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The Business Case for Plain Language in Healthcare Communications

What buyers of healthcare equipment, products and services have to say

Aha Media Group conducted a qualitative research study of B2B healthcare buyers in conjunction with Mantis Research.

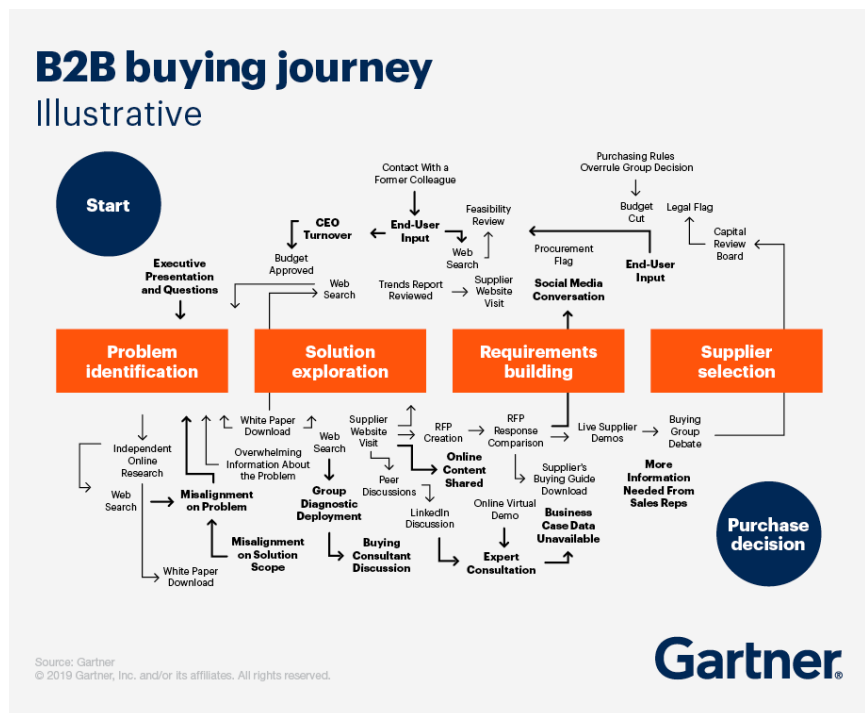
We asked about their buying processes and what they look for when receiving and reading promotional and sales materials. We primarily wanted to know how industry speak (jargon) and plain language impact their purchasing decisions.

The buyer journey is complex.

All study participants had decision-making authority or influence in buying decisions. They represented a mix of company sizes and types, departments and functions, and purchasing categories — such as software, medical technology, pharmaceuticals and marketing services.

We found that the healthcare B2B buyer journey is complex and varies dramatically from company to company and purchase to purchase:

- There is no clear delineation between decision-maker and influencer.
- The audience for marketing content is not always the technical expert.
- Priorities can shift from purchase to purchase.



Why not make things easier?

As part of our study, we showed a preview page promoting a white paper on digital tomosynthesis (DTS). We displayed two versions — the original, heavy with jargon and technical language, and a revised version, written in plain language — and asked for feedback.

#ECR2020: Digital Tomosynthesis on DR 800 and DR 600

Despite a large array of publications and clinically-oriented investigations and studies indicating potential applications in various fields, digital tomosynthesis (DTS) has not yet realized its potential as a widely used clinical application. Apart from mammography, where digital breast tomosynthesis (DBT) is becoming increasingly well-established, DTS is acknowledged in the academic field, but seemingly less in clinical practice – particularly not in productivity-oriented clinical environments. Agfa's tomosynthesis solution – facilitating novel reconstruction in combination with state-of-the-art MUSICA post-processing on both the DR 800 and DR 600 X-ray systems – allows Agfa to close this gap. By means of well-documented and practical clinical cases, this white paper demonstrates the potential of digital tomosynthesis in the radiological field. It shows that DTS can be a useful complement to 2D and CT imaging in improving department productivity and patient care.

Download the white paper [here](#).

Example 1: Original Description

Original version: Feedback

"It's overly complicated. The wording is so bulky. It should be simpler, more to the point, without trying to sound smart." — Chief Operations Officer

"You have to read a lot to figure it out. I want to know right away what problem you are trying to solve." — VP of Operations

"It's jargon and not enticing. It's dead on the table, dead on arrival. It's useless." — Director of Communications

"It's a disaster. Some people might say that this is the way that you establish credibility. But this is boring and hard to read." — Chief Clinical Officer

Graduate level
Arduous Useless
 Disaster Dead on arrival
Boring Not compelling
 Hard to read **Bulky**
 Overly complicated

#ECR2020: Digital Tomosynthesis on DR 800 and DR 600

Digital tomosynthesis (DTS) is a medical imaging technique where a single reading provides multiple tomographic slices that are quickly reconstructed into images. Despite its usefulness, DTS is not being used in many clinical settings, except for in mammography where it is becoming more common. Agfa's tomosynthesis solution, which combines new reconstruction techniques with advanced post-processing technology, aims to change that. Through real-life examples, this white paper shows that DTS can be a helpful addition to other imaging techniques in improving patient care and productivity in medical departments.

Download the white paper [here](#).

Example 2: Plain Language Re-write

Plain language version: Feedback

"This is much better because it's written in intelligible English. By the fact that it's more comprehensible, it is more enticing." — Director of Communications

"It's not oversimplifying it. You're still speaking to people on a level that they understand. It hasn't been dumbed down too much." — Chief Clinical Officer

"It's definitely clearer than the first one. It starts to line up a story in terms of why you should care." — VP of Operations

"It's taken out a lot of the technical terms and acronyms and gives an overlay. It's more succinct and meaningful." — Director of Pharmacy

Smoother **Easier to read**
 Meaningful **Relatable**
Clear Succinct
Concise Enticing
Conversational

Key findings with B2B healthcare buyer sentiment

Today's healthcare professionals, both clinical and nonclinical, want sales and promotional materials that are clear and understandable. Easy-to-read communications open the door to conversation and, ideally, conversion. Plain language content is a competitive advantage.

According to our study participants, sellers who cut through the noise grab the attention of a busy audience:

8 Key Findings

- 1** Complex, technical language is accepted as the norm — but that doesn't mean it's right.
"Don't throw [in] all this other stuff. We just want to get to the point. Don't make it hard for me to figure out if I want this." – COO
- 2** Technical detail and complex concepts are expected and necessary. But don't lead with them.
"That's not what I want to read. In a synopsis, I want to know very clearly what the problem is and how you will fix it." – VP of Operations
- 3** By speaking only to the clinician, the seller risks losing all nonclinical decision-makers.
- 4** Plain language is not the same as "dumbing down."
- 5** Plain language underscores credibility. It does not undermine it.
"You know if someone's trying to use the lingo, but they don't fully comprehend it." – VP of Ops
- 6** Overly technical language can introduce doubt and erode credibility.
- 7** Marketing can sound smart and authoritative without complex language.
- 8** Plain language drives sales.
"Clearer, simpler language will win every time, no matter what." – Director of Comms

Agree? Disagree? Want to know more?

This research study is continuing with a quantitative phase via an online survey ending in August 2023. Sign up now to get the full report when it's released.