

THE NEW SALES MOMENT

The buyer stopped waiting for you.

Buyers are doing more of the work alone, with AI beside them. Sales did not disappear. Its moment moved.

SEE WHAT CHANGED ↓



67% prefer a rep-free experience	70% prefer digital self-service
45% used AI in a recent purchase	69% still ask a rep to validate AI

Gartner, survey of 645 B2B buyers, 2025

The change

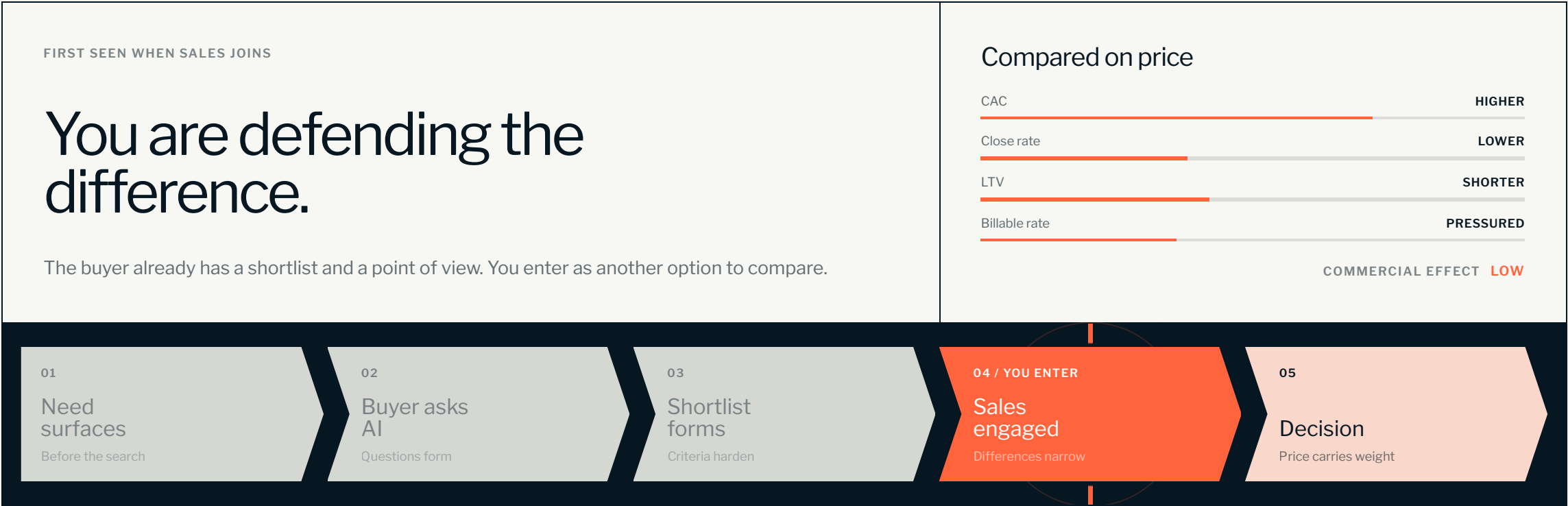
The idea of the trusted advisor is eroding, and AI is accelerating it. This isn't new. It started well before generative AI existed. During COVID, pharmaceutical reps lost in-office access to doctors, who used the disruption as a reason to stop taking meetings they'd already grown tired of. That's a real part of why so much pharmaceutical advertising now targets patients directly on TV: reps lost the room, so the industry rerouted around them.

Professional services is exposed to the same pattern, because consultative, relationship-based selling has always depended on early access. Buyers increasingly don't want that access from a rep when AI can do the same job faster and without a sales agenda attached.

The 67% figure is already a year old, and the trend line only points one direction. The 69% figure is the one worth sitting with: buyers aren't skipping human judgment, they're arriving with an AI-generated plan already in hand and asking you to validate it. Sometimes that plan is genuinely useful. Sometimes it's confidently wrong. Either way, you're no longer opening the conversation. You're auditing someone else's homework, and deciding in real time whether to follow it or rebuild it.

Starting sooner is more valuable, and more difficult.

When the buyer does the early work with AI, your first chance to matter moves downstream. Enter late and you defend scope, timing, and price. Become known earlier and your point of view helps shape the decision.



The buyer's journey

This is standard sales logic, not a new insight: the earlier you enter a relationship, the more trust you build, and the longer and healthier that account tends to be. What's changed is where "earlier" is actually possible. Buyers are leaning on AI specifically because it lets them avoid the moment they'd otherwise have to talk to a rep. The natural entry point keeps sliding later in the journey, not because sellers got worse at their jobs, but because the door buyers used to walk through on their own no longer requires a person on the other side of it.

Three ways out of the loop.

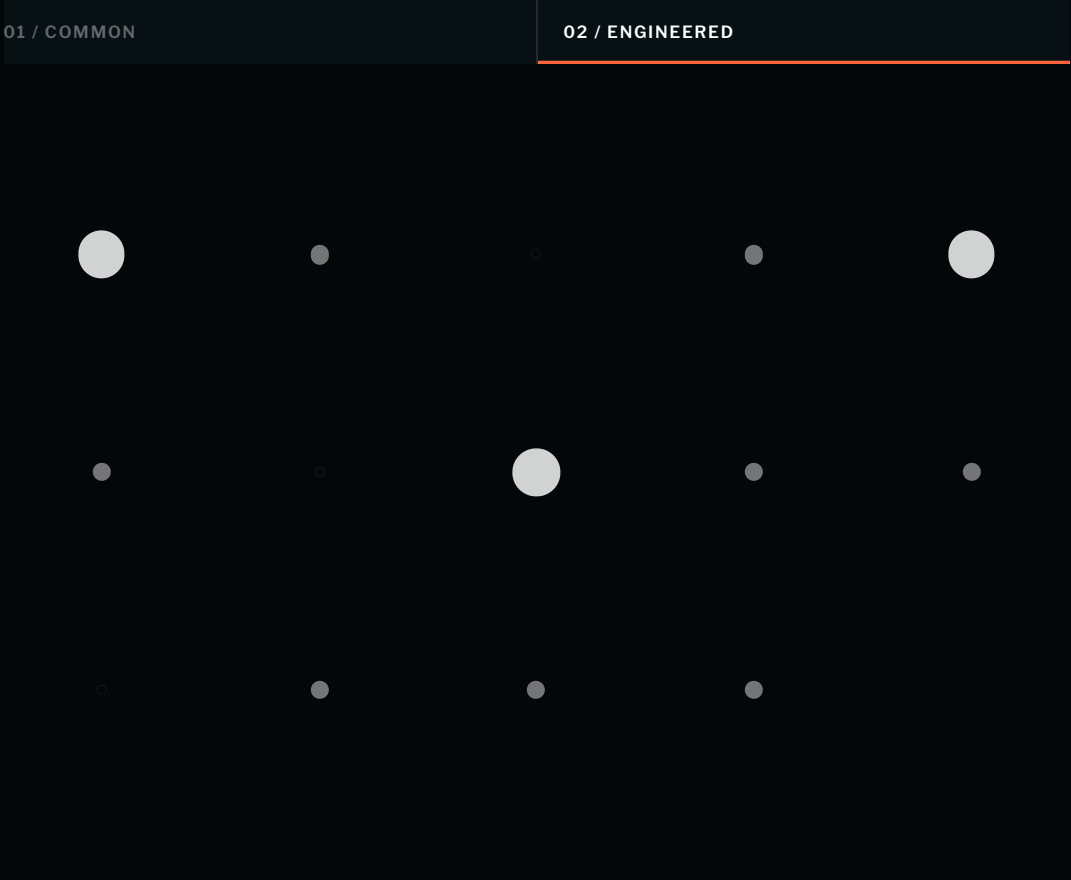
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|----|--------------|---|
| 01 | Referrals. | ↘ |
| 02 | AI. | ↘ |
| 03 | Positioning. | ↓ |

Three ways out of the loop

None of these are the only ways to move earlier, but they're the three worth building discipline around. Referrals are the known quantity: almost certainly the strongest revenue source in the room already, and the question is how to generate more of it deliberately instead of hoping it happens. The AI-to-AI approach is closer to "if you can't beat them, join them". If buyers are going to lean on AI regardless, the opportunity is influencing what that AI has to work with. Positioning is the branding and storytelling question underneath both: this is moving fast, and there's now real data on what works and what doesn't.

Create more referrals, build trust earlier.

Build a portfolio of small starts. Then run the same recipe: expand, repeat, or earn the next introduction.



Some projects stop here.

That is expected. The portfolio holds because no single account has to carry it.

Create your own referrals

The common model is what most technology consulting firms already live inside: revenue built on fixed projects with a defined start and end. Once the implementation is done, the relationship naturally goes quiet. The usual fix is newsletters and check-in emails, but to a client who's already finished the work, that's noise. It shows up as unsubscribe rates, not engagement.

The engineered model borrows a page from private equity. PE firms treat client-portfolio diversification as a non-negotiable early priority for the companies they acquire, precisely because smaller businesses tend to get comfortable inside a narrow client base and a narrow project type. That comfort is what caps growth. One way they break the pattern: take on smaller, easier-to-close projects across a broader mix of verticals. Yes, churn is higher on those. But each one is a live opportunity to ask for an introduction while you're still top of mind, something that becomes far harder once the project has wrapped and the relationship has gone cold. It's an uncomfortable ask to build into an active project. It's a necessary one.

A second lever alongside this: converting a completed project into a retained, annualized offering, such as performance optimization, analytics, or some form of managed service, so you stay in front of the client instead of resetting to zero. That ongoing presence is what keeps the referral conversation alive.

Referrals are the direct answer to AI's influence, because personal trust operates at the very first moment of the buyer's journey, before AI ever enters the picture. It's the strongest lever here, and also the hardest, because it requires real structural change to how the business generates and manages its pipeline, not just a new campaign.

Their AI is already researching this.

Build something useful for that research and their AI becomes a referral channel.

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mavenray.tools / build-your-erp-rfp

AI

YOUR ROUGH PROBLEM

“Our ERP is slowing down a growing, multi-site manufacturing business.”

CONCEPT TOOL

Build Your ERP RFP

01 Requirements

02 Processes

03 Integrations

04 Risks

STRUCTURED OUTPUT

RFP / 01

REQUIREMENT SET

Multi-site operations

Shared inventory visibility

Plant-level permissions

Consolidated reporting

YOUR NEXT STEP

Download so my AI can continue

↓

Markdown brief + reusable prompt

BUYER CONTEXT

→

USEFUL TOOL

→

THEIR AI CONTINUES

→

YOUR EXPERTISE

Sell to AI

If buyers are going to open ChatGPT or Copilot to shape a strategy, a budget, or a set of expectations before they ever talk to a person, that's the moment worth trying to influence, not after the fact. Most companies hand AI the same thing they hand everyone else: brochureware and generic thought leadership. The opportunity is giving it something genuinely useful to work with instead.

The RFP builder is a concrete version of that: helping a buyer build the exact document they'd otherwise ask their AI to draft from scratch. Technology companies don't typically help clients build a competitive RFP against themselves, but if the tool is robust enough to actually use, and the output is something the buyer can download and feed back into their own AI, you've done two things at once. You've made yourself useful earlier than a typical cold outreach ever could, and you've stayed embedded in the buyer's process as it continues past that first interaction.

What can you tell me that AI can't?

AI can summarize what you do. Your advantage is what it cannot originate: lived experience, earned judgment, and proof from doing the work.

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP CHANGES THE COMMERCIAL PATH		BUYER-REPORTED OUTCOMES
SALES RECEPTIVITY	90%	more receptive when a company with a useful point of view reaches out
NEW BUSINESS	23%	of buyers who discovered a new need through the content later hired or bought from the company behind it
PRICING POWER	60%	would pay a premium to work with a company whose thinking they value

Signals for acquisition, conversion, and value. Source: 2024 Edelman and LinkedIn report ↗

00:10

yourcompany.com

MY ATTENTION SPAN

10_{SEC}

Make the value proposition clear.

2
PAGES PER VISIT

≈2 min
DESKTOP SESSION

I'M LOOKING FOR...

Why you?

01

Do you understand my exact problem?

02

Have you solved it before?

03

What do you see that others miss?

DOES MY AI AGENT LIKE YOU?

I put your URL into ChatGPT. It is reading your whole site for me, so I do not have to. What does it think?

DO I TRUST YOU?

73%

of B2B buyers trust what a company teaches more than what its marketing claims.

The first 10 seconds are critical to the stay-or-leave decision. [Nielsen Norman Group](#) [B2B benchmark](#) [Edelman and LinkedIn](#)

“Certified Dynamics Partner”
says one thing. “We’ve untangled
forty ERP migrations for mid-
market manufacturers, and
here’s what actually breaks” says
something else.

Say what AI cannot

This is the lowest-cost, highest-return piece of the three, and arguably the most foundational. AI does two things worth separating: it reads your content directly and forms an interpretation of your story, and it also forms an interpretation of the category you sit in for the person asking. When something genuinely distinct is in the mix, AI tends to surface it, and so does the human reading it. That's the opening: case studies that show you solving a specific, maybe unrecognized problem, in a sector close to the buyer's own, register as valuable to both audiences at once.

The data behind this (Edelman/LinkedIn, 2024) is intuitive once you see it, but worth having in front of you:

90% sales receptivity: the same buyers who don't want to talk to a rep become open to it once that rep has demonstrated a useful point of view somewhere first: LinkedIn, email, the website. The distinction is whether you're positioned as an educator or as someone there to talk about yourself.

23% new business: a buyer doesn't need to be ready to buy for content to matter. Surfacing a problem they didn't know they had plants something that resurfaces months later: "that person posted about this, and ChatGPT never mentioned it." That's a trust deposit made without a sales conversation ever happening.

60% pricing power: depth and strategic thinking, communicated consistently, is what buyers pay a premium for. It's not abstract; it shows up directly in bill rates.

The website carries the same logic, for two audiences now instead of one. The old rule, ten seconds to earn attention, especially on mobile, still holds. What's sharper is the ceiling on an executive buyer's actual attention: realistically one or two pages, two minutes, maximum. In that window, they're answering one question, why you, through three sub-questions: do you understand my exact problem, have you solved it before, and what do you see that others miss.

AI is increasingly asking the same three questions on the buyer's behalf. A buyer may skim your homepage themselves, then paste your URL alongside two or three competitors' into ChatGPT and ask for a comparison, on experience, depth, whatever matters to them. What comes back isn't an assessment of your company. It's an assessment of your website, one step removed from what you can actually do. That makes deliberate communication more important, not less. Sites built around SEO and keyword density don't hold up here; what holds up is a story that actually lands in the moment someone's looking at it.

The last piece is trust, and it comes down to a simple test: are you talking about yourself, or are you talking about them. "Certified Dynamics Partner" is a credential. "We've untangled forty ERP migrations for mid-market manufacturers, and here's what actually breaks" is a story, and it's the one with real value to a buyer trying to figure out if you understand their exact problem.

THE NEW SALES MOMENT

Referrals. AI. Positioning.



Continue the conversation ↗

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Close

Referrals, AI, and positioning are not the only paths back into the buyer's journey, but they are the fundamentals. Referrals are the hardest, because they demand real change to how the business runs, but they are also the most direct answer to AI, since trust built early offsets everything downstream. Selling to AI means building something genuinely useful for the research a buyer is already doing, instead of competing with it. And positioning is the test to keep coming back to: if AI scanned your site for five seconds, what story would it walk away with?