Filling the void

What has happened now that the doors are closed on technology conferences?

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Managing Director

Here at Vanson Bourne, we love a good technology conference as much as the next person. And if the next person is an IT decision maker (ITDM) then they REALLY love a technology conference.

However it's not just the exotic locations, free drinks and logo'd giveaways that encourage ITDMs to attend, on average, **three events each year**. They value the opportunity to share experiences, to gain access to experts, to network and to gather information on the latest developments in the sector. Back in February, we published an **infographic** that showed that nearly all IT decision makers in the UK are influenced in their technology purchasing decisions by their attendance at these events.

Since that infographic was published, the majority of the major technology conferences scheduled for 2020 have either been postponed or moved online. The remainder have been cancelled outright.

95% of IT decision makers in January 2020 said that events help them to make purchasing decisions...
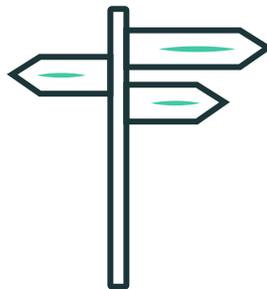
...45% said that they help them to make the majority or all of their technology purchase decisions

Base: 100 UK ITDMs interviewed online in January 2020, from organisations with 1,000 or more employees in private sectors.

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A variety of digital channels

So what is an ITDM to do under these circumstances? Well, according to the 300 respondents in the UK and USA who completed our survey on the subject in August, they exploit digital channels as much as they are able.

The online equivalent of networking is, of course, social media. Fully 51% of our respondents say that they are using social media sites such as LinkedIn more since the start of the year – whilst only 7% say that they are using them less. This tallies with **Microsoft's Q4 2020** report which showed that LinkedIn user sessions grew by 27% in the period.

To keep abreast of developments in the sector, ITDMs are accessing news sites more frequently. Around four in ten of them report that they are using "generic" news sites more frequently for technology news and approximately the same proportion report more frequent use of technology-focused news sites.

And for any technology vendors that might be reading this, ITDMs (particularly those based in the USA where 51% say their consumption has increased) are making greater use of your websites as a proxy for gathering information that they used to get through face-to-face engagements at conferences.

So here's hoping that your company has spent some time optimising its website to the needs of ITDMs in the current climate and providing them with content that resonates.
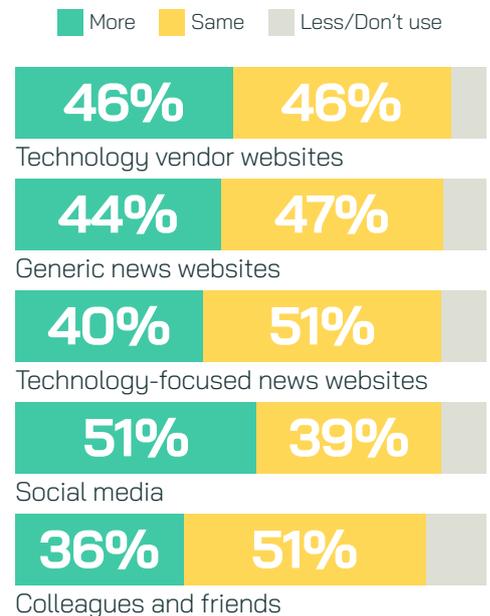
Increased consumption of all digital content

What types of content are ITDMs consuming through these channels? From the survey results we see an increase in the consumption of all of the forms of digital content that we tested, and the patterns are fairly consistent on both sides of the pond.

Given the thrust of the research and the impact that the pandemic has had on physical conferences, we were not particularly surprised to see that the largest increases are in the consumption of digital conferences and videos. Digital conferences are, in the main, intended as a direct substitution for the physical conferences that are currently being denied to ITDMs, but the results from our survey left us in no doubt that ITDMs appreciate the value of digital conferences and that we should reasonably expect them to be a more significant ingredient in the channel mix in a post-COVID world.

Moreover, the increases we are seeing in the consumption of content across the board serves to emphasise that, for the majority of vendor marketing campaigns, a mix of content is essential for maximising reach and engagement.

Keeping up to date with technology news and developments: How ITDMs' channel use has changed in 2020

■ More ■ Same ■ Less/Don't use

| 46% | 46% |
Technology vendor websites

| 44% | 47% |
Generic news websites

| 40% | 51% |
Technology-focused news websites

| 51% | 39% |
Social media

| 36% | 51% |
Colleagues and friends

Base: UK and US ITDMs (300) - August 2020

Technology-focused digital content: How ITDMs' consumption has changed in 2020

■ More ■ Same ■ Less/Don't use

| 58% | 34% |
Live/on-demand video

| 37% | 52% |
Online surveys/market research

| 28% | 59% |
Whitepaper/ebook reports

| 56% | 30% |
Webinars/online conferences

| 31% | 54% |
Infographics

| 29% | 53% |
Blogs

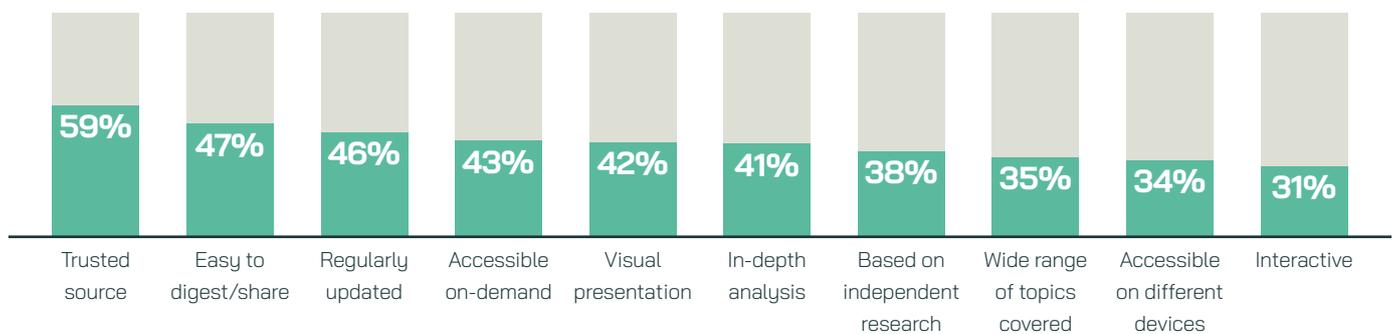Base: UK and US ITDMs (300) - August 2020

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Factors that make content resonate

So what makes for compelling content? The element deemed important by the largest proportion of our respondents, nearly 60%, is trust in the author or presenter of the content. And this makes a lot of sense. If you're interested in opinions, projections, forecasts or analyses on your industry, then you really want to hear them from a credible and authoritative source.

But there are many other factors that are also deemed important. The preference is for content that is easy to digest and share, that is available on demand and visually appealing. This speaks to the increasing consumption of video content as well as the ongoing debate around placing hero assets behind a registration page and whether the lead generation benefit that this delivers outweighs the impact on above the line marketing.

In the main, the factors that make for compelling content are broadly the same for both the USA and UK, though there are one or two interesting differences. A higher proportion of ITDMs in the USA rate in-depth analysis as important, whilst basing content on independent research findings is deemed important by a higher proportion of UK ITDMs (where it's one of the three most commonly reported considerations).

Digital content: Which elements are most important to ITDMs?

59%	47%	46%	43%	42%	41%	38%	35%	34%	31%
Trusted source	Easy to digest/share	Regularly updated	Accessible on-demand	Visual presentation	In-depth analysis	Based on independent research	Wide range of topics covered	Accessible on different devices	Interactive

Base: UK and US ITDMs who consume at least one form of digital content (299) - August 2020

A holistic approach

Gaining insight into developments in technology. Networking and sharing experiences. Hearing from experts in the field. These needs have not gone away with the pandemic. On the contrary, they are more heightened now than they were previously. And yet physical conferences – an erstwhile vital tool in addressing these needs – are no longer available to ITDMs. So they are satisfying these needs digitally – however they can and wherever they can. Many technology vendors have recognised that they need to review their digital marketing and content strategies to reflect the increased importance of the digital channel and the demands now being placed upon it. A holistic approach is required.

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