

yesler 

THE 5A FRAMEWORK FOR THE TECHNOLOGY CUSTOMER LIFECYCLE

THE 5A FRAMEWORK FOR THE TECHNOLOGY CUSTOMER LIFECYCLE

INTRODUCTION

Technology buying is different from other B2B purchases. Technology is much more difficult to buy, sell, and implement, and buying-committee stakeholders run the gamut from end users to CFOs—all of whom have different priorities that inform their own product or service recommendation. This, alongside the general evolution in consumer buying behaviors, has turned the tables on the idea that the business buying process is linear.

Technology purchases are now customer-driven, meaning that buyers want control over when

and how they get information about products and services. This includes the shift to cloud-based subscription services, which have changed how buyers think about commitment after a purchase—not only because of the pay-as-you-go model but because provisioning is largely self-service and doesn't take as much hands-on IT time per machine. The result is that technology buyers are always assessing, even after a purchase has been made.

To successfully grow your customer base, reduce churn, and increase the lifetime value of your existing set of customers requires

more than simply marketing to the typical B2B buying stages (Awareness, Research, Consideration, Decision). It requires a clear understanding of what makes the technology customer lifecycle unique, the outsized role that the entire customer experience plays in technology purchasing decisions, and how a customer's adoption of your technology affects your bottom line.

We've seen this transformation occur over a decade and a half of in-the-trenches work with our clients. After conducting our own research and analysis, we've

formalized our understanding of the way businesses make technology-buying decisions into the 5A Framework for the Technology Customer Lifecycle—a set of five moments in the technology-buying lifecycle where each represents unique marketing challenges and requires its own marketing strategies and efforts.

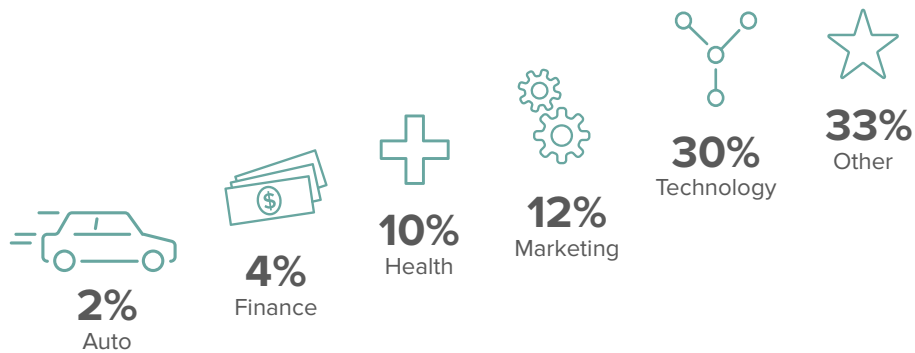
The framework isn't a linear set of stages that a customer moves through. It places Advocacy as the foundation for everything that marketing does and as the information most important to prospects and customers throughout their relationship with a technology, from **Awareness to Assessment, Adoption, and Attrition.**



WE TALKED TO TECH BUYERS

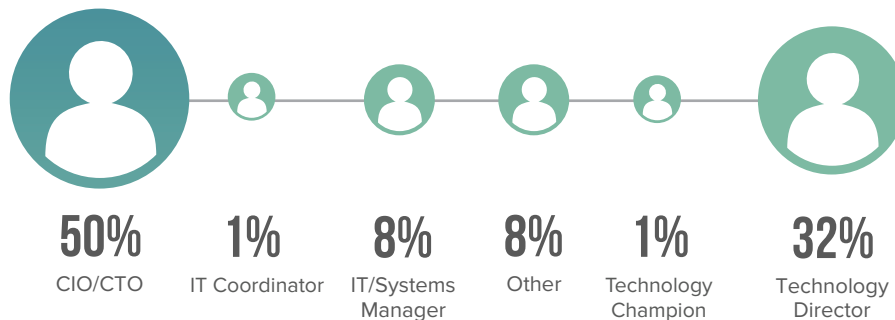
Yesler surveyed more than 400 IT professionals and interviewed nearly 40 professionals to get insight into the state of the industry and the role of marketing in technology purchase decisions.

INDUSTRY



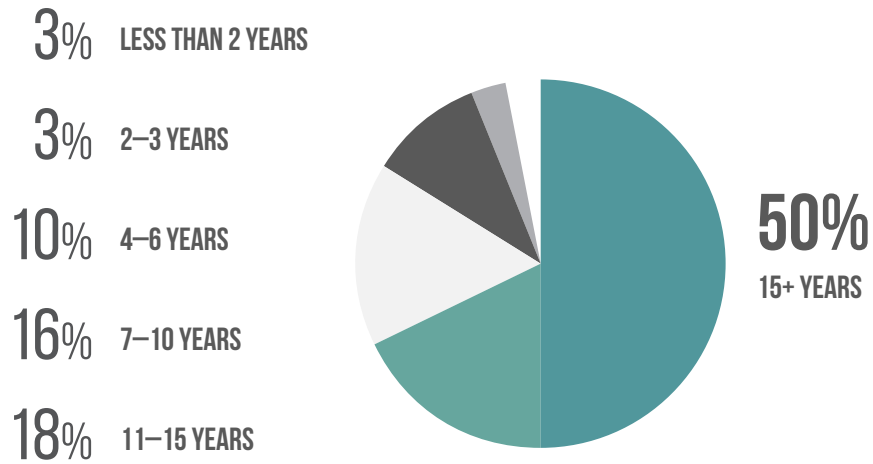
Most worked in technology, health, or financial sectors, but nearly a third suggested they didn't fit neatly into predefined categories.

ROLES



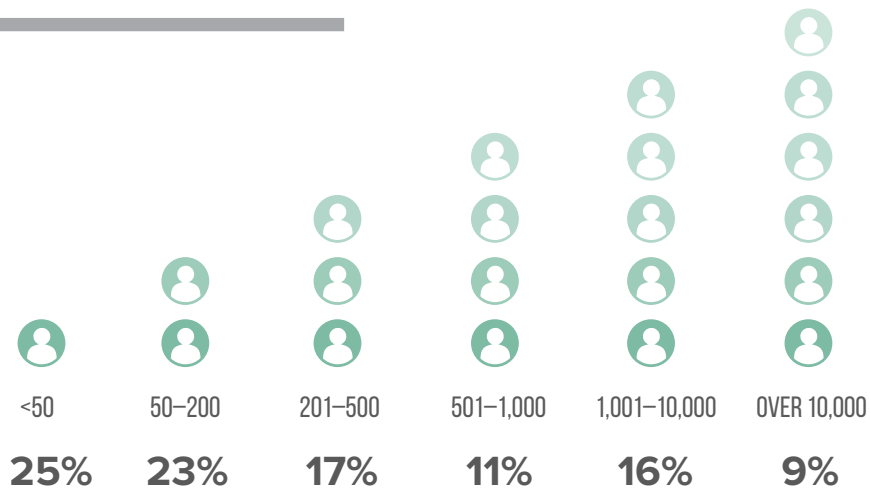
Most held management or leadership roles.

TIME SPENT IN IT LEADERSHIP



More than half have held an IT leadership role for more than 15 years.

SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

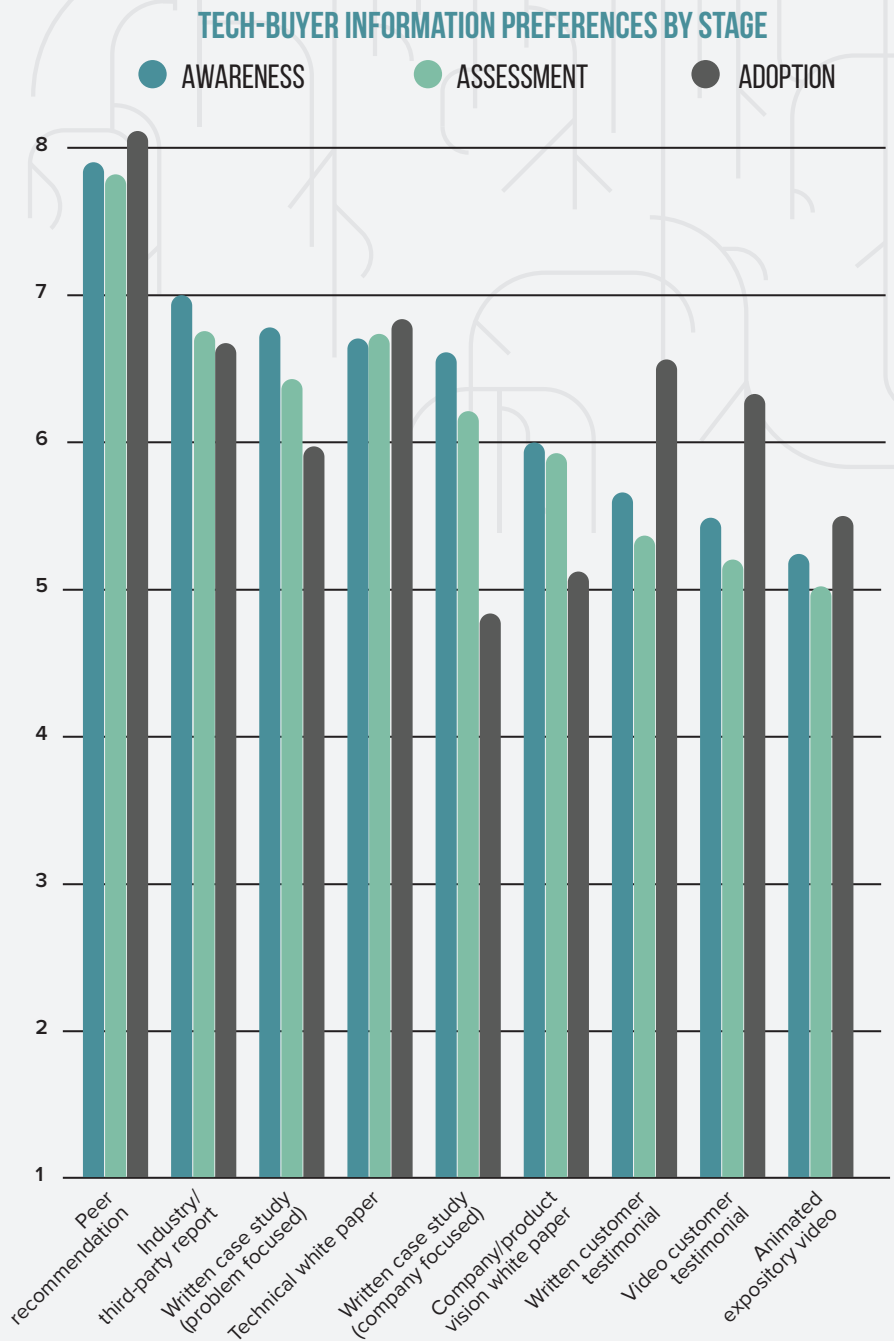


Just under half worked for organizations where 200 people or less had IT needs.

WHY BEGIN WITH ADVOCATES?

Technology purchases present unique challenges for companies and for the marketers and sellers who need to engage buyers. Unlike many other business purchases, technology purchases require input and buy-in from a large number of groups within an organization, and the time to value for a technology decision can depend on a variety of factors, including implementation time, socialization and user training, and integration with existing systems, on top of evolving buyer behaviors and the “always-shopping” mindset.

Because of the complexity of technology purchase decisions, IT professionals often turn first to their peers for advice—56% of our respondents say they become aware of technologies through peer interactions. Peers are far and away the most trusted source of insight into what’s exciting and what works—outranking all marketing sources—and IT pros see them as informative and persuasive sources of information across the entire lifecycle.



Most B2B marketing campaigns treat advocacy as the outcome of a well-executed marketing funnel or bow tie. “Advocacy” then stands for marketing activities at later buying stages such as Assessment, rather than as an origin of a customer’s knowledge of or interest in a technology and the eventual decision to buy. Or, many companies simply see advocates as the means for creating case studies and developing a reference list.

But we found that people who recommend, or advocate for, technologies are incredibly influential in how buyers become aware of a technology and decide whether they should learn more about it. Although many IT professionals advocate publicly in social media channels, case studies, and customer testimonials, many more do so privately, at events, through direct message and conversation, on the phone, or in person. Marketing activities rarely drive

these recommendations. They travel by word of mouth, what we could call “organic advocacy.”

To emphasize: An advocate need not be a customer who agreed to speak publicly in favor of a technology. The advocate is more likely to be an IT professional who has experience with the technology or the service provider either currently or in the past. IT professionals trust this information more than any marketing-provided information about a product or service.

Making advocates the foundation of driving demand means thinking about marketing’s role differently. If you’re not thinking about how the overall customer experience impacts your future marketing, and if you’re not already planning your content based on what a future advocate will engage or share, you’re missing one of the most essential and effective components of any B2B technology marketing strategy—

and with it, the chance to grow your customer base, not just by acquiring new customers, but by fostering a relationship to convert customers into advocates.

MAKING
ADVOCATES THE
FOUNDATION
OF DRIVING
DEMAND MEANS
THINKING ABOUT
MARKETING’S ROLE
DIFFERENTLY.

ADVOCACY

A customer pleased with a technology becomes a private or public advocate for that technology, encouraging others to use it and testifying to its value. Contact between prospects and advocates can be encouraged through marketing, analysts, and pre-existing peer networks and events.

Not every IT professional is willing to advocate for a technology, but a significant portion of them do so frequently. More than 40% of respondents have strongly recommended a technology publicly through a case study, interview, or social media post, while 77% of respondents have strongly recommended a technology to a peer in private.

Not surprisingly, be it public or private, IT professionals are more likely to advocate for a technology when they have a strong relationship with the vendor and are realizing value from the technology.

Making advocates the foundation of driving demand means

thinking differently about marketing's role. It means asking:

- How can marketing influence how customers are engaged and responded to after the sale?
- How can marketing encourage organic advocacy for brand-new products?
- How can marketing enable customer advisory boards?
- How can marketing help ensure that the “customer obsession” statement in the brand promise is realized across the implementation process and beyond, into product renewal and customer service?

IT PROS ARE MORE LIKELY TO ADVOCATE WHEN

- 91%** A vendor is highly responsive
- 76%** A vendor engages frequently with them after the sale
- 73%** They're aware of other people advocating for the product
- 73%** They can report data-driven ROI

These questions have often been tackled by customer success or product teams, but marketing teams have underestimated the impact that these moments in the customer lifecycle have on customer happiness, and therefore the likelihood of the customer becoming an advocate.

Our findings suggest that you should measure the impact of your marketing by its ability to create advocates, who in turn have a profound impact on revenue. Making advocacy the foundational buying stage keeps the entire customer experience the focus of your marketing.



Becoming an advocate is a very emotionally driven thing. The product could work better than another product but still not make that emotional connection because the smaller problems that it has are left to the users or administrators to figure out. So the customer support piece is really huge.”

BROOK, Director of Digital Media



AWARENESS

A prospective or current customer knows that a technology or feature set exists and has at least some understanding of what the technology does, the category in which it sits, and the company’s reputation.

In general, IT professionals represent a very aware population, and they see it as part of their job to stay informed about available technologies. Unlike other audience segments, 89% of technology pros consider themselves highly aware, and 92% work hard to stay aware of technologies that might help their business. More than three out of every four IT professionals will pay attention to new technologies even when they have no intention to buy anything.

Much of the time, IT pros hear about new technologies from peers, privately and publicly, or third-party recommenders like analysts or consultants.

It’s important to note that professionals who advocate publicly and professionals who advocate privately aren’t always the same people, and often

they have different preferences for content or different beliefs altogether. For example:

- People who recommend publicly are more likely to become aware of technologies through employees they manage and to have more awareness of what competitors use when confronting similar tech needs (Pearson’s correlation test: $r=0.13$, $p<0.10$; $r=0.16$, $p<0.05$).
- Private recommenders, on the other hand, are more likely to have control over a technology purchase, or can substantially influence those decisions, and are actively aware of problems that exist and the technologies that might address them (Pearson’s correlation test: $r=0.25$, $p<0.001$; $r=0.29$, $p,0.001$).

PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE RECOMMENDATIONS

Percentage of IT pros that have strongly recommended a technology multiple times



Marketing needs to account for these differences in the mix of content directed at promoting awareness of a technology.

Further, 82% of IT pros think that knowing about a product’s features is part of the Awareness phase. To encourage awareness among prospective customers, the people they work with, and their peers, marketers should focus on highlighting the best of, and what is accurate about, a technology through ads that focus on new business-relevant features, problem-focused written case studies, product-vision white papers, and mentions in third-party industry analyses and reports.



Generally, I become aware of a solution after I’ve become aware of the problem, and I can understand the information being thrown at me. Having said that, I do go to conferences, take part in some webinars—things like that—just to try to keep up with some of the new stuff coming out. The idea being: I may not need it today, but I may learn a little about something great.”

DAVID, CTO



ASSESSMENT

A customer is actively considering a set of technologies as a potential solution to an agreed-upon problem. Assessment involves gathering requirements and detailed product investigation, including roadmaps and product demos.

Assessment doesn't always follow Awareness sequentially. Instead, Assessment often leads to becoming aware of other potential solutions. This was true for 81% of respondents. And most respondents (80%) also noted that assessment begins with gathering requirements to identify and prioritize needs before assessing whether available technologies match the priorities. These findings indicated, and our conversations with respondents validated, that research and consideration occur together in one phase: Assessment.

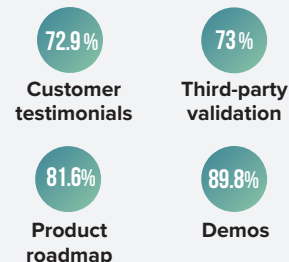
This focus on technology needs and solutions could account for why half don't think they need to consult their procurement department while

assessing technologies (and why procurement suddenly becomes the deal-killer late in the decision process).

During assessment, people who tend to publicly advocate for technologies look for different marketing materials than those who advocate privately. For example:

- Public recommenders more strongly view customer testimonials as a substantial part of the assessment process.
- Private recommenders, by contrast, tend to prioritize different types of information, including evidence of a product's reliability and stability and its compatibility with other systems.

WHAT TECH BUYERS NEED TO ASSESS A TECHNOLOGY



Assessment also involves gathering requirements, according to 80% of IT pros surveyed. For marketers, that means that third-party validation, product roadmaps, technical white papers, and demos become important materials for supporting the buying-decision process.

“ Assessment is twofold. First: Is this going to technically fit into our processes? Second: I look at the track record of what has happened previously when a respected peer, or someone else who has had success, has brought in the technology. What was their story and what happened?”

MICHAEL, Sr. Customer Marketing Manager



ADOPTION

A customer makes a final decision and begins to deploy the technology across their organization. This can involve a substantial amount of time and effort. If done well, the experience will encourage future advocates; done poorly, it encourages attrition.

In the decision, the vendor or product’s reputation tends to hold more sway than everything else, with time to value as the second most important priority. But 94% reported that it’s the product’s ability to best solve the problem that is the ultimate deciding factor, with 50% also ticking the relationship to the vendor as an influence on the final decision.

For many IT professionals the decision transitions into deployment, and they report that they begin to think about how to implement the technology as a factor in making the decision. Overwhelmingly, IT professionals expect adoption to be messier than marketers might promise; they expect deployment of a new technology to take more time than planned and more training than initially estimated. In fact,





92% said they prioritize getting implementation done right over getting it done fast.

But socializing the benefits of a new technology to employees across the organization is difficult, with IT pros saying that it requires incentivization and that they struggle to get the word out.

Not surprisingly, 72% of IT pros don’t think the work of marketing ends the moment the deal is signed. Instead they stress that the technology provider should engage at the same level they did before the purchase decision was made.

Notably, people who have more experience adopting new technologies and seeing them deployed across an organization are more likely to also publicly recommend technologies, likely because they have firsthand,

WHAT’S IMPORTANT FOR A SOLID DECISION

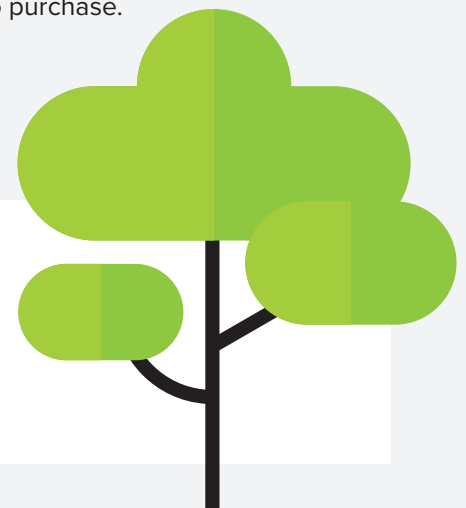
-  Say marketing shouldn’t end at the sale
-  Think tech-buying decisions should be data-driven
-  Prioritize doing implementation right, not fast
-  Want influence over the future of technologies they adopt

presumably positive customer experiences. Those same people also tend to be more confident in their ability to measure whether the new technology is actually working.

These findings suggest that marketers must focus directly on creating a good customer experience throughout the decision and after the sale. You can do this by engaging implementation and support teams and customers with content that helps accelerate adoption while easing its pains. Content like customer testimonials and accurate and complete product documentation—plus ensuring ongoing customer engagement—best align to the factors that have the biggest influence on a decision to purchase.

“More than half the time, vendors take you for granted. Once they’ve made the sale, they know that the cost of replacement is high, so they focus their energies on winning new customers. It’s about understanding the needs of the teams implementing the technology and then helping them do a better job. That would make me very happy.”

CHUCK, CIO



ATTRITION

A customer reaches the point where they decide an existing technology no longer works for them. This typically occurs because customer needs have evolved or the technology has reached the end of its lifecycle. But poor post-sales engagement from the vendor can also be a catalyst.

Attrition is a critical moment that marketing can influence to retain customers and create advocates for a technology. That's why it's one of the stages of the technology customer lifecycle.

Sometimes a product has served its purpose and delivered on its brand promise, but a customer has simply outgrown its features and functionality. The technology functioned as the partner that technology customers want their vendors to be. That is, if you've helped them outgrow your product, you've done your job.

For example, someone who had a good experience with your product or service at one role may advocate to bring it into their next role at a new organization.

While attrition most often occurs when a product has run its course, it can also stem from poor engagement at multiple points in the customer lifecycle, before and after the sale—ultimately leading to abandonment.

Abandonment is most often sparked by poor product performance, either because the product lags behind or because needs evolve. It can be accelerated by a lack of proper post-sale engagement or an overall poor customer experience. And it can occur at multiple points in the customer lifecycle.

This means that marketers must focus on making happy customers through good customer engagement.

TECH BUYERS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO ABANDON A PRODUCT IF*

- The tech company didn't keep its promises after the sale
- The tech company failed to clearly communicate future product updates and bug fixes
- They felt abandoned by the tech company
- Communication with the tech vendor declined

Proper engagement ensures the customer can realize the lifetime value of the product and it influences the nature of organic advocacy after the engagement has ended.

**We found a strong relationship between poor post-sale customer engagement and abandonment using the Pearson's correlation test as follows:*

<i>Promises after the sale</i>	<i>(r=0.22, p<0.001)</i>
<i>Failed to clearly communicate updates</i>	<i>(r=0.21, p<0.001)</i>
<i>Bug fixes</i>	<i>(r=0.14, p<0.05)</i>
<i>Felt abandoned by the tech company</i>	<i>(r=0.19, p<0.01)</i>
<i>Communication with the tech vendor declined</i>	<i>(r=0.14, p<0.05)</i>

“Attrition occurs when a vendor doesn't pay attention to you. They don't pay attention to your needs and what you need done. That pisses people off.”

GABRIEL, CIO



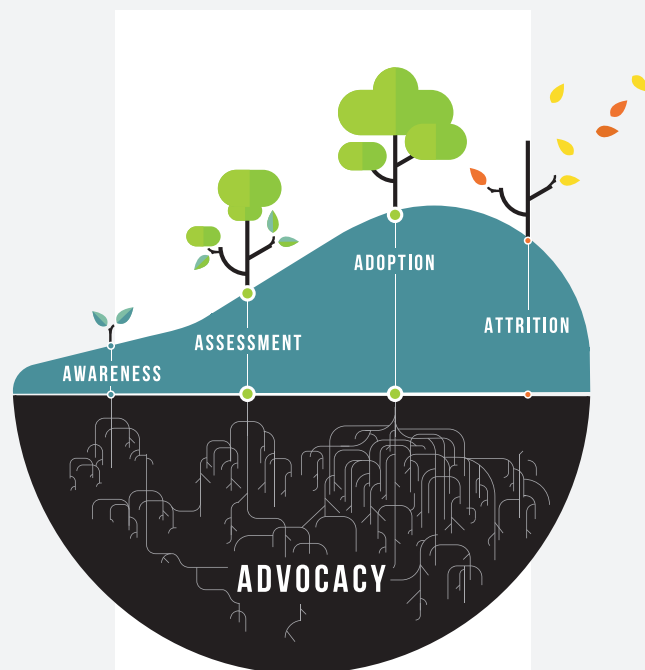
WHAT DOES THE 5A FRAMEWORK MEAN FOR YOUR MARKETING?

We can't emphasize enough that the 5A Framework means that technology marketers need to rethink strategy to take advocacy seriously and to build strategies and tactics with the goal of making more advocates. It means letting go of thinking that advocacy is an activity that happens only after the sale. It means making advocacy the foundation of your marketing strategy throughout the technology customer lifecycle.

Second, the 5A Framework demands that technology marketers pay more attention to the nuances of preference at each marketing stage. The strategies that work during Awareness aren't necessarily as effective during Assessment, for example. In the research we conducted, innovation outscored reliability during the Awareness stage across almost every vertical, but quickly fell behind reliability as the IT professional moved into the mindset required during Assessment or Adoption.

Business technology buying is a complex process, and technology buyers have different behaviors and motivations than B2B buyers in general. To be effective, B2B technology marketing must reflect that reality rather than echo the same strategies and vision that animate other B2B or B2C marketing approaches.

The 5A Framework offers a structure to help you create marketing programs that facilitate technology purchases. And it gives you a guide for fostering future advocates by attending to critical customer satisfaction points before and after the sale.



WE'VE GOT MORE TO SHARE

LET'S TALK ABOUT HOW YOU CAN USE THE 5As TO MAKE YOUR MARKETING MORE EFFECTIVE.

hello@yesler.com



Yesler is an independent B2B marketing agency that works with fast-growing tech companies to help create advocates and drive revenue. Yesler supports its clientele of global brands and midmarket companies from offices in London, Philadelphia, Portland, Singapore, and Toronto, and its headquarters in Seattle.

This study is part of a larger effort to formalize and inform the work that has made Yesler one of the top B2B marketing firms in the world specializing in marketing technology products and services to businesses.

www.yesler.com