

Revenue Blockers Report 2026

The 9 Revenue Blockers Killing
B2B Growth in 2026

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• EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

686 founders told us their #1 obstacle. The data behind the answers was the story.

Between November 2025 and February 2026, we surveyed 686 B2B founders, revenue leaders, and operators across 9 industries. We asked one question: **What is your #1 revenue growth blocker right now?**

Three blockers account for 57% of all responses. Every other blocker splits the remaining 43%.

25%

Not enough leads coming in
Most B2B companies under ~\$750K generate fewer than 150 leads per month

18%

Owner does all the selling
The revenue ceiling for founder-only sales is \$1-3M. After that, growth flatlines

14%

Response / follow-up too slow
63% of B2B companies never respond to inbound leads at all

686

B2B founders and operators surveyed across 9 industries and 4 revenue tiers - November 2025 through February 2026

The pattern across all 686 responses: Every blocker traces back to one of three root causes - not enough pipeline, not enough capacity, or not enough systems. Companies that solve all three grow. Companies that solve one hit a different ceiling. This report breaks down each blocker with benchmarks, industry data, and the specific actions that separate top performers from the rest.

• **METHODOLOGY**

Survey Design & Respondent Profile

Single-question blocker selection from 9 options, plus role, industry, revenue tier, and company identifiers. Distributed via landing page, QR code at Web Summit Lisbon (November 2025), direct outreach, and partner channels.

RESPONDENT PROFILE (N=686)

DIMENSION	BREAKDOWN
Role	Founders/Co-founders 72% · Sales/Revenue leaders 12% · Other executives 11% · Investors 5%
Revenue Tier	Getting to \$100K: 45% · \$100K-\$500K: 28% · \$500K-\$3M: 18% · \$3M+: 9%
Industry	B2B SaaS 28% · Agency/Services 22% · Other B2B 14% · DeepTech/AI/ML 10% · E-commerce 7% · FinTech 6% · HealthTech 5% · MarTech 5% · Manufacturing 3%
Geography	Primarily US and Europe (Web Summit Lisbon attendees + US-based outreach)

KEY DEFINITIONS

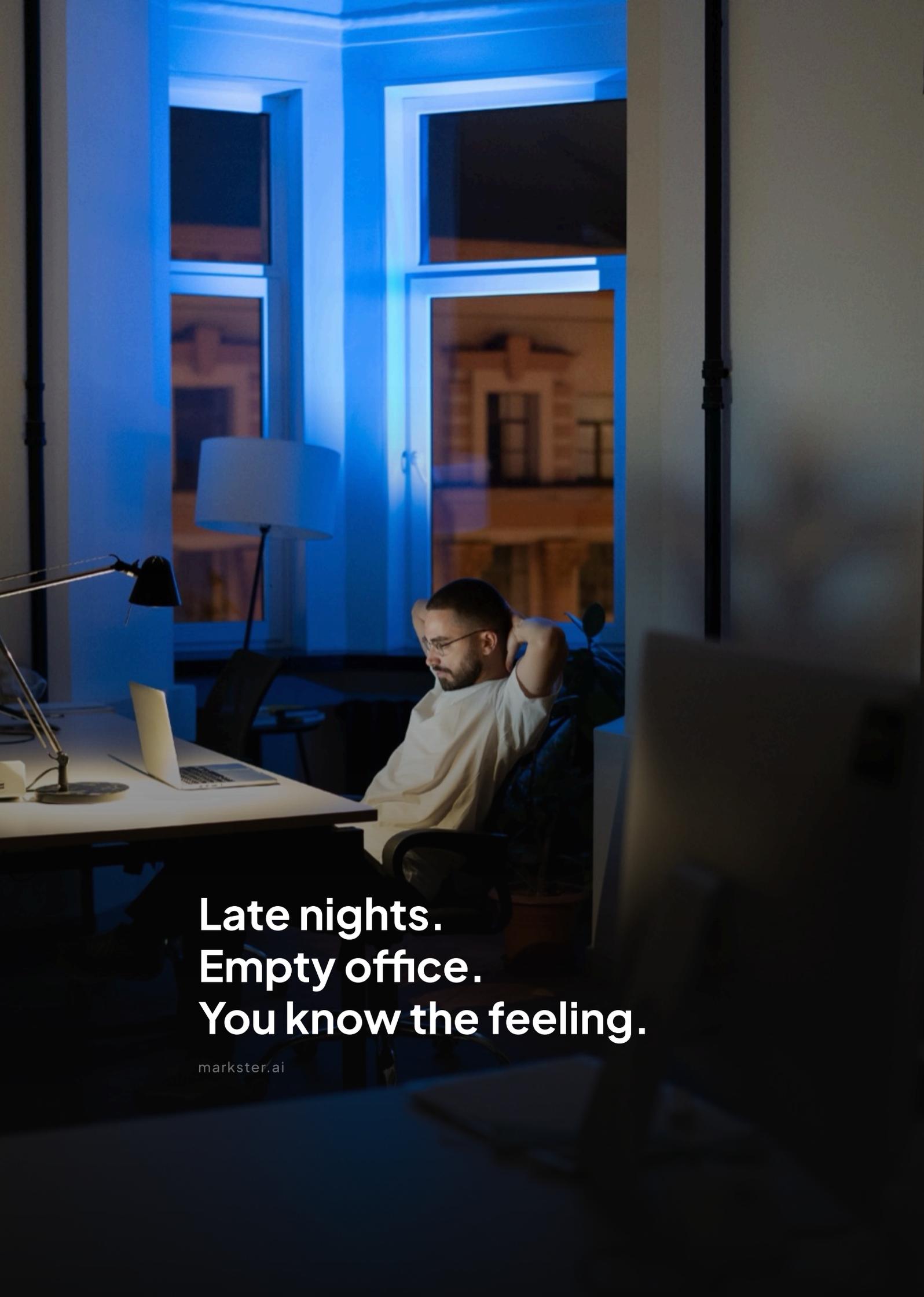
Lead = any inbound inquiry, form fill, or outbound response with contact information - including demo requests, content downloads, and direct inquiries; not newsletter-only signups. **Qualified lead** = meets basic ICP criteria and has expressed intent beyond passive interest. **CAC** = fully loaded cost including personnel time, tools, ad spend, and opportunity cost.

DATA INTEGRITY

Duplicate submissions and incomplete responses were removed; counts reconcile to n=686. Industry categories are self-selected and mutually exclusive.

LIMITATIONS

Self-reported single selection. Respondents may experience multiple blockers simultaneously. Sample skews toward early-stage and founder-led companies. Web Summit distribution introduces event-attendee bias. External benchmarks are drawn from vendor reports (HubSpot, Salesforce, Chili Piper, Gong, etc.) and may reflect those companies' customer bases rather than the full market.



**Late nights.
Empty office.
You know the feeling.**

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01

The 9 Blockers, Ranked

57% trace to three root causes: pipeline, capacity, and systems.

• THE 9 BLOCKERS, RANKED

57% trace to three root causes: pipeline, capacity, and systems.

Not enough leads coming in

172 respondents



Owner does all the selling

123 respondents



Response/follow-up too slow

96 respondents



Customer acquisition cost too high

82 respondents



Closing rate too low

69 respondents



Wasting time on wrong prospects

55 respondents



Sales cycle too long

41 respondents



Don't know how to sell effectively

27 respondents



Don't know what competitors do better

21 respondents



n=686. Percentages rounded to one decimal place. Total may not equal 100% due to rounding.

The top three are capacity and pipeline problems. The bottom three are knowledge and strategy gaps. The middle three sit at the intersection - where operational fixes unlock the biggest leverage.

- THE 9 BLOCKERS, RANKED

What the ranking tells us

The top three blockers are capacity and pipeline problems. The bottom three are knowledge and strategy problems. The middle three - cost, closing, qualification - sit at the intersection. Companies tend to feel the capacity problems first and only discover the strategy problems after they have built enough pipeline to expose them.

“Companies that solve all three root causes grow. Companies that solve one hit a different ceiling. Every blocker traces back to pipeline, capacity, or systems.”

THE THREE ROOT CAUSES

ROOT CAUSE	BLOCKERS	SHARE OF RESPONSES
Pipeline (not enough)	Not enough leads	25.1%
Capacity (founder bottleneck)	Owner does all selling · Response too slow	31.9%
Systems (operational gaps)	CAC · Closing · Wrong prospects · Cycle · Skills · Competitors	43.0%

THE PROGRESSION PATTERN

Early-stage companies feel the pipeline problem most acutely - they simply need more leads. As they grow, the founder becomes the bottleneck: they cannot simultaneously generate leads, run calls, write proposals, close deals, and deliver work. And as systems fail to scale, operational gaps widen: CAC creeps up, closing rates drop, and the sales cycle extends.

This progression explains why companies that solve only one blocker stall. The \$100K company that builds lead generation but neglects systems will stall at \$500K when the founder cannot keep up. The \$1M company that hires reps but lacks response infrastructure loses to faster competitors.

Key insight: The ranking is not just a list - it is a growth roadmap. Most companies need to solve blockers in sequence: pipeline first, then capacity, then systems. Attempting them in reverse order typically produces waste rather than growth.

02

Not Enough Leads Coming In

172 of 686 respondents (25.1%) - the most common blocker by a wide margin.

• DEEP DIVE - BLOCKER #1

Not Enough Leads Coming In

25.1%

of respondents named this their #1 revenue blocker - the most common obstacle by a wide margin

This is the default answer for companies that have not yet built a repeatable acquisition engine. It is also - according to every major benchmark - the correct diagnosis for most B2B companies under \$3M in annual revenue.

“The companies generating 5–10x more leads are not spending 5–10x more money. They are running repeatable processes across multiple channels simultaneously.”

HOW MANY LEADS DO B2B COMPANIES ACTUALLY GENERATE?

REVENUE STAGE	TYPICAL MONTHLY LEADS	TOP-QUARTILE BENCHMARK
~\$100K	10-50 total, 5-20 qualified	30-75 total, 15+ qualified
~\$500K	50-150 total, 20-50 qualified	100-200 total, 40+ qualified
~\$1M	150-300 total, 50-100 qualified	250-400 total, 80+ qualified
~\$3M+	300-600+ total, 100-200 qualified	500-1,000+ total, 150+ qualified

Sources: HubSpot 2026 State of Marketing; Martal Group B2B Lead Generation Benchmarks (2026); DemandSage/First Page Sage Lead Generation Statistics (2026). Note: “lead” definitions vary across sources.

WHERE DO LEADS COME FROM? COST PER LEAD BY CHANNEL:

CHANNEL	AVERAGE B2B CPL
Referrals	\$25
SEO / Organic search	\$164-\$206
Cold email	\$225
Paid LinkedIn	\$110-\$230
Paid search (Google)	\$310-\$463
Trade shows	\$840+

Sources: First Page Sage “Average Cost Per Lead by Industry -2026”; Sopro “B2B Lead Generation Statistics” (2025); Optifai “B2B Lead Generation Benchmarks” (2025).

- DEEP DIVE - BLOCKER #1

The Real Problem Behind “Not Enough Leads”

~50% of MSPs spend less than \$10,000 per year on their own marketing (ConnectWise, 2026 MSP Marketing Report). Many have no active lead generation beyond referrals. This is not a budget problem - it is a systems problem.

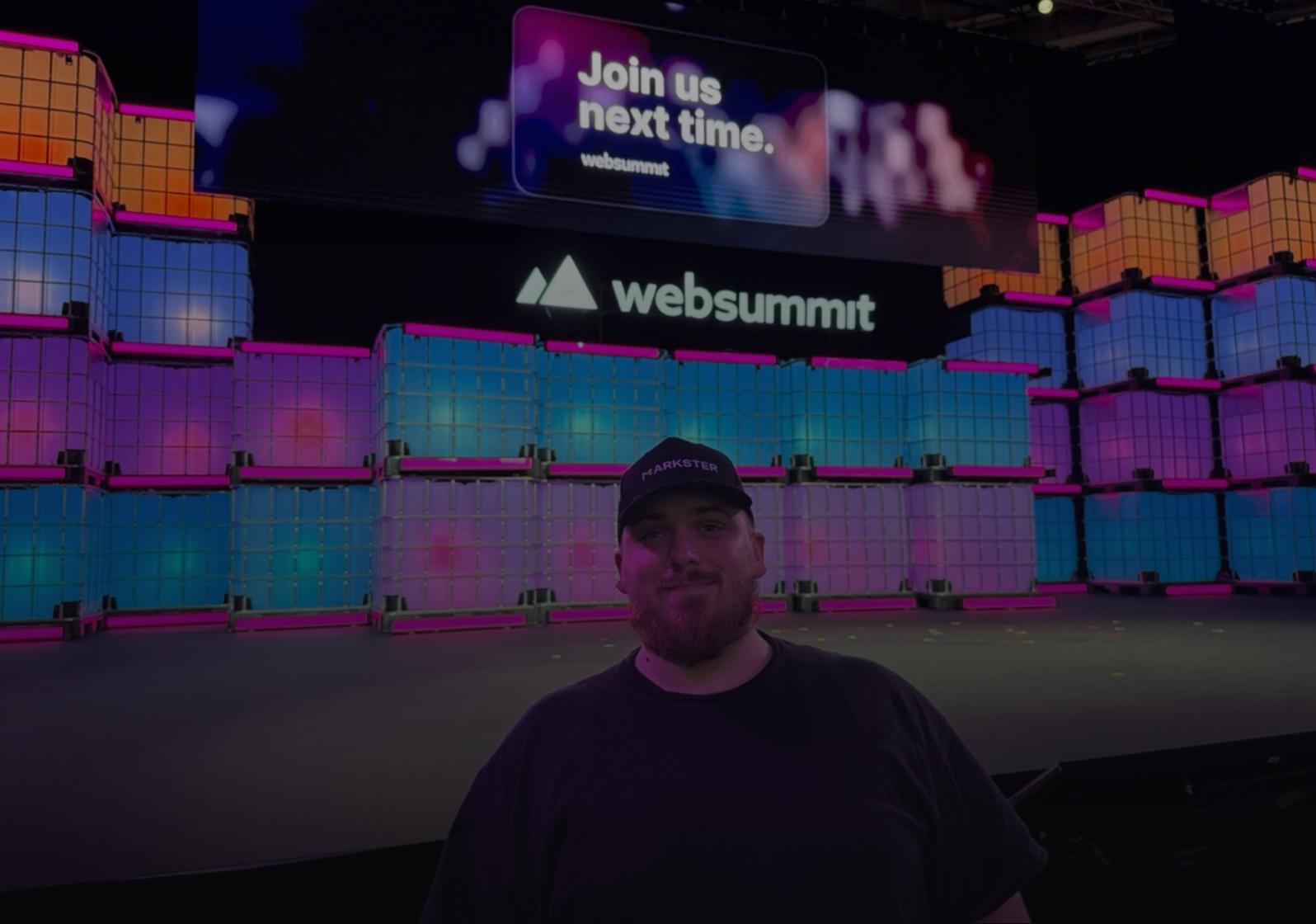
“The companies that win are the ones that started 6–12 months ago. A new marketing channel takes 3–6 months to produce meaningful pipeline impact. SEO and content take 9+ months.”

The blended average across B2B is \$198–200 per lead - but inbound (content, SEO, website) generates 3x more leads at 62% lower cost than outbound as a category. Multi-channel campaigns produce 31% more leads than single-channel.

WHAT TOP PERFORMERS DO DIFFERENTLY

- Run 3+ active channels simultaneously - not just referrals
- Invest in content/SEO for long-term compounding (lowest CPL over time)
- Use behavioral lead scoring (commonly 2–3x improvement in MQL-to-SQL conversion)
- Track cost per lead by channel and double down on what works
- Accept that lead gen is a 6–12 month investment, not a 30-day experiment
- Separate lead generation from lead qualification workflows
- Respond to inbound within 5 minutes (21x qualification rate)

Key benchmark: For businesses under \$3M in annual revenue, referrals and word-of-mouth account for 60–80% of pipeline. This is simultaneously the best channel (highest close rates, lowest cost) and the most dangerous dependency (unscalable, unpredictable). An active, structured referral program turns your best channel from unpredictable into repeatable.



“Every founder I talk to has the same problem. They know they need leads. They know they should follow up faster. But they are buried in operations and have no time to build the system that fixes it. That is what we built Markster to solve.”

Ivan Ivanka, Founder & CEO, Markster

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**Juggling calls.
Chasing deals.
Running on fumes.**

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03

Owner Does All the Selling

123 of 686 respondents (17.9%) - the most structurally
damaging blocker on the list.

- DEEP DIVE - BLOCKER #2

Owner Does All the Selling

This is the most structurally damaging blocker on the list. Lead generation can be outsourced or automated. Response time can be fixed with technology. But when the owner IS the sales team, growth has a hard ceiling - and the business becomes nearly impossible to sell or scale.

82%

of U.S. business entities are nonemployer firms - solo operators with no employees. The owner handles all sales and closing.

68%

of small business owner time is spent working IN the business (ops, sales, fires) vs. ON the business (strategy, systems).

Owners average ~50 hours per week total, with approximately 16 hours per week on sales and marketing combined. Service business owners frequently report 60-70+ hour weeks when delivery and sales overlap.

THE REVENUE CEILING IS REAL

Founder-led sales stops scaling at **\$1-3M in annual revenue**. This is consistently cited across SaaStr, First Round Capital, and EOS/Traction research. The pattern: monthly new bookings plateau or oscillate (\$100K, \$80K, \$120K, \$90K) even as the founder works harder. The ceiling is structural - one person cannot simultaneously generate leads, run discovery calls, write proposals, close deals, and deliver the work.

"The revenue ceiling for founder-only sales is \$1-3M. After that, growth flatlines - not because the founder works less hard, but because one person cannot scale in two directions at once."

Companies typically need to make their first sales hire after closing 10-20 customers and proving a repeatable process - usually around \$200-500K in annual revenue. But many founders delay 6+ months past the plateau, missing the acceleration window.

• DEEP DIVE - BLOCKER #2

The Valuation Penalty & What Delegation Looks Like

THE EXIT VALUE GAP

3-4x

Owner-dependent business

Revenue tied to founder's relationships. Key person risk discount: 10-50%.

7-8x

Systematized business

Delegated sales, documented processes. On \$500K profit: \$2M higher exit value.

Sources: WebsiteClosers "Business Valuation Guide" (2025); BizBuySell valuation data. Multiples vary by industry and deal structure; range reflects small-to-mid-market service businesses.

WHAT "DELEGATING SALES" ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE

The answer is not "hire an SDR." Premature sales hires - before a repeatable process exists - have a **50-74% failure rate** (Pavilion/Revenue Collective 2025; Bridge Group SaaS SDR Metrics 2025).

The real sequence:

- 1 Document the sales playbook** - scripts, objection handling, qualification criteria, CRM process. Write this before hiring anyone.
- 2 Build repeatable lead generation** - not dependent on the founder's personal network or relationship capital.
- 3 Separate roles** - founder handles strategy and key relationships; systems handle tactical outreach, follow-up, and qualification.
- 4 Hire when systems prove the process** - then hire two reps at once so you can compare performance and identify outliers.

Key benchmark: Companies where the founder still handles more than 20% of sales calls past \$1-2M in annual revenue grow **30% slower** than those that have delegated (Pavilion benchmark data 2025). The delegation target is clear - the timing is what most founders get wrong.

04

Response / Follow-up Too Slow

96 of 686 respondents (14.0%) - the most fixable blocker on the list.

- DEEP DIVE - BLOCKER #3

Response / Follow-up Too Slow

The data is unambiguous – the core multipliers have remained consistent since the seminal 2011 Harvard Business Review study, with 2025–2026 benchmarks confirming the same dramatic impact. Yet 63% of B2B companies never respond to inbound leads at all.

THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT OF RESPONSE SPEED

RESPONSE TIME	IMPACT ON LEAD QUALIFICATION
Under 1 minute	391% higher conversion (Velocify, 2015)
Under 5 minutes	21x more likely to qualify; 100x more likely to make contact (HBR 2011)
Under 1 hour	7x more likely to qualify (Harvard Business Review, 2,241 companies)
24+ hours	60x less likely to qualify vs. under 1 hour

Source: Oldroyd, McElheran & Elkington, "The Short Life of Online Sales Leads," HBR (2011). Chili Piper "State of Speed-to-Lead" (2025). 78% of B2B buyers purchase from the vendor that responds first (Chili Piper 2025).

HOW SLOW ARE MOST COMPANIES?

- 63% of companies never responded to a test inquiry (RevenueHero 2024, confirmed consistent 2025–2026)
- 29–47 hours average response time among the 37% that do respond
- Fewer than 1% of companies engage leads within 5 minutes

AI AND AUTOMATION HAVE MADE THIS OPERATIONALLY ACHIEVABLE

AI chatbots + routing achieve effective response times under 60 seconds, 24/7. Hybrid AI + human models produce 5–8x faster overall response, 15–50% more qualified leads, and 20–30% uplift in form-to-meeting rates.

"The fix is infrastructure, not effort. No human team can consistently respond to inbound leads within 60 seconds. But a system can – and the companies that built this system capture the entire first-responder advantage while competitors wait hours or days."

Critical nuance: A human must engage within 2 minutes after chatbot handoff for best meeting-booking rates (Drift/Salesloft 2025). Bot-only conversations are 66% less likely to convert to opportunity.

05

The Other Six Blockers

Quick benchmarks for blockers #4 through #9 - the 43%
the top three don't cover.

• THE OTHER SIX BLOCKERS

Blockers #4 – #6**#4 – Customer Acquisition Cost Too High****12.0%**

82 respondents. The real problem is usually incomplete math, not excessive spending. Most SMBs track only ad spend and miss 60–80% of true costs. Blended (fully-loaded) CAC – including founder time, tools, and opportunity cost – is typically 2–3× higher than reported. Founders spend roughly 16 hours/week on sales and marketing; at \$150/hour that's \$124,800/year in untracked acquisition overhead.

Benchmarks: B2B SaaS blended CAC: \$273–\$702. B2B Services/Consulting: ~\$650. IT/Managed Services: \$454–\$583.

Healthy ratio: LTV:CAC of 3:1+. Below 2:1 is unsustainable. Above 5:1 = under-investing. CAC payback target: under 12 months.

FIX: CALCULATE REAL CAC INCLUDING FOUNDER TIME · BENCHMARK AGAINST LTV · FORMALIZE REFERRAL PROGRAM (\$25 CPL) · SHIFT TO INBOUND OVER TIME

#5 – Closing Rate Too Low**10.1%**

69 respondents. Average B2B win rate on qualified opportunities (SQL to closed-won): **20–30%**. Inbound-sourced: 25–40%. Outbound-sourced: 10–20%. Referral-sourced: 40–50%+. Top performers close at **62–75%** on proposals sent (Rain Group, 472 sellers/execs). Average proposal-to-close rate: 30–47%. Deeply customized proposals: 50–65%. Generic templates: 15–25%.

Top three factors: Multi-threading (engaging multiple stakeholders, +130% win rate on deals over \$50K) · Personalized value demonstration (51–63% more effective) · Rigorous qualification discipline.

FIX: MULTI-THREAD DEALS EARLY · CUSTOMIZE EVERY PROPOSAL WITH SPECIFIC ROI CASES · QUALIFY HARDER EARLIER

#6 – Wasting Time on Wrong Prospects**8.0%**

55 respondents. A qualification problem, not a lead generation problem. Companies that report this blocker typically have adequate pipeline but poor ICP definition or weak discovery processes. Well-qualified deals close **21.6% faster** and win at **6.3× the rate** of poorly-qualified ones (Ebsta, \$48B in pipeline analyzed).

FIX: DEFINE QUALIFICATION CRITERIA BEFORE SCALING OUTREACH · VALIDATED ICP + LEAD SCORING + RIGOROUS DISCOVERY = FEWER BUT BETTER OPPORTUNITIES

• THE OTHER SIX BLOCKERS

Blockers #7 – #9**#7 – Sales Cycle Too Long****6.0%**

41 respondents. **Average B2B sales cycle by deal size:** Under \$5K: 40 days · \$5–10K: 55 days · \$10–50K: 75 days · \$50–100K: 120 days · \$100K+: 170–270+ days. 57% of sales professionals say cycles are getting longer (Salesforce 2026). Average buying committee: 6–11 people – each additional stakeholder extends the cycle.

But top teams using AI and multi-threading are compressing cycles by **15–30%**. Multi-threading is the single most effective compression lever.

FIX: MULTI-THREAD FROM FIRST CALL · MAP ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN WEEK 1 · USE AI TO AUTOMATE FOLLOW-UP CADENCE BETWEEN HUMAN TOUCHPOINTS

#8 – Don't Know How to Sell Effectively**3.9%**

27 respondents. Low selection rate, but disproportionately chosen by pre-\$100K companies and first-time founders. This is a skills and confidence gap more than a structural problem. The fix is frameworks, practice, and early customer conversations – not hiring a sales team prematurely.

FIX: LEARN A SALES METHODOLOGY (SPIN, CHALLENGER, MEDDIC) · DO 50+ CUSTOMER DISCOVERY CALLS · RECORD AND REVIEW EVERY CONVERSATION

#9 – Don't Know What Competitors Do Better**3.1%**

21 respondents. The sleeper blocker. Lowest selection rate but potentially the most damaging – companies that lack competitive awareness do not realize it is hurting them. **79%** of companies with under 50 employees have no formal competitive intelligence process (Forrester 2024). **68%** of B2B deals involve at least one competitor (Crayon 2025). **44%** lack CRM visibility into which competitors appear in their deals.

Companies with systematic competitive monitoring report **2–3x higher win rates** against specific competitors.

FIX: TAG COMPETITORS IN YOUR CRM · RUN QUARTERLY WIN/LOSS ANALYSIS · BUILD BATTLECARDS FOR YOUR TOP 3 COMPETITORS



“Most agencies hand you a dashboard and call it technology. We built 13 production services that actually do the work – prospecting, content, proposals, outreach – all running on the same infrastructure our own business runs on.”

Attila Sukosd, Co-Founder & CTO, Markster

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• INDUSTRY SNAPSHOT

How Blockers Differ by Vertical

BLOCKER	B2B SAAS	AGENCY / SERVICES	OTHER B2B	DEEPTECH / AI	E-COM / DTC	FINTECH	HEALTHTECH	MARTECH	MFG / HW
Not enough leads	High	Very High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Very High
Owner sells everything	Medium	Very High	High	High	Low	Medium	High	Medium	Very High
Response too slow	Medium	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low
CAC too high	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Very High	High	Medium	High	Low
Closing rate low	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Low	High	Medium	Medium	High
Wrong prospects	Low	Medium	Low	High	Low	Medium	Medium	High	Medium

n=686. Intensity levels are a qualitative interpretation based on relative incidence in our survey sample. Smaller segments (Manufacturing n=21, HealthTech n=34) should be read as indicative, not definitive.

KEY PATTERNS

- **Agency/Consulting/Services** disproportionately report “owner does all the selling” and “not enough leads” – service businesses are relationship-driven and founder-dependent by nature.
- **B2B SaaS** spreads more evenly across lead generation and CAC concerns – more channels available, but higher competition per channel.
- **DeepTech/AI/ML** over-indexes on qualification problems – technical products with narrow buyer profiles amplify these issues.
- **MarTech/AdTech** respondents (who theoretically know marketing best) still over-index on CAC and wrong-prospect problems, suggesting knowing the theory does not eliminate the execution gap.

• REVENUE-STAGE ANALYSIS

How Blockers Shift as You Grow

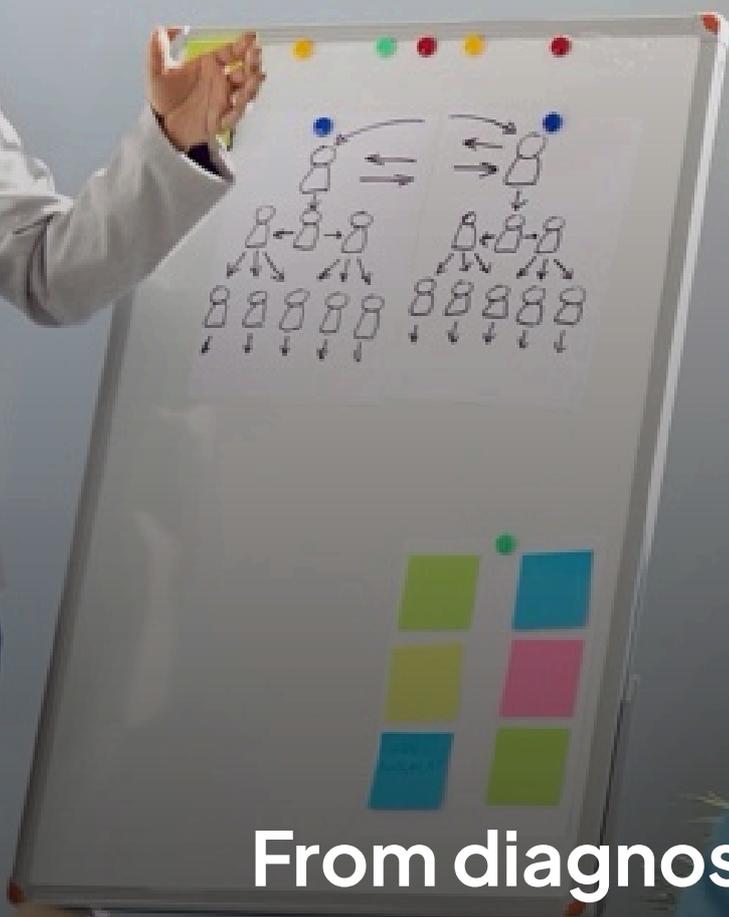
BLOCKER	GETTING TO \$100K (n=309)	\$100K-\$500K (n=192)	\$500K-\$3M (n=123)	\$3M+ (n=62)
Not enough leads	#1 (29%)	#1 (24%)	#2 (20%)	#3 (16%)
Owner sells everything	#2 (18%)	#2 (19%)	#1 (22%)	#6 (8%)
Response too slow	#3 (13%)	#3 (14%)	#3 (15%)	#2 (18%)
CAC too high	#5 (8%)	#4 (14%)	#4 (15%)	#1 (23%)
Closing rate low	#4 (9%)	#5 (10%)	#5 (11%)	#4 (15%)
Wrong prospects	#6 (8%)	#6 (7%)	#6 (8%)	#5 (11%)

Rankings reflect within-tier ordering by respondent count. See Appendix A1 for full 9-blocker breakdown. Percentages rounded to nearest whole number.

THE PATTERN IS CLEAR

- **Pre-\$100K:** Pipeline is everything. You need leads, and you need them now. Lead generation is the existential problem.
- **\$100K-\$500K:** The founder bottleneck emerges. You have some leads, but one person cannot handle them all and continue to deliver.
- **\$500K-\$3M:** The owner-as-salesperson ceiling hits hard. Systems must replace founder effort or growth flatlines. This is the stage where delegation becomes non-optional.
- **\$3M+:** Unit economics dominate. CAC, response infrastructure, and closing efficiency become the growth levers. Lead generation moves from existential to operational.

This progression is why companies that solve only one blocker hit a new ceiling. The \$100K company that builds lead generation but does not build systems will stall at \$500K. The \$1M company that hires sales reps but has no response infrastructure will lose to faster competitors.



**From diagnosis
to action.**

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Fix Framework

What Actually Works for Each Blocker

The benchmarks tell you where you stand. The fix framework tells you what to do. The question is execution.

• THE FIX FRAMEWORK

What Actually Works – By Blocker

FOR “NOT ENOUGH LEADS”

- 1 **Audit your channel mix.** If >60% of pipeline is referrals, you have a dependency, not a strategy. Add 1–2 active channels.
- 2 **Set realistic timelines.** New channels take 3–6 months. SEO takes 9+. Start now.
- 3 **Track CPL by channel.** Most companies cannot answer “what does a lead cost from LinkedIn vs. SEO?” Without this, you cannot allocate intelligently.
- 4 **Implement lead scoring.** Behavioral scoring commonly produces 2–3x improvement in MQL-to-SQL conversion by prioritizing intent signals.

FOR “OWNER DOES ALL THE SELLING”

- 1 **Document before you delegate.** Write the playbook before hiring anyone. Premature hires fail 50–74% of the time.
- 2 **Quantify your time.** Track hours spent on sales for 2 weeks. Multiply by your hourly rate – that is your hidden CAC.
- 3 **Separate generation from closing.** Automate or outsource lead gen, nurture, and qualification. Keep closing with the founder until process is proven.
- 4 **Set a delegation target.** Below 20% of sales calls by the time you hit \$1–2M. Companies that hit this grow 30% faster.

FOR “RESPONSE / FOLLOW-UP TOO SLOW”

- 1 **Measure your current response time.** Most companies do not know. The answer is almost always worse than expected.
- 2 **Set a sub-5-minute SLA.** This single change captures the 21x qualification multiplier. Every lead team should know this number.
- 3 **Automate the first touch.** AI chatbots, auto-scheduling, instant text/email triggers. Goal: no lead waits more than 60 seconds for acknowledgment.
- 4 **Keep humans in the loop.** Bot-only conversations are 66% less likely to convert. Hybrid (instant bot + fast human handoff within 2 min) is optimal.

FOR “CAC TOO HIGH”

- 1 **Calculate your real CAC.** Include founder time, tools, opportunity cost. The number is probably 2–3x what you think.
- 2 **Benchmark against LTV.** 3:1 LTV:CAC is healthy. Below 2:1 is broken. Above 5:1 means you should be spending more on growth.
- 3 **Formalize your referral program.** Most B2B firms lack a formal process despite referrals delivering the lowest CAC (\$25 vs. \$200+ blended) and highest close rates (40–50%+).
- 4 **Shift to inbound over time.** Higher upfront cost, dramatically lower long-term CPL as content and SEO compound.

“The common thread across every fix: systems replace effort. The top quartile of every benchmark are not working harder – they have built infrastructure that compounds, independent of any single person's time.”

• THE AI IMPLEMENTATION GAP

Buying AI Tools Is Not the Same as Having an AI-Powered Growth Operation

60–75%

of B2B SMBs now use AI tools for sales or marketing. Adoption has surged from 35–45% in 2023. Salesforce 2026 State of Sales; HubSpot; ZoomInfo GTM Intelligence Report 2025

6%

of companies extract significant bottom-line value from AI organization-wide. Ownership is not implementation. McKinsey "State of AI" (2025)

THE GAP BETWEEN OWNING AND IMPLEMENTING

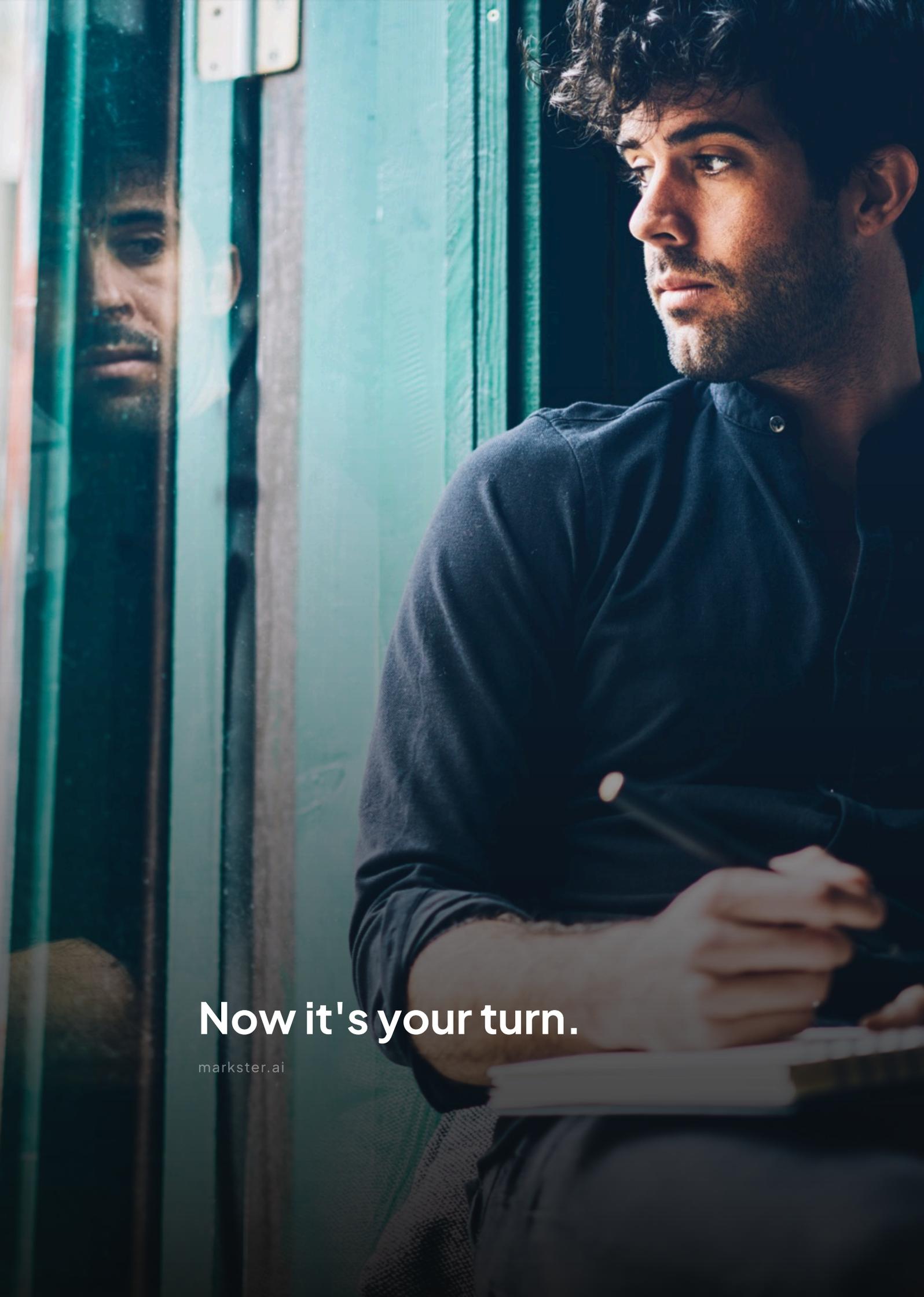
- 32% of AI tool users never actively use the tools they pay for (ZoomInfo 2025)
- 88% of companies use AI somewhere – but only one-third have scaled beyond pilots (McKinsey)
- The average B2B SMB has **8 sales tools**, many now AI-embedded, but data silos and manual workarounds persist
- Companies reporting measurable ROI from AI: **83% of active users** per G2 – these are companies that did the implementation work

WHAT THE GAP LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

Companies that report measurable ROI from AI have done four things: process redesign, data hygiene, team training, and human oversight. The rest are paying subscriptions and doing things the old way. AI tools built for lead response, qualification, and follow-up are the most directly applicable to the top three blockers in this report – yet most companies have not implemented them beyond surface-level.

"This gap – between tools owned and tools actively producing results – is the defining challenge for B2B growth in 2026. The companies that close it are winning. Everyone else is subsidizing their competitors' advantage."

The path forward is the same as every other blocker in this report: not harder work, not more spend – but intentional implementation with clear process ownership, measurable outcomes, and the discipline to iterate.



Now it's your turn.

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• SELF-ASSESSMENT

How Blocked Is Your Growth?

Check every statement that is true for your business right now. Be honest - nobody sees this but you.

- 1. I personally handle more than half of all sales conversations.
- 2. Most of our new business comes from referrals or word of mouth - not systems we built.
- 3. It regularly takes us more than 4 hours to respond to a new lead.
- 4. I do not know our customer acquisition cost within \$100.
- 5. Fewer than 30% of our proposals turn into signed deals.
- 6. We have lost a deal in the last 90 days because we were pitching the wrong person.
- 7. Our average deal takes more than 60 days from first contact to signed contract.
- 8. I could not explain in one sentence why a prospect should choose us over our top competitor.
- 9. We do not have a documented sales process that someone besides me could follow.
- 10. We do not have an automated follow-up sequence for leads who do not respond.
- 11. I cannot name our top 3 competitors and what they charge.
- 12. If I took two weeks off, pipeline activity would stop completely.

Count your checks. Turn the page.

• YOUR SCORE

What Your Number Means

0 - 3 Your growth engine is running.

You have the fundamentals in place. Your blockers are likely optimization problems, not structural ones. Focus on compounding what works - tightening conversion rates, reducing cycle time, and systematizing what your best sales month looks like.

Next steps: Audit your conversion funnel for the single weakest stage. Fix that one number. Then move to the next.

4 - 7 You have structural gaps.

You are growing, but the foundation has cracks. Revenue depends too much on you personally, and the systems that should be generating pipeline are either missing or inconsistent. This is the most common score - and the most dangerous, because things feel like they are working until they stop.

Next steps: Pick the two blockers that showed up in your checks. Map the current process (or lack of one) for each. Build a 30-day fix plan with measurable weekly targets. Do not try to fix everything at once.

8 - 12 Your growth is bottlenecked on you.

This is not a marketing problem or a sales problem. It is a capacity problem disguised as both. You are the pipeline, the closer, the fulfillment team, and the system administrator. Nothing scales until you build the first layer of process that runs without you in the room.

Next steps: Start with one system - either lead response automation or a documented sales process. Get one thing running without you before adding anything else. Speed of implementation matters more than perfection.

Want a personalized breakdown?

Take the interactive version and get specific recommendations for your business.

markster.ai/assessment

• ABOUT



Ivan Ivanka

FOUNDER & CEO, MARKSTER

Ivan has spent 15 years building and running growth operations - sales, marketing, and revenue systems - for service businesses ranging from solo consulting practices to established firms with thousands of people. He has operated across the same revenue stages this report covers, from first \$100K to scaling past \$3M.

He wrote this report because he has lived through every blocker on the list, and because the benchmarks he wished existed when he was scaling his own businesses did not exist in one place. The data is now in one place.

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About Markster

GROWTH AGENCY FOR B2B SERVICE BUSINESSES

Markster is a growth agency for B2B service businesses. One flat fee replaces the cost of building an in-house growth team. No contracts - you stay because it works.

We run our own pipeline, content, and outreach on the same system we deploy for clients. This report was produced to help founders benchmark their growth challenges. We solve these problems for a living, and we are upfront about that.

When you are ready to stop reading benchmarks and start moving the numbers, the conversation starts at markster.ai.

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- APPENDIX

Full Data Tables

A1 - BLOCKER DISTRIBUTION BY REVENUE TIER

BLOCKER	TO \$100K (N=309)	\$100K-\$500K (N=192)	\$500K-\$3M (N=123)	\$3M+ (N=62)
Not enough leads	29%	24%	20%	16%
Owner sells everything	18%	19%	22%	8%
Response too slow	13%	14%	15%	18%
CAC too high	8%	14%	15%	23%
Closing rate low	9%	10%	11%	15%
Wrong prospects	8%	7%	8%	11%
Sales cycle too long	6%	6%	6%	5%
Don't know how to sell	6%	3%	2%	2%
Don't know competitors	3%	3%	2%	3%

Percentages rounded to nearest whole number. Column totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

A2 - INDUSTRY DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

INDUSTRY	COUNT	%
B2B SaaS	192	28%
Agency / Consulting / Services	151	22%
Other B2B	96	14%
DeepTech / AI / ML	69	10%
E-commerce / DTC	48	7%
FinTech	41	6%
HealthTech / BioTech	34	5%
MarTech / AdTech	34	5%
Manufacturing / Hardware	21	3%

Survey period: November 1, 2025 - February 16, 2026. Distributed via landing page, QR code at Web Summit Lisbon (November 2025), direct outreach, and partner channels. Duplicate submissions and incomplete responses removed; counts reconcile to n=686.

CITE THIS REPORT

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This report went through automated verification, cross-referencing against primary sources, and internal team review before publication. All external benchmarks are cited with source and year.