A SPECIAL REPORT BY EMPANEL ONLINE FOR YOURICP

YOURICP

Greater Data

How software sector Sales & Marketing teams are pursuing digital automation and data hygiene excellence

10- to 15-minute read

Introduction

As digital transformation continues to reshape the software sector, go-to-market (GTM) teams are increasingly turning to automation and data hygiene to stay competitive. In today's fast-paced environment, we are witnessing a profound shift: GTM teams are shrinking, AI tools are evolving daily, and playbooks are constantly being updated in real time. Team members are being asked to do more with fewer resources, yet the basics of effective go-to-market strategies remain unchanged. Data quality and CRM hygiene are more critical than ever to achieving business success. Without a solid foundation of clean, accurate data, GTM teams risk wasting valuable resources and struggling to maximize conversion rates, ultimately hindering their ability to drive revenue growth.

This report will explore how B2B software companies are navigating these new challenges, focusing on the evolving role of automation and data hygiene in GTM strategies. We will examine key themes such as the integration of AI into everyday workflows, the shift in playbook strategies, and the increasing pressure on teams to maintain high levels of efficiency and effectiveness. Despite the rapidly changing landscape, ensuring clean, accurate data remains the cornerstone of a successful GTM operation.

About Wheelhouse

Wheelhouse is a B2B software review site that helps businesses discover, evaluate, and select the right software solutions tailored to their specific needs. Through verified user reviews, in-depth buyer guides, and curated content, Wheelhouse connects software vendors with high-intent buyers across a wide range of categories, including CRM, marketing automation, ERP, and more. In addition to our review site, Wheelhouse offers a comprehensive suite of high-end lead generation services, including display advertising, call center-based qualifying of prospects, and managed services. Focused on trust and transparency, Wheelhouse ensures that its content is unbiased and user-driven, making it a reliable resource for decision-makers navigating the complex software landscape.

About YourICP

YourICP was born out of Wheelhouse Enterprises, leveraging over 15 years of experience helping SaaS and enterprise tech companies generate quality leads. At the core of our experience is a fundamental lesson: effective marketing depends on reliable data. We provide B2B teams with reliable data tools, allowing them to focus on closing deals rather than managing contact lists. As the need for quality data grew, we evolved into YourICP, a standalone platform designed to help teams define their ideal customer profile, clean and enrich existing databases, connect with verified, compliant contacts, and maintain data accuracy through regular updates. Our platform ensures that businesses can maintain the clean data foundation essential for success in today's fast-paced digital landscape.

Introduction



In 2024-25, Wheelhouse Enterprises commissioned market research agency empanel online to better understand the needs of software companies with reference to their data management and current demand-generation needs, the environments they have in place, their opportunities and challenges, and planned improvements to serve their audiences better in future.

The results, outlined below and based on a survey of 400 decision-makers at relevant software companies in the US, afforded an illuminating insight into the value of clean, actionable data for Sales and Marketing executives and the importance of innovation to support strategy setting and campaign planning. This Special Report also sheds light on campaign model plans, resourcing, key performance indicators, relationships between Sales and Marketing teams, technology preferences, frustrations and near-term plans.

Some key aspects of findings include:

- Our audience generally preferred working with integrated individual apps rather than suites
- Data quality is managed using a combination of automated and manual approaches
- There remains significant non-alignment between sales and marketing views
- Lead generation typically combines in-house and partner/purchase approaches
- Business development efforts combine in-house and outsourced approaches almost equally
- Traditional metrics are still common when measuring sales and marketing performance
- Making greater use of digital and automation capabilities is seen as highly challenging
- Data silos, 'dirty' data and incomplete data are major causes of concern
- Preparing data for the application of AI and Machine Intelligence is a key project currently being worked on, as is applying data analytics more deeply
- Companies are broadly bullish on growing spend on digital tools in the next year

One leitmotif of the report was the significant differences between SMBs and larger organizations. For this reason we have highlighted these under 'lightbulb' icons, together with other demographic differences where significant.

We appreciate all feedback. Please send your thoughts to Sales@youricp.com.

Current state: what's happening in sales and marketing data management and tools today?

To begin at the beginning, we wanted to gauge the present state of our audience, starting with their current software stacks...

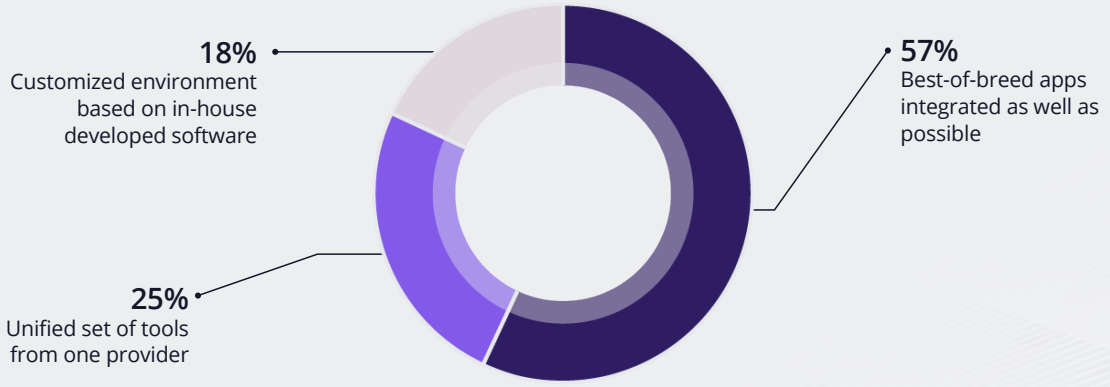
Best-of-breed approaches trump one-stop shops

There is a vast and growing variety of applications, tools and services aimed at Sales and Marketing teams, ranging from giants such as Adobe, Salesforce and Oracle to startups and scale-ups. New entrants arrive all the time, delivering innovation and fresh opportunities, so it's perhaps unsurprising that most organizations prefer to take a pragmatic, halfway-house approach of deploying best-of-breed apps and integrating them as best as they are able.

The option of a 'one-stop shop' with a single provider joining up a suite of tools is always attractive to some but Cloud, with its federated open API model and inherent ability to be accessed over a web browser via single sign-on, will certainly help to piece together individual applications and components in ways that were more difficult when on-premises and proprietary software deployments dominated.

Almost a fifth of respondents prepare to tailor their own environments. While there may be advantages of having a unique approach that fits specific needs, this will usually be a more expensive route to follow.

What would be your ideal scenario for structuring your data and revenue-related technology stack?



Sales and Marketing software stacks are changing fast but many or most organizations still rely greatly on familiar products and models. Today, decades-old tools for contact management records and purchasing lists vie with modern social software, novel call automation services and AI- or Machine Learning infused buyer intent interpretative models to seek new and expanded revenue streams. CRM remains a cornerstone of course, but we can expect to see rapid growth in tools that tap emerging technologies to identify and anticipate trends.

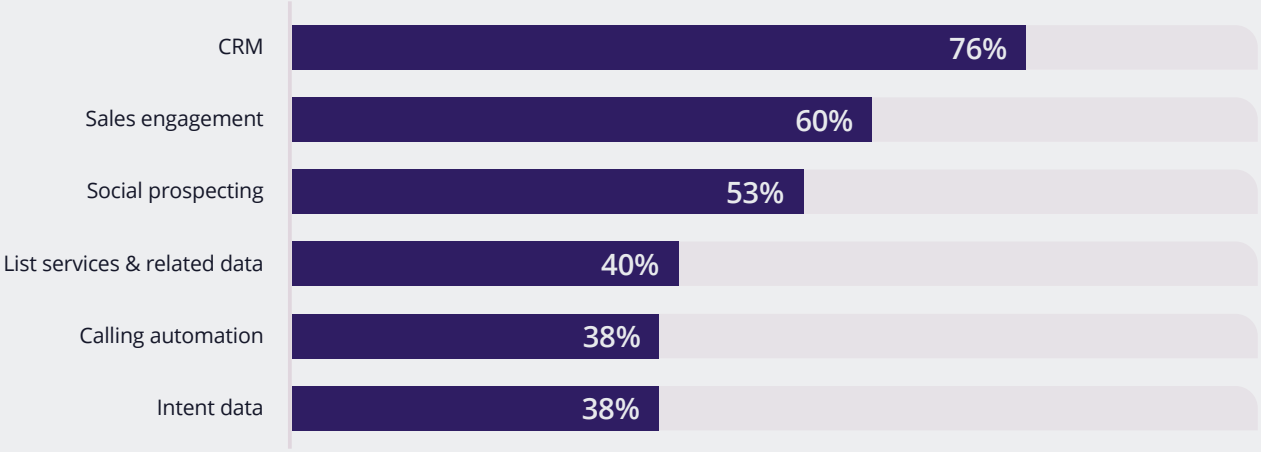
Broad Support for Best-of-Breed Tools Across All Company Sizes

While the largest enterprises and most senior decision-makers are slightly more inclined toward 'best-of-breed' solutions, support for this approach is strong across all company sizes. The table below shows the percentage of respondents in each staff band who selected each approach as their ideal setup.

% of respondents by company size who selected each stack preference

	Staff						
	50-99	100-249	250-499	500-999	1000-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999
Best of breed	58%	41%	52%	47%	58%	83%	69%
Unified	26%	40%	28%	36%	16%	8%	9%
Custom in-house	16%	19%	20%	17%	26%	8%	22%

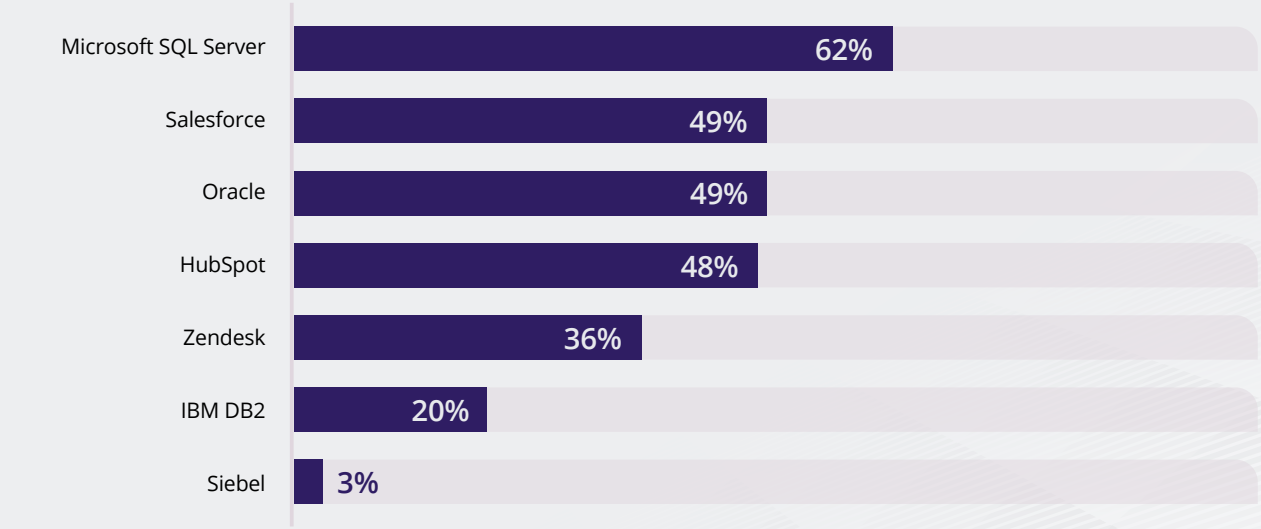
Which of these revenue-related technologies do you currently use?



As for those aforementioned core contact records, familiar names from the CRM and relational database spheres prevail as software giants continue to grow via M&A and acquire or outmuscle newcomers.

However, the rise of relatively young companies like HubSpot and Zendesk or cloud CRM pioneers like Salesforce suggest this is not quite a closed shop. Also, it's likely that future developments will quickly see new names added to this list as buyers adopt tools from startups that have 'built a better mousetrap'.

What database or CRM tools does your company currently use?



Automation of account data is still patchy

The way that companies currently manage the quality of their customer and prospect data is of course increasingly automated and digitized but many laggards remain and there remain islands (often very large ones) of hands-on activity.

Those that are still relying on a manual approach will inevitably move more slowly, spend more on labor and also incur risks of 'dirty' data creeping in and causing downstream errors in decision making.

It's also notable that more than two-thirds of our audience are turning to external partners to supplement internal skills and infrastructure. This is perhaps evidence of a situation where an inability to hire and/or retain staff is leading to improvised actions, or else companies are struggling to scale up to meet their needs.

How do you currently assess the quality of your contact and account data?



Key split

Third-party enrichment services are broadly less popular with SMBs than large enterprises.

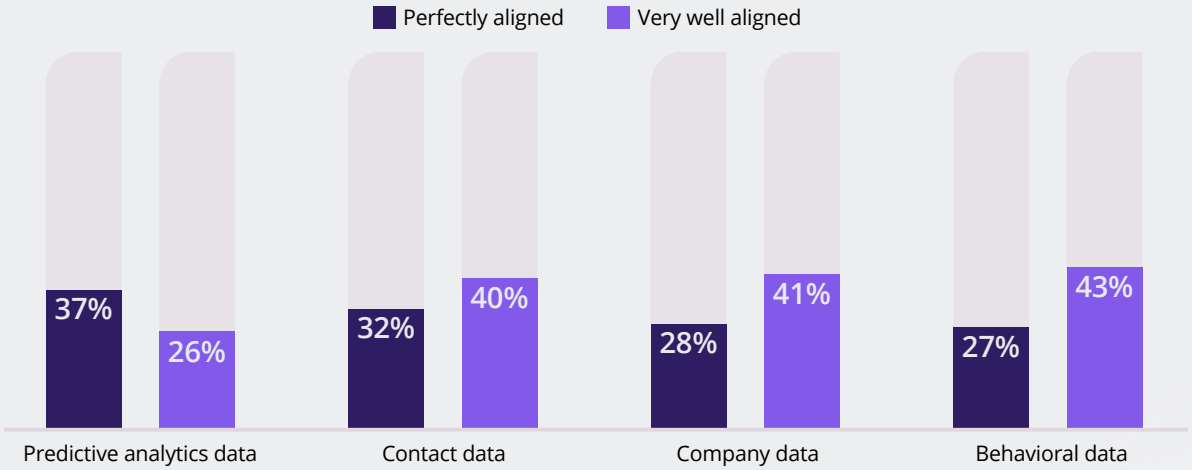
	Staff						
	50-99	100-249	250-499	500-999	1000-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999
3rd party	64	51	52	77	63	90	100

Mind the Gap: Sales and Marketing teams can still be miles apart

Ever since sales and marketing teams have existed, leaders have attempted to bridge the gulf between the two and connect their divergent needs, outlooks and cultures. This is bearing fruit as over half of respondents see perfect alignment or high levels of alignment. But our data suggests that oil-and-water delta still exists in pockets with 6-7% of respondents noting significant lack of alignment across key areas.

This is despite cross-team visualisation models like account-based marketing (ABM) that aim to provide a shared lens on customer/prospect activity and the opportunity via data integration and end-to-end software platforms to share a single version of the truth between sales and marketing departments.

How would you rate the alignment between your Sales and Marketing teams when it comes to leveraging data?



Key split

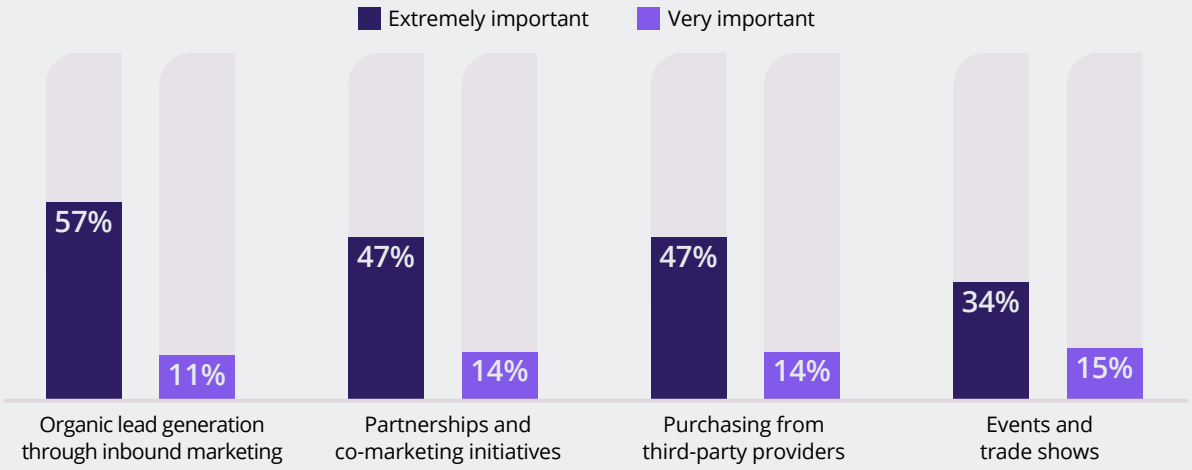
The largest companies were most likely to say their predictive and company data were perfectly aligned. Marketers were more likely to say predictive data is perfectly aligned.

	Staff						
	50-99	100-249	250-499	500-999	1000-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999
Perfectly aligned	37	25	28	45	39	47	53

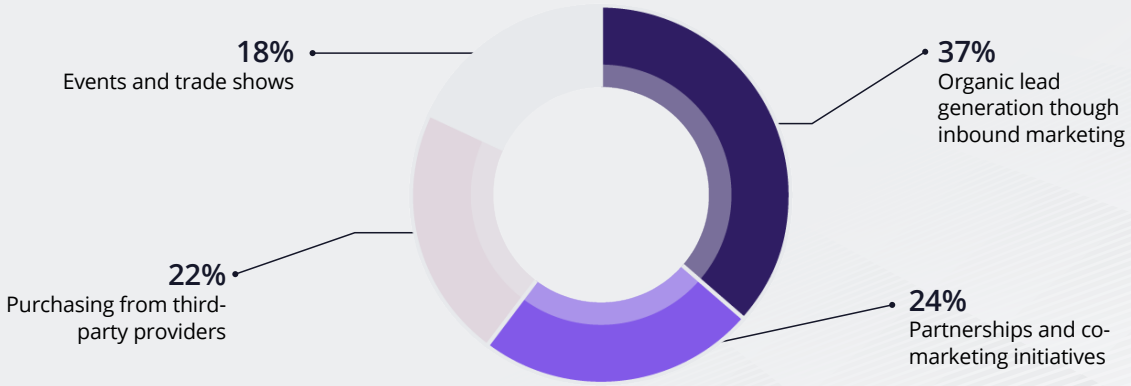
Contact Sport: Leaders chase ways to expand customer reach

The neverending need to freshen up, grow and augment contact databases is leading our audience in various directions from traditional inbound lead-generation routes to pragmatic purchase/partner hybrid models. It's also notable that events and trade shows continue to be valued decades after they were predicted to fade as the web and online marketing grew and years after pandemic lockdown forced marketers away from face-to-face strategies.

How important are the following for acquiring new B2B contact data?



And which of these is most important?



Key splits

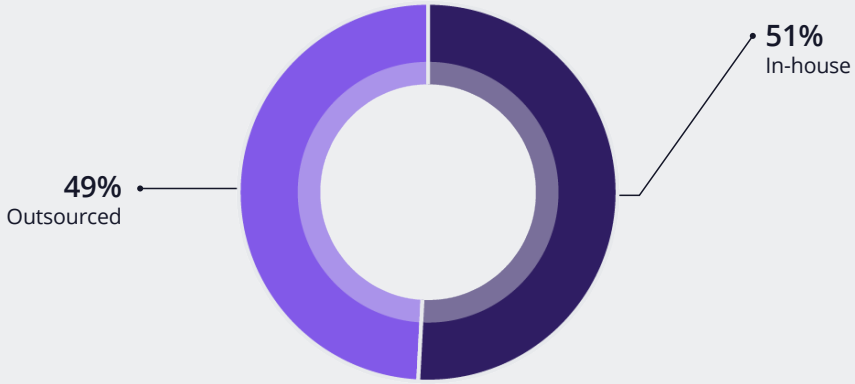
The largest organisations and marketers were more likely to say 'organic lead generation' is the most important data acquisition model. Events and partnering were key for SMBs.

	Staff						
	50-99	100-249	250-499	500-999	1000-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999
Organic lead gen	24	26	36	28	42	64	56
Partnerships	29	29	14	34	21	15	16
3rd parties	22	18	34	21	18	14	22
Events	25	26	16	17	18	7	6

Resourcing business development is split

Outsourcing remains a popular alternative to internal sales development but it is vying almost 50-50 with the in-house model and, among the largest companies we surveyed, in-house remains the largest mode. Again, the traditional struggle to hire and retain specialists is causing software companies to look outside their organizations for assistance from outsourcers that focus on one task and have the infrastructure to support their efforts.

How is sales/pipeline development resourced?



Key splits

Largest companies were more likely to say 'in house'.

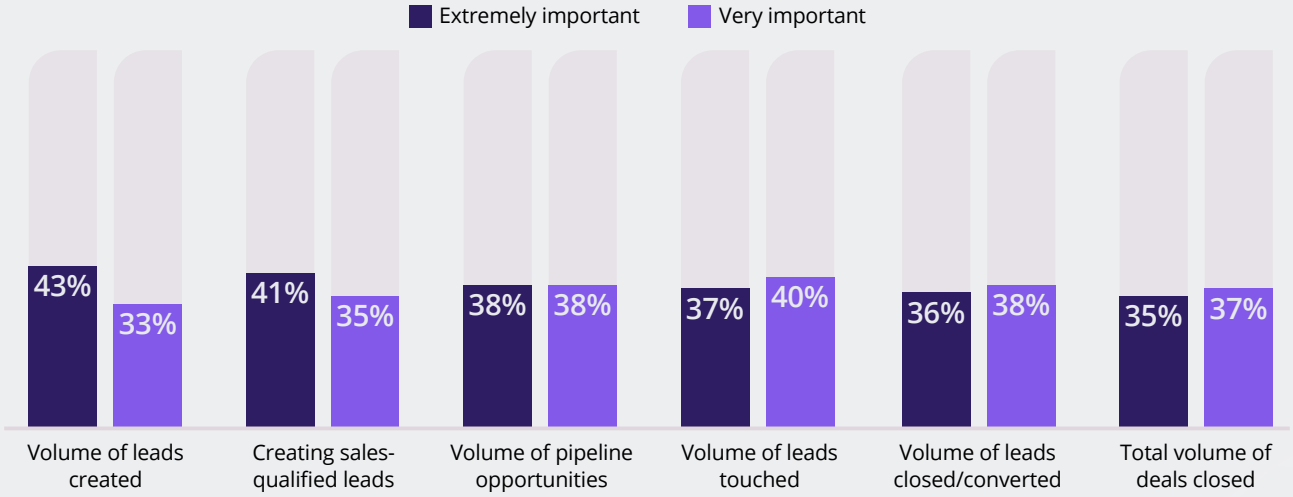
	Staff						
	50-99	100-249	250-499	500-999	1000-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999
In-house	47	48	52	46	54	59	60
Outsourced	53	52	48	54	46	41	40

KPIs: Firms mostly use the old metrics to assess Sales and Marketing performance

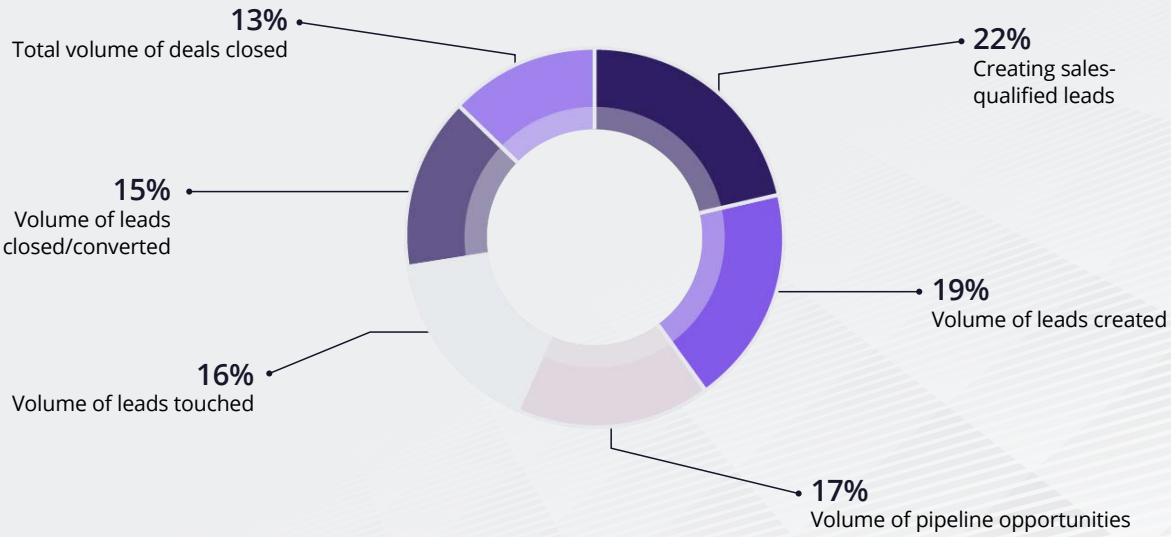
Keeping tabs on the success of Sales and Marketing teams is a complex affair and it's not easy to create reliable key performance indicators. Lead creation in its various forms remains critical but criteria will vary based on individual company needs and the state of markets.

What is also notable here is the lack of new ways to assess performance. Perhaps soon, KPIs such as propensity to buy more services or to share positive experiences with peers will be more closely analysed.

How important are each of these when analyzing go-to-market team success?



And which of these is most important?



CHALLENGES 1:
Capitalizing on digitization leads the list

To understand the major obstacles facing Sales and Marketing leaders and executives, we asked the audience on a sliding scale to nominate their biggest challenges. Here, two areas stood out.

First, capitalizing on the boom in digital automation capabilities where a plethora of tools and technologies have emerged to help executives analyze customer and prospect behavior. It may be that the sheer scale of these new and morphing opportunities has overwhelmed our panel as 69% found making use of such opportunities either extremely or very challenging. Also, on a related theme, having the people to deploy tools and interpret data is a challenge for even the largest organisations... and keeping them may be just as hard as finding them, given the demand for data scientists and analysts.

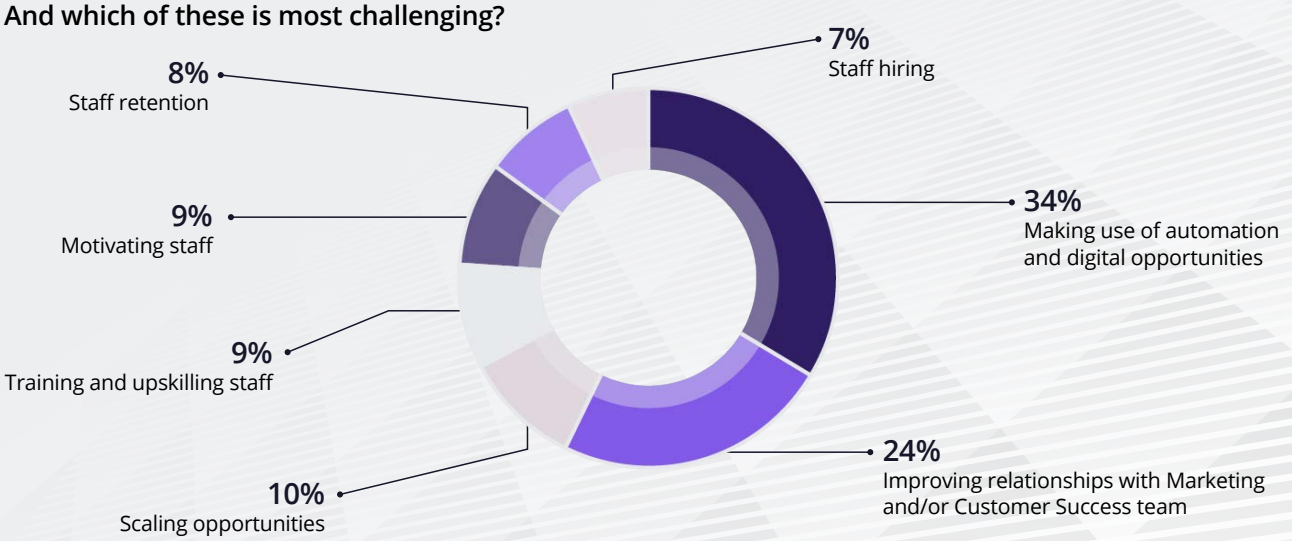
Second is the aforementioned age-old conundrum of having Sales and Marketing teams work in tandem. More reliable data, shared visibility into trends and activity, and models such as ABM are helping here but 63% of our panel indicated that improving relationships between these teams is highly challenging. Note also that making full use of new marketing activities and Customer Success leads is viewed as challenging.

How challenging would you say each of these Sales and Marketing responsibilities is for your company?



Drilling down, we asked the panel to simply name their biggest single challenge and viewing through this lens only underlined the importance of those challenges outlined above with a third of respondents seeing the hardest job is not squandering digital opportunities...

And which of these is most challenging?



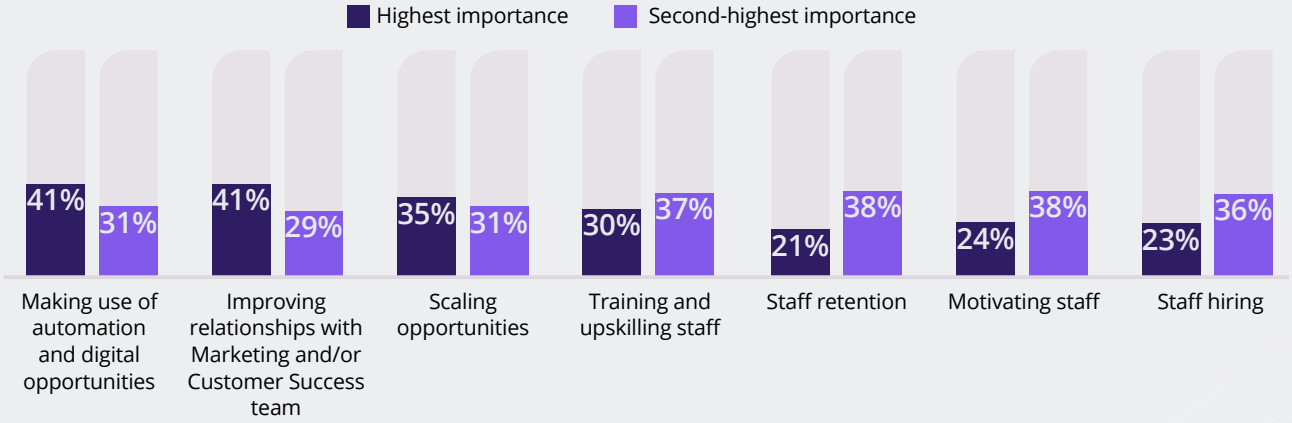
Key split

The largest companies, the most senior respondents and marketers were more likely to stress making use of automation as most challenging; sales respondents were more likely to say improving relationships with Customer Success and Marketing.

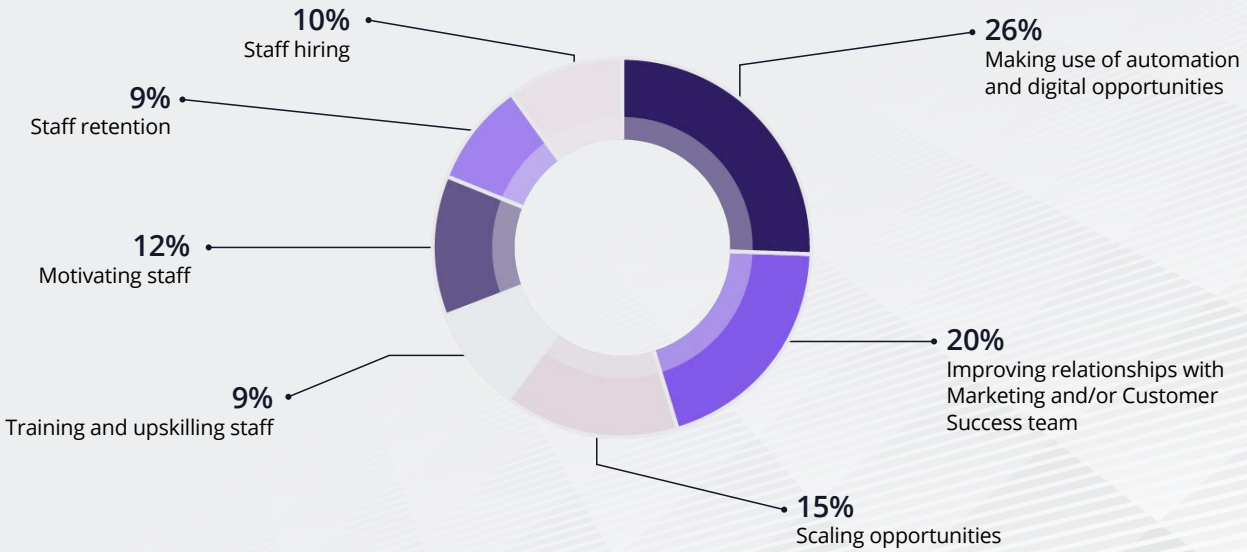
	Staff						
	50-99	100-249	250-499	500-999	1000-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999
Making use of digital/automation	24	31	23	26	34	61	53

Asking about the importance of these challenges, our audience stressed the relevance of the twin factors above but also pointed to the obstacle of scaling up opportunities. This of course is a growing pain for many companies pursuing enterprise status, as many in our survey are doing. (See note on demographics at end of document.)

How important are each of these Sales and Marketing responsibilities is to your company's success?



And which of these is most important?

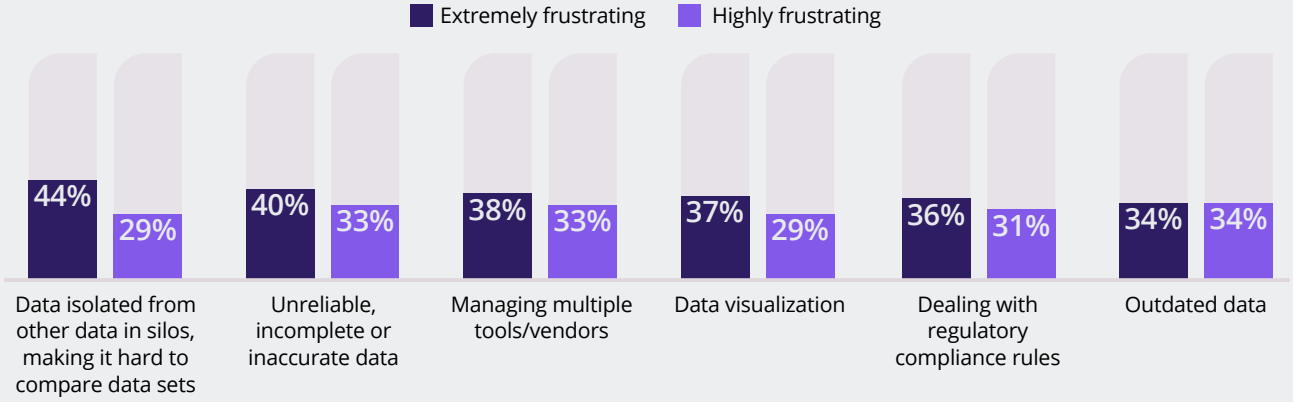


CHALLENGES 2:
What to do with the data we've mined?

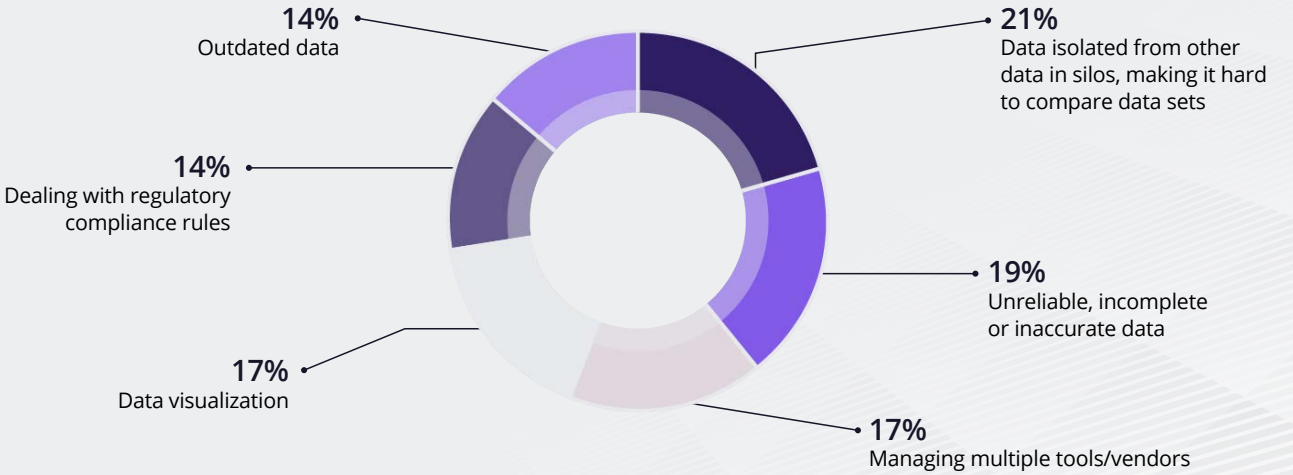
Despite wave after wave of technology advances, managing and making use of data remains a conundrum for many, if not most. Leading the challenges are incomplete or misleading data and data silos where data sets cannot easily be combined and viewed holistically through a single lens. Setting up a data integration technology bedrock with a simplified vendor roster may help.

The risks of poorly managed data here are many, from potential for security infractions and voiding data regulations to wasteful campaigns based on false and misleading assumptions because of poor data foundations.

How would you rate your frustration levels with discovering and making use of data?



And which of these is most frustrating?



Key splits

The largest companies were most likely to say isolated data was their biggest frustration. SMBs were more likely to stress data visualization.

	Staff						
	50-99	100-249	250-499	500-999	1000-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999
Isolated data	16	15	14	21	13	27	28
Data visualization	27	15	11	6	11	8	3

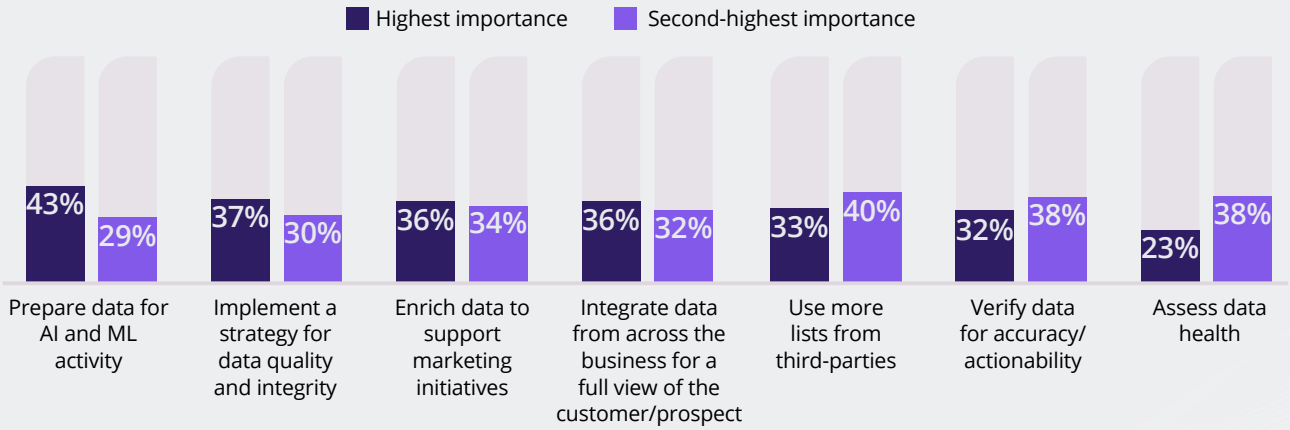
Opportunities

A massive opportunity from the revolution in data management for Sales and Management teams is taking advantage of expanding scope to bolster pipelines, encompassing everything from jumping on the AI and Machine Learning juggernaut to data hygiene enhancement.

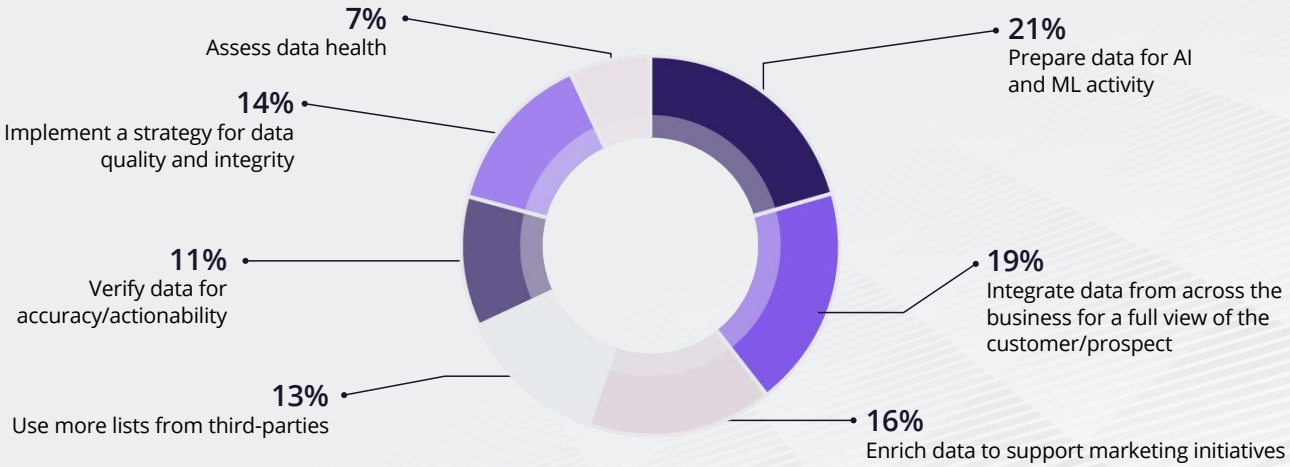
There is a schism here in that AI/ML in their present forms require new thinking, structures and teams. Data quality on the other hand is a perennial challenge that should have already been addressed and should be re-examined on a regular basis.

The key takeaway here is GIGO: 'garbage in, garbage out'. That is, if the audience doesn't commit to the hard yards of working to clean and integrate data across systems, platforms and applications, then AI/ML and all the other possible glittering prizes will be squandered.

In the next 12 months, how important will each of these pipeline-related opportunities be for your company?



And which of these is most important?



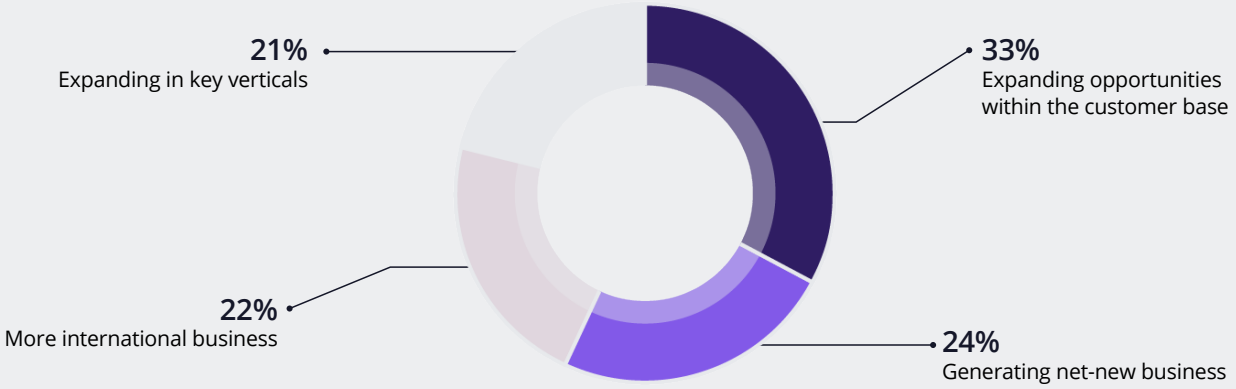
Key split

The largest companies and marketers were most likely to stress AI/ML data preparation as their biggest frustration.

	Staff						
	50-99	100-249	250-499	500-999	1000-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999
AI/ML	21	18	14	11	16	31	41

And while the race towards adding ‘new logos’ is always a thrill, expanding wallet share is seen as even more important, while delving deeper into new markets by geography or vertical is also a common chase. ABM is again useful here, helping to retain ‘flight risk’ accounts and persuade customers to invest more.

What is your highest priority for pipeline and go-to-market activities?



Key split

The largest companies were most likely to stress expanding within the customer base.

	Staff						
	50-99	100-249	250-499	500-999	1000-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999
Expanding across customer base	31	30	28	33	28	45	42

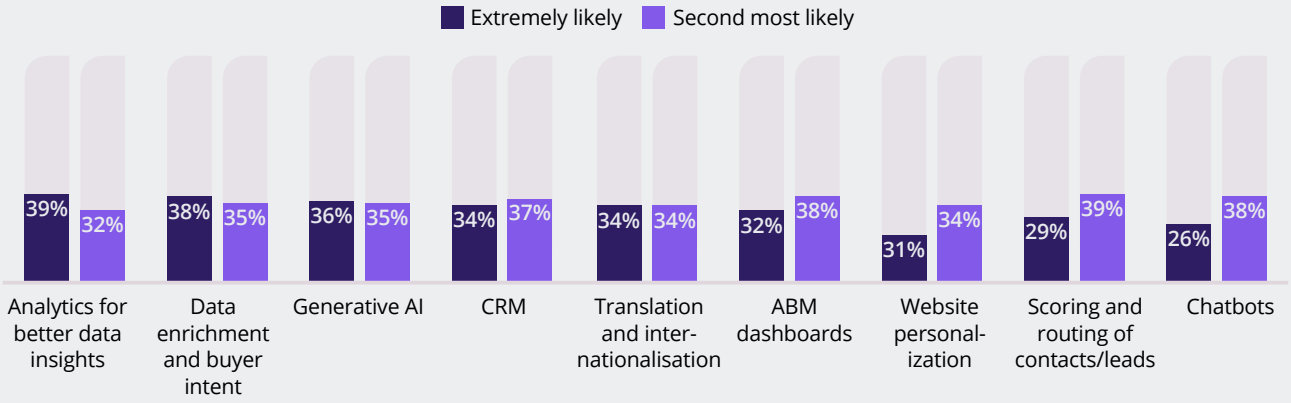
The future

Firms are investing in the future via several areas where pipeline spend is needed.

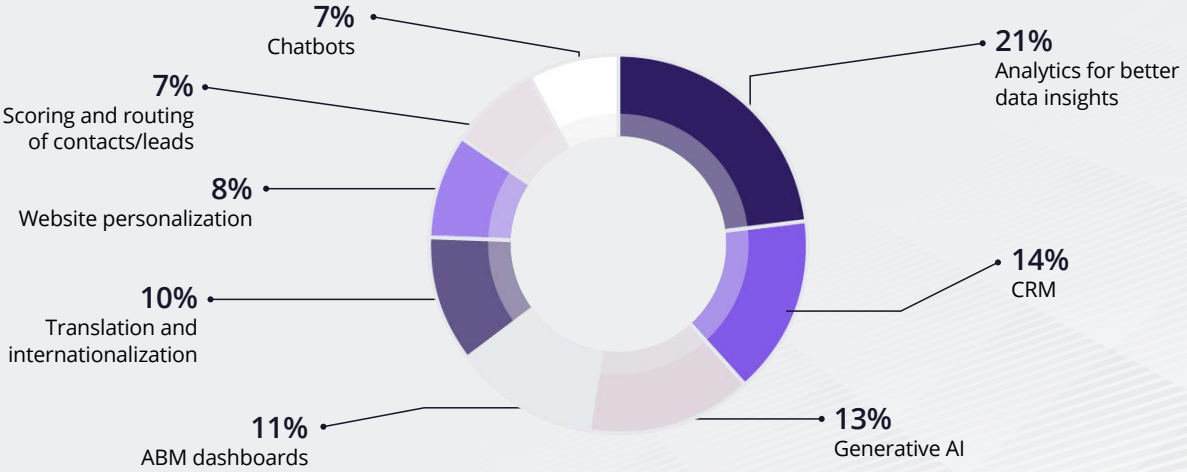
Software organizations will need to speculate to accumulate in order to succeed in the technologies that are turbo-charging sales pipeline opportunities. And once again, that spend will need to cross many spheres, encompassing everything from data analytics to hot areas like generative AI/chatbots, one-to-one personalisation of offers and predictive insights.

But it will also be important that core areas such as data hygiene and efficient CRM are not ignored. In other words, it's crucial that companies betting on innovation don't neglect to look after one of their most precious assets: data.

In the next 12 months, how likely are you to invest in each of the pipeline-related technologies listed?



And which of these is most likely?



Key splits

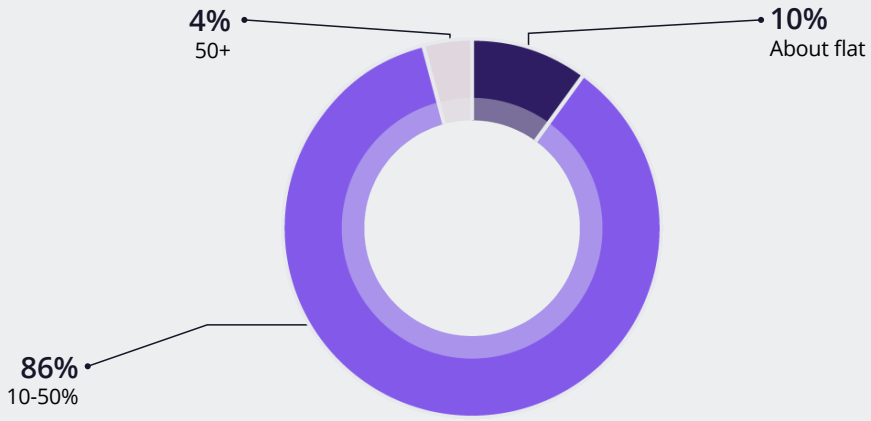
The largest companies surveyed were most likely to stress data analytics as their biggest pipeline spend plan, while SMBs focused on website personalization. Marketers stressed analytics and Generative AI while sales respondents stressed ABM.

	Staff						
	50-99	100-249	250-499	500-999	1000-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999
Data analytics	15	10	3	17	13	49	53
Website personalization	5	19	11	4	3	5	3

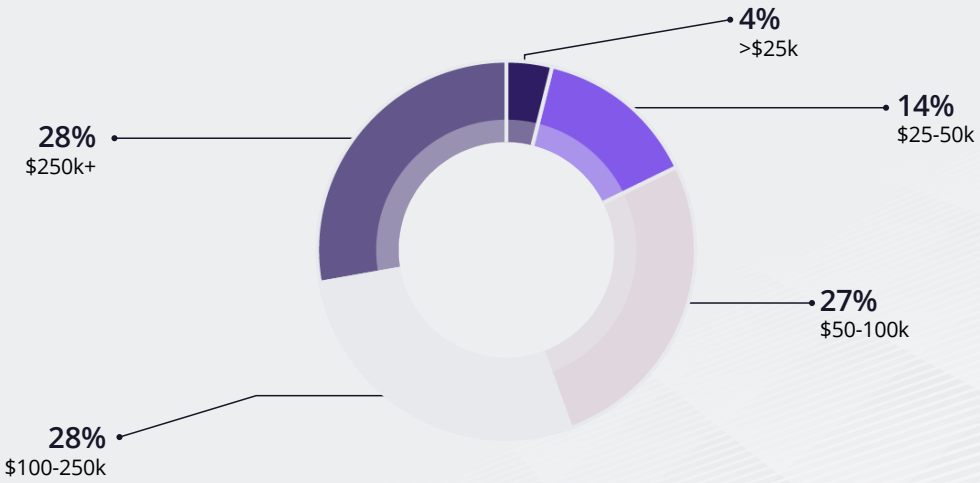
Great Expectations: Most expect significant growth in 2025

Such is the excitement over new tools and models that organisations plan to invest heavily in sales and marketing in 2025 on the back of projected company revenue growth. These confident predictions also probably point to the audience where many companies are young and still scaling up for growth.

What is your anticipated 2025 revenue growth rate?



In 2025, how much more will your company spend on software specifically related to sales and marketing initiatives compared to 2024?



Conclusion

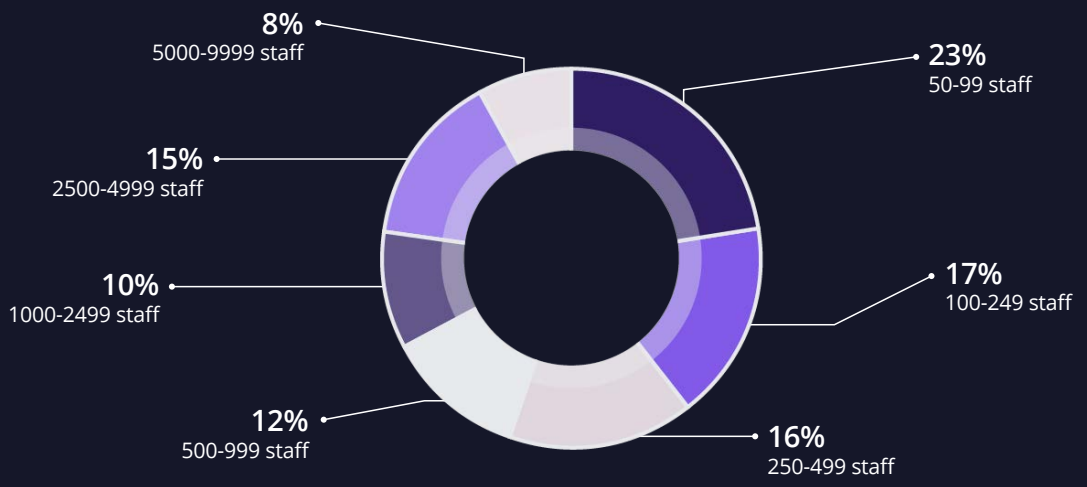


Our report points to a dynamic environment for software companies where new opportunities are widely valued but old habits still die hard. Digital-and data-enabled strategies will play a larger role going forward, especially as game-changing technologies such as AI advance. Keeping up with change is never easy and smart companies will pay close attention to technology change and take a progressive approach to partnering as well as classic conundrums such as how to make sales and marketing teams collaborative. This is an exciting time to operate in and a sensible mixture of stable data quality and management techniques with speculative spending, technology deployment and skills will be a likely formula for success.

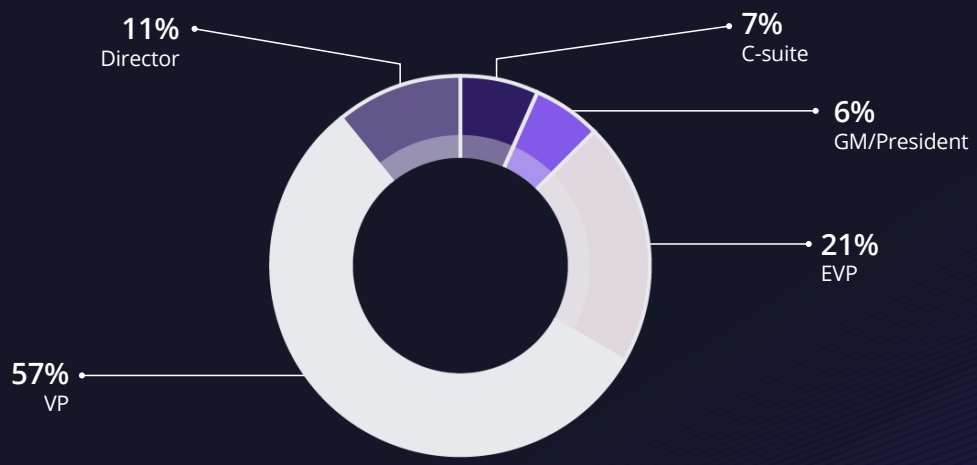
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Demographics

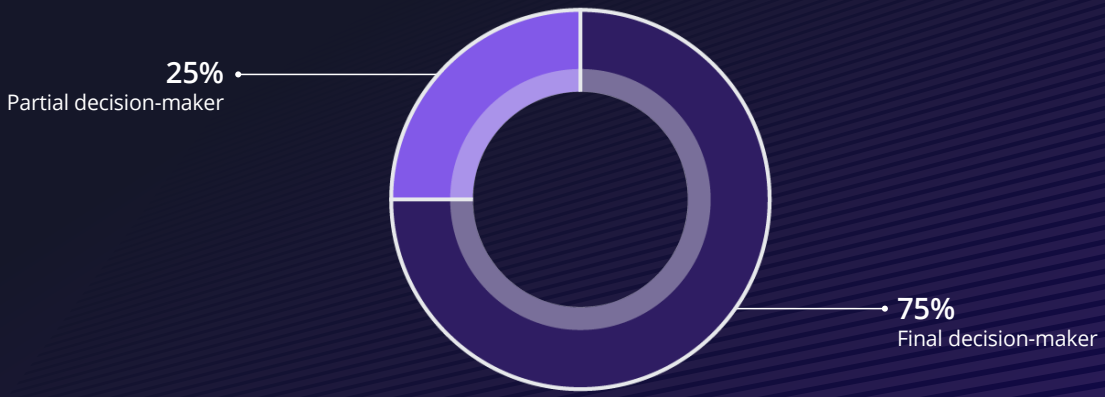
All respondents came from the US and all worked in the software sector. A little over half operated in marketing (54%) versus 46% in sales. Most came from small to mid-sized firms (40%) with the remaining 60% from enterprises with over 250 staff.



All respondents held senior roles.

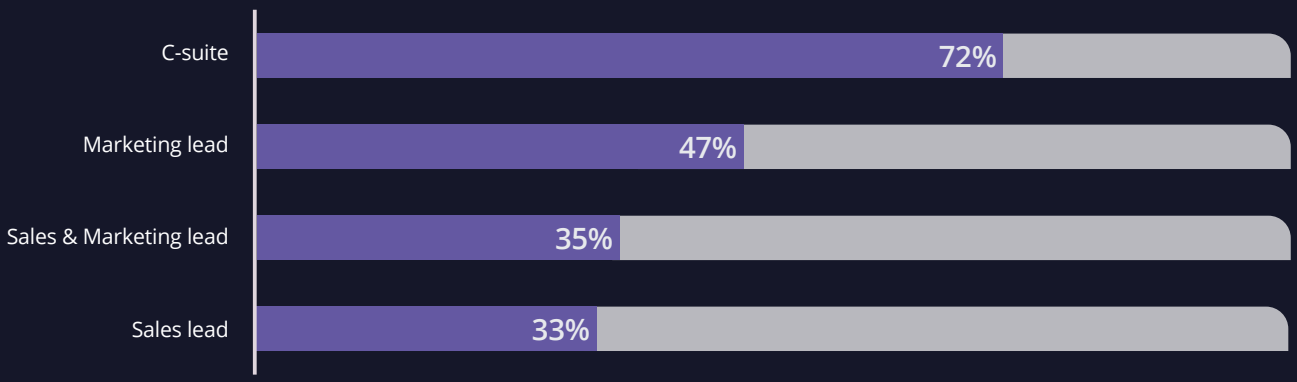


All of our panel were decision-makers with three-quarters of the panel having the final say in signing off relevant purchasing.



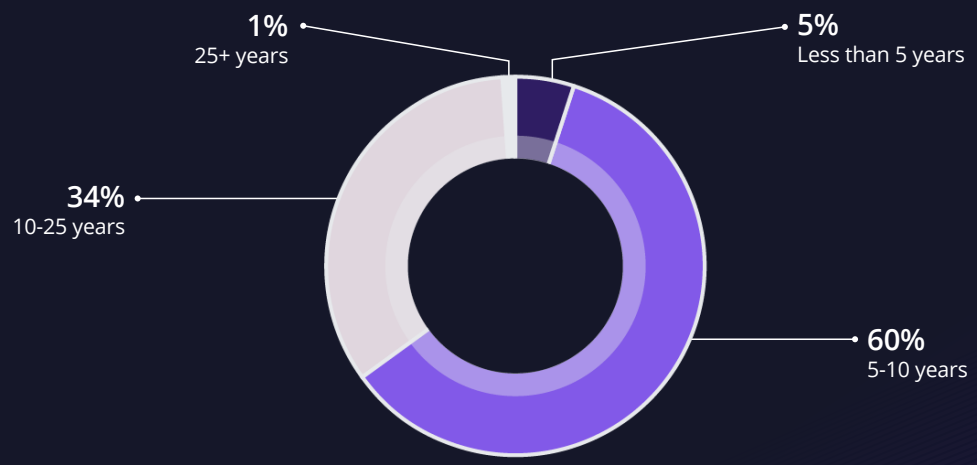
Business development leaders typically report into a mix of lines from C-suite to departmental leads in the Sales and Marketing functional areas.

To whom does the Business Development function report?



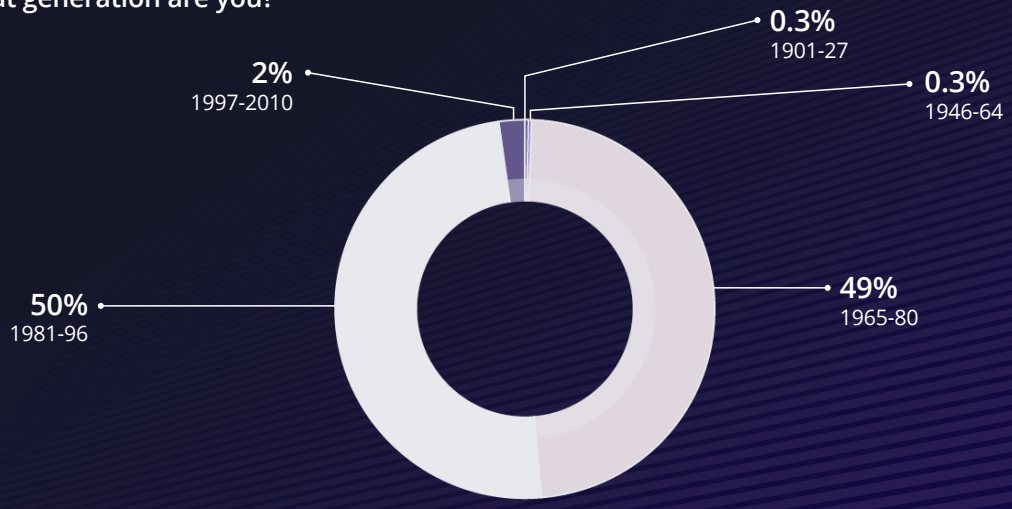
Most respondents came from scale-ups (five to 10 years old) but represented a wide span of company ages.

How old is your company?



As for individuals, about half were from the 30-45 bracket and almost half were older.

From what generation are you?





Phone Number: 650-435-4601

Email: contact@youricp.com

Address: 548 Market Street #51150, San Francisco, CA 94104

Website: youricp.com

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/youricp