

# Materials End User Buying Process and Perspectives Report

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**FALL 2019**



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***Dear Marketer,***

The purchase landscape for packaging materials and containers is in flux. To optimize marketing strategy, suppliers need to not only stay on top of end users' content and channel preferences but also recognize that the very nature of the buying experience is evolving.

To aid in these efforts, PMMI Media Group presents the following **End User Buying Process and Perspectives** report. Within this report, you'll learn about:

- Changing dynamics of packaging materials buying teams
- End users' research and vetting practices
- Optimal content approaches for influencing materials purchase decisions
- Differentiators among winning suppliers

The report is based on findings from our **2019 Packaging End User and Supplier Buying Insights Study**, a two-pronged project examining both buyer and supplier perspectives on changes in the research and purchase of packaging machinery and supplies. Highlighted are excerpts of end user responses. We look forward to sharing additional reports in this series with you at [pmmimediagroupresearch.com](http://pmmimediagroupresearch.com).

Best Regards,

*Sarah Loeffler*

*Director, Media Innovation & Marketing Insights*  
PMMI Media Group

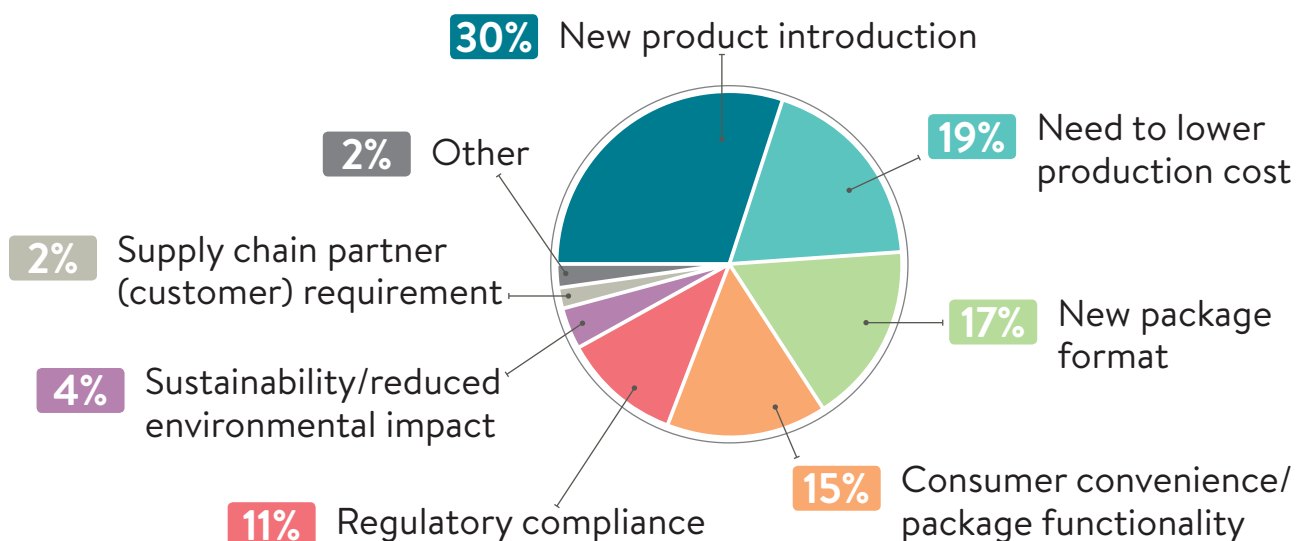


# MATERIALS PURCHASE DYNAMICS

## Product Innovation Triggers About Half of New Purchases

Working with a new packaging material or material supplier is a big decision for end users. About half of materials or containers purchases originate with either a new product (30 percent) or packaging format (17 percent). The next most common reason for a new purchase is to lower packaging cost (19 percent).

## Which of the following was the biggest driver for your facility's most recent packaging materials or container purchase?



**The takeaway?** Use case is always changing among packaging materials end users, as they continually innovate. As such, suppliers need to focus keenly on campaign frequency and channel diversity to maximize opportunity to hit those who may be weighing a materials change. Activities such as participation in directories, ads in trade media and attendance at events can be particularly useful in raising brand and product awareness with emerging companies and companies in expansion mode.

Suppliers should also consider organizing their website search and infrastructure to make it easy to view diversity of offerings or applications by industry. This type of organization will make it easier for end users to recognize potential uses that may align with their shifting needs.

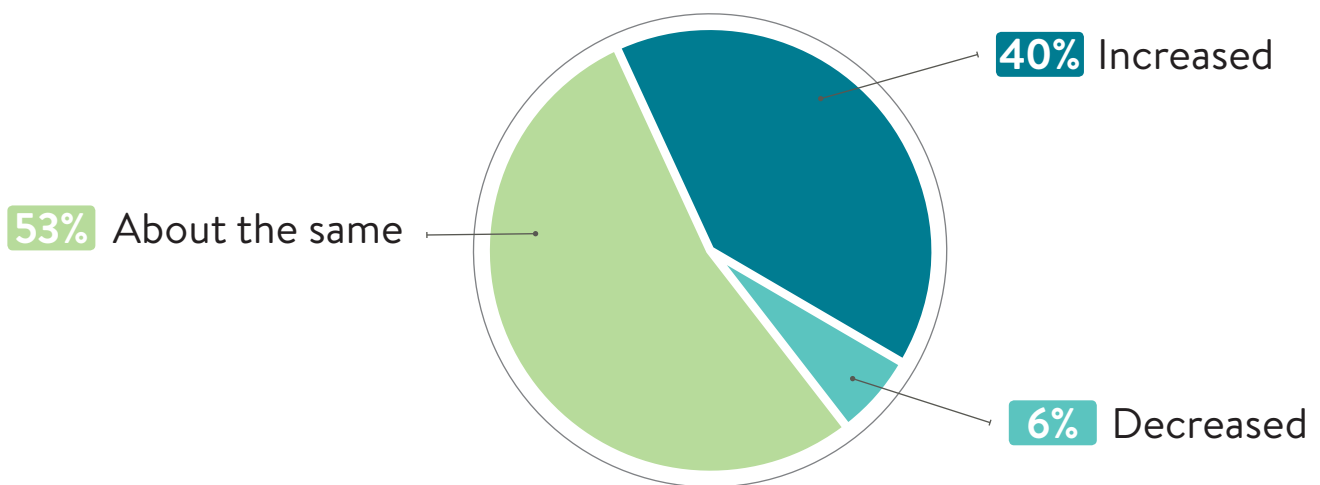


#### MATERIALS PURCHASE DYNAMICS

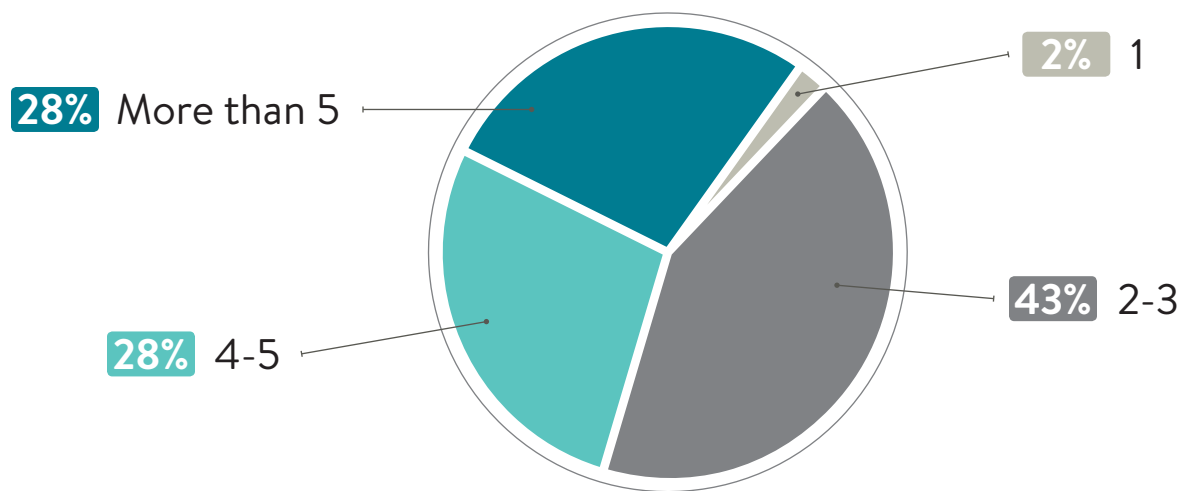
### **Buying Teams Have Grown**

Forty percent of materials buyers say that more people at their organization are involved in purchase decisions over the past five years. Teams have grown such that more than half of all materials purchases now involve committees consisting of four or more decision makers.

**Over the past five years, which best describes any change in the NUMBER OF PEOPLE typically involved in your company's purchasing decisions regarding packaging materials/containers?**



## How many people typically are involved in your company's purchase decisions regarding packaging materials/containers?



**The takeaway?** A larger buying team often makes for a more complex sales process. Suppliers should review their website, marketing messages and sales collateral to ensure diversity of content is sufficient to address all key stakeholders, recognizing that an engineer is likely to have different reasons for engagement and informational needs than a plant manager when comparing options.

Also, campaigns **going beyond customer lists** and making use of external channels will be particularly important to ensure reach across the full buying committee. Existing lists aren't enough when the traditional contact for a sales rep is likely only one of multiple individuals holding significant sway over decisions. Making use of trade media, events and web-accessed advertising channels, such as Google, will be needed to get in front of the broader group of decision influencers.

## Less Linear Purchasing Is Occurring

There are more fits and starts with the materials purchasing process than seen in years past, with 51 percent of end users saying their decisions are more likely to shift around changing priorities these days.

## Which of the following describes your purchase experience of packaging materials/containers over the past five years?\*

Purchase decisions are often accelerated or put on hold based on changing priorities



51%

We use formal purchasing teams



40%

We conduct a more detailed ROI analysis before making a final decision



32%

We're more likely to look beyond our list of preferred suppliers



32%

*\*Multiple responses permitted.*

**The takeaway?** Suppliers will need to be faster and more agile responding to prospect inquiries, as seemingly stalled purchase decisions may suddenly move. Also, marketers should be building greater frequency into campaigns. Providing a drumbeat of opportunities for engaging with content will be key to recognizing when interests may be changing and the prospect may suddenly be coming into market.

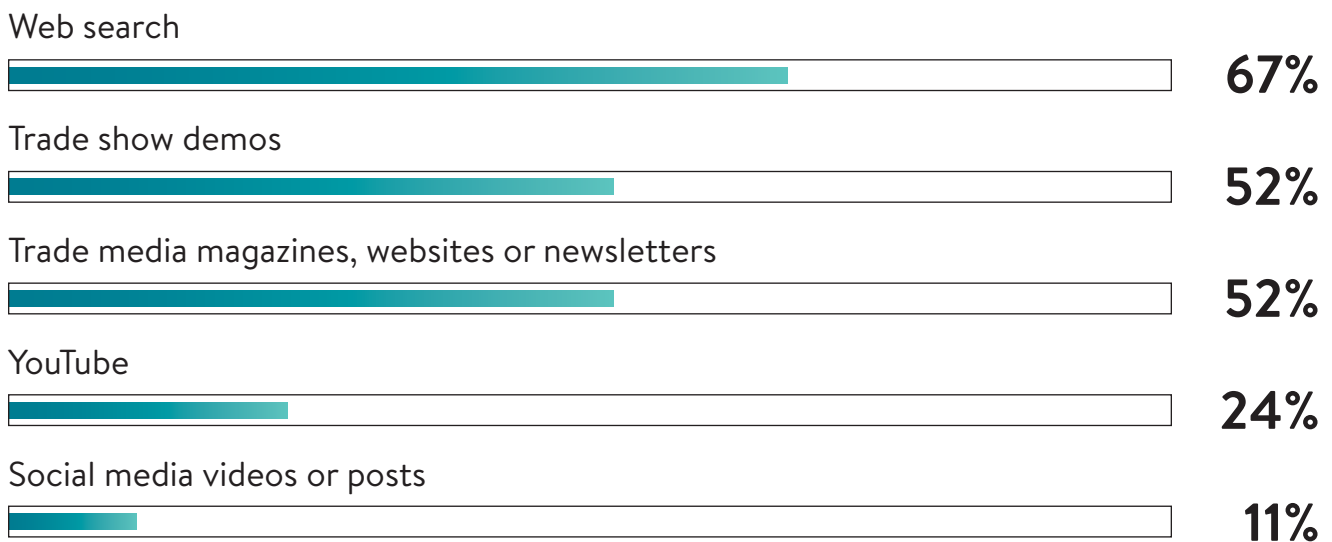
A non-linear sales process also means campaigns focused on brand and product awareness become increasingly important. These campaigns are vital to staying top of mind while weathering shifts in project focus or changes in the level of involvement across members of the buying committee.



## Web Presence Alone Isn't Enough

Despite more online channel options available these days for end users to research and view equipment, many will still rely on an in-person demo at a tradeshow (52 percent) or content from trade media (52 percent) to influence their decision.

## Which of the following resources informed your organization's most recent materials/containers purchase decision?\*



\*Multiple responses permitted.

**The takeaway?** Don't underestimate the importance of branding when trying to develop an effective inbound marketing strategy. A majority of end users (67 percent) will rely on web search in their research process—and having at least some familiarity with the supplier's brand will differentiate results. Awareness activities, such as print or online display ads, feed this search and prioritization.

Also, it is important to note the value of a multichannel strategy. A strong web strategy is just one aspect of reaching buyers; Marketers also need to provide “boots on the ground” advice at trade shows and participate in industry news coverage to optimize sales.

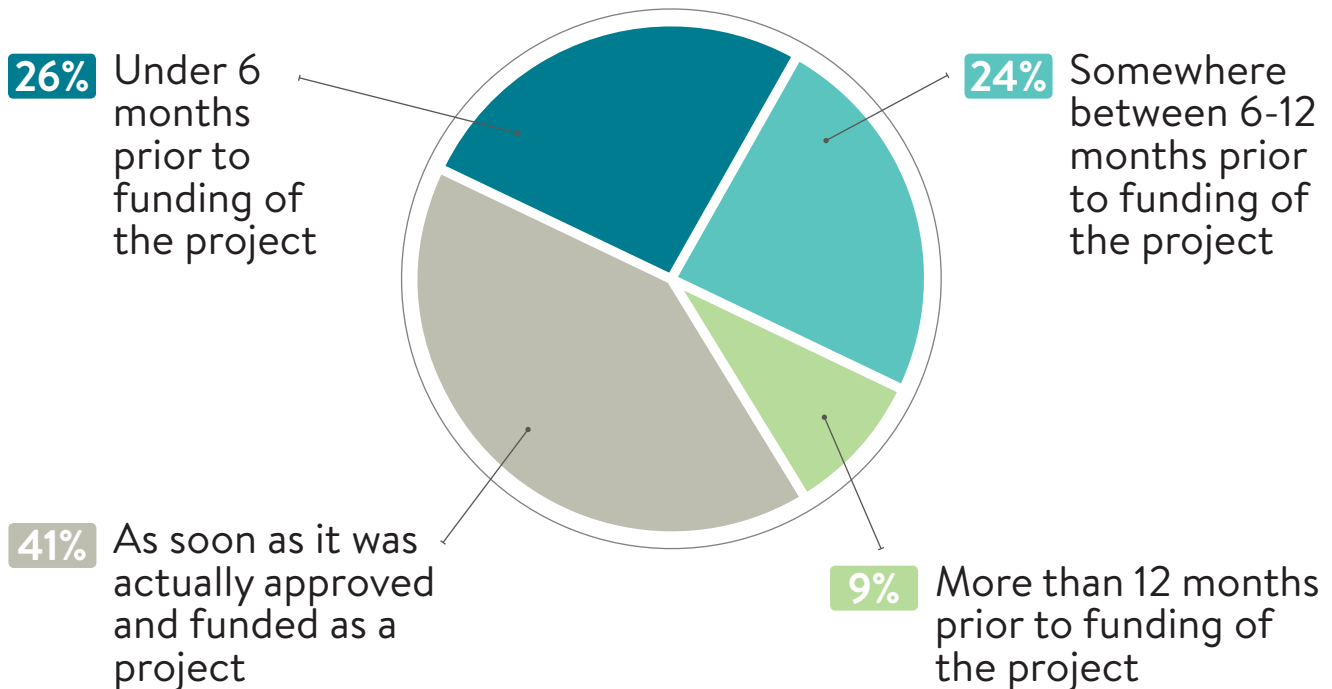


# RESEARCH AND VETTING OF SUPPLIERS

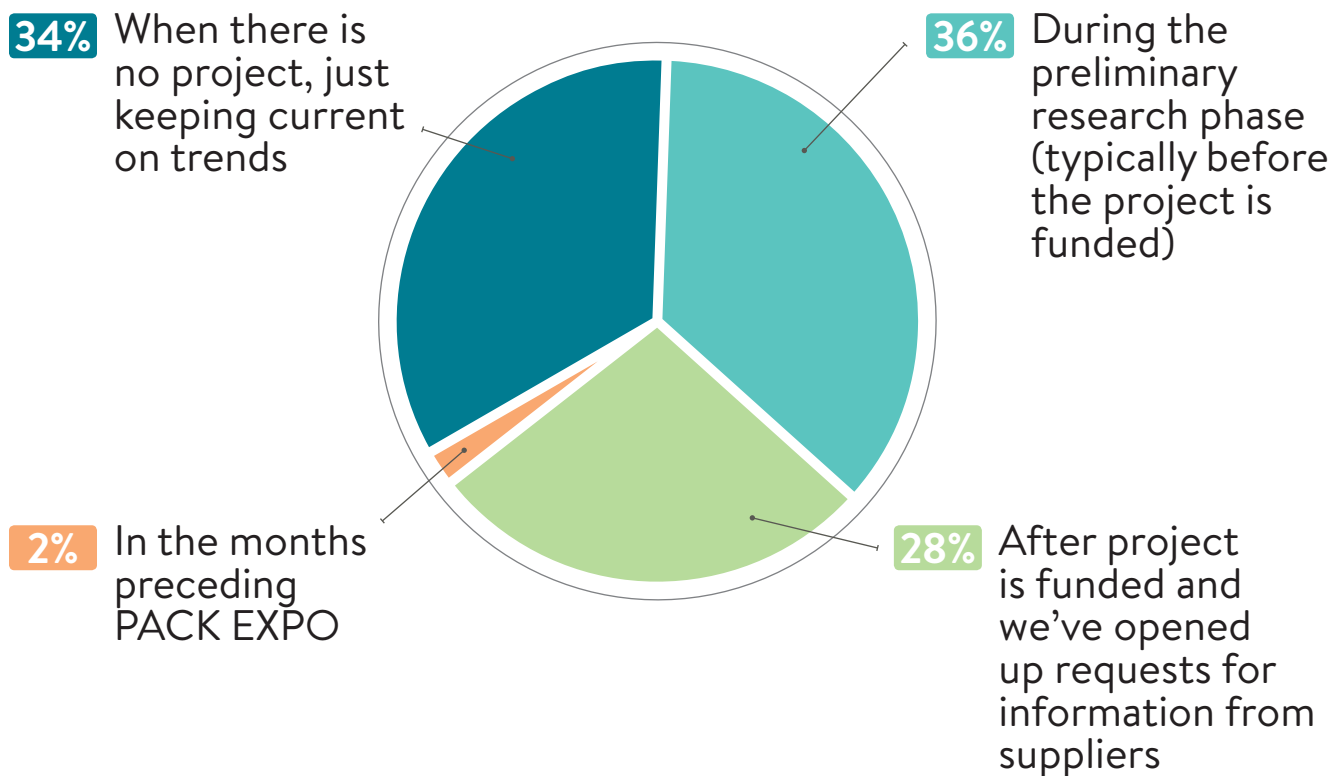
## More than Half of Research Begins Prior to Funding

The majority (59 percent) of research begins prior to a project being fully funded. A significant segment of the market (33 percent) will begin their research at least six months or longer before funding. And the time for new vendors to get noticed occurs even earlier: 34 percent of end users say they are most open to learning about options before active projects are even on their radar.

## When did you start researching suppliers and solutions relating to the purchase, even informally or anonymously?



## In general, when are you most open to learning about new suppliers?

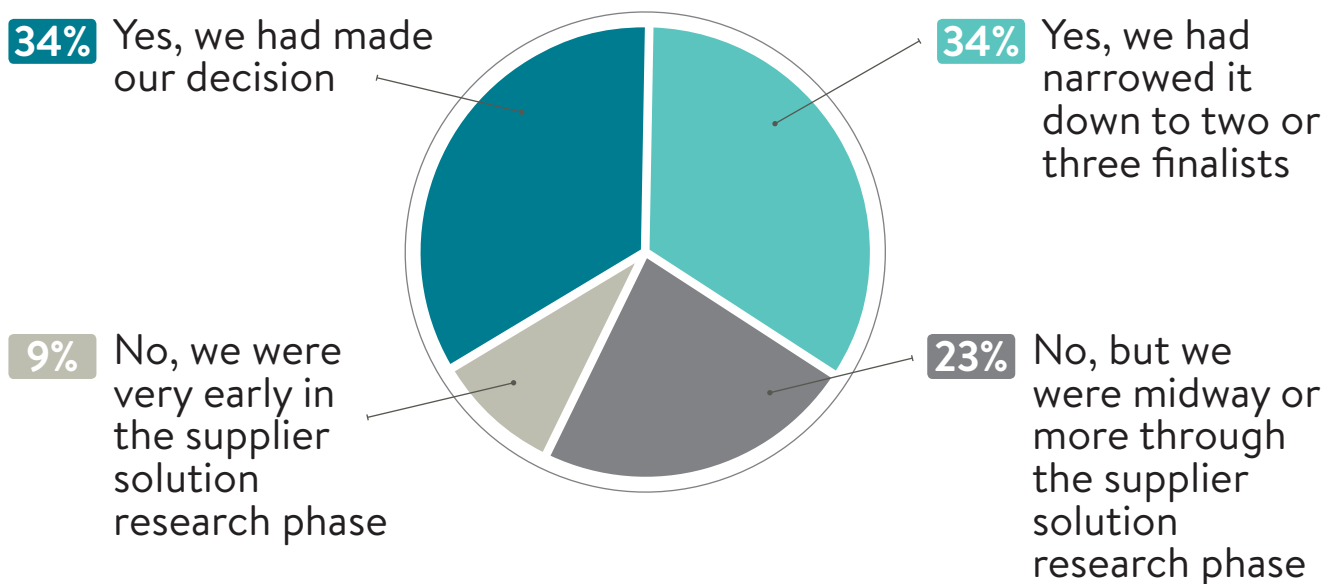


**The takeaway?** A long research period prior to funding means that those marketers who focus efforts solely around known prospects or fully specified projects will minimize potential for sales success. A more successful strategy is getting on a prospect's radar early—likely even before the prospect is willing to provide contact info—and sustaining nurturing efforts for a minimum of six months.

## Most End Users Have Determined a List of Finalists at Time of Project Funding

By the time a project is funded, 34 percent of end users will know the materials supplier they will use and 34 percent will have narrowed the field to two to three finalists.

By the time your most recent materials or containers project was approved and funded, did you know who the suppliers were going to be?

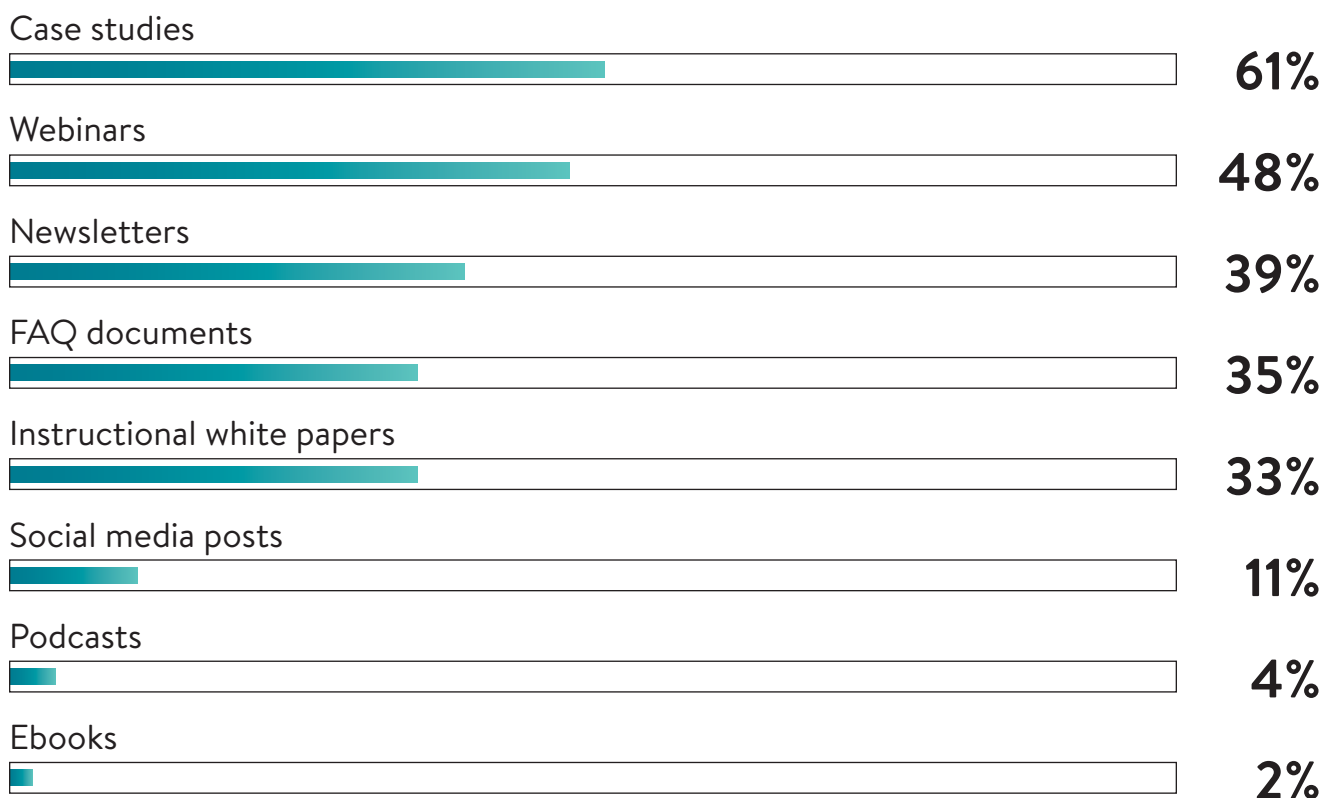


**The takeaway?** As noted earlier, the best way to reach buyers is to catch them early—long before projects are funded. Suppliers should not only provide clear product pricing but also tackle topics year round that affect return or corporate mission, such as impact on production cost or sustainability goals. Arming project champions with this type of information will help them build a case for investment with the rest of their teams. Suppliers who wait to examine these issues only when a prospect has a fully specified project that is almost or already funded will harm their competitive position.

## Case Studies Are Most Desired Content

Aside from basic product info (spec sheets and videos), end users say case studies are the most preferred content type when researching materials. Webinars rank second at 48 percent.

Aside from demo videos and spec sheets, which of the following content would you find most useful from suppliers?\*



\*Responses limited to three selections.

**The takeaway?** Buyers are most likely to be moved by information that has context relevant to their experience and that speaks to solving a common or particularly challenging problem. Case studies and webinars give assurance of the supplier's expertise, as they typically provide practical information and how-to guidance. Speaking to an end user's pain point, especially when able to quantify improvements, will garner more engagement than simply focusing on product features.

One other thing marketers should consider: Too often suppliers are held back from producing case studies because of difficulty getting a client to go on record. Although named case studies are powerful, they aren't always necessary. Focusing around a particular vertical or common use case will typically have enough relevance to draw interest from prospects. Discussing "a large snack manufacturer" switching to a new type of flexible packaging will still be compelling to peers.

# END USER PERSPECTIVES ON MATERIALS BUYING EXPERIENCE

## Top Barriers End Users Face When Trying to Get Information from Materials Suppliers

### Lack of Response/Unsatisfying Response

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“Filling out forms on their web site often doesn’t yield a response.”

“Timeliness is a big source of frustration. Usually if I am looking for information, I need it quickly to help direct a decision one way or another. If a supplier cannot provide information within a day or two of my request, I will typically remove them from the process.”

“I hate when I’m trying to simply gather basic information, and I suddenly get bombarded with a bunch of aggressive sales pitches. It wastes my time (and theirs).”

“I prefer to do most business over email so I have a paper trail. Too many companies are too eager to jump right to phone calls.”

## Difficulty Accessing Product Information

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“It often takes several conversations to get more product information, as the details I need are sometimes overlooked.”

“Too often I’m dealing with sales people instead of the technical people needed to answer my questions.”

“I wish it were easier to receive material composition data.”

## Inability to Address Small-Scale Project Needs

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“Many suppliers don’t have the ability to produce small scale quickly.”

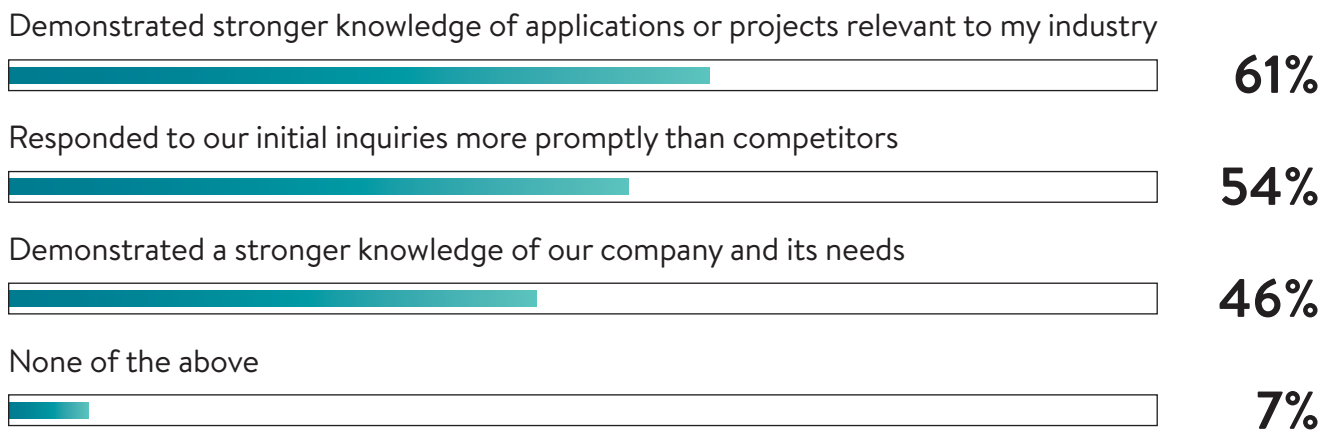
“Research is difficult when you aren’t sure of quantity—many suppliers don’t know how to respond.”

“Suppliers are not willing to sell to companies that aren’t buying truck loads and will just direct you to other suppliers.”

## Industry-Related Expertise Differentiates Winners

End users say that with their most recent materials purchase, the winning supplier demonstrated stronger knowledge of their application or industry.

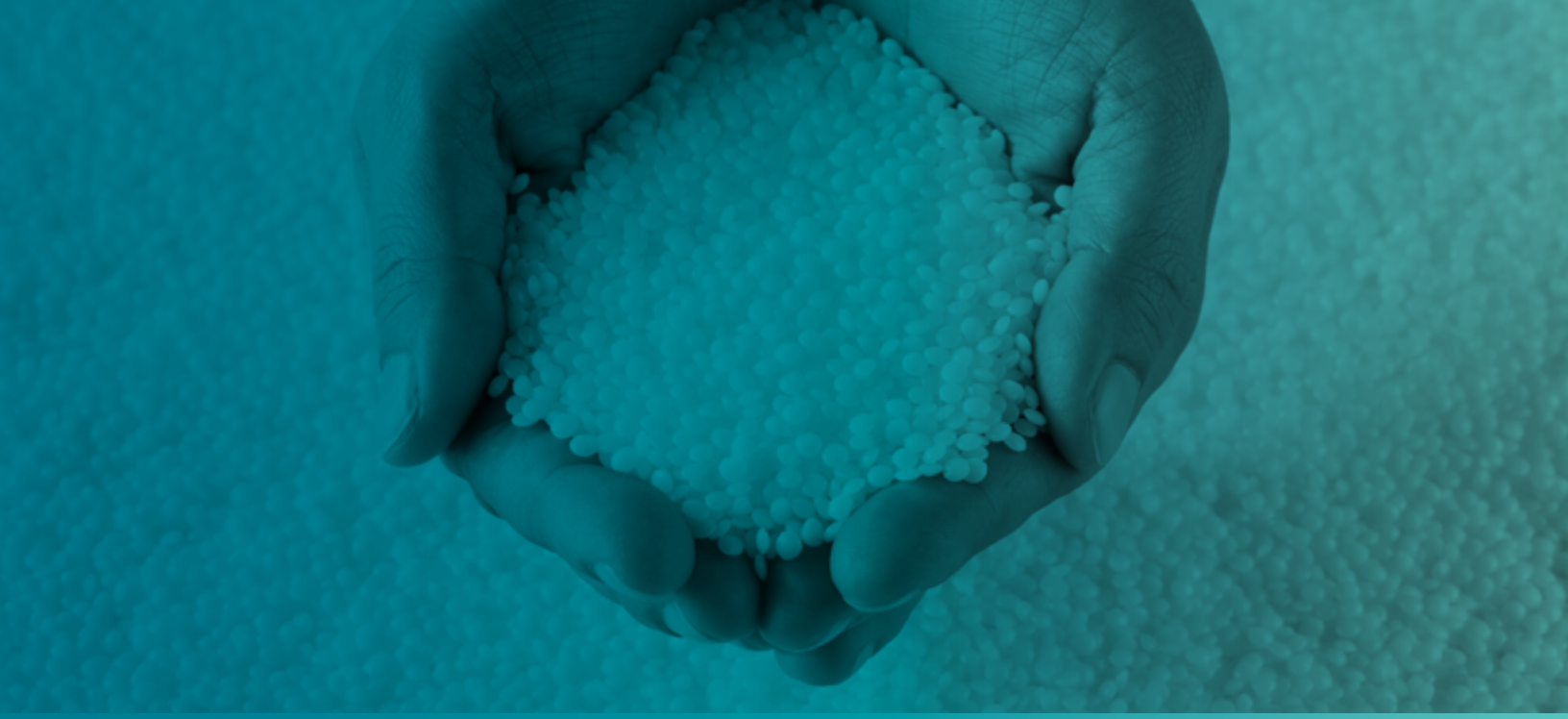
### Which of the following statements is true regarding the winning supplier?\*



\*Multiple responses permitted.

**The takeaway?** When determining marketing strategy, suppliers would be well-served to align message by industry whenever appropriate. Key ways suppliers can showcase industry-specific expertise include developing case study content, aligning the organization's site search and infrastructure for easy viewing by industry and versioning ad creative and product visuals to showcase specific industry applications.





# CONCLUSION

As research habits regarding packaging materials evolve, suppliers need to keep pace and accommodate the increasingly complex content needs of end users, from providing them with relevant information relating to use within their industry to instructing project champions on how to build a financial or sustainability case to share with the rest of their team.

Campaign pacing also will need review. As buying teams become larger and more diverse and paths to purchase experience more frequent fits and starts, the burden on suppliers is increasing to generate—and track—engagement over time while remaining agile to changing needs.

Simply put: Suppliers must speak at a very practical level around the end user's pain points. And just as important, they must have the persistence and depth of information to withstand months and months of vetting by a multi-disciplined buying committee. Those with an eye on these changing purchase dynamics will be best positioned for success.

*For additional resources on packaging supplier marketing trends and tactics from PMMI Media Group, visit [insights.pmmimediagroup.com](https://insights.pmmimediagroup.com).*



# SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The **2019 Packaging End User and Supplier Buying Insights Study** from PMMI Media Group was a two-pronged project examining both buyer and supplier perspectives on changes in the research and purchase of packaging machinery and supplies.

For the Materials End User Buying Process and Perspectives report featured here, PMMI Media Group surveyed readers of *Packaging World*, *ProFood World* and *Healthcare Packaging* during May 2019. The survey was distributed by email, resulting in 47 end users who self-identified as having direct influence or authority on packaging materials purchases (full completion).

# marketing INSIGHTS

 **PMMI MEDIA GROUP**

Research featured within this report was conducted by PMMI Media Group's Marketing Insights division. For more marketing-related resources, see [insights.pmmimediagroup.com](https://insights.pmmimediagroup.com).

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