

PRINT IN THE EYE OF THE BUYER  
IDENTIFYING AND  
MEETING THE NEEDS OF  
TODAY'S CUSTOMERS

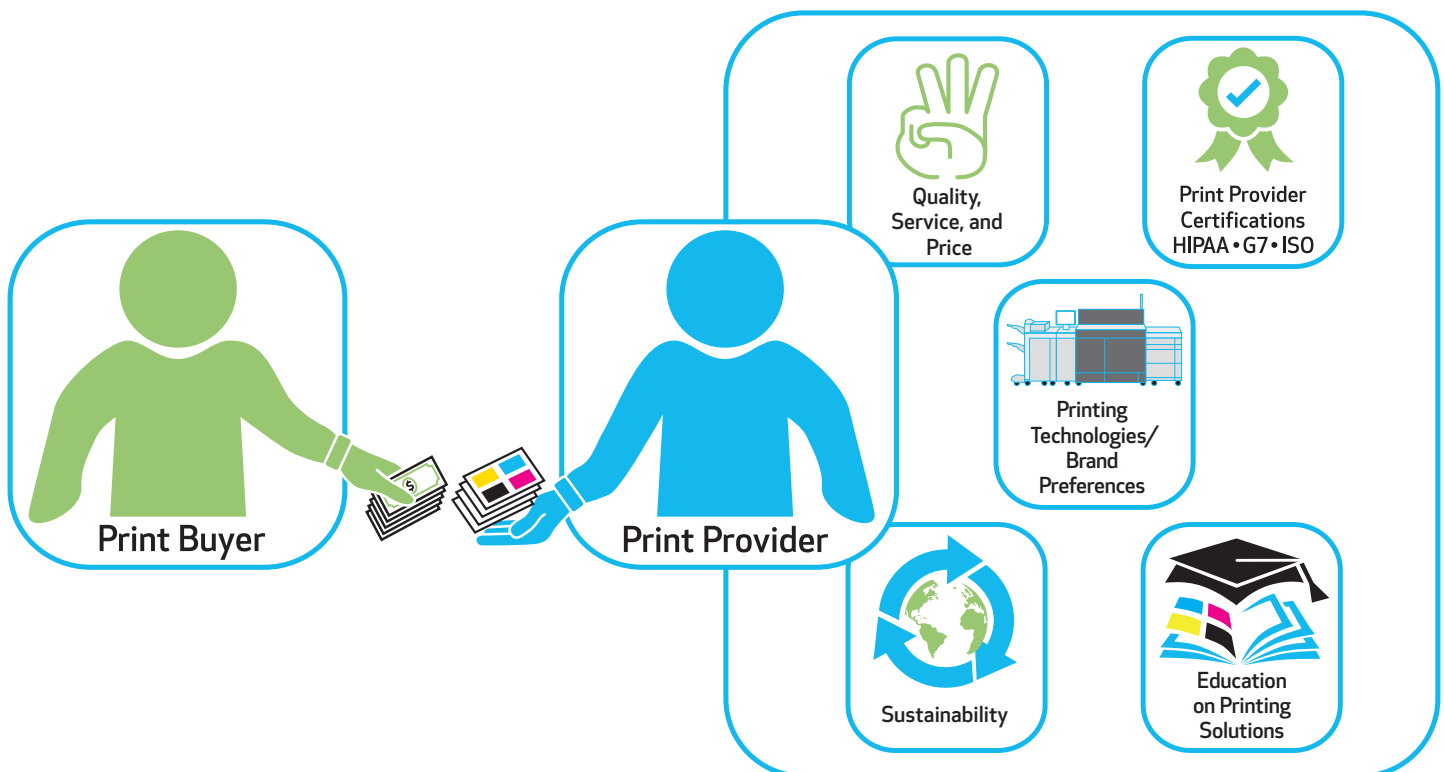


# Identifying and Meeting the Needs of Today's Customers

Meeting print customer expectations has never been more important or challenging. Today's organizations have many print providers and media options beyond print to choose from to meet their marketing and communication needs. Winning in today's competitive business environment requires print service providers (PSPs) to develop sound strategies that enhance customer experiences, build loyalty, and grow sales. Essential components to developing those strategies include understanding print buyers' expectations, technology knowledge, and perceptions of applications and providers.

## What Today's Print Buyers Are Looking For

Digital Technologies Have Dramatically Changed Print Purchasing Practices



Printing processes, communication options, and print purchasing practices all have dramatically changed because of innovations in digital technologies, resulting in the emergence of a new class of print buyer. Looking to identify and define key characteristics of today's buyers, this latest NAPCO Research\* study and white paper series, sponsored by Canon U.S.A., Inc., surveyed over 200 print buyers or influencers.

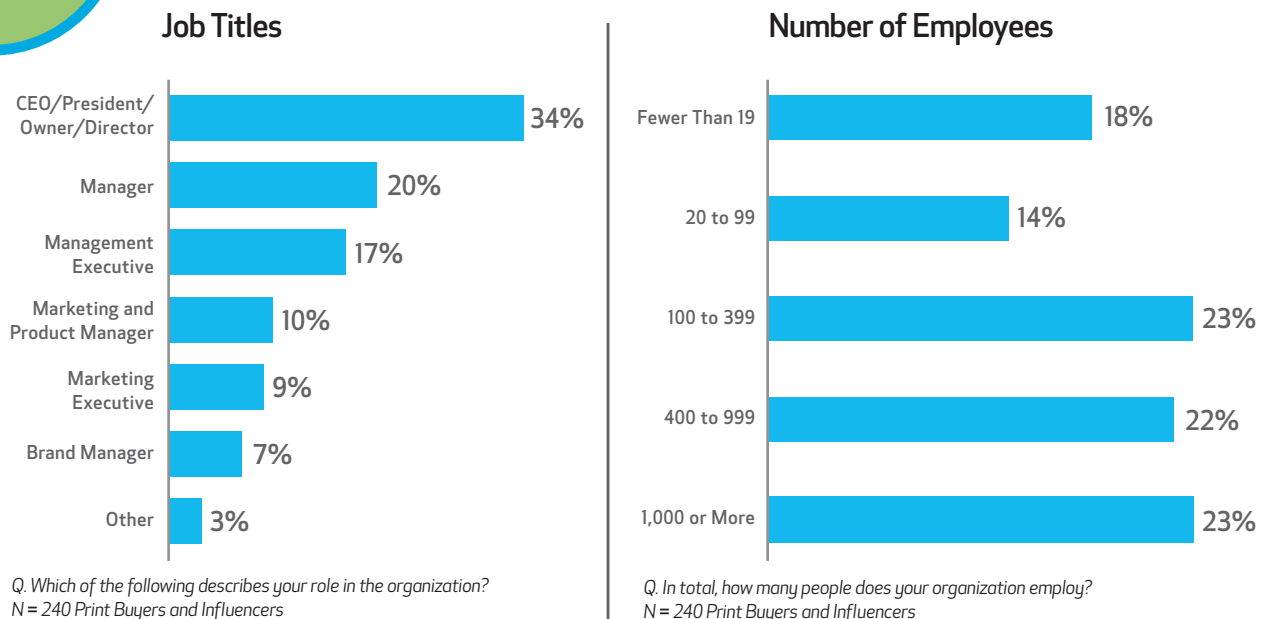
The research offers insights on what print buyers and influencers expect from providers, ways to help enhance the buyer experience, and strategies for engaging with buyers. Print providers can apply these research findings to customer engagement, sales, and marketing efforts.

### Over 200 Print Buyers Surveyed

The research surveyed 240 print buyers and influencers. Figures 1 and 2 describe the job titles, company size, and print experience of participants. Respondents hold top-level or key management positions and work at organizations representing a mix of sizes, with most employing over 100 people.

More than two-thirds of respondents (69%) report having an in-house printing operation.

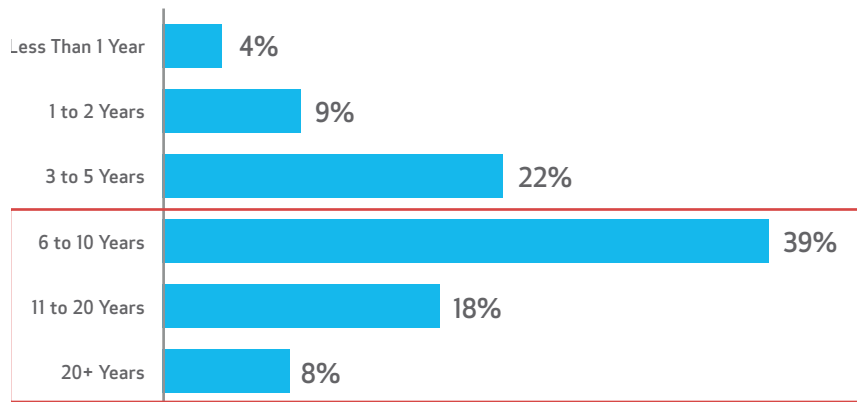
**Figure 1**  
Respondent Profiles



\*A unit of NAPCO Media, the parent company of Printing Impressions and In-Plant Impressions.

To qualify to take the survey, respondents needed to either purchase or influence print buying. The majority of respondents has been involved in purchasing or influencing print for six years or more. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) report they're extremely familiar with printing processes used to produce their organization's printing work, while 23% are moderately familiar and 10% somewhat/slightly familiar.

**Figure 2**  
Respondents' Print Experience



Sixty-five percent (65%) of respondents have 6 years or more of experience purchasing or influencing print.

Q. How long have you been involved in purchasing or influencing print?  
N = 240 Print Buyers and Influencers

### Understanding Customer Preferences Improves Results

Effective sales and marketing messages speak to real audience needs and requirements. An important question for print providers to consider and answer when creating marketing and sales messaging is, "What really matters to clients and prospects?" Do customers prefer certain printing processes or brands of equipment to print their work or is that not important? What certifications, if any, do buyers expect their print providers to have?

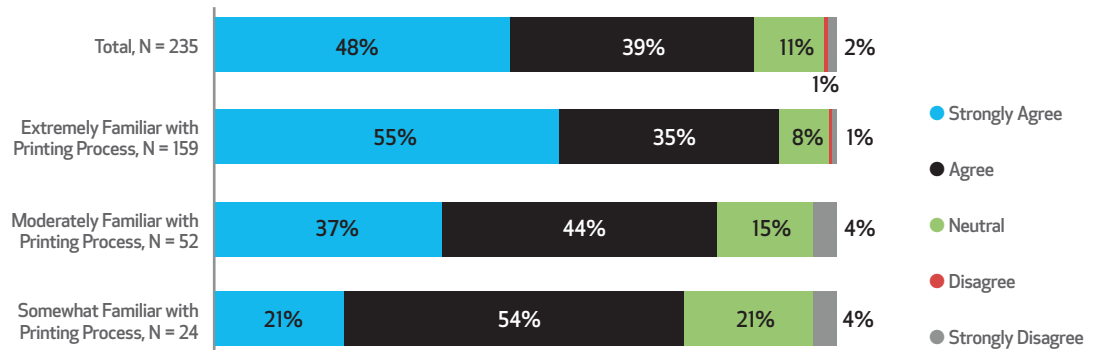
Understanding print buyers' demands and expectations are essential ingredients for directing sales, marketing, and technology investments. Print service providers are under enormous pressure to make the right strategy moves to retain and grow customers in a highly competitive market.

## Printers are Making the Grade

When asked if print providers understand and meet quality expectations, nearly half of respondents (48%) strongly agreed (Figure 3). This finding jumped to 55% for those who are extremely familiar with how their work is printed.

While respondents are mostly satisfied with their print providers, there's always room for improvement. As competition continues to increase, print providers need to be ever vigilant in managing and meeting customer expectations. This requires paying attention to research studies, articles, and events that offer insights into print customer needs. It also requires ongoing action to meeting changing buyer needs.

**Figure 3**  
Print Providers Meeting Buyer Expectations



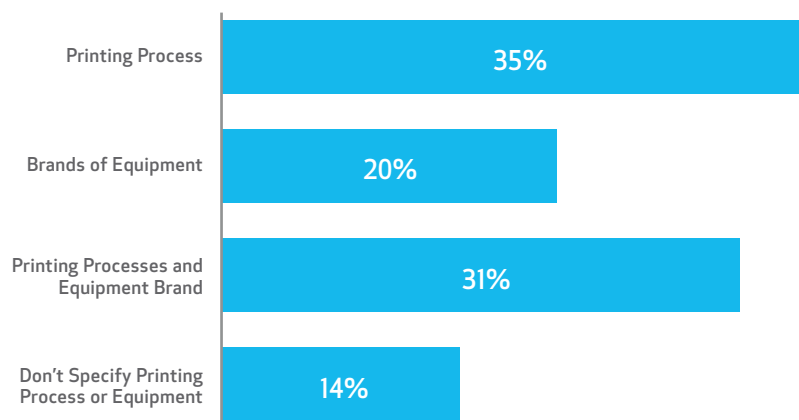
Q. Please describe your level of agreement with the following statement: Our print provider(s) understand and meet our quality expectations.

Source: *Print in the Eye of the Buyer*, NAPCO Research 2020

## Buyers Specify Print Process and/or Equipment Brands

The survey revealed interesting insights around the ways print buyers and influencers specify jobs. A large majority of respondents (86%) indicate they specify print processes and/or brands of printing devices used to produce their print work. As shown in Figure 4, two-thirds of those surveyed select the process used to print their job, and over half specify the brand of equipment used.

**Figure 4**  
Buyers Specify Printing Processes and Equipment



Q. When specifying/purchasing print, do you specify the printing process or brand of equipment to produce the work?

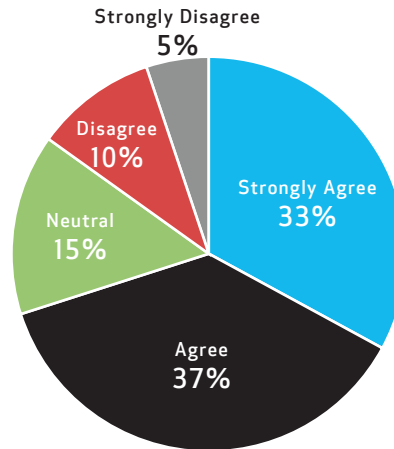
N = 240 Print Buyers and Influencers

Source: *Print in the Eye of the Buyer*, NAPCO Research 2020

## Brand of Printing Equipment Key Factor in Provider Selection

Print providers often question if their sales and marketing efforts should include the brands of printing equipment used in their operation. An ongoing question debated by many printing industry strategists and marketers is, “Do print customers select providers based on the brand of printing gear used to produce work?” The response from survey participants is that most do (Figure 5): 70% of respondents say that the brands of printing equipment owned by a print provider is a key decision factor when making their selection.

**Figure 5**  
Brand of Equipment Factor in Print Provider Selection



*Q. Please describe your level of agreement with the following statement: A decision factor in selecting print providers is the brands of equipment they use to print our work.*  
N = 230 Print Buyers and Influencers

Source: *Print In The Eye Of The Buyer*, NAPCO Research 2020

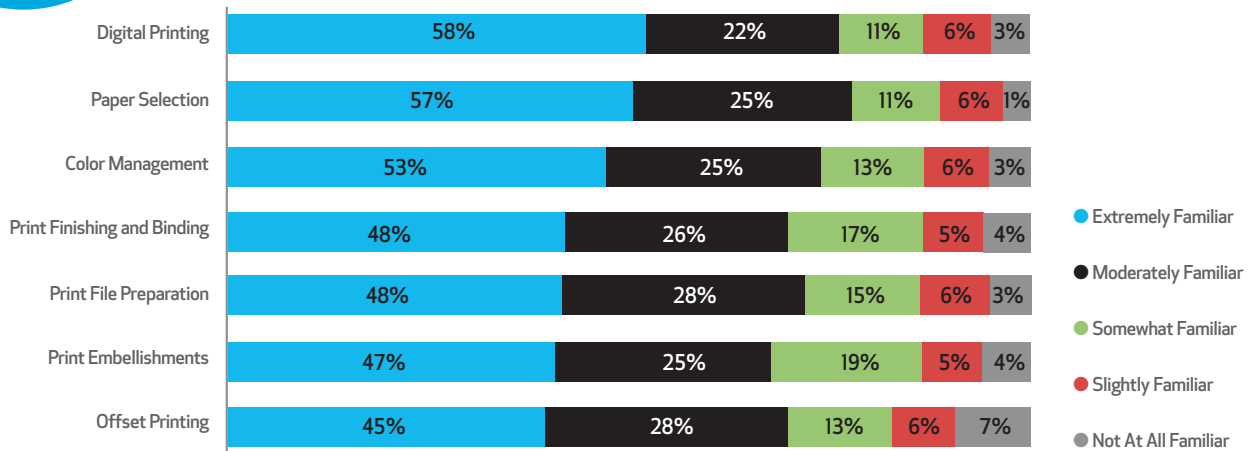
This finding indicates that print providers that promote their equipment used may have an advantage over those that don't. While at one time many print providers broadly shared information on the brands of equipment they used, the practice has declined. Now might be the time for companies to rethink this approach, market their equipment brands, and include equipment lists on their websites. Even though survey respondents highlight the importance of sharing the brands of printing equipment with prospective customers, it's only one component of a larger marketing strategy that should demonstrate the benefits your organization offers customers.

Respondents that specify the brand of equipment used to print their work were asked what brands they prefer, and close to two-thirds (64%) selected Canon, the top response.

## Digital Printing Key Process Specified by Print Buyers

The top process used to print work for 88% of respondents was digital printing; this number is more than double the 41% that reported using offset. Interestingly, more than half of survey respondents reported that they're extremely familiar with digital printing while a few said they are not (Figure 6). Buyers, overall, indicate a high degree of familiarity with printing process components, including paper selection and color management, as over half report being extremely familiar with those tasks. At the same time, there are respondents less familiar with key processes and features. No matter where customers are on the knowledge scale, there's an opportunity to build and strengthen relationships with print buyers and marketers via filling in knowledge gaps with educational initiatives.

**Figure 6**  
Print Buyers' Familiarity with Print Production Areas



Q. Please indicate your level of familiarity in the following areas.  
N = 233 Print Buyers and Influencers

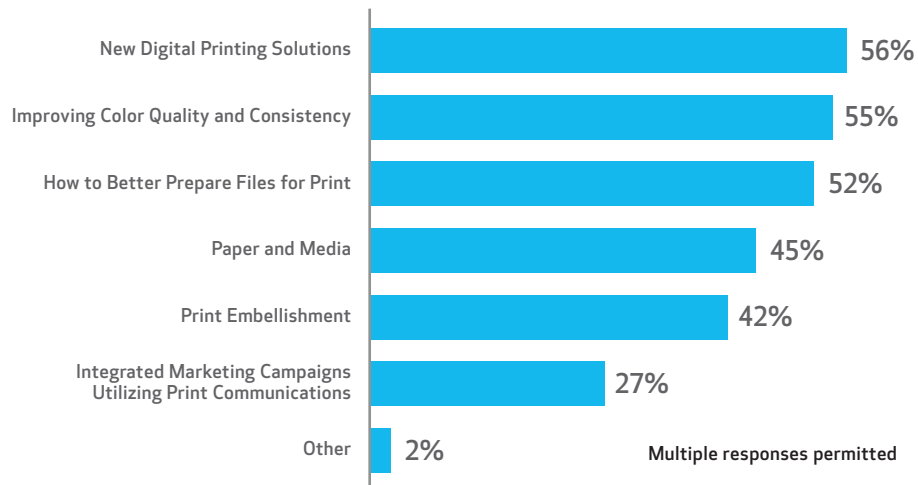
Source: *Print in the Eye of the Buyer*, NAPCO Research 2020



## Areas to Expand Customer Education

Survey respondents are looking to expand their knowledge on print technologies and processes. By offering customers and prospects education on technology and training them on how to improve color consistency and file preparation, a printer can position itself as a partner, build stronger customer relationships, and help improve production efficiency. While over half the respondents expressed interest in learning more about new digital printing solutions, ways to improve color quality and consistency, and better ways to prepare print files (Figure 7), larger firms with more than 400 employees were especially interested.

**Figure 7**  
Buyer  
Interest in  
Print Production  
Topics



Q. Which of the following would you like to know more about regarding print production?  
N = 233 Print Buyers and Influencers

Source: *Print in the Eye of the Buyer*; NAPCO Research 2020

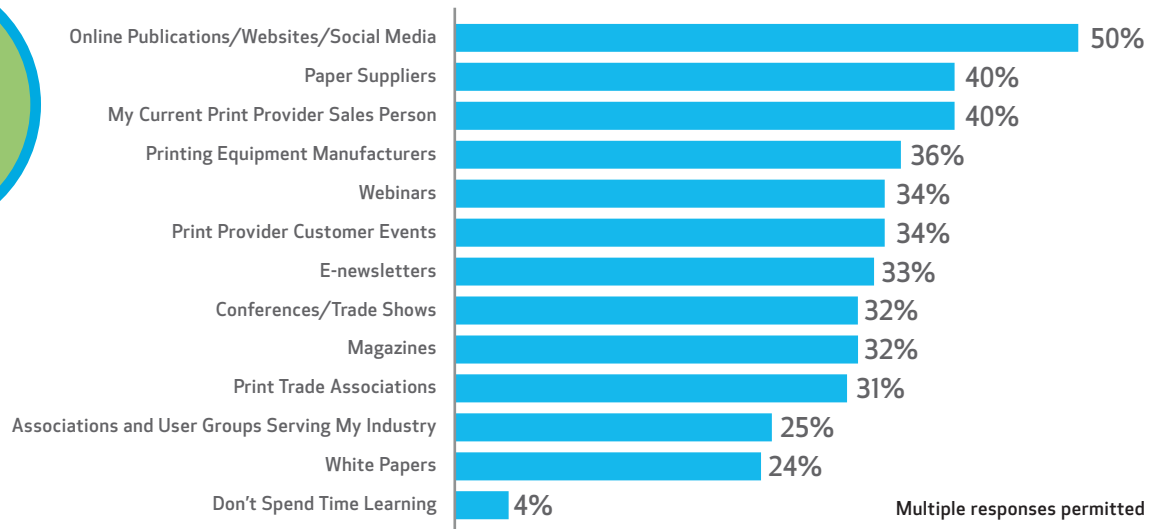
Customer education can be an essential business differentiator. Print buyers want to know more about various aspects of print production and technology to help improve their use and effectiveness. There are many ways to keep customers and prospects up to date on trends and technology. Print buyer respondents were asked to identify the top resources they used to stay current on printing trends and technologies.



## Ways Buyers Learn About Printing Trends and Technologies

Print buyer respondents—across companies of all sizes—cited online information resources and social media sites as their primary resource for learning about printing trends and technologies (Figure 8). Given its importance, PSPs should focus resources on keeping their online presence current via ongoing updates to websites/social media, issuing press releases, and participating in articles in publications that customers read. Other key resources used are print sales reps and paper suppliers; these were key options regardless of the company size.

**Figure 8**  
Ways Buyers Stay Current on Printing Trends



Q. What resources do you use to learn about, and stay current on, trends and technologies?  
N = 233 Print Buyers and Influencers

Source: *Print in the Eye of the Buyer*, NAPCO Research 2020

Because print salespeople are an important resource for keeping marketers up to date on trends and technology, it's essential to invest in their knowledge base. It's no secret that the print sales process has changed. Buyers used to rely solely on their sales reps to educate them about pricing, product features, and capabilities. Today, customers can find that information on the Internet, so print sales people need to find new ways to add value to customer relationships. As previously noted, buyers are looking for print providers to educate them and show them how to apply trends and technology to improve results.

Paper suppliers also play a key role in advancing respondents' print knowledge. In an effort to get buyers to specify their paper, paper suppliers offer educational materials and events to educate on print technologies and showcase the value of their product lines. These are also tools PSPs can use to educate sales staff.

More than one-third of print buyer respondents report that printing equipment suppliers are a key resource for learning about printing trends and technologies. Respondents from larger organizations, those with 1,000 or greater, turned more to printing equipment manufacturers for this information.

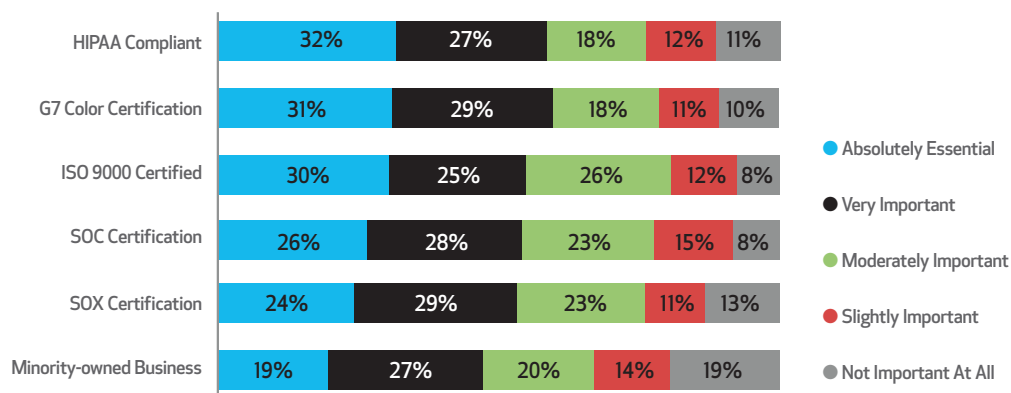
Meanwhile, 34% of respondents report attending webinars and print provider customer events. Buyers with 400 or more employees had a high preference for webinars. This finding underscores the importance of hosting virtual and in-person customer events.

## The Importance of Certifications and Designations

There are many accreditations and certifications that print service providers may consider obtaining to help improve internal processes and meet customer requirements. (See back cover to reference related websites.)

The survey asked respondents to rank the importance of key quality and regulatory compliance designations. The top three operational certifications/designations respondents deemed absolutely essential in their selection of print providers are Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), G7® color certification, and ISO 9000 certifications (Figure 9).

**Figure 9**  
Color, Quality, Security, and Business Certifications and Designations

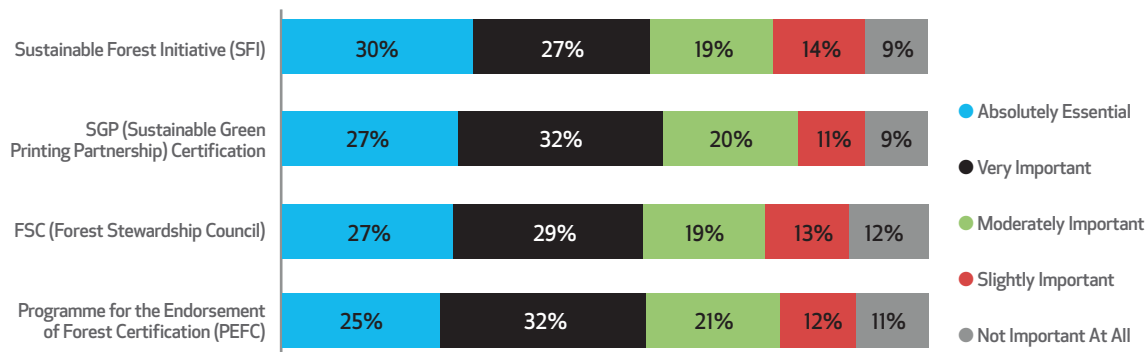


Q. How important are each of the following certifications/designations when selecting a print provider?  
N = 211 Print Buyers and Influencers

Source: Print in the Eye of the Buyer, NAPCO Research 2020

Print buyers also favor print providers that have certifications that demonstrate sustainability. Sustainability is a big trend among many brands, as millennials are altering their buying habits with the environment in mind. More than half of survey respondents deemed sustainability certifications and designations as absolutely essential/very important when selecting print provider (Figure 10). Given the importance of designations such as SFI, FSC, and PEFC, print providers may consider investing in certifications that demonstrate their company is buying paper from sustainable sources.

**Figure 10**  
Importance of Sustainability Certifications



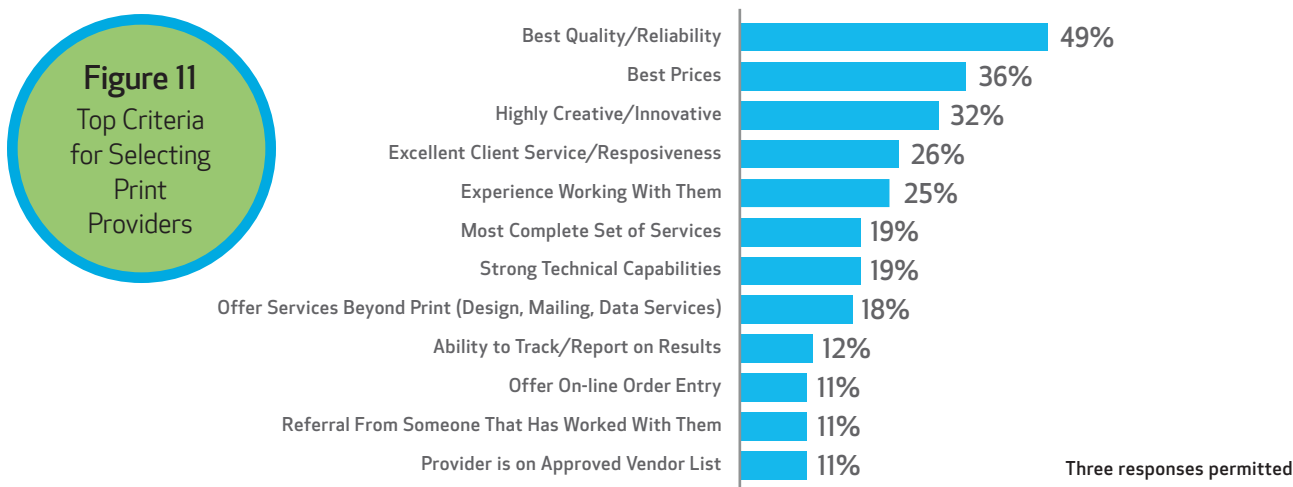
Q. How important are each of the following certifications/designations when selecting a print provider?  
N = 211 Print Buyers and Influencers

Source: Print in the Eye of the Buyer, NAPCO Research 2020

Another important certification is the Sustainable Green Printing Partnership (SGP). A non-profit organization, SGP certifies printing facilities' sustainability best practices, including and beyond regulatory compliance. The certification program includes the entire print facility, its process, product, and social areas. SGP certification is recognized by both print buyers and the printing industry. Printing facilities of all types and sizes in the United States and Canada are eligible to become SGP certified.

### Top Criteria for Print Provider Selection

Respondents were asked to identify the top three reasons they select print services providers. The number one factor influencing provider selection picked by almost half of survey participants is best quality/reliability (Figure 11). A takeaway from this question is that respondents value providers that reliably deliver high-quality work more than those that offer a lower price, which is the second most important factor.



**Figure 11**  
Top Criteria for Selecting Print Providers

Q. What are your organization's top criteria when selecting an external service provider for printing?  
N = 211 Print Buyers and Influencers

Source: *Print in the Eye of the Buyer*; NAPCO Research 2020

Quality, price, and excellent customer service/responsiveness are important and expected factors influencing print buying decisions. An interesting revelation relative to selecting print providers is that almost one-third of respondents expect their providers to offer creative and innovative ideas. This requirement likely reflects changes in the buyer/seller relationships and the increase in communication options beyond print. A common theme in the research results is that buyers demand that print providers be more than order-takers; they expect their providers to advise them on the most effective, efficient, and engaging ways to leverage print.

### Conclusion

A common characteristic of successful print services providers is continually focusing on ways to enhance customer experiences. Understanding print customers' expectations, requirements, and technology knowledge positions PSPs to better serve customers, create strategies that strengthen customer trust, and develop outreach efforts that hit the mark.

## Resources for Learning More About Certifications

- G7: [connect.idealliance.org/g7](http://connect.idealliance.org/g7)
- ISO 9000: [iso.org/iso-9001-quality-management.html](http://iso.org/iso-9001-quality-management.html)
- SOC Certified: [aicpa.org/soc4so](http://aicpa.org/soc4so)
- SOX Certified: [sarbanes-oxley-101.com/](http://sarbanes-oxley-101.com/)
- Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI): [sfiprogram.org](http://sfiprogram.org)
- Forest Stewardship Council (FSC): [fsc.org](http://fsc.org)
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA): [hhs.gov/hipaa/for-individuals/guidance-materials-for-consumers](http://hhs.gov/hipaa/for-individuals/guidance-materials-for-consumers)
- Minority-owned Business: [nmsdc.org/mbes/mbe-certification](http://nmsdc.org/mbes/mbe-certification)
- Sustainable Green Printing Partnership (SGP): [sgppartnership.org](http://sgppartnership.org)
- Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC): [pefc.org](http://pefc.org)

### About Print in the Eye of the Buyer

Print in the Eye of the Buyer is a series of thought-leadership content pieces based on a NAPCO Research survey of print buyers and influencers that was sponsored by Canon.

1. Identifying and Meeting the Needs of Today's Customers
2. Identifying Print's Role in the New Communication Mix
3. Enhancing the In-Plant Customer Experience
4. Enhancing the Print Customer Experience
5. Navigating Customer Purchasing/Procurement Processes

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