

# **THE END OF THE AWARENESS PHASE**

# **AND THE RISE OF DECISION- READY BUYING**

How marketers must evolve and meet the more-informed  
buyer where they are in their journey

# THE SHIFT IN BUYER BEHAVIOR

Lower the curtain. Applaud the role. Prepare for the next act. The awareness phase of the customer buying journey is officially over thanks in large part to the rapid growth of robust, valuable online marketing content that has become a central character in the purchase process. Designed to educate and inform, this content has altered the path to purchase and now enables potential buyers to skip the early hand-raising altogether. Why does this matter? If most buyers have conducted research before initial contact, the marketer's role has fundamentally changed.

## The new buyer reality

The age of the blank slate is over. Today's buyers come to the sales process informed, opinionated and ready to challenge assumptions. Research shows that most decision-makers have already completed a significant portion of their journey — more than 70% — before ever engaging with a vendor.<sup>1</sup> This shift is fueled by the rise of self-education. Whether through Google searches, peer forums or analyst reports, buyers are gathering the insights they need on their own terms and timelines.

In fact, 81% of buyers already have a preferred vendor and 85% have finalized their purchase requirements — before first contact.<sup>2</sup> Forrester data reinforces this trend: 92% of B2B buyers start with at least one vendor in mind, and 41% already have a single preferred vendor selected before a formal evaluation begins.<sup>3</sup>

Marketers have responded and helped ignite the trend by flooding the digital landscape with educational assets. The result is an accelerated buying cycle where the awareness phase isn't just shorter — it's often bypassed entirely thanks to direct-to-consideration marketing. Buyers are now initially guided not by sales pitches, but by educational assets: case studies, white papers, videos and thought leadership designed to inform and influence and neatly summarized by generative AI tools and large language models (LLMs) that provide personalized, on-demand clarity and accelerate decision-making.

By the time a prospect does surface for air, they've already progressed far beyond discovery through self-education emboldened by content profusion.



## 74%

of customers research solutions online before contacting a company<sup>1</sup>

## 3 out of 4

buyers expect suppliers to bring new insights, not just products<sup>1</sup>

## 9 in 10

B2B buyers say online content directly influences their purchasing decisions<sup>2</sup>

# IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING TEAMS

For marketing teams, the new buyer reality can have clear consequences. Traditional awareness tactics — banner ads, broad recognition campaigns or surface-level messaging — no longer drive meaningful engagement alone. Buyers don't have the patience to be pulled into a collapsed marketing funnel; they're already halfway down it by the time you appear on their radar. The role of marketing is no longer to *create* awareness but to *add value* once awareness already exists.

That means shifting from attention-grabbing to truth-telling and outcome-driven results. Buzzwords and generic claims don't just fail to persuade — they actively erode trust. Buyers have learned to tune out noise and filter for substance.

Credibility, clarity and candor now carry more weight than polished taglines. A well-researched case study or a candid explainer will outperform a slick awareness ad every time.

At the same time, content saturation might lead to fatigue. Prospects — because they have educated themselves — can spot hollow thought leadership or thinly veiled sales pitches and won't waste time on it. In fact, producing low-value content is worse than producing nothing at all because it signals that your brand doesn't understand your audience's reality. The mandate for marketing teams is to publish fewer, better assets — genuinely useful content that earns trust and accelerates decisions.

## QUICK MARKETING CHECKLIST: WHAT BUYERS EXPECT TODAY

- Clear, jargon-free explanations
- Real-world proof points
- Customer experiences from authentic voices
- Outcome-focused content
- Confidence in the brand behind the solution (with the product as the final offering)



## Meeting buyers where they are

If awareness has shifted out of marketers' control, influence begins with genuine connection, clear resonance and relevant proof. Buyers today don't want to be sold on features. They want to understand how offerings make their lives easier, faster or better. The central question is, *"Will this solution work for me in my context and deliver the results I need?"* and not, *"What does this product do?"* Leading with outcomes shows empathy and signals you've listened to their priorities before presenting your own.

Authenticity is equally non-negotiable. Prospects are drawn to brands that feel familiar. They trust that the people have put the work in, learned from it and are comfortable openly sharing wins and lessons learned. Marketers who acknowledge these challenges (or setbacks) alongside successes build more credibility than those who present only polished, one-sided narratives.

Just as a counterargument makes an original argument stronger, candor shows relatability, and that translates to trust.

Real offerings, delivered by real people, resonate far beyond a presentation. Case studies, customer testimonials and verifiable data points help cut through skepticism in ways marketing copy rarely can. In fact, peer validation consistently ranks as one of the most influential factors in purchase decisions.<sup>4</sup> By leaning into customer voices and measurable outcomes, marketers meet buyers where they already are: informed but cautious and searching for affirming evidence.

It's no longer about just pushing messages into the market. It's about earning trust by amplifying authentic experiences, familiar voices and tangible results from recognized partners. Because the *why* still matters; it's the *how* that is different.

## Content still matters. It's just consumed differently now.

Content remains the foundation of influence, even if buyers are arriving more prepared than ever. What's changed is *how* that content is consumed. Think of it as high-octane fuel — not just for prospects, but for the search engines, algorithms, as well as the AI tools that interpret and deliver it. Generative AI is already reshaping the way buyers uncover information. Strong, well-structured content becomes the raw material that AI condenses into insights, comparisons and recommendations that more-informed buyers can act on.

This raises the bar for quality. Specificity, clarity and technical precision matter more now. A hierarchy of clean information, smart use of schemas and metadata, and logical ordering ensure that your insights can be understood not just by people but also the many digital eyes and machines that shape what people see.<sup>5</sup>

Marketers also face increasingly complex buying groups. Enterprise decisions now involve more stakeholders across various functions, meaning content must address diverse needs, including technical validation for IT, ROI for finance, and risk reduction for leadership.

### Three rules for navigating the navigators and making content more AI-ready

- 1 BE SPECIFIC:** Avoid vague claims and include data, examples and proof points
- 2 STRUCTURE SMARTLY:** Use clear headers, lists and schemas so content is machine-readable
- 3 WRITE FOR ROLES:** Address multiple decision-makers with tailored perspectives







## The role of brand in a post-awareness world

In a buying journey increasingly shaped by algorithms, the brand becomes a decisive differentiator. Generative AI tools and LLMs condense information into tidy, digestible comparisons, often presenting multiple solutions side by side. This is helpful for the buyer, but many offerings appear more interchangeable when aggregated and lose the nuance that marketers have worked so hard to build.

This is where brand equity matters most — the comfort of familiarity, the confidence that comes with recognition and credibility of a trusted name all shape decision-making when buyers face what appear to be similar options. A strong brand can tilt the scales even when capabilities are evenly matched. In fact, research consistently shows that trusted brands are not only chosen more

often but are perceived as lower-risk investments.<sup>6</sup>

Equally important is building a category narrative that transcends product features. Clear storytelling grounded in real-world outcomes and expertise give buyers a reason to believe in your company's vision, not just its products. And while digital channels have leveled the competitive field, they've also elevated the importance of recognizable human voices. Subject matter experts, executives and customer advocates all serve as brand ambassadors who bring familiarity, credibility and clarity to the conversation. Brand equity is no longer just the backdrop to the buyer journey. It's often the deciding factor, especially when the brand is one that people already know and trust.

## What's next for marketers and SMEs

In today's buyer-driven landscape, the best referral marketing doesn't feel like marketing at all. It feels more like help, and that begins with authenticity: sharing customer experiences, lessons learned and measurable outcomes rather than hollow, polished claims. Marketers and subject matter experts who speak with candor position themselves as trusted partners who solve real challenges, not vendors with another slide deck to show.

Education also always beats boastful promotion. When buyers can act on your insights (even if they don't immediately choose you), you build long-term credibility that pays dividends later in the cycle, when it matters most. The balance lies in breadth and depth. Broad, entry-

point content such as blogs or videos still retains value, but only when it ladders into deeper, outcome-driven insights that answer the buyer's question, *"How will this work for me?"*

The best content creates clarity and comfort and makes complex challenges feel solvable. It also reminds buyers that they are in good hands; they're with people who have been there and know how to deliver. Content should seamlessly feed into consultative conversations, so equipping sales teams with tools to validate and expand on buyers' research, rather than launching cold pitches, is critical and reinforces being in touch with their needs.



### **PRACTICAL TIPS:** Three things to stop, three things to start

#### **STOP:**

- Feature-first messaging
- "One-size-fits-all" content
- Using diluted, fluffy buzzwords

#### **START:**

- Leading with outcomes and clarity
- Sharing real customer proof
- Equipping sales with actionable narratives

# THRIVING AND SHINING BEYOND AWARENESS

If awareness is no longer what we once knew it to be, it's only because marketing has evolved into something more vibrant and powerful. Buyers no longer need to be told what's out there. They already know. What they do need is help making sense of it all, which is where modern marketing lives: building trust, credibility and clarity, not just broadcasting messages.

The outlook is bright for companies willing to embrace this shift. By grounding content in authenticity, leading with outcomes instead of features and cultivating a brand that resonates even when solutions can get lost in a sea of sameness, marketers can do more than survive — they can thrive. The role isn't diminished. It's elevated. Marketing, like customers, has moved beyond zero-awareness purchases to become a critical driver of confidence, decision-making and long-term loyalty.

The challenge is to meet today's more-prepared buyer with honesty, expertise and proof, which is also an opportunity. Those who cling to old awareness playbooks risk being tuned out. Those who adapt will not just be part of the conversation; they'll help shape it.



## References

1. 6sense, "Findings from 6sense Research: When Do B2B Buyers Reach Out to Sales?" Aleksey Paneko, January 8, 2025. [Accessed September 3, 2025]
2. Demand Gen Report, "80% Of B2B Buyers Initiate First Contact, Once They're 70% Through Their Buying Journey," Kelly Lindenau, October 10, 2024. [Accessed September 3, 2025]
3. Digital Commerce 360, "Forrester: B2B buyers choose vendors before the buying process begins," Mark Brohan, July 7, 2025. [Accessed September 3, 2025]
4. Renasence, "Peer Influence Bias: Influence of Peers on Decisions," August 28, 2024. [Accessed September 3, 2025]
5. Moz, "What Is Schema Markup And How To Implement It," Chima Mmaje, November 11, 2024. [Accessed September 3, 2025]
6. Harvard Business School, "Brand Equity Explained: How To Build And Measure Success," Sallie Allen, November 5, 2024. [Accessed September 3, 2025]

**For more information**

[automation.honeywell.com](https://automation.honeywell.com)

**Honeywell Industrial Automation**

2101 CityWest Blvd  
Houston, TX 77042

© 2025 Honeywell International Inc.

**Honeywell**