

GROUNDED

IMPACT MAKERS

6 bold moves driving success against
the odds in B2B Marketing

INTRODUCTION

The drivers of change in B2B marketing are well known. The traditional marketing funnel has been questioned and eroded. ABM has blurred the boundaries between marketing and sales. The use of AI to speed up the creative process poses as many questions as it answers. And business leaders now expect marketing to be a profit centre, not a cost one.

In the Spring 2026 CMO Survey, B2B product companies allocated 7.0% of their overall company budgets to marketing,* down from 8.8% in February 2022.**

In other words, a perfect storm of challenges are hampering many marketers. We identified many of these challenges in our research, which gathered data from 150 senior marketing leaders. But more importantly, we also found a group of marketers who are managing to hold their own. These individuals seem to be succeeding against the odds.

We have called them “**The Impact Makers.**”

*The CMO Survey. 2026. “The CMO Survey: Highlights and Insights Report.” Spring 2026. Duke University’s Fuqua School of Business. https://cmosurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/The_CMO_Survey-Highlights_and_Insights_Report-2026.pdf

**The CMO Survey. 2022. “Managing Digital Marketing Returns, Privacy, and Climate Impact.” February 2022 Highlights and Insights Report. Duke University’s Fuqua School of Business. https://cmosurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/The_CMO_Survey-Highlights_and_Insights_Report-February_2022.pdf

Now, more than ever before, B2B marketers need to be able to demonstrate commercial impact. So far, so obvious – but what does that look like beyond ‘playing nicely’ with the sales team? The word ‘bold’ is critical here: marketers need to think beyond safe and conventional to make an impact.

JOEL HARRISON

Founder, B2B Marketing



THE DIFFICULT BACKDROP

In the worst cases, marketers today face a leadership trust deficit. The C-Suite does not necessarily value marketing or understand the role it plays. And many marketing leaders struggle to build relationships at the top table – relationships that would otherwise earn them the autonomy and freedom to make an impact.

The data suggests that there’s a persistent failure to speak the language of business rather than the language of marketing, which quietly erodes marketing’s position at the strategic top table. The effects of this misalignment ripple out, manifesting as a lack of confidence in the value of marketing itself. Too often, marketing is treated as a support function rather than a genuine driver of the business. This saps confidence to be as distinctive and bold as the climate demands.

In this environment, the default is to shrink from conflict, to apologise for strong opinions, and to conform as much as possible.

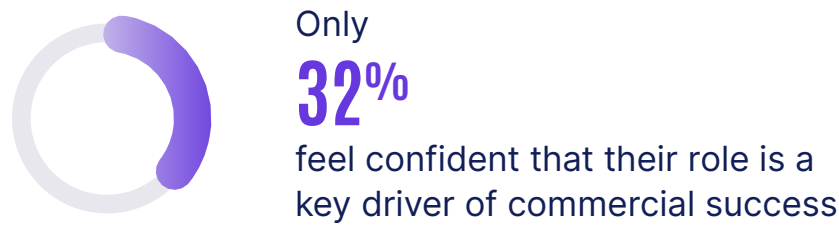
“ You’d not be paying attention, if you didn’t feel the pressure. ”



LEADERSHIP TRUST DEFICIT



LACK OF INVOLVEMENT IN COMMERCIAL STRATEGY



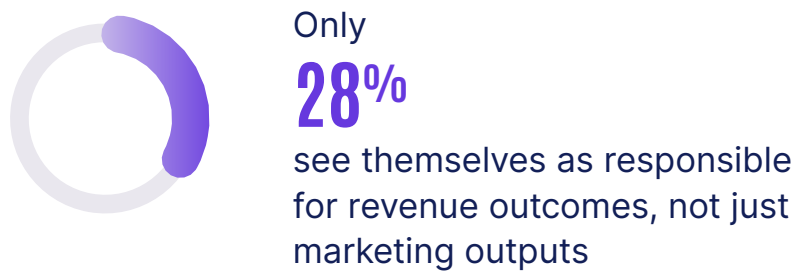
FAILURE TO COLLABORATE CLOSELY ON CAMPAIGNS



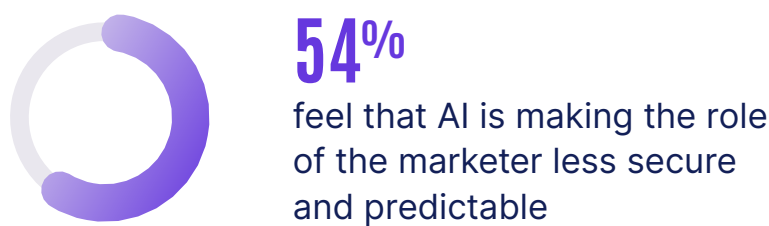
PRESSURE TO FOCUS ON SHORT-TERM GAINS



NOT SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE OF BUSINESS



INCREASING INSTABILITY



INTRODUCING THE IMPACT MAKERS

Despite this challenging backdrop, our research reveals a group we call the **Impact Makers: a fifth of the survey audience who overcome these challenges and do things differently.** They feel valued by senior management and are confident that they are making a contribution to commercial success.

In a difficult climate for most, these marketing leaders feel better about their roles. Not only are they driving commercial success for their organisations but they also feel more appreciated, and more valued.

Impact Makers also feel secure in one of the most uncertain climates for decades. A huge 98% of Impact Makers feel confident their role will be secure in the next 12 months, relative to just 38% of the total group.

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21%

of marketing leaders who feel valued by senior management and are confident that they are making a contribution to commercial success

HOW ARE IMPACT MAKERS SUCCEEDING?

The data reveals that Impact Makers are approaching the challenges in a different way. They are not continuing with the norm, repeating the same old tactics, or apologising for every decision.

Impact Makers are executing six bold moves. These moves, revealed in the data, were also validated in a series of interviews we did with leading B2B marketers.

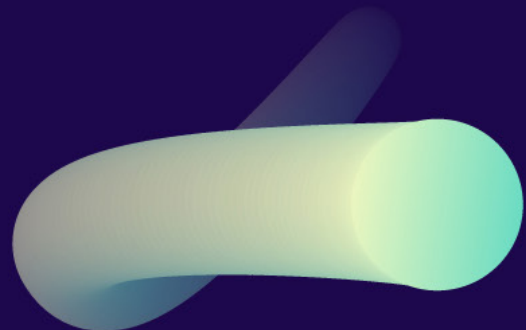
THE SIX BOLD MOVES OF AN IMPACT MAKER



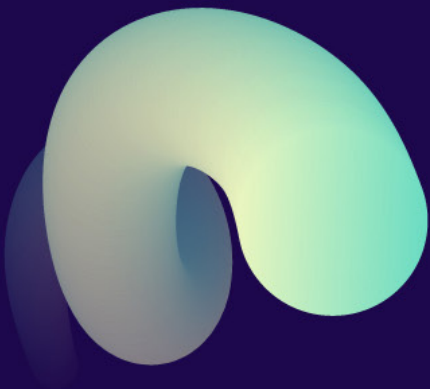
1. CHOOSE TO CHALLENGE



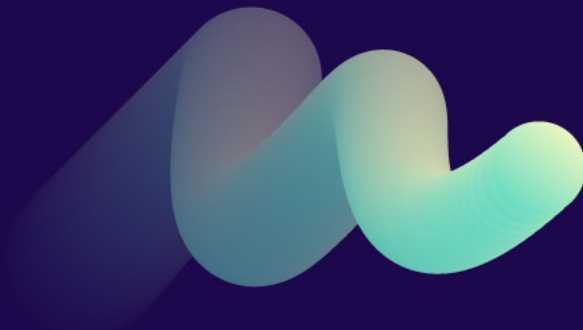
2. STAY ON THE HOOK



3. SET THE RULES



4. RE-BRAND BRAND



5. PUT REVENUE ABOVE EGO



6. EMBRACE DISRUPTION

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BOLD MOVE 1.

CHOOSE TO CHALLENGE

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CHOOSE TO CHALLENGE

Doing what you're told does not always build trust. In fact, our data suggests that Impact Makers actively choose to contradict or challenge leadership. They build relationships and hold themselves accountable – but they are not afraid to be the squeaky wheel. Instead, they are unapologetic about what they believe and what they need.

90% of Impact Makers are comfortable putting forward plans to the business even if they go against current thinking, relative to only 30% of the rest of the survey set.

90%

30%

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**// Don't ask for permission.
Beg for forgiveness. //**

JOANNA MOSS

Executive Engagement, Customer Marketing,
Community & ABM, FICO



THEY EXPECT RESISTANCE

The drivers of change in B2B marketing are well known. The impactful marketers we interviewed didn't expect to be handed opportunities to go against the grain. They focused on the business case for boldness, and they put themselves personally on the line. This accountability allowed them to turn conflict into respect among the C-Suite.

THE "TRUST ADVANCE"

Every marketer enjoys a small amount of trust from senior leadership initially. Impactful marketers use this "trust advance" wisely. They try to say 'yes' as much as possible, facilitating quick wins. But in parallel, they run campaigns and strategies that contradict current thinking, so they can build credibility and do more impactful work in the future.

JUST DO IT

If marketers wait for permission to act, they will wait forever. Impactful marketers consistently shared stories of experimenting without a clear go-ahead from the C-Suite. Instead, they planned something limited but bold, demonstrated the value, and then built out once they had proof to share with others.

DON'T CHANGE THE MEASUREMENT

Impact Makers may be contrarian in their thinking, but they are consistent in how they assess success. **71% of Impact Makers agree that the marketing KPIs that matter the most are the same as those that matter to the CFO.** This consistency helps build credibility with the C-Suite and only credibility can pave the way for more trust, more budget, more of everything.

“Don't expect to turn up and be given anything you want without having to fight really hard for it and really justify it, and back yourself. //



BRIAN MACREADIE
Head of Marketing,
Addleshaw Goddard

“Rather than say no – I adopted a 'yes and yes' strategy... Yes, I will keep doing the things the business is used to. But yes, I will actually run a different approach to marketing than the business is used to. //



SALLY CROFT
Chief Marketing Officer

“It's about sticking your neck on the line before you have the proof – and then, three months later, when it's working, support grows. //



ANDREA HERBERT
Marketing Director, Eastnets

“Marketing has got itself into a bit of a navel-gazing funk, because it is changing as a discipline quite a lot. But the more we change our story and try to tweak it, the more it hurts credibility at the top table. //



ANDREW SHEPHERD
Senior Director, EMEA North
Marketing, Palo Alto Networks

BOLD MOVE 2.

STAY ON THE HOOK

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STAY ON THE HOOK

Impact Makers put themselves on the hook alongside sales for strategy, execution and revenue. They do not just tactically collaborate with salespeople on campaigns. They break down silos, share a deep understanding of commercial direction and work together on strategy as well as execution.

90% of Impact Makers say the relationship between sales and marketing in their organisation is strongly collaborative or fully integrated, compared with just 37% in the full survey set.



77% of Impact Makers say they work with sales on account strategy, relative to 31% in the broader group.



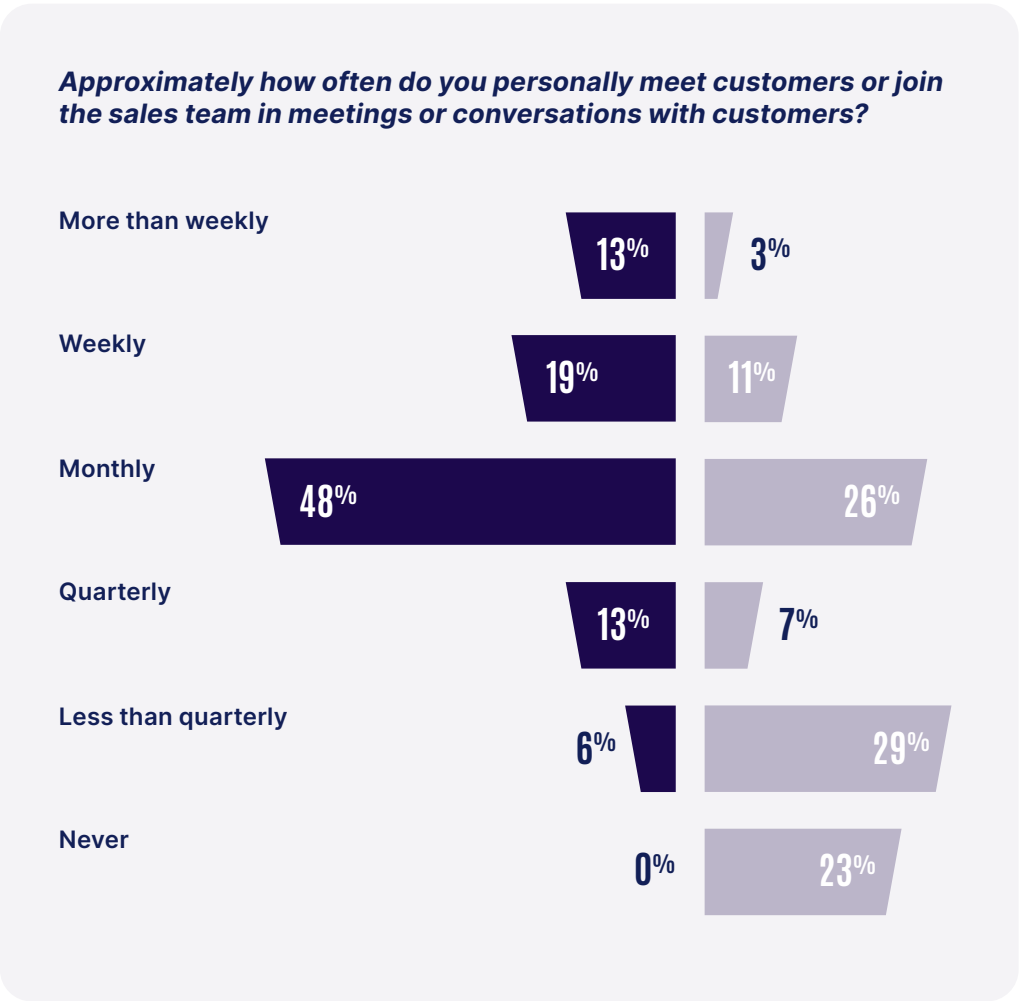
74% see themselves as responsible for revenue outcomes, relative to just 36% in the broader group.



68% say there is mutual understanding about how campaigns will support different stages of the sale cycle, relative to just 25% in the broader group.



Impact Makers also have more structured interactions with sales. **32% of Impact Makers meet sales weekly** compared to just 14% on average.



“ It’s not my money, it’s not my team. It’s our company, it’s our money, it’s our team. ”

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SALLY CROFT

Chief Marketing Officer

TAKE THE HEAT TOGETHER

Impactful marketers need broad shoulders. Many of those we interviewed accept blame for metrics that aren't wholly controlled by marketing. In other words, they share both criticism and glory with sales. In fact, when sales teams miss targets, **74% of Impact Makers either view this as a shared issue or primarily review what marketing could have done differently.**

ABM CREATES A SHARED LANGUAGE

When marketers speak about accounts, deals, and influence, sales teams listen. **55% of Impact Makers had collaboratively agreed an ABM strategy and method with sales**, relative to 29% in the rest of the group. Collaborative ABM strategy correlates with greater confidence about commercial impact.

BUSINESS LEADERS FIRST

One of the most consistent themes from our interviews was that impactful marketers make commercial strategy their primary focus – shared with sales teams. The best leaders do not view themselves as proponents of marketing, but as business strategists with marketing backgrounds.

ACTIVE COLLABORATION

Impact Makers are taking more steps to directly support their colleagues in the sales team. A notably higher percentage of the leader group had co-designed the ideal customer profile, agreed an approach to lead scoring together, designed marketing campaigns specifically around the sales cycle, and used marketing content to address sales objectives.

“ **One of the most awkward things is marketing high-fiving themselves for hitting their metrics when the broader business hasn't hit theirs.** ”



ANDREW SHEPHERD
Senior Director, EMEA North Marketing, Palo Alto Networks

“ **Leadership understands ABM, marketing speaks the same language as sales, we are heavily focussed on numbers.** ”



CAROLINA MARINO SARGEANT
Senior Marketing Manager at a Fortune 500 tech company

“ **Consider yourself a business leader first, marketing leader second. That allows you to lay the platform for success.** ”



DAN ROCHE
CMO, Workbooks

“ **Your goals are my goals, your targets are my targets. I'm not here to do blogs for the sake of blogs. I'm here to ask: what are your commercial targets, and how can I help you hit them?** ”



ANDREA HERBERT
Marketing Director, Eastnets

BOLD MOVE 3.

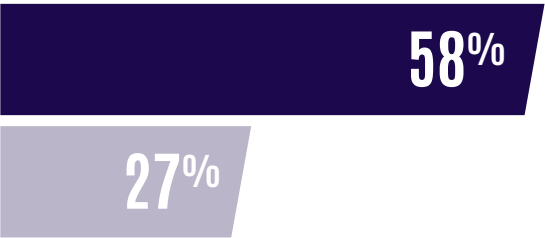
SET THE RULES

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SET THE RULES

It’s not just about supporting sales. Impact Makers are prepared to stand their ground and establish clear rules for engagement. They take steps to make sure sales teams follow up on leads so that marketing can prove its value to the business. In short, they request the support they need and are not subservient to the sales team.

58% of Impact Makers say they have established two-way SLAs with sales, relative to 27% in the wider group.



77% of Impact Makers are effective at getting feedback from sales about campaign performance, relative to just 30% in the wider group.



87% of Impact Makers ensure timely and relevant sales input to marketing campaigns, relative to 30% in the wider group.



“ There’s tension with sales when they reach outcomes they need without giving marketing attribution. ”

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ANDREW SHEPHERD

Senior Director, EMEA North Marketing,
Palo Alto Networks

BRUTAL HONESTY

Nobody has infinite time and resources. Many of the marketers we spoke with were well practiced at presenting trade-offs and pushing back when salespeople were too demanding. Because sometimes, knowing when to say ‘no’ is the key to forging a better relationship.

HOT ON FOLLOW UP

If marketing and sales both get held accountable for revenue, then marketing leaders are within their rights to expect rapid follow-up. It’s much easier to agree expectations if you share a strategy with sales – this way, follow-up is framed as an essential part of the revenue engine. Many Impact Makers (58%) chose to achieve this with a service-level agreement.

IF YOU DON’T SAY, THEY DON’T KNOW

It’s an oversight most marketers have made at some point in their careers: spending hours crafting assets but sending them to salespeople without clear instructions. **74% of Impact Makers communicate with sales about how best to use marketing campaigns**, relative to just 31% in the wider survey set.

ACKNOWLEDGE THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

For years, marketing commentators have been preaching about sales alignment. But there’s an elephant in the room: salespeople have little vested interest in completing the admin required to attribute revenue to marketing activities. Service-level agreements offer a space to negotiate – and show that marketing’s support is conditional on equivalent support from sales teams.

“ **With some salespeople, especially with ABM, they would take and take. I had to be upfront: if you want me on five calls a week, help me prioritise, otherwise I’ll help the other accounts.** ”



LAURA MATTHEWS
Global Marketing Director, UiPath

“ **If you don’t follow up, how are you going to have an impact?... I think that’s where everything falls down: the follow-up piece.** ”



JOANNA MOSS
Executive Engagement, Customer Marketing, Community & ABM, FICO

“ **One of the biggest assumptions is that sales just understand what it is you’ve created and how to use it.** ”



ELISSE LENGDEN
Global Head of Marketing, Transaction Network Services

“ **Marketing [has] a much more vested interest in what happens afterwards and how those metrics show up.** ”



ANDREW SHEPHERD
Senior Director, EMEA North Marketing, Palo Alto Networks

BOLD MOVE 4.

RE-BRAND BRAND

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RE-BRAND BRAND

Marketers face constant pressure for quick wins and immediate returns. Impact Makers feel the same pressures. However, they do a better job of attributing sales impact to marketing campaigns, putting them in a stronger position to defend their budgets. Many impactful marketers also protected their brand-building activity by reframing it explicitly in language the business understands: future revenue.

Impact Makers spent roughly the same percentage of time and budget on brand and demand activities as their peers. In fact, the average for the whole group was a 58:42 split between long and short-term activities.

The big difference? Impact Makers are doing a better job at defending their budget because they are much better at attributing sales to input from marketing campaigns.

78% of Impact Makers can attribute sales to impact from marketing campaigns, relative to just 31% of the wider group.

In other words, Impact Makers tell the story of long and short-term activities as overall, joined-up revenue and pipeline impact.

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“The minute you stop focusing on future pipeline... future you has a problem.”

EMMA EVERETT

Senior Manager, Field Marketing



STOP SEPARATING BRAND AND DEMAND

Even though the power of brand can be extraordinary, for business leaders, the word itself conjures up nightmares of expensive colouring-in jobs and years until any form of ROI. Impactful marketers choose to reposition 'brand' as future revenue instead, sidestepping the assumptions of business leaders.

THE ROLE OF THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Not all brand activities are created equal. A great thought leadership piece, when co-created with sales teams, becomes a solid platform to drive brand and a direct piece of sales enablement. One CRO, whose tech firm is a big believer, commented "thought leadership is the platform sales stand on. Without it, you get commoditised into competing on price and features."

COLLABORATE WITH SALES ON BRAND MESSAGING

77% of Impact Makers said that sales teams saw their messaging as a useful conversation tool, not just 'marketing fluff', relative to just 34% of the wider survey group. Impactful marketers view brand messaging through the lens of the sales team, making it easier to show the impact of brand – anecdotally through sales feedback, and ultimately in pipeline metrics.

PROVE THE GROWTH

Showing progress over time builds belief in long-term activities. To suggest a link between marketing efforts and growth goals, deliver quarterly reminders of the trend over years (not months). Marketers use this technique to make it clear that brand building is still about growth – and that ultimately the aim is to bolster the bottom line.

“It’s a brand-to-demand continuum. It needs to be a seamless, holistic, end-to-end go-to-market engine. ”



JUDIT SZABO
Director of AI-ABM
Transformation, Sage

“What you can do with a longitudinal piece is cut through, because you’ve got a story that not only ties in with what the market wants and can buy into over time... but also your people internally can... regularly weave into their client conversations as well. ”



Sandra Higgison
Former Head of Thought Leadership
Brand Governance, Genpact

“What we’ve seen from the longer-term play, from the brand activation, is that we now have the largest pipeline we’ve had for four or five years in the business. ”



DAN ROCHE
CMO, Workbooks

“In every quarterly review I do, I show how we’re doing not just quarter on quarter but versus the previous year. ”



CAROLINE GYTE
CMO, Arelion

BOLD MOVE 5.

PUT REVENUE ABOVE EGO

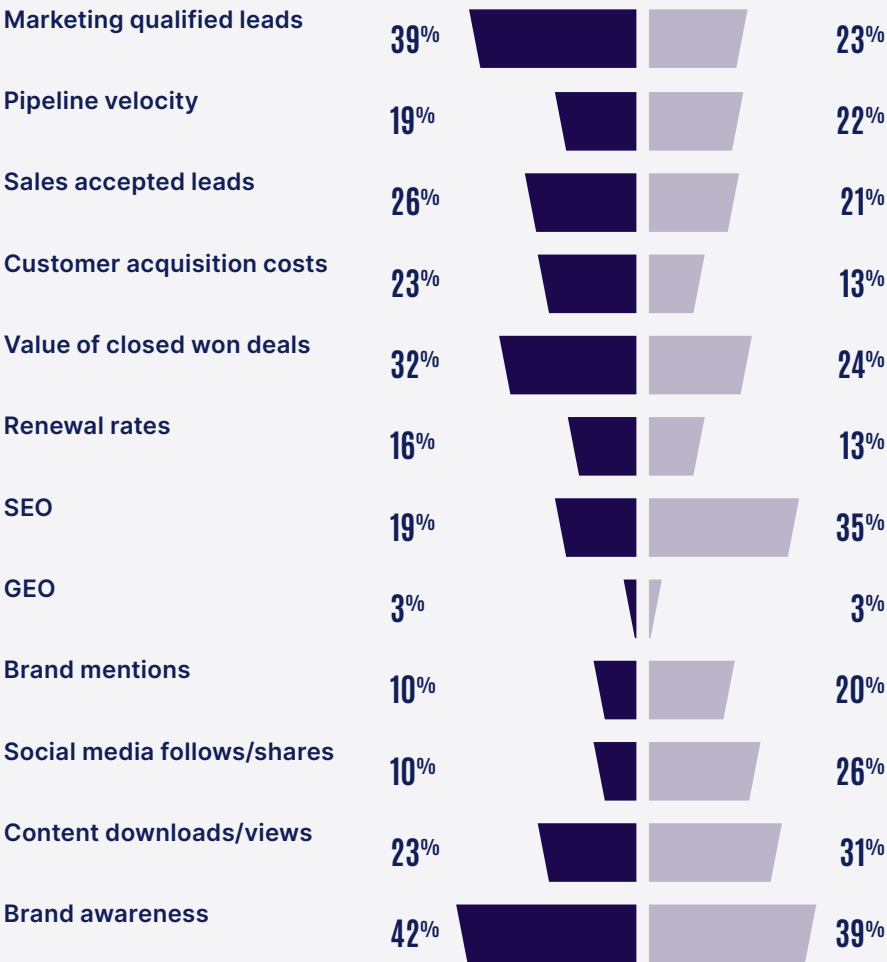
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MAKERS**

PUT REVENUE ABOVE EGO

Marketing metrics are not business KPIs and as such, most marketing KPIs should not be reported to the business. Whilst Impact Makers agree with their peers about which marketing KPIs matter, they do not use these KPIs as their main measure of success. When it comes to assessing performance, Impact Makers opt for fewer, more meaningful business metrics instead.

When asked which KPIs were most important to their marketing team, both Impact Makers and the wider group gave similar responses.

Which of the following KPIs are most important to your marketing team? (Select all that apply)



But this similarity hides a deeper difference. While Impact Makers consider marketing metrics, they do not use them as a real measure of success.

71% of Impact Makers say marketing success in their organisation is primarily judged in terms of revenue – relative to just 32% in the broader group.



// If you're not presenting revenue and pipeline, then nobody's listening. //

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TARA ALLISON
CMO, Advania

ACTIVITY METRICS DON'T LEAVE THE ROOM

KPIs like brand mentions, follows, and SEO are used in every marketing department, but the most impactful leaders never report them outside of their own teams. On average, Impact Makers consider cost of acquisition a more important KPI than their peers. When paired with revenue, this metric can help you speak in terms of the CFO's top priority: profit.

READ THE MARKET

Nearly **20% of Impact Makers say they always adjust plans for marketing campaigns in response to changing priorities or market conditions**, compared with just 5% of the broader group. At any one time the C-Suite might need to prioritise EBITDA, revenue, or recurring revenue. Impactful marketers remain flexible to these shifts and stay in tune with the nuances of the business strategy.

FEWER, BETTER KPIS

Metrics can get messy in marketing – that's not news to anyone. But impactful marketers think of revenue metrics as a 'single point of truth.' They tenaciously ask: what's stopping us reporting on ROI? Then they prioritise any back-end work required to move away from muddy metrics and towards a small set of meaningful numbers.

"I very distinctly shy away from reporting on traditional marketing metrics outside the marketing team. What counts is revenue impact."



VANESSA SCHOTES
CMO, Enfuce

"Having the context of what they want to be, what they want to do, and how they want to be seen, gives you a huge amount of freedom."



KAREN QUINN
Vice President Communications, Vizrt

"The biggest thing for me [is to] get to [that] single point of truth."



TONI ALLEN
Chief Engagement and Growth Officer,
IET (Institute of Engineering and Technology)

BOLD MOVE 6.

EMBRACE DISRUPTION

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EMBRACE DISRUPTION

Impact Makers anticipate more change than their peers – not less. This group accepts that disruption is on the horizon and many agree that AI has made the profession less stable. Nonetheless, Impact Makers feel far more in control of their careers and are prepared to turn instability to their advantage.

90% of Impact Makers agreed that the skills they'd need to be effective in their roles would be very different in three years' time, relative to just 41% on average.



Plus, **55% of Impact Makers agree that AI is making the role of the marketer less stable and predictable.**

Yet **74% of Impact Makers felt in control of their career progression**, relative to just 27% in the broader group.



And **90% of Impact Makers feel confident that their role will be secure in the next 12 months**, relative to 38% in the wider group.



// I think marketers need to feel comfortable feeling uncomfortable. //

**IMPACT
MAKERS**



FAITH WHELLER

Vice President Marketing, TeamViewer

ALL EARS

The most impactful marketers look for opportunities buried in every meeting. Many leaders shared stories about staying adaptable, listening to what others were trying to achieve, and finding ways to proactively support other teams in parallel to running ring-fenced, planned activity.

“ *I’m always listening to what everybody else is saying and trying to understand: how can marketing help with that? How can we accelerate that?* ”



EMMA EVERETT
Senior Manager, Field Marketing

STRATEGY OVER ASSETS AND TOOLS

Nobody knows what marketing outputs might look like – or how they might be made – in 12 months, let alone two years. Impactful marketers are shifting the conversation away from the assets they create and the tools they use and investing energy into judgment. The real strategic value comes from asking: how do we know what good looks like? Which judgement call will be most crucial to commercial success?

“ *The value is moving away from outputs and towards judging – knowing what things matter and understanding the customer well enough to guide strategy.* ”



JOANNA MOSS
Executive Engagement, Customer Marketing, Community & ABM, FICO

MOVE FAST, RUSH LESS

At its best, AI can help marketers meet reactive deadlines from senior leaders without compromising on the best practices which actually make campaigns work. Impactful marketers will take this moment to reset their ways of working and take longer over the processes which matter like campaign planning and ideation.

“ *It’s important to spend time codifying what makes a good piece of thought leadership or a good marketing campaign, because so few people actually go about it the right way. Aligning on what each is and what they achieve for client outcomes can make all the difference to success.* ”



SAMAD MASOOD
Associate Vice President, Infosys Knowledge Institute

\\ There's less demand in the market, and that's why marketers are struggling. So you can't get away with just doing average marketing and reaping the rewards. You have to do standout marketing. //

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DAN ROCHE

CMO, Workbooks

CONCLUSION

The environment for B2B marketers is incredibly difficult and sometimes the odds seem stacked against success. Despite this, Impact Makers are digging deeper, pushing (back) harder, and saying no more often.

Impact Makers are not the marketers with the easiest jobs – the data suggests the opposite. They carry more commercial weight, take more personal accountability for revenue, and put themselves on the line more than their peers. But that pressure is precisely what seems to buy them the credibility and freedom they need to feel valued at the top table. As one interviewee put it:

“ **YOU TAKE THE PRESSURE TO GET THE...JOY** ”



VANESSA SCHOTES
CMO, Enfuze

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None of the six bold moves we identified in this research represented the easy, low-conflict, low-effort option. Instead, Impact Makers are choosing the path of tough trade-offs and tricky conversations – and they are proving beyond any doubt that this is the path to success.

Each move requires a willingness to take personal accountability for numbers not fully within your control, and to continually justify your existence. To execute these moves, marketers must be unapologetic: having courage in their own convictions and championing better relationships. But the marketers who make these moves consistently describe feeling more secure, more valued, and more fulfilled than those who don’t.

In other words, the choice facing every B2B marketer right now is the same one the Impact Makers have already made: wait for permission and stay safe, or make the bold moves and make an impact?

As most industries face a drop in demand, this choice is more pressing than ever. Will we find ways to make the case for bolder, more creative work – created in close collaboration with sales, and measured in terms of real revenue growth? Or will we allow our own credibility to be slowly eroded, along with our confidence and job satisfaction?

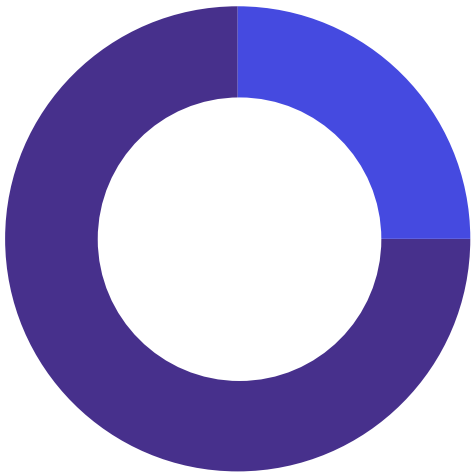
At Grounded, we’ve made our choice. Go bold or go home.

METHODOLOGY

We surveyed 150 senior B2B marketers – from Chief Marketing Officers to Brand Directors and Heads of ABM. Our respondents work across 17 countries, with dominant representation in the United Kingdom and United States. Many of these leaders work in businesses that specialise in technology services, software or hardware.

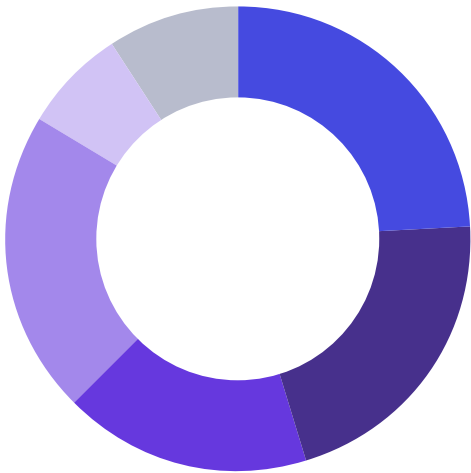
In addition to the quantitative survey, we conducted in-depth interviews with leading marketers. The reflections, experience and advice shared by these impressive individuals bring colour and clarity to the findings of the survey.

SECTOR



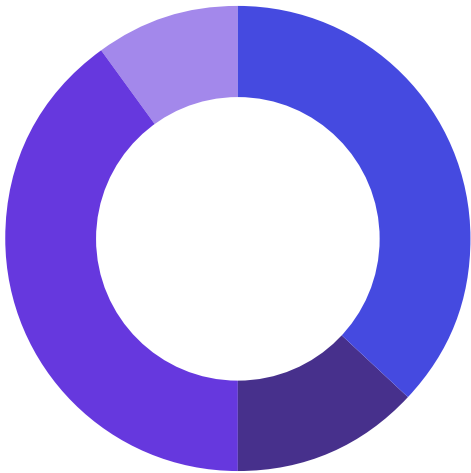
- Professional services **25%**
- Technology **75%**

ROLE



- Chief Marketing Officer **24%**
- Marketing Director **21%**
- Brand Director **17%**
- Marketing Manager **21%**
- Head of ABM **7%**
- Head of Content **9%**

REGION



- United Kingdom **37%**
- Europe **13%**
- USA **40%**
- ROW **10%**



About the research

RESEARCH LED. SALES ENABLED.

Grounded is a new breed of ABM agency. We use original research to create bold ideas and content that arm your sales teams with something worth saying – tailored directly to the accounts that matter.

Our clients are technology businesses that want to give their sales teams a platform of thought leadership to stand on. The kind of thought leadership that's:

- Not so far removed from the solution that sales don't know how to use it.
- Not chunked over the fence so sales don't feel any ownership over it.
- Not delivered as an opaque report that obscures the killer stories.

Let's talk about creating a research-backed story for your business.

GROUNDED

