Distributor Insights: What End Buyers Value in 2025

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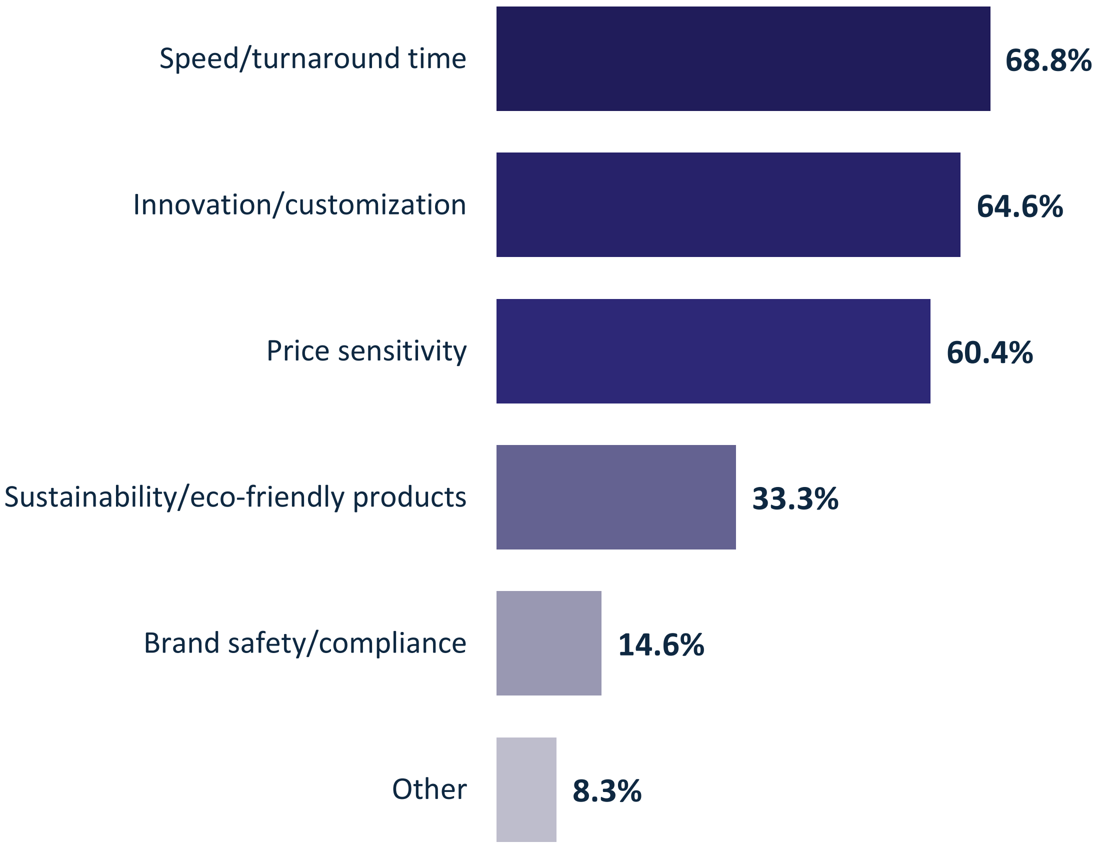
Speed, price and customization dominate, and sustainability is rising but not yet universal.

Speed First: **68.9%** of PPAI 100 distributors say buyers are prioritizing faster turnaround and rush delivery. Promo is increasingly expected to match e-commerce service levels.

Customization & Innovation: **64.6%** highlight buyer interest in unique products, personalization and digital tie-ins. Creativity is becoming a stronger differentiator once baseline cost and speed are met.

Price Sensitivity: **60.4%** report buyers pressing harder on cost, reflecting tighter budgets and an expectation of more for less.

Sustainability & Compliance: **33.3%** note buyer requests for eco-friendly products, higher than what suppliers reported. By contrast, only 15% cite brand safety/compliance, showing ESG is a selective but growing priority.



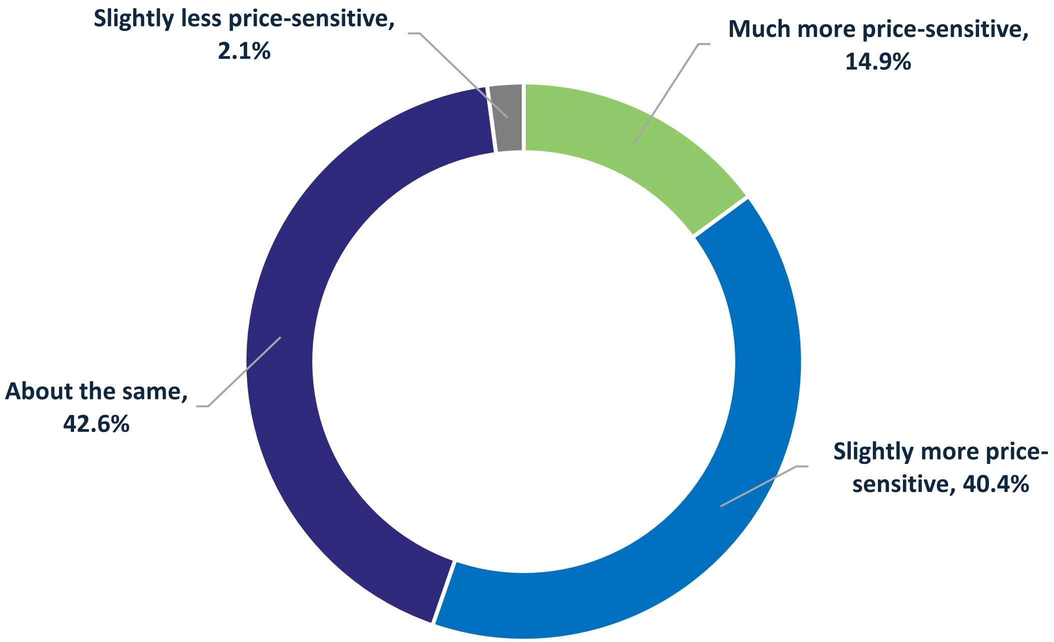
Distributor Insights: Price Sensitivity Trends

More buyers are tightening budgets, with very few easing pressure.

More Price-Sensitive: Over half of distributors (**55.3%**) report buyers have become more price-sensitive compared to last year. This shift is driving harder negotiations and stricter budget checks.

About the Same: **42.6%** say price sensitivity is unchanged, but with inflation and tariffs in play, “same” still means high scrutiny on cost.

Less Price-Sensitive: Only **2.1%** see buyers easing up on price, underscoring how rare premium flexibility is in 2025.



Price pressure is intensifying for most distributors. Even where it is unchanged, clients remain highly focused on cost, leaving little room to pass along rising expenses.

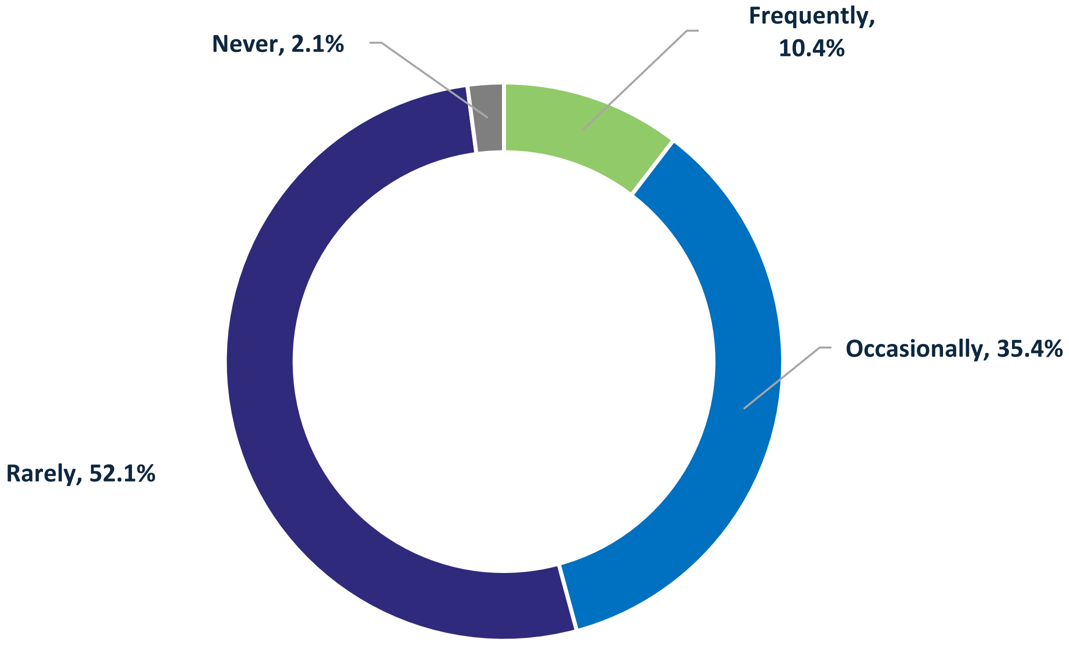
Distributor Insights: ESG & Product Origin Requests

Interest in ESG and product origin is present but not consistent across buyers.

Occasional Interest: **35.4%** of distributors say buyers ask about product origin, materials or ESG credentials in some projects, often when brand reputation is at stake.

Frequent Requests: Only **10.4%** report frequent inquiries, suggesting ESG is a priority for select industries but not yet mainstream.

Rare or Never: A majority (**54.2%**) say these questions come up rarely or never, showing ESG concerns remain uneven across the market.



ESG isn't every buyer's priority yet – but when it is, it can make or break the decision.

Distributor Insights: Service Differentiators

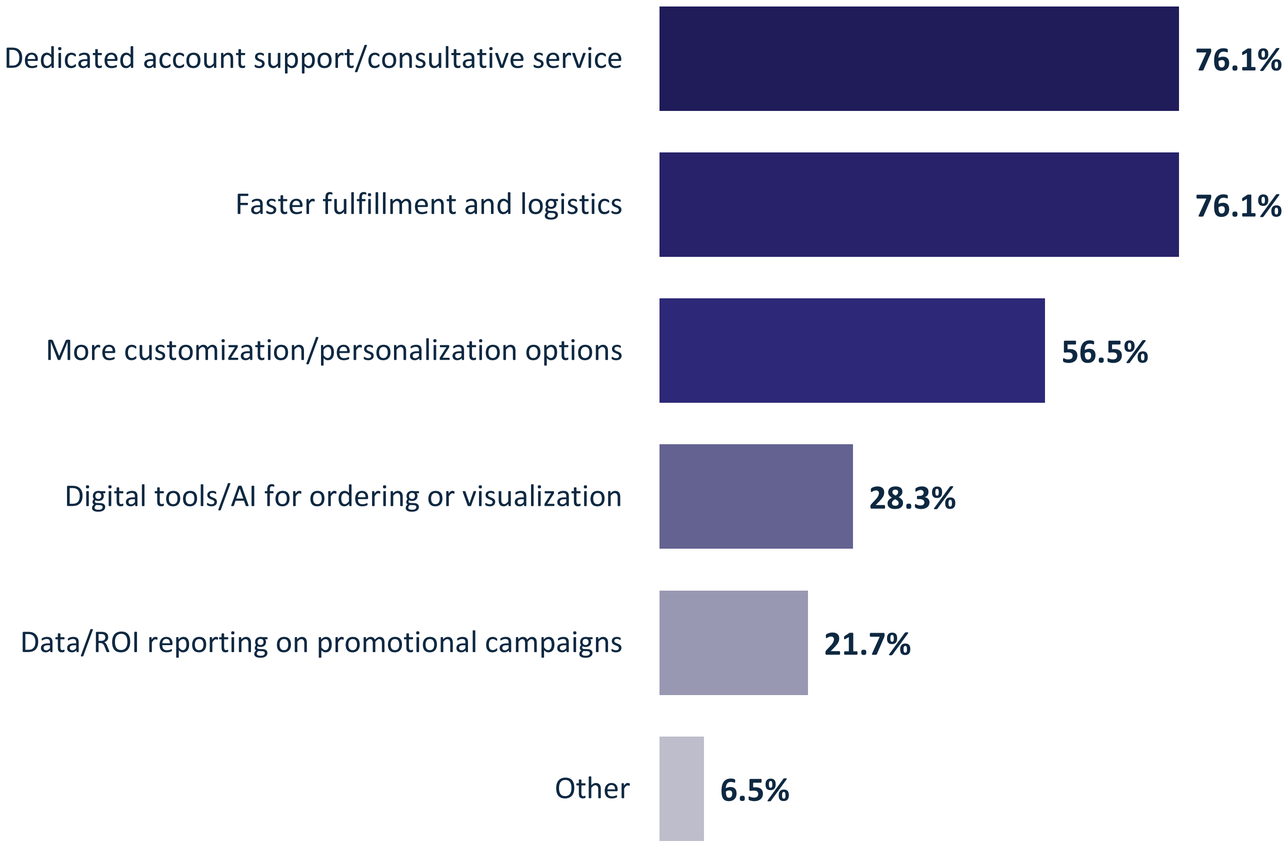
Clients value support and speed most, while digital tools and ROI tracking are emerging.

Dedicated Support: **76.1%** of PPAI 100 distributors say clients ask for strong account management and consultative service. Relationships remain a core differentiator.

Faster Fulfillment: Also at **76.1%**, faster logistics and fulfillment are equally critical, reinforcing that speed is non-negotiable in today's market.

Customization & Digital Tools: **56.5%** report rising demand for more customization and personalization options, while **28.3%** cite requests for digital tools or AI to support ordering and visualization.

ROI & Reporting: **21.7%** note interest in ROI measurement, reflecting early signs of buyers wanting data to justify spend.



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Distributor Insights: Role of Promo in Campaigns

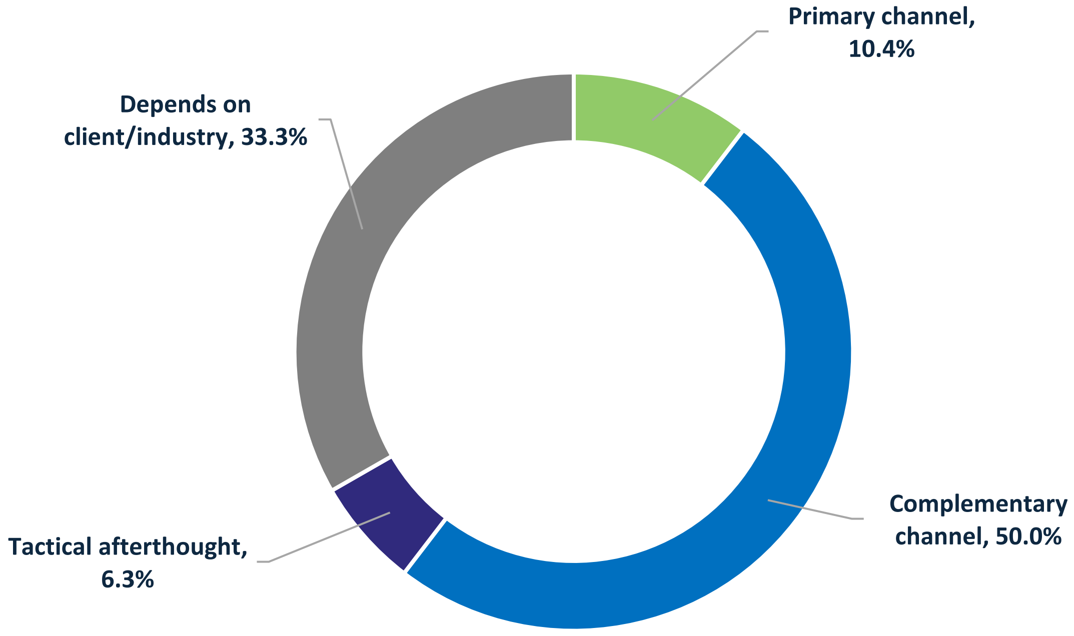
Promo is seen as an important tool but rarely as the lead channel.

Complementary Channel: Half of distributors (**50%**) say clients view promo as a complement alongside digital, events and other media. This confirms its position as part of integrated marketing plans.

Primary Channel: Only **10.4%** report clients treating promo as the lead vehicle for brand-building. These are typically sectors with strong reliance on physical engagement.

Depends on Client/Industry: **33.3%** note that usage varies widely depending on the sector and client objectives.

Afterthought: A small share (**6.3%**) say promo is still considered a tactical filler, highlighting lingering perception gaps.



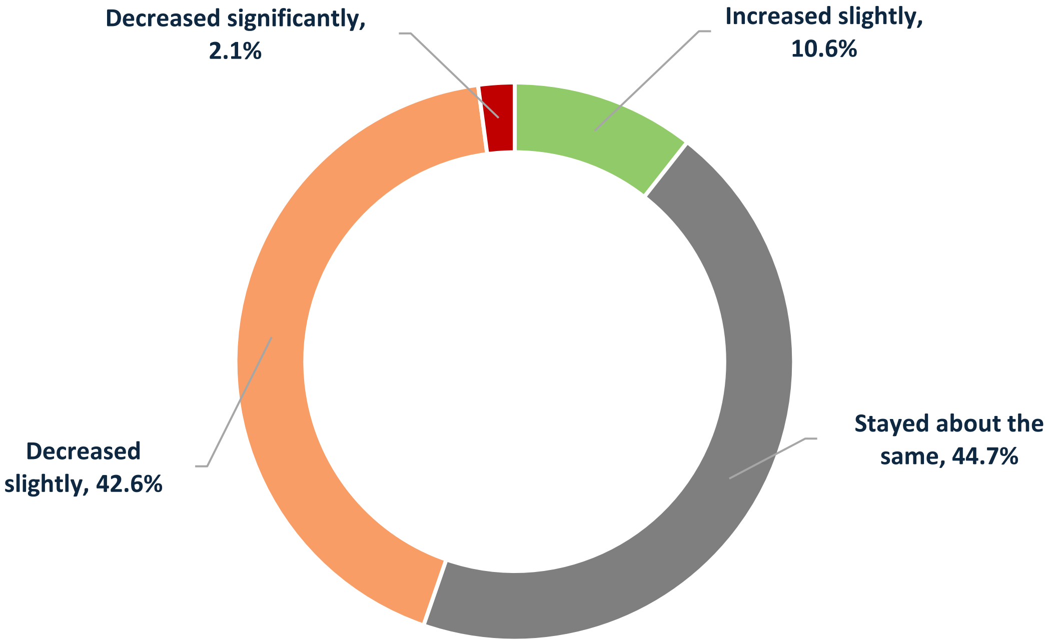
Distributor Insights: Client Budget Trends

Budgets are flat to down, with only a small share increasing spend.

Decreasing Budgets: **42.6%** of PPAI 100 distributors report clients have slightly reduced their promo budgets over the past year, reflecting ongoing cost caution.

Flat Budgets: Another **44.7%** say budgets have held steady. In practice, this often means spending power is shrinking once inflation and tariffs are considered.

Increasing Budgets: Only **10.6%** saw budgets rise, limited to specific clients or sectors prioritizing brand engagement.



Distributor Insights: What Gets Cut First

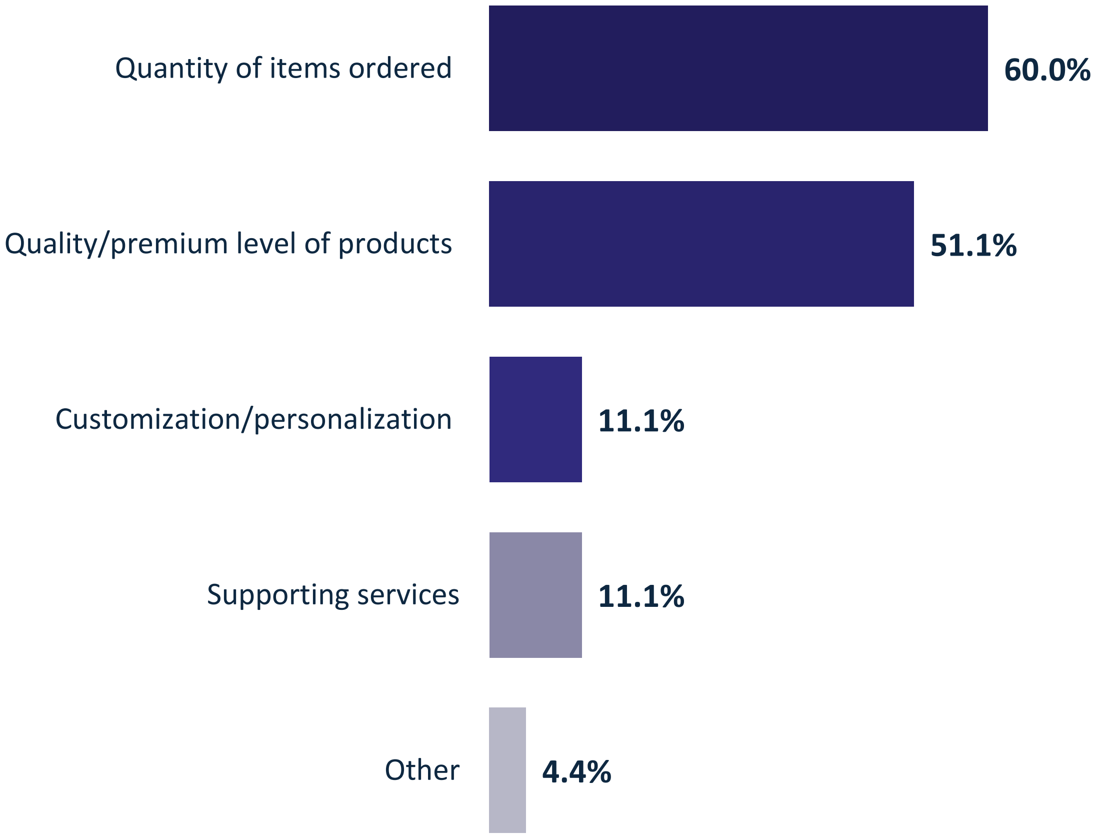
Quantity and quality are the first to go when budgets tighten.

Quantity of Items: **60%** of PPAI 100 distributors report that clients reduce order quantities first fewer pieces to stay within budget.

Quality/Premium Level: **51.1%** say clients downgrade from premium to standard products, reflecting a shift from aspirational to practical choices.

Customization & Services: Only **11.1%** see clients cutting back on customization or support services (kitting, fulfillment, reporting), showing that added value often survives budget cuts.

Buyers cut quantity and quality first but still expect service and customization.



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Distributor Insights: Emerging Buyer Expectations

Faster & On-Demand: PPAI 100 distributors report growing demand for shorter lead times, just-in-time ordering and on-demand production with minimal order quantities.

Digital & AI Tools: Clients increasingly ask for digital stores, AI-enabled ordering and seamless admin/shipping efficiency, reflecting expectations shaped by e-commerce.

Retail Brands & Lifestyle Products: Requests for specific retail labels (e.g., Spanx, Lululemon) and consumer-style products are rising as buyers look for promo to mirror retail trends.

Tariff Pressures: Several distributors warn tariffs are driving up costs and even jeopardizing large recurring projects, showing how trade policy is directly shaping client expectations and spending.

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Data sourced from the collective responses of PPAI 100 distributors via a flash survey conducted in September 2025.