

DEANHOUSTON+

2026

Sales + Marketing

Trend Report

**Growth Insights for Changing
Industrial, Technical & B2B Markets**

Overview

Growth Depends on Alignment Across Teams

Like a well-engineered system, a healthy sales pipeline depends on different people working together.

Thankfully, sales and marketing professionals have more tools and data at their fingertips than ever before. That's good news, as long as those tools and data are aligned across commercial operations.

The question is:

How well are we connecting tools, data, and most importantly, people to drive growth?

We surveyed sales, marketing and C-suite leaders across technical markets to find out. The respondents include technical B2B OEMs and service providers across oil and gas, pharma, food and beverage, automotive and more. It was an experienced bunch, too: 75% of respondents had 10+ years of industry experience.

The result is a collection of key insights and actionable takeaways to inform your strategy for business decisions that drive growth.

What's In the Report?

- 3:** Growth Projections and Performance
- 4:** The Data Disconnect
- 5:** System Silos Across Teams
- 6:** CRMs and New Business Development
- 7:** Primary Barriers
- 8:** Artificial Intelligence
- 9:** The Big Takeaways



Growth Projections & Performance

Key Finding:

Companies expect revenue growth this year, even though many fell short of last year's targets.

88%

of companies
expect revenue
growth this year

40%

are aiming for
growth above 15%

44%

report missed
revenue targets
last year

73%

focused on
organic growth

What Are the Barriers to Growth?



Industry downturns



Shifting economic conditions



Hiring challenges



Lack of marketing budget



Underresourced teams

How Accurate Is Forecasting?

Sales: 50% of sales respondents explicitly labeled their forecasting process as “not very reliable.” Another 16.67% said they have no formal process at all.

Leadership: 57% of C-suite respondents describe the forecasting as “generally reliable,” with only 28.57% calling it “not very reliable.”

The Conflict:

Leadership is making long-term capital and staffing decisions based on forecasts that the sales team admits are unreliable.

Actionable Tip:

Include a confidence metric with your forecasting so it's easy to identify how accurate estimations are. Review forecasts quarterly with sales and marketing.

The Data Disconnect

Key Finding:

Companies have the data, but a disconnect prevents the use of *clean* data.

100%

are at least somewhat confident using data

22%

rarely or never adjust marketing strategy based on data

C-suite professionals have the highest peak confidence, with 20% reporting they are “very confident” in data usage. In contrast, only 11% of marketers are “very confident.” Sales exhibits the most skepticism, with 50% labeling their core data forecasting as “not very reliable.”

The Consequences of Messy Data:

Commercial teams are essentially flying blind. Without accurate attribution, you can't measure which marketing efforts are working and which leads are most likely to close. Incomplete or messy data undermines confidence, skews projections and obscures valuable sales insights.

Data Usage by the Numbers

Industrial organizations believe they are data-driven, but their operating cadence does not reflect continuous, data-led decision-making.

- **100%** confident using data
 - » **89%** somewhat confident
 - » **11%** very confident
- **0%** adjust strategy weekly
- **33%** adjust monthly
- **33%** adjust quarterly
- **11%** adjust annually
- **22%** adjust rarely or never

Actionable Tip:

Assign data ownership. Set meetings to review key data, identify pipeline leakage and assess MQL/SQL friction.

System Silos Across Teams

Key Finding:

While teams *feel* aligned (4.36 out of 5), they aren't *technically* aligned.

67%

operate in
separate systems

33%

operate on the
same platform

0%

report fully
integrated systems

This points to “cultural alignment” without “systemic alignment.” The teams might get along, but their data does not. Essential insights can fall through the cracks between separate systems, and your lead pipeline suffers as a result. True alignment requires a unified platform where both teams look at the same dashboard in real time.

Growth Insight:

Mismatched data can cost you clarity. Industrial B2B organizations have the talent to analyze data, but they lack the infrastructure to unlock unified data across the organization. For professionals, solving the silo problem is the most direct path to unlocking growth.

The Attribution Struggle

- 43% struggle to accurately measure marketing attribution
- 0% have a formal attribution process with system integrations

43% Say Data Silos Are the #1 Barrier to Using Data for Growth

That's nearly double the number of B2B professionals who name untrustworthy data as the biggest barrier to data utilization (22%), and more than triple the number that name lack of skilled personnel as the biggest barrier (12%).

Actionable Tip:

Develop a system that all teams can use as a “Single Source of Truth.” An integrated dashboard for sales and marketing can align metrics and ensure all teams have the same data—and the same definition of success.

CRMs and New Business Development

Key Finding:

CRMs are being used as passive digital filing cabinets rather than active sales tools.

50%

of sales teams do not use a CRM

100%

of respondents who use CRMs say they "rarely use" it to optimize outreach

Professionals are missing out on the ability to prioritize their most likely-to-close deals. To optimize sales efficiency, teams must shift their culture to view the CRM as a "signaler" that tells them who to call and when, rather than a place to log calls after they happen.



How Are Companies Handling New Business Development?

66.67% of sales organizations lack a dedicated Business Development Team

Industrial teams are expected to support modern revenue strategies but often lack the scale required to execute them internally. Veteran sales reps (75% with 10+ years of experience) are handling everything from cold prospecting to account management.

The Sales Process Bottleneck

Sales teams are physically overwhelmed. They don't always have the bandwidth for strategic prospecting. Professionals should advocate for specialized roles (BDRs/SDRs) or AI-driven prospecting tools to free up veteran reps to focus on high-value closing and relationship management.

Actionable Tip:

Engage your sales reps in a candid conversation to discover where your CRM is useful and where it falls short. Develop standards based on actual usage and incentivize effective CRM usage.

Primary Barriers

Key Finding:

Underresourced teams and shifting market conditions are primary barriers to growth.

No matter what team you're on, you always wish you had more time, budget and personnel. That's definitely the case with marketers. Nearly half of marketing respondents had an internal team of 3 people or less, and many said a major challenge with hitting goals was the lack of resources.

Marketing: What is the biggest challenge to achieving your revenue targets next year?

"Underresourced. Not having a clear budget allocation."

"Finding out what the revenue target is and how I can support it with no budget or internal support."

"Lack of marketing budget."

"Budget restrictions and poor new product development"

How Big Is the Marketing Team?

- **33%** have 1 marketer
- **11%** have 2-3 marketers
- **11%** have 3-5 marketers
- **33%** have 5-10 marketers
- **11%** have >10 marketers



While marketers viewed internal challenges as a major hurdle to hitting revenue targets, sales and the C-suite focused more on external factors.

Sales & C-Suite: What is the biggest challenge to achieving your revenue targets next year?

"Marketing conditions and customers' Capex plans are changing all the time."

"Tariffs and interest rates."

"Market fluctuation and onboarding new customers."

"Reluctance from customers to rebuild inventory from current historic lows."

Actionable Tip:

Maximize your marketing efficiency by building a yearly content calendar based on strategic goals. Revisit quarterly and make sure all marketing efforts align with the commercial strategy.

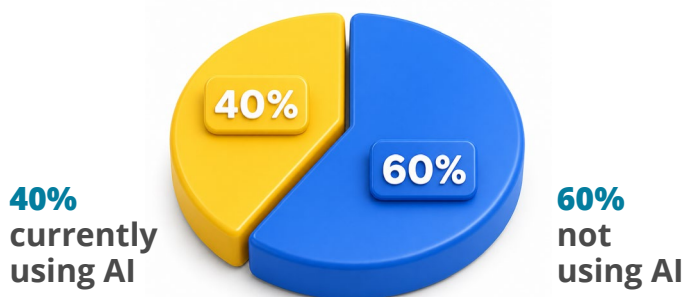
Artificial Intelligence

Key Finding:

**Some are using AI, some are not using AI
... and many *aren't allowed* to use it.**

The topic of artificial intelligence dominates headlines and earnings calls, but how is it actually being used by sales and marketing leaders at technical brands? Industrial companies are beginning to adopt AI, but usage remains focused on productivity rather than strategic transformation.

Is Your Team Using AI in Their Workflow?



Why Aren't Companies Using AI?

- **59%** say Corporate Policy
- **47%** say Security Concerns

AI in Marketing vs. AI in Sales

- **60%** of marketing teams are leveraging AI in their workflows
- **83%** of sales teams are *not* using AI at all

How AI Is Used Now vs. How It May Be Used in the Future

Primary use cases today:

- Content generation
- Research and ideation
- Workflow efficiency

Perceived future value:

- Technical content development
- Market research
- Sales enablement materials
- Process automation

Most organizations have not integrated AI into:

- Core marketing systems
- Revenue processes
- Decision-making frameworks

Actionable Tip:

Engage an internal stakeholder or external partner to act as your organization's AI subject matter expert. Use their expertise to help implement user-friendly AI systems where they will make the most impact.

The Big Takeaways

We Have More Tools & Data Than Ever ... But How Can We Leverage Them?

Industrial B2B companies in 2026 are not suffering from a lack of information or expertise. Instead, they are held back by a lack of connected data and streamlined systems. The winner in the 2026 growth cycle will be the organization that breaks down silo barriers and empowers their veteran sales force with integrated, AI-enhanced marketing intelligence.

How can modern sales and marketing teams harness the horsepower to drive big results and achieve their growth goals?

CRMs Are Highly Effective If Used Properly

Create an environment where your CRM works for your sales team, not the other way around. Fully leverage your CRM by establishing standards for use to unlock better targeting and lead scoring.



Cleaner Data Makes for Better Forecasting

Take the time to make sure your data is accurate. You'll gain clarity, unlock more insights and build data confidence throughout your organization, leading to more informed decisions.



Think Strategically to Maximize Impact

When you match marketing efforts with your organization's goals, even small teams can make a big impact. Leverage external agencies to fill in gaps in your team.



Break Down Operational Silos

Go beyond cultural alignment. Set up systems that ensure sales and marketing are operating with the same information and goals in mind to maximize efficiency and lead capture.



AI Can Speed Up Handoffs If Set Up Properly

AI adoption is fragmented, with different teams leveraging AI in very different ways or not at all. If AI use is allowed at your organization, it can become a pipeline accelerator.



DEANHOUSTON+

DeanHouston is a marketing firm that specializes in helping technical product and services companies. Founded in 1988, our diverse clients serve markets that range from automotive to biopharma and from mining to K-12 foodservice. With this report, our goal is to offer value and clarity to help make your professional life a little better.



Interested in More Educational Content?

If you found this report insightful and are looking for more content catered specifically to industrial and technical audiences, there are a few ways to follow DeanHouston:

Sign Up for Our Newsletter



Get expert insights, industry updates and resources delivered to your inbox.

Follow Us on LinkedIn



Get bite-sized nuggets and deep-dive articles on topics that matter most to B2B professionals right in your social media feed.

Talk to a B2B Expert



Reach out to our team for a free consultation with marketing and sales enablement experts who know how to unlock B2B growth.