

# The Evidence Gap

Why Your Buyers Aren't Convinced —And How To Win Them Over



#### If you were evaluating your own product, would you buy from you?

Think about how you buy B2B software. Maybe you source recommendations from trusted peers, comb through third-party reviews, or check out analyst research. You probably look for a range of data points to help you gain confidence in your decision and pick the right vendor.

There's no one-size-fits-all way to source and research a solution, and shopping for software is harder than it's ever been. There are thousands of new vendors, and with tight scrutiny on budgets, buyers are more hesitant, risk-averse, and frugal than ever before. The wrong purchase could cost their company thousands, and it might even cost them their jobs.

As they wade through a sea of marketing claims, buyers are looking to cut through the noise to find proof they can believe: a substantive business case, a hyper-relevant case study, hard numbers and metrics around ROI, and credible testimonials with actual detail rather than a PR statement. They're looking for **customer evidence**.

Meanwhile, software vendors are feeling the pain — longer buying cycles, lost deals to competitors, and chronic indecision from prospects. Even if the vendor has a great product and happy customers, convincing prospects is tough.

Something is missing: concrete, substantive proof of their product's value and ROI from current customers to drive marketing and sales conversations forward.

An overwhelming majority of vendors know they could do better: **nine out of 10 sellers and marketers wish they were providing higher-quality and more diverse customer evidence** to buyers.

This is what we call the **evidence gap**: buyers need verified, unbiased proof from software vendors, but customer evidence often needs more substance and relevance needed to make the sale.

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"The holy grail of marketing is customer evidence. Marketing teams must prioritize the creation of quantifiable ROI and validations to regain the buyer's trust. Elevating customer stories is no longer a 'nice-to-have' thing; it's essential for winning."



Kyle Lacy CMO, Jellyfish

9 out of 10

# SELLERS AND MARKETERS

wish they were providing higher-quality and more diverse customer evidence

Vendors need a whole new approach to collecting and sharing trusted proof that their product is the real deal.

We surveyed buyers, sellers, and marketers to understand the extent of the evidence gap — in this report, we'll explore how vendors can avoid it.

# **Methodology and demographics**

We had 619 survey respondents across three distinct B2B software audiences:



Buyers





In the survey, we asked buyers about how they search for software, their biggest challenges along the way, and what kind of collateral and evidence they need to make a strong business case to their leadership to bring on a new vendor.

We surveyed sellers and marketers about what (they think) matters to their buyers, what's missing from their customer evidence arsenal, and the challenges they encounter in collecting and producing customer evidence.

Most **buyers** worked in tech-related industries, with the two largest groups coming from IT and services (40%) and computer software (26%).

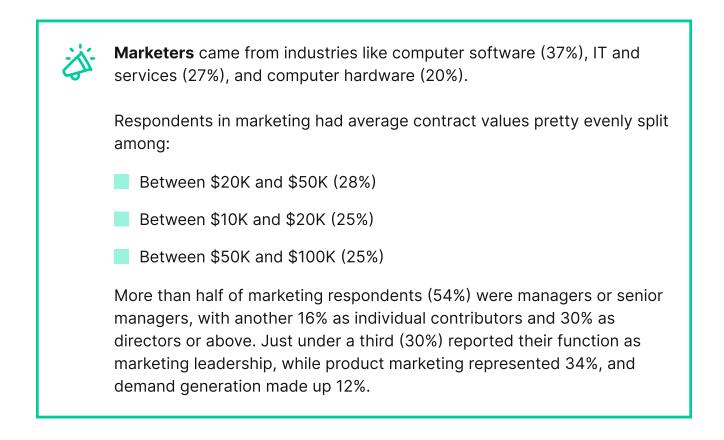
Respondents were overwhelmingly software purchase decision-makers: 44% at the director level, 29% from the C-suite, and 14% at the senior director level.

**Sellers** largely represented tech solutions — the three biggest cohorts were computer software (38%), IT and services (34%), and computer and network security (13%).

Most sellers said their average contract values fell within one of three ranges:

- Between \$50K and \$100K (26%)
- More than \$100K (25%)
- Between \$20K and \$50K (22%)

While a third (34%) of seller respondents were individual contributors, the audience was largely leaders — 43% were managers or senior managers, with the remaining 23% at the director level or above. Their typical functions were sales leadership (29%), sales management (29%), and account executive (28%).



# Your customer evidence crash course

Every software vendor on the planet has (hopefully) used their fair share of case studies and testimonials to make a sale — but those assets aren't enough. What is customer evidence? Customer evidence is **substantive**, **direct proof of success and value from verified users**.

Customer evidence is a category of different types of external-facing assets derived from the voice of the customer. Case studies and testimonials belong in this category, but there's a lot more (and potentially better) formats to communicate the success of your customers.

The vague and highly-varnished customer stories or testimonials aren't enough on their own to build confidence and credibility. Showing ample and diverse customer evidence gives your buyers credible proof that your solution can solve their problems.



It might look like:

- Aggregated, quantifiable ROI data or statistical proof
- Feature-specific validation
- Competitive evidence
- Industry Proof Points
- Account-level stories from many users in an account

Together, these evidence types can be the deal-maker that gives prospects the confidence to become customers. These data points help vendors build a compelling and even undeniable business case for their solution — yet they're also exactly what's missing from the buying process.

# **Customer evidence in the buyer's journey**

How do buyers *buy*? What do they need more of, and how far off are marketers and sellers on what they share with prospects?

To understand both sides of the equation, we surveyed buyers and vendors about the current state of the purchase process.

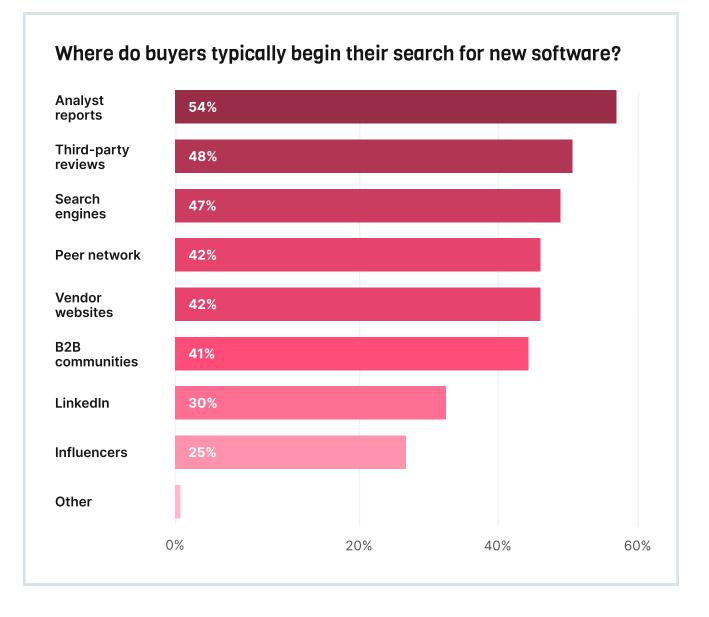
## Where do buyers start?

We asked buyers where they begin looking for software, and over half (54%) answered analyst reports from firms like Forrester or Gartner. In these reports, industry giants vet the "top" options, offering buyers a natural starting point.

But the real value of these reports lies in proprietary data and in-depth research — unbiased and verified resources for buyers. While early-stage companies may not have the budget to be part of a big-name industry report, they can build trust by producing original research that validates the audience's pain points.

We let buyers give multiple responses for their go-to starting points during their software search, and other popular options include:

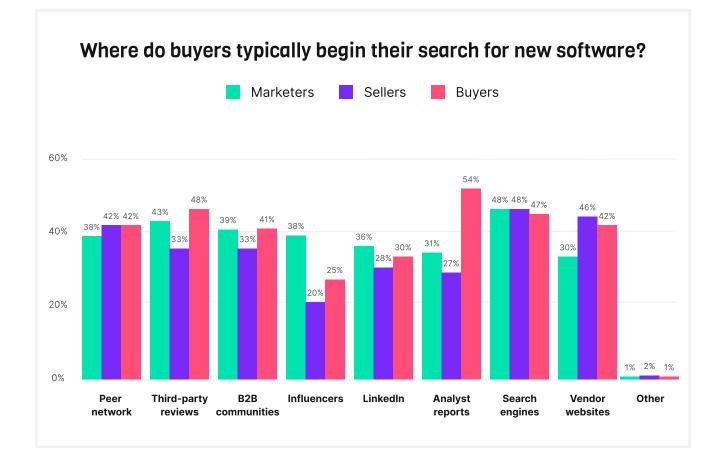




Vendors wish the buying process were a straight line: Software shoppers visit their website, convert into a warm lead, hop on a discovery call, and move straight to close. Easy. But as buyers showed us above, that journey's much more nuanced: remember, buyers are using *multiple* of the above options, all at once.

Sellers ranked vendor websites at a close second (46%) — but not so with marketers. They put vendor websites in last place (30%), underestimating them compared to buyers by 12 points. Seem counterintuitive? The data tells us buyers want to use vendor websites early in their search, but marketers sense their site isn't delivering the concrete evidence buyers look for there. (Spoiler alert: They're right.) The data also showed that marketers somewhat overestimated the power of socialdriven channels:





Sellers, for their part, underestimated the power of B2B communities like Pavilion and Exit Five early on. A third of sellers (33%) said buyers start looking there, compared to 41% of buyers.

At the same time, more than half of sellers (57%) believe that peer recommendations and word of mouth are the most trustworthy customer evidence type.

If vendors need to be more in sync with buyers in the earliest stages of the purchasing process, what about the rest of the buyer journey?

## How do buyers evaluate solutions and make decisions?

Although most buyers said they *begin* their search with analyst reports, they don't seem to finalize their decision there. That's where customer evidence comes in.

When deciding which software solution they'll actually purchase, **buyers are looking for two things: (1) specificity and (2) relevance.** These attributes build trust and confidence in buyers that the solution will work for them.

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"While a lot of people start their process with analyst reports, that's not how they made the decision. The level of detail is a good start, but it doesn't necessarily tell you how a solution is going to work in your unique environment. The evaluation was much more led by customer evidence."



**Evan Huck** CEO, UserEvidence



## Half of buyers said that the most trustworthy customer evidence types were:

- Statistical evidence (51%)
  - Case studies or testimonials (49%)

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"I'm surprised buyers say they trust case studies most; I would have expected they simply scan them for stats and social proof they need and don't dive in, especially to the longer, more traditional case studies."



#### **Emily Kramer**

Partner and Co-Founder, MKT1

## Buyers don't just want any case study or testimonial, though they want specifics:

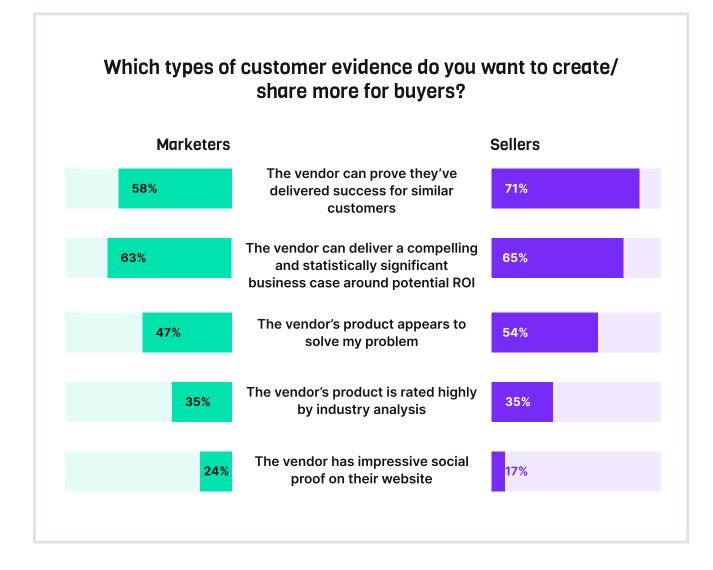
- Two-thirds of buyers (67%) said that the most important factor when evaluating new software was a compelling and statistically significant business case around potential ROI from the vendor.
- Proof of vendor success for similar customers (based on factors like industry, company size, and use case) was a close second at 61%.

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"A good customer case study is hard to come by. Companies often want to use the case study as a PR opportunity and focus on their chosen narrative, rather than the actual problems they solved."



Emma Stratton Founder, Punchy



Cherry-picked "social proof" on your website isn't enough for buyers anymore — in fact, compared to other factors, social proof (cool customer logos on the home page) came in dead last (30%). A basic ondemand product demo and recycling a handful of generic case studies don't hold up.

Buyers want quantitative proof that your solution can do what you claim or a tailored business case that gives them confidence it will meet their needs.

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"Nobody shares customer stories with bad results to balance out the good. We have a real legitimacy problem on our hands. I know I rarely believe what a vendor tells me because I've seen so many times how these numbers are created."



#### Mark Kosoglow

CEO and Co-Founder, Operator.ai Sellers and marketers see where buyers are coming from. When it comes to the most important factors when evaluating software, marketers answered the same as buyers:

- 1 Proof of potential ROI (63%)
- **2** Proof of vendor success for similar customers (58%)

Sellers came close but swapped those top two factors:

- 1 Proof of vendor success for similar customers (71%)
- 2 Proof of potential ROI (65%)

Knowing is only half the battle, though — what really counts is *delivering* customer evidence that matches those priorities. And that's where vendors miss the mark.

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"Sellers aren't going to share evidence for a customer that doesn't mirror their prospect — size, industry, use case, etc. That doesn't de-risk the decision for the buyer, so sellers would rather skip it versus sending something irrelevant and it backfire."



**Devin Reed** Founder, The Reeder

## What's changed for buyers?

Yes, selling software is a *lot* tougher in the current market. Buying has gotten more challenging, too. Here's why.

The rumors are true. Buying committees have increased: Over half of respondents (54%) said more than five internal stakeholders get a say in the buying process.

Nearly half of buyers (46%) also said their required due diligence has increased in the past three years.

#### Their reasons are both sweeping and significant:



Tighter budgets. Decreased budgets mean that approval for purchases is harder to come by and that companies are more concerned about the proven ROI of new software solutions.

More sophisticated scams and

data leaks. With rising security

requirements for cybersecurity

compliance. Buyers feel greater

and security of their data within

pressure to ensure the safety

concerns come stricter

new software.

"We are focused on budget more and want to make sure that we're getting a long-haul product that will last for years and be the right product the first time for our company's success."

- "There are of course financial demands on ensuring the vendor will deliver ROI, but a perhaps undercredited reason is that cybersecurity threats have become more sophisticated and prevalent, making it crucial to vet software vendors rigorously to ensure they can protect sensitive data."
- "Software solutions have become more sophisticated and integrated with other systems. Evaluating these complex solutions requires a deeper understanding of how they will fit into existing IT infrastructures and workflows."



An ever more crowded market. With new solutions arriving constantly, buyers can't always sniff out which vendors are the real deal, so research requires more of them and takes longer.

5)5)

"There are so many new vendors with big promises and lots of fake reviews. It's hard to know if something is legit."



Increasingly complex software solutions. While greater complexity can mean increased functionality, buyers still need to know that new software will integrate within their existing tech stack.

With all those forces at play, it's a wonder that anyone *ever* signs a contract — and vendors are still playing catch-up. As a result, buyers aren't getting what they need. More than half (57%) said their biggest challenge when looking for customer evidence is finding credible product and ROI stats, and 50% cited finding relevant customer examples.

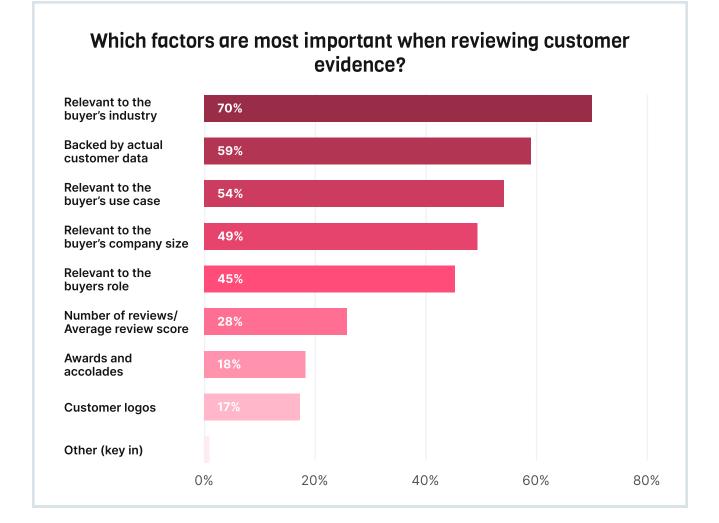
The two most important factors buyers look for in customer evidence are credible specifics and relevance — but they're the two traits that are hardest to find.

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"Buyers want more rigor in the methodology they use to select solutions, and as a result, sellers and marketers need to get more scientific with how they prove their value. This is a huge opportunity to rethink how you communicate value and ROI."

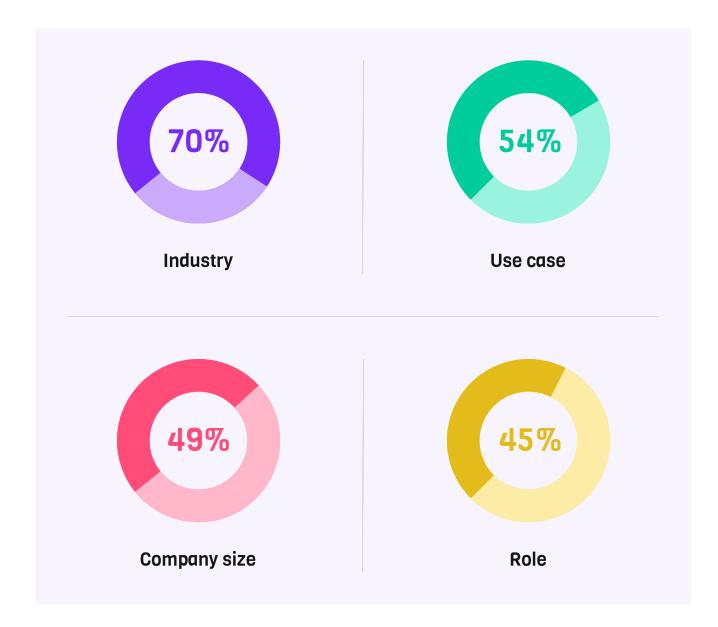


**Evan Huck** CEO, UserEvidence



Over half (59%) said the most important factor when reviewing customer evidence is that it's actually backed by customer data.

What does it mean for customer evidence to be "relevant" to the buyer? Buyers want to see customer proof from similar/like customers, IE customers with the same:



However, this relevance gets really challenging for marketers to deliver. Consider a company that sell two products, to 12 different industries, across three company size bands, and four personas. If you wanted to match on all these, **you'd need 3,876 unique combinations**. Even if your goal was just matching on both product and industry, you'd need 24 unique stories.

# Are vendors focusing on the right things?

Sellers were more likely than marketers to say they provided most types of customer evidence. Sales relies most heavily on 1:1 customer references (55%), even though buyers rated 1:1 customer references as one of the least trustworthy customer evidence types, ranking it second to last (42%). Another drawback here? Customer references are far from sustainable or scalable. Advocates can burn out quickly, leaving sales scrambling again to find another happy customer to talk to prospects.

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"We've seen similar things when asking sellers how often they offer a customer reference pretty much no one offers it proactively."



Mac Reddin CEO, Commsor

Sellers and marketers need to be more in step about providing statistical evidence, too. While four out of 10 marketers said they actually create it, five out of 10 sellers said they share statistical evidence with buyers.

Meanwhile, marketers may be losing sleep over assets that should be low priority. The three least important customer evidence factors for buyers?

- 1 Customer logos (17%)
- 2 Awards and accolades (18%)
- 3 Number of reviews or average review score (28%)

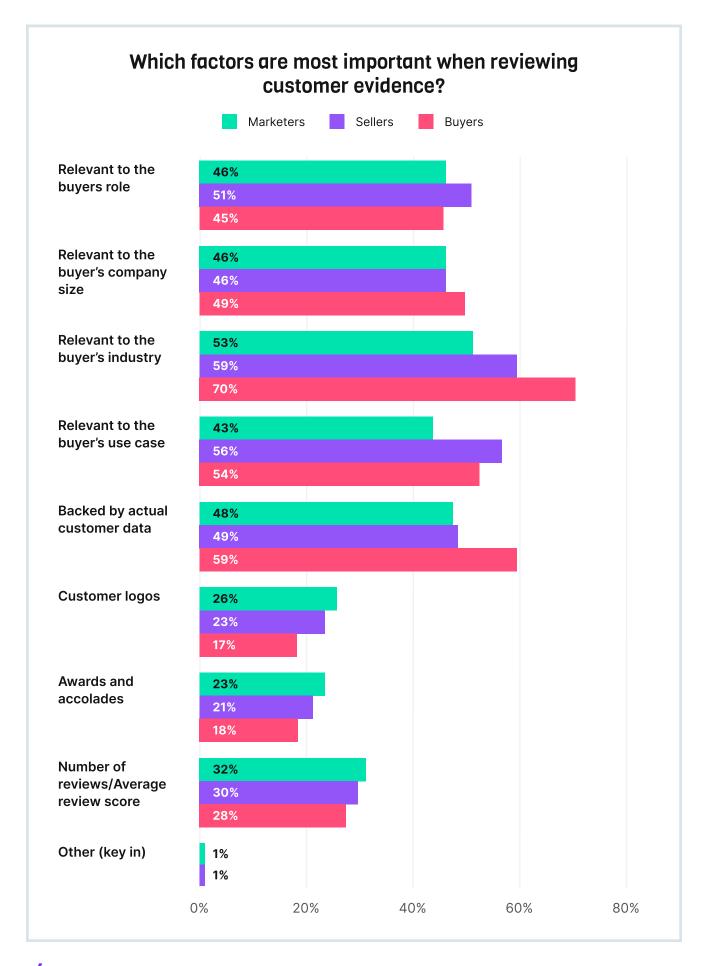
# 99

"We all spend so much time on adding new logos to our website and sourcing more reviews from customers, but, interestingly, it doesn't actually matter as much."



#### **Adam Schoenfeld**

CEO and Co-Founder, Keyplay



Marketing may be hustling to share customer evidence around that shiny new industry recognition or flashy logo, but here's the hard pill to swallow: most buyers don't care. And even though marketers seem to know that building a statistical business case is crucial, that's not what they're working on:

The #1 asset they create now? Third-party reviews (52%)

The #1 asset they want to create? 1:1 customer references (48%)

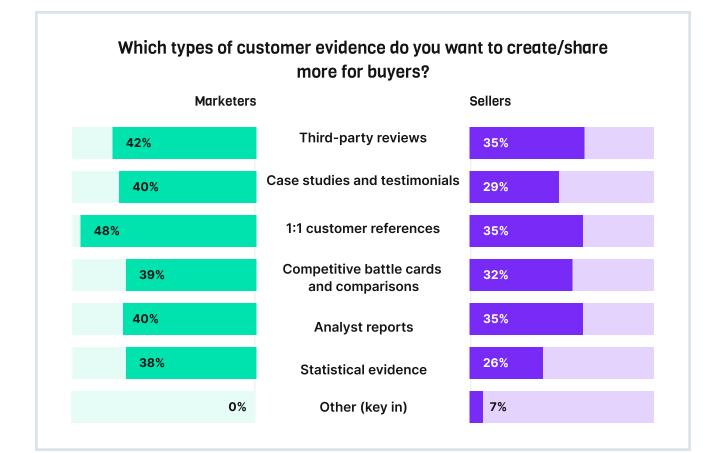
In other words, ROI and customer stats simply aren't at the top of their to-do list, now or in the future. Case in point: Just 38% of marketers said they want to create more statistical evidence for buyers, putting it dead last.



"Buyers clearly want and trust statistical evidence, but most marketers don't offer it or seem to think it's a priority. It's something marketers are getting wrong."



Jason Oakley Founder, ProductivePMM



Here's one of the biggest red flags for vendors: **Buyers were nearly 20 percent more likely to say that statistical evidence was trustworthy (51%) than vendors (32%).** 

# 4 out of 10 buyers said they do not see statistical evidence from vendors

46%

do not see customer evidence offering feature-specific validation do not see customer evidence offering **competitive intelligence** 

45%

..even though all of the above would increase their confidence when buying.

Buyers trust a wide range of customer evidence, so it's time for vendors to take advantage by providing multiple types of customer evidence in tandem:

Instead of just creating case studies about marquee logos that may or may not be relevant to the prospect, build a diverse arsenal of stories about detailed business cases in industries specific to different buyers.

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"Relevant customer stories need to be customer defined-problems in customer language. Internal teams often look for stories that validate their point of view, not the customer point of view."



**Kyle Asαy** VP Global Growth Sales, LaunchDarkly

- Rather than over indexing on carefully curated testimonials, marketers need to find ways to produce believable statistical evidence around ROI and product value.
- Quantity may actually beget Quality. That is, in order to have quality, content needs to be relevant. And in order to have relevance, you have to have a lot of different stories across different industries, sizes, use-cases, regions, product lines, competitors, etc.

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"Buyers are literally telling sellers what they want to see in order to make buying decisions, and sellers are just saying no. Once again, this proves the companies that can meet buyers where they are and win their trust will win."



Adam Goyette Founder, Growth Union

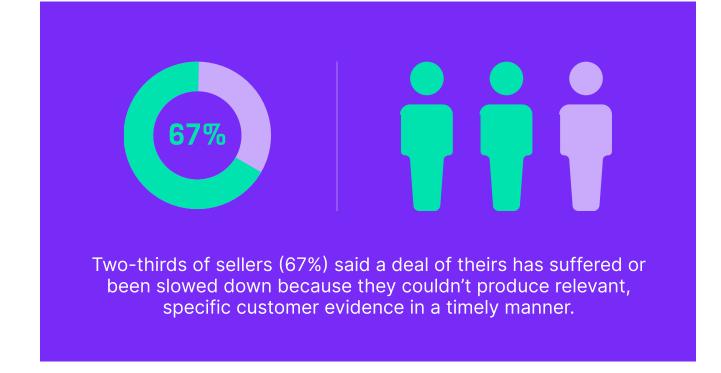
Taken together, these strategies to produce a robust library of customer evidence assets can establish the credibility your buyers need to sign.

# What customer evidence does your GTM team need?

In the current state of software sales, vendors have to jump through more hoops than an Olympic gymnast to close the deal. So, what's a seller or marketer to do? Let's explore what these teams have, what they need, and how to give customer evidencegathering a makeover.

# Sellers don't have enough concrete customer evidence

We've shown that buyers want more from customer evidence. Sellers do, too: 85% of sellers wished they had higher-quality and more diverse customer evidence from their marketing team. They're not just being aspirational, either.



#### Here's a selection of what sellers said:

- "I sell a product where the true ROI is difficult to define and requires a leap of faith to buy. When a CFO sees our product as a line item, they often want to shrink the spend. I need compelling business evidence to push it over the line."
- "I've recently had a couple RFP's for non-profit prospects. We have worked with non-profits, but none of them are referenceable nor do we have stories from them. We didn't win those RFPs."

"A lack of relevant evidence makes it difficult for the prospect to see how we can help, and how they can benefit from our products. We lost a \$1,000,000+ sale because we could not prove why a product would do well with a prospect in the financial services industry".

# **55%**

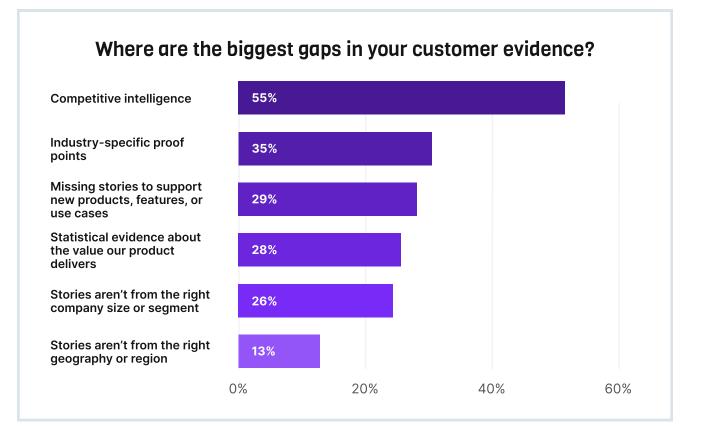
More than half (55%) said their biggest gap in customer evidence is **competitive intelligence** 



**Example:** why users switched from a competitor, what's better/ different about our product vs theirs), the top response by far



**This makes sense** against the increasingly crowded and noisy market (with increased due diligence required to separate wheat from chaffe) that buyers reported



Sales needs verified, unbiased industry proof that shows their solution is better than the alternatives. We're not talking about a feature comparison page on your website — or even a competitive battle card, which buyers ranked as the least trustworthy type of customer evidence. Instead, sales has to lean on their customers to answer the question, "why should we choose you vs your competitor?"



What is good competitive evidence? Direct feedback from customers about:

- Why they chose your product vs a particular competitor
- What features/differentiators tipped the scales in the decision.
- If the customer switched/ migrated - what has been the impact/value post switch?
  - How hard/easy was it to switch/migrate?

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"Giving someone a proof point by itself seems like it might lead to it not being used. Giving a seller a proof point and telling them exactly where it fits into your demo flow has a higher chance of being used because you remove the complexity of trying to figure out how to use it."



Chris Orlob CEO, pclub.io

TL;DR

Missing customer evidence makes sellers' jobs harder and costs them deals. They need something better.

# Marketers know they need better customer evidence, but they're stuck

Nine out of 10 marketers wish they could provide more diverse customer evidence to sales. They know what buyers are asking for and the gaps in the customer evidence they provide to sales (and, ultimately, to buyers). Three of the most common gaps?

- Competitive intelligence (55%)
- Industry-specific proof points (48%)
- Statistical evidence about the value their product delivers (37%)

Even as they recognize their opportunities for improvement, marketers face overwhelming obstacles when trying to *create* customer evidence. These were their biggest challenges:



Let's sum that up:

- 1 It's hard to even talk directly to customers (without having to go through Customer Success or an Account Manager or Sales).
- 2 When they do talk to customers and have a potential story, the story often gets shut down by legal and PR approvals.
- 3 If they get through all of that, there's still weeks of review cycles to produce a single external asset.

While buyers and sellers need more customer evidence, marketers need more hours in the day. And they need some help from sales and customer teams. Marketing teams need better strategies, processes and tools to reach customers directly, at scale, and efficiently transform positive customer feedback into useable external content.

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"Marketers don't prioritize case studies because it can be so difficult to get ROI data from customers. SaaS is more competitive than ever, so while customers may be happy to talk about their great experience using your software, they may not want to give specific stats that reveal a competitive advantage."



#### Natalie Marcotullio

Head of Growth and Operations at Navattic To deliver credible specifics, marketers have to capture customer data and stats. To deliver relevance, they have to deliver quantity and scale from the evidence they capture. It's a tough task.



Marketers are trapped under the weight of creating customer evidence at scale. They need more open lines of communication with customers and tools to double down on data-backed, original research content.

# Tackling the challenge as one team

Marketing and sales are chasing their tails. Sales is constantly looking to marketing for more customer evidence. Marketers need customer access from sales and customer success to create those assets. It's a broken feedback loop, and neither team gets what they need.

The way forward is good old-fashioned sales and marketing alignment. They need to get on the same page about the customer evidence gap, and then work as a team to identify which verticals, business cases, and customers should be everyone's top priority.

And here's the good news. Software companies typically have what they need to create better customer evidence waiting in the wings: hundreds (and sometimes thousands) of satisfied users who have seen the tangible value and ROI from using the product. The biggest thing standing in vendors' way? They don't have the process or tools to scale it all. Marketing and sales need to get on the same page about customer evidence collecting, curating, and distributing it — to support the other team and meet buyers' needs.

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"We don't want to bother our customers, and customers aren't incentivized to help us. After all, it's not their job to help us. One way forward? Senior leadership needs to unblock any barriers and facilitate connection."



### Amanda Natividad

VP of Marketing at SparkToro



With better processes and a customer evidence platform, each team can achieve its goals. The GTM team can create a scalable, ongoing channel for collecting statistical evidence directly from customers and a centralized bank of customer evidence for sales to reference and share. Marketing and sales can nail the process, scale their efforts, and capture relevant, concrete proof.

# Where do we go from here, and how do we close the evidence gap?

If there's a light at the end of the tunnel, it's this: Vendors and buyers can escape this downward spiral of mistrust. Ready to make a change? Here are our top three tactical takeaways for sellers and marketers in light of the data.

# 1 Get proactive and ask questions

Both sellers and marketers want better customer evidence. To get it, they need better conversations about what sales needs and what buyers are looking for.

All too often, marketers make educated guesses about what they think sales needs instead of outright asking:

- Which customer evidence types do sellers need in which conversations?
- What objections are they running into most?
- What common use cases are prospects asking about?

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"The reason we don't see as much high-quality, relevant content from Marketing is that they don't have enough conversations with Sales about current objections and challenges. If Marketing took the time to have these discussions, they could create more targeted and effective content."



Morgan Ingram CEO at AMP Creative Sure, the sales team might not always be able to articulate precisely what they need. But better customer evidence starts when sales and marketing talk to each other openly.

Sellers can share what they see in the market, and marketing can pinpoint what they can do to help. That's how everyone gets on the same page with their marching orders to capture the evidence that can close the deal.

# 2 Embrace transparency

"X customer increased revenue by 7,000%!"

Everyone's heard a bullshit claim like this from a software vendor. Buyers know it's too good to be true, and they tune these outlandish numbers out. Instead of spinning a crazy number from an outlier customer, vendors can rebuild trust with more transparent and realistic customer evidence.

For instance, if you have a legit stat like the one above, share the numbers behind that number. What was their baseline? Where did they start and end? Did they go from \$1 to \$70? Or did they start at \$100K? Those are two very different results; prospects are more likely to believe a statistical claim if you share context.

We've already noted how important relevancy is to buyers. Instead of sharing just one customer's ROI results, for instance, share average ROI metrics across customers in a certain industry of a specific company size. "These types of customers typically achieve between Y and Z results" is a lot more credible than "This customer got X results one time."

Full transparency isn't always possible, especially in sensitive or highly regulated industries. Share customer results in a way that buyers feel good about by anonymizing customer evidence. Protect the customer's identity while sharing verified stats and actual product performance.



# 3 Stop doing what you've always done

If you take one thing away from this report, let it be this: Buying has changed drastically in the last few years, which means selling needs significant changes, too.

With greater due diligence and more stakeholders comes greater scrutiny and skepticism. Yet vendors, in many cases, are still doing what they've done forever.

Here's an example. Buyers want relevance. But let's say a brand has three products with four use cases each and customers in 15 industries across six regions. For the marketing team, that's triple digits' worth of potential targeted case studies for any possible prospect. Meeting the growing demands for relevant customer evidence the oldfashioned way is an insurmountable task, even for a well-resourced marketing team.

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"Making case studies often feels like the least rewarding thing to spend time on as a marketer. They take forever, they usually come out (dare I say) a bit boring, back and forth with customers is hard, it's hard to track the impact on revenue growth and if sales is even using them."



Emily Kramer Partner and Co-Founder at MKT1

What vendors shouldn't do is just power through and approach customer evidence the same way they always have (going one-by-one and begging for case studies). They won't be able to keep up, and buyers still won't get what they need.

Vendors have to change their tactics to keep up. They need to source concrete, substantive, and verified customer evidence from a much larger, more diverse and representative sample of the customers to prove beyond doubt they can deliver value.

It's not easy to completely transform how you collect and curate customer proof. That's why marketers need new processes and tools (like a customer evidence platform) that can help them create customer evidence at scale. Sellers need new inroads to get unbiased stories and ROI data from happy customers into marketers' hands.

Want different results? Do something different. Build a scalable, repeatable system to capture compelling and ongoing customer evidence.

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"This is your pipeline on the line. Time to move customer stories from a nice-to-have to a requirement for winning against your competition."



#### **Kaylee Edmondson**

Founder, DemandLoops



# The buying process needs an overhaul, and customer evidence is the blueprint

Buyers, sellers, and marketers are in this together — everyone knows something is broken in the purchase process. Without some major changes, software sales will remain stale and stalled indefinitely. It's on software vendors to respond to what buyers say they're looking for and forge a new path to get them the good stuff.

The data is clear: It's time to reset the customer evidence workflow to build something that works for buyers, sellers, and marketers alike.

Trust is the missing ingredient, and customer evidence is how you rebuild it.

UserEvidence is the Customer Evidence Platform that helps you collect feedback, curate success stories, and create content that credibly proves the value of your product.

B2B marketing teams at Gong, Pendo, and Ramp rely on UserEvidence to create verified customer evidence.

