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THE APAC B2B MARKETERS GUIDE

TO AI, TRUST, AND THE DARK FUNNEL

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Executive Summary

The majority of B2B buying takes place in the dark funnel, where buyers conduct their research independently and increasingly assisted by AI, before they ever contact a sales representative. Drawing on insights from APAC marketing leaders at INFUSE, Adobe, Equinix, Palo Alto Networks, and SAS, this article explores how marketers can stay visible, build trust, and influence decisions long before buyers raise their hands.

- Discover how AI-assisted research is reshaping the B2B buying journey
- Combine intent data with organizational signals to identify future buying opportunities
- Build trust through evidence, credibility, and consistent brand visibility
- Engage complex buying groups with personalized, multi-persona experiences
- Apply AI to improve discoverability, scale personalization, and drive measurable growth

Learn how leading APAC marketers are adapting to AI-driven, trust-led buying journeys and turning dark funnel insights into competitive advantage.

B2B buying has fundamentally changed. The majority of the purchase decision now happens before a vendor is ever contacted, with buyers conducting research quietly, assisted by AI, and out of view.

Buyers complete roughly 61% of their journey before they reach out to sales (**6sense, 2025**), and only 20% of buying group members say they trust the content published by vendors (**INFUSE Voice of the Buyer 2026**). AI tools increasingly shape which companies make it to the shortlist, while the volume of available content has never been higher.

However, despite this abundance of information, buyer trust is lower than ever. **INFUSE Voice of the Marketer** research points to the same gap from the supply side, with 50% of APAC marketers reporting that they use AI mainly for predictive analysis and modeling rather than for segmentation and personalization.

Nowhere are these dynamics sharper than in Asia-Pacific. The APAC region is not one market but many, spanning diverse regulatory, linguistic, and cultural contexts. Buyer risk sensitivity runs high, regional marketing budgets are often the smallest of any geography, and the security and infrastructure decisions that dominate the market carry long-term consequences.

To understand how marketing leaders are responding, INFUSE sat down with four APAC marketing leaders across two webcasts.

This article distills their expert insights across five questions:

1. How buyer behavior has changed
2. How to capture early signals inside the dark funnel
3. How to bridge the trust gap
4. How to engage expanding buying groups
5. How to apply AI for measurable impact

How has B2B buyer behavior changed, and why is so much of the journey now invisible?

The **dark funnel** accounts for the majority of the funnel. B2B buyers self-educate, lean on AI to accelerate their research, and surface only once they are deep into a decision.

Sameer Thakkar,
VP Marketing APAC,
SAS

DISCUSSES HOW TO ENGAGE INVISIBLE BUYERS:

"Roughly 70% to 80% of the B2B buying journey is completed before a buyer has their first conversation with a vendor. This reflects the significant amount of independent research and internal alignment happening within buying groups as they define priorities and evaluate which vendors best meet their requirements. As a result, it is more important than ever for brands to remain visible and relevant, even when buyers are not actively in the market.

At any given time, only about 15% of buyers are actively evaluating solutions, while the remaining 85% are not. Maintaining consistent engagement with that larger group is increasingly critical.

Nonetheless, AI-powered research tools are playing a growing role in the buying process. Buyers are using these tools to research vendors, compare options, and generate shortlists based on factors such as cost, integration capabilities, technology stack, and business outcomes. This is driving a shift beyond traditional SEO and digital visibility, requiring organizations to rethink how they stay discoverable and influential throughout the buying journey."

Min Erh Mah,
Senior Director GTM and Regional Hub,
Palo Alto Networks

SEES THE SAME COMPRESSION PLAYING OUT ACCOUNT BY ACCOUNT:

"The primary shift that we are seeing is that the buying cycles have shortened, with much of the early research now being AI-assisted. The challenge is visibility into that research: People are doing research using AI, but we do not know what they are researching or what they receive as the outcome of the search.

The response is to treat discoverability as a first-order content problem, focusing on how content is surfaced within Gen AI environments, through GEOs, where a growing share of early research now happens."

If most of the journey is invisible, how do you light up the dark funnel and capture signals early?

If buyers do not clearly express their intent, marketers need to identify it through buyer signals.

APAC leaders agree on a key distinction: **intent data** alone is not enough. The richer picture comes from combining intent with signals that indicate a buying motion is forming.

Julian Chow,
Digital Performance Lead APAC,
Adobe

COVERS THE LIMITS OF INTENT:

"Intent data alone only shows what accounts are researching, but does not always reveal what is actually driving a potential purchase. To get a clearer picture, organizations are increasingly combining intent signals with indicators of organizational change, such as leadership transitions, contract renewals, vendor relationships, partnerships, and other market movements.

While not an exact science, layering these signals together can help identify future buying opportunities months in advance. That intelligence enables teams to prioritize accounts, tailor engagement strategies, and allocate budget more effectively based on where buying activity is most likely to emerge."

Fiona Lam,
VP Marketing APAC,
Equinix

FRAMES THE INVISIBLE JOURNEY AS A MEASUREMENT OPPORTUNITY RATHER THAN A BLIND SPOT:

“A large portion of the journey is invisible, but it is not unobservable anymore. Equinix made a deliberate structural change, moving from lead-based marketing to intent-led orchestration on our MarTech platform to detect buying stage and keyword-level intent across signals such as interconnection, AI-ready infrastructure, and hybrid multi-cloud.

The platform lets the team prioritize real-time demand (and not just wait for inbound leads), then activate targeted, personalized campaigns before a buyer engages directly.”

In the full webcast, Fiona Lam breaks down how to operationalize signal data, from organizational-movement triggers to intent-led orchestration.

Watch the session

How do you bridge the trust gap?

AI has made it possible to produce content rapidly and at a scale never experienced before. However, trust has eroded alongside the volume of content made available to buyers.

The trust gap is the widening divide between the overwhelming amount of information available and buyers' confidence in its accuracy, credibility, and relevance. As AI-generated content floods every channel, organizations must work harder to demonstrate expertise, transparency, and proof of outcomes before buyers are willing to act.

For complex buying decisions, such as security and infrastructure decisions where the cost of a wrong choice can be measured in years, trust becomes the deciding factor.

Mukesh Rajpurohit,
VP APAC,
INFUSE

SET THE STAKES WITH FINDINGS FROM INFUSE VOICE OF THE BUYER 2026 RESEARCH:

"We have a serious trust gap, where access to content has become easy, and there is simply too much of it. When we spoke to our buyers, there were only 20% of them who actually trust the content they receive from vendors. AI has accelerated the buying process, but it has also broken trust at exactly the moment buyers are doing more independent research than ever."

Fiona Lam,
VP Marketing APAC,
Equinix

SUGGESTS HOW TO CLOSE THE TRUST GAP WITH EVIDENCE:

"Buyers trust evidence over messaging. You can have great messaging, but buyers always look for evidence as well. In practice, that means proof points: performance benchmarks, service-level agreements, sustainability metrics, and customer outcomes, which matter particularly in APAC, where buyer risk sensitivity is high.

Trust comes from alignment. It is built when what you say, what your ecosystem is saying, and what the customer experience offers are aligned. Digital research builds initial confidence, and human validation closes the gap."

Sameer Thakkar,
VP Marketing APAC,
SAS

EXPLAINS HOW SAS TREATS TRUST AS A MULTI-DECADE DISCIPLINE RATHER THAN A CAMPAIGN TACTIC:

“We do not see trust as an experiment. We do not see trust as a moment. We do not see trust as a point in time. Trust is something that we have built consistently over the last 5 decades. In high-stakes use cases, trust is non-negotiable: rigorous regulatory testing for new vaccines, fraud detection across billions of daily banking and insurance transactions, and the fair distribution of government welfare.

In cases like these, trust becomes the cornerstone of everything that we have been doing for the last 50 years, built through sustained investment in reputation and brand rather than transactional wins.”

As buying groups are growing larger every day, how do you engage all members?

B2B buying groups now average nine members (INFUSE Voice of the Buyer 2026). Purchase decisions are made by large, non-linear groups in which every stakeholder has already formed an opinion in private.

Each buying committee member also has their own priorities and questions which need to be addressed in order to reach a consensus. Prioritizing one, or a small portion of the committee is often an ineffective tactic that neglects the other members responsible for contributing to buying decisions.

Mukesh Rajpurohit,
VP APAC,
INFUSE

DESCRIBES WHAT ENGAGING THE FULL BUYING GROUP IN B2B INVOLVES:

“Each stakeholder is conducting their own research in the dark funnel. They arrive at the evaluation stage with an opinion already formed. Your champion cannot just drive the narrative anymore. We have to get out of this mindset of champion-based selling.

There is an 84% chance that people will invite only those who they have connected with early on in the buying cycle. We cannot just air-drop our sales reps into a particular account and think we are going to get invited to do the RFP.”

Min Erh Mah,
Senior Director GTM and Regional Hub,
Palo Alto Networks

PROVIDED INSIGHT INTO JUST HOW LARGE THESE GROUPS HAVE BECOME:

"For strategic accounts, we are actually seeing at least 30 to even 50+ contacts, spanning users, influencers, evaluators, and decision makers. Engagement has to match the persona. Senior buyers expect ungated, outcome-focused, white-glove, face-to-face interaction because you do not just get a CIO to sign up, fill in a form, and download a whitepaper.

Technical audiences, by contrast, are served through always-on, hands-on programs. Layered on top is an industry-led approach by vertical. For example, financial services prioritize customer experience and compliance, while manufacturing prioritizes smart manufacturing and operational excellence."

Julian Chow,
Digital Performance Lead APAC,
Adobe

DESCRIBES HOW ADOBE APPROACHES THE SAME PROBLEM THROUGH COMPLETENESS AND PRIORITIZATION:

"Adobe measures buying-group completeness to identify which accounts are under-exposed in the marketable database, then builds personalized journeys for each persona within the group. We have identified six of what we would call 'core personas', surrounded by secondary personas who influence the decision without owning it. Having that concentric circle model allows us to prioritize at any point which potential personas are more important than the other.

Technology closes the loop. At Adobe, we've built our own technology, called Adobe Journey Optimizer, which reads known and unknown signals to decide when to escalate BDR outreach or trigger a closed-door account event. Always-on programs influence from the bottom up, while executive events influence from the top down, all aimed at the same outcome, because the most important thing about driving a decision is really the consensus."

Discover deeper insights on measuring ABM success beyond the lead, from weekly persona coverage to account engagement scoring.

Watch the full session

Everyone is investing in AI. How are you actually applying AI investments?

INFUSE Voice of the Buyer AI Research (2026) research shows that 62% of enterprise buyers still cite operational efficiency as their primary AI outcome, and 51% point to automation. The more difficult move is turning that efficiency into revenue, and the readiness data shows why it stalls. 35% of buyers feel personally AI-ready, but only 33% say their company is ready, and just 26% say their team is (INFUSE Voice of the Buyer AI Research 2026). Individuals are outpacing the organizations around them.

The idea behind AI has moved from "AI saves time" to "AI generates revenue." The practical way to unlock this value is through scalable customization. This should be a middle ground between one-size-fits-all campaigns and highly tailored market-specific builds. It delivers local relevance without sacrificing efficiency and scale.

Sameer Thakkar,
VP Marketing APAC,
SAS

STARTS BY REFRAMING APAC'S COMPLEXITY AS AN ASSET:

“The region's diversity is worth leveraging to our advantage in terms of becoming a sandbox for adopting new technology first. SAS focuses its AI applications across three areas:

1. **Making content and digital assets AI-ready so they are discoverable through LLMs and AI-driven search**
2. **Using AI internally to segment audiences and identify personas for scalable customization**
3. **Using AI to throw light on the dark funnel with a connected, full-journey view**

A single one-size-fits-all campaign is not going to work, while extreme per-market customization is not going to scale. AI is how a lean team finds the middle.”

Julian Chow,
Digital Performance Lead APAC,
Adobe

FRAMES AI AS A LEVERAGE PROBLEM, ESPECIALLY FOR A REGION THAT HAS TO DO MORE WITH LESS:

“The principle we are pushing toward is one unit of input, five units of output. That matters because APAC is usually the market that gets the smallest amount of investment. But it does not mean that we cannot create an outsized impact. I think that is where AI can really help us.

Concretely, Adobe applies AI to crunch account-engagement data and explain what is actually driving clicks, form fills, and account progression. Then, the company feeds those findings back into decisions about where to invest next.”

Explore INFUSE webcasts for more exclusive insights from B2B leaders

Key takeaways

The buyer decides before you meet them: With buyers completing the majority of their journey independently (and only 15% actively in-market at any moment), the marketer's job is to make the brand visible, relevant, and trusted long before a hand goes up. Lead generation still matters, but constant engagement with the invisible majority is what wins the shortlist.

Signals beat intent alone: Consuming content is not the same as readiness to buy. APAC leaders are pairing intent data with market-movement signals, such as leadership changes, contract renewals, and partnership activity, to spot buying motions months earlier and orchestrate engagement before buyers surface.

Trust is the differentiator, and it is earned with evidence: With only 20% of buyers trusting vendor content, proof points such as benchmarks, SLAs, customer outcomes, and aligned third-party validation outperform messaging, particularly for high-risk security and infrastructure decisions in APAC. Trust is built consistently over time, not switched on for a campaign.

You cannot win one persona and hope: Buying groups average nine members, but can reach as many as 50 contacts, each arriving with a formed opinion. Winning requires mapping the full group, matching content to each persona, and engaging both bottom-up through always-on programs and top-down through executive moments to drive consensus.

AI's payoff is scalable customization and leverage: The highest-value AI applications are not time savings but revenue impact. AI-ready content for discoverability, smarter segmentation and personalization at scale, and data analysis that reveals what moves accounts forward, turning APAC's small budgets and high diversity into an advantage.

FAQs

What is the dark funnel in B2B marketing?

The dark funnel is the part of the B2B buying journey that happens privately, before a buyer contacts a vendor. Buyers self-educate, compare options, and increasingly use AI to build shortlists. Roughly 61% of the journey is complete before sales contact, which makes early visibility essential.

How can B2B marketers capture buyer intent inside the dark funnel?

Intent data alone is not enough. The clearest picture comes from pairing intent with organizational signals such as leadership changes, contract renewals, and partnership activity. Layering these signals can surface buying motions months in advance, helping teams prioritize accounts and engage the vast majority of buyers who are not yet actively in-market.

How can B2B brands build trust when buyers distrust vendor content?

Only 20% of buying group members trust the content published by vendors (INFUSE Voice of the Buyer 2026). Trust is earned with evidence, through formats such as performance benchmarks, service-level agreements, customer outcomes, and aligned third-party validation. This matters most in APAC, where buyer risk sensitivity is high, and infrastructure decisions carry multi-year consequences.

How large are B2B buying groups, and how do you engage them?

B2B buying groups now average nine members and can exceed 50 contacts for strategic accounts (INFUSE Voice of the Buyer 2026). Each member forms an opinion privately, so champion-based selling falls short. Map the full group, match content to every persona, and engage both bottom-up and top-down to build consensus.

How can INFUSE help marketers engage buying groups across the dark funnel?

INFUSE demand generation programs help brands stay visible, build trust, and engage entire buying groups across the full journey. By combining intent and signal data, omnichannel demand programs, and account-based engagement, INFUSE turns dark funnel activity into pipeline that is more visible, more trusted, and more likely to convert.

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