Lube 2025 Digital Exclusive

THE EUROPEAN LUBRICANTS INDUSTRY MAGAZINE

January 2025

The official journal of UEIL

The Buyer Revolution status report

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The Buyer Revolution status report. How the research impacts you and what you can do about it!

Rob Taylor, *Plan.Grow.Do.*

The Buyer Revolution is a transformative research project examining the evolving dynamics of the B2B lubricants supply chain. As digitalisation reshapes industries globally, this initiative seeks to uncover how buyer preferences and behaviours have shifted within the lubricants sector. With over 100 unique insights gathered from industry participants, this study aims to highlight the new decision-making processes buyers follow, the role of digital tools, and the importance of personalised engagement in today's fast-paced marketplace.

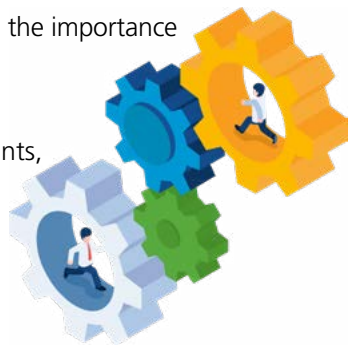
The research is spearheaded by two leading voices in the lubricants space – *Lube Magazine and Plan. Grow.Do*. **Tina Reading**, Editor of *Lube Magazine*, and **Steve Knapp**, Joint CEO of *Plan.Grow.Do.*, a prominent B2B sales agency, sat down and discussed the emerging themes of ***The Buyer Revolution*** research project. Tina, with a strong background in digital marketing, PR, and consumer psychology, has been a key voice in the lubricants industry's communication landscape. Steve brings over 25 years of experience within the lubricants sector, particularly focused on sales strategy and buyer engagement. Together, they are leveraging their combined expertise to explore how the lubricants industry can adapt to the rapidly changing expectations of modern B2B buyers.

Through their collaborative efforts, *The Buyer Revolution* research sheds light on the importance of understanding buyer psychology, adopting new technologies, and the need for companies to shift from traditional practices to stay competitive in the evolving market.

Purpose of *The Buyer Revolution* and this article

As the lubricants industry undergoes significant changes in buyer behaviours, this article aims to explore the key findings of the ongoing *Buyer Revolution* research project. With digitalisation transforming how buyers approach purchasing decisions, understanding these shifts is crucial for businesses looking to stay ahead in the B2B lubricants supply chain. The article will delve into essential topics, including the rise of digital research, the evolution of the buyer's role, and the importance of personalised communication.

By highlighting these talking points, we hope to provide actionable



insights for industry professionals on how to adapt their sales and marketing strategies to meet the demands of today's buyers. Importantly, this piece also serves as a call to action for businesses across the lubricants sector to participate in *The Buyer Revolution* survey. Your input will help shape the future of the industry by providing critical data to inform best practices and guide successful buyer-seller interactions. Take part now and contribute to this vital conversation!

Changing buyer preferences and digitalisation

The way buyers in the lubricants industry approach decision-making has undergone a profound transformation, primarily driven by digitalisation. No longer are buyers reliant on traditional methods of engaging with suppliers or dependent on in-person sales pitches. Instead, today's buyers are increasingly turning to online research to inform their purchasing decisions. In fact, *The Buyer Revolution* research reveals that **75% of buyers have already made a decision before they even reach out to potential suppliers**, fundamentally altering the sales landscape.

Steve highlights this significant shift, explaining, "What we've found in the research is that a buyer really has a multitude of activities that they do in the day, and for the mindshare that they've really got for buying lubricants and selecting lubricants, it's far less than the seller might appreciate." This compressed timeline for decision-making has placed greater emphasis on how sellers present themselves online, with digital content playing a crucial role in influencing buyer behaviour. As Steve continues, "Buyers want to now have researched so much that all the seller is actually doing is validating the decision of the buyer."

Tina adds context to the importance of a digital presence in this new dynamic, stating, "If you are not visible, then you've been left behind... because you're eliminating yourself from that decision process." This highlights the critical role of digital visibility—companies that fail to engage with buyers during their research phase are effectively missing out on the bulk of the decision-making process.

The implication is clear: sellers must adapt to this digital-first world. By leveraging online content, providing valuable insights, and making themselves visible to buyers early in the research phase, businesses can remain competitive and influence decisions that are largely made before any direct contact is initiated.

The evolution of the buyer's role

In the lubricants industry, the role of the buyer has evolved dramatically, becoming far more complex

than in previous decades. Traditionally, buyers were focused solely on procurement, often operating in silos within larger organisations. However, today's buyers are required to juggle multiple responsibilities, including logistics, inventory management, and even health and safety. This broader scope has led to a shift in how buyers approach purchasing decisions and their interactions with suppliers.

Steve Knapp elaborates on this transformation, saying, "When I first started selling, there was an army of buyers in the buying department... there was a profession of buying." He notes that buyers used to be exclusively focused on solving specific problems identified by engineers, but today's buyers are much more integrated into the overall operational functions of a business. "That engineering buyer has now moved to also being responsible for health and safety, also responsible for logistics, also responsible for inventory," Steve explains, underscoring the expansive role buyers now play.

This shift has significant implications for sellers, who must now understand that their buyers are stretched thin across various functions. As a result, buyers have less time to devote to purchasing decisions, which is why they increasingly turn to digital research and prefer suppliers who can provide quick, concise, and valuable insights.

Tina reflects on how this evolution has impacted communication between buyers and sellers: "A lot of companies now are actually starting to merge the teams together... because your buyers, your sellers, your marketeers, are all doing the same thing." This merging of roles highlights the need for a unified, consistent approach to messaging, making it essential for sellers to tailor their communications to meet the evolving needs of buyers who are now wearing many hats.

Ultimately, sellers must recognise that today's buyers are not just purchasers—they are problem solvers responsible for a range of operational functions. Understanding this complexity is key to building relationships and offering the kind of support that modern buyers need.

Impact of digital content and social media

Digital content and social media have become indispensable tools for reaching buyers, yes, even in the lubricants market; With 93% of buyers visiting websites as part of their research process, companies that fail to establish a strong digital presence risk being left out of the buyer's consideration set. Buyers are increasingly relying on digital platforms to gather information, make comparisons, and narrow down their options before engaging directly with suppliers.

Steve underscores the importance of this shift, stating, "We exclusively see... LinkedIn is their preferred digital channel... 63% of them are on LinkedIn in the evening." He stresses that this trend forces sales teams to adjust their strategies, ensuring that they are "providing content that educates with insight," making their presence felt when buyers are most likely to be engaged. Steve adds, "If we're not putting our company out there, we're eliminating ourselves from that decision process." This highlights the critical role that digital platforms play in staying competitive.

Tina echoes this sentiment, pointing out that companies must adapt their messaging to suit digital formats and platforms. "We've got companies within our industry of all different sizes, but the people in those companies are interacting digitally now," she explains, illustrating how digital engagement has levelled the playing field across companies of varying sizes. Tina also comments on the need to make digital content relevant and valuable to

buyers: "A lot of the sale has already been done before you actually talk to someone... you're 95% there."

This growing reliance on digital platforms has pushed companies to focus on producing quality content that answers buyers' questions and addresses their pain points early in the decision-making process. As buyers do most of their research online, suppliers need to ensure that their content is not only visible but also insightful and valuable to help influence purchasing decisions before direct contact is made. In this way, a robust digital presence is now essential for success in the modern lubricants supply chain.

Speed of response

Speed of response has become a critical factor in building trust and influencing purchasing decisions in the lubricants industry. Buyers expect timely interactions from suppliers, and companies that are quick to respond have a distinct advantage in the decision-making process. *The Buyer Revolution* research shows that responding within **three hours** significantly increases the likelihood of a sale, underscoring the need for efficiency in communication.

Steve highlights this crucial point: "Speed of response is a vital component of a buyer's trust-building... We've proven that you're more likely to buy from me if I respond within three hours." This data reflects a broader shift in buyer expectations—customers today demand not only quick but also meaningful engagements that assure them their needs are being heard. According to Steve, a fast response doesn't necessarily mean providing a complete solution right away, but rather, it's about acknowledging the buyer and setting clear expectations: "I value a response versus a thorough response... buyers want to know that their message has been received."

Tina adds that managing buyer expectations is key to maintaining trust, especially in a world where instant communication is the norm. "We have all become reliant on these devices... constantly checking emails, refreshing, waiting for a response," she notes, acknowledging the pressures placed on both buyers and sellers. Tina suggests that providing a timely response, even if it's just to say, "I'm on it, I'll get back to you," is often enough to keep the buyer engaged and reassured.

In today's market, where digital tools allow for near-instantaneous communication, failing to respond quickly can mean losing out to competitors who are more responsive. Therefore, businesses must prioritise not only the speed but also the quality of their initial responses to build trust and maintain strong buyer relationships. Speedy communication has become a key differentiator for success in the lubricants supply chain, as it reflects a company's commitment to meeting buyer needs in real-time.

The role of AI and future technologies

As digitalisation continues to reshape the lubricants industry, artificial intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies are becoming essential tools

for improving both sales efficiency and the buyer's journey. Companies that embrace AI can enhance their operations by making the sales process more seamless, providing more personalised experiences, and meeting the evolving expectations of today's buyers. In *The Buyer Revolution* research, the growing importance of AI is evident as more buyers look for smarter, tech-driven solutions to improve their purchasing processes.

Steve emphasises the need for businesses to adapt to AI, stating, "We're starting to see AI play out in the buyer's psyche... How will suppliers make my experience even better using AI?" He suggests that businesses should be proactive in integrating AI into their practices to streamline workflows and better serve their buyers. Knapp continues, "If I were an organisation, I would now be starting to think about how to integrate AI to make my sales team more effective and my buyer's journey more seamless and value-adding."

Tina concurs, noting that while some companies may be hesitant to adopt AI, it's essential to overcome that fear. "We have to get over this fear... AI is not going to replace people; it's going to make their jobs easier," she explains. Tina highlights that AI can be a powerful tool for analysing buyer data, predicting needs, and improving response times, all of which are increasingly important in an industry that thrives on efficiency.

The adoption of AI allows companies to better anticipate buyer needs and deliver customised solutions quickly, enhancing the overall buyer experience. As the lubricants industry continues to evolve, those who leverage AI will be better positioned to meet the demands of a digitally-driven market. By embracing AI, businesses can stay competitive, offering buyers a more responsive, efficient, and tailored experience. The integration of AI is no longer a future consideration—it's a current necessity for success in the modern B2B landscape.

Survey insights and participation

One of the key takeaways from *The Buyer Revolution* research is the importance of gathering and leveraging data to stay ahead of shifting buyer dynamics. Through a series of ongoing surveys, the project is capturing valuable insights into how lubricants industry buyers behave, what influences their decisions, and how businesses can better meet their needs. The participation of industry professionals is crucial, as the data collected provides the foundation for understanding and adapting to these changes in the marketplace.

Steve emphasises the significance of this data, explaining, "We've now gathered over 100 unique responses, and the clearer the picture becomes, the more insight we can share with the industry." The surveys have revealed some vital trends, such as the increasing reliance on digital content and platforms like LinkedIn, with 92% of buyers actively using the platform. Steve points out that companies need to be where their buyers are, stating, "If I could give you a tool that enables you to connect with 92% of your buyers, you'd jump at that, right?"

Tina is urging the industry to get involved: "We can't emphasise how important this data is... this is your chance to have an influence on the future of the industry." Tina explains that the insights gathered from these surveys will help businesses shape their communication plans, marketing strategies, and sales approaches to better align with buyer expectations.

By taking part in these surveys, industry professionals can contribute to a broader understanding of how

the lubricants sector is evolving. The more data collected, the better equipped companies will be to navigate the changing landscape and meet the needs of modern buyers. Participation in this research isn't just about understanding the present; it's about helping to shape the future of the lubricants industry for years to come.

Summary: seven key points

Changing buyer preferences and digitalisation: Buyers in the lubricants industry have shifted their approach, with a significant focus on digital research. Approximately 75% of buyers make their decisions before even contacting suppliers, which has fundamentally altered the traditional sales process.

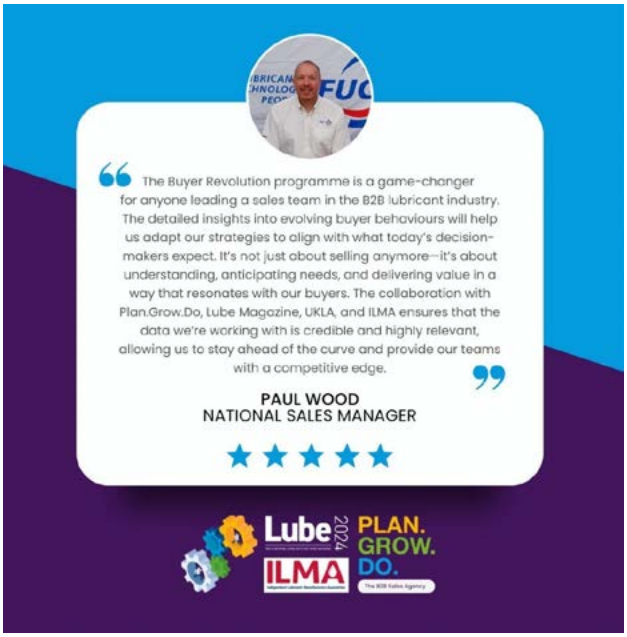
The evolution of the buyer's role: The role of buyers has expanded beyond purchasing to include responsibilities in engineering, health and safety, logistics, and inventory management. This multi-functional role leaves less time for traditional buyer-seller interactions, demanding a more solution-oriented and value-adding engagement from sellers.

Impact of digital content and social media: Companies not leveraging digital and social media effectively are being left behind, as 93% of buyers visit websites for research. LinkedIn was highlighted as the preferred platform, with 92% of lubricants buyers active on the platform, and many of them engage during off-hours, such as in the evening.

Importance of personalised messaging: The research revealed that buyers highly value personal relationships, with 66% of them prioritising personalised over corporate communication. This suggests that sales efforts should focus on building genuine, authentic connections rather than relying on generic corporate messaging.

Speed of response: Speed in responding to buyers is critical, with data showing that a response within three hours significantly increases the likelihood of a purchase. Buyers appreciate knowing they've been heard, even if a full response isn't immediately possible.

The role of AI and future technologies: The lubricants industry, like others, must embrace AI to improve sales effectiveness and the buyer journey. AI can help streamline processes and provide more personalised, seamless experiences for buyers, enhancing their overall satisfaction.



Here are three practical steps for you to reflect upon for your business based on *The Buyer Revolution* research to date

Invest in your digital presence: With 75% of buyers making their decision before ever contacting a supplier, having a robust digital presence is crucial. Ensure your website, social media channels (especially LinkedIn), and online content are up-to-date, engaging, and answer the questions buyers are likely asking. Buyers are doing their research independently—make sure they can find you.

Prioritise personalised communication: Buyers today highly value personal relationships over generic corporate messaging. Focus on building authentic,

human connections with your clients through personalised, insightful communication. Tailoring your messages to the specific needs and challenges of your buyers can significantly enhance trust and engagement.

Embrace AI and speed of response: Leveraging AI to enhance your sales process and improve response times can give you a competitive edge. Buyers expect timely, relevant responses—integrating AI can help you streamline interactions and provide faster, more meaningful engagements. At the same time, prioritise speed of response; a timely acknowledgment of buyer inquiries can build trust and increase the chances of closing a deal.

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Take part now!

SURVEY LINKS

Why your input matters:
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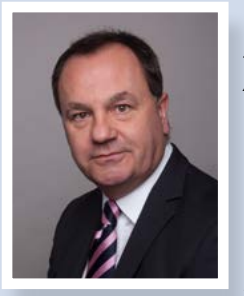

"Buyer behaviour in the sales process is changing. According to a recent McKinsey report, the consumerisation of the B2B sales process is complete. Buyers want an omnichannel experience backed by personalisation and delivered through a mix of traditional, hybrid and online channels.

Previously sellers would have been approached once a need had been identified. Today, the buyer could have identified a need, undertaken their own research on you and your competitors, shortlisted some companies, identified some suitable products and even trialled or tested these using digital channels even before they pick up the phone or send an email.

Lube magazine, with the support of UKLA, has partnered with Plan.Grow.Do. to better understand this new omnichannel, personalised and digitised sales process, the impact on buyers and sellers, and how companies can become more aware of the changing dynamic to adapt their sales processes to make the most of the opportunities in the fast changing and evolving lubricants market.

We would encourage you to take part in these short surveys for which participants will receive an anonymised and aggregated summary report on the responses."

David Wright, *Director General*
www.ukla.org.uk