

The State of B2B Understanding.

When buyers get the “What’s in it for me?”
And what gets in the way.

RESEARCH BY FIDE B2B
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Fide



The State of B2B Understanding.

B2B companies spend enormous effort explaining complex products and services with the ultimate goal of driving sales.

Because the prevailing wisdom is often to just simplify content, Fide conducted this study to discover what helps buyers understand what's in it for them and what gets in their way.

For Fide, the research raises a practical question for B2B marketers:

Are you giving buyers the right information in the right context to help them get it and make a sale?

The State of B2B Understanding.

FIVE KEY INSIGHTS

1

The Goldilocks problem is real.

There's a fine balance between too much and not enough information.

2

Sales funnel progression $\neq$ understanding.

Progression doesn't indicate that your buyer gets what you're selling.

3

More relevant. Less generic.

Buyers need business context alongside product information.

4

Self-service is part of the sales journey.

Optimize your content for those searching without your help.

5

AI is playing a big role.

AI assistants were the top interaction for judging fit – over humans.

We explored what buyers in the US and UK need along the buyer journey to understand complex products and services, what gets in the way, and the type of communication they prefer.

METHODOLOGY

The study combines 136 responses from B2B buyers in the US and UK (96 US from SurveyMonkey and 40 UK from Prolific), in decision-making roles at organizations with 1,000+ employees, ranging from Senior Management through Executive and C-suite roles. Questions and response options were normalized across the two sources before analysis. Multi-select percentages represent the proportion of respondents selecting each option and therefore may total more than 100%. No weighting, imputation, or estimation was applied.

Insight 1

The Goldilocks problem is real

There's a fine balance between too much and not enough info.

WHAT THE DATA ESTABLISHES

Many buyers stated that they either receive too much information or insufficient information that is not detailed enough for them to truly understand the benefit.

FIDE RECOMMENDATIONS: SUBSTANCE OVER SIMPLICITY

The challenge for marketers selling complicated products and services is determining what points to keep, what can be removed, and what must be explained more clearly. It’s finding the space between saying everything and saying so little that the point disappears. It’s about deciding what to say, how much to say, and where to say it.

“Shorter” and “succinct” are not the same.
While cutting words to make something look more accessible is often the goal, it has to be done in a way that maintains what’s important.

Build information in layers.
Avoid trying to say everything at once. Lead with the core point, then follow up with the supporting points. All the details don’t have to be in one asset, but the next asset needs to be easy to find.

Prioritize & personalize before you simplify.
Instead of asking yourself: “How do we make this shorter?” Ask: “What does this audience need to understand?”

Consider your different buyers at every stage.
A CTO, business lead, and tech evaluator at the same company often require different levels of detail.

Replace jargon with plain language without losing substance.
While jargon was the biggest stated barrier, insufficient detail was also considered a problem. The opportunity is to make clearer and less generic content.

WHEN IT COMES TO ADJUSTING YOUR CONTENT, ASK YOURSELF:

Are we removing complexity, or making complexity easier to understand? Is the most important information obvious before the buyer gets into the details? Have we created different depths of information for different roles and needs? What have we assumed the buyer already knows?



KEY INSIGHTS

Insight 1

STUDY RESULTS

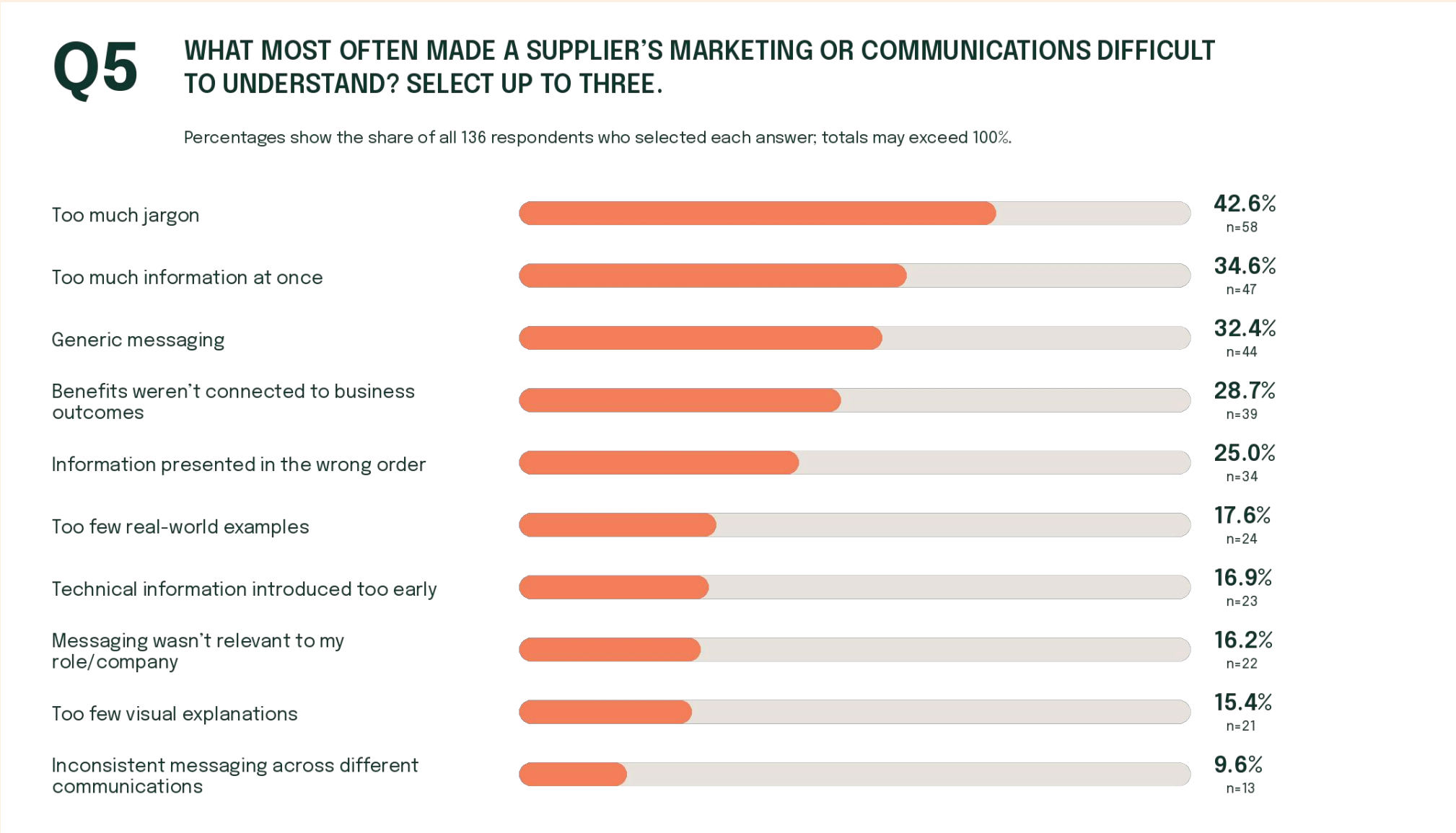
The results don’t point to a simple “too much information” problem. When buyers were asked what makes supplier communications difficult to understand, they said:

- 42.6% – too much jargon
- 34.6% – too much information at once
- 32.4% – generic messaging
- 28.7% – benefits not connected to business outcomes

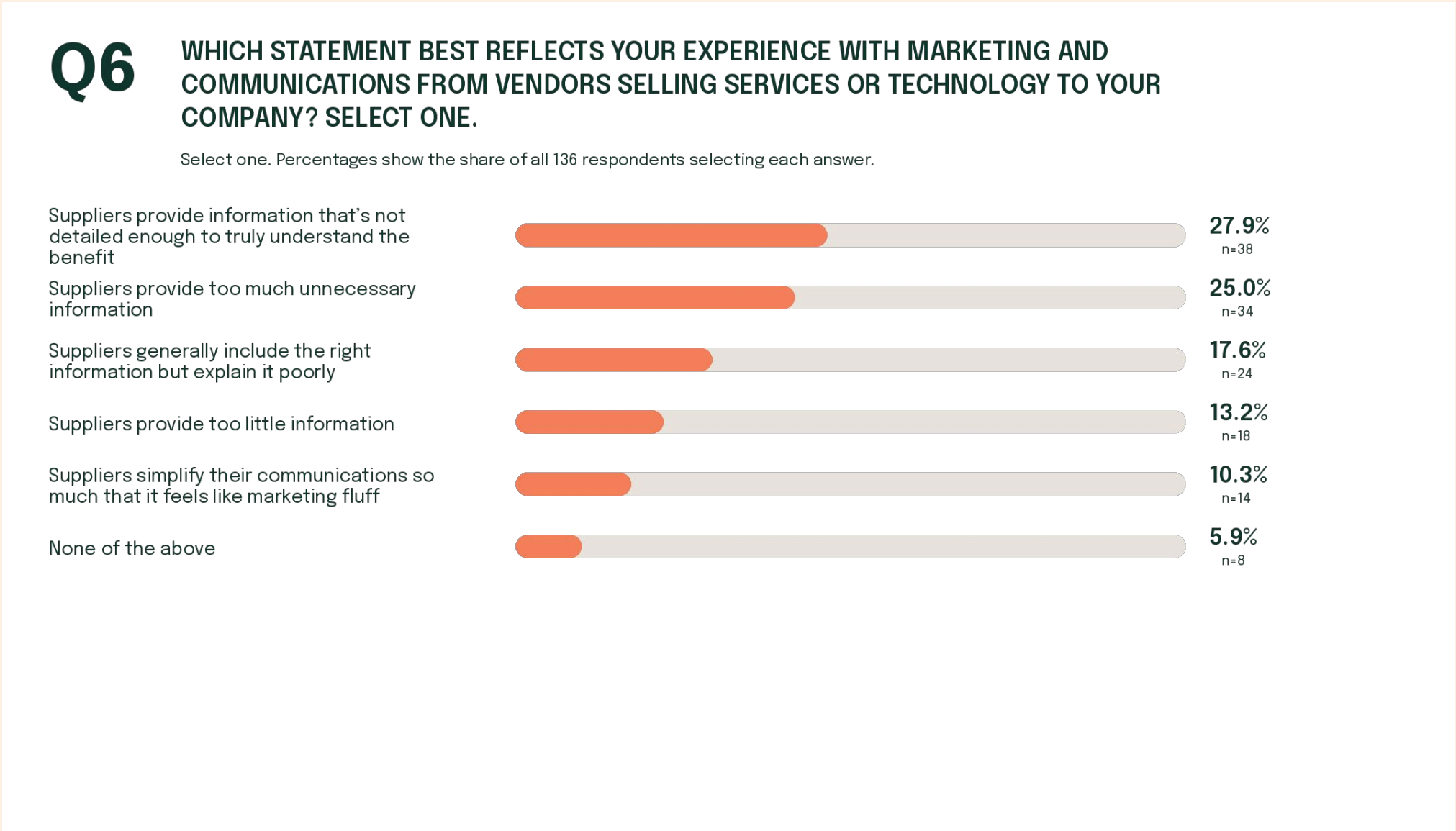
In a separate question describing supplier communications:

- 27.9% – information is not detailed enough to truly understand the benefit
- 25.0% – suppliers provide too much unnecessary information
- 17.6% – suppliers provide the right information but explain it poorly
- 10.3% – suppliers simplify communications so much that they feel like marketing fluff

Respondent-level analysis makes the tension clearer. Among buyers who said too much information at once makes communications difficult to understand, 40.4% also said suppliers provide either too little information or information that is not detailed enough to truly understand the benefit.



Percentages do not add up to 100% as respondents could select up to three answers.



Insight 2

Sales funnel progression ≠ understanding

Progression doesn’t indicate that your buyer gets what you’re selling.

WHAT THE DATA ESTABLISHES

Nearly 7 in 10 buyers move forward before they feel they truly understand.

FIDE RECOMMENDATIONS: PIPELINE PROGRESSION ISN’T AS RELIABLE AS YOU THINK

While the first insight talks about how you communicate, this is about questioning if your communication worked. That’s important because sales funnel progression has long been used as a common metric for determining the likelihood of a sale. But these results cast doubt about how reliable progression is as an indicator that buyers understand your value. This is especially important for those who use pipeline progression to forecast revenue.

Buyers might be on the journey without understanding your full benefit.

For marketers, buying progression may be an incomplete signal of communication effectiveness. A buyer downloading content, attending a demo, or moving into the next sales stage doesn’t necessarily mean they get it. This is particularly important for companies selling complex products and services because conventional funnel activity can continue even if a buyer has an understanding gap.

Develop ways to measure understanding beyond engagement.

Click-throughs, downloads, meetings, and stage progression tell you what buyers did. They don’t, however, tell you what those buyers understand. Consider where you can build indicators of understanding into your marketing and sales process to determine that they understand the problem you can solve for them and what differentiates you from the competition.

Don’t leave room for your competitors.

Progression can create a false sense of security. A buyer may appear to be moving closer to a purchase while still having unanswered questions or an incomplete understanding of your value. Those gaps leave room for a competitor to make their case more clearly.

If buyers don’t get it, they can’t explain it.

That means even if you think you have champions, they might not be able to convince their buying committee. Since some buyers use their ability to explain an offering as a test of their own understanding, marketers should ask not only, “Did we explain it?” but “Could the buyer now explain it?”

Equip your champions to sell internally.

Your materials need to do more than educate the buyer in front of you. They need to help that buyer communicate your product and service in the meetings you’re not in. Give your champions simple ways to communicate the business problem, your answer, why it matters, and the evidence that supports it.

TO HELP YOUR CHAMPIONS SELL INTERNALLY, ASK YOURSELF:

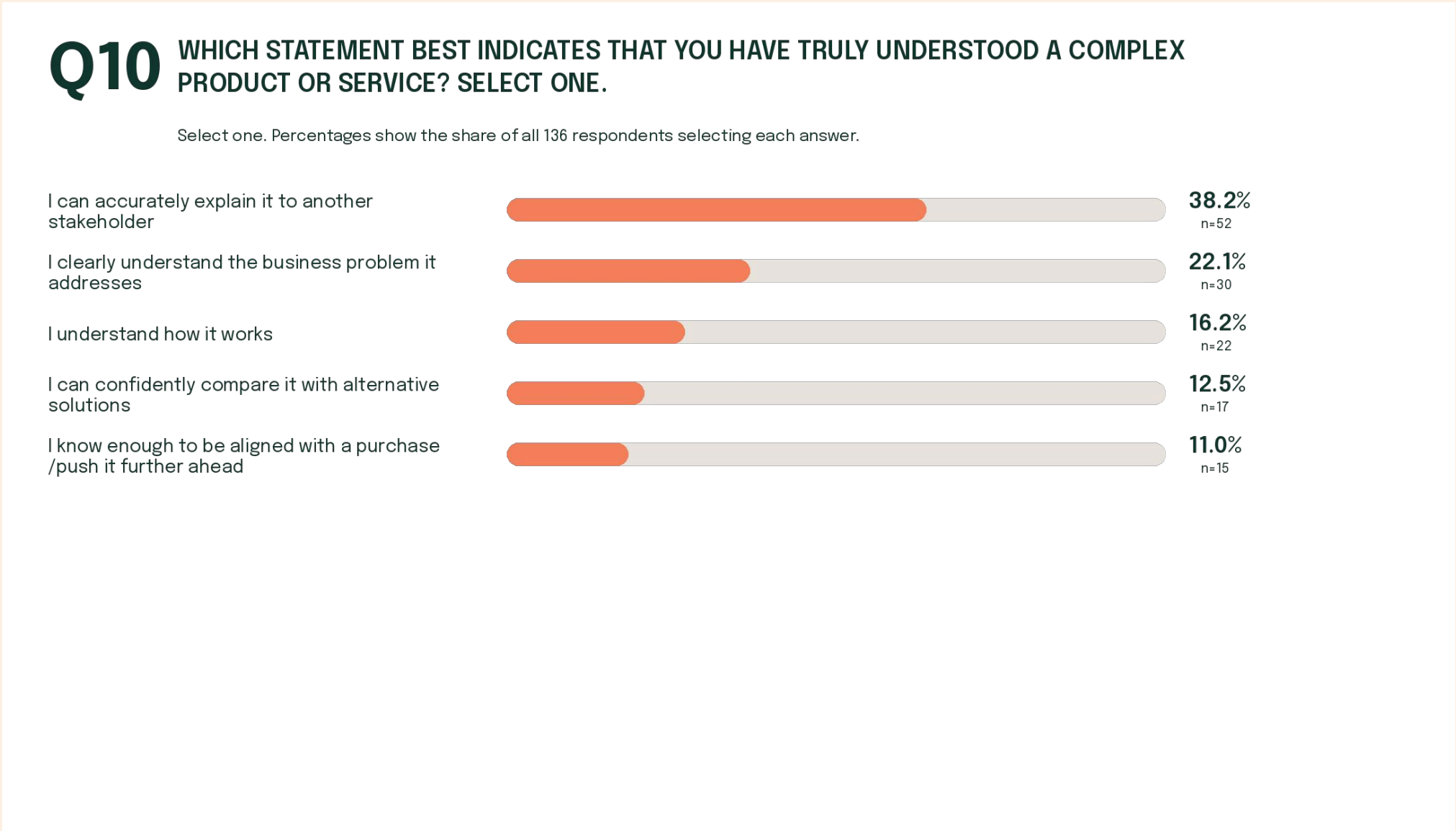
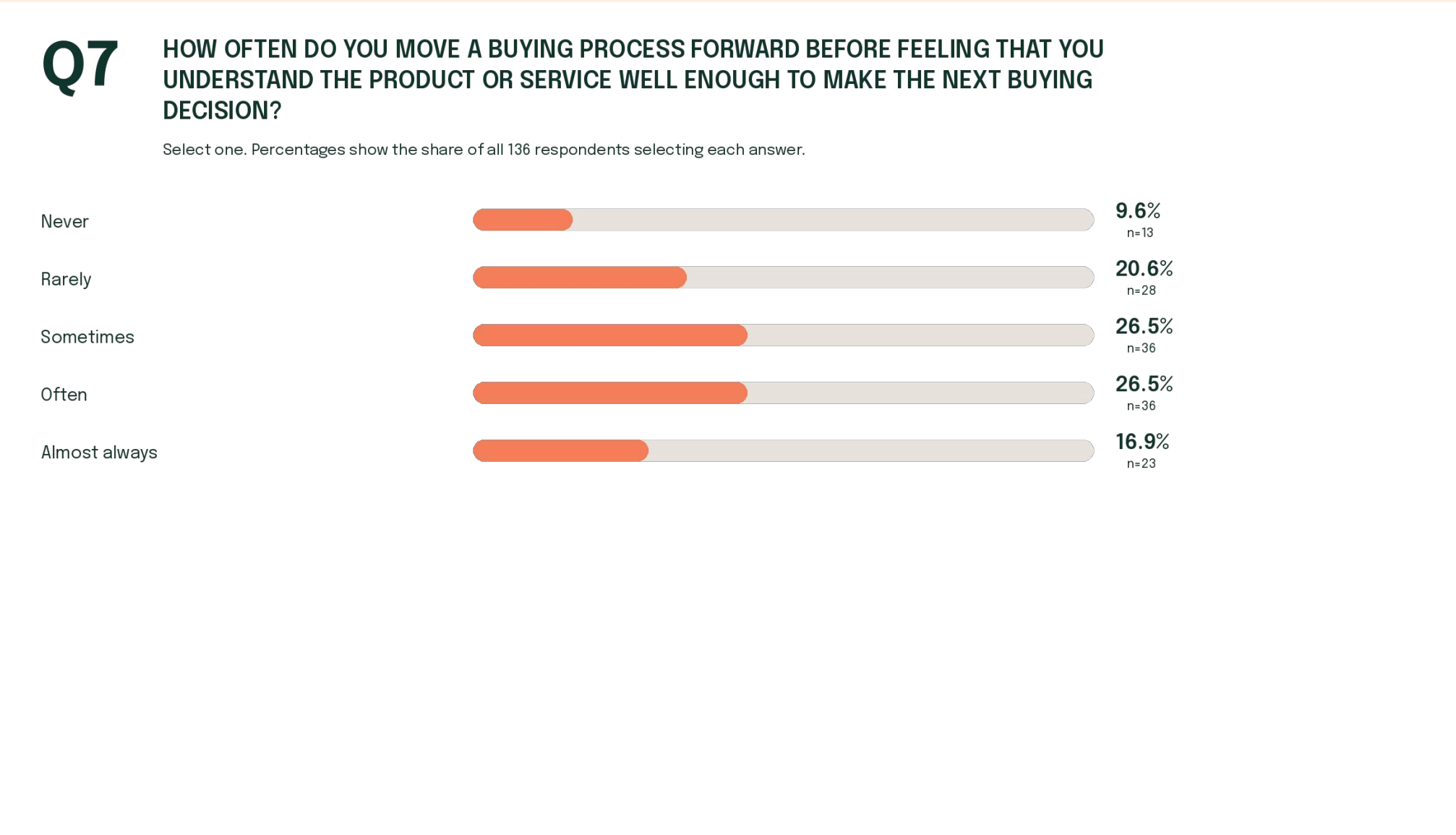
Where in the funnel are we actually checking for understanding? Could our buyer explain our value accurately to another stakeholder? Are we giving our champions what they need to sell internally? What gaps could still give a competitor an opening?

Insight 2

STUDY RESULTS

Almost 70% of respondents say they move the buying process forward before they feel they understand the offering well enough to make the next buying decision. And within that, as it pertains to frequency, over 43% say they frequently progress before they feel sufficiently informed.

For the largest group in this study, understanding is self-assessed through the ability to explain the product or service accurately to another stakeholder. When respondents were asked how they know they truly understand a complex product or service, the ability to explain the offering to another stakeholder was the most-selected answer, leading the next response by 16.1 percentage points.



Insight 3

Be more relevant and less generic

Buyers need business context alongside product information.

WHAT THE DATA ESTABLISHES

Product mechanics and business relevance are not competing needs for many respondents. They need both.

FIDE RECOMMENDATIONS: WIIFM! WIIFM! WIIFM!

Ensure you’re communicating the “What’s in it for me” (WIIFM) for your customers clearly. Technical information and business relevance aren’t an either/or choice anymore. Buyers need to understand what the product does and why it matters to their business. They need to see why your product is the answer to their challenges. If you’re speaking in generic terms, it might be time to update your materials based not only on sectors, but on specific business challenges and different audiences.

Your product or service is not your hook. Your lead is your benefit to the buyer.

Yes, it’s important to explain your product or service, but we believe grabbing them with a benefit that resonates will help them truly understand why they should not only keep you on the shortlist, but inevitably choose you. In practical terms, when creating content in all forms, lead with the WIIFM and back it up with a feature of your product or service that makes it happen. This is how technical information and business relevance can work together.

Create content around problems, not products.

Companies often organize their marketing around their own products, services, and capabilities. But that doesn’t necessarily reflect how buyers think about what they need. Instead, look at your content through the buyer’s eyes to determine if they would see the problem they’re trying to solve first, then deliver the outcome, then your capability, and then your proof points.

Go much deeper than industry personalization.

Being sector specific isn’t enough. Try to be role specific. Consider the business problem, role, company situation, and buying need when deciding how to contextualize your message.

Make your proof as relevant as your promise.

Generic case studies can undermine otherwise relevant messaging. When talking to a specific audience, support it with evidence that’s specific to their problem, situation, objective, and, of course, vertical.

WHEN EXPLAINING YOUR VALUE TO BUYERS, ASK YOURSELF:

Do you know your buyers’ biggest problems and challenges? Do you have content that addresses each problem specifically? Do you have case studies by problem, sector, and outcome? Does your messaging link product capabilities with business outcomes? Are you personalizing around meaningful buyer needs, not just industry? Is your website or CRM set up to offer content to various verticals and potential problems within those verticals?

KEY INSIGHTS

Insight 3

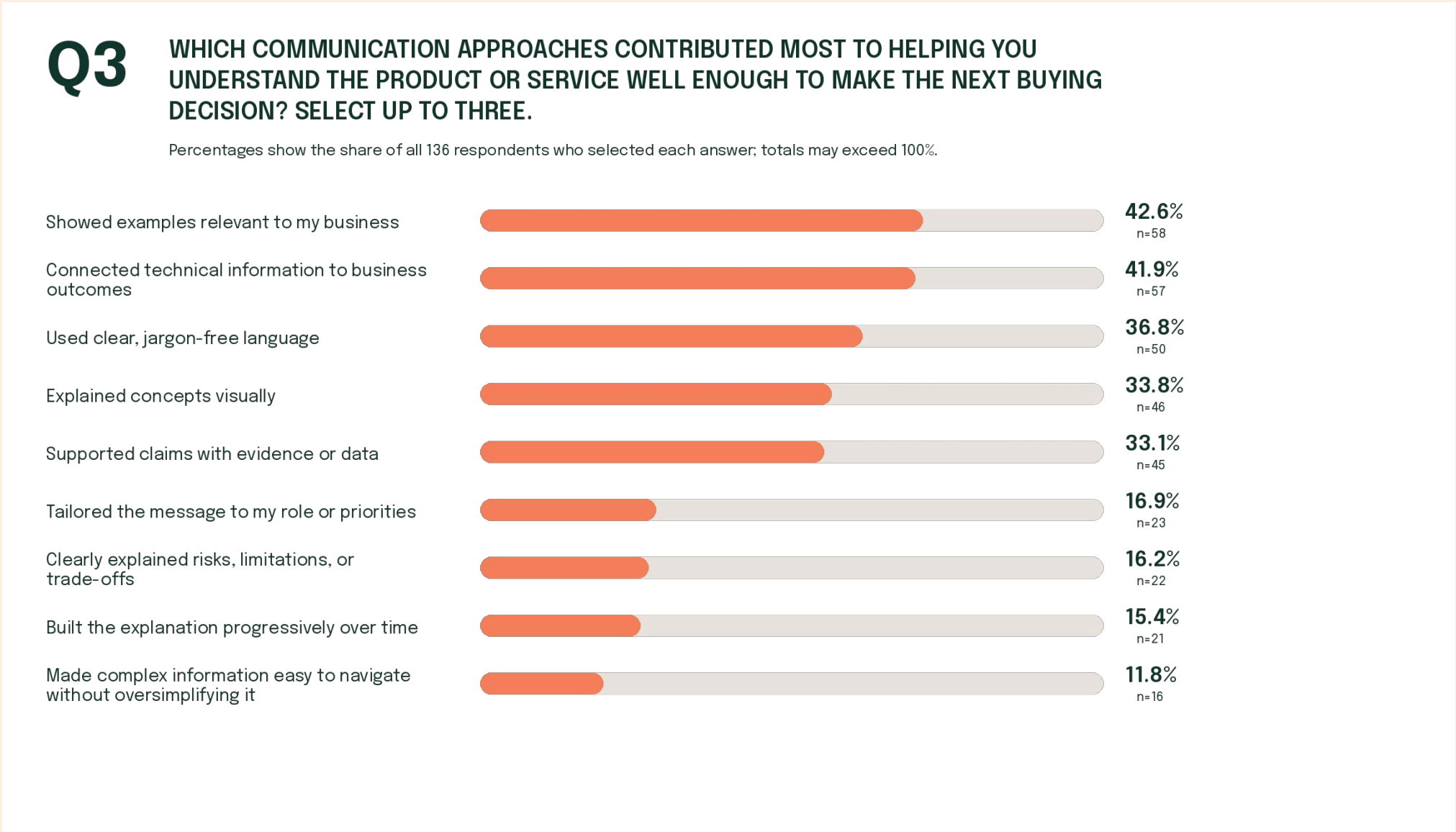
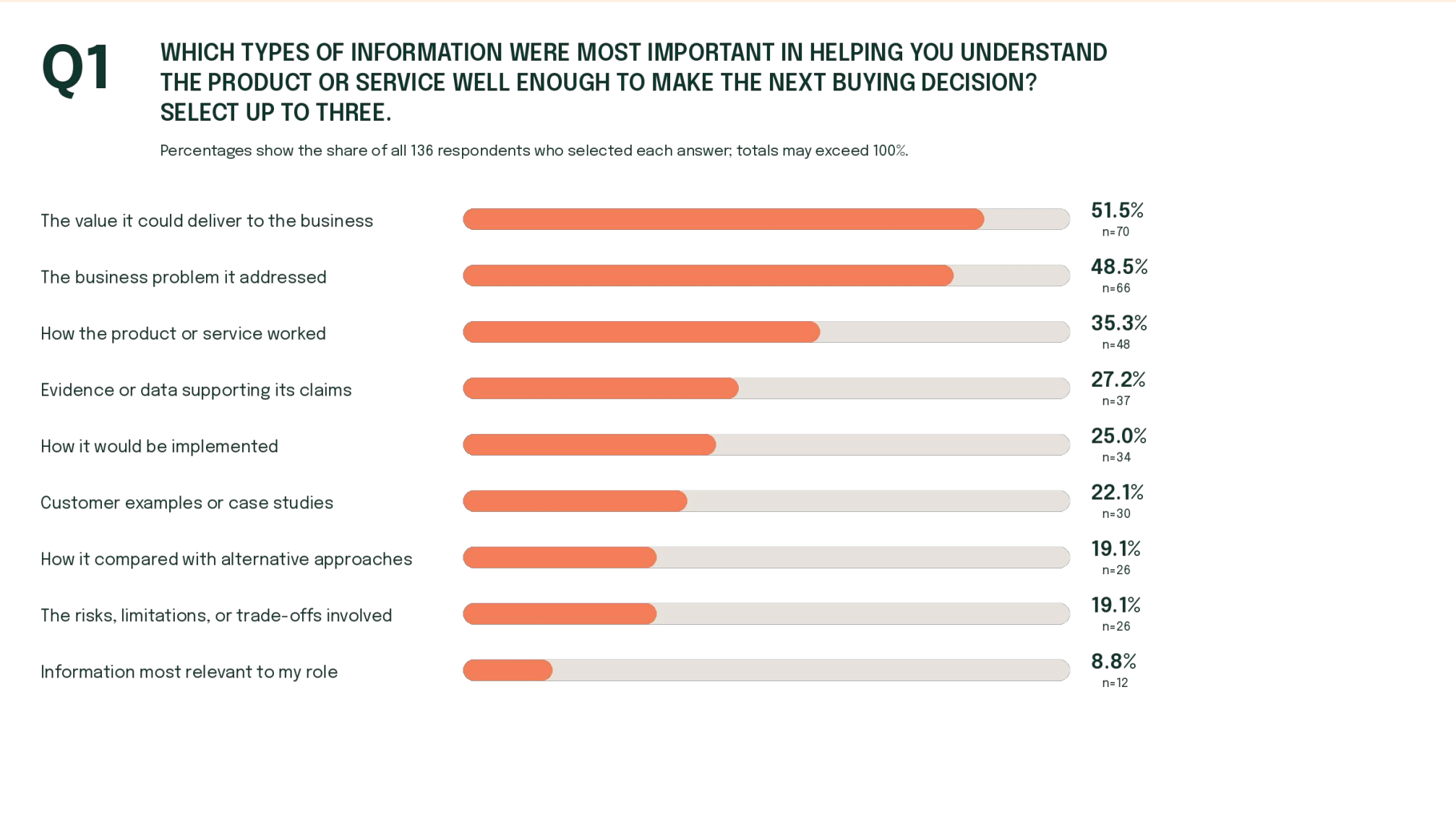
STUDY RESULTS

When respondents were asked which information was most important in helping them understand a product or service well enough to make the next buying decision, the following three were the most selected:

- Value it could deliver to the business (51.5%)
- Business problem it addressed (48.5%)
- How the product or service worked (35.3%)

Respondent-level analysis adds an important detail. Among those who selected how a product or service works, 77% also selected the business value it could deliver or the business problem it addressed.

A separate question produced a similar pattern. The two most-selected approaches contributing to understanding were receiving examples relevant to their business and being able to connect technical information to business outcomes.



Percentages do not add up to 100% as respondents could select up to three answers.

Insight 4

Self-service is part of the sales journey

Optimize your content for those searching without your help.

WHAT THE DATA ESTABLISHES

A lack of sufficient understanding does not usually end the buying process immediately. Buyers often continue gathering information from supplier and independent sources.

FIDE RECOMMENDATIONS: THINK EVERGREEN - NOT JUST CAMPAIGN CONTENT

This is all about putting your best comms foot forward because buyers keep looking for answers after the initial interaction. Make sure the information they need is easy to find when they go looking for it because if they can't get it from you, they might look for the answers with a competitor.

Your website is part of the buying conversation.
Nearly half of respondents said that they've returned to the supplier's website when they needed to learn more, so optimize your site architecture accordingly.

Don't gate everything. Instead make answers easy to get.
Forcing a potential buyer to input their data when they're looking for answers can create friction. Keep some useful pieces of information available to everyone so that they can research independently.

Build your content to best answer buyer questions.
Some pieces of information are better served for video, for an article, for a case study, or even a report like this. Mix up your content to deliver the most engaging answers.

Connect your content ecosystem.
Whether it's case studies, product pages, thought leadership articles, videos, or FAQs, all of your assets shouldn't just be easy to find; they should be connected and complement one another, so a buyer never needs to dig for what's next.

Don't just talk about yourself. Get others to.
Buyers want to know you've earned the trust of your customers and the industry. Include customer testimonials on your site and on review sites relevant to your industry, and where possible get third-party endorsements that can be found when a buyer does independent research.

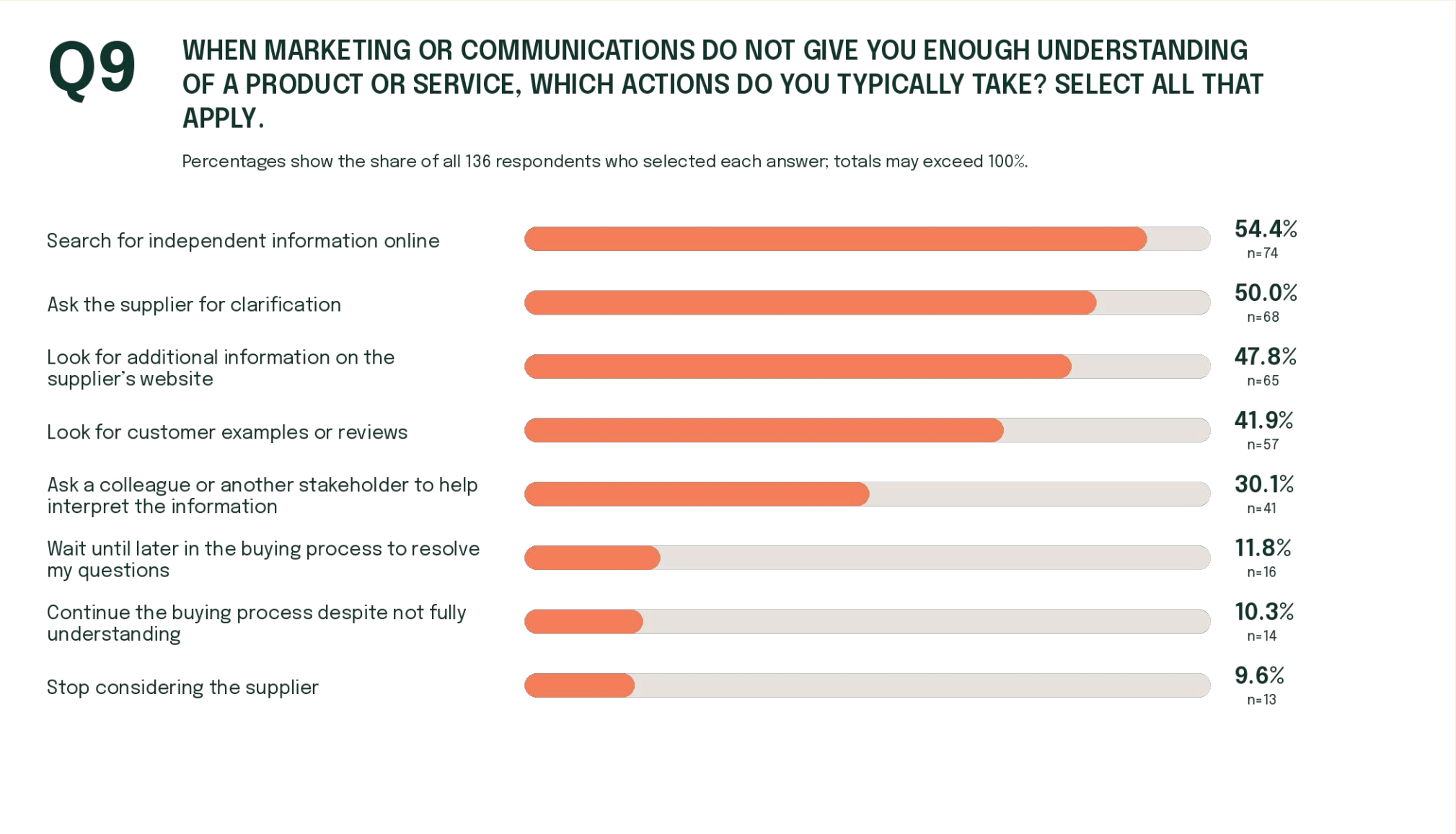
TO PROVIDE USEFUL INFO BETWEEN INTERACTIONS, ASK YOURSELF:

If a buyer left a sales call with three unanswered questions, could they find the answers on your website? Are your most valuable explanations easy to find on your channels? Is your best thinking available only in campaign assets that disappear after three months?

Insight 4

STUDY RESULTS

When supplier communications do not provide enough understanding, buyers report a broad range of follow-up behaviours with only 9.6% saying they stop considering the supplier. Because respondents could choose multiple actions, the findings show that many buyers use several routes to fill gaps in understanding.



Percentages do not add up to 100% as respondents could select all that apply.

Insight 5

AI is playing a big role

Agentic assistants were the top interaction for judging fit – over humans.

WHAT THE DATA ESTABLISHES

More buyers chose an AI assistant than any other interaction when asked what most often gives them enough understanding to judge whether a product or service is right for them.

FIDE RECOMMENDATIONS: PREPARE TO TALK TO AI ASSISTANTS

Based on these results, creating content optimized for AI is becoming increasingly important. For decades, B2B marketers created communications assuming the buyer would consume them, but increasingly, something else may search, interpret, and summarize that information first.

Your buyer may hear of you without visiting any of your channels.
These days you could end up on or off a buyer’s shortlist without a buyer having gone to your website or spoken to your sales team. AI assistants are being asked to condense, compare, and suggest solutions for companies.

Know that you have a second audience.
Content needs to be understandable not only to buyers, but also sufficiently explicit and structured for machines to interpret accurately. That’s two very different audiences.

Be explicit with your Unique Selling Proposition.
While a buyer might get nuances that help them understand your difference, AI may likely flatten it and miss differentiator unless you’re overt about it.

Give AI content to work with.
Clear product details, case studies, FAQs, comparison criteria, and business outcomes are all important pieces of content that AI will synthesize. And the more your content is supported by stats and facts, the better.

Consistency is important.
While a buyer might miss inconsistencies in your messaging, an AI assistant reading your whole site in split seconds will more likely catch them. Ensure you’re telling the story across your product pages, PDFs, old blog posts, and third-party profiles.

Search yourself.
Make it a point to see how you show up by regularly asking major AI assistants about the same questions prospective buyers might ask. When you do, use an incognito window and a free version of an AI to do your search instead of your business account for a more accurate read of how you show up.

This is only a growing trend.
The US/UK difference in responses, wherein AI was selected more in the US, signifies that this isn’t a universal behavioural shift. Rather, this is an emerging channel to add to your list, but it does not remove optimizing human interaction and understanding.

TO ENSURE AIS ARE REPRESENTING YOU WELL, ASK YOURSELF:

Can an LLM clearly understand what you do, who you’re for, and why you’re different? Are your most important claims and differentiators explicitly stated, or only inferred? Are your product, service, and positioning descriptions consistent across your website and other online channels? Are you thinking beyond traditional SEO to ensure your content gets picked up in AI-generated answers? If an AI assistant compared you with your competition, would you be happy with the answer?

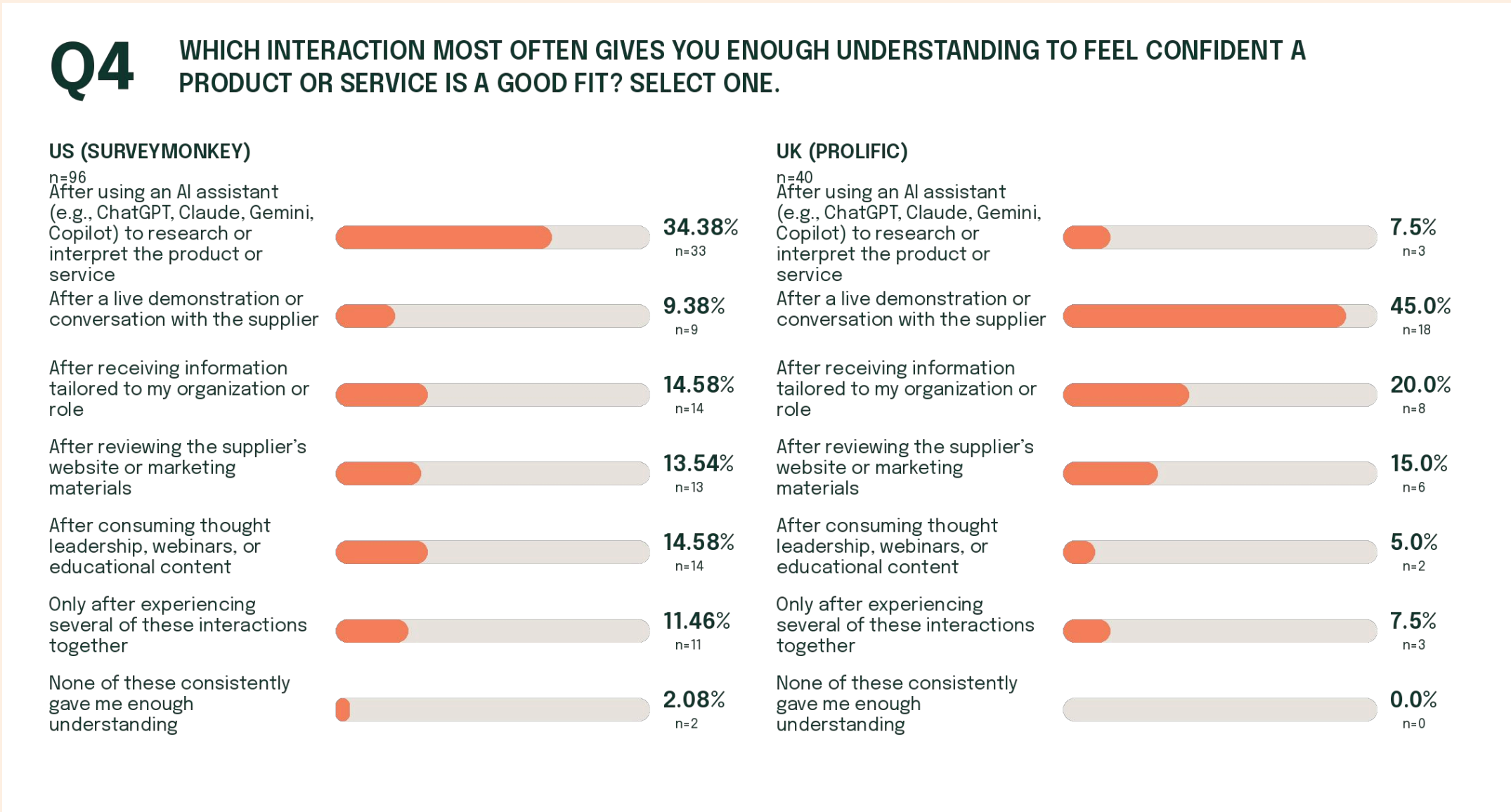
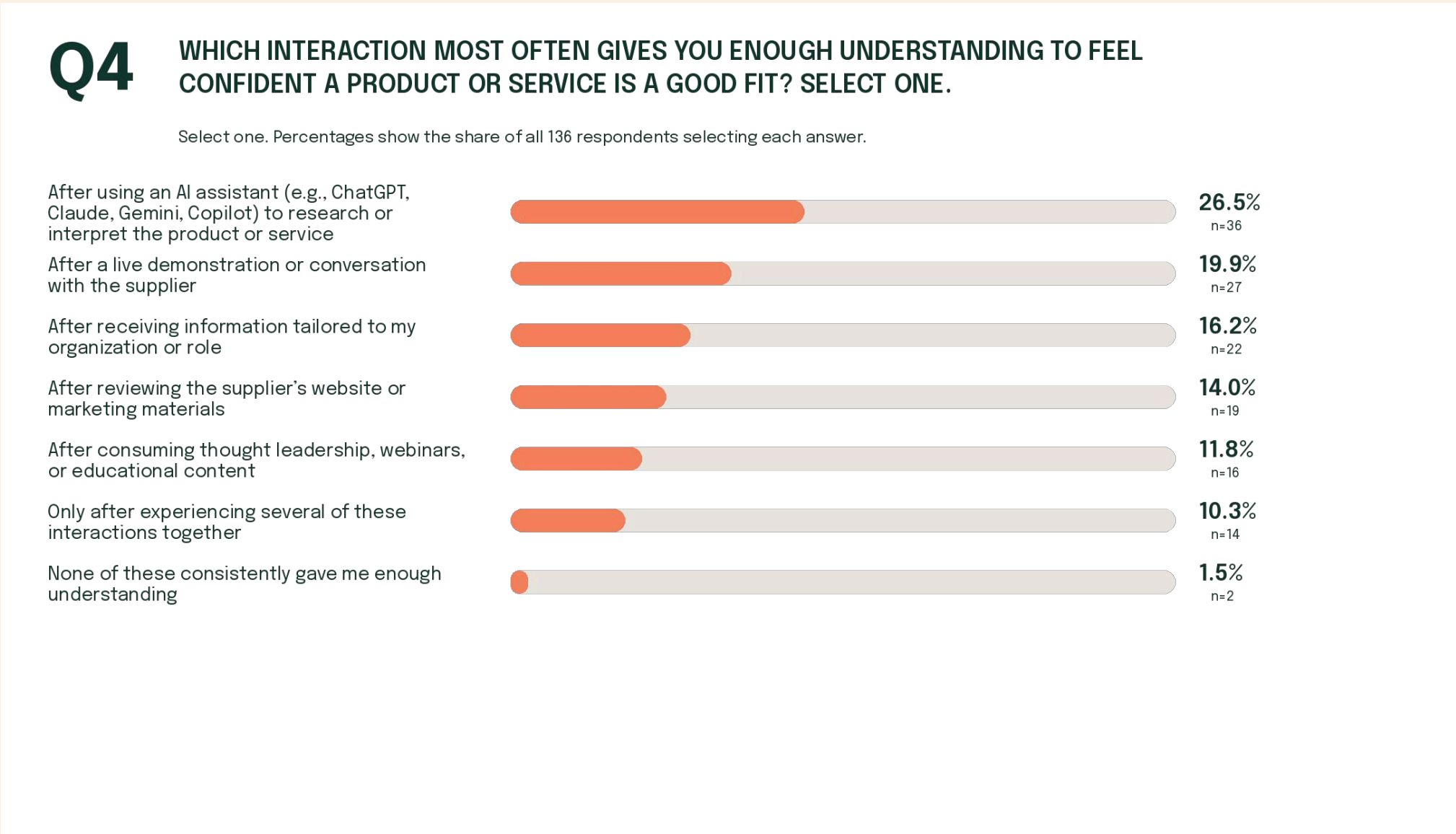
KEY INSIGHTS

Insight 5

STUDY RESULTS

When asked which interaction gives respondents enough understanding to feel that a product or service is a good fit: 26.5% selected AI compared with 19.9% selecting a live supplier demo or conversation.

The result was driven strongly by the US sample, where AI was selected by 34.4% versus 7.5% in the UK sample.



METHODOLOGY

ABOUT THE STUDY

Fide surveyed B2B buyers in the United States and United Kingdom to better understand how they reach understanding when evaluating complex professional services and enterprise technology products.

The final analysis included 136 respondents: 96 from the US and 40 from the UK. Participants were full-time employees in senior roles at organizations with more than 1,000 employees. In the US, respondents were classified as either Owner/Executive/C-Level or Senior Management. In the UK, respondents were Director, Vice President, or C-Level/Owner/Partner/President.

Respondents were asked to think about the most recent professional service or company-wide technology product their organization had evaluated. The 10-question survey then focused specifically on the marketing, communications, messaging, and information they encountered during that evaluation.

HOW THE RESEARCH WAS CONDUCTED

The research was conducted using two online research platforms to reach respondents in the two markets. US respondents were recruited through SurveyMonkey Audience and UK respondents through Prolific.

Both groups answered the same 10 core research questions using the same answer choices. Where questions asked participants to select “up to three” responses, SurveyMonkey was able to enforce this limit while Prolific was not. This difference was addressed during data cleaning.

Following cleaning, the valid responses from the two studies were combined into a single dataset for analysis. Each respondent was counted equally, with no weighting or imputation applied.

DATA QUALITY AND EXCLUSIONS

Responses from both studies were reviewed before the datasets were combined.

The original SurveyMonkey study contained 102 US responses. Six responses were excluded, leaving 96 valid US respondents for analysis.

The Prolific responses were reviewed specifically for compliance with questions asking respondents to select up to three answers. Because the Prolific platform could not technically enforce this limit, respondents who selected more than three answers on these questions were excluded. This resulted in 40 valid UK respondents.

The final combined dataset therefore contained 136 valid responses. Only these respondents were included in the reported findings and respondent-level analysis.

LIMITATIONS

The study was designed to identify patterns in how senior B2B buyers experience and respond to marketing/sales communications. With 136 valid respondents, including a smaller UK sample of 40, the findings should be considered directional rather than representative of the entire US and UK B2B buyer population.

The findings are also based on respondents’ recollection and assessment of their own buying experiences rather than observation of their actual behaviour.

Finally, respondents in the US and UK were recruited through two research platforms. While the same core questions and answer choices were used and the valid responses were combined consistently, differences between the two markets may reflect differences in the participant pools as well as differences between US and UK buyers.

The Questionnaire

The following are the full questions, as asked, along with the answer options presented

Q1. Which types of information were most important in helping you understand the product or service well enough to make the next buying decision? Select up to three.

The business problem it addressed / The value it could deliver to the business / How the product or service worked / How it would be implemented / Customer examples or case studies / Evidence or data supporting its claims / How it compared with alternative approaches / The risks, limitations, or trade-offs involved / Information most relevant to my role

Q2. Which marketing or communication approaches were most effective at capturing your attention and making you want to learn more? Select up to three.

A clearly stated value proposition / A memorable campaign or advertisement / A short video or visual story / A customer story or case study / Thought leadership or original research / A visual explanation or infographic / An interactive digital experience / A well-designed website or landing page

Q3. Which communication approaches contributed most to helping you understand the product or service well enough to make the next buying decision? Select up to three.

Connected technical information to business outcomes / Explained concepts visually / Used clear, jargon-free language / Built the explanation progressively over time / Showed examples relevant to my business / Tailored the message to my role or priorities / Supported claims with evidence or data / Clearly explained risks, limitations, or trade-offs / Made complex information easy to navigate without oversimplifying it

Q4. Which interaction most often gives you enough understanding to feel confident a product or service is a good fit? Select one.

After using an AI assistant (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Copilot) to research or interpret the product or service / After reviewing the supplier’s website or marketing materials / After consuming thought leadership, webinars, or educational content / After receiving information tailored to my organization or role / After a live demonstration or conversation with the supplier / Only after experiencing several of these interactions together / None of these consistently gave me enough understanding

Q5. What most often made a supplier’s marketing or communications difficult to understand? Select up to three.

Too much jargon / Too much information at once / Information presented in the wrong order / Technical information introduced too early / Generic messaging / Benefits weren’t connected to business outcomes / Too few visual explanations / Too few real-world examples / Messaging wasn’t relevant to my role and/or company / Inconsistent messaging across different communications

Q6. Which statement best reflects your experience with marketing and communications from vendors selling services or technology to your company? Select one.

None of the above / Suppliers provide too much unnecessary information / Suppliers provide too little information / Suppliers provide information that’s not detailed enough to truly understand the benefit / Suppliers generally include the right information but explain it poorly / Suppliers simplify their communications so much that it feels like marketing fluff

The Questionnaire

The following are the full questions, as asked, along with the answer options presented

Q7. How often do you move a buying process forward before feeling that you understand the product or service well enough to make the next buying decision?

Almost always / Often / Sometimes / Rarely / Never

Q8. After researching a supplier on your own, how well do you usually understand what makes its product or service different from alternatives?

Not at all / Slightly / Well / Very well / Completely

Q9. When marketing or communications do not give you enough understanding of a product or service, which actions do you typically take? Select all that apply.

Look for additional information on the supplier’s website / Search for independent information online / Look for customer examples or reviews / Ask a colleague or another stakeholder to help interpret the information / Ask the supplier for clarification / Wait until later in the buying process to resolve my questions / Continue the buying process despite not fully understanding / Stop considering the supplier

Q10. Which statement best indicates that you have truly understood a complex product or service? Select one.

I can accurately explain it to another stakeholder / I clearly understand the business problem it addresses / I understand how it works / I know enough to be aligned with a purchase and /or push it further ahead / I can confidently compare it with alternative solutions

At Fide, our goal is to help marketers create relevant and memorable B2B content that works – that helps drive sales.

Get to the point
without losing
the point.

[FIDEB2B.COM](https://fideb2b.com)

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