THE REVENUE ARCHITECTS
CREMANSKI & COMPANY

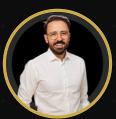
TRUST WAS NEVER GONE

How B2B Leaders Are Making Human Connection Their Competitive Edge in the Age of AI

A report by Cremanski & Company

AUTHORS

Virginie Rivet
Senior GTM and Marketing Strategy Consultant
Cremanski & Company



Michael Jäger
Managing Partner & Founder
Cremanski & Company

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KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

The Numbers Behind the Trust Gap

62% of respondents say trust is significantly more important in B2B deals than five years ago

58% say AI-generated outreach has left buyers overwhelmed, with declining response rates

78% believe trust infrastructure will be a critical competitive advantage over the next three years

80% report the sales-to-CS handoff as a standard process that varies widely in execution quality

51% say brand and thought leadership investment, before buyers are in market, is the single most important trust-building move in the age of AI

65% of pipeline is already influenced by trust built before a prospect enters an active sales conversation

About This Report

The findings in this report are based on 180 responses from senior GTM leaders across B2B markets. The survey was conducted between April and May 2026. Respondents span roles including CMO, VP Marketing, VP Sales, Head of Revenue, and CRO across scale-ups and enterprise organizations operating in Europe, North America.

Questions covered trust dynamics in the buyer journey, the perceived impact of AI on outreach and brand evaluation, internal GTM alignment, forecasting reliability, and investment priorities for trust-building. Quantitative insights are complemented by qualitative interviews and practitioner quotes gathered from senior revenue leaders.

Responses collected	180 senior GTM leaders
Survey period	April – May 2026
Roles covered	CMO, VP Marketing, VP Sales, Head of Revenue, CRO
Company stages	Early-stage scale-ups to enterprise
Geographies	Europe, North America
Methodology	Quantitative survey + qualitative interviews

Introduction

Something has shifted in B2B buying. Not suddenly, this has been building for years, but the consequences are now visible in pipeline data, forecast accuracy, and deal velocity in a way that is hard to ignore. Buyers are harder to reach. Response rates are declining. Deals that looked certain stall for reasons that are never fully explained.

The deeper problem is trust: the accumulated evidence, in the mind of a buyer, that a company will do what it says, knows what it claims to know, and represents something coherent and credible. Our survey of 180 senior GTM leaders confirms what many have long suspected: 62% said trust is significantly more important today, and not a single respondent said it had become less important.

> *Trust means that the buyers know your brand, know your product and the value proposition, and that they also know you personally, the sales team, the marketing team, the C-level. They evaluate if you are real and know what you are talking about.*
>
> **VP Marketing**
> *B2B SaaS*
> DACH

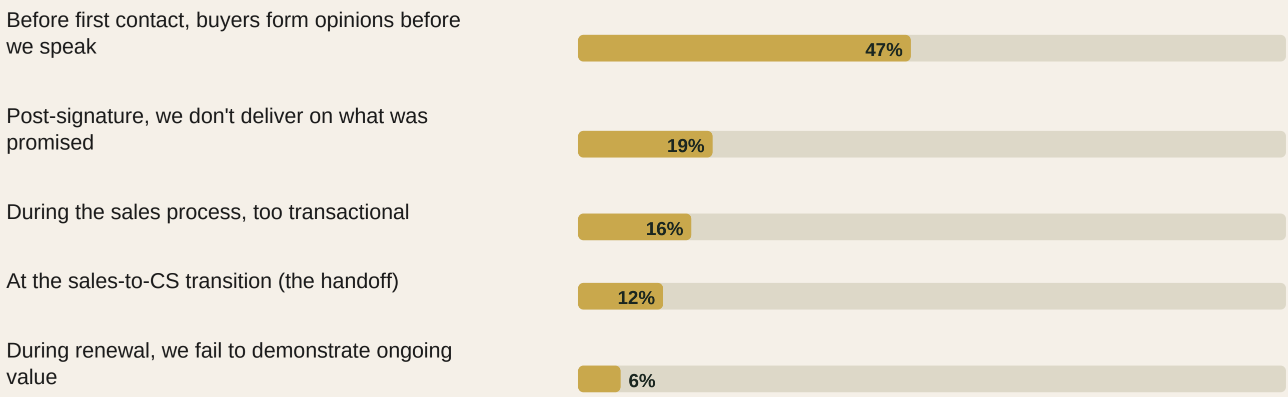
PART 1

The Trust Deficit Hidden Inside Your GTM Engine

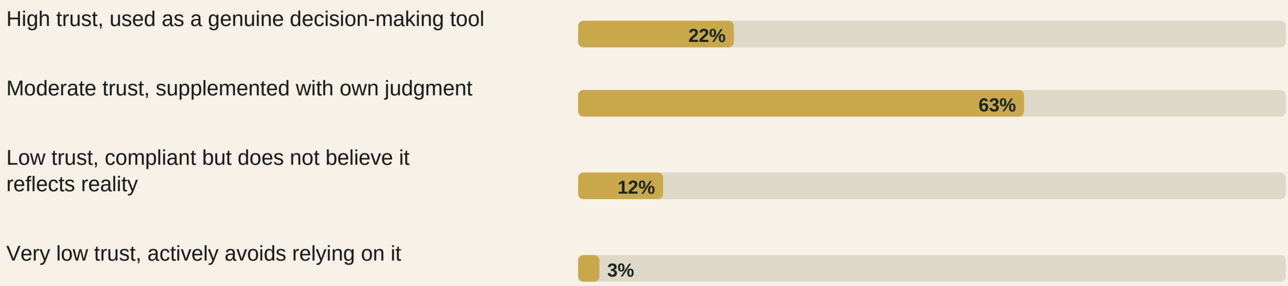
Most GTM leaders know something is wrong. They feel it in forecast reviews that require more explanation than they should. They see it in customer success conversations where the handoff from sales left the customer with a different understanding of what they bought. What they less often recognize is that these are trust problems that happen to manifest as execution failures.

Our research confirms the pattern. When asked where their organizations lose the most trust in the buyer journey, the most common answer, selected by 47% of respondents, was **before first contact**. Buyers are forming opinions before any sales conversation begins.

Where Organizations Lose the Most Trust



Sales Team Trust in CRM Data



The Handoff That Erodes Everything

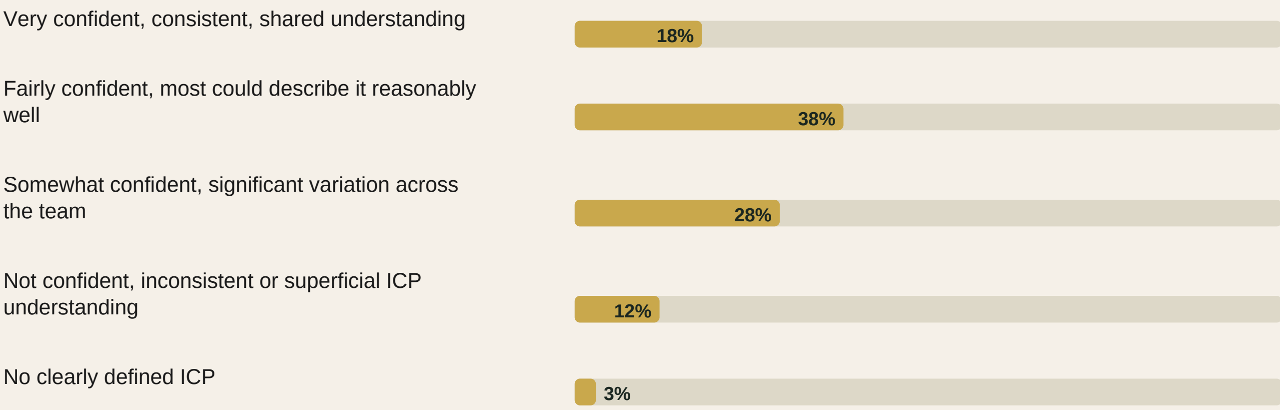
The moment a deal closes and ownership transfers from sales to customer success is one of the highest-risk trust moments in the entire customer relationship. A full 80% of respondents describe their handoff as a 'standard process that varies in quality of execution.' Only 12% describe a structured overlap. Just 8% have a formal warm handoff with clear context transfer.

The customer feels it. Not always immediately, but within the first ninety days, the sense that the delivered experience does not fully match the sold experience begins to take hold. Trust erodes. Renewal becomes harder. Advocacy, which is the foundation of organic growth, never materializes.

The Messaging That Fragments

Only 18% of respondents say they are fully confident that their sales teams could accurately describe the ICP in their own words. Another 38% are 'fairly confident.' The remaining 44% acknowledge significant inconsistency.

ICP Confidence Across Sales Teams



> *We have spent a lot of time perfecting our pitch and validating with our reps. Based on our conversation analysis we show up pretty consistent. The biggest proof is our customer references and the impact we demonstrate in the sales pitch, having customer champions talk about us.*

Nick Geurds
Chief Revenue Officer
Datamaran

in

PART 2

How the GTM Machine Quietly Eroded Trust

The trust deficit in B2B did not appear overnight. It is the accumulated consequence of a decade of GTM optimization that consistently prioritized speed and scale over depth and credibility. Sequence volume over genuine relationship. The result is a category where every company says similar things, and buyers have learned to discount most of what they hear until proven otherwise.

The Volume Trap

Decision-makers are overwhelmed by automated outreach, polished campaigns, and content that could have been written by anyone. When asked how AI-generated outreach from competitors has affected buyers, 58% of respondents say buyers are overwhelmed, with declining response rates and more ghosting. Only 8% report buyers being more receptive.

The problem is not the technology. It is the assumption behind the technology, that trust can be built through volume if only the messaging is precise enough. It cannot. Each undifferentiated message actively builds a negative impression of the sender's judgment.

> “ *We had automatic sequences in the past that I had to stop because they were ruining our credibility. The personalization was visible as fake. It was doing the opposite of what it was supposed to do.* ”
>
> *Director of Commercial Strategy*
> **B2B SaaS**

The Differentiation Problem

In a market where every company claims to be customer-centric, innovation-driven, and AI-powered, buyers fall back on the evidence that is hardest to manufacture: the people they have actually met, the thought leadership that named a problem they recognized, the peer who mentioned a company unprompted. Content that reflects genuine expertise earns a different kind of attention. It is remembered. It gets shared internally.

PART 3

What AI Is Doing to the Trust Equation

AI's impact on B2B trust is more complex than the outbound story suggests. There is a second, less-discussed effect that may ultimately matter more: AI is changing how buyers discover, evaluate, and form first impressions of vendors before any human contact takes place.

The Discovery Layer

When a buyer starts researching a category today, they increasingly begin with an AI query rather than a Google search. The AI synthesizes publicly available signals. It looks at what company leaders say on LinkedIn. It reads what industry experts write in relation to the brand. It evaluates what customers post publicly. And it forms a synthesized assessment of who appears credible, not a ranked list of links. A company can be very active and still fail this evaluation if its signals are fragmented. Activity without alignment is noise.

> *What separates winning companies from the rest is mindset. They treat AI as a tool, not a trend. They identify the real problems, build a solid foundation, and use AI to amplify what's already working, automating the no-brainer tasks while letting humans focus on connection and strategy.*

Mafalda Johannsen
Director of Commercial Strategy
N.Rich
in

AI's Expected Impact on Human Trust-Building

Will significantly increase	54%
Will slightly increase	28%
No change expected	13%
Will decrease	4%

> *The real advantage is judgment about what you point the AI at. When everyone has the same tools to generate emails and run sequences, the differentiator becomes who actually understood the customer problem before they automated against it.*

Martin Weigl
Head of Sales US
Yuma AI
in

PART 4

What Buyers Actually Trust Now

Buyers today trust the same things buyers have always trusted: demonstrated expertise, honest communication, consistent delivery, peer validation, and the sense that the person or organization across the table actually understands their problem. What has changed is the evidence bar.

> *A product that delivers. References matter. Buyers want confidence in post-onboarding competence.*
>
> **CMO**
> *B2B SaaS*
> **Europe**

> *Be a consultant first and a sales rep second. Be honest and provide real value during the entire pre-purchase process.*
>
> **Head of Sales**
> *B2B SaaS*
> **North America**

The Timeline Reality

Our survey asked how long it typically takes to build enough trust to move a new prospect into an active sales conversation. The most common answer, 54%, was one to three months. A further 19% said three to six months. Only 8% said less than one month.

Less than one month	8%
One to three months	54%
Three to six months	19%
Six to twelve months	8%
More than twelve months	11%

The Dark Funnel Is Not Mysterious

When we asked how much of current pipeline was influenced by trust built before a prospect entered an active sales conversation, 65% attributed the majority of their pipeline to pre-engagement trust.

More than 70% of pipeline	28%
50-70% of pipeline	37%
30-50% of pipeline	18%
10-30% of pipeline	11%
Less than 10% of pipeline	6%

The Peer Validation Multiplier

External validation consistently outperforms brand messaging in B2B buying decisions. Forrester research finds that over 90% of B2B buyers completely or somewhat trust peers in their industry, while independent experts command trust levels of 66-72%. By contrast, vendor websites are trusted as a primary information source by just 9% of buyers.

75%

of B2B decision-makers trust a brand more when affiliated with respected industry experts

The Employee Voice Advantage

76% of individuals trust content shared by people they know over content shared by brands, and content shared by employees generates eight times more engagement than the same content on a brand channel. In B2B, 92% of buyers trust employee recommendations over traditional advertising, and 59% of decision-makers consider thought leadership more reliable when it comes from an individual.

One of the most powerful employee trust signals is also the most counterintuitive: telling a prospect they are not yet ready to buy. This form of radical honesty is rare, and precisely because of that rarity, it works.

“ *The biggest thing for us is our investment in our direct and indirect community, keeping in touch, sharing knowledge with companies that are not in a direct buying cycle. That is very much the secret force behind our future pipeline.* ”

Nick Geurds

Chief Revenue Officer

Datamaran

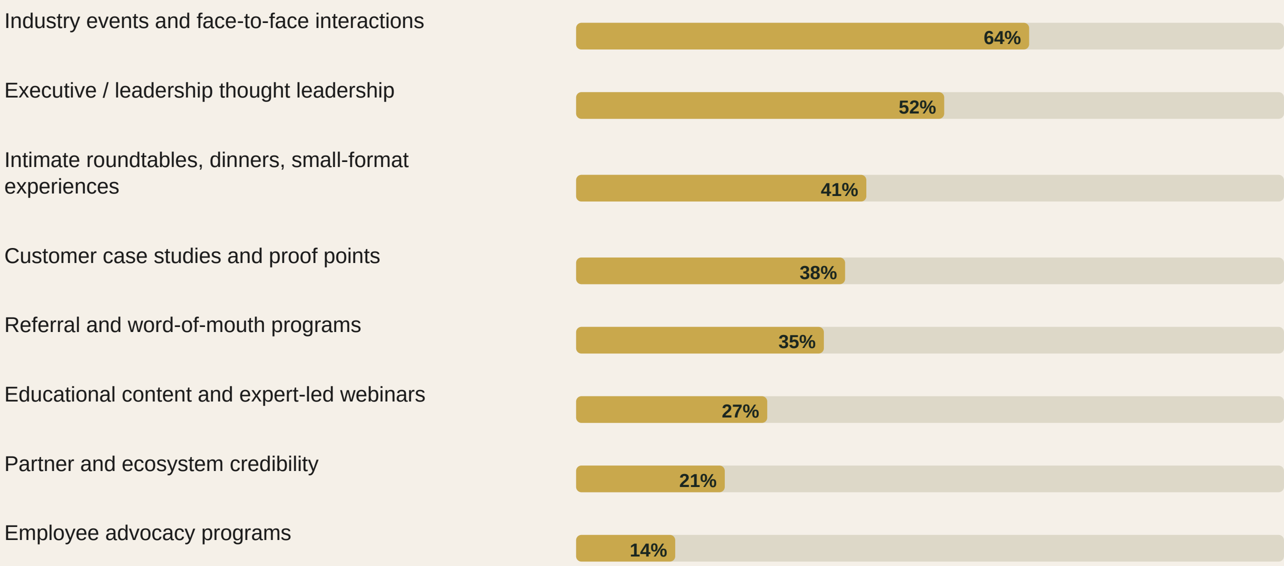
in

PART 5

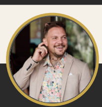
The Trust Layer, What High-Performing Orgs Build

The organizations winning in trust-intensive B2B markets share a structural characteristic: they have built trust into their GTM motion deliberately, not as a campaign or initiative, but as an operational discipline that spans every function that touches customers.

Most Effective Trust-Building Approaches (Past 12 Months)



> *Double down on in-person events. That's what builds real trust, not sequences, not content calendars. Actually being in the room with people.*
>
> **VP Marketing**
> *B2B SaaS*
> **DACH**



> *Human advantage in AI GTM is the ability to create real proximity: small dinners, intimate roundtables, the right 8 people in a room. AI can help you scale attention. It cannot replicate the trust that gets built when someone sits next to the right peers and feels you've curated the room with intent.*
>
> **Dominic Klingberg**
> *Co-Founder*
> **Oryn Group**
>
> in

The Seven Components of the Trust Layer

SHARED LANGUAGE

Every high-performing revenue organization has a common, precise vocabulary for the core elements of their business. Building shared language is not a communication exercise. It is a strategic alignment exercise that happens to have communication benefits. Our survey found that only 22% of respondents have fully standardized definitions for key revenue terms, the foundation of shared language.

1

CUSTOMER SUCCESS AS TRUST ARCHITECT

In most B2B organizations, CS is structurally positioned as a retention and support function. In the highest-performing organizations, CS is a trust architecture function. Our data reveals the gap: only 29% of respondents say CS is actively involved in revenue planning and strategy. The majority (44%) describe CS as consulted occasionally or not systematically.

2

FORECASTING AS TRUST INSTRUMENT

The quality of a company's internal forecasting tells you almost everything you need to know about its trust culture. Only 24% of respondents say their quarterly forecast reflects actual closed revenue with less than 10% variance. Another 38% are within 10 to 20%. The remaining 38% face forecast variance above 20%, a structural indicator that internal honesty norms are under pressure.

3

FEWER, BETTER TOUCHPOINTS

As AI automates more of the outreach process, the human touchpoints that remain carry disproportionate trust-building weight. The organizations winning in trust-intensive markets invest in fewer, higher-quality interactions rather than more, lower-quality ones.

4

SIMPLICITY AS TRUST SIGNAL

Complexity in customer-facing processes (complicated onboarding, convoluted contracts, opaque pricing, difficult renewal procedures) is a trust signal, and it is a negative one. It signals that the organization has designed its processes for its own convenience, not for the customer's.

5

AUTHENTICITY OVER PERFORMANCE

B2B buyers have become highly sophisticated at detecting performative credibility. The organizations that build the deepest trust are the ones where leaders communicate honestly about what they do not yet know, and where content acknowledges real tensions rather than resolving them artificially.

6

The Seven Components (continued)

PUBLIC TRUST ARCHITECTURE

The first six components describe trust-building within the commercial relationship. The seventh describes trust-building in the public sphere, the signals that AI and buyers encounter before any human interaction takes place. It requires leadership visibility that reflects genuine expertise, expert association, content coherence, and governance.

7

Most Important Trust Investment in the Age of AI

Trust-Building Priority	Share
Brand and thought leadership before buyers are in market	51%
Building a genuine community of customers, prospects, and experts	22%
Consistent, coherent public signals across leadership and content	13%
Improving post-sale delivery and customer success quality	8%
Internal trust infrastructure (aligned data, shared language, forecasting)	6%

PART 6

Building the Trust Layer, A Practical Framework

The following seven moves describe the practical sequence for building trust infrastructure in a B2B revenue organization. They are listed in the order in which dependencies tend to flow, but most organizations will need to work on several simultaneously.

01 **Move 1: Establish Shared Language**

Before any external trust-building work can be effective, the organization needs a common vocabulary. The practical test: ask ten people across sales, marketing, and CS to describe the company's ideal customer and primary value proposition. If the answers vary significantly, shared language does not yet exist.

02 **Move 2: Fix the Forecast**

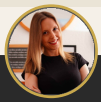
Accurate forecasting is both a trust-building output and a trust-building process. An organization that produces reliable forecasts signals to everyone inside and outside the company that it operates with honesty about reality. The work of fixing the forecast requires honest diagnosis of why the current forecast is unreliable, and it almost always requires leadership to model the behavior change first.

03 **Move 3: Redesign the Handoff**

The sales-to-CS transition is the highest-risk trust moment in most B2B customer relationships. Redesigning it requires three things: CS involvement before the deal closes, a structured handoff process with explicit context transfer, and a defined overlap period in which sales remains accountable during the early customer relationship. The goal is not administrative tidiness. It is ensuring that the trust the customer extended during the sales process is validated rather than tested in the first ninety days.

04 **Move 4: Invest in Pre-Buying Trust**

Most B2B organizations concentrate their trust-building investment inside the active sales process, after a prospect has been identified and qualified. The most effective trust-building investment is in the period before active buying intent exists. This means educational content, executive visibility, and intimate experiences, roundtables, dinners, small-format events, that create genuine relationship before deal-stage pressure enters.



> *We believe in building meaningful relationships with our prospects and customers: ones that extend well beyond the sale. The events and webinars we create are designed to deliver real value, and our conversations are driven by genuine interest, not just commercial intent.*

Mafalda Johannsen
Director of Commercial Strategy
N.Rich

in

Move 5: Activate Employee Advocacy Authentically

Employee voices carry more credibility than brand voices, the data on this is unambiguous. Content shared by employees generates eight times more engagement than the same content on a brand channel, and 92% of B2B buyers trust employee recommendations over traditional advertising. Sales reps who share content on social media sell 45% more than peers who do not, and leads generated through employee advocacy are seven times more likely to close than leads from other sources. Despite this, most organizations either do not activate employee advocacy at all, or they treat employees as a distribution channel, asking them to share corporate content without giving them genuine ownership of the message. The organizations that do this well start internally: they share thinking, build genuine conviction, and create the conditions for authentic amplification before anything goes external.

05

Move 6: Simplify Relentlessly

Identify every point of unnecessary complexity in the customer journey, onboarding, contracting, renewal, support, and remove it. Every point of friction that the customer encounters is a moment where the implicit promise of the sales process is questioned.

06

Move 7: Build Your Public Trust Architecture

In the age of AI-mediated discovery, the first evaluation of your company may happen without any human involvement. The question is not whether to build a public presence, most companies already have one, but whether that presence is coherent, consistent, and credible enough to pass AI synthesis. Practical steps: align public communication from leadership, sales, marketing, and expert voices around a common positioning. Invest in genuine expert relationships that create external credibility signals rather than manufactured endorsements. Build content that earns internal distribution, content that names real problems, gives people language they can reuse, and makes the sender look thoughtful for sharing it. Measure coherence of public signals, not just volume of output.

07

> *Knowing people personally, personal connections and bonds, is the most underappreciated part of B2B trust. It cannot be automated or scaled cheaply. But it is worth more than most organizations realize.*
>
> **VP Marketing**
> *B2B SaaS*
> **DACH**

CONCLUSION

The Work That Was Always the Work

The trust thesis of this report is not new. The argument that buyers trust companies they have learned from, that relationships built over time outperform relationships assembled under sales pressure, that internal alignment produces external credibility, these are not insights that required original research to generate. Most experienced B2B leaders know they are true.

What is new is the operating environment. AI has not changed what buyers trust. It has changed the speed at which credibility is evaluated, the visibility of incoherence, and the structural advantages available to organizations that have done the trust work.

78%	60%	47%
believe trust infrastructure will be a critical competitive advantage	do not formally measure trust	believe they are losing trust before first contact

The gap between belief and practice is the story of B2B trust in 2026. Every organization in our survey knows trust matters. Far fewer have done the operational work to build it systematically, to make it a function of how the business runs, not how the marketing sounds.

Trust was never gone.

In 2026, it has simply nowhere left to hide.

> *The organizations that will win the first AI evaluation are the ones that built genuine trust infrastructure, internally, operationally, and publicly, not because they were trying to rank in AI search results, but because they were genuinely doing the work of being trustworthy.*
>
> *Cremanski & Company*
> **2026**

VIRGINIE RIVET

Senior GTM & Marketing Strategy Consultant

Cremanski & Company

in

Virginie Rivet is a B2B marketing leader, analyst, and GTM strategy consultant with more than a decade of experience across Europe. She combines a data-driven, pragmatic approach with deep expertise in revenue architecture, attribution modeling, and go-to-market strategy. As Senior GTM & Marketing Strategy Consultant at Cremanski & Company, she partners with growth-stage companies to align marketing, sales, and customer success around scalable, predictable revenue outcomes. She is the project lead for the Beyond Revenue Podcast and also hosts the Revenue for Breakfast event series in Germany. She is the author of multiple industry reports and articles on GTM strategy, B2B marketing best practices and trends.

MICHAEL JÄGER

Managing Partner & Founder

Cremanski & Company

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In 2018, Michael Jäger founded Cremanski & Company with the overarching goal of supporting Tech and SaaS ScaleUps, SMBs, PE-backed companies and Private Equity funds in achieving commercial excellence by focusing on revenue architecture, aligned growth goals and an end-to-end defined data-model, the customer journey. He is a true expert in structuring successful revenue organizations, creating demand, revenue processes focused on employees, and building and implementing efficient growth structures within companies. Throughout his career, he has successfully built sales organizations across various industries and founded three of his own companies. With his extensive network in the German startup and entrepreneurial scene, he is always up to date on developments and trends. In addition to his work at Cremanski & Company, he is involved in various other projects and companies as an advisor.

GET IN TOUCH

sales@cremanski.com

www.cremanski.com

Europe's leading revenue architecture company