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Easy to say, harder to do

IT decision makers on vendor comms, claims and customer centricity

What 150 US and UK IT decision makers told us and what B2B tech marketers need to know

“Seriously, it sounds simple, but it makes all the difference (...) take some time to understand what my company actually does (and) our industry's biggest challenges right now.”

Senior US IT decision maker - Media, leisure and entertainment sector

Everyone says they’re customer-centric. But are they really?

Customer-centricity is easy to say but harder to do. The technology sector is no different.

To understand how vendors really measure up, we asked 150 US and UK IT decision makers (ITDMs) with involvement in purchasing about their experiences with technology suppliers: which messages land, what feels misaligned, and what evidence actually builds trust.

The story that emerges is consistent: too many vendors talk at customers rather than understanding them, over-emphasise features over outcomes, and struggle to show credible difference in crowded markets. For B2B tech marketers, this is both a reality check and an opportunity. The brands that ground strategy, propositions, and proof in real customer insight will outpace competitors in 2026: winning attention, accelerating decisions, and strengthening relationships.

Keep reading to learn more about what we found out and how it can help shape your planning for 2026.

About the research

150 IT decision makers were surveyed from across the US and UK. Respondents were from organisations of 500+ employees, from a range of private and public sectors. All respondents were involved in decision making when it comes to IT and technology purchasing decisions at their organisation

There's a disconnect between what buyers want to hear...

...and what vendors are shouting about.

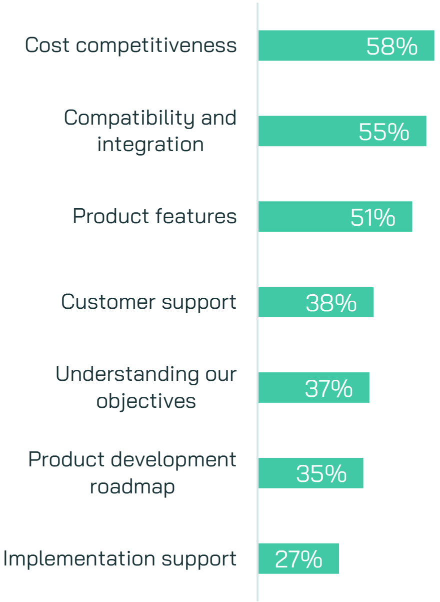
"They often underestimate the complexity of our workflows and specific industry challenges, assuming one-size-fits-all solutions will work."

Senior US IT decision maker - IT, technology and telecoms sector

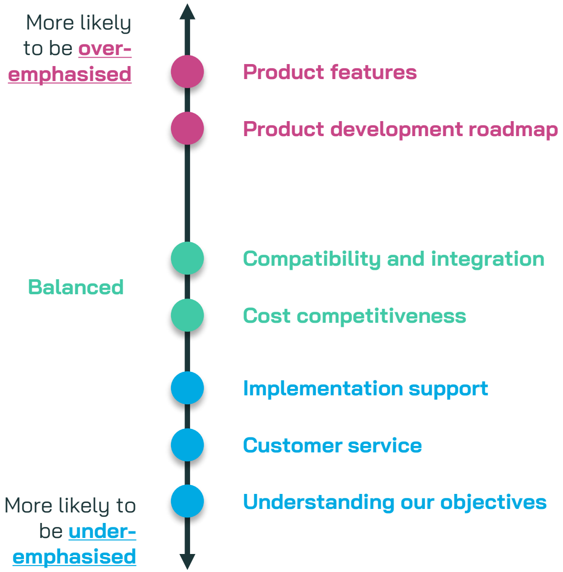
The areas that buyers care about most in vendor comms

vs.

How buyers view vendor comms across these areas



Q. Which areas are most important to you during an engagement with an IT and technology vendor?



Q. Thinking about your engagements with IT and technology vendors, to what extent do you feel the following are over-emphasised or under-emphasised in their communications?

IT decision makers highlight a clear lack of balance in what they hear from vendors.

Most over-emphasised areas are product-related – **features and roadmaps** – which vary in importance to buyers.

The most under-emphasised areas are where true customer-centricity can be demonstrated, in particular: **understanding an organisation's objectives.**

This is a key area for vendors to prioritise, especially as 87% of ITDMs believe that having a better understanding of organisational needs leads to better outcomes for both the buyer and the vendor.

Misalignment, particularly around areas like product roadmaps and customer understanding, is a key challenge for vendors to address.

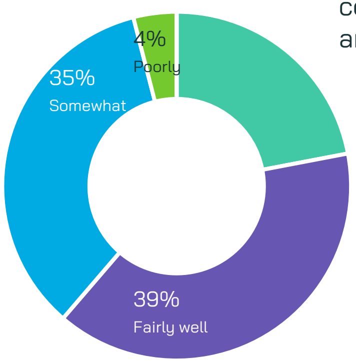
But it seems they have work to do.

"They want to sell the product and don't care on the fit. They will say literally anything to secure the sale."

Senior UK IT decision maker - Retail, distribution and transport sector

There's a big opportunity for vendors to better align their strategies to customer needs

Only **22%** say "very aligned - vendors consistently understand and support our needs"



The rest (**78%**) feel there's room for improvement

Q. How well aligned do you think IT and technology vendors' strategies are to your customer needs?

In fact, many believe vendors are overestimating their strengths, particularly when it comes to:

Understanding our industry (**49%**)

Understanding our objectives (**43%**)

This reinforces the **lack of alignment** between what buyers want and what vendors think they want. How can you make headway selling in a market you don't understand?

Q. In which of the following areas do you feel IT and technology vendors most overestimate their strengths?

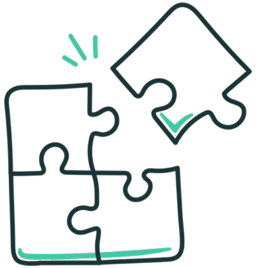
If many vendors are seen as misaligned and overestimating their strengths, that opens up opportunities for others. Those that can address this, will get ahead.

So where to start?

"Focus more on understanding our actual business needs rather than just promoting technical features."

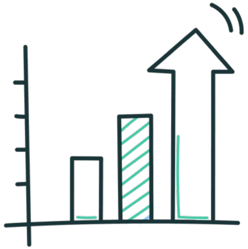
Senior US IT decision maker - Energy, oil/gas and utilities sector

To demonstrate greater alignment, buyers value vendors who invest in understanding their world first, and who use that knowledge to shape relevant, outcome-driven solutions



63%

say vendors should show a **clearer understanding of buyers' industries**, challenges and priorities



57%

say vendors should demonstrate **measurable outcomes against buyers' business objectives**

51%

say vendors should **tailor solutions** to buyers' specific requirements

Q. What could IT and technology vendors do to demonstrate greater alignment and understanding of your needs as a customer?

Understanding means knowing what you know <u>and</u> what you don't.

What is it that vendors are misunderstanding?

“Every time a supplier pitches new software, they assume we can simply replace our old systems, disregarding our legacy tools that need to remain compatible.”

Senior US IT decision maker – Manufacturing sector

ITDMs on what vendors consistently misunderstand about organisations and industries

A one size solution doesn't fit all

"They often misunderstand our unique business needs, assuming one size fits all solutions work without considering compliance scalability or integration challenges." **US IT decision maker - IT, tech and telecoms sector**

The need to bring teams together

"Number of non-aligned interests within our organisation. Different objectives and goals often mean a clash of requirements between different units in the same org. Getting everyone on the same page and satisfying them all requires a good understanding of requirements and our people."
UK IT decision maker - IT, tech and telecoms sector

Escaping the echo chamber

"I think one thing these IT vendors usually get wrong is being quick to assume that technology organisations always want the latest and cutting edge technology. While this is true to some extent, we are more interested in the reliability of these technology products and how well they fit existing systems."
Senior UK IT decision maker - IT, tech and telecoms sector

Connecting the dots

"Lack of overall knowledge about our sector." **UK IT decision maker - Public sector**

Q. What is the one thing IT and tech vendors consistently misunderstand about your organisation or industry?

Properly understanding customer needs is one thing, but demonstrating they can meet those needs is another.

What evidence would buyers want to see from vendors?

“Stop pitching features; bring a proven ROI calculator and a pilot contract that lets us test measurable outcomes first.”

Senior US IT decision maker – Manufacturing sector

Seeing the proof beats brand and third-party validation when it comes to demonstrating value during the sales process

More likely to be considered convincing

65% Technical demos/proof-of-concept

58% Customer case studies

48% ROI/business case data

44% Peer/customer references

43% Independent third-parties/analysts

41% Brand reputation and heritage

Less likely to be considered convincing

Q. What type of evidence do you find most convincing when IT and technology vendors try to demonstrate value to you during the sales process?

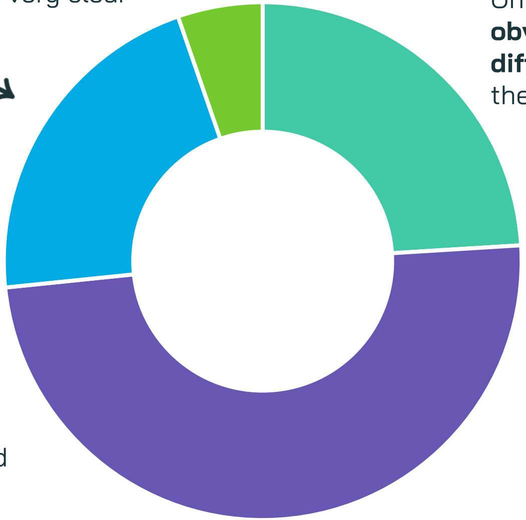
Brand being the least likely factor to convince a buyer to purchase is a wake-up call for marketers – but what's driving this?

The answer might lie in perceptions of differentiation.

"Generally a lot of vendors will try and fit their roadmap into our objectives rather than the other way round, specifically when it comes to pushing AI and Cloud services."

Senior UK IT decision maker – Consumer services sector

Many tech brands sound alike, making it hard for buyers to see why one is a better choice. They need to be clearer in what sets them apart and demonstrate how they deliver results that their competitors cannot.



"Concentrate on fully comprehending our business goals and customising the solution to fit our unique requirements."
Senior US ITDM - IT, tech and telecoms

"Focus less on buzzwords and more on how your product solves a real pain point."
Senior US ITDM - Financial services

Q. In your experience, how clearly do IT and technology vendors communicate what makes them different from competitors during engagements with your organisation?

A call to action for tech brands:
Stand out by understanding customers.

And here's where to start...

Understand before you sell

→ Listen first, then tailor

“Do better research up front and come prepared and then listen to what is shared and evolve the offerings aligned to our needs.”
Senior UK ITDM - financial services sector

“Research and understand how the business is different from the others and what would benefit the business.”
IT decision maker - financial services sector

Be transparent and trustworthy

→ Trust starts with clarity

“Provide a more transparent explanation of the product's limitations and risks, rather than focusing solely on its advantages.”
Senior US ITDM - manufacturing sector

“Important to understand our objectives and. Be transparent about their own motives Over use of the letters “AI” is discouraged.”
Senior UK ITDM - media sector

Prove value early and often

→ Evidence beats adjectives

“Focus on value creation and align with our business strategy, demonstrate measurable outcomes, offer outcome-based commercials.”
Senior UK ITDM - financial services sector

“Employ relatable scenarios that we can all understand. This approach makes it easier to recognise the value.”
Senior US ITDM - manufacturing sector

Each of these themes points to the same truth: vendors that build their strategies on real customer understanding — not assumptions — will earn trust faster and build stronger, longer-lasting relationships.

Q. If you could advise IT and tech vendors to improve on one thing in order to engage more effectively with you, what would it be?

In summary: five key takeaways

In summary: five key takeaways

Alignment is what buyers want, but they don't see it enough

Only the minority consider vendors to be balanced in how they communicate, with misalignment from over-emphasising product roadmaps to under-emphasising their understanding

Vendors over-estimate their strengths – particularly with understanding customers

Many believe vendors are overestimating their strengths, particularly when it comes to understanding customers' industries (49%) and their objectives (43%)

Vendor strategies need to better align with customer needs

Only 22% say they're "very aligned - vendors consistently understand and support our needs"

Demonstrating greater alignment comes from greater understanding

63% say vendors should show a clearer understanding of their industries, challenges and priorities

Tech brands need to be clearer in what sets them apart

Only 24% feel there's an obvious and credible difference in vendors when they engage with them

Discover how market insight research can help >>>

VansonBourne

This research brought real clarity. It gave us tangible, evidence-backed insights into the needs of our ideal customer profile. The findings have added value to everything from persona development to campaign planning, thought leadership, and roadmap decisions.

Brian House - Chief Executive Officer, Elastic Path

Build 2026 around your customers

Great marketing decisions come from real understanding, not guesswork. Market insight research connects you with the voices that matter: the IT decision makers shaping demand and deciding spend. It helps you see priorities clearly, tailor propositions, and prove what works — so every campaign, message, and enablement asset lands with confidence.

And best of all? The results can add value across your business: aligning teams, connecting the dots, and helping you escape the internal echo chamber.

When it's all too easy for companies to claim they're customer-centric, research provides the proof: real insights from real customers.

Want to learn more?

Read more about how market insight research can help your organisation

Discover the work we do with our clients

Get in touch for a conversation with one of our expert team

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Stronger insights. Smarter strategy.

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