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TURN UP THE VOLUME

Rethinking Where and How Customer Voice Enhances Experiences

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MARKETERS ARE LISTENING.

Marketers are listening, some quite intently, for the crystal-clear signal only derived from the voice of the customer. In fact, according to an audit of over 160 senior corporate marketing leaders across Europe, 63 percent of organizations have some form of customer listening initiative underway. Even among the 37 percent not currently engaged in a listening program, 13 percent indicate that a new strategy is in place and awaiting kick off.

While marketers ARE listening for the voice of the customer, they are failing to gather the real-time insight around behavior, intent and sentiment from across the omni-channel landscape that could significantly improve contextual customer engagement and the development of lasting, personal customer relationships. In short...marketers are listening to a lot of noise but are falling short of truly HEARING the voice of the customer.

DO YOU HAVE A CUSTOMER **LISTENING PROGRAM?**

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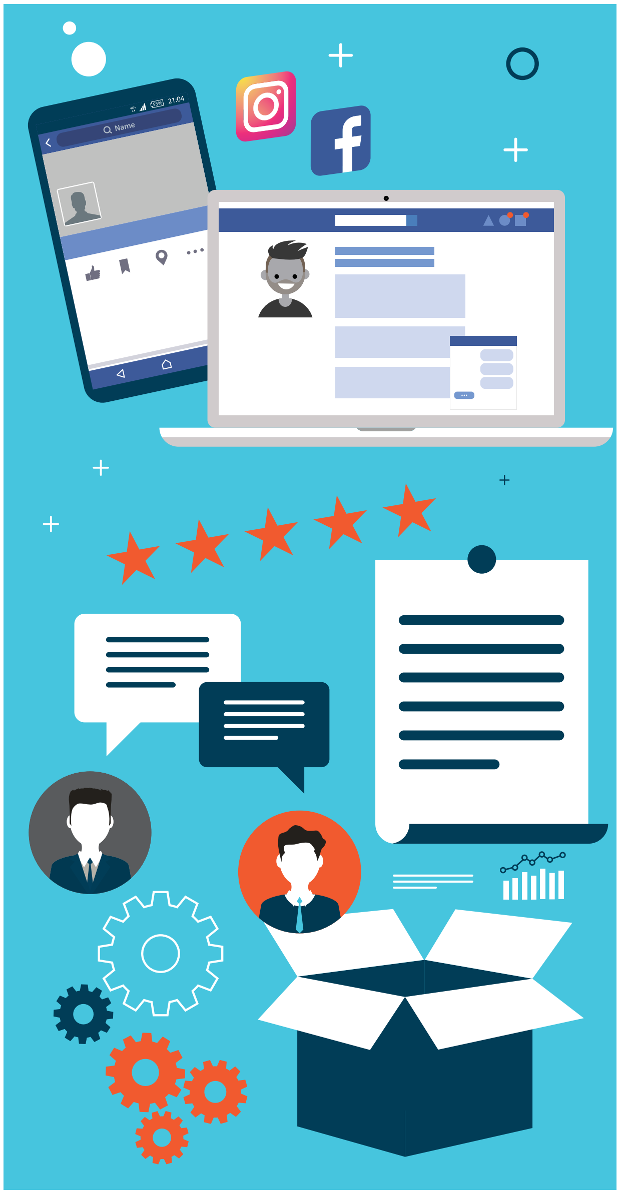
This statement bears out in the simple admission from the marketers surveyed, who admit that the listening programs in place are, at best, mediocre, specific to their ability to listen, analyze and respond to the customer voice. Only 10 percent of respondents believe their formal initiatives are exceptional, while just over half (51 percent) believe their programs are "fairly good," despite being limited to corporate-owned feedback channels and struggling to integrate insights from these limited channels across the entire organization.

When asked to consider where customer voice could be heard most clearly and accessed most easily, marketers pointed to social media (65 percent), customer feedback forms (51 percent), direct mail from the customer (45 percent), website engagement (43 percent) and service and support communications (42 percent). Yet let's pause to consider that marketers have already admitted that their listening programs are struggling because of limitations in where listening most often occurs – namely brands only listening via corporate-owned channels and failing to capture real-time insights across all channels in the customer's own (read: unstructured) voice.



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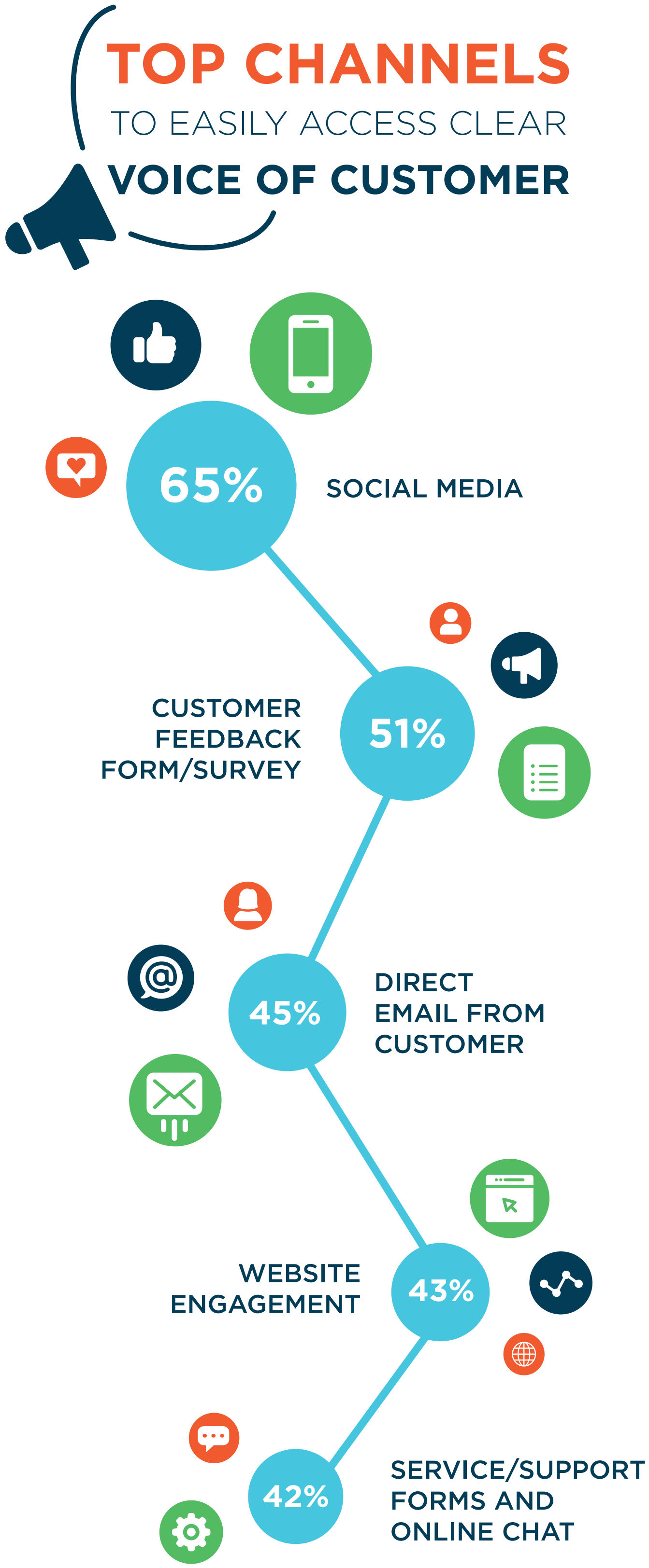

This begs the question: Is **"social media"** really an easily-accessed and clear listening post? Or are brands only listening in their own controlled and managed social accounts and channels? If we listen in...

Nearly 2 out of every 3 marketers point to social as an effective listening post, which is incredibly positive, until you marry that with the reality that the very nature of social media is unstructured data flooding into systems, challenging both IT and marketing resources. Social media is the antithesis of a "corporate-owned" channel and is, in reality, the outlier to all of the channels marketers also identified as a clear listening post. Social is bi-directional, conversational and, most importantly, a channel owned and directionally controlled by the customer. They are in total control of their voice and the volume, tone and tenor. Can social really be the "easiest" channel to hear the voice of the customer?

The answer may lie in the very perception the organization has of **what** social media actually is and **how** it is valued. It also shines a light on a second critical question: Is the most valuable customer voice data being left behind in favor of data that is easier to harness and collect in touchpoints controlled and owned by the organization?

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The first disconnect to tackle is the foundational perception of social media.

When asked how the organization views social, respondents admitted that social was, by and large, a push-message mechanism to amplify public relations efforts, relegated to being a “free” customer communication tool.

Advertising and attempting to push connections through the noise has positioned organizations in opposition to the organic customer conversations that reveal the context of a customer and aid in delivering relevance. Rather than being part of the community, too many brands have chosen to take to the sidelines, safely out of the fray and “mess” of unstructured data and real-time sentiment.

Just below the top five sits a response that is rather telling about the challenges marketers face when trying to reshape the perception of social media, namely that nearly one in four marketers believe that while social is an important marketing tool, the organization does not believe social is critical to the customer. This is an interesting response for multiple reasons: First and foremost, it reveals that social’s place in a customer’s life may be misinterpreted. Second, it reveals that a brand’s place in a customer’s life may also be misinterpreted.

HOW DOES THE ORG VIEW **SOCIAL?**

1	**64%**	**PR amplification channel**
2	**55%**	**Free push messaging for marketing**
3	**35%**	Critical listening post to gather customer voice
4	**25%**	Community to connect fans, advocates and global brand champions
5	**24%**	Advertising channel filled with hard to capture noise

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In previous CMO Council research, The Customer in Context, it was revealed that least important to the customer when thinking of what attributes make up an exceptional customer experience was engagement on a brand's social media pages. While engagement with other fans and conversations about brands with friends and family ranked rather highly as key influencers to purchase behavior, having a "branded place" in social networks to connect with, talk about or talk to a brand was simply NOT part of a valued customer experience.

While brands establish their social listening tools to listen for conversations about the brand, and otherwise monitor how customers are liking, following or commenting on brand content, the REAL voice of the customer and the key value of social conversations are being left out of the listening queue. Assuming that social isn't important to the customer negates what is clearly happening in the world...that our customers are having conversations about what is most important and top of mind for them. Asserting that social isn't important assumes that these breadcrumbs and signals of where and how a brand can add value to a customer's life are unimportant and can't drive action.

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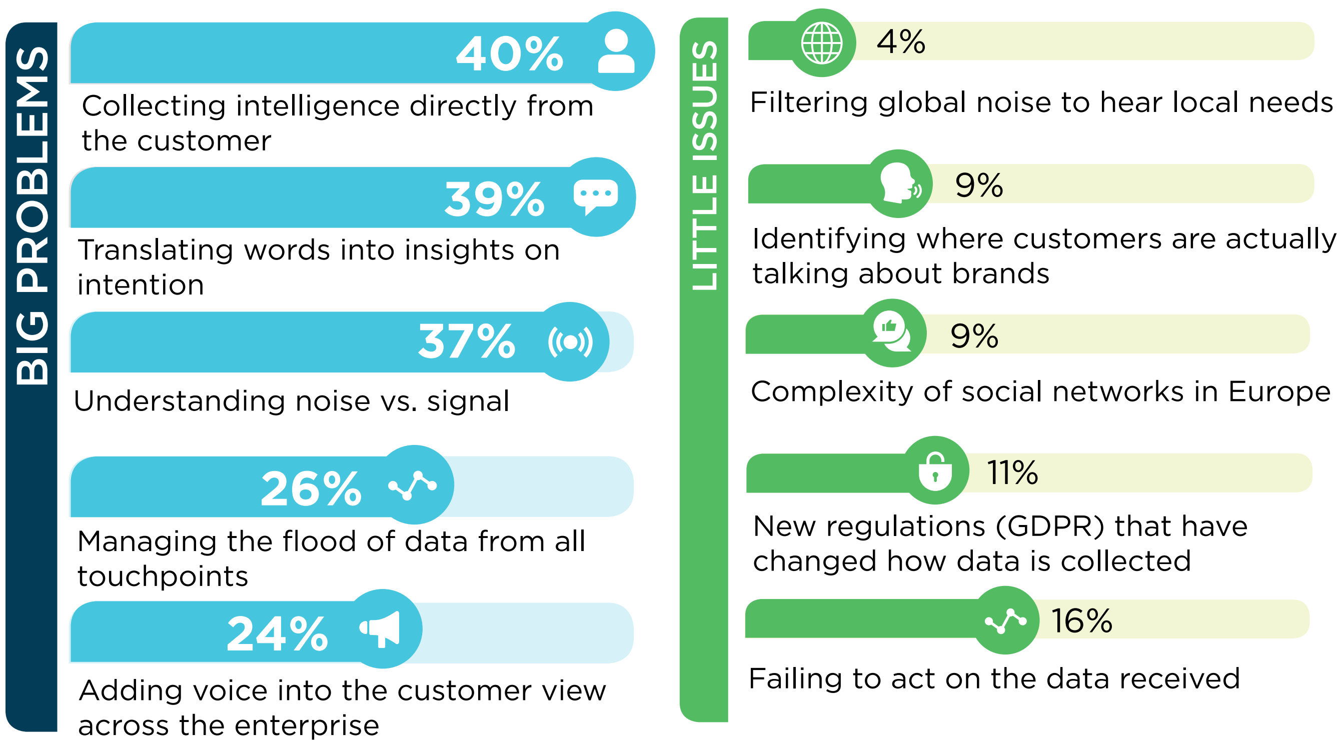
The second disconnect to examine is specific to the organization's attitudes towards data.

When asked to identify the greatest challenge the organization faces when listening for and to the voice of the customer, the top responses can best be summarized as a giant dilemma over data. Clustered at the top of the list is the organization's challenge in collecting intelligence directly from the customer (40 percent) and then translating the customer's words into insights around needs and intentions (39 percent). It is also telling that actually understanding what is noise and what is a signal emerges as a critical challenge for 37 percent of organizations.

TOP CHALLENGES



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Interestingly, the challenge is not in a failure to act. In fact, only 16 percent of respondents felt their organizations were simply unable to action on what customer voice data revealed. The issue is clearly far more systemic…when you can't decipher intelligence from the data being collected, it is impossible to act.

This issue with data is directly impacting the organization's ability to consistently deliver a contextual and personalized omni-channel experience to their connected customer. Some 40 percent of respondents admit that they are just not doing a great job, missing the critical pieces of insight needed to deliver in real-time and at scale. Just as 29 percent believe they are making the changes required and are on a path from good to great, only eight percent are doing an excellent job, leveraging data and customer voice in real-time to adapt and personalize engagements and experiences across all relevant channels.

Even more telling is that only 24 percent of respondents have been intentionally leveraging customer voice intelligence to deliver and improve personalized experiences. Most organizations (46 percent) are just using customer voice to reshape content development and deployment. Few, however, are leveraging customer voice to identify future growth (only 21 percent leverage voice to identify new opportunities based on trending market conversations), or to shift product development and launch roadmaps (22 percent), or optimize media mix (22 percent) and advertising allocations based on a deeper understanding of current conversations and customer voice sentiment.

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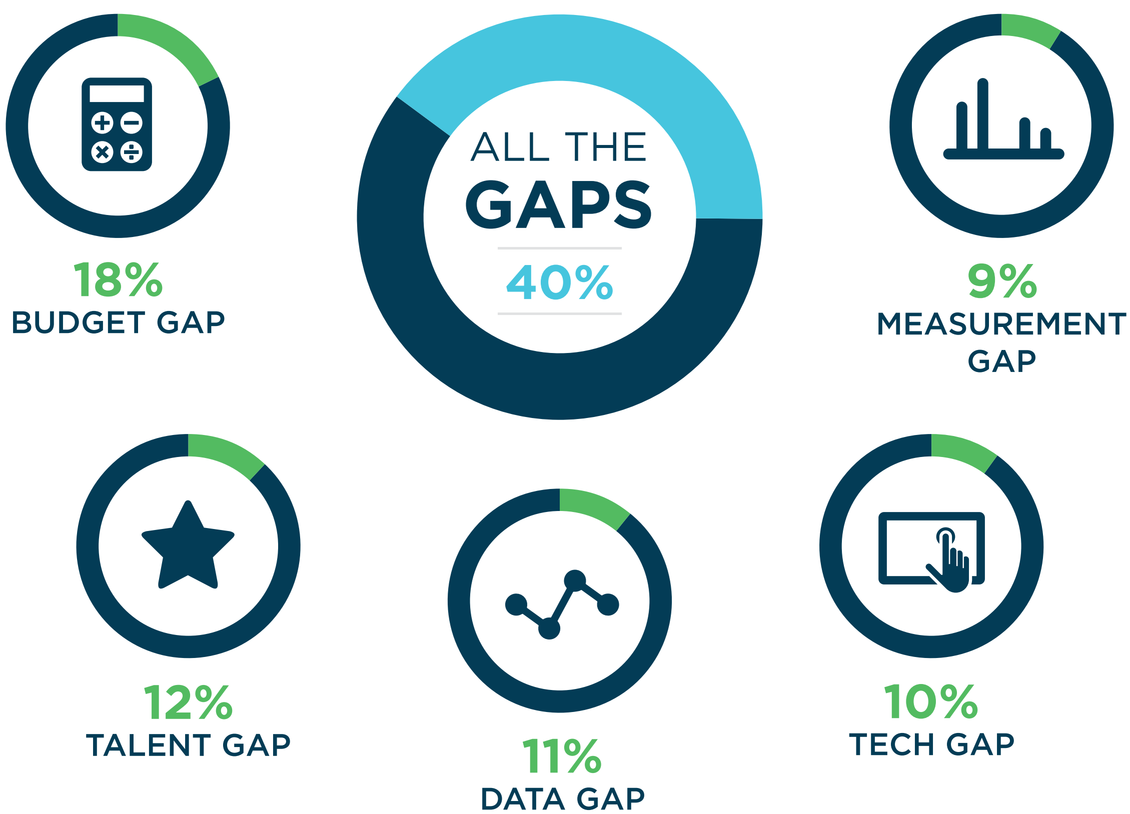
In an effort to streamline data collection and accelerate the opportunity to act on the intelligence being derived, organizations have potentially over-invested in some areas and underinvested in others. As the technology stack exploded, talent struggled to stay up to speed as organizations race to up-skill and bring on new team members to exploit everything from analytics to engagement. As engagement channels shifted, strategies for purposeful engagement have struggled to keep pace: real-time falls short and instead manifests as a fluctuating and ever-lengthening period of time based on how long it takes to export, import and analyze data across disparate systems of engagement.

As earlier noted, organizations are held back by two critical misperceptions: around data and around social. The solution and resolution to these issues is, understandably, not as easy to implement. In fact, when asked to identify what gaps are holding the organization back from better listening to and engaging with the customer in real time, marketers struggled to single out one issue as the one area where, if resolved, success would soon follow.

THE GAPS HOLDING EXPERIENCE BACK



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For most organizations, bridging these gaps will require prioritization of effort, investment and strategy as tackling all may simply not be feasible. For many, starting by addressing the technology gap feels most intuitive. When asked to look to the future, 57 percent of marketers noted that they intended to bring on new social listening and sentiment analysis tools to help bolster and improve customer listening and action. Marketers are also hoping to close the measurement gap by bringing in even more technology as 51 percent will turn their stack expansion and investment to onboard new marketing performance measurement tools.

Revenue is the real measure of marketing success. According to 62 percent of respondents, it is the top measure. But aside from understanding that bottom line is, quite literally, the bottom line, marketers may be missing an opportunity to strengthen their position specific to the measures that matter to the business as too many focus on what's most important to marketing and demonstrate a myopic focus on campaign performance.

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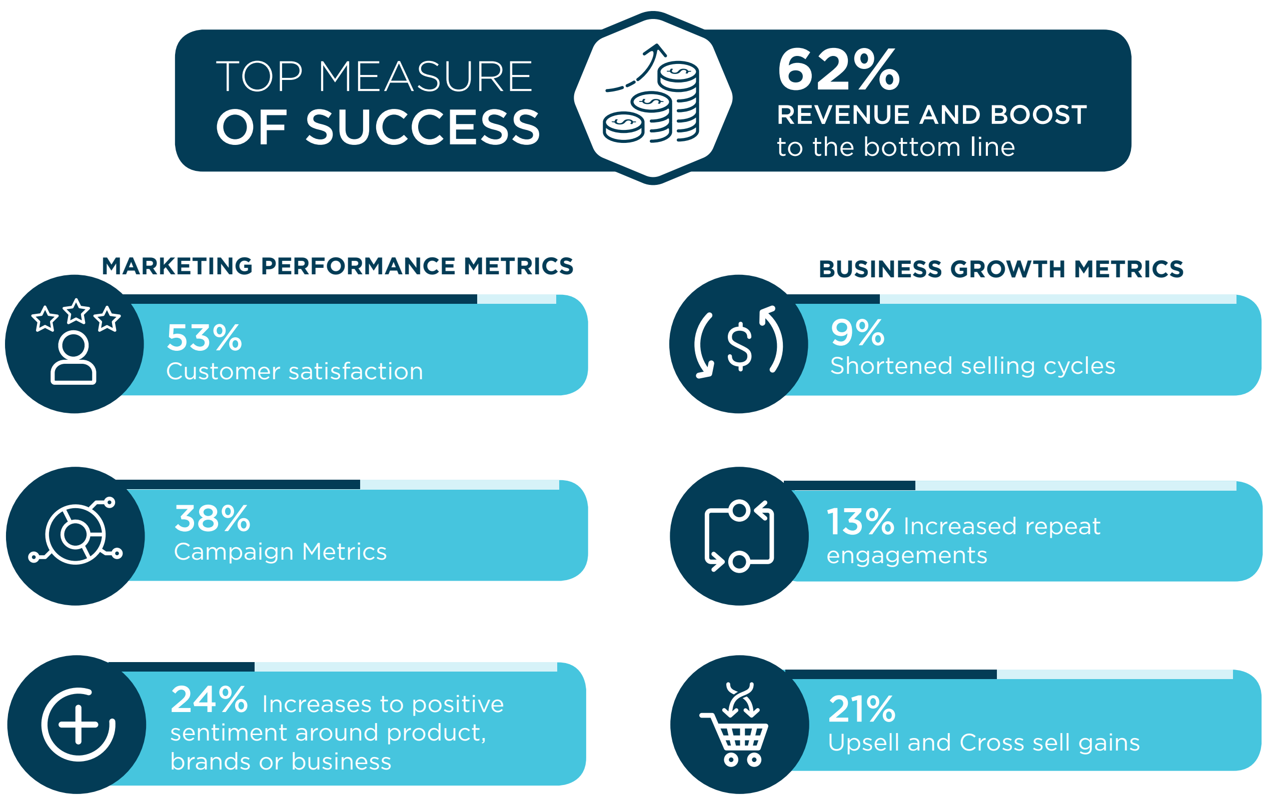
While marketers across Europe overwhelming agree that revenue is the top measure of performance, what lies just below reverts back to a retelling of campaign performance. Rather than tracking opportunities to further boost lifetime value via increased engagement or increases to upsell and cross-sell, brands are looking to reinforce a singular message: What we are pushing is working.

This view is reinforced by the fact that just under one in four marketers believes that social buzz tracking positive discussions is a top measure for the business, when in reality buzz tracking, while a great barometer for campaign success and performance, is just the tip of the social iceberg and all that it can reveal about sentiment, behavior and real-time needs and expectations of the customer in the customer's own voice.



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CONCLUSION

Social media, the struggles with customer listening and marketer's challenges with amplifying the voice of the customer are not new issues. Marketers, struggling to reach the relevant and actionable data that can provide real-time context and intelligence into the micro-moments of customer needs and opportunities, have fought long and hard to bridge gaps across people, process and platform.

SO WHY IS THIS MOMENT IN TIME SO CRITICAL TO SHIFT FROM THE STATUS QUO?

SIMPLY: THE CUSTOMER DEMANDS IT.

In consumer research conducted by the CMO Council and SAP Customer Experience of North American and European consumers, the demands and consequences of inaction were abundantly clear. First and foremost, consumers expect value to be delivered at every step of a customer experience. For their part, consumers do not have an unrealistic definition of value. Value is something that saves money, something that saves time, or something that aids, enhances or betters their lives. Corporate-controlled social spaces that just push out messages are not part of the value equation.

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THE CONSEQUENCE FOR INACTION IS THAT THE CONSUMER WILL WALK AWAY FROM A BRAND, TAKING THEIR WALLETS, LOYALTY AND DATA WITH THEM.

How do we begin to shift the power of listening away from gathering what is easy in passive or corporate-owned channels and back to being a critical moment for intelligence exploration based on real-time customer voice? It may start with once and for all shifting the strategic focus of engagements - starting with social media - from push-and-reply to a more intentional, purpose-driven opportunity to listen and be part of developing a truly real-time, personalized customer experience.

If social media is truly where customer voice can be heard more clearly (and most authentically) we have a responsibility to listen, aggregate and act on the signals and signs our customer is inviting us to hear and understand. This will demand we listen to more than issues and experiences with our specific brands. It will require we listen to both our customer and the crowd and decipher how these conversations can influence and shape opportunities and buying experiences.

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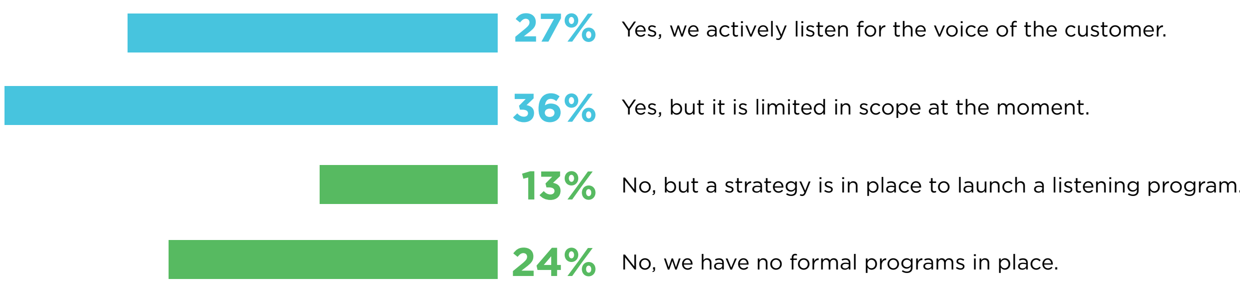
DETAILED FINDINGS

Q1 - Do you currently have a customer listening initiative that actively gathers voice, behavior, intent or sentiment from across the omni-channel landscape?



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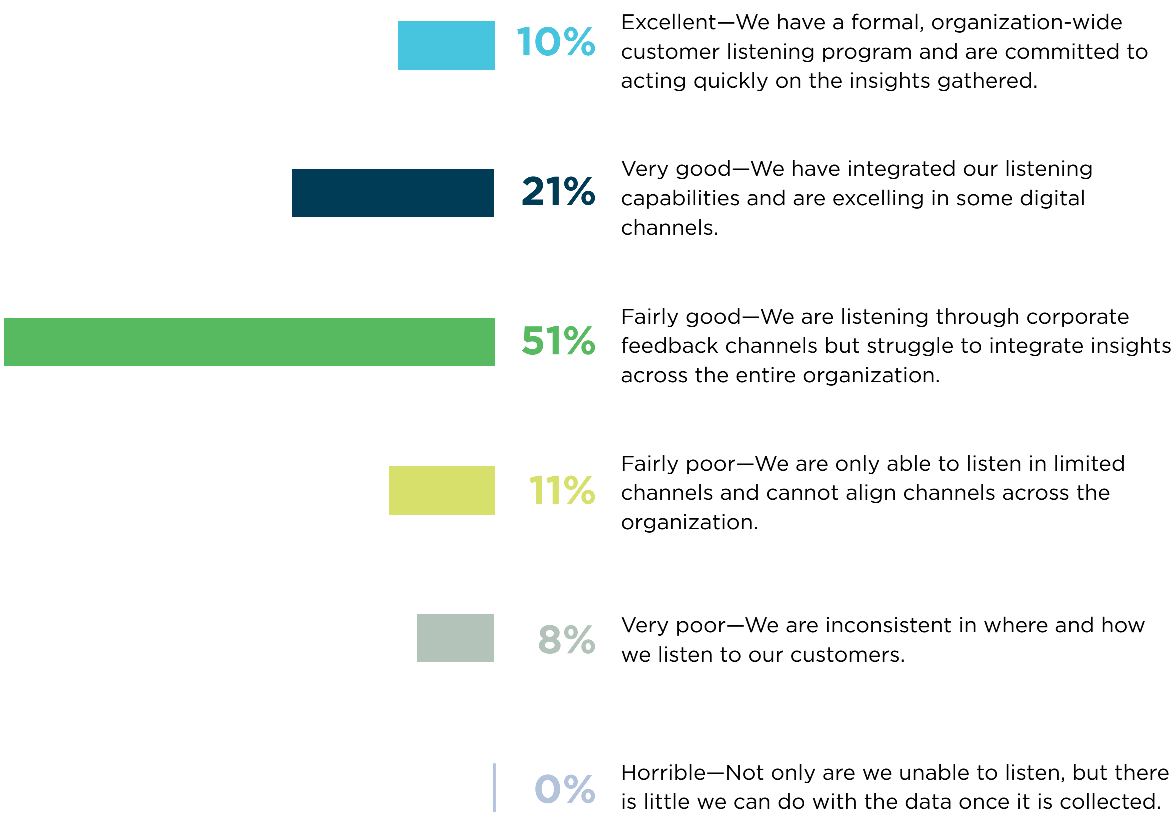
Q2 - Rate how effective your real-time customer listening strategies are when it comes to being able to listen, analyze and respond to customer voice.



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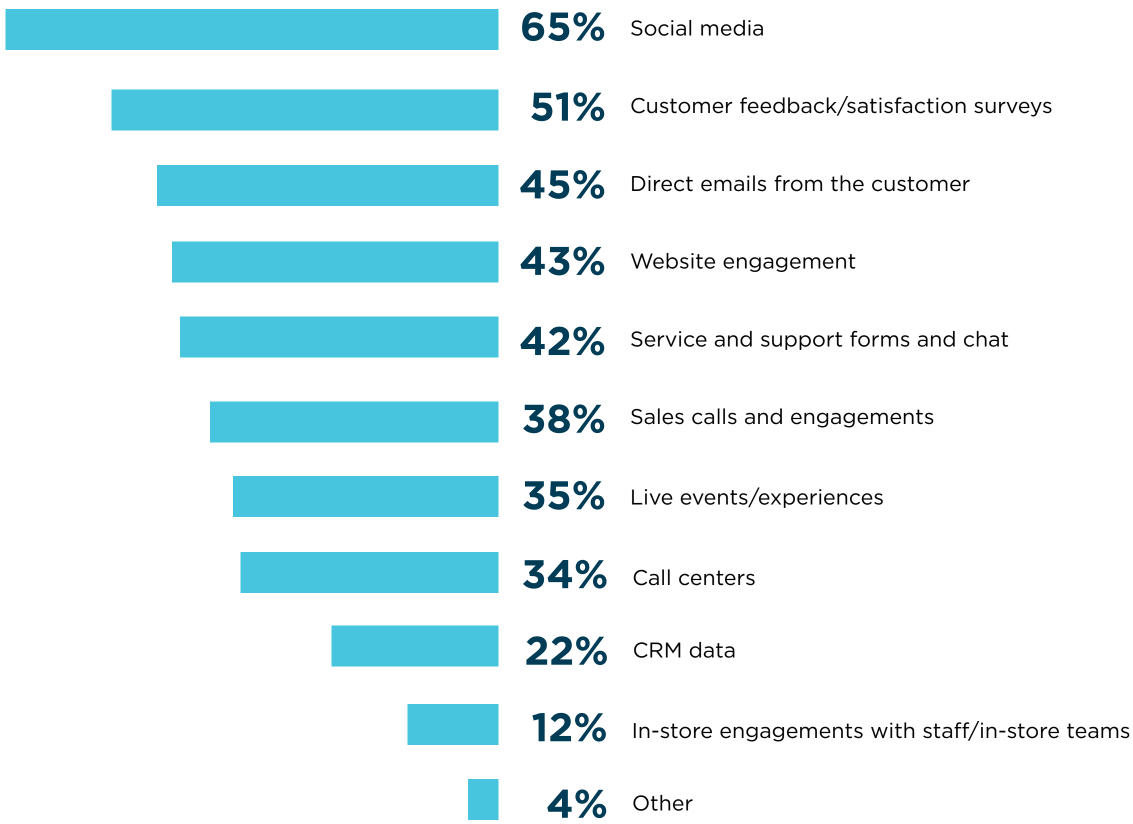
Q3 - Where is customer voice most clear and easily accessed? (Select top five)



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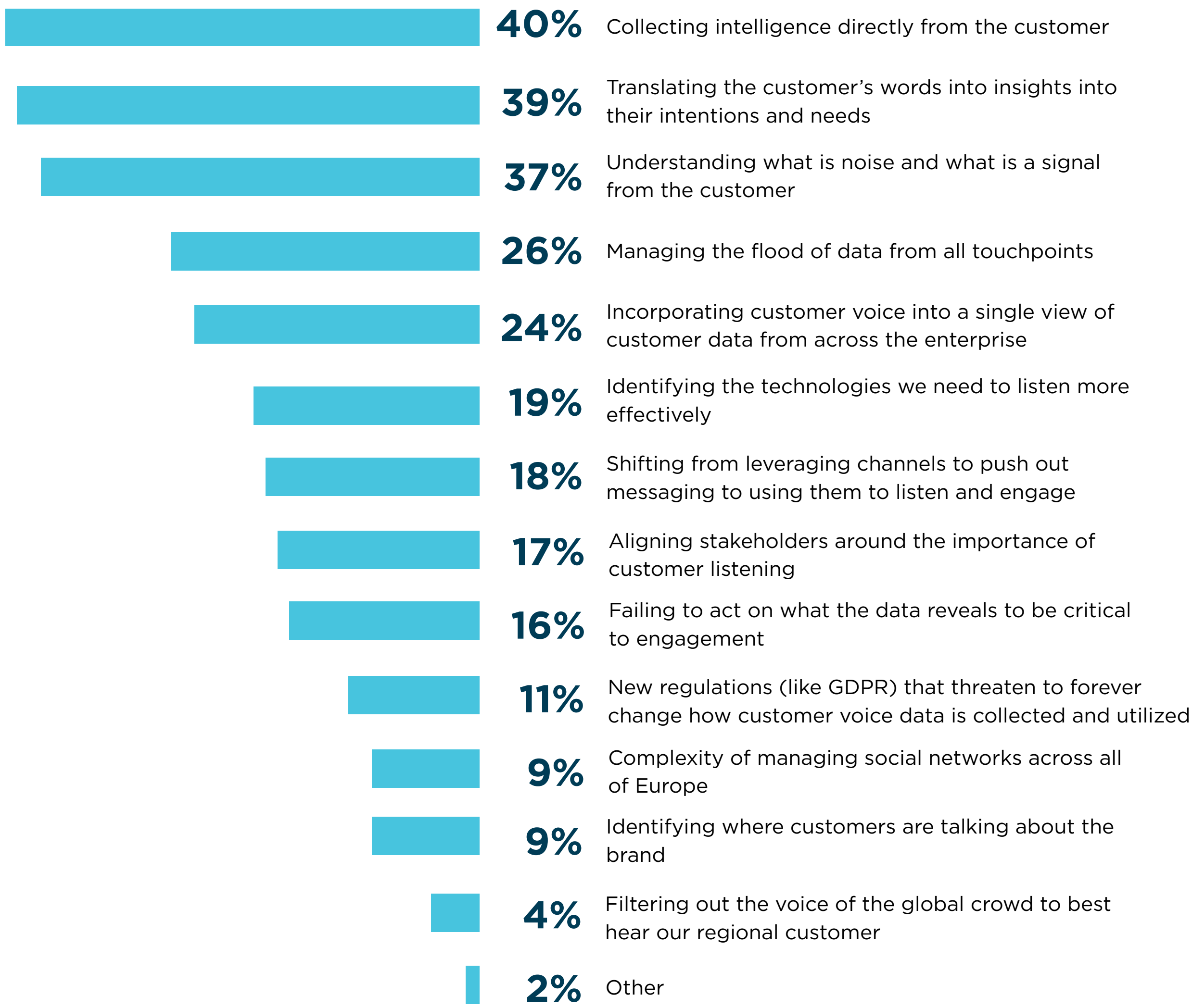
Q4 - What are the greatest challenges that your organization faces specific to the ability to listen to the voice of the customer? (Select top three)



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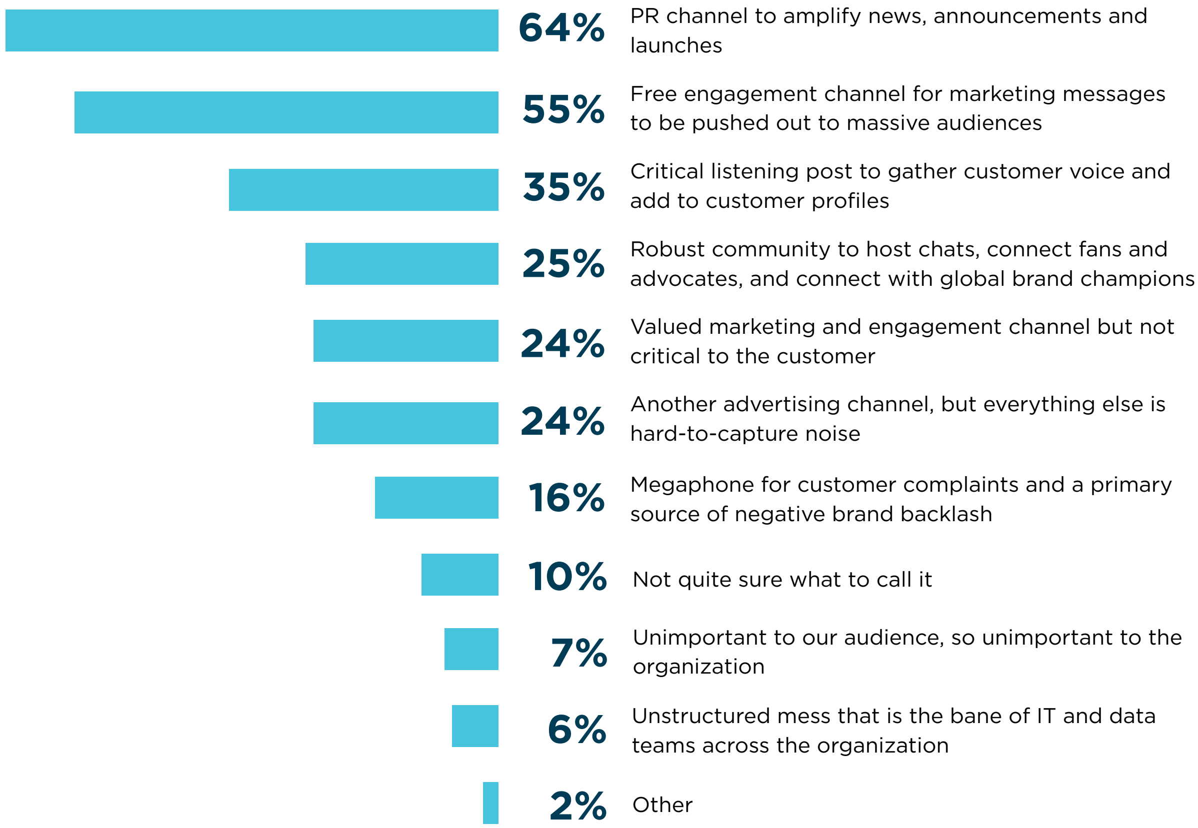
Q5 - How does the organization view social media? (Select top three)



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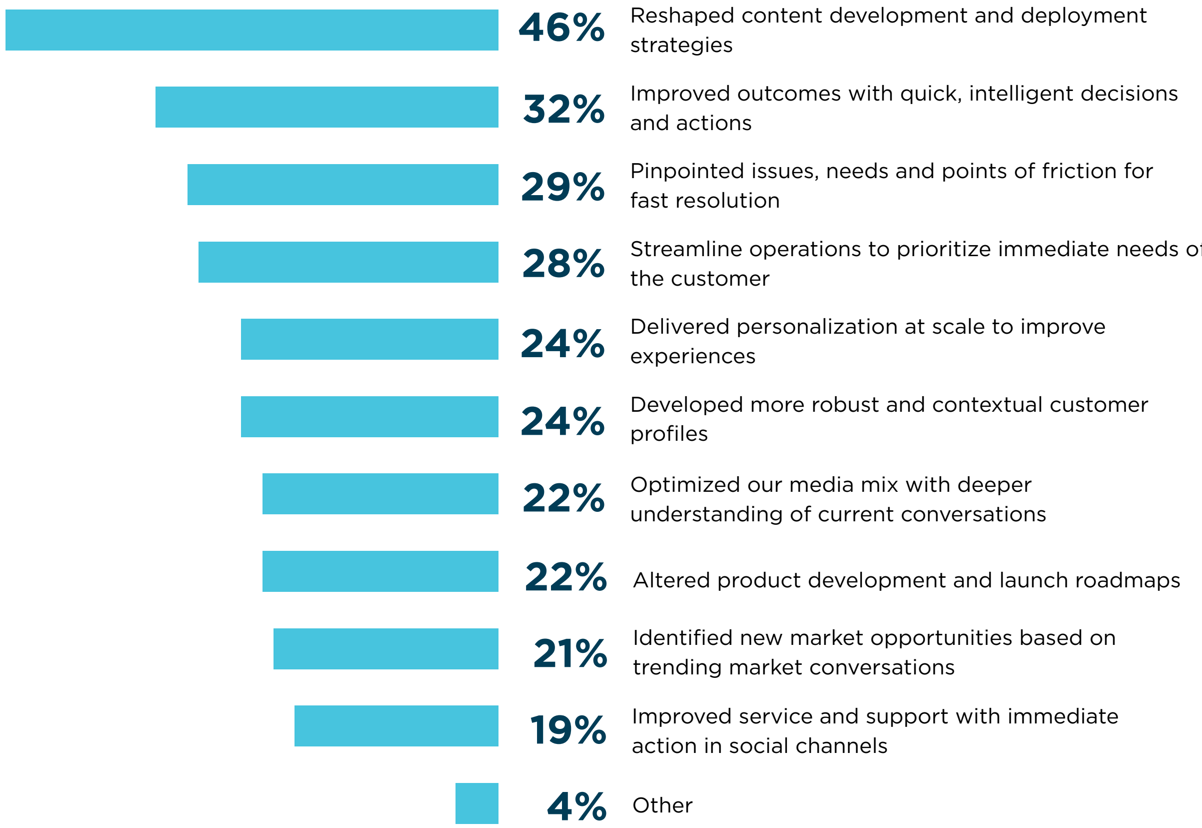
Q6 - How have you leveraged customer voice intelligence and understanding? (Select top three)



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Q7 - How do you rate your organization's ability to consistently deliver a contextual and personalized omni-channel journey?

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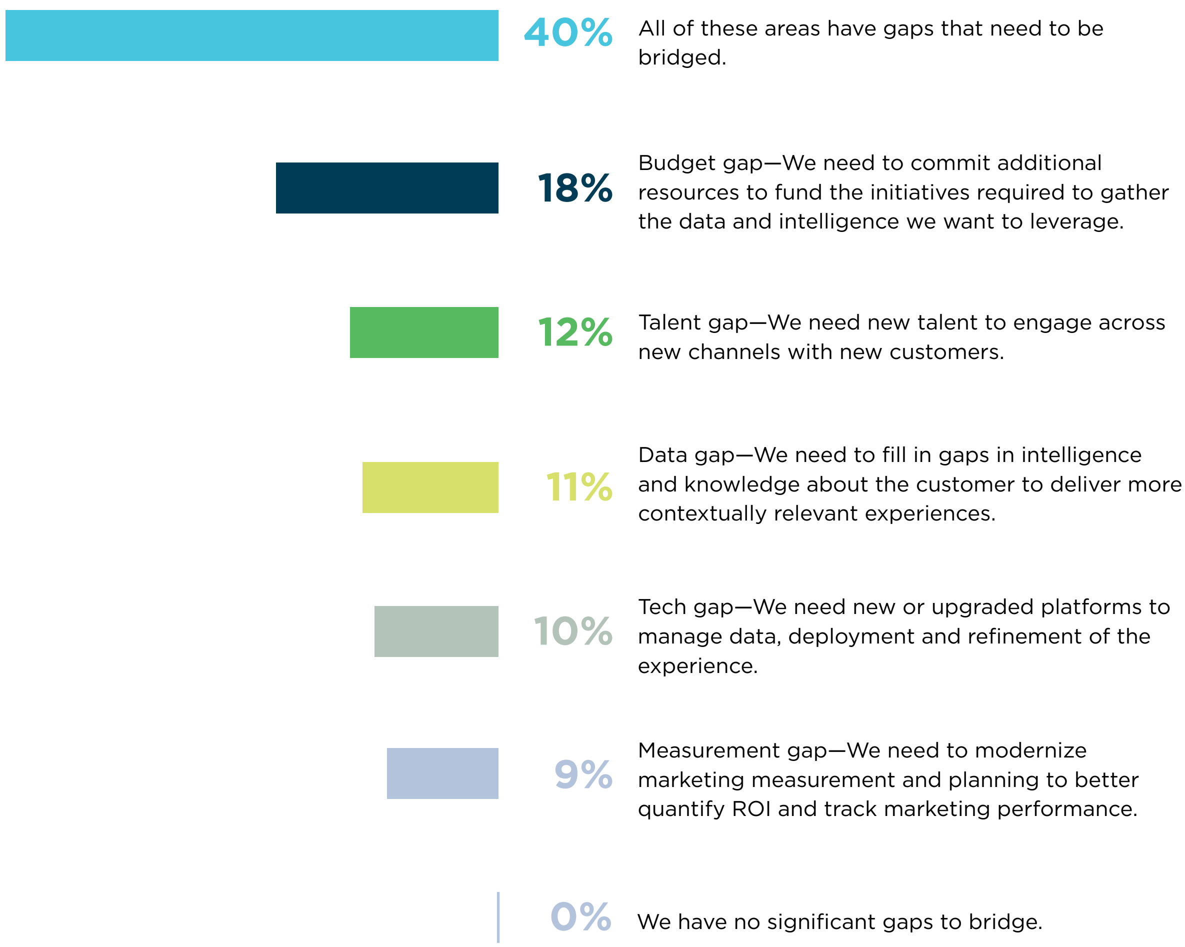
Q8 - What gaps have you identified that are holding the organization back from better listening to and engaging in real time with the customer?



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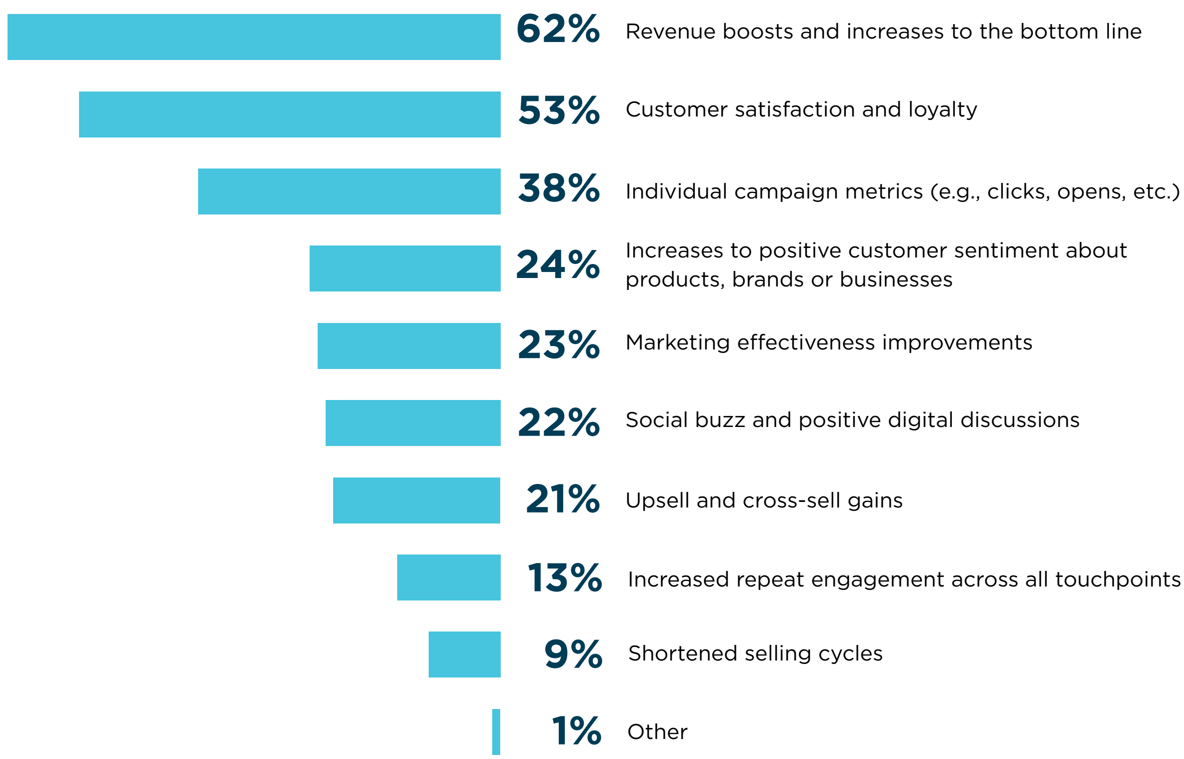
Q9 - How does the business measure the success of omni-channel engagements and experiences? (Select top three)



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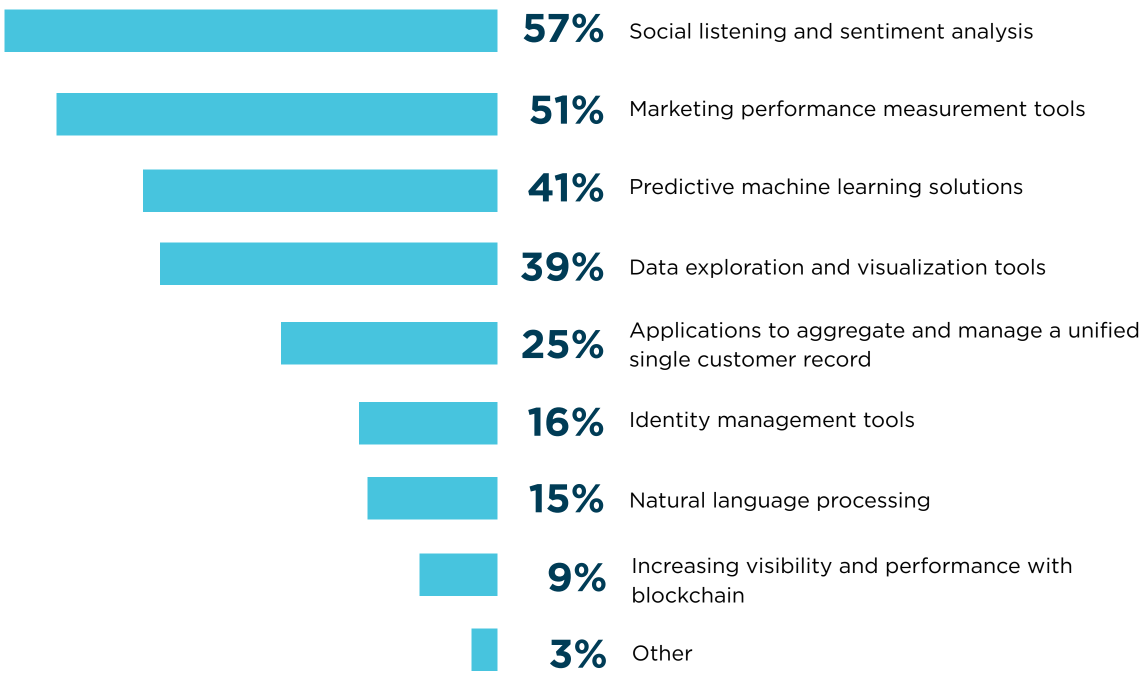
Q10 - Looking toward the future, what new tools, technologies and platforms are you planning to test or implement to improve customer listening and action? (Select top three)



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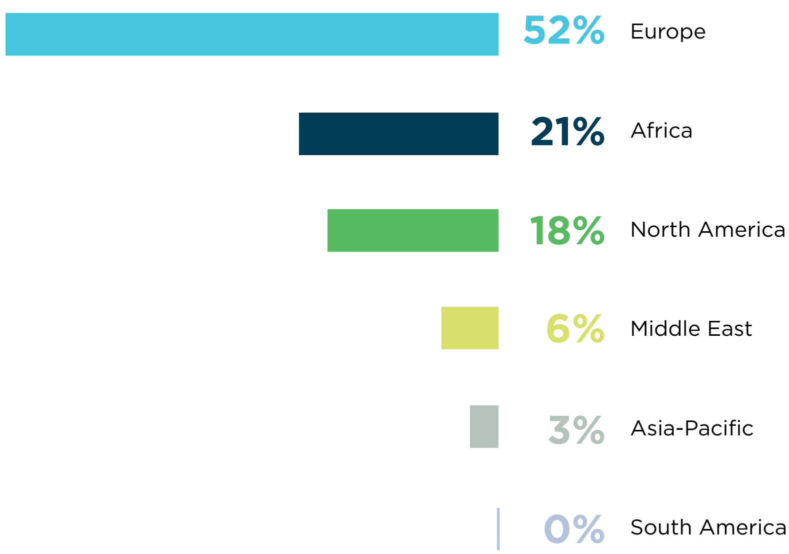
DEMOGRAPHICS

Q1 - In what region is your company headquartered?



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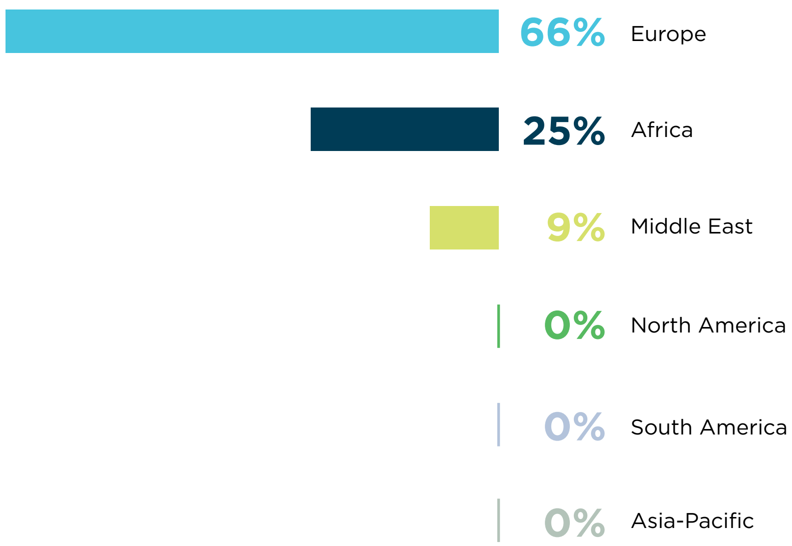
Q2 - In which region are you and your marketing team located? (Select one)



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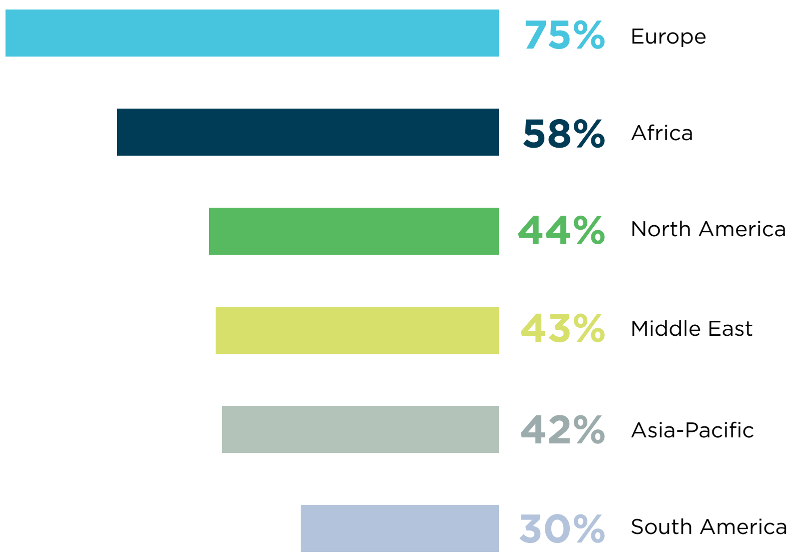
Q3 - In which region(s) does your company operate?



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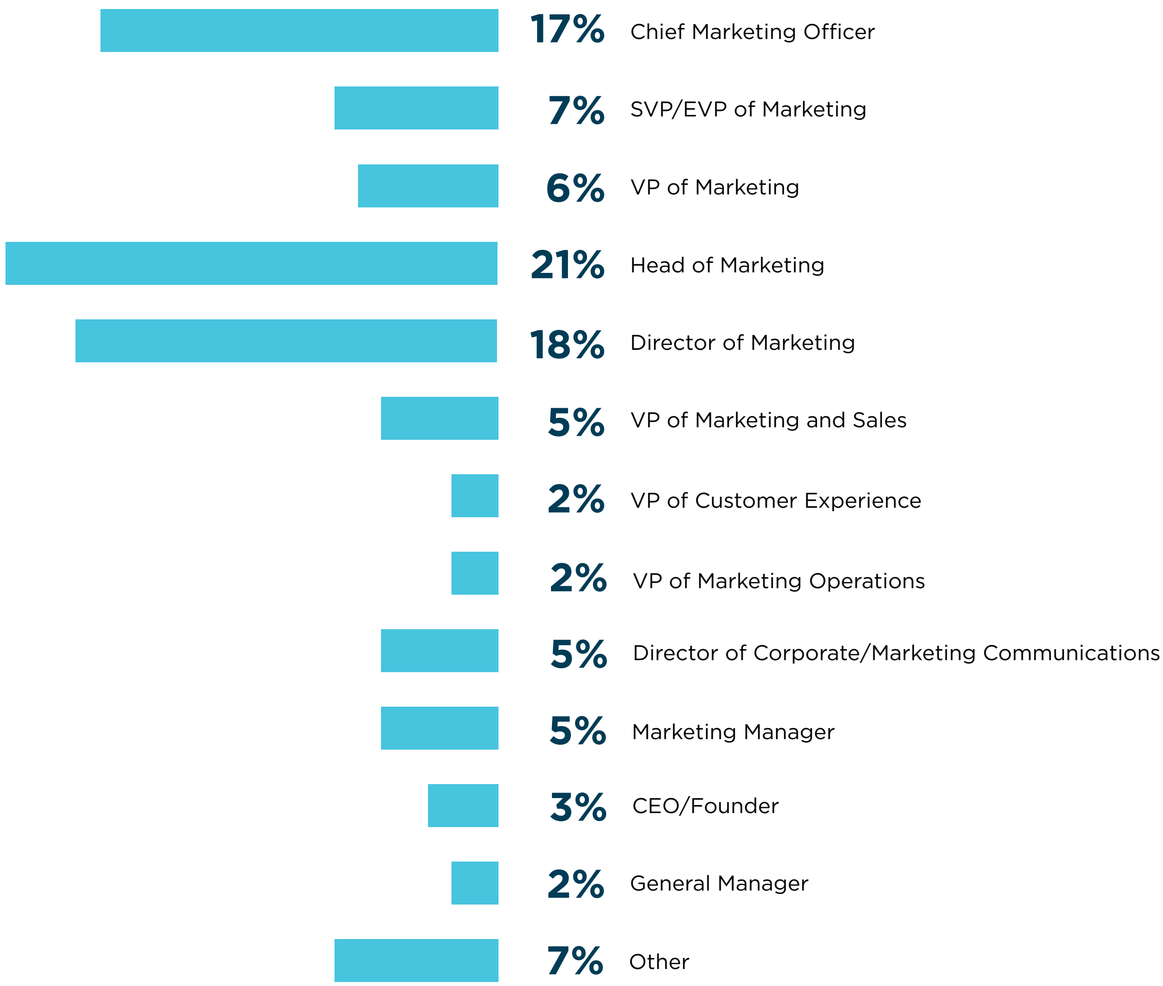
Q4 - What is your title?



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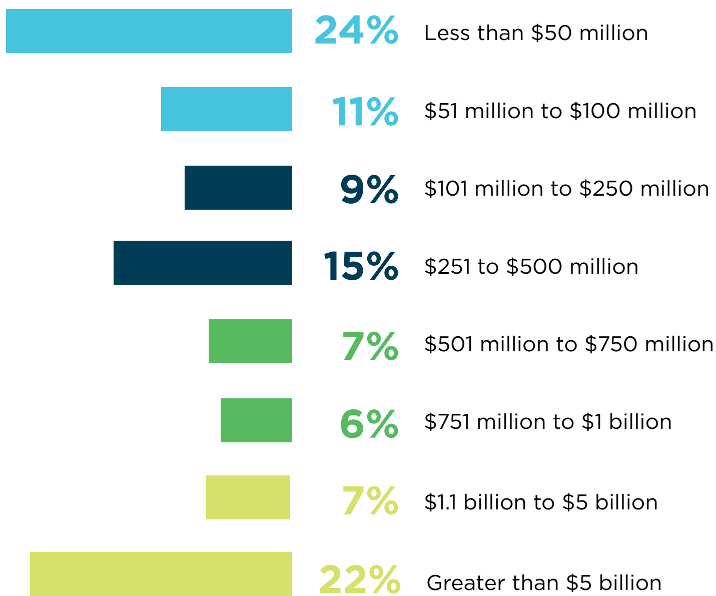
Q5 - How large is your company?



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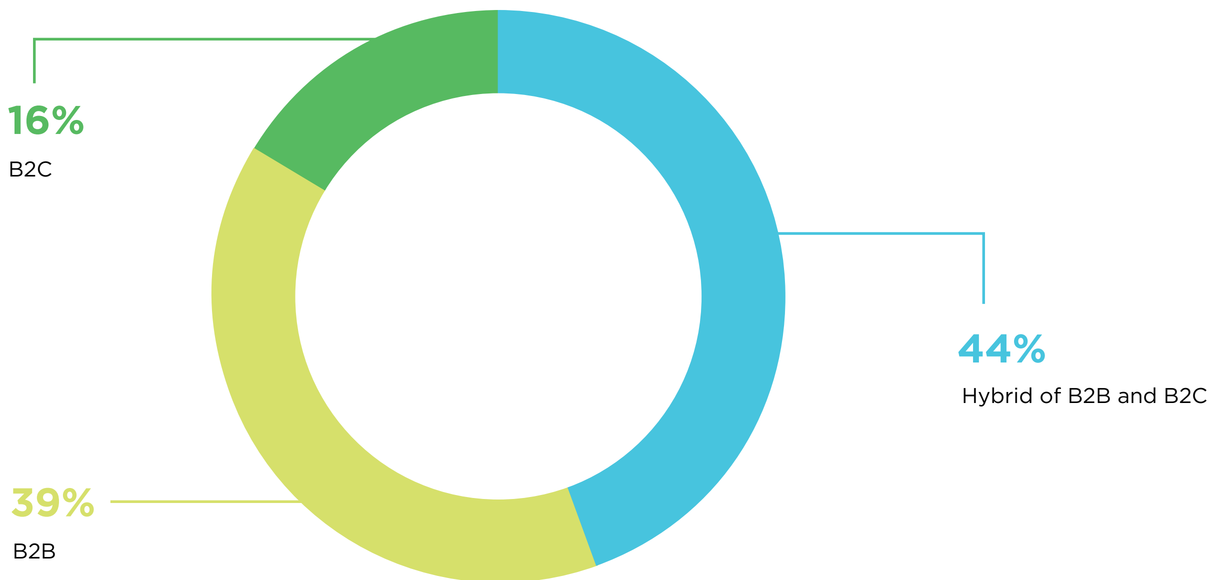
Q6 - What best describes the focus of your business?



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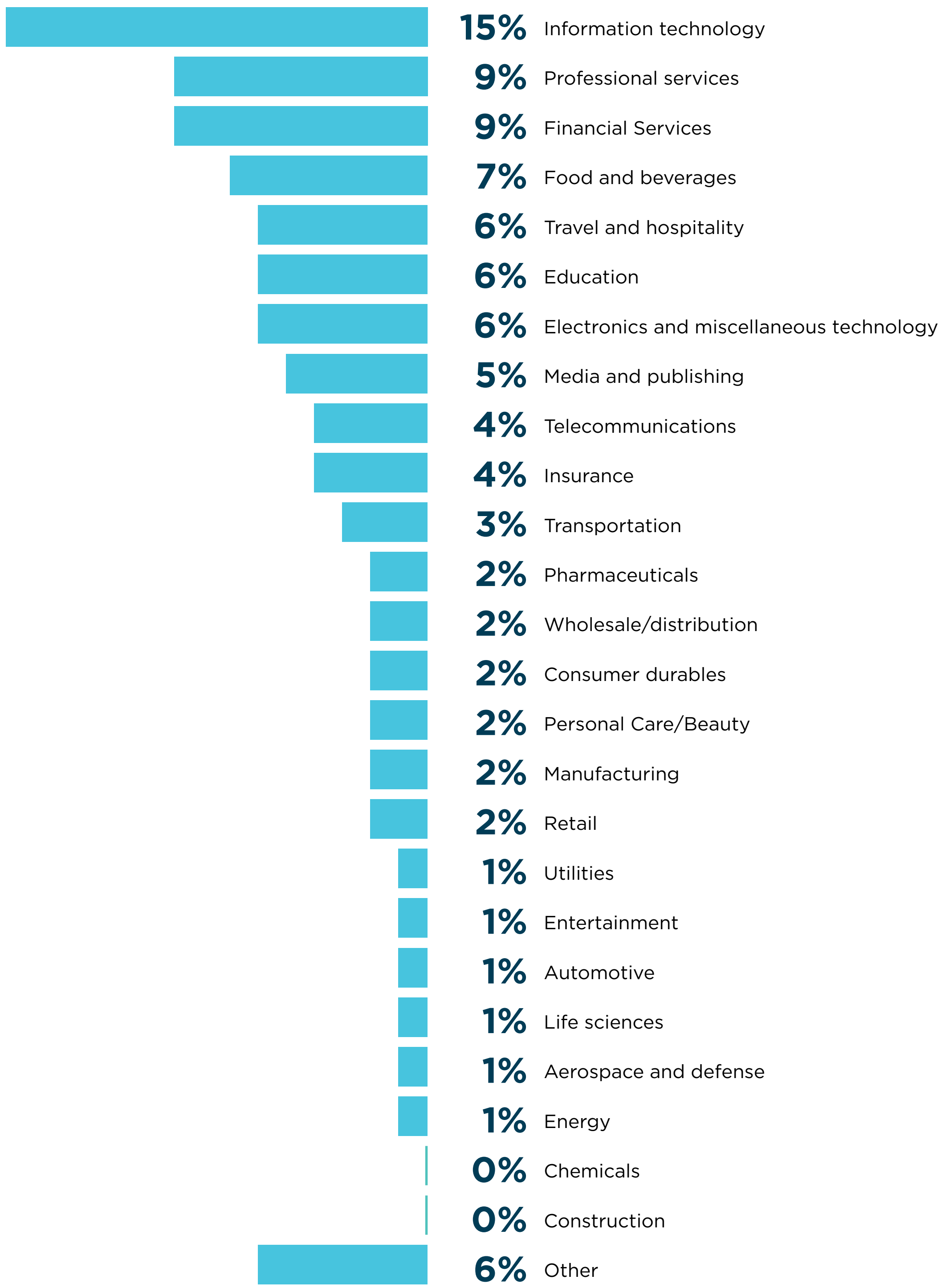
Q7 - What best describes your company's industry sector?



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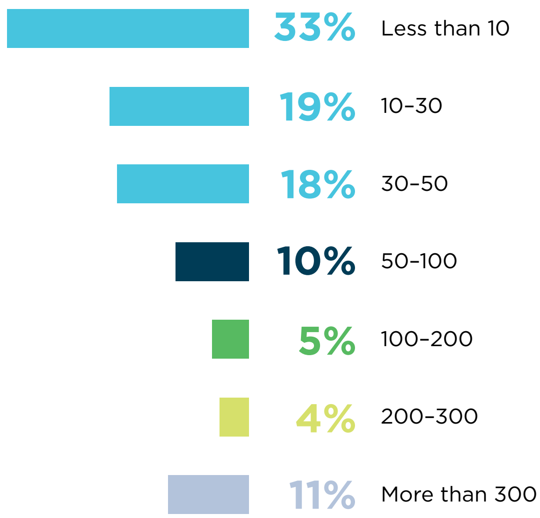
Q8 - How large is your global marketing staff/team?



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CMO COUNCIL™

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The Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Council is dedicated to high-level knowledge exchange, thought leadership and personal relationship building among senior corporate marketing leaders and brand decision-makers across a wide-range of global industries. The CMO Council's 15,000+ members control more than $500 billion in aggregated annual marketing expenditures and run complex, distributed marketing and sales operations worldwide. In total, the CMO Council and its strategic interest communities include over 65,000 global marketing and sales executives in over 110 countries covering multiple industries, segments and markets. Regional chapters and advisory boards are active in the Americas, Europe, Asia Pacific, Middle East and Africa. The Council's strategic interest groups include the Customer Experience Board, Digital Marketing Performance Center, Brand Inspiration Center, Marketing Supply Chain Institute, GeoBranding Center, and the Coalition to Leverage and Optimize Sales Effectiveness (CLOSE). To learn more please visit www.cmocouncil.org.

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