The 2023 State of Pipeline Generation

420+ marketing leaders on pipeline generation challenges, strategies, and future plans

REVSURE

Research created in partnership with Ascend2

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Introduction

Introduction

Raise your hand if you have a fool-proof way to predict and generate pipeline.

In a perfect marketing world, we would know exactly what levers we have to pull to drive growth. But in reality, many of us are still having a hard time coming up with that perfect marketing mix required to hit our targets while keeping costs of acquisition low. And in our current climate, there is little room for error.

52% of sales and marketing teams have experienced layoffs in the past two years according to the marketing executives surveyed.

So, how are marketers maximizing engagement and increasing impact on pipeline creation and revenue actualization in a scalable, efficient way?

Well, the answer sounds simple enough: Marketers need access to actionable, quality data across the end-to-end funnel. But this is easier said than done. In fact, three-quarters (75%) of all marketers surveyed report that they spend too much time in "fire drill mode" answering questions from leadership regarding revenue projections and pipeline forecasts. Why? Limited insight into their pipeline.

When marketers have insight into channels, campaigns, and activities that contribute to pipeline generation and closed-won deals, they have the ability to identify the details that make up the largest percentage of revenue. They can pinpoint where leads are leaking in the funnel, and where there are conversion bottlenecks.

And when marketers can accurately predict how much revenue they are set to generate quarter-over-quarter, then prioritizing budget and resources, and shifting to a welcomed quality over quantity approach *(more pipeline does not mean more customers)* inevitably makes hitting targets much more achievable.

Fewer fire drills. Greater efficiency.

In The 2023 State of Pipeline Generation Report, **424 marketing professionals** weigh in on the state of their pipeline, their approach to pipeline generation, and how they plan to hit their revenue targets in the year ahead.

Key Takeaways

95% of marketers surveyed feel that **having the ability to predict pipeline outcomes is important to the overall success** of marketing programs.

50% of **those who can fully predict pipeline contributions saw a significant increase in revenue** last year, compared to just 16% of those who cannot fully predict pipeline contributions.

There is a general **lack of confidence in marketers' ability to convert** throughout the entirety of the marketing funnel.

Three-quarters (75%) of all marketers surveyed report that they spend **too much time in "fire drill mode"** answering questions from leadership regarding revenue projections and pipeline forecasts.

Over two-thirds (68%) of marketers **don't know where there is funnel leakage and conversion bottlenecks**.

Only 29% of marketers surveyed say they can **fully predict pipeline contributions and outcomes**. In light of this, many said they plan to prioritize how to gain better insight into the pipeline in the year ahead.

What are marketers up against?

Generating pipeline comes with substantial challenges for marketers, the most significant barriers to success being lack of adequate data, scalability issues, and allocating budget. Each of these challenges feeds into the other, creating a cycle of barriers to success that marketers struggle to overcome without the right data.

What are the most significant challenges of successfully generating pipeline?

Lack of adequate data to make effective decisions
38%

Inability to scale demand program efficiently to meet growth targets
33%

Budget allocation challenges
33%

Misunderstanding around Ideal Customer Profiles and buyer-personas
29%

Inability to convert buyers across channels and campaigns
28%

Misalignment of sales and marketing teams
27%

Poor lead quality
25%

Lack of an effective go-to-market strategy
25%

Outlook on Business Success

44% of marketers surveyed feel extremely positive about the success of their organization in the year ahead. Throughout this report, you'll see references to this group and what can contribute to a better outlook on success in the coming year.
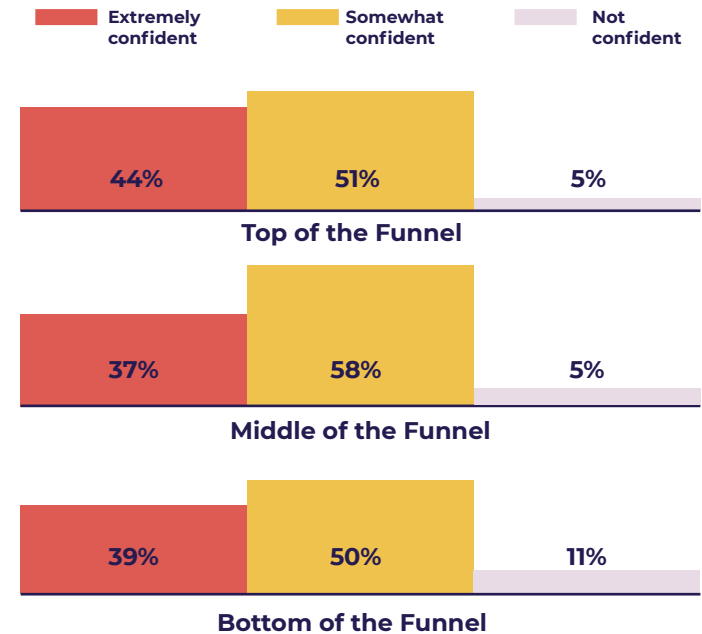
Executive Insight

Executives are significantly more positive about their outlook on their organization's success than others. **65% of executives feel extremely positive compared to 35% of non-executives.**

Marketers lack confidence in their ability to convert throughout the funnel.

Our research indicates that most marketers are not highly confident in their ability to convert prospects throughout the entirety of their funnel. This lack of confidence is most apparent in the middle and bottom of the funnel with just **37% of marketers reporting being extremely confident through the middle of the funnel and one in ten marketers feeling not at all confident in their bottom-of-the-funnel conversions.**

Rank the confidence you have in your ability to convert prospects within each part of your funnel:

Legend:
- **Extremely confident** (red)
- **Somewhat confident** (yellow)
- **Not confident** (light purple)

Top of the Funnel
- Extremely confident: 44%
- Somewhat confident: 51%
- Not confident: 5%

Middle of the Funnel
- Extremely confident: 37%
- Somewhat confident: 58%
- Not confident: 5%

Bottom of the Funnel
- Extremely confident: 39%
- Somewhat confident: 50%
- Not confident: 11%

The ability to convert prospects (and predict that conversion) at the middle and bottom of the funnel is extremely important. Here's why:

Timing. The middle and bottom funnel prospects are considering a purchase but simply haven't made a purchasing decision. If you see prospects stop engaging they might not be ready to buy but if engagement is accelerating they likely need a little nudge over the goal line.

Investment. The bottom of your funnel is the key to your bottom line. A great deal of budget and resources is often dedicated to filling the top of the funnel, but if you don't spend equal (if not more time) optimizing the middle and bottom of the funnel then you will not hit pipeline and revenue targets.

Velocity of the Sale. As you move down the pipeline, the time to close decreases, and that improves your ability to have an immediate impact on your monthly and quarterly sales goals.

Why a lack of confidence?

This general lack of confidence could be due to **the fact that only 29% of marketers surveyed say they can fully predict pipeline contributions and outcomes**. In fact, marketers who have full capabilities to predict pipeline contribution are significantly more confident in their end-to-end marketing funnel.

Ability to Predict Pipeline Outcomes

29% of marketers surveyed report being able to fully predict pipeline contributions and outcomes. This group gives us an opportunity to identify what access to data and the ability to forecast what contributes to success can help enable marketing teams to accomplish. Look for this "Pipeline Predictors" graphic throughout the report to see this perspective.

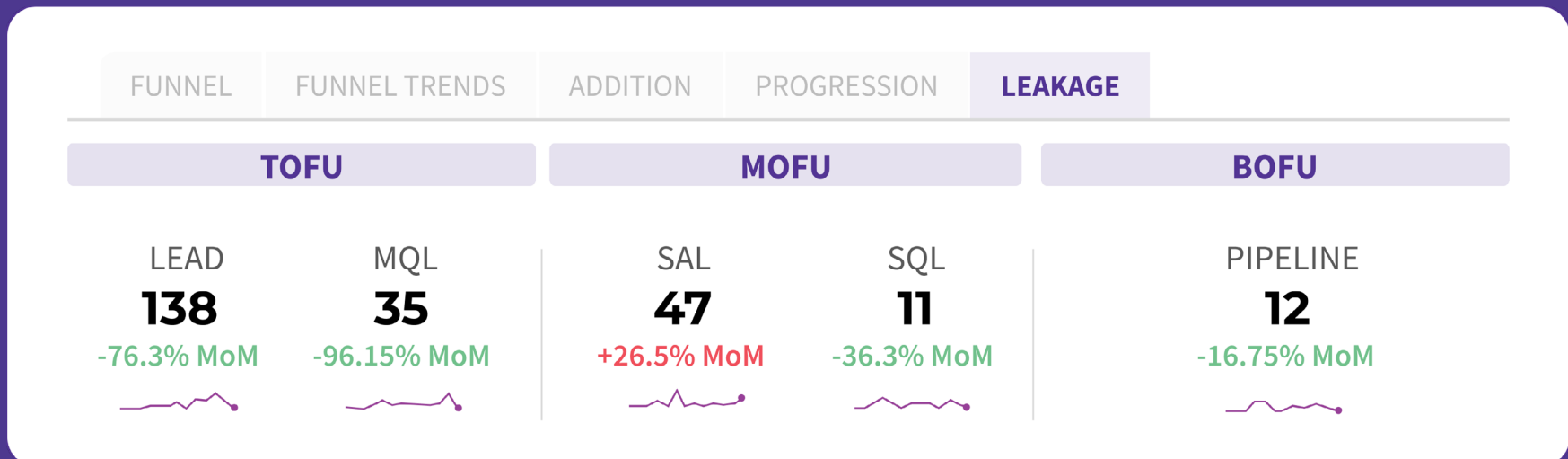# A major red flag: 68% of marketers don't know where there is funnel leakage and conversion bottlenecks.

The Data Marketers Need to Spot Funnel Leakage

When marketers have insight into why MQLs are not converting to opportunities or why accounts are stuck in the sales process, they can make more effective decisions on the where and why of funnel leakage and move forward with a solution to fix it.

Pipeline Predictors

Those who have the ability to predict pipeline outcomes have a significantly greater ability to identify funnel leakage and conversion bottlenecks. **68% of those who have the ability to fully predict pipeline outcomes say they can fully identify where funnel leakage/bottlenecks occur** compared to just 18% of all others.

FUNNEL	FUNNEL TRENDS	ADDITION	PROGRESSION	**LEAKAGE**

TOFU		MOFU		BOFU
LEAD	MQL	SAL	SQL	PIPELINE
138	**35**	**47**	**11**	**12**
-76.3% MoM	-96.15% MoM	+26.5% MoM	-36.3% MoM	-16.75% MoM

Marketers are making pipeline insight a priority.

The top three priorities for improving conversion rates in the year ahead are improving lead quality and nurturing, improving pipeline analysis, and understanding which leads and accounts convert. All three of the top priorities share a focus on improving conversion through a focus on uncovering exactly what is generating pipeline and revenue (and how to do more of it). The right data takes the guesswork out of understanding what is leaking vs what is converting at every stage of the marketing funnel.

What are the top priorities to improve your lead-to-opportunity conversion rates in the year ahead?

Improving lead quality and nurturing
43%

Improving pipeline analysis
39%

Understanding which leads/accounts are converting into pipeline
34%

Improving marketing and sales handoff or routing processes
33%

Aligning marketing and sales
28%

Reworking content strategy
23%

Enabling the buyer to self-serve
19%

Changing the tech stack
18%

Moving to an account-based structure
17%

Analyzing Pipeline Quality

Currently, over half of marketers report that they analyze the quality of their marketing pipeline with forecast to actual comparisons (55%) and percentage of pipeline that closes (51%).

In which of the following ways are you currently analyzing the quality of your marketing pipeline?

Forecast to actual comparisons

55%

Percentage of pipeline that closes

51%

Sales velocity

48%

Opportunities within your ideal customer profile

45%

Average deal size

45%

Metrics to measure success.

Nearly half (48%) of marketers surveyed report that they are measuring campaign success based on Return On Investment (ROI) or Customer Acquisition Cost. Other commonly reported metrics used include Revenue Contribution (47%) and Win/Loss Rate (37%) according to marketers.

It is encouraging news that **ROI and revenue contribution top the list of metrics that marketers are using to measure success**. It signals a shift in focus that organizations are making away from vanity metrics to supporting revenue generation.

What are the primary metrics you analyze to measure campaign success?

Return On Investment or Customer Acquisition Cost
48%

Revenue Contribution
47%

Win/Loss Rate
37%

Total Pipeline Value by Stage
34%

Leads
33%

SQLs
20%

MQLs
19%

MQL to SQL %
17%

Using attribution.

Multi-touch and custom attribution models are the most commonly reported by marketers. Multi-touch attribution models allow marketers to pinpoint all of the channels that contribute to a conversion and which of those channels have the most impact on a conversion.

Which of the following attribution models do you currently use?

Multi-touch

44%

Custom model

42%

First touch

36%

Last touch

28%

Unsure

10%

No attribution model

10%

57% of those who could identify an attribution model, chose more than one model that they use. Having the ability to easily switch between first, last, and multi-touch marketing attribution models helps marketers analyze how marketing tactics and touchpoints contribute to sales.

Which channels are making an impact?

Email marketing is making the most impact for marketers according to 42% of those surveyed, but social media, content marketing, and organic search are close behind with 38%, 35%, and 34% of marketers reporting these at channels that have the most impact on pipeline generation, respectively.

Many marketers are experiencing shrinking budgets and are being forced to work with fewer resources. With this comes a drop in marketing spend, so it is no surprise that more organic channels are being favored by marketers as avenues making the most impact on pipeline generation.

What channels have the greatest impact on pipeline generation?

Email marketing
42%

Social media
38%

Content marketing
35%

Organic search
34%

Paid media
34%

Events and webinars
34%

Community and partnerships
28%

Chatbot
4%

Other
4%

Unsure
2%

Improving scalability and efficiency.

95% of marketers surveyed feel that having the ability to predict pipeline outcomes is important to the overall success of marketing programs.

Successfully predicting or forecasting pipeline gives marketers the ability to use resources more efficiently, improves confidence to hit revenue contribution goals, meet targets, and pivot their strategies. When leadership and boards have confidence in the numbers and the GTM strategy aligned to it, marketers are much less likely to be in 'fire drill' mode and are able to be much more strategic.

Pipeline Predictors

Those who can fully predict pipeline outcomes are significantly more likely to have a positive outlook on the success of their business compared to those who cannot. **(76% of those who can fully predict say have an extremely positive outlook vs 31% of all others)**

What are the greatest benefits of successfully predicting or forecasting pipeline?

More efficient use of resources
43%

Improved confidence to hit revenue contribution goals
43%

Improved ability to meet targets quarter-over-quarter
40%

Improved ability to quickly adjust to market/economic events
40%

More efficient marketing and sales processes/workflows
38%

Improved trust of the Executive team
24%

Improved morale/work environment
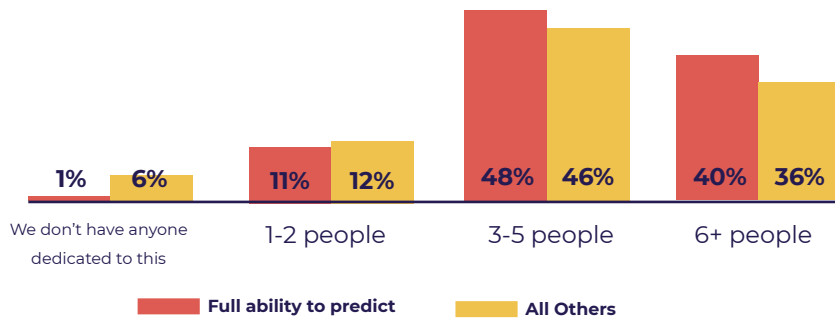22%

Improved employee retention
22%

Resource allocation.

Gaining valuable insight into pipeline outcomes doesn't have to mean adding additional resources. Those who can fully predict pipeline outcomes and those who cannot have similar resources dedicated to supporting these insights as a part of their job.

How many people in your organization support pipeline predictions/forecasting as a part of their job?

	We don't have anyone dedicated to this	1-2 people	3-5 people	6+ people
Full ability to predict	1%	11%	48%	40%
All Others	6%	12%	46%	36%

🟥 **Full ability to predict**   🟨 **All Others**

Pipeline Predictors

50% of those who can fully predict pipeline contributions saw a significant increase in revenue last year, compared to just 16% of those who cannot fully predict pipeline contributions.

How are marketers predicting pipeline?

Most organizations that can predict pipeline contributions are doing so manually to some extent. 60% of those surveyed report forecasting pipeline using either entirely manual or mostly manual processes.

Which best describes how you predict or forecast pipeline?

Entirely automated processes

8%

Mostly automation with some manual processes

32%

Mostly manual processes with some automation

45%

Entirely manual processes

15%

**78% of those who can predict pipeline to any extent describe this process as somewhat or extremely easy.**

As confidence in pipeline predictions increases, so does revenue.

32% of those who can predict pipeline outcomes to any extent feel extremely confident in these predictions. This highly confident group also has significantly more confidence in their **ability to convert prospects in every stage of the funnel,** and they are over **3x more likely than those with less confidence to know where funnel leakage and conversion bottlenecks are.** (70% vs 20% are able to fully identify where funnel leakage and conversion bottlenecks are).

Which best describes your level of confidence in the accuracy of your pipeline predictions?

Somewhat Confident **62%**

Extremely Confident **32%**

Somewhat Unconfident **6%**
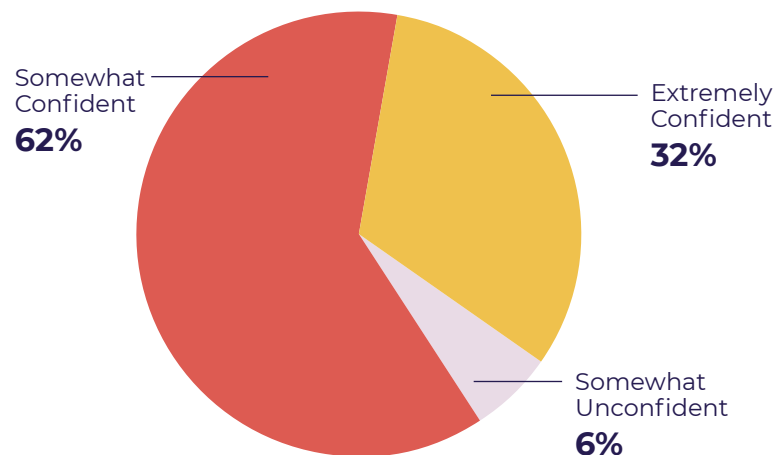
So what could potentially contribute to this confidence in pipeline predictions?

Automation. Those with the most confidence in their pipeline predictions are more likely to have entirely automated processes to predict. (14% vs 6% of all others)

Real-Time Visibility. Nine out of ten (90%) marketers who have the most confidence in their pipeline predictions have real-time visibility into the data to determine when it is time to pivot marketing strategies and tactics.

Transparency with Leadership. Those with the most confidence in their pipeline predictions are significantly more likely to have leadership teams with full visibility into their pipeline. (87% vs 44% of those with less confidence)

Know when to pivot.

55% of marketers say they have real-time visibility into when to pivot marketing strategies and tactics, another 29% say they have some visibility but have to manually monitor. This kind of insight allows marketers to proactively adjust their strategies to specific conditions and according to our research, it pays off.

Those with the insight to know when to pivot their marketing strategies are not only seeing more significant increases in revenue, but they are also more likely to feel positive about the overall success of their business than those who lack this real-time data.

Do you have the visibility to know when it is time to pivot marketing strategies and tactics?

Yes (I have real-time visibility)

55%

No (I don't know until it is too late)

16%

To some extent (I have to manually monitor)

29%

Positive Business Outlook

60% of those who have who report having real-time visibility into data that allows them to pivot their marketing strategies and tactics report feeling **extremely positive about the success** of their organization in the year ahead, compared to just 24% of those who do not have real-time visibility.

Revenue Growth

Over one-third (34%) of those who report having real-time visibility into data that allows them to pivot their marketing strategies and tactics saw a **significant increase in revenue** last year, compared to just 15% of those who do not have this insight.

Know the big picture.

Full-funnel visibility is critical for marketing teams as they aim to hit targets. This full-funnel view of data gives leadership the ability to make better strategic decisions and allows marketing and sales teams to align on what is generating pipeline and ultimately, revenue.

Over half (54%) of marketers surveyed report that their leadership team has full visibility into their pipeline. These organizations that have leadership teams in the know are more likely to have seen a significant increase in revenue last year (35% vs 15% of all others) and are more confident in their ability to convert throughout the funnel.

Executive Insight

81% of the executives from the group who say leadership has full visibility into their pipeline have an extremely positive outlook on the success of their business in the coming year.

Does your leadership team have visibility into your pipeline?

Fully
54%

Somewhat
43%

Not at all
1%

Unsure
2%
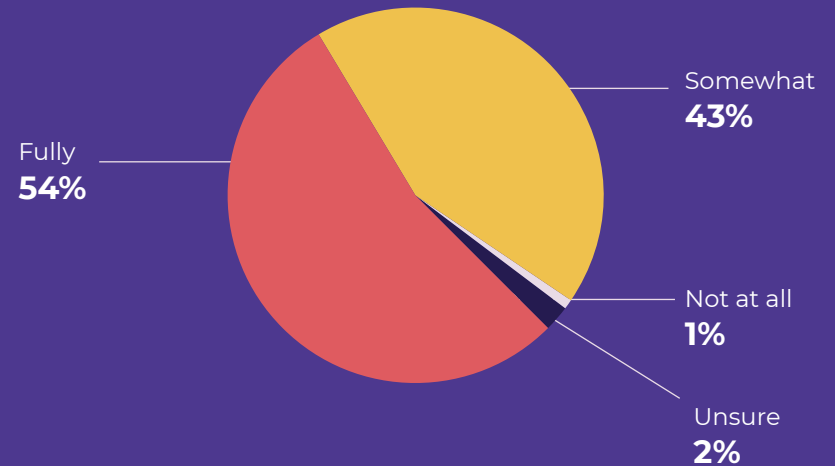
Why is full-funnel visibility so important? When sales teams can assess the health and quality of their pipeline, issues can be identified and decisions can be made proactively to keep confidence up each quarter.

An added benefit is marketing and sales alignment. When both teams have visibility into the end-to-end funnel, they can get aligned on the go-to-market strategy, how to fix problems, and optimize conversions. Visibility into your pipeline helps remove subjectivity that can separate teams and instead, teams can develop shared goals to overcome specific challenges.

Know where and how to spend.

One-third (33%) of marketers report budget allocation as a top challenge as they try to achieve pipeline generation success. When marketers don't have access to the right data, it is a guessing game of where to allocate marketing dollars.

Executive Insight

Nearly half (46%) of executives surveyed say they are "always fighting fires" when it comes to answering questions on revenue projections and pipelines.

Demand Generation Effectiveness

Filters	Period	View Metrics by		
None	Previous 365 days	Any Touch Campaign		

			Any Touch Campaign		
			First Touch Campaign		
			Last Touch Campaign		

Channel Name	Campaign Name	Budget		Pipeline ROI	Booking ROI
Website	Pathfactory Analytics	$2.4K		9436%	4089%
Conference	Annual SKO 2023	$2K	$1.75K	$42.7	3711%	0%
Email	Prospect Healthcare	$2.1K	$2.4K	$65.8	3676%	0%
Webinar	Risk Management	$2.4K	$1.69K	$36.1	6466%	967%
Partners	Lighthouse Promotion	$2.1K	$1.7K	$38.8	$3514%	0%

Follow-up Webinar

Campaign Name	Generated Lead Volume	Generated Pipeline Volume	Discovery Volume	Discovery Value
Follow-up Webinar	678	5	4	$1.15M

Metrics **Details**

Leads Pipeline Booking

REGION: EMEA, Americas, Other, APAC
CHANNEL: Email, Conferences, Webinar, Social
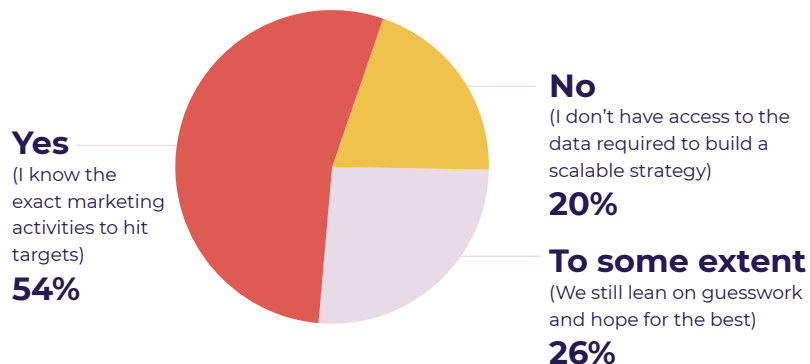FUNCTION: Engin..., IT, Produc..., Marke...

43% of those surveyed say that one of the greatest benefits of successfully predicting or forecasting pipeline is a more efficient use of resources.

Know how to sustain growth.

One-third (33%) of marketers report that a top challenge of successfully generating pipeline is their inability to scale demand programs efficiently to meet growth targets. This is no surprise as one in five (20%) of those surveyed report not having access to the data required to build a scalable strategy to predictably hit pipeline and revenue targets. Another 26% say they rely mostly on guesswork and hope for the best.

## Have you determined a scalable strategy to predictably hit pipeline and revenue targets?

Yes
(I know the exact marketing activities to hit targets)
54%

No
(I don't have access to the data required to build a scalable strategy)
20%

To some extent
(We still lean on guesswork and hope for the best)
26%

Marketers who do have a scalable strategy to predictably hit pipeline and revenue targets have a few things in common:

- They have a more positive outlook on the success of their business in the coming year. 60% of those who know the exact marketing activities to execute in order to hit targets feel extremely positive going into this year compared to 25% of those who do know have this insight.

- They have seen more increase in revenue in the last year. 39% of those who know the exact marketing activities to execute in order to hit targets saw a significant increase in revenue last year compared to just 10% of all others.

- They are more likely to have the ability to generate and predict their contribution to pipeline. Nearly half (49%) of those who know the exact marketing activities to execute in order to hit targets have the ability to fully predict pipeline contributions compared to just 4% of all others.

Which data do you need to be successful?
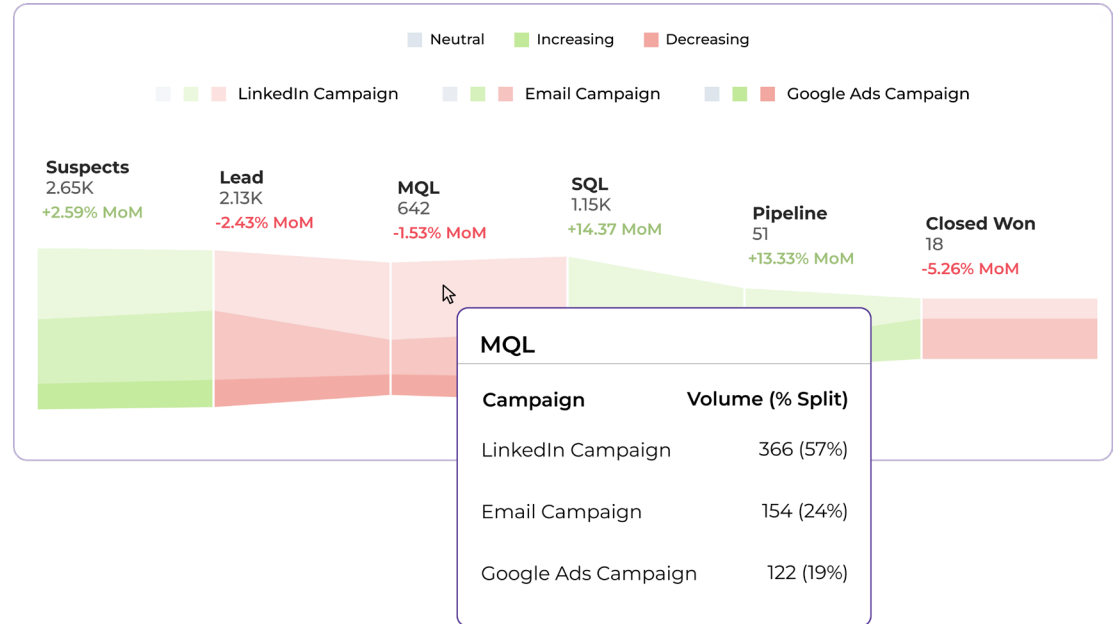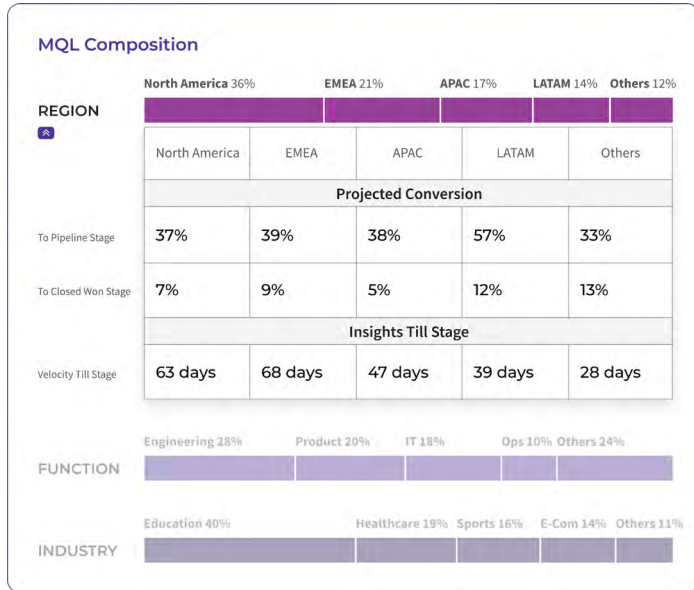
Measuring the Health of Your Pipeline:

When you think of the health of your pipeline, here are two metrics you should focus on:

- **MQL to SQL** % helps to determine the quality of your MQLs. This metric is a leading indicator of your pipeline that will be created perhaps months down the line. When your MQL conversions drop, you can guess your pipeline volume will take a hit shortly.

- **Win/Loss rate** indicates the ratio of opportunities you close versus create. It is helpful to dissect the win rates by segments: regions, reps, titles, channels, campaigns, etc.

Conclusion

Gaining visibility into your pipeline and funnel can be a monumental win when it comes to hitting revenue targets. Insight into which leads and opportunities are converting into revenue allows you to focus on driving and closing winnable deals.

The research in this study shows that **when you have a better understanding of the data in your pipeline and funnel you will reduce your fire drills, and that is a welcome outcome for all marketing professionals.** In a year that may bring challenges of tighter budgets and higher expectations, unlocking the insights of your pipeline to make better decisions is a necessity.

Use this research to take the next steps to greater efficiency on pipeline generation and creating a plan to hit your revenue goals in the year ahead.

Participants and Methodology

N = 424 B2B Marketing Professionals

Primary Role		Number of Employees		Approximate Annual Revenue	
CEO / Partner / Executive	32%	250 - 500 employees	14%	Less than $25M	12%
VP / SVP	14%	500 - 1,000 employees	27%	$25M - $100M	18%
Director	24%	1,001 - 5,000 employees	33%	$100M - $250M	15%
Manager	30%	5,001 - 10,000 employees	10%	$250M - $500M	17%
		10,000+ employees	16%	$500M - $1B	17%
				More than $1B	21%

Methodology

With a custom online questionnaire, we surveyed 424 marketing professionals who represent North American companies operating in the Business-to-Business (B2B) space, with more than 250 employees. These survey participants represent a variety of roles and industries. The survey was fielded during the month of January 2023.

About the Research Partners

REVSURE

RevSure fills a gap left wide open by years of RevOps development: pipeline generation. It's the missing piece between you and a unified sales and marketing funnel.

We call it Sales Pipeline Readiness. And it could revolutionize how you plan, manage, and analyze marketing activity.

Through Sales Pipeline Readiness, RevSure shines a light on those murky mid-pipe stages, offering you confident pipeline generation, improved conversion rates, and optimized campaign performance. And it's all powered by advanced AI predictions that help you capitalize on what converts and adjust what doesn't.

We know what's been holding marketing teams back. And we're confident that our platform could help you and your business scale the trickiest obstacles you face in 2023.

From planning to analysis, Sales Pipeline Readiness creates dependability and predictability when you need it most.

Learn more at RevSure.AI

Ascend2
RESEARCH-BASED MARKETING

Companies partner with Ascend2 to create original research from survey conceptualization through report and content creation to media outreach. Ascend2 helps companies fuel marketing content, generate leads, and engage prospects to drive demand through the middle of the funnel.

We find the right audience, ask the right questions, and gather insightful data to create useful and affordable research that will help you generate demand and increase engagement.

Join the industry powerhouses that use Ascend2 to create compelling research content that speaks to their audience.

Learn more at Ascend2.com.