How to Adapt Sales Strategies to the Current State of B2B Buying

This survey includes data from 771 B2B buyers from the U.S., Canada, the U.K. and Australia.



How to Adapt Sales Strategies to the Current State of B2B Buying

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Initiatives: Sales Execution

B2B buying dynamics are drastically changing, creating challenges for sales organizations trying to adapt to overwhelmed buyers who engage less with sellers. CSOs should use this research to develop proven tactics that drive more meaningful and higher value engagements with buyers.

Overview

Key Findings

- Organizational change drives B2B buying, with 99% of purchases occurring in the context of at least one change.
- Buyers report making more than two-thirds (68%) of purchases via digital commerce, and three-fourths (75%) of buyers said they prefer a rep-free sales experience. But 43% of buyers who complete digital purchases without rep assistance say they experience high purchase regret.
- When seller involvement augments digital interactions, buyers are three times more likely to value seller-led interaction and 1.5x times more likely to have higher-quality deals.

Recommendations

To drive optimal commercial results CSOs must:

- Unify commercial teams by designing a customer engagement strategy to help buyers navigate their own organizational change across all supplier touchpoints.
- Adapt to buyers' shifting behaviors by investing in customers' digital experience to leverage the most critical moments in the buying journey that best position sellers to engage.

Strategic Planning Assumptions

By 2025, 80% of B2B sales interactions between suppliers and buyers will occur in digital channels.

By 2026, B2B organizations unifying commercial strategies and leveraging multithreaded commercial engagements will realize revenue growth that outperforms their competition by 50%.

Survey Objective

The 2022 Gartner B2B Buyer Survey was administered in November and December 2022 and includes data from 771 B2B buyers from the U.S., Canada, the U.K. and Australia. Respondents had to be employed full time at an organization with total revenue of at least $250 million or the equivalent and had participated in a significant B2B purchase decision, defined as one that requires deliberation with at least one other person and the evaluation of more than one potential supplier or vendor. Respondents were instructed to answer questions based on their experience with this recent purchase and with the supplier that was used to complete the purchase. Respondents evaluated the quality of the purchase decision and provided insights into various stages of their recent purchase decision.

Data Insights

The 2022 Gartner B2B Buyer Survey identifies challenges that buyers face, which often lead to lower quality deals and purchase regret. This note outlines recommendations for CSOs that align with these three key buying trends:

- Organizational change drives B2B buying.
- Digital commerce is thriving, but deal quality is declining.
- Seller involvement in digital interactions improves buyer experience and deal quality.

Organizational Change Drives B2B Buying

B2B buying is driven almost completely by organizational change. [1] Buyers aren't just looking at purchases to solve an immediate problem. They are often motivated to solve longer term, internal challenges. As a result, sales teams face challenges serving B2B buyers who must juggle their own organizational change. Nearly all (99%) surveyed B2B buyers said at least one organizational change led to the need to make a purchase (see Figure 1). Digital transformation and changes in strategic focus, operations, product and service offerings, and target customer groups all topped the list of organizational changes that prompted B2B buyers to make a purchase. [1]

Figure 1: Most B2B Purchases Stem From Organizational Changes

Most B2B Purchases Stem From Organizational Changes
Organizational Changes That Led to Buyers' Need to Make a Purchase



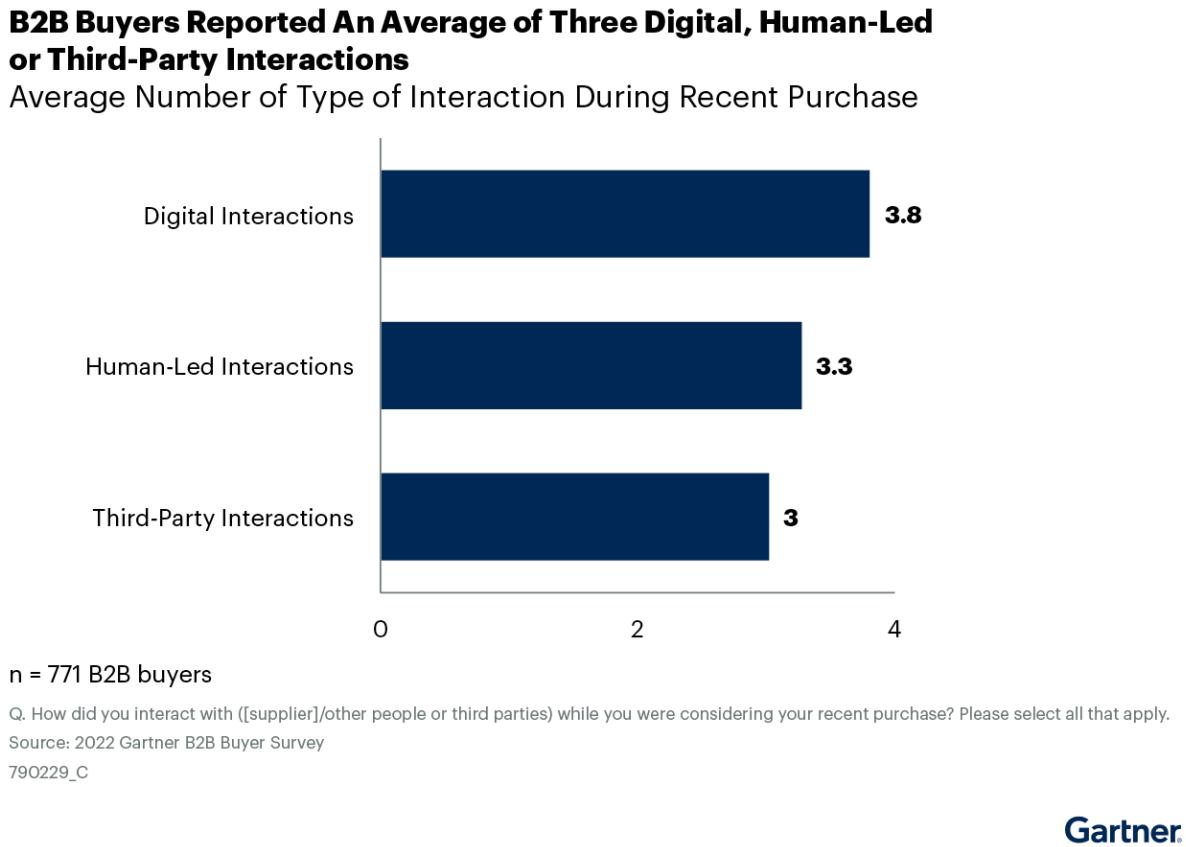
n = 771 B2B buyers

Source: 2022 Gartner B2B Buyer Survey
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Gartner

As changes such as digital transformation often span multiple parts of the buyer organization, they often prompt various stakeholders to begin researching solutions independently, focusing on the value or impact for their function or department. B2B buyers reported an average of ten types of interactions, spread approximately evenly between human-led, digital or third-party interactions per stakeholder during their recent purchases (see Figure 2). [1] The result is when these buying group stakeholders come together, they often bring their own differing expectations, goals and information — a recipe for buyer dysfunction.

Figure 2: B2B Buyers Reported an Average of Three Digital, Human-Led or Third-Party Interactions



Not only are B2B buying groups engaging with your digital channel at various parts of the purchasing journey, but multiple individuals from different parts of the buyer's organization are engaging at different times. They are accessing your website, looking at social media, using an interactive tool or using some other digital channel.

This buying behavior means sellers and providers must accommodate a growing number of buyers and their cross-functional representation in the organization. They must be able to navigate potential dysfunction that comes from such behavior among numerous buying group members who may have different goals and needs as they do their own research.

CSO Actions

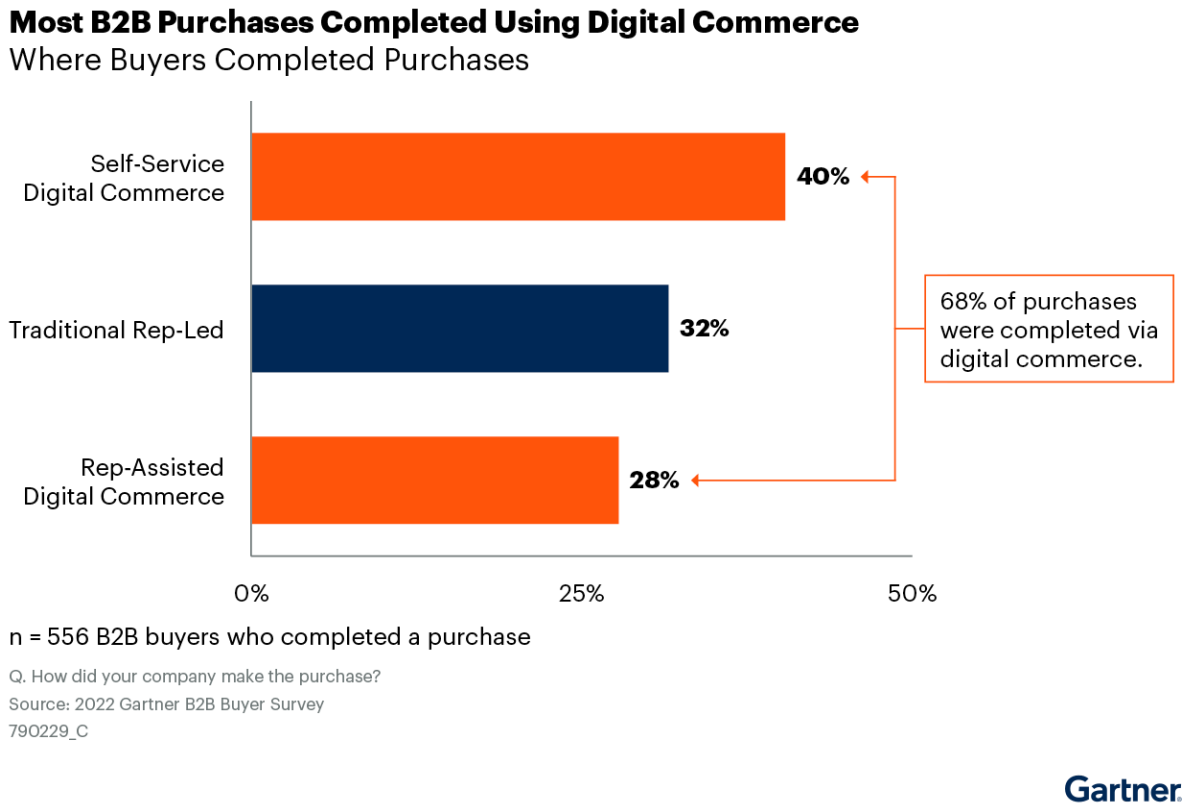
To help customers address the challenges that come with making a purchase in the context of organizational change, CSOs must:

- **Ensure** enablement focuses on getting sellers to tailor their customer engagement and better position their offerings by understanding the organization's buying approach (see Tailor Buyer Enablement Using Enterprise Change Readiness Profiles).
- **Align** sales process to buyer's journey to support buyers and buying groups in completing critical buying tasks necessary to making a high-quality purchasing decision (see Ignition Guide to Aligning a Sales Process With the B2B Customer Buying Journey).

Digital Commerce Is Thriving, but Deal Quality Is Declining

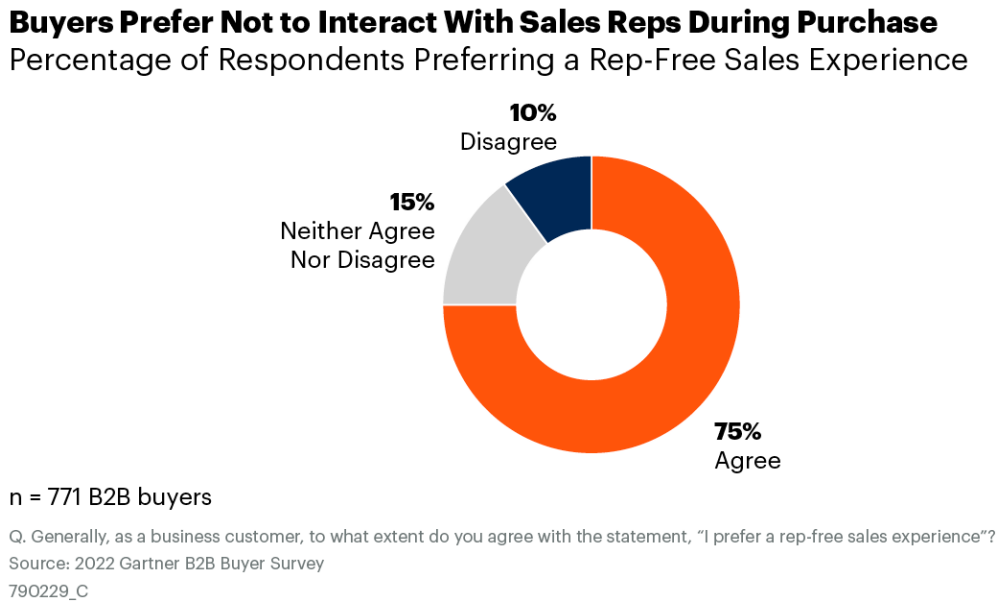
In the buying survey, B2B buyers said 68% of their purchases were completed either by using self-service digital commerce or through rep-assisted digital commerce (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Most B2B Purchases Completed Using Digital Commerce



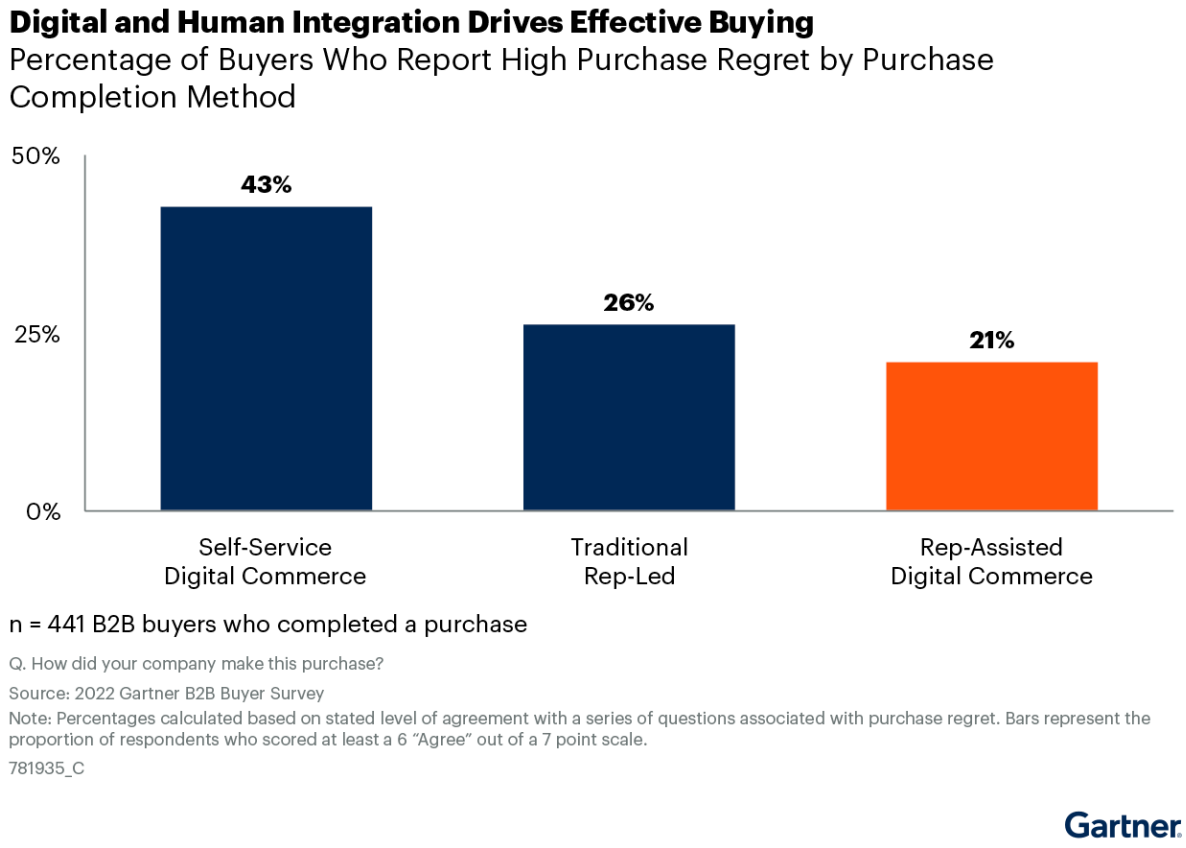
The survey also revealed that B2B buyers enjoy the independence of self-guided discovery during their purchase journey and prefer to browse, research and even purchase without the involvement of sellers. They are accessing seller and provider websites, social media content, search tools and interactive digital tools on their own. Of the buyers surveyed, 75% of them said they prefer a rep-free sales experience (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Buyers Prefer Not to Interact With Sales Reps During Purchase



But this surge in digital commerce among B2B buyers is hurting deal quality. Many B2B buyers who are leveraging self-service digital commerce options without assistance from reps are reporting higher levels of purchase regret. Of the buyers surveyed who purchased through rep-free digital commerce, 43% reported high purchase regret compared to 21% of buyers who reported high purchase regret after accessing rep assistance (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: High Purchase Regret Associated With Self-Service Digital Commerce



CSO Actions

CSOs seeking to support buyer interest in digital commerce must:

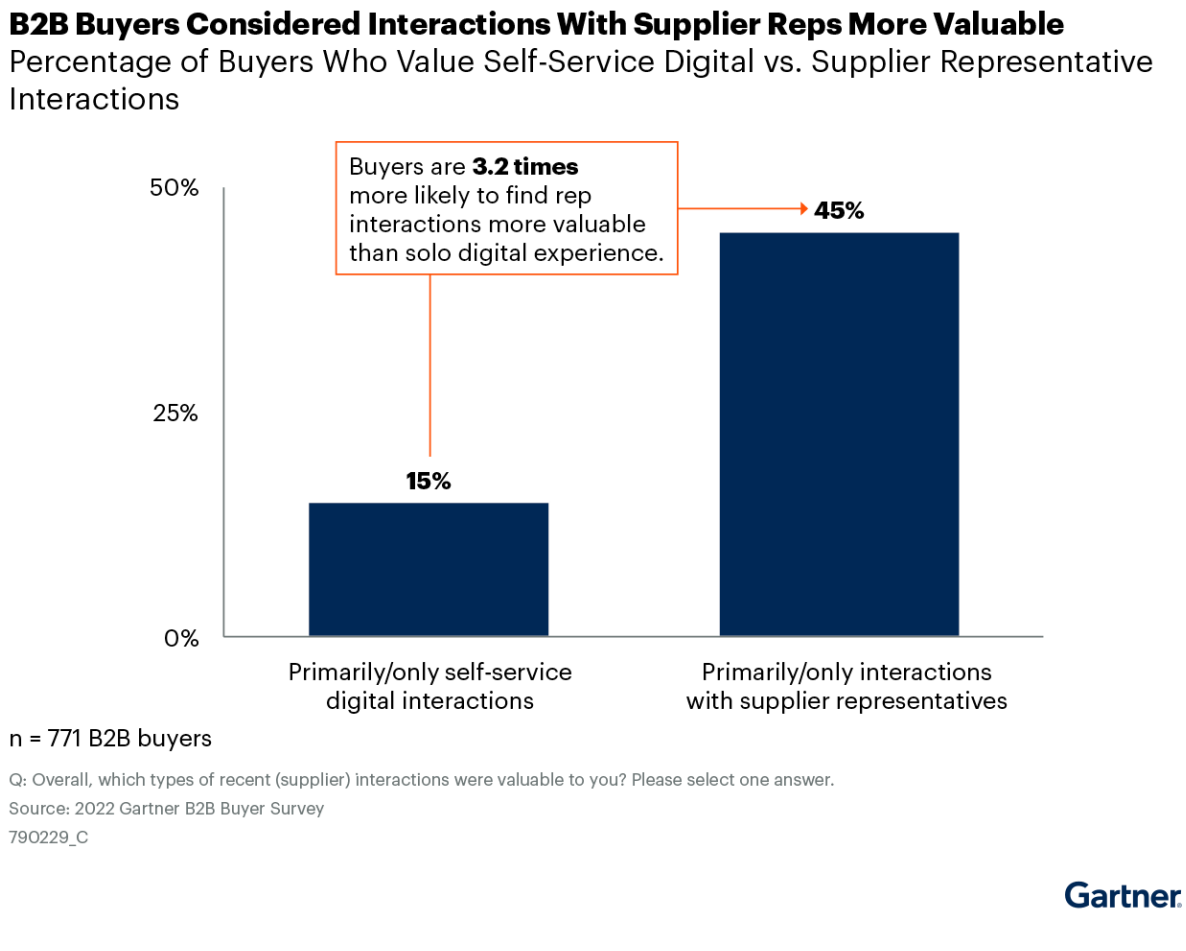
- **Invest** further in digital marketing and digital commerce platforms that provide buyer intelligence (see Quick Answer: How Should CSOs Contribute to Digital Commerce Strategy?).
- **Adapt** to buyers digital buying behaviors by aligning customer digital experience to key buying jobs (see Align B2B Digital Commerce With Customer Buying Jobs to Drive High-Quality Deals).

Seller Involvement in Digital Interactions Improves Buyer Experience and Deal Quality

Most B2B buyers say they prefer a rep-free experience, but many are not satisfied with the resulting purchase. They like the freedom of research and discovery, but they struggle to complete a purchase due to overwhelming and conflicting information, and avoid critical decision points in the purchase process. These buyers don't know when rep assistance could help them make better decisions throughout their purchase journeys.

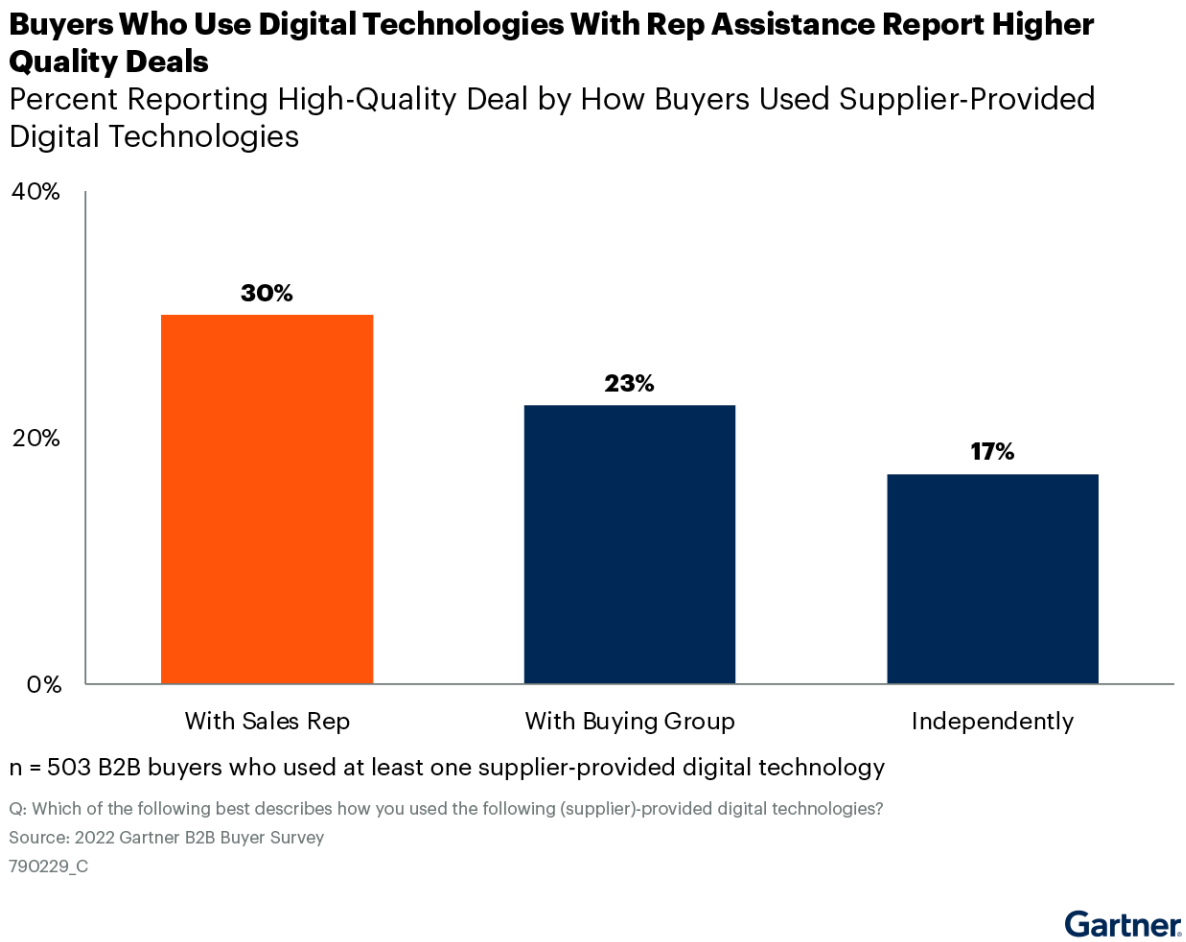
CSOs must support buyers' self-guided discovery on their digital channels while providing seller assistance at the appropriate time. It's not that buyers don't need assistance. Results from the buyer survey show buyers are more than three times more likely to find their interactions with supplier reps to be more valuable than their solo digital experience (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: B2B Buyers Considered Interactions With Supplier Reps More Valuable



The key for CSOs is to augment the buyers' desire for self-guided digital commerce with their need for access to seller assistance. The buyer survey revealed that buyers who use supplier-provided digital technologies with supplier reps are 1.5 times more likely to have high-quality deals than those who use the technologies without rep assistance (see Figure 7). The results suggest that regardless of when buyers engage with the rep, they'll find it valuable because the rep is often helping to overcome a buying challenge.

Figure 7: Buyers Who Use Digital Technologies With Rep Assistance Report Higher Quality Deals



CSO Actions

CSO seeking to improve deal quality must:

- **Create** an orchestrated buyer engagement strategy that delivers a consistent message across all supplier touchpoints (see Integrate Digital and Seller Customer Interactions to Drive High-Quality Deals).

- **Enable** the seller to know when and how to engage with the buyer in the digital buying journey (see Improve B2B Buying Interactions With Better Enablement Content).

Evidence

[1] **2022 Gartner B2B Buyer Survey:** This survey was administered in November and December 2022 and includes data from 771 B2B buyers from the U.S., Canada, the U.K. and Australia. Respondents who qualified for this survey had to be employed full time at an organization with total revenue of at least $250 million or the equivalent and had participated in a significant B2B purchase decision. A "significant B2B purchase decision" is defined here as a decision that required deliberation with at least one other person and the evaluation of more than one potential supplier or vendor. Respondents were instructed to answer questions based on their experience with this recent purchase and with the supplier that was used to complete the purchase. Respondents evaluated the quality of the purchase decision and provided insights into various stages of their recent purchase decision.

Disclaimer: Results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

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