



Capturing Buying Group Dynamics in the Buying Decision Process

B-to-b purchase decisions are rarely made by one person – multiple individuals are involved in a variety of buying scenarios that can exist within an organization

Key personas in a buying group have different buyer roles and may participate at different stages of the buying decision process

Understanding the buying group journey is crucial for creating marketing and sales strategies that work

Every day, consumers face a wide range of purchase decisions. Which sandwich to buy for lunch or which pair of shoes to add to one's wardrobe is a personal decision that can be made on the spot and rarely affects anyone else. But if someone is choosing a vacation destination or new home for the family, the purchase requires the input and agreement of other family members affected by the decision.

In b-to-b, individuals who make up buying groups consider how a major purchase affects other group members. Marketers with knowledge about how and when members of the buying group engage and interact throughout the buying process can adapt their content, programs and tactics to align with each target persona; without a complete picture, marketers inevitably miss addressing the needs of personas critical to the decision process. In this brief, we describe how portfolio marketers can document the purchase decision process for the key members of an organization's buying group.

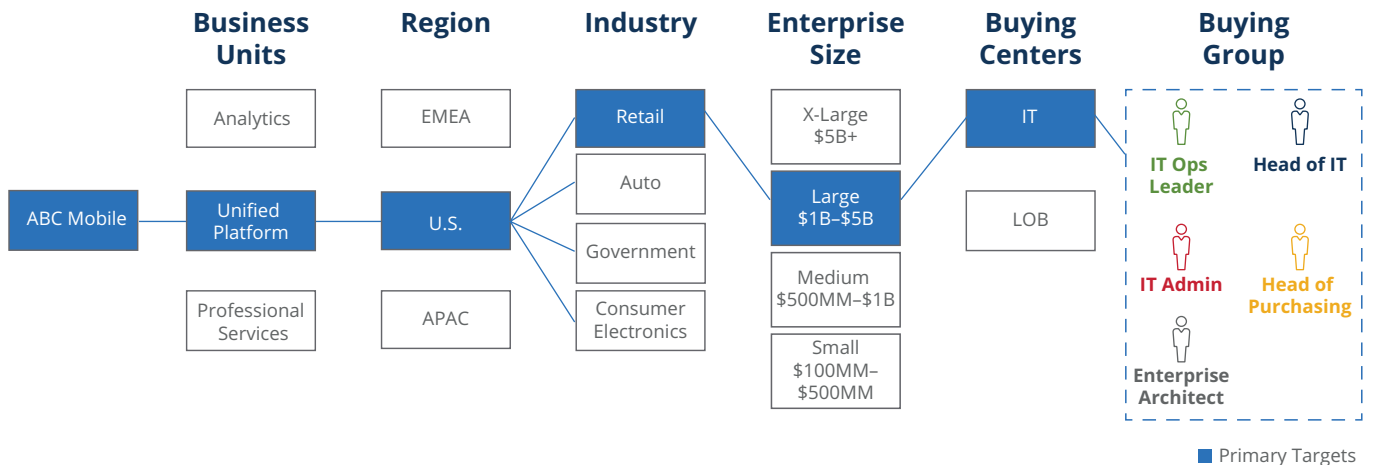
Understanding How the Target Organization Buys

A mistake many organizations make is assuming that how they sell matches how the prospect buys. Best practice, however, is to understand the buying process from the buyer's perspective, then design marketing and sales approaches that align with it. In this way, the selling organization can establish mutual engagement with buyers instead of trying to force them into a journey they may never take. Buying scenarios and the buying decision process are central to understanding how target organizations buy.

- **Buying scenarios.** B-to-b purchases typically take place in one of three distinct buying scenarios. Complex offerings requiring a large investment are usually purchased via a committee scenario, in which the buying process is formal and lengthy; it typically involves six to 10 individuals from the buying organization. Consensus scenarios are less formal and involve fewer participants (three to five) across different functions. Independent scenarios are for low-risk offerings with a lower price point. They involve only one or two participants and have the shortest buying cycle. Knowing the buying scenario helps marketers understand the level of complexity in how the organization buys, and approximate the type and number of personas involved in the purchase decision process (see the brief "The SiriusDecisions Buying Spectrum").

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Buyer Audience Framework Example



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- **Buying decision process.** The purchase decision process can be broken down into phases and stages (see the brief “The SiriusDecisions B-to-B Buying Decision Process Framework”). Before entering the buying process, personas are in a non-active pre-purchasing period. Once they recognize a problem or need, many buyers go through the three phases of education, solution and selection. In the education phase, buyers seek to understand why they should loosen the status quo and if they should commit to making a change. In the solution phase, they evaluate options and determine which solution type will best address their needs. In the selection phase, they seek to justify the decision for making the investment and then determine which provider from their short list will be awarded the purchase. Collectively, these buying phases (and stages) make up the buyer’s journey. Marketers must define this journey from the buyer’s perspective and adjust for the different offering types. For example, a journey for buyers of a freemium-to-premium software solution may have an additional free trial stage in the solution phase, while a journey for buyers of complex advanced manufacturing solutions may have an additional prototype stage before the final selection. Establishing the buyer’s journey for the target audience is essential for marketing and sales to create a plan for mutual engagement.

Identifying Key Personas in the Buying Group

B-to-b purchases nearly always involve multiple individuals in the buying process. Understanding the composition of the

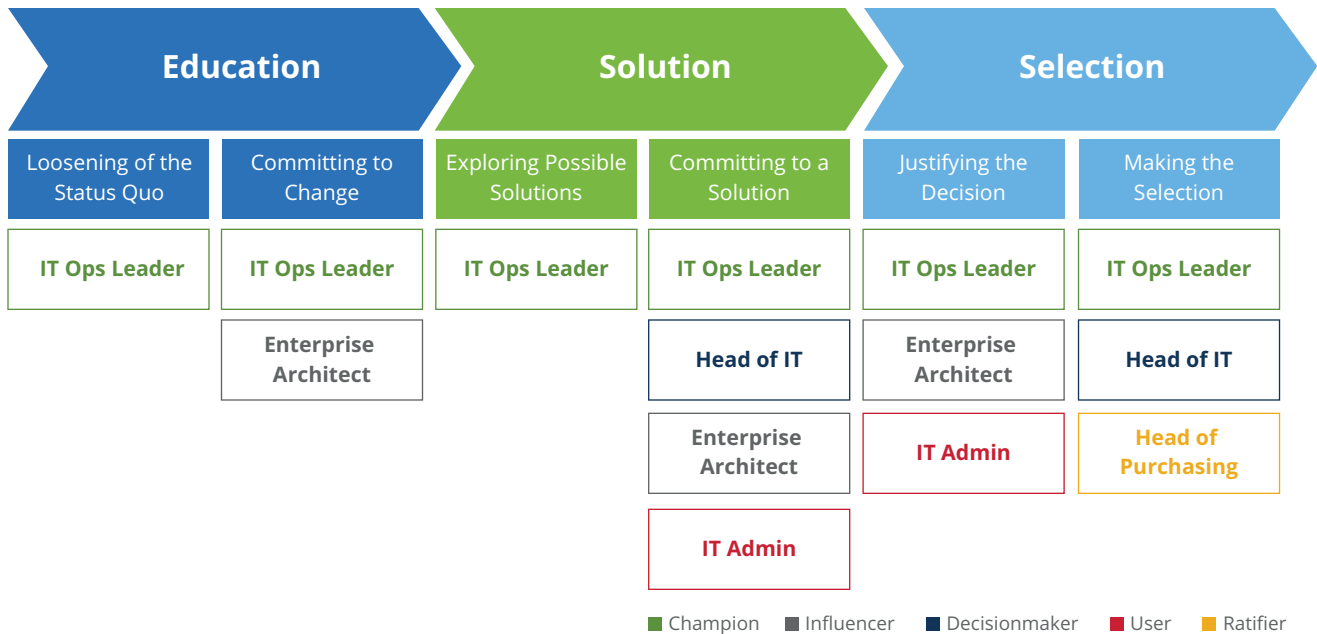
buying group and the associated buying need is central to defining the complete buyer’s journey. A failure to identify all key personas and their roles in the buying group creates gaps that can stall the progression of a sales lead or opportunity. Note that a buying group is defined as a collection of key personas, whereas a buying center is defined as the function that holds the budget for the purchase.

- **Audience framework.** The first step in identifying the buying group is constructing an audience framework that summarizes the target market segments and sub-levels such as region, industry, organization type, buying centers and the key personas involved in the purchasing process (see the brief “The SiriusDecisions Buyer Audience Framework”). Without this documentation, marketing and sales are often misaligned on the exact target audience. Worse, both teams may target only the primary persona (e.g. one that is familiar to the organization or holds the obvious decisionmaker or user role).

- **Persona definition.** The next step in identifying the members of the buying group is defining each key persona from the target audience segments. Personas are defined by their job roles (e.g. head of IT, IT operations leader), from which common titles (e.g. CIO, VP of IT) are mapped. Then, marketers must capture sets of functional, emotive, decision process and behavioral attributes to fully understand the persona (see the brief “The SiriusDecisions Buyer Persona

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Buying Group Journey Map Example



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Framework”). The buyer role is a decision process attribute that indicates how the persona participates in the buying process. A persona may hold one or more of the following buyer roles: champion, influencer, decisionmaker, user or ratifier (see the brief “B-to-B Buyer Roles”). For a complete view of the buying group, identify the personas that hold these buyer roles through market research data, internal sales experience and win/loss analysis.

Mapping Persona Engagement Levels

A persona’s purchasing behavior and preferences vary depending on job role, buyer need and buyer role. They are most directly observed through the persona’s participation in the buyer’s journey stages. A persona in a champion role may be active throughout the buyer’s journey to sponsor a change, while a persona in an influencer role may move in and out of the journey as needed to provide input on the basis of expertise. Knowing each key persona’s engagement level in the buying phases and stages is the final step in documenting the buying group journey.

- **Buyer insights.** To understand how customers buy – and then create journey maps based on this understanding –

marketers must first approach this task from the buyer’s perspective. Gather persona data and insights from the target audience through primary research such as online surveys and in-person interviews, and from secondary sources such as SiriusDecisions’ Buyer Insights Reports, which cover 23 key persona roles and industries. Internal data such as Web, social and search analytics is also useful to understand the target persona’s behaviors. As part of the research process, validate any buyer insights gathered with internal and external resources (e.g. high-performing sales reps, customers and prospects).

- **Buyer’s journey map.** A visualization of a persona’s behavior and preferences throughout the purchase decision process, the buyer’s journey map is essential for effective campaign and program planning. The map is built from the buyer persona’s perspective and lays out the persona’s interactions, content utilization and engagement level at each stage of the buyer’s journey (see the brief “Creating Journey Maps to Enable Buying Decisions”). Marketers should create a buyer’s journey map for each key target persona, then plot on a separate buying group journey map the stage(s) in which each persona participates.



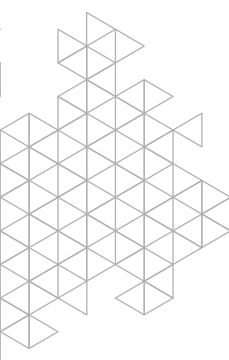
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Using the Buying Group Journey Map in Program Planning

As the function deemed the organization's "buyer expert," portfolio marketing collaborates with sales and other marketing teams to create the buying group journey map, which serves as strategic input into campaign and program planning. Specifically, marketers use this information to develop programs that entice members of the buying group to engage at the right juncture.

- **Program goals.** The first step to creating marketing programs is establishing quantifiable program objectives. Demand marketers use information from the audience framework and the definition of key personas in the buying group to home in on the specific target audience segments. In particular, they organize the buying groups into types that translate into demand units. This step is central to determining the appropriate pipeline and revenue objectives (see the brief "The Data Model for the Demand Unit Waterfall™"). For reputation and sales enablement programs, marketers can align objectives such as critical influencer and sales touchpoints with the points when key personas are most active in the buyer's journey.
- **Program design.** Savvy demand marketers incorporate buyer insights to design the best approach to engaging the target audience. When designing a program, they use the buying group journey map to help them put together the right combination of marketing interactions and tactics, and to inform the sequence and timing of tactics within the program. Further, portfolio marketing and content creators can see the journey stages in which personas are active and develop messaging and content that compel the entire buying group to advance the purchase decision process.

The Sirius Decision



Marketers can address the challenge of understanding personas and buying groups by prioritizing their focus, using relative targeting to rank each target audience segment's potential (see the brief "Targeting: It's All Relative"). When there are too many personas to target, use quantitative and qualitative factors (e.g. number of personas available, new or known personas) to prioritize which personas warrant immediate marketing attention (see the brief "Prioritizing Buyer Personas"). Within a buying group, determine whether the persona in the champion or decisionmaker role should be the primary target, then target additional buyer roles as marketing resources allow. With a phased approach in which teams are defining and operationalizing insights about a few key personas and buying groups to start, team skills improve over time, and scalability to a wider audience comes naturally.