

# 2018 B2B Lead Gen Outlook

Chief Marketer's annual B2B survey shows email, content and live events are still key prospecting activities

**E**ngaging prospects and getting them to convert are the biggest lead gen challenges for B2B marketers, according to Chief Marketer's 2018 B2B Lead Gen Trend Outlook.

Fifty-eight percent of respondents cited engagement as a big challenge, compared to 35 percent in our 2017 survey. Conversion concerns are also on the rise—51 percent noted it was significant, compared to 36 percent last year.

The buying cycles of respondents varied, with 16 percent saying less than a month to convert, 34 percent one to three months, 24 percent three to six months, 19 percent six months to a year, and seven percent more than one year.

## ROAD TO CONVERSION

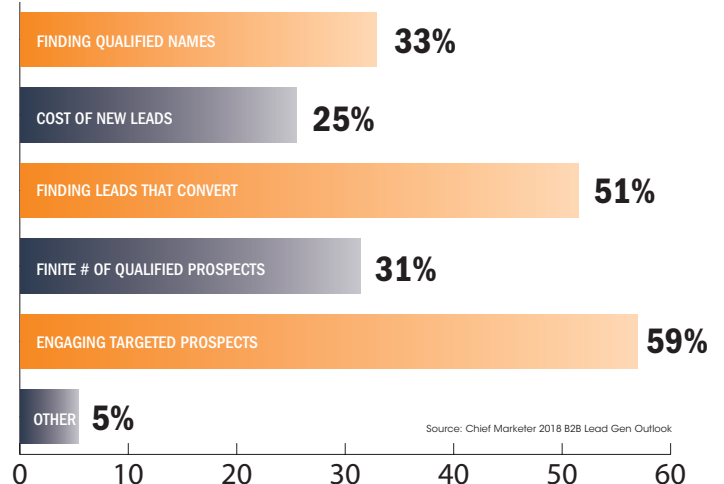
Exactly what B2B marketers are measuring to determine what got prospects to the finish line in that buying cycle has shifted a bit: Cost of conversion, at 52 percent, overtook amount of time to convert (50 percent) as the top metric to measure this year. First click came next at 27 percent, followed by channel (25 percent) and last click (22 percent).

Survey respondents cited a number of hurdles to conversion, including a lack of follow-up by sales, creating the right content to educate prospects about a complicated product or service and keeping momentum up during a lengthy sales cycle. "Some leads that need more nurturing get lost in the sales funnel as sales focuses on leads that will convert faster," one respondent noted.

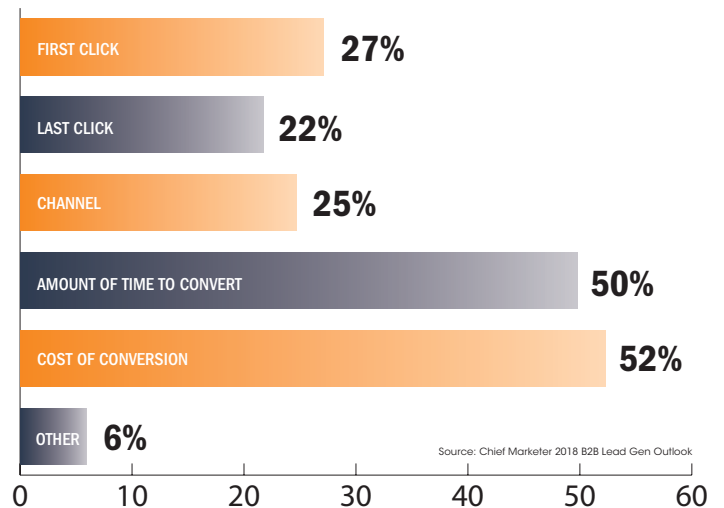
"We have to answer back to the c-suite about how we're spending our marketing dollars, but over time it becomes harder to track a lead through the lifecycle," says Jeff Reekers, vice president of marketing at Aircall.

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## What are your biggest challenges in generating new leads?



## What metrics matter most to you in lead attribution?



### WHERE IS CONTENT COMING FROM?

Marketing teams themselves are creating the vast majority of marketing content for lead nurturing.

Eighty-one percent of respondents said their marketing teams were creating content, and 25 percent said they used freelance writers or third-party providers. Twenty-one percent of respondents were lucky enough to have a dedicated editorial team creating content, and 20 percent said sales was involved in content creation.

If our results are any indication, B2B marketers like to read. Articles and blog posts were cited by the biggest number of respondents (49 percent) as being most effective for moving prospects through the funnel. Whitepapers were the next most popular type of content (37 percent).

As for visual content, videos were cited by 36 percent of respondents as being highly effective, and images by 18 percent.

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“Nonetheless, you have to have metrics to make the case for specific channels.”

Last touch is looked at critically, he says, noting that his group naturally likes to spend the least amount of money that it can for the most frequent number of touches.

“Think about ways to hack the system—you have to use a combination of detailed tracking with common sense,” Reekers says. “We might have Facebook ads without a call to action—those leads don’t usually convert very well, so this is a way to get the impressions without the [costly] clicks.”

Anuj Agrawal, CMO at Earth Networks, notes that his company measures the cost of conversion at every point in the cycle. But, he laments, “getting access to all of this data in once place is tricky.”

“We want to make sure that when sales people take the time to engage someone, that prospect is highly qualified,” says Agrawal, noting that a propensity to sample “self-serve” content like online demos or whitepapers can help qualify a lead.

Determining attribution of those converted leads is a major hurdle for B2B marketers.

“When marketing turns a lead over to sales, we seem to lose tracking over that lead and sometimes don’t even know when or even if a lead becomes a sale,” said one respondent.

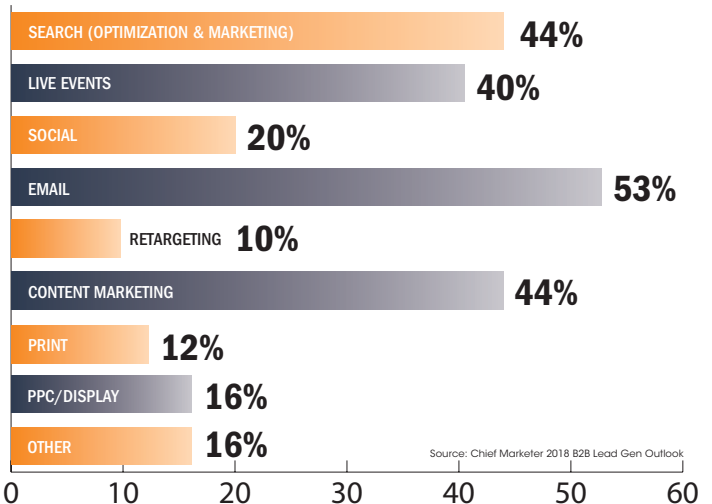
“Attribution and determining cost per conversion is always a challenge,” says Joann Kropp, vice president at Informa Engage Smartreach (formerly Penton Smartreach). “Having the ability to see intent triggers is a differentiator, so you can measure intent and act on it.”

### WHAT'S WORKING

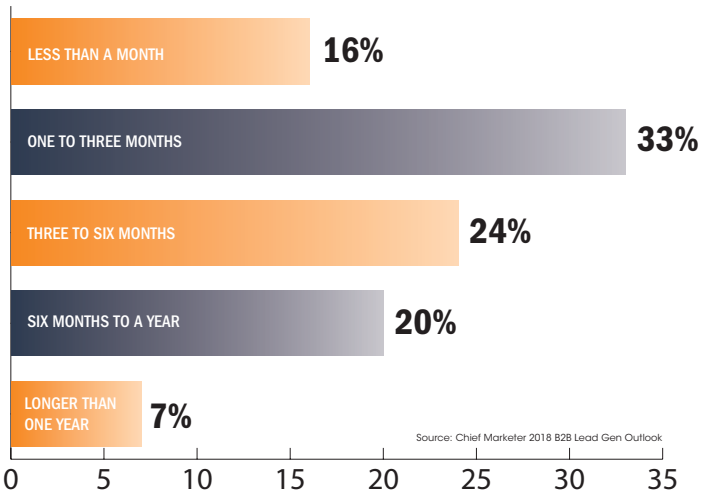
Email was once again cited by respondents as both the channel that produces the largest source of leads (53 percent ranked it top in this survey, versus 62 percent in our 2017 report) and the highest ROI leads (58 percent, versus 61 percent last year).

In both categories, not surprisingly, search was the

### Which channels produce your largest sources of leads? (Select top three.)



### How long does it typically take to close a sale?



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second most important lead source, followed by content and live events, which scored slightly higher on ROI.

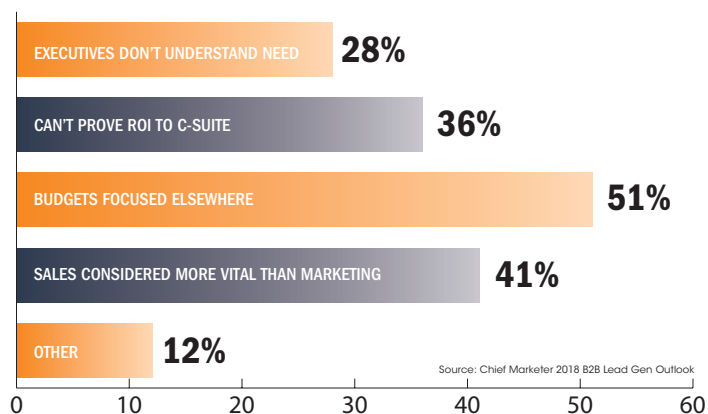
Making prospects feel like they are part of a community with peers is very helpful for nurturing leads, says Reekers, as are in-person events like dinners and roadshows. "Face-to-face meetings are our highest ROI activities."

Email can be tremendously helpful in engaging prospects during long B2B sales cycles. The trick, says Adryanna Sutherland, COO at gyro, is to keep the tone of those communications educational and not overly self-promotional.

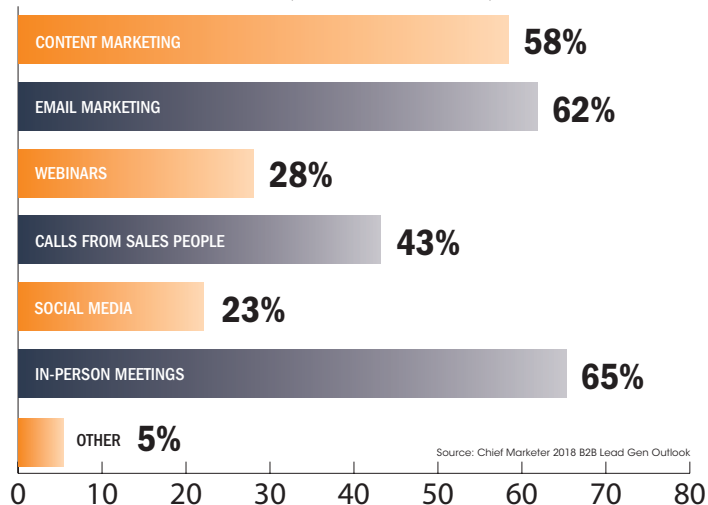
"We always say that content that sells doesn't sell, and content that doesn't sell, sells," she notes. "We try to provide content that helps people as they get close to the decision."

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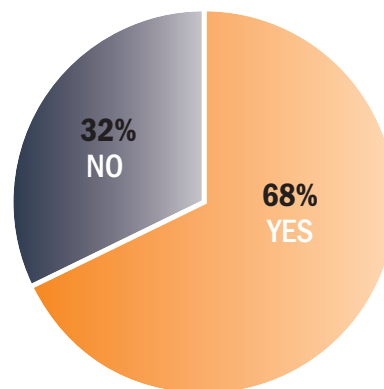
### What are the biggest hurdles to getting c-suite executive approval for marketing expenditures? (Select all that apply)



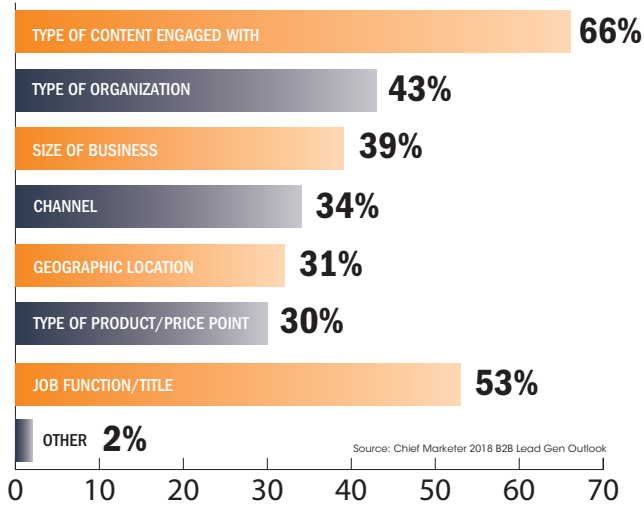
### What techniques are most valuable for lead nurturing? (Select top 3)



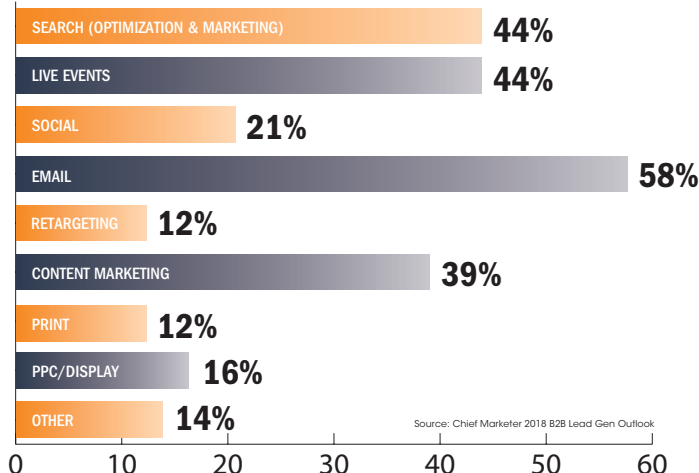
### Are you testing personalization of content or offers?



### What are you testing? (Select all that apply)



### Which three channels produce your highest ROI leads? (Select top three.)



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## ACCOUNT BASED MARKETING

Despite all the buzz surrounding account based marketing (ABM), the percentage of respondents using the tactic dipped this year to 38 percent, down from 43 percent in 2017's report.

Reaching the right decision makers at target accounts was cited as the biggest challenge to executing ABM (58 percent), followed by understanding the buying journey of individuals within target accounts (51 percent) and creating the right content to target key accounts (50 percent).

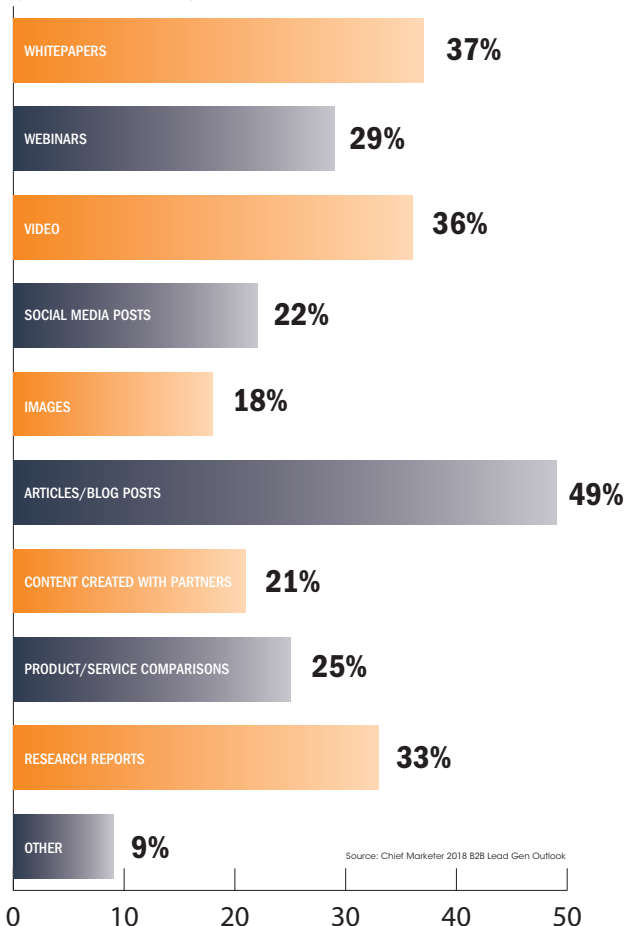
Some respondents felt that there was simply too much hype surrounding ABM. "It's not rocket science," noted one respondent. "We've been doing it without actually defining it as ABM."

Part of the surge in interest in ABM comes from the fact that the days of delivering lukewarm leads that just sit in the sales funnel are over, says Kropp.

"I come from the direct marketing space and we've always done ABM," she says. "Now, we're combining best practices with new technologies—if you get it

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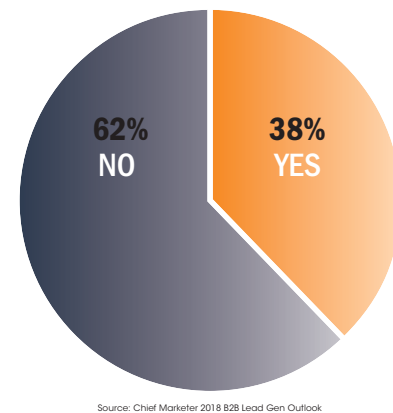
### What type of content is most effective for moving prospects through the funnel? (Select top 3)



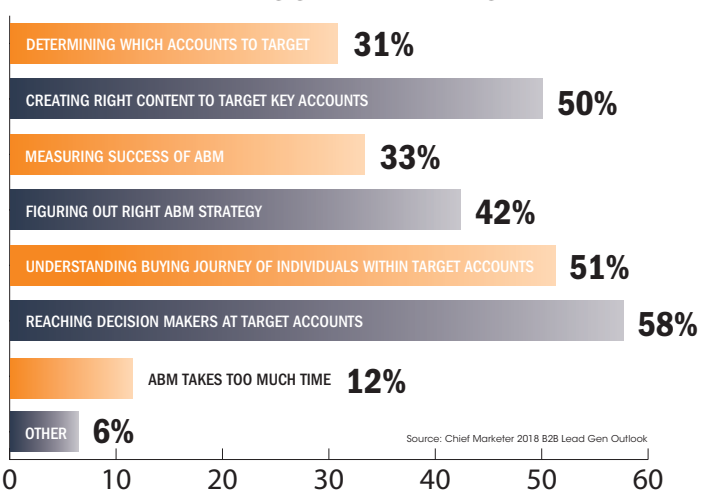
### IT'S NOT ROCKET SCIENCE

Is there too much hype around account based marketing? If you ask seasoned marketers whether they're ready to jump on the ABM bandwagon, chances are good that they'll tell you they've been doing dedicated marketing to key accounts for years. The label, they say, is the only new thing about ABM. What's deterring other marketers from implementing ABM? The cost and a concern about scaling it across the entire organization was a concern. "It's also difficult to get management approval on A/B testing before deployment en masse," wrote one survey respondent.

### Does your organization do account based marketing?



### What are your biggest challenges in ABM?



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right, the ROI can increase by large numbers.”

Training and scaling is one of the most challenging parts of ABM, says Reekers. “Sometimes you’ll see a salesperson send out the same blanket email to all of their contacts in a company, regardless of their level or position. That is not how you want to engage and build relationships with accounts.”

ABM requires discipline to understand different individuals, and that requires alignment between marketing and sales, adds Sutherland.

That alignment seems to be on the rise: 60 percent of respondents said their sales and marketing

organizations communicate effectively, up from 57 percent last year.

The biggest challenge to sales and marketing integration was sales not following up on leads generated by marketing, cited by 55 percent of respondents. Reekers notes that it helps to try and see things from the other side, to understand each team’s challenges.

“Sales people are certainly incentivized to close sales and we need to be part of their organization,” he says. “It’s the responsibility of marketing to work with sales.”

## METHODOLOGY

In July 2017, Chief Marketer conducted a survey of B2B marketers across the U.S. The survey received responses from 205 organizations.

Respondents were from a variety of verticals, including professional services (19 percent), agencies (13 percent) IT (11 percent), manufacturing/industrial (11 percent) and financial services (seven percent). Other verticals represented included education, mobile, aviation, energy and trucking.

Seventy-six percent of respondents have under 500 employees, 11 percent had 501 to 2,500 employees, and the remainder had over 2,501 employees.

Respondents were split almost evenly by job level: 22 percent identified as c-suite/president, 17 percent were vice presidents, 25 percent were managers and 25 percent were directors. Eleven percent identified as other. Fifty-eight percent cited marketing as their job responsibility, while 15 percent were executive management and eight percent were sales. The remainder work in areas like fulfillment, mobile, social media, operations, ecommerce or IT.

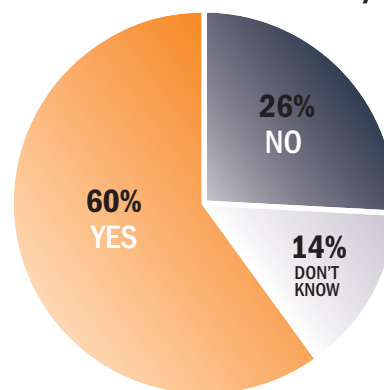


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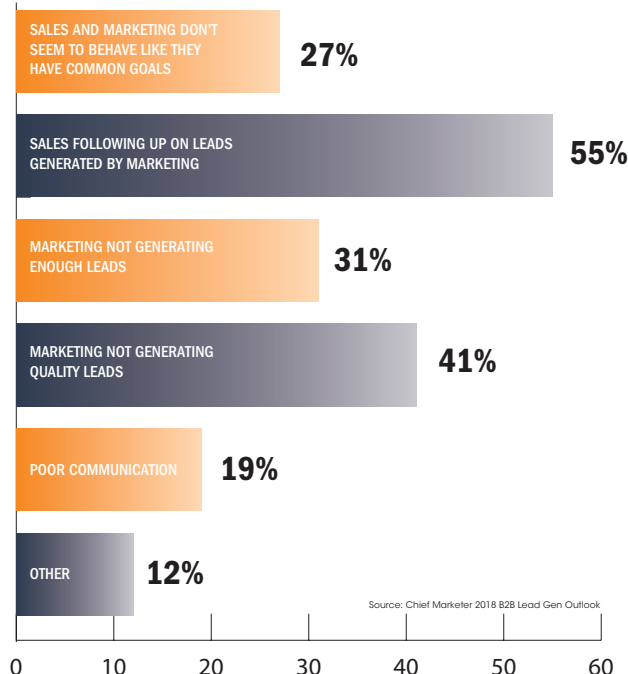


### Does your sales and marketing organizations communicate effectively?



Source: Chief Marketer 2018 B2B Lead Gen Outlook

### What are your biggest sales and marketing integration challenges? (Select all that apply)



Source: Chief Marketer 2018 B2B Lead Gen Outlook