Supplier Insights: What Distributors Are Asking For in 2025

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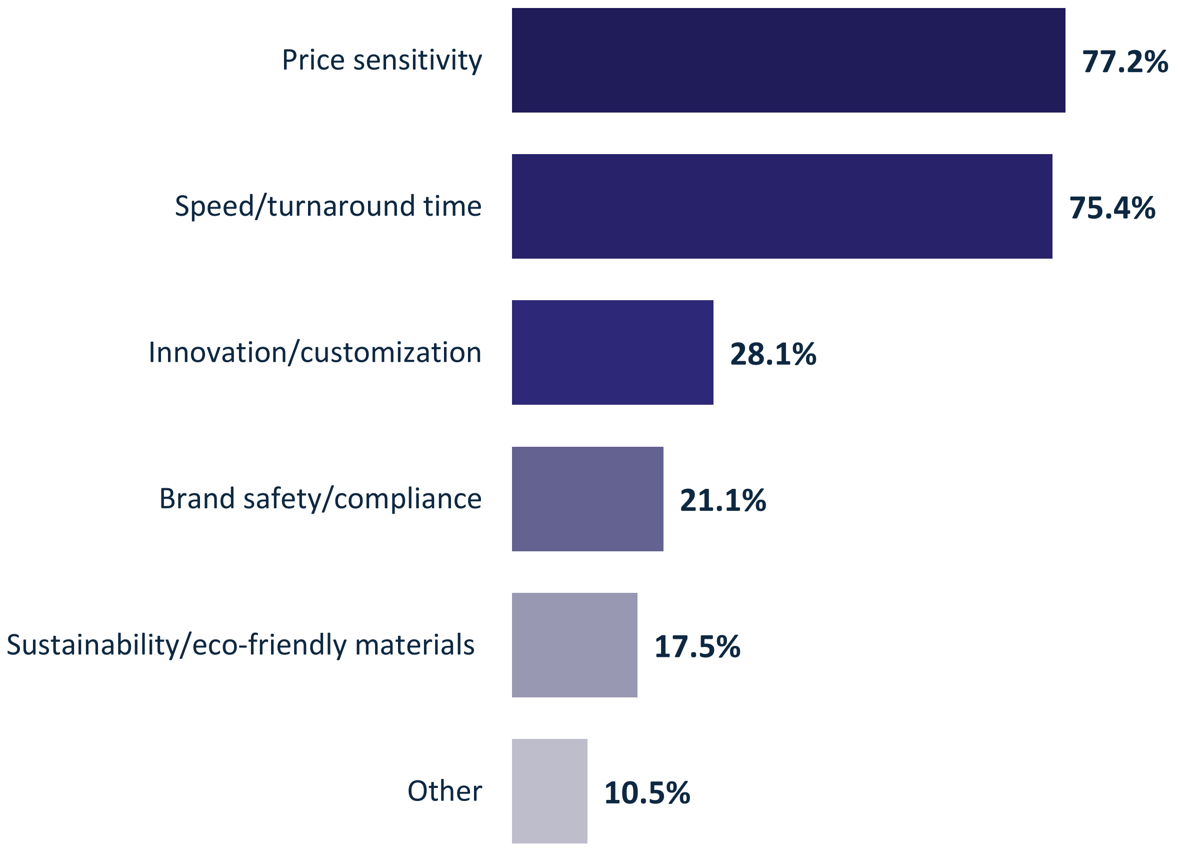
Supplier Insights: Buyer Priorities In Distributor Orders

Suppliers see cost and speed as dominant, with innovation, compliance and origin emerging as differentiators.



Cost & Speed Dominate: PPAI 100 suppliers report that distributors are most focused on price (**77.2%**) and speed (**75.4%**).

This reflects today's reality: Customers have tight budgets, shorter lead times and "Amazon-like" expectations.

Selective Differentiators: Distributors are also asking for innovation/customization (**28.1%**) and compliance (**21.1%**) once core needs of cost and speed are met.

Creativity, unique offerings and brand protection remain important differentiators.

Sustainability & Origin: Only **17.5%** of PPAI suppliers see sustainability requests from distributors, and demand is uneven and sector-specific.

There is also growing interest in products made in the USA, product value and usability and country of origin, alongside reports of projects being canceled outright instead of scaled down.

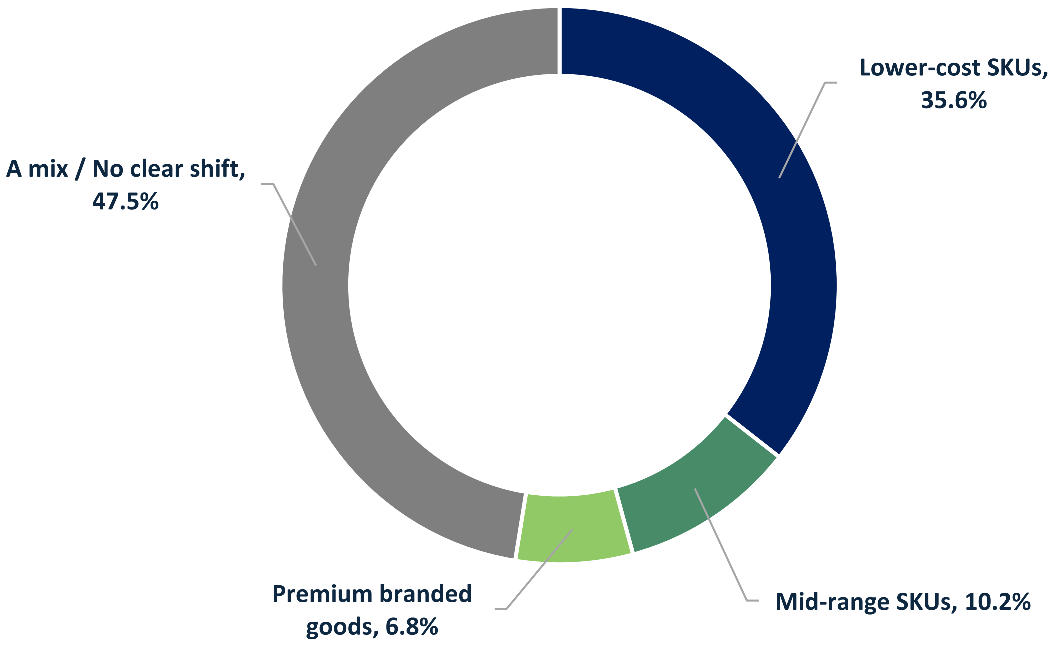
Supplier Insights: Product Demand Shifts

Distributors lean toward lower-cost options, while most see no clear shift in mix.

Lower-Cost SKUs Rising: Over a third (**35.6%**) of suppliers report stronger demand for budget products. This reflects tight distributor and end-buyer budgets, with volume often prioritized over premium features.

Mid & Premium Still Limited: Only **10.2%** see more demand for mid-range products and just **6.8%** for premium branded goods. High-quality and retail-inspired items remain niche as cost pressures dominate.

No Clear Shift for Many: Nearly half (**47.5%**) of suppliers say there's no clear change in product mix. This suggests demand is fragmented, with some buyers trading down while others hold steady.



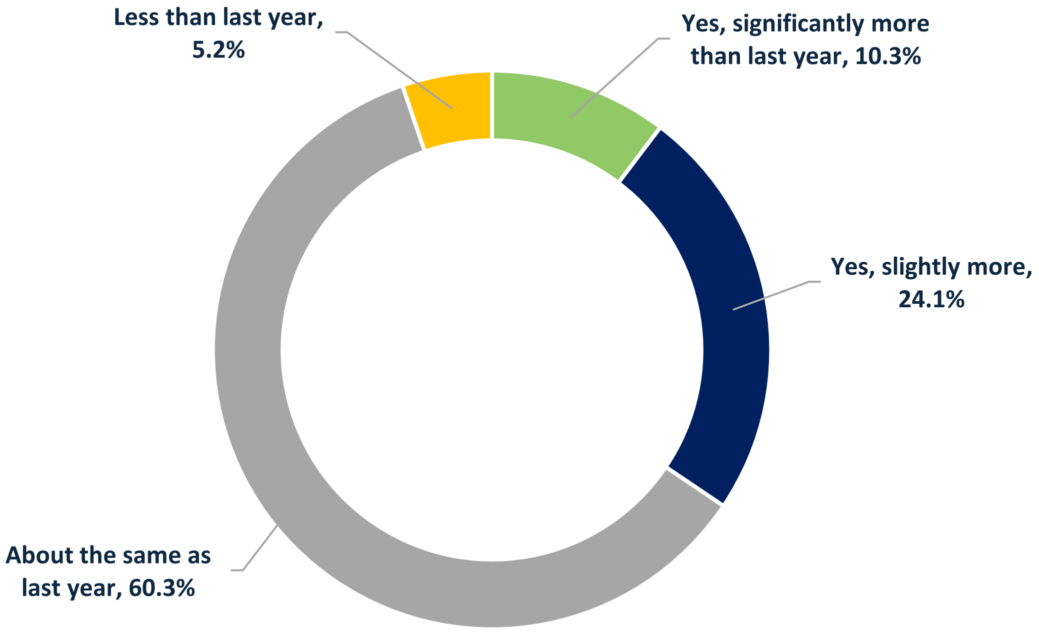
Supplier Insights: Compliance Requests

Compliance may not be universal yet, but for many buyers it's already a deal-breaker.

Growing Requests: About one-third of suppliers (**34.4%**) report more distributor requests for compliance and certification support, covering PFAS disclosure, safety testing and ESG documentation. This signals a gradual but notable shift toward greater accountability.

Stable for Many: The majority (**60.3%**) say compliance requests are unchanged from last year, showing that while expectations are growing, it's not yet a universal demand across distributors.

Minimal Decline: A small group (**5.2%**) report fewer compliance requests, suggesting variability tied to client mix or sectors less focused on ESG and testing.



Supplier Insights: Order Customization Shifts

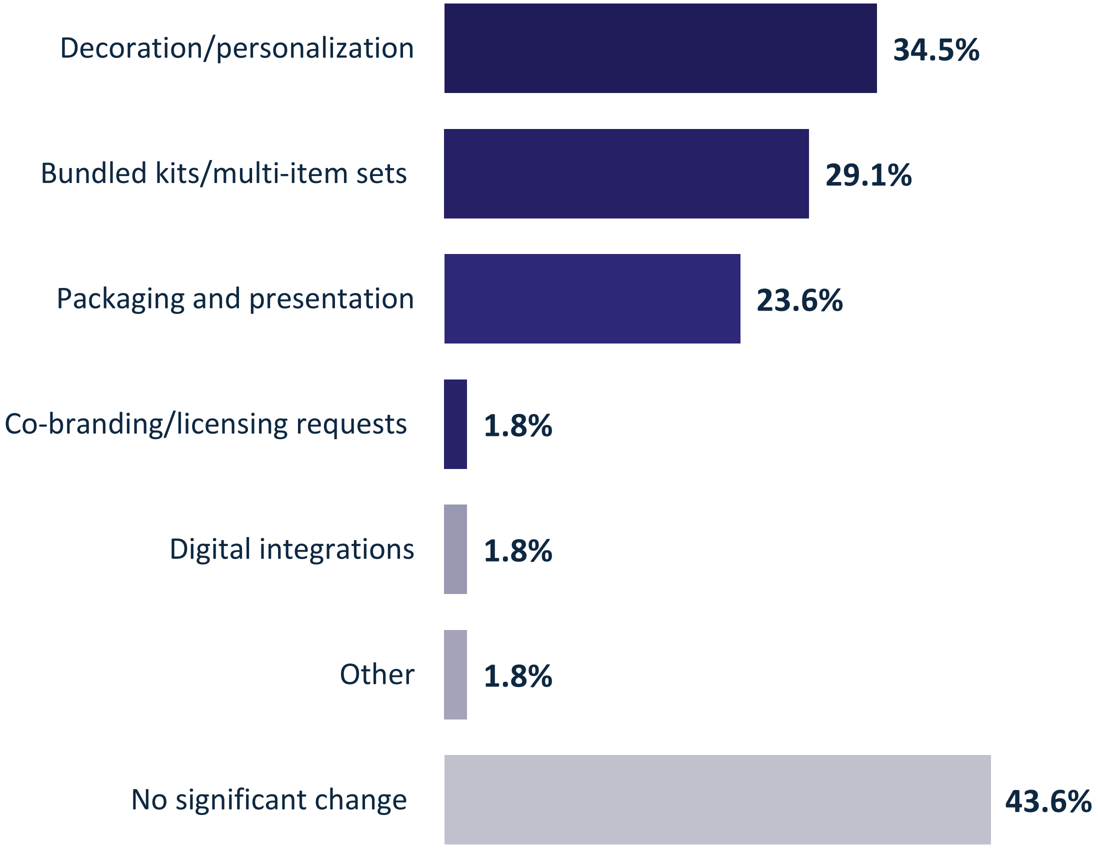
Personalization and bundled solutions are leading, while digital remains niche.

Personalization Leads: About **35%** of suppliers report stronger demand for decoration and personalization. Buyers continue to view personalization as a simple but powerful way to add impact.

Kits and Packaging on the Rise: **29.1%** see growth in bundled kits, while **23.6%** point to retail-style packaging and presentation. Together, these reflect the shift toward gifting, experiences and retail-like presentation in promo.

Digital Integrations Still Minimal: Only **1.8%** mention NFC, QR or AR features. While tech integration is emerging in other sectors, it remains a small niche in promotional products.

No Change for Many: Nearly **44%** report no significant shift in customization requests, showing that while some buyers push for more, many continue to order standard products.



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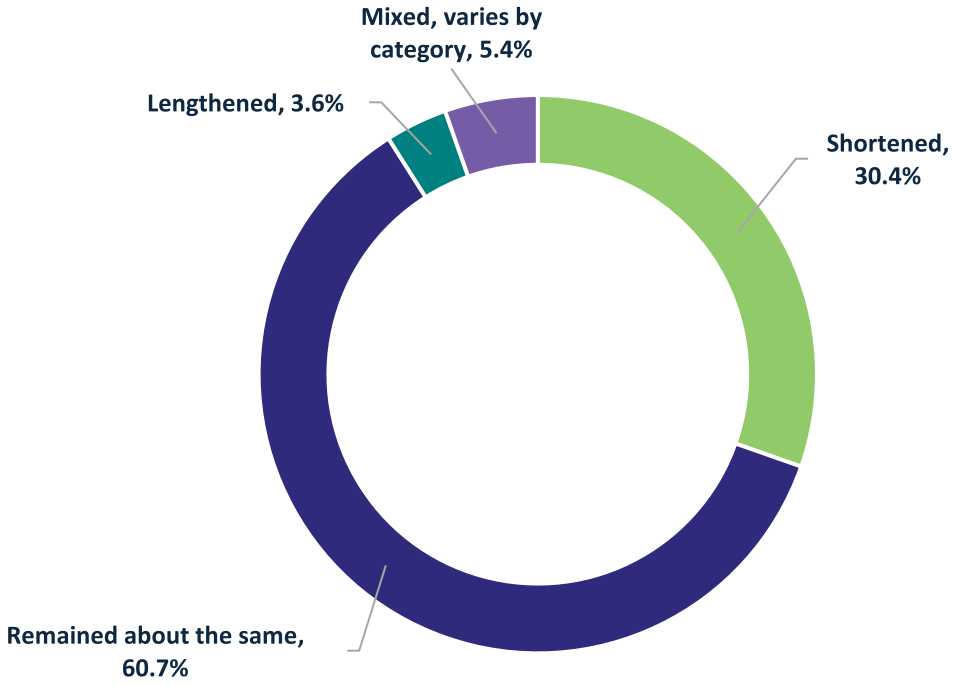
Supplier Insights: Order Lead Times

Rush orders are rising, but most lead times remain unchanged.

Shorter Lead Times: About **30%** of suppliers report more last-minute and rush requests. This reflects buyers' increasing expectation for on-demand promo, mirroring e-commerce habits.

Stable for Most: The majority (**60.7%**) say lead times remain about the same, suggesting that while urgency is a growing trend, it hasn't yet transformed the entire market.

Lengthened or Mixed: Only a small share (**9%** combined) see longer or mixed lead times, reinforcing that urgency, not early planning, is the dominant story.



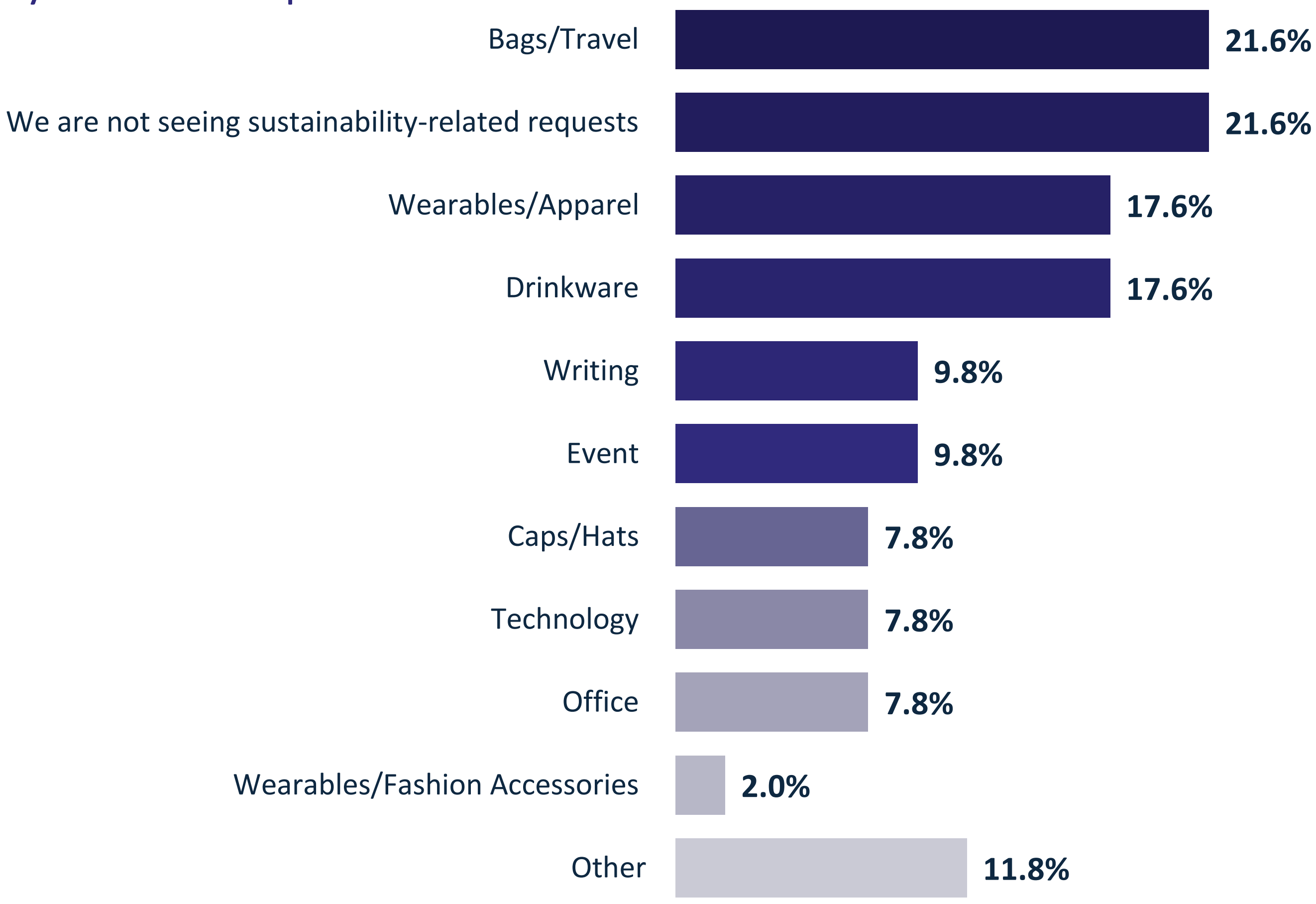
Supplier Insights: Sustainability Requests

Sustainability matters in some categories, but for many buyers it’s still optional.

Top Categories: PPAI 100 suppliers most often see sustainability requests in bags (**21.6%**), apparel (**17.6%**) and drinkware (**17.6%**). These are high-visibility items where eco-friendly materials or ESG claims can be clearly demonstrated.

Selective Demand: Roughly **22%** of suppliers say they are not seeing sustainability-related requests at all, showing that demand is inconsistent and heavily client-dependent.

Other Mentions: Some suppliers noted interest in packaging, food and specialty items, but these remain isolated rather than broad trends.



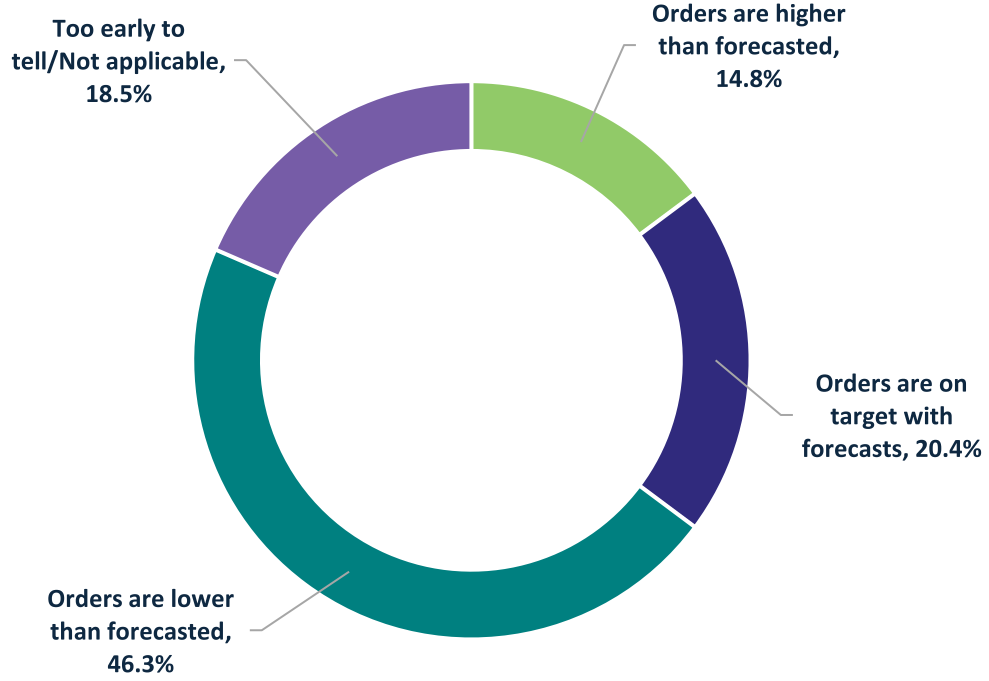
Supplier Insights: Distributor Forecasts vs. Actual Orders

Forecasts remain high, but actual orders are often lower, and suppliers must plan cautiously.

Orders Falling Short: Nearly half of suppliers (**46.3%**) report that distributor orders are lower than forecasted, showing persistent overestimation of demand in planning.

On Target or Higher: Only **35.2%** say orders are on target (**20.4%**) or higher (**14.8%**), underscoring how rare it is for actual sales to exceed expectations in 2025.

Too Early to Tell: About **19%** note it's too early or not applicable, suggesting continued uncertainty in projections.



Supplier Insights: Emerging Buyer Expectations

Distributors are echoing end-buyer demands for clarity, speed and stability.

Amazon-like Service: PPAI 100 suppliers report growing pressure for faster turnaround and simplified processes, with distributors asking why promo can't match the speed of e-commerce.

Pricing Transparency: Distributors increasingly demand clear, stable pricing with no hidden fees. Tariff handling in particular is under scrutiny, with many buyers expecting costs to be absorbed or delayed.

Greater Concessions: Requests for waived setup charges, reduced unit costs and rebates are becoming more common, reflecting tighter budgets and buyer leverage.

Project Stability: Suppliers note distributors delaying or canceling projects outright rather than scaling down, a sign of continued caution in discretionary spending.

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

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