Resetting the Focus

Study: What Attendees Want from Their Next Sales Kickoff

Insights from an extensive survey of technology sales professionals are redefining event strategies and design approaches for 2023.

opus

Table of Contents

Introduction 3

Insights for Defining Strategies 5

Insights for Designing Experiences 9

Spotlight: Point of View by Revenue 14

The Bottom Line 16

About Opus Agency 18

Appendix 20

Introduction

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the Opus Agency Study: What Attendees Want from Their Next Sales Kickoff.

Organizations and businesses are adapting quickly to new expectations of the modern workplace, with many sales professionals working partially or fully remote. This shift has accelerated in recent years, particularly in the tech space, emphasizing the importance for businesses to empower sales professionals to improve the use of core tools while modernizing multidisciplinary skill sets. In this new environment, the best sales teams are aligned with organizational strategy, feel confident in their product and skills, and are motivated to achieve their goals.

Reimagined patterns and practices in the virtual workplace have generated a fresh demand for team connection, specialized skills, and hands-on training. Annual sales kickoff meetings (SKOs) are tactical investments to drive meaningful returns, bringing sales teams together to foster culture, forge deep relationships, provide hands-on training, and celebrate successes. When organizations invest in opportunities to gather teams for a singular experience, they outperform competitors and grow new business.

As we move into a new fiscal year and as businesses begin planning their next round of SKOs, the team at Opus Agency fielded a purposeful, research-intensive study to answer the singular question:

What do technology industry-specific sales professionals want from their next SKO?

Completed in July 2022, this report from Opus Agency surveyed a cross-section of technology sales professionals ranging from executive leaders to account representatives across several age brackets and various company sizes. Throughout the survey, our team analyzed what attendees, from executives to individual contributors, want from the sales kickoff event, how they want to engage, and what aspects are most impactful.

Dig in with us as we unpack the insights and frame the recommendations to enable technology sellers to get the most out of your next SKO.

On Deck

This study has revealed some disconnects between attendees' needs and wants, what they deem necessary, and what they can do without. The insights we gathered align with the following framework:

- **Defining Strategies:** What you need to consider and who to engage as you plan your next SKO
- **Prioritizing Investments:** What you should consider including in your SKO budget this year
- **Designing Experiences:** What experiences and topics you should consider prioritizing

Insights for Defining Strategies

Traversing Disconnects

Insight

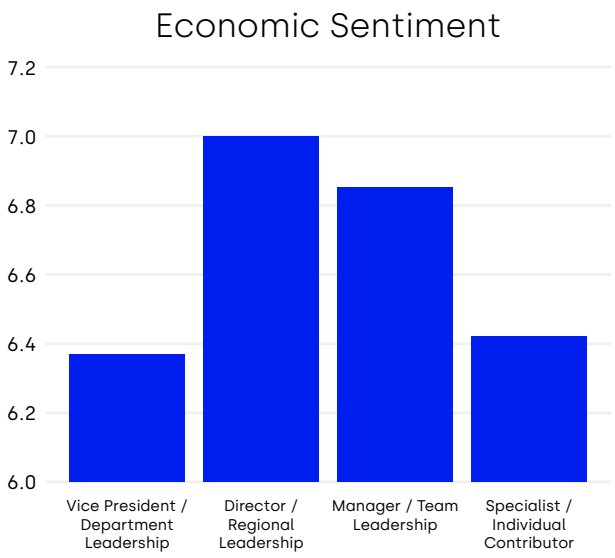
Confidence levels in the direction of the business vary between sales roles.

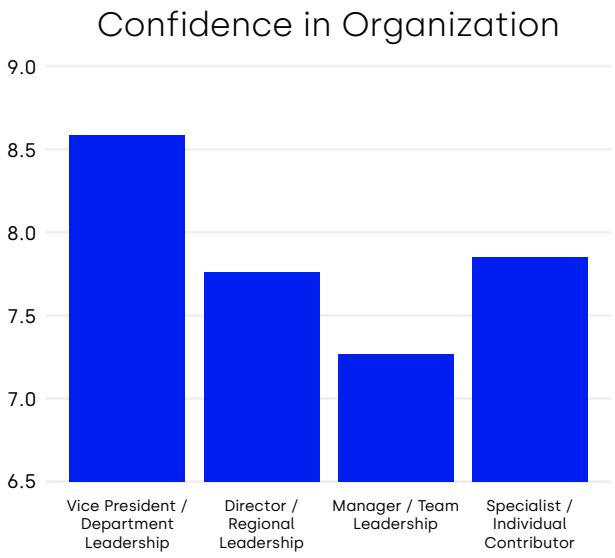
Recommendation

Utilize SKOs to align teams on sales objectives.

Across org charts, confidence in the economy and business efficacy varies by responsibility and role. VP-level sales professionals have lower confidence in the economy and higher confidence in their organization. Inversely, directors and managers have higher optimism about the economy and lower confidence in their organization, creating an opportunity for leadership to connect and align with their front-line managers.

To improve morale, organizations could consider providing director and manager-level stakeholders early access to the event planning process. Reading these individuals in on the value of planned experiences increases their investment in the SKO's success. At the event, create exclusive experiences for directors and managers, and consider giving them greater access to the leadership team. By engaging managers and directors in the planning process and treating them as valuable team members, sales organizations can gain alignment, improve operations, and amplify confidence in the strategic direction of their organization.





Aligning Expectations

Insight

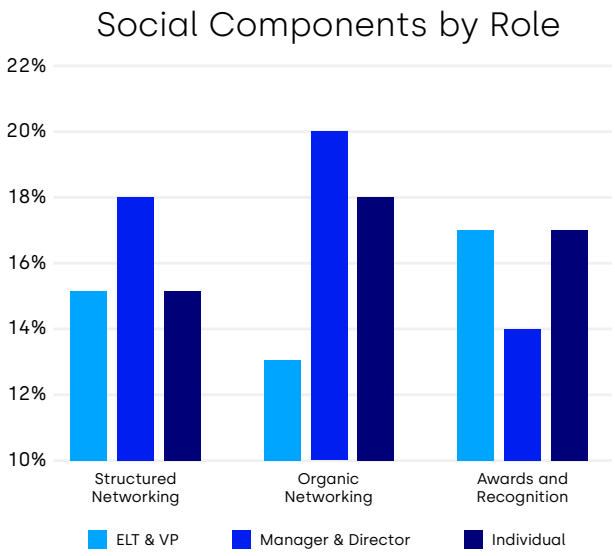
Sellers have different expectations about social SKO components.

Recommendation

Design purposeful networking opportunities that incorporate multiple priorities for alignment.

Managers and directors prioritize different social components of an SKO than what leadership and individual contributors deem essential. Opportunities to align on event value include networking, awards, recognition, and competition. With an eye on the day-to-day operations, managers focus on ensuring that their teams make organic connections, while executives are more interested in structured or deliberate networking opportunities.

Executives and individual contributors agree on the importance of recognition, with managers rating it significantly lower. Designing thoughtful opportunities that incorporate each group's priorities while helping them to see the value of the other experiences will strengthen each group's understanding of the overall event value.



Prioritizing Investments

Insight

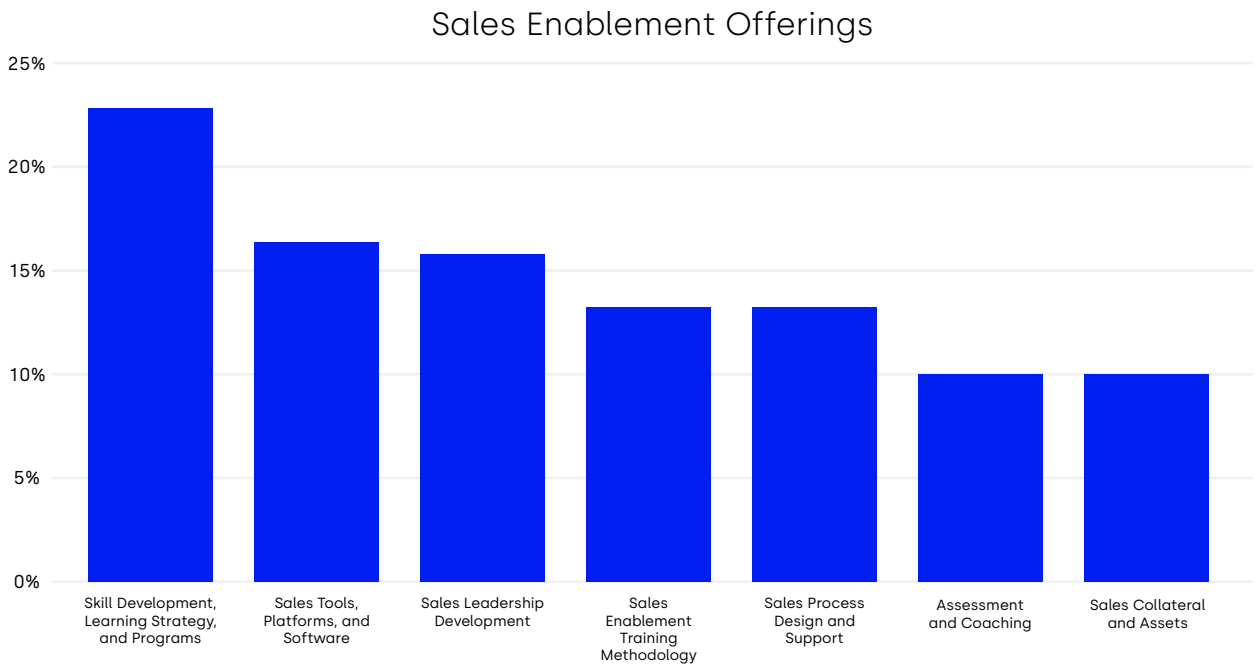
Attendees expect SKOs to facilitate product demonstration and skills training.

Recommendation

Deliver on this expectation by ensuring sales enablement is fully integrated into the meeting content.

When asked what could help them be more successful, respondents indicated that improving sales enablement was critical to helping them win. While this is the charter of any sales enablement department, our research suggests that businesses often unintentionally place sales enablement in a silo during event planning. SKOs are a critical touchpoint for sales enablement's onboarding, adoption, and ongoing usage of these resources. Still, too often, sales enablement is treated as an afterthought and not included in the initial planning phases.

Sales enablement encounters sellers daily and has vital information on preferred learning styles and insights that inform event themes and objectives. Bringing sales enablement stakeholders into the early planning phases allows for optimized educational content integration that provides attendees with the learning frameworks and tools they need throughout the entirety of the event.



Insights for Designing Experiences

Keynotes and Content

Insight

Early career professionals want soft skills development, while seasoned employees are more likely to opt for content focusing on trends and leadership.

Recommendation

Curate content themes to meet the needs of your workforce.

Markers like age, job function, and business size determine the types of keynote themes that attract attendees. Our study suggests that attendees at larger companies value executive keynotes more than those at smaller companies, likely due to limited executive visibility within large organizations.

Event planners can leverage this insight to ensure that executive keynotes resonate with all attendees. For example, executive upfronts can feature a strong point of view on future projections and tie the company's direction to industry trends to create a true trend-driven strategic story. Younger workers (under 25) value external keynote content focused on soft skills. These younger sellers entered the workforce in an era of remote working conditions. Helping these attendees bolster soft skills and personal strengths will result in a more competent and resilient team.

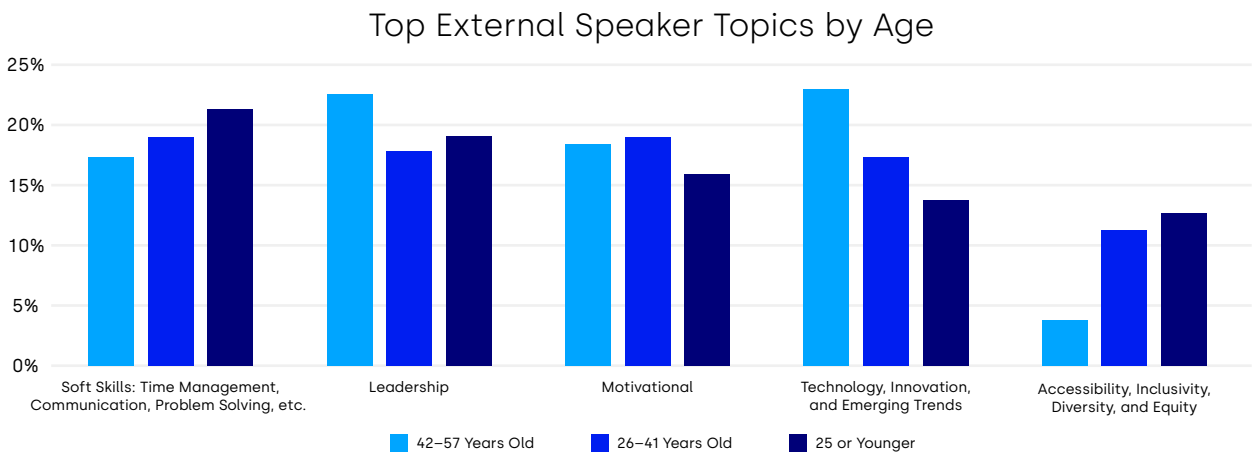
At the other end of the working-age spectrum, those in the 42–57 age bracket prefer external keynotes featuring technology, innovation, and emerging trends. These workers are confident in their soft skills and are looking for market insight that will serve them in hitting sales goals. Ensure content is balanced and tailored to attendees' needs by considering team demographics and surveying attendees on anticipated outcomes.

Survey verbatim:

"Discuss upcoming innovative products or new things the company is producing for clients or employees" (42–57 years old)

"Energize the team without exhausting the team" (26-41 years old)

"Demonstrations and overall practice delivering the sale speak" (25 or younger)



Networking and Competition

Insight

Attendees want different ways to engage, celebrate, and connect — depending on their role in the organization.

Recommendation

Sprinkle various networking and competition experiences throughout the program to maximize connections and celebrate accomplishments.

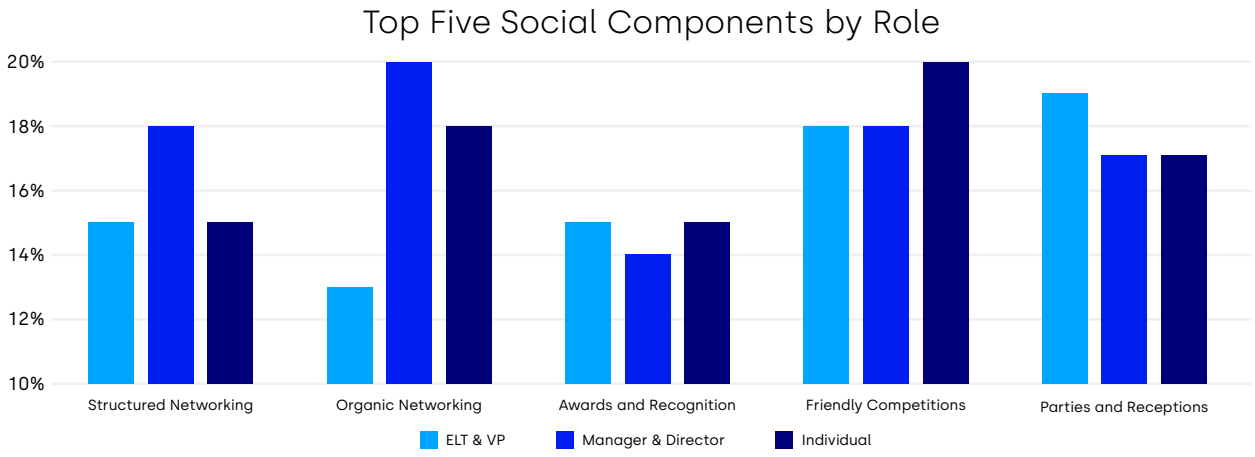
Our study suggests that executives prefer parties and receptions to celebrate and motivate their salesforce, while managers value organic networking. Individual contributors feel that friendly competition is the best method of networking and team building.

Sellers are competitive by nature — spirited challenges and creative gamification boost the "fun factor" of an SKO. Planners can organize teams across multiple regions or sales disciplines to satisfy the networking needs and objectives of stakeholders and attendees. While this may seem like 'structured' networking, the fun of competing against each other and being part of a team creates great organic connections.

Survey verbatim:

"Contests and prizes give a lot of motivation"

"I think it's important to boost morale with employees by having friendly competition to motivate."



Education and Training

Insight

Respondents want sales training through hands-on demonstrations, sales simulations, and practice sessions.

Recommendation

Harness the power of in-person experiences to move the needle on education, training, and teambuilding.

In a world of on-demand training, the top objectives for in-person meetings often mirror the biggest challenges for virtual environments — hands-on learning, team building, and networking. In-person SKOs allow attendees to slow down, tune in, and walk away with deeper understandings and stronger relationships. Event strategists should utilize the power of in-person experiences to move the needle on learning and networking objectives. SKOs stand out in delivering learning experiences; leverage the opportunity provided by an in-person event to maximize time spent practicing with tools and skills needed to succeed.

Survey verbatim:

"Just be as hands-on as possible. Anybody can listen and understand; it's another thing to practice what you know."

"I think they can do better by leading more people to have more training."

Awards and Recognition

Insight

Respondents do not rank awards and recognition as a top priority.

Recommendation

Thread recognition and appreciation throughout the program to maximize benefit and keep attendees engaged.

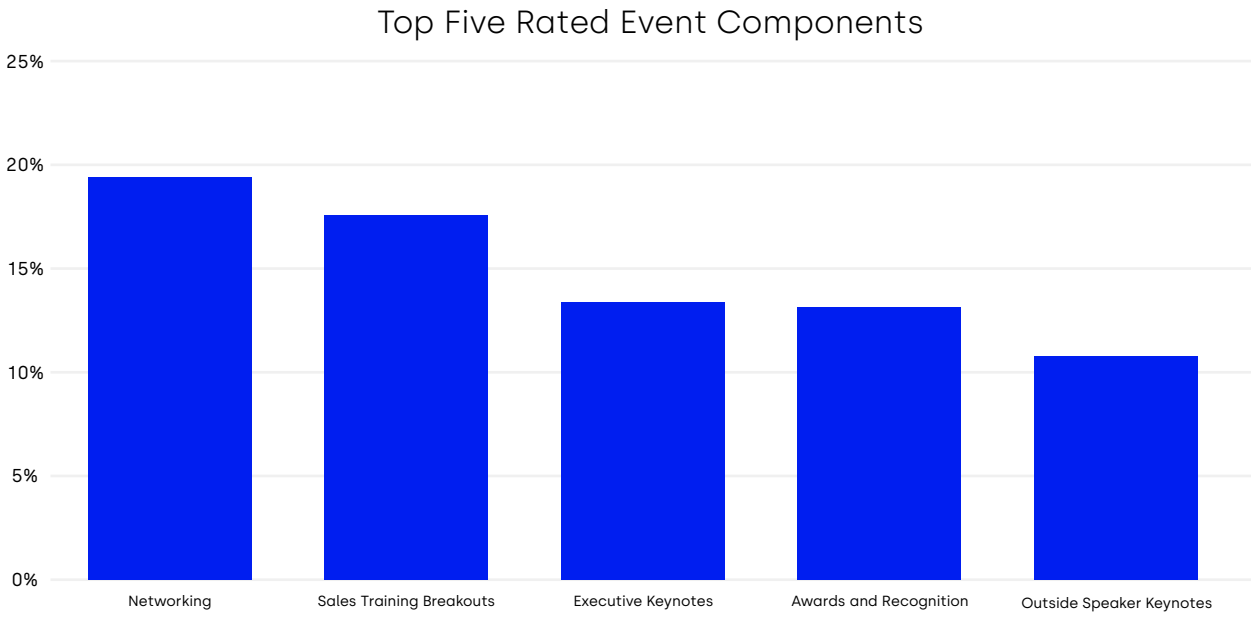
While each respondent segment valued awards and recognition to some degree, no one group ranked it as the most important experience. Recognition is undeniably important, but recognizing success as an educational tool will bring additional meaning and impact to those recognized and to those looking to learn and improve.

Featuring top sellers and president club winners in meeting content like panels or roundtables gives them a sense of pride and allows the rest of the organization to learn from their methods. Creating additional opportunities for recognition outside of an awards night shows a deeper appreciation and understanding of the value these top performers bring to the team and organization.

Survey verbatim:

"Top performers shadowing and undercover coaching."

"Acknowledge a few of the top performers and what they are doing that makes them successful."



Spotlight: Point of View by Revenue

Spotlight: Point of View by Revenue

This segmentation by revenue snapshot gives valuable insight into sentiment, confidence, needs, and opportunities, allowing for a deeper understanding of experience design.

Up to $250 Million	$250–$999 Million	$1 Billion +
6.5 economic outlook **7.5** confidence in organizational strategy	**6.6** economic outlook **7.3** confidence in organizational strategy	**7.0** economic outlook **8.2** confidence in organizational strategy
While all groups see value in **Networking**:		
These companies selected **Sales Training Breakouts** as one of the most valuable event components.	These companies selected **Sales Training Breakouts** as one of the most valuable event components.	These companies selected **Executive Keynotes** as one of the most valuable event components.
While all groups see **Increased Competition** as a key challenge:		
The smallest companies have identified **getting the attention of potential customers** as a key challenge.	Mid-sized companies have identified **converting sales meetings to revenue** as a key challenge.	The largest companies have identified **expanding services within the existing customer base** as a key challenge.

While there are expected commonalities, like valuing networking and selecting increased competition as key challenges, meaningful differences will inform event strategy and content design.

The Bottom Line

Sales teams are more efficient than ever.

Working virtually means less travel time and increased customer contact, but it can also lead to fatigue and disconnect from the larger organization and its mission. SKOs provide opportunities for teams to reconnect, recommit, and recharge.

With many individual contributors having entered the workforce during the macro shift toward remote work, the value of bringing teams together in person is higher than ever.

SKOs encourage teams to connect, human to human, to unite communities, practice skills, amplify culture, and celebrate action. Understanding the preferences and expectations of each audience segment results in SKOs that hit the mark for each attendee and meet the objectives of the organization.

Legacy SKO Goals	Modern SKO Goals
Information Sharing	Information Practicing
Building Knowledge	Building Teams
Improving Skills	Modeling Cultures
Showcasing Inspiration	Celebrating Action

This redesigned framework ensures that SKOs deliver on the promise of connection, culture, skills, and recognition.

About Opus Agency

Opus Agency partners with world-shaping brands to catalyze movements through shared experiences.

Across four decades, our end-to-end capabilities have scaled excellence at the intersection of events, content, and community. As the flagship of The Opus Group, you will find our teams outperforming from hubs across the United States, in the heart of London, and around the world. For category creators and global brands, we are forming and fueling the future of brand movements.

Meet the Study's Lead

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Amanda brings more than a decade of experience in event marketing to her role as a Marketing Analyst with Opus Agency. This understanding allows her to drill down into clients' requirements while holding onto the full project scope, ensuring actionable insights. Her consultative approach and ability to anticipate needs ensure success and earns loyalty. She is resourceful, creative, relentlessly optimistic, and makes an excellent trivia teammate.

Appendix

Appendix / Data Spotlights

As the Opus Agency team analyzed the survey results, these additional interesting data points emerged. The findings and patterns from these questions provide additional context and texture to our comprehensive insights and recommendations.

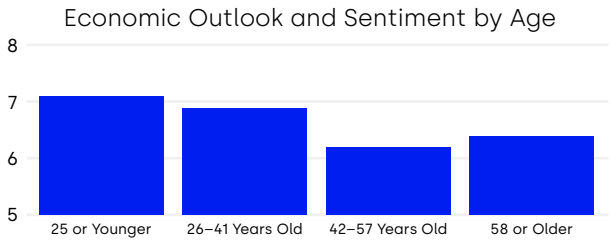
What is your economic outlook and sentiment for the next 12 months (August 2022 through July 2023)?

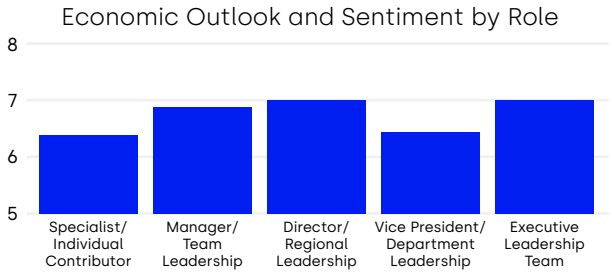
Aggregate Economic Outlook and Sentiment – 6.7 (out of 10)

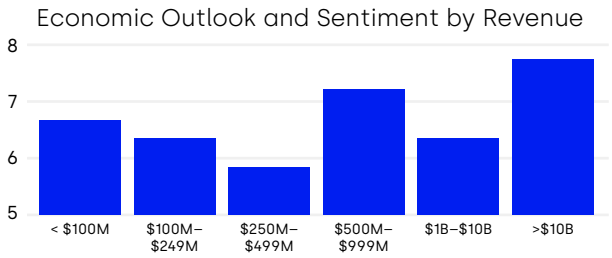
Younger workers show more optimism in their economic outlook. Proximity to retirement could be affecting outlook.

Specialists and VPs have lower economic outlook scores than the other roles. Managers and directors are more likely to be focused on the business's day-to-day running and less on long-term goals.

Larger companies trend toward higher confidence, with a dip for the $1–$10 billion category. Respondents from the $1–$10 billion category indicated a broader range of top concerns than other revenue brackets.







How would you rate your confidence in your organization's current business direction and strategy?

Aggregate Confidence in Organization – 7.6 (out of 10)

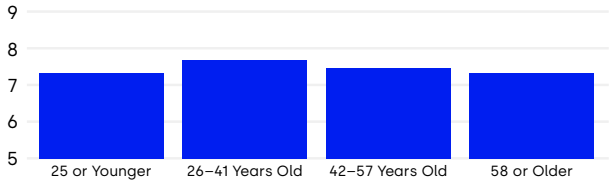
Confidence is high across all segments.

The middle two age brackets are the most confident in their organization's business direction and strategy.

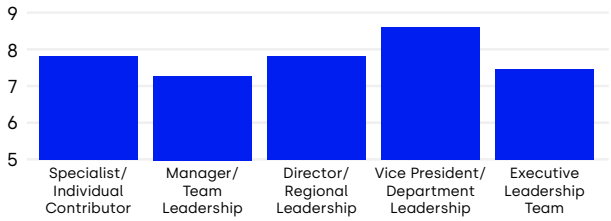
Specialists and VPs are the most optimistic about their organization's business direction and strategy.

Larger businesses are the most confident in their business direction and strategy.

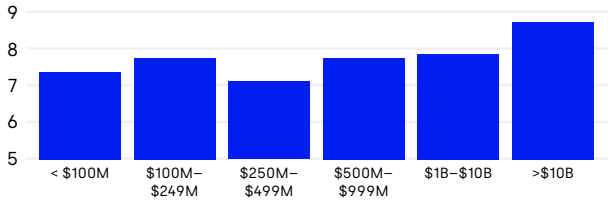
Economic Outlook and Sentiment by Age



Economic Outlook and Sentiment by Role



Economic Outlook and Sentiment by Revenue



How well does your organization's sales enablement help the sales team sell more effectively?

Aggregate Confidence in Organization – 7.6 (out of 10)

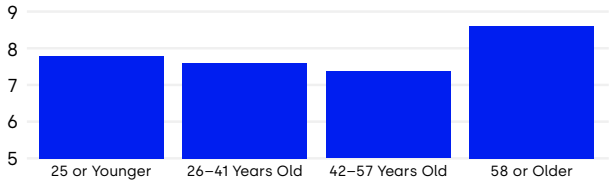
Satisfaction is high across all segments.

The oldest age bracket is most satisfied with their sales enablement team's effectiveness.

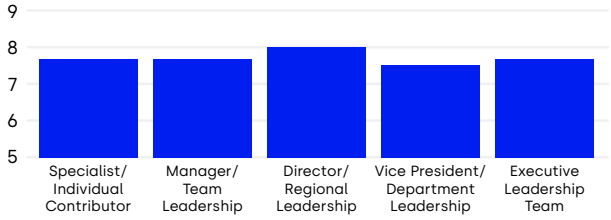
Directors are most satisfied with their sales enablement team's effectiveness.

Mixed satisfaction with the sales enablement team's effectiveness across business sizes.

Effectiveness of Sales Enablement by Age



Effectiveness of Sales Enablement by Role



Effectiveness of Sales Enablement by Revenue

Please choose the top 3–5 sales enablement offerings that would help you and your organization have greater sales success

Skill Development Learning Strategy and Programs; Sales Tools, Platforms, and Software; and Sales Leadership Development were the top three overall rated sales enablement offerings.

With various priorities across age groups, roles, and business sizes, pre-event surveys are key to understanding the needs of your organization.

	Sales Leadership Development	Sales Process Design and Support	Sales Enablement Training Methodology	Skill Development Learning Strategy and Programs	Sales Collateral and Assets	Sales Tools, Platforms, and Software	Assessment and Coaching
Aggregate	**57%**	**46%**	**46%**	**59%**	**35%**	**57%**	**36%**
By Age							
25 or Younger	54%	50%	57%	54%	34%	57%	30%
26–41 Years Old	60%	48%	44%	65%	33%	61%	41%
42–57 Years Old	58%	45%	45%	48%	48%	45%	29%
58 or Older	44%	33%	22%	67%	44%	67%	44%
By Role							
Speacialist/ Individual Contributor	53%	43%	47%	63%	38%	63%	34%
Manager/Team Leadership	61%	50%	47%	56%	31%	61%	33%
Director/Regional Leadership	67%	27%	40%	60%	60%	33%	33%
Vice President/ Dept. Leadership	62%	54%	38%	62%	23%	38%	46%
Executive Leadership Team	47%	71%	59%	53%	41%	53%	53%
By Revenue							
< $100M	60%	56%	43%	59%	26%	54%	39%
$100M–$249M	54%	38%	35%	70%	30%	62%	38%
$250M–$499M	53%	35%	59%	53%	29%	59%	6%
$500M–$999M	60%	40%	60%	64%	40%	52%	40%
$1B–$10B	47%	47%	42%	47%	63%	53%	37%
> $10B	56%	50%	44%	44%	50%	56%	44%

Please choose your top 3–5 most valuable Sales Kickoff event components

Networking and Training are the clear priorities for all segments.

The importance of Executive Keynotes, Awards and Recognition, and Competitions varies by age group, role, and business size.

Executive Keynotes are more important in larger companies; Competitions are valued higher by younger attendees, and VPs give Awards and Recognition more weight.

	Executive Keynotes	Sales Training Breakouts	Outside Speaker Keynotes	Parties and Receptions	Networking	Competitions	Live Entertainment (Comedians, Music, etc.)	Awards and Recognition
Aggregate	**45%**	**60%**	**36%**	**29%**	**67%**	**35%**	**25%**	**45%**
By Age								
25 or Younger	36%	50%	50%	33%	58%	42%	41%	36%
26–41 Years Old	50%	61%	32%	30%	70%	36%	24%	48%
42–57 Years Old	43%	63%	33%	25%	68%	28%	17%	43%
58 or Older	48%	71%	29%	19%	71%	24%	0%	52%
By Role								
Speacialist/ Individual Contributor	51%	54%	37%	28%	68%	32%	27%	49%
Manager/Team Leadership	43%	66%	34%	30%	68%	33%	26%	39%
Director/Regional Leadership	50%	68%	50%	32%	50%	32%	18%	45%
Vice President/ Dept. Leadership	36%	57%	36%	21%	86%	50%	21%	57%
Executive Leadership Team	34%	60%	31%	31%	63%	46%	17%	40%
By Revenue								
< $100M	43%	64%	27%	27%	71%	35%	22%	40%
$100M–$249M	35%	50%	40%	30%	68%	38%	28%	40%
$250M–$499M	52%	71%	33%	43%	48%	29%	24%	43%
$500M–$999M	44%	56%	52%	30%	59%	48%	37%	48%
$1B–$10B	57%	43%	52%	30%	74%	26%	22%	57%
> $10B	68%	53%	32%	42%	63%	32%	11%	58%

Please choose your top 3–5 most valuable external speaker topics

Soft Skills, Leadership, and Motivation scored high for external speaker topics. While a broad swath of each segment prioritized those three topics, managers, directors, and VPs gravitated toward Leadership; the youngest attendees gave weight to Soft Skills, and the largest companies focused on Motivation.

	Motivational	Sustainability & Environment	Leadership	Soft Skills (Time Mgmt, Communication, Problem Solving, etc.)	Technology, Innovation, and Emerging Trends	Accessibility, Inclusivity, Diversity, and Equality	Health and Wellbeing
Aggregate	**64%**	**30%**	**64%**	**66%**	**61%**	**33%**	**20%**
By Age							
25 or Younger	53%	42%	64%	70%	47%	42%	23%
26–41 Years Old	67%	31%	64%	66%	61%	40%	21%
42–57 Years Old	58%	27%	70%	55%	73%	13%	15%
58 or Older	86%	5%	48%	76%	71%	19%	14%
By Role							
Speacialist/ Individual Contributor	66%	33%	63%	68%	59%	34%	22%
Manager/Team Leadership	59%	30%	66%	66%	58%	32%	20%
Director/Regional Leadership	73%	23%	73%	68%	68%	27%	14%
Vice President/ Dept. Leadership	57%	29%	71%	36%	71%	57%	7%
Executive Leadership Team	63%	31%	54%	66%	71%	29%	23%
By Revenue							
< $100M	64%	28%	63%	66%	66%	25%	18%
$100M–$249M	55%	23%	75%	60%	53%	50%	18%
$250M–$499M	71%	24%	57%	52%	67%	38%	14%
$500M–$999M	52%	52%	37%	70%	56%	56%	37%
$1B–$10B	65%	30%	78%	65%	61%	17%	17%
> $10B	84%	32%	74%	63%	58%	37%	16%

Please choose your top 3–5 most valuable training methods

Hands-on Demonstrations and Simulations and Practice Sessions are rated the most valuable across all segmentation. Moderator-led Discussions and Breakouts and Roundtables, Panels, and Peer-to-Peer learning come in second. These are all training styles best suited to in-person learning.

	Keynotes or Lecture-Style (Large Group)	Moderator-Led Discussions and Breakouts	Hands-On Demonstrations	Co-creation Activities	Simulations and Practice Sessions	Roundtables, Panels, and Peer-to-Peer Discussions	At-Event Competitions and Games
Aggregate	**40%**	**47%**	**67%**	**41%**	**59%**	**47%**	**27%**
By Age							
25 or Younger	41%	38%	67%	55%	59%	33%	31%
26–41 Years Old	46%	50%	67%	41%	63%	47%	24%
42–57 Years Old	30%	52%	67%	35%	52%	52%	28%
58 or Older	29%	52%	71%	19%	62%	71%	29%
By Role							
Speacialist/ Individual Contributor	44%	50%	67%	39%	56%	34%	22%
Manager/Team Leadership	38%	44%	67%	45%	61%	32%	20%
Director/Regional Leadership	27%	68%	59%	41%	59%	27%	14%
Vice President/ Dept. Leadership	43%	43%	64%	43%	71%	57%	7%
Executive Leadership Team	40%	37%	74%	37%	63%	29%	23%
By Revenue							
< $100M	30%	45%	74%	40%	61%	47%	23%
$100M–$249M	43%	53%	53%	45%	58%	40%	28%
$250M–$499M	52%	52%	57%	29%	71%	38%	24%
$500M–$999M	70%	56%	59%	56%	44%	44%	37%
$1B–$10B	43%	30%	83%	35%	52%	57%	30%
> $10B	32%	47%	53%	53%	63%	68%	32%

Please choose your top 3–5 most valuable social elements

Friendly Competitions and Organic Networking are the top-rated social elements with consistently high ratings across all segments.

The second tier of valued elements included Parties and Receptions, Structured Networking, and Awards and Recognition. The largest companies value Awards and Recognition more; executive leadership gives weight to Parties and Receptions, and all age groups value Structured Networking.

	Organic Networking	Structured Networking	Parties and Receptions	Friendly Competitions	Live Entertainment	Awards and Recognition	At-Event Competitions and Games
Aggregate	**60%**	**55%**	**57%**	**62%**	**46%**	**53%**	**27%**
By Age							
25 or Younger	52%	59%	59%	63%	64%	48%	31%
26–41 Years Old	60%	56%	53%	67%	42%	59%	24%
42–57 Years Old	65%	47%	62%	57%	38%	45%	28%
58 or Older	62%	57%	57%	52%	43%	57%	29%
By Role							
Speacialist/ Individual Contributor	59%	52%	54%	66%	43%	57%	22%
Manager/Team Leadership	64%	60%	56%	61%	47%	49%	20%
Director/Regional Leadership	73%	55%	59%	64%	41%	45%	14%
Vice President/ Dept. Leadership	29%	57%	57%	79%	57%	50%	7%
Executive Leadership Team	51%	49%	66%	51%	54%	57%	23%
By Revenue							
< $100M	61%	51%	54%	59%	41%	52%	23%
$100M–$249M	50%	58%	60%	70%	53%	53%	28%
$250M–$499M	52%	67%	43%	52%	52%	62%	24%
$500M–$999M	56%	59%	70%	59%	67%	41%	37%
$1B–$10B	61%	57%	61%	70%	48%	43%	30%
> $10B	63%	53%	58%	74%	42%	68%	32%

Overview of Survey Respondents

Completed in July 2022, this report surveyed a cross-section of technology sales professionals ranging from executive leaders to account representatives across several age brackets and various company sizes. This is a snapshot of the respondents by age, role, and business size.

Age	
25 or Younger	23%
26–41 Years Old	48%
42–57 Years Old	22%
58 or Older	8%
Role	
Specialist / Individual Contributor	40%
Manager / Team Leadership	35%
Director / Regional Leadership	8%
Vice President / Department Leadership	5%
Executive Leadership Team	12%
Revenue	
Less than $100 Million	46%
$100 – $249 million	14%
$250 – $499 Million	7%
$500 – $999 Million	9%
$1 Billion – $10 Billion	8%
More than $10 Billion	7%

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