Aira



An Aira report

What Europe's fastest-growing companies *have in common*

The best B2B companies grow at twice the rate of their industries. Five traits their sales teams share, and the data each one depends on.

✓ *1,300*
Senior executives surveyed by Bain

✓ *18,000*
B2B buyers surveyed by Forrester

✓ *1.8M*
Sales deals analysed by Gong

✓ *2,000*
B2B companies in one dataset

Aira



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In brief

The best B2B companies grow at twice the rate of their industries. Bain's 2025 survey of roughly 1,300 senior commercial executives found exactly that (Bain, 2025). The question every sales leader should be asking is what those teams do differently.

Study the evidence and five traits keep appearing. The most effective sales teams:

1 Know exactly who to sell to.

They concentrate on the minority of customers who generate most of the value, and say no to the rest.

2 Reach buyers before the buying starts.

Buyers have them in mind before a shortlist exists.

3 Get to the decision maker first.

They know who matters in a buying group of thirteen, and which entity actually holds the budget.

4 Protect their reps' selling time.

They refuse to let reps spend their week correcting data that went stale months ago.

5 Don't let AI guess.

They build AI on verified data, not on a model's best guess.

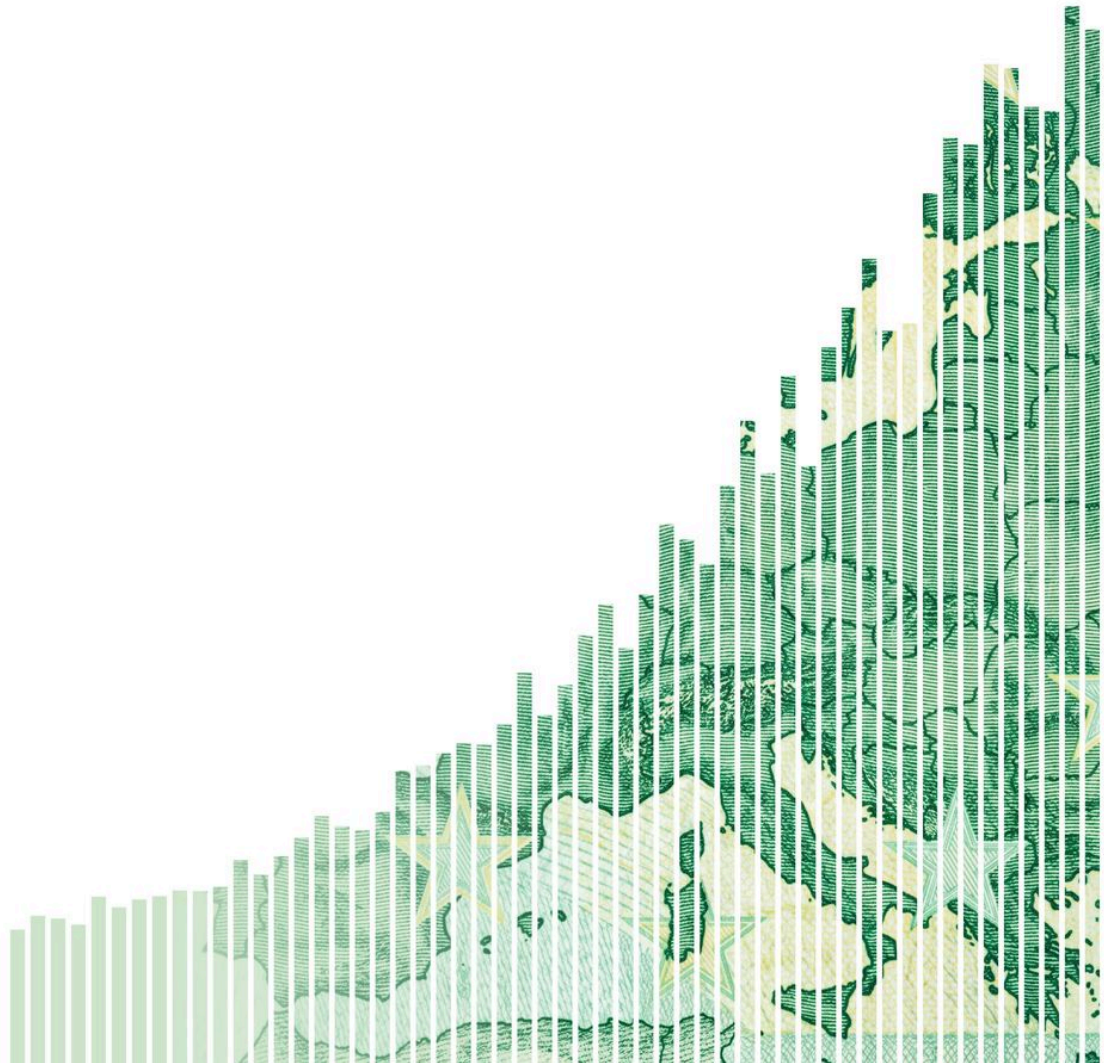
Five traits. One shared dependency. Each is only possible if you know the truth about the companies you sell to, and keep knowing it as they change.

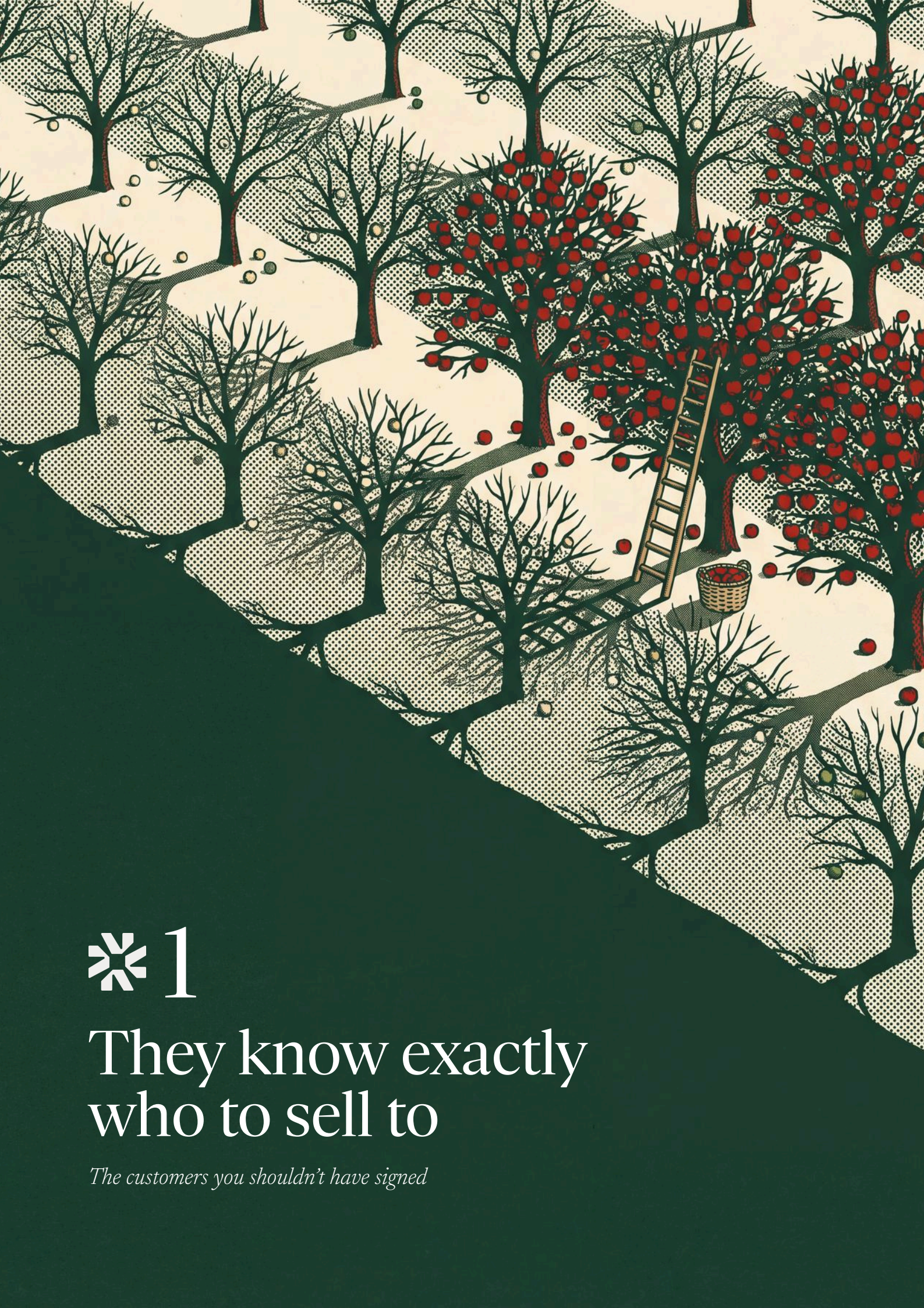
This report sets out the data behind each trait, and what to do about each one.

About this report

This report is published by Aira. It draws on published third-party research, official government statistics, and proprietary data provided to Aira. Most published research is global or US-based; where figures are specific to the EU, a single country or a single company, the text says so.

Where research was produced by a vendor with a commercial interest in the findings, it is labelled as vendor research. The worked example in section 4 is illustrative: its calculation shows its assumptions and is intended to illustrate scale, not to forecast results.





*1

They know exactly who to sell to

The customers you shouldn't have signed

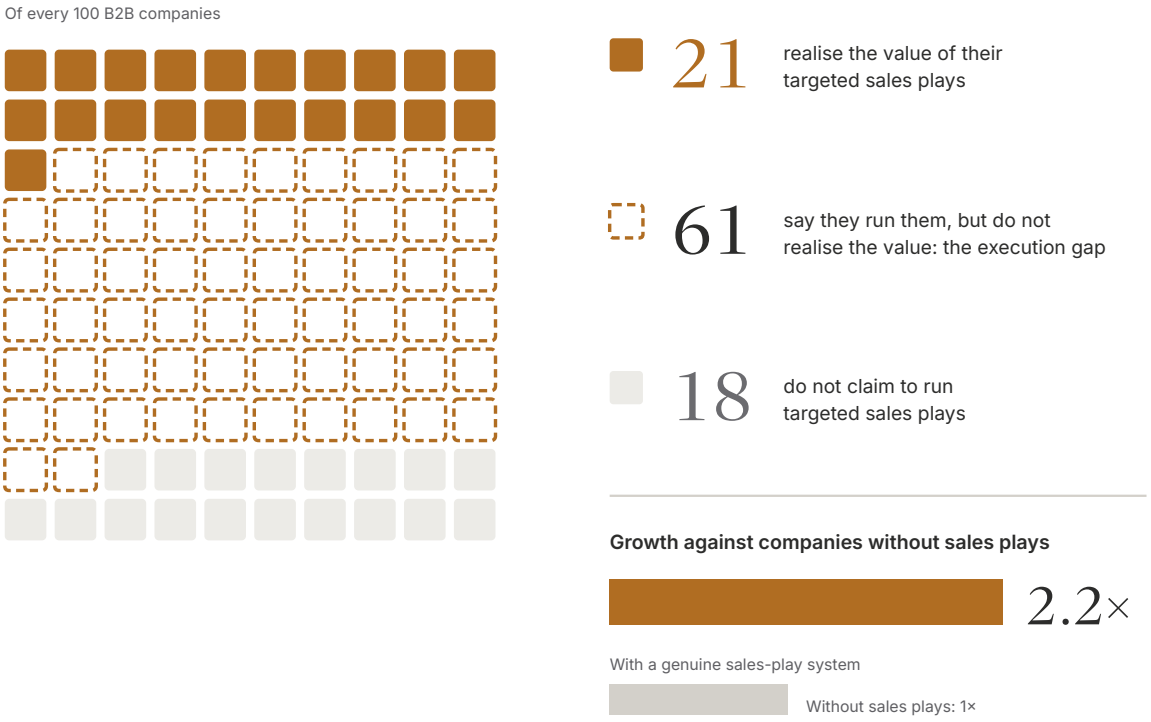
Every sales team says it is targeted. Very few are.

Bain found that 82% of B2B companies say they run sales plays, the structured motions that tell reps which customers to pursue and how. Only 21% realise their full value from them. Companies running a genuine system of targeted, repeatable plays grow 2.2 times faster than companies without one (Bain, 2025). The gap between thinking you are targeted and being targeted is where most growth is lost.

FIG. 01

The execution gap.

Most B2B companies say they run targeted sales plays. Few realise the value. Companies that run them properly grow more than twice as fast.



Source: Bain & Company, *The B2B Growth Divide*, 2025. Survey of ~1,300 senior commercial executives across 18 industries. Grid: 82% say they run targeted plays; 21% realise their full value. Growth: companies with a genuine sales-play system against companies without sales plays.

The reason is that value is far more concentrated than most teams assume.

Data from a high-growth European software company connected to the report's authors shows how concentrated. The company analysed every new client it signed in a full year: 369 in total. It split them into tiers by annual contract value. Just 39% of those clients fitted its growth-prospect profile. They generated 82% of the new annual recurring revenue.

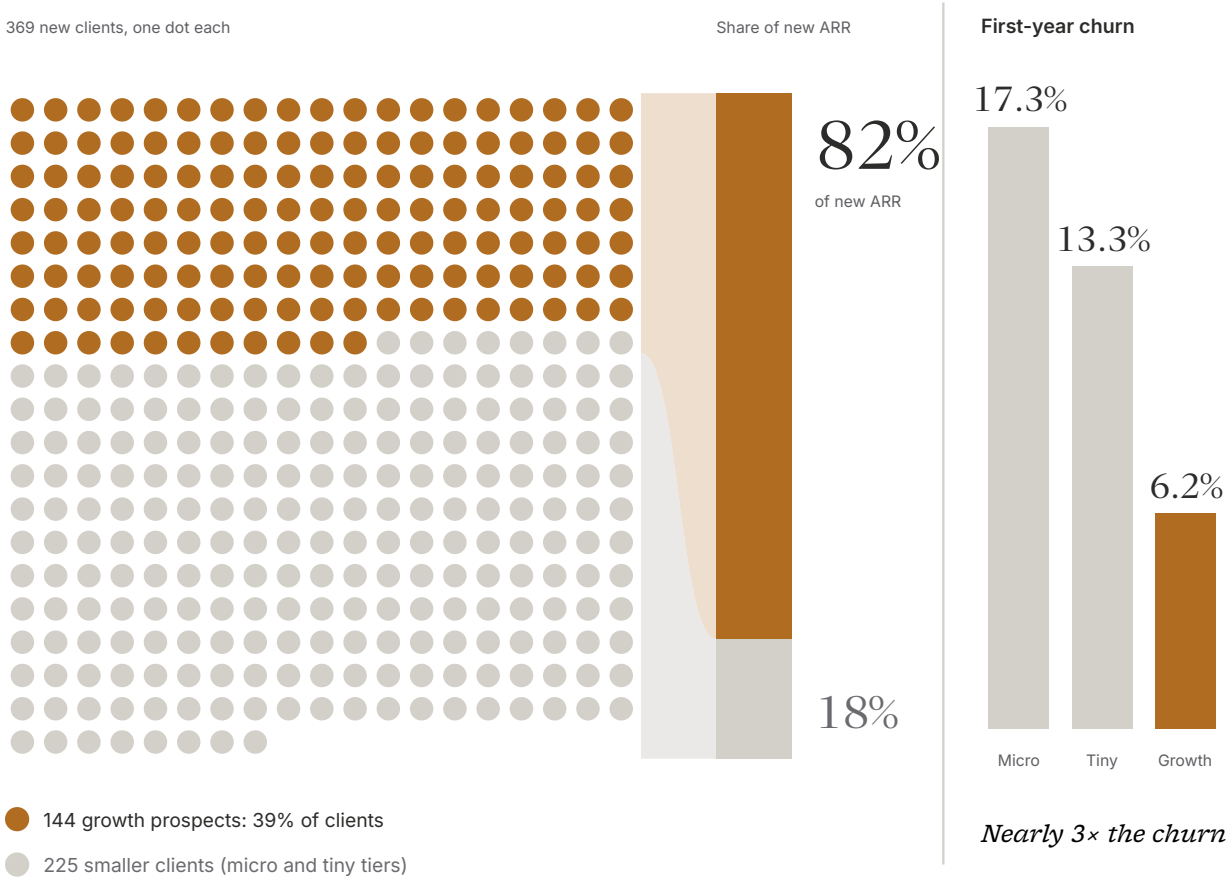
The other 61% brought in 18%. They also behaved differently once signed. First-year churn among the smallest clients was 17.3%. Among growth prospects it was 6.2%. Nearly three times lower. Growth prospects grew twice as fast after signing, and scored twice as high on customer satisfaction.

None of this should surprise anyone who has spent time in sales. We have all closed the deal that looked like a win and turned into a burden. Chris Voss, the former FBI hostage negotiator, measured it in his own business: difficult clients took two to five times longer to generate the same revenue as straightforward ones (Voss, in conversation with Aira). HubSpot's 2025 survey of sales professionals found "no product fit" was the single most common deal-killer, cited by 37% (HubSpot, 2025; vendor research).

FIG. 02

Fewer clients, more revenue, less churn.

Growth prospects were a minority of new logos, yet brought in the overwhelming share of new ARR, and were far less likely to leave.



Source: Data provided by a high-growth European software company connected to the report's authors. 369 new clients over 12 months. First-year churn rate by tier.

The most effective teams do not sell harder than everyone else. They choose better.

The flip side is where growth compounds. Keeping and growing the right customers is worth more than almost anything else a sales team does. In a dataset of 2,000 B2B companies provided to Aira by a sales technology provider, the fastest-growing companies kept 68% of their top 20% customers. Everyone else kept 50%. The fastest growers also expanded 26% of those top customers, against 11% for the rest.

Independent benchmarks tell the same story. SaaS Capital's 2025 study of more than 1,000 private B2B SaaS companies found that businesses with net revenue retention above 130% grew at a median of 50% a year. The median across the whole sample was 24% (SaaS Capital, 2025). Companies selling larger contracts, above $250,000 a year, kept 95% of their revenue gross. Below that line, 91%.

So what defines the right customer? For the software company above, it came down to measurable facts about each company. Its best customers employed between 200 and 2,000 people. That is not a matter of opinion. But it cannot be applied without accurate company data on every account.

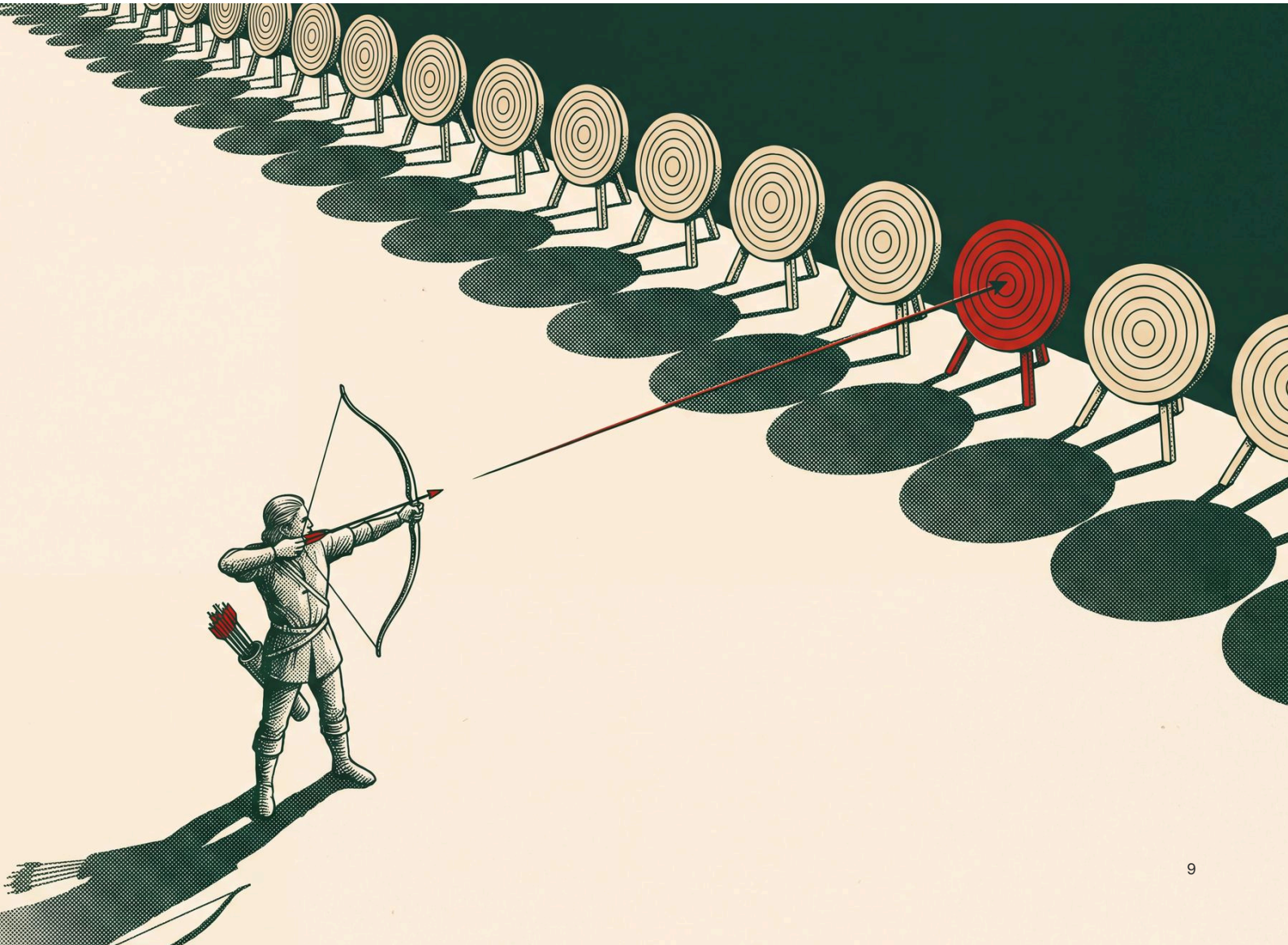
This is what separates the leaders. McKinsey found that data-driven commercial teams that combine personalised customer experiences with gen AI are 1.7 times more likely to increase market share (McKinsey, 2024). Bain's winners focus their investment on AI and automation, frontline coaching and customer segmentation, and build on a solid technology foundation. Many other companies still lack the data and technology foundations they need (Bain, 2025).

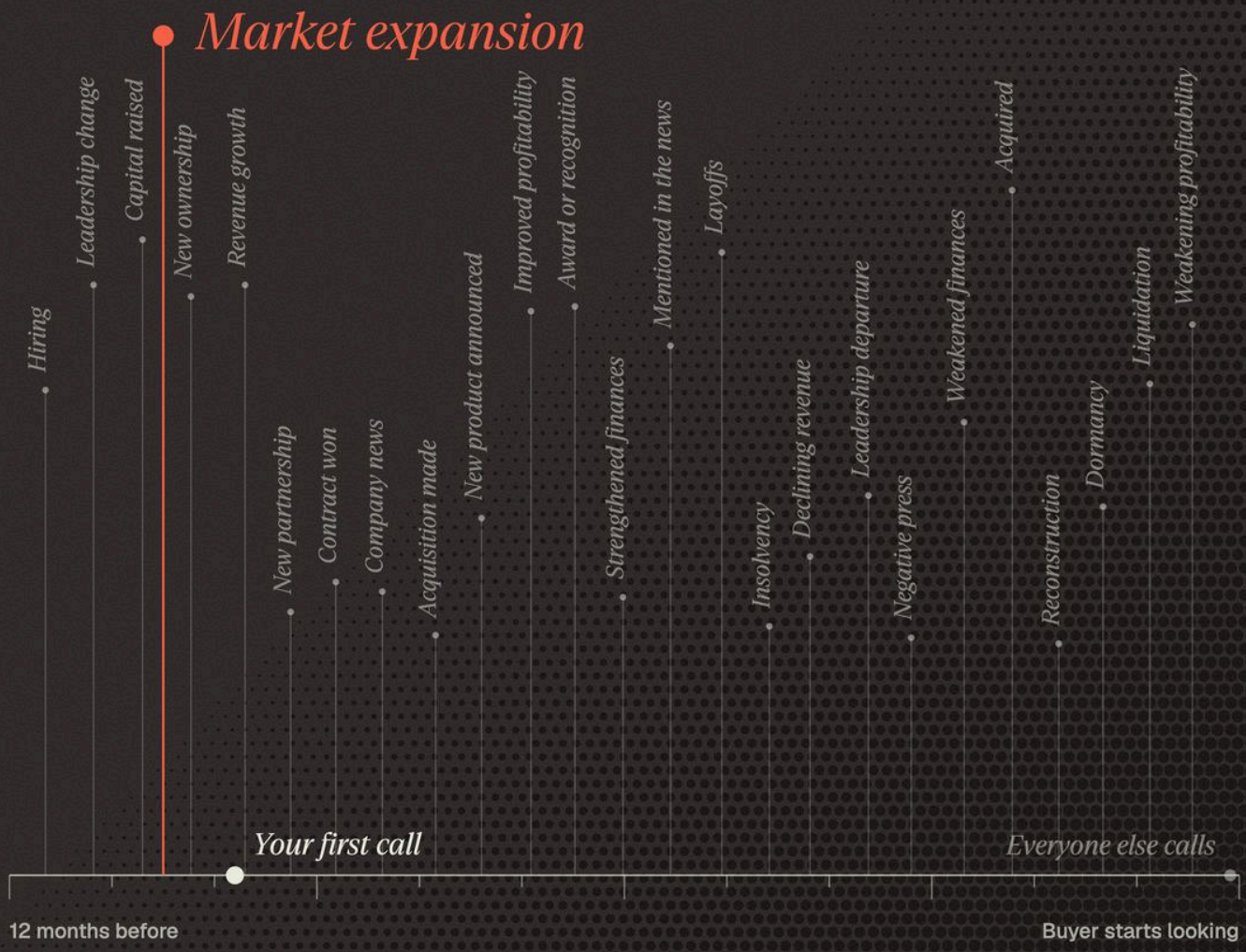
The most effective teams do not sell harder than everyone else. They choose better. But choosing better depends on seeing clearly.

None of this works if the data describing your accounts is wrong. For most teams, it is.

IN PRACTICE

- **Find out which customers actually pay.**
  Take last year's new customers, rank them by revenue, and compare the top group with the rest: share of revenue, whether they stayed, whether they grew. Any business with a customer list can do this. The software company found 39% of its new customers brought 82% of the new revenue.
- **Describe your best customers in facts you can look up.**
  Size, turnover, industry, ownership, location, growth. If you can't filter on it, it isn't a definition. The software company sells to manufacturers, and its best customers employed 200–2,000 people.
- **Don't trust industry codes.**
  Registry codes often don't match what a company actually does. Segment on real activity instead, for example with AI agents that read what each company makes and sells.
- **Say no early.**
  Agree a few disqualifiers (too small, wrong industry, financially weak) and check them before the first meeting, not after the quote.





*2

They reach buyers before the buying starts

The deal was visible months ago

Most sales processes are designed around a moment that no longer exists: the moment a buyer starts looking.

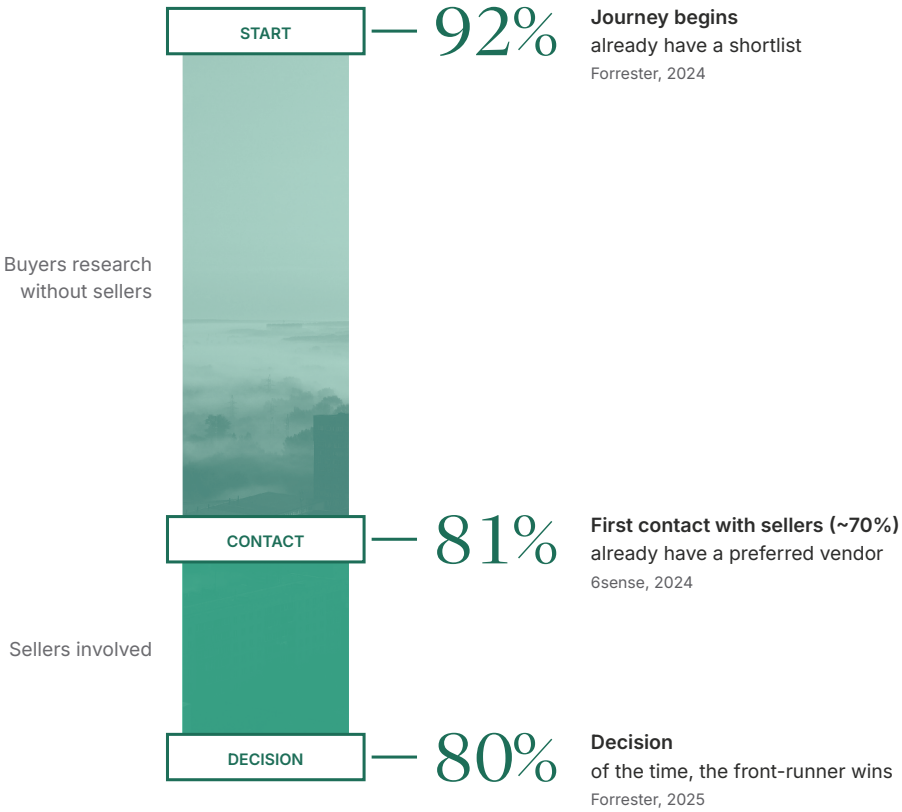
By the time a buyer starts looking, they have usually decided. Bain and Google's study of 1,208 B2B buyers found that 90% chose a vendor that was on their shortlist at the start of the process (Bain and Google, via HBR, 2022). Forrester's 2024 Buyers' Journey Survey found 41% of buyers had a single vendor in mind when they first began the purchase process, and 92% already had a shortlist (Forrester, 2024).

Being on that list early is decisive. In Forrester's 2025 survey, 68% of buyers began with a front-runner. The front-runner won 80% of the time (Forrester, 2025).

FIG. 03

The shortlist is written early.

Most of the buying journey happens before a seller is involved. By then, most buyers already know who they want.



Sources: Forrester, 2024 and 2025; 6sense, 2024 (vendor research). Position of first seller contact (~70% through the journey) is approximate.

Buyers also engage on their own terms, and late. Research from 6sense found buyers are nearly 70% of the way through their purchasing process before they engage sellers. At that point, 81% already have a preferred vendor and 85% have largely set their requirements (6sense, 2024; vendor research). Gartner's 2026 survey of 646 B2B buyers found 67% would prefer a rep-free buying experience (Gartner, 2026).

That does not mean buyers want to be left alone. It means they want to be left alone by people who have nothing useful to say. Gartner found 73% of buyers actively avoid suppliers who send irrelevant outreach (Gartner, 2025). Yet 69% turn to sales reps to validate insights generated by AI tools (Gartner, 2026). Buyers avoid reps until they need someone credible. Credibility comes from knowing their business better than a generic sequence does.

So how do the best teams get onto the shortlist before it exists? They pay attention.

Companies signal change long before they buy. A new CEO. A funding round. An acquisition. Expansion into a new market. A restructure. A change in strategy flagged in an annual report, or a quiet change on the company website. Each is a reason for a conversation, and a clue to what that conversation should be about.

The software company we cited in section 1 saw this in its own results. When its team read target companies' annual reports, aligned outreach to their stated strategic goals, and matched their own network against target companies' board members, a single campaign produced between 50 and 100 additional warm introductions.

That work is powerful and slow. Done by hand, it does not scale beyond a handful of accounts. Which is why most teams do not do it at all, and fall back on the generic outreach buyers ignore.

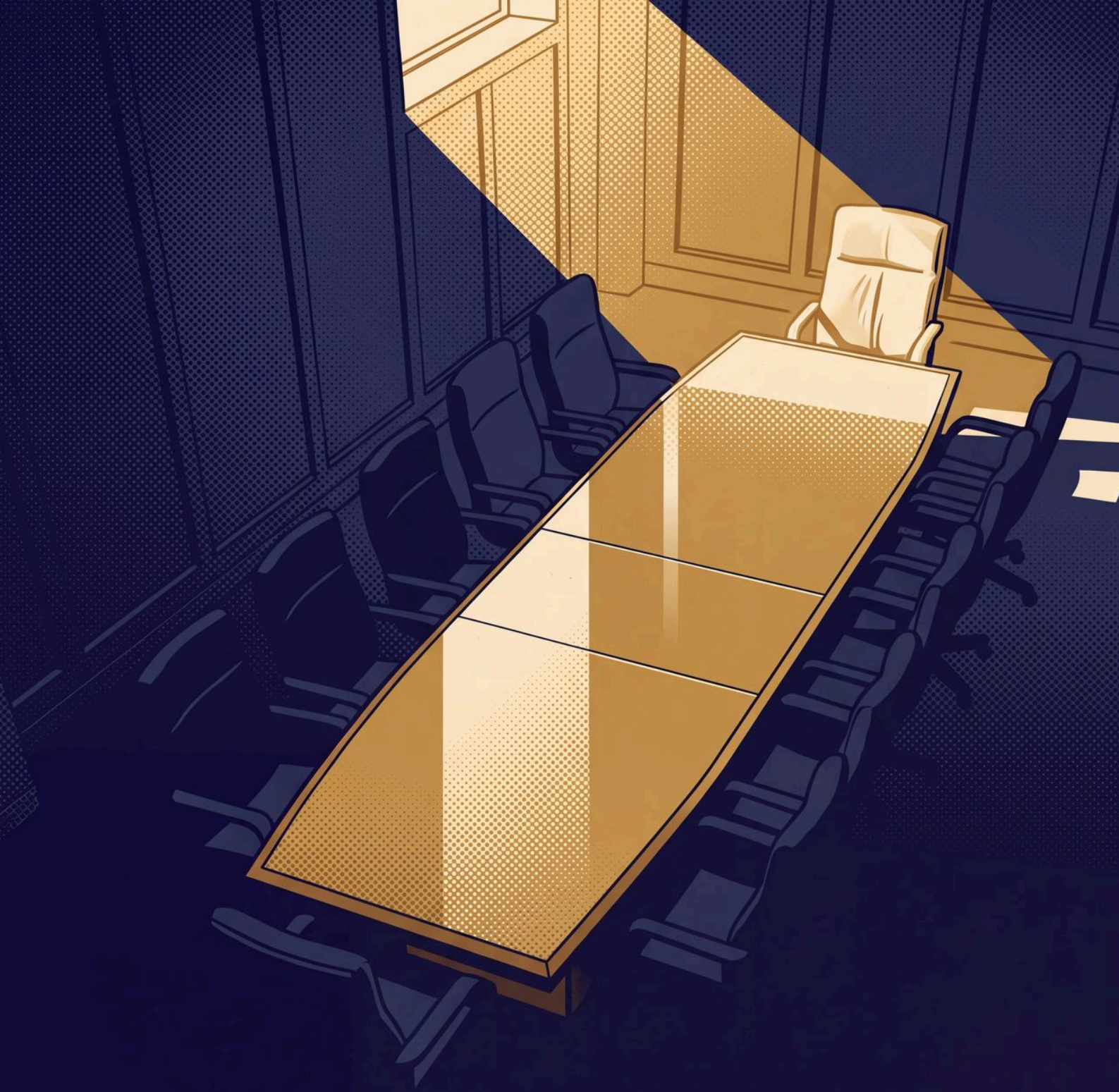
If the front-runner wins 80% of the time, the job is not to win the evaluation. It is to become the front-runner before the evaluation starts. That means knowing when something changes inside a target company, not finding out after a competitor already has.

You cannot act on a change you never see. Timing depends on knowing, continuously, what is happening inside every account you care about.

IN PRACTICE

- **Pick the few changes that create a reason to buy in your market.**
  For a supplier to manufacturers: a new plant, a capacity expansion, a change of owner, a new CFO. For a services firm: a merger or a restructure. Keep the list short.
- **Send every signal to the account owner.**
- **Let software read the filings.**
  Reading an annual report by hand pays off on large orders, but is too time-consuming for anything else. AI can summarise annual reports and turn them into signals, so every account benefits whatever the order size.
- **Make the first message about their change, not your product.**
  73% of buyers actively avoid suppliers who send irrelevant outreach (Gartner, 2025).
- **Scale the effort to the order.**
  For small orders, a timely signal and a relevant message are enough. For large ones, add research and introductions through shared contacts.





✳3

They get to the decision maker first

Thirteen people, one rep

B2B buying used to be a conversation between a seller and a buyer. It is now a committee.

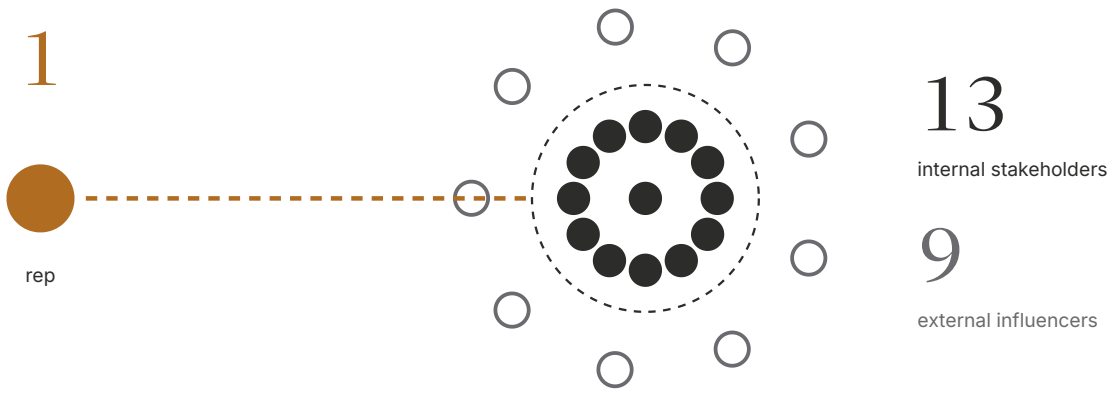
Forrester's 2026 survey of nearly 18,000 buyers found the typical purchase involves 13 internal stakeholders and nine external influencers (Forrester, 2026). Research from 6sense, using a different method, puts the average buying group at 11 (6sense, 2024; vendor research). However you count it, the rep is outnumbered.

Every stalled deal is a forecast miss waiting to happen.

FIG. 04

13 stakeholders. 9 influencers. 1 rep.

The average B2B purchase now involves a crowd. However you count it, the rep is outnumbered.



Source: Forrester, *The State of Business Buying*, 2026.

A single rep cannot build relationships with thirteen people they cannot name. That is where deals are lost.

The committees are not only large. They disagree. Gartner found that 74% of B2B buying groups show unhealthy conflict during the decision (Gartner, 2025). Forrester found 86% of B2B purchases stall during the buying process (Forrester, 2024). Even when a deal closes, the damage shows: 81% of buyers say they are dissatisfied with the provider they chose after a supposedly successful purchase (Forrester, 2024).

The teams that win cover more of the committee and reach its top earlier. Gong's analysis of 1.8 million deals found that won deals involve twice as many buyer contacts as lost ones. On deals worth more than $50,000, engaging multiple stakeholders lifts win rates by 130% on average (Gong Labs, 2025; vendor research).

Height matters as much as breadth. Ebsta and Pavilion's analysis of 655,000 opportunities found that involving the decision maker early lifts win rates by 55%. Engaged relationships with the C-suite lift upsell potential by 189% (Ebsta x Pavilion, 2025; vendor research).

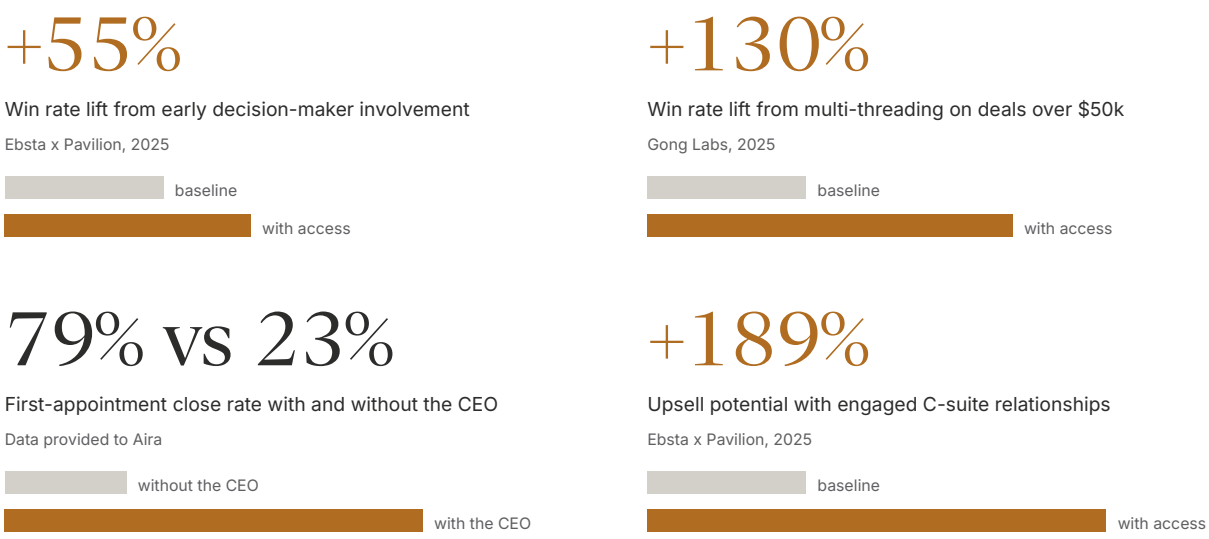
The software company's own data is starker still. The CEO of the customer was involved in 90% of its closed deals. When the CEO joined the first appointment, 79% of those opportunities closed. When they didn't, 23% did.

There is nuance worth being honest about. Gong's data suggests that opening an evaluation with an executive can lower win rates, while bringing executives in around the third touchpoint raises them. The lesson is not that reps should cold-call the CEO on day one. It is that they need to know who the decision makers are, and bring them in at the right moment. You cannot plan for the right moment if you do not know who is in the room (Gong; vendor research).

FIG. 05

Access changes the odds.

Deals go differently when senior buyers are involved.



Sources: Ebsta x Pavilion, 2025 (vendor research); Gong Labs, 2025 (vendor research); data provided by a high-growth European software company connected to the report's authors.

There is also a problem most teams never see: selling to the wrong entity altogether. When the software company analysed 3,600 target company records, they resolved to just 1,000 unique company groups. Around half were coded as holding companies or head offices. Reps working from those records would have approached the wrong part of the business, or approached the same business several times over.

Every stalled deal is a forecast miss waiting to happen. Getting to the right person, in the right entity, at the right time, is the cheapest way to prevent it.

Before the first call, you need to know who sits on the board, who holds the budget, and which entity you are actually selling to.

IN PRACTICE

- **Know the company before the contact.** Which legal entity buys, who owns it, which group it belongs to. It stops reps selling to a holding company, or approaching the same group three times.
- **Start the buying-group map from registry data.** Directors, board members and, in many countries, owners are public record.
- **Then validate it in the first calls.** Ask who else is involved, who signs off and who will use it, and update the map after every conversation. Registry data tells you who could decide; only the customer tells you who does.
- **Avoid depending on one contact.** If they leave or go quiet, you have no other way in.



✻4

They protect their reps' selling time

The half-life of a company record

Ask any sales leader what their team's scarcest resource is and most will say pipeline. The honest answer is time.

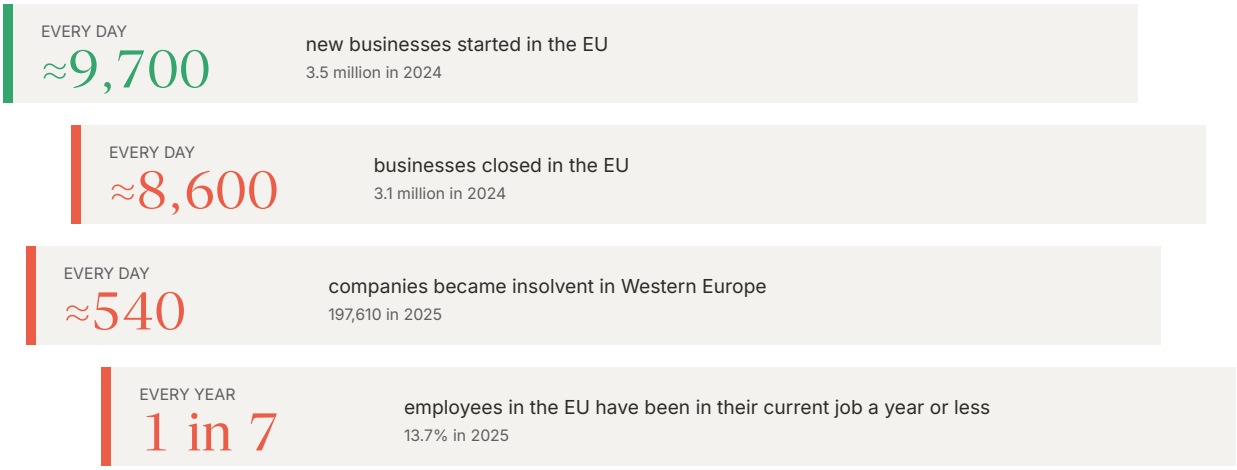
Salesforce's 2026 State of Sales, based on more than 4,000 sales professionals, found reps spend 40% of their week selling. Sales professionals spend 16% of their time on preparation and planning (Salesforce, 2026; vendor research). Reps devote almost a full day a week to prospecting, and still 47% say their team lacks the bandwidth to do cold outreach.

Much of that preparation is spent on something reps should not have to do: finding out whether the information in front of them is still true.

FIG. 06

Every day, the market moves.

The year's European totals, divided by the days in the year. The businesses and people behind your records change daily.



Sources: Eurostat, business demography, 2024; Creditreform, Insolvencies in Europe 2025/26 (vendor research); Eurostat, Labour Force Survey, 2025.

It often isn't, because companies do not stand still. In 2024, 3.5 million new businesses started in the EU and 3.1 million closed, against 34 million active: roughly one in ten in each direction, in a single year (Eurostat, 2026). In Western Europe, 197,610 companies became insolvent in 2025 (Creditreform, 2026; vendor research). In the second quarter of 2026, bankruptcy declarations in the EU reached their highest level since 2019 (Eurostat, 2026).

People move too. In the EU, 13.7% of employees aged 20 to 64 have been in their current job for a year or less (Eurostat, 2025). As a rough guide, one contact in seven in a CRM will have changed employer within a year.

The result is that most CRM data is already wrong, and teams know it. Validity's 2025 survey of 602 CRM users in the US, UK and Australia found 76% say less than half of their organisation's CRM data is accurate and complete. The same survey found companies lose an average of 16 deals a quarter to poor data (Validity, 2025; vendor research). Its 2026 survey, of 500 marketing professionals, found 62% of organisations lose revenue directly because of poor CRM data, and nearly a third of teams spend six or more hours a week fixing and reconciling data (Validity, 2026; vendor research).

The software company's experience fits. Its 3,600 target records became 1,000 real company groups, and around 400 genuine good-fit targets. Its team estimates that around 70% of the industry classifications in commercial company databases are wrong. Poor data quality is one of the top three barriers to getting value from sales analytics, cited by 44% of sales leaders (Gartner, 2024). Data and analytics leaders estimate that 19% of their company's data is siloed, inaccessible or otherwise unusable (Salesforce, 2025; vendor research).

ILLUSTRATIVE

Worked example: the cost of stale data

Take a team of 10 reps bringing in €2M of new revenue a year. Between them they sell for 7,360 hours (10 reps × 40 hours × 40% selling time × 46 weeks), so each selling hour is worth roughly **€270** of new business.

Suppose each rep loses just two hours a week to finding, checking and correcting account data. Across the team, it adds up to 920 hours a year.

At €100k a year per rep, fully loaded, that is about **€50k** in salary spent correcting data. Or, put back into selling, around **€250k** of new revenue: an eighth more new business from the same team.

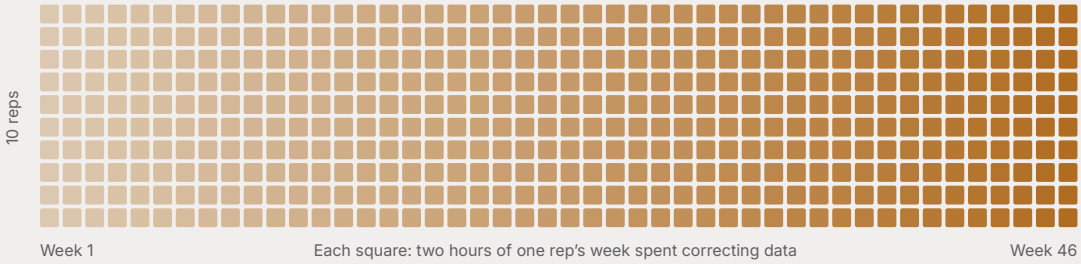
Contact decay compounds it. In a CRM of 5,000 contacts, EU tenure data suggests around **700** will have changed employer within a year.

FIG. 07

The cost of two hours a week.

920 hours

10 reps × 2 hours a week × 46 working weeks



Assumptions: new revenue scales with selling time; salary cost about €54 per hour (€100k ÷ 1,840 hours); EU tenure data as a proxy for contact turnover (13.7% of EU employees have been in their job a year or less). An illustration of scale, not a forecast.

The cost is not only the hours. It is the deals that age while reps are busy fixing records. Ebsta and Pavilion found that late-stage deals which slip by more than two months win less than half as often as those that do not. Deals that slip a week win 18% of the time; deals that slip three months, 8% (Ebsta x Pavilion, 2025; vendor research). A day spent chasing a stale record is a day the opportunity gets older.

The best teams treat this as a performance problem, not an admin problem. Every hour a rep spends correcting a record is an hour not spent with a buyer.

Every record starts decaying the day it is saved. Unless it is updated continuously, reps pay for it in hours.

IN PRACTICE

- **Ask reps how long they spend looking things up before a call.**
  Then work out what that time costs with your own figures: reps × hours lost a week × working weeks × revenue per selling hour. The worked example above shows how.
- **Stop reps doing company research and data entry.**
  Company details, financials, ownership and changes should arrive in the CRM automatically and refresh every day. That's what Aira does, with no clean-up project and no extra hire.
- **Remove dead accounts automatically.**
  Dissolved, insolvent and merged companies should leave active lists the day it happens. Across the EU, 3.1 million businesses closed in a single year.
- **Check contacts when it matters, not on a calendar.**
  Confirm the person is still there before the first call and before a quote, order or renewal.



※5 They don’t let AI guess

Confidently wrong

Every sales team is being told to use AI. Most already are. The question that matters is what the AI knows.

General-purpose AI tools are fluent, fast and persuasive. They are also frequently wrong about companies, and they rarely say so.

When Patronus AI tested leading models on straightforward questions about public companies' financial filings, GPT-4 Turbo with a retrieval system failed 81% of the time, either answering incorrectly or refusing to answer (Patronus AI, FinanceBench, 2023; vendor research). Models have improved since that study, but the underlying issue has not gone away. In 2025, researchers at Columbia University's Tow Center asked eight AI search engines to identify the source of news excerpts, across 1,600 queries. They gave incorrect answers to more than 60% of them. Even the best performer was wrong 37% of the time (Tow Center, 2025).

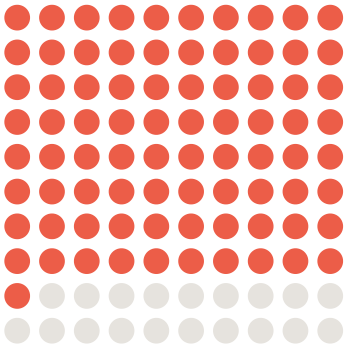
FIG. 08

Confidently wrong.

AI answers sound certain. Often they are not right, and most users do not check.

81%

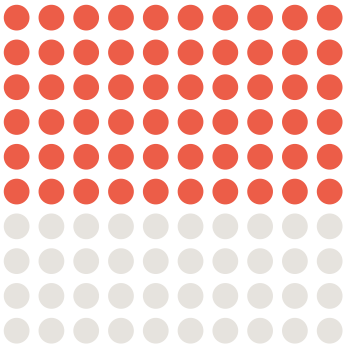
of questions on company financial filings GPT-4 Turbo answered incorrectly or refused to answer, in 2023



Patronus AI, 2023 (vendor research)

60%+

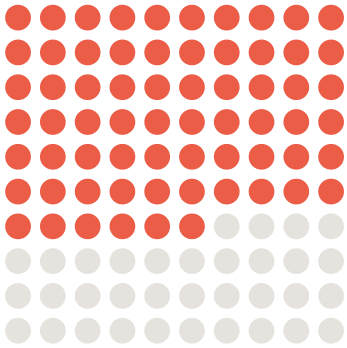
of queries where AI search engines misidentified the source of a news story



Tow Center, 2025

66%

of employees using AI at work rely on its output without checking it



University of Melbourne and KPMG, 2025

Sources: Patronus AI, 2023 (vendor research); Tow Center for Digital Journalism, 2025; University of Melbourne and KPMG, 2025.

The errors would matter less if people checked. They mostly don't. A University of Melbourne and KPMG study of more than 48,000 people across 47 countries found 66% of employees who use AI at work rely on its output without evaluating its accuracy. 56% said they had made mistakes in their work because of AI (University of Melbourne and KPMG, 2025).

Seniority does not help. Validity's 2026 survey of marketers found nearly 78% of C-suite respondents and 92% of SVP and VP respondents had acted on an AI recommendation they later suspected was wrong because of bad underlying data. Among individual contributors, it was 41% (Validity, 2026; vendor research). The people making the biggest decisions are the most exposed.

The consequences are real. In 2025, Deloitte Australia refunded more than A$97,000 of a roughly A$440,000 government contract after its report was found to contain apparent AI-generated errors, including a fabricated quote from a court judgment and references to academic papers that do not exist. In sales, the errors are quieter but just as costly: a pitch built on the wrong revenue figure, a call to an executive who left last year, a territory plan built on companies that no longer exist. Salesforce found 46% of sales professionals using AI agents say data quality issues are hurting their sales (Salesforce, 2026; vendor research).

Most organisations know the foundations are not ready. Gartner predicts that through 2026, organisations will abandon 60% of AI projects that are not supported by AI-ready data, and 63% of organisations either lack or are unsure they have the right data practices for AI (Gartner, 2025). 84% of data and analytics leaders say their data strategy needs an overhaul to meet their AI goals (Salesforce, 2025; vendor research). 51% of sales leaders using AI say tech silos are delaying or limiting their AI initiatives (Salesforce, 2026; vendor research).

The best teams have already worked this out. They are not using less AI. They are using more, on better data. Salesforce found high-performing sales teams are 1.7 times more likely than underperformers to use AI agents for prospecting. They are also far more likely to prioritise the data underneath: among teams using AI, 79% of high performers prioritise data hygiene, against 54% of underperformers (Salesforce, 2026; vendor research).

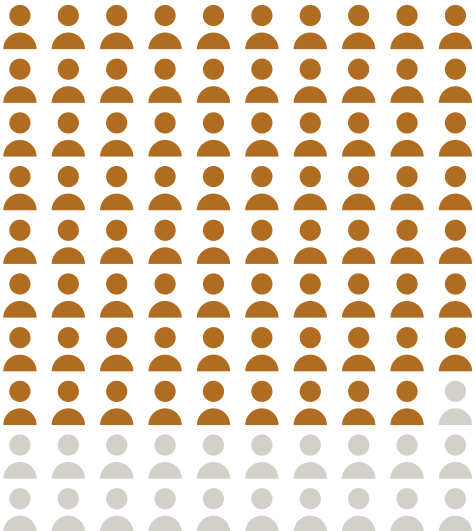
FIG. 09

The best teams use more AI, on better data.

High-performing sales teams pair AI with clean data.

DATA HYGIENE

79 in 100 high performers prioritise data hygiene



AI AGENTS FOR PROSPECTING

1.7×

High performers are 1.7 times as likely as underperformers to use AI agents for prospecting.

Source: Salesforce, *State of Sales*, 7th edition, 2026 (vendor research). Data hygiene: sales teams using AI.

An AI agent multiplies whatever it is given. Good data in, better decisions out, at scale. Wrong data in, confident errors out, also at scale.

Verified, current data is the difference between AI as an advantage and AI as a liability.

IN PRACTICE

- **Give AI facts, not the open web.**
  Connect AI tools to verified company data, and require a source for every figure they produce.
- **Check before it reaches a customer.**
  Any figure about a customer (turnover, size, owner, key people) needs a source before it goes into an email or a quote.
- **Start with one job and check the results.**
  For example, summarising accounts before calls, or screening a list against your customer profile. Check a sample by hand before relying on it at scale.
- **Fix the data first, then add AI.**
  An AI agent multiplies whatever it's given; Gartner expects 60% of AI projects without AI-ready data to be abandoned.



Why we built Aira

Every trait in this report rests on the same foundation. Knowing who to sell to. Knowing when to call. Knowing who to call. Keeping that knowledge current. Scaling it safely with AI. Each depends on accurate, up-to-date information about the companies you sell to.

Scan to see Aira at aira.app

FIG. 10

From trait to foundation.

Each trait of a winning team rests on data. Here is what each one needs, and where Aira fits.

	The trait	Depends on	What Aira provides
1	Know exactly who to sell to	Accurate financial and corporate data on every account	**Verified registry and financial data; agents for bespoke criteria**
2	Reach buyers before the buying starts	Knowing when something changes	**Live monitoring of news, websites and financials, with triggers and alerts to reach out before competitors do**
3	Get to the decision maker first	Boards, directors and group structure	**Corporate and ownership data, synced to the CRM**
4	Protect reps' selling time	Records that stay current	**Continuous updates, no manual research**
5	Don't let AI guess	Verified data underneath AI	**A sourced, current data layer for every agent**

Aira analysis.

We kept finding that foundation missing, including in our own business.

Before Aira, our team ran sales at a high-growth software company. We saw the pattern in our own numbers first. A minority of customers produced most of the revenue, churned less and grew faster. Our CRM could not reliably tell us which other companies looked like them.

When we built target lists, thousands of records collapsed into a fraction of that number of real companies. Many were miscoded. Many were out of date. Our best results came from work that did not scale: reading annual reports, tracking what was changing at target companies, mapping boards and group structures by hand.

We looked for a better way and found three options, none of which solved the problem.

CRM data decays from the day it is entered, and in most organisations nobody's job is to keep it current. Standard company databases classify businesses with codes that are frequently wrong, and filter on the same variables every competitor filters on. General-purpose AI fills the gaps fluently, but it cannot show its source, and it is often wrong.

So we built Aira.

Aira is an intelligence layer that sits on top of the CRM teams already use. It provides premium financial and corporate data, drawn from official registries and finance-grade institutional sources, and keeps it continuously updated. It monitors news and company websites for every account, so changes surface when they happen, not months later. It syncs all of it directly into the CRM, where reps already work. And it lets teams deploy AI agents to find the specific company characteristics standard filters cannot, built on verified data rather than guesswork.

The most effective sales teams do not have better instincts than everyone else. They have better information, and they keep it true.

That is the gap we saw. It is why we built Aira. ■



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