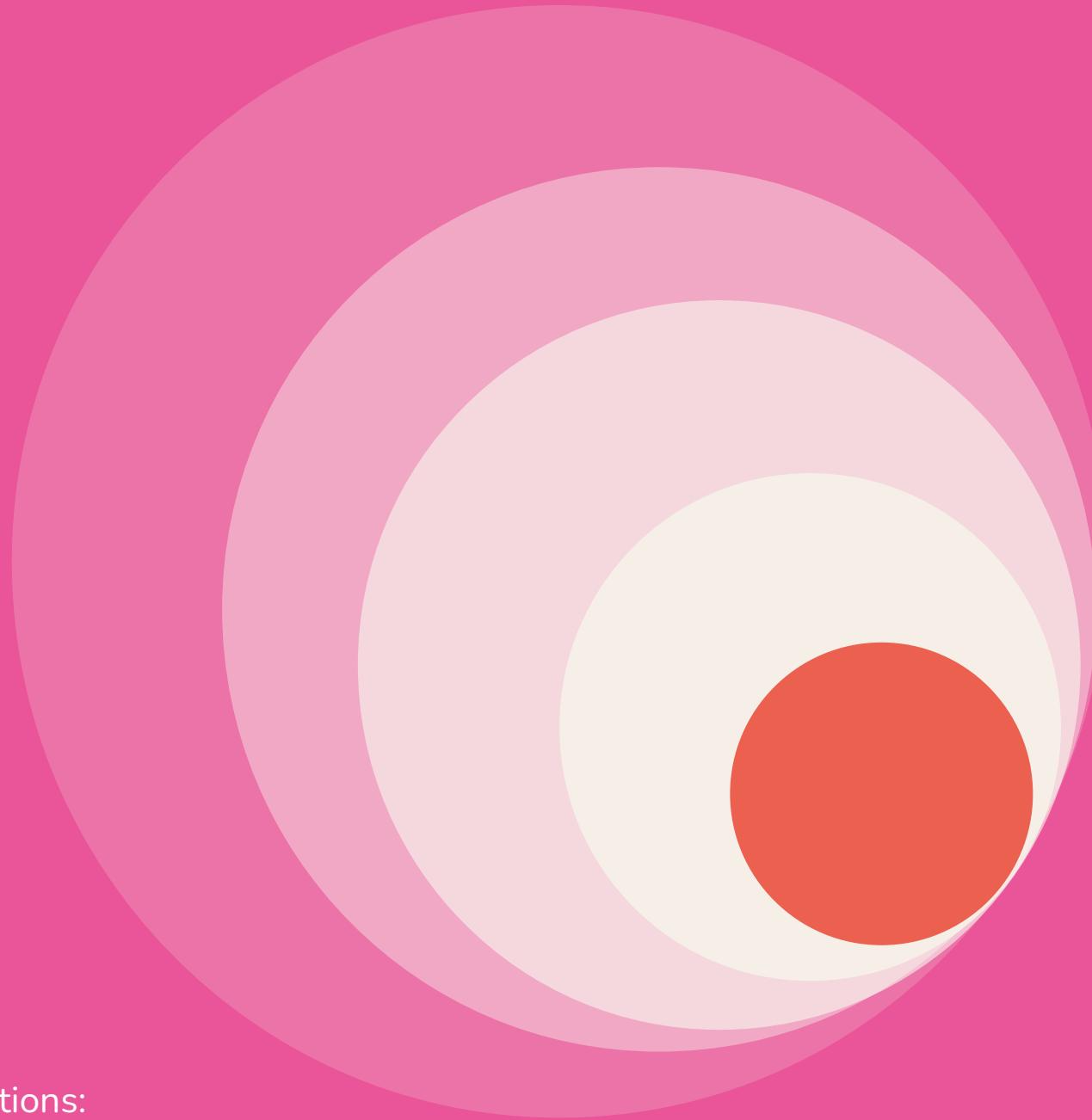




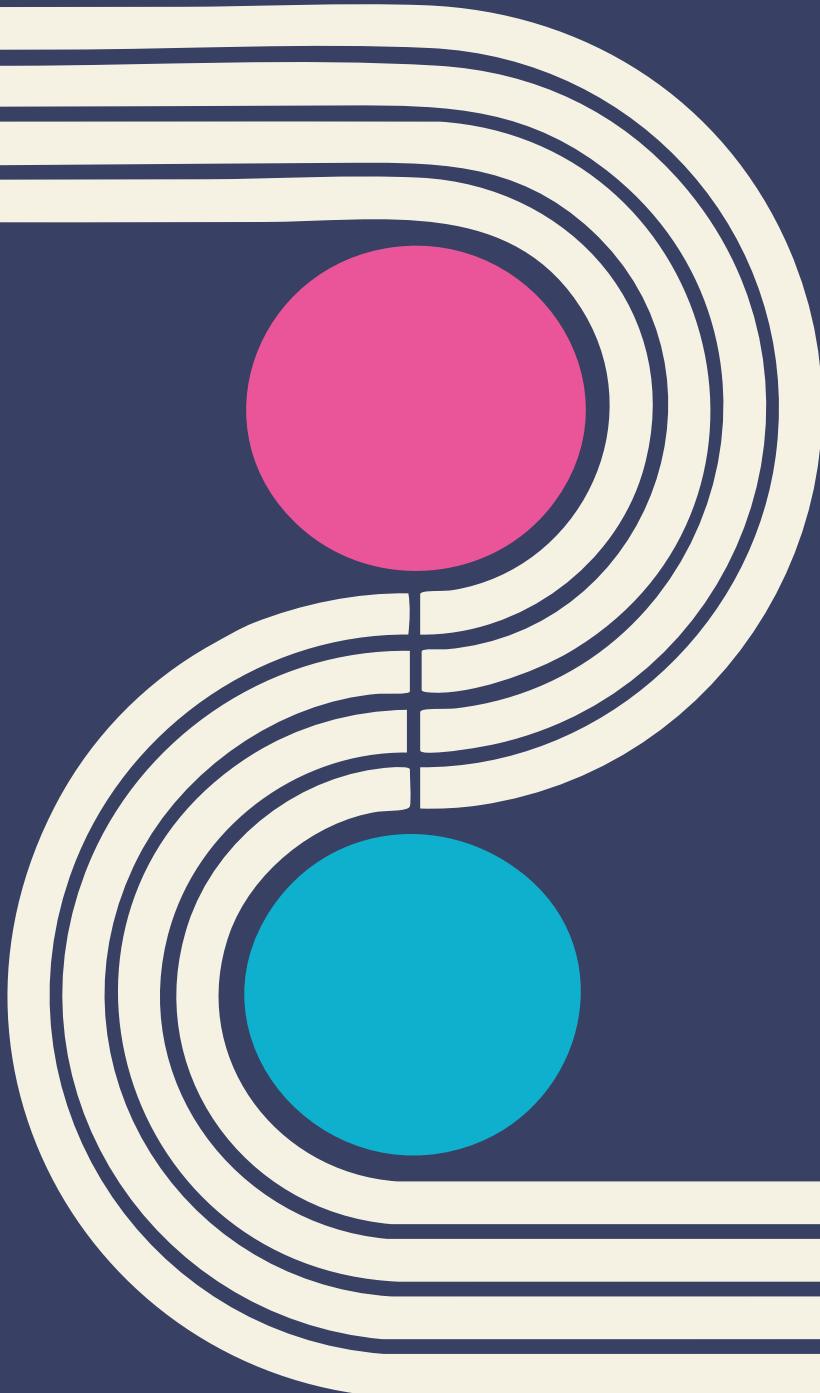
# The State of Prospecting 2026

From cold outreach to real conversations:  
the data and strategies shaping modern outreach



[sopro.io](https://sopro.io)

Built on insights from **442 senior B2B decision-makers**, analysis of **126 million emails**, and more than **25 million multi-channel touchpoints** and **intent signals**, paired with strategies from today's **leading outreach experts**.



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# Foreword

## Prospecting has never been tougher to get right, or more critical to growing your business.

AI has made it easier than ever to send messages and harder than ever to stand out. Buyers are harder to reach and harder to influence. But outreach isn't broken. It just hasn't kept pace with the evolution of buyer behaviour.

More research happens before a message. More decisions are made before a meeting. More brands are ruled out before they even know they were considered. The challenge isn't reaching people. It is being relevant at the moment they are ready.

So what actually works now? The data in this report points to three things the top performers have in common. They know exactly who they need to reach and keep that audience clean, complete, and current. They stay visible consistently, not just when pipeline dips. And they make every touch feel relevant, credible, and worth replying to.

Everything else - channels, copy style, AI tools, timing - only works once those foundations are in place. Without them, the tactics do not matter.

This report breaks down how the best teams are adapting. You will find data, patterns, and practical takeaways, but also something more valuable: clarity. A grounded view of what now works, what no longer does, and why some teams continue to outperform even in tougher conditions.

If prospecting still feels unpredictable, expensive, or harder than it should be, this report shows what has changed and what to do next.



*Rob Harlow*  
CEO, Sopro



*Ryan Welmans*  
Chairman, Sopro



# Key findings

## 1 Buyers decide when the conversation starts

Self-directed research, closed platforms, and AI-driven evaluations mean decisions often form before outreach is answered. Prospecting must align with how buyers already behave.

## 2 Brand familiarity and consistent outreach lift performance

When buyers recognise the sender, reply rates, meeting rates and deal velocity increase. Visibility isn't cosmetic – it's commercial.

## 3 Quality beats quantity every time

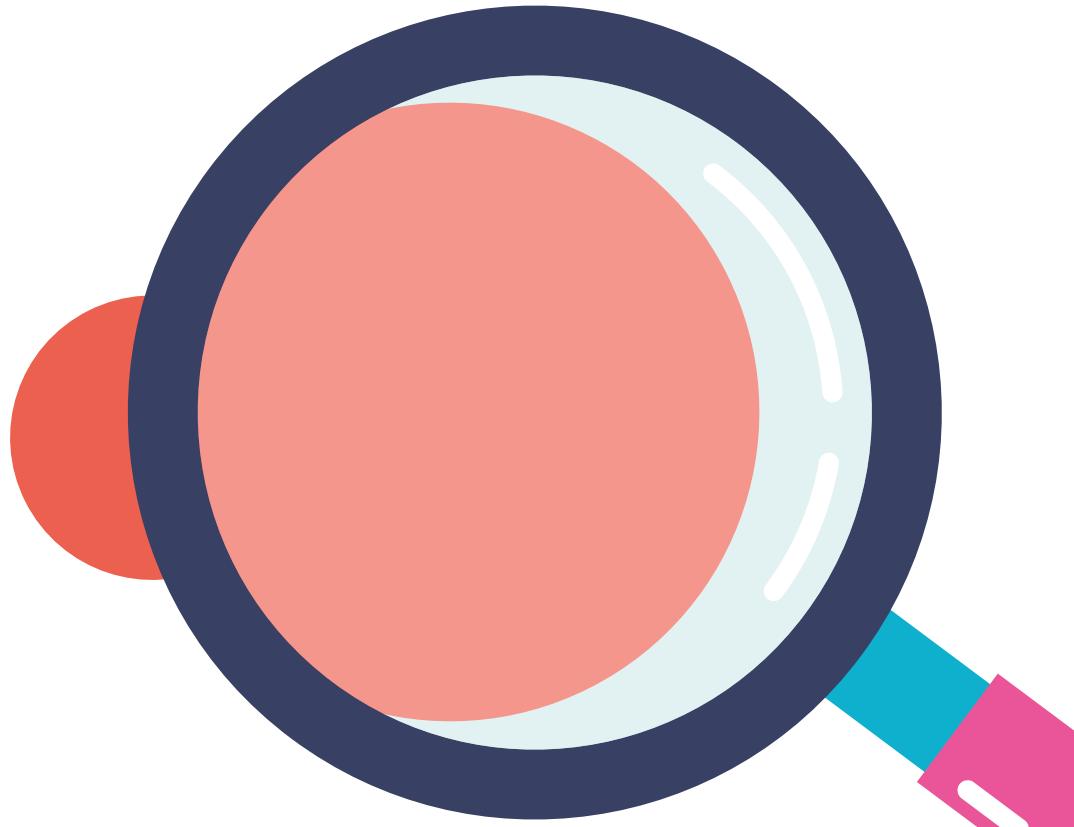
Sharper audience definition improves inbox placement, boosts engagement, and makes messaging feel relevant. The best results come from tighter lists, not bigger sends.

## 4 Integration beats accumulation

Most companies have the right tools, but not the integration. The strongest performers unify channels, workflows, and reporting around a single view of the buyer.

## 5 In an AI-driven world, people still buy from people

Automation can start conversations, but humans close them. Credibility, proof, and real responses now separate meaningful engagement from ignored noise.



# The sales landscape

## Performance



**40%**

exceeding their  
new-business  
targets

**21%**

are below their  
new-business  
targets

## Top areas for investment next year

**68%**

Outbound  
marketing

**68%**

AI content  
generation

**67%**

AI for prospecting/  
personalisation

## Prospecting and growth strategy

**89%** say prospecting is **essential** for new business

**89%**

call it "core,  
always-on"

**43%**

run it seasonally  
or selectively

**4%**

are not running  
any outbound  
activity

# The sales landscape

## Top lead gen channels



56%  
Referrals

78%  
Email

51%  
Paid social media

## Outreach complexity



58%

use multiple outreach channels...



87%

use intent signals in some form...

...but only

21%

coordinate across channels



...but under half of them trigger or tailor outreach



## Buyer behaviour

84%

of companies involve more than one person in their purchase decisions

59%

say buyers have tighter budgets

58%

say there is more competition

44%

say decision times are longer

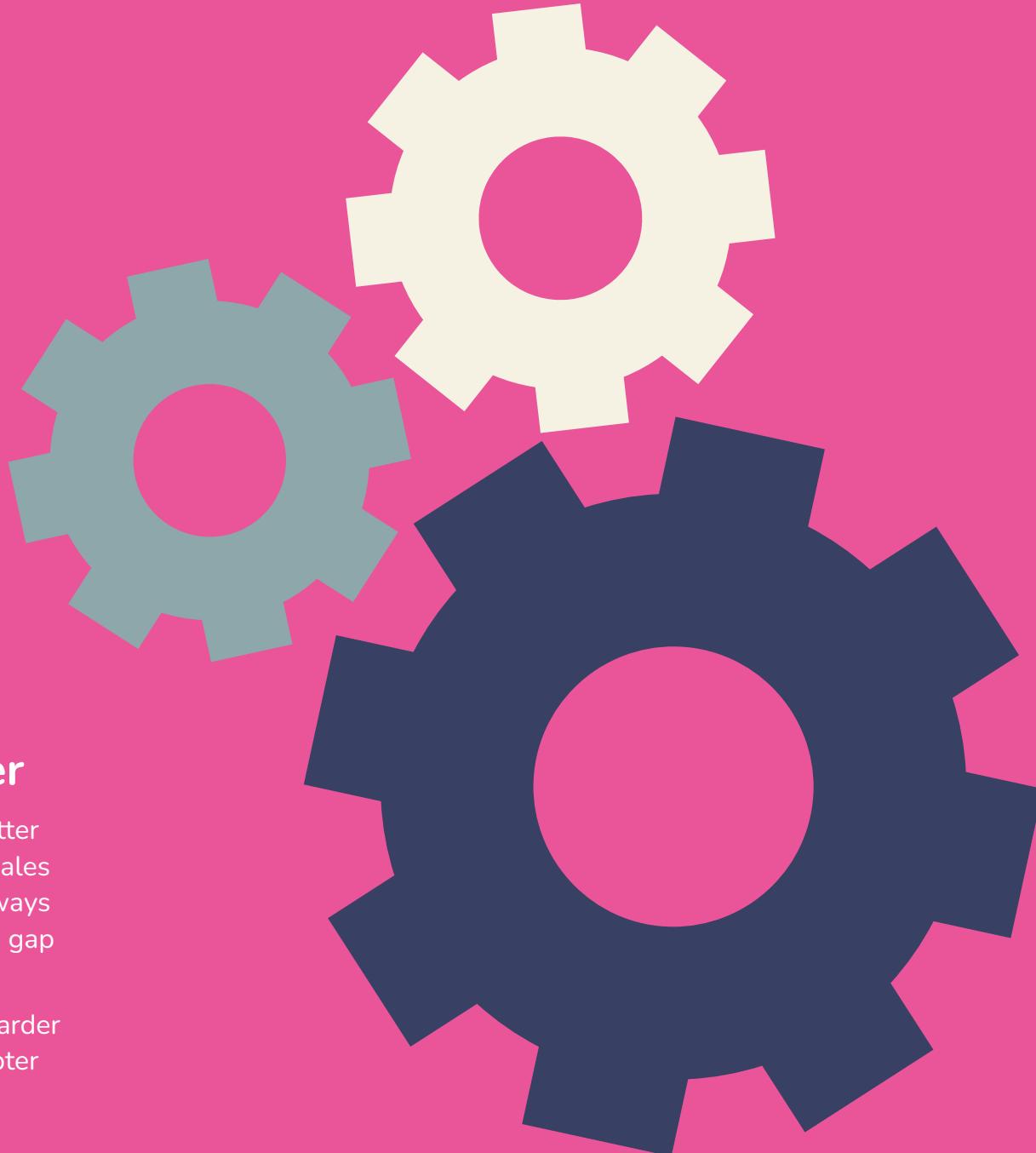
# Prospecting challenges

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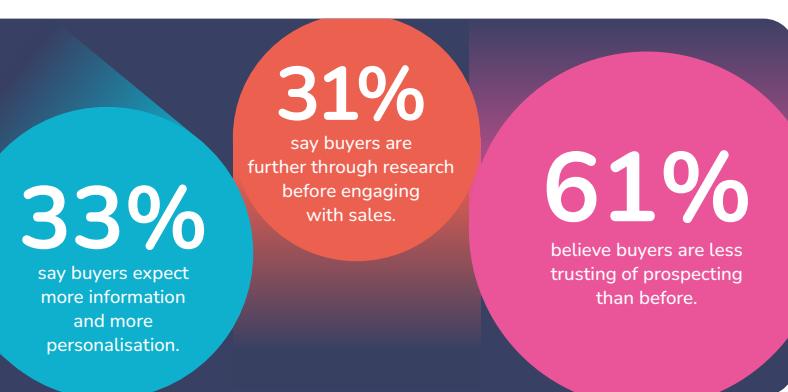
### Why outreach is harder than ever

B2B prospecting has never been tougher. Buyers are better informed, harder to reach, and increasingly sceptical of sales teams. At the same time, technology has created more ways to connect, but also more noise. The result is a widening gap between how buyers buy and how sellers sell.

Across every stage of the journey outreach must work harder to earn trust, prove relevance, and stay visible. This chapter explores the six forces reshaping modern outreach.



# 1. The empowered buyer: in control, out of reach



## How buyers really buy

Today's B2B buyers are informed, empowered, and independent. They conduct the majority of their research on their own, long before speaking to a sales team.

Remember the [95/5 rule](#)? It turns out that many of the 95% are quietly researching. Quietly is key here: the rise of AI has amplified buyer independence, turning desk research into an efficient, self-directed process. [Forrester reports](#) that 89% of B2B buyers use generative AI in at least one area of their purchasing process, from discovering potential vendors to evaluating and justifying their decisions.

As [6sense data](#) shows, buyers are typically 70% through their journey before they engage sales. And by the time buyers do engage sellers, their preferences are largely set. At that point, 81% already have a preferred vendor, and changing their mind is a tall order.





## 2. The complexity reality: more people, slower progress



### Why deals are slower and harder

B2B buying decisions are long and complex processes that involve multiple stakeholders and departments. While the exact number depends on company size, deal complexity and more, our survey shows an average of 4.05 people, with 18% of companies reporting six or more. Complex decisions can have double the average number of decision makers.

The dominant force driving this is the generational shift in leadership: Millennials and Gen Z now make up **71% of buyers**, and they typically involve twice as many stakeholders as older executives. They are also digitally fluent, so are driving that AI research.

Deal complexity doesn't end there. 59% say buyers have tighter budgets (down 6 percentage points on last year), 44% say decision times are longer (up 9 points) and 58% say more solutions are considered (up 13 points). 43% experience leads going silent mid-process (up 11), and 34% face more decision-makers in deals (up 8).

### 3. The timing gap: outreach and buying cycles are misaligned



#### Why sellers miss the moment

The length of B2B buying cycles varies widely, but one thing is clear: complexity is making them longer. Benchmarks suggest the average cycle spans anywhere from [three](#) to [eleven months](#), and our data shows one in five (20%) deals take over a year to complete.

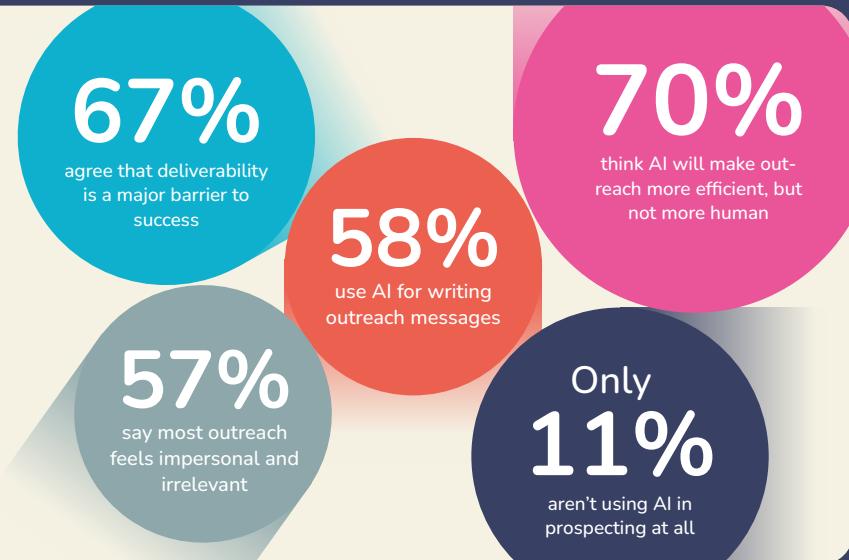
The process itself splits into two phases: a **Selection Phase**, which covers roughly the first 70% of the journey (when buyers are researching, comparing, and shortlisting); and a **Validation Phase**, the final 30% (when they engage with vendors to confirm their choice).

This mismatch often leaves sellers chasing shadows. Short-term cadences and campaign windows end long before the buyer is ready to engage. Leads captured early in their research are left to go cold, only to resurface months later - often in a competitor's pipeline.



## 4. The noise overload: automation without value

### Sopro Survey

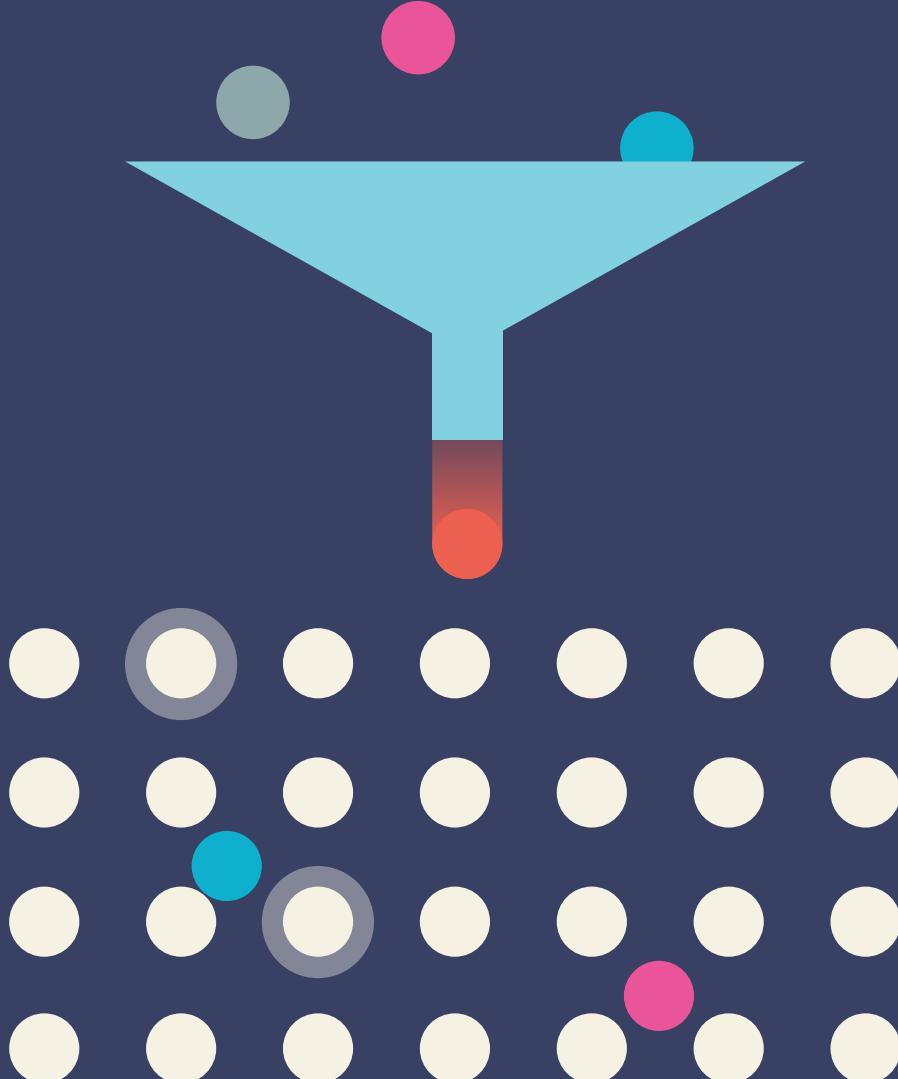


### How buyers really buy

AI and automation have transformed prospecting, but not in the way most hoped. For many teams, they've simply made it easier to send more messages, faster. The result is a flood of low-quality outreach that overwhelms buyers and erodes attention.

But it's not just inbox fatigue - it's deliverability itself. The sheer volume of emails has triggered tighter rules, meaning fewer messages even make it to the inbox. Those that do often compete in an overcrowded space where buyers tune out anything that feels generic.

For the buyer, it's exhausting. Their inbox is full, and their patience is thin. This flood has coincided with a time when they need vendor input less than ever. Making them want to talk to you? That depends on genuine relevance: understanding who they are, what they care about, and where they are in their decision-making.



## 5. The erosion of trust: brand, credibility, and human touch



### Why familiarity wins

In a crowded market, familiarity is everything. Buyers are far more likely to engage with companies they recognise. When inboxes overflow and every message looks the same, awareness and credibility become the filters that decide who earns attention.

Our data shows it clearly. Buyers are less trusting of prospecting than before, and deals commonly stall due to a lack of confidence in the provider. The top factors influencing provider choice - recommendations, case studies, and brand familiarity - all point to one thing: people want evidence they can trust a potential partner.

External research supports this shift. LinkedIn's [B2B Trends 2030](#) report shows that fame and familiarity are the strongest predictors of growth. Brands that build recognition before outreach see response rates increase by up to 150% when prospects are already aware of them. In other words, awareness doesn't just drive preference: it drives performance.



Familiarity gives people a sense of safety. It slips into our subconscious. When something feels known, you trust it more. We talk about rational decisions, but emotion is just as important.

Lynn Lester,  
Senior Vice President  
Events & Marketing | The Drum



## 6. The tech imbalance: too many tools, not enough integration



### How fragmentation holds teams back

Technology should make prospecting smarter. Instead, for many teams, it's made it harder to manage. Sales and marketing now use a growing mix of AI tools, CRM platforms, analytics dashboards, and automation software, but few of these systems connect cleanly.

What should be one continuous outreach process often becomes a series of disjointed efforts.

The result is a patchwork of tools, teams, and data. Our research shows the scale of fragmentation: B2B teams use an average of 3.1 different outreach methods, often blending manual efforts, in-house campaigns, and agency partners. Campaigns run in parallel rather than in sync. Insights from one channel never reach another. Reporting is partial, attribution is unclear, and performance is hard to measure. Instead of empowering prospecting, technology has created layers of friction that slow everything down.

The industry evidence points to the same issue. Forrester (2024) finds that fragmented martech stacks are one of the biggest barriers to sales and marketing alignment, and that unified revenue operations models deliver up to 19% faster growth. In prospecting terms, integration means precision: one view of the buyer, one strategy, and one rhythm across every channel. Without it, even the best tools underperform.



In B2B sales, success isn't about pushing for immediate results. It's about understanding the long sales cycle, staying visible, and nurturing relationships over time. The key is to remain relevant and present, without overwhelming the prospect, until the timing is right for them. Prospecting continues to evolve, but the fundamentals of building trust and maintaining consistent, thoughtful engagement remain as important as ever.

Paul Sherwood,  
Sales Manager | Unibox

“



## Case study



Neighbourhood Watch partnered with Sopro to expand its corporate reach. Sopro's multi-channel outreach secured mission-aligned sponsorships across multiple sectors and delivered a consistent flow of high-value leads, supported by a lead-scoring system built for long-term growth.

*"The response was overwhelming in the best way possible. We expanded our corporate relationships in ways we hadn't been able to before. It's been incredibly successful."*

John Hayward-Cripps | CEO  
Neighbourhood Watch

# Why traditional outreach falls short

### A playbook built for another era

Outreach itself hasn't stopped working, but the old playbook has. Traditional prospecting models were built for a simpler time: one buyer, one message sequence, one channel.

As we've seen, the modern buyer moves in committees, researches independently, and expects every interaction to be relevant. Yet most outreach systems are built for speed, not understanding. The result is a flood of messages that reach everyone but connect with no one.

To build a better outreach engine, check out our free guide.



## The education myth

Most outreach still assumes buyers are waiting to be educated. They're not. By the time a message reaches them, they've done their research and formed opinions about what they need.

Explainers fall flat. It's like being lectured on a topic you already know. Modern buyers don't need to learn at this stage; they want confidence that you understand their world.

## The single-contact trap

Older outreach strategies target a single "decision-maker." But in modern B2B sales, there rarely is one. An average of four people now influence each deal, and enterprise decisions can involve twice that.

Relying on one contact - often the most visible senior lead or budget holder - ignores the internal network of influencers, analysts, and end-users who shape the outcome. When outreach doesn't reach the full buying group, information splinters and deals stall.

## The short-term mindset

Traditional outreach still runs on campaign bursts: a few weeks of activity, followed by silence. Meanwhile, the average buying journey stretches over months.

When campaigns stop long before buyers are ready to talk, your brand slips from view and from memory. Modern outreach should work as infrastructure, not in case of emergency break glass.

Consistency matters, but so does balance. Always-on outreach isn't about volume; it's about being memorable without being a nuisance.

## The automation problem

Automation was meant to make prospecting smarter. In reality, it often just makes it noisier.

AI tools have made it easier to send thousands of messages in seconds, but most are generic pitches with low-grade personalization. The word itself has lost meaning - names and job titles pasted into otherwise identical emails.

The result? Diminishing returns, rising fatigue, and tightening deliverability rules.



There's always been noise in B2B outreach. But the rise of automation opened the floodgates, turning a stream of messages into a tsunami. In a world where scale is cheap, the only way to break through is by sending fewer, hyper-targeted messages that are truly relevant. Relevance is now the real competitive advantage.

Ryan Welmans,  
Chairman | Sopro



## The credibility deficit

Every inbox is crowded, every claim sounds familiar. Buyers default to what feels safe: the brands they recognise and the people they already trust.

Traditional outreach treats every interaction as a cold start, expecting trust to form in one message. But obviously credibility doesn't appear on demand. It's built through authority, relevance, and proof over time.

Without earlier brand presence or supporting content, even the best-written email feels like a gamble, and most buyers won't take that risk.

## The coordination failure

Behind the scenes, sales and marketing systems are often disconnected.

Teams use lots of different tools, but they don't talk to each other. What you learn in one channel never reaches the others. The result is outreach that feels messy, hard to measure, difficult to grow, and easy to waste.

Technology isn't the problem; orchestration is. It extends to teams, channels, tech, and data. Inbound and outbound. Brand building and sales activation. If they don't work together, even strong outreach strategies fall apart.

These failures all have one thing in common: traditional outreach was never built for today's buyer. It prioritised quantity, not quality.

To perform in the modern market, outreach needs rebuilding from the ground up to reflect how buyers actually buy, not how sellers wish they did.

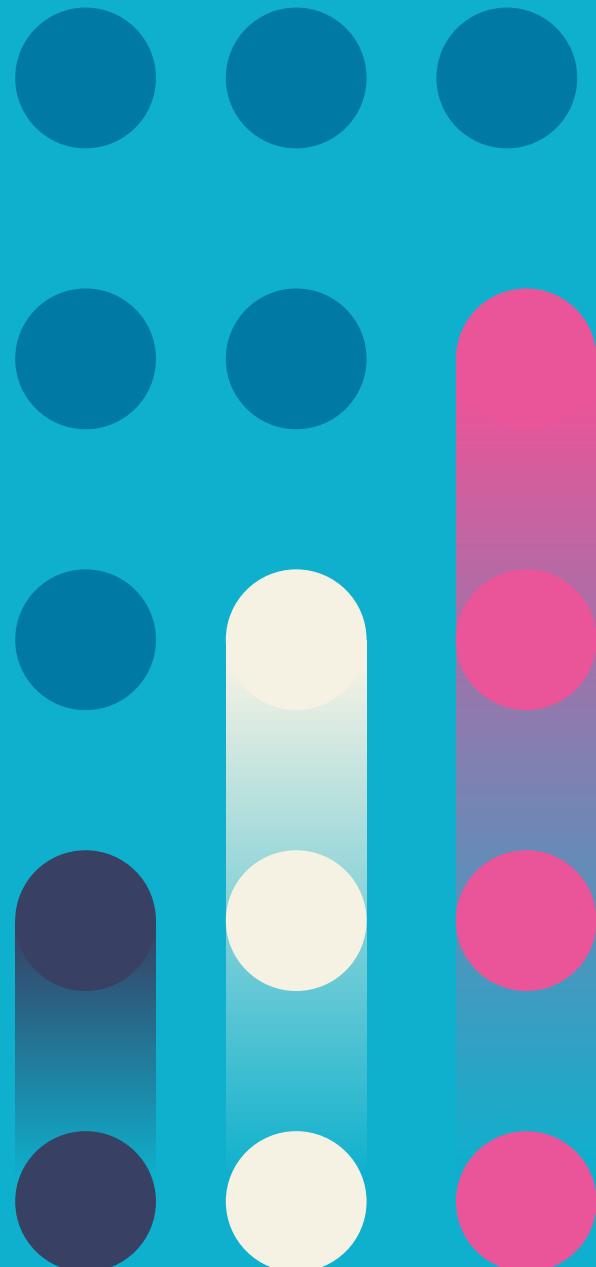
# The three pillars of modern outreach

## Building outreach that works today

The challenges are clear, and the old playbook can't keep up. Modern outreach needs a new foundation: a connected system that joins every part of the process and mirrors how buyers want to engage, not how sellers want to sell.

This chapter explores the three pillars of effective prospecting today: coverage, which is how you identify and reach all the relevant individuals in your market; relevance, which is how you engage each buyer with value through timing and context; and consistency, which is how you maintain visibility throughout the long buying journey.

Within each pillar sit the tactics, data, and systems that bring modern outreach to life. Together, they form the framework for scalable, coordinated prospecting that reflects how buyers actually buy.

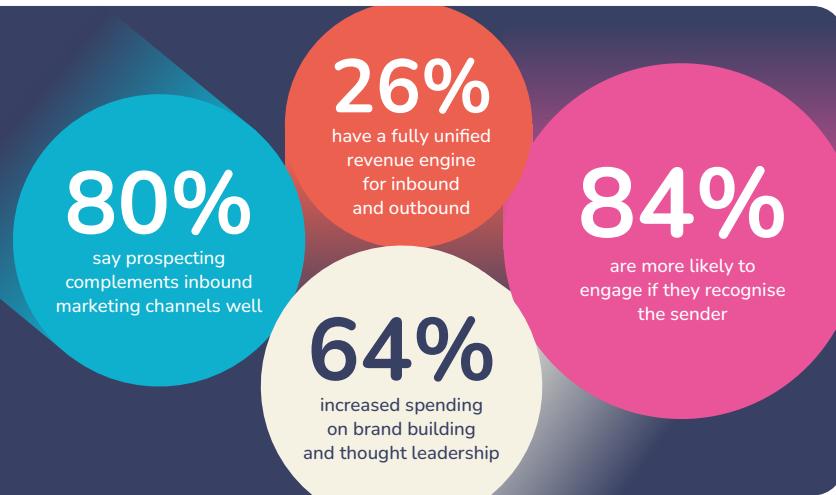


## 1. Coverage

**Coverage is about reaching your entire addressable market, not just a narrow slice of it. It means identifying every relevant company and all the people within them that influence the decision, then ensuring your outreach connects with all of them in the right way.**

But coverage isn't about sending more emails; it's about ensuring no part of your market is missed. Most outreach models leave up to 40% of the TAM untouched. True coverage comes from strategically mapping your market, engaging every influencer in the buying group, and staying visible across channels so no opportunity is left untapped.

## Building brand visibility for long-term success



We know most buyers aren't in-market at any given time. For prospecting, that means visibility matters long before a buyer is ready to talk. Today's buyers are independent and informed, and have often made up their minds before speaking to sales.

Brand presence goes beyond awareness. It makes every outreach touchpoint more effective. When buyers already recognise your company, your message feels more credible and worth their time. The mere exposure effect shows that familiarity alone can build preference. People gravitate towards what they recognise.

Sopro campaign data backs this up: Companies that visit your website before outreach are nearly three times more likely to become leads when you do contact them. Awareness doesn't just drive preference; it drives performance.

Research from the LinkedIn B2B Institute and Dentsu's B2B Superpowers Index shows that buyers are far more likely to respond when a brand feels consistent across every touchpoint. A strong brand means more inbound, warmer outbound, and bigger deals.

### Best practice

Invest in brand building. Create authoritative, original, memorable content. Aim to connect this activity with your prospecting so your audience sees your brand before, during, and after outreach, building familiarity and trust. Sopro's Adsync feature lets you export your prospecting audience directly into Google, LinkedIn, and Meta ad platforms to ensure your exact audience sees your brand across multiple touchpoints.

In a market where buyers are researching brands long before contact, your brand's visibility and credibility are your competitive edge. In this zero-click, LLM-powered world, you need to be found, trusted and remembered across all touchpoints. Your brand does the heavy lifting long before buyers ever talk to you.

**Beth Crowe,**  
Head of Business Development | Digitaloft



## Reach the whole market, not the same inboxes

Over-contacted prospects are twice as likely to reply, but half as likely to convert compared to fresh prospects

**61%**

say their prospecting does not cover all of their TAM

Every business wants to reach its entire addressable market. But in reality, most are fighting over the same smaller slice. Prospecting tools pull from similar databases, meaning competitors frequently contact the same individuals first.

The result? Some prospects are bombarded, while others are barely touched. A few suffer inbox fatigue; the rest never even hear from you.

True coverage begins with building a comprehensive and accurate view of your Total Addressable Market and keeping it updated. Ideally, your TAM needs a dedicated space to live: housing your audience before, during, and after outreach, enriched with data, intent signals, and updates over time. That's not your CRM, which hosts your post-lead data.

Instead of relying on static data or recycled lists, live-built, enriched prospecting data ensures you reach every relevant company and contact, not just those sitting at the top of everyone's search results. It brings visibility across every campaign and prevents gaps in coverage.



### Best practice

Build your TAM as a complete, living view of your audience. Start with clean, accurate data, carefully curated and segmented by ICP and market. Use this view to plan outreach strategically, defining how each segment should be approached and in what order. Before each new campaign or batch, refresh your data so it reflects the latest signals, role changes, and company updates.

Sopro does all this, ensuring outreach covers your full market rather than recycling the same overused contacts your competitors rely on.

Market Navigator Tool

# Your entire market. Mapped in 20 seconds.

Enter your website URL and get a free bespoke report. We'll profile your business, map your audience, and forecast your campaign results.

- Understand the **real size** of your **addressable market**
- See which **industries**, **company sizes**, and **regions** to target
- **Spot the market signals** and trends shaping your sales
- Get a **campaign projection** based on **real results**

You're already reading the whitepaper. You may as well build your perfect audience next.

Get your free Market Insights Report



\*This advert was brought to you by the same people who wrote the report you're holding. At least we're honest about it.

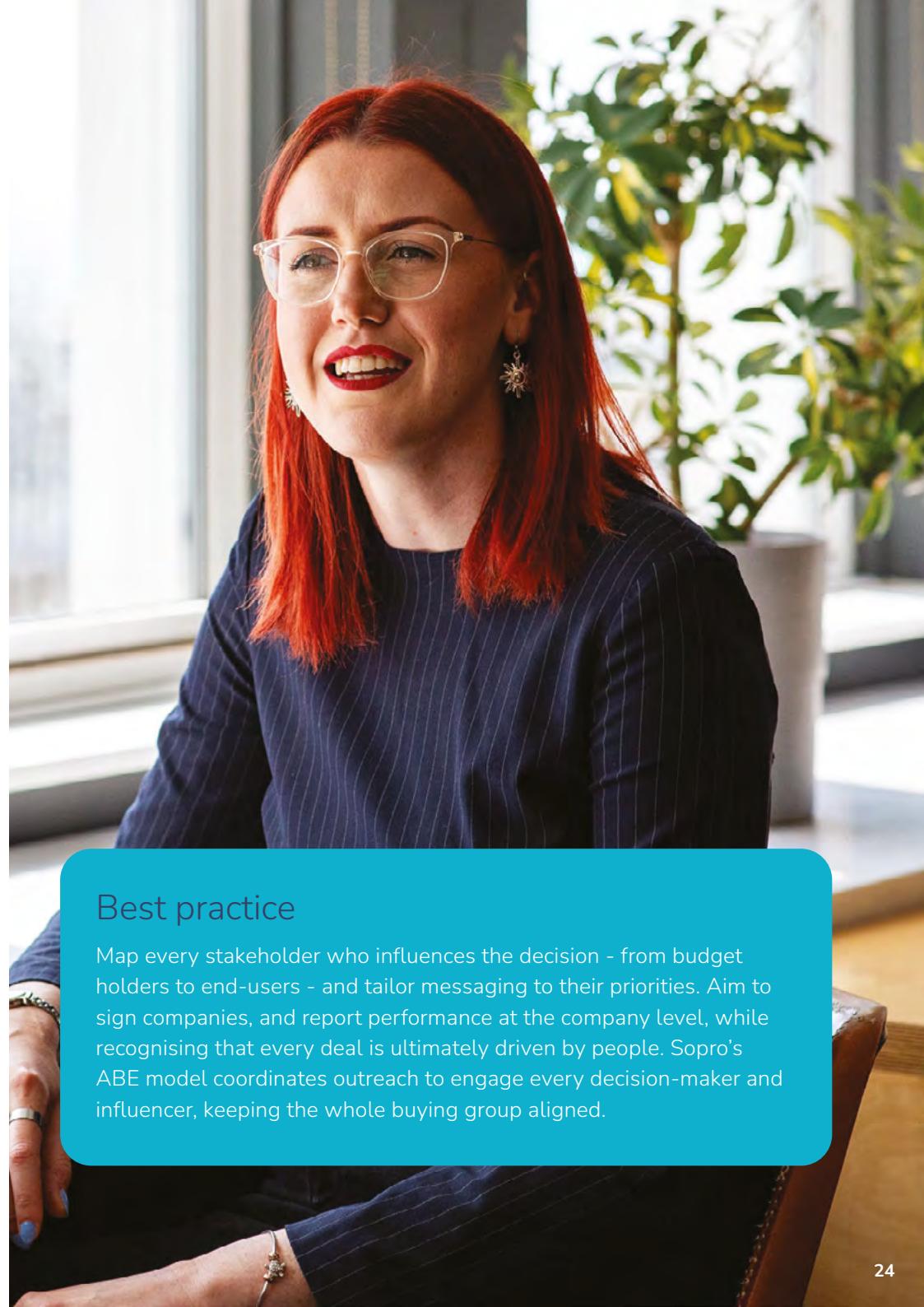
## Engage the full buying group



B2B purchases are now group decisions. The average buying committee includes at least four stakeholders, often more. Yet many outreach strategies still target one contact - typically the final approver - and ignore the colleagues who shape the decision earlier.

**Account-Based Engagement (ABE) widens that focus.** It connects with every key player: finance and procurement teams, technical experts, end-users, and compliance reviewers. Each has different priorities - ROI, risk, practicality, or fit - and each needs relevant information to stay aligned.

Multi-threaded outreach ensures that every stakeholder has a reason to engage. It prevents deals from stalling when one person goes quiet or another raises new objections. In short, ABE turns one conversation into many, helping keep the buying group moving together.



### Best practice

Map every stakeholder who influences the decision - from budget holders to end-users - and tailor messaging to their priorities. Aim to sign companies, and report performance at the company level, while recognising that every deal is ultimately driven by people. Sopro's ABE model coordinates outreach to engage every decision-maker and influencer, keeping the whole buying group aligned.



## Being present across channels



Modern buyers don't stick to a single channel. To achieve full coverage, your outreach needs to follow that same path.

But multi-channel engagement doesn't just extend reach; it strengthens recall. Seeing consistent messages across different contexts makes them easier to remember - an effect cognitive psychologists call the encoding variability hypothesis. When buyers encounter your message in multiple places, it sticks.

By meeting people where they already are, you increase visibility across the whole buying group and at every stage of the journey. Coordinating these touchpoints turns visibility into recognition into action. A connected, multi-channel presence keeps your brand front of mind and ensures you're there when prospects are ready to take the next step.

### Best practice

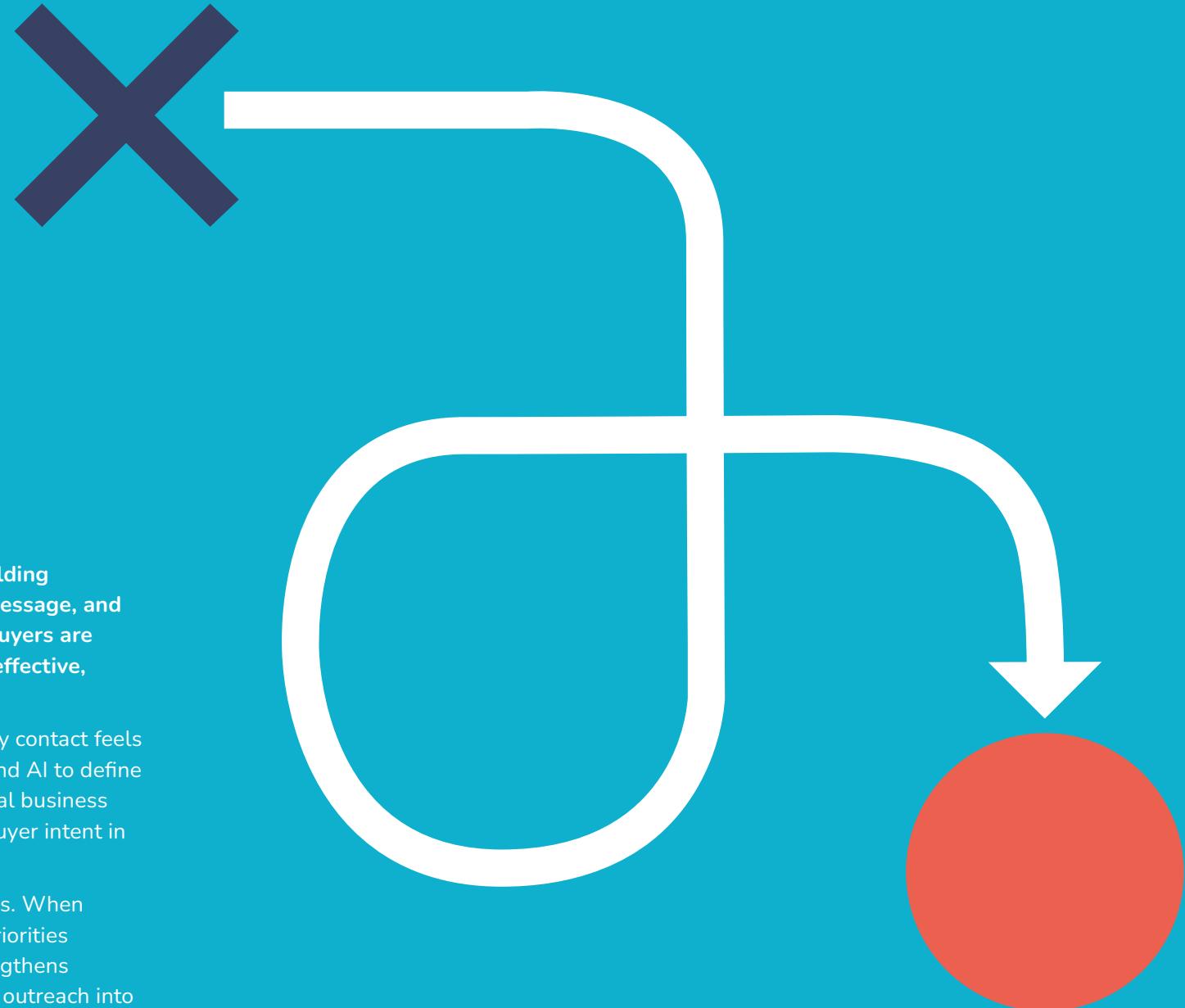
Take a connected approach to outreach. Coordinate activity across every channel your buyers use, maintaining a consistent presence and building familiarity from first touch to final decision. Sopro campaigns connect email, LinkedIn, and website engagement with optional gifting and direct mail and provide the data and support to run targeted ads and phone outreach.

## 2. Relevance

Relevance is about precision. About building better audiences, personalising every message, and acting on the signals that show when buyers are ready to engage. It's the foundation of effective, respectful outreach.

Modern prospecting succeeds when every contact feels intentional. That means using live data and AI to define the right audience, tailoring content to real business challenges, and responding to genuine buyer intent in real time.

This shift isn't about scale; it's about focus. When outreach speaks directly to the buyer's priorities and arrives when it's most useful, it strengthens deliverability, builds trust, and turns cold outreach into warm opportunity.



## Building better audiences



If coverage is about reaching every potential buyer, relevance is about refining who really matters. It's as much about the people you don't include as the ones you do.

With live data and AI filtering, audiences can now be defined with surgical precision. Suitability can be assessed in ways that were never possible before, excluding poor-fit clusters based on product nuances, business structure, or growth patterns rather than just firmographics.

That precision doesn't just improve performance. Deliverability is no longer a simply technical issue; it's behavioural. The technical setup is just the baseline. If your domain isn't configured correctly, nothing gets through. But once that's in place, behaviour decides the outcome: irrelevant outreach gets flagged as spam, while targeted messages land, complaint rates fall, inbox placement improves, and engagement rises.

Smarter targeting means stronger results in performance, reputation, and pipeline. This is what real scale looks like: smaller, sharper audiences that deliver bigger impact. To prove this, we analysed thousands of Sopro (internal) campaigns and used AI to filter audiences by true suitability, not just surface-level fit. The lead rate barely changed, but the true impact was dramatic: leads from the refined audience were 356% more likely to convert into closed deals.

## Best practice

Use live data to build your audience, starting with traditional firmographic filters to define your market. Then use AI to enrich that database with new data points and further filter out unsuitable companies, tightening your targeting even further. Map every relevant company and decision-maker so your outreach stays precise, compliant, and consistently deliverable. And yes, this is exactly how Sopro does it.

Every company has a CRM to track people after they become leads. Almost none have a system for the market before they respond. Your audience is a living, changing thing: people move roles, events happen, businesses change. Your data should reflect that reality.

Rob Harlow,  
CEO | Sopro



## Real personalisation



AI has made personalisation scalable. Done well, it helps you scale research-driven, insight-led communication. Done poorly, it just produces generic messages faster. Adding a name and company isn't personalisation; understanding a buyer's pain points, pressures, and priorities is. The most effective use of AI lies in its ability to surface and apply those insights.

This becomes especially crucial in the age of large buying groups. Research shows that the deal was abandoned in 40%-60% of purchase attempts because the buyer group couldn't align.

Personalisation and ABE can help these groups align. Content needs to address each stakeholder's benefits and objections and reduce their fear of messing up.

### Best practice

Personalisation should start at the foundation, not as an afterthought. Build every message around what matters most to each contact – their goals and challenges – using research and insight, not token gestures. Insertions aren't personalisation; relevance is. Not convinced? Here's the kind of thing you see when someone treats personalisation as a box to be ticked: "I saw your post about [your holiday], which really reminded me of our cloud accounting software."

Sopro's AI messaging engine combines detailed prospect and sender data to craft genuinely personalised outreach, trained on 80 million proven messages. But we haven't let the robots run wild: campaign strategists check tone, context, and messaging to stay authentic to the sender.



Personalisation has moved way past adding 'Hi {{FirstName}}' to your messages. It's about speaking to a segment like you actually understand them. Imagine you build a list of recently funded startups hiring in their sales department... there's a story there about pressure, opportunity and growth. That's something you can connect on, and use to show how you can help.



Shayna Wu,  
Customer Success  
Team Lead | Sopro



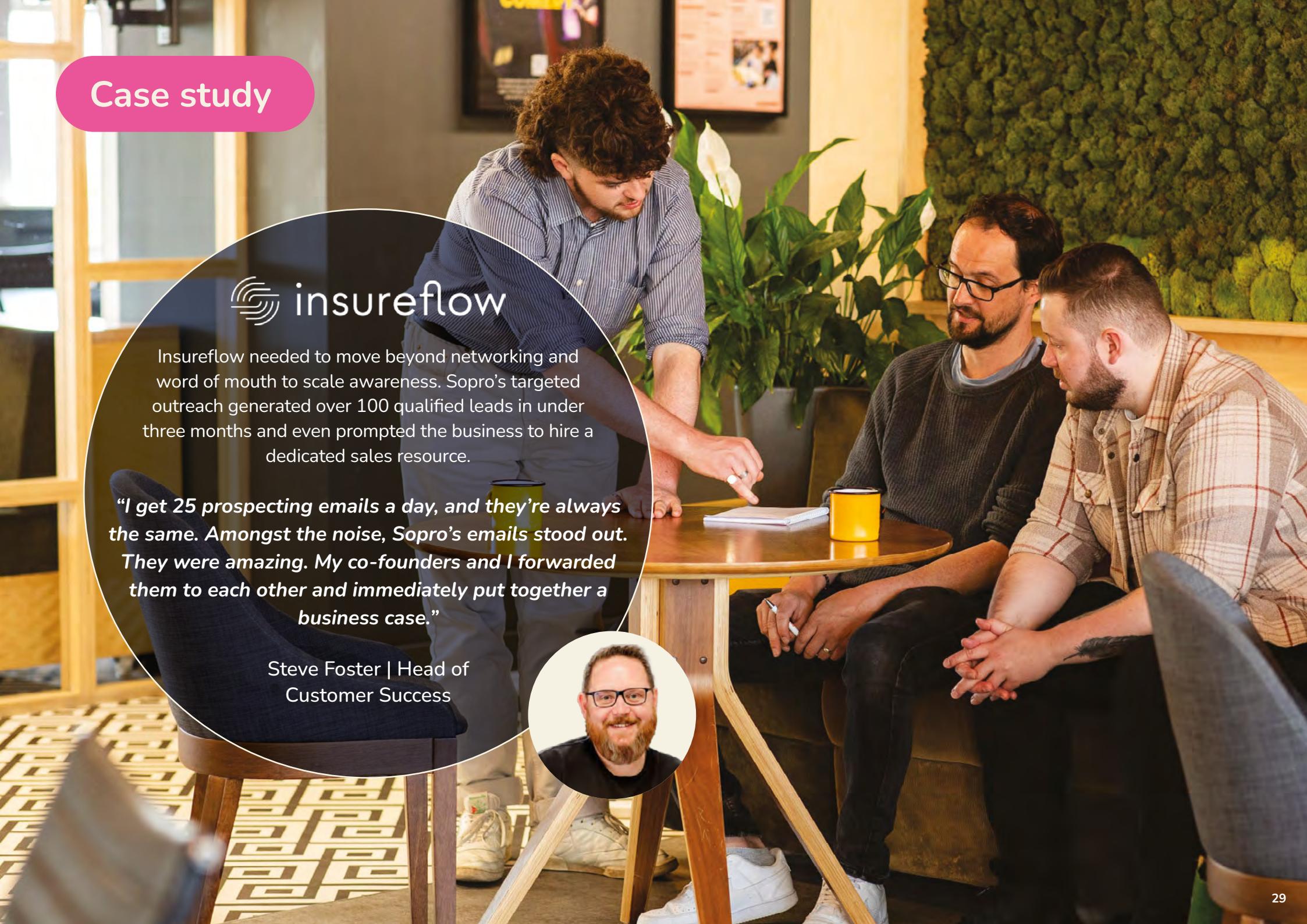
## Case study



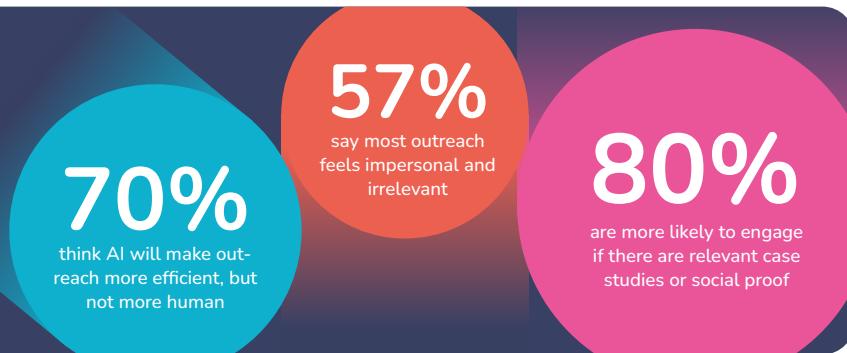
Insureflow needed to move beyond networking and word of mouth to scale awareness. Sopro's targeted outreach generated over 100 qualified leads in under three months and even prompted the business to hire a dedicated sales resource.

*"I get 25 prospecting emails a day, and they're always the same. Amongst the noise, Sopro's emails stood out. They were amazing. My co-founders and I forwarded them to each other and immediately put together a business case."*

Steve Foster | Head of Customer Success



## Human connection and trust



Let's be honest. Everyone knows the first message is automated. And that's fine. What matters is what happens next. When someone replies, asks a question, or pushes back, it needs a human response. That's where credibility is built.

In the AI age, trust is now a key differentiator in outreach. It lowers risk, creates familiarity, and makes buyers more likely to engage. People don't trust systems, they trust other people. The trust brands they know, not strangers in their inbox. The best outreach builds trust from afar, uses automation to reach, then humans to relate.

### Best practice

Automation is how you reach people; humans are how you connect with them. The first touch can be automated, but every reply, question, or objection needs a real person behind it. Credibility is built in conversation, not cadence.

Sopro handles the first touch with best-in-class automation, then puts the follow-up in your hands with intent alerts, phone numbers, live chat, and coaching during onboarding that helps your team turn engagement into relationships.



Automation gets you in the room. A human keeps you there. The second a brand sounds real, trust starts to build.

Lynn Lester,  
Senior Vice President  
Events & Marketing | The Drum





## Acting on buyer intent in real time



Buyers constantly reveal intent, and most sellers know it. The issue isn't access to data, it's what happens next. Despite widespread tracking, few teams connect signals across sales and marketing, and valuable opportunities slip through the cracks.

Outreach fails not because of a lack of information, but because of poor orchestration. Recognising a signal is one thing; responding before a competitor does is another. When intent signals guide your outreach, messages land just as buyers begin their research. It can turn what would have been a cold approach into a relevant, well-timed conversation.

### Best practice

Successful teams build intent into their daily rhythm. Automated systems should act on clear triggers, while high-value accounts and specific signals demand a fast human response. Align sales and marketing workflows so every signal is acknowledged and acted on quickly.

Sopro triggers automated outreach where it makes sense and delivers custom alerts when personal outreach will have the biggest impact, ensuring every signal receives a fast, relevant response.

### 3. Consistency

Outreach sequences and buyer readiness are often chronically misaligned. Most campaigns run for just a few weeks, but B2B buying journeys can take months or even years. By the time a prospect is ready to engage, sellers are no longer visible.

Consistency solves that gap. It's about maintaining presence throughout the entire journey, using lighter, longer-running sequences that keep your brand easy to mind and easy to find.

This isn't about sending more messages; it's about better timing. Intent signals and intelligent pacing ensure your outreach feels relevant and well-timed, so when the buying group starts evaluating, your name is already front of mind.



## Outreach as infrastructure



Stop-start outreach creates peaks and troughs in pipeline performance. When campaigns pause, brand visibility fades, and prospects who were mid-research turn elsewhere. Modern buying cycles are too long and unpredictable for outreach to work in bursts.

Leading teams treat outreach as infrastructure: a continuous system that underpins growth rather than reacting to short-term demand. It's always on, but intelligently paced. Automation and intent data keep engagement active in the background, while sales teams focus on higher-value conversations.

This approach turns consistency into a competitive edge. When buyers finally enter the market, your brand is already familiar, and familiarity drives conversion.

### Best practice

Adopt an always-on mindset. Replace bursts of short-term activity with continuous engagement, tuned to buyer behaviour. Use automation and intent data to maintain awareness even when prospects aren't ready to buy, so you're front of mind when they are.

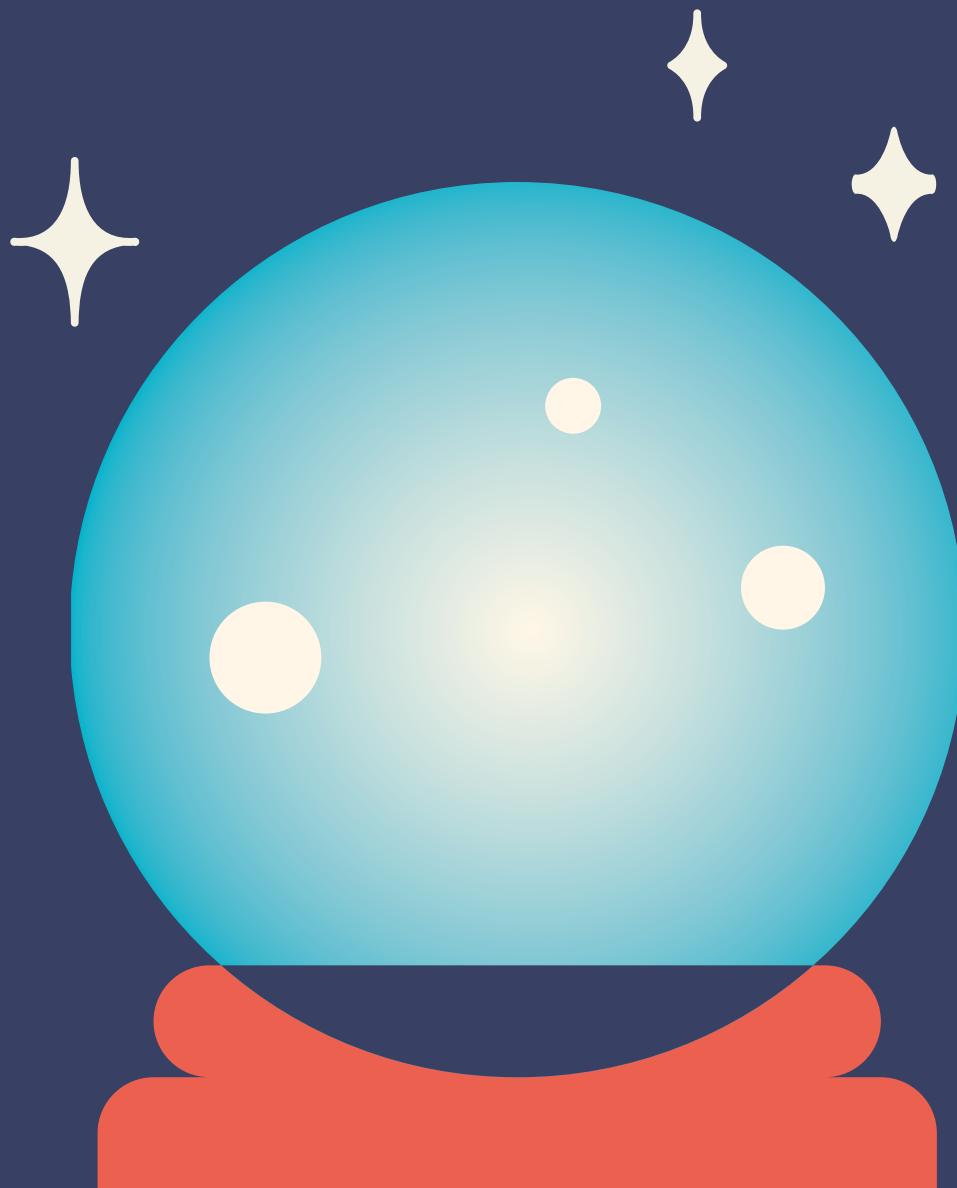
Sopro campaigns are built for sustained, long-term engagement. Monthly volumes are paced to maximise visibility without exhausting your total addressable market.



Most buyers aren't ready when your message arrives. That's why consistency matters. The brands that win are the ones that show up with value over time, not just when they need the sale.

Lynn Lester,  
Senior Vice President  
Events & Marketing | The Drum





## Maintaining visibility



Sopro Survey

Those lengthy B2B journeys unfold in two broad phases. Around 70% of the time is spent in the Selection Phase, where buyers research independently, compare options, and shortlist vendors. The remaining 30% is the Validation Phase, when they finally engage suppliers to confirm a decision.

Visibility during the Selection Phase determines who makes the shortlist. In a typical 11-month buying cycle, that phase lasts about seven months. If your outreach lands early and ends after a four- or six-week cadence, you disappear long before buyers begin vendor conversations. In these long cycles, prospects who were once warm quietly move on.

Consistent, light-touch engagement ensures you're still visible when interest turns into intent. The goal is to stay "easy to mind and easy to find", not to flood inboxes. When your message has been drip-fed through the Selection Phase and then reappears just as the buying group moves to validation, it feels timely, not persistent.

### Best practice

Align your outreach rhythm with how buyers actually buy. Blend steady engagement with reactive messages triggered by signals of readiness. This balance keeps your brand visible without fatigue, ensuring you're in the conversation when decisions are made.

## Case study

### Hypefy

*Hypefy wanted to break into new markets but lacked the infrastructure for structured outreach. Sopro's multichannel campaigns opened doors to high-value prospects at scale, rapidly building brand visibility and driving conversations with major UK companies.*

*"We went from being a completely unknown start-up to landing conversations with top UK brands. Sopro helped us connect with incredible brands we never expected to reach."*

**Kristina Maceković**  
Strategist, Hypefy



# Outreach Benchmarks

The three pillars outline what great outreach should look like. Here, we show how it performs in practice.

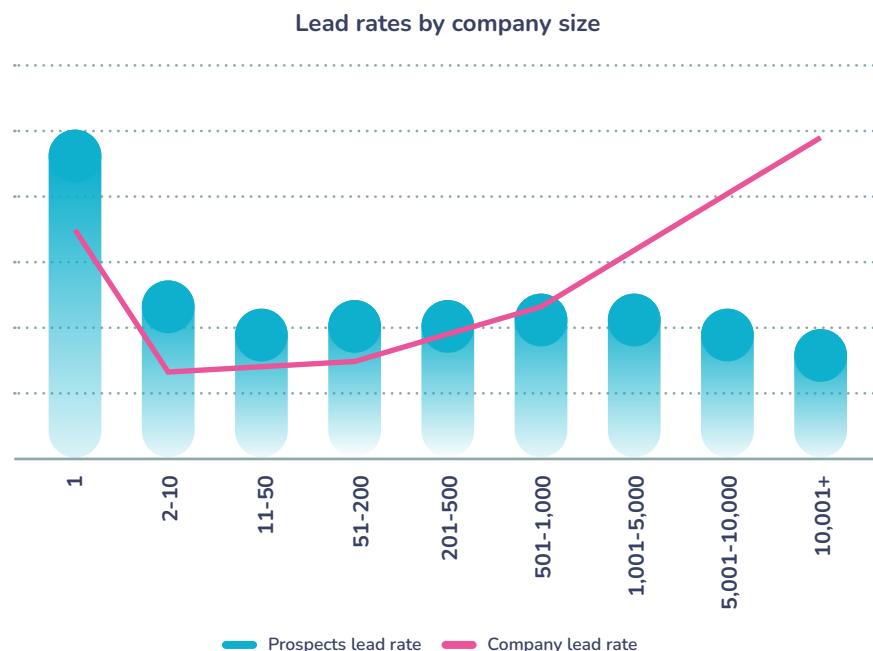
This chapter analyses 2025 campaign data to benchmark performance by company size, industry, message type, and buying intent, highlighting the patterns that turn prospecting into pipeline.



## Lead rates by company size

We began by looking at lead rates based on the size of the company prospected and split the data into two perspectives: lead rate per individual contacted and lead rate per company targeted.

When viewed per prospect, lead rates remain broadly consistent whether the person works alongside eight colleagues or 8,000. The only exception is sole traders, who stand out for their responsiveness. Agility has its advantages.

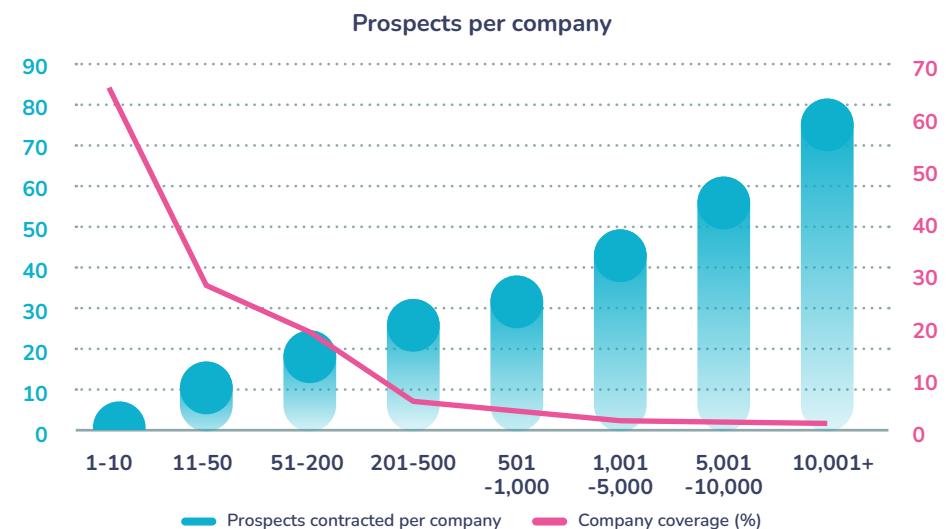


At company level, the picture changes. Larger organisations convert at higher rates, showing that outreach which reaches the full buying team - not just one contact - is more likely to turn interest into opportunity.

## Prospects per company

Next, we examined the average number of prospects contacted per company.

Company size	Prospects	Coverage
1-10	4	64.3%
11-50	8	27.0%
51-200	15	11.8%
201-500	21	6.0%
501-1,000	28	3.7%
1,001-5,000	39	1.3%
5,001-10,000	53	0.7%
10,001+	81	0.3%



At first glance, it looks like large volumes for large companies. But actually, it's a tiny fraction. Even contacting 80 people in a 10,000-person company reaches less than 0.5% of the employees. What seems like scale is often fragmented across teams and geographies. Real coverage means coordinated outreach to the right people, wherever they sit.

## Highest lead rate by industry

So, given we've shown the value of reporting on company lead rates, next up is the top ten industries by lead rate. Industries with clear operational needs - like public safety, government, and heavy industry - generate higher lead rates.

Industry	Lead %
Public Safety	5.4%
Government Administration	5.2%
Civil Engineering	4.6%
Mining & Metals	4.3%
Market Research	4.3%
Oil & Energy	4.0%
Higher Education	3.5%
Chemicals	3.4%
Utilities	3.3%
Renewables & Environment	3.1%

## Most prospected industries

Which industries are the most saturated with outreach?

Rank	Industry	% of 2025 emails	Lead rate	Change from 2024
1	IT & Services	6.1%	1.4%	↑ 7
2	Financial Services	5.7%	1.6%	↓ -1
3	Construction	5.1%	3.0%	↓ -1
4	Computer Software	4.0%	1.0%	New
5	Hospital & Health Care	3.4%	1.7%	New
6	Retail	3.3%	1.6%	↓ -3
7	Marketing & Advertising	3.2%	1.4%	New
8	Automotive	2.2%	2.2%	New
9	Real Estate	2.1%	1.9%	↓ -4
10	Pharmaceuticals	2.1%	2.1%	New



## Subject lines: from inbox to open

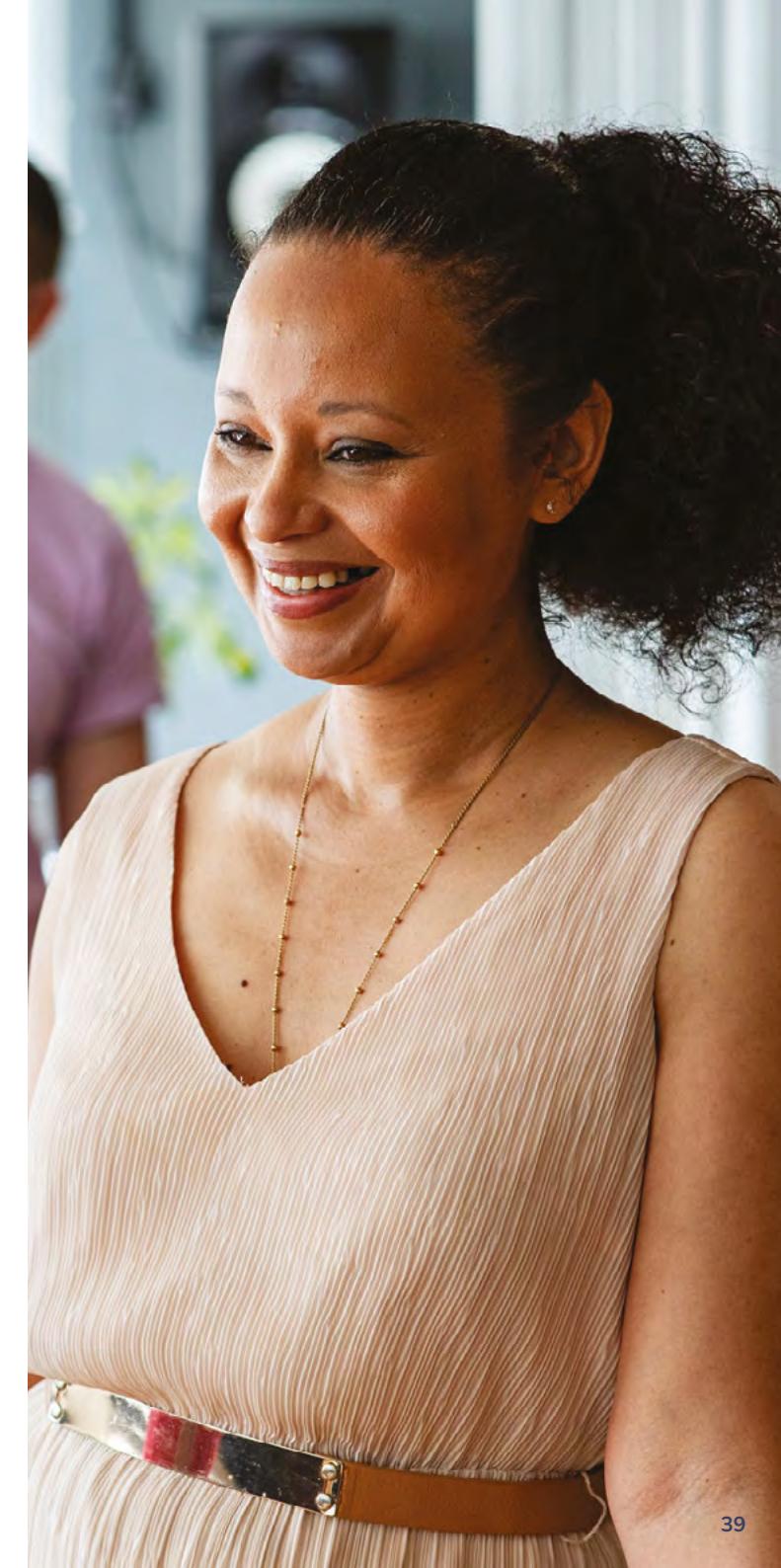
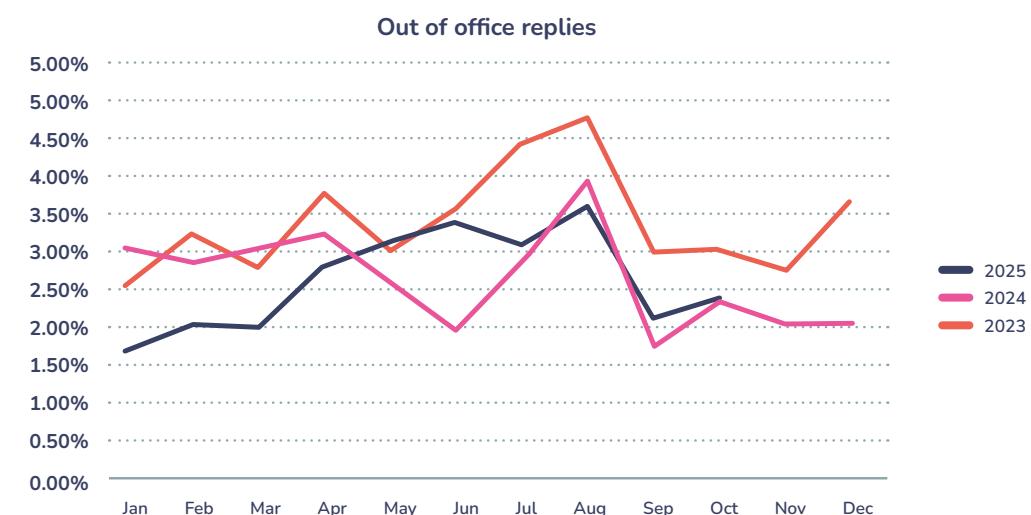
So once targeting is sorted, the next step is getting people to open your emails. With [open rates no longer reliable](#), we turned to our panel of 442 B2B buyers to discover which type of subject lines they were more likely to open.

Industry	% More likely to open	Makes no difference	% Would ignore
An offer	77%	14%	8%
Personalised (name/company name)	71%	22%	6%
A question	69%	19%	12%
Intriguing/mystery	64%	22%	14%
Topical/trend/current affairs	64%	26%	10%
Time-sensitive/urgent	60%	17%	24%
Humorous	59%	25%	16%
Shocking/alarmist	47%	22%	32%

A sad day for budding comedians.

## Out of office

August remains the clear peak for out-of-office replies. 2023 saw a spike possibly linked to post-pandemic travel, but leave and hybrid work patterns have since stabilised, leading to fewer full absences in 2024–25.





# Sentiment analysis: the psychology behind a response

Prospecting works when a message prompts action. Every email carries signals that shape how a reader feels, how they judge your intent, and whether they choose to respond.

To understand those signals at scale, we analysed 650,000 prospecting emails sent in 2025. These are not templates. Each one is written for a specific prospect, which gives us a natural view of how different psychological cues show up in real outreach.

The results on the following pages show how each bias impacts lead rates compared to the baseline performance across all 650,000 emails. For the last two years, we used a simple method: checking whether certain words appeared and linking them to lead rates. AI now allows us to assess tone, intent and the behavioural biases present in each email.

This analysis offers broad guidance, rather than fixed rules. It reflects patterns across a broad range of clients, sectors and offerings. Some biases work well in certain contexts. Others reduce performance. Use this as a starting point and keep testing where to lean in, where to avoid and how to adapt for your audience.

## What makes people act

Behind this analysis is a simple truth: people act when action feels easy, valuable, and low-risk. The best-performing emails do exactly that. They remove friction, make the next step feel obvious, and frame the sender as a trusted partner rather than a salesperson.

These messages don't manipulate readers; they reflect how people naturally choose. They create momentum and make taking action feel fast, achievable, and worthwhile.

Lead rate vs base

Time discounting bias

+52.5%

**What it is:** Promises credible near-term results or benefits to increase appeal.

**Example:** “See impact in week one.” / “Within days, you’ll notice a lift.”

**Why it works:** Near-term benefits reduce hesitation and make value feel immediate. When the reward feels close, prospects are more likely to act now rather than later.

## Distinctiveness bias

**+30.4%**

**What it is:** States what makes the sender or solution uniquely different.

**Example:** "The only..." / "What sets us apart."

**Why it works:** Clear differentiation helps messages stand out in crowded inboxes. Being specific about what makes your offer unique creates curiosity and credibility without exaggeration.

Good emails don't push. They remove friction, create confidence and make the next step feel natural

Carmen Pashen,  
Marketing Delivery  
Manager | Sopro

## Habit formation bias

**+16.3%**

**What it is:** Frames adoption as simple, repeatable, or naturally built into daily workflow.

**Example:** "Fits into your team's daily process." / "Set once, then it runs each day."

**Why it works:** People are more willing to try something that feels easy to start and maintain. Presenting a solution as effortless reduces the sense of risk or effort involved.

## Collaboration

**+16.1%**

**What it is:** Positions sender and recipient as joint contributors with aligned goals.

**Example:** "Partnering to..." / "We'll do X together."

**Why it works:** Framing outreach as a partnership builds trust and shared purpose. It shifts the conversation from selling to solving, which increases openness to engage.

## Optimistic tone

**+6.4%**

**What it is:** Uses hopeful, forward-looking language that suggests realistic possibility without exaggeration.

**Example:** "You're well placed to build on last quarter." / "There's scope to lift conversion rates."

**Why it works:** Optimism adds energy and confidence to a message. When phrased realistically, it creates momentum and makes readers more receptive to opportunity.

## Opportunity-led framing

**+4.5%**

**What it is:** Begins by highlighting a potential gain, improvement, or success relevant to the reader.

**Example:** "There's a clear opportunity to convert more inbound interest into meetings."

**Why it works:** Starting with potential gains focuses attention on what could be achieved, not what's missing. It sets a positive frame that keeps readers curious.

# What holds you back

Not every persuasion tactic helps performance. In fact, several widely used techniques now make cold outreach less effective, including some surprising inclusions. The patterns are clear: anything that slows the reader down, assumes too much, or feels generic creates friction, and friction kills replies.

Lead rate vs base

Authority bias

**-12.2%**

**What it is:** Mentions awards, certifications, or analyst coverage to convey expertise.

**Example:** "Multi-award winning" / "Featured in the FT."

**Why it underperforms:** It's a bit "me, me, me" ... focused on how important you are. Prospects are initially looking for relevance, not reputation. These claims come across as self-focused rather than credible.

Social proof

**-12.4%**

**What it is:** Cites clients, users, testimonials, or adoption numbers to build credibility.

**Example:** "Used by 2,000 companies." / "Trusted by [brand]."

**Why it underperforms:** Social proof works because it's other people saying you can be trusted. Trying to harness that effect in an outreach message doesn't work because it's a one-to-one email in your own voice.

Explaining / clarity

**-19.8%**

**What it is:** Shows clear, logical reasoning that links ideas and outcomes.

**Example:** "We warm inboxes gradually, which reduces spam flags and improves deliverability."

**Why it underperforms:** Over-explaining slows the read and disrupts flow. In cold outreach, brevity signals confidence; too much reasoning creates drag.

Educational / advisory

**-24.2%**

**What it is:** Provides insight, learning, or data that adds value beyond a sales pitch.

**Example:** "In 10,000 sends, personalised subject lines lifted replies by 30%."

**Why it underperforms:** Buyers don't expect to learn in a cold email. Data or lessons distract from the offer and risk sounding like unsolicited advice.

It feels like heresy to say social proof doesn't work. But real social proof comes from other people building your credibility. In an outreach email, you're landing in someone's inbox as a stranger and saying, 'Everyone loves me, trust me on that.' That's not trust-building. It's arrogance.

Kit Smith,  
Content Manager | Sopro



## Empathy

**-27.3%**

**What it is:** Recognises or validates the recipient's goals, pressures, or challenges in a human, considerate way.

**Example:** "I know it's tough keeping pipeline steady." / "We understand the pressure on quarterly targets."

**Why it underperforms:** Overly empathetic openings sound formulaic and slow to deliver value. Readers appreciate understanding, but they act on opportunity.

## Customer-first framing

**-30.7%**

**What it is:** Opens with the recipient's goals, challenges, or context before introducing the sender or solution.

**Example:** "You're likely focused on hitting revenue targets this quarter."

**Why it underperforms:** Leading with the customer can bury the offer. In short emails, clarity about what's being proposed matters more than courtesy.

## Reciprocity bias

**-32.3%**

**What it is:** Provides something valuable before asking for a response.

**Example:** "Here's a short guide, no sign-up." / "Sharing our benchmark deck."

**Why it underperforms:** Offers of free content feel transactional unless tightly linked to the reader's goal. Without clear next steps, they create no reason to reply.

## Problem-led framing

**-45.7%**

**What it is:** Begins by naming a specific, business-relevant challenge faced by the reader.

**Example:** "Many sales teams struggle to maintain pipeline momentum in Q4."

**Why it underperforms:** Starting with a problem makes readers defensive or disengaged. It focuses attention on difficulty instead of potential, creating a negative first impression.



In a sales conversation, exploring someone's challenges is essential. You ask, they explain, and together you work out whether there's a fit. That same approach often breaks down in cold outreach. For many offerings, you cannot know their exact challenges. Leading with guessed problems and positioning yourself as the fix can make you sound presumptuous or arrogant if the assumption misses the mark.



Vic Heyward,  
Director of Marketing | Sopro

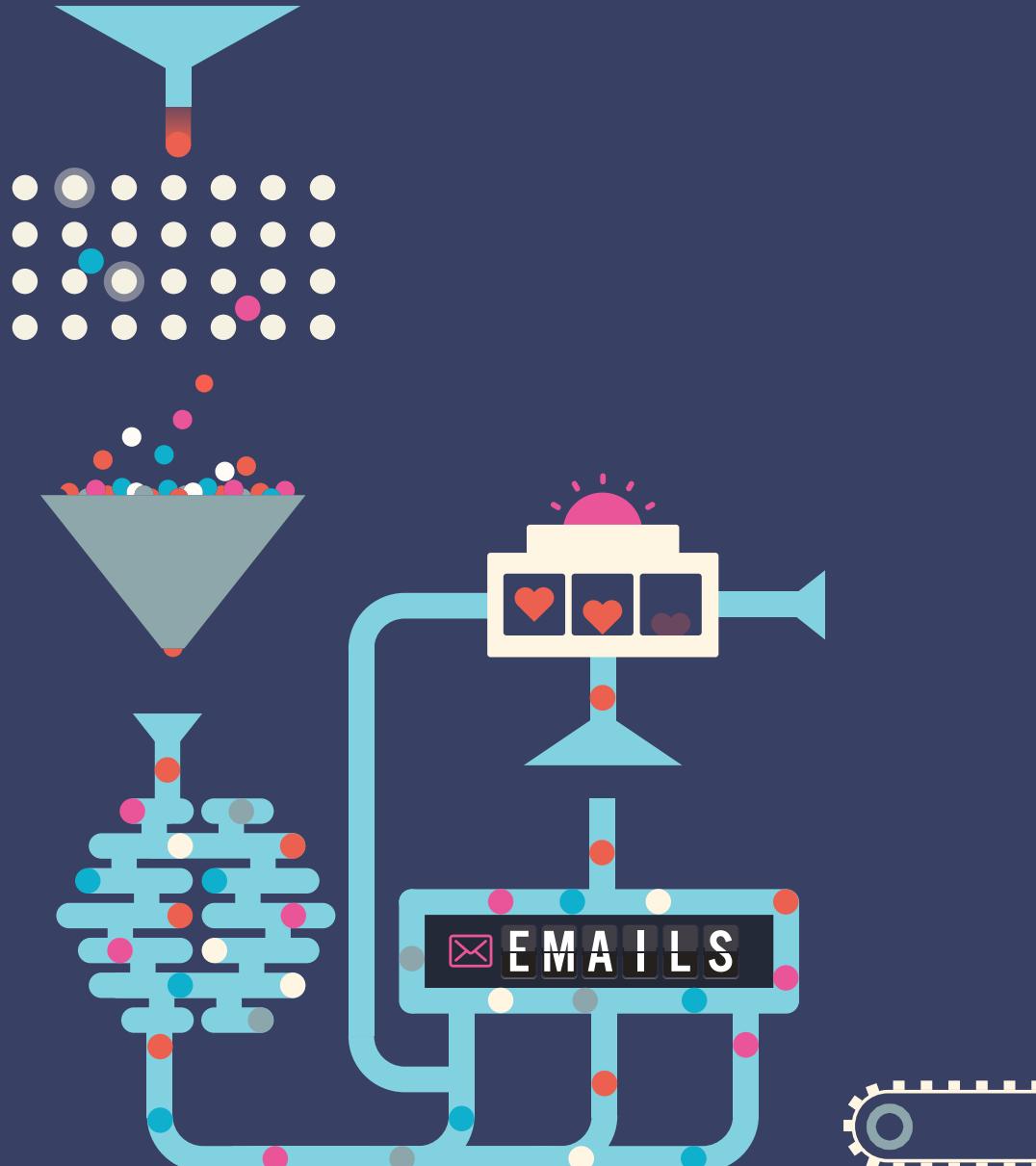


# How to build your futureproof prospecting engine

The future of prospecting is built on connections. Every part of the process - from audience data to buyer signals, from channels to content, and from sales to customer success - now needs to work together as one connected system.

When information flows freely, outreach becomes coordinated instead of duplicated. Marketing activities build awareness that support outbound efforts. Brand building feeds sales activation. Sales and customer success share insight that refines targeting and timing. These connections turn prospecting from a sequence of campaigns into a continuous growth engine.

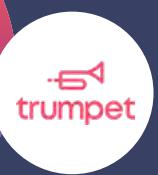
Within that connected system, success still depends on those three pillars: coverage, relevance, and consistency.





Buyers have never had more control over when conversations start, how they happen, and what they already know. Technology has flipped the dynamic as buyers arrive informed and opinionated long before sales gets involved. The best vendors now focus less on selling and more on enabling, creating an environment where buyers feel confident, in control, and ready to move forward on their own terms.

Rory Sadler,  
CEO | Trumpet



## Coverage: build an intelligent, complete audience

Coverage starts with understanding your total addressable market and ensuring every relevant company and contact is within reach. The goal is full visibility, not just higher volume.

- Treat your market as a living system that's constantly enriched with live data and intent signals.
- Keep data clean and current. Regularly verify information and remove stale or non-compliant records to protect deliverability and credibility.
- Use AI to uncover new opportunities, spot lookalike accounts, and maintain accuracy at scale.
- Expand within accounts, not just across them. Target full buying groups across roles, teams, and regions, not just final decision-makers.
- Build audiences that flow smoothly across every channel and campaign.
- Use intent data and predictive scoring to prioritise accounts most likely to engage.
- Align sales and marketing around one view of the buyer, supported by shared metrics and integrated systems.
- Monitor deliverability, reputation, and compliance to protect visibility over time

## Relevance: engage through personalisation and credibility

In crowded inboxes, relevance is what cuts through. Buyers expect communication that reflects their world, not just their name and title.

- Combine AI and human insight to deliver messages with both precision and empathy.
- Focus on "trust points" rather than touchpoints. Build familiarity through credible, expert-led interactions that show understanding, not selling.
- Time outreach around real-world triggers such as funding rounds, leadership changes, or company milestones.
- Equip sellers with enablement content that helps buyers make informed, confident decisions.
- Keep personalisation grounded in genuine value.
- Optimise tone and technical setup to maintain credibility and inbox placement.

## Consistency: maintain always-on visibility

B2B buying cycles are long and unpredictable. Consistency ensures you remain visible when buyers move from interest to intent.

- Treat outreach as infrastructure, not a campaign. Build a steady rhythm that runs in the background rather than in bursts.
- Maintain visibility across channels. Your brand should appear in inboxes, on LinkedIn, and wherever your buyers are active.
- Use intent scoring to decide the right follow-up. Low intent triggers automated nurture. High intent routes directly to sales.
- Pace outreach with light, long-running sequences that keep your brand easy to mind and easy to find.
- Keep every touchpoint connected. Whether a prospect sees an ad, an email, or a LinkedIn message, it should feel like one continuous conversation.
- Refresh audiences, messaging, and timing using live performance data, so outreach improves rather than repeats.

# We're Sopro

And we've transformed the way businesses find and convert new customers..

Prospecting today is about connecting with the right audience, staying visible across every channel, and engaging buyers with messages that matter. That's what we deliver.

Our experts combine live data, intelligent targeting, and continuous optimisation to build outreach that grows with your market. Every campaign is timed, relevant, and powered by intent signals - so when buyers show interest, you can act at exactly the right moment.

We don't just run outreach. We build systems that create consistent, scalable growth.



## Fully managed service

Leave prospecting to the experts. A dedicated team run and optimise your campaigns



## Set up in three weeks

Get a new source of leads in as little as three weeks, synced to your CRM.



## Intent-based multi-channel outreach

An intelligent and timely mix of personalised messaging connects with your ideal clients.

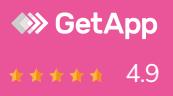


## Trusted by 3,500+ clients

With ten years of experience, you can trust Sopro to deliver a reliable sales pipeline.



Want to explore if we'd be a good partnership? [Speak to one of our team today](#)



# Appendix:

## Out of office

The survey was conducted among **442 B2B sales and marketing decision-makers** in the UK and US. Sapro Research conducted the study in **October 2025**, using an online questionnaire with a 4.7 percentage point margin of error at a 95% confidence level.

Additional insights are drawn from an earlier Sapro Research survey of **300 B2B decision-makers** conducted in July 2025, following the same cohort parameters, with a margin of error of 5.7 percentage points.

## Data

The data in this report is sourced from Sopro client prospecting campaigns. The data covers campaigns from 2016-2025, including 126,032,914 outreach emails and 25,127,388 multi-channel data points, including LinkedIn messages sent, prospect and company website visits, Webchat conversations, and SDR events (eg phone calls).

## Industries

Respondents represented a diverse range of **B2B sectors**, spanning technology, professional and financial services, marketing, manufacturing, healthcare, and more. The full list includes over **80 industries**.

## Sources and further reading

### Harvard Business Review

- [How sales teams can use GenAI to discover what clients need \(2025\)](#)
- [How one company used AI to broaden its customer base \(2025\)](#)
- [How successful sales teams are embracing agentic AI \(2025\)](#)

### Dentsu

- [B2B Superpowers Index 2024](#)

### Forrester

- [Launch your B2B customer-obsessed growth engine \(2025\)](#)
- [Shifting search behaviours demand smarter content strategies \(2025\)](#)
- [What Salesloft's acquisition of Drift means \(2024\)](#)
- [The future of B2B buying will come slowly and then all at once \(2024\)](#)

### McKinsey

- [An unconstrained future: How generative AI could reshape B2B sales \(2024\)](#)
- [Five fundamental truths: How B2B winners keep growing \(2024\)](#)
- [Five ways B2B sales leaders can win with tech and AI \(2025\)](#)
- [The multiplier effect: How B2B winners grow \(2023\)](#)

### LinkedIn

- [The sales game has changed: Why LinkedIn is your best play to win in 2025](#)
- [The real job of B2B marketing is to give the buyer group permission to agree](#)
- [Why building your outbound brand changes everything in 2025](#)

### Industry reports and surveys

- [2025 Demand Generation Benchmark Survey – Demand Gen Report](#)
- [The State of Enterprise Revenue 2025 – Clari](#)
- [WARC: The Multiplier Effect \(2025\)](#)
- [RAIN Group: AI in the sales process \(2024\)](#)
- [Demand Gen Report: The renaissance of ABM and the rise of intent data \(2024\)](#)
- [Outreach: Prospecting 2025](#)
- [Simply Psychology: The Mere Exposure Effect](#)

### AI, outbound, and buyer behaviour

- [OpenAI / NBER: How people are using ChatGPT \(2025\)](#)
- [Flowla: How to make outbound work \(2025\)](#)
- [6sense: 2024 Buyer Experience Report](#)
- [Sopro: 68 B2B buyer statistics and insights \(2025\)](#)
- [Dreamdata: LinkedIn Ads Benchmarks Report 2025](#)



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