

MARKETING LOGISTICS SERVICES

Results of 2022 survey on how to get, and keep,
the attention of buyers of logistics products & services

Introduction

Since 2014, [Logistics Marketing Advisors](#) has conducted a biennial survey of buyers of logistics products and services.

Yep, the exact folks you're selling and marketing to.

Our survey objectives have been the same from the outset: to understand the buying motivations of logistics executives and learn how to best get and keep their attention.

This year, 100 logistics buyers from a range of industries were surveyed, almost all of whom hold senior-level titles (Director and up) in logistics, supply chain and operations. The report summarizes responses to each of our questions, shares verbatim quotes that best summarize buyers' feedback, and offers our take on the changes the research suggests about how to successfully market to this group.

Past years' reports are [available here](#).

If there's a theme to this year's research results, it's "more of the same." Over the years, logistics buyers have consistently recognized the value that providers add to their businesses, but they remain consistently frustrated with providers who pitch generic solutions with no knowledge of their industry or business.

More to come on that. Let's first dive into the research results.

When it comes to choosing a logistics product or service provider, which statement best describes your attitude and priority?

"I seek operational excellence. I'm looking for evidence that the provider executes day-to-day operational details accurately and on time."

Ops Excellence - 24%

"Within my industry, there are unique logistics requirements. I need a logistics partner that understands the challenges of storing, managing and delivering my products."

Industry - 21%

"I want innovative ideas. I need a partner that provides regular recommendations on how to improve logistics operations."

Innovation - 9%

Flexibility - 23%

"My company's logistics requirements are constantly changing. I need a logistics partner that is flexible and can help me adapt quickly to the demands of the business."

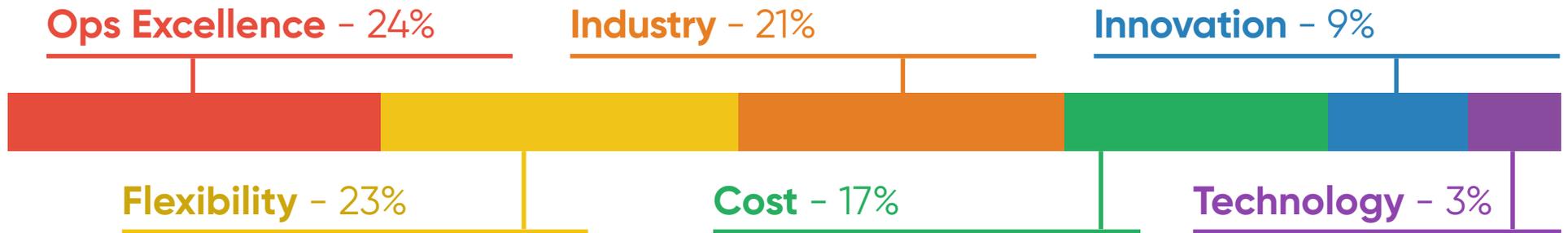
Cost - 17%

"I'm under constant pressure to reduce costs. I need a logistics partner who understands that pressure and is constantly thinking about how to do more, for less."

Technology - 3%

"The right technology is critically important. I need a partner that leverages the most up-to-date logistics management systems so that I can fully automate and optimize my supply chain."

When it comes to choosing a logistics product or service provider, which statement best describes your attitude and priority? (continued)



Results have been consistent on this question over the years, with cost reduction being the primary driver in the choice of logistics partners. This year, we threw in a new option – operational excellence. We’ve left it out in the past because we felt it would always be the default option for many. In fact, it was the #1 choice in our 2022 survey, but not by much.

About half of those who chose providers based on operational excellence felt that quality trumped cost. The other half felt that a vote for quality was a vote for achieving the lowest cost, as well, since poor quality drives up cost.

“Cost control is critical to my role as a logistics leader, but operational excellence is really the means to lowering costs and maximizing value.”

“TCO is driven by operational excellence.”

“Pricing is important, but if the result is late or damaged deliveries it’s not worth saving a few dollars.”

A close second behind operational excellence was the value statement that emphasized flexibility. Respondents’ comments reflected the COVID-era requirement to flex business models and adapt to greater market volatility.

“Our supply chain is volatile, and we need providers that can pivot when needed.”

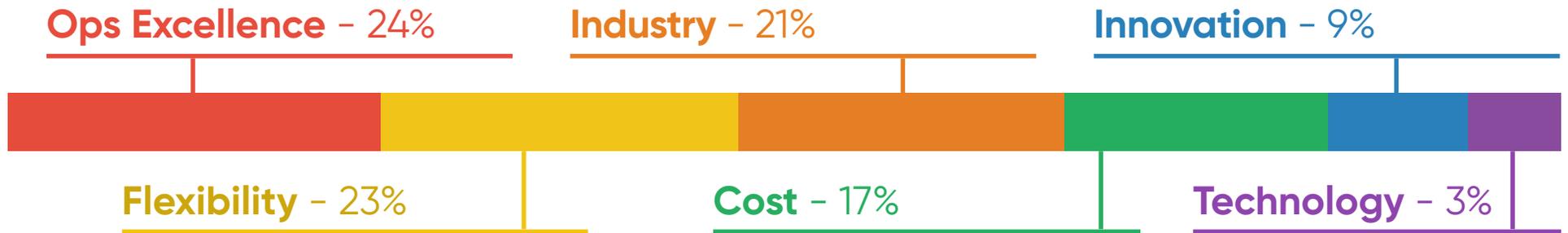
“We are in a constant grow-and-change mindset. We need flexible partners that can keep up.”

The 3rd most-favored value statement focused on industry expertise. In certain industries, like pharma and chemicals, buyers seek industry expertise above all else. If your logistics business primarily services an industry with special requirements, this could be a rich area for differentiation.

“We ship frozen and use cold warehouses, so we seek specialists.”

“My job involves shipping oversized and overweight cargo which requires special handling and care.”

When it comes to choosing a logistics product or service provider, which statement best describes your attitude and priority? (continued)



The next most popular choice was cost. This value statement has historically been the #1 choice. And it may still be if you consider the strong link buyers draw between operational excellence and cost.

“With the skyrocketing cost of freight, we are under constant pressure to find more cost-effective services.”

“We sell a low-cost product. When shipping and logistics costs eat up a larger and larger portion of our costs, it’s a real cause for concern.”

Few of the buyers we surveyed chose providers based primarily on innovation and having the right technology.

OUR TAKE

In a crowded industry where many providers look and sound the same, it’s critical to have a clear market positioning that gives prospects a reason to remember you – otherwise you’ll get lost. That’s marketing strategy. Those who lack a clear point of difference should heed the words of ancient Chinese military strategist, Sun Tzu: “Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory; but tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.”

How do you prefer to be contacted by a logistics business?

Email was by far the dominant response and has been since our original 2014 survey.

But don't rush to load up that next blanket email blast in your marketing automation system. Part of the reason email is the preferred choice is that emails are less intrusive than phone calls and easier to ignore.

Buyers tell us they are just too busy to pay attention to the large volume of emails they receive, especially if it's a generic pitch focused on the seller's product and not the buyer's problem.

"Stop filling up my inbox with perky words about how great your company is. Trust me, I received 5 emails on that day just like yours."

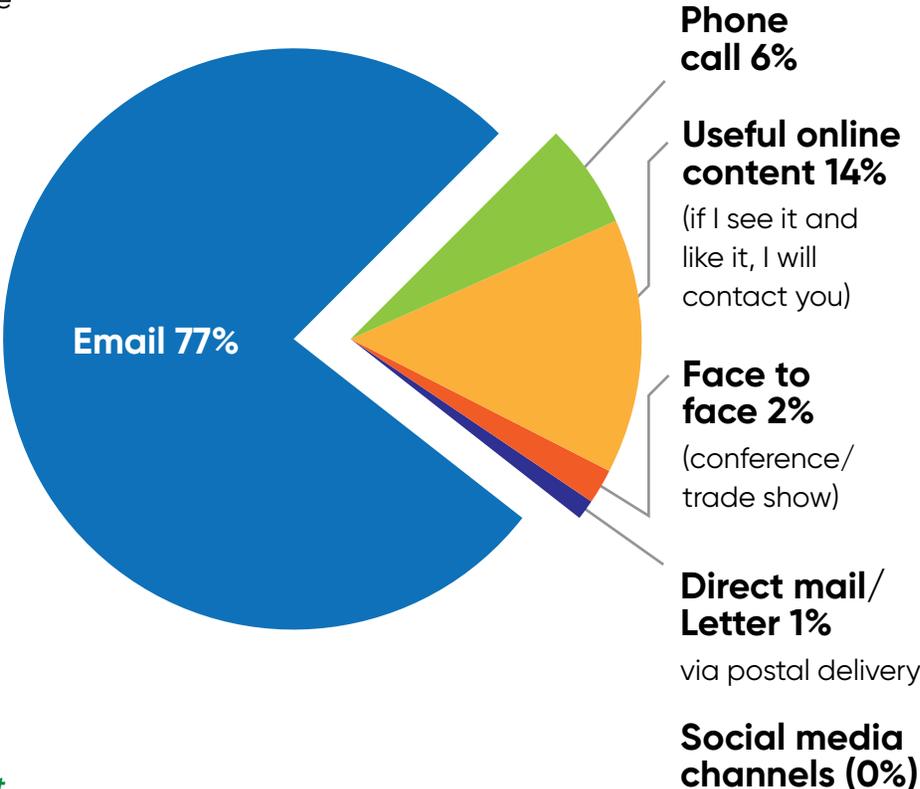
"We receive a flood of emails daily from potential suppliers. We can't pay attention to them all. Most of them simply say 'we do this or that, let's set up a call.' Sorry. No thanks."

"Quit the repeat phone calling. An email goes much further. But do your homework before reaching out. Connect your service to a problem I'm now having. Then I might look at it."

Emails can trigger a discussion with a new prospect, but only if suppliers shift from product-centric pitches to ideas that solve the buyer's problem. For freight companies, buyers say that straight-to-the-point emails with lane information are particularly effective.

"It's helpful to know where carriers are strong regionally and what capacity they have."

"If you've done your research and know where my production facilities are and then tell me specifically how my loads would fit into your existing network, that will catch my interest."



How do you prefer to be contacted by a logistics business? (continued)

A distant 2nd behind emails (but well ahead of phone calling and social media contact) was useful content. Basically, "don't call us, we'll contact you."

That's a scary message for an outbound sales agent (why does that cold calling job still exist?), but an encouraging one for inbound marketers.

"I'm always looking for smarter ways to address my company's challenges. If you can provide helpful content, I'll look at it and may follow up."

There is still a small percent of logistics buyers who prefer phone calls, but most ignore them.

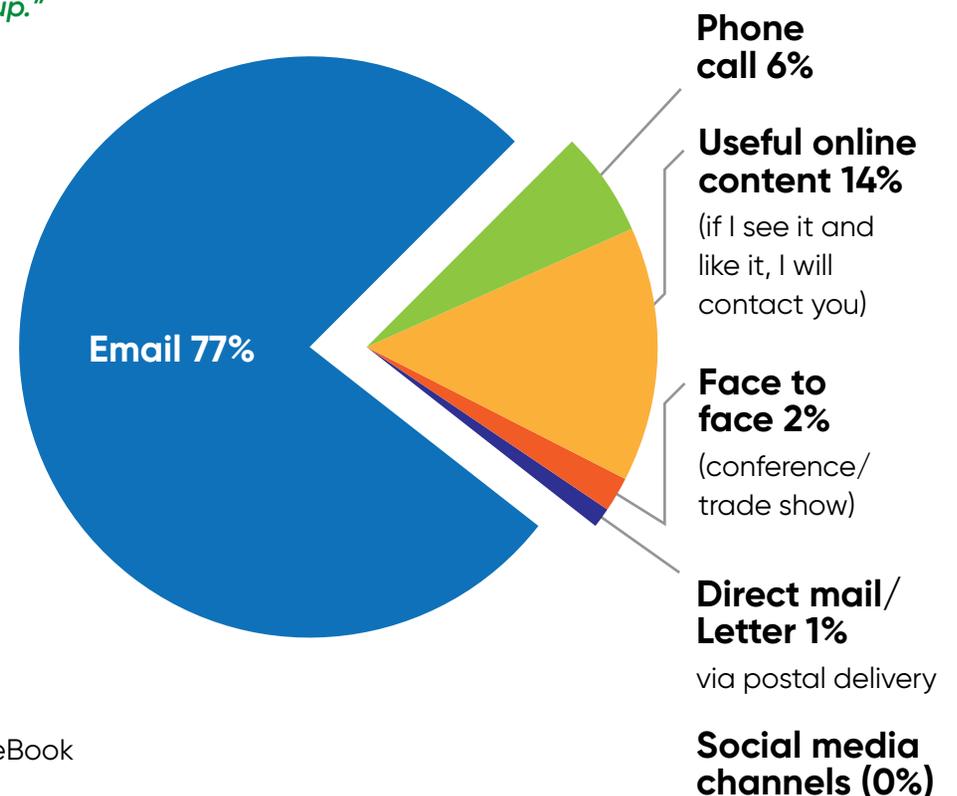
Not surprisingly, fewer buyers chose face-to-face meetings at conferences given that many events went online after the pandemic hit.

We were a little surprised that no one preferred to be contacted first via social media. Perhaps buyers have begun to view LinkedIn connections as a precursor to an unwanted sales pitch.

OUR TAKE

Generic emails to strangers don't work. But if you research a prospect's business and can quickly communicate how your solution addresses a problem that company has, email can work.

Sure, this custom approach takes more time. But it's a far better use of time than automated eblasts and follow-up phone calls to eBook downloaders who aren't ready to buy.



Which sources of information do you rely on to stay current on logistics management strategies, service providers, and logistics industry news?

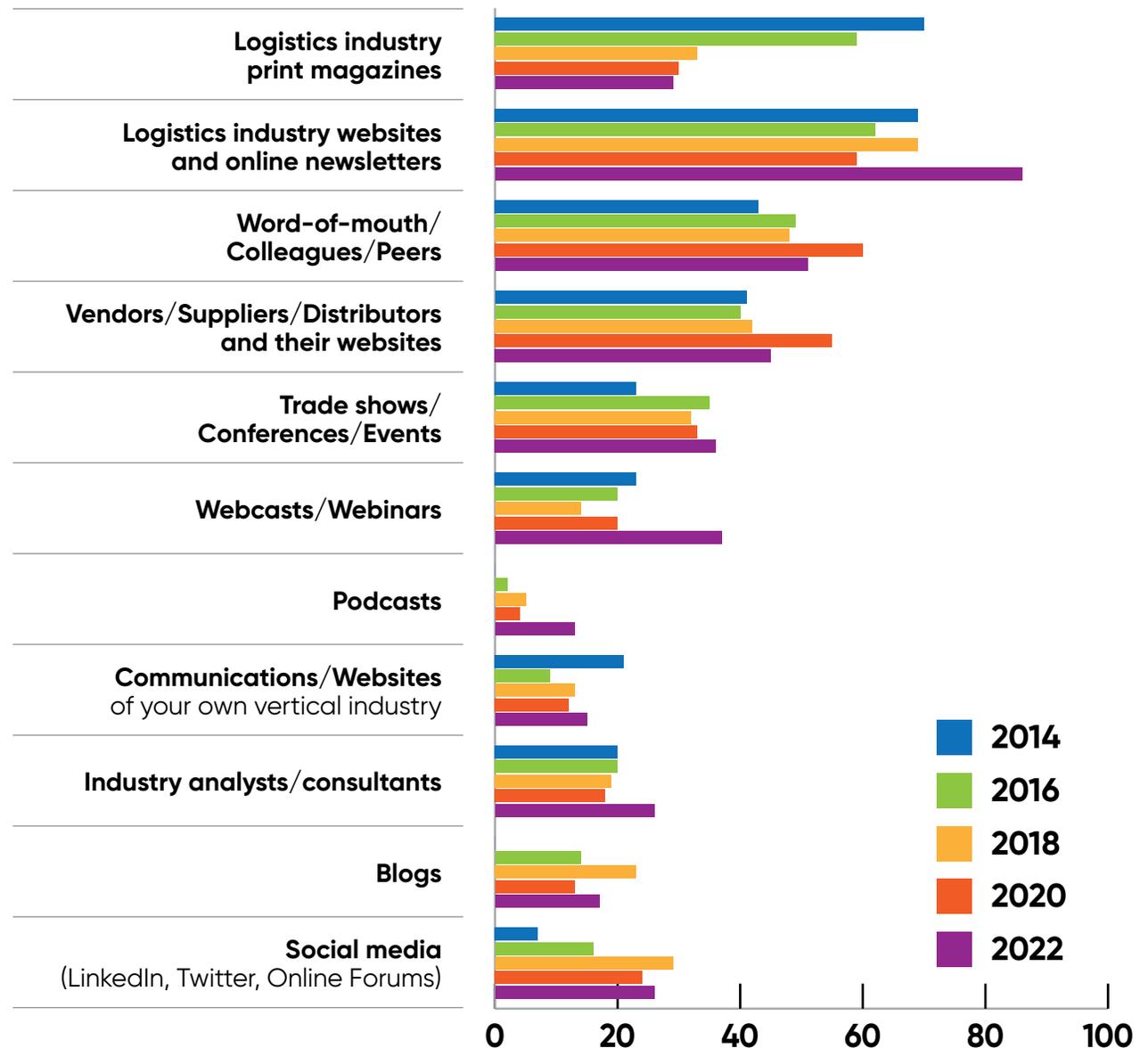
The dominant response was logistics industry websites and online newsletters. These busy executives are particularly reliant on daily digests for a snapshot of news and analysis that they can drill down into, if needed. Many different sources were mentioned – Freight Waves and the Journal of Commerce most often.

Print magazines were the top information source in 2014 when 70% of buyers cited it. This year, only 29% said they relied on hard copy magazines as a prime information source.

The 2nd choice of survey respondents was information from colleagues and peers. Social media now makes it easier to follow and share ideas with people we know.

Next on the list of top information sources was logistics providers. Logistics buyers are quite reliant on 3PLs, carriers, forwarders and other suppliers to keep them informed.

“We partner with these experts and expect them to keep us up to speed, especially in today’s wild freight market.”



Which sources of information do you rely on to stay current on logistics management strategies, service providers, and logistics industry news?

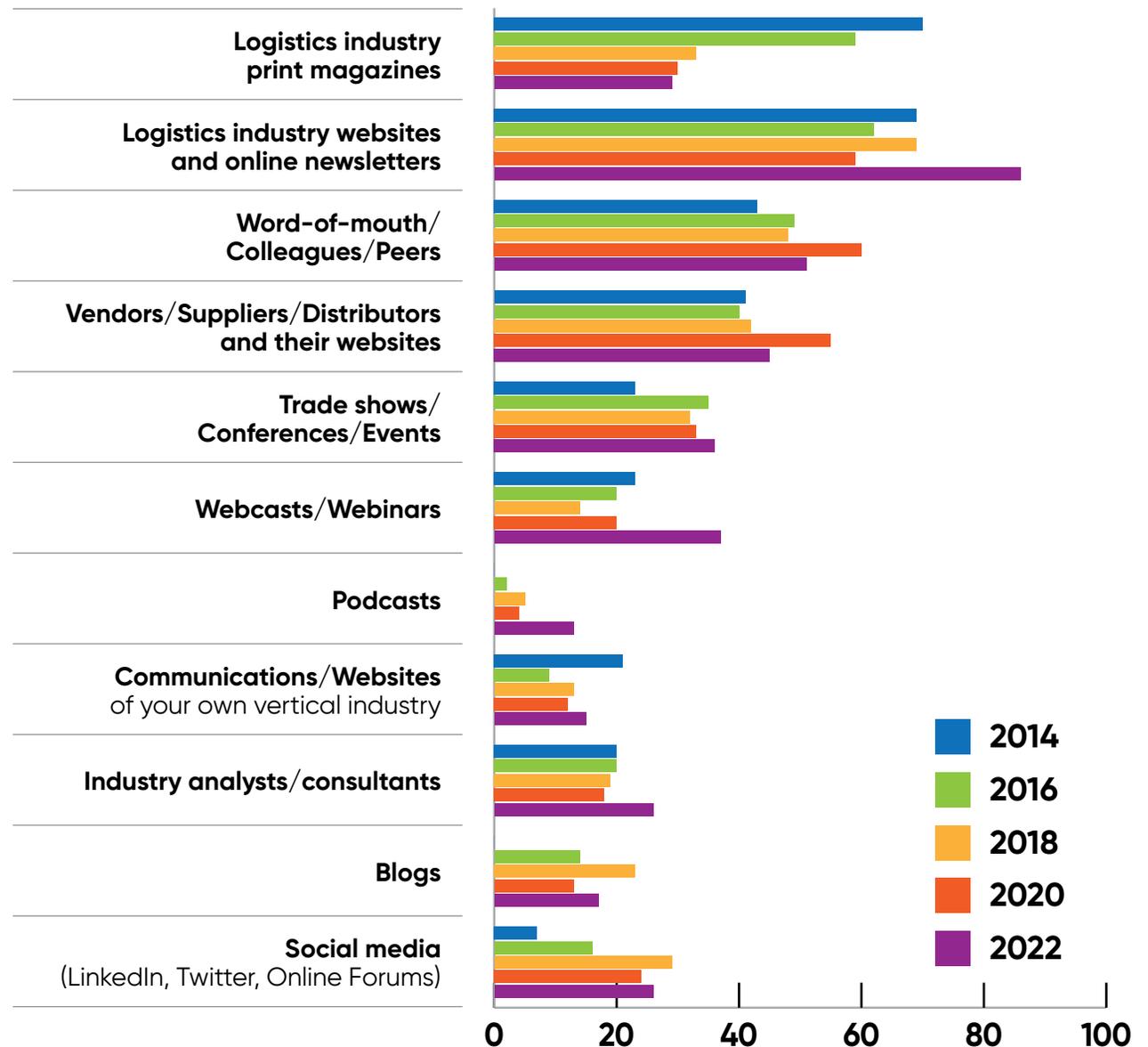
Don't underestimate the importance of regularly communicating to your current customers and helping them navigate this difficult market. If you're not, your competitors will.

Webcasts/Webinars took a big jump up in this year's survey as learning went more virtual.

Podcasts, although last on the list of preferred information sources, also took a big jump versus our last survey.

OUR TAKE

Media channels help spread your message but, in the end, *people* are the most credible information source. Don't underestimate the power of word-of-mouth marketing. Regarding podcasts, more and more professionals are choosing super-targeted podcast episodes to feed their brains while exercising, commuting, doing household chores or over a learning lunch. Podcasts are interesting because listening often occurs outside the formal workday and, therefore, they don't compete with the emails, meetings and phone calls that prevent logistics buyers from heeding your message. The trick is giving them something worth listening to.



Think about the last time you proactively reached out to a logistics business (that was not a current supplier) to learn more or to discuss a project. What led you to reach out?

As with the 2020 survey, the top response was a recommendation by a colleague. Risk-averse logistics buyers value advice from colleagues that have had positive, direct experience with potential suppliers.

"I find 90% of new partners through introductions from my logistics colleagues."

Look at your history of closed sales deals and, for higher value deals, you'll likely find that referred deals are your highest converting deals, which suggests that an outsized degree of effort aimed at referral sources (consultants, existing customers, personal networks, etc.) is time well spent.

The 2nd most important trigger for inbound inquiries was a strong reputation for a particular product or service. Such reputations are earned over time through consistent exposure to credible evidence of superb execution and thought leadership (case studies, webinar/podcast appearances, media exposure, etc.).

Takeaway: when possible, let others tell your story for you.

OUR TAKE

Choosing a logistics partner is not a whole lot different than choosing a medical specialist. Let's say you need a hand specialist for possible surgery. You're going to ask 3 questions:

1. **Who do I know?** If you already have a good relationship with an orthopedic hand specialist, your search is over.

Inquiry Trigger	2020	2022
Recommendation by colleague	27%	23%
Strong reputation for the service/product I needed	11%	21%
Relationship with salesperson	16%	15%
Internet search result	15%	10%
Useful content the company regularly shared with me	5%	9%
Trade shows/conference meeting	11%	7%
Read about them in industry media	6%	7%
Recommendation by consultant	3%	4%
Advertising	2%	0%
Saw/Heard them speak at conference or on podcast	2%	0%
Other		4%

Think about the last time you proactively reached out to a logistics business (that was not a current supplier) to learn more or to discuss a project. What led you to reach out?

2. **Who do YOU know?** You'll then ask family, friends, and medical professionals you might know who they would recommend. (This maps with logistics buyers' prioritization of colleague recommendations)

3. **Who's out there who KNOWS?** If no clear choice surfaces, you'll then go through a vetting process online to see if you can find the best, most experienced doctor for your hand issue. (This maps with logistics buyers' desire to find a supplier with a reputation for solving the specific challenge they have)

It's all about limiting risk. Choosing the wrong surgeon can have serious consequences, as can choosing the wrong logistics partner. This 3-question buying process occurs in the "Dark Funnel" – where companies have begun searching for suppliers, but you just don't know it. B2B buyers like our logistics customers spend 70% or more of their buying journey in the Dark Funnel researching the right answer – *before speaking to potential suppliers*.

Your company needs to surface in response to one of these 3 questions. If it doesn't, it's someone else's deal.

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Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statement	2016	2018	2020	2022	Our take
Logistics sales people that I don't know should never call me on the phone.					Not a dead end, but send a targeted email first before calling.
I pay attention to the print advertisements in the logistics trade magazines that I read.					OK, but logistics buyers tell us they aren't reading print magazines (see page 7).
I log into LinkedIn at least once a week.					Build your network, but do it to connect/learn/share – not just to sell.
When consuming logistics- or provider-related information, I prefer to watch a video versus read a blog post or other written information.					Buyers love the ease of watching a video, but it doesn't mean they won't read.
I never respond to an email sales pitch from a logistics company.					Emails can work. But abandon generic emails that target many prospects with the same message. Those don't work.
Logistics companies should stop printing hard copy promotional brochures and, instead, rely on electronic files.					Save the trees!
I don't mind providing my contact info in order to download useful content.					Good click bait can attract leads but few, if any, will close. Give away your content and change your key marketing metric from increased leads to increased marketing-sourced pipeline.

Agree
 Disagree

Please explain if and how COVID 19 has impacted your purchasing of logistics products and services

Strangely, over 20% of respondents said the pandemic has had little or no impact on their operations. The rest cited many different impacts. The two cited most often were:

COST INCREASES

"We are paying 3x more to purchase a poorer logistics service."

INBOUND SUPPLY CHAIN PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTY SOURCING SUPPLY

"Supply constraints have caused us to stock more inventory than ever before."

"We've had to plan much further out due to extremely long lead times to get products. This has exposed weaknesses in visibility and the ability to forecast."

The next 2 issues mentioned are inter-related, and what they suggest could be the most relevant takeaway for logistics marketers. Companies have been frustrated at the lack of freight capacity (international and domestic) and that has led them to seek alternate sources of supply.

"In the past, we leveraged volume for preferred pricing and depended on key partners to meet our needs. But too many have failed us during the pandemic, leading us to add new providers to our mix."

"We are focused on alternate mode strategies to stabilize transit times and reliability."

"COVID 19 has pushed me to diversify my logistics providers since it's common to run out of capacity."

A post-COVID business resurgence has triggered an active market for logistics services. If most of your new business involves unseating incumbents, know that companies are out there looking.

What frank advice would you have for logistics businesses that would like to build a relationship with you in the hope of gaining future business?

Logistics buyers always provide good, candid feedback to this question. The following 4 themes reflect buyers' primary suggestions, in the order presented.

Do your homework. Solve my problem.

More than anything, logistics buyers hate generic pitches. They expect you to research before reaching out.

"Stop the generic emails that usually start with 'I know you're busy...' Customize your approach to each new company."

"Do your homework on my industry. If I have a history with your company, know it."

"I am especially turned off by generic sales messages. I am in the petro-chem business and have gotten pitches for cold storage. Seriously?!"

"I prefer subject matter expertise over slick sales. Be a solution provider instead of a salesperson."

Another pet peeve: providers who want prospects to educate them to determine if there is a fit.

"I get dozens of calls and emails every week. I appreciate that providers want to understand my business, but the idea that I have time to educate them is absurd."

Worth noting for marketers of carrier or brokerage services is that buyers want you to know their key lanes before contact.

"If you've got capacity to serve my key lanes, I'll listen."

OUR TAKE:

Look hard at your marketing analytics and you'll likely find that generic, one-to-many marketing messages don't result in a bigger sales pipeline. It's time to prioritize quality over quantity. Buyers don't want to know that you can solve a problem. They want to know you can solve *their* problem.

What frank advice would you have for logistics businesses that would like to build a relationship with you in the hope of gaining future business?

I'm busy. Respect my time.

Logistics decision makers are busy and impatient with logistics providers who don't understand and empathize with their situation.

"Don't cold call. I don't have time for that and it makes me angry."

"If you reach me, you have about 15 seconds to convince me you are not wasting my time."

"If I like what I see I'll reach out, but sending me 5 follow-up emails doesn't work."

Many buyers stressed the need to say something that stands out.

"We receive a flood of communication from potential suppliers. We can't give each time. Something in the email has to catch my eye. Be innovative, not the standard 'Hey, we do this, how about setting up a call to review your needs...'"

"No provider is good at everything. Sell to your sweet spot and tell me how it applies to me."

Senior logistics executives are turned off when contacted by junior-level staff who lack strong industry knowledge. First impressions count, so be careful here.

"Based on an understanding of our large transportation spend, I expect a senior sales rep to be contacting me. It doesn't take long to identify junior people who are just cold calling."

OUR TAKE:

While you may see your communication as a clearly articulated value proposition, to buyers it is an indiscernible element in a "Where's Waldo?" illustration. That doesn't make the message unworthy of attention. It just means it must stand out or be delivered in a way that doesn't get lost in the flood of competing messages.

What frank advice would you have for logistics businesses that would like to build a relationship with you in the hope of gaining future business?

Relax. Don't oversell.

Whether it's a used car or a logistics product/service, no one likes to be sold. Hard-sell tactics will only turn off today's slightly cynical logistics buyer.

"Regardless of how good a solution may be, a pushy approach will drive me away."

"A lot of the people who contact me hit the ground selling and that's a turnoff. If you listen first, then suggest an innovative answer to my problem, you won't have to sell."

Most logistics buyers we spoke to have been burned in the past by providers who promise more than they can deliver. Be careful of making ambitious claims. It may backfire.

"Overselling and under-delivering is rampant in this industry and dooms relationships from the start."

"If you can't help or you're not sure if you've got the capacity, be honest. Saying 'no' could win you more business in the long-run than saying 'yes.'"

Buyers want complete transparency on costs. They hate surprises. Better to be up front from the start.

"Make it easy for me to figure out what I'm paying. If you're going to add a congestion charge, a chassis charge, etc., just increase the rate."

"I prefer openness and honesty. If issues arise, I want to be contacted immediately."

OUR TAKE:

Logistics buyers are hungry for reliable partners they can trust. They're in it for the long-haul and prefer providers with the same long-term view. Make sure your compensation structure doesn't encourage hard-sell approaches by commission-hungry agents or BDRs. Dr. Antonio Damasio reminds us that people are not thinking machines that feel; they are *feeling* machines that think. How you make logistics buyers feel early in the marketing and selling process will determine their interest in continuing.

What frank advice would you have for logistics businesses that would like to build a relationship with you in the hope of gaining future business?

Use your connections and your content to get my attention

Emails and phone calls from strangers get a cold reception. But buyers warm up quickly if you approach them through a mutual contact.

"I find partners mostly through recommendations from colleagues. Use introductions to open doors."

"I have never replied to a salesperson I don't know. A referral is important – like if a vendor of ours referred me to one of its logistics partners."

Another consistent theme from a subset of surveyed buyers is "don't call us, we'll call you." But it's not a brush off. They really mean it.

"I work for a \$15 billion global company and I get hundreds of inquiries. If you want my attention, give me free content and show me why I should do business with you."

"Give me useful information about your service with links to detail. If I'm interested, I'll reach out. I prefer not to waste my time setting up phone calls unless it's something I know I'm interested in."

"Make your company easily findable on the internet and have a detailed website that answers my questions. Then provide easy protocols to put me in touch with someone who actually knows what the heck they're talking about."

OUR TAKE:

In terms of relationships, connect the dots. What existing relationships do you have that can open doors elsewhere? If you service a retailer, would you have a strong value proposition for that retailer's suppliers? Would your most satisfied clients refer you to 3 or 4 of their colleagues? In terms of content, marketing is now a game of [Hide-and-Seek – in reverse](#). Buyers are now "it" and are on the web looking for solutions to their supply chain problems. Our job, as marketers, is to get found. Content provides the bread crumb trail that leads buyers to your brand.

An Open Letter to Logistics Businesses

If the respondents to this year's survey asked us to ghost-write a letter to logistics businesses with advice on their marketing and sales practices, it might go something like this:

To All Logistics Marketers,

I'm a little frustrated

I get dozens of unsolicited phone calls and emails per week. Most times, the provider has not even had the courtesy to understand my company and its needs. So, the vast majority of these calls and emails are blocked or ignored. If you've got junior-level people dialing for dollars, you may want to rethink this model. But if you take a more considered – and considerate – approach, believe me you'll stand out. And for that reason, you may get my attention.

Approach me through a mutual contact

If you've done your homework and believe you have an idea to solve one of my pressing problems, the best way to approach me is through someone I know and trust. Choosing the wrong 3PL or logistics software or carrier can really damage my business – and damage my reputation with internal colleagues. Anything that reduces that risk, like a referral, is a good thing.

Help me find you

If I've got a problem that requires outside help, I'm getting advice from colleagues. But I'm also doing my research on the web to find best-fit partners. In these cases, the best thing you can do is make it easy for me to find you during my research – through things like a helpful article, LinkedIn post, podcast appearance, media feature story, or speaking engagement. If you've established a reputation for addressing the very problem I'm looking to solve, there's a good chance you'll end up on my short list.

I need your help

My world has been turned upside down in the last couple of years due to freight capacity shortages, rising rates, runaway fuel costs, port disruptions and labor challenges. All are landmines that threaten my company's ability to survive and thrive. And all trickle down to my desk one way or another. I need your help more than ever. If you've got a smart answer to one of these problems, I'll listen. I can't afford not to. But be patient. Park the hard-sell approach and focus on simply helping. If you invest the time to earn my trust with good thinking and a sincere desire to help me succeed, you can earn a share of my budget.

To learn more about this research, contact Jim Bierfeldt at Logistics Marketing Advisors.



The author, Jim Bierfeldt, is president of Logistics Marketing Advisors, a marketing company that helps logistics businesses define and communicate their value, and then translate that value into revenue.

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