



# Influencing B2B Buyers

New insights into  
B2B purchase drivers

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# Executive summary

Digital technology has disrupted the supply-and-demand relationship forever and placed more power in the hands the buyer. As such, sellers need to put the customer at the center of their selling approach.

By being proactive in the purchasing journey, and by entering it earlier than before and with far greater and more detailed knowledge of clients and potential customers, sellers can build relationships with consumers that ensure return business and build powerful connected customer networks.

Those networks can also give sellers a significant competitive advantage.

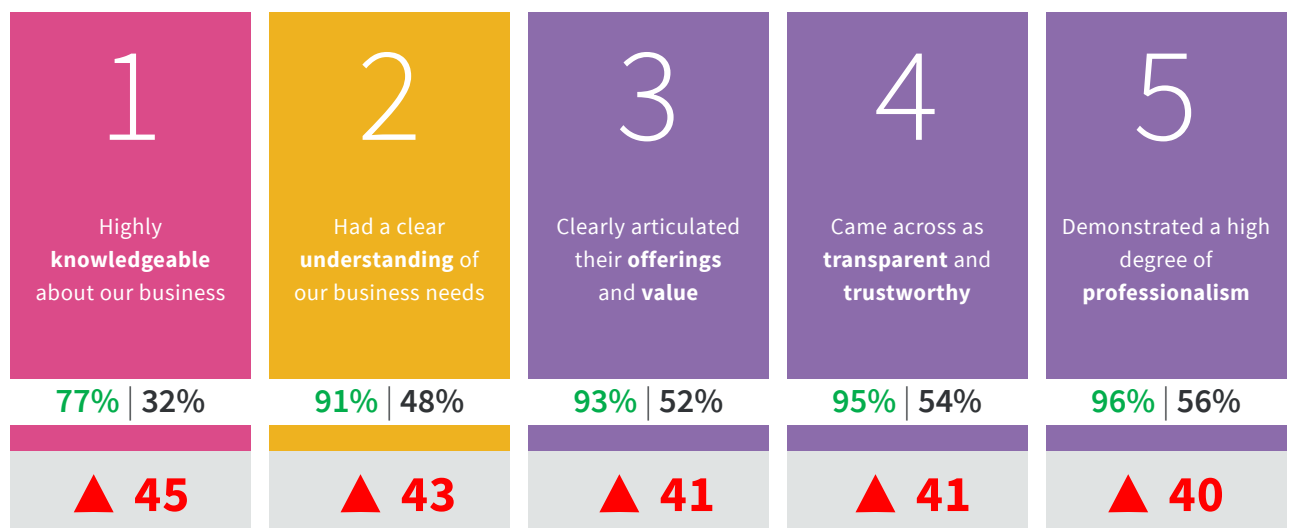
Our data shows that seller behavior across the purchasing journey has an effect on buyers. If your sales and marketing teams begin using social selling as an integral part of their approach, not only will they more reliably hit their sales targets, they are also likely to build lasting relationships with consumers that will ensure sales success into the future.

Turning customers into promoters is key – and this means knowing what your customers want, maybe even before they know it themselves.



# Results on a page

## Top 5 activities that impact Net Promoter Score (NPS) of a sales professional



= Delta between stated rep performance (promoters minus detractors)



# Why turning a customer into a promoter matters.

**Promoters are influenced by their representative:**

**75%** of promoters say their sales rep was a key influence on their purchase decision.

**Promoters are return business:**

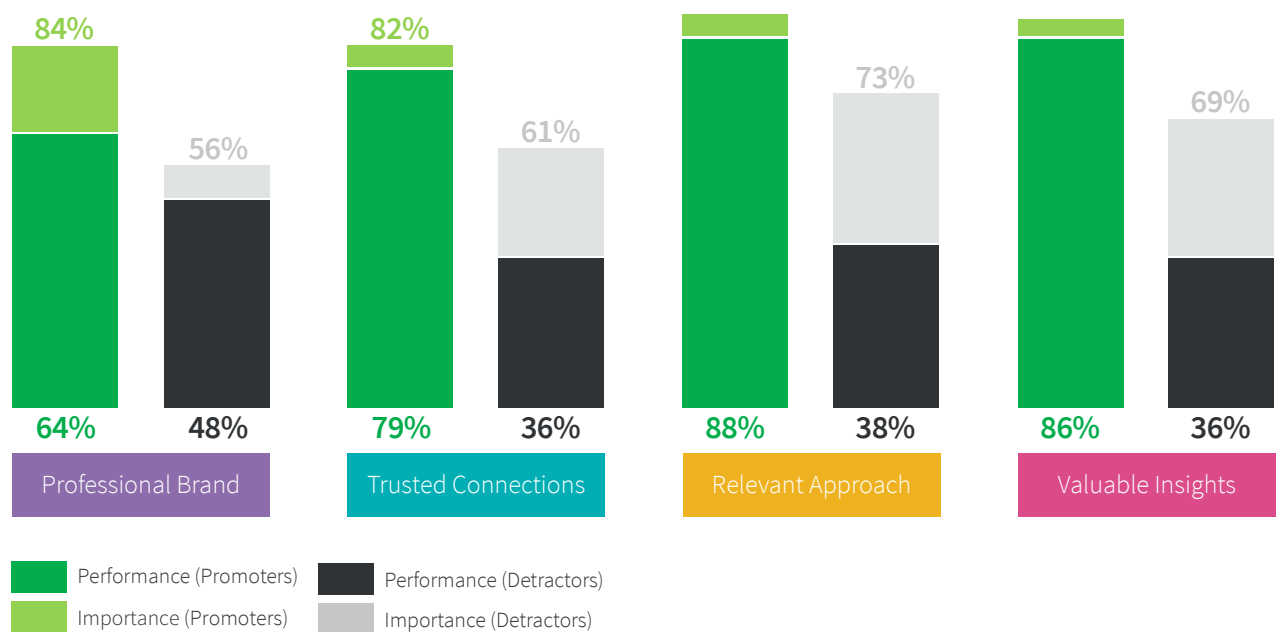
**74%** of promoters want to stick with their rep.

**Detractors are not return business:**

**20%** are likely to work with the same rep at the same provider and only 18% are likely to work with a different rep at the same provider.

# Promoters care about social selling.

A nearly equal proportion of promoters report strong sales rep performance across each pillar.

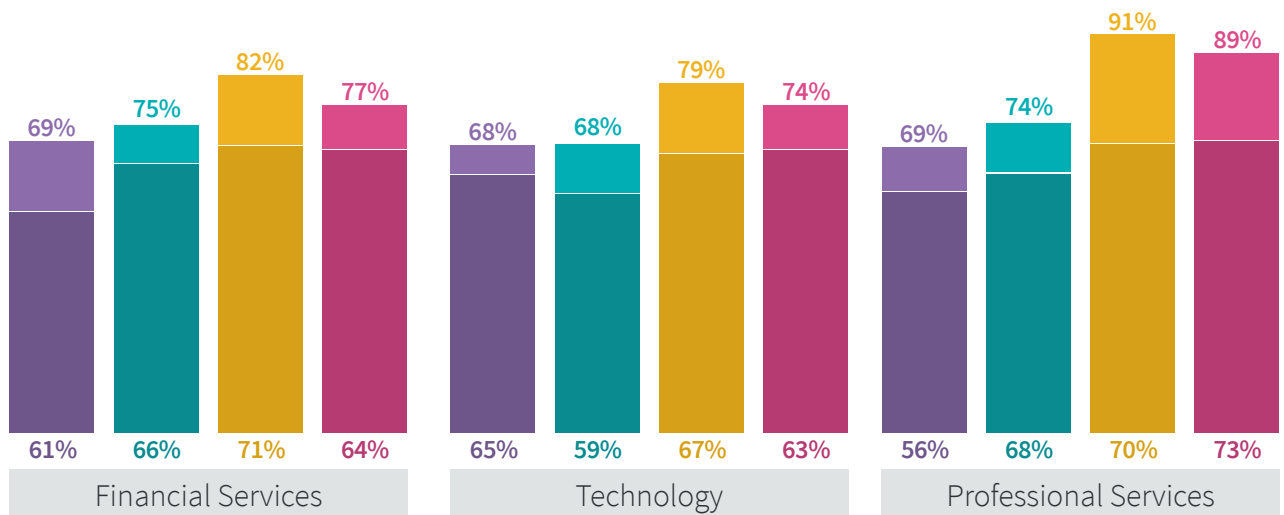


Q: Thinking about sales professional(s) from the provider your company selected for its most recent purchase of [x], how much do you agree disagree with the following statements?

Q: Thinking about sales professional(s) from the provider your company selected for its most recent purchase of [x], on a scale of 0 to 10, how likely would you recommend working with these individuals(s)? / \*NPS (Scale 0-10): Promoters = 9,10; Detractors = 0-6.



# There are gaps between expectation and performance.



Professional Brand Trusted Connections  
Relevant Approach Valuable Insights

% stated importance (light) vs. performance (dark) on each pillar.



# Understanding how digital disruption affects purchase drivers

The phrase 'digital disruption' has been around for a while now. So it's fair to ask: is the concept still important? And how is it affecting purchasing decisions?

Digital disruption is actually something of a misnomer, because the disruption we are seeing across all industries is not necessarily in digital technology itself, but in how it allows consumers to collaborate. Consumers can now connect, interact and communicate on global scales. This collaboration is empowering purchasers more than vendors, meaning purchase drivers are changing.

To better help us predict future business drivers, we need to understand how digital technology has created disruption across multiple industries over the past 20 years.



# A short history of disruption

Product-centric			
<b>Date</b>	Mid '90s	Late '90s	Early '00s
<b>Era</b>	Digitalization	Productization	Interactivity
<b>Defined by</b>	Available, searchable information	Products researchable and buyable	User-generated content
<b>Impact on commerce</b>	Rise of search engines. Example business model disrupted: photography	Rise of e-commerce. Example business model disrupted: brick-and-mortar retail	Rise of blogging and RSS
<b>Example disruptor</b>	AOL	Amazon	WordPress

Customer-centric		
<b>Date</b>	Late '00s	2010s
<b>Era</b>	Collaboration	Experience
<b>Defined by</b>	Social and sharable	Everywhere, real-time and personalized
<b>Impact on commerce</b>	Rise of social networks	Rise of hyperscale platforms
<b>Example disruptor</b>	LinkedIn	Uber

The '90s saw the first significant waves of digital disruption. In both stages – digitalization and productization – disruption was primarily on the supply side, meaning agile, proactive and adaptive businesses had an advantage over their more established competitors.

The most significant development came at the beginning of what is called 'Web 2.0' – the shift to interactivity. Interactivity meant that disruption was now on the demand side. Consumers began engaging with their peers and sharing experiences of products and services, as well as problems and solutions. This collectivized consumer buying power changed the purchasing journey and fundamentally shifted the supply-and-demand dynamic.

The dramatic rise of social networks and the freemium business model has meant value is directly related to the number of users a product has, and the information they share. Keeping users engaged is essential to monetizing 'free' platforms, which has in turn created significant opportunities for users to leverage those platforms for their own business purposes.

Digital technology has fundamentally changed communication, which in turn has affected the relationship between vendor, product and purchaser. We now see that some of the fastest-growing businesses are platforms rather than product owners – think Uber for taxis and Airbnb for accommodation. Instead, customer experience is their competitive advantage.



# What does this mean for you?

There are two important things we must understand about the disruption digital technologies and platforms enable, so you can anticipate potential disruption to your business and maximize the opportunities it offers you.

First, the speed of disruption is increasing and is difficult to predict. Second, that disruption is not linear – an industry or space can be disrupted more than once.

Traditionally, we have predicted the speed of technological advancement in line with [Moore's law](#), which states that the power of computer processing would approximately double every 18 months. As of 2016, the rate of technological advance is slowing, more players are emerging in the technology sector, we are moving into the cloud and it looks like [Moore's law is dead](#).

In short, businesses today cannot rely on the historical speed of technological advance to predict the future of disruption.

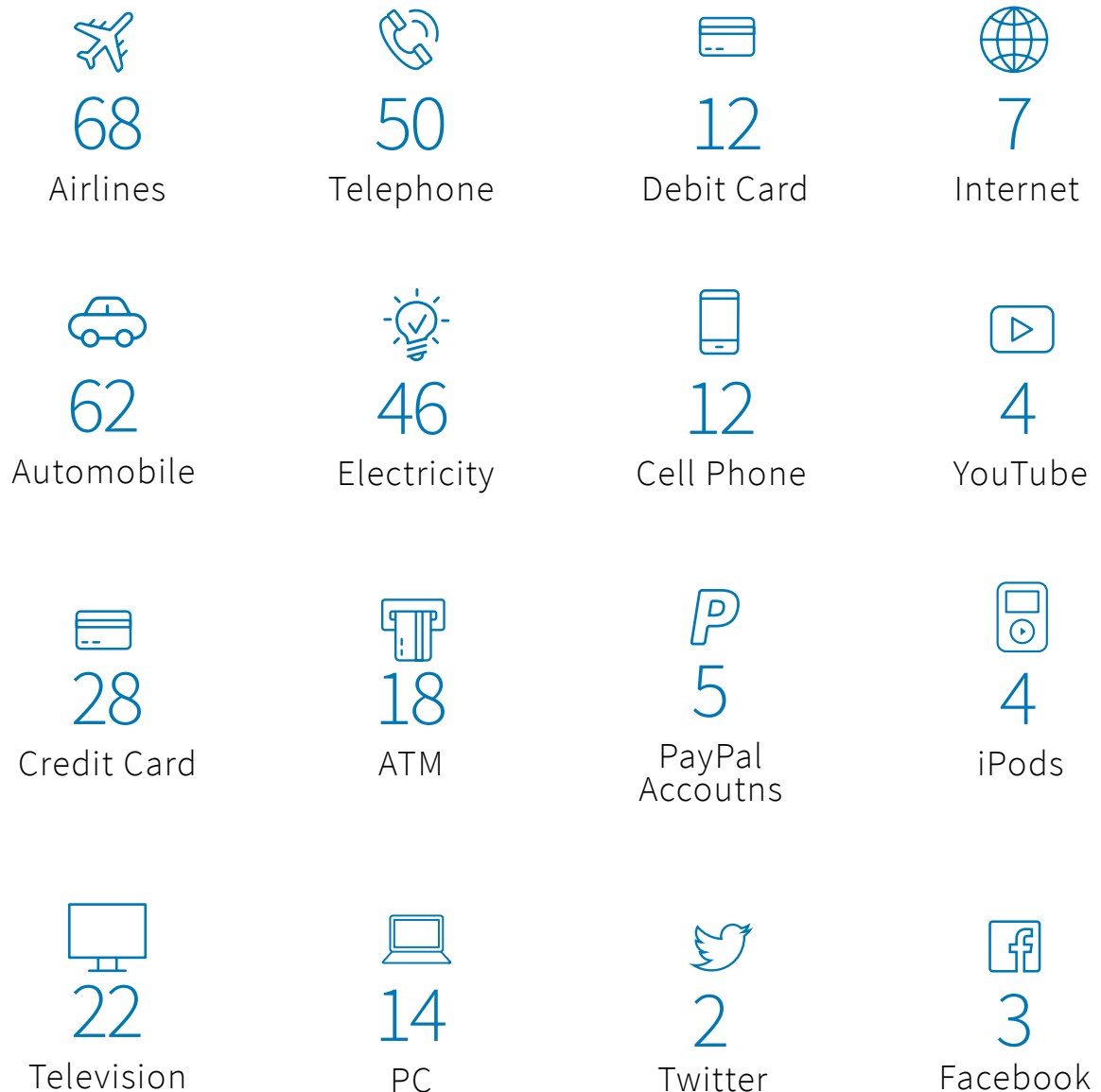
To mitigate this risk, organizations must be proactive with digital technologies, build agility into their way of doing business and, most importantly, know their customers better than ever before.

To illustrate the speed of technology adoption, this chart shows how quickly various technologies were able to reach 50 million users.

# Research results

The speed of user adoption is increasing.

**Years before product gained 50 million users**

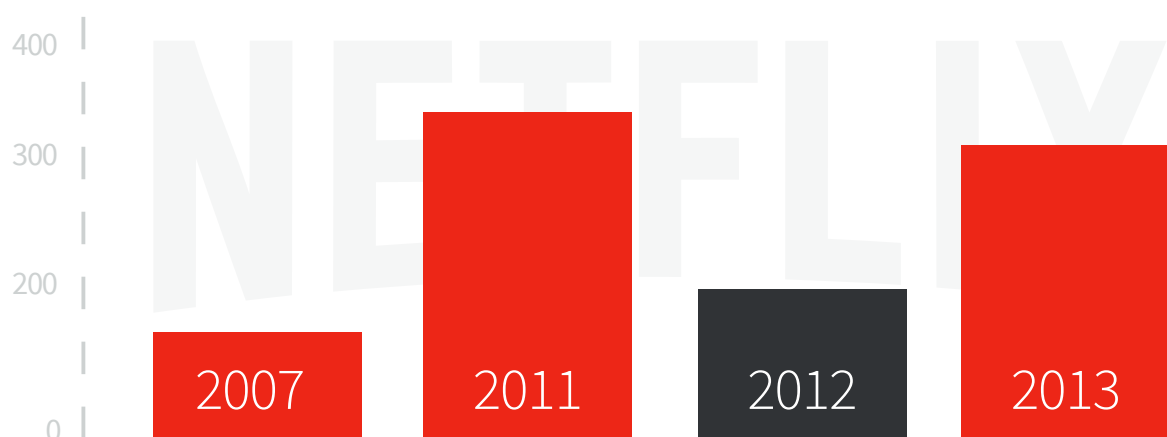


Source – Banking 3.0, Brett King

Secondly, digital disruption cannot be controlled, and it doesn't only happen once. As an example, let's look at Netflix, the poster child for digital disruption.

Since its founding, Netflix has undergone two major transformations in its business model. First, when it transitioned from hardcopy DVDs to a digital streaming service in 2011. The second time, only two years later, as it pivoted from distribution to content creation.

This serves as an important reminder that businesses must continually innovate to anticipate and embrace the opportunities created by digital technology.



Evolution of Share price: US\$ per share

2007  
**Identify upcoming disruption**  
Netflix adds streaming available at no cost

2011  
**Disrupt offering**  
Netflix forces subscribers to choose either streaming or 'original' DVD by mail

2012  
**Valley of death**  
Share price falls by >80% and analysts write off Netflix as a broken business model

2013  
**Produce content**  
Netflix continues to increase original content production

# Putting the customer in the center

In business-to-business (B2B) sales organizations, we have reached a point where customer experience is now the defining competitive advantage, especially since we know that disruption has had a disproportionate effect on the demand side of business models, and increasing collaboration and interactivity have empowered purchasers.

To compete in this environment, organizations need to measure themselves against other businesses, even those that operate outside their industry but provide services and purchasing experiences that will tempt their customers.

In this new world, being competitive means knowing your customer.

Transitioning to a business model centered on your customer can demand significant transformation of your organization, product and/or infrastructure. All of this takes investment, resources and time.

In the immediate term, you will need effective strategies that can be implemented quickly with low resourcing, and which will allow your organization to better understand customer expectations, needs and desires.

This question was the starting point for our research: how can we better understand the drivers for B2B buyers, and use that knowledge to provide a framework that your organization can use to influence purchase decisions in the current environment?



A man with short blonde hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie, is smiling and looking down at a smartphone he is holding in his hands. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with greenery. The entire image has a blue color overlay.

# Research methodology

LinkedIn conducted a 15-minute survey of LinkedIn members in the US, UK and Australia. Respondents were categorized into one of three priority industries: Financial Services (494), Technology (665) and Professional Services (529). ‘Buyers’ were defined as anyone who had decided on or influenced one or more business purchases in the past year. ‘Sellers’ were defined as anyone who had sold a business product or service in the past year.

# Research results

The research measured seller success based on three metrics:

1 [Net Promoter Score](#)  
(NPS) of the seller.

2 Perceived superiority  
of the seller compared  
to peers.

3 The influence the seller  
had on the purchase  
decision.

# The measurement methodology

Below is the breakdown of the independent variables that affected success metrics. We broke these into four pillars:

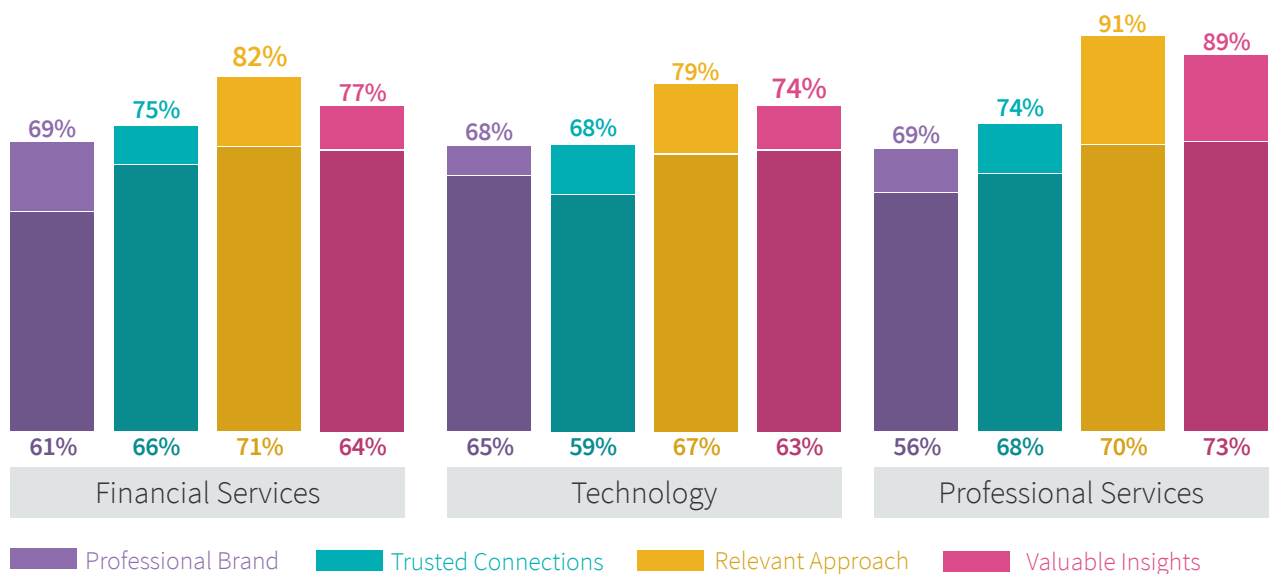
- 1 Professional brand.
- 2 Trusted connections.
- 3 Relevant approach.
- 4 Valuable insights.

## Reference: Independent & dependent variables used

Pillar definitions	Professional Brand	Trusted Connections	Relevant Approach	Valuable Insights	Department variable factors (outcomes)
	(ie, clearly articulated value, representation of expertise, and/or reputation in given field)	(ie, established networks, strong relationships, and/or common contacts in given field)	(ie, appropriate outreach, and understanding of needs, and/or applicable solutions)	(ie, availability of relevant knowledge, industry updates or market perspectives in field)	
Independent variable factors (drivers)	Came across as transparent & trustworthy	Strong relationships with influencers at my company	Clear understanding of our business needs	Highly knowledgeable about our business	NPS of sales rep
	Had positive recommendations from other clients	Well connected with others in this field	Provided personalized communication	Shared content applicable to my role in the process	Rep= superior to others
	Had an informative profile listing relevant credentials	Familiar to me from a previous interaction	Proposed/relevant solutions for our needs	Shared industry perspectives/ commentary	
	Clearly articulated offerings and value	Established rapport based on my LinkedIn profile	Had a clear understanding of my role in the process	Used relevant platform(s) when sharing information	Rep= purchase influence
	Demonstrated a high degree of professionalism	Introduced/referred by a common connection	Targeted appropriate people at my company for initial discussions	Utilized data-driven insights to provide value	



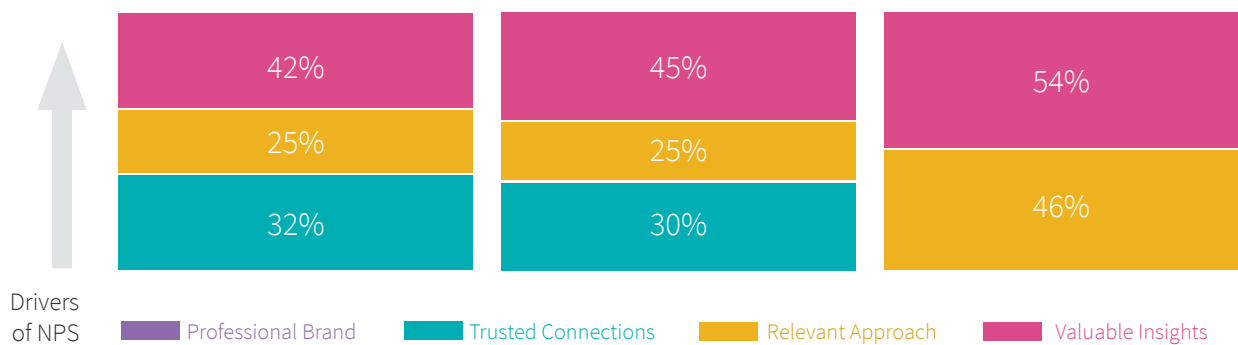
# Across all industries, buyers report a performance gap on three out of four pillars.



*% stated importance (light) vs. performance (dark) on each pillar.*

In all three verticals, buyers place the highest importance on relevant approach and valuable insights. Worryingly for sellers, these are the areas in which they perform least effectively – with the most marked performance gap being in Professional Services.

# Providing valuable insights and having a relevant approach both influence NPS.

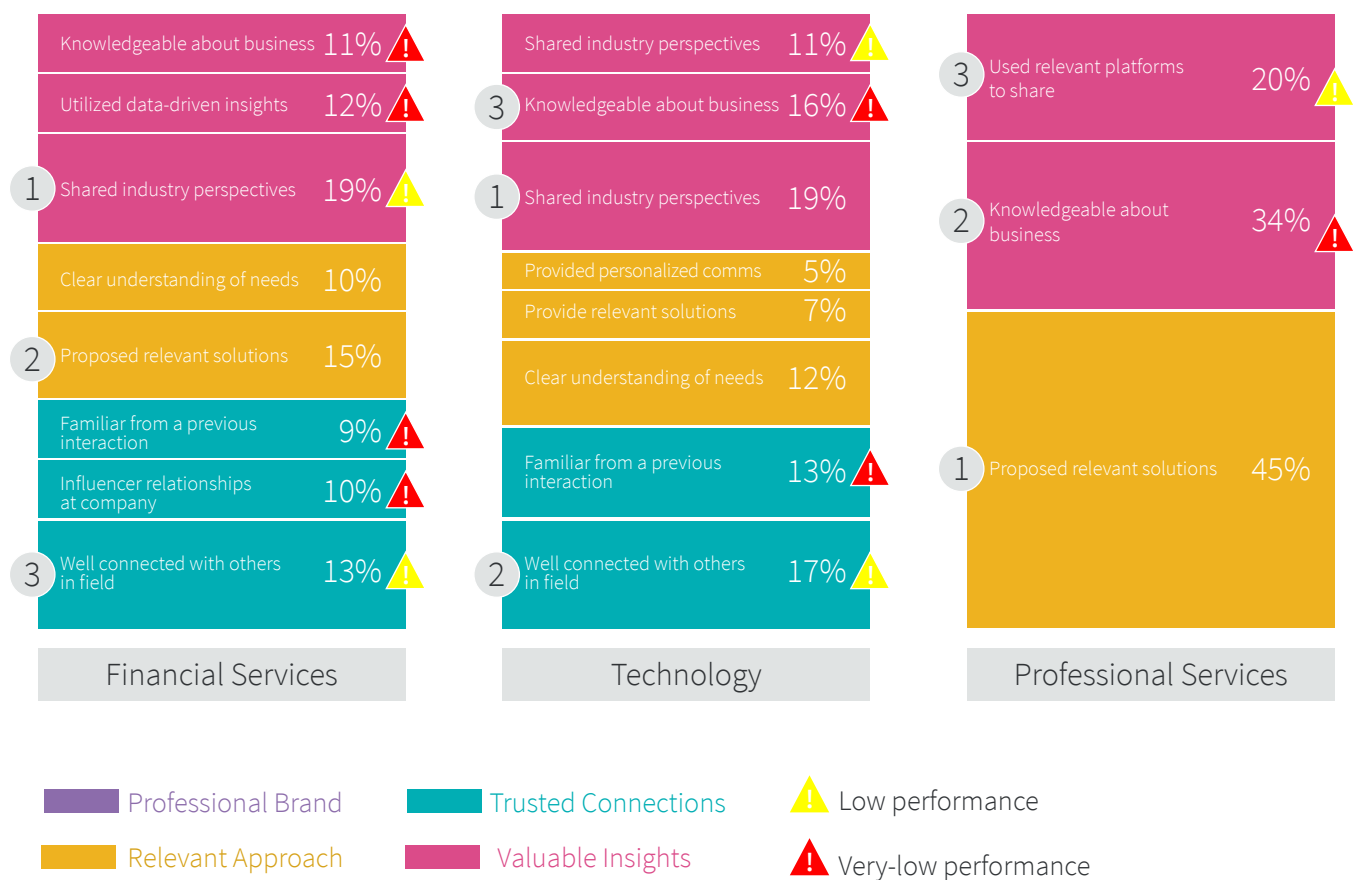


This figure shows what buyers care about when it comes to recommending a sales rep. When looking at the pillars that drive a seller's NPS, the importance of relevant and valuable insights is clear. Together, they drive at least 67% of a seller's NPS. In the case of Professional Services, they are all that matters.

A strong NPS indicates that a seller has promoters – clients who are extremely likely to recommend working with that rep. It is a measure of loyalty, and our data shows it has a significant impact on return business – 75% of promoters report that a sales rep was a key influence on their purchase decision, while only 26% of detractors say the same.

More significantly, only 18% of detractors would be interested in working with a different sales rep at the same business compared to 35% of promoters. A strong NPS can help your reps build return business and a strong client base for your business as a whole.

# Knowledge of the customer's business and industry is poor, but has a significant impact on NPS.



This figure shows the drivers of NPS in more detail. For each vertical, the specific elements that drive NPS are shown with the value ascribed to each. Reps particularly underperform in the “knowledgeable about the business” criterion in all industry segments. In Financial Services, sellers have low performance in the element buyers consider the most important – sharing industry perspectives. Sellers also perform poorly across the key elements buyers identified in the “trusted connections” category.



While sellers in the Technology market perform well in the element that is most important to buyers in that area, sharing content applicable to the buyer's role, they received very low scores in the "knowledgeable about business" area – another important requirement.

In Professional Services, where valuable insights and a relevant approach are vital, buyers report that sellers have low and very low performance in both valuable insights criteria.

What this tells us is that with attention to their social selling activities, and ensuring that they use all the tools they have at hand, your reps can improve their performance in key areas and drive up their NPS. This means converting more buyers into promoters, creating return business and expanding their client base.



# A new framework

In the digitally enabled environment, selling is more than just finding and developing leads.

Sellers need a new framework – one that puts the customer at the center and enables sellers to reimagine the supply-and-demand relationship, enter the purchasing journey earlier and influence purchasing decisions.

The data reveals three key strategies to drive sales success:

1. Target
2. Understand
3. Engage





# Understand

## ► **Know your customer through:**

- > Social listening.
- > Buyer personas.

The data shows just how important knowing your customer is. Being able to offer relevant insights and understanding customers' (and potential customers') businesses, including pain points and aspirations, means that a seller can anticipate demand as well as respond to it, all while performing well on key drivers of NPS. Social listening, tracking lead behavior on social media, building buyer personas and developing buyer-driven insights into issue identification and decision-making in the purchasing journey all give the seller an advantage over the competition, while also building their own reputation as a respected and valuable business advisor.



# Engage

## ► **Build and maintain a strong network with:**

- > Thought leadership content.
- > Referrals and testimonials (included in profile).

Buyers trust sellers who take a relevant approach and offer valuable insights, especially if they're highly knowledgeable about their business (a key driver for NPS in all three verticals and one of the key differentiators of a strong sales rep's performance) and share industry perspectives. This means that sales reps can – and should – use the information they have about the customer's business to establish themselves as thought leaders through their personal LinkedIn profile. When combined with referrals and testimonials, which demonstrate you are a trusted professional, a seller can set themselves apart from the competition before a buyer's purchasing journey has even begun.

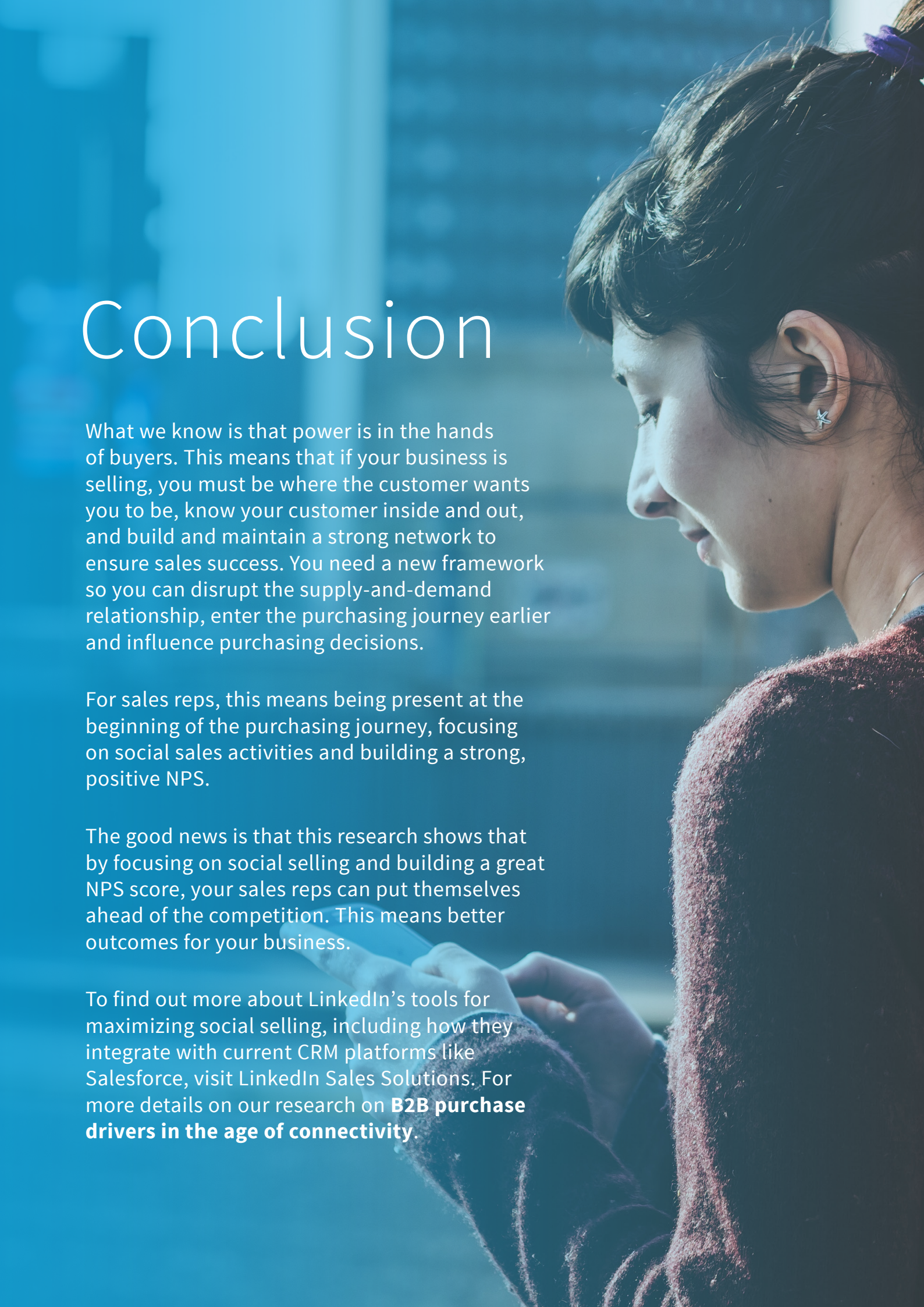
# Conclusion

What we know is that power is in the hands of buyers. This means that if your business is selling, you must be where the customer wants you to be, know your customer inside and out, and build and maintain a strong network to ensure sales success. You need a new framework so you can disrupt the supply-and-demand relationship, enter the purchasing journey earlier and influence purchasing decisions.

For sales reps, this means being present at the beginning of the purchasing journey, focusing on social sales activities and building a strong, positive NPS.

The good news is that this research shows that by focusing on social selling and building a great NPS score, your sales reps can put themselves ahead of the competition. This means better outcomes for your business.

To find out more about LinkedIn's tools for maximizing social selling, including how they integrate with current CRM platforms like Salesforce, visit [LinkedIn Sales Solutions](#). For more details on our research on **B2B purchase drivers in the age of connectivity**.



# About LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the premier social platform for professionals. With over 450 million members globally and growing, professionals are signing up to join LinkedIn at a rate of more than two new members per second. LinkedIn offers unparalleled access to information about customers and potential customers.

Over 733,000 of LinkedIn members are Directors, Vice Presidents, Chief Experience Officers and Partners, meaning LinkedIn connects you to professionals at all levels of business.

**LinkedIn**  Sales Solutions