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From Ambition to Execution: The Reality of Digital GTM for Today's Partners

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Table of contents

Click any title to navigate directly to that page.

In this InfoBrief

Despite increased investment, many partners remain constrained by legacy go-to-market (GTM) models that are increasingly misaligned with evolving buyer behavior.

Digital-first engagement, AI-driven insight, and self-service experiences are reshaping expectations across the customer life cycle.

Partners that fail to evolve risk losing visibility, relevance, and growth opportunities.

This InfoBrief challenges traditional assumptions and highlights what it now takes to compete and win in a market where digital execution, not relationships alone, drives success.

- The technology partner ecosystem is at an **inflection point:** Buyer behavior is changing faster than most partner GTM models.
- **Digital GTM is no longer a marketing function** but a revenue engine and a signal of overall business maturity.
- This IDC InfoBrief, **sponsored by Adobe,** draws on a survey of **300** technology partners across key markets to examine where the ecosystem stands today, what separates digitally mature partners from the rest, and what it takes to close the gap.

Why digital GTM is now critical for partner growth and competitiveness

Revenue engine

Digital GTM is no longer marketing support.
It directly drives pipeline, conversion, and measurable revenue growth outcomes.

Maturity gap

Most partners prioritize digital GTM, but many lack the maturity required to execute at scale and deliver consistent results.

Buyer shift

Customers increasingly self-educate through digital channels, requiring partners to engage earlier and more effectively across multiple touchpoints.

AI evolution

AI is widely adopted, but value depends on how deeply it is embedded into advanced, data-driven GTM and engagement strategies.

Marketplace reality

Partners must operate across fragmented marketplace ecosystems, aligning offers to diverse buying behaviors and procurement environments.

Business impact

Higher digital GTM maturity is linked to stronger performance across core KPIs, enabling more predictable, scalable, and controllable business growth.

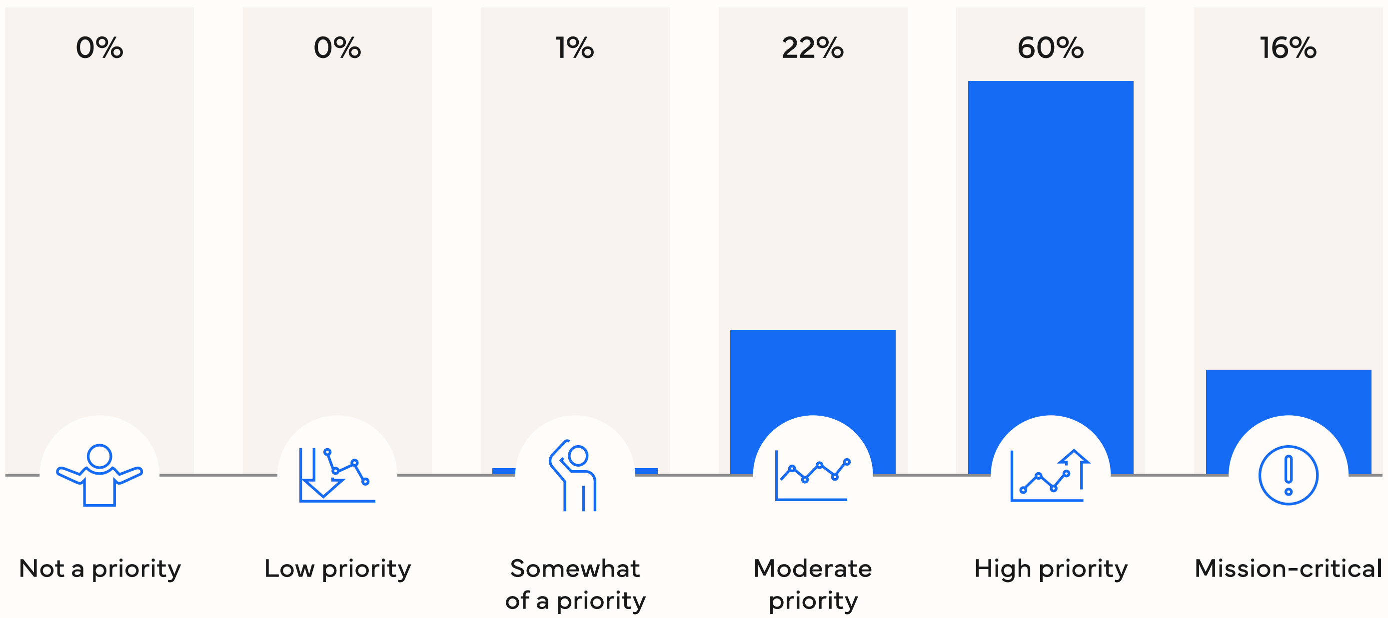
Digital GTM has moved from priority to necessity for partner growth

- Over three-quarters of partners now view digital go to market as a high or mission-critical priority, firmly embedding it in the strategic growth agenda.
- Digital GTM is increasingly recognized as a core revenue engine, directly influencing pipeline generation, customer acquisition, and measurable conversion performance outcomes.
- Early signals indicate that digitally mature partners may capture disproportionate demand share, reinforcing the need to scale beyond traditional relationship-led sales models.
- This emerging dynamic is expected to increase pressure on lagging partners to accelerate execution, as priority alone is no longer sufficient to compete effectively.

Figure 1

Q: To what extent is digital GTM a **strategic priority** to grow your company's revenue over the next two years?

(Percentage of respondents)



n = 300; Source: *Adobe Partner Digital Go-to-Market Survey 2026*, IDC, April 2026.

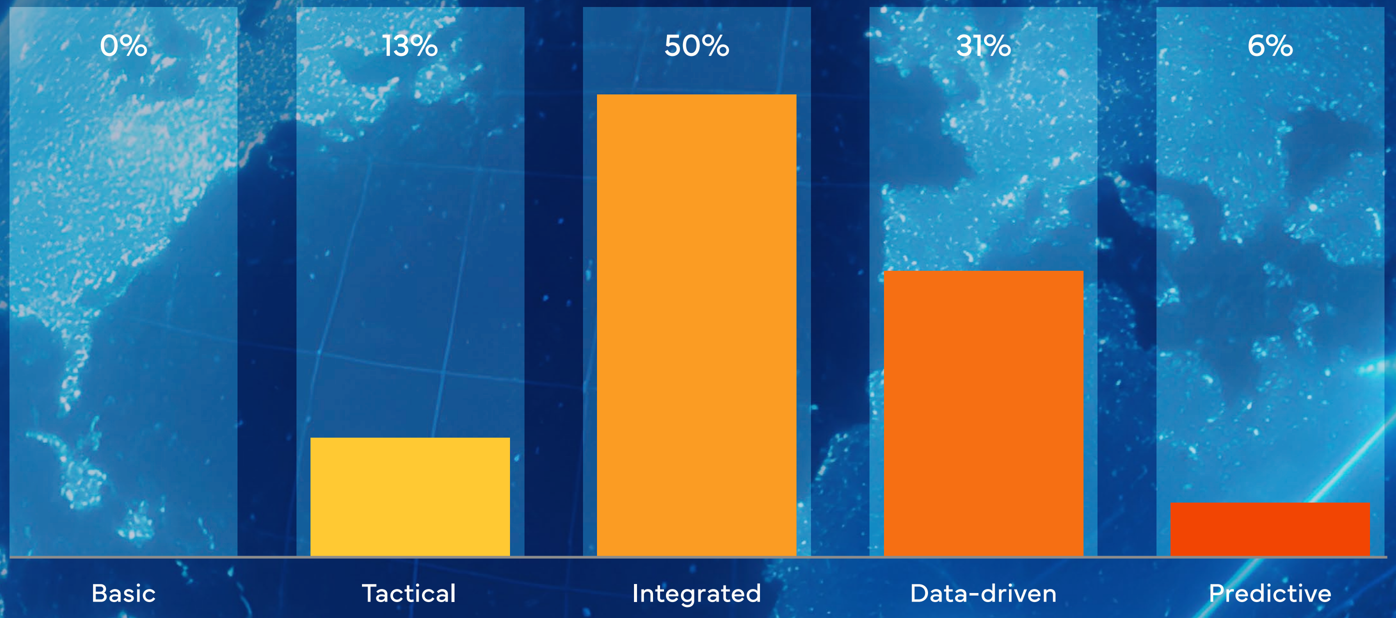
Ambition is high, but most partners lack the maturity to execute at scale

- Most partners have moved beyond early experimentation, with the majority operating at the integrated or data-driven maturity levels rather than taking basic digital GTM approaches.
- However, only a small proportion reach predictive or advanced maturity, highlighting a clear gap between strategic intent and fully scaled, insight-driven execution.
- Many partners can track customer journeys and measure activity but struggle to automate engagement or predict buyer intent at scale effectively.
- This execution gap limits the impact of digital GTM investments, reinforcing that maturity, not just prioritization, is now critical to delivering meaningful business outcomes.

Figure 2

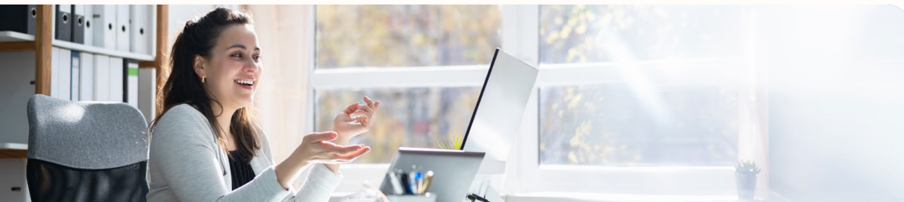
Q: Which of the following best describes the **digital maturity** of your company's GTM strategy and capabilities?

(Percentage of respondents)



n = 300; Source: *Adobe Partner Digital Go-to-Market Survey 2026*, IDC, April 2026.

Demand has shifted decisively to digital channels, reshaping how partners generate pipeline

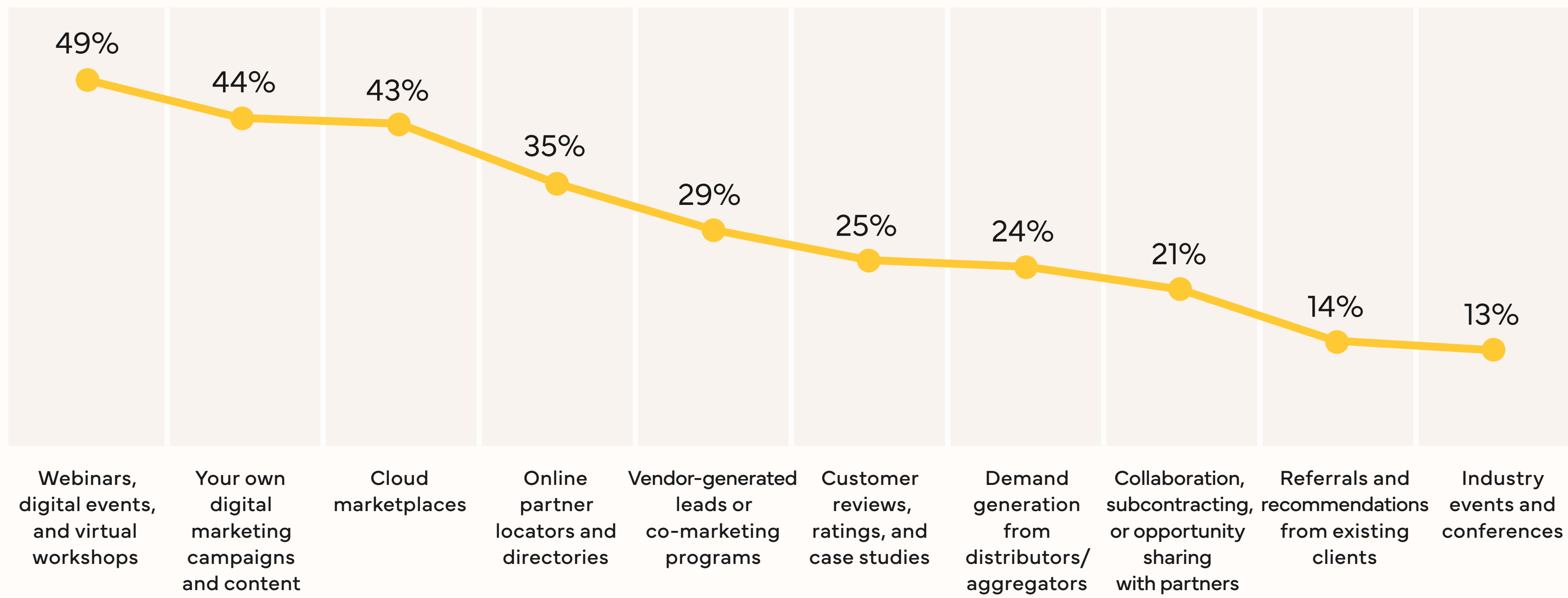


- Digital channels now dominate new business generation, with webinars, digital campaigns, and marketplaces emerging as primary engines for partner-driven demand creation.
- Traditional relationship-led channels, including referrals and in-person events, play a reduced role, reflecting a clear shift in how customers discover and engage partners.
- As marketplaces and digital marketing become core to GTM, partners must scale digital visibility and engagement, as growth increasingly depends on digital reach rather than proximity.

Figure 3

Q: Which of the following **channels** are the most important sources for generating new business? [Select up to 3]

(Percentage of respondents)



n = 300; Source: *Adobe Partner Digital Go-to-Market Survey 2026*, IDC, April 2026.

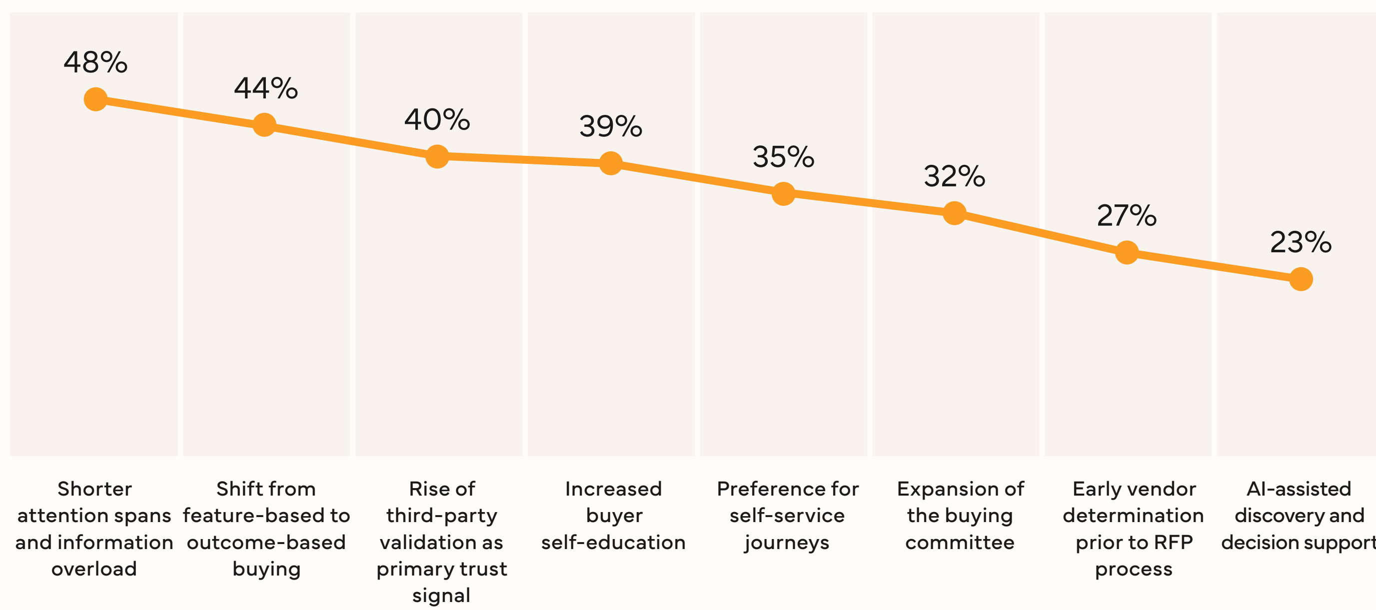
Changing buyer behavior is redefining how and when partners influence decision

- Changing buyer behavior is expanding how partners can reach, engage, and influence customers across multiple digital touchpoints throughout the entire buying journey.
- Buyers increasingly self-educate, engage earlier, and involve more stakeholders, creating new opportunities for partners to influence decisions before traditional sales engagement begins.
- Digital GTM enables earlier, more targeted engagement to meet the right stakeholders at the right time and place to deliver more targeted, relevant, and scalable engagement across channels.
- Partners that embrace data-driven digital GTM can respond more efficiently and intelligently, strengthening relevance, improving customer experience, and capturing a greater share of demand.

Figure 4

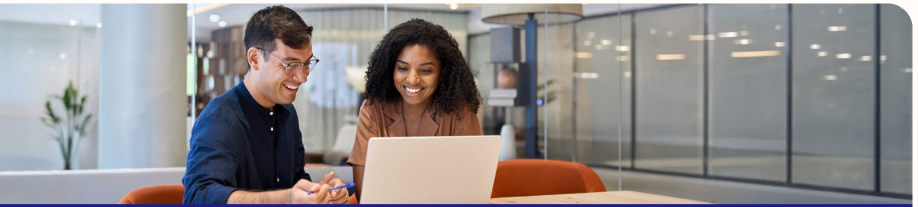
Q: Which of the following **changes in buyer behavior** do you think will most impact how marketing needs to evolve? [Select up to 3]

(Percentage of respondents)



n = 300; Source: *Adobe Partner Digital Go-to-Market Survey 2026*, IDC, April 2026.

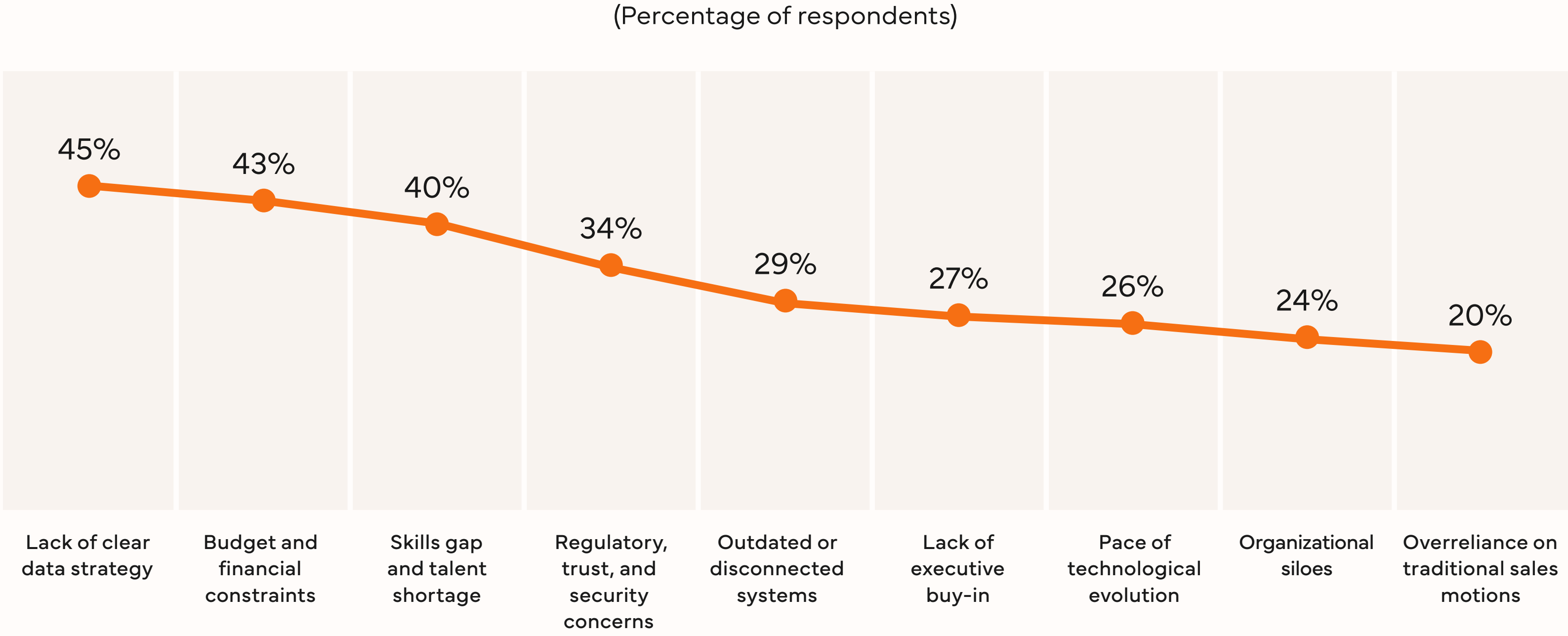
Barriers to digital GTM execution, not a lack of intent, are holding partners back



- Despite the strong prioritization of digital GTM, partners face structural and operational barriers that limit execution and prevent consistent, scalable revenue outcomes.
- Key challenges, including siloed teams, skills gaps, and disconnected systems, highlight that the issue is not awareness but the ability to operationalize digital strategies effectively.
- These constraints reinforce the maturity gap, as partners struggle to move from fragmented activity to integrated, data-driven, and scalable go-to-market execution models.

Figure 5

Q: Which of these are **major barriers** to advancing your company's digital GTM strategy and capabilities? [Select up to 3]



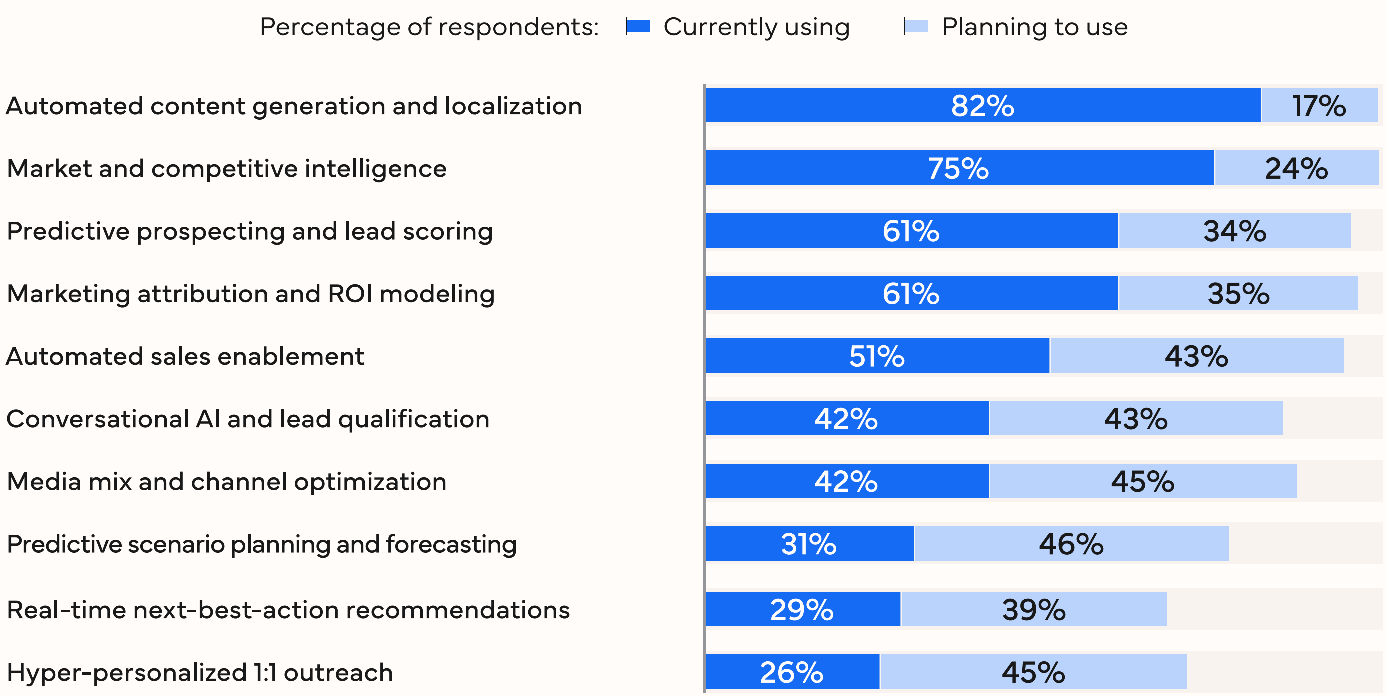
n = 300; Source: *Adobe Partner Digital Go-to-Market Survey 2026*, IDC, April 2026.

AI adoption is widespread, but maturity, not usage, now defines differentiation

- AI is already widely embedded in partner GTM, with most leveraging tools to automate content, generate campaigns, and scale baseline digital engagement across markets and customer segments.
- However, adoption remains uneven, with basic use cases such as automated content generation (82%) far outpacing more advanced capabilities such as hyper-personalized one-to-one engagement (26%).
- This reflects a broader maturity curve, where partners progress from efficiency-led automation toward more intelligent, data-driven, and predictive engagement models over time.
- As AI adoption deepens, competitive advantage will depend less on whether partners use AI and more on how effectively they apply it to differentiate and drive outcomes.

Figure 6

Q: For each of the following **marketing use cases,** please indicate if your company uses or plans to use AI:



n = 300; Source: *Adobe Partner Digital Go-to-Market Survey 2026*, IDC, April 2026.

Marketplace integration is at an inflection point

- Marketplace integration is becoming a critical capability as digital commerce increasingly shapes how partners sell and scale in-market.
- While only 9% of partners are fully integrated today, the majority are already integrating or planning to do so in the next 12 months, signaling rapid acceleration.
- This marks a clear transition point, where integration is moving from early adoption to mainstream execution, creating opportunities for partners that move quickly to embed it in their GTM.

Share of respondents that (strongly) agree with the following statement:

"Partners can benefit from linking their digital GTM systems to third-party marketplace/commerce platforms."

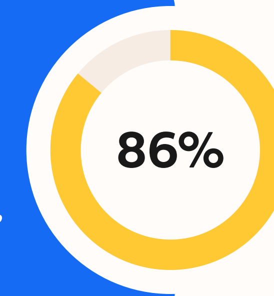


Figure 7

Q: Has your company integrated or does it plan to **integrate** its own digital GTM systems into the ecommerce platforms of any vendor partners (to enable end-to-end digital journeys for customers)?

(Percentage of respondents)

11%	39%	42%	9%
No plans to integrate	Plan to integrate in the next 12 months	Currently in the process of integrating	Already have integrated

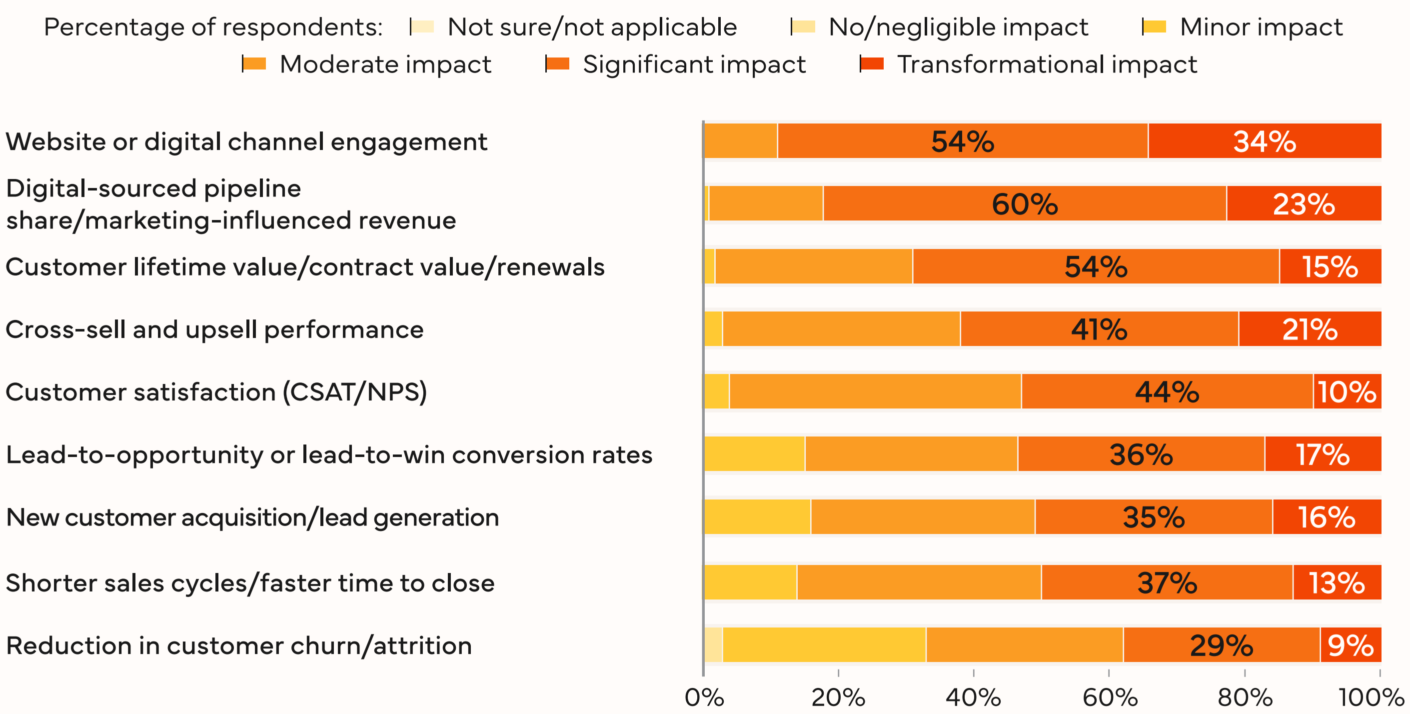
n = 300; Source: *Adobe Partner Digital Go-to-Market Survey 2026*, IDC, April 2026.

From pipeline to retention: Digital GTM drives results

- Digital GTM capabilities are directly translating into improved performance across key metrics, particularly digital engagement, marketing-influenced pipeline, and customer lifetime value, including renewals and contract expansion.
- Almost no partners report a negligible impact, reinforcing that digital GTM is not experimental but a proven driver of business outcomes across the acquisition, conversion, and retention stages.
- The magnitude of impact varies significantly, with more mature, integrated strategies delivering stronger results. This highlights the importance of alignment across marketing, sales, and commerce capabilities.

Figure 8

Q: What level of **positive impact** have improved digital GTM capabilities had, or could they have, on the following KPIs for your organization?



n = 300; Source: *Adobe Partner Digital Go-to-Market Survey 2026*, IDC, April 2026.

A growing divide in digital maturity

- To understand the impact of digital maturity, IDC segmented partners based on their self-assessed digital GTM capabilities. Partners classified as "data-driven" or "predictive" represent the high-maturity group, while all others form the broader, less mature cohort.
- This segmentation enables a direct comparison of how maturity influences behavior, capability adoption, and, ultimately, business performance. This highlights the growing divide between leading and lagging partners.

Figure 9

Q: Which of the following statements best describes the **digital maturity** of your company's GTM strategy and capabilities?

0% Basic — GTM is mostly manual; digital activity is limited and not formally tracked.

Low-medium digital maturity 63%

13% Tactical — We run consistent digital tactics, but individual channels are disconnected.

50% Integrated — Digital engagement and sales records are unified; we track lead progression from the initial digital source through to the final business outcome.

High digital maturity 37%

31% Data-driven — We use targeted, data-driven campaigns (e.g., ABM) and can link digital spend to revenue impact.

6% Predictive — We use automation, analytics, and AI to personalize journeys and predict buyer intent at scale.

n = 300; Source: *Adobe Partner Digital Go-to-Market Survey 2026*, IDC, April 2026.

From capability to control of revenue

- High-maturity partners are significantly more advanced in linking marketing activity to customer journeys and full-cycle revenue operations while also managing customer life-cycle processes in more data-driven and predictive ways.
- This dual capability enables continuous optimization, allowing partners to measure impact, refine strategy, and proactively manage customer relationships across the life cycle rather than relying on fragmented data or intuition.
- Digital GTM maturity ultimately creates a more controllable business model, where both revenue performance and customer life-cycle outcomes are observable, predictable, and actively managed rather than reactive or uncertain.

**See the Appendix for detailed answer options.*

n = 300; Source: *Adobe Partner Digital Go-to-Market Survey 2026*, IDC, April 2026.

Figure 10

*Q: Which of the following best describes how your organization **manages the customer life cycle?**

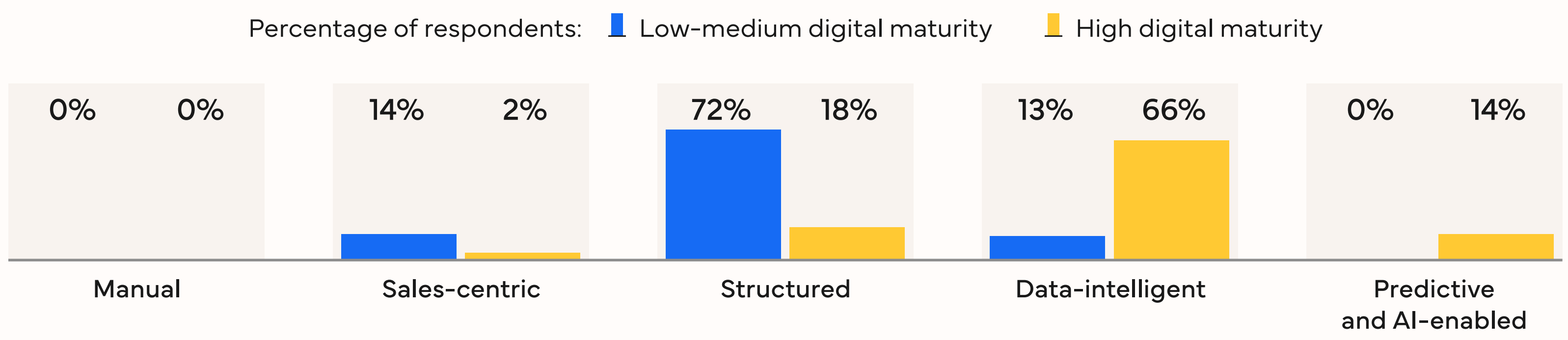
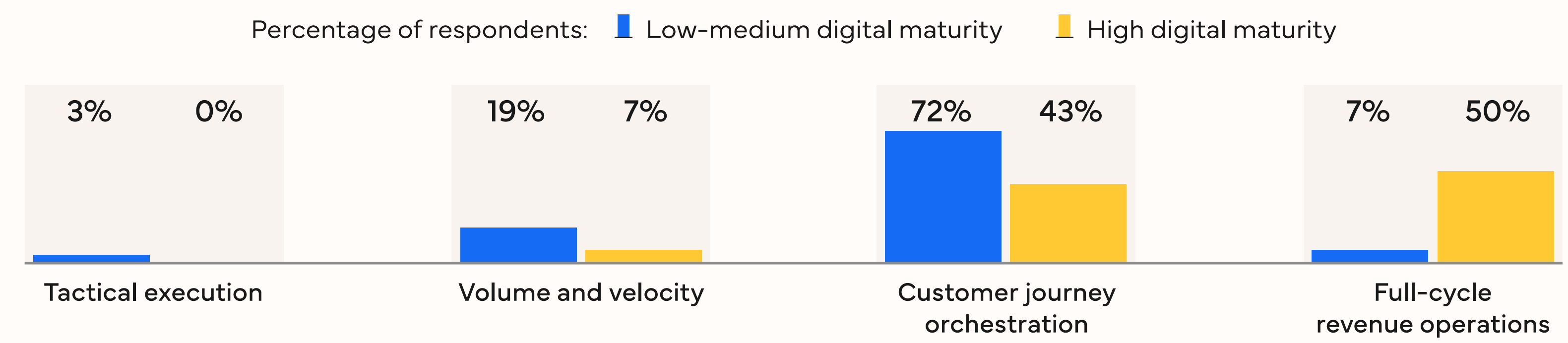


Figure 11

*Q: Which of the following best describes how your organization measures the **impact of marketing on revenue?**

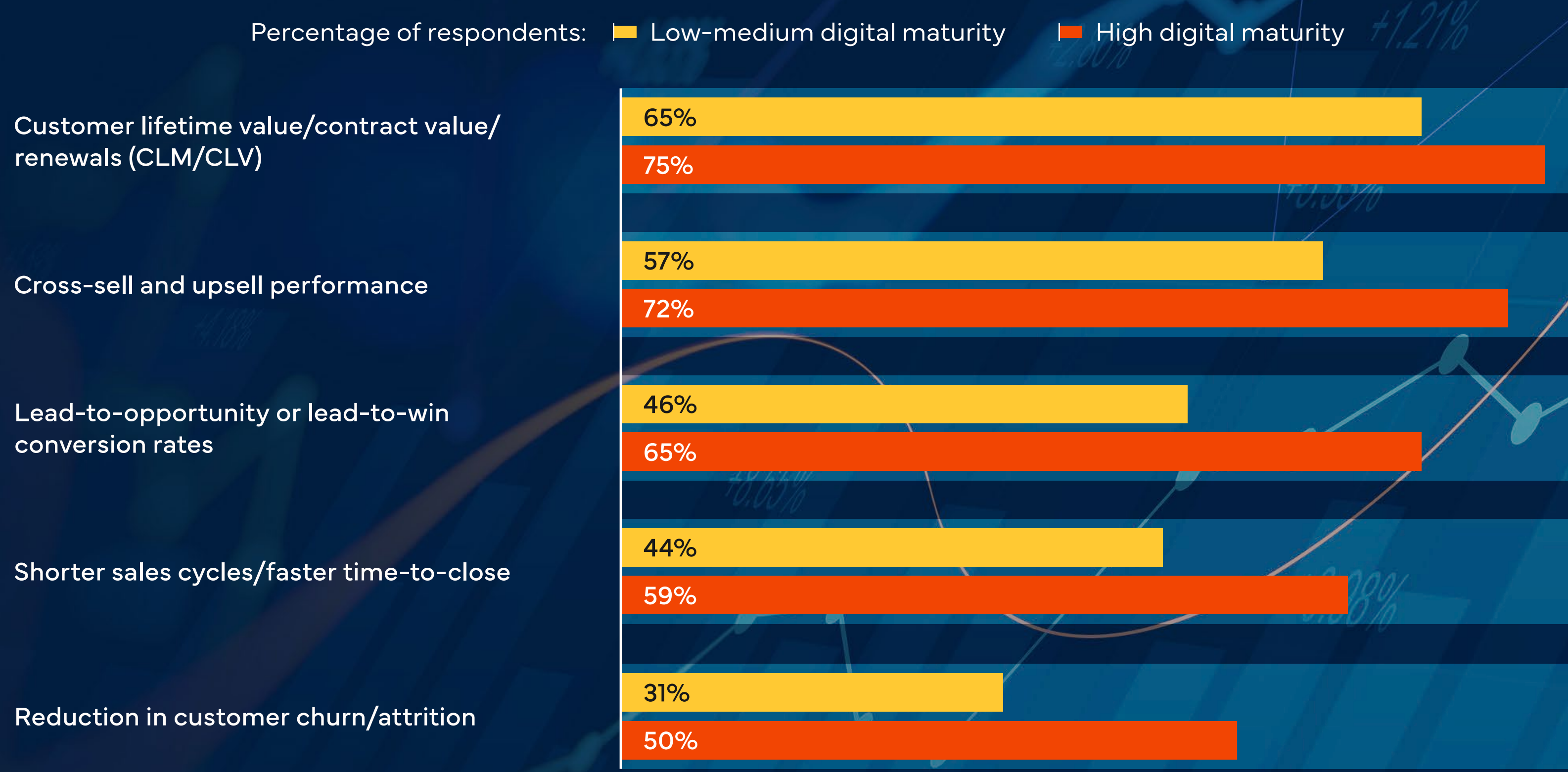


Performance improves with digital maturity

- High-maturity partners are significantly more likely to see stronger impact across key KPIs, including reduced churn, faster sales cycles, and improved lead-to-opportunity and win rates.
- These differences suggest that more advanced digital GTM capabilities help partners better coordinate activities across the revenue life cycle, particularly across marketing, sales, and customer engagement functions.
- While not deterministic, the data indicates that deeper digital GTM maturity is associated with more consistent and measurable performance improvements across multiple areas of the business.

Figure 12

Q: What level of **positive impact** have improved digital GTM capabilities had, or could they have, on the following KPIs for your organization?
[%TOP 2; "Significant" or "Transformational" impact combined]



n = 300; Source: *Adobe Partner Digital Go-to-Market Survey 2026*, IDC, April 2026.

Recommendations to partners: Move from digital ambition to execution to accelerate growth and competitiveness

#1 Commit

Move beyond priority to execution by advancing digital GTM maturity and operational integration.

#2 Empower

Invest in data, skills, and operating models, not just additional point tools or channels.

#3 Integrate

Treat digital GTM as life-cycle orchestration, linking engagement, sales, retention, and expansion.

#4 Streamline

Embed commerce and marketplaces into GTM workflows to accelerate monetization and scale growth.

Appendix: Demographics and methodology

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Survey responses (n = 300) were collected via phone interviews in March and April 2026.

Requirements for participating companies:

- Resells or influences the sale of third-party business application software
- Active partnerships with business application software vendors
- Minimum of 10 employees globally

Requirements for survey respondents:

- Senior professional employee or higher seniority level
- Knowledge about the company's digital GTM strategy and capabilities

Figure 13
Country

(Percentage of respondents)

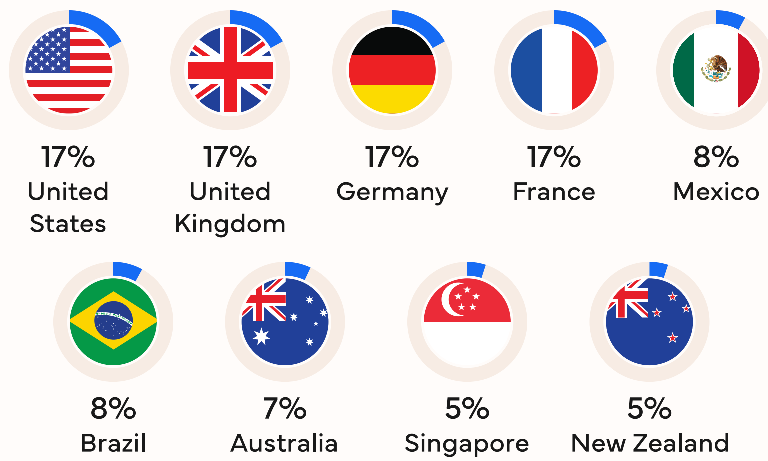


Figure 14
Company size

(Percentage of respondents)

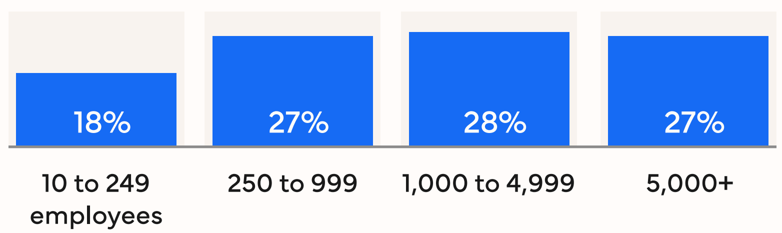
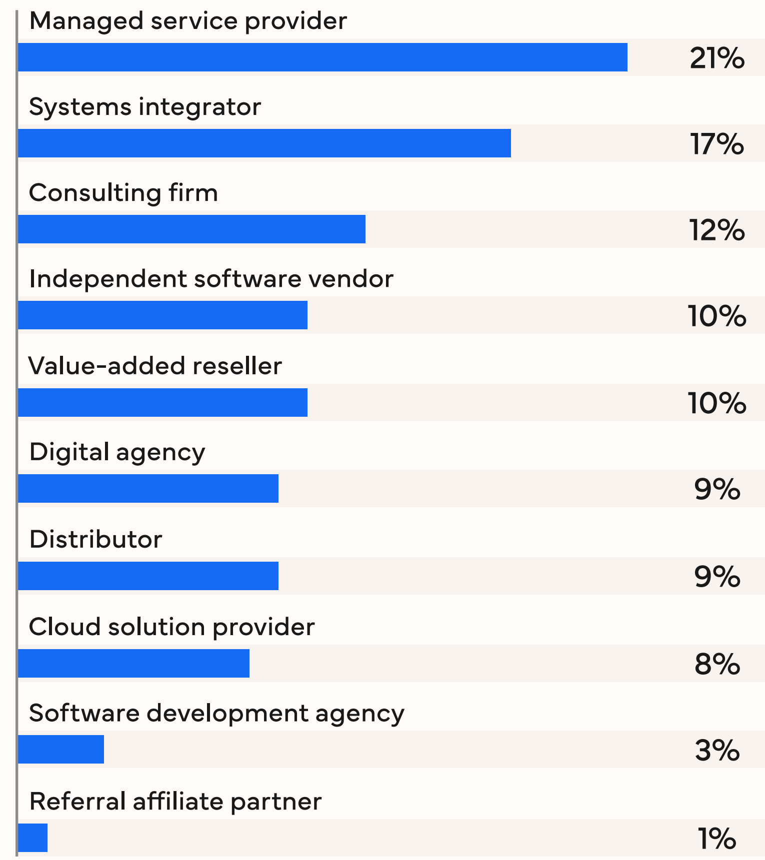


Figure 15
Primary partner business model

(Percentage of respondents)



n = 300; Source: *Adobe Partner Digital Go-to-Market Survey 2026*, IDC, April 2026.

Question details: Customer life-cycle management and marketing impact on revenue measurement

Q: Which of the following best describes how your organization manages the customer life cycle from first contact through onboarding, adoption, renewals, and advocacy?

Select one.

1. **Manual:** No structured life-cycle management; activities are ad hoc.
2. **Sales-centric:** We manage the sales funnel, but post-sale engagement is limited.
3. **Structured:** We map the customer journey and manage onboarding/adoption, with some digital tools.
4. **Data-intelligent:** We use automated, data-triggered life-cycle actions and track lifetime value.
5. **Predictive and AI-enabled:** We use advanced analytics or AI to manage the full life cycle, including retention and advocacy.

Q: Which of the following best describes how your organization measures the impact of marketing on revenue?

Select one.

1. **Tactical execution:** Our priority is tracking campaign-level engagement (clicks, views, and events) to optimize specific marketing activities.
2. **Volume and velocity:** Our focus is on generating a high volume of qualified leads and moving them quickly through the sales funnel.
3. **Customer journey orchestration:** We focus on aligning marketing and sales touchpoints across the entire life cycle to improve the customer experience.
4. **Full-cycle revenue operations:** Our strategy is built on a unified RevOps model where marketing, sales, and customer success share integrated data and revenue targets.

About the IDC analysts

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Stuart Wilson is senior research director for IDC's Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA) Partnering Ecosystems program. Based in the UK, Stuart has covered global business-to-business and business-to-consumer channels for 20-plus years in a wide variety of research, editorial and event-based roles. Stuart focuses on the evolution of go-to-market models and the wider impact on channel ecosystems, exploring how current and future trends will impact the vendor, distributor and channel partner landscape.

More about Stuart Wilson →

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Andreas Storz is senior research manager for IDC's Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA) Partnering Ecosystems program. Based in the US, Andreas focuses on the evolution of go-to-market models, new digital value chains and the wider impact on partner ecosystems, exploring how current and future trends will impact the vendor, distributor, and partner landscape.

More about Andreas Storz →

Message from the sponsor

Adobe

Adobe partners are at the center of one of the most significant shifts in go-to-market strategy in a generation. As buyers increasingly self-educate, engage digitally, and transact through marketplaces, the partners who will lead are those who evolve beyond traditional relationship-led models — and build the digital capabilities to match how customers buy today.

This IDC InfoBrief, commissioned by Adobe, reveals a clear and urgent reality: Ambition is high, but execution gaps remain. Most partners have moved beyond basic digital tactics, yet only a fraction have reached the data-driven or predictive maturity needed to fully capitalize on digital demand. The gap between intent and execution is where competitive advantage is won or lost.

Adobe is committed to helping partners close that gap. Through our partner ecosystem — spanning programs, tools, and co-marketing resources — we are investing in the capabilities that enable partners to build scalable digital GTM engines.

We invite you to explore the findings in this report and use them as a catalyst for action. The insights are designed to help you benchmark where you stand, identify where to invest, and accelerate the shift from digital ambition to measurable execution.

Ready to accelerate your digital GTM? Explore Adobe's partner program and access the tools, resources, and support to move from ambition to execution.

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