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Built for B2B sales teams

2026 Cold Outreach Report

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The **State of Play**

Outbound B2B sales has fundamentally shifted in the past 2 years.

What worked in 2024 stopped working in 2025, and these shifts will continue into 2026 and beyond.

The gap between best-in-class and average performers is widening. While some teams are hitting record outbound numbers, most are struggling with poor deliverability, falling engagement and increasingly complex sales cycles.

We've been there, we've battled through it, learnt hard lessons and come out the other side stronger.

Now we're sharing our findings with you so you can bring your outbound strategy up-to-speed.

2026 = GTM Revolution

What worked for outbound sales in 2024 and 2025 won't cut it in 2026.

The volume game is over. Sales teams that are winning right now focus on signals, timing and positioning of offers.

This report uncovers the current benchmarks and gives you a proven system that you can use to get ahead.

What is GTM?

A GTM (Go-to-Market) strategy is the plan a business uses to bring a product or service to market, showing exactly how you'll reach buyers, win customers, and generate revenue.

Unlike traditional marketing, which focuses on general promotion, a GTM approach unites sales and marketing around a clear strategy for driving revenue.

On average, an experienced GTM Engineer can generate 5x more leads on a weekly basis than a Sales Development Rep.



Cold email in 2026: Our Predictions

In 2025, several forks in the road met to reshape the world of outbound sales prospecting entirely. Understanding these shifts gives forward-thinking leaders a 12 month headstart on the competition.

This is what we expect 2026 will bring for sales teams:



Prediction 1:

Platform rules tighten (further)

Multi-inbox rotation becomes table stakes. Expect Gmail and Outlook to introduce even stricter sender reputation scoring, making proper infrastructure non-negotiable for consistent delivery.



Prediction 2:

AI will find its place

While AI tools dramatically accelerate prospect research and signal spotting, human creativity remains essential. The best-performing sequences will blend AI-powered insights with human messaging.



Prediction 3:

Think small. Close more.

Signal-timed sequences targeting hyper-specific and personalised lists outperform generic campaigns by 5-7x. This trend will continue into 2026 and precision will trump volume in every important metric.



Prediction 4:

We will face a data source crisis.

Database saturation becomes impossible to ignore. In 2026, teams shift away from Apollo's noisy lists and toward higher-quality signals from Google Maps, Clay, job boards, and LinkedIn Sales Navigator.



What you're up against

42%

Signal-based outreach gets 42% more positive replies than spray-and-pray approaches

3.2x

Signal-timed outbound converts 3x better than paid for mid-market and enterprise

4.8

5 decision-makers per deal means multi-threading is essential

87

87 days lost per rep, per year. Costing businesses £26k in productivity per rep.

150

Mailbox providers punish volume. 150 emails per inbox is the safe daily limit.



Getting into Fort Inbox

Today's inbox is a fortress, protected by multiple layers of authentication protocols and governed by increasingly strict volume policies from major inbox providers.



Authentication Mandatory

SPF, DKIM & DMARC are essential. First-touch emails should be text-only to build sender reputation (or major providers will filter you fast)



Volume Limits

Safe daily sends are now:

New domains = 20–30/day

Warmed = 50–75/day

Enterprise: 100–150 max.



Bounce & Spam Rates

Bounce rates must stay below 3% and spam complaints under 0.1%.

Cross those lines and your sender reputation tanks.



Domain Rotation

Relying on one domain for inboxes doesn't work anymore. Leading teams spread sends across several domains to stay deliverable.

These are not suggestions, they're non-negotiables. Leading sales teams now design their GTM stack around deliverability from the ground up.



What good looks like & how to fix gaps fast

Start by seeing how you compare to the best. These benchmarks highlight what top outbound teams hit. You can use them to pinpoint your gaps and level up quickly.

Metric	Best-in-class	Average	Concerning	F. SaaS client
Bounce rate %	<2%	3–5%	>6%	1.5%
Positive reply %	>3%	~2%	<1%	8.6%
Booked meeting %	>3%	1–2%	<0.5%	4.1%
Cost per meeting	£150–250	£250–500	>£500	£140
Lead score (1–5)	4+	3–3.9	<2.5	4.1

Instant diagnostic framework

High bounce rate

You're hitting bad data or stale lists. Fix it with better enrichment, verified contacts and strict daily send limits.

Low reply rate

Your targeting or messaging is off. Tighten your ICP, use signal-based triggers, and personalise your first touch.

Low meeting rate

You're getting opens and replies, but your offer isn't compelling. Strengthen your CTA and optimise follow-ups.

Low lead score

You're attracting the wrong buyers. Refine your list sources, focus on intent signals, and test new email copy and offers.

Hit best-in-class.
Hit us up.



Get Flowd in

How to build an **Outbound Operating System**

Top-performing sales teams don't just work harder—they have better systems. We call it an **Outbound OS**: repeatable, measurable, and built to turn data into qualified leads.

This system has 5 core steps:

1. Input



Define ideal customer profile and minimum viable lead criteria. Source fresh data from multiple providers, avoiding over-saturated databases.

2. Enrich



Waterfall enrichment to maximise insights & data accuracy. Layer in technographic, firmographic & intent signals.

3. Verify



Two-step verification including catch-all re-checks. Only send-safe contacts progress to activation to protect sender reputation.

4. Activate



Deploy signal-timed sequences with proper deliverability protocols. Multi-inbox rotation, text-only first touch and strict volume limits.

5. Learn



Analyse performance, identify patterns and feed insights back into ICP refinement and sequence optimisation for continuous improvement.



“

We monitor the source of every lead to the business and the leads from Flowd are amongst the best. 5 stars all day long.

— Dan, Altitude Internet

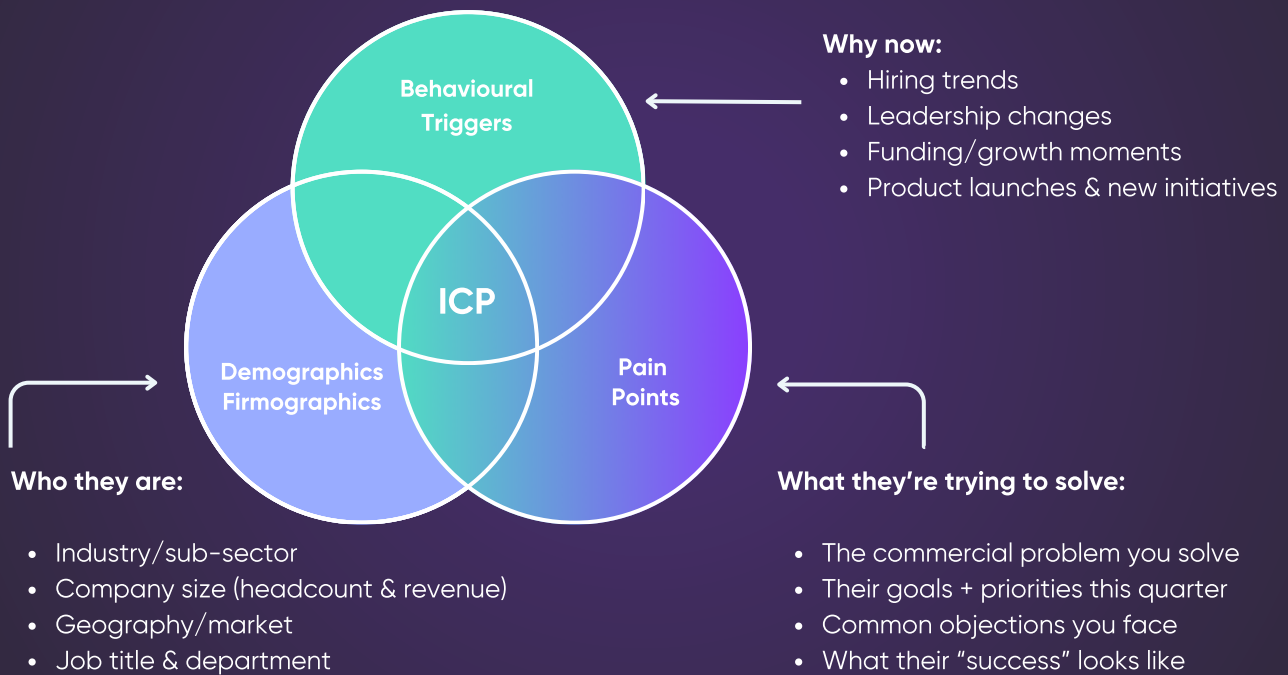
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Step 1

Input: List Building

Cold email in 2026 isn't a volume game. The fastest way to burn domains (and brand trust) is messaging people who were never a fit. Your goal is simple: define who you can help + spot when they're most likely to care.

The ICP Sweet Spot:



Your "Minimum Viable Lead"

Write 5–7 rules that must be true for a prospect to qualify as an MVL, for example:

- B2B, UK/US, 200–2,000 employees
- VP Sales / Sales Director / RevOps lead
- Hiring SDRs/AEs or new leader in seat <6 months
- Clear outbound motion (sales team already exists)
- Likely to value pipeline efficiency (lean team / high targets)

Then create micro-lists where every contact shares a clear "why now".

- **List A:** New-to-role leaders
- **List B:** Hiring bursts
- **List C:** Growth moments (funding, expansion, launches)

Top tools:

- **Fireflies:** Mine call notes to spot ICP patterns and repeatable pains.
- **ChatGPT:** Turn ICP rules into lead scoring and filtering prompts.
- **LinkedIn Sales Nav:** Build precise lists from live filters.
- **Indeed:** Use job ads as signals for targeting and personalisation.



Step 2

Enrich: Add context

Enrichment is where a “list of leads” becomes a list you can actually convert. You need to add enough detail to understand who they are, what’s changed and why they might care, so every message lands as relevant, not generic.

What to enrich:

- Contact data: job title, seniority, function, location
- Company data: headcount, industry, revenue/region (where available)
- Signals: hiring trends, funding/news, product launches, leadership changes
- Personalisation inputs: tech stack, recent initiatives, job posts, key pages

Top tools:



- **Clay:** Multi-source enrichment and workflow hub in one table
- **Serper:** Google Search API for pulling fresh web signals at scale
- **ZenRows:** Scraping API that extracts data from hard-to-scrape sites

Step 3

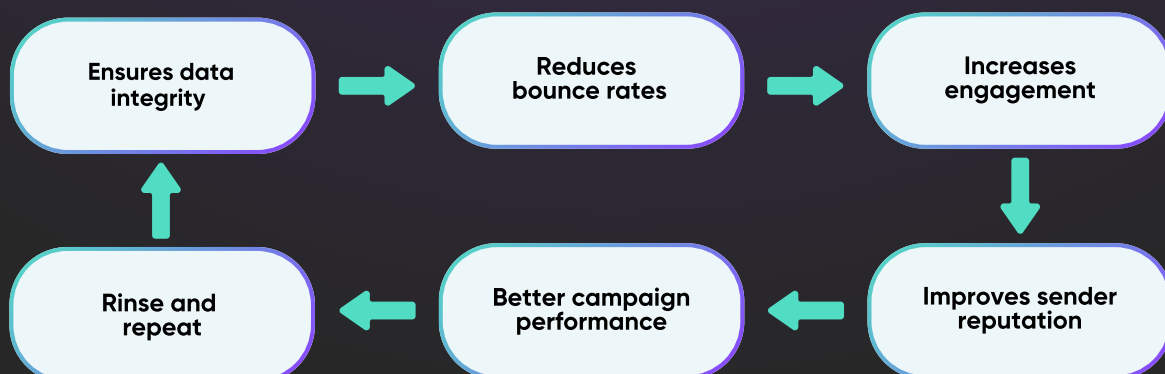
Verify: Ensure deliverability

Verification is your insurance policy. If you don’t verify every contact’s email address, you train inboxes to distrust you and waste outreach.

What verification prevents:

- Hard bounces (invalid inboxes)
- Risky “unknowns” (often catch-alls)
- Volume wasted on addresses that were never deliverable

Why you must always double verify your contact data:



Step 4

Activate: Set campaigns live

This is where data becomes pipeline. Once your list is enriched and send-safe, we load it into a sequencer and run a waterfall: one core message with signal-based personalisation, followed by low-friction nudges that add value.

Campaign non-negotiables:

- Import segmented micro-lists, each with a clear "why now"
- Assign sequences per segment (new-to-role, hiring, growth, renewals)
- Use enrichment data to personalise the opener
- Keep it simple: short, text-only, no links, irresistible offer
- Follow up properly – most meetings come from follow-ups, not the first email

Top tool:



Instantly: Our email waterfall sequencer to launch campaigns at scale, manage multiple inboxes from one place while keeping structure and control.

Step 5

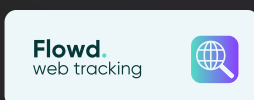
Learn: Optimise campaigns

Most teams only optimise copy. We also optimise **who we target** and **when**.

Optimisation is a feedback loop: review performance, identify where the funnel breaks and refine your ICP, signals and segments.

1. **Check funnel metrics:** Sends → Replies → Meetings → Opportunities
2. **Diagnose the bottleneck:**
 - Replies low = ICP/segment/signal problem
 - Replies fine, meetings low = CTA/friction/follow-up speed
 - Bounce/complaints rising = list hygiene/volume discipline
3. **Refine the rules:** tighten MVL, add/remove titles, adjust triggers, split segments.
4. **Double down:** scale the segments that perform and pause the rest.

Top tool:



Flowd Web Tracking reveals intent (visits, repeat visits, key pages) so we can route prospects into higher-intent follow-ups and continuously sharpen targeting for our clients.



Outbound Operating System

How it looks in action



Wondergrip is a global manufacturer of industrial protective gloves, engineered for superior grip in dry, wet and oily conditions. Their parent company is based in Tokyo, with operations across Europe and the United States.

The challenge:

Accounts typically spend £2,000–£5,000 per year, and the team's growth challenge wasn't retention – it was net-new acquisition. Most revenue was coming from repeat customers, with limited new logos entering the pipeline, so Wonder Grip tasked Flowd to source new business.

ICP Definition:

Company



- **Industries:** Manufacturing, Construction, Warehousing, Engineering
- **Size:** 50–2,000 employees
- **Location:** UK

Persona



- **Seniority:** VP Sales, Head of Sales, or CRO
- **Time in role:** Appointed within last 1–6 months
- **Responsibilities:** Manages team of 5+ reps, P&L responsibility or quota ownership

Key Signals



- New-to-role (LinkedIn profile update)
- Active AE hiring (job postings live)
- Recent funding announcement
- Expansion hiring across GTM

The solution:

Wondergrip's product needs to be tested in the real environment. So instead of selling features, the outreach was designed to remove friction and start a trial.

No-brainer offer



Free tailored glove samples for on-site testing.

We asked what glove they currently use, then sent the closest equivalent as a direct comparison.

Why it converts:

- Low lift (no meeting required to say yes)
- High relevance (built around their current glove)
- Clear outcome (test performance in real conditions)
- Safe (no strings attached)



How it looks in action

Campaign angles:

We ran multiple micro-campaigns with the same core offer, tailored by audience segment:

- **H&S leaders (core)** – reduce hand injuries + improve compliance
- **Housing associations** – contractor/site safety + consistency of PPE
- **Distributors** – supply, margin, product differentiation
- **New-to-role (small test)** – fresh leader likely eager to improve PPE standards

Copy example

Glove sample delivery

ExternalInbox

Hannah <han@wondergrip.org.uk>
to me ▼

Would you be up for testing our gloves, {{first_name}}?

I'd be happy to send across some tailored samples for your team to review on-site – no strings attached, just to see how they hold up day to day.

The reason I ask is because a lot of H&S teams in construction mention the same thing: hand injuries remain one of the most frequent and high-cost on-site incidents, even with PPE policies in place.

Is that something you're seeing at {{company_name}} as well?

Results

Months:

2

Replies:

348

Meetings:

98

Pipeline:

£490k

[Book a demo](#)

From insights to inboxes

Your 2026 action plan

You've surveyed the landscape, seen the data, learnt the system and reviewed a working example. Now here comes the crucial part: **implementing the system.**



1. Audit your current state

Compare your metrics against the benchmarks in section three. Identify your weakest link (replies, meeting conversion, opportunity rate, or deliverability) and make that your first focus area.



2. Set up architecture

Ensure your deliverability infrastructure is production-ready: DNS authentication (SPF/DKIM/DMARC), multi-inbox rotation, verified contact lists and compliant sending volumes. Without this foundation, nothing else matters.



3. Tighten your ICP

Define your ICP and MVL thresholds. Build your signal map to enable timing-based targeting. Source fresh data from multiple providers to avoid over-saturated databases.



4. Craft your offer

Develop a compelling offer that's specific, low-friction and addresses a real pain point. Test variants to find what resonates. Use prospect enrichment to deeply personalise each email.



5. Close the loop

Connect outbound activity to website behaviour, re-enrich returning visitors and build context-aware follow-up workflows. Review performance regularly and optimise.



Or call in the experts
Work with Flowd.

Hit your sales target on autopilot

★ Trustpilot

Excellent



Clutch

★★★★★
TOP EMAIL MARKETING AGENCY

You now have the tips, tricks and tactics to go and dominate your outbound sales.

But let's be honest – do you really have time to set all of this up, action it, revise it and then optimise it?

Probably not.

That's where we come in, we'll do the dirty work so your team can focus on closing new deals.

£43m+

Attributed
revenue

8x

Average
ROI

46,529

Meetings
booked

400+

Clients
served

Is your strategy 2026-ready?

Book a free demo today.



“

We've seen a consistent flow of good quality leads, including a deal worth nearly £1 million per year.

– Elliot, Recycling Lives

”

Flowd.