

The 2027 Revenue Agenda: Moving the AI Focus from Productivity to Proof of Value

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CROs are heading into 2027 with an unusually ambitious growth agenda: more people, more spending, and higher expectations for every seller. In BCG's survey of nearly 400 CROs, sales leaders, chief commercial officers, and revenue operations leaders across 23 countries and five sectors, 65% expect headcount to grow over the next year, 72% expect sales and revenue budgets to increase, and 91% expect quotas or productivity requirements per seller to rise. (See "About

Our Survey.”) It’s a “do more with more” agenda, with AI expected to help sales teams deliver on those ambitions.

– About Our Survey

BCG surveyed 398 CROs, sales leaders, chief commercial officers, and revenue operations leaders at large companies across 23 countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the US. Respondents worked in multiple sectors, primarily in technology, telecommunications, industrial goods, consumer, health care but also in energy and environment, financial services, real estate, insurance, media, professional services, and transport, shipping, and logistics.

But there’s a gap between AI adoption and commercial impact. Ninety percent of the leaders we surveyed report meaningful AI use in sales workflows, yet only 13% report win rates as a top area of measurable AI impact, and only 8% report higher quota attainment.

As CROs finalize their 2027 plans, it raises a pressing question: What will it take to turn this growing investment, AI adoption, and higher expectations of sellers into measurable growth? Our findings reveal where AI investment may be missing changing buyer needs, where returns are beginning to emerge, and what CROs furthest ahead say they are doing differently.

Focusing AI on the Customer Moments That Influence Buying Decisions

Part of the reason AI’s commercial impact has been slower to emerge is because too much of the focus so far has been on making sales teams more productive. Today’s buyers increasingly need sellers to help them navigate more complex purchase decisions, and AI can help sellers do that.

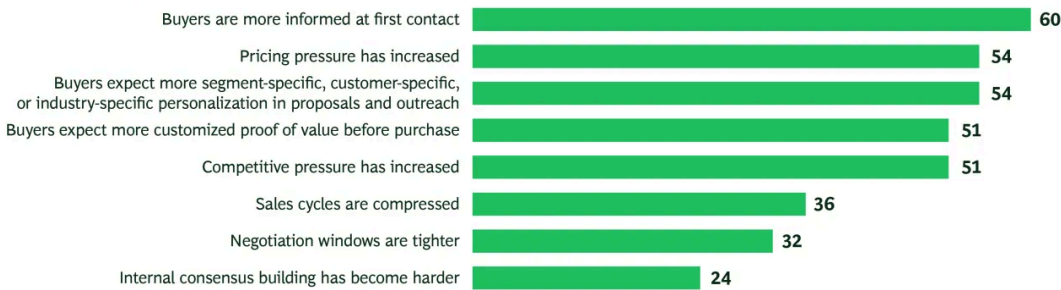
Nearly 60% of sales leaders say customers arrive at the first conversation knowing significantly more about products, competitors, and potential use cases than they did two years ago. Yet more information has not necessarily made buying easier. Nearly one-quarter of sales leaders report that internal consensus-building has become more difficult, as stakeholders bring their own research, priorities, and perspectives to the decision.

At the same time, buyers increasingly expect sellers to demonstrate value earlier and make the case specific to their business. Fifty-four percent of sales leaders report greater demand for customer- or industry-specific personalization in proposals and the business case, while 51% say buyers expect more customized proof of value, including evidence of ROI, before they purchase. The seller’s challenge is therefore becoming less about informing buyers and more about helping an informed, and sometimes divided, group of stakeholders build confidence in a decision. (See Exhibit 1.)

EXHIBIT 1

Customer AI Use Is Creating More Informed Buyers and Greater Pressure on Sales Teams

Customers’ AI use and its impact on sales teams
% OF RESPONDENTS SELECTING EACH IMPACT



Source: BCG Revenue Agenda Survey 2026 (n=398 CROs, sales and revenue leaders across 23 countries and five sectors).

“ The seller’s challenge is shifting from simply providing information to helping an informed, and sometimes divided, group of stakeholders build confidence in a decision.

That shift creates an important question about where CROs direct their AI investments. So far, their AI investments’ return has been weighted toward increasing seller productivity and coverage

(51%) and improving lead qualification (44%). Only 32% point to accelerating earlier proof-of-value activities, which are the very moments when sellers can help skeptical buyers understand whether a solution will deliver what they need with personalized narratives.

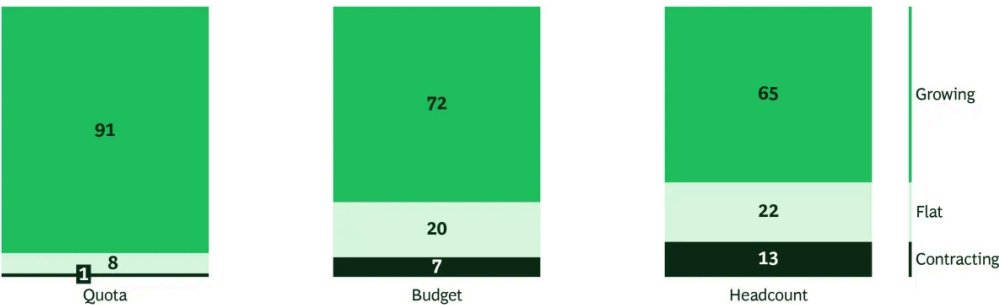
CROs Are Betting on Growth with More Sellers, Bigger Budgets, Higher Quotas

With buyer expectations rising and the pressure to deliver top-line growth unchanged, how are CROs planning to meet their ambitions for 2027? The survey suggests they are pulling nearly every growth lever at once: adding people, increasing investment in their sales organizations, and expecting more from every seller.

Sixty-five percent of CROs expect revenue organization headcount to grow over the next year, including 22% who expect it to increase by more than 10%. At the same time, 72% expect sales and revenue budgets to increase, while 91% expect quotas or productivity requirements per seller to rise. (See Exhibit 2.)

EXHIBIT 2
For Sales Teams, Headcount, Budgets, and Quotas Are Growing

% OF RESPONDENTS EXPECTING AN INCREASE



Source: BCG Revenue Agenda Survey 2026 (n=398 CROs, sales and revenue leaders across 23 countries and five sectors).
Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Those numbers point to an ambitious growth model built on more people, more investment, and higher expectations for what each seller can deliver. And despite widespread debate about AI replacing sales jobs, the survey suggests that CROs are not primarily planning to use AI to shrink

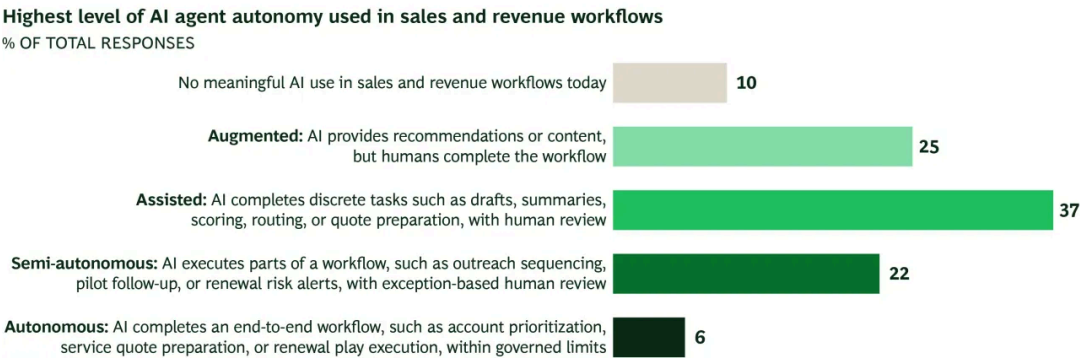
their sales organizations. Instead, they appear to be counting on AI to expand what a growing sales force can accomplish.

Can Bigger Growth Bets Translate into Stronger Sales?

AI is being widely deployed across sales organizations, but its clearest returns remain concentrated in productivity and operational improvements rather than revenue growth.

Ninety percent of sales leaders report meaningful AI use in their sales workflows, but most deployments remain relatively limited in scope. Only 6% say they have reached autonomous, end-to-end deployment. (See Exhibit 3.) AI has advanced furthest in activities such as data entry, CRM updates, account research, and other tasks with relatively clear inputs and outputs, while adoption remains lower in the customer-facing and judgment-heavy parts of the sales process.

EXHIBIT 3 90% of Sales Organizations Use AI, but Only 6% Report Fully Autonomous Workflows



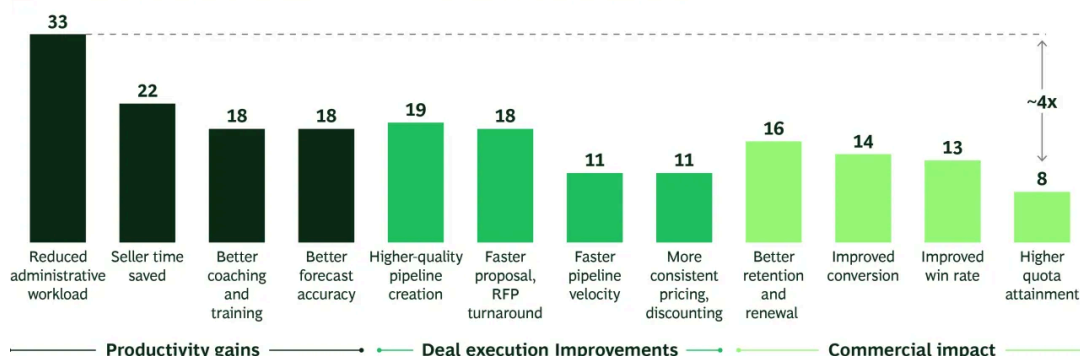
Source: BCG Revenue Agenda Survey 2026 (n=398 CROs, sales and revenue leaders across 23 countries and five sectors).

Given this focus, it's not surprising that the earliest returns on AI are operational: a third of sales leaders (33%) report reduced administrative workloads and 18% report better forecast accuracy. When it comes to impacts on deal execution and commercial gains, however, only 13% report measurable improvements in win rates, and only 14% report improved conversion. (See Exhibit 4.)

EXHIBIT 4

AI Is Showing Greater Impact on Sales Productivity Than on Commercial Outcomes

% RESPONDENTS RANKING EACH AREA FIRST OR SECOND FOR MEASURABLE AI IMPACT



Source: BCG Revenue Agenda Survey 2026 (n=398 CROs, sales and revenue leaders across 23 countries and five sectors).

But the survey also offers a glimpse of what's ahead. More AI-advanced organizations—those with more autonomous agents deployed—are twice as likely to report improved conversion as a top area of AI impact (23% versus 11%) and are more likely to be growing revenue at double-digit rates (69% versus 42%).

The gap between leading organizations and the rest of the market extends beyond commercial results. These organizations are also more likely to have formal goals and tracking in place and are twice as likely to expect AI agents to take on more than half of their sales workflows over the next three years.

CRO Leaders Are Turning AI from a Tool into a Growth Engine

These differences offer an early look at what separates organizations beginning to translate AI adoption into commercial impact from those still seeing primarily operational gains. Here's what CROs furthest along in that journey say they're doing differently.

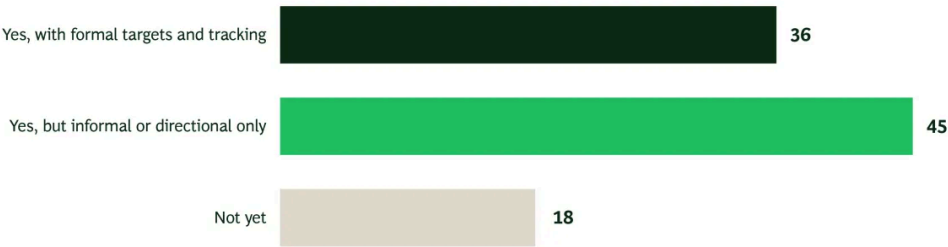
They set clear measures of success and accountability around AI. In our survey, 81% of respondents established AI adoption goals, but only 36% have targets and tracking in place. (See Exhibit 5.) More AI-advanced organizations are 44 percentage points more likely to have formal AI adoption targets (67% versus 23%). They are also more likely to tie seller performance to proven AI adoption rather than tool usage alone, and to have a center of excellence in place to own the follow-through. These practices suggest that organizations further along are not simply

encouraging AI adoption; they are defining what success looks like, how it will be measured, and aligning their growth expectations with what AI is equipped to deliver.

EXHIBIT 5

Most Sales Teams Have AI Adoption Goals, but Only 36% Formally Track Them

Explicit goals set for AI adoption within sales and revenue organization
% OF TOTAL RESPONSES



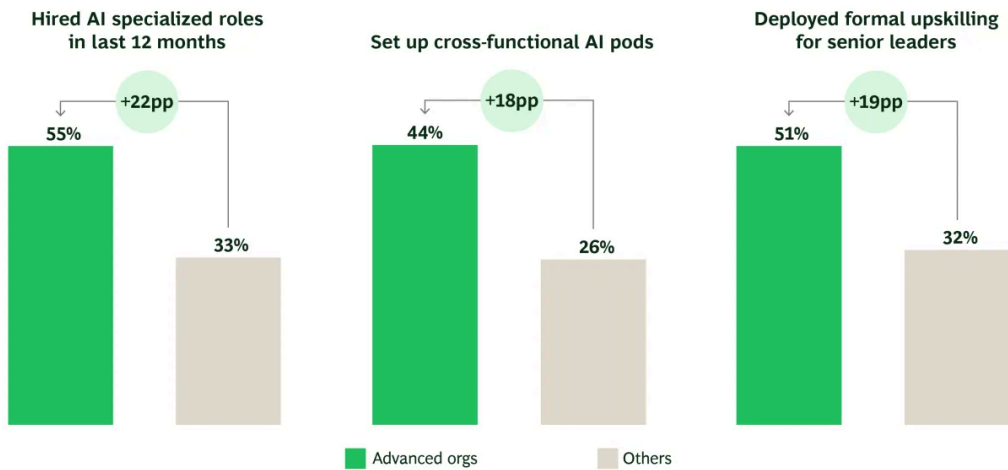
Source: BCG Revenue Agenda Survey 2026 (n=398 CROs, sales and revenue leaders across 23 countries and five sectors).

They align growth ambitions with AI readiness. Before approving increases in headcount, budgets, or quotas, leading organizations assess whether AI is sufficiently embedded in sales workflows to support higher expectations in terms of expansion, cross-selling, and upselling. Otherwise, CROs say additional investment and more ambitious targets can become a liability rather than an advantage.

They invest in the data and talent needed to take AI deeper into sales. More-advanced organizations are more than twice as likely to report mature data infrastructure and treat data readiness as core revenue infrastructure rather than a back-office dependency. They are also 22 percentage points more likely to hire AI-specialized roles, 18 points more likely to establish cross-functional AI pods, and 19 points more likely to provide formal AI upskilling for senior leaders, not just individual contributors. (See Exhibit 6.) These foundations become increasingly important as organizations extend AI to the customer-facing and judgment-heavy parts of the sales cycle, using it to improve the interactions and decisions that most influence customer outcomes.

EXHIBIT 6

Advanced Sales Organizations Are Building the Talent to Scale AI



Source: BCG Revenue Agenda Survey 2026 (n=398 CROs, sales and revenue leaders across 23 countries and five sectors).

They are pushing AI further into the moments that matter most in selling. Rather than layering AI onto existing processes, more-advanced organizations redesign coverage and workflows around the areas with the greatest growth potential. They extend AI to the customer-facing and judgment-heavy parts of the sales cycle, using it to improve the interactions and decisions that most influence customer outcomes. In BCG's experience, the highest-impact applications in these stages draw on what is already happening in customer conversations. For example, conversational AI can analyze calls and meetings at scale to identify the arguments and value messages that consistently move deals forward. Those patterns can then feed real-time prompts and coaching, benchmarked against top performers, to directly improve win and conversion rates in the field.

More-advanced organizations extend AI to the customer-facing and judgment-heavy parts of the sales cycle to improve the interactions and decisions that most influence customer outcomes.

They redirect the time AI saves toward higher-value selling. The CROs we interviewed described using the hours AI frees up to increase customer-facing time, broaden account coverage, and focus more attention on sales. Those choices become increasingly important as buyers demand more personalized engagement, stronger evidence of value, and more help aligning stakeholders around a decision.

Australia and New Zealand provide one example of how several of these patterns can come together. Among surveyed organizations in the region, CEOs are more likely to own AI investment

decisions (64%, versus 44% elsewhere), companies report fewer concerns about unclear executive ownership, and AI fluency features more prominently in hiring. In Australian and New Zealand organizations with live AI deployments, nearly a quarter report achieving measurable ROI in less than six months, which is more than twice the roughly 10% rate elsewhere in the survey.

CROs enter 2027 with no shortage of ambition. They are investing in growth, asking more of sellers, and adopting AI across their sales organizations. The question is how quickly those efforts can translate into stronger commercial performance.

The survey suggests that AI is beginning to deliver, but unevenly. For most organizations, the clearest gains still come from reducing administrative work and improving visibility. The next test is whether CROs can turn those productivity gains into more effective selling and stronger revenue growth.

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