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# What to Do When Your Buyers' Journey Isn't Linear (Hint: It Never Is)



Wouldn't it be great if your prospects actually followed your neatly designed sales funnel or smartly outlined path to purchase?

But honestly, you know they don't (even if your [content marketing strategy](#) assumes they do).

"Buyers are in control. And they're not going from step one to step two to step three in this process that you define as quite linear," Anna Talerico, co-founder of ion interactive, said in her recent ContentTECH presentation. "They are jumping around. They're exploring. They're comparing. They're doing their self-education

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Buyers are doing their self-education on their own terms in their own time frames, says @annatalerico.

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More than 70% of buyers conduct over half their research online before making an offline purchase, according to [research](#) from Forrester that Anna shared.

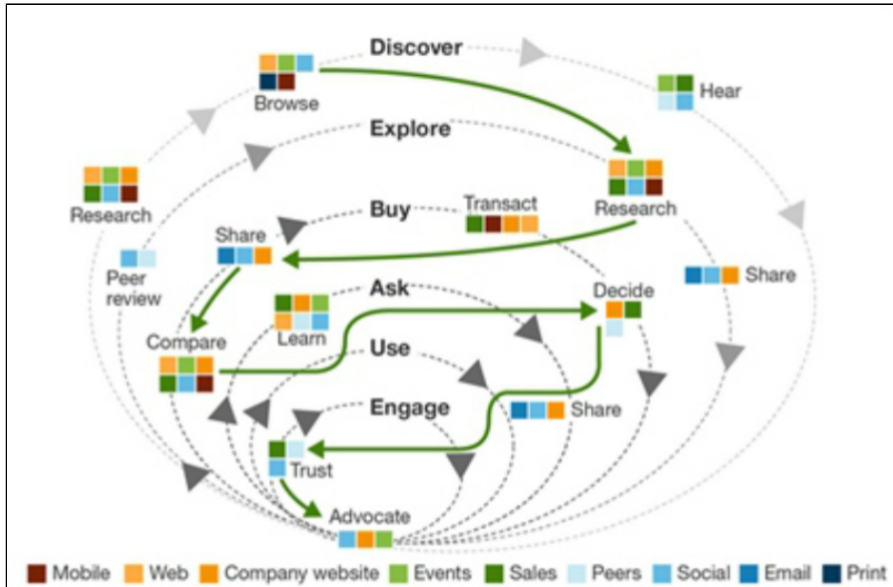


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McKinsey & Company [research](#) confirms the messy journey, which it dubs the consumer-decision journey.

Given (1) you don't know when the consumer starts the journey, (2) the consumer rarely follows a neat path, and (3) the consumer who eventually buys usually learned of his or her brand choice early on, what's a content marketer to do?

Give up on the buyer-journey model? Definitely not.

Don't give up on the buyer-journey model, says @anngynn.  
#contentmarketing

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content to satisfy your buyers in each of the traditional sales stages. It's the foundation on which to build your [editorial plan](#) – to detail the topics and formats that will help your buyers the most.

You need #content to satisfy your buyers in each of the traditional sales stages, says @annatalerico.

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If you haven't detailed your buyer journey, do it now. For help, consider one of these useful guides:

- [4 Ways to Model the Buyer's Journey](#)
- [Why – and How – to Map Out Your Customers' Journey \(Template\)](#)
- McKinsey & Company's [customer-destination-journey model](#)

## How to execute content

OK, so we agree it's critical to align your content and your distribution with the messy buyer's journey. But how do you deliver content that truly helps your buyers navigate their twists and turns? And how do you ensure that they can access that content when they want it?

Though the buyer's journey is non-linear, you can conquer it by creating content for the traditional stages in unexpected ways to create a content mix that gives buyers what they need even when you don't know they need it.

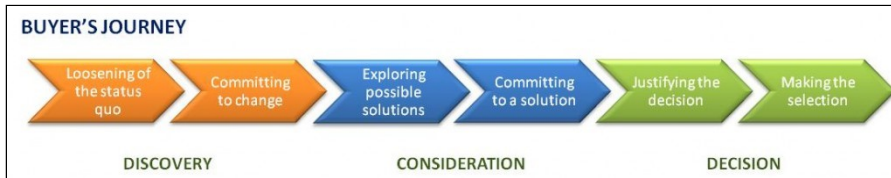
How do you create a good mix? Deliver for the chaotic – mixing your content formats and making them accessible no matter when or how the buyer arrives at that stage in the traditional buyer's journey.

For this post, we'll use a buyer's journey model shared in [Optimize Content Marketing by Facilitating the Buyer's Journey](#) and add a

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## Content formats

Let's consider how to use a mix of content types that delivers at each step of the journey. The key is creating content within that format that's the most relevant for a particular stage.

### Interactive

A **Demand Metric** survey reveals that 97% of participants say interactive content was somewhat or very effective in educating buyers, while only 70% say the same for static content. **Research** also shows that interactive content's ability to convert buyers is almost double static content's ability. Interactive content, as Anna explains, allows for self-exploration.

Interactive content's ability to convert buyers is almost double that of static content via @DemandMetric. [CLICK TO TWEET](#) 

- **Discovery (early stages):** Interactive infographics, look books, quizzes, diagnostic assessments
- **Consideration (middle stages):** Interactive e-books and white papers
- **Decision (end stages):** Concept-specific content – assessments, solution finders, calculators
- **Retention (ongoing):** Interactive support response

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As Juan Mendez **writes**: “Videos also are great for audience retention and can **increase purchase intent by 97%**. Besides, video is great for **sharing** cool content on your favorite social media channels.”

Videos are great for audience retention & can increase purchase intent by 97%.

@juanjo101 @mediapost

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- **Discovery (early stages):** Educational – help viewers understand how their problems can be solved
- **Consideration (middle stages):** Explainer – detail (not plainly showing) how your product or service solves the problem
- **Decision (end stages):** Demo, testimonial or ‘About’ videos – show brand value and credibility
- **Retention (ongoing):** How-to on specific features of tools and solutions

## White papers and e-books

CMI's 2017 **research** shows that 65% of B2B marketers use white papers and/or e-books. Almost 40% say white papers and e-books are most critical to their content marketing success in 2017.

65% of B2B marketers use white papers and/or e-books via @cmicontent. 2017 #research

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- **Discovery (early stages):** Provocative research-based and interactive
- **Consideration (middle stages):** Solution-oriented
- **Decision (end stages):** Value-oriented
- **Retention (ongoing):** Advanced insight, forward-thinking concepts

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## Events

Almost 70% of B2B marketers use in-person events, while 58% use webinars and webcasts, according to [CMI research](#). About one-third say in-person events as well as webinars are most critical to their success this year.

- **Discovery (early stages):** [Webinars](#)
- **Consideration (middle stages):** On-site activation at events drawing your target audiences
- **Decision (end stages):** Hosted events or meetings with your company
- **Retention (ongoing):** User workshops and customer-only conferences or meetings

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## Other content types

We know you use a lot of other content types. Here's a quick rundown of a few of them to give you an idea of how to incorporate them in the buyer's journey.

**Discovery (early stages):** Blog posts that answer [questions](#)

**Consideration (middle stages):** [Email newsletters](#) and content hubs

**Decision (end stages):** Testimonials on your website, third-party review sites

**Retention (ongoing):** Print magazines, mobile apps

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## Conclusion

The key to finding and delivering the right content at the right time is to stop thinking of your buyers walking a straight path to purchase. Instead, consider what type of information your potential buyers and customers need at every stage and create stage-specific content in a mix of formats. Then make it accessible when and where your buyer is ready to consume it.

To deliver right content at right time, stop thinking of buyers walking a straight line to purchase. @anngynn

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Ann Gynn edits the CMI blog. She also serves as the Tech Tools editor for Chief Content Officer magazine. Ann regularly combines words and strategy for B2B, B2C, and nonprofits, continuing to live up to her high school nickname, Editor Ann. Former college adjunct faculty, Ann also helps train professionals in content so they can do it

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