

2026 Marketing Planning Reset: Why the Old Playbook Won't Win

Five strategic forces reshaping marketing – and how today's leaders are rebuilding for relevance, precision, and sustainable growth



2026 isn't just another planning cycle. It's a pressure test.

Business volatility and the C-Suite's persistent scrutiny of marketing's value make this a uniquely challenging year for CMOs and their teams.

This year's planning isn't about optimizing last year's blueprint. It's about rethinking what "good" looks like in a market that has fundamentally shifted.

The foundation of marketing has shifted. Most plans remain rooted in a reality that no longer exists.

91%

AI has reshaped enterprise decision-making as a new member of the buying group; 91% of enterprise buyers use generative AI tools to guide purchasing decisions

4%

Marketing budgets rose just 4% year over year – barely keeping pace with inflation

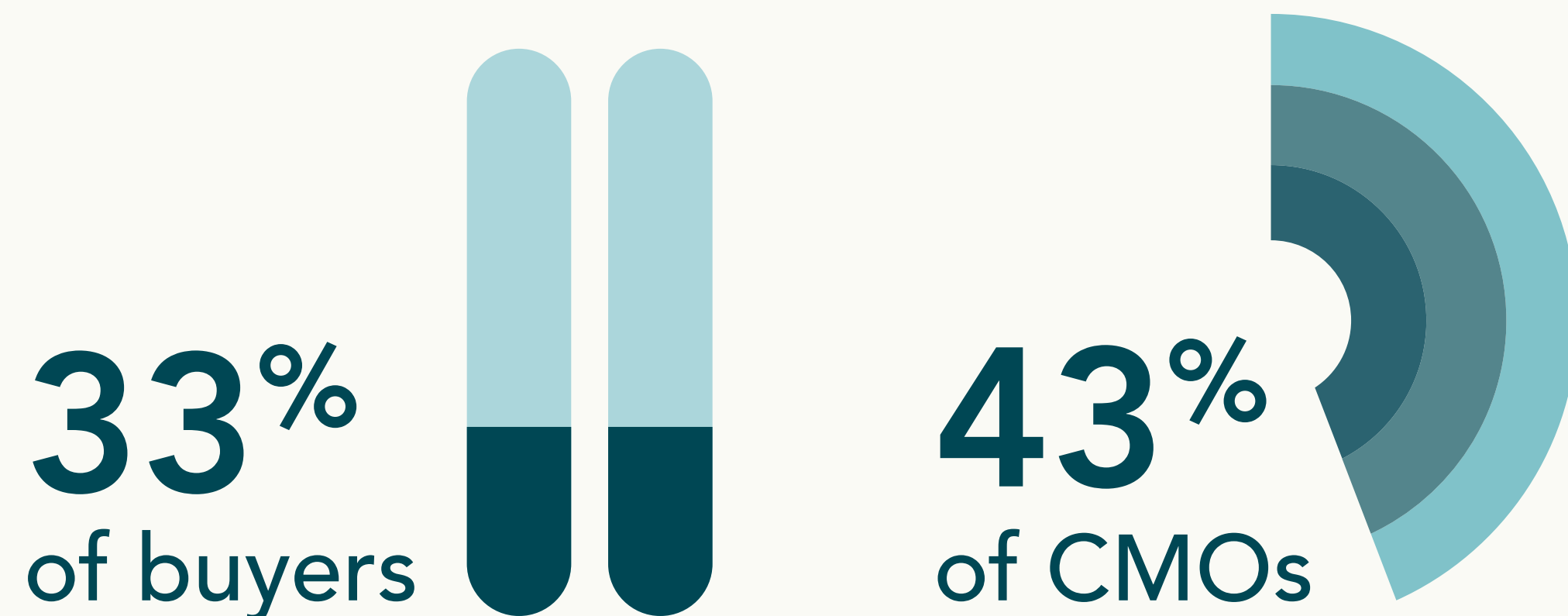
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CMOs say their #1 challenge is balancing growth across new and existing accounts

Next we examine 5 key forces that are reshaping marketing, what leaders and their teams need to know, and what they need to address to reset their plans.

FORCE ONE: B2B Buying Dynamics Shift

B2B buying has become harder to navigate, influence, and predict. In a risk-averse environment, decisions take longer and involve multiple stakeholders. In 2026, preference and trust must be earned early, and influence must extend beyond the obvious buyer to the full decision ecosystem.



agree they **often put purchase decisions on hold**, most often due to budget constraints, economic uncertainty, and the need for additional validation.

say their greatest challenge is **navigating the increasing complexity of buyer behavior** and understanding buyer needs.

How CMOs are Responding:

60% of CMOs in high-growth companies are **strengthening reputation and thought leadership** – recognizing that building preference and influence early on across the buying group is critical to gaining mindshare and building trust.

40% are **prioritizing messaging that addresses the full buying group** and journey, not just top-of-funnel, enabling consistent influence across all stakeholders and reducing the risk of decisions being put on hold.

Strategic Implications:

Address buying group gaps:

Are you systematically influencing prioritized stakeholders in the buying group, not just the primary buyer?

Audit your footprint:

Is your brand discoverable, credible, and consistent in the early, often invisible stages of the journey where trust is first built?

FORCE TWO:
AI Moves from Pilot to Priority

Buyers are tapping AI tools to ease the buying process, while marketing teams are trying to understand how they must plan, execute, and optimize their strategies to cater to this new member of the buying group. If buyers are accelerating with AI while marketing teams lag behind, influence is ceded to competitors who adapt faster.



91%
of buyers

use generative AI tools throughout the buying process. **AI is now part of the buying group.**



27%
of CMOs

are highly confident their team will be able **to fully leverage AI-driven tools** in the next 12-24 months.

How CMOs are Responding:

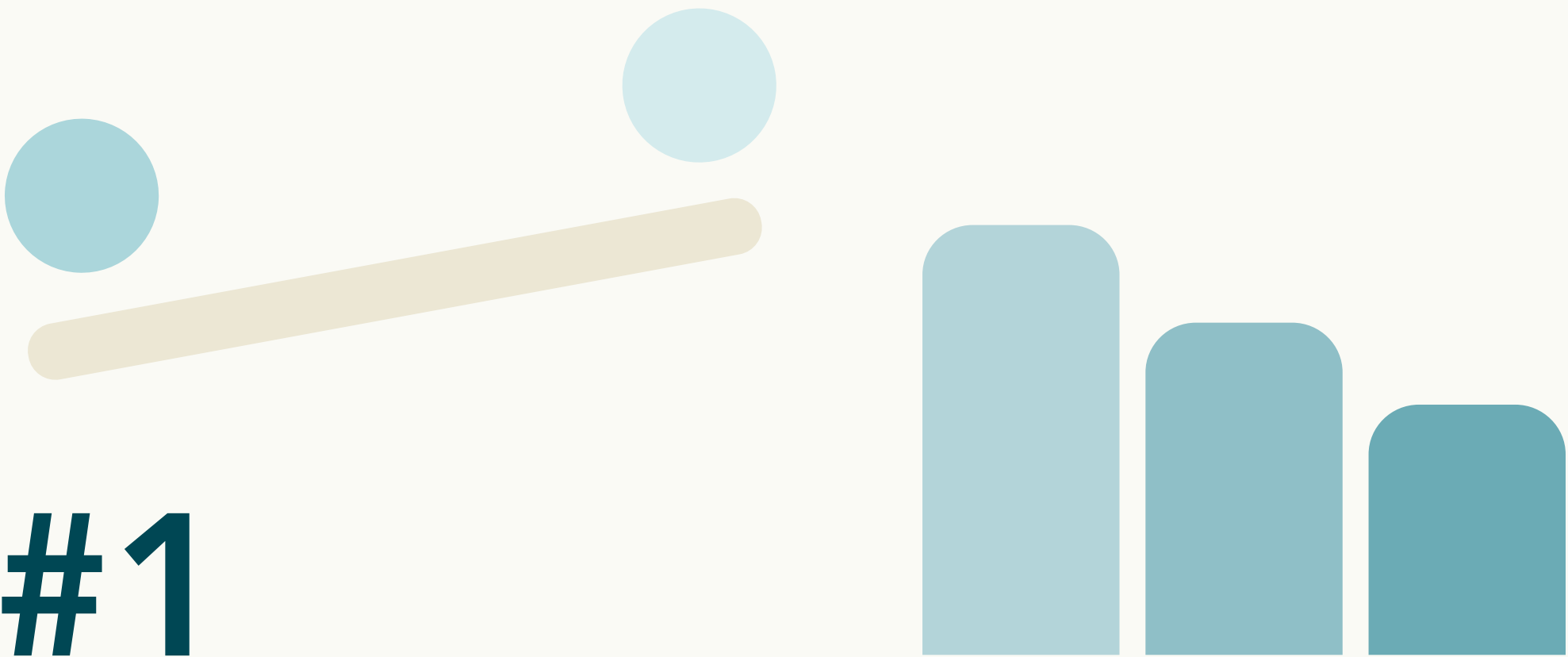


Strategic Implications:

- Design for AI discovery:**
Have you adapted your content for AI discovery through schema, modularity, and metadata?
- Close the confidence gap:**
Are your teams equipped to embed AI in your ways of working and critical areas of your business to improve business performance and marketing effectiveness?

FORCE THREE:
Growth Bets Consolidate

In today’s risk-sensitive, resource-constrained environment, acquisition alone won’t deliver – yet it is often still the dominant success metric for marketing. CMOs are under pressure to generate sustainable growth and need to deploy strategies to expand and deepen relationships, not just fill the top of the funnel.



Challenge for CMOs is **balancing acquisition with retaining and growing existing customers**, especially in low- or declining-growth organizations.

Whitespace and “net new” opportunities are shrinking, leaving little room for expansion without a more strategic approach.

How CMOs are Responding:

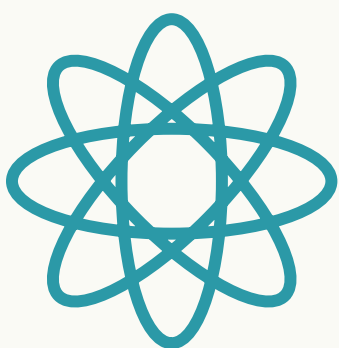
- 67%** of CMOs say **key account growth – both new and existing – is their top strategic priority**. This is the best course to drive sustainable expansion as whitespace shrinks.
- #1** **transformation initiative for the next two years is enhancing client-centricity across GTM functions** – aligning marketing, sales, and services around customers rather than products to maximize retention and growth.

Strategic Implications:

- Rebalance with confidence:**
Concentrate on accounts with the greatest long-term growth potential and deprioritize or divest from unstable or less strategic segments.
- Redefine the intention of retention:**
Develop and mobilize capabilities across relevant client-facing functions and develop programs that are focused on driving retention, utilization, mitigating risk and driving customer loyalty.

FORCE FOUR:
The Demand Engine Rebalances

Traditional broadcast efforts are losing effectiveness. Buyers are harder to find – and harder to impress. Yet many marketing programs remain rooted in top-of-funnel demand generation – optimizing for visibility rather than influence, utility, and trust. In 2026, growth will come not from broadcasting louder, but from meeting buyers where they actually are and driving meaningful, frictionless, and targeted engagement.



B2B buyers are shifting into **private and AI-enabled spaces** such as Slack, WhatsApp, LinkedIn Groups, and ChatGPT.

67%
of buyers

say **providers could have made the buying process easier**, particularly by delivering better content in the right format.

How CMOs are Responding:



33%

Investments are shifting toward account focus, customer expansion, and innovation, deprioritizing broad-based demand and net new acquisition efforts.

High-performing organizations are leveraging indirect channel partners to extend influence into private and AI-enabled spaces – with 33% of their CMOs prioritizing partner-driven growth, compared to just 7% of low/flat-growth peers. Partners act as trusted advisors where buyers already engage.

Strategic Implications:

Align with the buyer:

Design content and engagement strategies for private and AI-enabled spaces, not just public channels. Focus on making the buying process easier with relevant, tailored content in the right format at the right moment.

Activate the ecosystem:

Work strategically with your channel partners to identify and realize opportunities to strengthen trust, drive innovation, and extend influence across target customers.

FORCE FIVE:
Capability Gaps Emerge

Marketing has never had a broader remit – or higher expectations. But many teams are under-equipped to deliver. Skills haven’t kept pace with strategy. Enablement is disconnected from day-to-day execution. And role clarity is breaking down across GTM teams.

41% of CMOs
take a **structured approach** to
enabling their marketing teams.

65% of CMOs
say marketing enablement is
**managed by a dedicated function
outside of marketing** or has no
dedicated function at all.

How CMOs are Responding:

x2 In high-performing organizations, CMOs are **twice as likely to own B2B marketing enablement** inside the marketing team compared to low/declining growth organizations, signaling that direct, strategic ownership of training and skills development correlates with stronger growth outcomes.

38% **are moving beyond generic enablement** to bespoke, role-specific training, compared with only 13% in flat/declining growth companies. Targeted enablement is a key differentiator in execution and impact.

Strategic Implications:

Define outcome-focused competencies:
Establish what success looks like for every role, identify critical gaps across teams, and tailor enablement programs to directly support strategic priorities.

Link enablement to marketing strategy:
Embed enablement investment in your annual planning and articulate clearly the links between your enablement requirements with your marketing and business strategy. Collaborate with HR and L&D to ensure marketing enablement gains support as you move from strategy to implementation.

Why the Old Playbook Won't Win

The forces reshaping B2B marketing aren't trivial – they're structural. Buying behavior is changing. AI is accelerating. Growth is shifting from broad-based demand generation to targeted acquisition and customer expansion. Channels are fragmenting. And marketing teams are being asked to do more with skills they don't yet have.

Business as usual won't cut it.

Winning in 2026 Will Require:

- Rethinking how and where you show up in the buying journey
- Refocusing growth efforts on the accounts that matter most
- Rebuilding your GTM engine with strategy-aligned capabilities
- Reprioritizing influence, not just reach

Don't plan for what's been. Plan for what's next.

Don't go alone. Partner with our expert consultants to translate these trends into actionable GTM strategies and secure your advantage in 2026.

About the MomentumABM Marketing Priorities Survey 2025

102
RESPONDENTS GLOBALLY

43%
\$1BN+ REVENUE

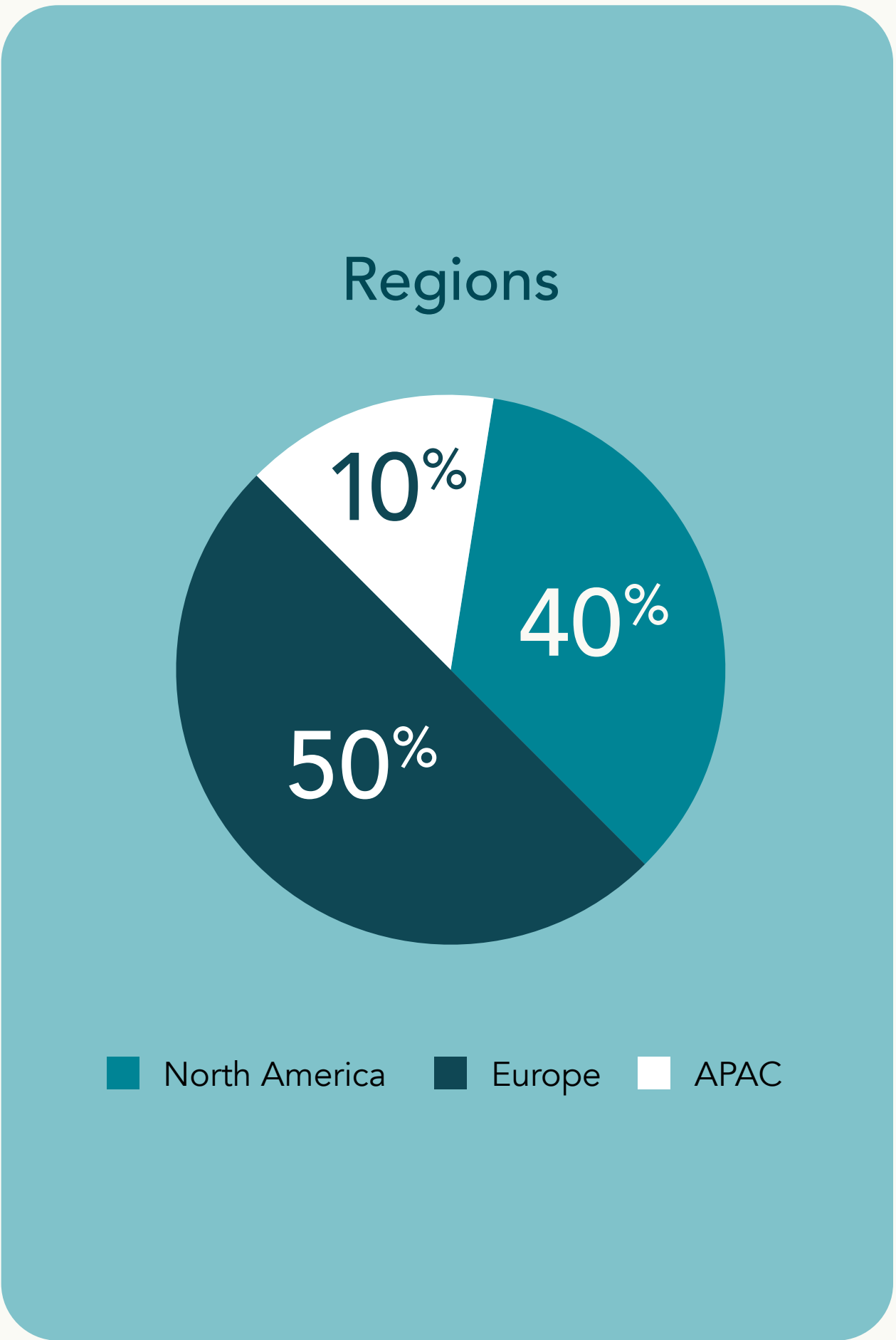
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INDUSTRIES

B2B
MARKETING LEADERS



Leaders with ownership and accountability for marketing strategy and execution at a:

- Regional level
- Business Unit level
- Global level



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