2019 Lead Nurturing & Acceleration Survey Report

With Added Pressures To Improve Acceleration Programs, Marketers Moving Beyond Over Reliance On Emails And Gated Offers

DEMAND GEN REPORT

SURVEY REPORT

60% of respondents gave their current nurture programs a failing grade.

Introduction

The importance of lead nurturing programs has only heightened in recent years, as more internal stakeholders are added to the consideration process and B2B organizations are putting greater time and attention to reduce risks in their selection process.

However, while marketing teams are increasingly being expected to help heat up lukewarm leads and accelerate passively interested buyers to those ready for sales conversations, the reality is the performance of conventional lead nurture programs has declined over the past two years.

According to our *2019 Lead Nurturing & Acceleration Survey*, 60% of respondents gave their current nurture programs a failing grade.

Breaking down this number further:

- 45% admitted their nurture programs need improvement;

- 14% rated their nurtures as poor or inadequate;

- Only 8% of respondents gave their programs an excellent rating; and

- 33% graded their nurture campaigns as average.

How would you rate your current lead nurturing initiatives?

0%
Not currently
nurturing leads

14%
Poor/
Inadequate

45%
Needs
improvement

33%
Average

8%
Excellent
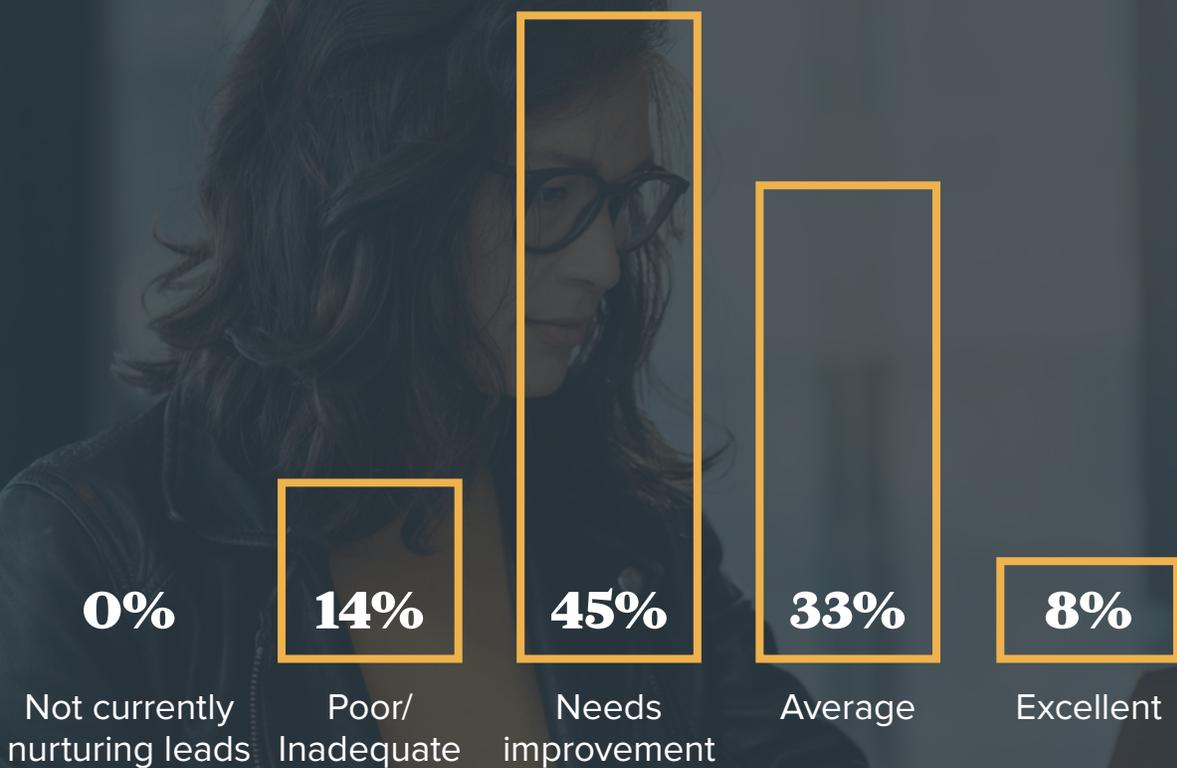
These results represent a continued decline from the previous year, when 10% of marketers categorized their nurture programs as poor or inadequate.

Marketers are also quick to admit that nurture campaigns are becoming more challenging, with 70% saying their programs were either somewhat (56%) or very (23%) challenging. Only 10% of marketers said nurtures were not challenging, while 11% were not sure.

In the following report, we will break down:

- The specific challenges marketers are seeing related to nurtures;

- The increased importance content offers are playing in successfully engaging and accelerating leads;

- Best practices around cadences for nurture programs; and

- The new strategies and approaches marketers are taking to address the declining response rates.

Have you found lead nurturing programs to be more challenging over the past 12-18 months, in terms of generating responses?

56%

It has been somewhat challenging to generate responses with our nurture programs

23%

It has been very challenging to generate responses with our nurture programs

11%

Not sure

10%

It has not been challenging to generate responses with our nurture programs

Sixty-three percent of marketers indicated they are using generic content for acceleration campaigns.

Connecting The Dots On Content & Cadence

The root causes for the declining results most marketers are seeing from nurtures could be directly related to an over-reliance on traditional cadences of emails with offers to gated content or event invites.

When asked to rank their top challenges related to building successful nurture programs, marketers pointed to the following areas:

- Developing targeted content by buyer stage/interest (51%);

- Building the right timing/workflows for campaigns (39%); and

- Anonymous visitors to the website (39%).

The struggle to develop targeted offers for specific audiences and streams was also reinforced when only 30% of marketers said they had developed content specifically for nurture programs. Sixty-three percent of marketers indicated they are using generic content for acceleration campaigns, with only 6% of that group saying they had plans to develop exclusive nurture-specific content within the next 12 months.

In addition to upping the ante around content, the survey found marketers are also experimenting with more frequent nurture cadences. Many companies are delivering weekly campaigns (41%), followed by every other week (26%). Further highlighting a shift to dial up the frequency of nurture campaigns, only 6% of respondents said their typical cadence is monthly, compared to 17% in the previous year who indicated monthly was their normal cadence.

Overall, 64% of respondents said they are running between one and 10 different nurture programs throughout the year, while 22% of marketers said they are running between 11 and 20 different nurtures. Also, 16% said they are running more than 20 different types of campaigns.

Do you have content offers that are used exclusively for nurture programs, or are they multipurpose assets?

30%

Yes, we have exclusive content for lead nurturing

63%

No, we only have multipurpose content

6%

No, but we plan to create exclusive nurture content within the next 12 months
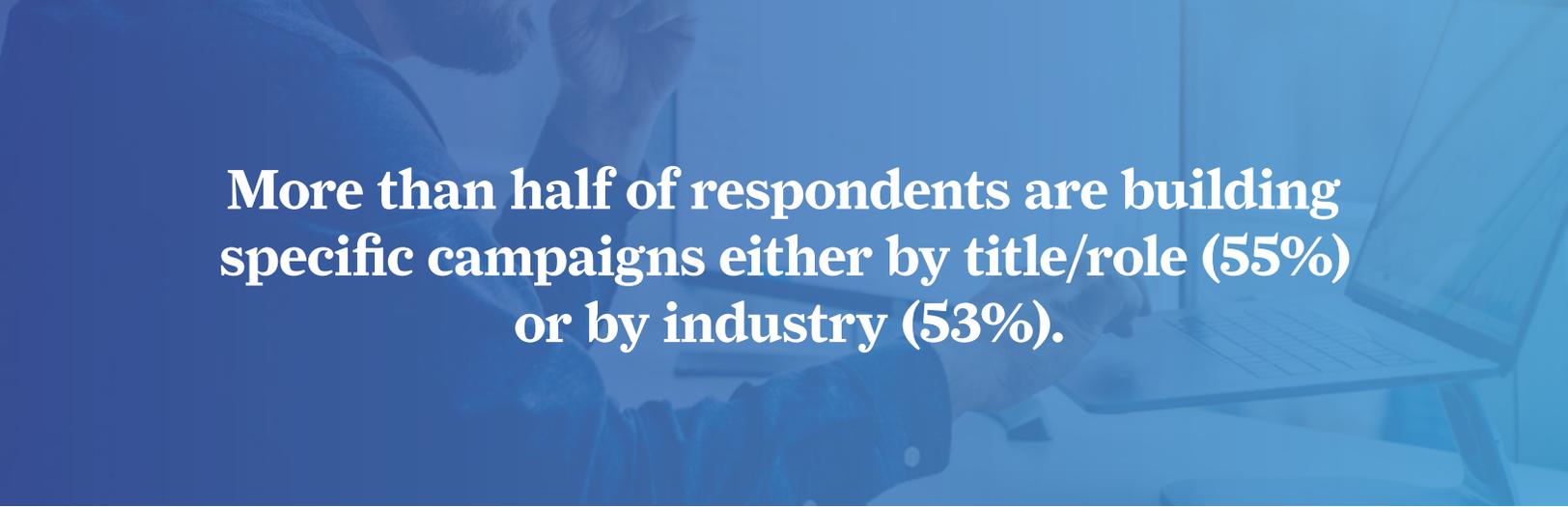
More than half of respondents are building specific campaigns either by title/role (55%) or by industry (53%).

Leaning More On Data In New Nurtures

Beyond simply sending out more nurture offers, marketers are also planning to test more targeted and data-centric approaches to accelerate early-stage leads.

When asked about new approaches they have tested, the top responses were:

- Event marketing (53%);

- Using content engagement data (48%);

- Account-based nurtures (48%);

- Retargeting (43%);

- Increased ungated content (37%); and

- Using intent data (36%).

Other write-in comments pointed to increased use of direct mail and social media. Also, some advanced respondents indicated they were doing segmented nurtures with specific streams for different personas and verticals.

Overall, segmentation proved to be a critical part of successful nurtures, with many respondents building specific campaigns either by title/role (55%) or by industry (53%). Other common strategies for segmenting acceleration programs included:

- By personas (36%);

- By funnel stage (35%);

- By account (33%); and

- By company size (32%).

Other write-in responses for segmentation included by geography, by product interest or for returning customers.

What new approaches/tactics have you taken with your nurture program?

53%
Event marketing

48%
Using content engagement data

48%
Doing account-based nurtures

43%
Retargeting

37%
Using intent data
(i.e. insights highlighting buyers that are in-market)

36%
Increased ungated content
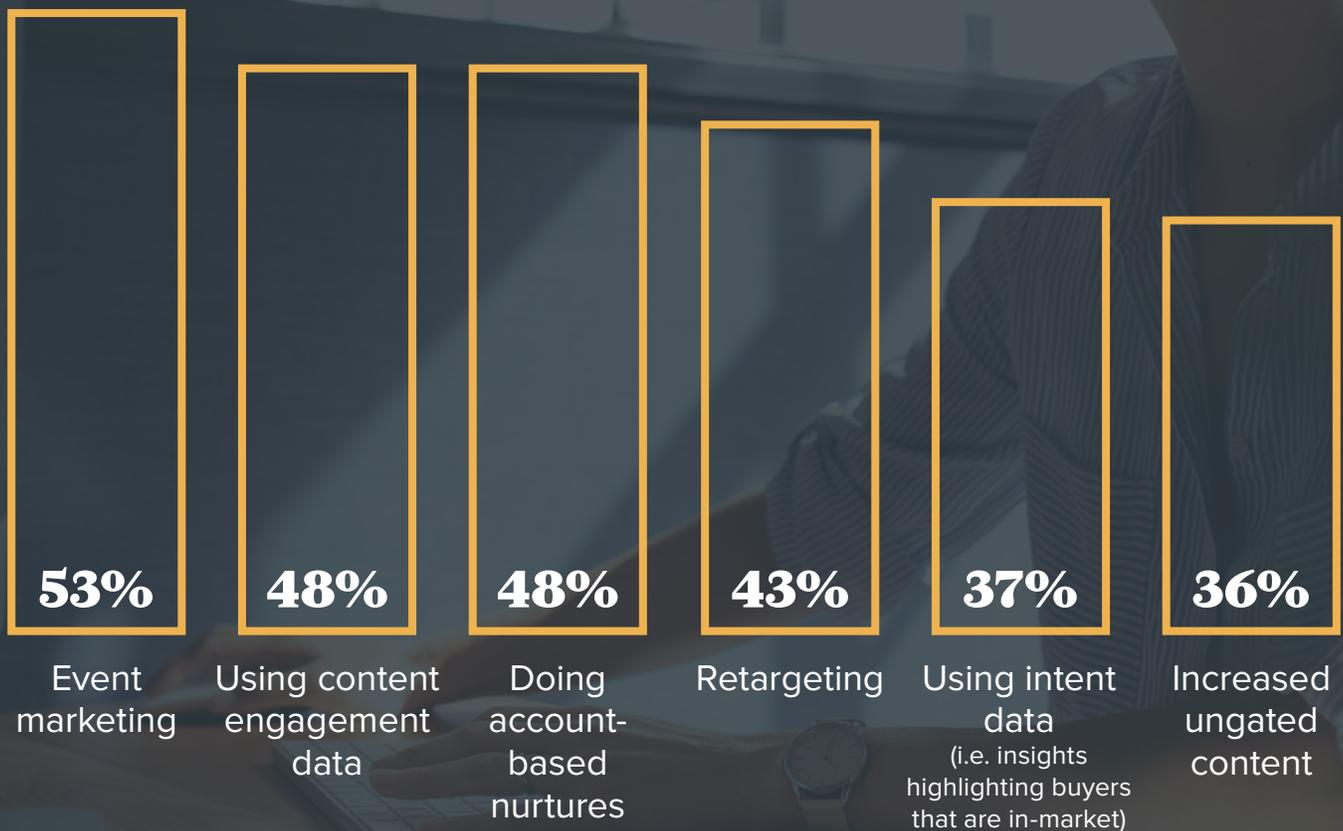
60% are measuring the conversion rate of their nurture efforts, while 36% are measuring revenue.

Building On What's Working

As the approaches and tactics deployed in lead nurtures adapt to changing buyer behavior, so are the metrics used to gauge the success of these campaigns.

While email click-through rates and lead volume have been the top metrics cited by marketers in past years, conversion rate (60%) was by far the most common metric to track impact this year. In addition to clicks, opens and lead volume, the other metric that climbed to the top of the list in 2019 was revenue, cited by 36% of marketers.

In terms of which tactics are driving the best results in nurtures, webinars remained the star of the acceleration show, cited by 35% of respondents. Other tactics that ranked right on the list were email newsletters (29%), thought leadership articles (28%) and white papers (26%). Customer content — such as reviews and case studies — also ranked high at 25%, while additional write-in nods went to event invitations and toolkits that combine multiple pieces of content.

Marketers are not only experimenting with a variety of tactics, but also different types of nurture programs. The most popular type of nurture campaigns are early-stage nurtures for new leads, cited by 77% of respondents. Other types of campaigns that topped the list include:

- MQL conversion campaigns (47%);

- Warm-up campaigns (41%); and

- Current client nurtures (36%).

Which types of lead nurturing campaigns do you currently have?

Early stage
(new lead, completed form)
77%

Marketing qualified
47%

Warm-up campaign
41%

Current client
(upsell/cross-sell)
36%

Advanced stage
(specific to role/title/industry/company)
32%

New customer/ onboarding
30%

Trial nurture
(following free trial request)
23%

Touch campaign
(sales owner reached SQL)
21%

Lost opportunity
17%

Which tactics have worked best within your nurture initiatives?
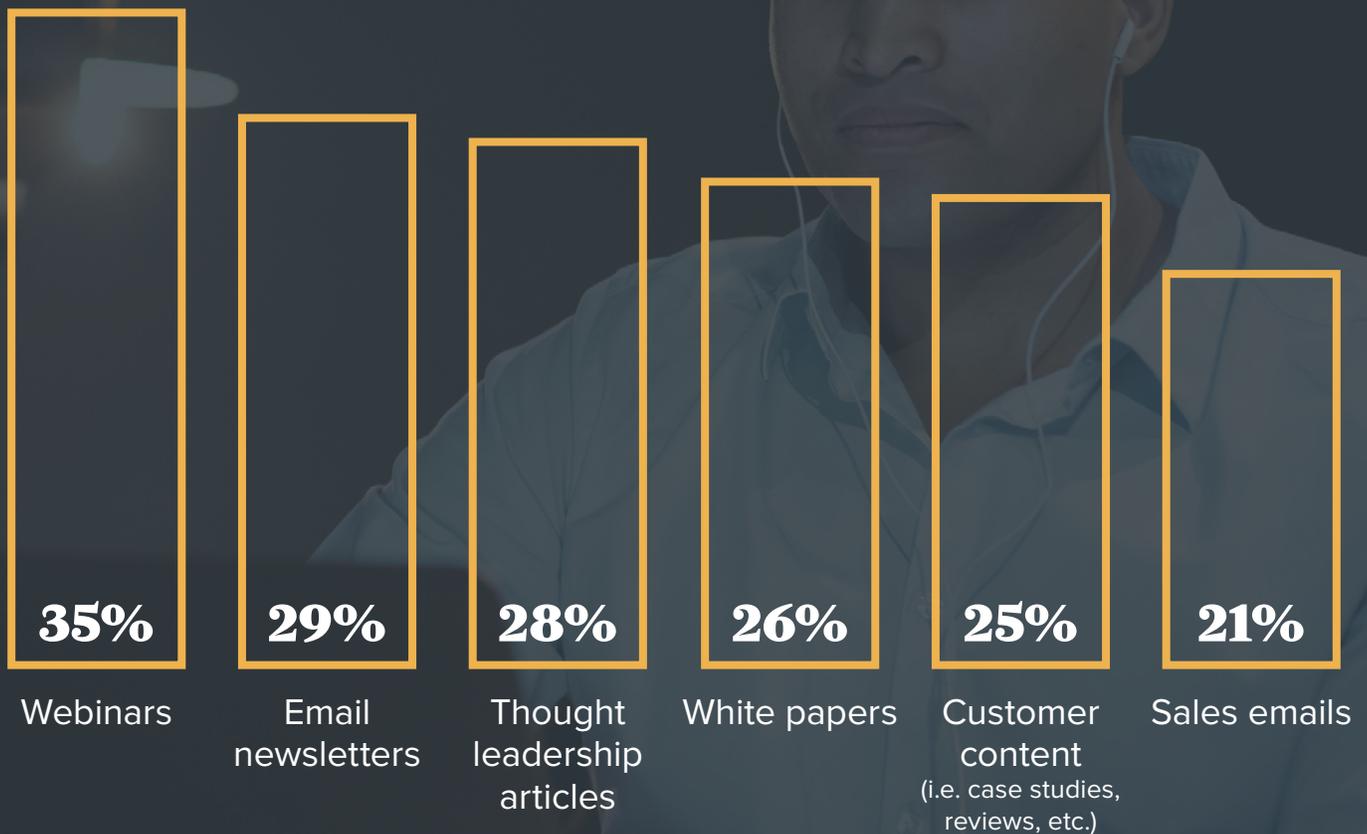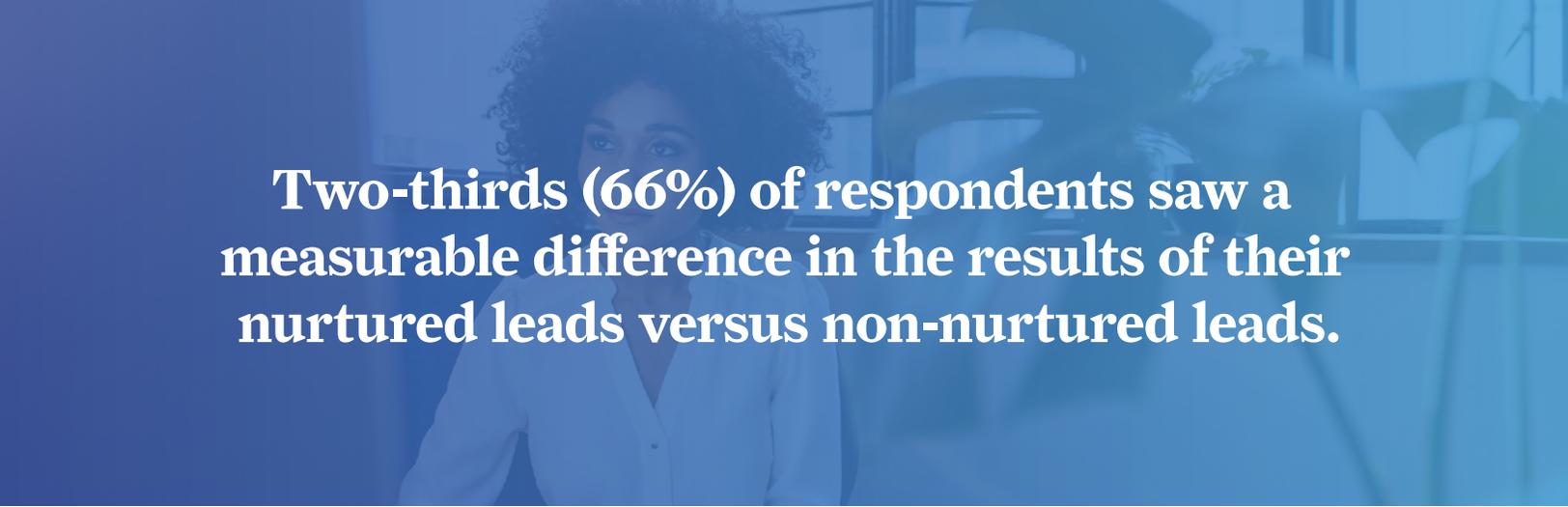
35%	**29%**	**28%**	**26%**	**25%**	**21%**
Webinars	Email newsletters	Thought leadership articles	White papers	Customer content (i.e. case studies, reviews, etc.)	Sales emails

Two-thirds (66%) of respondents saw a measurable difference in the results of their nurtured leads versus non-nurtured leads.

Eyes On The Prize: The Payoffs Of Nurtures

Nurture programs are not only a priority because of the long sales cycles involved in B2B, but also because they continue to show significant impact on pipeline performance.

When asked the biggest benefit of nurture programs, respondents cited:

- Better response to campaigns due to targeting/relevance (60%);

- Their ability to generate warmer, sales-ready leads (57%);

- Their ability to segment prospects based on interests/behaviors (55%); and

- Leads moving faster through the pipeline (42%).

Two-thirds (66%) of respondents saw a measurable difference in the results of their nurtured leads versus non-nurtured leads, with 29% seeing at least a 10% difference in conversion rates of nurtured leads, 22% seeing 20% or greater performance difference, and 15% seeing a 30% or greater difference.

In terms of future goals and priorities for their nurture programs, marketers are focusing even more on pipeline impact, with 75% focusing on increasing the number of opportunities entering the pipeline and 71% looking to improve conversion rates with nurtures.

Sales efficiency was also cited as a common goal as well with marketers referencing a desire to help shorten sales cycles, prequalify leads and gain higher sales acceptance of leads.

What are some of your future goals/ priorities for your lead nurturing programs?
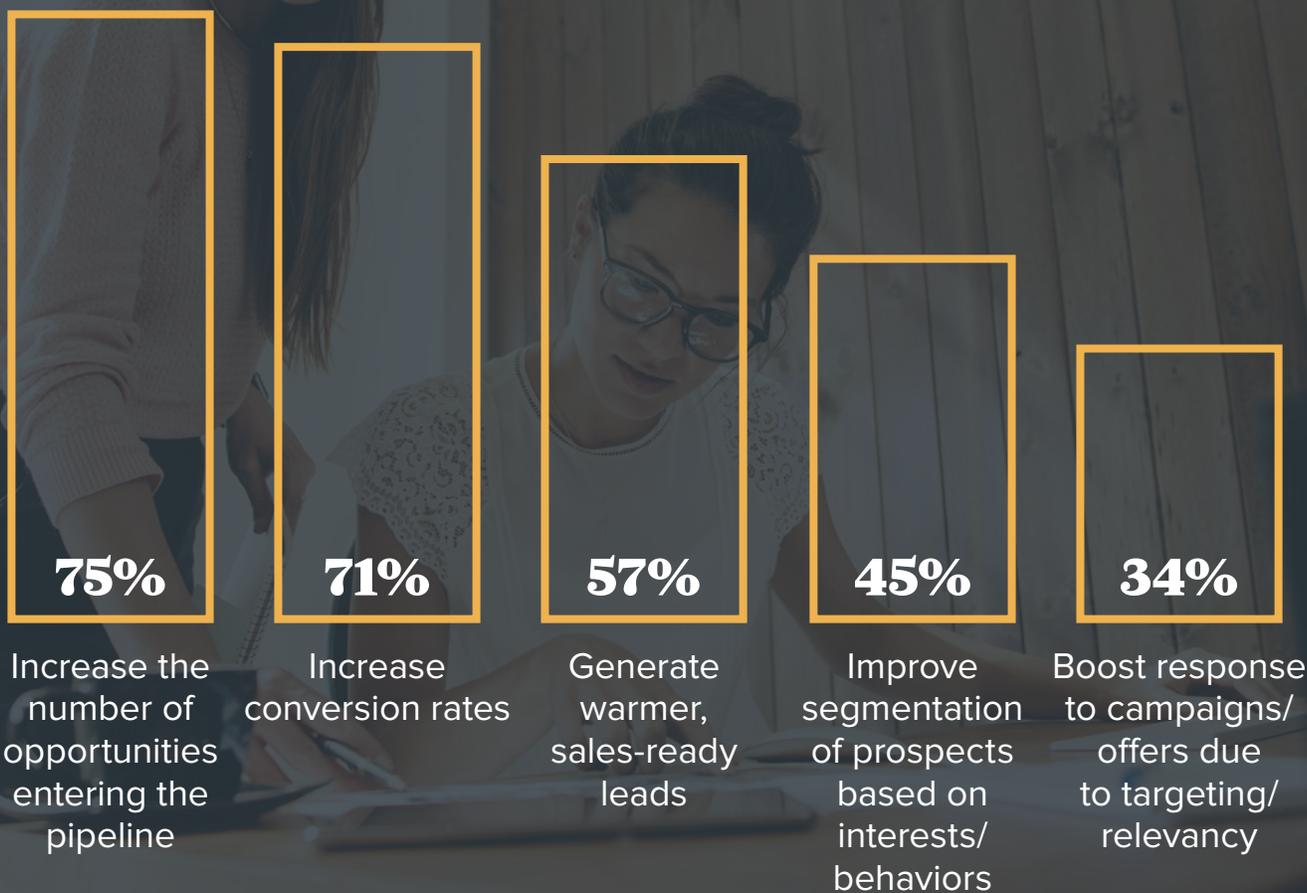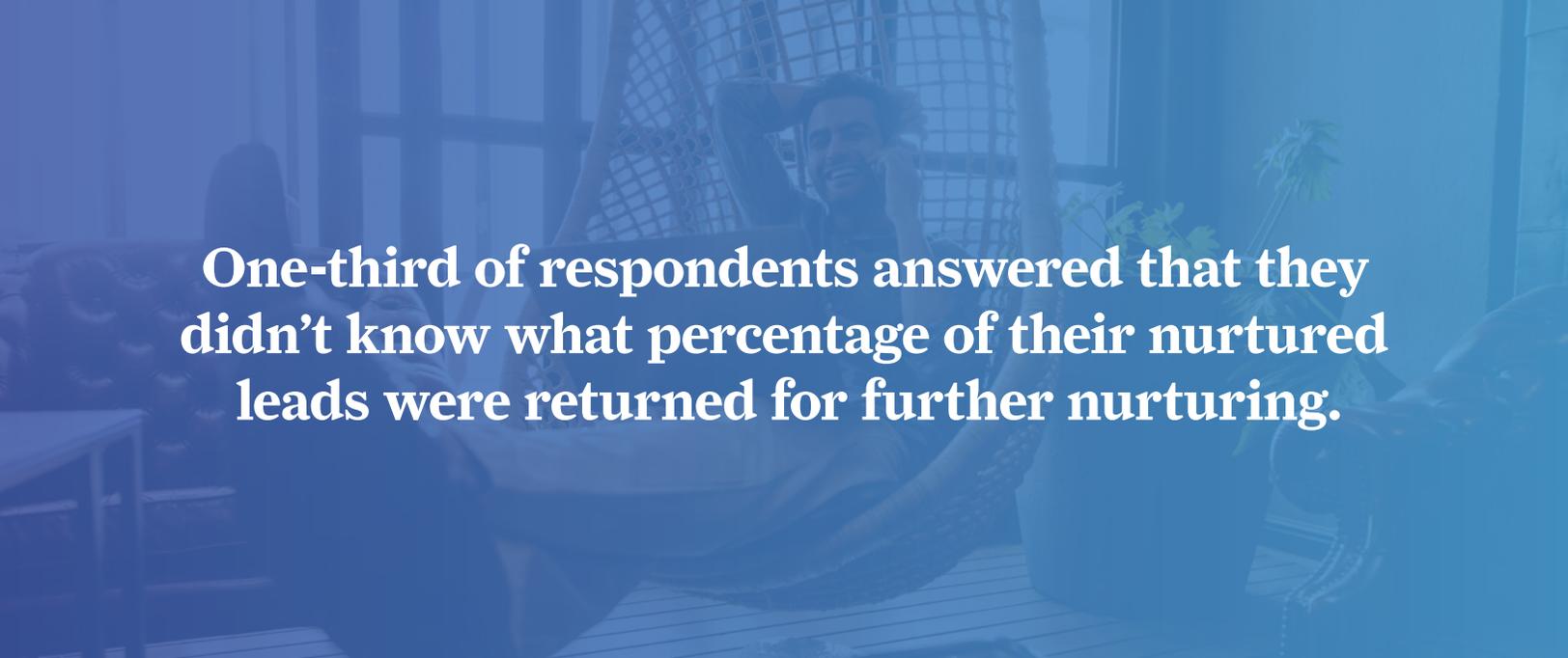
75%
Increase the number of opportunities entering the pipeline

71%
Increase conversion rates

57%
Generate warmer, sales-ready leads

45%
Improve segmentation of prospects based on interests/ behaviors

34%
Boost response to campaigns/ offers due to targeting/ relevancy

One-third of respondents answered that they didn't know what percentage of their nurtured leads were returned for further nurturing.

Conclusion: The Improvement Imperative

The average sales cycles from the survey respondents was six to nine months, cited by 30% of organizations. However, 29% of companies had even longer sales cycles. Given this data and the growing complexity of decision making in B2B, marketers have no choice but to continue to invest in improving the performance of their lead nurture campaigns.

In addition to moving to more advanced metrics for success, uses of data and alternative approaches to content, marketers also must get a better grasp on how their nurture programs are impacting buyer behavior. One glaring example of this came when one-third of respondents answered that they didn't know what percentage of their nurtured leads were returned for further nurturing.

Ultimately, the survey shows positive progress in marketers moving beyond linear nurture campaigns with a series of pre-set and scheduled email offers with assets hidden behind gates and forms. However, there is clearly work to do and experimentation needed with new tools, tactics and approaches to keep pace with shifting buyer behaviors and expectations.

PathFactory™

PathFactory's Content Insight and Activation Platform helps B2B marketers understand the role of content in the buyer's journey and discover a new class of data to optimize the path to purchase. PathFactory uses this data and insight to optimize content delivery across every channel, connecting buyers with the most relevant information whenever and wherever they click.

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