



# The 2026 B2B Marketing Edge: Control is the Competitive Advantage

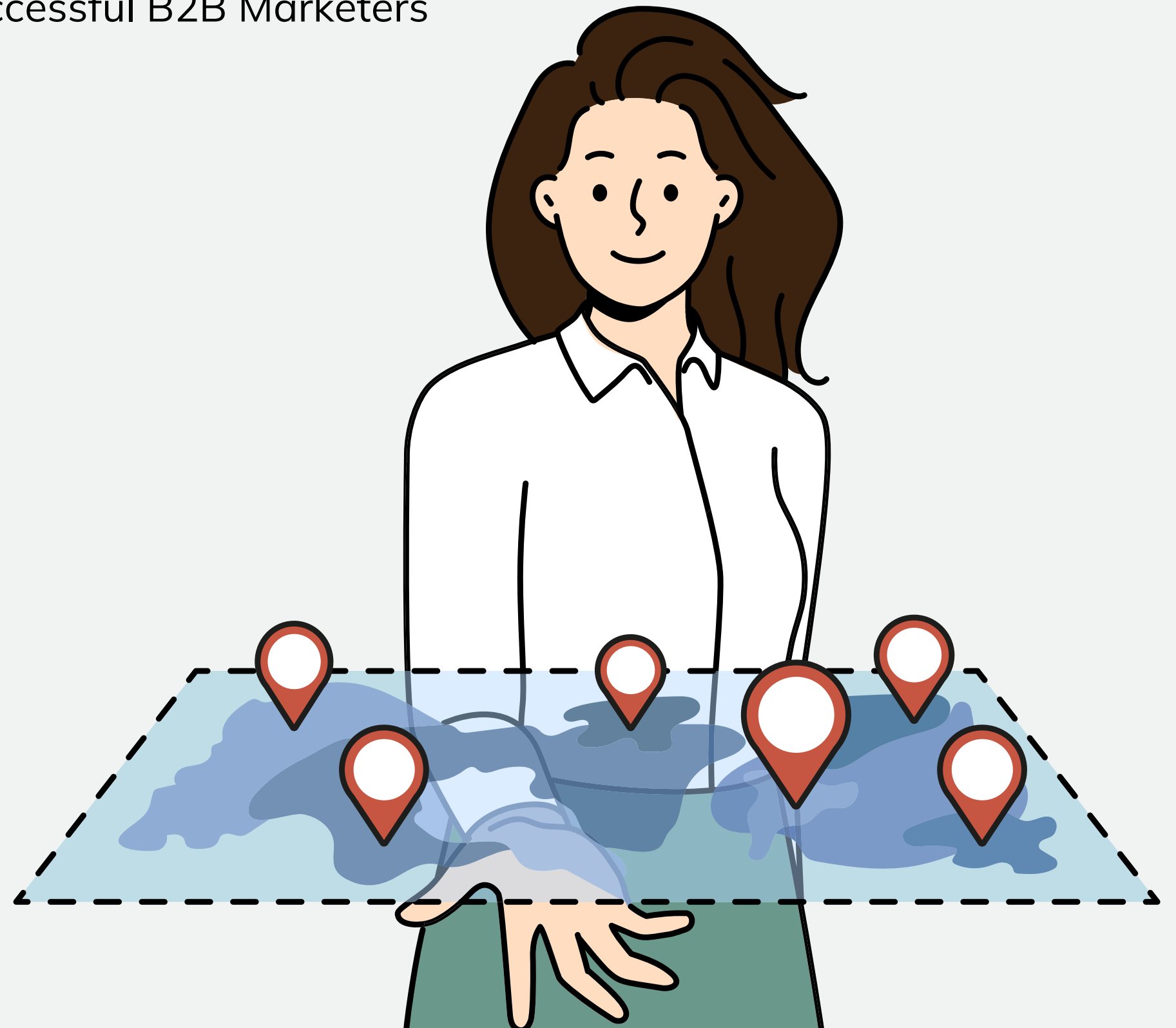
The Strategies Successful B2B Marketers Are Using to Create Growth



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### **Methodology**

Ascend2 benchmarks the performance of business strategies and the tactics and technology that drives them. Anteriad partnered with Ascend2 to survey 631 marketing decision-makers across all levels of marketing leadership, located across the United States, United Kingdom, and APAC. These marketers represent B2B and B2B/B2C organizations with 250 or more employees. The survey was fielded in March 2026.



B2B marketing continues to get more complex, including new buyer behaviors and emerging channels like AI search, Reddit and CTV. Marketing leaders also have to deal with higher expectations of growth in an uncertain economic environment.

Amidst this chaos, there are B2B marketers making it work. They are confident in their approach, see good returns on their marketing programs, and get higher budgets. This is the fifth annual report from Anteriad and Ascend2, examining the strategies of over 630 B2B marketing leaders and practitioners across the United States, United Kingdom, and APAC to see what the most successful marketers do differently.

The B2B marketers with the best results have found ways to create a competitive advantage. They have implemented buying groups, have a strong data foundation, and use sophisticated measurement including attribution to track their outcomes. The good news is that every B2B marketer can use these best practices, starting today. Not every B2B marketer has the budget or tech stack they wished for, but there is always an opportunity to improve your data strategy, optimization, and measurement.



**As Forrester notes, "Volatility can benefit those who adapt faster, focus harder, and lead more deliberately."**

# Takeaways: The Pillars that Define Top B2B Marketers in 2026

This year, achieving company revenue growth is harder. We saw a drop in marketers around the world reporting significant revenue increases from 2025 to 2026.

In last year's reporting, over one-third (36%) said they experienced significant increases in revenue during the previous year, compared to just 28% this year. About half have seen moderate increases. Organizations with flat or decreased revenue have become more prevalent this year.

At the same time, from data to campaign optimization to measurement, marketers cited a broad spectrum of challenges that they face. From managing and maintaining marketing data to slow approval processes to fragmented insights, many marketers grapple with incomplete and inefficient elements that hinder performance.

B2B marketers can't control everything, but they do have many powerful levers to drive growth even when the world isn't cooperating. In this year's report, we deep dive into the key growth levers that deliver the biggest returns.

- **Using the right data is more important (and effective) than ever.** Our Data Heroes group was a bit smaller this year: 40% of B2B marketers surveyed said that they are using the right data to convert their audiences, and it's proven in their pipeline. This group continues to see increasing success in meeting goals than their peers, with 43% significantly exceeding goals compared to 18% of other marketers.
- **Buying Groups are now a critical audience strategy.** While most marketers have not yet fully implemented buying groups (where they are defined, activated, and central to how they go to market), the 38% that have cite improved marketing and sales alignment, higher win rates, and better conversion from opportunity to closed revenue as the top benefits.
- **Attribution Leaders have better insights that drive results.** 18% of those surveyed report that they track marketing activity all the way through to closed revenue with a complete attribution model and prioritize attribution when measuring marketing success. Those Attribution Leaders with full visibility into marketing attribution are also more likely than others to have significantly exceeded their primary marketing goals in the last fiscal year (45% vs. 24% of non-attribution leaders).
- **Campaign agility delivers higher performance.** In our survey, 41% of B2B marketers reported they frequently reallocate spend based on performance data. Marketers who are less agile face a variety of challenges, including slow approval, technology and platform limitations, and lack of real time performance data.
- **B2B Marketers need to "Be In the Room Where It Happens."** For the first time, we asked who the top marketing leader reports to, and found that 36% report to the CEO while 33% report to a commercial leader. Marketers reporting to a commercial leader reported stronger goal alignment and measurability. But reporting structure is only part of the story. When marketing and the CFO are not aligned, the consequences are real: increased scrutiny on spend, reduced budgets, and delays in launching strategic initiatives. Influence across the entire C-Suite matters as much as who you report to.

# 2026 Overview: Pushing Past Challenges

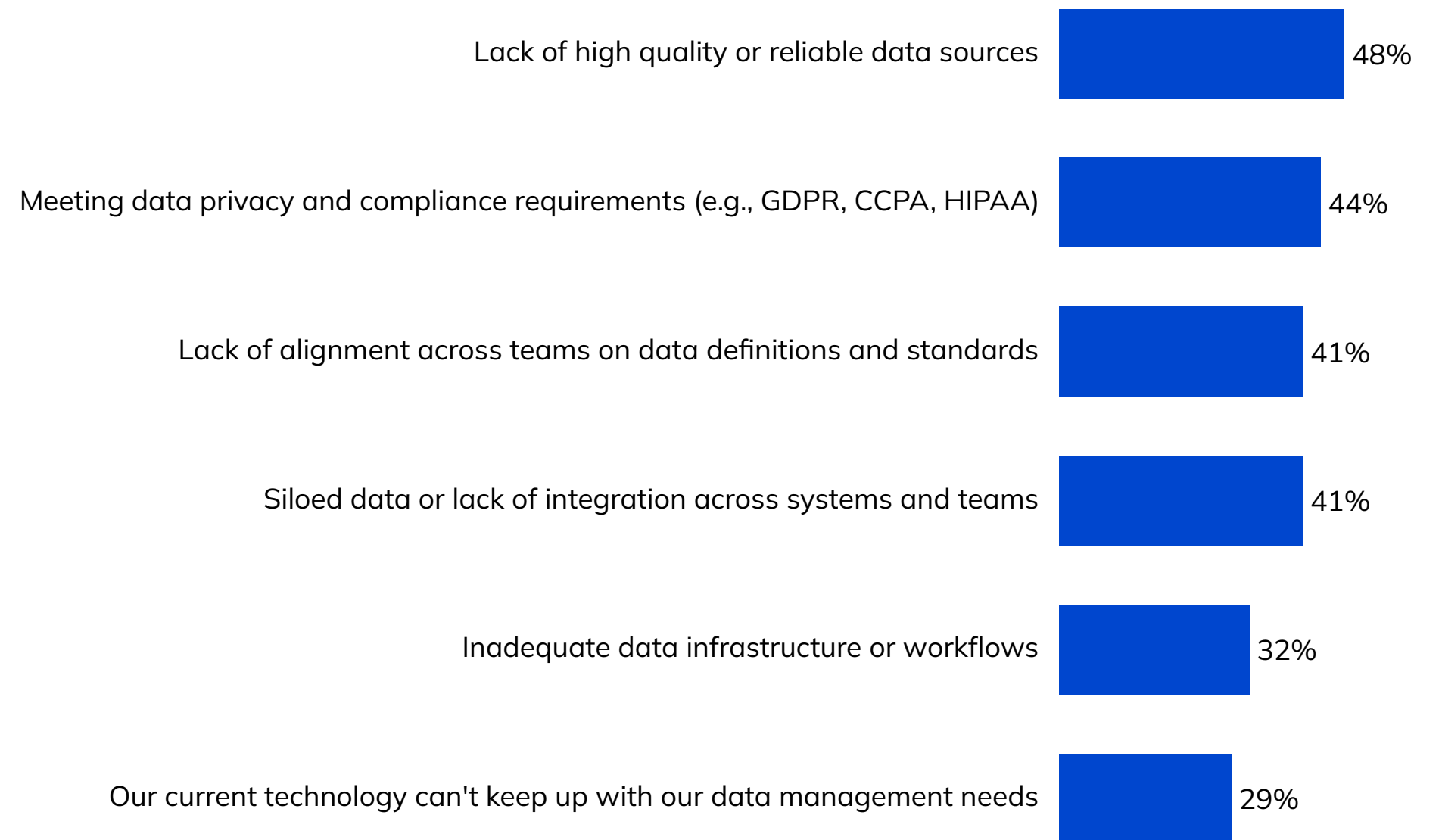
This year has been marked by roller coaster economies globally and emerging innovations that could dramatically change how businesses make buying decisions. Marketers must incorporate ever more data formats, KPIs, and media channels, from AI search to Reddit to CTV.

From identifying audiences to optimizing campaigns to measuring performance, B2B marketers face many challenges. Nearly half (48%) report issues with data quality and reliability. Meeting data privacy and compliance requirements impacts 44% of those surveyed. And 41% report being challenged by a lack of alignment across teams as well as siloed data or a lack of integration across systems.

Yet despite these headwinds, B2B marketers are pushing past them. Budgets are growing, goals are being met, and confidence in the budgeting process is at a high. The majority of survey respondents (63%) reported a budget increase for 2026, and 47% say they are very confident in their organization's process for making marketing budget decisions. The marketers finding ways through the complexity are the ones worth paying attention to.

## What are the most critical challenges your organization faces in managing and maintaining your marketing data?

(Select up to 3)

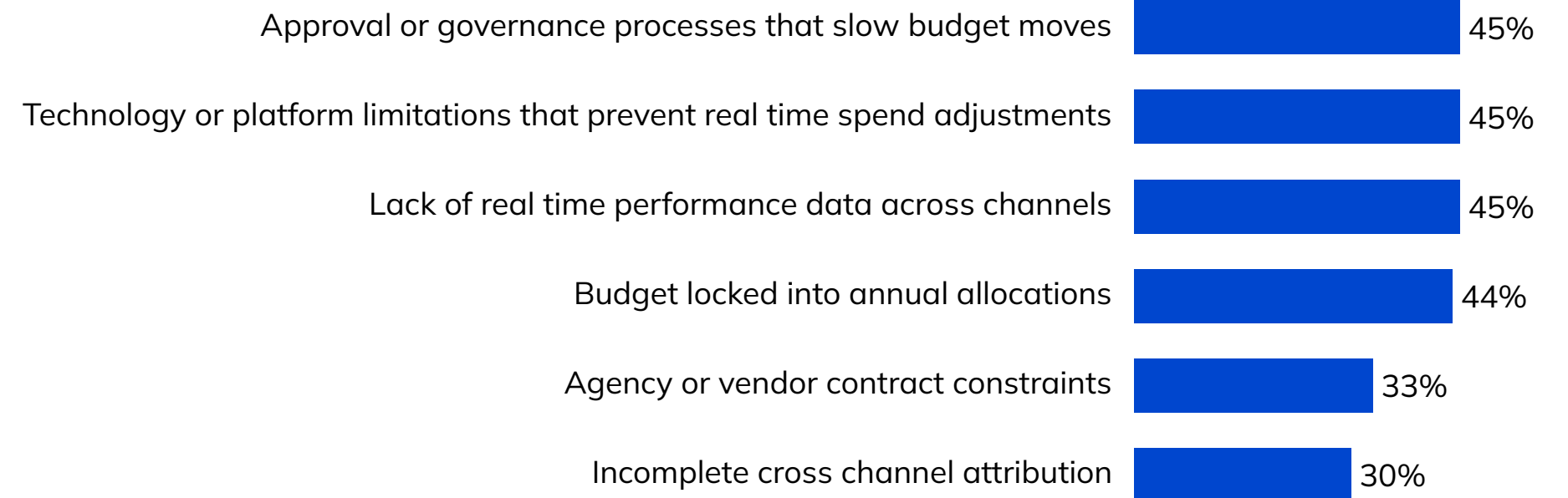


Optimizing campaigns effectively can also be a thorny task for B2B marketers. We saw several obstacles that were equally common including slow approval processes for moving budget, technology limitations that prevent real time budget adjustments, lack of real time performance data, and budgets that are locked in for the year.

Marketing teams also face a broad spectrum of analytics challenges. A third or more of global B2B marketers are challenged by measuring performance across channels in one place, connecting marketing activity to specific buyers or buying groups, identifying what marketing activity drives pipeline creation, connecting marketing to closed revenue, and limited visibility into behavior and engagement.

## What are the biggest barriers that prevent you from reallocating or optimizing spend during an active campaign?

(Select up to 3)



## What are the biggest challenges your team faces when using analytics to inform marketing decisions and understand performance?

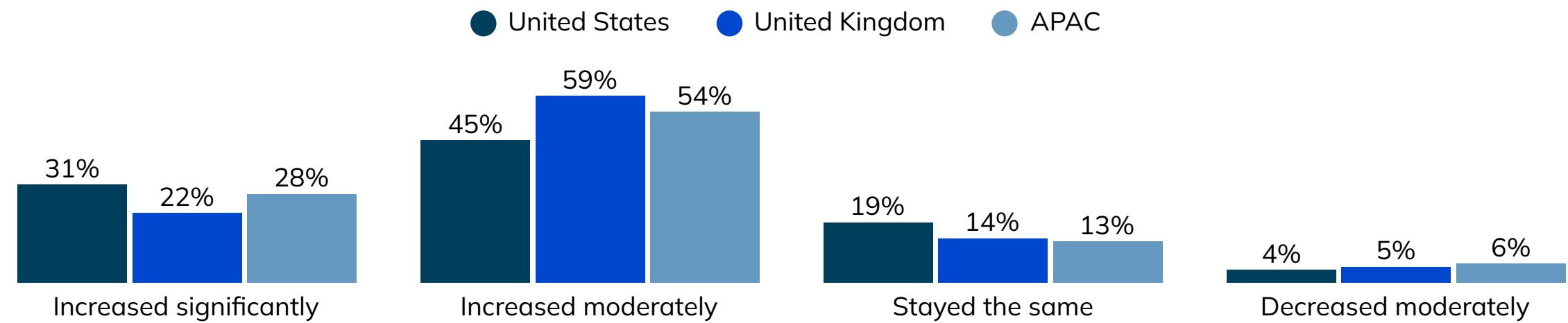
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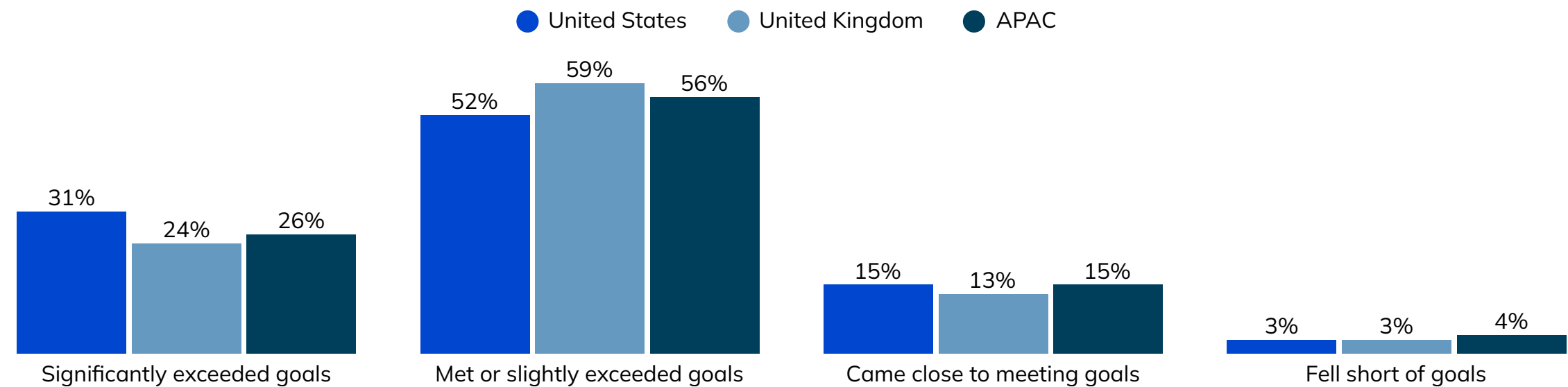
The market challenges may have had an effect on top-line performance in 2025. Fewer B2B marketers reported working at companies that achieved significant revenue growth last year compared to 2024 (36% down to 28%). B2B marketers in the US had the highest percentage of companies with significant revenue growth at 31%, compared to 22% in the UK and 28% in APAC.

When the company isn't growing revenue fast enough, marketers can feel the strain, with a higher sense of urgency to deliver pipeline, but marketers appear to have been up for the challenge. Across regions, the majority of marketers exceeded their marketing goals, with 31% of US B2B marketers significantly exceeding their primary goals, 24% in the UK, and 26% in APAC.

### Which best describes the change in revenue at your organization in the last year?



### To what extent did the marketing team meet primary goals last fiscal year?

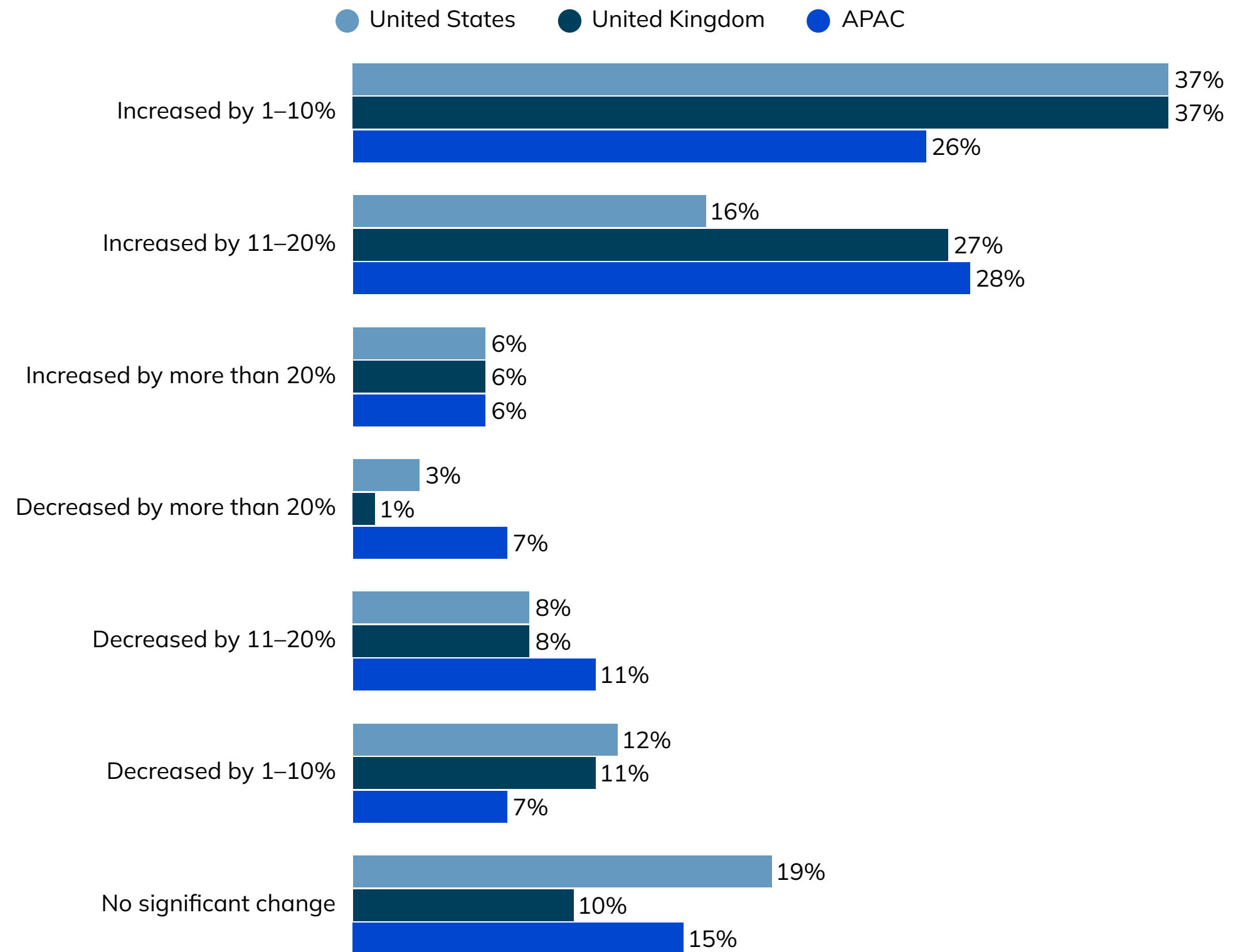


The majority of our survey respondents (63%) reported getting a budget increase for 2026 over last year. Analyst firms show variation in budget growth from 2025 to 2026. According to [Gartner, Inc.](#), marketing budgets remain effectively flat, rising only slightly to 7.8% of company revenue in 2026 from 7.7% in 2025. [Forrester's Budget Planning Guide: B2B Marketing Executives](#) points to higher growth (expectations at least) with 83% of B2B marketing decision-makers expecting increased investment over the next 12 months.

Our survey also discovered that budget increases fluctuate region to region. While the UK saw the least significant revenue growth, these marketers actually had the highest percentage of marketers with an increased marketing budget at 70% compared to 59% in APAC and 58% in the US.

It seems that the value B2B marketers bring to their organization is becoming clear to the executive team. After years of frustration, marketers have a positive outlook on their company's budgeting process this year. 47% of B2B marketers surveyed say they are very confident in their organization's process for making marketing budget decisions. Another 46% are somewhat confident.

## How did your marketing budget change for the 2026 fiscal year compared to 2025?



# Taking Control: The Strategies Used By The Most Successful B2B Marketers

We dive into the strategies and tactics used by the most successful marketers across four categories: Data, Buying Groups, Attribution, and Campaign Agility. In each section, we look at the factors that affect performance, and deliver expert tips for moving your own marketing strategy forward.

## Data Heroes: Creating Confidence

After peaking at 44% of respondents in 2025, our Data Heroes group shrank slightly to 40% this year, but are still seeing strong performance. Data Heroes still dramatically outperform compared to their peers, with 43% having significantly exceeded their marketing goals compared to 18% of other B2B marketers. The US is slightly more inclined to have Data Heroes compared to the UK and APAC.

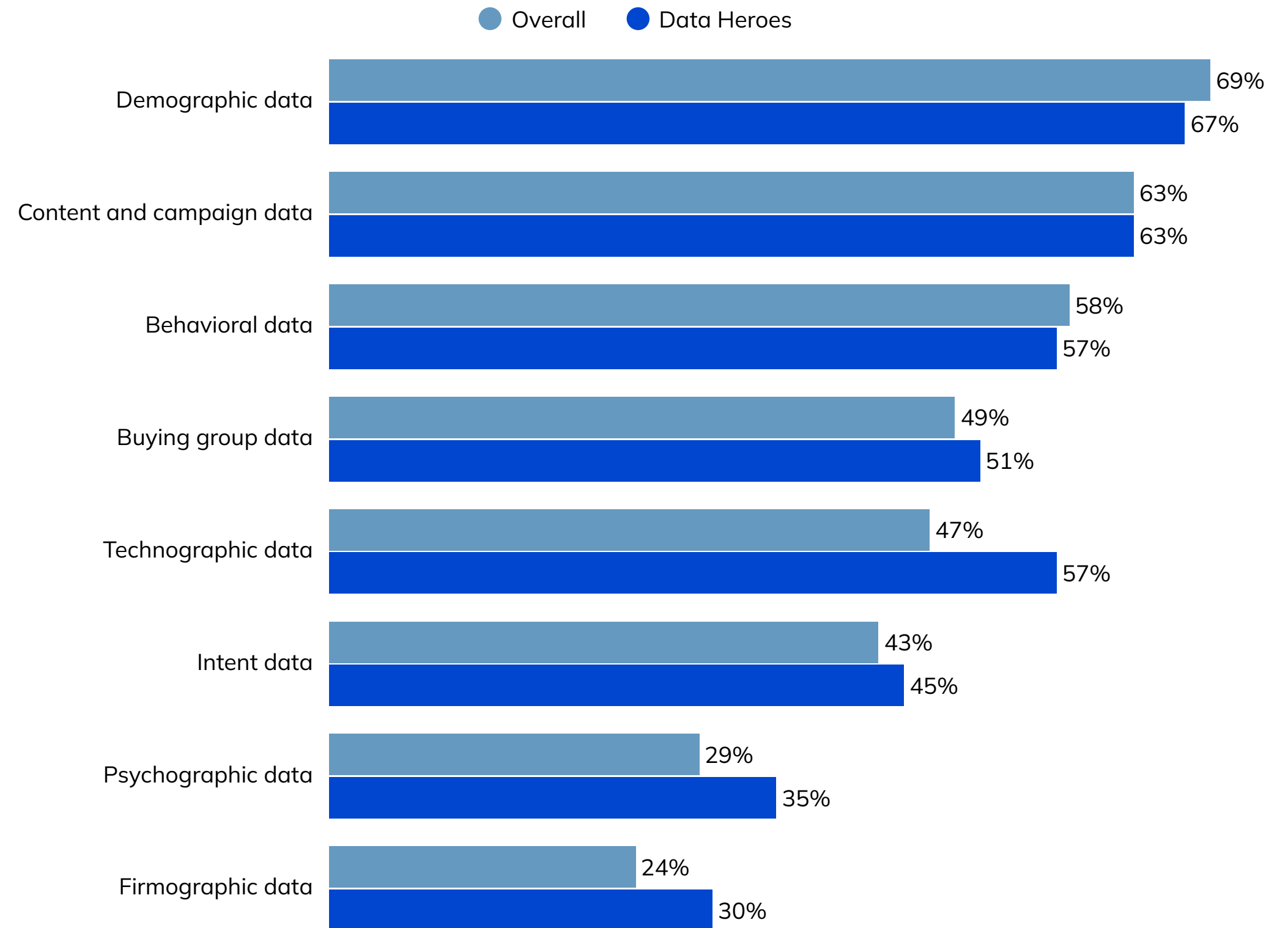


This year, the high performance of Data Heroes cannot be attributed to data access alone. In this year's survey, most marketers used a broad spectrum of different data types, which was not the case in the past. Both Data Heroes and other marketers have broadly adopted data types, including buying group data and intent data. Data Heroes are more likely to use technographic, psychographic, and firmographic data. While other marketers are catching up on adopting a broader range of data types, what continues to set Data Heroes apart is not just what data they use, but their ability to prove it is working.



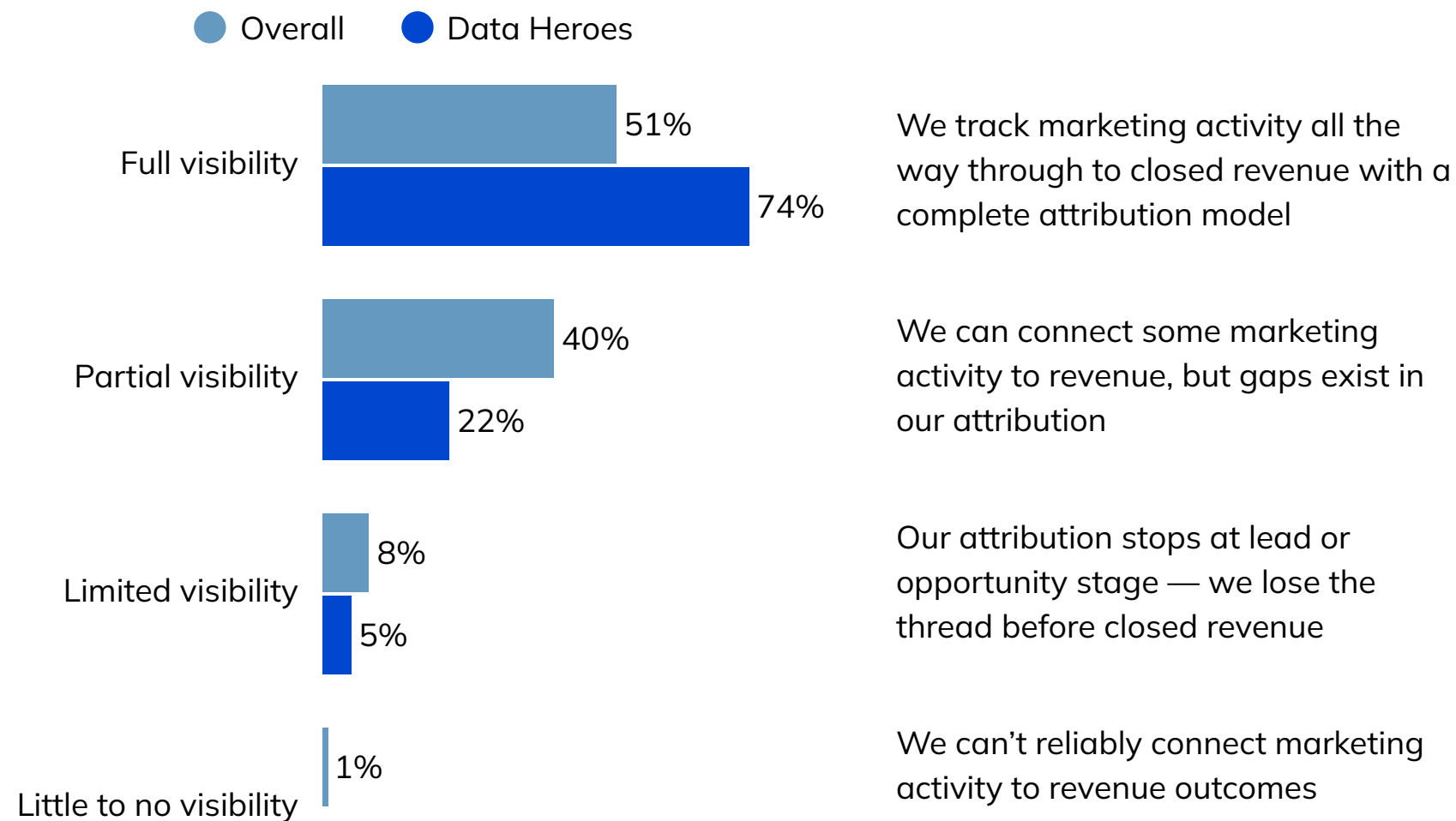
## Which of the following are you currently utilizing when targeting audiences?

(Select all that apply)

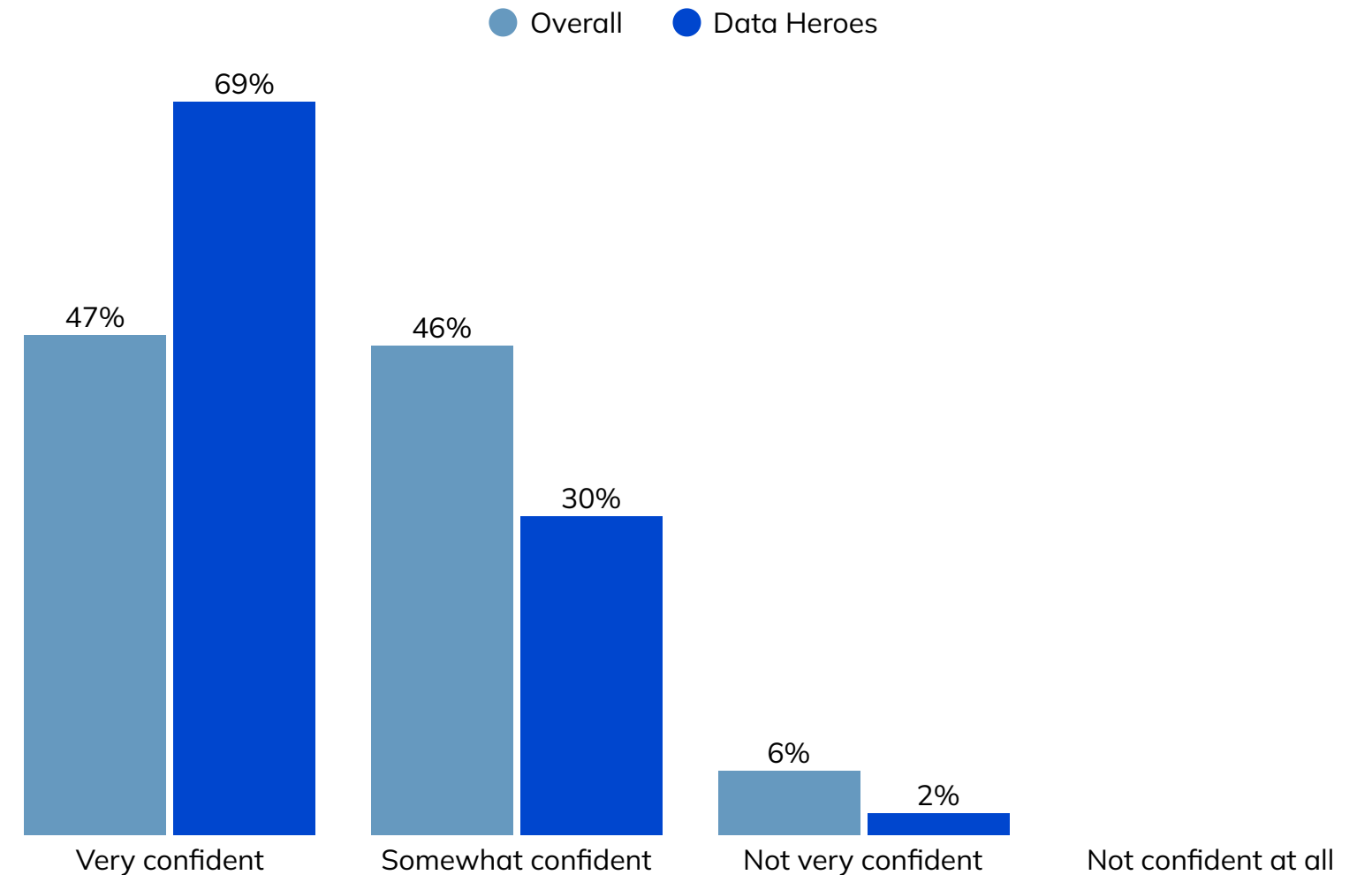


Where Data Heroes get their confidence, and their performance, is in their ability to understand how their data is working. Their data is proven in pipeline because they have the measurement models in place to attribute revenue to the data they are using, which allows them to be smart about how they use data. 74% have full visibility into attributing marketing activity to closed revenue compared to 51% of other marketers.

### To what extent do you have visibility into attributing marketing activity to closed revenue?



### How confident are you in your organization's process for making marketing budget decisions?



Interestingly, Data Heroes are slightly more likely to work for the Chief Revenue or Sales Officer and less likely to work for the COO or CFO. And they are more likely to be confident in their company's process for making marketing budget decisions. What seems to be separating the Data Heroes from other marketers this year is alignment and visibility. Data Heroes can see and prove how their data is driving value for their organization.

# Pro Tips

Simply having access to data isn't the same thing as being a "Data Hero." Today, most marketers are using intent data and buying group data. Yes, Data Heroes are using technographic, psychographic and firmographic data a bit more frequently, but the important difference is that they are aligned with revenue goals and are able to prove what data works.

1

Examine each data partner and each data type and do a value-based audit. More isn't always more and cheap data isn't always a bargain. With a proliferation of AI and scraping in the market, it's important that marketers source ethical, traceable data. Having the right data in place means having access to the data that delivers the best return on investment.

2

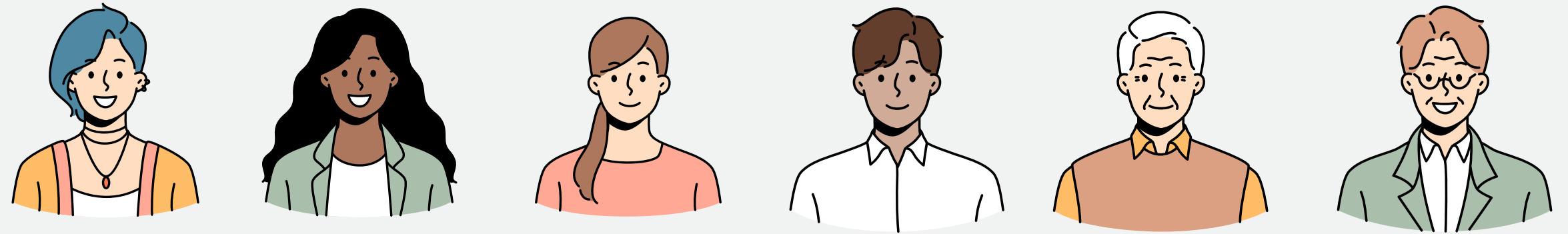
Create a measurement strategy that can connect revenue to data investments directly, so it's clear what data is driving value in your demand generation and pipeline.

3

Work closely with sales and commercial leaders to align on goals, and ensure that campaigns are set up to deliver against those goals directly.

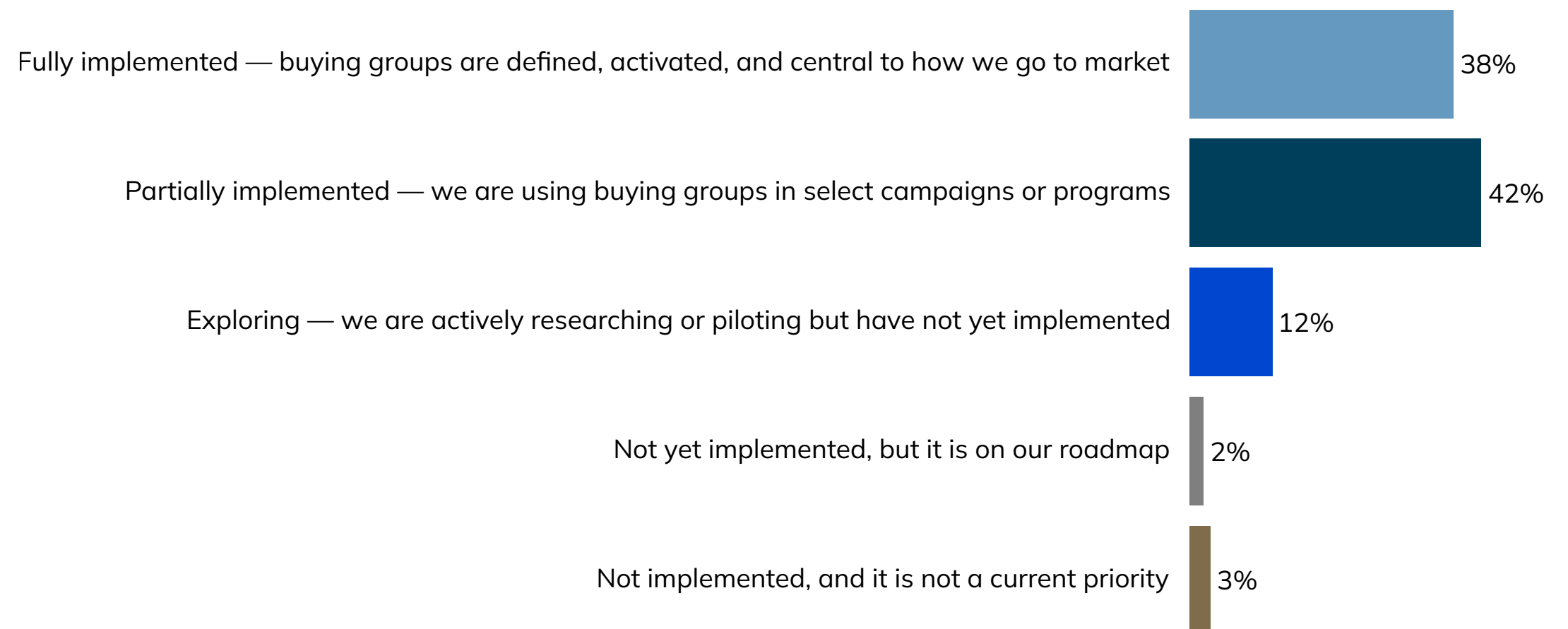
**BONUS: Our team helped OpenText achieve a 25% inquiry-to-MQL lift, 30% MQL-to-SQL lift, and 6x ROI. That is what a measurement model connected to data investments looks like in practice.**

# Buying Groups: The New Control Center



This is the first year we asked about buying groups, and we were surprised to learn that more than a third (38%) of marketers said they have defined and activated buying groups and that they are central to how they go to market. Buying groups are a relatively new concept and require significant orchestration across all marketing activities, and so it is likely that even marketers already activating buying groups have more work to do for buying groups to be a fully mature strategy.

## To what extent has your organization implemented buying groups as part of your marketing and sales strategy?



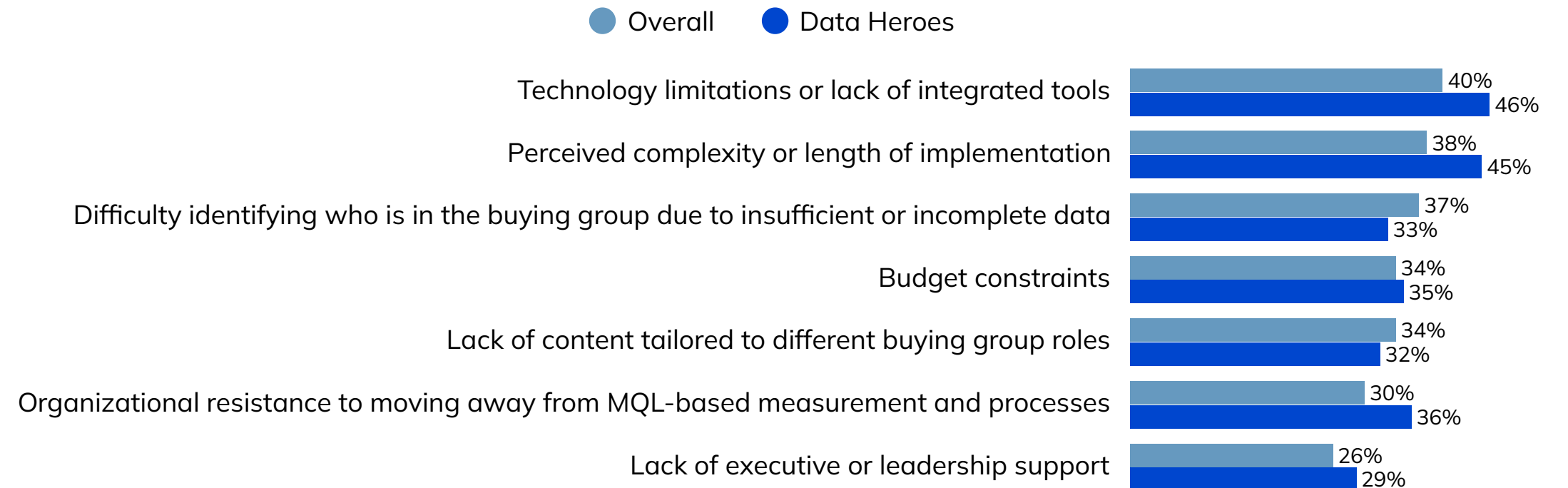
Marketers claiming to have fully activated buying groups are more likely to be executive level (50% vs. 38%). It is possible that while many companies have started to pull together buying group strategies, more senior marketers believe their organization has fully implemented them, while more junior members are experiencing the realities that come with a new strategy and are less likely to agree that their company is executing at a mature level.

Pivoting to a strategy that coordinates targeting and messaging to a group of stakeholders that can contain 10-20 people vs. a single lead is complicated. Even B2B marketers who have implemented buying groups are met with challenges, from technical limitations to perceived complexity.

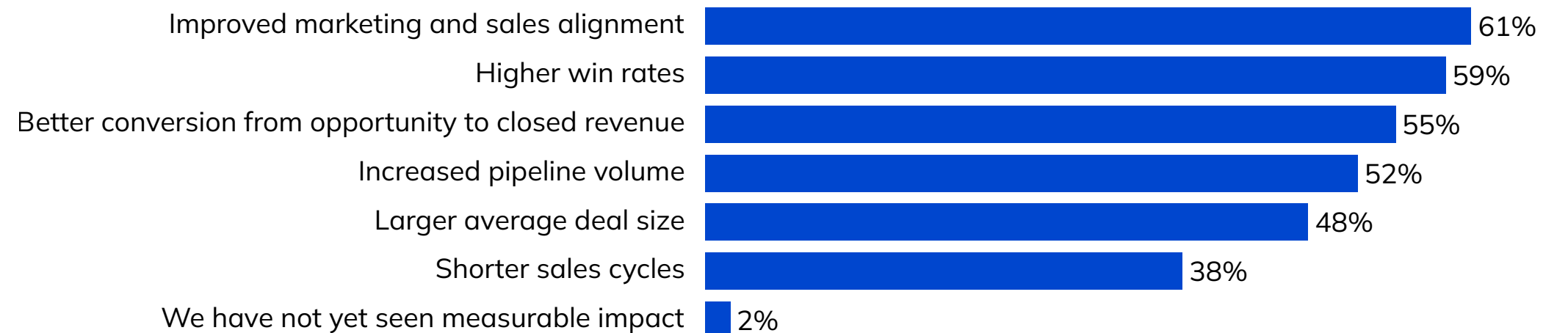
It appears that shifting to buying groups does deliver positive returns. Marketers that have fully implemented buying groups cite improved marketing and sales alignment, higher win rates, and better conversion from opportunity to closed revenue as the top benefits.

## What barriers or challenges has your organization encountered related to buying groups?

(Select all that apply)



## Which business outcomes have improved as a result of implementing buying groups?



# Pro Tips

Targeting buying groups has been a best practice espoused by top analyst firms for years. Although more than a third of companies have implemented buying groups, the number of challenges cited by B2B marketers indicates that there is still room for improvement. Buying group data is available from high quality data partners like Anteriad, which makes getting started entirely within reach. The key to success is to incorporate buying group data into a wider marketing strategy that coordinates outreach and messaging for different stakeholders alongside the sales team.

1

Understand who is in the buying group for each product you sell.

2

Get access to data to reach, engage and track the buying group members you identified. Ensure that buying group data is recent and accurate, from high quality partners that frequently update the data and make it readily available for targeting and execution. And work with partners who provide depth across your known prospective accounts as well as the ability to scale and identify additional targets.

3

Build a buying group strategy hand in hand with the sales team to ensure everyone is prepared to reach out to stakeholders in a coordinated fashion.

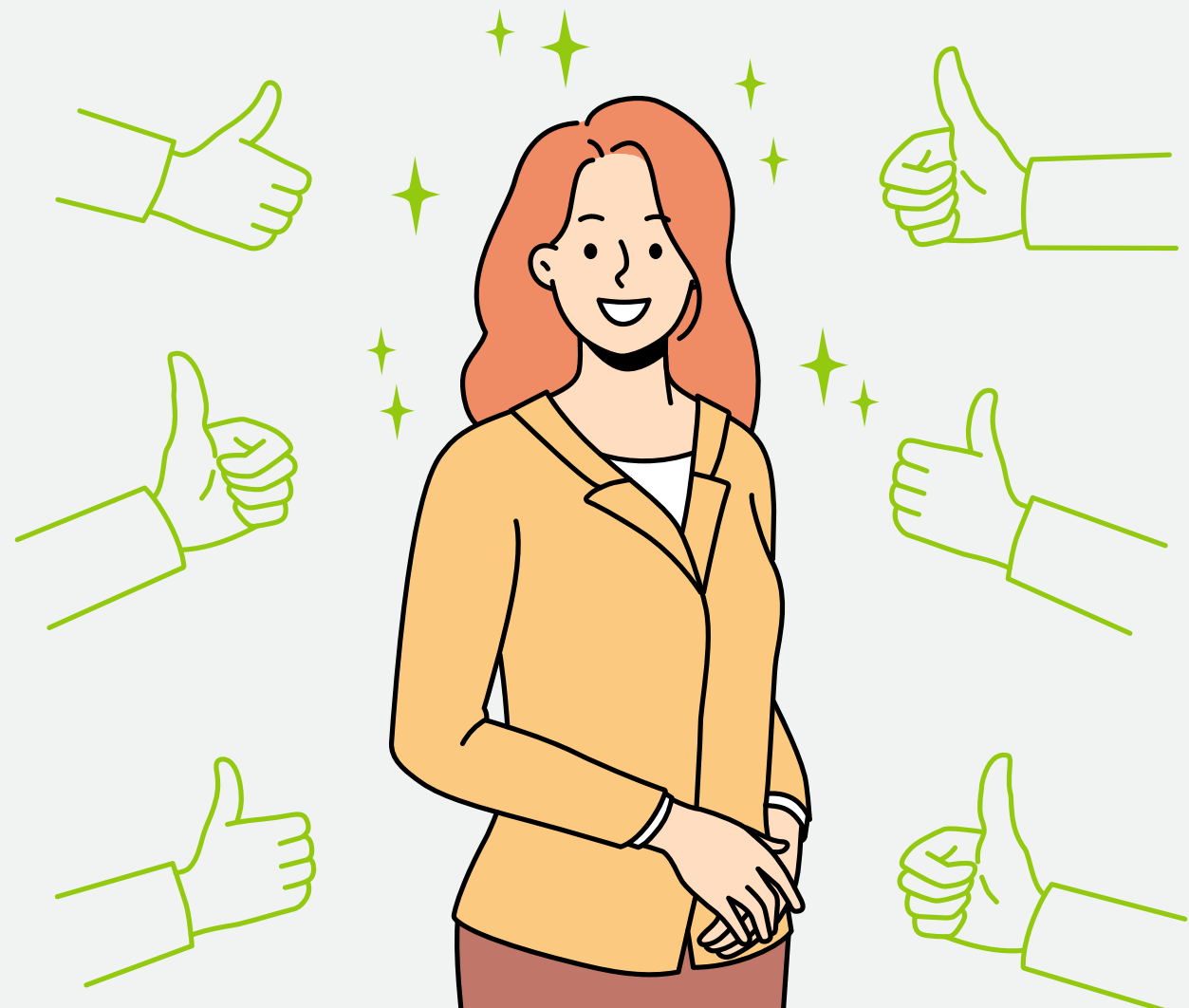
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Build KPIs that account for reaching and engaging more than one member of the buying group for each opportunity; don't try to wedge buying groups into an old lead-based model.

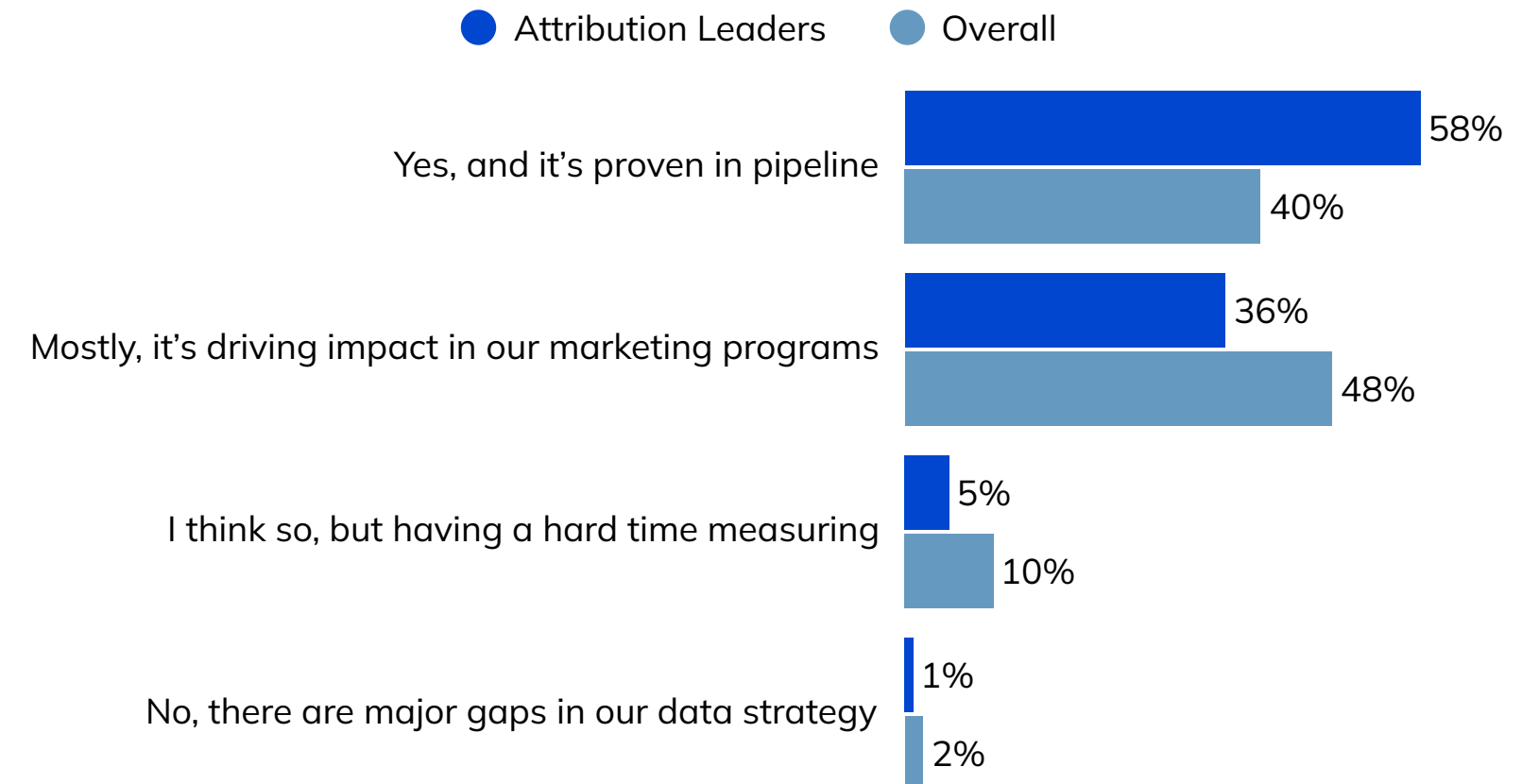
**BONUS: Ready to get started with buying group data?  
Our team put together an [eBook](#) with everything you need to know.**

# Attribution Leaders See The Future

Attribution Leaders are the 18% of marketers who told us they have full attribution visibility, with the ability to track marketing activity all the way through to closed revenue with a complete attribution model, and that attribution reflects how their organization measures marketing today.



## Do you feel you are using the right data to convert your audiences?



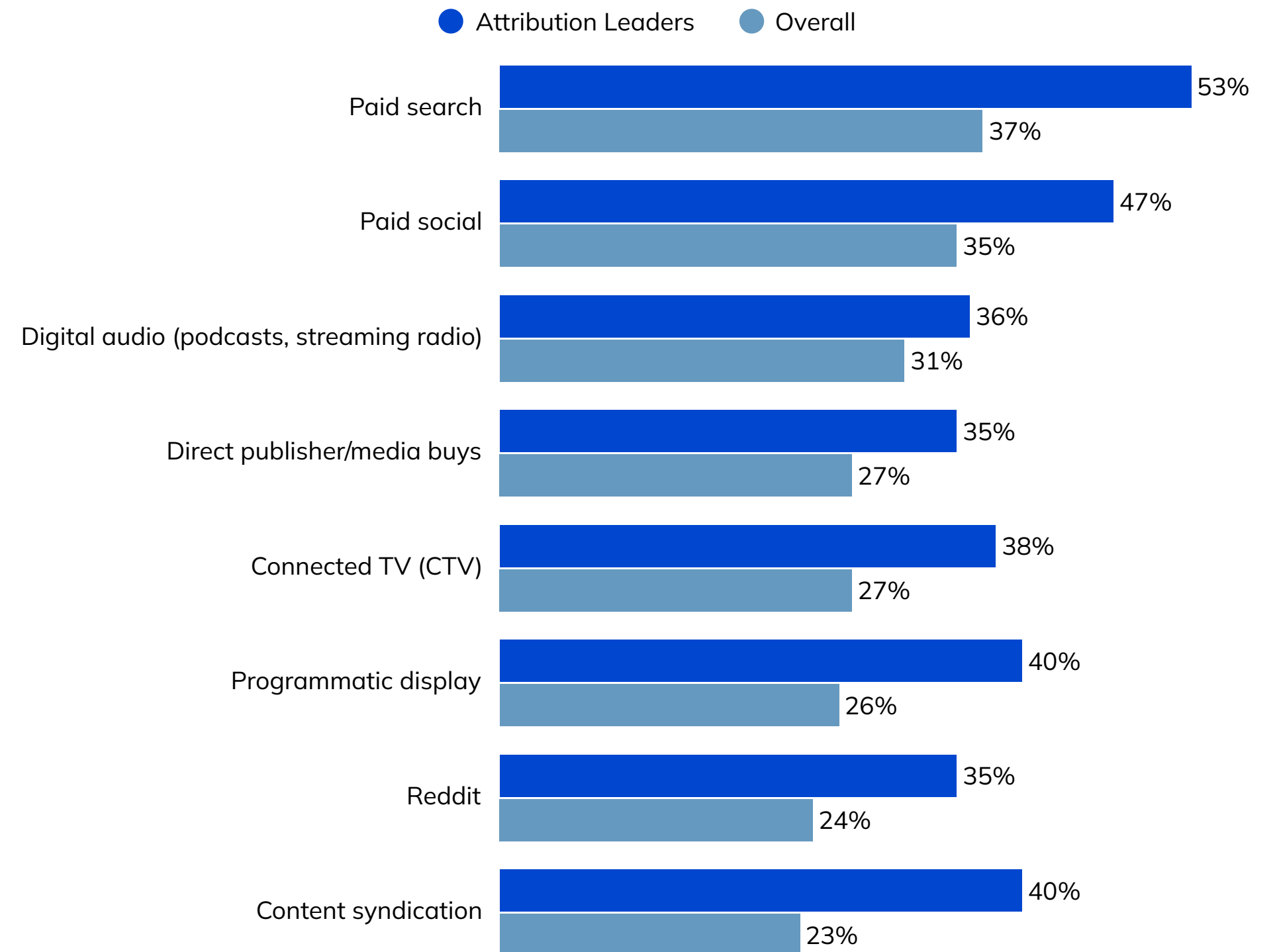
They have the insights they need to make confident decisions, from what data to use to which channels are driving performance. Being an Attribution Leader goes hand in hand this year with being a successful Data Hero, because it's not just about having access to the right data, it's about knowing what's working. Those with full visibility into marketing attribution are significantly more likely than others to have high confidence in the data they use to target their audiences (58% vs. 40% of all others).

Attribution Leaders have the insights they need to confidently invest in a wide variety of marketing channels and platforms. They are much more likely to say that they expect to invest significantly more over the next 12 months across every channel we asked about including paid search, digital audio, CTV, Reddit, programmatic display, and content syndication.

Attribution Leaders are also more agile about moving spend across these channels. 64% said they frequently reallocate spend across channels compared to 36% of all marketers. What's more, 62% of Attribution Leaders have fully implemented buying groups.

Even Attribution Leaders have their challenges, and having an attribution model in place doesn't mean the model is always perfect. Attribution Leaders are still likely to have difficulty measuring across channels in one place, and have limited visibility into audience behavior and engagement, and they are even more likely than other marketers to say they have difficulty connecting marketing activity to specific buyers and buying groups.

## How will your investment in the following channels change over the next 12 months?



# Pro Tips

Marketing confidence comes from a complete attribution model that tracks revenue back to marketing activity. However, even Attribution Leaders are met with challenges, which shows that measurement is an ongoing process, not a “one and done” project. If your company is lagging behind with attribution, know that taking steps, even small ones, in the right direction can have a positive impact.

- 1 Get executives and the sales team on board with the concept of tying marketing influence and engagement all the way to revenue, and discuss what is needed to be able to implement this new way of measuring.
- 2 Create a phased approach to implementing an attribution model, starting with small wins, such as building an influence and engagement attribution model for one key audience or one product.
- 3 Have a plan for testing and improving your models over time.
- 4 Consider using AI to bring different insights together into a single measurement approach.

**Bonus: Not sure where to start with attribution? Our Analytics and Intelligence team works alongside your team to build multi-touch attribution models and connect marketing activity to closed revenue. No data expertise needed.**

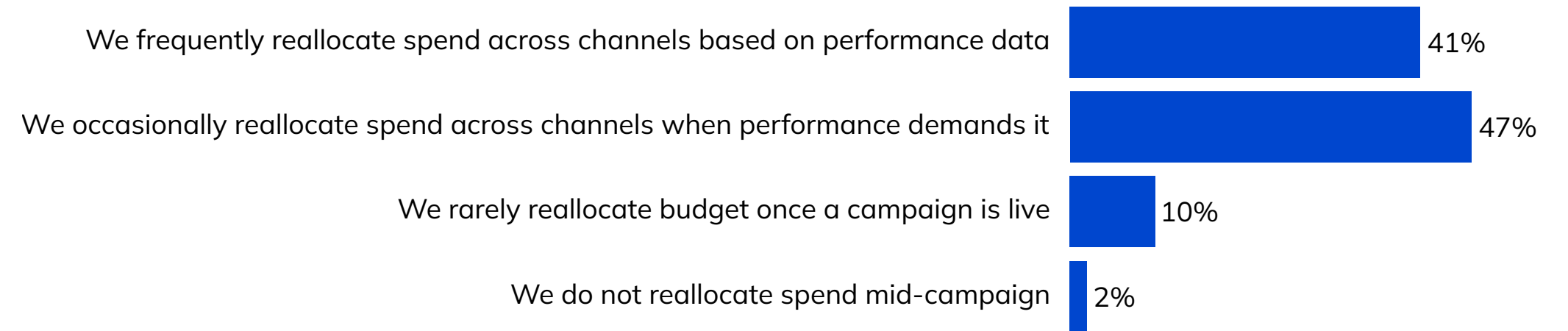
# Campaign Agility Delivers Results

One of the benefits of having access to clean and verified audience data and campaign measurement is that marketers can act with confidence, optimizing campaigns based on intelligence. However, not every marketer is positioned to optimize campaigns with agility. We found there are common challenges that get in the way of the marketer's dream of continuous, dynamic, cross channel optimization.

In our study, 41% of marketers globally frequently reallocate spend across channels based on performance data. The rest reallocate spend only occasionally or rarely.

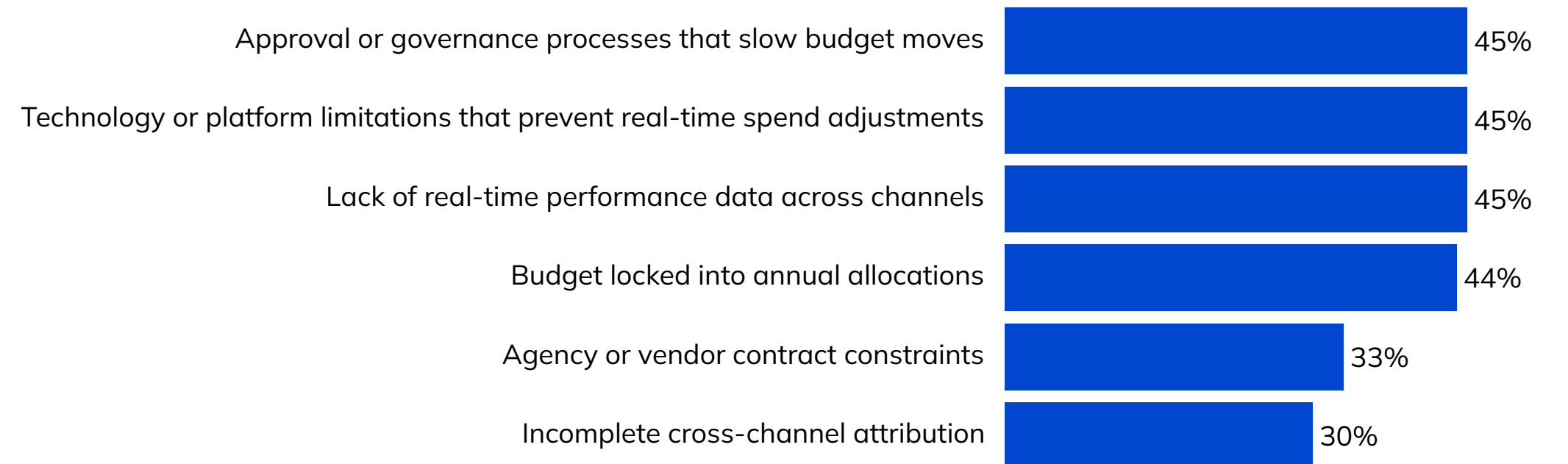
The reasons for slow budget reallocation are many, from slow approvals to lack of data, showing that campaign agility is a complex problem involving people, process, data, and technology.

## Which best describes how your organization manages marketing spend during an active campaign?



## What are the biggest barriers that prevent you from reallocating or optimizing spend during an active campaign?

(Select up to 3)



In many companies campaign agility is cultural. Either the company prioritizes using recent data and moving quickly, or it is entrenched in processes that slow things down, and uses solutions that are not flexible. We found that only 50% of marketers allocate budget using an “audience first” approach, with 24% using a “channel first” approach. Starting with channels entrenches budget and processes and reduces agility.

Campaign agility is particularly important for B2B marketers globally today as buyer behavior moves online and diffuses across many different channels. What’s more, having an annual budget meeting that puts budget into a few fixed buckets doesn’t give marketers the flexibility they need to shift budget based on performance. And not too surprisingly, agile marketers are much more likely to be confident they are using the right data at 57% vs. 40% of all marketers.



# Pro Tips

Campaign agility starts in the budgeting process. If B2B marketers are locked in to allocated channels, then there is no room for campaign agility. They need to shift the mindset of their leaders to understand how a more insights-driven approach to campaign allocation can drive improved outcomes. Of course, there's always a big event or sponsorship investment that's hard to shift, but across channels such as display, search, social, and email, spend can be moved relatively fluidly.

Working with agencies and partners that understand the importance of cross channel optimization is also critical. If a B2B marketer has individual agencies for each channel, they essentially lock themselves in.

- 1** Create a culture of optimization, working with leaders, agencies, and partners to adopt more fluid budgeting and campaign allocation processes.
- 2** Lead with data and insights and let them do the allocation for you. When you have revenue-based attribution models in place, you can be confident in your decisions to shift budget to optimize performance.
- 3** Build in optimization as part of your ongoing process. Rather than check in occasionally on performance or set a quarterly process in place, make it your team's job to measure and reallocate on a more regular basis. This might require an expert analyst depending on your buying cycle. A long purchase journey might require some time before you have the insights you need to make a shift.

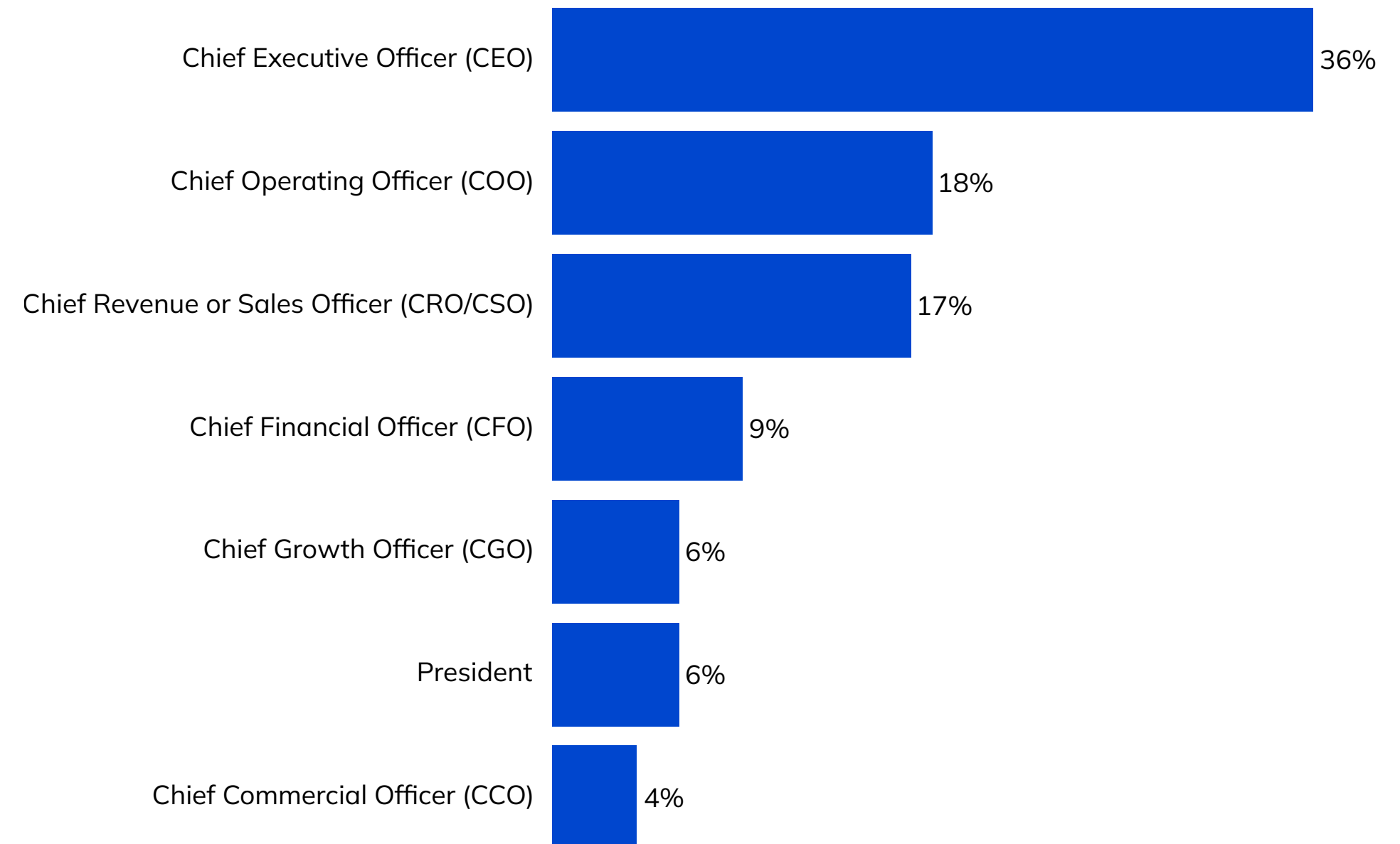
**BONUS: Want to go deeper? Read: [Planning for the Future: The Rise of the Agile Marketer](#)**

# Be In “The Room Where It Happens”

What does it mean to be in the room where it happens? Taken from the pivotal scene in Hamilton, it is the moment where decisions get made and strategies take shape. B2B marketers who are left out of those conversations have significantly less control over their ability to deliver value to the company. And in 2026, control is everything.

This year, for the first time, we asked who the most senior marketing leader reports to. We found that 36% report to the CEO, while 33% report to a sales leader such as the CRO, President, or Chief Sales Officer. Fewer report to the CFO or COO. Smaller companies were more likely to have marketing leaders reporting to executives other than the CEO compared to larger companies. For companies under \$50m only 31% reported to the CEO while 36% reported to a sales leader. This compares to 41% of companies with more than \$500m in revenue who have marketing leaders reporting to the CEO and 31% reporting to a sales leader.

## Who does your most senior marketing leader report to?



No matter the reporting structure, alignment with finance matters as much as alignment with sales. When marketing and the CFO are not on the same page, the consequences are concrete: 39% of marketers face increased scrutiny on spend, 36% see their budget reduced, and 35% experience delays in launching strategic initiatives.

Executive leadership also influences broader marketing responsibilities. Overall, BDRs report to marketing 48% of the time, but when reporting to the CFO or sales leader, marketing is much more likely to run the BDR team.

The chain of command matters, but it does not tell the whole story. What the data makes clear is this: marketers who are closest to revenue conversations have the most control. The room where it happens is the one where the marketing leadership, finance leadership, and sales leadership come together to align on the revenue strategy and the role each plays.

### When marketing and the CFO are not aligned, what are the most significant consequences?

(Select up to 3)



# Pro Tips

Your reporting line is a starting point, not a ceiling. The marketers who get the most out of their position, regardless of who they report to, are the ones who show up to every revenue conversation prepared, aligned, and speaking the same language as the others in the room.

- 1** Take your CFO to lunch (or have a virtual coffee chat)! Schedule regular meetings with your sales, finance, and customer success peers. Agree on shared goals and how you can work together to achieve them.
- 2** Tie marketing influence and activity directly to revenue outcomes. When leaders can see the connection, alignment happens naturally. Use a common language rather than “marketing speak” to ensure everyone agrees on outcomes.
- 3** Build your attribution model and share it upward. Visibility into marketing's impact on revenue is the fastest path to a bigger budget and a seat at the table.

# Next Steps: Insights, Alignment, Results

This year, we see more marketers globally embracing a spectrum of audience data from buying groups to intent data to psychographic data. But, our research is clear, it's not just about having access to data, it's what you do with that data that makes the difference. For example, there is a difference between having access to buying group data and having a fully implemented buying group strategy that is proven to drive closed sales.

Acting effectively on data means using that data to inform channel decisions, campaign optimization and sales strategies, even where to focus your BDRs.

B2B marketers who have good measurement in place, with a full attribution model and an understanding of how their marketing ties to revenue, have the advantage. Not only do they have the insights to know what audience data matters most, but they can also make more confident decisions, from allocating marketing spend across channels to mid-campaign optimization.

Marketers with data and insights can also more effectively communicate with their internal peers, aligning with sales to drive pipeline and with CFOs to get budget. Data and insights together tell a story for marketers that cuts through company silos and brings everyone together around shared goals, and how they will measure them.

Every company faces challenges getting to perfect data, insights and alignment. But, marketers can take steps to improve their current situation.

**Are you ready for better insights, alignment, and campaign results? Take these steps to start gaining control.**



1

## Do an “insights audit”

Identify gaps in measurement and insights across your entire marketing organization. Perhaps different marketing channels are using different metrics, or you don't have a unified model to compare results across channels. Maybe your BDRs aren't using recent data for their outreach. Perhaps you haven't been able to identify buying groups accurately. It's possible you're optimizing marketing campaigns using a metric that doesn't translate to sales and finance. Whatever the issues are, they are only going to be fixed if you can identify them first.

## 2

# Create a clear path to revenue

The most successful marketers in our survey are confident that they are making the right moves in marketing, and that's because they have models that can connect marketing influence and activity to revenue such as an attribution model that provides visibility through the entire marketing process from identifying audiences to campaign performance. Move away from short term KPIs and talk to your CFO about the revenue goals that really matter. Find a way, together, to put a plan in place that puts marketing at the center of revenue generation.

# 3

## **Prioritize alignment with sales and finance**

Marketers that align their goals and objectives with sales have higher performance across key initiatives like implementing buying groups. And if marketers are not aligned with finance, the ability to be agile and get the budget needed is a lot trickier. Get as much insight as possible into the way they see the company's strategy and speak their language. Work together to create a strong buying group strategy that connects to sales outreach with shared KPIs. Connect marketing activity to revenue and life gets much easier.



**You know what separates the best from the rest.  
Now it's time to act on it.**

The data is clear. Control is the competitive advantage in 2026. The marketers pulling ahead have the right data foundation, a buying group strategy that works, and the attribution to prove it. Getting there doesn't have to be a solo effort.

Anteriad's team works alongside yours to build the data foundation, execution, and measurement that turns this year's insights into next year's results.

**Demand more from every campaign.  
Talk to a specialist today.**

Sources: <https://anteriad.com/2026-b2b-marketing-edge#sources>