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from  Salesforce

*THE 2026 STATE
OF AGENTIC MARKETING*



The Inbound Pipeline Problem

*Why B2B marketing
teams are losing pipeline,
and how agentic
marketing closes the gap.*

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EPILOGUE **Demographics and Methodology**

A letter from **Maura Rivera** Chief Marketing Officer, Qualified

Over the past decade, B2B marketing teams have become incredibly effective at generating demand. We've built sophisticated programs to drive more traffic, capture more leads, and scale campaigns across channels. In many ways, the top of the funnel has never been stronger.

Despite this, many marketing leaders feel the same frustration: pipeline isn't growing at the same pace as demand generation investment. The reason isn't a lack of leads. In most cases, companies are already generating plenty of inbound interest.

“
**The real challenge lies
in what happens next.**

Too often, inbound demand enters what we call the “messy middle” of the funnel. Leads sit untouched, response times stretch longer than buyers expect, and high-intent prospects slip through the cracks before meaningful engagement ever happens. What looks like a demand problem is actually a conversion failure hiding in plain sight.

This report surveyed over 500 marketing leaders and uncovered the widening gap between inbound demand and actual pipeline creation.

It also examines a shift that is beginning to emerge inside high-performing marketing teams. Instead of relying entirely on human follow-up to engage inbound leads, some organizations are beginning to introduce agentic AI systems that can respond to buyers instantly, qualify conversations, and ensure every signal of intent receives attention.

Early data suggests that when inbound engagement becomes instant, consistent, and always available, the impact on pipeline generation can be dramatic.

The goal of this report is to help marketing leaders understand where the inbound pipeline gap is coming from, and what new models are beginning to close it.



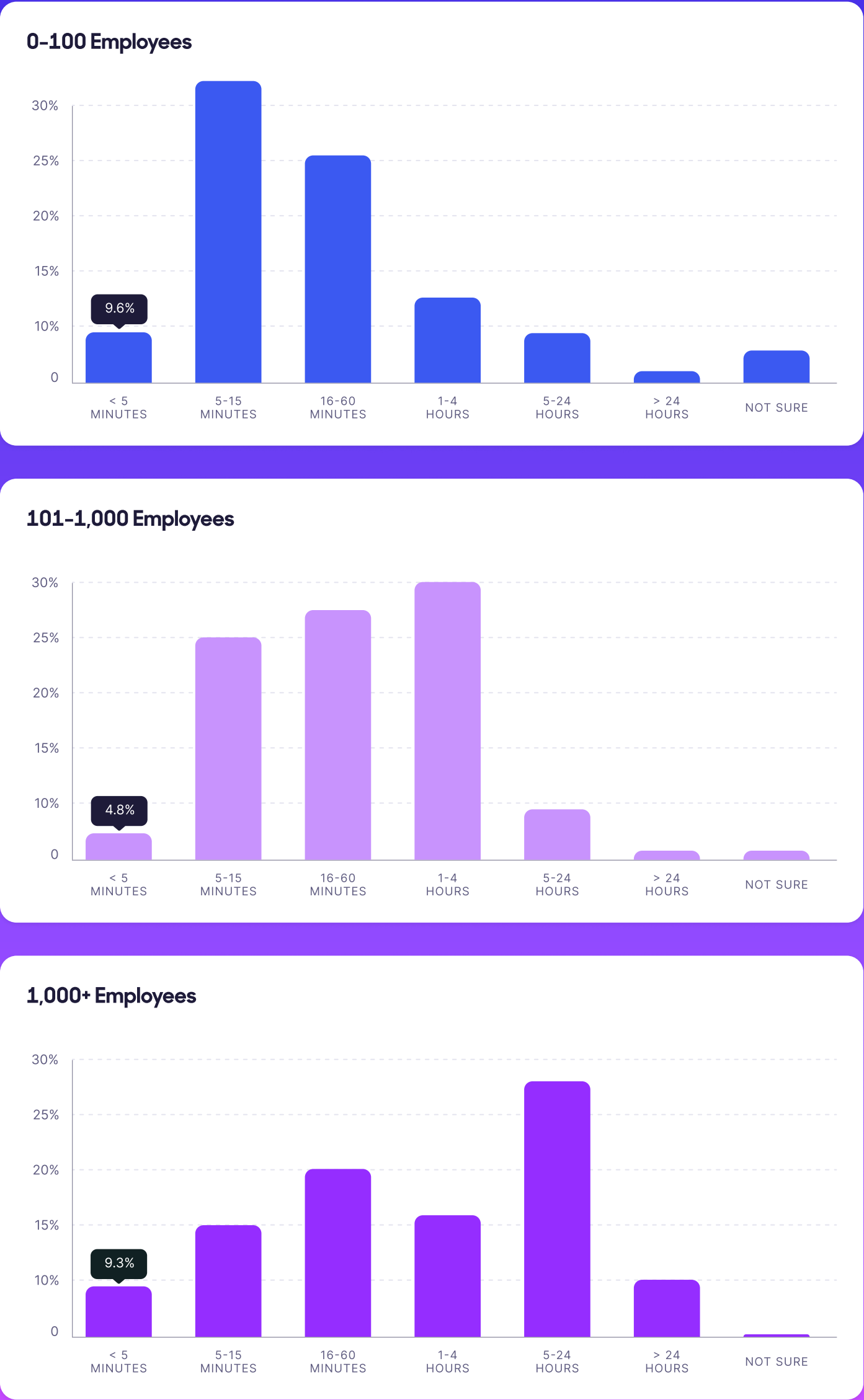
Chapter 1

The Inbound Pipeline Gap

SECTION 1:

Speed to Lead Remains a Major Gap in Inbound Performance

Average response time to demo requests



When a prospect asks for a demo or fills out a form, it's a clear signal they're interested.

They expect to hear back quickly, but most companies do not respond in real time.

In reality, responses often take minutes or hours, and that moment of interest slips away.

Initial strong signals of interest often diminish over time, not due to a lack of demand, but because there is no timely engagement to capture it.

Only **7.2%** of companies respond within **5 minutes**.





Very few teams respond immediately.

Only 7.2% of organizations respond to inbound leads within five minutes, meaning fewer than 1 in 14 companies engage buyers at the exact moment their interest is highest: when they’re actively researching and evaluating their options.

That short window is when buyers are most open to a conversation, most curious, and most likely to convert.

For most organizations, response time is measured in minutes or hours rather than happening right away. In that time gap, momentum is lost and buyers continue their research, explore alternatives, or move on entirely.



Response times slow as companies grow.

Smaller teams are far more likely to act fast. Among companies with fewer than 100 employees, **43%** follow up within 15 minutes. Only **24%** take an hour or more.

As organizations scale, that speed starts to break down. At companies with 101–1,000 employees, just **30%** respond within 15 minutes, while **41% take an hour or longer.**

At the enterprise level, the gap widens even further. Only **24%** follow up within 15 minutes, and **more than half (54%) take over an hour to respond.**

Growth introduces friction. More leads to route, more handoffs, more reliance on SDR capacity and internal processes. What should be a moment of immediate connection turns into a waiting game.



Human workflows create response delays.

Response times show that most teams still rely on manual processes like SDR availability and lead routing.

At a glance, these workflows can appear manageable, but they rely on timely availability and efficient lead progression through internal systems.

When lead volume exceeds team capacity, delays can accumulate. Follow-ups may be deferred, queues increase, and response times lengthen.

As volume continues to grow, these effects can become more pronounced, turning a previously manageable process into a constraint.

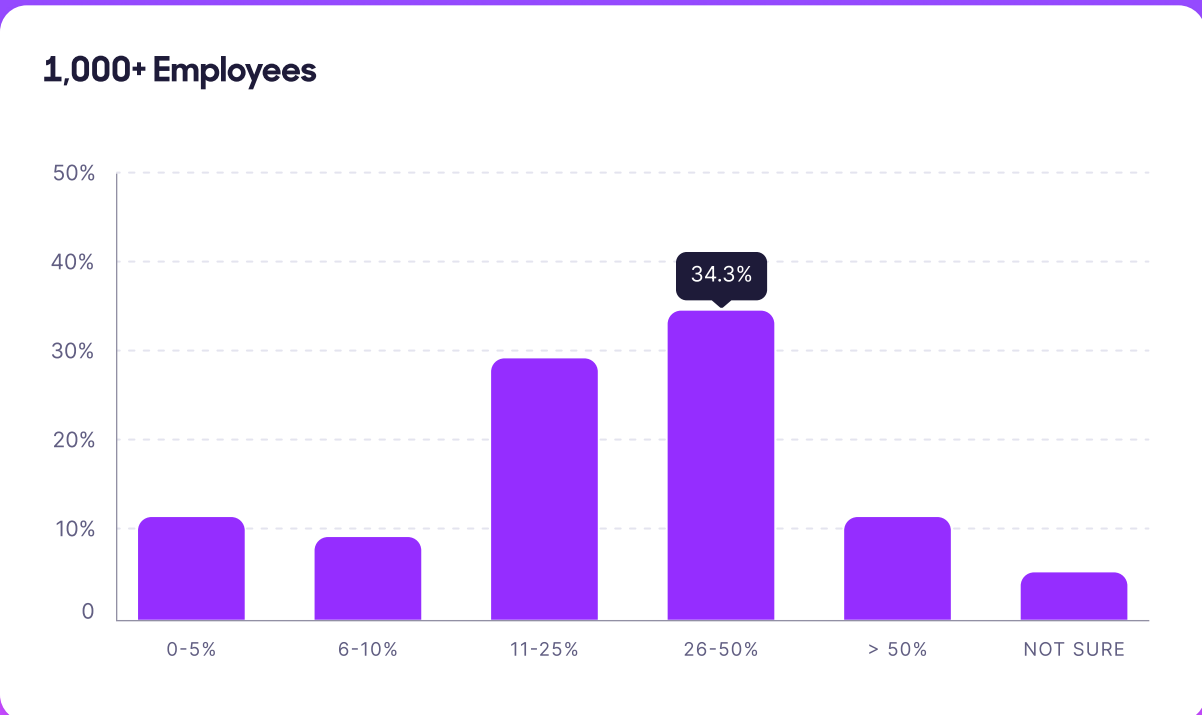
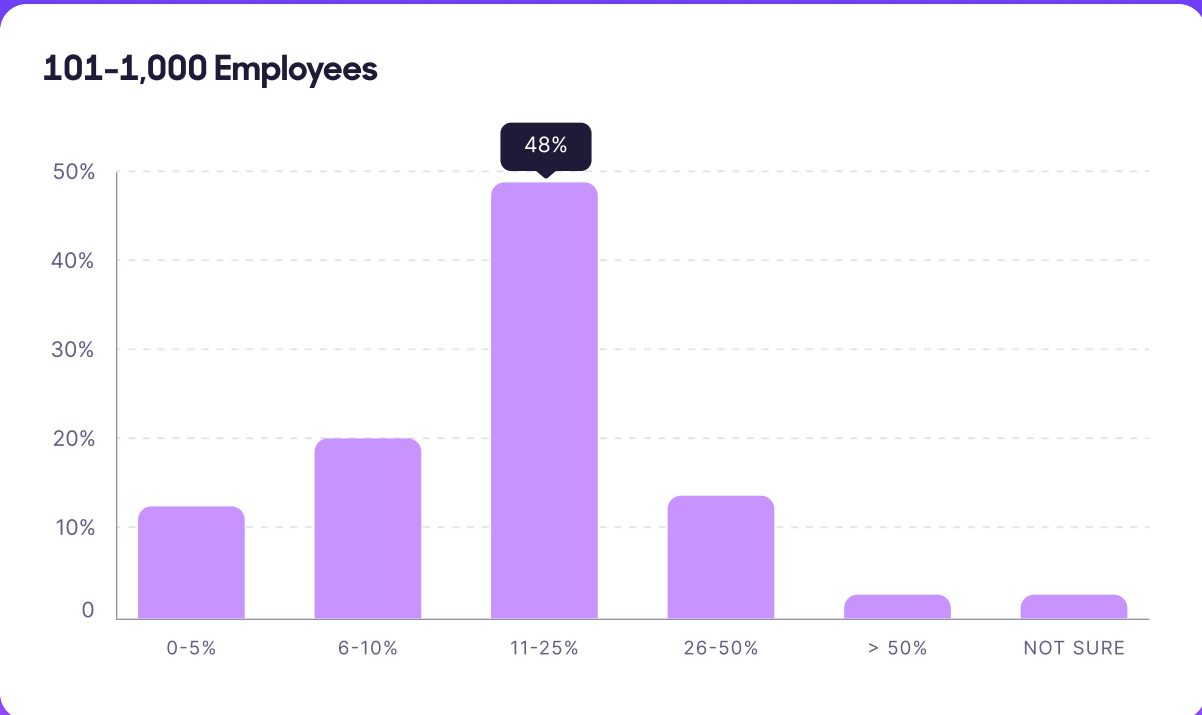
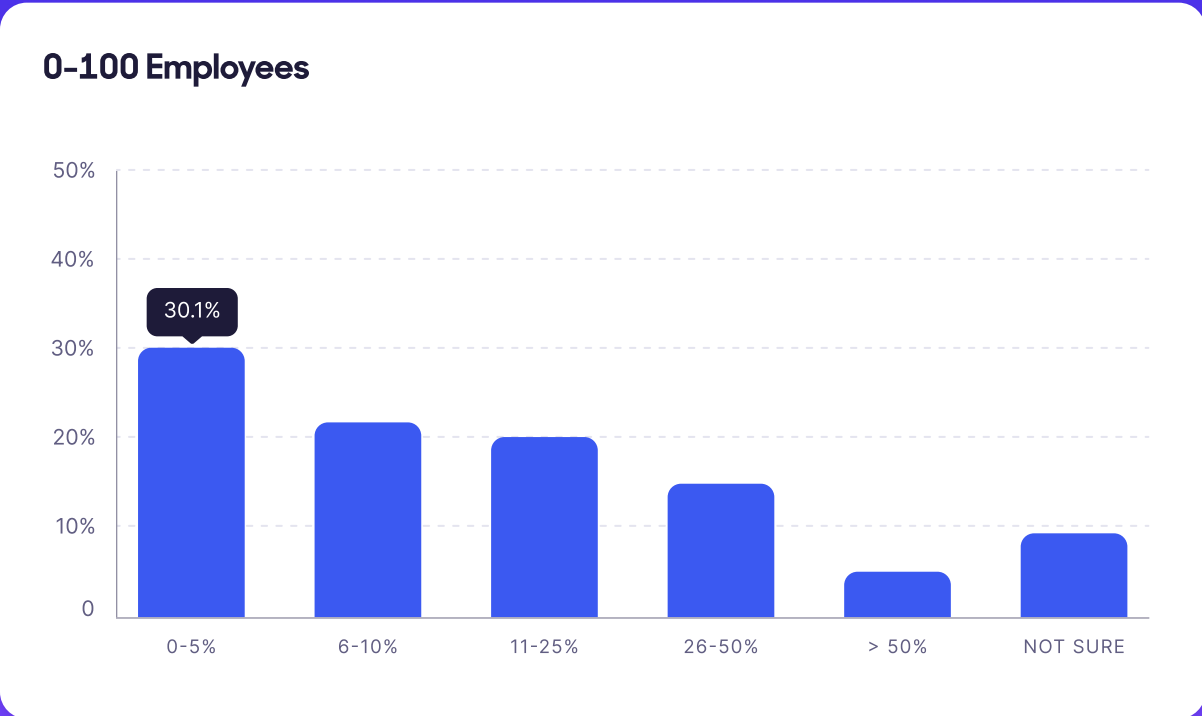
Without adjustments to the approach, maintaining immediate response times and engaging buyers at the point of readiness becomes more challenging.



SECTION 2:

Inbound Leads are Falling Through the Cracks

Percentage of inbound leads that are never contacted by sales



Generating inbound leads is only the first step in the pipeline journey.

What ultimately drives revenue is what happens next, whether those leads are actually followed up with and turned into real sales conversations.

Our data shows that this is where many organizations break down. Even when demand is strong, teams struggle to consistently engage inbound leads once they enter the funnel.

Across respondents, the inbound funnel often looks like this:

*Out of every **10** inbound leads, roughly **one is never contacted by sales, and only one ultimately becomes a meeting.***

The rest stall in the middle of the funnel.



11%

Inbound leads never contacted

A meaningful share of inbound leads never receive sales follow-up.

More than half of organizations report that **at least 11% of inbound leads are never contacted by sales**. In practical terms, this means roughly one out of every ten inbound buyers receives no engagement at all. These are not cold contacts, but individuals who have demonstrated interest by requesting a demo or submitting a form, yet may not receive a response. Each missed follow-up represents a lost opportunity to convert expressed demand into pipeline. Over time, these gaps can accumulate and reduce the effectiveness of what is typically a high-performing revenue source.

45%

Enterprise companies have major gaps

Enterprise companies struggle the most with lead coverage.

The likelihood that inbound leads go untouched increases significantly as companies scale. At smaller and mid-sized companies, gaps in follow-up exist, but they're more contained. Among companies with fewer than 1,000 employees, **18% report that more than a quarter of inbound leads are never contacted**.

At the enterprise level, the problem becomes far more pronounced. Among companies with more than 1,000 employees, that number jumps to **45%**. In other words, nearly half of large organizations report that **more than one in four inbound leads never receives follow-up**.

As organizations grow, inefficiencies in pipeline management may become more pronounced. More complex routing, more layers of ownership, and more reliance on manual processes make it harder to ensure every lead gets attention. The result is a surprising reality: the companies generating the most inbound demand are often the least equipped to fully capture it.

1 in 10

Inbound leads become a meeting

Only a small share of inbound leads becomes a meeting.

Even when leads are contacted, conversion into meetings remains limited. The most common reported outcome is that **6-10% of inbound leads result in a sales meeting**. Put simply, **only about one out of every ten inbound leads becomes a meeting with sales**, leaving the majority of inbound demand stuck in the middle of the funnel.



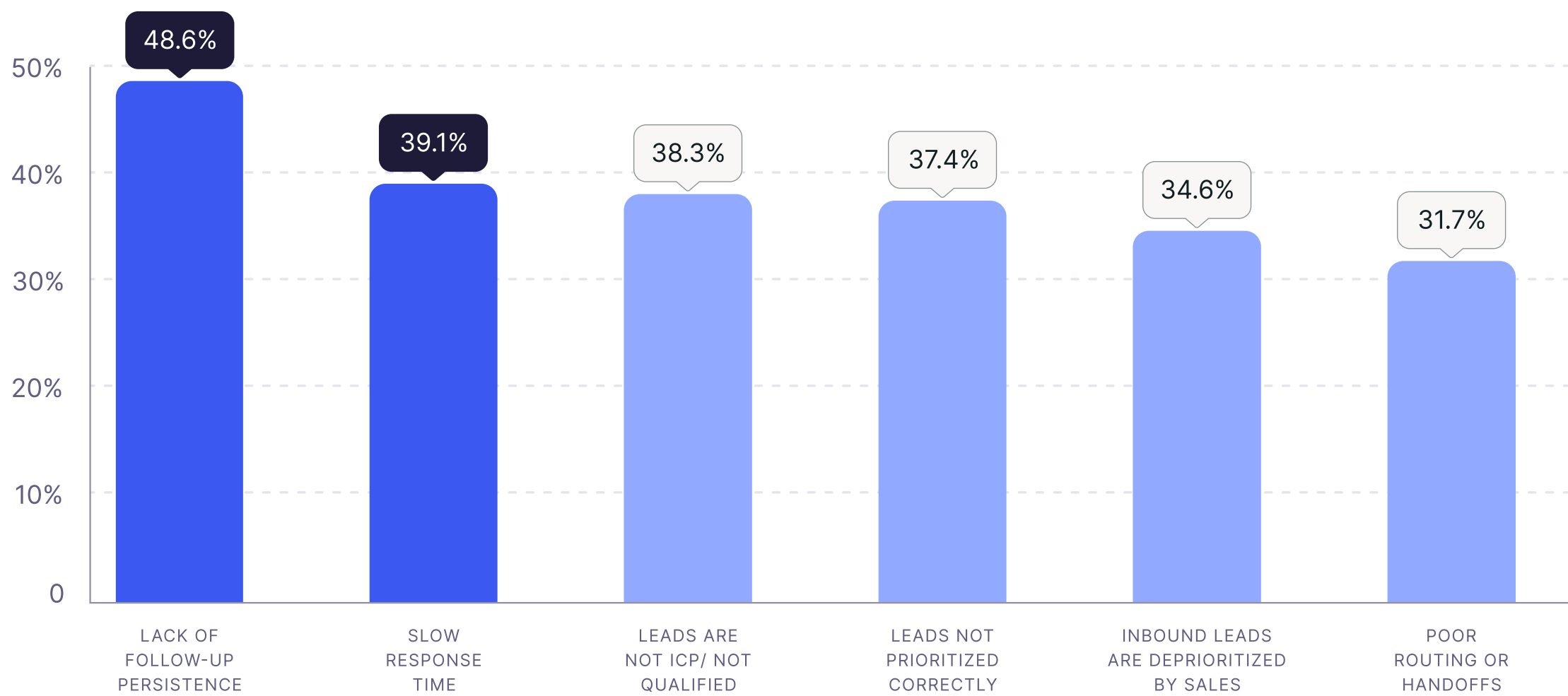
SECTION 3:

Why inbound leads fail to convert

Even when inbound leads receive follow-up, many still fail to convert into meetings. The data suggests that the biggest barriers are not a lack of demand, but breakdowns in how organizations manage inbound engagement once leads enter the funnel.

Across respondents, the most commonly cited reasons for failed conversions center on response speed, follow-up persistence, and internal prioritization, pointing to operational gaps in how inbound demand is handled after it is captured.

Top reasons inbound leads fail to convert into pipeline



1

Inconsistent follow-up is the single biggest driver of missed meetings.

The most frequently cited reason inbound leads fail to convert is **lack of follow-up persistence**.

Closely behind it is **slow response time**, reinforcing the pattern seen earlier in the report: many inbound opportunities are lost simply because engagement is delayed or inconsistent.

Together, these findings highlight how critical sustained and timely follow-up is to turning inbound interest into real conversations.

2

Internal prioritization & routing problems stall inbound leads.

Many respondents also pointed to operational issues inside the funnel, including **leads not being prioritized correctly, inbound leads being deprioritized by sales, and poor routing or handoffs between teams**.

These challenges suggest that many inbound leads fail not because of buyer intent, but because organizations struggle to consistently route and prioritize leads once they enter the system.



Chapter 1

Conclusion

Across organizations, the data reveals a consistent pattern in how inbound demand is handled.

While marketing teams generate strong signals of buyer intent through demo requests, form fills, and other inbound actions, many struggle to engage those signals quickly and consistently.

Response times are often slower than buyers expect, and a meaningful share of inbound leads never receive follow-up from sales at all.

Even when engagement does occur, inconsistent coverage and operational bottlenecks frequently prevent leads from converting into meetings.

Together, these gaps create what many marketing leaders experience as the **inbound pipeline gap**:

buyer intent enters the system, but

speed, coverage, and coordination ultimately determine whether that intent becomes pipeline.



Chapter 2

AI Is Everywhere
In Marketing,
**But It's Not
Always Agentic**

SECTION 1:

AI Is Widely Adopted, but Rarely Used for Inbound Engagement

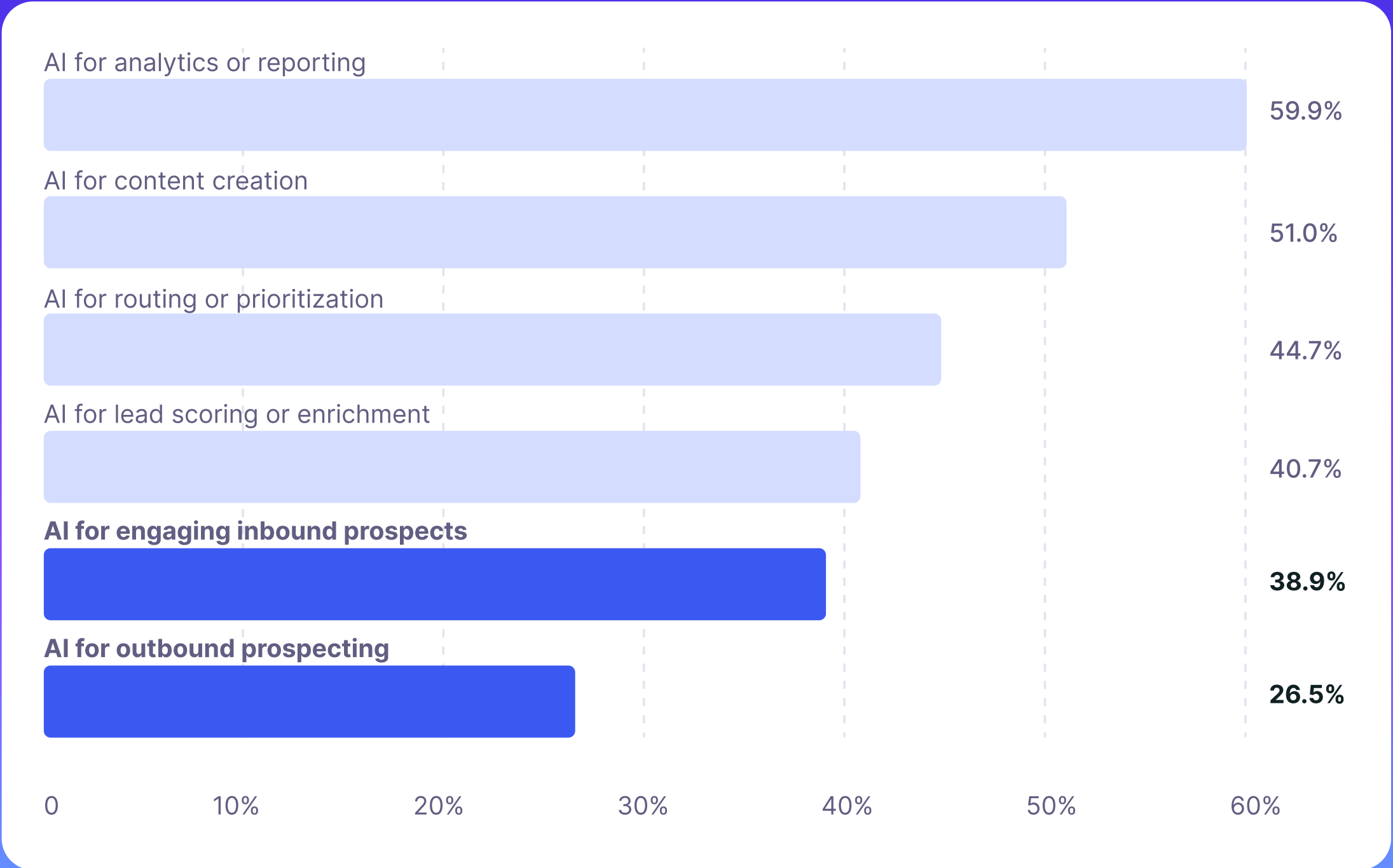
Artificial intelligence is becoming increasingly integrated into marketing workflows, with many teams using it to generate content, analyze performance data, and support operational decision-making. Its role has expanded across a range of activities, helping streamline execution and improve efficiency in day-to-day processes.

However, much of this adoption remains focused on augmenting internal workflows rather than directly engaging buyers. AI is often applied to tasks that enable teams to work faster and more efficiently,

such as content production, optimization, and reporting. By comparison, the stages of the funnel most closely tied to converting demand into pipeline continue to rely largely on human interaction.

As a result, there is a distinction between where AI is most commonly deployed and where it has the potential to influence outcomes more directly. While it contributes to productivity gains upstream, its role in real-time buyer engagement and conversion remains more limited in many current implementations.

How marketing teams are utilizing AI



**59.9%**

Use AI for analytics or reporting

1 Most AI adoption today supports marketing operations.

Current AI adoption is concentrated in supporting and optimizing existing marketing workflows. The most commonly reported use cases center on internal efficiency rather than external engagement.

59.9% of teams use AI for analytics or reporting, making it the most widely adopted capability. **51.0% report using AI for content creation**, and **44.7% use AI for lead routing or prioritization**. Taken together, these use cases indicate that AI is primarily being deployed to enhance how marketing teams execute their work. It plays a role in accelerating content production, improving visibility into performance, and helping teams organize and manage inbound demand.

At the same time, these applications largely operate behind the scenes. They support decision-making and workflow efficiency, but do not fundamentally change how or when buyers are engaged. As a result, AI's current role in many organizations remains focused on enabling marketing operations rather than directly participating in buyer interactions.

**38.9%**

Use AI for inbound engagement

2. AI engagement of buyers remains less common.

In contrast to its widespread use in operational workflows, AI adoption is less prevalent in direct buyer engagement. While many organizations have integrated AI into internal processes, fewer have extended its use to interacting with prospects in real time.

Only **38.9% of organizations report using AI for inbound engagement**, and just **26.5% use AI for outbound buyer outreach**.

This pattern of lower adoption reflects a concentration of AI usage in operational tasks rather than buyer-facing moments.

While it is frequently used to support preparation, analysis, and execution behind the scenes, it is less often used in the moments where buyer interest is actively converted into conversations and pipeline.



SECTION 2:

Most Teams Still Keep Humans in Control of Inbound AI

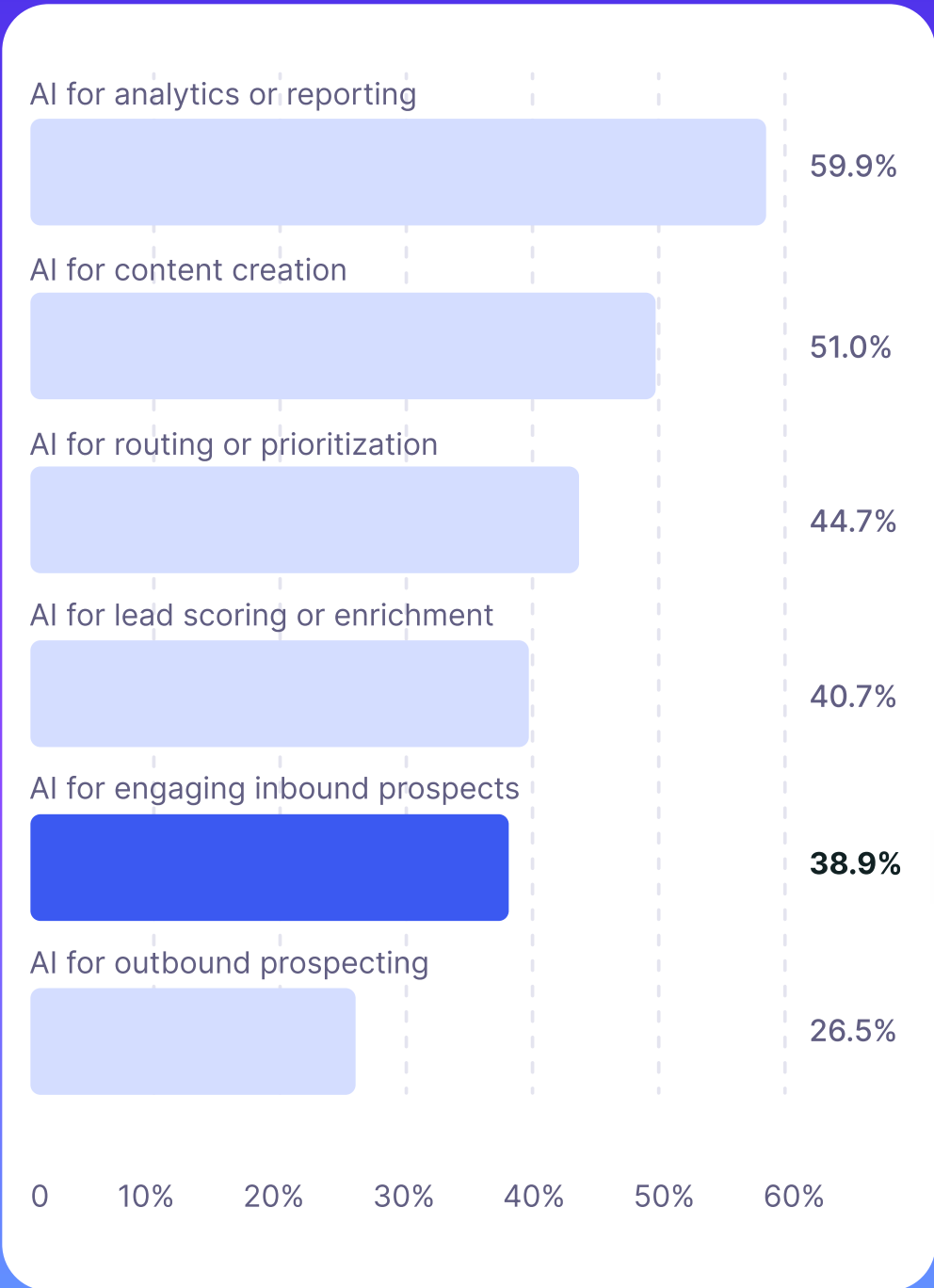
Even among organizations that use AI for inbound engagement, most teams continue to limit the level of autonomy these systems are given. In other words, adoption does not necessarily translate into full delegation. Instead, AI is often introduced in ways that keep humans closely involved in decision-making and execution.

In practice, this means AI is more commonly used to assist or automate specific parts of the inbound process rather than manage it end-to-end. Teams may rely on AI to surface recommendations or handle defined workflows, while reserving more complex interactions and final actions for human operators.

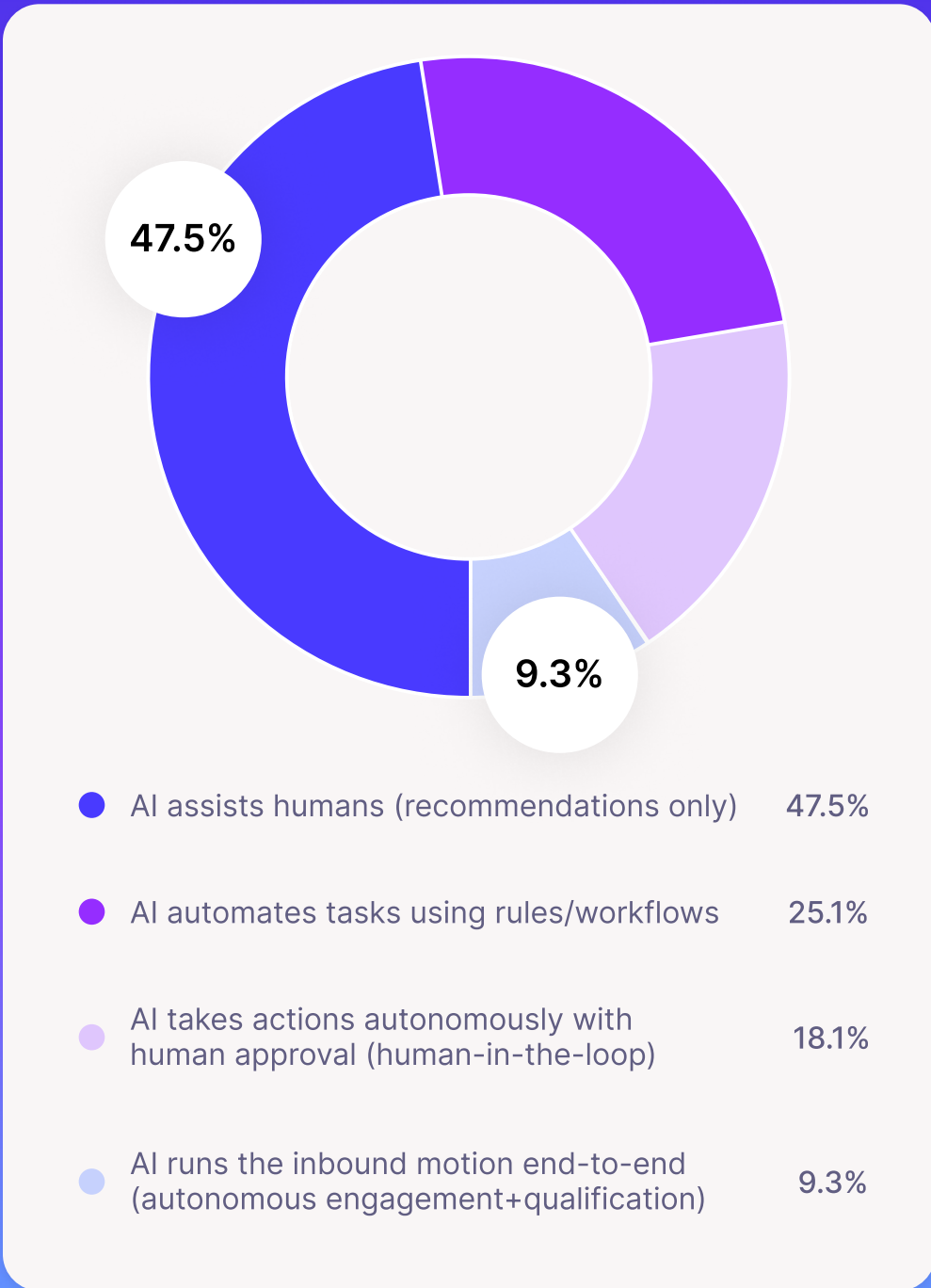
This approach reflects a measured adoption pattern. Organizations are incorporating AI into buyer-facing workflows, but typically in controlled, incremental ways that allow them to maintain oversight and adapt processes over time.

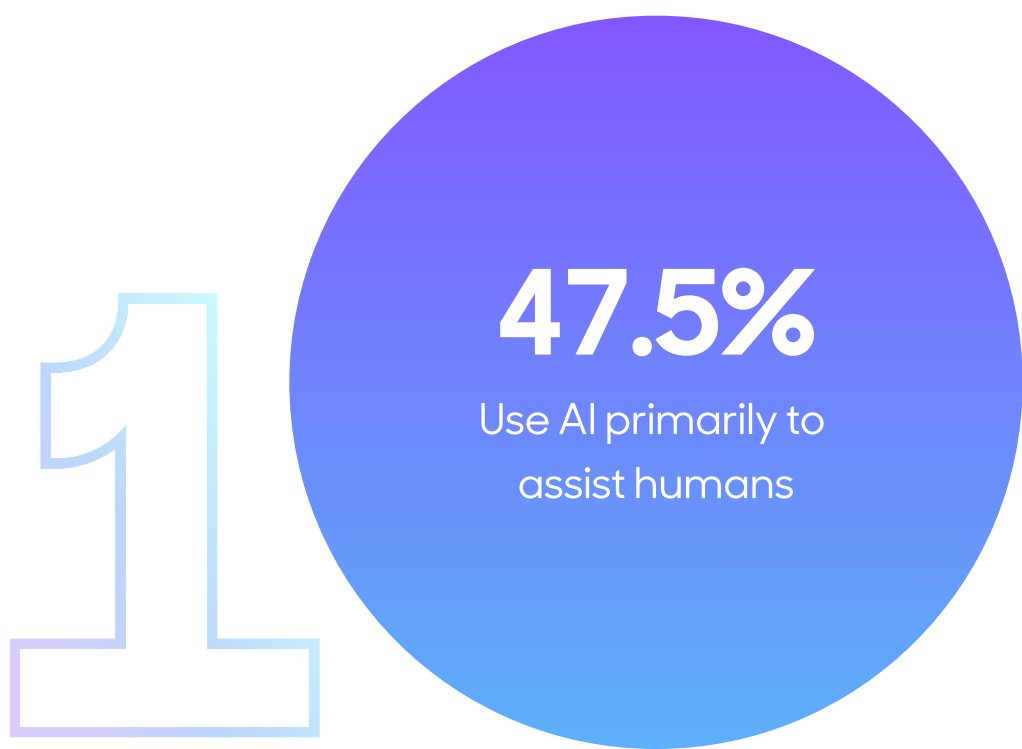
These dynamics suggest that while AI-driven engagement is gaining traction, most teams are still in the early stages of shifting from AI as a supporting tool to AI as a more autonomous participant in the inbound funnel.

How marketing teams are utilizing AI



AI maturity in inbound marketing





Most inbound AI is still assistive, not agentic.

Current usage patterns show that inbound AI is most often implemented in a limited, assistive capacity with a consistent emphasis on human control, rather than as an autonomous system acting independently on behalf of a team.

Even among organizations that have adopted AI for inbound engagement, most continue to limit how much autonomy these systems have in practice. Usage patterns indicate that AI is more often positioned as a support layer rather than a fully independent operator.

Within the 38.9% of organizations using AI for inbound engagement (see data from Section 1), 47.5% report using it primarily to assist humans through recommendations. Another 25.1% apply AI to automate specific tasks using predefined rules or workflows.

Only a small subset of organizations have moved toward more advanced, autonomous use of AI.



Fully agentic inbound engagement remains rare.

While some organizations have begun to experiment with more autonomous applications of AI, fully agentic inbound engagement is still uncommon. Most implementations stop short of allowing AI to independently manage the full buyer interaction lifecycle.

Only **9.3% of organizations report that AI runs their inbound motion end-to-end**, handling engagement, qualification, and booking without human intervention. A slightly larger segment, **18.1%, allows AI to take action autonomously but with human approval**, indicating that oversight remains embedded even in more advanced use cases.

These figures suggest that, although elements of autonomy are being introduced, they are often constrained by checkpoints that keep humans in the loop. Rather than fully delegating inbound engagement to AI, most organizations continue to apply it within defined boundaries, limiting its role in independently driving buyer interactions.

As a result, end-to-end, agentic engagement remains the exception. Most teams have yet to transition from controlled, semi-automated workflows to systems capable of operating independently across the full inbound process.



SECTION 3:

What's Holding Marketing Teams Back from Agentic AI

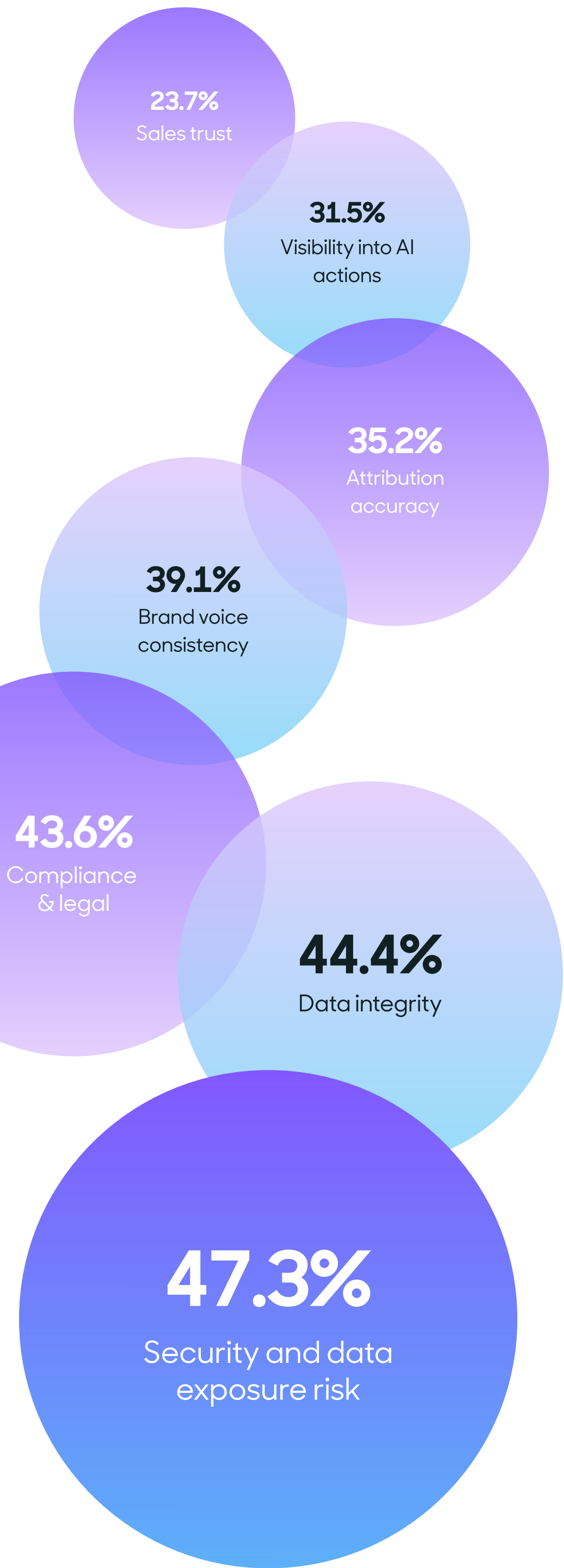
Concerns for adopting agentic AI engagement

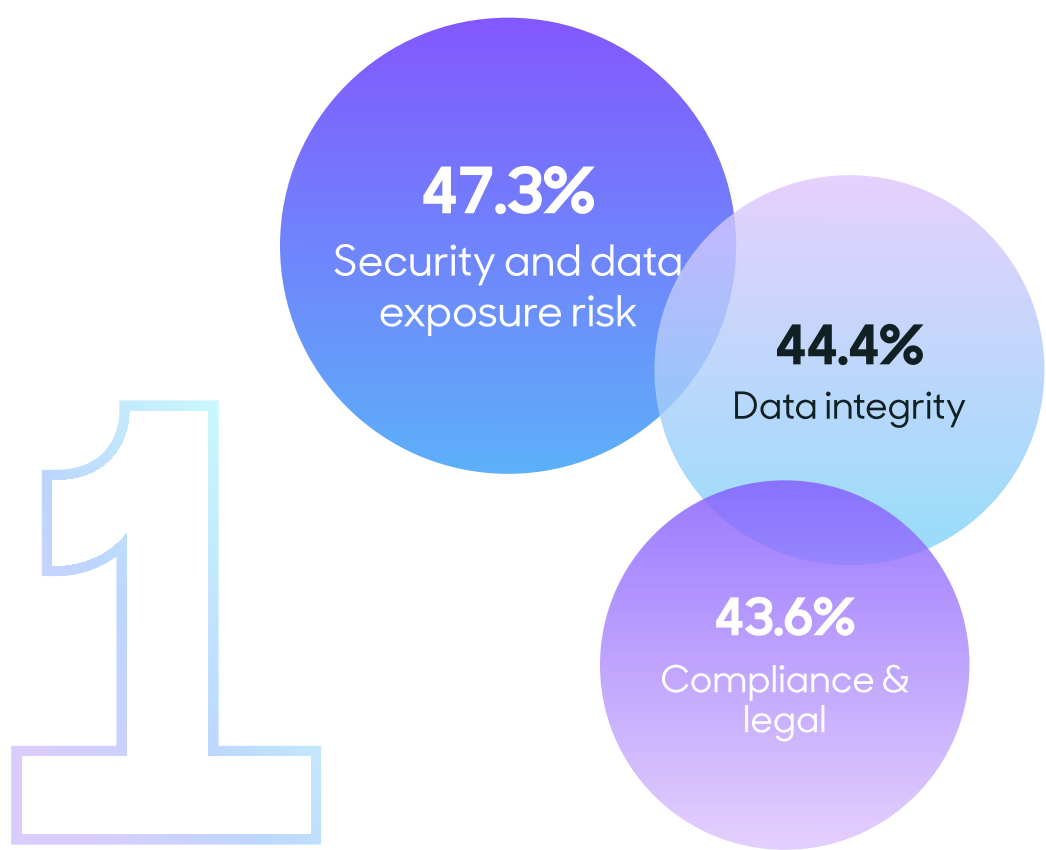
Despite broader adoption of AI across marketing workflows, many organizations continue to limit its role in fully autonomous, buyer-facing use cases. While AI is increasingly trusted to support internal processes, extending that trust to direct engagement with buyers introduces a different set of considerations.

The challenge is not solely about the capabilities of the technology, but about how it is governed, monitored, and controlled in practice. As organizations evaluate more advanced, agentic applications of AI, questions around oversight, reliability, and accountability become more central.

Across teams, hesitation tends to be driven less by uncertainty about AI's potential value and more by the need to manage risk and maintain control over critical aspects of the buyer experience. This includes ensuring that interactions align with brand standards, that actions taken by AI systems are visible and understandable, and that underlying data is handled appropriately.

As a result, adoption of more autonomous AI is often shaped by a set of practical constraints related to security, data integrity, compliance, and the importance of operational visibility and brand control in buyer-facing environments.





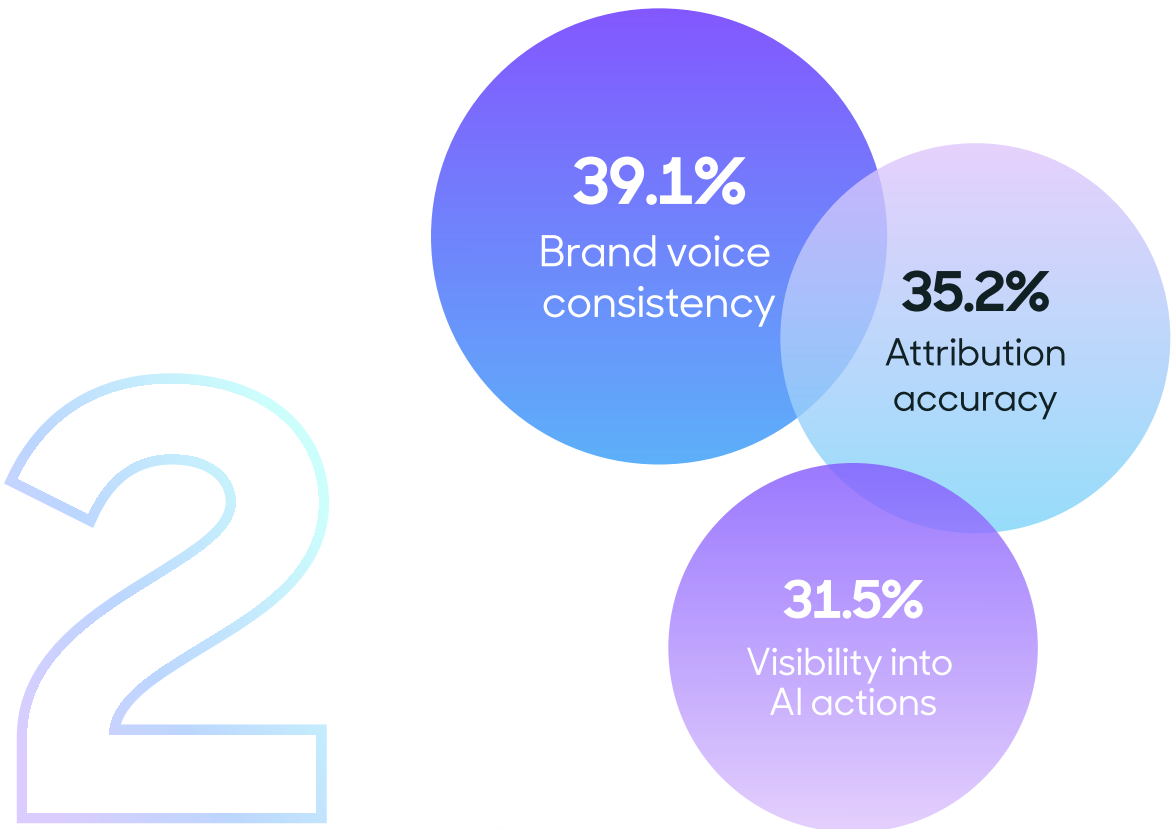
Security, data integrity, and compliance are the top concerns.

The most frequently cited concerns around agentic AI engagement center on data governance and risk management. **47.3% of respondents identify security and data exposure risk as a primary concern**, making it the most commonly reported issue. This is followed closely by data integrity at **44.4%** and **compliance or legal considerations at 43.6%**.

The consistency across these responses suggests that organizations are approaching autonomous AI with a focus on how data is handled, validated, and protected in buyer-facing contexts. As AI systems take on a more active role in engagement, the potential consequences of inaccurate data, unintended exposure, or non-compliant behavior become more significant.

These concerns indicate that trust in AI is closely tied to confidence in underlying data practices. Organizations are not only evaluating what AI can do, but whether it can operate within the constraints required for secure and compliant engagement.

As a result, many teams appear to be prioritizing governance and safeguards as a prerequisite to expanding AI autonomy, ensuring that systems can operate reliably and within defined boundaries before allowing them to act independently in buyer interactions.



Operational visibility and brand control remain important barriers.

Beyond data governance and compliance risks, organizations also express concern about how AI behaves in live buyer interactions. As AI systems take on a more active role in engagement, maintaining consistency, transparency, and control becomes a key consideration.

A significant portion of respondents cite brand voice consistency (39.1%) as a concern, highlighting the importance of ensuring that AI-generated interactions align with established messaging and tone.

Similarly, 35.2% point to attribution accuracy, indicating a need to clearly understand how AI-driven interactions contribute to pipeline and revenue outcomes.

31.5% report concerns around visibility into AI actions, reinforcing that teams require full transparency into how decisions are made and executed in real time.

Together, these concerns reflect a broader need for operational clarity. As agentic AI moves from supporting workflows to autonomously engaging buyers, organizations require greater insight into how it performs, how it represents the brand, and how its actions can be measured and evaluated.

In this context, hesitation is tied not only to risk, but to control. Without clear visibility into AI behavior and confidence in how it will represent the organization, teams may be less inclined to expand its role in buyer-facing processes.



Chapter 2

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence is already embedded across many marketing workflows.

Most organizations are still early in applying it to buyer engagement.

While teams commonly use AI to support content creation, analytics, and operational efficiency, far fewer have extended it into the stages of the funnel responsible for generating pipeline.

Even among organizations experimenting with AI-driven engagement, most continue to rely on human oversight rather than fully autonomous systems. Adoption in buyer-facing use cases remains measured, with AI more often assisting than independently executing.

As organizations build confidence in areas such as governance, visibility, and brand control, these constraints may become less limiting over time. This progression is likely to shape how AI evolves within the funnel, shifting from a supporting role toward more direct participation in pipeline generation.



Chapter 3

The Agentic Advantage

SECTION 1:

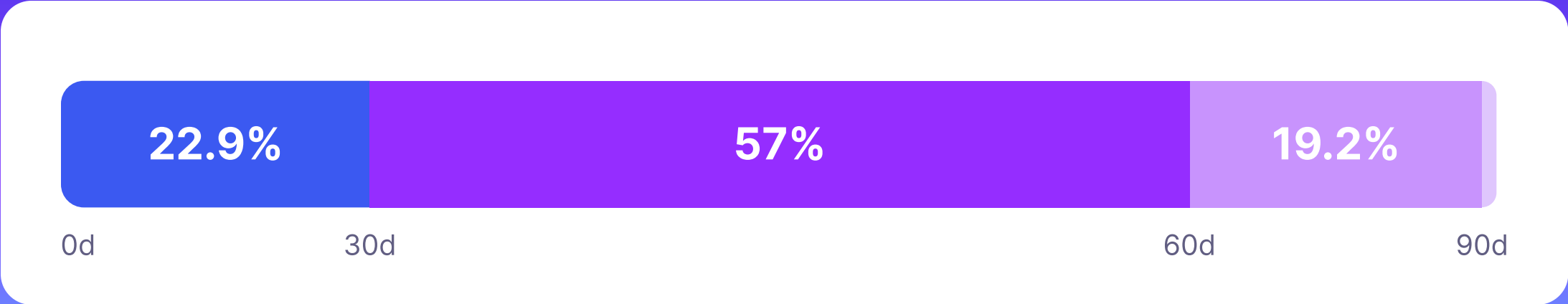
Agentic Engagement Delivers Measurable Results Quickly

Organizations using agentic inbound report that the impact becomes visible quickly after deployment. For many teams, improvements don't take months to materialize, they begin to show up within weeks.

This speed to impact stands out. Instead of long implementation cycles or extended ramp periods, teams start seeing measurable gains in how quickly they respond to leads, how many conversations they capture, and how efficiently inbound demand moves through the funnel.

This suggests that agentic inbound is not just a long-term transformation. It delivers immediate, practical improvements that teams can see and act on almost right away.

Time to impact from agentic inbound engagement



1 Most organizations see measurable impact within two months.

Among organizations deploying agentic inbound engagement:

- 22.9% report measurable impact in less than 30 days
- 57% report measurable impact within 30–60 days
- 19.2% report impact within 60–90 days

In total, nearly 80% of organizations report measurable improvements within the first two months of deployment.

For most teams, impact shows up quickly in day-to-day performance, from faster response times to move conversations captured and meetings booked.

Rather than waiting through long ramp periods, teams begin to see clear signals that inbound performance is improving, often within the first few weeks of going live.

2 Long ramp periods are extremely rare.

Only **0.9%** of respondents report that it took more than **90 days** to see measurable improvements in inbound performance.

In other words, extended ramp times are the exception, not the rule.

For most organizations, agentic engagement starts driving results almost immediately.

Teams see improvements across key inbound metrics like meetings booked, lead conversion, and pipeline creation without months of tuning or process changes.

The takeaway is simple: this is a model that delivers value and impact that shows up quickly.



SECTION 2:

Agentic Engagement Improves Multiple Inbound Metrics

Organizations using agentic inbound report improvements across a wide range of inbound performance indicators. The impact is not limited to a single metric, it shows up across how quickly teams respond, how effectively leads convert, and how much pipeline is generated.

These results point to a broader shift in how inbound demand is handled. Rather than optimizing one part of the funnel, agentic engagement appears to improve how the entire system operates.

1

Conversion improvements are the most common outcome.

The most frequently reported improvements relate to how effectively inbound leads convert into meaningful conversations.

- 55.2% report higher lead-to-meeting conversion rates
- 53.2% report more qualified conversations
- 42.2% report increased pipeline

These improvements suggest that agentic inbound not only increases the number of conversations happening with sales, but also improves their relevance and quality. Additionally, these leads progress further into the funnel.

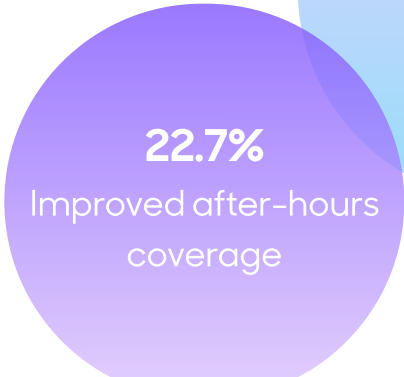
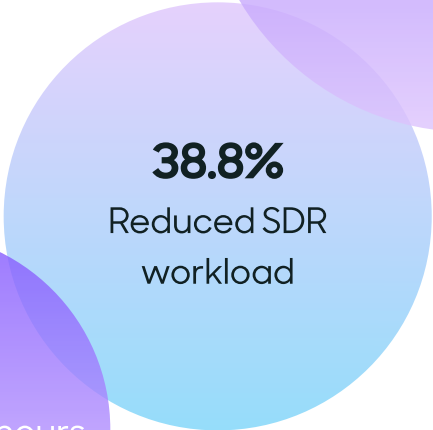
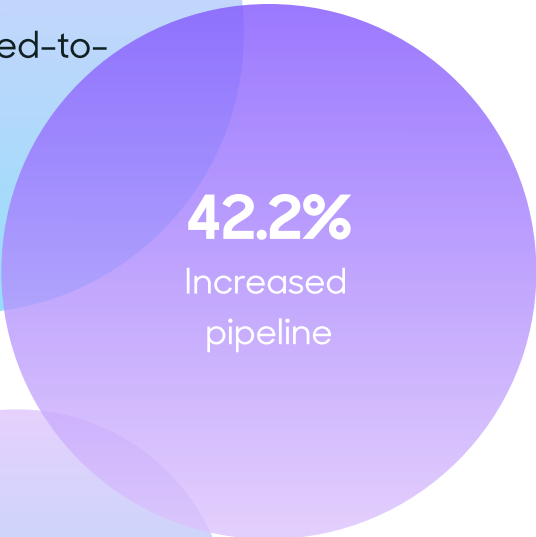
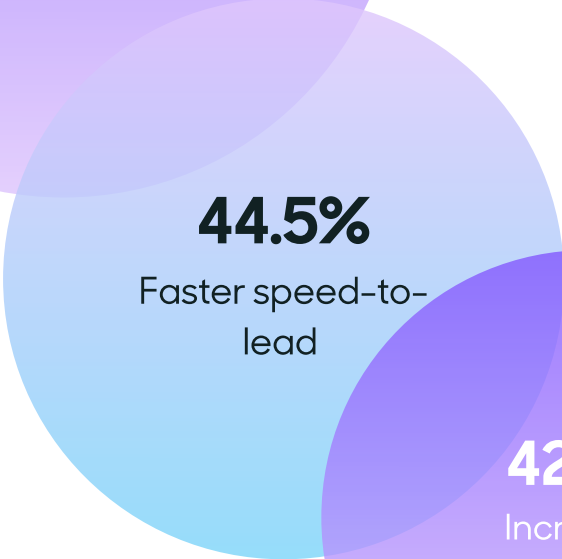
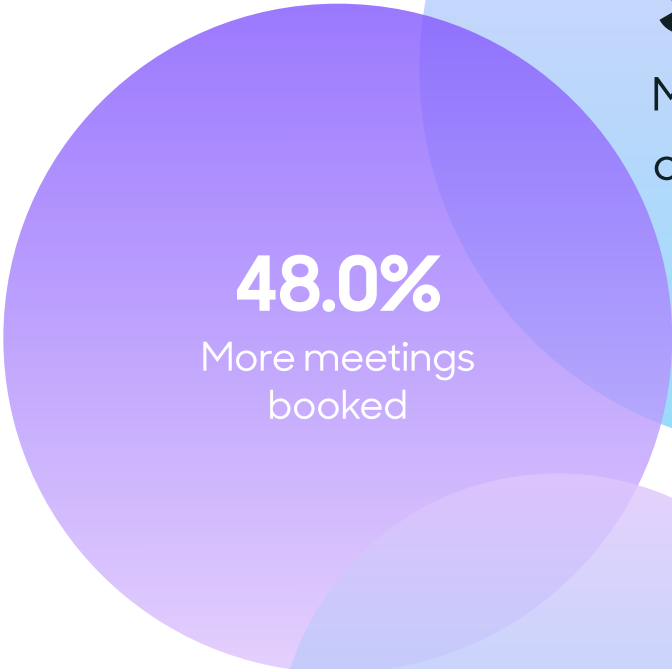
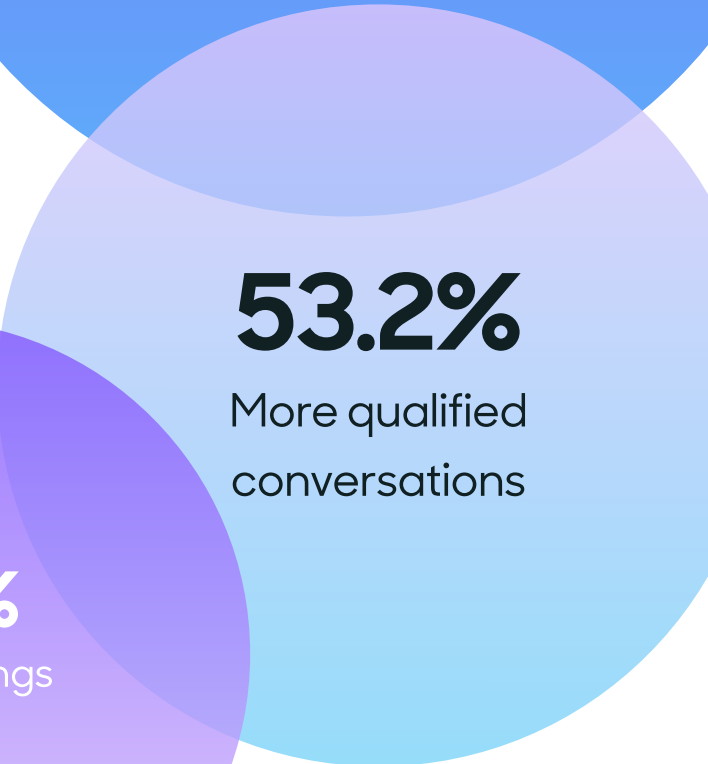
2

Operational efficiency improves alongside pipeline generation.

Beyond conversion improvements, many teams also report operational gains:

- 44.5% report faster speed-to-lead
- 38.8% report reduced SDR workload
- 22.7% report improved after-hours coverage

These outcomes show that improvements in pipeline performance are accompanied by changes in how inbound work gets done, with less reliance on manual follow-up and greater ability to engage leads consistently.



SECTION 3:

Nearly Every Organization Reports Positive Impact

Perhaps the most striking pattern in the dataset is how consistently organizations report improved inbound performance after implementing agentic inbound.

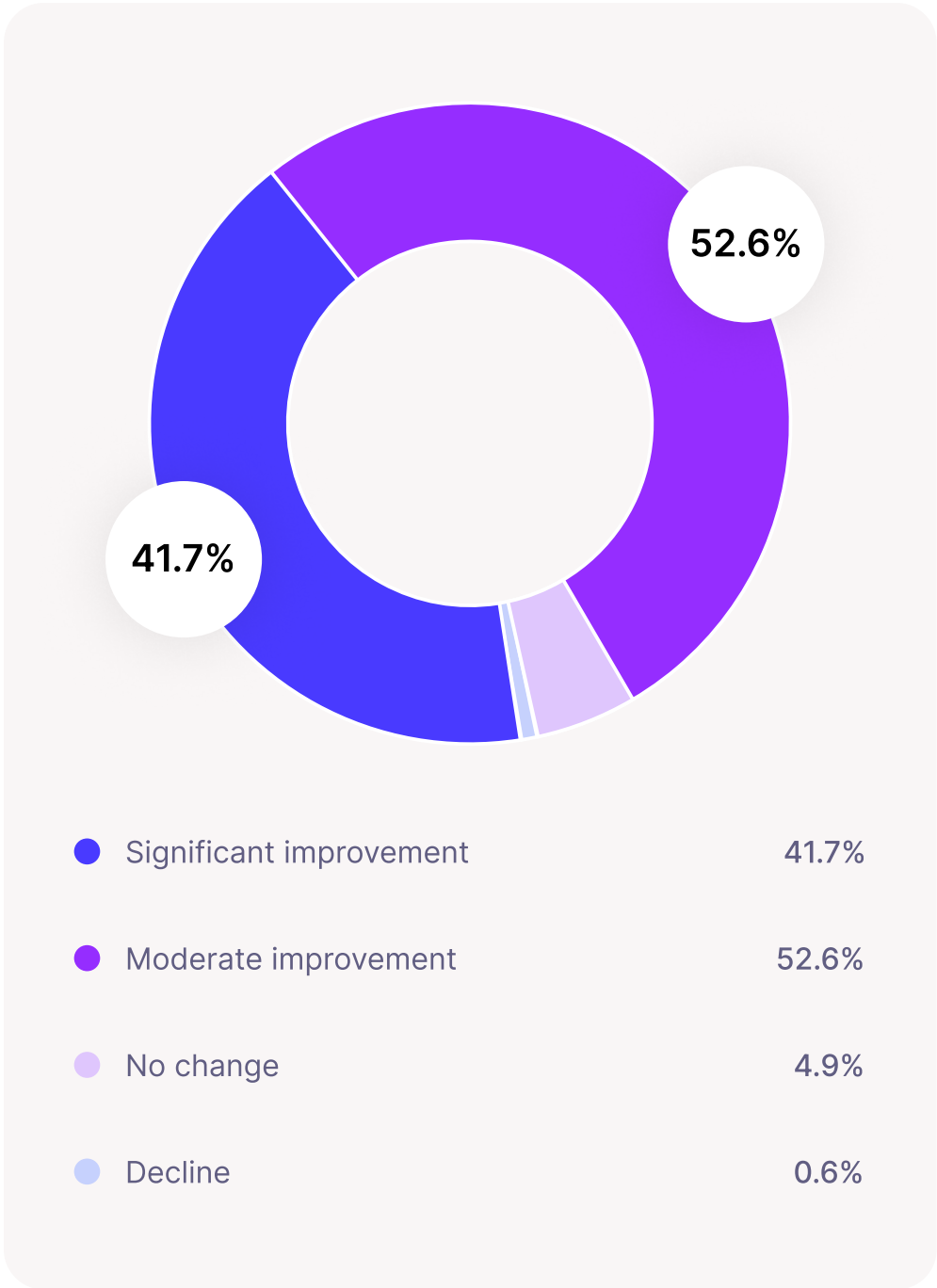
Unlike many go-to-market changes that produce mixed results, the outcomes here are overwhelmingly positive. Across organizations of different sizes and levels of maturity, most teams report some level of improvement after adopting this approach.

The degree of impact varies, but the direction is clear. Improvements are not isolated to a small group of high-performing teams. They are broadly distributed, suggesting that the benefits of agentic engagement are both repeatable and accessible across different operating environments.

This consistency reinforces a key idea: the value of agentic inbound is not dependent on perfect execution or highly specialized teams. It appears to deliver measurable gains across a wide range of organizations, making it a reliable lever for improving inbound performance.

94.3%

of organizations report improved inbound performance after implementing agentic inbound.



The vast majority of teams report meaningful improvement.

When asked to compare performance before and after deployment:

- 41.7% report significant improvement
- 52.6% report moderate improvement

Together, 94.3% of organizations report improved inbound performance after implementing agentic inbound.

What stands out is not just that performance improves, but how broadly those improvements are reported.

Nearly every organization sees some level of lift, with a large portion reporting meaningful gains.

This suggests that the impact is not limited to edge cases and that improvements appear consistently across different organizations.

Based on this data, once agentic inbound is in place, most teams see measurable progress in how effectively they capture and convert inbound demand.



Chapter 3

Conclusion

The organizations allowing AI to autonomously engage inbound buyers offer a clear view of where inbound marketing is heading.

When AI moves beyond supporting workflows and begins participating directly in the revenue process, the impact shows up across key performance metrics, including conversion rates, pipeline generation, and overall efficiency.

These improvements are not limited to long-term transformation. Many teams report seeing results quickly after deployment, with measurable gains appearing within weeks.

As more organizations explore how AI can operate within their revenue motion, a consistent pattern is emerging.

Agentic inbound is not just improving isolated metrics. It is helping teams capture demand more effectively and convert it into pipeline.

These results suggest that agentic inbound has the potential to close the inbound pipeline gap highlighted earlier in this report and redefine how inbound demand is managed going forward.



Chapter 4

How Agentic Inbound Changes the Revenue Team

SECTION 1:

AI Expands SDR Capacity Rather Than Replacing It

The rise of agentic inbound is not only changing how inbound leads are handled. It is also starting to reshape how revenue teams are structured and how work gets done.

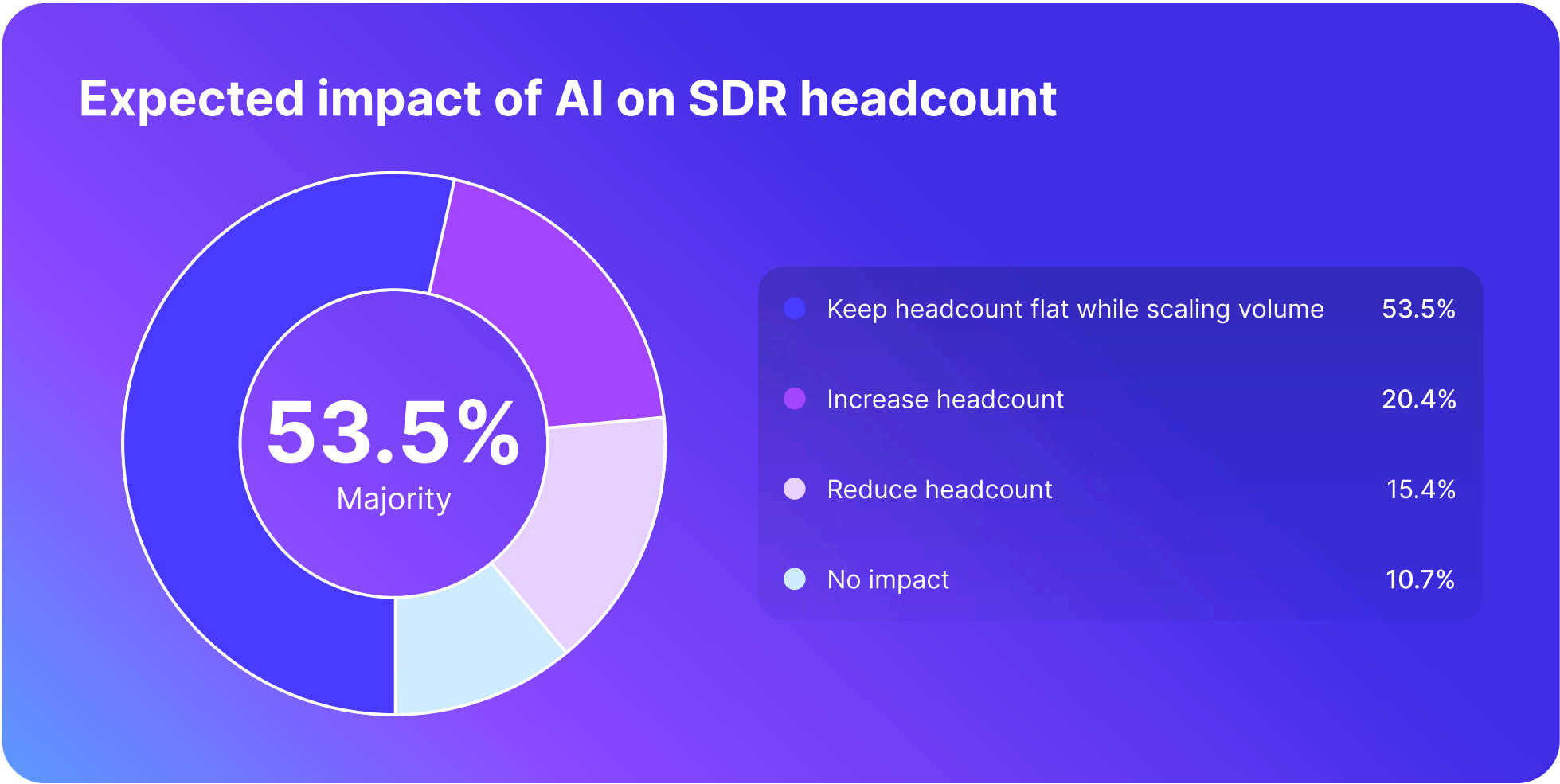
As AI takes on a more active role in engaging inbound buyers, organizations are rethinking how they allocate resources, define responsibilities, and scale pipeline generation. Tasks that once depended entirely on manual follow-up can now be handled in real time, creating new capacity across the funnel.

Rather than replacing human teams, most organizations see this as an opportunity to extend what their teams can accomplish. AI is expected to handle high-volume, time-sensitive engagement, while sales and marketing teams focus on higher-value interactions.

This shift is already influencing how companies think about SDR roles, hiring plans, and budget allocation. It is also raising new questions about ownership, including who is responsible for designing, managing, and optimizing AI-driven buyer engagement.

One of the most common questions surrounding agentic inbound engagement is how it will affect sales development teams. The data suggests that most organizations do not view AI as a replacement for SDRs, but as a way to increase the output and efficiency of existing teams.

Across respondents, expectations are centered on doing more with the same or greater capacity, rather than reducing headcount.



53.5%

Expect to keep headcount flat while scaling volume

1

Most companies expect to scale inbound volume without increasing SDR headcount.

The most common expectation among respondents is that AI will allow organizations to **keep SDR headcount flat while handling more inbound demand**.

- 53.5% expect to keep headcount flat while scaling volume

This points to a shift in how teams think about growth. Instead of increasing headcount in proportion to inbound demand, organizations expect AI to absorb a meaningful share of initial engagement and qualification.

As a result, SDR teams can focus more on higher-value activities, while routine, time-sensitive interactions are handled by AI.

20.4%

Expect SDR headcount to increase

2

Growth, not reduction, is the second most common expectation.

Some organizations even anticipate expanding their teams alongside AI adoption.

- 20.4% expect SDR headcount to increase

This suggests that, in some cases, improved inbound performance may generate additional pipeline that requires more human follow-up. Rather than reducing the need for SDRs, AI-driven engagement may increase the volume of qualified opportunities that need to be worked.

26.1%

Expect headcount to decrease or see no impact

3

Only a minority expect AI to reduce SDR headcount.

Despite broader concerns about automation and job displacement, relatively few respondents expect a reduction in SDR headcount.

- 15.4% expect SDR headcount to decrease
- 10.7% expect no impact

These results indicate that workforce reduction is not the primary expectation for most organizations. Instead, AI is more commonly viewed as a way to augment existing teams and the results suggest that most organizations view AI as a scaling tool rather than a workforce replacement strategy.

Rather than replacing SDRs, AI is expected to extend team capacity, improve responsiveness, and support increased inbound volume without requiring a proportional increase in hiring.



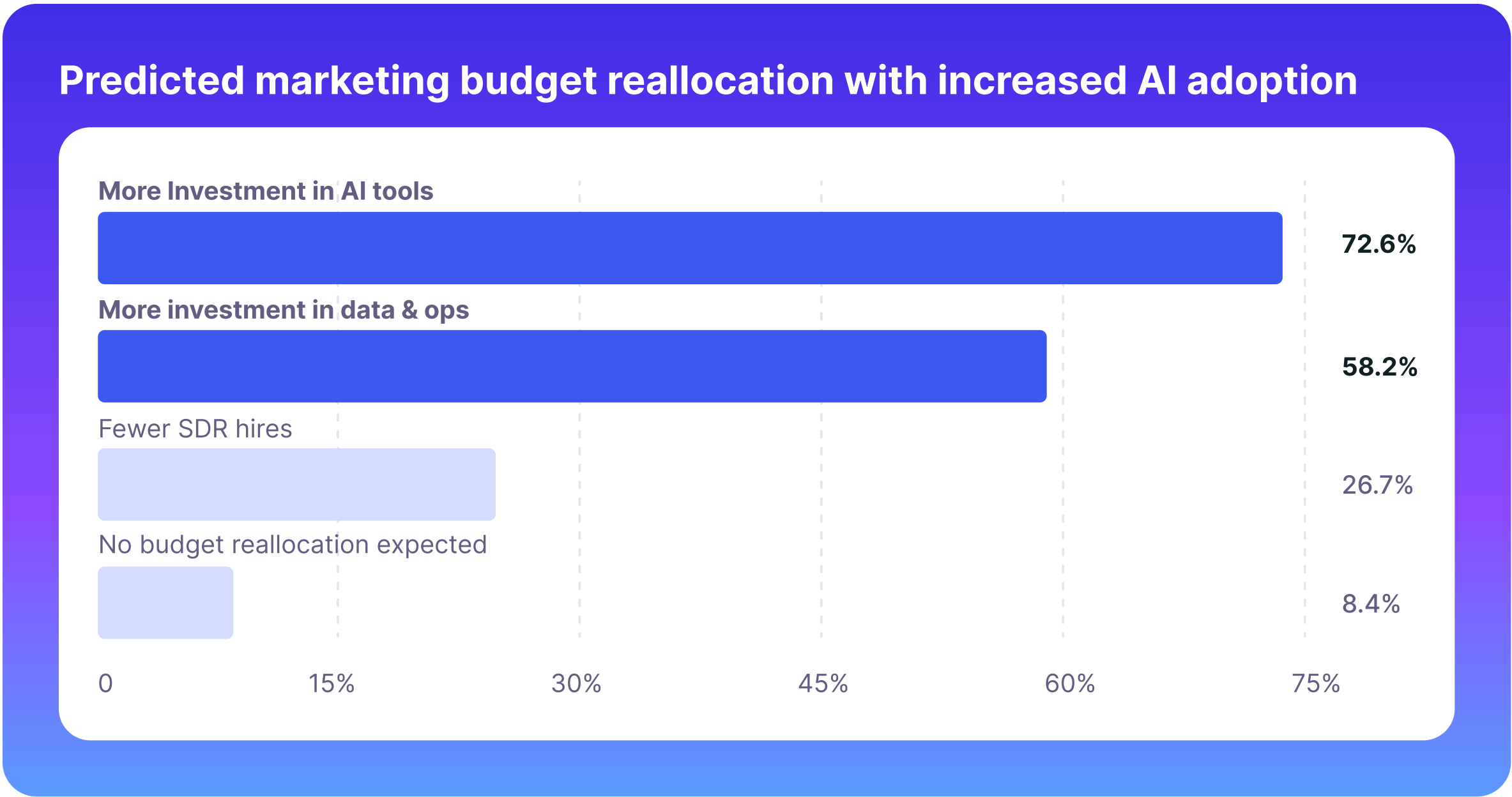
SECTION 2:

AI Is **Shifting** Marketing Budgets Toward Technology & Data

As AI-driven engagement becomes more central to marketing success, organizations expect meaningful shifts in how revenue teams allocate their budgets.

Rather than viewing AI as a cost-saving measure tied to headcount reduction, many organizations anticipate reinvesting resources into the systems required to support it. This includes both the tools used to engage buyers and the underlying infrastructure needed to operate them effectively.

Overall, the data points to a reallocation of budget toward technology, data, and operational systems that enable scalable inbound engagement.



1

The largest expected budget shift is toward AI tools.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents expect organizations to increase investment in AI technology.

- 72.6% expect more investment in AI tools

This reflects the growing role AI platforms are expected to play in managing inbound engagement. As organizations adopt agentic approaches, these tools become a core part of how demand is captured and converted, rather than a supplemental layer.

2

Data & operations infrastructure will also see major investment.

Beyond AI tools themselves, organizations anticipate investing in the systems needed to support them.

- 58.2% expect more investment in data and operations

This highlights an important requirement for AI-driven engagement. Effective execution depends on strong data quality, foundations, and operational infrastructure. Without these foundations, the impact of AI systems may be limited.



SECTION 3:

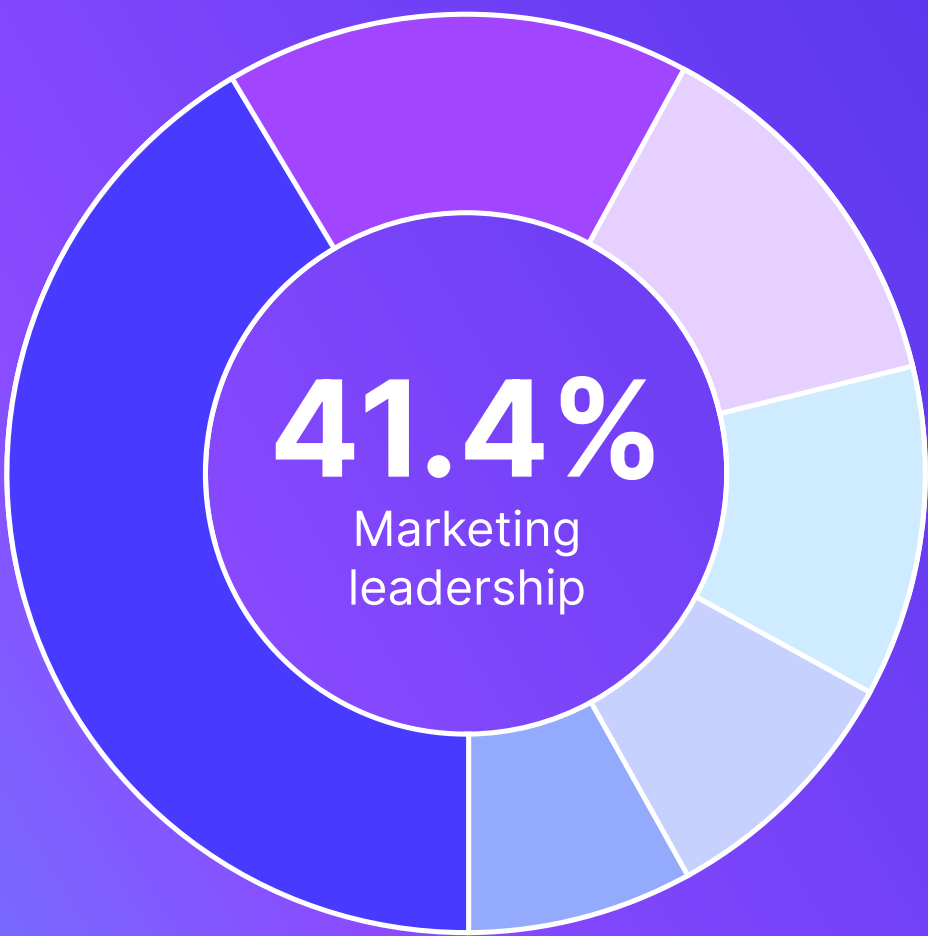
AI Strategy is **Becoming** a Marketing Leadership Priority

As AI-driven engagement moves closer to the revenue pipeline, ownership of AI strategy is increasingly shifting toward marketing leadership.

This reflects a broader change in how organizations think about AI. Rather than treating it as a standalone technical initiative, companies are beginning to view it as a core part of how demand is generated, captured, and converted.

The data suggests that agentic inbound is becoming a strategic capability that directly impacts pipeline performance, and as a result, is being led by teams closest to revenue outcomes.

Who owns the AI strategy for inbound engagement?



Marketing leadership	41.4%
IT / Security	16.9%
RevOps / Marketing Ops	13.2%
Demand Generation	11.7%
Shared ownership	8.9%
No clear owner	7.8%



1

Marketing leadership most often owns the AI strategy.

Among respondents, marketing leaders are the most common owners of AI strategy for inbound engagement.

- 41.4% say marketing leadership owns the strategy

This indicates that AI engagement is increasingly aligned with marketing's responsibility for driving pipeline. As these systems directly influence lead capture, qualification, and conversion, ownership is shifting toward the teams accountable for those outcomes.



2

Operational & technical teams still play an important role.

While marketing often leads the strategy, execution typically involves collaboration across multiple functions.

- 16.9% say IT or security owns the strategy
- 13.2% say RevOps or Marketing Ops owns it
- 11.7% say demand generation teams own it

These responses highlight the cross-functional nature of AI adoption. Technical teams support implementation, data governance, and system integration, while operations teams help define workflows and ensure consistency across the funnel. As a result, even when marketing owns the strategy, successful execution depends on coordination across the broader revenue organization.



3

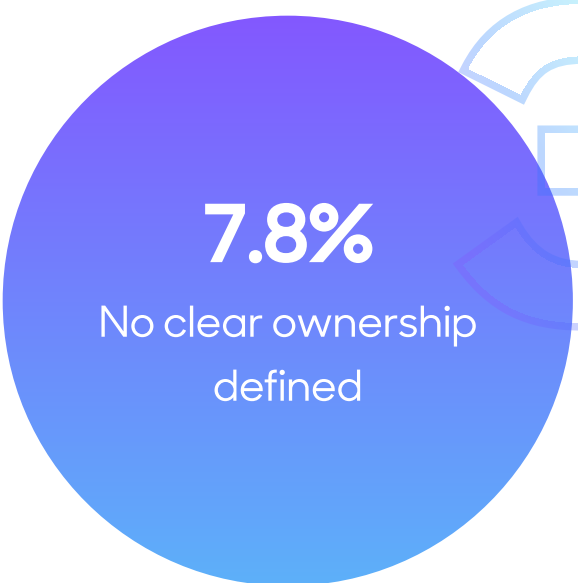
Some organizations are still defining ownership.

A smaller portion of companies report that ownership of AI strategy is still evolving.

- 7.8% report no clear owner

This suggests that for some organizations, AI engagement is still in an early stage, where roles and responsibilities have not yet been fully established.

As AI becomes more embedded in inbound strategy, organizations may need clearer leadership structures to guide adoption.



Chapter 4

Conclusion

Agentic inbound is beginning to reshape how revenue teams operate at a structural level. What starts as a change in how inbound leads are handled quickly extends into how teams are staffed, how budgets are allocated, and how ownership is defined across the revenue organization.

Organizations are using AI to expand capacity, allowing existing teams to handle more inbound demand without a proportional increase in headcount. In some cases, improved performance even creates the need for additional sales capacity, reinforcing the idea that AI is driving growth rather than contraction.

At the same time, investment priorities are shifting. Budget is moving toward AI platforms and the data and operational infrastructure required to support them. This indicates that scalable, real-time engagement depends on the systems that enable them to operate effectively.

These changes point to a larger transformation being that

agentic inbound is influencing how revenue teams are designed, how resources are allocated, and how pipeline is generated at scale.



Chapter 5

What High-Performing Inbound Teams Do Differently

SECTION 1:

High-Maturity AI Teams are More Likely to Hit Pipeline Targets

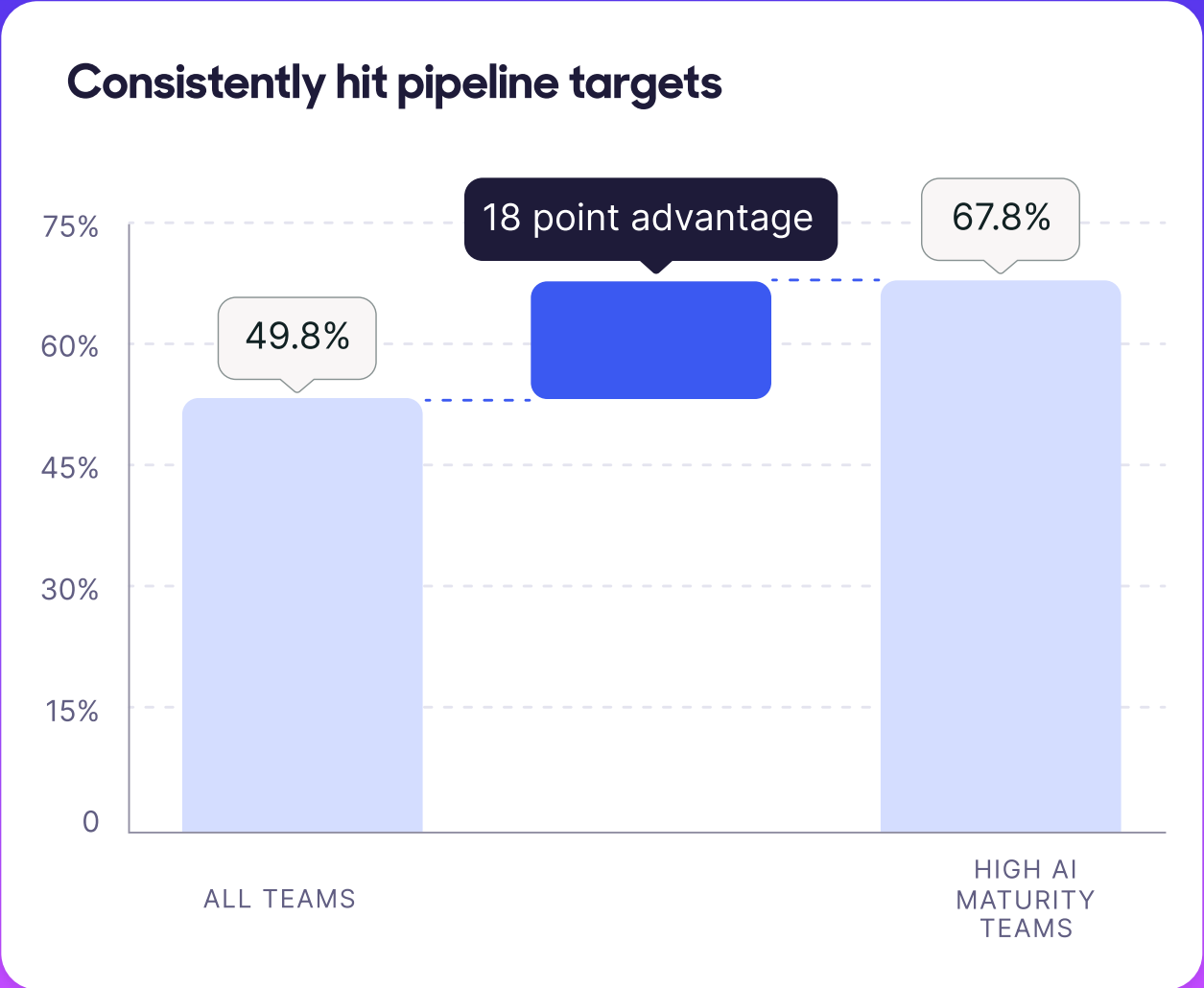
Across the dataset, inbound pipeline performance varies significantly. Some organizations consistently hit their inbound pipeline targets, while others struggle to convert inbound demand into predictable revenue.

To understand what separates these groups, we analyzed performance patterns alongside levels of AI maturity. A clear pattern emerges. Teams that are further along in adopting agentic inbound are more likely to consistently generate pipeline from inbound demand.

This gap is not just about volume of leads, but about how effectively those leads are handled. High-performing teams are better at responding quickly, engaging consistently, and ensuring follow-up coverage across every inbound opportunity.

The data suggests that agentic inbound plays a key role in enabling these behaviors. As a result, teams with more advanced AI engagement models are not only generating more pipeline, but doing so with greater consistency and predictability.

Inbound Pipeline Performance by AI Maturity



One of the clearest differences in the dataset appears when comparing inbound pipeline performance across AI maturity levels.

Organizations using more advanced AI engagement models consistently report stronger inbound outcomes than the overall dataset.

This reflects a meaningful difference in how effectively inbound demand is converted into pipeline.





High-maturity AI teams* hit inbound pipeline targets far more often.

Across all respondents:

- 49.8% say they consistently hit inbound pipeline targets

Among high AI maturity teams:

- 67.8% consistently hit inbound pipeline targets

This represents an **18-point performance advantage** for teams operating with more agentic inbound engagement models.

This difference demonstrates a shift from inconsistent to repeatable performance.

While roughly half of all teams report consistently hitting targets, that number increases significantly among those with more advanced AI engagement.

The data suggests that AI maturity is closely tied to a team’s ability to reliably convert inbound demand into pipeline.

Rather than depending on variable follow-up or manual processes, these teams appear to operate with greater consistency across each stage of inbound engagement.

**Respondents who responded that their organizations take autonomous AI actions in inbound engagement, either with human approval (human-in-the-loop) or by running inbound engagement end-to-end.*



Pipeline confidence increases significantly with AI maturity.

Confidence in the inbound pipeline also increases sharply among high-maturity teams.

Across all respondents:

- 46.9% say they are very confident in their inbound funnel

Among high-maturity teams:

- 69.4% report being very confident

This gap suggests that performance improvements are not limited to outcomes alone. They also influence how predictable and dependable inbound pipeline generation becomes.

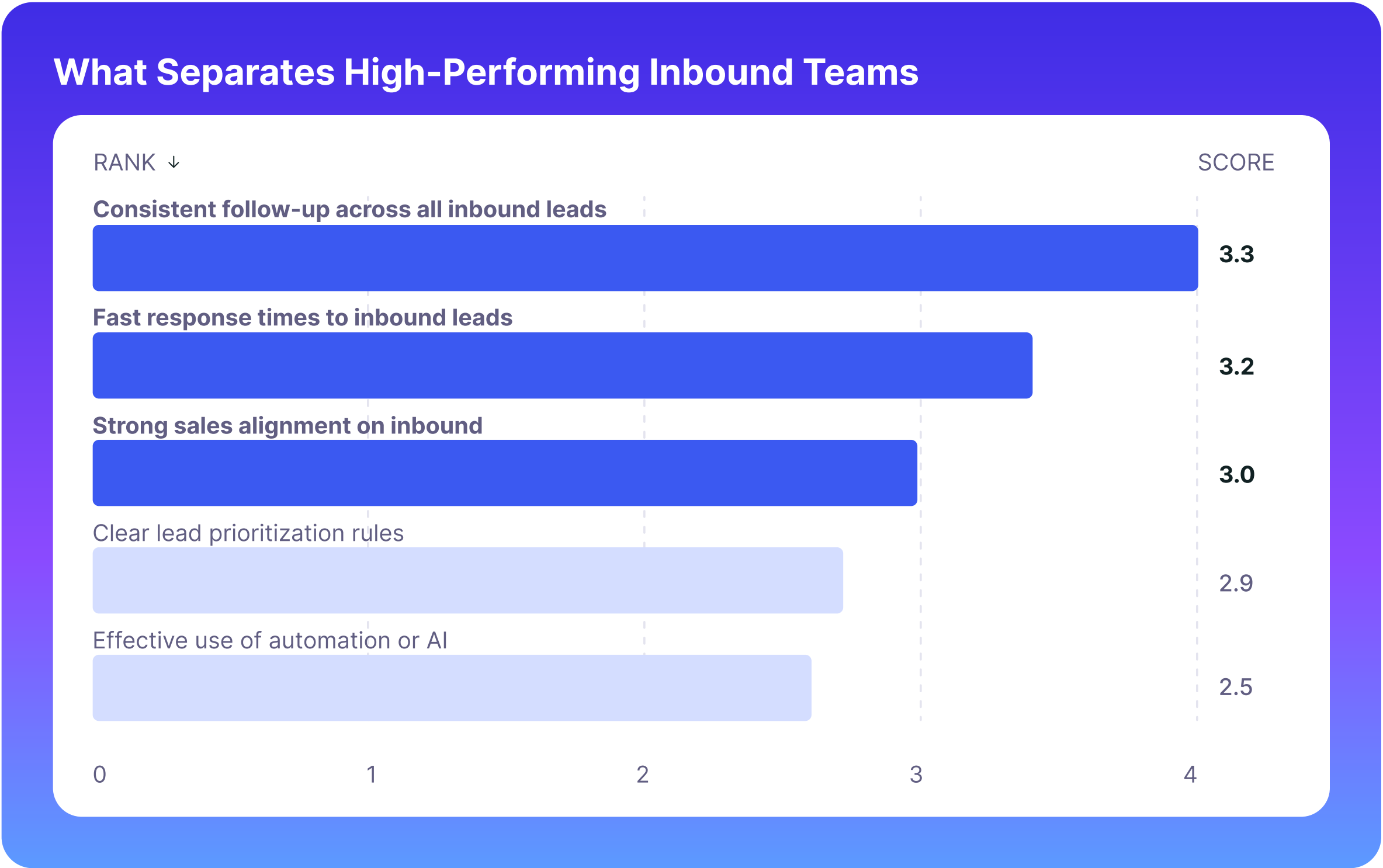
Higher confidence typically reflects more consistent execution. When teams are able to engage leads quickly, maintain follow-up coverage, and convert demand at higher rates, pipeline becomes easier to forecast and plan around.

These findings indicate that organizations using agentic inbound engagement are not only improving performance, but also gaining greater control and predictability over their inbound pipeline.



SECTION 2:

The Operational Behaviors That Separate High Performers



Beyond differences in technology adoption, respondents also identified a set of operational behaviors that consistently separate high-performing inbound teams from the rest.

These are not isolated tactics or one-off optimizations. They reflect how teams execute day-to-day across the inbound funnel, from how quickly they respond to how consistently they follow up and how well marketing and sales stay aligned.

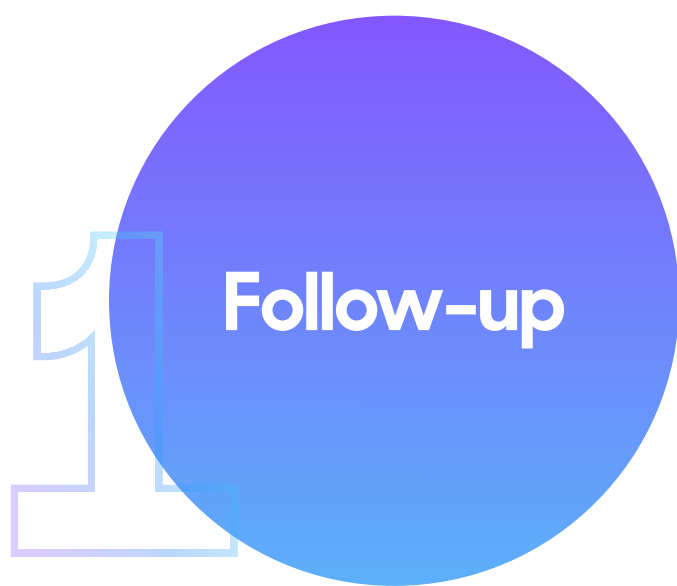
Across the dataset, high-performing teams indicated that they are not just generating more demand, but they are also better at capturing and converting it.

Their advantage comes from execution. They respond faster, maintain more consistent follow-up, and ensure that inbound leads are handled with clear ownership and prioritization.

Three themes appear repeatedly across these responses: speed, consistency, and sales alignment.

Together, these behaviors form the foundation of predictable inbound pipeline performance.





Consistent follow-up is the most important differentiator.

When asked to rank the factors that separate high-performing inbound teams from others, consistent follow-up across leads ranked as the most important factor.

This highlights a simple but critical point. Performance is not just about generating inbound demand, it is about what happens after that demand enters the funnel.

Teams that reliably follow up on every inbound lead are far more likely to convert demand into pipeline. They reduce the number of leads that go untouched, minimize delays, and ensure that initial interest is met with timely engagement.

Consistency is what creates coverage. Without it, even strong demand can break down due to missed handoffs, delayed responses, or gaps in ownership.

The data suggests that high-performing teams are not necessarily doing something radically different. They are executing more reliably. They follow up on every lead, every time, which allows them to capture more of the demand they are already generating.



Speed-to-lead remains a critical performance driver.

The second-highest ranked factor was fast response times to inbound leads.

This reinforces the findings from Chapter 1: Speed is not just a tactical advantage, it is a core driver of conversion.

Organizations that respond quickly to inbound buyers are significantly more likely to turn that initial interest into a conversation. When response times are short, teams are able to engage buyers while they are still actively evaluating and ready to act.

Delays, even small ones, introduce friction. As response times stretch, the likelihood of engagement drops. Buyers move on, explore other options, or lose momentum altogether.

High-performing teams treat speed as a baseline expectation rather than a best practice. They prioritize immediate engagement and build processes that allow them to respond in the moment, not minutes or hours later.

The result is a more consistent ability to capture demand at its peak and convert it into meetings and pipeline.



Sales alignment remains a key operational factor.

The third-ranked differentiator was strong sales alignment on inbound engagement.

Even with improved automation, coordination between marketing and sales continues to play a critical role in ensuring inbound demand converts into revenue.

When alignment is lacking, even strong demand and fast response times can fall short. Leads may be delayed, misrouted, or handled inconsistently, reducing the likelihood that they convert into meaningful conversations.

High-performing teams treat inbound engagement as a shared responsibility. Marketing, sales, and operations work together to ensure that every lead is handled consistently and moved forward with clear intent.



SECTION 3:

Automation Enables the Behaviors That Drive Performance

Automation plays a critical role in enabling the behaviors that top inbound teams rely on.

High-performing teams consistently execute on a small set of operational fundamentals. They respond quickly, follow up on every lead, and maintain clear prioritization across inbound demand. These behaviors drive performance, but they become increasingly difficult to sustain as volume increases.

Manual processes begin to break down. Response times slow, follow-up becomes inconsistent, and gaps in coverage emerge. Even well-structured teams struggle to maintain the level of execution required to convert demand reliably at scale.

Automation and agentic engagement become essential because, rather than replacing these core behaviors, they make them possible to sustain.

By enabling immediate responses, consistent follow-up, and continuous coverage, automation allows teams to execute with greater reliability, even as demand increases.

**Immediate response.
Consistent follow-up.
Continuous coverage.**

**Automation makes high-performance
execution reliable at scale.**



1 Full Coverage

Automation enables consistent follow-up at scale.

The top-ranked differentiator, consistent follow-up, is difficult to maintain manually, especially for organizations generating large volumes of inbound leads.

As demand increases, even well-resourced teams struggle to ensure that every lead receives timely and appropriate engagement.

Delays, missed follow-ups, and gaps in coverage become more common as volume grows.

Automation helps address this challenge by ensuring that every inbound lead is engaged in a consistent and timely way.

It reduces reliance on individual availability and removes many of the gaps that occur in manual workflows.

This creates more complete coverage across inbound demand.

High-intent buyers are less likely to be missed, and more opportunities are captured at the moment they enter the funnel.

2 Instant Response

Agentic engagement reduces operational bottlenecks.

By allowing AI to respond instantly and consistently, organizations can maintain fast response times without relying entirely on SDR availability or manual workflows.

This reduces many of the operational bottlenecks that typically slow inbound performance.

Instead of leads waiting in queues or being delayed by routing and handoffs, engagement can happen immediately.

As a result, teams are better able to maintain the core behaviors associated with high inbound performance, including speed, consistency, and clear prioritization.



Chapter 5

Conclusion

Across the dataset, the teams most consistently hitting inbound pipeline targets share a common set of behaviors. They respond quickly, follow up consistently, and maintain strong alignment between marketing and sales.

What stands out is that these behaviors are not new or unexpected. They represent well-understood best practices, but the difference is in execution. Maintaining this level of execution becomes increasingly difficult as inbound demand grows. Manual processes introduce delays, and make it harder to sustain consistent coverage.

The data suggests that organizations adopting agentic engagement are better equipped to overcome these challenges because it enables them to deliver immediate responses, consistent follow-up, and continuous coverage for every single lead, even as volume increases.

Teams that can engage every buyer signal quickly and consistently are more likely to convert demand into pipeline and do so with greater predictability.

The ability to execute on these fundamentals at a consistent level separates high-performing inbound teams from the rest.



Chapter 6

The Next Phase of Agentic Marketing

SECTION 1:

Agentic Engagement is Moving from Experimentation to Expectation

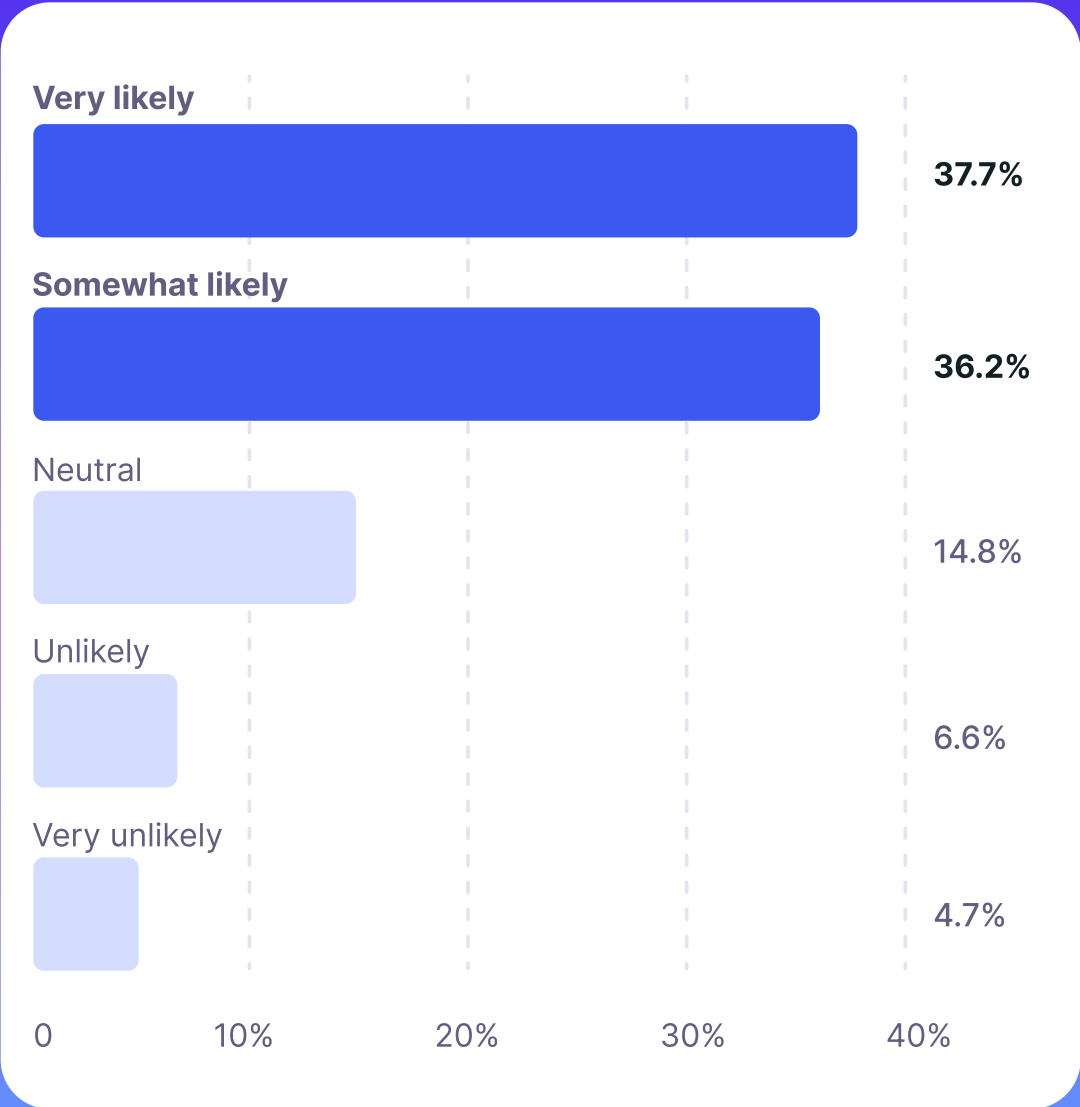
The rise of agentic inbound is not only changing how inbound leads are handled. It is also starting to reshape how revenue teams are structured and how work gets done.

As AI takes on a more active role in engaging inbound buyers, organizations are rethinking how they allocate resources, define responsibilities, and scale pipeline generation. Tasks that once depended entirely on manual follow-up can now be handled in real time, creating new capacity across the funnel.

Rather than replacing human teams, most organizations see this as an opportunity to extend what their teams can accomplish. AI is expected to handle high-volume, time-sensitive engagement, while sales and marketing teams focus on higher-value interactions.

This shift is already influencing how companies think about SDR roles, hiring plans, and budget allocation. It is also raising new questions about ownership, including who is responsible for designing, managing, and optimizing AI-driven buyer engagement.

Likelihood to adopt agentic inbound engagement in the next 12 months



Across respondents, most teams expect AI agents to become part of their inbound engagement strategy in the near future. While adoption is still developing today, many organizations are already planning for how agentic systems will be introduced and integrated into their workflows over the next year.

This indicates that agentic inbound is no longer viewed as a niche or experimental capability. It is increasingly being evaluated as a practical solution to challenges that teams are already facing, particularly around response speed, follow-up consistency, and scaling inbound engagement.





Nearly three-quarters of teams expect to adopt agentic inbound engagement.

When asked about adoption timelines:

- 37.7% say they are very likely to adopt AI agents within the next 12 months
- 36.2% say they are somewhat likely

Together, **73.9% of teams expect to adopt agentic engagement in the next year.**

This level of intent suggests a meaningful shift in how organizations are prioritizing inbound engagement. Rather than treating AI as a long-term initiative, many teams are actively planning near-term adoption.

As more organizations move forward, agentic engagement may transition from an emerging capability to a more standard part of the inbound stack.



Only a small minority of teams expect to avoid adoption.

Relatively few organizations report that agentic engagement is unlikely to become part of their strategy.

- 6.6% say adoption is unlikely
- 4.7% say it is very unlikely

In other words, fewer than **1 in 10 organizations expect to avoid adopting agentic engagement in the near future.**

This suggests that resistance to adoption is limited. Even among teams that are not yet planning to implement AI agents, most are at least considering how these systems may fit into their future approach to inbound engagement.

As more organizations plan for adoption, agentic engagement is moving from an emerging trend to a widely anticipated capability in inbound marketing.

SECTION 2:

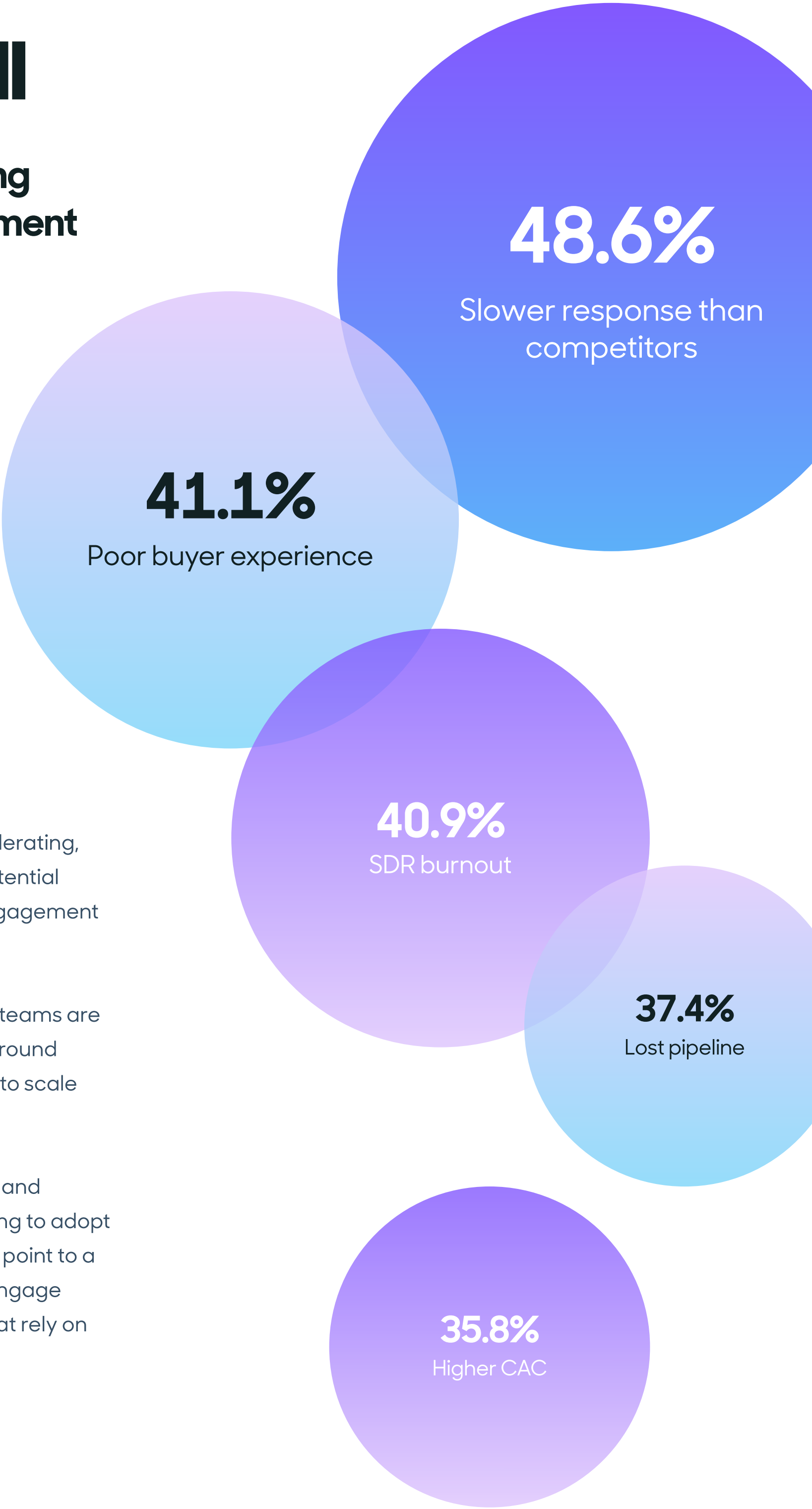
The Risk of Standing Still

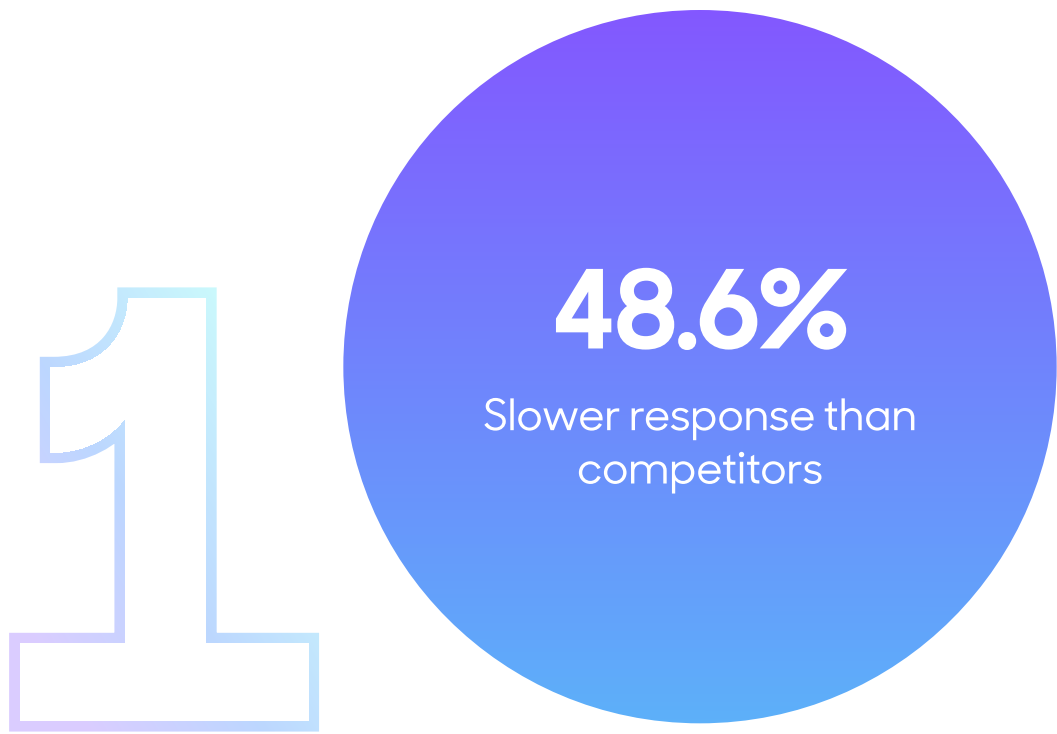
Downsides of not adopting agentic inbound engagement

While adoption of agentic systems is accelerating, many organizations also recognize the potential downside of not evolving their inbound engagement model.

The risks identified reflect challenges that teams are already experiencing today, particularly around response speed, coverage, and the ability to scale inbound engagement effectively.

Respondents cited a range of competitive and operational concerns associated with failing to adopt agentic inbound engagement. These risks point to a growing divide between teams that can engage inbound demand in real time and those that rely on slower, manual processes.





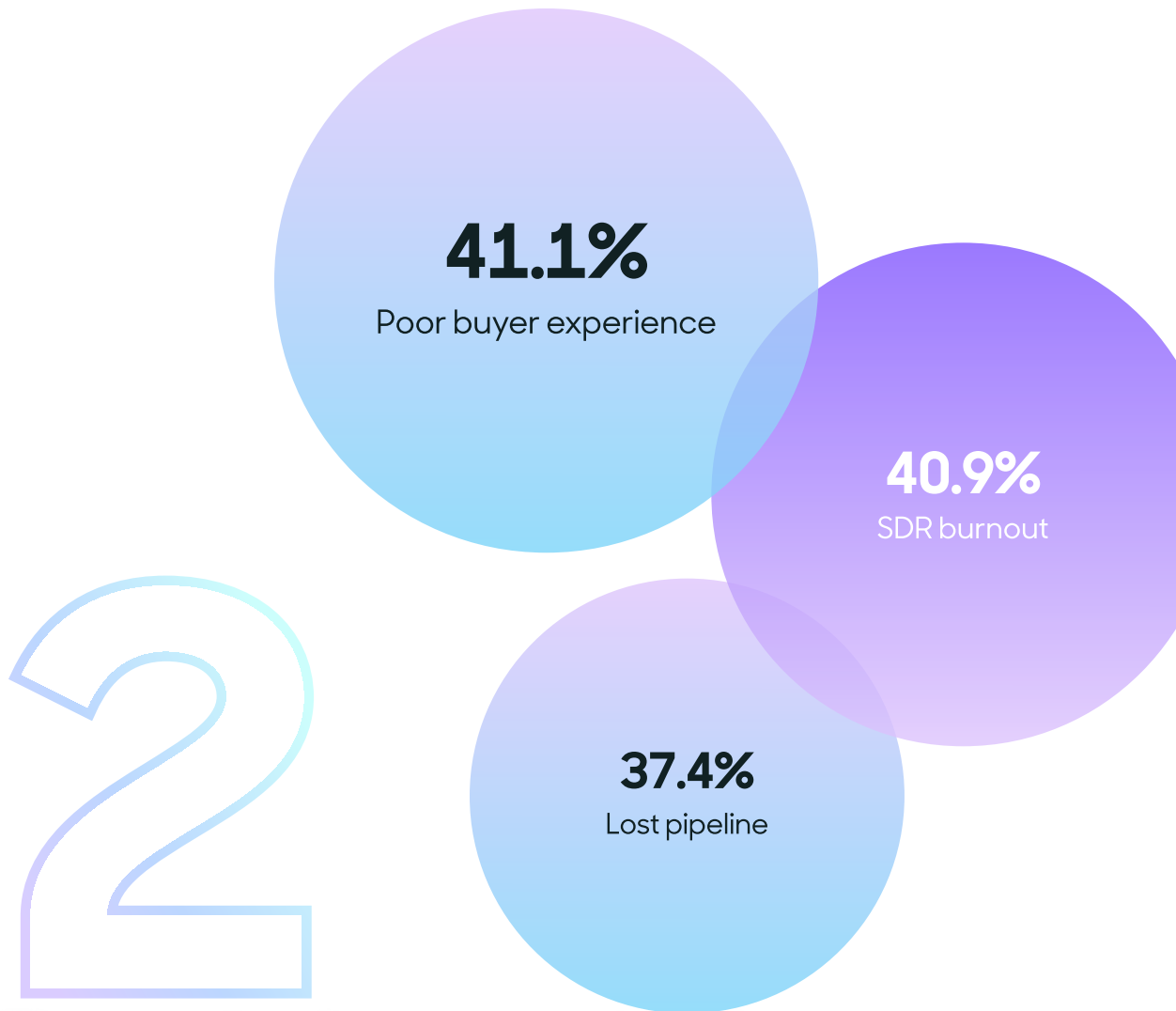
Slower response than competitors is the biggest perceived risk.

The most frequently cited concern is falling behind competitors in speed of engagement.

- 48.6% say slower response times than competitors are the biggest downside of not adopting agentic engagement

This aligns closely with earlier findings in the report. Speed-to-lead is a critical driver of conversion, and organizations that cannot respond quickly risk losing buyer attention at the most important moment.

As more teams adopt systems that enable immediate engagement, slower response times become more noticeable and more costly. What was once considered acceptable lag is increasingly registered as a competitive disadvantage.



Teams also fear operational strain without AI.

In addition to competitive risk, many respondents expect operational challenges if AI is not used to support inbound engagement.

- 41.1% cite poor buyer experience
- 40.9% cite SDR burnout
- 37.4% cite lost pipeline

These concerns pronounce the strain that manual engagement models typically place on revenue teams.

As inbound demand grows, maintaining fast response times and consistent follow-up becomes exceptionally difficult, increasing the likelihood of missed opportunities and uneven buyer experiences.

The inclusion of SDR burnout also reflects the limitations of scaling inbound without additional support where teams are sometimes required to handle higher volumes of leads without the systems needed to manage them efficiently.

Ultimately, these findings demonstrate that the risk of standing still is not limited to missed efficiency gains. It may also include declining performance, increased operational pressure, and a widening gap between organizations that can engage buyers in real time and those that cannot.



ADDITIONAL INSIGHT:

The Skills Marketers Will Need Next

The transition to agentic marketing is also expected to reshape the skills marketing teams prioritize.

As AI becomes more integrated into the revenue process, marketers are expected to take on a broader set of responsibilities that span strategy, execution, and optimization. This includes not only understanding how to deploy AI systems, but also how to guide, measure, and continuously improve their performance.

Respondents identified a mix of strategic, technical, and operational capabilities that will become increasingly important in an AI-driven revenue environment.



These results suggest that the success of future marketing teams will require more than campaign execution or demand generation alone. Teams will need to manage AI systems as ongoing, performance-driven components of the funnel.

This includes setting strategy, ensuring alignment with sales, maintaining data quality, and continuously optimizing how AI engages buyers. The ability to interpret performance data and adjust systems accordingly will become a core capability.

Over time, this may lead to a blending of disciplines. Marketing, operations, and analytics functions are likely to become more interconnected, with shared responsibility for how inbound engagement is designed and executed.



Chapter 6

Conclusion

The findings in this chapter point to a clear evolution in how organizations are approaching inbound engagement. Agentic systems are moving from early experimentation toward broader adoption, with many teams already planning to implement them in the near term.

At the same time, organizations are becoming more aware of the trade-offs involved in maintaining a fully manual approach. Slower response times, inconsistent follow-up, and increasing operational strain are emerging as meaningful risks as inbound demand continues to scale.

Together, these dynamics suggest that

AI in inbound is being considered as a way to improve responsiveness, consistency, and overall pipeline performance.

Faster response times and continuous engagement may become the standard rather than the exception. Organizations that adapt to this shift may be better positioned to outpace competitors in the race to capture and convert inbound demand.

At the same time, this teams will need to develop new skills, rethink ownership, and adapt how inbound engagement is managed across the funnel.





Demographics and Methodology

Methodology

The findings in this report are based on a survey of **514 B2B marketing and revenue leaders** conducted in early 2026. The survey was designed to understand how organizations are currently managing inbound engagement, how artificial intelligence is being adopted within marketing workflows, and how autonomous or agentic systems may shape the future of pipeline generation.

Respondents were asked a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions covering topics such as inbound response times, pipeline performance, AI adoption, organizational impact, and expectations for future AI-driven engagement. The goal of the study was to identify patterns across organizations and uncover the operational factors that differentiate high-performing inbound teams.

To ensure data quality, incomplete responses and invalid submissions were removed during the analysis process. Responses were analyzed both in aggregate and through segmentation cuts, including company size and AI maturity level. Where relevant, comparisons were made between teams using more advanced autonomous AI capabilities and those relying primarily on manual or assistive workflows.

Because this research focuses on operational patterns in inbound marketing and pipeline generation, results are intended to highlight directional trends rather than represent precise market share. Percentages may not sum to 100% in cases where respondents were allowed to select multiple answers.



514

B2B marketing and revenue leaders

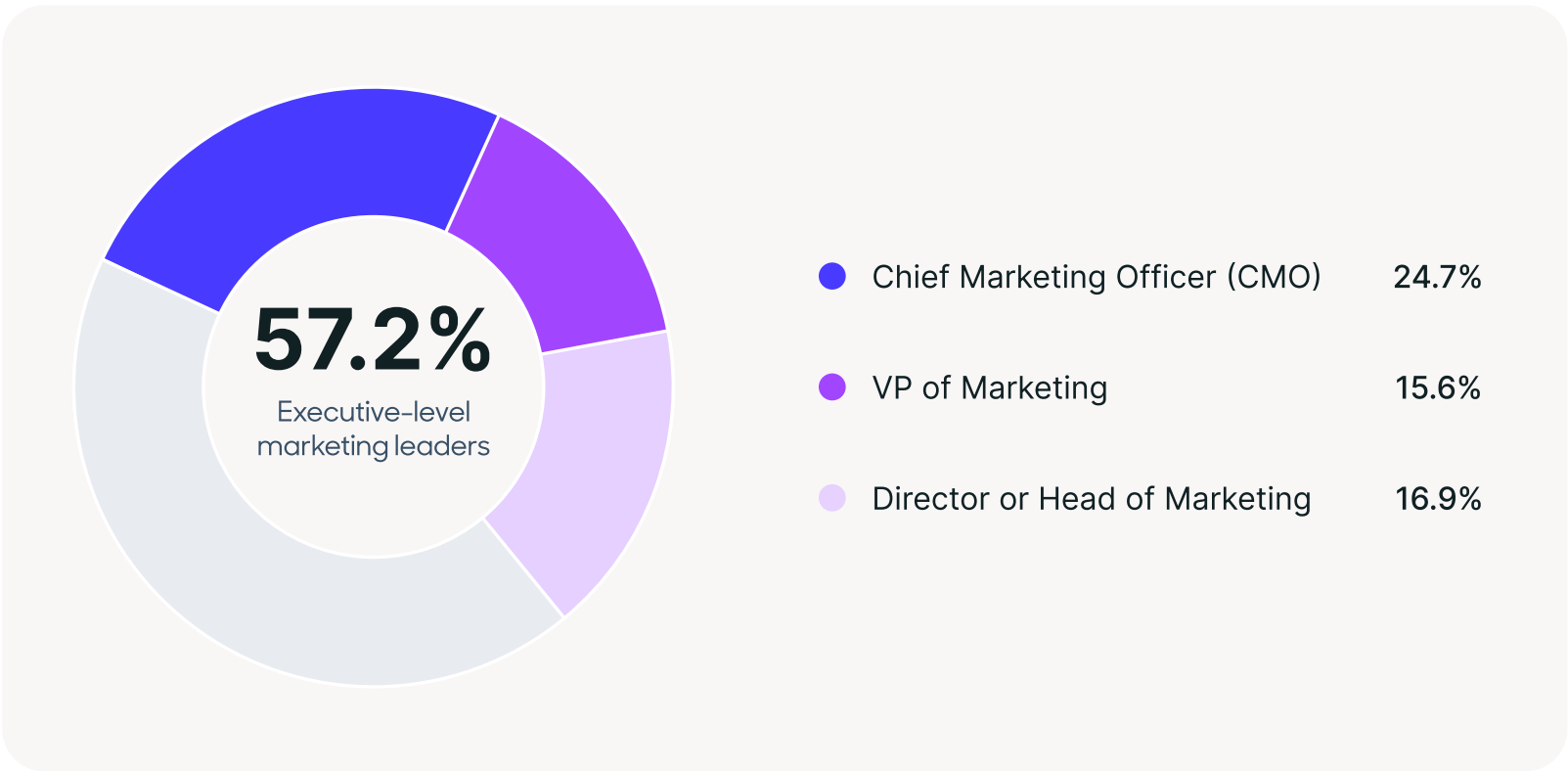


Respondent Roles

The survey sample primarily consists of marketing decision-makers and senior practitioners responsible for demand generation, marketing operations, and revenue pipeline strategy.

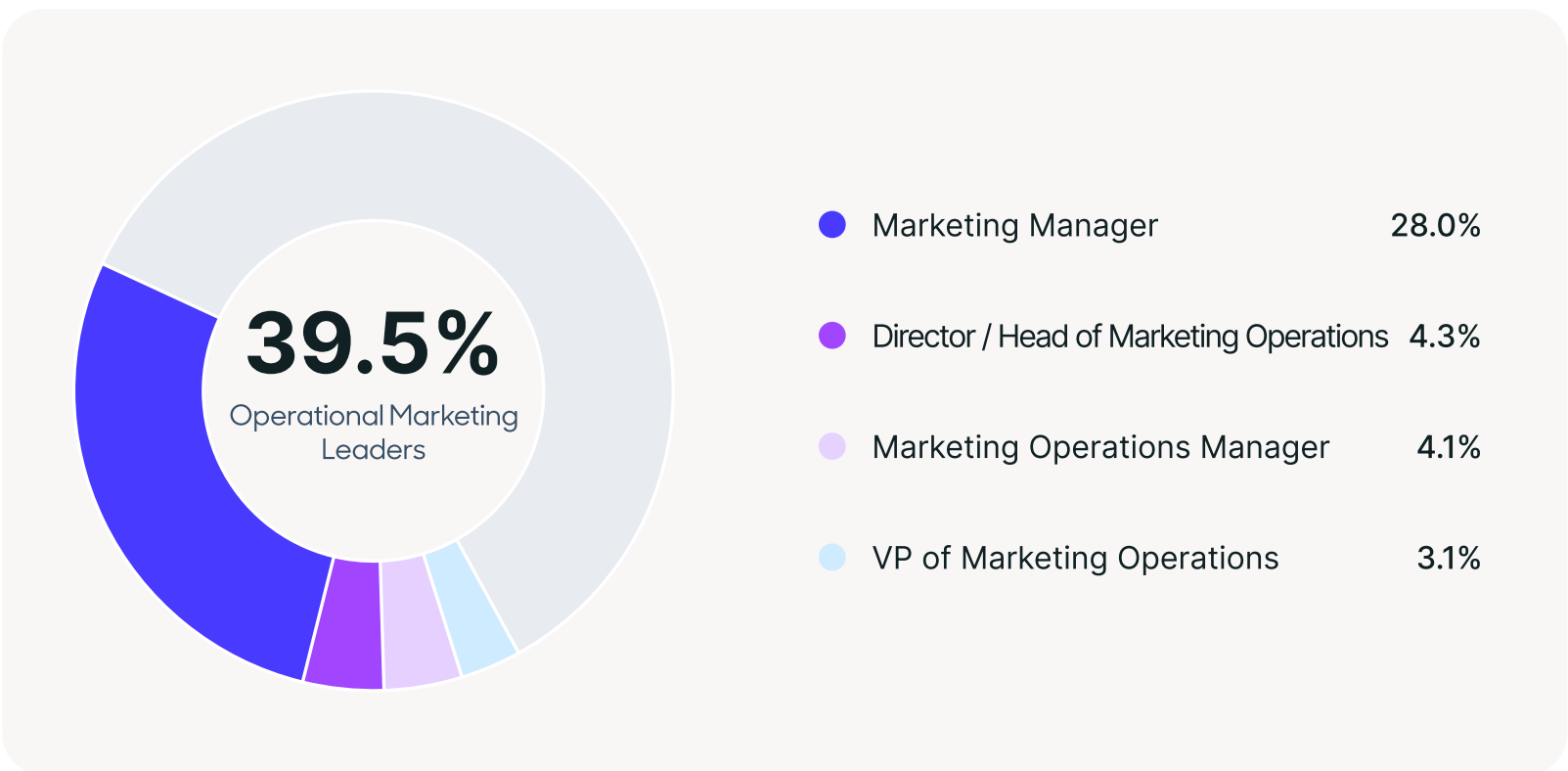
Executive-level marketing leaders:

- 24.7% – Chief Marketing Officer (CMO)
- 15.6% – Vice President of Marketing
- 16.9% – Director or Head of Marketing



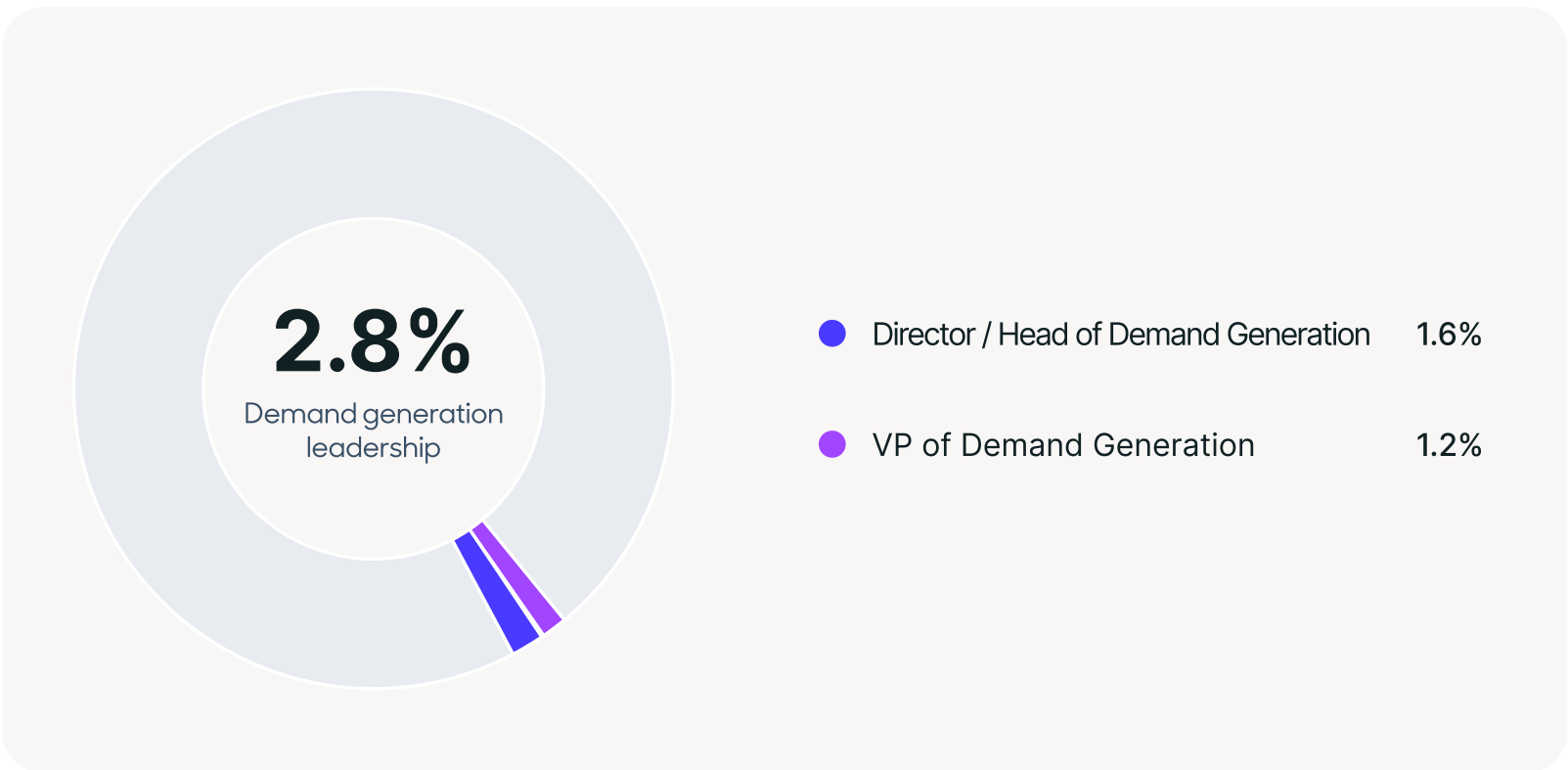
Operational marketing leaders:

- 28.0% – Marketing Manager
- 4.3% – Director / Head of Marketing Operations
- 4.1% – Marketing Operations Manager
- 3.1% – Vice President of Marketing Operations



Demand generation leaders:

- 1.6% – Director / Head of Demand Generation
- 1.2% – Vice President of Demand Generation



This mix of executive leadership and operational practitioners provides both **strategic and implementation perspectives** on how AI and autonomous engagement are being adopted across marketing organizations.



Company Size Distribution

Respondents represent organizations across a broad range of company sizes, from early-stage teams to large enterprises. This distribution allows the study to examine how inbound engagement practices and AI adoption differ as organizations scale.

The largest share of respondents come from mid-market organizations, with nearly one-third of responses coming from companies with 101–500 employees.

Company size distribution includes:

Company size distribution includes:

- 29.6% – 101–500 employees
- 19.1% – 501–1,000 employees
- 17.9% – 1–50 employees
- 13.8% – 1,001–5,000 employees
- 12.5% – 51–100 employees
- 7.2% – 5,000+ employees



This distribution reflects a strong representation of growth-stage and mid-market organizations, where many of the operational challenges around inbound pipeline generation and marketing automation are most actively evolving.



About This Research

This research was conducted to better understand the operational realities of modern inbound marketing and the emerging role of AI in buyer engagement. As organizations continue experimenting with AI-assisted workflows and autonomous engagement systems,

the goal of this report is to identify the patterns that separate high-performing inbound teams from the rest.

By analyzing how marketing teams structure their inbound operations today—and how they expect AI to shape those operations in the future—this study aims to provide practical benchmarks and strategic insight for marketing leaders navigating the next phase of AI-driven growth.



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