ITDMs and BDMs: Tech Purchase Superheroes

When it comes to IT purchasing decisions, who really calls the shots?
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The IT purchase quest begins...

In the fast-paced, chaotic world of Techtropolis, bad marketing is kryptonite to closing a deal. So how do you arm your marketing efforts with superhuman insight to target the right buyers?

There’s a growing perception amongst marketers that the balance of power has shifted in the IT decision-making process. Historically the domain of the traditional IT department, some see the role of IT becoming diffused across the business. It’s possible non-IT areas such as Marketing, Finance, and HR are playing a larger part in making tech purchase decisions.

Between the IT Decision-Maker (ITDM) and the Business Decision-Maker (BDM), who really calls the shots? Are they heroic purchase partners, dividing and conquering distinct phases throughout the purchase cycle? Or do they have entirely separate agendas?

Good news: We’ve fired up our survey spidey-sense to truly understand how buying decisions are made so that you can best guide tech decision-makers towards purchase success. Ready to reach your buyers with X-ray precision? Read on!

Our report includes results from more than 250 ITDMs and 150 BDMs across EMEA to dig into exactly how technology purchases play out. We tapped our own user base and market research panel, and partnered with a leading business sample provider to gain real-world insights.
ITDMs are key players in the purchase of nearly every tech category, and are more likely than BDMs to be involved in the majority of tech purchases in some capacity.

Each party holds varying degrees of influence depending on where they are in the purchase process. ITDMs are doing the legwork as they evaluate solutions, make recommendations, and implement tech; while BDMs secure budgets and sign off on the ITDM’s recommendation.

ITDMs bring the most insight to the table. When it comes to whose opinion saves the day, both buyer types agree that ITDMs contribute more valuable input throughout the process.

ITDMs consume up to 15 pieces of content (11 for BDMs) to help inform purchase decisions, so marketers will likely want to deliver even more content than they currently provide.
ITDMs & BDMs Unmasked
It’s a bird, it’s a plane...

Faster than a speeding network, more powerful than a malicious virus, able to influence technology purchases in a single bound: it’s the IT decision-maker!

ITDMs are on the front lines of sourcing, supporting, and maintaining all the devices and software running at their companies.

But who really is the ITDM? Here’s a quick snapshot of the elusive tech crusader:

Strengths:
- Can make or break IT purchase decisions — if it doesn’t meet their specifications, or won’t work with their current set-up, it won’t get purchased
- Understands the technology better than anyone

Weakness:
- Their powers are often underestimated by marketers
- While they might not sign the final cheque, they definitely serve as influencer and gatekeeper
- Business decision-makers fight the competitive threat to ensure that markets are dominated and customers appeased.

Business decision makers are the guardians of the business plan and strategy! They fight the competitive threat to ensure that markets are dominated and customers appeased.

Strength:
- Cuts the final cheque and approves recommendations from ITDMs

Weakness:
- They rely on ITDMs for their expertise and legwork including analysis, assessment, and research on solutions and vendors
Now that we've got a clear sense of who your two main buying powerhouses are, it helps to understand what fuels their purchase considerations.

**ITDM and BDM purchase consideration factors**

% critical or very important

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>ITDM</th>
<th>BDM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addresses Need</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compatible</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost/Value</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivers Competitive Advantage</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product Innovation</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of Expenditure</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider Reputation</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We found some crossover between ITDMs and BDMs on important IT purchase factors with both roles uniting on reliability as the primary consideration.

However, this is slightly more the case for ITDMs (95% versus 91% for BDMs) as they're charged with the successful implementation, management, and support for technologies brought into the business, hence reliability is crucial. ITDMs and BDMs also generally see eye-to-eye on the importance of cost, compatibility, addressing existing needs, security, and flexibility.

Size of expenditure was a slightly more important issue in EMEA than globally, perhaps reflecting smaller budgets and unease regarding Brexit.

Two factors do stand out in terms of how they're valued differently by the respective groups: ITDMs are more concerned by provider reputation, while BDMs put greater importance on product innovation and delivering competitive advantage.

**Marketer’s Secret Superpower:** In general, ITDMs tend to focus on practical considerations whereas BDMs also care a great deal about aspirational outcomes. As the differences between the two groups are revealed, it's important to tailor your messaging towards those preferences.
02

Uncommon Ground
Same mission, different tactics...

Our research suggests a clear symbiosis between ITDMs and BDMs. But while they both play a crucial role, the two parties tend to exercise their powers over different technologies and at different stages.

Tech purchase decisions each is involved in

ITDMs are key players in the purchase of nearly every tech category, as they're more likely than BDMs to be involved in nearly every tech purchase in some capacity.
With so many technologies available, how many do our purchasing duo influence? EMEA ITDMs report influencing nine different technology types, while BDMs say they influence six.

When it comes to major infrastructure purchases such as servers, virtualisation, networking, storage, and security, there’s a clear gap with ITDMs having a much greater likelihood to be involved in decisions than BDMs. The complexity of the technology and growing requirements around integrations mean that ITDMs are best suited to lead the charge.

For end-user technologies, the influence gap shrinks, with ITDMs and BDMs sharing the decision-making responsibility for categories such as computing devices, printers, business applications, and mobile devices. BDMs may feel that they’re closer to understanding user needs and desired business outcomes, which drives their involvement in these purchases. But it’s clear that both breeds of buyer have sway over end-user tech.

**Marketer’s Secret Superpower:** Lobby the ITDM aggressively when it comes to infrastructure. But make sure to focus your sights on both players when it comes to end-user tech.
When we break down the decision-making process, alternate perceptions emerge regarding how ITDMs and BDMs see their roles.

**Share of tech purchase decisions in which each role is played**

ITDMs see themselves as the sole decision-maker or final approver for 38% of the IT purchase decisions they're involved in. More commonly (62% of the time) they act as part of a decision-making team (or influence it). In this regard, they view themselves as critical to the purchase process by providing the legwork necessary to find the right solutions for their organisation's needs.

In contrast, BDMs see themselves as sole decision-maker or final approver for three quarters of the purchase decisions they're involved in. Ultimately, BDMs are more inclined than ITDMs to say they fly solo (rather than as part of a committee) when it comes to tech purchase decisions.

**Teaming up... or flying solo?**

Marketer's Secret Superpower: As you address the two purchaser roles, it's important to tailor your messaging to resonate with the level of control each player feels they have.
Role each decision-maker plays in the purchase process

Dividing up the purchase decision process into stages, it’s evident that the balance of influence between ITDMs and BDMs shifts as the process progresses.

The balance of purchase influence can be viewed on a continuum: ITDMs are influential throughout the entire process, driving the initial stages from determining need through evaluating solutions and vendors, to providing the recommendation for the tech to be purchased.

As the process moves to signing off on recommendations, approving funds, and making the actual purchase, the balance shifts towards the BDM. That said, ITDMs still play the part of gatekeeper — if a vendor doesn’t make it through the IT filter, they don’t get recommended to the BDM. The IT department ascertains that the technology works and is compatible with existing systems.

“As an IT pro, I’m not the decision-maker, but I do have two very important roles: decision influencer and gatekeeper. If a vendor doesn’t convince me, they don’t make it to the decision maker... and I can make or break most IT decisions.” —ITDM

Crucially, the ITDM is significantly more likely to be responsible for implementing purchased solutions (67% of ITDMs in EMEA say this is the best way to describe their role in the process).
As an IT pro, I’m not the decision-maker, but I do have two very important roles: decision influencer and gatekeeper. If a vendor doesn’t convince me, they don’t make it to the decision-maker... and I can make or break most IT decisions.

— ITDM

This could have a knock-on effect and end up guiding renewal / repeat purchases, which (per Spiceworks’ 2017 State of IT Report) account for 61% of spend on hardware purchases. It’s clear the ITDM has a wide domain and sphere of influence.

**ITDM purchase cycle touch points**

- **Determine Need**
  - ITDMs assess hardware, software, and infrastructure needs.

- **Research**
  - They dive deep into content to research solutions.

- **Vendor Vetting**
  - Once they’ve got a specific solution in mind, ITDMs narrow down the list of vendors.

- **Final Decision/Purchase**
  - They work with BDMs, recommending the winning solution and helping seal the deal.

- **Implementation**
  - ITDMs roll up their sleeves as they get newly purchased solutions up and running.

- **Renewal/Repeat Purchases**
  - Having implemented new tech, ITDMs monitor effectiveness and continue to influence future purchases.

**Marketer’s Secret Superpower:** Understand where you are in the purchase process funnel and who is guiding that phase. Then focus your marketing efforts accordingly.
Joining Forces: Decision-Making Duo
Tech purchasers assemble...

Industry observers estimate some USD $2.9 trillion will be spent globally on business tech purchases in 2017\(^2\). One can imagine the amount of consideration that will go into every single one of those dollars. So, where exactly are ITDMs and BDMs making decisions collaboratively?

Tech purchase decisions each is involved in

% extremely or very valuable

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<tr>
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<th>ITDM Stakeholders</th>
<th>BDM Stakeholders</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value of feedback from ITDMs</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of feedback from BDMs</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Results on how ITDMs and BDMs value each other’s expertise indicate that ITDMs bring the most insight to the table. When it comes to whose opinion saves the day, both buyer types agree that ITDMs contribute more valuable feedback and input throughout the process.
We sought to understand where ITDMs and BDMs saw themselves as putting in the most time and effort. EMEA ITDMs are doing a lot of the heavy lifting, spending more time and effort in every stage of the decision-making process versus BDMs.

Because they've done extensive research, they're better equipped to implement and manage new tech — no surprise then that their input is deemed valuable by all parties.

Marketer’s Secret Superpower: Marketers will want to educate ITDMs through the purchase funnel and nurture them as they evaluate and recommend solutions. Give them detailed information that helps them make technically led decisions, but also educates them so they can exercise their influence with BDMs.
04

Content to
Save the Day
Truth, education and the content way...

As the data emphasises a partnership between ITDMs and BDMs in the IT purchase process, it’s important for marketers to understand how to connect with both groups. There’s no magic channel or piece of content that will effectively reach each audience, but there are some similarities.

Best communication channels for tech marketers to reach each decision-maker
% selecting each as a “best communication channel”

Looking at a broad range of channels, the data shows that, in general, ITDMs are more open to a variety of communication methods than BDMs.

“IT people research the heck out of everything, and frankly we don’t trust salespeople. Provide some third party reviews or articles that can quickly help us make a decision. I know you think your product is the best, but you’re going to need to prove it.” — ITDM
Compared to BDMs, ITDMs are more reachable via most channels, most notably webinars and online forums. Traditional direct marketing like physical mail and phone calls don't yield great results with ITDMs, but are more successful channels with BDMs.

Marketer’s Secret Superpower: For ITDMs, focus on educational content delivered via marketing channels they love the most (webinars, forums, in-person meetings, conferences and trade shows). For BDMs, a mix of email, in-person meetings and events/trade shows are key channels to influence.

“IT people research the heck out of everything, and frankly we don’t trust salespeople. Provide some third party reviews or articles that can quickly help us make a decision. I know you think your product is the best, but you’re going to need to prove it.

— ITDM”
Let your content searchlight be seen...

The differences between ITDMs and BDMs also emerge when it comes to the amount of content they need during different phases of the decision-making process.

**Average number of content pieces consumed by ITDMs and BDMs during different phases of the tech purchase**

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<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>ITDM</th>
<th>BDM</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our research reveals that both purchaser groups need multiple pieces of content to help move them through the decision-making process. However, the amount of content required in every phase of the process is greater for ITDMs than it is for BDMs. The immersion phase is where the most information is needed to fuel up for the big purchase.

ITDMs need detailed specs on your offerings to build their case, which is no easy task. Consider appealing to both buyers by improving your website with info that decision makers truly want and focus your budget on creating written content.

**Marketer’s Secret Superpower:** Invest most in content that guides both parties through the information-hungry research phase. And because ITDMs consume up to 15 pieces of content to help inform purchase decisions, you’ll likely want to deliver more content than you currently provide.
Armed with real-world tech buying insight, how do marketers laser focus their campaign spend on the right buyers?

In EMEA, ITDMs are influential throughout the entire purchase process, whether as the main driver or a key member of a purchasing committee.

With the technical ability to evaluate and implement solutions, the business colleagues of ITDMs recognise that ITDM opinions have real weight and value. Even if they don’t always sign on the dotted line, ITDMs act as a key influencer and gatekeeper to the tech purchase decision.

Both purchase players have different preferences and ways of getting information, as well as a slightly different skew in terms of priorities. This means that marketers can’t afford to focus their efforts on one group to the detriment of the other. They should use this picture to tailor their campaigns appropriately to reach ITDMs and BDMs in the most engaging and effective way.
Here’s a quick recap of your decision-making heroes:

**The mighty ITDM:**
- Influences nine technologies
- Significantly more influence on infrastructure
- Feedback valued by 59% of ITDMs / 66% of BDMs
- Aligned with BDMs on top criteria
- Practicality-based purchases
- Consumes up to 15 content pieces

**The amazing BDM:**
- Influences six technologies
- Focuses on end-user tech
- Feedback valued by 30% of ITDMs / 44% BDMs
- Aligned with ITDMs on top criteria
- Aspirational-based purchases
- Consumes up to 11 content pieces

Who is the most influential tech purchase decision maker? Drumroll... it depends. It’s important to take into consideration your category, buyer stage, and product / solution type in order to channel those dollars into a strategic, smart, effective campaign.

That said, marketers are cautioned not to view the decision-making stages as solely distinct to each buyer. ITDMs, for example, are instrumental throughout the entire purchase process (even beyond the final sale).
Details on the Data

You've just read Spiceworks' version of data gone spicy: Our answer to humdrum data. We tackle the tech issues of today... and what's coming soon to a server room near you. And we deliver it all with more originality and spice than your typical run-of-the-mill reports. Drawing from a user base of millions of IT pros, it's a glimpse into tech you can't get anywhere else!

Related resource for tech marketers

https://www.spiceworks.com/marketing/reports/itdm-bdm-it-purchasing/

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Sources

1. Perception: Research collected from Juniper, Tech Target, and Gartner