

REPORT

From Ad Waste to ROI:

How B2B marketers can do more with more

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B2B marketing budgets are growing, but ad waste remains a challenge. Despite confidence in digital channels and new adtech and martech, marketers struggle to maximize efficiency. Priorities include better targeting, audience reach, and first-party data. This report explores the latest trends, opportunities, and hurdles in B2B marketing, providing insights to help brands refine their approach and drive better results.

This report analyzes data from a survey of 231 B2B marketers and agencies worldwide commissioned by Demandbase in partnership with EMARKETER. It was conducted in January and February 2025 to benchmark strategies, identify challenges, and find optimization opportunities in B2B marketing.

Key survey findings:

1

B2B ad budgets are growing, but waste remains a concern. A majority (64.9%) of marketers say their overall ad budget increased in 2025. However, 58.0% say ad waste is an issue, with over half (52.4%) estimating losses between 16% and 45%.

2

Targeting and journey-mapping strategies can improve. Reaching the right buying groups is the top challenge to maximize ROI, cited by half (50.2%) of marketers. While 47.2% use a group-based targeting approach, nearly a fifth are not satisfied and only 17.3% say their journey stages are fully mapped out.

3

B2B marketers need new ways to nurture buyer relationships. More than a third (37.7%) of marketers identify the extended sales cycle as a key challenge to maximizing ROI. This requires honing relationship-building and networking strategies, which 52.8% consider more effective in B2B than in B2C.

4

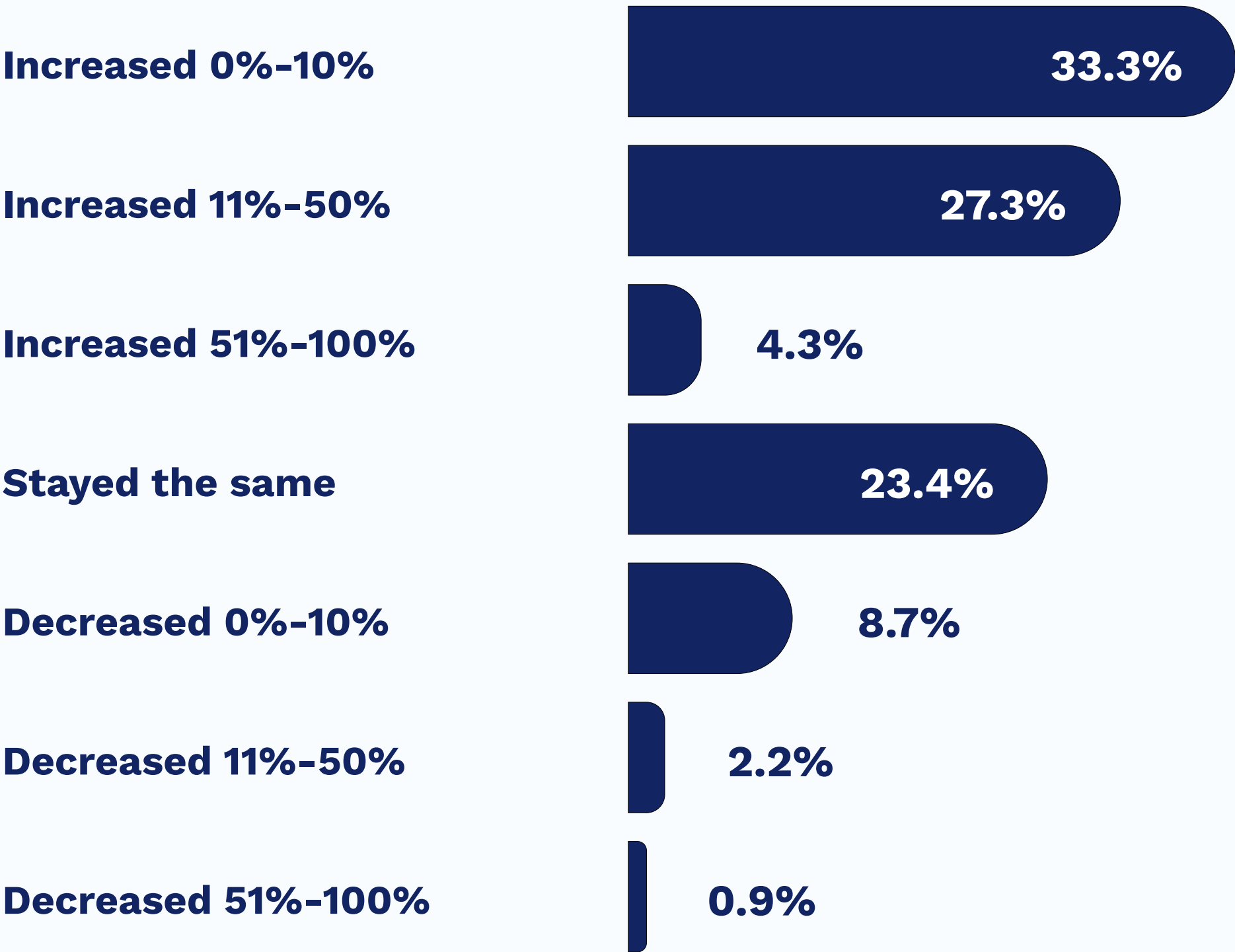
AI can streamline B2B marketing. The top use cases are content creation and optimization (48.5%) and data-driven insights like customer segmentation (44.6%). AI enables marketers to adjust their advertising strategy by region, which can vary in terms of messaging, digital platforms, and consumer behavior.

A significant portion of B2B ad budgets is wasted

Advertising budgets increased for nearly two-thirds (64.9%) of marketers in 2025, according to the survey.

- **Of those, a third saw a modest rise up to 10%, while 27.3% experienced more substantial increases between 11% to 50%, according to the survey.**
- **Only 11.7% of marketers saw a decline.**
- **US B2B ad spend will increase 10.3% in 2025, reaching \$44.35 billion, according to an August 2024 EMARKETER forecast.**
- **Worldwide, B2B digital ad spend will reach \$43.62 billion in 2025, a 12.8% increase YoY.**
- **India, Mexico, and Spain will experience the fastest B2B ad spend growth in 2025, while Japan, Australia, and South Korea will see the slowest growth.**

How did your overall advertising budget change for 2025?



Source: EMARKETER and Demandbase “B2B Advertising Survey,” January 2025 n=231

However, spending more doesn't guarantee better outcomes, and many marketers face efficiency challenges.

- **Over half (58.0%) of marketers agree that waste in B2B advertising is a significant issue, with 52.4% estimating that 16% to 45% of their ad spend is wasted on irrelevant accounts, per survey data.**
- **This wastage could cost billions annually.**

**“There’s no longer a direct path to purchase,”
said EMARKETER PRINCIPAL ANALYST Kelsey Voss**



More effective targeting strategies can reduce ad waste

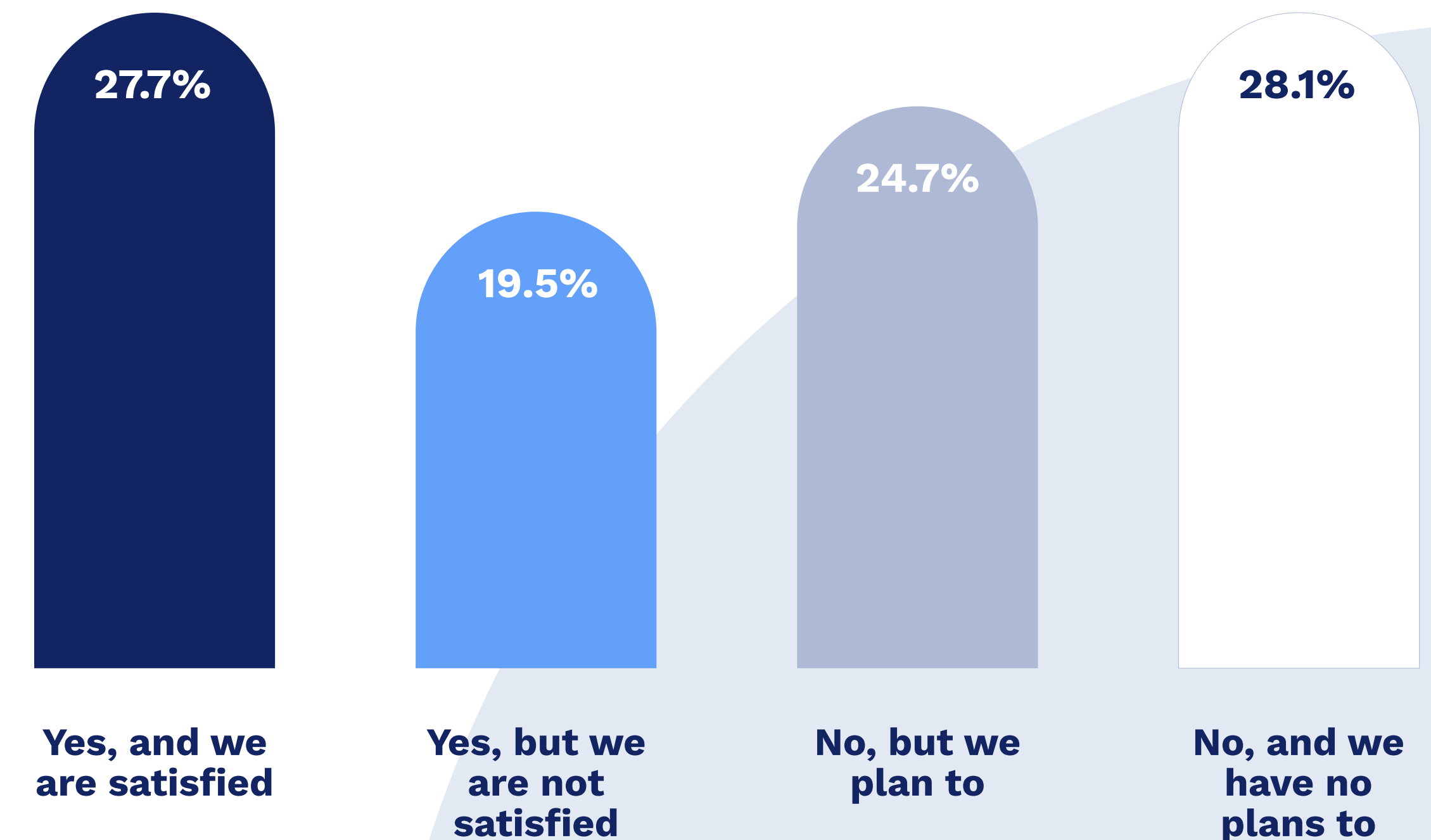
Like the consumer journey, the B2B buying journey has become less linear.

“There’s no longer a direct path to purchase,” said EMARKETER principal analyst Kelsey Voss. “Buyers might see a social post, do a Google search, ask a peer, and then come across a video—all before even engaging with a brand.”

This has made targeting the right audience even more difficult as B2B marketers struggle to identify where potential buyers spend their time.

- **Over a third (39.0%) of marketers believe their current B2B advertising is only somewhat or not at all effective in reaching the right audience, per survey results.**
- **50.2% of marketers struggle to reach the right buying group, making it the top issue in maximizing ROI.**
- **Currently, 47.2% of marketers use group-based targeting, yet nearly a fifth (19.5%) are dissatisfied with it.**

Do you currently use a buying group-based targeting approach in your B2B advertising?



Source: EMARKETER and Demandbase “B2B Advertising Survey,” January 2025 n=231



For B2B marketers, data is key to accurate targeting.

- **40% of US advertisers are using first-party data to maintain targeting effectiveness in 2025 amid growing privacy laws and a continued loss of persistent user identifiers, according to November 2024 data from Proximic.**
- **62% of brand marketers worldwide say first-party data will become more important for measurement and targeting over the next two years, while 55% say the same about zero-party data, according to October 2024 data from Econsultancy.**

Journey mapping can help marketers better understand the key touchpoints, pain points, and opportunities at each stage of the B2B buying process. However, only 17.3% of marketers have fully mapped their customer journey stages, according to the survey, suggesting room for improvement.

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B2B marketing needs a new playbook

“Marketers have always struggled with targeting, but in B2B, it’s even tougher,” said Voss. “The traditional funnel—brand awareness, white papers, SEO—doesn’t work the same way anymore.”

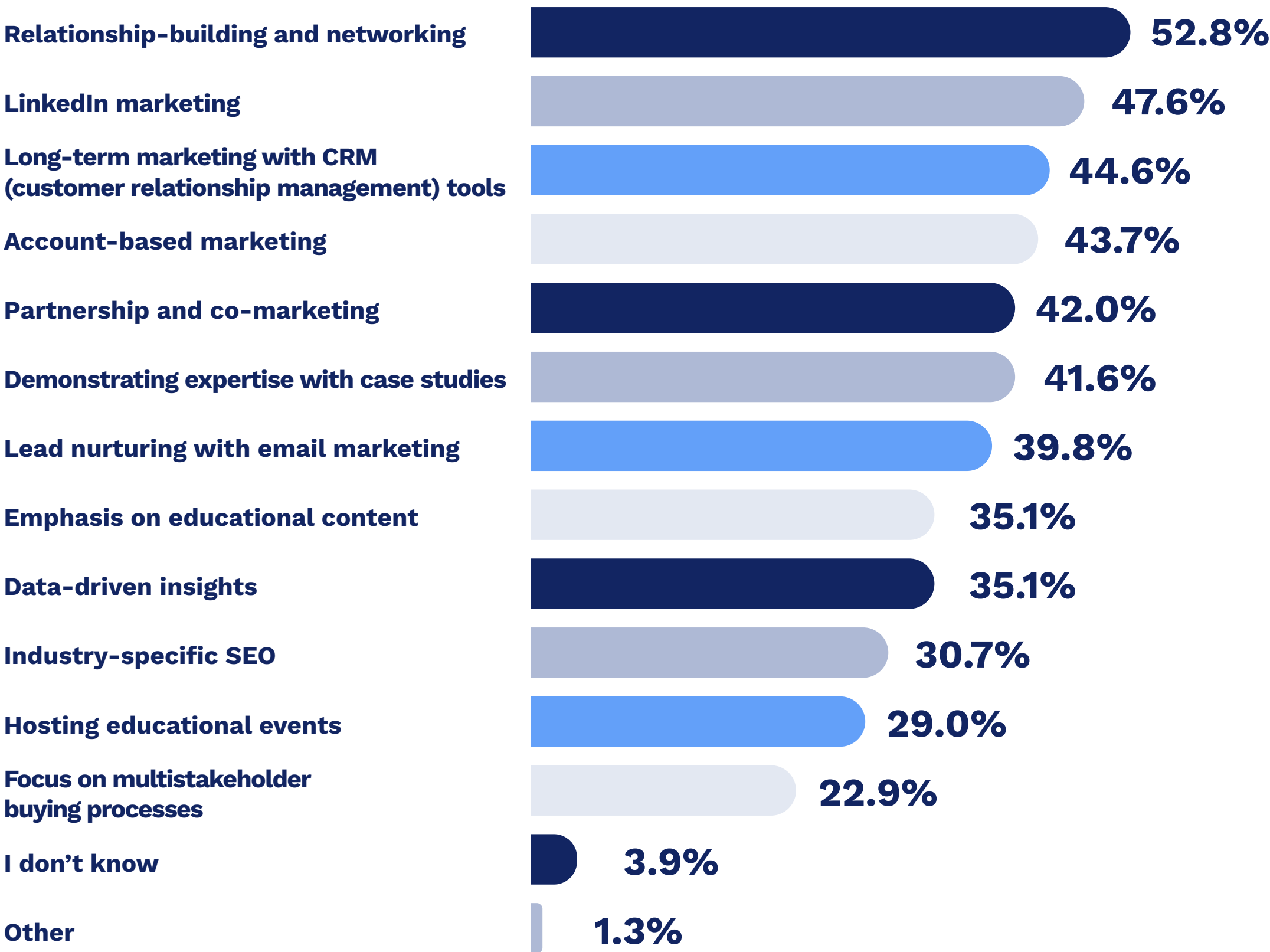
B2B marketing is unique due to the longer sales cycle, emphasizing the brand-customer relationship.

- **More than a third (37.7%) of marketers see the extended sales cycle as a key challenge to maximizing ROI, according to survey data.**
- **B2B marketers recognize the importance of relationship-building and networking, with 52.8% considering it a more effective strategy than in B2C.**

As the buying journey becomes more self-directed, B2B marketers need new ways to connect with buyers.

“It’s no longer about leading the buyer through a controlled sales-driven process,” said Voss. “Today, they arrive at the conversation already informed and ready to purchase—often catching sellers off guard.”

What tactics work better for B2B marketing than B2C marketing?



Source: EMARKETER and Demandbase “B2B Advertising Survey,” January 2025 n=231

Account-based marketing can help B2B marketers monitor where customers are along the buying journey.

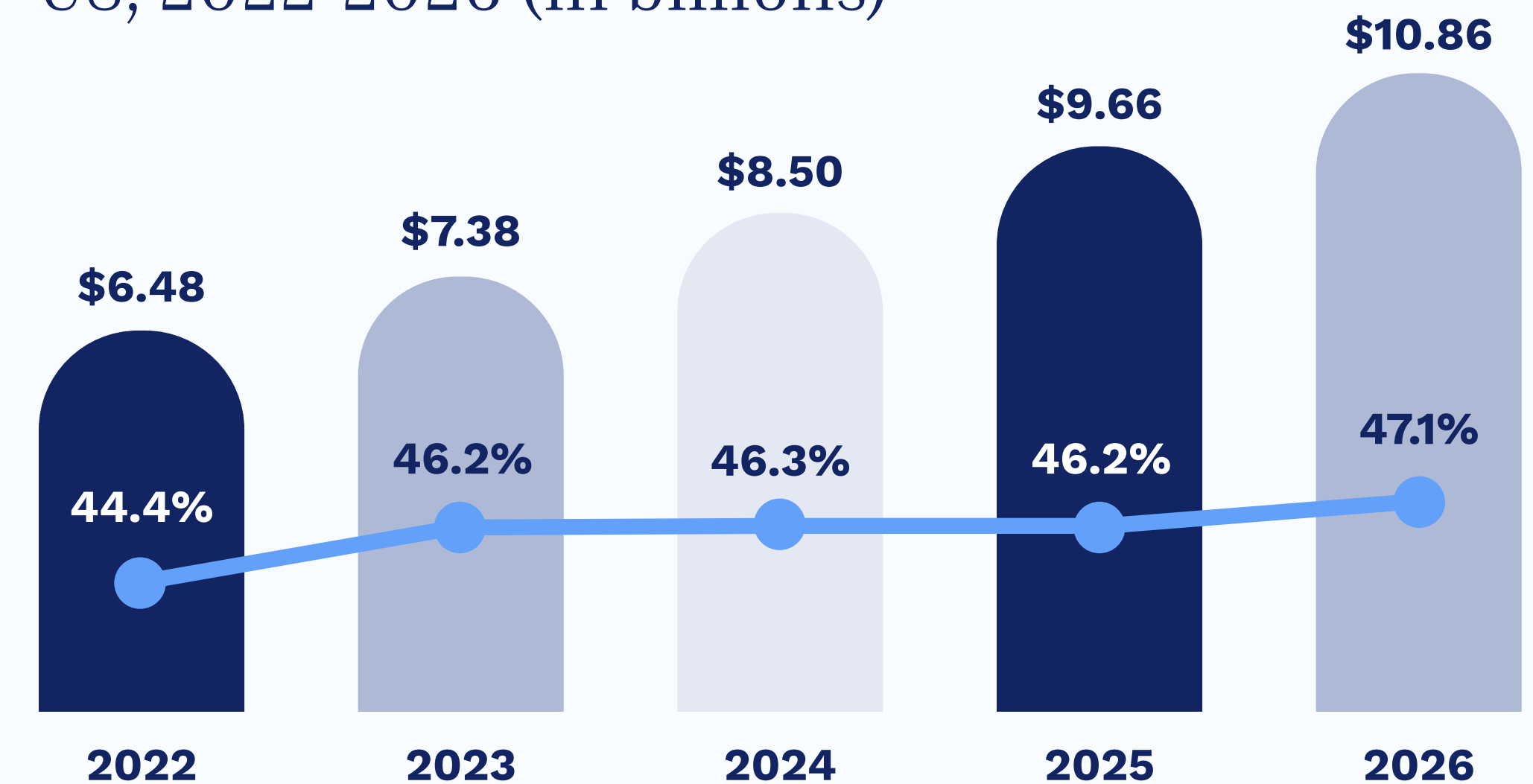
- **“By using account-based insights, teams can make smarter decisions and fine-tune their targeting for greater impact throughout the buyer journey,” said Voss.**
- **Taking it a step further, marketers can leverage predictive analytics to more effectively map the buying journey, identify key decision-makers, analyze behavioral signals, anticipate buyer needs, personalize engagement, and focus on high-priority accounts to accelerate deal cycles and drive revenue growth.**
- **Reaching prospects earlier in the sales cycle is crucial, considering 75% of B2B buyers prefer to gather information about products on their own and 57% purchased a tool in the last year without meeting the vendor’s sales team, according to 2024 data from Hubspot.**

Social media—paid or organic—is another way B2B marketers can engage with buyers outside of their owned channels.

- **Nearly half (49%) of B2B marketers worldwide say the social media advertising/promoted posts are the paid channel that produces the best results, according to August 2024 data from MarketingProfs and the Content Marketing Institute.**
- **89% of B2B marketers worldwide use organic social media to distribute content, per the same data.**

- **US B2B social ad spend (paid) will grow 13.6% in 2025, reaching \$9.66 billion or 46.2% of total B2B digital ad spend, according to an August 2024 EMARKETER forecast.**
- **Short-form video is the most popular media format for B2B marketing, used by 30% of B2B marketers worldwide, according to October 2024 data from HubSpot. Twenty-nine percent use images, 24% use interviews, 23% use blog posts, and 19% use long-form video.**

B2B Social Ad Spending Forecast US, 2022-2026 (in billions)



● % of total B2B digital ad spending

Source: EMARKETER Forecast, August 2024

LinkedIn is the top social platform for both paid and organic B2B marketing.

- **Nearly two-thirds (65.4%) of marketers use the platform most frequently for B2B marketing and 47.6% say it works better for B2B than B2C marketing, per the survey.**
- **68% of B2B marketers worldwide increased their organic social media usage of LinkedIn in the last year, according to MarketingProfs and Content Marketing Institute.**
- **LinkedIn will earn \$4.73 billion in US B2B ad revenues in 2025, according to EMARKETER's forecast.**
- **LinkedIn's worldwide ad revenues will grow 12.4% in 2025, reaching \$8.06 billion.**

Having a LinkedIn presence isn't enough. "Buyers are also on YouTube, Reddit, Instagram—even TikTok," said Voss. "The key is to meet them where they are with the right kind of content."

- **52.4% of marketers use Meta most frequently for B2B marketing.**
- **Facebook and Instagram are the top social media channels B2B marketers plan to invest in 2025, according to October 2024 data from HubSpot.**
- **Meta's US B2B ad revenues will reach \$3.27 billion in 2025, per EMARKETER's forecast.**



68%

of B2B marketers worldwide increased their organic social media usage of LinkedIn in the last year.

52.4%

of marketers use Meta most frequently for B2B marketing.

Marketers need to be thoughtful about their presence on consumer-facing platforms.

“Don’t just be on TikTok for the sake of it,” said Voss. “If you’re there, make sure it’s adding value—whether it’s thought leadership, product walkthroughs, or expert insights.”

Outside of social, survey respondents identified email (65.4%) and paid search (58.4%) as the top two channels they used most frequently for B2B marketing.

- **61% of B2B marketers worldwide say search engine marketing/pay-per-click is the paid channel that produced the best results, according to August 2024 data from MarketingProfs and Content Marketing Institute.**
- **Social media ads/promoted posts come second (49%).**

Marketers at organizations with over \$100 million in annual revenue have a more diverse channel mix than the total respondent population, indicating they use programmatic/direct video and display more frequently for B2B marketing.

Mobile and video are gaining more attention from B2B marketers.

- **While only 19.9% of marketers say they use mobile frequently for B2B marketing efforts, per the survey, US B2B mobile ad spend will grow 19.8% YoY to reach \$11.42 billion in 2025, over half (54.7%) of B2B digital ad spend, per EMARKETER’s forecast.**
- **Spend on video is also growing, rising 13.3% YoY, but representing less than 10% of B2B digital ad spend.**



AI is enabling a more streamlined, data-driven approach

B2B marketers are increasing their investment in AI technology as they look for more efficient ways to reach their audiences.

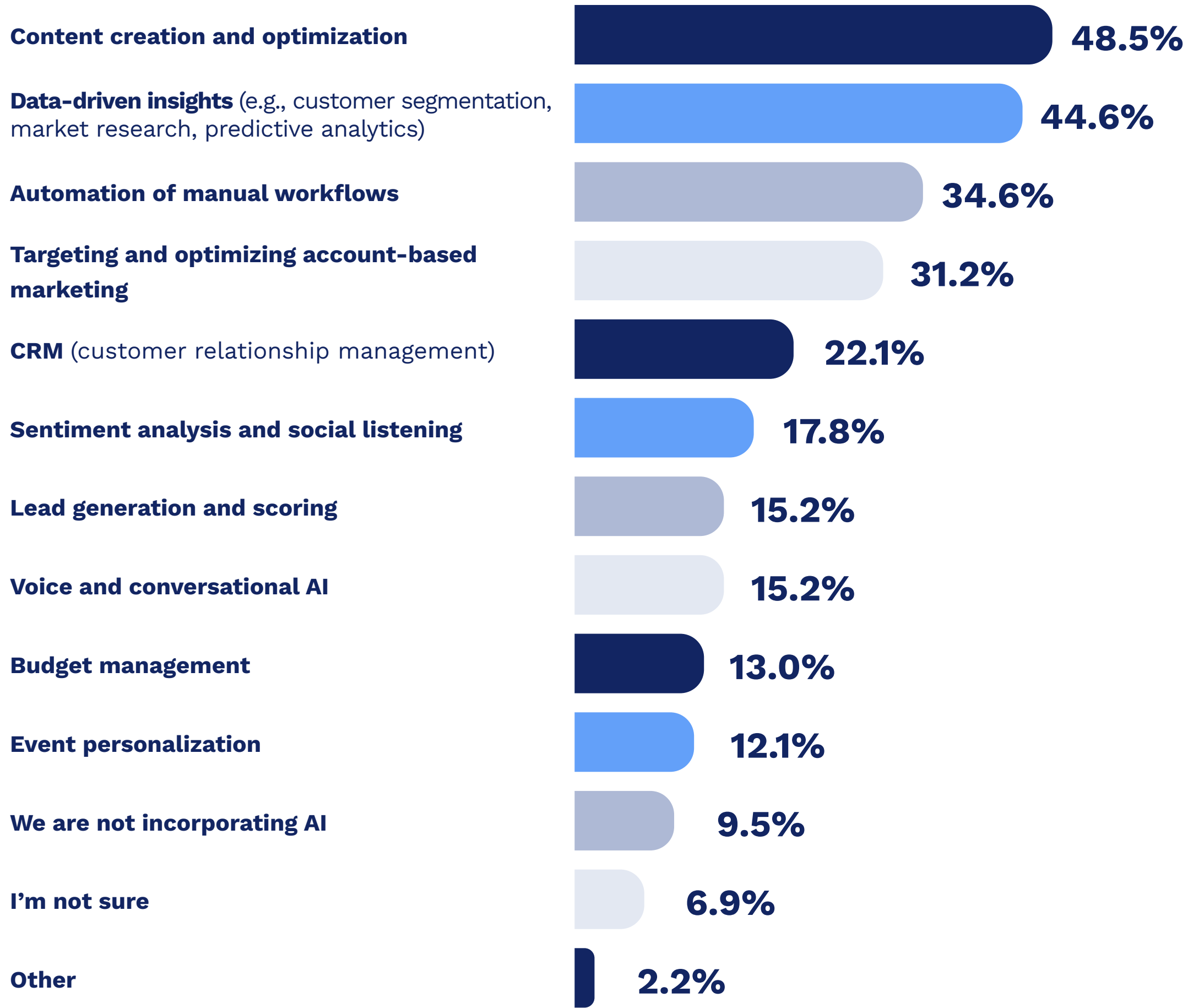
Currently, content creation and optimization is the top use case for AI according to 48.5% of survey respondents.

- **Over half (52%) of US B2B marketers use AI for content, according to July 2024 data from Sagefrog Marketing Group.**
- **The majority (87%) of B2B marketers worldwide say content marketing has been successful in creating brand awareness, 74% say it has generated demand/leads, and 62% say it has nurtured subscribers/audience/leads, according to MarketingProfs and Content Marketing Institute.**
- **AI can help marketers quickly adjust their content by region, which can vary in terms of messaging, digital platforms, and consumer behavior.**

Some 44.6% of marketers already use AI for data-driven insights, per survey data. As the technology evolves, it could revolutionize how B2B marketers target and measure campaigns.

“AI is transforming targeting, segmentation, and predictive analytics,” said Voss. “It helps marketers analyze massive datasets, identify patterns, and predict buyer intent—something that would be nearly impossible manually.”

How are you incorporating AI into your B2B marketing strategy?



Source: EMARKETER and Demandbase “B2B Advertising Survey,” January 2025 n=231

5 tips for a more effective B2B marketing strategy

B2B marketing is constantly evolving, and staying ahead requires data-driven insights, personalized engagement, and innovative technology. Whether targeting enterprise or small business customers, a strategic approach ensures efficiency and impact. Here are five tips to enhance your B2B marketing strategy.

1 Collect the right data and prioritize data management

Data is the foundation of an effective B2B marketing strategy.

“Having the right data is essential, but the real challenge is managing and integrating it effectively,” said Voss. “Without clean, structured data, even the most advanced AI will produce garbage insights.”

- **Invest in a strong data management system that consolidates first-party, second-party, and third-party data to create a 360-degree view of your target accounts.**
- **Ensure your customer relationship management (CRM) and marketing automation platforms are integrated for seamless data flow across your organization.**
- **Regularly clean and update your databases to avoid targeting outdated or irrelevant contacts. Better data hygiene will make your marketing efforts more precise and effective.**

2 Build an account- or buying group-based targeting strategy

In B2B marketing, decision-making involves multiple stakeholders. Instead of focusing on individual leads, develop an account-based marketing (ABM) strategy targeting high-value accounts with personalized content and campaigns.

Alternatively, consider using buying groups, which target key personas within your ideal customer profile. Then activate this persona targeting with your buying group to deliver hyper-personalized campaigns with more relevant messaging and increased conversion rates.

3 Prioritize relationship-building and engagement

Long sales cycles and complex decision-making processes make relationship-building crucial in B2B marketing.

- **Content marketing—such as webinars, whitepapers, and case studies—establishes thought leadership and credibility.**
- **Interactive experiences like live demos, workshops, and online communities foster deeper engagement and trust with potential buyers.**
- **Social platforms build brand awareness and give B2B buyers another place to learn about products and services.**



4 Experiment with AI for efficiency and personalization

AI-powered tools enable better targeting, automation, and personalization.

- **Consider AI-driven chatbots for real-time engagement, predictive analytics for lead and account scoring, and generative AI for content creation at scale.**
- **AI can enhance personalization by analyzing buyer behavior and dynamically adjusting messaging for different segments.**
- **Test AI-powered solutions that align with your goals and optimize processes without losing the human touch.**

5 Continually measure and optimize

Effective marketing strategies rely on continuous improvement.

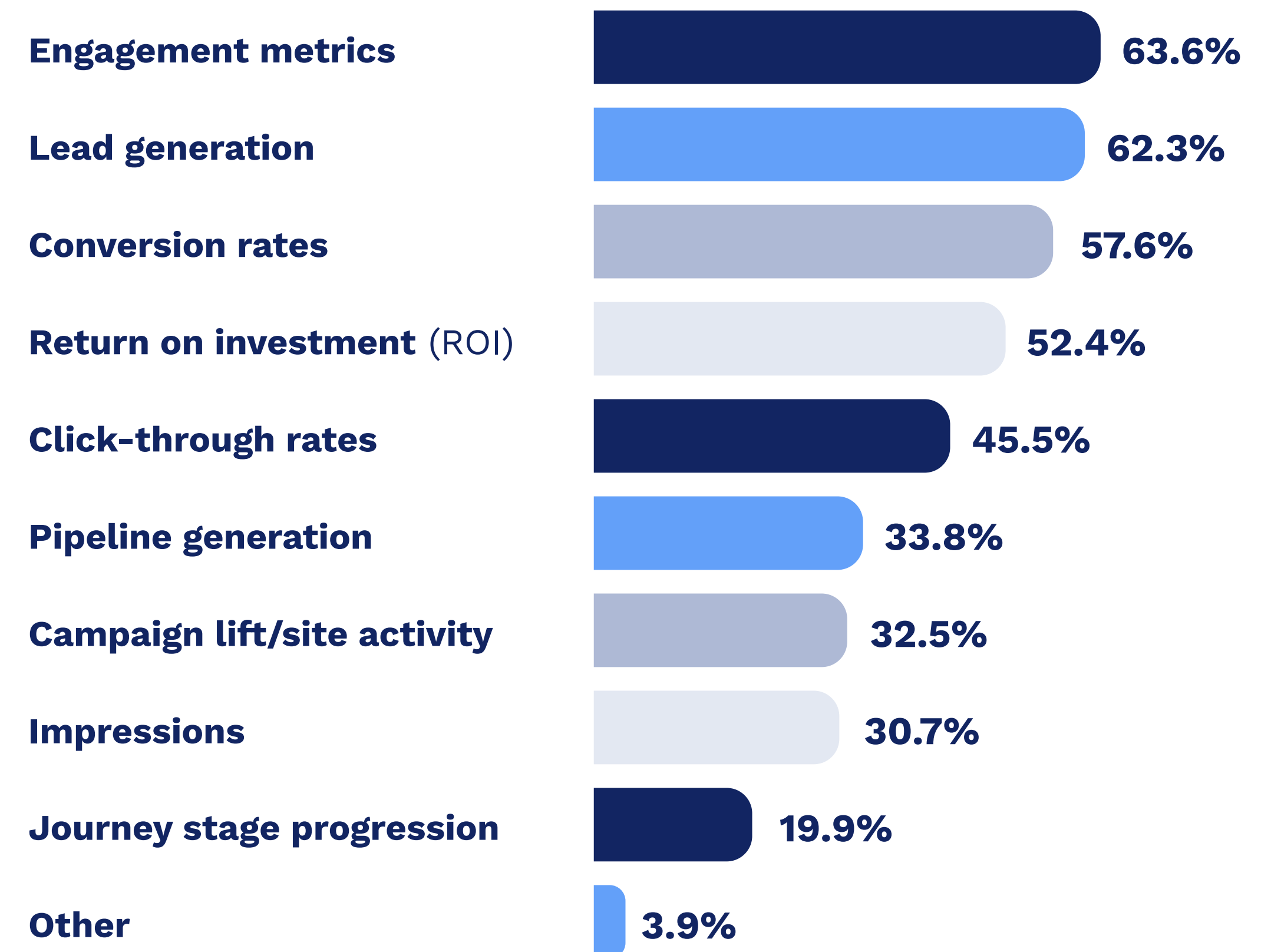
Marketers must define key performance indicators (KPIs) like engagement, conversion, and customer acquisition costs.

- **Engagement metrics and lead generation are the two leading measures of success, according to survey respondents.**
- **Marketers at organizations making \$100 million or more in annual revenue are more likely to use engagement metrics as a success measure than the total survey population.**
- **Meanwhile, impressions and journey stage progression are less frequently used to define success.**

Marketers must use analytics tools to track campaign performance and identify areas for optimization.

- **Regular A/B testing refines messaging, creative, and targeting.**
- **By maintaining a test-and-learn mindset, you can adapt to market changes and maximize ROI.**

How do you measure the success of your B2B advertising campaigns?



Source: EMARKETER and Demandbase
“B2B Advertising Survey,” January 2025
n=231

About the survey

This survey of 19 questions was developed and fielded by EMARKETER in collaboration with Demandbase.

We surveyed 231 B2B marketers and agencies worldwide about their B2B marketing strategies, including ad budgets, targeting tactics, preferred channels, and challenges.

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About this report

Research for this report was compiled by members of the EMARKETER Studio team in partnership with Demandbase, using reports, data, and research by EMARKETER on B2B marketing, ad spend, and strategy.

EMARKETER forecasts:

[US B2B Ad Spending](#)

[Worldwide B2B Digital Ad Spending](#)

[LinkedIn US B2B Ad Revenues](#)

[LinkedIn Worldwide Ad Revenues](#)

[Meta US B2B Ad Revenues](#)

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