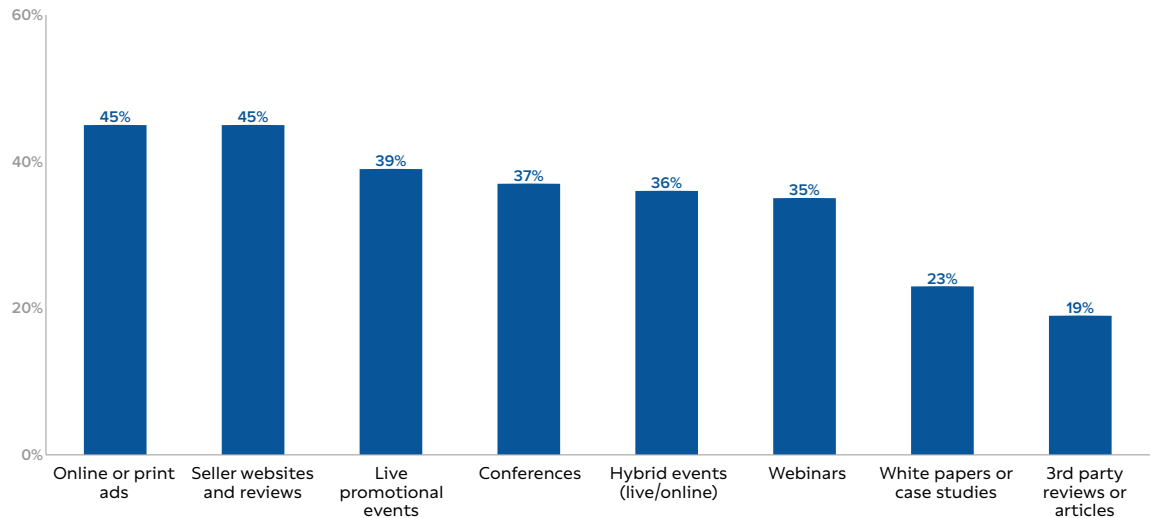
The top two sources of information for B2B purchases are online or print ads and seller websites and reviews, both mentioned by 45% of buyers. A second tier is composed of live events (39%), conferences (37%), hybrid events (36%), and webinars (35%). Below them rank white papers (23%) and third party reviews or articles (19%).

However, for the biggest purchases (over \$100,000), the top information source is live events (56%), followed by seller websites (54%) and ads (52%).

Webinars (47%) and hybrid events (44%) also rank higher for these purchases. By smaller margins, so do white papers (33%) and third party reviews (23%). In contrast, for purchases under \$1,000, reviews (19%) and white papers (9%) are much more rarely mentioned. In general, all information sources are less widely used for purchases on that scale.

There are some surprising gender differences in media use. For women the top medium is ads (cited by 50%), compared to 42% among men. In contrast, men are likelier to use seller websites (49% versus 39%), live promotional events (48% versus 27%), and conferences (40% versus 33%). Use of other media is similar between B2B purchasers of both sexes.

## INFORMATION SOURCES USED FOR LAST B2B PURCHASE



## MARKETING TECHNOLOGY

**B2B customers are very positive to martech – even more than consumers are.**

Marketing technology (martech) has received very broad acceptance among B2B buyers – even more so than the widespread favorability it enjoys among American consumers. Every one of nine relatively novel marketing technologies tested in the survey was viewed favorably by four-fifths or more of the B2B purchasers. This may reflect the wide use these technologies increasingly receive in marketing efforts by the firms the buyers work for and in the business community more generally.

The most positively viewed B2B marketing technology among buyers is artificial intelligence (AI) assistants, embraced by fully 92%. A whole series of other innovative martech enjoys favorability over 80% among business purchasers, including Internet of Things (IoT) data collection (88%), virtual reality (86%), smart speakers (85%), personalized ads, augmented reality, and even dream-seeding ad tech (all 83%), as well as omnichannel purchasing (82%). Micro-influencer marketing brings up the rear at a very healthy 79% favorable.

Compared to consumers, business purchasers at least 25 points more favorable to most types of martech. The only exception in the study was smart speakers, which enjoy the public's highest approval – 74% favorable – just 11 points below the figure for B2B

buyers. The largest gaps concern the technologies least popular with the general consumer, dream-tech (a 44% difference), omnichannel (43%), and micro-influencers (35%).

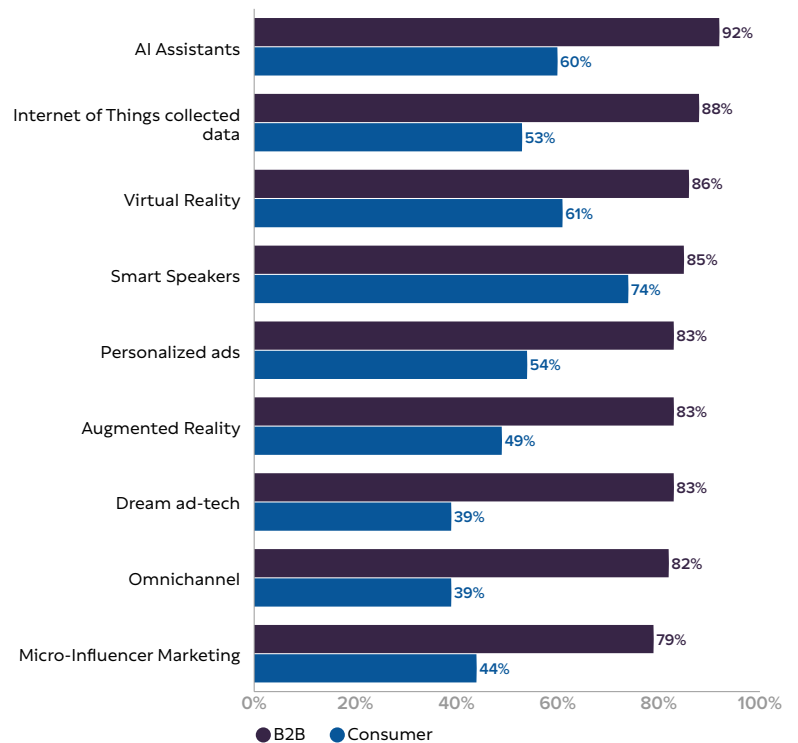
## B2B buyers see more benefits to martech and are less wary than consumers, though most acknowledge its negatives.

Belief in the advantages of martech is impressively broad among B2B purchasers. Nine in ten or more of those polled believe in each of seven potential benefits tested. These include IoT data improving public services and martech making shopping more informative (93% agreed) and IoT data improving buyers' lives and martech making purchasing easier (92% each). New technologies helping brands understand buyers' needs is mentioned by 91%, making shopping more fun by 90%, and making it quicker by 89%.

Here too the business customers are more positive than consumers, even though consumers too are alive to potential gains from martech. The B2B buyers ranged from 14 to 29 points more positive to the different types of martech tested than were the general public.

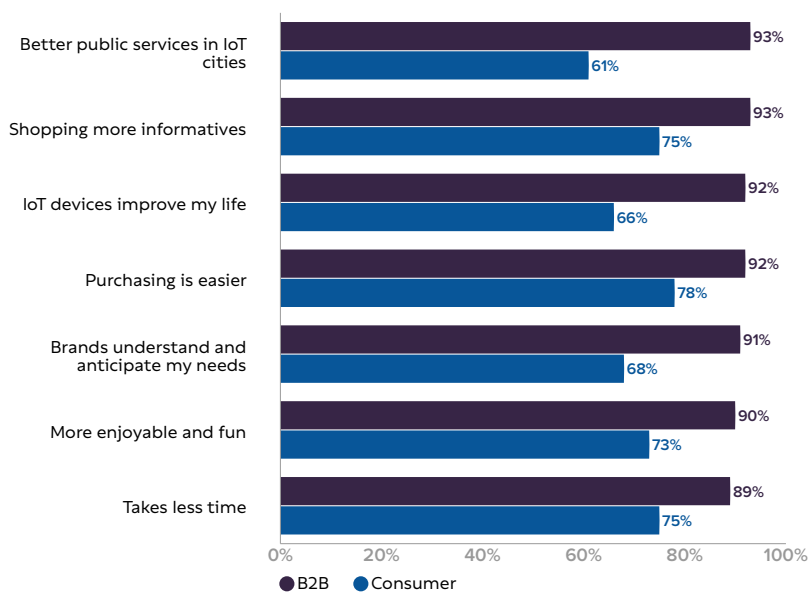
This does not mean that B2B buyers naively accept the new technologies: their concerns about martech's potential downsides mirror the widespread unease that US consumers display. All six of the potential disadvantages of martech tested worry three-fifths or more of the B2B purchasers polled. These include fake accounts and false information (74% concerned), isolation and depression (73%), feeling under surveillance and purchasing losing the human touch (both 72%), loss of privacy (67%), and less creative ads (59%). Strikingly, these fears are very similar to those of the general public: the figures for B2B buyers are close to those for consumers on each item, with only minor differences (three to six points).

## FAVORABILITY TO MARKETING TECHNOLOGY

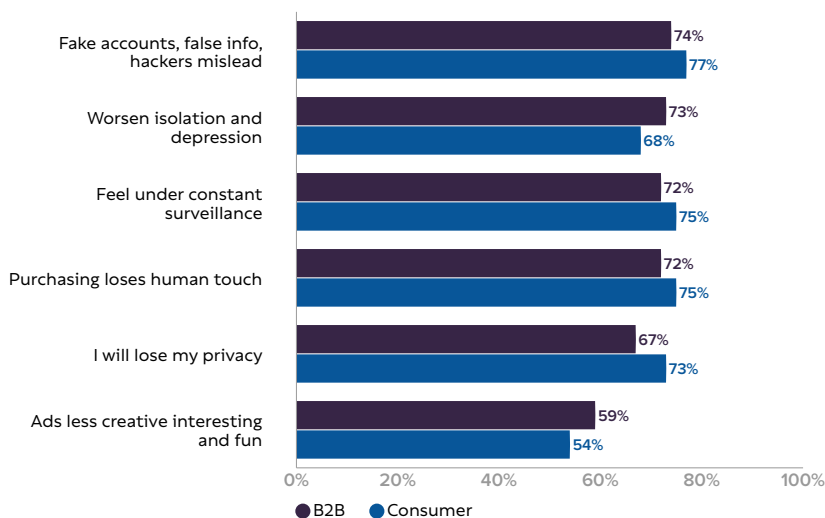




## ADVANTAGES OF MARTECH



## DISADVANTAGES OF MARTECH



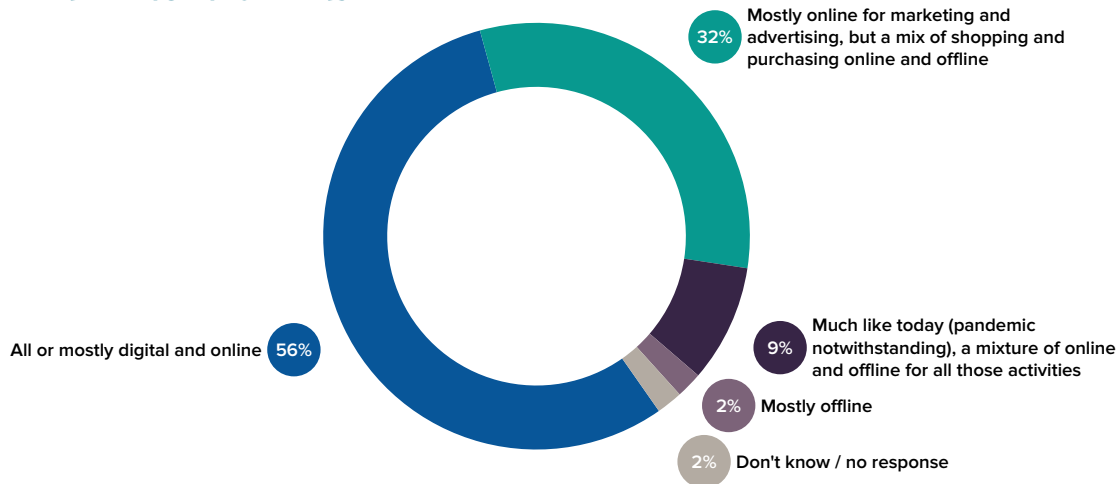
The rise of working from home for many B2B purchasers has increased their worries about data security, since home networks are often more vulnerable than the more sophisticated and better defended networks of the office. Fully 83% of the buyers interviewed are concerned about this, with 46% very concerned. To the extent that home-based work becomes permanent or part of a hybrid work plan, B2B customers will have to be reassured that their business and personal data is as safe at home as it is in their workplace

## Buyers massively expect B2B marketing to be mostly online in a decade.

The majority of B2B purchasers (56%) say that by 2032, business marketing and buying will be mostly online. Another third (32%) say it will be mostly online for marketing and advertising, though not purchasing. This makes a massive 88% who say marketing and advertising will be online in 10 years. Only 9% anticipate that marketing and advertising will be much like today (both online and offline) then.

There are some interesting differences by sector here. There are two where the majority don't expect B2B marketing and sales to be mostly online, both consumer-related: retail (only 43%) and consumer durables (45%). Among retailers, 31% say just marketing will be mostly online, while almost one-fourth (23%) say they expect a continued mix of online and offline for purchases as well as marketing. Buyers in consumer durables firms principally (50%) expect they will go online for marketing but online and offline to buy. In contrast, big majorities in producer goods (62%) and consumer services (61%) expect both marketing and buying to be digital.

## B2B MARKETING IN 10 YEARS



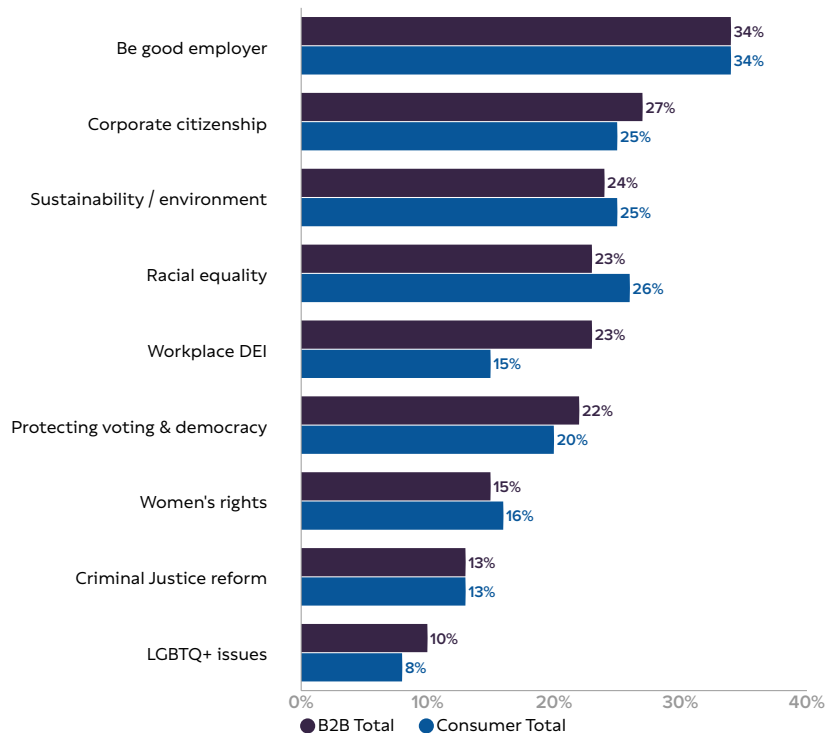
## BRAND PURPOSE

The top purposes B2B buyers think companies should address – being good employers and corporate citizens, sustainability and racial equality – are like those consumers do.

The most important social purpose companies can address, equally important to B2B customers and consumers, is being a good employer, cited by 34% of each group. Next for B2B purchasers is their suppliers being good corporate citizens, who give back to the community (27%). Just behind come sustainability and environmental protection (24%), followed by racial equality (23%). The same priorities make up the top four for consumers.

After that come workplace diversity, mentioned by 23% of corporate buyers, protecting voting and democracy (22%), women's rights (15%), criminal justice reform (13%), and LGBTQ+ issues (10%). Once again, what is striking in the findings of the study is how much the views on brand purpose of B2B purchasers reflect those of the public at large. (Workplace diversity, understandably, counts more among corporate buyers than among consumers, 15% of whom cite it.)

## ISSUES COMPANIES SHOULD ADDRESS



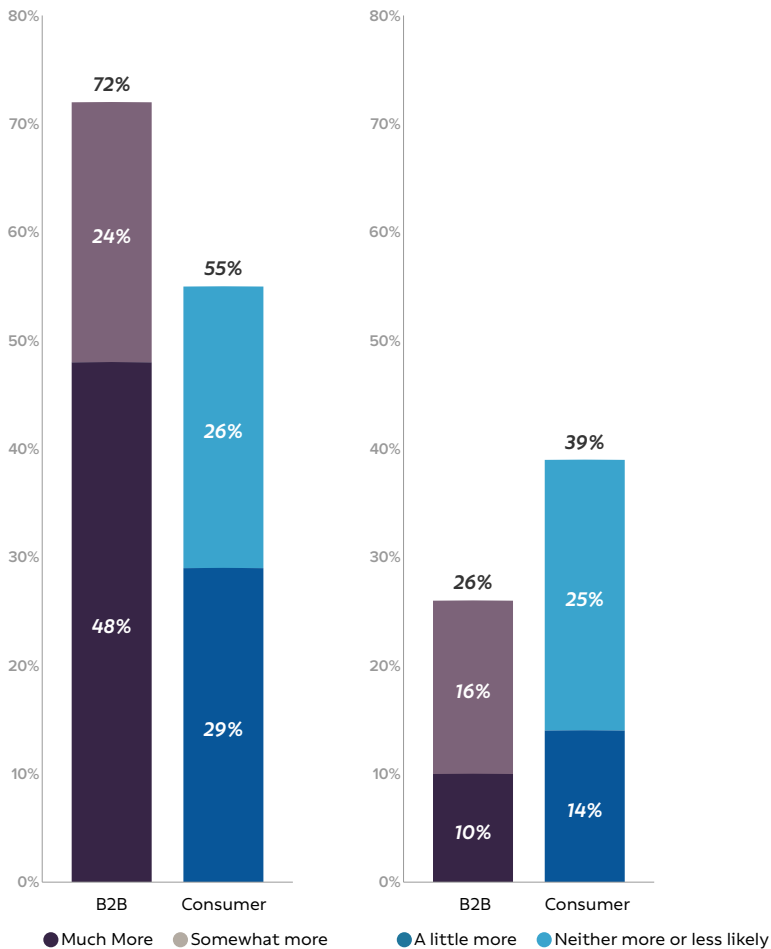
## B2B buyers are even more woke than consumers: they are likelier to buy from companies doing well on social purpose.

Overall, nearly three in four business buyers – 72% – say they are more likely to buy from firms that do well on socio-political issues they consider important. Fully 48% are much more likely to do so. This is substantially more than the proportions of consumers who say they would be (55% more likely to buy, and 29% much more likely).

### IMPACT ON PURCHASE INTENTIONS

IF COMPANY DOES WELL ON SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES YOU CONSIDER IMPORTANT...

LIKELIHOOD OF PURCHASE



There are some surprising demographic differences in B2B customers' responsiveness to social purpose, however. There is a big gender gap, but the opposite of the usual one: 57% of male buyers are much more likely to buy from firms doing well on purpose, versus just 35% of women. There is a substantial age difference in reactions too: while roughly half of buyers under 50 say they are much more likely to purchase if brands meet their purpose, among those over 50 only 13% do. One other demographic is revealing: 59% of purchasers working from home are much more likely to buy in response to brand purpose, while just 28%, fewer than half as many, of those working from the office say the same. (Is return to the office a correlate for less liberal attitudes?)

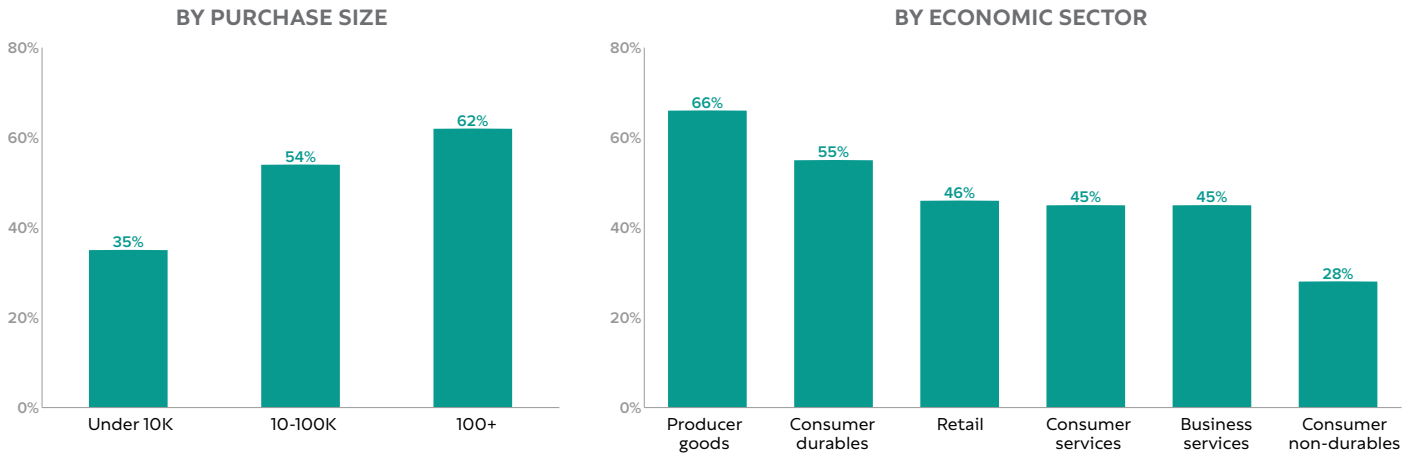
Purchase size also is associated with B2B customers' response to brand purpose. The larger the purchase, the greater the proportion of buyers who respond strongly to brand purpose. Among those whose last purchase was under \$10,000, only 35% are much more likely to buy from brands with purpose, against 54% of those who spent between \$10,000 and \$100,000, and 62% of those whose last buy was over \$100,000. By sector, the business purchasers most likely to respond to brand purpose are also with the biggest buys: producer goods, where 66% are much more likely to buy from brands achieving their social purpose, and consumer durables, where 55% say the same.

In other sectors minorities of buyers take that view, including retail (46%) and consumer and business services (both 45%). The sector where purpose least impacts purchasing is consumer non-durables. In this highly competitive sector, which includes mass-market fast-moving consumer goods, only 28% are much likelier to buy on the basis of brand purpose.



## IMPACT OF BRAND PURPOSE ON PURCHASING

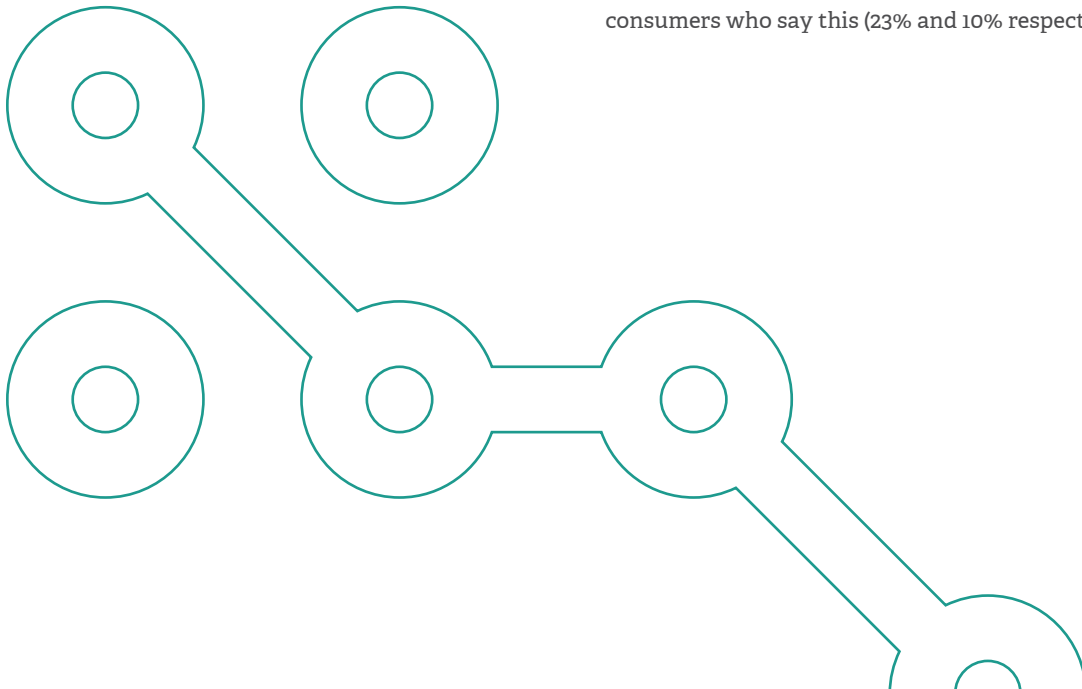
### MUCH MORE LIKELY TO BUY BRAND ACHIEVING ON SOCIAL PURPOSE



These findings are confirmed when B2B customers are asked if, in fact, a company's support of social or political causes has affected purchase decision-making already. Fully 55% say purpose has led them to buy from such a firm. The pattern here too is very similar to what has been seen already: the likeliest to have bought based on brand purpose are men, buyers under 50, and those working from home, along with people making larger purchases and those in producer goods.

**B2B customers are willing to pay higher prices to companies that pay attention to purpose – again more so than consumers.**

Almost three in four business purchasers (73%) say they will pay more for products or services from companies that are succeeding on socio-political issues the buyers consider important. That is substantially higher than the share of consumers who say this (48%). Moreover, 38% of B2B buyers say they would pay prices 10% higher or more for such purposes, and 17% an additional 25% or more. Once again these are larger than the proportions of consumers who say this (23% and 10% respectively).



## CUSTOMER WILLINGNESS TO PAY MORE FOR PURPOSE-DRIVEN COMPANIES

B2B



Consumers



● Not willing to pay more ● Up to 10% more ● 11-24% more ● 25-50% more

When it comes to paying at least 10% more, male B2B customers (43%) are again more likely to do so than women (29%). Again, too, over-50s are by far the least likely to pay more. Those making bigger purchases are more likely to do so, and the same is true for those in producer goods or consumer durables firms. In short: when it comes to social purpose, B2B buyers are putting their money where their mouths are.

**B2B purchasers are open to hearing from companies themselves about their brand purpose and achievements.**

Ads or information on brand purpose from suppliers are trusted by 51% of B2B buyers, the same proportion that would trust news media on the topic. Third party ratings are accepted by 37%, while company social responsibility reports would be trusted by 34%. In these respects corporate buyers are a bit more trusting of sellers than consumers: only 33% of consumers would trust company ads on social purpose, and just 25% social reports.



## CONCLUSION

This study has underlined a fundamental point: *B2B buyers are people too*. In many respects, the B2B market is coming to resemble the B2C (business to consumer) marketplace. The composition of the B2B market is becoming more representative as women move up the corporate ladder, if slowly. While B2B buyers are acting on behalf of their corporate employers, they also share many of the same attitudes and reactions as consumers. This is reflected in their media use and attitudes to corporate purpose. Many of the same marketing techniques used with consumers, such as personalization, omnichannel, or micro-influencers, can be used with B2B buyers as well. At the same time the size and nature of their firm and purchase also affects their purchasing behavior and needs to be taken into consideration in developing marketing plans.

Here are the key implications of the survey findings for B2B marketers.

### Who are the B2B buyers?

- You're selling mostly to Millennials and men, but the share of women in the B2B market will grow. Women's majority among buyers under 30 ensures this.
  - Men will continue to dominate purchasing for the biggest buys and firms, particularly in producer goods, consumer durables, and business services.
  - Women now handle most B2B buying for smaller firms and smaller purchases, and in the retail and consumer non-durables sectors. They will come to dominate in consumer services, mid-sized firms, and buys up to \$100,000.

### How can B2B sellers reach them?

- Your website is your most important selling channel and will only grow in importance, while stores are waning. But for the biggest buys, there's still a desire for the personal touch, which will persist.
  - Traditional stores are already out for almost half of B2B customers. Visits will become even rarer, particularly for buyers in small firms or purchasing in the \$1,000-10,000 range.
  - However, big buys (over \$100,000) will remain high-touch, with most buyers still relying on customer service centers, salespeople, and phone calls to marketers as well as online info.
- Digital transformation will roll on in B2B over the coming decade: online marketing will come to rule, and both marketing and purchasing will become predominantly online among B2B buyers in most sectors. The exceptions will be retail and consumer services, where offline buying will remain substantial.
- The media where you can reach B2B buyers are like those for consumers – websites, streaming media, social media, and outdoors. However, they use linear TV much less than consumers and will do so even less in future. Their use of other old media will also decline, making these choices less useful for B2B advertisers.
- The chief social media to target B2B customers are also the same as for consumers – YouTube and Facebook – but B2B buyers spend proportionately more media time on Twitter and LinkedIn than the public does.
- Seller websites and ads are the most common buying information sources B2B purchasers turn to, but as the dollar amount of the sale rises, their interest in seller events, white papers, and reviews also increases.



### How should marketing technology be used with B2B customers?

- They are very comfortable with martech, but just as aware of its negatives as consumers.
  - You can use just about any marketing technology with them, including AI assistants, IoT, VR, AR, smart speakers, personalization, omnichannel, and micro-influencers.
  - But you also need to be sensitive to their concerns about data privacy, accuracy, surveillance, isolation, and creativity.
- B2B suppliers need to reassure work-from-home buyers about digital information security, since those customers are not protected by office networks.

### Does brand purpose matter for B2B marketers?

- B2B buyers expect what consumers do from firms selling to them: being good employers, giving back to their communities, promoting sustainability, and advancing racial justice in the community. (And more than the public, they expect DEI in the workplace too).
- Brand purpose matters even more to B2B purchasers than to consumers, in surprising ways.
  - Men and under-50s are most likely to respond to purpose.
  - So are work-from-home buyers.
  - Purpose matters more the bigger the purchase.
  - B2B buyers in producer goods and consumers durables are the most concerned.
- If B2B customers see your firm as doing well on social purpose, you can charge higher prices – an additional 10% or more in many cases.
- You can tell B2B purchasers your story on purpose directly through ads or company reports, as well as news media or third parties. They trust companies more on this than consumers in general do.



The Future of Marketing Study involved online surveys of 380 B2B buyers, 506 consumers and 411 marketers around the United States, conducted by Toluna and Charney Research in August 2021. The 2019 survey, conducted by YouGov and Charney, included 500 marketers and 500 consumers.

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