

The Trust Advantage

Why Expertise Wins in the
Era of AI-Driven Sales

THE SALES LEADER COMPASS

LinkedIn®



The AI-Trust Contradiction

Buyers are more informed than ever, yet deals are harder to close, and trust has become more difficult to establish.

With 94% of sales professionals now using AI in their workflows, we asked: if everyone has access to the same information, what actually creates a competitive advantage?

To dig deeper, LinkedIn surveyed nearly 900 B2B buyers across 7 global markets.

What we discovered might surprise you: despite all this technology, trust remains the deciding factor in whether deals get done.



94%

of buyers use AI in their purchasing process, yet only **45%** describe sellers as trustworthy.

Information is a Commodity, Trust is Not



In an AI-driven world, information has become abundant and accessible to all – but trust and expert knowledge remain scarce and valuable. The gap between information access and trust has never been wider.

The numbers are staggering:

- **94%** of buyers use AI in their purchasing process.
- Yet only **45%** describe sellers as trustworthy.

Information has become a commodity. **Trust has not.**

This isn't just a statistic; it's proof that information has been democratized, but trust hasn't. And that creates a massive competitive advantage for sellers who understand how to bridge this divide.

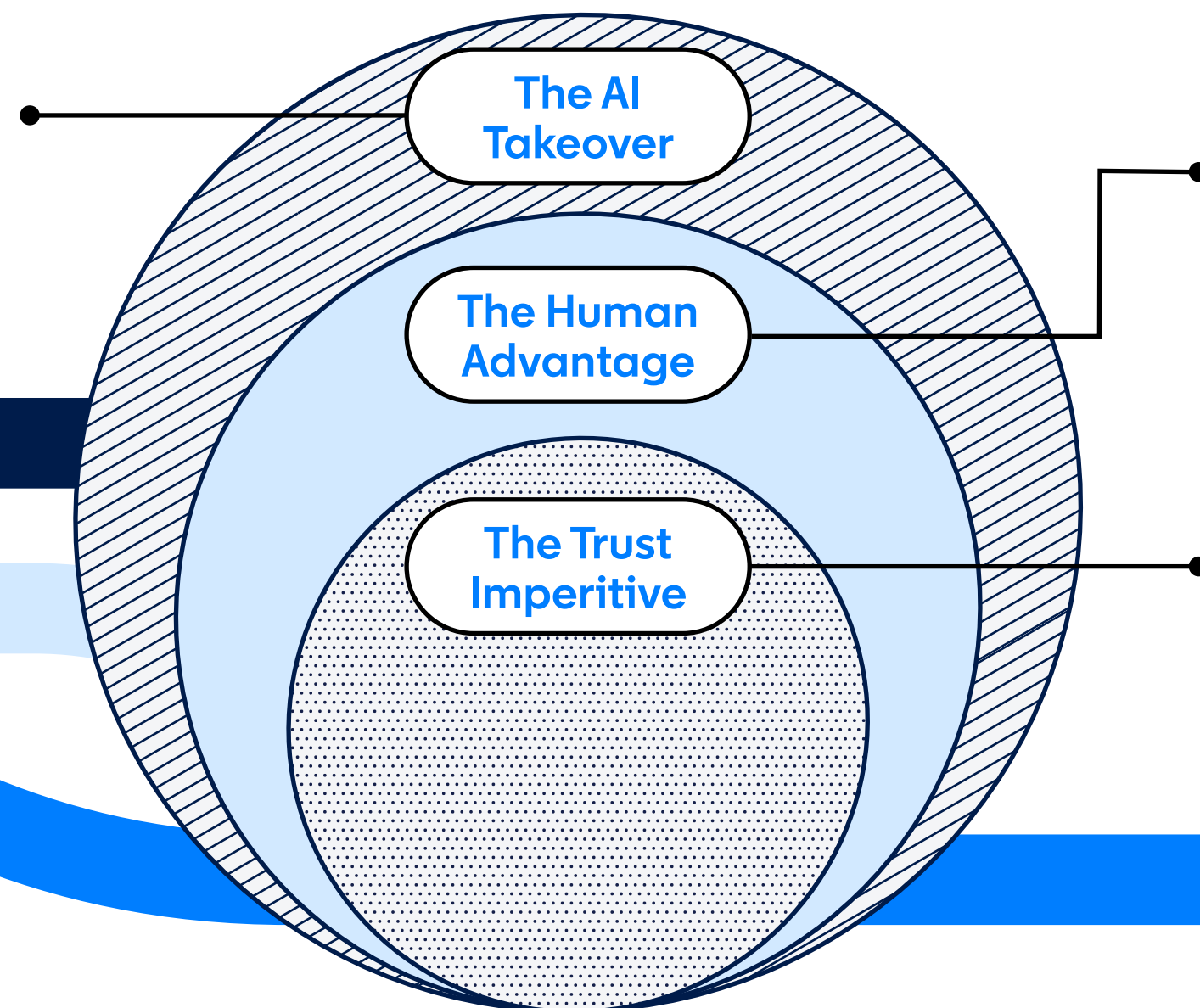


Three Fundamental Shifts Reshaping B2B Sales

LinkedIn's survey of 900 B2B Buyers globally reveals three shifts no leader can ignore:

94%

of buyers now use AI at every stage to analyze proposals and surface alternatives. **Sellers who adapt quickly will win.**



88%

of buyers value seller engagement most in the middle of the journey. **Sellers should focus resources where expertise has maximum impact.**

86%

of buyers say seller expertise drives trust, yet most buyers actively validate vendor claims. **Trust - not tech - seals deals.**



These three fundamental shifts are irreversibly reshaping B2B sales, and every sales leader needs to understand them.

- First, AI has embedded itself into the new path to purchase. It is judging your interactions at every step.
- Second, despite all this technology, there's a specific moment where human expertise has maximum impact (spoiler! It's the mid stage).
- Third, in a world where information is abundant, trust and expert knowledge have become the ultimate differentiators, and your biggest opportunity.

The AI Takeover

AI has re-mapped the entire buyer journey, sellers who quickly adapt will win.

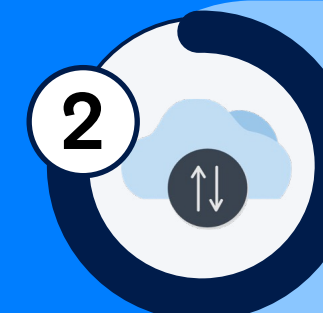
Just a few years ago, when a buyer first engaged with you, that was your moment to make a first impression and demonstrate expertise. You owned that conversation.

Now? By the time a buyer reaches out, they've already had dozens of conversations with ChatGPT or other AI tools. They've compared you to competitors, fact-checked your claims, and identified potential risks in your solution. More than 9 in 10 buyers are now using AI during their purchase process, which means:



1 Buyers form opinions before you interact.

The first impression used to be your moment to build trust through expertise and insight. Now AI gets there first.



2 Your expertise is pre-filtered. AI determines what insights surface and what gets buried. They've compared you to competitors, fact-checked your website claims, and possibly identified risks in your solution you didn't even know existed.

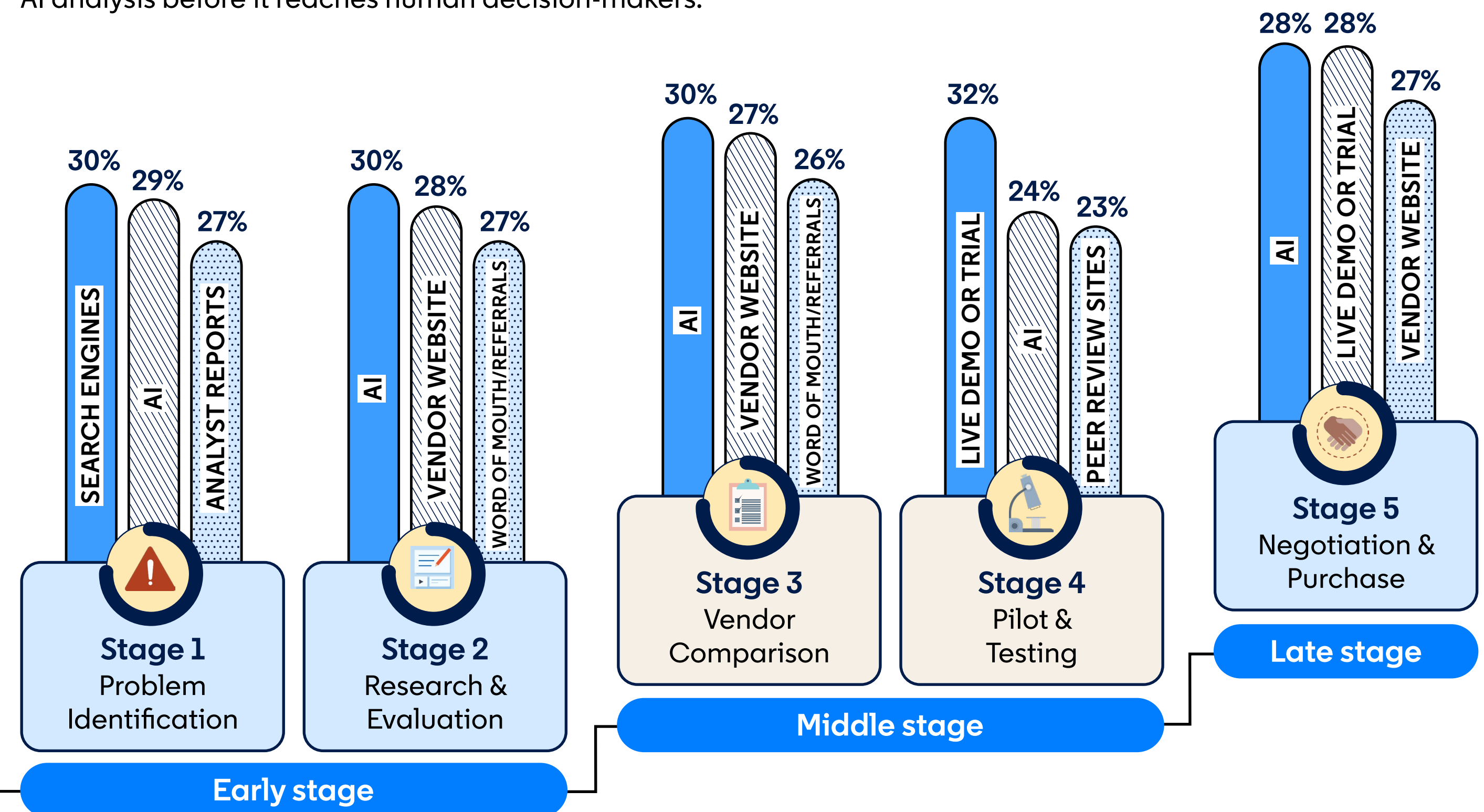


3 Trust must be earned differently. In an AI-driven world expert knowledge has become the ultimate differentiator and trust is the true currency of modern sales.

The New Path to Purchase

AI now ranks among the top 2 sources buyers turn to at every step.

The traditional buying journey has been fundamentally transformed. From problem identification through final purchase, AI is a constant companion to buying committee members. The implication is clear: every interaction, every piece of content, every claim you make is now subject to AI analysis before it reaches human decision-makers.





AI Has Changed the Sales Game Forever

5 ways buyer AI usage has reshaped sales

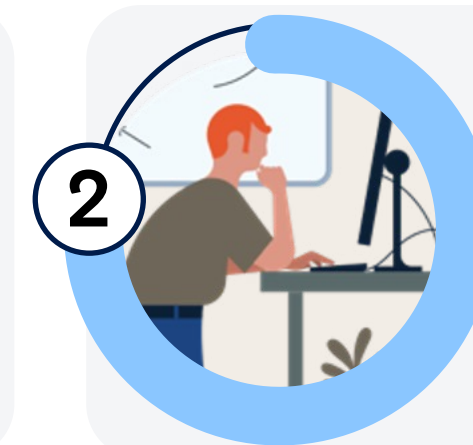
Buyers typically shortlist just 2–3 vendors. Breaking into that group is tough.

But here's the real challenge: nearly half of buyers now use AI to analyze proposals, challenge claims, and surface alternatives before they decide. AI has become another filter you need to pass through just to earn consideration.



1 Analyzing and comparing vendor proposals

By the time your team engages, prospects already have a shortlist.



2 Identifying risks and opportunities

AI doesn't just inform – it interrogates. Every statement can be fact-checked in real time.



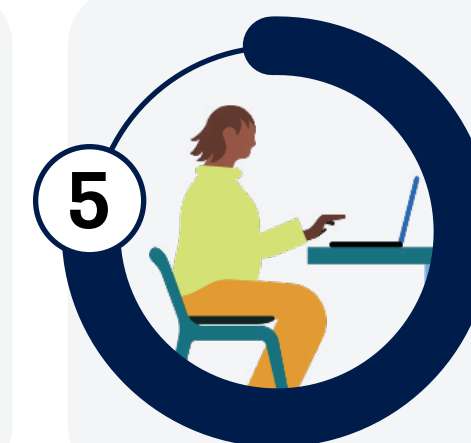
3 Researching vendors more efficiently

AI helps B2B Buyers research and consider vendors they may not otherwise know.



4 Predicting market trends

Buyers constantly reassess whether your product or solution matches the market, based on AI-driven comparisons.



5 Exploring in-house alternatives to external vendors

Buyers move fast at research but slow at validation, creating unpredictable rhythms.

The Complexity Multiplier

More stakeholders. Longer cycles. Bigger budgets.

Deals have become more complex and scrutinized but also more valuable

AI isn't the only force reshaping buying - it's amplifying existing trends towards complexity.

The bottom line is simple: if you're not adapting to larger committees, extended cycles, and heightened scrutiny, you will be left behind by competitors who are.

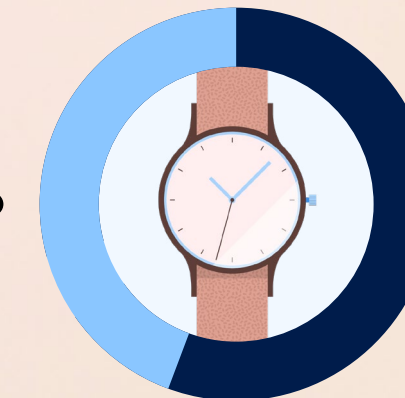
So we've established that AI has transformed the buying landscape. But here's the crucial question: in this AI-dominated environment, where do human sellers still have the edge?

The LinkedIn study revealed that:

40% report larger buying committees, with non-users involved 44% of the time.



76% of organizations report longer cycles, up by three weeks or more.



74% of buyers have increased B2B budgets.



The Human Advantage

Despite AI Everywhere, human expertise - at the right moments - still win.

Here's the existential question keeping sales leaders up at night: "If my buyers have AI doing all their research for them, do they even need us anymore? Should we just let the robots handle everything?"

But while AI is ubiquitous in the buying process, information processing isn't the same as decision-making confidence.

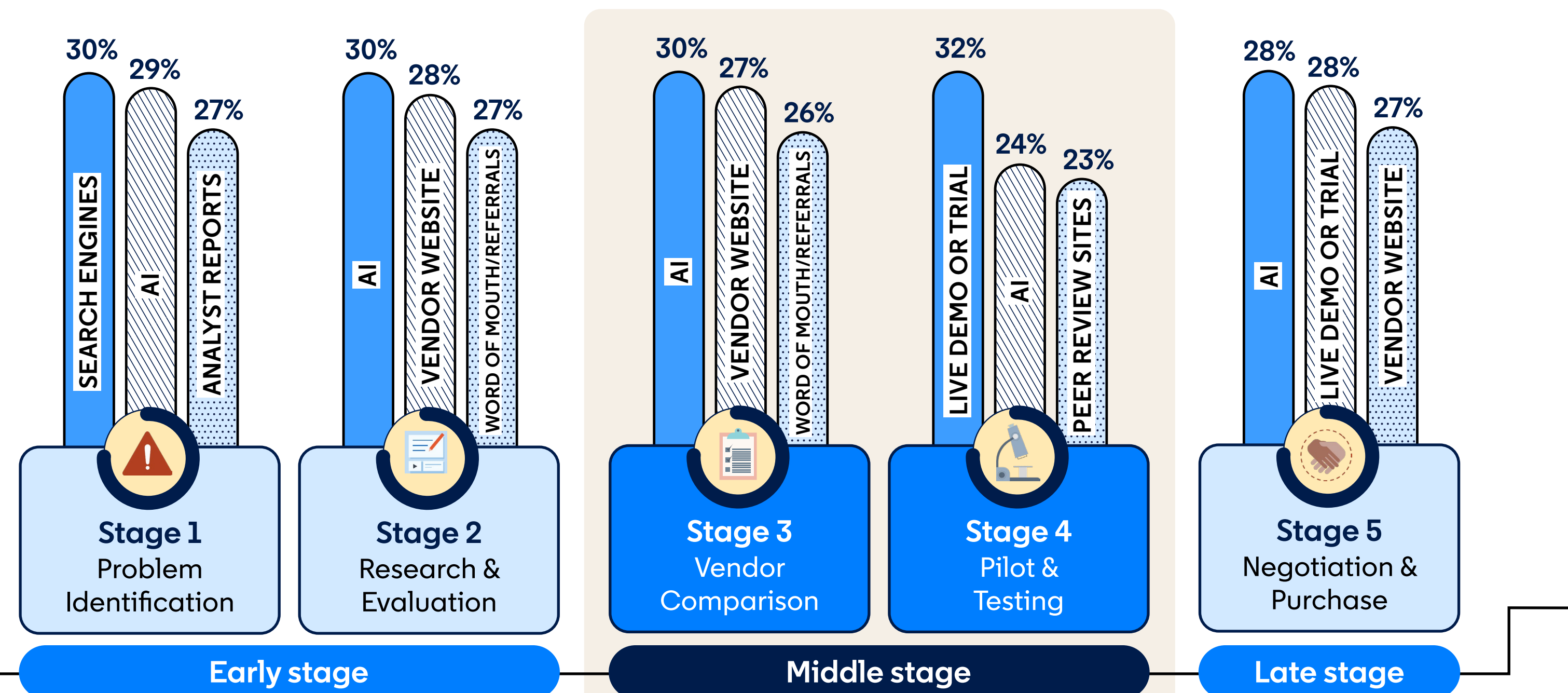
Why? Here's what AI can't do: it can't look a buyer in the eye and say, "I've seen this exact situation blow up before, and here's how we avoided disaster." It can't read the room when a CFO starts nervously tapping their pen during the budget conversation. And it definitely can't build the kind of trust that makes someone willing to stake their career reputation on a decision.



The Moment of Maximum Impact

Human expertise peaks where decisions get made: the middle of the journey.

Why? Because buyers need confidence to defend their investment. They're seeking validation that their choice drives organizational value and delivers measurable ROI to stakeholders



It's not that humans don't matter in the early or late stages—57% of buyers welcome interaction upfront, and 65% still want it near the end. But in the middle, the need climbs even higher.

Why? Because in [Stage 3](#) (vendor comparison), buyers are weighing trade-offs and looking for clarity. And in [Stage 4](#) (pilot/testing), they want reassurance that the solution will actually deliver. In both cases, human expertise is the difference between doubt and confidence.

This is why **88%** of buyers say seller engagement is most valuable mid-funnel. It's the stage where human expertise matters most.

For sales leaders, the implication is clear: if your sellers aren't trained to show up with authority, proof, and perspective at this moment, you're leaving deals on the table. Mid-funnel expertise isn't just a tactic. It's the moment of maximum impact.

“We asked nearly 20 thousand professionals across the globe where they turn for trusted information and found that more than 50% rely on their colleagues or friends over AI or search engines.

When people need important advice, they still turn to people they trust.”



Dan Shapero, COO, LinkedIn



The Trust Imperative

Trust is the True Currency of Modern Sales.

Picture this. Your buyer has done their homework, and is about to sign on the dotted line for enterprise software that costs more than a luxury car (or maybe several luxury cars) depending on the deal size.

But then there's that moment, maybe it's late at night, maybe it's right before the final approval meeting, when they think: "What if I'm wrong about this? What happens if it doesn't deliver? How will I explain this to my boss, or to the board?"

That moment right there – when they have all the information but still need confidence – that's where information stops being enough and trust becomes everything. And that's the reality we're all selling into today.

In a world where information is abundant, trust and expert knowledge have become the ultimate differentiators.

The evidence is clear: 86% say seller expertise is the top driver of trust, and 78% actively validate vendor claims before buying.

This means sales leaders must equip teams to sell on credibility, not just product capabilities.

The Trust Advantage

The Trust Advantage is about recognizing that credibility isn't a bonus. It's the differentiator. Sellers who are trusted close faster, win larger deals, and retain customers longer. **Sellers who aren't?** No amount of persuasion compensates.



A man and a woman are looking at a tablet together. The man is on the left, wearing a blue and white patterned shirt. The woman is on the right, wearing a yellow shirt. They are both smiling and looking at the tablet. The background is a blue grid pattern.

Trust, Not Tech, Seals Deals

The trust gap represents the biggest opportunity in modern sales

Here's the reality: 86% of buyers say seller expertise is the top driver of trust—yet only 45% of buyers actually trust the sellers they engage with. That's not just a gap. That's a chasm. And it represents the single greatest opportunity in modern B2B sales.

When all else is equal (when products have similar features, when pricing is comparable) trust consistently becomes the deciding factor. Recommendations from trusted advisors outweigh promises from vendors by 3-4x. Buyers aren't looking for another pitch. They're looking for someone who genuinely understands their world.

Sellers who can inspire confidence through genuine industry knowledge and consultative insight will differentiate themselves in ways that technology simply cannot match.

The trust gap isn't a problem to solve—it's a competitive advantage waiting to be claimed.

Message Over Medium

“Building trust is absolutely critical. Most of the prospects you’re trying to sell to may have anywhere from a handful to hundreds of choices.

That trust element becomes especially important in the middle of the funnel – when they know they want something, have created a shortlist, and now need to make a decision”

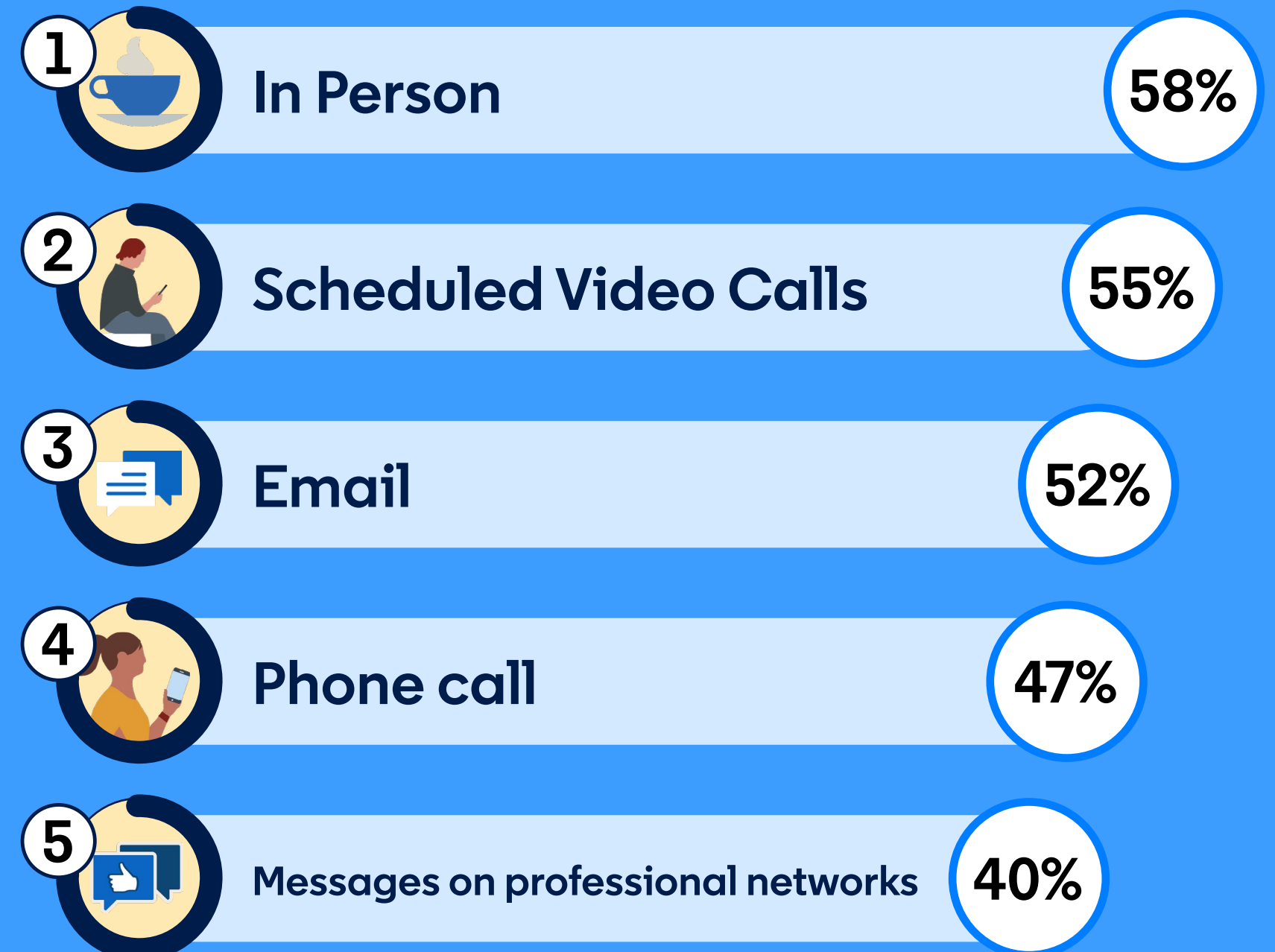
Aurélien Mottier, President, MemoryBlue



Here’s something that might surprise you: buyers don’t obsess about which channel you use to reach them.

Yes, they have preferences—in-person meetings and scheduled calls rank highest. But the key insight is that the medium matters less than the message.

Buyers value authenticity and trust over the specific engagement channel. A trusted, knowledgeable seller can build credibility over email just as effectively as in person. What matters isn’t how or when you show up, but how prepared and credible you are when you do.





Learn your buyers to earn your buyers

Let's talk about personalization – it's not binary, it's hierarchical.

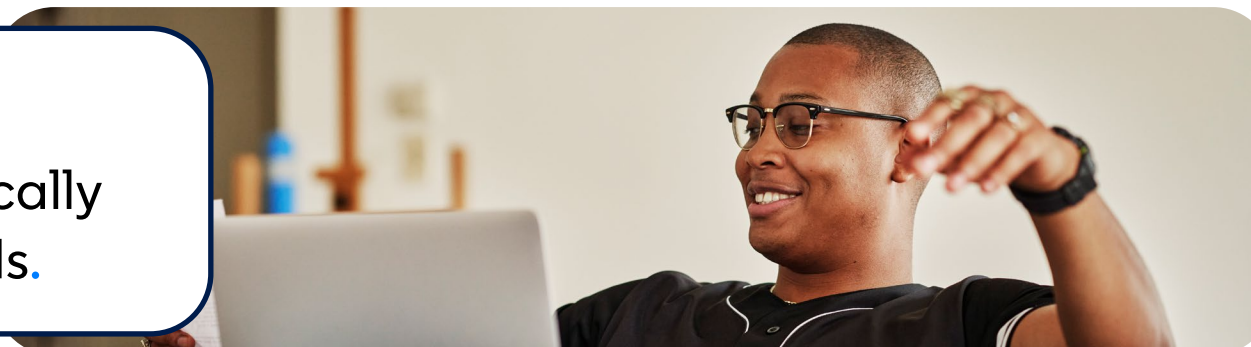
Industry Expertise.

Demonstrate deep understanding of their sector and challenges.



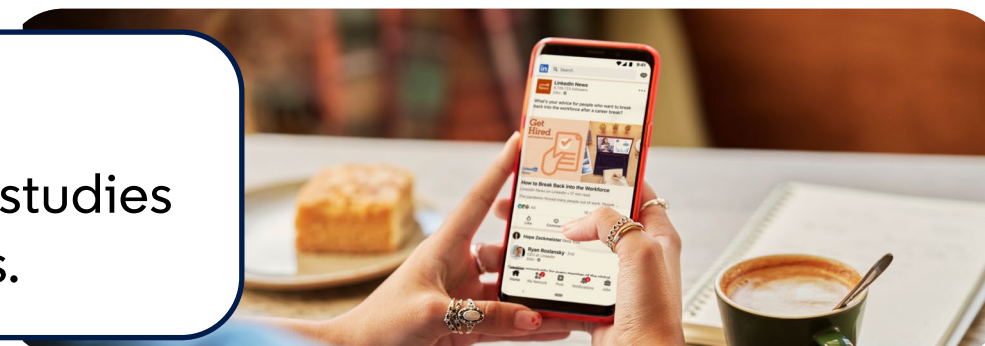
Business Relevance

Tailor solutions specifically to their company needs.



Proof Points

Share case organizations studies from similar organizations.



Personal Connection

Reference shared interests or backgrounds that create rapport.



Here's what our data reveals:

- About half of buyers (46 to 52%) say professional cues like case studies, company goals, or competitive benchmarks are helpful and build trust.
- By comparison, only about a quarter (22 to 32%) say the same about personal references like family, hobbies, or vacations.
- Lead with insight, follow with connection. Professional insight carries almost 2x the weight of personal details, but the most effective sellers master all four levels.

The key isn't choosing one over the other; it's understanding the hierarchy and leading with what matters most.

The New Sales Playbook

Evolve from vendor to strategic advisor by mastering these four strategic pillars.

Here's the reality:

AI has changed everything about how buyers research and decide. Traditional sales approaches are failing because they weren't built for AI-informed, trust-hungry buyers.

So what does success look like now? It requires these four strategic imperatives.

Now that you have this new playbook, you have the framework to win in a world where most sellers are still playing by the old rules.

Lead with Professional Insight

Demonstrate deep industry expertise and business acumen while also building meaningful personal connections.



Master the Mid-Journey Moment

Focus resources on solution comparison, demos, and pricing discussions.



Build Trust Through Transparency

Expect claim validation, lead with proof over promises, and position as a trusted advisor.



Become AI-Proof at Every Stage

Structure all your content, proposals, and presentations so algorithms can easily parse and summarize your key points.



Your Trust Advantage Starts Here

Your competitors are adapting. The question is whether you'll be among the trusted few who thrive.

Your buyers are already on LinkedIn – researching, reading, and signaling intent. But with millions of professionals and countless buying signals, finding the right people at the right moment has never been more challenging.

Sales Navigator helps you cut through the noise to reach the right people, at the right time, with the right message.

Accelerate sales with the world's most dynamic buyer network

Linked 

Methodology

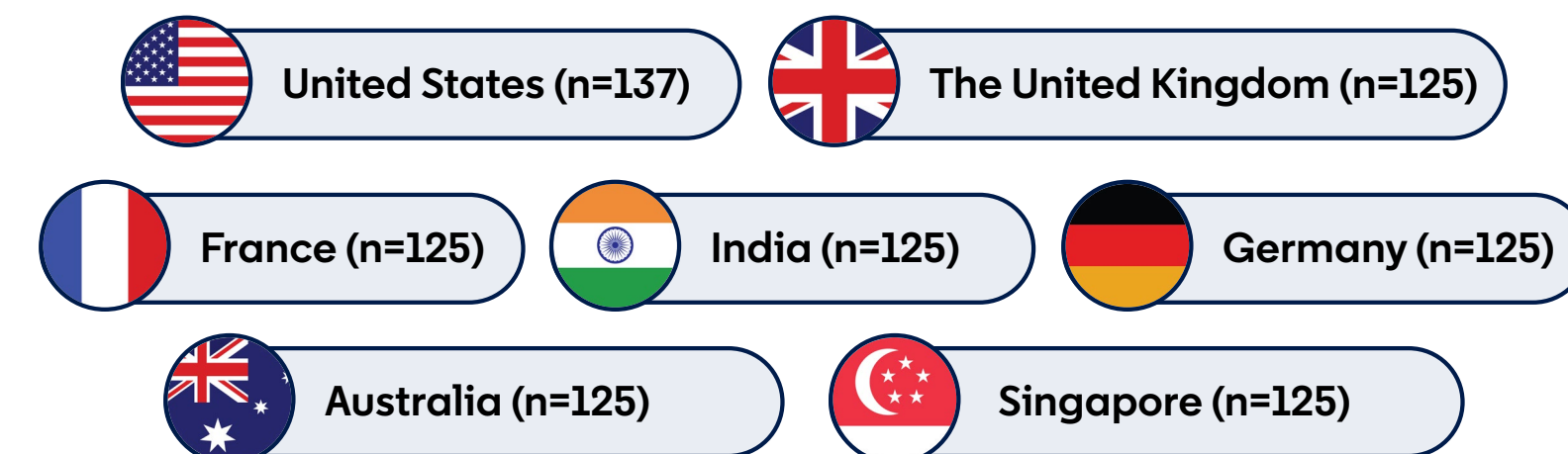
Primary quantitative research was conducted by Ipsos via a 20 minute online device agnostic survey in the United States, The United Kingdom, France, Germany, Australia, India, and Singapore.

Ipsos recruited a sample of 887 B2B Buyers utilizing a mix of expert network and B2B panel samples.

Survey development drew from Ipsos and LinkedIn expertise as well as findings from other Ipsos and LinkedIn data.

The data is based on respondents from the survey and may or may not be representative of all buyers.

The sample was distributed across countries as follows:



Qualifying Criteria

Final decision makers or primary influencers in company buying decisions

Respondent Profile

