

# 2020

# Smart Marketing for Engineers<sup>®</sup>

CRITICAL INSIGHT TO ENGAGE ENGINEERS  
IN A NEW DECADE

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# Introduction

Welcome to the third annual Smart Marketing for Engineers® report. In today's media environment, industrial marketers are increasingly tasked with justifying marketing spend. They need to be able to make informed decisions on where to allocate limited resources – including people, time and budget – to deliver maximum ROI.

Although there is a great deal of research regarding topics such as content marketing, online information sources, and the buyer's journey in the general B2B marketing space, this data doesn't always accurately portray the behaviors and needs of the highly technical audiences that industrial marketers seek to target.

For the third consecutive year, IEEE GlobalSpec and TREW Marketing have partnered to better understand how engineers and related professionals find the information they need to make critical work-related decisions. And for the first time, we chose to include questions on what constitutes valuable website content, as well as the role social media plays in an engineer's professional life.

This research report is designed to help you better understand the information needs of your target audience, giving you the critical insight needed to guide your marketing plans in 2020 and beyond.

# About the Survey Respondents

The 291 survey respondents, taken from a pool of Engineering360.com registered users, represent a wide range of engineers and technical professionals from across the globe.

- Respondents vary by age, with nearly a third of respondents indicating that they are 45 and under (16 percent are 35 and under; another 15 percent are between the ages of 36 and 45). Twenty-six percent of respondents are 46-55, and another 26 percent are between the ages of 56 and 65. The remainder of respondents (17 percent) are 66 and older.
- A wide variety of company sizes are also represented. Twenty-seven percent of respondents work at companies with between 1 and 19 employees; 22 percent work at companies with more than 1,000 employees. Another 21 percent of respondents work for companies with 20-99 employees, 13 percent work for companies with 100-249 employees, and 17 percent work for companies with 250-999 employees.
- More than three-quarters of respondents are engineers, with 37 percent identifying as engineering/R&D staff, 21 percent as engineering/R&D management, and 19 percent as engineering/R&D leaders. Respondents also include technical sales (6 percent), manufacturing staff (5 percent), manufacturing management (5 percent), product management (4 percent), and manufacturing leaders (3 percent).
- Twenty-eight percent of respondents work in the engineering services industry. Other industries represented include energy; automotive; manufacturing software/hardware; electronics/electronic components/semiconductor; materials; chemicals; aerospace/defense; government; medical devices/equipment/software; academic/university; communications and networking products; food and beverage.

# Key Takeaways for Industrial Marketers

- **Engineers are hungry for information – but hold high standards for content.** Datasheets, case studies, product demo videos, and white papers top the list as the most valuable content types for this audience. And when it comes to accessing content, engineers find value in various information sources, including supplier/vendor websites, industry directory websites, online trade publications, emails, e-newsletters, and more.

On the other end of the spectrum, social media is not considered an authoritative source for engineering content. More than half of respondents do not view social media as a valuable resource for seeking information on the latest technologies, trends, and products, which may illustrate that they do not view these channels as reliable.

To meet the needs of this audience, make your content discoverable on multiple platforms and in multiple formats. At the same time, this audience needs to be reassured that the content they are accessing is credible. Make your content available through various media channels, but be sure to reinforce to your audience the knowledge and expertise behind the content you are sharing.

- **Engineers are willing to provide information in exchange for valued content.** Work email, first name, company name, last name, job title, and industry are all form fields that more than 50 percent of engineers are willing to complete to access content. Younger engineers are only slightly less likely to complete form fields when compared to older professionals, and they are more likely to exchange information for CAD drawings, white papers, and product configurations.

Don't be afraid to put content behind forms - if what you are delivering is valuable to your audience. Their information is valuable too, and a fair exchange of information fosters a deeper level of trust in your relationship.

- **Engineers are spending more time than ever searching for answers.** Seventy-three percent of respondents are willing to view three or more pages of search results before selecting one or starting a search over, up from 54 percent the previous year. Twenty-eight percent are willing to view five or more pages of search results, up from 19 percent in 2018. While younger engineers as a whole stop their searches sooner, they are still more likely to search past page 10, than stop at page one.

In total, only five percent of respondents stop at the first page for results, a trend that continues to decline over the years as engineers spend more time searching.

Don't panic if your content does not show up on the first few pages of search, but strive to improve your search rankings for authentic terms. Often engineers search based on very specific problems or application needs. Take a persona-based approach to content planning, and publish on a topic in multiple formats and multiple channels to help engineers (and search engines!) find your content.

- **A large portion of the buying process is conducted online.** Nearly three-quarters of respondents are conducting more than half of the buying process online before choosing to speak with someone at a company. Younger engineers (45 and younger) spend even more time online before choosing to speak to someone. And once they are ready to connect with salespeople, they want to do that online as well. Fifty-nine percent of respondents prefer to connect over email and five percent prefer online chat, as opposed to 24 percent engaging with a salesperson over the phone and eight percent in person.

Connect with customers early and often online. Offer content tailored to each stage of the buyer's journey, helping your potential customer learn and evaluate. Build trust and showcase your expertise through content, and be cautious about early sales outreach which may erode trust and repel prospects. Hold off until you notice buying signals and choose email over phone for preliminary outreach.

- **Engineers are still looking to their inboxes for information.** Two-thirds of engineers subscribe to at least three newsletters, with 18 percent subscribing to six or more. Professionals aged 36-45 are the most avid newsletter subscribers – more than half subscribe to between three and five publications, and 32 percent subscribe to six or more.

And engineers engage with the content. Forty-three percent of respondents open most or all newsletters and either read every one or at least scan for content; another one-third of respondents scan subject lines and open the ones that intrigue them.

Email is still a highly valuable and relevant communication channel, but you need to work to get the attention of this audience in their inboxes. Create subject lines that capture attention, and newsletter content that clearly answers what's in it for the reader.

- **When it comes to websites, engineers want access to the basics.** This audience is not as concerned with the bells and whistles that a website has to offer. Instead, the large majority is looking for in-depth technical information and technical specifications. Items that an industrial marketer may view as a "must have" – pre-filled forms, interactive graphics, online chat, and more – are less critical. As for web usability, engineers prefer concise information with links to in-depth content, so they can drill down if needed.

Keep it simple. If you are struggling with limited resources (time, people, and budget), focus your efforts on what will deliver the most value to your target audience. In this case, it is detailed, technical content that is easy to access and understand.

- **Millennial engineers place high value on video content and online research.** Fifty-eight percent of millennial engineers rated YouTube among their top sources when seeking information for a purchase decision, and spend more time than their older counterparts watching videos for work. They also invest more time researching a significant purchase online before speaking to someone at a company. Once they are ready to engage with sales, they prefer email communication as do their GenX colleagues, but in contrast the millennial engineers are more receptive to phone calls.

As older engineers retire, the number of millennial specifiers and buyers in the market is rapidly increasing. Shift your marketing investment towards this significantly sized group by improving your web experience and adding video content served up on YouTube.

# Survey Findings

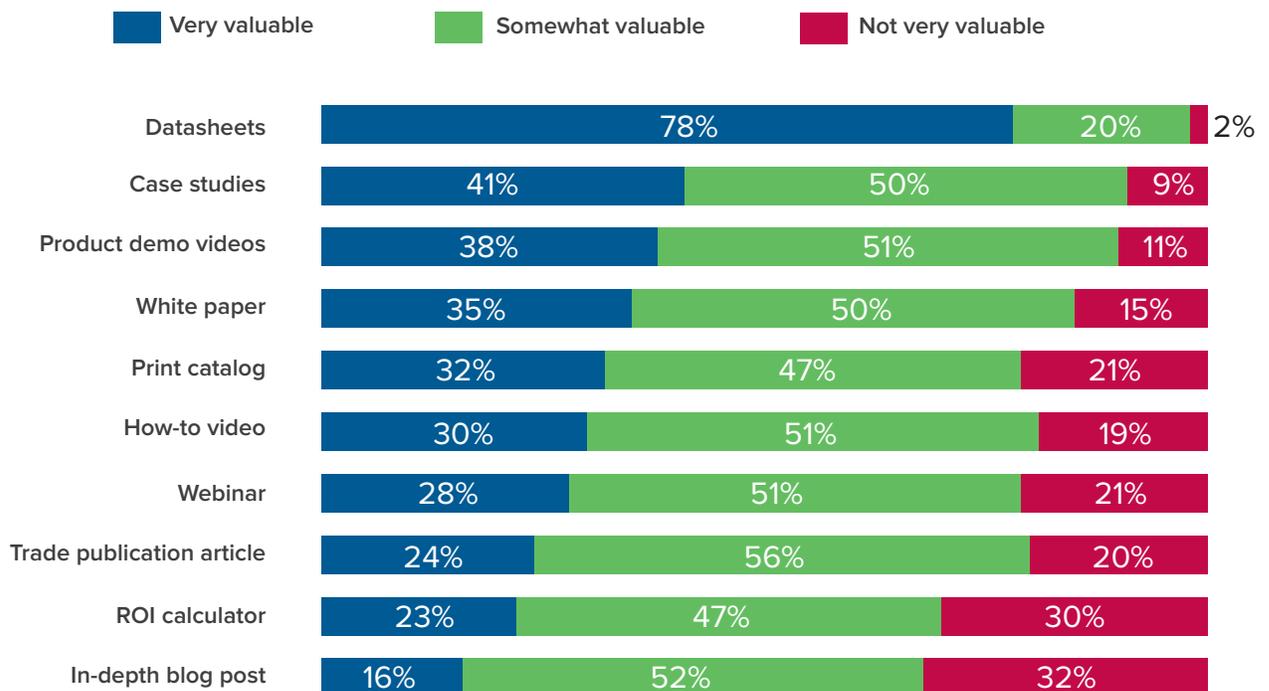
## ENGINEERS' CONTENT PREFERENCES

Engineers and technical professionals continue to place the most value on datasheets, followed by case studies and product demo videos. These findings are consistent with last year's results.

Respondents of all ages indicate that datasheets are a highly valued content type, with those aged 35 and under placing the most value on them. Engineers in the 36-45 age range find the most value in case studies when compared to other age groups, and engineers aged 45-55 are the biggest proponents of white papers.

The perception of print catalogs as a valued content type was consistent across all age ranges.

### How valuable are the following types of content when researching information to make a product or services purchase decision?



# Survey Findings

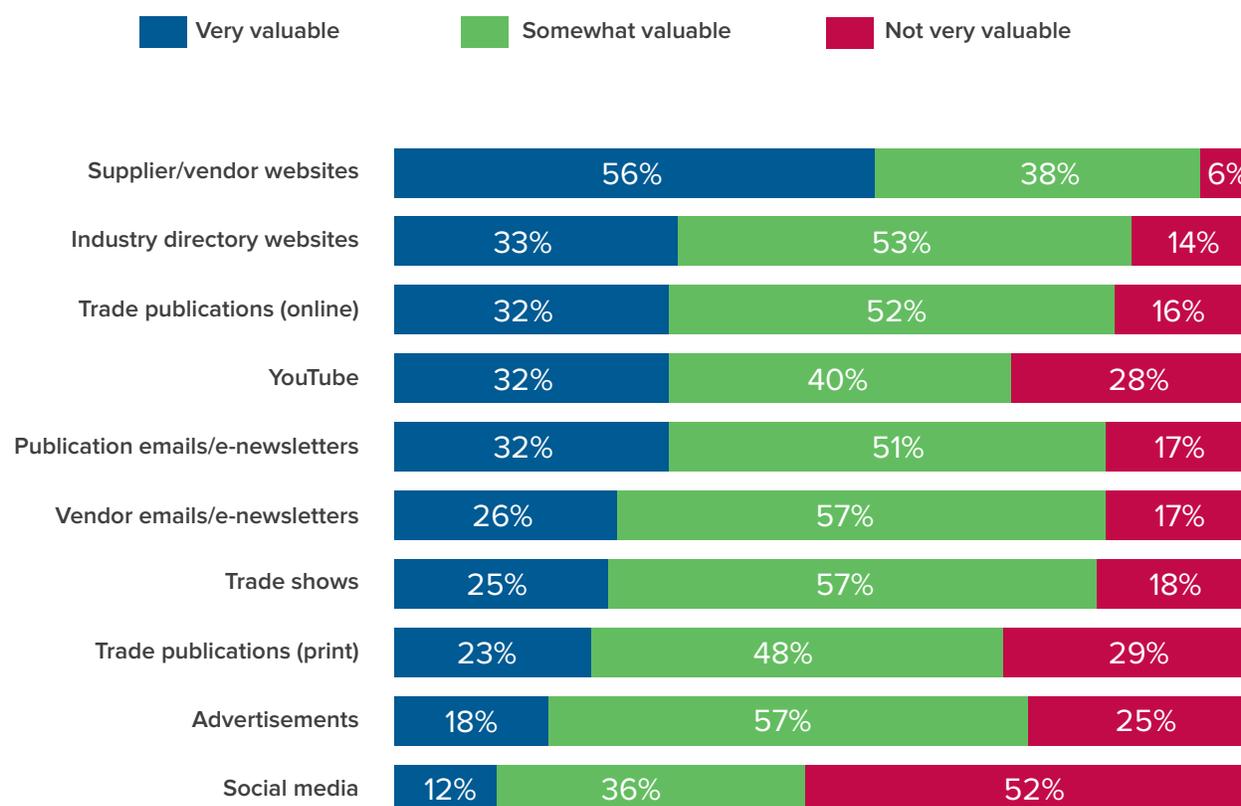
## ENGINEERS' CONTENT PREFERENCES

Engineers are increasingly placing value on online information sources when seeking content on technologies, industry trends, and products – supplier/vendor websites, industry directory websites, online trade publications, and various emails and e-newsletters continue to be highly valued by this audience.

By age, younger engineers (35 and under, and 36-45) place more value on YouTube than their older counterparts.

Social media is seen as the least valuable source for accessing this type of information, which aligns with 2018 survey results.

### How valuable are the following sources when seeking information on the latest engineering technologies, industry trends, and products?



# Survey Findings

## ENGINEERS' CONTENT PREFERENCES

Most engineers subscribe to 3-5 e-newsletters, and 18 percent subscribe to six or more. Only eight percent of respondents indicate that they do not subscribe to e-newsletters. These findings represent an increase in subscriptions compared to 2018, when most respondents subscribed to 2-3 e-newsletter publications.

Respondents aged 36-45 subscribe to the most e-newsletters, with 32 percent indicating that they subscribe to six or more publications.

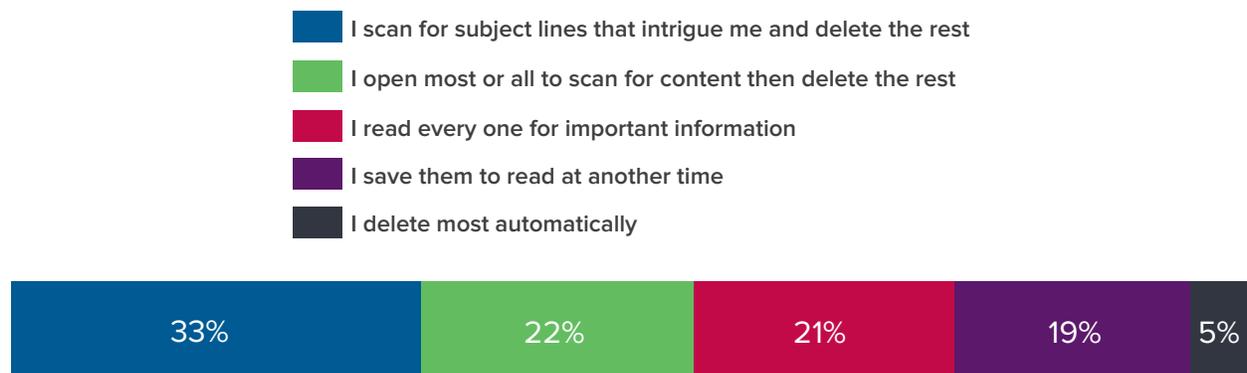
### How many e-newsletters do you subscribe to?



Upon receiving e-newsletters in their inboxes, one-third of engineers scan for subject lines that intrigue them and delete the rest. Twenty-two percent of respondents open most or all to scan for content and delete the rest, and another 20 percent read every one for important information. These results align with 2018 research findings.

By age, respondents under 35 are more likely to save e-newsletters to read at another time when compared to their peers. Conversely, respondents aged 66+ are most likely to scan emails for subject lines and delete the rest.

### How do e-newsletters behave in your inbox? Consider the ones you subscribe to and check the option that best fits.



# Survey Findings

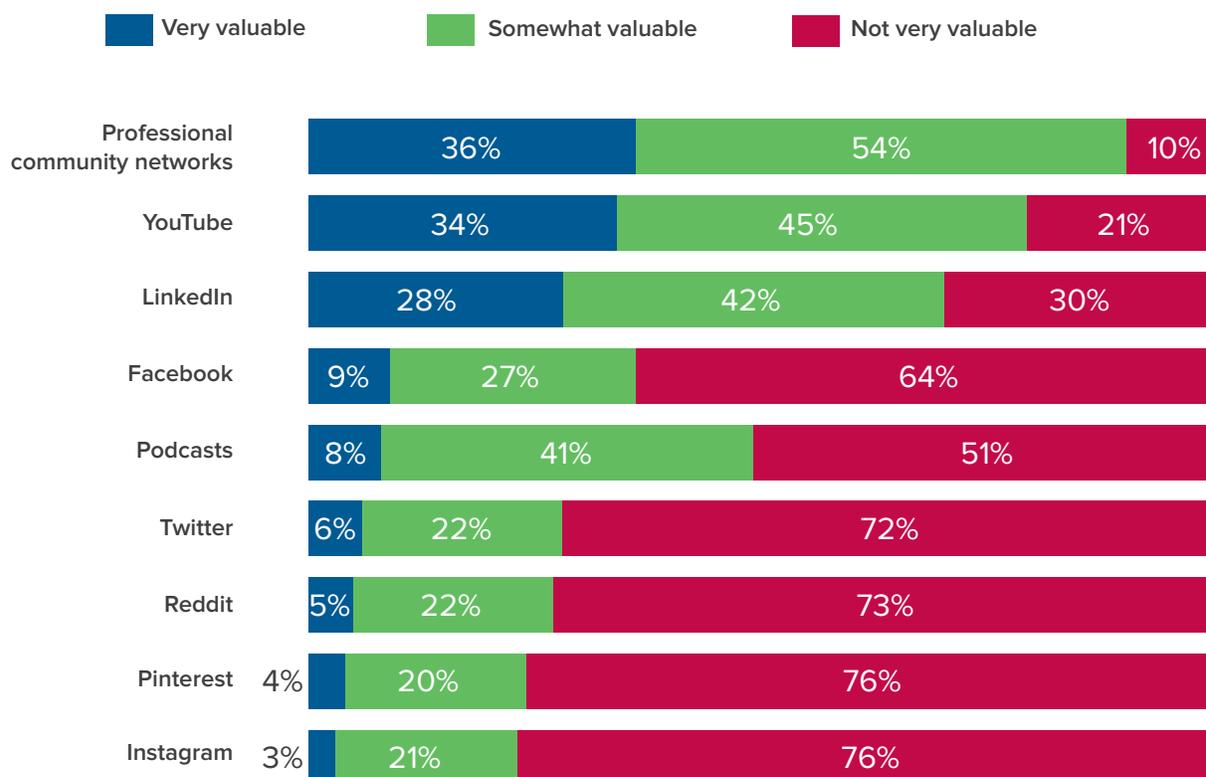
## ENGINEERS' CONTENT PREFERENCES

Now that social media has become a standard component of the industrial marketer's toolkit, it's important to understand how engineers and related professionals value this information channel.

As a whole, social media platforms are not seen as valuable as other information sources when researching information for work, with the exceptions being professional community networks, YouTube and LinkedIn.

By age, engineers under age 35 place the most value on YouTube, while engineers aged 66+ find the most value in professional community networks.

### When researching information for work, how valuable are the following social platforms?



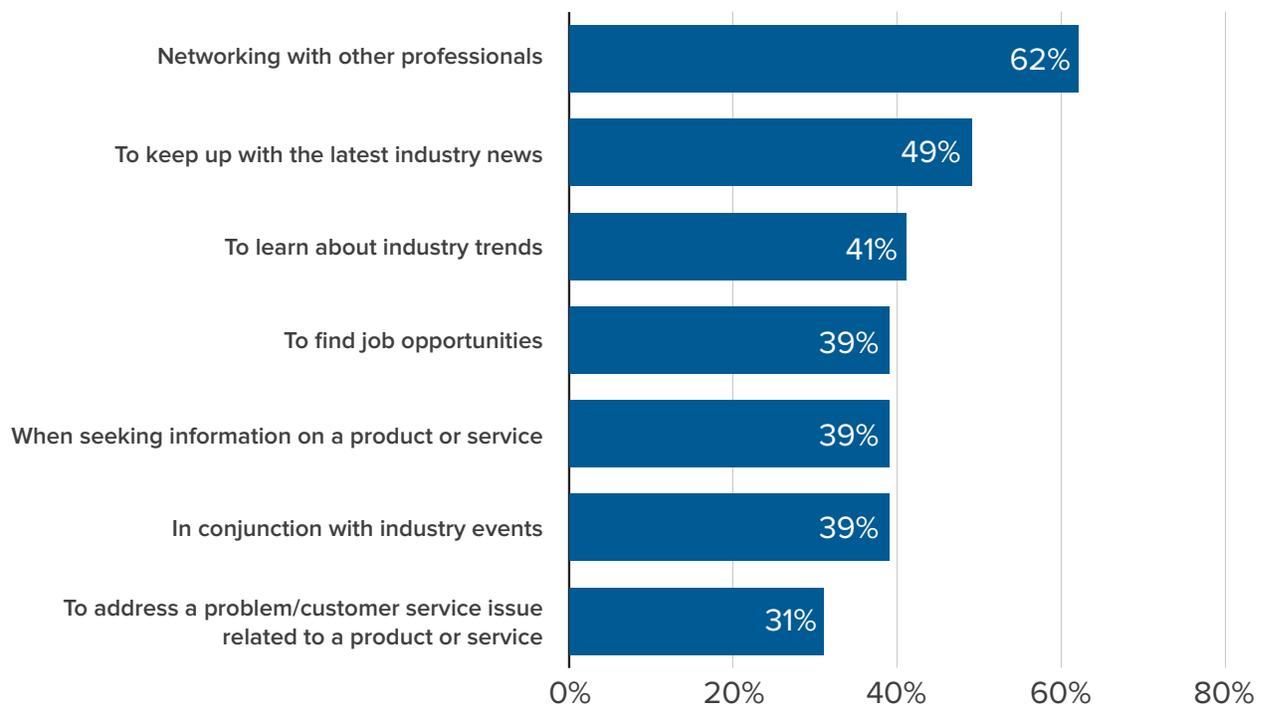
# Survey Findings

## ENGINEERS' CONTENT PREFERENCES

So what are engineers using social media for? The primary use case for social media is networking with other professionals, followed by keeping up with the latest industry news and learning about industry trends.

Professionals 35 and under are most likely to use social media to find job opportunities.

### In which situations are you likely to use social media platforms for business? (select the top 3)



# Survey Findings

## ENGINEERS' CONTENT PREFERENCES

With the popularity of product demo and how-to videos, and the value of YouTube as an information source, it's interesting to see the time spent on videos for work.

More than half of respondents indicate that they spend at least one hour a week watching videos for work. Professionals in the 36-45 and 35 and under age ranges spend the most time watching videos.

### How often do you watch videos for work?

- Never
- Less than 1 hour per week
- 1-2 hours per week
- 3-5 hours per week
- More than 5 hours per week

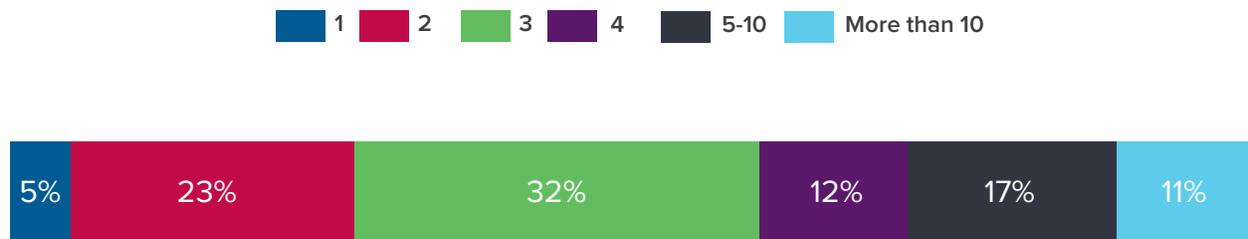


# Survey Findings

## ENGINEERS' SEARCH AND ONLINE PREFERENCES

Nearly three-quarters of engineers indicate that they are willing to view at least three pages of search results using a general search engine for research purposes. Twenty-seven percent will view five pages or more.

**When searching for information on a topic using a search engine, how many pages of results are you willing to view before you select one or start your search over?**



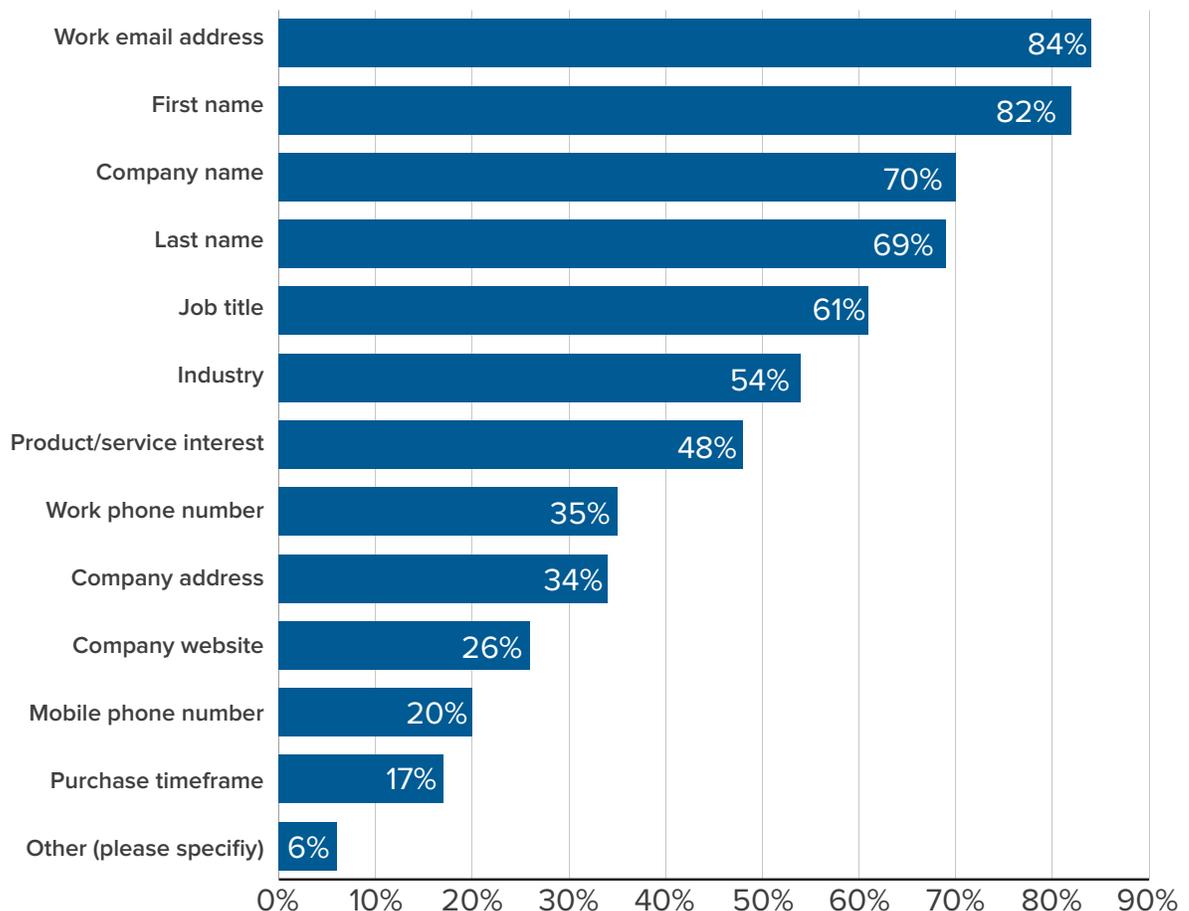
# Survey Findings

## ENGINEERS' SEARCH AND ONLINE PREFERENCES

Engineers are most likely to complete the following form fields on a company's website: work email address (84 percent); first name (82 percent); company name (70 percent); and last name (69 percent). Conversely, engineers are least likely to provide mobile phone number (20 percent) and purchase timeframe (17 percent). These findings align with 2018 survey data.

Younger engineers (ages 45 and under) are slightly less likely to provide work email address than their older counterparts.

**When completing a form on a website, which of the following fields are you most likely to complete in order to access online content? (select all that apply)**



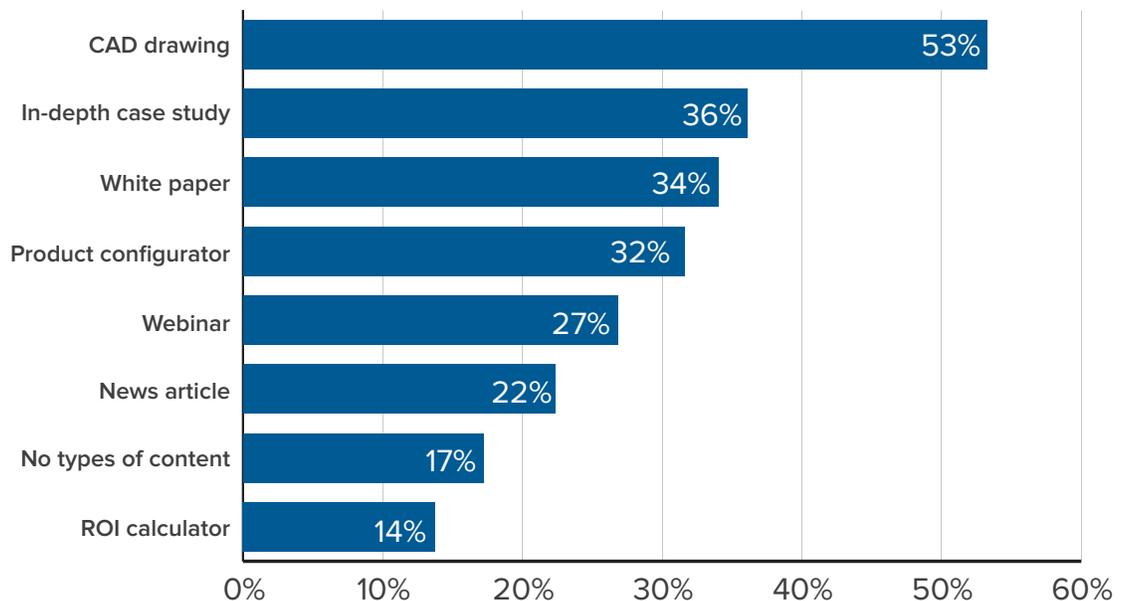
# Survey Findings

## ENGINEERS' SEARCH AND ONLINE PREFERENCES

This year, we took a deeper look into the types of content that engineers are most willing to exchange contact information to receive. CAD drawings top the list, with 53 percent of respondents indicating that they would be enticed to provide contact information for them. Case studies, white papers, and product configurators are also viewed as valued gated content types. Only 17 percent of respondents say that they are unwilling to fill out a web form in exchange for content.

Engineers aged 35 and under are most likely to provide contact information in exchange for CAD drawings. Engineers in the 36-45 age range are most likely to provide contact information for a webinar. Engineers aged 66 and older are the least likely to fill out a form in exchange for content.

**When offered technical content, but asked first to complete a short form (e.g., name, email address) to download the material, which types of content are most likely to entice you to provide your information? (check all that apply)**



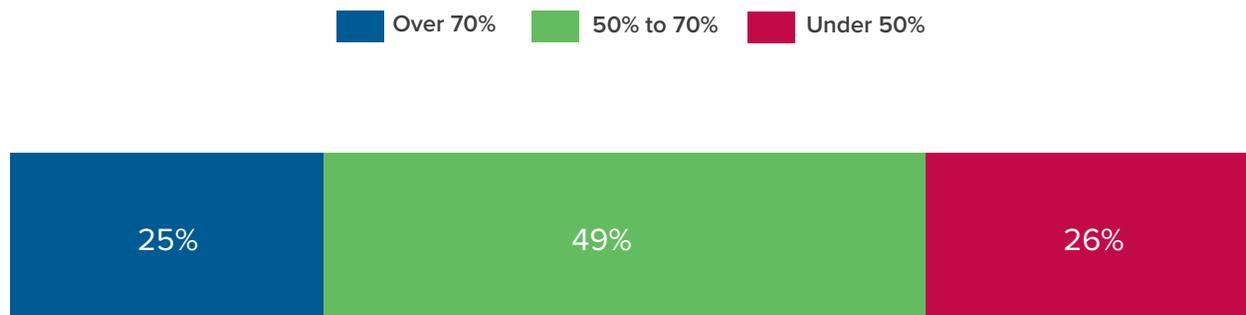
# Survey Findings

## THE ENGINEERING BUYER'S JOURNEY

Engineers have moved online to complete the majority of the buying process. Nearly three quarters of respondents complete more than half of the buying process online. Twenty-five percent of respondents indicate that over 70 percent of their buying journey is conducted online.

Younger engineers spend even more time online before choosing to speak to someone at a company.

**In thinking about the entire buying process for significant purchases you make for work, from early research to the final purchase decision, what percentage of the process happens online before you finally choose to speak to someone at the company?**



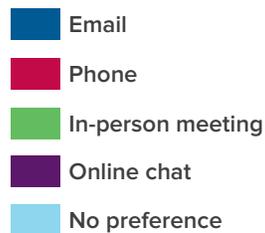
# Survey Findings

## THE ENGINEERING BUYER'S JOURNEY

This audience also prefers online methods when communicating directly with salespeople. Fifty-nine percent of respondents indicate that they prefer to communicate with vendors over email. Twenty-four percent prefer phone conversations.

When examining results by age, professionals aged 36-45 are the strongest proponents of email communication, with 81 percent indicating that email is their preferred channel. Conversely, professionals aged 66+ are the biggest proponents of telephone conversation. The youngest professionals (those 35 and under) prefer email, but are more open to telephone and in-person meetings than their older counterparts.

**When you are ready to speak with a salesperson at a vendor company for the first time, which is your communication preference?**

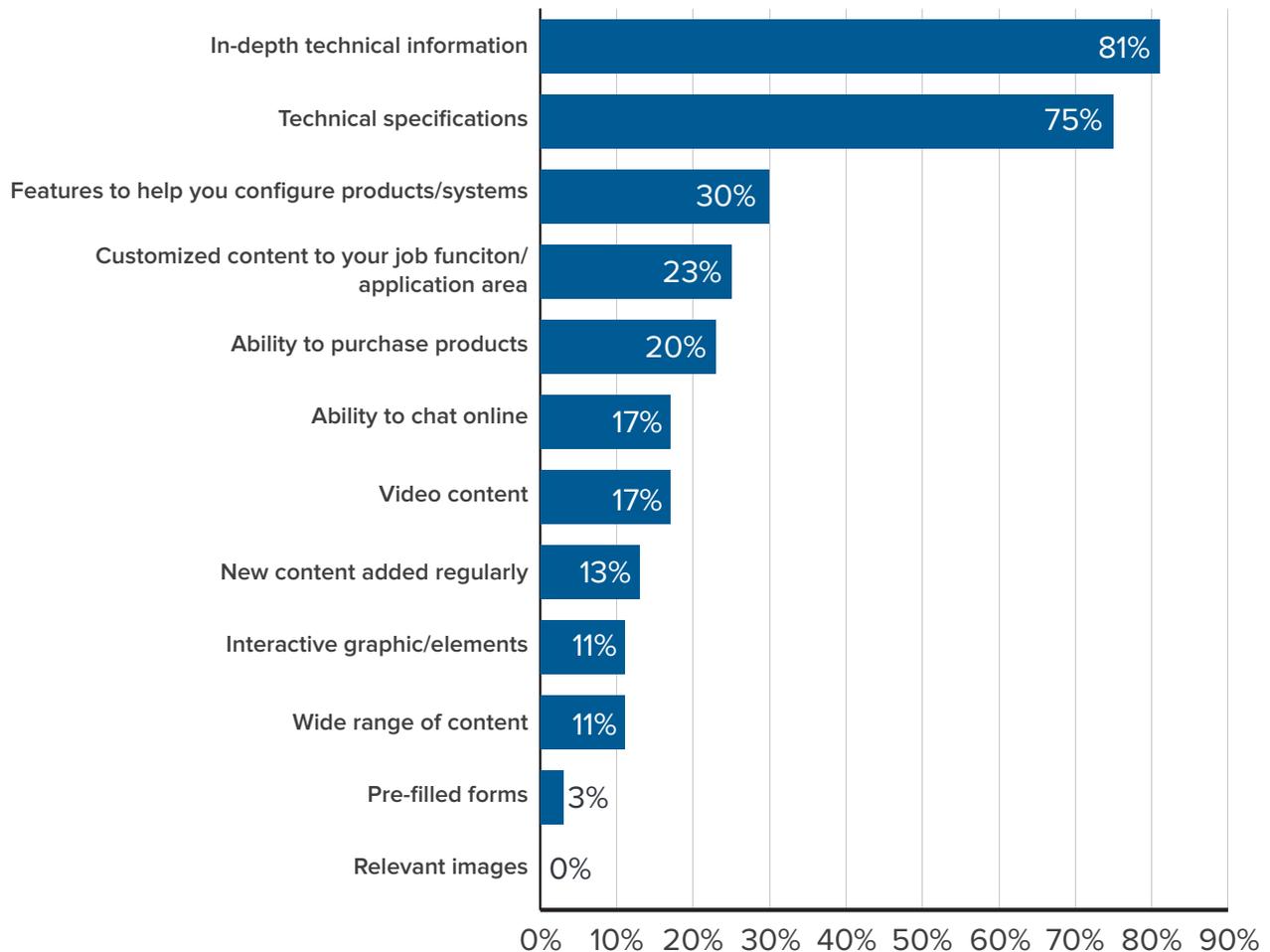


# Survey Findings

## WEBSITES AND THE ENGINEER

When it comes to supplier websites, engineers are looking for detailed technical content. In-depth technical information and technical specifications are the most important features for all age groups.

**Think of your favorite work-related websites. What features of those websites are most important to your experience? (list your top 3)**

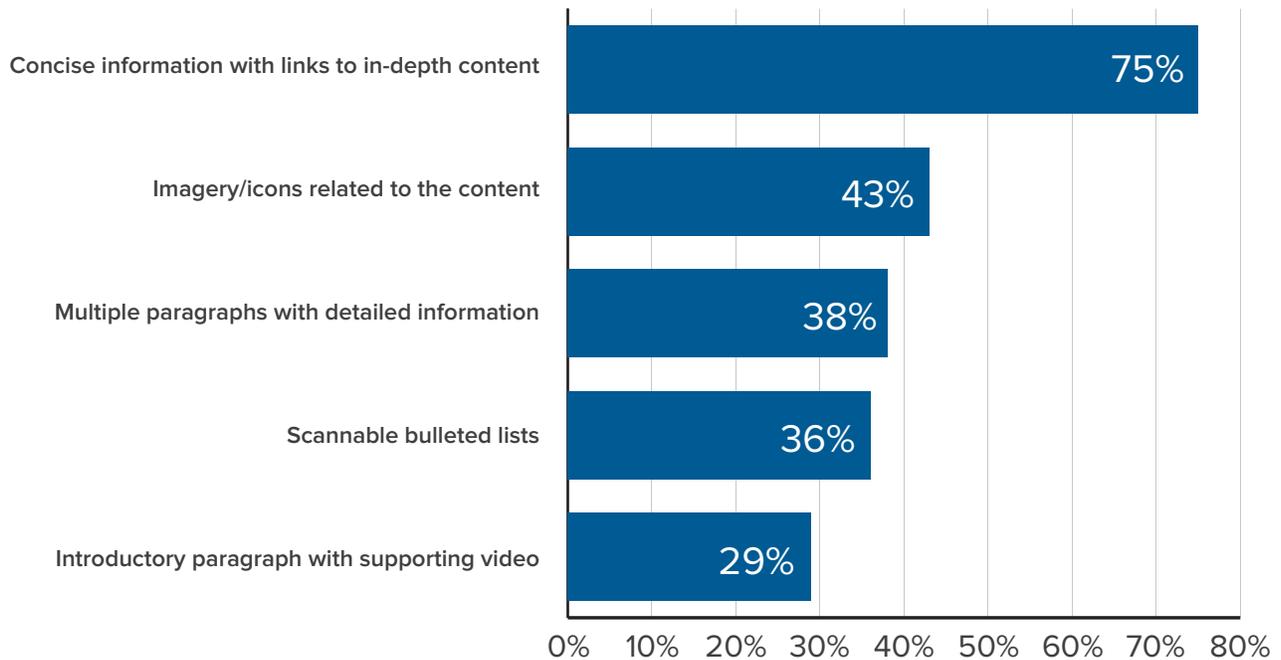


# Survey Findings

## WEBSITES AND THE ENGINEER

Engineers overwhelmingly prefer reviewing concise product or service information with links to in-depth content, as opposed to multiple paragraphs with detailed information or bulleted lists. Younger engineers (35 and under) are more likely to value imagery/icons related to the content and scannable bulleted lists.

**When reading information about a product or service on a website, how do you prefer the information be structured? (check all that apply)**

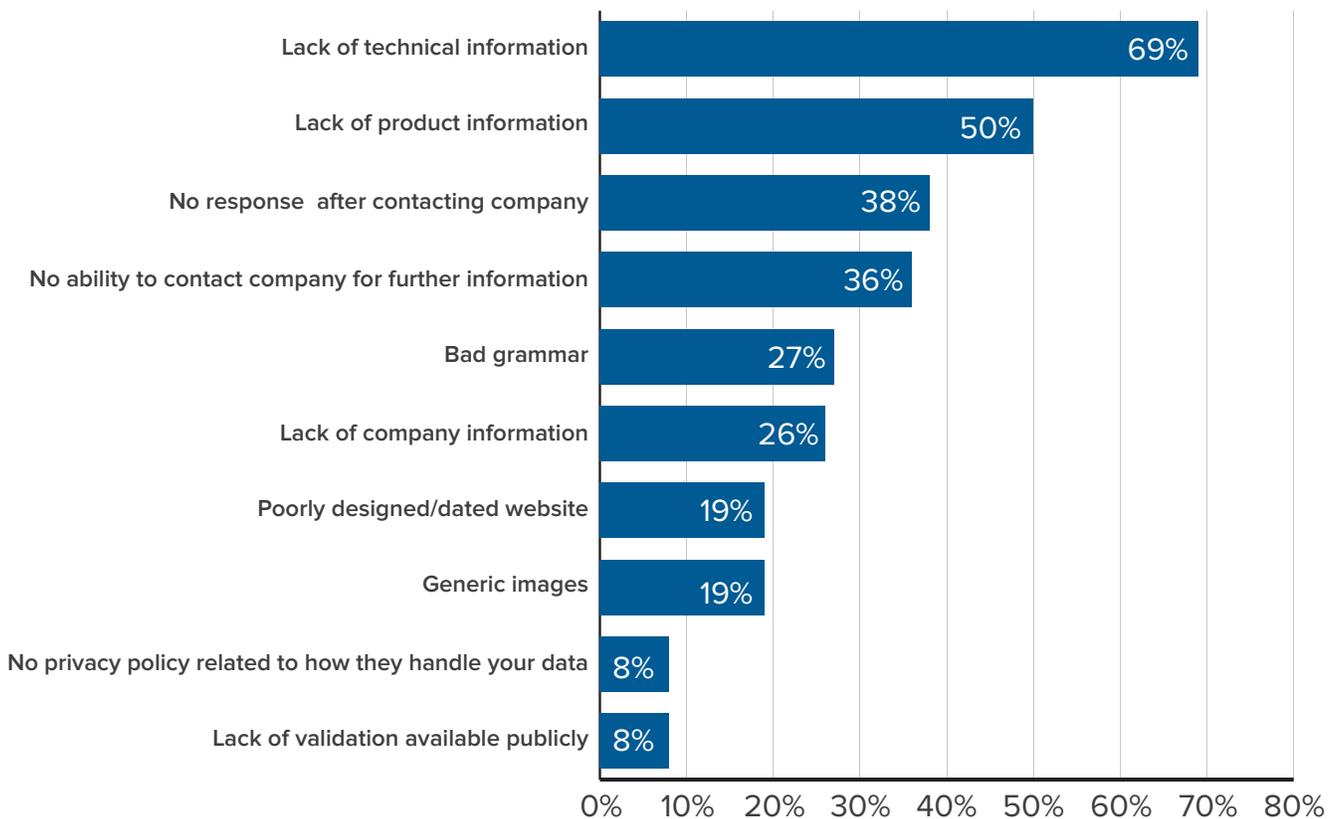


# Survey Findings

## WEBSITES AND THE ENGINEER

Websites with a lack of technical or product information are top “trust breakers” among engineers and technical professionals. Challenges related to contacting the company – either not receiving a response, or not offering the ability for a customer to contact you for further information – may also result in an engineer losing trust in a company or brand.

**As you are looking at a vendor’s website, what may cause you to lose trust in that company or their brand? (select your top 3 trust-breakers)**



# About IEEE GlobalSpec

IEEE GlobalSpec is a provider of data-driven industrial marketing solutions designed to help companies promote their products and grow their businesses.

Our audience of engineers and technical professionals relies on the IEEE GlobalSpec family of brands as trusted resources for content, community and engagement at all stages of the research, design and purchasing process.

We deliver deep industry intelligence, customized marketing programs and measurable campaign performance.

For more information about IEEE GlobalSpec, visit [www.globalspec.com/advertising](http://www.globalspec.com/advertising).

# About TREW Marketing

[TREW Marketing](http://www.trewmarketing.com), headquartered in Austin, Texas, is a full-service content marketing firm serving B2B companies in North America that target technical buyers. With deep experience in the embedded, measurement and automation, and plant management industries, TREW Marketing provides branding, marketing strategy, content development, and digital marketing services to help customers efficiently and effectively achieve business goals.

For more information, please visit [www.trewmarketing.com](http://www.trewmarketing.com).



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