



# Behind the Scenes

A Marketing, Sales, and Customer Success Pulse Check

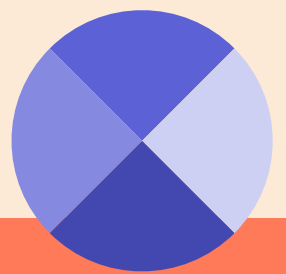
Understanding the Trends, Challenges & Strategies for Success in 2023



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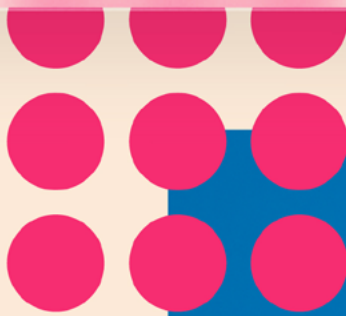
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Part 01

# Foreword



# Foreword

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For professionals working in marketing, sales and customer success in the UK, 2023 has already been a disruptive time, filled with both great opportunities and some potential hurdles.

The post-pandemic world we've emerged into is radically different from the one we left behind. Everything, from the kind of working models employees now expect to the revolutionary AI tools at their fingertips, means business leaders have a completely new landscape to navigate and contend with this year.

Customer preferences have similarly been revolutionised and engaging with them now presents a unique set of challenges. Professionals have to both go back to the fundamentals to provide the familiarity customers desire, while also adapting to the new normal of AI-driven customer journeys, something we couldn't have predicted just a few years ago.

These seismic societal and technological changes combined with the general state of economic uncertainty is having a destabilising effect on business leaders' decision-making, a task now filled with contradictions.

# Foreword

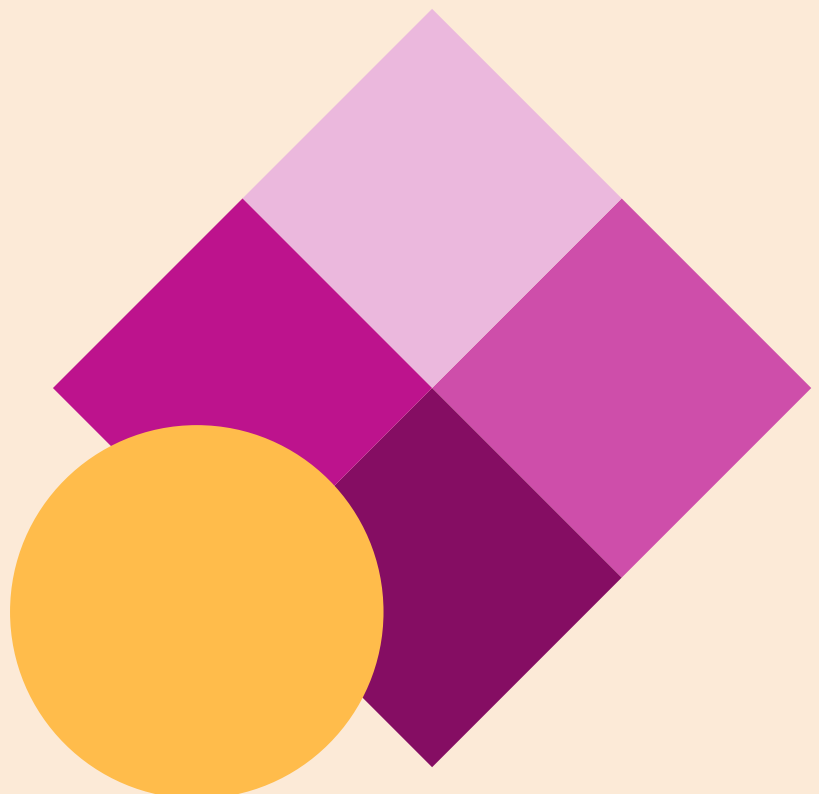
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For instance, on the one hand, new AI tools are helping marketing, sales and customer success teams save time by allowing them to work more efficiently. But on the other hand, despite many now using these tools, some professionals also fear it will make parts of their role redundant as well as unleash inaccuracies and security issues.

Businesses know this is not the time to take their foot off the pedal when it comes to digital transformation. This is the time to become more strategic and intentional in approach, and make sure their digital transformation strategy incorporates the many reciprocal human elements that are critical to its success.

To understand this picture, we spoke to more than 900 cross-industry marketing, sales and customer success managers across the UK in June of 2023. Managers are on the frontlines of their organisations, responsible for executing strategies and navigating day-to-day tasks. In capturing a snapshot of the trends, challenges and opportunities facing these professionals, we hope to offer some guidance to leaders as they formulate their business plans for the next 12 months.

**By Mark Barry, EMEA Managing Director, HubSpot**



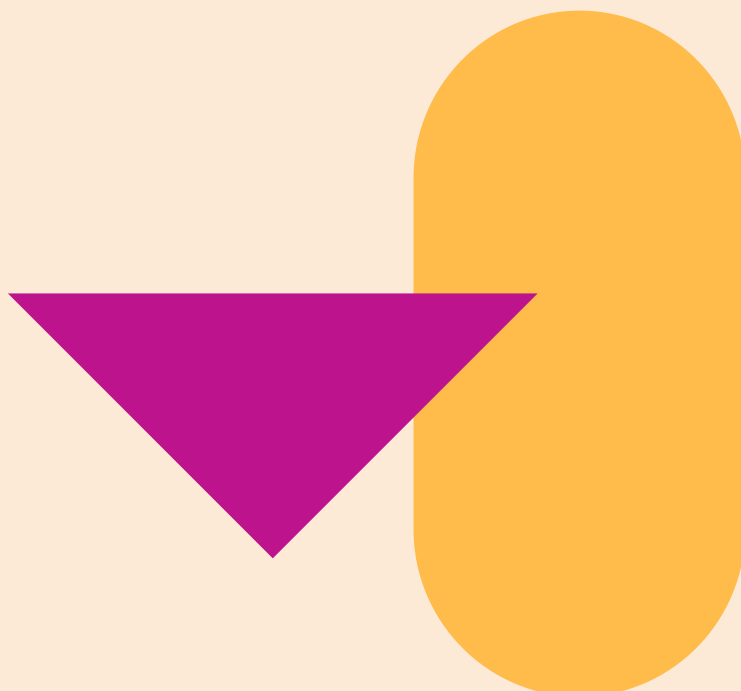


Part 02

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# Key Themes at a Glance





## Key themes at a glance

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A variety of topics were discussed with the sales, marketing and customer success managers to uncover their true feelings towards the numerous factors influencing their roles. However, there were three areas of commonality that emerged from those conversations – job satisfaction, budgets and flexible working.

# Key themes at a glance

## a. Job satisfaction

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The last few years have led to some significant changes in how managers across marketing, sales and customer success view their roles. From learning to adapt to smaller, often more remote teams, to exploring new skills in order to be able to work more closely with the wider business, the last 12 months have been defined by change.

**77%**

says they understand  
their organisation's  
business goals

As it stands, most managers report feeling connected to the larger business, with an average of 77% of all respondents saying they understand their organisation's business goals. These professionals have gained a deep understanding of businesses' goals and truly feel capable of delivering the ingenuity and strategies needed to achieve them.

For example, marketing managers – often considered the ideas powerhouse within their organisations – report regularly being given opportunities to offer input and are particularly relied upon when it comes to innovation.

However, they can also often find themselves questioning whether they're true strategic partners in the business – especially as more than half (53%) say they're still regularly asked to execute plans they had little to no influence over.

So, while most of them report they still feel like they can reach their full potential in their current roles, it's important to recognise there are some caveats to this apparent sense of fulfilment. For instance, on average, more than half of marketing, sales or customer success managers would consider moving roles in the next 12 months if it meant more flexible working conditions, access to training or better technology and tools to do their jobs.



# Key themes at a glance

## b. Budgets

While there have been significant exciting technological changes this year, purse strings have also been pulled tighter due to contracting economies and industries. This has seen budgets largely remaining the same or reducing, meaning practically every manager is being asked to do more with less.

However, businesses also recognise that this would be a particularly ill-advised time to slow down their digital transformation efforts, especially as new AI tools are redefining what's possible. So, businesses need to strike a fine balance between upskilling existing workforces and hiring the new talent they need to drive this innovation.

# 66%

marketing managers feel they receive the right training to use technology and tools available

And with some managers, such as those in marketing, a lot more likely to report feeling like they receive the right training to use the technology and tools available to them (66%) than others – such as those in customer success (51%) – it's fair to say some teams are peering over the edge of the skills gap more than others.

Further compounding these issues is the fact that despite the generally accepted understanding that data is critical for these managers to achieve their goals, few have seen data analytics tools prioritised for investment. For instance, as much as 40% of marketing managers report needing better data analytics tools to enable them to react quicker to audience behaviours and attitudes if they're to achieve their short-term goals.

And with most of those surveyed also pointing to a lack of investment in tools and technology as the biggest roadblock to them achieving their long-term goals, this is undoubtedly impacting business performance.

Yet, while these budgetary reductions may be having a detrimental impact on these managers – especially on the creativity front – recent advancements in AI seem to be helping offset some of these financial pressures. So, in a manager's quest to do more with less, we're likely to see increased reliance on intelligent tools.

# Key themes at a glance

## c. Flexible working

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The last few years gave professionals of all stripes a glimpse at what life can be like without the burden of having to make it into the office every day. Today, 32% of marketing managers agree that their top priority is gaining the flexibility to work remotely or with a flexible schedule. Similarly, for 26% of sales and 23% of customer success managers, their top priority is the ability to balance work and life commitments to meet customer success targets while ensuring customer satisfaction or sales targets.

We're well and truly in the age of remote and hybrid working, with greater work flexibility now consistently ranking as a top consideration for talent. One key to future success will be in finding ways to provide said flexibility while still ensuring workers still deliver on business goals.

Even relatively happy employees say they would consider changing jobs in the next 12 months if presented with an opportunity with greater work flexibility. This is a post-pandemic reality that leaders need to accept, because they simply can't afford to rest on their laurels if they hope to retain their top talent.





Part 03

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# Spotlight on AI

# Spotlight on AI

Our world is on the cusp of an AI revolution very similar to other seismic economic shifts of the past century. But while the industrial revolution ushered in mass production, and the computer revolution of the 1990s transformed the office, the AI revolution will pave the way for a whole new era of work.

And the grand promise of this next commercial phase isn't just that it will make us more productive – but also happier. While fears that AI will eventually lead to job losses are being felt by marketing, sales and customer success managers, the current reality is that it's an incredibly helpful tool and is being used widely.

82%

of customer success managers have used AI at least once in the last year

80%

of marketing managers have used AI at least once in the last year

79%

of sales managers have used AI at least once in the last year

# Spotlight on AI

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And it's making a tangible difference in the lives of these professionals. How tangible, you ask? Well, the average professional using it reports can save an astounding 2.5 hours a day! According to findings in our [State of Artificial Intelligence in 2023](#), 79% of salespeople using AI say it allows them to spend more time selling, and 89% of marketers report that AI improves the quality of their content.

**Because AI is particularly suited to helping automate mundane, tedious tasks, professionals can reclaim that time and divert it towards the more impactful, creative and enjoyable parts of their jobs.**

Nonetheless, the way AI is being used by marketing, sales and customer success managers does differ in some fundamental ways – as does their overall attitude towards the technology and the impact it may have on both the future of their roles and the overall business.

# Spotlight on AI

## a. AI use among marketing managers

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As with all professionals surveyed, marketing managers have embraced the use of AI in their work, with 80% of them saying they've used AI at least once in the last year. Of those using it, 88% say it's effective in their role, with 59% saying it helps them think creatively more frequently and 32% saying they used AI for data analysis and reporting in the past 12 months.

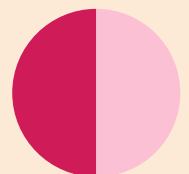
Yet despite its widespread use among marketing managers and the agreement by 59% of them that their business' leadership encourages the use of AI when it comes to improving efficiency in the workplace, overall feelings about using these tools professionally are still mixed.

**A primary concern is security – more than half of marketing managers (56%) agree AI could cause privacy issues such as data breaches.**

This issue could potentially be adding to reservations about AI adoption among businesses constrained by GDPR regulations.

However, some of the reservations this cohort of professionals have towards AI is much more personal – the fear that it could make parts of their roles redundant, something half of them believe.

Combined with the impression that leadership has an overall negative view of AI's role in the workplace – something 43% of marketing managers think – it's easy to see how a more pessimistic view of AI could be fostered among these managers. Therefore, awareness, education, and a more unified view of AI from the top down will be essential if businesses are to get the most out of these extraordinary tools.



# Spotlight on AI

## b. AI use among sales managers

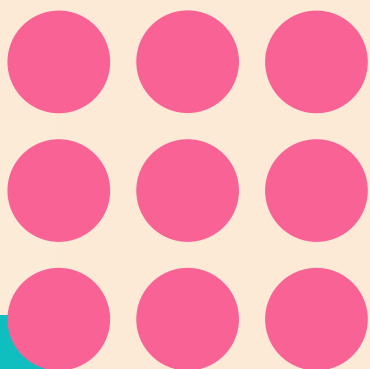
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Much like marketing managers, sales managers have also been widely experimenting with AI tools, with 79% of them using it at least once over the last year. And it has been a similarly effective tool for this cohort according to 87% of sales managers, with it helping these professionals optimise their sales processes by identifying bottlenecks and inefficiencies, while also helping them analyse customer data and prioritise leads.

With benefits so wide ranging and foundational, it's no surprise that the number of them planning to use AI next year is set to grow by nearly 10%.

However, sales managers are even more hesitant than their marketing colleagues around the impact of AI tools on their roles in the future – 10% more sales managers (60%) believe AI is going to make elements of their role redundant.

Another key driver of the caution amongst sales managers is that nearly half of them (49%) think they don't have the right skillset to operate AI tools effectively. So, if business leaders want their sales teams to be able to deliver the productivity and revenue boosts that these tools can help unlock, it will take support, education and upskilling to encourage them to let go of their fears and fully embrace the potential of AI.



# Spotlight on AI

## c. AI use among customer success managers

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Of the three cohorts of managers, those in customer success have the highest proportion of individuals saying AI is effective in their role (92%), with 82% reporting to already be using it. The primary uses of AI by customer success managers are to help monitor customer behaviour, identify problems and quickly find solutions (28%).

**However, the greater exposure and experience with AI may be a double-edged sword, as these managers are also the most concerned about the accuracy and potential for mistakes by AI (56%).**

They were also most likely to agree that AI could make their entire role redundant (53%).

Here we see that, despite a higher level of familiarity with AI tools, customer success managers are not immune to the sense of uncertainty pervading industry. And much like their contemporaries, they too seek to be reassured by a clearer sense of their organisation's wider feelings towards AI, and to know measures and guidelines are being put in place to ensure AI is used ethically and responsibly.



# Spotlight on AI

## AI Action Points



Despite the current hype around AI, leaders are still at risk of underestimating its potential to revolutionise their businesses. To ensure they don't miss out on the opportunities available, it's important they create a safe environment for managers to experiment – and fail – with these new tools and start building their internal foundation for future AI use in the business.



AI has the potential to radically improve employee productivity, however, it's important leadership doesn't take a short-term view of these resource gains and devalue the importance of employees. These tools still only work best in unison with professionals, so as leaders empower managers to automate the mundane aspects of their roles, they also need to focus on enabling and encouraging them to spend more time on the more high-value, human aspects of their jobs.



Leadership needs to strive to be as explicit as possible in their communications around their position on using AI. At the moment, there's a lot of uncertainty by managers around leadership's feelings towards its use in the workplace, and this confusion may be hampering the business' ability to digitally evolve. Clear and direct guidance around AI use will give managers the confidence to explore these tools and innovate operations.

Part 04

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# Marketing in 2023



# Marketing in 2023

Marketing managers are the creative engines at the centre of their business, and they are focused on one thing above all else – the quality of customer engagement. Our research found that marketing managers’ top three short-term priorities are improving the customer experience (28%), connecting social media engagement and analytics to the customer journey (27%) and expanding their channel strategy to reach customers in new places (27%).

This focus on the customer engagement is also what’s determining this cohorts’ future plans, with reaching customers in new places, improving the customer experience and developing brand loyalty programmes their top three long-term priorities.

## Long-term customer experience priorities for marketing managers

26%

Expanding our channel strategy to reach customers in new places

24%

Improving the customer experience

23%

Better understanding your customer through data-points

23%

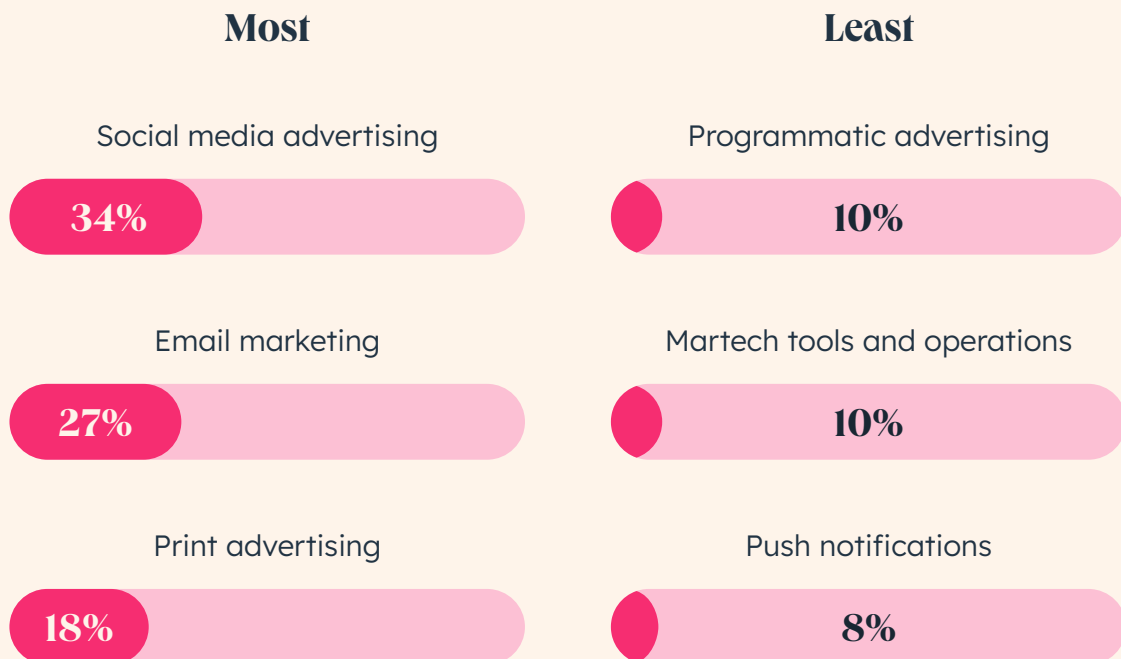
Creating a brand loyalty programme

# Marketing in 2023

Understanding how to deliver stronger customer engagement in our modern, digital world is highly dependent on having the right tools. So, it's no surprise that access to better data analytics tools to enable faster reactivity to audience behaviours and attitudes is something two-out-of-five marketing managers report needing if they're to achieve their short-term goals.

But it's not only technology that these professionals think is important, as 30% also point to the need for more customer success staff to deliver quality human interactions. As our world becomes more digital, a higher value will be placed by customers on genuine human interactions

## Most and least prioritised channels in 2023 by marketing managers [Q10]



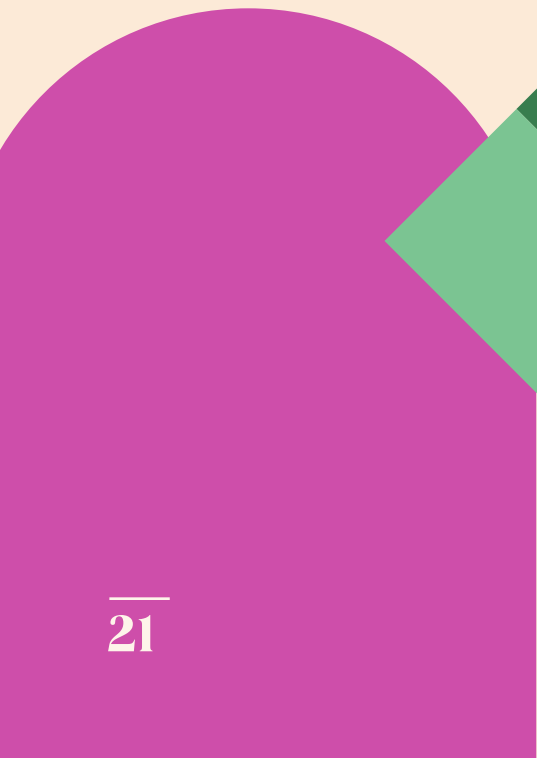
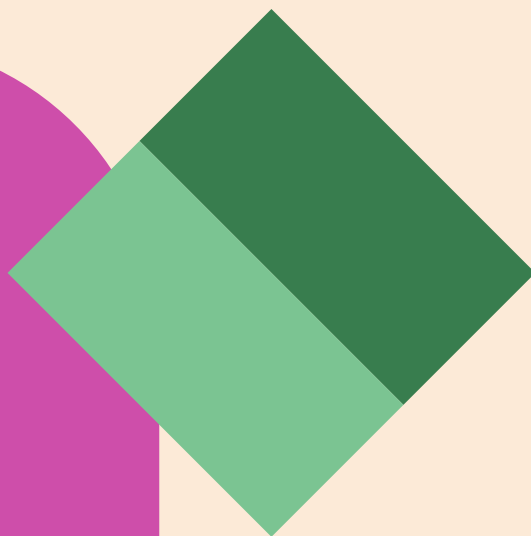
# Marketing in 2023

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And while some marketing managers have also had to work with leaner budgets this year, they seem to be the least impacted by budget cuts of the three groups of professionals surveyed. They're also the most optimistic that their budgets will either remain the same (48%) or increase (33%).

For those that have experienced budget cuts, the main aspects of their jobs impacted have been their approach to customer acquisition (40%), their freedom of creativity (37%) and the focus they place on customer retention (29%).

Having access to the right types of training for the technology and tools available to them was also another area where marketing managers came out strongest (66%). This may likely contribute to why they were also the least likely to admit to a technology skills gap in their teams, with less than half (46%) saying they're experiencing one.





Before a brand can delight customers, they must first excite them. Attracting and engaging customers is at the core of every marketer's strategy. However, in today's dynamic landscape, marketers face constant challenges.

With a multitude of new technologies, such as AI, to master, various social media platforms to maintain a presence on and economic disruptions to navigate, complexity has reached unprecedented levels. Yet, marketers have always excelled at adapting, whether during downturns or disruptions, leveraging their creativity and problem-solving skills.

The workplace is undergoing a technological transformation, and marketers must fully immerse themselves to stay aligned with their customers and prospects. Those who eagerly embrace this digital playground and learn how to amplify their brand's reach and engagement will ultimately prove the value of marketing to the entire business.

**Julie Lock,**

Head of Marketing UKI, HubSpot

# Marketing in 2023

## Action points for marketing leaders



Our survey shows that marketing managers feel more in sync with customer success managers than sales managers, but are positive about taking steps to improve their cross-team collaboration. So, there should be a focus on creating or improving channels communication and coordination between them and the other cohorts of professionals.



It's clear marketing managers have a good understanding of the businesses objectives and are powerful idea generators. However, to unlock their full potential, leaders need to see these professionals as strategic partners, and strive to ensure they're brought in early on projects so they can input in the development stage. This will enable them to have a truer sense of ownership and agency when executing business plans.



Focus on providing marketing managers with technology and tools which help them improve their ability to react faster and more accurately to customers' changing behaviours and needs. However, don't allow the focus on technology to cause you deprioritise the importance of human interaction, as these tools can't be a replacement for the value generated by genuine customer connection. More effort needs to be made to clarify leadership's stance on AI. They need to both acknowledge and implement measures to ensure they're taking the potential security threats of AI seriously, while also reassuring professionals that they support its ethical use.



Part 05

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# Sales in 2023



# Sales in 2023

When it comes to the priorities of sales managers, it's no surprise that being able to better target customers at the right moment in their journey, and strengthen their communication strategies to reach those customers, topped the list – both in the short – and long-term. These are foundational elements of sales roles and it's something that technology has the clear potential to help them improve.

Which likely explains why the third highest priority for sales managers, again, both short- and long-term, was streamlining the sales process. Nearly 1 in 3 (29%) sales managers believe better access to data analytics tools that enable their teams to react quicker to audience behaviours and attitudes, will be the most impactful in helping them overcome the biggest barriers to their short- and long-term goals.

## Top short- and long-term goals of sales managers

### Short-term goals

Better targeting customers at the correct point in their journey

38%

Strengthening communication strategies

32%

Streamlining sales process

31%

Utilising customer data to deliver a more personalised experience

31%

### Long-term goals

Better targeting customers at the correct point in their journey

38%

Streamlining sales process

32%

Push notifications

31%

# Sales in 2023

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With technology becoming so integral to achieving these plans, it's concerning that 55% of sales managers feel their organisation has not invested enough in technology and tools, with more than half (52%) also pointing to a current technology skills gap in the team.

It's maybe no surprise that so many of them have reverted to more traditional sales tactics this year, with a quarter saying they prioritised email marketing, cross selling and upselling this year and deprioritised more digitally dependent methods, such as inbound marketing or outbound prospecting (only 13%).

This is also consistent with the fact that sales managers have experienced bigger budget cuts than marketing managers. So, in response, they've opted for more cost-effective strategies – such as social selling – to make the most of available budget, something 39% of them report doing.

**But this focus on traditional sales tactics may also be connected to the fact that 43% of sales managers feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of new technology they need to get to grips with and think there's too much tech available for them to keep up with.**

Due to the constant need to make a profit, sales managers may be finding it too difficult to transform their sales approaches – and the larger business may ultimately be suffering as a result.



**In a year marked by transformation, sales managers have fearlessly ventured into uncharted technological territory, harnessing the power of AI to drive efficiency. Despite budget limitations, they have demonstrated innovative resourcefulness in making the most of the tools available to them.**

**This landscape shift highlights the need for continued investment in tools, technology, and training. Rather than eliminating roles, it is about evolving them. Upskilling becomes crucial to bridge the skills gap and maximise the potential of the ongoing digital metamorphosis. As AI streamlines mundane tasks, managers are able to redirect their focus towards strategic thinking, cultivating relationships, and crafting exceptional customer experiences that set their brand apart."**

**Flavia Colombo, Country Manager  
UK and Ireland, HubSpot**

# Sales in 2023

## Action points for sales leaders

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New sales tools and technology offer sales teams the ability to radically transform the ways they approach selling to customers, from customer relationship management (CRM) to sales automation software. However, it's also important to understand that this wide choice of innovations can be overwhelming and ultimately discouraging for sales managers. It's crucial to provide continuous education programmes and lines of support so sales managers feel reassured enough to experiment with new types of sales enablement technology.



Of the three groups of professionals, sales managers are the most likely to believe that their organisation hasn't invested enough in technology. Leadership must investigate this sentiment within their teams to determine whether it's a case of not investing in the right technology or not providing the training necessary to make that technology work.



Our research points to there being close to a 10% increase in the number of sales managers using AI next year. But along with being worried they don't have the right skillset to take advantage of it, 60% are also worried it will make elements of their jobs redundant. So, ensuring that sales managers have a clear understanding of the business' stance on AI and providing them with the right training should be a priority over the coming 12 months.

## A business' perspective



**The sales industry is undergoing a period of significant transformation driven by technology and evolving customer preferences. Technology continues to reshape the way businesses operate, and today more frequently than ever, sales managers face the challenge of adapting strategies to meet the demands of the dynamic market, and fear being replaced and/or left behind should they not be able to meet them. Salespeople need to understand their integral role in the customer lifecycle and how they add value throughout the entire process.**

**The rise of AI presents both opportunities and challenges. The integration of AI across mundane tasks allows for increased productivity and efficiency, but for now the human touch remains essential for maintaining relationships and personalisation.**

**While investing in tools is important, effective integration and fine tuning is the key to success. Salespeople should be empowered to operate within an automated sales process. Selecting and integrating tools is just the beginning; making them work seamlessly and aligning them with the sales process is crucial.**

**Elliott Braund, Senior Revenue  
Operations Manager at Fresha**

Part 06

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# Customer success in 2023



# Customer success in 2023

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Customer success managers are responsible for weaving together the journeys customers embark on, ensuring they receive the support and assistance they need as they do. It therefore makes sense that their top short- and long-term priority is creating a seamless, end-to-end customer experience that spans the entire customer journey from acquisition to retention (24%).

However, while this is their primary focus, it's clear that the path to achieving this is littered with challenges, as they need to also juggle other priorities from talent to technology.

**The digital skills gap is felt most keenly by customer success managers, as it's integral to their second highest short-term priority – utilising customer data to deliver a more personalised experience (22%).**

Gaining better access to the right technology to do their jobs well is a pressing issue for customer success managers. They are by far the most likely to agree with the notion that they would consider leaving their current roles for better access to technology and tools (61%) or better learning and development opportunities (64%).

On the plus side, at least when it comes to budgets, they are just as likely as sales managers to see theirs remain the same (52%). But they too are being asked to do more with less, and in the event that budgets are reduced, staffing levels appear to be the first thing impacted:

# Customer success in 2023

## Top priorities impacted by budget reductions

41%

Reduced staffing levels

32%

Reduced training and development

30%

Reduced staff incentives

Reductions in staffing levels is also detrimental to customer success managers' other long-term priorities, such as developing cross-channel strategies for delivering exceptional customer experiences (22%) which was a close second in terms of priority for these managers.

But putting together strategies capable of withstanding the test of time is difficult when you're struggling to keep up with ever-changing consumer demands – something that's only compounded by a lack of competitor insights and collaboration across cross-functional teams.



# Customer success in 2023

## Top challenges facing customer success managers' ability to achieve their short- and long-term priorities:

25%

Limited insight into competitor offerings and industry trends, making it harder to stay ahead of changing customer demands

25%

Insufficient cross-functional collaboration across different teams or departments, leading to gaps or overlaps in customer interactions or efforts

24%

Difficulty in balancing the demands of reactive (support requests) versus proactive (outreach, engagement) customer interactions

24%

Difficulty in keeping up with evolving customer expectations and preferences, especially in the fast-changing digital landscape

# Customer success in 2023

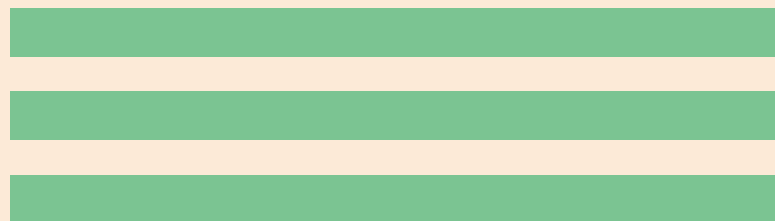
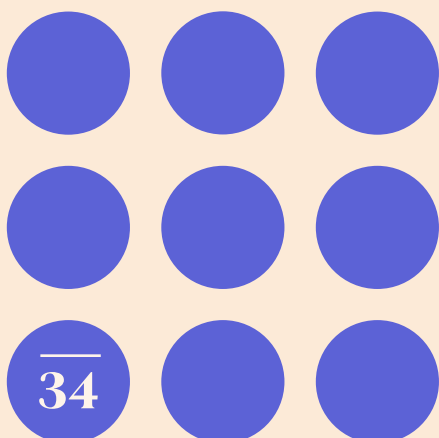
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In response to the challenges they face, around a fifth of customer success managers are shifting their focus away from community forums and discussion boards, and instead towards fostering customer collaboration and providing a space for peer-to-peer support (23%). They're equally prioritising the provision of education and training materials for customers to help them understand new features and get the most from their products (23%).

But conversely, much like sales managers, they're also diverting a lot of their energy towards more traditional tactics, with an emphasis on direct communication channels such as email, messaging, and phone calls to provide personalised and responsive support to our customers (29%). This may indicate that amidst the uncertainty of rapid technological and business landscape change, they're still heavily relying on tried and tested channels to achieve their KPIs.

Another challenge in achieving their top priorities is the fact they may be disconnected from their marketing and sales colleagues – more than a fifth of marketing and sales managers (21% and 22% respectively) agree that their customer success colleagues do not fully understand their strategies.

This disconnection from colleagues is undoubtedly impacting CX managers' ability to deliver a seamless customer experience. However, they're also keen to improve communication and education around their strategies, which will be key if they're to overcome these challenges.





**“The rise of AI is set to revolutionise the customer experience profession. Customer success managers have been at the forefront of leveraging AI tools, but the future expectations of customer service will undergo significant changes. The analytical skills of these professionals will be more critical than ever before.**

**“The next phase of customer success involves identifying areas where human value can be redefined, such as offering consultancy and guidance on navigating disruptions. Superficial and short-lived customer service tactics will no longer suffice when advanced AI can deliver those services. Professionals will need to actively listen and connect with customers to foster enduring relationships.**

**“Investing in advanced AI tools should never come at the expense of the customer experience. Any organisation that neglects human interaction will ultimately face failure and disappointment.”**

**Lisa Coakley, Principal Customer  
Success Manager, HubSpot**

# Customer success in 2023

## Action points for customer success leaders

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More than any of the other professionals, customer success managers are most concerned about the accuracy and potential for mistakes with AI. Leaders need to work to understand the nature of these concerns in their organisations and leverage managers' experience and knowledge to build frameworks and guidelines to help ensure ethical and responsible AI use.



Budgetary reductions and concerns make it particularly difficult for customer success managers to achieve their long-term goals. Leaders need to recognise the importance of these goals and ensure they're providing the necessary support that enables employees to keep pace with change and not just rely solely on traditional communication channels.



Customer success managers want to deliver great customer experiences through cross-channel strategies. But to do this, they need to be more closely aligned to their marketing and sales colleagues. It falls to leaders to create more opportunities for cross team collaboration and enable customer success managers to gain the understanding of colleagues' strategies so they can create more effective ones of their own.



Part 07

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# Conclusion



# Conclusion

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It's a daunting time for UK marketing, sales and customer success professionals – times of great change always are. But it's encouraging to see that despite understandable fears there's a lot of optimism and excitement being shown by these professionals. They're embracing new modes of work, new technologies and tools and have the right goals that will lead them to greater customer connection, future profit and growth.

Sales, marketing and customer success professionals comprise the three key facets of the customer experience. So, working to remove points of misalignment between the three cohorts won't only have a positive internal impact but will enable the businesses to foster better customer experiences.

There are inevitable challenges and roadblocks to overcome, as is the way in a transformative period such as this. However, these professionals are prepared to surmount these – they just need the support and buy-in from leadership. Because it will take more than simply allowing workers to use more tools and technologies; there also needs to be a focus on addressing the human elements of digital transformation.

So, whether it's better training and education or clarifying the business' stance towards the use of AI, leadership holds the key to unburdening and therefore unlocking the potential of these professionals. With the right approach, they can empower managers to meet and usher in a new era in the UK for marketing, customer success and sales to ensure a seamless customer journey.



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