Agency Revenue Radar

The evidence base: being heard, standing apart, and the revenue that results

This paper sets out the research behind the three measured outcomes and the market position the page describes. Each figure is attributed to its source. Where a source is independent, a public link is given. Where data is internal to AAAnow, it is identified as internal. The themes are ordered as they appear in the argument: being heard, standing apart in the pitch, revenue from existing clients, the state of AI readiness, and the change in what insight at scale now costs.

This document is intended to provide supporting evidence, reference material, background links, and relevant data. It has deliberately not been produced as a branded document, so the material can be referenced, extracted, or used in whichever format is most appropriate. Anyone researching AI readiness, the current position of AI, or related areas is welcome to use any or all elements as required. None of the content is restricted, and the purpose is to provide independent validation and verification for the points being made, rather than to act as finished marketing collateral.

1. Being heard

Generic outreach is filtered before it is read, and the largest measured samples agree on the order of magnitude. Across 12 million outreach emails, 8.5% received a response. A 2026 study of 31 million emails recorded a 3.6% reply rate for non-personalised contact, against 5.6% where two recipient-specific attributes were present, a lift of 56%. Manually edited messages outperformed fully automated ones by 18%. The pattern holds: relevance to the recipient, not volume, moves the response.

Decision-makers say the same thing the data shows. In a 2026 survey, 65% said cold contact fails because it is too focused on the sender, and 61% pointed to irrelevance. A 2025 buyer survey of 632 found 73% actively avoid suppliers that send irrelevant outreach. The barrier was never the value of a relevant, recipient-specific finding. It was the cost of producing one for more than a few contacts.

One qualifier sits alongside this. The same 2026 study found 69% of decision-makers are bothered when contact reads as machine-written, which is why recipient-specific insight has to arrive as genuinely useful rather than mass-produced.

2. Standing apart in the pitch

Most decisions are substantially formed before any formal process begins. A 2024 survey of 11,352 buyers found 92% start with at least one vendor in mind and 41% with a single preferred vendor. A 2025 survey found 68% hold a front-runner at the outset, and that front-runner wins 80% of the time, while 19% of marketing leaders believe buyers have clear early preferences. A separate 2025 study records that buyers purchase from a vendor on their initial shortlist in 95% of cases.

Credentials presented late do little to change this. A review of more than 1,000 credentials presentations found clients could rarely name the agencies afterwards. What buyers act on is independent insight delivered before the process forms: in a 2025 study, 79% said consistent, high-quality thought leadership makes them more likely to advocate for a vendor during an RFP, and 64% trust it more than product material. Evidence given early is what places an agency on the shortlist while the shortlist is still forming.

3. Revenue from existing clients

The economics favour the clients an agency already holds. The probability of selling to an existing customer is set at 60 to 70%, against 5 to 20% for a new prospect (Farris and colleagues). A 5% improvement in retention is associated with a profit increase of 25 to 95% (Bain, Reichheld). These are long-standing reference points and are cited as such.

Recent agency-specific data localises the picture. A 2025 study of 500 firms found 40% of those who outsource marketing switch or discontinue, and 56% of that movement happens within 6 to 12 months. Analysis of agency models in 2025 put annual churn at 18% for retainer relationships against 42% for project-based ones, with the average retainer relationship lasting around 56 months against 24. The common thread is silence after delivery. Where 86% of larger agencies are pursuing growth from existing clients, the post-launch gap is where that growth is won or lost.

4. The state of AI readiness

AI now assembles a picture of an organisation from across its whole footprint, not from owned content alone. Analysis of 21,311 brand mentions across AI assistants found 85% came from third-party sources and 13.2% from the brand's own domain. Independent work places brand-owned material at 5 to 10% of the sources AI references, and finds 16% of brands track their AI-search performance. A 2025 study recorded that users shown an AI summary clicked a traditional result in 8% of visits, against 15% for those who were not.

Few organisations are prepared for this. AAAnow research places 3% at the high levels of the AI Readiness Maturity Scale. Independent findings sit close to it: 4% of companies have built cutting-edge AI capability that consistently generates significant value (BCG, 1,000 executives, 59 countries, 2024), 1% of executives describe their rollouts as mature (McKinsey, 2025), and 13% of organisations are fully prepared (Cisco, 2025). A 2026 survey of 401 marketing leaders found 70% naming AI leadership as a critical goal while 30% report mature readiness. The enthusiasm runs ahead of the foundations, which is where misrepresentation takes hold.

5. What insight at scale now costs

Recipient-specific insight was expensive to produce, so it was reserved for the few contacts that justified it. Sellers spend under 30% of their time selling, and pre-contact research has consumed a significant part of the rest. Recent measurement shows automation compressing that: sellers using AI assistance expect research time down 34% and drafting time down 36%. The effect is that a specific, externally generated finding can now lead routine contact across a whole client base, rather than the few accounts that once warranted the work.

References and sources

Where a source is internal to AAAnow, this is stated. Where a named source has no direct public URL, the note says so rather than presenting an invented link. Figures described as projections are identified as such.

Being heard

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