MyOutreach
Where leads convert®

For US CMOs and demand gen leaders

The Lead Quality Field Guide

Why lead volume is the wrong KPI for 2027, and how to buy pipeline your CFO will trust.



22
people in a typical buying decision

61%
of the journey done before first contact

53%
of web traffic is now bots

Lead volume is a vanity metric.

Four shifts in the data, and what they mean for how you buy demand.

SHIFT	WHAT THE DATA SAYS	SO WHAT
Buying is a group decision	13 internal stakeholders and 9 external influencers per purchase[1]	One lead is a foothold, not an opportunity
The shortlist forms early	94% of buying groups rank vendors before first contact[2]	Quality means reaching them before that
Budgets are flat	7.8% of revenue; 56% of CMOs lack budget for their strategy[3]	Every dollar must trace to pipeline
Funnels are contaminated	Bots are 53% of web traffic, 40% of it malicious[5]	Form fills alone prove nothing

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You're not selling to a lead. You're selling to a committee.

Most lead programs still count individuals. Buyers decide as groups.

13 + 9

internal stakeholders and external influencers per purchase[1]

Forrester, 2026

2x

larger buying groups when the purchase includes genAI features[1]

14 members vs 7

53%

of buying cycles have procurement as a decision-maker[1]

Involved from the start

60%+

of buyers now run a trial before they buy[1]

Proof beats promises

WHAT TO CHANGE

- Count target accounts with three or more engaged roles, not individual MQLs.
- Map procurement, IT and finance early. They decide in half of all deals.
- Treat a single persona-matched lead as an entry point and build the group around it.

By the time they call, they've mostly decided.

61%

of the journey is done at first contact, down from 69%[2]

6sense, 2025

~80%

of deals go to the vendor buyers favored before contact[2]

6sense, 2025

67%

of B2B buyers prefer a rep-free experience, up from 61%[4]

Gartner, 2026

5%

of buyers are in-market at any one time[7]

Ehrenberg-Bass

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR LEAD QUALITY

- A quality lead reaches the buying group before the shortlist forms, not after.
- Most of your market is out-of-market today. Presence with them decides tomorrow's shortlist.
- Buyers who avoid reps still want proof: give them content they can use without a call.

Six signals your lead data can't be trusted

Bots are now 53% of web traffic[5], and poor data quality costs the average organization $12.9M a year[6]. These are the early warnings.

SIGNAL	WHAT IT USUALLY MEANS	ASK YOUR TEAM
Sales acceptance falling	Leads match the persona but not the account	What share of rejected leads were outside our ICP?
Form fills up, pipeline flat	Bot or incentivized traffic	Which sources produce fills with no follow-up activity?
One channel converts far worse	Recycled or low-intent data in that source	What is cost per accepted opportunity by source?
Rising personal domains	Consumer-grade or fake sign-ups	What share of last quarter's leads used free email?
SDRs hear 'I never downloaded that'	Co-registration or misattributed consent	Can each vendor show consent per lead?
Duplicates across vendors	The same database resold	How many leads already existed in our CRM?

Metrics that survive a board meeting

With 56% of CMOs short of budget for their strategy[3], the board wants pipeline, not activity.

REPLACE	WITH	WHY IT HOLDS UP
MQL volume	Buying-group coverage in target accounts	Reflects how deals are decided
Cost per lead	Cost per sales-accepted opportunity	Prices quality, not quantity
Lead-to-MQL rate	Sales acceptance within an agreed SLA	Sales owns the verdict
Leads delivered	Pipeline sourced and influenced in your ICP	Ties spend to revenue
Content downloads	Time from first touch to opportunity	Shows real buying momentum

THE CFO TEST

If a metric can rise while pipeline falls, it doesn't belong in your board pack.

10 questions your procurement team should be asking

Procurement is a decision-maker in 53% of buying cycles[1]. Give them the right questions.

01	Where does each record originate, and how often is it refreshed?
02	What share of leads gets a human review before delivery?
03	How is consent captured and evidenced, by region?
04	Can you map and reach multiple roles in one account?
05	Which intent signals do you use, and how recent are they?
06	How do you detect and filter bot or incentivized traffic?
07	What are the acceptance criteria and the replacement SLA?
08	How do you de-duplicate against our CRM and other vendors?
09	Can you report to opportunity stage, not just delivery?
10	Which clients in our segment can we speak to?

Contract terms that protect pipeline

If it isn't in the contract, it isn't a commitment.

Acceptance criteria per tier

Persona, company size, region and target-account rules, written down per account tier.

Replacement SLA

What counts as invalid, the window to reject and how fast it's replaced or refunded.

Verification standard

How each lead is checked, including the share reviewed by a human.

Data and consent warranty

Where data comes from and proof of consent, per region.

Pipeline reporting

Monthly reporting to accepted opportunity, not just volume delivered.

Performance exit

A right to pause or exit if acceptance falls below an agreed rate.

Score accounts, not leads

Run it on every batch. Share the results with your vendors monthly.

SCORE EACH ACCOUNT	NO	PARTLY	YES
Account sits in your ICP or target list	0	1	2
Contact matches a buying-group role	0	1	2
Two or more roles engaged in the same account	0	1	2
Verified and reachable	0	1	2
Consent and source evidenced	0	1	2
Recent, relevant intent	0	1	2
Accepted by sales within the SLA	0	1	2

12-14

Pipeline-ready

Sales engages the buying group now.

8-11

Build the group

Widen coverage before sales calls.

0-7

Not yet

Nurture, or reject and replace.

References

1 **Forrester, The State of Business Buying, 2026.** Published January 2026. Based on the 2025 Buyers' Journey Survey of nearly 18,000 business buyers.

2 **6sense, 2025 B2B Buyer Experience Report.** Survey of around 4,000 B2B buyers, published November 2025.

3 **Gartner, 2026 CMO Spend Survey.** 401 marketing leaders in North America, the UK and Europe, January to March 2026.

4 **Gartner, B2B buyer survey.** 646 B2B buyers, August to September 2025. Press release, March 9, 2026.

5 **Imperva (Thales), 2026 Bad Bot Report.** 13th annual edition, 2026.

6 **Gartner, data quality research.** Customer reference survey, 2020, cited in '12 Actions to Improve Data Quality', 2024.

7 **Dawes, J., The 95:5 Rule.** Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for the LinkedIn B2B Institute, 2021.

Figures are as reported by each publisher. Check the latest editions before quoting them externally.

Your quarterly vendor review

- Is cost per accepted opportunity falling?
- Is sales acceptance above your agreed rate?
- Are you reaching more roles per target account?
- Can every vendor evidence consent per lead?
- Is sourced pipeline tracked to revenue?

100% valid lead guarantee

You've read the data. Now see what good looks like.

A 20-minute walkthrough of how we'd fill your 2027 pipeline, built around your ICP.

Book my 2027 pipeline plan →

Book at www.my-outreach.com