



9%

That's the share of B2B marketing leaders whose last big decision was mainly based on research with the buyers they're trying to win. We surveyed 100 of them to find out what the other 91% used instead.

n=100 · CMOs and VPs of marketing at B2B SaaS companies with 200+ employees · Fielded September 23-24, 2026

THE SHORT VERSION

CUSTOMERS GET HEARD. THE MARKET DOESN'T.

A third of big marketing decisions are gut calls. 32% said their most recent significant decision was mainly a leadership or gut call. Only 9% said it was mainly based on direct research with target buyers.

Customer research is universal. Market research isn't. 92% learn from sales conversations and 85% interview customers. But 53% research buyers who aren't customers once a year or less, or never.

Most teams overstate how much they hear from the market. 80% said they'd tested ideas with, surveyed or measured non-customers in the past year. Yet asked to describe the last time they tried to understand buyers, half of them (51%) described only customers or internal sources.

18% have no real way to reach non-customers. The rest lean on events, sales calls and desk research.

When research is used, it changes things. 50% say research changed their messaging or positioning in the past year. The problem is how rarely it reaches the decision.

HOW DECISIONS GET MADE

A THIRD OF BIG MARKETING DECISIONS ARE GUT CALLS.

We asked leaders to describe their most recent significant marketing decision (messaging, budget, channels, a launch) and what it was mainly based on. We coded every answer by its main input.



Share of respondents (n=100). Open-ended answers, coded by what the decision was mainly based on.

Leadership judgment beat every other input. Internal performance data (pipeline, channel ROI, conversion) came second. Direct research with target buyers, the people the decision is meant to win, came fourth, behind customer and sales feedback.

Many respondents described the gut call as the default, not a choice:

"Most of this was a gut call from leadership rather than informed by anything specifically. The rebrand was heavily based on leadership preferences."

AVP MARKETING, ENTERPRISE SAAS

"Asked sales what they think, we argued about our opinions, and no one bothered to ask anyone in our target audience. We defaulted to guessing like we usually do."

AVP PRODUCT MARKETING, ENTERPRISE SAAS

WHO GETS HEARD

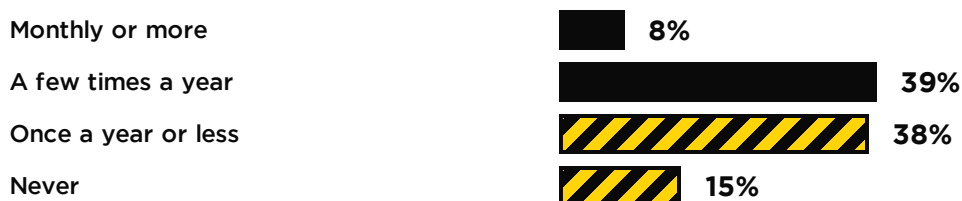
EVERYONE TALKS TO CUSTOMERS. FEW TALK TO THE MARKET.

Voice-of-customer research is close to universal. Research with buyers who haven't bought from you is not.



Share of respondents who did each in the last 12 months. Multiple answers allowed. Hatched: research that reaches non-customers.

Frequency tells the bigger story. Customer feedback flows in constantly through sales calls and account teams. Market research mostly happens once a year, if at all.



"How often do you research buyers in your target market who aren't your customers?"

53% research non-customers once a year or less. Only 8% do it monthly. Customers are the people your messaging already worked on. The buyers it failed on, or never reached, mostly go unheard.

THE SAY-DO GAP

MOST TEAMS THINK THEY HEAR FROM THE MARKET MORE THAN THEY DO.

80% of leaders ticked at least one box for non-customer research in the past year: testing ideas with them, surveying them, or measuring market perception.

Earlier in the survey, before seeing that list, we asked them to describe the last time their team tried to understand what buyers think or need.



"Think about the last time your team tried to understand what buyers think or need. What did you do?" Open-ended, coded by the furthest-reaching source mentioned. Share of respondents (n=100).

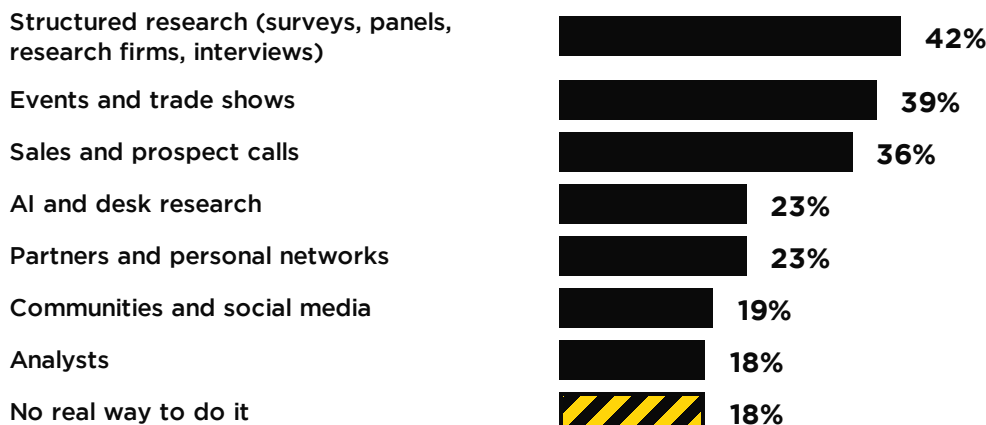
51% of those who said they research non-customers described only customers or internal sources when asked what they actually did last time: customer calls, the advisory board, sales feedback, internal discussions.

That's not dishonesty. It's what happens when market research is occasional: the annual survey gets remembered as "we research the market," while week-to-week learning comes from people who already bought.

REACHING NON-CUSTOMERS

18% HAVE NO REAL WAY TO REACH NON-CUSTOMERS.

We asked how teams learn about people in their target market who aren't customers yet.



"How do you learn about people in your target market who aren't your customers yet?" Open-ended, multiple mentions coded. Share of respondents (n=100).

The common sources share a limit. Events reach whoever showed up. Sales calls reach buyers already in the pipeline. Desk research and AI tools summarize what's already published. Only 42% mentioned any structured research that reaches the market directly.

"We don't currently have a program to help with this. It's a gap and largely due to budget constraints. However there is also a cultural component: we've grown without it, so why invest now?"

VP OF MARKETING, MID-MARKET SAAS

"What I don't do enough of today is direct research with people who aren't already in our network or pipeline."

VP OF MARKETING, MID-MARKET SAAS

WHEN RESEARCH LOSES THE MEETING

RESEARCH ONLY MATTERS IF IT GETS TO THE DECISION.

Several leaders described research that existed but didn't change anything, because it was too slow, too complex, or outranked by an opinion.

"We did a lot of research in the last 12 months, but truthfully, we didn't really listen to it or apply it to decision making. Leadership chose to go with their guts."

INTERIM CMO, B2B SAAS

"The most comprehensive research study we conducted was rejected by management as too complex."

CMO, B2B SAAS

"I have a thesis, but I have nothing really to back it up or anything that would help me push for a change or for a different approach."

AVP MARKETING, ENTERPRISE SAAS

Where research did win, it often won the internal argument rather than settling a question nobody had asked:

"The research has been helpful in getting alignment with leadership. Everyone has their opinions and usually the hippo in the room. This year has been more objective based on the insights."

CMO, B2B SAAS

WHAT RESEARCH CHANGES

WHEN RESEARCH GETS USED, IT CHANGES THE MESSAGE.

This is the counterweight to everything above. Asked what decisions research actually changed in the past year, most leaders named something concrete. Only a handful said it changed little or nothing.



"What decisions has your research actually changed in the last 12 months?" Open-ended, multiple mentions coded. Share of respondents (n=100).

So the gap isn't that research doesn't work. It's that it reaches a small share of decisions, and mostly hears from customers when it does.

THE OPEN QUESTIONS

WHAT MARKETING LEADERS WISH THEY KNEW RIGHT NOW.

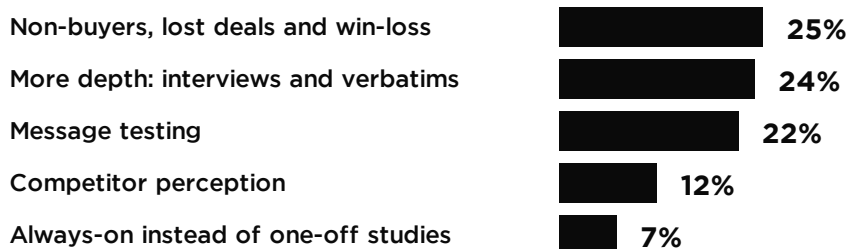
We asked for the one thing about their market they wish they knew. Most answers are questions only buyers can answer.



"What's one thing about your market you wish you knew right now?" Open-ended, coded by theme. Share of respondents (n=100).

The second-biggest theme is the oldest question in B2B: why buyers choose, switch or stall. Several leaders singled out losing to "do nothing" as the hardest loss to explain.

And if research budgets doubled, here's where leaders say the money would go:



"If your research budget doubled tomorrow, what would you spend it on?" Open-ended, coded by theme. Share of respondents (n=100).

"Surveys are good for showing trends but they are not granular enough to create messages that drive action."

VP OF PRODUCT MARKETING, B2B SAAS

THE COST OF GUESSING

WHEN EVERYONE GUESSES, EVERYONE SOUNDS THE SAME.

Two other Wynter studies show what B2B messaging looks like from the outside.

56.6

Average Sameness Index across 445 category-leader websites in 61 B2B categories (0 = unique, 100 = interchangeable)

12.1%

Share of the average homepage's messaging that no competitor says

99.1%

Share of those sites claiming AI or automation

1.86/5

How well 100 B2B SaaS marketing leaders matched real CRM value props to the right brand with names removed. Random guessing scores 1.0.

These are separate studies, so we can't prove the survey above causes sameness. Our read: when most decisions rest on leadership opinion and customer feedback, companies in a category draw on the same inputs (the same analyst reports, the same customer anecdotes, the same AI tools) and arrive at the same message. Sources: [Wynter Sameness Benchmark](#) and the [B2B Vendor Differentiation Survey](#), June 2026.

WHAT TO DO WITH THIS

FIVE WAYS TO GET THE MARKET INTO THE ROOM.

1. **Write the decision down before the research.** "Depending on what we learn, we will ____." Research tied to a named decision is much harder to ignore than a deck of findings.
2. **Keep your customer research, and add the market.** Customers explain why people bought. They can't explain why everyone else didn't. Pick one question you already ask customers and ask it of 100 buyers in your ICP who don't know you.
3. **Count what you actually did.** Look back at the last five big decisions and note what each was mainly based on. Most teams are surprised by the answer.
4. **Get evidence in before the meeting, not after.** Research that arrives after the decision becomes validation. Fast, small studies (15 people for a message test, 100 for a survey) can land in days, inside the window where they change the call.
5. **Make it recurring.** A study a year is a snapshot. A light cadence (a quarterly survey, a test before each launch) is how market input becomes the default instead of the exception.

Want to hear from buyers in your ICP who aren't your customers yet? Wynter surveys 86,000+ verified B2B professionals, with results in 12 to 48 hours.

[Run a survey](#)

METHODOLOGY

HOW WE RAN THIS STUDY.

Sample. 100 marketing leaders at B2B SaaS companies, recruited from the Wynter panel of identity-verified B2B professionals: 34 C-level (mostly CMOs), 62 VPs (marketing or product marketing) and 4 heads of marketing. 72 work at mid-market companies (200 to 999 employees) and 28 at enterprises (1,000+). Fielded September 23-24, 2026.

Questions. Eleven questions: two on company performance (used only to describe the sample), two closed questions on research methods and frequency, one on where growth will come from, and six open-ended questions.

Coding. Open-ended answers were coded by theme. For the decision question, each answer got one code for its main input; answers that didn't name a basis were coded "not clear." For other open questions, answers could carry several codes. Counts from coded answers are approximate.

Limitations. Respondents come from our own research panel, so they're likely more research-active than the average marketing leader. If anything, that makes the gaps above conservative. Results describe stated behavior and self-reported decisions. We also tested whether research habits related to revenue performance and found no reliable link at this sample size, so we make no claims about it.