



# How the B2B buyer journey is changing in the tech industry

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**DEMANDBASE**



**B2B tech buying is more complex than ever. Larger buying committees, AI-driven decisions and evolving LoB influence are forcing CMOs to rethink ABM and sales strategies.**

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Larger buying committees, rising LoB influence and mixed ABM signals are changing the B2B tech buyer journey.

## How B2B tech buying is changing

B2B tech buying is getting complicated. From the pace of change around genAI to the increasingly crowded C-Suite and greater LoB influence over technology investments, 50% of B2B buying today can involve anywhere from eight to 20 stakeholders.

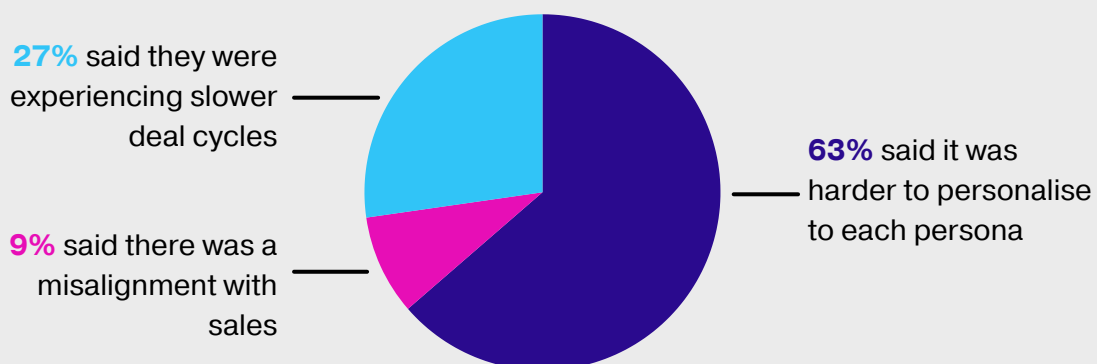
This fast-changing landscape is forcing **CMOs** to rethink how they approach buyers, go-to-market (GTM) and drive revenue growth.

During an online C-Suite Exchange from *HotTopics*, in partnership with Demandbase, B2B marketing leaders from the technology industry explored how shifting buyer habits, new market pressures and advances in artificial intelligence (AI) are changing the B2B buyer landscape.

The discussion, hosted under Chatham House Rule, also touched upon the importance of brand trust, marketing and sales alignment, multi-threaded selling, persona coverage in an age of larger buyer committees - and building successful **ABM** engagement models for breadth and personalisation.

## Larger buyer groups make personalisation challenging

### What's your biggest challenge when navigating larger buying groups?



*"We've seen lower sales cycles, larger buying groups and more complexity to the deal cycle,"* said a Demandbase Executive, reflecting on the results.

For B2B tech CMOs, this growing buyer committee emphasises the importance of knowing the various influencers and decision-makers, tackling ABM hand-in-hand with sales and deciphering first and third-party buyer signals.

## How larger buyer committees are changing B2B tech buying

Research has shown that B2B tech buying committees can be as large as 16-18 executives. This is exacerbated by greater line-of-business (LOB) involvement, senior tech executives entrusting more decisions to their leadership team and the arrival of new C-Suite roles, such as the [Chief AI Officer](#) and CHRO.

*“You’re going through most of that boardroom table; it’s not just the CTO, it’s the CRO, it’s so many different committees and lines of authorisation,”* said one executive.

The challenge is not only targeting personas with the right content on the right channel at the appropriate time, but also weighing the significance of each role as part of the decision-making process.

*“One of our challenges is aligning with sales on who constitutes the buying group – and how much weight we give to certain individuals within the buying committee,”* said one marketing director, referencing procurement as one such example - a department which is *“usually, at the end of the journey for us from a marketing standpoint.”*

This breadth is lengthening deal cycles and making it difficult for B2B tech companies to get in front of decision-makers. Timing and context are everything, so too market and company context - not least given B2B tech cycles can be two years or longer.

From an ABM perspective, partner referrals, trusted, [peer-to-peer communities](#) and more targeted customer advocacy programmes are bearing fruit in driving brand affinity, prospect relationships and, ultimately, shortening the sales cycle.

As one such example of the latter, a marketing leader at an IT service management company explained how developing brand trust - and C-suite relationships - had resulted in one CTO working with them across three separate organisations over a number of years.

## IT and LOB convergence in B2B buyer committees

If buyer groups are expanding, the question then becomes: *who truly holds the power?* Increasingly, that's shifting from IT to LoB leaders in a world of federated decision-making, tech-literate business departments and product-orientated teams.

LoB leaders increasingly control budgets and priorities, particularly when technology investments directly impact their function (e.g marketing, finance).

*"The roles are becoming more complex...you never know if you have to talk to the business persona or the IT persona because, depending on the company, it can be both,"* said one executive.

For many, especially in information security, the Chief Information Officer ([CIO](#)) is still the ultimate decision-maker. And yet marketers face the dual threat of decision-makers staying hidden until late in the sales journey, and also trying to identify the influencers who can internally push or veto a deal.

As one CMO remarked, it's 'two layers of conversation' which marketers need to be having, while being mindful that most buyers are not in the market for a solution. Appealing to product end-users is becoming critical.

*"If the users of the tool aren't bought into the buying decision, they refuse to use the tool,"* said a marketing manager for a network security firm. *"If it's a security tool you've purchased, and your developers don't use it, then it's obsolete."*

*"Sales need to be multi-talented in how they speak to their prospective customer, because that buying persona seems to have changed quite dramatically,"* added another attendee.

But with complex enterprise deals, inevitably, all rises back to the top to the C-Suite – especially given heightened boardroom clamour for AI investments.

## AI is transforming B2B tech buying committees

AI's infusion into all levels of the technology stack, as well as growing accountability around AI in enterprise, is changing the game for B2B tech buying.

If IT is often the bridge into AI, other functions are now involved too: the CHRO, procurement, operations, finance, data protection and legal.

*“A lot of our conversation was about AI and how the buying group has blended - and become harder to pinpoint,”* said Hale. *“This is because of this mandate on most of us, to not only include marketing in our messaging for our products, but to [bring AI into our organisations](#), to make our organisations more efficient.”*

In some cases, marketers find themselves working with Chief AI Officers, helping with buying decisions and operationalising AI across their own organisations.

*“That's been a really useful persona for me as a CMO,”* said a marketing executive.

## Emotional and transactional decisions drive tech buyers

Prospective tech buyers are influenced as much by an emotional sale—aligned to their values, beliefs or career aspirations—as by transactional buying criteria.

This can help elevate brands often doing ‘invisible’ work in b2b tech, such as telecommunications network providers, but there are nuances on how this pitch lands with buyers. As one example, in higher education, peer-to-peer recommendations were the only way forward; in real estate, it was cookie cutter - largely based on product specifications or price, and dependent on if the solution had worked for competitor organisations.

*“What we're doing at the moment is mapping out across our buyer journeys, the key personal motivations for each individual across those and really making sure that our messaging is targeted towards,”* said one marketing leader.

*“We're finding that it is much more effective in terms of engagement.”*

## Deciphering ABM signals and noise

ABM strategies are having to change, particularly to filter buying signals from market noise, to align marketing and sales ambitions and the need to get to clear, achievable ROI.

One remark that prompted a debate was reframing, and rebranding, ABM for business alignment in the first place.

Rather than Account Based Marketing (ABM), one marketing leader had changed this to Account Based Management - a clear identity around strategic accounts, holistic multi-channel tactics and multi-touch plan with proper segmentation. Others preferred ABX.

ABM campaigns are becoming harder due to more influencers, the growing number of millennial decision-makers, the need for functional messaging differences, troubling privacy laws (particularly in Europe) and unclear first-party and third-party buying signals.

*“By the time we pick them up, they probably have already made a lot of their decisions, and they are already evaluating three or four vendors they want to talk to,”* said a B2B SaaS marketer.

*“It’s just really unpredictable,”* she continued, adding the buyer’s journey was far from straightforward or linear. [Leanne Chescoe](#), EMEA field marketing director at Demandbase, agreed, adding that 80% of the decision-making process was completed before buyers would engage with sales.

‘Surrounding the account’ also means more than one touchpoint from one decision-maker.

*“One standalone engagement from one buyer doesn’t necessarily mean they’re ready to buy,”* said Chescoe.

*“[We] should be reaching out to those people. We’re actually looking for multiple engagement from across the buying group,”* she continued, adding the sales team should follow up while marketing continues to nurture. This is particularly true of accounts where marketers are running one-to-one ABM vertical plays, and ‘less broad-based marketing’.

*“It needs to be multiple engagements.”*

*“How do you really look into those third-party signals and even map it with your first-party and then kind of ensure that you are funnelling it down, and then trying to really qualify those accounts where you can have those personalised outreach. And when I say personalised, it could be really, really personalised.”*

## **Deciphering ABM signals and noise**

Ultimately, *sales alignment* remains critical for B2B technology marketers.

This can be difficult when ABM programmes take time, when sales want ‘quick results and big value’ and buyers are only in the market 5% of the time. Marketers, said one attendee, need to be ‘top of mind’ for the remaining 95%.

Bridges are being built.

*“What we’ve seen work is where there is strong sales and marketing alignment in fields,”* said a marketing leader from a US-based network provider.

*“Where that partnership has been strong, we have seen deals progress where marketing can support in all stages of that journey, be that from the RFP stage to getting research. We’re responding to proposals all the way through to the end, where we can share customer advocacy stories.”*

Another executive spoke of product marketing and sales enablement collaborating on accounts through a multi-threaded campaign. *“That is the utopia of that nice feedback loop”* said Hale.

*“We are constantly questioned about the ROI of our investments, and then the performance metrics; what works and what doesn’t work,”* said one CMO.

*“If we put that in the context of trying to engage and convert and upsell an account - that’s such a difficult task. Leadership and sales don’t often appreciate these challenges.”*

*“Sales teams are looking at ABM as a quick fix and you’re having to set KPIs to 18 months to prove the value of ABM.”*

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