



# A Novel Decision Journey

## Ecommerce for Manufacturing: The Content Experience

COM | CONTENT  
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*Novel represents a new strain of market conditions that are not fully identified or understood. We were all simultaneously thrust into a melee of panic, fear, confusion, and disorder. There's really no widespread expertise, playbooks, or best practices to guide us.*

-- Brian Solis

To begin understanding new content best practices, ComBlu conducted a special journey mapping exercise to see how the pandemic may be impacting technology related decision-making in B2B.

We chose an ecommerce platform decision in manufacturing as our representative use case, but the learnings for content strategy can be applied across different sectors, technologies and other product and service categories.

For more background, check out our blog – A Novel Content Journey [part 1](#) and [part 2](#).

# OVERVIEW

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Overarching objective was to learn how the coronavirus may be impacting the B2B Decision Journey

## **We designed this novel journey to better understand:**

- How to adjust content strategy appropriately
- Industry context and prioritization
- New best practice models

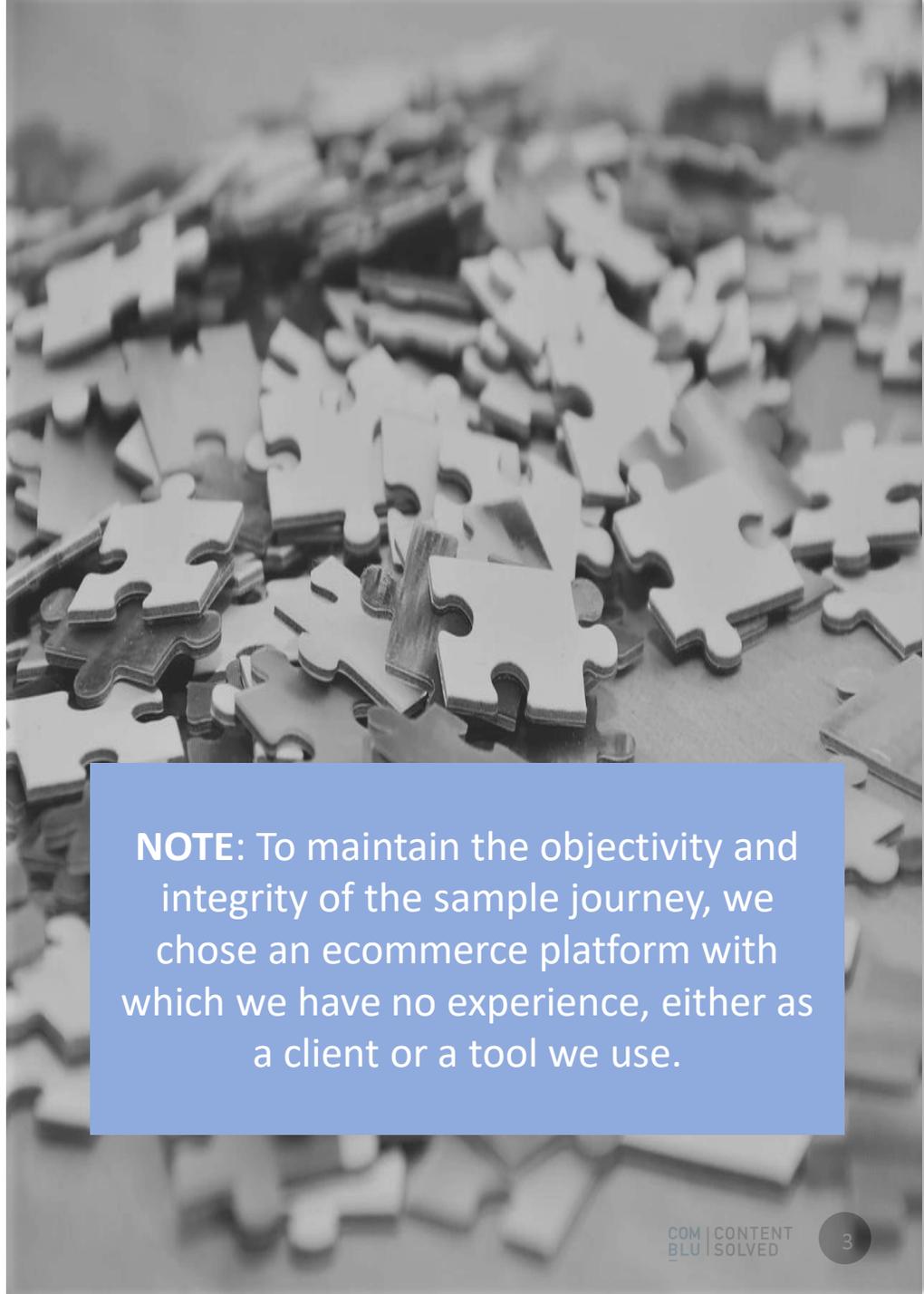
## **JOURNEY SPECIFICS**

- **Product:** B2B technology priorities have shifted. We selected ecommerce technology because it has moved higher on the priority list with companies needing to improve or implement it for the first time.
- **Industry:** We chose manufacturing because of the complex challenges facing the different sectors and because it tends to lag in ecommerce.
- **Buyer Persona:** We wanted a representative role that would be a primary decision-maker, so we used an IT Director as our prospective buyer.

## **JOURNEY PARAMETERS**

### **Focused on Awareness phase of the decision journey**

- **Channels:** Search, paid social, email, partners
- **Content:** Blogs, media/thought leadership and sponsored posts

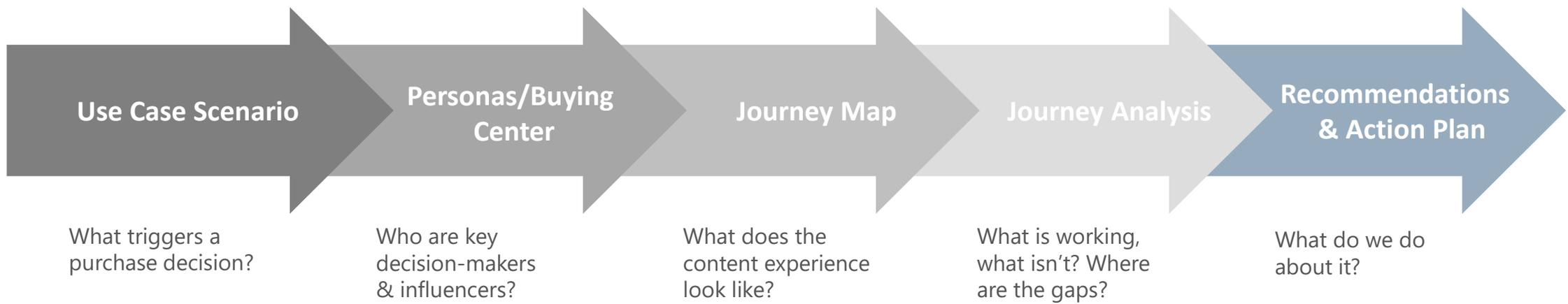


**NOTE:** To maintain the objectivity and integrity of the sample journey, we chose an ecommerce platform with which we have no experience, either as a client or a tool we use.

# JOURNEY PROCESS

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A content decision journey takes the use case + the persona and then captures the content and engagement experience, on- and off-property.





# PERSONA SNAPSHOT

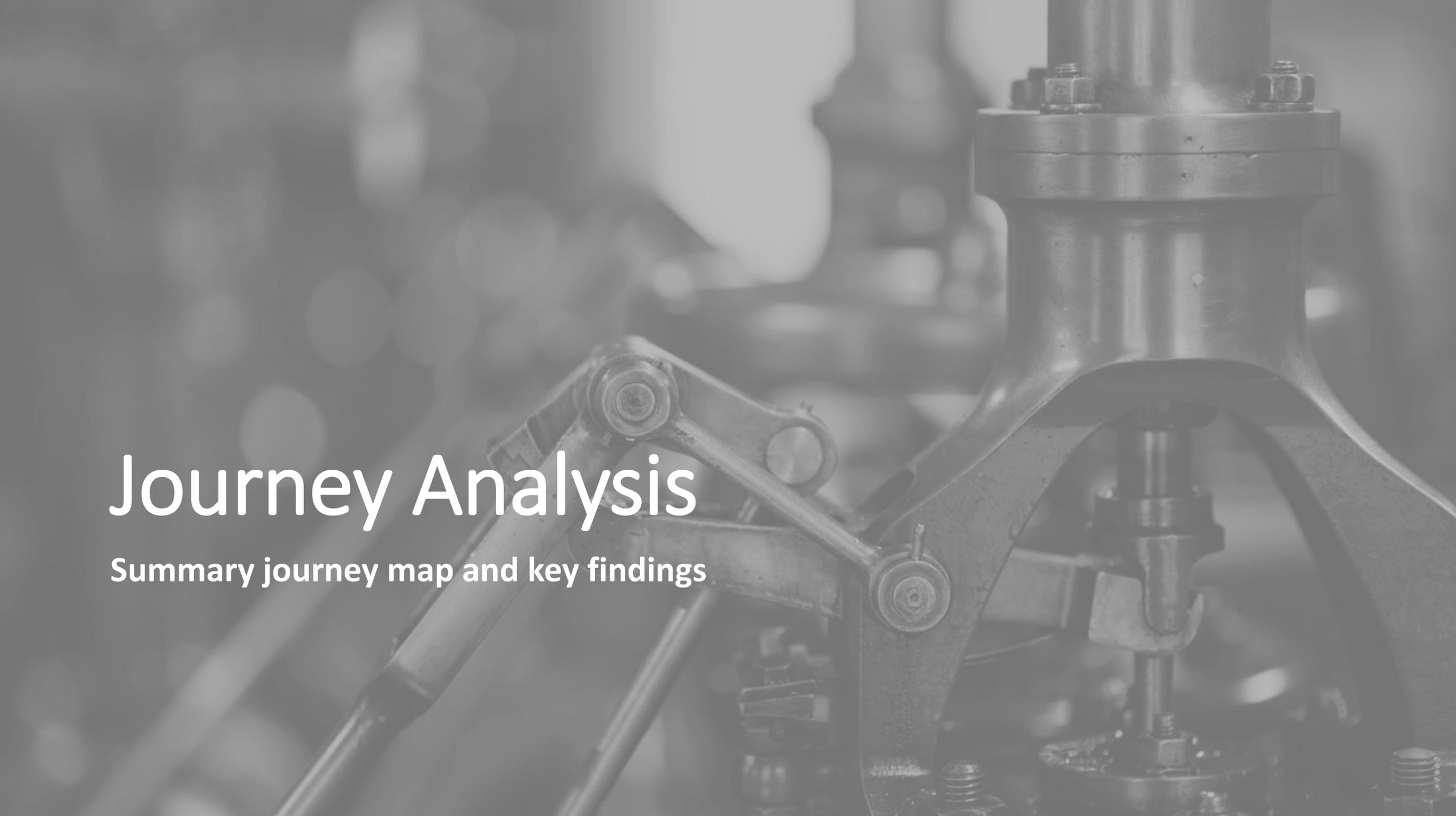
IT Decision-maker Fred is no nonsense and ~~wants~~ needs the facts. His BS flag is always at the ready.



*“ Even if I’m not doing the heavy lifting on a technology evaluation, I approve all technology related decisions for the company.*

*I rely on salespeople and marketing content because I have to, but I don’t trust a lot of it.*

<b>What content &amp; messaging does he value most?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Architectural diagrams</li> <li>• Security whitepapers</li> <li>• Features (which are custom vs. out of the box)</li> <li>• Clear and concise product and service information</li> <li>• Industry specific content</li> </ul>
<b>What are his main turn-off’s?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salesy content</li> <li>• Jargon</li> <li>• Gated content</li> <li>• Referring to technology as ‘easy’</li> </ul>
<b>What are his go-to sources:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer network</li> <li>• Colleagues</li> <li>• Industry analysts and news</li> <li>• Other customers</li> </ul>
<b>What keeps him up at night?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data breach</li> <li>• Downtime</li> </ul>



# Journey Analysis

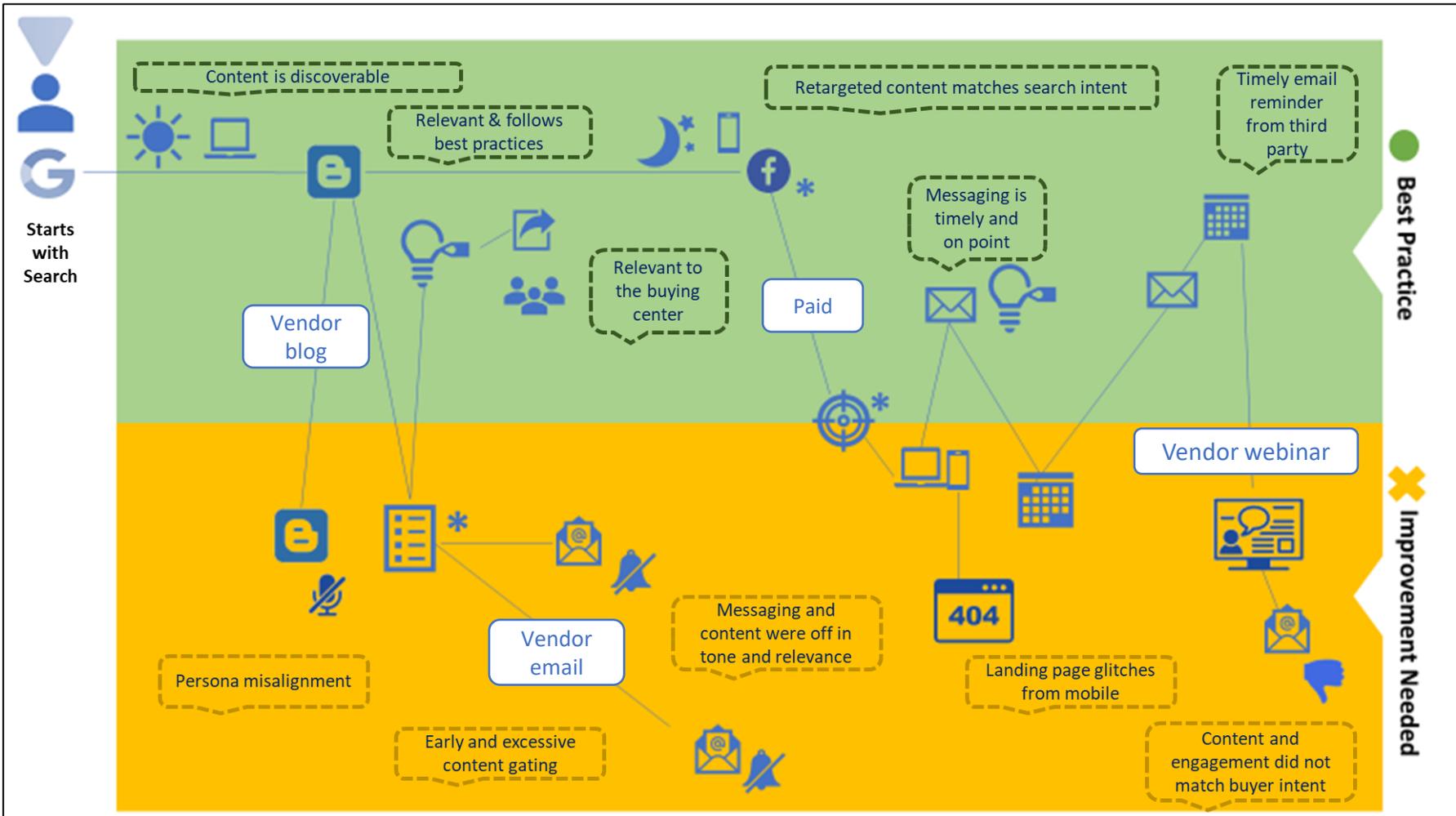
Summary journey map and key findings

# JOURNEY MAP: INITIAL DISCOVERY

This is a visual representation of our awareness journey.

Map shows where the ecommerce vendor applies best practice and where there are issues to be addressed.

The following slides will drill into the detail.



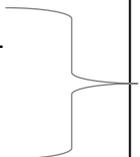
# SUMMARY SCORECARD

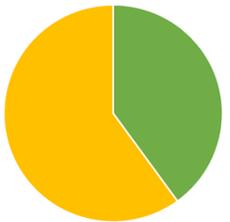
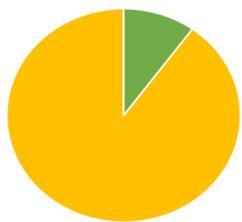
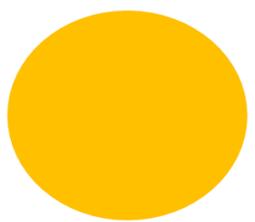
**We looked at 3 categories of diagnostics**

1. Vendor content experience
2. Relevance to what's happening in the industry and persona
3. Crisis communications - appropriateness

 BEST PRACTICE  
 NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

SELECT CONTENT ASSETS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE SCORES



CATEGORY:	Content Quality & Customer Experience	Industry + Role	Pandemic Messaging & Communication
RATING:			
SELECT DRIVERS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Blog 1</li> <li>+ Study</li> <li>- Blog 2</li> <li>- Webinar registration</li> <li>- Registration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Webinar copy</li> <li>- Webinar</li> <li>- Email copy</li> <li>- Related content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tone</li> <li>- Headline</li> <li>- Personalization</li> </ul>

# LEARNINGS & TAKEAWAYS



## Vendor's experience was a mixed bag:

- They did a good job with discoverability, which is a primary objective of awareness engagement
- But the actual content quality and relevance was hit and miss
- Tone, personalization, engagement and channel integration are areas that can be improved
- They should also better demonstrate industry knowledge
- In the category of 'low hanging fruit', there were some technical glitches to fix

## EXAMPLE: HIGH/LOW QUALITY CONTENT COMPARISON



### Blog 1 follows best practices & provides utility:

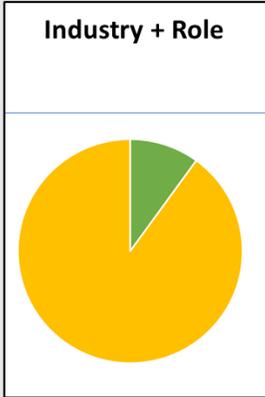
- Tone had appropriate sense of urgency.
- Current information and is regularly updated
- Includes other voices, such as experts and customers
- Comprehensive, but high level and contains relevant information on digital experience
- Scannable format with actionable lists
- Practices good SEO
- Bundles related content



### Webinar does not live up to the description:

- Messaging and tone were off, sales pitch
- Given the lead time of the webinar was expecting new information. Aggregation of other media's data.
- Constant interruptions with live polls without any live results
- More 'marketecture' than architecture
- Nothing on peak load or regulatory but was able to provide some answers when asked
- The presenter DID NOT know about industry experience or names of industry specific systems

# LEARNINGS & TAKEAWAYS



## High-value content for manufacturing ITDMs was absent:

- Demonstrating industry experience is A MUST. A lack of it will keep vendors out of consideration.
- In terms of specific assets, ITDMs are looking for examples. Architectural diagrams are helpful tools because **systems integration is such a showstopper**. Security whitepapers are a must read as well.
- Messaging should be clear and concise. Be straight and get to the point. An IT Director does not have the time to sit with coffee in hand and read an accounting about a day in his life. Just the facts, please.
- Send your best and seasoned SMEs to represent you at events and in communications.



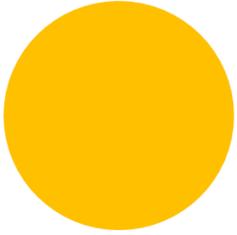
## EXAMPLE: ON-TARGET EMAIL MESSAGING

One-third of organizations expect “moderate to severe” operational and logistical challenges to last through years’ end. Many are concerned about the long-term impact on consumer confidence, or how the pandemic will fundamentally change buyer preferences and behavior. Join our webinar to understand:

- How to address supply chain optimization and customer experience challenges stemming from the COVID-19 outbreak
- Why (and how) to better prepare your business for unexpected disruptions with a reliable ecommerce solution
- What challenges your business may face after the storm settles

# LEARNINGS & TAKEAWAYS

## Pandemic Messaging & Communication



### Novel content marketing requires new best practices

- Resources are limited and shifting. Marketers need to accommodate for changes to the buying center and potentially account for different roles stepping in and out.
- Content has an even shorter shelf-life than before. Timely topics and up-to-date information are high-value.
- Tone really matters. Buyers are making personal and professional decisions simultaneously. They are emotional, tired and short on patience.
- Open the funnel. Don't. Gate. Every. Piece. Of. Content.
- Think before you hit send. Look at every piece of content you publish. Ensure that its appropriate for the time.



### EXAMPLE: TONE DEAF EMAIL OUTREACH

**Is one of these you?** - Wherever you are on your ecommerce journey, I recommend these guides to help you succeed:

1. **I'm thinking about launching my first web store :D**
2. **I love my current web store :)**
3. **My web store drives me mad :(**

A grayscale photograph of a path through tall grass leading to a wooden lattice gate. The path is made of wooden planks and leads towards a gate made of a wooden lattice. The grass is tall and dense, framing the path. The overall tone is muted and artistic.

# Journey Mapping Detail

**Key Points Along ITDM's Content Journey at Initial Discovery Phase**

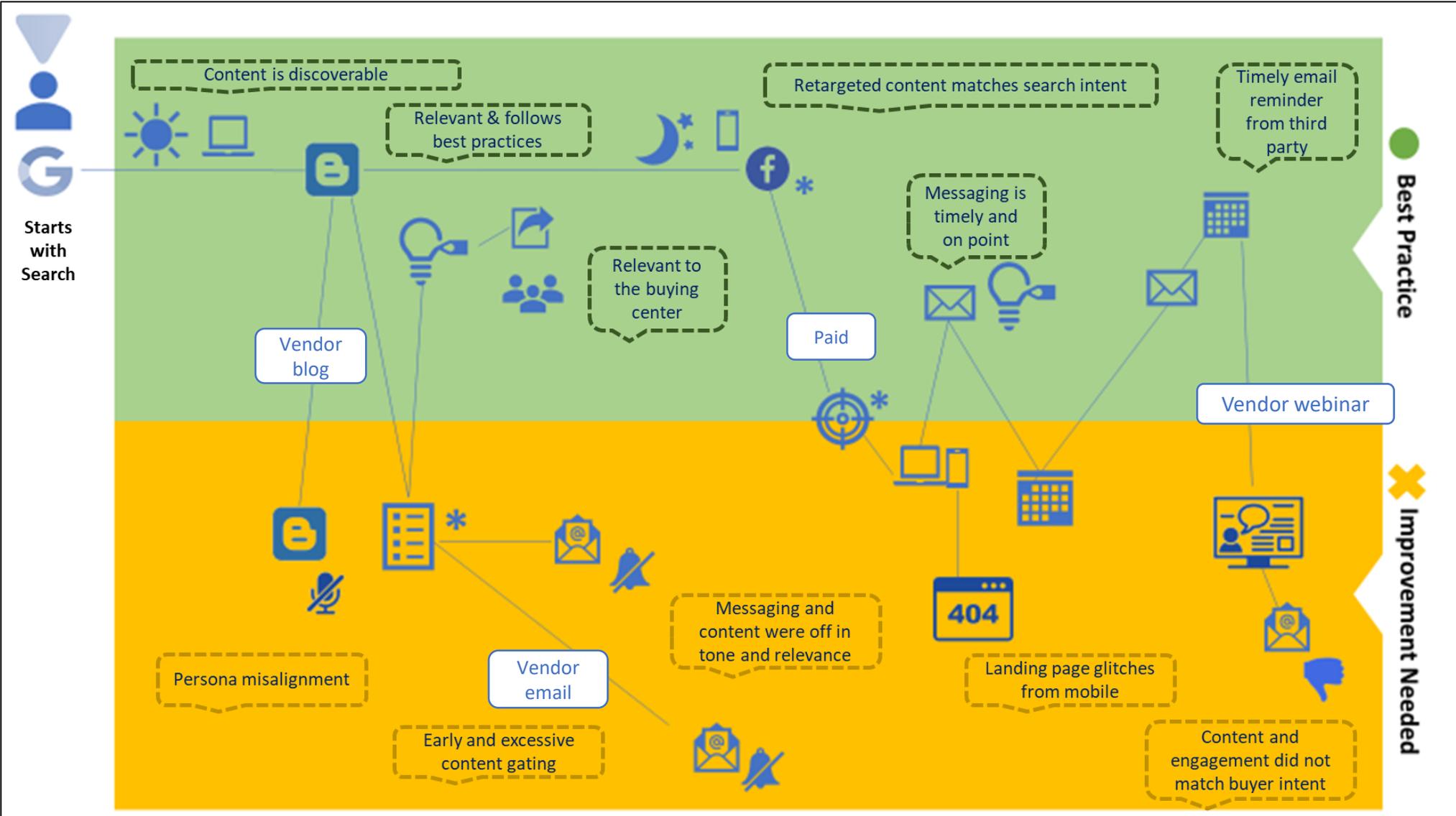
# JOURNEY MAP: INITIAL DISCOVERY

## START

Fred starts with basic searches:

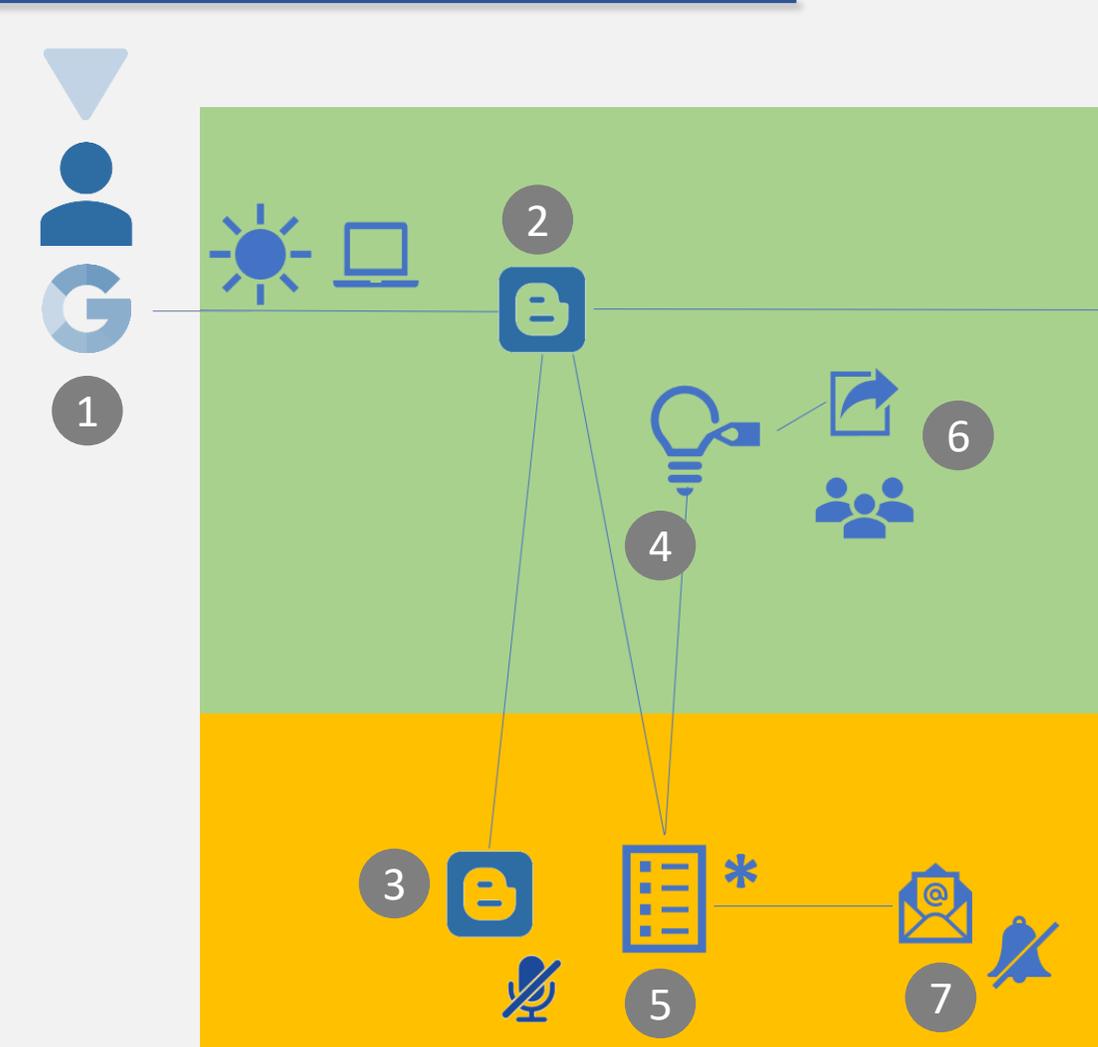
- “COVID-19”
- “B2B”
- “Ecommerce”
- “Examples”

Fred uses multiple devices to conduct his research during and after normal business hours.



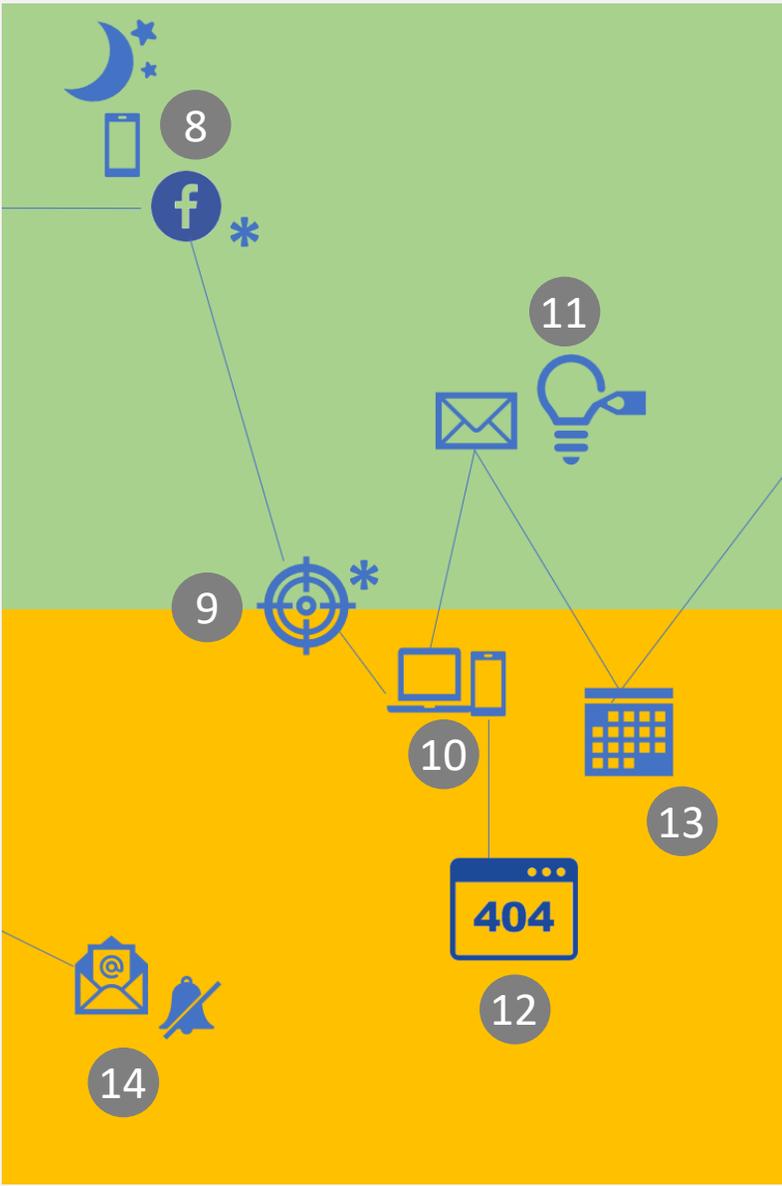
# FRED STARTS WITH GENERAL SEARCHES DURING THE DAY, ON WORK LAPTOP IN HOME OFFICE

- 1 Fred is **searching for post-pandemic** related challenges pertaining to manufacturing and the state of B2B ecommerce.
- 2 Scrolls past the ads; clicks thru to a vendor blog post with (a somewhat) on point headline that **included the word “Examples”**.
- 3 The blog contains a link to information on **peak load times**, so he clicks. Lengthy marketing story that doesn’t quickly answer his questions. **Punt.**
- 4 Back in the blog he zeroes in on a buyer experience study at the end that may contain a starting point for **requirements**.
- 5 Knowing its going to alert a sales rep to his presence, Fred **reluctantly registers** for the study. Though he doesn’t use his real first name.
- 6 The blog gets **updated regularly** so he sends it to the team along with the downloaded PDF.
- 7 Vendor sales rep sends a **“personalized”** email to Fred’s alias name. In the note, the rep ‘hopes he is enjoying his study’ and provides a link to an on-demand webinar he might like. Fred does not like. It was clearly written before the entire world changed and **not edited to acknowledge the crisis**.



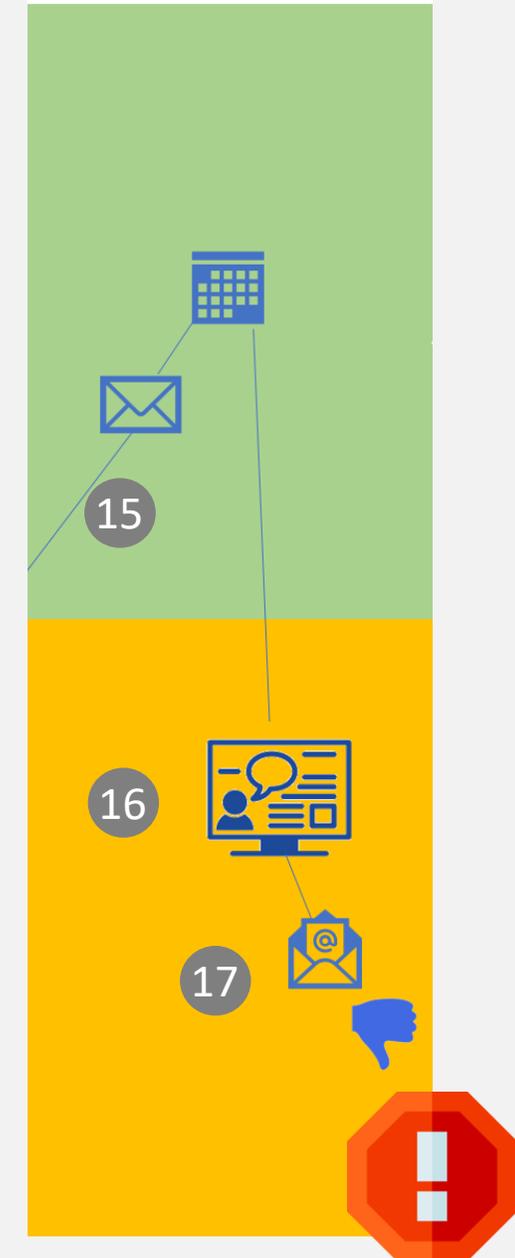
# FRED'S ACTIVITIES TRIGGER A SERIES OF EMAIL OUTREACH AND AD TARGETING

- 8 After a very long day – that's not yet over – Fred scrolls through Facebook on his mobile. **Fred doesn't normally use the social network**, but he needs to stay in touch with family and friends. He worries about their data.
- 9 A sponsored ad on Facebook from the vendor promoting a new webinar *on navigating the supply chain and B2B ecommerce experience* catches his eye. **Normally he would never click on an ad** – especially after hours – but, this was not a normal situation. Reluctantly clicks through and is taken to a landing page.
- 10 He hears the ping from his email with the registration confirmation and topic details. **The email is long with tiny type, so he launches it on his laptop**. He notes his real name was auto populated from Facebook and that it was sent from a different domain than the vendor.
- 11 The detailed description of the what was to be covered **seemed cogent and on point**.
- 12 Switches back to his phone and clicks thru as instructed by the landing page and **got an error**. Fred wonders about the vendor's own integration. Shouldn't they be a walking advertisement? Wouldn't they have tested for this?
- 13 **Annoyed with the glitch and distracted by using multiple devices** simultaneously when he's tired. Fred shuts it all down before he added it to his calendar.
- 14 Receives a second "personalized" email from the vendor sales rep with no mention of the webinar. **The email is way off the mark** as it wants Fred to select an emoji face as a way to self-describe his "ecommerce platform journey" point. WTF? What he needs to know is the webinar date and time.



# FRED GETS WHAT HE NEEDS FROM A THIRD-PARTY

- 15 A week later, Fred receives an email reminder from the webinar provider. He rereads the detail and decides that it still looks worth attending. **Sounds like no BS & has the latest information.** Fred adds it to his calendar.
- 16 Attends the webinar live. It does not live up to its description. It was really a glorified sales pitch with more 'marketecture' than architecture. **The presenter also wasn't up to speed on industry experience or points of integration.** He also didn't know some basic manufacturing terms which did not give Fred a warm and fuzzy.
- 17 Receives a follow-up email from the presenter with a link to the recording and some kind of '*beginner's guide to ecommerce*' eBook that he must register for. Which he doesn't. Nothing more from the original sales rep. **The vendor does not make into the consideration set (AKA the short list).**





## Why didn't the vendor make the short list?

- There are over 1,300 commerce and sales technology companies, making it a very crowded space. Practicing good SEO habits is critical to discoverability.
- But there was too much friction in the journey to nurture the buyer out of initial discovery and into the consideration phase. Sales and marketing misalignment and siloed channels had a direct impact to the customer experience.
- Content quality matters, and not just to Google. It matters to the team of decision-makers evaluating your product or service. In order to resonate with them, buyer preferences and expectations have to guide all efforts. In this case, that did not happen.
- When done right, personalization can double or triple the rate of conversion. But personalization has to have a solid strategy behind it. Who are you personalizing the content for and to what end? If it is to help your buyer solve a problem or complete a task, then you have succeeded. If it's simply a way to extract data from them, then you have failed.
- It all adds up. Ultimately, our buyer did not have a lot of confidence in the vendor. In addition to the technical glitches and immature voice, there was a lack of industry depth and expertise in the content and engagement.



# CONNECT WITH COMBLU

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: B2B BUYERS & THE DECISION JOURNEY



[How multi-generational insights influence the b2b buying center](#)



[Where does your content journey lead?](#)



[Putting personas in perspective](#)



[Hitchhikers guide to a content journey 2: The buying center at the end of the universe](#)

## INDUSTRY ARTICLES



[Why the coronavirus will bend but not break ecommerce](#)



[B2b companies are re-examining their-ecommerce expectations as the pandemic rolls on](#)



[Coronavirus is a wake up call for supply chain management](#)



[How coronavirus is affecting manufacturers](#)