



## **BTS Insights Sales and Marketing Study 2021**

– Trends and Challenges in Sales and Marketing organizations



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## Preface - A Note from René Groeneveld

Dear friends, clients of BTS, sales and marketing sounding board, and interviewees:

It is a privilege to present you with a summary of our 2021 BTS Sales and Marketing **"Client Insights"** study.

In my new role as Global Head of the Sales and Marketing Practice (SAM) at BTS, I had the honor to speak to **100 interviewees** from April to September. And what a pleasure it was.

We connected with an extensive range of functions, including our client's C-suite, heads of sales and marketing, L&D leaders, sales enablement, key account managers, lead generation managers, digital, and other commercial excellence roles.

We had an incredible range of industries and extraordinary diversity represented

among our interviewees.

Every interaction was worth the effort and time because of the trends, new insights, and overall learnings we gathered.

Thanks again to all interviewees involved. We appreciate your time, effort, and openness!

A special thanks to Jana Heidenthal, Eduardo Umanzor, the BTS Sales and Marketing (SAM) team, and the graphics team for supporting this initiative. We hope you find this summary insightful and thought-provoking for your Go-To-Market (GTM) challenges and ideas. Please let us know if you have any questions or want to deepen the discussions on any topic discussed.

Greetings,



**René Groeneveld**

Head of Global Sales and Marketing Practice at BTS

## Executive Summary

The BTS Sales and Marketing practice (SAM) focuses on supporting clients based on **integrated** and digital-focused Go-To-Market points of view.

A top priority is to **understand our clients** and their needs. To accomplish this, BTS interviewed 100 professionals in Sales and Marketing (including CXOs, sales and marketing leaders, L&D, digital, key account managers, and other commercial excellence roles) from various industries across the globe and identified current trends impacting their sales and marketing organizations.

This document outlines our research findings and best thinking on prevailing customer needs, trends in sales and marketing, and current challenges our clients face today. As we explore various topics, from digital transformation to new ways of selling, we will offer some insights and key takeaways.

The last eighteen months have brought about **significant change**, but leaders are focusing on what is ahead. To meet the challenges of tomorrow, sales and marketing organizations need to have better collaboration; better yet, they need

to work as one integrated team and think "digital-first" to help customers meet the challenges and seize the opportunities in the marketplace.

Although sales and marketing activities are becoming more and more integrated, we identified trends uniquely relevant to sales and marketing. For example, within sales, new ways of selling – beyond virtual and hybrid – are emerging, CRM is considered a critical enabler of digital transformation and data analytics, the requirements for sellers are changing, and key account management is becoming a top priority. In marketing, digital transformation drives the increased need for evidence-based digital analytics and marketing automation. In addition, the increasing relevance of customer-specific multi- and omnichannel approaches continues to be an enabler for success, as is the rise of digital marketing.

## Prevailing Customer Trends

Starting with our customers, we realize that most trends shaping their reality, from the importance of digital transformation to the increasing value of having an omnichannel approach, are not entirely new. Clients are finding ways to mitigate risks or see them as opportunities to gain an advantage. These trends are increasingly shaping how our Go-To-Market approaches and sales and marketing organizations interact with our customers, as they expect thoughtful interactions that can help them accelerate their desired business results.

**Chart 1** – Trends Sales and Marketing organizations observe with their clients

Trend	Share of interviewees that mentioned customer trends
Importance of digital transformation and disruption	53%
Higher customer expectations and demands from vendors	47%
Changing customer buying behavior	46%
Demand for sustainability and ESG responsibility	44%
New ways of selling, lead management, and marketing	32%
New (multi/omni) channel approaches	28%
Pandemic-related changes in commercial excellence	21%
Global mega trends (e.g., health, environmental pollution, urbanization)	18%
Changing relationship and contact building	12%
Other (industry specific)	5%

Digital transformation shapes our clients' businesses as their customer's changes buying behavior and expectations.

### Digital transformation and disruption

Digital transformation and disruption have been the buzz for years, and the pandemic has heightened their relevance. Although probably not a surprise, the impact of digital transformation and disruption on our customers and the implications for sales and marketing organizations is manifold.

For example, this trend has triggered the need for new and customer-specific channel approaches. It also shapes customers' expectations in different areas and their buying behavior.

Comments like,

“ If we don't get this (the digital transformation) right in our sales and marketing and the whole company we are out of business not in a few years but in a few months ”

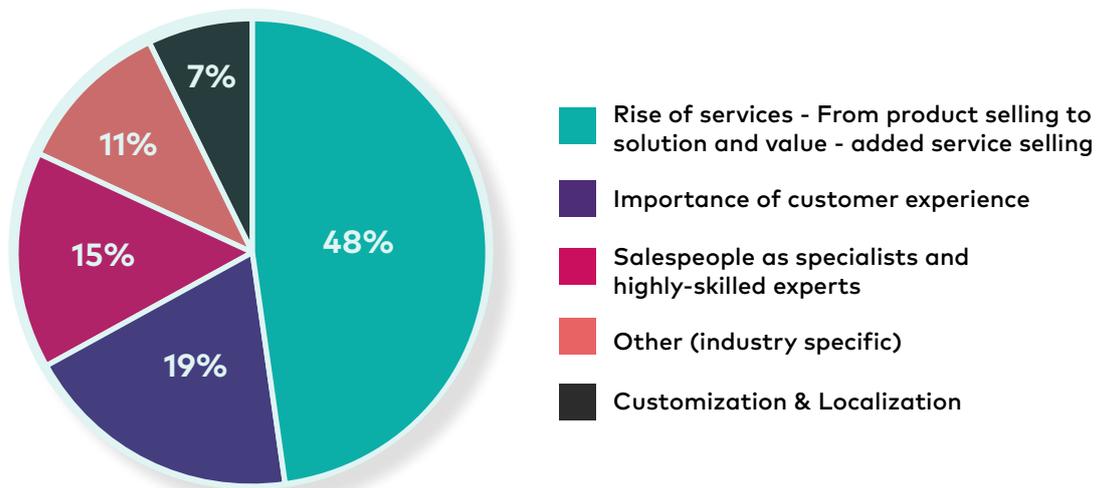
demonstrate the importance of addressing and getting ahead of this trend in some industries. Data-driven sales, lead management, marketing, and evidence-based management play a more prominent and significant role in this context. Consumers, and increasingly B2B customers, expect to leverage insights generated from the use of data. They also expect interactions through digital communication channels or new pricing models such as pay-per-customer, pay-per-treatment, pay-per-use, or performance-based pay.

### **Key Takeaway**

Ultimately, the rise of digital technology, disruption of business models, and data ownership affect sales and marketing organizations and their customers, which drives a need for greater agility and the application of data-driven decisions based on sound analytics and compliant data (e.g., CRM).

## Higher customer expectations and demands

Chart 2 – Which client expectations and needs are growing?



Services and customer experience become more important

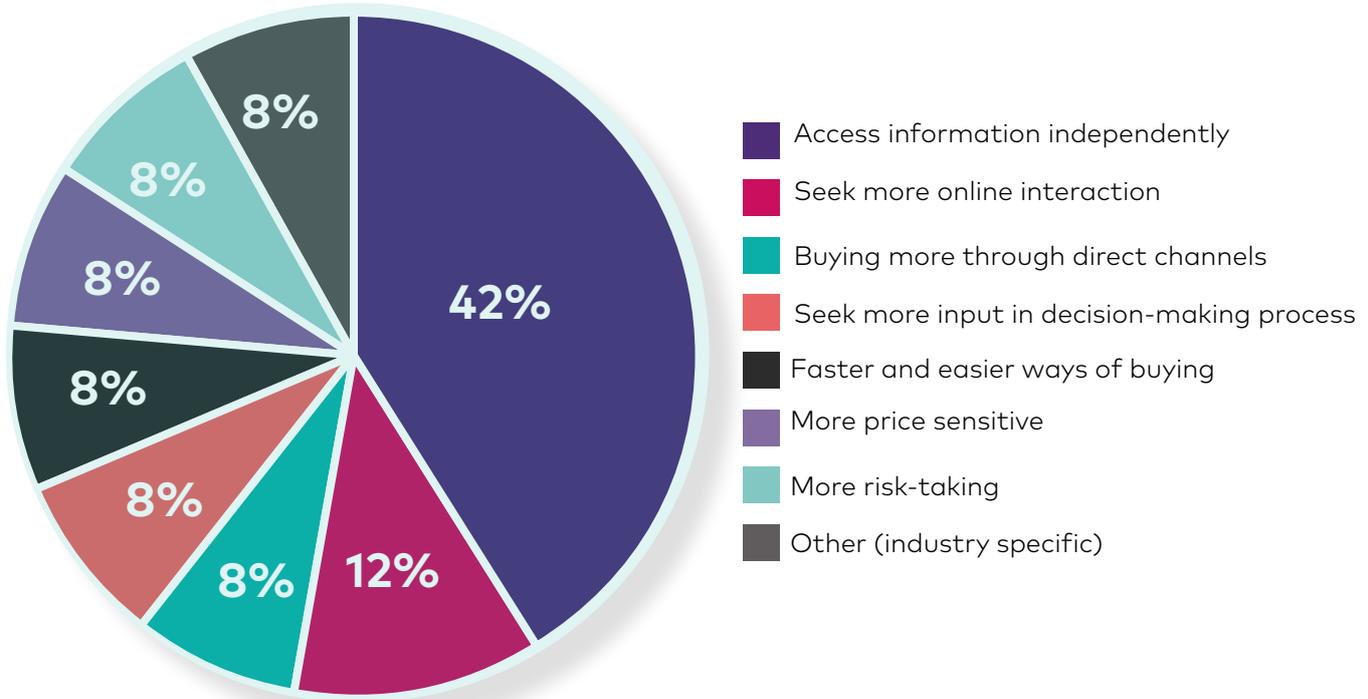
Customers expect more when buying products. They expect digitally-enabled B2C experiences. We heard about customers' expectations for product or solution reviews, suggestions on related products, immediate order confirmations, updates on deliverables, digital extensions of existing products, classical service packages, and more. Consumers are accustomed to experiencing these features, and it is no surprise that they bring these exact expectations to their workplace when consuming products and services in a B2B context. These expectations are additive to the already-existing benefits of buying B2B.

### Key Takeaway

According to our research, buyers expect sellers to have deep customer understanding, industry expertise, and market knowledge to engage in meaningful business conversations. Further, they expect the purchasing process to be easy. Organizations value partners that seek to enhance the B2B buying experience with the digital capabilities of a B2C buying experience, driving convenience and customer value.

## Changing customer buying behavior

**Chart 3** - In which ways are the buying behaviors of our customers changing?



Customers access information independently in the buying process and expect online interaction

Digital transformation also forces a change in our customers' journeys. Information on products and services is readily available via traditional online channels. However, other avenues such as blogs, videos, and influencers are increasingly becoming more relevant. As a result, especially in B2B sales interactions, customers are typically well informed before sales conversations start.

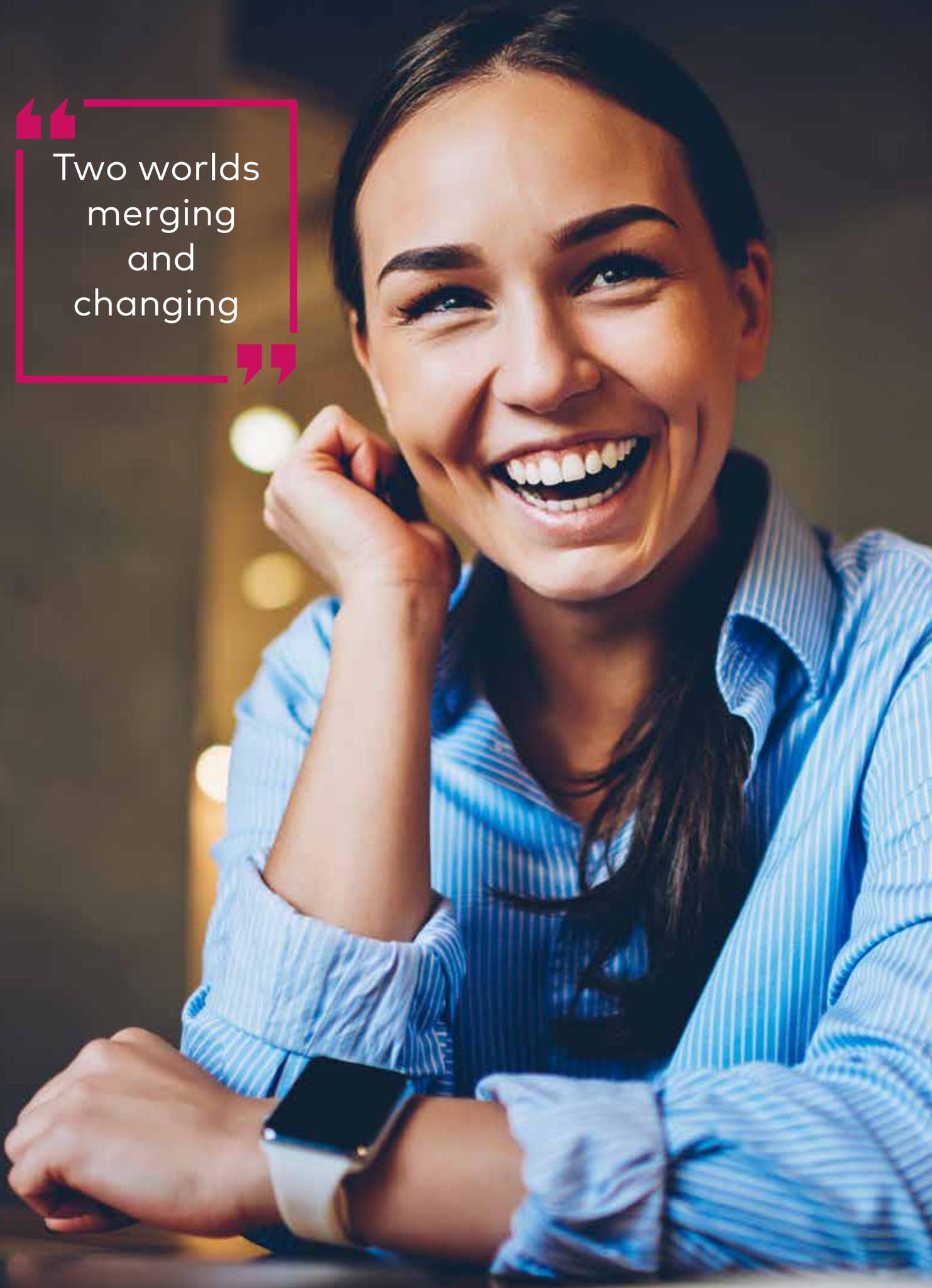
Sellers need to increase their relevance when helping their customers make purchasing decisions by leveraging their expertise and skill set. At the same time, while the decision-making process is becoming more complex, particularly in some industries such as life sciences because of industry or regulatory requirements, the expectation of speed at all stages of the buying cycle will continue to increase.

### Key Takeaway

Sellers need to meet customers where they are in their buying cycle and help them accelerate their decision-making process. Therefore, sellers must prepare convincing arguments about how their products and services will help the customer resolve a problem faster or accelerate attaining the desired business results.

B2B companies going B2C and D2C and B2C companies going B2B

Two worlds  
merging  
and  
changing



Many clients told us that their customers are changing, and even their target segments and buying centers are changing. For example, B2B companies are going more directly to consumers through new channels, leveraging digital. Meanwhile, as mentioned in the previous section, organizations selling in a B2B environment are seeing the pressure to provide experiences that resemble elements of a B2C approach, particularly regarding access to information and speed. **"Our customers expect B2C-like service and response times in a B2B world regardless of supply chain and talent shortages."**

On the other hand, we found traditional B2C companies going B2B as trends drove their businesses to be more focused on corporate customers than on consumers (e.g., IT, equipment, certain services). **"Before the COVID-19 pandemic, our business was 90 percent B2C, and now it is 90 percent B2B."** These types of shifts in corporate

and go-to-market strategies have a profound impact on established norms, practices, and most notably on the people that execute the strategy (for example, implementing a Key Account Management program or adopting the use of a robust lead management platform).

### Key Takeaway

These examples of how organizations are crossing over from B2C to B2B and vice versa indicate the need to adapt their business models quickly in an environment of constant change to seize opportunities in the marketplace. However, organizations need to remember that these changes also impact people. Therefore, there is a need to evaluate the necessary mindset shifts that people need to adopt and the capabilities needed to execute the new strategy. These organizations then need to adopt modern ways of learning that are digitally enabled, fast to produce, and scalable.

## Demand for sustainability and ESG responsibility



Sustainability is now a key differentiator

We are all impacted by climate change, social and corporate environmental governance challenges, political shifts, pressure from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and social unrest. Our clients see this as **the challenge of our generation**. Across all industries, our clients do not see solving the significant sustainability issues of our time as merely a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) topic. Sustainability is a crucial business topic that requires innovative products and solutions for the future and a rational answer in commercial excellence, sales, and marketing.

### Key Takeaway

Sustainability is a crucial change management initiative requiring alignment on new, more circular business models for the future with acceptable business impacts. Although it is not conventional thinking, the marketing and sales teams need to drive these shifts across the organization and beyond because of their unique position to understand the customer and their needs.

## Trends in Sales & Marketing

““ We don't differentiate between sales and marketing anymore “”

One might argue that this is a relatively strong statement and that a complete merger of marketing and sales is unlikely. Still, after talking to our clients, we realized that sales and marketing organizations are becoming more and more INTEGRATED. For example, global marketing campaigns with no or few links to local sales implementations don't work anymore. Unprompted, sales and marketing integration was mentioned

**59**

times in our interviews.

In other words, **47%** of our interviewees consider integrating sales and marketing an increasingly important trend. As sales and marketing integration becomes the norm, exploring goals from an integrated perspective has value. In subsequent sections, we will take a closer look at trends specifically impacting four critical sales and marketing goals.



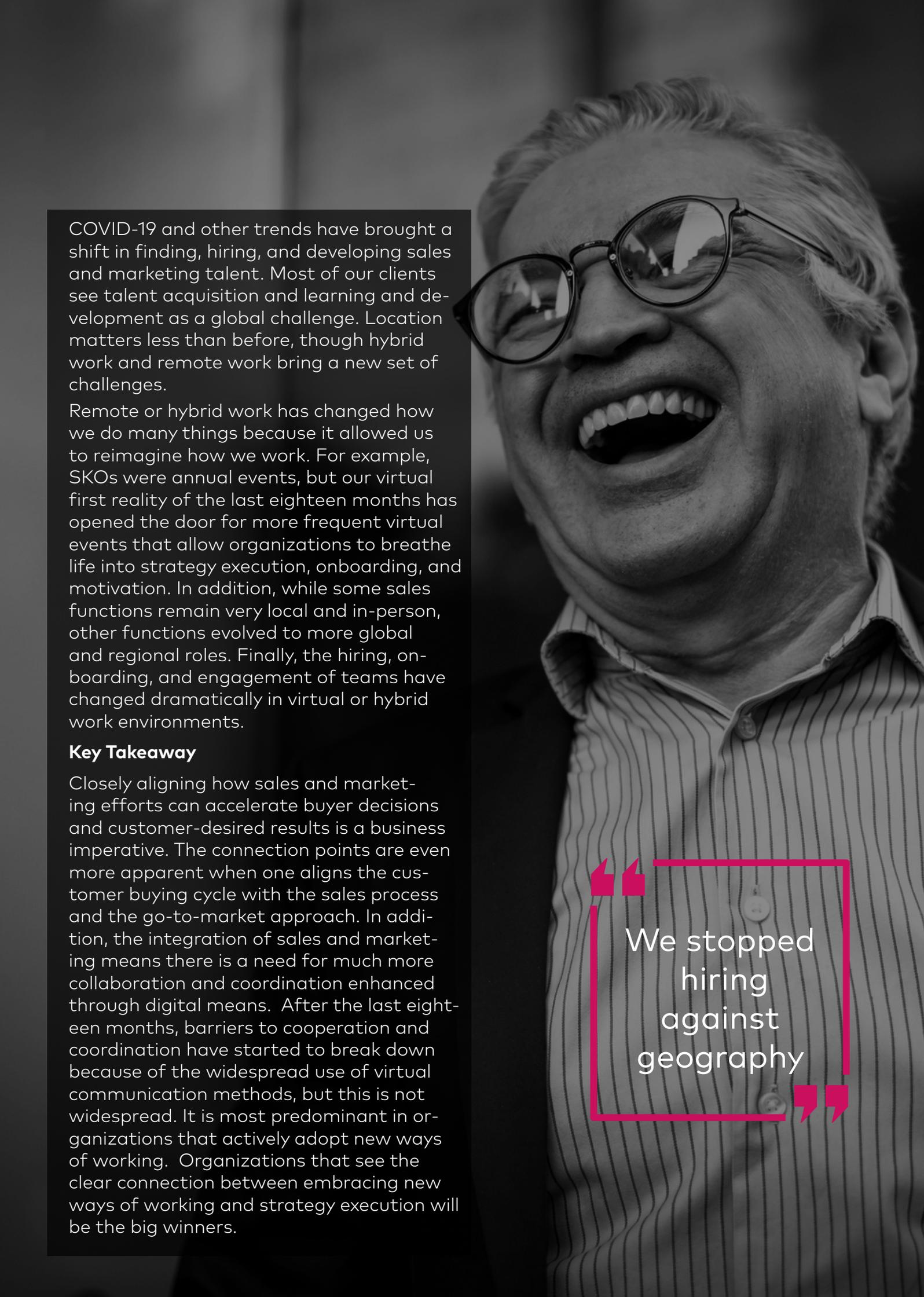
**Chart 4 - Top 4 Sales and Marketing goals for the upcoming year**



These goals for sales and marketing organizations impact the way we define and measure success. In addition to classic growth KPIs like revenue, profitability, or market share, new and customer-specific KPIs (e.g., cost per acquisition, conversion rates, customer awareness, or measurement approaches for cross- and upselling) appear more critical. At the same time, interviewees named two types of

success metrics relevant across the board: measures for sustainability and people- or talent-related KPIs.

People- or talent-related KPIs become relevant based on trends discussed in subsequent chapters. Building diverse and talented teams, developing new skills for sellers and marketers, and attracting and employing diverse talent with the right skill sets becomes more and more challenging.



COVID-19 and other trends have brought a shift in finding, hiring, and developing sales and marketing talent. Most of our clients see talent acquisition and learning and development as a global challenge. Location matters less than before, though hybrid work and remote work bring a new set of challenges.

Remote or hybrid work has changed how we do many things because it allowed us to reimagine how we work. For example, SKOs were annual events, but our virtual first reality of the last eighteen months has opened the door for more frequent virtual events that allow organizations to breathe life into strategy execution, onboarding, and motivation. In addition, while some sales functions remain very local and in-person, other functions evolved to more global and regional roles. Finally, the hiring, onboarding, and engagement of teams have changed dramatically in virtual or hybrid work environments.

### **Key Takeaway**

Closely aligning how sales and marketing efforts can accelerate buyer decisions and customer-desired results is a business imperative. The connection points are even more apparent when one aligns the customer buying cycle with the sales process and the go-to-market approach. In addition, the integration of sales and marketing means there is a need for much more collaboration and coordination enhanced through digital means. After the last eighteen months, barriers to cooperation and coordination have started to break down because of the widespread use of virtual communication methods, but this is not widespread. It is most predominant in organizations that actively adopt new ways of working. Organizations that see the clear connection between embracing new ways of working and strategy execution will be the big winners.

“  
We stopped  
hiring  
against  
geography  
”

## Trends in Sales

Chart 5 –Trends in sales

Trend	Share of interviewees that mentioned trends in sales
New ways of selling	73%
CRM as a critical enabler of digital transformation and data analytics	53%
Changing roles and requirements for sales rep profile	51%
Strategic and key account management	41%
Organizational challenges	19%
Customer-specific (multi/omni) channel approach	16%
Other industry-specific trends	16%
Services and solution selling	11%
Customer experience and engagement	7%

Changing customer expectations and digital transformation promote new ways of selling

### New ways of selling

Given the challenges of a pandemic, it might not be surprising that new ways of selling have emerged. That said, during our interviews, we realized that **virtual and hybrid selling only accounts for one-third of the responses associated with the need for new selling approaches.**

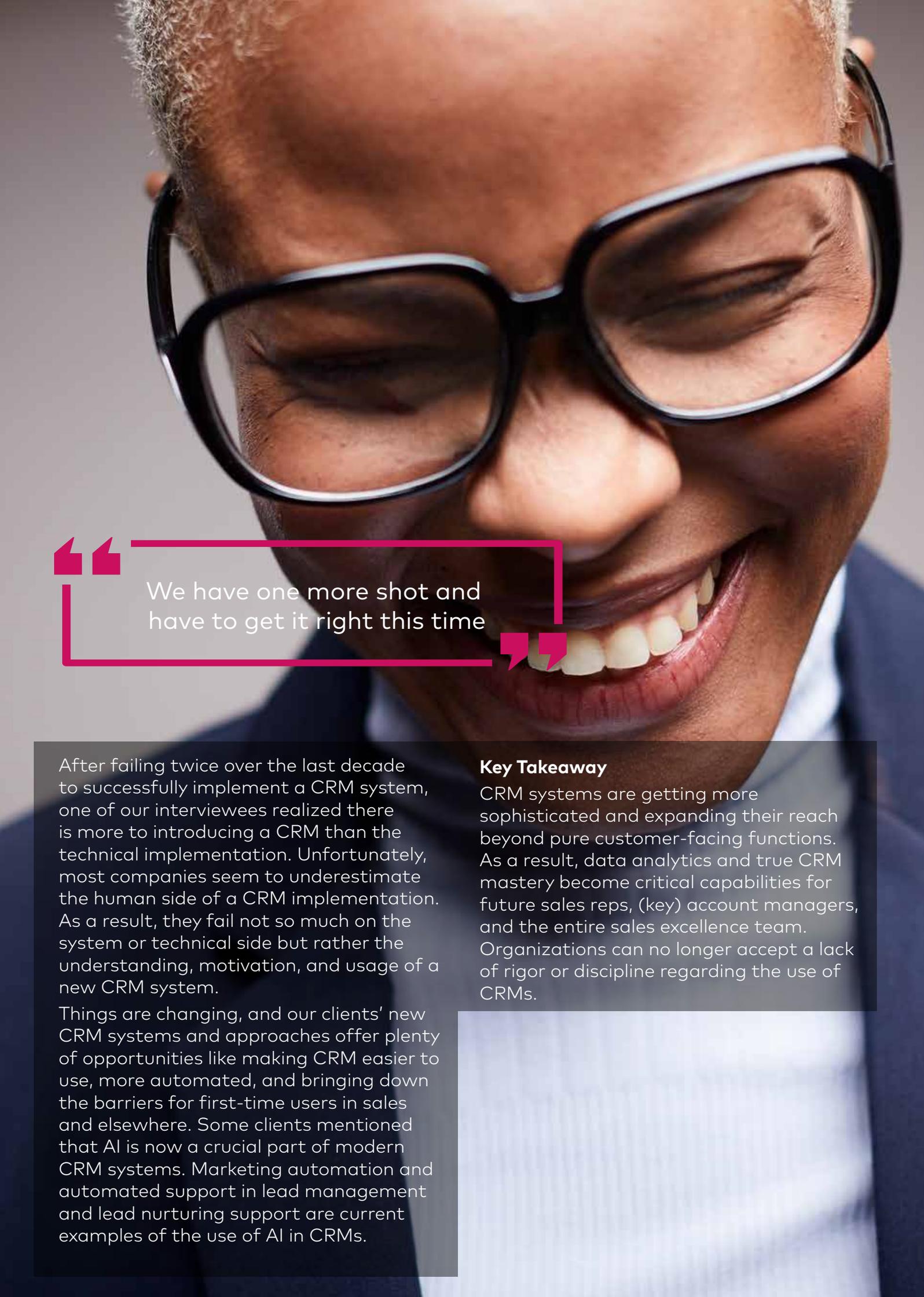
In addition to virtual or hybrid selling, there are three additional ways of selling that merit mentioning:

- 1. Accelerator selling.** Salespeople must understand the customer's business, industry, and marketplace to demonstrate how their solutions will accelerate the customer's desired business results. This focus on accelerating results for customers is what interviewees referred to as actual value selling.
- 2. A partnering style:** Our clients realize that the focus of their salespeople needs to shift from a transaction-based selling process to a relationship-based model of selling. In line with the increasing importance of strategic and key account management, we realized during our interviews that long-term partnerships with clients would allow salespeople to understand clients better and ultimately deliver consistent value across the customer's organization.
- 3. Integrated and holistic selling:** When establishing long-term relationships, salespeople need to engage with their clients throughout all phases of their buying cycle and holistically engage their customers. What do we mean by "holistically engage customers?" It means assembling the right team at the right time to deliver the full value of the organization, particularly for large or complex opportunities or accounts. Integrated or holistic selling requires close collaboration and alignment with internal functions such as marketing, product management, solution engineering, and customer success.

## CRM as a critical enabler of digital transformation and data analytics

More than **50 %** of the interviewees mentioned CRM as a crucial enabler for data and process-driven sales, lead management, and marketing. On the other hand, CRM represents a consistent obstacle because of the lack of internal alignment

regarding the use of a CRM system, limiting mindsets related to the value of a CRM, and the inability to use (skill or capability) a CRM effectively.



“ “ We have one more shot and have to get it right this time ” ”

After failing twice over the last decade to successfully implement a CRM system, one of our interviewees realized there is more to introducing a CRM than the technical implementation. Unfortunately, most companies seem to underestimate the human side of a CRM implementation. As a result, they fail not so much on the system or technical side but rather the understanding, motivation, and usage of a new CRM system.

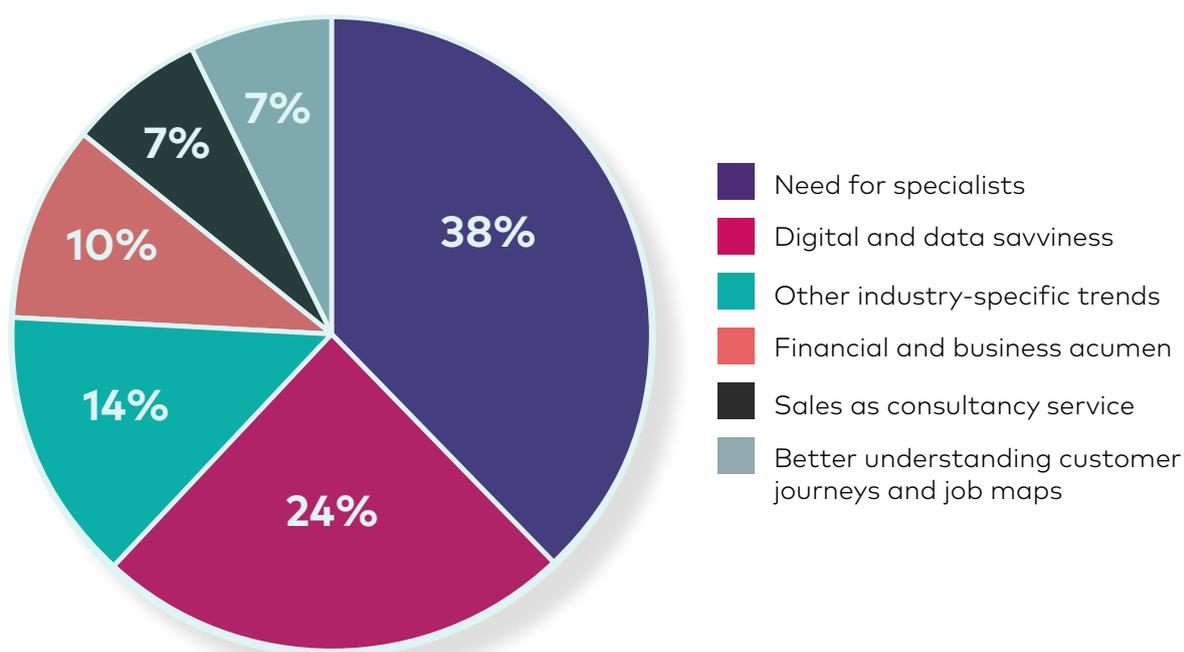
Things are changing, and our clients' new CRM systems and approaches offer plenty of opportunities like making CRM easier to use, more automated, and bringing down the barriers for first-time users in sales and elsewhere. Some clients mentioned that AI is now a crucial part of modern CRM systems. Marketing automation and automated support in lead management and lead nurturing support are current examples of the use of AI in CRMs.

#### **Key Takeaway**

CRM systems are getting more sophisticated and expanding their reach beyond pure customer-facing functions. As a result, data analytics and true CRM mastery become critical capabilities for future sales reps, (key) account managers, and the entire sales excellence team. Organizations can no longer accept a lack of rigor or discipline regarding the use of CRMs.

## Changing roles and requirements for a seller profile

Chart 6 - What will salespeople look like in the future?



Expert knowledge is even more important than digital skills

With products and services becoming more complex and increasing customer expectations, salespeople must acquire expert knowledge to interact with customers successfully. The required field of expertise varies and depends on the sales organization. However, we identified two critical areas of expertise during our interviews: industry and product or service-specific knowledge.

### Key Takeaway

Salespeople of the future will need to have greater degrees of specialization. This trend raises the possibility that more sellers may need engineering, scientific-educational, or business backgrounds, to name a few. In addition, digital savviness and a growth mindset will be essential. At the same time, capabilities like data-driven sales and marketing know-how will be in high demand.

## Strategic and key account management

According to a recent Harvard Business Review article **acquiring a new customer is 5 to 25 times more expensive** than retaining an existing one, depending on the industry. This is just one benefit of managing existing accounts strategically. An increasing number of stakeholders and the need for a deep customer understanding to deliver value raise the importance of building long-term relationships.

### Key Takeaway

Our clients consider Key Account Manager (KAM) programs a critical enabler to driving growth and deepening customer relationships.

## Trends in Marketing

Chart 7 –General Trends in Marketing

Trend	Share of interviewees that mentioned trends in marketing
Increased need for evidence-based digital analytics and marketing automation (including AI)	60%
New GTM and digital marketing processes	33%
Other (industry-specific)	25%
Increased need for digital demand and lead generation	21%
More customer journey management	14%
Organizational challenges (including talent recruitment and onboarding)	11%
Shorter product lifecycle and increased need for a collaborative approach to portfolio management	9%
More advanced content marketing (marketing 2.0)	5%

Marketing becomes more digital and data-based

## Increased need for evidence-based digital analytics and marketing automation

With the rise of digital channels and ongoing digital transformation, collecting and analyzing quantitative data has become more accessible. Based on data availability, the approach to analyzing relevant market trends, interacting with clients, and measuring success has changed.

Market research has become more digital, less expensive, and more quantitative. With the use of online channels, it is possible to track clients' behavior in a scalable way. Qualitative research approaches, such as focus groups, now serve as vehicles to validate or detect reasons for quantitative findings. Marketing automation allows for tailored interaction with clients. Based on

the information available in databases, CRM tools and AI enable specialized teams to make recommendations for customer interaction and propose solutions automatically. Finally, the use of data simplifies performance measurement and opens the doors for performance-paid marketing.

### Key Takeaway

Marketing organizations need to take what may seem like a quantum leap to become more data-driven and evidence-based. Digitalization helps to support this effort and offers new means like data analytics, AI, and marketing automation. Taking this leap will enable organizations to engage in real-time marketing, experimentation in the field with immediate adjustments.

## New GTM and digital marketing processes

“ 80% of the customer journey takes place online before a sales rep gets involved ”

This and more comments like it demonstrate the relevance of online and digital interactions with customers. Therefore, marketing organizations see the need first to identify how they can

use digital tools for their benefit and, secondly, to use and apply the digital marketing tools (e.g., SEO, personalized digital messaging) of their choice.

**Chart 8**–Go to Market Trends

Trend	Share of interviewees that mentioned Go to Market trends
Shift to customer-specific (multi/omni) channel approach	30%
Changes in brand equity management	21%
Need for more segment-oriented value propositions	19%
Need for deep market and customer insights	16%
Holistic 360-degree campaign management	11%
Need for value-based pricing excellence	11%
Actionable segmentation	7%

Multi and omnichannel strategies are more important than ever before

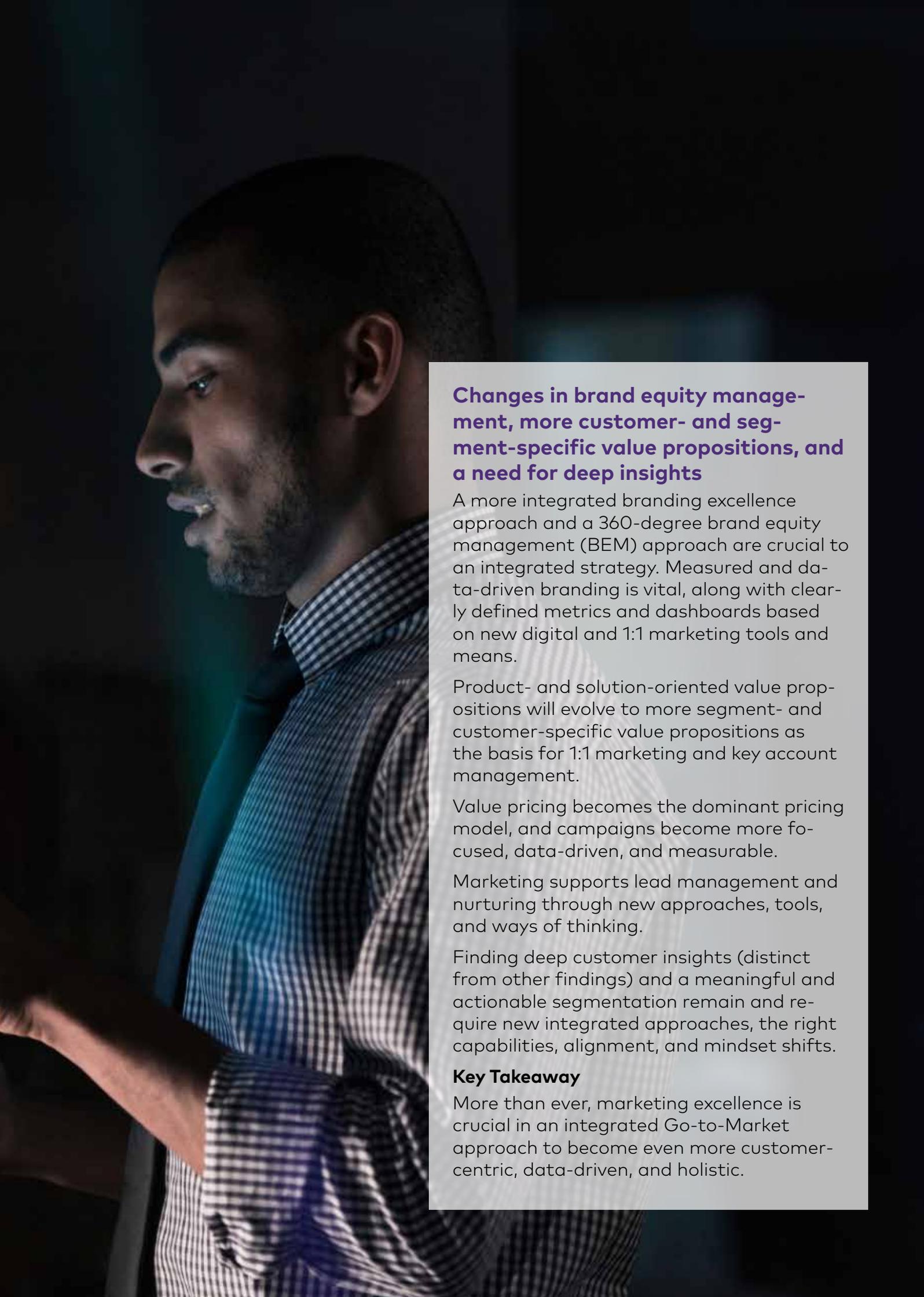
Throughout all interviews, the topic of **multi- and omnichannel strategies surfaced 42 times.**

While some people use multichannel and omnichannel interchangeably, making a clear distinction is necessary. For example, interviewees described omnichannel as "creating a consistent customer experience across all channels." On the other hand, multichannel refers to "selecting and prioritizing channels and touchpoints." Interviewees believe it is vital to align the organization on the differences to formulate and implement a successful channel strategy.

At the same time, multi- and omnichannel approaches are closely connected when formulating digital marketing strategies driven by digital transformation and data analytics trends. Additionally, digital online channels generate data that can help detect customer trends, and these trends serve as the basis for automation in marketing.

**Key Takeaway**

Multichannel and omnichannel strategies that are well-executed and fully (backward and forward) integrated are fundamental to future marketing and selling success.



## **Changes in brand equity management, more customer- and segment-specific value propositions, and a need for deep insights**

A more integrated branding excellence approach and a 360-degree brand equity management (BEM) approach are crucial to an integrated strategy. Measured and data-driven branding is vital, along with clearly defined metrics and dashboards based on new digital and 1:1 marketing tools and means.

Product- and solution-oriented value propositions will evolve to more segment- and customer-specific value propositions as the basis for 1:1 marketing and key account management.

Value pricing becomes the dominant pricing model, and campaigns become more focused, data-driven, and measurable.

Marketing supports lead management and nurturing through new approaches, tools, and ways of thinking.

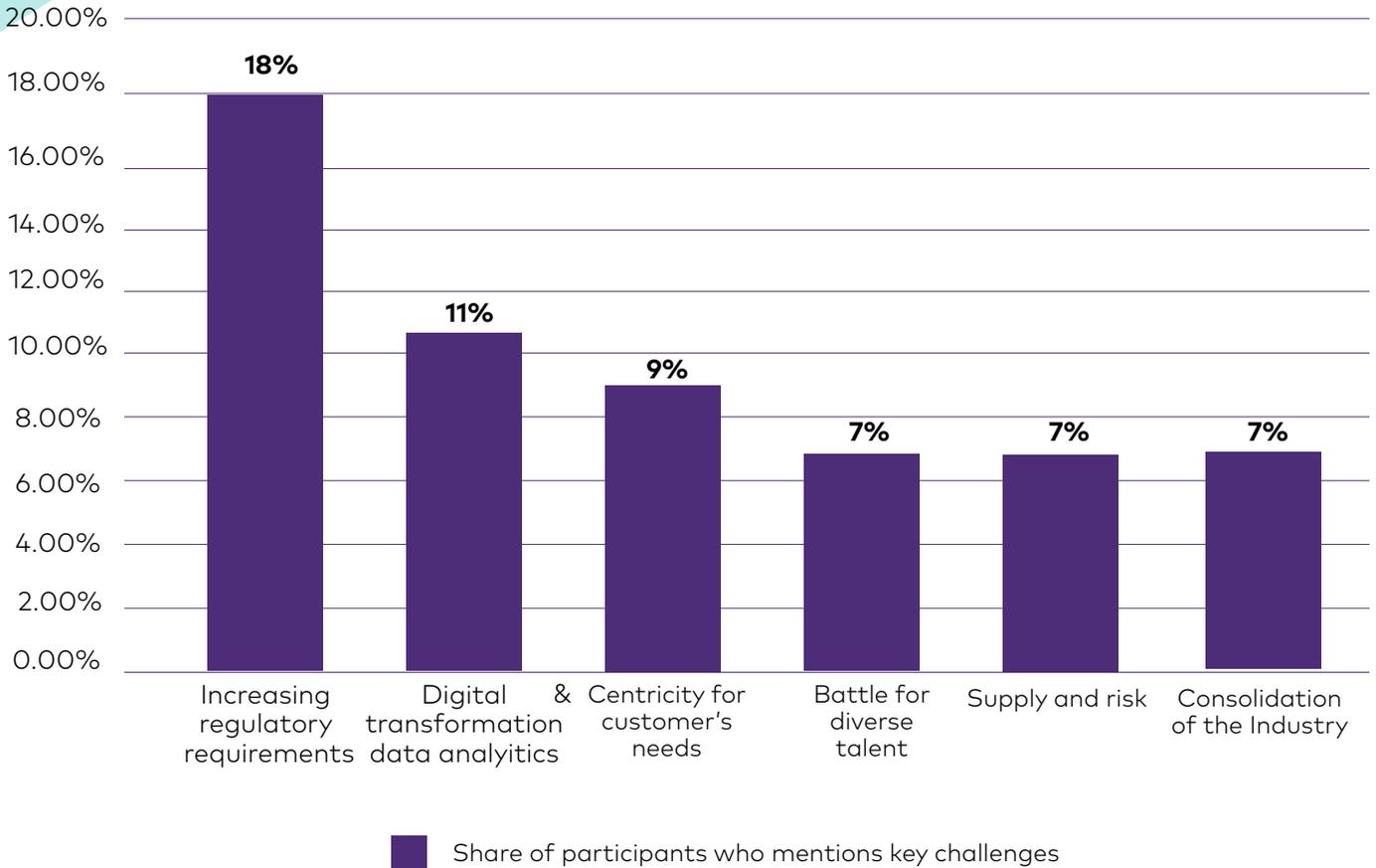
Finding deep customer insights (distinct from other findings) and a meaningful and actionable segmentation remain and require new integrated approaches, the right capabilities, alignment, and mindset shifts.

### **Key Takeaway**

More than ever, marketing excellence is crucial in an integrated Go-to-Market approach to become even more customer-centric, data-driven, and holistic.

# Biggest Hurdles, Obstacles, and External Challenges

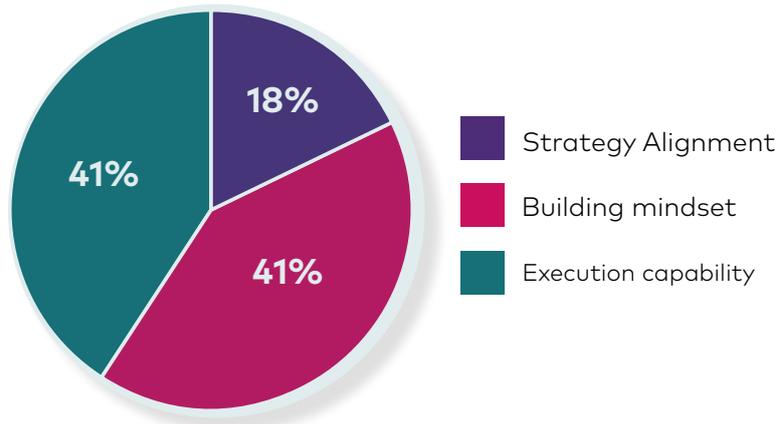
**Chart 9** - What are the biggest hurdles or obstacles you see on your GTM path?



Regulatory requirements continue to represent an external challenge to successfully executing a Go-to-Market strategy, but organizations in financial services predominantly raised these concerns. The other hurdles and obstacles identified during these interviews (digital transformation, the battle for diverse talent, etc.) apply across industries. But no matter which of the hurdles sales and

marketing organizations face, we believe that exceptional strategy execution depends on creating alignment on the strategy, building the right mindset, and developing the needed capabilities to execute a plan. When asking our clients which one of these three areas is most important to execute their strategy, it becomes evident that they all play an essential role.

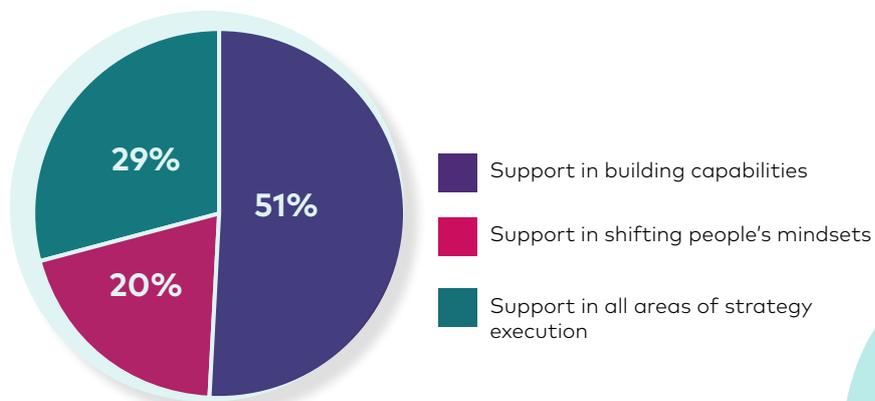
**Chart 10** - Where do you see the biggest challenges for strategy implementation in your organization?



BTS can support organizations with all three areas: creating strategic alignment, shifting relevant mindsets, and building key execution capabilities. Unfortunately, when asked, which three areas are a priority, more than **50 %** of the answers focus on **capability building** only.

However, our experience shows that capability building alone is not enough and that alignment and mindset are equally important when successfully implementing new strategies.

**Chart 11** - In which areas should BTS Sales and Marketing support you to successfully execute your strategies?



**Key Takeaway**

An integrated change management approach focusing on getting the strategic alignment right, shifting the right mindsets,

and building the relevant capabilities is crucial for successfully executing sales and marketing strategies.

# If You Had One Wish, What Would Be Different Tomorrow?

**Chart 11** - If you had one wish, what would be different tomorrow?



## Appendix

### Survey Demographics (Number of Respondents, Participating Companies, Interviewed Roles)

Industry	%
Financial services (including wealth services, consumer banking, and Insurance)	18%
FMCG / Consumer products	7%
Industry and automotive (including energy, industrial, automotive, and chemicals)	28%
Life science (agriculture, biotech, consumer health / OTC, and pharma)	34%
Professional services	2%
Tech	11%

Functions and focus areas within Sales & Marketing	%
CEO / Managing Director / President	18%
Commercial capability and learning	9%
Commercial excellence	7%
Marketing	22%
Sales	18%
Sales and marketing	5%
Strategy	5%
Other (including HR, L&D, other C-levels, etc.)	16%

Region	%
Africa, Middle East	4%
Asia Pacific	12%
Europe	55%
Latin America	4%
US and Canada	25%

Countries
Australia
Brazil
Canada
Finland
France
Germany
India
Japan
Malaysia
Mexico

Countries
Netherlands
Kenya
Singapore
South Africa
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
UAE
UK
US

# ABOUT BTS

BTS is a global professional services firm that partners with clients to enable strategy execution. At BTS, we believe that success comes from people understanding how their daily work impacts business results, so we provide the skills, tools, and knowledge your people need to take the right action at the right moment. We are experts in behavior change and care deeply about delivering results for our clients and ensuring that their people do the best work of their lives. Our engagements range from embedded multiyear transformation projects to brief, targeted capability development. It's a strategy made personal.

Our sales and marketing practice helps your sales and marketing teams better understand their customers' needs by building a mastery of business acumen and people dynamics. In other words, we equip your salespeople with the skills they need to engage buyers and prioritize sales activities effectively. We also provide your marketers with the capabilities to leverage deep customer insights, build customer-oriented value propositions, and work with your sales team. We partner with you to co-create the right mix of sales methods, go-to-market strategies, marketing excellence, training, simulations, and assessments for your sellers and marketers. We tailor solutions to fit your strategy and business through our unique approach, inspiring better decision-making and driving results.

For more information, please visit  
[www.bts.com](http://www.bts.com).

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Strategy made

**personal**