19TH EDITION

2026 B2B Marketing Mix Report

DATA-DRIVEN INSIGHTS FOR YOUR MARKETING PLAN

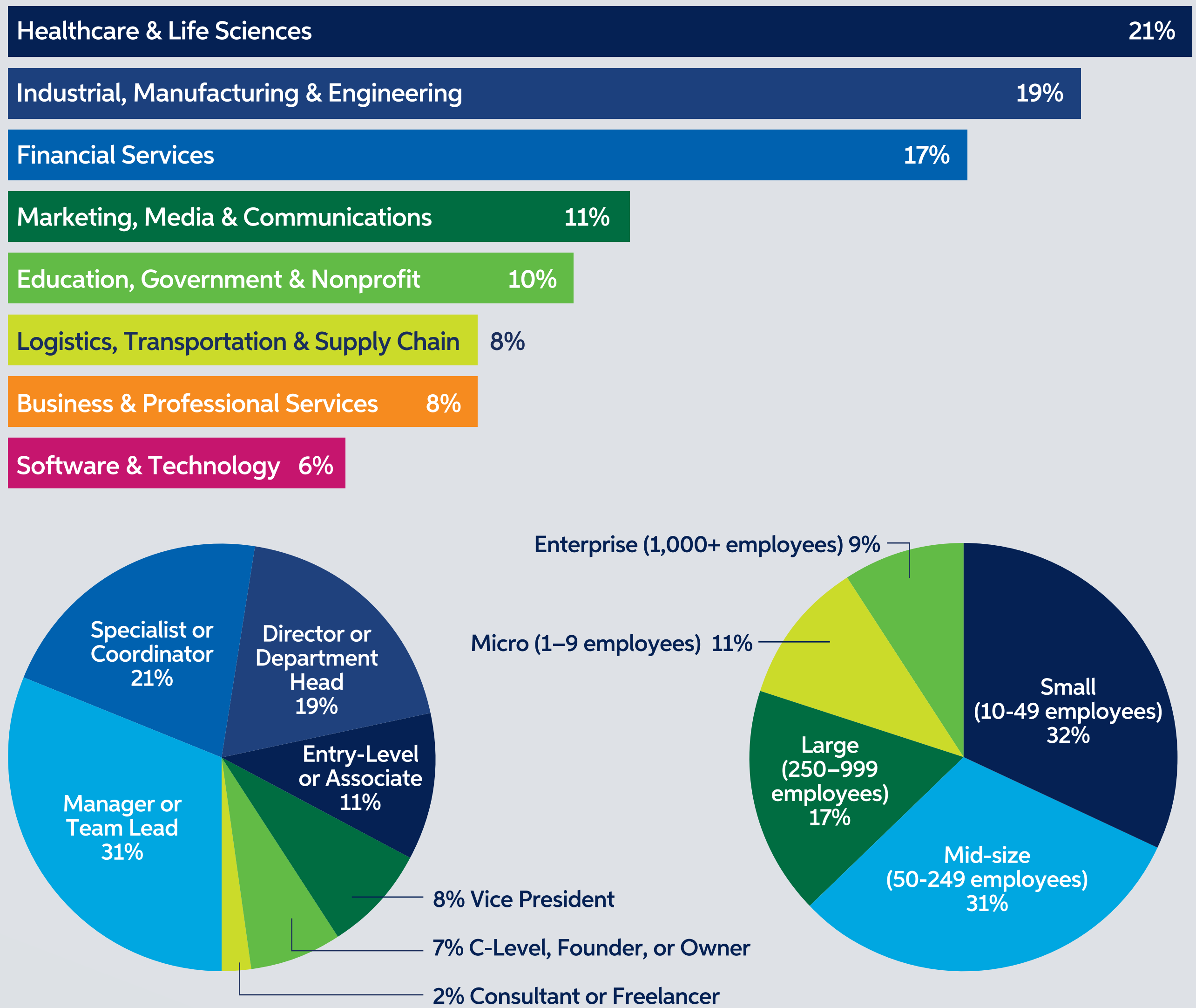
sagefrog® marketing group

This is the nineteenth edition of Sagefrog Marketing Group’s annual B2B Marketing Mix Report, a resource that has become a valuable year-end tool for modern B2B marketers.

This report breaks down the results of our recent B2B Marketing Mix Survey, gathering the opinions and experiences of professionals across B2B industries, including healthcare, technology, industrial, and business services. We transformed these contributions into digestible data, revealing the top marketing trends and tactics to watch in the year ahead. With this information, marketers can make informed investments as they plan new budgets and marketing programs.

We hope this year’s forecasts and findings help you approach your 2026 marketing strategy with greater confidence.

Who We Surveyed



Outsourcing Evolves to Meet New Needs

Outsourcing remains a critical part of the B2B marketing mix, shifting toward flexible models, faster execution, and deeper integration with internal teams.

How Are Businesses Engaging Outsourced Marketing?

Outsourced marketing continues to play a central role in B2B programs, with companies taking different approaches to structuring these relationships. Hybrid models are most common, showing that many organizations want partners who can integrate closely with internal teams while providing flexibility where needed.

A Hybrid Approach	35%
Project-Based	28%
Ongoing Retainer	24%
Freelancers or Contractors	12%

Why Are They Outsourcing?

This year, the leading motivators for outsourcing were limited internal bandwidth and the need for faster execution. Compared to past years, when lack of in-house expertise was the dominant factor, today's findings suggest that companies are more concerned with agility and efficiency, areas where agencies can deliver immediate impact.

Limited Internal Bandwidth or Time Constraints	22%
Faster Execution or Go-to-Market	18%
Lack of In-House Expertise or Specialized Skills	15%
Cost Efficiency Compared to In-House Teams	13%
Support for a Rebrand or One-Time Project	11%
Access to Fresh Ideas & Outside Perspective	11%
Launching a New Product or Campaign	8%
Temporary Transition Needs	2%

What Are the Benefits of Outsourcing?

This year, respondents valued outsourcing more for speed and cost-efficiency, viewing agencies as accelerators that launch campaigns quickly and stretch budgets further.

Faster Campaign Launch & Turnaround	22%
More Cost-Effective Than a Full Internal Team	22%
Easy to Scale Marketing Up or Down	12%
Frees Internal Teams for Core Business	10%
Strategic Guidance Across Channels	10%
ROI Tracking & Performance Metrics	9%
Specialized Expertise Not Found In-House	7%
Fresh Creative Ideas	4%
Access to Advanced Tools & Platforms	4%

How Often Does Outsourcing Meet Objectives?

Most companies say their agency partners are hitting the mark. When collaboration and alignment are strong, agencies become seamless extensions of internal teams, driving the best results.

Usually	50%
Always	23%
Sometimes	17%
Rarely	8%
Never	2%

Top Reasons for Unmet Objectives:

Collaboration & Fit	23%
Budget & Scope	21%
Execution & Delivery	18%
Performance & Results	16%
Expertise & Insight	14%
Creativity & Relevance	8%

Don't Risk the Wrong Agency

With marketing budgets surging in 2026, the pressure to prove ROI has never been higher. The numbers show that when outsourcing fails, it's not because agencies lack skill but because they're the wrong fit. Misaligned goals, clashing processes, and weak collaboration can derail the best strategies.

HOW TO AVOID IT:

- Look for an agency that feels like an extension of your team
- Ensure personality and culture align to support collaboration
- Confirm processes and workflows integrate smoothly with your own
- Establish shared goals and metrics so everyone is working toward the same outcomes
- Choose a partner flexible enough to scale with you as priorities evolve

The right-fit agency amplifies your investment. The wrong one wastes it.

Top Marketing Objectives for 2026

1	**Brand Awareness**
2	**Lead Generation**
3	**Sales Support**
4	**Client Retention & Customer Loyalty**

This year's results show brand awareness remains the top marketing objective, confirming its position as the foundation of B2B strategy. Its consistency shows that recognition and credibility continue to drive long-term growth.

Lead generation also holds steady as a core goal, but what stands out this year is the rise of sales support, edging ahead of client retention. This shift points to the growing need for tighter alignment between marketing and sales teams. While client retention remains essential, it's now balanced against the demand to strengthen collaboration across the funnel.

Viewed together, these four objectives highlight how B2B marketers are working to maintain strong brands while ensuring marketing directly supports revenue performance.

> "Strong brands capture attention. Aligned sales and marketing teams convert it. You really do need both. At Sagefrog, we help B2B companies bridge strategy and execution to activate a brand and build the marketing-sales connection that turns momentum into measurable growth."

–Mark Schmukler, CEO & Co-founder at Sagefrog

Marketing Budgets Surge

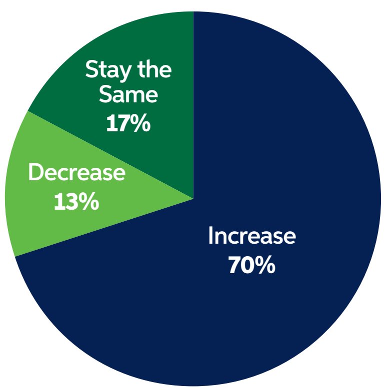
B2B marketers are channeling their larger budgets into areas that drive engagement and efficiency, with content marketing rising to the top and reinforcing its role as the backbone of modern campaigns.

The most significant shift in 2025 is the rise of AI tools and applications, which climbed into second place. Companies are no longer experimenting with AI; they're actively integrating it into their core marketing strategies.

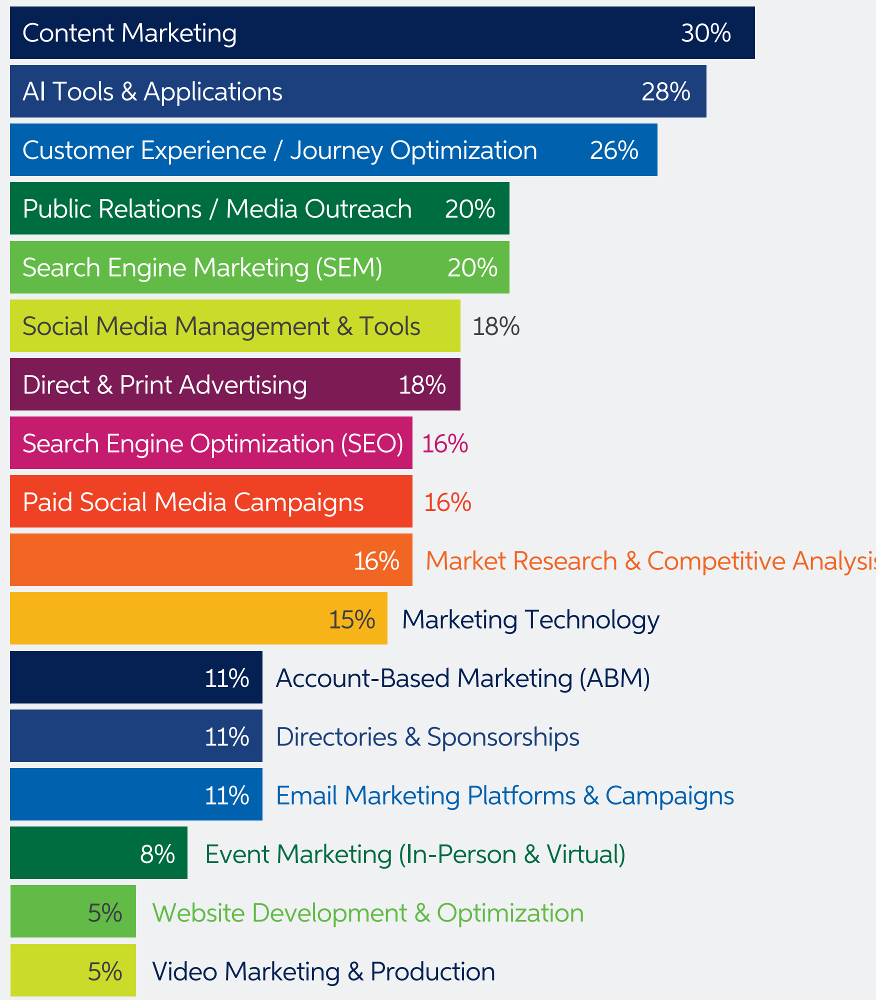
Another notable change is the entry of customer experience and journey optimization into the top five. This reflects a broader shift in mindset: marketing isn't just about generating leads, but ensuring that every touchpoint delivers a seamless, personalized experience.

Together, these priorities highlight a new balance. Content and branding remain essential for visibility, while AI and Customer Experience (CX) investments ensure companies can personalize, scale, and deliver measurable results.

Marketing Budget Changes for 2026

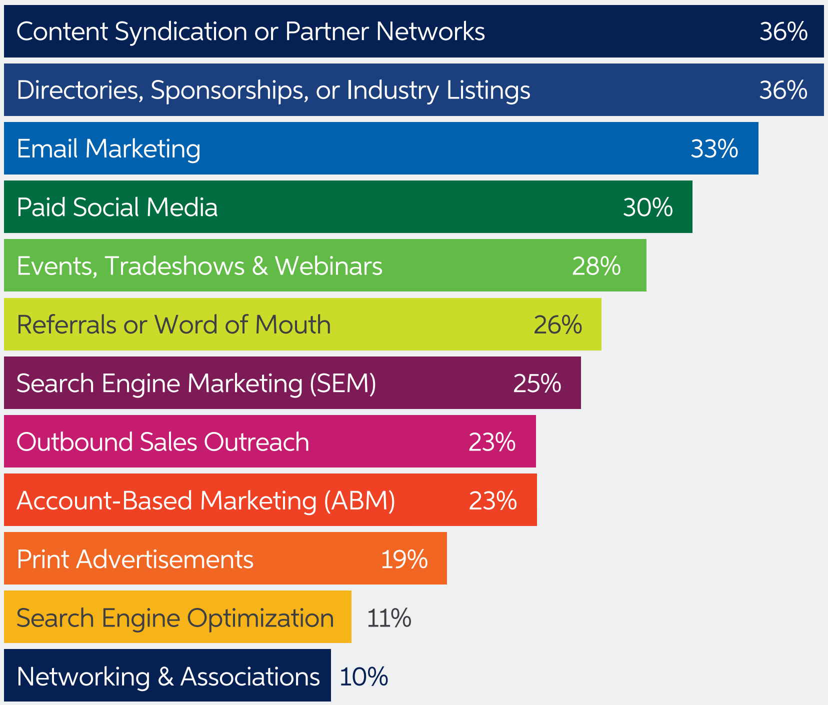


Top Areas of Marketing Spend



Qualified Leads Shift Toward Targeted Channels

Top Sales & Marketing Lead Sources



In 2024, in-person and virtual events topped the list of lead sources. But in 2025, B2B marketers report that their most qualified leads now come from more targeted, digital-first channels.

Content syndication and partner networks tied with directories and sponsorships for the top spot, followed closely by email marketing and paid social media.

While events and tradeshows remain essential, they no longer dominate. Instead, companies are investing in channels that offer precision, scalability, and direct access to qualified buyers. Referrals, SEM, and ABM also play a strong role, signaling that marketers are focused on quality interactions over broad exposure.

This shift reflects the ongoing evolution of the B2B buyer journey. Success is less about showing up everywhere and more about connecting in the right places with the right audiences.

Closing the Alignment Gap

In 2025, the top challenges in B2B lead generation point squarely to alignment between marketing and sales. The data shows that while generating leads remains difficult, the bigger obstacle is converting them efficiently once they enter the funnel.

Lead Generation Challenges Reveal Deeper Issues

While generating enough leads is still difficult, long sales cycles and sales-marketing misalignment are just as pressing. The data shows that quantity is only part of the problem; alignment and conversion are where growth breaks down.

Low Volume of Leads	38%
Long Sales Cycle	19%
Misalignment Between Sales & Marketing	19%
Poor Lead Quality	13%
Limited Budget or Resources	11%

The Middle of the Funnel Is the Breaking Point

Most companies struggle in the middle of the funnel, where leads should be nurtured and qualified. This stage is critical. Without consistent nurturing, high quality leads stall or are lost before they reach sales.

Middle of Funnel	53%
Top of Funnel	25%
Post-Sale Retention	12%
Bottom of Funnel	8%

Lead Handoffs Lack Consistency

The handoff between marketing and sales remains a weak spot. For many companies, it works only “somewhat effectively.” Opportunities are left on the table without clear definitions of lead readiness and consistent processes.

Somewhat Effective	56%
Very Effective	29%
Needs Improvement	14%
Not Effective	1%

Alignment Remains Occasional, Not Consistent

Few organizations report full alignment between sales and marketing. Most describe it as occasional at best, with some operating largely in silos. This limits the ability to pursue shared goals and deliver a unified customer experience.

Occasionally Aligned	49%
Fully Aligned	35%
Mostly Independent	16%
Not Aligned	<1%

What Sales Needs Most From Marketing

Sales teams point to collateral and nurturing campaigns as the most valuable marketing contributions. These assets directly enable stronger buyer conversations, showing where to prioritize marketing resources.

Sales Collateral	39%
Lead Nurturing Email Campaigns	26%
Case Studies & Testimonials	16%
Targeted Content for Key Accounts	8%
Social Selling Resources	7%
Product Demos & Explainers	5%

The Biggest Barrier: Communication

When alignment breaks down, the leading culprit is a lack of communication. Even the best tools and campaigns can't bridge the gap without consistent dialogue and shared expectations.

Lack of Communication	41%
Inconsistent Lead Quality	27%
Misaligned Goals	12%
No Shared Metrics	10%
Poor Tool Integration	7%

Strengthening Sales–Marketing Alignment

When marketing and sales operate in silos, the impact is direct and costly. Leaders may assume their teams are aligned, but frontline experience often tells a different story.

Misalignment rarely happens in big moments. It creeps in through missed follow-ups, conflicting goals, and disconnected systems. So, closing the gap doesn't require an overhaul. It starts with the right habits, systems, and shared goals.

- **Set Shared Revenue Goals**
  Keep both teams accountable for the same outcomes
- **Define Leads Together**
  Agree on clear qualification criteria
- **Create SLAs**
  Set expectations for lead delivery and follow-up
- **Hold Regular Syncs**
  Build consistent, structured communication
- **Use Closed-Loop Reporting**
  Share visibility into what's converting
- **Co-Create Content**
  Build sales enablement tools with joint input
- **Align on ABM**
  Coordinate outreach for high-value accounts
- **Integrate Your Tech**
  Connect CRM and automation for shared data

Alignment thrives on clarity, communication, and accountability. Companies that invest here turn more leads into revenue and waste fewer resources.

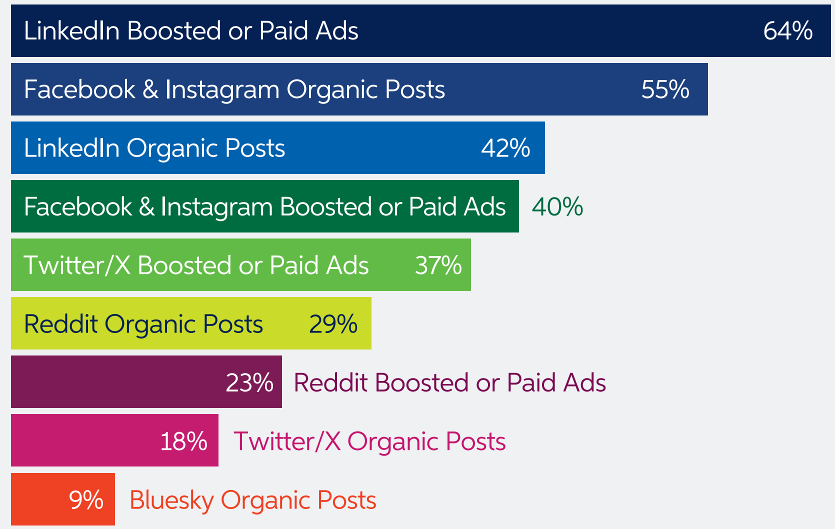
Social Media Shifts Toward B2B Channels

LinkedIn Paid Ads overtook Facebook as the top social tactic, marking a shift toward B2B-focused and account-based strategies.

While organic posting remains vital on LinkedIn and Facebook/Instagram, the trend is toward paid campaigns that guarantee reach with the right decision-makers.

Newer platforms like Reddit and Bluesky are also gaining traction, showing marketers are open to experimenting with niche and emerging networks. The pattern is clear: social media is less about volume and more about precision and professional context.

Social Media Platforms & Tactics in 2025



AI is Fully Integrated

The data shows AI has become a standard part of the B2B marketing stack, with companies adopting it to personalize experiences, accelerate production, and improve insights. At the same time, concerns about accuracy, privacy, and brand consistency highlight that the technology still hasn't proven itself against the realities of business risk.

Adoption Is Widespread & Varied

AI-powered personalization engines are the most commonly used tools, followed closely by generative AI and predictive analytics. This reflects a dual focus: personalizing the buyer journey and speeding up execution. Companies are also exploring image and video generation, AI-driven SEO, and chatbots to automate engagement.

AI-Powered Personalization Engines	51%
Generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT)	49%
Predictive Analytics & Forecasting Tools	47%
Image or Video Generation Tools	42%
Marketing Automation With AI Capabilities	37%
AI For SEO Optimization	34%
AI Chatbots or Virtual Assistants	30%
AI For Email Testing & Optimization	21%

Concerns Are Just as High as Adoption

Even as adoption grows, marketers remain cautious. The leading concerns are data privacy risks and brand consistency, followed by misinformation and bias. The message is clear: AI is powerful, but companies know it requires careful oversight to avoid eroding trust or introducing risk.

Data Privacy & Security Risks	57%
Brand Consistency & Tone Issues	52%
Misinformation or Hallucinated Outputs	45%
Bias in AI-Generated Content	40%
Over-Reliance on Automation	31%
Job Displacement	29%
Lack of Transparency	18%

Goals Focus on Insights & Efficiency

When asked about their primary goals for AI, marketers emphasized better insights and increased content production. Personalization also remains a priority, showing that marketers aren't just using AI to create more, but to create smarter, more tailored interactions.

Gain Better Marketing Insights	29%
Increase Content Production	26%
Improve Personalization	15%
Improve Lead Quality	8%
Streamline Workflows	8%
Automate Customer Engagement	6%
Reduce Marketing Spend	5%
Experiment with New Formats	2%

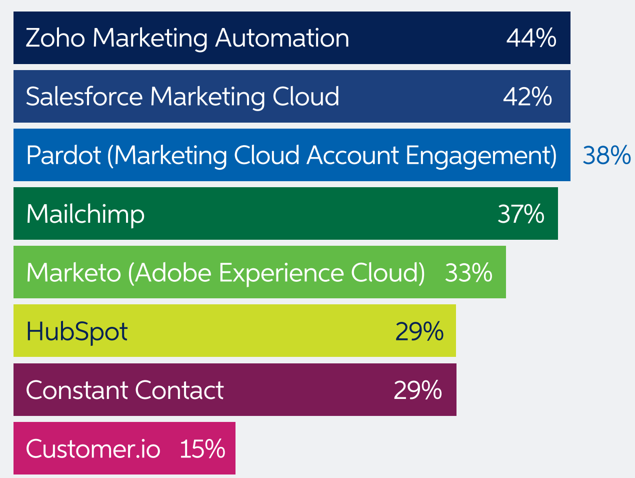
Marketing Automation Anchors the Stack

Marketing automation platforms continue to anchor the B2B marketing stack.

In 2025, usage spans a wide range of providers, showing that no single platform dominates the market. Instead, companies are adopting a mix of solutions that support automation, integration, and, increasingly, AI capabilities.

Salesforce, Zoho, Pardot, and Mailchimp rank among the most widely used, while HubSpot and Marketo remain staples. The diversity reflects how B2B companies prioritize flexibility and integration across ecosystems rather than consolidating under one system.

Top Marketing Automation Platforms



The State of B2B Branding

Branding isn't just about recognition anymore. The 2025 data shows that most companies are still wrestling with foundational questions: Does our name communicate our value? Is our team aligned on how to describe us? Does our visual identity stand out? The answers reveal a mix of confidence, caution, and ongoing investment.

88% of Respondents Have Changed Company or Product Names

Nearly nine in ten companies admit to launching a product or company name that later had to be changed. It's proof that branding evolves with markets, competitors, and customer expectations.

82% of Rebrands Included a Marketing Plan to Activate the Brand Externally

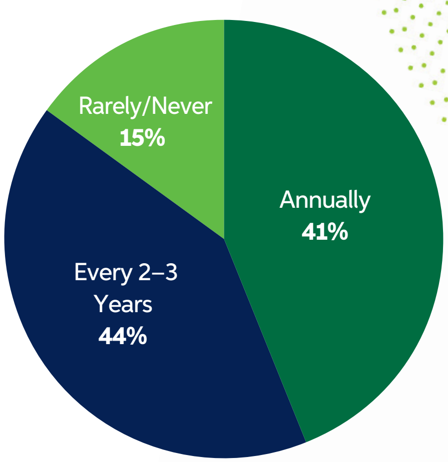
Most companies said their last rebrand included a clear marketing plan to launch it externally. The data confirms what experience tells us: a rebrand is only as strong as the activation that brings it to life in-market.

Confidence Is Solid, Not Absolute

When asked to rate confidence in their brand name, internal alignment, and visual differentiation, companies landed at an average of **7 out of 10**. Brands are holding steady, but most organizations know they haven't unlocked their full potential.

Repositioning Is Routine

Most companies revisit their brand messaging and positioning at least every 2–3 years, with a significant share doing so annually. This cadence reflects the speed of change in competitive markets and the need for brand strategies that keep pace.



Brand-Building Priorities for 2026

Brand Storytelling / Narrative Development	57%
Visual Identity Overhaul	54%
Employee Advocacy Programs	43%
Rebranding or Brand Refresh	42%
Brand Reputation Monitoring	28%

The Shift Is Underway

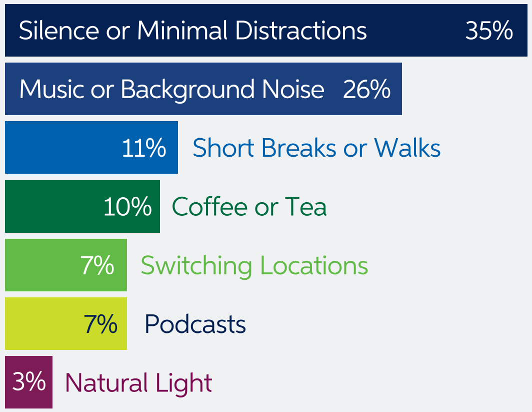
The data reflects an industry transforming. Marketers are embracing powerful new technologies, refining their brands, and adjusting their strategies for a more complex buyer journey. But beneath that progress is a deeper picture of recalibration, refinement, and rebuilding.

Sales and marketing teams are moving in the same direction, but not always in sync. Across the board, companies are navigating a period of refinement to bring greater clarity to quickly evolving strategies. These aren't setbacks; just signs of an industry undergoing transformation, where teams are building the infrastructure, alignment, and focus needed to meet the moment and move forward with purpose.

If last year was about acceleration, this year is about intention. Marketers aren't just adopting new tools, they're mastering them and aligning them with clearer processes, sharper positioning, and more strategic collaboration.

What Keeps Us Focused?

Even in a fast-evolving space, clarity and focus remain timeless advantages. Here's what helped our respondents stay inspired during the workday.



Top Takeaways from This Year's Report

→ Prioritize Sales & Marketing Alignment

Misalignment wastes resources. Shared goals, clear handoffs, and joint accountability are essential for growth.

→ Invest in AI with Purpose

AI is no longer a novelty. It's a core driver of smarter campaigns, deeper insights, and better customer experiences.

→ Branding Is a Growth Strategy, Not a Cosmetic Fix

Strong brands fuel differentiation, retention, and long-term value. Branding is a business imperative.

→ Use Data to Guide, Not Just Report

Closed-loop feedback turns metrics into momentum by clarifying what works and where to improve.

→ Rethink What Makes a Channel "Perform"

High-quality leads come from strategy, not just volume. Effective nurture and timing make the difference.

→ Tech Is a Tool, Not a Strategy

Technology only creates impact when integrated, aligned, and embedded into how teams actually work.

→ Revisit Brand Foundations Early & Often

The best brands are built with internal clarity and external activation, not just a new logo.

→ The Future Is Still Human

Even in an AI-driven world, focus, intention, and connection remain marketers' most powerful assets.

About Sagefrog Marketing Group

Sagefrog is a top-ranked B2B marketing agency and award-winning Best Place to Work®, with specialties in healthcare, technology, industrial, and business services. We accelerate client success through branding and integrated marketing delivered through deeper industry knowledge, smarter strategy and tactics, and faster turnarounds and results. Our services include branding and strategy, websites and digital, content and inbound, and traditional marketing. Visit Sagefrog.com.

Contact us to put the insights from this report into action for your company.

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