The Case for B2B Personalisation – Asia-Pacific

Contents

Executive summary

Your potential customers are more elusive than ever. They're spending more time researching purchases online, and less time talking to your sales team. And they're often doing their research anonymously, meaning your ideal next customer could have completed their purchase with a competitor without you even knowing they were in the market.

This is as true of B2B marketing as it is of B2C, with the added complication that B2B buyers now expect at least the same quality of customer experience as they would get from the best B2C brands.

At the same time, B2B companies are increasingly realising that they need to think differently about how they target prospective customers. Leading companies see the limitations of focusing only on individuals within a target business, or on the business as a whole (account-based marketing). Instead, they're focusing their activities on the buying group responsible for purchasing the type of product or service they supply, and on the information needs of its individual members.

The effect of this is to make personalisation the most important tactic available to B2B marketers today. Overall, almost half of APAC B2B companies surveyed (48%) now claim to be 'very much focused on personalisation'.

The report looks at how integration — of data, technology, and sales and marketing teams — is essential for companies seeking to employ more sophisticated approaches to personalisation based on a 360-degree view of the customer. Such integration is also crucial for underpinning the next step in marketing automation; the use of AI to deliver dynamic, real-time personalisation.

The report makes the following recommendations for businesses looking to deliver better, more personalised marketing:

Recommendations

Focus on integrating your martech stack
B2B marketing leaders recognise that truly personalised B2B marketing requires a highly integrated technology set-up, drawing on a robust, well-maintained and coherent company-wide data set.

Unify and activate customer data and insights across channels
A 360-degree view of the customer is fundamental for B2B companies striving to use AI to automate next-best communications and sales activities in real time.

Buying groups hold the key to growth marketing success
Buying groups have become common in recent years. B2B marketers increasingly need to target them and their members, rather than focusing activities either on individuals or on the overall account.

Strive for revenue team convergence
Sales and marketing teams need to be as closely aligned as possible for truly effective revenue generation. This alignment should be based on a common view of the ideal customer profile (ICP), and a collaborative approach to identifying and targeting the right members of the buying group at each opportunity.

Don't delay your deployment of AI
Generative AI is also now playing a foundational role in helping B2B organisations deliver personalised digital experiences at scale. If you're not among the leaders in your use of this technology, your first step should be to assess how your organisation is using AI, and what might be holding you back.

About the research

This report, produced by London Research in partnership with Adobe, is based on a 2024 survey of B2B professionals in the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region. Our methodology identifies a group of B2B marketing 'leaders', and seeks to establish what they are doing differently to those companies that are already behind the curve and in danger of slipping even further back. We characterise these businesses as 'laggards'. See the Methodology section at the end of the report for more details.

The research also found that:

- Leaders are significantly more likely than laggards to be employing a full range of personalisation tactics and initiatives. Among the widely used approaches, the gap is widest for the creation and marketing of content relevant to specific buying stages and to specific personas within the buying group, and in building profiles based on interactions.

- Leaders are more than four times more likely than laggards to be focusing their overall sales and marketing activities on multi-person buying groups within an organisation (34% vs. 8%). They are twice as likely to rate their B2B marketing automation platform as 'good' for its ability to identify and target at a buying-group level (78% vs. 38%).

- Fragmented data and insights are seen as the most significant obstacle to more seamless and personalised customer experiences, described as a 'major' barrier to success by 37% of B2B companies.

- Leaders are significantly more committed to investing in marketing technology. They are twice as likely as laggards to be significantly increasing their spend in this area over the next 12 months.

- Leaders are almost five times more likely than laggards to say they have operationalised AI into their day-to-day marketing activities. They're more than seven times more likely to describe the use of AI in their marketing activities as 'business as usual' (BAU). Across the board, companies are increasingly using AI for a range of marketing and sales-related activities, including content creation, conversational chatbots and customer journey optimisation.

Acknowledgements

Section 1

The trends driving 'business-to-human' marketing

The story of marketing in the 21st century — for both B2B and B2C — has been one of control moving from sellers to buyers. From the plummeting click-through rates and ad-blockers of the early 2000s to cookie blocking in recent years, customers have taken over the marketing agenda. And that's as true of B2B marketing as it is of B2C. More than half (52%) of our survey respondents said customers having more control of the path to purchase was having a major impact on their business (*Figure 1*).

This change was accelerated and intensified by the mass move online during the Covid-19 pandemic. The result is a marketing landscape where buyers complete most of their pre-purchase research online, invisible to the sellers on their consideration list. As *Figure 1* also shows, almost two-thirds (60%) of survey respondents reported that increased consumption of digital content prior to human interaction was having a major impact. A similar proportion (59%) said the same about greater use of digital self-service.

According to Ben Scott, Head of Marketing Operations at accountancy firm Grant Thornton in Australia, the balance between live events and online content has definitely changed again since the Covid pandemic.

"We've now found this balance of live events, webinars, and online content. Client service is still heavily relationship-based. But before someone becomes a client, the amount of research they're doing on the website, the number of people who are now comfortable submitting forms on the website for support and for new business enquiries, all that has increased a lot, where previously it would've typically been a lot of phone calls direct to a partner or referrals."

FIGURE 1

What impact have the following trends had on the way B2B prospects and customers engage with your organisation?

■ Major impact   ■ Minor impact   ■ No impact

60%	33%	7%

Increased consumption of digital content before human interaction

59%	32%	9%

Greater use of digital self-service and increased digital interactions post-sale

53%	41%	6%

Growing expectation that B2B digital interactions match the best B2C experiences

53%	36%	11%

Increased importance of multi-person buying groups within organisations

52%	41%	7%

The customer now has more control of the buyer journey

60%
The proportion of B2B companies who say that increased consumption of digital content is having a major impact on how prospects and customers engage.

B2B buyers are people too

Historically, there were clear reasons why B2B and B2C marketing were treated differently. The most significant was that the B2B purchase cycle is much longer than is typical in B2C, and requires much more nurturing of prospects before a lead is handed over to sales to complete the deal.

But the trends shaping B2B and B2C businesses are very similar. Marketers in both camps are increasingly concerned with attracting the anonymous would-be buyers researching purchases online, persuading them to drop their cloak of invisibility and engage in the sales process directly.

Increasingly, businesses are realising that all marketing and sales activities are about 'business-to-human' (B2H) interactions. It's time to stop asking whether a particular B2C tool or technique is applicable to B2B marketing. We know B2B buyers want experiences that replicate the ones they get in their B2C transactions. And we also know that an element of B2C marketing that is both prized by customers and delivers for sellers is personalisation.

Companies increasingly need a personalised approach to deliver against key overarching sales and marketing objectives. These include growing their revenue pipeline, improving the ROI of their marketing, and delivering better buyer/customer experiences (*Figure 2*).

What's striking is how much more significant improving the experience is seen by APAC research participants compared to more overtly commercial objectives such as increasing revenue and improving marketing ROI. Like their B2C counterparts, more and more B2B organisations realise that strong customer relationships underpin their commercial growth. Better experiences result in improved marketing ROI, and this helps drive greater investment in the technology, processes and people required to drive revenue growth.

As Balkar Singh Rao, Marketing Manager at HERE Technologies, explained: *"We try to make marketing more effective and efficient, and to provide better experiences. We want to get better at what we do, and personalisation is always a key area. When done right, it can result into impactful positive changes."*

FIGURE 2

How important are the following objectives for your 2024 B2B sales and marketing activities?

🟦 Very important   🟦 Important   ⬜ Not important
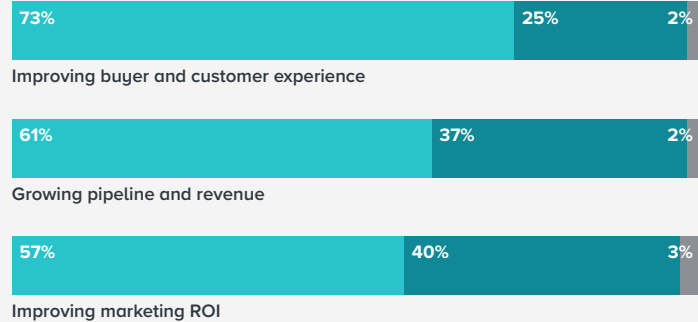
	Very important	Important	Not important
Improving buyer and customer experience	73%	25%	2%
Growing pipeline and revenue	61%	37%	2%
Improving marketing ROI	57%	40%	3%

"We want to get better at what we do, and personalisation is always a key area. When done right, it can result into impactful positive changes."

| Balkar Singh Rao
Marketing Manager
HERE Technologies

Section 2

How marketing leaders are focusing on personalisation

The report's breakdown of respondents into leaders and laggards (see the Methodology for more detail) is based on how they rated their capabilities across five areas that are the essence of effective B2B marketing. The results are shown in *Figure 3*.

Around a third of APAC respondents described themselves as 'advanced' in their use of content at scale, their ability to market across multiple channels, and their ability to measure revenue and ROI. Just over a quarter said the same about their use of AI (28%) and their ability to optimise and personalise the customer journey in real time (27%).

The aim of this methodological approach is to understand what marketing leaders are doing differently to help derive insights and recommendations for followers and laggards. As *Figure 4* shows, a focus on personalisation correlates very strongly with marketing leadership. Leaders are almost twice as likely as laggards to say they're very much focused on personalisation (76% vs. 42%).

76% vs. 42%

Leaders are almost twice as likely as laggards to say they're very much focused on personalisation.

FIGURE 3

How organisations rate their overall marketing capabilities

■ Advanced ■ Intermediate ■ Basic

| 33% | 49% | 18% |

We engage prospects and customers with personalised content at scale

| 32% | 43% | 25% |

We effectively orchestrate and automate marketing activities across multiple channels

| 32% | 42% | 26% |

We can measure the revenue and ROI impact of marketing activities

| 28% | 37% | 35% |

We deploy AI to speed up how customer journeys are built, launched and measured

| 27% | 53% | 20% |

We surface insights and activate data in real time to optimise and personalise B2B customer journeys
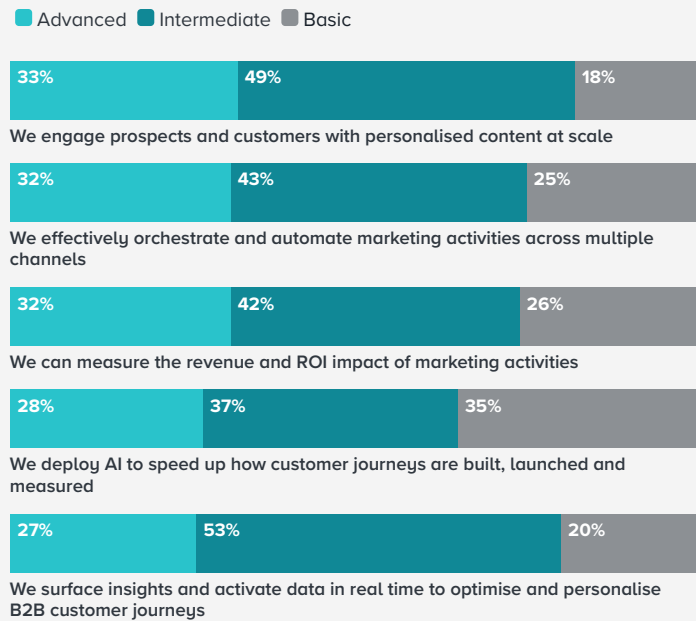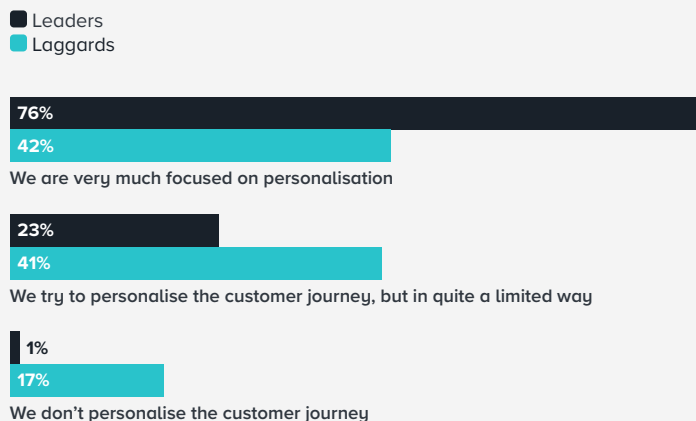
FIGURE 4

How would you describe your attempts to personalise the customer journey for B2B customers and prospects?
(Leaders vs. laggards)

■ Leaders
■ Laggards

| 76% |
| 42% |

We are very much focused on personalisation

| 23% |
| 41% |

We try to personalise the customer journey, but in quite a limited way

| 1% |
| 17% |

We don't personalise the customer journey

So what does this focus on personalisation look like (*Figure 5*)?

For just over half of our respondents (51%), it means real-time targeting of information based on on-site behaviour. For a slightly smaller proportion, it means creating and targeting content at either specific personas within a buying group (47%), or at specific buying stages (46%). Slightly fewer still are building buyer profiles based on interactions (43%), or creating and targeting content for specific industries (42%).

Education Perfect is an education technology specialist business in New Zealand. Mike Goodbourn, the company's Marketing Operations Manager, is in the process of building the marketing team there, and describes his ambition for personalisation as to be more timely and more relevant with content.
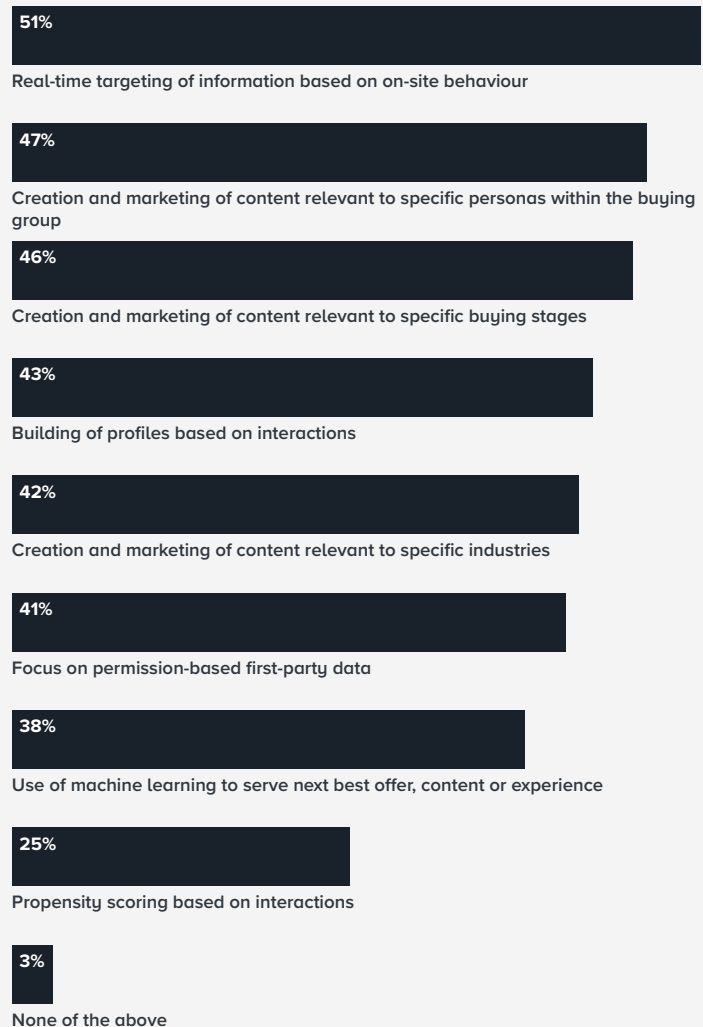
"Just knowing that we're sharing content with the right people at the right time is the aspiration. We're also moving much more to an inbound approach. We're making sure we've got that content engine set up and we've got a really good source of organic traffic coming in. Then making sure we have the data platforms to deliver timely, relevant content. That's what we want to get to."

Strikingly, only two respondents in five (41%) say they're focusing on permission-based first-party data, despite several years of noise around Google's now-withdrawn plans to remove support for third-party cookies in its Chrome browser.

Similarly, despite the hype around AI and machine learning, only 38% say they're using the technology for prescriptive targeting. This has long been seen as the holy grail of marketing, and involves automatically serving buyers with the best offer, content or experience to advance their progress through the purchase process. Issues around the adoption and use of AI will be examined in detail in *Section 4*.

FIGURE 5

What are you doing to personalise the customer journey or to make content and messaging as relevant and timely as possible?

51%
Real-time targeting of information based on on-site behaviour

47%
Creation and marketing of content relevant to specific personas within the buying group

46%
Creation and marketing of content relevant to specific buying stages

43%
Building of profiles based on interactions

42%
Creation and marketing of content relevant to specific industries

41%
Focus on permission-based first-party data

38%
Use of machine learning to serve next best offer, content or experience

25%
Propensity scoring based on interactions

3%
None of the above

"'[We're] making sure we have the data platforms to deliver timely, relevant content. That's what we want to get to."

Mike Goodbourn
Marketing Operations Manager
Education Perfect

Content leads the personalisation agenda

Figure 6 shows how much more likely leaders are than laggards to be delivering personalised content and experiences to buyers. They're twice as likely to be creating content for specific buying stages (65% vs. 33%) and for specific personas (65% vs. 31%), and to be building profiles based on interactions (57% vs. 29%).

Leaders are almost as far ahead in their adoption of real-time targeting of information based on on-site behaviour (62% vs. 35%), and of prescriptive targeting using machine learning (53% vs. 29%). This suggests leaders have already developed better capabilities around data, another topic that will be further examined in *Section 4*.

Intriguingly, the difference between leaders and laggards is smallest in their focus on first-party permission-based data (51% vs. 38%), suggesting that the driver here was as much Google's plan to remove third-party cookies as broader initiatives around personalisation.
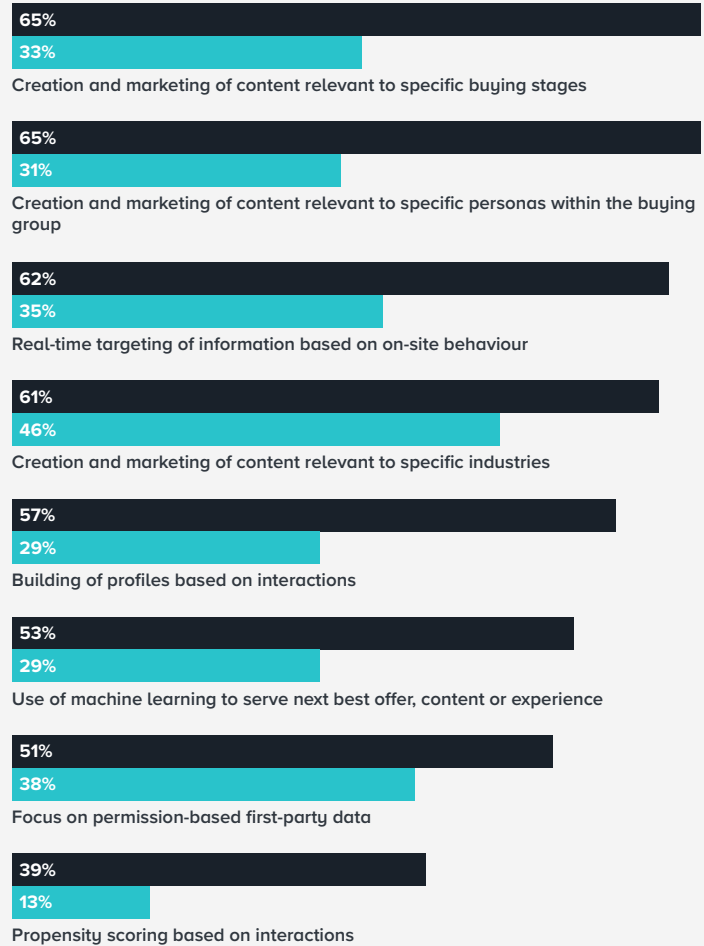
65%

The proportion of leaders creating content for specific buying stages and personas.

FIGURE 6

What are you doing to personalise the customer journey or to make content and messaging as relevant and timely as possible?
(Leaders vs. laggards)

- ■ Leaders
- ■ Laggards

65%	Leaders
33%	Laggards

Creation and marketing of content relevant to specific buying stages

65%	Leaders
31%	Laggards

Creation and marketing of content relevant to specific personas within the buying group

62%	Leaders
35%	Laggards

Real-time targeting of information based on on-site behaviour

61%	Leaders
46%	Laggards

Creation and marketing of content relevant to specific industries

57%	Leaders
29%	Laggards

Building of profiles based on interactions

53%	Leaders
29%	Laggards

Use of machine learning to serve next best offer, content or experience

51%	Leaders
38%	Laggards

Focus on permission-based first-party data

39%	Leaders
13%	Laggards

Propensity scoring based on interactions

Section 3

The buying group imperative

Historically, B2B companies have been focused on marketing either to individuals, or at an organisational level through account-based marketing. However, for large-scale purchases, businesses typically convene a buying committee made up of senior staff from the stakeholder departments. This buyer group will typically include the users of the technology or services as well as other departments including legal, compliance, procurement, finance and IT.

The head of marketing at a well-known global technology company explained to us why holistic marketing to a buying group is becoming increasingly important: *"We need to have consistent messaging across the different personas we're talking with inside a company, but customised to the needs of each persona. We have various personas as customers and as buyers. They can be from marketing, they can be from HR, obviously they can be from IT, even from sales."*

So, while *Figure 7* shows that account-based marketing is clearly still the default, marketing to buying groups is the way forward.

Leaders are more than four times more likely than laggards to be focusing their sales and marketing activities on multi-person buying groups within an organisation. And we've already seen that leaders are twice as likely as laggards to create and market content targeting specific personas within a buying group (*Figure 6*).

FIGURE 7

Where does your organisation focus its sales and marketing activities? (Leaders vs. laggards)

■ Leaders
■ Laggards

34%
8%
Multi-person buying groups within an organisation

53%
48%
Organisations (i.e. account-based marketing)

13%
44%
Individuals
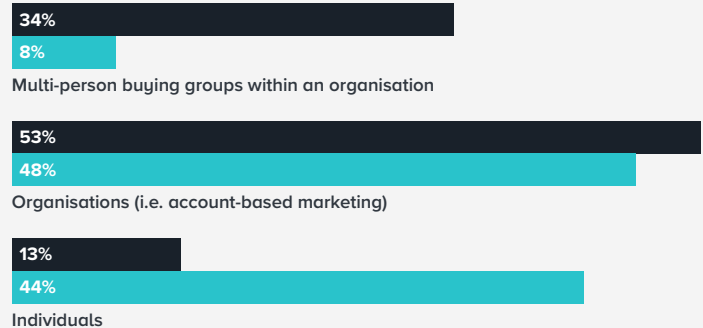
34% vs. 8%
Leaders are more than four times more likely than laggards to be focusing their sales and marketing activities on multi-person buying groups.

Only a quarter (24%) of respondents overall exclusively focus on buying group personas (*Figure 8*). A further 42% are doing this in conjunction with a focus on industry.

However, leaders are almost twice as likely as laggards to strongly agree that they are focusing their customer journey around the multi-person buying group (*Figure 9*). Put another way, only 4% of leaders say they're *not* personalising their customer journey around the buying group, compared to 21% of laggards.

42%

The proportion of companies personalising by a mix of industry AND buying group persona.

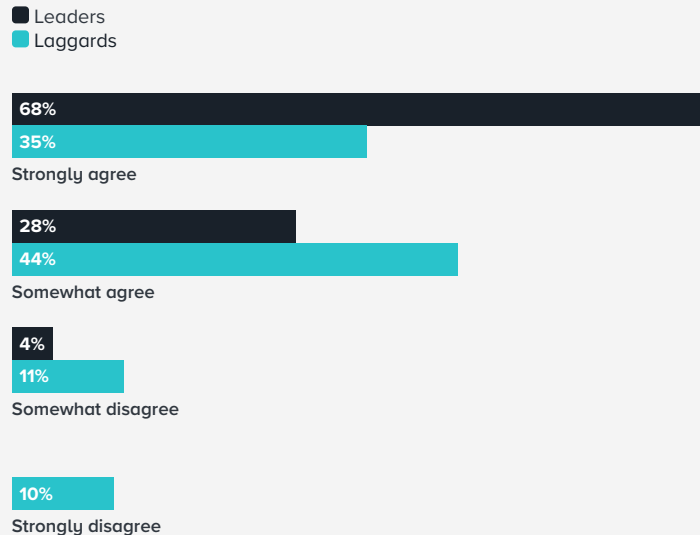
FIGURE 8

What best describes how you personalise the customer journey?

29%	We personalise by industry
24%	We personalise by buying group persona
42%	We personalise by a mix of industry AND buying group persona
5%	We don't personalise the customer journey

FIGURE 9

Do you agree that your organisation personalises the customer journey around the multi-person buying group?
(Leaders vs. laggards)

■ Leaders
■ Laggards

Strongly agree
- Leaders: 68%
- Laggards: 35%

Somewhat agree
- Leaders: 28%
- Laggards: 44%

Somewhat disagree
- Leaders: 4%
- Laggards: 11%

Strongly disagree
- Laggards: 10%

Section 4

Data capabilities and AI use cases

One finding that comes through loud and clear from our research is that a solid data foundation is crucial for companies aspiring to real-time personalisation. Leaders are between three and 12 times more likely to say their data capabilities are 'advanced' across a range of areas, compared to laggards (*Figure 10*).

These areas include 'actionability' – translating data insights into better experiences – and revenue team convergence – bringing together sales and marketing in one department, usually under a Chief Revenue Officer.
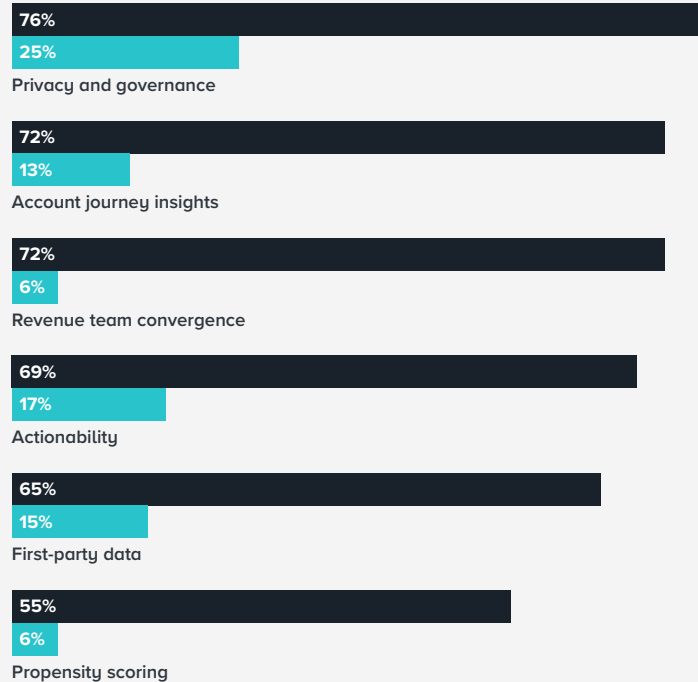
Three other capabilities particularly stand out. One is the use of first-party data, which is becoming even more important as consumers increasingly opt for privacy options. Recent Adobe research found that brands worldwide have become less reliant on third-party cookies, with 49% saying their marketing strategy still depends on this data, compared to 75% in 2022. Although *Figure 6* suggested there is only a small difference in the proportions of leaders and laggards focusing on their proprietary data, *Figure 10* also shows leaders are four times more likely to rate their capabilities here as advanced.

Another significant area is privacy and governance. Some 137 countries now have data protection laws in place. In APAC, updates and reforms are under way in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand and Vietnam. As a result, privacy and governance should now be seen as hygiene factors. Notably, three-quarters of leaders rate their capabilities here as advanced. But that's three times the proportion of laggards that say the same. It's likely that many laggard organisations may be neglecting their legal obligations.

FIGURE 10

Proportion of organisations rating their data strategy capabilities as 'advanced' (Leaders vs. laggards)

■ Leaders
■ Laggards

76%
25%
Privacy and governance

72%
13%
Account journey insights

72%
6%
Revenue team convergence

69%
17%
Actionability

65%
15%
First-party data

55%
6%
Propensity scoring

76%
The percentage of leaders who rate their privacy and governance data strategy capabilities as 'advanced'.

Finally, there is propensity scoring — which can save resources and maximise the chances of desirable outcomes. Leaders are nine times more likely than laggards to employ this approach to narrow their focus towards the right people at the right time (55% vs. 6%). This reinforces the suggestion in *Figure 6* that propensity scoring is emerging as a powerful tool. Only a quarter of respondents overall are using it, but that breaks down as 39% of leaders and just 13% of laggards.

AI requires a solid data foundation
It's widely accepted that a solid data foundation is also key for those looking to build their AI capabilities, in accordance with the old computer science adage, "Garbage in, garbage out". In the case of AI, this means not just ensuring the quality of all the data being used, but also that all the relevant data is being brought together from across the organisation, in a form that the machine can use.
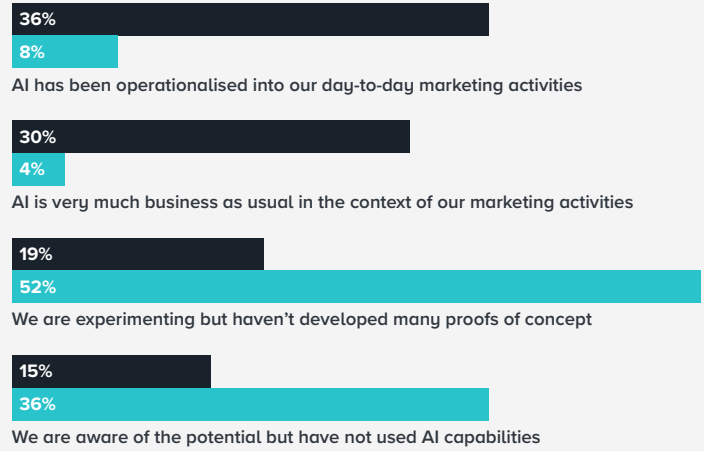
Once again there is a clear correlation between the use of AI and B2B marketing leadership (*Figure 11*), and, by extension, expertise in data management. APAC marketing leaders are nearly five times more likely to say that AI has been operationalised into their day-to-day marketing activities than laggards (36% vs. 8%). They're also close to eight times more likely to say AI is very much business as usual in the context of their marketing activities (30% vs. 4%).

Leaders are also more likely to be using generative AI for a variety of use cases (*Figure 12*). They're most notably ahead of their laggard counterparts in their use of conversational experiences (2.6 times more likely). However, at the other end of the scale, they're only half as likely again to be using it for report queries. And although three-quarters of leaders (73%) are using generative AI to create text for content and communications, 42% of laggards are doing the same, equal highest with report queries.

FIGURE 11

How would you describe your organisation's approach to the use of AI in the context of your marketing activities?
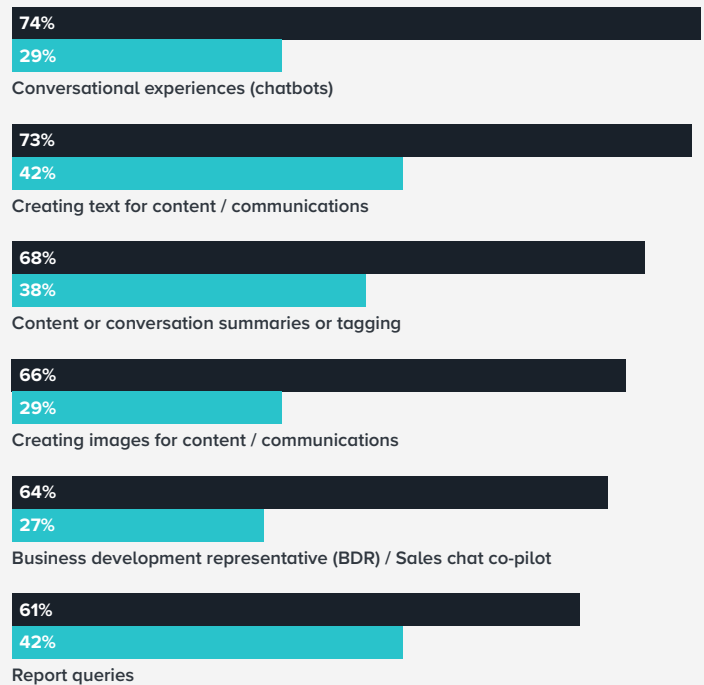(Leaders vs. laggards)

■ Leaders
■ Laggards

36%
8%
AI has been operationalised into our day-to-day marketing activities

30%
4%
AI is very much business as usual in the context of our marketing activities

19%
52%
We are experimenting but haven't developed many proofs of concept

15%
36%
We are aware of the potential but have not used AI capabilities

FIGURE 12

Are you using generative AI for any of the following use cases?
(Leaders vs. laggards)

■ Leaders
■ Laggards

74%
29%
Conversational experiences (chatbots)

73%
42%
Creating text for content / communications

68%
38%
Content or conversation summaries or tagging

66%
29%
Creating images for content / communications

64%
27%
Business development representative (BDR) / Sales chat co-pilot

61%
42%
Report queries

Section 5

Identifying and overcoming challenges

Businesses looking to increase the personalisation of their marketing activities face a number of barriers. Some of these have already been discussed, but *Figure 13* sets them out in detail. What's immediately apparent is that each is seen as equally significant among respondents as a whole. Fragmented data and insights are a significant barrier for many APAC organisations (as described in the previous section), but only five percentage points separate this from the difficulty of proving the business case for investment in personalisation, which is ranked lowest (37% vs. 32%).
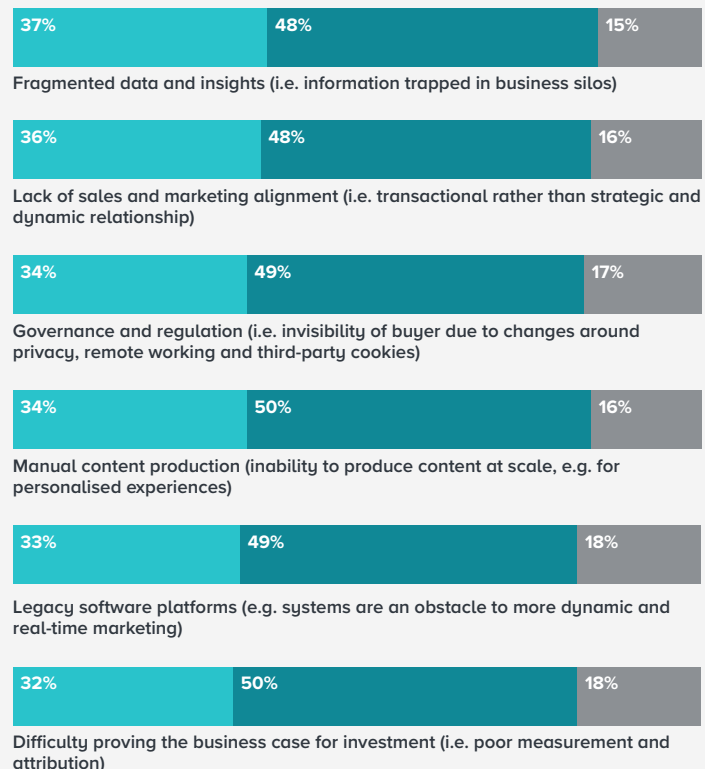
Balkar Singh Rao at HERE Technologies sees both budgets and technology integration as challenges to developing a more personalised customer experience. But he also raises another issue.

"The major challenge is not purely technical, but more people-oriented. One of the most challenging and effective areas of any business is people. When working in a team with rich diversity around the globe, communication isn't as simple as it looks. However, when a diverse global team can talk the same language, it's a superpower. Once you're in alignment, everything falls into place. It requires nuanced understanding of how different styles of messaging resonate with different people across the globe. You need to adapt to all of them."

FIGURE 13

To what extent do you regard the following as barriers to providing more seamless and personalised B2B customer experiences?

■ Major barrier   ■ Minor barrier   ■ Not a barrier

| 37% | 48% | 15% |

Fragmented data and insights (i.e. information trapped in business silos)

| 36% | 48% | 16% |

Lack of sales and marketing alignment (i.e. transactional rather than strategic and dynamic relationship)

| 34% | 49% | 17% |

Governance and regulation (i.e. invisibility of buyer due to changes around privacy, remote working and third-party cookies)

| 34% | 50% | 16% |

Manual content production (inability to produce content at scale, e.g. for personalised experiences)

| 33% | 49% | 18% |

Legacy software platforms (e.g. systems are an obstacle to more dynamic and real-time marketing)

| 32% | 50% | 18% |

Difficulty proving the business case for investment (i.e. poor measurement and attribution)

37%

The proportion of companies describing fragmented data and insights as a major barrier to more personalised experiences.

Breaking this data down by leaders and laggards reveals a more detailed story (*Figure 14*). Laggards are much more likely to be struggling with the difficulty of proving the business case for investment, and manual content production, than are leaders. They are also more likely to find fragmented data and insights, and lack of sales and marketing alignment to be major barriers.

But what stands out is that leaders are more likely than their laggard counterparts to see legacy software platforms and governance and regulation as major barriers. This is unlikely to mean leaders have poorer legacy software, or less of a grip on the legal side of data collection and use. Indeed, leaders are three times more likely than laggards to rate their capabilities in privacy and governance as 'advanced' (*Figure 10*). It's much more plausible that a greater proportion of leaders have identified these two areas as significant problems as they attempt to take personalisation to the next level.

Invest in integration to free your data
Without technology that is integrated and fit for purpose, organisations will struggle to unleash more dynamic and real-time marketing, with data and insights remaining trapped within their own silos. This explains why leaders are twice as likely to be significantly increasing their investment in marketing technology compared to laggards (*Figure 15*).

This is something Rosemary O'Connor at international law firm Allens also recognises as a challenge.

The company's Sydney-based Head of Digital Customer Experience and Marketing Technology says: *"It's really hard to make sure that we are getting that data into the hands of the people who are making decisions with clients, or growing client relationships so that they can see it in a holistic way. We report on certain campaigns or certain pieces of go-to-market activity, we report on engagement, but rolling that up into what it actually means for this client at this point in time in a way that's practical and actionable is really tricky."*

FIGURE 14

Major barriers to providing more seamless and personalised B2B customer experiences (Leaders vs. laggards)

- Leaders
- Laggards

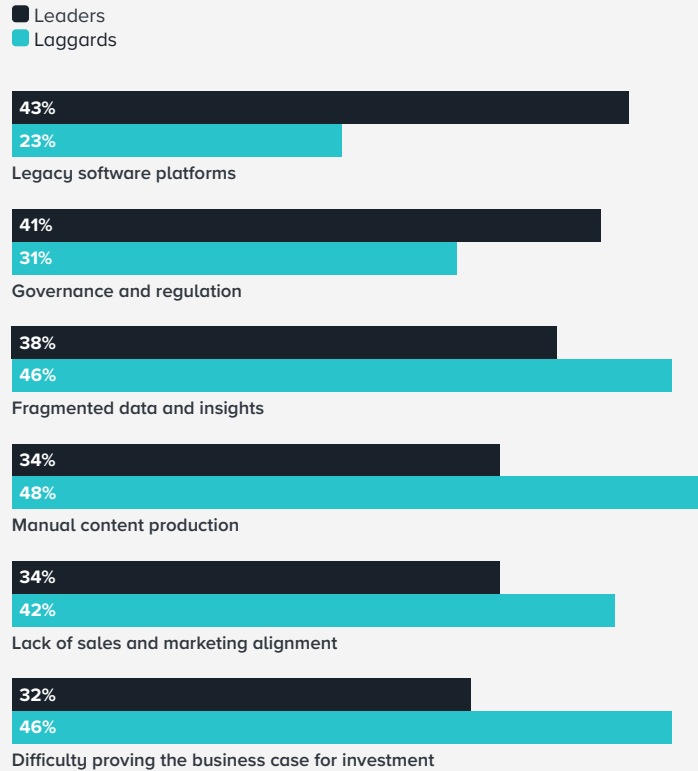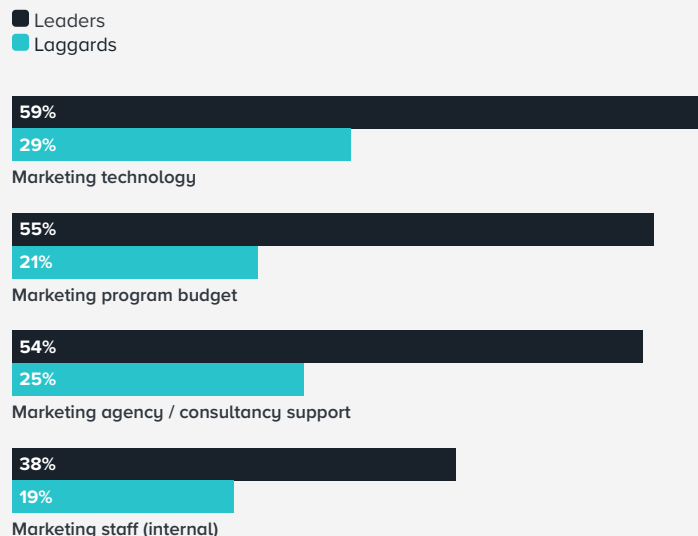|	Leaders	Laggards
Legacy software platforms	43%	23%
Governance and regulation	41%	31%
Fragmented data and insights	38%	46%
Manual content production	34%	48%
Lack of sales and marketing alignment	34%	42%
Difficulty proving the business case for investment	32%	46%

FIGURE 15

Proportion of organisations planning to increase their investment by more than 20% in the following areas over the next 12 months in the context of their B2B marketing engagement and personalisation activities
(Leaders vs. laggards)

- Leaders
- Laggards

	Leaders	Laggards
Marketing technology	59%	29%
Marketing program budget	55%	21%
Marketing agency / consultancy support	54%	25%
Marketing staff (internal)	38%	19%

Technology needs to support strategy
Section 3 looked at the growing importance of targeting buying groups in preference to either individuals or accounts. Part of that involves having the right technology. As *Figure 16* shows, marketing leaders generally have marketing automation technology that is better suited for a buying group approach.

In fact, leaders are twice as likely to rate their marketing automation technology as 'good' for supporting a buying group approach than are laggards (78% vs. 38%). In contrast, almost two-thirds of laggards (62%) say their technology is either 'okay' or 'poor'.

Looking at a spread of other B2B use cases, leaders are once again significantly more likely than laggards to rate their technology as good (*Figure 17*).

78% vs. 38%

Leaders are twice as likely as laggards to rate their marketing automation platform as 'good' for supporting a buying group approach.

FIGURE 16

How would you rate your B2B marketing automation platform for its ability to identify and target at a buying group level?
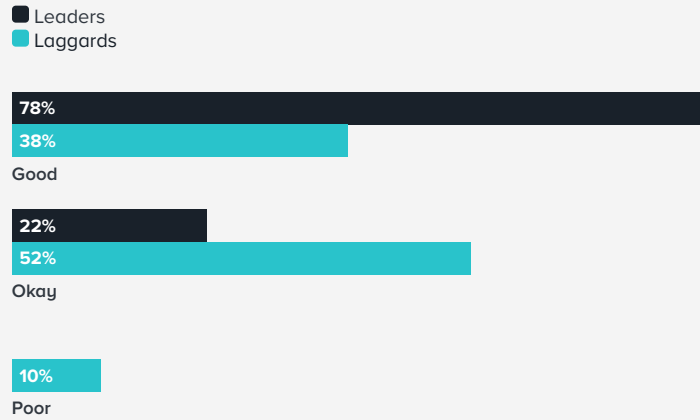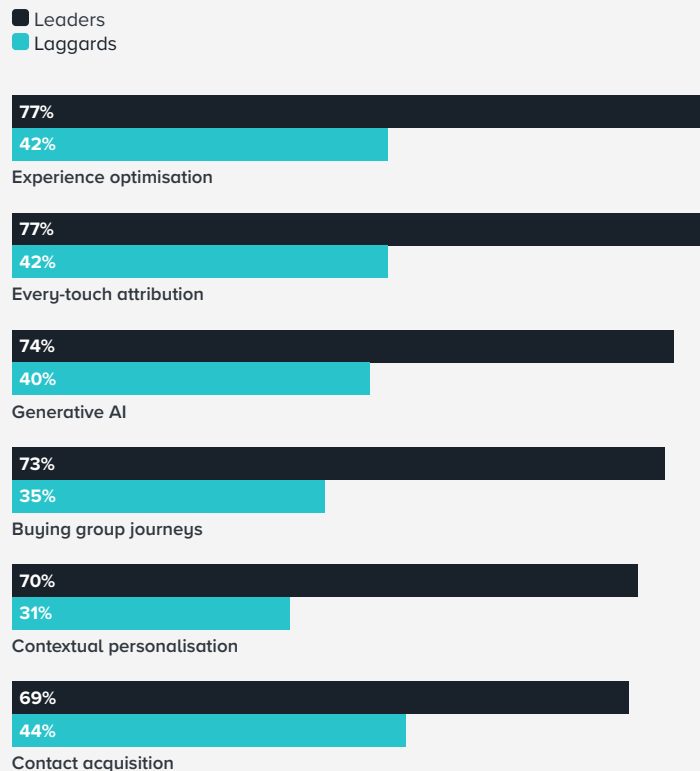(Leaders vs. laggards)

■ Leaders
■ Laggards

Good
Leaders: 78%
Laggards: 38%

Okay
Leaders: 22%
Laggards: 52%

Poor
Laggards: 10%

FIGURE 17

Proportion of organisations rating their technology platform as good for facilitating B2B use cases (Leaders vs. laggards)

■ Leaders
■ Laggards

Experience optimisation
Leaders: 77%
Laggards: 42%

Every-touch attribution
Leaders: 77%
Laggards: 42%

Generative AI
Leaders: 74%
Laggards: 40%

Buying group journeys
Leaders: 73%
Laggards: 35%

Contextual personalisation
Leaders: 70%
Laggards: 31%

Contact acquisition
Leaders: 69%
Laggards: 44%

The fact that leaders have superior technology in all these areas, some of which are relatively well-established, suggests that a leadership position is not attained through a short-term spending spree, but through strategic long-term understanding and investment. This idea is borne out by looking at a comparison of key decision-makers around B2B engagement and personalisation technology at leading and laggard businesses (*Figure 18*).

The CEO is only slightly more likely to be involved in these decisions in leading companies than within laggard organisations (62% vs. 54%). However, other C-suite executives are much less likely to be involved in the case of laggards.

This reflects the need for a collective approach at boardroom level in order to break down silos and facilitate sharing of data and insights. The fact that 54% of leaders involve the CMO in the decision-making process, and 47% involve the Chief Revenue Officer or Head of Sales also points to the importance of building a strong relationship between the two.

Grant Thornton's Ben Scott said: *"One of the things we know in professional services is that to carry out a transformation you need to have a CMO on the executive, which we do. And we're fairly rare in Australia in terms of that happening. A lot of the time the CMO reports to a partner or someone like a COO who sits on the executive, but as soon as marketing's moved that one step down, their voice and their ability to drive change is drastically reduced."*
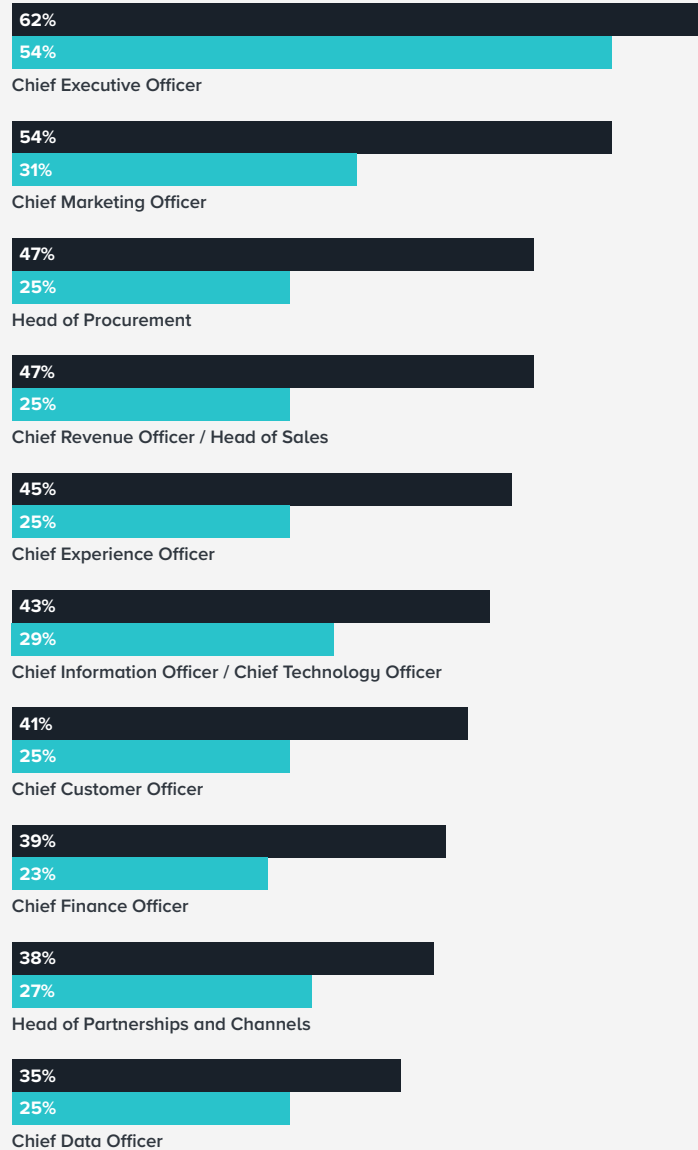
At the same time, the relationship between sales/marketing and IT remains crucial, as Lachlan McKinnon, Marketing Technology and Analytics Manager at Allens in Australia points out:

"We work very cohesively with the IT team. They're the ones that put their necks on the line when it comes to the systems that we decide to bring into the organisation. So, in terms of system implementation and integration, that ownership lies with IT. But then when it comes to the actual day-to-day work and the ongoing upkeep of those technologies, that sits on our side within marketing."

FIGURE 18

Proportion of organisations saying the following internal stakeholders are decision makers when it comes to technology decisions relating to B2B engagement and personalisation (Leaders vs. laggards)

■ Leaders
■ Laggards

Chief Executive Officer
Leaders: 62%
Laggards: 54%

Chief Marketing Officer
Leaders: 54%
Laggards: 31%

Head of Procurement
Leaders: 47%
Laggards: 25%

Chief Revenue Officer / Head of Sales
Leaders: 47%
Laggards: 25%

Chief Experience Officer
Leaders: 45%
Laggards: 25%

Chief Information Officer / Chief Technology Officer
Leaders: 43%
Laggards: 29%

Chief Customer Officer
Leaders: 41%
Laggards: 25%

Chief Finance Officer
Leaders: 39%
Laggards: 23%

Head of Partnerships and Channels
Leaders: 38%
Laggards: 27%

Chief Data Officer
Leaders: 35%
Laggards: 25%

Section 6

Your next steps

Focus on integrating your technology infrastructure

This research shows that leadership in B2B marketing correlates strongly with a clear focus on personalisation. B2B leaders in APAC are almost twice as likely as laggards to be concentrating heavily on personalisation (76% vs. 42%, *Figure 4*). At the same time, leaders recognise that a truly personalised approach to B2B marketing requires a highly integrated technology set-up, drawing on a robust, well-maintained and coherent company-wide data set. This is also an essential precursor to the adoption of AI to drive the next stage of personalisation. CIOs and CTOs must work with heads of both marketing and sales organisations to ensure that technology infrastructure is geared towards a unified approach to revenue growth. The more integrated the technology, the more unified and available the data, the better the customer experience, and the better the analytics and attribution to satisfy everyone from the Chief Customer Officer to the CFO and CEO.

Target buying groups for growth marketing success

A buying group or committee is simply a group of senior stakeholders brought together by a business to make decisions about the purchase of a specific product or service. These groups have become common in recent years, meaning that B2B marketers increasingly need to have them in their sights. In APAC, B2B marketing leaders are more than four times more likely than laggards to be focusing their sales and marketing activities on these groups (34% vs. 8%, *Figure 7*).

Buying groups represent both the contacts marketers can target, and the opportunities sales teams are trying to close. Sales and marketing team members need to be able to assign contacts to the roles they have identified as part of the buying group within a prospect organisation. This requires the right software, and leaders are twice as likely as laggards to rate their marketing platform as 'good' in this area (78% vs. 38%, *Figure 16*). Meanwhile, analytics on buying groups provide a more accurate view of customers' intent to purchase, creating a feedback loop that will unlock true personalisation for B2B.

## Unify and activate customer data and insights across channels

A 360-degree view of the customer is fundamental for B2B companies striving to use AI to automate next-best communications and sales activities in real time. This customer profile can then be activated at all stages of the customer journey, whether for personalised messaging to prospects, or for more effective cross-selling and upselling of existing customers. Analysts and marketers are trying to understand the impact of paid, earned and owned digital channels as part of the wider customer journey. Building these comprehensive customer profiles in B2B requires a best-of-breed customer data platform and effective integration with your sales tech infrastructure.

Strive for revenue team convergence

Sales and marketing teams need to be as closely aligned as possible for truly effective revenue generation. This alignment should be based on a common view of the ideal customer profile (ICP), and a collaborative approach to identifying and targeting the right members of the buying group at each opportunity. Where traditional go-to-market strategies rely on static customer lists that are shared back and forth via email, a united revenue team approach operates in real time and wastes less resource on dead-end leads and uninterested customers.

Other functions such as product and customer success teams also need to be part of the revenue growth process. Their data and insights across the customer journey should augment those from marketing and sales.
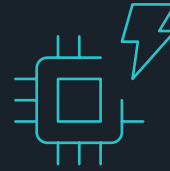
Don't delay your deployment of AI

Deployment of AI and GenAI is now accelerating everything from content creation and tagging, to conversational chatbots and real-time digital sales. Generative AI is also now playing a foundational role in helping B2B organisations deliver personalised digital experiences at scale. Large language models are being deployed to speed up how customer journeys are individuated, built, launched and measured. Leaders are more than five times more likely than laggards to say that AI is either BAU in their marketing activities, or has been operationalised into them (*Figure 11*). If you're not among those leaders, your first step should be to assess how your organisation is using AI, and what might be holding you back.

Methodology

This survey of 342 B2B professionals was carried out between May and July 2024. All respondents have responsibility for their companies' B2B customer journeys and experiences, working for companies across a range of industries including professional services, technology, manufacturing and financial services.

All respondents are based in APAC, including Australia and New Zealand (44%), India (19%) and Singapore (20%). Other respondents came from countries including China, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines.

Please see the Appendix below for more information about the profile of survey respondents. The report also contains insights from a series of in-depth interviews with a range of marketing leaders within APAC-based B2B-focused organisations.

Leaders vs. laggards

As part of our research methodology, we identified three distinct groups of organisations — 'leaders', 'followers' and 'laggards' — based on their perceived maturity across a range of marketing-related capabilities (*Figure 19*). These included campaign and customer journey orchestration, automation, optimisation, use of data and AI, and ability to measure ROI (see also *Figure 3*).

FIGURE 19

Maturity Index Distribution
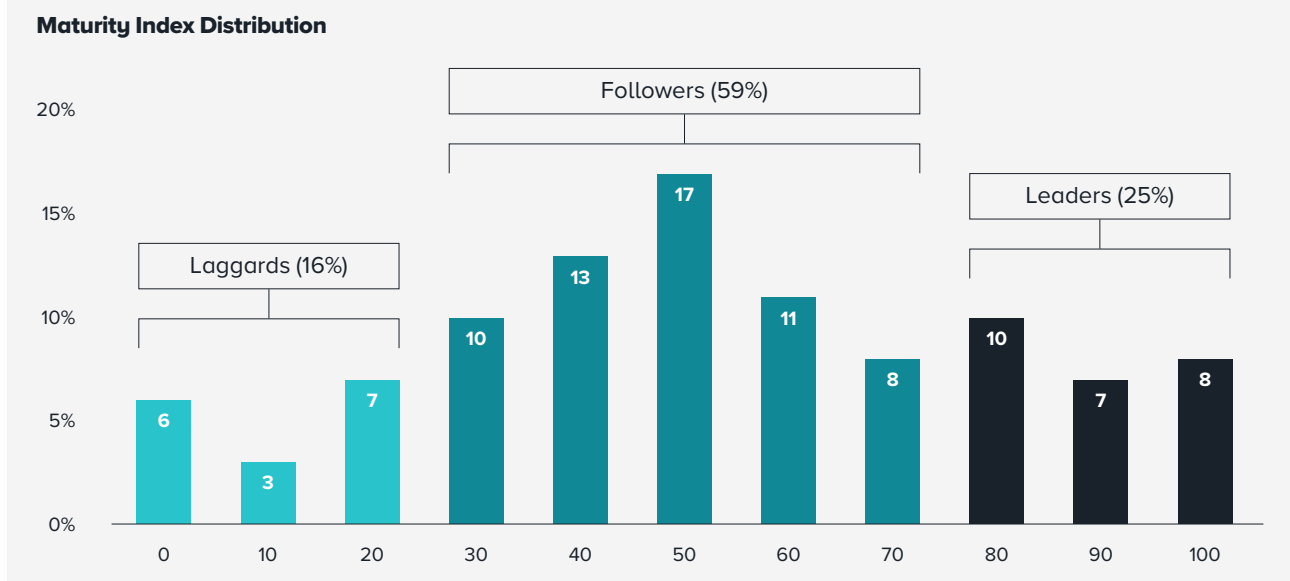
Appendix
Respondent profiles

Are you responsible for your company's B2B customer journeys and experiences?
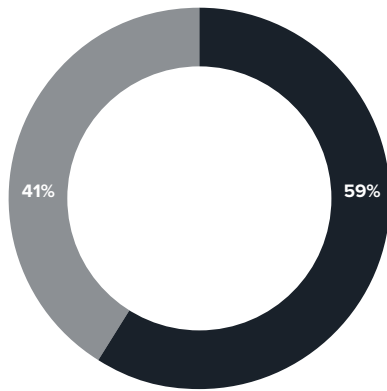
- Yes, fully responsible
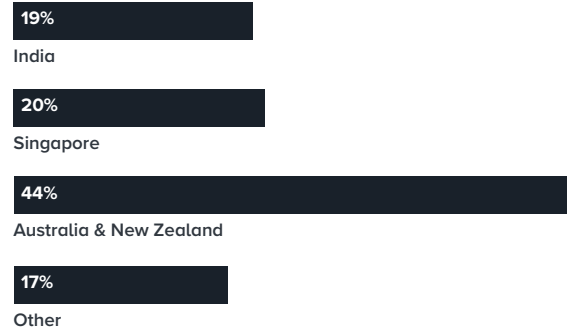- Yes, partly responsible

41%
59%

In which country are you based?

19%
India

20%
Singapore

44%
Australia & New Zealand

17%
Other

What is your annual company revenue? (USD)

31%
Less than $50 Million

24%
$50 Million - $99 Million

15%
$100 Million - $249 Million

13%
$250 Million - $499 Million

12%
$500 Million - $999 Million

5%
$1 Billion plus
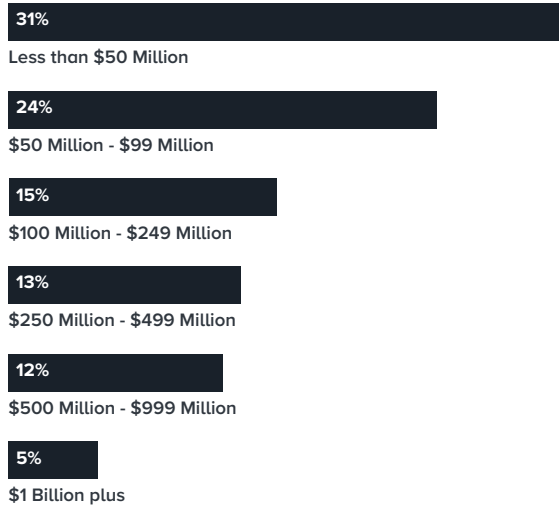
FIGURE 23

In which business sector does your organisation operate?

35%	Business & professional services
14%	Technology
9%	Retail
9%	Manufacturing
8%	Financial services and insurance
4%	Healthcare / Medical / Pharmaceutical
3%	Telecommunications
2%	Government and local authority
2%	Media and entertainment
2%	Higher education
2%	Charity / Non-profit
1%	Utilities
1%	Property
1%	Travel, leisure and hospitality
7%	Other
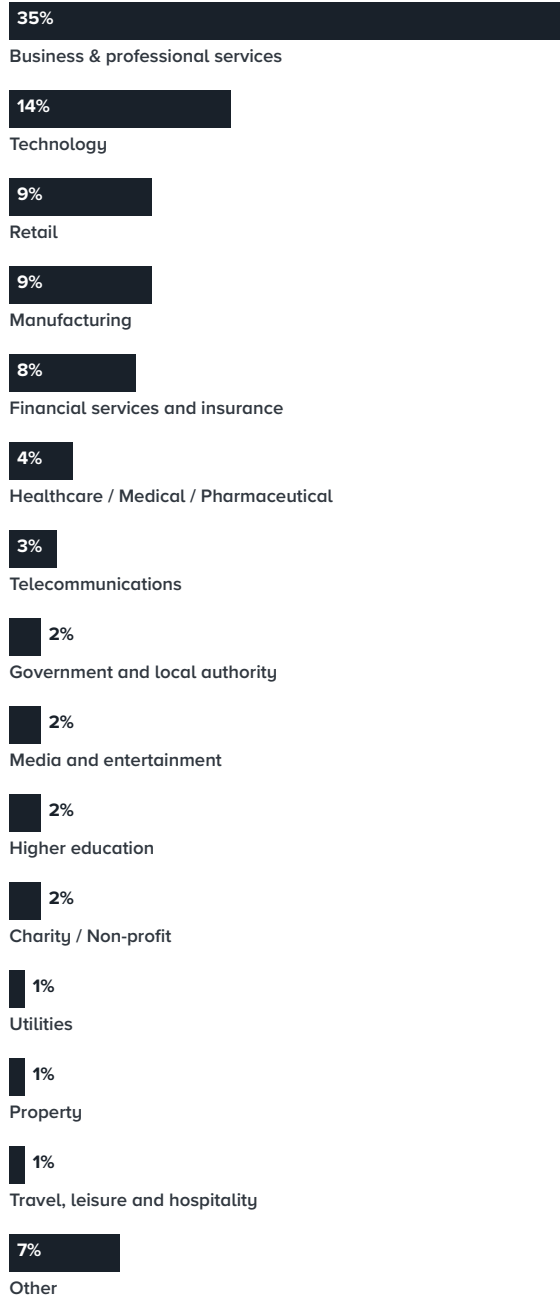
FIGURE 24

What is your level of seniority within the business?

26%	Manager
21%	Senior manager
21%	C-level
17%	Junior executive
15%	Director / Head of department

FIGURE 25

What job function do you work in?

18%	Business development
18%	Operations
15%	Marketing
14%	IT
11%	Revenue / sales
7%	Commerce / ecommerce
7%	Data analytics / data science
5%	Business intelligence
5%	Other
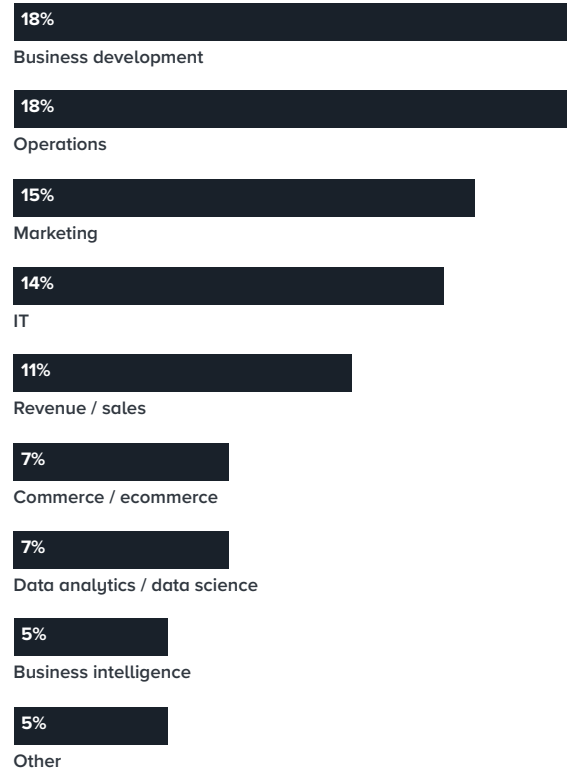
About the authors

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Linus is Co-Founder of London Research and a renowned tech industry analyst who has spent more than 20 years producing content for industry giants such as Adobe, Microsoft, Oracle and Salesforce. He has overseen the publication of hundreds of research-based reports, and is a sought-after speaker for webinars and events internationally.

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Before that he was editor of New Media Age, the UK's leading news publication for interactive business from 2000 to 2007, and its editor-in-chief from 2007 to 2011. He has written widely about the sector, is a regular speaker in the media and at conferences, and has lectured on the future of advertising and publishing at the London College of Communications.

About us

London Research produces insight-driven content for B2B professionals, helping them make better, more informed decisions. Our clients are typically market-leading international technology businesses and global agencies. We help them tell compelling stories based on robust research and insightful data points. As part of Demand Exchange, not only do we create valuable content, we're able to syndicate it so that it informs buyers and aids their decision making at every stage of the customer journey.

B2B buyers today are digital-first, they expect their vendors to understand them and deliver digital experiences that are tailored to their industry, role and preferences. And they want to progress through the majority of their buyer's journey before engaging with Sales. This places a huge burden on B2B Marketers to help them do so. Marketers must understand their contacts and accounts deeply, create offers that are tailor-made for their target audience and ensure they meet their buyers in the channels that matter most — and do all this with tight budgets and tighter timelines.

To address the requirements of today's B2B Marketer Adobe has brought together data, content, web, commerce, customer journey and analytics technology to provide the most comprehensive B2B marketing solution available today.