

A MOO BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT REPORT

# The State of Sales Structure 2026

Real people, talking to real people. Why structured, human-led business development wins in the age of AI, and how to build it from zero.

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FOREWORD

# Everyone runs on AI. Sales still runs on people.

Two years ago, the big question in prospecting was which channel to use. In 2026 the question is different. Every company now has the same tools, the same AI writers and the same automation. Buyers have noticed. They delete most of what lands in their inbox, they check what AI tells them, and they shortlist vendors long before anyone calls them.

In that world, more messages do not create more business. What creates business is structure: knowing exactly which market you serve, being visible and credible there before you reach out, talking to real people one conversation at a time, and following a process that keeps working when the founder is busy.

That is what this report is about. It is not another list of outreach hacks. It brings together the most important buyer research published in 2025 and 2026, and puts it next to what we have learned building business development systems for more than 30 companies since 2022.

You will find the data, the method we use, two real stories with real numbers, and a simple scorecard to check your own structure. I hope it helps you build something that lasts.



**Amar Burić**
Founder and Managing Director
MOO Business Development

# Key findings.

## 1 Buyers decide before you arrive.

In 95% of cases the winning vendor is already on the buyer's first shortlist, and buyers make first contact when they are about 61% through their journey. [5]

## 2 AI made outreach cheap and trust expensive.

73% of buyers actively avoid suppliers who send irrelevant outreach, and 94% of buyers who used AI in a purchase fact-checked what it told them. [3,8]

## 3 People still close the deal.

69% of B2B buyers prefer to validate AI-generated insights with a sales rep. Human reps are far more likely to be seen as understanding the buyer's needs. [2,4]

## 4 Credibility is now a filter.

59% of decision-makers say weak or missing thought leadership led to a vendor being dropped from consideration. [7]

## 5 Structure beats tools.

Buying groups now average 13 internal stakeholders and 9 external influencers. A sequence of messages cannot reach that. A system can. [6]

IN THIS REPORT

# Built on the biggest buyer studies of 2025 and 2026, and on our own work in the field.

**~18,000**
business buyers in Forrester's 2026 State of Business Buying [6]

**~4,000**
buyers in 6sense's 2025 Buyer Experience Report [5]

**645+**
B2B buyers in each of two Gartner releases, Aug-Sep 2025 survey [1,2]

**1,862**
technology buyers in TrustRadius' 2026 Buying Disconnect report [8]

**1,135**
executives in the 2026 Edelman-LinkedIn thought leadership study [7]

**4,000+**
sales professionals in Salesforce's 2026 State of Sales [10]

**30+**
companies MOO has built business development for since 2022

**2**
documented MOO client stories with full timelines

**BEFORE FIRST CONTACT**

# 95%

of the time the winner is on the Day One shortlist [5]

# 61%

of the journey is done when buyers first contact a seller [5]

**BUYERS**

# 67%

of B2B buyers prefer a rep-free buying experience [1]

# 69%

still prefer to validate AI-generated insights with a sales rep [2]

**TRUST**

# 94%

of buyers who used AI fact-checked its answers [8]

# 59%

dropped a vendor over weak or missing thought leadership [7]

# 01

# The 2026 buying landscape

Buyers have more information, more tools and more people involved than ever. They also trust less and decide earlier. This chapter looks at what that means for anyone selling B2B services.



CHAPTER 01

# Buyers decide before you arrive

The most important number in B2B sales right now is not a reply rate. It is this: in 95% of cases, the vendor that wins was already on the buyer's shortlist on day one. Four out of five deals still go to the buyer's favorite from before any sales conversation. [5]

Buyers also reach out on their own terms. In 2025 the average point of first contact moved earlier, to 61% of the buying journey, down from 69%. That is earlier than before, but it still means most of the decision happens without you. [5]

The practical lesson is simple. If buyers do not know you before they start looking, you are not in the race. Being found, and being trusted, has to happen months before the first meeting.

**95%**

Winner already on the Day One shortlist [5]

**4 in 5**

Deals won by the pre-contact favorite [5]

**61%**

Of the journey done at first contact [5]

**10.1**

Months: average B2B buying cycle [5]

> **Buyers do not wait for your pitch. They build the shortlist first, and only then pick up the phone.**
>
> MOO view

CHAPTER 01

# More people, more AI, less trust

Buying is now a group sport. Forrester's 2026 study puts the average buying group at 13 internal stakeholders plus 9 external influencers, and when a purchase includes AI features, the group doubles. Procurement is a decision-maker in more than half of all buying cycles. [6]

Almost every buyer uses AI along the way: 94% in Forrester's data. [6] But AI has not made buyers more trusting. TrustRadius found that 94% of buyers who used AI fact-checked its answers, and 47% trust online resources less than a year before. [8]

Gartner sees the same split. 67% of buyers say they prefer a rep-free experience, yet 69% prefer to validate AI-generated insights with a sales rep, and buyers say they are about as likely to get misleading information from GenAI (51%) as from a rep (49%). [1][2]

THE AVERAGE BUYING GROUP, 2026

**13** internal stakeholders + **9** external influencers

Source: Forrester, The State of Business Buying, 2026 [6]

**94%**

Fact-checked AI answers during a purchase [8]

**47%**

Trust online resources less than a year ago [8]

# 02

# The AI volume trap

AI made it almost free to send a thousand messages. That is exactly why a thousand messages no longer work. This chapter looks at what automation did to outreach, and where people still make the difference.



CHAPTER 02

# When everyone automates, nobody stands out

Every sales team now has access to the same tools: data platforms, AI writers, sequencing software and AI agents. The result is predictable. Inboxes are full of messages that look personal but are not, and buyers have learned to spot them.

Gartner found that 73% of B2B buyers actively avoid suppliers who send irrelevant outreach. [3] A 2026 survey of 1,009 professionals found that 52% delete cold messages without reading them, and another 30% only glance before binning them. [9] In separate research, 26% of buyers said obviously AI-generated outreach actively puts them off. [11]

Volume is no longer a strategy. It is a way to burn a market, and your name with it.




Firmable survey of 1,009 full-time professionals, August 2026. "Actually read it" is the remainder, calculated by MOO. [9]

**73%**

Avoid suppliers who send irrelevant outreach [3]

**26%**

Put off by outreach that looks AI-generated [11]

CHAPTER 02

# Where AI helps, and where people win

This is not an anti-AI report. AI is excellent at the repetitive part of sales. Salesforce's 2026 study found 87% of sales organizations already use AI, and sellers expect AI agents to cut prospect research time by about a third. [10]

But buyers are clear about where they want a human. In Gartner's data, buyers were 39 percentage points more likely to say a human rep understood their needs than to say the same of GenAI. [4]

Our rule is simple: automation handles the repetitive steps, people handle everything the buyer sees and feels. That is the split we use with every client.

| | |
|---|---|
| Finding companies and decision-makers | AI and data tools |
| Collecting company and role data | AI and data tools |
| Checking every lead before contact | People |
| Writing the message | People |
| Every conversation and follow-up | People |
| Qualifying need, budget and timing | People |
| Proposal, negotiation, the deal | People |

# 03

# Structure beats tools

Most companies that struggle with sales do not have a tool problem. They have a structure problem. This chapter defines what a sales structure is, and the six mistakes we see most often.



CHAPTER 03

# A sales structure has six layers

A structure is not a tool or a sequence. It is a repeatable path from "nobody knows us" to "signed contract". This is the sequence MOO builds with every client. Skip a layer and the ones after it stop working.

01

### Narrow the street

One clear market where your track record gives you an edge.

02

### Make contact

The right decision-makers, researched and checked by a person.

03

### Build the relationship

Hand-written messages, real conversations, patience.

04

### Talk about it

Content that proves you understand their industry.

05

### Build credibility

Visible, consistent, trusted before the first meeting.

06

### Close the deal

Qualified opportunities, proposals and support to signature.

Notice what is not on the list: buying a bigger database, sending more messages, or adding another tool. Those can support a structure. They cannot replace one.

CHAPTER 03

# Six mistakes we see in almost every new client

From building business development for 30+ companies since 2022. None of them are about tools.

### The founder is the system

Every deal depends on one person's network and time. When they are busy, the pipeline stops.

### Tool-hopping

A new platform every quarter, so nothing runs long enough to work.

### Burst and silence

Two weeks of heavy outreach, then nothing for two months.

### Selling everything to everyone

"We can build any app." Nobody buys from a company that claims to do it all.

### No qualification

Calendars full of meetings that were never going to close.

### Flying blind

No way to tell whether things are moving in the right direction.

# 04

# Building from zero: the MOO method

How we take a company from no sales process to a working, measurable business development system. Six stages, in the order we run them, with what each one looks like in practice.

CHAPTER 04

# Stages 1 and 2: the foundation

STAGE 1

## Onboarding and narrowing the street

We learn the company, its people and, most importantly, the work it has already delivered. Then we compare the markets it wants with what its track record proves. The answer is usually in the portfolio, not the pitch deck. Onboarding takes 10 to 15 days.

- Study past projects and what they prove
- Compare wanted markets against that proof
- Agree one or two industries and a buyer profile

**What you get:** one or two target industries, a clear buyer profile and a market where you have a real edge.

STAGE 2

## Market research and target lists

We build target lists with Sales Navigator, search patterns and data tools, then a person checks every lead: right company, right role, real fit. No bought lists, no mass uploads.

- Sales Navigator and keyword search patterns
- Manual check of company, role and fit
- Regional or international reach, as needed

**What you get:** a verified list of decision-makers in your chosen market, ready for outreach.

CHAPTER 04

# Stages 3 and 4: credibility and contact

STAGE 3

## Content and credibility

Before and during outreach, we write content for the client's LinkedIn and blog: articles, posts, visuals, short videos. It is built on fresh industry news and real examples from the target market, never generic AI filler. This matters: 59% of decision-makers have dropped a vendor over weak or missing thought leadership. [7]

- Built on fresh news from major outlets
- Written for one market and its problems
- Published on LinkedIn, the blog and socials

**What you get:** a profile and company page that look credible to the exact buyers you contact, 7 to 10 pieces of content a month.

STAGE 4

## Contact, written by people

LinkedIn is the main channel, email supports it. Automation handles sending and timing. People write the strategy and the messages, adapted to industry, role and the problems that buyer actually has.

- LinkedIn first, email as support
- Messages adapted to industry and role
- Every message visible on a live dashboard

**What you get:** consistent, personal outreach to the right people, with a live dashboard you can see.

CHAPTER 04

# Stages 5 and 6: conversations and deals

STAGE 5

## Human-led conversations and qualification

Every reply is handled by an experienced person. We ask questions before we pitch, understand the need, check budget and timing, and follow up until there is a clear yes or no. Leads are tagged by quality so nobody wastes time on meetings that were never going to close.

- Questions before any pitch
- Leads tagged: good lead, follow up, not a fit
- Follow-up until a clear yes or no

**What you get:** qualified conversations with decision-makers who actually have a problem you solve.

STAGE 6

## From conversation to contract

We book meetings in your calendar, help prepare for them, and support the deal through proposal and agreement. You keep the network, the content and the pipeline. The structure is yours, and it keeps working after the first win.

- Meetings booked in your calendar
- Help with preparation, proposal and agreement
- You keep the network, content and pipeline

**What you get:** sales opportunities, deal support and a system your own team can run.

CHAPTER 04

# What to expect, month by month

Outbound is not plug-and-play, and anyone who promises results in two weeks is selling volume. This is a realistic timeline, based on how our documented client stories actually played out.

DAYS 1-15

## Onboarding

Company, track record, market choice, buyer profile.

MONTH 1-2

## Build

Target lists, profiles, first content, outreach starts.

MONTH 3

## First opportunities

First qualified conversations turn into real opportunities.

MONTH 4-6

## Pipeline

Meetings, proposals, filtering out the wrong fits.

MONTH 7-8

## First contracts

In both of our documented cases, the first major deal landed here.

AFTER

## Ownership

The client runs the system, MOO advises or keeps running it.

**Slow before it is fast. Given enough time, the system works, and once it works, it keeps working.**

# 05

# Proof: two stories from the field

Data tells you where the market is going. Stories show you what it takes. Two real MOO engagements, anonymized, with the timelines and the numbers as they happened.

STORY 1 · SOFTWARE STUDIO, BUCHAREST

# Seven months, one system, one €60K contract

A five-person studio with real skills and no sales system. We narrowed their market to media and e-commerce, based on a large news-agency platform they had built as a subcontractor. Then came content, hand-written outreach and months of real conversations.

First opportunities came after three months. Of 14 meetings, 3 were a genuine fit and 11 were filtered out early. In March 2026 a Belgian company signed a €60,000 per year contract for a live video shopping platform, seven days after the first call. The studio now runs its own sales team on the same system.

**€60K / yr**
First contract value

**7 months**
From day one to contract

**7 days**
First call to signature

**9,000+**
CTOs and decision-makers in the network

**14** meetings booked

**3** genuine fits

**1** signed client, €60K per year

The full case study is available as a separate download at moobd.com.

STORY 2 · SOFTWARE COMPANY, EUROPE

# Month eight: a €40K deal nobody saw coming

A software company hired MOO to open new markets across Europe. Over about nine months we ran around ten campaigns in different countries, each built around one market and one buyer profile.

The deal came in month eight. A fintech company's Head of IT replied to outreach at exactly the right moment: their existing vendor was failing a project. Our client adapted a solution it had already built and closed a deal worth about €40,000.

The lesson is the one in our timeline. Structure and patience put you in front of the right person at the right time. You cannot schedule that moment, but you can be there when it happens.

**~€40K**
Deal value

**Month 8**
When the deal landed

**~10**
Campaigns across Europe

**1**
Right person, right moment

**A note on data.** MOO does not keep a client's campaign data after the engagement ends, so this story has fewer numbers than Story 1. What is here is what we can stand behind.

# Score your sales structure

Tick every statement that is true for your company today. Be honest. Nobody is watching.

- [ ] We can name our one or two target industries in one sentence.
- [ ] Our target market matches what our past projects prove we can do.
- [ ] Every lead is checked by a person before we contact them.
- [ ] Our messages are written for the buyer's industry and role, not a template.
- [ ] We publish content for our target market at least weekly.
- [ ] A real person handles every reply and follow-up.
- [ ] We qualify need, budget and timing before we pitch.
- [ ] We can see, every week, whether the pipeline is healthy.
- [ ] Sales keeps moving when the founder is busy or away.
- [ ] We have kept the same system running for at least six months.

**YOUR SCORE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **8-10** | You have a structure. Protect it and keep it running. |
| **5-7** | You have pieces. Connect them into one system. |
| **0-4** | You have activity, not structure. Start from layer one. |

> **Real people, talking to real people, inside a structure you own. That is still how B2B deals get done.**
>
> MOO view

MEET THE FOUNDER

# Amar Burić



## Founder and Managing Director, MOO Business Development

Amar has spent eight years in B2B sales and business development. He started in pharmaceutical sales, where every deal is won face to face, one conversation at a time. He holds a Bachelor of Law degree.

In 2022 he founded MOO Business Development with $900. Since then MOO has built business development structures for more than 30 companies, mainly software development studios, SaaS and cybersecurity firms selling into Western Europe. Amar personally owns every commercial conversation at MOO. He is also Managing Director at Zenos, where he works on EU-funded projects.

**2022**
Founded MOO with $900

**30+**
Companies served

**8 years**
In B2B sales and business development

ABOUT MOO

# We build sales structure for B2B tech companies.

MOO Business Development is a small, senior team that builds and runs business development systems for software development studios, SaaS and cybersecurity companies. Market research, content, outreach and conversations handled by people. Clients own the system. We help run it.

- Market research and positioning
- Verified target lists
- Content and credibility on LinkedIn
- LinkedIn and email outreach, written by people
- Human-led conversations and qualification
- Meetings, proposals and deal support

Pricing is a fixed monthly fee plus a share of deals closed, so the pressure to perform stays on us.

THE TEAM

**Amar Burić**
Founder, Managing Director

**Zlatan Mustajbašić**
Sales

**Ema Burić**
PhD in economics, project manager

**Ena Fejzagić Livančić**
Project manager, business development

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HOW THIS REPORT WAS MADE

# Methodology

This report combines two kinds of evidence, and keeps them clearly apart.

**Published research.** Every market figure comes from an independent study published in 2025 or 2026, cited by number. Figures are quoted as the source published them. Where we calculated something ourselves, we say so.

**MOO experience.** Statements marked "MOO view", the six layers, the six mistakes, the method and the timeline come from our work with 30+ companies since 2022. The two client stories are anonymized. Their figures come from MOO's own records and are reported as they happened.

**Limitations.** This report was written by a company that sells business development services, and its conclusions support how we work. The client stories are anonymized, so outsiders cannot verify them directly. Some studies are cited through reputable coverage rather than the full original report. MOO has no large proprietary dataset; our experience comes from 30+ engagements, not a statistical sample.

Prepared by Amar Burić, MOO Business Development, November 2026.
linkedin.com/company/moobd

SOURCES

[1] Gartner, press release, 9 March 2026: "Gartner Sales Survey Finds 67% of B2B Buyers Prefer a Rep-Free Experience". 646 B2B buyers, Aug-Sep 2025.

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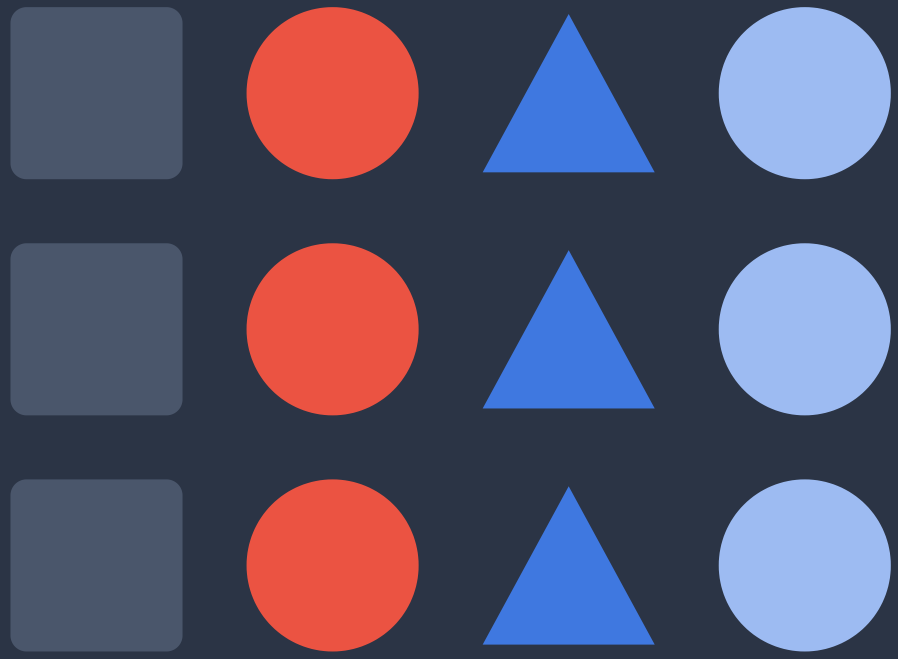
[8] TrustRadius, 2026 B2B Buying Disconnect report, July 2026. 1,862 technology buyers and 444 vendors, surveyed Jan 2026.

[9] Firmable, survey of 1,009 full-time professionals, published 19 Aug 2026, reported by PPC Land.

[10] Salesforce, State of Sales 2026. 4,000+ sales professionals in 22 countries.

[11] Adience buyer research, reported Dec 2025 (CMOtech, eCommerceNews): 26% put off by obviously AI-generated outreach.



# Could this work for your company?

Book a free 30-minute call. We will look at your market and your current sales approach, and tell you honestly whether we can help.

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**Book a call at moobd.com**