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Digital Markets

2025 Software Buying Trends

How Software Buyers Refine Their Options and Make a Purchase Decision



Foreword



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Every software vendor knows that landing on a buyer's shortlist is critical to locking down a sale. But in an increasingly competitive marketplace—where buyers have endless purchase options and are bombarded by information from a dizzying number of sources—making it to the shortlist has never been more of a challenge. What can you do to ensure you have a spot?

Leveraging the latest data from Gartner Digital Markets' 2025 Tech Trends Survey* of 3,500 software buyers from around the world, this report breaks down how software buyers go from an initial list of options to a shortlist of serious contenders. How many vendors do they consider at each stage? What purchase factors do they prioritize? Which information sources do they trust the most to help them make decisions?

Here are some key findings from our research:

- **Businesses are ready to spend big on software:** 82% of growth businesses plan to spend more on software in 2025 compared to 2024, and are mostly investing in IT security and AI.
- **Reputation and experience inform initial lists:** Vendor reputation (53%) and having previous experience with a vendor (48%) are the most influential factors when creating initial lists.
- **Reviews are the #1 source informing shortlists:** 41% of buyers use customer reviews when doing research to pare down their shortlist options.
- **Trials make or break the purchase decision:** 62% of buyers say the product trial is their top factor in the final purchase decision.
- **Purchase regret is shockingly common:** 59% of buyers regret at least one software purchase made in the past 18 months, causing many to replace their software with a product from a different vendor.

Software buyers in 2025 are ready to invest but unwilling to compromise. They are eager to spend big on new technology to achieve business goals, but not if it introduces new problems with everything they've implemented before.

In order to secure a sale from this hyper-diligent buyer, vendors need to thoroughly understand their purchase journey. Read on to learn more about how software buyers pare down their options and make a purchase decision, and get recommendations to make the list and build strong relationships.



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Bigger software budgets, bigger buyer concerns

Most buyers plan to spend more on software in 2025

Rapid technology advancements, tough competition, and high labor costs remain as top business challenges in 2025.

Despite these challenges, 83% of software buyers globally say they expect their organization to grow over the next 18 months. And among growth businesses, **82% plan to spend more on software in 2025 than they did in 2024**. Software continues to play a pivotal role in enhancing efficiencies, uncovering new opportunities, and driving sustainable revenue.

In other words, software vendors are in a prime position to grow their customer base in 2025. But it won't be easy.

Though buyers have bigger software budgets—and are eager to spend them—they're weighing more factors with every purchase decision than ever before.

Q: Does your organization plan to spend more, less or the same for software in 2025 compared to 2024? n=3,500 software buyers

Top buyers increasing software spend



Business size insights

The larger a business is, the more they will spend on software in 2025. Almost 8 out of every ten large enterprises plan to spend somewhat more (5%-15) or much more (over 15%) compared to the previous year.

Industry insights

The top industries increasing software spend in 2025 are insurance, marketing & advertising, and information technology.

Country insights

Out of the nine countries surveyed, businesses in India, Brazil, and Germany are expected to spend the most in software in 2025.

Buyers are prioritizing IT security to avoid threats

It's not just about finding the best product within budget in a given software category anymore, and that's reflected in where buyers are prioritizing their software spend.

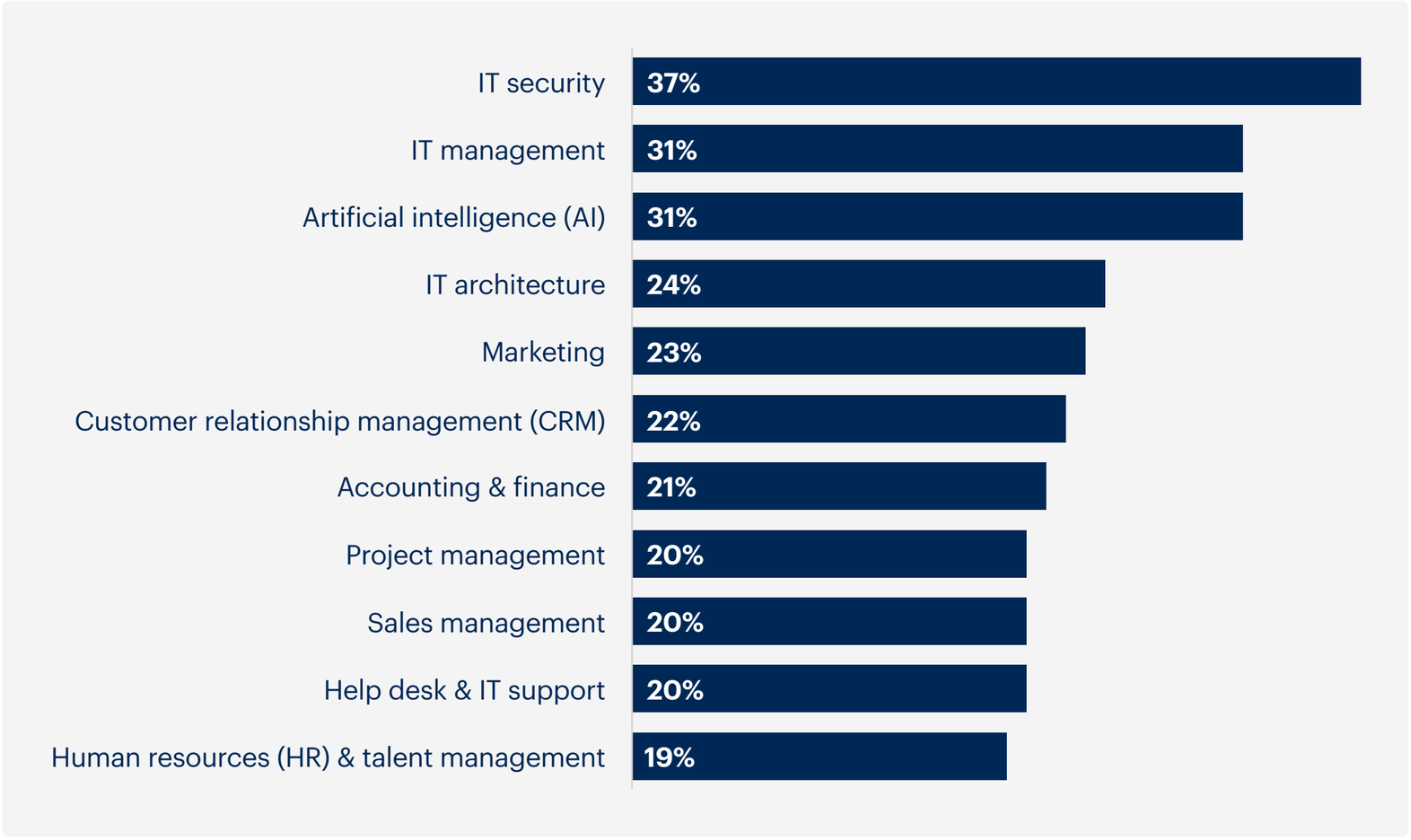
Take IT security, for example. With the potential for a devastating hack looming larger than ever, buyers are not only investing in standalone security solutions, but evaluating how security features impact every inch of their technology stack.

The number of buyers that cite **managing and preventing security threats as a top business challenge has increased 46%** since last year. In fact, mitigating security vulnerabilities is now the top challenge when buying software.

It won't matter how feature-rich or user-friendly your software is in 2025. If it isn't secure, buyers aren't buying.

Q: Thinking about your organization's budget for the next year, which of the following software tools are top priorities for investments? Please select all that apply. n=3,500 software buyers

Top priorities with 2025 software budgets

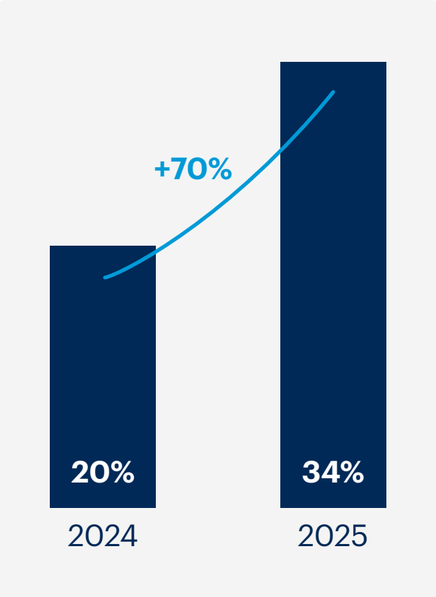


Assessing the risk and value of AI is a growing business challenge

Another undeniable factor impacting purchase decisions is artificial intelligence (AI). With the business-to-business (B2B) software market now oversaturated with AI options (the number of AI software listings on Gartner Digital Markets nearly doubled in 2023), buyers are having a hard time discerning the most valuable AI use cases, and picking out the best AI tools for those use cases.

As a result, the number of buyers that say assessing the value and risk of generative AI is a top business challenge has skyrocketed in 2025. AI is no longer a system-seller by itself; buyers want to know what exactly your AI brings to the table, and if the reward for injecting more AI into their software stack outweighs the risk.

The number of buyers that consider assessing GenAI value and risk a top business challenge has increased 70% year-over-year



Q: As a business decision-maker, which of the following challenges do you expect to face in 2025? Please select all that apply.
(2024) n=3,484 software buyers
(2025) n=3,500 software buyers



Putting your best foot forward in 2025

In a fast-changing and increasingly competitive marketplace, staying ahead and capturing software buyers' attention (and budget) is not easy. It requires innovation and adapting your positioning to solve top-of-mind buyer challenges. Here are our recommendations:

1

Build awareness and credibility

Making a lasting impression to capture increased software buyer demand requires a channel strategy that enhances brand awareness and trust. Claim your profile on the Gartner Digital Markets platform to introduce your product to a large audience of relevant buyers actively searching for software. Own your story with customized product descriptions and build trust and credibility with verified reviews.

2

Instill trust with security features and certifications

As technology grows more intricate, businesses are becoming more concerned with safeguarding data and protecting against system vulnerabilities, such as malware and ransomware attacks. Software providers need to highlight security features in product messaging to boost trust among buyers. Updating your product profile with security features and incorporating screenshots of security certifications can help build buyer confidence.

3

Integrate AI in your offerings

As the AI space matures, most organizations are looking for AI-powered software rather than relying on stand-alone AI solutions. This presents unique opportunities for vendors to embed AI functionality wherever it can improve the core capabilities of their existing product.

How buyers build their initial software list and shortlist

Buying teams are diverse and have a few top-of-mind options on their initial list

Have you ever decided to make a big purchase—whether it's a new car or new software—and immediately made a list of potential options in your head? We all have.

This is a buyers' initial list. It's the software options buyers consider before they've done any research, and the list that 81% of buyers end up making a purchase from most or all of the time.

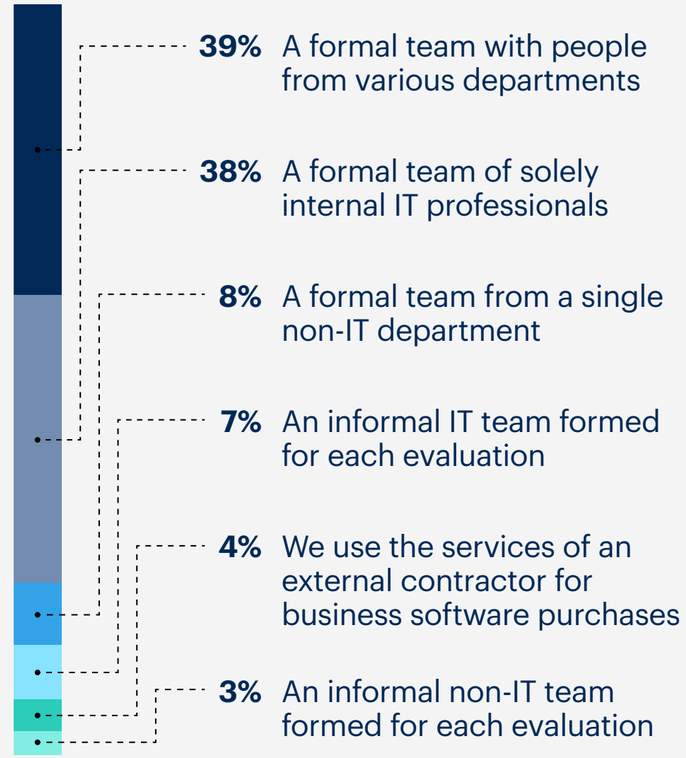
Securing your product's spot on this initial list is its own unique challenge. For one thing, because B2B software purchases are often made as a group (most often either all from IT or a mix of IT and non-IT departments), each person is bringing their own initial list to their table.

Software buyers have an average of 4.4 options on their initial list



Q: When looking to buy new software, how many vendors are usually on your initial informal list before conducting formal research into the purchase?
n=3,500 software buyers

Diversity of software buying teams



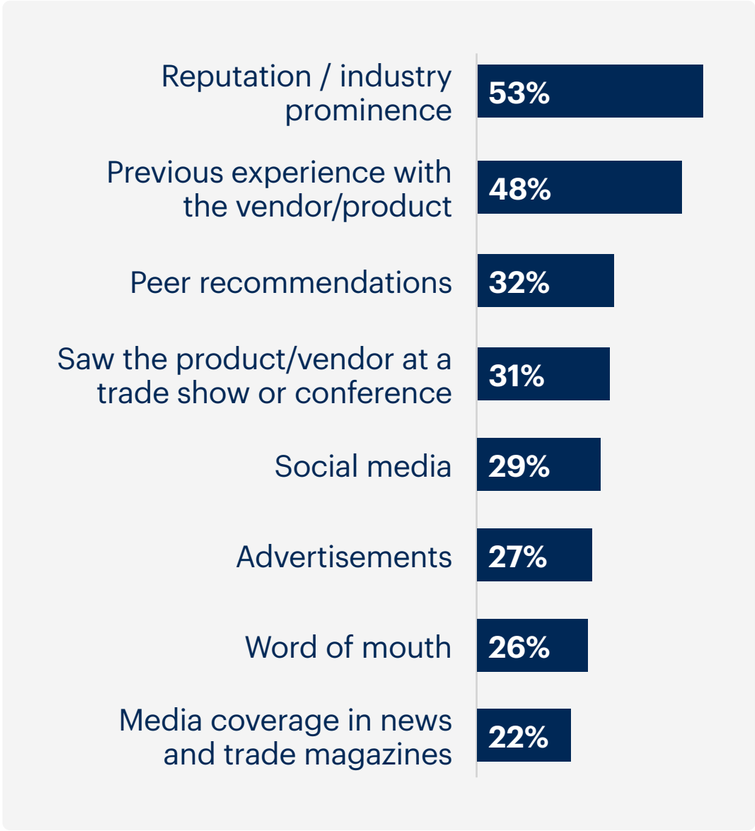
Q: Who handles new software evaluation, selection, and/ or purchase-related matters in your organization? Please select one response only.
n=3,500 software buyers
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Buyers turn to reputable brands they recognize to build an initial list

Complicating matters further, this initial list is influenced most by brand reputation and industry prominence. That is, the image of the vendor that exists in buyers' minds based on brand recognition and credibility, resonance with buyer needs, and differentiation from others in the market.

Other factors that strongly shape the initial list are previous experience with the vendor or product, recommendations from peers, and even which brands someone saw at a trade show.

Top factors that influence which vendors end up on the initial list



Q: What are the top factors that typically lead to vendors or products being on your initial informal list? Select up to three. n=3,500 software buyers

Business size insights

The larger a business is, the more likely that vendor reputation (62%) and previous experience with a vendor or product (62%) becomes a factor. Small enterprises (1,000-4,999 employees) are the most likely to consider products they saw at a trade show or conference (38%).

Industry insights

Buyers from marketing/advertising businesses are the most likely to factor social media (47%). Government buyers are the least likely (13%). Service industry buyers factor vendor reputation (66%) and previous experience with a vendor or product (62%) more often than the average buyer.

Country insights

Buyers from India are the most likely to factor social media (35%) and media coverage (30%). Peer recommendations have the biggest influence on U.K. buyers (40%).

Getting on the initial list

Well-known brands have a clear advantage in securing their spots on initial lists thanks to their long-standing reputations and the word-of-mouth benefits that come from having a widespread customer base. But even smaller or newer vendors can do things to get on more initial lists. Here are our recommendations:

1

Get more visibility with buyers

Trade shows, conferences, social media, advertisements—these are all sources of information that have a major influence on buyers' initial lists. If you're not there, you need to be. In addition, create a Sponsored Profile on Capterra, GetApp and Software Advice to increase brand awareness and ensure you're getting in front of target buyers.

2

Ensure your brand is memorable

Make sure your brand messaging resonates with your target audience's situation—when Gartner asked no-regret software buyers to share the characteristics that separated the vendor they went with from the rest of the pack, "understanding their situation" was the top answer. [1]

3

Show off your category leadership

Earning a recognizable top-rated badge such as Capterra Shortlist, GetApp Category Leaders, and Software Advice FrontRunners, is a quick way to gain social proof and grow your reputation among software buyers.

Buyers refine their initial lists after doing research

Getting on the initial list can help you secure an eventual sale. But that doesn't mean it's guaranteed.

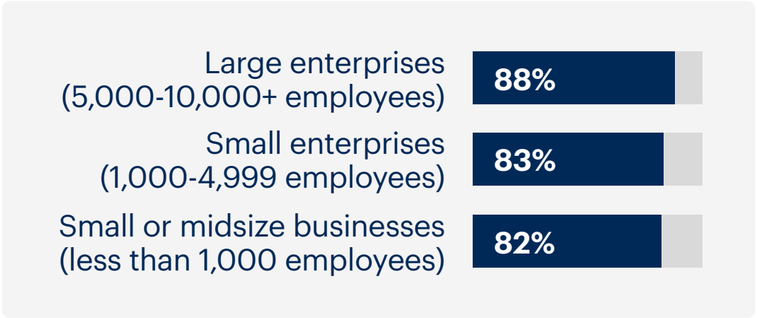
Less than a quarter of software buyers (24%) always purchase software that was on their initial list.

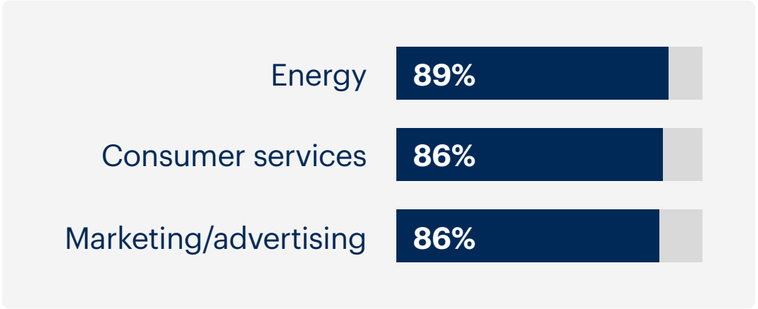
After doing research into different software options, buyers' initial lists turn into shortlists. And they rarely look the same:

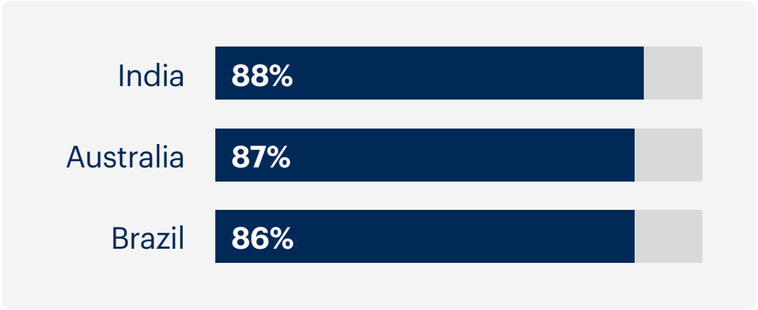
83% of software buyers say they make changes to their initial list after doing research—27% make significant or complete changes.

Q: How does your initial informal vendor or product list typically compare to your final list after conducting formal research? n=3,500 software buyers

Who changes their initial list the most







Business size insights

The larger a business is, the more likely they will make changes to the initial list of software options.

Industry insights

The top industries changing initial lists are energy, consumer services, and marketing & advertising.

Country insights

Out of the nine countries surveyed, businesses in India, Australia, and Brazil change initial lists the most.

One vendor is dropped from the initial list to the shortlist

Not only do buyer lists change going from an initial to a shortlist, but they also get smaller. One vendor, on average, isn't going to make it from the initial list to the shortlist.

Software buyers have an average of 4.4 options on their initial list



Q: When looking to buy new software, how many vendors are usually on your initial informal list before conducting formal research into the purchase? n=3,500 software buyers



Software buyers have an average of 3.5 options on their shortlist



Q: After conducting formal research, how many vendors or products typically comprise your final list? n=3,500 software buyers



Buyers favor reviews and third-party sources of information to create a shortlist

Vendors have significant sway to get on initial informal lists, but that sway dwindles in the research phase. Looking at the information sources that make the biggest impact during the research phase, we see buyers move away from vendor-provided information (trade shows, advertisements) in favor of information from more neutral third-party sources (reviews, expert recommendations, product comparison sites, etc.).

Q: As you conduct formal research to develop the shortlist of software vendors to consider, what are the most influential information sources? Select up to five. n=3,500 software buyers

Most influential information sources when creating a shortlist



Business size insights

The larger a business is, the more they rely on customer reviews (48%) and product comparison sites (48%).

Small enterprises use ChatGPT or other generative AI tools most often (31%).

Industry insights

Specialty retailers (49%) and insurance companies (48%) are among the buyers that rely the most on customer reviews.

Buyers from education use rankings or lists of top software providers more than the average buyer (43%).

Country insights

U.S. buyers are the most likely to use customer reviews (48%) and Google / search (43%) to inform their shortlists.

Buyers from India are the most likely to use product comparison sites (41%).

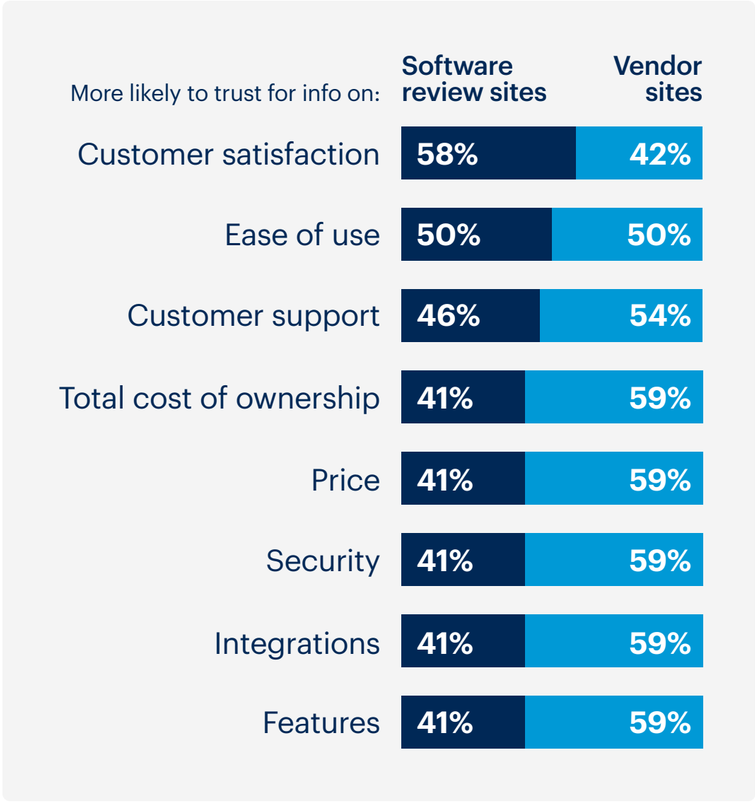
Together, review and vendor sites paint a complete picture

Diving deeper, we find that buyers view both review and vendor sites as trusted sources for facts (price, features, support, etc.), and to understand experience. In fact, buyers trust software review websites just as much, if not more, than vendor websites when researching information about a product's ease of use and customer satisfaction.

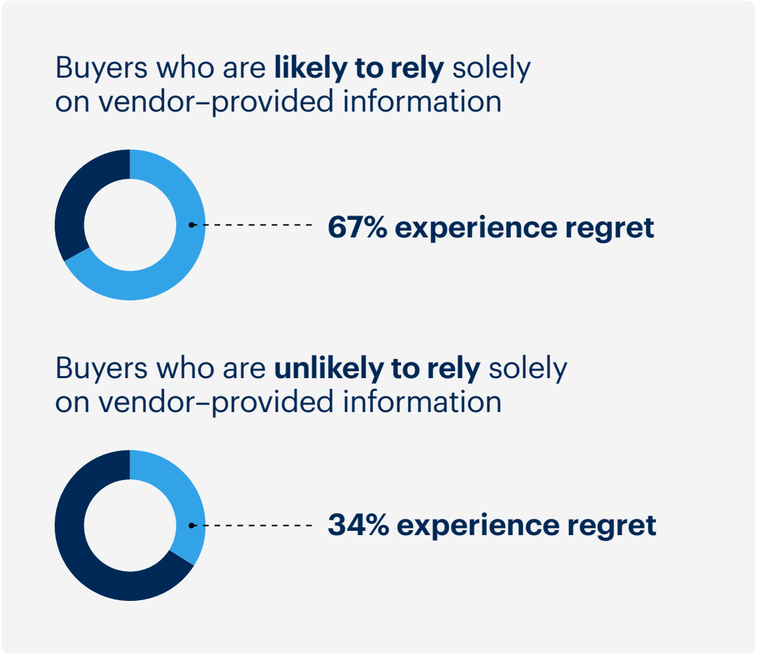
As if that wasn't enough, we also find that the more a buyer "rounds out" their research with information from third-party sources, the more likely they are to be satisfied with their ultimate purchase decision.

Q: Please select the type of site you are more likely to trust for information on the following factors when researching a software purchase? n=3,500 software buyers

Sites most trusted for different kinds of software information



Buyers who validate purchase decisions with third-party sources are more satisfied



Q1: How likely are you to buy software based SOLELY on information from the software vendor?
Q2: Do you regret any of the technology purchases your company has made in the past 18 months? n=3,500 software buyers

Getting on the shortlist

All of this evidence points to one conclusion: Vendors need to be viewed favorably by third-party sources to land on more shortlists and secure more sales. Here are our recommendations:

1

Gather customer feedback on software review sites

Increasing the number of verified reviews on third-party sites, such as Capterra, Software Advice, and GetApp, can send a strong signal to buyers that your offering is worth serious consideration. In addition, reviews help showcase your product's strengths and differentiators, highlight key features and provide buyers with the most comprehensive information while they research their shortlist.

2

Influence more buyers with a diversified review portfolio

Buyers prefer reading reviews from peers in a similar role, industry and business size. The more use cases your reviews cover, the more buyers you can influence. Other important factors buyers look for in user reviews are recency, verification and the presence of qualitative commentary.

3

Ensure product information is up to date across all online sources

GenAI tools can pull information about your products from anywhere—even if it's incorrect. More than ever, vendors need to stay on top of what product information is out there to ensure that buyers who are increasingly using GenAI as a software research tool have a positive experience.

How buyers make the final purchase decision

Buyers don’t engage with every shortlisted vendor

Once a buyer has finalized their shortlist, their next step is usually to reach out to vendors to begin demos and trials.

But here’s the twist: **Not all products on a buyer’s shortlist make it to this step**. According to our data, the average software buyer will not actively engage with one of the vendors on their shortlist.

In addition, we find that buyers went from **3.2** average vendor engagements last year to **2.5** this year—potentially lowering the total number of chances to sign a contract.

In any business, time is money. And with the average organization taking **4.6 months to evaluate all their software options** to make a purchase decision, many buyers are simply deciding to buy one of the first products they try if it manages to fit all their needs—even if it means not giving a fair shake to the other products on their shortlist.

Software buyers have an average of 3.5 options on their shortlist



Q: After conducting formal research, how many vendors or products typically comprise your final list? n=3,500 software buyers



Software buyers actively engage (talk to, attend demos, conduct trials) 2.5 vendors on average.



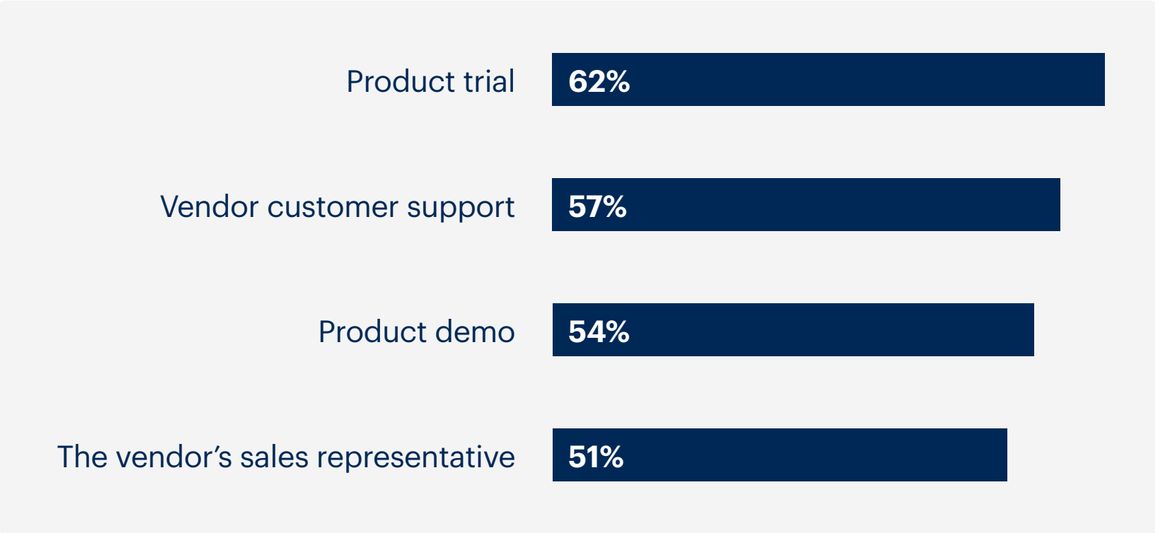
Q: Of the vendors on that final list, how many do you actively engage with? Meaning talk to, attend demos, get pricing, start a trial, or similar. n=3,500 software buyers



Product trials are deal breakers

Once you secure active engagement, we find that the trial is the biggest make-or-break factor in the final purchase decision:

Top factors in final purchase decision



Q: Do any of the following typically play a key role in your final decision to make a purchase? Select all that apply. n=3,500 software buyers

Business size insights

The larger the business, the more likely that product trials (72%) play a key role.

Small enterprises factor vendor customer support (66%), the vendor's sales rep (62%), and product demos (60%) more than any other size of business.

Industry insights

Business service buyers factor product trials the most (75%), while marketing/advertising businesses factor them the least (45%).

Government buyers favor product demos the most (70%), while IT software/hardware buyers favor vendor customer support (66%).

Country insights

Product trials are most important for buyers in Brazil (65%), Japan (64%), Germany, and India (62% each).

Demos matter the most in India (64%), the U.S. (59%), and the U.K. (55%).

Landing the demo or trial first

To ensure you beat out the other actively engaged vendors and land the deal, here are our recommendations at this final stage:

1

Offer a demo or trial period on your landing page

If you have active lead generation campaigns, ensure you are directing the traffic to a customized landing page with a clear call to action for a “Free trial” or to “Request a demo.”

2

Be ready with high-quality support

Customer support (or lack thereof) plays a critical factor for a majority of buyers before they even make a purchase decision. Even if it’s just a free trial period, you should provide self-service support in your product experience to help buyers see the full value you offer.

3

Dial-in feature availability

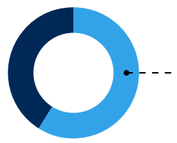
Giving users access to your entire product suite during the trial period can be overwhelming, but hiding too many features behind a paywall can cause frustration. Make sure potential buyers have access to enough features to understand the value and usefulness of your software.

The challenges of post-purchase retention

Purchase regret can lead to customer churn

As we've shown, securing a new buyer is no small feat. It takes patience, diligence and a hyper-targeted marketing strategy to grow your customer base in 2025.

Yet, customer retention may be even more difficult. With the number of buyers regretting at least one recent software purchase remaining high this year, it's clear that a sale does not guarantee long-term satisfaction. And when buyers experience regret, the most common remedial action they take is to replace their software with a product from a different vendor.



59% of buyers regret at least one software purchase made in the past 18 months

Q: Do you regret any of the technology purchases your company has made in the past 18 months?
n=3,500 software buyers

Software categories with highest purchase regret



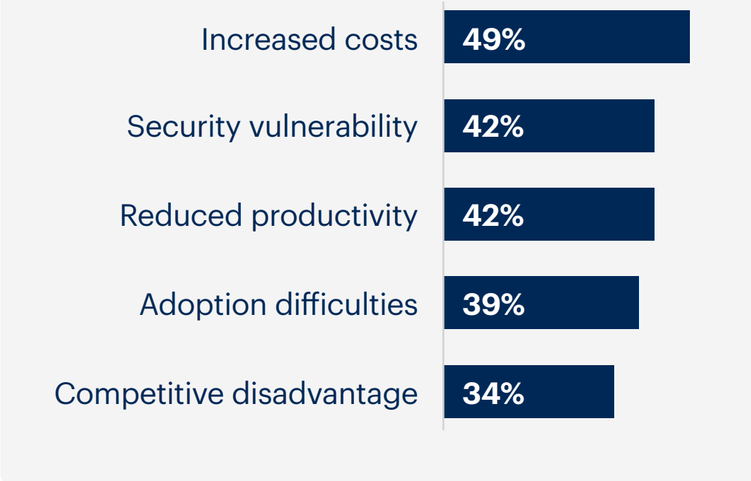
Q: For which of the following software categories did you experience regret? Please select all that apply.
n=2,081 software buyers who experienced regret

One regretful purchase can devastate any business

Regret continues to be a major fear among buyers because they know that a single regretful software purchase can be a major setback for their business. Nearly half of the regretful buyers in our survey cite increased costs as a result of their regretful software purchase. And when we break out our impact data by business size, we find that regretful purchases are causing a myriad of problems for businesses big and small.

Past regret is ultimately causing buyers to be more cautious with who they engage with for their next purchase. Vendors must understand these causes of regret and remedy them in order to secure their business.

Top impacts of purchase regret



Q: Thinking again about the software you regret purchasing, which of the following best describes the impact on your business? Please select all that apply. n=2,081 software buyers who experienced regret

Business size insights

Increased costs are the top impact from a regretful software purchase for SMBs (less than 1,000 employees).

Small enterprises (1,000-4,999 employees) are most likely to experience **reduced productivity** and **security vulnerabilities** from a regretful software purchase.

Large enterprises (5,000+ employees) are most likely to experience **adoption difficulties** and **being at a competitive disadvantage** from a regretful software purchase.

Retaining happy customers

To wrap things up, here are our recommendations for what vendors can do during and after the sale to keep a customer long term:

1

Set proper price expectations throughout the purchase process

The total software investment being more expensive than expected is the top product-related factor in purchase regret. Vendors need to be upfront about hidden or unexpected costs with software purchases, including costs for things such as setup, customization and maintenance.

2

Ensure sales and implementation are on the same page

A problematic handoff between the sales and implementation teams is the top vendor-related factor in purchase regret. You absolutely must ensure proper support is provided during implementation and assign a dedicated staff member to resolve particularly problematic purchases.

3

Take security seriously

As we mentioned at the beginning, security matters more than ever. Nearly a third of buyers with purchase regret (32%) would perform a security review with future purchases to avoid regret. Buyers are no longer tolerant when security flaws fall through the cracks, so you need to ensure that your product is secure from top to bottom.

Discover growth strategies that drive revenue

Understanding your market and adapting to changing buying behaviors is key to attracting buyers and making the list, securing the sale and avoiding churn this year.

Get Started

Methodology

Gartner Digital Markets' 2025 Tech Trends Survey was conducted online in August 2024 among 3,500 respondents in the U.S. (n=700), U.K. (n=350), Canada (n=350), Australia (n=350), France (n=350), India (n=350), Germany (n=350), Brazil (n=350), and Japan (n=350), at businesses across multiple industries and company sizes (five or more employees).

The survey was designed to understand the timeline, organizational challenges, adoption & budget, vendor research behaviors, ROI expectations and satisfaction levels for software buyers. Respondents were screened to ensure their involvement in business software purchasing decisions.

Sources

[1] Reach Buyers With Gartner's B2B Tech Brand Awareness Pyramid, Gartner (full research available to Gartner clients)

About Gartner Digital Markets

Gartner Digital Markets is the world's largest platform for finding software and services. More than 100 million people visit Capterra, GetApp, Software Advice, and UpCity across over 70 localized sites every year to read objective research and verified customer reviews that help them confidently choose the right software and services. Thousands of B2B companies work with Gartner Digital Markets to build their brand, capture buyer demand, and grow their business.

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