



EOS RESEARCH REPORT
OCTOBER 2026

2027 Sales Outlook

What the data says about outbound calls,
discovery, demos, and the path to a real
buying decision



Contents

Executive Summary	2
Chapter 1 - Why This Report Exists	4
Chapter 2 - The SDR Day Is Mostly an Attempt to Create a Few Real Conversations	6
Chapter 3 - The First Sales Problem Is Reach	8
Chapter 4 - The Cold Call Has to Keep Earning Time	10
Chapter 5 - Talk Ratio Changes With the Job of the Conversation	12
Chapter 6 - Good Discovery Is Visible in the Buyer's Answers	14
Chapter 7 - A Booked Meeting Becomes Valuable When It Survives	16
Chapter 8 - The Demo Works When the Buyer Keeps Entering the Conversation	18
Chapter 9 - The Sale Progresses When the Conversation Produces a Commitment	19
Chapter 10 - What the Numbers Say About Outbound Sales Entering 2027	21
Chapter 11 - Reading Sales Metrics Together	22
Conclusion	23
Evidence and Source Notes	24
References	25

Page numbers exclude the cover.

Executive Summary

Start with an ordinary SDR day.

Bridge Group's 2025 study of 351 B2B companies found that the median SDR completed 112 activities a day: 44 phone calls, 41 emails, 19 LinkedIn activities, and 8 texts or other touches. Yet all of that visible activity produced only 4.1 quality conversations per day on average. That gap is one of the most useful ways to understand outbound sales. The working day may be filled with calls, emails, tasks, sequences, follow-ups, and CRM activity, but the scarce commercial event is still the moment when an actual buyer is present, listening, and willing to continue a conversation.

Gong's analysis of more than 300 million cold calls shows how sharply performance begins to separate even before the conversation develops. The average rep connected on 5.4% of dials, while top-quartile callers connected on 13.3%. Once a conversation began, the average rep converted 4.6% of those conversations into meetings, compared with 16.7% for the top quartile. These advantages compound. Gong's own illustration shows roughly 2 meetings from 800 monthly dials for the average rep versus 18 for a top-quartile rep. A weak outbound result can therefore come from two very different places: too few genuine opportunities to speak with buyers, or poor conversion once those opportunities appear.

The reach problem extends beyond rep skill. Cognism reported a 13.3% answered rate across its 2025 SDR cold calls, almost identical to the 14.4% answered rate on its warmer AE calls. Orum's research across more than one billion dials shows why answer rates can vary so widely. Connection rates change with seniority, job function, number quality, prior pickup history, list composition, and dialing method. In one broad cut of its data, individual contributors averaged around 5.3%, managers 4.9%, VPs 3.8%, and C-suite contacts about 4.0%, while selected functions and high-propensity numbers performed materially better. The salesperson's opportunity to sell is therefore shaped well before the opening line: by who is being called, how good the contact data is, and how intelligently the calling system is built.

Once somebody answers, the problem changes from reach to attention. Cognism's average SDR call lasted about 2 minutes. Orum reports that calls producing meetings lasted roughly 6 minutes, while calls that did not produce meetings were under a minute on average. Gong's earlier analysis of 90,380 connected outbound calls found successful calls averaging 5 minutes 50 seconds, compared with 3 minutes 14 seconds for unsuccessful calls. The common pattern is that strong cold calls keep earning time. The prospect continues because the conversation remains relevant enough to justify another minute.

The data also shows why sales stages should not share one universal conversation benchmark. Gong's cold-call work found successful calls at roughly 55% seller talk and 45% buyer talk, which suits a situation in which the seller must quickly create context and justify the interruption. Discovery behaves differently. Cognism's 2025 AE data showed an average seller talk share of 47.3%, with its strongest interactivity clustered around 45-55% seller talk. Product demos shift again. Gong's demo analysis found successful demos at 65% seller talk and 35% buyer talk, while unsuccessful demos were almost identical at 66% and 34%. The important difference was the rhythm of the exchange: successful demos had 21% more speaker switches per minute. The buyer kept returning to the conversation.

Questions follow the same pattern. Cognism's AEs averaged 40.5 questions per hour, and question rate was positively correlated with interactivity. Gong's more recent analysis of 326,000 calls found that won calls contained about 15-16 questions, while lost calls contained around 20. Together, these findings point toward a more useful understanding of discovery. Questions help create interaction, but the purpose of the question is the information it produces. A strong discovery conversation gives the buyer enough room to explain the situation in a way that changes what the seller understands and does next.

Meeting data shows why the funnel should continue past the calendar invite. Cognism recorded 39,679 booked meetings and 34,336 held meetings in its 2025 dataset, reporting an average held rate of 85.94%. Growth Cab's field study of 1,380 B2B meetings found a lower overall took-place rate of 69.6%, but its most useful result was the effect of delay. Meetings scheduled within two days took place 85.4% of the time; when the meeting sat more than 30 days into the future, the rate fell to 58.5%. The distance between the initial conversation and the next meeting therefore carries information about the strength and durability of the buyer's commitment.

At the AE stage, current conversation data points toward balanced dialogue, meaningful buyer narratives, disciplined seller explanations, and clear progression. Cognism's 110 AEs averaged an 8.15/10 interactivity score, a longest AE monologue of 86.5 seconds, and a longest buyer segment of 95.3 seconds. Interactivity deteriorated sharply once seller monologues moved beyond roughly 90 seconds. Gong's demo research reaches a related conclusion: successful demos were not simply shorter or quieter. They contained more interaction, shorter uninterrupted stretches of seller speech, and more time devoted to what would happen next. Winning demos spent 12.7% more time on next steps.

The final stage extends beyond the conversation itself. Gong's analysis of 1.8 million new-business opportunities closed in 2024 found that 77% involved multiple buyer contacts, winning deals had twice as many buyer contacts as unsuccessful deals, and strategic enterprise opportunities averaged 17 contacts. Larger B2B decisions are collective. A good call or demo becomes commercially meaningful when it creates movement inside the account and brings the seller closer to the group that can actually make the decision.

Taken together, the data shows outbound selling as a sequence of connected stages. Activity creates opportunities to reach people. Reach creates opportunities to hold attention. Attention creates meetings. Meetings create opportunities to understand the buyer. Discovery creates the conditions for a relevant demo. A good demo creates a concrete next step. A serious opportunity begins to spread through the buying group. The useful benchmark changes at each stage because the job being performed changes with it.

CHAPTER 1

Why This Report Exists

Outbound sales is one of the easiest business functions to measure badly.

A new company can begin calling prospects almost immediately. An established company can hire SDRs, purchase contact data, deploy a dialer, add email sequences, create a CRM pipeline, and generate a large volume of activity within a short period of time. The resulting dashboards often look reassuringly precise. Calls are counted. Meetings are counted. Talk time is measured. Conversion percentages appear beside rep names. Discovery calls and demos accumulate in the CRM. Once enough numbers are visible, it becomes tempting to assume the sales process itself is understood.

For businesses that depend on outbound contact-driven sales, that assumption can become expensive. A team can make hundreds of calls and still have a reach problem rather than a sales problem. It can produce a healthy number of conversations and still have a conversion problem. It can book meetings that rarely happen, or hold meetings that AEs do not consider qualified. An AE can run a polished discovery call without learning anything important, then deliver a technically strong demo that creates no concrete movement in the account. At every stage, visible activity can continue while commercial progress weakens.

This report is written for businesses that need to understand that distinction. It is relevant to new companies building their first outbound motion, established businesses trying to improve an existing SDR or AE function, founder-led teams that still sell directly, and sales leaders responsible for prospecting, discovery, demos, or handoff between roles. The underlying sales model may vary considerably. A software company selling to mid-market buyers will not have the same call volume or sales cycle as a recruitment firm, an outsourced-services company, a healthcare vendor, a professional-services firm, or an enterprise technology provider. What they share is a dependence on direct contact with potential buyers and a need to know where that contact is succeeding or failing.

That is where benchmark data becomes useful. Its purpose is not to give every company the same target. It gives management a reference point for asking better questions about its own process.

If answer rates are weak, the immediate priority may be contact data, list design, persona selection, or calling infrastructure. Coaching objection handling will not solve a list that rarely reaches a human being. If answer rates are healthy but conversations rarely produce meetings, the problem moves closer to the call itself: the opening, relevance, positioning, objection handling, or the quality of the meeting ask. If meetings are booked but often missed, the team needs to look at commitment, scheduling delay, confirmation, and whether the prospect had enough reason to attend. If meetings are held but rarely become opportunities, qualification and handoff deserve attention. If discovery calls produce shallow answers, the problem may sit in questioning and listening. If demos are completed but deals stall, the issue may be interaction, relevance, stakeholder access, or the absence of a concrete next step.

The value of this report is therefore diagnostic. The data helps separate one kind of sales problem from another.

That distinction matters particularly for smaller and growing businesses because resources are limited. A founder may have only one SDR. A small company may be deciding whether to hire another rep, buy better data, change its dialer, rewrite the script, alter its qualification criteria, or spend more time coaching AEs. Without a clear understanding of where the funnel is failing, it is easy to invest in the wrong solution. More activity can make a weak list produce more failed attempts. More leads can feed a poor conversion process. More demos can increase workload without increasing opportunity creation.

The report also helps businesses avoid treating familiar sales advice as universal law. There is no single correct number of calls per day, because sales motions differ. There is no universal connect rate, because markets, personas, contact data, and geographies differ. A cold call and a discovery call should not have the same talk ratio because they perform different jobs. A product demo naturally requires more seller explanation than discovery, while still depending on buyer participation. Even question count becomes misleading when it is separated from the quality of the buyer's answers.

For that reason, the report follows the sales process in order. It begins with activity and reach, then moves through the cold conversation, meeting creation, meeting attendance, discovery, demo behavior, next steps, and buying-group participation. Each section asks what the available data tells us about that stage and what management should pay attention to before moving to the next one.

The aim is practical. A business should be able to finish this report with a clearer understanding of where to look when outbound sales feels busy but underperforms, what a strong signal looks like at different stages of the process, and which metrics deserve to be connected rather than viewed in isolation.

The central idea is simple: the sales process becomes easier to improve once the business can see where buyer commitment is being gained, weakened, or lost.

CHAPTER 2

The SDR Day Is Mostly an Attempt to Create a Few Real Conversations

The modern SDR dashboard is full of activity. Calls, emails, LinkedIn touches, tasks, sequences, voicemails, follow-ups, and CRM updates can occupy the entire working day. Bridge Group's 2025 data puts a useful scale around that workload. Across 351 B2B companies, the median SDR completed 112 activities per day, including 44 phone calls, 41 emails, 19 LinkedIn activities, and 8 texts or other touches.

The more revealing figure appears beside it: 4.1 quality conversations per day.

That means a large amount of visible sales work is being performed in order to create a small number of moments in which a buyer is actually available for a substantive exchange.

Phone-centric teams in the same study averaged 56 dials and 4.6 quality conversations, compared with 28 dials and 3.4 quality conversations for email-centric teams. The comparison does not make a universal case for one channel, but it makes the underlying economics of prospecting clear.

Activity is abundant inside the sales day; meaningful buyer access is comparatively scarce.

This changes how SDR productivity should be interpreted. If one rep makes 60 calls and another makes 40, the first appears more productive on an activity leaderboard. If the first produces two legitimate buyer conversations and the second produces six, the commercial picture looks very different. Call volume still matters because opportunities to connect have to come from somewhere, but the activity number has to be read alongside the conversations it creates.

Meeting targets reinforce the same point. Bridge Group reports a median monthly Stage 0 held-meeting quota of 10, with a median Stage 1 Converted quota of 6. These are quota structures rather than observed conversion rates, so they should not be divided to manufacture a funnel benchmark. Their value is conceptual: companies already distinguish a meeting that occurs from a meeting that progresses into an accepted next stage.

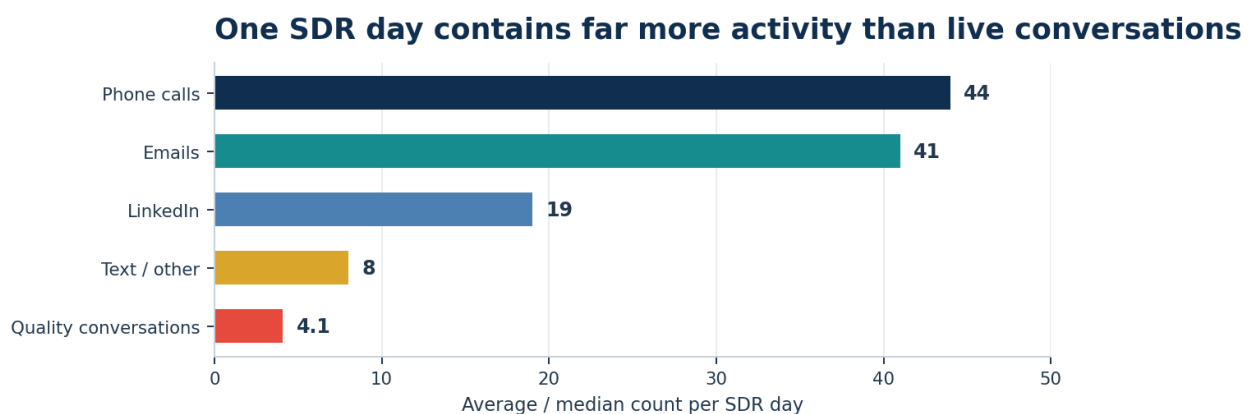


Figure 1. An SDR day contains far more activity than live buyer conversations.

Source: The Bridge Group, SDR Models, Motions & Metrics (2025). Quality conversations are shown as a separate outcome measure and are not part of the 112-activity sum.

That distinction should shape how an SDR function is managed. A booked meeting can later prove to be poorly targeted, weakly qualified, badly timed, or based on a problem that does not justify further sales effort. If the SDR is rewarded primarily for the calendar event, there is a built-in incentive to lower the threshold for what counts as success. The AE then inherits a busier calendar without necessarily receiving better pipeline.

The stronger question is how many legitimate buyer conversations the SDR creates and how many

survive into the next stage. Activity supports that outcome. It should not be allowed to substitute for it.

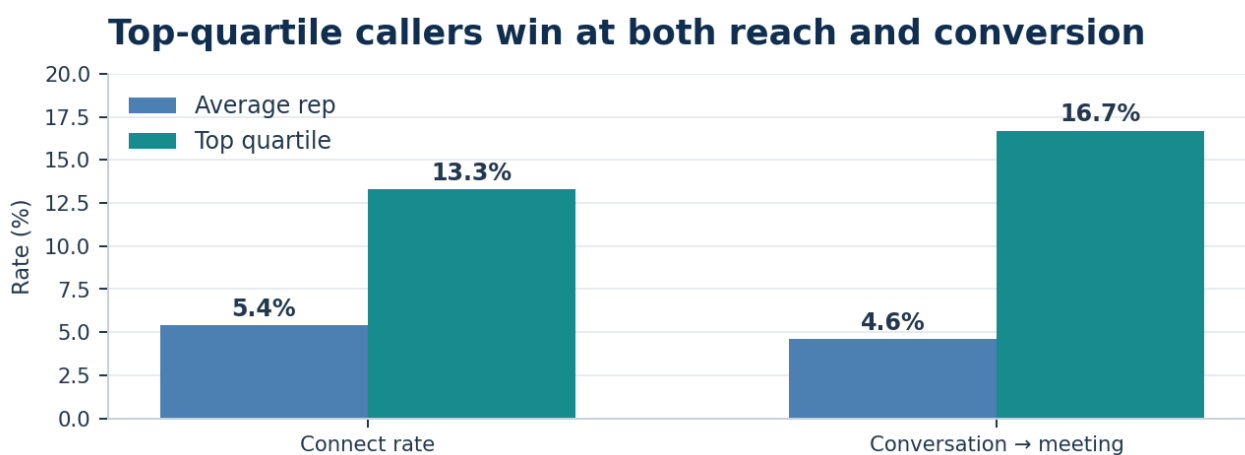
CHAPTER 3

The First Sales Problem Is Reach

Before a team worries about objection handling, discovery, tonality, or persuasion, it has to deal with the fact that most cold calls never become conversations.

Gong's analysis of more than 300 million calls found that the average rep connected on 5.4% of dials, which works out to roughly one live connect for every 19 attempts. Top-quartile callers connected on 13.3%, or about one in eight. The performance gap becomes much larger once conversion is added. The average rep converted 4.6% of live conversations into meetings, while top-quartile reps converted 16.7%.

Those differences multiply rather than simply add. Gong's illustration using 800 monthly dials produces roughly 2 meetings for an average rep and 18 for a top-quartile rep. One group gets substantially more opportunities to speak with buyers and extracts substantially more meetings from each opportunity.



Gong illustration at 800 monthly dials: ~2 meetings for an average rep vs ~18 for a top-quartile rep.

Figure 2. Top-quartile callers outperform at both reach and live-conversation conversion.

Source: Gong / 30MPC analysis of 300M+ cold calls. Connect rate and conversation-to-meeting set rate use different denominators.

That gives managers an immediate way to separate two very different problems. When connect rate is poor, the rep may be starved of genuine selling opportunities. When connect rate is healthy but meeting conversion is weak, the rep is receiving chances and failing to turn them into progression. The first problem points toward data, targeting, call infrastructure, persona selection, and dialing strategy. The second points much more directly toward the conversation.

Orum's research across more than one billion dials shows how much the reach layer can move before the rep says anything. Across one broad seniority cut, individual contributors connected at about 5.3%, managers at 4.9%, VPs at 3.8%, and C-suite contacts at 4.0%. Function-level results varied further. Sales individual contributors reached about 7.6% in one analysis, while administrative functions such as reception, office management, and executive-assistant roles were also among the more reachable groups.

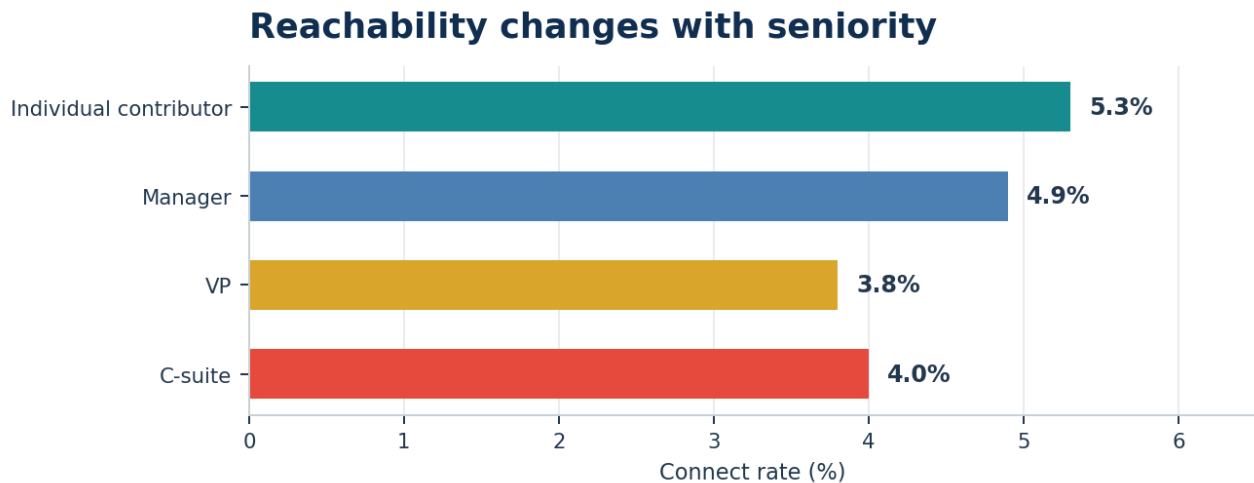


Figure 3. Average connect rates vary by prospect seniority.

Source: Orum, State of Cold Calling and related analyses based on 1B+ outbound dials. Function-specific rates can differ materially from these broad seniority averages.

The practical implication is that a call list is part of the sales system rather than a neutral input. Two SDRs can make the same number of calls into very different opportunity environments. One may have verified direct dials for reachable people in a well-defined segment; another may be calling poor mobile data into a difficult seniority band. Their activity totals may look comparable even though the probability underneath each dial is not.

Cognism's 2025 operation makes the same point from another direction. Its SDR cold calls achieved a 13.3% answered rate, almost the same as the 14.4% answered rate on warmer AE calls. Cognism naturally emphasizes the role of contact-data quality because that is part of its business, but the operating result still demonstrates that cold reachability has a much wider range than a single industry average suggests.

Orum's selected high-propensity "Hot Number" cohorts push this further. When the system identified numbers with a prior history of being answered, observed connect rates often moved into the 15-25% range, with some persona cuts above 24%. Those numbers are selected precisely because previous behavior indicates a higher likelihood of pickup, which is why they are useful. The operation creates an advantage by becoming more intelligent about which number deserves the next dial.

Dialing technology creates a related tradeoff. Orum reports that parallel dialing generated more meetings per hour than power dialing across the seniority groups it analyzed. For individual contributors, parallel dialing produced about 0.88 meetings per hour, compared with 0.62 through power dialing. Yet power dialing produced a higher meeting yield from each connection, at roughly 6.4% per connection versus 3.8% for parallel dialing. One method emphasizes coverage and throughput; the other gives more attention to each live connection. The correct choice depends on the economics of the sales motion, the value of the account, and how scarce a live conversation is.

Callbacks show why even an unanswered dial can remain part of the sales process. Orum found that 75% of callbacks arrived within 1.75 hours and 91% within 24 hours. In its analysis, an inbound callback was four times more likely to book a meeting, and around half became conversations lasting more than a minute. A dashboard that records the original call as a failed attempt and never links it to the return call misses part of the commercial effect.

The broader lesson is straightforward. Reach is a management problem as much as a rep problem. Before judging what happens inside the conversation, the business needs to know whether its salespeople are receiving enough legitimate opportunities to have one.

CHAPTER 4

The Cold Call Has to Keep Earning Time

A cold call begins with almost no commitment from the buyer. The prospect did not schedule the interaction and was doing something else before the phone rang. The seller therefore has to create enough relevance very quickly for the conversation to continue.

Call duration is useful because it captures that survival.

Cognism's average SDR call lasted about 2 minutes across its 2025 operation. Orum reports that calls producing booked meetings lasted roughly 6 minutes on average, while calls that did not produce meetings were under a minute. Gong's earlier analysis of 90,380 connected outbound calls found the same pattern: successful calls averaged 5 minutes 50 seconds, compared with 3 minutes 14 seconds for unsuccessful calls.

The important part of these numbers is the progression they represent. A strong cold call keeps receiving permission to continue. The opening earns another thirty seconds. The explanation earns a question. The question produces an answer. The answer creates enough relevance for the seller to continue. By the time the call reaches several minutes, it has stopped behaving like a brief interruption and begun to function as a commercial conversation.

That is why the opening carries so much weight. Gong's 2024 analysis of more than 300 million calls found substantial differences between common approaches. "Did I catch you at a bad time?" was associated with a 2.15% success rate. "How's your day going?" was associated with 7.6%. Permission-based opening language produced 11.18%, while an opener asking whether the prospect had heard the company's name produced 11.24%.

The pattern is more useful than memorizing the lines. Stronger approaches establish context quickly enough for the prospect to understand what kind of conversation is beginning and whether it deserves attention. The opening has a narrow job: it has to prevent the call from ending before there is enough information for the prospect to judge relevance.

Objection data adds another useful layer. Gong's 300-million-call analysis found that the five most common objections accounted for 74% of observed objections. It grouped the broader set into 49.5% dismissive objections, 42.6% situational objections, and 7.9% existing-solution objections. The recurring forms are familiar: lack of interest, requests to call later or send information, budget constraints, lack of capacity, poor fit, current providers, and contract lock-in.

This concentration has practical consequences for training. A rep does not need an enormous library of clever rebuttals. Most teams can prepare deeply for a relatively small number of recurring situations. The harder part is diagnosing what the prospect means when the same phrase can serve different purposes. "Send me some information" can indicate genuine interest, mild curiosity, or a polite attempt to end the conversation. The words alone do not decide which one is happening.

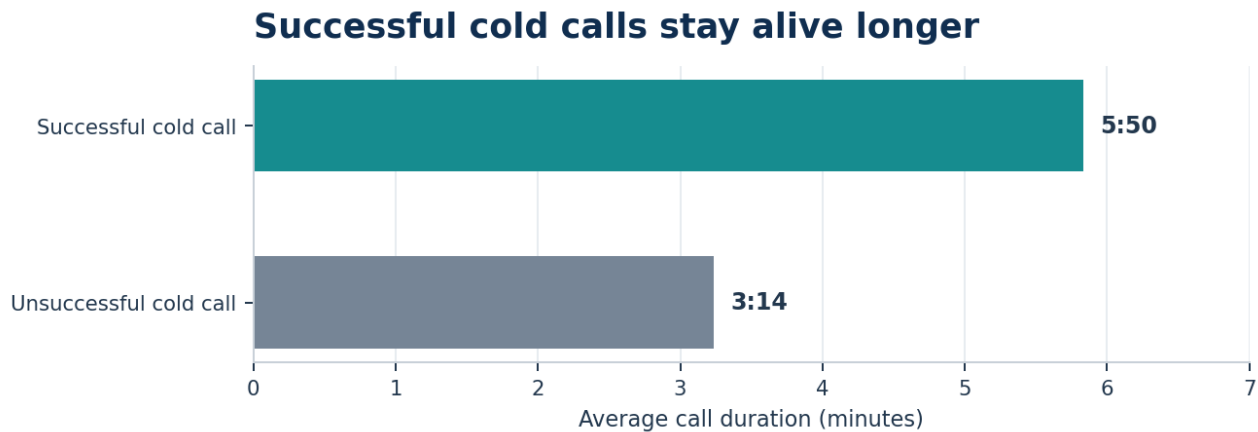


Figure 4. Cold calls that succeed tend to stay alive longer.

Sources: Gong legacy analysis of 90,380 connected outbound calls; Orum current platform analysis provides a similar directional pattern.

Scripts are therefore most useful as preparation for recurring terrain. They help the rep recognize familiar objections, explain the proposition clearly, and avoid improvising basic language under pressure. Once the buyer begins responding, judgment becomes more important. The rep has to listen to what is actually happening in this call rather than continue mechanically through the version that was written before the phone rang.

CHAPTER 5

Talk Ratio Changes With the Job of the Conversation

Sales coaching often reduces talk-to-listen behavior to one preferred ratio. The available data is more useful than that because it shows the balance changing as the sales process moves from prospecting to discovery to demonstration.

In Gong's earlier cold-call analysis, successful calls were approximately 55% seller talk and 45% buyer talk, while unsuccessful calls were only 42% seller talk. The result makes sense when the work of the cold call is considered. The buyer has not yet agreed to a discovery process. The seller has to create enough context, explain why the conversation may matter, and establish a reason to continue. Some of the early conversational burden necessarily sits with the person who initiated the interruption.

Discovery changes the job. By that stage, the buyer has already granted time. The seller needs information about the account, the problem, the current process, the consequences of the problem, the decision environment, and the reason anything might change. Cognism's 2025 AE data showed an average seller talk share of 47.3%, with its highest interactivity clustered around 45-55% seller talk. The conversation becomes more balanced because the buyer now possesses much of the information the seller needs.

Product demos shift the balance again. Gong's demo analysis found successful demos at roughly 65% seller talk and 35% buyer talk, while unsuccessful demos were almost identical at 66% and 34%. The seller naturally occupies more airtime because the product has to be shown and explained. The overall ratio, however, did very little to distinguish the outcome.

Interaction did.

Successful demos contained 21% more speaker switches per minute, and the switching rate increased by 36% in the second half of successful demos. The buyer kept re-entering the exchange as the demonstration progressed.

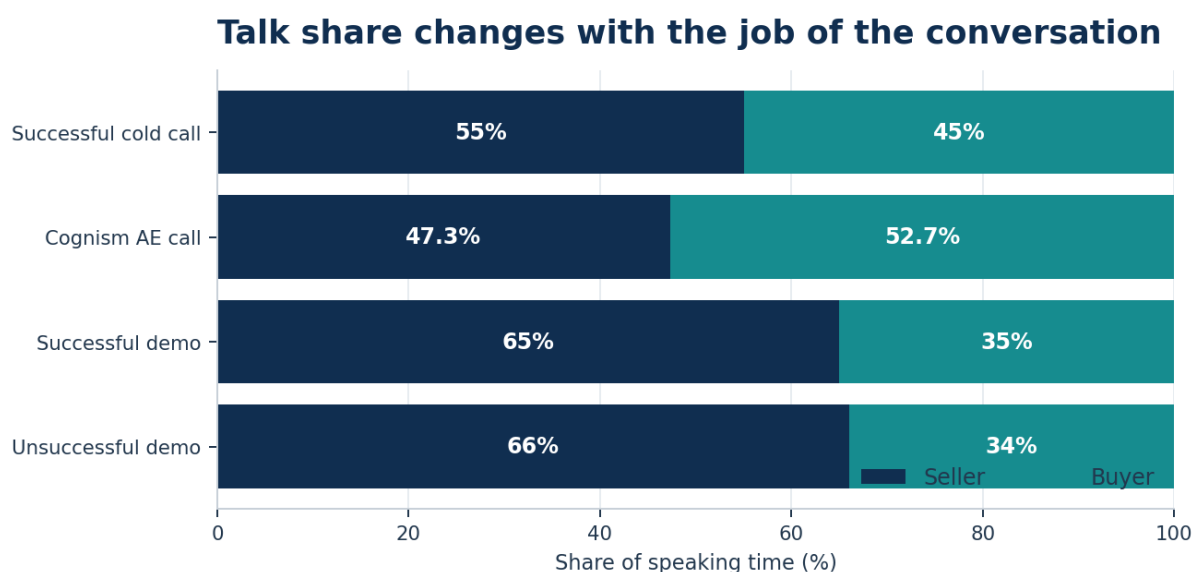


Figure 5. Talk share changes as the job of the conversation changes.

Sources: Gong cold-call and product-demo analyses; Cognism State of Outbound 2026. Populations and call stages differ, so the values are stage-specific rather than one universal benchmark.

This is the more useful way to read talk ratio. Seller airtime should match the work required by the stage, while the buyer remains active inside the conversation. A salesperson can speak for 65% of a demo and still run an interactive meeting when explanations are broken up by buyer questions, reactions, clarifications, and context. The same 65% becomes a weak experience when it arrives as long uninterrupted sections while the buyer waits for the presentation to finish.

The benchmark should therefore be interpreted as conversational structure rather than a universal listening rule. The sales stages require different amounts of explanation, but none of them benefit from losing the buyer's active participation.

CHAPTER 6

Good Discovery Is Visible in the Buyer's Answers

Question count is one of the easiest conversation metrics to misunderstand.

Cognism's 110 AEs averaged 40.5 questions per hour, and question rate correlated positively with the company's interactivity score at $r = +0.53$. More questions, up to a point, create more opportunities for the buyer to participate. Gong's newer analysis of 326,000 calls adds an important qualification to that pattern: won calls contained roughly 15-16 questions, while lost calls contained around 20.

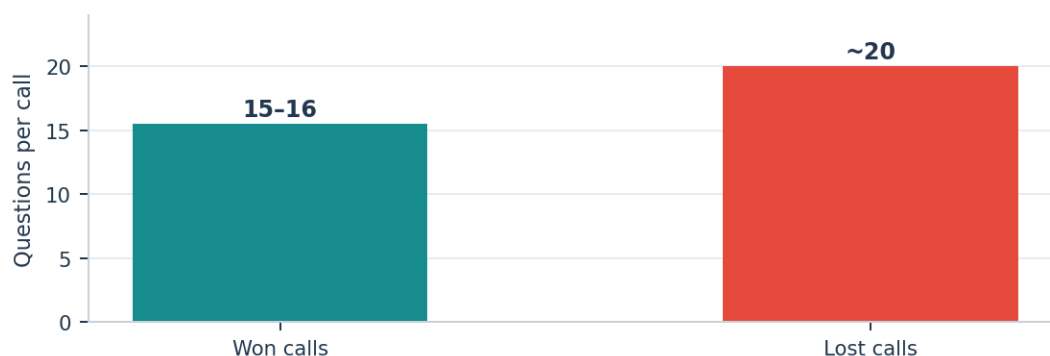
These findings become much easier to reconcile once the purpose of the question is considered. A discovery call improves when the seller asks enough to uncover the account, but the commercial value lies in the quality of the buyer's response rather than the size of the question count.

A salesperson can gather twenty factual answers without learning why the buyer would change anything. Questions about the current process, team size, technology stack, renewal date, or ownership may all be necessary, but they can leave the core commercial issue untouched. The conversation becomes more valuable when the buyer begins explaining what happens when the current process fails, who feels the consequences, what has already been tried, why the issue matters now, what internal constraints exist, and what would have to happen for the problem to become a priority.

Cognism's buyer-speaking data helps make that visible. Its AEs recorded an average longest buyer segment of 95.3 seconds. A buyer speaking uninterrupted for more than a minute and a half is usually doing more than filling a CRM field. The buyer is describing a sequence, an internal problem, a history, a failed attempt, a priority, or a constraint. Those narratives give the seller material that can shape qualification, positioning, the demo, and the next step.

The rhythm of strong discovery therefore matters as much as the quantity of questions. A useful question produces an answer, the answer creates a follow-up, and the seller allows the buyer enough space to develop the point. The conversation gradually becomes more specific because each response changes what the seller asks next.

More questions did not correspond to more wins



Gong 2025: ~326,000 calls of at least 10 minutes. Cognism separately found question rate positively related to interactivity.

Figure 6. More questions did not correspond to more won calls in Gong's 2025 analysis.

Sources: Gong analysis of ~326,000 calls of at least ten minutes; Cognism separately found question rate positively related to interactivity among its AEs.

Seller monologues can interrupt that process. Cognism's AEs averaged a longest seller monologue of 86.5 seconds, and interactivity fell sharply once AE monologues moved beyond roughly 90 seconds. Complex products sometimes require a detailed explanation, so a long turn is not automatically a problem. The concern is what happens when explanation becomes the dominant mode of the

meeting and the buyer spends increasingly long periods as an audience.

This also exposes the weakness of relying on a perfect 50/50 talk ratio. A salesperson can speak for five uninterrupted minutes, then allow the buyer five uninterrupted minutes, and finish with mathematically balanced airtime. The call can still feel awkward and unresponsive. Sequence carries information that the aggregate does not.

The most useful discovery metrics therefore move closer to the quality of exchange: whether the buyer gives substantial answers, whether the seller follows those answers, whether the conversation becomes more specific, and whether the resulting information changes the next sales action.

CHAPTER 7

A Booked Meeting Becomes Valuable When It Survives

The SDR books the meeting, the calendar invitation goes out, and the dashboard records a conversion. The next question is whether the commitment survives long enough for the meeting to happen.

Cognism's 2025 dataset included 39,679 booked meetings and 34,336 held meetings, with the company reporting an average held rate of 85.94%. Growth Cab's field study of 1,380 B2B meetings found a lower overall took-place rate of 69.6%. The difference is unsurprising because the populations, geographies, sales motions, and operating systems are different. What is more useful is the way attendance changed with delay.

Growth Cab found that 85.4% of meetings scheduled within 0-2 days took place. The rate fell to 77.6% at 3-7 days, 70.1% at 8-14 days, 60.3% at 15-30 days, and 58.5% when the meeting was more than 30 days away.

The calendar is therefore carrying information about buyer commitment. A prospect willing to continue the conversation this week is behaving differently from one who agrees vaguely to something a month from now. Time creates room for urgency to fade, competing priorities to appear, the original problem to become less salient, or a polite yes to reveal itself as weak interest.

That does not mean every meeting should be forced into the next forty-eight hours. Senior buyers have crowded calendars, enterprise deals have more participants, and some processes legitimately require delay. The useful management question is whether the scheduling gap is consistent with the account and whether the business understands what happens to attendance as that gap widens.

This stage also reveals one of the largest gaps in public sales benchmarking. There is abundant data on dials, connects, meetings booked, and meetings held. Reliable current public benchmarks become much harder to find for the stages immediately after attendance: held meeting to AE acceptance, AE acceptance to qualified opportunity, disqualification reasons, handoff quality, or discovery that has to be repeated because the SDR's information was poor.

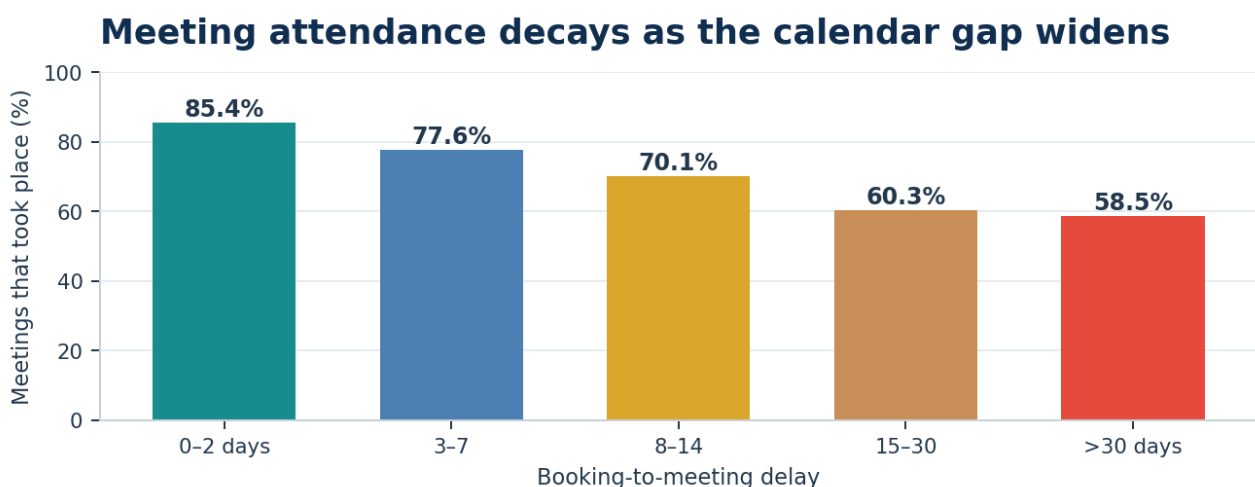


Figure 7. Meeting attendance declines as the booking-to-meeting gap widens.

Source: Growth Cab, 1,380 booked B2B meetings across 25 clients, September 2024-September 2026.

That missing middle matters because a full calendar can still produce weak pipeline. The SDR can persuade prospects to attend without creating the right kind of meeting, and an AE can spend much

of the week discovering that those meetings should never have progressed. The strongest internal measurement therefore continues beyond the booking and the attendance. It asks whether the meeting deserved to become an opportunity.

For a business building or repairing an outbound function, that is an important point of focus. If the organization measures only meetings booked, it may optimize for calendar creation. If it connects booked, held, accepted, and qualified stages, it can see whether SDR activity is producing commercially useful work.

CHAPTER 8

The Demo Works When the Buyer Keeps Entering the Conversation

A product demo creates a natural temptation to turn the meeting into a presentation. The seller has a screen to share, a product to show, features to explain, differentiators to cover, and a limited amount of time. It is easy for the meeting to become polished while the buyer gradually becomes passive.

Gong's analysis of 67,149 recorded sales demos provides a useful way to see the difference. Successful demos averaged 47 minutes, compared with 36 minutes for unsuccessful demos, but the longer meeting was not simply a longer pitch. Overall talk ratios were almost identical: successful demos were approximately 65% seller and 35% buyer, while unsuccessful demos were 66% seller and 34% buyer.

The separation appeared in interaction. Successful demos contained 21% more speaker switches per minute, and the speaker-switch rate increased by 36% in the second half of successful demos. As the meeting progressed, the buyer became more involved.

That is what a relevant demo should begin to look like. The seller may initially establish context and show the central workflow. As the buyer recognizes applications to the real environment, questions become more specific. The discussion moves toward implementation, edge cases, integrations, permissions, reporting, process differences, or the practical effect on the buyer's team. The product stops being an object on the seller's screen and starts being evaluated inside the buyer's world.

Uninterrupted seller speech works against that transition. In unsuccessful demos, Gong observed seller monologues reaching 106 seconds, while the analysis reported no closed deal containing an uninterrupted pitch longer than 76 seconds. The precise second count is less useful than the behavioral pattern. When the seller speaks for a long stretch without receiving anything back, the seller loses information about whether the buyer understands, cares, disagrees, or has already mentally moved on.

A separate Gong analysis of 121,828 web-based sales meetings found that sales decks in won deals averaged 9.1 minutes, compared with 11.4 minutes in lost deals. That finding fits neatly with the longer 47-minute successful demo. A strong sales meeting can last longer while the formal pitch occupies less of it. The extra time belongs to dialogue, questions, product exploration, commercial context, and planning what happens next.

Pricing followed a similar pattern in Gong's demo research. Successful demos tended to reach pricing around the 38-46 minute point, while unsuccessful demos showed less consistent timing and spent 8% more time discussing price. The useful interpretation is that price becomes easier to evaluate once enough relevance has been established. When the buyer understands the problem being solved and how the product fits the environment, price becomes one element of the decision. When that context is weak, price can easily become the whole discussion.

For managers reviewing demos, the strongest question is therefore not how polished the product presentation looked. It is whether buyer participation increased as the demo became more relevant. That is the point where demonstration turns into evaluation.

CHAPTER 9

The Sale Progresses When the Conversation Produces a Commitment

A good meeting can still go nowhere.

The buyer can be engaged, the questions can be thoughtful, the demo can be relevant, and the prospect can leave saying that the solution looks interesting. If nothing concrete happens afterward, the sales process has not moved very far.

Gong's analysis of 28,833 closed deals found that the fastest-closing deals spent 53% more time discussing next steps during the first meeting than slower deals. It also found that 26% of introductory meetings did not discuss next steps at all, with substantially weaker close rates when that discussion was absent.

The commercial meaning is straightforward. Interest becomes more valuable as it is converted into a specific commitment.

There is a large difference between a seller promising to send information and both sides agreeing to meet again at a defined time. The commitment becomes stronger when an owner is identified, a deliverable is clear, another stakeholder is invited, data is exchanged, a technical review is scheduled, procurement begins, or the buyer completes an agreed action before the next conversation.

That is why the closing minutes of a discovery call or demo deserve as much attention as the opening. They reveal whether the value created during the conversation was strong enough for the buyer to invest something additional. The investment may be time, internal access, information, effort, or political capital inside the organization.

For larger B2B opportunities, one of the strongest signs of that progression is stakeholder expansion. Gong's analysis of 1.8 million new-business opportunities closed in 2024 found that 77% of deals involved multiple buyer contacts, winning deals contained twice as many buyer contacts as unsuccessful deals, and strategic enterprise opportunities averaged 17 contacts.

Serious B2B opportunities spread beyond one contact



Gong analysis of 1.8 million new-business opportunities closed in 2024.

Figure 8. Larger B2B opportunities typically spread beyond one buyer contact.

Source: Gong analysis of 1.8 million new-business opportunities closed in 2024.

That picture reflects the reality of complex buying. The person who initially likes the product may

not own the budget. The budget owner may need technical approval. Technical teams may need security or integration review. Procurement, finance, legal, operations, end users, and executive sponsors can all become relevant at different stages. The decision exists across a group rather than inside one relationship.

This changes the role of the AE. A strong conversation with one champion is useful, but the opportunity becomes more durable when the seller gains access to the broader decision system. The salesperson has to help the account carry the case internally, involve the right people, resolve different categories of concern, and build enough shared understanding for the organization to act.

The strongest next step is therefore often the one that expands the buying process. A second meeting with the same person may move the deal forward. A second meeting that brings in the person responsible for implementation, budget, or executive approval can change the structure of the opportunity.

At that point, the sales call has done more than produce a positive reaction. It has changed what the buyer organization is doing.

CHAPTER 10

What the Numbers Say About Outbound Sales Entering 2027

Taken together, the datasets describe a sales process made up of distinct problems that occur in sequence.

The SDR begins with an activity problem because enough attempts are needed to create opportunities for contact. Bridge Group's 112 daily activities shows how much work can sit at the top of that process. The next challenge is reach. Gong's 5.4% average connect rate and 13.3% top-quartile rate, Cognism's 13.3% answered rate, and Orum's wide persona-level variation show how much of the funnel is shaped by contact data, list quality, number selection, seniority, and dialing strategy before the conversation begins.

Once a buyer answers, attention becomes the scarce resource. Meeting-producing calls last substantially longer because the buyer keeps participating. The opening, reason for the call, relevance, and handling of predictable objections determine whether the conversation earns enough time to develop.

The next challenge is conversion. Top-quartile reps in Gong's data do not simply reach more people; they convert a much larger share of those conversations into meetings. Reach and live-call execution therefore reinforce each other, which is why teams with similar activity levels can produce dramatically different meeting output.

The booked meeting introduces another form of risk. It has to survive. Cognism's strong held rate and Growth Cab's booking-delay curve show that the commitment can weaken before the next conversation even begins. The calendar itself becomes part of the sales process because the distance between meetings affects whether the momentum survives.

Discovery then changes what success looks like. The seller already has the buyer's time and must use it to understand the account. Balanced participation, substantial buyer answers, relevant follow-up questions, and controlled monologues become more useful indicators than raw question volume. The conversation has to produce information strong enough to shape qualification and the next action.

The demo changes the conversational job again. More seller airtime is expected, but interaction remains critical. The best evidence suggests that a strong demo keeps pulling the buyer back into the conversation, increasingly connects the product to the buyer's environment, and finishes with enough clarity to create another commitment.

Finally, the opportunity has to spread. A serious B2B sale eventually involves more than one enthusiastic individual. Stakeholder expansion, access to different decision roles, and concrete buyer actions show that the sale is moving through the organization rather than remaining contained inside a single relationship.

This is the most useful way to read the benchmarks entering 2027. They are not a universal scorecard. They are reference points for locating the stage where momentum is being lost.

A company with weak connect rates should not begin by coaching demos. A company with strong connect rates and weak meeting conversion should not solve the problem by buying another list. A company with high booked-meeting volume and poor attendance should not celebrate the SDR dashboard. An AE team with strong meetings but weak opportunity progression should examine what happens inside discovery, the demo, and the final ten minutes of the conversation. The data becomes valuable when it narrows the problem.

CHAPTER 11

Reading Sales Metrics Together

Traditional sales metrics remain useful, but they become much more informative when they are connected.

Calls per day show whether the team is generating enough attempts for its chosen motion. Connect rate shows whether those attempts are reaching people. Conversation duration helps reveal whether live calls end immediately or develop into meaningful exchanges. Meeting conversion shows whether the rep can turn attention into continuation. Held rate shows whether the commitment survives the calendar gap. Discovery metrics reveal how the buyer participates and what information enters the process. Demo interaction shows whether product explanation is becoming buyer evaluation. Next-step and stakeholder metrics show whether the opportunity is beginning to move through the organization.

Read in isolation, each number can create a false sense of certainty. A high call count can coexist with poor data. A strong connect rate can coexist with weak sales conversations. Long calls can waste time. A balanced talk ratio can conceal long monologues. A high question count can produce shallow discovery. A full meeting calendar can contain weak commitments. A polished demo can leave the opportunity exactly where it started.

Read together, the same metrics become diagnostic.

A sales leader should be able to move through the process and ask: Are we generating enough attempts for the motion we chose? Are those attempts reaching the intended people? When people answer, do they stay? When they stay, do they agree to continue? Do booked meetings occur? Do held meetings deserve qualification? Does discovery produce information that changes the sales approach? Does the demo become more interactive as relevance increases? Does the meeting finish with a concrete next action? Does the opportunity expand to the people required for a real decision?

This is also a more useful way for smaller companies to decide where to spend money. Better data is valuable when reach is weak. More rep coaching is valuable when live conversations convert poorly. Better scheduling and confirmation matter when meetings disappear between booking and attendance. Discovery coaching matters when buyer answers remain shallow. Demo coaching matters when the buyer becomes passive. Account planning matters when opportunities remain single-threaded.

The business does not need every sophisticated metric on day one. It needs enough connected measurement to know what kind of problem it is looking at.

Conclusion

The most useful lesson from the current sales data is that outbound performance is built through a sequence of increasingly meaningful buyer commitments.

The process begins with an attempt to reach someone. When the prospect answers, the seller has a brief opportunity to earn attention. If the conversation remains relevant, the buyer grants more time. A meeting extends that permission into the future. Discovery allows the buyer to disclose enough of the commercial situation for the seller to understand whether there is something worth solving. A demo allows the buyer to evaluate the solution inside that situation. A concrete next step turns interest into action. Broader stakeholder participation turns one person's interest into an organizational buying process.

Each stage can weaken independently, which is why high activity can coexist with weak pipeline. A rep can call enough people and still reach too few of them. The team can connect successfully and fail to convert conversations. Meetings can be booked and then disappear. Discovery can be busy but shallow. Demos can be polished and passive. A buyer can be enthusiastic without creating any internal movement.

The advantage of current sales data is that these failures are becoming easier to separate. Call recording, transcription, CRM linkage, dialing platforms, and conversation intelligence allow businesses to observe more of what happens between the first attempt and the final commercial outcome.

For a company entering 2027, that visibility should change how sales performance is managed. The objective is not to copy an industry average as closely as possible. It is to understand what each stage is supposed to produce, compare the company's own performance against credible external reference points, and focus attention where buyer commitment is actually being lost.

When people do not answer, examine reach. When they answer and leave quickly, examine relevance and the opening. When conversations happen but meetings do not, examine conversion. When meetings are booked but fail to occur, examine the strength and timing of the commitment. When discovery produces shallow information, examine the questions and the space given to the buyer. When demos become one-way presentations, examine interaction. When meetings end without a defined action, examine progression. When opportunities remain dependent on one contact, examine access to the buying group.

The path from attempted contact to a real buying decision becomes manageable when the business can see where that path is breaking.

That is what the benchmark data is most useful for.

Evidence and Source Notes

This report draws primarily on four types of evidence.

Bridge Group provides multi-company operating benchmarks. Its 2025 SDR study covered 351 B2B companies, and its 2026 AE study covered 158 B2B companies. These studies are strongest for activity, quota, staffing, ramp, and operating-model comparisons.

Gong provides large-scale call and opportunity behavior. Its recent cold-call work covers 300 million or more calls, its 2025 talk-ratio analysis covers roughly 326,000 calls of at least ten minutes, and its buying-group analysis covers 1.8 million new-business opportunities closed in 2024. Older Gong studies provide the most detailed public data located on discovery and product-demo behavior.

Orum provides platform-scale dialing behavior derived from more than one billion outbound dials and more than eight million verified job titles. Its data is particularly useful for reachability, persona differences, dialing methods, callbacks, and number selection.

Cognism provides a detailed operating case study from its own 2025 outbound organization, including roughly 450,000 calls, 39,679 booked meetings, and transcript-level AE behavior across 110 AEs.

Growth Cab contributes a smaller field dataset of 1,380 B2B meetings across 25 clients between 2024 and 2026, with especially useful data on booking delay and meeting attendance.

The report uses these datasets as comparative evidence for observed behavior. Where older Gong research is used for detailed demo and discovery mechanics, it is retained because the public datasets remain unusually large and granular for those specific questions.

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