

Gartner for Marketers

Gartner®

# Boost B2B Demand Generation Using Enterprise Personas

**Rick LaFond**  
Director Analyst

**Jeffrey L. Cohen**  
Director Analyst

**Kyle Rees**  
Sr Director Analyst

**Marketing Research Team**



Gartner discovered four distinct B2B enterprise customer profiles with varying buying behaviors and approaches to the change surrounding a purchase decision. CMOs should base their segmentation, demand generation and account growth strategies on the unique characteristics of these buyer profiles.

**Rick LaFond**

**Jeffrey L. Cohen**

**Kyle Rees**

**Marketing Research Team**

Published 12 April 2022 — ID G00766431

## Overview

### Key Findings

- Most B2B marketers still segment companies on the basis of basic facts, like industry vertical or revenue band, but these distinctions do not fully capture material differences in buying behavior and lead quality. They also miss the important dimensions of change readiness — the willingness and ability to navigate the changes surrounding a purchase decision — which predict initial deal quality and long-term growth prospects.
- Classification analysis reveals four meaningful B2B enterprise customer profiles that span purchase categories and industries. These profiles are the result of patterns in business practices and culture that combine to shape buying decisions within a given company.
- Each customer profile requires a distinctive combination of digital content, guided selling tools and sales support to make high-quality purchases. Adjusting the emphasis or timing of different commercial tactics will maximize resonance for a given profile.

### Recommendations

To improve customer acquisition and retention:

- Use the defining characteristics of Gartner's four enterprise change readiness profiles to identify which profile best fits each of your target accounts.
- Optimize demand generation effectiveness by applying a mix of content and guided selling tools designed to help each customer profile feel more prepared for change, given their distinct organizational dynamics.
- Boost the resonance of customer engagement by partnering with sales to design tailored multichannel campaigns and playbooks for each of the customer profiles in your target market.

## Know the Four Types of B2B Buying Organizations

Many B2B marketers have developed buyer personas for key individuals or roles in the buying journey. However, most still segment companies on the basis of basic firmographic facts, like industry vertical or revenue band. Just as individual buyer personas vary even within the same role, so do organizations within the same industry. Companies that look similar on their face can have very different buying group preferences and challenges that require a tailored approach.

The typical segmentation approach also misses a core insight about the nature of B2B buying and change. Most purchases, especially first-time or account growth purchases, represent organizational change — often involving new capabilities, different processes, a new set of stakeholders and unanticipated complexity. According to the 2021 Gartner B2B Buying Survey, 94% of B2B purchases are made amid organizational change, so even a straight rebuy must be integrated in a shifting context.

Marketing within a more expansive organizational context requires marketers to develop enterprise personas (or profiles of buying organizations) that encompass a mix of attributes. Use this research to help shortcut your discovery process and hone your multichannel campaigns for target customers and accounts.

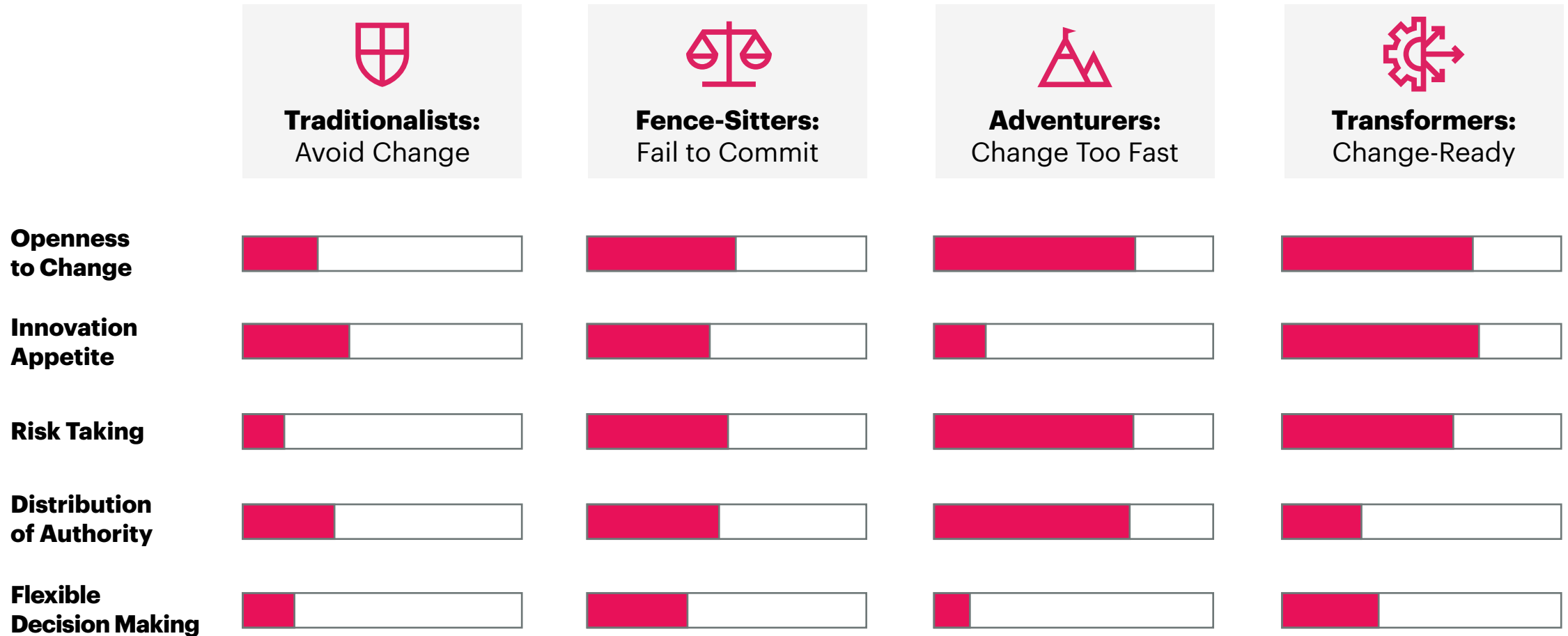
---

**Gartner discovered four meaningfully distinct enterprise customer profiles that span purchase categories and industries, with stark differences in change orientation, buying behaviors and commercial outcomes.**

---

We found these profiles through a latent class analysis of over 700 B2B buyers who recently considered an organizational purchase. From a larger set of potential indicators, the analysis revealed five company-level psychographic dimensions that best chalk the field of buying behavior: openness to change, innovation appetite, risk taking, distribution of authority and flexible decision making. Although individual B2B buyers answered the survey, they reported on characteristics of their company as a whole. The resulting four enterprise profiles are therefore highly likely to shape multiple buying decisions at the same company (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Company-Level Characteristics That Meaningfully Distinguish Four Enterprise Change Readiness Profiles

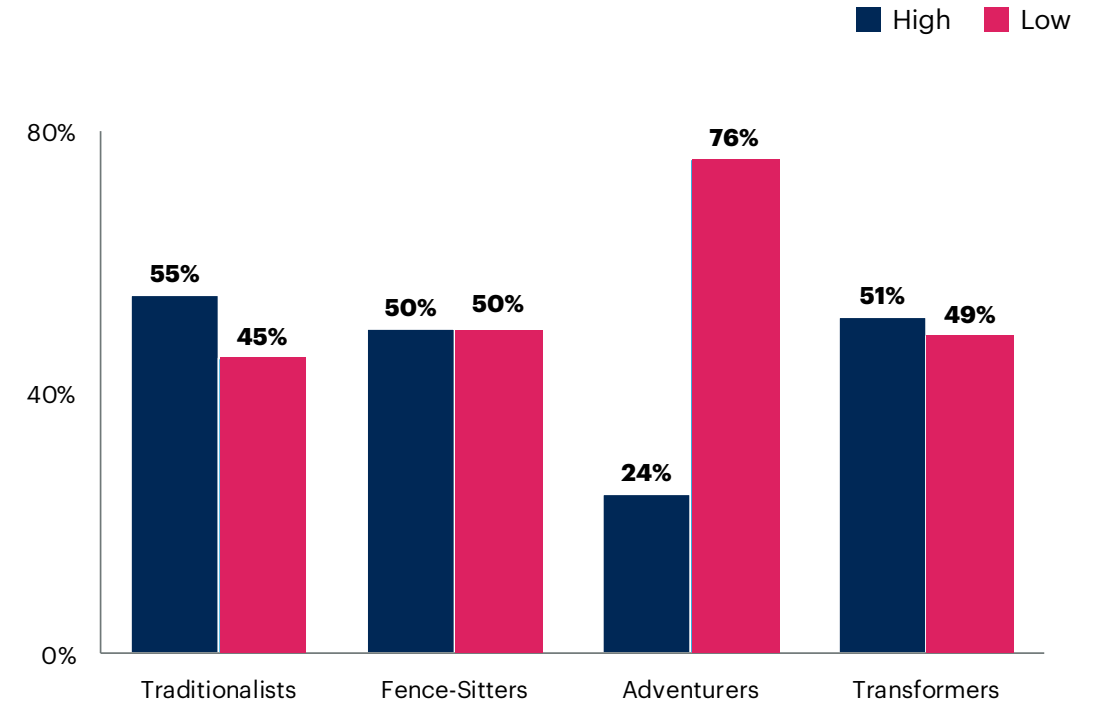


These four customer profiles are broadly distributed across company sizes, geographies, purchase categories and industries. That means you are likely to encounter all four profiles when marketing to prospects and existing customers, regardless of what and where you sell. Overall, Fence-Sitters are the most common profile at 39% of survey respondents, while Traditionalists are the least common at 9% of respondents (for additional detail, download the presentation deck at the end of this document).

Even if you already have enterprise personas in place, these profiles can enhance your understanding of target customers and accounts (see [Improve B2B Lead Generation by Defining and Targeting Enterprise Personas](#)). That is because they exhibit distinctive content and channel preferences, buying behaviors and commercial outcomes. In particular, Adventurers are significantly less likely to complete high-quality deals, which are defined as ambitious or premium purchases that live up to customers' expectations (see Figure 2).

The additional detail below will help you recognize and appeal to each customer profile.

Figure 2: Deal Quality by Enterprise Change Readiness Profile



# Tailor Your Demand Generation for the Four Enterprise Change Readiness Profiles



**Profile No. 1: Traditionalists**



**Profile No. 2: Fence-Sitters**



**Profile No. 3: Adventurers**



**Profile No. 4: Transformers**

## 1. Traditionalists

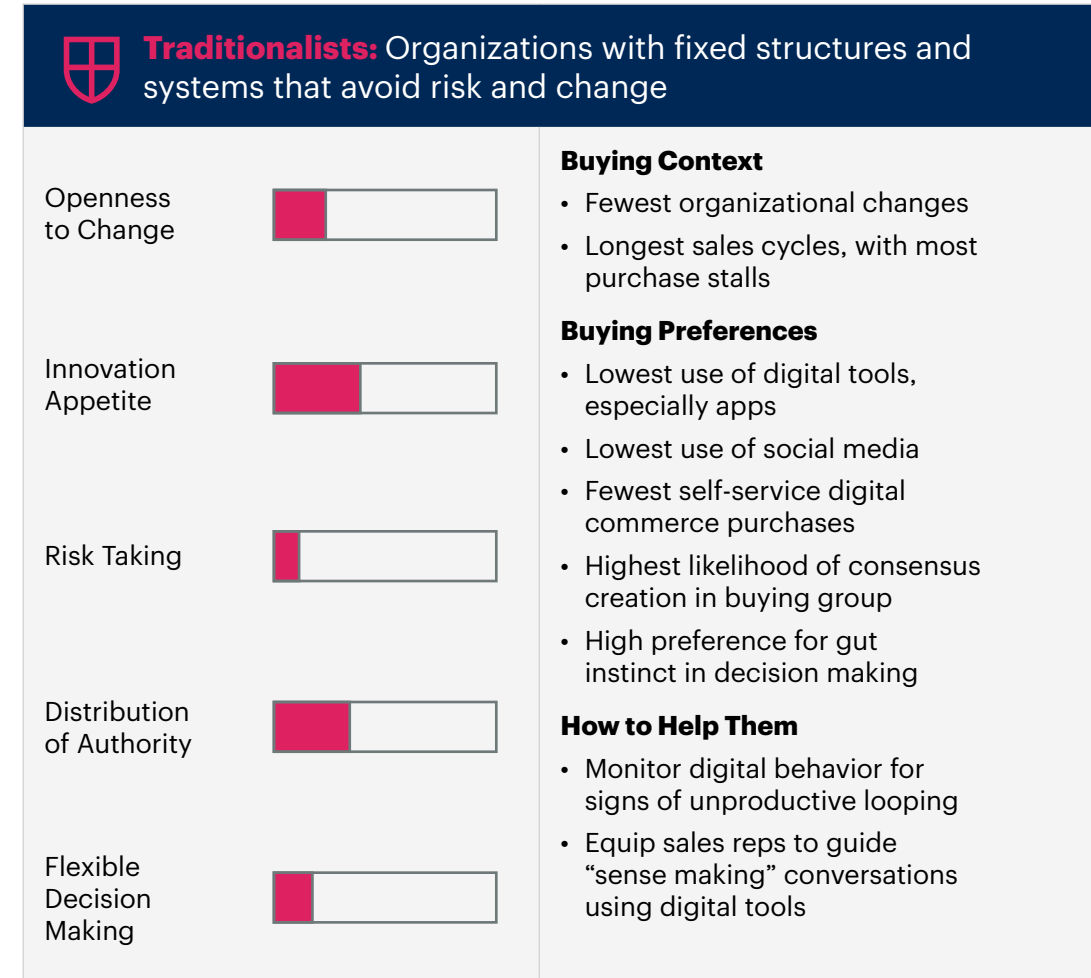
Traditionalists are organizations with fixed structures and systems that avoid risk and change (see Figure 3).

### • Buying Context

Across all four profiles, the vast majority of B2B purchases are made amid organizational change, such as digital transformation or restructuring (see Engaging B2B Buyers in an Uncertain Environment). However, Traditionalists are most likely to experience only one type of change at a time: a change in business operations, but not a change in market dynamics or organizational structure. This means they are likely to care about realizing the benefits of a single change, rather than managing complex interdependencies.

Traditionalists have the longest sales cycles of the four profiles, and they are most likely to report purchase stalls, or multiple points when they stopped making progress. Their plodding approach risks excessive cautiousness and unproductive delays as they seek to preserve the status quo.

Figure 3: Snapshot of the Traditionalists Profile



Source: Gartner



- **Buying Preferences**

The majority of B2B buyers across all four profiles use digital channels, technologies and guided selling tools (e.g., supplier mobile apps, interactive content) as part of their purchase consideration. However, Traditionalists are least likely to do so: A full 22% reported not using any digital tools such as diagnostics or calculators. Likewise, Traditionalists are least likely to consult social media sources for research or to interact with suppliers on mobile apps.

Traditionalists take a very relationship-based approach to buying. They are most likely to report seeking consensus within the buying group, and they are most reliant on sales rep assistance to make a purchase. They also report using their gut feel, rather than hard data and analytics, for decision making. In the context of organizational risk aversion, these buying behaviors and preferences likely contribute to slow sales cycles.

- **How to Help Them**

Monitor Traditionalists for signs of unproductive looping, or revisiting tasks and decisions without reaching new insight about their needs and goals. On digital channels, this could look like consuming the same type of content repeatedly. In sales interactions, this could take the form of multiple meetings with the same agenda. A simple buying checklist can help Traditionalists acknowledge completed tasks and feel ready to move forward. Likewise, messaging that emphasizes low risk and high available support can help them feel secure in the face of change.

Equip sales reps to take a sense-making approach to buying group interactions, helping the group interpret and apply information from digital sources and tools, rather than defaulting to gut instinct. The effective integration of human and digital information will help these buyers feel secure and more confident that they've done enough to move on (see [How to Build a B2B Commercial Strategy That Boosts Customer Confidence](#)).

## 2. Fence-Sitters

Fence-sitters are organizations that fail to commit to a strong culture or direction (see Figure 4).

### • Buying Context

Fence-Sitters are essentially conformists. Like most companies, they are pursuing some degree of digital transformation, but they are relatively unlikely to make other types of organizational change. That means they may be looking for proven products and services that support continuous improvement or business modernization, as opposed to radical innovation.

### • Buying Preferences

Compared to the other profiles, Fence-Sitters spend more time on independent online research, versus meeting with suppliers or other members of the buying group. During that research process, they stick to traditional channels such as supplier websites and they report lower use of social media.

Across profiles, the average buying group contains between four and 10 members, each of whom consumes four to 10 information sources. Fence-Sitter buyers who research independently may encounter different sources than other members of the buying group, and they may not take the time to fully wrestle with or reconcile seemingly inconsistent information. This buying behavior, in the context of a noncommittal organizational culture, could lead the group to focus on what they can easily agree on, such as price or a well-known brand.

Figure 4: Snapshot of the Fence-Sitters Profile

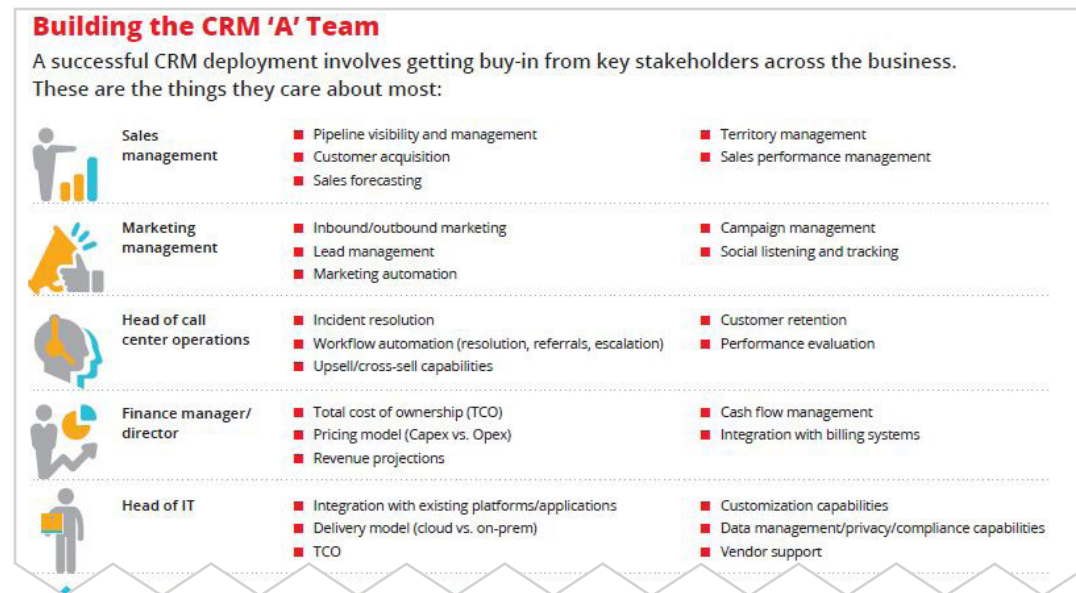


Source: Gartner

## • How to Help Them

Make sure that your website content and guided selling tools, even if designed for independent consumption, encourage buyers to consider other stakeholders' perspectives and needs. For example, SugarCRM's content provides visibility into common stakeholder objections and coaching on how to best respond (see Figure 5). Fence-Sitters may especially value testimonials that demonstrate how others have successfully used your product to manage incremental change (see Build, Deploy and Manage a B2B Customer Advocacy Program That Works).

Figure 5: SugarCRM's Guide to Identifying and Managing Buying Stakeholders



If you're not the safe bet in your category, use commercial insight to shock Fence-Sitters out of complacency and motivate more decisive action. Commercial insights capture customers' current thinking, expose the flaws or misinformation in this thinking, and then present a better course of action tied to your unique strengths (see Ignition Guide to Creating a Lead Generation Campaign). Pair commercial insight with practical change enablement to make the better way forward feel incremental and within reach.

### Navigating the Naysayers

How to overcome common objections to a CRM purchase.

#### OBJECTION

#### RESPONSE

Can we afford this solution?

We can start small with a per-user subscription model and scale as needed. We'll look for a solution with no hidden fees for maintenance, reporting, or customization. Additionally, in terms of productivity gains and increased sales velocity, not deploying the system now could cost us money in the short and long term.

Our employees hate CRM — it's too complex.

We can build role-specific interfaces that make it easy for users to interact with the system from desktop or mobile devices. They will see an intuitive tool that gives them access to the information they need when it matters most. And the insights we can draw from that data can give them an edge over the competition.

We don't have the skills to do the customization we need for this to work.

Customization is essential to creating a total customer view to empower our engagement strategy. Web services and standardized APIs make it easier to create custom integrations that are uniquely suited to our business needs. Plus, it's better to start small, configuring the system for quick wins, than to be oversold up-front on a bunch of features that we don't need.

We should buy from the CRM market leader — that's the safest choice.

Any vendor, large or small, can terminate development or support of a product at any time. We want to choose a vendor that offers solid protection in case of disaster or prolonged downtime, with the ability to run our CRM software with multiple cloud options — not just access it from a single cloud environment. And think about this: is doing the same thing as everyone else a good way to differentiate ourselves?

Our current solution is fine.

Our current system does not scale and does not allow us to address the changing needs and behaviors of our customers. We need a modern CRM solution to compete and grow. Advanced workflow capabilities are critical to simplifying complex processes. We need to develop mobile strategies and experiences on the fly, something we lack today.

We will lose control of our data with a cloud-based CRM solution.

The market is moving toward a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) consumption model. We will have the option to select a public cloud or a private cloud deployment. We will also ensure that the software complies with all relevant data security and privacy regulations.

Source: Gartner

### 3. Adventurers

Adventurers are organizations whose openness to risk and change exceeds their practical readiness (see Figure 6).

#### • Buying Context

Adventurers have the most discordant organizational cultures: Their leaders prize risk taking and adaptability, yet their technologies, structures and decision-making processes are rigid. Gartner research has found that transformational change often creates these “cultural tensions,” or a mismatch between new values and legacy practices (see How to Communicate to Improve Employee Engagement and Culture).

In fact, Adventurers are overwhelmed by change. Compared to Traditionalists and Fence-Sitters, they are more likely to experience multiple types of changes simultaneously. They also report the highest environmental uncertainty, or the belief that their organization is changing in an unpredictable manner. This pattern of responses suggests the organization is attempting to change too fast or too much, beyond its own capacity to absorb.

Concerningly, Adventurers have the lowest-quality deals, the highest purchase regret — and the shortest sales cycles. Their aggressive goals lead to fast, ill-considered purchase decisions that do not yield long-term value for either the winning supplier or the buying organization.

Figure 6: Snapshot of the Adventurers Profile



Source: Gartner

- **Buying Preferences**

It's no surprise that the chaotic operating environment spills over to Adventurers' buying group dynamics. Adventurers are least likely to report seeking consensus and they are most likely to report buying group conflict. Compared to other profiles, Adventurers work on the most buying tasks asynchronously, which creates less room for discussion. Decision makers may rush ahead without a complete, shared understanding of organizational needs.

Adventurers also report the highest use of third-party information sources, such as industry experts and blogs. Suppliers have little direct control over the information they will find there or how they will interpret it. This is especially worrisome given that Adventurers report a high preference for decisions based on gut instinct, rather than facts and data. Adventurers may be cherry-picking information that fits their preconceived notions and strong bias toward action.

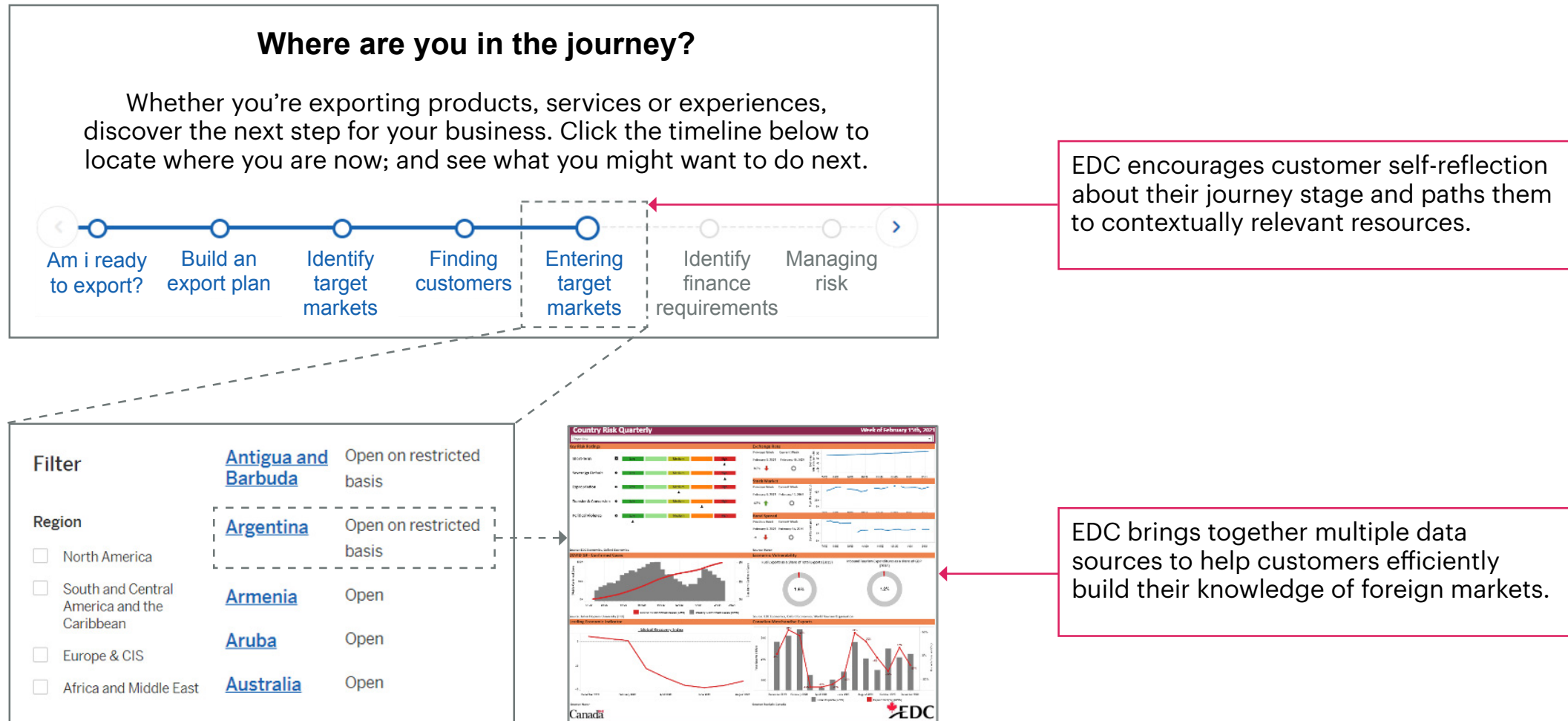
- **How to Help Them**

Adventurers need a lot of help to get to mutually valuable purchase decisions. This makes them less attractive prospects from a lead scoring or account tiering perspective. Nevertheless, Adventurers make up 20% of survey respondents, and you'll probably find them among your existing customer base.

Above all, Adventurers need to slow down and reexamine their own needs and goals. Use course-changing digital experiences to intentionally slow these buyers down and help them engage in productive, regret-minimizing reflection. For example, Export Development Canada (EDC) created a knowledge hub to help small exporters gather market intelligence and assess their readiness to export (see Figure 7). To learn more, see *Working Across Functions to Design Digital Customer Experiences That Boost Loyalty*. You may need to partner with third-party experts to drive adoption of these experiences.

Once they have chosen a path, equip Adventurers with introductory buyer and change enablement resources. These should contain highly prescriptive advice and practical support for completing specific buying tasks and managing the change surrounding a purchase decision. In particular, Adventurers need templates and checklists that prompt them to identify shared goals and sources of value across the buying group (see *How to Create Content That Drives B2B Purchases*). After an initial sale, these customers will need additional implementation guidance to get full value from your product.

Figure 7: Sample Output From EDC's Knowledge Hub





## 4. Transformers

Transformers are organizations whose appetite for change is backed by firm resource commitments (see Figure 8).

### • Buying Context

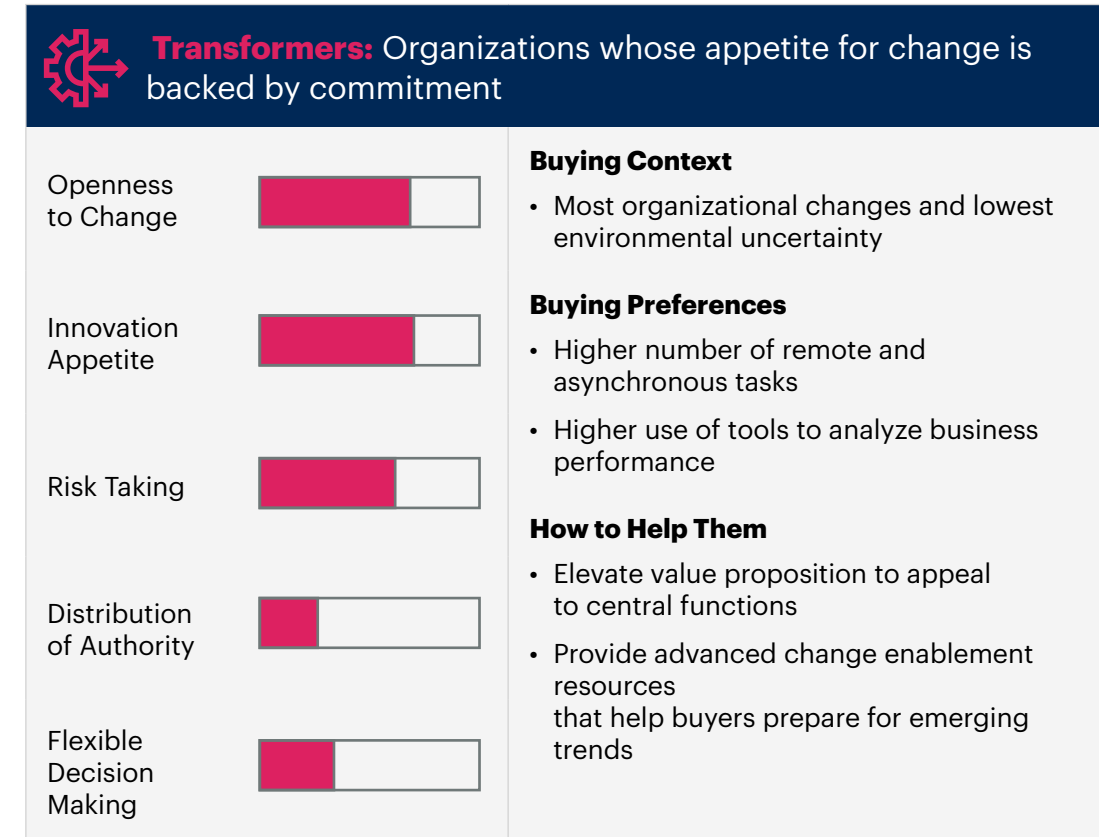
Where Adventurers are stymied by change, Transformers lead it. Compared to other profiles, Transformers report the highest number of simultaneous changes, yet they also report the lowest environmental uncertainty. They also have relatively short sales cycles. On their face, Transformers are the most attractive customer profile for complex solution sales and early-stage markets. Their combination of ambition and change management proficiency makes them more likely to generate account growth opportunities, as they successfully integrate past purchases and move to scale employee access or address growing needs.

### • Buying Preferences

Transformers are digital natives who complete more of their buying tasks remotely and asynchronously. Critically, they do not experience the same degree of buying group dysfunction as do Adventurers. Their superior technology investment almost certainly helps them collaborate well across boundaries of space and time.

Compared to other profiles, Transformers report higher use of guided selling tools to analyze their business performance. In the backdrop of frequent but well-managed organizational change, this buying behavior reflects a commitment to continually evaluate their own progress and buy what is necessary to get to the next level of performance.

Figure 8: Snapshot of the Transformers Profile



Source: Gartner

- **How to Help Them**

Because Transformers have centralized decision making, it is especially important to elevate your value proposition to appeal to strong central functions (e.g., finance, procurement). In doing so, you will need to highlight your unique advantage so the discussion doesn't devolve to price.

Although change enablement can be a unifying theme that resonates with multiple functions, Transformers don't need foundational guidance on change management. In fact, they should be recognized as industry leaders. Transformers will respond best to change enablement resources that help them reinforce their leadership position by preparing for the next set of emerging trends disrupting their industry (see Improving Your B2B Content Strategy to Resonate in Times of Disruption).

## **Conclusion**

Use Gartner's organizational buying profiles to quickly enhance your customer understanding. Map each profile's defining characteristics to your existing target accounts. Then, partner with sales to design digital content, campaigns and sales support that will resonate with each customer profile that you choose to pursue. Ultimately, this will help your customers overcome unproductive behaviors and even shift their companies to a better state of change readiness.



# Actionable, objective insight

Explore these additional complimentary resources and tools for marketing and communications leaders:

## Webinar

Gartner Panel: Marketing's New Rules of B2B Buyer Engagement

Learn how to integrate digital and human engagement into the buyer experience.

Watch Now



## Research

Elevate the Role of Marketing in Account Growth

Use B2B marketing strategies to drive account growth.

Download Research



## Conference

Gartner Marketing Symposium/Xpo™ 2023

Expand your sphere of influence and build your network in person in Aurora, CO.

Learn More



Already a client?

Get access to even more resources in your client portal. [Log In](#)

# Connect With Us

Get actionable, objective insight to deliver on your mission-critical priorities. Our expert guidance and tools enable faster, smarter decisions and stronger performance. Contact us to become a client:

**U.S.:** 1 855 811 7593

**International:** +44 (0) 3330 607 044

[Become a Client](#)

**Learn more about Gartner for Marketers**

[gartner.com/en/marketing](https://gartner.com/en/marketing)

**Stay connected to the latest insights**



© 2023 Gartner, Inc. and/or its affiliates. All rights reserved. Gartner is a registered trademark of Gartner, Inc. and its affiliates. This publication may not be reproduced or distributed in any form without Gartner's prior written permission. It consists of the opinions of Gartner's research organization, which should not be construed as statements of fact. While the information contained in this publication has been obtained from sources believed to be reliable, Gartner disclaims all warranties as to the accuracy, completeness or adequacy of such information. Although Gartner research may address legal and financial issues, Gartner does not provide legal or investment advice and its research should not be construed or used as such. Your access and use of this publication are governed by [Gartner's Usage Policy](#). Gartner prides itself on its reputation for independence and objectivity. Its research is produced independently by its research organization without input or influence from any third party. For further information, see "Guiding Principles on Independence and Objectivity." CM\_GBS\_1893539

**Gartner®**