SCHOOL INSIGHT SERIES

# Why Trust Matters in Sales

AUTUMN 2021

★ edtech
impact

**Selling to schools can be tough**, and building trust with school buyers and senior leaders feels harder now than at any other time.

**Traditional methods of building trust are no longer working.** Partnerships with local authorities are in decline, case studies are less effective, and email marketing is saturated.

**The pandemic has had a huge impact on how schools buy EdTech.** However, it's important to understand that it has only accelerated a change that was well underway.

Any buyer will tell you: **if a senior leader doesn't trust your company, they won't buy your product.**

**In this guide, we'll explore how you can build trust with school buyers.**

# A Crisis of Trust in Suppliers

Here's the thing; schools really don't trust suppliers. In fact, only 8% of teachers trust the claims made by a supplier in a sales meeting or demonstration. We're not dealing with a trust gap, we're dealing with a trust chasm!

For the past 20 years, EdTech has largely been a wild-west of companies making unsubstantiated claims about the efficacy of their EdTech solutions. Schools have all too often been on the receiving end of an "over-promise, under-deliver" sale, so it's no surprise that trust has eroded to what it has today.

## Trust in Suppliers

Only 8% of educators trust the claims made directly by EdTech companies

**8%**
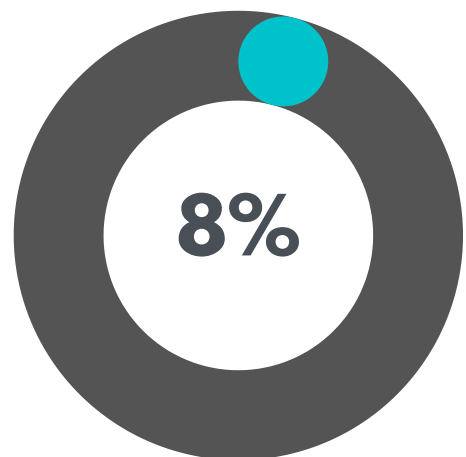
Teacher Tapp, *Sparx Teacher Survey*, 2019

## What factors influence trust?

If schools are naturally distrustful of you, what can you do about this? It's not enough for schools to like your product. They've got to trust your company. No matter how good your product is, if you fail to build trust, you're going to lose more times than you win.

You've probably experienced this first-hand, and perhaps not realised what has happened. A school contacted you, you delivered a demo, they said it looked good, and you thought they'd buy. Then you never heard from them again.
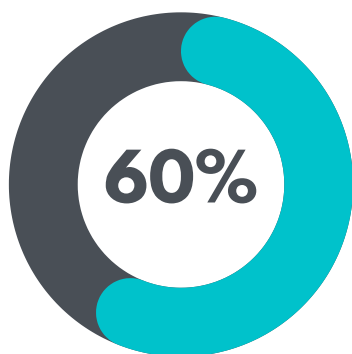
# 2x

"People are **more than twice** as likely to buy from a company they trust but don't like, than from a company they like, but don't trust."

- Inc, *Why Trust Beats Likeability*, 2018

# Why Don't School Buyers Trust Suppliers?

**There are 3 key factors driving the evolution of the buying environment in education:**

**60%**

## 1. Senior leaders are younger and more digitally savvy

UK teachers are the youngest of any OECD nation with an average age of 39[1]. 60% of all teachers are under 40, and in Academies, 28% of teachers are 21-30[2].

**79%**

**41%**
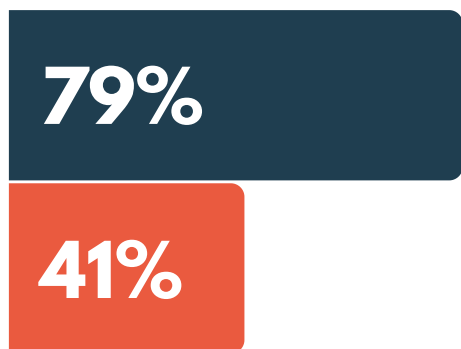
## 2. Word of mouth is in decline; Internet research is up

When it comes to searching for new EdTech solutions, 79% of teachers start their research online, versus 41% who rely on word-of-mouth recommendations from other schools[3].

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1,250 | | |
| 1,000 | | **>1200** |
| 750 | | |
| 500 | | |
| 250 | **<400** | |
| 0 | 2011 | 2021 |
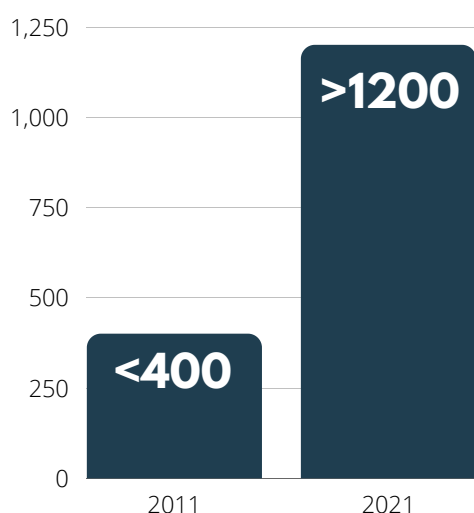
## 3. The growth of Multi-Academy Trusts

In 2011, there were fewer than 400 MATs. As of 2021, there are more than 1200, and 33% of all schools now belong to one[4]. With MATs growing in size and complexity, new job roles have developed such as CEO, CFO, and COO. Trusts are recruiting from the private sector, and the result is that procurement and budget control processes have significantly improved.

1 OECD, *Teaching & Learning International Survey*, 2018
2 Department for Education, School Workforce Census, 2020
3 BESA, EdTech in English Maintained Schools, 2020
4 Department for Education, Get Information About Schools Dataset 2011-2020

# 60% of the school workforce is now under 40 years of age (Millennials)

- Department for Education, *School Workforce Census,* 2021

**21 - 30**
# 22%

**Millennials, (1981-96) are the first Internet generation, and place greater value on research when buying**
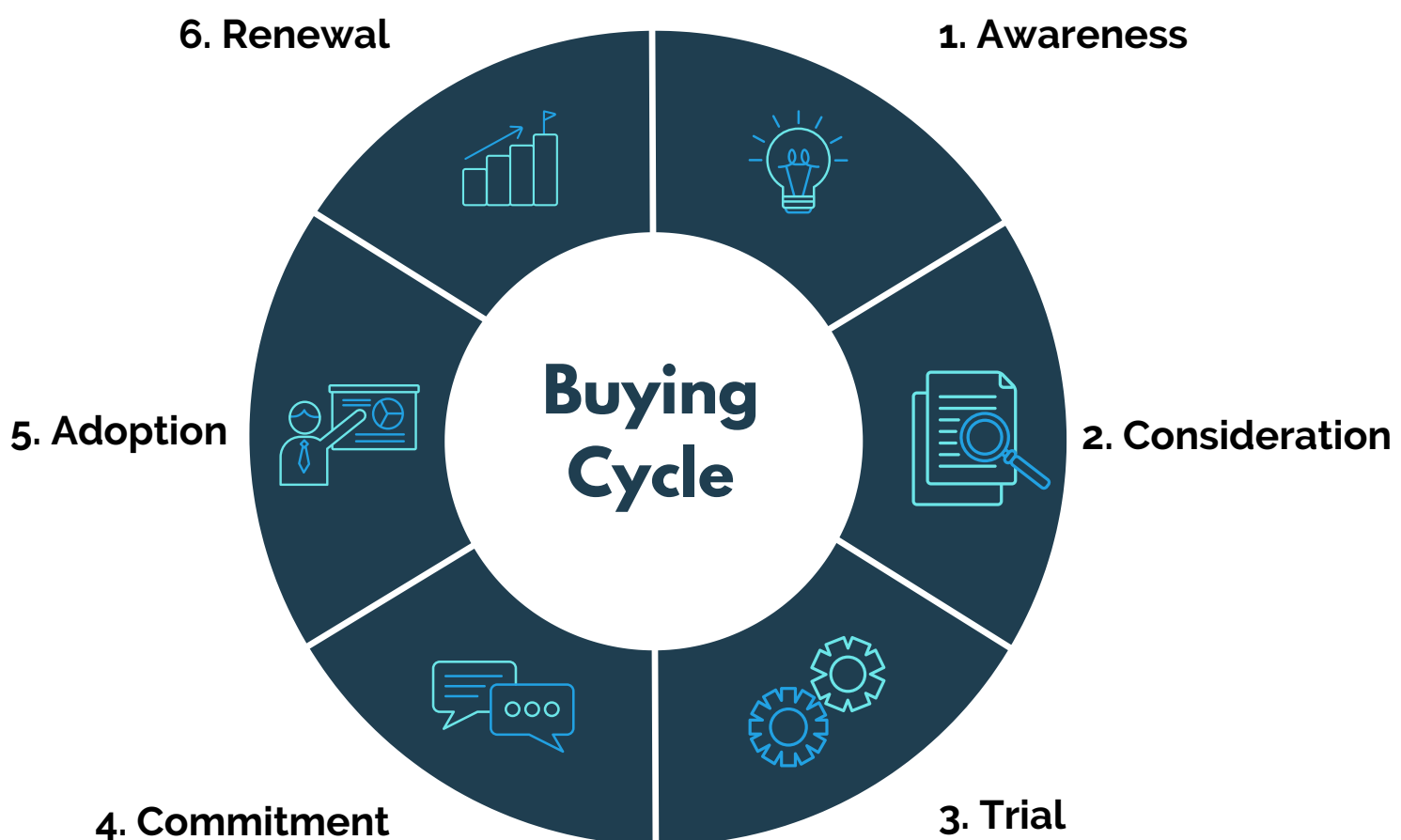
**31 - 40**
# 38%

# Key factors in building trust:

**1. Social Proof:** Other teachers have shared their experience online via social media, forums, or independent review sites.

**2. Impact Focused:** Your company cares about the goals and outcomes of your school customers. You're not making a sale, you're starting a partnership.

**3. Security & Privacy:** You take data protection seriously and have the relevant privacy and GDPR policies publicly available.

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**6. Renewal**

**1. Awareness**

**Buying Cycle**

**5. Adoption**

**2. Consideration**

**4. Commitment**

**3. Trial**

# How the Buying Cycle is Changing _____

Understanding a school's buying process will enable you to identify opportunities to increase trust at each stage.

Today, more than 60% of the UK school workforce is under 40 years of age classing them as Millennials. With Baby Boomers and Gen Xers beginning to retire from the workforce, there's a clear shift in purchasing power underway.

The way in which a Millennial school buyer procures EdTech products is different from that of previous generations.

## Key buying habits of Millennials:

**1. Email Marketing**: This worked particularly well with Gen Xers, but is poorly received by Millennials who instead prefer to consult the Internet or social media when looking for new solutions[5].

**2. Online Reviews:** Millennials are far more discerning buyers than previous generations. 92% are more likely to purchase a B2B product after reading a positive online review[6].

**3. Brand Reputation:** Trust in the company itself is a significant driving factor and actually trumps price, discount, and even product features for many Millennials[7].

**4. Supplier Materials:** Out of all the resources Millennial school buyers use, supplier materials (such as case studies or sales brochures) are ranked as the least trustworthy and influential[7].

**Let's now look at the buying cycle in-depth, evaluating what has changed at each stage.**

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5 Forbes, *Tips on Marketing to the Generations Through Email*, 2019
6 Qualtrics, *Online Reviews Statistics to Know in 2021*
7 PwC, *Millennials at Work: Reshaping the Workplace*, 2020

# 1 Awareness

**Description**: The school recognises it has a problem that needs to be addressed and is looking to identify where the issue lies.

The school will begin to search for potential solutions.

**How it's changed:** Schools are increasingly aware of the potential EdTech holds for solving key issues.

Schools now rely on internet searches twice as much as word of mouth recommendations

# 2 Consideration

**Description**: The school searches for potential solutions to its problem and draws up a shortlist of companies.

The school invites suitable companies to demonstrate their product.

**How it's changed:** Schools can find more solutions than ever before and want more granular comparisons of features on like-for-like solutions.

Factors such as data privacy, security, and interoperability are increasingly evaluated ahead of meeting.
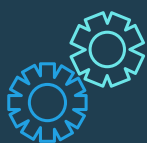
# 3 Trial

**Description**: The school wishes to trial the product before signing a contract.

In the case of large Multi-Academy Trusts, schools will test the product and report their experience back to the Trust central team.

**How it's changed:** The last 18 months have significantly increased the appetite for trialing products.

School buyers have become acutely aware that the implementation and support services a company offers are just as important as the product.

## 4 Commitment

**Description**: The school compares the shortlisted companies and makes a decision on which company to buy from.

**How it's changed:** Multi-year contracts are rarer. Academies and MATs may request break-clauses or an amended contract if they're not fully confident in the solution.

## 5 Adoption

**Description**: The school begins to implement the product. A period of initial onboarding will take place in which the product is set up for use in the school and staff are trained.

Once the onboarding period comes to an end, the school is typically responsible for driving adoption alone.

**How it's changed:** The amount and quality of support provided to a new school are rising factors.

School buyers expect a wider variety of training and support to be made available to their school in order to fully adopt and benefit from the product.

## 6 Renewal

**Description**: The school undertakes an end of contract review, reflecting on adoption, impact of the product, and the on-going value of renewing.

**How it's changed:** School budgets are more closely monitored, and all proposed expenditure is reviewed and assessed. If a product isn't delivering value, expect the school to cancel.
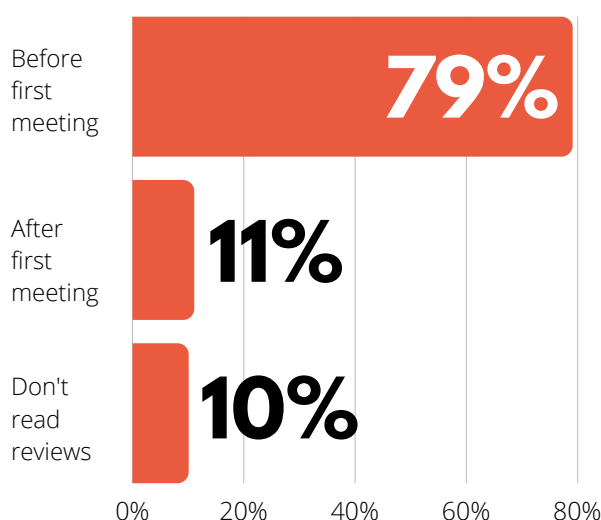
# How to Build
# Trust at Every Stage _____

The **awareness stage** is where a school buyer recognises that they have a challenge or problem within their school and is looking to identify the underlying issue.

Buyers are most likely to find your solution organically at this stage, so having a strong online presence and clear value proposition is key to capturing the attention of prospective schools.

**You can build trust at the awareness stage by undertaking the following actions:**

## EdTech Impact School Buyer Survey 2021

"If you read reviews, at what stage do you do this?"

| Stage | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Before first meeting | **79%** |
| After first meeting | **11%** |
| Don't read reviews | **10%** |

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%

**Build a strong online presence:** The best way for potential buyers to find you is to ensure you turn up where they are. This will mean adopting a multi-channel sales strategy. Channels to consider include search engine results page (Google, Bing, etc), social media, and online marketplaces.

**Have a strong vision:** School buyers want to buy from companies who share their values and vision to improve education. Brand reputation trumps features, and even the largest EdTechs will lose market share if they fail to recognise this.

**Be transparent:** Education sales is a high-context environment, and school buyers don't want to purchase from faceless companies. Become more human by having a team page on your website that gives a bit of background to your organisation. Consider blogging to demonstrate your vision, and use social media to share your impact and wider evidence base.

# Consideration

A school buyer enters the **consideration stage** at the point they identify the root cause of their problem and begin to research potential solutions.

A major shift in the consideration stage over the past few years is that school buyers have moved online, and it has become the norm to research solutions prior to making contact. Today's school buyer is consuming content, reviews and opinions about your product before you've even met them.

**You can build trust at the consideration stage by undertaking the following actions:**

## EdTech Impact School Buyer Survey 2021

"How many reviews give you trust in an EdTech product?"

| Reviews | % |
|---|---|
| 10 Reviews | 31% |
| 25 Reviews | 64% |
| 50 Reviews | 92% |
| 100 Reviews | 100% |
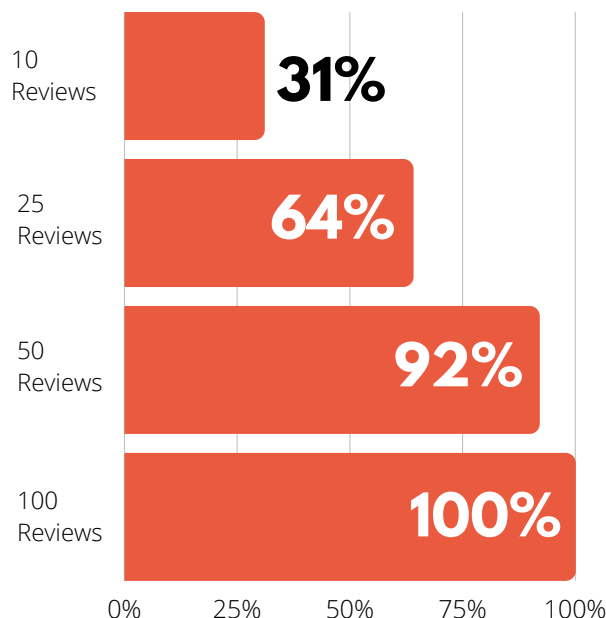
**Social proof:** Teachers don't trust companies; they trust other teachers. School buyers seek validation through reviews from educators in a comparable job role (ie. headteachers want to hear from other headteachers), school opinions, and other independent information.

**Focus on outcomes:** There are more than 1000 EdTech companies registered in the UK, many of whom state they improve outcomes, save teacher time, or save the school money. There's nothing wrong with this approach, but ensure that you back up your claims with evidence. To what extent did it improve outcomes? How much teacher time does it save? Which school saved money as a result of your product?

**Compare and contrast:** How do you compare against your competitors and showcase this to prospective schools? It's common practice for schools to speak with 3 companies in any procurement process. If you can demonstrate your advantages over your competitors, you'll stand out in the sales process.

# Trial

The appetite to **trial products** has significantly increased in the last 24 months, as school buyers have realised that there is an abundance of EdTech products available to them.

The increased use of Internet research, alongside the influx of staff with commercial backgrounds into the Academies sector has led to schools becoming more discerning buyers.

**You can build trust through the trial stage by undertaking the following actions:**
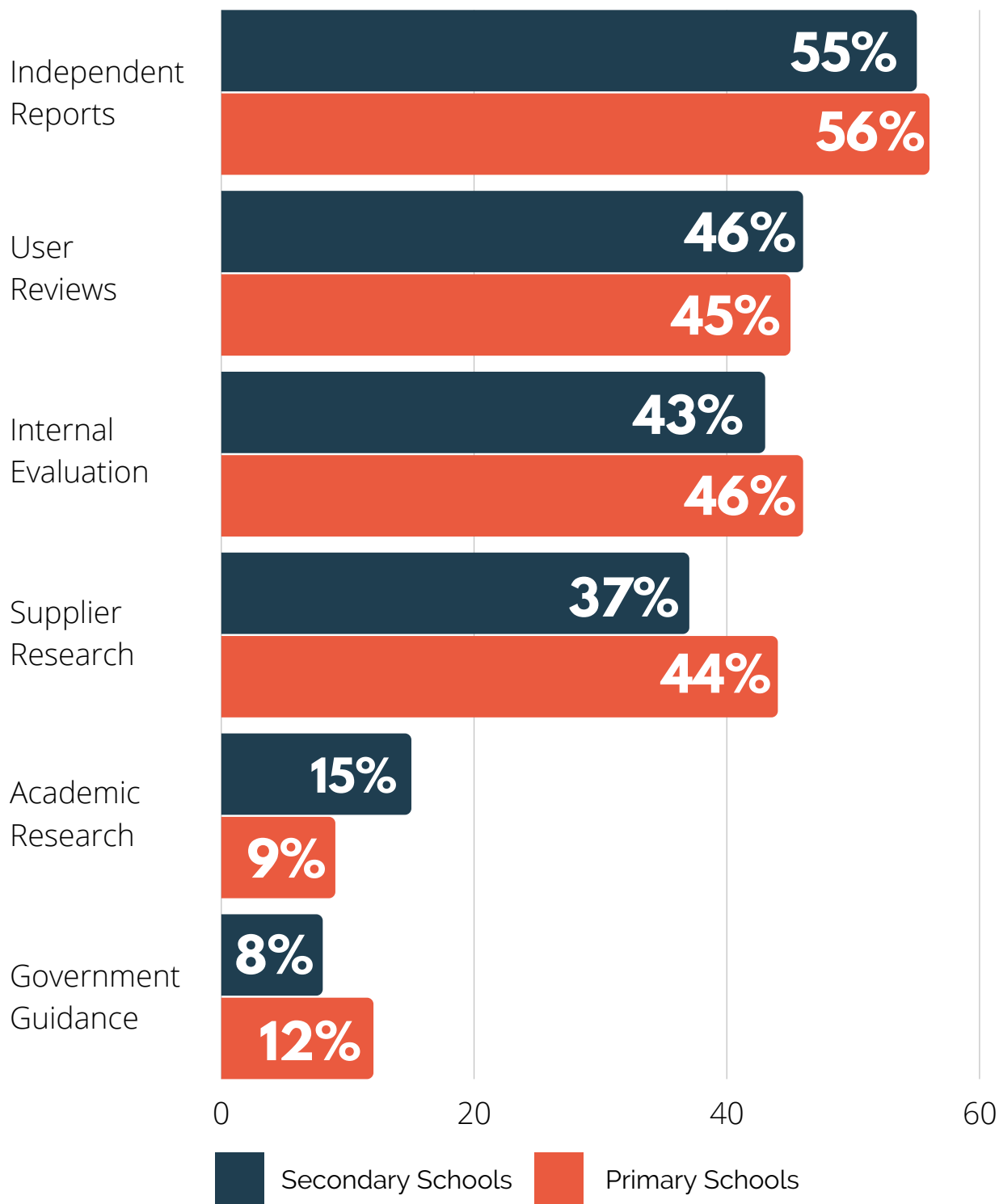
## 3 Types of Trial

- **Upfront Request:** The school asks for a trial in the sales process.
- **Trial Rollout**: The school takes a smaller license for the first year, testing the product before committing to wider adoption.
- **MAT Evaluation:** Trust central teams evaluate products internally with the view to adding them to a preferred supplier shortlist.

**Personalise communication and feedback:** Make sure you regularly check in with your customers and give them the opportunity to feedback. This seems like common sense, but more often than not, school buyers are put onto email lists and receive impersonal, mass updates from the companies trying to sell to them. Build a permanent feedback loop between your customers and your customer success team.

**Customer support and onboarding:** Involve your support teams with your trial schools. Sales staff are good at maintaining communication; however, the main determiner of whether a trial is deemed successful or not is how well the school is able to use your product. For that you need your support team on hand.

**Interoperability with other systems:** Schools use a variety of systems and products, and are realising that siloed data and information has limited value. How well your product connects with a school's core technology (MIS, Finance, Assessment) is a key consideration. If you can provide this information upfront, you can further build trust.

# How do Schools Assess the Efficacy of EdTech Products?



**Independent Reports**
- 55% (Secondary Schools)
- 56% (Primary Schools)

**User Reviews**
- 46% (Secondary Schools)
- 45% (Primary Schools)

**Internal Evaluation**
- 43% (Secondary Schools)
- 46% (Primary Schools)

**Supplier Research**
- 37% (Secondary Schools)
- 44% (Primary Schools)

**Academic Research**
- 15% (Secondary Schools)
- 9% (Primary Schools)

**Government Guidance**
- 8% (Secondary Schools)
- 12% (Primary Schools)

Legend: ■ Secondary Schools  ■ Primary Schools

Source: BESA, *EdTech in English Maintained Schools,* 2020

By the time the school buyer has reached the **commitment stage,** they've shortlisted a selection of options and are ready to purchase.

The Department for Education's 'Value for Money' guidance recommends that schools source three quotes whenever possible, so it is realistic to assume that the school buyer is actively considering two alternative providers.

Trust in your company will make or break any deal at this stage.

**How you can build trust at the commitment stage:**

**75%**

75% of schools leaders say the most important factor in buying a product is how relevant it is to their school

**EdTech Impact School Buyer Survey 20/21**

**Relevance to the school setting:** Schools are a high context buying environment. They want to know your solution will work in an environment like theirs. Headteachers want to read reviews from other headteachers using your product while rural schools want to hear from other rural schools. The better you can 'context-match,' the more trust you build with your prospective customers.

**After-sales support information:** School buyers are increasingly aware that implementation is a key challenge to successfully bringing in new products. The better you can showcase your implementation and support package, the more schools will trust you to support them on the journey and not disappear once the contract is signed.

**Clear data and security policies:** Data protection and security is a key consideration for today's school buyers. Academies and Multi-Academy Trusts are bringing in an influx of staff from the private sector, many of whom have extensive experience with commercial negotiation and compliance. Failing to have the relevant data policies and security standards in place will be a deal-breaker in these situations.

## Adoption

With the contract signed and the school committed, it's easy to think the work is done. This couldn't be further from the truth.

For the school buyer, their project is only just beginning as they reach the **adoption stage.** It's now time to put the product into action and realise the benefits your company has been promoting.

If a school fails to fully adopt a platform within the first 3 months, you'll be fighting an uphill battle to get them to renew.
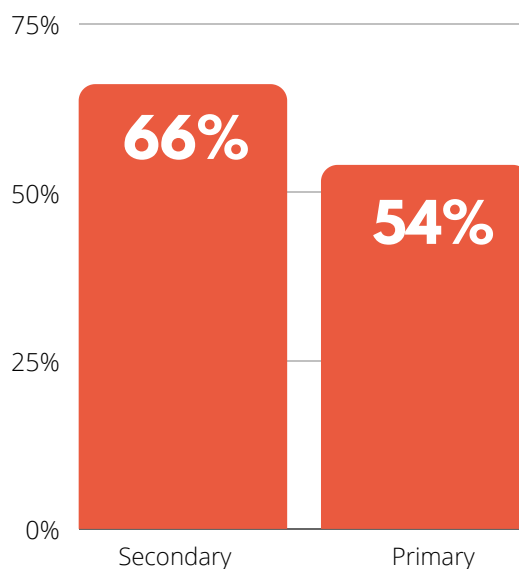
**How you can build trust through the adoption stage:**

### Training is the largest barrier to effective use of ICT resources in schools

| | 66% | 54% |
|---|---|---|
| | Secondary | Primary |

BESA, *ICT Survey*, 2018

**Be proactive in your support:** You only have a fixed window of opportunity to onboard any new school. Leave it too long and motivation to adopt your product will dissipate as other priorities come to the fore. A robust implementation plan, downloadable training guides or assets, and a dedicated support team will help you maximise how well you onboard any new school.

**Benchmark impact:** Is your product delivering the benefits that you advertised to the school? It is important to benchmark the impact for the school in order to ensure you're accurately marketing your product. Doing so can become a powerful marketing tool in itself, as teacher reviews are one of the most trusted sources of information on product efficacy.

**Be open to feedback:** Giving schools the ability to provide feedback through Net Promoter Score (NPS), Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT), or an independent review site demonstrates that you care about their experience. Not only can this help you improve aspects of your product or service, but it also helps to build goodwill and trust - both of which become invaluable should any challenges occur on the project.

# Renewal

Tightening budgets and ever-improving commercial expertise have changed how schools approach the **renewal stage.**

Products are reviewed on the impact they provide and if they're not delivering, schools will consider moving to another provider.

Academies, in particular, are driving this change. They're more active in procuring new solutions, more comfortable with large infrastructure projects (MIS & Finance), and are seeing a greater influx of staff with commercial experience in operational roles.

**How you can build trust at the renewal stage:**

# 2,670

**Of Secondary Schools are Academies**

# 6,102

**Of Primary Schools are Academies**

Department for Education, *Get Information About Schools,* 2021

**Proactively arrange renewal meetings:** Assuming a school will automatically renew is a risky strategy. It is good practice to formally engage a school in a review meeting at least 90 days out from the end of the contract. This gives the school the opportunity to discuss any challenges they've had, so you can address them before the school starts looking for alternatives.

**Have user feedback at hand:** School buyers are increasingly distant from the classroom, occupying senior leadership or operational roles. If you've been surveying users through the adoption phase, this information can be invaluable in a renewal meeting. You can tangibly demonstrate the impact of your product which gives you a ready-made business case as to why they should renew.

**Connect them with a comparable school:** Schools are high context environments, and everything from the size of the school through to demographic factors (EAL and FSM) can impact their ability to implement a new product. If you've had a rocky first year, being able to connect the school buyer with a comparable school using your product can build trust and win the renewal.

# EdTech Impact Seller Solutions

EdTech Impact is built to connect school buyers with EdTech suppliers. With over 1500 product listings and more than 20,000 visitors every month, joining EdTech Impact will empower you to grow faster.

## Build Trust

- **EdTech Impact Profile**: Claim your free profile and begin promoting yourself on the UK's largest EdTech marketplace.
- **Review Generation**: Launch a review campaign and get your users to share authentic feedback about your products and services.
- **Demonstrate Impact**: Developed by UCL, Impact Metrics enable you to demonstrate how you improve student, teacher, and whole school outcomes.

## Boost Conversion

- **Data-Driven Certifications:** Gain EdTech Impact badges and accreditations to help you stand out and influence your prospects.
- **Enhance Existing Marketing:** Review integrations enable you to embed reviews across your social media, email, and website to build trust at every touchpoint.
- **Automate Review Generation**: Utilise our review automations to capture feedback more frequently, and to rank higher in your category.

## Capture Demand

- **Enhanced Profile**: Add videos, case studies, and other downloadable assets to your EdTech Impact profile to increase transparency and demand.
- **Increase Website Traffic**: Increase your traffic by adding click-through buttons on your profile and enable 20,000 educators to connect with you each month.
- **Capture Demand**: Book demos, arrange trials, and capture quote requests directly on your EdTech Impact profile.

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