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The Science Sales & Marketing Survey 2026 Results

What's Working Now: Selling to Scientists in 2026

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Summary

This year's survey revealed optimism in the face of challenges, and that truly connecting with your scientist buyer's work drives the best results.

People across sales and marketing, all targeting scientists, shared their thoughts and results anonymously in the survey. A huge thank you to everybody who shared their experience so candidly.

Common challenges identified included;
- Growing targets coupled to stagnant team sizes and budgets
- Political headwinds (NIH funding and tariffs)
- ROI from conferences, and
- Getting team alignment on tools and tech to use.

Winning tactics identified included;
- Using a wider variety of channels in prospecting
- Staying politely persistent in your follow-ups
- Personalizing messages with context of the individual's work (not the company's work), and
- Doing pre-work before conferences.

In the coming report we examine the full results and give recommendations to succeed in 2026.

Reading this report:

💬 Direct quotes from a respondent   🔍 Question as phrased in the survey

💡 Links to learn more

*"This year is all about **authentic connection** - and these results confirm that **top performers are already taking that approach**."*

Laura Haldane, SciLeads

laura@scileads.com ✉
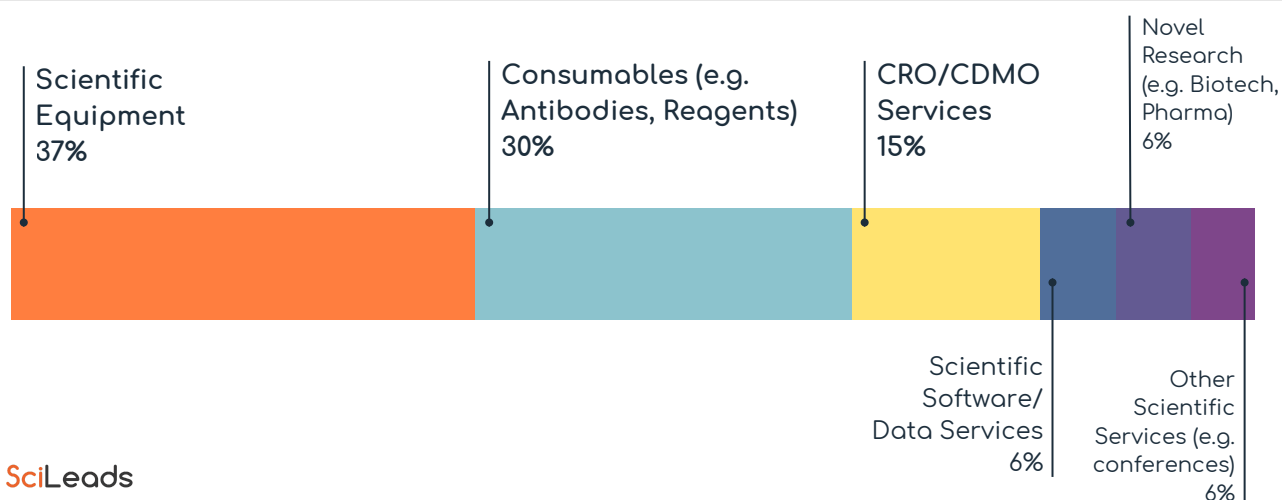
Let's Connect in

Contents

Industry Specific Results

Our main goal with this survey was to collect insights *only* from those selling to scientists.

There are tonnes of data out there from consultants, email providers, and many other sources - but selling to scientists is different. These highly expert and sceptical customers, whose environment, ways of working, and ways of purchasing are unique, need their own category.

This report contains *only* results from those selling products and services to scientists. You can see the precise breakdown below.

🔍 How would you classify your company's main offering?

Scientific Equipment
37%

Consumables (e.g. Antibodies, Reagents)
30%

CRO/CDMO Services
15%

Novel Research (e.g. Biotech, Pharma)
6%

Scientific Software/ Data Services
6%

Other Scientific Services (e.g. conferences)
6%

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🔍 What sectors of science do you sell to?

Biotech
31%

Academic
30%

Big Pharma
24%

Non-Bio (e.g. Semiconductors, Cosmetics, Food, Batteries)
15%

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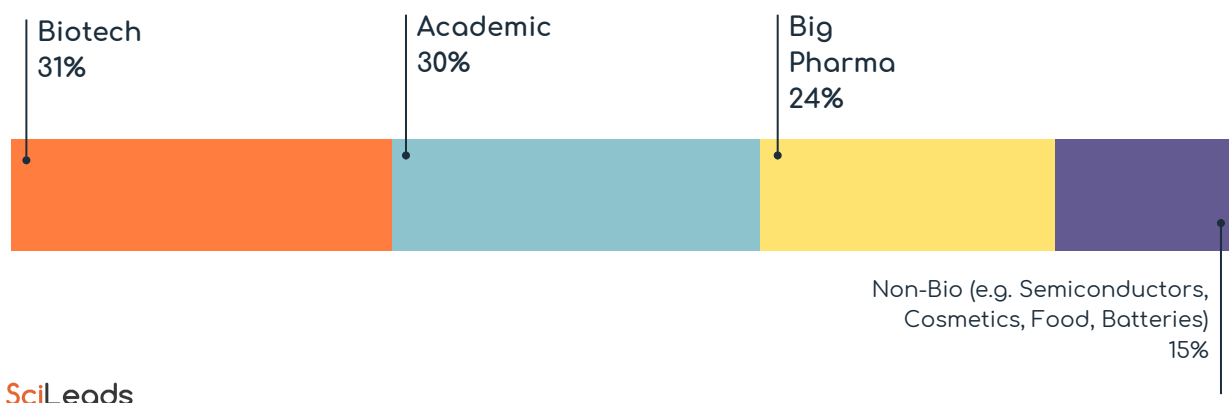
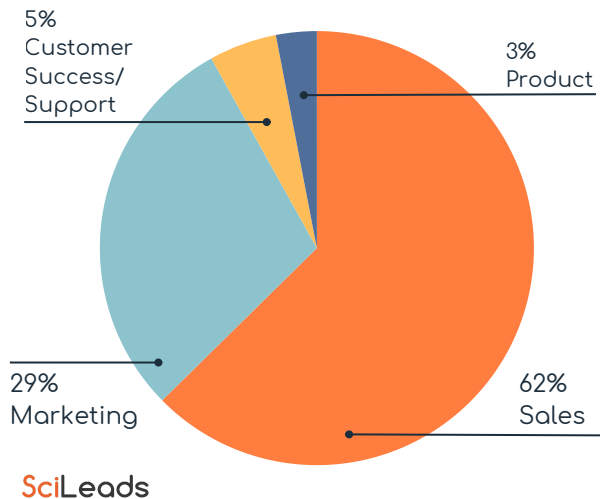The respondents were primarily sales and marketing, with a small amount of product and customer success. There was great coverage spanning seniority levels and company sizes, giving us a holistic view across our industry.

🔍 What best describes your role?

- 5% Customer Success/Support
- 3% Product
- 29% Marketing
- 62% Sales

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🔍 What best describes your level?

- 14% VP, Exec, C-Suite
- 54% Individual Contributor
- 32% Team Leader / Manager

🔍 How big is your company?

- 32% 1-50 people
- 11% 51-100 people
- 15% 501-10,000 people
- 34% >10,000 people
- 8% 101-500 people

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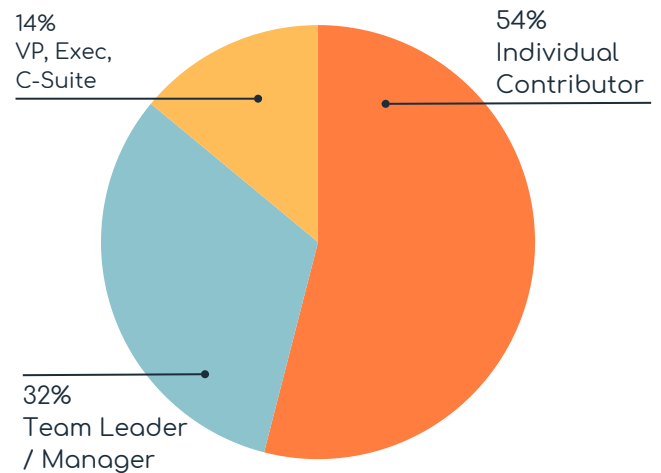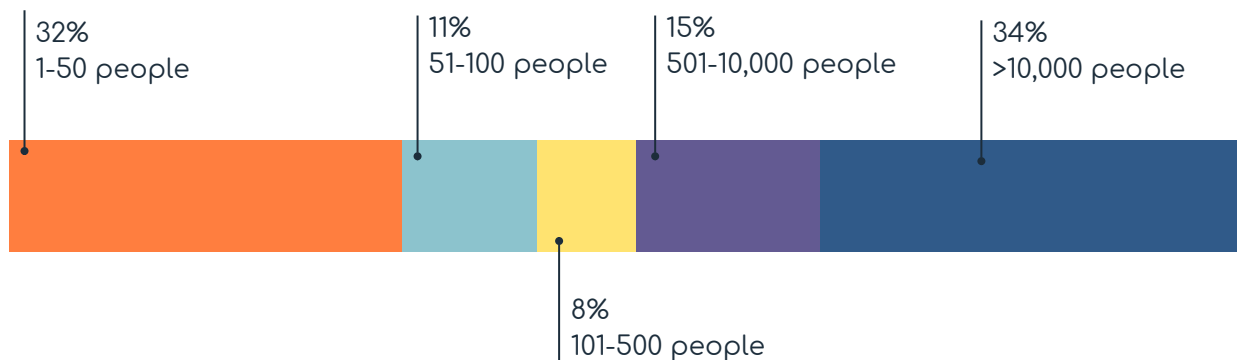
Challenges and Check-In

We have to acknowledge that many external factors have brought challenges this year. If you're feeling the impact of NIH funding changes and tariffs, you're not alone. 70% of you said NIH funding has impacted your 2025 results, and 66% of you said tariffs have.

Political Headwinds Impact Results

🔍 Which of these have impacted your business this year?

💬 *"Things are very uncertain in the US right now due to tariffs and inflation"*

💬 *"Reduced federal funding for DOE projects"*

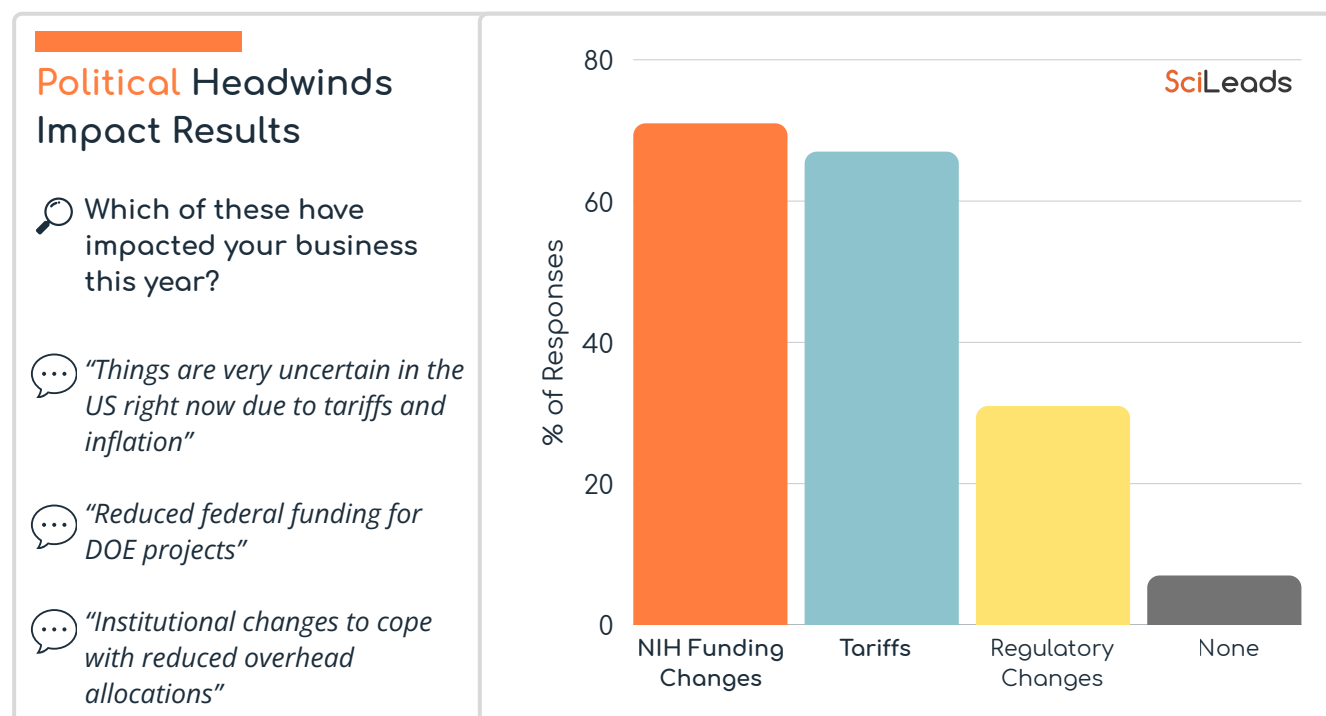💬 *"Institutional changes to cope with reduced overhead allocations"*

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Bar chart — % of Responses (y-axis, 0 to 80): NIH Funding Changes ~70, Tariffs ~66, Regulatory Changes ~30, None ~6

Your free-type comments echoed this too. While many mentioned the difficult political environment, lots of you spoke with cautious optimism for change, especially regarding VC funding and the biotech sector.

🔍 Any other comments about the coming year?

"Things will get better in pharma as US pharma investment, CDMO positive events, biopharma funding, and recent US/UK drug agreement - positive indicators for 2026"

"Big unknowns with potential major disruptions but hope that scientific instrumentation markets will weather the storm well"

"We have seen an uptick in Q4. We hope this is the start of the turning point and things will get better in 2026. Or it is just the year end rush and it will remain stagnant in 2026. Still seeing lots of RIFs and closures in the start-up biotechs."

"I think biotech will continue in two gears - some big winners whilst many hang on with their fingertips but I expect capital flows to pick up during the year."

When asking about lost deals, 51% of you said customer budget was the top reason for losing. While we can't control this, the positive signals in NIH and VC funding for 2026 should help to improve this.
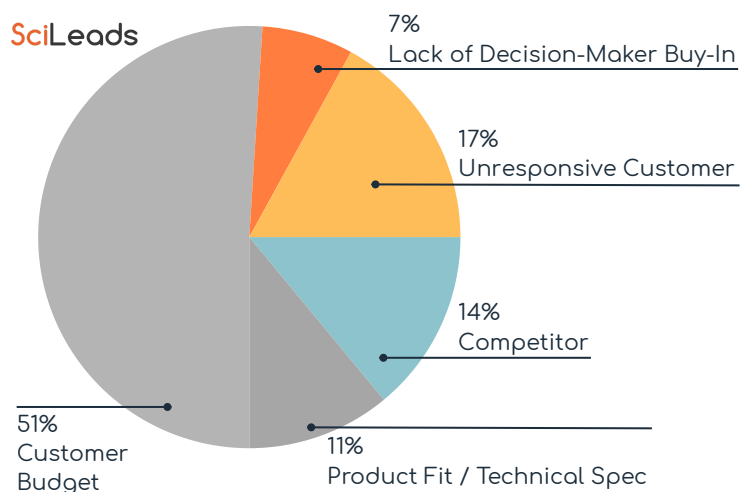
We also see a large portion of lost deals are down to factors that are within our control; lack of decision-maker buy-in (7%), unresponsive customer (17%), and competitors (14%) are all things that as sales and marketing professionals we can influence. Securing decision-makers early, remaining "politely persistent" to get responses, and having a deep understanding of our competitors are things we can continue to improve. In our **prospecting** section we get into the best platforms and personalization to use for those follow-ups.

Learning from Losses: Secure Authority & Responses to Win

🔍 What's your biggest reason for lost deals?

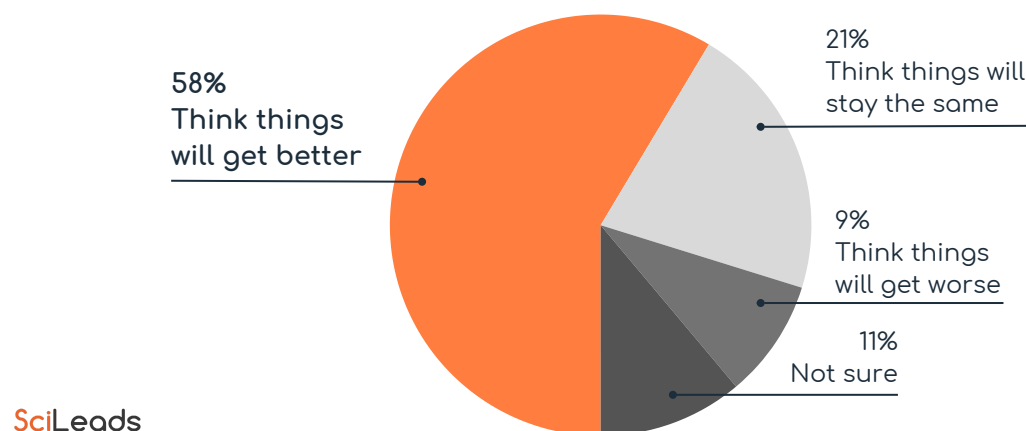💬 *"Making sure we're talking to the right people"*

💬 *"Not communicating to the pain points"*

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- 7% Lack of Decision-Maker Buy-In
- 17% Unresponsive Customer
- 14% Competitor
- 11% Product Fit / Technical Spec
- 51% Customer Budget

Overall the majority of you, 58%, think that 2026 will be better than 2025 - and only 9% of you think it will get worse.

🔍 How optimistic are you on the coming year?

- 58% Think things will get better
- 21% Think things will stay the same
- 9% Think things will get worse
- 11% Not sure

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💡 What's going on with NIH funding? Are VC biotechs up or down? **Get our monthly newsletter with all the data here.**

But if you're feeling stretched, you're not alone.

69% of you reported your targets are growing - but only 32% and 36% respectively have their team or budget growing to match. This means doing more with less, and getting ruthless with focusing on only on the things that deliver results.

Resources stretch to deliver growth

🔍 How is your ___ changing in 2026 vs 2025?

💬 *"Targets always get higher, but days only have 24 hours."*

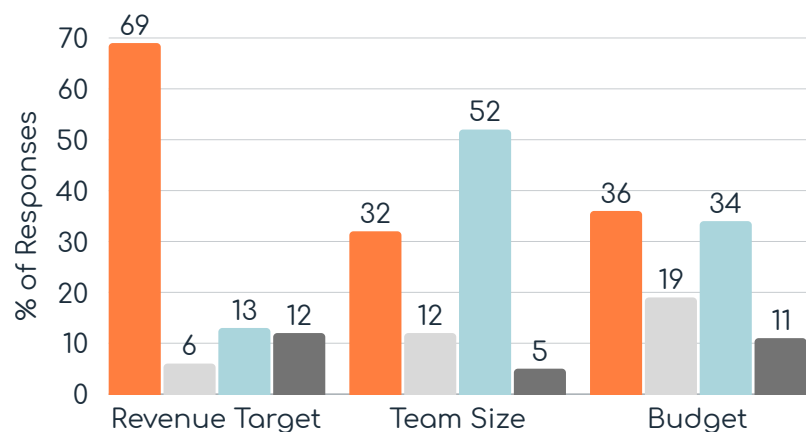💬 *"Process improvements will pay off"*

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- 🟠 Growing
- ⚪ Shrinking
- 🔵 Staying the Same
- ⚫ Don't Know

% of Responses

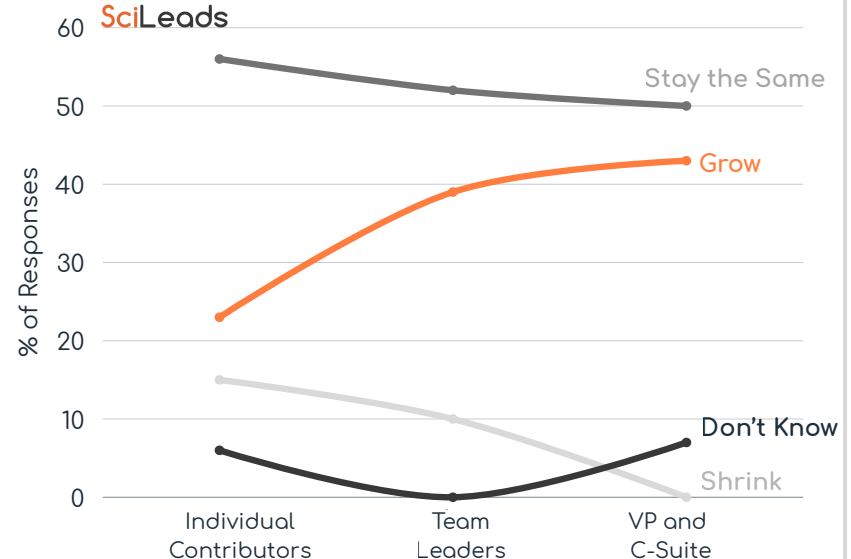| Category	Growing	Shrinking	Staying the Same	Don't Know
Revenue Target	69	6	13	12
Team Size	32	12	52	5
Budget	36	19	34	11

We do see that the more senior you are, the more likely you are to predict team growth, and the less likely you are to predict teams shrinking. This is a really positive indicator that those at the top, typically with the longest term view and deepest overall market awareness, are predicting growth in 2026.

Senior Teams Optimistic

🔍 Is your team likely to grow or shrink in 2026?

SciLeads

% of Responses

Line chart showing responses across Individual Contributors, Team Leaders, and VP and C-Suite:
- Stay the Same: ~56 → ~52 → ~50
- Grow: ~23 → ~39 → ~43
- Shrink: ~15 → ~10 → ~0
- Don't Know: ~6 → ~0 → ~7

Pipeline

Within our pipelines, we want to look for the factors we can influence or control.

Conversion is the most commonly reported challenge, and comments touching on the difficulty in capturing and holding the attention of our buyers re-confirm it. This echoes the reasons for lost deals we saw earlier; threading in decision-makers and remaining "politely persistent" will be key tactics to drive that conversion. Human connection and clear relevance is also so important here, and in the prospecting section we look at the methods high performers are using to connect with customers.

Conversion is the Biggest Challenge

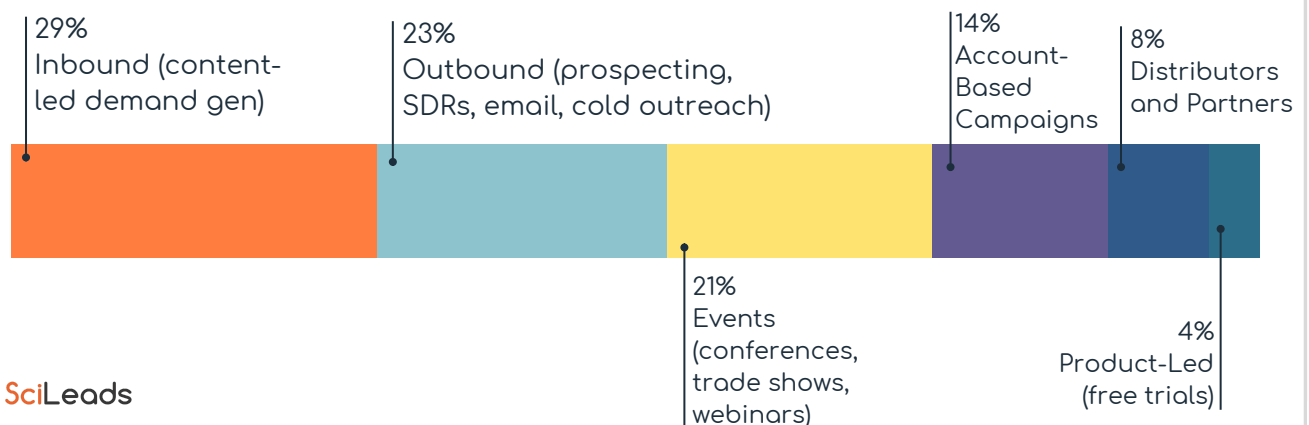🔍 **What are your biggest challenges within your role?**

💬 *"Attention Economy"*

💬 *"If trends keep this way (AI slop and spam becoming overabundant), the internet might become less and less relevant for sales."*
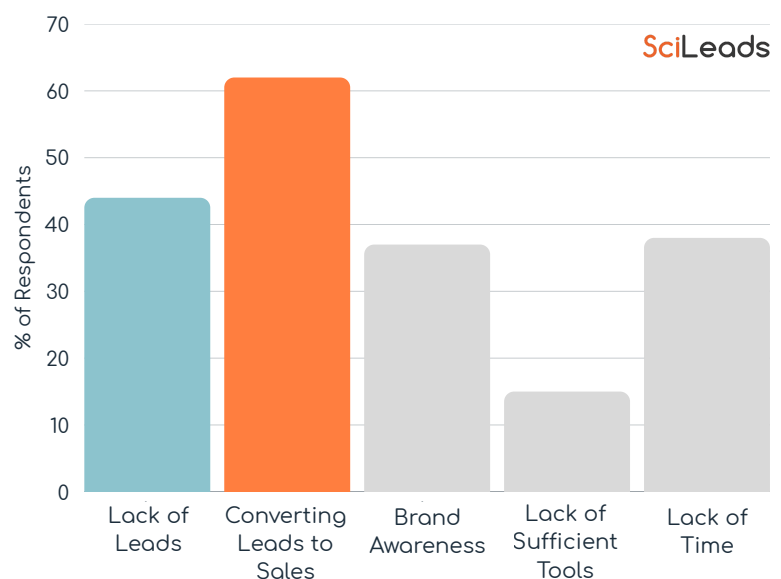
The top lead sources were inbound (29%), outbound prospecting (23%), and events (21%) - but the spread was quite broad. This indicates resilient pipelines that are not over-reliant on one channel.

🔍 **Where does the majority of your pipeline originate from?**

29% Inbound (content-led demand gen)

23% Outbound (prospecting, SDRs, email, cold outreach)

21% Events (conferences, trade shows, webinars)

14% Account-Based Campaigns

8% Distributors and Partners

4% Product-Led (free trials)

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Prospecting

There are many sources online speaking to "typical" email open rates and reply rates. But these vary massively, and include a very broad range of industries and target customers. We wanted to collect a benchmark specific to those selling to scientists.

The average open rate for cold emails to scientists was 10.7%, though we can see the spread is very broad. Even within the scientific niche there's huge variation.

Average Open rate
10.7%

🔍 What is your typical open rate from cold outreach?

SciLeads

(Bar chart — % of Responses, categories: 0-5%, 6-10%, 11-20%, 20% +)
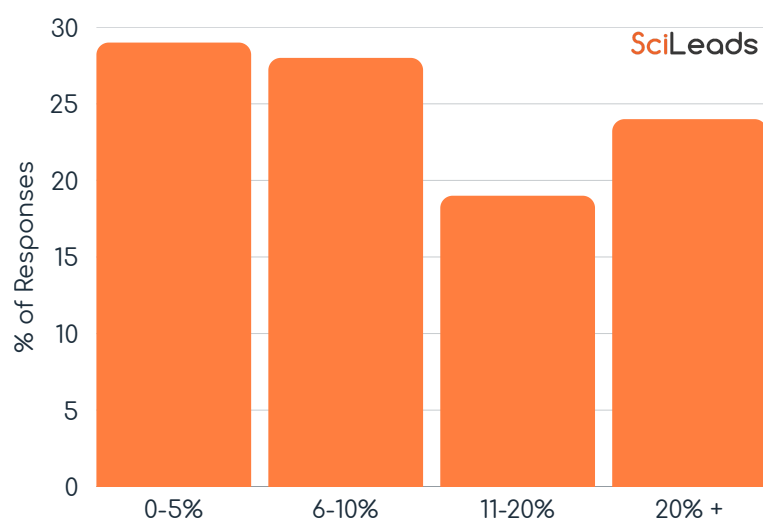
The average reply rate for cold outreach to scientists was 4.2%, and we can see this was less varied across the spectrum.

Average Reply rate
4.2%

🔍 What is your typical reply rate from cold outreach?

💡 For cold emails that drive results, watch our "Cold Email Clinic" session on-demand here.

SciLeads

(Bar chart — % of Responses, categories: 0-5%, 6-10%, 11-20%, 20% +)
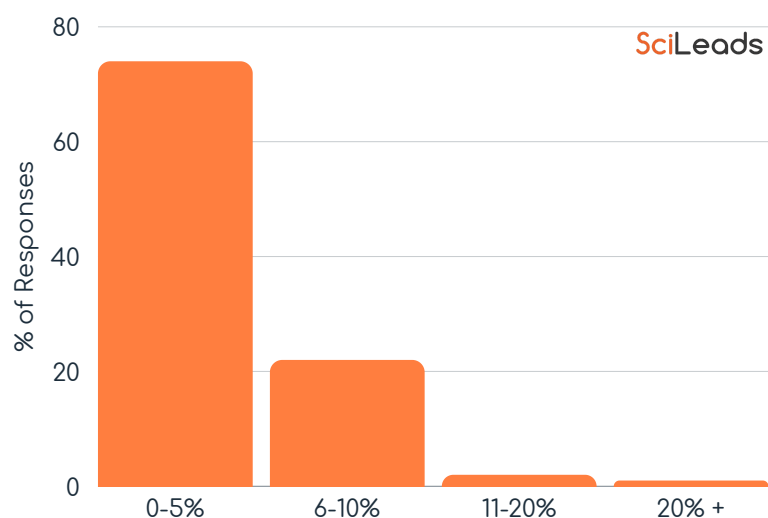
Where written messages are used, personalization is a must. It makes the recipient feel understood, and shows that you have chosen to contact them for a specific reason - both of which boost response rates. When speaking to highly analytical scientist buyers this is especially important.
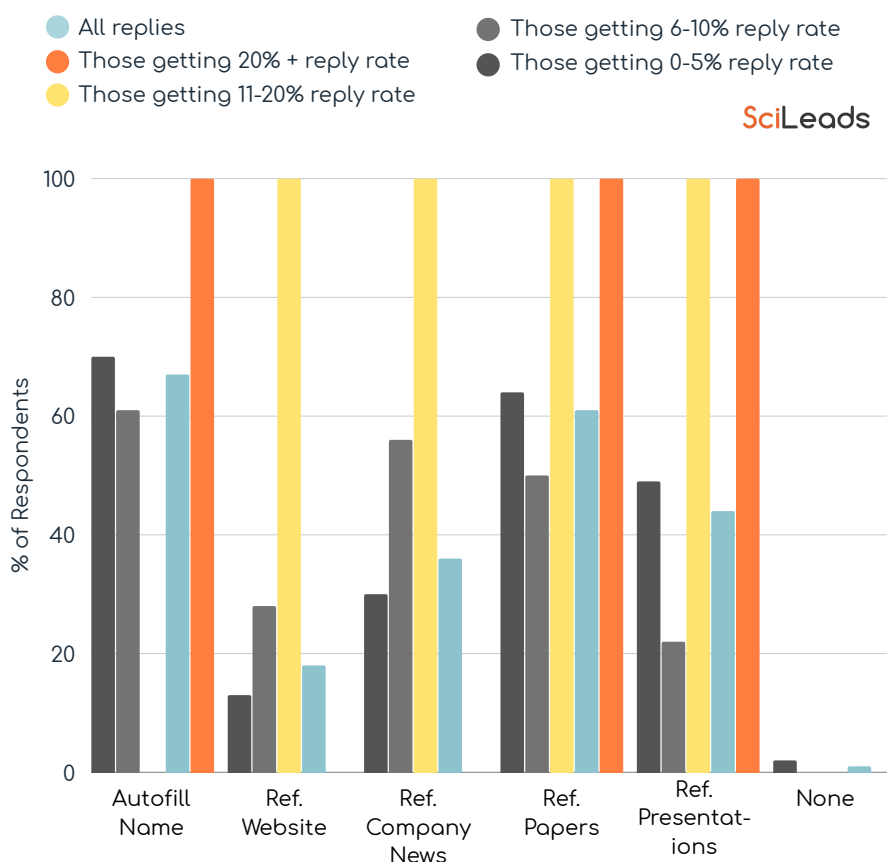
Personalization means more than *"Hi firstname"*. In science especially, there is so much information publicly available about the buyer's grants, publications, and presentations which we can use to understand their work and needs before reaching out.

As well as looking at all responses on personalization, we can isolate those achieving high reply rates. We find the high performers are more likely to use more personalization, and more likely to reference the individual's work.

This makes sense, since we are reaching out to end users of the lab equipment or consumables, e.g. *Dr Clark, the Senior Scientist*. She might have no connection to company headlines, or projects referenced on the company's website - but a paper she authored, or a presentation she gave at a conference? That speaks directly to work she *personally* delivered - and is more likely to get a response.
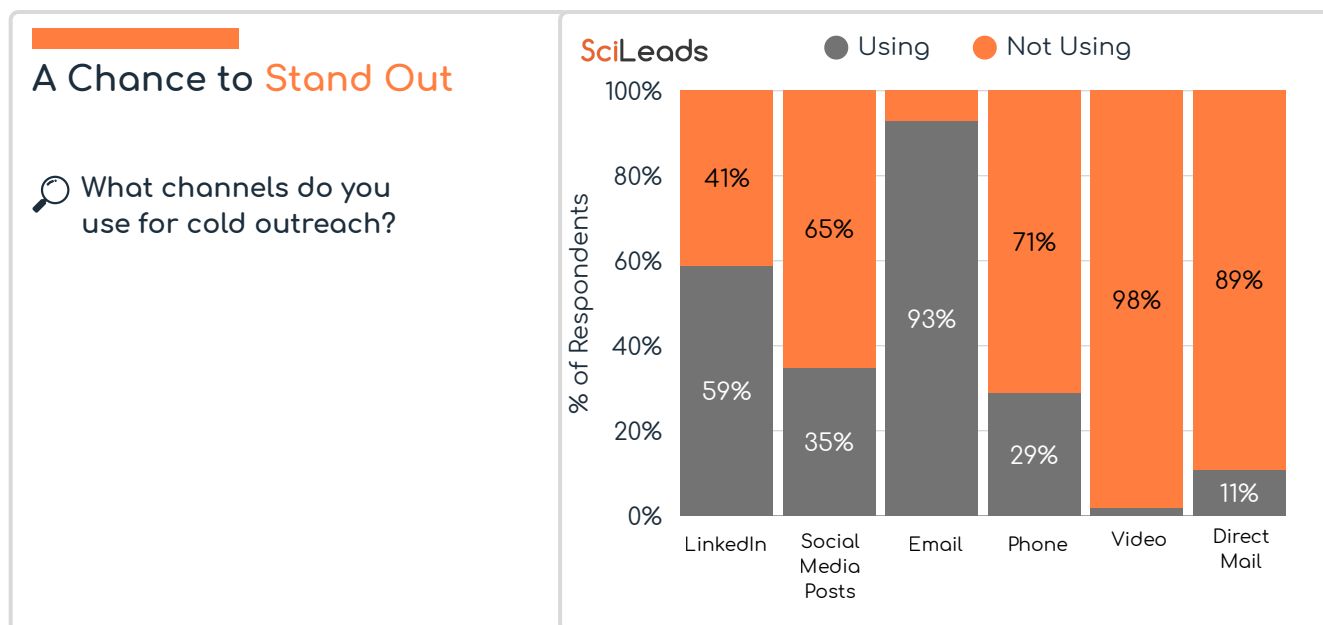
High Performers Reference the Individual's Work

🔍 How do you personalize your cold outreach?

Legend: All replies · Those getting 20% + reply rate · Those getting 11-20% reply rate · Those getting 6-10% reply rate · Those getting 0-5% reply rate

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Of course email is not the only route, and when we asked about channels, 59% of you are using LinkedIn messages as well.

We can look at these data and see opportunity; 71% of people are not bothering to pick up the phone, and 98% of people are not sending video messages. This is particularly interesting given that "unresponsive customer" was the top reason for lost deals for 17% of you - using phone calls or video notes to show you're a real human makes it much more difficult to ignore you.

A Chance to Stand Out

🔍 What channels do you use for cold outreach?

SciLeads ● Using ● Not Using

% of Respondents

Channel	Using	Not Using
LinkedIn	59%	41%
Social Media Posts	35%	65%
Email	93%	
Phone	29%	71%
Video		98%
Direct Mail	11%	89%

But a channel being little-used doesn't necessarily mean it's good - so what are the high performers doing?

When we cross-reference channels with the reply rates, we see that those getting 11%+ replies are more likely than average to use phone, LinkedIn, social media posts, and video.
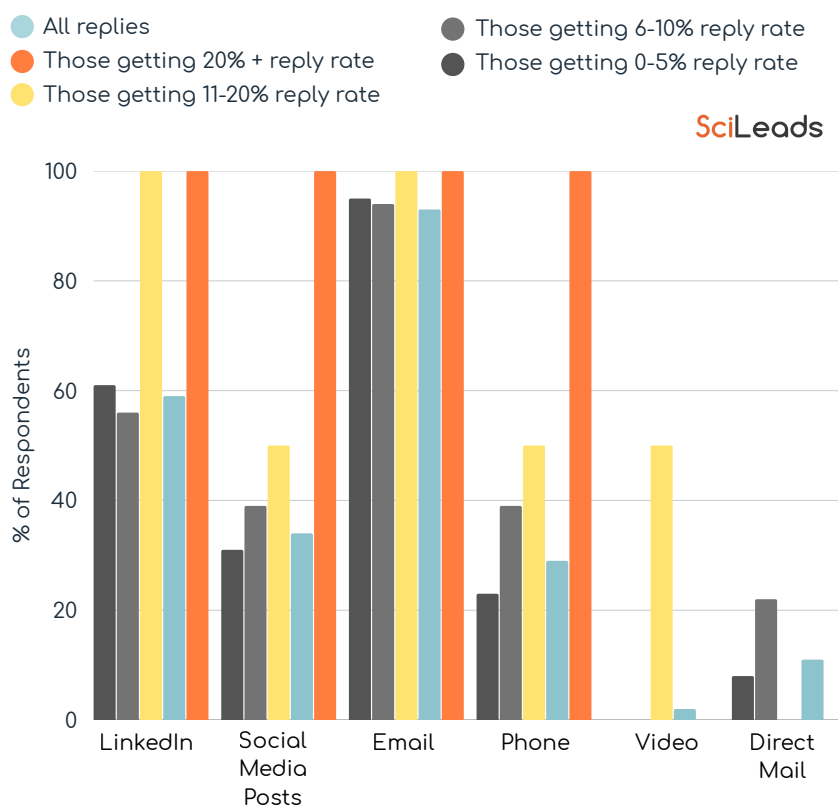
They are also using a wider range of channels, and this makes sense - each serves a unique purpose;

- **LinkedIn** and **Email** - personalized messages and nudges.
- **Social Media Posts** - showing up in your ICP's feed with news or tips; subconsciously associating your name with being useful.
- **Video** - personalized message with clear a clear human face and voice.
- **Phone** - 2-way conversation with a clear human input.

High Performers use More Channels

What channels do you use for cold outreach?

How to post on LinkedIn to engage and connect with scientists - watch the webinar here.

Legend:
- All replies
- Those getting 20% + reply rate
- Those getting 11-20% reply rate
- Those getting 6-10% reply rate
- Those getting 0-5% reply rate

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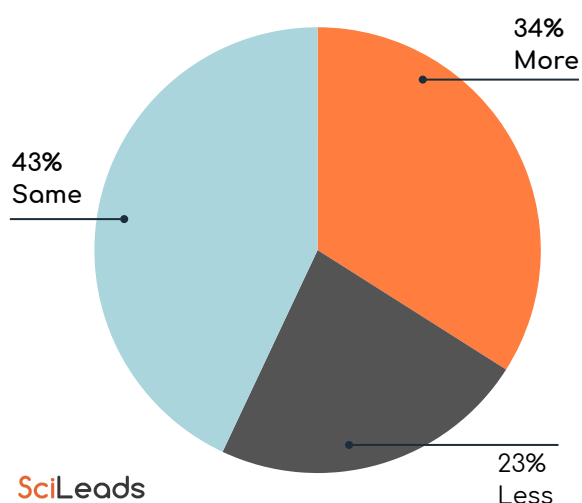
Events

Turning to events, 77% of you report that you are attending at least the same or more conferences in 2026 vs 2025. In itself this isn't unusual, but actually only ⅓ of you are happy with the ROI you're getting.
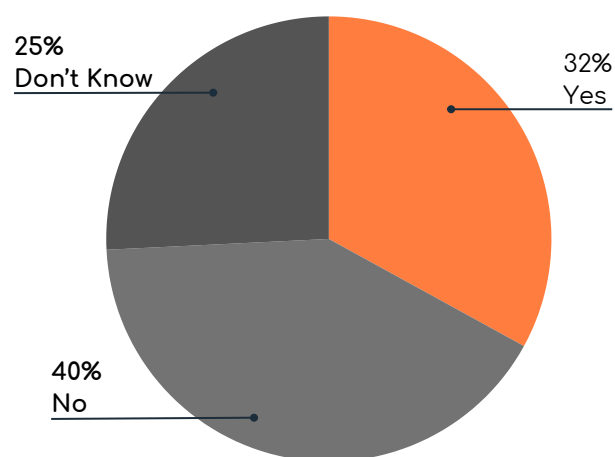
Conferences Remain Popular...

Are you planning to attend more or less conferences in 2026 vs 2025?

34% More

43% Same

23% Less

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But Desire for Better ROI is High

Are you happy with the ROI you get from in-person conferences?

25% Don't Know

32% Yes

40% No

You also revealed that 30% of the time conferences are chosen simply out of habit! The next most popular sources are LinkedIn, then jointly Google and SciLeads.

Habit and LinkedIn Drive Conference Selection

Where do you find the conferences your ICPs are attending?

Get a free report of the conferences that best match your scientific keywords here.

21% LinkedIn

SciLeads

18% Google

18% SciLeads

13% Advertising

30% Habit
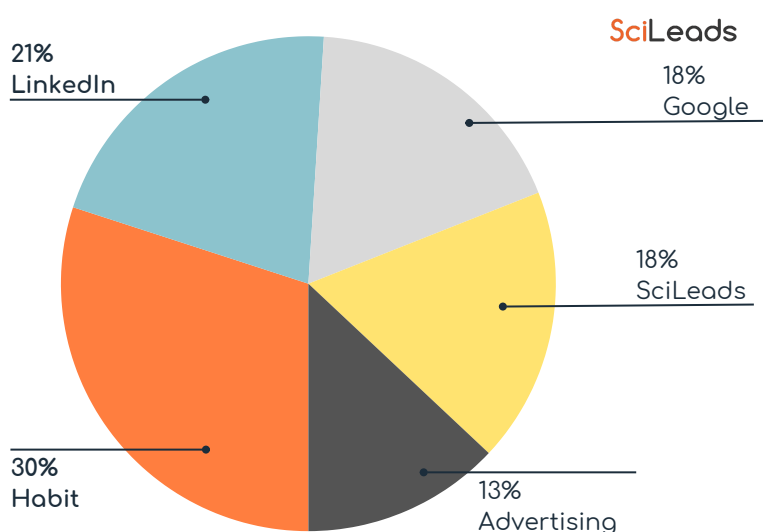
While there is some merit in building familiarity and seeing the same audiences by repeating events, those unhappy with ROI were more likely to attend events out of habit. This is a factor in your control; review the results, and consciously select events that match with your goals!

Those finding events on LinkedIn or SciLeads were more likely to be happy with ROI; potentially because these are more likely to be popular (talked about on social) or relevant (high keyword-match) respectively.

Happy People find Events on LinkedIn & SciLeads

🔍 Where do you find the conferences your ICPs are attending?

● Those happy w event ROI
● Those not happy w event ROI
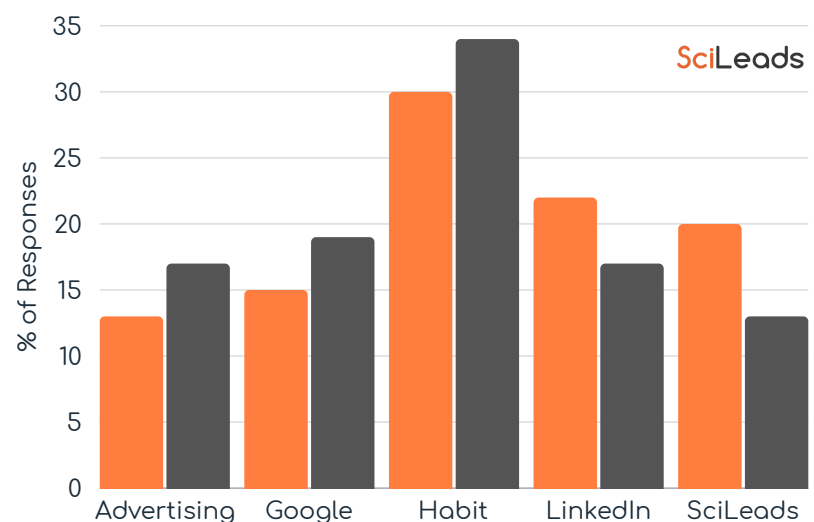
We asked if you reach out to prospects before events, and it was no surprise that those happy with events ROI more often do outreach beforehand. If you're not already doing it, try it for your next conference and see the difference.
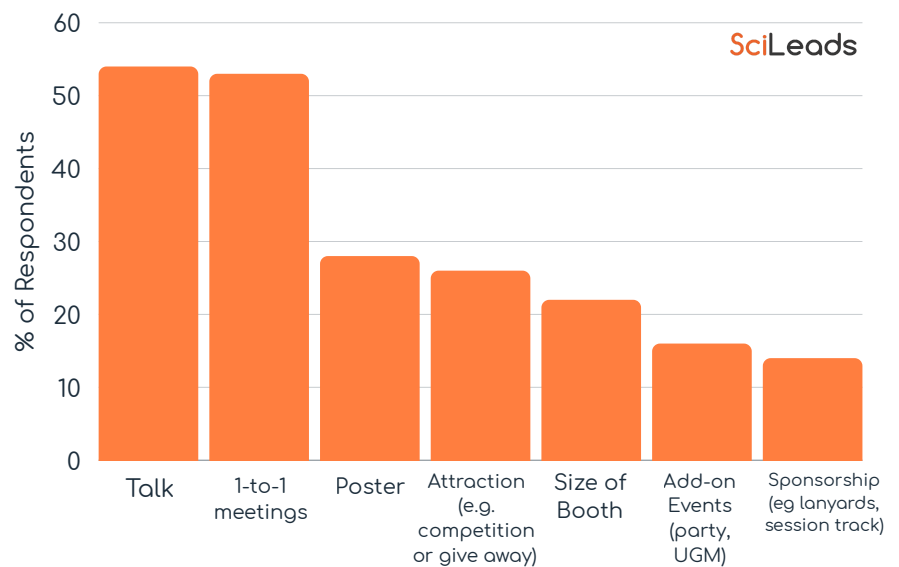
Homework Makes You Happy

🔍 Do you reach out to individual prospects before attending a conference?

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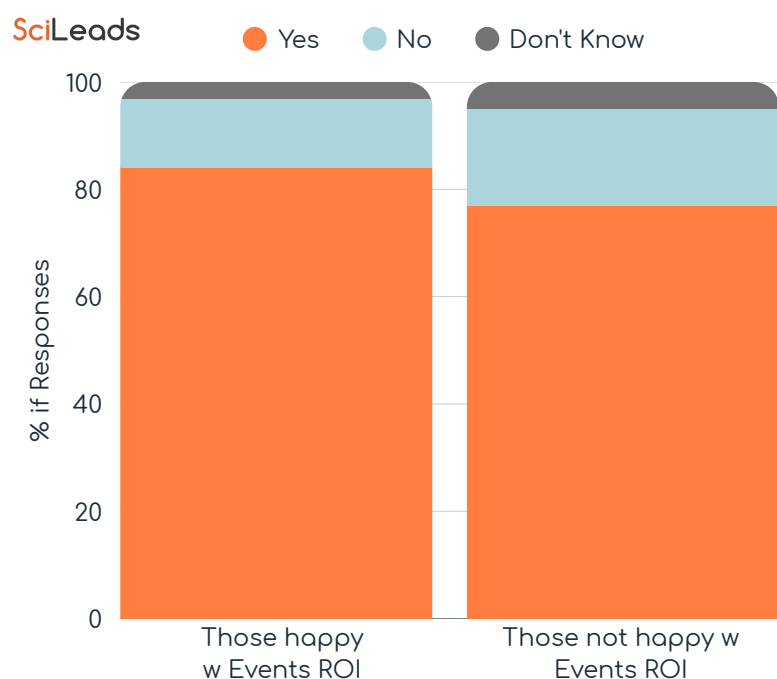
When it comes to making an impression at conferences, most of you reported that talks and 1-to-1 meetings have the greatest impact.

Talks and **Meetings** Drive Conference ROI

🔍 What activities at conferences have the biggest impact? (tick all that apply)

Marketing

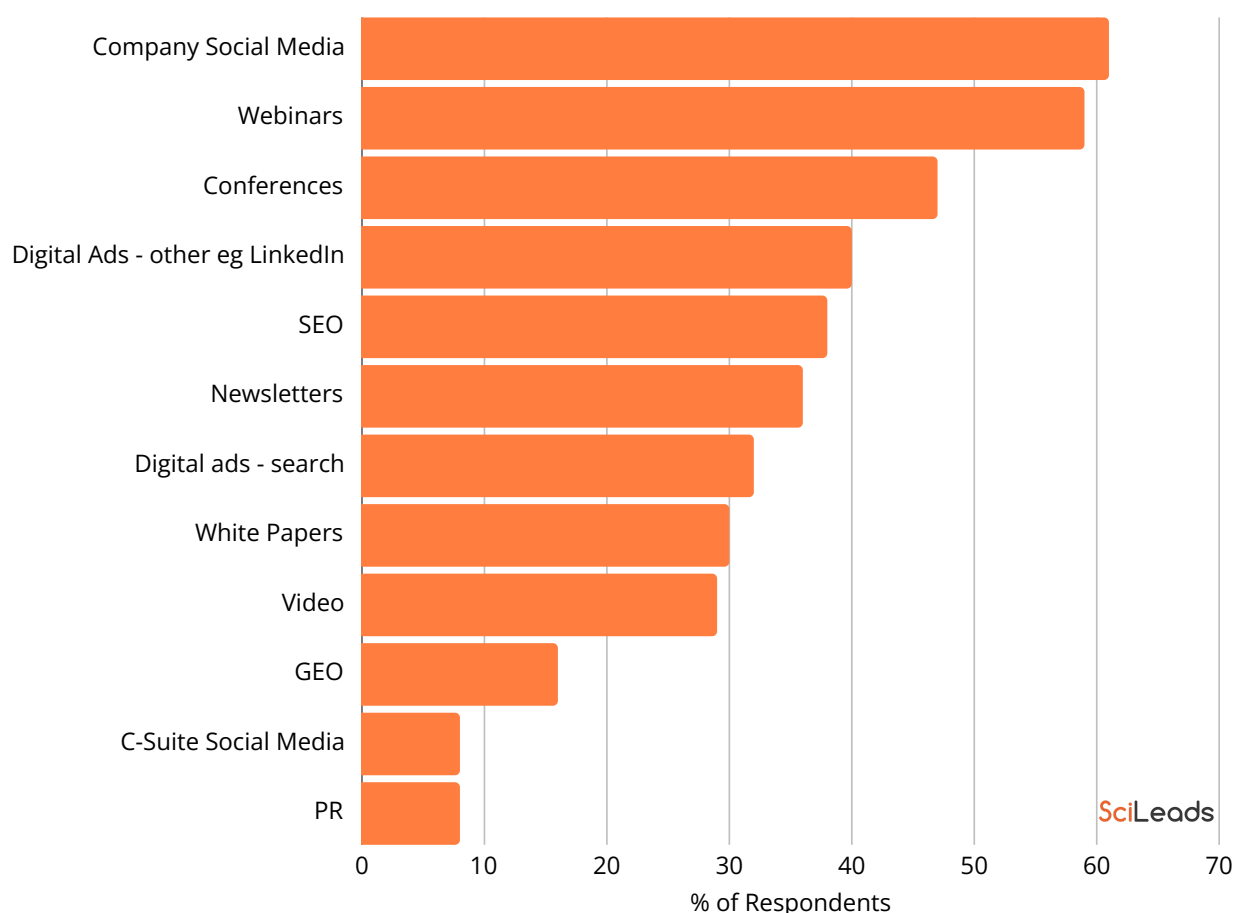For science marketing tactics in 2026 social media, webinars, and conferences ranked highly.

We were interested to see that C-suite social media was not more popular, given its increasing prevalence in other industries. The **prospecting** section showed that high performers use social media posts in their mix. We spoke with guests who are effectively using LinkedIn to connect with scientists on our webinar, so see this for more detail.

> How to post on LinkedIn to engage and connect with scientists - watch the webinar here.

Company Social, Webinars, and Conferences Top Marketing Tactics

🔍 What marketing tactics will your company do more of in 2026? (tick all that apply)

Bar chart titled "% of Respondents":

| Tactic	% of Respondents (approx)
Company Social Media	61
Webinars	59
Conferences	47
Digital Ads - other eg LinkedIn	40
SEO	38
Newsletters	36
Digital ads - search	32
White Papers	30
Video	29
GEO	16
C-Suite Social Media	8
PR	8

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Tools & Tech

When it comes to tools, the vast majority of you reported using AI at least daily. If you're not already using AI somewhere in your work, it's time to try it.

AI in Daily Use

🔍 How often do you use AI tools in your typical working day?

8%
Less Often

45%
Multiple Times
a Day

16%
Weekly

30%
Daily

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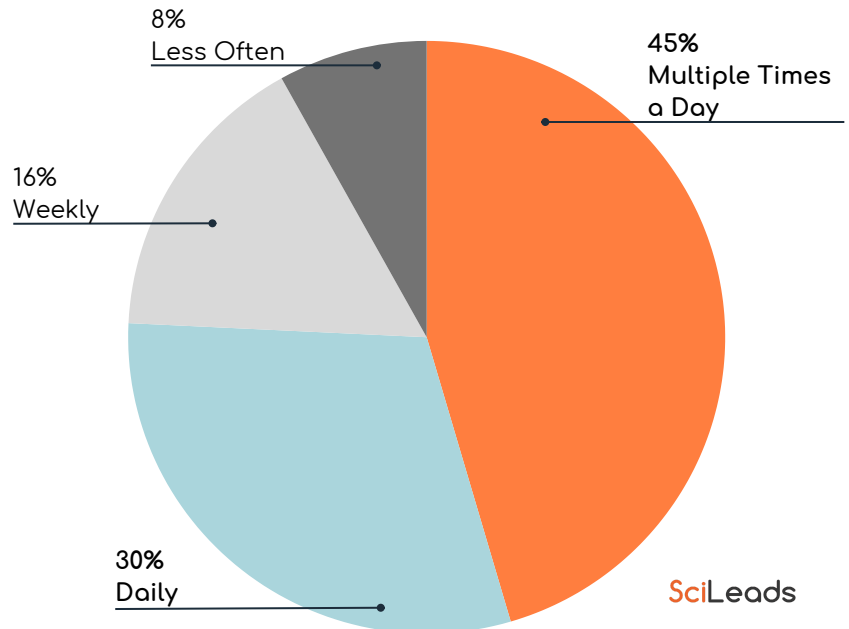
When we asked for your recommended tools, AI topped the board - but many of you mentioned tools and practices rooted in human connection. In the free type comments we found "humanity" and "deeply personalized outreach" alongside platforms like SciLeads and Sales Navigator - again returning to the value of authentic human connection that we found in the **prospecting** data.

AI and Human Outreach Tools Top Recommendations

🔍 What is your "must-try" tool recommendation for sales and marketing professionals?

💡 Recommendations grouped to examine trends.
See Appendix for complete list.

48%
AI

24%
Others

17%
CRMs

9%
Email

2%
Design

SciLeads
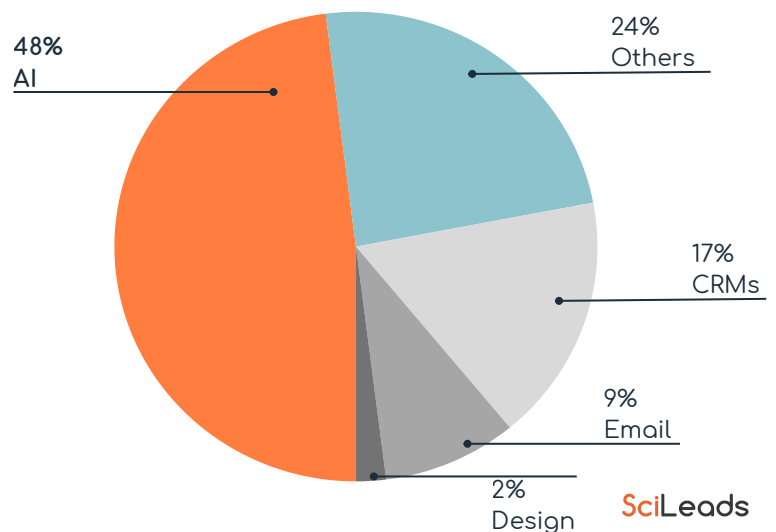
We then asked what your biggest challenge is with using these tools, and this was a free-type question. Many of you spoke about technical aspects of platforms, or costs, which we can't really influence as users.

However, time and usage were often cited too; together comprising 41% of responses.

For these, we can exert influence. Conducting focused trials, with a specific goal in mind, and adequate time to test will let you discover what works best.

Rolling out the winners to the whole team is then vital, to multiply that success. Many of you commented about different people having their "pet platforms" and feeling splintered. We have seen great results among SciLeads users when whole teams or departments all use and understand it; it means there is a cohesive strategy and uniform approach, which positively impacts brand reputation as well as results.

For Better Results Invest Time, and Align

🔍 What's your biggest challenge with your current sales & marketing tools?

💬 *"Not cohesive enough across the company"*

💬 *"Having the time to ensure we're getting the most out of the software"*

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% of Responses

Time	
Integration	
Technical	
Cost	
Usage	
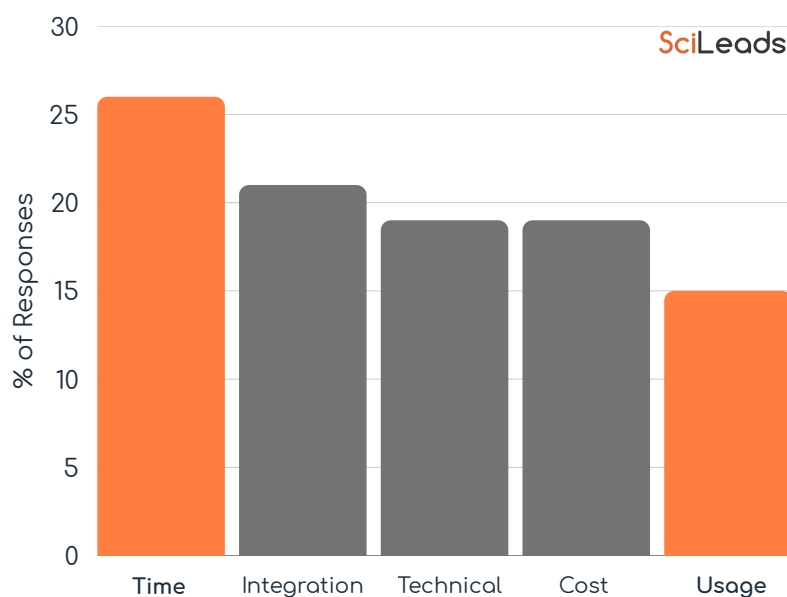
Recommendations

Overall these results show that science sales and marketing teams are cautiously optimistic for 2026, and we can still see many factors within our control that we can change and improve.

Our top recommended actions from these results are;

1 **Continue with emails** - remaining politely persistent to get that response, and personalizing with the individual's work rather than company-wide news.

2 **Use LinkedIn, Social Media Posts, and Phone Calls too** - to spread your reach, build your reputation, and show your human side respectively.

3 **Choose conferences wisely** using LinkedIn and SciLeads, not just habit!

4 **Get the best ROI from events** by reaching out to prospects beforehand, and having a talk where possible.

5 **When evaluating new tools**, carve out time to experiment - then double down on winners, rolling them out team-wide to multiply that success.

For cold emails that drive results, watch our "Cold Email Clinic" session on-demand here.

Appendix

We asked for your "must-try" recommendations for sales and marketing professionals - here they are. Some were recommended many times (ChatGPT, SciLeads, HubSpot) but we have listed them just once here for clarity.

- ChatGPT
- SciLeads
- Hubspot
- Hubspot Sequences
- Zoho- CRM
- Lovart for communications and design; any LLM for promotional emails
- coral.ai
- Deeply personalized outreach
- Google Gemini
- Juma
- Qualified AI SDR Platform
- Outreach.io
- CoPilot
- SEMRUSH competition analysis
- hunter.io for email retrieval (when not found on SciLeads)
- Besides SciLeads, I would say sequencing. Personalized one-to-one emails generate more leads than traditional marketing emails. Companies should be doing both.
- Automa (web automation for prospecting)
- NotebookLM (for paper summaries)
- Google Notebook
- Some form of mail merge, recording to SFDC.
- AmpleMarket
- Sales Navigator
- Humanity
- Hubspot integrations, and maply
- Perplexity

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Empowering 500+ Companies to Accelerate Growth

Deloitte.

50 | Technology **Fast 50**
2025 IRELAND
WINNER

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