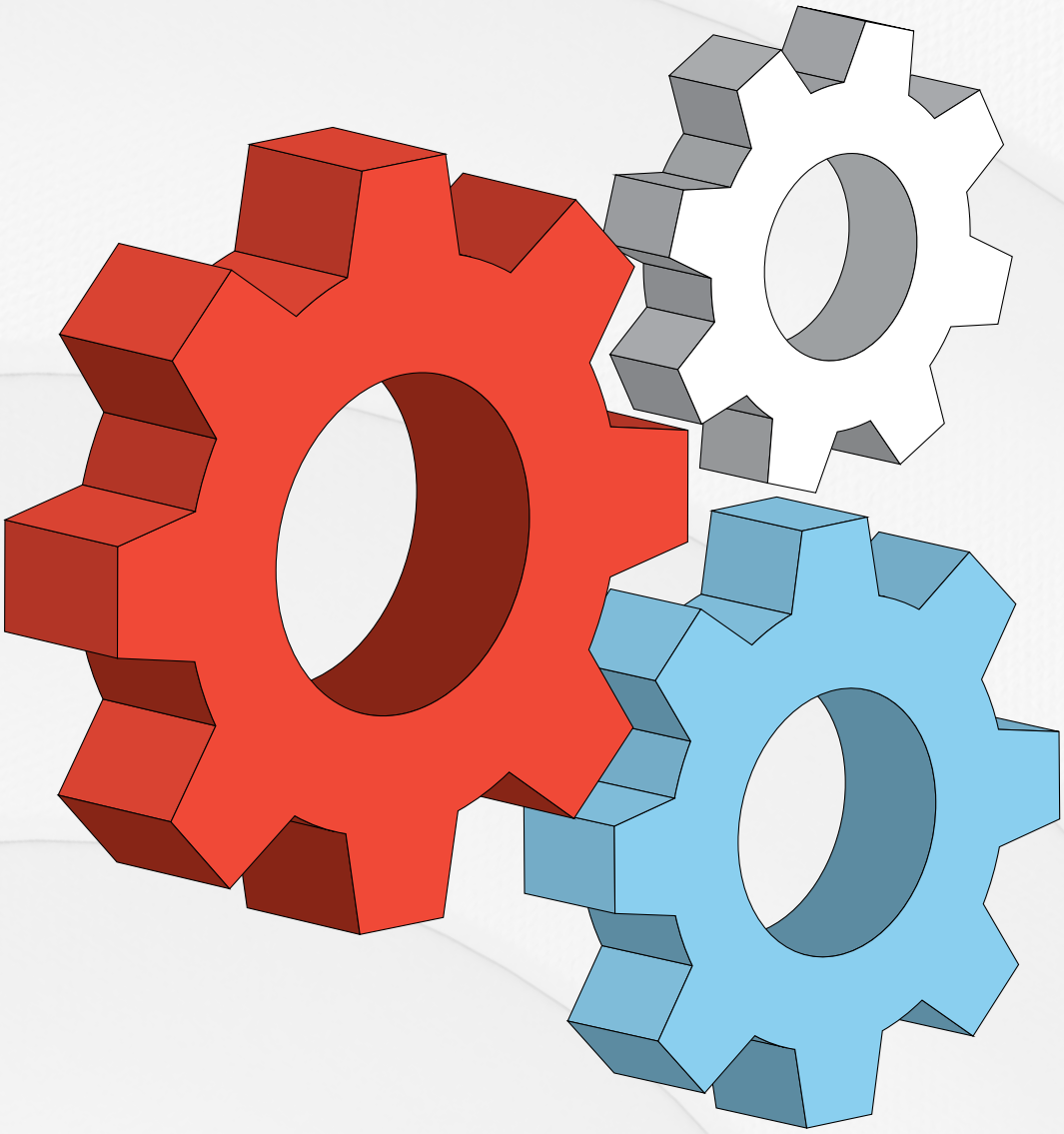


WHITE PAPER

WHERE THE GEARS GRIND:

How To Fix B2B Sales and Marketing Friction Points

Mutual goodwill isn't enough if your B2B sales and marketing teams are moving in different directions. Learn how to address the core barriers of prioritization, bandwidth, and budget to shift your team dynamics to a smooth, highly collaborative, win-win partnership.

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Understanding Sales and Marketing Alignment: The 2RM Research Methodology

In 2025, 2RM conducted a research survey among several sales and marketing teams. The data and themes from interviews and open-ended comments served as the foundation of this reporting. In the pages that follow, we've included quotes from survey respondents, some of which have been lightly edited for clarity. The respondents were all primarily B2B industrial brands that use a channel marketing model, whether through dealers, distributors, or other retail outlets. While each has some direct sales or national accounts, the majority of sales occur through distribution.

The 2RM Sales & Marketing Survey provides data and our perspective on our experiences working with marketing and sales teams and companies' distribution channels. The lessons we've learned through this research and across our agency's more than 25-year history have informed this report.

2RM SALES & MARKETING SURVEY RESULTS SHOW POINTS OF FRICTION

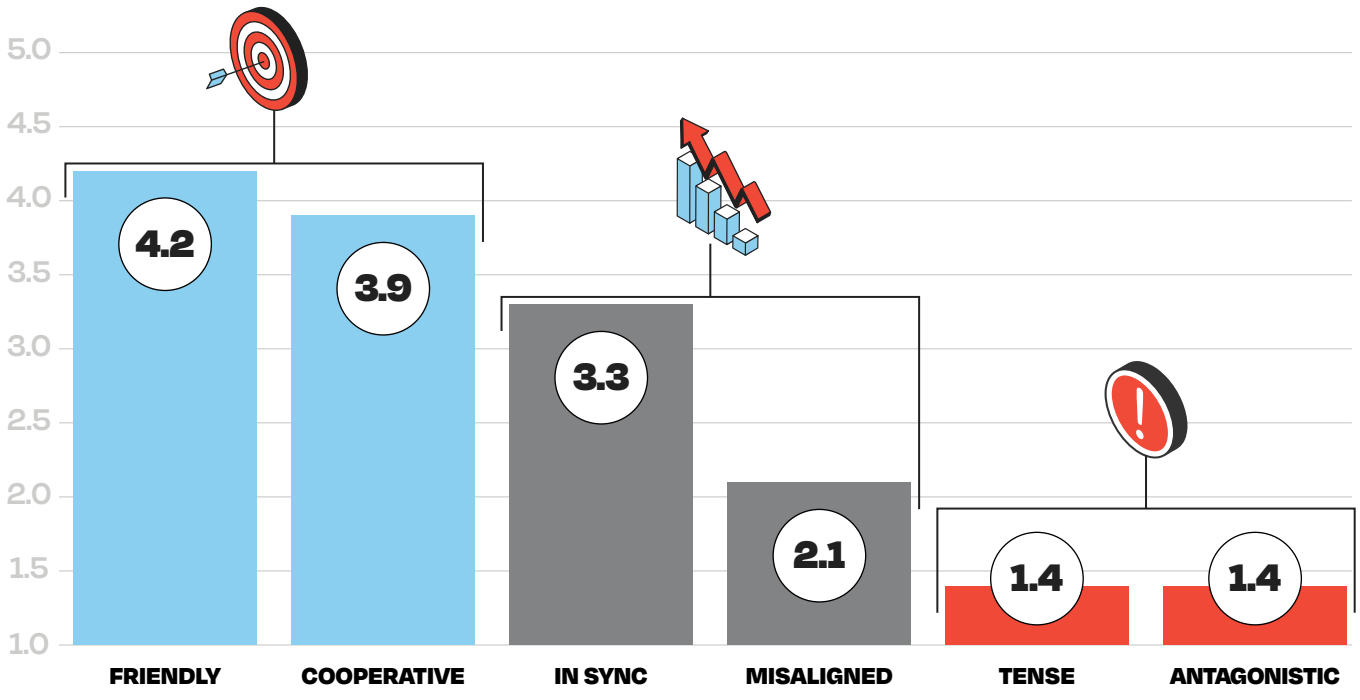
The gap between sales and marketing is a classic challenge for most companies.

In the past, this relationship has often been contentious, but based on our research and interactions with clients, the vibe is a lot more amicable these days. Sure, there are still divisions between the two disciplines, and within most B2B companies the sales team headcounts (and their budgets) outnumber the marketing team's, but there's a willingness to work together and move the business forward.

A *willingness*, yes, but in practice there is much work to do and some points of friction remain — often rooted in the **relationship dynamics** between corporate and channel teams.

Describe Your Relationship

How much do the following words describe the relationship you have with your marketing or sales counterparts?
1 to 5 scale: 1 = not at all, 5 = describes totally



Sales and marketing teams get along but aren't aligned. The "in sync" and "misaligned" scores show room to improve.

The most significant gaps can be found between sales channel partners and the corporate teams within sales and marketing.

Some of the lowest scores in the 2RM Sales & Marketing Survey were on **sharing insights with dealers** (2.0 out of 5.0) and **dealers making good use of marketing leads** (2.3 out of 5.0), perhaps indicating that the internal misalignment is starving the dealer channel of the insights and leads that would help them grow their businesses *and* tie them closer to corporate.

Similarly, scores were higher for **corporate leadership values sales** (3.8), **corporate leadership values marketing** (3.5), and **corporate leadership values dealers** (3.7), but **making sure dealers have easy access to resources** was much lower (2.4). The difference in these scores shows a stark contrast between how much corporate claims to value dealers vs. the operational support they provide dealers to run a successful business.

There's friction lurking in the relationship between corporate and channel partners.

As we found in the 2RM Sales & Marketing Survey and in our decades interacting with dealers and distributors, B2B channel partners frequently have the closest relationship with the end user — the target customer — yet they often struggle to get the support and resources they want from the brands they represent.

There are many legitimate reasons for this situation, but as B2B buyers become more demanding and raise their expectations, there's a real risk of losing sales and business opportunities when corporate brands and their channel partners aren't aligned. The risk is greater still for B2B companies that have non-exclusive dealer networks. If your corporate team is hard to do business with, dealers may choose to work with another brand instead.

If the sales team, the marketing team, and channel partners are not all moving in sync, in the same direction and at the same pace, they will not take the company as far or as fast as they could, leading to disappointing sales results and potentially frustrated customers. And to complicate matters: If the channel is multi-line or has weaker ties to the corporate brand, they are likely navigating on their own and need encouragement or incentives to fall in step with the brand.

So, why aren't they moving together? Our research identified a few reasons:

- **Prioritization:**
  Corporate leadership isn't prioritizing better alignment, or perhaps prioritizes sales over all other areas.
- **Lack of clarity:**
  "It's not my job" or "I don't understand what they do" or simply, "I'm confused."
- **Bandwidth:**
  Teams on all sides don't have time for better coordination.
- **Budget:**
  There's a lack of budget to support further integration and alignment.

This white paper will explore those issues and some potential solutions so sales and marketing teams can improve how they work together; better serve customers, prospects, and channel partners; and ideally increase sales.



See the top four alignment challenges facing B2B teams and how to tackle each.



PRIORITIZATION & LEADERSHIP

> **"There's no structured process to have the two teams working together."**
>
> — *Survey Respondent*

> **"Sales is seen as a necessity. Marketing is seen as non-essential."**
>
> — *Survey Respondent*
>
> **"We do not have enough established routines, processes, or clearly identified roles of who should be doing what between our groups."**
>
> — *Survey Respondent*

Most B2B companies fall into traditional siloed structures, with sales, marketing, and other areas of the business working separately with their own sets of goals, priorities, and measurements. As these quotes show — taken verbatim from the 2RM Sales & Marketing Survey — teams feel this disconnect acutely.

For all the "one company" initiatives unfurled over the years, old habits seem to be hard to break.

Corporate sales and marketing would likely agree that the business would perform better if they worked better together, were more closely aligned, and collaborated frequently. The challenge is that no one has made this collaboration a priority, as reflected in the comments. Sometimes it takes a directive from the top, or demonstrated behaviors from the heads of sales and marketing, to show people the way by:

- Sharing information
- Taking interest in what another department is doing and what could be learned from them
- Attending a team meeting

These are a few small ways to increase better alignment — and start to close the kind of prioritization gap that shows up when an organization's core **business drivers** aren't clearly understood. And for leaders, facilitating better interactions among sales, marketing, and the sales channel should be part of the job description.

See the appendix for more on how sales and marketing teams view their alignment.

> **"If we are not aligned, we appear as a disorganized, non-united front to our customers."**
>
> **"Sales and marketing alignment (or lack thereof) affects our message to the customer."**
>
> **"If our internal departments' KPIs don't align with each other then we won't run in the same direction, and we won't succeed."**

Comments from survey respondents

ALIGNMENT GAP 2

CLARITY, ROLE CONFUSION, & TEAM TENURE

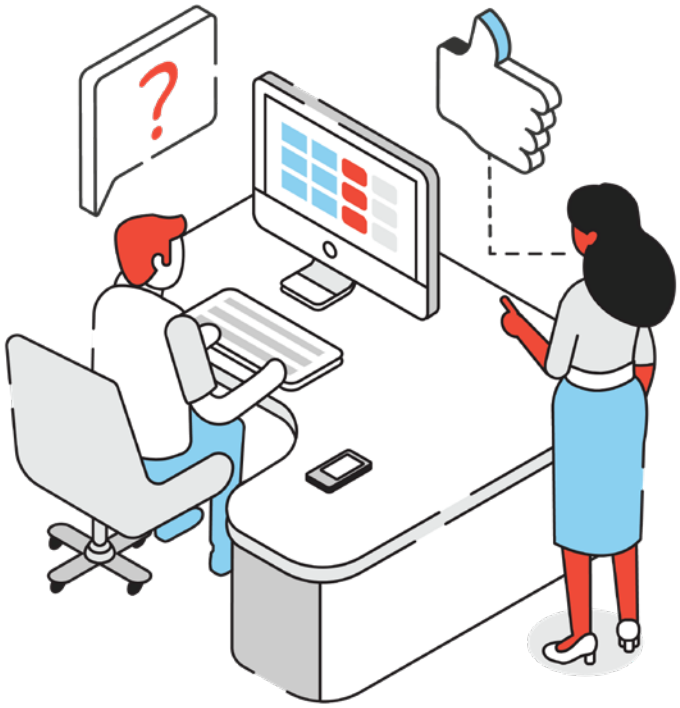
> **"The sales team always thinks they have the right ways/ideas and sometimes they run with it without telling the marketing team and we either end up all working separately towards the same goal (doubling the work) or we are working towards a completely different goal altogether."**
>
> — *Survey Respondent*

Generally, respondents of the 2RM Sales & Marketing Survey weren't aware of the goals their counterparts in sales or marketing were working toward; teams often worked independently. One respondent noted, ***"If you were to ask employees about the other team's goals — sales about marketing or vice versa — you would likely hear vague responses such as 'sell more' or 'gather customer insights."***

This somewhat superficial understanding of each others' goals leaves important details unsaid. As one respondent put it: ***"[Our goals] are aligned in that everyone understands the larger business goals, but I am not sure if the details of the strategy by business unit are fully understood."***

Without that clarity, teams can start moving in different directions. This kind of disconnect often comes down to how **operationally connected** teams really are, day to day.

See the appendix for more on how different operational activities impact business performance.



The impact of role churn

There are other factors that contribute to this lack of clarity. While many B2B sales and marketing professionals we surveyed are long-tenured in their careers, they are often relatively new to their current roles — jumping to a new company every few years. This continuous churn and learning the ropes of a new organization can lead to weakened relationships across a business and looser ties compared to more established teams.

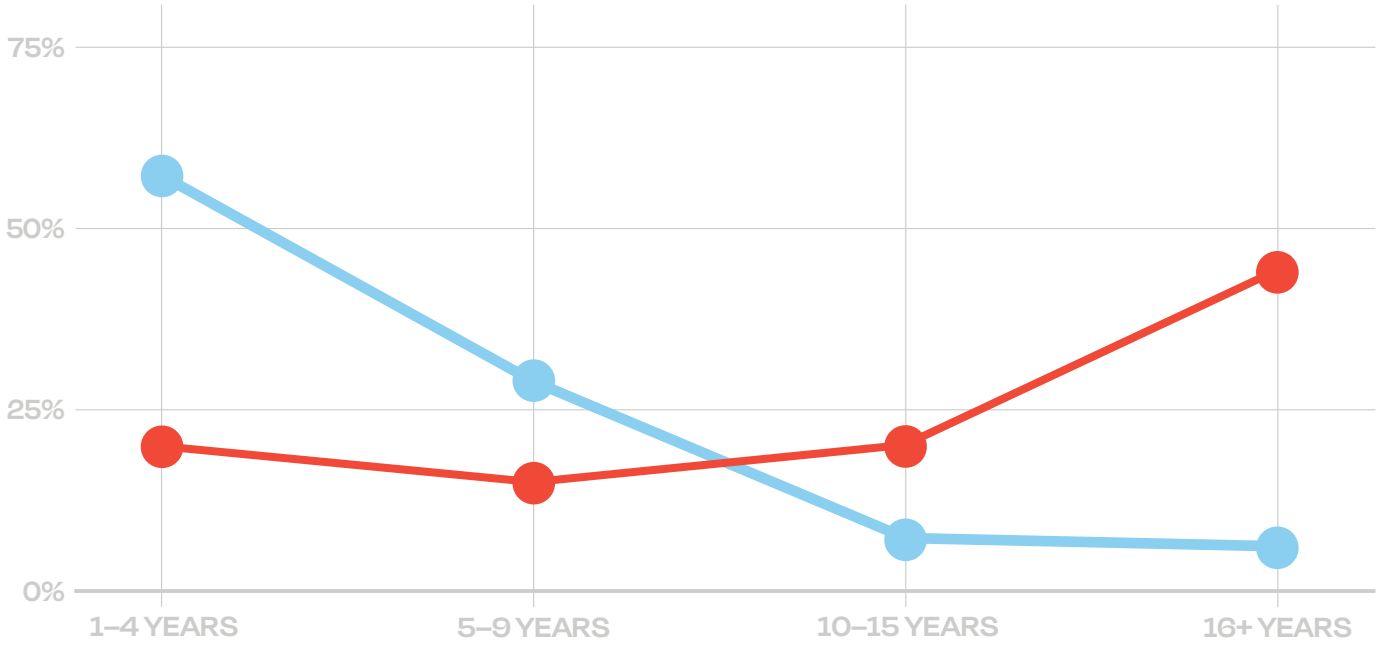
When these long-tenured, new-to-the-role people are leaders, it also impacts the whole team.

It compounds the prioritization issue and makes clarity difficult because people aren't always comfortable questioning the new leader. And, for their part, new leaders often want to make their mark, change things up, or try a new approach. So if the corporate side is experiencing leadership changes in sales and marketing every few years, it's no wonder that everyone is unclear about what's happening.

With churn comes lost institutional knowledge and internal partnerships. And even more challenging, perhaps, is the relationship with the sales channel.

The Tenure Paradox

How long have you been in your current marketing or sales role?
How long have you been doing marketing or sales in your career?



TIME IN CURRENT ROLE **TOTAL CAREER EXPERIENCE**

Sales and marketing pros bring decades of industry experience, yet most have been in their current role for less than four years. High industry loyalty, low job longevity.

Misalignment within corporate causes confusion for channel partners and customers.

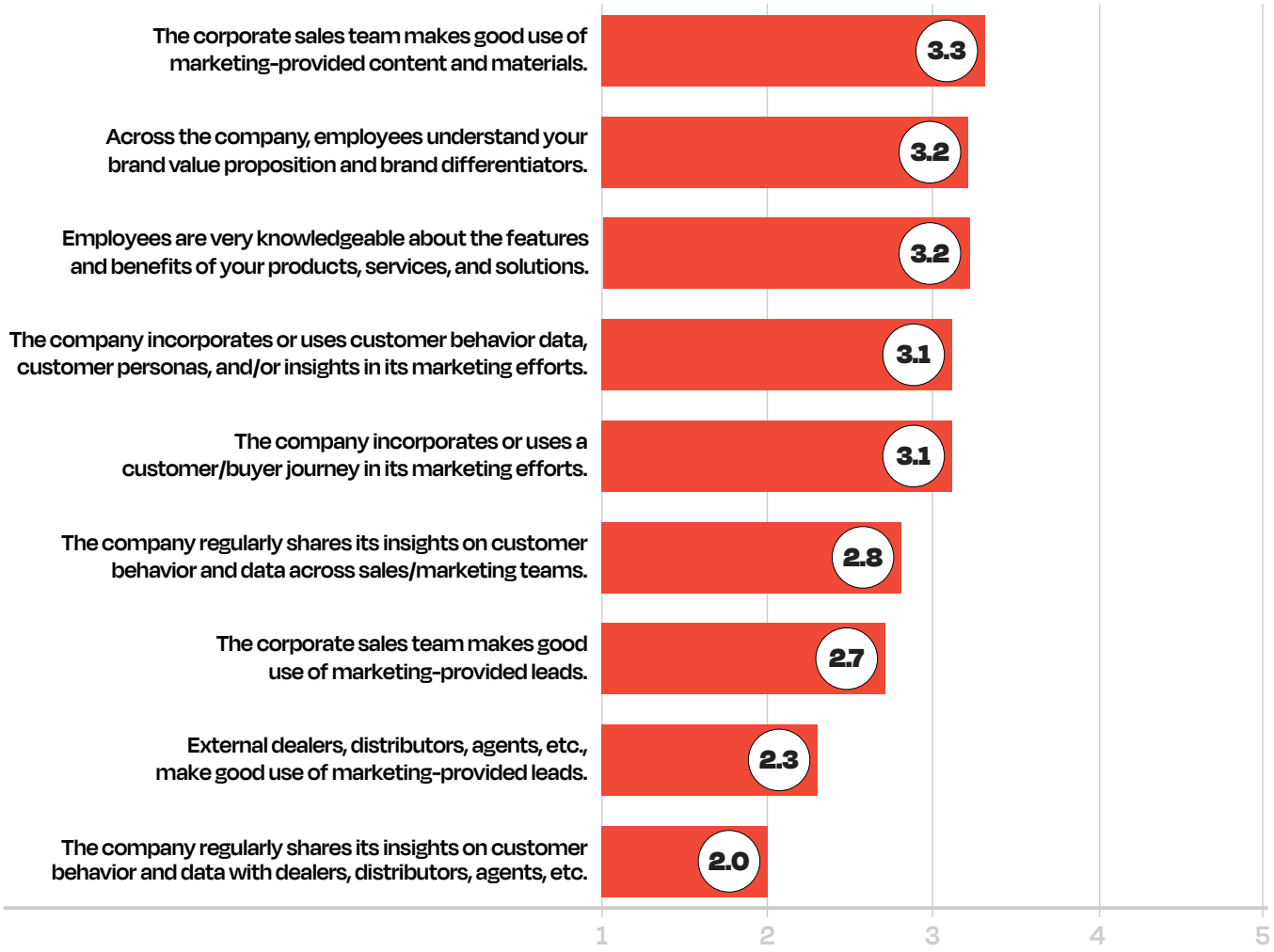
When corporate sales and marketing teams work independently and are generally unaware of each other's goals, it's no wonder the sales channel is confused, too. As one survey respondent said, the lack of alignment between sales and marketing directly "affects our message to the customer" and makes the brand appear as a "disorganized, non-united front."

All too often, unfortunately, the dealer is simply passing that disjointed corporate messaging along to the customer.

The best way to fix it? Have corporate sales and marketing teams take an honest look at their alignment and make sure they're setting the sales channel up for success by providing clarity. Channel partners can't capably support the brand narrative and help achieve corporate goals without it. And everyone needs to get better at sharing knowledge, communicating across teams, and taking advantage of the intelligence, leads, **content**, and other assets at their disposal.

Activating Company Initiatives

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
1 to 5 scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree



Survey responses showed room to improve across the board on more effectively activating company initiatives.

ALIGNMENT GAP 3

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL BANDWIDTH & COLLABORATION CONSTRAINTS

> **"Collaboration is limited to fragmented efforts, often driven by last-minute or urgent needs rather than proactive planning."**
>
> *— Survey Respondent*

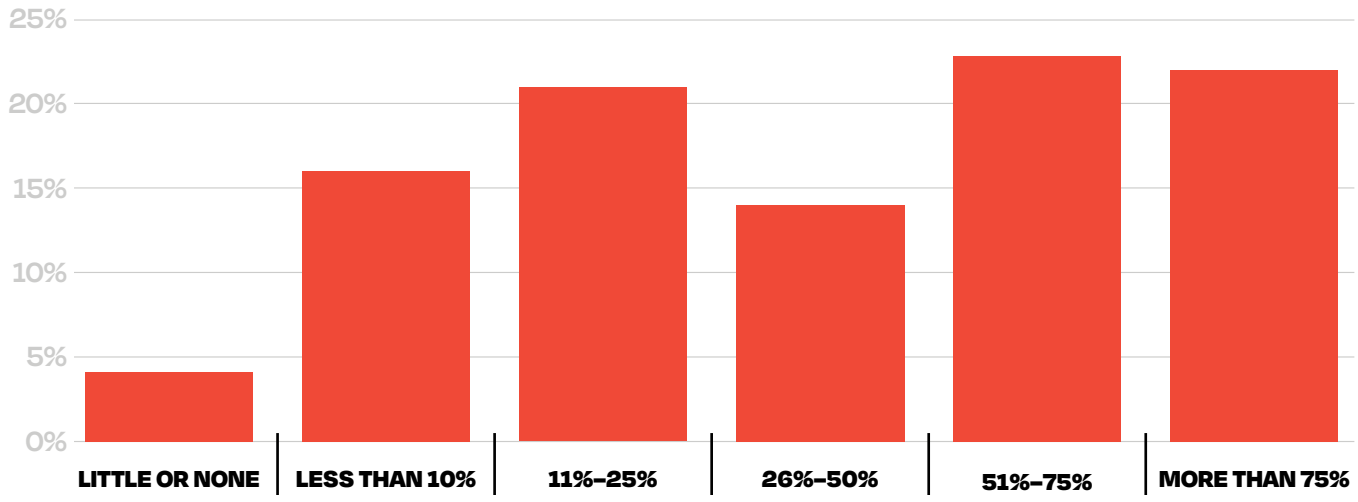
> **"We need quicker ways to work and make decisions."**
>
> *— Survey Respondent*

Our findings showed a mixed bag regarding how much time corporate sales and marketing teams spend collaborating — but they are collaborating.

Collaboration is hard, especially when there are other urgent business pressures. But when an entire B2B organization puts in the effort and works well together, customers notice. Companies need to make time for collaboration and alignment among sales, marketing, and the channel.

Time Collaborating Within Corporate

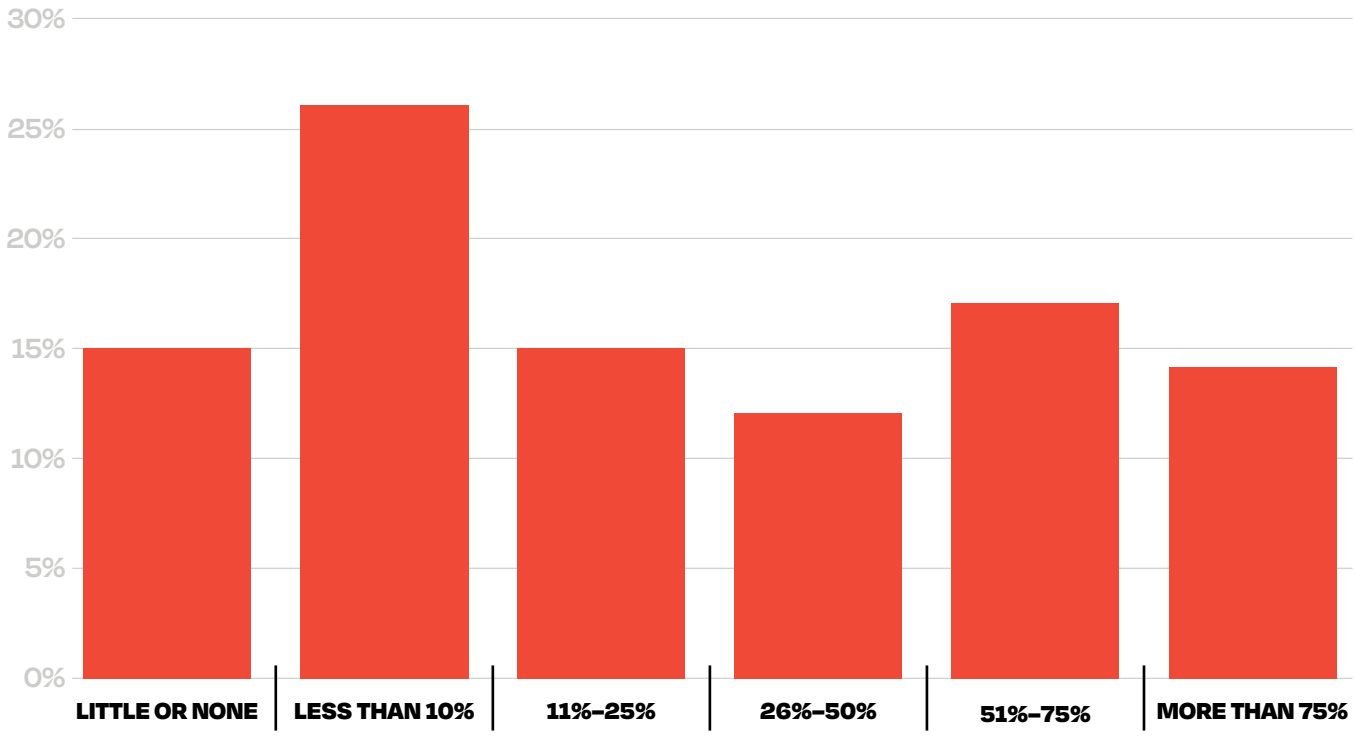
In your corporate role, about how much of your time do you spend collaborating, directly working with, or otherwise engaging with your marketing or sales counterparts within the organization?



Nearly 45% of respondents said they spend more than half their time collaborating with their teammates — a good sign that alignment is part of business as usual for many sales and marketing professionals.

Time Collaborating With Channel Partners

In your corporate role, about how much of your time do you spend collaborating, directly working with, or otherwise engaging with the external dealers, distributors, agents, or others who sell your company's products?



Notably, many respondents don't spend much time collaborating with their channel partners; more than half of corporate respondents say they spend less than 25% of their time working with the channel. In B2B, the channel is often key to selling success, and more engagement with those partners should produce benefits for the business.

If the brand looks at the sales channel as a "necessary evil," then it will be hard for everyone to succeed. When it's more of a collaborative partnership, win-win outcomes are much easier.

Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number; as a result, the total may not equal 100%.

ALIGNMENT GAP 4

MARKETING & SALES BUDGET ALLOCATION ISSUES

Budget and resources, no surprise, are reported to be a challenge for sales, marketing, and channel partners. And when you don't feel like you have all the resources you need, it makes expending effort on "luxuries" like collaborating across teams seem out of reach. But, realistically, the budget problem is never going to disappear — it will always be a convenient excuse.

So what should we do with the resources we have?



The answer is typically for sales to spend on sales things, marketing to do an ad campaign, and channel partners to try to execute on something helpful with the smallest budget of all.

With some creative thinking and collaboration, however, the best solution is the one that will most benefit the business.

Rather than view every decision and budget spend in isolation, corporate sales and marketing teams and channel partners should consider where they can strategically pool resources to have a greater impact. Perhaps all three groups could go in on:

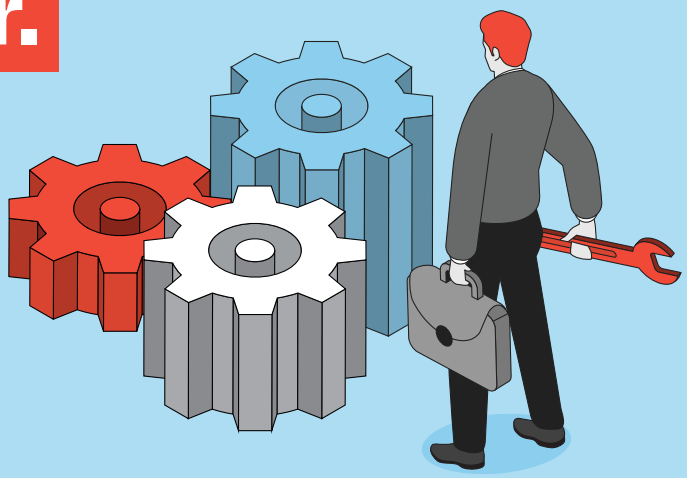
- Reinventing the dealer experience
- Updating customer contact lists
- Sharing results with each other

These may not be splashy activities but they likely will lead to business results, which benefits everyone.

See the appendix for more on the role of each discipline in the organization's success.

For companies looking to find an edge and improve their business performance, tackling these harder challenges that have long been neglected is the work that is left to do. The easy fixes have all been made.

It's time to roll up our sleeves, do the hard work, and start moving together.



REMOVING FRICTION FROM YOUR SALES & MARKETING TEAM OPERATIONS

> **"To work better together and achieve our business goals, sales and marketing need stronger alignment and proactive collaboration."**
>
> *— Survey Respondent*

> **"Establishing shared, specific goals with clear ownership, timelines, and measurable outcomes would create accountability and focus."**
>
> *— Survey Respondent*

> **"Improving communication and feedback loops is critical. Marketing needs timely input from sales on what's working and what isn't, so we can adjust strategies quickly."**
>
> *— Survey Respondent*

Take an interest in learning about what your counterparts do across sales and marketing, and what the reality of each other's worlds might be. Respondents to the research recognize the alignment gaps ... but who's responsible for closing them? All of us.

The only way to fix the sales vs. marketing rift is to prioritize collaboration. Here's how.

Business strategies that improve alignment:

- **Prioritize regular communications** between sales and marketing, beyond tactical requests. Schedule monthly or more frequent touchbase meetings to share insights, needs, and ideas with one another.
- **Build support** for sales/marketing alignment from executive leadership. The executive team should model joint decision-making and collaboration from the top.
- **Create shared "last mile" KPIs.** Because customer service scores high (4.0), create a unified performance metric for sales and marketing teams that measures channel satisfaction and channel lead-conversion rates.
- **Collaborate better from the start** with a strong onboarding process. Address the corporate tenure gap by requiring new sales and marketing hires to spend time embedded within each others' teams — even better, at a sales channel location!
- **Make it easy for the local sales channel** to do business with you. Don't expect them to memorize your differentiation. Build bite-sized, frictionless content so there's a unified message at the point of sale.

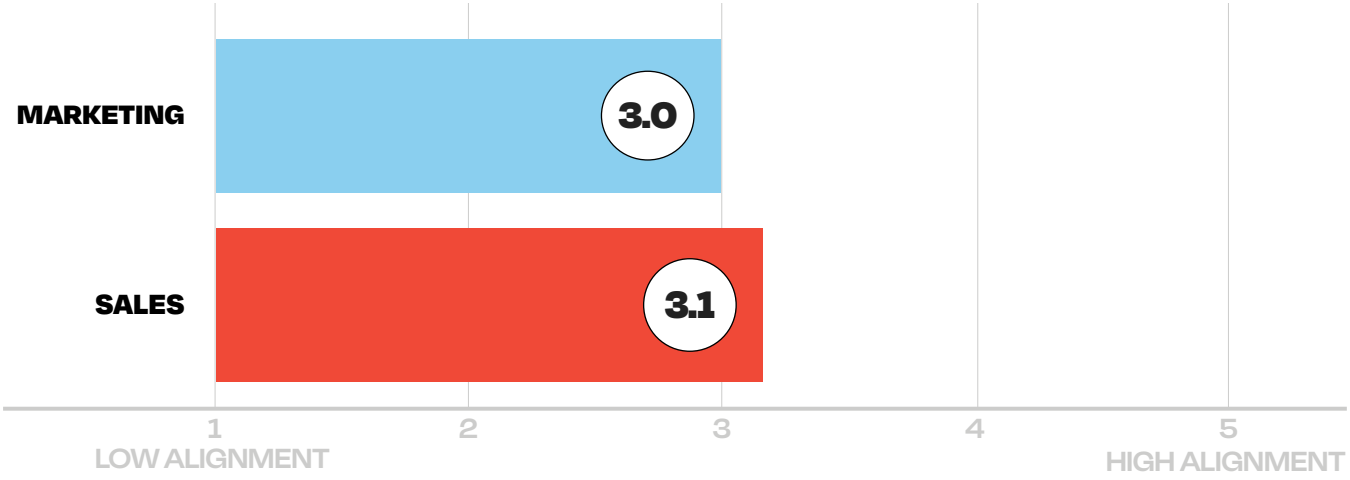
Take the Friction Out of Your B2B Marketing

Give your organization a go-to-market advantage with our integrated growth strategy. To get started, take our **2RM Catalyst Diagnostic** to pinpoint where friction exists today, and then get your teams better aligned to maximize your business growth.

APPENDIX

Sales and Marketing Goals Alignment

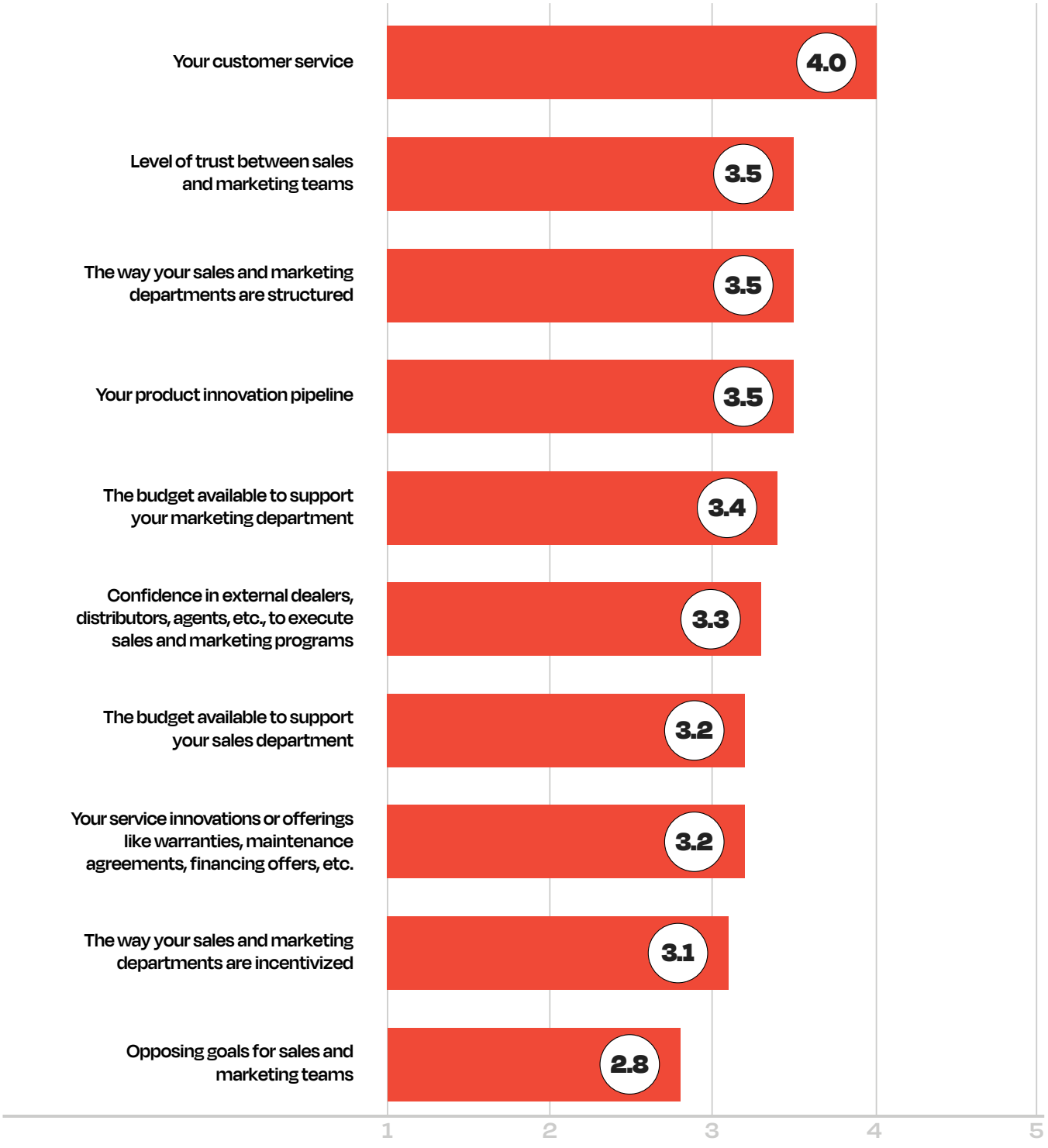
How closely aligned are the goals between sales and marketing department teams?
1 to 5 scale: 1 = not at all, 5 = completely aligned



Members of the corporate sales department felt equally sure — or unsure — about how aligned their goals were with their marketing team counterparts. The middling scores (3, 3.1) show room for both sides to improve how they communicate and align on their team's goals.

Impact on Performance

How much of an impact do the following items have on your company's ability to achieve its business performance goals?
1 to 5 scale: 1 = no impact, 5 = extreme impact

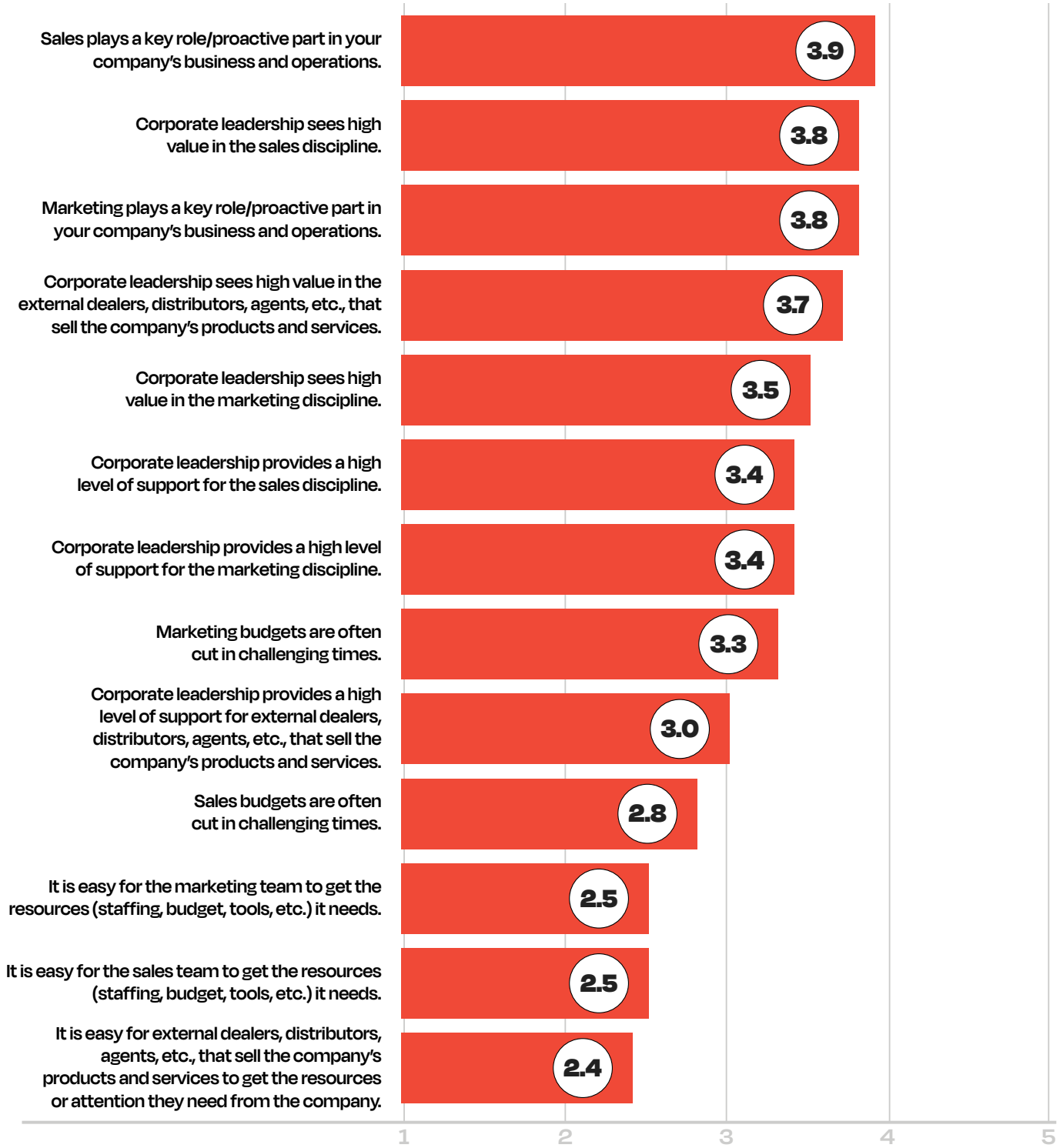


After customer service, respondents say the areas that have the most impact on business performance are trust between sales and marketing, the structure of those teams, and product innovation.

Organizational Structure & Beliefs

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the organizational structure and beliefs of your company?

1 to 5 scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree



Survey respondents were clear about where the challenges — and the opportunities — lie within their corporate structure.

Two Rivers Marketing is an integrated B2B growth agency built for companies and brands that sell through dealer and distributor networks. 2RM connects brand strategy, creative, content, digital, media, and sales enablement into a single growth model — so marketing, sales, and the channel work from the same playbook. We're fiercely proud to help our clients build, grow, fuel, move, fund, and feed the world.

430 East Grand Avenue | Suite 102 | Des Moines, Iowa

515.557.2000

tworiversmarketing.com

info@2RM.com

